

Review of the PhD thesis by Rev. Elias Matthew Carr, Can. Reg. entitled:

***“Es war schon in mir”.***

***Biography and Theology in the work of Raymund Schwager, SJ***

written under the direction of Rev. Dr. Hab. Robert Woźniak, prof. UPJP2,

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*The historical disciplines are necessary for the theologian’s investigations. This is due chiefly to the historical character of revelation itself which has been communicated to us in “salvation history”. Finally, a consultation of the “human sciences” is also necessary to understand better the revealed truth about man and the moral norms for his conduct, setting these in relation to the sound findings of such sciences. It is the theologian’s task in this perspective to draw from the surrounding culture those elements which will allow him better to illumine one or other aspect of the mysteries of faith. This is certainly an arduous task that has its risks, but it is legitimate in itself and should be encouraged” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian *Donum Veritatis*, 10).*

The doctoral dissertation written by Fr. Elias Matthew Carr is a valuable achievement in the field of systematic theology. The topic belongs to up-to-date research area of *Dramatic Theology* of Raymund Schwager (1935-2004). Responding to the demands formulated above by *Donum Veritatis*, the dissertation seriously takes into account the historical-religious experience as an important *locus theologicus*. By examining early theological concepts of Schwager through the prism of dynamic socio-cultural context of his life, Fr. Carr opens up new ways of thinking about the relation between theology and broadly understood experience.

## 1. Aim of the thesis

Fr. Elias Matthew Carr's study explores Raymund Schwager's biographical and theological background before and during the earliest phases of his encounter with the thought of René Girard (1935-1977). The author openly formulates and justifies his thesis that Schwager developed the main lined of inquiry independent of Girard's influence. I do find these explanations fully convincing.

Fr. Carr clearly expresses the aim of his doctoral dissertation. In the introduction he writes: "This dissertation endeavors to do [...] a consideration of the life and texts of Raymund Schwager. Appreciating the tensions and conflicts that shaped his world and his biography, on the one hand, and that he consciously placed tem front and center in his own theological deliberations, on the other, shows the usefulness of considering a theologian in terms of the drama of biography and texts and moreover, clarifies the meaning of his statement that "It was already in me" (p. 20).

In my opinion, this valuable introductory narrative could be additionally supplemented by a few concrete research questions. Such fundamental and intriguing questions posed in introduction could help to elaborate more creative and original conclusions in the final part of dissertation.

This dissertation rightly combines three major approaches: historical research, textual analysis, and theological reasoning. Methodologically, it is correct and justified. There are no doubts that Fr. Carr properly analyses early major works of Schwager using a historical-critical approach. He strongly underlines Schwager's concern about the phenomenon of social conflict that deeply motivated his choice of method and interpretations preparing for doing Dramatic Theology. Fr. Carr manifests his sensitivity to the epistemological requirements and reasonable understanding for the contextual theology which allows to create theological interpretations based on the experience of human existence and God's revelation as well. The doctoral dissertation proves that Fr. Carr is well-prepared to develop theological research. His historical and theological knowledge is solid and really impressive. Also his methodological skills are undisputed.

## 2. Structure of dissertation

Fr. Carr's dissertation consists of an introduction, four chapters, conclusion and bibliography. In the introduction drafted in a substantive and accessible way, the author provided the state of investigation, methodology and aim of the study. All these constitutive elements are described very well in accordance with the principles specified in the methodological handbooks.

The first chapter, entitled *Peripheries*, describes the complex background of Schwager's world. The author pays special attention to Schwager's birthplace depicting it through the lens of historical and cultural changes.

The second chapter, *A Jesuit from Thurgau*, presents a biographical narrative up to his appointment as to Innsbruck in 1978. The author accurately describes Schwager's childhood, his Jesuit formation and his cultural-political apostolate in 1970-1978.

The third chapter, *Neglected Texts*, analyzes Schwager's three principal early works (*Das dramatische Kirchenverständnis bei Ignatius von Loyola*, *Jesus-Nachfolge: woraus lebt der Glaube* and *Glaube der die Welt verwandelt*). The author discusses the aim, structure and content of these inspiring works. This part of dissertation is theologically most significant.

The fourth and last chapter, *Es war schon in mir*, presents the origin and essence of drama concept in Schwager's thought. The author analyses the genealogy and structure of drama. He also discusses drama in the Jesuit perspective on dialectics and the phenomenon of conflict in the Church community.

