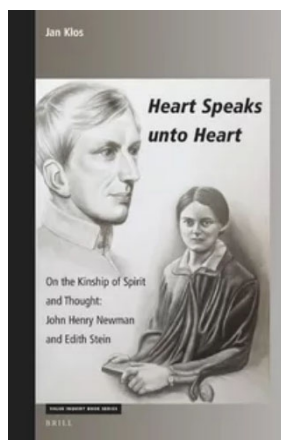


KINGSLEY MBAMARA SABASTINE

ON THE KINSHIP OF SPIRIT AND THOUGHT

Jan KŁOS. *Heart Speaks unto Heart: On the Kinship of Spirit and Thought: John Henry Newman and Edith Stein*. Leiden: Brill, 2021, 228 pages. ISBN 978-90-04-46019-5

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Jan Kłos, professor at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin is a Polish philosopher but writes in both in Polish and English. He has published many scientific works in the area of religion, society, politics, ethics and economy. Professor Jan Kłos' latest book does not depart from his main interest (i.e., social and political ethics), for it is dedicated to John Henry Newman and Edith Stein both of whom do not need a long introduction. Edith Stein, also known as Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, was a professional philosopher and specifically a phenomenologist but with an interest in theology. She published works in philosophy and theology. Newman, who was proclaimed a saint in 2019, is widely acknowledged as a theologian and

only but recently his merits as a philosopher, and contributions to philosophy are being appreciated and studied. They have remained considerably influential within and outside the Catholic Church and deservedly so. This is evident in the number of published scientific works, articles, and monographs under their names that seek to examine Newman's thoughts. (Newman in particular enjoys many types of scientific associations under his name that seek not only to examine but to promote and propagate his thought in a creative way. Stein herself shared in this effort as someone who was deeply

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influenced by Newman). Professor Jan Kłos' latest book titled *Heart Speaks unto Heart: On the Kinship of Spirit and Thought: John Henry Newman and Edith Stein* is a further demonstration or rather a testimony why the heroes deserve our attention.

Newman and Stein are special persons in demand not only in relation to their thoughts but also their personality and interesting life journey in search of the truth (that brought them to embrace the Catholic faith) which give their thoughts an even more amazing significance and depth. The author finds it interesting, exemplary and inspiring that Newman and Stein—contrary to what was popularly held as truth—made their personal discovery of truth (about themselves, about religious truth and reality in general) and held on firmly to that truth despite the consequences and the situation they found themselves as individuals. Thus, Kłos summarised his motivation for writing this book as loyalty to oneself, and this sums up the lives of Newman and Stein. Their similarity and significance follow from the fact that both left their comfort zones to embrace Roman Catholicism. But both had to overcome the rationalistic delusion, scepticism and indifference of their era and to manifest in their lives what the author described as living in context, by being at one with oneself and shared a personal approach to faith, knowledge and philosophy that is rooted in the common tradition.

The book is divided into four chapters structured systematically to follow each other and to give the ideas expressed and developed in the entire book a sense of unity and coherence, which is perceptible in the order by which each chapter builds on previous ones. The first chapter is dedicated to the biographies of Newman and Stein. The biographical notes did not merely recount the history of their lives. They provided vital information about the sources of their thoughts, the important intellectual, social and spiritual influences in their lives, the development of their thoughts as individuals and the context in which their personalities were made and their thoughts emerged and addressed. The biographical sketch of each philosopher further highlights personal concerns that impacted their work and life as well as contextualizing and situating their thoughts within the spiritual and intellectual heritage/patrimony of Europe.

It is the conviction of the author that the spirit and thought of Newman and Stein have positively affected the history of Europe. Therefore, our author presents Newman and Stein as “exemplars of personal prowess and dignity”. They are exemplars of how well both embrace and confront modernity, “with its emphasis on individual choice and negative liberty, can regain the lost world of dogmatic religion. There are two modes of reflection: philosophical and religious. Philosophy helps us define the person; religion places the person within the horizon of transcendence” (p. 205). This is the unique goal and significance or import of these biographies and form in part the motivation behind this publication. Given that and coupled with the personal tone that characterized the thoughts of Newman and Stein their biographical sketch as provided by the author becomes important if not necessary. Besides, whenever and wherever suitable the author adds as part of his methodology biographical information in support of interpretative

points made, which gives this book a bio-critical slant in addition to its well-manifested philosophical analysis and philosophical rigour.

The author sets a clear focus by intentionally selecting the areas and topics of relevance and consequently setting the boundary of comparison between Newman and Stein and the limit of the book itself. In the case of Newman, therefore, the focus is on the epistemology of religious knowledge. This is not an easy choice because to coherently articulate Newman's epistemology of religious knowledge as Kłos has done demands reading a large number of Newman's writings. Thus, chapter two takes up the detailed presentation and interpretation of Newman's theory of religious knowledge and supplies the immediate context and motivations behind this work as well as structuring his overall thought there into topics of key concern to this book.

