

EMPATHY, FAITH AND THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE WORK.

Dr. Marge-Marie Paas

University of Tallinn

What is the significance of human work in today's world? How can a Christian live one's faith and work professionally, fulfilling and carrying out Church's mission in the world? How to reach the point where one's work would also be one's vocation? There are numerous ways to answer this important question, but I will try to provide a short explanation, how through empathy it's possible to understand sanctified work and find its roots. I will use a philosophical-theological approach through empathy which is based on the Catholic Church in Estonia. I would like to emphasise especially Eduard Profittlich S.J.¹ the Archbishop of the Catholic Church Estonia in the 1930's, whose legacy is continuously gaining wider acknowledgement even in the church.

1 Eduard Profittlich, S.J. was born on September 11, 1890 in Germany. He studied at the Theological Seminary in Trier. On April 11, 1913, he joined the Jesuit Order in Heerenberg. On August 27, 1922 he was ordained as priest. He received a Doctorate degree in Theology and Philosophy in Kraków University in Poland. In 1924 he was a missionary in Poland, then from 1925 in Germany, in 1927 he served in Hamburg, from 1930 in Tallinn. In 1931, he was appointed as Apostolic Administrator of Estonia and on December 27, 1936 he was consecrated as Bishop. He remained in Tallinn after Estonia was absorbed into the USSR. He visited the German embassy three times, attempting to get permission for Catholic priests and nuns to leave Germany. In 1941 he was arrested and sent to the prison in Kirov, in Russia and was sentenced to be shot. On February 22, 1942 he died in Kirov prison before the sentence could be carried out.

Testimony of Faith

Every country and nation has its identity, traditions and customs. A lot depends of the *status quo* of the state, political climate, way of looking at things, how they approach religion, culture, history and human activity in general. But we will always look it from the Church's point of view, which is kind of the cornerstone of our faith like our activities in the Church, society and in the today's world. The Catholic Church of Estonia has done always everything it can, even if the number of Catholic's has been rather small, to help the person grow in his/her spiritual life, personal life and in the society.

In the Middle Ages, Estonia was Catholic for roughly four centuries (1227-1626). Under Swedish rule (1561-1710) the Catholic faith was forbidden and, after the expulsion of the last faithful in 1626, the Catholic tradition in Estonia was totally wiped out². During the Russian time, the catholic faith was permitted again.

After the Russian revolution in 1917, Estonia and its neighbours (Finland, Latvia, and Lithuania) grasped the opportunity to gain their national independence. In 1918 Estonians proclaimed the Republic of Estonia, a democratic state, which granted all citizens the freedom of religion³. When Estonia gained independence, the situation changed and the Catholic Church in Estonia got its first Apostolic Administrator (Antonio Zecchini, S.J) and before the Second World War, there were already around 6000 Catholics in the country. On 11. May 1931, the Church received the second Apostolic Administrator, a Jesuit priest Eduard Profittlich S.J who right away, during the first weeks of his term of office, started to foster education in Estonia. For the first time following books were published: a prayer book in Estonian (1931), Catechism of the Catholic Church (1931), a Catholic News, a journal "Kiriku Elu" ("Church Life") (from 1933) – all that under the supervision of Fr. Eduard. In 1931 the Church asked help from Rome, (more specifically) from the *Pontificia Commissione per la Russia*, in order to buy books (Gospels, breviaries, catechisms etc. for Estonians) so that they could discover faith for themselves and for those who already had found it could grow their faith stronger.⁴ Profittlich also humbly asked help from Rome in order to build a Catholic Church in Estonia and to provide the St. Peter-Paul parish better working conditions, to which Rome also responded.⁵ With the new Church awakening during the 1930's the level of pastoral care increased substantially.

2 Vello SALO. *The Catholic Church in Estonia, 1918-2001*. The Catholic Historical Review, Vol. 88, No. 2, April (281 – 292), pg. 281.

3 Vello SALO. *The Catholic Church in Estonia, 1918-2001*. The Catholic Historical Review, Vol. 88, No. 2, April (281 – 292), pg. 281.

4 ARSI (ARCHIVUM ROMANUM S.I) / (Letton. et Estone 1001), Lett. 27/02/1931. Mons. M. d'Herbeigny, S.J

5 ARSI (ARCHIVUM ROMANUM S.I) / (Letton. et Estone 1001), Lett. 28/08/ 1931. Mons. M. d'Herbeigny, S.J letter to Eduard Profittlich.

The deportation of Bishop Eduard left Estonia with five Catholic priests, and the events of World War II had further immediate effects on church life. From 1940 to 1991, thus for half a century, we cannot speak of normal life of Christian churches in Estonia. Most of this period must be called the open persecution of the church⁶.

But which was ruined by the war, has been re-built by current generation. There are around 5000 Catholics in Estonia and a great number of them participate in Church life as volunteers. Furthermore, there are more and more people finding their way in to the Catholic Church, for example during 2016 alone, there were 46 people baptised in the Cathedral of Tallinn.⁷ The Catholic Church is visible, active, close to the people and is no longer considered as the “polish” church, an image which has been associated with the Church for decades.

Empatheia

But why I give “empathy” the key notion of this discourse? If one would look the history of the Catholic Church in Estonia and how the Church has been a minority and how it was considered to be a “polish” church, then the sustainability of the Church must be based on something. Mutual understanding between its members, the functioning of the Church and the growth of the Christian faith must be based on the same thing which keeps the Church going. Of course, it’s faith, but faith is sowed by the people who work in the vineyard of the Lord, and a person always acts in relation to others. I have concluded that the most characteristic notion in the Church and in the work carried out in it, is empathy because a person always acts in relation to others and he or she is never alone in the world. Me, being in this life-world (*Lebenswelt*⁸ in German) is always also understood as being there for others. We have intersubjective relations in this life-world.

The notion “empathy” derives from Greek (εμπάθεια (*empathia*) in Greek) and it could be translated into English as “feeling into” to which corresponds the German word *Einführung*. This interpretation could be considered as the source of this notion. Through history and in different distinct disciplines the definition of empathy has varied. In philosophy, not until 18th century the closer studies of empathy started, because of the need to understand the sentiments of others (this is how it was understood by philosopher A.Smith).

6 Vello SALO. *The Catholic Church in Estonia, 1918-2001*. The Catholic Historical Review, Vol. 88, No. 2, April (281 – 292), pg. 287.

7 Information from Sts. Peter and Paul parish in Tallinn.

8 The term, *Lebenswelt* comes from German Philosopher Edmund Husserl - *Die Krisis*.

A 20th century female philosopher Edith Stein (1891-1942) explains empathy as follows, person experiencing empathy lives through in her/his inner world feelings of another person⁹. Thus empathy is a kind of act of perceiving (*eine Art erfahrender Akte*) *sui generis*¹⁰. This is the beginning of everything – understanding other persons’ experience and expressed feelings - pain, happiness, the feeling of love, needs, attitudes what means understanding other persons’ world. But, through the experience of empathy Stein researched social and cultural cognition in the society and she tried to understand the phenomena, how we understand others, how we understand their spiritual state and how it is possible to understand oneself through others. It’s an important argument to research disciplinarily empathy in today’s professional work, what we sanctify and in the life that we live. When researching Edith Stein’s disquisition of empathy, I would like to emphasize some arguments which are crucial in this context. First of all, Edith Stein’s disquisition of empathy differed from previous disquisitions by the fact that she substituted the notion 'feeling into' (*Einführung*) with 'living through' (*Erlebnis*); and furthermore, the problem of empathy wasn’t for Stein just a research about other persons and their feelings, thoughts, attitudes, but it was a philosophical problem concerning human culture, because according to Stein a human being was always a spiritual (sometimes she named it also a creative) person. This means that empathy is related to the inner life of a person who experiences empathy, which according to Stein is based on faith and connected to God. It’s interesting to note here that in her later text “The Science of the Cross” (*Kreuzeswissenschaft*), she explains that our way must be a journey of moving forward, a road to God, a road that’s connected to God. Even though, her ideas are based on the teachings of St. John of the Cross, we are also in our everyday working life on the road to this union that can be attained only through love. And if we love what we are doing, we have already established a connection with God. If you love then the work has also a soul – God’s and the person’s soul – and this way we achieve the best devotion. It does not mean that it is only meant for the consecrated persons – it’s for everybody and for attaining personal goals. Our relation must always be an empathic one and that towards God and other persons. And I say that Eduard Profitlich was the person in Estonian history who was on this road of holiness in his life what was described by Edith Stein.

Now, I will return to the history of the Catholic Church of Estonia, and I’ll show how it is possible to sanctify one’s life and work, which is related to the person’s inner spiritual life and experiences attained through empathy, where the person understands his structure (how it is described by Stein) - through psychophysical spiritual structure.

9 Edith STEIN. *On the Problem of Empathy* (Trans. W. Stein). The Collected Works of EDITH STEIN. Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross Discalced Carmelite 1891-1924. Vol. 3. ICS Publications, Washington, D.C. 1989. pg. 61.

10 Edith STEIN. *On the Problem of Empathy* (Trans. W. Stein). The Collected Works of EDITH STEIN. Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross Discalced Carmelite 1891-1924. Vol. 3. ICS Publications, Washington, D.C. 1989. pg. 11.

Sanctification of the work and its roots

In 1936 Estonia got its first post-reformation Catholic bishop – Eduard Profittlich, S.J (as I mentioned before from 1931 Fr. Eduard was the Apostolic Administrator of Estonia.). In 1930, he brought many changes to the Catholic Church in Estonia, he was engaged in the pastoral care, youth catechesis and strengthened Catholicism in Estonia.¹¹ Looking back at his work we can see that he was a very dedicated and empathetic person whose work was focused on loving Christ and close ones. Father Profittlich was a hard-working priest who realistically assessed the needs of the faithful and his own possibilities¹². Unfortunately, he was only ten years in the office, in Estonia, from 1930 until 1941. The political situation in the country was already difficult in the end of the 30's, and he had a chance to return to Germany, but before that he asked permission from the Pope, who responded that he can do “*in Domino*”¹³, and Profittlich decided to stay with his flock and serve the Church until the end, even, if the end was going to be martyrism. Archbishop Profittlich was arrested by the soviet authorities in 1941 in his apartment. Before leaving his home church he asked from his arresters if he could spend a few minutes with Jesus Christ in front of tabernacle. He died as a martyr in Russia, in Kirov prison in 1942.

In a letter to his friends and relatives on February 8, 1941, he wrote that it is normal for a priest to remain with his people in his parish, and to accept both joys and sufferings together with his people. He wrote how joyful it is to feel the presence of God, to whom we gave all, and he wrote that he was ready to give up to Him all his freedom and life: "So my life and my sufferings too, if it is necessary, will be the life and the sufferings for Christ"¹⁴.

Fr. Eduard is a very beautiful example in the history of the Catholic Church in Estonia, of how God worked in a person's soul and how he placed love as a centrepiece of his actions. I claim that when it comes to him, we understand this love through the capability of being empathic. This capability of feeling empathy does not mean here experiencing something which is experiencing empathy but person's capability of feeling empathy derives from his inner life – God could act in a person's soul and through that a person can act in his everyday actions with God. In this way, a person is not ignorant, he loves his doings and appreciates God more than any earthly thing. Archbishop Profittlich acted exactly in this state of grace, that supported his inner life and his capability of feeling empathy should be an example for us all. A

11 ARSI (ARCHIVUM ROMANUM S.I.) / (Letton. et Estone 1001), Lett. 20/07/1931, Letter sent to fr. McGarrgle, S.J by Profittlich, where he calls a new era begins in Estonia in Catholic Church (1931), called 'renaissance'.

