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REVIEW

for the dissertation of **Laurentiu-Joan Jagaru**

on the subject of

„Development of Religious Education in Romania

from the communist period until today“

for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific specialty "Theology" in the professional field 2.4. "Religion and Theology" (Religious Pedagogy) by the scientific jury of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

This review is based on the Decision of the first meeting of the Scientific Jury (Protocol No. 1/20.04.2023) in which I was appointed as a reviewer of the proposed thesis.

1. Data about the PhD student

Doctoral candidate Laurentiu-Joan Jagaru has a solid theological education, acquired at the Orthodox Theological Seminary "St. Gregory the Theologian", Craiova (2008-2012), followed by obtaining a Bachelor's degree at the Orthodox Theological Faculty of the University of Craiova (2012-2016), and a Master's degree in two educational programs: "Cultural Theology" (2016-2018, Craiova) and "Faith and Life" at the Theological Faculty of Sofia University (2016–2018). At the same time, the candidate also holds a Bachelor's degree in Management of Public Nutrition and Agrotourism (2012-2016, Bucharest).

Since the time of his studies, Laurentiu-Joan Jagaru has worked as a Heritage Advisor in the Diocese of Oltenia (September 2012-May 2015), and after graduation, as an Administrative Advisor (January 2019-March 2022) and Land Improvement Segment Leader (September 2016-January 2019) at the National Land Improvement Administration. From June 2022 to present, he has been working as an IT specialist and designer at Huawei Enterprise, Romania.

2. Details of the procedure

Laurentiu-Joan Jagaru was enrolled as a full-time PhD student in December 2019 by order of the Rector of St. 20-2168/10.12.2019 in the professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology (Religious Education). In the period of the doctoral studies, he has fulfilled his study plan in full. He has successfully passed the examinations. He has managed to prepare and implement the

required number of scientific publications. The doctoral candidate participated with papers in international scientific conferences organized by the Theological Faculty of Sofia University.

After the completion of the individual plan and the expiry of the doctoral studies, the dissertant was discharged with the right to defence by the order of the Rector of the Sofia University (ПД 20-6/05.01.2023) in January 2023. The preliminary discussion of the thesis in the Department of Practical Theology was held on 08.03.2023 (Protocol № 7/08.03.2023). Recommendations were made, which the doctoral candidate has taken into account in submitting the final version of the dissertation. The readiness of the dissertation text for defense was unanimously supported by the members of the Department. This decision was confirmed by the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Theology on 23.03.2023 (Protocol No. 09). The composition of the scientific jury and the deadline for the defence – until 28.07.2023.

At its first meeting (Protocol No. 1/20.04.2023) the Jury confirmed that the procedure was organized in full compliance with the requirements of the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedures for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and the Holding of Academic Positions of Sofia University. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivo Yanev was elected as the Chairperson. Prof. Dr. Magdalena Legkostup and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivo Yanev were appointed as reviewers, and the preparation of written opinions was assigned to Prof. Dr. Dilyan Nikolchev, Prof. Dr. Lyudmil Malev and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Theodor Stoychev. The Scientific Jury sets the deadline for the submission of reviews and opinions to 29.05.2023 and the date for the public defense of the dissertation – 12.06.2023.

The foregoing gives me reason to assume that all the time limits and rules of procedure have been complied with and that no violations have been committed. Laurentiu-Joan Jagaru meets the requirements and fulfils the criteria of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and its Implementing Rules.

3. Dissertation Data

The dissertation submitted for peer review, entitled "*The Development of Religious Education in Romania from the Communist Period to the Present Day*", contains a total of 262 standard printed pages in Romanian. An extended abstract in Bulgarian is enclosed in 102 pages. The scientific study consists of the following parts: preface, introduction, three chapters, conclusion and bibliography. The scientific-critical apparatus contains 418 footnotes divided into 30 sources (documentary sources), 38 monographs/books, 11 textbooks and teaching aids, 29 articles. The literature used is relevant to the topic of the dissertation research. I accept the proposed outline of the dissertation. The thesis is written in clear academic language. At the

end of the text of the abstract to the dissertation are attached the publications of the dissertation in relation to the topic and his scientific contributions.

