

REVIEW

from

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Faculty of Theology, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" Kliment Ohridski

of a dissertation for awarding the scientific degree "**Doctor of Science**" in:

field of higher education 2. Humanities

Professional field: 2.4. Religion and Theology (Medicine, Psychology and Faith)

Author: Prof. Dr. Stoyan Iliev Chilikov, Department of Theology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski".

Theme: "The Feast of the Assumption in the Orthodox Liturgical Tradition (theological content of the holiday based on the hymnographic and amilietical texts of the Church)".

1. Subject to review

By Order No PD-21-521 of 29.02.2024 of the Rector of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" I was appointed as a member of the scientific jury to provide a procedure for the protection of a dissertation on the topic: "The Feast of the Assumption in the Orthodox Liturgical Tradition (theological content of the holiday based on the hymnographic and omeletical texts of the Church)" for acquiring the scientific degree "Doctor of Science" of the University of Plovdiv in field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology (Medicine, Psychology and Faith). The author of the dissertation is prot. Ass. Dr. Stoyan Iliev Chilikov, Department of Theology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski".

The set of materials presented by Prot. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyan Chilikov is in accordance with Art. 45 (4) of the Rules for the Development of the Academic Staff of Plovdiv University and contains the following documents:

- an application to the Rector of Plovdiv University for disclosure of the procedure for the protection of a dissertation;
- CV in European format;
- a copy of the diploma for the educational and scientific degree "Doctor";
- minutes of departmental meetings related to the opening of the procedure and the preliminary discussion of the dissertation;

- dissertation;
- autoreferat;
- a list of scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation;
- copies of scientific publications;
- a declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents;
- a reference to meet the minimum national requirements;

2. Brief biographical data

Stoyan Chilikov graduated from the Theological Faculty of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Kliment Ohridski" in 1996. In 2000 he became a candidate of theological sciences of the Moscow Theological Academy, and in 2001 this degree was equated and legalized by the Higher Attestation of "educational and scientific degree of Doctor". The applicant has two specializations in: Thessaloniki State University and Lateran University (Rome). From 2002 to 2009 he was Assistant Professor at Plovdiv University Lyuben Karavelov Branch, Kardzhali, and since 2009 he has been Associate Professor of Patrology at the Department of Theology of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski".

3. Topicality of the topic and appropriateness of the objectives and tasks set

The relevance of the studied problem (scientifically and scientifically applied) is directly dependent on the exceptional importance that reverence for the Most Holy Mother of God has for the Christian faith and for the church life. Among all biblical women, her person occupies the sole and highest place in the minds of Christians, which is understandable because she was chosen by the all-wise providence of God to be the mother of the infant of Bethlehem, and in the true sense of the word became the mother of the incarnate God the Word. The reverence for the Virgin Mary, which permeates the whole life of the Church, does not mean that her image "obscures" that of Jesus Christ or that the Mother of God is the object of separate belief and worship. The Orthodox understanding stands on a Christological basis – only from the Lord Jesus Christ we receive this image as a gift, as a revelation of all that is contained in His divine teaching and message.

4. Knowledge of the scientific problem

Ass. St. Chilikov is well versed in research in the field, so the literature he uses is appropriate. It impresses that its choice is purposeful and directly consistent with the specifics of the tasks set.

5. Methodology of the study

The description and analysis are derived as the main ones when considering the primary material. As for the analysis of the hymnographic texts in the study of the holiday, it is methodologically

central, which is justified given the ecclesiastical understanding of the celebrated event. Thus, in order to argue the thesis of his dissertation, along with the comparative analysis, Assoc. Chilikov also uses the hermeneutic method – the interpretation of hymnographic texts, as well as selected patristic words. I also find it appropriate, both with a view to tracing the history and development of the holiday and related aftermath and to examining its main elements. In general, the chosen by Assoc. Chilikov methodological toolkit is relevant and expectedly leads to the realization of the set goal, and hence to the resolution of the tasks mentioned in the Introduction.

6. Characterization and evaluation of the dissertation

The dissertation theme is related to the person of the Most Holy Mother of God and the Church's teaching about her. Given the wealth of theological ideas and because of its importance, the Feast of the Assumption is the most significant of the Virgin Mary's holidays.

In Bulgarian theological science there is no detailed study on this issue, but on the topicality of the topic, it is related to the following question: since hymnographic and patristic texts talk about the resurrection of the Mother of God, whether this means that there is an inconsistency or, moreover, a contradiction – about the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. So far, there has been no definite answer, no comprehensive research that has been carried out through the prism of the Orthodox liturgical tradition. That is why Assoc. Stoyan Chilikov undertakes precisely this – to do, as he puts it, a "dissection" (Autoreferat, p. 8) of an organically whole, showing and accordingly analyzing from an Orthodox position, the different layers. I welcome the effort to comprehensively cover and explore the topic not only through apocryphal literature or patristic texts, but mainly through hymnographic ones.

The working hypothesis is related to the claim that in the feast, in addition to the Assumption of the Mother of God, there is mention of a move and even – of her resurrection. If in the ancient order of the feast the main message is about the death of the Virgin Mary, then with the gradual development of the holiday, the amiletic and hymnographic texts already contain the understanding of the resurrection of the Mother of God.

The dissertation has a thoughtful structure: Preface, Introduction, three chapters, Conclusion, Bibliography and Appendices.

In *the First Chapter*, which is entitled "History, Structure and Narratives of the Feast", attention is focused on the narratives of the Feast of the Assumption. In order to reach the center of the scientific problem, it is necessary to trace the history of the holiday and consider its structure. The Church's attitude towards apocryphal texts is cautious and careful, given some erroneous statements, which contain. On the second hand, the studied apocryphal texts fill gaps in relation to the feast under consideration and ideologically feed some patristic sermons and hymnographic works for the holiday (p.

97). Therefore, according to Assoc. Stoyan Chilikov, it can be assumed that the apocryphal texts contain "a grain of truth which the Church through her God-seers perceives and retains..." (255-256).

The second chapter of the dissertation is called "Theotocology of the Feast of the Assumption on the Basis of His Hymnography and Patristic Words". Here stands out the analysis of the theological content of the holiday, carried out through the two main hymnographic and omeletic traditions – the Greek and the Slavonic. The examined hymnographic and omiletic texts for the feast praise not only the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, but also her taking with a body in heaven and her resurrection before the common resurrection of the dead. Ass. Chilikov argues why this does not contradict other hymnographic texts and patristic words; Defending the position that there is no modification of the "Christological theotocology of the sacred event celebrated by the Church." (p. 201). Through the study of these manuscripts (Sin 631, Sin 630, Ta and C 186), in addition to bringing out the disseminations, the author also gives his reasons in proving his working hypothesis: in the hymnography of the feast is chanted (albeit rarely) the resurrection of the Mother of God.

The third chapter of the dissertation: "Liturgical Practices and Holidays in Connection with the Feast of the Assumption", reveals the dynamics in Christian worship. It is known that as a science of worship, the Orthodox Liturgy reflects the coming changes in church life. In this chapter, the author also warns of the danger of falling into maryolatry: "... Any likening of the resurrection of the Mother of God to that of the Lord Jesus Christ is profoundly wrong" (p. According to Assoc. Stoyan Chilikov it is necessary the observance of the Funeral Service of the Mother of God to be so changed and consistent that it does not resemble the funeral service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The most ancient Byzantine and Old Bulgarian manuscripts have been selected for the study, which are closest to the time of formation of the hymnographic texts and the consequence of the holiday. It impresses the creative effort of the author – to substantiate and prove his thesis not so much through the academic developments on the research problem, as through the source material – the hymnographic and omeletic texts of the holiday.

7. Contributions and significance of development for science and practice

The contributions of the dissertation text are related to the credibility and the nature of the material through and through which their derivation and formulation are reached. I believe that the dissertation text is contributed in several aspects:

- It is the first such study in the Bulgarian theological science;
- reveals a new research field (through the study of the hymnography of the holiday);

- contains an analysis of the two most ancient manuscripts (the aim is to emphasize the theological content of the holiday);
- discovers the common between the hymnographic and the omyletic texts with the narratives of the holiday;
- makes a meaningful analysis of the following Funeral of the Most Holy Theotokos;
- proposes the creation of a new version of the Funeral of the Most Holy Mother of God (for future liturgical use by the Church);
- uses a new methodological approach (based on the hermeneutics of hymnographic texts).

8. Assessment of publications on the dissertation

Stoyan Chilikov applied two studies and seven articles published in Bulgaria and abroad. The reviewed publications are directly related to the topic of the dissertation research and reveal a long-standing, systematic and purposeful work of the candidate in relation to the research scientific problem. It is evident from the attached report that Assoc. Chilikov has 390 with 350 points.

9. Personal participation of the author

It is undeniable that Assoc. Dr. Stoyan Chilikov has a personal participation in the study. The presence and attitude of the author to the scientific problem under consideration is clear – it is not only detected, but prevails and smoothly directs the study to the next step in the presentation. That is why I define the contributions and the results achieved as his personal achievement.

10. Autoreferate

The autoreferate meets the requirements and generally reflects the basic results achieved in the dissertation study.

11. Critical remarks and recommendations

I share some of my observations, which are not critical remarks, but well-intentioned recommendations:

- a shorter and clearer formulation of the contributions (circumstantial obscures their visibility and significance);
- when the author mentions various myths in connection with the death and resurrection of certain deities among the peoples of Ancient Egypt and the Middle East (p. 42), or when he speaks of the pagan cult of the mother goddess (pp. 33-34), it would have been scientifically sound if "foot-

noted" studies were given on these issues (e.g. Iv. Panchovski, prot. L. Milin, Ep. Anne. Yanulatos, M. Eliade, Sh. Otran, N. Smart, F. Vian, R. Blok, F. Cumon, etc.). This, on the one hand, would be useful to the reader, and on the second it would reveal the bibliographic awareness of the author as well as the interdisciplinarity in the methodology used;

- In this direction is my last recommendation: at p. 42 Assoc. Stoyan Chilikov dwells on messianic expectations and the Old Testament understanding of eschatology. I am surprised that protopr studies have not been used. Nikolay Shivarov and Slavcho Valchanov (see Shivarov, N. Old Testament Eschatology – Emergence, Development and Meaning. Orthodox-Biblical Research, GSU, BF, VOL. 3, 1999; Valchanov, Sl. The Messianic Hope in the Old Testament, p. Spiritual Culture, 4/1973; Valchanov, Sl. Interpretation of the book of Daniel (a tool for the examination of the priests). Sofia, 1975, etc.). Of course, their inclusion is not mandatory, but it would reveal continuity in Bulgarian theological science.

12. Personal impressions

I know the prot personally. Ass. Dr. Stoyan Chilikov as a well-meaning colleague, fascinating lecturer and respected researcher.

13. Recommendations for future use of dissertation contributions and results

The dissertation is suitable for the training of students in the field of humanities in order to expand and enrich their training specifically in the field of theological knowledge. Given the topic of the dissertation work, the depth of research, the fascinating style of writing, the sources and research used, as well as the existence of an interdisciplinary methodology, I am also convinced of the broader orientation of the study – on publicity for the benefit of the Church and Christians.

Conclusion

The dissertation paper contains scientific and applied scientific results that are contributed to the Bulgarian theological science. The presented materials and the results achieved fully meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (RASRB), and the relevant Rules of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski".

The dissertation work shows that prot. Ass. Dr. Stoyan Chilikov has in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional competence in the scientific specialty "Medicine, Psychology and Faith". The author reveals qualities and skills that are necessary for the successful implementation of scientific research, as well as for the achievement of scientific contributions.

In view of what has been written so far, I firmly express my positive assessment of the conducted research, presented by the dissertation work reviewed above and the publications related to it, autoreferat, achieved results and contributions. I propose to the honorable scientific jury to award the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" to Prot. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyan Iliev Chilikov in the field of higher education: 2. Humanities, professional field 2.4. Religion and theology (Medicine, psychology and faith).

26. 04. 2024 year

Reviewer:

Prof. DSc Clara Asenova Toneva