Cuadernos de pensamiento 38
Publicación del Seminario «Ángel González Álvarez»
de la Fundación Universitaria Española
Número monográfico sobre Edith Stein:
Filosofía de la educación
Año 2025

Understanding light: the contemplative pedagogy of Edith Stein

Comprender la luz: la pedagogía contemplativa de Edith Stein

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Recibido: 18/02/2024 | Revisado: 09/07/2025
Aceptado: 14/07/2025 | Publicado: 30/12/2025
DOI: https://doi.org/10.51743/cpe.475

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ABSTRACT: We learn to philosophize and reflect both on what we think and how we think about what we think when we think with Edith Stein about education and religion. This article seeks to illuminate the philosophical gifts that Stein brings to religious pedagogy, including her stance on the importance of the acceptance of the divine will to advance in spiritual discernment. Under her tutelage, what is often inculcated as the mere passive reception of the light of revelatory faith becomes a philosophically illuminating act of transformative transcendence. The call to teach and to learn thus cultivates not just passive belief but the emergence of great-souled moral force laying the ground for a new Age of Enlightenment centered on a light-bearing relational being-true rather than on the mere outward illumination of fact. In the cultivation of interiority, Stein imparts a contemporary rule of life in teaching and learning as a vocation whereby the evolution of individuality becomes an integrative flow between contemplation and action. To bear and to understand light is to learn to see in a new way with the eyes of faith. The relation between being and becoming in the intersection between education, vocation, and spirituality helps us come to recognize in the mystery of our lives and for the sake of others what it is that we should do. Stein lays out a contemplative pedagogy of the heart that reflects the intellectual rigor of her philosophical education and training in phenomenology as well as the spiritual vigor of her religious life.

KEYWORDS: carmelites, contemplative pedagogy, discernment, Edith Stein, religión.

RESUMEN: Cuando reflexionamos con Edith Stein sobre la educación y la religión, aprendemos a filosofar y a reflexionar tanto sobre lo que pensamos como sobre cómo pensamos lo que pensamos. Este artículo pretende poner de relieve las aportaciones filosóficas de Stein a la pedagogía religiosa, incluida su postura sobre la importancia de aceptar la voluntad divina para avanzar en el discernimiento espiritual. Bajo su tutela, lo que a menudo se inculca como la mera recepción pasiva de la luz de la fe reveladora se convierte en un acto filosóficamente iluminador de trascendencia transformadora. La llamada a enseñar y aprender cultiva así no solo una creencia pasiva, sino también el surgimiento de una fuerza moral que sienta las bases para una nueva era de la Ilustración centrada en un ser relacional portador de luz y verdadero, más que en la mera iluminación exterior de los hechos. En el cultivo de la interioridad, Stein imparte una regla de vida contemporánea en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje como vocación, mediante la cual la evolución de la individualidad se convierte en un flujo integrador entre la contemplación y la acción. Llevar y comprender la luz es aprender a ver de una nueva manera con los ojos de la fe. La relación entre el ser y el devenir en la intersección entre la educación, la vocación y la espiritualidad nos ayuda a reconocer en el misterio de nuestras vidas y por el bien de los demás lo que debemos hacer. Stein expone una pedagogía contemplativa del corazón que refleja el rigor

intelectual de su educación filosófica y su formación en fenomenología, así como el vigor espiritual de su vida religiosa.

PALABRAS CLAVE: carmelitas, discernimiento, Edith Stein, pedagogía contemplativa, religion.

1. INTRODUCTION

When we think with Edith Stein, we learn to philosophize and reflect both on what we think and how we think about what we think when we think about education and religion. For Stein, the study of these two disciplines together requires expanding intentionality. It is characterized by transformative self-transcendence such that embodiment and existence together comprise the entirety of life experience, which entails the total gift of self. Martin Heidegger points to the temporality and therefore finitude of the human being. Stein, however, unfolds intentionality to the extent that the self-transcendence of intentionality opens to personal self-giving in the relational awareness of what is, in her theology, "being-in-the-world-in-triperson-al-relationship" (Petersen, 2021, 175). That is, an infinite horizon opens in the relational awareness of a personal depth experience. From a strictly philosophical perspective, this is a placeholder to acknowledge the uniqueness and interiority of all human persons whatever their religious persuasion or not. Under Stein's tutelage, what is often inculcated as the mere passive reception of the light of revelatory faith becomes a philosophically illuminating act of transformative transcendence as hearts open to the needs of others.

The call to teach and to learn thus cultivates not just passive belief but the emergence of great-souled moral force laying the ground for a new Age of Enlightenment centered on a light-bearing relational being-true rather than on the mere outward illumination of fact. Stein's idea of a professional ethos has to do with a spiritual attitude that abides within, and which emerges as a formative principle. In her advocation of "a God-dedicated life 'in the world,'" which cuts through any dichotomy between different vocational forms of life, Stein imparts a contemporary rule of life that involves the evolution of individuality such that there is an integrative flow between contemplation and

ISSN: 0214-0284 / ISSN-e: 2660-6070 *Cuadernos de pensamiento* 38 (2025): pp. 211-233

action (Stein, 1996, 102). It is the fullness of life in learning to think with both the mind and the heart. It is the ready acceptance of our embodied consciousness that is expressed in bearing and understanding light–and which unfolds in the human person insofar as new meaning is arrived at: this is the illuminating pedagogy of Stein. Pope John Paul II points to this highly developed interiority in explaining that "The spiritual experience of Edith Stein is an eloquent example of this extraordinary interior renewal. A young woman in search of the truth has become a saint and martyr through the silent workings of divine grace" (Pope John Paul II, 2000, 7).

