



Co-Authoring Identity: Little Pencils in God's Hand

In a 1989 interview with Time Magazine, Saint Teresa of Calcutta famously likened herself to “a little pencil” in God’s hand:

“[God] does the thinking. He does the writing. The pencil has nothing to do with it. The pencil has only to be allowed to be used.”

Mother Teresa, in her characteristic humility, recognizes not only her success but her very identity as the result of God’s goodness and her readiness to surrender her will to God. Yet, from the perspective of a culture of busyness that defines surrender as unproductive non-action, Mother Teresa’s metaphor would seem to conflict with the example of her own life. Between maintaining correspondence with the Missionaries of Charity’s international network of shelters and aid centers, giving lectures and interviews, and meeting the daily demands of community life, it would seem she had no time in her schedule for surrender.

This perceived tension between work and surrender is keenly felt on American college campuses, where we more often appraise education for its purely utilitarian value as measured in terms of job-placement rates and graduates’ median starting salaries. It is little wonder that many students fall prey to the belief that their grades, extracurricular activities, and friend groups define them when their education is oriented towards the top of the corporate ladder rather than Jacob’s ladder. We need to cultivate a deeper appreciation for the Catholic anthropology and individual’s role in cooperating with grace to discover her identity in Christ.

Surrender is not inimical to productivity but, when met with God’s grace, is revealed to be the disposition through which the individual comes to an understanding of herself and her own capacity for creativity. Through self-sacrificial work and prayer, man and woman participate in the redemptive work of Christ and find, in the words of Mother Teresa, that God has been “sending a love letter to the world” through them.

With open arms, minds, and spirits, we invite you to attend “Co-Authoring Identity,” the nineteenth annual Edith Stein Conference presented by the Identity Project of Notre Dame February 9-10, 2024 at the University of Notre Dame. We are excited to welcome conference attendees to join us in person for prayer, conversation, contemplation, and service. Please join us!

To learn more about our conference and the Edith Stein Project, please visit our website at <http://edithsteinprojectnd.weebly.com/>.