

OPINION

of Assoc. Prof. Valeri Zlatanov Lichev, PhD

Head of the "Anthropological Research" Section at the Institute of Philosophie and Sociology
– Bulgarian Academy of Sciences,

Member of the Scientific Jury for the Competition for the Academic Position of Professor,
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I. SUMMARY OF THE CANDIDATE'S SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTION AND ACTIVITY

Assoc. Prof. Kiril Plamen Kartalov is the only one candidate who participated in the competition for a professorship in the section "Anthropological Studies", code 05.01.14 - "Philosophy of Culture, Economics, Law and Economics". His scientific productivity, characterized by international visibility, is impressive. I will not list his publication results due to the limited volume of the opinion. I will only point out that the candidate is a lecturer at the Catholic University of Milan and a corresponding member of the Pontifical Committee for Historical Sciences.

Assoc. Prof. Kartalov's scientific interests are concentrated in the field of historiography, focusing on the peculiarities of papal diplomacy and international relations. However, I would say that they also concern many related social and humanitarian disciplines such as philosophy, religious studies, political science, etc.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. K. Kartalov participated in the competition with the monograph "The Sound of Silence in the Light of the Vatican Archives. Pius XII and the Jewish Question". This is a remarkable study, presented in an unconventional way, bringing together the rigor of scientific discourse with the emotionally captivating nature of a work of art. It provides an original interpretation of the silence of Pope Pius XII during WWII, which for many years was the subject of criticism or at least remained misunderstood. The study is based on archival documents from the Vatican Library, which became available for scientific research only after 2020.

The author sets himself five tasks, which he implements in the three parts of his well-structured text. I will focus on those moments that are more closely related to philosophy and anthropology. The Jewish genocide is a unique drama with large-scale ideological, universalist and radical dimensions. At its core is the biological interpretation of the victims,

who become guilty as a result of their very origin. What is important is not "what they do", but "who they are". More generally, the roots of this substantialist treatment are laid in Western European metaphysics, the overcoming of which began only in the twentieth century thanks to the linguistic reorientation of all social sciences and humanities.

The inexplicable cruelty with which the extermination of the Jews is carried out has complex metaphysical, religious and anthropological dimensions that are difficult to comprehend. Mass extermination becomes an end in itself, achieved by the means of industrial rationality. It is associated with the dehumanization of the victims, who are deprived of all individuality.

The scale of this phenomenon makes it inexplicable according to some representatives of the Jewish community. There are limits to understanding beyond which reason cannot leap. This is a thesis reminiscent of one of the four basic questions whose answer Kant seeks in his metaphysics - in particular: "What can I know".

From a phenomenological point of view, it can be said that intellectual attempts to understand the genocide rest on a horizon of meanings beyond which the researcher cannot leap. The question is whether we should remain in this agnostic position or cross it together with the author. The main problem is related to the connection morality - politics - knowledge. As one Holocaust researcher points out, scientific rationalization of this phenomenon would indirectly lead to its justification.

In this regard, the author takes into account the limitations of the functionalist paradigm. In fact, it is a more general problem arising from the imposition of structuralism as a leading methodology in the second half of the twentieth century. In short, people are killers, not structures.

The complexity of the problem under study is also evident from the way in which the so-called "black legend" about Pope Pius XII was initiated. This happened after a theatrical production, that is, through artistic, not political, religious, scientific or other type of discourse. It is interesting that this legend is imposed by representatives of the Catholic community, while its "pink" alternative is supported by the Jewish community, including Golda Meir, who appealed for "the voice of the Pope to be heard".

From this point of view, the silence of Pope Pius XII fits into a complex power diagram, using a term borrowed from J. Deleuze and F. Guattari. If modern society is characterized by differentiation of social subsystems, we can say that the interpretation of the Vatican's passivity during WWII is located in the intersecting area of at least three spheres:

political-legal, cultural and value or ethical. As a result, the image of Pope Pius XII is loaded with many negative connotations, seriously hindering the reconstruction of his activity.

Assoc. Prof. Kartalov's research raises many questions for specialists from a number of fields such as: cultural studies, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, etc. Silence is subject to many interpretations, to which Assoc. Prof. Kartalov adds his own understanding, based on a careful reading of documents from the Vatican archives.

If the Pope did not publicly condemn the persecution of the Jews, this does not mean that he was indifferent to their fate. Through its diplomatic representatives and channels, the Vatican sought to limit discriminatory measures, reduce or delay deportations, and facilitate emigration.

In the 1960s, a fundamental change occurred in the views of the papal institution on the Jewish people. The long-standing contempt was rejected, but this does not mean that all problems with the past were cleared up, since evil can always awaken and appear, dressed in new forms.

At the end of his work, Assoc. Prof. Kartalov outlines the possible directions of his future scientific work, which I am convinced will be no less productive than his previous one. The archives provoke questions related to the attitude of the Holy See to the Declaration of Human Rights, the construction of a new world order, the Middle East issue, etc. I believe they will receive the illumination they deserve.

II. CRITICAL NOTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is difficult to make critical remarks about such a large-scale work. I would only address the metaphorical title, an allusion to a song that became a hit almost at the same time as the “black legend” about “Hitler’s pope” was being established.

From a phenomenological point of view, there is a difference between “listening” and “hearing”. According to M. Heidegger, we never hear pure sounds, but the birdsongs, the howling of the wind, the lapping of the waves, etc. That is, we could not hear “pure silence”. Unlike listening, hearing is an intentional process in which we direct ourselves to the perceived sounds according to some predetermined structure – gestalt, preunderstanding, mood, disposition, etc.

From a semiotic perspective, when we listen to someone else's speech, we only perceive sounds – soft, barking, hissing, etc. Understanding begins when we break the sound chain thanks to acoustic images, such as concepts or signifieds. Only then do articulated units, carriers of meaning, appear.

To the extent that the historical process is subject to semiotic interpretation, the syntagm “sound of silence” is, in my opinion, relevant to the time before the appearance of the “black legend”. As U. Eco notes, anything can acquire a sign value if it is interpreted. This is exactly what happens after the notorious theatrical production, which led to complex communicative interactions between representatives of different social subsystems. In other words, the semiotic chain of the historical process is structured and fragmented as a result of the interpretations, articulating in different ways the passive policy of the Vatican during the Second World War.

For clarification, I will refer to one of the stories of I. Calvino. It is possible to look at the communicative process in a mirror way (enantiomorphically in the semiotic theory of Y. Lotman and B. Ouspensky). Then the carriers of meaning will be the pauses between individual speech acts, and the latter will play the role of punctuation marks. The mixing of written and spoken language is intentionally allowed by the author, who is also a professor of semiotics.

I note these moments, since the significance of scientific creativity is expressed not only in the answers given, but also in the questions raised. This is exactly the case with the monograph of Assoc. Prof. Kartalov, who, in his own words, tries to “give voice” to the silent testimonies of a bygone time, the significance of which has not passed, but continues to excite humanity given the many collisions from which it has not yet managed to escape.

Since Assoc. Prof. Kartalov’s text is also constructed as a historical novel with its protagonists and antagonists, intrigues, tensions and denouements, I can say that in its design it reminds me of the poetic concept of R.-M. Rilke, who tries to give “a voice to dead objects”. This is a problem that became relevant after the collapse of the structuralist paradigm, which was replaced by postmodernist philosophy with its criticism of grand narratives, accompanied by the search for linguistic possibilities for expressing individuality.

This is a new type of nominalism, different from the medieval one, insofar as it aims not only at liberation from metaphysical substantialism, but also at the rehabilitation of the singular, whose uniqueness is erased from linguistic structures. As Hegel notes, “language contains only the general.”

It is from this perspective that Assoc. Prof. Kartalov’s work deserves admiration, as it provides an opportunity for past events and erased human destinies to speak with their authentic voices. In this sense, his monograph invites the reader to listen to the echoes produced by various scientific and other discourses on the Vatican’s position on the Jewish

question. Thus, it contributes to the articulation of messages that are valid for the contemporary world, and not just for a bygone era.

In order to perceive the voice of the past through “hearing”, which understand, it is not enough to simply free ourselves from listening. Here there is a semiotic problem that I will only allow myself to highlight. F. Saussure treated written language with great disdain, preferring spoken language. J. Derrida objected to this thesis, seeking the rehabilitation of written language.

From this perspective, the metaphor “sound of silence” seems to me to be fully justified, since it articulates both the effects of silence and the giving of a “voice” to historical testimonies of the past, which must be heard by later generations. If man is a linguistic being, then silence is his ontological limit. From this perspective, giving a voice to those who have disappeared without a trace is not only a scientific but also a moral-philosophical problem, insofar as it concerns both those capable of speech and those from whom this right has been gratuitously taken away.

III. CONCLUSION

Based on the materials provided, I can confidently state that Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kiril Plamen Kartalov possesses all the necessary scientific qualities and achievements for his appointment to the academic position of "professor" at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. His scientific achievements are distinguished by an extremely rich general and theoretical culture. He skillfully combines the study of authentic documents from the Vatican archives with their analysis in an extremely complex and colorful historical and socio-political context. His text is distinguished by both a clear and concise style and good structure. The ease with which it is read does not detract from its scientific character. Therefore, it would be of interest not only to narrow specialists, but also to a wide readership.

Considering the volume and heuristic nature of the scientific activity of Assoc. Prof. Dr. K. Kartalov, I believe that it fully meets the requirements of the ZRASRB. Therefore, I vote with conviction "for" his appointment to the academic position of "professor" in the "Anthropological Studies" section at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

12.11.2025

Sofia

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