

REVIEW

by Prof. Emil Traytchev Stoyanov

of the scientific and pedagogical work of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teodor Stoychev in connection with the announced competition for the academic position of „Professor“ at „Ep. Konstantin Preslavsky“ University of Shumen, field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology (Biblical Studies – New Testament), promulgated in State Newspaper, 32/09.04.2024

I started my review for Associate Professor Dr. Stoychev by including in the subtitle three rays of the candidate's realization, presented in detail in the attached documentation for the competition.

First of all – the candidate is a cleric of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church – Bulgarian Patriarchate.

In equal second place – scientific activity, developed both pragmatically as a self-explanation, and as transparency and its own reception horizon in the world of New Testament biblical studies, clearly outlined the stable erudition and research resourcefulness of the candidate.

And finally, also at the equinox – the pedagogical activity. It is to a great extent a function of the first two, or, if I may express it figuratively, it is a counterpart of the first two fields, which are fundamental, and it imbues them with the energy of contact with the young potential of the theological aura, both receiver and catalyst of creative thinking.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teodor Stoychev was ordained as a priest by the late Metropolitan Kiril of Varna and Preslav in 2000. Initially, his ministry took place in the church of St. Dimitar, Vladislavovo district, after which he was moved to the churches of St. Athanasius and Assumption of the Blessed

Virgin Mary, where he still serves today. He is the chairman of the ancient church „Assumption of the Virgin“, to which a library and a building for lectures were built. During the years of his ministry in the church of St. Dimitar, he taught religion in the neighborhood schools. Throughout his parish ministry, he has been part of the initiatives of the local national media. This activity continues to this day. At the St. Athanasius church, together with the other priests, he leads weekly talks, as well as takes care of the publication of two magazines: „Amvon“ and „Kambanka“. In 2016 he was awarded the office of „butler“ by His Eminence Metropolitan John of Varna and Preslav.

All outlined merits of the cleric are also present in the creative realization of Teodor Stoychev in New Testament biblical studies. Of course, academia models a variant approach. The scientific imperative is fully preserved in the construction of the treated theological topics, thanks to which the spiritual message bears the stamp of a philosophy for man and the time in which he creates.

The attached documentation for the competition includes the habilitation thesis „God manifest in the Flesh“ and two monographs: „The Old Testament in the Light of Archaeological Evidence“ and „Early Christian Identity: Issues and Challenges“ as representative texts for the professorship.

The habilitation work is a huge intellectual undertaking, which aims to „examine how some of the most frequently cited New Testament texts illuminate the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. To what extent do they give us reason to affirm His divine worthiness“, as well as other variants and sub-variants of the problem, „relevant to Old Testament monotheism as well as the different ways of defining the Christological question“ in the words of the author. What has been selectively stated is scientifically based on two main corpora of New Testament texts – the writings of St. John and St. Paul, as well

as on the concepts of the few ancient Christian researchers on the subject and, above all, St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Clement of Rome and the Shepherd of Hermas. On this basis, with his analysis of the mentioned sources, the author approaches the topic with an effort to reach and illuminate its essential spaces with all the „polysemy of the considered excerpts“ in his own words.

As a side-view arrangement, the individual chapter titles succinctly illustrate the author's intellectual range and research pathos:

„Introductory Reflections on New Testament Christology“, „The Hymn to Christ in the Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians 2:5-11“, „The Hymn to Christ in the Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians 1:15-20“, „The Prologue of the Gospel of John – introductory and Christological questions“, „The unity of the Father and the Son in the Gospel according to John“, „The 'Conversation' about Christ in some of the Apostolic Fathers“.

The enumeration of works in this case, as well as in view of the authors who have transformed the resistances and variations of this theme into the world (in addition to Bulgarian) New Testament biblical studies, are too voluminous for one review. It is only necessary to emphasize that the text of the work shows comprehensiveness of knowledge, a sense of precision, scientific immunity to mythological faltering, a refusal to treat the authors, embodying the details of the monographic thesis, in an autonomous plan.

I would like to emphasize one more undoubted quality of this work. Incorporating the chrestomathic informativeness into the theological-research fabric of the text. The reader remains under the influence of the theoretical energy or, more precisely, does not lose pace of reception. The skillful presentation of the various texts and concepts in trinity with the in-depth analysis and subtextual suggestions provides the habilitation work with a broad horizontal address at a high intellectual level.

The monograph „The Old Testament in the Light of Archaeological Evidence“ has an applied character and is addressed to the student audience – „to cover a wider range of topics and ideas“, which, according to the author, „will allow them to deepen their knowledge of biblical topics“. I find the work a successful illustration of the interrelationship between Scripture and the material context. Although the author does not draw information from the fieldwork, his approach is to treat the biblical material in the light of material culture primarily as two projections in the face of history, which precisely through them remains untouchable for the new age and identical in the sublime and the low.

At the heart of the monograph „Early Christian Identity: Issues and Challenges“ is the author’s desire to show that „Christianity, despite its diversity, began to create delimiting beliefs, which are the reason for its separation from the synagogue... the Christian community as demarcated/demarcating of Jewry in its diversity“. Undoubtedly, this work is the search for new scientific horizons, and the balance of the movement between the options for evaluating individual concepts is without implied or stated bias of the author towards one of them. The monograph organically bears the stamp of objectivity, and the reverence for the facts does not limit the author’s freedom to choose his path between the seemingly proven and the mythologically assumed.

The documentation for the competition includes a training manual entitled „Introduction to the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament“, where a synthesis is sought between the historical and theological reading of the proposed topics, as well as four studies and two articles illustrating the author’s continuing interest in the latest aspirations in the field of New Testament biblical studies.

In its entirety, the scientific work of Fr. Teodor Stoychev is distinguished by a clearly constructed line of research, which through a series of unexpected decisions leads the reader's attention to an expected logical conclusion. This type of scientific construction creates prerequisites for the priority of theological interpretation.

In the depth of the theological vision of Fr. Theodor always respects the penetrating observation of man in his pursuits and interests, in his inner hesitations, delusions and convictions. They ooze authenticity and organic verisimilitude.

And since I have already stated that when evaluating a candidate for a professorship, his teaching skills are also very important, following the facts, his working capacity is also evident in this area. And in order to manifest it in her, he was undoubtedly appreciated and attracted to the various research projects, as in the „Ep. Konstantin Preslavsky“, as well as in the Faculty of Theology of the University of Sofia, has already established pedagogical practice and achieved authority.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize my strong support for the candidacy of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teodor Stoychev for a professorship in the Department of „History and Archeology“ at the Faculty of Humanities of the „Ep. Konstantin Preslavsky“, University of Shumen, and to call on the scientific jury, of which I am a member, to recognize him with the academic position of „Professor“.

Signature:



02.08.2024 г.