

## Saint Edith Stein and the The Conversion of the Jews

There will always be individual conversion of Jews, but it is considered "of the faith," that the Jews as a nation will be converted towards the end of the world. This consoling truth is abundantly taught in Scripture and Tradition. Saint Paul devotes the entire eleventh chapter of his Epistle to the Romans to this mystery, in which he says in part:

As concerning the Gospel, indeed they are enemies for your sake: but as touching the election, they are most dear for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance (Rom. 11:28,29).

Fr. Denis Fahey in his excellent *The Kingship of Christ and the Conversion of the Jews*, after citing many of the Fathers on this subject, concludes with a brief citation from St. Thomas Aquinas and the famous Jesuit Scripture scholar, Francisco Suarez:

As from St. Thomas he quotes a sentence from the *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Chapter XI, lect. 4: "When the fullness of the Gentiles shall have entered in, all Israel will be saved, not merely as individuals as at present, but the whole nation as a body." Suarez is still more explicit with regard to the epoch. According to him, "the conversion of the Jews will take place at the approach of the Last Judgment and at the height of the persecution which Antichrist will inflict on the Church." <sup>3 1</sup>

A remarkable conversion from Judaism during the last century was that of Venerable Francis Mary Liebermann, C.S.Sp., first Superior General of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, an order dedicated to the African missions. Father Fahey, himself a Holy Ghost Father, records Father Liebermann's own account of the Talmudic formation he received from his father, a distinguished rabbi:

According to the teaching of the Talmud the possessions of the *Goim* should be regarded as a desert and as the sand of the sea, of which the first possessor is the real proprietor. The Talmud expressly forbids the Jew to save a Christian from death, to restore to him his lost property or to have pity on him. The rabbis have concluded that, when dealing with a Christian, the Jew is at liberty to make a mistake for his own advantage, and that it is honest to deprive a Christian of any sum of money. These pernicious doctrines formed a part of the instruction which the rabbi of Saverne inculcated on the minds of his children, who naturally received them as the purest expressions of truth...One day, Jacob (later Father Liebermann), was sent to the house of a neighboring Christian woman, to exchange a piece of money. Imagining that he was doing an excellent deed, he dexterously took away a penny from the infidel *Goim*. He returned quite proud of his feat, which gained for him the applause of his family, especially of his father, who saw in this youthful exploit an indication of a brilliant future.<sup>2</sup>

Of course all these pernicious doctrines are explicitly condemned in the Old Testament, but most Jews seldom read the Old Testament, preferring the Talmud. If they did read the Old Testament, even in their mutilated Massoretic text, many more would be led to the Church. The Talmud which signifies "teaching," is divided into the *Mischna*, which is the text itself, and the *Ghemara*, the commentary on it. The program of studies in the Jewish schools is as follows:

The Bible is to be compared to water; the *Mischna* to wine and the *Ghemara* to aromatic liquor. One who studies the Bible does something indifferent; one who studies the *Mischna* deserves a recompense; one who studies the *Ghemara* performs the most meritorious of all actions.<sup>3</sup>

The Jews are their own worst enemies, and the Talmud is the main source of Anti-Semitism, not Christianity, beginning with the Gospel of St. John, as the Jews, with the cooperation of some Modernist Catholic priests, are now trying to claim. The Nazis were able to exploit the horrendous teachings of the Talmud, but not all Jews are Talmudic Jews, and St. Edith Stein, the most outstanding convert from Judaism of our day, after she became a Catholic, began, but unfortunately never completed, her wonderful *Life in a Jewish Family*, which was intended mainly to be the story of her mother, to counteract the Nazi caricature.

Her mother, Auguste Courant Stein, had borne eleven children, four of whom had died in childhood, when her husband, Siegfried, suddenly dropped dead of a heat stroke. The 44 year old widow undertook to bring up her seven remaining children, two boys and five girls, and at the same time, run her husband's lumber business. Edith considered her mother an example of the "valiant woman" of Proverbs 31, "Let her works praise her in the gates":

Most of the people my mother dealt with were craftsmen. She knew each one's family history. She found it out, usually when they wanted goods on credit or when they could not redeem the notes they had given. My mother repeatedly followed her kind heart in these cases; sometimes she even gave bad customers some additional cash when they were in need. She was often cheated; and the business was plagued with heavy losses. Despite that it prospered.

AMy mother attributed this fact to being blessed by Heaven.

