

OPINION

by Prof. IVAN STOYANOV IVANOV PhD

for a dissertation for the award of the PhD, in professional direction 2.4 "Religion and Theology", scientific specialty "Pastoral Theology":

"FREE WILL AND OBEDIENCE IN THE PROCESS OF THE SPIRITUAL CARE OF THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN"

with author IVAYLO EVGENIEV VASILEV, PhD at the "Practical Theology" department at the Faculty of Theology at the "St. Kliment Ohridski"

and scientific supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. IVO YANEV.

On the basis of Art. 4 of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and order of the Rector of SU RD 38-351 of 2.07.2024 and decision of the FS of the Faculty of Theology of 20.06.2024 protocol n. 15, and protocol of the First meeting of The scientific jury from 16.07.2024 I was elected as a member (author of the article) for the procedure for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" for the dissertation of Ivaylo Evgeniev Vassilev.

Information about the doctoral student and the doctoral program

Doctoral student Ivaylo Vassilev was an excellent student and very strictly and consistently followed all the requirements for his preparation in the Doctoral program and fulfilled his Individual Plan, even giving more of himself within and beyond the required framework.

Information about the dissertation and the abstract

The dissertation is 236 pages long without the appendix. The scientific work consists of a preface, an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion, used literature of 223 titles, of which 79 are patristic, etc. sources, 83 studies in Bulgarian and Russian and 61 in English and Greek, 891 footnotes, self-evaluation of scientific contributions and a list of the requirements for the award of the ONS "Doctor" 3 nos. author publications related to the topic of the dissertation. The work is accompanied by an appendix of 11 pages, in which are cited texts from the Holy Fathers, relevant to the work, but not quoted in full in the body of the work.

The work examines a significant aspect in the field of Practical Theology and the scientific direction - Practical Theology. The proposed dissertation has as its object the spiritual life and care of the Orthodox Christian. Its subject is obedience as an internal principle of behavior and attitude towards God, the clergy and the neighbor. The purpose of the scientific work is to investigate and establish the place and role of man's free will and his obedience for soul salvation and eternal life in the various periods of his spiritual life and care. The tasks of the study are as follows: 1. to place the category of "free will" in the context of the Orthodox understanding of the world and man; 2. to explore and clarify the role of man's free will in his salvation and its place in his spiritual path; 3. to formulate and examine the stages of the process of spiritual care of the Orthodox Christian. 4. to examine the adverse results of disobedience; 5. to study and research obedience as an internal principle of behavior of the Orthodox Christian

and a hermeneutic key for understanding the dynamics of his growth in spiritual striving. The research methodology follows the traditions of theological science and the holy fathers. The methods of comparative analysis and analysis and synthesis were used in the work with the texts from the Holy Scriptures, the works of the Holy Fathers and modern theological texts. God's revelation and truth, revealed in the used sources and sources, are leading, and efforts are made to make them as accurately and clearly as possible in the context of the issues under consideration. For this purpose, exegesis is often used, as well as various logical and theological methods: inductive, deductive, theological-systematic, comparative, etc. It is remarkable that the dissertation topic and the subject it explores - obedience in the spiritual path and care of the Christian - have not been fully developed by theological science. And in Bulgaria, in the monographic studies and studies of Fr. George Shavelski, Fr. Hristo Dimitrov and others. obedience to salvation does not get the attention it deserves, if at all.

