

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Applicant

Mgr. Ing. Pavol Minárik, Ph.D.

Habilitation thesis

The Economics of Religion in Communist and Post-Communist Central Europe

Reviewer

Assoc. Prof. Martin Rode, PhD

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The present habilitation thesis presents a comprehensive exploration of the economics of religion, encapsulating a series of papers that collectively contribute to a nuanced understanding of this multifaceted field. Under the overarching theme of "economics of religion," the author delves into various dimensions of religious behaviour, institutional dynamics, and socio-economic interactions.

To a substantial degree, the thesis offers a large degree of theoretical research with formal modelling, mainly derived from a rational choice context and case studies that mostly attempt to underscore the theoretical findings. Nonetheless, there is also some empirical research that attempts to econometrically test model predictions. Most of the theoretical and empirical research that comprise the present thesis looks at individual behaviour in religious contexts from a microeconomic perspective (Minárik 2014, 2018, 2022a), but in Minárik (2021) there is also research that considers the interaction between the actors of state and church. Although little research in this collection thus looks at the public sector per se, the present habilitation thesis is clearly in-line with much of the research tradition in public economics, which usually presents a strong focus on rational choice in micro-contexts.

This evaluation aims to critically assess the strengths and areas for improvement within the thesis, acknowledging the author's scholarly contributions and delineating avenues for further refinement and expansion.

The habilitation thesis provides a series of important strength with respect to its integration and coherence, the expertise demonstrated by its scholarship, as well as the theoretical rigor and its empirical validity. In addition, the quality of the underlying publications is also of importance. Elaborating on these individual points:

- Integration and coherence: The thesis stands out for its adept integration of diverse papers, each coherently linked by a shared focus on the economics of religion. Through meticulous structuring and thematic alignment, the author effectively synthesizes disparate topics into a unified narrative, showcasing a keen analytical prowess and scholarly acumen.
- Expertise and scholarship: A hallmark of the thesis is the author's profound expertise and scholarship in the field of economics of religion. This is evident from the engaging and accessible literature review, which not only provides a comprehensive overview of existing research but also demonstrates a nuanced understanding of the subject

matter. Although quite broad in terms of the discussed religious institutions, there is somewhat of a comparatively stronger focus on the Catholic Church in this literature review, which I guess is partially justified because of the institution's historical importance in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic.

- Theoretical rigor: The thesis exhibits commendable theoretical rigor, underpinned by formal modelling within a rational choice framework. By employing a rigorous theoretical lens, supplemented mainly by insightful case studies, the author advances novel theoretical insights into the economic underpinnings of religious behaviour and institutional dynamics.
- Empirical validity: Despite its primarily theoretical orientation, the thesis incorporates some empirical research that rigorously tests model predictions and hypotheses. This empirical dimension not only enhances the credibility and applicability of the theoretical findings but also underscores the author's commitment to empirical validation and methodological rigor.
- Publication quality: An additional strength of the thesis lies in the publication quality of the underlying papers. With all papers published in reputable peer-reviewed journals spanning economics, religious studies, and political science, the author's research has garnered recognition and acclaim within the academic community. The inclusion of papers in esteemed outlets further underscores the scholarly rigor and impact of the research.

Potential areas for improvement in future research could be as follows:

- Empirical emphasis: While the thesis maintains a strong theoretical foundation, there is scope for a more pronounced emphasis on empirically testable hypotheses and research methodologies. Strengthening the empirical dimension of the research in future contributions could potentially enhance the practical relevance and applicability of the findings, fostering a somewhat more robust dialogue between theory and empirical evidence.
- Collaborative opportunities: For the present habilitation thesis, there can obviously be no question on the weight of the individual contribution in this research. Such a high degree of self-sufficiency in research activity is quite unusual in the profession nowadays, and it undoubtedly testifies to the high degree of individual research motivation and proclivity by the author of the present habilitation thesis. Still, the author may consider exploring collaborative opportunities in the future to enrich perspectives and foster interdisciplinary dialogue within the field. Collaborative endeavours not only facilitate knowledge exchange and innovation but also cultivate a culture of scholarly collaboration and mutual learning.
- Contextualization and interdisciplinarity: While the thesis effectively contextualizes the research within the economics of religion, there is potential for further exploration of broader implications and interdisciplinary connections. On the one hand, much of the focus lies on the economics of religion in the context of the Czech Republic, so there is potential to apply the ideas and hypotheses to other national contexts. On the other hand, further engaging with related disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and psychology could provide valuable insights into the complex interplay between economics and religion, enriching the analysis and broadening the scope of inquiry.

In conclusion, the thesis represents a significant scholarly contribution to the field of economics of religion, epitomizing the author's expertise, scholarship, and dedication to advancing understanding in this complex domain. While the thesis exhibits commendable strengths in integration, theoretical rigor, empirical validity, and publication quality, there are identifiable areas for improvement that warrant attention. By addressing these areas and embracing opportunities for further refinement and expansion, the author can consolidate and enhance the impact of his own research, contributing to ongoing scholarly discourse and interdisciplinary engagement within the field of economics of religion.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence:

- The present habilitation thesis focuses very much on religion in the context of Czechoslovakia and, following the decline of the communist regime in the late 1980's and the breakup of the CSSR in the early 1990's, in the Czech Republic. To what degree does the author believe the results are able to tell us something on the role of religion in the context of post-communist democracies in Eastern Europe? Is there something generalizable here, or is it all very much driven by country-level factors?
- In your literature review, there appears to be a focus on the Catholic Church's historical significance in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic. How did you navigate this historical context, and what led you to emphasize this particular aspect in your research, despite this area of Central Europe having a history of some religious diversity?
- Generally speaking, does the author believe that the low present-day levels of religiosity professed in the Czech Republic are essentially a long-run outcome of the comparatively harsher levels of repression under communist rule? How can one account for the significant present-day differences in religiosity with the Slovak Republic?
- The model of legal and illegal church activity under a repressive regime (Minárik 2018) are intriguing, as well as its recent application in a totally different context (Minárik 2022c). Is there scope for applying these results outside the context of religious organizations, for example in the autocratic repression of labour movements, civil society organisations, etc., or perhaps even in the study of illegal drug-cartels in Latin America, or similar? Could this potentially be done with empirical data, not only relying on comparative case studies?
- While primarily theoretical, your thesis incorporates empirical research to test model predictions and hypotheses. How did you navigate the integration of theoretical and empirical components, and what challenges did you encounter in this process?
- Due to the fact that this habilitation thesis is in the field of public economics, it would be interesting to know how the author generally values the contribution of the economics of religion to this field, and how his own contributions broadly fall into this area?
- Considering the absence of co-authorship in your research, could you elaborate on the rationale behind this decision and how it reflects your individual research motivation and approach?

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled *The Economics of Religion in Communist and Post-Communist Central Europe* by Mgr. Ing. Pavol Minárik, Ph.D. **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Public Economics.

Date: 27.02.2024

Signature: