

Aksakov, Ivan Encyclopedia Article

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Aksakov, Ivan

AKSAKOV, IVAN (1823–1886), Russian publicist, Slavophile, and pan-Slavist. Aksakov had a mixed career as civil servant, banker, and journalist. He accepted with all other Slavophiles that religion was the decisive factor in the shaping of a nation and that the essence of Russian national life (*narodnost*) was inseparably bound up with Orthodoxy. But he was painfully aware that Orthodoxy labored under manifold constraints in his milieu; as a convinced church member he campaigned in a cogent and constructive manner for their diminution. He regretted the bureaucratization of the Russian church administration and the subjugation (often subservience) of the clergy to the state that was its result, if not its cause. Aksakov's journalism was inhibited by an official ban on his work as editor (1853). Nevertheless, he contributed regularly to such publications as *Moskovskii sbornik* (1846–1847, 1852), *Russkaia beseda* (1858–1860), and *Den* (1860–1865).

Aksakov was less religiously oriented than the early Slavophiles. He also differed from them in his cautious appraisal of the Russian peasant (in his opinion, hardly the paragon of humility and faith as usually depicted). At the same time, he went beyond them in eventually projecting a historiographical (pan-Slavic) scheme in which the Russian people—not least because of their Orthodox heritage—would play a central role in the development (initially, the liberation) of other Slavic nations. The West, he believed, was seriously inhibited and undermined by its adherence to other creeds, whether Catholic or Protestant. Least favored of all, and viewed as renegades, were Slavic nations with a loyalty to Rome (notably Poland).

Aksakov raised funds for a Russian expeditionary force to aid the Serbs against the Turks (1876) and effectively promoted Russia's entry into war "for the faith of Christ" and in support of the Bulgarians (1877). In the aftermath of the Bulgarian episode, the climax of his career, Aksakov was even mentioned as a possible king for the newly established state.

Aksakov's appeal to the nationalism (and anti-Semitism) of his people was to persist during the last decade of his life. His funeral in 1886 was attended by several hundred thousand admirers.

Bibliography

Ivan S. Aksakov's collected works were published in seven volumes as *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii I. S. Aksakova* (Moscow, 1886–1887). The fourth volume (1886) contains his principal articles on "Social Questions Related to Church Affairs" (pp. 3–358). There is a useful monograph by Stephen Lukashevich, *Ivan Aksakov, 1823–1886: A Study in Russian Thought and Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965).