

## OPINION

On the dissertation of Dimitar Bozhidarov Bogdanov titled:

***“The Metaphysics of Light in the Corpus Aeropagiticum”***

For the granting of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the professional field

2.4. Religion and theology

Scientific specialization *Christian Philosophy*

Presented by Prof. Dr. Dimo Krastev Penkov member of the scientific jury,

Appointed by order of the Rector of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

№ RD 38 – 19/ 13.01.2025 r.

### **Brief Information on the Doctoral Candidate and the Procedure**

Dimitar Bozhidarov Bogdanov was born on February 10, 1976. He earned his Master’s degree in Economics from the D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics in Svishtov in 2002. In 2017, he obtained a Master’s degree in Philosophy from the Faculty of Philosophy of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski,” followed by a Master’s in Theology in 2018 from the Faculty of Theology at the same university. In 2019, he acquired a postgraduate qualification as a “Teacher of Religion” from the same faculty. He was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student at the Department of Systematic Theology by order of the Rector of Sofia University № RD 20-240/29.01.2020. He was discharged with the right to defend by order № RD 20-556/12.03.2024.

The present defense procedure was initiated based on a proposal from the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Theology (Protocol № 5 dated 19.12.2024) and by order of the Rector № RD 38 – 19/13.01.2025. At its inaugural session on 23.01.2025, the scientific jury confirmed that the procedure was organized in full compliance with legal requirements. Prof. Dr. Dimo Penkov was elected Chair. The jury unanimously appointed Prof. Dr. Valentin Kanavrov (SWU) and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kostadin Nushev (SU) as reviewers, and assigned opinions to be prepared by Prof. Dr. Nina Dimitrova (BAS), Prof. Dr. Dimo Penkov (SU), and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyan Chilikov (PU). The deadline for submitting reviews and opinions was set for 10.04.2025, and the date for the public defense – 25.04.2025. All procedural deadlines were duly met.

## **Thematic Scope and Structure of the Dissertation**

The dissertation submitted for defense, titled “The Metaphysics of Light in the Corpus Aeropagiticum,” explores a thematically significant and conceptually rich area, which has not been thoroughly researched in Bulgaria to such an extent. For over fifteen centuries, the writings comprising the Corpus Aeropagiticum have served as foundational sources for Christian theology, philosophy, and church art. These theological works show clear traces of pagan Neoplatonic influence, yet the Neoplatonic concepts are undoubtedly transformed through a Christian lens.

The dissertation comprises 329 pages. It includes a preface, list of abbreviations, introduction, three chapters, conclusion, and bibliography (primary sources, commentaries, and reference works), listing 162 titles. It features a robust scholarly apparatus, including 1088 footnotes.

In the Preface (p. 4), the author justifies his choice of topic. The Introduction (pp. 9–19) outlines the object, methods, goals, and tasks of the research. A central goal is to examine the synthesis between the Christian worldview and Neoplatonic metaphysics in the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. It is correctly noted that Pseudo-Dionysius adopts some Neoplatonic terminology without necessarily embracing its conceptual framework. In other words, this refers to a creative reception of certain Neoplatonic propositions in the spirit of Christian doctrine and the theological tradition of the Church. The subject of the dissertation research is very clearly defined: “light in its metaphysical, spiritual, and cognitive aspect” (p. 13). Also indicated are the working hypothesis, which reveals the main ideas of the dissertation, as well as the scholarly methodology through which the objectives and goals of the research will be achieved.

In the introduction, Dimitar Bogdanov substantiates and defends the relevance of the topic (p. 8), outlines the current state of research on the issue, and identifies the foundational studies that form the basis of his analysis (pp. 20–31). The structure of the research is logically argued and generally follows the methodology accepted in our theological scholarship. It is entirely appropriate that this introductory section also includes general information about Pseudo-Dionysius and the Corpus Aeropagiticum (pp. 31–44).

In the first chapter (pp. 45–119), the doctoral candidate examines the Neoplatonic philosophical language and terminology that have been partially adopted in the theology of light within the Corpus Aeropagiticum. The focus is placed on the metaphysical triad “abiding –

procession – return,” through which its transformation is achieved—from a pagan philosophical framework into a Christian theology of light.

In the second chapter (pp. 120–239), which is also the most extensive, the Christian theology of light in the *Corpus Aeropagiticum* is analyzed. The metaphysical structure of the Neoplatonic doctrine of light is revealed, along with its reinterpretation within a spiritual context—specifically in the presentation of the uncreated light as Divine energy. A detailed analysis is provided of the theology of light in relation to the first two terms of the metaphysical triad: “abiding” and “procession.” Here, the doctoral candidate seeks to ground and prove his hypothesis regarding the “de-substantialization” by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite with respect to these terms.

The final third chapter (pp. 240–310) is entirely focused on the mystical aspect of the doctrine of light in the ascent toward God—that is, here the doctoral candidate examines the third term of the metaphysical triad: “return.” In this chapter, D. Bogdanov outlines the supra-rational aspects and their place within mystical theology, particularly in the context of ascending beyond all speech in the mystical experience.

Each chapter is followed by corresponding conclusions. It should be emphasized that in the second and third chapters, the doctoral candidate clearly states that in Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, the symbolism and metaphysics of light are significantly more complex than the Neoplatonic concept and are interpreted entirely in the spirit of Church tradition and experience. The Conclusion (pp. 311–314) provides a comprehensive and clearly structured summary of the research findings.

The doctoral candidate’s ability to work with specialized theological and philosophical terminology is particularly impressive and deserves admiration and high praise. Overall, the dissertation presented by Dimitar Bogdanov is distinguished by its refined and precise language, with clear formulations in both conceptual and theoretical terms.

### **Structure and Content of the Abstract**

The abstract, comprising 38 pages, adequately and accurately reflects the most essential features of the dissertation. Its structure and manner of presentation demonstrate Dimitar Bogdanov’s ability to summarize the core aspects of his research and to highlight the main contributions of the dissertation in three key points.

His self-assessment of the scientific contributions is entirely accurate and faithfully reflects the high-quality results he has achieved.

The doctoral candidate has also submitted four publications on the topic of the dissertation, in accordance with the requirements. All of them have been published in reputable academic journals and reflect Dimitar Bogdanov's sustained interest in the subject of his research.

### **Final Assessment**

Overall, the dissertation reflects the sustained scholarly interests and pursuits of doctoral candidate Dimitar Bozhidarov Bogdanov, who has invested considerable effort and energy into its development. The work possesses notable academic merit and fully meets the scientific criteria and standards for an independent and completed research study.

The dissertation includes the legally required declaration of originality and authenticity of the text. For my part, I declare that I have found no evidence of plagiarism, that I have no joint publications with the doctoral candidate, and that I do not fall under the "conflict of interest" clause. The accompanying documentation is complete and in accordance with the legal and regulatory requirements governing the current defense procedure.

Considering the valuable scientific contributions of the dissertation and the relevance of the issues addressed, I firmly recommend to the esteemed members of the scientific jury that the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" be granted upon Dimitar Bozhidarov Bogdanov. For the current procedure, I declare that I will vote "YES."

31.03.2025 г.

Sofia

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(Prof. Dr. D. Penkov)