



A JOURNAL OF ORTHODOX FAITH AND CULTURE

# ROAD TO EMMAUS

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*and exclusive meanings can automatically be experienced as the language of the Ecclesia. It carries greater spiritual force.”<sup>1</sup>*

This is an astounding statement at a time when western convert churches are eager to translate everything into contemporary speech. Of course, the desire to hear the services in one’s own language is understandable and necessary, but underestimating the importance of primary church languages such as Greek, Latin, Slavonic, Georgian, Syriac, Arabic, and perhaps even Coptic and Ge’ez, too often ends in ignoring them, or even in a kind of disdain for the living traditions and original languages. I am not a Greek speaker myself, but I’ve been told that a single word in Greek often has several different meanings but when translated this richness is almost always lost. Is this so?

SISTER S.: Yes, this occurs all of the time. The person who reads the services and the theological books in the Greek of the Church Fathers gets much more out of it than a straightforward translation in French, German, or English can provide. In Greek, these words and terms have a long cultural history and theological meanings that were hammered out by great saints and theologians. They have a precision, a depth of meaning, and a breadth of context that is almost impossible to capture in another language. Probably Slavonic comes the closest because the Russians, Serbs and Bulgarians have had centuries of lived Orthodoxy that fills the words with meaning. But even Slavonic is sometimes poor in comparison to Greek. It lacks articles, so words may not be as clearly defined as they are in Greek.

Counting both the ancient and modern versions, Greek has an immense vocabulary, many times the size of the English vocabulary. For example, in my limited experience of translating from modern Greek to English, I have often had problems in translating words having to do with light. Greek has many terms for the action of light, while in English we have only a few that have the dignity that would suit the church context ... such as shine, radiate, or gleam. Flash, sparkle, glitter, and so on, are too common or shallow, but in Greek there is a whole range of vocabulary to speak about light and the way light acts—so when you translate it into English, the translation often sounds flat, or the same words are repeated too often. The word “joy” has the same problems.

This is a very simple example, but when you try to translate theological

terms, it is even more difficult. These are words that have a history, that have been used by the Church Fathers to mean specific things within a specific Orthodox theological-spiritual context. When you translate them into English, the words have a whole different context. In one language, a word has a certain circle of meaning, while in another, the closest word might have an overlapping circle of meaning, but it will never be exactly the same. It has other echoes and other connotations. (Like the use of “gay” now in English, to use a crude example.) In addition, English theological terms are often shaded by centuries of use in a Roman Catholic or Protestant context.

So translations can never be exact from one language to another because all the words will never have the same exact meaning. To make it worse, an English text is often not only a translation, but a translation of a translation. English translations made by people from the Slavic tradition are from Slavonic, which is already a translation from Greek. As good as Slavonic is, to translate from it is like making a xerox of a xerox; you lose resolution, you lose the quality of the image.

Of course, we must have translations, they are indispensable for us, but we mustn’t forget that there is a depth of meaning in the original that is inaccessible to us. We have to respect this, to see the the value of maintaining these old languages.

This difficulty in translation is not only a matter of vocabulary—there is also the grammar of the old languages. Both Greek and Slavonic are inflected languages, which means that while in English, we use strings of prepositions and strict word order to get our meaning across, in both Greek and Slavonic, the words themselves change—for example, according to whether they are the subject or object—which means that Greek and Slavonic have a great deal more flexibility. You can change the word order in the sentence to add extra nuances or emphases, while if you did that in English, it would change the meaning.

The Fathers who were masters of the Greek language used the structure of the language and all sorts of poetic rhetorical devices to add emphasis, meaning and beauty to their writings. They were trained rhetoricians. Much of this beauty, meaning and precision is simply lost in translation. A translation can have its own beauty, but it can never be the original.

RTE: One example of this would be “*nous*,” which is usually translated as “mind”, but is actually much deeper. When asked about this translation in a

<sup>1</sup> Markides, Kyriakos C., *Gifts of the Desert: The Forgotten Path of Christian Spirituality*, Random House-Doubleday, NY, 2005.

2002 interview with *Road to Emmaus*, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware said, “If you just say “mind” that is far too vague. In our translation of *The Philokalia*, we, with some hesitations, opted for the word intellect, emphasizing that it does not primarily mean the rational faculties. The *nous* is the spiritual vision that we all possess, though many of us have not discovered it. The *nous* implies a direct, intuitive appreciation of truth, where we apprehend the truth not simply as the conclusion of a reasoned argument, but we simply see that something is so.”<sup>2</sup>

And this is the word that we often see simply translated as “mind”! It’s no wonder that we English-speakers often find ourselves going around and around, wondering what we are missing when we read Orthodox spiritual works in translation.

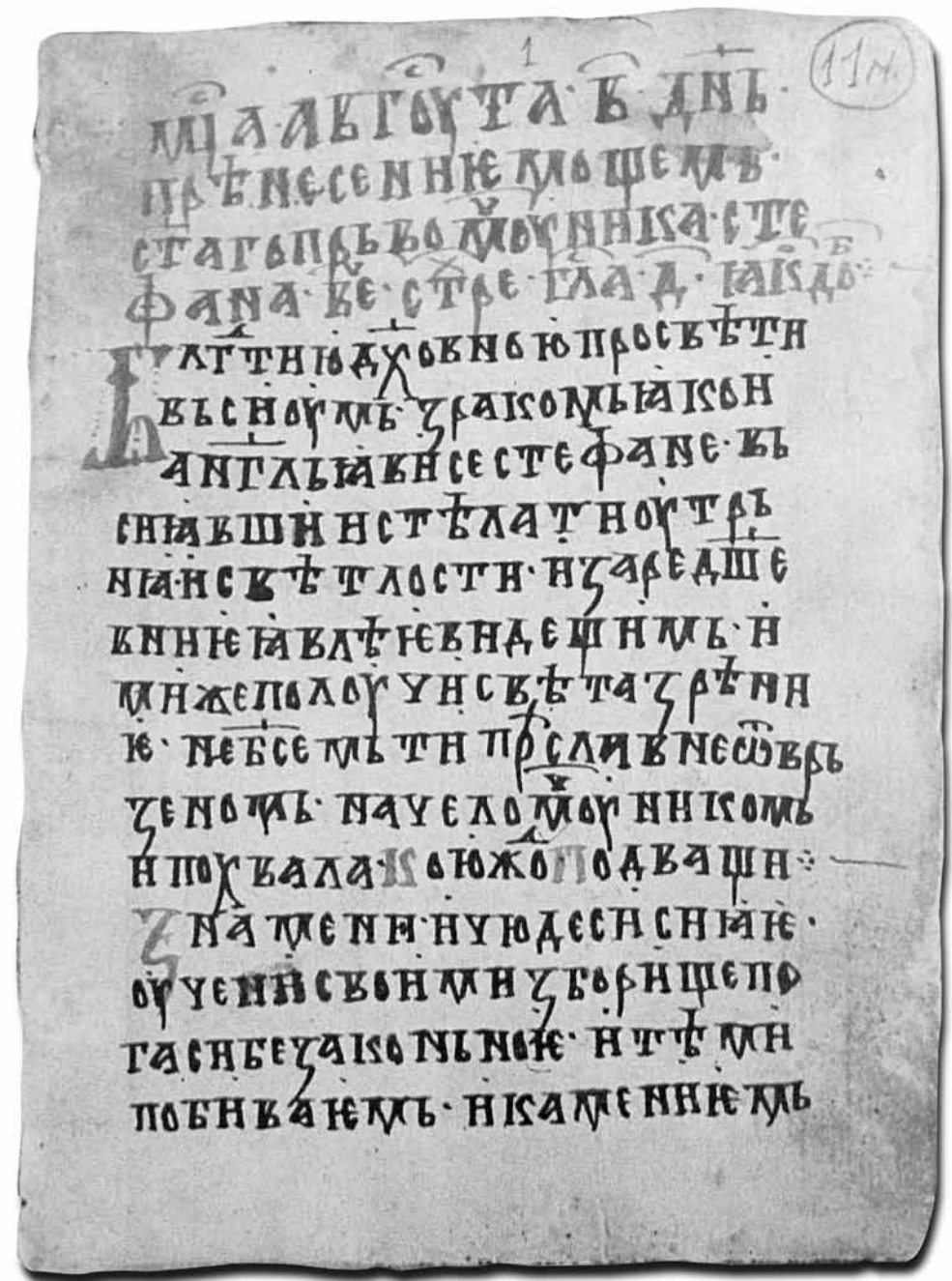
SISTER S.: In Greek there are also many words for love, while in English there is “love”, “liking”, “affection”, which really don’t differentiate the many different kinds of love as the Greek words do.

RTE: Yes. I recently read a book translated from Greek in which a well-known Greek elder talks about loving God with an “erotic” love (*eros*), which is sometimes surprising to non-Greek speakers, as “erotic” in modern English is so completely connected to the idea of lust. We’ve lost the meaning of the higher Greek term, which can mean a love for someone whom you love more than as a friend. I understand that this may or may not include romantic love; it can simply be an appreciation of the beauty within the other person. Plato also said that *eros* helps the soul recall the knowledge of beauty and contributes to an understanding of spiritual truth; it inspires philosophers as well as lovers.

Another example that seems to have very wide implications is the Greek word *logismos*, which is usually translated in English spiritual texts as “a thought.” I’ve recently learned that the real meaning is much fuller.

SISTER S.: Yes, “thought” is the only single word equivalent we have in English. We don’t have a word that conveys the whole meaning of *logismos*. As it is used in spiritual and ascetic writings, a *logismos* is not a simple thought that comes to you, but a thought of particular intensity and power, especially one that can distract you and derail you from your spiritual path.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Kallistos Ware, *Becoming Orthodox: Thoughts on Personhood, the Philokalia, and the Jesus Prayer*, Road to Emmaus, Issue #10, Summer 2002, pg. 49.



Fourteenth-century Serbian Menaion.

This isn't something like, "Oh, the trees are changing color, it's autumn, and soon the leaves will fall." That's *skepsis*—a simple thought, neither good nor bad. *Logismos* is something more like: "Oh, so and so was supposed to have raked up the leaves and he didn't do it. Now, how am I going to deal with this, how am I going to speak to him about it? Is it up to me to do it? He never does what he's supposed to do." Also, a *logismos* is not only negative, it can also be a positive or seemingly positive thought, but it is a thought with consequences for your spiritual life, and you have to know how to face it and deal with it in the right way.

RTE: Do *logismoi* ever have demonic or angelic forces behind them, for good or ill?

SISTER S.: They can have either. A *logismos* can come from our passions, our own inner self, or it can come from the outside.

Elder Paisius of Mt. Athos dealt a great deal with the question of *logismoi* and the importance of confronting a negative situation with a good *logismos*. Of course, he said, this is not the highest thing. The highest thing is to have no *logismoi* and to be centered in God.

He gave an example: once a man came to him and was terribly upset because he'd had this nice house in the suburbs where his family was happy and his children could play in a quiet yard. Then some people came in and built a party center right next to his house and there was music, noise and partying day and night. He said, "Elder, I'm going crazy, I'm taking tranquilizers, my whole family is falling apart. We're nervous wrecks, we're yelling at each other all the time. I can't sleep at night. What do I do?" Fr. Paisius said, "The only thing you can do is *na valeis kalo logismo*—to "put in" good thoughts. Imagine that you are in war time and the noise around you is tanks and shooting and bombs. Then, look at your situation now. Not only is there peace, but you aren't in any danger, you aren't being kicked out of your house, and even the people around you are so happy that they can have parties next door."

Many people would have just dismissed this, but this man took it seriously, forming good thoughts about the people he saw and the noise he heard. He returned to Elder Paisius later and said, "Although I'd prefer to be in a quiet place, I'm no longer a nervous wreck. My family is better, I can live with it."

RTE: So, a *logismos* is a thought with will behind it?

SISTER S.: It can be. The Church Fathers speak about different kinds of *logismoi* and how to deal with them, but to fully explain the idea in translation would take a much longer and more complex sentence than the word "thought" that we are usually left with. There simply aren't equivalent words in English.

Also, in the Greek language, and probably in Russian and Slavonic too, certain words have a history. Parts of words have meanings, and if you know where a word comes from, its etymology, this helps you to understand the meaning of the word as the Church Fathers use it. Of course this is true in English too, but it's far more true with Greek.

If we take a very simple word in English, like "sin," we think we know what the word means—a transgression of God's law. The Greek word *amartia* actually means "to miss the mark," which helps us to understand what the Fathers meant when they used the word. This helps modern people also. Many people today have an aversion to a word like sin because for them it is a legalistic term that is used to pound people over the head. In its essence it means that your goal is union with God and anything that deflects you from that goal is a sin. If you understand this, it gives you a much deeper understanding of our relationship with God.

Another word that people react to is the word "heresy"—especially in the West where people immediately think of heretics being burned at the stake, which is what happened in some parts of Europe. The Fathers didn't just come up with the word heresy to mean some kind of error of doctrine that will get you put on the bonfire. The root of the word is the Greek verb *haireo* which has a broad spectrum of meanings, but one of these meanings is to "choose your own idea." The verb itself is not negative, it's neutral. So, in this sense it means that you choose your own idea rather than that of the Church.

There is a depth and history to these words, that if you understand even a little, it helps you to understand the mind of the Fathers, the mind of the Church, and you can explain to people that a word like sin actually means missing the mark, missing the goal of your existence.

RTE: Then, when a language such as an Alaskan native dialect, or Spanish, or English doesn't contain theologically precise terms for a word, it seems even more necessary for translators to use footnotes and commentary to explain the missing concept to a general reader or worshipper. Otherwise, it can end in the problems that eastern Christianity encountered where, at least partly

## Sts. Cyril and Methodius: The Gift of Language

A part from the alphabet... the hardest task facing Cyril's team was to create a scholarly language for the Slavs.... A people without spiritual cultivation of education naturally lacked abstract concepts too, and it was precisely such concepts that had to be created in the Slavonic tongue so that they would then pass from Greek into Slavic. Here the team faced an enormous task, and the two brothers' knowledge and experience were vital.... The Slav associates contributed the material and checked and confirmed the selections, but the selection itself was unquestionably based on the great Cyril's judgement, assisted by his brother Methodius. In order to render the Gospel in Slavic, it was necessary to build up an enormous stock of abstract nouns and adjectives and even compound words, none of which existed in Slavic. These words and concepts came straight out of molds furnished by the rich Greek language, which had been worked on for centuries by scholars and intellectuals. In this way, limitless wealth flowed forth from the treasure-house of the Greek language and was offered to the Slavic world as a permanent, sacred gift. Transcending time, it stamped its presence forever on the Slavic language, which, alive and flexible as it was, now acquired greater plasticity and movement from this benevolent influence, as well as sufficient depth to become a highly expressive organ. Cyril, then, did not simply create an alphabet, but shaped the Slavic language in such a way as to enable it to assimilate the conceptual wealth of the Greek language.... Thus formed, the Slavic language became the basis for the creation of a self-sufficient Slavic learned culture, and it is precisely here that the significance of Cyril and Methodius' historic work may be found.

From *Cyril and Methodius of Thessalonica: The Acculturation of the Slavs*,  
by A-E. Tachiaos, SVS Press, 2001.

because of simplified equivalents of important theological terms in their native languages, some local churches veered off into unorthodox beliefs such as monophysitism.

Can we go on now to talk about the use of old languages in the liturgy?

SISTER S.: For traditional Orthodox Christians in Greece, their hair stands on end at the idea of doing the liturgy in the vernacular Greek. To them it is almost like blasphemy, because modern Greek is so flat and commonplace in comparison to the richness and beauty of ancient Greek. They feel the same about the translation of the New Testament Koine Greek, which is actually quite simple compared to the Greek of the Fathers.

RTE: Would this be as acute as the difference between the beauty of the King James Bible and one of the modern popular English versions incorporating slang?

SISTER S.: That's perhaps a bit extreme, but something like that, although there are probably Christians in America who think that slang would be alright. Of course, many Greek people have the New Testament with the original Greek on one side and modern Greek on the other, to help them understand what they are reading, but there is no comparison between the two. Even I, as a foreigner and not fluent in Greek, can feel the difference right away between the old language and modern Greek. The old is far more rich, dignified and beautiful.

RTE: I recently came across some interesting articles about Sir Thomas More, Erasmus, Colet, and their circle, who are remembered as the first European humanists. As it turns out, their aim was not at all to interest people in turning back to the classical period—they wanted to encourage a wider knowledge of Greek so that educated people could study the Church Fathers and the Bible in the original. They sensed that things had gotten off-track, even with the good Latin translations. Europeans after them took this in another direction, veering off into centuries of interest in classical Greek philosophical texts and pagan idealism.

SISTER S.: There was a reason why Greek was chosen as the language of the New Testament. In God's providence, Greek was also the vehicle for the liturgy, and for the fundamental theological writings of many of the Church Fathers. Of course, in the West the Fathers also wrote in Latin, but Latin

owes an incredible amount to Greek. I have heard that Latin has another feeling. It is more logical and has another spirit, and it doesn't always capture the subtleties of the Greek.

RTE: Along with this, I don't believe we can so easily dismiss this idea of "holy languages." In their *Lives* and in contemporary accounts, Sts. Cyril, Methodius, and their disciples who assisted them with translation (several of whom were also saints) insisted that Slavonic was a gift from God: that He had revealed the formation of the early alphabet. Slavonic and Greek, as well as other traditional Orthodox languages have been hallowed by thousands of years of saint's writings, liturgies, and prayer. If we disregard them as meaningless "ethnic accretions", we are cutting ourselves off from our Orthodox roots.

I've often wondered if Protestant divergences from traditional Christian doctrine might partially have been a result of the King James and other English translations of the Bible not carrying the fullness of the Greek?

SISTER S.: That certainly could have played into it, because every translator, whether he knows it or not, injects his own views into the translation. You can see this in the Protestant King James version, in the incident where Christ is teaching the people, and "a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice and said unto Him, 'Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps which Thou hast sucked.' But He said, 'Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.'"<sup>3</sup> This is not correct. That "but" isn't in the Greek. In Greek it is a continuation, as if it read, "And, he said unto her ..." Also, the "yea rather" is better translated something like "yes, and even more." It doesn't have that feeling of contradiction and contrast. And we have to remember that this translation was done by people who were losing their veneration for the Mother of God, so whether intended or not, people's views do enter into translation.

RTE: That's very helpful. Another argument for widespread translation that western converts often raise is that "Orthodox tradition says that every country and people are to have the services and the liturgy in their own language. We are just following this tradition." This is important as long as we understand that even a good translation is at best an approximation and that these translations took time. Many decades after the initial Valaam mission-

<sup>3</sup> Luke 11: 27-28

ary effort in Alaska, St. Innocent was still requiring his missionary priests to translate one Gospel into each dialect (which often meant first creating an alphabet for the dialect), along with some basic catechetical books. At the same time, he strongly encouraged the learning of Slavonic and Russian, so that the native catechists and clergy would have a solid understanding of Orthodox belief.

In promoting this, I've even heard native English-speakers criticize Greeks and Slavic speakers for retaining Church Greek or Slavonic in services because it is hard for contemporary Greeks, Russians and Slavs to understand. They say, "It should be in modern Greek or Russian ...."

SISTER S.: Of course, Sts. Cyril and Methodius translated the Greek into the Slavic of the time, modifying it for different dialects, and as you said earlier, even developed the Glagolitic alphabet, because Slavic wasn't a written language. Later, this alphabet was refined by their disciples, especially by St. Clement in Bulgaria, into what we now know as Slavonic. My understanding is that the Slavonic used in the Gospel and the services is a very literal translation of the Greek, where new words were composed to correspond to the Greek words. It was as exact as they could make it. Modern Russian speakers who haven't studied Slavonic may only have a partial comprehension, yet it is very understandable that most Orthodox Christians in those countries do not want to throw out the richness of the Slavonic tradition for a necessarily inferior modern Russian translation.

RTE: As a vivid example of this, I recall that not long ago, an official in the Russian State Department told me that he had been present at a state function where an Orthodox bishop was asked to give a prayer. Wanting to "relate" to the mostly secular officials, the bishop gave the prayer in modern Russian. The whole contingent of diplomats were in agony trying to stifle their laughter, as everyone in Russia knows something of Church Slavonic through studying linguistics, history or literature, and even to the ears of secular civil servants it sounded deeply wrong. And, in fact, the officially secular Russian Federation celebrates the Church Feast of Sts. Cyril and Methodius as one of Russia's national holidays. Everyone recognizes the importance of their contribution.

Russian friends say that when Cyril and Methodius introduced new Christian terms into the Slavonic language, rather than simply identifying existing words, finding a better or worse match, and supplying an alphabet, they put

together existing Slavonic roots to mirror Greek terms. The most obvious of these root combinations (called “calques”) is the Greek word *Orthodox*, which in Greek means correct + glorification. In Slavonic, of course, this is *Pravoslavie*, composed of the same pair *pravo* (correct) and *slavie* (glorification).

There are calque equivalents for many Greek theological, aesthetic, and philosophical terms, such as speaking of Christ’s dual nature as ‘divine humanity’ (in Russian, *Bogochelovechestvo*), or the single Russian word *Che-lovekoljubets*, which is the calque for the Greek word meaning “lover of mankind”. In this way, by using a language’s existing roots you can introduce terms for ideas or concepts that are previously completely unknown. For example, in English we simply don’t have the spiritual concept of “joy-making sorrow”, but this exists in both Greek and Slavonic.

SISTER S.: This results in Church Slavonic having an immediacy (and obviously it had even more in the past) for Slavic peoples because it is built using familiar root words. But it also conveys Greek meaning precisely and concisely, whereas English often needs a whole phrase or sentence, or has terms like “Orthodoxy”, whose meaning is not so immediate.

RTE: Interestingly, Chinese translators who are now working on translations of Orthodox books and services into Chinese are attempting to do the same as Sts. Cyril and Methodius. They are creating new words and characters to carry the full theological meanings of the Greek and Slavonic originals. Can you comment now on the current state of English translations?

SISTER S.: Most of the service books have been translated into English, which is a great blessing, but the quality of the translations is very uneven. Some are quite as good as we can get in modern English, while others are very inferior. Those who translate service books should have training in theology, including ascetic theology, a thorough knowledge of the Greek of the Church Fathers, and a good ear for English. There is also disagreement about which style of English is more appropriate for church use. Personally, I prefer the older Elizabethan style for its beauty and dignity as did Elder Sophrony, but only if it is well done—otherwise it sounds stilted and clumsy.

Elder Ephraim of St. Anthony’s Monastery in Arizona insists that all of his monasteries do all of the services in Greek. I don’t quite agree with this and I think it will eventually have to change—but I can understand that he wants the American novices who come to him to learn Greek so that they can



Byzantine Greek Menaion, Ascension of the Lord.



read the Fathers, understand the services, and enter the mind of the Church through the language. Also, Greek monasticism is a whole culture in itself. The way people relate to each other in the monastery, the traditional Greek phrases they use, creates an atmosphere and relationship within the monastery that you simply don't have with American converts using English. This all helps to bring people into the mind of the Church.

RTE: A few years ago I mentioned this language controversy to two British academics, both Orthodox converts, and they answered, "Well, there is only one real answer—everyone needs to learn Greek." Although not of Greek heritage themselves, this is what they had come to, they felt it was of such importance. Obviously, this is not going to happen for most of us, who will continue to rely on our English translators. Yet, many of us are concerned that some of our English-speaking churches are moving towards adopting not the best of our translations, but colorless versions with distorted meanings. To be fair, this is often in an attempt to fit the English words to traditional music, but even so, we are in danger of losing whatever real beauty and meaning can be preserved in English.

SISTER S.: Yes, these original languages were formed by the mind of the Church, by saints, by great theologians who were saints, and by the practice of the people over two millennia. Even though the West has been Christian, it hasn't always been Orthodox, so even words that might have originally corresponded to the Orthodox terms have acquired a different meaning or flavor and have to be reinterpreted and re-explained in light of the language of the Church Fathers and the New Testament. Many of these concepts have been lost and are now no longer intelligible to us.

Still, the Holy Spirit also helps, of course. You can be illiterate and become a saint, but these questions of language are certainly worth contemplating. I believe that we converts need to have a degree of humility towards the cultures that brought us Orthodoxy—to be grateful and humble that we are the recipients of these peoples' centuries of piety and learning. And not to be like Jacob—a weaned child on his mother's lap who grows fat, and kicks away. (cf. Deut. 32:15) Sometimes we read a few books and a smattering of Church history and think, "there we are". Humility and gratitude towards these cultures are important in developing a truly Orthodox world-view. ✦

## II. Coming Home to Church Greek

In 1981, Australian-born, Canadian-educated Dimitrios Christopolous and his wife Aliko moved back to Ioannina, Greece to establish themselves in their parents' homeland. Thirty years later, Dimitri shares the challenge of a native Greek-speaker engaging his liturgical language.

I grew up in Australia and am an English teacher myself, so I've thought quite a lot about Church translation. If you take, for example, the phrase, "The Lord is with us," in Greek it is *O Theos Methimon*. It resonates with such grandeur that you feel as if you are offering something beautiful to God, that this language is worthy of the Lord. You can also say this in modern Greek, *O Theos einai mazi mas*, but it sounds as simplistic as the English translation, almost as flat. When I hear it in old Greek, it is magnificent, like a beautiful brush stroke. It's the difference between going to church in jeans and going to church in a suit.

I've been told that Slavonic is just as beautiful. I don't know if English has the possibility of creating a beautiful Church language that separates itself from ordinary speech, but I believe that when you come to the Lord you have to offer something better than everyday things—in clothing, in attention, in language. Just as Abel gave Him the best fruit of his labor, we try to give Him the best of our language. Modern Greek and modern English might be more understandable, but there is little poetry or beauty in the words. There is something missing that leaves you flat.

RTE: We have some beautiful translations that are very clear and also uplifting, such as *The Lenten Triodion* and *The Festal Menaion* by Metropolitan Kallistos and Mother Mary, and other of Mother Mary's translations from the convent at Bussy-en-Othe. But in some translations, the English can be very colloquial and common-sounding.

DIMITRIOS: Yes, these beautiful old services are like old Byzantine icons. Besides their original depth, they develop a patina of centuries of use. Saint Romanos the Melodist and the Nun Cassiani wrote extraordinary things. Their hymns are a part of Church tradition, which has been passed down and prayed with for many centuries. You might have a sense of the fundamental meaning in a good translation into modern Greek or English, but I don't believe you will have the magnificence, the beauty, nor the layers of meaning



St. Gregory with Sts. Cyprian and Justina, Greek manuscript, 14th-century.

that come from the plays on words and the versatility of old Greek grammar. Perhaps I'm biased because I'm Greek, but I didn't grow up with the Greek Church language. I grew up in Australia with English and modern Greek, and only became interested in my native Orthodoxy as an adult. Now, when I go to church, it's as if I am transported to another world.

RTE: In some English translations, we aren't even left with the beauty of a modified King James type of English. Instead, everything has to be modern: God is addressed as "You," and the grammar and syntax are reduced to a fourth-grade level. For many people formerly used to older translations or even good literature, these new versions sound pale and simplistic.

DIMITRIOS: A few churches in Greece are also trying to use this everyday language because they say that people don't understand the older Greek, but people will understand even less if they do this because simplification doesn't stimulate deeper thought. An example that comes to mind in English is the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." Now, "You must not kill" or "Don't kill," are standard modern English translations. "Shalt not" carries serious authority, while "must not" sounds like a class in good manners, and "Don't kill," is simply a rule. I understand what it means, but it doesn't touch the soul. "Thou shalt not," comes from above, from a God with authority, and our souls respond differently.

RTE: Is it true that most modern Greeks don't understand the words of the liturgy and the services in Byzantine Greek?

DIMITRIOS: My wife has never had a single course in Byzantine Greek or theology, but she has sung in the choir in Greece for years, and because of her love for God and the Church, she has come to understand everything. Also, it is not a matter of simply understanding, it is also a matter of participating. You can read the service before or after, but to be present in the Church is to pray "Holy, holy, holy" with the angels to the Lord. If you haven't experienced that, all of the words in the world won't help you.

RTE: As an English-speaker in mostly Slavonic services, which I am glad to attend, I also take my English service books along to read. I don't have the advantage of your wife in being able to learn a church language that is an older form of what I already speak, and I would miss much of the meaning of the festal services if I didn't have a translation.

DIMITRIOS: I wasn't implying that one shouldn't use translations. I felt the same at the Bulgarian, Serbian, and Russian monasteries on the Holy Mountain, where they do services in Slavonic. I was so bored that my mind wandered everywhere. But for a Greek, these phrases in the Byzantine Greek services come to you. They are not completely dark and many words are close enough that you can glimpse their meaning, even if you are new to church. These words carry two millenia of prayer, and when you hear them you feel that you are in the presence of holiness. I'm sure that Slavonic is the same. If you come to church and hear it week after week, it becomes more familiar and accessible; the Lord opens your ears.

If someone wants to understand, he will. He will do what he must to learn. I remember when I first began attending church regularly, I would read the Gospel or parts of the services the night before in more modern Greek, so that I would have a clear understanding when I heard the passages in Byzantine Greek. After awhile those passages and the older words became familiar and dear to me. But, I had to go through the trouble of finding the translations and becoming familiar with them before I could really appreciate the much higher beauty of the Byzantine Greek.

It's like all spiritual life—you don't get anywhere by just sitting down and waiting for enlightenment. When you love someone, you dress up, you buy gifts, you use nice language... and it is the same with our love for Christ and His Church. You don't say, "I'm going to church and it had better be there for me, completely understandable." There is a synergy in the Church's services that lifts you to heaven, but you have to work for it.

One day, when I was new in church, I took a modern Greek translation to follow the service, like in a Protestant church. My spiritual father came out of the Royal Doors to cense and took the book out of my hand. Afterwards he said, "We don't do that. We listen, we pray, and we concentrate on the Lord." I said, "But I don't understand." He said, "You will understand. Just wait." Another priest said, "We are all together in the Holy of Holies—the Lord, the angels, the priests, the worshippers. It's as if all of the other worshippers are going down one path, and you are trying to find another. What are you doing reading?"

RTE: But if you were going to a Slavonic-speaking Church...?

DIMITRIOS: As I said, I wouldn't last a moment if it wasn't in a language that had some relationship with a language that I know.

RTE: And that's the problem most English-speaking converts to Orthodoxy have.

DIMITRIOS: Yes. When Sts. Cyril and Methodius translated all of this from Greek into Slavonic, they did it with care and reverence, and even created Slavonic words to express the Greek theological meanings. I believe we need righteous men and women, linguistically-educated Orthodox to do the same with English and other language translations. We need this harmony. ✦

### III. Defending Old Languages: Cultures, Discourse, and Heaven

International Greek journalist George Alexandrou is best known to *Road to Emmaus* readers for his absorbing 2004 interview, *The Astonishing Missionary Journeys of the Apostle Andrew*, and in 2007 for *The Land that Gave Birth to Saints: 2,700 Years of Greek Culture in Southern Italy*. He returns to us in this issue to warmly plead the cause of culture, tradition, language, and our profound need for Orthodox roots.

GEORGE: Before we begin to speak about older forms of language, we must start with the fact that each living tradition reflects a heritage of many centuries, and that these traditions come to us not only through books, but through verbal tradition as well. One of the greatest threats to human culture that we face now is globalization, which is being promoted as multiculturalism and an acceptance of differences, but this isn't really true. What we have is monoculturalism, which is spreading like a virus throughout the world, extinguishing cultures and languages.

In the United States, for example, the “melting pot” has long been a visual symbol of the way the country dealt with foreigners. I can accept this concept for the United States, but I can't accept it for the whole world. Actually, I should say, I can't accept it for the minorities and indigenous people of the United States, who have a right not to be forced into this melting pot, which is a dictatorship of monoculturalism.

RTE: The idea of a melting pot has given way to the new model of a “salad bowl” where all of the ingredients or individuals remain uniquely themselves, while they are mixed together with everyone else in society.

GEORGE: The melting pot idea is actually more innocent because it pressured people to react in an “American way”. But this “salad” can't preserve individuality or cultural characteristics because an individual will be lost in a “salad”. Why? Because by ourselves, individually, we are nothing. Can you imagine yourself as an Orthodox individual without other Orthodox people? Or not having other people of your own ancestry around you? Even God accepts us as a people—In Isaiah and in the Psalms, “all the nations pray

Opposite: Ethiopian Ge'ez Life of St. George, late 18th century.



to Him.” So, it is important that these small communities all have the right to make their own way, and that they respect one another. This would be the real “salad” of multiculturalism. Just saying, “I accept his individuality,” isn’t enough because a person’s individuality is connected (perhaps in eternity also) with the individuality of his unique community. He can’t survive in isolation. But these unique communities themselves are being swallowed up. Just look at your second or third generations—they are either completely inculturated into modern America, or they struggle on the fringe, like the native American youth. This is the context in which I want to put our discussion of language.

As another example of monoculturalism, take blue jeans. Everyone from Malaysia to Singapore to Uganda to Paris to Russia now has to wear blue jeans. Many of our cultures have lost their national dress, and this is a tragedy. Can you imagine having only one type of flower all over the world? One flower with different colors? This is horrible. But if the Greek Orthodox, or the Australian aborigines, or the Navajo Indians are able to keep their characteristics and their language as a people, then this will be a real salad with independent ingredients. In fact this isn’t happening because the minorities are pressured to become part of main-stream society, and their young people are seduced into it.

RTE: How does this separate multiculturalism you are talking about differ from nationalism?

GEORGE: Nationalism is the opposite of globalization. An example of this is if you go to an ethnic Orthodox parish where they may not accept you fully because you are not one of them. This kind of racial nationalism was condemned as a heresy by an Orthodox Church synod in Constantinople in 1872. As Christians, we must always walk on a tightrope. You can preserve your national identity, but at the same time, you must be open to others. You can be American or English or Irish, but you must also preserve the national identities of those who are Orthodox—the Russians, Georgians, Greeks, Romanians, Serbs, Antiocheans, Finns, and so on. This is vital for your faith, you cannot cut it off, and at the same time, we Greeks must accept you in a brotherly way.

A Christian must fight for freedom for everyone in this world, yet at the same time we must be very strict with our own tradition. This is a tight-rope, and this is what it means to be a Christian. The Moslem-Arab way, the “mod-

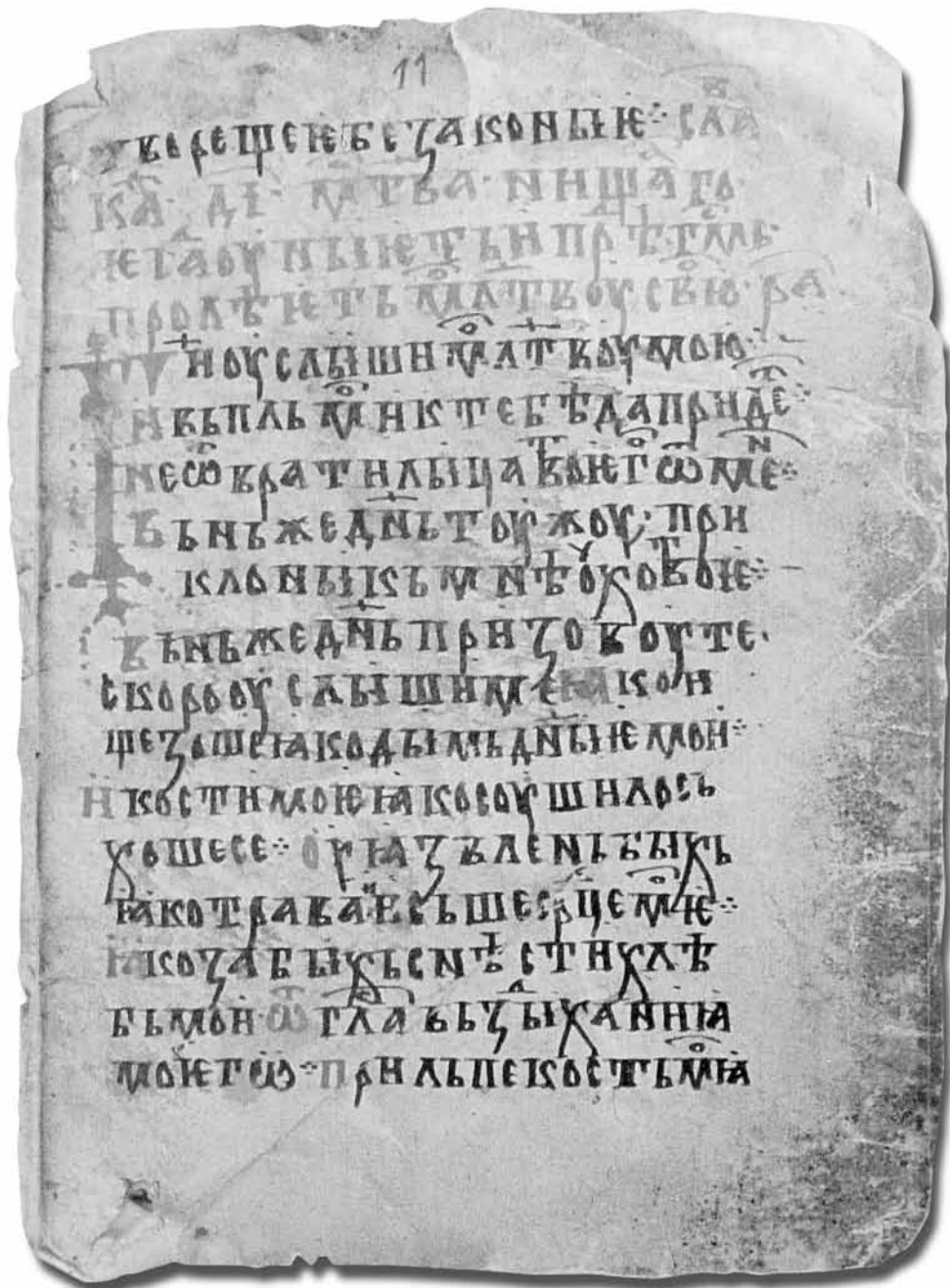
erate middle,” is to be always wise and moderate, but we Orthodox can never be proud or sure of our path, because we believe that everything that is done on earth is done through the medium of sinful people. The Orthodox way is to have one foot in this world, and one foot in the other world. We must ask God about every step. It is not easy to be Orthodox, but at the same time it is very easy. You don’t feel alone, you have God with you, but if you put your ego first, it’s impossible.

So, we ask ourselves, how can a Christian who lives in a multicultural world follow the will of God, which is His freedom? In this we have a sort of Orthodox compass, which is St. Constantine the Great, Equal to the Apostles who, through the Edict of Milan, gave absolute freedom of expression to any religion in his empire. With this edict, he denied that he himself was a god, which the earlier Roman emperors had proclaimed, and left everyone free to follow their own practices unless it involved something horrible such as infanticide or human sacrifice. He even allowed the heretics to be free. In the same way, he organized the Council of Nicea, where they made very strict decisions about what the Christian faith is, and this, I think, points the way—a modern Orthodox Christian must live in an absolutely free world, while being very strict with his own spiritual life. As Christ has told us, we are not of this world. We must leave other people free, but we ourselves must not live outside of the freedom and will of God.

You can see that Constantine’s experiment and decisions were very good because he created the Byzantine Empire that lasted for over 1100 years. So, if we have a voice in the secular world, we need to look closely at what he did. We are also free to follow saints who had other opinions because we understand that all of this advice is from people who sinned and made mistakes, but were nevertheless sanctified by being a part of the Church.

### Defending Old Languages

Now, to move on to the question of languages—as I said a moment ago, traditional languages contain the wisdom of local communities that have existed for thousands of years. Destroying a language is destroying this wisdom with its unique perception of good and bad, of medicinal herbs, of how we live in the desert, how we face the winter, techniques of farming, how to live by the world’s great rivers, how we describe snow or the green color of the Amazon jungle or the sea waves of the Pacific Islanders. All of this is still very important for us.



Serbian Psalter, 14th century.

There are three general types of languages that are important for us in this discussion. The first are the very ancient languages, which originated after the Tower of Babel. For example, we have the Australian Aborigines' languages, the Paleo-Siberian languages and the Negrito languages of Andaman Islands. Although I don't want to get into a discussion of the age of the earth, according to archeologists, these languages are 40,000 years old. Even if you believe that the earth is far younger, these are some of the oldest languages on the planet. You also have the San (Bushmen) languages (the "click" languages) and the Paleo-Arctic languages—Lapland, Yupiat, and other northern tongues. Then we have the pygmy language, which has been lost as the pygmies now speak Bantu. In losing the ancient pygmy language, we have lost a huge sum of wisdom.

These languages all have elements that go back to the roots of human language, to the time not long after the Fall. These are the roots of our life. As Fr. Theotimos Tsalas, a priest from Congo has said, "The indigenous languages of Africa have many words and phrases that point to the people once having had faith in One God, and this is even proof that once there was faith in One God over the whole earth. If you lose these languages you lose the ancient myths, and you lose all of these aspects of facing God."<sup>4</sup>

A second group of languages are the old languages of people who made very great civilizations, or very small but important civilizations, from 4,000 to 6,000 years ago. These include the Georgian, Iberian, Armenian, Greek, Latin, Chinese, Syriac, Ethiopian and Aramaic tongues, and some others. These languages happen to be written as well, and they contain a whole universe of meanings, of thoughts, that we cannot lose. (Spoken Latin we have already lost.) The Chinese are quite self-reliant and they can maintain their language, but the Georgians and Greeks are small countries with few people; yet it is very important to keep these languages alive because the New Testament and many early and later Christian texts were written with them. Arabic is rich and also has Christian components, but that came later. Before Arabic, classical Syriac and Aramaic were the liturgical languages of much of the Christian Middle East. Unfortunately, the Aramaic dialect that the Lord spoke exists now in only a few small villages.

The third category are old languages that were dead, but have been recreated—like Coptic, which has been preserved as a literary language, or the Hebrew language of the Jews (although they also have others such as Yid-

<sup>4</sup> See Fr. Theotimos Tsalas, *We Are Going to Live in Paradise*, Road to Emmaus Journal, Issue #18, Summer, 2004.

dish and Ladino), which has recently been revived as a spoken language. Also, the Welsh revived their language, which had not completely died out, but was spoken by very few, and the Irish are trying to do the same.

RTE: You speak about these languages as if they hold the same forms that they had from the beginning, but languages do change, and many languages have changed greatly even in the past century, although some of those changes were forced. The 20th century political upheavals slaughtered languages as well as peoples.

GEORGE: Yes, it is linguistic slaughter, as you call it. This is a slaughter of civilization, of wisdom, of a whole tradition. There has been a terrible transformation of Greek, and in Russia it is the same. For example, young Greeks growing up now cannot understand the Greek of 100 years ago, but Greeks living 100 years ago could even understand the Homeric language of 3000 years ago.

In Isaiah 43, the Lord says, “Let all the nations be gathered together...” This is important, because God doesn’t only speak of humanity in general, but of the wisdom of the nations. He wants us *as nations*, but if you cut off these traditions and languages, you cut off your own roots on the planet. This is the wisdom of our forefathers, the breathing of the tribes and peoples of the earth.

If we unthinkingly continue to do away with these languages (that is, if I want everything to be in modern Greek or in English), if we continue to homogenize and simplify, we will lose these ancient aspects of human wisdom which were gifts from God to His people when He gave us the right to name the animals, the plants, the stars.

For example, the Arapaho Indian can call a rabbit something so unique that we could never have imagined the word or the concept, but once we understand this name, we know that the rabbit means this for us as well. Or perhaps Slavic speakers in the Carpathian Mountains have a special word for the bear. It is not just a word, but a special characteristic that these people have identified in this animal, the way in which they interact with the bear and what they have learned from it. If we lose their language, we lose not only the sound of the word, but all of this knowledge. We are losing human wisdom, the ways a human society faced the glory of the Lord.

