



## Decision of the Holy Synod of the Church of Russia, 1913

*[The following decision of the Holy Synod of the Church of Russia is translated from the Greek as published in **Church Truth**, June 15, 1913, the official publication of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.]*

By the Grace of God, the Most Holy Ruling Synod of all Russia, to the All-honorable Brethren who are struggling in the monastic polity, grace to you and may peace from the Lord Jesus Christ be abounding!

The recently-appeared teaching of the Schemamonk Hilarion about the most sweet name of the Lord Jesus, which has agitated many of the Orthodox, both monks and laymen, has become a subject of diligent examination in the Most Holy Synod. For the sake of all possible objectivity, the Most Holy Synod heard three investigations (attached herein), composed separately from one another; and after sufficient deliberation, unanimously accepted the final conclusions of these investigations, as much as these conclusions are entirely in agreement with the judgments of the Greek theologians of the island of Halki and the decision of the All-Holy Ecumenical Patriarch and His Synod. Without entering here into a detailed exposition of this newly appeared teaching and all the proofs of its unorthodoxy (they who desire it may read these details in the attached reports), the Most Holy Synod considers it sufficient to note the principle and most essential points, first of the teaching of Fr. Hilarion as set forth in the book *'On the Mountains of the Caucasus'*, and then the theories of his followers on Mt. Athos, as these were expressed in the *'Apology'* of Schema-Hieromonk Anthony (Bulatovich) and in diverse appeals and pamphlets sent from Mt. Athos (including those in the name of *"The League of the Archangel Michael"*).

As concerns, first of all, the book *'On the Mountains of the Caucasus'*, it had a wide circulation among the monastics and was received favorably, and it is not at all remarkable, for this book has as its subject the precious treasure of the ascetics' "noetic asceticism" [prayer of the heart]. It confirms the necessity of this practice which has somewhat been neglected by the monks of our times; it gives a clear expression to many things, which the ascetics feel inwardly in their experience, but in the form of unclear presentiments and conjectures.

An objective judgment of such a desirable book, and much more its condemnation, when considering its shortcomings/failings was not easy, for everyone fittingly feared that in condemning the failings of the book, he might cast a shadow of disapproval upon the sacred truths for which this book was published in order to establish them. In spite of this, however, from the first edition of this book, many who were experienced in the spiritual life found it questionable. The Most Holy Synod knows, for example, that in one of our most illustrious monasteries in the north of the Empire, reading of *'On the Mountains of the Caucasus'* was forbidden by the elders. What constitutes the deception of Fr. Hilarion? It consists in this: that Fr. Hilarion, not being satisfied with the description of the Prayer of the Heart, of its spiritual fruits, its necessity for salvation, etc., bowed to the temptation of giving his own somewhat philosophical elucidation of why the Prayer of Jesus is salvific; and forgetting the guidance of the Holy Church, he wandered lost in his own theories; he invented, as he himself says, a new "dogma", which was found nowhere else before, leading not to the magnifying of the most sweet name "Jesus", nor to a strengthening of the Prayer of the Heart (which was, we think, the intention of Fr. Hilarion) but leading entirely to the contrary.

Truly, we must ask ourselves what is the Jesus Prayer in the understanding of the Holy Orthodox Church? It is the invocation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as the blind man in Jericho cried out calling upon "Jesus, Thou Son of David have mercy on me!"; and he did not cease from crying, paying no attention until the Lord hearkened unto his prayers ("Lord, that I might have my sight", etc. Mark 10:46-52). So also, does the ascetic of noetic prayer unceasingly call upon the Lord Jesus with undoubting faith, with humility, and with continuous cleansing of the heart that Jesus might come and grant him "to taste and see that the Lord is good." From the Holy Gospel we know that God does not abandon "His own elect which cry day and night unto Him" (Luke 18:7), for He gives them His Grace, for (with the Father and the Spirit) "He cometh and maketh His abode among such" for Himself. Where the Grace of the Holy Spirit is, there also are the fruit of the Spirit. "Wherever God is, here also is every good", as a certain ascetic said, for the kingdom of God is there. Behold, this is what constitutes the

