

“Name Worship,” Epistemology and the Abuse of Christian Philosophy A Revision

Matthew Raphael Johnson
Johnstown, PA

In 2015, I published a paper on the question of “Name Worship.” Looking back, it was a poorly worded essay. It could have been much clearer. The concepts here are not easy, especially for a layman, and any writer has to keep the views of the non-specialist in mind. My former presentation was muddled and confused in parts, and this revision is meant to address and correct that. I should have been more careful in the first presentation and ensured the upmost clarity in expression. The key argument here is that the term “name” did not mean the same thing in the patristic era that it does today. This is the crux of the present controversy and, when that's addressed, the controversy largely disappears – MRJ, December 31 2018).

“Name worship” or the doctrine of *“imiaslavie”* is one the most eccentric of all doctrinal controversies in Orthodox history. In part, this is because of its metaphysical complexity and difficulty. Almost always, the terms are stated incorrectly. Also, the acceptance or rejection of the theory has no impact on one's faith or life. This cannot be said of any other heresy or controversy in the past. More than anything else, it is almost totally unknown to the average, beleaguered parishioner, who now has to sort through yet another set of doctrinal controversies tearing his already damaged church apart. This essay is a brief analysis of what metaphysics has to do with Christianity.

In the *Historical Dictionary of the Russian Language*, we read under the heading “name”

In the Biblical sense, the concept of “name” is not just the proper name of something, but also the essence of that thing. It goes on to give examples of the name and its connection with the person in the old testament. For example, Abraham means the “father of the race.” Benjamin, the “son of happiness,” Moses is “saved from the water,” David is “beloved,” and so on.

In no way can this be evidence for the magical connection between the word and the person or the qualities of the person, but it might shed some light on the origin of our problem. Furthermore, the essential elements of apophatic logic are that any word cannot exhaust the experience and meaning it contains or seeks to replicate. Like anything else, words are historical products reflecting the fundamental ontological assumptions of those coining and using them.

The apophatic approach argues that words are abbreviations of fundamental ontological truths. They are symbols in the best sense of the term. A “symbol” is not the opposite of “substantial,” but is the very expression of substance. The cross is a symbol that speaks volumes. However, to recount the history of the crucifixion each time we speak of the cross would be a tad inconvenient. Hence, these symbols are abbreviations for a massive amount of transcendent material and are anything but non-substantial.

I.

In 813, the iconoclast emperor Leo V took power over a defeated, broken and

demoralized Byzantium. From Irene to Michael, Byzantium lost a huge amount of money, men and territory in a motley array of unsuccessful wars against Krum's Bulgaria. Leo, a strong populist, rebuilt the morale of the Byzantine army, but his source of ideological justification was iconoclasm, well established in the popular mind at the time with victory and military discipline.

It is always a good axiom to hold that no “academic” issue is ever merely ethereal, with no practical “value.” The heresies of the Byzantine period in the first millennium had extremely clear-cut and well known political and philosophical consequences that are often lost on the contemporary historian and, most certainly, the contemporary amateur historian within Orthodoxy.

From Arianism to Iconoclasm, one issue was at stake: the relationship of the Christian society to God, or even more basically, that of spirit and matter, form and content. Iconoclasm was always the party of the strong state, since the removal of icons was not really about “icons” as such, but the “autonomous” presence of grace within human affairs. The icons were a clear and understandable consequence of this issue, but not the heart. The concept of mediation and grace were the main concerns.

Each heresy, from the Arians to Iconoclasts, had clear payoffs to political power. Every heresy had imperial support without exception, showing the Orthodox as a small minority. The emperor did not “force” Orthodoxy on the world, it was instead a reaction to long periods of state persecution that all heresies justified. If divinity and divine energy are not independent, operating outside of human channels, then it can be “created” and controlled. It is papism and the essence of totalitarianism.

In Panos Sophoulis' (2012) work *Byzantium and Bulgaria, 775-831*, we read a adept description of this problem:

[T]he decision to prohibit icons also represented a reassertion of imperial authority. It was a statement by Leo [V] that he held the position of supremacy in mediating between God and men, and that, consequently, bishops, monks and icons themselves were no longer to be the dominant force they had become under Irene and Michael I, but were to come under the control, and if necessary, the ban of the emperor (Sophoulis, 248).

The issue is mediation. The church's role is not about “channeling” the uncreated grace of God for any purpose, but about pointing to where it always is. It serves to sanctify the nation, people, economy and state, not just the person. Nothing is left out of its scope. Nothing is to be removed from God's saving grace. It's no accident that both the Greek and Lutheran banning of icons was met with the simultaneous and identical justification for a centralized state control.

This issue gets to the heart of heresy and the distinction between Orthodoxy and heresy. Icons, among many other things, are mediators, expressions of uncreated grace. Grace is not something created by bishops then “dispensed” to the people. This is the error of errors: it's what separates heresy from Orthodoxy. This is the essence of what Khomiakov called the “Kushite” approach to the world, one based on formal, logical and external unities. The idea that bishops, the state, or a pope decides where grace goes, and that he may summon such power as he sees fit, is a preposterous superstition, but cannot be more critical to understanding the world. The vocabulary of this “channeling” is different, but the idea of human rights being the domain or creation of the state is just one manifestation.