According to the author, in Bulgarian theology, the various issues related to freedom are considered primarily in the discourse of morality, for example by Gancho Pashev, archim. Evtimii Sapundjiev and less than Ivan Panchovski (conditionally it can be called the discourse "must"), and not the ontological need for a relationship with God for the realization of the personality and its salvation and godlikeness through the union of the will with God, the clergy and the neighbor. An exception are the modern developments of St. Tutekov, M. Stoyadinov, St. Chilikov and others. The two categories - free will and obedience - are central to the creation and thought of the Holy Fathers throughout the centuries and contain everything necessary for the fulfillment of man's assignment on earth, his ascent to heaven and his journey there. The main sources of the doctrine of obedience and free will in the theological discourse outlined in this way are: the Holy Tradition of the Old and New Testaments; some early Christian writings such as the Didaches and the Epistles of St. Ignatius the God-bearer; the creations of the Cappadocian fathers; iconic figures such as St. Maxim the Confessor, St. John of Damascus, St. Simeon the New Theologian and other Philokalian fathers. With the spiritual rise of St. During the past century, many ascetics rediscovered and embodied the ideal of spiritual guidance and obedience, and their spiritual children preserved, disseminated and made available their testament to all of us. Among them are St. Joseph Hesychast, St. Ephrem of Katunaki, St. Sophronius of Esek, archim. Emilian Simonopetrit and others. The doctrine of obedience comes from a monastic environment, but it has a wide application outside the Cynovia, according to the testimony of all these fathers. Bulgarian theological science is not poor in works that are directly or indirectly related to the researched topic. It is enough to mention the Orthodox pastorate of Fr. G. Shavelski on the importance of freedom in spiritual care and the Pastoral theology of Fr. Hr. Dimitrov with the emphasis on individual soul care, and also his three studies on the subject of Confession and pastoral care about the meaning of confession, sin as disobedience and the importance of the will to change. Other significant works of Gancho Pashev, archim. Serafim Alexiev, Ivan Panchovski, Svilen Tutekov and Ivo Yanev accurately introduce the topic and explore various aspects of it. Scientific works written in other languages, such as those of Archim. Maxim Konstas, archim. Gabriel Bunge, archim. Peter Vriza, Irene Hauscher, Suzanne Hausmann, Mitr. Vasily Kudsiya and others.

The content is distributed as follows:

Chapter I. FREE WILL TO OBEY 1. The Orthodox understanding of the world and man 1.1. God's creation; 1.2. Cosmology; 1.3. Anthropology; 2. Free will 2.1. Free will for salvation; 2.2. Image likeness; 2.3. Origin and nature of evil; 2.4. Reconciliation of the will with God; 2.5.

Christology; 3. Obedience 3.1. Obedience for freedom; 3.2. Necessity of obedience and prerequisites; 3.3. Obedience to the clergy; 3.4. Backbiting and disobedience; 3.5. Dimensions of Obedience; II. BIRTH AND CONFIRMATION OF THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN 1. The process of spiritual striving and care 1.1. Care by the clergy; 1.2. Different stages of the spiritual care process; 1.3. Progress of the process of spiritual care in believers and their actions; 2. Birth 2.1. Acquisition by word of mouth; 2.2. Position of the Orthodox Christian; 2.3. Christian dedication; 2.4. Repentance and Confession; 2.5. Choosing a spiritual father; 3. Confirmation 3.1. Importance of Confirming the Christian; 3.2. Stages in the process of repentance; 3.3. St. Communion and prayer; 3.4. Good works and learning; 3.5. Discipline and admonition; III. GROWTH AND PERFECTION OF THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN 1. Growth 1.1. Confession; 1.2. Marriage and Priesthood; 1.3. Spiritual struggle and abandonment; 2. Contemplation 2.1 Place of contemplation; 2.2 Prerequisites; 2.3 Achieving Contemplation; 3. Adoration 3.1 Communion with Christ; 3.2 Prerequisites; 3.3 Characteristics of the condition; 3.4 Life in the Future Age.

