

## **REVIEW**

**for**

**Pavel Nikolov Pavlov, participant in the competition for the academic position *Professor* in professional field 2.4. – Religion and theology (*Introduction to Church History with History of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church*), 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, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology – BAS**

I have been appointed as a member of the current scientific jury under the professorship of Assoc. Prof. Pavel Pavlov by Order of the Rector of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" RD 38 – 50 of 27. 01. 2023.

In the competition for the occupation of the academic position of *professor* in professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology Associate Prof. Pavel Pavlov is the only candidate.

His papers are complete and in order. They include data on his diverse scientific activity: on the total number of his scientific publications and a list of those with which he participated in the current competition (when and in which editions they were published); for his scientific supervision of numerous graduate students and three doctoral students; for the scientific editorship and rich compilation activity carried out by P. Pavlov; for his dozens of participations in scientific forums – in Bulgaria and abroad; for the numerous appearances in the media; for the management of- and membership in various research projects; for multiple completed translations; for his function as editor-in-chief (together with Svetoslav Rybolov) of the magazine "Theological Thought" (since 2015).

In the announced competition, Pavel Pavlov participated with one monograph, three studies and 17 articles. The initial attitude in their development, as is valid in general for the entire scientific work of Dr. Pavlov, is the attitude of a *theological*

*historian*, interpreting history as the space allocated for the realization of God's plan for the salvation of man. The candidate's contributions can be defined as concretizations of this particular *pairing of theology and history*, as the fruit of the synergy of the two scientific fields. Pavel Pavlov's long-standing affinity for the ideological heritage of Georgii Florovsky, to whose methodology as a *Christian-historian* he closely adheres to, is no accident. In one of the articles presented for discussion, justifying the need for the meeting, the conversation, the dialogue between religion and science, Pavlov notes: "On a personal level, the biggest provocation on the topic of theology and science was and remains my occupation over the last twenty years with the theological legacy of Fr. G. Florovsky" ("Orthodox theology and university science in Bulgaria"). This initial research position determines the versatility, interdisciplinary nature of the works of Pavel Pavlov, in which the two main scientific competences fruitfully cooperate. To them we should also add his broad humanitarian erudition, the interweaving of ideas from the philosophy of the twentieth century – when commenting on the socio-political context of the *mass man*, the author repeatedly refers to the concept of Ortega-i-Gasset; the meaning of time in Christian theology (respectively *the end of time* and *the time of the end*) is discussed in comparison with various philosophical ideas of the twentieth century for which authors it is a leading theme – Cassirer, Bergson, Husserl, Heidegger, the representatives of existentialism... And so on.

A distinctive feature of Assoc. Prof. Pavlov's overall scientific activity is the attention he consistently showed to his native theological heritage, to the importance of continuity in history. The fruit of this attention are numerous of his publications, dedicated to the life and work of various significant personalities in Bulgarian theology – written with extreme respect, with diligence and diligence in searching for the preserved *traces*.

This kind of following the *traces* is represented by the habilitation thesis of Associate Professor Pavel Pavlov – "Teacher Gancho Velevev Ganchev (1921 – 1998), or about the craft of a theological historian in the twentieth century", published in the publishing house of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", 2023. *The teacher* is a

model of a theologian-historian, an example of this organic pairing between theology and history, an emblem of scientific activity and of Pavel Pavlov himself.

The years spent in the presence of this extraordinary man, who devoted his life to church history, undoubtedly give the biographical study an autobiographical perspective. The story is fascinating, emotionally saturated and manages to recreate the former life in the seminary at Cherepish – now a place of hushed, melancholic beauty.

The story of Gancho Velev is also the story of his generation, the story of the fate of native theological science in the context of socio-political life and its vicissitudes.

*The teacher and the spirit of the time* – Pavel Pavlov divided his attention between them, defining his teacher as "a product of a time and a circle in which much was read and spoken, but little was written – a verbal-sacred age, contrary to the current profane-graphic civilization" (p. 38).

The overall impression of the work dedicated to Gancho Velev is that enormous efforts have been made to search for the most diverse "bricks" through which to convincingly reconstruct his portrait – documentary evidence of a different nature, archival materials, foreign memories; so that "from all these 'dead archaeological pieces' a complete image of our teacher can be restored and 'come to life'" (p. 46). The idea is successfully embodied in the presented theological, historical, biographical research, the last part of which is represented by valuable appendices – publications from Gancho Velev's archive, letters, photographs, etc.

The research position of Pavel Pavlov is also the research position of Gancho Velev, described by him, and all the contributing moments in the book are mainly due to this synthesis between theology and history, as well as to the author's scrupulous attitude towards the set goal.

The habilitation thesis logically builds on what has been achieved over the years and contains all assessments on important topics from the specific scientific field that have occupied and excited its author so far.

