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## Heroic, Faithful, and Holy

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## Heroic, Faithful, and Holy

### Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"An ideology is a subtle, yet expansive way of describing someone's beliefs and views of the world. *Edith Stein* clearly places a high precedence on believing in oneself, all people, and having faith in times of adversity. The director of the film *Edith Stein* portrays the death of Edith Stein as one of a martyr of Auschwitz for her people and for her faith. The ideology of the director is tremendously evident through the heroic, faithful, and holy portrayal of Edith Stein in reference to her religion and all people."



*Ryan Dalton*

### **\*\*\* Heroic, Faithful, and Holy**

#### *Introduction*

An ideology is a subtle, yet expansive way of describing someone's beliefs and views of the world. *Edith Stein* clearly places a high precedence on believing in oneself, all people, and having faith in times of adversity. The director of the film *Edith Stein* portrays the death of Edith Stein as one of a martyr of Auschwitz for her people and for her faith. The ideology of the director is tremendously evident through the heroic, faithful, and holy portrayal of Edith Stein in reference to her religion and all people.

#### *Summary*

The story of Edith Stein, a respected philosopher and Carmelite nun, was filmed in Germany as a Docu-Drama (EWTN *Edith Stein* Film). Born in 1891 in Breslau, Poland, Edith was the youngest of her Jewish family. Baptized as a Catholic in 1922, Edith took on the name of Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Following the Nazi up rise in Holland in 1942, Edith was arrested with her sister, Rosa. They were sent to Auschwitz where they died in the gas chambers.

## *Faith*

In the film, the director portrays the faith of Edith Stein with the utmost importance and relevance. The director made it a point to convey to the audience that Edith Stein did not leave her original faith (as a Jew) behind her once she converted to Catholicism. This is first seen in an early scene when the German officer shows up at the convent in Echt to arrest Rosa and Edith. Edith's last documented and heard words in Echt were spoken to Rosa, "Come, we are going for our people" (*Vatican.va*). This shows that Edith was still representing those of the Jewish Religion as well as her current Christian religion. In this instance Edith showed that her faith in God and people was of remarkable strength and validity as a result of its existence in a time of adversity. The director clearly makes a point to include Edith's last spoken words into the film. This is a direct reflection of how the director wants Edith Stein to be viewed by the audience in the film *Edith Stein*.

Another instance when faith is established in the film is when it is seen that a rock is placed on the headstone in a cemetery. In another scene a stone is being shown in the process of being picked up. This is an established Jewish custom.

According to Rabbi Simkha Weintraub, Rabbinic director of the New York Jewish Healing Center,

The Hebrew word for 'pebble' is *tz'ror* – and it happens that this Hebrew word also means 'bond.' When we pray the memorial **El Maleh Rahamim** prayer (and at other times) we ask that the deceased be 'bound up in the bond of life' – *tz'ror haHayyim*. By

placing the stone, we show that we have been there, and that the individual's memory continues to live on in and through us (np).

The subtle incorporation of this Jewish custom by the director should not go unnoticed. Every scene is a part of the film for a reason. It is clear that the director wanted to keep Edith's Jewish heritage in the forefront because the director believed it was an integral part of who Edith was as a person. Edith herself titled her unfinished autobiography *Life in a Jewish Family*. The director obviously portrayed that Edith, in the film, was not afraid or ashamed of her Jewish background: for instance, when Edith is forced to wear the Star of David or when she states to Rosa that they are going for their people (when the German officers come to the convent for the arrest of Edith and Rosa).

It was made a point throughout the film that Edith was not afraid to be the exception or to stand out. This speaks to the faith that Edith had. There were multiple scenes in which the director chose to highlight this quality of Edith. The director was showing that Edith had faith in doing what she deemed was the right thing to do. This goes back to an early scene in the film when Edith's mother told her that it is more important to be "good than smart" (*Edith Stein, Film*). In Edith Stein's writing, *The Elevation of the Cross* she says, "It is the path from earth to heaven. It will lift one who embraces it in faith, love, and hope into the bosom of the Trinity" (Stein 1, np). The director shares this view with Edith, and he conveys this message in multiple scenes. In the bar scene Edith speaks of how people should be "critical" of God. The director shows how outrageous a statement this was by having the majority of the dinner party leave the table. Another example is the scene in which Edith spoke to her mother about converting to Catholicism. The director has Edith's mother adamantly disagree with Edith's decision to become a Christian. The director chooses to have the mother use the word "ashamed" during the

conversation. This shows that the director wants to show the moral strength of Edith by having her go against her mother's wishes.

