

## THE PEN SUPPLEMENTS THE SWORD

Immediately upon returning to St. Petersburg Mr. Troitsky began writing theological critiques of the new heresy. Individual articles were published by the Holy Synod in pamphlet form, one appeared in Skvortsov's *Missionerskoye Obozreniye*, and a long series designed to serve as a comprehensive refutation of every aspect of the heretical teaching found its way into the Synod's journal *Tserkovnyya Vedomosti*. That series and a few other articles Troitsky then combined into the book *Ob imenakh Bozhiikh i imyabozhnikakh* (About the names of God and the imyabozhniki), which was published immediately by the Holy Synod.

One chapter of this book reprinted an article entitled "Was Fr. John Sergiev (of Kronstadt) an imyabozhnik?" While Troitsky reminds the reader that even saints are fallible and that Fr. John in particular has not even been canonized, his main point is not that Fr. John erred, but that he didn't mean the disputed phrase the way the imyabozhniki mean it:

After all, the word "is" is used also in the sense: "designates," "depicts." Imagine to yourself that on a wall hangs a picture depicting St. Panteleimon's monastery. Now, if a person unfamiliar with it asks "What is that?" then of course he will get the answer "This is St. Panteleimon's monastery"; and in this answer the word "is" replaces the word "designates," "depicts." "By incorrect word usage," says St. Gregory of Nyssa, "we call a likeness a person, but particularly we call the living essence by this word." And so in what sense in this expression of Fr. John's, "the name of the Lord is the Lord himself," is the word "is" used -- the particular sense or the sense of replacing the word "depicts"? (155)

This is begging the question, for the whole controversy is precisely about the relationship between designating and being. Troitsky takes it for granted that the two concepts are radically different and mutually exclusive, and since he can show that Fr. John did use "is" to mean "designates," he feels that that in itself proves his point.

This basic theme he develops at length in the main section of his book. There he attempts to draw a parallel between the controversy that arose over *Na Gorakh Kavkaza* and a fourth-century one between St. Gregory of Nyssa and the Arian Eunomius. Eunomius believed that the divine names express the very "nature" or "essence" of God, and so he based his denial of Jesus Christ's divinity on the argument that since the name "Unbegotten" expresses God's true nature, the "begotten" Son could not share that nature. Hence Jesus Christ as the Son of God could not be God. St. Gregory refuted this by explaining -- as did St. Gregory Palamas a thousand years later -- that God's names express not his essence but his "energies" and his characteristics; not what he is, but what he has done or what he does or what he is like. The names answer the question "who," not "what" is God. So any and all names describe him inadequately, not absolutely; he is one sense nameable and in another above and beyond any name. In the sense Eunomius meant there is in fact no possible name for God. Therefore the Father's being "unbegotten" does not exclude the "begotten" Son from sharing his nature and consequently being truly God himself.

To tie this aspect of Eunomius' teaching to the imyaslavtsy Troitsky quoted the following from Ilarion's response to Khrisanf's review:

The name expresses the very essence of an object and is inseparable from it. So too the name Jesus ...<sup>41</sup>  
The name, expressing the essence of an object, cannot be removed from it; with the removal of the name the object loses its meaning. One can see this also in simple things, for instance a glass ...<sup>42</sup> Call it by another name, it will no longer be a glass. Do you see how the name lies in the very essence of an object and merges into one with it, and to separate it is impossible without changing the understanding of the object? This comparison can be applied also to the name Jesus. (49)

The terminology here is similar to that of Eunomius but Ilarion does not use "essence" in the technical sense meant by St. Gregory; his point is rather that our understanding of things is inextricably tied to their names. Moreover, elsewhere in *Na Gorakh Kavkaza* he does use

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<sup>41</sup>Here Troitsky jumps 400 pages from the introduction to the end of the book and a somewhat different context. This sentence actually reads not "So too the name ..." but rather "Thus the name 'Jesus' means Savior" (Так имя, ноТак и имя), and the section goes on to talk about the name "Jesus."

<sup>42</sup>Ilarion's ellipsis.

"essence" in the more technical sense and there acknowledges it to be "unconfessible" or unnameable, as does Fr. Antony on numerous occasions. No other evidence could be found to link any imyaslavtsy to this aspect of Eunomius' teaching.

Eunomius also held that God's names in the very form in which we know them originated from him and were revealed directly by him. Against this St. Gregory said that they are rather human creations; they can be ultimately attributed to God as can everything, but they are directly attributable to man's will and freedom, to the rational faculty given by God to man. Therefore to attribute them directly to God himself in Eunomius' sense is gross anthropomorphism. Cases where scripture says "God said" are not to be taken literally but are similar to passages which speak of the heavens proclaiming God's glory. In the same way, God does not speak to his prophets in human words but by a direct action on the soul, in response to which they use human words to express the meaning conveyed to them. Therefore God's names, even when scripture indicates that he personally spoke them, are strictly speaking not divine actions but human ones, the results of divine actions. From this Troitsky concluded that if the names are not divine actions then they do not even merit the title "divinity," much less "God himself." However, the imyaslavtsy had long before been accused of divinizing human letters and sounds and had frequently and explicitly denied it; it was not specifically in that sense of the word "name" that they called it God.

Against Eunomius' belief that God speaks exactly as humans do, St. Gregory argued that He has no need to do so. Words are symbols, necessary for rational thought and communication only for our bodily existence as humans; spiritual beings like God and angels have no need of them since for them their very thought is their word. And names, St. Gregory concluded, are merely a form of human words, disappearing with the sounds and having no independent existence. One must understand that the object named is one thing and the name itself another. Troitsky then drew from this some conclusions of his own: "All names are only symbols of things, signs, labels -- [they are] placed on things by human reasoning *and by themselves are not at all connected with things.*" (4) Because that connection exists only in the human mind, all names are separable from their objects; i.e. objects need not have names at all or their names can be changed, depending only on human will. The divine names are not fundamentally different:

The names of God all by themselves (God's names in prayer will be discussed later) are inseparable from God only insofar as is all that exists; but any other relationship of them to God exists not in reality but only in our thought, which establishes a connection between the sign and the designated object. (54)

God's names are just "empty sound" like all others when considered "by themselves." They are not God's essence, they do not express his essence, they are not his actions and they do not even express his actions -- "they are only signs, created by people, which *point to* either his characteristics or his actions in relation to the world and to man." (42) And in that function God's names actually do a poorer job than all others:

[They] stand apart from their Prototype much farther than the names of other things from the things themselves, since on the one hand our conceptions about God correspond not to his essence but to his actions, and that only in part; and on the other hand all of our words are formed on the foundation of sensory conceptions and for expressing conceptions about God are unsuitable (непригодный). (44)

To illustrate what Troitsky means: one of the divine names is "Holy Spirit," but in fact "spirit" as a word originally meaning simply "wind" or "breath" actually refers directly only to those material realities; it is applied to the third person of the Holy Trinity metaphorically and so is a poorer expression of him than it is of wind or of breath itself.

While ascribing this view to several early church fathers, Troitsky refers to the contemporary German linguist Max Muller as evidence that science confirms it:

Defending the connection of word and thought, and affirming the primeval religiosity of mankind, Max Muller also expresses the thought that divinity received nomenclature relatively late and that people could have been deeply religious without having any names for designating God. (58)

All was fine when these prehistoric people started applying names to their "sense of divinity," but they tended to understand names as "doubles" of objects with a reality all their own having "mystical connections" to the objects. That is precisely the origin of polytheism and idolatry, for while using many names to describe the one "divine sense" they began to ascribe divinity to those names themselves. Troitsky quotes Muller: "But *names have a tendency to be*

*made into objects, nomina are turned into numina (names into divinities), ideas into idols."*  
(59; Troitsky's emphasis)

This then is precisely the error of the imyabozhniki. By honoring the name *per se* outside of its connection with God himself and speaking of it as a "spiritual essence" they have created an idol and/or have even introduced a fourth divine hypostasis into the Holy Trinity. This accusation of Troitsky's is, however, merely a repetition of the same misrepresentation first made by Khrisanf and later by Abp. Antony. None of the imyaslavtsy ever spoke about combinations of letters entirely out of context; in fact, "the name of God" *by definition* consists of those combinations in the context of their link in meaning to God himself.

