

OPINION
FOR THE DISSERTATION THESIS OF PETAR UZUNOV
"THE SYNERGY IN THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY
OF REVEREND MAXIM THE CONFESSOR"
FOR THE AWARD OF THE EDUCATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC DEGREE
"DOCTOR" IN PROFESSIONAL FIELD 2.4. RELIGION
AND THEOLOGY (Christian philosophy)

by Prof. Nina Dimitrova, DSc., Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Petar Uzunov has a master's degree in theology (1995) and in philosophy (1999), from 2018 to 2022 he is a full-time doctoral student in the Department of Systematic Theology at the Faculty of Theology of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The documents for the procedure for the defense of his dissertation work are complete. Three publications have been deposited on the subject of this work. Information is provided on participation in a scientific project, as well as on electronic publications in the thesaurus of theology of Rev. Maximus the Confessor (25 articles on theological terms).

I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury under the current procedure by order of the Rector of Sofia University No. RD 38-336 dated 07.07.2023.

The proposed dissertation, dedicated to the ideas of St. Maximus on the synergy between God and man in the work of salvation, has a total volume of 178 pages. It contains a short preface (which does not appear in the content of the abstract), a list of abbreviations, an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and a list of the literature used and cited, listing titles from the following headings: sources, patristic editions, reference editions, dictionaries and studies.

The structure, sufficiently detailed, corresponds to the internal logic of the study. The introduction contains the author's motivation for dealing with the chosen topic, discussing its importance, as well as the fact that, despite the important place that asceticism occupies in the teachings of St. Maximus the Confessor, it has not been the subject of independent research.

In the introduction, the purpose of the dissertation work is formulated – a study of the synergistic union between God and man according to the anthropology of St. Maximus, feasible through the solution of specific tasks. The set of planned methods has been announced – historical-analytical and systematic, as well as comparative analysis; the object and subject of the research are indicated, as well as the state of world science on the work of St. Maximus, with an emphasis on the Bulgarian contribution in this regard.

The first chapter – "The Context of the Sources" includes a life description of St. Maximus in the context of the era – the *difficult* time for Byzantium of the Monothelite controversy, as well as a brief outline of the ideas of the main representatives of Cappadocian theology. With the apophatic theology of Dionysius the Areopagite, who had an important influence on the thinking of St. Maximus, this first part of the dissertation ends.

The second chapter, called "God's Providence and the Freedom of Creation", begins with the paragraph "The Divine Logos and the Logos of the Existent", very important for the overall impression of the study, insofar as it is the teaching of the Logoi in the Byzantine theologian that is confirmed as his contribution to Christian ontology. His understanding of the energies-logoi through which the action of God in the world as Creator is realized is also explained in detail.

Furthermore, in this part of the study, important anthropological theses are commented on – about man as an image of the eternal Word, as a kind of ontological center of the existing; about the relationship between soul and body according to the views of St. Maximus and an emphasis on his vision of the godlikeness of the entire composition of human nature – bodily and soulful; for the relationship between nature and hypostasis (respectively for the uniqueness of the composite hypostasis in Christ).

A good impression is left by the analysis of the differences between natural and gnostic will according to Maximus the Confessor, the special attention to the gnostic will, insofar as it is the one that determines the behavior of man after the Fall. A separate paragraph is devoted to the Fall and its consequences in the plan of anthropology, followed by one on death (considered by St. Maximus in an ontological and soteriological aspect), on the mystery of the Incarnation.

The concepts of monothelism and monoenergism and their philosophical justification are discussed.

The third chapter – "Synergy" is conceived as the most important in the work, therefore it begins with a preliminary explanation of the concept of *tropos* (important in order to understand the essence of synergy), respectively with the distinction *logos – tropos* in the teachings of St. Maximus. The following is an exposition of the doctrine of uncreated energies as the core of Eastern Orthodox spirituality, and in this respect the doctoral student is benefited from the available Bulgarian studies on the subject, the work of authoritative scientists from the faculty.

Petar Uzunov presents the difference between the Western and Eastern understanding of the knowledge of God, emphasizes the Eastern understanding of theology as both thinking about God and communion with God, comments on the influence of Dionysius on St. Maximus, draws a parallel between Neoplatonist and Christian philosophy/anthropology, shows how, at the level of apophatic theology, gnosis and faith are one. Special attention is paid to the ideas of St. Maximus about the ultimate goal of human existence as the realization of the Divine plan in relation to both man and creation as a whole. Further, the degrees of the ascetic life according to St. Maximus are analyzed, as well as many other important topics for the anthropology of the Byzantine theologian, with a special emphasis on asceticism as the authentic way of life of the Christian. Finally, the teaching of St. Maximus on theosis is presented – as a teaching in which the patristic tradition finds its fullest development. The theological-philosophical analysis is sufficiently comprehensive and carried out at a good theoretical level.

A few words about the thesis abstract – It does not so much present it as it is an abbreviated version of it. But the bigger problem is with the wording of the research's scientific contributions – a problem also noted in the discussion of the work in the department.

In summary – my overall impression of Petar Petkov Uzunov's dissertation is of a professionally conducted theological research on a significant topic, and as a member of the scientific jury I will vote "yes" for him to receive the requested

educational and scientific degree "doctor" in Professional direction 2.4. Religion and theology.

31. 08. 2023

Signature: