

**Prof. Dr. Aleksandar Omarchevski**  
Department of Historical Theology  
Faculty of Theology  
Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“  
1000 Sofia, 19 Sveta Nedelya Sq.  
**Registered in the RASD of NACID under Art. 2b, para. 2 of the LDASRB (ZRASRB) under No. 23046**

Fax (+359 2) 9872 525  
e-mail: omarchev@gmail.com  
e-mail: omarchevski@theo.uni-sofia.bg  
Phone (+359 2) 9890 115/25  
Phone (+359 2) 9883 950/25

**Sofia, 31.08.2023**

## **R E V I E W**

**for a dissertation on:**

**„THE GRACIOUS CREATIVITY OF MAN IN TIME ACCORDING TO  
FATHER GEORGES FLOROVSKY“**

**submitted by Theodor Assenov Avramov**

**for the award of the degree of PhD in 2.4. Religion and Theology**

**(History of Orthodox Theology in the Twentieth Century)**

By Order ПД-38-350/10.07.2023 of the Rector of the Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“ I was appointed as a member of the scientific jury, and by the jury (minutes 1/18.07.2023) – as its chairman and reviewer in the procedure for public defense of the dissertation of the part-time PhD student assistant professor Theodor Assenov Avramov for the award of the PhD degree in 2.4. Religion and Theology.

Theodor Avramov was born on 19.03.1994 in Sofia. He completed his primary and secondary education in Sofia. – 134<sup>th</sup> „Dimcho Debelyanov“ and 32<sup>nd</sup> „St. Kliment Ohridski“ Secondary School. In 2017 he graduated in Theology at the Faculty of Theology of Sofia University and in 2018 again there he obtained a master's degree in the master program Contemporary Aspects of Theology with master's thesis: „*Agapic Aspects in Orthodox Eucharistic Theology of the Twentieth Century*“. He specialized at the University of

Thessaloniki (Greece – 2016), Taizé Monastery (France – 2017), Taizé Riga (Latvia – 2018) and Château de Bossey (France – 2018).

By order of the Rector of Sofia University ПД 20-238/29.01.2020, amended by ПД 20-2040/26.11.2020, he was enrolled in the PhD program in 2.4. Religion and Theology, Doctoral Program in Theology (History of Orthodox Theology in the Twentieth Century) at the Department of Historical Theology of the Faculty of Theology at Sofia University, as of 1.02.2020 with scientific supervisor Prof. Pavel Pavlov. By Order ПД 20-1731/17.09.2021 the full-time PhD studies were transformed into part-time due to a successful competition for assistant professor. He has passed the required examinations and other commitments according to his PhD Individual Plan. In the process of preparation of his thesis there is no evidence of any violations. There are no grounds to suspect plagiarism. On 14.06.2023 he was discharged with the right to defence.

In 2021 he won a competition for full-time assistant professor at Sofia University – Faculty of Theology, in 2.4 Religion and Theology (Historical Theology). As a full-time assistant professor, he teaches classes for the disciplines included in the Department of Historical Theology. Assistant Theodore Avramov has accumulated rich experience and erudition as a lecturer in various disciplines of historical theology.

The dissertation submitted for review contains 284 (VII+277) pages and has the following structure: Foreword, Introduction, three chapters, Conclusion, Declaration of Originality, Sources and Literature and Appendices.

I have read the text of the submitted dissertation in detail. I express my satisfaction with what the PhD student has achieved in the stage of finalizing the text of the thesis. The deficiencies noted in the internal defense, as pointed out by the College in the Department, have been corrected in the text submitted for review. In this form the work reveals its undoubted merits.

As the topic of the dissertation indicates, the main problem for research is the life and work of one of the great and generally recognized theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – Jaroslav Pelikan (1923–2006). Avramov presents in detail facts from the biography of the author under review and gives a panoramic overview of his rich scientific production in a chronological narrative. The methodology chosen by the doctoral student allows for a broad presentation of the historical context of the era as well as introducing the reader to the personalities influential in Pelikan's growth in theology and his long journey in the transition to conversion to Orthodoxy at the end of his life. My overall impression is that the candidate has successfully tackled the difficult task he has set himself. The text is readable, informative, literate and written in good Bulgarian. The analysis is correct. The quotations are aptly placed and illustrate accurately the author's intent. I will try to present this otherwise rich text in a concise form. I should note that the proposed statements and conclusions in the text are well argued.

In the Foreword, Avramov details the reasons that led him to the choice of the topic and acknowledges all those from whom he received help in the development of his dissertation.

In the Introduction, the author makes a concise retrospective of the development of theology in the twentieth century, attempting to situate Jaroslav Pelikan's personality within this development and to trace his path to Orthodoxy. This, according to the author, is the purpose of the study. Then the relevance, objectives, chronological boundaries, object, subject, methodology including prosopographical study, synchronic and diachronic analysis are presented. The description of the historical context is set out as an internal sub-point. There is also one dedicated to the state of the research – a mandatory element in this kind of research. It is evident from the review that the research devoted to Jaroslav Pelikan is far from numerous and rather limited in scope, which makes the dissertation relevant and contributory.

In Chapter One, entitled „The Disciple“, Avramov addresses issues from Pelikan's early years in life in eight subsections. He was born in Akron, Ohio, to a Slovak family, and his father was a Lutheran pastor. Discusses his background, primary and secondary education, and his concurrent studies at seminary and the University of Chicago, from which he graduated simultaneously at age 22. He then did research on Martin Luther and taught at a Lutheran seminary. His teaching at the University of Chicago led to the formation of some elements of his worldview. His gradual transition from narrowly confessional theology to the history of the Church's doctrine is emphasized. As a formative factor in this respect, the influence of such personalities as Prot. George Florovsky and Adolf von Harnack is set out in detail.

Chapter Two is entitled „The Master“. In it the author discusses in five subsections the part of his biography related to Yale University (1962–1996) and Pelikan's gradual shift from theology to church history. Attention is drawn to some of his research, which already shows his enduring interest in the Christian East. The crowning achievement of this process, however, is his major work *The Christian Tradition* (1971–1990) in five large volumes. Pelikan's affinity for historical theology is already clearly evident in it. Avramov treats this *magnum opus* of Pelikan with due care and respect, especially in the parts relating to Eastern Orthodoxy. Here he reveals the future turn in his mind, which is largely conditioned by his work on Church Tradition. At the end of the chapter attention is also drawn to documents from Pelikan's correspondence with Albert Outler and Prot. George Florovsky found in the archives of Southern Methodist University and Princeton.

In Chapter Three, titled "The Orthodox," Avramov discusses in four subsections the last years of Pelikan's life (after 1989), when the fifth and final volume of *The Christian Tradition* was published. In this period the process of

his reorientation towards church history was completed. It was also a fruitful period for him, in which he published a number of books and publications relating generally to the history of Christianity. His second *magnum opus* titled *Credo. Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (2003) holds an important place among them. Since his retirement, Pelikan has continued his active research work and has held some prestigious positions in academia.

Parallel to this was the process of forming his conviction to take, impelled by the power and ideas and his faith, perhaps the most radical step in his life as a Christian – to be received into full sacramental communion with the Orthodox Church together with his wife. They both became parishioners of St. Three Saints church in „St. Vladimir“ Seminary, and Pelikan was elected churchwarden. According to Avramov, the leading motive for his conversion was his encounter with the East, especially through his contacts with Prot. George Florovsky. This puts the finishing touch on a long journey.

In the Conclusion, Avramov summarizes the results achieved in each of the tasks set in the introduction.

Included at the end of the text as Appendices are a Concise Biography of Pelikan, a Complete Bibliography of Pelikan, and a Bibliography on Pelikan.

The References and Literature used include a total of 156 titles of sources and contemporary studies on various aspects of the problem under consideration in several languages. The critical apparatus includes 680 footnotes.

There are a minimal number of typographical errors remaining that would be better corrected before printing the work, which I strongly recommend. Overall, the text is readable, analytical, and written in good Bulgarian.

Assistant Theodore Avramov has gained extensive experience as a lecturer in various disciplines of historical theology. This is evident from the text of the work presented, which has many merits. Its content is a very good testimonial for the author and has all the prerequisites to be successfully

defended. The skillfully presented narrative in the main text, as well as the particularly valuable information contained in the appendices, constitute a contribution to the native church historiography. In this sense, the thesis fully meets the requirements for a doctoral dissertation.

The abstract was prepared correctly and according to the rules, accurately reflecting the content of the study. It lists 5 scientific contributions that I take to be objective. Three publications on the topic of the dissertation, without being parts of it, are also attached.

I have no publications or projects in common with Avramov and no other conflicts of interest under the law.

In conclusion, I express my general satisfaction with the work done by Assistant Theodore Assenov Avramov and believe that he has successfully coped with the tasks set for him.

In view of all of the above, I vote „for“ and urge the other members of the esteemed scientific jury to support the work of Theodor Assenov Avramov by awarding him the PhD degree in the professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology (History of Orthodox Theology in the Twentieth Century).

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(Prof. Aleksandar Omarchevski PhD)