

**SU "St. Kliment Ohridski"**  
**Faculty of Theology**

**R E C E N S I O N**

**of a dissertation for the acquisition of  
scientific and educational degree PhD**

*Author of the dissertation :* **Dimitar Bozhidarov Bogdanov**  
*Dissertation topic:* **“METAPHYSICS OF LIGHT IN THE AREOPAGITE  
CORPUS ”**

*Scientific supervisor :* Prof. Dr. Ivan Hristov  
*Reviewer :* **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kostadin Kirilov Nushev**

**1. General description of the dissertation work**

The dissertation work of Dimitar Bogdanov submitted for review and public defense comprises a volume of 329 standard typewritten pages, of which 310 pages contain the main body of the text, and the remaining pages present a detailed bibliography with sources and critical studies that are directly related to the presented study. The scientific research on the topic of the dissertation was conducted at the Department of Systematic *Theology* at the Faculty of Theology of Sofia University within the framework of doctoral studies in the scientific specialty of *Christian Philosophy* under the scientific supervision of Prof. Ivan Hristov .

The dissertation is dedicated to an important and topical problem, which is of importance both for theological science, and in particular for Christian philosophy, and for modern systematic research related to the issues of Christian ethics and the doctrine of man, Dogmatic theology and theology, moral asceticism and mystical theology in the East and the West, insofar as the Areopagite Corpus is incorporated into church doctrine and determines the course of development of theological and philosophical thought throughout the centuries. This is true both for Byzantine theology and the hesychast tradition of Orthodoxy, and for Western scholasticism and mysticism in the Middle Ages.

**2. Relevance of the scientific issue, goal and objectives of the study**

The topicality of the research problem of the metaphysics of light in the Areopagite corpus of classical theological treatises is discussed in detail and in detail in the introduction and methodological approaches to the topic of the dissertation research. In the subject-problem area of research, the central object of the metaphysics of light is placed in the context of the interrelations between the philosophy of Neoplatonism and the Christian doctrine of God in the Orthodox patristic and theological tradition of the Church. The topicality and timeliness of the doctoral thesis is also determined by the fact that this church-theological question is extremely important in the context of the neo-patristic renewal of Orthodox theology and the understanding of the depth of the church liturgical tradition in the light of modern science. Dimitar Bogdanov's research is situated in the context of contemporary philosophical and theological scientific literature, which, both in our country and internationally, is connected with new translations, critical editions and reception of the Areopagite Corpus and fruitful new research towards understanding this rich cultural and ideological heritage. It is specifically about the deep religious foundations of the metaphysics of light in the theological Christian synthesis of the Areopagite Corpus, about the interpenetration of the philosophical conceptual system and the spiritual content of Divine revelation and about the various theological aspects of the doctrine of God and the hierarchical order of creation, as well as about the path of divine knowledge , contemplation and mystical ascent in communion with God in the light of grace. The dissertation systematically discusses and examines many of these universal theological

questions of faith and knowledge of God, contemplation of God, and mystical union with God, which have both important biblical and Christian New Testament sources and foundations, as well as deep philosophical-metaphysical foundations and an applied-practical dimension and significance for church life.

### **3. Structure and plan of the dissertation research**

In terms of structure and composition, the dissertation is made up of an introduction, three main chapters and a conclusion. This distribution corresponds to the chosen subject and object of the study and is consistent with the methodology of the study. The theological-systematic approach to the main problematic aspects of the topic corresponds to the subject of the study and presents in a systematic order the interconnected elements in the unified whole of the philosophical system of the Areopagite Corpus. It logically determines both the structure of the exposition and distribution of the content and the sequential consideration of the more important theoretical and philosophical questions about light and its place in Christian metaphysics, which have biblical-historical sources, theological foundations, church-historical and applied character.

In *the introduction* (pp. 7-44) of the dissertation research, the author presents his argumentative opinion and assessment of the relevance of the researched issues and outlines his view of its complex and interdisciplinary nature. This also motivates the choice of the specific theological, philosophical-historical and systematic methodological approach to the topic. The study of the main complex of theological aspects is situated within the framework of theological and philosophical methodology for systematic analysis and is placed in the context of the more important systematic studies on the topic in the field of contemporary Orthodox theology and history of medieval philosophy. In the process of his work, the dissertation candidate has clearly outlined the subject, goal, tasks and scope of his research, adhering strictly to his scientific-critical and systematic research, based on a good knowledge of the sources and relevant critical studies. As the main research goal of his dissertation, Dimitar Bogdanov sets himself the ambitious task of revealing the deep ideological and spiritual connections between the Orthodox church-theological tradition of theology, on the one hand, and the metaphysics of light as a central theme for Areopagite theology in the process of Christianizing the philosophical language of the Neoplatonic thought tradition. On the other hand, as the main goal of the presented dissertation research, the request for a critical study and presentation of the process of transformation of the language of the metaphysics of Neoplatonism and theological searches on the topic of Divine Light in the history of Christian philosophy and Orthodox Byzantine theology is set. In view of the implementation of these research goals, the main tasks and methodological framework of the dissertation work have been formulated. Through the application of a complex methodological research program, the richness and diversity of the philosophical and theological study of the difficult questions of theology and the presence of the doctrine of light in the theology of the Orthodox East and the mystical tradition of Hesychasm are presented.

*The first chapter* (pp. 45-119) of the dissertation is devoted to a theological-historical study of the origin and development of the metaphysics of Neoplatonism and the basic concepts and principles of this thought tradition. The theological analysis in this first part of the dissertation study focuses on the main philosophical and religious primary sources, the most important philosophical theories, views and concepts that are relevant to the conceptual development of the idea of divine light from antiquity to the emergence of the Christian patristic era. The analysis of the researched problematic of the metaphysics of Neoplatonism is carried out in depth and in a wide thematic scope, examining various elements of the doctrine of the One, light, emanation, trinity in ontological and metaphysical terms in the concepts of Neoplatonism and the prerequisites for the formation of the metaphysical model of the early Christian patristic tradition. The diverse biblical, theological and philosophical-anthropological

issues in this first chapter of the dissertation are interpreted according to the main guidelines of the Christian church tradition and the chosen The outlined parameters of the initial scientific hypothesis about the deep spiritual connections of the concept of light with the Orthodox Christian tradition are argued through the conclusions drawn from the critical analysis of the metaphysical language of Neoplatonism and are logically consistent with the main conceptual framework and goal of the study.

*The second chapter* of the dissertation is dedicated in particular to the Christian philosophical and theological concept of light. Here, in a more systematic order, the questions of the universal dimensions of the Divine light and the relationship between the created and the uncreated are examined through the prism of the philosophy of patristic Christian thought, and an attempt is made to study in more detail the relationship between God and created being, the divine and the human, the transcendent and the immanent in the Christian philosophical and theological church tradition. A classification of the basic concepts of church doctrine is presented and the significance of the doctrine of light as a general theoretical discourse and unifying language in the field of philosophy and theology is examined. The analysis of the sources of the doctrine of light is also deepened - religious and metaphysical ideas, on the one hand, and philosophy with the theory of knowledge and contemplation of the Divine invisible and intangible world.

*The third chapter* of the dissertation is dedicated to the more important church aspects of Mystical Theology, to the traditions in Orthodoxy and current theological aspects in the field of the Orthodox Church tradition and contemporary theology. Here, the main biblical-theological, anthropological and ethical arguments for building the systematic Christian doctrine of the celebration, contemplation and union with God in the Orthodox Hesychast tradition and church-theological thought are examined in a systematic order. In this chapter, we also find a more detailed outline of the main and current problems and aspects of the doctrine of the illuminative divine light and the gracious path of human enlightenment, as they are interpreted in particular in contemporary Orthodox theological thought in view of the contemporary challenges of the knowledge of God, the epistemological and ontological problems of theology and philosophy.

In the conclusion to the dissertation work, the most important results of the research are formulated and deduced and one of the main theses of the scientific work is argued. This thesis is expressed in the author's assertion and conviction, advocated in the dissertation work, that the concept of light has a Christian content and divinely revealed origin, expressed in a philosophical language that is transformed and spiritualized in a creative way in the spirit of mystical theology and the grace-filled life of the Church. This thesis is central to the teaching of the synergy between man and God on the path of salvation, the mystical path of grace-filled ascension and union with God in the love and richness of the theology of St. Maximus the Confessor and the teachers of Hesychasm.

#### **4. Scientific conclusions and contributions of the dissertation work**

In general, the dissertation research moves within the framework of the scientific and research approach of Christian philosophy, and the analysis of the main metaphysical issues is sustained within the framework of the academic style and scientific standards for theological and critical scientific research. It should be noted that the candidate proceeds to the study and critical examination of the main subject of his dissertation research after a thorough and careful analysis of a large volume of patristic sources, critical editions and specialized theological and philosophical literature available in our country on the subject. Already in the introduction and in the body of the text of the dissertation work, a detailed bibliographical and systematic overview of the more important and relevant to the topic of the dissertation, primary religious, general philosophical, theological and other critical literature on the studied metaphysical issues, both in Bulgarian science and within the broad horizon of contemporary scientific and

humanitarian literature in the field of Christian philosophy, is presented. In the course of the dissertation study on the main problematic of the metaphysical concept of light, an original methodological program for research work has been applied, based on a source analysis of church monuments and authoritative patristic testimonies, skillfully handling the text-critical editions of the Areopagite corpus and knowledge of modern translations and interpretations of the main concepts from the field of Neoplatonism and Christian theology. The theological interpretation and critical analysis of the problematic of light in the metaphysics of the Areopagites moves within the framework of the canonical reception and tradition of the Church and the systematization of historical testimonies from the field of philosophy and Christian ethics.

In his research, Dimitar Bogdanov has approached seriously and thoroughly the main issue of critical insight and study of the language of the Areopagite corpus in search of the fruitful process of Christianization and transformation of the philosophical language with a view to the task of becoming a carrier and container of the super-rational truths of faith and Divine revelation. He demonstrates a conscientious, competent and critical attitude to the existing research on the topic in Bulgarian theological science and in the field of philosophy. The main conclusions of the dissertation research are built on the basis of a good knowledge of the previous scientific, critical and theological research on the topic in the field of Orthodox theology and Christian philosophy, which are used by the author critically in order to argue his main thesis within the framework of his chosen research approach to the theological problem of the metaphysics of light.

In conclusion, the contributions of the dissertation work, which are also indicated in the abstract, should be noted and highlighted. The undisputed contributions of the dissertation work can be grouped into several main areas.

1. A thorough and critical theological reading of the basic principles of the doctrine of God and God's creation is presented through the metaphysics of light as a connecting link between the created and the uncreated, the principles of the universal unity of God and creation through communion in the divine light and the natural moral order of the hierarchy of creation, the relationship between theology, cosmology and anthropology and the reflection of the outlined metaphysical model on ethics, asceticism and mysticism in Orthodoxy and Western Christian thought.
2. Through the biblical, patristic and contemporary theological-systematic arguments presented, the connection between the philosophical metaphysical concept of light and the spiritual and mystical tradition of Christianity is highlighted and guidelines are outlined for overcoming the formal interpretation of the Areopagite Corpus based on linguistic similarities with Neoplatonism solely as linguistically Christianized Neoplatonism.
3. Specific conclusions and inferences have been formulated with a view to important and fundamental directions in contemporary Orthodox theological thought with a view to epistemology, ontology, mystical theology, and the spiritual and moral content of the path of asceticism and contemplation of the Divine light, which are relevant to contemporary metaphysical and philosophical searches in a number of humanitarian studies of the Areopagite corpus.

The abstract of the dissertation has been prepared in accordance with the requirements and reflects in detail, correctly and accurately the main theses, content and structure of the research, indicating the main contributions of the dissertation. There is also the required number of scientific publications in relation to the topic of the dissertation, which testify to specific results and research successes achieved in the course of the work carried out within the framework of the doctoral studies. The research fits fully into the context of contemporary theological and philosophical works on issues of Christian philosophy. Based on the indicated

merits and specific results of the research, I assess the presented dissertation work as meeting the requirements for a doctoral dissertation and I strongly recommend that the scientific jury award Dimitar Bogdanov the educational and scientific degree of "doctor".

04/06/2025

Assoc. Dr. Kostadin Nushev.....