The topic of the development of religious education in Romania is of interest, since school religious education in this country has very good results and can be a useful example for the educational mission of the Church in cooperation with the State and in our pedagogical context. Its relevance is determined both by the general interdisciplinary character of the text (theology, history, politics, pedagogy), in which the PhD student examines religious education in Romania during the communist regime and its contemporary situation today, and by the lack of studies on this subject that address the contemporary situation of Romanian religious education from the perspective of the theological paradigm, both historically and religious-pedagogically. At the same time, the study explores the attitudes and expectations of school-age youth, which allows for outlining future directions and perspectives for religious education in the Romanian educational system.

In the **Preface** (p. 3), the author states his reasons for choosing the topic of the dissertation and its addressees.

The introduction (pp. 4-14) offers a general description of the dissertation research, justifying and defending the relevance of the topic. The dissertation reviews the state of research and provides detailed information about Romanian theology and the theoretical and methodological aspects of the development of religious education in Romania. Here Laurentiu-Joan Iagaru states his contributory scientific methodology in his research and presents its object, subject, aims, objectives, structure. The stated aim of the present work is: "to present the situation of religious education in Romania from the establishment of the communist regime in the country until today, in the context of the relations between the confessions recognized by the state" (Abstract, p. 8). The tasks set by the work are several: "1) to examine and analyze the practices of religious education in Romania during the communist regime; 2) to examine the state of religious education in Romania after 1989 in the context of the existing religious pluralism in the country; and 3) to conduct a study of the attitudes of young people in the country regarding the place of religion in their lives and its place within the country's school system."

Based on the aforementioned issues, the dissertation formulates two research hypotheses: 1) Any attempt to replace the Romanian national identity in different historical periods also leads to a change in the content or prohibition of religious education and 2) Religious education does not contradict the secular character of education and the contemporary interreligious, intercultural and ecumenical dialogue in the European context.

The first chapter, entitled "EDUCATION AND RELIGION IN ROMANIA DURING

THE COMMUNIST REGIME" (pp. 15-78), provides a preliminary presentation of the cultural, historical, political, and religious context of the implementation of religious education in Romania before the establishment of the communist regime. Based on this retrospective, the situation created by the communist coup is clarified in detail, documenting and clarifying the prohibitions and persecutions during this period. Finally, the present context, the so-called "transitional period", in which new conditions for the life of the churches and the teaching of the subject of Religion emerged, is examined. Chapter I is divided into four sections. The first examines the religious context of twentieth-century Romania, while the following three trace the difficult path of monasticism, the priesthood, and professors of theology during the years of communism in Romania. The information presented in the abstract on the contents of the first chapter ends with conclusions and generalizations.

The second chapter, entitled "RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN STATE SCHOOLS IN ROMANIA AFTER 1989. RELIGIOUS PLURALISM" (pp. 79-162) pays special attention to the situation in Romania after the fall of the communist regime in 1989 – the beginning of religious education and its spread. It begins with a section on the beginnings of religious education in public schools in Romania after 1989. The next three parts of this chapter review the religious education provided by the more significant religious communities in the country in the period under review – Orthodox, Catholic and Neo-Protestant. It analyses the main teaching aids of the different denominations used to provide religious education in Romanian schools. The second chapter ends with a conclusion which briefly outlines the conclusions of the analysis of the relevant textbooks and teaching aids.

The third chapter, entitled "YOUNG PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES TO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN ROMANIA TODAY – A STUDY" (pp. 163-245) presents a study based on the attitudes of today's young people towards religious education in Romania. It contains seven points, the first of which presents the nature and content of the key concepts of *religion* and *religiosity*. The next four examine attitudes toward one's own religion/faith and behavioral indicators of religious well-being, emphasize religion as a guide to behavior and a guideline for decision making, and articulate types of attitudes toward it. The family-religious education correlation is presented in the sixth item based on a survey of parents' opinions. In the last point, a presentation of the Church's actions in the field of religious and moral education is made. And this chapter ends with a conclusion which draws conclusions from the issues discussed.

