

## Abstract

### *A Penitential Journey: The Life of the Archpriest Avvakum and Kenotic Tradition*

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By Priscilla Hunt

This article demonstrates that Avvakum's hagiographical saint's Life portrays his journey of suffering for his faith as an embodiment of the kenotic ideal originally expressed by the first three Russian saints, St. Theodosius of the Caves Monastery and Boris and Gleb. Avvakum embeds a series of citations and subtextual clues in marked places of his text to motivate the narrative of his conversion from hypocrisy and false-righteousness to the voluntary embrace of degradation. They portray his life's journey as a progress from false to true knowledge, darkness to light, climaxing in his transcendental vision of the divine purpose and his and Russia's place in it. The Life thus motivates Avvakum's stance in his Fifth Petition to the Tsar where he describes visions that prophesy the Tsar's condemnation and his own glorification as spokesperson for the Church. Avvakum's higher model is the conversion of St. Paul, as well as Paul's idea of foolishness in Christ. At the same time, he interprets his journey as a realization of the mystical process of self-transcendence described by Dionysius the Areopagite. Color symbolism plays a major role in marking the stages by which he "dies in unknowing" and comes back to life "in understanding." Avvakum's exposure of his inner life as a gesture of kenotic humiliation gives rise to a new type within the confines of traditional hagiography: the penitential or

spiritual journey. He creates this new type within the confines of the Russian Orthodox poetics of the Word in contrast to the allegorical type of spiritual journey by Protestant writers such as Comenius or Bunyan. Avvakum's kenotic focus on the inner life as the source of external renewal expressed a unique kind of humanism. His "emptying out" of himself motivated the autobiographical, confessional form of his narrative, as well as its particular, concrete, anti-intellectual "realistic" mode. Avvakum's conception of kenosis also motivated the symbolic spiritual dimension of the text which placed an emphasis on the action of his free will. These innovations made his text a herald of the psychological realism of later Russian literature.

Key words: Kenoticism , St. Paul, foolishness in Christ, Dionysius the Areopagite, Job, Fifth Petition to the Tsar, The Life of the Archpriest Avvakum, humanism, psychological realism.