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Sobornost': A Russian Orthodox term at the heart of Roman ecclesiology

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ABSTRACT: The article discusses the stages of reception by Catholic theology of the concept of “sobornost”, which was included in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church “Lumen Gentium” (“Light to the Peoples”). The author briefly describes the history of the emergence of this term in the writings by A. S. Khomyakov and analyzes the works by Cardinal Yves Congar, Fr. Bernhard Schultze, Abbot Albert Gratieux, Fr. Paul Patrick O’Leary, Fr. Hyacinthe Destivelle, in which this concept was critically comprehended, and thanks to which it was assimilated by the Roman Catholic Church in an updated format. The article analyses the relationship between the concepts of sobornost, catholicity, synodality, conciliarity and collegiality, which are closely connected in contemporary Catholic ecclesiology. These categories are compared with the principle of primacy and the ecclesiastical authority of teaching. The author notes the insufficiency of sobornost without the reality of the sacrifice on the cross, so it must take into account aspects of the relationship between love and the law. The path taken by the concept of “sobornost” from the desk of A. S. Khomyakov to the documents of Vatican II can be viewed as a miracle and an opportunity for dialogue between East and West. The comprehension of Khomyakov’s works by leading Catholic theologians certainly contributes to a deeper analysis of his legacy in Orthodox theology.

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KEYWORDS: ecclesiology, sobornost, catholicity, Vatican II, Lumen Gentium, A. S. Khomyakov, Yves Congar

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Introduction

How come that a term like sobornost', coined expressly in anti-Rome intent, found its way to that centerpiece of Vatican II ecclesiology which is *Lumen gentium*?*¹. To do this we have to first go through various pertinent stages of the history of its reception, from Khomyakov (1804–1860) who coined the term to its follow-up in Catholic reception. Given the vastness of the theme and the breadth of the reception, only some selected experts could be included in this brief article, centered on Catholic reception, yet unfortunately leaving out important Russian figures.

*¹ See, e. g.:
LG 21, 22; UR 3

Our point of departure is Yves Congar, OP (1904–1995), even if his yeoman service in making sobornost' acceptable in the form of a modified sobornost' is rather well known [*Congar 1964b, 125–142*]. Next comes Bernhard Schultze, SJ (1902–1990) as the one who did some of the necessary spadework for the Catholic reception of sobornost'. Following in Schultze's footsteps, Paul Patrick O'Leary, OP (d. 2005), has the distinct merit of having attempted a comprehensive picture of Khomyakov, although the latter defies neat schematization. Riding the crest of the wave, Hyacinthe Destivelle, OP, has successfully located sobornost' in a contemporary historical-theological landscape which crosses the confessional borders of Catholicism and Orthodoxy, joining both¹. A reflection on the theme from a Catholic point of view will be attempted.

1. Here Destivelle, meets half-way, without naming him [*Poggi, 374*]. Both draw attention to S. Tyskiewicz, SJ, professor for Russian and Eastern theology at the Pontifical Oriental Institute (1931–1962), who had drawn attention before Congar to Ivanov's use of the metaphor of the two lungs [*Tyskiewicz 1950*].

I. Yves Congar, Albert Gratieux and Bernhard Schultze: from Ras-bornost' to Sobornost'

I.I. Yves Congar

If we take the recent Catholic reception of sobornost' to have started about a quarter of a century before *Lumen Gentium*, approved and promulgated on 21.11.1964 during Vatican II, especially as it focused on Khomyakov², several names come to mind: Y. Congar³ (1937), B. Schultze (1938) and A. Gratieux (1939). Congar was quick to grasp that for Khomyakov the Church does not need an external magisterium [*Congar 1937, 264–265*]⁴ and sees in the addition of the Filioque to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan symbol the great sin that has destroyed the bond of fraternal love, nothing short of a “fratricide”⁵ because the Catholic Church, in so doing, pretended to have the monopoly on introducing such terms into the creed⁶. On the contrary, truth is granted only to a community where mutual love prevails. He recalls that before chanting the creed in the Eastern — Byzantine — liturgy the prayer is repeated: “Let us love one another so as to be able to confess in a unanimous consensus (i. e., Sobornost') the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”. Indeed, the Church does not even need an ecumenical council, which is more a *witness* to the Church's faith than an organ of dogmatic authority⁷. Congar criticizes Khomyakov for hardly paying attention to the terrestrial Church, to which he attributes the qualities of the celestial Church by defining it exclusively through the Spirit [*Congar 1937, 268–269*].

2. On Congar's influence on the text of *Lumen Gentium*, see: [*Henn*]. See more details in point 1 in the “Comments” section — *Editor's note*.

3. See point 2 of the “Comments” section — *Editor's note*.

4. In this, Congar and B. Bobrinsky meet half-way — in the acknowledgement of the miracle, as Bobrinsky puts it in “The Mystery of the Church: A Course in Orthodox Dogmatic Theology”, of how Orthodoxy guarantees doctrinal unity all the world over without any formal magisterial structure to impose it [*Bobrinsky, 129*].

5. “Fratricide” means a breakup of fraternity, that is, of sobornost'. See more details point 3 of the “Comments” section — *Editor's note*.

6. However, one should not forget that it was not an ecumenical council but Pope Hormisdas who in 519, after peace was shored up between Rome and

Constantinople after the Acacian Schism (484–519), accepted the council of Constantinople I (381) as ecumenical, against which decision no objection was ever raised from either side, thereby securing the universal reception of this council as ecumenical.

7. This position will later be taken up by Alexander Schmemmann (1921–1983), “The Idea of Primacy in Orthodox Ecclesiology”: “The idea of the synod as ‘the visible supreme constitutive and governing organ of church power’ corresponds neither to the slavophile doctrine of ‘sobornost’ (A. Khomyakov) nor to the original function of the synod in the Church. The synod is not ‘power’ in the juridical sense of this word, for there can exist no power over the Church Body of Christ. The synod is, rather, a *witness* to the identity of all churches as the church of God in faith, life and ‘agape’” [*Schmemmann, 159*]. See also: [*Meyendorff*].

By this short comment on Khomyakov, Congar shows himself to be not only conversant with his theology, but has also touched essential aspects of his ecclesiology.

In a later publication, Congar expresses even more succinctly his position on Khomyakov [*Congar 1963*]. His thought would be incomprehensible if not against the backdrop of the first part of 19th century Russia, a Russia victorious over Napoleon yet reeling under the shock of its awareness of being a retrograde country, which is why it kept posing the question about Russia's place in the world. The Russian sympathizers of the West, which are known as West-erners, wanted to take Western progress as a model; the Slavophiles denied this, saying that Russia should not copy others, but draw on its own tradition and be itself. By way of criticism of Khomyakov as he comes across through this presentation, or rather the supportive background, one may ask: are there then no third alternatives, such as to believe firmly, as a Christian, in both tradition and progress [*Farrugia 1996*]? With his maxim of integral rather than abstract knowledge, Ivan Kireevsky soon emerged as the philosophical leader of this group [*Rouleau, 159, 173, 184*], Khomyakov as its theological trail-blazer⁸. Unlike Catholicism, so Khomyakov argued, which has unity without freedom, and Protestantism, which has freedom without unity, Orthodoxy conjoins unity with freedom in love⁹ — so long as all its faithful participate in the faith community and participate in its liturgy and saintly way of life, the Church being a living and spiritually vibrant organism, in other words, a united and free society held together by love. The long list of conditions already belies the fact that the comparison between the three denominations is weighted in favor of Orthodoxy.

8. On this, however, V.V. Zenkovsky points out that: "Although his fundamental philosophic articles were written more or less as a continuation and development of those of I. V. Kireyevsky's — as a result of which Kireyevsky is often considered the creator of the philosophic system of the Slavophiles — Khomyakov's world-view had actually taken shape before Kireyevsky's experienced religious conversion" [*Zenkovsky, 180*], from which Zenkovsky deduces Khomyakov's unquestionable priority.

9. This affirmation by Khomyakov is quoted in full in a work expressly considered to be a continuation of Birkbeck: "I think now that it will be clear what the Easterners mean when they say that Rome and

Protestantism are in reality, only two sides of the same heresy; that Romanism is unity without liberty, and that Protestantism is liberty without unity; that while the unity of the Church is that of a living body, to the life of which every member contributes, whether he be living on earth, or be departed, or be yet unborn, the unity of Romanism is rather that of a brick wall, in which each individual is cemented to another by an arbitrary principle, but does not in the least contribute to the life of the others; while such unity as exists in Protestant communities is that of a number of grains of sand thrown together in a heap" [*Riley, 236*]; cf.: [*Khomyakov 2021, 33, 117*].

While Khomyakov himself did not even use the term *sobornost'*¹⁰, probably fearing censorship at home¹¹, his followers later on developed the theology of what will be called *sobornost'*, retaining his basic tenet of a P-free Church, held together by the reciprocal love of the faithful [*Congar 1963*]. In a word, Congar's sympathetic approach to Khomyakov even before Vatican II, with the support of the robust scientific knowledge he had accumulated, helped the concept to eventually receive a fair hearing. In contact with the Russian diaspora in Paris, Congar had occasion to know *sobornost'* at close quarters¹², thanks, most of all, to his acquaintance with Gratieux¹³. When he was invited as a peritus to Vatican II, Congar managed to make the term accepted in the form of "collegiality", after it was purified from its Slavophile strings and some of Khomyakov's own propensities, such as a collegiality without a magisterium.

1.2. Albert Gratieux

Schultze's study preceded that of A. Gratieux' massive and informative work by a year [*Gratieux 1939a; Gratieux 1939b*]¹⁴. Describing Khomyakov's work as being neither polemical nor apologetical, but an exposition critical of the German-Latin world, Gratieux was bound to reveal that beneath Khomyakov's polemical veneer there was a sincere promoter of reconciliation¹⁵. His attacks on Europe were really an invitation to explain oneself and one's terms, a dictate of his universal frame of mind that went far deeper than his nationalism, with the conviction that Russia had not yet said its last word [*Gratieux 1939a, xi-xii*]. With the coordinates of a perfect Christianity and a

10. It was coined by Yuri Samarín (1819–1876) on the model of *sobornaja*, the adjective Saints Cyril and Methodios, apostles of the Slavs, used as an adjective for Catholic Church in the creed. Moreover, *The Church is One* was first published in French, in Paris. It was published, in 1864, independently in Russian (by Giliarov-Platonov in *Pravoslavnoe Obozrenie*) and in an English translation (made from a manuscript) in London by Samarín. See: [*Loulié 2021a*].

11. "Khomyakov wrote his essay in 1844 or 1845, but his treatment of the subject was so unusual and provocative that he was unable to publish it anywhere during his lifetime. It appeared only in 1863 in a Russian periodical *Russkoe Obzrenie* three years after the author's premature death" [*Zernov, 3*]. Zernov is here mistaken, for "The Church is One" first appeared in 1864.

12. As editor-in-chief, Congar published Gratieux's works as n. 5, 6 of *Unam Sanctam*, and n. 6, and the

first part of n. 25 of *Unam Sanctam*, with a translation from Russian by Roger Tandonnet, A. S. Khomyakov, *L'Eglise est une* appended to n. 25 [*Gratieux 1939a, Gratieux 1939b, Gratieux 1953*].

13. Albert Gratieux (1874–1951) served as military chaplain to the Armée de Rhône (1923–1930); he defended his thesis on Khomyakov in Strassburg in 1932 [*Ladous*].

14. While Bolshakoff says nothing about Schultze, he considers Gratieux's book as original, the best book on Khomyakov not written in Russian, but without studying him as a theologian [*Bolshakoff, 281*].

15. "Toutes ses pensées ont été vécues avant d'être formulées, et lui-même ne laisse pas de redire qu'entre la parole et la plume, il préférerait cent fois la parole dans la conversation chaude et vivante" [*Gratieux 1939a, x*].

fervent nationalism, Khomyakov's universalism defies systematization and is prone to repetition, which nonetheless manifest the profound unity of his thought [*Gratieux 1939a, xiii*]. Gratieux' service was that of acclimatizing especially the thinker Khomyakov as a person and as a theologian in a European context, without especially occupying himself in depth with Khomyakov's thought; a further service was that of having made him known to Congar.

1.3. *Bernhard Schultze*

It was reserved for Bernhard Schultze, SJ (1902–1990)¹⁶, at the beginning of his teaching career as dogma professor at the Pontifical Oriental Institute, to do the spadework. Schultze's interest in Khomyakov was not accidental. When he took up the pen for the first time to discuss him it happened to be the fifth centenary of the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438–1439), and here two interests coincided: Khomyakov's life was dominated by a revulsion against the Filioque¹⁷; Schultze's apologetical interests to defend the Catholic faith as a theologian were galvanized precisely by such a frontal attack. Yet though apologetical in defense of his faith, Schultze was not personally polemical, but let his great admiration for Khomyakov shine through. The two met half-way; from this meeting there ensued a number of important studies. It was however the first article (1938) more than any of the other writings, except perhaps Khomyakov's portrait in *Russische Denker*, that laid the foundations for his approach to Khomyakov. Some of these remarks remain valid until the end of his analyses.

We may at this point prefix Schultze's critical appreciation. Quoting N. V. Arseniev, Khomyakov was

perhaps the greatest Russian theologian (whereby he was not even a professional theologian) and Church philosopher... Rightly has Samarina in the edition of his works seven years after his death called him 'the Father of the Church of the modern Russian Church' [*Arseniev, 87*].

16. See: [*Farrugia 1990*]. Interest in Russian theology was one of the main areas of Schultze's specialization. In 1936 he wrote his doctoral dissertation on *Die Schau der Kirche bei Nikolaj Berdiajew*, published in Rome 1938 [*Schultze 1938b*]. Schultze used the term *rasbornost'* in an essay, "Tre tipi di 'coscienza ecclesiastica'", where he says: "Difficult communion or *sobornost* easily becomes *ras-bornost* or disgregation... The unwieldy synthesis easily gives way to the insub-

ordination of fragmentary knowledge" [*Schultze 1954, 9*] (cf.: [*Farrugia 1990, 281–282*]). His critical appreciation for Khomyakov is found in: [*Schultze 1950, 91–99*]. Schultze considers Khomyakov the exact counterpart of Pyotr Čaadaev [*Schultze 1950, 91–99*].

17. "The controversy has focused on the trinitarian implications of the 'filioque'. Xomjakov is more interested in the ecclesial dimension of the problem..." [*O'Leary, 224*].

What is more remarkable for Schultze the apologist is that after repeating the litany of praises of Khomyakov as the true spokesman of Orthodoxy whose influence in leading spiritual circles keeps growing, he says that Arseniev is basically right, in spite of the fact that he expressly notes Khomyakov's deep-seated anti-Rome stance [*Schultze 1950, 91, 94*]. Moreover, Schultze expresses severe criticism of Khomyakov, who, to his telling, lacks a balanced soteriology, Christ's redemptive act being mentioned, but considered basically from the viewpoint of eternity [*Schultze 1950, 96–97*]. Besides, the spiritual and the concrete historical aspects of the Church gape wide apart, so that the relationship between the *internal* (mystical) dimension of the Church and its *external* aspects remain unmediated to one another [*Schultze 1950, 97–98*]¹⁸. Last but not least Khomyakov is, for Schultze, ultimately pantheistic¹⁹, a charge which is understandable for he was dealing [in his philosophy] with Hegel, Schelling and German idealism generally [*Schultze 1950, 92*]²⁰.

In his 1938 article, Schultze discusses Khomyakov by contextualizing the latter's criticism of the Filioque. The difference between East and West lies not so much in dogma as in the mentality, says Schultze, a rather remarkable concession for a Prussian Jesuit who was a stickler to the letter of dogmatic expressions. What the pope is for Catholics, the people taken in its entirety is for Russians. In effect, Khomyakov denies that there is any difference between the teaching and the learning Church [*Schultze 1938a, 473*]²¹. In this context, Schultze focusses on the encyclical of the four patriarchs in answer to Pius IX's invitation in 1848 to return to the see of Peter, because Khomyakov was never tired of insisting that his own theology of the Church finds its essence in the Encyclical of the Four Patriarchs in answer to Pope Pius IX's open letter of 6.01.1848 addressed to the patriarchs to return back to the see of Peter²². It is however the attention Schultze pays

18. The idea, now common to many Orthodox and even Catholic theologians, that an authority outside of the Church is no authority, has nowhere been so forcefully expressed as in Khomyakov. See: [*Congar 1937, 264–265*]. The italics are by EGF as the duality of “external — internal” touches one of the deepest points in Khomyakov; see: [*Khomyakov 1968, 19–21*].

19. But did Schultze mean, perchance, “pan-en-theistic”, a common confusion against which Paul Tillich vigorously protested?

20. See more details point 4 of the “Comments” section — *Editor's note*.

21. Cf.: It is the whole Church, and not the hierarchy alone, who is responsible as the guardian of the truth [*Khomyakov 1975, 94–95*].

22. This encyclical is considered to be one of seven symbolical books expressive of Orthodox teaching, an expression, for G. Florovsky, particularly typical of the tradition and school Peter Mogila (1596–1646) initiated, a veritable pseudomorphosis, or malformation, of Russian Orthodox religious consciousness and mind. Lacking an accompanying spiritually creative movement, the resulting scholasticism was imitative and provincial, simply school theology. “This signified a new stage in religious and cultural consciousness. But in the meantime, theology was torn from its living roots. A malignant schism set in between life and thought”. Florovsky concludes that, for all the lively interchange between Kiev and the West, “...the aura of doom hovered over the entire movement” [*Florovsky, 85*].

to the text of the encyclical that provides the most interesting point of discussion. Khomyakov was quoting from memory²³ when he cited it, little wonder then that he cited it wrongly. The word ὑπερασπιστής [*Jugie*, 488, 542]²⁴, which in Greek means “defender”²⁵, he translated as хранитель, which in Russian simply means “keeper, custodian, curator” [*Jugie*, 488, 542]. Schultze found himself before this dilemma: how explain that a genius of the stature of Khomyakov, who was besides so attached to his Orthodoxy, fully ignores in his ecclesiology such an important aspect of the Orthodox Church as its magisterium? Drawing upon M. Jugie, A. A., he interpreted the Patriarchs’ Encyclical as speaking on the particular case of hierarchs introducing novelties, as the Union Councils of Lyons II (1274) and Florence I (1438–1439) were generally considered to be by the Orthodox, and not as speaking on the magisterium in general. Schultze therefore argues that Khomyakov unintentionally misread the text of the Four Patriarchs. The patriarchs’ concern was certainly not to lessen their own authority as teachers in the eyes of their flock, but rather to curb the ambitions of such hierarchs as introduce novelties — in Greek, καινοτομία is usually a synonym for heresy — a jibe therefore against Rome [*Schultze 1938a*, 478–479]. Khomyakov’s interpretation thus floundered on his presupposition that, in matters of faith, there is no distinction between the teaching and the learning Church, and that therefore there was no special magisterium of the hierarchy. This, however, brought him criticism from several quarters. Khomyakov’s interpretation was thus a matter of — *Eisegese*, in this case, reading into the text through that professional deformity which comes from citing from memory without controlling the text [*Schultze 1938a*, 483]²⁶.

Particularly troubling is the caricature Khomyakov uses, which came to form part of the stock accusations against churches other than the Orthodox Church: The Catholic Church is one, but not free; Protestantism is free but not one; Orthodoxy is both one and free, in

The books still enjoy a certain prestige among the Orthodox as an accurate document of the times, however unfortunate, in which they were written [*Basile (Krivochéine)*].

23. In his Fifth Letter to Palmer, when he comes to this moot issue, Khomiakov admits: “I have not the Encyclical with me, and can only quote from memory” [*Birkbeck*, 94].

24. A Dictionary of Patristic Greek gives for ὑπερασπιστής the meaning of “protector, champion” [*Lampe*, 1438].

25. Renders the word as “protector”: “Moreover, neither patriarchs nor councils could then have introduced novelties amongst us, because the *protector of religion* is the very body of the church, even the people themselves, who desire their religious worship to be ever unchanged and of the same kind as that of our fathers” [*Response*, 282]. A few lines below Pius IX himself is called *protector*, therefore reduced to the level of the people.

26. Cf.: [*O’Leary*, 97].

the bond of love²⁷. This has brought Khomyakov much criticism, and not only from V. Solov'ev²⁸ and N. Afanas'ev²⁹, but also from many others. How could such a fine philosopher stoop so low, especially as in his correspondence with William Palmer (1811–1879), fellow of Magdalene College, he is more nuanced?³⁰ Could not here Khomyakov have been a victim of his own memory, and deflected his revulsion against the Branch theory onto Protestantism and Catholicism, sparing only Russian Orthodoxy³¹? The “Three Branch Theory” had been propounded by another Anglican, also by the name of William Palmer (1803–1885), Fellow of Worcester College, and author of the two-volume work³². As an Anglican on a visit to Russia, the younger Palmer had nothing else to offer³³. His two visits to Russia, in 1840 and in 1841–1842, came close on the heels of the publication of the older Palmer's two volumes, which was the talk of town, nay of the scholarly world of theologians. More: the younger Palmer had come to Russia to test the Three Branch Theory, according to which the Church is made of three branches, with Orthodoxy for the Greek and Slavic peoples, Catholicism for the Latin peoples, and Protestantism for the

27. Schultze understands this against the background of Hegel's triad as follows: Catholicism is the thesis, Protestantism is the antithesis, and Orthodoxy is the synthesis [Schultze 1968, 364]. That Khomyakov rejected idealism can be seen from his first letter to Yu. Samarin, which leads Khomyakov to decry, with express reference to Hegel, the abstract rationalism of the West; see: [Siclari; Babolin].

28. For Solov'ev's criticism of this generalizing of Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism, cf. “Das Slavophiletum und sein Verfall (1889)”, “Diese ideale Vorstellung fassen sie in folgender Formel zusammen: ‘Die Kirche als Synthese von Einheit und Freiheit in Liebe...’” [Szykarski, 223–332, 232–239].

29. From Khomyakov, according to A. Nichols, took the idea that freedom, truth, and love, in the Church, are coextensive, freedom being the corollary of love, whereas truth being the content of freedom..., while rejecting the idea that all these three qualities were exclusive to the Orthodox Church [Nichols, 19–24, 100, 152].

30. In *Russia and the English Church*, Khomyakov tells Palmer: “You are not satisfied with the reception you have met from the Orthodox Communion, and you have an undoubted right to complain; but, in justice to yourself and the Church Orthodox, you must consider whether the line you have followed has been such as to afford her a fair trial” [Birkbeck, 129].

31. One need only read “Khomiakoff's Eighth Letter to Palmer”, to see how critical Khomyakov is of the

Greek Church [Birkbeck, 122–123]. Of course, the comments Khomyakov makes on the conversion of Mr. Newman and Mr. Allies — that “they were certainly better Christians” before and have now lost their open-heartedness now” — [Birkbeck, 122–124] leads the reader to ask how does Khomyakov know this.

32. *Treatise of the Church of Christ: Designed chiefly for the use of students in theology*, Oxford 1838

33. By his insistence of the unity of life and work in Khomyakov, O'Leary misses the opportunity to ask whether the real target of the caricature of *Tserkov Odna* is not the elder William Palmer, Senior, fellow of Worcester College, who espoused his views of the Three Branches in: *Treatise on the Church of Christ*, Oxford 1838. Although we have no documentary evidence that Khomyakov had direct knowledge of the older William Palmer, one may make avail of this hypothesis in connection with D. Valuev's sojourn in England in 1842, Valuev having not only stimulated Khomyakov to write *Tserkov Odna*, but also collaborated in its elaboration. In “Notes of a Visit to the Russian Church”, written by W. Palmer junior and arranged by John H. Newman, London 1882, the cardinal gives an account of Palmer's state of mind on his first visit: [Bolshakoff, 79–80], wherein the doctrine of the Three branches is repeated, without any mention of the elder Palmer of his work. See more details in point 5 in the “Comments” section — *Editor's note*.

English-speaking peoples. One need only read Khomyakov's Eighth Letter to the younger W. Palmer, to see the difference:

My firm conviction, most Reverend sir is, that Romanism is nothing but Separatism, and that humanity has only one choice: Catholic Orthodoxy or Infidelity. *All middle terms* are nothing but preparatory steps towards the latter [Birkbeck, 134].

Could “all middle terms” possibly not include Anglicanism, especially as Anglicanism understood itself as the *middle* way between Roman Catholicism and continental Lutheranism?

2. Paul Patrick O'Leary, OP: the habitat of the initial intuition

Basically, O'Leary took much from Schultze, whose dependence he readily acknowledges³⁴. With Schultze, the Irish dogmatics expert Paul Patrick O'Leary affirms that Khomyakov's opposition to the Filioque and the council of Florence (1438–1439), known for its agreement of Catholics and Orthodox on the Filioque, occupied him all his life. One could have expected O'Leary, so conversant with the anglophone culture of the North, would have delved deeper into the correspondence between Khomyakov and Palmer³⁵.

Another missed opportunity for O'Leary is the following. Khomyakov did not explain his opposition to the *addition* of the Filioque³⁶ into the ecumenical creed ascribed to Constantinople and the prohibition of any addition to this creed at the council of Ephesus (431)³⁷, but on the basis of the council of Chalcedon (451), when we have the first documentation of the symbol known as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed. This is something which neither O'Leary nor Schultze comment. One need only compare Birkbeck's edition of “The Church is One” with Antonella Cavazza's critical edition to see the difference: the first refers to the prohibition of the council of Ephesus (431):

34. See, f. e.: [O'Leary, v, 183, 184, 215, 219, 220, 223, 237, 255–256].

35. N. Zernov in his Introductory Essay says that the correspondence between Khomyakov and the younger William Palmer (d. 1873) deserves special study, because it contains most valuable theological material [Zernov, 14].

36. This polemic against the Filioque as an addition to the ecumenical creed (NC) has a long history, even in Catholic — Orthodox interchanges; cf. [Marx]. For the criticism of this work see: [Gamillscheg, 39–42].

37. For the text of Ephesus (431), canon 7, with its prohibition of another faith, that is, producing, presenting or composing “another faith”, see the work of the Orthodox archbishop, Peter l'Huillier, “The disciplinary work of the first four ecumenical councils” [L'Huillier, 159], followed by a commentary. His conclusion is that the fathers of Ephesus wanted to prohibit private initiatives, not that competent Church organs could not produce new symbols, so that canon 7 of Ephesus (431) cannot be used against the addition of the Filioque; [L'Huillier, 163]. See more details in point 6 in the “Comments” section — *Editor's note*.

“in opposition to the decree of the whole Church (pronounced at the Council of Ephesus)” [*Birkbeck, 202*] ³⁸, Cavazza speaks instead of the prohibition of the whole Church at Chalcedon: “a dispetto della condanna di tutta quanta la Chiesa (espressa al concilio di Calcedonia)” [*Cavazza, 66*] ³⁹. At Ephesus we have no documentation that the text of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed existed, which we possess for the first time at Chalcedon ⁴⁰.

O’Leary contextualizes the insight and gives an-all round and insightful evaluation of Khomyakov ⁴¹. O’Leary describes him as the first independent Russian theologian who was neither simply a self-taught theologian, nor an instinctive anti-Catholic. His name is often invoked together with Filaret, with whom the real overcoming of Westernizing in Russian theology begins [*O’Leary, iii*]. More than the desk, his habitat was the salon, for he was a gifted conversationalist [*O’Leary, 6*]. O’Leary asserts that Khomyakov, unlike Filaret, did not base his thinking on the Fathers, for he was a philosopher rather than a theologian; the fact that he was a thinker rather than simply one who parroted others stood him in good stead in introducing new categories into a stagnant Russian thought, while at the same time deprived him of one of the main saps of Orthodox creativity. Part of his frame of mind was dictated by the political question as to whether Russia belonged to Asia or to Europe [*O’Leary, 20*]. This explains why he got so involved in the identity question as to whether to align with the Westerners or with the Slavophiles [*O’Leary, 16*], becoming in due course the head of the Slavophile theologians. Among the Orthodox witnesses O’Leary invokes is S. Bulgakov, who says: “the soul of Orthodoxy is sobornost’ according to the perfect definition of Khomyakov” [*Bulgakov 1989, 145; O’Leary, 97*].

Essential to Khomyakov’s theology is his distinction between the inner and the outer side of things ⁴². His abhorrence for the outside

38. The identical words, but in brackets (“pronounced at Council of Ephesus”) of the prohibition is found in: [*Zernov, 27*]. For the discussion about the origin of the NC creed ascribed to Constantinople I (381) see: [*Hauschild*].

39. “[I]n spite of the condemnation of the whole Church, expressed at the council of Chalcedon”. And here is the text of Chalcedon: “Now that these matters have been formulated by us with all possible care and precision, the holy and ecumenical council has decreed that no one is allowed to produce or compose or construct another creed or to think or teach otherwise” [*Acts, 204*].

40. In n. 7 of the Palmer’s translation of Khomyakov, *The Church is One*, no mention is made of which council forbade any addition.

41. Zenkovsky says in his section on the basic point of departure of Khomyakov’s philosophy that “we find in Khomyakov no systematic outline, however compressed, of his philosophic ideas” [*Zenkovsky, 186*].

42. In *The Church is One*, Khomyakov explains further: “External unity is the unity manifested in the communion of the sacraments; while internal unity is unity of spirit. Many (as for instance some of the martyrs) have been saved without having been made partakers of so much as one of the Sacraments of the Church (not even Baptism) but no one is saved without partaking of the inward holiness of the Church, of her

view is reflected in his teaching on the sacraments, whereby he refuses to link rites to sacraments, linking them instead to Christ himself [O'Leary, 103]. O'Leary readily accepts that Bulgakov is more nuanced than Khomyakov, yet he presents this as putting the latter in a thoroughly good light.

...Paul Evdokimov accepts Khomyakov's position unquestioningly. Sergius Bulgakov presents a more nuanced picture but in the last analysis accepts Khomyakov's basic tenet. He puts it in terms of the replacement of the very heart of the Church, unity love, with the principle of spiritual power. To replace this inner life of the Church with an external organ of infallibility is heresy. For Bulgakov the "soul of orthodoxy is sobornost' according to the perfect definition of Khomyakov". By sobornost' in this text Bulgakov means the ultimate quality of mutual love as a criterion of truth, as exemplified in Khomyakov's theory of reception [O'Leary, 97]⁴³.

Both N. Zernov and N. Berdyaev criticize Khomyakov for his double standard in judging Eastern and Western Christianity, so that by concentrating on the inner life of Orthodoxy he oversees its concrete limits, whereas in focusing on the external life of the West he is blind to its inner life. In this way, Khomyakov does not compare like to like. Similarly, the Church becomes an exclusive inner reality, to view which one needs to be spiritually in tune with this reality, but even to see the visible Church one must be animated with the principle of faith in unison with love [O'Leary, 103–104]. More serious criticism is that Khomyakov does not have any soteriology (E. C. Suttner) or eschatology (N. Berdyaev), so that there is no relation between Christ's death and his Church [O'Leary, 112–113]. Should, as often asserted, the Church have no visible head, this would weaken eucharistic ecclesiology (A. Schmemmann, N. Afanas'ev) [O'Leary, 114]⁴⁴. But the strangest omission is that Khomyakov, whose sobornost' has been translated as conciliarity, nowhere discusses the synodal form of Church government [O'Leary, 106].

faith, hope and love: for it is not works which save, but faith" [Khomyakov 1975, 35]. Here Khomyakov comes tantalizingly close to Lutherans' formula, but especially to the general Christian position, including the Catholic.

43. The quote from Evdokimov is taken from his work, *L'Orthodoxie*, see: [Evdokimov, 158–161] that from S. Bulgakov is taken from his work, see: [Bulgakov, 74]; for reception see: [O'Leary, 106].

44. Schmemmann's meaning of sobornost' is quite different from Khomyakov's [O'Leary, 114]; for one thing he accepts a universal primacy.

3. Hyacinthe Destivelle: bringing the insight historically up-to-date

Destivelle, a French Dominican, continues in the tradition of Yves Congar (d. 1995) and Hervé Legrand, but has unlike them pursued his studies not only in Paris, but also in Sankt-Petersburg. Synodality has been at the center of his studies, especially in its concrete form at the Synod of Moscow. The driving force, in Destivelle, for the study of sobornost' is his engagement in ecumenism. At Vatican II, Congar managed to make acceptable a modified form of sobornost' as collegiality [*Destivelle*, 103–105]. If Gratieux had mediated Khomyakov to Congar, after Vatican II Congar turned to V.V. Bolotov (1853–1900) and thus moved away from sheer complementary to the hermeneutics of diversity [*Destivelle*, 107]. This move itself was a deepening of interest in sobornost', for it was accompanied by a move away from apostolicity (where the dome of St. Peter loomed large) to the search for catholicity, (where the same dome is now accompanied by the bulb-shaped dome in the premises of the Russian embassy). For Congar, Khomyakov, Soloviev, and Bolotov were three steps in the right direction [*Destivelle*, 107, 110]. While the Orthodox Church itself never accepted the Slavophile form of sobornost' because of its sidetracking the magisterium as such, patristic sobornost' meant, for the Orthodox conscience, the ecclesiology of communion, whereby bishops are within the Church not outside it [*Destivelle*, 107–108]. To see Paul VI and Athenagoras I hugging one another in Jerusalem was prophetic, and has been repeated for example when Francis and Bartholomew embraced one another [*Destivelle*, 108]. As mercy surpasses evil, reconciled union (better than Destivelle's unity here) surpasses conflict, integrating it by purifying the good core in the conflict, the resultant unity being a case of "reconciled diversity" [*Destivelle*, 116 ff]⁴⁵.

Benedict XVI considered purifying memory⁴⁶ more significant than theological dialogue [*Destivelle*, 65–66]. In this context of reconciliation, however, one cannot be content with purifying memory, but must also de-pollute nature and culture, whereby celebrating the feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius as models of enculturation, as happens in Slavic countries when they celebrate it as a Day of Slavic Culture, is a case in point [*Destivelle*, 185–198]. The much-deplored euro-centric

45. Phrase Cardinal Mario Bergoglio has used, "reconciled community", derives from O. Cullmann (d. 1999).

46. Purifying memory — a term introduced by Pope John Paul II on the eve of the jubilee year 2000, is associated with the idea of general church repentance. — *Editor's note*.

stance in religion has been a significant step in this direction, but it has made not only Christianity less European, but Europe also less Christian. By way of criticism one may add, from a European point of view, one must encourage such de-centralization, but accompany it step by step with measures to recover the Christian roots of Europe [*Destivelle, 188–189*]. Spiritual ecumenism in the case of Europe cannot simply mean prayer and purifying memory, but also helping maieutically a paradigm shift to take place in such old institutions born in Asia and Africa and protracted in Europe [*Farrugia 2015*]. Unity means neither absorption nor submission, but that a person with two distinct but reconciled identities can live in harmony. A superficial view of Vatican II is that it impaired the once thriving foreign missions, once so sustained by Europe; the impression is both true and false: because the pre-Vatican II idea unwittingly relayed the false idea that only the foreign missions are a mission, whereas mission, especially in the perspective of Vatican II, is wherever the Church needs you, so that one could say, every mission, like every person, is unique [*Farrugia, Gargano*]. The Church becomes then an assorted ensemble of unique Churches and unique persons, yet not at loggerheads with one another because they live in communion. As H. Legrand put it:

The catholicity of the Church becomes tangible when the Church appears as a people of persons from every tribe, people and nation (Rev 5:9) gathered in front of the Lamb's throne, to which territoriality serves as a bulwark against forgetting this. ...The unity of the Church should not be understood as centered around a bishop, but rather as concentrated around the unity of the *episcopé*... [*Destivelle, 253*].

Far from imperiling its catholicity, the dimension of the local Church guarantees its catholicity [*Destivelle, 253*]. The fourth Gallican article Bossuet drafted⁴⁷, thus anticipated Khomyakov [*Destivelle, 262*]. Since the Orthodox Church has rejected the same point in Khomyakov, an unsuspected approach to Vatican I thus comes to light. Which is why, in 1902, archimandrite Michail Semenov criticized canonists as indulging in a common law divorced from life [*Destivelle, 297–298*]. The most significant thing about Semenov is that, with Khomyakov, he asserted that the Church has no juridical but only a charismatic

47. The fourth Gallican article (March 19, 1682) reads as follows: "Although the pope has the chief part in the questions of faith, and his decrees apply to all

the Churches, and to each Church in particular, yet his judgment is not irreformable, at least pending the consent of the Church" [*Schatz, 189*].

organization/constitution. In so doing he repristinated Sohm's thesis, later taken up by Khomyakov:

La tâche première du canoniste est de présenter la loi de l'Église en lien avec son application pratique à la vie, de justifier sa sainteté et son utilité, de montrer que le droit ecclésial n'est pas un assemblage casuistique de règles disciplinaires et de préceptes arbitraires, mais de normes de vie, le développement des lois indispensables au développement moral de la société ecclésiastique [Destivelle, 297]⁴⁸.

Expert on the Moscow Council (Sobor) of 1917, Destivelle notes that this — the first since the one which deposed Patriarch Nikon in 1666–1667 — is more important for introducing a true form of synodality than for having restored the patriarchate, a Slavophile maxim which harks back to Khomyakov [Destivelle, 304–305]. For all the criticism of Florovsky, the Council made a difference between the role of bishops and other laity, as the bishops were assigned the right to confirm and consequently to veto [Destivelle, 312]. The Council proved to be innovative, and not a simple return to the past, assigning — on parliamentary rather than a presidential charter — the patriarch the right to be commemorated in the diptychs and to consecrate the Myron [Destivelle, 322–324].

Destivelle mentions three dimensions of sobornost': (1) the *democratic* which wants to include all the faithful, without any distinction between the teaching and the learning Church; (2) the *episcopalist* view, which emphasizes the authority of bishops; and (3) the *charismatic* view, which tries to combine both, allowing the bishops the right to veto the proposals or even a decision [Destivelle, 306 ff]. Pitting sobornost' against the Petrine state-controlled "synodality", they hoped to restore a principle of conciliarity as it was practiced before Peter I's reforms [Destivelle, 306]. In the Moscow Council of 1917, the Slavophiles had a particular grudge against the "synodality" associated with the Holy Synod introduced by Peter the Great in 1721 to replace the conciliarity of the patriarchate, a novelty which meant, however, a shameless subordination of the Church to the State. This opposition between "synodality" and conciliarity, was farther implemented, in the Petrine

48. The position of the hierom. Mikhail (Semyonov) generalized by Fr. Hyacinthe Destivelle. See.: Semenov (Michail), hierom. Two systems of state-to-church relations: Roman and Byzantine-Slavic understanding of the principle of church-state relations / Speech before the defense of the dissertation "Legislation of the Roman-Byzantine emperors on the external rights

and advantages of the church" // Orthodox interlocutor. 1902, part 2, pp. 26–46. The dissertation was published as a separate edition: Mikhail (Semyonov), hierom. Legislation of the Roman-Byzantine emperors on the external rights and advantages of the church (from 313 to 565). Kazan : Typo-lithography of the Imperial University, 1901. LII, 260 p.

reform, by a certain *kollegialnost'*, or “collegiality”, whereby colleges were introduced throughout the Russian Orthodox Church reducing the bishops to presidents of a parliament of sorts, with the individuals tending their own particular interests instead of seeking to sacrifice their own interests for the sake of the Church’s common cause [*Destivelle*, 306–307]. This system came to an end with the restoration of the patriarchate in 1917. The restoration of the patriarchate was carried out on innovative lines, because it was not simply a return to the past: it was in this context that the bishops received the rights to veto in spite of the one head, one vote regulation [*Destivelle*, 312, 322].

In recent discussions, e. g., Ravenna (2007) and Chieti (2016) sobornost' was object of discussion in the sense that the Constantinople-Moscow tension led to a discussion of whether the relationship between primacy and non-Petrine conciliarity are identical at the different levels of the church: local, regional, and universal [*Destivelle*, 385–387]. Destivelle duly notes that Ravenna neither affirmed nor denied such an identity. Crete 2016 brought the discussion to a head, but fortunately the schism remained lop-sided.

Destivelle’s last chapter in this work affords an excellent summary. In 2015, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of bishops, Pope Francis gave his most toward statement on synodality: it is a matter of bringing the periphery to the center⁴⁹. Synodality means reciprocal listening; this is a way of expressing reciprocity of chores and of contribution⁵⁰.

4. To which question is sobornost' the answer? A Catholic comment

From the intellectual environment to which Khomyakov responded and the legacy he bequeathed to the Moscow Council (1917), we note a deep tension between the urge to impose order so as to abet reforms given the state of the Russian Church then, and the need to ensure the permanence of a charismatic spontaneity at the heart of Church governance. Khomyakov’s putting the hierarchy within parenthesis, and the dilly-dallying of prominent members of the Synod with R. Sohm’s thesis⁵¹ of *Frühkatholizismus* points to the convergence of interests

49. Pope Francis gave this remarkable talk on 17 October 2015 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the synod of bishops.

50. For a further discussion of Destivelle’s position see review of Destivelle: [*Farrugia 2020*].

51. K. Felmy notes that Sohm begins and ends the first volume of his *Kirchenrecht*, Leipzig 1892 as follows: “Das Wesen des Kirchenrechts steht mit dem Wesen der Kirche im Widerspruch”: the nature of Church law contradicts the nature of the Church

[*Felmy*, 61–63]. Sobornost’ doubtlessly marks the hallmark of Khomyakov’s theological development.

In its properly theological meaning sobornost refers to the qualities of an ideal community united by the moral law of mutual love and by an ever-deeper faith in divine truth [*Poole*, 146].

*1 Acts 4:32

This idea may easily evoke the depiction of the primitive⁵² community as being one heart and one soul *1. It was the cherished dream of many a saintly founder, as St. Francis (1181/1182–1226), and many a “prophetic” seer, as Giacomo da Fiore (ci. 1132–1202), but ultimately had to come to terms with the inexorable demands of a reality which was anything but idealistic. The keen opposition Khomyakov met even to publish his books, and the necessary modifications sobornost’ was subjected to before it become ecclesially presentable shows this much. Even Kireevsky and Khomyakov, for all their hostility to Catholicism — a hostility which N. Berdyaev has branded as “their fundamental error” — adopted as their basic approach to the perennial questions of faith Anselm’s “faith seeking understanding”, *fides quaerens intellectum* [*Poole*, 139]. Kireevsky called it “believing (faithful) reason” [*Poole*, 142–143], to which Khomyakov remained indebted all his life.

4.1. *The dilemma entailed in sobornost’: charismatic spontaneity or peace guaranteed through order*

For all their profundity, or perhaps precisely because of their lack of shallowness, both Kireevsky and Khomyakov had to pose the question of how sobornost’ as love relates to the imposition of law. Khomyakov solved the creative tension by largely suppressing law as a contrary creative pole. Both Soloviev, greatly indebted to Khomyakov, and Soloviev’s closest disciple, Sergei Trubetskoi (1862–1891), however,

[*Felmy*, 60]. For Sohm’s influence on Russian Orthodox Theology, in spite of his severe criticism of this Church, see: [*Felmy*, 67–73]. Especially noteworthy is Sohm’s influence on Nikolas Afanasiev (1893–1966), who, after modifying Sohm’s approach, could free his own ecclesiology from needless juridical ballast [*Felmy*, 68].

52. One is tempted to replace definitely “primitive” community with “early community”, but in this way the creative charge and freshness, nay, the very uncouthness of the first day of creation is lost. Both terms

may be used, but primitive is in a way an antidote to Sohm: the early community *had* to be primitive, not because it lacked the essentials, but because it was meant to develop in the course of time to better manifest them. One may translate “primitive”, in this context, as the “very early” community, though this is less expressive and primitive says it all, undiplomatically, as grace is. Indeed, Frühkatholizismus, Early Catholicism had anti-Catholic and even anti-Orthodox overtones to it which “primitive”, or very early, community tries to avoid.

especially in their political and social philosophy, went beyond Khomyakov by stressing that authentic knowledge cannot but rest on “the harmonious combination of experience, reason, and faith”.

Soloviev and Trubetskoi valued law as a necessary condition for the existence of society and therefore for the realization of all higher human development — including the ideal moral communities of sobornost (and Soloviev’s very similar social ideal of “free theocracy”). Lopatin had just this difference in mind when he noted that Soloviev and Trubetskoi parted company with the Slavophiles in matters of social and political philosophy. The prominent liberal philosopher Pavel Novgorodstev (1866–1924) praised Soloviev’s moral-philosophical justification of law, in particular against “Slavophile illusions” that law was unimportant and unnecessary for the Russian people... It is certainly true that Slavophilism (especially in the figure of Konstantin Aksakov) contributed greatly to the Russian “tradition of the censure of law”... By the end of the nineteenth century, that tradition was being challenged by powerful new legal philosophies advanced by Russian religious idealists... Yet the necessary element of law was never entirely absent from the Slavophiles’ legacy for Russian philosophical personalism. In his penultimate philosophical “fragment” Ivan Kireevsky wrote: “Justice, morality, the spirit of the people, human dignity, and *the sanctity of lawfulness (zakonnost’)* can all be felt only along with an awareness of the eternal religious relations of humanity” (italics added) [Poole, 148].

From this perspective, sobornost’ is the inspiring ideal that calls for law as counter-ballast. What Khomyakov has to offer by way of the lures of the ideal community needs the concrete law to bring it down to earth — and make it take off!

4.2. *The canon of love*

It is precisely at this point that we come across, first, the universal tension between God’s benevolent will and humans’ hankering for love, but on their own terms ^{*1}, a tension which cannot be suppressed not even under the pretext of striving after a solution. It is this unresolved tension which accounts for the drama of salvation history; and it is Khomyakov’s failure to keep the tension alive as a propellor for God-seeking that flawed his otherwise genial conception of Church law as love. Sobornost’ is precisely untranslatable not only because of its endemic richness, but also because it does not adequately keep alive this — in this world — unresolvable tension between love and law.

*1 See Gen 3:4 ff.

To cap both sides of the polarity under one roof, just one word, we need a term which apparently brings two contradictory terms together without compromising the identity of the one or the other. On the other extreme pole to sobornost', there is a common negative reaction in the West — but not only in the West — against law, often subconsciously identified with legalism, which seems to be at the antipodes to the union of unity in freedom and love proposed by Khomyakov. But: here's the rub. Western Catholics may have the temptation to despise law, but they talk of the best things they have in common with other Catholics in terms of it: the *canon* of Scripture, the *canon* of the mass, and, in *canonization*, they talk of the *canon* of saintliness. So, why not call the dynamics behind sobornost' as catholically adapted — the *canon of love*. It is this canon of love which makes canon law canonical — a precept of love rather than an imposition of constraint. Therefore, the *canon* of truth and love, as well as the *canon* of law is the answer to Sohm and Harnack and the Russians who toyed with the idea of a Church without a law, and with a sub-apostolic age supposed to be for them the betrayal of the first century regime of spontaneity and charism, by what they dubbed Frühkatholizismus. Indeed, renewal of interest in sobornost' was triggered off, at the turn of the century (19th — 20th cent.), by research on Khomyakov and the hesychastic renaissance⁵³.

Sobornost', when finetuned properly by other Orthodox and Catholics have done, is the answer to the impotent dream of belonging to a Church without a law except that of love, which moves ahead not on the basis of inertia, but by an overdose of spontaneity and charism. Khomyakov's three-pronged formula, if it pretended to be a literal description of the three Christian denominations, would be completely beside the point as it cannot do justice to any of them, not even Orthodoxy, even if it were supposed to describe the *concrete* life of Christianity — the Synod of Crete (2016) did not relay, unfortunately, a soothing image of an "agapeic" union in unity and freedom. But if we take it as *an open question to our consciences*, irrespective of which denomination we belong to, the formula is a stroke of genius. All three points can be addressed by all three denominations. There is more than a pinch of truth in claiming that Orthodoxy cherishes dearly the ideal of freedom and unity, because it believes and prays constantly to be under the sway of the Spirit.

53. Destivelle notes that Khomyakov, given his insistence on the Church as a spiritual rather than a juridical organization, is often accused of being a Protestant [Destivelle, 297–298].

We are thus in search of a word which at least linguistically is capable of capturing this tension by suppressing no side of this creative tension between constraint and spontaneity.

4.3. *An ecumenical examination of conscience*

Instead of throwing stones at other denominations, one could take up Khomyakov's *challenge* and make out of it an ecumenical examination of conscience. Many a Westerner, independent of the denomination, has a somewhat deformed approach to law. This negative approach to law is an attitude which can easily capsize into antinomianism or anti-legalism. The argument "This belongs — or does not belong — to our tradition" is much rarer in Western Churches than in Eastern Christian Churches, maybe because in the West there is a certain tendency to see in law a constriction, a restriction of our freedom, and in tradition a brake hindering spontaneity and progress. Unfortunately, those who so argue do not realize how large law is written in their own DNA. One need only read the Old Testament with relish and try to count how often Yahweh enjoins the Israelites to observe his commandments, if they want to be in his good books. The New Testament also manifests a development in all this: if you observe my commandments — and this amounts to loving one another — then one can be friends with God's own Son, Jesus Christ *¹. And St. Paul: all the commandments are summed up in the command:

*¹ Jn 15:1–27

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to your neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law" *².

*² Rm 13:9–10

Overlooking the intrinsic link of law and love leads to that breakup of communal thinking typical of sobornost' that makes Khomyakov's point difficult to understand. The collision or collusion of divine grace and the human will — God's benevolent will and man's reluctant reply, sometimes leading to a clash of wills — thus calls for some sort of paradoxical word to throw light on the riddle without eliminating the mystery: of God's abiding faithfulness in spite of man's fickleness; and even more so, the mystery of God's operation and man's cooperation, sustained by grace; an oxymoron, one might say. Oxymoron — like an "honest thief" (was not Dismas one such honest thief?) or Augustus'

“*festina lente*” (“hurry slowly”, i. e., not convulsively (German: “*nicht kramphaft!*”) etc. throw a revealing light on the clash between the obvious and the unlikely, the apparent and the paradoxical, time and eternity, especially — and ultimately! — eternity and time. Was Christ’s submitting to the law ^{*1} and radically criticizing it not a case of a live paradoxical tension between his ultimate status as God and his concrete status as the God-man.

*1 Lk 2:51

As such an oxymoron, as having enough of the attractiveness of canon in the East, and enough of the legalism to which law easily falls a prey in the West, could perhaps serve the term — “canonicity”. This does not mean it should be added to the trio catholicity, conciliarity and collegiality, but its intent is to try to capture the tension between love and law, spontaneity and constraint, man the recalcitrant and God the indulgent, God squandering his divinely foolish love ⁵⁴ on us, and human beings thinking they can outfox God; the cauterizing effect of Christ’s penetrating look at Peter, and Peter’s ducking his eyes onto the ground which refuses to swallow him.

The term *sobornaja* is the term Sts. Cyril and Methodius used in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed translated into Old Slavonic for “*katholicheskij*” as one of the four marks of the Church ⁵⁵. Yet even this catholicity needs to be expressed, in terms of Church dynamics, through conciliarity, and for the protagonist bishops who keep the Church on the move, collegiality, which results in a catholicity more of a quality than a quantity, as catholicity not a reality accessible to us statistically, but an act of faith: “I believe in the one, holy, *catholic* and apostolic Church”.

Conclusion

We can first look back with gratitude and see how a neologism coined under the duress of circumstances and, appearances to the contrary, managed to insinuate itself at the heart of Catholic churchliness against which it was originally directed. Congar, Gratieux, Schultze, O’Leary and Destivelle have drawn an accurate and insightful roadmap from Khomyakov’s desktop to Vatican II’s aula.

To which question is sobornost’ then the answer? While it is generally acknowledged that the term sobornost’, however attractive,

54. God’s foolish love for us is Nicholas Cabasilas’ word.

55. On the role of Yu. F. Samarín in the emergence of the term sobornost’, see: [Lurie 2020]. — Editor’s note.

is ultimately untranslatable with one word, the more restricted it is in denotation by the meagerness of only three terms, catholicity, collegiality, and synodality, all the richer it is in connotation, like the bird who has only two wings, but whose domain is the unlimited sky. If the concept is so understood to which the corresponding practice would follow suite, we come to benefit from the state of being together without feeling the trammels of constraint: we are together, because we want to be together; we do what God's law requires of us because we want to do it. We dream our dreams which as such admit of no checks, they do not make us omnipotent, but they inject in us the wish to be universal, catholic. We work for collegiality, of consensus, but unanimity, however fragile, is not of this world, the shadow of consensus being dissent. Khomyakov's sobornost's seems to forget at points the cross, and thus remains lop-sided, without an attempt to square the circle, as it were, a language capable of including the less positive aspects of the relationship of love and law.

Indeed, there must be collegiality because we need consensus; and synodality, as we have to move together towards the same goal. A Catholic may feel that, for all its depth, catholicity can be less spontaneous, unless we put a belt of sobornost' to it. How come that an Eastern liturgy, seemingly at the throes of chaos, actually takes place in perfect order, although with a minimum of rubrics⁵⁶? How are we to explain, as Boris Bobrinskoy has so aptly put it [*Bobrinskoy, 129*], that Orthodoxy manages to remain in unanimity of faith without coercion from outside? Yet, it runs into grave difficulties on the practice of praxis. Still, has not St. Irenaeus said: "Our disagreement over the fast confirms our agreement in the faith"?⁵⁷ By which he meant: difference in rite does not jeopardize faith, but rather: faith fosters difference in rite.

It may be easily overlooked that the kind of universality implied in the dialectic of universal Church and local Churches of eucharistic ecclesiology has something to do with the universality of *sobornost'*. If we consider Afanas'ev's masterpiece, *L'Eglise de l'Esprit-Saint*, the same kind of pneumatological orientation becomes evident. So perhaps it would be better to say that the whole discussion that started with Khomyakov and continued with Afanas'ev had as its one theme *catholicity*. Translated at first as "sobornost'" by the Khomyakov disciple Yu. Samarin (1819–1876) [*Khomyakov 1975, 54*], it was used

56. According to a saying of archim. R. Taft, an Eastern liturgy may very well seem to the Western observer to be in complete chaos, but deep down there is a harmony determined by a minimum of rubrics.

57. Irenaeus said this in the context of the Paschal Controversy of the Quartodecimans in the second century.

by the young G. Florovsky, who, however, later on, settled for “catholicity”. I suggest, however, that the word *sobornost’*, usually translated as collegiality or catholicity or synodality, would profit if all three words were interpreted from the viewpoint of “canonicity”, so long as a Westerner recovers the depth the word has for an Easterner and does away with any legalistic narrowing of the concept. *Sobornost’* somehow expresses at once catholicity, collegiality, and conciliarity [*Farrugia 1996, 199*].

It is half a miracle that a concept like *sobornost’* with its anti-Catholic implications came to be received, albeit after a thorough cleansing, at the heart of contemporary Catholic ecclesiology. The other half of the miracle would have been had Khomyakov been an observer at Vatican II: with gratitude but also with an accrued sense of self-criticism he would have rejoiced that the seed of the mustard seed had flourished to the extent to be able to house, in principle, all the peoples.

Comments

1. Henn distinguishes various phases and aspects in Congar’s influence on the text [*Henn, 570 ff.*]. He focuses on four main texts Congar himself claims to have influenced, with our own interpretation in brackets: 1) LG 9 (on the People of God, chapter 2 of LG, before any consideration of the hierarchy, a sort of relativization of the hierarchy, but without excluding it, as Khomyakov did); 2) LG 13 (“In virtue of this catholicity, each part contributes its own gifts to other parts and to the entire Church, so that the whole and each of its parts are strengthened by the common sharing of all things and by the common effort to achieve fullness in unity”, a catholicity reminiscent of *sobornost’*), cf.: [*Farrugia 2014*]; 3) LG 16 (“Whatever of good or truth may be found among them, is considered by the Church to be a preparation of the gospel”, an indirect reference to Khomyakov’s Orthodoxy as being the unity of unity, freedom and love); 4) LG 17, (which portrays the Church as being a triune Church: “For the church is driven by the Holy Spirit to play its part in bringing to completion the plan of God, who has constituted Christ as the source of salvation for the whole world”). Besides these four main texts, Congar [*Congar, 510–511*] refers to “a few other particular passages”, [*Henn, 589–590*], all conciliar references being from A. Flannery [*Flannery*]. Henn sums up as follows: “Congar’s impact on chapter 1 of *Lumen Gentium* was to render it more biblical and patristic, strengthening its reflection on the historicity of the Church and of the Church’s relation to those who are not

Christians" [Henn, 579], and concludes: "His first studies about collegiality, for example, were based upon Russian ideas about the synodality of the Church which Congar took up in his book, on the laity, in 1953" [Henn, 589–590]. Henn, however, does not further specify the corresponding Russian ideas at the basis of synodality (collegiality)

2. Through his contacts with the Russian Diaspora in Paris, Congar's early interest in Khomyakov was to keep growing, and he already mentions him several times in first volume of *Unam Sanctam*, a monograph series founded and directed by Congar for a number of years [Congar 1937]. Congar heard much about Khomyakov from abbé Pierre Baron, his friend from the days of military service in 1924, and whom he met again in the French-Russian Circle with such prominent figures as Nikolai Berdyaev and Jacques Maritain. Baron intended writing a dissertation on Khomyakov. He introduced Congar to St. Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute, in Paris, and to abbé A. Gratioux, who was giving a course on Khomyakov at the Institut Catholique [Congar 1964a, XVI–XVII]. Through Père Marie-Dominique Chenu and his course on the History of Christian Doctrine, Congar came to appreciate Johann Adam Möhler (1796–1838) and learnt to interpret this in terms of a profound Catholic tradition, some of whose ideas are akin to Khomyakov's [Congar 1964a, XII]. Indeed, Congar wanted to publish Möhler's masterpiece, *Einheit der Kirche*, as first number of his monograph series, "Unam Sanctam", though circumstances made it come out second [Congar 1964a, XXXIV–XXXV; Moehler]. Möhler, for Congar, stood for the passage from hostility to non-Catholics to a more serene objective presentation of the others' views in "Symbolik" or *Konfessionskunde*: presenting a denomination on the basis of its symbol or creed, thus letting it speak for itself [Congar 1964, 157, 180, 445]. A kinship of sorts between Möhler and Khomyakov seems often to be taken for granted, as for Congar, because his master Chenu instilled a deep attachment to Möhler. Still, S. Tyszkiewicz, SJ, in his short essay, "Der Kirchenbegriff Möhlers und die Orthodoxie" [Tyszkiewicz 1927, 304–305], however, is loath to speak of dependence, for he thinks that their similarity is due to a thorough knowledge of a common tradition. O'Leary, on the contrary, claims that there is evidence that Khomyakov knew Möhler's works, and that on points, like that of tradition, there may well have been a dependence of Khomyakov on Möhler [O'Leary, 84–85]. Much more authoritative is G. Florovsky's *Ways of Russian Theology* [Florovsky]: although Khomyakov nowhere mentions Möhler, it is by way of affinity that their relationship should

be judged: “Möhler himself defines ‘catholicity’[sobornost’] precisely as unity in plurality, as the continuity of common life. <...> Khomyakov could have above all found in Möhler a congenial generalization of patristic testimony, for in his book Möhler elaborated the doctrine of the Church ‘in the spirit of the fathers of the Church of the first three centuries’ [Florovsky, 47]. On Chenu, Y. Congar: “Der Lehrtätigkeit Chenus wohnte eine außerordentliche Macht inne, Menschen geistig zu wecken. <...> Pater Chenu hat ein ansehnliches Werk hervorgebracht, und doch ist ein Großteil seiner Zeit, seiner Kräfte und seiner selbst in die Arbeit anderer übergegangen“ [Congar 1970, 101]. Elsewhere Congar: “Le Père Chenu, éveilleur incomparable pour toute une génération de jeunes frères prêcheurs, nous avait parlé une fois, dans son cours d’Histoire des doctrines chrétiennes, de Mouvement ‘Foi et Constitution’... tout comme il nous avait parlé de Möhler. Tout cela... a joué un rôle analogue à celui que joue le vent pour disséminer le pollen des fleurs... un rôle d’ensemencement” [Congar 1964a, XI–XII]. For Khomyakov’s ideas used by Congar in sections of LG written by him, see Commentary by [Lourié 2021b, 731–732].

3. In his Second Letter to Mr. Palmer Khomyakov speaks of the innovation of inserting the Filioque into the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed unilaterally as follows: “The bonds of love were torn, the communion of faith... was rejected in fact. <...> I will not say, “Was that lawful? The idea of law and lawfulness may do for casuists... but not for Christians. But I will ask? ‘Was that moral? Was it brotherly? Was it Christian?’” [Riley, 272, 276]. However, the reasons Khomyakov adduces against the doctrine of the Filioque are questionable. Without any reference to a concrete place, it is John 15:26 that he is referring to when he says: “As Christ spoke clearly, so did and does the Church clearly confess that the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father...” [Khomyakov 1975, 27], a saying which nowadays by far not all exegetes interpret so. Khomyakov did not consider that there is a grammatical difference between the preposition “ἐκ” in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, and the proposition “παρά” in John 15:26, “ἐκ” referring to a relation of immanence in the Trinity, “παρά” denoting a relation of mission, of the sending of the Spirit by the Father and the Son; see work of Talatinian, who explains that ἐκπορεύεται (“ὁ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται”) with *parà* means “d’auprès de” (in French), as when one comes out from visiting somebody, therefore an extrinsic relation, whereas with “ἐκ” it denotes an intrinsic relation [Talatinian, 62–65]. In his study, C. Marucci adduces more examples of this trend; see his

conclusions: [*Marucci*, 323–324]. Finally, one should not forget that since V.V. Bolotov (d. 1900), S. Bulgakov (d. 1944) and others, there has been a more positive change in attitude towards the Filioque, Bolotov considering it only “a free” (i. e., non-heretical) opinion, which reproduces Bolotov’s theses [*Congar*, 1982, 74–80]; also [*Gamillscheg*, 65–85; *Bulgakov* 1936]. A certain unclarity in Bolotov’s three-fold distinction (dogma, theologoumenon, free idea) was dispelled by S. Bulgakov, called the Filioque a theologoumenon. The noun was first introduced by Bolotov exactly for the Filioque in his “Theses on Filioque”; the word itself first appeared in the Early Modern Catholic theology for “deviant” opinions of pre-Nicaean Fathers. There was a huge Byzantine corpus of polemical literature discussing these nuances between “ἐκ”, “παρά” and “διά”; theological problems could hardly be resolvable with a recourse to the grammar. Anyway, Khomyakov did not know either Byzantine polemics or the theologians who lived after him. One will in vain look for θεολογούμενον [*Lampe*], nor was it ever used in Byzantine theology nor is it found in the dictionaries of the Byzantine Greek language) “theologoumenon”, for it was first introduced by Bolotov in the context of the Filioque question.

4. In his “Introductory Essay” Zernov comments: “Khomyakov rejected the generally accepted description of the Church as a visible society or a society possessing certain objective marks... Instead of this more usual approach he boldly proclaimed the Church to be the new life in the freedom of the Holy Spirit, available only to those who received the gift of divine grace. ...Khomyakov liberated the notion of the Church from the legalistic and confessional controversies which for long had dominated the mind of Christians” [*Zernov*, 11]. O’Leary in his work “The Triune Church” says: “At the risk of stating the commonplace, it could be said that Catholic theology since the Reformation has tended to stress the Church as institution and as society. Orthodox theology of the Church, since it remained largely outside the crisis of the sixteenth century has not had the same emphasis. In this century, and especially in more recent years, Catholic theology has moved to a much more balanced point of view. The influence of Khomyakov on Catholic theology cannot be ignored. This influence has been largely indirect, through the Russian theologians of the emigration after the Russian revolution. Khomyakov’s influence on a theologian such as Paul Evdokimov has been profound. He speaks of a double way of knowing the Church, or at least, one knows the visible Church, but one believes the invisible Church. In addition, his definition of the visible

Church in terms of grace and the work of grace and the dead is reminiscent of Khomyakov” [O’Leary 1982, 80].

5. For Khomyakov’s appraisal for all Palmer suffered for his pro-Orthodoxy stand, see: [Bolshakoff, 121]; for Newman’s appreciation of Palmer: “His letters to Khomyakov shows that he little understood the theology of the latter. ...Palmer is no match for the merciless logic of Khomyakov. ...But he surpasses Khomyakov as a scholar” [Bolshakoff, 122]. Bolshakoff’s judgment is well worth reproducing: “The branch theory prompted Khomyakov to elaborate his own ecclesiology, which he opposed also to Newman’s conception of doctrinal development” [Bolshakoff, 123]. Khomyakov & Honorius, see: [Bolshakoff, 147], Baptism, see: [Bolshakoff, 161]; Symbolik, see [Bolshakoff, 233–234], Khomyakov and Moehler [Bolshakoff, 260–262]. Khomyakov’s conception of the church is static, because the knowledge of the Church is divine. Khomyakov objected to the theories of Moehler and Newman about the gradual growth to perfection and logical disagreement of the Church. He objected to the same theory in Samarín’s dissertation on Yavorsky and Prokopovich, and compelled him to abandon it. Soloviev wholeheartedly accepted Moehler’s idea of the doctrinal development modernism of Loissy & Tyrell [Bolshakoff, 260]. Newman tried to reconcile the static and dynamic conception of the Church in a *via media* [Bolshakoff, 261]. Strange to say, Khomyakov was in many respects much closer to the “*via media*” than Moehler, Newman or Soloviev [Bolshakoff, 262].

6. Indeed, the prohibition in Ephesus is directed against the creed inspired by Theodore of Mopsuestia which Carisius, presbyter of Philadelphia, was known at this council, because it was considered Nestorian. The real prohibition was made at Chalcedon, because as already said, the text of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed was unknown at Ephesus. L’Huillier’s comments on: “The fathers of Chalcedon in their dogmatic decree quoted not only the symbol of Nicaea but also that of Constantinople, which thus made its official entrance on to the historical scene. At the end of the decree, they essentially summarized the wording of the prohibition set out by the Council of Ephesus, without express reference, however, to Nicaea. The same formula was taken up with slight modifications in the dogmatic decree of the sixth ecumenical council. The Council of Constantinople in 879–880 did the same thing, but its more precise formulation of the dogmatic decree was aimed at the addition of the filioque clause, though without

mentioning it specifically. The legates of John VIII made no objection since the Roman Church, in contrast to the rest of the West, continued to keep the symbol of the faith in its unaltered form" [*L'Huillier*, 162].

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