

# Stein, Edith (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross), St.

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About this Person

Full Text:

# Stein, Edith (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross), St.

Martyr; Carmelite nun; philosopher and pedagogue; b. Wrocław (Breslau in Prussian Silesia), Poland, October 12, 1891; d. Birkenau section of Auschwitz death camp, August 9, 1942.

Born of devout Jewish parents, Edith gave up her faith as a teenager and became interested in philosophy after dissatisfaction with her studies in psychology. She read the important philosophical treatise *Logical Investigations* of Edmund HUSSERL, the founder of PHENOMENOLOGY, and went to Göttingen University to



**Stein, Edith (1891-1942).** Known in religion as Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, this saint was martyred in the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp in 1942. © BETTMANN/CORBIS

study with him. There, contacts with Husserl's former pupil Max SCHELER began her acquaintance with Catholicism. After several years of searching, she asked to enter the Church upon reading the autobiography of St. TERESA OF AVILA, and was baptized on January 1, 1922. She accepted a teaching post at a girls' school run by Dominican teaching sisters in the cathedral city of Speyer. Along with her teaching duties, she acquainted herself with Catholic philosophy and translated the treatise *On Truth* by St. THOMAS AQUINAS.

Stein traveled to several German-speaking countries to address Catholic audiences, especially on women's and educational topics. Her growing reputation led her to leave the school at Speyer to teach at a more specialized institution of higher learning. In 1932 she became a lecturer at the German Institute for Scientific Pedagogy in M<sup>n</sup>ster, but in the next calendar year she had to leave this post because of anti-Semitic legislation introduced by the Nazi Party. Convincing her spiritual director the time had come, she now acted on a longcherished

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wish and entered the Carmel of Cologne, taking the name of Sr. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. After her initial training at Cologne her monastic superiors invited her to resume writing. She transformed an earlier philosophical essay, developed in an unsuccessful effort to obtain a university position a few years previously, into her major opus *Finite and Eternal Being*, in which she attempted to synthesize the philosophy of St. Thomas with modern thought, especially with phenomenology. From her monastery she remained a faithful correspondent with former colleagues, among them the Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden.

Soon after the Nazi persecution of the Jews turned violent in the nationwide Kristallnacht pogrom of

November 9–10, 1938, she left Germany for exile in the Dutch Carmel of Echt on the last day of the year. Here she wrote another important work, *The Science of the Cross*, a presentation of the life and teaching of St. JOHN OF THE CROSS. This contained several sections that incorporate the phenomenological method. Nazi Germany invaded the Netherlands in 1940, and both Sr. Teresa Benedicta and her sister Rosa Stein, now living at the Echt Carmel as a lay assistant, had to comply with anti-Semitic regulations. SS agents arrested them both on a day Sr. Teresa Benedicta was putting the finishing touches on her *John of the Cross* manuscript (which was published posthumously). That round-up on Sunday, August 2, 1942, led to deportation of several hundred priests and religious and Catholic laity of Jewish origin as a reprisal for an outspoken pastoral letter written by Dutch bishops condemning the anti-Semitic measures of the German occupation forces. One week later they arrived at the Auschwitz concentration camp, where she and her sister died in the gas chamber.

Official introduction of her cause for canonization took place in 1962, leading to her BEATIFICATION at Cologne by Pope JOHN PAUL II on May 1, 1987. He canonized her at ST. PETER'S BASILICA in the Vatican on October 11, 1998. In the same week he recommended reading her works in his encyclical *Fides et Ratio*. The following year the pope declared her copatroness of Europe, the only twentieth-century saint to be so honored.

Stein's early phenomenological writings cover the nature of empathy (our mode of access to another's experience), the individual, community, and the state. She articulates an account of our structure which distinguishes differing types and levels of experience, including more private types of experience (e.g., purely physical experience and personal, free acts) and more communal levels which enable us to understand another's experience, follow intelligible relations, and form genuine communities. (Stein understands communities as neither mere masses nor associations, which have external goals for their formation. Rather, communities develop around an internally shared life based in common values.) Stein's account of the state builds on these analyses; although states per se are not communities, the strongest states are those which grow out of communities and enable the cultivation of a culture.

Stein's lectures on women are less explicitly phenomenological, and in them she distinguishes feminine and masculine souls. All traits (and souls) are fundamentally human; no traits belong exclusively to one gender. Analogously, she argues that no profession ought to be limited to females or males. Nonetheless, she thinks that our souls have gendered natures which incline them toward the development of certain of the human traits, and generalizations can be made about feminine and masculine ways of engaging in common activities. For example, she claims that women tend toward holistic and personally-oriented development, while men toward specialized and object-oriented development. Even while affirming a strong account of intrinsically gendered souls, Stein makes clear both that the goal of development is a common one (full human development) and that our unique individuality marks each of us so that no individual is simply an expression of the more feminine or masculine tendencies.

