

## **R E V I E W**

by Lyubomir Ignatov, Assoc. Prof., PhD,

on the dissertation work of Julian Agop Odazhiyan, doctoral student in independent preparation at the Department of Theology of the Faculty of Philosophy and History of Plovdiv University

"Paisiy Hilendarski" for the award of the ONS "doctor" in the field of higher education: Humanities, professional direction 2.4. "Religion and Theology", doctoral program: "Medicine, Psychology and Faith"

on a topic:

**"Liturgical and Musicological Aspects of the Great Doxology in the Slavic Manuscripts of the Rila Singing School"**

Scientific Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Apostol Delipapazov (Archimandrite Avksentiy); Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elena Georgieva Arnaudova

### **General description of the submitted materials**

By order No. P33-21-2360 of 17.12.2024 of the Rector of Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski" (PU), I have been appointed a member of the scientific jury to ensure a procedure for the defense of a dissertation on the topic "Liturgical and musicological aspects of the Great Praise in the Slavic manuscripts of the Rila Singing School" for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the field of higher education Humanities, professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology, doctoral program Medicine, Psychology and Faith. The author of the dissertation is Julian Agop Odazhiyan - doctoral candidate of independent preparation at the Department of Theology of the Faculty of Philosophy and History of Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski" with scientific supervisors prof. Prof. Dr. Elena Georgieva Arnaudova from the Paisiy Hilendarski University.

The set of materials on paper submitted by Mr. Julian Odazhiyan is in accordance with Art. 36 (1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of the University, and includes the following documents:

- a request to the Rector of the University for the opening of the procedure for the defense of a dissertation;
- a CV in European format;

- a protocol from the departmental council, related to reporting the readiness to open the procedure and with a preliminary discussion of the dissertation;
- dissertation;
- an abstract;
- a list of scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation;
- copies of scientific publications;
- a list of noted citations;
- a declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents;
- official notes.

The dissertation student has submitted five publications for review, two of which are in print. My review includes the five publications attached.

### **Curriculum vitae**

The author of the dissertation text was born on August 28, 1978. He graduated from the Secondary Music School in Shiroka Laka, where he began his professional career in 2002 as a teacher at this educational institution, also holding the position of conductor at the SMU. He also graduated from the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts in Plovdiv, obtaining a bachelor's and master's degree. Subsequently, he successfully completed two more master's programs at the Faculty of Theology and the Faculty of History of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Since 2014, he has been a doctoral student in Church Singing at the Orthodox Theological Faculty of Veliko Tarnovo University "St. Cyril and Methodius" with the upcoming finalization of the procedure at PU. In the meantime, he was a music teacher at the "Lyuben Karavelov" Secondary School in Plovdiv and for 10 years a teacher of church singing at the Plovdiv Theological Seminary "St. Cyril and Methodius", while also leading the choir at the Theological Seminary. He currently teaches at the Department of Theology of the Faculty of Philosophy and History of Plovdiv University, as well as at the "Kliment Ohridski" Secondary School in the town of Kostenets, as well as at the "Hristo Smirnenski" Primary School - Momin Prohod, where he currently holds the position of director. It should be noted that, in addition to the above-mentioned engagements, he also combined membership in the municipal council in Kostenets and leadership of the "Boili" Male Vocal Group. He held the position of Chief Expert on Religion at the Ministry of Education and Science, which was reinstated in 2018 in connection with the efforts of the Ministry of

Education and Science for better organization of teaching the subject of Religion in schools across the country.

From everything mentioned here, it is clear that the professional biography of the dissertation candidate is a worthy prerequisite for the successful and fruitful completion of the scientific work he has undertaken.

### **Relevance of the topic and appropriateness of the set goals and tasks**

In 2014, the psaltery-loving public celebrated the 200th anniversary of the last epochal reform of the unaltered notation. Our native Church commemorated this significant event by printing a special anniversary edition of its official publication, with which the congregation of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was acquainted with the history and significance of the notation reform carried out in 1814, as well as with the development and mission of Eastern church singing in general. In 2016, another important anniversary was celebrated – 200 years since the adoption of the reformed notation on Bulgarian soil. Thanks to the activities of the Rila Singing School and, above all, to the invaluable contribution of Hieromonk Ioasaf Rilets (c.1780-c.1852) – the bringer of the reformed notation from Constantinople to the Rila Monastery, Bulgarian church music singing became one of the first in the Orthodox world to adopt the “New Method” of notation. A true revival and flourishing of the Bulgarian psaltery art followed. With a remarkably fast pace, Slavic psaltery almost regained its position from before the five-century musical and cultural stagnation. The improved non-standard notation was also adopted by the other Bulgarian church singing schools: Tarnovo, Thessaloniki, Sliven, Ohrid, Edirne, Elen, etc., which in a relatively short time managed to prepare a large cadre of highly qualified church singers who took the path to the temples of the spiritually awakening fatherland, displacing foreign-language psalms. In practice, the Bulgarian ethnos established itself as one of the main carriers and guardians of the Eastern church singing tradition, a mission unchanged to this day.

In 2022 We celebrated the 100th anniversary of the completion of the church singing publishing activity of the notable Bulgarian music teacher Manasiy Poptodorov, and in the current year 2025, in which the defense of this dissertation work is also taking place, it will be 110 years since the publication of the first serious Bulgarian psaltery-theoretical manual, the work of the music teacher Petar Sarafov.

At present, along with the important anniversaries celebrated by the Bulgarian musical community with remarkably increased interest in our Psaltic art, everything written in this area, regardless of what problem and which era in its development it concerns, would be to some extent relevant and appropriate for the worthy commemoration of these significant events in the history of church music - in a general church and local (Bulgarian) aspect.

The present dissertation should be perceived precisely as a kind of participation in the celebration of these bright anniversaries, which otherwise would not have been possible without what was achieved in the Rila Singing School in the 19th century, i.e. in one of the most constructive periods in the existence of Bulgarian Eastern Church singing – the era in which the Great Doxology studied in Julian Odazhiyan’s dissertation appeared on the pages of Slavic-language singing manuscripts.

### **Knowledge of the problem**

The information presented in the professional and creative biography of Mr. Odazhiyan is sufficient evidence that the author of the dissertation text is extremely well acquainted with the problems of the type of singing he studied. The experience in church singing, which he undoubtedly possesses, is the means by which the correct solution to the questions posed is present in the presented dissertation text. I can boldly state that Mr. Adazhiyan's scientific work is precisely the result of his long-term church singing and music teaching activity and knowledge of the problem he has been working on in recent years.

### **Research methodology**

Mr. Julian Odazhiyan's research is of an interdisciplinary nature, which requires the use of a wide range of research methods. In accordance with the applied interdisciplinarity of the dissertation, I believe that the necessary, adequate and supporting methodology for the study has been selected. In other words: in each aspect of the study, the corresponding method successfully chosen by the dissertationist operates.

### **Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation work**

The dissertation work is presented within 257 pages, of which 6 pages are designated as Appendices and 15 pages as Bibliography. 401 footnotes have been entered and a total of 154

publications on the topic have been used, a significant part of which are source literature and musical manuscripts.

Overall, the dissertation work of doctoral student Yulian Odazhiyan meets the requirements for this type of scientific work. The presentation is scholarly, but at the same time light and understandable, despite the specific terminology of the topic. The necessary and rich in volume source and research literature has been selected. The long list of foreign language resources is impressive. All this is again a sign of the intensive scientific research work that has been undertaken, which has led to the realization of his work as a truly serious dissertation work, representing an undeniable contribution

*The introductory part* is presented in the usual (classical) form. With these lines, the dissertationist sharpens the reader's interest in the presentation of his master's thesis, introducing into his thinking an idea of the importance of the topic he has chosen.

*The first chapter* is presented within 47 computer pages and examines preliminary and general issues related to the chanting of the Great Doxology. In fact, these pages present in-depth exposition everything that, from a scientific point of view, represents information on essential issues relating to the Great Doxology as a whole. And more specifically: here is placed scientific information about the origin, development and composition of the Great Doxology, as well as about the types of doxology and their liturgical use in the Ancient Orthodox Church and in some pagan and non-Chalcedonian churches. This part of the work also touches upon issues related to the genre, dogmatic aspects, structure and editions of this chant.

In my opinion, what is presented in this chapter most categorically defines its author as an already established researcher and scholar. It is a significant contribution not only to Bulgarian theological science, but to a certain extent also to the general Orthodox one, since it is a summary and upgrade of the works of Russian, Greek and Western researchers. Orthodox theological science is enriched even with this part of the presented scientific work alone.

I would define *the second chapter* as a true introduction to the study of the liturgical and musicological aspects of the Great Doxology in the Slavic manuscripts of the Rila Singing School, accordingly engaging the reader with questions related to the history of the holy Rila monastery and, above all, to the activities and church musical traditions of the school. Prominent figures of

the school are mentioned, with emphasis placed on the life and work of its most active representative – Fr. Neophyte Rilski. Here, a brief overview has also been given, mainly of the Slavic-language, as well as the Greek-language and bilingual (Greek-Coslavian) musical manuscripts containing the Great Doxology and kept in the monastery library. Attention has also been paid to those that were created in the Rila musical scriptorium, but are not in its possession today.

It is a fact that many studies have been conducted on the Rila Monastery and the activities of the church singing school in this holy monastery with its most prominent representative, Hieromonk Neophyte Rilski, in recent decades, which have accordingly found their place on the pages of dozens of studies and articles, and even special monographs, and a dissertation on the contribution of Fr. Neophyte Rilski to the Bulgarian church singing work was recently defended. Nevertheless, this chapter has its own contribution, and it consists in the use of already known scientific information in a completely different aspect, not applied until now and necessary for scientific studies related to the Great Doxology. In addition, a contribution in this chapter is the systematized presentation of the achievements in this direction by our contemporary researchers, and in some respects an upgrade has also been carried out. All these factors contribute to the dissertationable status of the topic chosen by Mr. Odazhiyan.

*The third chapter* presents a fruitfulness of melodramas of the Great Doxology, more localized in the Rila church singing manuscript psalms, composed by hieromonk Neophyte of Rila. The object of study in this chapter are the Great Doxology of the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth voices. Their presentation is preceded by short theoretical notes for the respective voices, which have the vision and quality of a theoretical teaching aid for the presented voices. Such a musicological analysis of a certain type of chants, melodramas in the Rila singing school is being done for the first time. To the question: what is the benefit and meaning of these voluminous melodic findings? – the following should be answered:

1. The detailed analysis of the melodic line of the four Great Hymns studied will contribute to the correct and precise assimilation of the Eastern church singing melurgic tradition by those wishing to delve into the subtleties of the art of psaltery;

2. Through these analyses, the place of the Rila singing school on a pan-Orthodox scale should be determined, giving it the importance of a church music center of high rank;

3. Through them, the musical-compositional skill of our eminent revivalist, music teacher, melographer and codicographer hieromonk Neofit Rilski became known to the psaltic-loving Bulgarian public. It is precisely with this melorographic activity that he gains fame beyond our ethnic borders. The knowledge of his musical abilities, reflected in the third chapter of the dissertation, will also enrich our idea of him as a colossus in the Bulgarian church singing field. I admire what is written in the Conclusions section of chapter three.

*The conclusion* follows the usual way of presenting this part of the scientific works. In general terms, it represents a farewell to the reader, as an attempt is made to take stock of the work done, accompanied by confirmation and additional theological explanation of the achieved results. In this final part, based on the achieved results presented in the dissertation, the possibilities for further research on the topic are also indicated.

The abstract corresponds to the content of the dissertation.

### **Contributions and significance of the work for science and practice**

In our time, to the joy of all musicologists, there is a growing interest in the art of psaltery. This is true not only in terms of its theory and practice, but also in issues related to the essence, origin, origin and development of church singing, as well as the problems in the course of this development in its almost two thousand-year history. The unfinished and unwritten pages in it, more than ever, impose their scarcity and emptiness in anticipation of their writers, in the face of diligent and dedicated researchers in their work. This applies no less topically to psaltery within the borders of our homeland and in particular in the diocese of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Secular institutes studying our church music are showing success and to a large extent satisfy those seeking scientific knowledge about the history, theory and practice of the Psaltic art. Bulgarian theology has also recently shown success, but they are still insufficient in terms of the study and understanding of our Psaltic tradition. The present written work is a contribution in this direction. Mr. Julian Odazhiyan has chosen a truly interesting topic and, as is evident from the presented text, he has approached it responsibly and has made efforts and efforts to bring his dissertation work to a successful conclusion.

Given the special nature of the scientific work, the largely contributing moments, the disertability and the significance for Bulgarian theological science of the scientific work presented for evaluation were commented on during the examination and evaluation of the dissertation work.

In this regard, I dare to state that they fully correspond to the self-assessment of the scientific contributions indicated by the dissertationist, presented in four units of measurement at the end of the work.

The dissertation of Mr. Julian Odazhiyan provides a new ideological direction for research and opens a wide field for research activity. Hieromonk Neophyte of Rila is the author of hymns and other genres of church singing art, which await their scientific development, and in addition, the Rila singing school is also famous for other skillful composers, whose wonderful hymns deserve the attention of church music science. Let us hope that other workers in this field will also invest work in this direction and enrich the Bulgarian scientific research treasury.

