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TRUCE

Debate Continues in Russia

Fr. Antony Bulatovich's influential connections from before his tonsure turned out to be extremely useful. In March of 1913 Abp. Antony had written to Fr. Jerome:

It has been forbidden to allow Bulatovich into Petersburg ... he is lying low somewhere without a passport, as they say, around Petersburg among his acquaintances and is hiding himself. (Pakhomy 63)

In fact Fr. Antony was carrying on his work of making personal appeals to the authorities in behalf of the imyaslavtsy and was writing letters, pamphlets, and books -- right inside of St. Petersburg. A network of highly-placed friends from the litsey and from the regiment made possible a situation whereby the police did know where he was but did not inform the Holy Synod and did not hamper his activities in any way.⁵⁴ In late July the Synod tried again, deciding "to warn him that if he does not cut off his preaching about 'imyaslaviye' the question will be raised about expelling Bulatovich out of the borders of Russia." (NV Aug 2:3) It was never able to make good on that promise.

Such warnings indicated that Fr. Antony's efforts were not without effect. One, reported in nearly every major newspaper, was to make known a writing of Abp. Nikon from a decade back:

The name of God is always holy; by it our saving sacraments are accomplished ... The name of God is the same as the inaccessible essence of God, revealing itself to people. (Qtd. in Vechevoy 46)

⁵⁴Some of them: S. P. Beletsky, director of the police, Sergius Khripunov, general administrator of the lands of the crown, and prince Sergius Vasil'chikov. See Niviere 359-60.

The goal of course was not to embarrass Nikon but to reveal the true nature of the Synod's position -- that what used to be orthodox had suddenly become heretical.

A more immediate reason for the expulsion warning came from Abp. Nazary of Odessa, who in July presented to the Holy Synod a number of letters from Antony to the exiled monks in Odessa encouraging them to stand firm and not lose heart. Assurances in them that several bishops shared the monks' views, including Bp. Theofan and Bp. Germogen ("formerly of Saratov"), sparked also an investigation of the latter. The former had already been investigated: early in June the Synod held a series of secret meetings on the subject of Bp. Theofan's relationship with the imyaslavtsy. He was queried. He answered that he "views the matter of Bulatovich negatively" but that the name of God must be understood "mystically." Dissatisfied, the Synod asked again. No second reply was forthcoming. (See *Rech'* June 7:3) Apparently something similar happened with Bp. Germogen, for although the decision to investigate him was made in July, by late August newspapers were still reporting a rift between him and the Synod. There were also rumors that Bp. Trifon, Vicar of Moscow, and Bp. Tikhon of Ural were on the side of the imyaslavtsy (See *Rech'* Aug 10:2); but no evidence exists either that these or any other bishops supported the Athonite monks openly, or that the church authorities took punitive measures against any bishops for that reason. Nevertheless, it is probable that the cause of the imyaslavtsy was furthered behind the scenes by some Russian bishops whose actions will ever remain unknown to historians.

Support from the church's theologians was similarly low-keyed. When Fr. Florensky's magnum opus *Stolp i Utverzhdeniye Istiny* (The Pillar and Foundation of Truth) appeared in 1914 it contained but one brief remark seemingly favorable to the views of the imyaslavtsy. Interpreting Matthew 18:19 ("where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them"), he explained why such assemblies are always effective:

Because -- γαρ -- the gathering of two or three in Christ's name, the coming together of people into the mystical spiritual atmosphere around Christ, the partaking of his power of grace -- transforms them into a

new spiritual essence, makes of the two a particle of the body of Christ, a living incarnation of the Church (-- *The name of Christ is the mystical Church!* --), enchurches them. (421)⁵⁵

Sergius Bulgakov's lone contribution at this time was a short article entitled "The sense of the teaching of St. Gregory of Nyssa about names." Judging by what he wrote before and after (see Chapter 9), it is safe to assume that this was meant as a refutation of Prof. Troitsky's main theme, but it appeared in a little-known journal and can hardly have been influential.

The press mostly lost interest after the events of July ceased being news, but it remained generally sympathetic, sensing that a great injustice had been perpetrated on the Athonite monks. A common attitude:

Bulatovich proves that the real teaching of the Athonites is completely unlike what the Synod thinks and that the synodal decision is based on error ... No one argues that divinization of the very name "Jesus" sounds like fetishism. But why insert such content into the idea of the Athonite teaching? By its idea it simply means to say that the name "Jesus" is no simple name, that it is sanctified already by the very fact of assimilation of this name to the incarnated Son of God, that now one can not treat it like other names. With such fundamental positions each Christian can agree. One can even let the Athonites in their mystical strivings go somewhat farther than ordinary veneration of the name "Jesus." What harm in that? (TsOV 1913 42:2)

Others found it convenient to support the monks for political reasons, as turned out to be the case in the State Duma.⁵⁶ When in February of 1914 with the aid of the Octobrist party the Athonite monks submitted to the Duma a formal complaint ("*zapro*s") charging that their rights had been infringed (see in Vechevoy 48-9), their cause was taken up by "center/left" factions and opposed by "right" factions. The latter, generally supportive of autocracy and church understood

⁵⁵Notes in this section of *Stolp* refer to a long list of materials published by imyaslavtsy but list only the Synod's epistle for the opposing side. (See 782-3) Although some modern historians have listed Prince Eugene Trubetskoy (1863-1920) as supporting the imyaslavtsy, the *Russkaya Mysl'* article they base this on is in fact only a review expressing approval of Florensky's book. The case of Sergius Askol'dov (1870-1945) is similar: his *Russkaya Mysl'* article is not about imyaslavtsy or their doctrine but is a review of *Grazhdane Neba* (Citizens of Heaven) by V. Sventsitsky, a book about the growing phenomenon, attributed largely to the influence of *Na Gorakh Kavkaza*, of people living as anchorites in the Caucasus.

⁵⁶The Russian equivalent of a national legislature.

as one indivisible package, saw this *zapro*s as an attack against the church itself (which it certainly was for many of the "lefts"), and was able to get it sent to committee. There it seems to have died without accomplishing anything significant. The left factions brought up the issue again in April as an example showing why the Synod's budget should be reduced, but there it was once again only a means to a political end. Ultimately it had little or no influence on the course of the controversy itself.

For a time the Synod's intransigence had actually been unavoidable, for, having yielded jurisdiction in the case to the patriarch of Constantinople by its August 27 decision, it was awaiting instructions from him. After a delay of three months Patr. Germanos replied with a letter dated December 11 which was received in St. Petersburg in mid-January. He said leniency would be inappropriate for the "stiff-nicked and unrepentant" monks. Measures prescribed by the canons for "unrepentant heretics" should be applied with all stringency (επακριβως) for "reliable and full stigmatization and punishment, and for protection of the faithful from the deception and destruction that comes from them." But since now they are outside of the borders of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, such measures should be decided on and undertaken by the Church of Russia, "within whose borders the heresy of the *imyabozhniki* (ονοματοθειτων) both appeared from the beginning and exists now." Any who repent should be restored to their former status, with one exception:

But since it is not improbable that even having shown repentance they will cause problems and scandals upon returning to the Holy Mountain, we have decided that none of them may return to the Holy Mountain, which we consider just and proper. (Επιστολη Πατριαρχικη ...)

The Russian press reported that this letter produced an "extremely unpleasant impression" in "higher spiritual circles" since the patriarch not only declined to handle the unpleasant business of holding a court against the monks but also would not allow their return to Athos. Most saw it as more evidence that he was acting strictly from nationalistic motives, not wanting to allow Russians to gain a majority on Athos again. The Synod decided to have the Russian ambassador to Constantinople explain to Germanos the "inappropriateness of his point of view" as well as to send a complaint directly from the Synod itself.

It seems likely that their analysis of his motives was not groundless, but there were other reasons for the decision as well: after the exiles' departure the Athonite *Iera Koinotes* had decided on July 31 that none of them should be allowed back. And it was not only the Greeks who had expressed that view; the Russians who remained, under the leadership of Jerome and Misail, expressed similar wishes to the Holy Synod. The depth of feeling among them on the subject can be seen in a booklet entitled "The truth about the events that occurred at St. Panteleimon's monastery during the first half of 1913" (Правда о событиях ...), published by the monastery and signed by "Abbot and brotherhood." Designed to counter the bad press in Russia concerning Nikon's work, it even resorted to outright lies, claiming, for example, that the only condition given the imyaslavtsy for being allowed to remain on Athos was to promise to live there peacefully. The prevailing attitude of those left in authority on Athos can also be seen in this pamphlet's account of the fate of one imyaslavets, Archimandrite Arseny, who had served as abbot of St. Andrew's after David and who had been too ill to depart with the rest. Three months later because he would not "repent" he was allowed to die without the sacraments and was not even given a Christian burial.

Whatever Germanos' reasons, the Synod could no longer claim the matter was out of its jurisdiction, so on February 5 Fr. Antony petitioned for a church court. The request was granted, but the *opredeleniye* (decision) of February 14-18 granting it spoke as if the court's decision were a foregone conclusion. The text of the *opredeleniye* begins by recounting not only the patriarchal and synodal condemnations of the false teaching but also the "crimes" committed by the monks on Athos and their continuing refusal to listen to "the voice of the Church." In conclusion it calls to court only twenty-five of them, those who had been "on Athos especially stubborn partisans of the false teaching and the most zealous spreaders of it, and in Russia did not display an inclination to repentance but continued to defend their delusion." These monks could avoid the inevitable only by repenting, for which they would be given ample opportunity:

[Since] outside of the Church there is no salvation, and with excommunication from the holy Church the imyabozhniki will inevitably destroy their own souls, the Holy Synod, in motherly love for perishing Christian souls, has considered it necessary that the imyabozhniki be given admonishments even in court.

Monks known for their "strict monastic life" were to be chosen to admonish them even before the court's formal opening in hopes that even then they might repent. Each was to be admonished individually and each was to appear before the court individually, their cases considered completely separately. The Moscow synodal office would hold the court, but its decisions were to be approved by the Synod itself.⁵⁷

Church court or kangaroo court? With each monk being called to appear singly before a panel of judges at meetings closed to public and reporters, this would be no open debate as the imyaslavtsy had hoped for. And no attempt at mutual understanding; they would merely listen while their judges "admonished." Recognizing the hopelessness of the situation, on the eleventh of April twelve of them headed by Fr. Antony sent an announcement to the Synod declaring that they would not appear at court and were breaking communion with the Russian Holy Synod. In doing so they nevertheless asserted that they remained as always loyal to the Orthodox Church:

We the undersigned announce to the Holy Synod that we always unchangeably abode and now abide in the teaching of the Holy Orthodox Church and do not allow ourselves to depart one iota from the teaching of the Holy Orthodox Church ...

It was the Synod itself which departed from the Church's teaching, and many efforts were expended to convince it of its error:

However the Holy Synod not only did not pay attention to our petitions but continued to abide in the same opinions and condemned our veneration of the divinity of the name of God -- which is in agreement with patristic teaching -- as a heresy. And it named us, orthodox monks, with the unjustified and offensive name "imyabozhniki."

Concluding from this that the aforementioned incorrect teaching about the name of God is not a mistake which has crept in by chance but has been received by the Synod henceforth irreversibly as a dogma -- we with regret and sorrow are forced, for the sake of preserving the purity of the Orthodox faith: TO RENOUNCE EVERY SPIRITUAL RELATION (общение) WITH THE ALL-RUSSIAN SYNOD AND WITH ALL WHO AGREE WITH IT, UNTIL CORRECTION [BY IT] OF THE DESIGNATED

⁵⁷For the judges' names see the *opredeleniye* (TsV 1914 9:62-3), TsV 1914 11:598, NV Apr. 3:2, and MV May 8:3-4, each with a slightly different list.

ERRORS AND UNTIL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT [BY IT] OF THE DIVINITY OF THE NAME OF GOD, IN AGREEMENT WITH THE HOLY CATECHESIS AND THE HOLY FATHERS.

Therefore we also announce that we refuse to appear before the court of the Moscow Synodal Office. (I. Antony, *Имяславие* 166-9)

In time more than 300 Athonite monks signed this declaration. Nevertheless, as *Novoye Vremya* reported, it "didn't make a big impression" on the members of the Synod. "The fickle character of A. Bulatovich, in their opinion, allowed one to expect surprises." (Apr. 20:6)

The Athonite Monks Vindicated ... Sort Of

Soon something did make a very big impression on them indeed, something from above rather than from below. Already in the fall of 1913 rumors had been rampant that "higher circles" were very unhappy with the way the Athonite affair had been handled and that Abp. Antony, Abp. Nikon, and Sabler were all going to lose their posts. It turned out that only Abp. Antony was actually dropped from the Synod that fall, but the consensus was that the move was forced upon Sabler against his will. Indeed, the two were so close that the archbishop reportedly suffered no loss of influence in the Synod's affairs; Sabler even traveled to Zhitomir in order to confer with him regarding the next summer's agenda for the Synod. Then the following spring the Synod's bowing to requests for a church court was again ascribed to "higher circles." One may wonder, what "circles" were higher than the supreme church authority?

