

SU "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Faculty of Theology

Department of "Historical Theology"

R E C E N Z I A

by Prof. Dr. Ludmil Martinov Malev

(appointed as a member of the scientific jury by Order RD 38-347 of 02.07.2024)

of a dissertation on:

**"Bulgarian saints and monasteries in pilgrimage and educational activities  
among the youth "**

author: **Plamen Anatoliev Mihailov**

for awarding the scientific and educational degree "doctor"

by field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional direction 2.4, scientific  
specialty Religion and Theology (Christian Pilgrimage)

Sofia

2024

## Data for the Ph.D

Doctoral student Plamen Mihailov originally had a technical education and worked as a graphic designer and teacher. From 2016 to 2018, he pursued a master's degree (Religion and Education) at the Faculty of Theology of the University of St. Kliment Ohridski". His education at the Faculty of Arts and his graduation with a master's thesis, his long-term editorial and publishing activity in the department of St. Sofia Metropolis, as well as pilgrimages, are important prerequisites for the positive end result achieved.

Plamen Anatoliev Mihailov was enrolled as a doctoral student (regular training) for the period 2020-2023 by order of the rector of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". The entire preparation, including the writing of the dissertation, was carried out in the "Historical Theology" department in the Faculty of Arts of the SU. His academic supervisor is Prof. Dr. Pavel Pavlov.

During the period of doctoral studies, the dissertation student has completed his study plan in full. He successfully passed the scheduled exams. He managed to prepare and implement the necessary number of scientific publications. He always responded and diligently handled the activities assigned to him by the department. He was involved in additional forms of doctoral training at the faculty level. He participated in doctoral readings organized by BF. In the current control carried out through the provided attestations, it has always received good marks.

All this has led to the completion and integrity of his doctoral studies and to the most important result - a well-written dissertation.

He was expelled by rector's order from 2023 on the basis of the law and regulations, as well as a decision of the FS of BF.

In my opinion, Plamen Mihailov meets the requirements and fulfills the criteria of the ZRASRB and the Regulations for its implementation.

What has been pointed out so far gives me reason to accept. that all procedural rules have been followed and no violations have been committed.

The first meeting of the academic jury approved by order of the rector of SU was held on 16.07.2024 and is reflected in the protocol attached to the documents.

Dissertation data

Plamen Mihailov's dissertation work, proposed for defense, is 207 pages long and is structurally organized in the following parts: Preface, Introduction, two parts, Conclusion, Literature used, Index of saints, Index of monasteries and Appendices. Placing a list of abbreviations and indicated indices is appropriate, in order to orient the reader more quickly and clearly.

There is a balance between the individual parts, in terms of volume.

In the Preface, the author, after the initial introductory thoughts, shares the reason why he turned to the topic and its development in the light of hagiology and catechesis, in an educational and educational, historical and practical aspect.

The introduction contains all the attributes specific to this part. Actuality and practical orientation - here it is very clearly stated not only from what derives the importance and modern sound, but also the applicability of this work. Object and subject matter - these important aspects of the research work are formulated with the necessary precision. The goals and tasks that the author sets for their achievement are formulated. The methodology is indicated. It stands out with the necessary complexity and comprehensiveness. The limits of the study are outlined. A short

review of the foreign works known to the dissertation was made. The usefulness and applicability of the dissertation work are highlighted in detail.

The content of both parts corresponds to their wording.

**Part one**, "Places to honor Bulgarian saints" is dedicated to one of the sides of this work - the saints of Bulgarian origin chosen by the author and the places connected with them, where pilgrimage visits can be made for their glorification. It contains brief, but sufficiently clear and accurate information about the respective God-pleasers, divided chronologically.

**Part two** " Catechism and Pilgrimage" presents Bulgarian monasteries selected by the dissertation - spiritual schools and educational centers, connecting them with the saints highlighted in the first part and above all with their importance and merits, both in historical terms and for the contemporary state of our entire church life. This part also contains subdivisions of a catechetical and methodical nature.

In order to arrive at a complete clarification of the mentioned questions, the dissertation student has separated them into relevant subdivisions of the parts. This is a technique that also serves for better visualization and easier orientation in the content. It should be noted that the author did not engage in mechanical fragmentation and fragmentation of the text, and each of the substructures seems appropriate.

The conclusion outlines the results of the research, highlights the contributions and gives recommendations to those who are related in a different way to the field of this work and, more specifically, to the issues involved in it.

The parts indicating the sources and the literature (author's and reference) are formatted according to the requirements. The sources studied and used testify to deep interest and diligent work.

Placed applications are tailored to the topic and contribute to its visualization.

The embedded indexes are also useful.

The abstract presented by Plamen Mihailov meets the requirements and provides an opportunity for a clear and accurate introduction to the text of the dissertation in a synthesized form.

The dissertation's publications are sufficient in number and depth and have been published in authoritative journals. The same could be said about his participation in scientific forums.

### Scientific contributions

Plamen Mihailov's dissertation work, although it is dedicated to familiar matter, has a marked contribution character. I deliberately use the word "familiar" because at first glance the content is familiar to us. In fact, the proposed text delves into details and information that are by no means widely popular. In addition, the part dedicated to the catechetical and methodical aspects is particularly important. It is not to be overlooked that the dissertationer has taken up the development of such a relevant topic in our ecclesiastical age. Unlike in the past, today's believers and worshipers often pose challenges that should be responded to with a solid dose of theoretical preparation. This is what the present study suggests. As for specific dimensions, I fully accept the contributions highlighted in the dissertation and the abstract. The main ones, as indicated by the dissertation student, are: 1. The proposed dissertation is the first collective ecclesiastical scientific study of the "holy dwellings" (places of

worship related to the birth, life, death and relics) of 70 canonized Bulgarian saints, including the literary and educational activities in the monasteries closest to them.

2. The main contribution of the development is the preparation of the first interactive virtual map of the above-mentioned locations, with navigation and information about their connection with the Bulgarian saints.

3. For the first time, a weekly annual program for pilgrimage and educational activity related to Bulgarian church history, suitable for wide application among the youth, was presented .

## Remarks

Along with the undoubted qualities of this work, in my opinion, there are also some minor weaknesses:

1. The structure could be refined. Dividing into parts and then into chapters is not typical of this kind of research. Moreover, the first part is not composed of chapters, like the second, but only the numbering is marked.

2. The first chapter of the second part could fit into the first part. This is how they will be distinguished: historical, hagiographic and liturgical part; and a catechetical and methodical one.

3 . In the review of the historiography, not only information about authors and titles should be given, but also a brief critical analysis should be made; This would make the contributions stand out even more brightly.

4. The Appendix section could be more extensive.

## Conclusion

I declare that I do not in any way fall under the hypotheses of the law and other normative acts concerning conflict of interests!

The qualities of the current dissertation give me full reason to vote positively with "FOR" Plamen Anatoliev Mihailov to be awarded the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional direction 2.4, scientific specialty Religion and Theology ( Christian Pilgrimage).

Veliko Tarnovo

2024