

# Aleksei Khomiakov: A Study of the Interplay of Piety and Theology

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Much of contemporary scholarship has the tendency to historicize and relativize the objects of its study, to downplay the personal element in works of creativity and reflection, preferring rather to view these as determined by historical and socio-political factors. In the field of religious studies in particular, the objective content of an author's faith, his expression of personal piety and devotion, is often downplayed, passed over in silence, or even scoffed at. Moreover, frequently the originality of a religious author's works is emphasized to the exclusion of his fidelity to his own religious tradition and ecclesial culture, and the theology he produced is viewed as determined by historical and societal forces largely outside himself. It is my contention that in the case of genuinely religious men the source of theology should be located in their own religious or spiritual experiences, rooted in their particular tradition, which need to be admitted as fundamental to their self-expression. There is no reason to pass over in silence or be embarrassed by devotion and piety, however odd these words may sound to some today.

A case in point is that of the nineteenth century philosopher, poet, and theologian, Aleksei Khomiakov. As much as Khomiakov was a man of his times, he was even more a man of the Russian Orthodox Church, and his creative outpouring makes sense only when this fact

is borne solidly in mind. In his essay Bishop Gregory (Grabbe) writes that to speak of Khomiakov as philosopher, historian or poet and ignore his theology would be to create an incomplete picture of him inasmuch as “his Orthodox faith lies so deeply as the foundation of all his views, of all his world outlook.”<sup>1</sup> While an original philosopher, he was even more a traditional theologian. While speaking in new terms, he was only recontextualizing the convictions, the proclamation, and the ethos of Orthodox theology. Khomiakov was not an academic theologian, but rather a praying theologian, in the Evagrian sense of the true theologian as the one who prays truly.<sup>2</sup> I submit that it was precisely his faith and his zealous piety that stand as source and inspiration for his thought and creative output. This becomes evident by considering his upbringing, youth, ecclesial experience, relation to the society of his time, and way of life.

It should come as no surprise that Khomiakov came from a devoutly Orthodox family. His mother, in particular, endowed the young Aleksei Stepanovich with a profound religious consciousness. In his notes about his reposed mother Khomiakov writes, “Considering myself, I know that to whatever degree I can be of use, for that I am grateful to her and also for my direction and my unwavering stand in that direction, although she never even gave it a thought.” He continues, “Fortunate is the person who has had such a mother as a guide in his youth, and at the same time what a lesson this gives in humility! How little good in a person really belongs to him.”<sup>3</sup>

Mariia Alekseevna, Khomiakov’s daughter, wrote of her grandmother during her final illness — “several times a week they served *molebens* in her room on appropriate days. There were very many

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<sup>1</sup> Episkop Grigorii Grabbe, *Zavet Sviatogo Patriarkha*, (Moskva: 1996), 61.

<sup>2</sup> If you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian.” Evagrius the Solitary, “One Hundred and Fifty-three Texts on Prayer,” 61, *The Philokalia, Vol. I*, G.E.H. Palmer, Phillip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, Ed. and trans. (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1979), 62. My appraisal is attested to by both those supportive and critical of Khomiakov. The former praise the content of Khomiakov’s theological writings despite his lack of formal academic training; the latter note this lack in his presentation. From a traditional Orthodox perspective the presence of an academic background has never been a criterion in establishing the authority of a theologian. Holiness of life and adherence to doctrinal Orthodoxy, however, have been criteria.

<sup>3</sup> V. Koshelev, *Aleksei, Stepanovich Khomiakov, Zhizneopisanie v Dokumentakh, v Rassuzhdeniakh i Razyskaniakh*. (Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2000), 36.

icons and icon lamps.”<sup>3</sup> Peter Christoff, in his study of Khomiakov, notes “Khomiakov’s biographers are agreed that his upbringing accounted to a large extent for his unswerving devotion to Orthodoxy in later life.”<sup>4</sup> Khomiakov’s most recent biographer, Viacheslav Koshelev, likewise notes, “All the incense, the molebens, and the fasting — Khomiakov received this from his mother.”<sup>5</sup>

Zavitnevich records: “Having been raised in a religious family and especially by a God-fearing mother, he [Khomiakov] acknowledged, ‘I was taught to take part in the wonderful prayer of the Church, (especially for the union of all) with my whole heart when I was still very young, even an infant. My imagination was often fired by the hope of seeing the whole Christian world united under a single symbol of truth.’”<sup>6</sup> This is an especially significant passage, as it demonstrates that Khomiakov’s zeal for spiritual unity under the banner of truth was an outgrowth of the Church’s own prayers. It was no abstract interest, but rather something that he sincerely believed in and prayed for, even from his very early youth.

Khomiakov’s faith, under the early direction of his mother, was expressed in a truly virtuous life, one which today may appear quaint or even repressive, but which reflects the moral standard of the Orthodox Church. Nikolai Berdiaev, in a study of Khomiakov to which we will have many occasions to return, records an incident unusual for someone in Khomiakov’s social class at the time: Khomiakov’s mother made all her sons swear an oath to remain chaste until marriage — a promise kept by them all.<sup>7</sup> Khomiakov appreciated the hypocrisy of the notion that chastity was an exclusively feminine virtue. He writes:

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>5</sup> Peter K. Christoff, *An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century Russian Slavophilism: A Study in Ideas, Vol. I. A.S. Khomjakov*. (‘S-Graven-Hague: Mouton and Co. 1961.), 25.

<sup>6</sup> Koshelev, 36.

<sup>7</sup> V. Z. Zavitnevich, *Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov, Tom Pervyi, Kniga I.* (Kiev: Tipografia I.I. Gorbunova, 1902.), 83. As we note later in this essay, he was in no way referring to some nebulous conglomeration of united Christian denominations but saw the Orthodox Church as the focal point and the Russian Orthodox Church in particular as the vanguard.

Many nations adhere to an opinion that is absurd and displeasing to God: that moral purity is more suitable for women than men! Women's morals depend on those of men. For the stronger vessel, the head of God's creation, to demand from a weaker vessel, the woman, virtues that he himself does not possess, is not only irrational but also dishonest.<sup>8</sup>

Khomiakov continued to preserve his moral purity throughout his life, keeping himself on guard in mixed company, to such an extent that some judged him to behave rudely. One witness writes, "He went to extremes concerning his moral passion, i.e., his desire to preserve his moral purity. This was partly manifested in his unbearable unfriendliness in society, and especially around ladies."<sup>9</sup> Fr. Pavel Florensky, not always complimentary in his comments about Khomiakov, relates, "He was modest in describing his inner life, even secretive, very chaste, and proud of his chastity, not allowing any automatic reflexes."<sup>10</sup> Khomiakov himself relates in 1846 how he had been "either supposed a sycophant or considered as a disguised Romanist [i.e., Roman Catholic]; for nobody supposed the possibility of civilization and Orthodoxy being united."<sup>11</sup>

Khomiakov likewise observed the Orthodox Church's fasting rules in a manner that, while expected of all the faithful, was highly uncommon among his own social class at the time. In fact, his fasting became something of a legend among his contemporaries. Liaskovskii writes, "having arrived in Paris at the beginning of Great Lent, I as witness for future biographers can testify how strictly that twenty year old youth kept the fast in noisy Paris. Throughout the Fast he would absolutely not eat non-Lenten foods, no milk or fish products."<sup>12</sup> Berdiaev relates in similar fashion, "Throughout his life he observed

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<sup>8</sup> Berdiaev, N. *Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov*. (Westmead, England: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1971.) 46.

<sup>9</sup> Koshelev, 230.

<sup>10</sup> Berdiaev, 188.

<sup>11</sup> E. V. Kharitonova, *A.S. Khomiakov, v Dvukh Tomakh, Tom 1 Raboty po istoriosofii*. (Moskva: Moskovskii Filiosofskii Fond, izdatel'stvo "Medium", 1994), 7.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Bird, Boris Jakim edit. and trans. *On Spiritual Unity, A Slavophile Reader, Aleksei Khomiakov, Ivan Kireevsky*, (Hudson: Lindisfarne Books, 1998), 13.

all the rites, he fasted, and was not afraid to appear comical in the eyes of an indifferent society. This was an outstanding characteristic of Aleksei Stepanovich. He observed all the fasts and rules while in the service of the horse-guardsman unit and wore a home-spun coat while traveling in England.”<sup>13</sup> His close friend, Iurii Samarin, likewise bears witness that, “All his life, in Petersburg, in the civil service, in the guards regiment, during military campaigns, abroad, in Paris, in his own home, while visiting, Khomiakov strictly observed the fasts.”<sup>14</sup> It should be pointed out here that the practice of fasting is not strictly speaking a matter of personal devotion. Rather, by observing the ecclesial year with its cycles of feasts and fasting, the faithful manifest and express in their daily lives the spiritual unity of the Church, a unity that was one of Khomiakov’s primary concerns.

