

Liturgical Translations of the Orthodox Church in America

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Abstract

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The author begins with the history and analysis of Isabel Hapgood's translation, acknowledging its faults (archaic language, translating from the Slavonic without sufficient reference to the Greek) and also its pioneering value. Next he turns to the 1967 Liturgy Book of the OCA, translated from the Greek but following received Slavic practice, using the RSV Bible, which raised the difficult question of "thee's" and "thou's." A revolutionary dimension is its omission of the rubric that some prayers be read "silently." He notes that this translation is now part of popular OCA piety. Finally, he turns to subsequent developments, especially Bishop Dmitri's 1972 translation, and the liturgical reforms and translations of the New Skete monks; the main contribution of the latter, he concludes, is to have brought the issue of a contemporary English idiom to the forefront of Orthodox awareness.



The Hapgood Service Book

The first serious attempt in America to translate liturgical texts into English was the massive effort of an Episcopalian woman, Isabel Florence Hapgood (1850-1928), who certainly deserves to be called one of the "mothers of American Orthodoxy." While there had been earlier efforts to produce English texts of various individual services, none was as systematic or serious as her project, and none of these has survived. Hapgood's *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic (Greco-*

*Russian) Apostolic Church*¹ not only survived, but remains very much in use to this day, kept in print by the Antiochian Christian Archdiocese.² For some rarely-used services, such as ordinations, the burial of infants and priests, or the consecration of churches, it remains the only available published text.

History of the Translation

It was under Bishop Nicholas (Ziorov) (1891–1898) of the Russian Missionary Diocese that Miss Hapgood, a noted journalist, author, and translator, was commissioned to prepare a complete service book in the English language. This was a period of tremendous growth in the diocese, resulting both from the move to Orthodoxy of thousands of Eastern Catholics through the efforts of Alexis Toth, and from large-scale immigration from Greece, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. Bishop Nicholas, as well as Tikhon, his successor (1898–1907), began to prepare the groundwork for a local, American Orthodox Church. Obviously, the preparation of liturgical texts in English was a necessity, as English was the only common language. In addition, the first generation of immigrants had little desire to preserve their “ethnic” customs, but sought to assimilate as quickly as possible into American society. Remarkable also was the fact that Orthodox bishops would entrust such a task to a non-Orthodox – one can just imagine the kind of reaction this would provoke today!

Miss Hapgood began her work in 1895, after discussing her project with Bishop Nicholas, who gave her not only his approval and support, but also a complete set of Slavonic service books. Bishop Nicholas also approved the structure of the book, which departed radically from the traditional Orthodox practice by combining, in a single volume, materials from

¹Isabel Hapgood, *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic (Greco-Russian) Apostolic Church* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1906; Second Edition, New York: Association, 1922).

²Reprinted by the Antiochian Christian Archdiocese in 1956, 1965, and 1983.

multiple liturgical books. "My object," she explains in her introduction to the 1906 edition,

has been to make a book which shall show, as precisely and clearly as possible, all the services in general use; and that in a manner which shall be practical, not only for the ecclesiastics who are familiar with them and their congregations, but also for students of Liturgies and for travelers in the various lands where the Orthodox Church exists, as well as visitors to the churches in America and in numerous capitals and cities of Europe. To that end I have adopted an arrangement of my own devising.

She explains that her translations are based on the Slavonic text and reflect Slavic practice, as it will be used primarily by the "Russian Church in America," though she acknowledges that slight differences in practice, though "not in dogma," exist between the Russian and Greek churches.³

In her translation, she worked primarily from the Slavonic text, though she claims to have checked her translation against the Greek. Scriptural lessons are based on the King James version, and Psalm texts are generally taken from the *Book of Common Prayer*.⁴

She concludes her introduction by thanking others who have been helpful to her, including Archbishop (later Patriarch) Tikhon, Konstantin Pobedonostsev (the former Oberprocurator of the Russian Holy Synod), Count Sergius Witte (for his material support), the Holy Synod (for helping to defray the cost of publication), and Fr. Feodor Pavlovich, archpriest of Tsarskoe Selo. Miss Hapgood was well-connected indeed, counting among her friends and acquaintances not only the leadership of the Russian Church, but also leading politicians and literary figures. The *Service Book* was presented to the imperial family, which expressed its "inmost thanks" for

³Hapgood, "Introduction," *Service Book*, iii.

⁴*Ibid.*, iii-vi.