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**THE DOCTRINAL CONFLICT BETWEEN  
CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM**  
**(according to St. John Damascene's Heresy 101)**

ABSTRACT

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction .....	3
I.1. Brief description of the dissertation .....	3
I.2 Relevance of the dissertation.....	6
I.3 Object, subject, methodology, chronological framework, aim and objectives .....	7
I.4. Literature review .....	9
I.5 Structure of the dissertation.....	16
II. Body .....	17
II.1 Islam: emergence and ideological and doctrinal formation .....	17
II.2. Christianity and Islam: spiritual and historical context of their interaction.....	17
II.3. Tawhid versus Christian triadology .....	18
II.4. Glory and power of the Cross of Christ .....	19
II.5. Communion in love or communal solidarity .....	19
II.6. Salvation or prosperity: two divergent anthropologies .....	20
II.7. Love never fails.....	21
III. Notes and applicability .....	22
IV. Conclusion .....	24
V. Scientific contribution.....	31
VI. Relevant publications.....	32

The doctoral dissertation “The Doctrinal Conflict between Christianity and Islam” (according to St. John Damascene’s Heresy 101) contains 453 pages, and consists of a preface, an introduction, seven chapters (with conclusions at the end of each chapter), a conclusion, a list of abbreviations, and a bibliography.

## I. Introduction

Conceptualising human behaviour based on religious moral values and setting boundaries may seem shocking or provoking to people today, especially if they are disconnected from faith. But should it? In other words, if we assume that no boundaries exist, are we not, in fact, deliberately ignoring the past, being unrealistic about the present, and building a future based on illusions?

Boundaries are associated with differences, and their study poses important research questions that have, at times, been ignored, and, at others, been associated with “the colonial mind”. Numerous attempts have been made to define boundaries, including “a formalisation of difference” (F. Barth), “a hermeneutic key” (G. Dineva), “identity spaces” (S. Evstatiev), etc., and, even if they can be crossed, boundaries are, in fact, stable constructs that guide social life.<sup>1</sup>

If the ability to stay away from the “inner world” of the other was once seen as an integral part of peaceful communality, whereas debating his religious beliefs was deemed an act of boundary crossing on behalf of an outsider and an invasion of “the inner and the sacred”, does today’s interreligious culture of silence, i.e. “the silence about the religious secret of the other” (as M. Đorđević puts it),<sup>2</sup> not create its own boundaries?

### I.1. Brief description of the dissertation

Can Christians and Muslims preserve their religious and cultural identities and yet live together; does communality require setting boundaries based on faith; how should social issues be settled without crossing religious boundaries; is the boundary between Christianity and Islam so insurmountable as to render all of their common characteristics inconsequential; does taking an active

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<sup>1</sup> For further information, see Евстатиев, С. *Салафизмът в Близкия Изток и границите на вярата*, София, 2018, 43–46.

<sup>2</sup> Гьоргевич, М. „Християнско-ислямският диалог във Византийското културно пространство – опит, предизвикателства и перспективи“, *Християнство и култура*, 1 (2012), с. 119.

interest in the worldview of the other and considering his religious beliefs and values not constitute a transgression of boundaries, and, hence, an invasion into his world and a change in one's own behaviour; should such empathy be allowed to interfere with faith, and will faith suffer or benefit from it; can we justify the abolition of boundaries based on the claim that all religions are paths to salvation; can the withdrawal from Islam seen in some Christians be overcome, and vice versa ...?<sup>3</sup>

The relations between Christianity and Islam have a long history, in which debate and dialogue, even if co-dependent, are still intrinsically different: the former stands for taking a stance and willingness for confrontation, whereas the latter seeks agreement. As Y. Peev puts it, "Debate is an exchange with a clash, where differences stand out and the urge to defeat the other prevails, which inevitably leads to confrontation. Dialogue is an exchange in search of reciprocity, marked by an intentionality to overcome differences..."<sup>4</sup>

As part of the discussion of differences, debate is a form of open theological dialogue. Its outcomes will depend on the choice of topic: if it focuses on what Christianity and Islam have in common, one expected outcome will be the achievement of mutual recognition and a reconceptualisation of the experience of the other through the personal religious experience; if the focus are doctrinal differences, myths and bigotries, which are largely fuelled by a misunderstanding of differences, are likely to be disproved.

Researchers generally outline five periods in the 14-century-long relations between Christianity and Islam: the first dates back to the time of the Arab-Muslim conquests, as a result of which the Middle East and North Africa became part of the House of Islam; the second

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<sup>3</sup> Стаматова, К. „Една православна позиция за отношението към нехристиянските религии“, *Религиите в Европа и бъдещето на православиято*, София, 2006, 61-62.

<sup>4</sup> Пеев, Й. „Отношенията християнство-ислям: дебат и диалог“, *Християнството и нехристиянските религии* (съст. и прев. И. Мерджанова), Силистра, 2003, с. 178.

is the period of the Crusades; the third coincides with the advancement of the Ottomans towards Eastern and Central Europe (from the 14th until the 18th century); the fourth is the time of the European colonial expansion (the 19th and the 20th centuries); and, finally, the fifth is associated with the proclamation of independence by Muslim states in the past century.<sup>5</sup>

The European research interest in the Muslim religion is deeply rooted in Christian theology; however, Eastern and Western Christianity each followed a different path to the study of Islam. Theological polemics with Muslims were mostly initiated by the Christians of the East, whereas the interest of the Latinised West really surged after the Crusades, even if it had begun long before that. As the subject of this doctoral dissertation is the doctrinal conflict between Christianity and Islam (according to St. John Damascene's Heresy 101), it will not consider the historical dialectic between Islam and the West.<sup>6</sup>

The dissertation outlines the doctrinal differences arising on both sides of the Christianity-Islam divide as reflected in some of the seminal works of the patristic tradition of Eastern Orthodoxy, in particular, and of Christianity, in general, namely the writings of St. John Damascene. The latter were, in fact, composed in response to the dynamics of an era marked by turbulent change in the history of the Eastern Mediterranean region and Byzantium, and catered for the cultural and spiritual needs of the time. Four of them are particularly relevant to Islam, of which Chapter 101 (Heresy of the Ishmaelites) of his *On Heresies* constitutes a first attempt of a Christian polemic

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, c. 179.

