

OPINION

for

Dimo Krastev Penkov, participant in the competition for the academic position *Professor* in professional field 2.4. – Religion and theology (scientific specialty *Christian apologetics*), announced for the needs of Faculty of Theology of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in the State Gazette, No. 48 of 28.06.2022,

by Prof. Nina Dimitrova, DSc.

Associate Professor Dimo Penkov is the only candidate in the announced competition for a professorship. The competition procedure has been correctly followed, the submitted documents are complete and in order.

I am appointed to the current jury by order of the Rector No. RD 38-497/22. 08. 2022.

Dimo Penkov is a doctor of theology (the topic of the dissertation defended in 2005 was "Religious-philosophical views of Stoyan Mihailovski") and associate professor in the Department of Systematic Theology at the Theological Faculty of Sofia University. His area of interest covers *Christian apologetics, Philosophy, Psychology of religion, etc.*

Associate Professor Penkov is the head of the project "Dogmatic sources for the fight against iconoclasm" (Sofia University, 2020), as well as a member of 7 other research projects. He is the supervisor of two successfully defended doctoral students and 22 graduate students.

He is the editor of the collection dedicated to the life and activities of Archim. Euthymius (2019). He is a member of the editorial board of the magazine "Theological Thought" and also of the collection dedicated to the life and activities of Boris Marinov. There are 13 participations with a *sectional report* at various scientific forums.

Dimo Penkov has deposited a list of all his publications, including 4 monographs, numerous dictionary articles from the Thesaurus "On Heresies in a Nutshell", 30 articles and studies in scientific journals and anthologies and a teaching aid.

The candidate fulfills and exceeds the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b of the Law on the Development of Academic Degrees for obtaining the academic title "Professor".

In the current competition, Dimo Penkov participated with two monographs - "The Philosophical and Theological Arguments of St. John Damascene for the Existence of God", 2022 (LIBRUM publishing house) and "The Resurrection of Christ - the Victory of Life over Death", 2017 (Sofia University publishing house), one study in the journal "Theological Thought", 12 articles and a teaching aid.

The candidate in the announced contest has cleverly combined his publications in a way that makes it possible to single out several groups of scientific contributions, the claims of which I find well-founded. Among the specific thematic areas are: *History of Christian apologetics; Relationship between belief and knowledge; Studies on religious motifs in fiction* (in the works of Vazov, Stoyan Mikhailovsky, Dostoevsky); *Orthodox-anthropological ideas; History of Bulgarian theology* (searching and promulgation of little-known facts from the life and activities of the founders of the "Christian Apologetics" department at the Faculty of Arts of the SU); Systematization and analysis of the philosophical and theological arguments for the existence of God in John Damascene. The last topic is the main one for the 2022 monograph, in which special attention is focused precisely on the philosophical-theological argumentation of John Damascene about the existence of God, contained in his main dogmatic work "Fountain of Knowledge". The study consists of a preface, an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, and an extensive bibliography, including sources and commentary. The book is presented by its author as a theological-apologetic interpretation of the argumentation proposed by John Damascene, uniting philosophy and patristic tradition.

A prerequisite for the scientific significance of the undertaking is the fact of the uniqueness of this type of argumentation, which, however, has not received satisfactory research interest. We can look for the main scientific contribution of Dimo Penkov's habilitation thesis precisely in this direction – the highlighting of the possibilities provided by the pairing of philosophy and theology used by John Damascene in the "Fountain of Knowledge" for the formulation of "rational proofs" for the existence of

God. As an important feature of Damascene's intellectual and spiritual portrait, the impact he felt of ancient philosophy is shown, perceptible in the presentation of the cosmological and teleological argument for God's existence. Associate Professor Penkov shows how this part of the remarkable work of the Christian author, which deals with the question of "evidence" for the existence of God, illustrates how intensively and to what extent Christianity was influenced by Hellenic philosophy. In the mentioned aspect, the habilitation work "stepped", I suppose, on the results of Dimo Penkov's earlier research on the religious ideas of Socrates and Plato (published in the journal "Theological Thought" from 1998) and Aristotle (ibid., 2003). In this regard, it is important to mention the teaching aid he compiled, "The Ancient Theology of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle as a Form of God-Knowledge", 2008.

Written at a high professional level, the work is at the same time clear and accessible not only to specialists, but also to a wider audience, including that of students.

The monograph "The Resurrection of Christ – the victory of life over death" is dedicated to the most important events of human existence – death and Resurrection. The first chapter, called "The Secret of Death", is particularly insightful. It examines the two types of Christian attitudes towards death – as a tragedy and as a blessing. The statement "If we ignore the dimension of death, we take away the true greatness of life" (page 17) is fundamental to the overall direction of the work. The second chapter, "The Immortality of the Human Soul," presents and comments on numerous arguments in favor of this immortality, philosophical and theological. The third chapter, dedicated to Christ's resurrection, also includes the history of this idea – its various prototypes, highlighting their categorical difference with the Christian one.

The work is eruditely and competently written and illuminates the authentic meaning of life in the context of death and resurrection.

The study "The Uncreated Light of the Transfiguration in the Teaching of Saint Gregory Palamas", published in the journal "Theological Thought" (2020), analyzes the theological disputes about the nature of the light of the Transfiguration as disputes over a religious problem of primary importance. It is about the uncreated divine energies – a fundamental position for the teachings of Palamas, to which the entire issue 1 of the magazine is actually dedicated.

As previously noted, Dimo Penkov is also the author of numerous shorter publications, divided according to their subject matter into several groups. As I do not have the opportunity here to consider them individually, I will share my positive impression in general and in particular of those dealing with religious ideas in fiction.

The scientific activity of associate professor Dimo Penkov is rich and varied and meets the criteria for occupying the academic position requested by him, therefore, as a member of the scientific jury for the current competition, I fully support his candidacy and propose to the Faculty Council at the Faculty of Theology of Sofia University to choose to be a "professor" in a professional direction 2.4. Religion and Theology, scientific specialty Christian Apologetics.

26. 09. 2022

Signature: