

OPINION

Prof. din Dimo Cheshmedzhiev

For a competition for the academic position of "professor",

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in the field of higher education 2. Humanities.

Professional field 2.4 Religion and Theology

(Patrology and Dogmatic Theology),

Department of Theology, Faculty of Philosophy and History,

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The only candidate for the competition for professor is Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyan Iliev Chilikov. For this purpose, he has submitted, in addition to the so-called habilitation thesis, also the monograph submitted for the defense of the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences". To these are added four articles and reports published in refereed and indexed scientific publications, some of which abroad. To them are added thirteen articles published in non-refereed publications with scientific review or peer-reviewed scientific collections.

The articles are directed in several main directions, in which the scientific activity of the candidate is. First of all, on the ascetic tradition in Christianity, from St. Anthony to some contemporary representatives, such as Porphyry of Kavsokalyte. The views of prominent apologists of this tradition are traced (John Cassian of Rome, Dorotheus of Gazki). Several articles are devoted to the pedagogical views of great Christian theologians, starting with John Chrysostom, whose ideas for Christian education are compared with the aforementioned Porphyry of Kavsokalyte. In a special article, the pedagogical views of prominent representatives of Bulgarian theological thought from more recent times are also traced - Metropolitan Methodius of Starozagorsk (Kusev) and Metropolitan Boris of Nevrokop (Razumov). A separate study is dedicated to the pedagogical ideas of Metropolitan Kliment Tarnovski (Vasil Drumev), a prominent church figure, Renaissance scholar and writer, and a much-discussed politician after the Liberation, whose church-pedagogical activity usually remains in the background.

In another article, based on biblical, patristic and hymnographic material, the relationship between dogma and ethos in the life of the Church is examined, and on this basis the collision between liberalism and fundamentalism in its contemporary development is examined. Sotirology is studied in the poetry of a contemporary church poet - Seraphim Alexiev. In a special article, the character and methods of the theology of the Holy Fathers are traced, placed in a historical context. The study of the patristic tradition is continued in a study devoted to the theme of the salvation of man and his sanctification in the work of the famous Byzantine hymnographer John of Damascus.

Two articles are devoted to various issues surrounding the founder of the Bulgarian Revival, Rev. Paisius of Hilendar. In the first of them, based on an analysis of his service and life, some conclusions are formulated regarding nationalism in the church. The life was written by the famous Bulgarian theologian Bishop Parthenius of Levkiy, also the author of the synodal edition "Life of the Saints". The service was created by the contemporary Bulgarian church psalter and hymnographer Argir Malchev. The author compares the two texts and finds that nationalism, which is strongly expressed in places in the service, is overcome in the life. Regarding the life, Assoc. Prof. Chilikov explains that because of the worship in Greek, the Bulgarian people cannot reach the truths of the faith. Of course, part of the depersonalization of the Bulgarians is not only due to the "centuries of Turkish slavery" in itself, but also because of the so-called millet system that existed in the Ottoman Empire, which divides people not on an ethnic principle, but on a confessional one. In it, Bulgarians are a "rum millet", like all other Orthodox. Paisii Hilendarski bases his history on the bourgeois principle of ethnic division and there is no way to avoid this, regardless of whether it will be called nationalism or patriotism. If Bishop Parthenius of Levkiyski did not somehow reflect this in his life, then he simply kept quiet about it. While the author of the service, Argir Malchev, did not bypass this result of writing the most popular Bulgarian Renaissance history, but even emphasized it. In this sense, the conclusion of Assoc. Prof. Chilikov, made about the service, that nationalism is the main theme in it, is completely correct. He tries to explain it without accusing Paisii Hilendarski of ethnophyletism, by highlighting the apostolic moments in the service itself ("Service of the Venerable and God-bearing Father Paisii Hilendarski, Equal-to-the-Apostles and Enlightener of the Bulgarians"). Of course, as I already shared above, faith and nationality during the "Turkish slavery" overlap to the extent that the idea of nationality at that time was confessional.

Chilikov's claim that the Athonite New Martyrs of the 18th and 19th centuries shone as a result of the spread of the "Slavonic-Bulgarian History" is subject to proof. Their cults have been well studied, as has their connection with some monasteries on Mount Athos (e.g., by K. Nihoritis, and some of my articles in the Orthodox Encyclopedia), and such a statement requires additional justification. This work also recalls the question of the death and burial of Father Paisios, a question that has recently again been the subject of increased interest. Despite the new opinions, S. Chilikov is right that the main hypothesis remains the one about his death in the monastery (not a hermitage!) of Hilendar in Ambelino (in present-day Asenovgrad), although not according to tradition, but according to some Hilendarian testimonies discovered and published by the American scholar Predrag Matejic, long-time director of the "Hilendar Room" at the University of Columbus, Ohio.

Another article examines the catholicity of the church based on a comparison of some early Byzantine hymnographic texts with those from the service of Paisius of Hilendar and the even later service of a contemporary saint such as Seraphim Sobolev. Particular attention is again paid to the work of Argir Malchev, author of the service of Paisius of Hilendar. In it, the author has discovered "nuances

of Bulgarian church nationalism”, with which it contrasts sharply with the Byzantine liturgical sequences, which emphasize the catholic nature of the church. Of course, the fact that Paisius of Hilendar is called a “Bulgarian star” cannot be considered as “ethnophyletism”. In Byzantine texts, such ethnic definitions are avoided, since, being an empire, Byzantium is polyethnic and there is no way to emphasize the ethnic origin of a saint. Especially with the universalist claims of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which continued after the destruction of the empire. Furthermore, the majority of Byzantine hagiography and hymnography was written in Greek, and ethnic characteristics such as “Greek, Greek” or “Hellen, Hellenic” in such texts are unlikely, insofar as these definitions are either contemptuous (the former) or synonymous with pagan (the latter). Although, with a systematic approach based on a broader material, and not just on individual examples, exceptions can be found, especially in more recent times. In this regard, for Argir Malchev, there were especially many examples from medieval Bulgarian literature (without knowing how much he knew them), where ethnic definitions appeared at its dawn, and became widespread at the beginning of the 13th century, and then continued. I do not know how adequate the examples with the service of Seraphim of Sarov are, given the circumstances of his canonization as time and place. Perhaps the texts of other similar contemporary Russian saints, who have shone in large numbers recently, should also be attracted? However, it is obvious that the issue is very interesting and deserves detailed and systematic study, as it is also considered rather one-sidedly in citizen scientist research.

I would also like to draw attention to the study of some new church denominations in our time, little known as the so-called Thracian Church, defined as a sect. Initially, I thought that it could be defined as heretical, but still, heresies are based on the same sacred texts, which are interpreted in a different way from Orthodoxy. Here we are talking about texts invented by the founders themselves, with claims to “antiquity” and “authenticity”, as well as relevant “historical” hypotheses. They are most often associated with the Thracians, beloved by such people, and their place in the development of ancient civilizations, including the Egyptian one. Particularly noteworthy in this case is the “discovery” of the Besiktas Bible, an obvious contribution to the development of science, worthy of the Nobel Prize. According to some opinions, such “discoverers” should not be paid attention to so as not to popularize themselves, but I believe that Assoc. Prof. Chilikov has quite rightly focused on this “church” and has accurately defined its essence. It is striking that in this analysis he does not succumb to emotions (and he could!), but presents the main ideas of Stefan Gai and his brother analytically, and shows with arguments their insolvency from a theological point of view. He is also absolutely right when he assumes that such trends should be analyzed from the point of view of the causes that give rise to them, as a great Bulgarian cleric and writer from the 10th century did, namely Presbyter Cosmas!

Further, a study of the secularization processes in the contemporary church is presented, based on an analysis of contemporary theological discourse, which, according to the author, is increasingly directed towards rationalistic forms of thinking, called scholastic by him. Particularly relevant today is

the article dedicated to war from a theological point of view, based on biblical, patristic and contemporary theological texts.

A special study is devoted to one of the eternal theological problems - the veneration of the Christian icon and the Eucharist, as well as its role in Christian eschatology.

In the article dedicated to suffering and sin in the Constantinople Euchology, based on a copy from the 11th century, it is compared with some contemporary tribbles, and especially with the incantatory prayers in them. The prayer "Against Various Diseases" is subjected to a detailed analysis. In direct connection with the candidate's priestly activity is the article dedicated to the Paschal Canon and the Canon of Holy Saturday, in which their soteriological nature is examined. It analyzes the main dogmatic themes in both canons and draws conclusions regarding the understanding of the salvation of Orthodox Christians.

To these studies we must add three university theology textbooks, also used in theological schools. The first is entitled "Orthodox Faith and Life" and can be used both as a contemporary catechism and in the disciplines of dogmatic theology and ecclesiology. The second, co-authored, is on dogmatics, and is intended for accompanying training for 11th grade students in seminaries. A third textbook is also on dogmatics, but for 12th grade seminaries, as accompanying training. These textbooks are supplemented by an essay on the prayer "Our Father" in an electronic version, which is also intended for wider use.

The main monographic work with which the candidate participates in the competition for professorship, here called habilitation, is entitled: "Eucharist and asceticism in the tradition of the Church. Sofia: Omofor Publishing House, 2025.

It first examines the synthesis of the Eucharist and the feat, as one of the most important themes in the earthly life of Christ. The main thesis is built on several basic theological concepts, studied in correlation - dogma and ethos, grace and freedom, essence and energy, salvation and deification. In their context, the problem of the relationship between the Eucharist and asceticism is examined. The sacred texts - Holy Scripture, the works of the Holy Fathers of the Church, liturgical hymnography, read hermeneutically, proceed from the rule that dogma cannot be separated from ethos, grace from freedom and essence from energy. In this way, asceticism and Eucharist are considered as interpenetrating realities, called here perichoresis (this term is usually used in theology to define the relationship between the two natures of Christ). Assoc. Prof. S. Chilikov quite rightly claims that the synthesis of the Eucharist and the feat is inconceivable without the synthesis of dogma and ethos. Therefore, at the beginning, the meaning of the relationship between them is considered.

The first chapter presents the "two ecclesiologies" - the eucharistic and the therapeutic, often opposed, with their arguments and representatives. The second chapter continues the study of the themes

of the image and likeness of God, freedom and grace, the sacraments of the church. Main attention is paid to the theological disputes in the 4th century regarding grace and freedom, which is preparatory for another famous debate - about the image and likeness through the feat and the sacraments. The Eucharist, as the author has well shown, is not only one of the sacraments, but is the center of church life, which gives meaning to all the other sacraments. Together with the feat, he continues, the Eucharist shapes man as the likeness of God. In this sense, freedom determines the personal choice on the path to the likeness of God. Logically, the third chapter continues with the problem of salvation through the sacraments and the feat, in the light of the Palamite teaching about the essence and energy of God. As is well known, Gregory Palamas is the main Orthodox theologian who develops this idea, in connection with the Varlamite disputes. The Eucharist is shown as participation in the divine-humanity of Christ. The hermitic way of life is considered as approaching the divine-human Christ, in his human form. In this context, the possible contradictions between the eucharistic and ascetic Christian life and their consequences for ecclesiological life are shown. These contradictions are considered in their dialectical dynamics, which in itself is very interesting. It is also important that Assoc. Prof. Chilikov seeks a connection with the Eucharistic practice, incl. the modern one, and thus provides an explanation of some questions related to the preparation and reception of the Holy Gifts.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that the main problem with such works is not to introduce confessional elements into an academic study. The author himself emphasizes this (p. 34). I must say right away that he has successfully dealt with this problem, within the limits of what is possible. Although in some places this was clearly not possible (see, for example, p. 19). Based on my academic competences, I assess that Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyan Iliev Chilikov, with the presented scientific production, has all the qualities to receive the claimed scientific title of "professor" at the Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski"! I will vote for this with conviction and I call on the esteemed scientific jury to also support my decision!

Based on the above, I strongly recommend that the Scientific Jury prepare a report to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History, proposing the election of Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Iliev Chilikov, DSc, to the academic position of Professor at the University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski" in the field of Humanities, professional field 2.4 Religion and Theology (Patrology and Dogmatic Theology).

Plovdiv

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Cyril and Methodius Scientific Center

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