

Review

by Prof. Andrey Dimov Andreev, PhD – member of the academic jury for conducting a competition for the academic position “professor” in the professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology (Church Law, Structure and Management of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church) at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Faculty of Theology, published in the State Newspaper, issue 57 of June 26, 2020

The competition for the academic position „professor" in a professional field: 2. 4. Religion and Theology (Church Law. Structure and Management of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church) was announced according to the legal requirements and regulations of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski ". There were no violations during the procedure for announcing the competition. The only candidate who submitted documents to participate in the contest is Assoc. Prof. Dilyan Nikolaev Nikolchev, PhD, DSc of Theology.

Assoc. Prof. Dilyan Nikolchev has presented the monograph “History, Structure And Management of the Strumica-Drama Eparchy (Aegean Sea Part, 1941-1942) and the Eparchy Of Drama (1943-1944) through the Reading of Archival Documents”, 366 pages, University Publishing House “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Sofia 2020. The colleague has submitted 14 articles, and separately applies 1 book, 4 monographies, 84 articles and 4 studies.

The monograph “Strumica-Drama Eparchy...” is an original interdisciplinary study. It is dedicated to the newly established eparchies of the period 1941 – 1944. Within the monograph intertwine history, theology and ecclesiastical law. The study is a result of a long-term work with

historical sources, most of which unpublished yet. This work is a continuation of the research of the colleague Nikolchev and his interest within the scope of history, structure and development of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. The author suggests an interesting, unconventional structure, that meets the goals he has set. The introduction deserves a special attention. He truly “involves” the reader into the issues of the topic, represents the structure of the eparchies, motivates the need for the division of the large administrative unit, demonstrates excellent knowledge of historical sources and diverse literature, explains the toponymy of the settlements, demonstrates the interdisciplinary approach of the study. The monograph fills in an evident gap in the studies dedicated to the BOC (Bulgarian Orthodox Church) in the 20th century, and precisely a complete study based on archival documents, dedicated to two “new” eparchies that became part of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in the period 1941-1944. D. Nikolchev's work comes up with conclusions for the assessment of the activity of the Bulgarian authorities in the Aegean Sea for the time considered. The reader receives information about the activities of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, but also about the work of the state administration there. The author also clarifies the role of clergymen, who played an important role in the first half of the 1940s in the Strumica-Drama eparchy and in the Eparchy of Drama.

Within the process of writing the monograph, a large number of archival units from Central State Archive, State Archive – Blagoevgrad were researched, as well as published collections of documents, diaries and memories of participants in the events, historical literature and Internet resources (pp. 359 - 366). It should be noted that the author uses both unknown and unprocessed archival material. D. Nikolchev also found the “disappearance” of valuable documents – the unprocessed funds of the Maronite and Drama bishopric, as well as archival units from the old archive of the Holy Synod. He has found that in a publication by D. Yonchev from 1993, and additionally has given his own version of when did these documents disappear.

The first part consists of two large sections. In the first one the author skillfully introduces to the reader the situation in Bulgaria, as well as in the Balkan Peninsula in the begging of the Second World War – until June 22, 1944. Assoc. Prof., DSc of Theology D. Nikolchev analyses the new realities in Eastern and Southeastern Europe after the signing of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact and its consequences. Initially, D. Nikolchev's attention is focused on the expansion of the Bulgarian borders and the consequent new commitments of the BOC. Also, he has not missed the

reintegration of the seized ecclesiastical districts to the Varna-Preslav and Dorostol-Cherven eparchies. It is not accidental. The colleague points out the new tasks in front of the Holy Synod, initially in Northeastern Bulgaria. The book benefits from following the international relations in 1941 and the position of Bulgaria in the newly occurred complex situation. The Bulgarian policy, the joining of the Tripartite Pact, the territorial expansion after the defeat of Yugoslavia and Greece, are logically traced. The policy of Tsar Boris III and the government for non-participation of Bulgaria directly in the military actions is taken into account. The author analyses the position of the Holy Synod concerning the “new lands”, the idea of restoring the Patriarchate as well the special opinion of the future Exarch Stefan. The last mentioned is the only member of the Holy Synod, who holds the opinion that the election of a patriarch should be postponed until after the war, and that bishops should be elected for the new eparchies and should be integrated in the BOC. D. Nikolchev evaluates the activity of the BOC in the newly annexed lands as part of the state policy on the national question. The church authorities do not question the Bulgarian origin of the Slavic population in Macedonia and Thrace. Here again the author provides an objective analysis, unaffected by the idea of complete independence of the Church. He does not bother to show the joint work of official and ecclesiastic authorities, with the civil administration leading the way.

The constitution of the new eparchies, mainly of Strumica-Drama, the organization of Bulgarian church structures there and the church life in the new eparchies are examined thoroughly. The author points out the quick reaction of the Holy Synod, which on April 25, 1941 prepared a project for the territories with Bulgarian population, which are expected to join Bulgaria. The described demographic structure of the eparchy is of an indisputable interest, as well as a contributing moment. The author considers the problem of secondment of clergy from inside Bulgaria. The last mentioned is due to the lack of Bulgarian priests in the “new lands”. An attention is paid also to the monasteries and monastery life in the eparchy. In the second section of the first part, stands out the detailed statistics for the Eparchy of Strumica-Drama, which will be useful for future researchers of the problem. The colleague Nikolchev does not spare “awkward” moments in the history of this region. He does not miss the Drama Uprising in the autumn of 1941, nor the deportation of the Jews (he uses the local term the “raising” the Jews) in March 1943. As an objective researcher, the author also does not miss the fact that the church authorities received items confiscated from the deported ones. That is undoubted merit of the

monograph and the author himself. The strict adherence to the historical truth, even when it is unsympathetic, speaks not only about the professional knowledge of my colleague Nikolchev, but also about his morality as a researcher. Even if he was tempted, he does not avoid these painful events.

The second part of the monograph impresses with the perfect knowledge and analysis of huge number of documents, which are the result of a long-lasting work with numerous archival units. The ecclesiastical districts in the Eparchy of Drama (Drama, Serres, Demirhisar) are represented, and afterwards are described by parishes, with detailed data about the clergy, including their families. The reader gets familiar with the churches in each parish, the concerning problems, the repairs, etc. A particularly interesting part is the description of the Orthodox population in the ecclesiastical districts, the performed weddings, baptisms, etc. All this provides an opportunity for an analysis not only of the church life, but also of the daily routine of the Bulgarian population in the region of Drama. Assoc. Prof. D. Nikolchev dedicates a special place to the monasteries and monastery life in the eparchies. Here as well can be observe the provided detailed data and competent analysis of this important part of the church activity in the Eparchy of Drama. The problems are precisely outlined, as well the work that should be done to solve them. In the monograph are quoted the names of the churches and chapels in the Strumica-Drama and in Drama eparchies. The author correctly notes that the information related to some names is incomplete.

Assoc. Prof. D. Nikolchev also pays attention to the toponymy of the settlements. The author explicitly notes that $\frac{3}{4}$ of the settlements, respectively the parishes, have new Greek names. He has given the old Bulgarian names in order to prove the Bulgarian character of the studied region. The spelling mistakes of the Bulgarian and Greek names after 1941 have not been overlooked. The inaccuracies have been made by the civil authorities, but they are automatically included in the spelling of the names of the parishes. This clarification is important for the future researchers.

The whole monograph also emphasizes the work of the heads of the eparchies, clearly outlining the role of Metropolitan Boris, his efforts for the organization of the eparchy and the difficulties he faces. Another important figure is the “right hand” of the Metropolitan, Hieromonk Anthony, a devoted church servant, a true supporter of Metropolitan Boris. Assoc. Prof. D. Nikolchev dedicates many pages to the life and work of Anthony, who obviously impressed him. The author

also represents the contacts of Metropolitan Boris with the Holy Synod, as well as the outlined problems to which the bishop was seeking a solution.

A thorough work is presented, that will provoke interest and controversy, a dignity to which every author strives for. The monograph will help other researchers of that matter. It is an indisputable contribution to the study of the history of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

The study is written in a readable, interesting style, which is a guarantee that it will reach readers in Bulgaria and abroad. It will be useful for bachelors and masters studying History of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and Contemporary History of Bulgaria.

The knowledge of historical sources, the introduction of new ones, the use of official state and church acts, publicism, interviews, etc., the analysis of the existing scholar literature is undoubted.

At this state of academic development, it is difficult to make specific remarks, especially when we have such a book in front of us.

Assoc. Prof., DSc of Theology D. Nikolchev is a well-known author of scholar publications, which is quite evident from the attached reference of the presented articles, as well as from the overall scholar work of the colleague. They are published in famous and respected magazines and collections in Bulgaria and abroad. D. Nikolchev is a regular participant in various academic forums, concerning which he also has given an information. Assoc. Prof. D. Nikolchev is a member of editorial boards of established academic journals and conference collections, which is a recognition of his qualities as a scholar. The significant number of quotations of the publications of my colleague Nikolchev speaks of a scholar who is well known in Bulgaria and abroad. A reference for fulfillment of minimum requirements for the field 2. Humanities, Professional field 2. 4. Religion and Theology has also been submitted. He is part of research projects related to his specialty. The presented publications are within several thematic spheres, which speaks of an author, with diverse interests and studies in the field of church history and the structure and management of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

Assoc. Prof., DSc of Theology Dilyan Nikolaev Nikolchev is an established lecturer at the Faculty of Theology at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". He teaches courses in disciplines

related to church law, organization and management of the BOC. He works actively with graduates and doctoral students.

Conclusion: I recommend to the esteemed academic jury to give a positive assessment of the academic production and the teaching work of Assoc. Prof. Dilyan Nikolaev Nikolchev, PhD, DSc of Theology. I vote “FOR” and express my opinion that he meets all the requirements to take the academic position of “professor” in professional field 2. 4. Religion and Theology (Church law. Structure and management of the BOC) and I believe that the academic jury can propose of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Theology at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” to make a choice to hold the above-mentioned academic position.

Prof. Andrey Andreev, PhD