source and cause and the entire interpretation of those exalted and sweet conditions which befit those higher degrees of noetic asceticism [i.e., Prayer of the Heart] which do not only possess the soul, but which are also manifested in the bodily life of man; they are the gift of the source of every good in response to our beseeching: an entirely free gift, explainable only by the goodness of Him Who gives it; since He is free to give or not to give, to both increase and decrease, and also to take away completely His gifts. But this so natural and comforting explanation which so arouses in us love for the good Lord appeared to Father Hilarion and his followers to be insufficient; and they decided to replace it with their teaching, i.e., that the Jesus Prayer saves, because the *name* "Jesus" is *salvific*, for in it, as in the other divine names, God is inseparably present. But saying this, they do not suspect apparently to what fearful conclusions such a teaching inevitably leads. For if this doctrine is true, then it follows that the unconscious repetition of the *name* of God is effective (so Father Bulatovich states in his *Apology*, page 89). "If you unconsciously invoke the name of the Lord Jesus, you will still have Him in His name with all His divine properties like a book with everything printed in it; and if you invoke Him as man, you will still have in the name 'Jesus' *all* of God." However this contradicts the very words of the Lord, "Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt 7:21). If this new doctrine be true, then in this case, it would be possible for someone to perform miracles with the *name* of Christ without believing in Christ. However, Our Lord told the Apostles that they could not cast out the demon "Because of their unbelief" (Matt. 17:20). If the interpretation of Father Hilarion and his followers is accepted, some events cannot be understood such, as that recorded in Acts 19:14. More significantly, the acceptance (by Father Bulatovich) that "*in the very sounds and the letters of the name of God the Grace of God is present*" (*Apology*, pg 188) or, which is essentially the same, that God is inseparably present in His name, which results finally in God being somehow subordinate or subject to man; and moreover, that we can consider Him to be somehow at the disposal of man. It is sufficient (even without faith or unconsciously) for a man to pronounce the name of God, and God is somehow obligated through His Grace to be with this man and fulfill his desires.

But this is now blasphemy! This is a magical superstition, which long before has been condemned by the Holy Church. Certainly both Fr. Hilarion and all those of like mind with him will turn their faces away with horror from such blasphemy; but, however if they do not like this, they are obligated to come to doubt concerning their "dogma" which necessarily results in such a condition. Not less dangerous results are from this new teaching for the ascetic life, for noetic asceticism [the Prayer of the Heart]. If the Grace of God is present in those *sounds and letters* of the name of God, if this name

pronounced by us or the idea of it held in our spirit *is* God, then the first place in noetic asceticism is now taken not by the invocation of the Lord, not by the lifting up of our heart and our mind to Him (for why should I invoke Him, Whom I practically by force possess Him already in my heart or spirit?) but rather the first place will be the repetition of the words of the prayer and the mechanical turning of it in the mind and on the tongue.

An inexperienced ascetic will entirely forget that this prayer is directed towards someone, he will be satisfied only in the mechanical repetition and he will expect from this dead repetition those fruits which only the true Jesus Prayer gives. When he does not receive these fruits, he will either lose heart or he will begin to produce them artificially in himself and to accept this exultation wrought by him as the action of Grace. In other words, he will fall into *deception*. Certainly, Fr Hilarion does not wish such to befall anyone.

The followers of Fr. Hilarion who wrote the '*Apology*' and the appeals from Mt. Athos consider themselves to be followers of St. Gregory Palamas and their opponents to be Barlaamites. This however, is an evident misunderstanding; the similarity between the teaching of St. Gregory and this new teaching is only external and just in appearance. St. Gregory taught that we must attribute the term "divinity" not only to the essence of "God" but also to the "energy" or to His energies, i.e., to the divine attributes: wisdom, goodness, omniscience, omnipotence, etc., through which God reveals Himself to them without, and in this manner the Saint taught that we should use the term in a somewhat broader sense than usual. This variable sense of the term constitutes the whole resemblance of St. Gregory's teaching with this new teaching, but essentially there is a complete difference between them.

First, the Hierarchy in no place names the energies "God" but teaches that we should name them "divinity" (not God, but *divinity*). The difference between these two terms can be easily understood from the following example. It is said, "Christ showed His *divinity* on Tabor", but no one, however, would say, "Christ showed His *God* on Tabor"; this would either be mindless or blasphemy. The word "God" indicates the person or personality, while the word "divinity" the attribute, the quality, the nature. In this way, even if we acknowledge the name of God as an energy of His, in such a case we could name it simply divinity, but not God, much less "God Himself" as do these new teachers. Secondly, the Hierarchy nowhere teaches that we should confuse the energies of God with the results of these energies in the created world, which is to confuse the energy with the fruits of the energy. For example, the Apostles saw the glory of God on

Tabor and heard the voice of God. We can say about them that they saw and heard the divinity.

