

# **Personalism of Robert Spaemann and the Crisis of Western European civilization.**

## **Summary**

The aim of this doctoral dissertation is to show Robert Spaemann's personalism (1927-2018) as a deliberate answer to the current crisis of Western European civilization, which can be described as the "crisis of spiritual foundations". The author wants to juxtapose different views of the German thinker and reflect on their importance in the context of contemporary disputes. He believes that in this way it is possible to show a consistent and coherent personalistic concept of man, which is of considerable importance, because the bad consequences of action are very often the result of an incorrect - and therefore inadequate - anthropology. The dissertation is to show that the category of "person" is fundamental to philosophy, because it is the key to understanding ourselves as conscious and free creatures. It turns out that such a concept finds its justification only in metaphysical realism and was best presented in the Christian vision of creation. The problems of modern times come from a departure from this understanding of man.

Robert Spaemann follows various changes within Western civilization. The sources of its crisis are found in the era of modernity, when the concept of rationality of cognition has been reduced to the area of science and narrowly understood empiricism. It happened in the Age of Enlightenment. It was the result of processes related to the change of the philosophy paradigm (mentalist) and the emergence of modern natural science. The mathematical-empirical method became the model of rationality. The world ceased to appear as a being in itself, which has its own purpose and began to appear as a mechanical structure and the subject of possible manipulations. It resulted in dangerous anthropocentrism. Man instead of looking for his goals in reality, began to subjugate it, which made him lose the sense of his own borders, because he broke away from the teleological process he was a part of. In other words, reason has ceased to be a form of life and has become a highly abstract procedure for the emergence of judgments. However, it soon turned out that the mind itself lives from a believing in the power of its own principles. This belief could not be justified on the basis of the Enlightenment ideals of knowledge. Therefore, the extreme rationalism of the Enlightenment has evolved over time into irrationalism, which is now observed in scientist naturalism and various conceptions of antihumanism. This dialectic of the Enlightenment was

described in an excellent way by Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno. But let us ask a question: Are these changes within Western civilization an inevitable verdict of fate? It seems not. What's more, Spaemann proposes that Western European civilization can be saved by returning to the idea of God's Creation and some categories of metaphysics (including teleology, laws of nature). Since these Aufklärung transformations have produced such bad fruits, most probably there must have been errors in their background. Therefore, Spaemann postulates to rethink the assumptions of the modern worldview. He thinks that in this way we will be able to show the errors of modernity. This position will meet resistance and must win the discussion.

The first research hypothesis is that assuming the idea of God and personalistic realism, we get the fullest explanation of the world and our place in it. This is not obvious at first and requires a thorough justification. To confirm this hypothesis, it will have to be confronted with various currents present in Western European civilization (inter alia transcendentalism, naturalism, relativism). We believe that the explanations given by these trends must fail at some stage of the research, and by spreading the errors they contribute to the emergence of a crisis situation. And although in philosophy there are no arguments that settle matters in an indisputable way, we should seek a concept that will provide the fullest possible explanation of the world. We think that we find such an explanation in personalist realism, which is complemented by the Christian vision of creation. Thus, the return to certain premodern forms of thinking is not a renewal of something long ago overcome, but is dictated by a concern for understanding the whole. The choice between different paradigms depends ultimately on the perspective from which we see more. If we manage to clear up some problems with which other trends can not cope, our task will be fulfilled. This is the basic message of Spaemann's thought: to go beyond the *nomos* of the present being and find a horizon that will allow a fuller understanding of what is here and now.

The second research hypothesis is that the emergence of science and structures of a modern state did not have to lead to the break of continuity within the Western European civilization, and thus we can still look for the truth in the message of tradition. However, we must find a research perspective that allows to preserve the positive achievements of modernity, because opposing science or democracy does not make any sense and threatens obscurantism. Is it possible to find such a perspective? We will try to show that yes. Robert Spaemann takes a dialectic stance towards tradition, which leads to exceeding the limitations of old conservatism. For he does not mean to dig in the old positions, but to remind today's man of the real, thought absent in the consciousness of the era. The German philosopher uses

a method that consists in a reminder (*Erinnerung*). In this way, it becomes possible to defend the continuity of Western civilization, despite the changes occurring in it (*novum continuum*). To confirm this hypothesis, we will try to show that both science and democracy get their adequate foundations only in the Christian religion. That is why moving away from the spiritual foundations of Europe has led to the abolition of these wonderful achievements of humanity, which is now observed in the scientific culture and axiological nihilism. We think it did not happen without a reason.

The first chapter is the introduction to the main part of the work. We will present the diagnosis of the state of Western civilization and the idea of crisis. We will try to show how various changes have led to the rejection of the spiritual foundations of Europe.

In the second chapter, we will discuss the assumptions of Robert Spaemann's personalism. We will put special emphasis on the concept of a person. The views of the German thinker lead to the metaphysical and anthropological conclusions. He argues that God is the ultimate explanation of the universe and the fact that there are persons. Such a view is consistent with the Christian vision of man created in the image of God.

The next two chapters concern modernity and post-modernity. These currents led to many negative changes in Western civilization. Spaemann tries to show that they are not a necessary fate. They are based on false premises. It is possible to overcome them. He thinks that we should return to pre-modern styles of thinking.

In the fourth chapter, we examine the political views of Robert Spaemann. German philosopher defends classical political thought and the category of human dignity. This requires a return to the concept of human nature and its teleology.

In the last chapter, we intend to show possible ways of developing Western civilization. The basis of our considerations will be the concept of the person and the Christian vision of life.

This work defends a position that is called "neoconservatism". It can be summarized in the statement that beautiful things are difficult to create, but very easy to destroy. Therefore, only very important reasons should lead to a change in the foundations of our civilization. The world is constantly changing, but "new" does not always mean "true" or "good". Spaemann does not underestimate the positive achievements of enlightenment and adopts the tactics of preserving what is good in our civilization. His position is somewhat dialectical. German thinker emphasizes the immense role of Christianity in Europe culture.

Piotr Prodziewicz