

## **REVIEW**

**by Prof. Dr. Archpriest IVAN STOYANOV IVANOV**  
**for the dissertation of ELEONORA DIMITROVA ASSENOVA**  
**for awarding the educational and scientific degree “doctor”**

**on the subject:**

**MUSIC IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS OF RELIGION**  
**IN PRESCHOOL AGE**

**Academic supervisor of the dissertation student: DOC. DR ADRIAN ALEXANDROV**

**Sofia October 3, 2023**

On the basis of RD 38-351 of 10.07.2023 and decision of the FS of the Faculty of Theology of 27.06.2023 decision 12, I have been elected as a member of the Scientific Jury (author of a review) for the procedure for awarding the educational and scientific degree “ doctor” for Eleonora Asenova's dissertation in professional direction 2.4. Religion and Theology, Doctoral Program: Religious Pedagogy.

### **Information about the doctoral student and the doctoral program**

In the period 2000-2006, Eleonora Asenova studied in the “Musical Pedagogy” specialty at the NBU, and in 2008 she successfully completed the Master's program “Management and Production in the Musical Arts” at the same university. From 2006 to 2011, he studied for a bachelor's degree at the Theological Faculty of the SU. In 2015, he enrolled in the Master's program “Religion and Education”, which he graduated in 2019. From July 2019 to July 2022, he was a full-time doctoral student at the Faculty of Arts of the SU “St. Kliment Ohridski” in the scientific specialty “Religious Pedagogy”. The doctoral student successfully fulfilled her individual plan: the exams were passed with excellent results. He has three published papers in scientific conference proceedings. She was dismissed with the right to protection in July 2022. From 2007 until today, Eleonora Asenova has been a Music and Religion teacher in various kindergartens: ODZ “Mecho Pooh”, DG “Gianni Rodari”, DG “Sun” and DG “Magnolia”, where for years students of the Faculty of Theology carried out their pedagogical practice.

### **Information about the dissertation and the abstract**

Eleonora Asenova presents an interdisciplinary dissertation work that connects and reflects the music-pedagogical practice in the teaching of religion in primary school education with elements of practical theology, church and religious music, and hymnology.

I also build my review by summarizing the recommendations, opinions, remarks and opinions of colleagues from the Department, which are related to the dissertation presented by my colleague Asenova.

The Introduction presents the main scientific ideas and statements in the work of the dissertation. The research hypothesis is that children develop a better sense of faith with the help of music. The subject of the study is music in religious education at preschool age. The object of the study is religious education in preschool age. The tasks are multifaceted: A study of the historical development of religious education, music and, in particular, religious songs. Study of the main components of education in preschool age - approaches, means, forms and directions. A study of the physiological and psychological aspects of religious and musical education in preschool age. An overview of basic music activities in preschool and their consideration in the context of religious education. To analyze and present those musical works that are interesting and suitable for children, according to their age characteristics. To cover and present more and diverse musical works of genre and nationality that are applicable and accessible to children in religious education at preschool age. To classify and relate musical works to one or more themes of the preschool religion curriculum in some of their basic modes of operation - perceiving, performing and composing music. To present the different types of musical works that are applicable in the education of religion in preschool age and their complex use with music, sound, speech, image and animation through modern audiovisual and information technologies. Presentation of basic thematic units used in religious education in preschool age with an interspersed musical element - themes, open lessons and celebrations. Presentation of new opportunities for practical application based on modern interactive technologies and tools. The methods are: general retrospective analysis of religious education with the use of music and songs. Structural analysis and synthesis of the individual elements of preschool religious and musical education - psychological and physiological prerequisites. Empirical experimental method of musical activities and their complex use with music, sound, speech, image and animation, through modern audiovisual and information technologies in religious education in preschool age. A method of specific situations based on many years of pedagogical experience with children in kindergarten in the field of musical and religious preschool education.

Approbation of the results and conclusions of the research is presented through the publications that are related to the researched problem and work with children in kindergartens in the city of Sofia: “Magnolia”, “Sun”, “Gianni Rodari”.

The significance of the research lies in the integration of musical activities in the educational process of religion in preschool age and their practical application. Structure and volume The dissertation is 306 pages long, consists of a preface, introduction, three chapters and a conclusion, used literature from 175 titles, of which 2 patristic sources, 153 studies in Bulgarian and Russian and 20 in English, a reference to scientific contributions and a list of publications related to the topic of the dissertation work. The paper is accompanied by 81 appendices with the author's participation. Applications include: 13 international religious animations; 5 combinations of dynamic pictures, music, sound and speech; A PowerPoint presentation that presents the complex use of music, sound, speech, image and animation through audio and audio-visual means; Exemplary development of an open pedagogical situation in religion on the topic “Veneration of

St. Icons” with the use of interactive methodology and modern audio-visual means (PowerPoint presentation); An example development of an open pedagogical situation in religion with a scenario element on the theme “Nativity” (large video); Educational scenario in religion with musical elements, type of celebration on the theme “Resurrection of Christ” (Prezi presentation); 17 children's songs - general and religious (instrumental and vocal) and 4 church chants, 2 musical games, 1 religious musical-didactic game and 4 religious-didactic games; 14 musical examples, 11 tables, 5 diagrams, 3 figures and 2 photographs; 6 descriptions, tasks, practical examples and exercises.

