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The Modernity of Khomiakov

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Paul Valliere

When considering a theologian from the past, one inevitably faces the challenge of distinguishing between the enduring and the ephemeral in his or her work. The Gospel is eternal; but theologians are not, nor are theologies. In an Orthodox theological context the search for the eternal typically focuses on sacred tradition. One looks for those moments when the theologian speaks not in his own voice, but in the voice of the fathers, the voice of the church.

In the case of Khomiakov and the other Russian religious philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, identifying the traditional element is a difficult task for a reason which becomes more obvious as one becomes better acquainted with their work: Khomiakov and the other Russian religious philosophers were not traditional thinkers. They were modern thinkers, and modern concepts profoundly conditioned the traditional element in their thought. At first inspection, indeed, the passing appears to outweigh the eternal in them, for is not the "modern" by definition the modus, the way or fashion of the moment, "now" as opposed to "always and forever?"

To pursue a discussion of Khomiakov in these terms, of course, one must substantiate the premise that Khomiakov was a modern, not a traditional thinker. Or if this is too adversative a way of putting it—since a person can be modern and traditional at the same time—one must at least demonstrate that Khomiakov's theology...
was unprecedented in important respects, whatever traditional features it might also have manifested.

The first evidence of the modernity of Khomiakov is so obvious that many observers look right past it. It is the fact that he engaged in theology at all. One can appreciate this point by considering Khomiakov as a social and historical type. In most respects he conformed to a traditional pattern. He was a prosperous Russian nobleman, devoted to tsar and country, trained in arms, indeed distinguished in the armed service of his country, absorbed in the management of his estates, passionately devoted to hunting, to his family and to the Orthodox Church, which he viewed as the one true church of God on earth. Ever since the Middle Ages one could find men like this in Russia. To be sure, Khomiakov’s personal gifts were exceptional and set him apart from the generality of his class. But his pursuits were not untypical, except for the one with which this paper is concerned, namely, his theological project. The latter was unprecedented because before modern times—or for that matter before Khomiakov’s own generation—Russian Orthodox noblemen did not busy themselves with theology and certainly did not produce it. This fact should not lead us to question their piety, of course. Pious Orthodox noblemen could be found all over Russia in every generation, but they did not express their faith by reading or writing theology. For that matter, even the secular clergy was scarcely active in the theological sphere. Theology was the business of hierarchs and monks, the latter in particular when one considers that the most important idiom for theology in Russia was not verbal theology, and certainly not scholarly theology, but iconography, umozrenie v kraskakh (contemplation in colors) in Evgeny Trubetskoi’s immortal characterization; and iconographers were for the most part monastics.

What changed this situation? Why did Khomiakov and a few other Orthodox laymen of his time decide to assume theological responsibilities? The cause was as much external as internal to their piety. Khomiakov’s theology was not the natural, organic and harmonious unfolding of his Orthodox spirituality. It was a response to an external challenge, a crisis. His theology was a same basic concern as his broader intellectual project—Slavophilism. The concern was to define Russia’s place, and Russia’s and Russia’s Orthodox mission, in, aggressively expanding European civilization. Khomiakov and his fellows saw it, modern Europe on a collision course with the values which they countrypeople held dear. Khomiakov’s theology was a response to modernity.

The responsive character of Khomiakov’s theology in the texts he left us. Except for the celebrated is One”—more about that in a moment—most theological writings take the form of letters or correspondence to Western European interlocutors, Catholic or Orthodox, or to Russians, an Orthodox addressing Orthodox. Little of Khomiakov’s theology represents a conversion of Russian partners, past or present. This is the reason why so many of his theological writings take the form of letters or correspondence to Western European interlocutors, Catholic or Orthodox, or to Russians, an Orthodox addressing Orthodox. His theological voice was directed also to his own. He pursued a conversation beyond the bounds of the Orthodox tradition.

The case involves more than the purely formal aspect of Khomiakov’s theology. Khomiakov’s confrontation with modern Christianity affected the substance of his thought. Pauline features of his theology are an example of his abiding attachment to the writings of Paul. One of his later projects was to make a complete...
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instance because it was a response to modernity.

The responsive character of Khomiakov's theologizing is evident
in the texts he left us. Except for the celebrated essay, "The Church
is One"—more about that in a moment—most of Khomiakov's
theological writings take the form of letters or other kinds of replies
to Western European interlocutors, Catholic or Protestant. Very
little of Khomiakov's theology represents a conversation with Or­
thodox partners, past or present. This is the reason—not counting
censorship—why so many of his theological writings were written in
French or English, and why Russian theologians to this day quarrel
over the adequacy of the Russian editions of his works. When one
reads Khomiakov's theological essays in Russian, one is generally
not reading Khomiakov at all, but Iurii Samarin or Giliarov-Platonov
or Vasilii Lur' e or others. This leads to many problems because of
the tendentiousness of the editors and translators. How much sim­
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of Paul’s letters, a project cut short by his untimely death. Khomiakov’s Paulinism cannot be explained simply as an “elective affinity” between him and the apostle, although a spiritual kinship certainly existed. One must reckon also with the Pauline spirituality of the modern German Protestant theologians whom Khomiakov read so carefully. The exegetical note which Khomiakov wrote on Phil. 2:6 provides solid evidence for this claim. Besides the connection with German Protestant exegesis (F. C. Baur and others), the text also provides early evidence of the “kenotic” theme in Russian theology, a distinctively modern theme introduced by Protestant theologians and developed in distinctive ways by the Russians. The note on Philippians is also the place where Khomiakov offers his translation (i.e., exegesis) of Paul “absolutely apart from any authority,” as he puts it—a protestantizing declaration of exegetical independence which we should not exaggerate, but not ignore, either.1

Modern influences figure also in “The Church is One.” While we may never know exactly what prompted Khomiakov to write his famous essay, we do know that it owes a debt to the Roman Catholic theologian Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838), a contemporary of Khomiakov’s who lectured at the University of Tübingen and later at Munich. Möhler’s most important work appeared in 1825 when the author was only twenty-nine years old: The Unity of the Church, or, the Principle of Catholicism Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers of the First Three Centuries. The book was one of the first attempts to develop a more experiential, Spirit-filled understanding of the church in modern Roman Catholicism, an understanding of the church not just as a historical and juridical institution but in terms of spiritual fellowship, or communion.2


The notion of communion (κοινωνία) as the being of the church is associated today with John Zizioulas’ now-classic work, *Being as Communion*. In it Zizioulas cites Khomiakov’s concept of sobornost’ as one of the harbingers of his own ecclesiology. Arguably, the admiration for Khomiakov in the Orthodox theological world of our day rests in the main on this feature of his thought. It is tempting to suppose that Khomiakov’s ecclesiological insight—the germ of koinonia ecclesiology—merely expressed what every Orthodox person knows and experiences as the church. However, this explanation does not account for the perceived novelty of Khomiakov’s ecclesiology in its time, its status as a conceptual break-through. Once again, therefore, one must consider the role of factors external to Orthodoxy which, when combined with the internal determinants, account for the synthesis of elements found in Khomiakov.

The unprecedented prominence of the Holy Spirit in Khomiakov’s discourse about the church in “The Church is One” is the fact that demands explanation. The dogma itself was there for Khomiakov to work with, of course. But what energized it? Möhler’s pneumatology is not a sufficient cause, since one also wants to know what energized pneumatology in Möhler. Or to put the question more broadly, what led a significant number of European theologians in the first half of the nineteenth century to recover—and in some sense to discover—the promise of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit for theology in general and ecclesiology in particular? Who put “Spirit” on the agenda of European thought and sensibility in Khomiakov’s century, and why?

The answer, it seems to me, is: the German Romantic philosophers did. It was the Romantics who resurrected Geist in the human and religious sciences and reconceived these disciplines as Geisteswissenschaften. Moreover, the Romantic philosophers were prompted to undertake their project by exactly the same historical and cultural crisis that captured Khomiakov’s attention: the secularizing and globalizing challenge to revealed truths and historic institutions in

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modern times. During the Enlightenment and especially with the rise of industrial civilization, the security of the established churches began to be undermined, as did the scientific veracity of the Christian religion. Neither objectivist apologetics nor the argument from the political utility of established religion were very successful apologetic tools, not least because they lacked vital theological resonance. The Romantics broke with these approaches by setting out the case for the experiential truth of the Christian religion. Romantic apologetics proclaimed the relevance of Christian doctrine to human subjectivity or, as we usually say today, personhood. "The Church is One" is an early example of this kind of apologetics in Orthodox theology.

That the Spirit is an experiential principle in "The Church is One" can be sensed in a phrase in the essay which adumbrates an important development in twentieth-century Orthodox theology. Discussing faith, hope and charity as gifts of the Spirit and emphasizing their interrelatedness, Khomiakov speaks of the zhiznoe Predanie and zhiznoe edinstvo of the church—the "living Tradition" and "living unity" of the church.4 If in "The Church is One" Khomiakov had simply affirmed the "tradition" and "unity" of the church, there would be nothing special about the essay. After eighteen hundred years of Christianity, the world did not have to be told that the Church is one and that it preserves a sacred tradition. Khomiakov's originality lay in his application of the adjective "living" to the categories of unity and tradition, hence also in the implication that unity and tradition may be "dead". To be sure, the Holy Spirit had always been confessed in the Creed as zhivotvorishchii, "life-giving." What Khomiakov did was to take this vitalistic descriptor seriously in practical terms and use it to energize the being—the tradition and unity—of the church. An experientialization of ecclesiology was the result. In this way Khomiakov anticipated Zizioulas' insight into the difference between the "institution" and the "constitution" of the church:


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Christ-institutes and the Spirit con-stitu

The difference between these two proposi-
tions can be enormous ecclesiologically.4 It is something presented to us as a fact, most accom plished. As such, it is a provocation to ob ject to "con-stitution" is something that involves us something we accept freely, because we take its emergence.

While not formulated as clearly as it is in Zizioulas' paradox, Khomiakov's "The Church is One" that "the visible church is visible church with the empirical church. This is the institution with its organization, rituals, etc., while the visible church is this institution when it is Spirit through faith—something that happens wherever it occurs. The experientialism of Khomiakov's ecclesiology is the more apparent by the absence of patristic language. Khomiakov recognizes in his essay with the empirical church. Khomiakov's connection to the patristic studies which began in the nineteenth century is much more tenuous.7

5 "Tserkov' odna," Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh, 2:12.
7 Even Ivan Kireevskii, who through his association with Optina Hermitage was an early center of the patristic revival in Russia, incorporates little patristic studies which began in the nineteenth century is much more tenuous.7

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“con-stitution” is something that involves us in its very being,
something we accept freely, because we take part in its very
emergence.3

While not formulated as clearly as it is in Zizioulas, this
distinction is implicit in Khomiakov’s paradoxical statement in “The
Church is One” that “the visible church is visible only to the be-
iever.”4 With this formulation Khomiakov rejects the conflation
of the visible church with the empirical church. The empirical church
is the institution with its organization, rituals, history and tradition:
the visible church is this institution when it is constituted by the
Spirit through faith—something that happens anew whenever and
wherever it occurs.

