



REVIEW

By Assoc. Prof. Dr. SVETOSLAV S. RIBOLOV

Faculty of Theology

SOFIA UNIVERSITY

"ST. KLIMENT' of OHRID"

concerning the candidature of

Assoc. Prof. Dr. KLARA ASENOVA TONEVA

participant in the competition

for professor in the professional field

2.4 - RELIGION and THEOLOGY (History of Religions) - SG, iss. 63
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"St. Kliment of Ohrid"

The competition of the professional field 2.4 - *Religion and Theology (History of Religion)* takes place for the needs of the Department of Systematic Theology at the Faculty of Theology at Sofia University "St. Kliment of Ohrid". It has been announced in the *State Gazette*, issue 63 of 27.07.2021. The procedure of the announcement of the competition and the admission of candidates to participate in it is made according to the terms of the requirements of the LDAG (Law for Development of Academic Grades) and the Regulations for its implementation. The envisaged legal deadlines and procedural requirements have been met and the necessary documents have been attached.

The only candidate is Assoc. Prof. Dr. *Klara Assenova Toneva*, whose research biography fully meets the expectations for participation in the competition for the academic position of "professor". All materials concerning the competition were handed to me electronically within the time limits specified by law. During the years as her colleague – from 2005 until today– I had the opportunity to follow her research work. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Klara Toneva has always proved

to be a thorough and hard-working researcher, kind and responsive colleague. The acquired professional skills and capabilities allowed her to develop as a scholar who has made indisputable contributions not only in the field of theology, but in the field of religion and Islam-Christian relations as well.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Klara Toneva participates in the competition for "professor" with two monographs, four studies, sixteen articles and two textbooks. After obtaining the academic position of "Associate Professor", the candidate participated as a member in four research projects: "Development of Orthodox Christian Ethics as a Theological Discipline in the Bulgarian Church and Academic Tradition in the Twentieth Century" (contract number 80-10-177 / 23.03.2021); "Dogmatic Sources for the Struggle against Iconoclasm" (contract number: 80-10-169 / 24.04.2020 2020); "1000-Years of the Ohrid Archbishopric (Sources and Researches)" (contract number: 80-10-226 / 04.05.2018 2018); "Religion and Multiculturality. Educational Pathways for Local Church Leaders" (contract number: 527098-LLP-1-2012-1-NO-GRUNDTVIG-GMP).

Meanwhile, the candidate, as can be seen from her CV, has carried out various activities as an expert in the academic field for the benefit of the public interest.

Dr. Yana Stoilova and Dr. Magdalena Kraycheva defended their doctoral dissertations under her supervision. She has participated in numerous competitions concerning assistant and doctoral positions during her work as a full-time associate professor of *History of Religions* at the Faculty of Theology at the Sofia University "St. Kliment of Ohrid".

The educational activity of the candidate for bachelor's and master's degrees at Sofia University, concerning the competition, is more than sufficient during the period 2019-2021, while at the same time she was teaching subjects in the master's program at the Military Academy "G.S. Rakovski", Sofia, in the field of *History of Religion*.

Monography

Undoubtedly the main work that summarizes and illustrates the candidate's contribution is the published monograph *The Secularized Religiosity*. University Publishing House "St. Clement of Ohrid", Sofia, 2018, 208 pg. The work has been reviewed and recommended by the Department of Historical and Systematic Theology at the Faculty of Theology at Sofia University

"St. Kliment of Ohrid" on January 16, 2018 (see Minutes №5 / 16.01.2018). The work is original and unique in our theological literature.