Stein's translations and writings from the 1930s reveal a deep interest in bringing together the phenomenological and medieval traditions. Her translation of Aquinas's *De veritate* was the first into German, and she makes Thomas speak a more modern language, dropping the form involving objections and replies and providing commentary to help initiate more contemporary thinkers into Aquinas's concerns. *Potency and Act* continues this synthesizing project, and it comes to maturity in *Finite and Eternal Being*. In these later writings, Stein understands philosophy as capable not

only of providing a foundation for the other disciplines (as phenomenology) but also of articulating the nature of being (as METAPHYSICS). Hers is a metaphysics, however, arrived at through phenomenological analyses.

Stein frames much of her synthetic project around Thomistic themes. She understands the movement from potency to act to be key to understanding living things; she affirms the centrality of the TRANSCENDENTALS (placing particular importance on BEAUTY) and articulates a variety of ways in which we are oriented toward the eternal; and she employs the analogy of being, understanding our knowledge of God to be fundamentally analogical rather than univocal or apophatic. These more medieval topics are discussed, however, in relation to contemporary concerns with philosophical method and advances in the natural sciences (including quantum physics and evolutionary theory).

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Although adopting much from Thomism, Stein's metaphysics differs markedly in her affirmation of an individual form and her understanding of being. She adopts the broadly Aristotelian-Thomistic hylomorphic account of human nature, understanding us as a unity of matter in which potencies are actualized and soul, or form, as the seat of our distinctively human potencies. (This model is slightly adapted to be a unity of body, soul, and spirit, the latter of which is the *I* or conscious, free, and first-personal engagement.) In contrast to Thomas, however, Stein takes the most basic structure of the soul not to be the species form, but rather a unique individual form. Similarly, Stein's account of being is distinctive, understanding being not simply as act. She distinguishes actual being (efficacious being), mental being (being in the understanding), and essential being (*wesenhaftes Sein*, the being of intelligible structures). What comes to act actualizes the structures which *are* already in essential being. Thus, Stein's understanding of potencies coming to act is one of a thing unfolding in act what already is in essential being.

Stein's early writings make contributions to the general Husserlian project, providing a detailed account of intersubjectivity and a phenomenology of types of social groupings. After her conversion, Christian themes become more noticeable, and she draws heavily from the Christian medieval tradition. Throughout all of her work, however, certain themes are constant, including a commitment to a personal core or individual form and the essential communal dimension which are a part of our structure as human beings.

**SEE ALSO** AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU ; DIRECTION, SPIRITUAL; DOMINICAN SISTERS; FIDES ET RATIO; HOLOCAUST (SHOAH); HYLOMORPHISM; PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE; WORLD WAR II.

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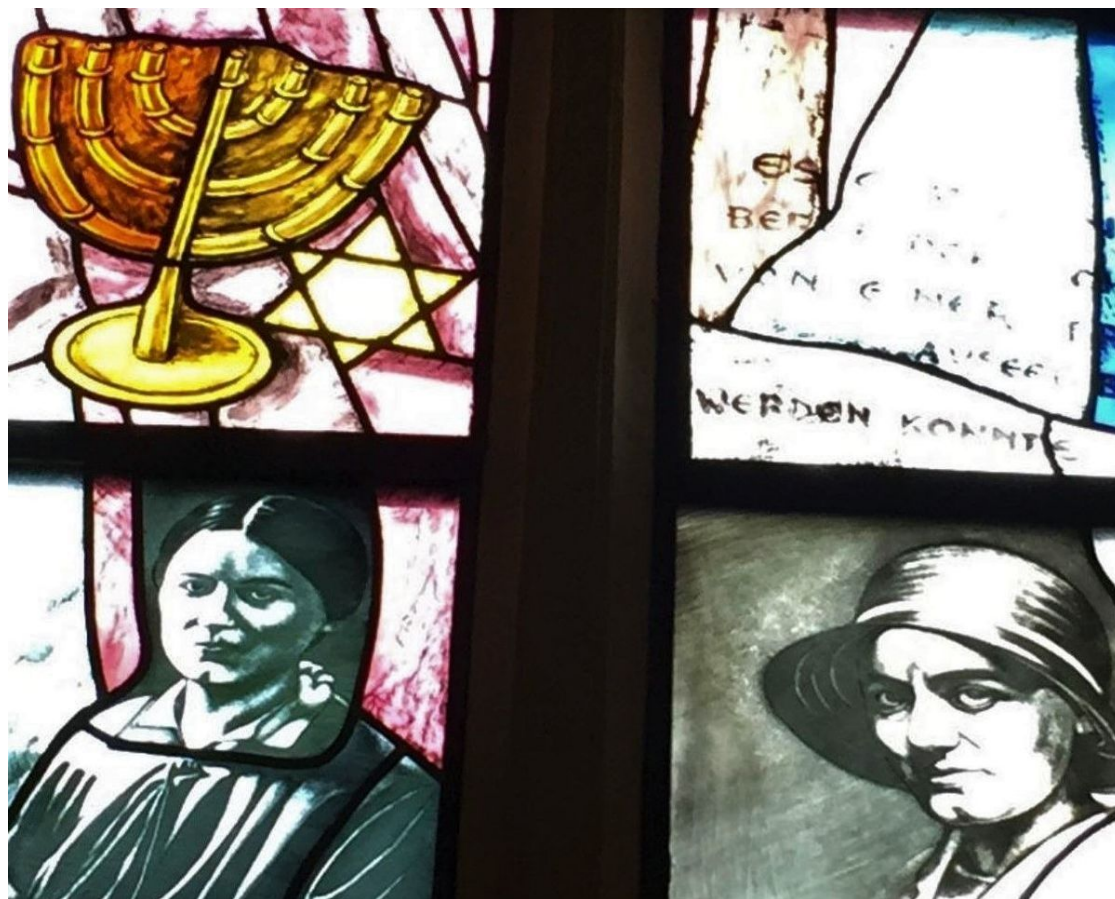
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## Edith Stein, Advent, and the Collision of the Two Covenants

by **Travis Lacy**[\[link:/articles/authors/travis-lacy/\]](https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/authors/travis-lacy/)

November 30, 2020



*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*

## Betrothal

**S**even years before her baptism, Edith Stein tried to attend what would have been her first Mass. On Christmas Eve, 1915, a fellow Göttingen student suggested they attend the Vigil together. Stein recounts in her unfinished autobiography:

*Liane proposed we go to the midnight Mass in the Catholic church. She had probably done that often in Munich. I was not at all familiar with it but gladly agreed to the suggestion. So we went to the Kurze Strasse that dark winter night. But there was not a soul in sight anywhere, and when we arrived at the church we found the door securely locked. Apparently the Mass of Christmas was to be celebrated only in the morning.*

*Disappointed, we had to go home.*<sup>[1]</sup>[\[link: #\\_ftn1\]](#)

This anecdote is an allegorist's fantasy. A born and raised Jew sets out to encounter a Messiah she does not confess, only to find the door to his presence locked.

On the night of his arrival, she misses him. Her efforts frustrated, she returns home and joins her people in a practice with which they are all too familiar: she waits for morning. Like Job straining for an answer too long in coming (Job 6:11, 32:16), like the Psalmist mustering the courage to face the night (Ps 27:14, 31:24, 33:20, 37:7-9, 38:15, 39:7, 40:1 and *passim*), like the prophets entreating the Lord's betrothed to remember his vows—she waits (Lam 3:25-26, Mic 7:7, Zeph 3:8). Betrothal marks the delay between promise and fulfillment; it is to be tensed, stretched, expectant. And this is the lot of Israel, affianced by the Lord of Hosts: “On that day, says the Lord, you will call me, ‘My husband,’ for you will no longer call me, ‘My master’” (Hos 2:16). Seen in the light of Israel's history, the period of seven-year delays separating the patriarch Jacob from his desired bride is not anomalous, but the law itself (see Gen 29). Stein would recapitulate this delay millennia later and receive her first communion in 1922, seven years after she had been turned away from a Savior she did not yet call her Spouse.

Even after her baptism, Stein would continue to bear the history of Israel within her flesh. Recalling the events that precipitated her entry into the Carmelite Order, she writes:



*I had heard of rigorous measures against the Jews before. But now it dawned on me that once again God had put a heavy hand upon His people, and that the fate of this people would also be mine . . . I felt almost relieved that I was now caught up in the common fate.*<sup>[2]</sup>

[\[link:#\\_ftn2\]](#)

Stein had already expressed a desire to enter religious life soon after her confirmation. Knowing that this would further embitter her devoutly Jewish mother, however, she would once again “have to wait patiently.”<sup>[3]</sup>[\[link:#\\_ftn3\]](#)

In time she would get her wish, but the circumstances availing her entry into Carmel are curiously tied not to her identity as a Catholic, but as a Jew. Fearing she was too much in the eye of an increasingly hostile public, the director of the German Institute for Scientific Pedagogy—founded and supported by the Catholic Teachers’ Organization—recommended Stein quit her popular lecture circuit in 1932. Her long-deferred desire to become a nun had become almost overwhelming by then: “Lately this waiting had become very hard for me.”<sup>[4]</sup>[\[link:#\\_ftn4\]](#) But with the rising swell of anti-Semitism in Germany, and now with no work, Stein concluded that her mother would find the safety of a convent advantageous. Seized by “the common fate of her people,” providence had arranged that Edith Stein enter Carmel through the fact of her Jewishness.

