

Liturgical Translations in the Melkite Church

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Abstract

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Since their arrival in the U.S. in 1889, Melkite priests have made various unofficial liturgical translations from Arabic into English for their own needs, especially from the 1940s. In the 1950s, the staff of Saint Basil's Seminary in Methuen, Massachusetts undertook an unofficial translation of the common parts of the divine offices. In 1969, *Byzantine Daily Worship*, a collection of divine offices and liturgical texts compiled by Archbishop Joseph Raya, was published. An attempt to form a liturgical commission was made in 1981, and its guidelines were approved by Archbishop Joseph (Tawil) in 1982. The liturgical commission published a series of works in the 1980s, but its activity nearly ceased after 1989. In 1990 an ad hoc committee on liturgics reaffirmed the 1982 guidelines with some reservations. In addition, Archbishop Joseph Raya and Jose de Vinck produced a number of liturgical translations.



Prior to the establishment of an exarchate for Melkites in the U.S.A. in 1966, and later an eparchy in 1976, local parish priests scattered across the U.S.A. made liturgical translations according to their needs and wants. These translations mainly included translations of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, Marriage, Baptism, and some parts of the funeral services. The focus was on what was needed for the immediate situation.

Since the arrival of the Melkite clergy beginning in 1889, the first generation of Melkites prayed in their native Arabic language. English made its entry into the services quite early with the first and second generations born in the USA. At first these translations were made so that people could follow while the services were celebrated in Arabic and even Greek. Since the pronunciation of Greek was more easily adaptable to English than Arabic, most choirs sang all the responses to the Liturgies in Greek, especially if choir members were not fluent in Arabic. The early translations began in the 1940s – yet some did exist earlier, possibly from the 1930s. None were ever approved by the Melkite Church Synod or Patriarch.

With the establishment of St. Basil's Seminary in Methuen, Massachusetts in the mid 1950s, a project of translation of the common parts of the divine offices was made by the seminary staff. The work was done on mimeograph, and the offices translated were Vespers, Compline, Orthros, and Little Hours – mainly the Horologion. This was fairly complete in the mid 1960s and was used regularly by the seminarians. Again no official approval was received, since a diocese or eparchy had not been formed.

Early published books or booklets included:

- 1) *The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*, published in Detroit in 1949 by Archimandrite Agabios Riashi. This book used the translation of Dom Placid de Meester OSB and was approved with a Nihil Obstat and Imprimatur by the Latin Archdiocese of Detroit. It included the Divine Liturgy, thanksgiving prayers after Communion, and marriage ceremony, and explanatory notes adapted to Melkite customs.

- 2) In the mid-1950s Archimandrite Elias Skaff published the Divine Liturgy, Marriage, and some Holy Week services, mainly for local parish use in Brooklyn, New York. This was expanded and republished in a small prayer book format in 1975, titled *My Faithful Guide*. The main portions used the approved text of *Byzantine Daily Worship* of Archbishop Joseph Raya. Skaff's small book includes common parts of Vespers, Small Compline, part of Great Compline, Orthros, three Liturgies, sections from the Menaion, Triodion, Pentecostarion, Marriage, Holy Unction, Confession, Funeral, various blessings, Akathist Hymn, and Theotokia of the Week.
- 3) The first formal book, still without authorization, was the *Byzantine Missal*, translated and published by Archimandrite (now Archbishop) Joseph Raya and Baron Jose de Vinck in 1958. Although not officially accepted by the Patriarch and Synod, it became the official text used in most parishes at its time. Contents: Introductory notes, Chrysostom Liturgy, Common for Weekdays, secret prayers of the Basil Liturgy, Thanksgiving prayers after Communion, Lauds, and sections from the Menaion, Triodion and Pentecostarion needed for Divine Liturgy, Great Compline, Akathist, Paraclesis, Baptism, Penance, Marriage, Churching, Unction, Funeral, Communion of the Sick. Most of the services appear in abridged format, except the Divine Liturgy.
- 4) This book was redone in a much more positive way by Archbishop Joseph Raya in 1969 and titled *Byzantine Daily Worship*. It includes most of the Office (Horologion), three Liturgies, and proper troparia from the Menaion, Triodion, and Pentecostarion needed for the Divine Liturgy. The Paraclesis, Akathist Hymn and a more complete Funeral service were added. This translation was approved as the official translation for Melkites in the USA by His Beatitude Maximos V Hakim, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, of Alexandria and Jerusalem, in 1968. He approved it as the only one to be used in English-speaking countries. Interestingly, it also received high acclaim from Athenagoras I, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of

Constantinople. This text has become the basic text for all future translations in English.

- 5) Other works produced prior to this official translation include:
- a) *The Divine Liturgy*, Chrysostom Liturgy with music by Fr. Nicholas Abraham, BSO, St. Basil Seminary, Methuen, Massachusetts, 1963, with eight troparia of Resurrection.
 - b) *The Burial Service* by the same priest with music, 1965.
 - c) *Holy Saturday Matins* by the same priest, with music, 1965, reprinted 1968.

All of these services were in abridged format.

- 6) During the 1970s, Archimandrite Cyril Haddad published *the Melkite Hymnal* – the Liturgy music, resurrectional troparia, memorial service, and troparia sections from the Menaion, Triodion and Pentecostarion.

He continued his work with the *Funeral Service for a Layman* and *Funeral Service for Monastic Clergy*. None of these books was ever officially approved, but they became official by constant use and custom, so popular in the Eastern Churches.

- 7) A Small Euchologion – *Byzantine Melkite Euchologion* – was published in 1972 by Fr. Joseph Haggag (RI) and received official approbation by Archbishop Joseph Tawil, Eparch of Newton. Common texts were used from *Byzantine Daily Worship*. The services printed were abridged: the Arabic text was printed in full with two type sizes – the required prayers in larger print, prayers that may be deleted in smaller print. The English version printed only the required prayers.

During the time that Archbishop Tawil was eparch, some corrections were made to *Byzantine Daily Worship* and given to the clergy. These few changes were minor items.

- 8) *Great Lent* was published in 1971 by the Melkite Exacharte, approved by Archbishop Joseph Tawil, and includes the Pre-sanctified Liturgy with Vespers stichera and biblical pericope notations for every day of the Great Fast, Akathist and Great Compline, adapted for parish use.
- 9) A provisional text was printed and “semi-approved” by Archbishop Joseph Tawil of the *Divine Liturgy of St. James the Apostle, Brother of the Lord*, the original Liturgy of the Churches of Antioch and Jerusalem. This book appeared in 1980. In some parishes this Liturgy is celebrated on the feast of St. James, October 23, with special approbation of the Melkite eparch. Abridged versions, more true to the earlier forms of this liturgy before its byzantinization, appeared in the years following.

Finally, an attempt was made to form a liturgical commission in 1981. The scope of this commission was translations. Archbishop Tawil appointed six clergy to form the commission, and in the fall of 1982 it created guidelines, which were approved by Archbishop Joseph. There was some movement to working with the Antiochian Orthodox Church in order to remain close together in the scope of its work. This never materialized, since the Antiochian Orthodox Church was still using older forms of the English language that were not acceptable to the Melkite Commission.

The 1982 Liturgical Guidelines are:

- (1) So that the unity of the Church as well as liturgical awareness may be fostered through the work of this commission, every effort shall be made to collaborate with the liturgical commission of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese. If possible, we will work in concert with their group in preparing texts. If this is not acceptable to them or to those with whom they may be working, we will utilize the fruit of their labors, provided that contemporary English and correct usage is employed in their texts.

(2) Failing this, this commission will concern itself with revising where necessary because of error, mistranslation, omission or intrusion the currently used service books of the eparchy, namely *Byzantine Daily Worship* and the *Byzantine Melkite Euchologion* in consultation with those responsible for those texts, as well as to prepare new texts of additional services in harmony with the above.

(3) In correcting the above mentioned texts or preparing new ones the following principles shall be employed:

(a) One version of the Bible shall be used consistently, namely the *New American Bible*. Where the LXX Septuagint differs from this version, the LXX shall be used.

(b) Texts currently set to music and in general use throughout the eparchy shall be employed whenever they occur in texts of any service. If several translations exist in use, the versions of the diocesan Liturgy booklet and the *Melkite Hymnal* shall be employed. Where these differ among themselves, the more commonly used version shall be employed.

(c) Texts shall be presented in their entirety without exception, including all secret prayers and diaconal invocations.

(d) The assignment of prayers and actions shall accurately reflect the most complete celebration envisioned, i.e., with the ministry of deacon and reader. Notation shall also be made of variations when the bishop serves or presides.

(e) The original text should be the Greek edition of Rome. Significant variations should be noted.

(f) Recurring liturgical expressions should be translated consistently wherever they occur. Consistency should also be sought in matters of style, e.g., whether or not to use "O" in invocations.

(g) All texts intended for singing by choir or congregation are to be set to music with notes indicated for ison.

- (4) The procedure for preparing and reviewing texts shall be:
 - (a) All texts submitted for consideration must conform to the principles set forth in #3, above.
 - (b) Copies, along with the original Greek text, are to be submitted to the committee for review one month before any given meeting.
 - (c) Meetings shall be held for one full day in concert with any of the following diocesan meetings: Convention, Clergy Conference, Diocesan Pastoral Council, ECDD, etc.
 - (d) After initial approval by the commission, the text is to be sent to Fathers Cyril Haddad or John Elya to be set to music as noted above and then returned to the commission.
 - (e) Upon approval by the commission of the musical setting, the text will be considered ready for publication.

- (5) Texts shall be published in two versions:
 - (a) Initially texts for participation will be printed periodically on 8½" x 11" paper for insertion into three ring binders, which will have been provided to all priests and deacons in the eparchy. These texts, arranged to facilitate duplication by the local parish as 8½" x 14" booklets, will be sent to all clergy as they appear.
 - (b) Completed texts for altar use will be printed in quantity and offered for sale by Sophia Press when a full complement of services has been completed (e.g. Euchologion, Liturgicon, etc.).

- (6) Each service printed will be prefaced with an introduction setting forth the spiritual and theological focus of the rite and include an appendix giving suggestions for parish use, including abridgment. Footnotes giving biblical references and rubrics will be placed on the margins of each page.

- (7) An annual progress report shall be sent to all priests and deacons of the eparchy each spring. New services completed

during the year will be presented for use at the annual Clergy Conference.

(8) Priorities for work shall be:

- (a) Determination of ## 1 and 2 above.
- (b) Participant texts for the sacraments of marriage and Christian initiation.
- (c) Participant texts for the services of Vespers and Orthros in the eight tones.
- (d) Altar and participant texts for the festal services of Pascha, Great Week, Christmas and Theophany.
- (e) Occasional services (Paraclesis, Akathist, Panagia, etc.)
- (f) Prayers (ambon prayers, prokeimena of Liturgy, misc. blessings).
- (g) Revision of altar texts for Liturgies, offices and Horologion (BDW) and other sacraments (BME).

This commission began its work:

- a. Great Week Services – Orthros for each day
- b. Pascha services
- c. Paraclesis
- d. Baptism
- e. Marriage

Completed works were:

- a. *Bridegroom Service (Orthros)* of Great Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, published by Sophia Press of Eparchy of Newton, 1984.
- b. *The Mystery of Holy Baptism*, same 1985, approval withheld.
- c. *Services of Holy Pascha: Hajme, Orthros and Divine Liturgy*, with music, published as an educational text with catechetical notes by Educational Services of the Eparchy, 1990. An audiotape of the service accompanies this book.

d. *The Small Paraclesis to the Theotokos*, published for educational purposes, same as above 1990. This is unique, since Fr. Cyril Haddad re-translated the canon to fit the Greek meters in each ode so that the English matches the Greek meter exactly. An audiotape of the service accompanies this book.

- 10) *Ceremonies of Ordination in the Melkite Greek Catholic Church*, published by Sophia Press in 1987 with approval of Archbishop Joseph Tawil and used for all subsequent ordinations; it includes reader, subdeacon, deacon, priest, and archimandrite.
- 11) Also in 1987, a text for ordination of a bishop was printed and subsequently used three times: ordinations of Bishop John Elya – 1987, Bishop Nicholas Samra – 1989, Bishop Ignatius Ghattas – 1991.

In October 1990 an Ad Hoc Committee on liturgics met and reaffirmed the guidelines of 1982 with some reservations, particularly on biblical translations. The 1982 liturgical commission became slightly dormant in 1989 for a variety of reasons.

- 12) *Order for Burial of a Priest* (non-monastic) printed by Archimandrite (now Bishop) Nicholas Samra in 1987, compiled from approved texts and non-approved texts where they were lacking. This includes some music. It was needed for the funeral of Fr. Albert Gorayeb, and has been used several times since.
- 13) Fr. Damon Geiger, OSST, a Melkite priest, began the major task of translating the *Menaion* from the French edition of Deacon Denis Guillaume in Rome. Where *BDW* texts existed they were incorporated with permission of the publishers. Some comparison was made with the Greek. Each month is published separately and has been well received by Catholics and Orthodox alike – several volumes have been reprinted. Most canons were not printed in the *Menaia* – only the canons for major feasts and the more popular saints. Completed are

September, October, November, December, January, March, June, and August. Ready to be printed are the final four: February, April, May, and July. The Oktoikhos is also complete and ready to be printed. Preliminary work has begun on the Archieratikon.

The liturgical commission of 1982 hit some snags, and much work remained incomplete. Since the retirement of Archbishop Joseph Tawil in 1989, the commission has barely functioned, although in theory it still exists. Some attempts are being made to resurrect it today.

Presently sitting in the computer are completed texts of all Great Week services with music, a full marriage ceremony, a music metered version of the Akathist Hymn, and Vespers and Orthros of Christmas with music.

Separately from the eparchy, Archbishop Joseph Raya had begun the translation and publication of the *Gospel Book* and *Epistle Book*. He continued his work with Jose deVinck. Both books were printed and are used extensively throughout the eparchy as well as by many Catholic and Orthodox jurisdictions. Mr. DeVinck continued his work with Fr. Leonidas Contos and published the *Septuagint Psalms*. The translation basis is the style of *Byzantine Daily Worship*, and the full Psalter is completed. In his foreword, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Athenagoras, then ruling hierarch in the USA, he urges his faithful and clergy to use this book in church services and regard it as “normative to our devotional life.”

In summary, other than the *Byzantine Daily Worship* and *Small Euchologion* and ordination rites, which were all approved, all the rest is unapproved but used in parish and diocesan celebrations. Numerous translations exist, along with numerous formats for non-Eucharistic services and mysteries.



Резюме

Від самого прибуття до США (1889 р.) та зокрема з 1940-их рр., мелхітські священики виконували неофіційні літургійні переклади з арабської мови на англійську. Літургійна Комісія, створена 1981 р., виконувала свої обов'язки до 1989 р. Нова Комісія була створена 1990 р.



Discussion

Daniel Griffith: I was wondering, your Grace, about the percentage of Arabic to English that's actually in use in your churches. I realize that it's not the same in every parish but, as a general rule...

Nicholas Samra: I would say 90 percent English, 10 percent Arabic.

Griffith: And for how long?

Samra: In the Diocese there would be a few parishes that use a bit more Arabic because of the newer immigrants. But even there, English is on the rise. How long? For quite a while. I was one of the last seminarians that learned the Arabic language, because at that point we didn't think we would ever need it again, and that was in the 1960s. We didn't realize that nationalization would take place in Egypt and the wars would break out with Israel and Arab countries, and all these people would flood over here again.

Griffith: One further question, is there a difference between the parishes in the United States and those in Canada? In our Archdiocese, the Antiochian, there's a very decided difference. Canada is Arabic-speaking...

Samra: Language-speaking, yes. I think Canada is using a little bit more Arabic than the United States. One of the reasons is that they have a very large immigration, and one reason also is narrowness of mind. I say that very politely, because they don't see that at least 60 percent of the Canadian-born Melkites, or it might be even more, are not going to our Churches. Just as in the United States, we've lost many of them. Yes, Canada is a separate diocese; we don't have jurisdiction over them. We have two dioceses.

Daniel Kuc: Your Excellency, the Epistle book that was put out by Archbishop Raya, I believe, is based on the Confraternity version, of the...

Samra: No. The Epistle book was a new translation done by deVinck and Raya based on the Septuagint...

Kuc: The Epistle book?

Samra: The Epistle book is done by them, but what text they used I don't know. It's a new translation [laughter]...

Kuc: So they did their own translation of the Epistles.

Samra: They did not take the Confraternity edition. Even in the Gospel book they reworked the translations; again, what texts they used I don't know, they did not spell that out. But it was not the Confraternity. There was one printed with the Confraternity; I think it was the Ruthenians printed one with the Confraternity Edition.

Peter Galadza: The NAB is simply a revised version of the Confraternity version. Now, you are right that one of the Eastern Churches produced a Gospel book that is based on the Confraternity, and for some reason it seems to me that it is in fact the Gospel book published by Archbishop Raya and Baron Jose deVinck...

