

ADAM DROZDEK

**ANASTASII BRATANOVSKII: LIVING FOR IMMORTALITY**

Andrei Bratanovskii (Romanenko-Bratanovskii, 1761-1806) received his education in the Pereiaslavskaja seminary. He lectured in the Sevskaja seminary, the Vologda Seminary, in the seminary in the Kirillov monastery, and in the seminary (then academy) in the Aleksandrovskii monastery in which in 1790 he became a monk assuming the name of Anastasii. In 1794, he became a member of the Russian Academy. In 1797, he became an archbishop of Belorussia in Mogilev and in 1805, an archbishop of Caucasus in Astrakhan.

Bratanovskii translated several religious and theological works from French and wrote in Latin a rhetoric textbook.<sup>1</sup> He also preached and gave speeches and many of his sermons and speeches were published twice.<sup>2</sup>

---

DR ADAM DROZDEK, Associate Professor na Duquesne University, autor kilku książek, m.in. *Moral dimension of man in the age of computers* (1995) oraz *Greccy filozofowie jako teolodzy* (2011). Kontakt: drozdek@duq.edu.

- 1 *Tractatus de concionum dispositionibus formandus, in usum jventutis, ad sacra Graeco-Russicae Ecclesiae munia ambenda obeundaque formanae*, adornatus Auctore Anastasio Archiep. Astracan, Mosquae: Typis Sanctissimae Sinodi 1806.
- 2 Поучительные слова, Москва: В Синодальной типографии 1803, vols. 1-2, 1806, vol. 3, 1807, vol. 4; Сочинения, Санкт-Петербург: Типография ведомостей С. П. Б. городской полиции 1850.

## Christian life

Bratanowski wanted to instill in his listeners the necessity and the judiciousness of the life of virtue as the only kind of life pleasing to God and the only life opening bright prospects in the afterlife.

There is no doubt for Bratanovskii that God exists – the omnipotent, omniscient, good, just and providential God who lovingly cares for His creation for which reason “His greatest name is the Father” (1.7).<sup>3</sup> Beauty and order of the world testify about God’s wisdom (49); all things striving to their proper ends testify about God’s guidance; the union of all causes testifies that God sees everything (49-50). Therefore, the increase of knowledge of the workings of the world should enhance the faith in God: “we scrutinize the works of God to glorify His supreme wisdom” (224).

The world is God’s creation and God always wants to bless His creation even though the sin that has crept into the world separates creation from God. This blessing brings the world closer to God to the point of creating a union in the world and a union with God. “The union of all things constitutes the beauty and perfection of the world. Consent, wholeness, and unity are the universal end for which all beings exist according to the inviolable laws of nature” (1.1). On the human level, the union with God is a state in which “the human heart and mind by perfectly giving themselves up to the will of God attach themselves only to him and God present in man like in a consecrated temple fills him with spiritual gifts mercifully cooperating with him in all good works. This is the end of salvific faith, true glory of virtue, the grandeur of Christianity” (1.13).

The union with God can reach its perfection in the afterlife, but this life should attain some level of this union. People can unite with God on earth in two ways: 1. with the blessing sent down from above that illuminates believers (J. 14:23); 2. through inner workings of spiritual forces, i.e., through reason that gets to know God through faith and through the heart that clings to God through love. The exercise of virtues gradually creates the habit to see God with the eyes of faith – and this is up to the particular person (3.174). This may not be an effortless undertaking. “This life is given us not for rest and idleness, but for work and [earning] merits” (87). To come closer to God, one has to go away from oneself and from the love of the world (175). Prayer brings a person closer to the union with God (179). With love of

---

3 References are made to the four volumes of Bratanovskii’s *Поучительные слова*.

God, faith, and prayer the union with God will be as perfect as it only can be on earth (180).

The life of genuine virtue is not conducted for its own sake. True virtue is the conformity to the perfections of God (1.15), it is “the conformity of the human will that acts freely with the will of God” (74); thus, acting according to the will of God will surely be seeking His perfection. For this reason, the constant reliance in all situations on God should be the guiding principle for each person. Without it, virtues can fairly easily turn into their opposites. Patience, courage, magnanimity, and hope are a shield used by philosophy to defend man before the woes of life. However, without God, patience turns into bitterness, magnanimity into rage and bestiality, courage into insolence and irrationality, hope into ennui and desperation (1.65). Faith without virtue and virtue without faith are not genuine and are imperfect (4.11).

