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Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross

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The importance of intelligence in Edith Stein

August 9, 2015 (Communicationes).- We stand before a person of great intelligence, reflective, restless, a searcher by nature; and her speech has a transparency inevitable in someone of this nature; as a result, her religious experience maintains a strict relationship with her talent as a thinking woman, a philosopher. In her biography, the choice of philosophy appears in 1911, (at age 20); much earlier, however, philosophy had taken possession of her; for ages she felt captivated by this way of knowing, which was to form in her a way of living, a style of being, of finding a place in the world.

Edith Stein is a philosopher by nature, not able to avoid being so. The preference for sticking to essentials, to be content with what is necessary, the taste for spacious horizons, the commitment to truth, the category of totality, etc, bear witness to the early influence of philosophy on this woman. In commenting on her process of conversion to the Catholic Church, she confesses: *Perhaps, in explaining my journey, I omitted that what was intellectual did not fare very well.*

But during the long time of preparation it played a decisive part; it could not be otherwise. After all, the evolution of Edith Stein was marked by two separate strands of reading: for

phenomenology, Edmund Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, and for Catholicism, the *Life* of Saint Teresa.

The appeal of truth in Edith Stein

August 9, 2015 (Communications).- It could be said that rather than seeking the truth, it was truth that seduced her from an early age, as she succumbed to its attractiveness. Then, the search for truth (of oneself, of each human being), to which she devoted a good part of her intellectual efforts, in the end will become identified with the search for God, which makes it difficult to catalogue her thought. The above result is sprinkled throughout the entire production of Edith Stein, the Christian.

In a 1940 meditation, bearing resonances to Augustine, she wrote: *God is Truth and he seeks to let himself be encountered by those who search for him with all their heart.* This conviction will remain fresh until the last work, her spiritual testament: *The one who walks in the truth lives by preference in this inner centre, where there takes place the captivating activity of understanding; if a person seriously tries to look for the truth (and not for accumulating mere isolated knowledge), he is perhaps closer to God than what he himself imagines, closer to this God, who is the same truth, and, for this reason, closer also to one's own centre.* Not in vain Edith Stein described the human being in search of God. She insisted: *The question of that being, the search for God, belongs to the being of man.*

Moved also by the open ecumenical spirit which was characteristic of her, she had no qualms in associating the search for other values with possible experiences of God. The Jewish Carmelite in her last writing admitted without scruple: *He who searches sincerely for the good, that is to say, the person who is ready to do it in every moment, has already taken God's side and has placed his will into the divine will, even when he is not clearly aware that the good is identified with what God wants".* Perhaps the most eloquent text of intellectual nuance that presides over all religious experience can be found in the letter that Edith Stein wrote to a religious friend who was involved in taking care of the elderly professor Edmund Husserl, whose death was imminent: *I have absolutely no preoccupation for my dear teacher. I have always been very far from thinking that the mercy of God is confined by the borders of the visible church. God is truth, whoever searches for the truth searches for God, whether they are aware of it or not".*

God leads everyone by their own way

August 9, 2015 (Communications).- As each person is unique so are their religious experiences; in good logic, approaches to God, then, must enjoy the privilege of singularity. She put her philosopher friend, Roman Ingarden, on guard when she wrote to him: *Quite clearly I have **no** intention to present to you my way as **the** way. I am deeply convinced that there are as many roads leading to Rome as there are human heads and hearts.*

The explanation of the above mentioned abundance of ways places Edith Stein rather on the other side; she was convinced of the leading role played by God in every faith experience, and equally of the originality of the process; concerning this she wrote to a lady friend: *God leads each person along their own path by which they reach the goal more easily and rapidly than by another.*

It is evident that behind such assertions lies the influence of the great Carmelite mystics whom the Jewish convert particularly admired. In St Teresa's Way of Perfection she could read with satisfaction: *Here one does not try to have another consolation, there are different ways along which God leads, not by force, a confessor knows them all.* Equally, that diagnosis is to be found in the teaching of St John of the Cross, where the idea is found that: *Because God leads each soul along a different way, you would hardly find a soul who, in the midst of following God's way, would find another more appropriate.* In Edith's approach to pedagogy, care and cultivation of individuality occupy a prominent place.