#### **Assessment of publications on the dissertation work**

The list of publications from the documentation on the procedure, attached by Mr. Odazhiyan, reflects five publications, four of which are explained to be in print. When reviewing them, I found that at least four of them contain a single text with parts of the dissertation.

#### **Personal participation of the doctoral student**

It is evident that the doctoral student has made enormous efforts and remarkable diligence in compiling and presenting his dissertation, which ultimately we find in the form and quality of a serious research work, with its inherent scientific contributions. The proposed text presents almost everything related to the Great Doxology in a detailed but also systematized form. The doctoral student refers in his composition to the scientific achievements of prominent researchers in this field, using them as a basis on which he builds with his own scientific studies, which is actually the contributing element of his work. I believe that the results achieved are his personal merit, but the expert guidance of his scientific supervisors should not be underestimated, whose guidance undoubtedly helped bring the work to a successful conclusion.

#### **Critical remarks and recommendations**

In the dissertation text of Mr. Odazhiyan, imperfections and reasons for critical remarks were noticed. The reasons for them do not actually deteriorate the conceptual and contribution quality of the work done. Some of them are minor errors of a technical nature, and others I attribute to oversight or inexperience. According to the requirement for presenting an objective assessment,



at least some of them should be mentioned, and their mention here should be perceived as a collegial recommendation with the aim of bringing the dissertation to even greater impeccability.

Given the requirement for balance between the individual chapters of scientific works of this kind, it should be noted that this was not observed in the master's thesis: the first chapter consists of 47 pages, the second of 41, and the third of 130. It is clear that this chapter is intended to be the denouement of the presented issues and the emphasis should be on it in view of the specificity of the researched material, but still, in the interest of the balance between the chapters, the third chapter could be restructured and opportunities could be found for the separation of the fourth and even fifth chapters, in which the diatonic and other voices that clothed the Great Praises in music available in the Rila manuscripts would be presented separately.

The Bulgarian church music terminology used today has its origins in the centuries before us. During the Bulgarian Renaissance, it was confirmed and supplemented by our music teachers-Renaissance people. It is in the Rila Singing School that Greek chants and church-penchant vocabulary were categorically replaced with Bulgarian, leaving only a negligible number of Greek terms. This is perceived everywhere in our ethnic borders. For nearly two centuries now, this tradition has been strictly observed by generations of music teachers and ordinary church singers, and this is also embedded in church-singing literature. A certain exception is observed in some secular publications on church music-medieval themes, but recently, even in them, unification with the Renaissance and modern theological practice has been noticed, with only in isolated cases imitating the foreign-language tradition. This was also applied in the evaluated composition. Such writing techniques are certainly not signs of a particularly high level of scholarship of a given text. I am sure that the compiler of the present work wishes this creative achievement of his not only to serve his personal satisfaction, but to be accessible and understandable to a wide circle of readers, who will not need to have the Dictionary of Foreign Terms in the Bulgarian Language lying in front of them along with the work. All these musical foreign terms have their own correspondence with wonderful and sonorous Bulgarian definitions, understandable to all theological readers who will adequately appreciate the valuable work of the dissertationist. With exceptional goodwill I recommend that he follow our Bulgarian church singing practice with regard to the symbolic names and other musical designations.

### **Recommendations for future use of the dissertation contributions and results**

The merits of Mr. Julian Odazhiyan's dissertation work are in the necessary sufficiency for it to be well received among Orthodox readers seeking theological knowledge, especially in relation to church musicology. The information presented in it is very useful and timely for Bulgarian theological science and especially for those engaged in research in the field of Christian hymnography, church Octaichia, the history of church singing art and liturgical order. The work would certainly be interesting reading for musicologists outside theological science. I highly recommend its publication.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the good impressions obtained and the contribution of the dissertation work, I strongly recommend that the members of the esteemed jury join Mr. Julian Odazhiyan to the community of doctors of theology, giving a positive assessment of his scientific work and awarding him the scientific and educational degree "doctor" in the field of higher education: Humanities, professional field 2.4. "Religion and Theology", doctoral program: "Medicine, Psychology and Faith". I give such an assessment with satisfaction and admiration, and I recommend that the author exert good will and do what is necessary to publish and popularize the content of his dissertation. Its merits are in the necessary sufficiency for it to be well received among our working "Churches and Fatherland for the benefit" of our musicological theologians and the entire Bulgarian church performance.

Sofia, 02.02.2025

Reviewer: .....

(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Lyubomir Ignatov)