The dissertation contains an interesting conclusion. The author presents in it the results of his research in a competent and precise manner. He clearly states that his dissertation "synthesized a well-documented biography of Schwager's pre-Innsbruck years" and "shows the coherence of Schwager's early major writings as a progressive engagement with the problem of conflict and violence under the term of drama" (p. 290). Fr. Carr rightly underlines that his dissertation explains the origin and meaning of drama in early works of Schwager and also "contextualized Schwager's perspective on drama by placing it within a twentieth-century Jesuit tradition of considerations on dialectics,

showing Schwager's indebtedness to Przywara, Fessard, Moingt, Stierli and von Balthasar even as he developed his own distinctive theology" (p. 291).

The last section of the dissertation is the bibliography. It is extensive and sufficient. Its division meets all formal criteria. However, it is striking that the author didn't introduce the contemporary teaching of *Magisterium Ecclesiae* to the bibliography.

### **3. Content-related and formal assessment**

Fr. Carr effectively achieves the objective of research. Based on sources he presents biography and theology of Raymund Schwager in a methodical and rational way. He recognizes the real impact of historical-cultural factors on the mode of theological thinking. Fr. Carr confirms this link between local environment of life and the formation of open identity, in the perspective of theological education. Identifying the influence of life experience on the concrete shape of Schwager's theologizing seems to be the main achievement of this dissertation.

I highly value the most theological parts of the doctoral thesis. I mean chapter three and chapter four. It is really great that Fr. Carr presents so inspiring theological ideas found in early works of Schwager. These include: following Jesus (*Nachfolge*) as a motive of credibility for faith, the prophetic and evangelical spirit of criticism, faith as participation in the resurrection of Jesus, the ambivalent witness of the community of believers, Dramatic Understanding of the Church, the purification of Human images of God. All these deep and moving ideas are of big importance for the development of post-Conciliar *communion ecclesiology*.

The fourth chapter is especially noteworthy. It includes a broad vision of conflict in the Church. Fr. Carr cleverly discusses pluralism, synodality and co-responsibility. Indeed, these three elements are deeply correlated and keep the Church united in diversity (*unitas in diversitate*). It is also of great value to present a dynamic and realistic model of the Church which is not afraid of the world but is always ready to be a "sacrament of salvation" in and for the contemporary world. I fully agree with the notion of the author, that "pluralism resists the temptation towards a monolithic vision that would eventually fail to honor the implications of the revelation of God as the Trinity

and of humanity's creation, male and female, *ad imaginem Dei*" (p. 258). This model of the Church unity may encourage those who fanatically see in pluralism the only reason of all contemporary ecclesial problems and crises. Thanks to it, theologians may develop a kind of "healthy pluralism" which reflect the richness of God's gifts in the community of the Church. Fr. Carr rightly suggests adopting pluralism to describe the nature of Church, because "this pluralism is not only a matter of diverse points of view", but it also "seeks to accommodate, in the widest frame possible, the variety of human experience, creativity and expression" (p. 259).

Generally, the structure of the dissertation is logical, consistent and original. The research methods used by Fr. Carr are appropriate to the interdisciplinary and contextual type of the dissertation. The language of work is clear, correct and comprehensible. I am convinced that such a good doctoral dissertation should be published either in USA, or in Poland.

Although the author really cares about the methodological correctness, he has not avoided some minor errors. I make a comment concerning "Table of Contents". In chapter one (see p. 40) the author is not enough consistent in division of the subchapter 2.2.2 *Regeneration (1830-1848)*. If the author decides to introduce section 2.2.2.1 *Thurgau in the Regeneration (1815-1848)*, he should also consequently introduce a section 2.2.2.2. According to the methodological rules one should divide a section into at least two parts. Exactly the same applies to the section one in chapter two (see p. 69-77). Moreover, I notice a lack of chapter conclusion in chapter four. I suggest to complete it before publishing the doctoral dissertation.

#### **4. Issues for discussion**

I propose two questions for discussion.

- 1) To what extent can the dramatic understanding of the Church restore or strengthen her credibility in our postmodern society?
- 2) What is the meaning of "Gewaltfreiheit" in the Church often experienced as a *communio in conflict*?

## 5. Final conclusion

I am fully convinced that the dissertation by Fr. Elias Matthew Carr meets all the obligatory requirements for doctoral dissertations. I would like to emphasize that the dissertation, written by the author with wisdom and passion, gives an important contribution to the promotion of dramatic theology of Raymund Schwager that helps to build bridges between the Catholic Church and the modern world.

Concluding, I recommend to the Council of the Faculty of Theology of The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków to proceed the successive stages of the doctoral procedure.

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