

## THE RUSSIAN CHURCH'S DECISION

### Debate in the Russian Press

In Russia itself, whatever squabbles over the name of God which arose apparently resolved themselves peacefully and so did not make it into the newspapers. But the spectacle of Russian monks engaging in fistfights and tearing each other's hair out -- this was newsworthy. Early reports in the secular press presented woefully inaccurate accounts of both events and issues. In March some said "Andrey" Bulatovich had "organized a rebellion" not only at St. Andrew's but at St. Elijah's and St. Panteleimon's as well, expelling Abbot Misail from the latter in the process. As late as April the St. Petersburg newspaper *Rech'* carried a report that the new "heresy" counted nine persons in the Holy Trinity and that Ilarion had been Bulatovich's orderly (денщик) in Ethiopia.

A few publications closely tied to church circles followed the lead of *Russkiy Inok*. The one coming closest to Abp. Antony's vehement style was the newspaper *Kolokol* (The Bell), published by an official of the Holy Synod named Vasily Mikhailovich Skvortsov (1859-1932). Skvortsov was known as the organizer of the "Internal Mission" of the Russian Orthodox Church and was often appointed by the Holy Synod to deal with sectarians, schismatics, and heretics. Seeing a new heresy in the imyaslavtsy, he had begun a series of attacks against them in *Kolokol* already in 1912. The virulence of these attacks is exemplified by a review of Fr. Antony's *Apologiya Very* printed in 1913. Referring to the statement that even "unconscious pronunciation" of God's names is effective, the review states that:

In the foolish Apology of Bulatovich ... God doesn't have power over us but we, insignificant, sinful people, have power over him. We need only pronounce his name, even without faith, without reverence, "unconsciously," carelessly -- and we will have him with all his characteristics ... What a terrible blasphemous

teaching, lowering the omnipotent Master of heaven and earth to the level of an obedient tool of man ... This is magic, transferred wholly from the dark realm of the divinely renounced sciences of wizardry into the dogmatics supposedly of the orthodox faith ... (Qtd. in Сборник Документов 47)

The book's "masked goal" is to promote "antinomianism, i.e. that there is no necessity for a moral life":

"All is sanctified by God's name" [they say], i.e. do any abominations you care to, any shameful acts you want to, but if during it you repeat the name of God all this "is sanctified"!!

Another *Kolokol* article proclaimed that:

The provenance of the new heresy, taking in view the seemingly edifying nature of the book *Na Gorakh Kavkaza* and hence its popularity -- exposes the extremely cunning work of Satan, who has prepared in a completely hidden and sweet form murderous poison. (Qtd. in ИОБ 1913 19:9)

Other papers even resorted to slander and character assassination, carrying spurious reports that among other misdeeds Fr. Antony had married and abandoned an Ethiopian on one of his trips. (See Pakhomy 111)

Fr. Antony, who had left Athos in February in order to defend his cause in Russia, had his work cut out for him. He began by writing letters to newspapers. Some, like *Kolokol*, would not print them, but others were sympathetic. *Moskovskiya Vedomosti* (Moscow News) on March 9 printed one of his letters on the front page and accompanied it with a long, basically sympathetic introductory article remarking that, "of course," a final decision could only take place at a church council. In a reflection of the widespread concern about the political consequences of the controversy, the paper also warned against rashly accusing Russian monks on Athos of heresy especially because that would give the Greeks the right to kick them all out, and then the Holy Mountain would be lost to Russia for good. Less than a month later the same paper devoted a large article to the story of Fr. Antony's life -- to show that he "is not at all like the picture drawn of him by his enemies, who are no less embittered in the spiritual field than on the battle fields." (Apr 5:2)

Others rendered even more substantial support. M. A. Novoselov of the Moscow "Religious-Philosophical Society" offered to take on the task of publishing *Apologiya* at his own expense, and it appeared in March. A foreword expressed strong views about the importance of the doctrinal issues at stake:

Like the wave of an earthquake, through the whole Universal Church, from South to North, from East to West, spread indignation when some thoughtless and corrupted-by-rationalism monks dared to attack that nerve of the Church upon which converge all other nerves, that dogma, the denial of which constitutes the denial of all dogmas, that holy thing (святѣня) that lies at the foundation of all holy things. (VII)

This was signed simply "From the Editor" (От редакции), and only years later was it established as belonging to the pen of Fr. Pavel Florensky (1882-ca.1946), a well-known theologian of the Russian Church. (See Andronik 288)

Fr. Florensky also asserts that *Apologiya* is but the first of many works which will be required before the church can finally decide the important issues raised. Meanwhile the controversy is itself something to be thankful for insofar as it proves that the church is not dead as many are saying -- people do care about the faith after all, enough to get excited about theological issues. As for Abp. Antony, "one can peacefully ignore" his condemnations since even the Kiev Pecherskaya Lavra saw in *Na Gorakh Kavkaza* nothing unfit to print towards the end of 1912 after months of his attacks.

Florensky quoted in its entirety a three-page letter written by "one of the most honored and accomplished theologians of our homeland" in response to the request of an also unnamed bishop for an opinion about *Apologiya*. The letter's authorship became known several years later: it was by Mitrofan Dimitriyevich Muretov (d. 1917), a professor of the Moscow Theological Academy. He echoed Florensky's positive evaluation of *Apologiya* and belief in the debate's fundamental importance:

[The book] breathes with the spirit of true monasticism, ancient, ascetic. The matter is, of course, not as simple as the reviewer of Ilarion's book sees it. In its roots the question about the Jesus prayer and the name of the Savior extends to a primordial and not yet decided -- more accurately -- unfinished struggle of opposites: of idealism, or, what is the same thing, mysticism, on the one side -- and nominalism, which is rationalism and materialism, on the other. ... True Christianity and the Church always stood on the ground of idealism in deciding all the questions of the faith's teachings and of life that have arisen. On the other hand,

pseudo- and anti-christianity and heterodoxy always held to nominalism and rationalism. (XI) Idealism and realism lie at the base of the teaching about the unity of essence and the trinity of person of Divinity, about the divine-humanity of the Savior, about the sacraments, especially the eucharist, about veneration of icons, etc. And I am personally on this side. The reviewer for *Russkiy Inok* and the apologist for Fr. Ilarion are not saying one and the same thing but rather completely the opposite. (XII)

Those who belittle Jesus' name are guilty of a great sin:

... those who mock the name Jesus, whether in their soul or by their lips or on notes, etc. -- all the same -- they know after all just what the name expresses and to whom it relates; consequently they necessarily mock also the Savior himself. Yes, and they cannot not know [this], and no sophisms can cleanse this mocking -- only repentance. For this reason blasphemy against the Spirit is not forgiven, and for every, even idle, word a person will give account. And no one, speaking in the Holy Spirit, says: Jesus is anathema (in general Jesus, without any designations -- for from the moment that *Logos sarx egeneto*,<sup>26</sup> there is only one true Jesus -- the Savior, the God-man), and no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. [1 Cor 12:3] They mocked the defenders of the name Jesus and of the Jesus prayer, of course, by thoughtlessness, or to put it more truthfully, by a lack of true Christian feeling, which can always show to true Christians the true path among all temptations and misunderstandings. This is what we also see among the simple monks. (XIII-XIV)

Others sharing such views were also reluctant to publicly reveal their names. In the St. Petersburg paper *Novoye Vremya* (New Time) on April 11 and May 10 appeared two articles signed by one "S. Ivol'gin" who wrote authoritatively about the Athonite disputes but whose name had never been heard before and never showed up afterwards -- "apparently a pseudonym for a well-known person." (Filosofov 300) Ivol'gin expresses hopes that the Holy Synod will not move too quickly in rendering a decision. Much debate is required first, and people should at least read *Na Gorakh Kavkaza* and *Apologiya Very* before making up their minds. If Abp. Antony would bother to read the former even he would see that he had been deceived. (A real optimist, this Ivol'gin.) The journal *Tserkovnost'* has shown what comes of hasty condemnations -- it printed some "heretical statements" of Bulatovich that later turned out to have come from St. Tikhon of Zadonsk. As for Skvortsov, his position is understandable because "a missionary needs heresies like a reporter needs events." Ivol'gin provides a long list of those who would have to be

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<sup>26</sup>"The Word became flesh."

excommunicated if the imyaslavtsy are declared heretics, including even famous bishops and professors of theological academies, and warns that "It will be possible to speak not of a sect but of a *schism*":

An unheard of event in Russia -- the excommunication of bishops for heresy, but it would have to take place. One must hope in the foresight of the Synod, that it will not want to create a conflagration. Everything is revealed and is formulated by degrees. There was a time when the book of Khomyakov was considered heretical and had to be printed beyond [Russia's] borders. But now the orthodox teaching about the Church is based on it. The same thing is happening with the teaching about the divinity of the name of God. When the noise dies down its truth will become indisputable.