<sup>6</sup> For further information, see Евстатиев, С. *Религия и политика в арабския свят. Ислямът в обществото*, София, 2012, 48-82. The author traces and analyses the scholarly discussion and the public debate on the issue of Orientalism and anti-Orientalism as demonstrated in the relations between Islam and the West. He concludes that „The debates, controversies and their consequences suggest a dramatic and, at times, even painful relations between the two civilisations, that of the Muslim Middle East and that of the Catholic West.” (c. 82).

against Islam, and is the only piece whose authorship is indisputably acknowledged as his.

St. John Damascene considers the religion of the prophet Muhammad a Christian heresy, which, historically viewed, is both justifiable and understandable. In his conceptual framework, “heresy” was a wide-ranging term, applying to both various religious teachings and to different schools within the Hellenistic philosophical tradition. Moreover, at that time, the Islamic theological doctrine was still in the early stages, and theological science within Islam was not yet developed.

## **I.2 Relevance of the dissertation**

The choice of topic was motivated by several factors: the presence of Islam, not only in Bulgaria but also in Europe,<sup>7</sup> has been and will continue to be a major ideological and spiritual challenge. There is hardly any need to justify the importance of theological research into the nature of this religion. It is indeed essential to make the differences between the histories, doctrines and religious practices of Christianity and Islam the subject of theological analysis, all the more so in view of the major challenge this poses to theologians, namely that without renouncing their faith, they should attain the kind of exchange that would ensure the necessary reciprocal knowledge.

Not just in the Middle East, but also in the public spheres in numerous other countries, Islam clashes with the fundamental principles of liberal secularism and development theories, according to which modernisation invariably leads to secularisation and westernisation of public life. Islam, however, had already become “a

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<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to identify the exact number of the Muslim population of Europe; however, it is generally agreed to be rising. This is driven by the two key demographic factors of high birth rates and immigration, and, according to demographic statistics, in 2020 Muslims accounted for around ten percent of the European population. (See Тонева, К. *Секуляризираната религиозност*, София, 2018, с. 106).

societal, cultural and civilisational model”<sup>8</sup> long before the West started to civilise it by force.

### **I.3 Object, subject, methodology, chronological framework, aim and objectives**

The *object* of research of the dissertation is the doctrinal conflict between Christianity and Islam, and its *subject* is St. John Damascene’s Heresy 101, more specifically the identification of the key questions that it sets out to examine.

The research *methodology* used in the study is based on: the historical method, the historical-critical method, the apologetic method, the method of analogy, the comparative method, the method of generalisation, and patristic analysis. The purpose of combining historical-critical and theological-systematic methods and objectives is, on the one hand, to identify the similarities and differences between the doctrines of the two monotheistic religions by tracing the theological discussions led in the course of centuries, and, on the other, to outline the Orthodox theological and dogmatic reflection on the religion of Islam.

*Chronologically*, the doctrinal conflict generally coincides with the first phase of the literary conflict between Eastern Christianity and Islam, spanning from the middle of the seventh to the middle of the ninth century. However, other key periods of Islamic history and of the history of the relations between the two religions have been considered, as required by the contexts of different research questions.

No *thorough research* into this subject exists in Bulgarian theological science, with the exception of the study and three articles quoted below:

Тонева, К. „Ерес 101 на св. Йоан Дамаскин: доктринални различия между християнството и исляма в съпоставителен план“, *Богословска мисъл*, 2 (2020);

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<sup>8</sup> Hudson, M. „Islam and Political Development“, *Islam and Development*, Syracuse, 1980, p. 23.

Риболов, Св. „Мястото на исляма в творчеството на св. Йоан Дамаскин“, *Ориенталия*, г. III, 1 (2007);

Великов, Ю. „Свети Йоан Дамаскин, Теодор Абу Кура и ранният ислям“, *Мултикултурният човек. Сборник в чест на проф. д.и.н Камен Гаренов*, Т. I, София, 2016;

Кънев, З. „Ерес 101 книга За ересите на св. Йоан Дамаскин и кораничните аргументи срещу иконопочитанието“, *Богословска мисъл*, 2 (2020).

The identification and analysis of the doctrinal conflict between Christianity and Islam (according to St. John Damascene's Heresy 101), as the *aim* of the dissertation, is based on an examination of literary sources. Regarding Islam, these include: examples of classical Arabic poetry, texts from the Qur'an, commentaries on the Qur'an, and a selection of hadiths; as for Christianity, the Bible, patristic literature (focusing on the works of St. John Damascene), and the horoi of some Ecumenical Councils are considered. Thus, in the first instance, the doctrinal differences between the two monotheistic religions are identified; secondly, the theological discussion on the subject since the time of St. John Damascene is examined; and, finally, the Orthodox theological-dogmatic reflection on the religious doctrine of Islam is expounded.

The *objectives* corresponding to the aim of the dissertation are as follows: the first is to identify and analyse specific texts from the Qur'an that are directly or indirectly related to the key questions discussed in each of the chapters; the second is to explore the way in which these key questions have been interpreted by Muslim theology, and to identify the specific purpose of this interpretation; the third, which is based on the traditional research methodology, is to establish the compliance, or the lack thereof, of the key opinions expressed by the author of this dissertation with those of other scholars having studied the topic. This has been achieved through the application of two approaches of Orthodox methodology: the comparative-analytical approach, used to outline the identified differences between the Christian and the Islamic understanding of certain aspects of theological science (e.g. the doctrine of God, the doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ, the doctrine of God the Holy



Spirit, the doctrine of man and his appointment by God, the understanding of community, morality, eschatology, etc.), and the comparative-critical approach, used, along with the required argumentation, to challenge the views of Islam from a Christian perspective; the fourth objective is determined by the specific natures of the two religions, especially as manifested in a dialogic context, which have been identified by using the methods of Orthodox dogmatics, in particular as regards ambiguous concepts that co-exist in the two religions but, in the context of each, refer to fundamentally different entities (e.g. transcendence, immanence, grace, image of God, sin, law and gift, community, salvation, etc.)

#### **I.4. Literature review**

The question of Islam's affiliation with Judaism and its contrast to Christianity is well known to researchers (e.g. S. Hasr, M. Hodgson, P. Crone, C. Brown, etc.)<sup>9</sup> This study approaches it in an attempt to prove that the purpose of using the Gospel in the construction of the Islamic discourse on Christianity is twofold: the formation of the Islamic religious identity and the striving of Muslim authors to position their faith in the monotheistic history of salvation. A comparison is drawn between the criticisms made by the followers and theologians of the two religions in the first centuries after the emergence of Islam in order to clarify the precise nature of their doctrinal conflict.

