The Life of Aleksandr Men': Hagiography in the Making

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Hagiography is not an extinct genre in Russian literature, even though many believe that it was important in the history of early Russian literature but became irrelevant as Russian literature entered its modern period. The autobiography of priest Avvakum, written in the second half of the seventeenth century, is often considered to be the final work in the development of Russian hagiography. Russian spirituality has not died out, however, and holy men and women continue to display the same devotion to Christ that was admired in medieval saints. The biographies and memoirs of these modern "saints" retain some of the hallmarks of traditional hagiography. In this paper I propose to show that the memoirs written about one of these contemporary Christian heroes, Aleksandr Men', draw upon traditional hagiographic elements in order to portray him as a saint. Furthermore, the literature written about Men' contains the seeds for a full-length saint's Life, one that could possibly be included among the works of a modern neo-hagiographic genre.

I. Introduction: Aleksandr Men' and Russian Saints

Aleksandr Vladimirovich Men' was an influential Russian Orthodox priest who was murdered on September 9, 1990. He was struck in the back of his head by an axe as he was walking to the train station to travel to the parish church he served in a small village outside of Moscow. The inquiry into his death still has not succeeded in discovering the murderers, and many see Father Aleksandr as a modern martyr.

During his life Father Aleksandr had a broad sphere of activity that placed him in many different roles: a priest who officiated the liturgy and administered the sacraments to his parishioners; a spiritual father and guide to the scores of people with whom he had a relationship; an author who produced numerous books and articles on the history of religion, the Bible and the Orthodox faith; and a lecturer who was invited to speak about Christianity to over 200 audiences during the last two years of his life. Because of his activity, Men' became well known during his lifetime, and like any prominent figure, he was both attacked and praised. Although he was never arrested like many clergy who served during the Soviet era, he was regularly the object of KGB surveillance and interrogation. Persecution also came from within the Church, mostly from people who refused to consider Men', who was ethnically Jewish, as a true Orthodox Christian. However, by the end of his life he had become very popular among large groups of both local provincials...
and Moscow intellectuals. Many of his followers likened him to the apostle Paul someone who was "all things to all men."

Since his death, Aleksandr Men's has continued to be a controversial figure. The West is only beginning to hear about him, as some of his books are being translated into English, but in Russia he is more widely debated and discussed. His opponents write articles attacking him for his Jewish heritage and accusing him of various heresies that they believe his books promote. However, most of the focus on Aleksandr Men's has been positive. His books are being published freely in Russia (during his life they were secretly printed abroad), organizations are establishing charitable projects in his name, and churches are promoting his values and teaching. Furthermore, people who knew him personally, as well as those who were only acquainted with him through his books or lectures, are writing about their memories of him. To these people who mourned his death and are working to preserve his legacy, Aleksandr Men's is a saint:

Father Aleksandr lived in Christ and died as a Christian saint. The fame of him and his work will not pass away, but will grow (Danilov, "Zhizn'," 69).

The Church Fathers, in their time, were considered heretics and were persecuted, but now they are canonized, and each of their words is consecrated with theological authority. It will be the same with Father Aleksandr (Iliushenko, "Kompleks," 117).

A terrible and bitter fate - to die by an axe blow, like John the Baptist, like the apostle Paul - but isn't this a great Glory - a martyr's crown . . . (Andreeva, "V nem," 210).

Russian Orthodoxy, like other Christian traditions, has always canonized, revered, and remembered its great heroes of the faith. The first canonized saints in Russia were two sons of Prince Vladimir of Kievan Rus', Boris and Gleb, who were killed by their ambitious brother in 1015 (Hollingsworth, Hagiography, xxvi). They were martyrs, or strastoterpcev ("passion-bearers"), but the army of Russian saints who came after them has also included ascetic monks, mystics, military leaders, charismatic priests and starcy ("elders" or spiritual fathers). What they all share in common is their recognition as someone to be praised and emulated, someone to serve as a model and a source of inspiration for all Christian believers.

In order for a saint to become an influence in the lives of Christians, information about him must be preserved and propagated. One of the most significant ways in which Christians have sought to establish the memory of a saint in the tradition of the Church is by writing his biography. Christian hagiography, literature describing the lives of saints, was developed in 1

1 All quotations from Aleksandr Men's memoirs are my own English translations from the original Russian texts.
Byzantium around the fourth century. Slavic countries translated the Byzantine monuments of this genre, which made their way to Kievan Rus around the time of its conversion to Christianity in 988. Byzantine saints' Lives provided basic patterns which early Russian hagiographers adopted and transformed to write saints' Lives in a Russian context.

Like any genre of literature, hagiography follows certain conventions. In other words, a Russian saint's Life follows a set of rules that governs its style, structure, themes and imagery. The purpose of such genre conventions is to establish a dialogue between the writer and reader that makes a particular set of expectations operative, thereby enabling the reader to enjoy the work (Curler, Structuralist, 141). A reader can easily recognize a saint's Life as a piece of hagiographic literature. Once he has made this identification, he can expect the hero of the work to be a saint whose life confirms the truth of the basic principles of Christian doctrine.

If Aleksandr Men's followers want to transform him into a saint, one means by which they can approach their goal is to write their memoirs in the code of hagiography. In Father Aleksandr's memoirs, the extra-literary and the literary concerns interact. In other words, the author's purpose is to express his view of Men' as a saint and to persuade the reader to see him in the same way, and the author accomplishes this goal by calling upon hagiographic literature and the set of notions connected with the genre. The facts about Men' are formulated and coded in such a way as to establish contact with the reader and cause him to enter into dialogue with traditional saints' Lives. As the reader recognizes hagiographic conventions in the memoirs, he will expect the hero to be a saint because the genre demands such a hero. The literature by Russian writers about Father Aleksandr does not contain a full-fledged, official saint's Life, but it is hagiography in the making. His memoirs are an integral element in the process of creating a saint.

The idea of transforming a Christian figure into a saint through the writing of hagiography is not a new one. The first saints' Lives on the territory of Kievan Rus' were translations of Byzantine works that came from South Slav countries, in particular Bulgaria Soon after Kievan Rus' converted to Christianity in 988, it began its own translation work. The translated monuments of Byzantine hagiography subsequently served as models for original Old Russian saints' Lives. The Russian Lives often drew heavily upon Byzantine examples and even borrowed entire excerpts. For instance, the monk Nestor, the first Russian hagiographer, incorporated sections from the Life of Saint Euthymius and the Life of Saint Sabas into his account of the life of Saint Feodosij, a monk of the famous Kiev Caves Monastery in the eleventh century (Bortnes, Visions, 14). In writing the life of a local monk, Russian hagiographers sometimes copied or borrowed what had been said about a Byzantine manic of the same name.
In this way they could begin the process of introducing a local hero into the universal army of saints.

Most of the heroes of both Byzantine and Old Russian hagiography were monks - ascetics and mystics who left the secular world to seek eternal life through spiritual disciplines. However, there were other saints who strove to live according to Christian principles within the secular world and died at the hands of godless people around them. Therefore, in addition to Lives (vita, Russian zhitiie), which tell the story of a saint from his birth to his death and posthumous miracles, there are also martyr stories (passio, Russian strast', muchenie) that focus on the murder of the saint (Bortnes, Visions, 12).

Furthermore, the saints who are honored in Russian hagiography represent a variety of spiritual laments that have characterized Russian Orthodoxy through its history. Kenoticism has always been one of the "dominant motifs" (Fedotov, Treasury, 14) of Russian spirituality. This standard of behavior (kenosis, from the Greek, meaning an emptying) focuses on the imitation of Jesus Christ in his complete poverty and humility. Saint Feodosij represents the kenotic ideal because he provided a pattern for cenobitic monastic life based on a combination of ascetic practices and service to the community. Boris and Gleb have been considered the ultimate examples of kenoticism (Maloney, "Spirituality," 607) because they fully humbled themselves before their brother Svjatopolk, rather than use force to defend themselves against the assassins he sent to kill them. The martyrdom of these two saints also places them within the trend of strastoterpcy ("passion-bearers"), faithful Christians who suffer unjust death without retaliation.

Another important current of Russian spirituality came from Mount Athos, a monastic community on the Aegean. Hesychasm (Greek hesuchia, meaning tranquility, peace, calm) was an attempt to replace the ritual side of Christianity by a mystical inner life which seeks to approach God through contemplation and inward prayer, rather than external asceticism. Sergij of Radonezh (1319-1391) is traditionally considered the first and most distinguished representative of Hesychasm in Russia, and his Life, written by Epiphaniy the Wise, contains many descriptions that show the saint to be a mystic.

The mystical trend of Hesychasm may have influenced the hermit movement of the fourteenth century, when the monastic tradition in Russia began to recover from the Mongol's destruction of monasteries, and the new leaders were hermits who retreated into the solitude of the forest. In contrast to the hermits, who usually remained for long periods in solitude and silence, other monks were in dialogue with society and drew people from all arenas of life who were searching for truth, counsel or spiritual encouragement. The famous Optina monastery of the nineteenth century was particularly well known for its starcy ("elders"), spiritual fathers who
both directed younger monks under their care and gave guidance to the lay people who came to talk with them.

Aspects of each of these important currents in Russian Orthodox spirituality - kenoticism, mysticism, the traditions of the starcy and strastoterpcy - can be observed in the life of Aleksandr Men'. The descriptions of Father Aleksandr in his memoirs contain allusions to the basic principles of each trend, and hagiographic literature describes the great saints who were the foremost representatives of these spiritual currents in a similar way. Thus, Father Aleksandr emerges from the memoirs as an embodiment of the fullness of Russian spirituality. The use of similar imagery is only one way in which the literature about Father Aleksandr resembles traditional saints' Lives. The memoirs also reflect the language and structure of Russian hagiography. Furthermore, they share the same purpose of celebrating the saint through praise and deification and edifying the reader by providing a model to imitate.

The discussion that follows will compare quotes from the literature about Aleksandr Men' with excerpts from some of the significant works of Russian hagiography, in order to show that many of the essential features of hagiography are present in the memoirs. For this purpose I have chosen the Lives of several of the most well known Russian saints, who lived during different periods in Russian history. They are as follows: Chtenie o svjatykh' muchenikakh' Boris i Gleb [Lesson about the holy martyrs Boris and Gleb], written by Nestor, a monk of the Kiev Caves Monastery, in the late eleventh century; the Life of Feodosij, a superior of the Caves Monastery, also written by Nestor; the Life of Sergi of Radonezh and the Life of Stefan of Perm, written by Epiphanij the Wise in the early fifteenth century; Zhitie protopopa Avvakuma, im samim napisannoe [the Life of priest Avvakum, written by himself] from the mid seventeenth century; and the Life of Saint Amvrosij, who was an elder of the Optina Monastery in the second half of the nineteenth century.

It is necessary to point out that the overall styles of the Lives mentioned above vary because each of them reflects the literary style of the period in which it was written. A work of hagiography encompasses the conventional, timeless features of the genre, but at the same time, it integrates the literary trends of its day. In this way, the literature about Men' is similar to the Lives, since its style is not anachronistic but consistent with twentieth century tastes. Early Kievan literature was marked by a "monumentality" of style, characterized by a lack of stylistic devices and a concentration on a single theme (Chizhevskij, History, 32). In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, style became an end in itself, and a variety of ornamental adornments sometimes hid the theme of a work (Chizhevskij, History, 82). Elements of a new orthography and style in South Slav works began to influence Russian hagiography in the fourteenth century. This style, known as pletenie stoves ("word-weaving"), is even more embellished than the ornamental style of the
previous century and is marked by devices such as, antitheses, etymological features, alliterations and accumulation of synonyms. Finally, Avvakum's autobiography of the mid seventeenth century is an example of the Russian Baroque style which, according to Jostein Bortnes, is characterized by "tensions, insoluble antinomies, breaches with tradition . . . a confusion of genres and a predilection of hybrid forms" (Bortnes, *Visions*, 195). Aleksandr Men's memoirs were written at the end of the twentieth century and therefore reflect a more modern style.

II. Examples

*Structure of a Life*

The external form of a typical full-length saint's Life is based on several constitutive sections. The exordium, in which the author introduces himself and his hero, and the conclusion, which usually contains a description of the saint's posthumous miracles, together form a frame for the biographical section (Bortnes, *Visions*, 49). The main body of the Life tends to follow a standard pattern: an account of the young saint's pious behavior in childhood; a description of his adult life, marked by various edifying episodes that illustrate his ascetic mortification, mystical pursuits, miracles, or service to the community; and finally, an account of the saint's death, which he usually foretells to his disciples.

The collections of memoirs about Aleksandr Men' do not contain any works that are patterned on the structure of a full-length Life from start to finish. However, many of them resemble the structure of a Life's biographical section, which consists of a series of short episodes. Some of these episodes are anecdotes about individual events in the life of the saint, and the author includes them as evidence of the greatness of his hero. For example, in the Life of Saint Sergij, many episodes begin with the words "one day . . ." or "on another occasion . . ." and go on to describe a significant event that helps the author in his goal of portraying the saint as an idealized figure who is worthy to be praised. Many of the passages in this Life contribute to the image of Sergij as a mystic who has a special communion with God: "One day when Theodore was still living at the Holy Trinity, St. Sergij was celebrating mass with Stephen, his brother in the flesh, and Theodore his nephew. And Isaac, the observer of silence, saw at the altar a fourth celebrant of wondrous aspect, radiant with a bright light and clothed in gleaming vestments"(76)². Other episodes describe more habitual practices of the saint that show how he behaved. Their purpose is to edify the reader and provide a model which he should strive to

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²Page numbers for excerpts from the Life of Saint Sergij refer to Fedotov, *Treasury*, unless otherwise noted.
imitate: "Saint Sergij assiduously read the Holy Scriptures, in order to draw from them all virtues, discipline his mind in secret meditation and elevating it to the desire of eternal good" (63).

One article about Father Aleksandr that has a particularly evident similarity to the structure of traditional Lives is a piece by writer V. Fajnberg ("Otec Aleksandr," 157-200). In the Lives, episodes are often identified by sub-headings in the text, and Fajnberg's article is divided into numbered sections. Each one relates a specific incident in Men's life that the author recalls, and each one contributes to the general picture of his hero that the author is creating. Some of the anecdotes describe unusual incidents that show Father Aleksandr to be an exceptional person who deserves admiration. For example, in section 9, Fajnberg describes Father Aleksandr's remarkable strength by remembering a day when Father Aleksandr was called to the Ministry for Religious Affairs, where he spent the day in grueling interrogation. He emerged from the building at the end of the day, unafraid, still cheerful and full of energy, and spent the evening helping Fajnberg with his new book. Other chapters recall more usual, everyday incidents that illustrate Father Aleksandr's character, such as evenings he spent in the apartments of his spiritual children, whom he freely offered his time and help.

Fajnberg's memoirs of Father Aleksandr display another important structural element of the Lives. Dialogue between the saint and the author, if the Life is narrated from the first person, or between the saint and others helps to animate the figure of the saint and, in a sense, to restore him to life on the pages of the manuscript. It contributes toward developing the figure of the saint as an authentic person who interacted with others and helps the reader gain a clearer impression of what he was like during his life. Fajnberg's article contains long passages of dialogue that cause the reader to feel as if he himself had been an acquaintance of Father Aleksandr.

These passages of dialogue often contain wise words or instructions that Father Aleksandr gave to his spiritual children in order to guide and teach them. The authors of the Lives also frequently quote the saints, thereby establishing an important record of the saint's beliefs and teachings. With a modern figure like Aleksandr Men', this function is not as vital since his teachings are preserved in audio recordings of his sermons and in the books he himself wrote. For many of the ancient saints, on the other hand, the legacy of what they taught might be recorded only in their biography. In both the Lives and the memoirs about Men', quotes from the hero's teachings are an essential contribution to the edifying purpose of the literature. The words of instruction, warning and encouragement that the saint conveyed to his disciples during conversations with them are relevant and useful to the reader, as well.

*Formulaic language of a Life*

In addition to resembling the overall structure of traditional hagiographic works, the literature about Aleksandr Men' also contains similarities to the characteristic language of the
In writing each section of a saint's Life, an author was compelled to draw upon a set of *koinoi topoi*, "expressional constants" (Bortnes, "Hag. Trans.," 5) or "commonplaces" (Chizbevskij, History, 176). The *topoi* of hagiography, according to Bortnes, "must be regarded as a supplementary rhetorical repository from which the individual hagiographers selected their phrases, combining them into continuous accounts of their saint's childhood, adolescence, ascetic achievements, death and glorification, according to the rules of the genre" (Bortnes, *Visions*, 18).

Some of these formulaic expressions jump out from the pages of the memoirs about Father Aleksandr. The *topoi* of the author's exordium often include one or more of the following: an invocation to God, phrases expressing the author's humility and unworthiness, and excuses and requests for the reader's indulgence. While the memoirs of Father Aleksandr do not contain proper introductions, the authors often express their humility in language that reminds the reader of the *topoi* of hagiography. Compare the words used by one of Men's memoirists with a quote from Nestor's introduction to Feodosij's Life:

> To tell the truth, I am doubtful of my right to speak about the unforgettable Father Aleksandr Men'. People who knew him better, who belonged to his flock, could tell more about him, more poignantly and concretely (S. Averintsev, "Missioner, 326).

> It is a task too great for my powers, I am not fit for it, since I am neither wise nor learned . . . (15).  

In each excerpt, the author expresses the feeling that he is not equipped to write about his hero and that someone else could write a better piece of literature, one that would do justice to the greatness of the saint. Nevertheless, each author continues with his task because of his love and admiration for the saint.

In the body of a Life, *topoi* are used to describe the saint's birth and childhood. Hagiographic convention demands that saint be born of pious parents and display saintly qualities from his early years. Feodosij fits this pattern perfectly, and one of Men's memoirists describes his childhood in a similar way:

> In this town [Kiev] lived our saint's parents, who were enlightened Christians of exemplary piety, and here it was that blessed Feodosij was born to them. On the eighth day after his birth, according to the custom, they brought the child to God's priest in order that a name should be given him. The priest, perceiving with spiritual insight that the newborn child would devote himself to God's

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3 Page numbers for excerpts from the Life of Feodosij refer to Fedotov, *Treasury*, unless otherwise noted.
service from infancy, gave him the name Feodosij. Then after forty days he baptized the child. Feodosij grew up under the tutelage of his parents. God’s grace was with him, and he had the light of the Holy Ghost from his first years. (16-17)

Father Aleksandr Men’ was born in Moscow on January 22, 1935 into the family of the chief engineer of a textile factory. From the beginning he displayed unusual giftedness, industry and desire to choose truth and goodness as his life’s path. His father was not a religious person, but his mother was distinguished by her deep and unbreakable faith, good heart and devotion to the Church. The father did not stand in the way of his son’s having a religious upbringing, and the mother was able to foster in him a spirit of love and faithfulness to Orthodoxy, and she had him baptized at the age of seven months by the "catacomb" starec Father Seraphim (Vasilenko, "Kul’nura," 165).

In these examples, one can notice the correspondences immediately. Aleksandr Men’s mother is characterized by her deep faith, good heart and devotion to the Church, just as Feodosij’s parents live by the Christian faith and are adorned with piety. The parents bring both children to the priest to be baptized because they want to give their sons a Christian upbringing. Furthermore, both authors point out that the boys displayed God’s special blessing in their early years, Feodosij by exhibiting God’s grace and the light of the Holy Spirit and Alik by showing unusual giftedness and a desire to do good.

Descriptions of the saint’s giftedness and pious behavior at a young age are important to setting the stage for him to become a great spiritual figure in his adulthood. They establish the idea that this is a special person who is chosen by God and set apart to do great things in the kingdom of God. The childhood section usually contains episodes that illustrate the young saint’s behavior, showing him to be different from other children. The Life of Sergij describes an almost supernatural episode that occurred even before the child was born. A passage from one of Men’s memoirs is strikingly similar, and although young Alik’s behavior is not quite supernatural, it is extremely unusual.

There was a miracle even before the child’s birth. One Sunday, when she was still carrying him in her womb. his mother entered the church, as was her custom, during holy Mass, and stood with the other women on the porch. And as the holy gospel was about to be read, and there was complete silence, the child suddenly cried out in his mother’s womb, and many were awed by this cry, a glorious miracle. A second time, before the singing of the hymn of the Cherubim, he cried out even in a louder voice. And when the priest chanted: "Let us attend," the child cried out for the third time in a loud voice . . . And the women, sighing and beating their breasts, returned to their places, saying to themselves: "What kind of a child will this be? May the Lord’s will be with him." (54).
Elena Semenovna [Alik's mother], with eight-month-old Alik in her arms, was standing in the room when Vera [Elena's sister] walked in and began to speak about her doubts. All of a sudden Alik jumped in his mother's arms, laughed, and began to tug at the cross around her neck. She realized that he was not simply pulling it but had some kind of goal, and that she must give him the cross. She took it off and gave it to him. He straightened the chain and reached out for Vera. She came closer, and he put the cross on her and broke into a joyful smile.

"Well, there you have it, he destroyed all my doubts!" said Vera, who was deeply moved. "He blessed me, and I will obey . . ." (Vekhova, "Vseisceljajushchee," 189).

Like the beginning of his life, the account of the end of a saint's life is also full of typical expressions. Most importantly, the author explains that the saint had a foreknowledge of his death. The Lives of both Feodosij and Sergij contain such topos: "When Feodosij had reached the end of his life, he learned beforehand from God the day he would go to rest" (46); "Sergij foresaw his own end six months in advance" (403). Zoja Maslenikova, in her memoirs of Father Aleksandr, asserts that he also had a premonition of his coming death:

Father Aleksandr knew something about his coming death. Of course, a "mortal consciousness," as with every Christian occupied an important place in his life, maybe even especially important. But during his last weeks there was something different here: not thoughts about the rapid course of early existence and not even suspicions, but a firm knowledge (Maslenikova, "Fenomen," 55).

A saint does not keep this foreknowledge secret but shares it with his disciples. In the traditional Lives, the blessed one usually calls the brethren to tell them that he will soon die, and he gives them instructions about how to carry on the life of the monastery after he is gone. Father Aleksandr also referred to his death in conversations with his spiritual children, Maslenikova relates one such exchange:

I have to hurry. I have very little time left, I have to manage to do something more." I grew cold with fear. "Is something wrong with your heart?" "No, it's not connected with my health, my health's OK . . . But this is how it is, believe me, I know it (Maslenikova, "Fenomen" 55).

Besides topos, another evident feature of the language of saints' Lives is the profuse use of Biblical quotations. These excerpts are not inserted randomly into the text, but are woven into the author's narrative to become an integral component that cannot be removed without deforming the distinctive character of the Life. In the narration of the introduction, they can be used to justify

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4Page number refers to Dmitriev (ed.) Pamiatniki literatury. English translation is my own.
the author's task: "I have in mind the words 'If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, remove from hence thither and it shall remove.' Reflecting on these words, I, sinful Nestor, have girded myself with faith and hope in order to relate the life of blessed Feodosij" (20). In the main body, Biblical quotations and allusions are juxtaposed with historical accounts to create a parallelism between the narrative and the Gospels, between the saint and Christ (Bortnes, Visions, 39). In this way, the quotations contribute to the idealization of a hero who deserves to be emulated. The Life of Stefan of Penn describes the saint's entrance into monasticism in the following way:

In the holy Gospels the Lord says: 'Whoever leaves father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, home and belongings for my sake, to him will be returned a hundredfold, and he will inherit eternal life. Whoever does not refuse all these things just mentioned cannot be my disciple.' And many such things and other similar things that speak about this are contained in the Holy Scriptures. And in the name of love for God, Stefan left his father's home and all his belongings and, simply speaking, this youth . . . took monastic vows. (Fedorova, "Slovo," 107)5

Biblical quotations are also used in the memoirs about Men to emphasize his obedience to Christ. In the following example it is interesting to note that, while Epiphanius uses Scripture to justify Stefan's retreat into monasticism, this author shows that Men's interaction with the modern world is also consistent with Biblical teaching.

From the very beginning this voice was directed exactly and concretely to contemporary man. . . . It would have been much finer to organize the Church without people, from only angels, but you can't do anything of the sort because it goes against the clearly expressed will of Christ, who established His Church for the salvation of imperfect, sinful people, just the way they are. "The Pharisees said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners? When he heard this, Jesus said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.'" (Mt. 9: 11-12) (Averincev, "Vmesto," 82).

There is another important feature of the language of hagiographic works that serves to build up the image of the saint as an ideal hero. Descriptions of him often contain an abundance of positive adjectives that are fitting for a saint, a person who stands above other people, even other pious Christians, because of his exceptional character. In fifteenth century hagiography, particularly in the Lives written by Epiphanius, the style of "word-weaving" encouraged strings of adjectives and comparisons. Consider, for example, one of Epiphanius's descriptions of Saint Sergij:

He led many souls to God by his pure and chaste life, our holy Father saint Sergij: a wonderful starec, adorned with every virtue, quiet, possessing a meek

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5English translation is my own.
disposition, humble and good-tempered, affable and good-humored, comforting, smooth-spoken and soft. . . (409)6

The twentieth century authors of Father Aleksandr's memoirs make use of this device, though to a lesser degree, in order to describe their hero in saintly terms. The following examples show how Father Aleksandr is showered with glowing adjectives:

Father Aleksandr himself was a revelation, steadfast, pure, honest and fearless. His courage became a legend (Andreeva, "V Rem," 215).

It was necessary to see and feel this amazing person with your whole heart, which always, when it met with him, filled up with warmth, peace, calmness and some kind of special, unearthly love for everything surrounding you (Korb, "Chtoby vy", 249).

The authors of the Lives and of Father Aleksandr's memoirs do not notice only the inward character of the saint, but they also paint a picture for the reader of his physical appearance:

Sergij:
Everyone saw that his saintly appearance was made beautiful by angelic gray hair; he was adorned by fasts, shined with self-control and was radiant with brotherly love; he had a meek look and an unhurried step . . . (411)7

Father Aleksandr:
I saw a person of rare physical beauty and spiritual charm. From his smile, his kind, calm temperament and his light, your own light was fumed on. Such a wonderful attribute was in the nature of this person (Iskander, "On byl svetom," 320-21).

These excerpts describe the appearance of both men as being beautiful, and the reader gets the impression that this outward beauty shines from an inner source. Sergij's appearance is angelic and Father Aleksandr's has a spiritual charm and a light that spreads to other people. In other words, physical beauty is the natural reflection of the spirituality that is at the core of each saint's character.

Imagery in a Life

The fact that the literature written in honor of Aleksandr Men' reflects the structure and the formulaic language of Russian hagiography is significant. The reader who notices these hagiographic conventions in the memoirs about Men' is reminded of traditional saints' Lives and begins to form an impression of Father Aleksandr as a saintly figure. A third important aspect of

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6Page number refers to Dmitriev (ed.) Pamjatniki literatury. English translation is my own.

7Ibid.
the memoirs makes this perception of Father Aleksandr even more complete. Many of the authors portray him in terms of images that are associated with saints and are, in fact, essential to a hero's status as a saint. These images, of course, also surround the descriptions of the saints in the full-length Lives. First, each traditional saint is associated with at least one current of Russian Orthodox spirituality. As discussed above, these spiritual trends include kenoticism, mysticism, and the traditions of the starcy and strastoterpcy. Secondly, the saint is a source of miracles, both miracles that he performs during his life and ones that occur posthumously at the site where his relics lie. A third essential feature is the apotheosis of the saint. His ascension and union with Christ are prerequisite to his receiving the deification and glorification that characterizes a saint.

In his life as an Orthodox Christian and in his service as a priest, Aleksandr Men' displayed some characteristics of each of the spiritual currents mentioned above. Therefore, when his memoirists describe his spirituality, they unavoidably associate Father Aleksandr with the great saints of hagiographic literature. The Life of Feodosij, for example, emphasizes the kenotic traits of the saint, who identified himself with Christ by his self-humiliation:

He (Feodosij) was animated by real humility and great gentleness; in everything he imitated Christ, our true God, Who said: "He that will be first among you shall be your servant." Contemplating Christ's humility, he humbled himself, putting himself in the lowest place as an example to the others. He was the first to begin his work; he entered the church before everyone else." (33).

The memoirs about Father Aleksandr make many references to his kenotic qualities and thereby remind the reader of saint Feodosij. In the following excerpt, the description of his unselfish labor in the church is reminiscent of Feodosij's self-sacrificing service. In both passages the use of biblical quotations further highlights the saint's obedience to and identification with Christ:

For many years he bore abuse from every side and, accepting the difficult conditions of church work, actually fulfilled Christ's command: "If anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile" (Mt. 5:41) (Vasilenko, "Vokrug," 34).

According to Fedotov, kenoticism must be understood "in the sense of charitable humility as well as of non-resistance or voluntary suffering" (Fedotov, Treasury, xi). These last two characteristics are also an integral part of the kenotic tendencies of Feodosij and Father Aleksandr. The following two examples show how both heroes often display their humility in the context of suffering. They accept and patiently bear criticism, insults and other attacks because Christ Himself suffered.

*Feodosij:*

Our Lord Jesus Christ became poor and humbled himself, offering Himself as an example, so that we should humble ourselves in His name. He suffered
insults, was spat upon and beaten, for our salvation; how just it is, then, that we should suffer in order to gain Christ. *(20)*

He (Men') never called those in the Church itself who hated him, who denounced and slandered him, "false brothers". He never said that his enemies didn't have a place in the kingdom of God, and he neither anathematized nor accused anyone of heresy (Vasilenko, *Vokrug imeni,* 34).

The idea of non-resistance makes the kenoic ideal intimately tied with the tradition of the *strastoterpca*, those who voluntarily sacrifice their lives rather than defend themselves against their enemies. This type of sacrificial death is the ideal example of kenoticism because it is the ultimate imitation of Christ, who suffered unto death. In the memoirs about Men' there are many references to his martyrdom. The examples below emphasize the fact that Men' was a person who sacrificially gave up his life for the sake of others. In the first excerpt the author particularly stresses Men's similarity to Christ by alluding to the possibility that like Christ, Father Aleksandr's blood is the blood of forgiveness.

He fulfilled another command of Christ: *"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."* (John 15:13). Before he died, when he was already bleeding profusely, he didn't accuse anyone but took everything on himself. The voice of the murdered man's blood, I think, did not demand revenge. It fully well could be a prayer of forgiveness for those, from whom he received his heavy life's destiny and for those, from whom he received death (Vasilenko, *Vokrug imeni,* 34, emphasis mine).

Love is what he lived and breathed and what poured out from his heart. He fulfilled both of the main commands about love for God and love for man. He laid down his life for his friends and offered himself as a sacrifice. This was a voluntary sacrifice: for the sake of people's salvation, and he faced it without wavering (Iljushenko, *Syn,* 126, emphasis mine).

"A prophet in his hometown," he followed the way of the cross of a preacher, humiliated and persecuted. He taught us, and with his whole life he proved "that the cross of Christ is not merely a mark that we wear but a complete giving up of oneself, even unto death." (Andreevna, *V nem,* 201, emphasis mine).

The saints Boris and Gleb, the first canonized Russian saints, are famous examples of *strastoterpca*. When their elder brother Svjatopolk, who had seized their father's throne, sent his armed men to kill Boris and Gleb, the two chose to appeal to their brother's mercy rather than engage in battle. In the *Chtenie* version of this martyr story, Nestor praises the saints' humble, sacrificial act in words that almost seem to be the direct source for the descriptions in Men's memoirs. Like Father Aleksandr, Boris and Gleb laid down their lives for the sake of others.

What could be more marvelous than these saints, who, enjoying such honor and glory, were so submissive that they gave themselves over even unto death? . . . When those sent to murder the saints arrived, how did they answer their men
when they wanted to oppose the murderers? Not only did they entreat them not to oppose them, but they also bade them return to their own homes, for they themselves preferred to die on behalf of all, imitating the Master Himself, our Lord Jesus Christ, who laid down His life for His people. (30-31)

The self-humiliation of kenoticism and its ultimate manifestation in sacrificial death are very tangible and physical expressions of one's spirituality. There are many examples of imagery associated with these tendencies in the literature about Aleksandr Men'. However, the memoirs also contain allusions to a spiritual current that is often expressed less overtly, that of mysticism. As discussed earlier, the mystic trend of Hesychasm came to Russia in the fourteenth century from Mount Athos, a monastic community on the Aegean. Instead of an outward expression of faith, focused on ritual and physical asceticism, followers of Hesychast teachings sought to approach God through contemplation and inward prayer. The goal of these contemplative techniques was to experience a vision of the divine light that surrounds the risen Christ.

According to Fedotov, Saint Sergij "belongs to another epoch than does Feodosij; he is the first Russian saint in whom mysticism is observed" (Fedotov, Treasury, 52). His biographer, Epiphanij, does not evidence any knowledge of the Hesychast contemplative techniques in his descriptions of Sergij. However, two celestial visions that he describes— one of a shining angel serving with Sergij in the liturgy and the other of fire surrounding the altar during the Eucharist—are typical Hesychast light-visions. The second of these deserves particular notice because similar imagery is used in one of the memoirs about Father Aleksandr.

This Simon beheld a wondrous vision. He relates that while the saint was chanting Mass, he saw a flame hovering over the sacrificial table, descending upon the altar and embracing the Holy Offering. And when the saint prepared himself for Communion, the Divine Fire twined itself into the shape of a corporal and entered the holy chalice. Thus the saint received Communion. (82).

Like Saint Sergij, there is no specific reference to the fact that Father Aleksandr practiced inner, mystical prayer. However, one of his memoirists describes a vision that immediately reminds the reader of the imagery in the Life of Sergij and suggests that mysticism was one of the currents that comprised Father Aleksandr's spiritual life:

The firm voice of the priest sounds: "Take and eat, this is my Body, which is broken for you for the remission of sins." And I suddenly sense physically that the sky over the church is breaking up, and uncreated, dazzling rays are issuing forth from the chasm that was formed. They extend in all directions to a multitude of other churches, forsaken among the Russian snow and ravines, and further, to the churches of Greece and France, Lithuania and Poland, England

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*Page numbers for excerpts from the Chtenie of Boris and Gleb refer to Hollingsworth, Hagiography.*
and America... And one of these rays pierces space and time and, while the choir quietly sings "We sing to You," it comes to rest on the Holy Gifts, which are offered to God "from all and for all" by the priest of Novaja Derevnja (Bessmertnyj-Anzimirov, "Pastyr'," 331).

In both visions, as the priests are serving Communion, a holy light miraculously appears and descends upon the elements, appearing to sanctify them. In each case one of the people present at the Liturgy sees and relates the vision. The author of the excerpt from Men's memoirs mentions a further connection between Saint Sergij and Father Aleksandr. He explains that as he arrived in Novaja Derevnja, the village where Father Aleksandr's church was located, he recalled that this was "the land of Saint Sergij of Radonezh," whose Troice-Sergieva Monastery was located down the road from the village (Bessmertnyj, "Pastyr'," 330).

The final trend which must be considered in connection with Aleksandr Men' is the tradition of the starec, or spiritual advisors, which was particularly cultivated in the Optina monastery. Optina began in 1795 as a small group of monks living in community, and it later grew to also include a secluded skit for monks who desired to live in prayerful silence and solitude. The monastery was materially prosperous both in terms of its number of buildings and monks, but its main legacy lies in the establishment of the tradition of starec. A starec is a person who, having achieved spiritual maturity through obedience and inward prayer, is able to become a spiritual advisor who will direct the lives of less mature monks under his care. He is a "spiritual physician" who must be able to penetrate the depths of his disciple's soul, perceive the sources of sin and dictate the proper means for rooting out and continuing along the path of spiritual growth. Very often a spiritual advisor has other gifts such as intuition, miracle working and prophecy (Zhitiya prepodobnykh stareev, 4).

Aleksandr Men' did not consider himself to be a starec because, as a parish priest, he didn't have the right to be authoritative and require lay people to be obedient to him in the same way monks must submit to their spiritual advisors (Hamant, Alexander Men, 124). Yet Father Aleksandr was a confessor and spiritual father to countless numbers of people who came to him for guidance. Some of his memoirists describe his role as priest in words that seem to fit the definition of a starec. The following examples compare two such descriptions with characterizations of Father Amvrosij, one of the starec of Optina:

Father Aleksandr
To him all sins were the same, but people were different. In his eyes, the source that united them was the Lord Himself, not personal peculiarities or spiritual disposition (Zhurinskaja, "Reki," 153. emphasis mine).
A line after the service in front of the pastor's office... Embarrassment in the office, a startling confused articulation ("a heavy tongue"), difficulty grasping the art of setting forth your thoughts, fears and hopes before such a wise and impressive confessor, a church author with an international reputation. And enormous love in his eyes, the intense attention with which he listens to you, immediately grasping the essence of a problem and, in two or three words, often with a good-natured and subtle joke, guiding you to an independent solution, never thrusting one on you (Bessmertnyj-Anzirnirov, "Pastyr," 331, emphasis mine).

Amvrosij

How many people have been here! And they came here, bathed in tears of sorrow but left with tears of joy, the despairing went away comforted and encouraged; the unbelievers and doubters left as faithful children of the Church. Here lived "batjushka" ('father') - the source of so much blessing and comfort. Neither the title of a person nor his position meant anything in his eyes. He needed only a person's soul, which was so precious to him that he, forgetting himself, tried with all his strength to save it and set it on the true path. (165, emphasis mine)⁹

He always grasped at once the essence of the matter, inconceivably wisely making an interpretation and giving an answer... From his words and his instructions it was clear that he loved not only the person with whom he was speaking, but all of this person's loved ones, his life, everything that was dear to him (166, emphasis mine).

In these excerpts, the portrayal of Father Aleksandr resembles starec Amvrosij in significant ways. First, the memoirist mentions that there was always a line of people waiting to see Father Aleksandr after the service, just as large numbers of people came to see Father Amvrosij at Optina. Furthermore, these people came with fears and sorrows, but were comforted after speaking with the priest who displayed care and concern for them. The authors describe how Father Aleksandr's great love for these pilgrims could be seen in his eyes and how Father Amvrosij's words were evidence that he loved them. One important aspect of the love that both men showed was the fact that it was unconditional; it did not depend on a person's name, place in life, or spiritual disposition. Finally, Father Aleksandr has the same ability as Father Amvrosij to immediately grasp the essence of a person's problem. This type of spiritual perception is one of the important qualifications of a starec.

Some starec, as discussed above, also had the ability to predict events and to work miracles. In the saints' Lives, miracles are connected with every saint, not just with starec. The imagery of miracles in the memoirs about Aleksandr Men' is another important feature that causes the reader to associate him with the great heroes of hagiographic literature. Unlike the traditional

⁹Page numbers for excerpts from the Life of Amvrosij refer to Zhitiia Prepodobnykh Startsev Optinoi Pustyni. English translations are my own.
Russian saints, there are no references to posthumous miracles, such as healings, at the site where Father Aleksandr is buried. However, there are allusions to special abilities that he displayed during his lifetime. The following excerpt highlights three saintly attributes of Father Aleksandr:

Father Aleksandr possessed god-like attributes in the highest degree. Often, when a person came to him for confession, Father Aleksandr began straight off to answer thoughts that the person hadn't voiced yet. He cured spiritual and physical illnesses with a friendly touch on the shoulder, a pastorly blessing and a grasp of the hand. He Predicted events. Once he confessed that during moments of prayerful contemplation he could see his entire parish at once (Andreeva, "V nem," 211, emphasis mine)

In many of the saint's Lives, similar miracles are described. For example, the following selections from the Life of Sergij show that saint Sergij had each of the three miraculous experiences and abilities - healing, prophecy and vision - underlined above in the passage about Father Aleksandr.

First of all, saint Sergij performed healings:

He brought his son to the monastery, asking the saint to pray for him.... Sergij had compassion on this man, and kneeling down, he prayed for the dead child. Suddenly the boy stirred into life, and his soul returned to him and he began to move about. (72)

Secondly, Sergij was also able to predict events:

And his prophecy came true. Hence all venerated Sergius as a prophet. (79)

Finally, Men's mystical vision of his parish during times of prayer is strikingly similar to a vision that God granted Sergij while he was praying:

One night the saint, in accordance with his ordinary rule, was watching and praying for the brethren, so that the Lord might help them in their difficulties of life and in their deeds . . . And he saw a wondrous vision: a great light appeared in the heavens, illumining the night. And he twice heard a voice saying: "Sergij! You pray for your children, and the Lord has heard your prayer. Look attentively, then, and you shall see a multitude of monks, assembled in the name of the holy, life-giving Trinity, to become your flock and be instructed by you."

The saint looked and beheld a multitude of beautiful birds, fluttering not only over the monastery, but all around it. (73)

Saint Sergij and Father Aleksandr share another important quality that is characteristic of the heroes of saints' Lives. In the literature about both men, their accomplishments are often described by the wordpodvig,a term that contributes to the reader's idealized image of the saint. A podvig is, in its most general sense, a heroic deed or action, but the word can also have other connotations, depending on the context. It may suggest a difficult exploit or feat, and it often refers to an act that is self-sacrificing. In both the Life of Sergij and the memoirs about Men', the
The word *podvig* appears numerous times. However, the heroic deeds of the two men were different in nature, as the following quote suggests:

Sergij’s *podvig* - labor for the revival of the Russian people after the spiritual decline that preceded the Tatar-Mongol yoke and was intensified by it. Father Aleksandr’s *podvig* - work for the revival of the Russian people after the spiritual and moral decay that was born under the yoke of atheistic totalitarianism and increased a thousandfold by it (Belavin, "Svjashchennik," 28).

Sergij was a hermit and a mystic who initiated the revival of monasticism in Russia in the fourteenth century. The *podvigi* described in his Life are, therefore, centered on ascetic exercises and inward contemplation.

And girding himself strongly, he prepared to courageously undertake spiritual *podvigi*, having left the world and renounced it and everything in it, including his inheritance and all other worldly blessings (303).

Saint Sergij, living with the brothers, bore many burdens, performed great *podvigi* and carried out the labors of an ascetic life. He lived a severe ascetic life. His virtues were the following: hunger, thirst, vigil, dry food, sleeping on the ground, bodily and spiritual purity, silence, thorough mortification of the desires of the flesh, physical labor . . . (319).

These *podvigi* are extraordinary feats because other average monks did not attain such a high degree of perfection in performing such acts:

What is our life or what is our existence in comparison with the *podvigi* and other virtues of the saint? Our monasticism is nothing in comparison with him, and our prayer is only a reflection of his prayer (421).

Such practices made Sergij holy in the eyes of others, and he attracted people who wanted to learn from him and follow his example in their own spiritual lives:

This was the first monk in that place: he established the basis for *podvici*: he was an example for all other monks who lived here (303).

Men’s *podvigi* were no less heroic, but they were appropriate to his situation, which was very different from Sergij’s. Father Aleksandr lived in the twentieth century Soviet Union, in a society in which Sergij’s practices would not have been successful in attracting people to the Christian life. As one of his memoirists writes, "Old forms, connected with a church cult and monasteries, fit poorly into modern life" (Eremin, "Ty ne uznal," 53). Father Aleksandr’s accomplishment did not lie in approaching God through the self-discipline and seclusion of a monastic life, but rather in serving God through active engagement with the world and with people who did not know . . .

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1Page numbers for excerpts about Sergij’s *podvigi* refer to Dmitriev (ed.) *Pamjatniki literatury*. English translations are my own.

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Christ. He was attractive because he validated intellectual society and united it with faith in God. In an officially atheistic nation, Men's podvigi required both heroism and self-sacrifice.

But he saw, or perhaps still only felt, something else: around him were deception, cruelty, tyranny and death. And he consciously did not become either a member of the Pioneers or the Komsomol. In those years, this was a moral podvig (Andreevna, "V nem" 203).

Aleksandr Men' feared no one, but modestly, adamantly carried out his quiet podvig of service to God and people. He was a stranger to displays of heroism, wealth and pride. This was Captain Tushin of Christ's army. And is it not said of such people by the apostle, "We are in distress, but we always rejoice; we are poor, but enrich many; we have nothing, but possess everything"? (Vasinskiy, "Po doroge," 26).

The final reward of a saint for his podvig is his glorification in heaven. In traditional Russian hagiography, the apotheosis of the saint is an essential part of the Life's function as a work that celebrates and exalts its hero. Furthermore, a vision of the saint's glorification after death is consistent with Orthodox theology, which teaches that "the final goal at which every Christian must aim [is] to become god, to attain theosis, 'deification' or 'divinization'"(Ware, Church, 236). This doctrine of deification is based on the idea that man is made in the image of God, as expressed in the Trinity, and man's salvation means his union with the Godhead. The author of a Life must describe the saint's deification because the saint, in order to serve as a worthy example for other Christians to emulate, must be someone who has achieved the ultimate goal of the Christian life. In the following excerpt, one of Father Aleksandr's memoirists affirms that Men' has a place with God in heaven:

Now Father Aleksandr contemplates the Savior not through a mirror dimly, but face to face. And he looks in a unique way on the world, on his native Church, on all his spiritual children and on each of us not only with his own love, however permeated by God's light it might have been, but with God's love! (Vasilenko, "Vokrug imeni." 13, emphasis mine)

The description in this example of Father Aleksandr's being face to face with God is similar to a passage about Saint Sergij's death that likewise describes the saint's ascension to heaven and his personal vision of God as embodied in the Trinity:

Though it had not been the saint's wish to be glorified in life or in death, the immutable power of God glorified him. Angels preceded his entrance into heaven, opening before him the gates of paradise and leading him into the beatitude he had aspired to, into the peace of the just, the light of angels. And the saint saw that about which he had dreamed, and he received the illumination of
the Holy Trinity as befits an ascetic, the adornment of the monks (405, emphasis mine)\textsuperscript{11}

