

A Defense of a Dissertation Thesis at Tbilisi Theological Academy and Seminary

On May 10, 2023, in the hall of the Center for Spiritual and Intellectual Development of the Youth at the Patriarchate of Georgia, Priest Ioane Bondarenko defended his thesis for the acquisition of an academic degree of Doctor of Theology. The theme of the thesis was “The Gelati Translation of ‘**The Ladder of Divine Ascent or Ladder of Paradise**’ by Saint John Climacus of Sinai and its Theological Analysis.”

The following members of the Dissertation Council of Theology of Tbilisi Theological Academy and Seminary attended the defense:

1. His Eminence, Anania (Japaridze) – Metropolitan of Manglisi and Tetristsqaro, Doctor of History, Professor;
2. His Eminence, Ioane (Gamrekeli) – Metropolitan of Kutaisi and Gaenati, Doctor of Theology, President of Gelati Scientific Academy, Professor;
3. Protopresbyter Giorgi (Zviadadze) – Doctor of Theology, Doctor of Philology, Professor;
4. Archpriest Bidzina (Gunia) - Academician of Gelati Scientific Academy, Doctor of Theology, Doctor of Philology, Professor;
5. Archpriest Maxime (Chanturia) – Doctor of Theology, Professor;
6. Archpriest Giorgi (Gugushvili) – Doctor of Theology, Doctor of History, Professor;
7. Archpriest Michael (Galdava) – Doctor of Theology, Doctor of Philology, Professor;
8. Archdeacon Demetre (Davitashvili) – Doctor of Theology, Professor;
9. Edisher Chelidze – Doctor of Theology, Doctor of Philological Sciences, Academician of Gelati Scientific Academy, Professor;
10. Sergo Vardosanidze – Doctor of Theology, Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor;
11. Giorgi Andriadze – Doctor of Theology, Professor.

Scientific supervisor of the doctoral student - Doctor of Theology, Doctor of Philology, Professor Edisher Chelidze.

Reviewers - Metropolitan of Kutaisi and Gaenati, Doctor of Theology, Professor Ioane (Gamrekeli) and Doctor of Theology, Professor, Archpriest Maxime Chanturia.

Before presenting his dissertation, the doctoral student, Priest Ioane Bondarenko expressed his special gratitude to the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia Ilia II, with whose great authority and blessing, the Dissertation Committee was founded at Tbilisi Theological Academy and Seminary and the Doctoral Program was created.

Priest Ioane Bondarenko thanked the Rector of Tbilisi Theological Academy and Seminary, Protopresbyter Giorgi Zviadadze, for the warm, caring, orderly and, at the same time, demanding, highly academic and working environment created at this educational institution. He noted that due to the great efforts and merit of the Rector, Protopresbyter Giorgi Zviadadze, today Tbilisi Theological Academy and Seminary is a solid educational and scientific center, a source of knowledge and faith.

The doctoral student expressed his gratitude to the scientific supervisor, Professor Edisher Chelidze, under whose qualified and dedicated guidance, he accomplished his work on “The Gelati Translation of **“The Ladder of Divine Ascent or Ladder of Paradise”** by Saint John Climacus.

Speaking about the scientific novelties and main results of the scientific paper, the doctoral student noted that the identification of **“The Ladder”** of Saint John of Sinai as a writing of ascetic genre is not surprising to anyone, however, the mentioned Teacher as a dogmatist and anti-heretic, exegete and terminologist is less known to the community of the faithful.

Accordingly, based on the old Georgian translations of **“The Ladder of Divine Ascent”**: the manuscript A 39 taken as the main text, also, the two editions of Ioane Petritsi (1968) and Euthymius (1902 and 1965), on the Greek original (PG. 88) and the Russian text (1898), in addition, using the theological works of many holy teachers and contemporary theological publications, the author substantiates that from the point of view of the delineation of the ascetic teaching, Saint John of Sinai appears to be a profound dogmatist, anti-heretic, terminologist and exegete. While explaining ascetic teachings, the Hegumen of Mount Sinai remains faithful to the spiritual tradition, which originates from the works of the holy teachers even from the early centuries. Thus, the work of the Holy Father, titled **“The**

Ladder” appears to be not only a work of the ascetic genre, which is well known by itself, but as it has been mentioned, a profound theological monument as well.

The scientific supervisor of the doctoral student, Professor Edisher Chelidze spoke about the value of the dissertation work and its scientific and theological purpose. The official reviewers of the dissertation - the Metropolitan of Kutaisi and Gaenati, Doctor of Theology, Professor Ioane (Gamrekeli) and Doctor of Theology, Professor, Archpriest Maxime Chanturia positively evaluated the work presented by Priest Ioane Bondarenko and expressed their significant, competent advice and opinions. Afterwards, a scientific discussion started in which the members of the Scientific Committee, the professors and teachers of Tbilisi Theological Academy and Seminary participated. Everyone unanimously confirmed that the dissertation topic was accomplished on a high academic level and was relevant with its practical purpose both from the ecclesiastical and scientific viewpoints. The session of the Dissertation Committee was attended by the Metropolitan of Gori and Ateni, His Eminence Andria (Gvazava). He congratulated Priest Ioane Bondarenko on the successful defense of his dissertation and noted that the professors of Tbilisi Theological Academy and Seminary, especially its Rector, Protopresbyter Giorgi Zviadadze had contributed greatly to this success.

The Dissertation Committee evaluated the work with a high score and Priest Ioane Bondarenko was unanimously awarded an academic degree of Doctor of Theology.