Descending from the mountain, the Apostles remembered that which had taken place and then narrate it to others, communicated to them all the words heard by them. Can it be possible to say that they communicated to others the *divinity*? That their narration was an *energy* of God? Certainly not. It was simply the fruit of the divine energy, the fruit of its activity in the created world. However, these new teachers manifestly confuse the energy of God with its fruits, when they name as divinity as God Himself, the names of God, and every divine word, and indeed even the Church Prayers, i.e., not only the word spoken by God, but *all* our words about God, "The words, by which we name God" as is written in the objection to the Confession of Faith of the Monastery of St. Panteleimon (in a parenthesis to the words of St. Symeon the New Theologian). But this is already a deification of the creature, *pantheism*, which considers that all that exists is God. Wherefore, the danger is clearly justified, that was pointed out in the theological verdict from the theologians of Halki Theological School. In this confusion of the creature and the divinity one discerns not a resemblance with the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas, *but rather an exact resemblance to the teaching of Barlaam and his followers*, whom the Holy Father refuted, for among other things, also accepting somehow two kinds of divinity, created and uncreated (Porphyrios, *History of Mt. Athos*, Vol 3, page 748). In order to support its conjectures, the *Apology* and other writings of like mind with it did not bring forward quotations from Holy Scripture and the writings of the Holy Fathers. For Fr. Hilarion did not confess in vain to his spiritual father [Kyrikos] that the teaching of this new dogma "is not found anywhere."

The passages presented do not prove the ideas of the followers of this doctrine, as is proved in detail here in the attached statements. The phrases "Thy name", "The name of the Lord" and the like in the language of Sacred Literature (and together with these, in the Fathers of the Church and in the Church's hymns and prayers) are simply descriptive expressions, like "the glory of the Lord", "the eyes, ears, hands of the Lord", or referring to a man, "my soul". It would be extremely erroneous to understand literally and to attribute eyes and ears to the Lord or the soul as separated from a man. Likewise, not in the least is there any foundation to perceive in the former expressions traces of some teaching concerning the name of God; i.e., the deification of the name of God; the phrases simply mean "Thou" or "the Lord". A great many passages of Holy Scripture, aside from the foregoing, are arbitrarily misinterpreted by the followers of this new doctrine, so that justly we can bring to mind the anathema published against them who attempt "to misinterpret and change that which is spoken by the Grace of the

Holy Spirit" (Greek *Triodion* pg. 149) which anathema is referred to in the *Appeal of the League of the Archangel Michael* (section 6).

In the appended expositions, examples of such misinterpretations are presented; here one of them of all will suffice. One of the objections in the *Confession* of the Panteleimonites refers to the words of St. Symeon the New Theologian, "The words of men are changeable and empty, but the word of God is living and active". But where herein either refers to the creative word of God (e.g. "Let there be light, and there was light" and the like) or it refers to the begetting before all eternity of the Son of God, the Word of God. The editor of the objection himself simply interpolated after "the word of God" (that is, the words with which we name God) and he achieved that which he desired, forgetting that the words proceeding from the mouth of men, even if they are spoken concerning God, are not possible to be equal with the words from the mouth of God.

With special insistence, the followers of the new teaching refer to the late Fr. John of Kronstadt, in order to prove their doctrine. Wonderful to say, the writings of this blessed man are widely available. One might say that all have read them. Why then up till now, has anyone observed in them such a teaching except Fr. Hilarion and his followers? This and only this now causes one to doubt the accuracy of the reference to Father John. Carefully reading the works of Fr. John everyone can be convinced that Fr. John is speaking only concerning the particular phenomenon in our consciousness when praying, with the pronouncement of the name of God in our heart, and especially in the Jesus Prayer, we do not separate Him in our consciousness from the pronounced name, and that the Name and God Himself coincide. Fr. John counsels that we not separate them, not to attempt in prayer to think of God as separated from the name and outside it; this advice is entirely necessary and reasonable for the man who is praying. If we, so to speak say, enclose God in His name, when in it is pronounced in the heart, we are protected from the danger of attributing to God, when we address Him, a material form, which all the law givers for spiritual warfare dissuade us from doing.

The name of God at the time of prayer should in some fashion be fused or identified with God so as to be inseparable. Not unjustly did Fr. Hilarion in the beginning say that the name of God for the man praying is not "God" but "like God". But this is so only in prayer and in our heart and it depends only upon the limits of our consciousness and our created nature. However, never is it concluded from the foregoing, that outside of our consciousness the name of God is *identical* with God, that *it is divinity*. Wherefore, Fr. John, if he like many other church writers, refers to the special and miraculous power of

the name of God, he also clearly gives us to understand that this power does not consist of the name itself as such, but in the invocation of the Lord, Who or Whose Grace is acting. For example, we read in his *My Life in Christ*, (book 4, pg 30, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, revised by the author, Petrograd, 1893) “the almighty and creative spirit of Our Lord Jesus Christ is everywhere and He can everywhere name the non-existent as existing (Matt. 18:20) ‘And lo, I am with you always ...’ But so that the heart of little faith might not think that the Cross or the name of Christ accomplish these things in and of themselves, and that the same Cross and the name of Christ, do not produce miracles when I do not look with the eyes of the heart or of the faith in Christ the Lord and I do not believe with all my heart in everything which He did for our salvation.” These words in no way agree with the new dogma of Fr. Hilarion and Fr. Anthony Bulatovich that supposedly “the name has almighty power to work miracles as a consequence of the presence in it of the divinity” (fourth point of the *Appeal of the League of the Archangel Michael*). On the contrary, that which Fr. Chrysantos and the others spoke and wrote against such a teaching is validated, i.e., the name of God works miracles under the condition of faith. In other words, when a man pronounces the name, he awaits the miracle not from speaking the words, but he calls upon the Lord, Whom the name indicates, and the Lord according to the faith of this man performs the miracle. The Lord also designates this absolutely necessary condition for a miracle, “If you have faith and doubt not, you shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if you shall say unto this mountain be thou removed and cast into the sea; it shall be done, and all things, whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive (Matt 21:21-22). “If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say unto this mountain, remove yourself hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you [(Matt 17:20) *et. al.*]. So does the Apostle Peter explain the healing of the lame man in Acts 3:6 “And His name through faith in His name both made this man strong, whom you see and know: yea the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all” (Acts 3:16). The falseness of this new dogma is finally verified by the conclusions, which are derived from it by its followers, especially Fr. Bulatovich in his *Apology*. According to him, the icons and the Sign of the Cross and Divine Mysteries of the Church have effect only because upon them or during the course of performance, the *name* of God is portrayed or pronounced.

One cannot read without extreme astonishment the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Apology* (pg. 172-186) where Fr. Bulatovich, gives a new elucidation of the Divine Liturgy according to his new doctrine. Up to now, the Holy Church taught us that bread and wine become the Body and Blood of the Lord because God by the prayers and the faith (certainly not that of the priest or of one of the congregation, but) of the Church of Christ “sends

down His Holy Spirit and makes the bread the Body and the wine the Blood of His Christ". Fr Bulatovich in his *Apology* writes that the mystery is accomplished "precisely by the pronounced *name* of God" i.e., supposedly, because simply the words "Holy Spirit", "name of the Holy Spirit" and the Sign of the Cross was made with the fingers in a position which expressed the *name* (pg 183-184). But since before this the names of God are pronounced over the gifts indeed more than once, Fr Bulatovich in his sophistry maintains that in the *proskomide*, from the moment of the piercing of the Lamb "the lamb and the wine in the chalice are all-holy, sanctified by the confession of the *name* of Jesus; it is Jesus according to Grace, but *not* yet according to essence" (pg. 174). If such be the case, why did the Orthodox Church once condemn the so-called bread worshippers, who preformed prostrations before the Holy Gifts before their change? Finally, if the performance of the Mysteries is restricted only to the pronouncement of certain names and the performance of certain names and the performance of certain actions, in that case these words could be pronounced and these actions preformed not only by a priest, but also by a layman and indeed even by a non-Christian(!). Is Fr. Bulatovich really ready to accept that even by such a server the Mystery would be accomplished? Why then do we have a lawful hierarchy? It is true that in the *Synaxaria* and other such books there are found narratives of Mysteries accomplished without a lawful celebrant when the appointed words of the prayers were pronounced (indeed, sometimes as a joke or childish sport). But all these narratives bear record that God at times "became manifest to them that asked not after Him" (Esaias 65:1), as e.g., the Apostle Paul or at times, that the Church's Mysteries must not be a subject of mockery or childish games, for God can punish such. In any case, such narratives do not overturn the God-given ecclesiastical order. Thus from an erroneous principle, Fr Bulatovich necessarily reaches erroneous conclusions, which on their part prove the falseness of the principle.