The question of assent (notional versus real), certitude and certainty, faith and reason was necessary to progressing this particular enquiry. The interpretations and analyses of Newman's theory of knowledge by the author placed Newman as a philosopher in the tradition of phenomenology and personalism to emphasize the author's idea of the kinship of spirit and thought. This is made manifest by characterizing and emphasizing Newman's ultimate concern: the analysis of how the concrete human person as an individual reason, knows, assents to proposition and attains certitude and commits him or herself in real situations of life. According to the author, Newman's "principal position was that of 'metaphysics in the singular,' in which selfhood rises to the point of being the main cognitive centre. Therefore, Newman uses such terms as personal result, cognitive method. This centre is, at the same time, very unsteady and unreliable, for it is the living centre of the human being that undergoes all the contingencies of the living entity, but at the same time the only one, we have immediate access to. We have to use ourselves, however, all these shortcomings—hesitations, prejudices, uncertainties, weakness—notwithstanding" (p. 149).

It could be said that creating awareness of Newman as a philosopher of note is the main purpose of this chapter. This is something Kłos (2012) has done competently with other non-professional philosophers such as Graham Greene.⁴ In doing so he agrees with Edward Sillem, the editor of *Philosophical Notebook of John Henry Newman* that "Newman has indeed a philosophy to give that is at least of interest." However, Kłos thinks that Newman did not merely seek philosophy for the sake of speculation but as a living and guiding principle of life. It is philosophy as such that endeared Newman to Edith Stein so that the initial pure intellectual pursuit of Newman became for Stein personal encounter issuing into a profound dialogue described as "heart speaks unto heart." In the words of the author, "the formal and notional level of the language barrier imperceptibly turned into a genuine communing" (p. vii). This is the basis of the kinship or genealogy of the spirit and thought between Newman and Stein which the author

⁴ Cf. Jan KŁOS, *Freedom as an Uncertain Cause in Graham Greene's Novels. A Philosophical and Literary Analysis* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2012).

makes good to establish and emphasize. This aspect is further explored in chapters three and four.

Chapter three engages in a similar presentation and interpretation of the thoughts of Stein as was done in chapter two with Newman. As can be seen, this is an intentional reading insofar as the author deliberately approaches the text and chooses key areas of concern and relevance. The topics dealt with among many others are Stein's notion of *primaeva* life, the knowledge of the heart, selfhood, and the science of the Cross. Very crucial in the interpretations of the author is the endeavour to make manifest the many areas and points of convergence between Newman and Stein to further cement their kinship of spirit and thought. One of such important areas and high points of convergence is the human person and the centrality of the person with all his/her natural endowment/faculties which must be accepted in the process of knowing. According to Kłos, "[t]he person is, therefore, a special point of reference, a being who can learn what cannot be demonstrated and what must be left untold. The person can learn the way of science and accept in faith the winding path of mystery." The above thesis is appreciated and defended by Newman and Stein against the impersonal theories that were the creation of the Enlightenment movement especially "the secular trends of the epoch of reason and experience" (p.151). This is important to Kłos because each of his heroes in their peculiar circumstances responded to the challenges of modernity in relation to Christian life with its demand that each person assents "to the truth that surpasses the confines of his rational cognition" (p. x).

Chapter four features an in-depth analysis of the human person that centres on the phenomenological description of the interior or subjective dimensions of personhood which the author rightly recognized as the most significant aspects of a human being. These aspects include among other things human individuality considered along with its aspect of non-communicability as the source of originality, peculiarity, dignity and respect. The knowledge and expression of this interior aspect of the person (i.e., his individuality) can only be reached or attained and carried out respectively by the self which is best reflected in *rea assent*. Kłos' philosophical analysis reaches its climax in the affirmation that the person is not defined and determined by all that he or she shares with others but by human individuality which is connected with essential form and ultimately with the soul as the source of dignity and respect. This means that the person must be respected based on his/her individuality rather than universality (p. 177).

The book speaks to the epistemology of religious belief and philosophy of religion. In addition to the interpretative approach which the author claimed to be his methodology, the analytical and comparative approach are evident throughout the work. The combination of these methods serves to present the book as work in contemporary philosophy. Nevertheless, the book will interest not only philosophers but theologians, sociologists, psychologists and scientists concerned with truth and the possibility of truth in religion, the place of religion and religious truth in contemporary society. The language of the book is simple, accessible/ comprehensible and sensitive to all classes of

readers without watering down its content as a professional book in philosophy. To be able to accomplish once again a literary and philosophical work of this standard speaks volumes of Kłos' mastery of the English language and his competence in philosophical analysis. Kłos expertly extracts and expresses what is philosophy especially its personalist and ethical standpoints in the writing of Newman. And when he highlights the convergence of Newman with Stein, he makes more manifest and lucid this philosophy which is by no means an easy task. This is among others the strength of this book and its mark of originality.

Lastly, the author could be judged to have achieved more than he originally set to do. Beyond his goal of exemplifying Newman and Stein, he succinctly articulates the core philosophical ideas of Stein and Newman in particular. Besides, by reading this book you are brought to the knowledge of the new dimensions of Newman's and Stein's thoughts that are not so obvious namely, the personalism and social aspect of their thoughts. Above all, Kłos in this book raises illuminating but challenging insights associated with the social, religious and political context that Newman and Stein found themselves which inspired them, as products of modernity. The book in review does more than acquaint but also inspires you to research more about that context vis-à-vis our contemporary context.