

## **OPINION**

by Assoc.Prof. Dr. Sc. Stoyan Iliev Chilikov; Department of Theology, Faculty of Philosophy and History, Paisii Hilendarski Plovdiv University

on Dissertation work for acquiring the scientific and educational degree "Doctor" in Scientific field of High Education: 2. Humanities, Professional field: 2.4 Religion and Theology

on the topic: "**FREE WILL AND OBEDIENCE IN THE PROCESS OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION OF THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN**" by Ivaylo Evgeniev Vasilev, Theological Faculty, Department of Practical Theology, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski

The opinion was prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Law for the development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its Implementation and the New Regulations for the Conditions and Procedure for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and the Occupation of Academic Positions at the University of Sofia "St. Kliment Ohridski", amended and supplemented by the AC on 26.05.2021.

The reviewing of the materials is according to the order of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Kliment". No. RD 38-67/ 05.02.2024). Ivaylo Evgeniev Vasilev has provided all the necessary documents concerning the procedure for the defense of the dissertation.

### **1.Data about the dissertant and the procedure**

Ivaylo Evgeniev Vasilev has studied and graduated from the Faculty of Theology, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" . He completed his Individual Plan and was discharged with the right to defend. The dissertation, which has been submitted to me for opinion, has been discussed at a meeting of the Department of Practical Theology of the Theological Faculty, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski. At the same meeting it was decided to admit it to public defence. At the first meeting of the scientific jury, a chairman was elected and the authors were appointed to draw up reviews and opinions. The procedure was followed and I consider that no violations were committed.

### **2. Dissertation data**

This dissertation of 236 pages, excluding the appendix, consists of a foreward, an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. The list of references comprises of 223 titles, 79 of which are primary, 83 in Bulgarian and Russian and 61 in English and Greek. The number of footnotes used amounts to 891.

With the preface, the doctoral student introduces the topic by presenting a summary of the motives of his research work.

The introduction justifies the choice of the topic and its relevance; the subject, object, aims and objectives of the research are clearly formulated.

The dissertation consists of three chapters, The first chapter explores freedom and obedience based on the patristic sources and certain scientific studies that the dissertationer used. The second chapter of the text traces the interaction of obedience and freedom in relation to the birth of Christians and their spiritual care, and the third - the growth and perfection of Christians, emphasizing the relationship elder/confessor-novice/confessed.

The topic of the dissertation study is important not only for Pastoral Theology, but also for theology in general. At the same time, it can contain various difficulties due to which incorrect conclusions and interpretations can be made, even if we have the necessary spiritual and pastoral experience. The formulated two hypotheses of the dissertation set the further course of the argumentation of the text: "First, the free will, embedded by God in man, makes his spiritual feat possible and fulfills its purpose when it is expressed in obedience. Second, obedience is a necessary factor for success in every stage of spiritual life in the Church." Formulated in this way, the essay's hypotheses are inaccurate and incomplete. It is essential to note that obedience is to God. This problem is also apparent in the argumentation of the text in the content part, as the difference between obedience to God and obedience to the elder or spiritual mentor is not clearly defined. The work is built extremely hypothetically, theoretically, idealistically, diverging from the reality of church life.

I think the topic is extremely important and challenging, but it has not been explored in depth. Major moments of growing up in the Christian life are not presented in the second and third chapters: the problematic of obedience, the abuses of obedience, the negative processes related to it, the problem of young aging and the sick spirituality or pseudo-spirituality, which is very often clothed in the form or garment of obedience . The spiritual director, and the priest in general, is presented in an idealized way, as infallible and sanctified, without the right to error, which leads to incorrect conclusions about freedom and obedience.

In essence, he misrepresents the meaning of obedience and the role of the spiritual mentor.

### **3. Evaluation of the scientific contributions**

The scientific contributions of the thesis according to its author are four.

I accept the first and partly the fourth of the mentioned scientific contributions, considering that the dissertation of Ivaylo Evgeniev Vassilev is really the first attempt in theology in Bulgaria to substantiate the relationship between free will and obedience in relation to the salvation of man.

The topic of the scientific research is dissertationable and current. The author has reviewed a large amount of literature and works with sources on the topic of the dissertation work. The author's ability to systematize the vast material on the subject and to look for a connection between the facts presented on the basis of the analysis of the text makes a good impression. Undoubtedly, the dissertation student has mastered academic writing and the text conforms to the necessary scientific standards and criteria in this regard. I consider the attempt to argue the practical and empirical side of the subject on the basis of systematic theology and

especially patristic theology to be successful. The topic of the scientific research is dissertationable and current. The author has reviewed a huge amount of literature and works with sources on the topic of the dissertation work.

#### **4. Critical remarks and recommendations**

I have made my critical remarks above in the statement of opinion.

#### **5. Abstract details. Publications and participation in scientific forums. Personal impressions of the dissertation.**

The abstract is written as required and correctly reflects the content of the dissertation.

The dissertant has submitted 4 publications that are in the field of his dissertation.

#### **6. Conclusion**

Despite the errors and inaccuracies of the dissertation as pointed out, I declare that I will vote positively on the procedure of Ivaylo Evgeniev Vasilev for the award of the PhD in the professional field 2.4. Religion and Theology.

12.08.2024.

Assoc. Prof. Rev. Stoyan Chilikov

Sofia