The main thesis of the author is that modern secular society has shifted the emphasis in its development from spiritual pursuits to liberal values along with "universal application of individual human rights." It is also interesting that the author notes that the emergence of religious fundamentalism - Christian and Islamic - is the result of the very displacement of religion to the periphery of public interest. According to the author, multiculturalism is experiencing a crisis in its attempt to reconcile different religious views, while, at the same time "religious pluralism precludes the dominance of a dominant religion." "Thus, religious freedom triumphs over church authority." "The Ubiquitous Influence of American Mass Culture" is also noted by the author. Thus, religious fundamentalism has been replaced by secular fundamentalism. Furthermore, secularism turns out to be a common enemy of Islamic and Christian fundamentalism, which, according to the author, have "a number of intersections, common themes and goals." According to the author, the intolerance of fundamentalists towards modern secular society is due to people who were brought up in a certain religious tradition, but subsequently distorted it. The author's statement that Islamic officials in Bulgaria – defined as extremists by security specialists in the country– actually seem to be quite liberal compared to their Western European counterparts is really interesting. This is another proof of the specificity and complexity of the problem under study. Secularization leads to a certain obsession of the human being characterized by forms of modern and at the same time premodern idolatry due to the innate religious need of each individual. This issue is discussed in the first two chapters. The third chapter is devoted to the other extreme – the rejection of secularism and modernity, leading to manifestations of religious fundamentalism.

Thus, the author's observations provide a valuable contribution to the theological thought and public interest in the context of a non-conservative religious discourse. What the author proposes as important conclusions is that secularized religiosity has in fact shifted the centre of religious life from the truth of Jesus Christ to political, moral and other kind of values that represent a kind of imitation of religious life. Consequently, the author leaves open the question of how far, according to the Church, personal freedom should be extended and whether modern democratic society allows the existence of traditional religious communities. In this regard, the author could benefit from the writings of Aristotle Papanicolaou, George Demakopoulos, Pandelis Kalaidzidis, Archbishop and Elder of America Elpidophoros on democracy and Orthodoxy in the modern world. Undoubtedly, a look at the decisions and messages of the *Holy*

and Great Council of the Orthodox Church in Crete in 2016 would be useful for her work, as it would provide a little more specificity in the last chapter, because one of the decisions of the Council concerns the issue under study.

Although the work is defined as belonging in the field of "History of Religions", traditional for the Faculty of Theology at Sofia University "St. Kliment of Ohrid", it relates with the disciplines "Sociology of Religion" and "Christian Sociology", which are closer in the field of "Christian Ethics" and "Moral Theology". However, she remains steadfast in her field of science.

The other work included in the monographs: "The Church - a Community of Love", ISBN: 978-954-409-283-2, "Pleiades", Sofia, 2008, 223 pages, is not subject to review because it belongs to another academic field.

Studies

"The Muslim as a subject of Islamic Morality and Perception of the World", Collection "Public communications in security and defense", Defense College "G.S. Rakovski", Sofia, 2010, p. 69- 97, ISBN: 978 -954-9348-18-7, is also a valuable asset in the field of religious studies, especially in the field of Islamic studies. Here we see a concentrated and precise "section" of contemporary Muslim identity and self-identification. The work has a high practical value.

"From the soul to the spirit. The difficult road of contemporary intellectuals". The multicultural person. A collection in memory of Prof. Dr. Kamen Garenov (father Petar Garena), v.2, Publishing House Gutenberg, Sofia, 2016, pp. 732-765, an important analysis of contemporary Bulgarian intellectual life, proposed precisely from a religious point of view.

"St. Clement of Ohrid: The timeless messenger of truth", St. Clement of Ohrid - the first bishop of the Bulgarian language, University Publishing House "St. Clement of Ohrid", 2020, pp. 53-74, shows the author's competence in the field of pre-Islamic religious studies in the Balkans.

Articles

"Archimandrite Prof. Dr. Ephthimiy (Sapundzhiev) - the originator of the discipline History of Religions in Bulgarian theology", Professor Dr. archimandrite Ephthimiy Sapundzhiev: Life, Church and Academic Activity (1884- 1943). Collection on the occasion of

the 75th anniversary from his death, Foundation for Regional Development, Sofia, 2020, pp. 32-50, represents a valuable contribution to the history of the discipline taught by the author. Reflecting on the history of the regional theological school is an important element in building a consistent and high-quality teaching approach. The text pleasantly surprises with its reflectivity.

“Orthodox theology and the modern world”, Sixth congress of higher-education schools of Orthodox theology (5-10 October 2004). Journal of Spiritual Culture, issue 11, Sofia, 2004, pp. 32-50, is a review on a world forum held in Sofia almost two decades ago.

“An Orthodox position on the attitude toward non-Christian religions”: Religions in Europe and the future of Orthodoxy. The scientific research group for Religious and Philosophical Paradigms, Publishing House “Orion Press”, Sofia, 2006, pp. 57-64, is an interesting text that sets something like a program for the development of a training course in the field of non-Christian religious teachings - a course that the author has been teaching for years at the Bulgarian Faculty of Arts at Sofia University. In this respect, it is methodologically correct and interesting.

“Relations between parents and children. The rights and obligations among the members of the Christian family”, The family as a value in the globalizing world, “A-PRESS” OOD, Sofia, 2011, pp. 50-60, it is again a study that takes the author into the realm of Christian ethics and presents her interests very close to what is called "Moral Theology" in our standard theological curriculum. It follows in the footsteps of authors such as Iliya Panchovski and Gancho Pashev - undisputed authorities in the field and well-known professors of theology.

„The Relation between Eastern Orthodoxy – Identity: Speculation, Myths and Dynamic“, THE BALKANS AS REALITY. Cultural Policy and Religious Communities on the Balkans: Present Condition and Future Development. Proceedings of the Third International Workshop. 5-7 October 2012. Sofia, 2013, 2013, pp. 73-82, is an interesting study that again shows the author's interests close to Christian sociology. Undoubtedly, the participation in such an international forum gives even more weight to the presented research.

“Challenges the Muslim community faces in Bulgaria within the context of the Islamic revival”, Military Journal, Defence College “Georgi Stoykov Rakovski”, Sofia, 2013, pp. 72-81, is an interesting look at the prospects for development and integration of the Muslim community in Bulgaria. The text certainly has a high practical and pragmatic value.

„The Trail of the Edict of Milan in Modern Bulgaria, The Christian Paradigm of a United Europe“. The Historical and Religious Dimension of the Reign of Saint Constantine the Great and His Present Reception. International Scientific Symposium 29– 30 of May 2013, 2014, pp. 73-84, is a brief reflection on the social dimensions of a historical document and its significance for contemporary Europe. The text seems also to belong in the field of Christian sociology.

“Religious extremism: Military issue and problem”, Journal, Defence College “Georgi Stoykov Rakovski”, Sofia, 2013, pp. 51-61, is a study that is at the centre of the author's scientific interest and therefore sounds expert and specific. It has a high application value.

“Fr. Alexander Men - the difficult road to dialogue”, Bible-culture-dialogue (research and studies), Sofia, 2013, pp. 148-159, is a work reflecting the personality of one of the most famous preachers of the ROC in the era of "real socialism". What is interesting in this text is the emphasis on the specific contribution of Fr. Alexander Men in inter-Christian and inter-religious dialogue in an age of persecution and stagnation.

„History of Religions: The Young Person’s Guide to a Correct Worldview“, The Orthodox Christian Religious Education Association (OCREA). Methods of Teaching in Religious Education – Learning by Heart or by Experience? Proceedings of the conference held in Sofia, Bulgaria, 17–21 June 2014., 2015, ref, International, article again in an area bordering with Christian sociology and ethics. However, the author has remained in the field of "History of Religions", appreciating religious education in a relatively applied way.

“History of Religions – metronome of this life and the afterlife”, Religion, values and orthodoxy: Religion and science in the 21st century. Scientific research group “Religious and philosophical paradigms” - department of Religion; Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge-Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia University and the Russian Culture and Information Center-Sofia. International thematic collection, Publisher: “Propeler”, Sofia, 2014, pp. 272-286, in collaboration with foreign scientists. This is an article that has a methodological character and presents the author’s expertise in her particular scientific field. Apart from its educational value, the work also has a high research value.

„Refugees: Between Law and Mercy“, Stat si Societale in Europa, Publisher: Craiova, 2015, pages 76-84, ISBN:978-606-731-018-4, ref, International. The work focuses on an important and pressing issue that is again on the border between religious studies and religious ethics. It is an important contribution.

„The Way of the Young: from Rebellion to the thirst for Meeting, Young people in Church and Society“. 15th International Symposium on Science, Theology and Arts, Alba Iulia, 9-10 of May, 2016, Publisher: Alba Iulia, 2016, pages:339-351, ref, International, it is also a text bordering on Christian sociology and ethics. It certainly builds on the author's research in the field and presents it in a positive light internationally.

“Religion – an instrument to use”, A theoretical collection in honor of the founder of the department of Rhetoric, professor Vasil Ivanov, University Publishing House “Bishop Constantine of Preslav”, Shumen, 2016, pp. 263-276, is an interesting work in the field of religious studies, which corresponds to the main work of the author. The topic of fundamentalism and extremism is discussed from the point of view of a highly engaged expert.

“The dangers of tolerance”, Contemporary challenges before security and defense - part one, Defense College “Georgi Stoykov Rakovski”, Sofia, 2017, pp. 78-83, is also a work between the History of Religion and Christian Sociology. The author's analysis corresponds to his main work. The thesis is that the multicultural society of the Western world has in a special way caused radicalization in certain social strata.

“The Theological Approach of Prof. Ivan Panchovski toward History of Religions”, The theological work of Prof. Ivan Panchovski and the spiritual and educational tradition of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, University Publishing House “St. Clement of Ohrid”, 2018, pp. 79-88, is a work dedicated to a prominent Bulgarian theologian from the recent past. The work has a high educational and research value.

“Radicalization in the Home of Islam - religious terrorism against traditional Islam”, Collection “Public communications in security and defense”, Defense College “G.S. Rakovski”, Sofia, 2010, pp. 53-59, is a serious study of specific processes of extremism of certain circles in the Islamic community around the world. From the point of view of the applied nature of the research, it undoubtedly has a high scientific value.

Both textbooks presented in the competition: “Introduction to Orthodox Dogmatic Theology”, ISBN: 978- 954-409-253-5, Pleiades, Sofia, 383 pages and “Appendix to "Introduction to Orthodox Dogmatic Theology", ISBN: 978-954- 409-256-6, Pleiades, Sofia, 319 pages, do not belong in the author’s academic field and are not subject to review.

The academic work of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Klara Assenova Toneva, presented in the attached monograph, studies and articles, can generally be grouped into three main sections. In the first

place and the most numerous are the publications dedicated to the history of religions, religious relations and dialogue. These are the immediate theoretical and factual contributions on the field of "History of Religion" relating with the monograph "Secularized Religiosity". It also worth noting that these papers deserve a separate in-depth and analytical reading.

Moreover, several other articles and papers relate to the above-mentioned field, but they are also connected to the scientific fields of "Christian Ethics" and "Christian Sociology". Another semantic unit is formed by the purely Bulgarian theological theme. Finally, publications related to the teaching of the "History of Religion" and religion in general, as well as its application in the process of dealing with the immigration crisis in Europe have been also published.

Considering and adhering to everything that I have stated above, I cannot but note with satisfaction, impression and full conviction that the esteemed colleague Assoc. Prof. Klara Assenova Toneva has all the professional and personal prerequisites for occupying the highest academic position of "professor". After getting acquainted in detail and thoroughly with the materials presented for the competition and follow the examination of the importance of the scientific contributions contained in them, I strongly recommend the esteemed Scientific Jury to give a positive vote for the election of Assoc. Prof. Dr. KLARA ASENOVA TONEVA to the academic position "Professor" in professional field 2.4 "Religion and Theology" (History of Religions).

I am voting "FOR" with deep conviction!

Sofia,

04.12.2021

St. John of Damascus

Reviewer:



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(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Svetoslav S. Ribolov)