When icons – in the broad sense – are removed, so is the cultural and liturgical center of a

people. Without mediation, there can be no Christian culture, no Christian family or Christian state: what remains is a chasm between God and man that can only be bridged by the power of the state acting in God's "stead." This is Islam. Bishops occasionally play this role, distorting and destroying the entire purpose of Scripture. This is why Arianism was the policy of the statist and centralist throughout its history: God is a distant creator that establishes natural law and leaves it as the proverbial watchmaker.

The opposition is Chalcedon, a balance of the material and spiritual, form and matter, word and meaning, inner and outer. All heresy assumes either that a) the divine has no relation to the material world, or b) that the material world is unreal. For either of these, any check on elite power is destroyed. It is agnosticism's root, since there is no way to show or "experience" something that, by its very nature, cannot be connected with anything man might cognize. Each heresy upsets this balance between the things of man and the things of God mediated by Christ as logos. The autonomous realm of God, and the other of man, acting independently, is essential for freedom of any kind.

II.

The question of "name worship," once understood correctly, points to a systematic intellectual crisis in western man specifically, but increasingly on global terms as well. The entire controversy is being so mishandled, bungled and misappropriated that confusion is all that remains. It rests on a reductionist and positivist definition of "name" or "word." A "name" is not the phonetic pronunciation of a word, nor the shape of the letters on a page. It has nothing to do with language as a set of rules nor the preferred font used to print these symbols. Rather, a "name" or "word" is far broader, it is the content that these vessels contain; it is the reality behind the symbol.

The patristic authors came of age in the Greco-Roman world. This can only be a matter of divine intervention in history. When educated Christians cannot agree on the definition or even existence of fundamental terms such as "physis," "nomos," "ousia," "prosopon," or "hypostasis," then theology has ceased to exist, or at least, cannot be communicated. There can be no Christianity if there is no way for it to be expressed.

The intellectual inability of so many involved in this issue is a problem. Consider the following example: Brian Ephraim Fitzgerald's introduction to St. Basil's work on the Holy Spirit features an attempt to define the term "substance," "essence" or "ousia," without doubt one of the cardinal conceptions of patristic thought, classical metaphysics and even basic cognition:

For the ease of the reader, the terms "essence" and "person" have been used, which do not obscure the meaning of the concepts explained. But to understand these concepts more clearly, and to understand the theological contribution of St. Basil and the Cappadocian Fathers more aptly, it is good to have a basic understanding of the actual terms they used. . . [Ousia] is the being, essence, or substance of a thing, namely the material of which it consists. It can refer both to the substance of an individual item, or to the substance shared by several items, e.g., the golden lamp-stand or the coins of gold. Here gold is the essence of the things mentioned (12).

To say the least, any Freshman philosophy major will not recognize this as a definition of essence or any of its synonyms. In fact, it is a definition of the opposite of essence, namely a

quality or “accident” which is so named only because it is not important to the essential nature of a thing. This is the equivalent of an auto mechanic not being familiar with the meaning of internal combustion or a farmer having no idea what manure is used for.

Gold in the example above would be the “matter” of a thing and hence irrelevant to its essence. “Ousia” is the nature of an object. A lamp is a human artifact not found directly in nature, so its essence would be identical with its purpose. A lamp's essence, therefore, is to give artificial light. The material from which it's made is precisely that which is *not* included in its essence. Mr. Fitzgerald claims a doctoral degree (but no mention of the field), is a clergyman, and sees himself as a teacher of patristic truths. That he cannot define one of the most basic concepts of both philosophy and theology should suffice to show the crisis of ignorance and relativism affecting Orthodoxy. Worst of all, it seems that his colleagues have yet to inform him of his error. He remains an important theologian of the Antiochean Orthodox in America.

Another example of this disaster is the recent exchange of letters between Nikolai Stromsky and a Fr. Panagiotes Carras over this controversy. The only thing here that concerns us is how Plato, a name bandied about in these discussions, is obviously misunderstood and unread. Stromsky quotes Fr. Panagiotes as stating:

Many of [the name worshipers] argued that, since according to the ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, the name of an object exists before the object itself does, so the name of God must pre-exist before the world was created, and that it [the Name] cannot be anything but God Himself. Among other things, this was thought to mean that knowledge of the secret name of God alone allows one to perform miracles. A similar concept exists in Jewish Kabbalah and in Buddhism.” (Stromsky, answer to Bishop Photius of Marathon, November 2011).

Now, for someone who has, for many years, poured over the texts and commentaries of classical Greek and Roman philosophy, this quote was actually painful to read. In fact, its a muddled mess of pretension. Plato never said any such thing. The name and the object are never the same, even if the object is fictional. Any x is a manifestation of divine energy and is dependent upon the spiritual world, that of the Real, the world of the Forms. In creation, all is flux, all is unstable; but the role of reason is to make sense out of this, utilizing Forms or archetypes from a realm that is not in constant motion; this is the realm of Being and Truth. Without access to this world, no knowledge is possible. If the Forms are denied, all that remains is power, not truth. Without the connection to the spiritual world of Forms, “reason” becomes mere pragmatism.

Fr. Panagiotes is the typical amateur in a difficult field. Its typical marks are simplistic reasoning, the use of vague language, and most of all, sweeping conclusions that seem to have no connection to any data presented. The “Greek philosopher Plato” allegedly argues that the name of a thing exists “prior” to the actual observable. The terminology says very little, since it might mean that it is logically “prior” to or chronologically “before” the sensible thing. That is, the archetype of any x can exist without any individual x-es and thus be logically prior to it.