Moreover, as Robert Bird notes, Khomiakov also “early on ... took to wearing a beard, quite a provocative gesture in the regimented Russia of Nicholas I.”<sup>15</sup> Again, we see here Khomiakov’s immersion in the traditional life and customs of the Russian Orthodox Church, even at a time when many of his fellow noblemen were abandoning their faith or observing it only formally. As the historian Peter Christoff adds:

While in the army his commander, Count Osten Saken, noted in his memories, “Khomiakov’s education was superlative... in him everything is moral, spiritually exalted... He observes strictly all the fasts according to the rules of the Orthodox Church. At that time there were already a considerable number of freethinkers and deists, and many scoffed at Khomiakov, saying that the observance of Church rules and rites was fit only for the illiterate mob. But Khomiakov, though so young, inspired already such love and respect for himself that nobody dared touch his faith.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Prototropviter Georgii Grabbe, *Tserkov' i Eia Uchenie v Zhizni. Tom Vtoroi*. (Montreal: “Monastery Press,” 1970), 34.

<sup>14</sup> Berdiaev, N., 60-61.

<sup>15</sup> Bird, 163.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 13. This we might note was indeed provocative and not unnoticed. Besides evoking occasional ridicule as primitives (Khomiakov was described as appearing at a soirée “a la muzhik”) a government order was once issued to the Slavophiles to shave their beards!

Nowhere is his faith more clearly reflected than in his ecclesiological works, first and foremost, “The Church is One.” The limits of my brief study do not allow a close reading of this essay, however I will consider a few themes of direct relevance to this work.

Khomiakov wrote little about the Church that was new or unique from a theological perspective. The fact that he was a layman writing in European languages does not change this fact. Rather, he articulated the Church’s essential nature in a popular and accessible fashion, remarkably free from the scholastic tendencies so dominant in much of Russian theological scholarship at the time. This articulation came as nothing short of a revelation to his contemporaries, and continues to manifest a significant legacy in contemporary Orthodox theological reflection. The essence of his ecclesiology could, with the risk of greatly oversimplifying his thought, be summarized as such: the Church is a singular, united, organic, distinguishable body, wherein alone is to be found salvation. He considers each of these elements from various perspectives. But it is love, freedom, and community that bind together the spiritual organism of the Church. Bishop Grigorii (Grabbe), a direct descendant of Khomiakov, notes that the latter’s personal religiosity is to be found most evidently in his writings on the Church. “Higher than anything is love and unity,” a love and unity which are expressed precisely “in the Church.”<sup>17</sup>

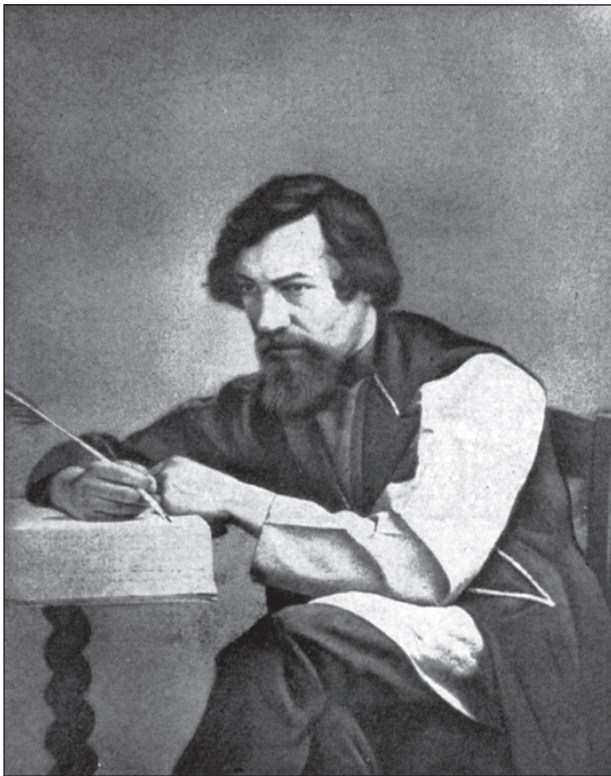
In his essay “Three Russian Prophets” Nicholas Zernov remarks on Khomiakov, “The greatest treasure for him was his membership in the Church. There was only one source of inspiration in his whole life, and that was his belief in the truth of Christianity.”<sup>18</sup> Joost van Rossum, likewise, echoes this thought, stating, “Khomiakov lived in the Church, it was his piety and the source of his definition [that] ‘The intellectual freedom of the believer is not submitted to any external authority.’”<sup>19</sup> That is, it is one thing passively to submit to ecclesiastical authority, and quite another to

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<sup>17</sup> Christoff, 28.

<sup>18</sup> Grabbe, 89.

<sup>19</sup> Nicholas Zernov, *Three Russian Prophets*. (London: S.C.M. Press Ltd. 1944), 51.



A. S. Khomiakov (1804-1860). Sketch by E. A. Mamonov. From *A. S. Khomiakov. Stikhotvoreniia i dramy*. Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1969. Courtesy of Alexis Klimoff.

make the truth of the Church one's own, to incarnate the Church's dogma in one's own life, to find one's freedom in and through the unity of the Church — and that is precisely what Khomiakov managed to do in his theological writings and indeed in his very life of true ecclesiastical piety. Indeed, Khomiakov would go so far as to argue that giving up one's freedom in exchange for external unity is characteristic of Romanism while to cling to external freedom, which does not issue unity, is characteristic of the Protestant Reformation.<sup>20</sup> True freedom, for Khomiakov, is found only in the internal, integral unity of the Church.

Although Khomiakov begins his discussion of the unity of the Church in “The Church is One” from the unity of the Godhead, it was his own personal experience of the life of the Church that inspired his thoughts on the centrality of freedom and unity in the Church. Christoff states that it was often said of Khomiakov that he “lived in the Church.”<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Rossum writes, “Khomiakov's own experience of the Church was the primary source of his ecclesiology.”<sup>22</sup> And this Church in which he lived was, for Khomiakov, not merely the institutional Russian Church of his time, but the very Church of Christ about which he writes with so much conviction in his essay. This was a Church not bound by personalities or political tumult, but the very Church of Christ, one in which great faith and conviction are often required to remain for the duration. We never see Khomiakov turn cynical when faced with the mundane and sometimes scandalous realities of the earthly life of the Church.

Neither the political realm nor the institutional Church structure was as kind to Khomiakov in return. It is indicative that many of his works were published first in French and only later translated into Russian. Even “The Church is One,” the work for which he is most popularly known, was published only posthumously in Russian. But however much suspicion his writings, so characterized by an internal

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<sup>20</sup> Joost van Rossum, “A.S. Khomiakov and Orthodox Ecclesiology”, (Crestwood, St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly, Vol. 35, no.1, 1990), 73.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>22</sup> Christoff, 244.



freedom, aroused in the government and in the Church hierarchy, Khomiakov never ceased to defend the ideals of Church and monarchy. We discover that the Emperor Nicholas I read Khomiakov in French and, according to a message passed on to Alexei Stepanovich from the Empress Mariia Aleksandrovna, “His Majesty the late Emperor enthusiastically read the essay [“The Church is One”] and was pleased with it.”<sup>23</sup>

Khomiakov felt what we might characterize as a “humble pride” in the inner strength that he received from his participation in the life of the Church. “For this right, this power, this strength,” he writes, “I owe only to the fortune of being a son of the Church, and in no way to my own personal strength. I say this daringly and not without pride, for it is improper to act humbly towards that which the Church gives.”<sup>24</sup> It was observed that he did not use the Church or turn to her, like many, only in times of need and turmoil but rather lived in the Church, as one contemporary wrote, “not from time to time, not in spurts, but always and constantly, from his early childhood until the moment he obediently, fearlessly, and without shame met the ‘destroying angel’ sent to him”<sup>25</sup> at death.

His faith in the Church remained unwavering. According to his friend Iurii Samarin, it was precisely this faith that lent him that element of internal freedom that is so central to his thought. His deep conviction of the truth of Orthodoxy gave him courage to express it in his own life and even to point out the hypocrisy of others in regard to their faith. Berdiaev writes, “Khomiakov assessed western chivalry negatively, but he himself was a true Orthodox knight, one of our very few knights. His chivalrous relation to the Church rarely occurs even among our Russian clergy and among educated Russian society... According to Herzen, Khomiakov was ‘like a medieval knight defending the Virgin’s Church... At any moment, day or night prepared, fully armed, to go out and defend the Orthodox Church.’”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> van Rossum, 78.

<sup>24</sup> Episkop Grigorii Grabbe, *Zavet Sviatogo Patriarkha*, (Moskva:1996), 62.

<sup>25</sup> Berdiaev, 45.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 62

Yet this piety was expressed in a sober, integral manner, free of piety and fanaticism. His religiosity, to cite Berdiaev once again, was “a way of life. He valued endlessly the Russian Orthodox way of life down to the last and final detail. There was no religious anxiety in him, no yearning, no religious craving. He was a religious person who was at peace, satisfied, fulfilled... he lived day by day without any feeling of imminent catastrophe, without horror or terror.”<sup>27</sup> Nor, for all his belief in the truth of the Orthodox Church, did he denigrate western culture, learning, or religiosity. As Zavitnevich comments on Khomiakov’s temperament, “Despite his unshakeable piety it was observed that he was neither a fanatic nor a bigot.”<sup>28</sup> Christoff explains that Khomiakov “combined religiosity with appreciation of beauty and culture.”<sup>29</sup> Robert Bird writes, “The natural and confident nature of Khomiakov’s beliefs allowed him to combine his national pride with a deep respect and even love for Western civilization. Constantly throughout his writings, Khomiakov expressed the need for Russia to turn to the West in order to develop the means of achieving its own spiritual potential; at the same time, he did not foresee a bright future for Western civilization without spiritual guidance from the East.”<sup>30</sup>

To cite Berdiaev once more:

In his relation to the Church there was nothing weakly, wavering, unsure. He was foremost faithful and firm. The Rock of the Church was in him. Khomiakov was born into God’s world religiously prepared, churched, stable, and throughout his entire life bore his faith and fidelity. He was always pious, he was always an Orthodox Christian, he never underwent a turnabout, a change, or betrayal. He is one of the only men of his age who did not fall into the universal obsession with Hegel’s philosophy. He did not subordinate his faith to philosophy. The clarity of ecclesial consciousness accompanies him throughout his life.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 60-61.

<sup>29</sup> Zavitnevich, 110.

<sup>30</sup> Christoff, 75.

<sup>31</sup> Bird, 13-14.

What can be said of Khomiakov's beliefs and his interaction with society? T. I. Blagova writes in the introduction to her book *The Founders of Slavophilism* that "Khomiakov, in his attempt to explain the importance of Orthodoxy in the life of Russia to educated Russians, exclaimed, 'A tragedy... is when all roots and branches are tossed aside from one's historical tree: then Russia will arrive at that incurable shakedown to which France came and gave the world a great but misunderstood lesson.'" <sup>32</sup> Peter Christoff writes:

At a time when Russian intellectuals were moving and had moved further away from their national spiritual roots, Khomiakov ardently converted thinkers to his side. Koshelev in his memoirs wrote of him, 'I saw Khomiakov again in Moscow at the beginning of 1833... We met often at his home, at my home, and especially at the Kireevskys'... here took place endless conversations and arguments, beginning in the evening and ending at three, four, or even five and six o'clock in the morning. Here was worked out and developed that Orthodox Russian orientation whose soul and prime mover was Khomiakov. Many of us were ardent westerners. Khomiakov almost alone defended the necessity of indigenous development (*samobytnoe razvitie*) for every nation, the significance of faith in man's spiritual and moral order, and the superiority of our Church over the teachings of Catholicism and Protestantism.'" <sup>33</sup>

As mentioned before, Khomiakov was not viewed as a fanatic or bigot despite his strong religious polemics. An example is from a French Catholic reviewer of his work (the Paris edition of "Concerning the Western Confessions") who was not offended by his uncompromising style and justified the edition as allowing "one outstanding person to express himself, whose noble character and living faith is impressed on the pages written by him. That same

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<sup>32</sup> Berdiaev, 60-61.

<sup>33</sup> T. I. Blagova, *Rodonachal'niki Slavianofil'stva, Aleksei Khomiakov i Ivan Kireevskii*, (Moskva: "Vysshiaia Shkola," 1995), 63.

noble faith and character encourage us to honor and sympathize even in light of substantial difference of opinion about our spiritual fellowship in Christ.”<sup>34</sup> Thanks to his polemical writings the West was able to recognize the reality of “The Orthodox world as a Church, totally independent and completely unwavering in its faith in itself.”<sup>35</sup>

Khomiakov’s ability to discuss theological and other themes for many hours was not the result of his own personal devotion alone but of serious and prolonged independent reading of Patristic authors. If this had not been the case his opinion would have been judged ungrounded and would not have had lasting impact. Several authorities confirm that his thought was in fact thoroughly grounded in patristic sources. Both Zenkovsky and Florovsky, for instance, consider the Church Fathers the primary source of his material. Florovsky states, “In his teaching about the Church, Khomiakov remained true precisely to the basic and most ancient tradition of the Church Fathers.”<sup>36</sup> Or, as Bishop Gregory writes, for him, “divine truth is the guiding principle on which to lay all the foundations. There is no development.”<sup>38</sup> The then rector of the Moscow Theological Academy, Archpriest Gorsky, noted in a letter to a critic of Khomiakov’s, “There is no doubt that his deep reflection on the tenants of the Christian Faith is a result of not only his very broad, continual and honest study of the Word of God and the writings of the Holy Fathers but also his inner, practical acquisition of Christian truths by his heart and in his life.”<sup>39</sup> I. S. Aksakov and others declared Khomiakov a “Teacher of the Church.”<sup>40</sup> Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) considered Khomiakov his forerunner in the break with scholasticism and the

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<sup>34</sup> Christoff, 42.

<sup>35</sup> Grabbe, *Tserkov*, 89.

<sup>36</sup> Koshelev, 444.

<sup>37</sup> Cited in Grabbe, *Tserkov*, 125. Serge Bolshakoff comments extensively on this theme. See, Serge Bolshakoff, “Patristic Foundations of Khomyakov’s Theology” (*Eastern Churches Quarterly*, X 5: 1945), pp. 233-237.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>40</sup> Christoff, 162.

renewal of the patristic witness.<sup>41</sup> Khomiakov's emphasis and clarification of the doctrine of *sobornost'* met confirmation, he believed, in the 1848 Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs to the Pope. If there had been any doubt as to the doctrinal Orthodoxy of Khomiakov's theology of *sobornost'* the Encyclical affirmed his elucidation.<sup>42</sup>

Viacheslav Koshelev, a recent authority, has written, "His love for reading the Fathers of the Church was phenomenal. It was recognized that he managed to read through the Fathers more thoroughly than 'professional theologians.'"<sup>43</sup> He was said to have discussed the works of St. Athanasius the Great, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Cyril of Jerusalem for hours with Kireevsky. In discussions Khomiakov could quote from memory a patristic source and even cite the page and sometimes the paragraph from a book he had read nearly twenty years previous. After one such conversation the interested party went to St. Sergius' Lavra to look up the reference and found it just as Khomiakov had quoted. Samarin, who was researching patristic studies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, gathering information for his dissertation on Stephan Iavorsky and Theophan Prokopovich, was forced to admit that Khomiakov, who had undertaken no formal research, was superior in his knowledge of the subject.<sup>44</sup>

Khomiakov's thoughts on education are fully in accord with and inspired by his religious ideals. He writes, "The general spirit of a school must be in accord with Orthodoxy and must strengthen the seeds planted by family education."<sup>45</sup> In examining the entirety of his writing on education we should not, however, be so simplistic as to characterize him as an advocate of an exclusively religious education. He himself had a degree in mathematics, studied painting, knew English and French fluently, and was an amateur agriculturalist and homeopathic physician, besides being a poet, theologian, and philosopher. His thoughts on the subject include his own pedagogical

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<sup>41</sup> Grabbe, *Zavet*, 63.

<sup>42</sup> Christoff, 167.

<sup>43</sup> Koshelev, 433.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 433.

<sup>45</sup> Christoff, 183.

method and continue with a full program for peasant schools through the university level.<sup>46</sup>

Capital punishment, a subject still vigorously debated in our society, was likewise a concern of Khomiakov. He writes, “Be strict in judgments about popular opinion, otherwise you cannot guard against a gradual moral decline... In legal and criminal judgments be merciful, remembering that society’s guilt is found to a greater or lesser degree in the crime of an individual. Do not pass the death sentence on a criminal! He already is defenseless. It is shameful for a brave people to kill a defenseless man. It is sinful for a Christian to deprive a person of the possibility of repenting.”<sup>47</sup> Zavitnevich writes, “Any punishment should only involve the guilty party and not extend to his family. It is a mistake to separate punishment into degrading and not degrading.” Khomiakov himself writes,

All punishment, except that leading to spiritual edification, is degrading in itself due to the very fact that violence is directed against someone. The fact is that his honor is already violated by his own crime and the punishment; as a result the punishment of the crime has the goal of correction and not to add to dishonor. A man is dishonored (or shamed) not by what happens to him against his will but by what he does willingly. Wherever there are punishments people have to carry them out whose role in punishment is in itself not disgraceful. However the executioner’s profession is dishonorable. There should be nothing triumphant in punishment, for every individual crime and its punishment is everyone’s misfortune.<sup>48</sup>

Khomiakov’s love for the Slavs and his vision of their universal mission is legendary and a major theme in his work as the leader

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 186-187.

<sup>47</sup> Zavitnevich, 863.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 863.

of the Slavophiles. However, here, as in nearly all his writings, his faith played a definitive role. He supported and promoted the idea of pan-Slavism based on the principle of Orthodoxy. It was noted by a minister, Uvarov, in his remarks to Nicholas I concerning Khomiakov's pro-Slav poem "Kiev," "The last stanzas here are related to another poem [Orel] in which Khomiakov sings of the union of all Slav nations under the banner of Russia...The deep religious feeling (in which Khomiakov is entirely different from Pushkin) gives this beloved thought a special warmth and loftiness."<sup>49</sup> Although the government and the Church were not initially entirely accepting of the Slavophiles they were eventually won over and Khomiakov received the approval of Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow and Elder Makary of Optina.<sup>50</sup> To the end of his life he supported Orthodoxy and the Slavic ideal. When the question rose about the Bulgarian Church's independence from Greek control he sided with the Bulgarians, writing two articles of encouragement.<sup>51</sup> In his last major work, "A message to the Serbs" he expounded on his belief that Russia should be an "older brother" to other Orthodox Slavs.<sup>52</sup>

Peter Christoff characterizes Khomiakov's belief as follows, "Although Khomiakov respected and valued much in the Western nations he was absolutely convinced of the superiority of Orthodoxy."<sup>53</sup> The Slavic world-view and the Russian peasant commune specifically served as a foundation for a new social order with the emphasis on the Orthodox Church. To refer to Khomiakov's Christian Orthodox messianism would in no way do him an injustice.<sup>54</sup> Khomiakov believed that Russia had a mission to bring the whole world under the "roof" of the Orthodox Church.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Christoff, 53

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 109.