The personal process of discernment which lies at the heart of Stein's contemplative pedagogy requires our intellectual humility to understand that well-exercised reason and good judgment invariably introduce us to limitations. We may thus open to the ultimate meaning of living before the presence of the divine. Stein points to the limits of the Enlightenment insofar as it underestimated the complexity and mysteriousness of education in a lecture she presented to an educational committee of the Federation of German Catholic Women on November 8, 1930 at Bendorf on the Rhine (Stein, 1996, 131-32).[2] As we acknowledge human weakness and limitation, humility grounds us in our situation so that we might open to grace as a progressive reality in our personal history and ongoing interior transformation (131).[3] She explains in the text of a lecture she delivered on September 1, 1930, in Salzburg, Austria that "Only by the power of grace can nature be liberated from its dross, restored to its purity, and made free to receive divine life. And this divine life itself is the inner driving power from which acts of love come forth" (56). Spiritual discernment necessitates trust as we learn to listen to members of communities of discourse and institutions of which we are a part. Personal friends and acquaintances and family members can all echo the living word. We learn *how* to see in the moment in and through our presence to each other. We learn to see in a new way. We learn to see with the eyes of faith. To bear and understand light is to learn *how* to see in a fresh way–with the mind and

[2] She explains how education is "less subject to arbitrary will than the Enlightenment conceived; and because the Enlightenment did not deal with the essential factors of formation, its system of education had to suffer shipwreck."

[3] Stein states "that is the *power of grace*."

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the heart open to the possibility of self-transcendence. Stein says our finitude reflects beatitude and is "a transformation into light" (56). The relation between being and becoming in her letters as well as her essays on education, vocation, and spirituality are helpful here.

We come to recognize in the mystery of our lives and for the sake of others what it is that we must do (Stein, 2002b). Stein lays out a contemplative pedagogy of the mind and the heart that reflects the intellectual rigor of her philosophical education and training in phenomenology as well as the spiritual vigor of her life and religious formation as a Carmelite nun. The hallmark of her rich personal life of prayer is her integrity which grounds her interpretation of the ultimate meaning of what is received (Stein, 2002a, 372-73).[4] The reference point of her interpretation is the divine in that she states, "this participation in divine life has a liberating power in itself; it lessens the weight of our earthly concerns and grants us a bit of eternity even in this finitude" (Stein, 1996, 56).

Her contemplative pedagogy is instructive so that others might live and understand the entirety of their existence in a new way. The invitation emerges in two ways: through the liturgy and the liturgical life of the Church in a life

[4] Stein describes how spiritual life is not an isolated realm. Rather, spiritual life is connected to matter that is "placed at the disposal of the human being's intellect and free will to be illumined, formed, and used. In this way the bodily sentient life of the human being becomes a personally formed life and a constituent part of the human person." The lifelong project of the human being is to illuminate the ground and thus give it personal form. However, there is an "ultimate meaning" to the soul in that "As spiritual soul it rises above itself, gaining insight into a world that lies beyond its own self—a world of things, persons, and events—communicating with this world and receiving its influences." If, however, soul is considered in its "strictest sense" then "it abides in its own self, since in the soul the personal I is in its very home." Everything accumulates there "from the world of sense and from the world of spirit. Here…everything that enters…is weighed and judged…." There are Eucharistic intimations here as Stein goes on to say that "here there takes place the appropriation of that which becomes the most personal property and a constituent part of the self—that which, figuratively speaking, 'becomes flesh and blood.'" See also (Stein, 2002b, pp. 159-60). She explains in the important section in "The Soul, the 'I,' and Freedom" the dynamic movement of the soul, that with an interior and an exterior accepts whatever comes to it at an appropriate level. The "inmost region" is also where the divine resides, and so in this regard, it is mysterious and should be protected as "a precious good entrusted to them." Further, "only at the deepest point can one possibly measure everything against one's own ultimate standards."

of prayer and through acknowledging the source "from which acts of love come forth" in the sacraments. Above all, it emerges in the sacrament of love by living the Eucharistic life (56). Stein instructs that "Only in daily, confidential relationship with the Lord in the tabernacle can one forget self, become free of all one's own wishes and pretentions, and have a heart open to all the needs and wants of others" (56). In Part One, I will discuss the illuminated discernment of spiritual awareness. I shall initially focus on the Carmelite, Ernest E. Larkin, whose contemporary work is essential in the education of interiority before moving to Stein. In Part Two, I shall trace the relation between being and becoming and the transformative self-transcendence involved in the illuminative evocation of relational presence. And finally, in Part Three, I will examine Stein's contemplative pedagogy of the heart and the mind insofar as we bear and understand light –infinitely so– through discovering and reflecting on the ultimate meaning of our lives. We therefore grow in relational awareness (Stein, 2014, 44).[5]

2. The Illuminated Discernment of Spiritual Awareness

Before taking up the texts of Stein, I want to discuss the recent reissue of *Silent Presence*, the brief and profound text by the late Carmelite Father Larkin, who takes up the issue of personal discernment (Larkin, 2021). Larkin defines discernment as "mindfulness, recollection, centeredness. It is being aware of what is going on spiritually" (64). He explains that "Discernment will not tell us the technical solution to our problem or give us secret knowledge no one else possesses. Discernment will only give us a sense that we are doing the right thing" (39). He points out that for people like John of the Cross and Ignatius it is a language of wisdom that has to do with intuition and feeling, not science and analysis.