In any case, the imyaslavtsy consistently explained that they were speaking of "God's name" in the wider sense meaning all of a person's thought about or knowledge of God. This position of theirs Troitsky acknowledges but asserts that it is merely obfuscation, for he believes "name" means specifically and exclusively the combinations of sounds. If the imyabozhniki mean by it "idea" or "thought" then they should simply say that. Be that as it may, they are wrong there too, he says. To equate our thought of God with God himself is even worse than doing that with his name, for thought exists only within the person. As St. Gregory of Nyssa said that "the name or *idea* are for Eunomius an idol which replaces God" (71), the same can be said of Eunomius' modern followers. Here Troitsky has at least not misrepresented his opponents' position, and it is precisely here that the fundamental difference between the two sides in the controversy is located. Before investigating that further, however, it will be helpful to review the practical consequences of his viewpoint.

Troitsky explains that God's names are indeed worthy of honor as religious symbols, in which respect they are identical in nature to all the others (the cross, icons, etc). Just as an icon consists of wood and paint, a name consists of paper and ink or vibrations in the air. Both serve merely to point to their prototype. This understanding is reflected in scriptural and patristic texts speaking of the cross and of icons in the same exalted terms used for God's name, and in statements like one made at the Sixth and Seventh Ecumenical Councils calling the words of the Gospel books an icon (image) of Christ. Therefore:

The name of God is also a symbolic representation of God, is an εἰκὼν, just like a painted icon, and about icons, i.e. all representations of God, not excluding from that God's names, the fathers of the Church and the Seventh Ecumenical Council itself clearly and decisively teach that they are not God. (104)

In fact neither the fathers of the councils nor the councils themselves said that; the statement "icons are not gods" repudiates an understanding rather different from that held by the imyaslavtsy.

Fr. Antony's approach to this issue is diametrically opposed to Troitsky's: whereas the latter calls names forms of "icons" in order to forestall ascribing too much significance to them, Fr. Antony calls icons forms of "name" in order to link them to the wider meaning of "name" and thereby ultimately to ascribe greater significance to them. The difference may seem strictly semantic, but it involves radically different views of reality insofar as Troitsky's approach reflects his view that the link between symbol and object is entirely subjective and therefore not real. Fr. Antony's approach on the other hand stresses the reality of that "link," subjective though it may be.

Another consequence of Troitsky's view is that since a name is just another symbol it cannot sanctify any of the others; icons, for example, are sanctified by the image itself painted on them, not by the name. The imyaslavtsy, of course, would reply that the image is itself the name, but Troitsky adds that in any case it is really only God himself who sanctifies:

And so not one holy object is sanctified by the name of God, but all holy objects are sanctified by God's grace and only with invocation of the name of God or with the use of other holy symbols expressing the faith of the Church in God. (128)

Troitsky also repeats the accusations that imyabozhniki hold a magical and superstitious view of the effectiveness of God's name in prayer. Equating them with the medieval Jewish rabbis who, he explains, believed that pronunciation of the divine name always produced desired results, he lists a series of examples like the following:

When the Philistine threw David high up, Avisaga pronounced "the name" and David remained hanging between heaven and earth, and later, with the help of the same means, came down. In general, in rabbinic literature "the name" often plays the role of a flying machine. (109)

The same superstitious view could be found in Christian apocryphal literature, where the name "Jesus" merely replaces the tetragrammaton. Examples:

The name "Jesus" banishes fever, heals all diseases, raises a person into the air and lets him down again, helps a camel go through the eye of a needle, raises the dead, and drives out demons. (110)

The error in all this is that it places God in dependence on the whims of people and uses his name as something separate from him himself. Against such usage Troitsky explains that confession of God's name has no meaning except as an expression of faith, and points out that pronouncing God's name often does not result in miracles, and many miracles occur entirely without such pronunciation. From this he concludes that there is no "internal connection" between miracles and God's name. In general miracles occur for the purpose of strengthening and spreading the Christian faith, which is why God deigns to do some through otherwise unworthy people, rather than because of the power of the name itself. In any case only God himself through his grace actually performs miracles, not icons themselves, not names themselves, and not any of the other means used by humans to help bring them about. In this respect all holy symbols are nothing more than a means for grace.

This issue is directly tied to the sacraments, and here also Troitsky argues that only God himself and not his name is the effective or sanctifying force. In addition, since at the Seventh Ecumenical Council statements were made specifying that the eucharist is not an image (εἰκόν) of the Lord's body and blood but rather truly is his body and blood, and since names are forms of icons, Troitsky concluded that God's name can neither be called a sacrament nor be equated to one:

... if the name of God by itself, as only a holy symbol *created by man*, cannot even compare with a sacrament in which *by God's will* the grace of God is inseparably united with a symbol, then it is clear that in no way can God's name sanctify the sacraments. (136)

And because the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of the Lord solely by the action of the Holy Spirit, sacraments cannot even be equated with prayer:

In this way the sacrament is effected by God and only by him; and in this the sacrament differs from prayer, where there are two actions, and the divine action is united with the human action. (138)

He specifies that sacraments are always effective, but, probably being conscious of thereby claiming for them essentially what the imyaslavtsy claim for God's name in prayer -- and for which he accuses them of magic -- Troitsky carefully explains that such could not be said of the sacraments:

... God performs the sacrament exclusively according to his good will, and not by any necessity; he performs it because he himself freely chose to unite for the whole time of the existence of the Church militant the actions of his grace which creates the new man with certain conditions, carried out by man. (138)

The pronunciation of God's name is but one of many conditions needed to effect the sacraments, others of which are material in nature, such as water for baptism. Therefore the imyabozhniki are guilty of a Lutheran view of the sacramental nature of the word, the unthinkable consequences of which would be that anyone, even non-Orthodox, could perform sacraments; the church hierarchy would not be needed; and even the sacraments themselves could be done away with.

Troitsky differentiates prayer from sacraments also in that pronunciation of God's name is not even one of the necessary conditions for the former as it is for the latter; as Theofan Zatvornik and others say, it can consist merely of a "striving of mind and heart" for God. The fact that names are unnecessary can even be seen in ordinary human interaction, where two people can communicate without knowing each other's names. Granted, Bulatovich calls the whole of a person's knowledge about God God's name, and the person's understanding of himself causing him to speak to God he calls the person's own name, but in doing so:

Bulatovich simply named all the elements of prayer with the word "name," although no one has ever called these elements that until now; and thanks to such a method of proof he easily attained the needed result. Such a hussar-like audacious method of proof somewhat recalls the tale of the Catholic monk who called birds given to him during Lent by the names of various fishes, and so considered that he hadn't broken the fast. (123)

A truer analogy would be to say that Troitsky's position is like that of a person who gave the monk fishes but called them birds in order to accuse the monk of breaking the fast. Fr. Antony had clearly shown that his understanding of "name" was solidly based on scriptural usage.

In addition to warning against exaggerating the importance of God's names in general, Troitsky also expends much effort to show that the name "Jesus" is not more important than the others. If it appears so in the book of Acts, that is simply because it was necessary for the spread of the new faith at that time. As for Philippians 2:9, St. Gregory of Nyssa interprets it not as exalting any one particular name above the others but rather as speaking of God's essential unnameability; "the name of Jesus" means "this special name which Jesus has," i.e., that of the unnameable God. And many patristic texts speak of "Jesus" as a human name. Khrisanf's applying it to the Lord's human nature is not nestorianism but rather rejecting such usage amounts to monophysitism.<sup>43</sup> This last charge is typical of Troitsky's apparently willful misunderstanding or misrepresentation of his opponents' position. Fr. Antony had very clearly objected not simply to referring the name Jesus to the Lord's human nature but rather to doing so exclusively -- and in that he was correct because the Lord's name designates his *person*, which is at once human and divine.

Troitsky goes on to refute the most important of the proof texts quoted by the heretics. He argues that some, i.e. those not of the canonical books of scripture or of canonized saints, are not authoritative anyway and may be dismissed. Statements of someone like John of Kronstadt cannot be used to help establish the teaching of the Church or at least cannot be placed on the same level as truly authoritative texts.

Having thus immediately disqualified a large chunk of his opponents' witnesses, Troitsky deals with most of the rest by ascribing them to poetic or metaphorical language. Specifically he claims that the *imyabozhniki* are guilty of confusing homonyms, i.e. words which are spelled and sound alike but which have completely different meanings. He provides an example of the nonsense that can arise from such confusion: the word "lock" can mean a lock of hair or the lock

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<sup>43</sup>Ascribing to Jesus Christ just one nature (*mono-physis*) was condemned at the council of Chalcedon in 453 as constituting a denial of his humanity, i.e., as confessing Christ as being truly God but not truly man.

on a door, but just because of the words' similarity one does not speak of combing the lock of a door or of unlocking a lock of hair.<sup>44</sup>

The danger of confusing things in this way is especially present in theology since, as Max Muller confirms, all religious terminology consists of homonyms. "Name" is no exception. Not only can it mean a combination of letters, it can also mean glory and renown, and it can even be used simply as a synonym for the person itself. These meanings must not be confused. The latter usage is typical of Hebrew and can be seen especially in poetical texts like the Psalms. These often make use of parallelism wherein two clauses mean essentially the same thing; so texts like "Praise the Lord, sing praises to his name" prove nothing except that "name" is used there in a sense different from that of a symbol of sound. And there are many such uses of "name" which are simply peculiarities of the Hebrew language. Where texts say "the name of God" does a miracle, this means actually "God through his name." Likewise, in Hebrew "*b'shem*" (in the name) is used simply as a preposition meaning exactly the same thing as "*b*" (in), so that texts speaking of "faith in God's name" actually mean "faith in God himself." The same principle applies to texts like Isaiah 30:27: perhaps it really is a prophecy of the coming of Christ; but if so, then that is simply a different meaning of "name." Therefore all of the proofs offered by the imyabozhniki are convincing only for people who don't realize this peculiarity of language in general and Hebrew in particular.

The validity of this line of thinking is dependent on whether or not the various meanings of "name" are truly as unconnected and unrelated as Troitsky claims. And that is directly linked to the question of whether the symbols used to express those meanings are "in reality" unconnected with them. In a word, what Troitsky and all those opposing the imyaslavtsy were advocating is nominalism. And that is inevitably based upon objectivism. Both are foreign to Christianity.

Prof. Troitsky believes it is possible to conceive of an object "in itself" outside of all relation to any subject, entirely out of any and all context. But in fact an object inevitably presumes a subject; an object removed from all context is literally inconceivable, for the very act of conceiving places it in the context of the conceiver's mind. To speak of things "in or by

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<sup>44</sup>The example in Russian is *коса*, which can mean 1) plaid or braid of hair; 2) scythe; 3) spit (small peninsula).

themselves" insofar as that means "entirely out of context" is to speak untruth and unreality. Reality by its very nature includes *both* subject and object, and to divorce either from the other is fundamentally impossible. Reality is always as it were "dependent on" or "conditioned by" or "determined by" both subject and object, and to deny the proper role of each is to speak falsehood. This is why the belief that something can be isolated as "entirely subjective" and therefore "not real" is fundamentally false.

Nearly every page of Christian scripture abounds with evidence that it does not endorse such a view, but a few examples will suffice here. One is the story of Jesus watching all the rich people put great sums of money into the temple treasury and then seeing one poor widow throw in two cents and remarking: "Truly I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them: for they all put in the offering out of their plenty, but she from her lack put in all the life that she had." (Lk 21:3-4) He did not say she put in more "relative to the others" but simply "truly ... she put in more." The objectivist has no choice but to deny the Lord's words and assert that no, she *really* did *not* give more.

Even the scriptural language itself argues against an objectivist view, as can be seen in the following saying of the Lord:

Either make the tree good and its fruit good; or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. (Mt 12:33)

In general Hebrew words meaning "cause to be" or "make to be" also mean "consider to be" or "judge to be." The talk here is not about doing things to trees but about rendering judgments, about naming. Yet it is expressed in terms of changing reality ("making to be"). The objectivist must argue that the two meanings are separate and incompatible -- but this is an incompatibility felt neither by the Hebrew language nor by the Lord himself.

One of the very best examples of how Christianity balances the two "sides" or "aspects" of truth comes from St. Paul:

... we know that there is no idol in the world and that there is no god but one; for even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is one

God, the Father, from whom are all things and we for him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and we through him. (1 Cor 8:4-6)

The objectivist must reject "indeed there are many gods and lords" while the subjectivist must reject "there is no god but one," but St. Paul does not find it necessary to reject either. Indeed, a Christian cannot absolutely reject the truth of either without ultimately denying the whole of the Christian faith.

It is this "balance" of two seemingly conflicting truths that the opponents of the imyaslavtsy abandoned. In doing so they were constantly forced to interpret scripture as "*really meaning*" something quite different from its plain wording; so "the name above all names" "really means" no name at all; "God's name healed this man" *really means* God healed this man through His name; "faith in God's name" *really means* faith in God himself, and so forth. Such interpretations are not without validity -- but to deny the equal validity of the sense of the plain wording is not merely to reject "literalism" but to project upon the texts a view of reality fundamentally different from the one they themselves reflect.

The point is that one cannot deny the reality or truth of "that which is subjective" without ultimately denying all reality, for all reality is experienced, is known subjectively. If, for example, I see a blue sky and another person sees it green, and I say that the other is wrong, I am essentially saying that his perception or his understanding or his knowledge of the sky is not the same as mine. He will say the same about mine. Which of us is correct? Which of us speaks "objective" truth? The only way to answer that is to assume that both of us are of one nature which would "normally" cause our perceptions of the same object to be the same, that our common nature also permits those perceptions to differ, and that we can determine what the "normal" perception should be for the object in question. The *only* basis for deciding that one of our understandings is "objectively true" and the other "objectively false" is thus to somehow decide that human beings *should* normally see there the color blue. In a simple case like the color of the sky we assume that human beings "should" see blue because most do, but in other areas deciding what "should be" is not so easy.

This is directly applicable to Christianity. The Christian believes that human persons can indeed know God because that capability is inherent in their common human nature insofar as all are made in his image and likeness. On that basis and only on that basis can we assert that the

Christian understanding of God is "objectively" true and understandings contrary to it false. However, the Christian understanding or experience of God is ultimately just as "subjective" as all other understandings of God. And so we must acknowledge a sense in which all such understandings *are indeed* true and real. If we deny another reality because it is "only subjective" and because that which is subjective is *per se* "not real" -- then we inevitably deny the truth and reality of our own understanding of God as well since it is equally subjective. There is thus in Christianity a paradox or antinomy according to which we must acknowledge that one and the same thought can be "true and real" and simultaneously "untrue and unreal." To completely repudiate either or to over-emphasize either at the expense of the other is to distort reality itself. This is why St. Paul did not feel it necessary to deny unconditionally the reality of other gods; he in fact *could not* do so.

That is precisely where Troitsky erred, and it can be seen most concisely in the statement quoted above where he concludes that the connection between symbol and object is unreal because it "exists not in reality but only in our thought ..." Thought, memory, sensation, experience, perception, knowledge -- all these do refer primarily to that which is "subjective," but this by its very nature cannot be divided or separated from that which is "objective." So even if it were true that the "connection" between symbol and object exists "only in thought" -- it nevertheless truly, in reality, does exist.

But in fact that connection cannot exist "only in our thought" any more than the light by which we see exists "only in our thought." Just as we see because light through the organs of our eyes creates impressions on our mind, the "connection" between symbol and object can only be the result of some particular action. It must be created there by a very real action either of the person using the symbol or by other persons. Or by God. If God did give the name "Jesus" to his Son by sending his archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary<sup>45</sup> -- then the "connection" between that particular symbol and its referent is not even of human provenance but of divine. Unreal? Then divine inspiration is unreal. But this is clearly not Christian belief. Moreover, Christianity acknowledges that divine inspiration is at work not only in isolated miraculous events but through-

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<sup>45</sup>One need not even accept a literal interpretation of Mt 1:20 ff: the essential point that the choice of the name "Jesus" was indeed made by God himself remains insofar as one believes that scripture is true and inspired by God.

out the life of the Church -- in the whole of scripture, in the writings of the saints, in the Church's prayers and worship services, etc. And so the same can be said of other symbols' relationship to reality that can be said of the name of Jesus.<sup>46</sup>