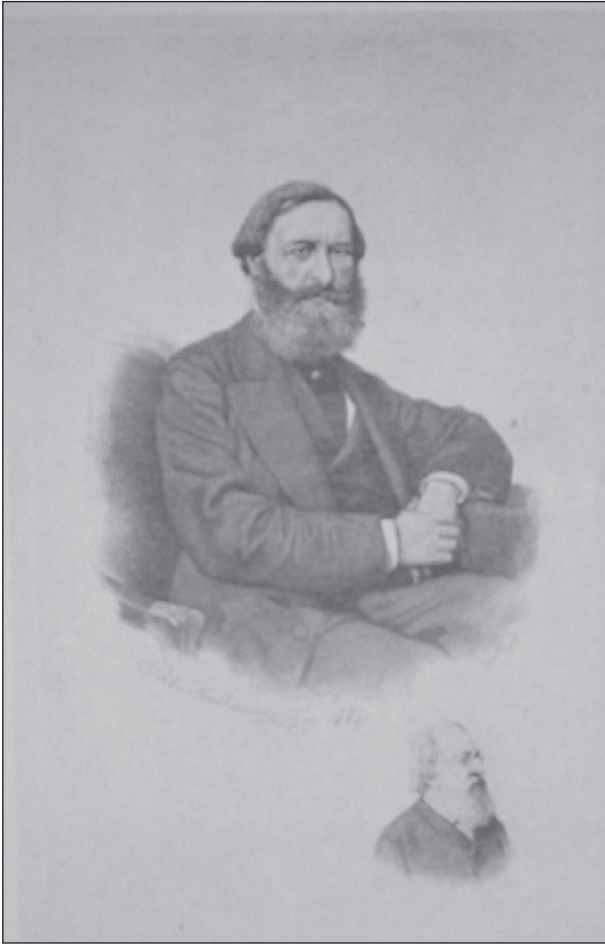
<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 75.



Iu. F. Samarin. From Aleksei Vikulovich Morozov. *Katalog moego sobraniia ruskikh gravirovannykh i litografirovannykh portretov*. (Moscow: T-vo skoropechatni A.A. Levenson, 1912-1913). Rare and Illustrated Collections, Slavic & Baltic Division, NYPL. Courtesy of Hee-Gwone Yoo and Edward Kasinec.



His views on government were also permeated with his Orthodox *Weltanschauung*. He wrote, “As Christians we live in the state but are not of the state.”<sup>56</sup> Rule in the state according to Khomiakov and the Slavophiles could be centered on the autocracy, which itself, in the words of Khomiakov’s son Dimitrii, “understood authority as a burden, not as a privilege, as a cornerstone of autocracy.”<sup>57</sup>

I would conclude a few more words about Khomiakov’s spiritual experience from witnesses. Bishop Gregory (Grabbe) reports this first hand account of Samarin:

I lived once at his home in Ivanovskoe. A group of people came to visit and, since all the rooms were filled, he moved my bed into his room. After dinner, after long conversation, vivified by his unquenchable joy, we lay down, put out the candles and I fell asleep. Long after midnight I woke from some talking in the room. The morning light just barely illuminated the room. Without moving or speaking I began to look around and listen. He was on his knees in front of his traveling icons; his hands were crossed on the seat of the chair, his head on his hands. I could hear muffled weeping. This continued till morning. It should go without saying that I pretended to be asleep. The next day he arrived in good spirits, refreshed and with his usual good-natured laugh. From another person who accompanied him everywhere, I heard that this repeated itself almost every night.<sup>58</sup>

Another source writes: “On another occasion thieves reported that they were planning to rob his house but coming closer they saw him [through the window] on his knees praying till dawn.”<sup>59</sup>

Concerning his active Christian love we read that during a crop failure Khomiakov’s wife wrote to her brother, “Imagine that in Tula grain is sold for six rubles a pood. It’s horrible. All the fields are still black. Alexei has used up nearly all our revenue to feed the peas-

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 203

<sup>58</sup> Grabbe, *Tserkov'* 41

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

ants.”<sup>60</sup> Although emancipation of the serfs in 1861 deprived them of assistance from the landlord, almost all of Khomiakov’s serfs had been already practically freed or situated on a work/rent system.

Despite the contemporary dangers of cholera over a hundred years ago, Khomiakov personally, although not a medical professional but only with a layman’s interest and concern, provided medical care for over one thousand patients. As a result he contracted the fatal disease.

A half-hour before his death, having received the sacraments, he felt better. His neighbor, present at his side, decided to write of the “good news” of his recovery to his relatives. Khomiakov stopped him. “It’s true,” exclaimed the neighbor, “look how you’ve come around and how your eyes have lit up.” Khomiakov replied for the last time, “And how bright they will be tomorrow!”<sup>61</sup>

Any consideration of Khomiakov’s thought that does not take into account the reality of his religious experience, thoroughly grounded in traditional Russian Orthodox piety, risks overlooking the very guiding principle of his life. Khomiakov’s theology — and indeed his entire creative output — can be correctly judged most accurately as an expression of this belief and experience. As witness after witness attested, he was a man of the Church writing from within.

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.