

CONCLUSION

If the cause of this complex theological controversy can be reduced to one basic issue, then that might be what is sometimes termed scholasticism. This approach to theology views it as a system of data culled from authoritative sources which can then be put into a comprehensive scientific system. Scholastic theology is characterized by a belief that these data can provide an answer for every question, that everything can be divided into neat and distinct categories for which there are always simple and clear rational explanations.

Into this system as it has existed and to some degree does exist in the Orthodox Church, a belief in God's name as a real "sacrament" simply will not fit. It cannot be reconciled with the view that would set aside seven and only seven "sacraments" as absolutely unique rites fundamentally different from other aspects of Christian life. It cannot be reconciled with the view that ascribes efficacy to "sacraments" only when they are performed by duly appointed hierarchs within the canonical limits of the Eastern Orthodox Church. And insofar as it presumes that every person has within himself or herself the capability of immediate and direct communion with God it cannot be reconciled with the view limiting the bounds of the Church to its official membership lists.

At the time of this controversy the scholastic approach to theology was widely accepted and taught in Orthodox theological institutions. That is why such a clash arose between the "educated" monks imbued with the rationalistic spirit of the late nineteenth century Russian seminaries and the "simple" monks imbued with the spirit of Bible, liturgy, and fathers -- for the two "spirits" are at heart incompatible. That the imyaslavtsy were generally those who had never attended theological seminaries (including Fr. Antony Bulatovich) reveals both the tremendous potential for evil inherent in such institutions and the tremendous power for good inherent in the

liturgical life of the Church, its scripture, and the writings of its saints. These two points cannot be overemphasized.

Scholasticism has been able to exist within Orthodoxy because on the surface it does not deny the essential truths of the faith. In Orthodoxy varying opinions can and do peacefully coexist; however, this is not because we consider mutually contradictory beliefs to be equally acceptable; rather, it is because we recognize that people, including hierarchs, are fallible, and their making mistakes does not necessarily make them "heretics." However, when disagreements are perceived to be about essential truths of the faith, and especially when at least one side wants to force its view on the other, it becomes necessary to seek a definitive resolution to the question.

We have here an example of how that is done in the Orthodox Church, or at least how it was done in the Russian Orthodox Church of the early twentieth century. It is not a pretty picture. Major dogmatic pronouncements were influenced primarily by personal grudges, personal favoritism, intra- and inter-church politics, and interference from secular authorities. The supposedly conciliar mechanisms for assuring that such decisions reflected the mind of the Church were simply window-dressing for decisions predetermined by a few powerful individuals. Mechanisms for appeal served only to maintain an appearance of fairness while reliably rendering predetermined verdicts. Church leaders at every level from monastery abbots to Holy Synod acted as autocrats not responsible to anyone but themselves. And the way in which high positions of ecclesiastical authority could be occupied by people ready, willing, and able to use their power to perpetrate shocking cruelties on those with whom they disagreed is little short of mind-boggling.

It would not be true to assert that this is a highly unusual state of affairs, however. In fact, political, personal, and economic factors can be found to play important roles in nearly every major controversy that has ever rocked the church. Sometimes they seem to have been decisive. But in each such case it was the masses of simple church members, usually led by a few skillful apologists, who ultimately determined whether the victory of one side or the other would be temporary or permanent. Falsehood might appear to reign for years, even decades, but it was always ultimately doomed to fail so long as it did not capture the hearts of the masses of simple believers. So too in this controversy over the name of God. Had the imyaslavtsy been unable to prove that they were indeed faithful to the church's tradition, the "connections" through which earlier condemnations were reversed would have availed little. On the other hand, had the

imyabortsy kept up their attacks, a more definitive resolution would have been necessary, and the heresy of "imyaborchestvo" would have been made famous by a definitive condemnation. But they did not and it was not. And seeing that it has not arisen again, it did not need to be.

However, "imyaborchestvo" was indeed as serious a "heresy" as any of those which have been officially branded as such. The denial of the divinity of God's name was the first step on a road that could only inevitably lead not to Christ but away from him, not to life but to death. And for the Russian Church to officially remain on record as endorsing such an inherently anti-Christian view would have caused incalculable harm to the Church in the following years. For that reason all Orthodox Christians owe a debt of gratitude to the work done by the imyaslavtsy in defense of the truth, particularly to those who accepted incredible hardships in defense of truths they themselves didn't even fully understand. Of them, Fr. Antony Bulatovich played a role not unlike that of Maximus the Confessor in an earlier theological dispute. The issue there too was one seen by many to be about an obscure and unimportant point of theology. There too it seemed like only one dared raise his voice against the prevailing opinion of those in power, and that only he was endowed with the literary capability to do so. There too the defender of the faith died not in glory, not having been vindicated in his lifetime, but having seemingly been rejected by the Church he had so hoped to serve.

Both cases speak eloquently about the very nature of the Orthodox Church, as Bulgakov had suggested in 1913. For us preservation of truth is not solely the responsibility of the church hierarchy -- in fact, all too often truth has had to be defended *from* the hierarchy. That responsibility, in varying forms and degrees, belongs rather to each and every member. This is in turn possible because each and every member has personal knowledge of and communion with God himself through the indwelling Holy Spirit. And that is effected by the power of God's name -- in prayer, in certain rites like baptism and the eucharist, and in numberless other acts of faith which essentially constitute confessions of God's name.

These are indeed fundamental truths of the faith, not minor intricacies of esoteric theology. And we who are Orthodox are indebted not only to God for his work in preserving this truth within his church, but also to those people through whom he did it. If they made mistakes, so did all of the saints of the church, who were, after all, human. So it is in recognition of the debt of gratitude owed to them especially by all of us who are spiritual children of the Russian Church that I

dedicate this work to the imyaslavtsy and particularly to Fr. Antony Bulatovich. May God grant them "memory eternal" -- an eternal name.