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<sup>9</sup> Hasr, S. „Comments on a Few Theological Issues in the Islamic – Christian Dialogue“, *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, University Press of Florida, 1955; Hodgson, M. „A Comparison of Islam and Christianity as Framework for Religious Life“, *Diogenes* 32 (1960); Crone, P. „Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine iconoclasm“, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980); Brown, C. „Islam, Judaism and Christianity in Comparative Perspective“, *Religion and State*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2000, 19–30 (C. Brown's study has been translated into Bulgarian: Браун, К. „Ислямът, юдаизмът и християнството в сравнителна перспектива“, *Християнството и нехристиянските религии*, Силистра, 2003, 161–178).

As far as the *state of research* is concerned, the sources used are diverse and were chosen in accordance with the objectives. The comparative analysis is mostly reliant on:

Св. Йоан Дамаскин. *Извор на знанието*, (прев. Ат. Атанасов, под редакцията на Ив. Христов и Св. Риболов), Т. I, София, 2014;

Св. Йоан Дамаскин. *Извор на знанието*, (прев. Ат. Атанасов, под редакцията на Ив. Христов и Св. Риболов, Том II, Точно изложение на православната вяра, София, 2019;

Св. Йоан Дамаскин. *Извор на знанието*, (прев. Ат. Атанасов, под редакцията на Ив. Христов и Св. Риболов), Том III, Точно изложение на православната вяра, София, 2021.

In addition to the study and the three articles quoted above, which are directly relevant to the topic of the dissertation, there are also other Orthodox authors who have turned their attention to either the general nature of Islam (its emergence, stages of development, founder, basic beliefs, practices, etc.) or to specific aspects of its doctrine and religious practices. Those include Bishop Nicodemus, T. Hristov, Bishop A. Yannoulatos, Prot. J. Meyendorf, G. Papadimitriou, D. Papandreou, Prot. A. Men, L. Milin, Y. Maximov, K. Yanakiev, S. Simić, R. Popov, S. Ribolov, P. Pavlov, S. Markov and Y. Velikov.

Some of the key works of those authors considered here are: Янулатос, Ан. *Ислам*, Београд, 2005; Янулатос, Ан. „Разбирайки православието: как да различим мисията от прозелитизма“, *Християнството и нехристиянските религии*, Силистра, 2003; Янулатос, Ан. „Диалогът с исляма от православна гледна точка“, *Православието и глобализацията*, Силистра, 2005; Майендорф, Й. „Византийски представи за исляма“, *Богословска мисъл*, 2 (2002); Максимов, Ю. В. „Преподобный Иоанн Дамаскин об исламе“, *Византийские сочинения об исламе (тексты переводов и комментарии)*“, Москва, 2006; Шон, Д. „Св. Йоан Дамаскин и неговият принос към средновековния спор за „правилната религия““, *Богословска мисъл*, 2 (2020); Риболов, Св. „Мястото на исляма в творчеството на св. Йоан Дамаскин“, *Ориенталия*, г. III, 1 (2007); Марков, См. „Срещата на исляма с Византия“, *Християнство и култура*, 1 (2012); Великов, Ю. „Свети Йоан

Дамаскин, Теодор Абу Кура и ранният ислям“, *Мултикултурният човек. Сборник в чест на проф. д.и.н Камен Гаренов*, Т. I, София, 2016.

The dissertation further references studies of Western European Arabists and historians, such as W. M. Watt, P. Crone, F. Denny, H. Corbin, L. Massignon, I. Goldziher, S. Nasr, R. Bell, G. Juynboll, J. Schacht, S. Balić, D. Kerr, M. Cook, D. MacDonald, R. Nicholson, T. Izutsu, C. Brockelmann, D. Brown, G. Grunebaum, M. Hodgson, C. Armstrong, D. Sourdel, H. Masse, and others.

The Russian Arabist tradition (including I. Krachkovsky, I. Filshinsky, P. Gryaznevich, S. Prozorov, A. Zhuravsky, E. Razvan, D. Yermakov, L. Klimovich, M. Piotrovsky), as well as, to a considerable extent, the Bulgarian Arabist school (represented by T. Teofanov, Y. Peev, P. Pavlovich, S. Evstatiev, D. Michaylov, V. Belev, K. Velichkova and M. Malinova) are also instrumental in forming the author’s position.

The development of the Orthodox-apologetic response is identified on the basis of the studies of Prot. J. Meyendorf, Prot. G. Florovsky, Prot. J. Romanides, Prot. A. Schmemmann, V. Loski, C. Yannaras, N. Afanasiev, St. Justin (Popović), Arch. Sophrony (Sakharov), J. Zizioulas, A. Kartashev, A. Radović, Arch. Euthymius (Sapundzhiev), B. Marinov, D. Penov, I. Panchovski, B. Piperov, I. Markovski, T. Koev, N. Shivarov, S. Valchanov, D. Kirov, I. Zhelev, A. Hubanchev, I. Hristov, etc.

*Chapter one*, which deals with the emergence and the ideological and doctrinal development of Islam, builds on the works of T. Izutsu, P. Crone, W. M. Watt, as well as of the Bulgarian Arabist T. Teofanov (Izutsu, T. *God and men in the Koran*, Pakistan, 2005, Crone, P. *Meccan trade and the rise of Islam*. Princeton University Press. 1987, Watt, W. M. *Muhammad at Mecca*, Oxford, 1953, Watt, W. M. *Muhammad at Medina*, Oxford, 1956, Теофанов, Цв. *Арабската средновековна култура: от езичеството към исляма*, София, 2004).

In his monograph, T. Izutsu proposes a conceptual and semantic analysis of the term “Islam”, which is important given that it has mainly been translated as “obedience” and “abiding”. According to

the author, rather than “obedience to Allah”, it actually means “restraint and humility”, “devotion to Allah”, and “righteousness and truthfulness in the relationship with Allah”.

Patricia Crone is the first researcher to critique and refute the theory of the causes and the emergence of Islam developed by her teacher William M. Watt. In her monograph, Crone proves the absence of a causal relationship between the change in the socio-economic context in Mecca and the birth of the new religion.

The Arabist T. Teofanov focuses specifically on poetry as an important source for understanding the social and political life in pre-Islamic Arabia, considering the view of the poet as a knowledge bearer with an important public role and the universal functions of poetry, used as the groundwork for the new religion. In his monograph, he studies the transformation of the Bedouin lyrical epic into a model for both interpreting the text of the Qur’an and imposing the Arab verbal tradition within the borders of the new theocratic state.