[5] See also (Stein, 2014, 43-46). Stein has a strong sense of the whole of humanity early on in her life as evidenced by this letter of February 9, 1917, written in the throes of World War I. She refers, in this context with Roman Ingarden, to the relationship between an individual and the state.

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The divine will decidedly work within the confines of "the human condition of not knowing" and will not provide individual directions or, for example, private revelations (39). Just as the divine Son grew in faith and experience, so, too, does the individual person. "What the Spirit gives us," Larkin explains, "is reassurance, love, peace, and joy, so that we know we are on the right track. […] The method, therefore, cannot be overly objectified. It will not reveal things to us, only the mystery of persons" (39). The spirits can be thought of as "thoughts, desires, and affective moods" (63). Discernment can be thought of as both "process" and "problem" (63). There is "a progressive awareness of the movements of the spirits in our consciousness" (63). And the spirits must be interpreted so that the divine will can be ascertained. This is where discernment as "problem solving" comes in (64). Discernment is concerned with the trajectory or orientation of feelings rather than their sources. And finally, Larkin instructs, "We discern as long as we are searching; the process stops when we cease to search" (58).

In the end, he regards discernment as both "complicated" and "simple" (Larkin, 2021, 59). It is complicated insofar as the stages of our lives change and develop over time; it is simple because it is the struggle for awareness in view of what the divine is doing. We must be aware of our changing moods as well as the meanings represented in them and connect these to the larger patterns of truth in our lives, "and that resonate with our whole being, by our consciousness of what helps and what hinders our wholeness and growth" (59-60). We may not know something with great specificity, but we can know generally the sense in which the divine is working.

Larkin writes in the *Addendum* that personal experience can be evaluated in three different ways (Larkin, 2021, 64). I want to point out that these three ways are inclusive of the mind and the heart. The first way is cognitive in that we must utilize our mind, and I would add, our critical and self-critical thinking to analyze our experiences, objectify our experiences, and keep them in our mind so that we might understand them and thus carry out an interpretation. Both the second and third ways to evaluate our experience have to do with the heart: Larkin refers to one as mystical and the other as affective. I want to briefly rehearse all three of them as they serve as a good entryway to discuss the Steinian experience of discernment. I also want to note that there

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is a remarkable congruence between Larkin and the philosophical anthropology of Paul Ricoeur in his three levels of human being –thinking, acting, and feeling– with feeling inclusive of the first two levels and characterized by inner conflict.

First, cognitive discernment has to do with thinking. We try to do good and to avoid evil, and the moral norm is "right reason" and what makes good sense (Larkin, 2021, 65). Knowledge of spiritual life is called for here as he looks to Teresa of Avila who, in looking at the Scriptural tradition, discerns the ways of the divine and thus gains knowledge about both the divine and human. Larkin acknowledges how Teresa of Avila "puts a high premium on learning in spiritual directors, whose function is to assist in the process of discernment by confirming or questioning the conclusions of the client" (67). Cognitive discernment is for beginners on the spiritual journey, to learn to see how the divine is active today and who cannot yet trust their feelings to indicate the presence of the divine.

Second, mystical discernment has to do with "the experience of ourselves being lifted up *to [the Divine] in loving surrender"* (Larkin, 2021, 65). It is also characterized by mystical grace with no doubt about the relation between the self and the divine; it is the first principle of affective discernment, as Larkin explains, for it represents the fullness against which subsequent movements toward […] [the divine] are measured" (65, 69). Mystical discernment relies on the free action of the divine for what is the content of the mind and the heart.

Third, affective discernment is awareness of divided affectivity. It is marked by ambivalence in relation to the divine as we can be conflicted between sometimes saying yes and sometimes saying no in response to a divine call or summons; both positive and negative affections can be experienced and yet, the calling of the divine is nevertheless sensed intuitively. "Personal, intuitive contact" rather than knowledge about the self is the way of discerning the true self (Larkin, 2021, 70). While it is for moral reasoning to establish what is right and wrong or to discern the right or wrong of an issue in moral theology, for example, there is more of a sense of the subjective stance of being good rather than being right. In the final analysis, we have an intuitive feeling not just emotional–for whether a course of action can give us a sense

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of living in the presence of the divine. Self-knowledge, self-acceptance, integration, and validation constitute the process of discernment for Larkin.

For Stein, discernment is possible because the souls of created spirits can contact one another (Stein, 2002b, 160-61).[6] Stein's letters provide an important source of information for understanding how she herself approaches spiritual discernment. In a letter in 1927 to her good friend, Fritz Kaufman, she claims to have an intuitive grasp of the distress he is in following his disclosure to her of his innermost thoughts, as she assures him that she is subsequently able to assist him by praying on his behalf (Stein, 1993, 51). She encourages him to submit to the divine will if it is possible for him to do so and advises him to plead with the divine for assistance, even as the divine is unknown and doubt may reign. She further instructs that wisdom with its hidden mysteries is concealed in childlike simplicity and will lead to the goal that he is seeking.

In a 1930 letter to Sr. Adelgundis Jaegerschmid, OSB, Stein writes that it would be good were the sister able to give a class on choral singing and expresses how she was select in offering advise concerning such matters as her practice was only to weigh in when and if she were to be asked to (Stein, 1993, 59). Just a few weeks later, Stein again writes to Sr. Jaegerschmid, and with a great deal of humility, expresses the fact that she well knows her place even as she has had a profound conversation with Husserl about "last things" (60). Moreover, by having engaged in this vitally important conversation with him, both have a deeper responsibility in terms of their relationship with the divine—and she more so than him. In the end, though, she discerns that the most important thing is to engage in prayer as well as sacrifice and senses that her life is about a larger perspective as she talks about structuring and appropriating the days and hours accordingly.

[6] Stein discusses how "there are spiritual ways in which the soul can make contact with the other created spirits. She can address herself to another spirit with whatever has become an *interior word* in her." She goes on to explain that "even without our intention to share, the created spirits have a certain access to what occurs within us: not to that which is concealed in our inmost region, but probably about whatever has entered the interior regions of the soul in a perceptible form. From that point, they are also able to draw conclusions about that which may be concealed from their sight."

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Stein is sensitive to, as well as respectful and protective of, her family members as she deals with people who want to assist her and her family. For example, she urges discretion to those who are assisting to obtain employment for her sister, Rosa, while she urges confidentiality for the sake of her mother due to her lack of knowledge of Rosa's interest in seeking employment outside of the home (Stein, 1993, 109). In a lengthy, sincere, and heartfelt letter to Ruth Kantorowitz, whom Stein had first come to know as a child, she addresses the topic of discernment and her conversion (185). The fact that Kantorowitz, in becoming a Catholic, had given her father joy entailed grace for both, writes Stein, and that joy serves as a further indication that he entered the eternal dimension as a friend of the divine.

Stein encourages her to live with childlike trust in that she will be led to find her place in the church, just as she was initially led into the church. Stein also urges patience regarding the pursuit of a religious vocation and explains to her that she will need that patience as she settles into the Catholic world; if the waiting period bears fruit and she is, in the end, allowed to pursue a religious vocation, she urges her caution as she explains that very few people can enter the monastery and engage in scholarly research. The potential novice would be bound to the holy talents she possesses so that Stein makes it clear that her own case is the exception to the rule. She is generous to Kantorowitz in the final analysis, as she encourages her to be patient and continue to do the job she is doing if she receives no divine sign indicating otherwise.

This lack should not preclude her from gaining a better understanding of the different aspects of the church, however, including the shadows, which eventually she will see revealed over time. Stein does not want her to romanticize her relationship with the church and end up disillusioned due to unrealistic expectations about how things should be. She prepares her to live a well-integrated life that remains open to transformation. She is willing to help her to establish contacts and offers her assistance and the readiness to answer any questions she might have; she also exercises discretion in doing so (185-86).

She makes important points in her text, "First Treatise: Sentient Causality," about reflection and the thinking process within the context of discussing the role of motivation, which directly connects with the subject of discernment. Stein discusses how "sense" and "reason" have their origins in "acts and

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their motivations" (Stein, 2000, 46). She goes on to explain that "Here you can talk about accuracy and falseness, *discernment* [my emphasis] and obtuseness, in a sense that doesn't even come up in the sphere of 'actless' consciousness" (46). While she explains how one has "a formal similarity of experiential structure" in relation to perception, when we discuss "the higher levels of act-operation, we live through motivation in a specific sense, we live 'in it,' we accomplish it 'consciously,' so that motivation is readily accessible for the gaze of reflection" (46). This is different than at lower levels where there is present the "latent" capability to emerge or develop; she says that here "the motivations govern 'in the dark' and must first be brought to light by careful reflective analysis" (46). Her thinking here reveals the importance of and the specificity with which we do our own cognitive work in the process of discernment. However, when we have proper motivation, then discernment simply happens.

Stein is realistic about the human condition. She is attuned to the importance of concrete, everyday experience as a teacher. She also understands as the scholar she is that academics and learning in general is about more than just asserting a scientific argument. She therefore has a robust view of the individual person who integrates both the mind and the heart together, whether it be through teaching or scholarly work. Later, she will go on to write that "One who seeks truth lives principally at the heart of an actively searching intellect. If he is really concerned about *the* truth (not merely collecting single bits of knowledge) then he is perhaps nearer to the God who is Truth, and therefore to his own inmost region than he himself knows" (Stein, 2002b, 163).

There are intimations of her understanding in this regard in her correspondence with Roman Ingarden (Stein, 2014). What is at stake for Stein is no less than the truth about the human being and how and what one learns. For example, she critiques his lecture on epistemology in philosophy and what are the consequences that can emerge out of an absolute scientific discipline. Importantly, she questions whether objectivity is even possible and asserts that, despite the rigorousness of his claim, "I seriously question its actual absoluteness and freedom from all dogmatism" (222). While she acknowledges a certain independence of each respective positive science, she nevertheless challenges the ability of each of them to be justified as scientific. She explains that

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such a science begins with the absolute rule that knowledge is both a fact and an idea in its appearance to ourselves: "It appears to me that this act lies *before* all science and is an *act of faith* and has no higher justification than faith in its own strength and faith in the *veracitas Dei*. Because of that, *in my opinion* [my emphasis], epistemology is at the same time metaphysics *and* ontology of knowledge" (222). Further, she challenges his assertion "that the subject of pure epistemology should be free of empirical conditions" (222).

She argues that philosophers whom we should respect and take seriously "regard it as an inescapable fact that the epistemologist as well as each other person carries out all of his actions under conditions of human nature and can no more be free of them than the leopard can change his spots" (222). She challenges him in the sense with which and the justification for which he can abstract from them; he would have to show that, she asserts. That is, a person is embedded in the sociocultural world with conditions that influence subjectivity and the capability for objectivity in thinking and being. For Stein, the person who has an awareness of embodied consciousness can integrate the mind and the heart in and through their thinking, acting, and being in the world.

3. The Illuminative Evocation of Relational Presence

I want to show how necessary it is to integrate emotions and reason on an ongoing basis and use the dynamic between being and becoming; this is what it is to become more human through the individuation process. Stein, in a beautifully profound way goes straight to the heart of what is at stake in her time and place as well as in every time and place in human history, in a letter she writes from the Carmelite cloister at Cologne-Lindenthal. It is 1935 and the regulations of the Nazi regime are in full swing and are being implemented in all their horror and dehumanization. She writes to a friend of hers in Siegburg who is teaching and says she is glad that she has found peace and is resigned to the will of God (Stein, 1993, 205).

Stein hopes for inner peace for her and all her companions who are suffering much and reminds her friend that while she will encounter many difficul-

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ties, it will also be possible for her to effect good in like measure—there will be a way for her to do so; she also invites her to invoke her faith life. This letter is a paradigmatic example of how a person who is contemplative at heart can affect action of the highest order because it emerges out of the interior depths of a person who is well-integrated in terms of the mind and the heart. Education and religion both require the commitment of the entire self in the cultivation of interiority; nothing is held back even if it is the case that one is professionally prohibited from discussing spiritual matters (Stein, 1993).[7] The hallmark of such a life is the continuous flow between contemplation and action, and between person and community, as in the Carmelite charism of person and community. A person increasingly becomes herself even as she becomes more deeply immersed in the community.

As mentioned at the outset, an education of interiority for Stein includes the Eucharistic community with its interior depth relations. She explains that "Whoever prays together with the Church in spirit and in truth knows that her whole life must be formed by this life of prayer" (Stein, 1996, p. 57). The formative principle for such a person is "through the most intimate union with the divine heart in a Eucharistic and liturgical life" (57).[8] The Holy Eucharist

[7] Stein is instructive as she writes to Elizabeth Nicola on May 13, 1935. She acknowledges that Nicola is not teaching in a parochial school and therefore the teaching context will require even more of her insofar as she exercises wisdom and prudence. More will be said of this letter.

[8] See also Borden Sharkey who explains that "Stein had a great love of the Eucharist, placing it at the center of her devotional life. After her conversion, she attended daily mass, and throughout her writings and speeches, she recommends turning to the Eucharist for spiritual refreshment" (Borden Sharkey, 2003, 119-20). See also Ales Bello who explains that it would be in keeping with Stein's line of argument concerning the body that "the functions of the sacraments, which are capable of producing sanctity, could be justified. In particular, the Eucharist, upon which Stein often meditates, has a salvific value insofar as it is the nourishment that can save the living body" (Ales Bello, 2018, 39-40). Further, she quotes Stein in stating, "'She/he who receives the Body of the Lord will see his or her own living body sanctified'" and further explains, "The significance of the sacrament is not to produce a miraculous healing; rather, it serves to place the living body in its proper place, to establish the psycho-physical equilibrium of the human being as the spiritual that is visible through the body. This is the profound reason why the Word became flesh. The whole human being is involved; the spirit does not operate without being connected with the psyche and the body" (40; 40fn26). Finally, see Graef who states that "The way Sister Benedicta sketches here is

is at the center of life with each day to be received as the gift that it is and offered back to God. There is deliberation with God on the happenings of the day; it is in this way that God is heard deep within the heart and forms the soul so that the faculties are clear-sighted and attentive for what is the supernatural.

It is in this way that we can learn to see in a new way the difficulties of our own lives, as we learn to see "with God's eyes" and we "learn […] to resolve" the problems in the spirit (125). The Holy Spirit is at work in and through the person and the community, whether the person is in the Carmelite cloister or amid the world. There is a formative spiritual dynamic at work in cultivating an education of interiority that is inclusive of the mind and the heart. Vocation is forged in the relation between being and becoming. Each generation is called to accomplish something new as well as individual. There is a threefold function for human personality: that of understanding, enjoyment, and creativity.

Stein warns against one-sidedness and dehumanization. There should be freedom of development and the serving of other humans "in a reverential loving manner in order to foster their natural formation for the glory of God and thereby further their natural happiness" (75). A corrupt and distorted relationship with the divine is the root of any evil we may have and being a child of the divine can help us attain the nature and original vocation of our lives. Stein speaks of the desire for the development of our own personality insofar as we are unconstrained, as well as helping someone else to achieve the same goal in relational presence, while also being unimpeded.

Moral and religious education are closely connected with the yearning for divine personal union, the eagerness and desire for fulfillment so that there is guidance in and through love of God (Stein, 1996, 78). Stein warns against a loss of balance in our lives and discusses how we can quite easily get too involved in another person's life for whom we are responsible; she cautions

her own way; it is the way of full co-operation with eucharistic grace […]. From the moment of her conversion she had co-operated with grace; and now, in Carmel, her truly eucharistic life was bearing its full fruit. Therefore it is not surprising that she should be very severe when she found any tendency to make light of the Sacramental Presence" (Graef, 1954, 133-34). Graef goes on to quote Stein in a letter she wrote to a former pupil from the Echt Carmel to substantiate her claim.

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against getting too wrapped up in that other life such that a person loses the grounding that provides for the very opportunity to support and serve another. It is professional activity that keeps us from being too intimate of an involvement in the life of another which could, in turn, result in the sacrifice of our own lives.

Exclusive preoccupation with professional occupation, too, could result in infidelity toward vocation; all in all, she argues for balance and points to the dire economic distress of her time where people are forced to take whatever employment is offered and make the best of what they are faced with. Personal maturity and goodwill despite any obstacles will keep us prepared for what is to come with the resultant understanding that life circumstances are given to us by the divine. Further, work is at the service of the divine, and "the gifts which God gives must be developed" to the glory of God (83). She says this is the case for every vocation, whether it is consecrated or not; however, "the vocation which is designated as being consecrated to God does stand out as being especially meaningful" (85).

The original human vocation is the presentation of the *imago Dei* in ourselves. It is possible to realize self-transcendence through the overcoming of natural limitations, "which is the highest effect of grace;" again, this is realized through acquiescence to divine order (85). We come to be who we are meant to be in the light of faith. While in the physical dimension, however, faith and reason, and faith and existence work in tandem so that there are ongoing anthropological and epistemological questions as to who and what the human being is.

She continually brings the depth dimension of the human being into her conversation about education and formation. The mystery of human being is at the heart of the opening of Stein's essay on Christian spirituality as she remarks that "We cannot evade the question as to what we are and what we should be. And it is not only the reflective intellect which faces us with this question; life itself has made our existence problematic" (Stein, 1996, 87). She goes on to recount how people have been torn out of their familiar lives. She responds to the situation by taking up consideration of what is "the innermost recesses of our being; we see that it is not a completed being but rather a being in the state of becoming, and we are trying to achieve clarity relative to that process.

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Our being, our becoming, does not remain enclosed within its own confines; but rather in extending itself, fulfills itself" (88). She then explains that there is a directionality and ordering about all our being and becoming, as well as our acting, with the proper reference point being transformative transcendence, in contradistinction to the temporal being of finitude in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. Further, our being and becoming and acting all contain ultimate meaning. That meaning is understood with clarity only if ultimate meaning is our reference point (88). She states that there is a compulsion for the soul to become what it should be and "the drive to allow the latent humanity, set in her precisely in its individual stamp, to ripen to the greatest possible perfect development" (94). Spiritual powers must be activated in order that there be perfect development of personality. Being is in the state and process of becoming with the soul having to "bring to fruition those predispositions with which it was endowed when coming into the world; however, it can develop them only through activation" (94).

Sensuousness is the foundation of the world of the spirit, and it is both spiritual and physical, as Stein explains: "the intellect, knowing its activity to be rational, reveals a world; the will intervenes creatively and formatively in this world; the emotion receives this world inwardly and puts it to the test" (Stein, 1996, 95). The extent of the powers, as well as their relationship vary from person to person. She uses the example of the maternal vocation in which life must be assimilated into ourselves; all the while it grows and evolves and must be contained and nourished. She refers to this process as mysterious and as representing "such an intimate unity of the physical and spiritual" (95). Likewise, in contemporary terms, close relationships of personal intimacy that integrate the spiritual, sexual, and intellectual dimensions of human life into an integral union are life-giving not only for those involved, but for the world beyond as well.

She turns to the interrelationship of the spiritual faculties which she explains are in a state of interdependence in that each one requires the existence of the other. Emotional response begins with the intellectual cognition of reality (Stein, 1996, 96). Emotion is important in spiritual being and has an indispensable cognitive function in that "it is the central pivot by which reception of the existent is transmuted into personal opinion and action" (96). It requires the intellect and will to cooperate and carry out its function, and it cannot "at-

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tain cognitive performance without preparation of the intellect" (96-97). Stein explains that intellect serves as a light to illuminate the path of emotion, and absent the light, emotion would change back-and-forth. If emotion can gain ascendancy over intellect, it can conceal the light, and how we picture the world is distorted with the result that the will is forced into inaccurate practice.

Therefore, "emotional stirrings need the control of reason and the direction of the will" (97). While the will does not have any absolute power when it comes to creating or stifling emotional reactions, it does cling to the freedom to allow or to limit the progression of increasing agitations. Stein explains that "[w]here discipline of mind and will are lacking, emotional life becomes a compulsion without secure direction. And because it always needs some stimulation for its activity, it becomes addicted to sensuality, lacking the guidance of the higher spiritual faculties" (97). Because of the intimate nature of the union between the body and the soul, the result is a "decline of spiritual life to that of the sensuous-animalistic one" (97). This is important to understand in terms of the process of discernment.