On the foundation of all the foregoing, the Most Holy Synod unanimously is in agreement with the decision of the All-Holy Patriarch [i.e., Germanos V] and the Sacred Synod of the Great Church of Constantinople, which condemned the new teaching as "blasphemous and heretical"; and after this, the Synod also beseeches everyone who has been led astray by this new teaching, to abandon this erroneous sophistry and humbly obey the voice of the Mother Church which alone upon the earth is "the pillar and ground of the truth" and outside Her there is no salvation. She, the Bride of Christ, knows more than all how to love and honor Her heavenly bridegroom. She, more than all, knows, embraces the most sweet name of Jesus and other names of God; but She never permits, however, this honor to extend beyond what is proper, She does permit our purblind human conjectures and our limited human perception to become superior to the truth revealed to the Church by Christ, as if we would correct it.

The Orthodox theology concerning the divine names is as follows:

1. The name of God is holy, worshipful, and desirable, because it is useful to us as a verbal designation for that most desired and most Holy Being, God, the source of every good. This name is of God, because it was revealed to us by God, it speaks to us of God; it refers our spirit towards God, etc. In prayer (especially the Jesus Prayer) the name of God, and God Himself are inseparably in our consciousness, and it is if they coincide, and indeed, they cannot and ought not be separated, opposing one to the other; but this only in prayer and only by our heart. Examined theologically and in reality, the name of God is only a name. It is not God Himself, nor an attribute (characteristic) of His. The name of an object is not the object itself. Therefore, it is impossible for it to be considered or named either God (this would be mindless and blasphemous) or divinity, for it also is *not* an energy of God.

2. The name of God uttered in prayer with faith is able to perform miracles, but not by itself in itself, nor as a consequence of some divine power which, in a matter of speaking, is enclosed in it or attached to it, which would then work mechanically, but rather thus: the Lord seeing our faith, in the power of His un-lying promise, He sends His grace, and through it He performs the miracle.

3. Each of the Holy Mysteries are accomplished neither by the faith of him who performs them nor by the faith of him who receives, but neither by the invoking or depiction of the name of God, *but by the Prayer and Faith of the Holy Church*, on Whose behalf it is preformed and with the power granted Her by the Lord's promise. Such is the Orthodox Faith, the Patristic and Apostolic Faith.

Now the Most Holy Synod invites the Superiors and Elders of all the Venerable Monasteries in Russia: after the reading of this Epistle, with all the brethren present, to hold the Service of Supplication, that is appointed for the Sunday of Orthodoxy, for the return of all who have gone astray. Afterwards, if there are in the brotherhood some of contrary mind, they must express their submission to the voice of the Church and promise that from now on they will withdraw from self-willed arbitrary theories and they shall not offend anyone by them. All are obliged to forgive one another from their heart, if anyone in the excitement of the discussion said or did something offensive to the other, and they should live in peace, working out their salvation. The book, *On the Mountain of the Caucasus*, as containing grounds leading to erroneous theories and the *Apology* of Fr Bulatovich and the books and pamphlets written to establish this concocted new teaching, *must be proclaimed as condemned by the Church and must be*

*removed from circulation among the brotherhood of the monasteries and their reading to be forbidden.* If after this there should still exist stubborn followers of this condemned teaching, immediately they are to be suspended from priestly service, as many as among them have the priest's office, all who remain obstinate, after counseling, should be referred to the appointed Church court, which in the case of their further persistence and un-repentance, will deprive them of their priestly and monastic rank, so that the evil sheep not infect the flock. The Most Holy Synod fervently summons to obedience, Fr. Hilarion the Schemamonk, and Anthony the Schema-hieromonk and the other foremost defenders of the new doctrine. For if they until now believe that they were defending a truth of the Church and that the words of the Apostle could apply to them concerning "shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:20), now when the highest authority of the Church both of Constantinople and of Russia have passed judgment, further persistence in their own opinion is finally a battle *opposing the truth* and draws, upon them the threatening word of the Lord, "But whosoever shall offend one of these little ones, it were better that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt 18:6). But may this lot never befall them, nor any one else, but may the Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with all men. Amen.