

REVIEW

for

Associate Professor Dr. Klara Assenova Toneva, participant in the competition for a professor in a professional field 2.4. Religion and theology (scientific specialty History of Religions), announced for the needs of the Faculty of Theology at Sofia University "St. Clement Ohridski" in the State Gazette, issue 63 of 30. 07. 2021, by Prof. Nina Dimitrova (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences)

In the current procedure for obtaining the academic title of *professor* I have been appointed by order of the Rector of Sofia University № RD 38 - 450 from 17. 09. 2021. Associate Professor Dr. Klara Toneva is the only candidate.

The documents required by the procedure are well arranged and completed. The scientific works with which Klara Toneva participates in the competition are: 2 monographs, 4 studies, 16 articles, 2 textbooks. She has also deposited the following references and certificates for: the study employment; the scientific guidance of two doctoral students, as well as many students; other scientific events – the participation in various research projects, the last of which is from 2021 ("Development of Orthodox Christian ethics as a theological science in the Bulgarian church and academic tradition in the twentieth century").

Associate Professor Toneva's scientific interests are very diverse – her work covers various thematic circles, the subject of which is not only relevant, but sometimes topical. *Islam as a religion* is one of these constant areas of research interest, manifested at the beginning of her scientific career with the defense of a doctoral dissertation on the current situation of the Muslim woman.

A significant part of the candidate's recent research in this competition is devoted to *interreligious dialogue* and specifically between Christianity and Islam, to *radical Islam* and the consequences of this radicalization, and others.

Another important topic for Toneva is *women and religion – the woman in Islam, the woman in Christianity, the Christian family, feminism and theology*.

The specificity of the scientific developments proposed for discussion is the emphasized interest in the native theological heritage – an interest that motivated not only the writing of penetrating portraits of Bulgarian theologians and prominent spiritual figures (archimandrite Evtimiy, Ivan Panchovski, etc.), but also the active and constant using their ideas in her own scientific pursuits.

The sphere of especially relevant topics that excite Klara Toneva and today's theology in general include *Christianity in postmodernity, religion and biotechnology, religion and education*, etc. And, of course, the fundamental theme of *secularization* in its various manifestations today – the subject of the author's latest book (2018).

The book (208 pages) is called "Secularized Religiosity" and was published by the Sofia University Publishing House. The research is interdisciplinary – it intertwines history and psychology of religions, apologetics, religious anthropology, sociology, political science, philosophy. The interest is focused on our global society, the period of postmodernity and the status of religion in this period. The initial premise is the statement about the original religiosity of man ("a religious being who carries with him the pursuit of eternity and immortality"), and the exhibition traces the forms of this religiosity in today's society / societies.

The focus is on secularization – the author makes a careful and comprehensive analysis of the concept, including tracing its etymology and the genesis of the phenomenon, bringing opinions, ideas, statements of world celebrities on this fundamental topic.

The first chapter is entitled "The ungodliness of the secular world" and is the author's diagnosis of modernity in terms of the state of religion, respectively Christianity. In unison with the prevailing assessments in the sought-after attitude, postmodernity is assessed as post-secularization, expressed in religious "omnivorousness", religious syncretism, which replaced the aggressive denial of religion by Modernity.

I was impressed by a sentence from the first part of the book: "Although we believe that the world has become secular because it has rejected God, the real reason is

that secularism is a phenomenon of our Christian world. The specificity of secularism is the result of problems within Christianity itself – of *its internal changes*" (p. 40). In fact, this is a recognition of the inevitability of the processes of secularization in Christianity. *Secularization*, as we know, derives from the Latin word *saeculum*, denoting the world in time (and corresponding to the Greek *eon*, αἰών), as opposed to the world in the spatial sense – *mundus* (whose Greek equivalent is *cosmos*, κόσμος). Or, temporalization, resp. the course of history is in parallel with the process of establishing the world (обмирщение in Russian, *Verweltlichung* in German, and so on). This is also pointed out by Reinhart Kozelleck in his research on the history of concepts („Begriffsgeschichten“, 2006): the analysis of the most important components – the affirmation of the secular and the temporalisation, must precede the consideration of the concept as a factor and indicator of the history indicated by it. And if Max Weber seeks the sources of the religious-historical process of disenchantment in the ancient Hebrew prophets, then the Protestant theologian Karl Heim shows how this process is transferred to the New Testament. The division of life into two spheres – sacred and secular, into two Cities – earthly and Divine, proves how the very tendency of secularization is embedded in the very foundations of Christianity.

In the detailed picture of secularization painted by Klara Toneva, I miss the presence of Rudolf Otto, the commentary on his ideas about *the sacred* (1917). They seem to me to be very important in view of the specification of the sacred-profane opposition, which affects the very essence of the process of secularization.

The book convincingly shows the great difficulty in understanding the consequences of secularization. The author concludes about the ontological incompatibility between the Church and postmodernism, but there is also such an incompatibility between the Church and Modernity, which, imposing civic values, has developed its own ersatz religions (Marxism, communism, liberalism, nationalism, anarchism). As *secular religions of salvation*, they are in fierce competition with Christianity.

The second chapter of the book is entitled "Secularism as a New Religiosity" and is devoted to the various forms of secularized religiosity. Here I would like to distinguish in more detail the difference between secularization and *secularism* – a

phenomenon in the field of ideology, denoting the absolutization of the secluded, the values of "this world" at the expense of transcendence.

Various specific ersatz religions are examined, in the role of which the state, nationalism, science, psychoanalysis, Marxism, the new atheism enter. For me, the analysis of: the state-Church relationship (historically and today); the difference between patriotism and nationalism, respectively one of the great challenges facing religion / Christianity – the "merging" with nationalism; the absolutization of science – the scientific replacement of religion (and here, for the solution of the problem religion – science, the appeal to the Bulgarian theological heritage turns out to be especially productive) is satisfactory. As far as psychoanalysis is concerned, it seems to me superfluous the categoricalness with which it is rejected. I mean the numerous modes in which psychoanalysis exists – from a therapeutic method to a universal hermeneutic key. For me, the position of Boris Visheslavtsev – *the ethics of transformed eros* – deserves attention precisely because of the opportunities it offers for the use of some of the principles of psychoanalysis by Christianity (Вышеславцев, Б. „Этика преображенного эроса“, 1931). But the difference in views is something normal in scientific discussion.

What I do not agree with does not relate to the nature of the issues raised. We are talking about the way of quoting – the ideas of Freud, Jung, and Hegel (later in the book), can not be presented according to various articles of colleagues (I do not affect the quality of these articles at all!) – the citation must be based on the works of world authors themselves, or, when it comes to well-known positions, such is simply not necessary.

Further analysis becomes more concrete and topical, touching on the topic of religious fundamentalism. This term, first used to describe conservative American Protestantism in the early 20th century, as noted by the Greek theologian and sociologist Vasilios Makrides (“Orthodox Christian Rigorism: A Multifaceted Phenomenon”, 2016), finds wider application. Klara Toneva is undoubtedly a scholar in the field and her developments are valuable and applicable and practical (it is no coincidence that some of her articles have been published in publications such as the “Military Journal” or collections of the Military Academy). The comprehensive review of the discussed

phenomena in the field of *Islam* – reasons, perspectives, the Bulgarian context, is impressive. As for the situation with Orthodoxy, the author believes that this phrase – *Orthodox fundamentalism*, is illegal and misleading. Instead, Makrides suggests "rigorism". It seems to me that Klara Toneva is of a similar opinion. She notes how fundamentalists distort the understanding of spiritual reality by claiming that here on earth, joy does not exist; that a the gloomy, oppressed man is considered a good Christian (p. 140). The statement of the Bulgarian theologian Ivan Panchovski illustrates exactly this tendency: "Life is given to be lived, not poisoned daily by the image of death and the thought of it. One must flee away from such "yellow" and "black" preachers of death, whose voice is heard everywhere. The worst thing is that they point to themselves as faithful followers of Christ and the world often takes them for such... " ("The Modern Man in the Face of Life, Death, and Immortality", 1944).

In the last, fourth chapter, theological issues are predominant. It is dedicated to the Church's response to today's various challenges to Christianity / Orthodoxy, to abuses of the faith. The identified directions are: ministry and education. Specifically, the many steps on the Path to Bliss are discussed: work, peace, a pure heart, truth, beauty, a clear conscience, love, and so on.

The proposed analysis and comprehension of such emblematic for postmodern religiosity (including in our country) characteristics as *non-church Christianity*, *faith without affiliation*, etc., is interesting.

I think that the author could also comment on such works close to the issues of her book, such as Anna Krasteva's book "The Elastic (Post) Secularism", 2014, or the study of cultural and sociological nature, conducted by Galina Goncharova and Teodora Karamelska – "The Invention of Orthodox Traditions: Religiosity in a Post-Socialist Context", 2013 (which is also related to the issue raised by Klara Toneva about *the intellectuals in the Church* in another of her texts).

Klara Toneva annotates her book as conceived and intended for the preparation of theological students in the specialties "History of Religions", "Non-Christian Religious Teachings", "Religion and Extremism", hoping that it will be interesting for the intelligent Bulgarian reader. Even the topics listed so far, discussed in the book, are the prerequisite for this hope to be fully realized. But its significance is also determined

by the professional qualities of the author as a researcher, by her multifaceted expertise, by the clear and precise language.

The other monograph with which Assoc. Prof. Toneva participates in this competition is "The Church – a community of love", published in 2008. The title clearly shows the direction of the research interest. John Zizioulas's book "Being as Communion" is at the center of many of the reflections here.

The exhibition is structured in five chapters, which discuss various aspects of the life of the Church – the invisible and the visible Church; the Church and the world, the mystery of the sanctity of the Church and the sanctity of the response of the Church.

Among the main topics for discussion are the ideas about the kingdom of God and the time of its fulfillment; the Church as the new people of God and its role in the realization of the Kingdom; the structure of the visible Church (and its relation to the invisible); the church hierarchy, etc. – the versatility of the analyzes performed is convincing, and the literature used is completely relevant. The attitude of the Church towards the world is a development that I will dwell on in more detail, as the topic has constantly drawn a dividing line between Christians – those who accept the world and those who deny the world. I think Schmemmann is right when he claims ("The Life of the World") that Christianity has completely lost the world and must therefore rediscover it. What is the position of Klara Toneva – I will quote her words: "We Christians are no longer required to flee the world, but to be present everywhere, sanctifying it with the spirit of the Gospel, supporting it through our personal prayers" (p. 84). Such a position is in agreement with the ideological heritage of Bulgarian theology, which, I will note again, is constantly attracted in support of the statements made. The book also offers a good basis for discussions on important theological topics.

At the beginning of my review I tried to group the smaller texts presented for discussion – studies and articles, according to their issues. My general impression of them is that they all arouse serious scientific and practical interest.

Very briefly about the textbooks compiled by Associate Professor Klara Toneva – "Introduction to Orthodox Dogmatic Theology", 2007, and especially about the Appendix (319 p.) to it, which covers many (about 200!) annotations of "the main dogmatic literature in our country" – books, studies and articles. These efforts in favor of student education deserve our admiration and respect.

With what has been said so far – taking into account the quality and versatility of the scientific performances of Assoc. Prof. Klara Toneva, as a member of the scientific jury for her habilitation, I express my conviction that she fully deserves the requested scientific title of *professor* (2.4. Religion and theology) and I call on the Faculty Council at the Faculty of Science of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" to give it to her.

20. 10. 2021-10-20

Signature