

The Necessary Problem of Edith Stein

An Honors Thesis for the Department of Religion

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Part One: Life

CHAPTER 1

Edith Stein: An Introduction

“I am not a ‘cleverly-designed book’: I am a human being with my contradictions.”

- Edith Stein

“What’s the buzz? Tell me what’s a-happening.”

- *Jesus Christ Superstar*

Edith Stein was born on October 12, 1891, in Breslau, Germany. It was an auspicious day: Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement. Edith’s parents - Auguste and Siegfried Stein - were practicing Jews, in a cosmopolitan city that had the third largest Jewish population in Germany at the time (Batzdorff “Tracing”). Edith was the youngest of eleven children, though only seven survived to adulthood. As a child, Edith was the “beloved pet of her family,” known for her “gray eyes, dimpled chin, and petite frame” (Berkman “Intellectual Passion” 17). Edith always had a strong bond with her mother, partly due to her status as the baby of the family, and partly due to Auguste’s Jewish piety. In her autobiography, Edith wrote that her mother “laid great stress on my being born on the Day of Atonement, and I believe this contributed more than anything else to her youngest’s being especially dear to her” (Stein *Life in a Jewish Family* 72).

Sadly, the bonds of the Stein family were tested soon after Edith’s birth. In 1893, Siegfried Stein suffered a stroke while working for the family lumber business. Auguste Stein was left a widow with seven children, two under the age of five. (Berkman “Intellectual Passion” 17). Auguste’s close-knit family - she herself had 13 siblings scattered across Breslau and Upper Silesia - moved swiftly to support the widow. However, it turned out that Auguste needed little

help. A shrewd businesswoman, Auguste took over her husband's lumber business and turned it into a lucrative venture. Edith proudly remembered when a family friend dropped by the house and exclaimed: "I must tell you at once what I just overheard in the streetcar. A few men were talking about the lumber trade here in Breslau, and one of them said: 'Do you know who is the most capable merchant in the wholesale trade in town? Frau Stein!'" (*Jewish Family* 61).

Edith grew up in a family marked by tragedy, but headed by a powerful and nurturing matriarch. With her many siblings and cousins, she always had playmates and companions. Edith was especially close to her sister Erna, and the two were often mistaken for twins. Though Edith was stubborn as a child, she grew into a quiet, serious young girl. Edith wrote about this time: "within me...there was a hidden world. Whatever I saw or heard throughout my days was pondered over there" (*Jewish Family* 74). As Edith recounted, "the older sisters used to say [Erna] was as transparent as clear water while they called me a book sealed with seven seals" (*Jewish Family* 63).

Edith's mysterious interior life was transformed when she entered school and found an outlet for the thoughts formulated in her "hidden world." Though Edith had a loving family, school played an important role in her life. The young student found inspiration and meaning in the classroom: "I almost believe I felt more at home there than in our house" (*Jewish Family* 65). She ruefully remembered, "as a pupil I was overly zealous. I was apt to skip right to the front of the teacher's desk with index finger raised to 'get my turn'" (*Jewish Family* 78). Edith was ambitious, recalling how "in my dreams I always foresaw a brilliant future for myself. I dreamed about happiness and fame for I was convinced I was destined for something great and that I did not belong at all in the narrow, bourgeois circumstances into which I had been born" (*Jewish Family* 77). Siblings and peers recognized her intellectual gifts and teasingly called her "Edith,

the smart one” (Herbstrith 4). Auguste, who had experienced the turmoil and eventual validation of becoming the family breadwinner, stressed the importance of educational achievement for both her sons and daughters (Berkman “Intellectual Passion” 18). Still, Edith noted that “even as a little girl, I knew it was much more important to be good than to be smart” (Herbstrith 4).

Edith was raised practicing Judaism and had fond memories of celebrating Passover and the High Holy Days with the large Stein clan. Yom Kippur had special significance for Edith, who was “attracted to the ritual of this particular holy day when one refrained from taking any food or drink for twenty-four hours or more” (*Jewish Family* 71). Despite the holiday’s ascetic elements, she “loved it more than any of the others” (*Jewish Family* 71). However, Edith recognized that despite her mother’s piety, much of the wider family had drifted away from Judaism, assimilating into the German bourgeois culture. While Edith’s brothers learned enough Hebrew to celebrate their bar mitzvahs, the girls in the family received little formal Jewish education (Batzdorff “Martyr of Auschwitz”). As the youngest Stein child, Edith remembered dutifully reciting the four questions during Passover Seders and reveling in her special role (*Jewish Family* 70). But by the time she was an adolescent, Edith realized that the Jewish “celebrations lacked some of the solemnity due them since only my mother and the youngest children participated with devotion” (*Jewish Family* 70).

In 1906, when Edith was 15 years old, she took time off from school and spent 10 months living with her older sister Else in Hamburg, Germany. Else had just given birth to her second child and was grateful for the help with housework and childcare, while the time away from home gave Edith a chance to recover from academic burnout. Edith described the experience in her autobiography: “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” (*Jewish Family* 148). There she “lived in a world of

my own even more exclusively than I had at home...Max and Else were totally without belief; religion had no place whatsoever in their home. Deliberately and consciously, I gave up praying here. I took no thought of my future although I continued to live with the conviction that I was destined for something great” (*Jewish Family* 148). Edith’s stint in Hamburg served as a “chrysalis” for the bright young woman. Living away from her mother for the first time, she declared herself an atheist as part of her blossoming independence.

At the end of the year, Edith returned to Breslau and dove into her studies with renewed vigor. Though family members tried to convince her to study a lucrative field like law or medicine, Edith was determined to pursue questions about the workings of the mind (Berkman “Intellectual Passion” 18). In 1911, she enrolled at the University of Breslau, planning to study psychology, history, and German (*Jewish Family* 185). At Breslau, she formed a close circle of friends, including her sister Erna and the man who would become Erna’s husband, Hans Biberstein. Her friends included men and women, and were a diverse group in terms of religion. She spent time with many secular Jews like herself, but also had friends who were Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Jews.

Studying psychology and history at the University of Breslau, Edith also encountered philosophy for the first time. She became enamored with the subject, and with one thinker in particular. In a psychology seminar, Edith noticed continual references to the work of Edmund Husserl. Another student in the class had spent a semester at the University of Gottingen, where the influential philosopher Husserl taught. This classmate told Edith: ““In Gottingen that’s all you do: philosophize, day and night, at meals, in the street, everywhere. All you talk about is ‘phenomena’”” (*Jewish Family* 218). This pronouncement caught Edith’s attention. She was also

intrigued to learn that one of Husserl's protégés was a woman named Hedwig Conrad-Martius, at a time when female students were still rare in German universities (*Jewish Family* 218).

After reading Husserl's groundbreaking book *Logical Investigations*, Edith concluded that "Husserl was *the* philosopher of our age" (Berkman "Intellectual Passion" 24). The challenging volume introduced Edith to phenomenology, Husserl's realist approach to the study of consciousness. Phenomenologists assume that "things do exist inside and outside our mind and that their nature is objectively knowable" (Berkman "Intellectual Passion" 25). In phenomenology, thinkers must "bracket" their preconceived assumptions about the object under consideration, and communicate "with other truth seekers in order to discern and check one's subjective bias and to amplify the range of angles possible in knowing a thing" (Berkman "Intellectual Passion" 26). Husserl's set of mental tools for determining the truth appealed to Edith, a curious mind who was also invested in interpersonal bonds of family and community. She decided to transfer to the University of Gottingen to study under Husserl, with her friends and family supporting the decision (Herbstrith 11). At a New Year's party before her impending move, Edith's friends Lili, Rose, and Hede performed a humorous verse about the eager philosophy student: "Many a maiden dreams of 'busserl' [kisses] / Edith, though, of naught but Husserl. / In Gottingen she soon will see / Husserl as real as real can be" (*Jewish Family* 220). Edith was delighted by the comedic poem, recording it in her autobiography many years later.

The transfer to Gottingen was all that Edith had wanted and more. Edith remembered happily: "Dear Gottingen! I do believe only someone who studied there between 1905 and 1914, the short flowering time of the Gottingen School of Phenomenology, can appreciate all that the name invokes in us" (*Jewish Family* 239). Edith took philosophy classes with Husserl - who his students called simply "the Master," though he disliked the nickname - and attended additional

discussions for the most dedicated students. On her first visit to one of these more informal meetings, Edith impressed Husserl by having devoured both Volume One and Volume Two of his complex *Logical Investigations*. Soon she was incorporated into the inner circle of students and professors who considered themselves Husserl's disciples. She found mentors in two established philosophers. One was Adolf Reinach, another Gottingen professor, who helped Edith grasp the basics of phenomenology. Edith also learned from Max Scheler, a frequent lecturer at Gottingen whose work diverged sharply from Husserl's, but whose ideas about the phenomenon of sympathy intrigued Edith (*Jewish Family* 250-252). She befriended fellow philosophy students in Gottingen, including Roman Ingarden, Fritz Frankfurter, and Hans Lipps, a man who "made a deeper impression on me than anyone else" (*Jewish Family* 254). Eventually Edith became close friends with Hedwig Conrad-Martius, the female philosopher who had so inspired Edith when she was still studying in Breslau.

This tight-knit circle of philosophy students and truth seekers became a second family for Edith. She was always welcome in the homes of Edmund and Malvine Husserl, and Adolf and Anna Reinach. As 1913 became 1914, Edith did indeed philosophize "day and night" in Gottingen, embarking on an ambitious doctoral thesis investigating the phenomenon of empathy. Additionally, though Edith was an atheist at the time, she wrote that "in Gottingen I had learned to respect questions of faith and persons who had faith" (*Jewish Family* 316). The study of philosophy naturally led to reflections on the meaning of life, the nature of consciousness, and how the universe came to exist. Many of the philosophers who surrounded Edith had engaged with religion in their search for truth. Husserl and Scheler were both Jews who had converted to Christianity: Husserl and his family to Protestantism, Scheler to Catholicism. The Reinachs, as well as Hedwig Conrad-Martius and her husband, became Lutherans during the time Edith knew

them. While other friends remained skeptical of organized religion, Edith acknowledged that studying in Gottingen was transformative in many ways. Spending so much time with religious mentors and peers, she wrote that “the world of faith unfolded before me. Persons with whom I associated daily, whom I esteemed and admired, lived in it. At the least, they deserved my giving it some serious reflection” (*Jewish Family* 260).

But Edith’s intellectual and spiritual exploration in idyllic Gottingen was ultimately “blown to bits by the Serbian assassination of royalty...No one growing up during or since the war can possibly imagine the security in which we assumed ourselves to be living before 1914. Our life was built on an indestructible foundation of peace...and on the permanence of circumstances to which we were accustomed” (*Jewish Family* 293). With the onset of World War I, the lecture halls of Gottingen and the cozy living room of “the Master’s” home were emptied. The university shrank as students and professors were called to the military, and Edith was left alone, desperate to be of service. She thought at the time, “I have no private life anymore...All my energy must be devoted to this great happening. Only when the war is over, if I’m alive will I be permitted to think of my private affairs once more” (*Jewish Family* 297). Edith had a strong sense of German patriotism and was determined to serve her country as philosophy students disappeared around her, some coming home in coffins.

Driven by this sense of urgency, Edith put her studies on hold and volunteered with the Red Cross, receiving training as a nurse. She worked as a nurse in a *lazaretto* or contagious diseases hospital in Austria for most of 1915, attempting to alleviate the suffering of soldiers who had contracted typhoid and diphtheria. In the *lazaretto*, Edith witnessed death for the first time, and felt great compassion for the patients she treated (Berkman “Intellectual Passion” 29). She remembered vividly when one of her patients died, and she found a prayer for his safety in

his belongings, written by his wife. The young nurse wrote, “only when I saw that did I realize what his death meant, humanly speaking” (Berkman “Intellectual Passion” 29). Though Edith made friends with the other nurses, she wrote that she preferred night duty, when she could focus on the neediest patients in the quiet that descends in the middle of the night. Exhausted and exhilarated by nursing, Edith also kept up a constant stream of letters to friends at the front, such as her philosophy mentor Adolf Reinach.

Edith was released from her volunteer role in 1916 – though the war raged on. With her mentor Husserl still at work in Göttingen, Edith returned to the university with the goal of receiving her doctorate in philosophy. After her break from academia, Edith threw herself into her doctoral thesis and worked feverishly. She recounted: “page after page was filled. The writing would bring a rosy glow to my face, and an unfamiliar happiness surged through me. When I was called to dinner I returned, as it were, from some distant world...every day I felt that the ability to continue my work was a new gift” (*Jewish Family* 377). When Husserl, who was supervising Edith’s thesis, was offered a lofty position at the University of Freiburg, Edith followed him to the new city and university. In Freiburg, she completed her thesis, *The Problem of Empathy*, and received a *summa cum laude* on her doctoral examinations. She became the second woman in German history to earn a doctorate in philosophy (Berkman “Introduction” 1). The Husserl family threw a celebration in Edith’s honor, even giving her a flower crown. A friend remarked: ““One ought to take your picture like that...while the glow of happiness is still there. Otherwise, you’ve got such a serious look on your face”” (*Jewish Family* 414). Edith preserved this moment in her autobiography, a snapshot of joy at the pinnacle of her student life.

With her doctorate in hand, Edith was ready to enter the professional world, but initially remained by Husserl’s side. The philosopher was searching for a gifted assistant to help compile

and edit his next phenomenological tome, but had struggled to find an appropriate candidate since most of his students were still serving in the military. Edith speculated that Fritz Frankfurter would have been a perfect fit, but sadly he was an early casualty of the war. Before her doctoral examinations, Edith worked up the courage to ask Husserl whether she could fill the position. Edith recounted Husserl's response: "You want to help me? Yes! With you, I would enjoy working!" (*Jewish Family* 411). Edith was excited about the turn of events and her new relationship with "the Master," writing: "I do not know which one of us was more elated. We were like a young couple at the moment of their betrothal" (*Jewish Family* 411).

In 1916 Edith assumed the coveted position of Husserl's assistant, and published her thesis in 1917, hitting several academic high points. However, she soon plunged into a dark period in her life. Professional partnership with the brilliant but disorganized Husserl proved more difficult than expected. During this time, she poured out her troubles in letters to her friend Roman Ingarden: "if Husserl will not accustom himself once more to treat me as a collaborator in the work - as I have always considered our situation to be and he, in theory, did likewise - then we shall have to part company" (*Stein Self Portrait in Letters* 22). While weathering this professional crisis, she also faced an emotional one. Her friend and mentor Adolf Reinach was killed in action in 1917. In 1918, Edith was invited to Gottingen to visit his widow Anna Reinach and help make sense of Adolf's philosophical legacy. Edith steeled herself to visit the grieving widow and provide comfort, but was struck by Anna's strength when they came together. Anna, who had recently converted to Lutheranism, displayed an unshakeable belief in life after death that made a big impression on Edith (*Herbstrith* 25). Soon after, facing professional and spiritual crossroads, Edith began reading the New Testament.

In 1918, World War I ended and Edith resigned as Husserl's assistant. In the post-war atmosphere of political and social upheaval, Edith was looking for change. She decided to seek a philosophy professorship and spend more time on her own writing. Husserl approved of her ambitions and wrote her a glowing recommendation, but Edith struggled to find a position, which she "attributed to her gender and her challenge to dominant psychological theories" (Berkman "Intellectual Passion" 35). Edith returned to Breslau to live with her mother, writing essays and tutoring philosophy students to make a living. She also continued to explore her spirituality, though she kept her religious leanings a secret from the wider Stein family.

In the summer of 1921, Edith went to visit her friend Hedwig Conrad-Martius and her husband at the couple's farm in Bergzabern, Germany. Hedwig wrote, "It was natural for her to come and stay with us for weeks at a time like all the other phenomenologists...we were both in the middle of a religious crisis. We stuck very close to each other like people walking across a narrow ridge, waiting for the divine summons to come at any moment" (Herbstrith 30). For Stein, the "divine summons" came when she spent an evening alone in Bergzabern, and decided to read St. Teresa of Avila's autobiographical *Book of Her Life*, which happened to be on her friend's bookshelf. She reportedly stayed up all night reading the saint's account of her spiritual journey, and declared in the morning, "This is the truth" (Herbstrith 30). Inhaling St. Teresa's autobiography turned Edith sharply towards Catholicism.

After the summer of 1921, Edith progressed quickly in learning about Catholicism and the order of Carmelite nuns founded by St. Teresa. She studied the Gospels and religious philosophy texts such as Soren Kierkegaard's *Training in Christianity*. She began attending church regularly, and on January 1, 1922, was baptized into the Catholic Church. Hedwig Conrad-Martius served as godmother when Edith took the baptismal name "Teresa" (Herbstrith

36). Edith's Jewish family was bewildered by her decision to convert, and observant Auguste was especially upset by her daughter's choice. Though Edith was attracted to contemplative life, and especially the Carmelite Order of nuns founded by St. Teresa, she held off on any further religious upheavals. Edith continued to attend synagogue with her mother on High Holy Days and take part in extended Stein family traditions, soothing their fears about her drifting away into a new Catholic life (Berkman "Intellectual Passion" 37).

In 1922, Edith accepted a position at St. Magdalena's in Speyer, Germany, a teacher training institute run by Dominican nuns. At St. Magdalena's, Edith could work as a teacher while also deepening her Catholic practice. During this time, she utilized her intellectual gifts by translating key Catholic texts from German to Latin, such as Thomas Aquinas' *Disputed Questions on Truth*, and writing philosophical essays about Catholic themes. She became a sought-after lecturer on Thomistic philosophy, and on the place of women both in the professional world and within the Church. Edith advocated for women's higher education and entrance into professional settings, which had accelerated in Germany post-WWI.

Like many feminists of her time, Edith argued for women's equality using arguments based both on the similarity of men and women, and "sex difference," which she expressed as the unique vocation of women (Berkman "Intellectual Passion" 38). Though this line of thought may seem essentialist today, Edith balanced "recognition of women's proclivity toward nurturant professions" - such as teaching or medicine - "with her insistence on the primacy of individual talent and full equality of female opportunity" (Berkman "Intellectual Passion" 38). Though Edith spoke about "masculine" and "feminine" traits in her lectures, she argued that everyone possesses these qualities in varying degrees and should be allowed to pursue the career most

suited to their individual natures. At the time, she was at the forefront of Catholic feminism (Berkman “Intellectual Passion” 38).

From 1922 to 1931, Edith taught at St. Magdalena’s while also traveling widely to deliver lectures, often to Catholic women’s organizations. Edith continued exploring her prayer life and sought out opportunities for contemplative practice. During those years, she often spent peaceful retreats at the Benedictine Abbey in Beuron, which she regarded as “the fore-court of Heaven” (Stein “The Road to Carmel” 46). In 1931, exhausted by lecturing, Edith decided to leave St. Magdalena’s and seek a professorship once again. In 1932, she became a lecturer at the German Institute of Pedagogy in Munster, where she could put her many years of teaching experience to good use. However, her time in Munster was short-lived.

During Stein’s happy years at St. Magdalena’s, the Nazi Party had risen to power in Germany. By 1933, Hitler had become Chancellor and was transforming the Weimar Republic into a one-party state. In April 1933, the Nazi regime passed laws including the infamous “Aryan Paragraph,” which sanctioned the removal of Jews from positions in government, professional associations, and schools (Berkman “Intellectual Passion” 39). On April 19, Edith’s position in Munster was terminated due to her Jewish heritage. While Edith had dealt with anti-Semitic insults and prejudice throughout her life, this was the first time she had been discriminated against so blatantly within the bounds of the law. Edith wrote about the dismissal, “I was almost relieved to find myself now involved in the common fate of my people, but I had of course to consider what I was to do” (Espin 138).

Edith attempted to use her power within the Catholic Church to advocate for herself and other Jews. After her dismissal in 1933, she requested an audience with Pope Pius XI, planning to ask him to denounce the persecution of Jews through a papal encyclical (Berkman

“Intellectual Passion” 39). When her request for an in-person meeting was denied, Edith sent her plea to Rome in the form of a letter. She soon wrote to a friend about the result of her petition, in a letter tinged with disappointment: “some time thereafter I received [the pope’s] blessing for myself and for my relatives. Nothing else happened” (Krochmalnik 76). Edith shook off the pope’s inaction and chose to see her firing as an opportunity for a long-desired change.

Ever since her conversion, Edith had been drawn to the Carmelite order founded by St. Teresa, but had judged that her family was “not yet ready for this second blow” (“Road to Carmel” 358). After her dismissal from Munster, she wrote, “Waiting had lately become very hard. I had become a stranger in the world” (“Road to Carmel” 358). In May 1933, she finally sought admission to the Order of Discalced Carmelite nuns. She swiftly received a response from the Carmelite convent in Cologne, Germany: ““Joyful assent. Regards, Carmel”” (Berkman “Intellectual Passion” 40). Now Edith had to break the news of a cloistered existence to her family: soon she would only be accessible to her loved ones behind a grille.

Edith spent the summer of 1933 in Breslau with her family, preparing them - especially her mother - for her entrance into Carmel. Many relatives were upset that Edith would choose to join a convent, deepening her Catholic commitment, while anti-Semitism was surging in Germany (Herbstrith 66). Even Edith’s young niece confronted her aunt about her decision to enter Carmel. When they ran into each other at the dentist, twelve-year old Susanne asked Edith, “Why are you doing this now?” (Espin 132). Edith replied, “What I am doing does not mean that I want to leave my people and my family...And don't think that my being in a convent is going to keep me immune from what is happening in the world” (Espin 132). Living up to her desire to stay involved in the happenings of the world, and perhaps responding to her family’s pain and confusion, Edith started to write an autobiography. She titled it *Life in Jewish Family*. In the

foreword dated September 21, 1933, Edith declared that she would give “a straightforward account of my own experience of Jewish life” that would combat the “horrendous caricature” of Jewish people painted by Hitler and his propaganda machine (*Jewish Family* 24). On the brink of becoming a Catholic nun, Edith wrote, “we who grew up in Judaism have an obligation to give our testimony” (*Jewish Family* 24).

Edith’s last day at home was her birthday, October 12. She recounted that at the end of the day, “My mother buried her face in her hands and began to cry. I stood behind her chair, resting her old, white-haired head against my chest. We stayed like that for a long time, until I was able to her convince her to go up to bed...I sat alongside her at the edge of the bed until she sent me off to sleep. But I don’t think either one of us got any sleep that night” (Herbstrith 67). Despite the difficult parting with her family, Edith was determined to follow the path to Carmel that had entranced her since she read Teresa of Avila’s life story.

On October 14, at the age of forty-two, Edith entered the Cologne Carmel as a postulant, secure in her belief that she was “coming into the harbor of God’s will” (Herbstrith 67). She adjusted to cloistered life within Carmel, filling her days with liturgical and personal prayer, physical work, and instruction from the novice mistress. On April 15, 1934, Edith was admitted into the novitiate as a member of the Discalced Carmelite Order. Many of her friends and mentors attended her clothing ceremony. On that day, Edith Stein wore a white dress and veil. She received a habit and took the Latin religious name “Teresia Benedicta a Cruce,” usually rendered as Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Herbstrith 70). Edith wrote that she received her religious name “exactly as I requested it,” honoring St. Teresa, the Benedictines she prayed with in Beuron, and her special affinity for the Christian symbol of the Cross (Krochmalnik 72).

Auguste Stein refused to attend the ceremony and maintained a stony silence with her daughter throughout Edith's novitiate, but the conflict eventually eased and they started writing to each other again in 1935. On September 14, 1936, Auguste passed away. Edith was alarmed to hear a rumor that her mother had converted to Catholicism on her deathbed, and wrote to a friend, "The news of her conversion was a totally unfounded rumor. I have no idea who made it up. My mother held to her faith to the very last...Therefore, I have the firm belief that she found a very merciful judge and is now my most faithful helper on my way" (Sullivan "Saint Edith"). Though she and her mother had intense spiritual differences, Edith respected her mother's faith and believed Auguste was watching over her from beyond the grave.

On April 21, 1938, Edith made her final profession of vows. She swore to uphold the values of poverty, chastity, and obedience, committing herself permanently to Carmel. During her time as a nun, Edith's superiors instructed her to continue her philosophical work and her autobiography *Life in a Jewish Family*. Engaging her intellect in the context of Carmel was a source of joy for Edith. When she prepared to move into the convent she wrote, "Six big cases of books preceded me to Cologne...I supposed no Carmelite had ever brought such a dowry before!" ("Road to Carmel" 361). She put her texts to good use and wrote spiritual essays about St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and St. Elizabeth. She often prepared speeches for the prioress to deliver on feast days and other ceremonial occasions. While in Carmel, Edith also suffered the loss of "the Master" - Edmund Husserl died in 1938. Her grief was tempered by happiness when her older sister Rosa Stein converted to Catholicism, forging a new bond between the siblings. However, the peace Edith found at the Cologne Carmel did not last long.

The evening of November 9, 1938, would later be known as *Kristallnacht*, the night of broken glass. The Nazis authorized violence against Jewish people and property, ushering in

over 24 hours of looting, arson, beatings, and arrests. More than 1,000 synagogues and 7,000 Jewish businesses were damaged across Germany, and Jewish schools and cemeteries were vandalized (Berenbaum). Thirty thousand Jewish men were arrested, and many were sent to the growing concentration camps already established within Germany (Berenbaum). The pogrom was a horrifying wakeup call for German Jews who had hoped to weather the Nazi storm, and many made plans to flee as soon as possible. The Stein family, like many others, scattered in every direction. Edith's brother Arno had already emigrated to the United States, and Erna and Else Stein quickly followed suit with their children. Unfortunately, the emigration applications of two other siblings, Paul and Friede Stein, were denied, and they were forced to remain in Breslau (Herbstrith 93). While other relatives left Germany for North and South America, Edith considered joining the Carmel in Bethlehem, Palestine. Edith's Carmelite superiors recognized the danger she was in, and helped her transfer to the Carmel in Echt, Holland instead. She was driven across the border under the cover of darkness on December 31, 1938 (Berkman "Intellectual Passion" 42). Edith wrote, "it was luminously clear to me that once again God's hand lay heavy on His people, and the destiny of this people is my own" (Espin 130).

Parting from the nuns she had lived with for five years, while her Jewish family fled their ancestral home, was painful for Edith. However, she was optimistic about her fresh start in Holland, writing that "everyone here is treating me with so much love. Pray with me that I can find a way to reciprocate and make myself useful to the community...He who has laid the Cross on my shoulders has managed to make it sweet and light" (Herbstrith 94). Still, Edith was clear-eyed in understanding the ongoing persecution of German Jews and the danger posed by the militaristic Nazis. In the spring of 1939 Edith composed her last will and testament, and wrote a prayer that she delivered to her prioress on Passion Sunday: "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 the Antichrist might be broken without another world war...I would like to do it today...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” (Herbstrith 95). At this turbulent time, Edith also found comfort in the story of Queen Esther, which comes from the Hebrew Bible. In her writings, she often invoked the figure of the Jewish queen who pleaded with her husband to rescue her people from a bloodthirsty advisor. Drawing on her Jewish and Catholic experiences, Edith wrote, “I am a very poor and helpless little Esther, but the King who chose me is infinitely great and merciful” (Berkman “Esther and Mary” 59). Edith was aware that her own death was a possibility in the near future, but believed in the redemptive power of prayer, suffering, sacrifice - the spiritual labor she was sworn to undertake as a Carmelite.

World War II officially began when Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. Two weeks later, Edith wrote a speech for the Echt prioress to deliver at the Feast of the Cross, when Carmelites renew their vows. Edith’s depth of feeling emerged in the powerful imagery she employed when contemplating the outbreak of war: “The world is in flames, the battle between Christ and Antichrist has broken out into the open. If you decide for Christ, it could cost you your life. Carefully consider what you promise. Taking and renewing vows is a dreadfully serious business. You make a promise to the Lord of heaven and earth. If you are not deadly serious about your will to fulfill it, you fall into the hands of the living God” (*The Hidden Life* 94). Edith’s sense of urgency, and her emphasis on faith costing “your life,” presaged the turmoil and horror of the coming years.

In early 1940, Rosa Stein fled Germany to join her sister at the Echt Carmel. Unfortunately, Germany forces invaded and occupied Holland just a few months later. By 1941,

all non-Aryan Germans in Holland were decreed stateless, and ordered to register for emigration by December 15. Edith and Rosa complied with this order from the Nazis under the threat of severe punishment (Borsinger 268). Edith began to seek asylum for herself and Rosa in a Swiss Carmel. At one point, the Swiss Carmelites offered to sponsor Edith but had no room for Rosa, who was a lay member of the Carmelite community, not a nun. Edith refused to leave Holland without her sister (Herbstrith 101). Throughout the summer of 1942, the Nazi authorities deported large numbers of Dutch Jews. Many Dutch people mounted resistance against the Germans. In July, Protestant and Catholic church leaders sent a telegram to the leader of the Nazi occupying forces - Reichskommissar Seyss-Inquart - protesting the treatment of the Jews.

The Christian leaders wrote that they were “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,” and had “learned with horror of the proposed action that would evacuate men, women, children, and entire families into German territory. The suffering this would cause to thousands of people...and, above all, the resistance that such a step would constitute to God’s commandments of love and mercy, compel us to urgently petition you not to have this directive carried out” (Herbstrith 101). When Nazi authorities did not respond to the telegram, the Christian leaders threatened to speak publicly against the deportations in a joint pastoral letter. This act of resistance angered the Reichskommissar, who forbid the action. Protestant leaders backed down, but the Catholic Bishop of Utrecht defied the occupation authorities and instructed priests to read the letter aloud in congregations across Holland. On July 26, thousands of Catholics heard the letter and the prayer, “let us beseech God...to swiftly bring about a just peace in the world and to strengthen the people of Israel” (Herbstrith 102).

Nazi retaliation against the Dutch Catholics was swift and brutal. On July 27, the Reichskommissar ordered that all Catholic Jews - who had been ignored in previous waves of arrests - were to be deported by the end of the week (*Jewish Family* 430). The Nazi authorities had already deported 6,000 Dutch Jews, and had a list of over 700 Jews registered as Catholics in the country (*Jewish Family* 430). On August 2, 1942, Nazi officers appeared at the Echt Carmel and demanded to see Edith Stein. When Edith was called to the visiting room, she was ordered out from behind the grille and given five minutes to pack her things. She and Rosa were removed from the convent and arrested. A neighbor recounted that Rosa grew distressed as the sisters were pushed towards a squad car, but Edith took her hand and said "Come, let us go for our people" (Sullivan "Beatification" 13). The Echt Carmelites never saw them again.

The sisters were taken to Amersfoort, a central transportation camp that housed many Jewish prisoners, including several other Catholic Jews who had been arrested at the same time. The Stein sisters were forced onto a train with thousands of other prisoners and transported to Westerbork, another detention camp in northern Holland (Herbstrith 104). At Westerbork, men and women were separated, breaking up families. The Jewish prisoners were denied basic necessities. One survivor remembered seeing Edith Stein there: "Edith Stein's complete calm and self-possession...marked her out from the rest of the prisoners. There was a spirit of indescribable misery in the camp...Edith Stein went among the women like an angel, comforting, helping, and consoling them. Many of the mothers were on the brink of insanity and had sat moaning for days, without giving any thought to their children. Edith Stein immediately set about taking care of these little ones. She washed them, combed their hair and tried to make sure they were fed and cared for" (Herbstrith 105). Edith's experience as a nurse in World War I, and

as a loving aunt to many nieces and nephews, may have provided her with the strength to comfort others in such a terrible place.

Initially, Edith and Rosa hoped that they would be released and sent back to the convent in Echt. Then, they heard rumors that the prisoners were being sent to work in Silesian mines. The Dutch nuns were informed that the Steins were being held in Westerbork, and sent messengers with blankets, traveling necessities, and a letter from the Carmelites. Edith and Rosa were allowed to meet those messengers on August 6. One of the messengers, P.O. van Kempen, remembered Edith telling them the prisoners might be compelled to do hard labor in Eastern Europe. She assured him, “if she were to leave, her prayer - regardless of what job would be given to her - would always occupy first place” (Van Kempen 275). Van Kempen jokingly offered her a cigarette, and Edith refused, laughing, but told him she had smoked and danced back in her student days. Then the visit was over. On August 7, the prisoners in Westerbork were awakened before dawn and told that all but six of them would be deported. Edith and Rosa entered the train cars heading east, and slipped out of official records.

As Edith’s biographer Waltraud Herbstrith writes, “it is very possible that the exact details of Edith Stein’s final days will never be fully known” (112). In 1982, a man named Johannes Wieners, who had been conscripted into the German army, came forward with a story of seeing a woman in nun’s clothing on August 7, 1942. (*Jewish Family* 434). He was working at the train station in Breslau when a freight train pulled up to the platform, and Wieners could see that it was packed with people in miserable conditions. He looked at the group sympathetically, and spotted a woman wearing a habit. They made eye contact and she said, “This is my beloved hometown. I will never see it again.” The woman added, “We are riding to our death” (*Jewish Family* 434). Wieners reported that at this point his fellow soldiers castigated him for speaking to

a Jew, and the train soon pulled out of the station. When he saw an image of Edith Stein in the 1980s, he felt certain that she was the nun he spoke to in the summer of 1942.

The ultimate fates of Edith and Rosa Stein were not known for a long time, despite inquiries from their family and the nuns in Cologne and Echt. In 1948, the Netherlands Red Cross was finally able to provide official documentation that Edith and Rosa were murdered in the gas chambers upon arrival at Auschwitz on August 9, 1942 (*Jewish Family* 433). Edith's nephew Gerhard Stein noted that Edith's death fell on Tish B'Av, when Jews mourn the Destruction of the Second Temple, widely regarded as a day destined for tragedy (57).

Edith - the beloved aunt and sister, bright young philosopher, passionate Catholic convert, devoted teacher, and pious nun - died a tragic, senseless death along with millions of others who perished in the Holocaust, or the Shoah (Hebrew: catastrophe), as some Jews prefer to call the Nazi genocide. However, her memory and literary legacy were preserved by those who had learned from her, prayed with her, and loved her. During WWII, the Carmelite convents in Echt and Cologne were both damaged, but thousands of pages of Edith's handwritten manuscripts were rescued and sent to the Husserl Archive in Louvain, Belgium (*Jewish Family* 459). Two scholars at the archive, Dr. Lucy Gelber and Father Romaeus Leuven, worked tirelessly to share Edith Stein's works with the world. The two established the Archivum Carmelitem Edith Stein in Cologne and published ten volumes of Edith's work, beginning in 1947 (*Jewish Family* 459). These books - eventually translated into English - included Edith's unfinished autobiography *Life in a Jewish Family*, philosophical texts like *The Problem of Empathy*, and collections such as *Self-Portrait in Letters* and *The Hidden Life*.

While still uncertain about Edith's fate, the nuns in Cologne collected as much data as possible about her life and whereabouts, including correspondence and shorter essays. In 1948,

Sister Teresia Renata Posselt, who had been Edith's novice mistress and became prioress of the Cologne Carmel, used this material to publish the first biography of Edith Stein (Sullivan "Path to Beatification" 8). This biography, along with the steady stream of Edith's work released by the Archivum Carmelitem Edith Stein, created a stir in the Catholic world and led many to explore the extraordinary life of the nun murdered in Auschwitz. Academics, philosophers, theologians, and lay people - Jews and Catholics - began to learn about Edith Stein.

Of the seven Stein siblings, only three survived the Shoah. But for the resilient family, life went on. Susanne Batzdorff nee Biberstein, the young niece who had once boldly questioned Edith's decision to enter Carmel, grew up in the United States after her family fled Breslau. She married, had children of her own, and became a successful writer. Susanne helped translate several volumes of Edith's work into English and wrote moving poetry about "Tante Edith." In the 1960s the Catholic Church opened the "ordinary process," or first step towards sainthood, for Edith Stein. Erna Biberstein, the sister who had been the "clear water" to Edith's "book sealed with seven seals," shared her memories with the Cologne canonization commission before her death (Sullivan "Path to Beatification" 9). Erna advanced Edith's candidacy for sainthood, but made sure to comment, "a living sister would have been worth a thousand times more to me than a dead saint" (Batzdorff "Significance" 27).

On May 1, 1987, Pope John Paul II beatified Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, and the philosopher-turned-Carmelite gained a new epithet, Blessed Edith Stein. On October 11, 1998, the pope canonized Edith, and made St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross a co-patron saint of Europe. Icons of St. Teresa Benedicta proliferated, some depicting the saint wearing a yellow star of David, others showing her in a habit behind barbed wire, combing a child's hair.

But was Edith Stein's sainthood the end of her story? Her unique life seemed to curl in on itself. As her canonization sparked controversy, her martyrdom became a Mobius strip. Academics, theologians, Carmelites, rabbis, and extended family struggled with enduring questions about Edith Stein. In the wake of Edith's beatification, passionate debates about the implications of her sainthood spilled into scholarly journals, op-eds, protests, and entire volumes of essays, all about what one commentator called "the unnecessary problem of Edith Stein." Was Edith Stein a Jew, a Catholic, or both? How did she understand her own faith identity, and how can Jews and Catholics make sense of it today? How could she become a Catholic saint through her martyrdom when she was killed, like six million others, due to her Jewish heritage? Can St. Edith Stein be held up as a symbol of multiculturalism and improved relations between Jews and Catholics, or is her canonization an attempt to Christianize the Shoah? Overall, what impact has her canonization had on Jewish-Catholic dialogue, and what meaning could her sainthood have in the future? In this paper, I will explore these questions by fleshing out the complexities of Edith Stein's life and legacy, which pose a necessary problem for Jews and Catholics endeavoring to hear each other in the post-Shoah world.

INTERLUDE: AT THE PONTIFICIA UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA DE CHILE

Santiago, Chile

Fall 2018

There was a crucifix hanging in every room. They were unobtrusive - clean, swooping lines, no blood or gore, no indication of suffering. Just a metal cross and a featureless metal man. But once I noticed them I saw them everywhere.

The crosses made sense at the Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Chile, affectionately called “la Cato” by students and faculty alike. Catholicism was woven into the foundation of the university, of the country, so I probably shouldn’t have been surprised to see the crucifixes, or the large statue of Jesus with his arms outstretched over the San Joaquin campus, or the small portrait of the Virgin Mary that my host family mounted over my bed. Still, I had never lived, studied, and worked in a place so palpably Catholic. In Santiago, the bustling capital grinds to a halt on Sunday mornings. The Church winds in and out of Chilean history, popping up in figures as varied as the Dominican friars who came with the conquistadors and the activist priests gunned down by the Pinochet dictatorship. I had never felt more out of place as a Jew.

I knew studying abroad in Chile would be different from growing up in New York City, which was part of the appeal. As a Religion student, I looked forward to learning more about Catholicism in Latin America, and enrolled in a course called “Women and Mysticism.” Our professor was a young, energetic woman, very fond of asking us to turn and talk to our classmates. In one of the first classes, we were asked to discuss why we were taking a class on mysticism. I started to explain that, as a Jew, I knew a bit about kabbalah but wanted to learn more about Christian mystical traditions. At this point, my Chilean partner interrupted me to say that she had never met a Jew before. Then she asked, “What do Jews believe in?”

We had about thirty seconds to finish our turn-and-talk. My mind went blank as I tried to summarize thousands of years of Jewish history and teachings. I thought about kosher laws even though I don't keep kosher. I thought about explaining the High Holy Days. Too late I remembered Hillel, and Shammai, and standing on one foot. I knew I'd have to explain this all in my second language. As our professor called us back from discussions, I blurted one answer to the question of what Jews believe in: "Not Jesus!" And that was that. In some small way, I felt like I had let my people down.

A few classes later, after lectures on St. Teresa of Avila and Hildegard of Bingen, our professor announced that we would be looking at a modern mystic. She flipped to the next slide: a nun in a full habit, but with a bright yellow star of David pinned to the dark material. I sat up straight at the incongruity of it, at the recognition of symbols and stories I had been missing. The slide changed again, time slid backwards. The Jewish nun vanished and was replaced by a young woman with dark uncovered hair, her head propped on one hand and tilted to the side. She had a steady, intelligent gaze. I learned her name was Edith Stein.

For "Women and Mysticism" we were assigned a research paper on one of the Christian thinkers we had studied. I eagerly chose Edith Stein, after getting the broad strokes of her story in that first lecture. I wanted to trace the unusual arc of her life - a woman born to a Jewish family, a convert to Catholicism, a nun who died in the Holocaust, now canonized as a Catholic saint. I tracked down her autobiography and several articles about her work and legacy, flipping back and forth between Spanish and English versions. I waded through the stacks of the well-stocked Theology library and found whole shelves on Stein: her philosophy and her martyrdom, her relationship with Judaism and her relationship with the Church, her feminism and her mysticism and her ultimate tragedy.

I worked away on my paper, sitting on my narrow bed at the top of the stairs in Santiago, under the picture of the Virgin Mary. I thought about Edith Stein and her complex faith identity as I made my quietly Jewish way through a Catholic country. At the end of the semester I turned in my 10-page paper on Edith Stein and realized I could write more about her - much more - especially if I could read and write and speak in English. (But sometimes I prefer the Spanish. “Misericordioso” has more depth to it than just plain “merciful.”) Edith Stein, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, wearing her dark habit and her gold halo and her piercingly bright star.

I was not done with her and she was not done with me.

CHAPTER 2

Edith Stein the Daughter of Israel

“It was luminously clear to me that once again God's hand lay heavy on His people,
and the destiny of this people was my own.”

- Edith Stein

“Listen, King of the Jews, where is your Kingdom?

Look at me - am I a Jew?”

- *Jesus Christ Superstar*

I. Introduction

When Edith Stein was canonized as a Catholic saint on October 11, 1998, Pope John Paul II stood before the assembled crowd and declared, “I am able solemnly to present this eminent daughter of Israel and faithful daughter of the Church as a saint to the whole world” (“Homily of John Paul II”). But was Edith Stein truly a daughter of Israel, a member of the Jewish people? Her life consisted of many shifts in spiritual practice. She went from a practicing Jew to a philosophizing atheist, from a spiritually curious intellectual to a pious Catholic teacher, and from an active Catholic lecturer to a cloistered Carmelite nun. Did her Jewish identity endure throughout her life, in her own estimation and in the eyes of Jewish authorities? Stein’s writings and actions indicate her lifelong connection to Judaism. As a student presenting her doctoral thesis in 1916, she began her curriculum vitae: “I am a Prussian citizen and a Jewess” (Jacoby 282). The last words the Carmelite sisters of Echt heard Stein speak - as she was being arrested by the Nazi occupiers - were directed to her sister by blood. Edith said to Rosa, “Come, let us go for our people” (Sullivan “Beatification” 13). Stein’s ongoing relationships with Jewish friends

and family members, her decision to write the autobiography *Life in a Jewish Family*, and her political activism on behalf of German Jews all signal that Stein self-identified as a Jewish woman even after she became a Catholic.

Still, Stein's unorthodox faith identity - which encompassed practicing Catholicism while also claiming kinship with the Jewish people - raises two much-debated questions. Who is a Jew, and can one ever cease being a Jew? *Halakha*, or traditional Jewish law, has been interpreted in various ways to provide answers. This chapter will lay out the evidence of Stein's continual identification with the Jewish people, provide a brief overview of Jewish tradition regarding what makes a person Jewish, explain the two dominant *halakhic* rulings on the place of converts, and consider how they might apply to Stein. Establishing Stein's choice to self-identify with the Jewish people will illuminate further investigation of Stein's unusual faith identity.

II. Edith Stein's Jewishness, According to Edith Stein

As recounted in the first chapter, Stein cared deeply about her Jewish family, and was sensitive to their reactions to her conversion and eventual decision to become a Carmelite nun. In 1933, she assured her niece that her decision to join the convent "does not mean that I want to leave my people and my family" (Batzdorff "Witnessing" 37). Stein closely linked her belonging to the Jewish people with her connection to her close-knit family. Stein's practices after her conversion reflected this desire to remain engaged with Jewish life. As Joyce Avrech Berkman, professor of history at the University of Massachusetts, concludes:

The most powerful evidence of how Stein's Jewishness and communal roots shaped her identity is her positive attitude toward Judaism even after her conversion to Catholicism. Unlike those Jews who honored Jewish accomplishments but, whether unbelievers or converts, viewed Judaism as backwards and primitive, Stein prized myriad Judaic features and preserved many after her conversion. She rejoiced in Jewish holidays and festivities, especially Purim and the High Holy

Days. Until she entered her cloistered Carmelite life, Stein gladly accompanied her mother to Yom Kippur services (“German-Jewish Symbiosis” 187).

Additionally, Berkman writes that Stein’s Catholic faith in some ways only deepened her connection to Judaism, as she “delighted in the links between Jewish High Holy Days and Catholic liturgy, and she frequently corresponded with her niece, Erika Tworoger, a Jewish theologian, regarding translation and commentary on Hebrew texts of the Torah” (“Symbiosis” 187). Stein’s conversion to Christianity did not prevent her from participating in Jewish celebrations and even textual study with her family, an ongoing tie to Jewish community.

Stein’s continual sense of Jewishness and respect for her fellow Jews manifested itself in other aspects of her life. As theologian David Novak found, “one of Edith Stein's closest Jewish friends recalled with gratitude how her firm decision to remain a Jew in religion was respected by Edith, who never tried to proselytize her firmly Jewish friends in any way” (*Talking to Christians* 157). Stein did not pressure Jews in her circle to change their beliefs, and expressed her opinion that many different faiths could lead to divine insight and heavenly rewards. Berkman writes that “Stein clearly felt quite free of pre-Vatican II doctrine that only Christians could be saved,” a belief that was evident when Stein reacted to the deaths of her Jewish mother Auguste and her Protestant mentor Edmund Husserl (“Esther and Mary” 118). Writing a letter to a friend in 1936, she scornfully rejected the rumors that her mother had converted to Christianity on her deathbed, and added that “I have the firm conviction that my mother now has the power to help her children in these great afflictions...from eternity, Mother will take care of them” (Berkman “Esther and Mary” 59). Stein believed that her mother, a devout Jew, had proceeded to a peaceful afterlife where she would even have intercessory powers.

Discussing Husserl’s impending death a few years later, Stein shared similar sentiments: “I am not at all worried about my dear Master. It has always been far from me to think that

God's mercy allows itself to be circumscribed by the visible Church's boundaries. God is truth. All who seek truth seek God, whether this is clear to them or not" (Herbstrith 78). Stein did not see the bounds of the "visible" Catholic Church as the only way to find mercy, holiness, or truth. Her continued sense of unity with the Jewish people was displayed in her ability to hold Catholic beliefs while also respecting the boundaries and decisions of others. Significantly, University of Minnesota professor Patricia Hampl writes that Stein never expressed "the troubling distaste for Judaism and Jewish life that sometimes betrays itself" in the work of converts and even some Jews who lived through the toxic period of Nazi persecution (71). She asserts that "for Edith Stein, Judaism and, more to the point, Jews are not subject to judgement. They *are* - and are human. Therefore, to be honored in their persons and in their beliefs. And, of course, treasured in her own personal life and memory" (Hampl 71). Stein's ongoing connections to Jewish practices and people signal that her conversion did not sever her ties to Judaism.

Moving from Edith Stein's relationships to more concrete actions, she proclaimed her Jewishness and desire to combat anti-Semitism by writing her autobiography, *Life in a Jewish Family*. In the preface, which Stein wrote in 1933, she stated her intent to oppose the anti-Semitic "programmed writings and speeches of the new dictators" (*Jewish Family*, 23). She described vividly how Nazi propaganda became "a concave mirror" for Jews like her, from which "a horrendous caricature looked out at us" (*Jewish Family* 23). Stein's use of the word "us" is telling. She further clarified her purpose, writing that non-Jewish Germans who interacted with "Jewish families as employees, neighbors or fellow students, have found in them such goodness of heart, understanding, warm empathy, and so consistently helpful an attitude that, now, their sense of justice is outraged by the condemnation of this people to a pariah's existence" (*Jewish Family* 24). But she acknowledged that in places less tolerant and

cosmopolitan than her native Breslau, “many others lack this kind of experience. The opportunity to attain it has been denied primarily to the young who, these days, are being reared in racial hatred from earliest childhood. To all who have been thus deprived, we who grew up in Judaism have an obligation to give our testimony” (*Jewish Family* 24). The very existence of Stein’s autobiographical testimony indicates her enduring connection to the Jewish people, and her willingness to fight anti-Semitism.

The content of *Life in a Jewish Family* also affirms Stein’s sense of Jewish identity. According to Berkman, Stein exhibited “pride in her Jewishness” that “extends beyond the fact of descent” (“Symbiosis” 187). In the text, Stein “situates the formation of her self within the context of her family religious traditions, noting, on her maternal side, that her great-grandfather was a cantor and had a prayer-room in his own home. Her grandfather founded a Jewish private school, where his fifteen children received a basic Jewish education. Stein grew up in a home in which, as she recurrently informs her readers, her mother practiced a genuine Jewish piety” (Berkman “Symbiosis” 183). This emphasis on her family’s history and Jewish piety highlights Stein’s desire to share these traditions with the world. Susanne Batzdorff summed up her aunt’s intention for *Life in a Jewish Family*, “which she hoped would show German readers that Jews were people like themselves, that they were rooted in the German past and loyal to their country...I am glad she recorded this family history, for it is an authentic statement about her life” (“Martyr of Auschwitz”). Though Stein’s testimony was not enough to hold back the flood of Nazi propaganda, it reveals her authentic Jewishness.

Even after Stein became a Carmelite, she used her position in the Catholic world to advocate for her fellow Jews, and was unafraid to take her concerns all the way to the top. In 1933, Stein took action against the Nazis by contacting Pope Pius XI. As Batzdorff recounts:

That my aunt did not feel she had abandoned her fellow Jews was evident in the written appeal she sent before entering the cloister to Pope Pius XI, asking for an encyclical condemning the anti-Semitic policies of the National Socialist Government in Germany. Because of her ties to both Catholicism and Judaism and her respected position in Catholic academic circles, she hoped to intercede and effect a dramatic change through moral suasion. Her bold act proved that she was, indeed, still loyal to her Jewish family and heritage (“Martyr of Auschwitz”).

Stein attempted to leverage her position as a prominent Catholic lecturer to meet with the pope, originally requesting a private audience to make her case. Unfortunately, she was denied due to large crowds during the Year of Jubilee (Krochmalnik 76). When Stein’s “bold act” did not go as planned, she cancelled her trip to Rome and sent the pope her plea in the form of a letter. Stein wrote movingly: “For weeks...not only Jews but also thousands of faithful Catholics in Germany and, I believe, in the whole world, have been waiting and hoping for the Church of Christ to raise its voice to put a stop to this....All of us who are truthful children of the Church and who are observing conditions in Germany closely fear for the worst for the reputation of the Church if this silence goes on any longer” (Jacoby 290). Stein’s appeal to the pope - which was only answered with a generic blessing for her family - was frustratingly ineffective, but showcased her willingness to confront anti-Semitism within and outside the Church.

Apart from her correspondence with the pope, Stein was continually outspoken against the Nazi regime. She resisted Nazi edicts in any way she could, even when they hurt her professionally or personally. For example, “in 1936, having completed her magnum opus,” the philosophical text *Finite and Infinite Being*, “Stein learned that the treatise could not be published under her name, but she refused to adopt a name eligible for the guild of Aryan writers” (Brenner 59-60). In 1938, as dissent against the Nazis grew ever more dangerous in Germany, “Stein tried in vain to convince her fellow-sisters not to take part in the

plebiscite...about the politics of Adolf Hitler” which was basically a rigged voted (Siegele-Wenschkewitz 103). Though submerged in the peaceful life of the convent, Stein refused to be silent about her Jewishness. Rachel Brenner, professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, recounts Stein’s dramatic encounter with Nazi Party members who appeared at the Carmel during this plebiscite. Brenner writes that “when the Nazi Party members who did not know [Stein] was Jewish offered to drive her to a polling place, Stein courageously stated her position on the National Socialists, replying, ‘Well, if the gentlemen attach such importance to my ‘No’ vote - I can oblige’” (59-60).

As Olivia Espin, professor at San Diego State University, concludes, “in contrast to many converts, [Stein] never denied her Jewish background and consistently reminded other Germans of it - including the nuns in her convent. Rather than hiding behind her conversion, she prepared herself to share the fate of her people” (119). Stein made her Jewishness and resistance to the Nazi regime evident to all those around her: Jewish family members who questioned her conversion, fearful Carmelite nuns, Pope Pius XI, and even the Nazis themselves, who must have been taken aback by this nun’s witty and combative response.

Stein’s self-identification as a Jew is illustrated by one more charming anecdote. In 1933, Father Daniel Feuling attended a conference on the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, where Stein was a featured speaker. He recalls, “a conversation at the conference in which Stein and Alexander Koyre, a professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne (a friend of hers since their Gottingen University days), kept invoking names of philosophers of Jewish birth...each time gleefully remarking, ‘He is another one of ours!’” (Berkman “Symbiosis” 180). The image of Stein and her college friend giggling over how many famous philosophers shared their Jewish heritage is not only heart-warming, but crucial to understanding how Stein viewed herself.

Feuling continues, “It amused me a little to hear the way Koyre and Edith Stein speaking of Jews and Jewish matters would simply say ‘we.’ I had a vivid impression of that blood-brotherhood which was so strong in Edith, as formerly in Saint Paul, who...spoke with such pride, ‘Hebraei sunt - et ego’ [‘They are Hebrews, and so am I’]” (Berkman “Symbiosis” 180). Stein referred to Jews as “we,” speaking to the unity she felt with the Jewish people despite her Catholicism. Glimpsing Stein’s complex faith identity, Feuling compares her to St. Paul, the apostle who leveraged his identities as a Jew and a Roman citizen to preach to both Jews and gentiles.

Stein’s ongoing relationships with Jews and Jewish traditions, her choice to write an autobiography combating Nazi propaganda, her political resistance to the Nazi regime, and her continual references to her Jewishness all provide strong evidence that she considered herself a Jew throughout her life. But having established Stein’s personal sense of belonging to the Jewish people, how do Jewish gatekeepers traditionally establish who is and who is not Jewish? Can Stein - the Carmelite nun - be a daughter of Israel in the eyes of modern Jewish authorities? To investigate these questions, we must turn to the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, and *halakha* (Jewish law) developed from these impactful texts.

III. Edith Stein’s Jewishness, According to Jewish Tradition(s)

What makes a person Jewish is an ongoing debate, central to many controversies in the Jewish world apart from the “problem” of Edith Stein. As Zev Garber – professor of Jewish Studies at Los Angeles Valley College - explains, “in the Jewish law...biological descent plays a significant role in defining who is a Jew. Classical Halachah designates a child to be a Jew if (a) both parents are Jewish; (b) the natural mother is a Jew; and (c) Halachic ritual conversion...is performed” (64). Across denominations, rabbis agree that anyone born to a Jewish mother or

who formally converts - which involves a period of study, appearing before a religious panel called a *beit din*, and immersion in the *mikvah* or ritual bath - is a Jew (Heilman).

The emphasis on matrilineal descent, key to this widely accepted definition of Jewishness, is contested today. Garber notes that the matrilineal descent law was created to ameliorate the “harsh realities of Jewish history,” involving frequent persecution and exile (64). Matrilineal descent extended Jewish legal status to children born of both consensual and non-consensual unions between Jewish women and gentile men, protection often needed in the ancient world (Garber 64). However, the necessity of this legal stance has been questioned in modern times. Since the 1980s, the Reform and Reconstructionist Jewish movements (more liberal denominations) have acknowledged patrilineal descent, declaring children born to Jewish fathers and gentile mothers to be Jewish (Kaplan).

As discussed above, apart from biological descent, conversion to Judaism through personal commitment and specific rituals is also possible. While Judaism is not traditionally a proselytizing religion, Jews have welcomed faithful converts throughout history. In the Hebrew Bible, Leviticus 19:34 reads, “as one of your native born he shall be considered by you, the proselyte who lives with [converts among] you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (*Sefaria*). Jews are encouraged to treat converts with kindness and equality, and there are specific Talmudic prohibitions against mocking a convert or reminding them of deeds from their past (*Sefaria Bava Metzia 58b:8*). One teaching reads:

With regard to a potential convert who comes to a court in order to convert, at the present time, when the Jews are in exile, the judges of the court say to him: What did you see that motivated you to come to convert? Don't you know that the Jewish people at the present time are anguished, suppressed, despised, and harassed, and hardships are frequently visited upon them? If he says: I know, and although I am unworthy of joining the Jewish people and sharing in their sorrow, I

nevertheless desire to do so, then the court accepts him immediately to begin the conversion process (*Sefaria* Yevamot 47a:13).

According to this text, converts are welcome as long as they are aware of the hardships Jews historically face. If someone is ready to share in both the joys and the sorrow of the Jewish people, they are eligible to become a child of Israel. Another *midrash* (rabbinic teaching based on biblical exegesis) attributed to Rabbi Resh Lakish places special value on converts:

The proselyte who converts is more beloved than Israel when they stood at Mount Sinai. Why? Because, if they had not seen the thunder and lightning, the mountains trembling, and the noise of the trumpets, they would not have accepted the Torah. But this proselyte, who did not see one of them...resigned himself to the Holy One, and took upon himself the Kingdom of Heaven. Is there one of you more lovable than this one? (*Sefaria* Midrash Tanchuma Buber, 6:1).

Some Jewish thinkers elevate the spiritual seeking of converts, and delight that they have found meaning in Judaism, calling them especially dear to the divine.

However, traditional Jewish sources are much less lenient when it comes to Jews who convert to other religions, like Edith Stein. A dramatic passage from the Hebrew Bible makes this terribly apparent:

If your brother, your own mother's son, or your son or daughter, or the wife of your bosom, or your closest friend entices you in secret, saying, 'Come let us worship other gods'...do not assent or give heed to him. Show him no pity or compassion, and do not shield him; but take his life...Stone him to death, for he sought to make you stray from the Lord your God (*Sefaria* Deuteronomy 13:7-11).

While such violent imagery does not reflect actual practices (at least in modern times), this passage reveals the strength of traditional Jewish prohibitions against conversion to other faiths. The pain and confusion that Edith Stein's family experienced when she converted, and her trepidation around sharing her spiritual conflict, are contextualized by such harsh opposition

enshrined in holy texts. This anti-conversion rhetoric also raises the question most central to interpreting Edith Stein's faith identity through a Jewish lens. Is it possible for one to stop being Jewish, to be cut off from the Jewish people?

This is not an easy question to ask or answer. Who gets to stand under the umbrella of Jewish community, and who gets to decide how far it extends? Berkman provides an introduction to this thorny question: "as befits their ideal of Talmudic debate, Jews disagree on the definition of Jewishness and who represents it" ("Symbiosis" 181). There are two main interpretations of the *halakhic* rules on the Jewishness of converts to other religions, which are contradictory. The first interpretation is generally espoused by more traditional Jews and scholars - including Rabbi Daniel Polish and Zev Garber - and holds that there has to be a point of no return in order to establish Jewish self-determination. Professor David Novak, Chair of Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto, sums up this more traditional viewpoint:

Jewish tradition regards such persons [Jewish converts] as apostates (*meshumadim*), who have removed themselves from the assembly of Israel (*keneset yisrael*) in a radical way, even if they still consider themselves personally part of the body of the Jewish people. That general judgment stands even if the apostate is a person of extraordinary intellectual and moral virtues like Edith Stein (*Talking to Christians* 148).

According to this interpretation, removal from the Jewish people is possible. If one radically breaks with Judaism by practicing another faith, this action and not their personal feelings of self-identification matter in the eyes of Jewish authorities.

Rabbi Polish further explains that "apostasy" in this context does not mean simple non-belief or discontinuation of Jewish practices. Rather, it means actively embracing another religion. Polish applies this lens to Edith Stein and the Nazi regime she endured:

To the Nazis, it made no difference that Edith Stein had converted to Christianity. To Jewish self-understanding, on the other hand, that fact made all the difference. While a non practicing, even

non believing, Jew is considered to be Jewish, one who embraces another faith is understood by Jewish teaching as renouncing Jewish faith and must, as a consequence, be considered no longer a Jew (“Canonization of Edith Stein” 172).

Garber also directly addresses Edith Stein’s situation, writing that “paradoxically, according to Halachah, Edith Stein in her state of disbelief (from the tenets of Judaism) is considered a Jew, but in her decision to convert to Catholicism and later join the Carmelite order at Cologne, she has removed herself from the Jewish fold” (69). Therefore, according to Polish and Garber’s interpretation of *halakha*, Stein was no longer a Jew at the time of her death. While she would have been considered a member of the Jewish people during her years as an atheist and truth-seeker, these Jewish theologians would claim Stein forfeited her status as a daughter of Israel when she was baptized into the Catholic Church on January 1, 1922.

However, this more restrictive attitude towards the Jewishness of converts is not the only interpretation of *halakha* offered by respected Jewish thinkers. Professor and theologian David Novak, mentioned above, actually comes down on the opposite side of this debate from Garber and Polish. Novak invokes the covenantal nature of Judaism - the idea that the Jewish people made a unique agreement with God to keep the commandments of the Hebrew Bible. Novak writes: “one can check into the covenant, but one cannot check out of it. A convert is ‘born again,’ which also means that he or she has always been in the community retroactively. An apostate, *conversely*, does not...quit the community existentially; he or she is only absent without leave...That is why we regard Edith Stein as a Jewish apostate, but always a Jew nonetheless” (*Talking* 134). Following this understanding of *halakha*, the Jewish covenant with the divine is fixed and binding. When a person is born into Judaism or converts, they enter the covenant and remain a Jew their entire life. Berkman asserts that Novak’s stance is “akin to that of non-traditional Jews, who argue that though Stein changed faith, she grew up as a Jew, adhered

proudly to many Jewish traditions throughout her life, affirmed herself a Jew, and thus died as fully a Jew as a Catholic” (*Talking* 181).

This second strain of *halakhic* interpretation differs dramatically from the traditional position held by Garber, Polish, and others. In the first view, someone born to a Jewish parent who converts to another religion ceases to be a member of the Jewish people. (Though if they remain simply non-believing or non-practicing, they can still be considered Jewish. The “radical” break with Judaism comes from actively practicing another faith.) Edith Stein would not be considered a Jew at the end of her life, despite her own feelings or statements. According to the second view, the covenant essential to Judaism is not breakable, even by apostasy or conversion. Edith Stein’s self-identification with Judaism would be affirmed, permitted in conjunction with her Catholic faith.

How can the Jewish tradition encompass two such different, even contradictory, understandings of *halakha*? This famous Talmudic *midrash* provides some illumination: “For three years, the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai argued. One said, ‘The *halakha* is like us,’ and the other said, ‘The *halakha* is like us.’ A heavenly voice spoke: ‘These and these are the words of the living God, and the *halakha* is like the House of Hillel’” (*Sefaria* Eruvin 13b). The key section of the teaching is the Hebrew phrase *eilu v’ eilu*, “these and these” are the words of God. This teaching chronicles the great rivalry between two influential rabbis, Hillel and Shammai. The disagreements between the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai are not seen as destructive, rather the process of passionate argumentation is validated. In other places, the Talmud cites the *halakhic* fights between Hillel and Shammai as an example of *machloket*, or arguments for the sake of heaven (*Sefaria* Pirkei Avot 5:17). These Talmudic teachings indicate that the Jewish tradition is historically comfortable with scholarly

disagreement, contradiction, and paradox. For that reason, crucial *halakhic* questions - like “who is a Jew?” and “is there a cutoff point for Jewishness?” - can remain unsettled and hotly debated. But with two competing interpretations of *halakha* and Edith Stein’s self-identification as a Jew to consider, how can we come to understand Edith Stein’s Jewishness?

IV. Conclusion: Reconsidering Edith Stein’s Jewishness

Novak provides an insightful comment concerning Edith Stein’s complex faith identity in a paper entitled “What Does Edith Stein Mean for Jews?” He writes, “the easiest way out of this conundrum about Edith Stein is to accept the liberal assumption that one’s religious convictions are a matter of individual choice and that everyone must respect the choice of everyone else to believe whatever they want and practice any religion or no religion they want” (Novak *Talking* 158). I agree with Novak’s assessment that the simplest way to square Edith Stein’s words, actions, and feelings about Judaism with the views of Jewish authorities is to validate her choice to identify as a Jew throughout her life. Out of respect for Stein’s self-understanding, in terms of *halakhic* interpretation I choose to side with Novak and other non-traditional Jewish thinkers who interpret Jewishness as a part of identity that is not closed off by conversion. I believe this stance empowers spiritual seekers and those attempting to engage creatively with their traditions, opening up the definition of who is Jewish rather than closing it off. If “these and these” are the words of the living God, let us have as many voices as possible speaking new understandings of Judaism into being.

After diving into Stein’s words and deeds to assess her Jewish identity, and wading through the Hebrew Bible, Talmud, and *halakha* to investigate Jewish positions on conversion, we have come to a deeper understanding of Stein’s Jewishness that will serve us going forward. Stein affirmed her sense of belonging to the Jewish people throughout her life, and proved her

connection to Jewish community through her political actions and personal relationships. I choose to accept Stein's self-identification and would describe her as "a daughter of Israel" - to borrow Pope John Paul II's phrase. However, Stein's Jewishness clearly does not encompass her entire faith identity. Next, I will turn to an equally fascinating part of Stein's spiritual journey: her path to Christianity. In Chapter 3 we will explore the question, how did Edith Stein become Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross? Why did Stein convert to Catholicism, and why did she choose the life of a Carmelite nun?

INTERLUDE: AT THE BOSTON CARMEL

Roxbury, Massachusetts

November 14, 2019

I am up to my neck in Edith Stein scholarship. Since returning from Chile, my determination to write a thesis on this fascinating figure has been approved by my academic advisor, vetted by my professors, and even supported by my rabbi. I inhaled Edith Stein's autobiographical *Life in a Jewish Family*, her intimate *Self-Portrait in Letters*, and her Christian reflections captured in *The Hidden Life*. I consumed the essay anthologies *The Unnecessary Problem of Edith Stein* and *Never Forget: Jewish and Christian Perspectives on Edith Stein*, along with the more concisely titled *Contemplating Edith Stein*. I discovered all sorts of perspectives on Stein's life, philosophy, faith identity, and impact on Jewish-Catholic dialogue.

I'm becoming familiar with the names that pop up again and again: the scholars and religious who made Edith Stein's legacy their life's work. I feel a warm glow of recognition when I see the names Josephine Koepfel, John Sullivan, Amata Neyer, Renata Posselt, all OCD (I learned quickly this is the Latin abbreviation for Order of Discalced Carmelites - if there's any obsession and compulsion it's mine). I'm connecting the different works by frequent Stein analysts Zev Garber, Emily Leah Silverman, Joyce Avrech Berkman, and Rachel Brenner. I learned that Waltraud Herbstrith is one of Edith's Carmelite biographers, and Waltraud Stein is Edith's great-niece - not one and the same person as I believed for a confusing few weeks. Still, while books piled up on my desk and I swam in a sea of Google documents, I knew there was a limit to what they could give me.

My thesis advisor encouraged me to learn more about the Carmelites. Coming from a Jewish background, I had never spent time with a nun or known much about Christian religious

orders. Immersing myself in Edith Stein's world, it made sense to familiarize myself with her life behind the walls of Carmel. I discovered that the Carmelites have a Boston-area convent: the Boston Carmel in Roxbury. Thinking this could be my chance to meet someone living a life similar to Stein's, I reached out to the Boston Carmel (and hoped nuns checked their emails). Sister Mary Teresa wrote back that she was no expert on Edith Stein, but would be happy to meet with me and discuss the Carmelite saint.

On the morning of November 14, 2019, I picked my clothes carefully, darting into the kitchen to ask my Catholic housemate whether my dark jeans and long sleeved sweater were appropriate for meeting a nun. I made my way to Dudley Square on the orange line, then walked to 61 Mt. Pleasant Street. The convent is a brick building, separated from the street by a black gate that was left ajar for me. Red brick walls extend down half the street, enclosing other buildings and a private garden. An older woman wearing street clothes answered when I buzzed the doorbell, and said she would page Sister Mary Teresa. She led me to a plain room with a couch and several chairs, divided in two by a low wooden barrier similar to a table, but built into the wall. On the other side of the table was another door, more chairs, a statute of the Virgin Mary, and a small sign emblazoned with a slogan in Gothic font: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them."

I waited for a few minutes and then Sister Mary Teresa entered from the door on the other side of the barrier. I realized that the low wooden structure must have replaced the grille that once separated Edith Stein from her visitors. Sister Mary Teresa is an older woman with a kind face. She wore the black habit and brown robes typical of the Carmelites. She took my hand across the wooden barrier, and brought me tea and cookies along with a stack of books on Edith Stein. I had told her that I was a Jewish woman writing a thesis on Stein and Jewish-Catholic

dialogue around her canonization. Sister Mary Teresa asked about my faith, and mentioned some of the parallels between Judaism and Christianity. Then I asked about daily life in the Carmelite order, and she sketched out the life of a cloistered nun. We went through the schedule: rising at five in the morning, praying the liturgy of the hours while kneeling in the choir, breaking for meals, time for spiritual reading and personal prayers, brief recreation periods, and frequent examinations of conscience. She spoke about the “great silence” that descends between dinner and morning prayers. These details made me feel closer to Edith Stein, thinking about the contemplative life she shared with women like Sister Mary Teresa.

Turning back to Stein specifically, Sister Mary Teresa recounted that St. Teresa Benedicta is highly revered within the Carmelite order. The Boston Carmelites often read Stein’s essays, especially ones she composed for special feast days. Sister Mary Teresa also emphasized her hope that Stein would eventually be declared a Doctor of the Church, like St. Teresa of Avila and St. Therese of Lisieux, a great honor. Speaking about Stein’s death, Sister Mary Teresa emphasized that, in her opinion, Stein had never stopped being Jewish. She argued that Stein was killed due to the Nazi persecution of the Dutch bishops, but emphasized the importance of her Jewishness. Sister Mary Teresa showed that she was familiar with the details of Stein’s life, mentioning Adolf Reinach and Han Lipps. She quoted Stein’s famous words: “Come, let us go for our people.”

Sister Mary Teresa had brought a battered-looking white envelope to the visiting room. I didn’t notice it among the books until the end of our visit, when she exclaimed that she had almost forgotten something. She handed me the envelope, and several slips of paper spilled out. She explained that these were icons of Edith Stein, the kind that some Catholics carry with them,

or keep in places of honor. The cards were small enough to hold in the palm of my hand, and the likeness of Edith Stein, or rather St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, stared out of them.

Two were simple photos of Stein, taken at different points of her life, with her name added underneath. One is a famous picture of Stein in her Carmelite habit, her mouth a contemplative, downturned bow. On another icon, a younger Stein holds a child, identified as her cousin's son, on her lap. She is the image of a doting aunt, her smiling face tilted down as she adjusts his sleeve. The other icons are drawings, heavy with symbols. Train tracks, prison stripes, and barbed wire appear in the artwork. On the Edith Stein Guild of New York's icon, Stein stands surrounded by pale, hungry-looking children. Holding one child in her arms, Stein peers out from behind loops of barbed wire, dressed in her habit. Her dark eyes stare outward at the viewer, aware that someone has noticed their plight. In a final Russian Orthodox-style icon, Edith appears with a cross and a halo. Her name is spelled in Russian and Hebrew, and in the background an Old Testament bush catches fire. A rainbow, the biblical equivalent of "never forget," crowns the image. A menorah hovers nearby, inexplicably.

After pouring over so much text, the images are startling, confusing, beautiful and paradoxical. Edith Stein, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, is not just text and breath, quote and fading memory. Through her image, she can be tangible, physical, ever present. Sister Mary Teresa presses the envelope of icons into my hands, tells me I can take them with me. Our conversation winds down and I gather my things. I thank her for her time, and she blesses me. There is an awkward moment when I laugh nervously and tell her I don't know what to say in response. She tells me I can just say thank you. And so, I do.

CHAPTER 3

Edith Stein the Catholic Convert

“Your body mysteriously permeates mine / and your soul unites with mine: /

I am no longer what I once was”

- Edith Stein

“I don’t know how to love him, what to do, how to move him.

I’ve been changed, yes, really changed.”

- *Jesus Christ Superstar*

I. Introduction

In one of many reflections on her aunt’s life, Susanne Batzdorff writes about Edith Stein’s response to a question that has plagued scholars and admirers: “When members of [Edith’s] family, trying to understand her conversion, would ask how she drifted toward Catholicism, she would smile softly and say, ‘That’s my secret’” (“Martyr”). Stein’s conversion to Catholicism - and eventual commitment to the Carmelite Order - shaped the rest of her life, from her relationship with her family and her philosophical outlook, to the trajectory of her career and the circumstances of her death. All the while, she wrote several books, numerous shorter papers, and kept up heavy correspondence with friends and family. Stein composed the memoir *Life in a Jewish Family*, which stretched back in time to record her mother’s childhood memories, but stopped short of her conversion, ending instead with the completion of her doctoral thesis. In 1938, Stein wrote an essay entitled “The Road to Carmel,” which documented her acceptance to the Carmelite convent in Cologne and her experience breaking the news to her

family. But an enigmatic gap remains between these two narratives, one of Jewish girl's coming of age, and one of a Christian woman taking the first steps to become a nun.

As academic and memoirist Patricia Hampl has noted, “when Edith Stein was asked to reveal the true nature of her religious conversion, she refused. There is no essay or memoir, not even a letter to a trusted friend - nothing - that sheds light on her decisive action” (67). Will we ever know Stein's secret? Biographers and scholars have identified key moments in Stein's unusual spiritual journey from Jew to atheist philosopher, atheist to Christian, then lay woman to Carmelite nun. In this chapter, I will recount the pivotal forces typically highlighted by Stein's biographers when they try to understand her conversion: the influence of her intellectual mentors, her interactions with Anna Reinach, and her transformative reading of St. Teresa of Avila's autobiography. However, to dig deeper into the mystery surrounding Stein's Catholic conversion, I will examine the period which writer Angela von Renteln calls Edith Stein's “years of crisis,” when she weathered professional and personal storms. Using Rabbi Bene Lappe's crash theory, I will explore two especially meaningful questions for Jewish commentators. Did Stein engage with Judaism before deciding to convert? Was there a place for her in the Jewish tradition? Finally, I will discuss why Stein was specifically drawn to the Carmelite Order, and consider how her choice was another manifestation of her Jewish-Catholic synthesis.

II. Classic Explanations: Why did Edith Stein Convert to Catholicism?

Despite the mystery surrounding Edith Stein's conversion, its genuine nature has never been in doubt. As Espin affirms, Stein “converted out of conviction rather than convenience” (135). Baptized in 1922, Stein had little to gain personally or politically from this ritual. While Jews did face hiring discrimination under the Weimar Republic, anti-Semitism was not as rampant as it would be in the 1930s. As Susan Jacoby - author of “Strange Gods: A Secular

History of Conversion” - explains, converting to Christianity might have given Stein a slight leg up in the world of academia. However, Jacoby notes that “Catholicism...was regarded with much greater animus than Protestantism by German Jews...the Jewish experience of being persecuted by Catholics was much longer and more intense” (277). If Stein had merely hoped to escape anti-Semitic persecution and enhance her career prospects, she would likely have become a Protestant and caused “much less angst among her Jewish family members and friends” (Jacoby 277). Instead she chose Catholicism, putting cherished relationships at risk. Academic Rachel Brenner sums up the scholarly consensus: “as painful as it was to her family and Jewish friends, and as baffling even to her Catholic advisors, Stein’s conversion seems, by all accounts, to be authentic” (77).

But how to account for this genuine attraction to Catholicism from a Jewish-born atheist? Any cursory biography of Stein will mention at least one of these explanations: her relationships with Christian converts in her intellectual circle, her friendship with the devout Lutheran Anna Reinach, and her late-night reading of Teresa of Avila’s autobiography in the summer of 1921. Stein affirmed that all of these moments were important parts of her spiritual journey, but these distinct experiences may not encompass the whole story.

As discussed in earlier chapters, Stein grew up participating in Jewish rituals, influenced by her mother’s piety. However, other family members were not as observant, providing Stein with alternative models. At age 15, Stein “deliberately and consciously...gave up praying” (*Jewish Family* 148). Throughout her adolescence and into her college years, she considered herself an atheist. Stein’s orientation to the world of faith changed when she transferred to the University of Gottingen and began to study with the acclaimed phenomenologist Edmund Husserl. In Gottingen, Stein learned to “philosophize, day and night” with a cadre of students

and professors dedicated to Husserl's methodology (*Jewish Family* 218). Berkman writes, "it is striking that Husserl and many of his students were of Jewish descent: Adolf Reinach, Husserl's right arm; the brilliant mercurial Max Scheler; Hedwig Conrad-Martius, Stein's closest friend; and Stein's dear friends Fritz Kaufmann, Hans Lipps, Alexandre Koyre, all key early contributors to the phenomenological movement" ("Symbiosis" 184). However, "most, not all, of Gottingen Jewish phenomenologists converted to either the Lutheran or Catholic faith" (Berkman "Symbiosis" 184).

In Gottingen, Stein found comfort in being surrounded by people with Jewish ancestry similar to her own. But as an atheist she was an outlier, and the Husserl devotees frequently discussed the philosophical underpinnings of religion. The three professors Stein deeply admired - Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler, and Adolf Reinach - had all converted to Christianity, providing her with potent role models. Max Scheler was the only Catholic among "the leading minds of the phenomenological movement" (Krochmalnick 64). German academic Daniel Krochmalnik posits that Stein's first serious contact with Catholicism, "which in her Silesian hometown was the primitive faith of Polish foreign workers," was through Max Scheler's lectures (64). Stein wrote about her experience as Scheler's student in *Life in a Jewish Family*:

His influence in those years affected me, as it did many others, far beyond the sphere of philosophy...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 as yet to the Faith. But it did open for me a region of 'phenomena' which I could then no longer bypass blindly...The barriers of rationalistic prejudice with which I had unwittingly grown up fell, and the world of faith unfolded before me (*Jewish Family* 160).

Scheler's Catholic teachings, and the influence of her peers and mentors, opened Stein's mind to the power of faith. While she did not consider becoming a Catholic at that time, the Gottingen philosophers led Stein to question her atheism.

When did Stein's respect for Christians and acceptance of religion as a 'phenomenon' begin to affect her own spiritual path? Most biographers point to two flashpoints that Stein herself identified. In the devastation and chaos of WWI, Adolf Reinach was killed in action. Stein had been close with Reinach, who had often given her academic advice, and with his wife Anna. In 1918, Stein was asked by the Reinach family to help put her mentor's unpublished papers in order. But according to Stein's biographer Waltraud Herbstrith, "she hesitated. She felt disoriented by Reinach's death. He...together with Husserl, had made up the nucleus of the Gottingen group; it had been his kindness that allowed her to glimpse a world that was formerly sealed" (Herbstrith 24). Stein was mourning her friend and uncertain how to console his grieving widow. But when she went to visit Anna, she found that "rather than appearing crushed by her suffering, the young widow" - and recent Lutheran convert - "was filled with a hope that offered the other mourners consolation and peace" (Herbstrith 25). The visit with Anna Reinach exposed Stein to the transformative effects of faith. Later in life, Stein recalled this experience in a letter to a Jesuit friend: "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...triumphant over the sting of death" (Herbstrith 25).

The distinctly positive attitude towards death and suffering present in Christianity made an impression on Stein in 1918. However, she would not convert for another four years. The inciting event mentioned almost universally by Stein's biographers is her fateful reading of St. Teresa of Avila's *The Book of Her Life*. Some authors play up the drama of the climactic

evening. The year is 1921, and Stein is spending the summer with her close friend Hedwig Conrad-Martius on her farm in Bergzabern, Germany. When Hedwig and her husband go out for the evening, Edith is left alone to peruse her hosts' library. By chance she picks up Teresa of Avila's autobiography. According to Herbstrith, "once she began reading it, she found it impossible to put the book down and stayed up reading the entire night" (24). Eminent Stein scholar John Sullivan writes, "a night-long reading of...St. Teresa of Jesus, ending with the exclamation 'That is the truth,' was her conversion experience. She felt immediately attracted to a contemplative calling in order to live out the divine life that had finally broken through the defenses of her atheism" ("Saint Edith").

Truth was a sacred concept for Edith Stein. She searched for truth her entire young life as a philosopher, and she believed she found it in Catholicism. Stein always maintained that her decision to become a Catholic and a Carmelite was sealed that night in Bergzabern. In "The Road to Carmel" she wrote that the order founded by Teresa of Avila had been her "goal...since the summer of 1921 when the 'Life' of our holy mother St. Teresa had fallen into my hands and brought to an end my long search for the true faith" (358). Reading St. Teresa was clarifying for Stein, by her own account the "end" of her long spiritual struggle. But when hagiographical biographers elevate this single moment of insight, Stein's epiphany remains mysterious. She keeps her secret.

Intercultural dialogue leader Angelika von Renteln, among other scholars, has sought to put Stein's conversion experience within a wider context. Renteln writes that "for anyone who searches for a deeper understanding of Edith Stein's conversion and is not satisfied with the explanation of her conversion as a sudden supernatural experience," it is important to sketch the years of personal crises that she endured from 1918 to 1922 (135). Namely, Stein's struggle to

find her place in the professional world, and the foundering of her marital dreams. I agree with Renteln that, though she is now a saint, Edith Stein should “receive human characteristics and be freed from the idealized interpretations and moral representations of others. Only once her humanity and her very human struggles and doubts receive an adequate place in her biography, can today’s readers be brought nearer to Stein’s life; and only then can her life be pioneering for others” (Renteln 135). Therefore, we now turn to a more in-depth exploration of Stein’s years of crisis, and the concept of spiritual crash.

III. Edith Stein’s Years of Crisis and Crash

Returning to 1918, which Renteln marks as the beginning of Stein’s years of personal crisis, it is important to remember that Germany was in a state of political and social upheaval. When WWI ended, “it was apparent that not only the German Reich but also the old social, business, and cultural orders were breaking down” (Renteln 134). Against this backdrop of turmoil, Stein had direct experience with the suffering and death inherent to modern warfare. She had spent 1915 caring for the sick and dying as a nurse in an infectious diseases hospital (*Jewish Family* 318). Apart from her beloved mentor Adolf Reinach, she lost her philosopher friend Fritz Frankfurter and several extended family members and acquaintances to the “Great War.” However, the end of the war brought little comfort and clarity to Stein’s personal life.

Stein had been selected for the coveted position of Husserl’s assistant in 1916. Unfortunately, “this promising academic position soon yielded disappointment: she felt neglected by Husserl,” who failed to treat her as an equal collaborator in their work (Spector 33). In 1918 she wrote to her friend Roman Ingarden sardonically, “the Master recently favored me with a whole set of directions regarding the handling of his manuscripts...I explained to him...that

such a procedure (1) is impossible, in principle; (2) if at all valid, could be set up that way for his own use only by himself; and that (3) I am especially unsuited for it, and can only continue with this occupation if I do something original on the side” (*Self Portrait* 21-22). Stein felt creatively stifled in the position she had once been so excited to hold, chafing against the disorganization and high demands of “the Master.”

In 1918, Stein left her position as Husserl’s assistant, remaining on good terms with him. She was eventually replaced by the now-famous Martin Heidegger (who likely due to his gender, was treated not as a lackey but as a philosopher in his own right). In 1919, Stein began *Habilitation*, the German process for becoming a university professor, which required the production of an ambitious academic work. In October 1919 she submitted a new philosophical piece to several universities, hoping to be offered a professorship. However, Stein learned that “her wish to habilitate had failed, despite an intensive effort on her part, since the habilitation of women brought with it as many difficulties as it had prior to 1918” (Renteln 141). Stein was surprised and frustrated that the shake-up of gender roles precipitated by the war had not reached academia. Her “hope of an academic career was dashed irrefutably,” though many of her male contemporaries from Gottingen were landing lofty university positions (Renteln 141). Stein was “forced privately to swallow yet another disappointment” (Renteln 141).

Jacoby speculates, “another unanswerable question is whether Stein would have been so preoccupied with religion in her twenties, or would have taken the enormous step of converting to Catholicism rather than Protestantism, had she been able to establish a more stable and promising (in conventional contemporary terms) academic career” (288). Though University of Michigan professor Scott Spector warns scholars “not to succumb too quickly to the temptation to read Stein's turn to Catholic religion...in terms of this academic and intellectual

marginalization,” it was an aspect of her life at this time that cannot be denied (33). Stein’s disillusionment and loss of direction during this period provide a crucial backdrop for her spiritual search, and eventual discovery of Catholicism as a new path forward.

Parallel to Stein’s struggles in the professional world, she experienced disappointments in her love life. She wrote that as a young woman, ““though totally dedicated to my work, I still cherished in my own heart the dream of a great love and a happy marriage”” (Renteln 142). In 1917, Stein was in constant epistolary contact with her philosopher friend Roman Ingarden. She often turned to him for support during her frustrating time as Husserl’s assistant. Towards the end of 1917, she sent him an “exceptional” love letter that let Ingarden “know of Stein’s deep affection for him, though he did not reciprocate those feelings” (Renteln 135). Batzdorff speculates that the two young philosophers wrote more extensively about this romantic attraction, as Stein later asked Ingarden to burn her letters (Silverman 336). Stein and Ingarden eventually resumed a strictly platonic relationship and their correspondence, though Stein was frustrated by the distance he maintained, writing: “I had always forcibly to hold myself back, never writing to you with the full force of my personality” (Renteln 136).

After establishing the boundaries of her relationship with Ingarden, Stein grew close to another friend from Husserl’s phenomenological circle. In 1919, she reconnected with Hans Lipps, who she had found the “most attractive among her fellow students in Gottingen” (*Jewish Family* 454). They had managed to stay in touch while Lipps served in WWI - once they met up in Dresden while he was on furlough, and Stein commented that he looked “splendid in his field grey uniform with the brown leather leggings” - but their friendship did not intensify until after the war. (*Jewish Family* 399). In 1919, the young philosophers both visited Anna Reinach frequently and worked together to organize her husband’s papers for posthumous publication.

Stein also assisted Lipps with his *Habilitation* process, and reportedly “dreamed of a shared future” with him (Renteln 141). But “by the summer of 1921 at the latest, she must have realized that yet again a valuable colleague and discussion partner, who had become a friend, did not however reciprocate the affection she as a woman felt for him” (Renteln 141).

Hedwig Conrad-Martin, Stein’s close friend, wrote about Stein and Lipps: “I am also certain that she would have married him if he had wanted it. But he did not want to” (266). Conrad-Martius and Stein discussed the troubles of the past and their aspirations for the future during the fateful summer of 1921. Like any good friend, Conrad-Martius did not hesitate to broach the topic of Stein’s unrequited feelings for Lipps, and confronted her about “the photograph [of Hans Lipps] that, all by itself, still stood on her small desk in our Bergzabern home” (266). As the two friends had been discussing religious matters intensely, Conrad-Martius told Stein, “it didn’t seem right to surrender totally to God and to want to dedicate oneself to him and yet to keep on the table a picture of a man who didn’t want to marry you...[Edith] was deeply affected and shortly thereafter, perhaps even immediately, the picture disappeared from her desk” (266). Within six months of that conversation, Stein had been baptized and expressed her desire to become a Carmelite nun.

Hans Lipps married a woman named Christine Masing in 1923, and they had two daughters. Sadly, in 1932 Christine died suddenly (Koeppel 56). Soon after, Lipps “approached Edith Stein again,” hoping to find a new partner and mother for his children (Hampl 65). According to a friend, Stein told Lipps succinctly, “Too late.” Hampl editorializes: “this was not the romantic ‘too late’ of disappointed dreams...but quite simply an acknowledgement that she was already committed: by then she was baptized, and with her conversion came her vocation to Carmel” (65). Stein’s long-time translator Josephine Koeppel warns that “there is no justification

for assuming that Edith was ‘disappointed in love’ by Lipps, and that this caused her to choose the life of a religious...she *was* disappointed, but not surprised, by the treatment she received from the Gottingen all-male faculty when she sought a professorship in the autumn of 1920” (53). While I agree with Koeppel that Stein’s romantic life was not the main cause of her turn towards religious life, acknowledging the hardships she faced professionally and personally - shaped by her experience as a female intellectual in a male-dominated field - is key to understanding her conversion.

Rabbi Benay Lappe’s “crash theory” can be used to make sense of how Edith Stein’s years of crisis - the loss and upheaval of WWI, the discrimination and frustration in her professional life, the struggle to find a romantic partner - led to the mystical moment when she discovered “the truth.” Lappe posits that religions exist to create meaning, and do so by telling a “master story” that answers the big questions of life, often contained in a religious text. However, master stories are inevitably challenged by external events that create chaos and doubt, “making your story’s answers no longer workable” (Lappe). She describes moments when the old answers to crucial existential questions no longer seem true, and calls them “crashes.”

Rabbi Lappe identifies the destruction of the Second Temple as the archetypal crash for Judaism, but emphasizes that crashes often occur when painful personal events take place, such as the death of a loved one. Lappe argues that there are three possible responses to a crash. Option one is to return to your original master story, denying the crash and seeking solace in your familiar tradition. Option two is to find a new master story that provides you with different answers post-crash, though this new master story will also inevitably crash one day. Option three is to accept the crash and return to your master story with a willingness to change it: retaining elements that still work for you while incorporating new answers, ultimately creating a radical

new tradition. Lappe argues that crashes are a part of life, they nudge people forward and spur creativity, and so should be recognized and embraced.

Having gone through the classic explanations for Edith Stein's conversion, and explored the dark time that she faced post-WWI, I believe that Stein experienced a spiritual crash as Lappe understands it. Stein had abandoned the full practice of Judaism as a teenager, choosing atheism as her master story. But in the face of an uncertain future professionally and personally, the big questions in her life were looming. According to University of California Santa Barbara professor Jane Duran, Stein happened upon St. Teresa's work "at a time when her internal search had become heightened and when reading the life of a Christian saint might have meant a good deal more" (249). Confronting the crash of her atheist mindset after years of crisis, Stein chose between Lappe's three options. It seems apparent that she seized on St. Teresa's autobiography - and the religion and religious order that went with it - as her new master story to make sense of the world, "the truth." Therefore, one could argue that Edith Stein chose option two, primed for a new master story by years of frustration, disappointment, and loss.

However, the next section will discuss a crucial question for Jews and Catholics alike. Why did Edith Stein choose option two (conversion) instead of option one - returning to a familiar tradition, in this case Judaism? Did she truly explore Judaism before jumping off into a new master story? Could she have found spiritual nourishment with the Jewish tradition? Stein's family, Jewish leaders, and scholars have wrestled with these questions while also working to discern the virtues of Catholicism that most attracted the young philosopher as she emerged from years of crisis.

IV. Edith Stein's Engagement with Judaism

What prevented Edith Stein from choosing option one, returning to Judaism when she sought new answers to existential questions? Some scholars have noted that Stein did not receive an in-depth Jewish education, and had no knowledge of certain Jewish practices that might have appealed to her. Many question how Stein's gender affected her decision to convert, and the opportunities available to her in the Jewish and Catholic worlds. Still others point out that there are legitimate differences in Catholic and Jewish religious orientations, arguing that Stein sought out a tradition that emphasized life after death and the existence of a personal God. Additionally, the peaceful life within the Carmelite cloister enabled Stein to eliminate sources of past turmoil, a route not available to her within the Jewish tradition.

First, I will address the question, did Edith Stein engage deeply with Judaism before deciding to convert to Catholicism? The short answer is no. Jacoby writes that "when Edith was growing up, her family was moderately but not extremely observant. The Steins were the kind of Jews who observed the High Holy Days and Passover but were just as or more likely to have a picnic in the countryside on an ordinary Sabbath as to spend the day in shul" (284). While Edith was knowledgeable about special holidays - especially Yom Kippur, which coincided with her birthday - she was not immersed in daily prayer or the content of weekly Torah portions. Stein received no official Jewish religious education and never learned Hebrew. (On the other hand, Stein studied Greek and Latin in school, which she enjoyed immensely). Batzdorff notes that in the Stein family "the sons were prepared for their Bar Mitzvah, learned a little Hebrew and probably also a bit of Jewish history," but in turn of the century Germany "there was no equivalent (Bat Mitzvah) for girls...one saw no particular reason to give them religious instruction" ("Aunt Edith's Legacy" 40). Jacoby sums up the attitude of families like the Steins:

“in this regard acculturated, moderately observant Jews were no different from more devout Orthodox Jews: sophisticated study of the Torah was not for women” (284).

Would option one - return to Judaism - have been a more viable option for Stein if she had a deeper understanding of Jewish history and prayer life, or possessed Hebrew language skills? Krochmalnick makes the intriguing argument that Edith Stein might have appreciated “the rich life of prayer of the mystical and Hasidic-styled Polish Judaism,” more so than the rigid Prussian Judaism that her family practiced (69). Stein, who was later fascinated by the mystical experiences of St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, could have delved into the mysteries of *kabbalah* enshrined by Eastern European mystics. However, prejudice likely held her back: “culturally and legally emancipated Prussian Jews did not want to be confused with the backwards immigrants from the East, and at best felt pity for them” (Krochmalnik 69). Stein was not immune to stereotypes about Jews that permeated the society she lived in, and on occasion made comments that exposed her biases (and perhaps internalized anti-Semitism). For example, in her autobiography she provided a description of a new Eastern European Jewish friend: “nor had he even the slightest trace of that unpleasant intonation common to the uneducated Eastern Jews” (Batzdorff “Legacy” 43). While Stein might have found meaning among the Hasidim, divisions among the Jewish community, as well as her lack of religious education, prevented her from exploring this strain of Judaism.

As touched on above, Stein’s gender is also a sticking point for scholars speculating about whether Stein could have found a place within a Jewish tradition. Berkman and Rabbi Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer dig deeper into the marginalization of Jewish women in Stein’s time. Berkman writes:

Since women were systematically excluded from the study of Jewish thought and erased from the histories of the Jewish people, Stein’s opportunity to learn about the range and depth of Jewish

religious history and thought was minimal. As a risk-taking and ambitious woman, she naturally was attracted to the figure of Esther...but apart from the exemplary daring, practical wisdom, and love of diverse Old Testament women, the Judaism that Stein knew and experienced lacked non-biblical historical figures of inspiring prominence (“Symbiosis” 189).

Even as a Christian, Stein clung to Queen Esther as a spiritual role model, but she had few real-life women to connect with in (recorded) Jewish history. When Stein was born, women could not become rabbis. Women who attended services were obligated to sit far from the center of worship, praying from the synagogue balcony or from behind the *mehitza*, a screened partition separating them from men (Berkman “Symbiosis” 189).

Rabbi Fuchs-Kreimer invokes the importance of the *mehitza* in determining Stein’s path to conversion. She brings up Stein’s contemporary, the German-Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig. Similar to Stein, Rosenzweig questioned his Jewish faith as he deepened his philosophical inquiry. Fuchs-Kreimer recounts, “when Franz Rosenzweig was a young philosopher about to abandon Judaism...he visited an Orthodox *shul* on the eve of Yom Kippur and was awakened to the spiritual depth of his native religion. But would Franz Rosenzweig have remained a Jew if he had been hurried upstairs to sit behind a *mehitza* that fateful night? Frankly, I doubt it” (Fuchs-Kreimer 162). Inferior treatment within the Jewish community - simply due to her gender - likely pushed Stein away from Judaism.

In contrast, Stein was drawn to Catholicism when she discovered a strong female role model within its canon. Fuchs-Kreimer argues:

It seems hardly a coincidence that the book that decisively turned Stein toward faith was written by a woman - Teresa of Avila. Does a female author of similar stature exist with the Jewish spiritual canon? No. The life with women to which Stein was ultimately attracted - the paradoxically restricted and liberated life of the cloistered nun - has no parallel in the Jewish world. The tremendous focus on family which is so characteristic of Jewish life may have made it

even more difficult for a single, 30-year-old, female philosopher to find adequate models within Judaism (162).

As a woman, and especially a single, intellectually driven woman, Stein was attracted to Teresa's vision of female-centric spiritual community. The ideal Jewish woman is traditionally framed as wife, mother, and matriarch, in the model of the biblical foremothers - Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah - whose names are enshrined in the *Amidah*, a central Jewish prayer. There is no such thing as a Jewish nun. In St. Teresa's autobiography, Stein found not only a female spiritual leader to emulate, but a roadmap to life within a religious order which had no equivalent in the Jewish community. As a nun, Stein could even commit to a spiritual marriage and take a "husband" without giving up her focus on philosophy, prayer, and sisterhood.

Before I turn to other aspects of Catholicism that attracted Stein, it is important to acknowledge that there were women in her time carving out a place for themselves as Jewish spiritual leaders. For example, Regina Jonas, a German woman born in 1902, graduated from Berlin's Academy for the Science of Judaism in 1930. While studying there, Jonas wrote a thesis entitled "Can a Woman Be a Rabbi According to Halachic Sources?" She answered her own question in 1935 when she was privately ordained by the Reform rabbi Max Dienemann, becoming the first ordained female rabbi (Sachar). Unfortunately, Jonas' remarkable achievement was clouded in 1942, when she was deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp. Jonas continued to provide pastoral care in the camp until 1944, when she was sent to Auschwitz and murdered (Sachar). Though their lives diverged, Regina Jonas, the first female rabbi, and Edith Stein, the Catholic saint, rest in the same place.

It would take 30 years for another female rabbi to be ordained: New York's Hebrew Union College granted ordination to Sally Priesland in 1972. In 2010, Alina Treiger became the first woman to be ordained as a rabbi in Germany since the trailblazing Regina Jonas ("Timeline

of Women”). If Edith Stein had reconnected with Judaism after her years of crisis and ultimate crash, could she have become a Jewish theologian and spiritual leader, opening doors like Regina Jonas? Stein became a loud feminist voice in the Catholic community after her conversion; could she have done the same for Judaism? Stein’s niece writes, “it is intriguing, however futile, to speculate what might have happened to her spiritual development had she turned to a more intensive study of Judaism instead of Catholicism” (Batzdorff “Martyr”).

We will never know what might have happened if Stein chose option one when confronting her spiritual crash. Rabbi Fuchs-Kreimer eloquently describes the mix of feelings that arise when Jewish scholars contemplate Edith Stein’s conversion, especially female ones:

On the one hand, I felt proud of this intellectual, spiritually gifted woman. On the other, as someone seeking Jewish women role models, I felt abandoned and betrayed...I am angry when a Jew chooses not to struggle with the civilization into which she was born, however difficult she may find it. I don’t understand why Stein didn’t wrestle longer and harder with this complicated blessing of Jewishness. And I feel sad and cheated that her profound work as a translator, philosopher, inspirational writer and spiritual director enhanced another tradition and not mine...Stories such as Stein’s make me feel more committed than ever to ensuring that Jews, especially women, not be hindered in experiencing the riches of our faith (163).

Stein had legitimate reasons for feeling marginalized as a woman within the Jewish world, and was ultimately drawn to the figure of St. Teresa of Avila and her contemplative order. Still, there were Jewish women who experienced the same pressures and sexism, and chose to wrestle with the “complicated blessing of Jewishness” instead of converting. While Stein’s choice can produce feelings of anger and betrayal in Jewish thinkers, I believe it is important to acknowledge but also move past these emotions. Stein’s faith identity and her relationship to Judaism were complex, but to dismiss her as a convert who took the easy way out denies her to Jews as a source of inspiration, introspection, and thought-provoking dialogue.

Speaking of Stein's unusual faith identity, an important question remains. Did Stein truly go option two - finding a new master story to replace atheism (and her ties to Judaism) - when she experienced a spiritual crash? Undoubtedly, there were Catholic beliefs that Stein felt answered her existential questions more adequately than Jewish ones, especially concerning life after death, the concept of a personal God, and the opportunity for spiritual marriage. But her choice of the Carmelite order also signaled her desire to hold onto elements of the Jewishness she claimed for herself. Did Edith Stein create her own option three?

V. Edith Stein's Connection to Catholicism and Carmel

In her autobiography, Stein provided more clues to the "secret" of her conversion by emphasizing her appreciation for Catholic understandings of the afterlife and the nature of the divine. In *Life in a Jewish Family*, Stein recounted attending the Jewish funeral of an uncle. She recalled vividly:

The rabbi began the eulogy...They gave the resume of the life of the deceased, recalling all the good things he had done, thereby rousing the sorrow of the bereaved all the more; there was nothing consoling about them. To be sure, there was a prayer pronounced in solemn tones: 'And when the body returns to dust, the spirit returns to God who gave it.' However, nothing of faith in 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 on me (*Jewish Family* 81).

During her spiritual exploration, Stein noted the difference in Jewish and Catholic attitudes towards death. In Anna Reinach, she saw Christian faith in a heavenly reunion personified, something she had not encountered in Judaism. However, it is important to note that while Jewish and Catholic funerals differ, "Edith mentions nothing of the prayers and psalms that are

always recited at Jewish funerals. Because she did not know Hebrew, she probably did not understand them” (Batzdorff “Legacy” 40).

Stein likely did not understand the finer points of Jewish beliefs about the afterlife - and Judaism provides a multitude of teachings in this area - but Rabbi Fuchs-Kreimer asserts that Stein’s views of death and sacrifice were still much more aligned with Christianity. Stein embraced the idea of “personal life after death,” transforming death into something redemptive rather than sorrowful. Fuchs-Kreimer writes, “on the subject of death, Stein clearly preferred a Christian view over a Jewish one...she wrote, ‘I joyfully accept in advance the death which God has appointed for me’ - an attitude towards death that is uncongenial to Judaism’s ‘life’ orientation...I believe Stein was correct in understanding that her own approach to death was more consonant with Christianity than with Judaism” (161).

Another aspect of Christian faith that appealed to Stein, and which she eventually embraced whole-heartedly, was the concept of a personal God who can have a direct and intimate relationship with each believer. In *Life in a Jewish Family*, Stein described an exchange with an Orthodox Jewish friend during her time in Gottingen. She asked “whether he believed in a personal God. His reply was succinct: God is spirit; nothing more could be said on the subject. To me, it seemed I had been handed a stone instead of bread” (*Jewish Family* 213). The concept of the divine as only “spirit” did not provide Stein with spiritual nourishment, as her metaphor suggests. She wrote about another experience which sharpened her understanding of the personal relationship (some) Catholics have with God. On a 1916 trip to Frankfurt, Stein and her college friends visited a cathedral:

While we looked around in respectful silence, a woman carrying a market basket came in and knelt down in one of the pews to pray briefly. This was something entirely new to me. To the synagogues or the Protestant churches which I had visited, one went only for services. But here

was someone interrupting her everyday shopping errands to come into this church, although no other person was in it, as though she were here for an intimate conversation. I could never forget that (*Jewish Family* 401).

In this fleeting moment, Stein recognized a distinct type of relationship with the divine. She could not forget this view of God as a friend one could visit while running errands, on one's own terms, without the trappings of a regimented service. While this concept of a personal God is not unique to Catholicism, it was the tradition in which Stein first encountered it. Later, she would affirm her desire for an intimate relationship with the divine by becoming a nun, entering into a "marriage" with Jesus.

This concept of spiritual marriage was another element of Catholicism that appealed to Stein, after frustration and turmoil in her love life. On her "clothing day" when she became a fully-fledged nun, Stein wore bridal white, and in the last year of her life wrote at length about how much it "means to be the Lord's bride under the sign of the Cross" ("Homily of John Paul II"). As a Carmelite nun, Stein found peace and emotional fulfillment that she lacked during her years of crisis. Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem "Heaven-Haven" speaks to the mindset of a nun taking the veil: "I have asked to be / Where no storms come, / Where the green swell is in the havens dumb, / And out of the swing of the sea." Stein too likened her path to a ship, tossed by the waves of war, loss, and uncertainty, finding a haven in Carmel. When she joined the Catholic religious order, she believed she was "coming into the harbor of God's will" (Herbstrith 67).

As discussed above, when Stein endured years of crisis and sought a new master story, she was pushed away from Judaism by sexism and her lack of religious education. Conversely, she was drawn to Christianity by an attraction to specific beliefs, opportunities, and role models in the Catholic world. The simple explanation, using Rabbi Bene Lappe's crash theory, is to describe her conversion as choosing option two: Catholicism as a new master story. But could

Stein's Carmelite vocation actually point to Lappe's option three - keeping elements of an old tradition that still work for you, while adding new ones to create radical synthesis?

The Order of Discalced Carmelites is a Catholic religious order which venerates Jesus and Mary. However, scratching the surface of the order's foundational beliefs reveals a focus on the Old Testament. The Prophet Elijah - who appears in the Hebrew Bible as well as Talmudic literature, and makes appearances in Jewish celebrations such as Passover - is a central figure within Carmel. The order is named for Mount Carmel, where according to the Hebrew Bible, Elijah performed miracles and bested the prophets of rival gods (Dubov). As Hampl explains, "Carmelites, though they take their role from Teresa and much of their contemplative practice from John of the Cross, look back to Elijah as the first 'Carmelite'" (68). Hampl argues further that "the choice of Carmel is telling: Edith Stein chose the one Catholic contemplative order whose roots extend past Christianity back into the hermetic tradition of the Old Testament" (68). In this way, Stein chose a religious order much like herself: practicing Christianity, but acknowledging a connection to the Jewish people.

Berkman provides even more details about Stein's draw to Carmel: "One of the appeals...was its devotion to the prophet Elijah, its maintenance of the Hebrew six-pointed star, and its prayer of monotheistic faith beginning with Sh'ma Yisra'eil" ("Esther and Mary" 59). Stein could have easily chosen a religious order other than the Discalced Carmelites, with their Jewish parallels and history predating Christ. But in "The Road to Carmel" she recounted: "I had been teaching for eight years with the Dominicans at Speyer, was most intimately united with the whole community, and yet could not enter there; Beuron I thought of as the fore-court of Heaven, but I never thought of becoming a Benedictine" (359). Instead, Stein wrote, "the thought of Carmel had never left me...it always seemed to me that our Lord had been keeping something

for me in Carmel which I could find only there” (“Road to Carmel” 359). If Stein had wanted to immerse in a contemplative Catholicism free of Jewish connections or connotations, she could have become a Dominican or Benedictine nun. However, she expressed a distinct longing for Carmel, which she considered the seat of religious truth.

Finally, most scholars point to the influence of St. Teresa as Stein’s inspiration to become a Carmelite. As we have established, Stein was impacted by Teresa’s mystical writings, but also saw herself in the Spanish saint. Stein related to Teresa’s childhood introversion and unusual intellectual abilities, along with the fact that “Teresa’s [family] did not take kindly to her notion that she ought to become a nun” (Duran 250). Interestingly - though this information was not known in Stein’s lifetime - modern historians have discovered that Teresa of Avila “came from a Converso family on her father’s side...Teresa’s paternal ancestors, well-off merchants from Toledo, chose Catholicism over expulsion in 1492” (Jacoby 284). In other words, St. Teresa of Avila was descended from Jews. The “secret” of Edith Stein’s conversion may always remain a secret. Perhaps it was a mysterious pull even to herself. But it is intriguing to contemplate that Stein’s essential Catholic role model - in which she found “the truth” - also had ties to Judaism.

VI. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the mystery of Edith Stein’s conversion, recounting the classic explanations for her turn to Catholicism, then digging deeper into the humanizing crises that pushed her to a spiritual breaking point. Using Rabbi Bene Lappe’s crash theory, I explored Edith Stein’s three options once her belief system came crashing down. I argue that she did not seek answers in Judaism - option one - largely due to the marginalization of women in the Jewish community, though other women took up the challenge of wrestling with their intersectional identities. I recounted how Stein found meaning in aspects of Catholic belief, especially the

valorization of life after death, the idea of a personal God, and the opportunity to become a bride of Christ. Attraction to these Catholic values likely contributed to Stein's conversion, which Lappe would describe as choosing option two. However, examining the founding principles and practices of Carmel, I discern connections and overlap with Judaism which likely appealed to Stein and may have influenced her selection of religious order. Therefore, Edith Stein's conversion to Catholicism and ultimate clothing as a Carmelite nun suggest that when faced with a spiritual crash, she chose option three: the integration of Jewish identity and Catholic practice into a unique synthesis. The next chapter will explore how Edith Stein reconciled her dual faith identity, casting herself in the role of spiritual intercessor.

INTERLUDE: AT THE CARMEL COLOGNE

Cologne, Germany

January 7, 2020

I'm writing this from a narrow bed in the Karmel Maria Vom Frieden, the Carmelite cloister in Cologne, Germany. This room in the guest house is not as spare as I expected - it includes a warm orange bedspread, two small woven rugs, a comfortable armchair and a framed drawing of the Cologne Old City. Of course, there is a crucifix mounted above my head, and a Bible in German on the desk.

Today is my second long day in Cologne, my second ever in Germany. I spent yesterday settling in and exploring Cologne. My mom (who luckily was able to accompany me on my thesis trip) and I were told we had to see the Cologne Cathedral, whose twin spires mark the city's skyline. When we got off the train from the Dusseldorf airport, we headed right to the cathedral, and stumbled into a wave of choral singing and bright Christmas lights. After all our travel planning, jet lag, and time changing, we had forgotten it was December 6th - Epiphany. We explored nativity scenes and stained glass windows with the sound of "Gloria" thrumming in the background. We stopped and lit candles.

We wandered through Cologne in the bright sunlight, delighted by the old brick fortresses and grand churches that would pop unexpectedly into sight. But before a traditional German dinner and a walk along the Rhine we had to make a pilgrimage, anchor ourselves in the reason for our visit, see the patron saint of the continent we had entered. We walked to the Edith Stein statue at Boersenplatz 1. It's not really one statue - it is composed of three Ediths, cast in metal at different stages of her life. Young Edith the philosopher sits in her classic thinking pose, elbow propped on her knee, head resting on her palm. She holds a large Jewish star in her lap. Teresa of

Avila's biography sits by her feet, waiting to be discovered. Another Edith stands tall and stately behind the first. This older Edith gazes out at passersby, clutching her pamphlets as she prepares to lecture on women and Catholicism. Her face is split down the middle, a (very literal) representation of her spiritual struggle and dual faith identity. The final Edith, positioned at the front of the group, wears a habit and holds a cross, complete with a figure of Jesus whose head droops downward onto his chest. The trinity of Ediths reminds me of the three norns from Norse mythology, the women responsible for spinning and cutting the threads of fate.

At the feet of the three Ediths, a path marked by indented footprints extends forward. At the end is a pile of shoes, a haunting symbol of the Nazi genocide. Dropped between the cracks of the path is a crown of thorns. One set of footprints, right next to the Ediths, is signed with the name "Rosa." We looked at the statue for a long time, we took pictures and touched details. I hadn't come across an image of it before. It lingered before my eyes.

After a restful first night in Cologne, we made our way to the Carmelite convent. I stood outside the cream-colored buildings, a little complex in the middle of an otherwise unremarkable street. The Carmel is composed of two simple buildings, the nunnery and the guest house, which flank a taller, resplendent church. In contrast to the plain buildings, the church is adorned with five statues of Mary, light gray trim that highlight whorls and columns, and small stained glass windows. These buildings all sit behind smooth white walls and a high gray gate. Though this building dates from after WWII - the one Edith Stein lived in was destroyed by bombing after she fled to Holland - it is inhabited by the same community. I remind myself that Edith never stepped foot here, but when we enter the convent I still think of her words on the first day of her enclosure. She approached the door of the Carmel Cologne and said, "it opened at last...in deep peace I stepped across the threshold into the House of the Lord."

It's morning, I will have all day to study in the Archivum Edith Stein - the library and study space maintained by the convent for scholars and seekers. In the little front office of the convent we met a German woman who called Sister Verena, the nun I had emailed to confirm our stay. Sister Verena greets us, handing me a heavy metal key that we can use to unlock the gate and a smaller modern one for entering the guest house. She shows us to our small rooms. She has to gather her long robes in her hand as she climbs the wooden stairs. Sister Verena is polite but awkward, maybe due to uncertainty in English - she picks her words carefully - or maybe she just doesn't spend much time with people from outside the convent.

After we drop our bags she shows us the route from the guesthouse to the archive, housed within the same convent complex. It's a path that meanders through several buildings, so no one needs to set foot outside the convent walls. We pass through a door on the second floor of the guesthouse and step into the balcony of a small chapel, cross that space to find ourselves standing above an even grander altar, looking down at the pews of the large central church. From the church balcony we open another door, and descend twisting stairs that end in the building where the nuns live. It's a strange route, it reminds me of hiding, of fugitives, of things hidden in walls. I read that when she lived in the Cologne Carmel and feared that her Jewish presence would bring reprisals on her sisters, Edith Stein dug a hole in the garden and buried her manuscript *Life in a Jewish Family*. When she fled to Holland, the nuns dug it back up and had the autobiography-in-progress smuggled across the border too.

From the nunnery building we open a final door and step into the garden, which surrounds a small modern building with large glass windows, outlined in red. Standing outside you can already see the warm wooden tables and rows and rows of books. I hold my breath as I step into the archive. I wasn't sure what I would find here - I knew it was a place where scholars

were welcome, but I wasn't sure what resources it had. Details had been hard to find online, and questions difficult to ask across language barriers. But the archive doesn't disappoint. There are three other people, all women, bent over their books already.

My mom leaves to explore Cologne, and I float into the archive. The director doesn't speak much English, but he makes me a cup of tea and shows me to the English language section of the archive - several shelves worth of books. I climb a ladder to study the spines, seeing familiar names and titles. Edith Stein's collected works. The anthologies that have been my companions: *Never Forget*, *The Unnecessary Problem*, *Contemplating Edith Stein*. I find volumes by John Sullivan, Josephine Koepfel, and Susanne Batzdorff - old friends at this point - that I haven't read yet. I find a slim book published by the Church, which groups Edith with other pious "victims of the Nazis." Another volume compares Stein's work to the writings of other Jewish women caught in the horrible churn of the Holocaust: Anne Frank, Hannah Arendt, Simone Weil, and Etty Hillesum. I glance at the Spanish shelf and find a very small book I didn't know existed. Someone bound and translated Stein's short article "How I Came to the Carmel Cologne" into Spanish. It seems fitting that it lives in this library within the convent walls.

I take my stack of books to a wooden table, reading and taking notes until the archive closes. I could have found some of these sources online, and I am familiar with almost all of the authors on the English shelf, which fills me with satisfaction (and a little relief - I haven't been missing something crucial this whole semester). But there is something powerful in sitting in this warm room in the company of three other women focused on Stein. It is easy to feel her presence here. There is a large poster of Stein from her student years hanging on one wall, and a mounted picture of the entire Stein family on another. I happen to know that this family photo is actually made of two pictures: after her husband's death Auguste Stein gathered her seven children for a

portrait. Then in some 1890s attempt at Photoshop, the developer superimposed an older photograph to add Siegfried's image. Edith, dark haired and dark eyed, is the smallest child but stares straight into the camera. The picture is ghostly, but fits this warm library.

When I gather my things to leave the archive, I pass by a glass case that contains a few shreds of physical evidence of Edith Stein's passage through the world: a few letters, pages of notes, and postcards written in her hand. On an old slip of paper used to check out a book from the University of Munster library, I can see her signature written clearly. I sign my name in the guestbook and leave this place, where I felt wrapped in the cocoon of knowing that I am not alone in contemplating Edith Stein.

CHAPTER 4

Edith Stein the Interfaith Intercessor

“I am a very poor and helpless little Esther,
but the King who chose me is infinitely great and merciful.”

- Edith Stein

“Nail me to your cross and break me, bleed me, beat me, kill me, take me now -
before I change my mind.”

- *Jesus Christ Superstar*

I. Introduction

In an elegant piece for the essay anthology *Contemplating Edith Stein*, professor Dana Greene poses many of the questions raised in this study of Edith Stein’s life and faith identity. Greene writes: “Did [Stein], as some have argued, cease to be a Jew when she became a Christian? If not, to what degree was she able to reconcile these two commitments, and how did she carry out the reconciliation? [...] Is this reconciliation always fragile, illustrated most fully by the enigmatic image of Stein swathed in the black habit of Carmel with a yellow star of David affixed to the sleeve?” (53). I have presented evidence of Stein’s identification with the Jewish people, and activism on their behalf, throughout her life. I have contextualized her turn to Catholicism, and how even as she encountered “the truth” in St. Teresa of Avila, she chose the Carmelite way of life with its subtle and overt ties to Judaism. These dual identities - Jewish and Catholic - have been established as important parts of Stein’s personhood. But Greene’s question about reconciliation remains: how did Stein integrate her Jewish and Catholic identities in increasingly dark times?

As the Nazi threat loomed, I explore how Stein imagined herself in the role of spiritual intercessor, uniquely positioned - due to her status as a Catholic nun - to serve the Jewish people through her prayers, suffering, and even sacrifice. I will demonstrate that Stein likened herself to the biblical Queen Esther, star of the Purim *shpiel* and protector of the Jewish people, and saw in Jesus a corollary to King Ahasuerus. Stein's writings also indicate her desire to emulate her "Jewish husband" Jesus and engage in expiatory suffering that would benefit her fellow Jews, Germans, and the world (Silverman 333). Finally, this chapter will discuss Stein's controversial last will and testament and the charge that Stein was supersessionist. As we investigate Stein's capacity for inner reconciliation along with dissonance and contradiction, I will argue that her unusual path challenges normative definitions of what it means to be Jewish, Catholic, and anything in between.

II. Sister Edith and Queen Esther

The biblical heroine Queen Esther appears in the Hebrew Bible's *Book of Esther*. Stein would have been familiar with this text from childhood, due to its central place in the Jewish holiday Purim. While the historical authenticity of the events described in the Book of Esther is unclear, it tells the tale of Jews living in Persia under a King named Ahasuerus (frequently identified as Xerxes I of the Achaemenid Empire), grounding the narrative in a specific time and diasporic context. The story goes that King Ahasuerus became displeased with his current queen when she disobeyed his orders. He decided to select a new queen and recruited beautiful young women from across Persia to join his harem. One of these women was Esther, a Jewish orphan raised by her uncle Mordechai. Esther was selected to become the new queen, while hiding her Jewish identity. Mordechai had advised her to engage in this subterfuge, fearing discrimination as Jews were a minority group in Persia. Unfortunately, his fears were well founded - Esther's

ascent to royalty coincided with the rise of Haman, a fierce advisor to the King. Haman had the King's ear and a hatred for Jews, telling Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm, whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the king's laws; and it is not in Your Majesty's interest to tolerate them" (*Sefaria* Esther 3:8). Haman convinced the King to issue an order for the extermination of Persian Jews on the 13th day of Adar (according to the Jewish calendar), a date determined by randomly casting lots.

Mordechai discovered Haman's plot and implored Esther to reveal her identity to the King, hopefully convincing him to spare the Persian Jews. He told Esther, "Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king's palace...And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis" (*Sefaria* Esther 4:14). Esther replied, "I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law; and if I am to perish, I shall perish" (*Sefaria* Esther 4:16). Esther appeared before Ahasuerus - though doing so unannounced was punishable by death - told him she was Jewish, and pleaded for her life and her people. The King listened to Esther, and realized he had been led astray by an evil advisor. By the King's orders, Haman was hanged on the gallows that he had built to kill the Jewish people. Today the Jewish holiday Purim (Hebrew for "lots") is celebrated on the 13th day of Adar, commemorating the triumph of Queen Esther and the Persian Jews over their oppressor. Jews mark Purim by dressing in costumes, eating sweets, and reading the Book of Esther aloud, often transforming it into a play or Purim *shpiel*. Whenever Haman's name is mentioned, listeners drown it out with yells and special noisemakers.

The resonance of Queen Esther's story for Edith Stein makes sense on many levels. The Book of Esther is the most searing biblical narrative about anti-Semitism. Stein witnessed the

rise of political and social forces intent on the extermination of Jews, just as Esther did, though both had some modicum of protection, some ability to hide themselves within another identity. Mordechai's warning to Esther ("do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life") brings to mind Stein's reply when her niece questioned her entry into Carmel: "don't think that my being in a convent is going to keep me immune from what is happening in the world" (Espin 132). The themes of Purim - masquerade, the absence of God, life and death hinging on chance, reversal of fates - were ever present for Jews in Nazi Germany.

Like Queen Esther, Stein recognized that she held a privileged position for a Jewish woman. As discussed in earlier chapters, Stein leveraged her status as a well-known Catholic lecturer, writing to the pope and urging him to issue a denunciation of the Nazi regime. Though Stein's plans to influence the worldly powers of the Vatican failed, she continued to envision herself as a spiritual intercessor. In a 1938 letter she wrote, "I cannot help thinking again and again of Queen Esther, who was taken from her people for the express purpose of standing before the King for her people. I am a very poor and helpless little Esther, but the King who chose me is infinitely great and merciful" (Berkman "Esther and Mary" 59). This connection to Esther helped Stein make sense of the danger and oppression German Jews faced, and understand her place as a Catholic convert with a firm Jewish identity.

As Berkman writes, "Stein's readiness to identify with Esther was one of many examples of her overt post conversion ties to her Jewish...identity and to some extent to Judaism itself" ("Esther and Mary" 59). Stein's identification with Esther, and her use of the heroine to integrate her Jewish and Catholic selves, appears most strikingly in a piece called "Conversation at Night," which she wrote in 1941. This piece is a dialogue, likely intended for performance as a stage play. As a child, Stein loved theater and composed skits to perform with family and

friends. She brought her talents into Carmel, even acting in the role of St. Francis of Assisi in a play she wrote for the Feast of the Holy Innocents in 1935 (Berkman “Esther and Mary” 57).

“Conversation at Night” is an exchange between two imagined characters: the Mother Superior of a Carmel, and the Stranger who eventually reveals herself to be Esther. At the beginning of the dialogue, the Stranger knocks on the door of the Mother’s rooms, dressed as a pilgrim and seeking lodgings. Esther’s first appearance as an anonymous asylum seeker parallels Stein’s entrance into Carmel, motivated by anti-Semitic persecution and the loss of her teaching job. Pushed out by the Aryan laws in 1933, Stein wrote, “I had become a stranger in the world” (“Road to Carmel” 358). In the dialogue, once Mother realizes who the Stranger is, she highlights a specific part of Esther’s background: “It always touched me: As a tender child you lost your father and your mother” (*Hidden Life* 129). Esther’s orphanhood is not strictly relevant to the Purim story, but Stein’s inclusion of this detail indicates the similarities between the biblical heroine and herself. Perhaps Stein believed the early loss of a parent transformed and ultimately strengthened Esther, as her father’s untimely death affected young Edith.

But “Conversation at Night” not only cements Stein’s connection to Esther, suggesting a powerful identification with the Jewish people that continued in her post-conversion life. The dialogue links the threat of genocide in Persia to the increasing horrors faced by German Jews. When Esther recounts “how the highest Lord freed his people through Esther, his maidservant, from the hands of Haman,” the Mother replies, “and today another Haman has sworn to annihilate them in bitter hate. Is this in fact why Esther has returned?” (*Hidden Life* 131). Stein’s Esther has a sacred purpose, the protection of the Jewish people from Hitler, a modern Haman. Esther speaks to the struggle of many Jews - including Stein’s extended family - to escape Germany and find asylum anywhere it was offered, telling the Mother, “I am traveling through

the world to plead for lodgings for the homeless, the people so scattered and trampled that still cannot die” (*Hidden Life* 131). Additionally, the Esther of “Conversation at Night” asserts that she has a partner in this mission: the Virgin Mary. Initially the Mother asks whether the stranger at her door is Mary, and Esther responds, “I am not she - but I know her very well, and it is my joy to serve her. I am of her people, her blood, and once I risked my life for this people. You recall her when you hear my name. My life serves as an image of hers for you” (*Hidden Life* 129). Therefore, in “Conversation at Night,” Stein constructs Mary, Esther, and herself as Jewish women, bound by blood to their people, and working for their salvation.

Analyzing this powerful dialogue, Berkman concludes that “Stein deployed Esther and Mary to unify her personal identification as both a Jew and a Catholic and as well to reconcile her Jewish, Christian, and feminist ideals of womanhood” (“Esther and Mary” 56). Stein saw a Jewish model for herself in the brave, self-sacrificing Queen Esther, who she imagined as inextricably linked to the Virgin Mary. Stein’s Esther proclaims, “I saw the Church grow out of my people...saw that [Mary’s] heart was the unblemished, pure shoot of David...I knew that I was bound to her from eternity in accordance with God’s direction - forever. My life was only a beam of hers” (*Hidden Life* 132). In “Conversation at Night,” Esther, Mary, and the Carmelite Mother have a common goal: spiritual intercession on behalf of the Jewish people. The dialogue concludes with the Mother agreeing to pray for the Jews: “your Israel, I’ll take it up into the lodgings of my heart. Praying secretly and sacrificing secretly, I’ll take it home to my Savior’s heart” (*Hidden Life* 133). Giving her central characters this purpose, Stein reveals the place she sees for herself in a dark and dangerous world. As a spiritual intercessor, Stein can channel her Jewish and Catholic role models - Esther and Mary - integrating her dual faith identity.

Additionally, Berkman argues that “Stein’s elevation of Esther as Mary’s collaborator in saving her people echoed Stein’s conviction that all holy people, regardless of religion, can mediate between temporal and transcendent realms” (“Esther and Mary” 58-59). Berkman writes, “Esther, in this sense, is a saint” (“Esther and Mary” 58-59). In “Conversation at Night,” Stein blurs many boundaries. In a dark room at the heart of Carmel, there is space for shape-shifting and transgression, there is space for masquerade. Esther the Purim Queen becomes a Catholic saint, a follower of Mary and Jesus. The Virgin Mary emerges as a Jewish woman, a “pure shoot of David” who pleads for her people from eternity. Through these figures, we can glimpse Stein’s complex faith identity, the spiritual integration that Berkman describes as “ingenious, brilliant, and historically significant,” yet containing “contradictions and areas of incoherence” (“Esther and Mary” 56). Moving from Stein’s connection to Esther and Mary to her relationship with Jesus, this integration and contradiction becomes even more clear.

III. Edith Stein and Her “Jewish Husband Jesus”

Stein likened herself to Esther not only because of their similar paths and political surroundings, but because of her marriage to a powerful king. In the letter where Stein described feeling like a “poor and helpless little Esther,” she drew a direct parallel between Jesus and Ahasuerus: “the King who has chosen me is infinitely great and merciful” (Berkman “Esther and Mary” 59). As a fully clothed Carmelite nun, Stein consecrated herself as a bride of Christ. But Stein’s spiritual marriage was shaped by her perception of both herself and Jesus as members of the Jewish people. Stein once told a Jesuit friend: “You don’t know what it means to me to be a daughter of the chosen people - to belong to Christ, not only spiritually, but according to the flesh” (Herbstrith 63). As has been discussed at length, Stein’s Jewish identity remained in place throughout her life as a Christian, but it also impacted and deepened her relationship to Jesus.

In writings that she shared with her Carmelite sisters and the wider public, Stein took it upon herself to emphasize Jesus' Jewishness. In an essay called "The Prayer of the Church" published in 1936, Stein wrote, "the Gospels tell us that Christ prayed the way a devout Jew faithful to the law prayed...From his last meal with his disciples, we know that Jesus said the old blessings over bread, wine, and fruits of the earth, as they are prayed to this day. So he fulfilled one of the most sacred religious duties: the ceremonial Passover to commemorate deliverance from slavery in Egypt" (*Hidden Life* 7). Stein characterized Jesus as a follower of traditional Jewish practices such as holding Passover Seders, and eagerly shared this interpretation with other Christians. As frequent Stein analyst Emily Leah Silverman asserts, Stein "saw Jesus as a Jew before Christian theologians took this fact seriously" (333). For this reason, Silverman refers to Jesus as "Edith Stein's Jewish husband Jesus."

Stein's sense of a unique link with Jesus - due to both her Jewish heritage and Catholic commitment - magnified her belief that she could serve as a spiritual intercessor in the mold of Queen Esther. Silverman asks, "Was Stein in a position to do something about the suffering of her people that no one around her was able to do because of her unique identity claim of being a Jew, like Jesus, but also realizing that he was the Savior?" (336). Stein answers this question affirmatively, at least in her own estimation. In 1933 she wrote about an experience she had while deep in prayer: "I talked with the Savior and told Him that I knew that it was His cross that was now being placed upon the Jewish people; that most of them did not understand this, but that those who did would have to take it up willingly in the name of all. I would do that. He would show me how" (Silverman 335). Stein believed that her conversion to Catholicism had given her a different understanding of suffering - typically represented by the cross in Christianity - and the power to "take it up willingly" to benefit Jews. As Silverman sums up, Stein believed "only a

fellow Jew could fully practice the *imitatio Christi* through a sacred marriage as a Carmelite to transmute Jewish suffering. Her Carmelite practice opened her to offer herself as a sacrifice for her people as the Jewish Jesus had done nearly two millennia before” (Silverman 333).

Silverman suggests that one of the most powerful aspects of Stein’s Carmelite practice was her belief in expiatory suffering, and her willingness to sacrifice herself for others. Stein plainly expressed her devotion to this Christian tenet: “there is a call to suffer with Christ, and through this call to collaborate with Him in His work of redemption” (*Edith Stein Thoughts* 9). As Christian theologian Gina Loehr notes, Stein was no stranger to suffering, having experienced many hardships: the “loss of her father as a young girl, the depression of her youth, the tragedy of war, the disapproval of her family, the discrimination of the Nazis” (67). It was incredibly meaningful to Edith that in Christian thought, “instead of trying to explain suffering, ignore it, escape it, or rage against it, she found...a significance to suffering: it is a share in the redemptive power of Christ” (Loehr 67). For Stein, union with Jesus and the imitation of his sacrificial actions had intense spiritual power.

By 1939, Stein was troubled not only by the persecution of the Jewish people, but by the outbreak of a destructive world war. In September of that tumultuous year, Stein wrote:

The world is in flames. Are you compelled to put them out? Look at the Cross.....Do you hear the groans of the wounded on the battlefields in the west and the east? You are not a physician and not a nurse and cannot bind up the wounds. You are enclosed in a cell and cannot get to them...Look at the Crucified...Bound to him, you are as omnipresent as he is...You can be at all fronts, wherever there is grief, in the power of the cross. Your compassionate love takes you everywhere.

(*Hidden Life* 95-96)

Living the cloistered life of a nun in 1939, Stein was unable to physically aid the wounded and dying, as she did in a World War I hospital. But Stein believed that her connection with Jesus

and her humble life as a Carmelite - which she once described as a “life-long martyrdom that no one suspects and is at the same time a source of deep peace and hearty joyousness” - transformed her into an intercessor who could impact the world at large (*Hidden Life* 6). In 1939, Stein wrote out a prayer and sent it to the prioress of her convent: “Dear Mother, please will [you] allow me to offer myself to the heart of Jesus as a sacrifice of propitiation for true peace, that the dominion of the Antichrist may collapse, if possible, without a new world war, and that a new order be established? [...] I know that I am a nothing, but Jesus desires it, and surely he will call many others to do likewise in these days” (Kohler 147). As a Catholic and a bride of Christ, Stein believed that her self-sacrifice could bring peace, a redemptive effect. As Stein added in another essay, “only in union with the divine Head does human suffering take on expiatory power” (*Hidden Life* 93).

While Stein offered many prayers for peace at large, she dwelled continually on the fate of the Jewish people, her people who were suffering. In Stein’s view the Jews were carrying a cross, but lacked her connection to Jesus. The concept of the cross was so crucial to Stein that she incorporated it into her religious name. The Latin name Teresa Benedicta a Cruce can be translated as “Teresa Benedicta of the Cross” or “Teresa, Blessed by the Cross.” In a December 1938 letter Stein confirmed that she received her religious name “exactly as I requested it,” and in the same passage linked the cross in her name to Jewish suffering. The horror of *Kristallnacht* took place only two months before and was likely fresh in her mind: “By the cross I understood the destiny of God’s people which, even at that time, began to announce itself. I thought that those who recognized it as the cross of Christ had to take it upon themselves in the name of all” (Krochmalnik 73). Again Stein cast herself in the role of selfless intercessor, protecting “God’s

people,” the Jews. As Rachel Brenner concludes, “she saw the Jewish plight as the Cross and was ready to accept it in the name of her people” (63).

Since Stein’s childhood, her mother emphasized the significance of her birth on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement. As a nun, she continued to write about the importance of this holy day, tied to the concepts of suffering, sacrifice, and renewal. Stein further illustrated her attempts to reconcile her Jewish and Catholic selves when she drew comparisons between Jesus and the *Siindenbock*, the sacrificial goat symbolically laden with communal sins and driven out into the wilderness on Yom Kippur by ancient Jews (Spector 40). Stein’s identification with intercessory figures - Jesus, Esther, even the original “scapegoat” - illuminates how she integrated her Jewish and Catholic identities. Like Jesus she was willing to suffer “in the name of all,” and like Esther she believed her husband would heed her risky pleas. Stein’s understanding of herself as a member of the Jewish people, but granted access to unique spiritual power through her union with Jesus, helped her reconcile these disparate identities. But does this mindset call into question Stein’s regard for Jews who did not accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior? The next section will discuss the charges of supersessionism leveled against Stein, especially due to her controversial last will and testament, which have alienated some Jews from considering the import of her life and legacy.

IV. Edith Stein the Supersessionist

In order to consider whether Edith Stein held supersessionist beliefs, we must first define this divisive term, which often emerges in Jewish-Catholic dialogue. David Novak, author of *Talking to Christians: Musings of a Jewish Theologian*, defines supersessionism as “the theological conviction that the Christian Church has superseded the Jewish people, assuming their role as God’s covenanted people, Israel” (“Supersessionism Hard and Soft”). Novak asserts

that some level of supersessionism is inherent to Christianity: “A complete denial of supersessionism leaves Christians unable to affirm Christianity as having brought something new and fuller to the ancient covenant between God and Israel” (“Supersessionism”). If Christians did not embrace the New Testament and the teachings of the Church as necessary changes to the Jewish covenant, they would have no reason to practice Christianity instead of Judaism. But Novak makes a crucial distinction between “hard” and “soft” supersessionism:

Hard or maximal supersessionism asserts that God has elected Christians to displace the Jews in the covenant between God and His people. Christianity is taken to be Judaism’s necessarily total successor or “fulfillment.” For hard supersessionists, the only option for Jews is conversion to Christianity...Hard supersessionism of this sort kills Jewish-Christian dialogue before it even starts. Jews faithful to the Jewish tradition cannot accept this categorical dismissal of Judaism’s theological validity (“Supersessionism”).

In short, Christian “hard” supersessionists believe that all Jews should convert to Christianity, a position that is understandably offensive to Jewish people.

A version of supersession that leads to more productive dialogue between Jews and Christians is what Novak terms “soft” or minimal supersessionism. Novak explains that a soft supersessionist believes:

Christianity brings something new (*a novum testamentum*) to the covenant between God and Israel. That does not mean, though, that Christians must see Jews set aside or replaced, any more than new tenants who have built upon the first story of a house must displace the original tenants on the main floor, even if the original tenants do not want to move upstairs with them. Christian soft supersessionism can mean accepting the historical fact that Jews have remained with the “un-supplemented” ancient covenant while Christians have been called by God to a higher level by their affirmation of Jesus as the Christ (“Supersessionism”).

This version of supersessionism is more respectful of Jewish autonomy and practice - Jews and Christians are construed as neighbors who share a building, but who choose not to live together -

and can lend itself to the fruitful exchanges of ideas. Novak deems “soft” supersessionism an internal matter, one that Jews and Christians must consider: “inner supersessionism seeks to answer the Christian’s question of why a Christian should not become Jewish and a Jew’s question about why a Jew should not become Christian...it is quite different from hard supersessionism, which gives external answers to others, telling them what they should become, not explaining why they are what they are” (“Supersessionism”). Supersessionism is a key concept for the relations between Jews and Christians more generally, and Novak’s distinctions clarify that not all forms of supersessionism are destructive to Jewish-Christian dialogue.

Turning back to Edith Stein, it seems clear from the course of her life, writings, and statements that she was a “soft” supersessionist. She converted to Catholicism and became a nun because she believed she found something new and important (“the truth”) in Catholic teachings. To use Novak’s metaphor, she decided to move upstairs (but I would say kept a lot of furniture from her old apartment). Stein’s desire to intercede for the Jewish people is in line with “soft” supersessionism. She believed her Christianity, coupled with her Jewish identity, gave her extra spiritual power. In many pieces of writing Stein expressed her desire to sacrifice herself for peace, the end of the Nazi regime, the preservation of her family, and asylum for the Jewish people. However, her last will and testament is controversial because it seems to veer into “hard” supersessionism, the conviction that Jews should convert to Christianity.

Stein’s handwritten last will and testament, composed in 1939 at the Echt Carmel (three years before her murder in Auschwitz) reads:

I ask the Lord to accept my life and death for His honor and glorification, for all concerns of the most Holy Heart of Jesus and Mary and the Holy Church, especially for the sanctification and completion of our Holy Order, particularly the Carmels of Cologne and Echt, for the atonement for the unbelief of the Jewish people and in order that the Lord may be accepted by his own

[people] and that His Kingdom come in magnificence, for the deliverance of Germany and world peace, the destruction of the Antichrist, and finally for my relatives both living and dead and all whom God has given me: that none of them may be lost (Espin 147).

In this short testament, Stein sparked controversy by offering her life “for the atonement for the unbelief of the Jewish people.” The key word “unbelief” sets Stein’s will apart from her other writings about suffering on behalf of the Jews. Did Stein wish to atone for the fact that the vast majority of Jews do not accept Jesus as the messiah? Was she implying, along “hard” supersessionist lines, that all Jews should convert to Christianity? Silverman acknowledges Stein’s unusual faith identity, but sums up one typical reaction to her last will and testament: “Stein’s view of her faith offends the Jewish community, because she was working to save them at the cost of their conversion to Christianity...She hoped her people would embrace Jesus the Jew, and see the light that one of their own had already saved them, and their suffering would end” (Silverman “On the Frontiers”). Espin notes that Stein’s will is “now usually quoted in abridged form, so as not to give offense to Jewish readers” (147).

However, not all scholars see Stein’s last will and testament as evidence of “hard” supersessionism, or disregard for the theological validity of the Jewish tradition. One of these dissenters is professor Joyce Avrech Berkman, who has called for multidisciplinary analysis of Stein’s life and work. In fact, Berkman edited *Contemplating Edith Stein*, “the first anthology in English of serious scholarly meditations on Stein” (Berkman “Introduction” 2). Using her secular, scholarly approach, Berkman concludes the “highly controversial last Will and Testament documents Stein’s desire that God receive her death as a sacrifice for the unbelief of the Jews (being their unbelief in their Talmudic God, not their failing to be Christians)” (“Symbiosis” 187). Berkman argues that Stein’s “unbelief of the Jews” comment refers to atheists and assimilationists among the Jewish people, those who drifted away from any

conception of the divine (like Stein's teenage self). Berkman supports her theory with one of Stein's last recorded statements before her death. In August 1942, P.O. van Kempen was one of the messengers sent by the Echt Carmel to bring travel necessities to Rosa and Edith Stein, after the sisters were arrested and held in the Westerbork detention camp. Van Kempen met with the sisters, and recorded Edith's conviction that while working in the camp, she "wanted to sacrifice her suffering for her Jewish people, for the blind persecutors, and for all who had lost God from their hearts" (Van Kempen 275). This comment, made in Stein's final days, makes no mention of Jews finding Christ. Rather, she emphasizes atonement for the loss of faith among Jews and gentiles, and the loss of basic morals among the Nazi persecutors.

Stein's writings and actions earlier in life conform to this more generous understanding of her will. At a theological conference in 1941, Stein wrote succinct notes to herself during a spiritual exercise: "State of my soul prior to conversion: Sin of radical unbelief. Salvation purely by God's mercy, without personal merit. Remember this often to become humble" (Kohler 141). Directly prior to Stein's conversion to Catholicism, she identified as an atheist. In these notes, Stein described "radical unbelief" as a sin, but did not characterize Jewish piety - such as her mother's practices or her own engagement with Jewish life - with that negative term. As has been discussed in previous chapters, Stein maintained close friendships with Jews and deep connections to her Jewish family throughout her life. Notably, there are no accounts that Stein pressured anyone in her life to convert to Catholicism.

In fact, one of Stein's most famous letters centers around her "unwillingness to meddle in the spiritual life of others" (Hampl 68). When Stein's beloved mentor Edmund Husserl was close to death, Stein's friend and fellow nun Adelgundis Jaegerschmid often visited him. In one letter,

Sister Adelgundis reported happily that she had nudged Husserl - a Jewish convert to Protestantism - into considering Catholic last rites (Hampl 68). Stein wrote back, alarmed:

Prayer and sacrifice are surely more important than anything we can say to [Husserl]...There is a real difference between being a chosen instrument and being in a state of grace. It is not up to us to pass judgement, and we may confidently leave all to God's unfathomable mercy...After every encounter in which I am made aware how powerless we are to exercise direct influence, I have a deeper sense of the urgency of my own *holocaustum* (Hampl 68).

Those who are intrigued by Stein's mystical side are often struck by her use of the Latin word *holocaustum* to describe her own suffering in 1938, before the outbreak of WWII and long before the word "Holocaust" entered the global lexicon. But the most important part of Stein's letter is her insistence that she and her fellow Christians must not pass judgement on the faiths of others, or "exercise direct influence" to change their paths. Instead, she believed in the power of prayer and inner sacrifice – the Latin *holocaustum* refers to a burnt offering - to aid others.

Considering Stein's comments to P.O. van Kempen, her letter to Sister Adelgundis, and her strong relationships with Jewish loved ones over the course of her life, I choose not to read Stein's last will and testament as an attack on Jewish faith. Instead, I believe Stein meant to offer herself for the preservation and protection of the Jewish people - not their conversion - as well as for a peaceful end to the Nazi terror. Some commentators, especially Jewish ones, may fairly find Stein's last will and testament offensive. But I argue that the full context of her life and work indicates that she was a "soft" supersessionist, not a "hard" supersessionist who believed all Jews should convert. Siding with Berkman, this interpretation of Edith Stein's controversial last will and testament allows us to include her unique thought and life experiences in the Jewish-Catholic dialogue that continues today.

V. Conclusion: Edith Stein the Monster?

Past chapters have explored the different facets of Edith Stein's unusual, dual faith identity. Stein confirmed again and again that she considered herself a member of the Jewish people, and was willing to fight and suffer on their behalf. But she was also baptized into the Catholic Church and dedicated her life to Carmel, after a long string of hardships and spiritual struggle. She became a bride of Christ and continued to attend Yom Kippur services with her mother. She took the nun's veil and kept Jewishness at the heart of her relationship with Jesus. At first glance, Stein's spiritual life seems full of contradictions. However, I posit that she integrated these dual Jewish and Catholic identities by positioning herself as a spiritual intercessor, aspiring to the transformative suffering, sacrifice, and redemptive power wielded by figures such as Queen Esther and Jesus.

Many other scholars who study Edith Stein reach the same conclusion that her Jewish and Catholic identities could coexist. Sullivan, the Carmelite monk and prolific writer on Stein, summed up this position: "Stein highly prized her relationship to the Jewish people and their religion. There was no root incompatibility for her between being a Christian and her esteem for Judaism" (*Edith Stein* 28). Spector wrote, "Stein's turn to Christianity was never described by herself in terms of disavowal; to the contrary, she insisted upon the close kinship of her Catholic spirituality and her Jewishness - but as with other close kinships, the relationship was complicated" (39). Berkman continued this line of thought, arguing, "Stein forged creative options for herself by allowing, consciously or otherwise, her dissonant ideas and feelings to coexist" ("Esther and Mary" 72).

Stein prized her Jewish and Catholic selves, an unusual position that was not without its areas of complexity and dissonance. Her "soft" supersessionism brushed up against her respect

for Jewish family and friends. Her desire to suffer on the behalf of the Jewish people became bound to her love of the cross. The lasting image we have of her is the star of David emblazoned on a Carmelite nun's habit. When she was a teacher, Stein assigned her students a writing prompt based on one of her favorite quotes: "I am not a 'cleverly-designed book': I am a human being with my contradictions" (Berkman "Esther and Mary" 72).

Hardliners among both Jews and Christians would say that such a merged and mingled faith identity should not exist, that there are distinct boundaries between Judaism and Catholicism. Some scholars would ignore the grey area and insist that Edith Stein should be classified as either a Jew or a Christian. Daniel Boyarin - a historian of religion and Orthodox Jewish writer on taboo topics - instead embraces hybridity. In his groundbreaking book *Border Lines*, he explores the partition process that separated Judaism and Christianity into two different religions. Boyarin argues that "the borders between Christianity and Judaism are as constructed and imposed, as artificial and political as any of the borders on earth" (1). He writes about the "heresiology" that took place in the first few centuries of the common era, "the extraordinary practice of anatomizing, pinning down, making taxonomies of Christians who are not somehow 'in'" (Boyarin, xi). Boyarin argues that early Christians imposed borders with Judaism by "producing a species of heretics called 'Jews' and 'Judaizers,' hybrids, 'monsters' to use the terminology of one of the earliest of Christian writers Ignatius of Antioch: 'It is monstrosous to talk of Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism'" (xii).

I believe that an important question lingers about Edith Stein. If she is both a Jew and a Catholic, if she is both a "daughter of Israel and faithful daughter of the Church," is she a monster? Should we - as Jews, as Catholics, as anything else - be afraid of her? Later chapters will show that as the canonization process brought greater attention to her life story, Edith Stein

sparked intense controversy and interfaith debate. If there is a reason to construe Stein as a hybrid “monster,” it is because she blurs the lines between Judaism and Christianity, the neat boundaries often placed around institutionalized religions. Stein illuminates, as Boyarin and others argue, that there “was no inevitability to the division between Judaism and Christianity...if history had followed a different course, Edith Stein's position may not have been perceived as so controversial or absurd” (Espin 135-136). The creation of new identities - choosing option three, recalling Rabbi Bene Lappe’s crash theory - can be generative rather than threatening.

Spirituality is messy and expansive because people are messy and expansive. Jewish and Catholic authorities might wish to ignore the complexity of faith identities held by people like Edith Stein, but doing so does not enrich religious traditions. Stein’s life experiences and eloquent writings about her spiritual journey raise crucial questions. What does it mean to be Jewish? What does it mean to be Catholic? How can these identities and peoples coexist? Thinking deeply about these questions, and exchanging ideas across “border lines,” provides opportunities for reflection and spiritual growth. As Boyarin affirms, “the affiliation between what we call Judaism and what we call Christianity is much more complex than most scholars, let alone most layfolk, imagine and that complexity has work to do in the world...we can learn something from it about identities and affiliations” (xi). In sparking Jewish-Catholic dialogue and deeper consideration about the construction of faith identities, I believe that Edith Stein can serve, in her own words, as “a mysterious light in a mysterious darkness” (*Hidden Life* 109).

Part Two: Legacy

CHAPTER 5

Edith Stein the Saint

“I am in no way a saint, and I even have my hours of weakness.”

- Edith Stein

“Always knew that I’d be an apostle, knew that I would make it if I tried.

Then when we retire we can write the Gospels, so they’ll all talk about us when we die.”

- *Jesus Christ Superstar*

I. Introduction

Edith Stein, also known as St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, lived an unusual and extraordinary life. Perhaps it should not be surprising that her memory spurred an unusual and extraordinary “afterlife,” a path to sainthood that reverberated through Jewish and Catholic communities. So far in this study, I have covered the major events of Stein’s life, discussed her enduring Jewish identity, contextualized her conversion to Catholicism, and explored the complexity of her dual faith identity. While these facets of Stein’s life are fascinating, it was her elevation to sainthood - and the passionate debates sparked by her beatification and eventual canonization - that put her on the radar of many scholars and students of religion.

In death as in life, Edith Stein provoked the search for truth. Did she die as a Jewish martyr? Did she die as a Catholic martyr? What does it mean for the Church to propose a Jewish woman killed in Auschwitz for sainthood? Can Stein symbolize Jewish-Catholic reconciliation and unity, or does her canonization carry more problematic messages? Before we attempt to unravel these knotty questions, we must investigate a more basic one. How exactly did Stein become a saint? Additionally, how was her canonization affected by contemporary instances of

Jewish-Catholic dialogue (and miscommunication)? In this chapter, I will examine how the cause for Edith Stein's sainthood was built, and provide an overview of important events in postwar Jewish-Catholic relations.

II. Edith Stein's Path to Sainthood

After Edith Stein was murdered in the gas chambers of Auschwitz in 1942, her written legacy could have been destroyed just as senselessly. However, the Carmelites nuns' devotion to their lost sister - and the phenomenological community's respect for a trailblazing female philosopher - ensured that Stein's story would be told. Though the Carmelite convents in Echt and Cologne were damaged in World War II, the nuns in both locales preserved thousands of pages of Stein's manuscripts (*Jewish Family* 459). When the war ended, Stein's Carmelite sisters did not know her ultimate fate, only rumors that she had been sent "to the East," the Nazi euphemism for the death camps. In the immediate postwar period, the nuns hoped that Stein would return, perhaps emerging from hiding in the Netherlands or as a survivor of the camps. As time went on, the likelihood of this possibility diminished, but the Cologne Carmelites were determined to honor Stein's life and memory. While facing "an initial dearth of information about her deportation and death," the nuns "assembled as many data and autograph copies of her correspondence as they could" (Sullivan "Path to Beatification" 8).

Sister Teresia Renata Posselt, prioress of the Cologne Carmel and Stein's former novice mistress, spearheaded the collection of information (Neyer). In March 1948, after many years of inquiries, the Cologne Carmel received a report confirming that Stein and her companions had been killed in Auschwitz on August 9 or 10, 1942 (Neyer). In the wake of this blow, Sister Posselt decided to write the first biography of Stein. *Edith Stein: The Life of a Carmelite and Philosopher* was published at the end of 1948, just in time for Christmas (Neyer). Posselt's

biography helped spread Edith Stein's story to the world beyond the cloister. However, the book was riddled with errors due to the fact that Posselt "was exclusively dependent on the recollections of the Sisters in Cologne and Echt and on her own memory" (Neyer). Reliable sources on Stein's early life were hard to come by at that time: the Stein family was scattered across the globe, and Posselt did not have access to all of Stein's work, much of which remained in the Netherlands. Additionally, as Posselt's relationship with Stein was grounded in their Carmelite sisterhood, the book strongly emphasized Stein's post-conversion life. Still, Posselt's goal was not to provide a scholarly account of Stein's life and work, but rather to "braid a 'wreath of memories'" for Stein, whom she knew as Sister Teresa Benedicta (Neyer). According to Posselt the "success of her little book surpassed all expectations" - within four years, the biography was translated into six languages and widely read by Catholics (Neyer).

On the scholarly front, others took up the mantle of building Stein's legacy. In 1947, at the request of the Belgian monk Herman van Breda, Stein's existing manuscripts and the information gathered by the Cologne Carmel were sent to the Husserl Archive in Louvain, Belgium (*Jewish Family* 459). There, two researchers - Dr. Lucy Gelber and Father Roman Leuven, OCD - were "assigned the task of preparing the manuscripts for publication" (*Jewish Family* 459). Gelber and Leuven established the separate Edith Stein Archive at Louvain University, and set about publishing 10 volumes of "Edith Stein Works" from 1950 to 1958 (*Jewish Family* 459). These volumes - including *Life in a Jewish Family*, *The Hidden Life*, *Self-Portrait in Letters*, *Essays on Woman*, *The Problem of Empathy*, *The Science of the Cross*, and *Finite and Infinite Being* - spanned philosophy, religion, and autobiography. Between Posselt's successful biography, and the posthumous publication of Stein's insightful work by Leuven and Gelber, Stein became an ascendant figure in the Catholic and philosophical worlds.

To sum up, directly following WWII, Stein “was essentially an unknown figure...even the circumstances of her death were unknown” (Woodward 137). But with the establishment of the Edith Stein Archive alongside Husserl’s in Belgium, she attracted attention “under her own name as a philosopher and religious thinker,” and there was also significant interest in “a Catholic who died like the other Jews in the Holocaust” (Woodward 137). By the mid-1950s, Cardinal Joseph Frings of Cologne recognized “the inherent importance of Edith Stein’s life for Catholics and their growing interest in her” (Sullivan “Beatification” 8). For example, in 1955, a lay Catholic organization called the Edith Stein Guild of America was formed in New York City to spread knowledge about the philosopher and Carmelite (Donovan 180). Responding to this surge of interest, Cardinal Frings contacted the Vatican. In 1958, he received permission to begin initial steps for building a cause for Stein’s sainthood. On January 4, 1962, these preparations were completed and Cardinal Frings officially opened the Ordinary Process for the sainthood of Edith Stein (Sullivan “Beatification” 8).

Before we examine further details of the beatification and canonization process, it is important to recognize that “according to Catholic belief...candidates for sainthood show that they heeded the call to ‘be holy as their God is holy’ [...] Afterwards the Church intervenes to guide a process designed to acknowledge the holiness of God at work in them. This does not preclude long and sometimes tedious-sounding procedures for determining their worthiness” (Sullivan “Beatification” 7). Therefore, when Cardinal Frings opened the Ordinary Process, it was the beginning of a multi-step journey with no assured destination. While beatification brings a candidate to the distinguished level of “blessed,” more requirements must be met for a candidate to be canonized and become “sainted.” Many causes for sainthood stall due to lack of

evidence or insufficient support from the Congregation for the Causes of Saints (the subsection of the Roman Curia which supervises the canonization process).

Additionally, there are two major paths to sainthood within the Catholic Church. Those who propose a candidate for sainthood must prove that the candidate died as a martyr of the Church, or that the candidate displayed exemplary heroic virtues. Father Robert Barron, currently the Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles, speaks to the definition of heroic virtues:

What precisely does the church mean when it solemnly proclaims that someone is a blessed or a saint? It means that the person in question exhibited in the course of his life virtue to a “heroic” degree. And what exactly is virtue? The church has identified the “cardinal” virtues of justice, temperance, prudence and fortitude and the “theological” virtues of faith, hope and love. For the Catholic Church therefore, a saint is not, primarily, someone who has seen visions or performed miracles or exhibited flawless practical judgment, but rather someone who has remarkably embodied these moral and spiritual excellences (“Displaying Heroic Virtue”).

According to Barron, a candidate for sainthood along the heroic virtues track must embody important spiritual values. Cardinal Frings and the Cologne Carmelites pushing for Stein’s beatification initially took this path, emphasizing her virtuous displays of faith, love, and fortitude. Kenneth Woodward - the author of *Making Saints: How the Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn’t, and Why* - confirms that in the 1960s and 70s, “the process was based on proving [Stein’s] heroic virtue, not martyrdom. The assumption was that she had been killed because she was a Jew” (137).

After the Ordinary Process for Edith Stein’s sainthood was opened in 1962, the Cologne diocese set about collecting evidence of Stein’s heroic virtues. In the 1960s, “sworn statements about Stein’s life and conduct came from 22 different cities and two continents. There were 109 people interviewed about their experiences with Stein, including three Jewish women” (Sullivan “Beatification” 10). One of these women was Stein’s older sister Erna Biberstein, who gave

testimony in support of the canonization in the fall of 1963 (Batzdorff “Significance” 27). The collection of testimonies about Stein’s virtuous life continued for many years. During this time belief in Stein’s blessedness grew, fostered by her Carmelite sisters: “the nuns of Cologne Carmel observed commemorations of Stein’s death and received letters of gratitude for favors granted through her intercession. Most frequently the assistance obtained through prayer concerned finding either employment or residence - quite fitting, symbolically, from a person who out of prejudice was blocked from following her professional career and had to go into exile” (Sullivan “Beatification” 10). If Stein was to become a saint, it seemed she would be a saint of striving students and desperate job hunters, a saint of the displaced, a saint of asylum-seekers.

By 1981, “the cumulative list of petitions asking for canonization of Stein...indicated 436 requests had been submitted to the officials of the cause” (Sullivan “Beatification” 9). In 1983, Cardinal Joseph Hoffner - who had replaced Cardinal Frings as Bishop of Cologne - compiled all the information into a monumental Brief for the Introduction of the Cause, which he submitted to the Vatican. This important document making the case for Stein’s beatification clocked in at over 1,000 pages of text with 35 tables of supporting evidence (Sullivan “Beatification” 10). With the Brief for the Introduction of the Cause completed, the Vatican introduced a new player to the canonization process. On May 1, 1984, the Congregation appointed Dominican Father Ambrosius Eszer as “Relator” for Edith Stein’s cause (Sullivan “Beatification” 11). In this role, Father Eszer would oversee the collection of supplementary evidence to form the final Report to the Congregation, which would be considered by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints and Pope John Paul II himself.

Father Eszer's involvement was crucial as he shifted the cause from focusing on Stein's heroic virtues to examining the possibility of her martyrdom. When Father Eszer dug into the collected research on Stein, he was influenced by the work of Canon Schlafke, who had unearthed a collection of documents in the Dutch Royal Institute for War Documentation which discussed Stein's death (Woodward 139). Schlafke posited that Edith Stein had "suffered martyrdom" for the Catholic faith, and by early 1986 many German and Polish cardinals (including Cardinal Hoffner of Cologne) had adopted this position. As Woodward writes, "the cardinals argued that the death of Edith Stein could be seen as an act of retaliation against the bishops of Holland for their public protest against the deportation of Dutch Jews. Therefore, they concluded, there were grounds for recognizing Edith Stein as a martyr for the church" (139). In January 1986, with the support of Father Eszer, many Church leaders petitioned Pope John Paul II to allow "the cause of Sr. Teresa Benedicta to go beyond the question of heroic virtues, and specifically 'investigate martyrdom'" (Sullivan "Beatification" 11). On January 17, 1986, the pope granted this request.

Even at this point, there was pushback from the Jewish community as word spread that Stein's sainthood might be based on Catholic martyrdom. In the fall of 1986, a Jewish-American writer named James Raphael Baaden - who was writing a biography of Stein - reached out to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Baaden asked the Vatican authorities "how Edith Stein could be beatified as a Christian martyr when she had died because she was Jewish" (Batzdorff "Witnessing" 34). Father Eszer replied definitively, "'To me it is very clear that the motive of Nazi action was *odium fidei*, hatred against the Church,'" arguing that Stein was killed due to the anti-Nazi actions of the Dutch bishops (Batzdorff "Witnessing" 34). Why would the bishops and cardinals making the case for Stein's sainthood shift from proving her heroic virtues to building

a case for her martyrdom, knowing this would open them up to challenges such as Baaden's?

Woodward argues that there were practical and symbolic considerations at play. He writes:

There were at least three good reasons to suppose why the bishops wanted Edith Stein declared a martyr. First, it would obviate the need for a miracle: as a martyr, she could be beatified (but not canonized) without one. Second, in the popular mind (if not in the minds of experts) Edith Stein's reputation for holiness was grounded in the history 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 witnesses to the crimes and horrors of the Nazis (139).

At the simplest level, categorizing Stein as a martyr would circumvent some of the Vatican's bureaucracy and allow her cause to move forward with fewer external events. She could be beatified within a few years, rather than waiting indefinitely for a miracle. On a deeper level, Woodward argues that describing Stein as a martyr would allow the Church to honor the sacrifices of many Catholics killed by the Nazis, and provide the Catholic Church with an archetypal "blood witness" to the Nazi death camps. Additionally, in the early 1980s Pope John Paul II had presided over several positive interfaith gatherings of Jews and Catholics. While the Church surely must have anticipated questions and concerns from Jews about the canonization of Edith Stein, in a time of improved Jewish-Catholic relations, they likely believed that honoring Stein would be seen as an act of reconciliation rather than antagonism.

By mid-1986, Father Eszer's Report to the Congregation was complete, along with a Supplementary Brief which laid out evidence of Stein's heroic virtues and the argument for her martyrdom. It was highly unusual for a cause to proceed so speedily, and along two paths at once. One reason for Stein's fast-track to sainthood were changes in the requirements for

sainthood after Vatican II, which simplified and streamlined the process (Sullivan “Beatification” 11). But another reason was Pope John Paul II’s personal support for Stein’s cause. The pope shared Stein’s “interest in phenomenology and its relation to Christian ethics. For his own thesis in philosophy, [John Paul II] had chosen to write on the phenomenology of Max Scheler and its relation to Thomistic thought” (Woodward 139). John Paul II was familiar with Stein’s mentor Max Scheler, and had likely consumed her philosophical work which combined phenomenology and Thomism. In an even stranger twist of fate, “the pope had come to know well Roman Ingarden, who taught philosophy at the University of Cracow when Wojtyla was the city’s archbishop” (Woodward 139). Ingarden was the first young philosopher who rejected Stein’s romantic advances, a life-long friend and one-time burner of her letters. Woodward adds that “in addition to this chain of personal connections, John Paul II 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” (139). With the pope’s open esteem for Stein, it was not surprising that when the necessary documentation was in place, Stein’s beatification proceeded quickly.

In October 1986 the theologians within the Congregation for Causes of Saints met to discuss Stein’s cause, and in January 1987 the cardinals and bishops within the Congregation did the same. As Sullivan reports, “each meeting voted favorably to approve Stein for beatification on the basis of both her heroic virtues and martyrdom. This led to the final step of approval: in the presence of the Holy Father the Decree confirming the heroic degree of the virtues as well as the martyrdom of Sr. Teresia Benedicta was promulgated on January 26, 1987, an event without precedent in the centuries-old history of the Congregation” (Sullivan “Beatification” 12). The stage was set for Stein’s formal beatification. She became the “first person of Jewish origin in

modern times to achieve this ecclesiastic rank of ‘blessed’” (Batzdorff “Witnessing” 34). Stein was also the first person ever to be declared both a martyr and a confessor of the Church, based on the manner of her death and her heroic virtues respectively.

Stein’s beatification ceremony took place on May 1, 1987 in Cologne. In a piece called “Witnessing My Aunt’s Beatification,” Batzdorff describes the scene: “The stadium is festooned with white and yellow bunting, the papal colors. A sea of people surrounds us, rows upon rows of nuns and monks garbed in their habits, members of youth organizations in their uniforms, men, women, and children. Choral singing and short speeches heighten the joyous mood that pervades this audience of about 70,000, as they await the arrival of Pope John Paul II” (34). Batzdorff shares that eight of Stein’s surviving nieces and nephews attended the ceremony, though some family members chose not to take part, such as her brother Ernst. She eloquently sums up the mix of emotions family members felt: “all these people are gathered to witness my aunt Edith Stein be declared a blessed martyr of the Catholic Church. Yet in August 1942, when a freight train carried her to her death in a gas chamber, no one would help or cry out to stop the horror that snuffed out her life, the life of her sister, and of countless others” (Batzdorff “Witnessing” 39). Batzdorff also comments on the diversity represented by the extended Stein family - hailing from different countries, practicing different religions, and encompassing different reactions to Edith’s beatification. Stein’s niece writes, “Hitler is responsible for having scattered us, like so many Jewish families, over the globe, but this unique occasion brings us together. She would approve of that. Some of us have remained Jews, while others have adopted the Christian faith. We don’t all agree on what her beatification means, but we are together as a family, her family” (Batzdorff “Witnessing” 39).

At the beatification ceremony, Woodward suggests that Pope John Paul II chose his words carefully to avoid “offending Jews or denying the logic of the arguments by which [Stein’s] cause had succeeded” (144). In the beatification homily, the pope “deftly declared that ‘in the extermination camp [Stein] died as a daughter of Israel ‘for the glory of the Most Holy Name,’ and, at the same time, as Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, literally ‘blessed by the cross.’ The ‘cause’ of her martyrdom, the pope said, was the Dutch bishops’ letter of protest against the deportation of the Jews” (Woodward 144). The pope walked a fine line, suggesting that Stein died as both a Jew and a Catholic - alluding to her complex, dual faith identity - while asserting that the reason for her martyrdom was retaliation against the Dutch bishops. In this way, the pope affirmed the process that elevated Stein to the level of “blessed” based on both her heroic virtues and her violent death.

Though Stein was now officially beatified, her cause could not proceed to canonization without a Vatican-sanctioned miracle. Many potential saints remain stuck at the level of “blessed” indefinitely, but fortunately for supporters of Stein’s cause, an unusual event occurred in the spring of 1987. In March of that year, a two-year-old girl named Benedicta McCarthy - born to Catholic parents - was rushed to the hospital in Brockton, Massachusetts. She had accidentally ingested an overdose of Tylenol, and had such serious acetaminophen poisoning that her liver and kidneys began to fail. Doctors explained to the family that Benedicta would need a liver transplant, but even with the surgery she had only a 50% chance of survival. The day before the surgery was scheduled,

Mrs. McCarthy had been speaking on the telephone to her sister...about Benedicta’s condition. It was her sister who asked if Benedicta hadn’t been named after a woman recently proposed for beatification. Benedicta had been born on August 9, the day of Edith Stein’s death, which is now the Feast of Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. [The sister] then suggested that they pray to Edith

Stein, Benedicta's patron...On Sunday afternoon, March 22, about 5pm, Mrs. McCarthy put her hands over the area of Benedicta's abdomen where her liver was located and prayed, 'Dear Heavenly Father, in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, through the intercession of Edith Stein, if it be accorded to your will for your greater glory, may Benedicta's liver return to normal size and normal functioning. Amen.' [...] All the McCarthy's solicitous friends, calling to ask about Benedicta, were requested to pray to Edith Stein for the little child's cure (Kavanaugh 187).

Unexpectedly, within 24 hours Benedicta's liver condition improved to the point that surgeons decided not to transplant. In fact, "by the end of the week, Benedicta had completely recovered. Several of the doctors and nurses were amazed...Benedicta left the hospital without a single prescription" (Kavanaugh 188).

With the consent of the McCarthy family, accounts of the miraculous recovery appeared in Catholic newspapers throughout the spring of 1987, and over the next few years the story spread widely (Kavanaugh 188). In 1991, Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD, residing in the archdiocese of Boston, was appointed by the Vatican to investigate the McCarthy miracle. Along with several doctors and Church officials, Kavanaugh interviewed witnesses and gathered documentation to argue that Benedicta's illness was cured in a medically unexplainable way. The star witness was Dr. Ronald Kleinman, who had treated Benedicta and was also an associate professor at Harvard Medical School. Dr. Kleinman, who "declared that he was Jewish and had never heard of Edith Stein," testified that "Benedicta's case was unique...because she went into multi-organ system failure. It was at that moment that a team of doctors began to consider the liver transplant. And then Benedicta started to recover spontaneously...The recovery was permanent and no further treatments were necessary" (Kavanaugh 193). The Vatican judges asked Dr. Kleinman, "'In your estimation do you think that her recovery was something extraordinary?' Dr. Kleinman answered, 'Yes, it was extraordinary'" (Kavanaugh 193). The case was reviewed by Church

authorities in the U.S. and Rome for several years. However, Dr. Kleinman's testimony proved highly persuasive. On March 25, 1997, the pope and the Congregation for the Causes of Saints approved the miracle for the canonization of Edith Stein (Kavanaugh 196).

On October 11, 1998, Pope John Paul II officially canonized Edith Stein. She became St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, one of the co-patron saints of Europe. The pope began his homily, "On 1 May 1987, during my Pastoral Visit to Germany, I had the joy of beatifying this generous witness to the faith in the city of Cologne. Today, 11 years later, here in Rome, in St Peter's Square, I am able solemnly to present this eminent daughter of Israel and faithful daughter of the Church as a saint to the whole world" ("Homily of Pope John Paul II"). He ended his speech, "we give thanks to God for this gift. May the new saint be an example to us in our commitment to serve freedom, in our search for the truth. May her witness constantly strengthen the bridge of mutual understanding between Jews and Christians." ("Homily"). Again, the pope emphasized both Stein's Jewishness and her Christianity, and expressed his hope that she could serve as a "bridge" to facilitate Jewish-Catholic dialogue. But before we consider whether Edith Stein (St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross) can serve such a purpose, we must look more closely at Jewish-Catholic relations post-WWII, and the interactions between these communities as the cause for Stein's sainthood advanced.

III. Jewish-Catholic Relations from the 1950s-1990s

Edith Stein's beatification, canonization, and the controversy over these developments did not take place in a vacuum. In fact, these events were deeply influenced by changes in Jewish-Catholic relations after World War II. In the 1950s, one incredibly significant shift within the Catholic Church was the declaration of Vatican II. In January 1959, "when Pope John XXIII announced the creation of the Second Vatican Council...it shocked the world. There hadn't been

an ecumenical council - an assembly of Roman Catholic religious leaders meant to settle doctrinal issues - in nearly 100 years” (Tiecher). Pope John XXIII assumed the papacy in 1958, succeeding Pius XII who had occupied the office throughout World War II. The new pope declared the need for an ecumenical council because “cultural changes in the aftermath of World War II spelled a need to reconsider church practices” (Tiecher). To revise Catholic doctrine and ecclesial practice, the council “called between 2,000 and 2,500 bishops and thousands of observers, auditors, sisters, laymen and laywomen to four sessions at St. Peter's Basilica between 1962 and 1965” (Tiecher). Sixteen ground-breaking documents stating the new positions of the Church were drawn up in these sessions. Notably, “a theme of the documents was reconciliation...they allowed for Catholics to pray with other Christian denominations, encouraged friendship with other non-Christian faiths, and opened the door for languages besides Latin to be used during Mass” (Tiecher).

The effects of Vatican II on Catholic life and doctrine were wide reaching: “the council is credited with essentially shaping the modern Catholic Church” (Tiecher). One document in particular generated by Vatican II is central to understanding Jewish-Catholic relations today. This document, called *Nostra Aetate* (Latin: in our time), also known as the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, was proclaimed by Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965. *Nostra Aetate* focuses on the relationship between the Church and the Jewish people. The document reads, “since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is...so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues” (“Nostra Aetate”). Apart from generally promoting interfaith dialogue

and respect, *Nostra Aetate* directly addresses the Church's history of labeling Jews as "Christ-killers," enemies of the Church to be destroyed or converted. The council writes:

What happened in [Christ's] passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ. Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church...decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone ("Nostra Aetate").

Therefore, while engaging in some soft supersessionism, *Nostra Aetate* condemns anti-Semitism from any source. (Though commentators such as Anna Maria Strehle, OCD, have questioned: "Why wasn't it possible...to be concrete and say, 'even by the Catholic Church, even by Catholics?' Where is the admission of complicit guilt on the part of the official church, where is the plea for forgiveness?") (18). Additionally, in recognizing the inherent value of the Jewish tradition - "God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues" - *Nostra Aetate* signals the cessation of conversionary efforts among the Jewish people ("Nostra Aetate"). By describing anti-Semitism as essentially opposed to Christian tenets of spiritual love, and calling for friendship between Catholics and Jews, *Nostra Aetate* marks an important turning point in Jewish-Catholic relations.

As the 1960s turned into the 1970s, communities, nations, and scholars continued to discover the scope of Nazi atrocities and attempted to place their rise to power in historical context. In the late seventies the word Holocaust "first entered the working vocabulary of most Western languages as a reference to the genocidal attack on the Jews by the Nazis" (Fisher "Catholic-Jewish Relations" 165). The genre of Holocaust literature was pioneered by writer Elie

Wiesel, among others. In the decades following World War II, much healing, rebuilding, and learning took place. But as Eugene Fisher, the director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, recounts: “the 1980’s were in some ways a time of great pain and vulnerability for the Jewish people. Many younger Jews learned for the first time in any detail what had really happened to their parents, grandparents, and other relatives during World War II. It had been too painful to be told for three decades, and now had to be told with urgency as the survivor generation began to die out” (“Jewish-Catholic” 165). Pope John Paul II, who assumed the papacy in 1978, was aware of this urgency and vulnerability. According to Fisher, building on *Nostra Aetate*, the pope embarked on a “papally unprecedented quest for reconciliation between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people” (“Catholic-Jewish” 166).

The landmark event of Pope John Paul II’s “quest” for interfaith unity was his visit to the Great Synagogue of Rome on May 13, 1986. On this historic occasion, John Paul II became “the first pope ever to visit the Great Synagogue of Rome, and not just visit, but to pray with its rabbi and congregation...The pope’s personal solidarity with the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust was expressed by a large contingent in the congregation, sitting together and wearing their concentration camp uniforms” (Fisher “Catholic-Jewish” 166). The symbolism of the pope praying with Holocaust survivors, entering their worship space as a respectful guest, was potent. Attending an interreligious conference, Pope John Paul II described the visit as an “event that transcends the limits of the year, since it is measured in centuries and millennia in the history of this city and this Church” (Fisher “Catholic-Jewish” 166). The pope’s rhetoric about the synagogue visit was grateful and conciliatory: “I thank Divine Providence that I was able to visit our ‘elder brothers’ in the faith of Abraham in their Roman Synagogue! Blessed be the God of

our fathers! The God of Peace!” (Fisher “Catholic-Jewish” 166). When 1987 began - the year of Stein’s beatification - “a new period of more positive relations between Jews and Christians appeared to be on the horizon” (“Catholic-Jewish” 166). After the synagogue visit, Pope John Paul had made plans to meet with national Jewish leaders in Miami at the very start of his 1987 visit to the United States, hoping to continue the string of positive interfaith interactions.

However, this hopeful outlook proved ill-founded: Jewish-Catholic relations quickly soured over the next few months. In June 1987, a few weeks before his trip to Miami, the pope received former United Nations General Secretary and new Austrian President Kurt Waldheim as an honored state visitor to the Vatican (Suro). In what would become known as the “Waldheim Affair,” the pope “praised the Austrian President for a lifetime of activities on behalf of peace but made no mention of the controversy surrounding his service as a German Army officer in World War II” (Suro). Documents had recently been made public that implicated Waldheim in “the Nazi deportation of Greek Jews to death camps and in brutal reprisals against Yugoslav Partisans” (Suro). Viewing Waldheim as a Nazi collaborator who had lied about his past, ambassadors from many nations had refused to meet with Waldheim after his election as the president of Austria. Therefore the pope’s welcome angered many Jewish people and organizations. In the United States, the Waldheim Affair led to public protests outside Vatican missions (Suro). Prominent international Jewish leaders, including the Israeli prime minister, criticized the pope for legitimizing Waldheim.

The Waldheim Affair was not the only event which disrupted warmer Jewish-Catholic relations in the late 1980s. The seeds of another controversy had been planted in 1984, when Carmelite nuns moved into a building near the Auschwitz death camps in Poland. The building had once served as a storage facility for canisters of Zyklon B gas, which was used to kill over

one million Jews in Auschwitz alone (Weiss). Polish Cardinal Franciszek Marcharski and local authorities “granted the nuns a 99-year lease to convert the building into a convent, where the nuns sought to pray for the souls of the murdered” (Weiss). As Carmelites, these nuns must have known about Edith Stein’s murder in Auschwitz, and likely sought to pray for this candidate for beatification along with all the other people who perished in the infamous camp. In the mid 1980s, another Catholic institution was founded near Auschwitz, this time on the outskirts of the Birkenau camp (also known as Auschwitz II). Not long after the Carmelites established their convent, the Parish Church of Brzezinka took over a building that had once been the Nazi commandant’s headquarters (Weiss). The large cross erected at the top of the building cast a shadow over the grounds of Auschwitz II, and has come to be known as the “Auschwitz cross.”

The establishment of the “Auschwitz convent” and the “Auschwitz cross” angered Jewish people around the world. As the *New York Times* reported, “the presence of the nuns...has been an impediment to improved relations between Roman Catholics and Jews in Poland and elsewhere. Many Jews view the red brick convent just outside the barbed wire perimeter at Auschwitz, where some 1.5 million Jews perished, as an affront to Jewish sensibilities” (Perlez). In 1987, Catholic cardinals and leaders of Jewish organizations met in Geneva “and agreed that the nuns should move to a new Jewish-Christian center and convent to be built some distance from the camp” (Perlez). While this seemed to be a victory for Jewish-Catholic dialogue, the nuns were unwilling to leave their new home. By 1989, the nuns still had not moved, frustrating many Jewish people. American Rabbi Avi Weiss writes, “as a rabbi, I have deep respect for all places of worship. I also feel that Christian houses of worship do not belong at what is in effect the largest Jewish cemetery in the world” (Weiss). In July 1987, Weiss joined a group of seven Jewish activists who protested the Carmelite convent by breaking into the grounds and staging a

sit-in. According to Weiss, the activists “climbed over the fence surrounding the convent and peacefully assembled. Polish workers inside the convent poured a bucket of water mixed with urine on us, as nuns watched from the windows” (Weiss).

Unfortunately, Polish Cardinal Jozef Glemp responded harshly to this incident. He “denounced the ‘anti-Polishness’ of Jews and their ‘power over the mass media,’” leaning into anti-Semitic stereotypes (Perlez). This statement of course only upset Jewish activists more. In 1993 Pope John Paul II ordered the nuns to leave the Auschwitz area and shut down their convent, hoping to avoid future conflict (Weiss). However, the parish church and the large “Auschwitz cross” remained near Birkenau. In 1995, Rabbi Weiss asserted that “it’s up to people of moral conscience to raise a voice for the sake of Holocaust memory and declare loud and clear: A church has no place at Auschwitz II,” and led another sit-in at the Birkenau church (Weiss). The Jewish activists were arrested. According to Weiss, they were asked to strip at the police station, to which he responded, ““You mean you haven’t stripped enough Jews in this place?”” (Weiss). The Birkenau church remains operational today, as the 1995 protest did not lead to any action by higher Catholic authorities. Since then tensions have eased somewhat, and the Auschwitz camps - which serve as a memorial and museum - have been the site of many interfaith commemoration ceremonies. Apart from these Auschwitz-based struggles and the Waldheim Affair, the main event that sparked Jewish-Catholic conflict in the 1980s and 90s was the progression of Edith Stein’s cause for sainthood.

IV. Conclusion

Edith Stein’s beatification and canonization were interspersed with the periods of calm and controversy discussed throughout this chapter. While the cause for Stein’s sainthood proceeded, Elie Wiesel wrote, and Pope John Paul II prayed at the Roman synagogue, and

Carmelite nuns moved into a building that had once held the gas that choked their sister. Stein's beatification ceremony was held the same summer in which the pope praised a Nazi collaborator, and Jewish and Catholic authorities agreed that the "Auschwitz convent" must be shut down.

While Vatican investigators gathered materials on the miraculous healing of Benedicta McCarthy, Rabbi Weiss climbed over a wall and Jewish activists were stripped in a Polish police station. When Stein was canonized in 1998, despite renewed protests, the shadow of a cross still loomed over a Nazi death camp. As interreligious affairs expert Fisher writes:

It is not coincidental that all of the great controversies between Jews and Catholics of the late 1980s and early 1990s revolved, like a hurricane spinning on its axis, around the Holocaust. Profoundly religious symbolism, such as nuns at prayer and the cross at Auschwitz, the meaning of 'forgiveness,' and the pope as the 'Holy Father' for Catholics and a symbol of Christian misdeeds for Jews, became almost inextricably entangled as event after event sparked hurtful rhetoric from both sides of what should have been a dialogue ("Catholic-Jewish" 168)

Despite Stein's heroic virtues and tragic death, her life and all that it symbolized could not be disentangled from the wider tapestry of Jewish-Catholic relations in the second half of the 20th century. As hurtful words and misunderstandings piled up - despite the promising changes of *Nostra Aetate* and Pope John Paul II's efforts towards reconciliation - Edith Stein's sainthood also became a controversial flashpoint for Jews and Catholics.

What exactly is the "problem of Edith Stein," as professor Harry Cargas put it? In the following chapters, I will address the controversial questions raised by commentators who feel compelled to speak out about Edith Stein. The next chapter will address the basis of Stein's sainthood. As the Church argues, did Stein die because of her Catholic identity, as a martyr of the Church? Or did she die because she was Jewish, making her a Jewish martyr? How is martyrdom understood in these different traditions? Then, the final chapter of this study will

speaking to questions that stretch forward into the future: What does Stein's sainthood symbolize? Can Stein serve as a source of interfaith reconciliation and connection, or does her canonization carry destructive messages? How will her life and legacy continue to affect Jewish-Catholic relations?

INTERLUDE: AT THE JEWISH MUSEUM IN BERLIN

Berlin, Germany

January 9, 2020

I am in the voided void, and it is dark, and it is cold.

But truly I am at the Jewish Museum in Berlin. This place is beautiful and crushing, and it feels so...thoughtful, well considered. Berlin is a delightful, cosmopolitan city crowded with monuments and memorials that don't shy away from the horrors of its history. The Jewish Museum is no different. The main exhibition is centered on the Holocaust, and made up of three interconnected parts, actually three long sloping hallways: the Axis of Exile, the Axis of Holocaust, and the Axis of Continuity. When we enter the museum the guides apologize, but explain that The Axis of Continuity is closed for construction. As Kurt Vonnegut, former prisoner of war, would say: so it goes.

The two axes that we can visit represent the two paths that German Jews were forced to take under the Nazi regime. Along the Axis of Exile the names of different cities where Jews found refuge are printed in large grey letters. I see a photo of Jews waving from the deck of a ship bound for Valparaiso, Chile. We see personal artifacts representing the journeys of Jewish families from Germany to China, to Bolivia, to the United States, to Palestine, to the Dominican Republic. Detailed stories follow underneath, stories of near misses, luck, love, loss, fateful choices. At a certain point the Axis of Exile crosses the Axis of Holocaust, and the format of the exhibit is similar: photos or objects accompanied by biographical information. But instead of ending in Chicago or Montevideo, these stories end in Theresienstadt, Chelmo, Sobibor, Bergen-Belsen. So many of the stories start with plans for escape that go sideways - a visa is denied, an elderly relative cannot be left behind, a Nazi knocks on a hollow-sounding floor board.

This happened to Edith Stein. She attempted a transfer to a Carmelite convent in Palestine, near Bethlehem, but could not obtain a visa. She was offered papers to travel to a convent in Switzerland, but the Swiss nuns could not promise to shelter Rosa, Stein's sister who had followed her to Christianity and the Echt Carmel. Stein was caught in the Axis of Holocaust, in a museum description that reads: she was murdered in Auschwitz. When I tell people about my thesis and try to describe in a few short breaths the arc of Edith Stein's life, I usually tell people she *died* in Auschwitz. I will follow the lead of the museum and start speaking plainly, speaking truthfully. She was *murdered* in Auschwitz.

At the end of the Axis of Exile is the Garden of Exiles, designed by the esteemed Jewish architect Daniel Libeskind. You step outside the museum into the open air garden, containing a sculpture made up of 49 tall, square, metal poles arranged in a grid, just wide enough to span your body. When you try to walk through the Garden of Exiles, the path is stony and uneven, dipping up and down as you zig-zig between the poles, trying to decide which way to turn. The architect wrote that the garden is meant to be disorienting, even meant to make you feel sick. It's like walking through an optical illusion. I lose sight of my mom and feel gripped with a sudden fear. It's the fear of being alone, the fear of starting over, of being a stranger in a strange land.

At the end of the Axis of Holocaust is a room. Libeskind called it the "voided void" and refused to explain any further. The voided void is dark, and it is cold. It is a pitch black room with concrete walls, small but high-ceilinged. If you look up you'll see a bright slash in the ceiling, a chink of light. My mom and I enter along with two other visitors. It's winter in Berlin, we left our coats at the coat check, and we shiver. It feels like a prison cell, it feels awkward and painful and I want to leave immediately. Suddenly there is a flash of light. One of the other people in the voided void has taken a picture with flash, trying to capture that glimmer of

sunlight that looks so far away. I feel a surge of anger at the tourist. I don't want to be here! No one would want to be here! It is dark and it is cold and it is empty.

But can't you just sit in it? For one minute?

CHAPTER 6

Edith Stein the Martyr

“If you decide for Christ, it could cost you your life.
Carefully consider what you promise.”

- Edith Stein

“To conquer death you only have to die, you only have to die.”

-Jesus Christ Superstar

I. Introduction

Edith Stein was killed in the gas chambers of Auschwitz in 1942. Just 56 years later - an eye blink in the life of the Catholic Church - this exemplary nun and philosopher was canonized as St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. The canonization process, convoluted though it may seem, was sped along by Stein's categorization as a martyr of the Church. This title of Catholic martyr, conferred on a Holocaust victim, triggered anger and confusion within the Jewish community. To reach the heart of the controversy, we must ask: What is the meaning of martyrdom in the Jewish and Catholic worlds? How did the Church argue that Edith Stein was a Christian martyr? Why might Jews claim her as a Jewish martyr? Why might others question her status as a martyr in the first place? Theologian David Novak also sought to untangle these questions around Stein's martyrdom, and the emotions this status evokes for some Jewish commentators. In his book *Talking with Christians*, Novak writes: “We Jews had better understand the Jewish origins of the idea of martyrdom and its Jewish interpretation very well before we criticize its enunciation by another community that derives its own identity out of Judaism...It is only those who have no understanding of martyrdom per se, thinking it foreign when it is really domestic,

who find the idea unintelligible” (152). Following Novak’s advice, to understand Edith Stein the martyr, we will first examine the place of martyrdom in Jewish history and liturgy.

II. Martyrdom in Judaism

When Edith Stein was beatified and then canonized as a martyr, some Jewish people reacted negatively to this designation, seeing martyrdom and its veneration as a purely Christian practice. But Novak asserts that commentators expressing this view misunderstand “the essence of martyrdom, which is not an originally Christian idea, but one that Christians learned from Judaism” (*Talking* 151). Although in modern times, religious reverence for martyrs is much more common in Christian circles, Judaism has its own conception of martyrdom that predates the Church. As Rabbi Louis Jacobs writes, “martyrdom, in Hebrew *Kiddush Ha-Shem* (‘Sanctification of the Divine Name’), is defined as giving up life rather than being false to the Jewish religion” (Jacobs). The Talmud contains *halakhic* laws that state when martyrdom is appropriate. The rabbis teach that a Jew is “required to give up life rather than offend against three basic commandments” - idolatry, forbidden sexual relations (i.e., incest, adultery), and murder (Jacobs).

However, as with many Jewish laws and precepts, there are conflicting opinions and dissenting voices. For example, rules about martyrdom were relaxed in historical contexts where Jews truly risked death if they refused to convert. The famed rabbi Maimonides - who lived under Muslim rule in medieval Spain - taught that since monotheistic Islam is “not an idolatrous religion, martyrdom is not required if Jews are faced with the option of conversion to Islam or death” (Jacobs). Additionally, academic Freeman teaches that Judaism is generally a life-affirming tradition. Freeman argues that while the Talmud calls martyrs *kadosh* (holy) and asserts that “their place in the world to come is beyond the reach of any created being,” the

rabbis also teach that “one hour of return and good deeds in this world is more beautiful than all the life of the world to come.” Therefore, the Jewish tradition provides mixed messages on martyrdom. Those who die sanctifying the divine name will be rewarded in the world to come, but Jews should not seek martyrdom. One should only become a martyr if following the persecutor’s demands means committing extremely immoral acts, or leads to the extinction of the Jewish people.

This second caveat is exemplified by the story of Rabbi Akiva’s martyrdom, passed down in the Talmud and commemorated with special liturgy on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year. The Talmud relates that after the Bar Kokhba revolt - a Jewish uprising against Roman rule in the second century C.E. - the Roman rulers prohibited Torah study. However, Rabbi Akiva continued to convene public assemblies for studying Torah. Another rabbi asked why he would risk his life in this way, and Rabbi Akiva responded with a parable:

It is like a fox walking along a riverbank when he sees fish gathering and fleeing from place to place. The fox said to them: From what are you fleeing? They said to him: We are fleeing from the nets that people cast upon us. He said to them: Do you wish to come up onto dry land, and we will reside together just as my ancestors resided with your ancestors? The fish said to him: You are the one of whom they say, he is the cleverest of animals? You are not clever; you are a fool. If we are afraid in the water, our natural habitat which gives us life, then in a habitat that causes our death, all the more so (*Sefaria* Berakhot 61b).

Freeman provides a translation: “As soon as Jews give up risking their lives for Torah, they give up their viability as a people.” Rabbi Akiva keeps teaching - keeps swimming - despite the fear of death because learning Torah gives the Jewish people hope for continuity.

Rabbi Akiva is also considered the quintessential Jewish martyr due to the legend told about his death. According to the Talmud, he was arrested by the Romans for his teaching activities and sentenced to a grisly punishment. This section of the Talmud reads:

When they took Rabbi Akiva out to be executed, it was time for the recitation of *Shema*. And they were raking his flesh with iron combs, and he was reciting *Shema*, thereby accepting upon himself the yoke of Heaven. His students said to him: Our teacher, even now, as you suffer, you recite *Shema*? He said to them: All my days I have been troubled by the verse: With all your soul, meaning: Even if God takes your soul. I said to myself: When will the opportunity be afforded me to fulfill this verse? Now that it has been afforded me, shall I not fulfill it? He prolonged his uttering of the word: One, until his soul left his body as he uttered his final word: One. A voice descended from heaven and said: Happy are you, Rabbi Akiva, that your soul left your body as you uttered: One. (Sefaria Berakhot 61b)

Rabbi Akiva's recitation of the *Shema*, the Jewish prayer that proclaims the oneness of God, was recorded and emulated by future martyrs. This Talmudic story teaches that only a martyr truly fulfills the commandment to love God "with all your soul," and so serves as one of the more positive depictions of martyrdom in rabbinic literature. However, other Talmudic legends use this same event to ask questions about the divine. In one tale, the rabbis imagine God showing Moses a glimpse of the Jewish people's future. But when Moses sees the fate of Rabbi Akiva, he asks God, "Is this the Torah and its reward?" The question remains hanging," signifying Judaism's ambivalent and contradictory responses to martyrdom (Feld 337).

Still, martyrs make an appearance in Jewish liturgy. Rabbi Akiva, along with 10 other rabbis killed in the wake of the Bar Kokhba revolt, are honored in a prayer called *Eilleh Ezk'rah*, (Hebrew: "these I recall") which entered the Yom Kippur liturgy during the Crusades (Feld 336). The text of the prayer reads: "These I recall and my soul melts with sorrow; for the bitter course of history, tears pour from my eyes" (Feld 336). While Jewish martyrs are honored with remembrance, they are not particularly glorified, rather they are mourned for. These types of prayers, or "dirges for the martyrs," are recited on Yom Kippur, certain Shabbats throughout the year, and on T'ish b'Av, the day of mourning for the destruction of the Second Temple.

Strangely, Edith Stein's death on August 10, 1942 coincided with T'ish B'Av. During the time she and her companions entered Auschwitz, congregations around the world lamented the "bitter course of history" and recalled the martyrs of other centuries.

A final important note on the place of martyrdom in Judaism concerns victims of the Holocaust or Shoah. Rabbi Jacobs explains, "by a consensus among Jews, the six million victims of the Holocaust are given the accolade of martyrdom and are known as *kedoshim* ('holy ones'), the name otherwise reserved for martyrs; they were, after all, murdered because they were Jews" (Jacobs). Novak elaborates that in Judaism martyrdom is a matter of free choice, but it can take two forms. He writes that this choice can consist of "whether to die or not. That was the choice of Rabbi Akibah, who chose to teach the Torah in public rather than be a living accomplice to the Roman attempt to kill the soul of the Jews by outlawing the public teaching of the Torah. In doing that, he knew very well he would soon be killed" (Novak *Talking* 151). The other type of martyrdom deals with "the choice not whether to die but how to die. Thus on one's deathbed a Jew is supposed to commend his or her spirit back to God who gave it, and to see his or her death as an act of reconciliation with God...This is also an act of sanctification of the divine name, even though one's death there is inevitable and not a matter of his or her own free choice" (Novak *Talking* 152). Applying this second mode of the martyr's choice, Novak concludes: "any Jew who was murdered in Auschwitz, who at the moment of death accepted being a Jew, one of the elect of God...is definitely a martyr. And since we refuse to believe that any Jew in his or her heart of hearts would not be grateful to God for the election, despite our humanly unbearable suffering in this world, when we Jews mourn the dead of the Holocaust, we refer to all of them, religious or irreligious or even antireligious in life, as *qedoshim*, as 'saints'" (*Talking* 151-152).

As Novak and Jacobs assert, the consensus among the Jewish community is to regard all victims of the Nazis as *kedoshim* regardless of their religious practices. Due to the nature of her death, Edith Stein would be considered a Jewish martyr, a holy sanctifier of God's name, despite her conversion to Catholicism. With her ongoing pride in her Jewishness, I believe Stein was ultimately "grateful to God for the election." However, to understand Stein's ascent to sainthood as a martyr of the Church, we must now turn to Christian conceptions of martyrdom.

III. Martyrdom in Christianity

A prime example of early Christian martyrdom is the execution of two Roman women named Perpetua and Felicitas in 203 CE ("Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas"). The experiences of these women have been preserved in a historically rich source, the prison diary of Perpetua, a Christian convert who was jailed and sentenced to death – she had refused to make legally mandated sacrifices to the Roman gods. According to the diary, Perpetua and another Christian woman named Felicitas desired martyrdom and refused to take any action to avert their executions, which were performed by wild beasts in a Roman arena. According to this historical document - Perpetua's diary and descriptions of her death added by an unknown editor - her last words were: "You must all stand fast in the faith and love one another, and do not be weakened by what we have gone through" ("Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas"). Perpetua and Felicitas are named during Catholic Mass to this day, remembered as quintessential martyrs and saints of the Catholic Church.

Moving forward in time, the definition of martyrdom offered by 19th century Catholic theologian Dominic Prummer reflects modern Catholic thought: "Martyrdom is the endurance of bodily death in witness to the Christian religion" (Joseph). He continues: "three conditions must be verified for martyrdom: a) actual death; b) the infliction of death by an enemy out of hatred

for Christianity; c) the voluntary acceptance of death.’ [...] According to Christian doctrine, martyrdom renders the soul of the martyr worthy of immediate entrance into heaven. The Church prays to the martyrs but has never prayed *for* the martyrs” (Joseph).

According to Prummer, a martyr must accept voluntary death at the hand of an enemy of Christianity, and true martyrs receive a direct ticket to heaven. Martyrs are considered spiritually elevated, possessing intercessory powers. For that reason, Catholic worshipers often direct their prayers towards martyrs (who frequently become saints), keeping the potency of martyrdom at the forefront of their minds. Here a difference emerges between Jewish and Catholic reverence for martyrs. Jewish prayers concerning martyrdom are infrequent, occurring at set times during the year, and while they honor the memory of martyrs, the liturgy expresses sorrow about their fates. This is in keeping with Jewish teachings around martyrdom, which are ambivalent about its reward. While the Talmud teaches that martyrs receive a special place in the world to come, the rabbis couple this assertion with a reminder that life on earth is infinitely sweeter. On the other hand, while Christians are cautioned not to seek martyrdom, its result is considered unambiguously positive: “immediate entrance into heaven.”

Returning to the Catholic definition of martyrdom, an important note about modern Catholic martyrs remains to be addressed. Using Prummer’s definition, a martyr must be killed by an enemy “out of hatred for Christianity.” This stipulation is crucial for understanding the case of Edith Stein. She was killed by Nazis, but did these partisans act out of hatred for the Church? Significantly, before Edith Stein’s beatification, the Catholic Church had set precedent by advancing the causes for sainthood of two Christian men killed in Nazi death camps.

Both men - the Polish Franciscan Maximilian Kolbe and the Dutch Carmelite Titus Brandsma - were involved in Catholic publishing enterprises, and were arrested by the Nazis as

political prisoners when their countries were invaded. Kolbe was sent to Auschwitz in 1941, and “made history by offering to die in place of a Polish stranger, Franciszek Gajowniczek” (Fletcher). This came about when camp guards chose ten random prisoners to be executed as reprisal for a prison escape. When Kolbe overheard a man chosen to die crying about the prospect of leaving his family behind, Kolbe reportedly said, ““Let me take his place. I am old. He has a wife and children”” (Fletcher). Kolbe and the nine other prisoners were locked in a cell to starve to death, and when Kolbe persisted longer than the others he was killed by lethal injection (Ball 365). Kolbe is quoted as telling fellow prisoners in Auschwitz: “They will not kill our souls...They will not be able to deprive us of the dignity of the Catholic. We will not give up. And when we die, we will die pure and peaceful, resigned to God in our hearts” (Ball 365). The man spared by Kolbe’s decision survived Auschwitz and lived to the age of 93 (Fletcher). Kolbe was beatified as a confessor by Pope Paul VI in 1971, and canonized as a martyr of charity by Pope John Paul II in 1982 (Ball 365).

The other victim of the Nazis recognized by the Catholic Church is Stein’s fellow Carmelite, Titus Brandsma. He served as a spiritual advisor to the Dutch Catholic press, and in 1942 “delivered a mandate to the Catholic press, stating that it was not possible for a publication to print Nazi propaganda and still claim to be Catholic” (Ball 369). For his outspokenness, the Nazis arrested Brandsma and sent him to Dachau. In July 1942, Brandsma became sick and was sent to the camp hospital, where he was killed by lethal injection when his condition proved difficult to treat (Ball 371). Brandsma was beatified in 1985 - his canonization cannot proceed until a miracle attributed to his intercession is identified. However, saint-making expert Woodward reports that Brandsma is already being promoted by the Church “as the patron saint of journalists who, God knows, are certainly in need of one” (134).

Kolbe was canonized and Brandsma was beatified before Edith Stein's cause for sainthood reached those levels. Woodward writes that "Brandsma succeeded in becoming the first Nazi-era martyr not just because he opposed the Nazi ideology as un-Christian - to have argued on these grounds alone would have invited the standard objection that he was only a political martyr - but also because his advocates were able to demonstrate that he was killed for defending certain Catholic principles," namely freedom of education and freedom of the press (134). Woodward describes Brandsma as the first Nazi-era martyr because Kolbe was originally declared a confessor and later a martyr of charity (a subtle distinction that will not be examined here). By beatifying Brandsma, the Church upheld his understanding of the National Socialism as anathema to Catholic ideals.

Woodward explains further: "For the saint-makers...the success of Brandsma's cause had another, more precise meaning. They now had a precedent for arguing that Catholic victims of the Nazis could be officially declared martyrs in circumstances where it could be shown that the hierarchy had provoked the tyrant into acting against the church by denouncing its unjust action" (135). With the causes of Kolbe and Brandsma, the Church developed a formula for identifying martyrdom in the World War II era: if the Catholic hierarchy provoked the Nazi tyrants, retaliation against members of the Church could be considered a martyr's death. Now, having discussed the significance and history of martyrdom in Christianity and Judaism, we can turn back to Stein. In Woodward's words, we will examine how the precedent set by Brandsma and Kolbe "was worked into a new logic in the more controversial cause of Edith Stein" (135).

IV. The Argument for Edith Stein's Catholic Martyrdom

In 1986, when the cause for Edith Stein's sainthood shifted from proving her heroic virtues to emphasizing her martyrdom, this change was based on the discovery of Dutch

documents discussing the lead-up to her death. Canon Schlafke, Cardinal Frings, and Father Eszer argued that Stein was killed as a form of Nazi retaliation against the outspoken Dutch bishops. Following the precedent set by the Brandsma and Kolbe causes, the Church argued that Nazi reprisals constituted “the infliction of death by an enemy out of hatred for Christianity,” one of Prummer’s conditions for true martyrdom. But what exactly happened in Holland that precipitated this chain of events that eventually led to Edith Stein’s canonization?

As German professor of church history Joachim Kohler notes, it is important to recognize that from the beginning of the German invasion of Holland in 1940, “the persecution of the Jews had united the Christian churches in Holland for joint action. In February 1942, a joint commission of Catholic and Protestant churches submitted a memorandum to the Reichskommissar condemning the terror of the occupying forces. In it they protested against the imprisonment and deportation of numerous Jews and against the large number of fatalities among the deported” (154). Apart from formal complaints, many non-Jewish Dutch citizens, including church leaders, engaged in protests against the Nazi occupation. For example, “when Jews were ordered to wear the yellow star, Dutch fellow-citizens showed their sympathy with the Jews by wearing yellow flowers in their button-holes. Posters challenged the Dutch to show their respect to Jews wearing the yellow star. At least three priests were arrested for wearing the Jewish star” (Kohler 154). Since 1941, the Dutch bishops had also resisted the Nazis by denying “the sacraments to members of the Nazi movement and their umbrella organizations” (Kohler 153). These actions were strong symbols of solidarity between Dutch Catholics and Jews.

Despite these popular protests, Nazi oppression of Dutch Jews continued, and deportations began in early July 1942. Just “two days after the deportations began, the church sent a telegram of protest to the Reichskommissar,” expressing its disapproval of the harsh

measures against its Jewish neighbors (Kohler 154). In response, the Nazi commissioner “promised that converted Jews who had belonged to the church prior to January 1, 1942, would not be deported. The churches were not satisfied with this exemption. They decided to go public with this protest” (Kohler 154). It is significant that when the Nazi authorities offered the church leaders an out - a deal that would mean converted Jews, such as Edith Stein, would be protected if the church stopped protesting the Nazi regime in Holland - the Dutch bishops declined. The church hierarchy put the life of converts such as Edith Stein at risk, and ultimately sacrificed their lives, for the freedom to preach their message of defiant lovingkindness. Following this logic, it can be argued that Edith Stein died for the Catholic Church, serving the Dutch Catholic resistance against Nazi occupation.

After communicating with the Reichskommissar in early July and rejecting the Nazi promise to spare converted Jews, the Dutch bishops moved forward with their plans to publicly denounce the imposed anti-Semitic laws. According to Kohler, “in all Catholic and a few other Dutch churches,” a pastoral letter addressing the situation was read aloud to parishioners on July 26 (Kohler 154). The letter expressed Catholic disapproval of mass deportations of Jews: “The suffering that this will cause tens of thousands of people, the knowledge that these measures contradict the deepest moral conscience of the Dutch people, but above all the infringement these measures constitute against God’s commandment of justice and mercy, compel the churches to implore you not to carry out these measures” (Kohler 155). The letter concluded with a prayer for the Jewish people: “let us beseech God...to swiftly bring about a just peace in the world and to strengthen the people of Israel” (Herbstrith 102).

The Dutch bishops’ open defiance of Nazi edicts, and their influence over a significant swath of the Dutch population, enraged the occupiers. On August 2, the subsequent Sunday,

Edith Stein was arrested and deported along with a large number of Catholic Jews (Kohler 155). Within the week she was transported to Auschwitz and murdered. Due to this sequence of events - evidence of which was uncovered by Church investigators in the 1980s - champions of Stein's cause argued that she was a martyr of the Church. They posited that Stein was killed by Nazis who despised the Dutch Christians for their continual protests, and so the cause of her death was *odium fidei*, literally "hatred of the faith." If one accepts this line of reasoning, it is easy to conclude that Stein fulfilled the first two requirements for genuine Catholic martyrdom: bodily death, and death at the hands of an enemy of the church. However, some commentators have questioned Stein's fulfillment of the third aspect of the martyr's demise: voluntary death. Additionally, many still take issue with labeling Stein a Catholic martyr, viewing her death as inseparable from her Jewish origins. Now we will explore these reasons for rejecting Stein's classification as a martyr of the Church.

V. The Arguments Against Edith Stein's Catholic Martyrdom

The first and perhaps simplest argument against Edith Stein's standing as a Catholic martyr concerns whether or not her death was voluntary. Classic Christian martyrs, such as Felicitas and Perpetua, had the option to perform Roman sacrifices to pagan gods. If they had done so, they would have been pardoned and spared execution. However, due to their Christian faith the women refused to make the sacrifices, accepting the harsh death penalty. Some commentators have argued that unlike Perpetua and Felicitas, Edith Stein did all she could to escape death at the hands of her persecutors.

Stein tried to arrange an escape to Switzerland for herself and her sister Rosa when the Nazis invaded Holland, and continued to seek a visa until the last days of her life. Batzdorff describes how Stein sent one last message from the Westerbrok detention camp to her Carmelite

sisters in Echt: ““Urge Swiss Consulate to take all steps necessary to get us across the border. Our convent will take care of travel expense”” (“Witnessing” 38). Stein’s niece also comments on scribbled missives Stein reportedly passed from the windows of the cattle car on its way to Auschwitz: “the heart-rending notes she dropped from freight-train compartments as she passed through towns where she had once lived and might still be remembered, testify to her last frantic attempts to avert her doom” (Batzdorff “Martyr”). However, Johannes Wieners, the German soldier who reportedly struck up a conversation with Stein on the Breslau train platform in early August 1942, speaks of a woman more resigned to her own death. According to Wieners, the grey-eyed woman in a nun’s habit told him: ““This is my beloved hometown. I will never see it again. We are riding to our death.’ Wieners asked, ‘Do your companion prisoners believe that also?’ She answered, ‘It is better that they do not know it’” (Jacoby 292). In Wieners’ telling, Stein embodies calmness in the face of her own mortality, and a willingness to protect others by keeping quiet about her insight into the nature of their travel to the east.

Those seeking to bolster Stein’s claim to martyrdom point to her earlier statements to show that she had accepted the possibility of death and was even willing to sacrifice her life for others. For example, while being arrested by the Nazis at their convent, Stein famously told her sister, “Come, let us go for our people” (Sullivan “Beatification” 13). In the last will and testament Stein composed in 1939, she wrote: “I joyfully accept in advance the death God has appointed for me, in perfect submission to his most holy will” (Herbstrith 95). Earlier that year, Stein wrote to her Mother Superior, “Dear Mother, please will [you] allow me to offer myself to the heart of Jesus as a sacrifice of propitiation for true peace, that the dominion of the Antichrist may collapse, if possible, without a new world war, and that a new order be established?” (Kohler 147). These snippets of text represent a larger body of Stein’s work where she frankly

contemplated her own death and suffering, emphasizing her belief in the redemptive power of her pain. While it seems clear that Stein made every effort to save herself and her sister from the Nazi death camps, I believe that when death became inevitable she accepted her fate with grace, comforted by her Catholic beliefs about sacrifice and the afterlife.

However, there is another, even more complex aspect to the discussion of whether Stein's death was voluntary. Some commentators argue that Stein should not be considered a Catholic martyr because she was not killed due to Nazi hatred of the Church. Rather, she was killed due to Nazi hatred of the Jews. As Judith Hershcopf Banki, the American Jewish Committee's Associate National Director of Interreligious Affairs, explains:

The claim that Edith Stein was murdered because of Nazi hatred of the Catholic faith...seems patently self-serving from a Jewish perspective. For Jews, it is self-evident that Edith Stein was murdered because of Nazi hatred of Jews. She was arrested, deported and gassed as a Jew - a category the Nazis defined racially; religion was considered irrelevant. Jews should be sensitive to the likelihood that her death was hastened by the refusal of the Dutch bishops to suppress a pastoral letter condemning the deportation of the Jews...Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that all persons considered Jews by the Nazis were slated for extinction, sooner or later (45).

To begin with, commentators in Banki's camp reject the Catholic Church's identification of *odium fidei* in Nazi actions (though she does acknowledge the impact of the Dutch bishops). In a case like Edith Stein's, Banki argues that she was murdered solely because of her Jewish heritage. According to Banki, Stein was incontrovertibly a Jew by Nazi "racial" standards, making her conversion to Catholicism irrelevant.

If Stein's murder was caused by her Jewishness can she be considered a voluntary martyr of the Catholic Church? Novak states the basis of this concern clearly: "Edith Stein and all the rest of the six million Jewish victims of the Nazis died because of their involuntary birth, not because of their voluntary faith. Therefore, the Church is accused of using its traditional category

of martyrdom to make Edith Stein a Catholic Holocaust martyr instead of a Jewish Holocaust victim” (*Talking* 149). In a similar vein, Banki argues that even if the Dutch bishops had taken no action, the Nazis would have arrested and killed Stein eventually because of the Jewish star pinned to her habit. If Stein had been swept up in a later wave of Dutch deportations, with the bishops effectively cowed into silence, would Stein be considered a Catholic martyr? Banki, Novak, and other Jewish commentators raise these thorny questions to effectively challenge Stein’s claim to Catholic martyrdom. Some of these scholars argue that claiming Stein as a martyr of the Church is offensively off base, and she should only be regarded as a Jewish martyr, one of the six million *kedoshim*. Therefore, several concerns about the basis of Stein’s Catholic martyrdom are raised by the consideration of whether her death was voluntary, and ultimately caused by her ties to the Jewish or the Catholic community.

VI. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed Edith Stein’s death at length, addressing the arguments for categorizing her as a Jewish martyr or a Catholic martyr. We have explored attitudes towards martyrdom in the history of these two faith traditions, finding Catholic positivity and Jewish ambiguity. I have presented the Church’s argument in favor of Stein’s Catholic martyrdom, based on the Dutch bishops’ resistance to Nazi occupation. I have also laid out a few of the challenges to the Church’s argument. Some commentators see Stein’s death as involuntary, and so not meeting the standard for true Christian martyrdom. Others believe she was killed due to her Jewish heritage, and so should only be considered a Jewish martyr in the broad category of Holocaust *kedoshim*. Returning to the perspectives of Jewish scholars explored in chapter two, some commentators do not consider Edith Stein to be a member of the Jewish people at all due to her conversion, and would even reject the Jewish martyr label.

Is Edith Stein a Jewish martyr, a Catholic martyr, neither, or both? These questions remain unresolved, because the concept of martyrdom is fraught and painful. Beliefs about martyrdom come from the very human need to make sense of the senseless - suffering, sacrifice, and death. We can say with Holocaust survivor Emanuel Tanay, “Death has always been essential to sainthood; a living saint is a contradiction in terms,” even as we hear Erna Biberstein’s voice: “a living sister would have been worth a thousand times more to me than a dead saint” (Batzdorff “Significance” 27). Though this issue is complex, considering Stein’s martyrdom is the first step to unraveling the meaning of her life after death, the impact of her sainthood on Jews, Catholics, and the world.

When Edith Stein is construed as a martyr and as a saint, she looms large in the collective imagination. She becomes a powerful symbol, even as her personhood with its quirks and contradictions recedes. Maybe this reach should not be surprising - as a child, Stein seemed driven by some call to a wider destiny: “I continued to live with the conviction that I was destined for something great” (*Jewish Family* 148). Perhaps Hampl put it best: “Ultimately, a life seeking greatness is about the loss of the self in the service of a more complete reality. It is a disappearing act. It is, sometimes, a martyrdom. That, finally, is how it came to be in the unlikely life of Edith Stein” (63). In the next and final chapter, we will turn to this larger meaning. What does Edith Stein, beatified and canonized as St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, symbolize? Can her memory connect Jews and Catholics, or only feed misunderstandings? Put simply, is veneration of Edith part of the solution or part of the problem?

INTERLUDE: AT AUSCHWITZ I AND AUSCHWITZ II-BIRKENAU

Krakow, Poland

January 11, 2020

I don't know how to write about Auschwitz.

But it's the reason we came to Poland, what caught at my heart when I first heard the story of Edith Stein. In my mind she started off as the nun in the concentration camp, the Catholic saint who died (no, was murdered) at Auschwitz. And yet it is hard to describe. We take the bus from charming Krakow to the small town of Oswiecim, which the Germans renamed Auschwitz. Looking out the window, I can't shake the eerie feeling that the green hills rolling by were once glimpsed by Jews from their cattle cars. I can hear the deathly rattle, I think of Edith Stein. Did she see that outcrop of rock? That tree? Our bus is humming alongside train tracks. It is unnerving, but it is early in the morning, and I close my eyes.

The entrance to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum is comfortingly banal. The parking lot is packed with visitors by the busload, there's a cafe and bookstore and a security checkpoint. Our group passes through security, we receive an English-speaking guide, a receiver and headphones that amplify his steady voice. We exit the visitor center and begin to walk through the preserved camp of Auschwitz I, which was once a Polish army barracks. My breath catches as we walk under the metal archway emblazoned with the motto "Arbeit macht frei." Our guide translates: work will set you free. He adds that the phrase was a false promise. Auschwitz prisoners found no freedom in work, labor was just a useful extermination method. We see where the prisoners once slept and washed, guard towers and barbed wire fences, a block that held torture chambers. We see a crematorium. It is hard to look and hard to look away.

We learn facts and figures about Auschwitz. Originally the largest Nazi German concentration camp, it was used mostly to hold Polish political prisoners at the beginning of the war. Starting in 1942, it became a mass extermination center for Jews. In the end, 1.3 million people were deported to Auschwitz. Approximately 1.1 million Jews, 150,000 Poles, 23,000 Roma, 15,000 Soviet prisoners of war, and 25,000 people from other ethnic groups were interned in Auschwitz. Over one million of those people were murdered in the sprawling Auschwitz complex, which included three main camps along with labor sub-camps. Ninety percent of them were Jews. One of them was Edith Stein.

For so long, I've been looking at the history of Germany, the course of World War II, the horror of the Nazi regime, through the lens of one person and her family. When I read about fractured Jewish families at the Jewish Museum in Berlin, I thought about the Steins. Edith was one of seven siblings. Edith and Rosa were murdered in Auschwitz, their older siblings Paul and Frieda were murdered in Theresienstadt. Three siblings joined the American diaspora. Arno had settled in the United States before the war, Else and Erna managed to flee with their families in the late 1930s. I was staggered imagining it: a family cleaved in half.

But at Auschwitz the awful reach and scale of the Nazi genocide becomes clear. One barracks now holds the material evidence of their crimes against humanity. There is a long hall that holds thousands upon thousands of shoes. Heels, sandals, work boots, children's booties, every size and shape imaginable. Another room holds a huge pile of eyeglasses. There is a giant room of suitcases, emblazoned with names. (The deported Jews were told to label their luggage so they could find it again. Any valuables they brought were plundered by the Nazis.) There is a hall with a depression in the floor, filled to the brim with enamel cooking pots. I imagine women bringing them along, planning the dishes they would cook for their families when food was

plentiful again. A smaller display holds the ragged prayer shawls that religious Jews carried with them. The room that affects me the most is the only one in which we are not permitted to take pictures. In this room there is a gargantuan pile of human hair. The coils look thick and cloudy, like wool or spun yarn. The colors are strange after all this time. Has the hair started to disintegrate? Or does hair always look so inhuman removed from its head? I touch my head, the thick curls of my hair under my fingers. I feel sick.

