

Review

from Prof. DSc Georgi Theologov Kapriev, Chair History of Philosophy, Faculty of Philosophy, St. Kliment Ochridski University, Sofia

for dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Science

Field of higher education 2. Humanities

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

Author: Prot. Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Ilien Chilikov, PhD

Topic: The Feast “Dormition of the Theotokos” in the Orthodox Liturgical Tradition (Theological Kontext of the Feast Based on the Hymnographic and Homiletic Texts of the Church)

1. Review Subject

By order No. RD-21-521 dated February 29, 2024, issued by the Rector of “Paisii Hilendarski” University of Plovdiv (PU), I have been appointed as a member of the academic jury to ensure the procedure for defending a dissertation on the topic "The Feast “Dormition of the Theotokos” in the Orthodox Liturgical Tradition (Theological Kontext of the Feast Based on the Hymnographic and Homiletic Texts of the Church)” for obtaining the academic degree of "Doctor of Sciences" at PU in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology (Medicine, Psychology, and Faith). The author of the dissertation is Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyan Iliev Chilikov, Department of Theology, Faculty of Philosophy and History, PU “Paisii Hilendarski”.

The set of materials submitted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyan Iliev Chilikov on paper medium is in accordance with Article 45 (4) of the Regulation for the Development of the Academic Staff of PU, and includes the following documents:

- Application to the Rector of PU for initiating the procedure for defending the dissertation;
- Curriculum vitae in European format;
- Copy of the diploma for the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor";
- Protocols from departmental councils related to the initiation of the procedure and the preliminary discussion of the dissertation;
- Dissertation;
- Abstract;
- List of scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation;
- Copies of scientific publications;
- Declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents;
- Certificate of compliance with the minimum national requirements.

The candidate has attached 2 studies and 7 articles published in Bulgarian, Serbian, and Romanian prestigious academic magazines.

2. Brief Biography:

Stoyan Chilikov was born in 1972 in Assenovgrad. In 1996, he graduated from the Faculty of Theology at Sofia University. In 2000, he specialized at the Moscow Theological Academy and defended his doctoral dissertation in 2001. He then specialized at the Lateran University in Rome (2001-2002) and at the University of Thessaloniki (2004-2005). From 2002 to 2009, he was a chief assistant at the branch of PU "Lyuben Karavelov," Kardzhali. In 2009, he was appointed as an associate professor of Patrology in the Department of Theology, Faculty of Philosophy and History, PU, a position he holds to this day. In 2011, he was ordained as a priest. Since April 2012, he has been a priest at the church "St. George the Victorious" in Darvenitza quarter, Sofia. Apart from the current work, he is the author of the following books in Bulgarian: "The Doctrine of the Mother of God in the Theology of St. Gregory Palamas" (2003), "Salvation of the Individual According to St. John Chrysostom: (2006), "The Beauty of the World" (2007), "Introduction to the Theology of the Fathers" (2007), "Orthodox Religion and Life" (2012). Archpriest Assoc. Prof. Dr. Chilikov read and speaks Greek, Russian, Italian, and English.

3. Relevance of the Topic and Appropriateness of the Objectives and Tasks

The research is undeniably relevant, both in theological and cultural contexts. Despite the abundant and powerful religious veneration of the Virgin Mary, the cult devoted to her, and the numerous secular cultural forms associated with her, there has not been a comprehensive study of the problematic circle outlined by the figure of the Mother of God, the liturgical feasts (with the undeniable center being the Feast of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary), her liturgical veneration, her place in Orthodox faith and life in scholarly literature so far. Stoyan Chilikov's research in this direction began during his student years, continued throughout his academic career, and culminated in the proposed dissertation text. In this sense, all levels developed in the dissertation are relevant: from outlining the problematics, to studying the history and structure of the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, together with the corresponding narratives, to research on hymnography, iconography, doctrinal basis, as well as on the apocryphal tradition, and the practices associated with it in religious life.

4. Understanding of the Problem

Archpriest Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Chilikov, PhD has an excellent understanding of the object and subject of the study, as well as the related scholarly literature. The bibliography attached to the dissertation, covering twenty-eight pages, encompasses manuscripts, source texts, and research texts in Bulgarian, Greek, Russian, Serbian, English, French, and Italian languages. This deserves particular attention in an era where researchers, apart from their native language, predominantly read publications in English, which is detrimental to scholarly ethos. Assoc. Prof. Chilikov deals with respect and critical acumen with both original texts and research texts, creatively using them to construct his authentic and original research position.

