

**FATHER ALEXANDER SCHMEMANN RECOUNTS A MEETING HOSTED BY  
METROPOLITAN LEONTY THAT WAS THE STARTING POINT TOWARDS  
THE AUTOCEPHALY RECEIVED BY THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN  
AMERICA IN 1970**

One rainy evening, in March of 1963, Dr. Paul Anderson, an old friend of Orthodoxy, called me at St. Vladimir's Seminary and informed me that Archbishop Nikodim, head of a delegation of the Moscow Patriarchate visiting the United States, had expressed a desire to pay a visit to the Seminary, and that he and his companions were to arrive in about two hours. I told Dr. Anderson that I must ask permission to receive the delegation and would call Metropolitan Leonty. I still remember the weak and soft voice of the old Metropolitan who, after listening to me, said: "... him who comes to me I will not cast out (John 6:37). Receive them with love . . ." And thus one hour later a bus stopped at the doorstep of the Seminary, and some fifteen Russian hierarchs, priests and laymen entered the building. The seminarians were already at Vespers in the Chapel and, having welcomed our guests in the name of the Metropolitan, I invited them to the Chapel.

They prayed with us, praised the student choir, and then, at a rapidly organized reception, Archbishop Nikodim took me aside and said that, in his opinion, the time was ripe for "resolving our misunderstandings." Were we ready to discuss them? My answer was that all I could do was to inform the Metropolitan and try to arrange a personal encounter between him and Archbishop Nikodim. This was done and a few days later, Archbishop Nikodim came to the Metropolitan's residence at Syosset, Long Island. I will never for-

get the nearly ninety-year-old Metropolitan as he slowly came down the stairs to meet his guests, dressed as usual in his white riason, so majestic, so sure of himself, and yet so simple and joyful, so obviously the head of the Church to which he had given his entire life. At the end of the dinner, he made a speech in which, after having expressed his joy to see representatives of the Mother Church after so many years of mutual alienation, he spoke of his participation at the Moscow Sobor of 1917-1918, of his experiences in Russia afire with revolutionary chaos, of the path followed by the Metropolia. It was the speech of someone who knows where he stands and who, because he knows it and carries upon himself the ultimate responsibility, knows what to expect from the future. No serious matters were discussed during this first encounter, but I am sure that it had a great importance. I am sure that it was then that Archbishop Nikodim realized the *reality* of the American Church, a reality which made the previous categories — those of "schism," "repentance," "return to the Mother Church," etc., somewhat irrelevant. He must have felt the sincerity and the depth of Metropolitan Leonty's unflinching love for the Russian Church, yet at the same time the *incarnation* in him of the local American Church, the strength of its roots, the reality of its own life and tradition. It was an encounter in depth: that which was not said was, in a way, more important than that which was said.

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