While ascribing much of this to Fr. Antony's "connections," the press never named them. However, it did name one very important "connection" for the imyaslavtsy in general: the grand duchess Elizaveta Fedorovna (the tsar's sister-in-law), who had published *Na Gorakh Kavkaza* on her own means. And there is evidence that Rasputin too may have supported the imyaslavtsy, perhaps mainly out of personal dislike of Sabler. (See Niviere 364) Such connections could, and apparently did, reach the tsar himself, for on April 15 he addressed a note to Sabler:

On this feast of feasts [Easter] ... my soul grieves for the Athonite monks, from whom has been taken away the joy of partaking of the holy mysteries and the comfort of being in church. Let us forget the quarrel ... the court should be canceled and all the monks ... placed in monasteries, their monastic rank returned, and they should be permitted to serve as priests. (Qtd. in Katsnelson *По неизведанным* 187; ellipses his)

The order itself was not publicized, but the results were swift and dramatic. Five days later the ober-prokurator presided at a meeting in Moscow where he "conveyed his instructions concerning the matter of the Athonite monks" to Metropolitan Makarius. And when both Makarius and Bp. Modest of Verey were called to Petersburg on the next day, *Moskovskiya Vedomosti* reported that "their departure is attributed to the new direction which the matter of the imyabozhniki must now take." (Apr. 22:3)

On the twenty-fourth at a special service held in Moscow the hierarchs of the court participated in a church service at which nine of the Athonite monks, who had expressed their "desire to be received into communion with the Orthodox Church," were officially received. Neither signatures nor repudiations were required of them. They only had to announce that they adhered to all the teachings of the Church, neither adding to nor subtracting from them, and to confirm that announcement by kissing the Gospel book and the cross. It was explained that the previously "distrustful" attitude of these nine toward the synodal court was based on a "misunderstanding," and Bp. Modest was sent to Petersburg to visit the others to determine if perhaps their attitude too was based on a misunderstanding.

And so a new petition, which Fr. Antony had sent to the Synod on April 22 expressing willingness to negotiate directly with it instead of the Moscow court, turned out to be unnecessary. Upon returning Modest reported that his mission was successful:

The Athonite monks made a good impression on me. They are humble, cherish the dogmas of the Orthodox Church [and] recognize the divinely established hierarchy. The particularity of their opinion about the name of Jesus is explained by their not being familiar with our commonly-received theological language, and they express their thoughts in such words which for us have a somewhat different shade [of meaning] ... Fr. Antony Bulatovich, a former officer of the guard, gives the impression of a very intelligent person as well as of one well-read in the writings of the holy fathers. From a long discussion with him I got the impression that his soul suffers from the noise raised around his name, which he fears can engender the thought that he supposedly goes against the Orthodox Church. He is amazed, why do people not want to understand him. He doesn't consider his opinion about the name of God a dogma, doesn't foist it on others, but only desires that the coming council will pronounce on it and decide the theological argument which has arisen. (MV May 8:2)

The hierarchs, headed by Metr. Makarius, decided not to call the monks to court; to receive them back into the church; and to admit them into Modest's Znamensky monastery. Thenceforth in order to be received into communion with the Church, any of the Athonite monks would need only to announce to their local bishops that they "believe as the Orthodox Church believes" and to confirm their sincerity by kissing Gospel and cross. Their things taken from them at Odessa were to be sent to them at whatever monasteries they wound up in. The Moscow synodal office also promised to take into consideration their request to be given a skete of the monastery of Simon the Canaanite in the Caucasus (where Ilarion himself once dwelt), and to establish it with funds drawn from the Athonite monasteries from which they had been expelled. Though not explicit in the court's decision, future events showed that their request for consideration of the theological issues at the upcoming council was approved. Likewise their request that the name "imyabozhniki" be dispensed with was apparently received favorably, for Metr. Makarius called them "imyaslavtsy" in his notice to the Holy Synod of the court's decision. In that notice he explained that the decision was based on documents sent to the court and to the Synod by the imyaslavtsy:

Upon examination of these "confessions" and "announcements" the synodal court found ... data for the conclusion that ... there are no bases for [their] departure (отступления) from the Orthodox Church on account of their teaching about God's names. [Specifically this is evident in their statement that]: "I repeat, by calling the name of God and the name of Jesus -- God and God himself, I am neither venerating God's name separately from God himself and as some kind of special Divinity, nor am I divinizing the very letters and sounds and chance thoughts about God." (Qtd. in OIB 211)

Accordingly on May 18 Fr. Antony and the others sent a new announcement to Metr. Makarius thanking him for absolving them of the charge of heresy; rescinding their notice of April 11; and asking that he inform the Synod of that fact. While reaffirming their faithfulness to all of the Church's dogmas, they did not back down from their beliefs concerning the name of God:

... we in agreement with the teaching of the holy fathers confessed and do confess the divinity and divine power of the name of the Lord. This teaching we do not raise to the level of a dogma, for it has not yet received conciliar formulation, but we expect that at the coming council it will be formulated and dogmatized. Therefore we, in agreement with the teaching of the holy fathers [and] in the words of the ever-memorable John of Kronstadt, both said and do say that the name of God is God himself, [and] the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. We understand this teaching not in the sense of divinization of

a created name, but rather we understand it spiritually, in the sense of the inseparability of God's name from God while calling upon him, and in the sense of divinely-revealed truth, which is the action of divinity. (NV May 23:6)

They were still "deeply offended by the actions and words of archbishops Antony and Nikon, especially the former, for he is the main culprit in the Athonite trouble." After briefly recounting the deeds of these two the monks added:

May God reward them according to their deeds if they do not repent. As for those many slanders which Abp. Nikon raised against us in his report and in his booklets, as, for example, that the trouble arose supposedly because of separatist dissension, from a striving for robbery and power, because of reasons of a revolutionary character, etc. -- may the Lord God forgive him this and we forgive him. May God also forgive him those tragedies which he caused us personally by his cruel-heartedness and injustice.

Finally they repeated their request for a skete in the Caucasus (which was, apparently, never granted).

"In that way, thanks to the tact and gentleness of Bp. Modest, the formerly stormy matter of the Athonite monks has been resolved peacefully and calmly" reported *Novoye Vremya* on May 8. A rather strange "resolution," however. It was never reported in any of the Synod's publications, although they had reported every condemnation against the imyaslavtsy and had thoroughly covered the start of the court's proceedings. Troitsky kept up his polemics against them. Abp. Antony kept up his polemics against them.⁵⁸ As late as 1916 many were still being refused the sacraments, even on their deathbeds. (See Niviere 366) And when the matter was taken up at the 1917 council, the monks were still officially called "imyabozhniki."

In these developments and in what preceded them a definite pattern can be seen. Several times major decisions were forced on the Synod against its will from outside -- but since in their implementation the Synod was left to its own devices, it did all it could to circumvent the intent. So when Abp. Antony was dropped from the Synod, Sabler still went to confer with him on the following year's program. When the Synod found itself obliged to hold a church court it created

⁵⁸Even as late as 1916 he had his new diocese of Khar'kov publish a book entitled *Holy Orthodoxy and the imyabozhnik heresy*.

one where the result was a foregone conclusion. And in its eyes this last situation would have been worst of all, for it was a humiliating reversal: suddenly the stubborn stiff-necked unrepentant blasphemous deluded heretics were really orthodox all along but had been misunderstood. All the public condemnations, all the work of "admonition" on Athos, all the cruelties of the expulsion, all the ensuing propaganda -- all one big mistake. Small wonder the Synod had no desire to publicize the court's decision or even to carry it out in good faith. It didn't.

As one religious publication noted in October of 1913, prematurely foreseeing resolution of the Athonite affair, such behavior was lamentably typical of the contemporary Russian Church:

Purely chance circumstances helped the Athonites attain a more favorable attitude toward their case. It is this that is sad. If Antony Bulatovich had no connections, Antony and Nikon would be sitting on the Synod and there would not even be talk about reconsideration. In such a way the church world turns out to be in dependence on external factors, and the establishment of truth is attained thanks to external interference. The thought involuntarily arises: just how normal is such a situation of church affairs? In the press it is justifiably pointed out that the Athonite history serves as a graphic demonstration of in what untrustworthy hands lies the guidance of the ship of Church. The tactics shown in the matter of the Athonites are common tactics of the contemporary ecclesiastical course. Not to consider public opinion, not to want to hear objections, to act according to personal views and sympathies -- there is the program of contemporary leaders. Consequently they are applied everywhere, and only external circumstances occasionally restrain catastrophes like the Athonite affair. (TsOV 1913 42:2)

Since the same course of action could be seen in a series of church reforms being pushed through by "the party of Antony of Volynia," the author expresses hope that the departure of that party's leader might mean a change. "However, signs of such a change are for the time being not visible."

This state of affairs, while indeed sad, is not exactly an anomaly unknown to the history of the Church. One need only think of the triumph of Orthodoxy over the iconoclasts, which was effected both times by imperial decree. Nevertheless, icon veneration would have been as short-lived as iconoclasm had it been rejected by the masses of church members and if its defense had not been taken up by brilliant theologians who convincingly showed the errors of their opponents. In the case of imyaborchestvo more work of this nature needed to be done. That task was undertaken again largely by one person -- Ieroskhimonakh Antony Bulatovich.