

REVIEW

by **Prof. Georgi Theologov Kapriev, PhD, DSc**
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concerning the materials submitted for participation in a competition
for the academic position of **Professor**
at **Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”**
in the field of higher education 2. Humanities,
professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology
(Patrology and Dogmatic Theology)

In the competition for the academic position of *Professor*, announced in the *State Gazette* (issue no. 96 of 11 November 2025) and on the official website of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”, for the needs of the Department of Theology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History, the sole applicant is **Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Iliev Chilikov, PhD, DSc**, from the Department of Theology, Faculty of Philosophy and History, Plovdiv University.

1. General Presentation of the Submitted Materials

Subject of the review

By Order No. RD-21-31/08.01.2026 of the Rector of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” (PU), I was appointed a member of the academic jury in the competition for the academic position of *Professor* at Plovdiv University in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology (Patrology and Dogmatic Theology), announced for the needs of the Department of Theology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History.

For participation in the announced competition, documents were submitted by **a single candidate: Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Iliev Chilikov, PhD, DSc**, from the Department of Theology, Faculty of Philosophy and History, Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”.

Inventory of the Materials Submitted for Review

The set of materials submitted in hard copy by Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Iliev Chilikov complies with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of Plovdiv University and includes the following documents:

- Formal application.
- Curriculum vitae.
- Diploma of higher education.
- Diploma for the academic degree of PhD and for the degree *Candidate of Theology*.
- Diploma for the academic rank of Associate Professor.
- Diploma for the degree Doctor of Sciences.
- List of scholarly publications.
- Statement of compliance with the national minimum academic requirements.
- Declaration of originality and authenticity.
- Annotations of the submitted materials.

- Self-assessment of scholarly contributions.
- List of citations.
- Certificate of academic employment record.
- Documentation of teaching activity.
- Documentation of research activity.
- English-language abstracts of the publications.
- English-language abstracts of the publications.

The candidate, Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Iliev Chilikov, PhD, DSc, has submitted a total of **twenty-four scholarly works** for participation in the present competition, including **one monograph, two authored books** (one of which is based on his doctoral dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Theological Sciences), **eighteen scholarly articles, three textbooks and teaching manuals**, as well as documentation of **five research and academic projects**.

All listed publications and activities—with the exception of the book published on the basis of the doctoral dissertation—are accepted for review. The distribution of the submitted scholarly works by language and place of publication is as follows: twenty-two publications in Bulgarian and two in English.

2. Brief Biographical Information about the Candidate

Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Chilikov, PhD, DSc, was born in 1972 in Asenovgrad. In 1996 he graduated from the Faculty of Theology at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski.” In 2000 he pursued advanced studies at the Moscow Theological Academy. He defended his doctoral dissertation in 2001. Subsequently, he undertook further specialization at the Lateran University in Rome (2001–2002) and at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (2004–2005).

From 2002 to 2009 he served as Senior Assistant Professor at the Kardzhali филиал of Plovdiv University “Lyuben Karavelov.” In 2009 he was elected Associate Professor of Patrology at the Department of Theology, Faculty of Philosophy and History, Plovdiv University, a position he continues to hold.

In 2019 he defended a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Theological Sciences entitled *The Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos in the Orthodox Liturgical Tradition (Theological Content of the Feast Based on the Hymnographic and Homiletic Texts of the Church)*. A revised version of this work was published as a monograph under the title *From Death to Life: The Dormition of the Theotokos* by Fatum Publishing House (Sofia) in 2025.

In 2011 Stoyan Chilikov was ordained to the priesthood. Since April 2012 he has served as a priest at the Church of St. George the Great Martyr in the Darvenitsa district of Sofia. Since 2023 Archpriest Stoyan Chilikov has also been a lecturer at the Sofia Theological Seminary “St. John of Rila.”

He is the author of the following books: *The Doctrine of the Mother of God in the Theology of St. Gregory Palamas* (2003); *The Salvation of the Individual According to St. John Chrysostom* (2006); *The Beauty of the World* (2007); *Introduction to the Theology of the Fathers* (2007); and *Orthodox Religion and Life* (2012).

Assoc. Prof. Chilikov has a working knowledge of Greek, Russian, Italian, and English.

3. General Assessment of the Candidate's Academic Activity

Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Chilikov is the author of one university-level teaching manual and two textbooks designed respectively for the eleventh and twelfth grades of theological seminaries. During the 2024/2025 academic year, he taught nine courses at the Department of Theology, Faculty of Philosophy and History, Plovdiv University, with a total teaching load of 690 contact hours. In the 2025/2026 academic year, his teaching load at the same department increased to ten courses, amounting to 750 contact hours.

In addition to the aforementioned five projects—two focused on student internships and two on the organization of international scholarly conferences—Assoc. Prof. Chilikov has served as a visiting professor at Ca' Foscari University of Venice and has presented papers at five national and eight international academic conferences.

He has participated in the editorial boards of three academic journals (two based in Bulgaria and one in Serbia), has served as editor of two collected volumes, and has acted as reviewer of seven scholarly monographs.

Evaluation of the Candidate's Scholarly and Applied Academic Activity

The publications with which Assoc. Prof. Chilikov participates in the competition for the academic position of *Professor* may be classified as follows: one monograph in Bulgarian; four articles published in peer-reviewed and indexed journals, one of which is in English and three in Bulgarian. In addition, fourteen further articles and conference papers have been published, of which two are in English, while the remaining texts are in Bulgarian. To these should be added the three previously mentioned textbooks and teaching manuals.

It should be emphasized that not only the teaching materials, but also the other publications—and in particular the monograph—display a clearly articulated practical and applied orientation, directed toward contemporary ecclesial and theological practice. All publications are single-authored; I have not identified any works produced in co-authorship.

Scholarly Contributions and Citations

The monograph submitted by Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Chilikov for the present competition is entitled *Eucharist and Asceticism in the Tradition of the Church* and was published in 2025 by Omophor Publishing House (Sofia). The study addresses the life of Christ within the Church, focusing on the question of its synthesis with asceticism and, consequently, with spiritual struggle (*askesis* as *podvig*). The problem is examined through a network of fundamental theological topoi, structured by basic correlations such as dogma and ethos, image and likeness, freedom and grace, essence and energies, salvation and deification. Through the interactions operating within this network, the unity of the Eucharistic and ascetical principles is articulated and interpreted.

The research is grounded in a hermeneutical reading of the sources, chief among them the Holy Scripture, the writings of the Church Fathers, and—of particular scholarly significance—liturgical hymnography. The principal conclusion emerging from this analysis is that just as freedom cannot be separated from grace, so dogma does not retain its full force apart from its

realization in ethos. Special emphasis is placed on this latter point, tracing the operation of this dyad within the life of the Church. Within this conceptual framework, two significant ecclesiological models are critically examined: the eucharistic and the therapeutic. The second part of the monograph offers a detailed engagement with the subject matter, beginning with an analysis of the fourth-century debate on the relationship between grace and freedom, and proceeding to the positions that arise from it regarding the passage from image to likeness through the sacraments and ascetical struggle. Particular attention is devoted to an extensive interpretation of the Eucharist as the sacrament of sacraments, the core of the sacramental life, standing in fundamental harmony with ascetic practice. The third part is dedicated to an interpretation of the problem through the perspective of Palamite theology, with special emphasis on the concept of the energies of the essence. From this perspective, the principal potential dichotomies that would—and indeed do—emerge for Christian existence, ecclesiology, and theology as a result of a rupture between the Eucharistic and ascetical dimensions are systematically unfolded. In the final pages, the author addresses a number of contemporary questions concerning readiness for the reception of Holy Communion, the preparatory fast, and, correspondingly, the role of asceticism as an integral element of Eucharistic life.

The contributions of Assoc. Prof. Chilikov's habilitation monograph are evident even from this brief outline. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first monographic study on the necessary relationship between Eucharist and asceticism on a global scale. Of particular scholarly merit is also the treatment of liturgical and hymnographic texts within this context, whereby they are introduced and argued for as authoritative theological sources. In this way, the study adds a further, highly productive dimension to the investigation of Tradition in its multilayered and polyphonic character.

Since reviewers are required to take a position also with regard to the scholarly-applied and practice-oriented contributions of the submitted publications, I state unambiguously that the practical and applied dimension of this research is beyond any doubt. In the efforts of today's intellectually responsible Orthodox theologians and church leaders to introduce theological literacy and sound discernment as a response to semi-pagan forms of "popular religiosity," the conclusions of this study possess clear potential for direct application in the preparation—essential to Christian life—for the reception of the Eucharist and for its corresponding existential dimension, fundamental to life in the Church and in Christ.

A closer examination of the articles submitted for the competition shows that a number of them are devoted to issues related to the theme of the monograph, further developed through concrete *case studies*, thereby allowing for a more nuanced articulation of several key theological topics. Such is the reflection on spiritual struggle in the thought of John Cassian, Dorotheus of Gaza, and Porphyrios of Kavso-kalyvia. A particularly significant contribution is offered by the article on "joyful sorrow" (*charmolýpē*), published in English in *Ostkirchliche Studien*, which constitutes a pioneering study of this spiritual state in the international scholarly literature.

Another coherent body of studies with substantial scholarly contribution consists of publications devoted to Bulgarian figures who were major drivers of ecclesial life, among them Paisius of Hilendar, Clement of Tarnovo, Methodius Kusev, Boris of Nevrokop, and Seraphim

Alexiev. These works seriously challenge the entrenched prejudice regarding the alleged secondary character of Bulgarian theological and ecclesiological thought. Closely connected with these publications—and in many cases overlapping with them—are studies addressing the pedagogical and formative dimensions of the activity of Bulgarian church leaders and their social significance, with particular emphasis placed on the actualization of tradition and its vitality in the contemporary context.

A further group of publications focuses on the thematic field shaped by the anthropological and ecclesiological dimensions of contemporary church life, where dichotomies such as “clericalism versus anti-clericalism” are critically examined as consequences of the rupture between dogmatic teaching and ecclesial ethos. In this context, concrete pathways toward integrative theological and pastoral reflection are proposed. Of particular contemporary relevance is the treatment of nationalism and militarism from an Orthodox perspective, especially against the background of their aggressive “appropriation” and “legitimation” by certain other Orthodox churches. The contributory character of all these publications, as well as their direct relevance to the practical activity of the Church, theological educational institutions, and their not merely ecclesial but also social mission, is immediately evident.

Assoc. Prof. Chilikov has identified forty-one positive citations of the majority of the publications submitted for the present competition. It is noteworthy that, alongside citations by Bulgarian scholars, his articles (published in English, in Serbian, and in Bulgarian) have been cited by colleagues from Spain, Serbia, Greece, Italy and Hungary. This fact in itself answers the question of the impact of his publications on other researchers, including those working outside the Bulgarian academic context, as well as the recognition of the author within scholarly communities both nationally and internationally.

In conclusion, it must be stated that the significance of the scholarly and applied contributions of Assoc. Prof. Chilikov is considerable. All relevant quantitative and qualitative indicators, criteria, and requirements have been fully met.

4. Assessment of the Candidate’s Personal Contribution

The publications of Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Chilikov are entirely his own individual work, and the scholarly contributions they contain are exclusively the result of his personal research and authorship.

5. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

I have no critical remarks. I would, however, offer one recommendation. There is no doubt that the scholarly work under consideration constitutes a solid, heuristic, and academically productive body of research, which stands before excellent prospects for further development. I would encourage the author not to follow the unfortunately common pattern, observed among some scholars in Bulgaria, of curtailing research activity upon entry into the rank of full professor, but rather to do precisely the opposite.

6. Personal Impressions

My personal impressions of Archpriest Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Chilikov, PhD, DSc—as an academic, as a cleric, and as a person—are entirely positive.

CONCLUSION

The documents and materials submitted by **Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Iliev Chilikov, PhD, DSc**, **fully comply** with all requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, its Implementing Regulations, and the relevant Regulations of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski.”

The candidate has presented a **substantial body** of scholarly work published after the materials used in the defense of the academic degrees of *Doctor* and *Doctor of Theological Sciences*, as well as works published prior to the latter procedure but not submitted for participation therein. The candidate’s publications contain original scholarly and applied contributions that have received international recognition, with a representative portion of them published in journals and edited volumes issued by international academic publishers. His theoretical research demonstrates clear practical applicability, with part of it being directly oriented toward teaching and educational practice. **The scholarly and pedagogical qualifications of Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Iliev Chilikov are beyond any doubt.**

The results achieved by **Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Iliev Chilikov** in both teaching and research activity **fully** meet the national minimum requirements as well as the additional criteria adopted in accordance with the Regulations of Plovdiv University for the implementation of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff.

Having examined the materials and scholarly works submitted in the competition, and in view of the analysis of their significance and of the scholarly, applied-scholarly, and practice-oriented contributions contained therein, I find it fully justified to offer my **unequivocally positive evaluation** and to **recommend that the Academic Jury submit a proposal** to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History for the election of **Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Iliev Chilikov, PhD, DSc, to the academic position of *Professor*** at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology (Patrology and Dogmatic Theology).

January 23, 2026

Reviewer:
(Signature)

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