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What's in God's Name:

literary forerunners and philosophical allies of the *imjaslavie* debate

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to explore the interaction between a tradition that belongs originally to the realm of orthodox contemplative monasticism (i.e., hesychasm) and nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian intellectuals. In the first part, this paper will explore how hesychasm gradually penetrated nineteenth-century secular culture; a special focus will be on the hermitage of Optina Pustyn' and its renowned elders, as well as their appeal to members of the Optina-intelligentsia, especially Fëdor Dostoevskij. Then, attention will shift to the *imjaslavie* controversy at the beginning of the twentieth century, which flared up initially as a dispute between Athonite monks and reached a sad culmination in 1912-13 with a *manu militari* intervention by troops of the Russian Holy Synod. However, the debate was taken up by some prominent intellectuals of the Russian religious renaissance, such as Pavel Florenskij, Nikolaj Berdjaev and Sergej Bulgakov, who explicitly sided with the *imjaslavcy* ("Glorifiers of the Name") and actively stepped into the debate.

Keywords: hesychasm, elderhood, Optina-intelligentsia, imjaslavie, religious philosophers

*А в Оптиной мне больше не
бывать*

(Anna Akhmatova, 1940)

*И поныне на Афоне
Древо чудное растет,
На крутом зеленом склоне
Имя Божие поет*

(Osip Mandel'stam, 1915)

Introduction

The history of Russian Orthodoxy is marked by an increasing split between the theology prescribed by the ecclesiastical authorities and the faith of the Russian believers. In his *Ways of Russian Theology*, Florovsky uses a straightforward metaphor to sketch the situation: the theology of the official academies has been "a stranger" in Russia, stubbornly hanging on to its own foreign tongue, incomprehensible to the common people; as such, "it grew unaccustomed to listening to the beating of the Church's heart, and consequently, it lost access to that heart" (Florovsky 1987, 290). The schism between official theology and "the heartbeat" of the people's religion is clearly illustrated in the Russian history of *hesychasm*, a method of contemplative prayer that occupies an important place in the monastic and ascetic tradition of the Eastern Church (Lossky 1991, 209). Although the theology of hesychasm was developed and confirmed as a doctrine of the Orthodox church in the fourteenth century, its history on Russian soil is a troubled one; soon after its adaptation in Russian monastic circles in the fifteenth century, the practitioners of hesychasm were – partly due to political circumstances – pushed into the margins of the church. At the end of the eighteenth century, against the background of the rigid state church, hesychasm enjoyed a revival that inspired a

renaissance of spiritual monasticism in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the more popular hesychasm grew, the more resistance it experienced from the clerical authorities. The tension between the ecclesiastical establishment and the practitioners of hesychasm reached a tragic culmination in the *imjaslavie* (“Worship of the Name”) controversy at the beginning of the twentieth century. This was a dispute that started with a poetic treatise on how to practice hesychastic prayer but soon evolved into a heated debate in clerical circles on the status of the Name of God. The Holy Synod’s reaction to the *imjaslavie* affair was symptomatic of the crisis the Russian church was in and deepened the ongoing schism in Russian Orthodoxy: the Synod fought the *imjaslavcy* (“Worshippers or Glorifiers of the Name”) not only with words but also *manu militari*.

Interestingly, and crucially for the development of Russian hesychasm, from the mid-nineteenth century on, a growing group of Russian intellectuals were drawn to the spirituality of hesychasm and, partly motivated by personal dissatisfaction with the secularized church, professed themselves as advocates of this silenced tradition. The schism in Russian Orthodoxy between the theology of the official academies and the hesychastically inspired faith spread far outside clerical circles and permeated Russian secular discourse. These religious intellectuals – all of them renowned and influential figures in their time – not only played a seminal role in the dissemination and popularization of hesychasm to the lay public but also, sometimes indirectly and unintentionally, had a substantial impact on the further response of the official church. The aim of this paper is to explore this fruitful interaction between the originally monastic tradition of hesychasm and nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature and thought. As such, it hopes to shed new light on the history of Russian Orthodoxy, Russian literary and cultural history, and on the controversial dispute on the Worship of the Name, which in recent years has gained new interest in scholarly circles.¹

A short history of Russian hesychasm

Hesychasm is a special form of contemplative monasticism that goes back to the eremitic lifestyle and prayer practice of the Desert Fathers. It is primarily a method of prayer that is deeply rooted in the tradition of *apophatic* or negative theology that typically left its mark on the Eastern Christian tradition and in which theology, or speaking about God, can be summarized as setting aside the human *logos* when approaching God. Derived from the Greek *hesychia* (“inner stillness or silence; tranquillity”), hesychasm is a prayer practice that aims to quiet the rational mind so that it can enter a state of stillness in which it can have a mystical vision of God. In order to attain the state of *hesychia*, the hesychast invokes perpetually, first verbally then almost silently, the “prayer of the heart” that revolves around the Name of Christ and thus came to be called the “Jesus prayer”: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” (In Russian: Господи, Иисусе Христе, Сыне Божий, помилуй меня, грешного”).²

Hesychasm reached its theological synthesis in the fourteenth century. Defending hesychasm against the attacks of Barlaam of Calabria – who insisted on God’s transcendence and the impossibility of having a direct vision of Him – Gregory Palamas distinguished between God’s “essence” (*ousia*), which is unknowable, and His divine “energies” (*energeiai*), which pervade creation. Through hesychastic prayer, which aims at purifying the human mind, the hesychast can have a vision of the divine energies. Palamas’s teaching was confirmed by three councils in Constantinople.

¹ See e.g. the works by Alfeev; Kuße 2006; Gurko 2006; Leskin 2004.

² For an exhaustive bibliography of the hesychastic tradition, see the recent bibliography by Khoružij (2004). See also Meyendorff (1974).

Although hesychasm was from then on a fundamental ingredient of the ascetic tradition of the Eastern Church, its history in Russia is a troubled one. The tradition of hesychasm spreading in Russia was not derived directly from Palamite hesychasm but inspired by Gregory of Sinai, a contemporary of Palamas who also contributed to the rise of Athonite hesychasm. With some of his disciples, the Sinaite founded a monastery in Bulgaria through which his hesychastic writings were disseminated to other Slavic countries. Sinaite hesychasm is a more spiritual tradition that is primarily directed toward the practice of the Jesus prayer and the mystical union with God and is less concerned with the theoretical side of it (Krausmüller 2006, 113-121). Generally speaking, in Russia, the spiritual and mystical side of hesychasm became more important than the technical debates surrounding it. Hesychasm became known in Russia in the fourteenth century with Sergej of Radonež, but it really began to flower in the fifteenth century with Nil Sorskij and his Transvolgan elders. However, due to the conflict with the so-called “possessors”, i.e. supporters of a rich and state-bound church, Nil’s theology of hesychasm was soon pushed into the margins of the Russian church (Grillaert 2010, 190-191). It experienced a renaissance at the end of the eighteenth century with the Slavonic translation of the *Philokalia* (*Dobrotoljubie*, 1793), which was instigated by the Ukrainian-Moldavian monk Paisij Veličkovskij. With this edition, Palamite hesychasm finally found its way to Russia and was adopted by some small monastic communities. It was especially the monastery of Optina Pustyn’ in the Kaluga province that became the center of the neo-hesychastic revival. In 1821, a *skete* was built at this monastery. A *skete* is a group of separate cells headed by a spiritual elder and designed to secure for the hermits the solitary life required to devote themselves completely to the practice of the Jesus prayer. However, with the arrival of the elder Leonid (1768-1841), the spiritual reputation of the hermitage started to spread outside of monastic circles and into Russia’s cultural life. As a result, Optina became a popular place of pilgrimage for lay believers. Against the background of the socially impoverished church, Leonid received visitors, listened carefully to their problems, and dispensed advice. Leonid’s follower Makarij (1788-1860) initiated the publication and translation of patristic texts and made Optina a renowned publication house for works on hesychastic practice and spirituality. One of the last nineteenth-century Optina elders was Amvrosij (1821-1891), who became a celebrated spiritual authority among Russian believers from all social classes. He was especially popular among peasants, who came in crowds for his guidance; this gave him the reputation as a “moral and spiritual guide of the Russian *narod*” (Paert 2010, 127).

Although the Optina elders operated within the canonical bounds of Russian Orthodoxy, they were fundamentally different from other clergymen and monks because their activities bore a non-institutional character (Stanton 1995, 44). In addition to the renewed mystical spirituality, the elders took up a social engagement towards the common people that was severely lacking in the secularized church. They gained the status of spiritual and moral role models who were always prepared to receive visitors and offer them guidance and advice. Their social service caused much tension with the representatives of the church, who felt threatened by their popularity. Especially the “learned” monks, or the monks linked to the official theological academies, observed the elders with suspicion and undertook attempts to discredit them in the eyes of their followers. The bishop of Kaluga, for example, forbade Leonid at some point to receive visitors and forced him to leave his *skete* (Sederholm 1990, 63-79). In spite of the attempts within the church to stop the hordes of pilgrims travelling to the Optina hermitage, the elders’ fame rose. The nineteenth century – the Golden Age of Russian *starčestvo* – experienced an upsurge of renowned elders of various kinds. Serafim of Sarov, for example, who lived most of his life in the Sarov forest, was an admired elder who

was consulted by many lay visitors.³ Still, the Optina elders occupied a unique place in Russian *starčestvo* because they attracted a substantial number of Russia's cultural and intellectual elite and as such established a link between monastic tradition and secular life.

In the nineteenth century, hesychastic theology thus transcended the monastic realm and gradually penetrated Russian culture. The hesychastic teaching that every individual can realize the mystical union with God turned out to be very attractive for common believers, who had broken away from the secularized church in search of a more spiritual faith. There was a rise of hesychastic writings that reached and were widely read by a secular public. One of the most popular works on hesychastic spirituality became the *Candid Tales of a Pilgrim to His Spiritual Father*, better known as *The Way of a Pilgrim* (1881), which describes in a naive and accessible manner an anonymous pilgrim's spiritual growth and gradual mastering of the Jesus prayer. Feofan the Recluse translated the *Philokalia* into modern Russian, published many other spiritual texts and corresponded with a large number of lay believers about his mystical experiences. Ignatij Brjančaninov published four volumes of spiritual literature instructing his readers how to practice the Jesus prayer and offering them an understandable exegesis of the Greek and Slavonic hesychastic texts. Another widely read work in those days was *The Tale of his Wanderings and Travels through Russia, Moldavia, Turkey and the Holy Land by Parfenij, a Monk tonsured at the Holy Mount Athos* (1855), many pages of which are devoted to the works of Paisij Veličkovskij and the Jesus prayer (it was one of Dostoevskij's favourite books). Ioann of Kronstadt, a simple parish priest who became renowned throughout Russia for his healing and prophetic powers, became a spiritual guide for many believers, recommending the practice of the Jesus prayer to them. In his most important book, *My life in Christ (Moja žizn' vo khriste)*, 1893), there was one formula that would become crucial in the *imjaslavie* debate: "The Name of God is God Himself" (Alfeyev 2007a, 231). In addition, there appeared Russian translations and anthologies – often Optina editions – of the writings of the Desert Fathers on hesychasm. In short, the nineteenth century witnessed the transition of hesychasm from the exclusively monastic to the secular realm.

The role of the Optina-intelligentsia

From the mid-nineteenth century on, the Optina hermitage started to have a special appeal for Russian religious intellectuals who were painfully aware of the poor moral state of the rural clergy and longed to find an alternative religious counterweight against the atheist theories gradually permeating Russian culture. These intellectuals, aptly labeled the "Optina-intelligentsia" (Stanton 1995), were not only inspired by the elders in the personal sphere but also started to play a fundamental role in the dissemination and popularization of the Optina spirit for a large lay public. In the 1840s, Optina became for many Slavophiles the epitome of Russian spirituality; Ivan Kireevskij, for example, put himself under the spiritual guidance of elder Makarij and participated in the elder's project to translate and edit patristic texts, hitherto unknown in Russia. At the end of his life, tormented by a deep spiritual crisis, Nikolaj Gogol' visited the monastery several times, hoping to find some peace of mind there (Stanton 1995, 89-149). Another troubled soul who visited the hermitage several times was Lev Tolstoj. He travelled to the monastery four or five times, always in periods of existential despair and always hoping to find some answers to his religious quests. Tolstoj's impressions of the Optina elders are marked by his characteristic ambiguity. In light of his growing resistance to official Orthodoxy, he valued the *starcy* for their relatively independent status within the hierarchy of the Russian church; at the same time, he found that they were still too closely connected with it. Nevertheless, the fact that he set out for Optina in 1910, tired of the

³ See Paert (2010) for the diverse range of elders in Russia.

endless quarrels with his wife and just a few days before he died at the train station Astapovo, testifies to the special attraction the hermitage had for him. The ambiguity of his impressions found reflection in his novella *Otec Sergij* (posthumously published in 1911), in which he sharply analyzed the psychological and moral pitfalls associated – in his view – with monastic elderhood.

The key figure in the conveyance of hesychastic spirituality to the secular public was Fëdor Dostoevskij. In the summer of 1878, deeply grieving over the sudden death of his son Alëša, Dostoevskij, accompanied by his young friend Vladimir Solov'ëv, made a pilgrimage to Optina, where he stayed a couple of days. He was so overwhelmed by the special atmosphere of the hermitage and the charisma of elder Amvrosij that he decided to recreate his impressions in the novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879-1880), on which he was working at the time. In addition to the monastic setting, he created – obviously inspired by Amvrosij – the fictional *starec* Zosima, to whom he gave a central place in the narrative and envisioned as the “culminating point” of the novel (PSS 30 (1), 75).⁴ He devoted a whole book in the novel, book 6, “A Russian Monk” (“Russkij Inok”), exclusively to his elder; this book functions as a hagiography of Zosima and serves as the spiritual and moral counterweight against the atheism voiced by Ivan in the preceding book, “Pro et Contra.” When writing his chapter on Zosima, Dostoevskij was well aware of the polemical status of *starčestvo*: “I have entitled this sixth book ‘a Russian monk’, a bold and provocative title, because all the critics [...] will scream: ‘is that what a Russian monk is like, how can you dare to put him on such a pedestal?’” (PSS 30 (1), 102). The writer, whose precise interpretation of Russian Orthodoxy is fodder for many past and contemporary debates, did not eschew the controversy surrounding elderhood but chose deliberately to reflect it on the pages of his novel. In a separate chapter “Starcy” in the beginning of the novel, a lengthy explanation of elderhood is given, describing its origins and its place in Russian Orthodoxy; the narrator overtly talks about the popularity of the elders among lay believers and how this seems to threaten the clerical authorities, who take actions against it that amount to persecution (PSS 14, 27). Next to these unambiguous references to Optina elderhood, Zosima’s hagiography is permeated by echoes of the practice and spirituality of hesychasm (Grillaert 2010). In addition, Zosima’s sermons are interwoven with some subtle critical remarks referring to the official church. As has been noted by other scholars, the institution of the church is notably absent in Zosima’s biography and teachings; at some point in his *žitie*, he openly utters his disapproval of the parish clergy’s unwillingness to perform their duties (PSS 14, 265). Instead of placing God in the church, Zosima finds Him in the whole of nature, thus infusing his teachings with a strong dimension of nature mysticism. The mystical pantheism of Zosima’s spirituality is highly unorthodox for a “Russian monk” and provoked much controversy in ecclesiastical circles since the publication of the novel, no doubt adding to his special appeal for the secular readership. With his recurring emphasis on the need of social engagement and mutual moral responsibility – all under the heading of “active love” (*dejatel'naja ljubov'*) (PSS 14, 292) – Zosima offers an alternative for the lack of social ministration among many of the real clergy.

The reception of Dostoevskij’s fictional elder is important for our purposes here. In the clerical camp, the literary elder seemed to cause some distress because of what was perceived as divergences from the mould of official Orthodoxy. The non-conformity of Zosima’s teachings is revealed by a censor’s report that there is “obvious harm in the distribution of Zosima’s mystical and social teaching, which [...] is in essence completely opposite to the doctrine of Orthodox faith” (Lebedev 1970, 124). Most notable are the reservations of Konstantin Leont'ëv, who took secret monastic vows in Optina in 1891; but it should be

⁴ Quotes from and references to Dostoevskij’s works are from the *Polnoe Sobranie Sočinenij v tridcati tomakh* (compiled by the Institute of Russian Literature of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, 1972-1990), cited as PSS, followed by the volume and page number.

emphasized that he was also critical of the historical elder Amvrosij. Openly contesting the accuracy of Zosima's teachings, he condemns them as "lying" and "false" (Leont'ev [1891] 1991, 184). In lay circles, however, Dostoevskij's elder seemed to strike a sympathetic chord, especially among religious philosophers. These readers were not so much concerned with the question of whether or not Zosima was a correct reflection of Optina elderhood, but were drawn to this literary character precisely because they found a new, original dimension in his religious teachings. In response to Leont'ev, Vasilij Rozanov famously suggested that Zosima even gave the impetus towards a new type of Russian monasticism:

*All of Russia read his *Brothers Karamazov*, and believed the presentation of the elder Zosima. Two consequences followed from this. The authority of monasticism, weak and uninteresting theretofore (except for specialists), rose to an extraordinary degree. "The Russian monk" (Dostoevskij's term) emerged, like a native and enchanting image, in the eyes of all Russia, even among its unbelieving parts. This is the first extraordinary consequence. The second consists in the following: Russian monks, from the learned type, have almost automatically yielded to the side of love and expectation that Dostoevskij roused up with his elder Zosima. A new school of monasticism, a new type, emerged to the well-known level: loving, tender and "pantheistic" (Rozanov [1903] 1991, 186-187; author's italics).*

Dostoevskij's "Russian monk" thus gave a new interpretation of and even shaped the tradition on which he was modelled; his fictional elder offered many lay readers a spiritual alternative to the rigid state church.

The nineteenth-century hesychastic renaissance provided the breeding ground for a dramatic theological controversy in the beginning of the twentieth century that would attract attention from some prominent Russian philosophers. Interestingly, whereas in the nineteenth century it was especially the spiritual and mystical side of hesychasm rather than the theological dimension that appealed to lay believers, in the twentieth century, it was precisely the theological background that interested the lay intellectuals and enticed them to join the debate.

The *imjaslavie* controversy

The history of *imjaslavie* begins in 1907, when an elder named Ilarion published a book titled *On the Mountains of the Caucasus (Na Gorakh Kavkaza)*.⁵ Between 1872 and 1892, Ilarion had his residence in the Russian St. Panteleimon monastery on Mount Athos, where he had studied the texts of the *Philokalia* and the great hesychastic masters. He then moved to the Caucasus to join hermits who sought solitude and mental peace in the isolated wilderness of the mountains. While there, Ilarion wrote a kind of autobiographical account in which he described his experience of the Jesus prayer in the form of dialogues with the elder Disiderij, another Athonite monk who lived as a hermit in the Caucasus. In the introduction, Ilarion teaches in a simple and accessible manner about the Jesus prayer and draws attention to the mystical link between name and person: "For the believer, who loves the Lord and prays to Him all the time, the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is as it were He Himself, our divine Savior. And in reality this great truth is best experienced in the practice of the Jesus prayer of

⁵ For this concise overview of the history and development of the *imjaslavie* controversy, I have relied primarily on Dykstra (1988), Alfeyev (2007a, 241-307), Paert (2010, 171-178). See also Schultze (1951), Leskin (2004).

mind and heart” (Ilarion [1907] 2002, 193).⁶ The Name of Jesus – identical to the Name of God – repeated in the prayer instigates the mystical experience of unity with God, which leads to the belief that “in the Name of God, God Himself is present, in all His essence and in (all) His infinite characteristics” (“в имени Божиим присутствует Сам Бог - всем Своим Существом и (всеми) Своими безконечными свойствами”, id., 210). Ilarion’s book – which was given the subtitle *A conversation between two hermit-elders on the inner union of our hearts with the Lord through the Jesus prayer* (*Beseda dvukh starcev pustynnikov o vnutrennem edinenii s Gospodom našikh serdec črez molitvu Iisus Khristovu*) – was initially well received in clerical circles.⁷ Because the book was more a poetic invocation of the practice of the Jesus prayer than a theological treatise, it was especially popular among less-educated monks. It also became known in lay circles and went through three editions between 1907 and 1912, with, amongst others, financial support from Optina (one edition was even financed by grand duchess Elizaveta Fëdorovna, sister-in-law of tsar Nikolaj II). However, in the same year that the third edition was published in the Kievo-Pečerskaja Lavra, there was a change in the reception, instigated by a negative review of the book by the monk Khrisanf of the St. Elijah *skete* on Athos. Khrisanf claimed that Ilarion was fundamentally wrong in his identification of the Name of God or Jesus with the entity of God or Jesus. In his formulation that in the name of God, God Himself is present, Ilarion places the essence of God outside of God, thus falling prey to the heresy of “pantheism”: “And so the author personalizes the nominal, immaterial ‘name Jesus’ into the living and very highest Essence of God. Such a thought is pantheistic, that is merging the essence of God with something located outside His essence” (quoted in Dykstra 1988). Khrisanf’s review first aroused discussions about the Name among Athonite monks, but in 1912 it also started to make its way in Russia, after the review was published in *Russkij Inok*, the obligatory journal for all Russian monasteries. As a result, the controversy that existed until that point only in small, mostly Athonite circles became suddenly a hot topic among all Russian monks and aroused a heated debate between supporters and opponents of *imjaslavie*. Although by that time the Jesus prayer was a relatively well-accepted and practiced form of spirituality through the writings of Ioann of Kronstadt, Feofan the Recluse and Ignatij Brjančaninov – writings the Name-Worshippers themselves relied on to support their views – Ilarion’s statement that “in the Name of God, God Himself is present” turned out to be too provocative for the church authorities (Alfeyev 2007a, 242). In 1912, Ilarion’s book was banned by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Joachim III, and again in 1913 by Germanus V. In the same year, the reactionary Antonij (Khrapovickij), archbishop of Volhynia and member of the Synod of the Russian church, openly started the struggle against Ilarion’s book in Russia. He was joined by other clerics and bishops and soon after that, the Russian Holy Synod openly denounced *imjaslavie* as pantheism and declared it a heresy.

The *imjaslavcy* (also called *imjabožniki* or *onomatodoxoi*) refused to denounce their teaching and gained an increasing number of supporters in monastic circles, who in turn accused their opponents of the heresy of *imjaborčestvo* (“struggle against the Name”). Hieromonk Antonij (Bulatovič) became the most ardent champion of *imjaslavie*. He was a former military officer in the Russian army who accepted, partly instigated by conversations with Ioann of Kronstadt, monastic tonsure in 1902 on Athos.⁸ Bulatovič decided to write a

⁶ “Для верующаго, любящаго Господа и всегда к Нему молящагося, имя Господа Иисуса Христа есть как бы Сам Он, Божественный Спаситель наш. И действительно, в производстве умно-сердечной Иисусовой молитвы всего лучше ощущается эта высокая истина.”

⁷ For a detailed analysis of the book’s content, see Hamburg (2003).

⁸ During his military career, Bulatovič had served on diplomatic missions to Ethiopia. On one of these missions, he made a geographical report on Ethiopia for which he was rewarded a silver medal of the Russian Geographical Society (Dykstra 1980). During World War I, he again entered the Russian army to serve as a chaplain. Upon his return to Russia, he again became an active participant in the *imjaslavie* debate and tried to

more theologically underpinned defense of Ilarion's book and especially of the controversial phrase "in the Name of God, God Himself is present." This resulted in his *Apology of faith in the Name of God and in the name of Jesus* (*Apologija very vo Imja Božie i vo imja Iisus*), which initially circulated on Athos with only seventy-five copies but was printed in Moscow in 1913 with the financial support of Mikhail Novosělov, head of the Moscow "Circle of Seekers of Christian Enlightenment." It was especially the religious-philosophical group around Novosělov that would become interested in the *imjaslavie* debate and spread it in secular circles.

Bulatovič's *Apologija* became known as the foundational theological work on Name-Worshipping. In this work, he presents quotations from the Old and New Testament, fragments from patristic literature and hesychastic writers (among them Paisij Veličkovskij, Ignatij Brjančaninov, Serafim of Sarov, and Ioann of Kronstadt), and even liturgical texts to legitimate the doctrine of the Glorification of the Name. At the core of his apologia is the formula that "the Name of God is God Himself ("Имя Божие есть Сам Бог"), which runs as a leitmotiv throughout the book. In his identification of the Name of God and His Person, Bulatovič makes an even more radical claim than Ilarion, who posited God's presence in His Name. Countering the condemnation of the *imjaborcycy* that the Worship of the Name boils down to pantheism, Bulatovič reverts to Gregory Palamas's distinction between God's essence and His energies. In order to substantiate the formula that "the Name of God is God," Bulatovič defines the Name as a divine energy, thus safeguarding the transcendent nature of God. Also, the parallel between *imjaslavie* and the teaching of Palamas – the theologian of hesychasm – serves Bulatovič well in his argument. First, the historical link with Palamism, accepted as an official Orthodox doctrine in the fourteenth century, enforces his theological arguments. Second, it also enables him to draw a line between the current controversy of *imjaslavcy* and *imjaborcycy* and the fourteenth-century conflict between Palamas and Barlaam, who opposed the idea that God becomes manifest in His energies and denied the possibility that humans can experience Divinity. By this equation, Bulatovič can make the blunt claim that the *imjaborcycy* are themselves heretics because, like Barlaam, they refute the divinity of God's energies (Bulatovič [1913] 2002; Dykstra 1988).

Bulatovič's *Apologija* – and especially the formula "the Name of God is God," which had become the slogan of the *imjaslavcy* – added fuel to the debate on Athos and triggered an even more enraged atmosphere between the Athonite monks. The hostility between *imjaslavcy* and *imjaborcycy* increased rapidly and took the form of a revolt: each side condemned the other as heretical and used all means to put the other camp under a ban. The dispute gave rise to a delicate diplomatic problem: were the Russian monks – that is, the main protagonists in the debate – under control of the Russian church or could they also be put under the authority of the Greek patriarch? The complex relationship between Russian and Greek church authorities in relation to the semi-autonomous status of the Holy Mountain prompted the Russian Holy Synod to take direct action in the Athonite uproar. It asked two of its members, archbishop Antonij (Khrapovickij) and archbishop Nikon (Roždestvenskij), to write reports on the Athonite uproar; a third report was delivered by Sergej Troickij, a theology professor and specialist in canon law. All three reports were published in the Synod's official journal *Cerkovnye Vedomosti* in May 1913 (Alfeev 2007b). Immediately

persuade the church authorities to accept Name-Worshipping. In October 1918, Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow signed a decree that prohibited Worshippers of the Name to take part in church services. After that, Bulatovič broke all his negotiations with the church and returned to his family estate near Kharkov, where he lived as a hermit. It was there that he was murdered in mysterious circumstances on the night of 5 to 6 December 1919; some say he was killed by robbers, others say he was murdered by soldiers of the Red or White Army (Graham and Kantor, 2009: 16-17).

thereafter, the *Oberprokuror* of the Holy Synod sent archbishop Nikon and Troickij to Athos to observe the controversy and put an end to it. Unable to convert the *imjaslavcy*, Nikon requested tsar Nikolaj II to send military troops to Athos. The tsar was initially opposed to a military intervention on Athos (partly because his wife Alexandra showed sympathy for the Name-Worshippers). At first, he hoped to solve the matter in a non-violent manner: the Panteleimon monastery, the bulwark of the rebellious monks, was cut off from financial support and food supplies, but the monks managed to obtain food from local sympathizers and persevered in their cult of the Name. Alarmed by the reports about the growing revolt on Athos, the Greek government ordered military troops to be on stand-by to invade the disobedient monasteries in case of further mutiny. Faced with the possibility of a Greek intervention, the prospect that Russia could lose its political influence in this region, and anxious that another schism could develop in the Russian church, tsar Nikolaj in the end agreed to send Russian troops to Athos and suppress the onomatodox rebels with force. In June 1913, a military fleet from the Imperial Russian Navy, consisting of the three steamers *Donec*, *Car*, and *Kherson*, arrived on the Holy Mountain. After an official count, in which 517 monks declared themselves openly as *imjaslavcy*, the soldiers stormed the Panteleimon monastery in the beginning of July to remove the recalcitrant monks. Although the monks were unarmed and engaged in prayer, the marines opened fire and used water canons to chase the monks from the monastery before beating them. In the end, four monks were killed and dozen others severely injured. Archbishop Nikon was present and lectured the monks the whole time (Graham and Kantor 2009, 7-11; Polovinkin 2002, 490-493). Although he was at that time in Russia defending *imjaslavie*, Antonij Bulatovič describes in 1917 the tragic events on Athos:

The monks, unarmed and engaged in liturgical service, were exposed to an unseen torture: for an hour, they were held back by powerful streams of cold mountain water coming out of two fire-hoses, that swept them from their feet and hit them, like the most strong blows, in the face and on their body [...] they beat the monks without mercy, grabbed them by the hair and threw them on the ground [...] that night, four murdered monks were buried (Bulatovič [1917] 2002, 222).

The monks were then forced on the steamers and deported to Russia: according to official figures from the Russian Synod, almost 900 monks were transported (Alfeyev 2007a, 293). Upon their arrival in Odessa, forty of them were imprisoned; the others were sent to remote monasteries. Eight hundred of the exiled monks were defrocked and sent to their home villages, completely stripped of their monastic status (Graham and Kantor 2009, 10-12).

The conflict between the representatives of the Holy Synod and the *imjaslavcy* reveals the lingering schism between two streams within Russian orthodoxy. The first one is the orthodoxy of the official academies, or “the orthodoxy of reason” characterized by a formal and rational approach to theology. The second one is the “orthodoxy of the heart” based on spiritual experience and a more intuitive approach to questions of theology. Many of the onomatodox monks came from the Russian peasantry and lacked theological training, leaving them unprepared for complex discussions when they were confronted by official authorities. However, they immediately received theoretical support from a growing group of lay intellectuals who were appalled by the Synod’s violent reaction and decided to step into the debate.

Reactions and repercussions in Russian culture

In spite of the Synod’s attempts to nip *imjaslavie* in the bud, the events on Athos “literally stirred up Russia. Everyone wrote about them: politicians and scholars, newspaper publicists

and musicians, journalists and philosophers” (Leskin 2004, 141).⁹ Or, to quote a well-known eyewitness, who would also participate in the debate: “in every issue of the newspapers, they write about the Worshippers of the Name and the Strugglers against the Name, about the elder Ilarion, about the schema-monk Antonij Bulatovič, about the agitations on Athos, about the measures of the Holy Synod against the new ‘heresy’, about the terrors, from which one’s blood burns with indignation” (Berdjaev [1913] 1989, 623). Among the intelligentsia, the outcry over the church’s suppression of *imjaslavie* was great.

One of the first laymen to become highly involved in the debate was Mikhail Novosëlov, the central figure of the “Circle of Seekers of Christian Enlightenment” (“Kružok iščuščikh khristianskogo prosveščenia”). A former Tolstoyan, Novosëlov made a turn to Orthodoxy around 1900. Although still very critical of the state-controlled church, he had close contacts with the spiritual elders of Optina Pustyn’ and Zosimova Pustyn’, a hermitage around ninety versts from Moscow that was founded in 1826 by the elder Zosima (Verkhovskij). The Zosimova monastery acquired a status of great spiritual splendor in Russian intellectual circles at the beginning of the twentieth century and had taken the place the Optina monastery had occupied in the nineteenth century.¹⁰ Novosëlov was not alone in his attraction to the elders; according to Nikolaj Berdjaev, in those days “a real myth about *starčestvo*” emerged in Russian intellectual circles, especially among the ones who had taken distance from the church and were in search of a more authentic interpretation of Orthodoxy (Berdjaev [1949] 2003, 435). Many of these intellectuals, including Pavel Florenskij and Sergej Bulgakov, met each other during meetings and lectures organized by Novosëlov in his house. They all called Novosëlov “*abba* (АВБА) Mikhail,” *abba* being a term commonly used for elders or spiritual fathers. When Novosëlov was informed by Antonij Bulatovič about the Athonite uproar, he immediately spread the word in his circle and stirred up its members to take action.

Already before the Synod’s military intervention, Novosëlov was fully engaged in the *imjaslavie* case; as editor of the “Religious-Philosophical Library” series, he published Bulatovič’s *Apologija* in 1913 in the lay publishing house *Put’*. He asked his close companion Florenskij to write a foreword to the book; Florenskij’s foreword, albeit anonymous, set the tone for the chorus of disapproval concerning the Church’s attitude towards *imjaslavie*:

Like the wave of an earthquake, through the whole universal Church, from South to North, from East to West, spread indignation when some light-minded monks, corrupted by rationalism, dared to attack that nerve of the Church, in which converge all other nerves, that dogma – the denial of which constitutes the denial of all dogmas – that object of worship that lies at the foundation of all holy things in the church [...]. And so the Church shuddered now, when from all ends – from remote provincial monasteries and from the capitals – from half-literate ascetics and from educated figures burst from the bosom a general cry of indignation [...] it is cold in the cultural world. The impenetrable stony crust of rationalism covers the fiery ocean of grace everywhere. But eternally there boils in the Most Holy and Pure Mother of God this burning and heated lava, without which humankind would be frozen. Such a spiritual

⁹ There were also some reports in the international press: for example see an article in *The New York Times* (July 27, 1913)

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F30B11F93E5B13738DDDAE0A94DF405B838DF1D3> and a series of articles in *The London Times* (June 19, August 22 & 23, 1913) (Khoružij 2004, 673-674).

¹⁰ It has been suggested that Zosima Verkhovskij served as one of the saintly models for Dostoevskij’s fictional elder Zosima (in addition to the Optina elder Amvrosij and Tikhon of Zadonsk), but that is not a commonly accepted view among Dostoevskij scholars (see the editors’ commentaries to *The Brothers Karamazov*, PSS 15, 570).

eruption, in line with others, appeared in 1912, which is termed, “*The year of the Athos disputes on the Name of Jesus*” (Florenskij [1913] 2002, 12-13).

Florenskij puts the spotlight on Ilarion’s *Na Gorakh Kavkaza*, which he places in the long tradition of hesychastic practice, thus attempting to qualify its allegedly controversial content. Relying on the ancient fathers and on contemporary figures, like Ioann of Kronstadt and Ignatij Brjančaninov, Ilarion explains that “the redeeming character of the Jesus prayer is in the cultivation of the most sweet Name of Jesus in the heart, and the Name is Divine and is Jesus Himself because the Name is inseparable from the one who is named” (Florenskij [1913] 2002:13).

Nikolaj Berdjaev also took up his pen to utter his disapproval concerning the events on Athos. After his move to Moscow in 1908, Berdjaev had regularly attended Novosëlov’s circle and had at some point, together with Novosëlov and Bulgakov, made a pilgrimage to Zosimova Pustyn’ (Berdjaev [1949] 2003, 435-436). After some time, he had taken distance from this group, but he still shared with them his aversion to the secularized and rationalized Church. In August 1913 – just one month after the Synod’s intervention – Berdjaev published a vehement article entitled “Quenchers of the Spirit” (“Gasiteli Dukha”) in *Russkaja Molva*.¹¹ The article begins with an extensive quote from the preface (only later identified as Florenskij’s) to Novosëlov’s edition of Bulatovič’s *Apologija*, which he implicitly considers to be too gentle in its condemnation of the Synod’s actions. In spite of the horror the events on Athos evoke in him, Berdjaev wants to make clear that *imjaslavie* is in fact a joyful event because it breathes new life into a spiritual tradition that was for a long time silenced in the Russian church. The value and truth of Name-Worshipping is in its “pantheism, which assumes that God’s energy becomes immanent to the world and humanity” (Berdjaev [1913] 1989, 624). Still, as Berdjaev himself indicates, it is not his intention to dwell too long on the theological questions posed in the debate; for him, it is first of all an incident that reveals, in Dostoevskij’s words, the “spiritual paralysis” of the official church. Throughout the essay, Berdjaev makes a sharp distinction between the supporters of *imjaslavie* (i.e., “monks, elders and laymen”) who share a devotion to true Orthodoxy and “official, public, Synodal Orthodoxy, which has long ago broken off every connection to Christian mysticism and has already for a long time been indifferent to any spiritual life” (ibid.). In a provoking tone, he strikes out at the rigid condition the official church is in:

They [the Synod’s representatives, NG], people who are impregnated with a worldly utilitarianism, are not able to penetrate into such questions that are only within the powers of mystics, religious philosophers, and people of a higher contemplation [...] the holy synod hates any spiritual life, it considers it dangerous and disquieting [...]. They sometimes love to shout that the church is oppressed by the state. But the bishops themselves summoned the state power to acts of violence in the name of their own goals, they are a thousand times worse than the soldiers and city police. Archbishop Nikon convinced the *imeneslavcy*-monks into the right faith of the holy synod with the help of bayonets, mutilating defenseless elders (id., 625-626).

Berdjaev, the self-proclaimed “philosopher of freedom,” observes in the Synod’s violent intervention the tragic summit of what he calls historical Christianity; this is a corrupted form of Christianity that advocates a religion of fear and submissiveness instead of Christ’s original teaching of freedom and love. Using his religious-philosophical leitmotiv of freedom,

¹¹ The title “Quenchers of the Spirit” can be traced back to 1 Thessalonians 5: 19, “Quench not the Spirit.” Just two verses earlier, we find Paul’s command “Pray without ceasing,” which is often quoted among practitioners of the hesychastic Jesus prayer.

Berdjaev stresses that authentic spirituality – in this case onomatodox spirituality – can only thrive in freedom, and that is why it poses such a great threat to the Synodal church. Official Orthodoxy is no more than “a church of rottenness and decay” that suffocates all attempts at a spiritual revival and claims for freedom and creativity. By rejecting *imjaslavie* on the grounds of pantheism, the official church in fact rejects God’s presence in the world and consequently the incarnation of Christ. That is why “the monophysite [...] official Orthodoxy became itself long ago a pernicious, anti-Christian heresy” (id., 630). Official Orthodoxy rejects what is at the core of Christianity, which is that in Christ, the God-man (*Bogočelovek*), God became human to lead the way for humanity so that they can become reunited with God. As such, it denies not only the human nature of Christ, but also the divine potential of humankind. That is why “the gates of hell have since long overpowered the Synodal church [...]. The tragedy of *imeneslavstvo* unmasks the lie of official ecclesiology and the absence of the Spirit of Christ in it” (id., 631).

As Berdjaev himself indicates in his intellectual autobiography *Samopoznanie*, he wrote “Quenchers of the Spirit” not because of a special theological interest in *imjaslavie*, but because he was revolted by the Synod’s abuse of power and their use of force (Berdjaev [1949] 2003, 451). For him, the theological merit of *imjaslavie* lies in its pantheism, a view he can relate to his own theological preoccupations. At the core of Berdjaev’s thought is an ardent faith in man’s divine potential based on the incarnation of God in His Son. Through the incarnation, God became immanent in the world. The appearance of Christ holds a promise for humanity: that God is present in every human. Still, for Berdjaev, the significance of the whole controversy lies most of all in its unmasking of the hypocrisy of the ecclesiastical authorities, and he seizes the occasion to lash out at the official church in a highly polemical manner.¹² This was far from the first time that Berdjaev had openly criticized the clerical authorities, but the tone of his essay was so critical and the whole controversy so heated that this time he could no longer avoid severe measures taken by the ecclesiastical camp. The issue of *Russkaja Molva* in which the article appeared was immediately confiscated and Berdjaev was charged with blasphemy, for which he would have paid with life-long exile to Siberia except that he was unexpectedly saved by the outbreak of World War I; many of the witnesses were called to fight in the war, and thus the trial was postponed. Then the revolution came and the whole matter was closed for good. Berdjaev wrote in hindsight: “if there had been no revolution, then I would not have been in Paris, but in Siberia, in perpetual exile” (id.: 452).

Another renowned intellectual who was drawn into the debate and would become one of its most ardent theoreticians was Sergej Bulgakov. He was a regular attendant of the intellectual group around Novosëlov, who informed Bulgakov about the Athonite *imjaslavians* in 1912 and urged him to start reading Ilarion’s and Bulatovič’s works. He also closely observed how the affair gradually spread in Russian monastic circles. During one of his pilgrimages to Zosimova Pustyn’ with Novosëlov, Bulgakov could not help but notice that the air was filled with talk about the events on the Holy Mountain. In a letter to his friend Aleksandr Glinka he wrote: “we travelled to Zosimova Pustyn’ [...] There we could notice the excitement that was going on in connection to the question of ‘the name of God’, a dispute that was aroused by the book ‘On the Mountains of the Caucasus’ by the monk Ilarion; I highly recommend you become acquainted with this book” (letter from 27 December 1912; Kejdan 1997, 501). Bulgakov became increasingly involved in *imjaslavie* and the discussions

¹² In a letter to Vladimir Ern, dated 18 September 1913, Bulgakov writes he regrets the heated style of Berdjaev’s essay (Kejdan 1997, 553).

surrounding it; after the Synod's official condemnation of it, he decided to join the debate.¹³ In 1913, he published his essay "The Athos affair" ("Afonskoe Delo") in *Russkaja Mysl'* in which he condemned the Synod's oppressive and violent conduct against the "Name-Worshippers," which "troubled us and caused much grief" (letter to A. Glinka from 15 January 1914; Kejdan 1997, 568). Although the tone of his article is less vehement than Berdjaev's essay, he unambiguously shows his disapproval of the Synod's role in the current events on Athos: "the color of shame, of indignation, of sorrow and of insult for the church appears on one's face at the thought of this expedition [...]. Instead of wise tolerance and benevolence, the church authorities displayed an envious lust for power" (Bulgakov [1913] 2003, 299-300). Labeling the question of the Name of God as quintessential for a correct understanding of all problems of a religious-philosophical nature, Bulgakov counters the Synod's claim that *imjaslavie* is a heresy. On the contrary, as Bulgakov insists, it is a "theory of prayer" that is a theological continuation and reformulation of the ancient Orthodox tradition of the hesychastic Jesus prayer, or "mental activity (*umnoe delanie*)" typically practiced among hermits and ascetics (id., 297). As such, the *imjaslavcy* put back on the theological map a teaching that is central to Orthodox dogma: the distinction between God's essence and His energies, a question that continues to arouse divided opinions and therefore needs further theological grounding. Bulgakov admits that the theories put forward by the Name-Worshippers are still immature, and that is why learned theologians must step in and contribute to the debate. However, instead of encouraging further theological investigation and entering a dialogue with the contemporary hesychasts, the church authorities chose to suppress the movement and revert to "the beloved method of shutting mouths": all discussion about it was carefully kept out of the official journals of the theological academies and in the end the whole movement was condemned as heretical.

Bulgakov seizes the occasion to raise the matter of how dogmas are determined and accepted in the Orthodox Church. Contrary to the Roman Catholic Church, where dogmatic disputes are settled hierarchically by the infallible pope, the Orthodox Church does not have an external dogmatic authority but relies on councils. Referring to Aleksej Khomjakov and his ideal of *sobornost'*, Bulgakov puts forward the idea of a "church in its wholeness": in the Orthodox Church truth is preserved by all its members – without hierarchical distinction – and thus every believer has the right to take part in the determination of dogmas. Illustrating this on the basis of the authority of an "odd assortment of theologians" – Bukharev, Dostoevskij, Solov'ëv, Fëdorov, Tjutčev, Tolstoj and Leont'ev – he stresses that Orthodoxy needs the dogmatic creativity of all its believers: "Orthodoxy constantly finds itself (or rather, ought to find itself) through its members in the process of seeking new dogmas." This freedom in the search for new dogmas constitutes "the living nerve" of Orthodoxy, and to ignore this is to "quench the spirit" (id., 296; Evtuhov 1997, 213). Therefore, because the ecclesiastical authorities refuse to clarify the question of the Name of God, it is only obvious that the debate is taken over by Orthodox laymen. The ecclesiastical authorities missed the opportunity here to give a new impetus to Russian Orthodoxy, and instead they further established the break between the church and the common believers because of their military intervention. As was a commonly uttered criticism in the Russian press in those days, Bulgakov is convinced that the Synod's actions are not prompted by dogmatic motives but by "national-political motives" directed toward facilitating Constantinople's desire to reduce in a legal manner the number of Russian monks on Athos.

But in spite of its violent ending, the Athos affair is in fact a "joyful event in the life of the church" because it is the best proof of the "vitality of Orthodoxy." "On the Mountains of

¹³ In the summer of 1913, Bulgakov took up the plan to publish a whole volume on the *imjaslavie* controversy and asked several members of the Novosëlov circle to contribute articles to it. This plan was never realized (Leskin 2003, 172).

the Caucasus” by the monk Ilarion – “a profound elder” – contains “the most fragrant pages of religious poetry” (id., 301). Bulgakov concludes that in the events on Athos, we should not see a final ending of the question but “a prologue to a further dogmatic movement” (id., 304).

With hindsight, Bulgakov spoke prophetic words; the controversy over the Worship of the Name that originally flared up as a dispute between Athonite monks provoked many reactions from secular thinkers and left an undeniable imprint on intellectual life in the Russian Silver Age. For some, such as Nikolaj Berdjajev, the Athos affair was perceived as symptomatic for the poor moral and spiritual condition of the official church, and he seized the opportunity to vent his disapproval of this rationalized church. For others, such as Pavel Florenskij, Sergej Bulgakov, Aleksej Losev, and Vladimir Ern, *imjaslavie* also raised some fundamental metaphysical and epistemological questions and issues in the philosophy of language, and they developed a life-long commitment to the exploration of them. Over the years and in different writings, Florenskij construed a philosophy of language that owes much to the hesychastic distinction between essence and energy. Combining a deep philosophical interpretation of *imjaslavie* with a mystical one, he also believed in the magic powers of the word. He was unique in relating *imjaslavie* to mathematics (Graham and Kantor 2009). When – as part of the All-Russian Church Council of 1917-1918 – a special commission was appointed to examine *imjaslavie*, Bulgakov was asked to join as a specialist on the subject. He prepared a manuscript on Name-Worshipping, which he continued working on after his exile to France and was published posthumously as *The Philosophy of the Name (Filosofija imeni)* (1953) (Dennes 1999; Leskin 2004; Gurko 2006). The “Athonite affair” not only drew reactions from philosophers but also appealed to the symbolist poets, who projected theories of the Name in the fields of aesthetics and philology and used them in their reflections on the nature of the poetic word (Paperno 1994).

In this paper, only a small “prologue” – to borrow Bulgakov’s term – could be devoted to the whole movement of Name-Worshipping and the repercussions it had on intellectual and cultural life. In recent years, there is a renewed interest in *imjaslavie* from various disciplinary angles, but there are still many questions to be clarified concerning this rich but complex episode in Russian religious and cultural history.

Conclusion

In his diagnosis of the schism between institutionalized Orthodoxy and a more spiritual, extra-ecclesiastical form of Orthodox faith (in his view, the “heartbeat” of Russian Orthodoxy), Florovsky pointed at the *imjaslavie* controversy as the tragic culmination of this ever-widening gap:

Most harmful has proven the strange gulf separating theology and piety, theological learning and devotional prayer, the theology of the schools and the life of the Church. A split or schism between the “intelligentsia” and the “people” occurred within the Church itself [...] This is so characteristically expressed in the 1912-1913 ‘Athos controversy’ concerning the names of God and the Jesus Prayer (Florovsky 1987, 290).

Remarkably (and maybe ironically), a process occurred wherein “the schism between the ‘intelligentsia’ and the ‘people’” *within* the church shifted *outside* of the church and *lay* intelligentsia took up the defense of the marginalized Orthodoxy of the “people.” The clash between two forms of Orthodoxy – on the one hand, the dogmatic, rationalized Orthodoxy of the theological academies, “the Orthodoxy of reason”, and on the other hand, the more intuitive Orthodoxy based on spiritual experience and ingrained ascetic and ritual traditions, “the Orthodoxy of the heart” – was partly fought out *outside* of the church. Since the

nineteenth century, some of the most prominent figures of Russia's cultural elite were drawn into the hesychastic revival in Russian monasticism and became instrumental mediators in the further dissemination and popularization of hesychastic spirituality and elderhood in Russian culture. This movement from the religious to the secular realm was continued in the twentieth century when leading intellectuals actively stepped in the *imjaslavie* debate and became the most ardent trailblazers of divine onomatodoxy. There is, however, a shift in the intellectuals' fascination with hesychasm and their role in the distribution of it. In the nineteenth century, it was especially the elders in their role as spiritual authorities and the mystical dimension of hesychastic practice that had a strong appeal for Russian religious intellectuals; painfully aware of the poor spiritual and moral state of a great part of the clergy, they found in the hesychastic revival an alternative to the rationalized Orthodoxy of the church. In the twentieth century, it was especially the theological and complex theoretical debates concerning the Jesus prayer and the Name that attracted the intelligentsia's interest and drew them in the debate. Philosophically trained, they profiled themselves as allies of the Name-Worshippers, who often lacked theological education, and set out to develop solid theological theories in defense of *imjaslavie*.

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