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Edith Stein and her female protagonism

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Man is a child of his time and for this reason strongly influenced by the historical, social and cultural context in which he lives. Therefore, it is very important to underline that when we refer to Edith Stein and feminism, it is not one more chapter in her theoretical elaboration that can be approached in a purely abstract way.

To understand it, it is necessary to situate Stein in his context, having as a background his relationship with his mother, sisters, students, friends, teachers and obviously his relationship with the thinkers of his time. Edith Stein's writings cover feminine themes

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through historical data, interpretations and varied sources, as well as make it possible to know her speculative path, her female identity, her relationship with family history and the history of her people and her dilemma in the search for "truth" and spiritual evolution.

The human person has been the central nucleus of Stein's life and work since his first writings (García, 2014, p.39-40). It is not by chance that the anthropological problem is the theme that gives profound unity to all his studies. For this reason, too, his life goes hand in hand with his investigations, and whoever meets the philosopher meets the woman, and vice versa. To understand your life is to penetrate your thinking. Thus, it follows that his biography is the best hermeneutic key to enter into his doctrine. Accessing Edith Stein is equivalent to facing intellectual honesty and ethical coherence (Rojo, 2015, p.13).

With prophetic instinct, Stein denounced the terrible face of this totalitarian system, when many looked upon it as the savior of all evil. During this same course, an unjust law was enacted prohibiting her from teaching because of her condition as a Jewess. Society was becoming contaminated and the environment was becoming unbreathable (García, 2014, p.42-43).

With her perception of defending the dignity of the human being, our author is a pioneer in the claim of women's rights. One of his books bears precisely this title: "*The Woman*". During the Weimar Republic, she joined the German Democratic Party, in order to be able

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to better defend women's demands. He worked intensely, especially for the right to vote, which was obtained in 1919; however, it did not achieve the same success in terms of the possibility for women to access university chairs (García, 2014, p.41-42).

Feminism as a contemporary phenomenon was born as a big no to this type of considerations, to justify the denial and exclusion of women in their great contribution to the history of humanity (Magda, 1997, p.7). The irruption of feminine thought presents itself as a response to contemporary challenges. Female thought has been presented as one of the possible paths to today's philosophical and cultural pluralism. (Peretti, 2013, p.28).

According to Peretti:

Scientific research has contributed a lot to show the contribution of women in the history of Western thought and, at the same time, in the reconstruction of their own history. From antiquity to the present day, much of what has been structured about women's lives and thinking has been carried out by men whose image of women is often a reflection of them. (Peretti, 2013, p.28).

Despite all the progress of scientific research in its most diverse areas, the thesis of essential inequality between the sexes, originating in classical Greece, has received different formulations throughout history (Caryvalho, 2004, p.230). This proves that it is not easy to change a

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mentality that has been perpetuated over the centuries. However, we cannot deny significant steps that have been and continue to be taken, especially in contemporary times.

The twentieth century has been called, not without reason, "the century of women" because, throughout this same century, the Western world has undergone a profound change in its economic, political and cultural situation. However, many achievements of the first half of the century suffered a setback in the second half, after the World War. During the two wars, women took the reins from economic activity, keeping production active in the absence of men.

The presence and insertion, increasingly numerous, of female figures, for example, in the field of philosophy, has made possible an advance in the feminine question thanks to the elaboration of an anthropology attentive to the person in his duplicity of masculine and feminine. In this context is the figure of Edith Stein, a Jew by birth and Catholic by choice. She presents herself as a woman who left an intellectual heritage, not only in the history of contemporary philosophy, but also in the history of feminist thought, cultivated by women, as it happens in our time. The presence and participation of our author in feminist movements contribute to the social recognition of the feminine sphere. She writes in her Autobiography:

After a year, Edith returned to Breslau and re-entered the college. At that time, he

sympathized with the movements that fought for the legitimate rights of women: adequate professional training, political and social equality, work carried out in humane conditions, etc. Strongly interested in women's issues, she became a member of the "Prussian Association for Women's Suffrage" (the goal of voting was only achieved in 1918). "Being a university student, I was a radical feminist" (...). (Stein, 2006, 8-9).

In Edith Stein, the awareness of being a woman is something that always accompanies her. Since her adolescence, she has become clearly aware of the discrimination suffered by women, which will be one of her challenges throughout her life. As a young student, she became involved with groups that demanded equality, and even became politically involved in the struggle for women's right to vote. He will suffer discrimination in his own flesh when he tries to access a university chair (Stein, 2002, 64).

On October 12, 1891, Edith Stein saw the light in the then Prussian city of Breslau (Wroclaw, present-day Poland). Their family environment fuses their roots, traditions, and religion into Judaism. And this is his referential language and the seal that, in one way or another, will mark his whole existence and his very death.

It is not possible to understand the world and the extraordinary personality of Edith Stein, "the most special and intelligent woman of the twentieth century" (B. Jiménez Duque) without taking into account her Semitism, her belonging to the Jewish people. Everything in it has

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been marked from birth to death by belonging to this magnificent people of Yahweh's promises (Muñoz, 2007, p.25).

Of Edith's childhood and family life we have first-hand data in her "Autobiography", where the daily life of her Jewish home is narrated, in rich detail. We can highlight two characteristics that begin to shape her character from a very young age. As he grows, his character and appearance are refined, until he acquires a very attractive personality.

In the early years of my life I was like a scroung, lively, always on the move, with a sparkling genius, intelligent, daring and meddlesome (...) Besides, indomitable, willful and choleric when something contradicted me. (...) but inside me there was, moreover, a hidden world. Everything he saw and heard during the day he elaborated from the inside (Stein, 2002, 204-205).

His autobiographical project is more than a simple autobiography in the ordinary sense of the term. In reality, it is indicative of a need to raise a voice of protest against the crime of the persecution of the Jews and the crime of a racist education to which German youth have been subjected. Therefore, the social value of Stein's autobiography represents the courageous stance of a thinker and educator living in a time of atrocities. And all this occurred in 1933 (Rojo, 2015,42).

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His parents, Augusta Courant and Siegfried Stein, were of German nationality and of Jewish religion, originally from Lublinitz of Upper Silesia. His mother was widowed when Edith was not yet three years old. His father, a small timber merchant, dies unexpectedly from heat stroke during a business trip. (Stein, 2006, p.31).

Strength of spirit and solidarity are the maternal traits that mainly mark the character of Edith Stein. During her life, she remembers and attributes a new meaning to the "maxims" taught by her mother, even in moments of difficulties and great decisions: "What someone wants, he gets" and: "If someone proposes something, God will help him". Edith Stein's decisive ethical stance and openness towards others, and her solidarity, even in diversity, is the result of the profound experience of the relationship between mother and daughter. Edith Stein portrays, in her autobiography, the photograph of her mother:

Although my mother was by nature generous and helpful to everyone, she did not tolerate lack of character, as well as insincerity, punctuality, and arrogance. He could not stand people who spoke only of themselves with an air of grandeur; he showed his total disapproval on these occasions. (Stein, 2018, p.28)

Edith Stein spent the years of her childhood and her early youth in a family in which she experienced her own Jewish and German

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origins at the same time and with equal force, and in a journey of family pedagogy she grew up healthy, sensitive and intelligent.

On April 27, 1911, he began his university life, after having overcome the crisis of adolescence. At the University of Breslau, he studied German history, philosophy, psychology, grammar, as well as languages, for which he had a special talent. If a university career was an exception for a woman, then what about philosophy, a domain reserved for men? Stein participated in the feminist and intellectual movements of her time. It motivates young women in formation to become aware that they are also capable of "thinking", and of "doing philosophy".

Let us think that the entry of women into the University was only possible from 1901 onwards in Germany. And yet, when Edith entered the University of Breslau in 1911, called the University of Silesia de Federico-Guillermo, the number of women was much lower than that of men. This will not be an obstacle for Edith to follow her path, even if, as will happen to her in psychology classes, she is the only woman present (Stein, 2002, p.47). The University will be for Edith something like her new place, her "alma mater", where she will be able to fulfill many of her projects and desires that she nurtures within herself (Stein, 2002, p.316).

Certainly, Edith's university life is not reduced to her studies, nor to her intellectual concerns. These correspond to existential

questions in which one is actively involved: defense of women's rights, pedagogical reform, volunteering, etc. the "Prussian association in favor of women's suffrage" (Stein, 2002, 23).

In the years of study in Wroclaw he already reproached his colleagues for their lack of sensitivity to social problems. For our young university student, it is not enough to have a professional career, but to commit to improving social and political life. She herself describes in her autobiography her feeling of frustration in relation to the lack of empathy of her colleagues:

I was indignant at the indifference that most of my colleagues displayed to questions of general interest: a part of them, during the first semesters, allowed themselves to be guided only by their own pleasure; others, by the anxious desire to acquire the knowledge necessary for the exam and thus ensure a better situation for themselves in the future. Because of this strong sense of social responsibility, I also resolutely committed myself to women's right to vote. This was not something obvious at the time, even within the civic women's movement. The Prussian association for women's right to vote, which I joined with my friends with a view to full and complete political equality for women, was made up mostly of socialists (Stein 2002, p.303).

At no time is he distant from the socio-political reality of his country. It suffers with its persecuted people, sympathizes with all its members, and deeply regrets the chaos that Hitler is causing Germany.

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Edith Stein feels that she cannot take refuge in philosophy, forgetting the cry of the suffering of the wounded soldiers who fought on the battlefields. (Muñoz 2007, p.95).

In a way, the war contributed to the constitution of an experience of responsibility, especially with the valorization of women's work in the service of the homeland and to the opening of new professional possibilities. As an educator, she fights for women's education and participates in the struggles for educational reforms.

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