In *chapter two*, which explores the Judeo-Christian tradition and Islam, in addition to the works of the above-mentioned Orthodox authors, the following are also considered: Crone, P. „Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine iconoclasm“, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980); Пеев, Й. „Вторият Ватикански събор и повратът в отношенията християнство-ислям“, *Арабистика и ислямознание. Том II. Студии по случай 60 – годишнината на доц. д.ф.н. Пенка Самсарева*, София, 2003; Пеев, Й. „Отношенията християнство-ислям: дебат и диалог.“ *Християнството и нехристиянските религии*, Силистра, 2003; Евстатиев, С. „Исторически основания за отношенията между християни и мюсюлмани“, *Християнство и ислям. Основи на религиозната толерантност*, София, 2007; Стаматова, К. „Християнство и ислям. Пътят от противопоставяне към „пречистване на историческата памет““, *Духовна култура*, 2 (2004); Стаматова, К. „Ислямът и неговият изначален юдейски избор“, *Духовна култура*, 12 (2003); Crone, P. „Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine iconoclasm“, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980); Brown, D. *The Cross of the Messiah*.

*Christianity and Islam*, London, 1969; Sweetman, J. „Islam and Christian Theology“, *A Study of the interpretation of Theological Ideas in the Two Religions* (part 2, vol. 1), London: Litter worth Press, 1947. In view of the fact that the content of the Qur'an is bound to the Judeo-Christian tradition, scholars have tended to favour the rational-analytical approach (the preferred method of European Orientalists), and have identified a generally poetic and synthetic mode of expression, an inconsistent narration, and a lack of specific details and historical dating.

*Chapter three* references two studies by P. Pavlovich: „Зараждането на монотеизма в земите на Арабия и представата за отношението между човека и Бога“, *История и култура на древна Арабия*, София, 2001; and „Първото откровение на пророка Мухаммад: зараждане и историческа динамика на наратива през периода VIII-IX век“, *Ориенталия*, 1 (2009). In these, he examines the historical development of the narrative of Muhammad's first revelation and its modifications in the different versions, suggesting that before the emergence of written tradition, short narratives existed, which were later incorporated into a single text. In the process, distinctions were drawn between the narratives, where each compiler edited them according to his personal preferences.

The observations and conclusions drawn in the apologetic section, which deals with the Christian response, are based on the following works: Милин, Л. *Научно оправдање религије. Апологетика. Књига 5. Натприродно откривена религија*, Шид, 1993, Архим. Евтимий (Сапунджијев). „Естествено развитие и богооткривена сврхестествена помош (във врска с методологијата на историјата на религиите)“, *ГСУ БФ*, Т. VII (1930), Архим. Евтимий (Сапунджијев). *Потребност от Откровение*, София, 1931, Коев, Т. „Божественото Откровение“, *Духовна култура*, 12 (1995). Arch. Euthymius (Sapunzhiev), L. Milin and T. Koev single out truthfulness criteria for each religion by examining the distinctive features of the supernatural revelation of God.

In order to ensure a correct understanding of history, *chapter four*, “Glory and power of the Cross of Christ”, considers the monograph

of the Orthodox Biblical scholar E. Traychev *История на епохата на Новия Завет*, София, 2012. Here, he proves that a correct understanding of history is only possible on the basis of the Biblical Revelation: not the dead god of idols and philosophical principles abides in the history of the New Testament era, but rather the Biblical and true God.

Some of the authors who have examined the presence of Jesus Christ in Islam are G. Anawati, L. Bachmann, S. Balic, M. Bauschke, R. Bell, E. Bishop, A. Braddock, M. Brugsch, K. Cragg, A. Deedam, M. Forward, W. Höpfner, D. Kerr, K. Kuschel, O. Leirvik, D. MacDonald, G. Parrinder, W. Phipps, M. Pörksen, N. Robinson, R. Robson, V. Taylor, D. Wismer, A. Zhuravsky, S. Simić, R. Popov and A. Rauch. In some of these studies, the personality of Jesus Christ is considered in the context of interreligious dialogue (i.e. Christology as a basis for dialogue); others are primarily concerned with His image in the Qur'an; still others tend to overestimate His role in the Qur'anic text; finally, there are also those that, in the pursuit of a contemporary interpretation, present Jesus Christ as a prominent representative of ethics (i.e. an ethical approach to Christology), placing Him against unqualified acceptance in Islam (taqlid).

The second paragraph of this chapter aims to present a more complete picture of the Islamic notion of Jesus Christ on the basis of identification of the Islamic argumentation and a comparative analysis with Christianity. In effect, it builds on and further develops the findings presented in K. Stamatova's monograph *Ислямската представа за Иисус Христос*, София, 2011., pastor T. George's study *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?* Michigan: Zondervan, 2002, and E. Traychev's monograph and two articles (*Новозаветна хронология, Част I. Хронологични податки в евангелските вести за живота на Иисус Христос*, София, 2018, Трайчев, Ем. „Произходът на концепцията за Логоса“, *Духовна култура*, 3 (1999), „Юдейският календар и датата на Христовата кръстна смърт“, *Духовна култура*, 4 (1994)), which are also instrumental for the comparative review of the accounts of the birth of Jesus Christ in the Gospel and in the Qur'an.

*Chapter five*, called “Communion in love or communal solidarity”, draws upon a monograph by M. Stoyadinov (*Божията благодат*, В. Търново, 2007), in which the author highlights the difference between essence and energy as the basis of the Orthodox teaching of grace. The latter, the author affirms, is always given according to the favour of God the Father, it proceeds from the redemptive act of God the Son, and is infused into our souls by God the Holy Spirit.

The elaboration on the Islamic understanding of communality borrows from: Левин, З. *Развитие арабской общественной мысли 1917-1945*, Москва, 1979; Simić, S. „Islam as an ideology“, *Religion and Tolerance. Journal of the Center for Empirical Research on Religion*, Novi Sad, Vol. XIII, N 23 (2015) Hudson, M. „Islam and Political Development“, *Islam and Development*, Syracuse, 1980; Lewis, B. *Islam and the West*, Oxford, 1993. Basing their argumentation on the Qur’anic text and the history of Islam, the authors express different views on the nature and the content of the ummah.

The groundwork for *chapter six* “Salvation or prosperity: two divergent anthropologies” includes two studies on Islam by P. Pavlovich („Космогонични и есхатологични представи в епохата на джахилията“, *Арабистика и ислямознание*, София, 2001; „Съдбата в представите на джахилията и исляма“, *История и култура на древна Арабия*, София, 2001). In them the author demonstrates the co-dependence between Islamic anthropology and the development of historical self-awareness, the main goal being to abolish the cyclicity of the pagan mythological consciousness by placing it between creation and the Day of Judgment.