## Carmel

Of the canonically recognized religious orders in the Catholic Church, only one claims an Old Testament saint for its founder: the Carmelites. Named for the mountain on which Elijah called down fire before the servants of Baal (1 Kgs 18), Carmelites consider this witness to the Transfiguration their architect and exemplar (Matt 17). Stein notes in a beautiful essay that her order’s specific charism is taken from the prophet’s first words in Scripture:

*“As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word” (1 Kgs 17:1). To stand before the face of the living God—that is our vocation. The holy prophet set us an example. He stood before God’s face because this was the eternal treasure for whose sake he gave up all earthly goods . . . Elijah stands before God’s face because all of his love belongs to the Lord [and] by living penitentially, he atones for the sins of his time . . . He stands before God’s face like the angels before the eternal throne, awaiting God’s sign, always ready to serve.[5][link:#\_ftn5]*

Thus on April 15, 1934, Edith Stein, dressed in a bridal gown, entered the religious order most consciously rooted in the faith of her birth. Her mission ever after would be, quite literally, seraphic. She is still asked to wait, but the waiting is now different. For it is worth noting that Israel was waiting not only for the Son of David, but for another Elijah (Mal 4:5). Now Elijah has already come (Matt 17:12), and his children take up their place in expectant adoration. They wait not that the Savior would make his face known, but that they might become its icon: “We thus fulfill our Rule when we hold the image of the Lord continually before our eyes in order to make ourselves like him. We can never finish studying the Gospels.”[6]

[link:#\_ftn6] In Stein’s view, we might say that Carmelite waiting is not that the Lord would merely be present, but catholic. She speculates in *Finite and Eternal Being*. [link:https://www.icspublications.org/products/finite-and-eternal-being-an-attempt-at-an-ascent-to-the-meaning-of-being-the-collected-works-of-edith-stein-vol-9]

that, if Jesus Christ reveals the new humanity *per se*, then it would follow that his personality could not be reduced to that of a single character. In other words, he requires the cosmos to refract his charm. She writes:

*In Christ there is the total plenitude of humanity . . . This is what makes the figure of the Savior, as it is depicted in the truthful simplicity in the Gospels, so mysterious and unfathomable. He is wholly human [ganz Mensch] and precisely for this reason unlike any other human. He cannot be apprehended and comprehended as a “character” like Peter or Paul. Any attempt, therefore, to bring us into intimate contact with our Lord by depicting his life and character in the manner of a biographical portrait means really an impoverishment and a narrowing down of his life to some particular aspects, and in some instances it even means a distortion and falsification.[7][link:#\_ftn7]*

While modern attempts to uncover the “personality” of Christ in the gospels are often motivated by a kind of piety, Stein thinks this misguided. Of course, this is not to deny that the Word Incarnate is an individual person. Her point is merely that this person is the fount of all personality, that the universe has life only in and through his name (Cf. Phil 2:9-11, Col 1:16-20). “Perhaps,” she rightly wonders, “we may venture to say that the creation of the first human being may be regarded as the beginning of the incarnation of Christ.”<sup>[8]</sup> Stein has no conception of Christ apart from the *totus christus*, no image of his body lacking its members. And it is *this* body, whole and entire, which the Carmelite Order awaits.

As with Israel, the waiting is itself the fidelity, the mechanism of purification. If Elijah stood before the living God that Israel might chastely endure the delay of Christ, Elijah’s children so stand because the Son has already come, and he too awaits his dazzling bride. Those dedicated to the religious life are thus both bride and friend of the bridegroom, cleansing by a “silent, life-long martyrdom” the spouse they themselves compose.<sup>[9]</sup>

After all, Israel’s fate could be swayed by the prayers of a single prophet; Stein sees a similar logic at work in the religious life. Through small and hidden sacrifices made by those unknown to the world, the entire universe receives a christic face: “In the silent dialogue of souls with their Lord, consecrated to God, the events of church history are prepared that, visible far and wide, renew the face of the earth.”<sup>[10]</sup> Stein’s upbringing in a Jewish family prepared her for this asceticism of anticipation. Her entry into Carmel was not its erasure, but its consummation. She thus stands as a question to the Church she entered—can our waiting be separated from Israel’s?

## Advent

While embarrassment over its Jewish origins has sadly plagued Christianity since the early Church,<sup>[11]</sup> each liturgical year we are allotted an interval of atonement, of reckoning with the tree onto whose trunk we are the graft (Rom 11:17-24).<sup>[12]</sup> Advent is the season wherein the Church adopts Israel’s expectant longing. For in Advent we are asked to look through the eyes of the exiled, to be alert in our anticipation of the Messiah. So commands the gospel reading for the season’s first Sunday:

*Stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be broken into. So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come” (Matt 24:42-44).*

