

**OPINION**  
**ON THE DISSERTATION OF PLAMEN MIHAYLOV**  
**"BULGARIAN SAINTS AND MONASTERIES**  
**IN PILGRIMIDGE AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES AMONG**  
**YOUTH"**  
**FOR THE AWARD OF THE EDUCATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC**  
**DEGREE "DOCTOR" IN PROFESSIONAL FIELD 2.4. RELIGION**  
**AND THEOLOGY (*Christian Pilgrimidge*)**  
**by Prof. Nina Dimitrova**

Plamen Mihailov has an impressively diverse biography, but in connection with the procedure for the defense of his dissertation, the fact that he holds a master's degree from the Faculty of Theology of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and that the dissertation research has a direct thematic connection with the defended thesis.

I am appointed to the current jury by order of the Rector No. RD 38-347/02. 07. 2024.

The dissertation is structured in two parts, which contain seven chapters. Besides them, it includes a preface, an introduction, a conclusion, a list of the literature used (source, commentary and Internet resources, a total of 150 titles), as well as several appendices. They total 207 pages.

The preface presents the personal motivations for writing the dissertation research, and the introduction contains the mandatory components such as topicality of the topic, object and subject, goal and tasks, methodological tools, state of research in the scientific field so far.

The actuality is based on the fact that the work of the saints in the national history is underestimated.

The purpose is clearly formulated (note that the text as a whole is written clearly and comprehensibly); in the rubric *object* of the dissertation, it is agreed that a selection has been made in the desired respect and 70 persons (of Bulgarian origin) have been presented to our attention, as well as – also selected – spiritual schools and holy abodes.

The remarkable thing about Plamen Mihaylov's work offered for review is that it is mainly of a practical and applied orientation.

The technical-mathematical education of the doctoral student is an essential condition for the satisfactory result of the dissertation research, which aimed to create an interactive map intended for the youth and an annual program for individual or group pilgrimages related to Bulgarian saints and monasteries. The author also offers other, thematically related, educational materials.

Although the successful practical outcome is the main 'justification' for writing the present dissertation research, theoretically I see some merit in asserting the relationship between individuals and habitats – I will quote the author: "Precisely the bringing out of the most significant "светообитания" in order to serve to revive the prayer connection through Orthodox pilgrimage is the desired result...".

This emphasis, announced at the beginning of the work, remains valid for the entire text and is one of its merits precisely in a theoretical sense. However, I think that the chosen term is not successful – under "светообитание" (as suggested by Plamen Mihailov) is usually meant "inhabiting the world", not "inhabiting by a saint".

In connection with the description of the chronological limits of the study, I was struck by a footnote that explains the author's reasons for talking about "Ottoman slavery" and not about "Ottoman rule" – according to him, this is the lack of freedom of religion. During the time of socialism, there was also talk of "slavery" ("Turkish slavery"), but the grounds were different. But let us leave the criteria for this classification to be proposed and confirmed by historical scholarship, otherwise we risk falling into unprofessionalism.

So, part one presents Bulgarian saints from four historical periods: the First Bulgarian Kingdom (681 – 1018), the Byzantine Empire (1018 – 1185), the Second

Bulgarian Kingdom (1185 – 1396), the Ottoman Slavery (1396 – 1878), such as the portraits from these distinct periods make up the content of the four chapters, always ending with specific conclusions. It struck me that a statement (from p. 47) in which it is said that St. Theodosius "denounces a number of pagan customs, Judaism, Bogomilism, iconoclasm and other false teachings..." – where is the place of Judaism here among paganism and false teachings?

The second part is entitled "Catechesis and Pilgrimage" and is entirely subordinated to the principle of the relationship between place and person in the description of the selected spiritual schools. The third and last chapter of this part is dedicated to sample programs and materials for youth pilgrimage and educational activity. I think that the statement how the Orthodox worldview in recent decades has been mixed with an esoteric perception of spirituality and equated with anthropocentric views (p. 149) needs clarification.

The abstract accurately conveys the spirit and content of the dissertation. It includes the author's self-assessment of the three scientific contributions made, with whose claim I agree.

The PhD student has four publications on the topic of the dissertation, as well as nine others in *Diocesan Voice*.

In conclusion: as a member of the scientific jury, I will vote "yes" for Plamen Anatoliev Mihaylov to be awarded the requested educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional direction 2.4 Religion and theology, specialty *Christian pilgrimage*.

17. 09. 2024

Signature:

