

A Survey of the Liturgical Translations of the Byzantine Catholic Metropolia

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Abstract

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Various English liturgical translations from the Church Slavonic have been used in the Byzantine Catholic Metropolia of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. The first were prayer manuals for the faithful. From about 1950, entire liturgies began to be celebrated in English. An English vernacular translation was approved by Rome in 1964 and published the following year by Byzantine Seminary Press. Later, the Intereparchial Liturgy Commission published a lectionary of Gospel readings (1978) and Epistle and Old Testament readings (1979). It has continued its work to this day, revising some of the earlier texts and publishing translations of the Ritual of Marriage (1971), Anointing of the Sick (1973), and the Office of Christian Burial (1975, 1983). Reconstituted by Archbishop Judson (Procyk), the Commission has begun to revise earlier translations, notably the divine liturgies of St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil the Great.



On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down upon the disciples gathered in the Upper Room in Jerusalem in the forms of tongues of fire, and the apostles were able to preach to the "Parthians, Medes and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphilia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travellers from Rome, Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs," each in their own language (Acts 2:1-11). This mission to proclaim the gospel in a variety of tongues has continued here, in America and Canada, England and Australia as the worship of the Byzantine Church is now expressed in English. In so doing, we fulfill the command and promise of the gospel, and do the work of the Spirit.

I have been asked to speak today about the English translations of the Church of the Byzantine Catholic Metropolia of Pittsburgh, an association of four eparchies (Pittsburgh; Passaic, New Jersey; Parma, Ohio; and Van Nuys, California) in the United States serving the Christian people whose ancestors immigrated from Carpatho-Rus', Slovakia, Hungary, and Croatia from approximately 1880 to 1920. These people have become almost completely assimilated into American society, and a large portion of its population are not descendants of the original immigration, but have entered the church by way of marriage, conversion or transfer of rites. The native language of 99 percent of this population is American English. Many have retained a nostalgic attachment to Church Slavonic, but over 90 percent of the liturgical celebrations are conducted in English.

Already in the 1930s, there were problems over liturgical language. Since the Liturgy was not celebrated in the Slav vernacular spoken by the people (a variety of Rusyn dialects called affectionately "*po našemu*"), it was difficult to understand and became impossible as the first language of the population became English. The cultural pressure was great, and many of the second generation were attracted to the Roman Catholic Church, which had been in America earlier. The attraction was not the vernacular, since the Roman Liturgy was still in Latin, but the Liturgy in Slavonic seemed more "foreign," and "peculiar."

The first attempt to deal with this problem was the publication of prayer manuals for the faithful. These manuals had the Slavonic