5. Research Methodology

The research is conducted based on a series of established scientific methods, authorially adapted to its subject area. The main methods include comparative, hermeneutical, exegetical, historical-philological, and cultural-historical approaches. These methods are precisely selected and accurately applied to each specific subject of analysis. Their adequate application leads to an adequate response to the research tasks. It should be noted that Assoc. Prof. Chilikov's analysis of hymnographic texts generates the use of a new methodological model in interpreting this genre.

6. Characteristics and Evaluation of the Dissertation

Assoc. Prof. Chilikov's dissertation is structured with a preface, introduction, three chapters, conclusion, two appendices, and bibliography, totaling 361 pages. The first chapter is titled "History, Structure, and Narratives of the Feast." It begins with a conceptual description of the veneration of the Virgin Mary and her place in Orthodox worship. It then traces the establishment and history of the Feast of the Assumption of the Mother of God, its dissemination, and analyzes its structure historically. This section also examines the apocryphal narratives associated with the feast and the patristic sermons.

The second chapter is titled "The Theology of the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary Based on its Hymnography and Patristic Sermons." Assoc. Prof. Chilikov rightfully views this as the "most important part of the dissertation." The overall framework here is outlined by defining hymnography as theology and the charismatic nature of theology, built upon patristic sermons. The sequential study of the hymnography of the feast (with a focus on the Slavic tradition and particularly on Old Bulgarian texts) and the doctrinal basis opens horizons for interpreting and defining key "moments," such as the Dormition of the Virgin, the angelic proclamation of her death, her death and the gathering of the Church's *pleroma* around her, her burial, assumption into heaven, resurrection, and glorification of the Mother of God. This part concludes with an examination of iconography based on hymnographic and patristic texts regarding the feast.

The third chapter is titled "Liturgical Services and Feasts Related to the Feast of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary," which not only sets the conceptual and substantive context of the feast but also highlights the fullness of the celebration and the presence of the Virgin Mary in the life of the Orthodox believer. By closing this circle, Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Chilikov successfully accomplishes the "super-task" of his study outlined in the introduction. He substantiates his thesis regarding the Assumption, the assumption of the body of the Virgin into heaven, and the resurrection of this body before the general resurrection of the dead. He proves the genesis of the feast from apostolic times around the glorification of the Virgin and the prayers addressed to her as the intercessor. Assoc. Prof. Chilikov presents arguments in favor of the thesis that the development of veneration and cult of the Virgin Mary occurs parallel to the formulation of Christological dogma. He establishes the historical establishment of the feast, initially focused on the Assumption of the Virgin, and only later including the idea of her bodily assumption and the transition from death to life, which begins with its "incorporation" with hymnographic and homiletic texts, completing the main corpus of hymnographic texts (as determined through parallel reading of Byzantine and Old Bulgarian sources) in the 12th-13th centuries. Particular emphasis is placed on establishing the fact that only after the 15th century there is a hymnographic tendency emphasizing the praise of the Virgin as a co-redeemer and comparing her to Jesus Christ as preceding the resurrection. It is important to reiterate that the reliability of the material used to support the theses is unquestionable, as it is based on original sources (textual, musical, and pictorial), clearly evidenced by the two appendices concluding the dissertation.

7. Contributions and Significance of the Study for Science and Practice

First and foremost, it should be emphasized that the contributory aspects of the dissertation are correctly and clearly formulated by Assoc. Prof. Chilikov, and the main point to be made is as follows: his text is the first comprehensive study of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary as it is according to Orthodox tradition. The study of hymnography associated with it, with its

characteristic emphasis on the Assumption and assumption of the Mother of God into heaven, is pioneering. The study of the two oldest manuscripts in the Byzantine and Slavic traditions, compared with contemporary liturgical text, is contributory. The articulation of the main thesis of the dissertation through its examination in the totality of inherited materials, i.e., hymnographic, homiletic, and apocryphal texts, as well as the argumentation of the fact that icon painters mainly follow the latter, are contributory. This entire line of contributory moments should be assessed as unequivocally significant for the development of theology - both Orthodox and Christian in general - and for the sciences of culture, whatever they may be called in today's academic world. Despite not being expected of a historical-theological dissertation, this one has a direct applicative-contributory, practical character. The substantive analysis of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos and the impending theological risks from its contemporary practice, Assoc. Prof. Chilikov justifies a new edition of the Dormition for its liturgical use, avoiding the danger of – ultimately superstitious – mariolatry. This step offers a practical key to reconsideration of other similar cases.

8. Evaluation of Publications Related to the Dissertation

Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Chilikov, PhD identifies nine texts as relevant to his dissertation: two studies and seven articles published between 2014 and 2023. One of the studies was published in the Serbian journal *Sabornost*, where three of the articles were also published, and the other in *Crkvene studije*, where one of the articles was published. Another article was published in the Romanian edition *Martyria*, three in volumes of the Plovdiv series *Misal, Slovo, Text*, and one in *Christianity and Culture*. All nine are directly related to themes developed in the dissertation. An apparent exception is one of the studies: “St. Augustine of Hippo and His Theological Views in Connection with the Development of Roman Catholic Mariology,” published in *Sabornost Nova Serija* in 2014. I say “apparent” because it is not difficult to notice that the topic is again developed in the dissertation. Indeed, this text discusses positions advocated by perhaps the most powerful Latin patristic authority. On one hand, this study outlines a specifically Orthodox interpretation of Mariology. On the other hand, the text insists that the teaching of St. Augustine about the Virgin Mary is essentially similar to Orthodox and different from Roman Catholic Mariology, which emerged later in the Middle Ages. This study is entirely on the topic of the dissertation, and in a structurally shaping manner.

In this section of the review, a look at the quantitative criteria imposed on our academic community, named “minimum national requirements according to Article 26 of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB),” is required. From this perspective, Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Chilikov, PhD, precisely covers all bibliometric indicators and requirements, exceeding the required number of “points” by 40. It is evident that his publications have been cited in relevant texts on the topic, by reputable researchers. It should also be noted in this section that Assoc. Prof. Chilikov has participated in a series of representative forums, and simultaneously has a solid public and media presence, contributing to the good reputation of both the department and the university.

9. Personal Contribution of the Author

The personal contribution of the dissertation author to the conducted research is one hundred percent, and the formulated contributions and obtained results are entirely his merit.

10. Abstract

The abstract of the dissertation is prepared adequately, taking into account all national and local requirements. It accurately reflects the main substantive points in the dissertation, as well as its other essential parameters. The main results are also well presented in the abstract. It even includes a list of texts cited in the abstract itself, as well as a list of the author's publications presented as relevant to the dissertation topic, which is not a mandatory element of this genre.

11. Critical Comments and Recommendations

Possible critical comments that I would be able to formulate regarding the content and research work of the author would be minor in view of the analyses conducted and the results achieved. I have no remarks to the set of materials.

12. Personal Impressions

My personal impressions of Archpriest Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyan Chilikov, both thanks to his publications and his collegial and purely human interactions, are excellent. I believe that the Department of Theology at Plovdiv University has been truly fortunate to attract him as a member of the faculty.

13. Recommendations for Future Use of Dissertation Contributions and Results

The main recommendation is in view of the practical application of the results of the dissertation. Considering the otherwise healthy conservatism of the ecclesiastical order, active approaches are needed to affirm what has been derived and proven in the dissertation. However, with this particular case, Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Chilikov raises a very serious question about the areas in church life where corrections are available, both from the perspective of tradition, disrupted over the centuries, and from the perspective of the contemporary state of the church and the person within it. A question cannot be resolved ad hoc.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation contains scientific, scientifically applied, and applied results that represent an original contribution to science (I have not noticed any trace of plagiarism; I should also add that I have no conflict of interest with the author). They meet all the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulation on the Application of LDASRB, and the relevant Regulation of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski." The materials presented and the dissertation results fully comply with the minimum national requirements adopted in connection with the Regulation of Plovdiv University for the application of LDASRB.

The dissertation shows that Archpriest Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Iliev Chilikov, PhD, possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific field Religion and Theology, scientific specialty Medicine, Psychology, and Faith, demonstrating qualities and skills for conducting research with obtaining original and significant scientific contributions.

Due to the foregoing, I confidently give my positive assessment of the conducted research, presented by the reviewed dissertation, abstract, achieved results and contributions, and I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award the academic degree "Doctor of Sciences" to

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyan Iliev Chilikov, Department of Theology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski," in the field of higher education: 2. Humanities, professional direction 2.4. Religion and Theology (Medicine, Psychology, and Faith).

April 5, 2024.

Reviewer:

Prof. D.Sc. Georgi Theologov Kapriev