### *Holiness*

One of the definitions of holy in the Merriam-Webster dictionary is: "devoted entirely to the deity or the work of the deity" (Merriam-Webster.com). Throughout the entire film the director makes it clear that Edith was devoted to the work of God. "In a full attempt to imitate Christ, she became a holy woman. In fact, her definition of a holy person is to become 'another Christ'" (Oben, np). The director makes a point to mention that Edith went through a religious progression. She started out as a member of the Jewish faith, and then became an atheist, before finally converting to Catholicism in 1922. "In the midst of all her studies, Edith Stein was searching not only for the truth, but for Truth itself and she found both in the Catholic Church, after reading the autobiography of Saint Teresa of Avila. She was baptized on New Year's Day, 1922" ([www.ewtn.com](http://www.ewtn.com), np). This shows that Edith was in constant search of religious and life answers. This information is coupled with the facts that Edith studied and received her PhD in Philosophy. Edith's studies and teachings are of a main focus and are lengthened in scenes throughout the movie. The director is successfully magnifying the studying and devotion to God that Edith exhibited throughout her life which reflects the religious ideology of the director in the film *Edith Stein*.

The reason for this seems to be part of the director's attempt to convey the fact that Edith Stein did not just convert to Catholicism in an attempt to escape the wrath of Hitler and the Nazi party. When Edith Stein was baptized a Catholic in 1922, it was more than a decade prior to the

Nazi regime becoming a threat to the Jewish people. There is no reason to believe that she converted to Catholicism for the sole reason of protecting herself from the cruelties of the holocaust. The Nazi party did not come in to power until 1933. This is evidence that Edith converted to the Catholic faith for exclusively religious beliefs. The director of *Edith Stein* believed this, and made it clear for the audience by mentioning significant dates while emphasizing the time that Edith spent studying religion.

### *Heroic*

It is apparent throughout the film that the director is looking to leave a heroic aura around Edith Stein. Brave, Courageous, valiant, and admirable are all words that could be used to describe the character of Edith Stein in this film. The film is a synthesis of documentary-like clips or interviews, and a dramatic characterization of Edith Stein by an actress. The director is able to leave this impression across the duration of the whole movie, but is more in the forefront in the 'drama' scenes due to the director being able to cast the actors in order to best portray his/her vision of Edith Stein.

The bravery and calmness that the character of Edith Stein exhibits in the film is able to leave an impressive imprint on the audience. The heroic persona of Edith Stein that is portrayed by the director starts early in the film when Edith tells Rosa, "Come, we are going for our people." The director has Edith's actress perform this scene with a great amount of calmness and confidence, especially considering that it is directly in the face of adversity (an almost certain death). These are two qualities that people prefer to view in people that they look up to.

This heroic persona is further developed during most of the film. The many car scenes that the director incorporates throughout the film provide the audience with a progressed sense of

calmness and confidence regarding Edith Stein. There are numerous close ups on the face of Edith's character. Her poised facial impressions are in accordance with her original words to Rosa to help develop this heroic persona. The director makes it clear to differentiate the demeanor of Edith and Rosa while in the car. Edith is portrayed as having her emotions intact, while Rosa is portrayed as struggling to accept what is about to happen to them. This willingness to accept what is in store for her is an attribute of Edith that the director chooses to highlight. Another example of this is when Edith is ordered by a German officer to wear the Star of David "two hand widths" above her waist to symbolize that she was once of the Jewish faith. The director portrays Edith as accepting the decision and has her hold her head high as she walks out of the office.

Not all scenes that portray Edith as heroic were of the drama genre. The final scenes of the movie, which are of the documentary type, are a slide show of photos of the holocaust. The director chooses to display these horrible images so that the audience can see what he wants Edith Stein to stand for: a martyr of the holocaust for her people and her faith.

The director would have been much more successful at cementing this image into the minds of the audience if scenes of Edith in Auschwitz were incorporated into the film. This would have provided the director another outstanding opportunity to portray his vision of Edith Stein. A scene in Auschwitz could have been used as the climax of the dramatic portion of the movie just as it was used in the film *The Seventh Room*. In this film "the presentation of Edith arriving at the "seventh chamber" at Auschwitz opens the door, so to speak, to viewing the film as a whole" (Greydanus, np). If viewers see what the character actually has to go through, they will feel a stronger sense of attachment and trust that character.

## Conclusion

The use of drama and documentary scenes allows the director to reveal his/her ideology to the audience through the portrayal of Edith Stein. The director correctly portrays Edith Stein as a martyr for her people in the film. The director successfully develops a heroic, faithful, and holy persona of Edith Stein through the use of specific quotes, interviews, photographs, and acting performance. This persona is a direct reflection of the religious and world views of the director in reference to Auschwitz and the holocaust.

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*Photo of Edith Stein*