The analysis of Christian righteousness references two studies by I. Panchovski („Божии промисъл и нравствена свобода“, *ГДА*, Т. V, (XXXI), 2 (1955-56); „Вина и изкупление“, *ГДА*, 6 (1956–1957), as well as D. Kirov’s monograph *Въведение в християнската антропология. За богообразността на човека*, София, 1996. In them the authors assert the theocentric essence of Christian anthropology, showing the transcendent and immanent nature of the development of the doctrine of man, i.e. building on the triadology

and Christology, it examines the essence of man in terms of the singularity of his nature and of the diversity of created persons. The review of foreign sources includes a study by T. Andrae (*Mohammad, the Man and his Faith*, New York – Evanston, 1960), in which the author considers Muhammad's personality as a model and example for Muslims.

The analysis presented in *chapter seven* is based on the following studies: Евстатиев, С. „Толерантноста в контекста на доктриналният дебат и диалог между християнството и исляма“, *Християнство и ислям. Основи на религиозната толерантност*, София, 2007; Стаматова, К. „Библейски основания на междурелигиозния диалог. Православно-догматичен анализ“, *Библия, култура, диалог*, Т. I, София, 2009; Джорджевич, М. „Източнохристиянската перспектива“, *Толерантност и религиозни принципи*, Силистра, 2005; Lewis, B. *Islam and the West*, Oxford, 1993; Peters, R. *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam*, New York, 1996; Simić, S. „Islam as an ideology“, *Religion and Tolerance. Journal of the Center for Empirical Research on Religion*, Novi Sad, Vol. XIII, N 23 (2015). With their opposing views (in some ways at least), these studies are useful in providing a fuller picture of the obstacles and opportunities facing the dialogue between Christianity and Islam.

### **I.5 Structure of the dissertation**

The dissertation consists of a preface, an introduction, seven chapters (including conclusions at the end of each chapter), a conclusion, a list of abbreviations and a bibliography, and contains a total of 453 pages, 778 referenced sources, and 1,111 footnotes.



## **II. Body**

### **II.1 Islam: emergence and ideological and doctrinal formation**

*Chapter one* begins by tracing the conflict between the pagan worldview and the newly emerged religion by examining the two key concepts of “jahiliyyah” and “Islam”. Considering that the former is used as a reference to the pre-Islamic period in the history of the Arab world, the question is why the modern officially recognised meaning of “jahl”, which is “ignorance”, i.e. a time of ignorance about Allah, prevails? What is the meaning that Muslim theologians attach to the term of “Islam” and why is it such a terminologically loaded concept?

The role of Muhammad as described in the Qur’an is further outlined and some of the historical evidence about him is examined. The important questions here are: Has religious tradition been used as a complementary source to historical data? Has there been any interference in the description of real events and has the story of Muhammad’s life been embellished with legendary details? If that is indeed the case, is the underlying reason not to reaffirm his divine choosing?

### **II.2. Christianity and Islam: spiritual and historical context of their interaction**

*Chapter two* tackles the spiritual and historical context of the interaction between Christianity and Islam. The new religion holds to have restored the monotheism professed by Abraham, and lays claims to universality by asserting its identity and validity on the basis of prophesy. The part of the Qur’an that is connected with the Judeo-Christian tradition is analysed with the help of the following approaches: the Islamic approach, the rational-analytical approach, and the Orthodox-theological approach. The Qur’anic texts concerning Christianity are related to issues that arose as a result of the Christian controversies of those times. Is there evidence in the Qur’an to suggest an affiliation with certain Christian heresies? The key to answering this question lies in analysing certain Qur’anic verses, which will either confirm or reject the hypothesis.

It is very important to identify how the Muslim authors used the Gospel and what their main goals were, as these are both key questions related to the formation of the Islamic religious identity and the ultimate validation of the Islamic religion. At the same time, it is also important to understand what stages the Byzantine theoretical approach towards Islam went through, as well as to identify its general leanings as either extreme or moderate.

### **II.3. Tawhid versus Christian triadology**

*Chapter three* is dedicated to an important part of the topic, which further develops the study of the key issue of the revelation. The latter is a focal theme in the dialogue between Christians and Muslims in that it shapes the conceptualisation of history and God's interference in it. The chapter begins by examining the conflict between the sacral authoritarianism of Islam and the sacral egalitarianism of the pagan world. This is important because at the heart of this conflict lies the reason for Islam's rejection of the truth of the Holy Trinity.

For St. John Damascene, there are two essential questions concerning the nature of Islam: whether it is a religion based on a revelation of God and whether Muhammad was indeed a prophet. The Orthodox response to both is negative, based on the following arguments: if it is assumed that Muhammad was indeed a prophet, the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, which he himself admitted to have been given in an act of revelation by God, would appear to be untrue, as they cannot be attributed to him; and, if they are true, as long as their origin is from God, but cannot be attributed to him, why should he be the promised messenger of God? The chapter continues by addressing the issue of Muhammad's fulfilment of the requirements by virtue of which the truth of the revelation can be confirmed and attempts to establish: did he indeed have a heavenly confirmation that his professed religion is a revelation from God; why do stories of the miracles and wonder works associated with him appear only after what has come to be known as the first revelation, and is their purpose purely pragmatic; why does

Muhammad's personal choosing by God lose its prominence; is it in order to legitimise the divine nature of Islam?

St. John Damascene professes the Church's teaching on the triune God, emphasising the ineffability and the incomprehensibility of the Trinitarian mystery. The chapter presents the Christian arguments against the Islamic perception of the triadology as "an association".

#### **II.4. Glory and power of the Cross of Christ**

*Chapter four* is devoted to the glory and the power of the Cross of Christ. Whereas Christianity is very open about the act of kenosis, why is there no affirmation in the Islamic doctrine of Allah's condescension to man, to share in his suffering so man can be saved? If, for Christians, the Resurrection of Christ is proof that life conquers death and that love never fails, why is there no death on the cross in Islam? Moreover, why is it specifically in the death on the cross that Islam grounds its strongest divide from Christianity? Why is even the notion of Allah's co-suffering and experience of death together with his creation unthinkable? Can the issue of the immanence of Allah be proved (albeit partially) only in the more esoteric contexts of Shi'ism and Sufism?

