14/12/2021

38th anniversary of the repose of Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemann



Monday, December 13, 2021 marks the 38th anniversary of the repose of Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemann, Dean of Saint Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary and one of the 20th century's leading Orthodox Christian theologians.

Father Alexander was born in Estonia in 1921 to a family of Russian emigres. He spent his youth in France, where he completed his secondary and university educations. He also finished theological studies at the Orthodox Theological Institute of Saint Sergius in Paris, which at that time was the center of Russian Orthodox scholarship after the turmoil of the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Ordained to the priesthood in 1946, he taught Church history at Saint Sergius Institute until 1951, when he was invited to join the faculty of Saint Vladimir's Seminary, at that time located in New York City. He was soon recognized as a leading exponent of Orthodox liturgical theology, which sees the liturgical tradition of the Church as a major sign and expression of the Christian faith.

Father Alexander received his doctorate on July 5, 1959 from Saint Sergius Institute, having defended his dissertation, "Tserkovny Ustav: Opyt Vvedeniia v Liturgicheskoe Bogoslovie" ["The Church's Ordo: Introduction to Liturgical Theology"]. He held honorary degrees from Butler University, General Theological

Seminary, Lafayette College, Iona College, and Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology.

In addition to teaching at Saint Vladimir's, Father Alexander held positions as adjunct professor at Columbia University, New York University, Union Seminary, and General Theological Seminary and was a popular guest lecturer at many universities throughout the country. He was also active as a representative of the Orthodox Church in the ecumenical movement, and held positions in the Youth Department and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches.

Appointed Dean of Saint Vladimir's Seminary in 1962—position he held until his repose—he was instrumental in educating a generation of Orthodox Christian priests. During his tenure, the seminary achieved widespread recognition as a center of Orthodox theological studies.

Father Alexander was active in the establishment of the Orthodox Church in America as an autocephalous Church in 1970, at which time the former "Metropolia" became officially independent from the Russian Orthodox Church, dedicating itself to the unity of the Orthodox Church in North America.

While committed to the cause of an Orthodox Church that would be united and American, he always remained concerned with the fate of believers in the Soviet Union. For 30 years, his sermons were broadcast in Russian on "Radio Liberty," gaining Father Alexander a broad following across the Soviet Union and elsewhere. Alexander Solzhenitzyn, while still in the Soviet Union, was one of his auditors and remained his friend after emigrating to the West.

Over a dozen books written by Father Alexander have been published in multiple languages and continue to be widely circulated. Among them are Introduction to Liturgical Theology; Ultimate Questions; Church, World, Mission; and many articles and tracts.

His classic book For the Life of the World—recently reprinted by SVS Press—has been translated into numerous languages and remains one of the most popular works on Christianity for the general public.

The title of this work was selected as the theme of the Orthodox Church in America’s 19th All-American Council, held in Saint Louis, MO July 23-27, 2018, and served as the inspiration for His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon’s recent work, Of What Life Do We Speak? Four Pillars for the Fulfillment of the Apostolic Work of the Church. He also completed a major study on the Eucharist only weeks before his death.

Photo courtesy of schmemann.org

basilica.ro