

ASSESSMENT

of

ASSOC. PROF. DIMO KRASTEV PENKOV'S APPLICATION
FOR EMPLOYMENT AS PROFESSOR
IN THE PROFESSIONAL FIELD 2.4. RELIGION AND THEOLOGY
(CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS),

State Gazette № 48/28.06.2022, for the needs of the Faculty of Theology,
Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Department of Systematic Theology
by Prof. Ivan Christov, PhD, Faculty of Theology, Head of the Department
e-mail: ichri@theo.uni-sofia.bg,

Enrolled in the Registry of Academic Recognition at the National Centre for
Information and Documentation (Article 2b, para. 2 of the Act of development of
academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria) under № 13130

Only candidate: Associate Professor Dr. Dimo Krastev Penkov

As the chairman of the scientific jury, I have the honor and pleasure at the beginning of my review to present the candidate and the data for the procedure.

I. Applicant Data

The research and teaching activity of Assoc. Dr. Dimo Krastev Penkov in the Faculty of Theology at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" began twenty-eight years ago – in 1994, when he became a part-time assistant. In 1999, he defended his dissertation on the topic "Religious-philosophical views of Stoyan Mihailovski (1856 - 1927)" with supervisor: Prof. Dr. Nikolay Madjurov and two years later was elected assistant, and in 2004 – chief assistant. In 2009, his habilitation procedure for associate professor took place.

The research activity of Dimo Penkov over the past years resulted in 36 publications, of which 4 monographs, 29 articles, as well as 1 text book and 1 theological dictionary (co-authored). He took part in 10 projects of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". The last two of them he failed to reflect in the "Authors" system, but as the supervisor of these projects I have every right to correct his omission in my review. The presented reference shows that the works with which Dimo Penkov participated in the competition have 18 citations in Bulgarian and international publications.

Colleague Penkov has supervised 14 master's and 7 doctoral students, of which 3 are

current and 4 have successfully defended their dissertations

II. Procedure data

The current procedure for becoming a professor was opened by order of the Rector of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” No. RD 38-497/22.08.2022 at the proposal of the FS of the Faculty of Theology (Protocol No. 11/30.06.2022) for the needs of the “Systematic Theology” department. The order defines the parameters of the procedure and the composition of the scientific jury. At its first meeting, the jury judged that the only candidate, Associate Professor Dr. Dimo Krastev Penkov convincingly meets the conditions of ZRASRB, PPZRASRB and PURPNSZADSU. The certificate presented by him for the fulfillment of the minimum national requirements has 870 points in the professional field, and all publications are on the subject of the competition. Taking into account the presented evidence, the scientific jury admitted to evaluation the scientific production presented by Associate Professor Penkov in the competition for the academic position “professor” in the professional field: 2.4. Religion and Theology (Christian Apologetics).

At its first meeting, the scientific jury elected Prof. Dr. Ivan Christov as its chairman, and Prof. Dr. Valentin Kanavrov, Prof. Dr. Ivan Christov, and Assoc. Dr. Svetoslav Rybolov as reviewers. The other members were asked to prepare brief assessments. 11/14/2022 was set as the deadline for submitting the reviews and assessments, and 12/2/2022 as the date for the final meeting. All deadlines of this decision have been met.

III. Description of pieces of research

Prof. Penkov participates in the competition with two monographs, one study, twelve articles and one textbook. The book Philosophical-theological arguments of St. John Damascene on the existence of God (theological-apologetic research). Sofia: LIBRUM, 2022 (149 pp.; ISBN-978-619-7690-01-9) is presented as a habilitation monographic work. The monograph was discussed in the Department of Systematic Theology with the participation of five professors, two of whom were full professors, and it was given a positive evaluation. It is original and has a contributing character. This is a mature study, the result of many years of research. In it, the author raises his studies of recent

years to a new level. The main merit of the work is the clear distinction between the philosophical-logical layer in the teaching of St. John Damascene and its theological content. Prof. Penkov has avoided the temptation to reduce this knotty patristic teaching to the philosophical means of expression it uses and has preserved its authentic meaning. His work is an important contribution to the department's research in systematic theology.

The Habilitation consists of a Preface, an Introduction, three Chapters, a Conclusion and a Bibliography. An Index of Names and Terms is also added, which is essential for any scholarly monographic study.

The author clearly outlines the continuity of his work with the prominent Bulgarian theologians of the previous generations, and against this background his original contribution stands out.

In the **Preface**, he defines the importance of the problem of God's being and its proof for Orthodox theology. Basic settings from the studies of Archim. Euthymius (Sapundzhiev) are integrated, modernized in the light of modern Orthodox theology and the challenges of modernity. The **Introduction** presents the background of the proofs of God's existence and ancient thought, their biblical basis and their place in the works of the holy fathers. Here the author formulates the extremely important thesis about the integration of logical discourse in a theological context, in which, in his words, “The theological-philosophical argumentation of St. John Damascene, on the one hand, uses the achievements of ancient philosophy and culture in a formal way, and on the other, reflects strictly the Christian understanding of God (p. 17).” Strictly speaking, it is not about “proving” (ἀπόδειξις) but about “exhibiting” (δείξις) the existence of God. The author distinguishes this approach from the approach of the Western theological tradition, which sees it as attaining truth only through the means of reason. In the introduction, the main goal of the study is stated – to reveal the creative approach that affected the content, specificity and meaning of the arguments for the existence of God in the dogmatic works of St. John Damascene, by tracing the ideological influences and analyzing the cosmological, teleological and the historical argument for the existence of God in their theological-apologetic context. The research methodology is also determined – this is the comparative-apologetic method. A whole series of inductive

and deductive methods combined with the historical-dogmatic method is added to it for the needs of the research analysis of places.

In the **first chapter** “Life and creative development of St. John Damascene” the historical and chronological parameters of the topic are outlined. The author gives a brief account of the life of St. John Damascene and presents his work together with the ideological influences in the historical context of the time. On the ancient side, the influence of Plato, Aristotle and the Neoplatonists is especially noted. In theological terms, the author notes the influence of the holy Cappadocian fathers and of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

The **second chapter** “God's being - source and ontological basis of everything that exists” examines the main points in the teaching of St. John Damascene about God. A central idea in which his belonging to the Patristic Tradition is manifested is that all the rest of creation, together with humanity, are inseparable from God not only because He is their Creator but also because of their logos-basis. Therefore, the relationship with Him is not only logical-causal. Man and all of creation are related to the Triune God first of all in another way, since the Divine imprint of the First Creator is placed on them – they have not only a natural basis, but also a spiritual, logos basis. In this way, an eternal Logos principle is present in man – this is his spiritual content. This property of man makes possible an authentication of God's existence that is not reduced to logical proof. The author tends to completely reject the meaning of “reasoning” (p. 53). This unconditionally refers to God's essence. Indeed, “his interpretation with the help of concepts gives only a 'coded' truth, it is the 'method of representations', because the reality to which He testifies is absolutely unique and incommensurable with any system of thought (ibid.)”. The problem of the knowability of God's being is more complicated. The author defends the theological position according to which the Lord's words (in the Septuagint translation) “I am the eternally Existent” reveal that in God “essence coincides with existence” (p. 57). From here one can go in two radically opposite directions. On this basis, Thomas Aquinas (and with him for centuries the entire Western tradition) exaggerated the importance of rational theology and assumed knowledge of God in essence. Colleague Penkov stands on Orthodox positions and completely denies such knowledge, but hence also denies any

rational proof of God.

The **third chapter** “Philosophical-theological arguments for the existence of God” is devoted to the relevant arguments in the teaching of St. John of Damascus, and based on his position already defended in the previous chapter, the author avoids the term “proof”. The apology made by St. John of Damascus on the belief in God is convincingly presented and the main arguments for his existence are considered: cosmological, teleological and historical-psychological. A major contribution of the thesis is the systematization and analysis of these arguments in the context of the more general question of the relationship of faith and reason.

In the book, the author states his confessional commitment, but finds the right balance and objectively presents the difference between the Orthodox and Western positions.

The rest of the presented pieces of candidate’s research includes studia and articles dedicated to subjects within the scope of the competition. In them, he contributed to the construction of a data array of modern scientific developments, which are a valuable contribution to Orthodox Apologetics and to its teaching in our theological schools. Here I refer to his works on the Orthodox elements in the works of Ivan Vazov, Stoyan Mikhailovsky and Fyodor Dostoevsky. Also of particular value are the studies on the human personality and its disclosure in the principles of patristic personalistic anthropology. No less important are the articles in which the basic truths of the faith are presented, related to God's being, Creation, Redemption, Resurrection, etc.

What has been said so far characterizes Prof. Penkov as an accomplished specialist in his field, who is needed for the academic Department and has all the merits to be elected a professor.

In my opinion, the contributions in the reference attached by the candidate are formulated correctly and correspond to what he has achieved.

As the head of the Department of Systematic Theology, for whose needs the competition has been announced, I express my satisfaction that we have a worthy candidate who will be able to contribute to the further development of Christian apologetics – one of the main and most important disciplines in the Faculty of Theology.

I cannot but be satisfied that in the field of systematic theology there is functioning a full-fledged community of scholars which coordinates its activities around the teachings of St. John Damascene. The members of the department are the basis of the series of bilingual editions of St. John Damascene and the scholarly apparatus for them. They carry out joint research already on two projects, to which they also involve their doctoral and postdoctoral students, and thus give a higher dimension to their teaching. Colleague Penkov plays an important role in these activities.

I declare that Assoc. Prof. Dimo Penkov and me have no related activities and do not fall under the hypotheses of the normative documents defining a conflict of interest.

IV. Conclusion:

The given data testify to the full compliance of the candidate with the legal requirements for occupying the scientific position of “professor”. In view of the above and in connection with Art. 111 para. (2) to PURPNSZADSU, I express my positive assessment and recommend to the respected members of the Scientific Jury to allow Assoc. Dr. Dimo Krastev Penkov to the election by the Faculty Council for the academic position of “Professor” in professional field 2.4. Religion and theology (Christian Apologetics). I appeal to the Faculty Council to award it to him.

14.11.2022 г.

(Prof. I. Christov, PhD)