

# The Third Millennium and the Philosophical Life Or, “Celsus, Don’t Despair”

By  
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## 1. Introduction

In an extraordinary passage in *Fides et Ratio* (n. 38), the Pope counters an argument advanced by Celsus against the Christian faith—that Christians were “illiterate and uncouth.” Remarkably, a Pope from the twilight of the Second Millennium engages in debate with a pagan philosopher from the dawn of the First Millennium. This fact merits attention. By citing Celsus and Origen’s response to Celsus, John Paul is calling our attention to that early encounter between Christian theology and pagan philosophy. One of the issues over which Celsus and Origen argued was the nature of the philosophical life. Which life really leads to wisdom and human fulfillment: the way of life pursued by the pagan philosophers or the way of life pursued by the Christians? By calling this debate to our attention, the Pope, I would like to suggest, is inviting us to locate discussions concerning faith and philosophy in the larger context of the classical search for the way of life that leads to wisdom and fulfillment. The Pope does so, I believe, for two reasons: First, because it is on this level that people live their lives; people are seeking fulfillment. They seek to be happy. Second, the Pope is convinced that when people bring their search for happiness to reflective consciousness, it is then that they become open to responding to God’s grace and to receiving the proclamation of the Gospel. In other words, by promoting the philosophical life, one is promoting the New Evangelization.

In the Pope’s judgment, however, there is something that threatens this New Evangelization: despair, despair of reason’s ability to know the truth about the human person. This despair is essentially the abandonment of the philosophical life. It marks a collective loss of faith in the quest for the truth. In the Pope’s view, philosophical despair is not benign. It does not lead to tranquility or to intellectual humility. It leads, instead, to blind faith in the will to power; and when blind faith in the will to power becomes dominant, the roads that lead to life in Christ become obscured.<sup>1</sup> In the Pope’s judgment, therefore, one of our tasks is to rekindle in people’s hearts belief in philosophy, belief that the quest for truth is possible.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the Pope is encouraging non-Christian and secular philosophers not to despair of their craft. The image that comes to mind is of Celsus and the Pope in the boxing ring together; and Celsus, instead of sparring with the Pope, has fallen on the floor in self-inflicted philosophical despair and the Pope is leaning over him with a towel, trying to revive him. Our task is to participate in this revival, and to do so in two principal ways: first, by promoting true philosophy, through conveying its basic truths and its method of inquiry; second, by living the witness of a Christian life. To put flesh on this thesis, let us first look more closely at Celsus, the *philosophia* that he pursued as his ideal, and Origen’s response to it.

## 2. The Early Church and the Philosophical Life

Scholars know little about the identity of Celsus, except that he was a Middle Platonist philosopher of the second century who, during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-180), wrote a pamphlet attacking Christianity.<sup>3</sup> Celsus entitled his work, provocatively, *alèthès logos*, which is customarily translated as the “True Doctrine,” but can of course literally be translated as the “True Word,” the “True Logos.” In Celsus’ view, Christians have severed themselves from the ancient wisdom of philosophy; they are not living the “true logos.” For Celsus, the error of the Christians

concerns not only what they think, but how they live. Celsus recognizes that Christians strive to follow Jesus, but in Celsus' view, Jesus was an ignorant charlatan who led those more ignorant than himself into an immoral way of living.<sup>4</sup>

As one can imagine, Origen was not at all happy with Celsus' view of Jesus or with his view of the Christian life. Origen responded to Celsus vigorously and at great length.<sup>5</sup> What interests us, however, is that in spite of their vast differences, Origen and Celsus share several assumptions in common. For both of them, philosophy was not merely a theoretical tool or a body of doctrine: it was a way of life. It was a style of life and a way of being whose goal was to direct one toward and place one in harmony with true wisdom. This was the common view held by most pagan philosophers during the Hellenistic period.<sup>6</sup> Integral to the view that philosophy was a way of life, was the conviction that there was such a thing as wisdom.<sup>7</sup> The goal of the philosophical life was to attain wisdom, to be in harmony with it. "Philosophy," Pierre Hadot explains,

took on the form of an exercise of the thought, will, and the totality of one's being, the goal of which was to achieve a state practically inaccessible to mankind: wisdom. Philosophy was a method of spiritual progress which demanded a radical conversion and transformation of the individual's way of being.<sup>8</sup>