Admittedly, this exhortation sounds odd. Christ is already present with his disciples, and Matthew’s final memory is that this presence will abide (Matt 28:20). But the teaching is clear: the Son of Man who is here is still to come. This will be the law of the Church, who is Christ’s presence tarrying with his absence, a body still growing into its full stature (Eph 4:13). Warned that she will have no earthly city (Heb 13:14), she nevertheless bears the Kingdom wherever she wanders, for that Kingdom lies within (Luke 17:21).<sup>[13]</sup>[\[link:#\\_ftn13\]](#)

The life and thought of Edith Stein help us contemplate the meaning of Advent. As a partaker of the anticipation inscribed within Judaism and Christianity, she discloses what it means to be a people of promise and presence, whose lot is to adore the face of him who is coming again. She inhabits the braided destinies of Israel and the Church, which St. Paul affirms in a famously difficult passage thus:

*I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved . . . for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable (Rom 11:25-26, 29).*

Stein explores this mystery perhaps most profoundly in a narrative poem called “Conversation at Night,” in which an unnamed “Mother” hears a knock at her door and opens it to find a pilgrim.<sup>[14]</sup>[\[link:#\\_ftn14\]](#) The stranger says not to fear, for she has “no other weapons than raised hands.” She then adds that she has traveled far and seeks a place to rest her head. Mother replies: “Looking for lodgings? / . . . I am reminded of that pure one, the Immaculate, / Who once about this time also sought lodgings.”<sup>[15]</sup>[\[link:#\\_ftn15\]](#) We learn this occurs around Christmas, when Mary and Joseph were sent to a stable for lack of an open room. Unlike them, this woman has been welcomed and taken in. Mother even wonders if the Virgin herself has appeared to her and asks whether this is the case. The stranger replies:

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.<sup>[16]</sup>[\[link:#\\_ftn16\]](#)

The response is puzzling, but upon reflection Mother remembers that she knows a woman of Mary's blood, one who risked her life for her people with no other weapon than "hands raised in supplication": Queen Esther. The poem then retells her story, making particular use of the Septuagint's additional chapters describing Esther's prayer for Israel. She tells of her time in Abraham's bosom after her death, and the historical events which proceed thereafter:

I saw the church grow out of my people,  
 A tenderly blooming sprig, saw that her heart was  
 The unblemished, pure shoot of David.  
 I saw flowing down from Jesus' heart  
 The fullness of grace into the Virgin's heart.  
 From there it flows to the members as the stream of life . . .  
 . . . Her head was adorned with a crown of stars  
 And like the sun she was bathed in heavenly light.  
 But now 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.<sup>[17]</sup>[\[link:#\\_ftn17\]](#)

In Esther's telling, Mary is like a prized fruit grown in the soil of Israel. It is as though the people had been cultivated and pruned until a "pure shoot" should arise. She also makes the interesting comment that the Virgin's heart was replete with grace flowing from the heart of Jesus. Here, the heart of Jesus is the logically prior reality, granting Mary the life whereby it too can one day be conceived. Esther says she sees herself bound to the Virgin "from eternity" and inverts the root/branch imagery which Paul uses in Romans 11. It is Esther's life which is the "beam" of Mary's, not the reverse.

The wanderings and lineage of Israel are like the tributaries whose headwaters gather at the Virgin's feet, and it is she whom their history has conspired to produce. But if Mary is the preeminent daughter of Israel, she is also mother of the Church (as the literal bearer of Jesus' body). In one and the same person, the destinies of the two covenants collide. As a daughter of Zion and mother of Christ, the Virgin's solicitude encompasses both people. And if the first advent of her Son occasioned a parting of the ways, his second advent is unto their reconciliation, for "Only when Israel has found the Lord, / Only then when he has received his own, / Will he come in manifest glory. / And we must pray for this second coming." Having heard Esther's plea, Mother responds:

Like once the first—I understand exactly.

You were the pathfinder for the first coming.

Now you are clearing the way to the kingdom of glory.

You came to me—do I now understand the message?

The Queen of Carmel sent you . . .

. . . Her people, which are yours: 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.<sup>[18]</sup>[\[link:#\\_ftn18\]](#)

Mother promises to do the works of penance on behalf of Esther and her people. The language of secrecy also echoes Stein's comments in her essay on Carmel, in which the "silent, life-long martyrdom" was the mark of the religious vocation. But here, sacrifice is joined to Esther's exhortation that "we must pray for this second coming." Why? Because the salvation of Israel is enfolded within the second advent of Christ, and each augurs the other. The Church must therefore be a people of longing for the simple reason that Israel is not yet whole. Advent's liturgical rhythm is framed by this common hope.

True, the Church longs for the Messiah as one who has already come, and this all-important fact changes the nature of her waiting. But she still waits. She still lives and breathes as one who is not yet full grown (see Eph 4:13), with both the concern of a faithful daughter and the attention of a devoted



mother. To be an Advent Church is therefore to be a Marian Church, to embrace Christ with a love that, having treasured his presence, abides in his absence. In other words, it means joining Israel in tensed expectation. At the end of Stein's poem, Esther prophesies:

We'll meet again on the great day,

The day of manifest glory,

When above the head of the Queen of Carmel

The crown of stars will gleam brilliantly,

Because the twelve tribes will have found their Lord.<sup>[19]</sup>[\[link:#\\_ftn19\]](#)

There is a tradition in the Catholic Church that a priest's hands are wrapped with a cloth cut from his mother's bridal gown at his ordination. When the mother dies, her hands are then bound by this anointed fabric, that she might present her child as a dowry when she greets her Lord. Stein sees a similar logic at work in the relationship between Israel and Mary. Evoking Revelation 12:1—A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars—Stein interprets the crown of twelve stars as a sign of Israel's redemption. For Stein, Mary's love and care for the people who formed her is, like the gift and calling of God, irrevocable (Rom 11:29). Her reward is that they would be her eternal crown.

Stein's conviction is that Christ's return and Israel's salvation are included in one and the same hope. Jesus' mother is the sacrament of this unity, the visible sign that the mystical body she bore has no life apart from those who conceived her. Advent then invites the Church into the Marian mold, to ache like an expectant Israel while still adoring the child who came. Like Edith Stein entering Carmel, she continues to bear the fate of the Jews while celebrating her nuptials with Christ.

<sup>[20]</sup>[\[link:#\\_ftn20\]](#)

In this unity of adoration and expectation, Scripture's final prayer—*Maranatha*, come Lord Jesus—becomes the doxology common to the covenants (Rev 22:20). *Nostra Aetate* states that “the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice.”<sup>[21]</sup>[\[link:#\\_ftn21\]](#) But maybe such a voice already sings, one whose timbre resonates with the longing of Israel and Church alike. Maybe the *Magnificat* is the anthem of the new creation.

Until then we wait and sing as those betrothed. For “this is what God likes / patient waiting till the hour comes.”<sup>[22]</sup> The life of Edith Stein is a witness to this patience, a testament to the fidelity of waiting, in short, an icon of Advent. This was the posture of her people, and it is the vocation of her Church. The body of Christ therefore adopts the Jewish longing, because Israel is the Virgin’s crown. Would that we see our Mother so adorned.

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[1] <sup>[link:#\_ftnref1]</sup> Edith Stein, *Life in a Jewish Family: 1891-1916* (Washington D.C.: ICS, 1986), 385.

[2] <sup>[link:#\_ftnref2]</sup> “The Road to Carmel,” republished and translated in Sr. Teresia Posselt, O.C.D., *Edith Stein: The Life of a Philosopher and Carmelite* (Washington D.C.: ICS, 2005), 115 and 117.

[3] <sup>[link:#\_ftnref3]</sup> Ibid., 118.

[4] <sup>[link:#\_ftnref4]</sup> Ibid.

[5] <sup>[link:#\_ftnref5]</sup> Edith Stein, “On the History and Spirit of Carmel,” in *idem. The Hidden Life: Essays, Meditations, Spiritual Texts* (Washington D.C.: ICS Publications, 2014), 1-2.

[6] <sup>[link:#\_ftnref6]</sup> “On the History and Spirit of Carmel,” 4.

[7] <sup>[link:#\_ftnref7]</sup> Edith Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being* (Washington D.C.: ICS, 2002), 524.

[8] <sup>[link:#\_ftnref8]</sup> Ibid., 523.

[9] <sup>[link:#\_ftnref9]</sup> “On the History and Spirit of Carmel,” 6.

[10] <sup>[link:#\_ftnref10]</sup> Edith Stein, “The Prayer of the Church,” in *The Hidden Life*, 13.



[11] [\[link:#\\_ftnref11\]](#) Any evaluation of the early Church's attitude toward Israel must reckon with two concomitant realities: first, gnostic heresies were often defined by their rejection of the Old Testament, its preservation in turn serving as a mark of Christian orthodoxy. Second, this valuation of the Old Testament nevertheless did historically coincide with an often unreflective attitude regarding the meaning of Israel. The legacy of the early Church can thus neither be completely rejected nor adopted and, as ever, requires probative theological engagement. For those working specifically within the Roman Catholic tradition, *Nostra Aetate* is an indispensable yet inchoate development.

[12] [\[link:#\\_ftnref12\]](#) Advent has also been traditionally viewed as a penitential season, like Lent.

[13] [\[link:#\\_ftnref13\]](#) The understanding of the Kingdom lying "within" has been upheld and preserved largely through the mystical tradition. This is an essential aspect of the gospel. It should be added, however, that there is another aspect to the Kingdom, which involves proclaiming "good news to the poor, freedom to the prisoner, recovery of sight to the blind, and setting the oppressed free" (Luke 4:18-19). This is also essential to the gospel and ingredient to its first aspect. So my statement that the Church "bears the Kingdom wherever she wanders" is true, but requires supplementation, since the Kingdom remains inchoate wherever the qualities of Lk.4:18-19 do not obtain.

[14] [\[link:#\\_ftnref14\]](#) The significance of the name "Mother" is most likely layered by the following: 1) Stein's physical mother, who was the formative religious and personal influence on her life given that her father died at a young age (see *Life in a Jewish Family*, 28-32); 2) the superior of Stein's Carmelite convent; 3) the Virgin Mary. Of course, the last of these will be discussed in the poem itself, but one of the recurring themes of Stein's writings is that all are called to participate in the maternal "office" of the Virgin by bringing Christ to birth in our particular place and time. In this way, "Mother" is actually a kind of "Everyman," since all are called to participate in the Virgin's work of saying *fiat* to the will of God.

[15] [\[link:#\\_ftnref15\]](#) "Conversation at Night," in *The Hidden Life*, 128-129.

[16] [\[link:#\\_ftnref16\]](#) *Ibid.*, 129.

[17] [\[link:#\\_ftnref17\]](#) *Ibid.*, 132.

[18] [\[link:#\\_ftnref18\]](#) *Ibid.*, 133.

[19] [\[link:#\\_ftnref19\]](#) *Ibid.*

[20] [\[link:#\\_ftnref20\]](#) The antecedent for “she” in this sentence is intentionally ambiguous.

[21] [\[link:#\\_ftnref21\]](#) *Nostra Aetate*, 4.

[22] [\[link:#\\_ftnref22\]](#) Edith Stein, “I am Always in Your Midst,” in *The Hidden Life*, 118.

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## The Anthropology of Expressive Individualism

[link:/articles/the-anthropology-of-expressive-individualism/]

December 01, 2020

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**O. Carter Snead**

O. Carter Snead on what it means to be human.

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# Auschwitz



Auschwitz: entrance gates



Auschwitz

Auschwitz was actually three camps in one: a prison camp, an extermination camp, and a slave-labour camp. As the most lethal of the Nazi extermination camps, Auschwitz has become the emblematic site of the “final solution,” a virtual synonym for the Holocaust. Between 1.1 and 1.5 million people died at Auschwitz; 90 percent of them were Jews. Also among the dead were some 19,000 Roma who were held at the camp until the Nazis gassed them on July 31, 1944—the only other victim group gassed in family units alongside the Jews. The Poles constituted the second largest victim group at Auschwitz, where some 83,000 were killed or died.



**Auschwitz, Polish Oświęcim, also called Auschwitz-Birkenau,**

Nazi Germany’s largest concentration camp and extermination camp. Located near the industrial town of Oświęcim in southern Poland (in a portion of the country that was annexed by Germany at the beginning of World War II), Auschwitz was actually

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## Auschwitz I

Auschwitz was probably chosen to play a central role in the “final solution” because it was located at a railway junction with 44 parallel tracks—rail lines



### Auschwitz: crematorium



**Auschwitz-Birkenau**

that were used to transport Jews from throughout Europe to their death. Heinrich Himmler, chief of the SS, the Nazi paramilitary corps, ordered the establishment of the first camp, the prison camp, on April 27, 1940, and the first transport of Polish political prisoners arrived on June 14. This small camp, Auschwitz I, was reserved throughout its history for political prisoners, mainly Poles and Germans.

### Auschwitz II (Birkenau) and Auschwitz III



**Auschwitz II**

In October 1941, work began on Auschwitz II, or Birkenau, located outside the nearby village of Brzezinka. There the SS later developed a huge concentration camp and extermination complex that included some 300 prison barracks; four large so-called *Badeanstalten* (German: “bathhouses”), in which prisoners were gassed to death; *Leichenkeller* (“corpse cellars”), in which their bodies were stored; and *Einäscherungsöfen* (“cremating ovens”). Another camp (Buna-Monowitz), near the village of Dwory, later called Auschwitz III, became in May 1942 a slave-labour camp supplying workers for the nearby



**Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum**

chemical and synthetic-rubber works of IG Farben. In addition, Auschwitz became the nexus of a complex of 45 smaller subcamps in the region, most of which housed slave labourers. During most of the period from 1940 to 1945, the commandant of the central Auschwitz camps was SS-Hauptsturmführer (Capt.) and ultimately SS-Obersturmbannführer (Lieut. Col.) Rudolf Franz Höss (Hoess).





corpses of Auschwitz victims



Auschwitz III memorial, Père-Lachaise Cemetery, Paris

provide information that would supposedly lead to the rapid expansion of the “Aryan race.”



Auschwitz: prisoner barracks



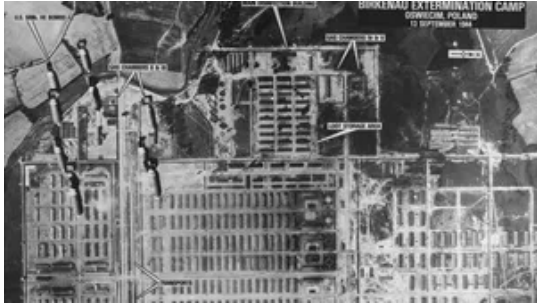
IG Farben factory

The death camp and slave-labour camp were interrelated. Newly arrived prisoners at the death camp were divided in a process known as *Selektion*. The young and the able-bodied were sent to work. Young children and their mothers and the old and infirm were sent directly to the gas chambers. Thousands of prisoners were also selected by the camp doctor, Josef Mengele, for medical experiments. Auschwitz doctors tested methods of sterilization on the prisoners, using massive doses of radiation, uterine injections, and other barbaric procedures. Experiments involving the killing of twins, upon whom autopsies were performed, were meant to

Subject to harsh conditions—including inadequate shelter and sanitation—given minimal food, and worked to exhaustion, those who could no longer work faced transport back to Birkenau for gassing. German corporations invested heavily in the slave-labour industries adjacent to Auschwitz. In 1942 IG Farben alone invested more than 700 million Reichsmarks in its facilities at Auschwitz III.

### **The Allied response to Auschwitz**

Throughout the camp’s history, there were numerous escape attempts, and on April 10, 1944, two Slovak Jews—Rudolph Vrba and Alfred Wetzler—successfully broke out of Auschwitz-Birkenau. After a harrowing two-week journey through Nazi-occupied Poland, they made it back to their home country. There they made



Auschwitz

contact with Slovak resistance forces and gave them a complete report on the extermination camp. Vrba and Wetzler documented the killing process and provided detailed maps of the camp's layout. This information was passed on to Western intelligence organizations along with an urgent request to bomb Auschwitz. Part of the report was forwarded to the U.S. government's War Refugee Board and arrived in Washington in July 1944. In August U.S. Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy rejected the notion of bombing Auschwitz, stating that "such an operation could be executed only by the diversion of considerable air support essential to the success of our forces now engaged in decisive operations elsewhere and would in any case be of such doubtful efficacy that it would not warrant the use of our resources." Although the IG Farben industrial complex adjacent to Auschwitz was bombed four times in the final year of the war, the death camp and its crematoria were left untouched, a subject of controversy more than 70 years later. (See Why Wasn't Auschwitz Bombed?)



concentration camp



Holocaust

On March 19, 1944, Germany occupied Hungary, and, while the Allies considered the ramifications of the Vrba-Wetzler report, the Nazis undertook the systematic destruction of Hungarian Jewry. Between May 15 and July 9, 1944, some 438,000 Hungarian Jews were shipped on 147 trains to Birkenau, stretching the camp's resources for killing beyond all limits. Because the crematoria were overcrowded, bodies were burned in open pyres fueled partly by the victims' own fat. More than two-thirds of Hungary's Jewish population would perish in the Holocaust, and the overwhelming majority of those murders would take place at Birkenau.



As Soviet armies advanced in 1944 and early 1945, Auschwitz was gradually abandoned. On January 18, 1945, some 60,000 prisoners were marched to Wodzisław Śląski, where they were put on freight trains (many in open cars) and sent westward to concentration camps away from the front. One in four died en route from starvation, cold, exhaustion, and despair. Many were shot along the way in what became known as the “death marches.” The 7,650 sick or starving prisoners who remained were found by arriving Soviet troops on January 27, 1945.

## The legacy of Auschwitz and war crimes trials

After the war, hundreds of Nazi officials and SS soldiers would be tried for war crimes in connection with the atrocities committed at Auschwitz. Höss was arrested by Allied military police in 1946, and the following year a Polish tribunal sentenced him to death by hanging. On April 16, 1947, he was executed on the grounds of Auschwitz. Another tribunal was convened at Kraków in 1947, and 23 SS officers, including Arthur Liebehenschel (who had served as commandant of Auschwitz I) and Maria Mandel (director of the women’s camp at Birkenau) were sentenced to death. Mengele went into hiding after the war and fled to South America in 1949. With the exception of Adolf Eichmann, Mengele was arguably the highest-profile Nazi to escape justice in the years immediately following World War II. Eichmann was arrested by Mossad agents in Buenos Aires in May 1960 and returned to Israel for trial, but Mengele would remain at large. In 1985 a team of forensic investigators concluded that Mengele had died of a stroke in 1979 while living in Brazil under the assumed identity of Wolfgang Gerhard.



Auschwitz prisoner barracks

Although the Germans destroyed parts of the camps before abandoning them in 1945, much of Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II (Birkenau) remained intact and were later converted into a museum and memorial. The site has been threatened by increased industrial activity in Oświęcim. In 1996, however, the Polish government joined with other organizations in a large-



scale effort to ensure its preservation. Originally named Auschwitz Concentration Camp, the memorial was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1979. It was renamed “Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Nazi German Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940–1945)” in 2007.

Michael Berenbaum The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica

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