Plotinus or St. Gregory of Nyssa describes the descent of the world from the One as it overflows with content until the world goes from the nous to the more fragmented world of Forms, which is the realm of Platonic archetypes. From then, it becomes mixed with matter until, at the lowest, it is matter and flux. In other words, the structure of the cosmos begins with the unknowable essence of God and ends with the muddled flux of matter. This is *not* a description

of a temporal sequence. All of these levels exist at the same time. Even our language and logic assumes a series of steps until a conclusion is reached. This is a human trait because we are embodied, and nothing universal can have a body. Bodies are things, observable objects. Man is body and soul, not one or the other, but both.

The rest of the quote from Fr. Panagiotes is one big non-sequitur. To have the “secret” name of God, if his understanding was correct, is to be God, not to “perform miracles.” The name is God would thus be his description, and so to know it and to pronounce it is the magician's proof of his dominance over “god.” He would rule all creation. This sort of “vibrational” theory is found in the Zohar, part of the canonical texts of the Kabbalah, and because of that, its all over the Renaissance. The basic idea is that the pronunciation of the name, or certain sounds, imitates the vibrations spoken when “god” first brought all things into being through his voice. This is the only idea that the writer here can be referencing.

More importantly, this most certainly is not what “name worshipers” believe. Other than Alexei Losev (whose approach is different but not “name worship”), this writer has never come across a writer of any sort espousing the the vibrational or any other theory that would identify the “word” denoting the Supreme Being to, in fact, be that Supreme Being.¹

The two examples mentioned here are most certainly not a way to demean anyone. Fr. Panagiotes is an excellent Orthodox cleric and a strict apologist for the True belief. This writer is not claiming some arcane, secret knowledge. It is, however, a needed critique to show that these concepts, the heights of ontology, are not to be approached lightly and certainly not by well meaning amateurs. The technical terms of ontology are not terms used in common speech. Hence, amateurs, not aware of the technical nature of these terms, will misuse them.

The worship of a “name” or a “word” is advocated nowhere. Terms such as “word” or “name” can refer to a) a set of letters of a specific language, b) the pronunciation of these verbally, c) the social understanding of the word when stated in discussion, d) the meaning or content the word exists to communicate, e) the connotation of the word as contrasted to its simpler denotation, or f) most comprehensive of all, the full content of the meaning, social context and historical circumstance of any word's usage. This is just to name a few.

In other words, no name or word exists in isolation, as it is an infinitely plastic thing that connects my consciousness, an object and the rest of the cosmos in countless ways. The mere utterance of the word “Barbados” does not give us the experience of actually being there. Words are highly limited and can only express a tiny amount of experience relative to the whole, and even this is dependent on the clarity of thought and presentation.

The concept of language has tormented philosophy for almost the entirety of the 20th century. As a field, it is massive, abstruse and sometimes impenetrable. If the names of God (or any symbol denoting him) were to be claimed as, in itself, divine, then “name worship” would be a form of mental illness, not a theological heresy. Language is the last field that should be the subject of debate in the church.

The upshot of all this is that the “word” used to express a meaning is a temporary, contingent and historically relative object, but this does not mean the word is an arbitrary invention. The English language has changed so much that words common two or three centuries ago are not used today. Some of my favorite examples include “law,” “family,” “love,” “state,” and “myth.” These words are in common use today, but they also have little relation to their use

1 The Jewish Philo and his school from Alexandria held to some version of the “word” as the literal pronunciation of God that creates through vibration, but this was only to eliminate Christ as logos and to reduce Him to vibrations – a deliberate insult.

in the patristic period or the middle ages. The positivist idea has taken these complex symbols and reduced them to the simplest and most banal denotations.

III.

In Chapter IV of his most infamous book, Fr. Anthony Bulatovich writes:

When a person, driven by the grace of the divine, will work hard and spare no effort, time or interest to call upon God's sacred name in the Jesus prayer. . .with a strong consciousness of his own weakness and need of God's help . . . The Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, so to speak, is present as if it were embodied in the man – people in this state often and clearly feel a strong presence of Christ himself in his name in the soul. This feeling of the Lord's presence and His name merges into one's being and identity, and eventually, one cannot distinguish one from the other (Bulatovich, Ch 4).

This passage is striking because first, it suggests that this is a feeling, not necessarily a real presence, but a mystical emotion. It is “generated” by the repetition of the name under the conditions of true Orthodox hesychasm and virtue. There is no clear reason to reject this, and no clear reason to believe that it is anything other than a strong mystical state created by the grace of the name. Grace and energy are synonyms. Gregory of Sinai speaks of the energies of the Holy Spirit made “actual” by grace. Energy is “prompted by grace” as he writes in his *Signs of Grace and Delusion*. Palamas makes it clear that logos is the divine energy found in creation, and it is that which makes the natural order perceivable and describable.

In Palamas' *Topics on Natural and Theological Science*, he speaks of these energies as “divided” and granted to each according to his level of devotion (sec 69). He also states that the “energy is accessible to us creatures; for according to the theologians, it is indivisibly divided, whereas the divine nature remains totally undivided.” In section 74 he writes, “God's grace and energy are accessible to each one of us.” And in dealing with Moses and Aaron, they are both “vessels of divine energy” which makes of them “living icons. . .by grace rather than assimilation”(76).

Again, Palamas writes in Chapter 93 of his *150 Chapters*: “This very radiance and divinizing energy of God, by which the beings that participate are divinized, is a certain divine grace but not the nature of God. Here, energy is a type of grace, but certainly not different from it.” Again in 110,

This is therefore the object of participation for those deemed worthy of divinizing grace. Listen then once again to Chrysostom who taught both doctrines most clearly, namely, that it is the energy and not the substance which is participated and that it is the energy which is indivisibly divided and participated, and not the imparticipable substance from which the divine energy proceeds.

This is a clear statement showing that Palamas is using “grace” and “energy” interchangeably. The energy of any substance is its operations. It is the object in motion, accomplishing what it has set out to do in accordance with its nature. Energy, as it applies to our human struggle, is grace, or the power and presence of God. Again in Palamas, that grace and energy are one and the same is shown by this passage:

He who participates in the divine energy... becomes himself, in a sense, light; he is united with the light and with the light he sees in full consciousness all that remains hidden for those who have not this grace; for the pure of heart sees God [the light] (Palamas, Sermon on the Feast of the Presentation of the Theotokos and cited by Lossky, 61, of the Image and Likeness of God).

The way its worded, Palamas uses “energy,” “light” and “grace” interchangeably. While they might not be absolutely identical concepts, they are so close as to render this wording harmless. St. Basil says the same in his analysis of the Trinity. In the context of denoting a common nature though the observation of a common “will” among the persons of the Trinity, St. Basil writes:

What, then, is my argument? In delivering the Faith of Salvation to those who are being made disciples in His doctrine, the Lord conjoins with Father and with Son the Holy Spirit also. That which is conjoined once I maintain to be conjoined everywhere and always. There is no question here of a ranking together in one respect and isolation in others. In the quickening power whereby our nature is transformed from the life of corruption to immortality, the power of the Spirit is comprehended with Father and with Son, and in many other instances, as in the conception of the good, the holy, the eternal, the wise, the right, the supreme, the efficient, and generally in all terms which have the higher meaning, He is inseparably united. Wherefrom I judge it right to hold that the Spirit, thus conjoined with Father and Son in so many sublime and divine senses, is never separated (Letter 439, to Eustatius the Physican, sec 5).

The argument of course, is to show that the Trinity has a single will, and that God's power should always be named by a unity of action. It is clear here that by “power” Basil means “will” or “energy.” The power of the Spirit bringing us to God is an action of the Trinity. The Spirit is “united” with the rest of the Trinity and hence, terms such as “right” or “wise” are present in this “higher sense,” that is, the Trinitarian sense. The terms, so long as they are used in this sense, are also not separate from this power. Nothing here suggests that God's name is God Himself, but His power is and His name is connected with His power.

Basil expounds on the idea that “energy” and “grace” are one and the same later in the letter:

There is, then, a distinction to be observed between the essence, of which no explanatory term has yet been discovered, and the meaning of the names applied to it in reference to some operation or dignity. That there should be no difference in the operations we infer from the community of terms. But, we derive no clear proof of variation in nature, because, as has been said, identity of operations indicates community of nature (sec 8).

For us, no name can be granted to the essence of God but only his operations. That's close enough, since we know an x largely by its effects. If the essence cannot be named, then the energies (or its action) can be. At the same time, these energies cannot be radically different from

the essence, or else, as Basil would argue, the energies would be arbitrary.

With that in mind, we can now read The Moscow synod's condemnation of the “name worshipers” in 1913:

The name of God is holy and also gives the faithful a verbal designation of enlightened and holy beings. The name of God is divine because God revealed it to us and it elevates our mind. . . In prayer, in particular the Jesus prayer, the name of God and God Himself are the inseparable – but this is only for prayer and within our own hearts. In theology, the name of God is merely a name and not God Himself. . . .The miracles of the church are not performed by the name, but by the prayer of the church.

This is perfectly understandable, since no one is referring to the name as a mere verbal or written mark. In her *The Divine Name Controversy*, Tatiana Senina (Nun Kassia) writes in reference to the formula “the name of God is God himself” that “In my opinion, this formula evoked and continues to evoke misunderstanding because people are accustomed to understand as “names” only conventional signs and symbols that could of course not be identified with the object named.” This is precisely the argument of this paper. The problem is the phrase “name worship.” The phrase is misleading and, almost by itself, is the cause of the misunderstanding. It is unwise to use an archaic sense of the word “name” in a discussion like this. It gives a very different impression from the intended meaning. Fr. Anthony himself argues,

In the Names of Christ we have, so to speak, the created shell – that is, the sounds and letters – with which we express Truth. These sounds and letters are different in every language, and they will not carry over into eternity, and are not united in any way with the Lord Jesus Christ, because when we, speaking about the Name, have in mind created human words with which we express ideas about God and about Christ, then it is appropriate to speak of the presence of God in His Name (Hieroschemamonk Anthony (Bulatovich). *My Battle with the Onomatoclasts on the Holy Mountain*, 117).

This is the “name worshiping” position. The only thing that Fr. Antony could be referring to is the Truth that the name manifests or communicates something. If this is the case, then there is no issue at all. There is no “name worshiping” controversy. Fr. Anthony repeats elsewhere:

But so that no one would think that this name is some kind of magical power, which by a mere combination of letters and by the power of mere pronunciation must work miracles, Peter added “and faith, which is for His sake, gave him complete healing.” Our opponents ignore the power of the first half of the text and concentrate only on the second; seizing upon these words they say, “There, you see, not the name of the Lord healed the lame man, but faith in him himself.” However, to the degree that it would be unorthodox to affirm that only the power of Peter's pronouncing the name of Jesus Christ without any co-action of his faith healed the lame man, to the same degree it would be unorthodox to affirm that it was not the power of the name of Jesus Christ that co-worked this miracle, and reject the words “His name strengthened him.” (*My Battle with the*

Onomatoclasts on the Holy Mountain, 88)

Fr. Anthony might not express himself perfectly, but it is clear that he is speaking of the form and matter of a theological object. A sacrament is both the grace that exists independently of the actions as well as the actions, rituals and words themselves. For example, one communes with God through the holy Eucharist, but this is not the only way one can commune with God. Therefore, the Eucharist contains the grace, the very presence of Christ that might be found elsewhere. This, however, does not permit the priest to then substitute any material for bread and wine. These are not arbitrarily chosen media. These elements have been chosen for their universal applicability and Christ's own examples. If the name had no connection to its object, there would be no argument against changing these media at will.

The confusion was made worse by the Ecumenical Patriarch's order of April 5th 1913, where he accused this movement "of equating hypostatically the Name of Jesus with Jesus Himself." In 1918, the defenders of the "name worshipers" stated, "[O]ur opponents, with means that we are unable to comprehend, have been transforming an absolutely Orthodox veneration of the Name of God and our expression: "the Name of God is God Himself" – into an expression that is unacceptable to us: "the very Name is God" – something we have never said." This is the crux of the issue and entirely ignored in the polemics about this.

Elder Ilarion writes in a crucial passage:

Certainly one can also pray to the Son of God without the Jesus prayer, even without words – just by a striving of the mind and heart. But firstly this is an achievement of those advanced in the spiritual life, absolutely unattainable for the majority; and secondly even in such contemplative, refined, and immaterial prayer the name of Jesus Christ cannot be excluded. Otherwise to what would the prayer adhere and to what would it attach itself? (76)

Thus, the word is not even necessary for the prayer. How then can they worship the "name" of God? Finally, earlier in the book, he relates this to the Jesus prayer specifically,

But one must know that it is not possible to do any work well immediately. Everyone knows this by experience – how much time, effort, and trouble it has cost each of us to learn the work he does in life. Just so, prayer, which is the highest science -- heavenly, divine, holy, uniting us with our Creator – necessarily must pass through the initial stages of one's learning and getting accustomed to it, in a condition extremely weak, not corresponding to its great dignity. But this must not serve for us as a cause and pretense for leaving and despising it. (48)

These and many other qualifications show that Ilarion, in referring to name, was actually referring to what used to be the domain of "symbol." They are based on Plato's doctrine of Forms. Either way, the name, the orthography or pronunciation are not God.

Gregory Palamas is trotted out by many, often without the slightest idea of the ontological verbiage he uses as the foundation of his theology. Energy, as the grace of God, is not divine. It derives from his divinity, but it is not divine. If it were divine, then all that has been created would be God as well. Names, therefore, are human creations that mediate between God and man for the sake of imparting knowledge. They express some aspect of the eternal truth about

God. They are “graces” in themselves. Palamas writes in chapter 144:

The substance of God is entirely unnameable since it is completely incomprehensible. Thus it is given names on the basis of all its energies although one of the names there differs from another in its denotation. For on the basis of each and all the names nothing other is named than the Hidden One, while 'what it is' is in no way known. But in the case of the energies each of the names has a different meaning, for who does not know that creating, ruling, judging, guiding providentially and God's adopting us as sons by his grace are different from one another? Therefore, those who say that these natural divine energies are created because they differ from one another and from the divine nature, what else but God do they drag down to the level of a creature? For things that are created, ruled, judged and all such things in general are creatures, but not the Creator, and Ruler and Judge, nor even judging, ruling and creating in themselves, which are realities observed in his nature (Palamas, 150 Chapters).

First of all, the “thing” that makes God God cannot be named since it cannot be conceived. That would be His essence. Second, a name is given to its energies in the sense that God's action is not his substance, but imparts an eternal Truth that is present in God. Third, Palamas argues that these energies are not created because God as substance is not created. The effects of this power, this operation in the world, are quite human and comprehensible. There, at least, mankind has a vocabulary that can convey some important information about God's actions and their effects in the world. This and only this is denoted when a name is attached to God's actions such as “powerful” or “just.”

IV.

Another example of the misuse of this technical vocabulary is Vladimir Moss' work rejecting “name worship.” He quotes Gregory Lourié as saying:

If you take away the name “glass” from a glass, it truly ceases to be a glass, but turns into a cylindrical (or some other form of) glass (or made out of some other material) vessel, which is usually used as a container for liquid or some wet substance. You can no longer speak of it as a “glass.” The same applies to any other named objects – in the absence of a name their definition disappears and we are forced to describe them as a combination of other objects, dividing their hypostatic integrity in accordance with various properties of various natures. (quoted from Moss, 27).

Moss concludes from this that Lourié is intrinsically connecting a glass cup with the common term “glass” as if they are identical. No one could or does say this. Lourié only says that if the term “glass” were removed from human circulation, there would be no other way to refer to a cup except by some long, awkward phrase he cites above. You cannot “speak of it as a glass” because, in this example, the term does not exist. It is hypothetical. This is awkwardly phrased in the first sentence with the phrase “take away.” All he means is the absence of the simple, one-syllable term “glass.” He is not making an ontological statement.

Now, the problem develops when certain hierarchs, which under the conditions of

Russia at the time, stated:

On Athos the quarrels are continuing concerning the book of the fallen-into-prelest' schema-monk Ilarion, *Na Gorakh Kavkaza* – highly related to khlystism, which like a fire has now engulfed all of Russia. The essence of this khlystic prelest' consists in their calling some or other cunning and sensual peasant an incarnated Christ and some or other filthy old woman the Mother of God and worshiping them in place of God, after which they betray themselves to carnal (svalnomu) sin. This is the delusion into which Fr. Ilarion is directing his foolish followers, himself not realizing it, we hope.

This is hardly philosophical argument. Vladimir Moss is far from his field when he tries to tackle these issues. While doing admirably well for much of the analysis, the problem is the conventional idea of “name.” He goes halfway, using elements of the ancient and elements of the modern nominalist idea. The ancient understanding of “name” or “word” is accurately but idiosyncratically summarized by philosopher Lloyd Gerson, dealing with names or symbols in the Platonic tradition:

The referents of names in the sensible or material world – the data that the theory of Forms seeks to explain – are essentially images. An essential image is both one that is not adventitiously an image and one that is necessarily related to that of which it is an image. Take away the Form of Largeness and we cannot say that the largeness in a large thing is essentially an image; it could only be adventitiously an image of some idea in the mind of a maker. As we have seen, there is nothing untoward in there being multiple copies of one paradigm. That they are made according to a paradigm is adventitious and produces adventitious sameness, the stipulative kind produced when we say, for example, that two people are from the same place. Real identity in difference, by contrast, requires essential imagery. An essential image is one whose entire being is to be an image (Gerson, 92)

Now, the “image” is the key concept. An image is a reflection, a pictograph, a complex “symbol” that summarizes some of the key elements of an object that make it an x and only an x. “Symbolic” in modern usage is almost identical with non-substantial. Of course, “symbol,” much like “name” in a different context, is not a non-substantial thing, but a complex of graphic contours that manifest, but are not identical with, the Formal objects involved. So here, the deflation of the term makes any reference to the “symbolic” the same as a reference to nothing.

Now Moss seemingly misses Lourie's accurate connection of the denotative and connotative elements found in any term. This is essential: mere denotation is what moderns often mean by “symbol” or “name.” Moss is not willing to move further than the ordinary, denotative concept of words.

Moss will not entertain the idea that a “name” is not merely an accidental link between, say, Vladimir Moss and the name Vladimir. In no way is the name “Vladimir” identical to Vladimir Moss as a human being. Names speak to the culture that creates them, making them something other than arbitrary sounds. A “name” is not a “word,” in the same sense that the concept of logos does not refer to words in a book. Moss is prefacing his entire case on the fact

that a “word” is just a sound. While this is the normal denotation today, it was not the case in the ancient or medieval worlds.

Moss' error is on page 29: “However, in ordinary language names are words. And in ordinary language “Jesus” as referring to the Son of God and “Jesus” as referring to the son of Man are one and the same word and one and the same name.” This is very true, so long as we are not speaking of the ontology of the classical world. The term “symbol” is used identically. Today, the word itself has no bearing on the classical conception. Moss, however, muddies the waters further:

The name-worshippers were also suspected of identifying the names of God with the physical sounds or letters with which they are pronounced or written. That this was a real temptation for some Russian believers is proved by the superstition of some priestless Old Believers, who reasoned that since the Orthodox spelled the name of the Son of God according to His humanity as “Iisus” in Russian, while they themselves spelt it as “Isus”, the Orthodox were actually worshipping a different Jesus (Moss, 32).

Again, Moss is assuming that “names” and “symbols” are the words that conventional, daily, or practical language assign to a class of things. Like so much else, the ancient or medieval understanding of an object has little relation to its modern, debased and nominal usage.

The Old Believers, specifically the more radical priestless sects, argued that changing the spelling of “Jesus” is unacceptable. No intellectual in that movement ever argued that the new spelling is a literally “different Jesus.” They would have to argue that the Hebrew Joshua is not Jesus either. Rather the Old Belief was making the claim that even the name of Christ was not closed to revision and that, most of all, it would cause confusion. Moss tries to make sense out of the created/uncreated distinction that the original name worshipers used. Moss types it out and ignores it from there on. The man has just stated “When we are talking about the Name of God, and have in mind the essence of the Name itself, by which we name God, then we say that the Name of God is God. But when we have in mind letters and syllables, by which the truth about God and the Name of God is conventional expressed, then we say that God is present in His Name.”

Yet again, this only works on the condition that Moss has defined “name” or “word” correctly. The use of terms like “uncreated” are of no import. Moss has just – again – refuted the silly idea that the name worshipers worship the “J” or the “e” as elements of the divine essence. Moss, having missed the purpose of his own reference, then states that Fr. Anthony's denial of this very thesis causes so many additional problems, including the question “what is the relationship between the created name and the uncreated Energy-Name? Does not the one name the other?” The answer is simple: the former is not a word, but a complex, conceptual and even an affective symbol. The latter is a word, a conventional marker and nothing else.

V.

