

OPINION

for dissertation for the acquisition of the scientific degree

"Doctor of Science" By field of higher education 2. Humanities. Professional direction 2.4.
Religion and theology. Scientific specialty Medicine, psychology and faith

On the subject:

"THE FESTIVAL OF THE ASSUMPTION IN THE ORTHODOX LITURGICAL
TRADITION (THE THEOLOGICAL CONTENT OF THE HOLIDAY BASED ON THE
HYMNGRAPHIC AND HOMILETIC TEXTS OF THE CHURCH"

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from

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The dissertation work of Associate Professor Dr. Stoyan Iliev Chilikov contains 362 pages, which include a preface, an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, two appendices, a list of used manuscripts, a list of used sources and a bibliography. There are 2 (two) studies and 7 (seven) articles published on the subject. Of them, 5 (five) are in foreign editions. It is very difficult to write a review of a purely theological work, especially from the point of view of academic scholarship, from which the author repeatedly distinguishes himself. In the preface, he explains his motivation for taking up this topic. First of all, that it has not been studied in its entirety, and secondly, some incorrect, according to him, views about the Assumption of the Holy Virgin. Therefore, Prof. Chilikov sets himself the task of examining the feast of the Assumption on the basis, first of all, of liturgical, hymnographic and homiletic texts, and not so much on narrative ones. As the author will explain next, since the narrative texts are mostly apocryphal. This research approach is justified insofar as hymnographic and homiletic texts are understudied. Despite the caveats, narratives should not be underestimated, regardless of their sometimes theologically uncertain status.

In the introduction, the author defines the object and subject of the study - the theotology of the holiday based on its hymnographic and homiletic texts. As for methods of study, the main one is the method of the holy fathers of the Church, which is different from a rational study of a particular text. When the holy fathers quote some hymnographic or other patristic text, it is to argue their position on something they have penetrated through the path of contemplation. In this regard, the author's

clarification that this will not be a philological study is also important. Although a philological analysis of "manuscripts and sources" is being made, the connections between the original Byzantine and the translated Old Bulgarian texts will not be sought, but the main thing will be to reveal the theological content of the Assumption feast. Despite these intentions, he nevertheless used, and quite extensively, both a purely philological approach and a critical-historical one. . In this way, the composition really becomes interdisciplinary, although the field of liturgical theology and above all eortology has an advantage, quite expected.

But it "...has important points of contact with hymnography, homiletics, patrology, church history, Christian art."

I could only comment on the historical part of the study, as well as regarding the iconography of the feast of the Assumption, as it is difficult for me to assess the problematic from a theological point of view, being an academic historian who cannot understand arguments received along the way of contemplation. This also refers to the main problem that Associate Professor Chilikov sets himself the task of solving - about the Assumption or the Resurrection, with the taking of the body of the Holy Mother of God. To this end, he examines the position of both Orthodox and Catholic scholars on this issue. Although in several places he divides scholars into Orthodox and non-Orthodox (e.g. p. 23), which is not usually done in academic research. Perhaps we should even for a moment imagine what such a study would look like without the "non-Islamic" authors and their publications on the subject... The dissertation, as follows, begins with a literature review. From Martin Jugi's classic study, defined as fundamental, but characterized as confessional and tendentious, in relation to the promulgation of the new Catholic dogma on the Assumption from 1950. The review then continues with the main studies on the subject, regardless of denomination attribution of the authors.

The first chapter is devoted to the history and structure of the holiday. The narrative texts that lie at its foundation are also considered here. The first part is devoted to the cult of the Virgin and her place in the Orthodox liturgy. The author traces the veneration of the Mother of God, rejecting the idea of "pagan researchers" about the connection of this veneration with the pagan mother goddess, an idea widely advocated in academic scholarship. The argument is that in Christianity the Holy Mother of God is not deified. From the point of view of the dogmatics of the Orthodox Church, it is quite accurate. The overview of the veneration is comprehensive and well-founded, showing the establishment and development of the holidays in her honor.

The distinction with the holy holidays is well made, as well as the dogmatic and liturgical connection with the Lord's holidays. On this basis, the special position of the Virgin's holidays in the Christian holiday system is justified.

Extremely important, not only in view of the subject, is also the next part, in which death is considered as Assumption in the Christian Church, paying attention also to the Greek terms that are used

for this purpose: «ἀνάπαυσις» ("rest") and «κοίμησις» ("falling asleep"). Both traditions are well revealed in the legends related to the Assumption, and the Jerusalem one, which is the main one, is highlighted. The next part is particularly useful, where the history of the feast of the Assumption is examined, starting with the most ancient feast in honor of the Holy Mother of God called Catism. It is very important in this direction to show, and this the author has done briefly, but very comprehensively, the establishment of the date August 15, as the original date of the "Cathism" temple, and subsequently became the date of the Assumption. It is well shown that the Jerusalem tradition is the basis of the most important feast of the Virgin Mary. The connection and establishment of this feast is also shown, with some events of Roman history associated with the emperors Justinian I the Great and Maurice, despite the insistence that its establishment is primarily related to the liturgical development of the Christian church of that period. The spread of the holiday throughout the Christian world, both in the East and in the West, is explained in great detail and well.

Skipping perhaps the most basic part in this chapter, about the structure of the feast according to the Liturgical Typics, since I am not competent in this area, I note the next part - about the narrative sources for the feast. They are entirely apocryphal, but the author has explained well enough, the reason for their appearance, and their role in establishing the holiday. In this part he draws on Tischendorf's detailed study, noting the various apocryphal traditions. The patriarchal tradition, which is fundamental to the formation of the feast of the Assumption, is examined in appropriate detail. Here it is striking that the author adopted a broad definition of what is a patristic tradition, and includes in it authors from the 14th - 15th centuries. The part with the Bulgarian words for the holiday, with authors such as St. Kliment Ohridski, Grigoriy Tsamblak, as far as they are spread not only in the Bulgarian churches, but also in the Slavic-speaking Orthodox churches. Perhaps some chronological principle should have been followed in enumerating the various traditions separated by linguistic features, which would have highlighted the movement of influences, despite the author's declaration that he did not seek such an effect with his work.

The second chapter, dedicated to the theotology of the holiday, examined on the basis of its hymnography and words of the Holy Father, is the most important in the dissertation, insofar as the hymnographic texts are fundamental in the development and, accordingly, the study of the holiday. Here at the beginning of the chapter, Prof. Chilikov again makes the stipulation that he will examine this question on the basis of the theology of the church fathers, which he calls charismatic, and not on the basis of academic theology, which he calls speculative. I understand well what he meant, inasmuch as in the church, both in the East and in the West, there are disputes in this direction. Of course, we have no way to approach the revelations of the holy fathers and their charismatic science, not least because we lack contemplation, as well as communion with God, although a congregational faith is possible. After all, the theory (θεωρία) in speculative science is rational! Otherwise, one can support the idea that the hymnographic texts are equal to the patristic texts, in view of the subject. A quote from Prof. Kristian

Hanik is very appropriate here, explaining why homiletic texts usually take precedence, justifying the need to include hymnographic texts in such a study.

The part of the second chapter is important, where the Bulgarian hymnographic work regarding the Assumption - the canon of St. Kliment Ohridski and the triode of Constantine Preslavski is considered, as far as they will spread in the Slavic Orthodox world. Without attempting to take a stand on purely theological issues, I would like to note the precise and clear exposition of the matter of the Virgin Dogma, its establishment at the Council of Ephesus in 431, and its explanation. Here the long-term teaching experience of S. Chilikov is clearly visible, who is obviously able to explain complex theological problems well. It makes an excellent impression that the examples given by the author are from Greek and Bulgarian manuscripts in parallel, which, apart from being more convincing as evidence, can also serve as a comparison between the two traditions. Moreover, the Slavic texts are taken from a (perhaps still) unpublished work by V. Krivko. Here I would like to draw attention to the fact established by the author that most of the festive words of the Assumption of the Theotokos convey the famous case of the Jewish priest Jephunius, who tried to overturn the coffin with the body of the Mother of God and prevent the celebration of the Church. As the text says above, this episode is borrowed from the Apocrypha. In relation to the iconography of the scene, it is important to emphasize that it is also found in hymnographic texts, although rarely.

Personally, for me, the most interesting part of the second chapter is the one in which the pictorial representations of the Assumption scene are examined. It begins with a statement that I wholeheartedly support, namely that "Ecclesiastical icon painting is, indeed, an art, but above all it is a theology." Today this statement seems obvious, but there was a time when it was not thought so. This part begins with an overview of the most ancient images of the Virgin Mary. More images can be added here, but that's not the point. Further, the author, citing the well-established opinion that the scene was formed under the influence of apocryphal texts. He tries to challenge this finding to some extent. He is right that hymnographic and homiletic texts can also play a role in different cases. However, I do not agree with giving them an advantage just because they knew them well. I understand the author's concern that apocryphal texts are theologically problematic, but their relationship to canonical texts varies, incl. from the point of view of official church authority!

Here I would recommend that each individual image of the Assumption scene that is cited as an example be indicated from where it is cited. The author obviously used one of the general studies cited, but this should be indicated because some of these images are disputed, mainly over their dating. And

it is often decisive in view of the formation of the iconography of the scene. The third chapter is dedicated to liturgical successions and holidays in connection with the feast of the Assumption". It traces the formation of the modern rank. From this chapter I would like to highlight the part that deals with the laying on of the girdle of St. Theotokos. In the part devoted to the great prayer canon of St. Theotokos, which is very interesting because these prayer canons are also performed in case of public calamity, there are, however, some errors that must be corrected if the dissertation is to be published as a book. The author of this canon is the Nicaean emperor Theodore II Douka Lascaris. However, there is no definition of "duke" in front of his name, as Chilikov believes, and there could not be. Duka is the name of a large Byzantine family, which he received through his mother Irina Laskarina, daughter of Emperor Theodore I Laskaris and Anna Angelina, who was the daughter of Emperor Alexius III Angelus and Euphrosyne Duka Kamatyr. So it cannot be determined whether Theodore II Lascaris wrote this canon before or after his accession.

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The feasts of the Enshrinement of the Virgin in Blacherna (July 2) and Halkopratia (August 31) are very interesting, as they are widely popular among the Orthodox population. On this basis, a "new" saint is even appearing in some parts of Bulgaria - "Holy Zone". In fact, it is about the girdle of the Holy Virgin, which in the popular translation has become a saint. In this regard, it is important that the author

has traced the used lexemes (shirt, chiton, covering, funeral clothes, girdle) regarding the clothes of the Holy Mother of God, as well as their mixing, with a view to the study of the folk cult of the Mother of God. In the conclusion, the author once again reiterates that he sought the answers about the Assumption, "not so much on the basis of academic research on the subject, as on the source material." His idea is clear, but it should not be forgotten that he works with texts, even if he insists on hymnographic and homiletical texts, with authors of various divinely inspired fathers, which are sought out and published by academic scholars, not as a result of contemplation or any revelations from above, but as a result of hard and too qualified academic work. Finally, I would like to make some remarks. Already in the preface, the author states: "The liturgical texts of the Church in their essence best depict the content of hymnographic and patristic texts, because they are the core of authentic Christian life and faith and at the same time represent the source of all theology." There is no doubt that the liturgical texts are the core of the authentic Christian life, but they are themselves hymnographic and homiletical, and so a vicious circle of logic emerges.

In connection with the Slavic hymnographic tradition of the Assumption, S. Chilikov mentions the famous article of the Russian scholars A. A. Turilov and L. Moshkova (p. 30). In it they develop their hypothesis that the Canon of St. Clement of Ohrid on the Assumption was compiled ("they find great similarity with the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete on the same subject"). It is not clear why the author finds it unsustainable, "...because the dependence of one work on another is not a precedent, but occurs, although not often, in the old Bulgarian literary traditions". The "similarities", as the author calls them, are clear enough to be disputed. And there is nothing unusual in them, since such borrowings are not only not rare, but very frequent in Old Bulgarian literature! In addition, the famous French priest, a well-known publisher of theological literature Jean-Paul Migne (J.-P. Migne) was rechristened Jean Migne (J. Migne. On p. 216 the church in Zhicha is called Zhech, apparently because of the source that has been used. On p. 276, mention is made of the Empress Zoe, cured of an "unclean spirit" by means of the girdle of St. Theotokos, without explaining who this empress was. On the same page, it is not clarified which patriarch Euthymius composed the word on the occasion of the healing of the empress. Perhaps this information was spared because Zoe (Carbonopsina) was the fourth wife of Leo VI called the Wise, and Euthymius was the patriarch who recognized the illegitimate fourth marriage of the said emperor. Thus it would become clear what "unclean spirit" the famous Byzantine beauty was suffering from. In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that this is a fundamental work, a step forward in the development of research on the Assumption feast. It has all the qualities to bring its author the academic degree "Doctor of Science". I would recommend that it be published. Therefore, I categorically give my

positive assessment of the presented dissertation work, abstract, achieved results and contributions, and I propose to the respected scientific jury to award the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" to Assoc. Dr. Stoyan Ivanov Chilikov in the field of higher education: 2. Humanities. Professional direction 2.4. Religion and theology. Scientific specialty Medicine, psychology and faith.

5.5. 2024

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