

Supervisor's review of Tomáš Schrott bachelor thesis "*They did What?*" *Reaction of Public, State and the Church to the Scandals of Catholic Church in Ireland*

Before I start my assessment of the content of this thesis, I feel obliged to briefly mention the difficulties that Tomáš Schrott went through during his writing process. His original supervisor, František Kalenda, under whose guidance he chose the topic and started to work on it, unfortunately left the faculty at the end of last year. I think that such a fact should not be taken lightly. As someone who supervised the thesis for only a few months, I would like to state that Tomáš Schrott did a great deal of work on its preparation. But, at the same time, I must admit that he didn't always manage to translate his enthusiasm for the topic into the final text itself.

I believe that the chosen topic, which the student defines as the scandals of the Catholic Church in Ireland (in the first decade of the 21st century), is extremely interesting and, so far, almost unexplored. This holds true not only for the Czech historiography or sociology, but also for the scholarship at the international level.

However, such topic implies a major obstacle that Tomáš Schrott had to deal with: the almost complete absence of existing secondary literature on which he could base his thesis. And this, in my opinion, is the biggest shortcoming of the final text. In terms of the secondary literature, the thesis relies almost exclusively on only four but well-chosen texts: 1) Daithi O'Corrain's book *Catholicism in Ireland, 1880-2015*; 2) Tom Inglis's book *Moral Monopoly*; 3) the book edited by Andrew Greeley entitled *Religion in Europe at the End of the Second Millenium*; 4) Susie Donnelly's and Tom Inglis's study *The Media and the Catholic Church in Ireland: Reporting Clerical Child Sex Abuse* which was published in the *Journal of Contemporary Religion*. The problem, however, is that Tomáš Schrott hardly works with them. He refers to them practically only once in the sub-sections of the thesis, not in the introduction. In other words, he treats them as sources of a particular information.

In contrast to how this may seem based on the thesis itself I can attest to the fact that the student was actively looking for the existent literature on various contexts, such as the modern history of Ireland, the role of the Catholic Church in modern Ireland, the history of the Catholic Church at the turn of the 20th and 21st century as well as the history of scandals of the Catholic Church in modern Europe. But his reading unfortunately didn't translate into the main arguments of the thesis.

The main questions are stated plainly: Did the scandals of the Catholic Church change the Irish society and how the Irish society has responded (p. 4)? In order to seek answers to these questions, the student works with a fairly broad range of sources. I believe that this aspect is the biggest strength of the thesis. The selected documents come from various state authorities, the Catholic Church as well as the contemporary media (newspaper articles and film documentaries). Here I want to emphasize again that Tomáš Schrott has become familiar with a much larger number of sources than is evident in the final thesis. For example, the Ferns Report and the Murphy Report are not the only investigation files that he read through.

One of the several weaknesses however is the absence of a clear concept which would help him grasp the complexity of the topic as well as moderate his schematic view on the relationship between the Catholic Church (and religion in general) and the society in Ireland. Although the thesis starts with the dictionary definition of the term scandal, I would suggest that the much more important term for the text is secularism which clearly has an undefined explanatory function. It provides the necessary broader context within which the story about the scandals is explicated to the reader as the cause and the effect at the same time.

The core of the thesis consists of two chapters (III and IV) in which the student examines scandals and their consequences in Ireland. In the first of these, he selects from two extensive investigative reports the cases of four priests to demonstrate key aspects of the abuse of power by church leaders and the dimension of sexualised violence, and he anticipates the responses of the

Catholic Church. If a particular problem with this chapter is the fragmentary nature of the individual stories, the following chapter suffers from a somewhat schematic understanding of the Irish society. The student divides it into three segments: the public, the state, and the Church. What is problematic is not the division itself, which I think is functional, but rather the way in which he deals with these segments. He presents all three in a uniform and oversimplified manner. This is most evident in the case of the public, which is represented exclusively by the media (contemporary newspaper articles and documentaries). This is based on the student's somewhat unproblematic understanding of the meaning of the media: "They worked as a narrator as they described the ongoing events and allowed public to discover the information." (p. 39) In general, media certainly can play the role of a mere mediator of unheard voices, but at the same time they mobilise readers in a certain way and can significantly shape readers understanding of the world. The media can provide some insight into the Irish society, but they cannot encompass it in all its complexity – standing not only in opposition to the Catholic Church but in much ambivalent positions.

In this regard, I want to put forward some follow-up questions for discussion. During the period under review, was there any social movement or organisation in Ireland that had the scandals of the Catholic Church as its main or at least very important agenda – either in the sense of criticising the Catholic Church or, conversely, defending it from the attacks? Are there any other ways in which public reaction can be explored other than through the analysis of the media? To what extent has the issue of the Catholic Church scandals impacted on the political development of Ireland in the 21st century? Why did the student choose these four stories of priests in chapter three? Can they be seen as representative or are they exceptional, even extreme, in some ways?

Finally, in relation to language and style, it should be noted that the thesis sometimes exhibits poorer language level which affects the clarity of ideas in those sections. There is also a problem with the list of sources and footnotes. For example, the book *Religion in Europe at the End of the Second Millenium* which is mentioned in footnote no. 92 is missing in the bibliography. The footnote no. 90 is completely missing either text or reference. In the student's defence, however, I must mention that he has significantly improved the overall quality of the text compared to the draft.

In summary, despite the number of downsides of this work mentioned above, I claim that Tomáš Schrott in his thesis demonstrates the basic academic skills and, therefore, I recommend grade 3 ("good") for this thesis.

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