Moreover, a virtuous life without God is without hope, good deeds are done to elevate oneself in the eyes of others, and so good deeds done outside the divine light matter little. “Man is created not for creation, but for God; God is the end of his desires and an object of his love; God is his joy and happiness, and blessing” (1.20); man exists to love God and to serve Him (121); therefore, “if virtue is not rooted in the human heart; if the human heart is not maintained by the law of the Lord; if love for the law is not based upon the love of God, then all of the rightfulness of works is only a pretense of virtue” (2.188).

If only the expected reward is the reason of good deeds, then impatience may fill the heart with sadness; conscience, this lamp of virtue, gets dimmed (1.25). Man has to be convinced about the truth of his actions, act according to his conscience, act motivated by love of goodness (26). A Christian acts virtuously because of his love of God, His laws, because of his love of virtue (27). This is a tall call: the life of disinterested virtue, the life of striving for perfection. However, because of the constant reliance of God’s loving help, it is possible for all people, not only for the elect.

Conscience, the built-in voice of God’s justice (3.95), “an image of the truth of God” (1.213), reminds humans that they should turn to God: “according to the law of conscience, the first duty of man is to get to know God, his Savior and to love Him with all one’s power” (1.162). This law of God inscribed through conscience in the human soul makes all people responsible before God for their actions, not only those who heard the Gospel. Therefore, conscience is the only natural law according to which also pagans will be judged

(1.214). “Conscience is an inner witness of designs of our mind and heart” (93, 94) “since it is a witness of the supreme Being [that is] above us.” It is a faculty of power that is in us but not from us, in our soul, but above it (3.94).

### **Faith and knowledge**

If God should be the center of the human life, what kind of relation to God should this be: emotional? cognitive? Bratanovskii made few scattered remarks concerning human psychology and epistemology.

Reason and free will elevate humans over other creation (1.257). Therefore, a rational grasp of God should be expected as a necessary element of the human condition – and it is, according to Bratanovskii. On the other hand, there is faith, presumably the faculty of the heart. There is an interplay between the two. “When reason amazed by the beauty and harmoniousness of this world comes to the knowledge of God, it tells the heart: love your Creator; when the heart tastes the goodness of the Lord, it tells reason: know more and more your Lord; when conscience supported by the truth of God’s perfections prescribes the law to the heart and reason” (247), then this submission of reason to the heart and vice versa is the natural faith (248). Reason should be enslaved by faith, the heart should fulfill the sacred will of God, virtue should be motivated only by the love of God and by the testimony of conscience and eternity (1.21). If the mind is adorned with virtue, then “its thoughts are innocent, knowledge is salvific, undertakings are humble, plans are without evil, advices are good. Then the thought soars toward the Author of being to throw itself before Him with reverence” (1.224).

Obviously, an interplay of reason and heart does not lead to faith in and love of God. Pride and blind self-love are sources of unbelief (2.6) or rather misbelief since there are no people on earth without faith and even the staunchest freethinker believes in an illusory truth of his impure thoughts (4.3). Evil in children is from the original or inborn sin (2.79). There is in us an evil teacher, a damned law contrary to the law of reason (Rom. 7:23), a consequence of the original sin (80). The human heart is very self-loving, proud, and drawn to pleasures (1.40). It appears that divine intervention is necessary to break through the barrier of sin. God’s revelation illuminates the soul with the knowledge of God and turns the heart to the love of God (74). Evangelical faith develops when God calls man and gives him new light to his mind, new feeling to the heart, new power to conscience, new direction to desires (249).

God can act in a variety of ways. One way is the revelation: true knowledge of God is in the gospel (4.5). Another way is self-knowledge that allows people to see whose image and likeness they have in themselves (1.50). Another way is parents who should educate the minds of their children with sciences and their hearts with virtue (90). For this reason, education is considered the second birth of man (258). Yet another way is the world. Bratanovskii repeatedly stated that man is a microcosm (1.2, 178, 2.31, 4.121). If the world is reflected in man, man is reflected in the world. For this reason, God turns all the physical phenomena (3.59) we can see into a mirror in which we see where the heart is directed. In infertility of the soil is presented infertility of the heart in its love of God and neighbor. In waterless clouds [sic] can be seen our soul dried in faith and virtue. In thunders – our vengeance and hatred (3.60). Rostovskii treated everything in the Bible as a metaphor, including descriptions of natural and historical events. Bratanovskii extended this approach by treating natural events themselves as metaphors. This would accord with the idea that God revealed Himself in two books, in the Bible and in nature, a popular view expressed e.g. by Lomonosov.

Since passions overpower intellect (1.164), the whole of Christian teaching is summarized in the statement: to die to the world and to oneself (3.31). To oneself since humans have to die to their passions and its evil desires, to egoism, pride, stubbornness, to their will by suppressing its desires (33), which can be accomplished by evangelical faith that frees humans from the power of passions. This is accomplished by the work of faith and submission to God. However, faith and the gospel do not make man a slave. Faith overpowers only free-thinking, prohibits only lawless things, prohibits loving this world blindly, prohibits following bad examples; the gospel submits bad passions only, makes man a servant of justice, holiness, and God's law (2.12). Thus, a Christian dies to the world by submitting passions to reason and desires to the law of God (1.102, 130) and by the cooperation of faith and reason, reason eventually overpowers passions.

### **The immortality of the soul**

“Our soul is the daughter of heaven, a created ray of the Deity. It cannot be satisfied with anything else than God and heavenly happiness” (1.18). Admittedly, heavenly happiness is unobtainable in the earthly life; therefore, the soul should look beyond death to the afterlife. Whence its certainty that such a life exists?

“This world is a challenge for virtue, but a reward is not in it ... So, death of the virtuous is a proof of immortality and of this happiness which is granted in heavenly realms, in the eternal kingdom, by pious accomplishments” (1.223). “For works performed on account of the love of God and his law to remain unrewarded is the same as for the soul [that is] in the likeness of God to turn into nothingness” (229). “There is God, just God. Reward is in His hand. It [reward] is just as imperishable as the immortal soul, as great as good is Lord the rewarder” (230). “We are best witnesses for ourselves that we have been created for eternity. Our soul is immortal; our desires are boundless; love of good is not satisfied by anything on earth. ... By understanding of goodness of our Creator and God we should not doubt that we have been created for supremely happy eternity.” Could God create us to be unhappy? (2.52) Immortality is assured by perfect goodness and justice of God: since perfect reward for virtue is impossible in this world, God’s justice assures believers that this reward awaits them after death. It would be an unimaginable injustice if a virtuous life ended in nothingness, in an annihilation of the soul. God’s goodness and justice guarantees that this will not be the case. Thus, Bratanovskii could exclaim, “God, just God, decided to perfectly reward virtue in heaven. This is the end of Gospel! This is the object of faith! This is the glory of immortality!” (2.192).

The argument of the immortality of the soul used by Bratanovskii was called the ethico-teleological proof.<sup>4</sup> This is a moral argument which was fairly well known at that time in Europe and in Russia it was used by Shcherbatov.<sup>5</sup>

In the same vein, Bratanovskii also said that people strive for heavenly perfection, and they have “sacred desires and the heavenly hope”; could they simply “disappear as smoke, as a dream? Would the supreme wisdom of God elevate man to such levels of perfection in natural and moral world to more violently hurl him in the abyss of nothingness?” (1.227). If perfection cannot be actualized in this world, then the perfection of God indicates that this can

4 И[ван Н.], Корсунский, Петербургский период проповеднической деятельности Филарета (Дроздова), в последствии митрополита Московского (1809-1819), Харьков: Типография Окружного Штаба 1885, p. 175.

5 Михаил М. Щербатов, Сочинения, Санкт-Петербург: Типография М. Акинфиева и И. Леонтьева 1896-1898, vol. 1, p. 804, vol. 2, p. 352. A faint reflection of this argument can be found in Derzhavin’s poem, *The immortality of the soul* (1787), which states, “*God lives – [so] my soul lives!*” and that it simply cannot be that God would allow the soul, His image, to die, Гаврила Р. Державин, Сочинения, Санкт-Петербург: Императорская Академия Наук 1863-1883, vol. 2, pp. 1, 2, 6; cf., vol. 9, p. 250. Only goodness and justice of God would make the death of soul an impossibility.

be done in the afterworld, the world of heavenly perfection. In this, Bratanovskii used an argument also applied by Anichkov and Zlotnitskii.<sup>6</sup>

Immortality pertains to the entire human being, the body and soul. God created with His hands the human body as the seat of the soul, so He will not allow the body to perish, this “creation of His hands, the wreath woven with the glory of His omnipotence, this shelter of the breath of His supreme wisdom, this face of His invisible hypostasis visible [in it] more than in any other bodies” (4.47). Through the Incarnation of the body was restored to its original immortal dignity. The body without the soul and the soul without the body do not constitute the complete human being; for instance, the body is a tool of the soul; it can feel joy and sadness only when the body feels (48).

However, God’s justice also shows that immortality is not necessarily a welcome prospect: “evil to the evil, good to the good – this is an eternal truth” (1.230) and without faith immortality should terrify anyone (1.181). Without faith there is no virtue, without virtue immortality is an eternal death that separates man from God (1.181) to spend this eternity in the hellish abyss (2.91), whereas the saved are angels in heaven (1.196). Such eternal punishment is spent in the body and soul (4.49). This somber perspective justifies the importance of the Christian teaching: “live for eternity and be ready to die any time!” (4.95). The *memento mori* principle should be very close to everyone’s heart.

Thus, in the future life it can be in suffering, in the separation from God, and eternal happiness, in the union with God (2.98). Separation from God is the death of the soul – the second death (Ap. 20:6) (2.112). However, the death of a Christian is a peaceful sleep of the body until the trumpet will wake it up for the resurrection. The death is thus necessary to remove the original sin (2.120).

### Religion and patriotism

Like many intellectuals of this age, Bratanovskii frequently expressed his patriotism and he did so in the most exalting religious terms, not uncommon in this age. It not infrequently led to a rather sycophantic rhetoric, particu-

6 Дмитрий С. Аничков, Слово о невещественности души человеческой и из оной происходящем ее бессмертии [1777], in: Т.В. Артемьева (ed.), Мысли о душе. Русская метафизика XVIII века, Санкт-Петербург: Наука 1996, p. 107; Владимир Т. Золотницкий, Доказательство бессмертия души человеческой [1780], in: Мысли о душе, pp. 149-158. Cf. Clement, *Strom.* 6.68; Lactantius, *Div. inst.* 7.9, Athanasius, *Contra gentes* 32.

larly when praising Russian monarchs, the rhetoric which often exceeded the boundaries of good taste and at times was theologically risky.

Catherine II was extolled for her goodness, mercy, love of man and justice, for being an incomparable heroine and triumphal conqueress; God was glorified in her and blessed Russia through her (1.95). She was a model of virtue (1.131). Catherine was incomparable in the world, her piety bent down heavens, and God, whose power rests on her sacred head, preceded her in all her designs (2.34). God was glorified by Catherine's faith and piety (2.44).

Even cursory acquaintance with Catherine's personal life, her political designs, and her treatment of religion – notwithstanding the fact that she proudly presented herself as the head of the Orthodox church, true as it was after Peter I's abolition of the patriarchate – simply makes a mockery of the model of virtue and of the idea that God preceded her in all her designs which frequently were anything but pious and virtuous. Therefore, the statement that people can best see the power of God in the tsar who is God's image (2.151, 153, 182) is motivated by a servile attitude of a subject of the tsar rather than by theological thought. Shouldn't an ecclesiastic consider the many saints of his church to be better examples of the power of God? An ideological reason for this attitude is the common acceptance of the superiority of the monarchical political system, which at that time was fortified by rather unpalatable developments in France. That would be a reason why Bratanovskii claimed that Russians “never look at their Monarch other than (155) at the visible image of the goodness, supreme wisdom, power, majesty, and glory of the invisible God” (156) and that “God blesses a nation in his chosen Tsar,” for which reason, “who violates in his heart faith and loyalty to the Tsar, then his heart does not seek true faith in God” (154) and “a true son of the church is truly a subject of his Monarch” since the church teaches that the Monarch is an anointed of God (175) and “traitors of the Monarch are traitors of God. The holy church rightfully passes such ones to damnation. ... God loves His Anointed and thus the subjects should love their Tsar” (178). By completely blurring the line between the secular and the sacred, Bratanovskii stated that love of the state is the same as the love of God since the state is a visible proof of God's providence, and the same as the love of neighbor, since all neighbors and their condition are concentrated in the governing of the state so that the state can say, if mother and father abandon you, I will embrace you (3.205). In this Bratanovskii applied to the state the statement that the psalmist made about God (Ps. 27[26]:10).



About Russia Bratanovskii pronounced that Russia's happiness and well-being are due to its faith and virtue (1.94). In everything God is a helper of Russia (117). In everything, we can ask, even in the most egregious act of aggression? Unless all acts of Russia are considered supremely virtuous, making God Russia's helper in everything makes Him a divine accomplice of Russia's misdeeds, a consequence that an ecclesiastical preacher should not allow to make possible to derive.