After Auschwitz I, we are taken to Auschwitz II-Birkenau. It's only a few minutes away by bus. It is a much larger facility with more barracks, built with shoddier materials. Unlike the Polish army that constructed the brick buildings of Auschwitz I, the Nazis didn't care about keeping their victims warm. Auschwitz II has industrial-sized gas chambers and crematoria, built especially for the accelerated extermination of Jews in Reich-held territory. It is the camp with the infamous metal arch that rises over the train tracks – you might recognize it from *Schindler's List*. It's probably where Edith Stein was murdered. She was never a true prisoner of Auschwitz, never given a number and a work assignment. She was one of thousands who were immediately sent to die, off the train and into the “showers,” into the cloud of suffocating Zyklon B gas.

The tour has given me a new understanding of the Nazi genocide, just how *many* people were murdered here. But on the ground of Auschwitz II, I still can't stop thinking about Edith, how she was here, what she saw, what she was thinking. We pass by a replica cattle car, and our guide explains how the selection of who would live and who would die happened on this packed dirt road. Those deemed fit to work walked one way, the others were herded immediately towards the gas chambers. Did Edith stumble down from the train car on this very spot? Did she go through selection, or were the Catholic prisoners shoved violently to one side, their fate sealed since Holland? I know she was still wearing her habit, the long brown skirt of the

Carmelites. Did she have to hike up her robes to walk along this muddy dirt road, like Sister Verena on the convent stairs? Did the Nazis cut Edith's hair? Was she able to stay close to Rosa? When was she forced to remove her clothing, when was she no longer visibly a bride of Christ? Was she cold? Was she afraid?

We stand over the remains of the gas chambers, only the brick foundations exposed to the open air. Edith was human, I'm sure she was afraid. But she was also faithful. Maybe she was like Rabbi Akiva, who was martyred (*murdered*) by Romans all the way back in the first century. According to legend he died saying the *Shema*, the central Jewish prayer. He died proclaiming that God is one. I wonder if Edith knew that story. I wonder if she glimpsed, for a single shimmering second, that so many others would tell her story.

CHAPTER 7

Edith Stein the Problem

“Our being and our life are forced upon us as a problem.

We cannot avoid the question of who we are and what we want...

Living itself has made our life into a problem.”

- Edith Stein

“I must be mad thinking I'll be remembered, yes, I must be out of my head!

Look at your blank faces, my name will mean nothing ten minutes after I'm dead!”

-Jesus Christ Superstar

I. Introduction

In March 1991, the 21st Annual Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust took place, with the thematic focus of “The Netherlands and the Nazi Genocide” (Cargas). Scholars at the gathering quickly realized their shared interest in Edith Stein - a victim of the Nazi extermination of Jews in the Netherlands. Dr. Harry James Cargas of Webster University was deputized to put together an essay anthology considering Stein's legacy. Three years later, Cargas published *The Unnecessary Problem of Edith Stein*, the first collection of scholarly articles discussing the Jewish-born philosopher and recently beatified Catholic martyr. The contributors included Jews and Catholics, experts on interreligious affairs, two Holocaust survivors, one rabbi, and one Jewish convert to Catholicism. In Cargas' volume, they all shared their thoughts on Stein's beatification and the impact of her new status on Jewish-Catholic relations. Some of the pieces were hopeful, others accusatory, all passionate. But what exactly is the “problem” of Edith Stein? Most commentators see no problem in recognizing Stein's contributions as a philosopher

and religious thinker, or in honoring her tragic death. Hampl writes: “If there is a problem (and the essays and letters published on the subject make it clear that there is a problem), it is not hers. This ethical question belongs to the church’s life, not to Edith Stein’s” (62). The problem stems not from Stein’s lived experiences themselves, but from the Church’s claim to Stein as a martyr, with the added symbolism of elevating a Holocaust victim to sainthood.

In the atmosphere of strained Jewish-Catholic relations brought on by the Waldheim Affair and the so-called Auschwitz convent, Stein’s canonization loomed as another point of contention between Jews and Catholics. Novak writes of Jewish interest in the saint-making process: “How could we not be concerned with the life and death of one of our own at the time when we all could have died, even though in life she chose to live apart from us? How could we not be concerned with the life and death of one of our own, who has been granted the highest posthumous honor possible by a community of hundreds of millions of people with whom we live, converse, even suffer in the world, often quite closely?” (*Talking* 146)

As Stein’s cause for sainthood advanced, certain Jews and Catholics raised objections while others defended her ascent, sometimes lapsing into anger and hurt. In the introduction to his book, Harry Cargas distills the question he seeks to answer: “We are a Church of symbols. Right now to canonize Edith Stein would be to create a symbol which would cause pain to a lot of people. Why then do it?” (Cargas). The problem of Edith Stein lies in what she, as a martyr and saint of the Catholic Church, symbolizes to Jews and Catholics around the world. Cargas asks, why are we creating this symbol? What effects does the Church’s action have, and do the positives outweigh the negatives? What symbols could have been created instead?

This chapter will delve into scholarly analysis of Stein the symbol (and so Stein the problem). I will present the arguments for Stein’s canonization due to its positive effects on

Jewish-Catholic relations, and the contradictory concerns about its meaning. However, while these opposing sides illuminate the contours of the problem, the question of what Edith Stein represents is far from resolved. As Greene writes, “The meaning of Stein’s life is unfinished; it is not controlled by her, by official saintmakers, or by interpreters past, present, or future” (54). Even as we attempt to break down the problem of Edith Stein, there remains “the irreducible freedom in a life that can never be fully grasped, contained, or expressed” (Greene 54).

II. Edith Stein the Positive Symbol: Reconciliation, Unity, Memory

Many commentators who supported Stein’s canonization hoped that she could serve as a symbol of progress for Jewish-Catholic relations. Scholars have long recognized Stein’s unusual faith identity, the way she blurs lines between categories by claiming both her Jewishness and her Catholic faith. For this reason, some believe Stein can represent interfaith harmony and European multiculturalism. Holocaust survivor Emanuel Tanay writes, “The life of Edith Stein symbolizes the link between Christianity and Judaism. She was a philosopher, a self-respecting Jew and a devout Christian nun...Edith Stein is a symbol of post-Holocaust concord between Christianity and Judaism” (31). Jesuit priest Jan Nota, who knew Stein personally, adds: “That is what Edith Stein really ought to be: a sign, a symbol of reconciliation. In her the ‘daughter of Israel,’ the ‘daughter of the Church,’ and the daughter of Germany meet in a living synthesis” (122).

Stein’s many, hybrid identities give her elevation to sainthood additional power. This construction of Stein as a multicultural icon was exemplified by Pope John Paul II’s decision to make her not only a saint, but a patroness of Europe. On October 1, 1999, the pope issued an apostolic letter crowning St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (along with St. Bridget of Sweden and St. Catherine of Siena) as co-patroness of Europe: “Today’s proclamation of Edith Stein as a

Co-Patroness of Europe is intended to raise on this Continent a banner of respect, tolerance and acceptance which invites all men and women to understand and appreciate each other, transcending their ethnic, cultural and religious differences in order to form a truly fraternal society” (“Apostolic Letter”). Professor Janine Holc discerns that as patroness, Stein becomes “available as a representation of Jewishness in Central European history and as a representation of cultural hybridity - Jew and Catholic” (69). Supporters of Stein’s canonization argue that she provides a positive example of religious and cultural synthesis in Europe. Dr. Freda Mary Oben, herself a convert from Judaism to Christianity, writes of Stein: “Her image is stronger than all barriers erected between races, religions, and nationalities” (9).

However, in addition to representing harmonious cross-cultural interactions, many Catholics and Jews posit that Stein’s elevation to sainthood provides an opportunity for Catholics to honor all victims of the Holocaust. On April 24, 1987 - a few months before Stein’s beatification - the National Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Ecumenical and Interreligious Committee released a statement on the upcoming events. The statement reads: “We see the beatification of Edith Stein as a unique occasion for joint Jewish-Catholic reflection and reconciliation. In honoring Edith Stein, the Church wishes to honor all the six million Jewish victims of the Shoah. Christian veneration of Edith Stein does not lessen but rather strengthens our need to preserve and honor the memory of the six million” (Fisher “Catholic-Jewish” 169). Eugene Fisher, Associate Director of the Interreligious Committee, emphasized, “Catholic veneration will necessarily contribute to a continuing and deepened examination of conscience regarding sins of commission and omission perpetrated by Christians against Jews during the dark years of World War II” (“Response” 19). Therefore, many Catholics see Stein’s rise to sainthood as a chance to recognize all Nazi victims, and as a provocation to think deeply about

Catholic silence and complicity. Oben cites a response from a German priest: ““Edith is good for Germany - she confronts us with our conscience”” (10).

Some Jewish commentators view Stein’s sainthood positively as well, appreciating Catholic efforts to show respect for the Holocaust dead and educate their own community. Tanay states, “I, as a Jew and a Holocaust survivor, reacted to the Pope’s homily with gratitude. A victim of the ‘Shoah’ has been beatified and will forever remain part of the Christian tradition. The Pope used the beatification of Sister Teresa to emphasize her connection with the Jewish Nation and to commemorate the martyrdom of the Jews as whole” (29). Ernst Ehrlich - the European director of the international Jewish organization B’nai B’rith - also appreciated the pope’s clear denunciation of Nazi actions and respectful attitude towards the Jewish people in his statements on Edith Stein. Ehrlich argues: “The pope’s beatification of Edith Stein in Cologne was not used for anti-Jewish purposes...On the contrary: Probably never before had a person of rank cited the crimes of the *Shoah* so insistently as the pope did on this occasion...Edith Stein’s Jewish fate, just like that of all other Jewish martyrs, was stated most impressively. Since the pope’s entire homily was shown on German television, the events of the *Shoah* could be transmitted to millions of people” (132). For Ehrlich, it was meaningful that the pope, with his huge platform and worldwide influence, spread awareness of Nazi crimes.

Jewish and Catholic commentators acknowledge Edith Stein the saint as an access point for Catholic learning and mourning around the Holocaust. Hampl believes that Edith Stein “should remain a ghost, a figure forever calling Christians towards contrition - the proper Christian response to the Holocaust” (62). Germany literary critic Paul Konrad Kurz writes that Stein ““belongs - even after her beatification - not just to the inner realm of the church. Edith Stein is not a sacred decorative figure. She does not stand in an imaginary museum but with a

questioning eye looks at us as her contemporaries. Involuntarily she became a provocation for Jews, for Catholics, for Germans, and for intellectuals” (Strehle 20). These commentators argue that as a saint, Edith Stein prompts moral and ethical questions, the search for truth that she so admired. They believe this process of questioning, learning, and atoning is a positive development for the world, and so rejoice in the canonization of Edith Stein. However, other scholars challenge this rosy interpretation of Stein’s legacy as a saint.

III. Edith Stein the Negative Symbol: Appropriation, Conversion, Complicity

For a wide swath of Jewish scholars and observers, the initial reaction to Edith Stein’s beatification was suspicion and anger. As saint-making expert Woodward describes, “The beatification of Edith Stein outraged many Israelis and other Jews. Why, critics wanted to know, was the church placing the crown of martyrdom on the head of a single apostate Jew when millions of other Jews...had perished at the hands of the Nazis? Once again, it was said, the first Polish pope was attempting to rob the Holocaust of its specific intent - the genocide of European Jewry - by focusing attention on those Catholics who were also Nazi victims” (Woodward 127-128). From the mid-1980s on, certain Jewish commentators struggled to make sense of the Catholic Church’s decision to advance Stein’s cause, fearing “the Catholic appropriation of the Shoah, the ‘Christianization’ or even ‘universalization’ of the Holocaust” (Spector 30).

Fisher, the interreligious affairs director, acknowledged this fear even as he tried to assuage it: “Jewish concern lay in the nature of the Holocaust and in how it is to be remembered by future generations. This is the fear that by pointing such a bright spotlight on a Christian victim of the Holocaust, the Catholic Church might be in some way trying to turn itself, in history’s memory, into its chief victim, this at once glossing over the historical culpability of so

many Christians in the deed and, in effect, appropriating the Holocaust as primarily an event of Christian martyrdom” (“Catholic-Jewish” 168). Cargas addressed this issue as well in the introduction to *The Unnecessary Problem of Edith Stein*, writing, “There is a feeling among a lot of Jews that to deny even one *Jewish* death at the hands of Hitler is to betray the Holocaust event in some way. I and some other Christian Holocaust scholars agree.” Many Jewish people (and some Christians) warned that Edith Stein could become a more insidious symbol: a figure through which the Church could appropriate the Holocaust as its own tragedy, highlighting its own persecution while brushing Catholic inaction under the rug.

For these commentators, Catholic assurances that Edith Stein’s sainthood confers honor on her and all Holocaust victims mean little. They argue with Hampl that “Catholics must accept the fact that sainthood is not simply a way of honoring a great life; it is inevitably a way of claiming it. The act of contrition must begin with the willingness to relinquish that claim” (62). In this view, Edith Stein remains a problem because her sainthood allows the Church to claim some part of Jewish suffering as its own. Rabbi Daniel Polish speaks to the sense of ownership some Jews feel over the Holocaust and its remembrance:

No doubt it may appear unseemly, even morbid for the Jewish people to appear so vehement about asserting its claim to the Holocaust. Who, after all, would want such a legacy? The answer is two-fold. The Jewish people take pride...in the ignominy of being descended from a band of runaway slaves. We recognized in that estate, perhaps disreputable from a human perspective, an event of divine consequence. Similarly, we recognize in this cataclysm of our age, a tremendum as compelling and filled with - perhaps cosmic - import as any event in our millennia long experience...With all its pain the Holocaust has become a *sanctum* for us. It reminds us of our continuing special relationship with God...It has become a rallying-point for our collective experience, a key to our shared identity. Jews are Jews because we share that anguish (“Painful,” 15).

Polish introduces the idea of the Holocaust as a *sanctum*, a word meaning “sacred,” “holy,” or “inviolable” in Latin. Polish acknowledges “it may seem macabre to wish to hold claim to an event of such singular suffering. But the import of just such events - and their redemptive potential - cannot be lost on a tradition whose emblem is a crucifix bearing the dead body of its incarnated lord” (“Painful,” 16). Polish’s message for the Catholic Church, with its history of appropriation (including its claim to the Hebrew Bible), is simply to back off. Leave honoring Holocaust dead and interpreting the theological meaning of the Shoah to the Jews.

However, there is some pushback from Jewish thinkers in this area. Novak rejects Polish’s idea of the Holocaust *sanctum*, arguing, “to assert that somehow or other the Holocaust ‘belongs’ to the Jews, even belongs to the Jews exclusively, is simply not true. The only people to whom the Holocaust *belongs* are the Nazi murderers” (*Talking* 150). Novak writes that the Holocaust belongs to the Nazis because they are responsible for its horrors, but then stretches and expands the meaning of “belonging.” He dismisses the idea that the Holocaust is only the province of the Jewish people: “If belonging means to have a right to something, then mourning the victims of the Holocaust is the right of every community of survivors. We Jews have a right to mourn our Jewish victims, whoever they were, just as *you* Christians have a right to mourn your Christian victims, whoever they were, even if they were Jews like Edith Stein who chose to become like *you*. Nobody deserved to be murdered in Auschwitz. All the victims were innocent. Every death there was tragic” (Novak *Talking* 50). Proclaiming the tragedy of every murder at the hands of the Nazis, Novak welcomes all mourning and remembrance.

He concludes, “Christian mourning is only objectionable when it loses sight of the fact that Jews were the chief victims of the Holocaust. But Jewish mourning is also objectionable when it loses sight of the fact that there were other victims too, including those who were both

Jewish and Christian: Jewish by birth and Christian by conviction. The sympathy of mourning for our own should not exclude empathy for the mourning of others” (Novak *Talking* 150). In my opinion, Novak gets it right: we need both sympathy and empathy - the topic of Edith Stein’s doctoral thesis. But Polish’s concept of the *sanctum* also speaks to a facet of Jewish experience, and may reflect the feelings of Jews directly descended from Holocaust victims or survivors. The issue of who can claim the Holocaust - who has the right to mourn and honor the victims of this horrific genocide - remains fraught within and without the Jewish community. Still, for some Jews, Edith Stein came to symbolize the Christian capacity for Holocaust appropriation.

The symbolism of Edith Stein as a sainted convert was also problematic for some Jewish thinkers. Fisher speaks to concerns that “declaring a Jewish convert...to be a saint might precipitate Catholics to launch massive efforts to convert other Jews” (“Catholic-Jewish” 168). Polish writes that “efforts to convert the Jews were specifically repudiated in the guidelines from various episcopal conferences explaining Vatican II,” but “all this seems reversed by the beatification of Edith Stein. That act seems to carry the tacit message encouraging conversionary efforts” (“Painful,” 14). Banki, the interreligious affairs expert, agrees:

Though perhaps not deliberate, there is an inescapable triumphalism implicit in using the name/example of someone who has abandoned your community of faith for another’s purposes of reconciliation...The witness and thinking of converts have enriched all of our faith communities. Nevertheless, the essential work of Christian-Jewish relations, the building of mutual understanding, mutual respect, and cooperation...must be done for the most part by Christians who will remain faithful Christians and Jews who will remain faithful Jews (47).

Some scholars like Polish and Banki see undertones of hard supersessionism in the veneration of Edith Stein, the belief that Judaism naturally feeds into Christianity and all Jews should convert.

Catholic spokespeople like Fisher have emphasized that “there has never been any hint of an organized conversionary effort using [Stein’s] name being developed among Catholics. Nor have the educational and devotional materials that have been developed around Blessed Edith Stein sought in any way to diminish the Jewish reality of the Shoah” (“Catholic-Jewish” 170). The 1987 letter from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops asserts, “in no way can the beatification of Edith Stein be understood by Catholics as giving impetus to unwarranted proselytizing among the Jewish community. On the contrary, it urges us to ponder the continuing religious significance of Jewish traditions...and to approach Jews not as potential ‘objects’ of conversion but rather as bearers of a unique witness to the Name of One God of Israel” (Fisher “Response” 18). But due to the long history of Catholic conversionary tactics, some Jews remain suspicious of Edith Stein’s canonization, declaring that veneration of a convert sends mixed messages about the validity of Judaism.

Finally, continuing with these themes of conversion and appropriation, Rabbi Polish (among others) identifies a trend in the Church’s “diversifying” its pool of saintly figures. Polish raises an interesting point: “More than one skeptical voice within the church itself has noted that the church seems to have a saint drawn from the ranks of every ethnic and national group from which it wants to elicit loyalty and devotion. Irish, Italian, Polish, Gypsy groupings each have their respective ‘voice at the table’” (“Canonization” 173). Looking at the strategy involved in saint-making, Polish wonders whether Stein, as the “Jewish saint,” is “intended as a vehicle by which Jews could be made to feel comfortable within the body of the church” (“Canonization” 173). While some find this line of inquiry too reminiscent of conspiracy theories, it is illuminating to consider the political goals and social dynamics that impact the modern saint-making process.

Some commentators - Jewish and Catholic - object to Stein's canonization because they believe she symbolizes creeping "Christianization" of the Holocaust, and a supersessionist effort to promote Jewish conversion. Where more positive observers see good faith attempts at reconciliation and remembrance, scholars such as Polish watch for a regression to old, destructive patterns. In *The Unnecessary Problem of Edith Stein*, professor Zev Garber poses a question that gets at the truly problematic aspect of the dialogue around Stein's canonization: "Can the Church and the Jewish people overcome familiar roadblocks of mistrust, indifference and intransigence on the road from Auschwitz to Zion?" (67) Can we move from violence and destruction to peace, to the land of milk and honey?

IV. Moving Forward: Alternative Symbols

Edith Stein's progression to sainthood - and entrenchment as a lasting symbol within the canon of the Catholic Church - has been lauded, rejected, embraced, and dismissed by a wide range of thinkers. Some believe she serves as a reminder to "never forget," an embodiment of interfaith unity and multiculturalism. Others see in her sainthood the specter of supersessionism and conversion, erasure and appropriation. Religion does not necessarily determine who supports the canonization of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Some Jews applauded Stein receiving the martyr's crown, some Catholics questioned the appropriateness of the whole event. Others proposed new symbols to set alongside St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross.

Nechama Tec, a sociology professor and Holocaust survivor who contributed to *The Unnecessary Problem of Edith Stein*, asks: "Why does the Catholic Church ignore the Christians who risked their lives to protect Jews and Jews who selflessly saved Christians?" (52). She proposes for sainthood the Baranek family, Polish Catholics who were executed by Nazis on March 15, 1943 for sheltering four Jews (Tec 52). Carmelite monk John Sullivan, who has

written extensively about Edith Stein, argues that Stein's canonization should not be treated as an end point. He writes, "Now that Stein's cause has been completed, why not consider the possibility of promoting the causes of these other Catholic Jews who were deported and killed in the summer of 1942? Official acknowledgement of their deaths would spread the honors wider and offer an attempt to heal at least some of the misunderstandings that have resulted from her beatification" (Sullivan "Beatification" 13). Cargas suggests other saints who would be "conducive to healing" rifts between the Catholic Church and other faith communities. He champions Franz Jagersdatter, an Austrian peasant who "gave his life rather than fight on the Nazi side," and even proposes a "great ecumenical gesture: canonizing Lutheran minister Dietrich Bonhoeffer who died resisting the Nazi program against Jews" (Cargas). Returning to his belief about what shapes the future of the Catholic Church, he declares: "*There* would be a symbol" (Cargas).

Perhaps what Edith Stein has come to symbolize more than anything else is the ongoing project of Jewish-Catholic dialogue. Especially in the wake of the Holocaust, these conversations about martyrdom, sainthood, suffering, and redemption will always be fraught, sometimes painful. There will be flashes of anger and distrust. But there will also be learning and problem-solving, insights gained and perspectives shifted. As the famed Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel writes, "The religions of the world are no more self-sufficient, no more independent, no more isolated than individuals or nations. Energies, experiences and ideas that come to life outside the boundaries of a particular religion or all religions continue to challenge and to affect every religion. Horizons are wider, dangers are greater...No religion is an island" (119). Edith Stein, who in life recognized her belonging to both the Church and the Jewish people, represents most clearly the interconnectivity and interdependence of her faith communities. As a saint, a symbol,

and a problem, the controversy over Stein shows that Jews and Catholics are not living on separate islands, unconcerned with what goes on across the water. We have work to do together, ideas to share, lines to draw and blur and erase.

Polish, one of the most consistent critics of Stein's sainthood, rejects the notion that in one fell swoop Stein will "serve as a bridge to Catholic-Jewish understanding" ("Canonization" 171). But even he sees hope for the "problem" that has vexed scholars, theologians, and lay communities: "while we cannot embrace the notion that Edith Stein will serve as a bridge, we can see the occasion of her canonization as opening a door to significant discourse" (Polish "Canonization" 171). In the end, the unnecessary problem of Edith Stein may be a jumping off point for Jewish-Catholic dialogue that is very necessary indeed.

INTERLUDE: AT 360 CABRINI BOULEVARD

New York, New York

April 3, 2020

My life has been upended, but at least it has not ended. At the beginning of March, I was planning spring break travel and comedy shows, struggling to fit my thesis into the cracks between rehearsals and readings and senior bar nights. At the beginning of April, I am lodged in the comfort of my family home, my college life evaporating as a global pandemic takes hold. I'm trapped and protected in my family's apartment in Washington Heights, passing the time with walks in the parks (with masks, with gloves, with hand sanitizer), yoga and baking, movies and board games and Zoom calls. And then, there is Edith Stein.

My thesis has expanded to fill the space, fill my thoughts as virtual classes fade into the background. This, my personal project, can be completed as planned. My family is lucky that we have neighbors who headed to Texas three weeks ago, and asked us to feed their cat. They give us access to their apartment, exactly one floor up from ours, and say I can use the space to study. There's a desk pressed up against the bank of windows in their living room. I can see the Hudson River. The great grey bridge and the little red lighthouse. I have lost my comfy seat in the Tower Cafe, windows looking out over the Tufts Campus Center, but I have this.

I bring my laptop and my stack of books on Edith Stein, and I get to work. It's quiet up on the third floor. Our two-bedroom downstairs holds four adults now, my brother and I crashing back into the nest. Here I can think about Edith Stein, how she lived through disasters and diseases. When World War I broke out, Edith was 23 years old, only one year older than I am. She watched her university shatter as her fellow students marched to the front lines, some never to return. She threw herself into the war effort, received training as a nurse, and worked in an

infectious diseases hospital for most of 1915. She nursed men with typhoid and diphtheria, watched some of them die, and continued on. In 1918 the Spanish flu ravaged Europe. Edith moved back to her family home in Breslau, tutored students in philosophy (did she have to wear a mask?), and lived through that too.

In the quiet third floor apartment, I re-read Judith Hershcopf Banki's essay in *The Unnecessary Problem of Edith Stein*, the book that first made me think I was on to something. Something about Jews and Catholics, something about dialogue and symbolism, something about memory and martyrdom. In her essay, Banki expresses a common sentiment for Jewish women who write about Stein. The urge to pull her back into the fold. The wish that she could have understood us better. Banki writes: "I would have liked to meet Edith Stein. I think we would have liked each other. In a recurring fantasy - in which, of course, the language barrier is dissolved - we meet and carry on a lively conversation. (It is before her conversion.) I find her a bit pedantic, but engaging and warmhearted...In my fantasy, I try to dissuade her from abandoning her faith community. Dear Edith, I say, if you only knew the spiritual depth and intellectual richness of your own tradition, the poetry of the liturgical language, the interplay of ideas and opinions among our sages, the challenge of ethical decision-making. Abide with us..." (49).

I read this and I understand Banki's fantasy, my heart aches with it. I want to meet Edith Stein, I want her to visit me, here in the third floor apartment. I can picture her, perched in the plush chair next to my desk. Her dark hair is tied up and out of her face. She wears a white collared shirt, like in the pictures from her student years that weave through my books. She rests her head on her hand for a moment, then reaches down to pet the fat cat I feed every morning. Edith is holding a book, of course. She marks the page with her finger. I've caught her during her

Freiburg years, she's working on her thesis too. Edith is full of ideas and ambition, and she talks more philosophy than I can understand, but she's interested in what I'm doing. She admires my laptop, turns it over in her hands, tells me how wonderful it is that I won't need an army of cousins to type up my manuscript, as she did. Her grey eyes are bright and a flush is high in her cheeks as she points out a typo, corrects my Latin spelling. (Somehow, she doesn't know I'm writing about her.) We laugh together.

Like Banki's, my fantasy Edith comes to me before her conversion, before the Bergzabern library and the convent walls. Her heart still leaps when she brushes Hans Lipps' knee as they sit across from each other in the train compartment. She keeps a picture of him by her desk though Hedwig rolls her eyes. Edith shows me some of the funny skits and silly poems she writes for family gatherings. She likes my comedy sketches; I show her the one where I played a nun (I wrote it, I cast myself, I'll admit it). And it's okay. We can sit and read in the third floor apartment. I write about what her life and death symbolize as she hums, off key. I read she was a good dancer but never that she was a good singer. I remember that she is a person.

I am almost done with my thesis. I am almost there in this strange time of quarantine, social distancing, colleges closing and families gathering only to shut themselves inside. There are so many people I wish I could reach out and touch. Edith finishes her book. She smiles at me, the strange half-smile from the picture of her clothing ceremony. She puts on the wide brimmed sun hat I recognize from the cover of *Contemplating Edith Stein*. I turn around in my chair and watch her leave the third floor apartment, the door clicking shut softly behind her. But she will be back tomorrow.

For a little longer, she will abide with me.

CONCLUSION

The Necessary Problem of Edith Stein

“Too little love is a worse offense against the Divine Heart than too much”

- Edith Stein

“Could we start again, please?”

- *Jesus Christ Superstar*

Edith Stein first drew my attention because she was a mystery, a contradiction and a controversy, a “book sealed with seven seals” (*Jewish Family* 63). She was a Jew and a Catholic. A martyr and not-a-martyr, depending on who you asked. A saint and a symbol of disrespect. A bridge and a barrier. But as professor Patricia Hampl writes insightfully, “Edith Stein bore a crushing burden of paradox with simplicity, certainty, and humility...for her, the paradox of her life was not a contradiction to be debated but a truth to be lived” (62). In this paper, I sketched the contours of Stein’s life and the conflicting perspectives on her legacy. I presented her biography and investigated her Jewish identity. I explored reasons for her conversion and proposed a theory of how she integrated her Jewish and Catholic selves. I traced her path to beatification and the arguments for and against her martyrdom. I spun out the varied meanings of her sainthood for interfaith dialogue. Stein wrote “God is truth,” but I rejoice in the knowledge that I discovered few objective facts, settled no long-standing arguments (Herbstrith 78). Instead I have raised questions and provided many answers, adding another layer to the problem and paradox of Edith Stein.

The ultimate question is still before us: why should we care about Stein's life and legacy? Perhaps because she sharpens distinctions even as she blurs boundaries between the two traditions that shaped her life: Judaism and Catholicism. Contemplating Stein prompts Jews and Catholics to seek deeper truth, to ask difficult questions that have no set answers. What does it mean to be a Jew? What does it mean to be Catholic? What place do converts have in our faith communities? How do people construct their faith identities? What can we learn from people who reject normative understandings of religious boundaries, whose identities are multiple and even contradictory? What is the meaning of suffering and martyrdom? How can we honor victims of the Holocaust? Who can lay claim to tragedy? Who gets to decide what is sacred? How will we educate future generations, passing on the message to never forget? In a world where no religion is an island, how can we build bridges and open doors?

Studying Edith Stein - as a person and a symbol - leads to the discussion of these controversial questions. Scholars and commentators will never find a single solution to the problem(s) of Edith Stein. But this outcome shouldn't be viewed negatively. Here a Jewish teaching about the value of disagreement may be illuminating. In rabbinic Judaism, debate, argumentation, and challenges posed to study partners are venerated above all else. Clashes are framed as the way laws and codes of ethics are clarified. The Talmud teaches, "every dispute that is for the sake of Heaven will in the end endure" (*Sefaria Pirkei Avot 5:17*). Perhaps in contemplating Edith Stein, Jewish and Catholic scholars would do well to see each other not as opponents but as study partners, working together to deepen our understanding of our faith traditions and our global community. As a philosopher and contemplative who spent her life searching for truth, I believe Edith Stein would approve of this legacy: serving as a dispute for the sake of heaven, a necessary problem.

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