

**SOFIA UNIVERSITY „ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI“**

**FACULTY OF THEOLOGY**

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**DISSERTATION ABSTRACT**

**of a dissertation for awarding of the educational and scientific  
degree „Doctor“ in  
Professional Field: 2.4 Religion and Theology  
Scientific Specialty: History of religions**

**THE IDEA OF REINCARNATION IN THE EASTERN RELIGIONS  
(THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS)**

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Sofia, 2022

## Content

<b>I. Introduction</b> .....	2
<b>1. General characteristics of the dissertation research</b> .....	
3	
1.1. Relevance of the research.....	
4	
1.2. Object and subject of the research.....	
7	
1.3. Aim and tasks of the research .....	
7	
1.4. Research methodology.....	
8	
1.5. Status of the study.....	
9	
<b>II. Statement</b> .....	
13	
1. First chapter. Origin of the idea of rebirth.....	
13	
2. Chapter Two. Christian view of the idea of reincarnation.....	
15	
3. Chapter three. Manifestations of the idea of rebirth.....	
17	
<b>III. Conclusion</b> .....	
18	

<b>IV. Scientific contributions .....</b>	
25	
<b>V. Publications on the topic.....</b>	
25	

The dissertation: „The idea of reincarnation in Eastern religions (Theological analysis)“ contains a total of 279 standard pages. It consists of a preface, introduction, development in three chapters, conclusion and list of references.

## **I. Introduction**

Bulgaria's state in the spiritual dimension is undoubtedly overshadowed by the processes of globalism, the consequences of which determine a broader picture of a combination of secularized multi-religiousness and multiculturalism. The human's soul is deeply hurt by the negligence of the public religious consciousness, which allows a variety of foreign spiritual practices within the limits of its most valuable – the soul. The successful introduction and consolidation of customs, traditions and religions from the Far East is the result of the deformity of religion by individual misuse of „foreign“ terms, desecration and trampling of the Church's authority, improper superstitious „worship“ of Orthodox holidays and depersonalization.

The doctrine of reincarnation confronts the moral and ethical question of the uniqueness of the man, but also rejects the great meaning of human existence – the

perfection of the person who has life, inspired only by God; the deep secret of the personality is insulted. Elucidating these issues from the early education of children will help in the Church's opposition to false teachings, after which the study of world religions would not be a problem threatening the moral foundations of man.

The dissertation is an attempt to identify a disease that is characteristic of modern times, to warn about its consequences and look for the cure to overcome it. It is difficult to talk about the interaction between Christianity and the Eastern religions in Bulgaria, as they do not meet in dialogue as openly as they should. Interreligious dialogue and education are of particular importance for establishing differences and building tolerance, which will not allow Orthodoxy to be violated by Eastern religious tendencies, but will not condemn the other.

## **1. General characteristics of the dissertation research**

The topic deserves to be explored, because the idea of rebirth is „reborn“ constantly in one or another doctrine, theory or spiritual practice, which in itself is quite provocative. The idea of rebirth confronts directly with the most valuable truth for man, namely his creation and higher meaning. The concept of rebirth, derived from the philosophical idea of karma, is untenable and cannot be reconciled with the Christian faith, which professes Christ's teaching on the unity of the person and the resurrection of soul and body together.

It is an interesting fact that the idea of rebirth is perceived positively even by Christians who interpret it in their own way and manage to fit it into their otherwise „orthodox“ faith. Reincarnation is often commented on in colloquial speech, with the impression of mass disinterest in historical facts or dogmatic

truths. This is an eloquent example of the consequences of the processes of secularization, also the result of the diseased connection and relationship between the Church and society.

The topic covers another interesting point of view: (relatively) the initial emergence of the idea of rebirth. As is clear from the first chapter of the dissertation, the idea is hinted at during a very typical public philosophical debate of the time, which does not claim to be knowledge transmitted by a deity. This fact organically raises the question: if reincarnation is a philosophical assumption, then why is it easily perceived as legitimate, without the necessary knowledge in the field of Eastern religions – historical or theological.

The topic of Eastern religious thought was the subject of research interest of Dr. Yana Stoilova, who pays attention to the idea of rebirth in her dissertation "The man between suffering and enlightenment (Orthodox theological analysis of Buddhist anthropology)." The present dissertation research on the idea of rebirth is a modest continuation and attempt to expand the conversation about the Christian Orthodox attitude to Eastern religions and in particular to the idea of rebirth, but does not claim finality and completeness. The topic covers a much wider range, which deserves more serious and in-depth research. The idea of rebirth is only a small part of an existential philosophy, on the one hand, and a deeply religious practice, on the other, but it directly affects man's attitude to himself in every way – determines his behavior, care for his mind and body, goals and his needs, etc. Although a separate element of the common, reincarnation is an insidious theory – both inspiring hope and despair, but both provoking extremes.

### **1.1. Relevance of the research**

Eastern religions have an exotic flavor in their concepts and the feeling that there are unspoken secret wisdoms that the average person does not have access to if he does not follow or practice a particular religious cult. Therefore, the relevance of the topic of the idea of rebirth is indisputable – every person, in a purely psychological aspect, has a deep need to feel part of something great, a community that promises to reveal universal secrets and therefore several reasons can be identified that unite the opinion on the topicality of the research:

*First.* The growing media „violence“ of the term „rebirth“<sup>1</sup> itself, as well as the other Eastern terms that invariably accompany it, „karma“, „samsara“, „yoga“ and „nirvana“. From 2020 to the present, the term „new normal“ is heard more and more often, part of which is the daily repetition and consolidation in the various morning TV blocks of such spiritual concepts, as well as the mass translation and distribution of Eastern spiritual literature. Media manipulation is difficult to recognize due to the lack of theologically literate journalists, who often fall victim to a larger system.

*Second.* The illiteracy of children from school in the basics of Christianity leads to a more successful abuse of the Holy Scriptures. There is often a reason to legitimize the concept of reincarnation even by Christians, using the Bible in their defense, without studying the quoted text or comparing it with the research of Christian apologists.

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<sup>1</sup> Punarjanma (санс. – पुनर्जन्म) – букв. прераждане на душата в ново тяло; възстановяване от тежка болест; да се върнеш в света след смъртта под някаква форма.

Punarjanmajaya (санс. – पुनर्जन्मजय) – освобождение от трансмиграция, последна еманципация. (Вж. Cologne Digital Sanskrit Dictionaries: Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary)

Punarjanmajaya (санс. – पुनर्जन्मजय) – победа над прераждането. (Вж. Cologne Digital Sanskrit Dictionaries: Yates Sanskrit-English Dictionary)

(<https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/punarjanma>, 20.11.2021, 8:00)

*Third.* The topicality of the research will not cease, on the contrary – it will become more and more noticeable over time, due to the growing multiculturalism, which confuses the minds of adolescents, as well as the processes of secularization.

*Fourth.* The suppression of human free will through the constant use of Eastern terminology in books, television and social networks; allowing the guru to determine what is „healthy“, using little-known words for the Bulgarian viewer – Ayurveda, yoga, tantra, meditation, personal development – completely removed from the overall religious picture of the East.

*Fifth.* Last but not least, as parents and as Orthodox Christians, we have a duty to educate both children and future students in the field of History of Religions and to clarify basic Eastern concepts in order to avoid misleading and media manipulation and to shape spiritually healthy individuals.

## **1.2. Object and subject of the research**

The *object* of the scientific research is the idea of reincarnation, because it is a phenomenon that creates a problematic situation that affects spiritually confused people and their religion and spiritual growth.

The *subject* of the scientific research are the processes according to which the idea of reincarnation originates and spreads from antiquity to the present day. In an effort to clarify the truth, theological analysis chronologically systematizes the historical facts surrounding the formation of both religions; i.e. traces the scientific theological authority of Christian apologists and church writers and the path of ancient Eastern philosophical thought.

### **The main arguments are:**

*First,* the idea of reincarnation arose during a philosophical debate, not a divine mystery revealed to mankind. To assume that a person is reborn after death

is irrelevant, and any other philosophy, whether of Socrates, Plato or Aristotle, can be equally accepted as a religion. However, the philosophies of the ancient Greeks were not raised in a religious cult, so why were the philosophies of the ancient Indians raised in a cult?

*Second*, the idea of reincarnation has not withstood the time continuum in its original form. The dialogue of reincarnation has changed many times in the history of religions; it takes many forms – from the „journey of souls“ to the elevation of the soul from a higher level, to the denial of the soul, and the union of impulses, etc. The ideological change of a concept speaks of its weakness and, accordingly, untruth.

*Third*, the tracing of the processes after the fall of the ancestors gives reason to believe that rebirth does not enter as a consequence of damaged human nature, but the evil, the limitation of which is death.

*Fourth*, the clash between the idea of rebirth and the truth of the resurrection. The main arguments against the insignificance of the idea of rebirth are the most important Christian truths: about the Holy Trinity, the Christological dogma and the purpose of human creation. The most important argument against reincarnation is that it is not present in the consequences of the fall of the ancestors, nor in the life and redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why Christian dogma, richly described and studied in the patriarchal literature, categorically denies the possibility of reincarnation.

### **1.3. Aim and tasks of the research**

The working thesis of the dissertation is that reincarnation does not exist and therefore the aim is through the History of Religions to trace the processes in creating the idea of reincarnation, to ask questions that affect the issue and to give

answers. The main purpose of the study is to find out if there is a justification for the idea of the rebirth in the Bible and the teachings of Christian apologists; to determine if Eastern religions and Christianity meet; to establish the boundaries between authentic Indian religiosity and the New Age and neo-Hindu guru movements.

Another goal of the study is to put the conversation about the influence of Eastern religions on Bulgarian society in the foreground. To ask the questions: why is it negative for the Bulgarian psyche and mentality; specifically what their religious cults and doctrines consist of; how to protect the uneducated in theology man.

Among the tasks of the dissertation research is the answer to the question: does reincarnation exist as a natural factor in the human life. The research rejects this hypothesis. In the course of the study, several key sub-issues emerged, which are divided into three chapters.

In accordance with the objectives of the study, the tasks are united around the theoretical framework according to which, firstly, Eastern religions do not correspond in any respect to Christianity, do not approach it and, secondly, to answer religiously wandering people why they they can be dangerous for them – taken from their traditional Indian roots and planted in Bulgarian soil.

#### **1.4. Research methodology**

The topic of the dissertation is studied with the methods: historical, historical-critical, apologetic, comparative, method of generalization and patriarchal analysis.

*The sources* used in support of the research are in accordance with the specific topic of reincarnation and the specifics of its understanding in Eastern nations, compared to its understanding from the Orthodox-Christian point of view.

The name „Hinduism“ is a relatively new religious term that summarizes a much broader religious picture in India. In India, this term is not known, instead they use the word „dharma“, which more clearly outlines local understandings. However, „Hinduism“ resonates much better in research, as it is a summary of the many religious practices in India, some of which are seriously divergent in their doctrines, others – openly collide with each other, others – exist independently, fourth – they worship a huge pantheon, the fifth – they deny the soul, etc. Buddhism, which is much better known to Bulgarian society, is a religious sect formed from the desire to deny Brahmanism, but it is part of this religious „patch“ and therefore can be safely attributed to the general „Hinduism“. That is why the research of Indologists and Orthodox historians of world religions is extremely important in the study of the idea of reincarnation and above all – for its correct understanding from as many points of view as possible, as it is not a homogeneous, clear and distinct idea.

### **1.5. Status of the study**

In compiling the dissertation, the selection of authors is consistent with the division of the text into three main chapters. The questions posed in the first chapter concern the origin of Indian civilization and the historical path of Hinduism and Buddhism, so here are selected mainly Indologists, culturologists (Bulgarian and world) and historians in the field of world religions. Chapters two and three turn the Christian view to the issues of Eastern religions, comparing them with the dogmatic truths of Christianity. The authors who have taken their place here are Orthodox high clergy and theologians.

*Orthodox high clergy and theologians*: the study of Eastern religions would not make sense if it were not justified by shedding light on Orthodox apologetics and the study on the issues raised by them. That is why the apologetic researches of the patriarchal literature are of the greatest importance for the whole dissertation: St. Basil the Great: „Six Days“, „For the Holy Spirit“, St. Gregory the Theologian: „Creations, vol. 3“, St. Gregory of Nyssa: On the Soul and the Resurrection, St. John Chrysostom: The Nine Words of Repentance, St. Ephraim the Syrian: Creations 2 and 3., St. John of Damascus: Source of Knowledge, vol. II and vol. III – under the editorship of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Svetoslav Ribolov and Prof. Ivan Hristov.

On the way to clarifying the topic of the idea of reincarnation, I rely mainly on the study of protoprezv. Vasilij V. Zenkovski: The unity of the personality and the problem of rebirth. In: *Spiritual Culture*, Sofia, 1995, which proves the insolvency of reincarnation by analyzing the Christian meaning of the unity of the soul. The other researches on the unity of the soul, on which I supported the research, are by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Klara Toneva: *Secularized religiosity*. S., 2018, *Biblical foundations of interreligious dialogue – Orthodox dogmatic analysis*. In: *Bible – Culture – Dialogue*. S., 2009, *Introduction to Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*. S., *The Church – a community of love*. S., 2008, *If I Have No Love...* S., 2006 and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Dimo Penkov: *The Ancient Theology of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle as a Form of Knowledge of God*. S., 2008, *The Theology of Socrates*. In: *Theological Thought* 1\98, *The Resurrection of Christ – the victory of life over death*. S., 2017.

The task of proving the insolvency of the phenomenon of reincarnation requires a look at the deep meaning of godly life, church life and the way to the Kingdom of Heaven, so in this part of the study I used the works of Prof. Nikolai

Shivarov: The work of the prophet Ezekiel mission. In: The Holy Scriptures in the Church Tradition. S., 2016 and Eschatological issues from biblical and intertestamental times. In: Theological Thought, 1-4/2000, S., prot. Dr. Radovan Bigovich: The Church in the Modern World. S., 2013, Prof. Dr. Dimitar Dyulgerov: Jesus Christ – New Testament Redeemer High Priest. S., 1926 and Textbook of Missionary Work. S., 1937, Prof. Totyu Koev: The Dogmatic Formulations of the Seven Ecumenical Councils. S., 2011, protoprezv. Alexander Schmemmann: On the life of the world. S., 2013, The Historical Path of Orthodoxy. S., 2009, Liturgical Theology. S., 2013, From water and spirit. S., 2005 and Prot. John Meindorf: Byzantine Theology. S., 1995.

For the correct understanding of the Christian apologists the works of Prof. Dr. Iliya Tsonevski are extremely important: The ancient Christian apologists and the Greek philosophy. S., 1958, Patrology. S., 1986, The teachings of St. Irenaeus of Lyons on the person and redemptive work of Jesus Christ. S., 1965.

The work of Mitr. Callistos Ware had a great influence on the research: The unity of the human person according to the Eastern fathers. East and West for the individual and society. VT, 2001, The Orthodox Way. S., 2014, The Mystery of the Human Personality. 2002, the Kingdom is within us. S., 2019. The modern dimension of Christianity in everyday life was considered through the work of: John Breck: God is with us. S., 2017. Mitr. Hierotheus Vlachos: Spiritual landmarks for modern society. S., 2017, Orthodox Spirituality. W. T., 2005. Prof. George Dragas: The Anthropic Principle and the Human Nature of Christ. In: Sp. „Christianity and Culture“, 7/2011. Mitr. John Zizioulas: Being as communion. S., 2013 and Personality and Being. East and West for the individual and society. W. T., 2001.

*Indologists, culturologists and historians (Bulgarian school)*: among the researchers of Eastern religions an important place for the dissertation is occupied by: Tatiana Evtimova: Introduction to Indology. S., 2004; Bratislav Ivanov: History of Japan. S., 2016, Chinese Buddhism In: Almanac „Lotus“, 1/2020, S., Symbols of Japan. Japan – the age of Zen. S., 2019; I was very helped by the research of Indologists from the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology at Sofia University, published in the periodical of the East-West Publishing House – Lotus: Julian Angelov: The First Buddhist Council – History and Context. In: Almanac „Lotus“, 3/2021, S., Lyubomir Konstantinov: The Teacher in Tibetan Buddhism. In: Almanac „Lotus“, 1/2020, S., Petya Manolova: Eternity beyond suffering and death – the perspective given to us by the Mahabharata. In: Almanac „Lotus“, 2/2020, Sofia, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Antoaneta Nikolova: Taoism – the art of living in the fullness of the moment. In: Almanac „Lotus“, 3/2021, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gergana Ruseva: „In time is the mind, in time is the spirit“. Imagine the weather in ancient India. In: Almanac „Lotus“, 2/2020, S. and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Galina Sokolova: Is there a religion in India? Almanac „Lotus“, 2/2020, S., Prof. Alexander Fedotov: On Buddhist Literature and Buddhist Schools in Tibet. In: Almanac „Lotus“, 2/2020. Clarity on the eschatological views of Eastern religions I received from Vladimir Grigoriev: Religions around the world. S., 1998, as well as by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Klara Toneva: If I Have No Love... S., 2006. Totyu Koev and G. Bakalov: History of Religions. S., 2001.

*Indologists, culturologists and historians (world)*: Among the world historians of religions of great importance are: Mircea Eliade: History of religious beliefs and ideas, vol. 1. From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian mysteries. S., 1997, History of Religious Ideas and Beliefs, vol. 2. S., 2009, Yoga. Immortality and freedom. S., 2014, Treatise on the History of Religions. S., 2012. Norbert

Bischoffberger: The Thought of Reincarnation in European Antiquity and the New Age. IN: The idea of reincarnation in the East and in the West. S., 2019. In Erman. Essay on the history of Vedic literature. M., 1980. Philip Kaplo: The Three Pillars of Zen. S., 2020. Damien Coon: Buddhism. S., 2002, Buddhist ethics. S., 2007. GM Bongard-Levin: Ancient Indian civilization – philosophy, science, religion. S., 1982. The most detailed knowledge about the life of Buddha and the development of Buddhism I received from Hermann Oldenberg: Buddha – life, teaching and order. S., 2016. Alan Watts: The Spirit of Zen. S., 2021 and the Philosophies of Asia. S., 2021. Hans Wolfgang Schumann. Soul-seekers versus soul-deniers – the teachings of Indian religions on reincarnation. In: The idea of reincarnation in the East and in the West. S., 2019. Louis de la Vale Poussin. The road to nirvana. S., 2016.

## **II. Statement**

**1. First chapter. Origin of the idea of rebirth** – The first chapter traces the historical path of the idea of reincarnation, clarifying from the very beginning the current situation in India; i.e. how the cultural development of ancient India took place until the formation of the sangha (Buddhist religious community). It is divided into three main points, each of which is fragmented into sub-points that comment on more specific events in the history of Eastern religions.

The first part examines the era of Indian civilization – it is a brief overview of the historical path, which begins with the first tribes inhabiting the Indian Valley, passes through the invasion of Aryan tribes, which is supposed to have borrowed some of the idea of rebirth and the writing of the first Vedic texts, until the creation of the Upanishads and the first ancient Indian philosophers, spoke more clearly about the reincarnation and the wheel of samsara. This raises the question of reincarnation and the extent to which it could be perceived as part of a

religion, having been the subject of more philosophical controversy between two of the most influential and famous speakers of the time.

The second part of the first chapter deepens the study of the idea of reincarnation in its natural historical course, namely – with the advent of Buddhism. During this period, the problem of the caste regime in ancient India deepened, which gave rise to a religious revolt, which formed the first most pronounced sects – Jainism and Buddhism.

If the previous championship of Brahmanism was of absolute authority, then by the time of the Buddha it was gradually shifting, due to the arrogant attitude of the Brahmins – the highest social class. Brahmins distanced themselves from other castes by isolating almost all people from spiritual practices and sacred texts, which oppressed the vast majority of people, especially those of the lower classes, who were compared below animals and, according to Brahmins, polluted food even only if they touch it.

Buddhism appeared in this period, known in history as the Decline of Indian Society. The Buddhist religious group began as a movement whose principles were radically different and contrary to Brahmanism. The struggle between the two religious movements is obvious, but gradually, especially after the Buddha's death, the sangha brings the whole concept of Buddhism into a political commune that drains the state's resources. This is achieved after the introduction of a law by which members of the middle class are obliged to support it. This gradually weakened the influence of Buddhism in India until the twelfth century, when it disappeared completely, and today the Buddhist community there is insignificant.

From the title of the dissertation it is clear that the idea of rebirth is at the center not only of Buddhism but of Eastern religions in general, so the third part of the first chapter transfers the study to the three most popular Eastern religions that

were influenced by Buddhism, but and which contain in some form the idea of reincarnation – Tibet, China and Japan. Here is a brief overview of the differences in understanding of reincarnation, which show the failure of the idea – a new argument against reincarnation – if something is true, it would not undergo editing and changes over time. The idea of reincarnation is at the heart of all Eastern religions, but wandering in understanding and adapting to local traditions changes it to a different setting, which is chronologically well described; i.e. one can easily trace how Eastern thought about the idea went.

## **2. Chapter Two. Christian view of the idea of reincarnation**

The second chapter is devoted entirely to the evidentiary and apologetic part of the dissertation. Provoked by the challenges of the East, the Christian view finds it necessary to turn to it, to study it, and to state firmly the position of the Christian apologists, the Church, and the teachings of Christ.

The second chapter is divided into three main parts – the first raises the question: is there a reason to look for the idea of reincarnation in the natural life process of man after the fall; commented on the creation of man according to the Christian faith, as well as the fall, from which death enters into being.

In this part, the focus is more on Christian apologists and their teachings, in order to trace and clarify the state of the idea of rebirth in their time and whether it had any followers. The answer is no – in the time of the apologists the attention of society was not focused on this idea, but it was not alien to them; they understood the rebirth mainly from Hellenic philosophers and Orphics (the Orphics were not accepted with special authority). For this reason, apologists do not talk lavishly about reincarnation, it is even difficult to find sources from which to read their opinion. Some speculations claim that Origen believed in reincarnation, but it is

clear that this is not true, and his teaching has a completely different nuance about the movement of the human soul.

The second part examines the life and saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ as the center of Orthodox identity and whether there is a place for rebirth here. An argument against rebirth is precisely the idea of the unity of the human person as body and soul, which is to come resurrection, not reincarnation. God does not create man for death, but for eternal life, so the whole House-Building Plan is aimed at fulfilling God's plan.

The third part comments on the place of the term nirvana in the life of Eastern religions. The meaning of nirvana is clarified, as well as that of the Kingdom of Heaven and the Church, where human rebirth takes place, but not rebirth. It is clear that the path to nirvana is the path to the destruction of the individual; the Buddhist goal is annihilation and thus liberation from suffering, while the goal of the sacraments of the Church is just the opposite – the renewal of spiritual strength and will through the Holy Spirit and the path to eternal life in the Kingdom.

### **3. Chapter three. Manifestations of the idea of rebirth**

The third chapter points out some modern misunderstandings in the perception of both Christianity and Buddhism. Like the first two chapters, it is divided into three main parts, which show some examples of implementing the idea of rebirth in everyday life.

The first part is a commentary on the modern processes of multiculturalism, increased influence of the media and social networks, which not only manipulate but also form a new kind of consciousness and a whole new level of consumer attitude to life. Here is a brief description of some speculations with the Holy

Scriptures, from which most often arise religious currents on a Christian basis and who believe in reincarnation.

The second part talks about the dangers of religious sects, giving several examples – the guru’s New Age sects and transcendental meditation (TM). The focus of this part is TM, as it is the most modern and popular method of attracting people to various religious totalitarian movements. Recruitment is always done through seemingly innocent courses and methods of personal development, but gradually a deeply religious practice is revealed.

The third part of the last chapter makes a theological analysis of the most commonly used Eastern settings – karma, meditation and yoga, not only clarifying their meaning and significance, but comparing them with the Orthodox truths of repentance, forgiveness and prayer. This analysis highlights another argument against reincarnation – the whole teaching of Christ and all its elements demonstrate the personal communication between man and God and as such, it is dynamic, emotional, sometimes happy, other times sad. The meaning of personal communication is the deification of man, theosis, eternal life in constant communion with God.

In the final part of the dissertation the arguments in the opposition to the idea of rebirth are summarized; several suggestions for dealing with the case are attached. One of the solutions is to educate journalists in the field of Christianity and other religions so that they have a more adequate transmission of news and reports on church issues that are not biased and misleading.

### **III. Conclusion**

The idea of reincarnation is an indisputable challenge for Christianity. The danger does not arise from the idea itself as a philosophical reasoning of ancient

Indian thought, but comes from the way of thinking that it is a real possibility for the continuation of man after death. The greatest danger comes from the refusal of reasonable research on the unknown – in this case the East, because when one does not approach with extreme caution to its soul, it becomes a bargaining chip of institutions that are wrong to speak of as non-religious, as they have a specific cult structure and worship practices – meditation in exchange for peace, Ayurveda in exchange for health, yoga in exchange for tight appearance, tantra in exchange for a good family life. The trade of the soul takes away the most valuable gift that man has received from God – his free will, leaving him with the feeling that he is infinitely dependent on some external circumstances and takes away the sense of responsibility from his own actions.

Reincarnation cannot be considered, taken out of the whole picture. It comes from a centuries-old culture, cemented by events whose origins can only be guessed at and speculated on, but are also of scientific value, as not many written sources from this period have survived, but what has a history, is highly mythologized and fabulous. An interesting observation from the study is that people are very inclined to believe in myths and legends, because they ignite their imagination and make them feel as if they are learning something more than others.

The dissertation research passed into two main stages in theoretical terms – first, historical review and, second, theological analysis. From the first stage of the study – historically, the following conclusions stand out, and with them – the first arguments against the idea of rebirth:

*First.* Historically, the origins of the idea of reincarnation cannot be traced back to the roots, but it can be assumed that, as far as the East is concerned, it was most likely introduced by the Aryan invasion of the Indus Valley. This period is

classified by historians as the Early Vedic period, when the written documentation of some religious practices of the tribes at that time began. In writing, the idea of reincarnation appeared much later (almost 2000 years after the first Vedas) in the Upanishads, which the ancient Indians considered esoteric. Here is *the first argument* in the struggle against reincarnation – a philosophical idea should not become a religious cult.

*Second.* Once the caste situation in India was established, the sharp division of people from different social groups began. This led to the detachment of the people from the orthodox religious practices of the Brahmins, and hence the creation of Buddhism and its sangha.

*Third.* Although claiming to be non-religious, the sangha has taken care to establish a cult of her spiritual leader, Siddhartha Gautama, despite his recommendation not to do so. This in itself speaks of an unstable organization that selectively accepts and follows the spiritual instructions of its own guru. Gradually, the sangha became a burden on the state, a mark that spread to every other Asian nation that encountered Buddhism.

*Fourth.* The transfer of Buddhism along the Silk Road inevitably led to its mixing with local beliefs and superstitions. The result was a variety of religious teachings, whose „Buddhist“ concepts became increasingly confused, and with them the idea of reincarnation. Hence *the second argument* against the legitimacy of the idea – if it is true, it would not change over time.

*Fifth.* The idea of reincarnation was not alien to the Orphics of ancient Greece, about which there is also very little information. They used the expression „wandering of souls“, which is in stark contrast to the classical Indian notion of reincarnation. When the Buddha created his sangha and doctrine of deliverance from suffering, in Greece the philosophical reflections of Socrates, Plato and

Aristotle already reached the feeling of a Demiurge, Who is the root cause of all that exists, the immortal soul and the approaching Christianity, whose apologists and church writers will wash away any doubts about the afterlife.

The second stage of the research examines the topic of reincarnation through the theological analysis of the Christian view, tracing both Christian thought and the various notions of reincarnation from the Eastern world, which led the dissertation to the following conclusions:

*First.* At the heart of early Buddhism is an event that Buddhists call the „enlightenment of Siddhartha Gautama“. The Buddha is „the one who connects the doctrine of reincarnation and karma of the Upanishads with the denial of the soul“.<sup>2</sup> What the Western world understands as a person, according to the Buddha, is nothing but a combination of five factors – body, sensations, perceptions, spiritual impulses and consciousness. The Buddha calls this set the „five groups of appropriation“ – with rebirth one appropriates them in a new person. The Buddha’s arguments are based on the fact that the five groups are subject to change according to external circumstances such as disease and suffering, and are therefore non-soul (anatta) if the idea of the soul of India's ancient religious systems is that it is eternal and unchanging.<sup>3</sup> What puzzles the Christian world is how Buddhists explain the nature of reincarnation, while at the same time categorically denying the existence of the soul and affirming the illusory nature of the individual self.

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<sup>2</sup> Шуман, Х. Пос. съч., с. 31.

<sup>3</sup> „Още докато Буда е бил жив, мнозина са се затруднявали да разберат будисткото схващане за прераждането. Когато се оспорва душата, надживяваща смъртта, смятат те, кой тогава се преражда? (...) В действителност, отговаря Буда, прераждането се осъществява без душа и без странстване на душите, а именно като обусловено възникване (paticcasamuppada)“ или „истината е по средата“, тъй като личността А обуславя следващото съществуване на личността Б и ѝ дава импулс, но не е напълно идентична с нея, нито е независима от нея. Вж. Пак там, с. 33.

*Second.* The second part of the theological analysis asked questions about the meaning of human existence according to God's plan, how man's life was transformed after the Fall, and whether there is room for reincarnation in the flow of life: does reincarnation enter man's damaged nature after the Fall?; do the life and redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ testify to rebirth after death; Does the Holy Scriptures also give grounds for the Holy Apostles to answer the questions of rebirth; Are the kingdom of heaven and nirvana the same thing? why Christianity preaches resurrection and not reincarnation. The answers to the questions are in accordance with the Holy Scriptures.

As a result, the idea of rebirth in the ancient world of the early Christians was not popular in its Buddhist light, but was still present in philosophical thought. Theological analysis traces the ideological thread of the first apologies, which to some extent answered the question of whether there is a rebirth, but it is noteworthy that the answers of the holy fathers and church writers is always short, strongly negative and ironic approach to the subject. This gives the right to believe that the groups of people who believed in reincarnation in the period III-VIII, Orphics or ordinary people, were relatively small; society viewed them with suspicion and distrust, and the more important task of the apologists was to reject misunderstandings in the understandings of Christians themselves, theology to face the educated Greeks and win their respect and above all – to awaken faith in the risen God Jesus Christ.

From the second part of the theological analysis the following two arguments in the opposition to rebirth stood out:

***The third argument*** is derived from the first question of the Second Chapter of the dissertation: does reincarnation come after the fall of the ancestors. At this point, an attempt is made to understand the processes of the first consequences of

disobeying God's law and detachment from communion with Him – the entry of evil that has no existence but is assimilated by man and the imposition of death as an unnatural state in life. of man as a restrictive measure to prevent eternal evil. It has become clear that reincarnation does not enter the damaged nature of man, because, even if fallen, the human person is created by body and soul, which are connected and equally equal. Death, on the other hand, is the result of a broken connection with God, Who is Life, therefore separation from Him means death, impossibility of existence. It is naive to attribute reincarnation to this stream of life – man is a „living soul“ only because of God's breath, which God breathed into matter at creation, so that it becomes a man bearing God's image.

*The fourth argument*, which proves the insolvency of rebirth, is derived from the Christological dogma, according to which God the Word incarnates, becomes a real man, dies and rises. The redemptive work of Jesus Christ is first and foremost an expression of God's immeasurable love for man – God the Father sends His Son to atone for man's sin and to lift up broken human nature, because this is the only possible way for the human person to set out again. of perfection and the likeness of God. The story of Lazarus during the earthly life of Jesus Christ shows that the resurrection of man is not impossible even before Christ's or universal resurrection. After the death of the physical body, the soul continues to exist and does not disintegrate, but when the time comes, it will return to the same body, regardless of whether its elements have disintegrated.

From an ontological point of view, the very resurrection of Jesus Christ is an example of the future of the human person – the resurrection of body and soul together, simultaneously and forever, not rebirth. Jesus Christ is entirely God, but also fully man (except in sin); therefore, what is the point of not comparing human life to His human life, which ends in death and resurrection? The idea of

reincarnation in Eastern religions is also conditioned by some kind of „malfunction“ in nature; i.e. reincarnation is „damage“ according to Hinduism, so one must seek „correction“. But if this correction depended on reincarnation, and it was necessary, Jesus Christ would demonstrate and preach reincarnation, not resurrection. The disciples of Jesus Christ saw Him with their own eyes after the resurrection, but to this day no one has witnessed a reincarnation.

*Third.* As a result of focusing on a distant for the Bulgarian religious and psychological pursuits and needs of the individual, there is a convincing introduction and establishment of neo-Hindu teachings. A typical feature of modern Hindu religious teachings is the disguise of pseudo-scientific theories and „evidence“ that convincingly reaches many people. Using the methods of emotional manipulation, religious organizations mislead even unsuspecting people to become accomplices in cult expression.

The theological view of the idea of reincarnation in the analysis so far is an attempt to reach the truth. This experience is not intended to reject, humiliate or condemn believers of different religions, because the meaning of Christianity is not in the obedience of the other, but in the revelation of the higher meaning for which man was created, and the core is Jesus Christ Himself. Understanding Christianity, as well as Eastern religions, is of particular importance, because only the conscious person has the strength to resist the temptation of the unknown; to recognize inaccuracies in the free use and media „scattering“ of religious terms and not to deprive reality of reason and religious value.

#### **IV. Scientific contributions**

1. The dissertation is one of the first scientific experiments in Bulgarian Orthodox theology to study the idea of reincarnation in Eastern religions and the regard of Orthodox Christianity on this issue.

2. The dissertation will be useful in future research of students in History of Religions.

3. The dissertation is the first step towards bringing the issue of reincarnation to the general public from a Christian point of view and setting new dimensions of the conversation on the topic of why there is no rebirth.

### **V. Publications on the topic**

1. Traykova, V. How the media shape reality (Examples of new paganism on-air) – In: Orthodoxy – traditions and modernity, vol. 6, Studio 18, P., 2019, pp. 115-130.

2. Traykova, V. The idea of reincarnation in the lives of young people (The attitude of Prof. Arch. Dr. Evtimiy Sapundzhiev). – In: Archimandrite Evtimiy Sapundzhiev: life, church and academic activity. Collection on the occasion of 75 years since his death. S., 2020, pp. 118-129.

3. Traykova, V. The idea of reincarnation – delusion of reason and doubts in the faith – In: Magazine. „Svetovats“, no. 7/2021 and on: <https://dobrotoliubie.com/2021/07/21/идеята-за-прераждане-заблуда-на-р/>

4. „The idea of reincarnation (An attempt to make sense of it through the relationship science-religion in the theological work of Prof. Dr. Boris Marinov)“ – forthcoming. (In press, with attached official note).

#### ***Others:***

1. „The idea of reincarnation as a problem for the spiritual life of young people“ – forthcoming, in press.