

REVIEW

of Prof. Klara Toneva's doctoral dissertation

„THE DOCTRINAL CONTROVERSY BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM
(according to St. John Damascene's Heresy 101)“

for conferment of the scientific degree of „Doctor of Science“

by Prof. Emil Traytchev

The presented scientific work of Prof. Klara Asenova Toneva leads me to a multifaceted view of the observation, because my impressions are immediate at every level of her overall teaching and scientific maturity.

Usually in such cases one resorts to the tempting terminology of „the graduate“ from the student bench to the eternally towering height of scientific ascent. I have never taken for granted the controlling function of one researcher over another, I have always deeply shared the conviction that the original mind, from the earliest awakening of interest in science, strives for freedom in the context of inheritance and continuity, and in the overall scale and power of the word, while the average „artisan's“ layer of ambitions seeks a niche, security, and comfort of the patronage.

At the beginning of her teaching and scientific activity, Toneva showed a marked interest in various phenomena in the field of the history of religions, and more specifically of the Islam. She went deeper into the field, expanding along the horizon of specific periods and the vertical of historical time her idea of this important religious phenomenon. From a moment on, the accumulations in this sphere also led to a rethinking and expansion of

generally accepted concepts in the field, not as self-enclosure and bringing self-development internal processes into a cult, but as a purposeful influx of spiritual values.

The proposed Dissertation „THE DOCTRINAL CONTROVERSY BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM (according to St. John Damascene’s Heresy 101)“ is a vivid testimony of this. This work presents to the scientific community in its substantive part the character of a scientist freed from pedantic observation in already crystallized connections and relationships. The severe syndrome of science for the reception of factology and the dictatorship of concrete in Toneva is only one ingredient of the profile and angle of observation. It is a merit of the thesis that it proceeds from the sovereignty of the multifaceted religious process without „exile“ within its own framework.

Following the tradition of the Chair of Systematic Theology, Klara Toneva wished to habilitate according to the letter of the law, according to which the dissertation and a series of publications are sufficient grounds for the announced procedure. The doctoral thesis includes a Preface, an Introduction, seven chapters, a Conclusion, a List of abbreviations and a bibliography. It contains 453 pages; the sources used are 778, and the footnotes are 1111. The first chapter is a kind of analysis and synthesis of the emergence and ideological doctrinal shaping of Islam, taking into account the works of a number of distinguished Bulgarian and foreign Arabists. Looking for internal support in the various scientific readings or rather in the high-order thinking of the intellectual association of close minds, Toneva actually expands the research focus, frees it from the usual and traditional spaces to the territory where only the talent is a citizen.

This trend, which I support, finds a logical continuation in Chapter Two, „Christianity and Islam: spiritual and historical context of their

interaction“, which traces the spiritual and historical background of the interaction between the Judeo-Christian tradition and Islam. In Chapter Three, „Tawhid vs. Christian Triadology“, the research discourse undergoes an upgrade in view of the essential and central question of revelation. The Christian arguments for the ineffability and incomprehensibility of the Trinitarian mystery are presented against the Islamic perception of the triadology as „an association“. The fourth chapter is devoted to the glory and the power of the Cross of Christ. For St. John Damascene, the whole life of Jesus Christ is a redemptive deed, of which the Cross of Christ is the climax. In Chapter Five, attention is directed to the Christian and, respectively, to the Islamic understanding of community. The sixth chapter, „Salvation or prosperity: two divergent anthropologies“, traces the basic principles on which the Christian anthropology, theocentric in character, and the Islamic anthropology, which is closely related to the shaping of historical self-awareness. In the last, Seventh Chapter, in addition to the main issue of the Day of Judgment, attention is also paid to the interreligious dialogue in the context of the doctrinal differences between Christianity and Islam. This part of the study is a kind of peak, but the more correct and relevant is a high plateau. Toneva's conclusion is that „doctrinal differences will persist, and it is only the joint efforts of Christians and Muslims that will prevent them from turning into rifts“ (p. 30, Abstract).

In fact, Klara Toneva's Doctoral Dissertation is not only a polemical work, with a markedly critical analysis of the more important doctrinal differences along the Christianity-Islam axis, but covers a wide field of research, the entrance to which is the Heresy 101 of St. John Damascene, where de facto the reinterpretation of the Orthodox theological tradition is understood and outlined, and the dynamics of the development of the Islamic religious identity in the later centuries are experienced. I take this ambitious

research reading as an obvious and indisputable contribution point of the Doctoral Dissertation. We are witnessing a creative unfolding of the white fields, of the free territories, giving strength to interpenetration and its awareness by research science. This is not the global modern Internet world, but an existent not from yesterday opportunity for multifaceted penetration into the nature of the religious and cultural history of mankind, sometimes carelessly bypassed or unnoticed in its inherent scale.

The territory of the Dissertation finds intellectual comfort and harmony in the content-wise reconciliation of patristic historical-theological questions of faith and the specific ecclesiastical-theological approach, reflected through the early critical positions and theological reflections on Islam in the work of St. John Damascene.

Another contributing point of this Dissertation is the highly erudite focus of multidirectional momentums and analogies in the stated research pathos, which implies enormous labor and empirical discipline of the researcher.

Such enormous work also carries certain risks. There is not everywhere a voluminous correspondence of dedicated research attention and significance. An excessive increase in the volume of the verbal area is felt. Comparative parallels sometimes look for a purpose and find it in history inconsistent with the nature of temporal strata. At times it feels like a messy accumulation of evidence that opposes concepts separated by centuries in a unified plan, or accepts them with anachronistic arguments. In many cases, the sources cited are second-hand.

Despite the mentioned remarks, the work has a high scientific quality both with Toneva's obvious merits in the practical direction of the research, and with its undoubted contribution to the development of the scientific

specialty „History of Religions“ in the 100-year history of the Faculty of Theology.

In conclusion, I strongly recommend to the respected scientific jury, given the long-term work of Klara Toneva as a teacher and builder of theology in Bulgaria, with her undoubted scientific and didactic authority in higher theological education in our country, that she be conferred the scientific degree of „Doctor of Science“.

Prof. Emil Traytchev