Vladimir Ern's criticism of the 1913 Synod decree is one of the more interesting philosophical treatments in the century since its release. After summarizing the Synod's opinion concerning the mental lack of separation between God and his name, he writes, in part VIII of his essay:

In other words, we need to magically create an illusion of identity [between the two], which actually does not exist. On the advice of the Synod, the act of prayer is a subjective mental state that is to build a mental idol of God. In other words, it is a regulative, rather than constitutive, element of God – in Kantian terms. It is the mind's own creation. It is an ideal fiction. Truly this is reminiscent of the “image-less” prayer in Soloviev's preface to the Three Conversations: “My home; my weakness! Save me!” The only difference is that the illiberal peasants had before him all the same vulnerability, a primitive, but real message from a real external being. And through “the window” of this inscrutable, vast uncertainty, strange, but not completely alien, the world could experience a higher and “saving Reality.” The more Enlightened writers of the Synod's condemnation closed the “hole” that communicates with the outside world, and with the rigor of true prayer, these Kantians reduced to almost nothing the individual cell in which to imprison our sinful empirical consciousness, “my home, save me!” This “home” the consciousness, is conceived by these writers as one “with no windows, no doors,” ie, without any access to God. When in such idealistic “houses” suffer in a precarious existence as “prisoners of spirit” when, become bored own prison, they start banging their head against the wall in them, and in this narrow range of [merely] individual consciousness plays out a real tragedy – one without God and without anything real, where the judge and the victim have yet to learn to create the image of God himself, and they do not even wish to have any assimilation to God, then any outside observer will experience the greatest pity as the word condemnation freezes on his lips, for the kind of suffering our Redeemer experienced is always rebuked.

Ern's argument points out the great danger in the synod's position. Without realizing it, the synod argues that any real connection between the mind and God, ontologically speaking, is imaginary. He argues that there is a definition of God (that is, the “regulative” principle) that is radically separate from the reality of God (that is, the “constitutive” principle). The former is as far as the mind can reach. The latter is not present in prayer at all, regardless of the names or words used. Only the dogmatic definitions are present, not God himself. Because of this, the mind is closed off – a peasant hut that has no doors and windows, and leads to insanity.

The condemnation of “Name Worship” is the amateurish inability to understand how the terms “name” or “word” can be used in many senses that cannot be taken for granted. The “word” in the vulgar sense of letters and phonetics is not at issue: no one is “worshiping” that. The “words” used, that is, the terms, in any conception of theology are highly relative according to the synod. Now, the words used, while contingent, are necessary as vehicles to communicate – often poorly – the eternal truths of God. No one, of course, disagrees with this. Believe it or not, this is the “name worshiping” argument.

The “word” is really all culture: art, iconography, music, incense, vestments, embroidery patterns, climates and calendar developments are all “words” in that they are all “symbols” that use material and contingent entities to express elements of absolute and unchanging significance. Since the modern world is based on nominalist ontology, the use of words has become far more a form of manipulation than a means of expressing truth. The nominalist idea destroys all knowledge, contradicts itself in its own formulation, and is a negative “weapon” used to break down cultures in hopes to plant the revolutionary new order in its place. Nominalism holds that

universal concepts are just words. Words like “grace” cannot actually refer to anything since there is nothing that exists universally or transcendently.

The nominalism of those following those like Fr. John Romanides argue agnosticism in that they say human beings cannot know God and cannot love him. He might be “experienced,” but this is too ethereal for much use. There is no basis for a connection between God and man, and even logos is either created or a nominal entity. Moss, as an aside, has written a skillful critique of Romanides in this regard.² Moss correctly cites Romanides as saying this essential statement:

No similarity whatsoever exists between the uncreated and the created, or between God and creation. This also means that no analogy, correlation, or comparison can be made between them. This implies that we cannot use created things as a means for knowing the uncreated God or His energy (quoted from Moss, 2008).

This shocking statement is the essence of nominalism and cannot be reconciled with Christianity. Moss is correct, further, to ask the obvious question: if there is no similarity between God and His creation, what does “image and likeness” of the book of Genesis mean? And again: is not this likeness between God and man precisely the basis on which the union between God and man, and man’s deification, takes place? How does deification take place without commensurability?

Nikolai Berdyaev, while not an Orthodox theologian, was disturbed by the treatment of the matter by the synod and caustically remarked:

No sort of mysticism should disrupt the deathly calm of the Orthodox world. And suddenly the very Orthodox from among the Orthodox were a tremble, they became restless, they thirsted. Our bishops, sitting in the Holy Synod, long ago ceased to be interested by essentially religious questions, and indeed the bishops never were strong in questions of religious knowledge and mystical contemplation. What is beyond the matter for them is whether Jesus Himself is really present in the Name “Jesus” or whether the name is but an abstract mediative sign. They, being people subsisting by a worldly utilitarianism, are not able to penetrate into such questions, posited merely by mysticism, by religious philosophy or by people of profound contemplation. . . Suddenly there is shewn, that there is neither the power nor the life of the Spirit in the Synod Church. The brutal punishment by Archbishop Nikon over the Athos monks, having earned the rank of great-schema, and having dwelt on Athos for 30 and 40 years, tormented by troops and the police, shows an unprecedented degradation of the Church, its utmost debasement. They sometimes love to shout that the Church is suppressed by the state, but it was the bishops themselves indeed summoning the civil powers to violent acts for their own ends, they are a thousand times worse than the soldiers and city-police (Berdyaev, 1913).

These harsh words are not too far removed from Ern. The synod's attack on the Name

² Romanides, *Deification and the Image of God*, 2008. He is criticizing the assumptions found in Romanides *Patristic Theology*. (Dalles, Oregon: Uncut Mountain Press, 2008).

derive from a positivist mindset. Words and concepts exist because they are useful, not because they are real. In essence, Berdyaev is saying that the synod, bereft of philosophical understanding, is threatened by the existence of an intensely mystical understanding of the hesychastic life. The bureaucratic and political life of a Russian bishop left no room for this kind of thought.

Nominalism justifies and enshrines fragmentation and mutual exclusion. The scientific and industrial revolutions required nominalism in order to function. Why is this? Because the Platonic universe, one of absolute truth, manifest in the material world of change, cannot be manipulated at will. The nominal idea alone provides the justification for technology, or that drive to replace nature with “superior” human knowledge. It then leads to the commercialization and “dollarization” of all things – existence itself is dissolved into the image of the cash nexus.

Christ, in containing this world of absolute Truth in Himself, brought it directly to the simple man. A Christian man believes because it makes sense to him, but he will not be able to refute a materialist on his own terms. Christ obviated the need to be a lifelong philosopher to gain the highest truth, something Plato failed to do. Christ carried it within Himself and made it accessible to the simplest of men.

VI.

This article has already gone on too long. It has argued that the issues raised by the Name Worshiping controversy are some of the most difficult and dense of the entire Orthodox tradition. Grace and energy, name and power, essence and operation are all Orthodox contributions to ontology. The church must make use of metaphysics for the same reason it must make use of grammar, art, sociology and historical science: the faith is not confined to a set of experiences, its about the resurrection and transfiguration of all things. Metaphysics has never been an easy subject, but today it is made impossible because the methods of cognition inherent in nominalism and positivism have truncated the names, definitions and natures of words.

The original purpose and use of words has now become mere handmaidens to industry, technology and self-interest. Mass society and mass communications have ensured that every possible argument on any possible subject has been made, meaning that searching for the truth is impossible. Even if the truth were found somewhere, the mental foundation for expressing it no longer exists.

Christ came at a time of decaying Platonism and Stoicism, this is not an accident. Christ came to finish these ontologies and show that all of them, in very important ways, are really about the logos. Christ was the logos accessible to all. This accessibility does not imply that speculation about it's nature and function should be open to all comers. In 2015, even the truth itself has no real way of being expressed.

Selected Bibliography:

Аскольдов, СА (1914) Мысль и действительность. Путь

Ern, Vladimir (1913) Critique of the 1913 Epistle of the Russia Synod on the Name of God. The Wonderful Name (Journal maintained by Metropolitan Gregory of HOMB)

<http://www.thewonderfulname.info/2015/05/critique-of-1913-epistle-russian-synod.html>

Dykstra, Thomas (1988) Heresy on Mt. Athos: Conflict over the Name of God Among Russian Monks and Hierarchs, 1912-1914. Unpublished Master's Thesis Written at St. Vladimir's Seminary

St. Basil (1895 edition): Letters and Select Works. Schaff, Philip, Editor. Edinburgh: T&T Clark

Moss, V (2007) On the Name of God. <http://www.orthodoxchristianbooks.com/>

Moss, V and Lourie, G. (2001) Dialogue on Name Worship. <http://imiaslav.narod.ru/>
(Extremely valuable if one reads Russian)

Moss, V (2008) Romanides, Deification and the Image of God.

<http://www.orthodoxchristianbooks.com/articles/271/romanides,-deification-image-god/>

Kapitanchuk, V (1990) Name-Glorifying. The Tsar Bell: 6,7

Theophan of Poltava (1997 edition) On the Divine Names. The Hierarch-Hermit Theophan of Poltava, Collected Works, St. Petersburg, 1997

Florovsky, G (1976) Revelation, Philosophy and Theology. In: Creation and Redemption, Vol. 3 of his Collected Works. Nordland Press

Archbishop Nikon (1913) The Great Trial Surrounding the Most Holy Name of God. Tserkovny Vestnik, no 20

Lossky, V (1963) The Vision of God. The Faith Press

Gerson, L (2002) Plato's Development and the Development of the Theory of Forms. In: Plato's Forms: Varieties of Interpretation, WA Welton, ed. (85-110). Lexington Books

Hieroschemamonk Anthony Bulatovic (1917) My Struggle with Imyabortsami on the Holy Mountain

Hieroschemamonk Anthony Bulatovic (1914). My thought on Christ: On the Work (Energy) of God

Hieroschemamonk Anthony Bulatovic (1913) Apology of Faith in God's Name and in the Name of Jesus

(All three in Russian here: <http://www.pravoslav.de/imiaslavie/index.htm>)

Иеромонах Феофан (Арескин) The Historic Life of the Name Worshipers on Athos after their Expulsion. http://www.pravoslav.de/imiaslavie/istoire/xronik_feof.htm

The remainder can be found in English on Gregory Lourie's site here:

<http://www.pravoslav.de/imiaslavie/english/english.htm>

Berdyaev, N (1913) Quenchers of the Spirit. Trans: Fr Stephen Janos. Russkaya Molva 232

<http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/Philosophy/Sui-Generis/Berdyaev/essays/gasiteli.htm>