

SOFIA UNIVERSITY "ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI"
FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

REVIEW

by Professor Doctor Veselin VUCHKOV,
member of the scientific jury in the procedure for acquiring the educational
and scientific degree "doctor", announced at the Faculty of Theology of Sofia
University "St. Cl. Ohridski",
Department of "Practical Theology",
the professional direction 2.4 Religion and theology,
scientific specialty: "Organization and management of the Bulgarian
Orthodox Church",
in accordance with Order No. RD 38-650/13.12.2023 of the Rector of the
Sofia University Prof. Dr Georgi Valchev

Reviewer: Prof. Veselin Borislavov Vuchkov, Doctor of Law

Candidate: Mihail Rumenov Mihailov

I. Brief biographical data about the candidate

Doctoral candidate Mihail Rumenov Mihailov has a master of theology degree from the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (2000). Prior to that, he received secondary special education at the Sofia Theological Seminary "St. Ivan Rilski" (1994). In addition, he has a Master of Laws from the University of Veliko Tarnovo "St. St. Cyril and Methodius" (2011). He also has legal capacity from the Ministry of Justice.

He carried out the activities of a religious organization at the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church: priest at the Patriarchal Cathedral, the stauropygial temple monument "St. Alexander Nevsky" (1999 - 2002), priest at the Faculty of Theology of Sofia University "St. Cl. Ohridski" (1997-1999), secretary of the administration of the Holy Metropolis of Stara Zagora (2002 - 2018), parish priest in the church " St. Great Martyr Demetrius" high school in the city of Sofia (2018 - 2021). From July 2021, he is an assistant at the Faculty of Theology of the University of St. Cl. Ohridski", Department of "Practical Theology".

In 2002, the doctoral student, Mihail Mihailov, specialized in the Institute for the Study of Eastern Churches in Regensburg, Germany.

The dissertation was developed in a part-time form of education, the initial form was regular. Enrollment was carried out at the beginning of 2019, and the scientific supervision was carried out by professor doctor of

theological sciences Dilyan Nikolchev. He was dismissed with the right of defense in February 2022.

II. General characteristics and structure of the dissertation work

The title of the dissertation is: "The Statute of the BOC-BP (Bulgarian Orthodox Church - Bulgarian Patriarchate: practice, application and conflicts with other sources of ecclesiastical law".

The presented work is structured in *five chapters*; it also contains a *preface, introduction* and *conclusion*, as well as *applications* and a *bibliography*.

The total volume of the dissertation is 492 pages.

Chapter one of the dissertations is entitled "The Statute of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church - Bulgarian Patriarchate as a source of law". This section includes *five paragraphs*.

Chapter two is dedicated to the central bodies of ecclesiastical authority in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and, in turn, also contains *five paragraphs*.

Chapter three presents the local bodies of ecclesiastical authority in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church; here we find *four paragraphs*.

Chapter four analyzes the ecclesiastical court – regulation, activity and challenges. There are *five paragraphs* here.

Chapter five has the following title: "Incompleteness in the Statute of the BOC-BP and conflicts with other sources of ecclesiastical law". This chapter includes *five paragraphs*.

III. Actuality and relevance

The *relevance* and *significance* of the dissertation submitted for defense are beyond doubt. This has been carefully assessed already at the time of enrollment in doctoral studies.

The subject of the dissertation - the organization and management of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and the subject of the research - the Statute of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church - Bulgarian Patriarchate, in themselves suggest the relevance of the dissertation research. In January 2024, i.e. at the very moment of writing this review, fifteen years have passed since the entry into force of the current Statute of the BOC-BP (January 2009). The selected chronological framework of immediate effect of this Statute allows a fruitful author's scientific expression: on the one hand, the period is not long enough to allow for large historical generalizations, but on the other hand, a period of fifteen years in the application of legal norms in all branches of law is quite sufficient to notice shortcomings and inconsistencies, as well as for proposals with a view to future legal revisions.

The significance of the dissertation submitted for review and public defense is also beyond doubt: The statute of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church -

Bulgarian Patriarchate has the character of a regulation of the highest legal order, to which its organization and its management are "subordinated". From this point of view, directing research interest precisely to the Statute of the BOC-BP is a most significant scientific effort.

IV. Main contributions (scientific and scientific-applied) and results: characterization and evaluation

In the content of the dissertation, the following two more significant scientific contributions can be highlighted:

First, it is a more general scientific contribution – multifacetedness and completeness in analyzing a research problem. The author of the dissertation has undoubtedly succeeded in creating, for the first time in Bulgarian ecclesiastical science, a comprehensive and complete work dedicated to the Statute of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church - Bulgarian Patriarchate as a source of local ecclesiastical law. Separate publications on the subject (of course) - either more voluminous or more concise - can be found by other authors as well, and this has been indicated in good faith by the doctoral student Mihailov. But his research is complete precisely from the point of view of the comprehensiveness of the issues and the depth of the arguments. Without claiming great knowledge in the field of ecclesiastical law and dogmatics, I cannot fail to note precisely this achievement: the depth of the arguments and the penetration into the smallest details of the problem. This can hardly be found in other dissertation studies in the field of classical legal branches (for example, criminal procedural law, administrative law, etc.). I fully accept and support the dissertation's conclusions regarding the legal nature of the Statute of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church - Bulgarian Patriarchate: a function of the legislative power of our local Orthodox Church and a private source of church law as an element of the current more general Bulgarian church law. It is correct to summarize that the legal norms contained in this Statute regulate both the internal legal relations in the native local church (between its members and bodies) and its external relations (with the state, other local Orthodox churches and other subjects of law). Valuably and well-argued, the author expresses the thesis that the character of the Statute of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church is most fully expressed by its perception as a private source of church law – "this definition most accurately corresponds to both the situation and the goals pursued by the existence of the SBOC-BP (The Statute of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church-Bulgarian Patriarchate)" (p. 33 of the dissertation). Before that, in good faith and with a critical sense, the author of the dissertation presents other points of view on the subject of the legal nature of the Statute: "constitution of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church", "internal regulations of a corporate association", "bylaws" (in the latter case - on the

basis of a special normative delegation contained in the Law on Religions). This is an undoubted scientific contribution.

Second, we find the most significant concrete contributions in Chapter Five of the dissertation research, dedicated to the shortcomings in the Statute of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and its collisions with other sources of church law. Of course, the specific author's reasoning and conclusions are not to be underestimated, and among other parts of the dissertation, for example, on the topics of the central bodies of church power and the local bodies of church power in our Orthodox Church. But the presentation of Chapter Five stands out because of its specific and contributing nature: marriage law, a single synodal register for property, for the church candle, etc. The author's conclusions are so clear and complete that they could be directly applied in view of upcoming normative revisions in the Statute of the BOC-BP. Again, I will express my excellent impression of the depth and comprehensiveness of the research, since the doctoral student Mihailov goes into the smallest details, and this, in turn, demonstrates an excellent cognitive ability in the field of theology and in the field of law. This is due, of course, to his educational degrees in both scientific fields, as well as to his practical experience.

I will allow myself to highlight three more positive details. First – dealing with a rich judicial practice: specific court decisions, moreover, from different instances (district courts, Supreme Court of Cassation). Second, each chapter of the dissertation structure ends with a specific paragraph devoted to summaries and conclusions. Third - the exposition is "situated" on a historical context: comparisons and analogies between the three statutes of our local church from more recent times.

The style and means of expression are clear and legible.

Based on the above, I believe *that the author of the dissertation has in-depth theoretical knowledge of the specialty and a definite ability for independent scientific research; the work contains scientific and scientific-applied results that represent an original contribution to science.*

V. Evaluation of publications and authorship

The author presents *four publications* on the topic of the dissertation. I accept all four posts. Publications demonstrate the doctoral student's research abilities, contribute to achieving the goals of the dissertation, and are the author's personal work. I have no information about their citation by other authors. They have been published in authoritative scientific publications, mostly in collections of SU "St. Kl. Ohridski".

The author's abstract, with a volume of 38 pages, comprehensively and reliably reflects the structure and content of the dissertation.

VI. Literary awareness and competence

In the text of the dissertation, *the sources* from the bibliography are cited appropriately and correctly. 56 bibliographic units in Cyrillic and 2 bibliographic units in Latin are cited. Internet resources were also used (54 items). There are a total of 320 references below the line.

VII. Critical notes and recommendations

I will allow myself one critical note: the individual opinions expressed up to this point regarding the legal essence of the Statute of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church - Bulgarian Patriarchate should be developed more fully.

VIII. Conclusion

Based on the positive evaluation of the presented dissertation work, taking into account the serious professional experience of the candidate, I confidently formulate my *positive evaluation* and recommendation to the Scientific Jury to vote for awarding the candidate the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

31 January 2024
the city of Sofia

Member of the jury:
/Prof. Dr. V. Vuchkov/