Kuc: Nonetheless, you said that one of the principles was to use the NAB for the liturgical commission.

Samra: The reason being, that they found that by looking at the NAB, most of the Psalms that Raya had already in his book were very similar to those in there. That was chosen, there was debate. In 1990, when the commission met as an ad hoc committee to revise the commission there was discussion again not to use the NAB. But it never got off the ground.

Kallistos Ware: You mentioned how at an early date there was a practice of the choir responding in Greek. Does that still go on?

Samra: No, very, very little... In Canada it does. A few of our Churches, I'm sure, still sing some in Greek, but not too much.

Galadza: Can you say something more about Baron Jose deVinck, in other words, give more biographical background? This man has intrigued me ever since I bought my first copy of the BDW, and for some reason, I can't say that I've actually committed myself to any consistent research, but it's apparently rather difficult to learn his affiliation, background, education, etc., what he's up to, how it is that he has managed to collaborate so consistently with the Melkites, in particular with Archbishop Raya. He's a very key figure in all of this; if you can say something about him...

Samra: For the amount of work that he has created over the many years, it's very sad to see him today because he has become senile, he has Alzheimer's. And if you were to see him and talk to him, I don't think he even knows too much of what he did in the past. The second thing is he does not say "José" deVinck – I always call him Baron "José," he is Baron *José* deVinck, because it's not a Spanish name, it's Belgian. He came from Belgium with his wife, was working to raise a family, very poor. Archbishop Raya was a priest in New Jersey, assistant in 1949/1950. He was beginning to translate the liturgy at that point. As a priest he wanted it because, I guess, the parish translations weren't good. He said, "I need a professor who knows English well." Somebody introduced him to deVinck, who was barely working at the time, to raise his family, and they started to work together. Raya would translate something and give it to deVinck, deVinck would pull it apart and tell him, "No, this is not good English." They became close in their work, and deVinck tells the story that it was through his relationship, and developing these liturgical texts, that God blessed him and he became a little bit more successful in his life, he got the job and whatever else. So he then established Alleluia Press, which is his, not anything [to do] with Archbishop Raya.

Michael Thompson: The Antiochian Archdiocese has done a lot of work, especially Basil Kasan, publishing chant for Vespers, for Orthros, and for Triodion and Pentecostarion. Is there any plan to do that in the Melkite Eparchy? Something that broad-based...

Samra: We have some published – the Melkite hymnal, which is mainly Divine Liturgy and some Troparia from the different seasons of the year. All of the other works have not been published formally, but are definitely used in parishes. We have all the tones of Vespers done, the Orthros...

Thompson: Where could one order them?

Samra: That's it, they're not published. They've been done for diocesan use, and we have been talking about this format, of putting them on 8½ x 11 but making a small page so that parishes can reproduce it until such time that we print the whole books up. So we have many of those things... all set to the Greek music, but in English. And most of them are well set too – a few arabisms: instead of “distributed” we have “distributed.” You've got to understand the priest; he didn't know English that well, but he did a good job.

Jack Custar (Byzantine Catholic Seminary – Pittsburgh.): A couple of times, your Grace, the question has been raised about a common translation. It wasn't so long ago that Ruthenians and Ukrainians used the same *sluzhebnik*, at least in Slavonic. Do you really think a common translation that could embrace Byzantine-Slav and the Melkites is really possible, rubrically even, in terms of ethos and aesthetics?

Samra: In the United States, yes, I believe it can be done in English. When it comes to rubrics, it's another ball game, but if we're really serious about looking at the roots, then I really think we can get over the hurdle of the rubric and create a common one too. I am not a translator; I'm on the liturgical commission, but not the translator. I feel, lock up your best people in a room, tell them, “Don't come out until you agree” [laughter]; they may never come out, and they may die inside. I'm a strong believer – I think it's time in this country when we're all praying in the same language that it makes it a little bit easier when we pray together – that we can do the same texts so that we don't have to feel uncomfortable with it. I'm a firm believer that the rubrics can be worked in

eventually and create a common rubric. I'm tired of hearing, "Well, we do this, this is our custom...". If it's your custom, it's a mistake from the original, fine. It became custom and you used it and it's time-aged and it's beautiful. It can go back to something that you want, or [you can] make a new one even, as we heard. It's time, I think, for something [like that]. We can't convince everyone of that. There's an openness, but not a willingness to make that openness move yet.