In the conclusion, the author makes an objective analysis of what has been achieved, the research hypotheses and analyses. The proposed study studies in depth the issues of free will and obedience of man in his spiritual path of striving and care from the spiritual mentor. The above points point unambiguously to the fundamental role of man's free will, which he is called to use for good in the world and to direct towards God in order to gain benefit and a good existence here on earth. The most appropriate way for the latter is the use of obedience as an inner movement of freedom and love on the part of the believing Christian, which he directs to God, to his clergy and to his neighbor, according to the established evangelical command of the Savior and the tradition of the Church and the holy fathers. Obedience, usually understood and considered only in monastic circles, is often misunderstood and its purpose underestimated, which is why it remains unpracticed in many places. The proposed work contextualizes man's free will for obedience in the various stages of the process of his spiritual care, offering clarifications of difficult questions, solutions to timely problems, and also advice tested and borrowed from the spiritual treasury of the Orthodox Church: the wealth of scriptures and accounts of the teachings of the holy fathers and ecclesiastical writers, in addition to modern scholars, who with a critical apparatus and attitude extract the most valuable from the vast existing literature on the questions sought. Last but not least, an understanding of the spiritual care process and the place of obedience in it is of immediate importance to all those moving in the church: who are passing through the stages, or who are leading others who will face the challenges of modern spiritual care. life in the Orthodox Church.

Dissertation Contributions:

The study is the first scientific work in our country that consistently presents the Orthodox teaching on the free will of man, contextualizing it in the stages of his spiritual life and care. 2. The study is the first attempt at a comprehensive analysis of obedience as a way to progress in the spiritual life of the Orthodox Christian and achieve salvation. (I do not accept it as a contribution) 3. The research has a practical application in the care and personal feat of the Orthodox Christian, describing the ways of approaching communion with God and marking some problems in the different stages of his growth. 4. A large number of patristic sources, which have not been translated, published or researched in our country to date, are cited, which puts the scientific question of the spiritual path and care of the Orthodox Christian on a correct ontological basis (this is not a contribution, but a finding of the sources used).

Objectivity and originality of the dissertation:

On the basis of the presented data for the dissertation and the published articles in connection with the topic of the dissertation and outside the topic of the dissertation, regardless of the purely methodologically Orthodox focus of the research, elements of the pastorology of Western theology and in particular scholastic-systematic Protestant elements are found, which slightly blur the author's claim to analyze the spiritual life of the Orthodox Christian and the very delicate topic of freedom of will. Obviously handling the rich western literature in the process of preparing the dissertation work has its influence in the exhibition. The dissertation has a contributing character and is distinguished by its authenticity and originality. A large part of the detected shortcomings and the recommendations of the internal defense before the Primary Unit - Department of Practical Theology, have been removed and the dissertation has been brought into a defensible form. The app is contributory in nature.

Props:

The documentation submitted for the procedure is complete and the required checks have been made. I declare that I have no joint publications with the candidate. Underline citation meets the standard. The language and style of the research is clear. Technically, the text is correct and understandable. The bibliography and references are properly structured.

Publications on the topic of the dissertation:

1. The service of the ephemeral priest in educational institutions, magazine Theological Thought, 2, 2022 (2023);
2. 2. The passions, types of passions and their development according to the holy fathers. Preconditions, journal Thought, word, text, 13 (19), 2023;
3. 3. The dangers of technology and artificial intelligence to the spiritual life of the Orthodox Christian, Collection Harmony in Differences X, Sofia, 2023.

The author has many publications outside the topic of the dissertation.

In conclusion

On the basis of the overall work of the dissertation student during his studies at the Faculty of Theology, the presented dissertation work and the published articles related to the topic of the dissertation and outside the topic of the dissertation, despite the shortcomings found in the work, contributions are found in all three chapters, which determines the presented work "FREE WILL AND OBEDIENCE IN THE PROCESS OF THE SPIRITUAL CARE OF THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN", as a dissertation and contribution in the field of Pastoral Theology.

Upon successful defense of the dissertation, I recommend the respected Scientific Jury to vote positively for the awarding of the scientific and educational degree "doctor" to Mr. Ivaylo Vasilev.

Sofia, 09.10.2024

Prof. Ivan Ivanov, Ph.D