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### Mediating Archpriest Avvakum: Two ZhZL Biographies Debate the Russian Religion

This study examines two biographies of Archpriest Avvakum from the series Жизнь замечательных людей (hereafter ZhZL), written at two very differing periods of Russian history by two very different authors. Dmitry Zhukov's 1972 biography of Avvakum is published in a two-part book entitled Русские писатели XVII века, providing a Soviet perspective on Avvakum's role in history. More recently, the ZhZL series released a 2011 biography entitled Протопоп Аввакум: жизнь за веру, by Kirill Kozhurin, a historian and practicing member of the priest-less branch of the Old Believers. While these biographies differ very little in the facts they present, the significance they assign to Avvakum's role in history present a marked contrast. The Soviet era biography approaches him first as a writer, presenting his contributions to Russian culture primarily in literary terms and downplaying the religious thrust of his works. Zhukov's Avvakum is mainly an unconscious rebel crying in the wilderness to prepare the way for a more complete revolution. Kozhurin, in contrast, draws attention to Avvakum's ecclesiastical title and his martyrdom, emphasizing rather than downplaying the religious nature of Avvakum's career. For Kozhurin, Avvakum rescued the vital form of the Christian religion from the secularization of Russian society and ensured its survival among the Old Believers, who would preserve it in the following centuries and provide spiritual nourishment to the Russian society that rejected them. In both biographies, however, Avvakum is seen as inherently Russian, and thus his legacy carries implications about Russian national character and presents opportunities for making historiosophical conclusions about the development of Russian culture, especially in terms of religion and its role in history and society. Studying the two biographies, therefore, serves as a useful exercise in comparing how history is interpreted and furthermore demonstrates the renewed importance of Orthodoxy in contemporary Russian politics and worldview.