AOn one occasion later, after I had lost my childhood's faith [Edith became an atheist at 15], she said to me, giving what she likewise considered a proof of God's existence: >After all, I can't imagine that I owe everything I've achieved to my own ability.= This was of course correct.

ABut her natural talents had played a large part in her success. One day a woman who had for a long time been my mother's friend visited us 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 whole trade in town? Frau Stein!'" 4

When Edith was still a small child, her uncle, her mother's brother, Jacob Courant, shot himself as a result of the failure of his business, and the following year, another uncle, her father's brother, Alexander Stein, did the same. Edith comments on these tragedies:

A...The economic war against the Jews, which has ruined so many in the year just passed [1932], has again caused an alarming number of suicides. I believe that the inability to face and to accept the collapse of one's worldly existence with reasonable calm is closely linked to the lack of any prospect of life in eternity. The personal immortality of the soul is not considered an article of faith; all of one's effort is concentrated on what is temporal. Even the piety of the pious is directed toward the sanctification of this life. A Jew is able to endure severe hardship and untiring labor coupled with extreme privations for years on end as long as he sees a goal ahead. Deprive him of this goal and you destroy his vigor; life then appears meaningless, and so he can throw it away. The true believer, of course, is deterred from such a course by his submission to the will of God.@5

I don't know how much Saint Edith knew about the Talmud; the only comment she makes in regard to it in her autobiography is the following:

AOne day when out walking with him, I had an errand in one of the houses we passed. In the doorway I suddenly handed him my briefcase to hold while I went in. Too late, it occurred to me that it was Saturday and one ought not to carry anything on the Sabbath. I found him dutifully awaiting me in the doorway. I apologized for thoughtlessly causing him to do something forbidden.

"I haven't done anything forbidden," he replied quietly. "Only on the street is one not allowed to carry anything; it's allowed in the house."

AFor that reason, he had remained in the entrance-hall, taking care not to put even one foot into the street. This was an example of the talmudic sophistry which I found so repugnant. But I made no comment.@6

Mother Teresa Posselt, O.C.D., Saint Edith's superior in the Cologne Carmel, in her excellent *Edith Stein*, records the two great graces which led to her conversion. When she went to the University of Göttingen to study phenomenology under Edmund Husserl, her most admired friend was the philosopher Adolf Reinach. During World War I he had become a Lutheran while at the front, and his wife Anna had followed him. He was killed in Flanders in 1917.

As Edith Stein had another duty of a sadder nature to fulfill. Frau Reinach had invited her to Göttingen and requested Edith to arrange the philosophical papers left behind by her late husband. Edith was ready to do so immediately, but was really frightened of entering the house now that it had been robbed of Reinach's presence who had filled it with sunny warmth and overflowing kindness. Even more deeply she feared to find that Frau Reinach, whom she only knew as this fine person's radiantly happy wife, had become a broken hopeless widow.

It turned out quite differently. What the atheist Edith Stein could only regard as a shattering blow of fate had been accepted by the Christian Frau Reinach as a part of her Master's Lay Cross. It was true that every fiber of her sensitive soul had been shaken by the sorrow, but this sorrow had at the same time laid bare the deepest sources of her nature, so that gratitude, the joy of sacrifice and ardent faith swelled up inside her as she drew the Cross closer to herself. The healing Cross and its secret blessing had transfigured the sorrowful features of this admirable woman.

Edith never spoke to her about it, but the impression left on her by this experience could never be effaced. It was then that I first encountered the Cross and the divine strength which it inspires in those who bear it. For the first time I saw before my eyes the Church, born of Christ's redemptive suffering, victorious over the sting of death. It was the moment in which my unbelief was shattered, Judaism paled, and Christ streamed out upon me: Christ in the mystery of the Cross. Sister Benedicta revealed all this to a priest shortly before her death, ending with these words: >Therefore at my clothing I could express no other desire than that of being called in the Order 'of the Cross.'" <sup>7</sup>

Anna Reinach soon became a Catholic, and also Adolf Reinach's sister, Paulene, who eventually became a Benedictine nun in Belgium, taking the name Sister Augustina. The second great grace that Mother Teresa records, involves Lutheran couple who also were philosophers, Hedwig Conrad-Martius and her husband Hans Theodor Martius:

It happened, however, that during one of these holiday-visits both husband and wife had to go away. Before their departure Frau Conrad-Martius took her friend to the book-case and told her to take her pick. They were all at her disposal. Edith herself tells: >I picked at random and took out a large volume. It bore the title *The Life of St. Teresa of Avila*, written by herself. I began to read, was at once captivated and did not stop till I reached the end. As I closed the book, I said, "That is the truth."

A Day was breaking. Edith hardly noticed it. God's hand was upon her and she did not turn from Him. In the morning she went into the town to buy two things: a Catholic catechism and a missal. She studied them until she had mastered their contents. Then for the first time she went into a Church, the Parish Church at Bergzabern, to hear Mass. >Nothing was strange to me,= said Edith later. >Thanks to my previous study, I understood even the smallest ceremonies. The priest, a saintly-looking old man, went to the altar and offered the holy sacrifice reverently and devoutly. I followed him to the presbytery and asked him without more ado for Baptism. He looked astonished and answered that one had to be prepared before being received into the Church. 'How long have you been receiving instruction and who has been giving it?' The only reply I could make was, 'Please, your Reverence, test my knowledge.'" <sup>8</sup>

Saint Edith was baptized on January 1, 1922. She was born on the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*, and for that reason was especially cherished by her mother. The notion of "atonement" would come to have great mystical significance for Saint Edith. She had always treated her mother with childlike simplicity:

A...Kneeling before her mother, looking her in the face, she said gently but firmly: >Mother, I am a Catholic.= And the woman who had mastered her difficult lot with truly biblical heroism, and had by her own labour won security for herself and her children; she wept. This was something Edith had not expected. Never had she seen her mother in tears. She had nerved herself for insult and abuse, she had even reckoned with the possibility of being cast out of the family; she knew the righteous anger of which her mother was capable. Yet this strong woman wept. Edith wept with her.@<sup>9</sup>

Edith wanted to enter Carmel immediately, but friends persuaded her that a second blow would be too much for her mother. She then began a distinguished career teaching in Catholic colleges, lecturing to various Catholic groups, and publishing several books. This came to an end in 1933 when Jews, even Jews who had become Christians, were forbidden to teach or publish. Saint Edith now felt free to fulfill her long delayed desire to enter the Carmel of Cologne.

AOn the first Sunday in September I was alone at home with my mother. She was sitting at the window with her knitting and I was beside her. Suddenly the long-expected question came: >What are you going to do with the sisters in Cologne?=>Live with them.=...Then came the despairing reply:

"=Why have you learnt more? I don't want to say anything against him. He may have been a very good man. But why did he have to make himself God?=" <sup>10</sup>

When Edith entered Cologne she asked Mother Teresa Posselt for just one privilege, that she might continue her practice of writing to her mother once a week. Her mother did not answer her letters, but her sister Rosa, acting as an intermediary, used to write regularly giving her the family news. It was a great joy to Edith when her mother began to add her own greetings to Rosa's letters. Edith received the habit in 1934, and chose as her name, Sr. Teresa (Teresia in German) Benedicta of the Cross:

¶The year drew on to the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the 14th of September [1936], a very important day in Carmel, since it marks the beginning of the great fast which lasts until the day of Our Lord's Resurrection. Also the whole Order renews its vows in accordance with St. Teresa's instructions, and this was the third time that Sister Benedicta had taken part in the ceremony, held in the silent hour before dawn. Afterwards she said to one of the sisters who was specially intimate with her, >As I was standing in my place in choir waiting to renew my vows my mother was beside me. I felt her presence quite distinctly.=On that same day a telegram came from Breslau with the news that Frau Stein had died at the very time her daughter was renewing her vows.@<sup>11</sup>

That her mother's death occurred on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, had great symbolic meaning for Sr. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Her mother had died unconverted, and she considered her a type of all the unconverted Jews. A few years earlier in 1933 she had written:

¶I spoke to Our Saviour and told Him that I knew it was His Cross which was now being laid on the Jewish people. Most of them did not understand it; but those who did must accept it willingly in the name of all. I wanted to do that, let Him only show me how. When the service was over I had an interior conviction that I had been heard. But in what the bearing of the Cross was to consist I did not yet know.@<sup>12</sup>

Edith's sister Rosa who had been caring for her mother, now felt free to follow her own heart and enter the Catholic Church. She was the only one in the family to do so. By a providential accident, Saint Edith had fallen down a flight of stairs and broken her wrist and ankle, which forced her to be hospitalized outside the enclosure. She was thus able to finish Rosa's final instructions in the faith, and be present at her baptism.

*Krystallnacht*, November 9, 1938, when synagogues were burned and Jewish homes and businesses destroyed, marked the first mass deportation of Jews by the Nazis to the death camps:

¶Naturally the Sisters were horrified, and Sister Benedicta herself was almost paralyzed with grief. >It is the shadow of the Cross which is falling on my people. If only they would see this! It is the fulfillment of the curse which my people called upon its own head. Cain must be persecuted, but woe to whoever lays hands upon Cain. Woe also to this city and this country when God's wrath descends upon them for what they are now doing to the Jews.@<sup>13</sup>

This prophecy was fulfilled to the letter. Germany was devastated, and Cologne was destroyed in the Allied bombings. The Cologne Carmel was burned to the ground, but the Sisters who were praying in the cellar were miraculously spared. Saint Edith was afraid she was endangering her community, and the Sisters determined to get her out of the country for her own safety. Under cover of darkness a friend of the community drove her to the Carmel in Echt, Holland, a daughter house of the Cologne Carmel, where she was welcomed with open arms. In

1940 Rosa, after a narrow escape, made her way to Echt through Belgium. She became a Third Order Carmelite and served as portress for the community.

Saint Edith could well be called the Saint of Mary Co-Redemptrix. It is certainly significant that today while this beautiful doctrine is being attacked by Modernist theologians, the Church continues to teach it by her canonizations. Dr. Freda Mary Oben, herself a convert from Judaism, writes:

ANow I know it is not stylish today to refer to Mary as Co-Redemptrix, but that is exactly the way Edith saw her. Mary is, Edith writes, our entry into the redemptive order. The language in John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* is very similar. Mary is described as providing the point of entry into the divine and human dimensions of the mystery of redemption in Christ."<sup>14</sup>

A beautiful poem on this mystery was found among Saint Edith's posthumous papers:

#### JUXTA CRUCEM TECUM STARE

Today I have stood with you beneath the Cross  
 And felt more certainly than ever before,  
 That you became our Mother beneath the Cross.  
 How faithfully an earthly mother strives  
 To fulfill her dying son's last wish.  
 But you were the handmaid of the Lord,  
 Subduing wholly your own life and being  
 To the life and being of God incarnate.  
 You have taken your own to your heart  
 And with your heart bleeding from bitter sorrow  
 Have purchased for each one of us new life.  
 You know us all, our wounds and our defacement,  
 But you know also the heavenly radiance  
 In which your Son's love eternally bathes us.  
 And so you carefully direct our footsteps.  
 You find no pain too great to bring us to our goal,  
 So those whom you have chosen for companions,  
 To stand beside you at the eternal throne,  
 Must stand beside you here beneath the Cross  
 And with hearts bleeding from bitter sorrow  
 Purchase heavenly radiance for the precious souls  
 With whom the Son of God entrusted you.<sup>15</sup>

After Edith Stein became a Catholic, she lectured frequently to Catholic women's groups. Here she is urging Catholic women to participate in Mary's role as Co-Redemptrix, a thing she was to do perfectly herself:

The example of Mary is relevant here. She is the ideal type of woman who knew how to unite tenderness with power. *She stood under the Cross*. She had previously concerned herself with the human condition, observed it, understood it. In her Son's tragic hour she appeared publicly. *Perhaps the moment has come for the Catholic woman also to stand with Mary and the Church under the Cross.*<sup>16</sup>

When Pope John Paul II beatified Edith Stein on May 1, 1987, a howl of protest went up from Jews all over the world:

A member of Israel's parliament...told the Associated Press in Tel Aviv that the beatification of Miss Stein is an insult to the Jews.

"We interpret it as a provocation and an insult because 1 million children died in Auschwitz, and they take a woman and beatify her because she became a Catholic. It's ironic to say the least, and it's clearly degrading and humiliating to the Jews, she said...

James Baaden, a Jewish author who has written a biography of Miss Stein, told the AP in London the controversy in large part was about why the Nazis killed her.

Baaden said the Nazis killed her because they still viewed her as a Jew.

He maintained that it is not correct to say she converted to Catholicism, because that suggests she turned away from something that was in some way wrong or base, to embrace something essentially superior. =..

Tullia Zevi, president of Italian Jewish Communities, agrees with Baaden that Miss Stein was killed because of her Jewish origins.

"While beatification is an internal church affair, this particular case has caused concern in Jewish circles because of its implications," Ms. Zevi said in Rome.

She added that the beatification might be interpreted as an act of Christian triumphalism, which she called inconsistent with the Vatican's expressed desire to have a dialogue with Jews and other religions.

"A dialogue between two religions should be conducted among partners having equal dignity and legitimacy in mutual respect."<sup>17</sup>

In 1987 a little two year old girl, named in Edith Stein's honor, Teresia Benedicta McCarthy, (she was born on August 9th, the same day that Edith died), swallowed a lethal dose of Tylenol. Her parents who were devoted to Edith Stein, besought her to cure their little daughter. Dr. Ronald Kleinmann of Massachusetts General Hospital testified before Vatican



officials, that the girl had suffered irreversible liver damage, and that her cure could only be considered miraculous. The miracle was accepted by the Vatican, and Pope John Paul II canonized Edith Stein on October 11, 1998. The Jews had launched a massive propaganda campaign to block Edith's canonization. It got louder and louder as October 11 approached. One was reminded of, "But they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified; and their voices prevailed" (Lk. 23:23). But in this case their voices did not prevail.

One of the major complaints of the Jews is that the bishops did not sufficiently protest the deportations of the Jews. Exactly the opposite is true in this case. The bishops protested too much, but I am sure that is the way that Saint Edith would have wanted it. The bishops drew up a joint pastoral which was signed by the leaders of the Protestant churches. The Nazis got wind of the pastoral and threatened to deport all Christian Jews if it was read. The Protestant leaders said they would withdraw their signatures, but the document had already been sent off. No Protestant Jews were deported. The bishops went ahead, and the pastoral was read in all the Catholic churches on Sunday the 26th of July. It said in part:

¶The undersigned religious organizations of the Netherlands, deeply shaken by measures against the Jews which have excluded them from the normal life of the people, have learnt with terror of the latest regulations by which men, women, children, and whole families are to be deported to the territory of the German Reich.

¶The suffering which has been thus imposed on thousands of people, the awareness that these regulations offend the deepest moral convictions of the Netherlands, and above all, the denial in these regulations of God's precepts of justice and mercy, forces the undersigned religious organizations to request most urgently that these regulations shall not be carried out...

¶And so, dear Brethren, let us implore God, through the mediation of the Mother of Mercy, to grant to the world a just peace. May He strengthen the people of Israel who are being so sorely tested in these days, and may He bring them to true redemption in Christ Jesus...Let us implore His help for all those in tribulation, for prisoners and hostages, for so many over whom hang clouds of peril and destruction...Open the ears of Thy Mercy, O Lord, to the prayers of those who fly to Thee...@<sup>18</sup>

The Nazi reaction was swift. General-Kommissar Schmidt announced:

¶...Even in Protestant churches declarations were made in which they took up an unmistakable standpoint. However the representatives of the Protestant churches have informed us that this announcement was unintentional, but could not be withdrawn in time for technical reasons. Since the Catholic hierarchy, on the other hand, refuses to enter into negotiations, then we, for our part, are compelled to regard Catholic Jews as our worst enemies and consequently see to their deportation to the East with all possible speed.@<sup>19</sup>

The Archbishop of Utrecht tried desperately to have the same exception applied to Jewish Catholics as applied to all Jewish Christians. But Seyss-Inquart made no reply to either his letter or his telegram:

"From Schmid's declaration one can conclude with confidence that all these religious, both men and women, really died *testimonium fidei* [in witness to the faith], because their arrest was an act of reprisal for the Bishops' pastoral letter. It was an attempt to strike at the Bishops and the Church by arresting Jewish members of Catholic religious orders." <sup>20</sup>

When the Gestapo came to the Carmel of Echt, Saint Edith taking Rosa by the arm, said: "Come let us go for our people." In her cell the sisters found, written on the back of a small picture, her last will and testament:

AMay the Lord accept my life and death for the honor and glory of his name, for the needs of his holy Church - especially for the preservation, sanctification, and final perfection of our holy Order, and in particular for the Carmels of Cologne and Echt - for the Jewish people, that the Lord may be received by his own and his Kingdom come in glory, for the deliverance of Germany and peace throughout the world, and finally for all my relatives living and dead and all whom God has given me; may none of them be lost.@<sup>21</sup>

Jesus always asks our cooperation when we ask for a miracle. "And Jesus saith to him: If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And immediately the father of the boy crying out with tears said: I do believe Lord: help my unbelief" (Mk. 9:22,23). St. Paul would not have been converted had not St. Stephen prayed: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:59). The Jews will indeed be converted, but Jesus would not work that great miracle of grace, unless Saint Edith had offered her life for it.

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