

OPINION
ON THE DISSERTATION OF DIMITSR BOGDANOV
"METAPHYSICS OF LIGHT IN THE CORPUS
AREOPAGITICUM"
FOR THE AWARD OF THE EDUCATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC
DEGREE "DOCTOR" IN PROFESSIONAL FIELD 2.4. RELIGION
AND THEOLOGY (*Christian philosophy*)

Dimitar Bogdanov is a full-time doctoral student in the Department of Systematic Theology at the Theological Faculty of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in the period 2020-2024. In addition to a master's degree in theology from the University of Sofia, he also has a master's degree in philosophy from the same university (a circumstance of great importance for his doctoral studies).

Bogdanov has several publications on the topic of the dissertation in specialized publications, participation with reports in scientific forums, as well as significant participation in the research project led by prof. Ivan Christov – "Thesaurus of the theology of Maxim the Confessor".

His documents in the current procedure for the defense of his dissertation work are in order. I am enrolled as a member of the scientific jury by order of the Rector RD 38-19 of 12/19/2024.

The topic of the dissertation research – "Metaphysics of Light in the Corpus Areopagiticum" is looking for the intersections between theology and philosophy, and that is why the doctoral student's competence in both spheres (and more specifically: in ancient philosophy and Byzantine theology) is so necessary.

The dissertation has a total volume of 329 pages; the bibliography covers 100 titles in Cyrillic and Latin. The paper is structured in a preface, an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion.

In the preface, the reasons for the conducted research, centered around the question of the divine origin of the world from a philosophical and theological point of view, are highlighted.

The introduction is quite extensive and amply clarifies the relevance, tasks, goals, subject and object of the research, as well as the selected methodological apparatus. The topicality of the subject is justified both by its theoretical importance and by the fact that it is almost unexplored in Bulgarian theology/philosophy. The review of its current state is very detailed, with the commentary also emphasizing the Bulgarian contribution (works of Bulgarian philosophers and theologians are productively used in the dissertation).

The formulated hypothesis is related to the transformation of the essentialist metaphysics of light in Plotinus and Proclus, to its desubstantialization by Pseudo-Dionysius. In general, the main discussion problem is that of the relationship between essence and energy (in its various concretizations) in the interpretations of Neoplatonism and Christianity.

Diligently and carefully conducted, the comparison between them and the clear statement of the differences from each individual aspect of the researched topic is the essence of the present dissertation. Each of the parts in it is further divided into paragraphs and subsections, and finally there are "conclusions" – in fact, these are synthetically deduced the main points from the chapter, which makes it easier for the reader.

The first chapter – "Neoplatonic philosophical premises for the Christian theology of Light in the treatises of the Corpus Areopagiticum" is devoted to the comparison between the light metaphysics of Neoplatonism (as the dominant philosophy of late antiquity) and its transformation in the Areopagite Corpus. The comparison here (as elsewhere in the dissertation) is done precisely and the differences are highlighted. I will quote one sentence as an example: "... the transition from non-being to being in Christianity is the attainment of perfection of the form into which it is breathed, while in Neo-Platonism the transition from non-being to being produces a product devoid of unity and perfection" (p. 88). Or, for Proclus and Plotinus, life – as a

result of the process of "falling away", is already a loss and deprivation of unity and perfection. Also shown in detail are the other consequences of the diametrical difference between the Neoplatonist emanation of light and its movement in Christianity, which transforms the involuntary, automatic process of emanation of the One into a conscious volitional creative act in Christianity. The transformation also consists in the replacement of the world view, according to which God's relationship to man is complex and too mediated, with such an understanding in which the relationship is more direct.

The second chapter – “The Christian theology of Light in the Corpus Areopagiticum. Metaphysics of Light and descent of God” is of fundamental importance for the dissertation. It begins with the statement that light is theology itself, and in this connection the relationship between theology and philosophy is examined. According to the logic of the exposition, it is clear that here are concentrated the efforts of the Neoplatonic metaphysics of light to be opposed to the Christian one, which separates divine and created light. It is shown how, unlike Neoplatonism, the divine light is absolutely transcendent to the world, but is immanent as a good action in it. Efforts are focused on explaining the Orthodox understanding of the relationship between the divine essence and the divine energies, in so far as it determines the further differences (in this part of the dissertation study 16 significant differences are distinguished) between the basic positions in the two types of metaphysical worldviews. The difference between the two types of understanding of salvation stands out in particular relief – between becoming god by essence (nature) and becoming god by grace – theosis. This is also one of the most important consequences of the transformation of Neoplatonism in the Areopagite corpus.

Here is the place to note that for me "baptize" – a term used by the author, is not appropriate; transformation, Christian interpretation, etc. (widely used in the dissertation) are more relevant.

The third chapter – “The Areopagite mystical theology of Light. Mysticism of Light and ascent to God”, contains reflections on the differences between the mystical experience of the Areopagite and that of Plotinus and Proclus, contrasts the intellectual

ascent to God in Neoplatonism with the ecstatic in the Areopagite; reflects on the mysticism of light as divine darkness, on the two types of ecstasy and on their different existential goals, and the final statement is that theosis is not a natural faculty of human nature, but comes from the power of divine light.

In the conclusion, the doctoral student presents convincing evidence for the fulfillment of the goals and tasks set at the beginning.

Dimitar Bogdanov has formulated three scientific contributions, with whose claim I agree. There is a partial coincidence between the first – too circumstantially described – and the third.

In conclusion: the presented dissertation work is at a high theoretical level, it proves the ability of its author to deal with this difficult topic and thus successfully fill significant gaps regarding its development in our country. As a member of the scientific jury for the defense of this dissertation, I will vote unequivocally "yes" to Dimitar Bozhidarov Bogdanov to be awarded the requested educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional direction 2.4 *Religion and theology*, specialty *Christian philosophy*.

17. 02. 2025

Signature: