

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

R E V I E W

from

Associate Professor Kostadin Kirilov Nushev, PhD

**For a dissertation to acquire the
educational and scientific degree "doctor" (2.4. Religion and theology)**

Author of the dissertation: Petar Petkov Uzunov

**Dissertation topic: "Synergy in the anthropological teaching of Venerable
Maxim the Confessor"**

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. Ivan Hristov

The dissertation work of Petar Uzunov submitted for review and public defense covers a volume of 178 standard typewritten pages, distributed within a preface, an introduction, three separate chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography. The scientific research on the topic of the dissertation was conducted in the Department of "Systematic Theology" at the Faculty of Theology of the SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" during his doctoral studies in Christian philosophy under the scientific supervision of Prof. Dr. Ivan Hristov.

1.

2. General description of the dissertation work

The dissertation is dedicated to an important and up-to-date scientific research problem from the field of Christian anthropology and Orthodox asceticism, which has immediate scientific and theological significance and an important applied dimension for Orthodox systematic theology. The relevance of the studied problem of synergy in the Christian anthropology of St. Maximus the Confessor, and the importance of his theological views for the Orthodox church tradition and modern theological science, is also determined by the fact that this theological question is relatively less studied in our specialized theology and religious-philosophical scientific literature, and in recent decades it has provoked the attention of many scholars and researchers from various theological and other scientific specialties.

Structurally and compositionally, the dissertation is built according to a classic model of an introduction, three main chapters that offer a systematic approach to the topic, a conclusion and a bibliography with the necessary indexes and abbreviations of primary literature and the patristic sources and relevant sources used. This distribution of content in the presented dissertation corresponds to the chosen scientific and methodological approach to the topic, to the goals and tasks of theological-systematic survey, critical analysis and logical arrangement of the main problematic aspects of the topic as it corresponds to the subject and object of the research. The systematic look at the theology of St. Maximus the Confessor and the chosen problematic field of study, from the point of view of the Orthodox Christian tradition of the Church, is deployed within a well-constructed conceptual model for the study of the main aspects of the problem of synergy in the theological anthropology of the holy father .

2. Actuality of the scientific issues, subject, purpose, tasks and methodology of the research

In the introduction to the dissertation work (pp. 6-17), the dissertation student presents his concept and methodology and provides an argumentative justification for the choice of the subject and the object of his research. The set goals and tasks of the dissertation imply a deep insight into the main corpus of patristic writings and theological creations of St. Maximus the Confessor and the application of a complex theological, philosophical, cultural-historical and anthropological analysis of the issue of synergy in the anthropological teaching of the holy confessor in the context of his Orthodox Christology and the teaching about the ascetic life of Christians in the blessed path of salvation in the Church. This problem setting of the research, the subject-object area, together with the goals and tasks of the research, motivate and determine the choice of the specific theological tools and a complex methodological approach to the problem.

In the presented doctoral research on the synergy in the theological anthropology of St. Maximus the Confessor, a Christian philosophical approach to the subject is combined with historical-critical and theological-systematic methods of research and analysis of the main theological questions of faith and the doctrinal system of Orthodoxy with an emphasis on the ontological model in the teaching of the holy father, the themes of the creation of man in God's image, the fall and redemption, the Christological foundations of the teaching about man and the gracious renewal of his life on the path of God-likeness and salvation.

The scientific nature and volume of the used primary and critical literature corresponds to the specifics of the investigated issues, corresponds directly to the subject and the object of research in the dissertation work and testifies to the bibliographic awareness and preparation of the dissertation student for independent and critical scientific research on the topic.

3. Structure and plan of the dissertation research

The first chapter of the dissertation work (pp. 18-33) is devoted to the problem of forming the theological system of St. Maximus the Confessor in the context of the Christological controversies and tracking the role and importance of the main authorities for the construction of his theological thought. Attention is given here to the role of Cappadocian theology and the Areopagite corpus in shaping the Diophysite and Diothelite Christology of the holy father and outlining the contours of his teaching on man. At the center of the theological analysis in this first part of the dissertation study are the main questions about the spiritual tradition of the Church and the leading ideological directions of theological thought in forming the patristic teaching and anthropological views of the holy father. The analysis of the researched issues was carried out thoroughly, correctly and in a wide thematic scope, considering the various sides and aspects of the fight against monolithism and the formation of the Orthodox Christological teaching in the ideological framework and established religious-philosophical model of the teaching of the Church.

The second chapter of the dissertation work (pp. 34-102) is devoted to the issue of "God's providence and the freedom of creation" (pp. 74-124) and it examines the main theological ideas and concepts of St. Maximus Confessor, the rich ideological basis and wide-ranging theological system of the holy father, within which his in-depth and comprehensive theological anthropology is built. This chapter analyzes the main complex of questions related to the topic and the subject of the study, which are examined through the prism of the Christian teaching about the Divine Logos and the logos of the created being, the main categories of the anthropological and theological teaching of St. Maximus the Confessor, the role and place of the dynamic relationship between God's image and God's likeness in the doctrine of human personality, the duality of human being and the relationship between nature and hypostasis in the Orthodox doctrine of human personality.

The problems of man's destiny and God-likeness, the human will and the fall, death and the mystery of the Incarnation, the connection and union of the Divine and human nature in Christ's divine-human hypostasis, the union of the two wills and the dialectic between the created and the uncreated are also examined here. in the process of reuniting man with God. These questions are important in order to clarify the issue of the synergy between the human will and God's uncreated energy and to clarify the doctrine of salvation and the transformation of man in Christ's grace. and union with the uncreated energy of the Godhead in the path of salvation.

The third chapter of the dissertation (pp. 103-164) presents the content of the doctrine of synergy in the theology of St. Maximus the Confessor in the context of his Christological and anthropological teachings. In particular, here the main object of the study is presented with focus and emphasis on the theological-dogmatic reflection of the holy father on the knowledge of God, the way of life of the Christian in the grace of Christ, spiritual asceticism and contemplation and union with the uncreated Divine grace. All these questions are considered in the spirit of the doctrine of synergy Orthodoxy, according to the basic truths of the Christian confession of the Church in the field of Orthodox theology and the Christological teaching of the Ecumenical Councils. Theological issues are examined in the context and basic conceptual framework of Christian anthropology The theological problems are examined in the context and basic conceptual framework of Christian anthropology and in the context of the ascetic tradition of the Church and the Orthodox hesychastic teaching about man. The investigated issues are situated in this chapter in a clear systematic order within the established ideological boundaries and spiritual quests of Eastern Greek patristics and Byzantine theology - the Cappadocian doctrine of the knowledge of God and the Areopagite system, the ascetic experience of the Universal Church and Byzantine Hesychast theology, whose key authority and most an important spiritual center is precisely the theology of St. Maximus the Confessor.

In *the conclusion* to the dissertation, the most important results of the research are formulated and presented and the main thesis of the scientific development is argued. The main conclusions of the dissertation study are built on the basis of a good knowledge of the previous scientific and theological studies on the topic in the field of Orthodox theology, patristic studies and Christian philosophy, which have been used in sufficient volume and critically by applying one's own research approach to the researched problem.

4. Scientific conclusions and contributing points of 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 problematic is sustained within the framework of the academic style and according to the scientific standards of theological and scientific-critical research. The content is arranged logically through the main theological and philosophical rubrics of the church doctrine in search of the internal logical connection and systematic integrity of the Christian patristic anthropology of the image of God and delineating the contours of the synergy between man and God in the gracious path of his union in Christ's grace and the incorporation into the Divine life in the uncreated divine energy through the action of the Holy Spirit.

The doctoral research is structured within the established format for theological-systematic and scientific-critical research with the relevant parts and the necessary attributes of a critical study that meets the requirements for a scientifically developed doctoral thesis.

In the course of the dissertation study, a complex methodological program for research work was implemented, based on primary sources and modern scientific and critical research on the topic. The theological interpretation and critical analysis of these main statements from the theology of St. Maximus the Confessor are presented correctly and with a marked philosophical sense of the depth and scope of his theological thought. The author

demonstrates good knowledge and a conscientious, competent and critical attitude to existing scientific concepts and research on the subject in Bulgarian theological science and foreign language literature. In the conclusion, the most important conclusions from the attempt made to systematically study this difficult and difficult to investigate problematic in the theological thought of St. Maximus the Confessor, which is of decisive importance for the development of Byzantine theology and Orthodox Hesychast spirituality of the Christian East, are indicated.

4. Final assessment and proposal to the scientific jury

1. The review and careful reading of the presented dissertation gives the impression of a well-systematized theological study, which was conducted within a well-thought-out plan and by means of relevant methodology and research tools for theological-philosophical study of the subject, the object and the main components of the subject. The study moves in the methodological and research field of Christian philosophy, but also includes many elements and approaches from the field of moral theology, Christian anthropology and ascetic teaching of the Church. A sufficient volume of source and scientific critical literature on the topic of the dissertation work was used and the necessary scientific conclusions were drawn.

2. There are the necessary publications related to the topic of the doctoral research and self-evaluation of the scientific contributions in the abstract to the submitted dissertation work. The abstract of the dissertation correctly reflects the main theses, presents the content and structure of the research in detail, indicating the main contributions of the dissertation.

There is a sufficient number of scientific publications related to the topic of the dissertation, as well as concrete results in the course of developing individual components of the content within the framework of the doctoral studies.

3. The dissertation research as a whole corresponds to the formulated topic and research problem, it has successfully fulfilled the set research goals and tasks, and the main conclusions and results support and argue the author's theses. Based on the stated merits and specific results of the research, I positively evaluate the presented dissertation work as meeting the requirements of the Law and the rules as a successfully developed doctoral dissertation and I recommend to the scientific jury to award Petar Uzunov the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in a professional direction: 2.4. Religion and theology.

12.10.2023

Assoc. Prof. Dr. K. Nushev