

## OPINION

On dissertation submitted in particular fulfilment of the requirements for the educational and scientific degree "PhD" in the scientific specialty "Theology" in professional direction 2.4. "Religion and Theology" by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vencislav Karavalchev, Faculty of Theology, University of Sofia "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia, Pl. "Holy Sunday" 19

**Author of dissertation thesis:** NINA TANEVA KOLEVA

**Title of the dissertation thesis:** "The Arian controversies during the reign of Emperor Constantius II (historical-dogmatic study)"

**Scientific supervisor:** Prof. Dr. Alexander Omarchevski

Nina Koleva was born in Yambol in 1971. She graduated from the Professional High School of Economics in her hometown. In the period 2006 - 2010, she studied at the Theological Faculty of the University of Sofia, where received a bachelor's degree. Immediately after that, she continued successfully in the master's program "Christian Pilgrimage" of the Faculty of Theology. She speaks in different level several languages - English, Italian, Russian, Turkish and Greek. In the years of her doctoral studies, she showed herself as a responsible and conscientious student.

The dissertation work of Nina Taneva Koleva submitted for defence has a volume of 197 pages and includes: Table of Contents, List of Abbreviations, Preface, Introduction, Three Chapters, Conclusion, Declaration of Originality of the Text and Bibliography. In the Bibliography are included 193 titles mainly in Bulgarian, Russian and English, as well as several in German, Turkish, Italian, French, etc. The scholarly apparatus includes 324 footnotes. The dissertation is accompanied by an abstract in Bulgarian and English, all other regulatory requirements are fulfilled. The dissertation work was examined at a

departmental meeting, and in its current form, a large part of the notes and recommendations made during the meeting by the departmental board are reflected.

The work is dedicated to one of the most interesting and difficult periods in the life of the Church, namely the appearance, spread and fight against the heresy of Arius. A heresy which for several centuries threatened with varying intensity the unity of the Church and caused enormous damage to her flock. The study focuses on the reign of the second son of Emperor Constantine the Great - Constantius II, but de facto covers a wider chronological framework of about 120 years, the time of the reign of St. Constantine and his successors Constantine II, Constans and Constantius II.

The paper is written in a pleasant to read academic language, the narrative flows smoothly and in a relatively consistent chronology.

In the study, the teaching of Arius and the problems it creates in the Church are revealed in sufficient depth. The work is well structured, the chapters have a balanced volume and are appropriately divided into sub-chapters, in which the most important events and moments of the life of the Church in the period under consideration are presented.

In the Introduction, the obligatory for this kind of research are precisely set: goals, tasks, subject, degree of development of the topic, chronological framework, etc.

The First chapter, which has eight sub-chapters, introduces the reader to the era and examines the issues surrounding the reforms in the Roman Empire, dictated by the accumulation of many problems, one of which was the great increase in the number of Christians. The policy of repression against them from the first three centuries after Christ did not give positive results and inevitably led to a change in the attitude of the state authorities towards them, started by Emperor Constantine I the Great.

The Second chapter has seven subchapters and is devoted to the appearance, causes of it, spread and countermeasures by Church and State against the Arian heresy. Special attention is paid to the central event, provoked to a large extent by Arianism – the convening of the First Ecumenical Council of the Church in Nicaea (325), as well as to the activity and theology of one of the key participants in the council, St. Athanasius of Alexandria.

The Third chapter, which has eleven subchapters, examines the personality and reign of Emperor Constantius II, giving an assessment of the degree of assimilation, changes and application of the model of interaction between Church and State set by St. Constantine. Special attention is also paid to the key Council of Serdica, which is extremely highly valued by the Western Church and, it seems to me, seriously undervalued by the Eastern Church.

The Conclusion is a summary of the researched issues and an assessment of the work of Emperor Constantine the Great and his successors.

As I have already noted, Nina Koleva's research is an interesting and readable work, written competently, with desire and showing the serious attitude and work of its author. Like any such research, it has its weaknesses and gaps, but I clearly realize that the topic and its problematics are indeed huge and difficult to comprehensively exhaust. Not all titles listed in the Bibliography are cited in the text. For example: Vachkova, V. One road, one temple, one palace and ten centuries of history. Sofia, 2015 is included in the Bibliography, but not cited in the text of the dissertation. I would also like to point out that with regard to the contributions of the essay and more specifically to those noted as the third such, perhaps it would be appropriate to specify that this is indeed the first attempt for such a study, but only in Bulgaria. The life and work of Emperor Constantius II has been examined in great detail in a relatively new study, which has apparently escaped the attention of the researcher and is missing from the literature used. It's about the research of Peter Crawford. Constantius II. Usurpers, Eunuchs and the Antichrist. Barnsley, 2016.

I believe that the proposed PhD work has all the merits and contributions for a similar type of work, and this gives me the reason to support the dissertation and to propose to the Scientific Jury to award Nina Taneva Koleva the scientific degree "PhD" in the professional field 2.4. "Religion and Theology".

St. Mary of Egypt and  
St. Avramius the Bulgarian  
April 1, 2024, Sofia

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ventzislav Karavaltchev