AVVAKUM (1620–1682), Russian Orthodox arch-priest; founding father of the Old Believers; martyr. Avvakum was ordained to the priesthood at the age of twenty-two, serving in the area of Nizhniy Novgorod; eight years later he was promoted to be archpriest. By then he had amply demonstrated his zeal as a reformer. Following in the wake of the Muscovite “God-seekers,” an influential group of scholarly zealots, he sought to revive liturgical life and public morality. The resentment which this provoked led to his displacement and his first visit to Moscow (1652). There he was welcomed by the leading God-seekers and introduced to the tsar.

The election of Nikon as patriarch of Moscow later that year promised to confirm and revitalize the God-seekers’ reforms. However, Nikon proceeded arbitrarily to reform liturgical phrasology and practice, particularly concerning the sign of the cross. Avvakum vociferously objected to these reforms, which he saw as a challenge to the true faith. For if even minor rituals were to change, the whole edifice of related doctrines would be undermined. He was arrested and exiled to Siberia (1633). After many tribulations he was permitted to return to Moscow (1664), but his insistence on the validity and importance of the pre-Nikonian liturgical norms led to renewed exile.

Avvakum and his companions were brought back to Moscow and anathematized at a church council of 1666–1667; he in turn anathematized the council. Thus was confirmed the existence of the Russian church schism, which was to have decisive influence on the ordering of Russian society throughout the centuries to come. Avvakum was sent to the arctic outpost of Pustozersk from which he and his companions issued tracts and letters. More important than these was Avvakum’s apologetic autobiography composed in 1672 to 1673. It is a masterpiece of Russian literature and one of Europe’s great confessional texts.

The accession of a new patriarch of Moscow (Joachim) was probably a decisive factor in making the state’s campaign against the Old Believers a stage further, and Avvakum, together with his three companions, was sent to the stake in April 1682. Avvakum had persuasively presented himself as confessior and prophet in defense of the sacred Orthodox heritage delivered to Moscow, the “third Rome,” and he is remembered as a martyr of the old faith.

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AXIS MUNDI, the “hub” or “axis” of the universe, is a technical term used in the study of the history of religions. It comprises at least three levels of reference: the images themselves, their function and meaning, and the experiences associated with them.

Vivid images of the axis of the universe vary widely, since they depend on the particular worldview entertained by a specific culture. Foremost among the images designated by the term axis mundi is the cosmic mountain, a sacred place deemed to be the highest point of the universe and perhaps identified with the center of the world and the place where creation first began. Well-known examples of the cosmic mountain are Mount Meru of South Asian cosmology, Harabera-zaiti of Iranian tradition, and Himingbjör of Scandinavian mythology.

The cosmic tree, at whose top abides the celestial divinity, is another frequent image standing for the axis of the world. The roots of such a tree may sink into the underworlds, while its branches traverse the multiple world planes. At the center of the classical Maya vision of the world stood Yaxche, the “first tree,” the “green tree,” whose place marked the center of all meaningful directions and colors of the universe.

A cosmic pillar may also serve as an axis mundi. Such is the case with the Delaware (Lenape) Indians and other Eastern Woodland peoples of North America. The center post of their ceremonial cult house supports the sky and passes into the very hand of the celestial deity. The Milky Way is often viewed as another form of cosmic pillar that supports the heavens and connects them with earth.

Many other images fall under the designation axis mundi because they share in the symbolic meaning rep-
resented by a cosmic mountain, tree, or pillar that joins heaven, earth, and underworld. This category includes cities, especially imperial capitals deemed "heavenly" sites by virtue of proximity to the divine realm; palaces or temples that continue the imagery of the cosmic mountain (e.g., the Babylonian ziggurat); vines or ropes that pass from heaven to earth; and sacred ladders such as the seven-rung ladder, described by Origen, that brings the candidate in the cult of Mithra through the seven heavens.

None of these images has a static function. They are all places of active passage and transition. As places of dynamic union where beings of quite different natures come together or pass into one another, the images of axis mundi may be associated with the coincidence of opposites—that is, the resolution of contradictions by their progress onto a more spiritual plane.

Because the axis mundi serves as the locus where cosmic regions intersect and where the universe of being is accessible in all its dimensions, the hub of the universe is held to be a place sacred above all others. It defines reality, for it marks the place where being is most fully manifest. This connection of the axis mundi with the full manifestation of being is often expressed as an association with the supreme being to whom the axis provides access. This axis mundi is often traversed and its heights attained in a state of ecstasy brought about by spiritual techniques. Hence the term axis mundi implies an intersection of planes through which transcendence to other kinds of being may be achieved.

There is a tendency to replicate the image of the axis mundi in multiple forms. Such is the case with the cross—the cosmic tree of Christianity. Recreating the image of the axis mundi in the form of village sites, house plans, ritual furnishings, personal ornaments, and even kitchen items tends to identify the universe as a whole with the fullness of being characteristic of action at that sacred place. It ensures that contact with the fullness of reality is everywhere possible. As a result, the meaning and function of the axis mundi rest not in abstract and geometrical concepts alone but in everyday gestures that can effect the same transcendence.

All these symbols imply a particular quality of experience. The symbols of axis mundi are ambivalent: on the one hand, they connect realms of being but on the other hand they emphasize the distance between such realms. In short, they point to the need for a rupture of planes of existence, for experience of an order quite different from that of the ordinary world.

[See also Mountains and Trees; for discussion of symbolization of the axis mundi in religious architecture, see Architecture.]

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**AYURVEDA** The traditional Hindu system of medicine widely practiced in India, Ayurveda is based on authoritative treatises written in Sanskrit over approximately the past two millennia. Three major classical medical systems have flourished on the Indian subcontinent: Ayurveda among Hindus, Yünānī among Muslims, and Siddha among Tamils in South India. Their reliance on elaborate textual traditions distinguish these three systems from the assorted medical practices offered by astrologers, exorcists, priests, snakebite specialists, and kinareed healers in the context of diverse folk traditions. In general, folk practices are associated with a magico-religious understanding of illness; whereas Ayurveda is associated with an understanding of illness that refers to the balance of three physiological principles suggestive of yet distinct from the Galenic humors. Such boundaries delimiting classical and folk traditions are not absolute, however, and humoral concepts pervade many folk practices just as magico-