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OPINION

for the dissertation thesis entitled:

**„BULGARIAN SAINTS AND MONASTERIES IN THE PILGRIMAGE-
EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY AMONG THE YOUTH“**

**submitted by regular PhD student Plamen Anatoliev Mihaylov
for the confer of PhD degree in 2.4. Religion and Theology
(Christian Pilgrimage)**

This review is prepared based on my participation as a member of the scientific jury of the competition according to (Report № 1/16.07.2024 г.), in which I was tasked to give an opinion on the dissertation in question.

I. Data for the Candidate

The dissertant Plamen Anatoliev Mihaylov was born on 27.11.1989. He graduated from Sofia Mathematical High School „St. Paisius of Hilendar“. In the period 2003–2014 he studied successively Computer Engineering and Technology and Engineering Design at the Technical University where he obtained his Bachelor's degree. In 2016–2018 he obtained a Master's degree in Religion and Education at the Faculty of Theology of Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“. Since 2019 he works as the Editor-in-Chief in the Cultural Information Department of the Sofia Holy Metropoly.

II. Data on the Procedure

In 2020, Plamen Mihaylov was enrolled as a full-time PhD student in Christian Pilgrimage at the Faculty of Theology of Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“. He has fulfilled all his obligations under the Individual Study Plan and has passed his PhD minimum examinations. He has been given the opportunity to defend his dissertation in 2023. There were no irregularities in the preparation of his work. He has complied with the recommendations made and advice given during the preliminary discussion of his thesis in the Department.

III. Data on the Dissertation and the Abstract

The dissertation contains a total of 206 pages and has the following structure: a Preface, an Introduction, two parts, a Conclusion, a Declaration of Originality, Bibliography, Indexes of Saints and Monasteries and Appendices. 14 sources, 74 titles of interpretive literature and 62 internet sources were used. The critical apparatus includes 401 footnotes. There is a relatively good balance between the different parts and there is a logical connection and coherence.

I have read the text of the submitted dissertation. I was impressed by the author's good expression.

The main research problem is, in the words of the author, „the analysis and synthesis of the most closely related to the pilgrimage-educational activity information available on the topic and its use for the practical development of tools and programs for youth initiatives.“ In the Preface, Mihailov argues his interest in the topic, outlines his general understanding of scholarly work on such topics, and expresses his acknowledgments. The Introduction contains the required elements for each dissertation – relevance, aim, objectives, subject, object, structure, chronological limits, methodology, state of the research, applicability. On p. 9 n. 2 the author motivates the use of the obsolete form „saints“ (old form) instead of „saints“.

Part One „Places of Homage to Bulgarian Saints“ reveals the author's desire to present to the young audience the saints who lived in Bulgarian lands – included are data on about 70 of them, divided chronologically into 4 periods. Their hagiographies with their ecclesiastical and pedagogical content were used as a basis. Emphasis is placed on the topoi associated with their lives and relics as well as the temples suitable for the veneration of their memory. The aim is to support activities within the framework of Christian pilgrimage.

Part Two „Catechesis and Pilgrimage“, consists of three chapters on: 1) the educational activity of the Bulgarian monasteries; 2) Pilgrimage as a method of building an Orthodox worldview; and 3) sample programs and materials for youth pilgrimage and educational activities.

In the Conclusion, the results achieved and the answers to the tasks set in the Introduction are presented. The six appendices at the end of the dissertation contain lists of temples dedicated to Sts. Cyril and Methodius, St. John of Rila and St. Petka of Tarnovo, an artistic account of St. Zlata Muglenska, a board game

about Bulgarian saints and monasteries, and an interactive map of places associated with Bulgarian saints.

The work presented has merit and meets the requirements for a doctoral dissertation that can be successfully defended. The text is readable, informative, literate and written in good language. Spelling and punctuation errors are kept to a minimum. However, a proof reading would not be superfluous. As the author points out on p. 13 n. 3, its form departs from the commonly accepted model for a dissertation in historical theology, but this is necessitated by its nature and purpose.

The abstract accurately reflects the content of the dissertation. There are 3 points of contribution that I agree with. Also attached are four publications on the topic of the dissertation, without being parts of it.

Recommendation: footnotes to be double-sided.

I have no publications or projects in common with the author of the dissertation, and no other conflicts of interest under the law.

On the basis of what I have said so far, I give my positive vote and take the liberty to petition the esteemed scientific jury to also vote positively and to confer of PhD degree to Plamen Anatoliev Mihaylov in 2.4 „Religion and Theology“ (Christian Pilgrimage).

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(Prof. Aleksandar Omarchevski, PhD)