**CHAPTER ONE** of the work “Religious Education in Preschool Age” includes the following points: 1. Musical samples used in religious education before 1945. and their relationship to contemporary religious education in preschool; 2. Features of modern preschool education and upbringing; 3. Interactive methods and means used in religious education in preschool age. 1. Musical Patterns Used in Pre-1945 Religious Education and Their Relation to Modern Preschool Religious Education Musical patterns are diverse and have accompanied religious instruction since its earliest periods. They, as well as religious education, have their origins since the founding of the Church, becoming an irrevocable component of both liturgical life and catechesis. The main points of the study in this chapter are: 1.1. Historical overview of religious education in Bulgaria; 1.2. Church chants and religious education in pre-school age; 1.3. Folk Songs; 1.4. Revival songs; 1.5. Religious songs after Liberation; 1.6. Songbooks; 2. Features of modern preschool education and upbringing; 3. Interactive methods and means used in religious education in preschool age; 3.1. Interactive methods; 3.2. Interactive tools.

In my opinion, the First Chapter, which has more of an introductory context, in terms of the overall structure of the work, is quite interesting, but some parts of it should be in the Introduction. Given the specifics and characteristics of the dissertation, I believe that the emphasis is on the third Chapter and is directly related to the contributions you offer to both theology and school pedagogy related to your particular profession.

**CHAPTER TWO** examines “The main musical activities in the context of religious preschool education” in the following points: 1. Physiological and psychological aspects of musical and religious education in preschool age; 2. Perception of music; 3. Performance of music; 4. Composing music; 1.1. Religious development; 1.2. Musical development; 2. Perception of music; 2.1. The Perception of Music in Preschool Religious Education; 3.1. Singing; 3.2. Musical-rhythmic movements; 3.3. Playing with children's musical instruments.

Of interest is the fact presented by the author that many elements are included in the performance of songs in religious education at preschool age - text, melody, mime, dance, game, performance of rhythm. The song is experienced as it is acted out and performed by the children with the help of the teacher. Songs attract children and they perform them with great desire and inspiration if they are properly selected, directly affecting their sensitivity, contributing and enriching their cognitive abilities. The range of melodies should correspond to the vocal capabilities of the particular age. Namely - for the third preparatory group, the tonal volume of the general range is mi1 -si1, and accordingly for the fourth preparatory group - do1 -do2 (si-do2, la-do2 - in some

children). Types of musical works suitable for performance in preschool religion education. A variety of song forms can be used in religious education in preschool age, which are tailored both to the age characteristics of the children and to the goals and objectives of the specific religious topic. Generally speaking, in the process of work, one should gradually move to the performance of more complex elements in terms of music and text.

These are: church hymns suitable for performance by children of preschool age; religious nursery rhymes; children's songs that are used in general music education and co-authored and authored children's songs. In religious education at preschool age, children's musical instruments can be used: in the perception of a musical piece; in the performance of songs; in the performance of musical-rhythmic movements and musical games; to illustrate a specific moment of a biblical event or element of educational content. The performance of music in preschool religious education opens up numerous possibilities for use in different parts and aspects of the educational process. The performance of different types of songs, the wide variety of musical-rhythmic movements and the wide use of children's musical instruments, give the opportunity to develop the creative potential in the context of religious education. They support and enrich the pedagogical situation in every part of it, contributing to the interesting and easy presentation of the religious content in a way that is close to the little learners - through music, play and movement. Musical creativity in preschool age is reduced to musical improvisation - motor, musical-rhythmic or singing. In this regard, every musical activity reveals opportunities for creativity in children, which arises in most cases spontaneously. In religious education at preschool age, it is possible for children to improvise parts of a song, musical conversation with questions and answers, characteristic movements when listening to music or rhythm, accompaniment with children's musical instruments, dance movements. The third major activity, music-making, is characterized and considered on a much broader scale, including children's creativity and originality in all aspects related to it. It provokes the unfolding of the creative potential that the Creator has placed in each person. The creative process frees the child from limitations, brings him joy and satisfaction, bringing him closer to his true purpose and mission in this life dedicated to the service of God and people.

