

REVIEW

By Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariyan Stoyadinov,

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Mandatory information

Scientific field (field of higher education): Humanities

Professional direction: 2.4. Religion and theology

Scientific specialty: Christian philosophy

Educational institution: SU "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Theology,
Department of Systematic Theology

Title/topic of the dissertation: "Synergy in the anthropological teaching of St Maximus the Confessor"

Dissertation student: Petar Petkov Uzunov

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. Ivan Hristov

The doctoral dissertation proposed for review is devoted to an aspect of anthropology, resp. the Christology, of St Maximus the Confessor, which is of great importance for the formation of the Church teaching on the synergy between God and man in general.

1. Data on the doctorate, dissertation, abstract and publications

Petar Uzunov was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student in the Department of Systematic Theology of the Faculty of Theology of the SU in 2019. He was awarded the right of protection by the FS of Theol. Faculty in 2022. The procedure was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the law and by-laws.

The dissertation is 178 pages long and is structured in a preface, list of abbreviations, introduction, three chapters, conclusion and bibliography. The bibliography includes sources - the writings of St Maximus, included in various series, patristic editions in Bulgarian and Russian translation, reference editions,

dictionaries, studies in English, Bulgarian, Greek, Russian and French, divided into sections: in Cyrillic and in Latin.

Petar Uzunov basically knows the state of research from the last century. However, he does not know a number of texts by Bulgarian authors about synergy that would be useful to him (including my research on God's grace, S. Simeonov's research on perichoresis, etc.). Regarding the anthropology of St Maximus, it seems strange that a doctoral student approaching such a topic does not know Svilen Tutekov's studies on St. Maximus (The Eucharistic Approach to the Mystery of the Person in the Theology of St. Maximus the Confessor, A Look at the Theology of the Will at St. Maximus the Confessor, The Feat as an Existential Path of Communion (quinone dimensions of asceticism in the theological teaching of St. Maximus the Confessor, the Logosology of St. Maximus the Confessor and the synthesis of ontology and ethics). The brief mention that the latter has a published monograph (435 pages, by the way) regarding the aretology and anthropology of St Maximus, do not change the general impression. These omissions make me emphasize once again that before leafing through texts in foreign languages, our doctoral students must know the Bulgarian theological academic tradition very well.

Regarding the originality of the work, I have no reason to doubt it, nor have I identified incorrect borrowings.

The abstract (in a volume of 44 pages) summarizes the main parameters in the doctoral dissertation: topicality of the topic, purpose and tasks of the research (the latter are described randomly: first, second, first, second, third...), methodology, object and subject, and state of research. Applied and self-assessment of scientific contributions. The content of the abstract provides a summary of the merits of the main work.

The PhD student has three published texts that are relevant to the topic of the dissertation. Quantitatively and content-wise, they meet the requirements of the law and the regulations of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Linguistically, the text is not at the expected level. It needs serious stylistic editing as well as proofreading. Ignorance of the rule for the full article in the Bulgarian language, unfortunately, is not only a problem of this doctoral dissertation. It is unfortunate to have multiple paragraphs of one sentence. As far

as I got acquainted with the opinions of the colleagues who commented on the text in the department, the problems were noticed and the recommendations were made in time. Even at this stage, however, the result is not satisfactory. I would not recommend publishing the text as it is.

2. Scientific contributions

The PhD student formulated four scientific contributions.

As a first contribution, it is stated that "for the first time in our country" a complete specialized theological study of the ascetic teaching of St. Maximus in the context of his anthropology was carried out. I cannot accept such a contributing nature of the research, first of all, because the contributions should not be limited to "in our country". This may be a merit of the work in a local context, but not a substantive scholarly contribution. In addition, if the author knew Svilen Tutekov's monograph on the aretology and anthropology of St Maximus the Confessor (Virtue for the sake of truth, Veliko Tarnovo, Syntagma ed., 2009), he would have limited his contribution to a more specific research area.

As a second contribution, it is stated that "the stages of realization of the synergistic union leading to deification - active wisdom, natural contemplation, knowledge of God and communion with God - are examined, and in this connection concepts from the ascetic practice of St. Maximus are drawn." Of course, without this consideration, the dissertation would not be possible. It can hardly be assumed that Uzunov's text fills a void in the previous studies devoted to St. Maximus. A review cannot be a contribution. At the very least, because there is such a thing in Sergey Epifanovich (St Maximus the Confessor and Byzantine Theology, S., ed. "Omofor", 2008, ch. 26 - 28), and in Tutekov (see the second chapter of the above-mentioned monograph).

The third contribution highlighted by the doctoral student states that "in the field of the anthropology of St. Maximus, as a contribution moment of the study can be indicated the study of the unfolding of the human being through asceticism from the purely physical mode of existence through welfare to eternal being." Research is a process while contribution is an outcome. The research in this case is a contribution to the structure of the dissertation and so on.

The fourth contribution is formulated as "scientific-practical", since "elements of the dissertation are presented on the website of the Center for the Study of Patristic and Byzantine Spiritual Heritage and can serve students in connection with their studies". This is not a substantive scientific contribution. First, because the dissertation is not the teaching aid; it's a completely different genre. Second, because the possible defense of the doctoral thesis by definition precedes the publication of the text, incl. and in electronic version.

My impression of the self-assessment of scientific contributions is that the PhD student has difficulty formulating a scientific contribution. Methodological help from the collegium in the work process would definitely be useful to him.

If this review were limited to the evaluation of scientific contributions only, as is the standard at my university, my evaluation would be negative. In this case, however, I will give credit to the clear structure of the research, to the work that the doctoral student has put into synthesizing the data at his disposal, as well as to the fulfillment of the tasks he set himself at the beginning of his work.

Here is the place to mention that I am familiar with the recommendations that the members of the department made to Petar Uzunov and with which he partially complied. The findings of the colleagues are entirely positive, and in my capacity as a reviewer external to the training college, I cannot ignore their opinions. If, according to the teaching unit, the doctoral student has achieved the level for the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in theology of Sofia University, it would not be natural for other criteria to be leading.

3. Conclusion

Given the above, I declare that I will vote for the awarding of Petar Petkov Uzunov the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (in the scientific specialty "Christian Philosophy" in the professional direction "Religion and Theology").

Veliko Tarnovo, 30.08.2023

Reviewer:.....

(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariyan Stoyadinov)