A saint’s deification involves not only his soul, but also his body, since Christ has saved the whole man (Ware, \textit{Church}, 237). The full deification of the body will not occur until the Last Day, but even in this present life, some saints exhibit signs of this outward, bodily glorification. Saint Seraphim of Sarov is an example of this type of physical transformation. One of his disciples, Motovilov, relates a vision he had during a conversation with Father Seraphim:

\begin{quote}
I looked into his face, and an even greater awe filled me. Picture to yourself the center of the sun in the most dazzling brightness of its noonday rays, and in this center the face of the man who is conversing with you... You do not see yourself, nor the man's figure, only the dazzling sphere of light spreading in a radius of many feet...
\end{quote}

(Fedotov, \textit{Treasury}, 274)

One of Father Aleksandr's spiritual children describes a similar image of brightness that surrounded the priest's physical body during his life:

\begin{quote}
In the last two years a feeling began to arise that he had some kind of spiritual body in which his physical body resided, like in a cocoon. It became visibly discernable. It became visible... So, during the last two years it was possible to visibly discern some kind of golden mane around his physical body. He became like a merciful lion with a golden mane (Aleksandrova, "Liturgija," 254).
\end{quote}

Deification is the pinnacle of the holy life that a saint leads in pursuit of Christian perfection. The descriptions of Father Aleksandr Men's glorification, which are similar to the apotheosis of saints such as Sergij, suggest that he deserves a place among the ranks of those holy men of Russia who are remembered and revered as saints.

\section*{III. Neo-Hagiography}

One interesting and important piece of literature remains to be discussed - the Life of Nestor, a twentieth-century Russian priest of a small village parish. Like the memoirs about Aleksandr Men', the biography of Nestor is not a saint's Life in the traditional sense, but it has hagiographic features and seems to deserve a place within the genre of hagiography. The presence of non-traditional elements in this work, however, suggests that perhaps the boundaries of the genre need to be expanded to include new types of saints' Lives. Nestor's Life was written at the end of the Soviet era, a period of spiritual depression in Russia. Thus, it was written at a time when hagiographic activity had declined considerably, and it therefore represents, to some degree, a revival of the genre. Aleksandr Men' and the literature about him share much in common with

\textsuperscript{11}Page number refers to Dmitriev (ed.) \textit{Pamjatniki literatury}. English translation is my own.
Nikolaj Savchuk (1960-1993), known by his monastic name Nestor, is referred to as a "new martyr" ("Strastoterpec Nestor," Russkij Palomnik’). The term "new martyr" places him, on the one hand, in the tradition of saints such as Boris and Gleb and on the other, in connection with modern figures such as Aleksandr Men’. Nestor did not have the intellectual background and higher education that Men’ had, yet there are many similarities between the two men. While Men’s background gave him access to a particular subgroup of the population, the Moscow intelligentsia, Nestor likewise had a special focus for his ministry, the provincial youth. Furthermore, like Father Aleksandr, Nestor served in a small village parish (in Zharki) during the Soviet era and suffered from the government’s anti-religious repression. He was also murdered under circumstances that were only weakly investigated and still remain unexplained. Nestor’s biography is much closer to a full-fledged saint’s Life than the memoirs about Aleksandr Men’, and it has many features that are consistent with traditional hagiography. One of the most interesting is the orthography that contains Old Russian letters, giving the work the appearance of medieval hagiography. The article follows the chronology of a Life, beginning with Nestor’s childhood and progressing through his years of service in the Church to an account of his death. There are also allusions to his apotheosis and accounts of posthumous miracles. The structure of the biography is based on a series of short episodes that are labeled by subheadings, and Nestor’s character is presented and developed through extensive sections of dialogue.

While much about the article is reminiscent of traditional saints’ Lives, there are many characteristics that suggest it is a new type of hagiography. Despite the fact that the orthography gives the work an old appearance, it is actually written in modern vocabulary. Furthermore, the language has the quality of oral narrative because the biography was compiled from stories told by people who knew Nestor well. The characteristics of oral narrative include the following: the use of the present tense to narrate the past and add to the sense of action ("His grandfather became seriously ill and needed nursing and Kolja goes to Pochaev to take care of him."); short, factual sentences that accelerate the movement of the story ("He got to the seminary."); and repetition of facts that deserve emphasis. The modern language and quality of oral narrative make the biography very understandable and place Nestor in a contemporary context that the reader can relate to.

Many of the memoirs about Aleksandr Men’ are also based on the reminiscences of people who knew him personally. For example, a piece by Father Aleksandr’s good friend Fajnberg ("Otec Aleksandr," discussed earlier) consists of various stories about trips that the
author and Father Aleksandr went on together, meals that they shared and conversations they had. Articles such as this one are written not from the objective viewpoint of the third person, but rather in the personal style of first person narrative. Close friends portray both Father Aleksandr and Nestor in a very human light, as people whom it is possible to know intimately. The authors give insights into their friends' various habits and the eccentricities of their behavior, and this makes Father Aleksandr and Nestor seem more real and human. Sometimes the insights reveal aspects of their character that aren't particularly saintly. For example, one of Men's memoirists writes about how he was sometimes unexpectedly very rude to his friends.

The hagiographic elements of Nestor's biography and Men's memoirs certainly bring the works into dialogue with traditional hagiography and help to create an image of these two men as saints. Furthermore, the friends who remember them in the literature express their admiration, respect, and unequivocal belief that Nestor and Men' are holy; they are set apart from average Christians. Yet the oral narrative qualities of the literature and the descriptions of the more ordinary, and sometimes even negative, aspects of each hero's character adds a new dimension to the account of his life. The authors expand the image of a saint by writing about him from a more personal, intimate perspective that reveals the human aspects of his character that all people can identify with. The neo-hagiography exemplified by the literature about Nestor and Men' is fitting for the depiction of the modern saints of today.

The evidence is convincing that much of the literature about Aleksandr Men' reflects the structure, formulaic language and imagery of traditional Russian saints' Lives. The obvious similarities cannot be attributed to mere coincidence. Father Aleksandr's memoirists hoped to present their spiritual father as a saint and they attained their goal by incorporating hagiographic elements into their works. These intertextual ties draw Aleksandr Men' into the literary reality in which the hero of the story must be a saint.

All that remains is to bring the memoirs together into a comprehensive saint's Life. However, the Life of Alexander Men' will not be merely an imitation of Old Russian hagiography. As part of a neohagiographic trend, it will modernize the valuable aspects of traditional hagiography. The devices, themes and theology that have been successfully used to present praiseworthy Christian heroes will be recombined and integrated with new features to create the Life of a modern saint.

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