In the competition for the academic position *Professor* Pavel Pavlov has also submitted 20 more publications, three of which are studies. All of them were created after the previous habilitation. Some of the texts are in English. Dr. Pavlov has very appropriately grouped them according to their subject area. Here I will not consider them

separately, but in turn I will try to single out specific thematic fields. Among them, in my opinion, the leading one is the theoretical justification of the fruitful union between Christian theology and history; a union, for the argumentation of which the ideas of Georgii Florovsky and Valentin Asmus, Yaroslav Pelikan, Mark Blok and his *Apology of History*, etc. were used. I am referring specifically to the article "History and Christianity, Time and the Church", which first examines *history* and *Christianity* separately in order to arrive at the conclusion about the religious meaning of history. The figure of *the historian* is also outlined in this text – the historian is presented as an apostle, as a narrator, as a reliable witness (for whom there are no insignificant events, facts or personalities); after all, the historian is defined as an *ascetic of goodness*, because "history is not a profession or a method, but a gift and an opportunity", in the words of the author. The story provides not only an interpretation of the past, but also a creative look at the future ("St. Gregory Palamas and the Ottoman Turks").

In the article already mentioned, devoted to the place of theology in the university, the same theme is developed, the emphasis in this case being on what theology is. This is a necessary prerequisite for establishing the theological-historical synthesis as a basic research position.

An important thematic field is also the discussion of the meaning of church tradition, continuity, memory – questions precisely within the competence of *the Christian-historian*. They are present in many of the texts proposed for discussion: in the study "The Saint and the Monastery", in "Devotion and credibility: the waker, according to Prof. Archimandrite Dr. Evtimii Sapundjiev", "Memory and testimony. Bulgaria between St. Tsar Boris and St. Kliment Ohridski" (memory as the main carrier and engine of the Tradition).

An important scientific contribution to the work of Pavel Pavlov is represented by the religious and anthropological figures outlined by him. Yeah, they're like that:

◀ *the saint* (in "The Saint and the Monastery" – juxtaposed with the figure of the revolutionary hero); the saint is defined as "that person who, to the greatest extent, realizes the divinity of man" ("St. Joachim I – The Patriarch of *Polomieto*");

◀ *the monk* – In the same article, as well as in the text "The Great Constantine and Athanasius. The Meeting of Two Worlds", dedicated to the problematic encounter

between Egyptian monasticism and the Roman state; between "the Christianizing empire and the affirming of its faith before the holy Church";

◀ *the martyr ruler* (in the article dedicated to St. John Vladimir). The importance of the ruler's personality is also commented on in the article "Emperors Galerius and St. Constantine");

◀ *the professor – an ascetic of faith and piety* (in the article in memory of N.N. Glubokovski "Theological asceticism and scientific humility"; also in the article "Theological testimony of the church historian Prof. Hristo Stoyanov");

◀ *the wake-up teacher* (in the book dedicated to Gancho Veleev, in the article "Kuzman Shapkarev's program for education and catechization in the native language").

To them, of course, we must add the figure of *the theologian-historian*, constantly present both as an object of research interest and as personifying the chosen research position.

Another important scientific contribution is the study of the topoi in which all these *figures* carry out their activities – *the city and/or the monastery*. The monastery is defined as a "projection of the city in the desert" ("The Saint and the Monastery"). The special importance of *Constantinople* as one of the most important topos in the history of Christianity is also discussed.

Undoubted relevance is the work on the relationship between Christianity and Islam – a work that addresses an episode in the life of St. Gregory Palamas (his captivity by the Turks) and affirms the legacy of the Byzantine theologian in search of a solution to the modern problem.

The solution that Associate Professor Pavel Pavlov offers to the question of the relationship between the so-called *theories of progress* is especially important for me, i.e. of the clarification of the Christian opinion on the essence of progress, respectively on the attitude of Christianity to the ideas of the French Enlightenment.

The relationship between the Church and society is also among the significant current problems analyzed in the works of Pavel Pavlov ("Again about the social role of the Church", "The Church – guardian and guarantor of the treasury of Christian values (or how the Church makes politics)"). Expressing his position categorically on the

question of *what it means to be a Christian today*, Associate Professor Pavlov aptly refers to the famous ideas of the Serbian theologian Radovan Bigovic.

As a historian of the Church, a particularly important place in the scientific work of Dr. Pavel Pavlov, presented for discussion, is occupied by his studies dedicated to specific individuals or to aspects of the past of the Church as a whole. I will again emphasize the special attention and piety to the native theological heritage, to the maintenance of historical continuity in this regard.

In conclusion: what has been said so far gives me full reason to claim that Prof. Pavel Nikolov Pavlov categorically meets all the requirements for occupying the academic position of *professor* in professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology (scientific specialty *Introduction to Church History with History of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church*) and I call the Faculty Council at the Faculty of Theology of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" to award it to him.

08. 03. 2023

Signature: