

STATEMENT

by **prof. ScD Vera Boneva** – University of Library Studies and Information Technologies

on the occasion of the

Dissertation on the topic “Trullo (Fifth-Sixth) Ecumenical Council (691-692): Historical and Canonical Study” by **Svetoslav Tsekov**, presented as defense and obtaining the scientific degree of "Doctor" in the professional field 2.4. Religion and theology, doctoral program "Theology"

Information about the candidate and the procedure

Svetoslav Tsekov obtained secondary theological education and higher education in law. From 2019 to 2022, he was a doctoral student at General History of the Church at the Faculty of Theology of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" – Faculty of Theology. From the submitted documentation it appears that he completed his individual plan on time and successfully wrote his dissertation work under the supervision of prof. Alexander Omarcevski.

The text was presented in the Department of Historical Theology and is aimed for defense in a scientific jury. Three articles published in scientific proceedings are also presented to the scientific jury. After due verification, a protocol was created for the absence of plagiarism and other copyright delicts. The protocol is signed by the scientific supervisor. The information included in the documents provided to me gives me a reason to assume that all legal requirements for finalizing the procedure have been met.

As a member of the scientific jury, I received all the necessary documents regarding the dissertation and the education of the doctoral student. I have also been provided with the abstract, which diligently shows the main contributions of

the scientific research. I declare that I have no common publications or other forms of common professional activity with the candidate, which would be a prerequisite for a conflict of interest.

General data for the dissertation

The text of the dissertation is 278 pages long. The following main parts are distinguished: preface, introduction, three chapters, conclusion, bibliography, and appendices. The bibliography includes 179 sources - mostly printed materials - articles, studies, monographs, and books with canonical and historical documents. There are seven appendices - pictorial materials and two tables with systematized decisions of the Trullo Council. Citations are strict and correct.

The structure of the main narrative is convincing and balanced. The first chapter interprets the historical context of the topic. The second chapter contains a historical overview of the Trullo (Fifth-Sixth) Ecumenical Council. In the third chapter the doctoral student analyzes the rules of the Trullo Council from a canonical point of view. It contains the main author's contributions of the study.

The object, subject, and objectives of the work are formulated in a motivated way. The methodology is described briefly but clearly. The scientific methods inherent in two academic fields - history and theology - have been rightly chosen. Scientific studies and articles used in the dissertation are carefully described in the introduction. This part is slightly repetitive with the bibliography, but this does not interfere with the overall impression of a well-done scientific work.

Analysis of the main text

The main narrative begins with the creation of Byzantium and the division of the Roman Empire into Eastern and Western Roman Empires. The structure of secular power and its relation to ecclesiastical power are competently described. Special emphasis is placed on the history of ecumenical councils, held until the

7th century. The establishment of monotheism and the reforms of Justinian I have been assessed as key moments in the development of Byzantium during the early Middle Ages. A special paragraph is devoted to the meetings and decisions of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (Third Council of Constantinople), held from November 680 to September 681 in Constantinople under the direct supervision of Emperor Constantine IV. It has been rightly concluded that the heresy of Monothelitism was overthrown at this council. Its canons also contain part of the prerequisites for strengthening the governing principle of Caesaropapism.

The historical overview of the Trullo (Fifth-Sixth) Ecumenical Council begins with a detailed description of the reign of Emperor Justinian II. The circumstances surrounding the convening of the council, its conduct, the debates on individual issues, and final decisions are described in detail and in depth. Some of the important speeches are summarized. The ways of confirming the canons are outlined precisely. The more important participants bishops with a key role in formulating the decisions are mentioned. The thesis is defended that the council is ecumenical, that is, mandatory for the entire Christian community. Some circumstances related to the interactions between Rome and Constantinople on the canonical issues treated by the council have been reconstructed. It has been rightly pointed out that the council's canons gave a decisive impetus to the beginning process of division between the Eastern and Western churches, which would be finalized by the schism of 1054.

Before the main analysis of the council's decisions, a clarification is made about the difference between theological categories *dogma* and *canon*. The council's role in banning certain pre-Christian cultic practices is indicated. The status of the various groups and grades of clergy is more clearly defined. Basic issues of marriage and divorce are treated in detail. The issues surrounding fasting, and some Christian holidays have been resolved. Leading ecclesiastical

management rules have been approved, and the issue of the ecclesiastical-administrative division of dioceses has also been settled. The status of local churches is regulated. Church sacraments have been specified and explained. The preaching functions of the bishop are explained in terms of content, scope, and form. A norm was established for the inheritance of the property of a deceased bishop. The rules for the monastic dormitory are classified and presented in the context of the practices and norms existing in the Early Middle Ages. The canons concerning the conduct and activities of the lower clergy are also treated with due depth, references being made to certain authoritative ecclesiastical authors. The various norms concerning the behavior of the laity in their capacity as Christians are revealed by the author in a logical sequence and through references to some later legal practices and interpretations. The place and role of the temple in the community as a sacred space is fixed through another group of canons, which have their meaning even to this day. At the end of the main text, the council's canons are systematized according to several criteria, indicating which of them are present in the ritual practices of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

Assessment of contributions and critical notes

As a contribution, the choice of the topic for the Trullo Council, which has not yet been treated independently in a dissertation or monographic work in Bulgarian theological science, can be defined. The motivation of the ecumenical status of the forum with historical and canonical arguments is also an author's contribution. The systematization of the council's canons by thematic groups is an expression of an analytical approach and testimony to the author's ability to interpret in depth some of the fundamental questions of theology. It is also important to separate the norms that have faded over time from those that have not lost their canonical weight to this day.

My critical remarks relate mostly to the author's penchant for lengthy narration of known historical circumstances - especially in the first half of the text. The attached maps of Constantinople are not very good as visual material and have more of a promotional, rather than a scientific, character. Greater rigor is also needed in footnotes. A list of abbreviations used in the dissertation is missing.

Conclusion

The work presented by Svetoslav Tsekov covers all the basic requirements for a dissertation in the professional field "Religion and Theology". The text is carefully and competently written. The author demonstrates intellectual courage and analytical skills. I recommend, after removing some minor inaccuracies and repetitions, that the text be published as a monograph.

In view of the above, I vote in the affirmative for awarding the educational and scientific degree Doctor in the professional field Religion and Theology of Svetoslav Tsekov.

Sofia
January 4th, 2023

Prof. ScD Vera Boneva