The Qur'an does indeed accept the historicity of the God-man and paints a vivid picture of Him, but to what end? The study proceeds with a comparative examination of the Gospel accounts of the birth of Jesus Christ and those contained in the Qur'an in order to identify the main similarities and differences. The main point that the author is trying to prove here is that the Qur'anic narrative of the birth of Isa is only told in a way that affirms the tawhid.

#### **II.5. Communion in love or communal solidarity**

The focus of *chapter five* is the Christian and the Islamic understanding of community

Ecclesiology is based on both Christology and pneumatology: the Church is the body of Christ and the fullness of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:23). If the Church was just a catholic community, even if only of the disciples of Jesus Christ, in His name, but without the Holy Spirit, then it would be a historical religious community, but not the body of

Christ. It is the Holy Spirit Who makes the Church a life-giving community of the faithful in Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is not God but only a “spirit from Allah”, so goes the claim of Islam. In order to understand this rejection of the divine dignity of God the Holy Spirit, it is important to understand the use of the word “spirit” in the Qur’an, which is mentioned seven times in connection with Jesus Christ, as well as what (specifically) is meant by “ruh” (spirit, soul, breath) and its twenty-one usages in the Qur’anic text.

Since the Church is both the body of Christ and the fullness of the Holy Spirit, what are the characteristic features of the community built by Muhammad; are they conditioned by the tawhid and are they associated with it?

## **II.6. Salvation or prosperity: two divergent anthropologies**

*Chapter six* examines the fundamental principles of Christian anthropology, which is typically theocentric, and of Islamic anthropology, which is closely associated with the shaping of historical self-awareness.

The way of formation of Christian anthropology is essentially transcendent and immanent. Building on the doctrines of the triadology and Christology, it examines the essence of man in terms of the singularity of his nature and the diversity of created persons. Conversely, Islamic anthropology is closely associated with the shaping of historical self-awareness: in the person of Adam, as the common and only ancestor of all people, the past is already understood as a unified whole. Man was not created in God’s image and Allah’s forgiveness of the original sin becomes essential: there are no consequences, either for man or for all creation, and man does not need a Redeemer and Saviour.

The end of the chapter is dedicated to the meaning of human life and the appointment of man according to the two religions. For Christianity, the former lies in living in the example of the God-man Jesus Christ, in which, however, Christians are not just His followers, but also, and essentially so, the members of His body (see Eph. 5:30). As liturgical life and the sacraments are inseparable from the image,

St. John Damascene is relentless in proclaiming that as long as there is Incarnation, there will also be icons, and where there is no Incarnation, neither will there be icons.

Unlike Christianity, Islam refutes the ontological nature of the image (thus also of representability) and its veneration. Why does Islam not only reject the use of the image, but also its very existence, and hence its place in religious life? Does this make Islam not only iconoclastic but also aniconic?

## **II.7. Love never fails**

The title of the seventh and final chapter is “Love never fails”. Love is and will remain the guiding principle of virtue and moral perfection, just as the essence of earthly life is and determines the essence of the afterlife. In this regard, Islam sees the Day of Judgment as an indicator of the earthly existence of man, and thus, albeit partially, manages to overcome the jahili fatalism by redirecting the thoughts and the acts of the faithful to the day of the last judgment. The main approach used in the Book of Allah and the basic characteristics of the Islamic eschatological teaching are the key questions that the section dedicated to Islamic eschatology tries to answer.

For Christians, the kingdom of God is past, present and future: it is past as it already dwells in those professing the faith of Jesus Christ and living according to it; it is present in that the Church of Christ is its manifestation among the people; and it is future by virtue of its belonging to the future age.

The last paragraph is devoted to interreligious dialogue in the context of the doctrinal differences between the two religions. The questions that it seeks to resolve are: are there and what are the Biblical grounds and the spiritual causes to partake in such dialogue; what lies at the heart of this dialogue; is it in any way confined and how far do its boundaries stretch; why does Orthodoxy build its theological approach to interreligious dialogue on the principle of the triadology; is tolerance only a proclamation or is it a conscious and manifested choice; what is the foundation of tolerance; is there perfect tolerance; what are the prospects for Christianity and Islam in

the context of globalisation; is this process essentially dialogic or debative?

### **III. Notes and applicability**

*Notes* on transcription and Biblical and Qur'anic references. The use of the terms of Arabic and Ottoman Turkish origin in the text is governed by the principles of practical transcription, but the established norms of their usage in Bulgarian have also been considered. This particularly applies to the name of the founder of Islam, for which the largely accepted version of *Moxamed* has been preferred instead of *Myxammad*, which is much closer to the Arabic version (as well as to the one used in the Bulgarian translation of the Qur'an). References to verses from the Qur'an are made by indicating the number of the surah (chapter), followed by the number of the ayat (verse), and references to the Holy Scripture of the Old and the New Testament are governed by the abbreviations adopted in the Synodal translation and edition of the Bible.

All quotations from the works of St. John Damascene appear in italics. This is a decision of the author, the aim of which is to facilitate the reader by highlighting issues that are particularly relevant to the topic of the dissertation.

*Applicability.* Even though, as a piece of theological-systematic research, this doctoral dissertation falls into the scientific and methodological field of history of religions, it also uses other contemporary approaches of comparative theology and comparative religious studies. The presentation is intentionally structured in a way that will enable a deeper understanding of the doctrinal differences between Christianity and Islam. Readers who are not familiar with the cultural specificities of the Arab world may find it hard to understand the logic of Islam and its cultural context. Therefore, the text makes an attempt to provide a smooth and gradual entry into the subject by using the founding dogmatic principles of Orthodox theology (triadology, Christology, ecclesiology, pneumatology, soteriology, anthropology and eschatology), while also introducing the cultural and historical content. In the context of the study, St. John Damascene's Heresy 101 is the point of entry for the

comparative analysis, which reflects both the reinterpretation of the Orthodox theological tradition (with the relevant theological reflection on the Holy Father as a witness of the birth of Islam) and the dynamics of the development of the Islamic religious identity in the later centuries.

The dissertation is a polemical study including a critical analysis of some of the more important doctrinal differences between Christianity and Islam. It is intended for readers with larger interests within the humanities. In the narrower context of teaching and research, it is suitable for students majoring in “Theology” and “Religion in Europe” programmes, students in master degree courses, and religious education teachers who would like to expand and improve their knowledge in the field of history of religions.

## IV. Conclusion

The Qur'anic text shows an affiliation with the Jewish tradition, and, based on three approaches – the Islamic, the rational-analytical, and the Orthodox-theological – the study of the textual material leads to the following conclusions: first, according to the Islamic thesis, the Qur'an is not just a message to Muhammad, but a revelation from Allah; second, the rational-analytical approach, used for the analysis of the Old Testament narratives in the Qur'an, showed that these are not just quotations influenced by other texts, but they also reflect the social reality and religious perceptions in Mecca (at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century); third, with the help of the Orthodox-theological approach it was found that the Old Testament narratives appearing in the Qur'an are not told systematically, there is no historical dating, the mode of narration is, for the most part, poetic-synthetic, where the importance is placed not on the details of the chronological development, but rather on the final conclusion and implication.

The Christian material in the Qur'an is connected with issues arising from the Christian arguments of the time. The Qur'anic text contains evidence that asserts the kinship of Islam with some Christian heresies, such as Nestorianism (Qur'an 19:34-35; 5:76-79; 19:16-36; 43:57-59), or with certain monophysite claims (Qur'an 4:171).

The key theme in the Qur'an is the positioning of Islam within the history of salvation (relative to Judaism and Christianity), as well as the perception of these two religions. The major issues arising from the dispute with Christianity concern the Holy Trinity and the divine dignity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Over time, the defence of Islamic teachings based on rational and logical arguments became one of the main goals of the Kalam. There are also Muslim authors who seek to justify their arguments by quoting the Bible and tend to use evidence external to their religious tradition. The Gospel in particular is used for two reasons: the first is connected with the gradual formation of an Islamic religious identity; the second is to seek validation for Islam by identifying an appropriate position for it within the monotheistic history of salvation. While Islam recognises the sacred nature of some of the Biblical books, the only one that it considers



truthful is the Book of Allah (Qur'an 5:44). The allegation of scripture being deliberately manipulated by Jews and Christians is the basis on which Islam builds its polemic with Christianity, and the person of Muhammad is the vehicle through which it lays claims to being the bearer and holder of absolute truth.

For St. John Damascene, Islam is a Christian heresy, concerning which he is specifically interested in two questions: whether Islam is a religion based on a revelation of God and whether Muhammad is indeed a prophet. The Orthodox response to both is negative, and is based on the following arguments:

*First*, if it is assumed that Muhammad was indeed a prophet, through whom God made a supernatural revelation to men, then the messianic prophesies of the Old Testament, which Muhammad himself admitted to have been given in an act of revelation by God, would appear to be untrue, as they cannot be attributed to him; and, if they are true, as long as their origin is from God, but, at the same time, cannot be attributed to him, he cannot be a messenger of God;

*Second*, Muhammad does not fulfil the requirements confirming the truth of supernatural revelation;

*Third*, Islam would have found it convenient if Muhammad had been gifted with the power of miracle working, as, he thus would also have received the heavenly confirmation that his professed religion is a revelation from God;

*Fourth*, after the first revelation, stories of the miracles and wonder working associated with Muhammad begin to appear, the reason for which is purely pragmatic: where, during the pagan period of his life, the strange events happening to him aim to convince us that he was an ordinary man specially chosen for a future mission, after what has come to be known as the first revelation, the miraculous aspect of his life already takes on a more general dimension. The fact of Muhammad being personally chosen by God loses its prominence as the intention shifts to legitimising the divine nature of Islam.

The reason for Islam's rejection of the truth of the Holy Trinity lies in the conflict between the sacral authoritarianism of Islam and the sacral egalitarianism of the pagan world.

In his reflections on the triadology, St. John Damascene professes the Church's teaching on the triune nature of God, reaffirming the ineffability and the incomprehensibility of the Trinitarian mystery. He further points out the importance of hypostatic difference: while the three Persons are not similar, they are identical in essence. The unity of the Godhead is not composed of hypostases, but is in three hypostases and is three hypostases, each possessing the fullness of God's essence and existence. Their difference from each other lies only in their personal properties, i.e. in the distinctive properties of each hypostasis.

The Christian arguments against the Islamic perception of the triadology as "an association" are:

*First*, the teaching of the Church on the triune nature of God is essentially Biblical;

*Second*, the teaching of the Church on the equality and the oneness of the three Persons and their differentiation based on their hypostatic properties;

*Third*, the origin of the hypostatic existence is ascribed to the Person of God the Father rather than to the general essence of God, i.e. their oneness is personal, not natural.

Understanding history is possible only through God's Revelation, which shows the Christian view of the world and of man. Unlike Christianity, which is very open about the act of kenosis (Phil. 2:6-8), in Islam there are no doctrinal principles affirming Allah's condescension to man, to share in his suffering so he can be saved.

St. John Damascene considers the whole life of Jesus Christ a redemptive deed, of which the Cross is the climax.

There was no death on the cross – such is the claim of Islam; instead, another man likened to Isa died on the cross, while the "real" Isa was raised by Allah to himself (Qur'an 4:157). Islam considers the crucifixion to be its main dividing line from Christianity. God's incarnation undermines and shakes the foundations of monotheism, because it, according to Islam, is tantamount to an association with Allah.

Christians know God in Jesus Christ not only by getting closer to Him and seeing Him, but also by having Him, i.e. literally receiving

Him during the Holy Eucharist, which is the liturgical mystery of Christianity. In this sacrament, Christian life finds completeness, as the community becomes the Church, the body of Christ, the new people of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

St. John Damascene pays special attention to the word “spirit” and its multiple meanings: it is what the Holy Spirit is called, but also His powers and energies, which are named “spirits” too; “spirit” has been used to refer to the angel, the devil, the air, the wind and the soul. The name of the third Person of the Holy Trinity irrevocably includes the predicate “holy”: the Holy Spirit, Who has His existence from the Father, but not by way of birth, but by way of procession. For St. John Damascene, the procession of the Holy Spirit from God the Father through God the Son is a procession from eternity, an immanent procession of being. Islam, conversely, categorically rejects the divine dignity of God the Holy Spirit, Whom it considers not the third Person of the Holy Trinity and not God.

Ecclesiology is based on both Christology and pneumatology: the Church is both the body of Christ and the fullness of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:23). Since the prototype and the foundation of the catholicity of the Church is the oneness of the divine Persons (John 17:21), it follows that catholicity is understood primarily as wholeness and intrinsic oneness.

The community built by Muhammad is significantly different. Its beginnings date back to the time of the Jahiliyyah, when the key to self-identifying was one’s family affiliation and the highest ethical norms were based on a sense of family, dignity and honour. The notion of the ummah as a unique, one-of-a-kind, independent and united Islamic community, the principle of the absolute power of Allah, and, last but not least, the concentration of power within the ummah become the foundations on which the Islamic state power rests. Since Islam affirms the covenant made by the prophets with Allah, it follows that Muslims are entrusted with the guidance and supervision of all mankind.

Christian anthropology is theocentric, and the teaching of man is built in a way that is essentially transcendent and immanent: building on the doctrines of the triadology and Christology, it examines the

essence of man in terms of the singularity of his nature and the diversity of created persons. In St. John Damascene's anthropology, human nature takes pride of place on account of its deification in and through Jesus Christ. Creating man, God did not only endow him with being, but also with well-being, clothing him in His grace, giving him the right and opportunity to reside freely in an unceasing union with Him. When man sinned, God, because of his love, condescended to him, assuming his weakness and his nature, in order to free him from transience and once more let him partake in His Divinity.

Conversely, Islamic anthropology is closely associated with the shaping of historical self-awareness: in the person of Adam, the past begins to be understood as a unified whole, and Muhammad's preaching is already aimed at all mankind. Thus, as a result of the unification of all that is to come in history, all men must join in one community (the ideal of the ummah) which professes one religion, that of Islam (Qur'an 21:92)

The Islamic concept of Allah and his oneness is static rather than dynamic: it is ontologically confined within the plane of being. The historical review of the principle of freedom of the human will and, respectively, the predestination of man reveals certain directions, as well as partial changes. By separating heavenly affairs, which are the attribute of Allah, from transient human concerns, Islam presents Muslims with a requirement to act. Although, to them, divine will is incomprehensible, they must persevere in pursuing the goal, either until they have achieved it or until they have realised its unattainability.

As regards the meaning of life, the teaching of Jesus Christ considers all Christians to be, essentially, members of His body (Eph. 5:30). Change in human behaviour happens in the course of personal and active communion with the Church, in which there can be no service without icons; liturgical life and the holy sacraments are both deeply connected with the image, because of which the icon is also called "a theology in images".

St. John Damascene is relentless that as long as there is Incarnation, there will also be icons, and where there is no

Incarnation, neither will there be icons. This absolute is not grounded in logic, but rather in the Biblical and patristic tradition. Whether icons are venerated or not is what, according to him, determines the attitude towards accepting the human nature of the Son of God.

Unlike Christianity, Islam refutes the ontological nature of the image (thus also of representability) and its veneration. What is more, not only does it reject the use of the image, but it also denies its very existence, and hence its place in religious life. It follows that Islam is not merely iconoclastic, but also aniconic.

According to the Islamic religion, the meaning of human life is bound by a statutory determination of human actions as either “beautiful” or “ugly”. This categorisation is typical for Islam and can be likened to today’s understanding of the legal concepts of “lawful” and “unlawful”. Morality in Islam is significantly more passive than it is active; there is no doubt that Allah rejects evil, but the ideal of good is different from the Christian understanding.

In Christianity, morality is a response borne of the freedom of man; in Islam, it is tied up with solidarity in the ummah and with the strict fulfilment of ritual duties.

The Islamic religion attaches great importance to the day of judgment. Its eschatological teaching is built on the dichotomy between two contrasting abodes – the gardens of paradise and the fires of hell. The approach used in the Qur’anic text consists of depicting the horror of torture in hell and the anticipation of delight in paradise, which is a main characteristic of Islamic eschatology. Compared to the Christian understanding of hell, there is not even a hint in the Qur’an that the unbearable suffering of man there actually stems from his dissociation from the Creator. As regards the description of paradise, its hedonistic dimension in the Book of Allah is the exact opposite of the Christian understanding, according to which the kingdom of God is a state of the human spirit and not a recompense for the tribulations of earthly life, consisting of carnal pleasures in paradise.

Christianity professes that not only the lot of man but also that of the entire creation pursues an ultimate goal defined as the dynamic state of man. Therefore, the eschatological state is both future reality

and present experience that can be attained in Jesus Christ through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. According to St. John Damascene, a truly deified person is not someone whose essence becomes divine. Man becomes God by partaking in divine energy, and he is God not by nature but by disposition. The likeness and oneness with God is a supreme bliss; it is the ultimate goal of man and an expression of his fulfilment.

As regards the Biblical foundations and spiritual conditions for interreligious dialogue in the context of the doctrinal conflict between Christianity and Islam, the following remarks and observations can be made: *first*, Orthodox thought builds its theological approach to interreligious dialogue on the basis of the triadology; *second*, there is no perfect tolerance; *third*, tolerance is not just an expressed position but a manifested perception; *fourth*, tolerance is based on the structure of faith and the content of religious truths; *fifth*, each of the two psychological requirements – absolute devotion to one’s faith and absolute openness to the faith of the other – is in itself valid, but is at odds with the way in which religious devotion is expressed.

Doctrine, ethics and practice are specific to each religion. A believer will not replace his faith with another, as that will put its essence at stake: I believe exactly thus, my faith is true, and it is impossible and I do not want to give truth away for the sake of dialogue. Therefore, at the doctrinal level, compromise is not an option. Doctrinal differences will persist, and it is only the joint efforts of Christians and Muslims that will prevent them from turning into rifts.

## **V. Scientific contribution**

1. A theological study into an important research subject: contains an analysis of the subject and offers interpretation guidelines based on a scientific approach combining tradition and continuity.

2. A first attempt in Bulgarian Orthodox theology for a systematic review, a comparative study and a critical analysis of the doctrinal differences between Christianity and Islam seen in the light of St. John Damascene's Heresy 101.

3. A consistent combination of patristic historical-dogmatic issues of faith and the specific ecclesiastical-theological approach as reflected in the early critical positions and theological reflections on Islam in the works of St. John Damascene and in the subsequent Byzantine cultural-historical tradition of the Church.

4. A theological justification of debate as a necessary part of the discussion of differences based on a consideration of interreligious dialogue in the context of the doctrinal conflict between Christianity and Islam.

5. Practical applicability of the study: for students majoring in "Theology" and "Religion in Europe" programmes, students in master degree courses, and religious education teachers who would like to expand and improve their knowledge in the field of history of religions and comparative religion.

6. A contribution to the development of the scientific specialty "History of Religions" in the almost 100-year-old history of the Faculty of Theology in terms of: consistence with previously done research into the topic by using contemporary methods of analysis; an interdisciplinary methodological approach; raising public awareness for the benefit of the Church and the wider public.

## VI. Relevant publications

### Studies:

1. Стаматова, К. „По благодат сте спасени чрез вярата“, Духовна култура, 1 (2009), ISSN (print): 0324-1173, 15–37.

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