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**Sent:** Friday, September 21, 2012 8:40 AM

**Subject:** Name worshipping heresy (please forward this on)

***A Call for Sanity, A Call for Unity, A Call for Clarity***

*Then answered the Pharisees, "Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who know not the law are cursed." Nicodemus saith unto them (he that cometh to Jesus by night, being one of them). "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?"*

*John 7:47-51*

I write this letter to both sides of this dispute about the name worshipping heresy. I am not on either side. I am a priest of the Orthodox Church who prays and strives that we remain as we were, one family in Christ; who prays that the robe of our Saviour be not torn asunder again; who desires and hopes that a son be not turned against his father, or a priest against his bishop. I pray for our unity in the true confession of Orthodoxy and in love for one another in Christ.

I am not happy with what I am hearing, reading, and seeing. The accusation of heresy is a serious one. I cannot condemn my hierarchs on hearsay. As St. Nicodemus retorted, "Doth our law judge a man before it hear him?" (John 7:51). From the side of the accusers I hear anger. I read letters which mock the bishops for their "wandering synodal chancellery" because they send us letters from different places. I read articles purporting to condemn the "name worshipping heresy" which proclaim Arianism (that the Son of God is only of like essence with the Father, not the same essence). I read ultimatums to our hierarchs to sign an unconditional agreement with a Russian religious department of Moscow (the Synod of 1913) which contradicts the teaching on the energy and essence of God articulated by that pillar of Orthodoxy, St. Gregory Palamas. I see a headlong rush to break off communion with the lawful hierarchs which is reminiscent of the herd of swine possessed with the legion of demons "which ran violently down a steep place into the sea (they were about two thousand) and were choked in the sea." (Mark 5:13). My questions to the accusers are "Who is chasing you? Who is causing you to depart from the canonical order of the church without so much as meeting with your brother clergy at our scheduled synaxis, October 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> 2012? Do you have such little regard for your brothers in Christ that you wish to avoid meeting with us face to face as we implore the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth. (John 14:26)?" Imagine if the Orthodox had not bothered to attend the third ecumenical council condemning the Patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius.

On the other side I see responsibility for the confusion and conflict which is shared by His grace Bishop Demetrius of Carlisle. Bishop Demetrius travelled to St. Petersburg, met with Bishop Gregory Lourie (who seems to be the main defender of the name worshippers), and invited him to Boston. When Bishop Gregory Lourie visited Boston months ago, he was given Holy Communion at HTM with the permission of Bishop Demetrius and Metropolitan Ephraim. In their defense, he claimed to confess our faith and recognize our canonicity, but they should have guarded the holy mysteries from someone of dubious orthodoxy. Our hierarchs apologized for this and have not repeated their error (all the clergy received a formal apology signed by both

Metropolitan and Bishop Demetrius many months ago). Bishop Demetrius after examining the faith of Fathers Job and Martinian (of the Ukraine) ordained them to the holy priesthood. In May, he and his fellow hierarchs released them to join another right confessing Orthodox Church. Instead of doing so, they joined Bishop Gregory Lourie! Fathers Job and Martinian are now said to confess the name worshipping heresy. All the hierarchs except Bishop Demetrius (who had abandoned his synod that same morning) formally issued a statement making clear “that our Church, and the clergy of our Church in Georgia, are not in ecclesiastical communion with Bishop Gregory (Lourie) of Petrograd and with those in communion with him.” (29 August/ 11 September 2012). However by not signing on to the synod of Moscow of 1913 as demanded unconditionally by certain clergy they open themselves up to the accusation that they are closet name worshippers. They explain that they do not believe in name worshipping but reject the anti-orthodox statements of this synod against the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas. Bishop Demetrius presumably signed this demand unconditionally. Does he now reject the teachings of St. Gregory Palamas, the patron saint of the cathedral he abandoned? The Holy Council of Constantinople of 1351 which proclaimed the orthodox theology of St. Gregory Palamas has been universally accepted by the whole Orthodox Church for nearly 700 years. The synod of Moscow of 1913 cannot abrogate it. Our hierarchs reject the false teachings ascribed to the name worshippers in a formal statement of 5/18 September, 2012. They proclaimed with the orthodox that they do not believe that

- 1) God’s name is His essence
- 2) God’s name is to be separated from Him
- 3) God’s name is another deity
- 4) The letters, the sounds, and random/accidental thoughts about God are to be deified or used for magical purposes

The hierarchs also “espouse and embrace” the February 1921 Encyclical of the Holy Confessor Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow as a “resolution of the matter”. What they fail to recognize is that this same encyclical goes on to say that “the synod did not alter its previous judgment regarding the very error contained in the writings of Anthony Bulatovich and his followers”. Neither side of this argument has defined well what that error is or created an anathema which we might all together join in proclaiming. I call upon both sides to translate these writings of Anthony Bulatovich, who seems to be the chief heresiarch, so we can see if there is something else, besides these four points above, which we must be alert to reject and exclude from the church. It would also benefit both sides to translate the entire statements of the council of Constantinople of 1912 and of Moscow 1913. This work would greatly assist us as we meet.

Finally, a philosophical reflection on this conflict. When we observe our world today, the biggest problem with violation of the third commandment “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain” is not that people are excessively reverent to His name but that people swear, curse, make false oaths, blaspheme, and mock God and his holy things. Opposers of the actual heresy need to be careful as they preach and teach against it, not to give the impression that they lack proper piety and reverence toward God’s name or to lead the flock astray by seeming to speak against God’s name.

Number two, just as the reverence we give to an icon ascends to the prototype, not to the wood or paint itself, or even to the image apart from the prototype, so the reverence we give God’s

name ascends to He Who Is, rather than the sound, letters, or even mental constructs of the name. This idea is completely consistent with the faith expressed by St. John of Damascus in his “Exposition of the Faith” and his defense of the holy icons. Also just as the Holy Spirit can bestow grace upon us through holy things, holy icons, holy water, or even the shadow of the saint’s (Acts 5:15), so the Holy Spirit bestows grace upon us by the name of God, to those who call upon Him with faith and love and a pure heart.

We all need to calm ourselves and not let our zeal turn us against one another to our mutual destruction. May the Holy Trinity enlighten us all.

Father Christos Patitsas