The Holy Synod does need to render a decision soon, and Ivol'gin hopes it will merely tell the monks to stop fighting and then label their doctrine a "theologoumenon" (a theological opinion). He laments, however, that Abp. Antony has been taking an active part in advising the Synod. Observing that the archbishop's sharp words "only sew enmity," he adds:

As for the desire that to Athos would be brought "three companies of soldiers" to "lock up the scoundrels" -- this would serve as the beginning of destruction for the Russian monasteries on Athos.

Abp. Antony responded with a letter to *Novoye Vremya*, reproduced here in full:

In today's issue of *Novoe Vremya* words are ascribed to me which I did not speak and did not write, i.e. (будто), that it is necessary to put in irons the followers of Bulatovich. The articles of this author represent a series of inaccuracies. Especially interesting is the fact that the author does not say a word about what constitutes the main position or thesis of the teaching of Bulatovich. (May 12:7)

As he claimed, the archbishop had indeed not written "put in irons the followers of Bulatovich" (заковать в кандалы последователей Булатовича), but that wasn't even how Ivol'gin had quoted him. Ivol'gin's quote was slightly different -- "lock up the scoundrels" (заковать нахалов) -- and that was quite accurate, as were all his other quotations from Abp. Antony.

The charge that Ivol'gin had skirted the theological issues themselves was true, however. So Fr. Antony Bulatovich, always eager to please his ecclesiastical superiors, was quick to

provide *Novoye Vremya* those particulars. He sent it a copy of his Open Letter to Abp. Antony of May 7, 1912 and included some pertinent comments with it:

Abp. Antony refused to print this letter in his journal, and, in spite of the fact that we completely clearly disproved the "divinization" by us of the name itself (letters and sounds) "Jesus," nevertheless Abp. Antony has continued to accuse us of this until the latest time. ... Yes, the patriarch condemned us with an official decree, but he condemned us of something of which we are completely innocent, for we don't think to say that the letters and sounds of the name Jesus are "essentially" joined to divinity. ... We are amazed at the lightness with which people condemn us, and at the reluctance with which the judges attend to investigation of the matter. ... still no one has asked, specifically what do you understand and specifically what are you saying!

Despite all this activity in the secular press, the religious journals curiously remained largely silent. Just one relatively detailed examination of the doctrinal issues was published, written by a relatively unknown priest named Kh. Grigorovich. It appeared in *Missionerskoye Obozreniye* (Missionary Observer) and offered arguments against the imyaslavtsy, as could be expected from a sister publication of *Kolokol* also belonging to Mr. Skvortsov. It raised no issues not addressed by other more important sources before or after but did distinguish itself by being one of extremely few to avoid a polemical tone.

### **The Russian Holy Synod Enters the Fray**

The next major entry into the debate was to be that of the Holy Synod itself, where Abp. Antony Khrapovitsky's influence bode ill for the imyaslavtsy. Ober-prokuror Vladimir K. Sabler happened to be quite close to Abp. Antony, and this closeness was reflected in the Synod's method of reaching a decision. Purportedly to attain the "greatest possible impartiality," three persons were chosen to present independently prepared reports on the subject. One highly qualified person was available for the task, and the papers later reported that he had in fact been considered -- but was rejected. That person was Bishop Theofan Bystrov of Poltava (1873-1940), who was not only widely known as the "only Russian ascetic-bishop" but also had written his doctoral dissertation on the name of God in the Old Testament. However there were also rumors that he

agreed with the *imyaslavtsy*<sup>27</sup> and it seems that this disqualified him. Instead the first reporter chosen was that paragon of impartiality, Abp. Antony himself. Second was Abp. Nikon Rozhdestvensky (1851-1918), a man who did not even have a higher theological education.<sup>28</sup> His conclusions too were predictable; he was one of Sabler's partisans on the Synod, as was Abp. Antony, and shared the conservative political views of both of them. Besides that, he had already written letters and had published at least one article against the *imyaslavtsy*. The third choice was a lay theologian named Sergey Troitsky (1878-1973), a seminary professor's son who had graduated from the St. Petersburg Theological Academy in 1901 and had served as a professor there ever since. Whether or not he had previously been involved in this controversy is unknown.

The reports were presented, a decision was reached, and Abp. Sergius of Finland was entrusted with the task of combining the reports into one official epistle addressed to all Russian monks. That was then approved at a special meeting on May 16, 1913 and was published in the May 18 issue of the Synod's journal *Tserkovnyya Vedomosti* (Church News).<sup>29</sup>

Abp. Sergius' text identifies *Na Gorakh Kavkaza* as having caused the troubles by introducing a new teaching about the name "Jesus" but stresses that the Synod does believe the Jesus prayer to be of fundamental importance in monastic life. It sees the author's goal of promoting its practice to be basically laudable. But Ilarion erred when he went beyond describing prayer and its benefits to offer his own "philosophical explanation" of how and why prayer works as it does. Specifically, his error is in seeing the name itself as saving, whereas the truth of the matter is that the essence of prayer is calling upon the Lord. It is the personal God who listens and answers as he wills; prayer is not automatically effective. The Jesus prayer is based on the

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<sup>27</sup>Ivol'gin, for one, mentioned no names but described him in such detail that there could be no doubt as to whom he meant.

<sup>28</sup>In Russia the basic level of education was at "seminaries," roughly equivalent to our undergraduate institutions, while the equivalent of master's degrees were granted by the theological "academies." Nikon attended seminary only.

<sup>29</sup>Signed by all members of the Synod: Metr. Vladimir of St. Petersburg (who chaired the May 16 meeting), Metr. Sergius of Finland (later Patr. Sergius), Abp. Antony, Abp. Nikon, Abp. Eusebius of Vladivostok, Abp. Mikhail of Grodno, and Bp. Agapit of Yekaterinoslav. See Божией милостью.

principle of the blind man on the way to Jericho (Lk 18:38 and parallels), who kept on crying out to the Lord until he finally got his attention.

If the view of the imyaslavtsy were correct, the consequences for spiritual life would be unthinkable: "A person need only pronounce God's name (even without faith, even unconsciously), and God is, as it were, obligated to be with this person by his grace and to do what is characteristic of him. But this is already blasphemy!" (279) Worse, it is "magic" and "superstition." Even miracles could then be worked completely without faith. And monks would be encouraged to engage in simple mechanical repetition of prayers for the mere sake of repetition, forgetting that there is a person to whom they are speaking.

The epistle refutes contentions that the imyaslavtsy were followers of St. Gregory Palamas by referring to two main points where it claims they differ: 1) St. Gregory never used "God" (θεος) to refer to both God's energies and his essence; only "divinity" (θεοτης) can be used in the wider sense. 2) St. Gregory did not confuse an action or energy of God with its result (or its "fruit"). Only words spoken *by* God are his actions; not those with which we speak *about* him. The apostles did hear and see divinity on Tabor, but one does not say that in repeating what they heard to others they were communicating divinity to them. This is where the imyaslavtsy are guilty of divinizing creation -- of pantheism.

The Synod's epistle goes on to dismiss all the quotes from scripture where the name of God seems to be equated with God himself as merely examples of a peculiarity of scriptural language. In such cases "the name of God" is simply a "descriptive phrase" as are others like "the ears of the Lord" or the "eyes of the Lord." Just as we do not take the latter literally, so we should not the former.

Though John of Kronstadt does use the disputed phrases, the very fact that no one objected to his language before is evidence that he didn't mean the same thing by it as do Ilarion and Bulatovich. What he was speaking of was subjective, not objective reality -- he spoke of what is so only "for us" and "in our consciousness." In order to form no false image of God, while praying we concentrate on the words of the prayer, particularly on God's name; and when God truly makes himself present he does become identified with his name -- but this is true only for the one who is praying and during the time of prayer. In any case, Fr. John's words about the power



of the name referred not to the name *per se* but to its use in calling upon the Lord. He clearly says that the name will perform no miracles without faith.

As for the effectiveness of sacraments and icons and crosses, this is by no means due to the pronounced or inscribed name of God, nor due to the faith of individuals, but due to the faith of the Church. If the imyaslavtsy's arguments were true, then anyone at all could perform the sacraments -- and the church's hierarchy would become superfluous.

In conclusion the name is indeed holy and worthy of worship (достопоклоняемо) because it designates God and was revealed by him, but it is not God himself nor is it even divinity because it is not the divine "energy" but its result. When pronounced with faith it does work miracles, but not of itself, not mechanically or automatically.

Therefore: 1) heads of monasteries are to hold special services (*moleben's*) to pray for the repentance of those who have fallen into error; 2) those who disagree must obey the church and not bother other people; 3) all must forgive one another and stop fighting; 4) *Na Gorakh Kavkaza, Apologiya Very*, and all other works written in defense of their doctrines are to be removed from the monasteries and reading them is forbidden; and 5) any who remain stubborn in their beliefs face a church court and possible deprivation of priesthood and/or monastic rank. Now that both the patriarch of Constantinople and the Holy Synod of Russia have spoken, Ilarion and Antony in particular have no more excuse for holding to their mistaken beliefs and should admit their error and submit to the voice of the Church.

