

But at this point, my joy that an attempt was being made to tell this outstanding pastor's story in the Western press gave way to misgiving.

Firstly, I am aware, as I have known Father Alexander for a number of years, that the author of the article is only superficially acquainted with his subject and has not got his facts quite right. The article, as a whole, paints a picture of an essentially different person – it is difficult to recognize it as a picture of Father Alexander.

I do not wish to linger over these details, I shall merely mention a few facts. The article begins: "Father Alexander Men is well-known in Moscow, but not in the West". Naturally Father Alexander is better known in his own country, where he has been a priest, preaching God's word, for 17 years. But he is not unknown in the West. The articles he wrote for the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, on whose staff he worked from 1959 onwards, aroused interest among readers abroad and were translated for a number of theological publications. His essays and research studies on Church history, the history of religion and the Bible were based on contemporary knowledge and at the same time showed clarity and subtlety of conception. Apart from that, he always addressed living words to a living audience.

Father Alexander carried on a lively correspondence with many Western Church leaders and theologians on a wide range of Christian problems. He has been invited more than once to international ecumenical conferences, although unfortunately, for various reasons, he has never travelled abroad. It should be emphasized that Father Alexander never sought any kind of fame, abroad or in his own country. On the contrary, all kinds of sensation-seeking sickened him and he always tried to avoid it. (Incidentally, one might here mention that many of his written works were anonymous.)

A. Dubrov has a number of inaccuracies in his biography of Father Alexander. He writes: "After finishing his studies at a forestry institute in Siberia, he realized that a profession as a graduate in forestry was not for him . . . He was brought up in a believing family and his uncle was a priest . . . he entered the seminary at Zagorsk. He excelled in his studies and graduated in the early 1960s. After ordination he was sent to serve in the village of Tarasovka, 40 kilometres from Moscow on the way to Zagorsk." All this is inaccurate. It is not true that Father Alexander grew up in a Christian family – only his mother was deeply religious and no uncle of his was a priest. He felt a call to the priesthood, not when he finished his studies at the Institute, but in adolescence. At 15, he was already singing, reading lessons and serving as an altar boy in church. At 17 he took external courses at a seminary. He did not immediately enter a theological school, as he felt that a modern priest should have a broader theoretical training and experience of life. For this reason he began to study at the Moscow Fur Institute, where he took biology (to which he had always been attracted) as his main subject. He did indeed spend his last three terms in Siberia at the Agricultural Institute, due to a change of faculty. Because he was considered sufficiently advanced in theology and thoroughly prepared in church ritual, he was consecrated as a deacon immediately after his fifth term (he was then 23 years old). He took the external examinations at the Leningrad seminary and Zagorsk academy. His doctor's thesis was about the religion of Babylon, and was called "The Elements of Monotheism in Pre-Christian Religion and Philosophy". This work was part of his multi-volume work on the history of pre-Christian

religions. At the age of 25, Father Alexander was consecrated as a priest and served in the village of Alabino near Moscow. In 1970 he was made an Archpriest. He was transferred to Tarasovka and then to Pushkino, not as a result of KGB searches, as A. Dubrov writes, but in the usual way. Such transfers are normal occurrences and Father Alexander has even had a settled way of life in this respect compared with some of his colleagues. The curious will be interested to know that the author of the article presented Father Alexander with three children, while in reality he has only two, both long past the Pioneer stage.

Most important of all, Father Alexander's character is portrayed in the article in a wholly unrecognizable way. The reader is given the impression of some kind of propagandist, constantly converting people at work and at home. Such a view of a priest's calling is in any case somewhat strange, and it has no resemblance to Father Men. As a pastor he never put pressure on anyone. Father Men was convinced that conversion was a secret meeting between the soul and God, and he was therefore very restrained, careful and guarded on these questions. It was difficult for an unbeliever to get him to speak of his religious experiences. Even with believers he spoke of this only from the pulpit, at confession or in intimate conversations. However, he does indeed attract people to himself and a number of conversions are attributed to him. Evidently this is explained simply by the qualities of his character.

A. Dubrov quite rightly observes that Father Alexander's Christian faith is his whole life – he is completely true to what he preaches and serves. At the same time, he is completely natural, open and ready to listen to every human problem. His knowledge is wide and varied, and people of very different professions are able to discuss with him. He himself, as a phenomenon, involuntarily inspires respect for the faith he serves. Incidentally, there have been attempts to make a film, in which Father Men would answer questions connected with the film (this film was actually produced by Kalik, but was never put on general release).

Father Alexander never held any kind of *jours fixes* as were customary in many Moscow houses at the end of the '60s. This would have been impossible for him. It is true, that when he was younger he used to invite many guests to stay at his house, with his typical simplicity, his cordial and welcoming approach. However, as time went on, he was forced to limit his hospitality because of the demands put on him by pastoral and theological work. This, again, had nothing to do with KGB pressure. Nobody directly asked him to limit this side of his pastoral work.

In his article, Dubrov alleges that Father Men criticized people who were concerned with social problems. But this is exaggerated. He never criticized anything which did not contravene Christian principles and the demands of conscience.

It is worth saying something about Father Alexander's special gifts in preaching. His hearers often feel that he is speaking to each of them personally, about their own personal problems. His sermons are strictly based on the Gospel – they touch the hearts and minds of the old uneducated peasant women and young intellectuals alike.

Much more will certainly be said and written about Father Men, but information about him should be correct and should not lead to misunderstanding about his work.