

THE ECUMENICAL MARTYRDOM OF EDITH STEIN (SR. TERESA BENEDICTA)?

Edith Stein's poem:



Juxta Crucem Tecum Stare*

*Latin title from *Slabat Mater* line "to stand at the Cross with you." The composite image by admin meant to depict Edith Stein, in her mind/heart, intent to "stand" under the Cross with Mary "become" our Mother.

Today I stood with you beneath the Cross,
And felt more clearly than I ever did
That you became our Mother only there.
Even an earthly mother faithfully
Seeks to fulfill the last will of her son.
But you became the handmaid of the Lord:
The life and being of the God made Man
Was perfectly inscribed in your own life.
So you could take your own into your heart,
And with the lifeblood of your bitter pains
You purchased life anew for every soul.
You know us all, our wounds, our imperfections;
But you also know the celestial radiance
Which your Son's love would shed on us in heaven
Thus carefully you guide our faltering footsteps,
No price too high for you to lead us to our goal.
But those whom you have chosen for companions
To stand with you around the eternal throne,
They here must stand with you beneath the Cross,
And with the lifeblood of their own bitter pain
Must purchase heavenly glory for those souls
Whom God's own Son entrusted to their care.

MARCH 5, 2020; Admin post on *Hail Ecumenical Mary, Mother of All Christians!* Facebook Group Page:

An early posting on our Marian ecumenism-focused FB group page featured a poem by Edith Stein/Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, whose death at Auschwitz many consider martyrdom. But some don't and, in the past, have said so.

In her poetic meditation, Stein is standing near Mary as Jesus is dying on the Cross. The philosopher-poet beholds the sorrow-laden distraught figure (1) as a woman in anguish, (2) as a Jewish sister, (3) as the Mother of our Lord, and (4) as the spiritual Mother of Us All – we, redeemed humanity.

While in Nazi custody with a thousand other Jews en route to the death camp, the noted nun encountered a sympathetic official during a stop in Westbrook, Netherlands. He offered her a plan of escape to neutral Switzerland. But she declined, electing solidarity with her brother and sister Jews and offering her certain death as a spiritual sacrifice to help hasten the end of the Holocaust. She is quoted saying:

"If someone intervened now and took away my chance to share in the fate of my brothers and sisters that would be utter annihilation!"

Such self-identification as a Jew can be cited by Stein martyrdom deniers as fitting well with their view. They argue that by Christian tradition, the crown of martyrdom is reserved for those put to death for their faith, whereas – so these objectors contend – she died simply because she was by birth Jewish.

But the Stein martyrdom deniers overlook, discount, disregard, or are unaware that she was among those Christians chosen for death camp execution in retaliation for Dutch Catholic Bishops denouncing the Nazis for their unconscionable mistreatment of Jews. In reprisal, the occupiers targeted Christians who had been born Jewish but converted to faith in Jesus. The converts were targeted even if – as in Edith’s case – their conversion happened long before Hitler rose to power.

Stein, when a teen ceased her Jewish observances and turned into an agnostic, but her philosophical researches into phenomenology led her to Catholicism. She was baptized more than a decade before the anti-Semitic dictator’s rise that set in motion the horrific events which followed.

In response to his becoming Germany’s ruler, the Carmelite Order sent her to the Netherlands, then still a free country. However eventually, the Nazi military machine overran that country too. She and other converts were executed in reprisal for the bishops having given expression to their Christian faith by condemning the atrocities being perpetrated against the Jews.

Quite clearly, those facts point to her and the other converts’ reprisal deaths as having been ordered because they -- each and every one of them -- were **both** Christian **and** Jewish in the eyes of the executioners.

However, some critics don’t dispute that Edith Stein and the other Christian converts in the Netherlands died as reprisal victims in Nazi retaliation for the church leaders’ criticism of the maltreatment of Jews. Rather, these deniers argue instead that her and her fellow and sister converts’ deaths don’t count as part of the Jewish Holocaust because their conversions rendered them no longer Jews.



Images of Edith Stein aka Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross from Commons Wikipedia.

