

OPINION
FOR THE DISSERTATION THESIS OF NINA KOLEVA
"THE ARIAN DISPUTES IN THE GOVERNMENT OF
EMPEROR CONSTANTIUS II
(historical-dogmatic study)"
FOR THE AWARD OF THE EDUCATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC
DEGREE "DOCTOR" IN PROFESSIONAL FIELD 2.4. RELIGION
AND THEOLOGY (History of Christianity)
by Prof. Nina Dimitrova, DSc., Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Nina Koleva, Master of Theology (2010) from the Faculty of Theology of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", is a full-time doctoral student in the same faculty. The documents for her doctoral procedure are in order. I have been appointed as a member of the current jury for the defense of the dissertation by Order of the Rector of SU RD 38 – 66 of 02/05/2024.

The dissertation, the total volume of which is 197 pages, is structured in a preface, an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and a list of the literature used (sources and research), containing 193 titles in Bulgarian, Russian, English, French, German, Italian and Latin.

The preface explains the motivation for writing the proposed research, and the introduction includes all the mandatory components for this part of a dissertation work, starting with the argumentation of the relevance of the topic, referring to the need for synergy of ideas and concepts from different disciplines. Following are clear and precise definitions of the object of the study, as well as of the scope and the proposed disaggregated structure as a prerequisite for the logicity of the exposition. Next comes the explanation of the goal, as well as the tasks through which it will be fulfilled, also the expected results.

The thesis (or hypothesis, according to the preferences of the doctoral student) declares the key role that the ecclesiastical-historical IV century played for the

fate of Christianity, of the ancient world and for the subsequent development of European civilization.

The methods to be used are also announced in the introduction, and special attention is paid to the sources and interpretive literature, which are described in detail. Thus composed, the introduction is a request for a successful study.

In the first chapter - "St. Emperor Constantine I and Successors", the study is primarily historical in nature; the purpose of this part of the dissertation is to introduce the reader to the context of church-historical events, the subject of the upcoming analysis. Structured in several subsections, the first chapter offers detailed and competent descriptions.

The second chapter - "The Arian Controversy" is a theoretical precursor to the next and most important part of the dissertation. Here the essence of the Arian heresy is clarified, the Arian controversies before the Council of Nicaea are traced, and the conclusion is made that the Arian crisis was the first major crisis inflicted on Christianity in its earliest years (p. 74). Attention is paid to the fight against this heresy after the Council of Nicaea and to other important events of the indicated period, the historical-dogmatic study being predominant now: the work of St. Athanasius as the founder of the post-Nicene trinitarian theology is examined and analyzed beyond the disputes with the Arians; a particularly important emphasis is placed on the Cappadocian theology, which received a satisfactory and clear presentation in the dissertation. It makes an excellent impression on the successful attempt to compare the three great Cappadocians and to highlight their specific merits in their reasoning on the question of the relation between essence and hypostasis.

One of the statements made in this chapter needs further clarification or editing – it is about the religious relations between the West and the East, about which the following is said on p. 100: "In the West, the East was often looked upon as little more than a group of bold ecclesiastical adventurers looking for pulpits, and these theological disputes were thought to have been driven simply by ambition. That was partly true..."

The third chapter - "Emperor Constantius II as Ruler" again combines methods from history and from theology to present a sufficiently convincing argument in favor of the thesis raised in the dissertation study. The individual paragraphs here discuss in detail the religious policy of Emperor Constantius II (compared to that of St. Constantine, which highlights the specific differences), present the role of the court bishops in the implementation of this policy, and the important ecclesiastical events that followed. A good impression is made by the analysis of the relationship between *paganism and Christianity* in the East and in the West.

Constantius II's pro-Arian policy is rightly emphasized, and the exposition carefully follows the conduct of the most important councils in the IV century. A summary is made of the significance of the institution of the church council as one of the determining factors for the consolidation of the churches in the East and in the West, as well as the real failure of this policy, doomed due to its Arian basis. The assessment of the contradictory and untenable nature of Constantius II's religious strategy is convincing.

The third chapter, which also deals in detail with the relations between the emperor and Persia, concludes with the conclusion that although Constantius II is often considered a supporter of Arianism, his version is actually a compromise.

In the conclusion, the results of the research are presented, which confirm the initial thesis and outline Arianism as the most significant religious and social heresy in the IV century.

The dissertation abstract is carefully prepared and presents it adequately. Three scientific contributions have been formulated, the claim of which is well-founded.

The PhD student has three publications on the chosen topic.

In conclusion: the work presented for discussion "The Arian Controversies in the Reign of Emperor Constantius II" is a competently executed historical-dogmatic

study, meeting the requirements of the "dissertation" genre. These impressions of mine motivate me to vote "yes" for Nina Taneva Koleva to be awarded the requested educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional direction 2.4 *Religion and Theology*, specialty *History of Christianity*.

12. 03. 2024

Signature: