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REVIEW

for the dissertation of **Eleonora Dimitrova Asenova**

on the subject of

„Music in the educational process of religion in preschool“

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 Eleonora Dimitrova Asenova has a music pedagogical education, acquired at New Bulgarian University in the Bachelor's degree programme in Music Pedagogy with the acquired qualification Music Teacher (2000 - 2006) and in the Master's degree programme Management and Production in Musical Arts with the acquired qualification Master in Art Management (2006 - 2008). She acquired her theological education at the Theological Faculty of Sofia University. He completed his Master's degree in Theology (2006-2011) and Master's degree in Theology (2015-2019) with the qualification Theologian and Teacher of Religion.

From 2003 to 2007, Eleonora Asenova worked at the Publishing Centre of New Bulgarian University, first as a trainee research assistant on a HESP scholarship (2003-2005), and then as an associate specialist (2006-2007). After 2007 she devoted herself to pedagogical work in the field of pre-school education as a music teacher in 17 Kindergarten "Winnie the Pooh" (2007-2008), 82 Kindergarten "Gianni Rodari" (2008-present) and 63 Kindergarten "Sun" (2016-2021). Eleonora Asenova also works as a religion teacher at 77 Kindergarten „Magnolia“ (2013-2021) and 63 Kindergarten „Sunny“ (2016-2021).

2. Details of the procedure

Eleonora Asenova was enrolled as a full-time PhD student in June 2019 by order of the Rector of Sofia University RD 20-1070/25.06.2019 in the professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology (Religious Pedagogy). In the period of her PhD, she has fully completed her study plan. She has successfully passed the examinations. She managed to prepare and implement the

required number of scientific publications. The dissertant participated with papers in scientific conferences, including two international ones, organized by the Theological Faculty of Sofia University.

After completion of the individual plan and expiration of the doctoral studies, the dissertant was discharged with the right to defense by the order of the Rector of the Sofia University (RD 20-1196/12.07.2022) in July 2022. The preliminary discussion of the thesis in the Department of Practical Theology was held on 07.06.2023 (Protocol №10/07.06.2023). Recommendations have been made, which the PhD student has taken into account when 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 27.06.2023 (Protocol №12). By order of the Rector of the Sofia University № RD 38-351/10.07.2023 was determined the composition of the scientific jury and the deadline for the defense - until 03. 11. 2023.

At its first meeting (Protocol №1/18.07.2023 г.) the jury confirms that the procedure was organized in full compliance with the requirements of the Regulations for the conditions and procedure for the acquisition of scientific degrees and the occupation of academic positions of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivo Yanev was elected as the Chairperson. Prof. Dr. Magdalena Legkostup and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Protopriest Ivan Ivanov were appointed as reviewers, and the preparation of written opinions was assigned to Prof. Dr. Rostislava Todorova-Encheva, Prof. Dr. Lyudmil Malev and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivo Yanev. The Scientific Jury sets the deadline for submission of reviews and opinions to 03.10.2023 and the date for public defense of the dissertation - 20.10.2023, Friday, at 13:00.

The foregoing gives me reason to assume that all the deadlines and rules of procedure have been complied with and no violations have been committed. Ms Eleonora Assenova 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 „*Music in the educational process of religion in preschool*“, contains a total of 308 standard printed pages in Bulgarian. An abstract of 37 pages is attached. The research consists of the following parts: preface, introduction, three chapters, conclusion, references and appendices.

The scientific-critical apparatus contains 407 footnotes, divided into 2 world-theological sources, 153 studies in Bulgarian and Russian and 20 in English. 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 is attached a reference of the dissertation in relation to his scientific contributions.

The topic of music in preschool religious education is of interest because, in addition to its specific contribution to children's education and psychological development, music plays an important role in shaping their religious experience. The topicality of the topic is determined both by the general interdisciplinary nature of the text (theology, music, pedagogy) and by the lack of research on this issue that proposes specific methods and approaches for the inclusion of music in the preschool religion curriculum. At the same time, personally conducted educational practices are also explored within the research, enabling not only a theoretical but also a convincing empirical and practical-applied assessment of the importance of music as a means of enriching religious education and developing the religious experience of young children.

In the **Preface** (c. 3) the author states his motives for choosing the topic of the thesis and expresses his gratitude to all those involved in its realization.

The introduction (c. 4-14) offers a general characterization of the dissertation research, justifying and defending the relevance of the topic. Here, Eleonora Asenova states her contributory scientific methodology in her research and presents its object, subject, aims, objectives, structure. The stated aim of this thesis is: „To examine and explore the main musical activities in the context of pre-school religious education“. The first tasks of the work are related to the study of the historical development of religious education, music and religious songs in particular; the main components of preschool education, as well as the physiological and psychological aspects of religious and music education in preschool. The next task is to review the main musical activities in preschool and their consideration in the context of religious education, while analyzing and presenting more and diverse in genre and nationality musical works that are interesting and appropriate for children, tailored to their age characteristics. The last group of tasks have a practical-applied orientation: to classify and relate musical works to one or more themes of the pre-school religion curriculum in some of their main forms of work – perception, performance and composition of music; to present the different types of musical works applicable in pre-school religious education and their complex use with music, sound, speech, image and animation through modern audiovisual and information technologies; to present basic thematic units used in pre-school religious education with a musical element – themes, open lessons and celebrations, as well as new opportunities for practical application based on modern interactive technologies and tools.

Based on the above issues, the research hypothesis formulated by the dissertator is that

children develop a better sense of faith with the help of music.

The dissertator presents the research methods she used and provides a detailed review of the research on which the dissertation is based on the main themes.

The first chapter, entitled „Religious education in preschool“ (c. 14–84) provides the theoretical basis of the study in a historical-educational and contemporary pedagogical context. The author not only explores the musical models used in religious education before 1945, but also presents a reasoned account of their relationship to contemporary religious education in preschool (16-58). The particularities of contemporary preschool education and upbringing are pointed out in favor of the study (59-65). An overview of interactive methods and tools used in preschool religious education is provided. (66–84).

However, the information presented on the content of chapter one does not end with conclusions and generalizations.

The second chapter, entitled „Basic musical activities in preschool religious education“ (c. 85-165) pays particular attention to the physiological and psychological aspects of religious and music education in preschool in terms of music perception (104-115), music performance (116-156), and music composition (157–165). The study of these basic musical activities in a religious-educational context gives the dissertation theoretical and scientific authority and allows for the further development of technological aspects of the application of music in the methodology of religious education.

The second chapter, unfortunately, also does not end with a conclusion that briefly states the conclusions of the analysis of the relevant musical activities.

The third chapter, entitled „The Practical Application of Music in Contemporary Preschool Religious Education“ (c. 166-245) explores the pedagogical toolkit for the practical application of music in preschool. The main prerequisites for its choice as an auxiliary tool in religious education are pointed out (167-170). The content of pre-school religious education with a musical element /inclusion of musical activities is presented (171-186). An in-depth analysis of the religious pedagogical situation with a musical element in the practical-applied environment is carried out (187-245).

And this chapter lacks a brief summary in which to draw conclusions from the issues addressed.

The study concludes with a general **Conclusion** (pp. 241-252), which draws the main conclusions from the researched issues, summarizes the achieved results and through descriptive presentation of the results proves the achievement of the formulated in the introduction goal and hypothesis of the research.

The bibliography (c. 253-266) includes a total of 175 titles, of which 2 world-theological sources, 153 studies in Bulgarian and Russian and 20 in English. The literature cited is consistent with the topic and contributes to its development.

Impressively, the work is accompanied by 81 author-contributed appendices, which include a wide range of international religious animations; combinations of dynamic pictures, music, sound and speech; and a presentation of the complex use of music, sound, speech, image and animation through audio and audio-visual means; examples of pedagogical situations; teaching scenarios in religion with musical elements, celebration type on the theme of "Resurrection of Christ"; children's songs and church chants; musical games; music examples, tables, diagrams, figures and photo images; descriptions, tasks, practical examples and exercises.

Presented by Eleonora Asenova **the extended abstract** (37 c.) meets the requirements and allows for a clear and precise introduction in a synthesized form to the text of the dissertation.

No plagiarism was found in the thesis submitted for defense.

The dissertation also contains three scientific publications.

In the present procedure, I have no joint publications with my colleague and in no way fall under 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. A topical interdisciplinary topic is presented in an interesting, original and practically applicable way.

One of the main contributions of the dissertation is that all the aspects of religious and musical education in pre-school age, discussed in it, find their practical application in the educational process of religion through the variety of proposed methods and pedagogical techniques, many of which Ms. Eleonora Asenova has authored and personally approbated. This study is the first for Bulgarian religious pedagogy. It contributes not only to the formulation of the content and methodological aspects of the religious pedagogical situation with a musical element, but also sets the perspective for revealing the importance of interdisciplinarity in religious education in general.

The applicability of this study would be extremely useful for the development of a methodological guide supporting the work of pre-school pedagogical specialists and teachers of religion.

I accept the main contributions formulated by the PhD student in practical and applied

terms, namely:

1. A rich basis for practical application is provided with descriptions, methodological instructions and author's participation - music examples, audio files, video clips, sample developments, etc.

2. New aspects related to the use of music in the modern educational process of religion are formulated and clarified (music-image movements, religious pedagogical situation with musical element and complex use of music, sound, speech, image and animation with the help of audio and audio-visual means).

5. References

There is a lack of conclusions and generalizations in the thesis statement. They are descriptively brought out in the Conclusion, without giving a structured answer to the question of achieving the set goal and objectives of the research. 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 gives me reason to confidently support the dissertation and to vote positively for the award of Eleonora Asenova the educational and scientific degree „Doctor“ in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology, scientific speciality Religious Pedagogy.

03.10.2023 г.,
Veliko Tarnovo

Prof. Dr. Magdalena Legkostup