

Aleksey Khomyakov, a “Christian Philosopher”*

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Abstract—This article explores the philosophical concept of Alexey Khomyakov as the first systematic attempt to create an Orthodox-based Christian philosophy. The Russian thinker managed to get in the presentation of his religious and philosophical views between the Scylla of apologetics of the Orthodox Faith and the Charybdis of heresiologists philosophical position within it. There are two key concepts in Christian philosopher A. S. Khomyakov’s point of view – freedom and love, or rather one – freedom in love. The article develops two main ideas that, first, Khomyakov is a true Christian philosopher. Here the main emphasis is made on distinguishing between a Christian and religious philosopher, where the latter primarily refers to Russian religious philosophers. And, secondly, that the studies of A.S. Khomyakov are a system of Christian Orthodox philosophy as they have a single basis.

Keywords—Christian philosophy; religious philosophy; Khomyakov; historiography; theology; sobornost

I. INTRODUCTION

Is there any possibility for the phrase to exist? First of all, it is vulnerable because it is not rooted in a particular Christian tradition and cannot compete with theology and philosophy, acknowledged by time. It is for a reason that E. Gilson, the representative of neo-scholasticism, warned of the fate of a lonely thinker who walks a path that simply causes attacks from both theology and philosophy [1].

Secondly, the subject of Christian philosophy seems long gone and the opinions about it are already formed. And finally, thirdly, if looked at Orthodox-Christian angle, Christian philosophy can cause a negative reaction because of its traditional reference to medieval Catholic philosophy – Thomism, which is actively updated and developed in contemporary Thomism. In order not to distract the reader from the main topic by a rather complex problem, worthy of a separate detailed discussion, we will refer to our reflections and conclusions on this matter in another article [2].

The philosophical concept of A.S. Khomyakov is the first systematic attempt to create an Orthodox based Christian philosophy. Other earlier attempts of Orthodox theologians to solve problems of correlation between faith and knowledge, science and religion, rational and irrational are difficult to consider as attempts to create Christian

philosophy, as Orthodox theology was only possible within the strict framework of Orthodox dogma and church ministry. Hence a prior underestimation of philosophical thoughts and even, to some extent, disregard of it. In our opinion, in the presentation of his religious and philosophical views Khomyakov managed to get between the Scylla of apologetics of the Orthodox Faith and the Charybdis heresiologists philosophical position within it (mind the sentence of Bulgakov to any philosophizing). There are two central concepts in such point of view of A. S. Khomyakov, a Christian philosopher – freedom and love, or rather one – freedom in love. This reminds of the words of St. Augustine: *Dilige et quod vis fac* (Love, and do what you will). For a reason many researchers point out the influence of the ideas of St. Augustine of Hippo on the philosophy and theology of the Russian thinker.

II. ORTHODOX PHILOSOPHY

The publication has been prepared with the support of the “RUDN University Program 5-100”.

It is at equally extremely easy and extremely difficult to write about Khomyakov. We can safely talk about the ‘phenomenon of Khomyakov’. Everything seems to have already been said, examined, studied in depth and as he is second most written about perhaps to only V. Solovyov. But compared to Solovyov’s developed system of philosophy, stages of formation, evolution of views, we find the works of Khomyakov rather scattered, more polemic and occasionally rather philosophically thought out; we have Khomyakov focusing on one immediately found truth.

Nevertheless, these have already been said and written a lot about Slavophilism in general and Khomyakov in particular and the views on both are very controversial. The evaluation of Khomyakov as a Christian philosopher is the one that stirs up controversy the most. Considering the above said, we assume it to be more productive to emphasize and analyze the main ideas in Khomyakov’s reflections and his attempts to respond to them.

First of all, we will highlight and emphasize two main theses:

A.S. Khomyakov is a true “Christian philosopher”. Here are to be highlighted what V.V. Zenkovsky has to say about it. It is interesting for us to consider how a person, who

*The publication has been prepared with the support of the “RUDN University Program 5-100”.

belongs to the same traditional Christian thoughts, characterizes Khomyakov.

According to Zenkovsky, “Khomyakov is a true Christian philosopher for he originated from Christianity. It is, indeed, a background of his philosophical analysis, but one was to remember his own faith – firm but always enlightened by mind, or to be more precisely, always calling for intelligence – Khomyakov was exceptionally free. There were no trace of hypocrisy or blind faith in him, and he considered the Church, as we shall see later, not an authority but rather a source of light”. [3]. And a little further he repeats his thought: “Khomyakov not in words but in deeds gravitated to create a Christian philosophy – the living sense of the Church and the understanding of its meaning were crucially significant for his thought. Khomyakov is already beyond the tendencies of secularism – he consciously and without hesitation he tried to proceed from what the Church was revealed to him. However, nothing constraint the spirit of free philosophical research – his ecclesiastic consciousness itself was permeated with the spirit of freedom, it is this inner freedom, the irrelevance of authority in the Church that determine the spiritual type of Khomyakov’s that demonstrate the main lines of his thought” [4].

Here the question arises of how a Christian philosopher differs from a religious one. As for Russian philosophers, the so-called “Soloviev school” or the philosophy of unity, they are defined as religious philosophers, and no one, even philosophers-priests, is called a Christian philosopher. Is it accidental or thought? Though being a rather scholastic one, but such a question is meaningful and provoking. It would be probably irrational to suppose that Russian religious philosophers fr. Pavel Florensky or fr. Sergius Bulgakov, for example, was less Orthodox compared to Alexey Khomyakov. That related to their faith more enslaved and less freely than he did. Therefore, it is that the answer to the question above does not lie on the surface but is hidden in details, peculiarities, shadows and our further speculation will be the answer to it.

A.S. Khomyakov’s doctrine is a system of Christian Orthodox philosophy since all of its parts are founded on a single basis. G. Florovsky himself considered A. Khomyakov “a systemizer of Slavophile doctrine” which is fully justified. It should only be noted that this system was neither assembled nor designed but coherent and ontological. It is why, as Florovsky notes, Khomyakov did not have to justify or prove, but describe. However, when describing, he does not dwell upon the surface, but analyzes complicated, controversial and multilateral questions in his works. At the same time certain crudity in these issues and the inconsistency noted by the researchers (for example, characterizing an “integrated mind” or the relationship between the concepts of “reason” and “consciousness”) are related both to the features of his character (that Khomyakov is known to actively take part in various kinds of discussions in St. Petersburg salons and mostly relied on his memory in polemic articles) and to the fact that on many topics, especially theological and historiosophical ones, he was, as they say, a pioneer. One of the reasons was the early death of the author.

The noted single basis brings him closer to the Russian religious philosophers. But with Khomyakov, we can describe the nature of this basis as ecclesiological – not just Orthodoxy, but Orthodox Church. According to the Russian philosopher, the Orthodox Church is the truth, freedom, grace, i.e. it contains the basis for solving ontological, epistemological, ethical and social problems.

III. HISTORIOSOPHY

Referring to the nature of world history development in his historiosophy, Khomyakov singles out two defining principles that are connected to religion and divided according to the principle of the correlation of freedom and necessity: Irani and Cushite. According to the philosopher, the first belief is based on “the tradition of freedom or on its inner consciousness” [5], the main feature being the recognition of God as a theurgist; the second, prone to pantheism, which he also calls “the religion of necessity” [6], emphasizing the fact of birth as opposed to creation, originates from the recognition of the rule of necessity, logically cognizable.

According to the Russian thinker, a tribal origin strongly influence the religious principles described above. As for European Christianity, it was influenced by the German tribe with a craving for formless speculation, the Slavic world, of which perception was symbolic with freedom from the symbols themselves and the Western or Roman world with its logical formality [7].

As for history of Russia, unlike Kireyevsky, Khomyakov was far from idealizing its past. The dark and terrible instincts of the Russian soul were ennobled by Christianity, and furthermore the state supported “the unity of faith and church”. With all the disadvantages of Orthodox Christianity, among which Khomyakov points out primarily its certain remoteness from public life and focus on private life, he insists that we have something to be proud of compared to the West: “Blood and enmity were not a basis for Russia, and the forefathers did not bequeath hatred and revenge to their children. Never has the Church, having limited its range of influence, lost purity of its inner life and never preached injustice and violence to its children. The simplicity of the regional administration of the pre-Tatar system was not alien to the human truth, and the law of justice and mutual love were the basis for this life, almost patriarchal one. Now that the epoch of state formation has come to an end, when the masses have been united into an indestructible for external entity, it is time for us to understand that a person achieves his moral goal only in a society where the strength of all belongs to everyone and everyone’s strength to all” [8].

IV. THEOLOGY

There is a popular opinion of theology being the peak of Khomyakov’s work and all the rest being just a preparatory stage. Hence the fact that most researchers of Khomyakov’s work are theologians or religious philosophers who focus on Khomyakov’s theological reasoning. It is necessary to recognize this opinion with one important caveat: there were no preparatory or initial stages in the development of the

religious and philosophical position of Khomyakov. His position initially differs by integrity and completed in itself, and only various tasks in the manifestation of this position revealed certain aspects of it, and only the apologetic goal of defending and explaining the essence of Orthodoxy for foreigners manifested this position in the greatest completeness and wholeness.

Despite all the criticism of Khomyakov's theological arguments, he was a true theologian on two fundamental points that should characterize any true theologian:

He believed in his faith, faith was rooted in his life, we have many evidences about this. It is difficult to convince someone or even persuade if the persuader himself does not have a strong belief in it. According to St. Gregory Palamas, there are three kinds of theologians: those who have direct experience of God-communion in the uncreated energies of God's grace are true theologians; not having such experience, but completely trusting him of others - these are just good theologians; and, finally, theologians who have neither personal experience of communion with God nor those who trust saints are bad theologians

He was forced to begin theology, not in order to express himself, he had nothing to prove to himself, nothing to convince himself in. But the theological gap that existed in Russian Orthodoxy in the West, allowed anyone to say anything about it, and for that reason Khomyakov did not want to remain silent, he could not have done that. Again, all true theologians are forced to defend the truth of faith before the heresies and obscurantism attacks. The Russian thinker emphasizes: "The only area of the Church is soul; the only sword it can use is a word, which can become its own enemy if turned against it. Therefore, each member of the Church bears the responsibility to respond to the slanders to which the Church is exposed. Silence would be a crime not only in relation to those who belong to the Church but even more so in relation to those who could have been ones if false representations did not reject them from the truth. Every Christian, when he is attacked against his faith, must defend it as best as possible and wait for a special authority – the Church does not have official lawyers" [9].

Khomyakov was one of the first to analyse the causes of the Christian division of churches. The external reason for Khomyakov's cycle of theological works was his communications with W. Palmer, the archdeacon of Anglican Church, who desired to convert to Orthodoxy, but he did not do so and accepted Catholicism.

The core of Khomyakov's theological works includes a small article "The Church One" containing "the experience of a catechetical presentation of the doctrine of the Church", three polemical pamphlets published in the West in French and addressed primarily to the Western reader, several letters to their Western and domestic correspondents, as well as translations of messages to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and notes to some other parts of the Bible.

Defining the specifics of the religious and philosophical discourse of Khomyakov, his friend and colleague Y. Samarin expressed in it three words: "Khomyakov lived in

the Church" and explained further: "Of course in the Orthodox Church, for there are no two churches" [10]. This peculiarity was expanded in two main characteristics of the theological approach of the Russian thinker. He studied all the problems of Christian life ecclesiologically, from within the church life, the foundation of which, in his opinion, is sobornost. A steady consciousness of the truth of his faith, confidence in its strength, gave the thinker a support for independence in religious views: "Khomyakov was an original, almost unprecedented phenomenon of complete freedom in religious consciousness (italics of the author of the Preface)" [11].

Khomyakov's initial intention was claim of the unity of the Church as the essence of the Orthodox faith. This fact for him is undoubted and primary to the historical division of Christian churches. This fact was experimentally mystical for him, the evidence plays only a supporting role and essentially does not prove anything. According to Khomyakov, it is faith, not the mind reflects the truth of Christianity. The Russian thinker compares the antinomy "faith-reason" through other interrelated antinomies: internal – external, living – dead, moral – immoral, heavenly – earthly. The West has succeeded in knowledge, in the conquest of nature, but, according to Khomyakov, lost the integral higher knowledge, which is sealed with the inner spiritual knowledge or faith: "Christian knowledge is not the cause of the mind, but the gracious and living faith" [12]. Khomyakov often repeats this very thought in his other works: "A living faith will remain...a distinctive feature of the Church; and rationalism, be it dogmatic or utilitarian, will tar all social actions of the other two opposing confessions" [13].

Faith is a living knowledge, hence the effective knowledge, leaving no space for rational evidence. On the contrary, attempts of rational proof, according to Khomyakov, indicate the absence of faith or its distortion. It is in rationalism, which has not been transformed by faith, but, on the contrary, undermines it from the inside under the plausible pretext of strengthening it, sees the Russian thinker as a general premise of Western Christian schisms. According to Khomyakov, it is rational that Catholicism initially perceives infallibility in dogma which drastically changes the moral emphasis to the rational and immoral and allows further schisms in Protestantism to appear. Rationalism also changes the vector of evolution: it is not the heavenly scale of values that is applied to the earthly, but the heavenly scale begins to be judged from the position of the earthly.