The 'Ecumenical Martyrdom' of Edith Stein?

Given the premise of that viewpoint, the converts’ deaths would appear to count at most as unfortunate additional, collateral, side, subordinate, or secondary victims of Hitler’s racial purity programs. These deniers consider the spotlighting of the converts’ deaths as distracting, diverting, or diluting attention, recognition and acknowledgment away from the catastrophic horror that was the Holocaust.

Edith Stein, who felt she had reclaimed and

fulfilled her Jewish roots when she finally recognized Jesus as Messiah, would be the first to grasp the emotional pain and psychic trauma undergirding the hesitancy, reluctance or even resistance by some to honoring death camp Christian martyrs such as herself. After all, her dissertation had been devoted to “The Problem of Empathy.”.

This admin is among those who regard Edith Stein and her co-convert reprisal victims as no less martyrs than the early Jewish Christians who were fed to the Roman lions. But in so saying, we need to make something very clear: that in honoring them also, we in no way diminish the devastating destruction inflicted on the Jewish people by *The Shoah*, regarded world-wide as the most atrocious mass abomination in modern history.

Were we to be insensitive to those critics' underlying concern, would we not be going completely counter to the spirit of what Edith Stein's execution as a Jewish Christian convert represents, its meaning? Under the circumstances attendant at the time, was not her murder a kind of Ecumenical martyrdom? Did she not die faithful to both the Torah and the New Testament? Did not her death attain the ultimate empathy her life pursued?

What do you think?

FEBRUARY 23, 2020; Admin post on Hail *Ecumenical Mary, Mother of All Christians!* Facebook Group Page: Long intrigued by the life of Edith Stein/Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross and her death (many consider martyrdom) at Auschwitz, this admin encountered for the first time just the other day, her poem "*To Stand by the Cross with You.*" The discovery was quite fortuitous, given the focus of our newly-launched Facebook Group Page:

- (a) Mary's Ecumenical role as Mother of All Christians and
- (b) her spiritual relation to all humanity as the new Eve.

One of the very few early 20th Century women to venture into the theretofore rarified male bastion of philosophic disputation and discourse, Stein was born into an observant Jewish family with 10 older children during Yom Kippur 1891 in a part of Germany that is now part of Poland (Breslau);

When a teen she declared that she viewed God, if existing, not relevant. As a young woman, she became an active feminist and self-acknowledged "radical suffragette;"

At Gottingen University, Edith studied under the Father of Phenomenology Edmund Husserl and later became his assistant (and perhaps *de facto* collaborator) but was initially denied advancement because of gender.

Nevertheless, perseverance earned her a doctorate with highest academic honors. Her dissertation addressed "The Problem of Empathy." Although at this stage her perspective was basically atheistic, still her phenomenological analysis of empathy as possibly the central issue of epistemology proved very telling in her own life. Her approach in examining and explaining empathy crafted a philosophical pathway that ultimately and unintendedly opened for Edith the discovery (or was it rediscovery?) of the spiritual dimension to reality.

If this admin understands her dissertation argument accurately, empathy is more than mere awareness of another individual as a living human entity with an independent mind and feelings. It goes beyond and grasps to some personal degree the mental and emotional experience of the other. This process of empathizing – to the extent an individual engages in it – is what enables a person to develop certain kind of inner knowledge, a self-realization of who one is.

Given that as its background, Edith's poetic expression of empathy with Mary under the Cross seems appropriate to be among the first on-subject posts uploaded to our "Hail Ecumenical Mary, Mother of All Christians!" FB group page. Standing in her mind/heart near Jesus' mother as He is dying on the Cross, Stein finds herself relating to Mary (1) as a woman in anguish, (2) as a Jewish sister, (3) as the Mother of our Lord, and (4) as the spiritual Mother of Us All, the redeemed human race.

** Does Edith Stein's poem fit our FB Group Page's focus on the Ecumenical role of Mary as the Mother of All Christians and as new Eve for all humanity? Your thoughts, yes or no; either way or another way, please share your reaction and your reasoning with us.**

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