

Abstract

Avvakum's "Fifth Petition" to the Tsar and the Ritual Process

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Avvakum's 1669 vision of his cosmic body in the "Fifth Petition" to the Tsar does not conform to the Christian tradition of mystic experiences. It represents a deliberately transgressive act that is a ritual form of dissent against the official Church and State aimed at fomenting a mass movement analogous to the millenarian protests in the contemporary West. Analysis demonstrates that it embodies the language of holy foolishness, a radical Muscovite form of protest that alone was sufficient to address the crisis in community symbolized by the Tsar's rejection of the Old Belief. His vision masqueraded apocalyptic prophecy in "carnival behavior" first described by M. Bakhtin. Models from V. Turner's study, The Ritual Process (1969) clarify the role of the Fifth Petition to address Muscovy's crisis of modernization. His vision embodies a ritual solution through the mediation of higher symbolic paradigms--the rhetoric of holy foolishness and the mythological structure of the Book of Revelation. When viewed through the prism of holy foolishness, Avvakum's vision functions as a kind of carnival mask directed towards the people. This "mask" disguises a deeper sacred mystery embedded in Revelation about their shared power to solve the crisis of community created by Muscovy's embrace of a new religious ideology.

Key words: The writings of the Archpriest Avvakum, the Fifth Petition to Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, mystical vision, M. Bakhtin, carnival behavior, crisis of modernization,

holy foolishness, ritual degradation, the ritual process, millenarianism, folklore structure,
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