The experientialism of Khomiakov’s ecclesiology is made all
the more apparent by the absence of patristic discourse in “The
Church is One.” Tradition may be present in his essay, but the
fathers are not. This contrasts, incidentally, with Möhler’s method,
announced already in the subtitle of his book: The Principle of
Catholicism Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers of the
First Three Centuries. Möhler can be linked to the revival of
patristic studies which began in the nineteenth century in several
confessions. Khomiakov’s connection to the patristic revival was
much more tenuous.5

3 Being in Communication, 140.
4 “Tserkov’ odna,” Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh. 2:12.
5 Even Ivan Kireevskii, who through his association with Oyina Hermasage was linked to one of the
early centers of the patristic revival in Russia, incorporated little patristic discourse into his writings
and for this reason is excommunicated along with Khomiakov by critics such as John S. Romanides, “Or-
thodox Ecclesiology according to Alexis Khomiakov (1804-1860),” The Greek Orthodox Theolo-
gical Review 2 (1956) 71. Romanides takes a strong exception to Kireevskii’s view that “il est im-
potental de renouveler la philosophie des saints Peres sous l’aspect qu’elle avait de leur temps… Elle
répondait aux questions de son temps et de la culture parmi laquelle elle se développait” (Kireevskii as
This does not mean that Khomiakov was history of the church. He was very interested in way than most Orthodox theologians in our cent- ary Orthodox theologians, benefiting from the scholarship of the twentieth century, view the tradition. Khomiakov was less interested in historic tradition—something which he took for grandiose than as a historical force: a force not just in society, politics and culture as well. Orthodoxy in Khomiakov’s philosophy of history or, as the historiosophy—the search for the sophia, the inner of the historical process.

One does not hear much about historiosophy these days. The greatest Orthodox voices seventy years—Florovsky, Lossky, Meyendorff and others—were not concerned with it and in some hostile to it. They were historians, not philosop- historical discipline of patristics displaced sp historical process in their work.

Things were very different with Khomiakov. the apogee of philosophy of history in Europe bound to the project also through his connec- Idealism, the fountainhead of all the great nine- sophies of history. Moreover, the Romantic his- history was integrally connected with their religion of the most besetting sins of religion in the eyes of rationalists was its particularism. The creeds and the historic churches held fast seemed hopelessly obscure to them. The Romantics by contrast, sense discovering the historical and contingent experience, gave the religious attachment to pa- on life. Historicist apologetics reinforced exper- In both cases, the relevance of faith to human lived was demonstrated in a powerful new way.
This does not mean that Khomiakov was uninterested in the history of the church. He was very interested in it, but in a different way than most Orthodox theologians in our own day. Contemporary Orthodox theologians, benefiting from the profound patristic scholarship of the twentieth century, view the church as a historic tradition. Khomiakov was less interested in the church as a historic tradition—something which he took for granted—than in the church as a historical force: a force not just in personal life, but in society, politics and culture as well. Orthodoxy played a crucial role in Khomiakov’s philosophy of history or, as the Russians say, historiosophy—the search for the sophia, the inner meaning and design, of the historical process.

One does not hear much about historiosophy in Orthodox theology these days. The greatest Orthodox voices of the last sixty or seventy years—Florovsky, Lossky, Meyendorff, Ware and most others—were not concerned with it and in some cases were actively hostile to it. They were historians, not philosophers of history. The historical discipline of patristics displaced speculation about the historical process in their work.

Things were very different with Khomiakov. He lived during the apogee of philosophy of history in European thought and was bound to the project also through his connection with Romantic Idealism, the fountainhead of all the great nineteenth-century philosophies of history. Moreover, the Romantics’ fascination with history was integrally connected with their religious interests. One of the most besetting sins of religion in the eyes of Enlightenment rationalists was its particularism. The creeds and rituals to which the historic churches held fast seemed hopelessly arbitrary and obscure to them. The Romantics by contrast, discerning and in a sense discovering the historical and contingent character of human experience, gave the religious attachment to particulars a new lease on life. Historiast apologetics reinforced experientialist apologetics. In both cases, the relevance of faith to human life as it was actually lived was demonstrated in a powerful new way.
Khomiakov was deeply invested in the philosophy of history along Romantic lines and "had apparently formulated his historical views before he turned to theology."8 The sprawling compendium of essays on mythology, religion, language and folklore on which he worked for over fifteen years, *Semiramida*, places him clearly in the Romantic and specifically Schellingian project of "philosophy of mythology"—mythology being the bridge between history and religion as the Romantics construed them. *Semiramida*, or *Notes on Universal History* as Khomiakov called it, is a work one does not hear about in contemporary Orthodox appreciations of Khomiakov, and with good reason. There is little in it to warm the hearts of patristically-schooled theologians. The speculative heart of the work, the distinction between the "Iranian" (free, spiritual) and "Cushite" (authoritarian, materialistic) forces of world history, does not appear to engage Orthodox theological values except in a very general way. Are we not therefore dealing with arbitrary and passing features of Khomiakov’s thought, interesting in terms of his time and place perhaps, but irrelevant to the tradition of the church? Who, indeed, does not wish that *Semiramida* was only 18 pages long like "The Church is One," and that "The Church is One" was hundreds pages long like *Semiramida*?

Most of *Semiramida* is indeed negligible today, however important it seemed to Khomiakov. Yet the distinction between the passing and the enduring in this instance is not as clear-cut as one might suppose. The sticking point is Khomiakov’s Slavophilism, a stumbling block which must be reckoned with. Integrally connected to Khomiakov’s historiosophy, Slavophilism cannot by any stretch of the imagination be construed as a traditional or patristic enterprise. It was a modern invention. For this reason Orthodox theologians might decide to ignore it just as they do the cultural-philosophical musings in *Semiramida*.

The reason is that Slavophilism of Khomiakov’s religious vision and personal Khomiakov regarded Slavdom—for all practical purposes—as the venue by which Orthodoxy was a historical force, a force which would reveal the destiny of the historical process. Obviously this is a speculative-historical proposition—has not borne it out, and the prospects for our own time are remote at best. But Slavophilism was a speculative, historiosophical proposition, that is to say, as a means of outside the fold, a vehicle for carrying the Orthodox world. And Slavophilism was an ethical project to ground society—an own but also world principles of the Gospel (*sobornost*). Construed as a speculative, historiosophical proposition, Khomiakov’s religious vision and personal Slavophile project cannot be ignored in a theory of Khomiakov’s legacy.

Andrzej Walicki’s discussion of Khomiakov on Slavophilism is pertinent here. "The concern of dogmas," Walicki writes, "interested Khomiakov as he thought them a symbolic expression of Church, which for him was above all an ideal antidote to the social atomization and spiritual emptiness of the contemporary world."9 While this statement is extreme—because there is no reason to reject this speculative-historical proposition—there is an ethical interest in dogma in this way. Slavophilism was an ethical project, his own but also world principles of the Gospel (*sobornost*). Hence, "Slavophile..."

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8 Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, "A. S. Khomiakov’s Religious Thought," St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly 23, no. 2 (1979), 98. Note also Sturtev’s observation as he begins his exposition of Khomiakov’s thought: "Das Geschichtswerk ist der Niederschlag von allen geistigen Schaffen A. S. Chomjakovs in seiner ersten Periode; in keiner Disziplin läßt sich seine Position aufklären, wenn man nicht von denen Anzeichen absieht, die ein Gefühl von dem letzten Streben ausdrücken."

as deeply invested in the philosophy of history and "had apparently formulated his historical need to theology." The sprawling compendiumology, religion, language and folklore on which fifteen years, *Semiramida*, places him clearly and specifically Schellingian project of "philosophy—mythology being the bridge between history and Romantics construed them.* *Semiramida, or History as Khomiakov called it, is a work one at in contemporary Orthodox appreciations of its good reason. There is little in it to warm the closeted theologians. The speculative heart distinction between the "Iranian" (free, spiritual) and "oriental, materialistic) forces of world history, engage Orthodox theological values except in a We are not therefore dealing with arbitrary and Khomiakov’s thought, interesting in terms of perhaps, but irrelevant to the tradition of the Reed, does not wish that *Semiramida* was only "The Church is One," and that "The Church eds pages long like *Semiramida!* amida is indeed negligible today, however im-

Khomiakov regarded Slavdom—for all practical purposes, Russia—as the venue by which Orthodoxy was to become a world-historical force, a force which would reveal the inner meaning and destiny of the historical process. Obviously there are many reasons to reject this speculative-historical proposition. Historical experience has not borne it out, and the prospects for its fulfillment in our own time are remote at best. But Slavophilism was not just as a speculative, historiosophical proposition. It was also a missionary project, that is to say, as a means of sharing Orthodoxy outside the fold, a vehicle for carrying the Orthodox Gospel into the world. And Slavophilism was an ethical project, an attempt to ground society—his own but also world society—on the principles of the Gospel (sobornost’). Construed in these terms the Slavophile project cannot be ignored in a theological assessment of Khomiakov’s legacy.

Andrzej Walicki’s discussion of Khomiakov in his classic work on Slavophilism is pertinent here. "The content and history of dogmas," Walicki writes, "interested Khomyakov only in so far as he thought them a symbolic expression of the essence of the Church, which for him was above all an ideal social organism, an antidote to the social atomization and spiritual disintegration of the contemporary world." While this statement as it stands is a bit extreme—because there is no reason to restrict Khomiakov’s interest in dogma in this way—Walicki nevertheless makes an extremely important point. For Khomiakov, dogma had ethical and social content; it implied an ethical and social project, not just an ecclesiastical project. Hence, "Slavophile ecclesiology cannot

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be discussed in isolation from Slavophile social philosophy — there are in fact very close analogies between the Slavophiles’ reflections on the church and their conception of the secular norms governing social life.” Nikolai Berdiaev called attention to the same facet of Slavophile theology. “The Slavophiles were, to use a contemporary expression, pragmatists in theology. In a certain sense, their religious philosophy was a philosophy of action; it was directed against intellectualism in theology.” And I would add, against contemplationism, that is to say, against a purely contemplative appropriation of the Gospel.

In contemporary Orthodox evaluations there is a tendency to value Khomiakov’s ecclesiological vision while ignoring his social and political vision. This one-sidedness distorts Khomiakov’s project, for his vision of sobornost’ was as much a recipe for the regeneration of society as it was an ecclesiological doctrine. In fact, he regarded these two projects — the social and the ecclesiastical — as mutually relevant, indeed as necessary to each other. Both were concerned to effectuate the same norm of life, namely, the reconciliation of freedom and unity through love. Khomiakov was sure that, without the church, no earthly society would ever approximate this norm. But he was also convinced that without a social and historical mission, the church falls short of being what it called to be. Unlike many later Orthodox theologians, Khomiakov did not see a tragic break between church and society, or between church and world. He saw a practical continuum grounded in the ethical imperative of the Gospel to “love one another.”

This theological pragmatism, as Berdiaev called it, is another token of the modernity of Khomiakov. The nineteenth century prized itself on being a practical age, an age of action or contemplation. With his ethical seriousness the reform, Khomiakov shared this Zeitgeist. He does not do justice to his legacy by construing the timeless communion of the church and discrete historical projects. Or to put it another way, notice to Khomiakov by focusing on communion a community. Khomiakov’s Slavophilism was an implication of communion for community itself. We may reject ninety-nine per cent of its irrelevance; but if we reject one hundred per cent of it, we reject the type of project Khomiakov envisaged something fundamental in his theology: the vocation in the world and for the world. The form in this vocation, in effect a kind of social Gospel, is of the modernity of Khomiakov.

The deflection of theological attention away from community leads to an overly ecclesialized view of sobornost’. To be sure, in the early twentieth centuries Khomiakov’s theology opposed this tendency. In that period, as Sergei Khoruzhii, “the social aspect, the treatment of sobornost’ as existence, over time came to the fore, leaving theological meaning of the concept marginalized and . . .

9 Walicki, The Slavophile Controversy, 197.
10 “From Alexei Stefanovich Khomiakov [by Nikolai Berdiaev],” On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader, trans. and ed. Boris Jakim and Robert Bird (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998), 332. In his introduction to On Spiritual Unity, Bird makes a similar point about concreteness — or at least the aspiration to it — in Slavophilism when he observes: “While Slavophilic philosophical thought largely took German idealism as its point of departure, the demand for realism and historicism provoked a search for the roots of Russian distinctiveness.” (p. 11). Likewise Khoruzhii, who writes of “the concrete-experiential, not abstract-speculative character of Khomiakov’s thought,” Polia perenca, 19.

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ition from Slavophile social philosophy—there are analogies between the Slavophiles' reflections and the concept of the secular norms governing Berdiaev called attention to the same facet of "The Slavophiles were, to use a contemporary term, a philosophy of action; it was directed against a purely contemplative Gospel. In a certain sense, their project was as much a recipe for the regeneration of ecclesiological doctrine as a principle of social existence. The form in which he articulates this norm is "the social aspect, the treatment of the secular non-norm as a principle of social existence occurred not only as a point of departure, the demand for realism and historical projects. Or to put it another way, one does not do justice to Khomiakov's thought if we reject one hundred per cent of it—that is to say, if we reject the type of project Khomiakov envisioned—we will miss something fundamental in his theology: the vocation of Christian action in the world and for the world. The form in which he articulates his project was as much a recipe for the regeneration of ecclesiological doctrine as a principle of social existence. The form in which he articulates this norm is "the social aspect, the treatment of the secular non-norm as a principle of social existence occurred not only as a point of departure, the demand for realism and historical projects. Or to put it another way, one does not do justice to Khomiakov's thought if we reject one hundred per cent of it—that is to say, if we reject the type of project Khomiakov envisioned—we will miss something fundamental in his theology: the vocation of Christian action in the world and for the world. The form in which he articulates this vocation, in effect a kind of social Gospel, is yet another feature of the modernity of Khomiakov. The deflection of theological attention toward communion and away from community leads to an overly spiritualized and overly ecclesialized view of sobornost'. To be sure, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Khomiakov's theology was distorted by the opposite tendency. In that period, as Sergei Khoruzhii has written, "the social aspect, the treatment of sobornost' as a principle of social existence, over time came to the fore, leaving the original ecclesiological meaning of the concept marginalized and even forgotten." In

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recent decades, however, the opposite has occurred: the ecclesiologi-
cal meaning of sobornost' has displaced and virtually swallowed up
the social and political message. This appropriation of Khomiakov
is as much of a mistake as the earlier one. Khomiakov’s Slavophil-
ism challenges this one-sidedness by making it clear that the unity
he sought was not just mystical but also social and historical. This is
what Slavophile “wholeness” was about: not just wholeness of spirit,
and certainly not just wholeness of mind, but wholeness of life, in-
cluding common life in the secular world. Mother (now Saint) Maria
Skobtsova captured the point exactly in her essay on Khomiakov:
“Ideally the whole world, on all levels beginning with the simple and
guileless level of people’s everyday working life and ending with
the heights of the religious life of the spirit, should be built on the
principle of sobornost’ which obliterates intellectualism and opens
the way for all the capacities and characteristics of the whole person
to manifest themselves.”14 That a natural-born activist like Mother
Maria was drawn to Khomiakov’s thought is indirect evidence of its
pragmatism (in Berdiaev’s sense of the word).

Many pages in Khomiakov illustrate his passion for action
and witness in the everyday world. So, for example, in his “Let-
ter to the Serbs” he advises his fellow Slavs, among other things,
to retain their distinctive national costume. “Custom, it seems,
consists of little things, but it is not a little thing. What sort of
importance could there be in a piece of clothing, for example? Is
the manner in which one is dressed and the design of the pieces
of cloth with which one covers oneself of any importance? Is it
not something quite dead and incapable of affecting life? That
is what people say in our country, but do not believe them. Such
is the nobility of the human soul that even that which is dead
receives a living meaning from it and in turn influences [human]
life.”15 More than Slavophile mythology is at work in these lines.

A realistic ethical intelligence is at work. Khomiakov
that the temporal, the passing, can and in some
vessel of the eternal.

Khomiakov’s pragmatism has implications
Orthodox ecclesiology. In Being as Communi-
tifies as one of the great unfinished tasks of Cthology the “synthesis between Christology and pra-
is to say, an understanding of how the church
“Christ” can be also “a charismatic society,” or
instituted by Christ and preserved in ecclesial
also be con-instituted ever anew by the Holy Spir-
theology is pertinent to this issue because of
his witness to the charismatic being of the church
which, incidentally, precipitated trenchant at-
cisms of him by Florovsky and others for all,
the christological, sacramental and institutional
the church.16

Zizioulas’ call for a synthesis of christo-
tology is apt, but one may question how he
achieved. What is needed, Zizioulas writes, is a
ation of communion to its ontological conclus
ontology of communion.”17 But what if the sy-
institution and free inspiration is not some-
accomplished within the ecclesia itself, in the
of communion, but something which is acc-
the creative activity of believers--the laos the-
where they actually live and bear witness to the
not in the ecclesia alone, but along the bour-

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15 Nicolas Berdiaev, Khomiakov, saisie de A. S. Khomiakov, Lettre aux serbes, trans. Valentine and
Jean-Claude Marcade in collaboration with Emma Sebald (Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, [1988]), 184.

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Slavophile mythology is at work in these lines.

A realistic ethical intelligence is at work. Khomiakov recognized
that the temporal, the passing, can and in some sense must be the
vessel of the eternal.

Khomiakov's pragmatism has implications for contemporary
Orthodox ecclesiology. In Being as Communion, Zizioulas iden-
tifies as one of the great unfinished tasks of Orthodox ecclesi-
ology the "synthesis between Christology and pneumatology," that
is to say, an understanding of how the church as "the body of
Christ" can also be "a charismatic society," or how the church as
in-stituted by Christ and preserved in ecclesiastical tradition can
also be con-stituted ever anew by the Holy Spirit. Khomiakov's
theology is pertinent to this issue because of the forcefulness
of his witness to the charismatic being of the church, a forcefulness
which, incidentally, precipitated trenchant and persistent criti-
cisms of him by Florovsky and others for allegedly minimizing
the christological, sacramental and institutional dimensions of
the church.16

Zizioulas' call for a synthesis of christology and pneuma-
tology is apt, but one may question how he thinks it is to be
achieved. What is needed, Zizioulas writes, "is to push the no-
tion of communion to its ontological conclusions. We need an
ontology of communion."17 But what if the synthesis of ecclesial
institution and free inspiration is not something which can be
accomplished within the ecclesia itself, in the ontological depths
of communion, but something which is accomplished through
the creative activity of believers—the łatos theou—in the contexts
where they actually live and bear witness to the Gospel, hence
not in the ecclesia alone, but along the boundary between the

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16 See John S. Romanides, "Orthodox Ecclesiology according to Alexis Khomiakov (1804-1860)," The Greek Orthodox Theological Review 2 (1956): 57-73. Rasnovsky has observed that the tension between Khomiakov and his critics in ecclesiology bears a certain resemblance to the quar-
tel between liberal and traditionalist Catholics in post-Vatican II Catholicism ("A. S. Khomiakov's

17 Being as Communion, 141.
ecclesia and the world? If so, then the synthesis of christology and pneumatology happens whenever and wherever communion passes over into community. If this is the case, then what Orthodox ecclesiology needs today is not more ontology, but more ethics and more mission. I believe Khomiakov would have found this suggestion congenial.

18 In passing, as a parenthetical addition to his call for an ontology of communion, Zizioulas acknowledges "the rediscovery of the importance of the love of God and the local Church" as elements which "can help even the Orthodox themselves to be faithful to their identity" (Being as Communion, 145). But he does not develop this suggestion; and what local and local church have to do with ontology is not clear, for these are not ontological concepts.

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