The study ends with a general **Conclusion** (pp. 246-251), which draws the main conclusions from the studied issues, summarizes the results and provides answers to the set tasks and goal. Through the descriptive presentation of the results, the hypotheses of the

research formulated in the introduction are proved.

The bibliography (pp. 252-261) includes a total of 108 titles (38 monographs, 29 articles, 30 documentary sources and 11 textbooks and teaching aids). The literature cited is relevant to the topic and contributes to its development.

The extended abstract (101 pp.) presented by Laurentsiou-Yoan Yagaru meets the requirements and allows for a clear and precise introduction in a synthesized form to the text of the thesis.

No plagiarism was found in the dissertation submitted for defense.

The dissertation topic was also the subject of three scientific publications.

In the present procedure, I have no joint publications with my colleague and I am in no way covered by the assumptions of the law and other regulations concerning conflict of interest.

4. Dissertation merits and contributions

The text of the dissertation is clearly and precisely formulated. Its structure is logically argued and in general follows the academic methodology of research accepted in the theological faculties of Bulgaria.

One of the main merits of the dissertation is the competent detailed analysis of the history and legislative framework regulating religious education in Romania. The new data provided regarding the changes and perspectives in this public sphere during the communist regime and then until the present day are of a contributory nature. The immersion in the historical context, the meeting with key personalities, and the familiarization with archival documents contribute to the discovery of the interrelationships between the processes and phenomena under consideration that presuppose religious pluralism and the remarkable achievements of religious education in Romania today. The sources used are objective and clarify important details in the overall picture of the development of religious education in the country. Of special interest are the data and statistics provided on the educational practice of the various religious communities in Romania.

I point to the study described in chapter three, which reflects the attitudes of young people in Romania towards religious education, as particularly useful and relevant. The empirical data analysed and tabulated confirm the research hypotheses and make the work scientifically sound and objective. The applicability of this study would be extremely useful for developing a strategy for the development of contemporary religious education not only in the Romanian context.

I accept three of the 4 main contributions formulated by the PhD student, which argue that: 1) the dissertation is the first study to examine the continuity of religious education within the last two consecutive historical periods in the perspective of the theological paradigm; 2) some

archival items related to Romanian history and education during the communist period have been promulgated for the first time; and 3) an empirical study has been conducted from which theoretical conclusions have been drawn about the role of faith and worship as conscious values in the religious formation of students. I do not find a "detailed comparative analysis of the curricular content reflected in textbooks of the three main types of confessional education - Orthodox, Catholic, and neo-Protestant."

5. References

The dissertation lacks conclusions and summaries after each chapter. They are specifically brought out only in the extended abstract. I regret to note that the conclusions and summaries at the end of the first chapter of the research contain findings only with respect to the first half of the twentieth century. Ignoring here the processes and state of religious education during the communist regime detailed in the text is perplexing. The conclusions after chapter two are also fragmentary and need a more detailed summary of the developed dissertation content on all points.

With regard to the research conducted and described in Chapter Three, the absence of important data that support the representativeness of the research is striking, namely: 1) The purpose and motives for selecting the studied student audience, which in the study was narrowed down to the high school stage (the same applies to the textbooks analyzed in Chapter Two), are not described; 2) The correctness of the conducted study required the indication of key data such as time of conducting, number of persons studied, age, gender, religion, place of residence, etc.

In preparing for the publication of the present essay, I would recommend that my colleague refine these points in his work.

6. Conclusion

The dissertation presented here meets the requirements and contributes to contemporary religious pedagogy. This leads me to confidently endorse the dissertation and to vote in the affirmative for the award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology, scientific specialty Religious Pedagogy.

25.04.2023 г.,
St. Mark the Apostle and Evangelist
Veliko Tarnovo

Prof. Dr. Magdalena Legkostup