

## OPINION

On the dissertation of Petar Petkov Uzunov titled:

***„Synergy in the Anthropological Teaching of venerable Maximus the Confessor.”***

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 SU “St. Kliment Ohridski”

№ RD 38 – 336/ 07.07.2023 г.

The current defense procedure was initiated upon the recommendation of the Faculty council of the Faculty of Theology, (protocol № 12 on 27.06.2023) by the order of the Rector of SU “St. Kliment Ohridski” № RD 38 – 336/ 07.07.2023. During its inaugural session, held on 18.07.2023, the Scientific jury confirmed that the aforementioned procedure had been organized in accordance in compliance with all the legal requirements and regulations. Following the debates, Professor Dr. Dimo Penkov was appointed as Chairman. The Scientific Jury, in unanimous agreement, selected Assoc. Professor Kostadin Kirilov Nushev (SU) and Assoc. Professor Dr. Marian Bogoev Stoyanov (VTU), to serve as reviewers, while the task of preparing opinions was entrusted to Professor Dr. Nina Ivanova Dimitrova (BAS), Professor Dr. Valentin Apostolov Kanavrov (SWU) and Professor Dr. Dimo Krastev Penkov (SU). The deadline for the submission of these reviews and opinions was established on 12.10.2023, while the date for the open session of the scientific jury and the public defense was set for 27.10.2023. All procedural deadlines were met.

### **Relevance of the Topic**

The doctoral dissertation, presented for public defense by the full-time doctoral student Peter Uzunov offers an interesting insight on the synergistic relationship between God and humanity within the theology of St. Maximus the Confessor. The enormous importance of Venerable Maximus the Confessor for Orthodox theology hardly needs any special reminder or argumentation. He integrates the intellectual and spiritual facets of the

preceding Orthodox tradition into a harmonious whole, thereby presenting the most comprehensive theological synthesis in Byzantine thought. In this line of thought, I find the chosen subject matter to be particularly appropriate, given the relative scarcity of research on this topic within our country. Doctoral student Petar Uzunov has correctly oriented and directed his attention to it.

### **Thematic scope and structuring of the key problem areas**

The submitted dissertation has 178 pages. The text is organized into a preface, a list of abbreviations, an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, and a bibliography.

The preface (p. 4) elucidates the motivation behind selecting this particular topic and appropriately extends gratitude to colleagues both within and outside the Faculty of Theology who have supported the doctoral student's work. The introductory section (p. 11) offers a clear exposition of the research's object and subject along with its aims and objectives (p. 8-11). The methodology used is also specified (p. 10-11). The introduction also encompasses a review of key writings relevant to the issues at hand (p. 11-17).

Chapter One (p. 18-33), titled „The Context of the Sources,“ includes the life and work of Venerable Maximus the Confessor, the era in which he lived and worked along with the theological influences of the Cappadocian Fathers and the Aeropagitic Corpus.

In the second chapter, titled “God's Providence and the Freedom of Creation” (p. 34-102), the doctoral student presents an overview of the theological underpinnings within Venerable Maximus the Confessors writings. He astutely underscores that, from an anthropological perspective, the possibility of achieving a synergistic union between God and humanity hinges on the on the communion of the two natures in the person of the God-man, Christ.

The third and concluding chapter of the dissertation holds a pivotal role within the study and bears the title “Synergy” (p. 103-164). Here, the doctoral student's main thoughts are directed towards the theological reflection on the synergistic unity between God and humanity according the anthropological teachings of Venerable Maximus the Confessor. It should be noted that the doctoral student has adeptly structured his work, first considering the ontological, christological and anthropological foundations that underpin the possibility of synergy between God and humanity; and only then shifts to the ascetical theology of Venerable Maximus the Confessor, which Petar Uzunov interprets as a central theme of his thought, particularly in terms of realizing the divine plan for the human being.

The conclusion (p. 165–168) succinctly presents the primary findings of the study. The dissertation is equipped with the necessary textual-critical apparatus, encompassing a total of 435 cited references in the footnotes. The bibliography is extensive and contains titles in various languages, including Bulgarian, Russian, English, French and others.

Naturally, there are some valid criticisms that can be raised regarding the dissertation text. Specifically, a few typographical errors can be identified, notably on pages 7,8,24,26,27,28,29,32,38 and so forth within the main text. In certain instances within the text, biblical references are presented using traditional brackets, while in other cases, a slash mark is employed instead of brackets (see. p. 46, 48, 79, 81, 84 and so forth), which has not been standardized and should be corrected in subsequent publications. On p. 17 there is an incorrect citation that includes only information about the internet source, lacking any reference to the author and the title of the publication that was used. I recommend standardizing the spelling of theological terms, such as “knowledge of God” (lower case or upper case?) on p. 27. I cannot agree with the use of “familiar” style when referring to the Venerable Maximus the Confessor, who is referred to as “the Holy Father” (he is not the Pope) on p. 9, “the Confessor” (he is not the only confessor) on p. 10, “the Venerable” (he is not also the only one venerable) on p. 11. The use of “Alexandrian” on p. 36, where it invokes the influence of one of the Alexandrian theologians, is rather ambiguous and it becomes evident only later that the reference is to Origen.

Any omissions, inaccuracies, or errors present can be readily corrected and do not hinder the comprehensive understanding of the text.

### **Formation of the Abstract**

The abstract (44 pages), adheres to the dissertation’s structure and faithfully captures its content. The four scientific contributions by the doctoral student underscore the unquestionable merits of the dissertation.

Three publications directly linked to the dissertation’s topic have been included. They have been featured in esteemed scientific journals and collections, reflecting the doctoral candidate’s enduring interest in the topic under study.

## **Final Assessment**

Overall, the dissertation mirrors the sustained scientific interests of doctoral student Petar Petkov Uzunov, who has dedicated considerable effort and energy to its development. The work possesses scientific merit and aligns seamlessly with the scientific criteria and standards for an autonomous and complete study.

The dissertation includes the obligatory declaration of the text's originality and authenticity, as legally required. I, for my part, affirm that I have not found instances of plagiarism, and I have not co-authored any publications with the doctoral student and that I do not fall within the "conflict of interest" hypothesis. The accompanying documentation is complete, in accordance with the legal and procedural requirements governing this defense.

Considering the valuable scientific contributions presented in the dissertation and the relevance of the issues explored, I wholeheartedly recommend to the esteemed members of the scientific jury that they confer upon Petar Petkov Uzunov the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor." For the current procedure, I declare my vote as "YES."

12.10.2023 г.

Sofia

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(Prof. Dr. D. Penkov)