Many of the early Christian apologists accepted this ideal of philosophy; indeed, they embraced it. They argued, however, that only in Christ is this ideal fulfilled. In other words, these early Christian thinkers respected *philosophia* as a life dedicated to searching for wisdom and to striving to live that wisdom.<sup>9</sup> They argued, however, that the ancient schools of philosophy had failed in their endeavor. The wisdom they contained was partial and did not lead to the healing, peace and happiness that the philosophers sought. For Justin Martyr (d. 162-167), Clement of Alexandria, as well as for Origen, the Gospel is the "true philosophy," because Jesus is the true Wisdom.<sup>10</sup> He is the Logos itself made visible in human form; as such Jesus is the pattern of the true philosophical life.<sup>11</sup> Celsus had claimed to know the true logos, but, Origen counters, in reality Jesus is the "True Logos."<sup>12</sup> Only in Christ do we fully discover the way to wisdom and only in Christ do we have the power to live this wisdom.

### **3. The Philosophical Life and Despair: the Example of the Weimar Republic**

In the centuries that have passed since the days of the Early Church, the meaning of the word "philosophy" has clearly changed, and it would not be helpful, as the Pope notes, to start calling the Christian faith a philosophy.<sup>13</sup> Yet, when we read what John Paul says about the human person's search for wisdom, we discover that the Pope is describing human culture in classical terms. He affirms that all people search for wisdom, for the meaning of their lives, and that every human life and every human culture is essentially a response to the question of meaning.<sup>14</sup> In other words, John Paul affirms that every life in its own way is a philosophical life: it is a search for wisdom and a lived response to the question meaning. "The human being," John Paul tells us, "is by nature a philosopher."<sup>15</sup>

Like the early apologists, however, John Paul proclaims that only in Christ, the eternal Logos, does the philosophical search finds its fulfillment.<sup>16</sup> From this perspective, John Paul shares with the apologists the view that philosophy and the philosophical life are of propaedeutic value.<sup>17</sup> Only those who seek, find. Only those who believe that a search for truth is possible, can encounter a Truth that calls them to loving union with itself. From this perspective the principal threat to the New Evangelization is not non-Christian or secular philosophy, but the despair of philosophy. (One could perhaps more accurately say that he regards secular philosophies as a threat only to the extent that they

constitute a form of despair.) Thus, the Pope states, “now, at the end of this century, one of our greatest threats is the temptation to despair.”<sup>18</sup>

Here I believe the Pope’s biography becomes important. Karol Wojtyla lived firsthand the terrors of the Nazis occupation of Poland.<sup>19</sup> The American Catholic philosopher/novelist Walker Percy observed that “Buchenwald was only four miles from Weimar.”<sup>20</sup> How those four miles were traversed is a question that continues to haunt us at the end of the Millenium. Indeed, I would like to suggest that concern for this question has been a guiding factor throughout John Paul’s work.

What was there in the fabric of German life during the Weimar Republic that gave rise to Nazism? The answer to this question is beyond the scope of this short reflection. But the path from Weimar to Buchenwald can perhaps be sketched by looking at the experience of someone who lived through those days. The psychiatrist Karl Stern was raised in a Jewish family fully assimilated into secular German culture. Looking back at the Weimar years, Stern describes himself as one who “had known the life of ‘freedom,’ the perfect libertinism of European youth of the twenties, and the hangover of nothingness and spiritual despair.”<sup>21</sup> After his conversion to Catholicism, Stern wrote an autobiography in which he explains that his “spiritual despair” led to a search for meaning. By the time the twenties had turned into the thirties, Stern had drifted from Orthodox Judaism, to secular Zionism, and back again to Orthodoxy. It was a journey that took him through the philosophical currents of his day and was tinged with a rejection of the beliefs and mores of the older generation. A parallel restlessness existed among non-Jews. Stern saw spring up around him a generation of young people who were alienated from their parents, restless and searching.<sup>22</sup> Children raised in secularized homes, whether of Jewish or Christian ancestry, were left with an inner void. The hangover of nothingness, it would seem, was giving way to a search for a cure-all far stronger than a raw egg: Germany’s youth were searching for meaning and were going to extreme lengths to find it. Troubled and angry, they sought a goal to live for and a community with which to pursue it, and many found this with the Nazis.

#### **4. Weimar Revisited: Despair at the End of the Millenium**

The desire to understand the relationship between Weimar and the Nazis is not merely of historical interest. A number of thinkers hold the view that certain features of contemporary culture are strikingly similar to features present in German culture during the Weimar Republic. Nicholas Boyle, for example, describes Weimar Germany in the following terms:

Germany . . . entered the post-modern and post-bourgeois era a generation before the other industrialized European states. In the 1920’s, stripped of empire and bourgeoisie, Germans were dropped into the world market and left to find an identity for themselves.<sup>23</sup>

After painting this description of pre-war Germany, Boyle turns his attention to the present.

After the collapse of the Cold War balance of power, the dilemmas of Weimar Germany have been revealed to be general. The need to compete in a world market is undermining social and political certainties everywhere. The most serious threat to world peace seems once again to come from violent sectarian ideologies. And once again it seems doubtful whether the intellectuals of Europe and North America can mount any counter-offensive or whether the Post-Modernists are not unwittingly collaborating with forces that will destroy them. . . . The decline of the Weimar

intelligentsia into Fascism may be seen as the first case of the failure of a Post-Modernist movement to meet the political challenge of globalization.<sup>24</sup>

In *Evangelium Vitae*, *Centesimus Annus* as well as *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul offers descriptions of contemporary culture that are reminiscent of the cultural and spiritual upheaval of the Weimar years in Germany.<sup>25</sup> The notion that we are currently sowing the seeds for some future holocaust is a disturbing prospect. Yet, in John Paul's view, this need not be the outcome. There is no historical necessity that we too must walk those four miles to Buchenwald. The peoples of the world are free to choose a different course. The challenge for the Christian is to help our contemporaries choose that other way.

How to help others choose the way that leads to eternal life is a theme that recurs in John Paul's work. In *Centesimus Annus* and *Evangelium Vitae* John Paul focuses on the task of promoting true culture. In *Fides et Ratio* the focus is upon promoting true philosophy: the vocation of the philosopher, John Paul explains, is to share philosophy's basic truths and method of inquiry so that our contemporaries can undertake a search for the truth. In each of these encyclicals, however, John Paul notes that merely thinking-it-right will not be enough. We must live it right: thought and action together.<sup>26</sup> Philosophy and the Christian life are what John Paul is calling us to in order to help our contemporaries walk the way that leads to the tree of wisdom.

In paragraph 74 of *Fides et Ratio*, the Pope invites us to look at the spiritual journeys of philosophers who have promoted the philosophical life. By looking briefly at the life of one of these thinkers, we will have a better sense of how philosophy and the Christian life work together to promote confidence in the search for truth. We shall look at the experience of Edith Stein.

## **5. True Philosophy and the Christian Life: the Case of Edith Stein**

By the time Edith Stein was fifteen years old, she had lost her faith in God, but her desire to know the truth remained.<sup>27</sup> In college she undertook the study of philosophy. In God's providence she became a student of Husserl. Here is how she describes Husserl's early method:

The main reason the *Logical Investigations* had made such an impact was that they seemed to mark a radical break with critical idealism, both of the Kantian and neo-Kantian types. The book had been considered as representing a 'new form of scholasticism,' because it transferred the attention away from the subject and back onto the object. Once again perception was treated as something receptive, governed by its objects, rather than constitutive and regulative of the objects as in critical philosophy. All the young phenomenologists were committed realists.<sup>28</sup>

This method of receptivity before the real, led Stein to be receptive to the religious experiences of others. Thus, when she started to attend Max Scheler's seminars on "the Nature of the Holy," she was profoundly moved.

This was my first encounter with this hitherto totally unknown world. It did not lead me as yet to the Faith. But it did open for me a region of 'phenomena' which I could then no longer bypass blindly. With good reason we were repeatedly enjoined to observe all things without prejudice, to discard all possible 'blindness.' The barriers of rationalistic prejudices with which I had unwittingly grown up fell, and the world of faith

unfolded before me. Persons with whom I associated daily, whom I esteemed and admired, lived in it. At the least, they deserved my giving it some serious reflection.<sup>29</sup>

From the realism she had learned from the early Husserl, Stein was able to see the religious experience of others as phenomena from which she might be able to learn so new truth. This is precisely the realist philosophy that the Pope desires to promote. He does so, I would like to suggest, precisely because of the effect it has had on people such as Edith Stein and on others like her.

But, we should recognize that more was happening among Husserl's students than merely philosophy. There was the presence of God's grace and there was the presence of committed Christians who were influencing these students through the witness of their lives. Stein herself offers many examples of these Christian witnesses: an important one was the calm hope and resignation exhibited by a Lutheran friend when her husband was killed: this hope-filled response was new to Stein and left her deeply impressed and puzzled.

It was my first encounter with the Cross and the divine power that it bestows on those who carry it. For the first time, I was seeing with my very eyes the Church, born from its Redeemer's sufferings, triumphant over the sting of death. That was the moment my unbelief collapsed and Christ shone forth--in the mystery of the Cross.<sup>30</sup>

The summit, however, of these witnesses occurred in Stein's accidental encounter with Teresa of Avila, when Stein stumbled upon her autobiography in the home of a friend. She stayed upon all night reading it, and by dawn when she finished the book, she had the faith of the Church.<sup>31</sup> Stein became a Catholic because in that encounter with the life of Teresa she encountered a truth, which, through the gift of grace, she was able to receive. Thus, in Stein's own life we see the two elements that the Pope believes promote the philosophical search for truth and a subsequent openness to the Gospel: (a) realist philosophy and (b) the witness of a Christian life.

What Stein did after her conversion is also significant. Her response to the rise of the Nazis was to enter the Carmelites, the Order that, perhaps more than any other, recognizes the Christian life to a journey of discovery: an ascent up the mount of truth, an ascent into the mystery of Christ's cross. Although the logic of despair and of the will to power was to surround her and lead to her death at Auschwitz, Edith Stein's fidelity to the truth about human life--the truth about the cross and resurrection--continues to speak to us. She lived the life of the Logos, and did so in confidence and peace. By doing so, she says to Celsus and to all of us, don't despair: in God's grace, the search for truth leads to eternal life.

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<sup>1</sup>. Cf. *Fides et Ratio* (henceforth *FR*) 90: The positions we have examined lead in turn to a more general conception which appears today as the common framework of many philosophies which have rejected the meaningfulness of being. I am referring to the nihilist interpretation, which is at once the denial of all foundations and the negation of all objective truth. . . . It should never be forgotten that the neglect of being inevitably leads to losing touch with objective truth and therefore with the very ground of human dignity. This in turn makes it possible to erase from the countenance of man and woman the marks of their likeness to God, and thus to lead them little by little either to a destructive will to power or to a solitude without hope. Once the truth is denied to human beings, it is pure illusion to

try to set them free. Truth and freedom either go together hand in hand or together they perish in misery.”

<sup>2</sup> *FR* 56: “in the light of faith which finds in Jesus Christ this ultimate meaning, I cannot but encourage philosophers--be they Christian or not--to trust in the power of human reason and not to set themselves goals that are too modest in their philosophizing. The lesson of history in this millennium now drawing to a close shows that this is the path to follow: it is necessary not to abandon the passion for ultimate truth, the eagerness to search for it or the audacity to forge new paths in the search.” *FR* 102: “There is today no more urgent preparation for the performance of these tasks than this: to lead people to discover both their capacity to know the truth and their yearning for the ultimate and definitive meaning of life.”

<sup>3</sup> Henri Crouzel, *Origen* translated by A. S. Worrall (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 47-48. Crouzel describes this pamphlet as the “first attack launched against Christianity on the intellectual plane” (47).

<sup>4</sup> Marcel Borret, “Introduction Générale, Tables et Index,” in *Contre Celse* volume 5 Sources Chrétiennes (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1976), 33-121.

<sup>5</sup> The text of the *Alèthès Logos* has only come down to us through the extensive quotations of it that Origen makes in the *Contra Celsum*. On the character and accuracy of Origen’s method of quoting Celsus’ text, see Marcel Borret, “Introduction Générale, Tables et Index,” in *Contre Celse* volume 5 Sources Chrétiennes (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1976), 29-33. For an analysis of Origen’s *Contra Celsum*, see, in addition to Borret’s “Introduction Générale” (199-246), Henry Chadwick, “Introduction” in Origen, *Contra Celsum*, translated with an introduction and notes by Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Eugene V. Gallagher, *Divine Man or Magician? Celsus and Origen on Jesus* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982); Robert John Hauck, *The More Divine Proof: Prophecy and Inspiration in Celsus and Origen* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989); Jeffrey A. Oswald, “The Self-Evident Truth: Scripture and Apology in the *Contra Celsum* of Origen” (Ph.D. Diss. University of Notre Dame, 1993); Louis William Roberts, “Philosophical Method in Origen’s *Contra Celsum*” (Ph.D. Diss. State University of New York at Buffalo, 1971).