The formative powers and particular spiritual disposition are the original faculties unique to every human soul. Stein refers to "a living formative root which possesses within itself the driving power (*inner form*) toward development in a particular direction;" it can be likened to a seed that grows and ripens into perfect creation or a plant (Stein, 1996, 98). However, she explains that not everything about the organic growth of a plant emerges from within; the plant is prone to exterior influences as well. The faculties of the soul must be activated and are as follows: the senses, the intellect, the will, and the emotions. Contact with people and surroundings are important for this activation, which is why the relationships of ordinary, everyday life are integral to this process.

However, for responses having to do with the higher faculties, she counsels instruction as well as guidance; both spontaneity and planned work are important. Cognitive work and any achievements by the will are free actions as are "original, involuntary, self-governing emotional stimulations" (98). Therefore, when we are awakened and not merely given over to formative influences coming from the exterior, and perhaps possibly even avoiding them, the discussion of spiritual formation must include the factor of "individual free activity" (99). Educational factors that are external are bound to the natural predisposition, as

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we cannot be endowed with a quality that is not part of our human nature. Nature and freedom of will place limits on our spiritual formation. Such are the constraints set on personal formative work. The nature of education must do then with "the process of shaping the natural spiritual predisposition" (99).

There is an exception when considering natural limits in that no limits exist for God. God as the giver of nature can transform it, which has the effect of turning it from the natural course it takes in development. Stein explains that God can also "bring the will's *interior* inclination toward a decision to execute that which is presented to it" (Stein, 1996, 99). She points out that there are goals that are common by virtue of our humanity and there are individual goals. God has given humanity both natural and supernatural destinies. A life of faith in this world together with personal union is rewarded with the eternal contemplation of God; this is the essence of Carmelite spirituality.

Stein advocates for both religious education and awareness as well as a response to humanity in its entirety. God is the primary Educator (107). While students must be formed in the classroom, they also should be allowed spontaneity as well. Further, faith can be strengthened in and through communion with those who are living and with those who have entered the glory of God and who therefore possess the power to assist the living, having stood the test of time. Religious instruction has the possibility to affect the resistance we may have to receiving divine instruction. If we are sincere, no effort is fruitless even if it is the case that from the individual perspective, we see only failure.

Selfless service in our relationships is the path to help to develop what is highest and deepest in our humanity. It is a holy task when we can help others develop what is their "God-given nature" (Stein, 1996, 110). In this regard, we can look at ourselves and others in relationships as instruments. It is interesting to note that now, in a time of the pervasive and sometimes insidious nature of social media and ready access to information, Stein is speaking of informational overload in her time. She frowns upon reducing teaching material to concentration on "the acquisition and transmission of factual knowledge" (113). She gives witness to the loss of the importance of the personal element in teaching. Moreover, teachers now had to be specialists and, in the process, lose the attentiveness directed at humanity in its broadest sense on the one hand, and the personal contact of a relational understanding of humanity on the other hand.

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She does acknowledge, however, a few changes that are made such as the admittance of women to university such that they can enter teaching as a career path. She cautions a certain detachment in the case that teaching is considered a vocation in the God-given sense, however, especially when it comes to connecting with young people through the teaching and learning process.

Freedom is important and entails both intellectual and spiritual autonomy. We also must keep in sight the main educational goal, which she explains as "humanity developed most perfectly in the natural and supernatural sense. This can be found again only when the teaching vocation is understood as entrusted by God, and the student's personality is taken up in light of the educational mission" (114). When it comes to legal protection for women and children, Stein cautions against pursuing only the theoretical perspective and abstraction. It is important to identify with empirical reality and the human condition in all its concreteness. Perspectives of a more general and formal kind should certainly not be disregarded, however, so that the collaboration of all people of goodwill is called for.

By point of comparison, for Stein, the educational mission is a divine one of developing interiority to relate to students in such a way that they become increasingly aware through freely choosing to open to the divine life of faith within. It is a divine mission because in serving God and humanity, human beings complete and thus realize their destiny in God in terms of vocation. The sacraments, including the sacramental grace of the Eucharist with its Eucharistic theology, would bridge any perceived lack coming from the human side. Whereas for Karl Barth, the Swiss Reformed Protestant theologian, for example, the revelatory word of God is paramount.

He makes a strict delineation between the will of God and human response in his dialectical theology. Human responsibility encapsulated in continual responsivity to the word of God and giving witness is important (Barth, 1961, 644). Barth's view is that "Man is in no sense responsible to his vocation; he is solely responsible to God alone" (607). While Barth was much more critical of the role of the church in comparison, for Stein, the church as the corporate body of Christ in time would complete any purported lack on the human side in accepting the divine will and advancing in discernment; the Eucharistic community is of import here.

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4. The Infinite Bearing and Understanding of Light through Discovering and Reflecting on the Ultimate Meaning of Our Lives

For Stein, understanding the real meaning of our lives has to do with individual nature, which is perfected both by loving devotion and by surrendering to the God of love; the surrender involves at once loving abandonment as well as compliant obedience. It is the spiritual way of walking in service to the divine. Stein appropriates the rich spiritual tradition as she references both Augustine and Thomas and their followers insofar as they "find a likeness of the Trinity in the human spirit" (Stein, 1996, 118). While she acknowledges how the Trinity may be perceived in different ways, she states that most accept that the three persons of the tripersonal God "are rendered back in being, knowledge, and love.

Divine wisdom was incarnated as Person in the Son; love came as Person in the Spirit" (118). The "inexhaustible source of power" is nothing other than divine grace (120). We can repeatedly turn to this source of power—in the grace of the divine. The Lord remains close in the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice and sacrament as well as in the tabernacle where Christ is present. It is in this way that quietude and peace can be found in the most difficult of circumstances. The daily offerings are no longer burdens but joyfully offered insofar as we can co-suffer as a participant in the Mystical Body of Christ. The possibility of renewal exists for those who offer up their pain, suffering, and personal weakness for the life of the world.

We can learn to see the divine will in every circumstance, so that that which is not personally chosen "freely and joyfully" can nevertheless be accomplished with the goal of harmonizing our own will with the divine will; moreover, "whoever makes her will captive to God in this way can be certain of a special guidance in grace" (Stein, 1996, 124). Stein discusses consecrated communal life as one path, while acknowledging that others go their own way. She addresses the "unique strengthening" that is required for persons who are "thrown into an entirely different path" such as those who are given a personal mission that is only revealed in steps (125). They must be attentive to watch

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for signs along the way to help guide them on their path. Such persons must do all they can to use their own power to stay in the divine presence, which is to say persons have grace available at their disposal.

When Eucharist is the focal point of life and the heart of existence is the Eucharistic Savior, then every day is received as a gift and given back to Him. All the day's events are deliberated so that the divine is then "given the best opportunity to be heard in the heart, to form the soul, and to make its faculties clear-sighted and alert for the supernatural" (125). Then it happens that we can see in a new way, that is, see the difficulties of life through divine eyes, and learn to resolve them in God's spirit.

We must have a disposition that is peaceful and be clear-headed about exterior facts as well as events. For such persons who have strong faith and know that nothing in life occurs "without the knowledge and will of God […] will stay quiet and face the facts clearly; he will discover the right guidelines for his practical behavior in the overall situation" (Stein, 1996, 125). The needs of individual existence, whether they be small or large, lose their sense of importance. Stein explains, "Those who know how to create ever new life out of the eternal source experience freedom and joyfulness" as the story of redemption plays out in the cosmic drama of the life of the Church and the human soul. This scene plays out repeatedly in the reality that is "the struggle of light over all darkness" (126). These persons then become the spiritual guides of others who are "striving to the light" (126).

This is an extraordinary path, according to Stein, with an overarching method of coming to an awareness of divine will; persons are formed in relationships through yet other persons. The life of grace spreads through the mediation of human relationships. It is always necessary to obtain both inner and outer guidance on the journey. To live in the light of eternity is to fulfill a vocational faith, whatever our station in life. To live in the light of eternity (theological) as both a referent (philosophical) and a reality (theological) is to infinitely bear and understand light.[9]

[9] This essay is written in loving memory of my beautiful and beloved mother, Diane S. Kueter, June 24, 1939 - July 14, 2023, with gratitude for her love and devotion and faith.

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5. CONCLUSION

The ultimate meaning of Stein's understanding of divine light is that there are no demands put on us without the power to meet them (Stein, 2002a, 445). She says that we learn this from faith, and it is confirmed in our everyday experiences. In Part One, the illuminated discernment of spiritual awareness entails a soul language conversant in the wisdom that emerges out of intuition and feeling, and that connects it with our own cognitive work of reflective analysis of our motivations.

In Part Two, an education of interiority involves the illuminative evocation of relational presence that emerges out of freedom of development and serving others in a way that elicits their formation in a shared life of understanding, enjoyment, and creativity, and which is reflective of personal maturity and goodwill. And finally, in Part Three, the infinite bearing and understanding of light through discovering and reflecting on the ultimate meaning of our lives is the contemplative pedagogy of Edith Stein. New life is imparted to the soul so that we can do things that would otherwise be impossible to accomplish. With this influx of meaning and power, comes a definite direction to the activity of the soul.

Therefore, she explains that "every *meaningful* demand which is made upon the soul with obligatory force is a *word of God.* For there is no *meaning* that does not have its eternal home and abode in the *Logos*" (445). If we are willing to be receptive, then our souls are empowered to meet demand. When grace is increased, so too is our spiritual being such that we open to greater insight into the meaning of the word that is behind every event, and which is expressed as inspiration.

When we live a life of grace there is the capability of transformation. It is in our ordinary everyday lives that we rise up and love. The ultimate meaning of love is the surrender of being and union in love with the beloved. A person who carries out spiritual discernment comes to know the divine. When we surrender the innermost part of who we are, our souls are empowered to love (445).

Stein explains that "Love in this highest kind of fulfillment […] includes knowledge. It is simultaneously a receiving and a free act" (453-54). It is the flow of contemplation and action, the flow of life and love, and at its deepest

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it is the reality of relational presence. It is, for those who love, what it is to think with both the mind and the heart.

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