12 Vello SALO. *The Catholic Church in Estonia, 1918-2001*. The Catholic Historical Review, Vol. 88, No. 2, April (281 – 292), pg. 284.

13 *Actes et Documents du Saint Siege relatifs a la Seconde Guerre Mondiale* (ADSS), III, doc. 226, p. 334, 367.

14 Eduard PROFITTLICH, S.J. *Letter to family in Germany*. Re-published: in *Kiriku Elu*, 1990, pg. 17.

Dominican, a 20th century's spiritual classic, Fr. Reginald Marie Garrigou-Lagrance, O.P says: "So it is unthinkable, that a soul could have more love, if he does not have at the same time a certain amount of the gift of wisdom"¹⁵. We have to agree with it here because the love that I have described, that bishop Eduard Profittlich gave to the Church must be related to the gift of wisdom, how else could he could have taken on so professionally such a responsible job. For example, in one of his homily's he writes as follows: "We have time to time such questions, questions if we have acted correctly, if we have rightly followed our vocation. Not if I've been a good official in an office or a good housewife in a family. No, I mean your calling as a human, have you as a human, as a Christian been the person that God expects you to be?"¹⁶. In an empathic way, he thinks on and tries to understand every single person. His work and actions for the Catholic Church in Estonia reflect an incomparable entirety, a certain structure and beauty of work that flourished in the Holy Spirit, and was centred around the love of God and the Cross of Jesus, but we cannot separate it from the wisdom, in which we accept the Cross in every single action and analyse how we act because in the end everything must be approved by Christ. "It is good if also Christ could approve our life's work, if He approves of our actions, it is really good. Even if our life is hard, if disappointments and on our journey come up endeavours that remain without results, yes, if our life goes through misery, then it will do nothing to us. If Christ approves of our life's work then we haven't lived for nothing"¹⁷. In these words, the soul of the work life is hidden, not being afraid to admit the Truth and being open to others and to God's love, when our work is in accordance with our inner life and "our spiritual life must be a life of faith, hope and love, and through continuous prayer a contact with God"¹⁸.

Vocation, empathy and devotion

"Have you as a human, as a Christian been the person that God expects you to be?", asked Profittlich. We can respond to this question saying that yes, we can be, if we become aware of other people, and through others we understand ourselves. I claim that our vocation shouldn't be limited merely to description of our experiences, but we should pursue the understanding of a person's inner world. Edith Stein researched the problem: Who is actually the human being? According to Stein, also the empathy is nothing else than the question of being human, because we must treat empathy as a problem of constitution and answer the question of how the objects in the usual theories, such as the psycho-physical individual,

15 Reginald GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, O.P. *The Three Conversations in the Spiritual Life*. TAN-Books, Rockford, III 2002, pg. 13.

16 Eduard PROFITTLICH, S.J. *In Prison*. 1937, nr. 12. pg. 91.

17 Eduard PROFITTLICH, S.J. *In Prison*. 1937, nr. 12. pg. 90.

18 Reginald GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, O.P. *The Three Conversations in the Spiritual Life*. TAN-Books, Rockford, III 2002, pg. 15.

personality, etc. arise within consciousness¹⁹. Stein's disquisition of human being is based on the philosophy of Aristotle, and how the other person appear into our consciousness – as a whole his/her being with his/her inner world is given in our consciousness. Stein emphasized that a spiritual person is a higher form of being which case the soul is the unifier between body and spirit. It is very important in this case. According to her a human being is not a mere psychophysical person, but human person is psycho-physical spiritual living-being²⁰. And this is where the person's creativity also lives, which I referred to in the beginning of this article; and it's hidden, but to understand it make us important to find support in the search for the working-life spirit in the vocation to work.

Empathy is a human experience and most of all empathy gives us knowledge of the experiencer's inner world, then there is a need to attain the full knowledge of the working-spirit through the fact how much our work is a devotion, what is nothing else than the way how we acknowledge what we do and why we do it. We are aware of our actions and being aware is always causal and it has its aim.

In the 1930's Eduard Profittlich dedicated himself to the Church activities and tried to strengthen Catholic faith in Estonia. Estonia is a protestant country, a land (where this year we are celebrating 500th anniversary) of the reformation, which was also close to Profittlich's heart to work with protestantism. He made a lot effort that people wouldn't detach from the Church and that they wouldn't lose their faith, but would strengthen it, even through ecumenism. He wrote numerous articles about the Christian faith and that the Church being one – or at least towards unity. His vocation as a shepherd was to bring a many people to Christ, he did it with strong empathy which he showed towards every single person, at the same time being aware of his own needs and weaknesses. In the first issue of the 1939's "Kiriku Elu" he wrote: "in the essence of faith it is stated, that people who love God should not be enemies because of faith. Despite all the conflicts and spiritual combat there should reign some sort of God's peace in and over all believers and between them there must be some kind of secret unity, which God himself has blessed"²¹. In this article, he described how Christians should act together and that there should be a certain peace and reconciliation in them – solidarity towards one another in order to rebuild the Catholic Church in a reformed country. According to Profittlich as a shepherd we are able to do it if we acknowledge that we are one and by making ourselves understandable, then we are able to cooperate in every day service of the Church. And I believe this is a good example how he lived through the other person's feelings, thoughts, etc, because Profittlich was truly empathic person to understand every single person on that time in Estonia. But this

19 Edith STEIN. *On the Problem of Empathy* (Trans. W. Stein). The Collected Works of EDITH STEIN. Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross Discalced Carmelite 1891-1924. Vol. 3. ICS Publications, Washington, D.C. 1989. pg. 37.

20 Stein meant 'spiritual' as 'intellectual'. She describes that the person a carrier of a rational nature, based on Aquino Thomas, is claimed always as spiritual carrier. She explains these moments of 'spiritual being' – 'being-spiritual', in her book – *Finite and Eternal Being* (in The Collected Works of Edith Stein, ICS Publications 2002).

21 Eduard PROFITTLICH, S.J *One God, One Faith, One Love*. Kiriku Elu, 1939, nr. 1. pg. 2.

means that we are given interpersonal unity in faith, which is blessed by God and with this we come back to the teachings of Edith Stein, who explained how we're moving towards unity, which can only be achieved through love, and if we love, then our work has become our vocation.

The latter is well depicted by archbishop Profittlich's empathy filled dedication while serving the Church in the position that was trusted to him. But if there is no (this) unity of faith, how would it be possible to bring to life this mystery of the working-soul? Edith Stein responds to this through the notion of 'lifepower'. Stein calls 'lifepower' (*Lebenskraft*), a certain force that helps us to unite with one another, and that gives the soul some power to engage in certain activities. Stein explains in the book "Of the Philosophical Origins of psychology and humanities" (*Beiträge zur Philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften*) it gives also the motivating power²². That means a person is capable of opening one's soul also in rather difficult situations, and he or she is still motivated to carry out our duties with love and this way we can discover our soul in our daily actions. And as meant by archbishop Profittlich, when we are empathic persons and have this described "lifepower", we can carry the most difficult given duties, and it has its value in our life, and we are the persons as God expects us to be.

For conclusion, this was an example from of one person's life and how he sanctified his work using empathy. Empathy, guided by love and following to the Truth, gives meaning to our work and actions and also, of course to our relationships for others. I wanted to bring out only one perspective how we can think and act using empathy in our everyday life, but the root of sanctification lies in our heart in our soul, if we truly think who is the other human being with whom we act together and who are given to our life. And one tool to think about it, is empathy.

22 Edith STEIN. *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*. (Trans. M.C Basehart and M. Sawicki), The Collected Works of Edith Stein, VII, ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies, Washington, D.C., 2000, pg. 80.