What are the sources of affirmation of the truth of the Orthodox dogma, if rational evidence cannot be such? Khomyakov found them in mutual love and joint prayer, because such actions are aimed at uniting with God, and not at opposing the human mind and reality of God. As Russian thinker has it, love and prayer arise in a person not on its own, but are intended by God and therefore realized with his help. And in the practices of prayer Khomyakov finds distortions of Western Christianity, the rationalism of which turns the unity of the Church with God by prayer into the legal contract with individuals. Noting the specific character

of the Orthodox prayer in Khomyakov's works, which primarily consists of a single common action, the Russian researcher S.S. Khoruzhy says: "This approach to prayer leaves its vertical dimension in the background and pays more attention to reciprocity and sobornost of a prayer than to the very purpose of the communion with God, it certainly does not cover all aspects of the Orthodoxy prayer life. The Russian Hesychast Renaissance of 19-20th centuries and the development of Orthodox theology formed a strong view according to which the essence of Orthodox spirituality, its true expression is the hesychastic order of inner life and the way of a pray. But this way, this system is significantly different from that of Khomyakov's" [14].

Considering the validity of the reasoning of the modern Russian researcher of Khomyakov's work, it is necessary to understand the underlying reasons for the Russian philosopher's attitude to faith in general and to prayer in particular. After all, Khoruzhy explains that Khomyakov does not recognize the authority of the Church as a confrontation between the Russian philosopher and Catholicism. In our opinion, there are two reasons why Khomyakov emphasizes the "reciprocity and sobornost of a prayer" and underestimates the individualizing moments. The first one is connected with the opposition to Protestantism, the second – with the personal Christian aspiration to restrain pride.

The key concept of the religious-philosophical system of A. Khomyakov was the concept of "sobornost", which, as he puts it, "contains in itself a whole confession of faith" [15]. He considers this concept to be a derivative of the concept of "sobor", which "expresses the idea of unity, not only in the sense of manifested, visible connection of many in some place, but in a more general sense of the possibility of such connection, in other words: expresses the idea of unity in a plurality" [16]. Moreover, Khomyakov uses precisely the ecclesiological, but not social meaning of the concept "sobornost" and insists on such a high and not quantitative or geographical meaning of the believers' unity – unity in the Holy Spirit. The concept of "sobornost" is used by A. Khomyakov for a clearer representation of the nature of the Orthodox faith and its difference from the Catholic and Protestant faiths. It is in this conception, in his conviction, that lies non-controversial duality of a person - his internal and external, social and individualism, integrity and his many hypostases - which is violated in the Catholic and Protestant versions of Christianity.

There is another important point in the character of faith of the Russian thinker and, consequently, in the character of his theology. This was accurately noticed by V.V. Rozanov. He pointed out that in his theology Khomyakov "was searching to express his sense of Orthodoxy, not official (as his writings were not allowed to be published in Russia) but public, rural, historical, poetic and finally common. "That is how a Russian person feels God", "that's how he prays", "that's what he is looking for in faith", "that's what he hopes for". We cannot find anything like this or close to the works of neither Cyril of Alexandria nor Athanasius the Great. All of them gave the constructions of dogmas, all of them were thinkers, all of them were scholastics, they always relied on

texts, in their thoughts they followed and partly copied Plato (more often) or Aristotle (in Western theology). However, in Khomyakov's works we can see an immense love, immeasurable admiration for the Russian sense of God and faith. This is more important for him than the text and more indisputable than Aristotle. This is why the official theology, theology schools, could not be connected to the ideas of Khomyakov in any way, but in the end everything new and efficient went along Khomyakov's path and recognized his ideas, or rather his sense of theological truths, to be correct, promising and fruitful" [17].

And Khomyakov's sense of faith is not related in any way to the religious senses of the German scholars, F. Schleiermacher or P. Natorp, it is not related to the objective pure mathematical feeling of the infinite, for him it is specified, common and subjective.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we would like to return to the main characteristics of A.S. Khomyakov as a Christian philosopher, which can be clarified among other things by comparing to the characteristics of a religious philosopher. Approximately, with a great deal of conventionality we can point out a few of them:

According to another famous Russian theologian, Khomyakov preferred "not to prove and define", but indicate and describe [18].

There is a need for compulsion, not academicism in theology of the Russian thinker. Therefore, when one points out the aspects, which are not or poorly disclosed in Khomyakov's theology, the historical situation and the basics, which his works were published, should be kept in mind.

It is the feeling of faith, not faith itself and certainly not the mind that plays the main part in the frame of Khomyakov's thinking.

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