**CHAPTER THREE** is entitled “Practical Application of Music in Modern Preschool Religious Education.”

It conveys all considered aspects of religious and musical education in preschool age in three points: 1. Prerequisites for the choice of music as an auxiliary tool in religious education in preschool age; 2. Content of preschool education in religion with a musical element / inclusion of musical activities; 3. Analysis of the religious pedagogical situation with a musical element in the practical-applied environment. 1. Prerequisites for the choice of music as an auxiliary tool in the education of religion in preschool age; 2. Content of preschool education in religion with a musical element / inclusion of musical activities; 3. Analysis of the religious pedagogical situation with a musical element in the practical-applied environment. It is clarified what the pedagogical situation is in the process of learning about religion in this early childhood age. The pedagogical situation takes place in a stricter form in the pre-school educational institution - kindergarten and school, and in a freer form in the church school. The most variability is related to the different parameters that are contained in its basic structure. The music presented in the musical activities supports and enlivens the religious matter (content) because it is related to the mental, spiritual and physical

world of the child. And on what “bricks” he will be built with, depends on his building as a person - illuminated by the “Light of the world” (John 9:5) and following the true path (cf. John 14:6).

From the information presented in the Third Chapter, it is clear that the scientific contribution, in this context, is extremely large. The mutual cooperation of musical pedagogy with practical theology is revealed. The author points out that the musical development of children is an integral part of their overall development. “Music is a mediator between the spiritual and physical nature in man, as it is elusive, immaterial, but at the same time vividly present. It flows through time, like a tape that projects emotions, feelings and thoughts for which words are insufficient, due to the poverty of the vocabulary, to express them, but which are recognized by the soul and move the heart”. I support this both your personal human and scientific opinion.

Of course no work is perfect, and here we see some ambiguities regarding the strict theological terminological statement, sometimes there are emotional moments in your text that are not inherent in this kind of scientific text, but given the influence you have from your work with children, this may be accepted as justification in your favor.

In his dissertation, the doctoral student gives many examples from researchers in the field of religious, music, musical pedagogy and church music, specifically, emphasizing the development of musical pedagogy in Bulgaria (undoubtedly connected with the creations of the Bulgarian church song heritage, from the First and The second generation of Bulgarian church composers, conductors and performers). The research models are combined with musical examples from the history of the development of Bulgarian church and religious music. For example, in the first chapter of the work “Religious education in preschool age”: Historical review of religious education in Bulgaria; Musical patterns used in pre-1945 religious education and their relationship to contemporary preschool religious education; Peculiarities of modern preschool education and upbringing, etc.

The dissertation emphasizes his confessional affiliation, stating that religion teachers are called to introduce children to the Orthodox faith through a variety of methods and means that are adequate to the modern changing society. Religious education and training, in general, is realized on three levels - in the family, in the educational institution (kindergarten or school) and in the Church. He points out that the musical samples used in religious education before 1945 contain spiritual messages that are hidden and waiting to be discovered again by the young learners, in the words of Dobri Hristov, who writes that “the song is the best gift , given by God to man, and all the secrets are hidden in it, and only through it does our heart understand them” (Hristov, D. Preface. Izvorcheto sings. Sofia, 1936). Expresses the opinion that in order to bring these songs closer to modern religious education, they need to be presented to children in an appropriate way - diverse, depending on the specific goals, tasks, age and individual characteristics, which is also developed as a postulate in the dissertation essay .

I refer to the author's opinion that “the perception of music takes place both as an independent activity and in combination with other basic musical activities and even with other arts. This is due to the fact that children have greater opportunities to perceive music than to perform it, which is also confirmed by the methodology of musical education”. Because in fact, in preschool religious education, the perception of music should be based on a wide and rich musical palette of church,

folk, classical, contemporary, popular and children's music. In this way, children will enrich their musical culture and together with their musical-auditory ideas, they will develop their imagination and associative abilities, which in turn will support their cognitive abilities.

Religious educational content will become closer to them through church music, which will introduce them to church life; folk music, which will touch the most intimate corners of their Bulgarian essence; classical music that will enrich them spiritually and children's music that will bring religion closer to their children's world. "Performing music is a leading activity in Bulgarian music pedagogy. It is an active activity that is essential for the musical education and training of adolescents". Its application is wide-ranging because it includes singing, musical-rhythmic movements and playing with children's musical instruments. (cf. Asenova, E. The perception of music in the teaching of religion in kindergarten. Witness, service and worship of the church. Collection of articles. Sofia, University Publishing House "St. Kliment Ohridski", 2021, p. 81). Musical creativity provides an opportunity to develop the overall creative abilities of children. Music specialists very accurately determine that tasks of a creative nature in the field of music education are extremely important for many aspects of personality development. They contribute to the release of creative impulses; for mental liberation; for the activation of artistic thinking and imagination; for the stimulation of motives for musical activities; for the strengthening of children's personal self-esteem and for their general multifaceted development (cf. Peev, I., Gaitanjiiev, G., Torbov, G., Diamandieva, N. Pos. op. p. 288.).

