

Thoughts on the Future...From the Past
Upbeat
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Note: The following quotes were taken from the introduction to a book entitled *Orthodox Hymns* in English, by Rev. Michael G. H. Gelsinger, Ph.D., published in 1939 by the Syrian Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of New York and All North America. This book was one of the first of its type ever published in this country, with translations of forty-five *hymns* into English, from the Greek, Syrian and Russian Traditions.

It is quite interesting to note that Rev. Gelsinger was concerned with the exact same problems facing our church today, and which many of our contemporary Orthodox writers and theologians are expounding upon. Yet, it goes without saying that today's church in America has made tremendous headway in many of the areas which Rev. Gelsinger discusses below, although we still hear of parishes in which such problems now exist. Keep in mind while reading these quotes, that fact that they were not written last week, or last month, or last year, but over sixty years ago!

“It is unusual to say that our children will all be Americans together; but that is only one face of the truth. It is equally true that each of our children as an Orthodox Christian is as much Russian as he is Greek, as much Greek as he is Syrian, as much Syrian as he is Bulgarian or Rumanian; for he is the rightful heir of everything Orthodox that has ever entered this country.”

“Some of our Orthodox people fear that the use of a little English will lead quickly to the exclusive use of English and to the loss of the older languages. If they could understand what the exclusive use of the older languages in many parishes is costing the Church in the loss of children and adults, they might see that such a fear is indecent – certainly in the case of Orthodox people who have Protestant children and grandchildren. But, after all, there is no reason whatever to fear that the older languages will pass out of use; for the simple fact is that there is not now – and will not be for many years to come – a sufficient amount of material available in English. Furthermore, the whole situation of Orthodoxy in America is very different from that in any other country where our religion has taken root; and, as I hope to show further on, the difference is such as almost to require that all the older liturgical languages shall always remain in use here.”

“The case of St. George's parish in Niagara Falls, which I have been serving since 1933, is instructive. It is the only Orthodox parish in the city. As long as it used Arabic exclusively, other Orthodox groups did little for it. When Sunday school instruction in English was begun, the other groups began to send their children. When a choir was organized and some English began to be used in the services, the parents of our children came. Every group would prefer to have services in its own language, but all can understand English. The older languages kept them divided, but English has united them. The parish is Syrian, and its official language is Arabic; the priest uses English and Greek, with an occasional litany in Slavonic; the instruction of the children is necessarily conducted exclusively in English, and everybody is satisfied. The Greek children are

taught the Greek language by a visiting teacher, and more Syrian children than ever before are learning to read and write Arabic. But one of the most significant facts of all is that the services for any feast are mainly in Arabic and Greek, for the very good reason that there is no English translation available which could be used for singing them.”

“Orthodoxy must sing in English if it is to live in English.”