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Hadot, “Présentation au Collège International de Philosophie,” (unpublished manuscript), 3, cited by Arnold I. Davidson in his introduction to Hadot’s *Philosophy as a Way of Life* edited with introduction by Arnold I. Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 30-31. See also, Hadot’s statement in the same volume: “During this period, philosophy was a *way of life*. . . . philosophy was a mode of existing-in-the-world, which had to be practiced at each instant, and the goal of which was to transform the whole of the individual’s life” (265). I wish to thank Brian Daley, S.J. for introducing me to Hadot’s work.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Arnold I. Davidson “Introduction” in Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* 25.

<sup>8</sup> Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* 265.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Justin Martyr in *Dialogue with Trypho*: “Philosophy is indeed one’s greatest possession, and is most precious in the sight of God, to whom it alone leads us and to whom it unites us, and they in truth are holy men who have applied themselves to philosophy” (2, *PG*: 6.475); “Man cannot have prudence without philosophy and straight thinking. Thus, every man should be devoted to philosophy and should consider it the greatest and most noble pursuit; all other pursuits are only of second or third-rate value, unless they are connected with philosophy. . . . Philosophy, . . . is the knowledge of that which exists, and a clear understanding of the truth; and happiness is the reward of such knowledge and understanding” (3, *PG*: 6.479-482). The translation is from *Writings of Saint Justin Martyr*, translated by Thomas B. Falls (New York: Christian Heritage, 1948). For analysis of

the meaning of *philosophia* for both pagans and early Christians, an analysis that collects most of the relevant texts, see A. N. Malingrey, “*Philosophia*,” *Étude d’un groupe de mots dans la littérature grecque, des Présocratiques au IVe siècle ap. J.-C.* (Paris: , 1961). Cf. Hadot 141, n. 17.

<sup>10</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.18.90.1 (SC 30.115); FR 38.

<sup>11</sup> Justin Martyr, *Second Apology* 10 and 13 (PG: 6.459-462; 466-467); *Dialogue with Trypho* 8 (PG: 6.491-494); Hadot *Philosophy as a Way of Life* 128; FR 38. Although Origen is highly critical of many of the doctrines held by the pagan philosophers, he respects their ideal and makes it his own. As Crouzel notes, “Origen holds in high esteem the moral ideal of the philosopher characterized by the love of truth and the quest for it” (Henri Crouzel, *Origen* translated by A. S. Worrall [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989], 157). Elsewhere, Crouzel describes Origen’s attitude as follows: “*Origène est sensible à l’idéal hellénique du philosophe et en assimile tout ce qu’il peut. Il emploie fréquemment le mot dans un sens chrétien . . . Cet idéal moral et religieux, joint au travail et à la recherche intellectuelle, Origène le fait sien*” (Henri Crouzel, *Origène et la Philosophie* [Paris: Aubier, 1962], 69-70). At the same time, however, he affirms that Greek philosophy fails to attain its end. Only the “divine philosophy,” only the “philosophy of the patriarchs” fully imparts the true wisdom of the Logos (*Contra Celsum* 3.4.15-17; SC 136.20).

<sup>12</sup> *Contra Celsum* 8.1.4-16; SC 150.180.

<sup>13</sup> FR 76: “the Christian faith as such is not a philosophy.”

<sup>14</sup> FR 30: “All men and women, as I have noted, are in some sense philosophers and have their own philosophical conceptions with which they direct their lives. In one way or other, they shape a comprehensive vision and an answer to the question of life’s meaning; and in the light of this they interpret their own life’s course and regulate their behavior.” FR 70: “When they are deeply rooted in experience, cultures show forth the human being’s characteristic openness to the universal and the transcendent. Therefore they offer different paths to the truth, which assuredly serve men and women well in revealing values which can make their life ever more human.” *Centesimus Annus* (henceforth CA) 24: “Man is understood in a more complete way when he is situated within the sphere of culture through his language, history, and the position he takes towards the fundamental events of life, such as birth, love, work and death. At the heart of every culture lies the attitude man takes to the greatest mystery: the mystery of God. Different cultures are basically different ways of facing the question of the meaning of personal existence.” CA 50: “From this open search for truth, which is renewed in every generation, *the culture of a nation* derives its character.”

<sup>15</sup> FR 64. FR 27: “people seek in different ways to shape a ‘philosophy’ of their own—in personal convictions and experiences, in traditions of family and culture, or in journeys in search of life’s meaning under the guidance of a master. What inspires all of these is the desire to reach the certitude of truth and the certitude of its absolute value.” FR 30: “The truths of philosophy, it should be said, are not restricted only to the sometimes ephemeral teachings of professional philosophers. All men and women, as I have noted, are in some sense philosophers and have their own philosophical conceptions with which they direct their lives. In one way or other, they shape a comprehensive vision and an answer to the question of life’s meaning; and in the light of this they interpret their own life’s course and regulate their behavior.” FR 33: “From all that I have said to this point it emerges that men and women are on a journey of discovery.”

<sup>16</sup> FR 34: “[Jesus] is the *eternal Word* in whom all things were created, and he is the *incarnate Word* who in his entire person reveals the Father (cf. *Jn* 1:14, 18). What human reason seeks ‘without knowing it’ (cf. *Acts* 17: 23) can be found only through Christ: what is revealed in him is ‘the full truth’ (cf. *Jn* 1:14-16) of everything which was created in him and through him and which therefore in him

finds its fulfillment (cf. *Col* 1: 17).” See also *FR* 99 and *Redemptoris Hominis* 8: “The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a type of him who was to come, Christ the Lord. Christ, the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling” (cited in *FR* 60).

<sup>17</sup>. *FR* 67: “Recalling the teaching of Saint Paul (cf. *Rom* 1:19-20), the First Vatican Council pointed to the existence of truths which are naturally, and thus philosophically, knowable; and an acceptance of God’s Revelation necessarily presupposes knowledge of these truths. . . . From all these truths, the mind is led to acknowledge the existence of a truly propaedeutic path to faith, one which can lead to the acceptance of Revelation without in any way compromising the principles and autonomy of the mind itself.”

<sup>18</sup>. *FR* 91.

<sup>19</sup>. See Darcy O’Brien, *The Hidden Pope: the Untold Story of a Lifelong Friendship that is Changing the Relationship between Catholics and Jews. The Journey of John Paul II and Jerzy Kluger* (New York: Daybreak Books, 1998) 164-171; 185-195; 202-218; Tad Szulc, *Pope John Paul II: the Biography* (New York: Scribner, 1995) 124-132; Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi, *His Holiness: John Paul II and the Hidden History of Our Time* (New York: Doubleday, 1996) 225-230.

<sup>20</sup>. Walker Percy, *The Second Coming* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980), 132.

<sup>21</sup>. Karl Stern, *The Pillar of Fire* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951), 222. Stern says these words in describing himself and his future bride: “Whatever our views may be, we had come from roots far apart; she from an over-sophisticated academic tradition, I from the merchant’s house in the small town; she from a liberal Lutheran, I from an ‘enlightened’ Jewish background. We both had been instilled with Goethean humanism but our revolts against the bourgeois tradition had taken entirely different routes. We both had known the life of ‘freedom,’ the perfect libertinism of European youth of the twenties, and the hangover of nothingness and spiritual despair.”

<sup>22</sup>. Karl Stern, *The Pillar of Fire* 47-48, 160-161.

<sup>23</sup>. Nicholas Boyle, *Who Are We Now: Christian Humanism and the Global Market from Hegel to Heaney* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1998) 125-126.

<sup>24</sup>. Nicholas Boyle, *Who Are We Now* 126. Karl Stern noticed as early as the late 1940’s that a number of his colleagues in the medical profession were already expressing views, such as the legitimacy of killing the chronically mentally ill, that were chillingly close to those expressed in Germany during the Weimar Republic and subsequently taken up by the Nazis with great efficiency (Karl Stern, *The Pillar of Fire* 125-127). Flannery O’Connor was also sensitive to this growing attitude, describing it as flowing from a compassion that is cut off from Christian faith. Concern about the implications of faithless compassion is a theme throughout her fiction. In 1960 she expressed her views on this subject clearly in an essay introducing a biography of a young girl who had died of cancer: “Ivan Karamozov cannot believe, as long as one child is in torment; Camus’ hero cannot accept the divinity of Christ, because of the massacre of the innocents. In this popular pity, we mark our gain in sensibility and our loss of vision. If other ages felt less, they saw more, even though they saw with the blind, prophetically, unsentimental eye of acceptance, which is to say, of faith. In the absence of this faith now, we govern by tenderness. It is a tenderness which, long since cut off from the person of Christ, is wrapped in theory. When tenderness is detached from the source of tenderness, its logical outcome is terror. It ends in forced-labor camps and in the fumes of the gas chamber” (Flannery O’Connor, “Introduction to *A Memoir of Mary Ann*,” reprinted in *Mystery and Manners* edited by Sally and

