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A Monolithic and Unmovable Tradition? A Comparative Assessment of Josef Pieper and Robert Spaemann

In his latest book on some prominent representatives of the German Catholic tradition in the period entre deux guerres Kurt Flasch tries to demonstrate the role of Michael Schmaus, Joseph Lortz and Josef Pieper in introducing Nazi thought to the German intellectual landscape. After Flasch's criticism the problem of the Catholic tradition has surfaced again in public debates. The paper aims at analysing Josef Pieper's notion of tradition which seems to me free of Nazi aspects, but is indeed problematic as it tends to regard tradition as something unchanged since the Ancient period of the European culture. In contrast with this Robert Spaemann has a significantly different approach to the phenomenon of tradition. Comparing Pieper and Spaemann can be instructive also because both authors had a close relation to Joseph Ratzinger, himself a prominent thinker with a strong emphasis on a very special notion of tradition as to be interpreted with a "hermeneutics of reform".