

A S S E S S M E N T

for a monograph “The doctrinal confrontation between Christianity and Islam
(according to Heresy 101 by St. John Damascene)”
by Prof. Dr. Clara Asenova Toneva

for the procedure for awarding the scholar degree Doctor of Theological Sciences in
the professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology (History of Religions),
by Prof. Ivan Christov, PhD, Faculty of Theology, e-mail: ichri@theo.uni-sofia.bg,
Enrolled in the Registry of Academic Recognition at the National Centre for
Information and Documentation (Article 2b, para. 2 of the Act of development of
academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria) under № 13130

As the chairman of the scholar jury, I have the honor and pleasure at the beginning of my review to present the candidate and the data for the procedure.

I. Applicant Data

The research and teaching activity of Prof. Clara Asenova Toneva, PhD in the Faculty of Theology of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" began twenty years ago - in 2002, when she became a part-time assistant in the Department of “Systematic and Practical Theology” and a full-time doctoral student in the History of Religions. After the defense of her thesis in 2004, she was elected as Assistant Professor in the same department, in 2012, she qualified as an Associate Professor, and in 2022 as a Full Professor. Her scientific activity over the past years resulted in 74 publications, of which 4 monographs, as well as 5 study aids and 2 textbooks (co-authored). Prof. Toneva took part in 9 projects, of which 2 were international. She supervised 14 masters and 8 doctoral students and taught 13 university lecture courses on the subject of the monograph.

II. Procedure data

The current procedure for becoming a professor was opened by order of the Rector of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” № ПД 38-603/3.11.2022 г. at the proposal of the FS of the Faculty of Theology (Protocol No. 11/30.06.2022 г.) or the needs of the “Systematic Theology” department. The order defines the parameters of the procedure

and the composition of the scholar jury. At its first meeting, the jury judged that the candidate convincingly meets the requirements to be awarded the scholar degree Doctor of Theological Sciences. The candidate has passed the standard plagiarism check, after which no further reports for plagiarism were received. Taking into account the presented evidence, the scientific jury admitted to evaluation the monograph “The doctrinal confrontation between Christianity and Islam (according to Heresy 101 by St. John Damascene)” presented by Prof. Dr. Clara Asenova Toneva for the procedure of awarding the scholar degree Doctor of Theological Sciences in the professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology (History of Religions).

At its first meeting, the scientific jury elected Prof. Dr. Ivan Christov as its chairman, and Prof. DSc. Emil Traychev, Prof. DSc. Valentin Kanavrov and Prof. Dr. Ivan Christov as reviewers. The other members were asked to prepare brief assessments. 16/01/2023 was set as the deadline for submitting the reviews and assessments, and 16/02/2023 as the date for the final meeting. All deadlines of this decision have been met.

III. Evaluation of the monography

Prof. Toneva's monograph is original and has a contributing character. It consists of a Preface, an introduction, seven chapters, a conclusion and bibliography. The author clearly outlines the continuity of her work with the Bulgarian theologians of previous generations and outlines her original contribution. In this way, it fully corresponds to the traditions, and also to the level of the Faculty of Theology. The structuring of the chapters derives from the author's analysis of the individual aspects of St. John Damascene's critique of Islam. The bibliography includes an impressive list of 778 titles in Bulgarian, Russian and English. The scientific apparatus consists of 1111 footnotes.

In the **Preface**, she tells about her personal motivations and the prehistory of her engagements with this topic of research. The introduction poses the fundamental question of the interfaith border in the context of modern approaches to the border in general, to its transgression, and to the contested status of the interfaith culture of

silence as contributing not so much to tolerance as to the establishment of new borders. Hence the importance of interreligious and more specifically theological dialogue. In the introduction, the author also defines the object, methods, purpose and tasks of her research, outlines the current status questionis, as well as those studies that are relevant to its analysis.

In the **First chapter** “Islam: emergence and ideological-doctrinal formation” the historical and chronological parameters of the topic are given. It traces the emergence of Islam in opposition to the pagan worldview inherent in the pre-Islamic period in the history of the Arabs. The main moments in the ideological and doctrinal formation of Islam are presented. The role of Muhammad as described in the Qur'an is outlined and some of the historical evidence for him is examined. The question is raised about the confirmation of his chosen of God status in view of the goals he sets for himself - religious, civil and political.

The **Second chapter**, “Christianity and Islam: A Spiritual-Historical Context of Interaction,” presents the main points in the relationship between the Judeo-Christian tradition and Islam. The author identifies three approaches to the of the Qur'an - the Islamic, the rational-analytical (typical to the European Orientalists) and the Orthodox-theological. Sticking to the the third, she asks whether the Christian material available in the Qur'an is related to themes arising from some of the Christian heresies. The author identifies the purposes with which Islamic authors use the Gospel, relating them to the formation of Islamic religious identity and to the validation of Islam in general. The Byzantines' theoretical approach to Islam, its stages and the issue of its tolerance are also examined.

The **Third chapter**, “Tawhid vs. Christian Triadology”, deals with the central theme of the dialogue between Christians and Muslims, defining the notion of history and of God's intervention in it. The answer to the question of why Islam rejects the truth of the Holy Trinity has to do with Islamic sacral authoritarianism, which comes into conflict with pagan sacral egalitarianism. In this context, the thesis of the Koran's inimitability is confirmed, as well as the authenticity of the first revelation that Muhammad received, and hence the categorical distinction between

Allah and the created. The historical development of the narrative of Muhammad's first revelation is also presented, as well as the modifications in its various versions, as well as the response of Christianity. The attitude of St. John Damascene towards Islam, which rejects its God-revealed character and rejects his belief that Muhammad is a prophet, is specially analyzed. St. John of Damascus emphasizes the inaccessibility of the trinitarian mystery. From this position, the Islamic perception of triadology as “association” is impossible.

The **Fourth chapter**, “Glory and Power of the Cross of Christ”, performs a comparative analysis of Islam and Christianity on the central issues in their dialogue, relating to the symbolism of the Christian Cross and its dogmatic meaning, as well as the meaning of the Incarnation and the Resurrection of Christ. Here the subject of the Islamic conception of Jesus Christ, which excludes kenosis and death on the cross as the victory of life over death, is examined, and the arguments of Islam for not recognizing the incarnation of God are revealed.

The **Fifth chapter**, “Communion in Love or Community Solidarity,” juxtaposes the Orthodox teaching on the grace transmitted by the Church in the discourse of divine energies with the Islamic understanding of community. The Christian understanding is ecclesiological, being based on both Christology and Pneumatology.

Chapter Six, “Salvation or Good Fortune: Two Different Anthropologies”, compares Islamic and Christian teachings on man. The latter is based on triadology and Christology and is built on a transcendental-immanent way, while Islamic anthropology is directly related to the construction of historical self-awareness. Accordingly, for Christianity, the meaning of human life is life in Christ, life in the Church. This includes worshiping sacred images, whereas Islam rejects them and denies their being and their place in religious life.

Chapter Seven, “Love Never Falls away,” examines eschatological concepts in both religions. The appearance of the afterlife for Christianity is dependent on the appearance of earthly life, in which the criterion for virtue and moral perfection is love. Love is a distinctive feature of life in the Church of Christ, which is a

manifestation of God's kingdom among people. In turn, Islam defines the Day of Judgment as an indicator of man's earthly existence.

In the light of the discussed questions, the main topics in the dialogue between Christianity and Islam are outlined - its biblical foundations, its spiritual prerequisites, the place of triadology, its limits and the meaning of tolerance.

In the book, the author expresses his confessional commitment, but finds the right balance and objectively presents the difference between the Orthodox and Islamic positions.

IV. Monograph Contributions

Among the scientific contributions stated by Prof. Toneva, the third and fourth deserve special attention, which should be given first place. Above all, it is the theological argumentation of the debate and consideration of the interreligious dialogue in the context of the doctrinal confrontation between Christianity and Islam. A significant contribution is the reconciliation of patristic historical-dogmatic issues with the ecclesiastical-theological approach, as reflected in the early critical positions and theological reflections on Islam in the work of St. John Damascene and the subsequent Byzantine cultural-historical tradition of the Church.

In my opinion, the contributions in the reference attached by the candidate are formulated correctly and correspond to what she has actually achieved.

As the head of the “Systematic Theology” department, I express my satisfaction that in recent years the department has concentrated its efforts in common topics, one of which is the legacy of St. John Damascene. We already have the bilingual edition of the “Fount of Knowledge”, we are developing projects in which PhD students are trained, we are building working tools on the Internet, and we already have a habilitation thesis for a DSc.

Finally, but not least, I am proud that the first procedure for a woman for the scientific degree Doctor of Theological Sciences in Bulgaria is taking place precisely in our department.

I declare that Prof. Klara Toneva and I have no related activities and do not fall under the hypotheses of the normative documents defining a conflict of interest.

V. Заключение:

The given data testify to the full compliance of the candidate with the legal requirements for acquiring the scholar degree “Doctor of Sciences” (Doctor of Theological Sciences) in professional field 2.4. Religion and theology. Considering the qualities of the work “The doctrinal confrontation between Christianity and Islam (according to Heresy 101 of St. John Damascene)”, I will confidently vote for Professor Klara Asenova Toneva to be awarded the scholar degree “Doctor of Sciences” (Doctor of Theological Sciences) and I call on the members of the esteemed scientific jury to support this decision.

16.01.2023 г.

(Prof. I. Christov, PhD)