

STATEMENT

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On the dissertation

„MUSIC IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS OF RELIGION IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION”

for the award of the educational and scientific degree “PhD”
in the professional field 2.4. *Religion and Theology*

to **Eleonora Dimitrova Asenova**

The discussed scientific work explores the potential of music art to have a profound impact on the psyche, physiology, and emotions of individuals, particularly during the early stages of human development. The main idea of the dissertation is to use music as a means to directly engage preschool-aged children with the truths of the Orthodox faith. It serves as an instrument through which their souls can, in a more accessible and emotional manner, connect with God and grasp the educational content related to religion. The research is built upon the personal experience of Eleonora Asenova, who is a practicing teacher in both religion and music at a preschool, enhancing the scientific and practical orientation and applicability of her findings.

The introduction of the dissertation (pages 5-13) outlines all its fundamental scientific parameters, including relevance, working hypothesis, subject, object, and research goals. These elements collectively provide a clear understanding of the nature of the dissertation and the direction of its scientific inquiries. However, it should be noted that the defense of the relevance of the scientific problem (pages 3-8) becomes somewhat submerged amid the multitude of cited opinions and fails to clearly state and define the contemporary necessity of using musical art in the field of religious education in the preschool age. This is more effectively and clearly done in the abstract of the dissertation (page 4), where the abundance of quotations is absent.

The research hypothesis posits that children develop a better sense of faith through the aid of music. The subject of the study is music in religious education in preschool age, while the object of the study is the religious education itself in the preschool age (page 8). It is worth noting that, following the path of formal logic, the object of scientific research precedes its subject, just as the general precedes the specific. The aim of the dissertation is to investigate the fundamental musical activities in the context of preschool religious education, and for this purpose, nine ambitious research tasks are formulated (pages 8-9). A suitable set of analytical and synthetic methods, as well as empirical experimental methods, have been employed (pages 9-10).

The first chapter of the dissertation (pages 14-84) is dedicated to religious education in preschool age, examining musical patterns used in religious education before 1945 and their connection to contemporary religious education in preschool age. It covers the specifics of modern preschool education and upbringing, as well as the interactive methods and tools used in religious education for preschoolers. The historical overview is detailed and provides thorough commentary on musical patterns from the previous century. It seems that the essence of the section describing the contemporary situation in preschool education could have been used to support the relevance of the research topic. The detailed enumeration of all interactive methods and tools is somewhat exhaustive to read, especially considering that it does not become clear how each of these tools is used in religious education for preschoolers until the end of the chapter (pages 83-84). Reading the text is further complicated by the multitude of citations that carefully and exhaustively quote the opinions of specialists but hinder the formation of an impression of the author's own opinion and contribution. However, this minor flaw is often encountered in initial dissertation works and is a result of the author's effort to convey all the essential information noticed in the bibliography used.

The second chapter of the dissertation is devoted to the fundamental musical activities in religious education for preschoolers (pages 85-165). Here, Eleonora Asenova delves into the physiological and psychological aspects of religious and musical education in preschool age, focusing on the perception, performance, and composition of music. The author first clarifies the religious and then the musical development of children in this age group. She explores the role of music perception in the context of religious education, as well as the composition and performance of music (within the children's age capabilities). In certain parts of this section, the flaw of

numerous consecutive citations, which was previously mentioned, is noticeable again. However, in this case, it is compensated for by the author's personal observations as a practicing teacher in religion and music - this being the most significant contribution in the examined chapter.

The third chapter of the dissertation is dedicated to the practical application of music in contemporary religious education for preschoolers (pages 166-240). It examines the prerequisites for choosing music as an auxiliary tool in religious education for preschoolers, comments on the content of preschool religious education with musical elements, or the inclusion of musical activities. Additionally, it analyzes the religious pedagogical situation with a musical element in a practical applied environment. This part of the research is the most valuable and important as it presents the practical experience of Eleonora Asenova and the empirical data obtained from her pedagogical experiments. Table 2 (pages 180-187) has a scientifically applied character and can be used very successfully as a tool for educators. The same applies to the sample developments of pedagogical situations – regular ones and those with the addition of a musical element (pages 192-240).

The conclusion (pages 241-251) succinctly reaffirms the main goal of the research - to integrate religious content and musical activities in the context of contemporary preschool education, presenting them in the primary form of pedagogical interaction: the religious pedagogical situation with a musical element. The author emphasizes the scientific-practical orientation of the research and summarizes the path taken, the conclusions drawn from the scientific work, and the essence of the practical work of a highly qualified and experienced educator with a vocation. In the final part of the conclusion, the contributory nature of the dissertation is clearly outlined, although the author modestly formulates two main scientific contributions of her work: providing a rich foundation for practical application with descriptions, methodological guidelines, and authorial involvement, and formulating and clarifying new aspects related to the use of music in the contemporary educational process of religious education (page 308).

The minor imperfections observed at various points in the text, such as punctuation or spelling errors, emotional tone not inherent to scientific research, or sections with numerous consecutive quotations, cannot detract from the overall very positive impression of Eleonora Asenova's dissertation. Every young scholar encounters similar challenges at the beginning of their research journey, and no doctoral dissertation can be considered perfect. I believe that the

significant value and important consequences of Eleonora Asenova's research manifest in the realm of practical pedagogical activities, specifically addressing the absolute applicability of the results from her pedagogical experiments. Moreover, the tools and methods she tested can successfully be applied by other colleagues working in preschool education, potentially leading to substantial improvements in religious education for this age group, which is highly valuable.

The abstract is structured within a volume of 37 pages and presents the content, key points, and contributory nature of the research quite clearly. It also lists the author's publications on the dissertation's topic, meeting the minimum state requirements.

In conclusion, I would like to state that I highly appreciate the scientific and applied contribution of the presented dissertation, and I vote with a confident "yes" for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree of "doctor" to the candidate Eleonora Dimitrova Asenova. I suggest that the other members of the esteemed jury also vote in the affirmative.

October 1, 2023

Feast of the Protection of the Mother of God

Prof. Dr. Rostislava Georgieva Todorova-Encheva