

Preface

This hymnal has been developed specifically for the use of Western Rite congregations of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America; we hope that it might prove helpful for others as well. Our congregations have been given permission to make use of old Roman and English liturgies, adapted for Orthodox use, and it is expected that our services will be sung. In his *Western Rite Edict* of 1958, Metropolitan ANTHONY (Bashir) declared that we may make use of “all such Western liturgical rites, devotional practices and customs as are not contrary to the Orthodox Faith...” Thus, the use of congregational hymns is customary and we are not limited to texts and music composed before the schism of the 11th century. Until this time, no suitable collection of hymns, selected and evaluated principally for their proclamation of the Orthodox Faith, has existed. *The St. Ambrose Hymnal* has been prepared to provide a basic collection containing the liturgical hymns (sequence hymns, office hymns...), para-liturgical hymns (those not specifically required by the liturgy but which help us to sing our praises and to teach, based on the emphasis of the day or season), and service music for the Eucharistic liturgies.

Hymns are sung praise of God, and to this we would add that the praise must be right praise. Hymns also have evangelical value, helping to pass on our faith. St. Paul encourages us to teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Col. 3:16). Tradition is that which is faithfully passed on from age to age and we are obliged to be sure that we are passing on what is right and true. The Arians of the 4th century were known for having popular hymns, but that did not make the hymns right or true. Likewise, many well loved hymns of the 19th and 20th centuries have been embraced, not for the faith they express, but primarily for the stirring tune associated with the text.

Our principal concern has been to provide hymn texts that convey our faith. Ancient texts of the East and West provide great devotional treasures and the model for evaluating more recent hymns. Among the many Fathers of the Church who wrote hymns, St. Ambrose of Milan (340-397AD) is often called the Father of Western hymnody; in his *Confessions*, St. Augustine tells us:

It was only a year, or not much more, since Justina, the mother of the boy [Emperor] Valentinian, had been persecuting your devoted servant Ambrose in the interests of the heresy into which the Arians had seduced her. In those days your faithful people used to keep watch in the church, ready to die with their bishop, your servant... It was then that the practice of singing hymns and psalms was introduced, in keeping with the usage of the Eastern churches, to revive the flagging spirits of the people during their long and cheerless watch. Ever since then the custom has been retained, and the example of Milan has been followed in many other places, in fact in almost every church throughout the world.

Along with the works of St. Ambrose, the hymns of St. Gregory the Great, Prudentius, Sedulius, Fortunatus, and many other Orthodox Fathers of the West and East have given us rich and beautiful texts to sing with the spirit and with understanding (1 Cor. 14:15). These ancient hymns express the faith of the early Church and help to ensure that we pass on the faith of the fathers today. Comprising some 40 percent of this collection, these hymns of the universal Church have a greater degree of authority and we have indicated them with a ✠ next to the hymn number to facilitate their identification. The English-speaking world owes much to John Mason Neale, Edward Caswall, Robert Bridges, George Woodward and others who labored in love to translate these texts and make them available to us despite difficulties of meter and rhyme. We have endeavored to choose translations for their orthodoxy and beauty of language; in a few instances new translations have been supplied.

Later hymns have also been evaluated, paying particular attention to those theological areas where the post-Schism West has departed from the Orthodox mind: original sin, the Holy Spirit, ecclesiology, sacramental theology, prayers for the departed, the merits of the saints, etc. At times the problems in a hymn text were obvious; at other times the problem was one of subtle emphasis. Some well loved hymns were rejected because they had little to say. Many good texts “not contrary to the Orthodox Faith,” have been chosen, making use of the finest offerings of successive generations. In some hymns we found that an author’s or translator’s original text had been substantially diluted by the political correctness of the editor’s day. We have restored earlier versions of these texts when appropriate.

Our musical choices have been based on our desire to offer only the best to God in our worship. Music is rightly the handmaid of the liturgy and part of the cultural language of our prayer. Music that is majestic and beautiful, a true offering of human creativity, helps us to join our voices “with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.” Considering musical choice as being far from subjective, we have accepted the objective criteria articulated by the English musician, George Gardner, as essential: nobility of rhythmical structure, beauty and fitness of melodic outline, soundness of harmonic basis, to which is added that a good tune ought to convey an impression of hopefulness and of spiritual vitality. We have rejected tunes that have strong negative associations, that are clearly secular (including almost all folk tunes), or that are overly sentimental or “of the moment.” We have endeavored to choose tunes that meet the highest standards, that help to convey a particular text, and that are singable in our congregations. To help maintain our ancient Western musical heritage, we have included many Gregorian chant tunes. Much of the music (and texts) in this hymnal will be unfamiliar at first but with the effort befitting our worship, these hymns will soon be learned and become worthy and appropriate offerings - new “old favorites” that express the faith once delivered to the saints.

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Holy Cross Day 2001