

TRDL7061: Modern Orthodox Theologians

Orthodoxy looking outward: Universalism in Orthodox Ecclesiology:

A.S. Khomiakoff and S.N. Bulgakov

As Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia (Timothy Ware) has observed in his well-known book *The Orthodox Church*, the Orthodox Church claims to be universal. This aspiration to universality has manifested itself over the centuries in a variety of ways. The strong preference for grounding Orthodox doctrine on the decisions of *ecumenical* (meaning 'universal') councils is probably an ancient example: from antiquity, Orthodox doctrine addresses itself to the entire inhabited world – or at least to the entire Roman Empire! Subsequent generations of Orthodox theologians have not had the luxury of presuming that their culture and the entire universe are in any meaningful sense coterminous. Particularly after the numerous reforms within the Christian West, the Orthodox sometimes found themselves in correspondence with churchmen and theologians who were impressively well educated, keen to learn more about the beliefs and customs of Eastern Christians, but not overly deferential. The correspondence between Jakob Andreae and Martin Crusius, Lutheran divines in Tübingen, and Patriarch Jeremias II (written c. 1576-81) provides an excellent example. During the age that we are studying in this course, Orthodox theologians in Russia had become involved in comparable discussions.

Perhaps the most important instance was the correspondence between William Palmer (Magdalen College, Oxford) and Alexey Stepanovich Khomiakoff, subsequently edited by W.J. Birkbeck and published as *Russia and the English Church*. Palmer was unique within the Oxford Movement for his sustained interest in the Eastern Church, some further evidence of which is to be found in *Notes of a Visit to the Russian Church* (London, 1882), a volume edited by John Henry Newman. Around the same time that Newman, Palmer, Pusey and others were arguing that the Church of England is one of the 'branches' of the 'One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church' confessed in the Creed, Khomiakoff (1804-60) for his part was involved in attempts to assert the 'traditional' character of Russia, by way of reacting against the westernization of Russian society by Peter the Great and Catherine the Great. This westernization had directly affected the Russian Church, for one of the major changes that Peter the Great instituted was the Procurator, a body within the Imperial government under the direction of the *Ober-Procurator* and having authority over the Church. Khomiakoff and other Slavophiles were deeply committed to the proposition that Russia need not follow slavishly after Western developments and were prepared to criticise Western trends on the basis of Russian culture. In consequence of this commitment, Khomiakoff was able to move beyond what was already in his time a very old strategy among the Orthodox, whereby they relied on Protestant theology when they felt threatened by Catholics (as with Cyril Lukaris, the 'Calvinist' patriarch of Constantinople) and turned to Catholic theology

when they felt threatened by Protestants (as in Peter Moghila's *Orthodox Confession*). Consequently, in his correspondence with Palmer on the Church of England and the Church of Russia, from which the first reading in this packet is taken, Khomiakoff made original contributions to ecclesiology from an Orthodox perspective that was knowledgeable, but critical, of western trends.

Khomiakoff situates his account of proper ecclesiology with reference to two key terms: *freedom* and *unity*. He avers that in the Roman Catholic Church unity is found at the cost of freedom, whereas in the Protestant Churches freedom is found at the cost of unity. By contrast, in the Orthodox Church both are preserved. The concept that explains how in practical terms this is possible is *sobornost* – 'catholicism' in a particular sense of that term. In Khomiakoff's usage, 'catholicism' refers not to the universal geographic extension of belief but to the intensive and internal unity that joins the members of the Church into a whole. Such an ideal was, he believed, consistent with the traditional Muscovite values that had been obscured by Peter the Great's reforms. Moscow, rather than St Petersburg; the collective farm, rather than the depersonalised factory: the deep preferences which allied Khomiakoff to the Slavophile movement are basic to his thinking about the church.

About a decade after Khomiakoff's death, Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov (1871-1944) was born to a priestly family in Livny. Bulgakov was chiefly trained in law and political economics and during the course of his studies he conceived a serious interest in Marxism and gradually moved away from Orthodox Christianity. By the turn of the century, however, Bulgakov's interest in Christianity was re-awakened and he quickly gained recognition as a major figure in the intellectual conversations that included Tolstoy, Vladimir Solovyev, Pavel Florensky and others. Bulgakov was involved in politics, secular (in 1906, he was elected as a Christian Socialist to the Second Duma) and ecclesiastical (in November 1917, he participated as a layman in the All-Russian Sobor' that appointed Bishop Tikhon (Bellavin) patriarch of Moscow). That Sobor' convened in the first flush of hopeful possibility for renewal after the Russian Revolution swept away the Procurator: it announced a series of decisions aimed at rolling back the innovative measures that had been taken by Peter the Great, some two and a half centuries earlier.

That council established the terms and conditions that made possible the self-determination within the Russian tradition that was characteristic of the Metropolia in North America (now the self-governing, or *autonomous*, Orthodox Church in America (OCA)) and, during the archiepiscopacy of Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom), the Diocese of Sourozh in Great Britain. It is not by accident that Bloom frequently echoed Bulgakov's views about the important role to be played in Orthodoxy by lay Christians. The egalitarian tone of Bulgakov's ecclesiology owes much to his sympathetic reading of Khomiakoff's message about *sobornost*, but his own claims about ecclesial authority (which, although presented as anti-papalism, sometimes

come giddily close to anti-clericalism) are a departure and were probably intensified by the shattering in Russia of the ancient links between State and Church. For even though some major ideals survived in Western Europe and North America, it must be said that the hopes inspired for Russia itself by the Sobor' of 1917 were short-lived. Within five years under the Bolshevik regime the Russian Church entered a phase of persecution and martyrdom which was unprecedented in its own history and indeed the scale and ferocity of which was unprecedented in world history. (Many Orthodox had supported the White Army and so earned the hatred of the Bolsheviks, which was compounded by Lenin's animus against the Church as part of his pursuit of a classless society.) A large population of Russians left, many of whom eventually found refuge in Paris. Bulgakov was among their number.

Under the leadership of Metropolitan Evlogy (Georgievsky), the Institut de théologie orthodoxe Saint-Serge was founded in 1925 for the purposes of training priests and educating lay Christians. Bulgakov had begun publishing serious books in the tradition of Russian religious philosophy long before emigrating from Russia, so it was natural that he was one of the founding members of the Institut's faculty. He remained on the faculty, teaching dogmatic theology and, from 1940, serving as dean, until his death in 1944. With the presence of Saint-Serge, Paris became an important centre for Orthodox intellectual life – much as it was, and long had been, for Catholic life. During Bulgakov's period of productivity in France, the movement of *réssourcement* known as the 'Nouvelle Théologie' was gathering strength. Bulgakov's contemporaries included Etienne Gilson, the noted scholar of Thomism at the Sorbonne (1921-32), and Henri de Lubac, whose work on scriptural exegesis is still highly regarded and was professor in Lyons (1929-61); among Bulgakov's younger contemporaries were Jean Daniélou and around the same time Yves Congar. Their collective influence was evident in the Second Vatican Council. Although he wrote some considerable time before that council, Bulgakov's writings on the Orthodox Church have an affinity to typical ideas associated with the Second Vatican Council, such as the appropriation of resources from the past in response to the novel problems of the present, confidence that the Holy Spirit provides guidance, the decentralisation of external authority, and a warming to the possibility of reconciliation with other Christian churches.

A.S. Khomiakoff

Source:

'The Church is One,' in W.J. Birkbeck, ed., *Russia and the English Church*, London: Rivington, 1895: 192-222.

Other major publication:

L'Eglise Latine et le Protestantisme au point de vue de l'Eglise d'Orient. Recueil d'articles sur des questions religieuses, écrits à différentes époques et à diverse occasions, Lausanne: Benda, 1872; reprint: Vevey: Editions Xenia, 2007; also available on-line via the Bibliothèque nationale française : <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k73549v>, accessed 23/01/2012

Secondary literature:

P.P. O'Leary, *The Triune Church: A Study in the Ecclesiology of A.S. Xomjakov*. Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1982.

J.S. Romanides, 'Orthodox Ecclesiology According to Alexis Khomiakov,' *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 2 (1956): 57-73.

R. Wheeler, *Palmer's Pilgrimage: The Life of William Palmer of Magdalen*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006, esp. 289-302.

Sergei Bulgakov

Source:

'The Orthodox Church', in *A Bulgakov Anthology*, London: SPCK, 1976: 119-138.

Other major publications:

The Bride of the Lamb, trans. and ed. Boris Jakim, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002.

The Comforter, trans. and ed. Boris Jakim, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004.

Friend of the Bridegroom, trans. and ed. Boris Jakim, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004.

The Orthodox Church, revised trans. Lydia Kesich. Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1988.

Sophia, The Wisdom of God, revised trans. Christopher Bamford, Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1993.

Secondary literature:

Catherine Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997.

St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly 49 no. 1-2 (2005) – special double issue on Bulgakov.

Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000.

Rowan Williams, *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999.