

## Saint Edith Stein (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross): How Her Life Influenced Her Philosophy of Male and Female

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Edith Stein was born on October 12, 1891 of Jewish parents in Breslau, Germany which is now Wroclaw, Poland. Edith was the youngest of eleven children; the death of four siblings antedated her own birth. She was not yet two years old when her Father, Siegfried Stein, died leaving Edith's mother, Augusta, to not only raise the family of seven children but also to take over the family logging business. Edith often expresses great admiration for her mother's total openness to God and her ability to carry on the family enterprise all the while never neglecting her maternal vocation.

Those who were close to Sister Teresa Benedicta in her final days in the Auschwitz concentration camp report that she was a woman of remarkable interior strength, giving courage to her fellow holocaust victims and helping to feed and bathe the small children when even their mothers had given up hope and were neglecting them in the concentration camp. One Holocaust survivor had this to say: "Maybe the best way I can explain it is that she carried so much pain that it hurt to see her smile... In my opinion, she was thinking about the suffering that lay ahead. Not her own suffering—she was far too resigned for that—but the suffering that was in store for the others. Every time I think of her sitting in the barracks, the same picture comes to mind: a Pietá without the Christ."

Saint John Paul II beatified Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross on May 1, 1987 and canonized her on Oct. 11, 1998.

### THE UNIQUE NATURE OF MALE AND FEMALE

Based on her personal reflection and her reading of Genesis, Edith Stein concludes that humanity, homo sapiens, is further divided into the double species of man and woman or, as she alternately calls them, the male and female species, or the masculine and feminine species. What she meant is that to be a member of the human race for a human person means being so as a male or as a female. Between the two sexes, Stein explains, "There is a difference not only in body structure and in particular physiological functions but also in the entire psychosomatic life." The male-female bodily dissimilarities have implications for the distinctive way the male body relates to the soul of a man as opposed to the way the female body relates to the soul of a woman. For our purposes here, suffice it

to say that women and men have complementary but distinct psychosomatic identities, according to Stein. That is to say, the femininity or masculinity of a person also leaves its mark on the person's soul. The intellectual faculties, or spiritual organs as Edith calls them, will also develop differently in a woman than in a man.

The unique nature of a woman or the feminine species is expressed in a unity and wholeness of the total psychosomatic personality and in a harmonious development of her spiritual powers (mind, will, emotions, and interior senses). The unique

nature of a man or the masculine species strives to enhance individual abilities or powers so that these capacities can attain their highest achievement. In other words, women are generalists; men are specialists.

Since the nature of every individual person contains both masculine and feminine elements, and since only one set of these elements is predominant in each person, both men and women are needed, in their maturity, to represent perfectly the human species as a whole. And woman and man need each other to keep each other honest so to speak, to fulfill each other, and to save the other

from a lop-sidedness or one-sidedness that would keep them from becoming whole persons.

### THE VOCATION OF WOMAN AND MAN

What is a vocation? Vocare is the Latin root of the word vocation and it means to call. A vocation is a calling. But what does it mean to have a vocation or to be called? A vocation is a call sent to one person from someone else for a life mission that is very distinct. Example: the call to a man or woman to take up a chair in a university setting is given after recognition that the ability of the one being called—all the gifts which the person has inherited and developed through training and education—is rooted in the person's nature and are the very fruits of that nature. The person or persons making the call declare the position, the endowed chair, will help the person being called to happily find his or her place in life. Woman is called primarily to be mother and secondarily to be ruler-as-companion. This natural vocation of woman conforms perfectly to a woman's two-fold predispositions to the personal and wholeness and to their intricate network of gifts and virtues, capsulized in the symbols of spore and pillar and in the concept of genius.

Man is called to be ruler primarily and father-as-protector-and-helper secondarily. Man's natural vocation conforms perfectly to his primary predisposition to the objective and to intellectual specialization and his secondary predisposition



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