



REVIEW

by Ivo Georgiev Yanev, Assoc. Prof., PhD,

For the dissertation on a topic

" BULGARIAN SAINTS AND MONASTERIES IN
PILGRIMAGE AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES
AMONG YOUTH"

To PhD student Plamen Anatoliev Mihaylov

for awarding the educational and scientific degree "PhD",
professional direction 2.4. Religion and Theology (Christian Pilgrimage)

Supervisor: Prof. Pavel Nikolov Pavlov PhD

1. Procedure data

The present procedure was opened following a decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Theology on 20.06.2024, protocol No. 15 and order No. RD 38-347/02.07.2024. At its first meeting, held on 16.07.2024, the scientific jury in composition: Prof. Alexander Omerchevski PhD, prof. prot. Ludmil Malev PhD, Prof. Nina Dimitrova DSc, Prof. Valentin Kanavrov DSc and Assoc. Prof. Ivo Yanev PhD found that the procedure was organized in compliance with all legal requirements. After discussions, Prof. Alexander Omerchevsky PhD was elected as the chairman of the scientific jury, prof. prot. Ludmil Malev PhD and Assoc. Prof. Ivo Yanev PhD. The other members are assigned to prepare written opinions. The deadline for submission of reviews and opinions was 03.10.2024, and the date for the open meeting of the scientific jury and public defense was 18.10.2024 - Friday at 1:00 p.m. All



deadlines for the procedure were met correctly. I believe that the procedure has been followed, I do not find any violations in its conduct. All documents are available. The scope and type of research correspond to the requirements of the Rules for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees of the SU, as well as the legal provisions regulating the procedure.

2. Information about the dissertation student

In June 2003 he graduated from the Sofia Mathematical High School "Paisiy Hilendarski", July 2008 "Computer Engineering and Technologies" at the School of Technology "Electronic Systems" at the Technical University, July 2014 he obtained a bachelor's degree "Engineering Design", Technical University, October 2018 MP "Religion and education" of the Faculty of Theology of the SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". In the period July 2020-2023, he was a full-time doctoral student at the "Historical Theology" department, when, after completing his individual plan, he was dismissed with the right to defense. Successfully passed the procedures of the internal discussion in the department and for anti-plagiarism. Since July 2019, he is the editor-in-chief of the official website of the Sofia Metropolis, edits the magazine "Diocese Voice", organizes the activities of the radio of the same name of the Sofia Metropolis, etc.

3. Dissertation and abstract data

The presented doctoral dissertation on the topic "Bulgarian saints and monasteries in the pilgrimage and educational activity among the youth" of the dissertation student P. Mihailov is in a volume of 206 pages, 401 footnotes, 151 cited publications, of which: 14 sources, 75 scientific literature, 62 internet resources and has the following structure: table of contents, abbreviations, preface, introduction, two parts, conclusion, bibliography and appendices The dissertation is written in good literary and academic language, the author is well acquainted with and correctly uses the terminology of historical theology, as well as for ecclesiastical religious education in our country.

In the Preface, the author indicates the reason for undertaking the development of this topic, as well as gratitude to the scientific supervisor, as well as to his relatives.

In the **Introduction**, the topicality of the topic is indicated - the author's findings: "Unfortunately, in modern Bulgaria, organized and regular pilgrimage-educational activity among the youth is a very rare phenomenon." (9). **The main goal** of the work is "supporting the Orthodox faith of adolescents through methods and materials for pilgrimage and educational activities related to Bulgarian saints and monasteries" (10-11). **The main tasks**, which, in my opinion, have been successfully completed are: – preparation of a chronological list of established Bulgarian saints in the form of a name list, with the dates of their celebration in the church calendar; – output of basic data for each saint, related to pilgrimage and educational activities - chronology and locations of the most characteristic moments of his life, as well as temples named after him; – selection of monasteries most directly related to the described Bulgarian saints, with basic data on the spiritual and educational activities in each of them; – analysis of modern methods for presenting religious truths and for building an Orthodox worldview among adolescents; - implementation of the researched data in a variety of spiritual and educational materials aimed at the youth - preparation of an interactive map, educational board game, stories, etc.; - preparation of an annual program for pilgrimage and educational activity for adolescents, related to the Bulgarian saints (11). **The subject** of the dissertation is a selection of 70 saints with data of Bulgarian origin (four of them are group martyrdoms), who have been approved for celebration by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and are highly revered in the Bulgarian lands (12). **The subject of research** topic analysis and synthesis in this connection is the information that links them to specific geographical locations and places them in chronological frameworks to serve to support the pilgrimage activity (12). **Chronological boundaries** are the periods of the First Bulgarian Kingdom (681–1018); Byzantine rule (1018–1185); Second Bulgarian Kingdom (1185–1396); Ottoman slavery (1396–1878) (14). **The following methods** of scientific research are used in the work: Empirical methods: retrospection - study of historical development, methodology and materials for pilgrimage and religious teaching in the monasteries under consideration; scientific observations - study of the applicability among the youth of existing materials, methods and good practices for pilgrimage-educational activity. And theoretical methods:

analysis - identification of specific characteristics of the considered saints and monasteries in relation to the topic; synthesis - unification of the analyzed data about the saints and monasteries with an applied-practical purpose; thought experiment – systematic consideration of the possible benefits of the proposed programs and materials (14-15). The main authors and studies on the topic are presented. **The applicability part** of the work is interesting: application of the proposed materials in the classes on religion-Orthodoxy, history and civilizations, in theological disciplines; application of the proposed methods, programs and materials in pilgrimage-educational centers and initiatives; conducting talks about the Bulgarian saints at parish and other training centers, in religious education classes and at summer camps based on the data systematized in the development; conducting presentations in general education and higher education institutions about the proposed pilgrimage and educational activities related to the Bulgarian saints; publication of advertising printed materials for the Bulgarian monasteries; publication of printed geographical maps and albums for the places associated with the Bulgarian saints; publication of books with creative stories about the Bulgarian saints; preparation of media projects and programs for Bulgarian saints and monasteries; development of mobile applications and interactive GPS-maps to stimulate individual pilgrimages related to Bulgarian saints and monasteries; development of educational board games for Bulgarian saints and monasteries, etc. (17-18).

In the **first part** entitled "Homage to the Bulgarian Saints", doctoral student Mihailov presents to our attention the lives of 70 saints revered in our country during the First Bulgarian Empire, Byzantine slavery, the Second Bulgarian Empire and the Ottoman yoke, with proposed places of pilgrimage related to the respective saints. which is indicative of the people's respect for them. The data on the chronology and on the available geographical locations related to their lives and the respect for them - birth, haircut, asceticism, ordination, service, martyrdom or ascension, relics, temples and monasteries in their honor - have been analyzed and synthesized.

In the **second part**, "Catechization through Pilgrimage" is dedicated to the presentation of the religious teaching and educational activities developed in the Bulgarian

monasteries most directly related to them. 22 monastic monasteries have been studied, for which basic data on their location and historical development are described, as well as information on the existence of training schools, literary figures and the library fund in the monasteries. Basic principles of religious views, religious teaching approaches in educational and church environment are studied, and two modern schools are presented here - at the Holy Metropolis of Lovčana and at the Holy Metropolis of Vidin, which are an important example of providing real Christian education in school , excluding the subject "Religion-Orthodoxy". Historically used auxiliary materials in relation to religious teaching and pilgrimage, as well as contemporary good practices in the field of pilgrimage and spiritual enlightenment, are indicated. According to the author, based on the presented approaches: "...basic guidelines are derived to make pilgrimage-educational initiatives objectively applicable to the target age group and to encourage them to convert to the church and become like God" (152).

In the **Conclusion** of the dissertation, the doctoral student has made a summary of the entire study in relation to the tasks set, namely to overcome the weak knowledge of the Bulgarian saints and the legacy they leave on the Bulgarian lands; the misunderstanding of the meaning of the monastic life and the reduction of those who wish to live such a life, leads to the absence of such spiritual centers, and from there to the lack of a monastic example, which is an example of the spiritual life of all Christians; although rare, good practices of youth pilgrimage are presented. According to the author, the study "mainly has an applied-practical function in the field of Christian pilgrimage... The aim is, through the results of the study, to develop appropriate pilgrimage tools and methods to fill a significant gap in our society in terms of youth spirituality -educational activity and the acquaintance of adolescents with the most significant personalities in the Bulgarian church history" (153).

Appendices are important application material for dissertation purposes. They are six in number - three of them with the locations of temples dedicated to Bulgarian saints; proposals for the rules of an educational board game, for an artistic narrative on the topic

and visualizations of the developed interactive map, which occupies a particularly important place as part of the dissertation composition.

The abstract corresponds to the main text, but I think that the presented applications have no place in it, they should only be in the main dissertation text. The contributing moments of the scientific study are missing because they are presented in the main corpus of the stud The abstract corresponds to the content of the main text, but I think it is too short and sketchy, it could better represent the dissertation research, which is its main purpose.

Recommendations and comments

There are some spelling and technical errors that can be easily fixed. Unfortunately, some of the recommendations at the level of internal discussion in the Primary Unit - the Department, which were noticed by the collegium, as flaws in the text, have not been corrected. When the author examines the Rila School, he begins with the monastery in the village of Skrino and describes its contemporary activity, which, in my opinion, is not directly related to the Rila Monastery School, although it is part of the memory of its creator and spiritual patron - St. John of Rila (91) , as I said to the defense before the primary unit, if it is important to the author, some other way can be found to insert this information into the text. To the history of the Cherepish Monastery, I think it is good to mention some brief information about the priestly monastery school, opened in 1920, which grew into the Pastoral and Theological Institute in 1938, which existed until the Seminaries moved there in September 1950.

4. Scientific contributions

I accept the scientific contributions of the scientific contributions achieved during the research and formulated in the reference presented by the dissertationer in the abstract.

5. Publications

Four scientific publications are presented on the topic of the dissertation, which are of the necessary scientific value and are related to the topic of the dissertation and meet the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b, para. 2 and 3 of ZRASRB and Art. 24 of the Regulations for the implementation of the RSARB.

6. Conclusion

My overall assessment of the dissertation work, the abstract, scientific publications, as well as the scientific contributions indicated by the dissertation student, is positive. Therefore, I propose to the honorable Scientific Jury to vote for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the Scientific field: 2. Humanities; Professional direction: 2.4. Religion and theology; Scientific specialty (Christian Pilgrimage) of Plamen Anatoliev Mihaylov.

Sofia,

26. 09. 2024

(Ivo Yanev, Assoc. Prof., PhD)