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Religious Schism of the Russian Orthodox Church in Official Notes of I. S. Aksakov (1849–51)

Abstract

I.S. Aksakov's "Notes" on the history of the Schism of the Russian Orthodox Church appeared in 1849–51 and in 1866–89 were introduced into scientific use. In 2002 they have been republished and provided with scientific commentary. The documents as a source of theoretical conclusions about the Schism did not attract the researchers' attention, and I.S. Aksakov's

doctrine on Old Believers was not elucidated. Thus, it is necessary to examine the “Notes” as a historiographical source, to determine its place in the literature of the 1850s. The study of texts has included analyzing their origin and content, comparing the evidence in notes and letters, correlating doctrines. I.S. Aksakov explained the meaning of the Schism in a new way, disavowing views of Platon (Levshin), Filaret Drozdov, Ignatius, Makarius, and others who reduced the phenomenon to rite, “ignorance” of the opponents of the church and state. He described the Schism as a spiritual and material dissonance in the life of society, provided insights into the meaning of protest resulting from inconsistency of the activities of protestants, church, and state with the moral ideal, tradition. I.S. Aksakov's conclusions were based on analysis of history and modernity of the process. The religious scholar assessed the scale of the phenomenon, its depth and danger to society. Having studied life and customs of the Old Believers of Bessarabia, he became convinced that the church was dealing with an “organized” “cohesive” “society” supported by “huge capital.” His familiarity with current life of dissenters led I.S. Aksakov to reject the key thesis of clerics about their ignorance. In a “Brief Note on Wanderers or Runaways,” he noted that a “well-read” heretic could surpass “any rural priest” in discussion of religious issues. Contrary to position of historians of the scholastic school, who blamed solely Old Believers for the crisis, I.S. Aksakov believed that responsibility for the split lay with the church and state. His reports note “bureaucratic nature of the church,” venality of clerics. In a letter to his family dated January 22, 1850, he reproached the “clergy” for abusing the “administrative and police trend.” However, the root cause of the Schism development in the 18th – 19th centuries in the Slavophile's opinion was reforms of Peter I that changed the masses' way of life. In his “Notes” (1849–51), I.S. Aksakov rejected the scholastic method of church historians and was the first to investigate the Schism as a historical phenomenon generated by contradictions in the society. Within frameworks of a different ideology and methodology, this trend was continued by A.P. Shchapov, S.M. Solovyov, N.I. Kostomarov, and other scientists whose works determined the specifics of the new historiography of the Schism.

### Keywords

Source studies, old believers, clerical and conservative literature, I. S. Aksakov, notes, origin, doctrine of Schism.

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