Robert Fitzgerald [New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969] 227). This concern was also a theme in the work of Walker Percy. It is present in the passage from the *Second Coming* cited above; Percy investigates it at length in *The Thanatos Syndrome* and offers a non-fiction account of his views in “Why Are You A Catholic” in *Signposts in a Strange Land* edited by Patrick Samway (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991) 304-315. For an analysis of Percy’s views, see Patricia Lewis Poteat, “Pilgrim’s Progress; or, A Few Night Thoughts on Tenderness and the Will to Power” in *Walker Percy: Novelist and Philosopher* edited by Jan Nordby Gretlund and Lark-Heinz Westarp (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1991) 210-224; Sue Mitchell Crowley, “*The Thanatos Syndrome: Walker Percy’s Tribute to Flannery O’Connor*” in *Walker Percy: Novelist and Philosopher* 225-237. See also Deal W. Hudson, *Happiness and the Limits of Satisfaction* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996) 42-45.

<sup>25</sup> *Evangelium Vitae* (henceforth *EV*) 4; 12-17; *CA* 24; 41; *FR* 46-47; 55; 81; 90-91.

<sup>26</sup> *FR* 32; 105. John Paul develops this theme more explicitly in his earlier encyclicals: *CA* 57-58; *EV* 80-100.

<sup>27</sup> The nature of Stein’s loss of faith during her early years is not entirely clear. Waltraud Herbstrith asserts in her biography of Stein that “Edith Stein acknowledged years later that from thirteen to twenty-one she could not believe in the existence of a personal God” (Waltraud Herbstrith, *Edith Stein, A Biography* translated by Bernard Bonowitz [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985], 5); but Herbstrith does not offer a source for this assertion. Stein does state in her autobiography that at the age of fifteen, when living in the home of non-practicing relatives, that “deliberately and consciously, I gave up praying” (Edith Stein, *Life in a Jewish Family: 1891-1916: An Autobiography* edited by L. Gelber and Romaeus Leuven and translated by Josephine Koepfel [Washington, D.C.: I.C.S. Publications, 1986] 148). Stein’s niece, however, wisely cautions that an adolescent’s decision not to pray does not necessarily mean that the adolescent is an atheist (Susanne M. Batzdorff, *Aunt Edith: the Jewish Heritage of a Catholic Saint* [Springfield, IL: Templegate, 1998] 67). What is clear is that Edith Stein herself affirms that during her years as a college student she was without faith in God (See, for example, Edith Stein, *Life in a Jewish Family* 195).

<sup>28</sup> Edith Stein, *Aus dem Leben einer jüdischen Familie Kindheit und Jugend*, Edith Steins Werke, Bd. VII (Louvain: Nauwelaerts/Freiburg: Herder, 1965), 174, as cited by Waltraud Herbstrith and translated by Bernard Bonowitz in Waltraud Herbstrith, *Edith Stein, A Biography* 18. See Edith Stein, *Life in a Jewish Family* 250.

<sup>29</sup> Edith Stein, *Life in a Jewish Family* 260. Cited in Waltraud Herbstrith, *Edith Stein, A Biography* 19.

<sup>30</sup> Edith Stein in a letter to Fr. Hirschmann, S.J. cited by Waltraud Herbstrith, *Edith Stein, A Biography* 24-25. The friend was Anna Reinach; her husband, the phenomenologist Adolf Reinach, was killed in the First World War. For an account of Stein’s friendship and professional relationship with the Reinachs, see Edith Stein, *Life in a Jewish Family* 247-300, passim; 377- 385, passim.

<sup>31</sup> See Waltraud Herbstrith, *Edith Stein, A Biography* 30-32.