However, Bratanovskii made an interesting remark that the concept of union connects meaningfully theology with political thinking. In his view, in all circumstances determined by nature, luck, society, or the law "man is obligated to live not for himself alone" (1.2). People should be bound by strong union rather than by usefulness and habit. This union is through faith, piety, and virtue. That is why Christians are the best citizens and the most faithful sons of the fatherland (1.32). This does not have to mean that this union is accomplished through an unconditional, even knavish obedience to the monarch who is almost endowed with the divine status, although it appears that Bratanovskii is not necessarily against such kind of obedience. He said that "conscience is pure by fulfilling calling and duty required by the Church, fatherland, home, citizenship, monarch, and God" (3.96) – the church is first, God is last and the tsar is in between.

### Rhetoric

Bratanovskii was considered "one of the most shining examples of Russian church rhetoric."<sup>7</sup> This is not easy to assess relying only on the printed word. Just as important as the content of sermons is their delivery and the general mood of the times. Also, reading sermons one after another, particularly with the same messages being frequently repeated and the same rhetorical devices reused, does not have the same effect as listening to them once a week.

Bratanovskii generously quoted Biblical verses. In his speeches and sermons he only once referred to the patristic tradition by mentioning Augustine (2.71), a less important theologian from the perspective of Orthodoxy. From other authors, he mentioned only Epicurus and his alleged atoms (1.114). Only in his thoughts he mentioned, again, Epicurus who created the world without God (4.125) and three enlightenment figures: Voltaire, d'Alembert, Diderot as those who had shaken minds toward unbelief and

7 Корсунский, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

hearts to dishonesty; these “miracle workers” constituted the number of man, i.e., 666 (Ap. 13:18), tripartite but one: 600 is Voltaire, 60 is d’Alembert, and 6 is Diderot (4.117).

Bratanovskii used Biblical examples and only in his praising speeches he mentioned some contemporary events. Except for his praising speeches, his messages are rather ecumenical and would be acceptable for most Christians. There are no hostile inroads against Catholicism and Protestantism so common in his times. This does not mean that Bratanovskii abandoned the idea of the superiority of the Orthodox church. He surely did not, but he did not stress it too strongly. He did say that people are in the fold of Christ since they are in the Orthodox church (3.1) and that “there is no salvation outside the Church” (15), meaning the Orthodox church, and that God was the maker of the Greek-Russian Church (3.92), presumably not a maker of other churches.

Bratanovskii’s speeches often turned into flourish that could drown down the message. One of devices he frequently used was repetition. For example, he asked rhetorically, “Who will remove the rock of pride?” “Who will remove the rock of unbelief?” with eight more such questions following (3.55-57). Blessed is the state in which excellence does not despise the lowly, in which honor does not trample on the undistinguished – with twelve more such in-which’s (3.134-135). About Alexander I, he said: “His truth teaches impartiality; His mercy teaches love of man; His gentleness teaches longsuffering” with eight more such “His X teaches Y” (3.212). A peacemaker is someone “who, if it depends on him, *seeks peace with all men* (Rom. 12:18); who is *swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath* (Js. 1:19)” and eight more such who’s (4.55-56). “Christ calls people, come to me, Jews and Greeks and barbarians and Scythians and ...” and eighteen more such ands (4.70). After a chain of a dozen of such questions one exasperated author, with some exaggeration, said: “its pomposity is vexing: up to 50 lofty questions in one sermon.”<sup>8</sup>

There is no interest expressed in large theological themes in Bratanovskii’s sermons: the nature of the Trinity, of the Incarnation, etc. The physico-theological proof of the existence of God is barely perceptible, and the moral argument of the immortality of the soul is not well laid down and is obscured by a very strong rhetorical strain in the sermons. However, Bratanovskii wanted to edify his listeners by instilling in them the need for the

8 Филарет Гумилевский, *Обзор русской духовной литературы*, Санкт-Петербург: И.Л. Тузов 1884 [1857], p. 395.

realization of God's omnipresence and the need to follow God's ways, and in that respect he accomplished his goal really well.

## **ANASTAZY BRATANOWSKI: ŻYCIE DLA NIEŚMIERTELNOŚCI**

### **Streszczenie**

Anastazy Bratanowski, arcybiskup Białorusi, tłumacz kilku książek religijnych, opublikował cztery tomy swych kazań i przemówień. Mówił w nich o swojej wizji życia prawosławnego chrześcijanina, przedstawiał argumenty na rzecz nieśmiertelności duszy i często dawał wyraz patriotyzmowi, który u niego miał bardzo silne zabarwienie religijne.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Bratanowski, prawosławie, nieśmiertelność duszy

**Key words:** Bratanovskii, Orthodoxy, the immortality of the soul