### **Archbishop Antony Khrapovitsky's Report**

The three reports from which the official epistle was compiled were all printed together in the same issue of *Tserkovnyya Vedomosti*. Each had its own particular emphases. Abp. Antony's report was devoted mainly to attacking Fr. Antony Bulatovich. He described his approach to the task of preparing it in a letter to Jerome dated May 14:

Oppressed by a multitude of people and papers, I deliberately secluded myself for four days at the St. Sergius Hermitage near Petersburg in order to compile a refutation of the stupid and ignorant book of Bulatovich, who himself doesn't believe a word of what he cluttered there. This is just such a blackguard

(мерзавец) as Iliodor, who openly repudiated Christ, and I already knew him in 1907 as such. (Pakhomy 64)<sup>30</sup>

Actually, the report is devoted not so much to refutation as to questioning of motives. Ilarion is said to have dreamed up his new teaching because of vainglory:

He fell into the so-called "*prelest*" of startsy." Each has his own temptation: for the young it is lust, for the old it is avarice, for bishops it is pride and vainglory, and for startsy -- to think up new rules to immortalize their memory in the monastery. ... However, those who, like the starets Ilarion, think up new dogmas to immortalize their memory, sin far more. (872)

In suggesting that the Jesus prayer could replace all others, Ilarion created a temptation for lazy monks and a temptation to laziness for others:

That's why so many were carried away by the teaching of Ilarion: some by blind zeal and stubbornness, others by laziness, sweetly foretasting that they would soon pass on to that level of perfection where they would not have to stand through church services or read any prayers at all, but just "carry in their heart the name of Jesus." (871)

The lazy were joined by the downright evil:

All that was in our monasticism of disobedience, stubbornness, vainglory, and avarice was taken by this foolish dogma, and without a second thought rejoiced in the opportunity to reject authority and slander the higher powers, to grab the position of leadership, and to pilfer from the monastery bank. (872)

Nevertheless, at least Ilarion may have been sincere; that can hardly be said of Ieroskhimonakh Antony. Proof that the latter does not even believe what he himself is saying is to be found in his accusations that those who disagree with him are heretics who deny that Jesus Christ is God, who deny the importance of the Jesus prayer and all prayer in general, and who have no true spiritual experience:

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<sup>30</sup>What this refers to is unknown; according to Fr. Antony the two never even met.

To this we answer that we do confess the divinity of Jesus Christ, and we do highly esteem the Jesus prayer; and we do not pride ourselves in learning but we do place it lower than spiritual experience. However in the book of Skhimonakh Ilarion we don't see any spiritual experience but rather self-deceptive dreaming. Still less spiritual experience do we find in the book of Bulatovich; there we see only logomachy, i.e. scholasticism, without hard logic and without knowledge of the Bible. (871)

Regardless of what one may think about Bulatovich's logic, he at least never stooped to anything remotely approaching the kind of mud-slinging that pervades Abp. Antony Khrapovitsky's writings. Here the slanderous accusations flying so free and easy actually constitute the main theme of the archbishop's report, which abounds in phrases like "absurd heresy," "fallen into *prelest*," "ravings of lunatics" (бред сумасшедших), "absurdity," "stupidity," "mindless conclusions," and the like. And if he didn't always use the term "heresy," *Novoye Vremya* reported the reason why:

Abp. Antony of Volynia goes even farther and says that to call this false teaching a heresy is to give it greater honor, since it is simply khlystic idiotic ravings. (May 17:5)

The archbishop even specifies Fr. Antony's insidious ulterior motives:

Himself not believing what he is writing, but only wanting to have for himself a means for rebellion in the Athonite monasteries ... this imitator of the new false teaching much more skillfully disseminates it than its originator, for he far exceeds him in cunning and in ability to deceive and intimidate simple-minded Russian monks. (873) Alas, it is necessary to accept the thought that specifically these fights and expulsions [at St. Andrew's] constituted the goal of Fr. Bulatovich in the compiling of his hypocritical (фальшивой) book, full of obvious perversions of the sacred words and deliberately false interpretations of them. (876)

The report does, however, occasionally depart from *ad hominem* rhetoric to attempt a refutation of arguments made in *Apologiya*, and one must at least give the archbishop credit for having read the book first this time. He says Fr. Antony's position is based on two main fallacies, of which the first is a false understanding of "name." A name is only a word consisting simply of letters and sounds; its "essence" is not even its meaning but "the movement of air and its striking against our eardrum." Fr. Antony's claim that "the name of God" means something other than letters and sounds is totally unacceptable:

And does he even want to say something or simply to obfuscate, to darken the thought of [his] trusting disciple, so that he, having read these lines, would say, "Well, thank God, here they're divinizing neither letters nor sounds, but something different, which I can't understand." Yes -- and no one can understand, we will add, because it is impossible to understand nonsense. (878)

Bulatovich's other fundamental error is in not differentiating God's energy or action from what it produces:

And such absurdity Fr. Bulatovich asserts without any shame; he says that every word spoken on Tabor is God: does that mean both the word "listen" and the word "him" are God? ... the Lord ... denounced the contemporary Jews, saying to them: "serpent, viper's brood." Does that mean that a serpent is God and a viper is God? According to Bulatovich this is definitely so; doubly so, since God created the serpent and the hedgehog and the rabbit they are actions of divinity -- are all these wild animals consequently also God? (877)

As for Bulatovich's quotations from scripture and fathers, he consistently perverts their meaning, mainly through a literal understanding of expressions meant metaphorically. This kind of word usage is found throughout the Old Testament and consequently in liturgical and patristic texts as well, including St. Gregory of Sinai's "prayer is God working all in all":

This is a poetical expression, which replaces other predicates with the word "is": is caused, is sustained, attains, etc. A similar turn of phrase is constantly found in Church poetry: "Jesus most wonderful, amazement of Angels, Jesus most glorious, strengthening of kings, chastity of virgins." From this can we say that the chastity of the righteous is not a quality of soul, undergirded by grace, but rather God himself? (881)

As for the suggestion that the name of God is ultimately the Son of God, the archbishop (blissfully ignorant of the text of St. Maximus) proclaims that, "of course, nowhere is such stupidity said" (875).

### **Archbishop Nikon Rozhdestvensky's Report**

Abp. Nikon's report placed less emphasis on character assassination and more on reason and logic. A "name" is nothing more than "a conventional sign necessary for our mind, clothed by us in sounds, ... in letters (written), or only represented abstractly, subjectively thought -- but in reality (реально) not existing outside of our mind (an idea)." (854) Nikon stresses that any word,

and a name in particular, has no real existence. So this fact in itself proves illogical the contention that "God's name is God himself," for an unreal name cannot be the very real personal God; an abstract idea cannot be a concrete person. Nor can God or his grace even be present in something that doesn't even exist. Fr. Antony's main error is precisely here -- in speaking of the name as something that has real existence.

Since the imyaslavtsy can't prove their position true logically, they resort to mysticism (a bad thing roughly equivalent to magic in the eyes of the archbishop) and myriads of quotations from various authorities. But the only "authority" who really seems to support their position is John of Kronstadt, who didn't mean what they mean, was not a theologian, and was not attempting to write an accurate exposition of theology in the works they quote. It is of great significance to Nikon that for all their effort the imyaslavtsy were not able to find other quotes from church fathers plainly supporting their position. If this "dogma" were really so important, wouldn't one find irrefutable evidence for it everywhere? He also emphasizes that the name does nothing except through faith and God's good will, then observes that many other holy objects work miracles in the same way -- icons, the Lord's garments in the Gospel, relics of saints, etc. Yet we never say that an icon "is God himself" -- and an icon is a real object, whereas a name doesn't even really exist. Even in the case of the Church's greatest sacrament -- we say the bread and the wine are truly the body and blood of the Lord, but we go no further; we do not say that they "are God himself."

### **Professor Sergey Troitsky's Report**

The last report, Prof. Troitsky's, was obviously the result of much greater investigation and research than the others and even included a historical introduction. Considering the first edition of *Na Gorakh Kavkaza* apart from later developments, Troitsky sees nothing wrong with it other than "certain unfortunate and inexact expressions." Ilarion's error came in the move from simple description of spiritual experience to propounding metaphysical theories, and this was actually caused by Khrisanf's review:

In this way a practical question about how one should pray becomes with the reviewer a theoretical question about the relationship of God's name to [his] essence. The author followed the reviewer's example. (887)

And controversy grew because of Abp. Antony's journal:

When Khrisanf's review, at first, apparently, known only to Fr. Ilarion, appeared in *Russkiy Inok*, the arguments about the name "Jesus" passed over from a small circle into the midst of all the Russian monks of Athos, [and] a new phase in the history of the controversy began. (888)

Among the defenders of Ilarion one can now differentiate two main groups: simple uneducated monks who have simply divinized particular combinations of letters and sounds, and educated ones who have developed more sophisticated philosophical and theological theories. The magical and mechanistic views of the former are so obviously contrary to Christian teaching as to need no refutation, but something similar in a "somewhat softened form" can be found even among the latter, whose main spokesman is Fr. Antony. This view can thus be considered common to all of them. To show this, Troitsky first concedes that Bulatovich specifically denies ascribing divinity to mere letters and sounds, and then after quoting that section of *Apologiya* adds:

... in addition the author announces, "nevertheless, we believe that even to these sounds and letters is attached the grace of God for the sake of the divine name pronounced with them ... Even if you unconsciously invoke the name of the Lord Jesus," he writes, "then you will still have him in his name." And so [Troitsky concludes,] the grace, the power of God is attached to the very sounds and letters of the divine names, irrespective of the thought united with them, and that means one need only pronounce these sounds, pronounce the names of God, and the grace or power united with them will operate by itself, *ex opere operato*. (891)

The fallacy in Troitsky's interpretation is that to whatever degree one can speak of an "unconscious action," to the same degree one can also speak of unconscious thought. As Fr. Antony says in this very passage, grace is present in the letters and sounds precisely because of the divine name expressed by them, precisely because of their meaning, not "irrespective" of it. As for charges that this view constitutes a belief in magic or in effectiveness *ex opere operato*, Fr. Antony's understanding of God's presence in his name can be compared to the physical presence of one's human friend, who may choose sometimes to answer the way expected, other times to say nothing at all, and yet other times to say something quite unexpected -- yet the person is nevertheless truly present whatever he chooses to do.

Next Troitsky turns his attention specifically to those who have dreamed up "sophisticated philosophical theories." To counter their claims to be followers of St. Gregory Palamas he offers the same two arguments made by Nikon and Antony, beginning with the claim that "God" can only mean God's "essence." While acknowledging that the Palamites themselves did use "God" in the wider sense, he argues that they did so rarely and for special reasons no longer valid:

... in *Apologiya* it is made clear that in the present case the word "God" is used not in the particular narrow sense of God's essence, but rather in the same wide sense used by the Palamites, in the sense of opposition to all that is created, and in that understanding of opposition, as the Palamites correctly taught, is included not only God's essence but also his energy. But if the Palamites had good reason to use the word "God" not in the usual narrow sense but in the wide sense to expose the heresy of Barlaam, who taught about the createdness of the manifestation of God's energy -- the light of Tabor -- yet the imyaslavtsy have no right to this. For now no one holds that God's name, as a part of revelation, is a created thing, and consequently they are introducing confusion, giving cause to think that they are identifying God's action with his essence. (893)

The better word for the wider meaning is "divinity," and that is the word used by the councils that affirmed the Palamite teaching. Granted, this is really just an issue of semantics; but then such issues are also important:

In this way the imyaslavtsy, at least by their terminology, completely stand on the side not of the Palamites, but of the Barlaamites. But it is impossible to consider this heretical terminology a matter of little importance, for the Church worked out the form of its dogmas with long effort, and the formulations established by it have obligatory significance for all who wish to remain in it, and they serve as a guarantee of unity of thought among church society. (895)

Troitsky's reasoning here -- as throughout his report -- is both confused and fallacious. It is true that causing dissension by using language easily misunderstood is certainly to be avoided if possible, is undoubtedly sinful if deliberate, and presumably would be subject to disciplinary action if continued in defiance of church authorities. However, this was certainly not the case with the imyaslavtsy, who were clearly not motivated by a desire to cause trouble (Abp. Antony notwithstanding). They did defy the instructions of Patr. Germanos, but the latter condemned not

their terminology but the content of what he thought they believed, and they were contending that he had misunderstood and/or misrepresented their position.

Moreover, saying that the imyaslavtsy stood on the side of Barlaam "by their terminology" is a rather extreme sophism. Troitsky argued that this was so because Barlaam only acknowledged a distinction between "God" and "creation" while St. Gregory added the third category of "divine energies." But this is a gross misrepresentation of what the latter meant to say; his terminology of "essence" and "energies" could have been applied in a similar way to human beings, to animals, even to stones. We know a person by the things he has done, by the things he has said, by what he looks like, by what he habitually does, etc.; yet no matter how well we know the person there remains something beyond our knowledge -- the very essence of the person, which is ultimately unknowable and indescribable. Yet in spite of that "limitation" we nevertheless do truly know the person himself through a variety of forms of contact. To equate the person only with that "essence" which always remains beyond our knowledge is to deny that we can know the person at all. The same can be said of our relationship with God. Were Troitsky's position correct the whole of Christian literature would have to be rewritten. One could never know God himself nor describe him in any way. One could not say God is love, for that is one of his characteristics, not his essence. One could not say God is merciful, for that is one of his characteristics, not his essence. One could not say that God heals the sick, for that is the work of his energies. One could not say that God will raise the dead to eternal life, for that is the work of his energies. One could not even say that God as the "unknowable essence" is known or reveals itself in these ways through the energies -- for Fr. Antony's equivalent statement that "the energies name the unnameable essence" Troitsky rejects as an "impossible contradiction." So it is Troitsky's terminology (shared by all three of the Synod's "reporters") that for Christianity is nonsense. What he did with "essence" and "energy" in God was the same as what Nestorius did with "two natures" in Christ, i.e. instead of distinguishing that which is united, he separated them -- even while emphasizing their inseparability. If there can be such a thing as "heretical terminology," this is it.

Troitsky does concede that "name" is sometimes used by scripture in a way that can be equated with the technical term "energy," a concession neither of the other reports make:



The name of God, understood in the sense of God's revelation and at the same time from its objective side, i.e. in the sense of *the revealing* (открывание) of truths to man, is the eternal, inseparable-from-God energy of God, received by people only insofar as their createdness, limitedness, and moral dignity allows. To the word "name" used in this sense is applied the appellation divinity (θεοτης), but not God, insofar as "God is the act-or" (действующий), and not the action, and insofar as "God is above divinity." (906-7)

Beyond word usage, Troitsky sees the error of the imyaslavtsy to be in confusing the objective with the subjective. He believes that when they say "the name of God is God," they mean by "name" the human act of pronouncing it rather than the objective side of divine revelation. And speaking of the name as "the very idea of God" or the thought of God is no better, for that too is a human action, not a divine one. He accuses them of claiming that the human understanding of God can be "adequate" to him, though it is impossible that the finite can fully comprehend the infinite. This is a misrepresentation; no imyaslavets ever called God's name God himself in the sense of absolute identification, and Fr. Antony in *Apologiya* specifically and repeatedly denied that the divine name is "adequate" or all-inclusive.

Invocation of the name in prayer is yet another issue. Here Troitsky acknowledges a reciprocal action of both God and man:

But if prayer is always not only the action of God's grace, but also of our spirit, then to call prayer God means to call God even the action of a created, limited spirit, while the Church doesn't call God even God's action, but calls it only divine. (897)

St. Gregory of Sinai's phrase is therefore explained not by ascribing it to poetic language as does Abp. Antony, but by saying that St. Gregory was speaking only of the "objective side" of prayer.

In conclusion Troitsky points to a variety of sometimes contradictory positions in various writings of the imyaslavtsy and suggests that they themselves have yet to fully define what they believe. But in general one can summarize that they are wrong both in terminology (including energies in "God himself") and in content (confusing the objective side of divine revelation with the subjective).<sup>31</sup> Troitsky's analysis of confusion on the side of the imyaslavtsy is a fair one;

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<sup>31</sup>This last issue will be dealt with in ch. 7 below.

having been pushed into a defensive position by Khrisanf's review, many monks a good deal less capable than Fr. Antony Bulatovich had also taken pen in hand. And under that pressure some of them probably did use imprecise phraseology that could be misinterpreted. But a careful, unbiased attempt to understand their main points could have avoided such misinterpretations. Unfortunately, not one of the Synod's reporters seems to have been motivated by a desire to understand so much as by a desire to find bases for condemnation. Some reasons why Abp. Antony took this approach have already been presented. Not enough information about the other two is available today to make a similar analysis of their motives. One may nevertheless reasonably suppose that for Troitsky the power and influence of the archbishop from Volynia was not without effect, and that for Nikon personal friendship with a fellow member of the Synod and/or political camaraderie played a role.

Many greeted the Synod's decision as the final word that would terminate the conflict once and for all. That was to prove a vain hope, and it was with the foresight of a Neville Chamberlain that one *Novoye Vremya* reporter entitled his May 16 article about it "An End to the Matter of Bulatovich" (Финал дела Булатовича).