In this context one can also see that Troitsky misinterpreted St. Gregory's statement that for Eunomius the "name or idea" of God had become an idol: by this St. Gregory meant not that *any* name or idea is by nature an idol, but rather that *Eunomius'* name or idea of God was such. This was so specifically because his "idea" of God was false; or in other words because it was incompatible with the one St. Gregory took to be normative -- true -- for Christians. St. Gregory would not have called his own "idea" of God an idol because he believed it to be true. At the same time, vital to the "true-ness" of his own "idea of God" was the conception that it was not absolutely all-encompassing, could not be identified absolutely with God. The idea that his understanding of God was in some sense inadequate was included in the very understanding itself, and that is why it did not become an idol for him. All of which is precisely the way the imyaslavtsy understood God's name.

As they pointed out, scripture does use "name" in the wider sense meaning all of our knowledge of God, and in that sense the name of God truly is God, *our* God, God as we know him. And so they were also correct in saying that one cannot conceive of God apart from his name, for that is the same as saying that an object (God) cannot be conceived of without presuming a subject (his name, understood as our human understanding of him). It is the same as saying one cannot conceive of or know the "essence" of God. And so the faith of the imyaslavtsy -- their understanding of God, their "name of God" -- was precisely that of the Old Testament, of the New Testament, of St. Gregory of Nyssa, of St. Gregory of Palamas and of the entire Christian tradition. With which their opponents' understanding was incompatible.

The importance of the difference between them and their opponents is by no means trivial. If a given person's understanding of God is contrary to the Christian view, a Christian must nevertheless admit that that person's God is indeed true and real for that person, though it is not the Christian God. The same is true for us who are Christians, and if then our understanding of God is indeed God himself for us -- then *all* that affects our understanding of him is of the utmost

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<sup>46</sup>This does not mean that all are of equal importance, of course.

importance because it determines the personality of the God we serve. The essence of Christian life is truly to love and serve God -- but we can only truly serve the God whom we know, and so to the extent that our knowledge of God is false, even though we call ourselves Christian we are in effect serving a false God. For Christians this knowledge of God, also called experience of God or communion with God, comes about in every aspect of life in the Church, yet some specific actions have a more direct or influential bearing on it than others. Among these would be prayer, participation in church services and sacraments, and reading of scripture and writings of the saints.<sup>47</sup> Therefore the words used in those contexts are of tremendous importance insofar as they constitute one of the most directly and obviously influential factors forming our understanding of God.

This is why so many prayers of the church consist almost entirely of names (i.e., descriptions of what God is like and what he has done). The Anaphora of St. Basil's Liturgy is typical:

... O Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the great God and Savior, our Hope, who is the Image of your goodness, the Seal of your very likeness, showing forth in himself you, O Father -- the living Word, the true God, the eternal Wisdom, the Life, the Sanctification, the Power, the true Light, through whom the Holy Spirit was revealed ...

These prayers help ensure that all who are gathered together for common prayer are indeed speaking to the same God; through them we are not only speaking to God but forming our own understanding of him into the one common Christian understanding of him.<sup>48</sup>

Hence the specific words used to form that understanding -- the names -- are of the utmost importance. Troitsky's talk about homonyms is misleading; there is a significant difference between multiple meanings of one word, and multiple words which are spelled the same. The

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<sup>47</sup>Once again, they are not necessarily all of equal importance.

<sup>48</sup>Hence also the warnings about the Jesus Prayer -- its short and concentrated form is at once its advantage and its danger. The person who does not already know the Lord well through years of living experience with him could easily pour into the name "Lord Jesus Christ Son of God" his own false meaning, and thereby be praying not to the true Jesus Christ of true Christianity but to someone or something quite different.

various meanings of one word are truly and intimately connected with each other and each reveals something about the other.<sup>49</sup> So when we speak of Jesus Christ as "Life" we are not *merely* using a different meaning for this word. We are indeed doing that, but at the same time the more general meaning of "life" shapes our understanding of Jesus Christ, and he in turn shapes our understanding of "life" itself. In this way the two become intimately tied together in our thought -- and therefore in reality.

It is for this reason that the names we use to refer to God are not to be treated lightly; we are not free to change them at will. This is why Orthodox Christians are so unwilling to change traditional symbols used to refer to God. This is why we will not, for example, refer to God as "she"; we may not be able to specify precisely how the masculine pronoun "he" shapes our understanding of God, but in some way it inevitably does, and to change it would involve a change in our very understanding of him -- and then we would actually be serving a different God.<sup>50</sup> It is in this context that Ilarion's statement about the name "Jesus" is to be understood: if we tried to call Jesus by a different name our understanding of him would indeed change -- for us he himself would change and we would be worshiping a different Lord, a different God -- because this name also bears other meanings which shape our understanding of the Lord.<sup>51</sup>

What this also means is that a difference in word usage always involves a different view of reality, for no word is a mere combination of letters out of all context. Ultimately there is no such thing as a difference "only in semantics." Each and every word has particular associations which influence and form the others. In some cases such influences are relatively insignificant but in others they are tremendously significant. For a Christian who takes his faith seriously, those referring to God belong in the latter group. And so the contention that God's names are really not

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<sup>49</sup>Of course, even the different meanings of homonyms are connected insofar as they share the same symbol expressing them. But this connection is far less significant.

<sup>50</sup>The same can be said of other symbols. In his role as celebrant of the Eucharist the priest serves as a symbol of Christ himself, and after thousands of years during which the Church has felt that being male was somehow significant in this context, to change that belief now could change the very understanding of God himself, even though we do not conceive of him as "male" in a crudely anthropomorphic sense.

<sup>51</sup>Including its etymological meaning "Savior" or "Victor" as well as the Old Testament persons who also bore it.

all that important, that they can be changed at will, and that they serve only as a means for calling upon him are all fundamentally false. And the assertion that the word "God" can only mean God's "essence" is by no means a trivial error but is rather of the utmost seriousness.

Indeed, the consequences of the nominalist view for all of Christian life are enormous. Veneration of icons becomes meaningless, for then when we venerate an icon of Christ, we are not "in reality" kissing Jesus Christ himself but only wood and paint. Even if Christ himself were to appear now in bodily form as he walked the earth in the first century we could never really kiss him himself -- the apostles never did so, they never saw him himself, they never heard him himself, etc. -- for his human body is not the "essence" of his divine person.<sup>52</sup> Ultimately every single action of Christian worship, every expression of worship and reverence -- all of life -- is made meaningless and worthless by the nominalist viewpoint. Nothing is true, nothing is real.

The point in all of this is not that the phrase "the name of God is God himself" cannot be interpreted in a way contrary to the Christian faith. One can do that with any given expression, as did Sabellius with as venerable a term as "Holy Trinity."<sup>53</sup> But this expression is indeed capable of a true interpretation, and that true interpretation was the one held by the imyaslavtsy. What's more, it *cannot* be rejected out of hand without ultimately denying the faith *in toto*. Proving it to be absolutely and unconditionally false requires disproving also scripture, fathers, liturgy -- ultimately the whole of the Christian tradition. Yet the condition for the exiled imyaslavtsy to be readmitted to communion with the church was precisely to sign a paper acknowledging that they "in no way" (отнюдь) considered the name of God to be God himself.

From an Orthodox Christian standpoint was the position of those who opposed the imyaslavtsy then heretical? If that were synonymous with "false" the answer would unquestionably be yes. The imyaslavtsy were certainly as justified in calling their opponents "imyabortsy" for denying the divinity of God's name as the early church was in using the etymologically similar word "pneumatomakhoi" to designate those who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit. But the

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<sup>52</sup>Of course, the same can be said even of mere human beings. Who can define or locate the "essence" of a human person? Nominalism leads to a denial of reality on every level; one need not be a Christian to reject it.

<sup>53</sup>Sabellius' view was termed "modalism," for he taught that God does not consist of three real persons but rather one only, who manifests himself in three different ways or "modes".

word "heresy" also tends to imply that a given position is stubbornly held even after it has been explicitly condemned by church authorities. That is not the case here. As *Moskovskiya Vedomosti* said of Nikon's use of military force, "This is much worse." Much worse. Here it is the church authorities themselves who not only proclaimed falsehood as truth, but also demanded signatures from their flock by which they would repudiate truth and embrace falsehood.

The Russian church was maneuvered into that position largely by political factors, and it would turn out to be largely political factors that would rescue it. Or God working through those factors. Both views are true.