It is emphasized that the basis of the content of religious education in preschool age covers five global themes and a number of main themes, which were developed by Dechev, Stefanova and Milenova in "Help for the education of religion in kindergartens". There is also an example annual distribution, which indicates one topic per week. Stefanova (now Rabadzhieva, who is the former director of DG No. 77 "Magnolia", Sofia and current director of the larger DG No. 18 "Children's World"), is developing a more extended version, with two topics per week, which are spread out, some of them embracing new and interesting aspects, such as: "Good and Evil," "Friendship," "Different Children," "Love of God," "Love of Man," "Love of Nature." Taking into account both these topics, which are very interesting to children and cover everyday events, and current contemporary issues that are considered from the perspective of the Holy Scriptures, not five, but six global topics and sixty-two main topics are formed, which are slightly modified from their original version.

A main point of contribution presented by Asenova is the practical application of music in the education of religion in preschool age, which takes place in a precisely defined form. As such, it is synthetic, as it combines religious and musical education within the framework of comprehensive preschool education. Based on the content of preschool religious education, sample musical material has been added, which is different for each topic. The author clarifies that this is done in order to have more variety and individual choice on the part of religion teachers, but from a methodological point of view it is good, for example, for a given song to be performed in several consecutive classes in order to reinforce it, to serve as a bridge to the various topics and to contribute to the positive emotional background of the educational process. The tables you proposed are one of the proofs of the contributions made in the dissertation research.

The doctoral candidate concludes very motivated and with great confidence that teachers of religion are called, as helpers of the apostles, to follow with faith, hope and love the instructions and the promise of the Lord, which he addresses to them, and at the same time to all of us: “Therefore, go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and behold, I am with you all the days until the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:19, 20).

**The main contributions proposed by the dissertation are:**

1. Provision of a rich base for practical application with descriptions, methodological guidelines and author's participation - sheet music examples, audio files, videos, sample developments and others;
2. Formulation and clarification of new aspects related to the use of music in the modern educational process in religion (musical-pictorial movements, religious pedagogical situation with a musical element and complex use of music, sound, speech, image and animation with the help of audio and audiovisual funds).

Regarding the second and third contributions, your research follows the defined methodology and fulfills the goals and objectives, combined with the evidence of the specific pedagogical work, you provide evidence as Appendices related to the specifics of religious and musical preschool education with the other practical application descriptions. The most applied and scientific arguments are mostly related to the second contribution, formulating and clarifying the new aspects related to the use of music in the modern educational process of religion, I think you do it quite reasonably and this is found in the thesis.

**Publications on the topic of the dissertation:**

1. Изпълнение на разнородни песни в обучението по религия в детската градина. Хармония в различията. Сборник с доклади. София, Академично издателство За буквите – О писменехъ, 2020, с. 84-98.

2. Възприемането на музика в обучението по религия в детската градина. Свидетелство, служение и богослужение на църквата. Сборник статии. София, Университетско издателство „Св. Климент Охридски”, 2021, с. 79-94.

3. Религиозните песни след Освобождението и съвременното обучение по религия в детската градина. Хармония в различията. Сборник с доклади. София, Академично издателство За буквите – О писменехъ, 2021, с. 211- 221.

**The abstract meets the requirements.**

I present to the attention of the Jury a part of the motivated proposal for public defense by the scientific supervisor Assoc. Dr. Andrian Alexandrov, thanks to whose diligence and diligent guidance the doctoral student shows positive results in his work: “So structured, the dissertation work of Eleonora Asenova presents interesting, current and original research in the field of education and religious pedagogy. The topic, developed from the point of view of music and its role in preschool age, offers new opportunities and perspectives for the development of religious education in this age group. The preschool age is extremely important for the formation of

children's personality and value beliefs, and music has a specific contribution to their psychological development. It stimulates creative thinking, learning social skills, emotional expression, and the ability to empathize. In the context of religious education, music has the potential to create and deepen children's connection to religious values, traditions and practices. The proposed dissertation essay on the topic: "Music in the educational process of religion in preschool age" meets the academic criteria and requirements for a doctoral dissertation, and the essay has a contributing nature and is of interest both to researchers of this specific scientific issue and to teachers of religion in this age group'.

The documentation submitted for the procedure is complete and the required checks have been made. No plagiarism detected. I declare that I have no joint publications with the candidate.

Underline citation meets the standard.

### **In conclusion**

Based on the overall work of the dissertation student during his studies in the doctoral program in Religious Pedagogy, the submitted dissertation work and published articles related to the topic of the dissertation

I recommend the esteemed jury to award Mrs. Eleonora Asenova the scientific and educational degree "doctor".

**Prof. Dr. Archpriest Ivan Ivanov**