

REVIEW

by **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Theodor Bozhidarov Stoychev**

on the dissertation of Victoria Albert Traikova "The idea of rebirth in Eastern religions (theological analysis)", Faculty of Theology, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski ", for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of 2.4 Religion and Theology / History of Religions.

The topic of the presented dissertation is not only relevant, but also necessary from the point of view of the Christian reading of the problem. As the doctoral student herself objectively testifies, today we are flooded with Eastern teachings and practices, which requires an Orthodox theological response. The topic is not easy, because it implies a good knowledge not only of the source literature, but also of the cultural layers that define this way of thinking. This largely means that the topic is interdisciplinary. In this regard, it should be noted that the doctoral student shows interest not only in the works of the Orthodox specialists, but also in the research of Indologists, culturologists and historians, which makes her research comprehensive. This means that she has tried to meet the scientific challenge that follows her research.

The introduction meets the scientific criteria. The content is also well structured, consisting of three main chapters and three sub-chapters, which in turn are further subdivided.

The first chapter has both a purely historical character and an explanatory one on the main topic, namely the emergence of the idea of rebirth. In the first subchapter, in my opinion, she presents the main argument on which she will base her critique: the belief that the doctrine of reincarnation is not a revelation, but a philosophical product resulting from the work of three thinkers.

In the second subchapter she focuses on Buddhism, which, according to the doctoral student, provided a substantial impetus to the spread of the doctrine of rebirth. In addition to tracing the historical circumstances behind the emergence of Buddhism, she undertakes the task to compare different concepts of the soul, which makes her research even more analytical. As a disadvantage, I would note that the study uses mostly secondary sources when presenting the teachings of the Buddha, rather than source literature (pp. 69, 70, and many others). In general, it is a significant mistake to present the teaching according to the reading of other researchers, which is not acceptable for critical research.

Otherwise, Victoria Traikova deepens her analysis by including in the discourse the idea of rebirth in the Eastern religions after Buddha. This is the third point of the first chapter. Here she discusses other existing teachings on reincarnation as well as practices for achieving nirvana. She focuses on the Tibetan Buddhism, the idea of rebirth in China, on the Japanese Buddhism, showing the changes that have taken place and the circumstances that led to it. The adaptive nature of Buddhism is emphasized, which has helped influence other peoples and cultures.

The second chapter is entitled "Christian view of the idea of rebirth." Here the researcher presents the Orthodox view of the Fall, proving that according to the biblical perspective, the idea of creation and the Fall does not presuppose a doctrine of rebirth.

V. Traikova also dwells on some Western philosophers of antiquity who profess a similar doctrine. In order to show its inconclusiveness, she rightly refers to the opinion of some fathers. In my opinion, however, there is an unnecessary scattering of information that has little to do with the topic. The position of the fathers about the Eastern religions, discussed by the doctoral student, remains unclear. Even for some of the fathers she mentioned, such as St. Gregory of Neocacaria, and not only him, it is not stated what they actually say about

reincarnation. In my opinion, those fathers who write against Hellenistic philosophical teachings on reincarnation, should not be involved in a topic about Eastern thought.

The second point of the second chapter is entitled "Jesus Christ - the center of Orthodox identity." From the very beginning, the doctoral student derived an important principle that really distinguishes the doctrine of reincarnation from the Christian one for the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Another important distinction that has rightly been made is precisely the Christian doctrine of the unity of the human person and the value of the human soul. The author enters into an argumentative presentation of Christian anthropology, claiming it superior to the doctrine of rebirth.

The defining of the Savior Jesus Christ as a major reasoning factor is crucial. Christ's death and resurrection are the events that heal, and that is why, as the doctoral student emphasizes, rebirth is not necessary for a person to heal himself.

The last point of the second chapter is entitled "Is nirvana the content of the Kingdom of God?" Here, in my opinion, the doctoral student is much more skilful and dialogical and with a clear sense of her personal presence, she points out the basic shortcomings not only of the doctrine of nirvana, but also of the nihilism that Buddhism entails. The agonizing neglect of life in general, which really shows the other face of the Eastern practices and teachings, is objectively assessed by the doctoral student. Unfortunately, the PhD student is again moving on to issues she might overlook, such as the church ecclesiology and some biblical topics unfamiliar to her. In this way she elaborates on an unnecessary retelling of the Orthodox dogmas, which has long been done.

The last third chapter is entitled "Manifestations of the idea of rebirth." Here V. Traikova expands the horizons of the research with additional questions. Thus the reader can easily understand the practical manifestations of this religion,

which have found their place in some well-known modern sects. On the other hand, comparing them to the Orthodox spirituality, the author reveals the dignity of the Christian tradition. It is in the doctoral student's ability to present the superiority of the Eastern Orthodoxy over the Indian spirituality in general that I find the contributing nature of the work presented.

In conclusion: Taking into account the compliance of the dissertation of Victoria Albert Traikova with the requirements of the Law for the development of academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulation for state requirements for admission and training of Ph.D. students and holding academic positions at Sofia University, as well as the compliance with all procedures related to the preparation of the doctoral student and the process of putting the dissertational study through, I give my positive evaluation and recommend the Honorable Jury to award Victoria Albert Traikova the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education. 2.4 Religion and Theology / History of Religions.

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