OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. **Yuliyan Ganchev Velikov,** PhD

Faculty of Orthodox Theology, St Cyril and St Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo

regarding the materials submitted for participation in a competition

for the academic position of *Professor*

at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv,

Field of Higher Education 2. Humanities, Professional Area 2.4. Religion and Theology

(Patrology and Dogmatic Theology)

In the competition for the academic position of Professor, announced in the State Gazette, issue 96/11.11.2025, and on the official website of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, for the needs of the Department of Theology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History, the sole candidate is Assoc. Prof. Dr Sc Stoyan Iliev Chilikov at the Department of Theology, Faculty of Philosophy and History, Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

1. Overall review of the procedure and the candidate

The present procedure was initiated following a decision of the Department of Theology and Report No. RD 21-31/08.01.2026 of the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and History at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, in accordance with Art. 4(3) of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria, Art. 2(8), Art. 57(2) in connection with Art. 62 of the Regulations for its implementation, and Art. 79(2) of the University Regulations, and subsequent Order of the Rector of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv No. RD 22-35/09.01.2026. The present opinion has been prepared on the basis of the aforementioned Rector's Order and Minutes No. 1 of the first meeting of the Scientific Jury held on 19.01.2026.

All necessary materials relating to the procedure have been made available to me. In my judgement, the procedure has been organised in full compliance with the relevant statutory and institutional requirements. The candidate participating in the present competition is a long-standing member of the academic staff of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, where he

currently serves as Associate Professor in Patrology and Dogmatic Theology. In 2024 he was awarded the scientific degree of Doctor of Sciences.

2. General characteristics of the candidate's academic activity

In the present competition the candidate submits three monographic studies, identifying *Eucharist and Asceticism in the Tradition of the Church* as his habilitation thesis. The twenty articles provided, two of which are published in foreign languages (English and Romanian), reflect participation in a range of scholarly forums and attest to the breadth of his academic interests: from Orthodox asceticism and therapeutic spirituality to Bulgarian Church history and ecclesiastical pedagogy.

The habilitation thesis (192 pages) argues persuasively that Holy Eucharist and asceticism (the ascetical struggle) are of constitutive significance for Orthodox ecclesiology (p. 11). This fundamental premise informs the structure of the monograph, which comprises three chapters and a conclusion.

The first chapter, *Asceticism and Eucharist in the Life of the Church*, introduces the pagan understanding of asceticism and the mystical asceticism of the ancient Jewish Therapeutae; it delineates the authentic meaning of asceticism and the sacraments of the Church; it seeks to articulate the ontological–eucharistic unity of dogma and ethos, the synthesis of asceticism and Eucharist (pp. 56–57), and outlines a eucharistic and therapeutic ecclesiology.

The second chapter, *Anthropology and Soteriology*, places patristic and liturgical texts in relation to the Church's reading of Holy Scripture (p. 78), clarifying the theological meaning of the "image" and the "likeness of God", expounding the doctrine of "free will" and "God's grace", and returning to the primordial character of the Church's liturgical and service texts as a primary source of the Christian faith.

The third chapter, *The Church and Life in Christ*, foregrounds the intrinsic interrelation between asceticism and Eucharist, elaborates the "practical" theology of the Church, and addresses "salvation and deification" through the doctrinal framework of "essence and energies".

Throughout the study one observes the candidate's clear intention to enter into theological dialogue on the issues under consideration and, with evident pastoral attentiveness, to engage in sustained

and wide-ranging argumentation, while at the same time offering a measured and critically aware engagement with particular strata of the Orthodox tradition.

3. Critical remarks and recommendations

I accept the contributions and academic activity presented by the candidate as accurately and conscientiously described, and as demonstrating sustained commitment to academic development in his capacity as a lecturer in theology (Patrology and Dogmatic Theology). The thematic focus of the habilitation thesis, as selected, affords the opportunity to incorporate and engage with the observations of Metropolitan Hierotheos (Vlachos).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is my considered opinion that the materials and scholarly works submitted for this competition provide sufficient grounds for a positive evaluation. I therefore recommend that the Scientific Jury support the election of Assoc. Prof. DSc Stoyan Iliev Chilikov to the academic post of Professor at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in Field of Higher Education 2. Humanities, Professional Area 2.4. Religion and Theology (Patrology and Dogmatic Theology).

26.02.2026

Prepared by: .....

Assoc. Prof. Yuliyan Velikov, PhD