In the same way, the natives in the Amazon River basin have many different words for “green”. We must learn their language to really understand

“green”, but to do so we must save it—not just by copying it into a dictionary, but by helping these people to preserve their tradition. Sumerian and other ancient languages are now entirely confined to books and this is a tragedy. You may learn how to read Sumerian, but you will never know the essence of the living words.

You also have this linguistic wisdom in North America. For example, we all know that the Eskimos have very many words for snow, but if the Eskimo is forced to inculturate and use English more and more, you will lose these forty possible descriptions—forty ancient wisdoms—for snow. You will be trying to describe snow with just a few words, and the Eskimos themselves will forget what they know about snow. But if they keep their language, we will all be wiser—we can know snow through their language.

An even more universal example is the use of medicinal herbs that are unique to each area. If we lose this language, we’ll forget the use of herbs that these people knew. These herbs are life-giving, and if you leave these traditions, you lose this oral wisdom and you lose knowledge.

Also, English-speakers don’t want to lose their Old English or Shakespearean English traditions. There is a richness for you in these forms that is more complex and beautiful than your modern English, and although not everyone reads it easily, it is an important component of your cultural and human treasures. The English language has these examples as every language does, but you must go to the roots of your words and your own unique culture.

RTE: I imagine that if we dismiss these other languages as something that doesn’t touch us, we not only lose vital theological concepts, but even the ability to express certain states or feelings. For instance, the Russians have a single word with which they express the spiritual concept of “joy-making sorrow,” which is often used in Orthodox literature. This is a concept we simply don’t have as a single word in English.

GEORGE: Yes. We think that in simplifying and modernizing, our language is going to be accurate and more people will be more able to join in and share, but this is a mistake. In any large city now you find modern kids creating their own intricate slang, and this is not a simple phenomenon. A human being needs something rich, mythical, and hierarchical. He wants simplicity, but not insipidity, and he transforms simplicity into complicated forms to express what he actually experiences. Slang carries feeling as well as meaning.

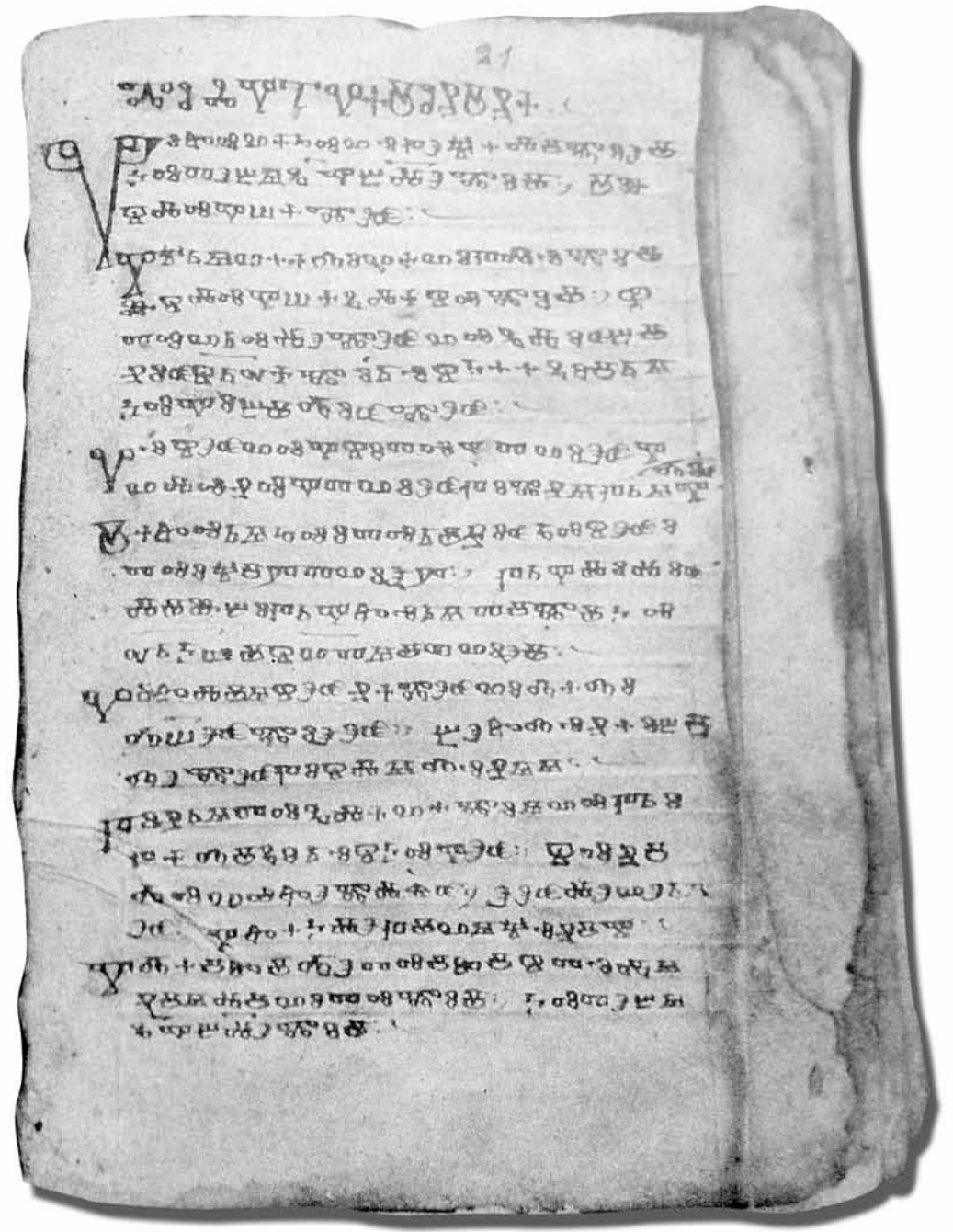
RTE: So we English-speaking Orthodox have been grafted onto a living body of tradition without which we cannot survive?

GEORGE: You can even cut down a plant and if you leave the roots a new plant will grow. But if you cut the roots you can never restore the plant.

As an example of what we could lose if we ignore those roots, take something as fundamental as the New Testament. In Greek you have this *Kaini Diathiki*, the New Testament. If you know the Greek language well, you know what this means and you know that the words “New Testament” are a very bad translation. *Kaini Diathiki* means something that is absolutely new, that is appearing now, at this moment. This is *Kaini*. It means something that is appearing for the first time in the whole universe—something absolutely important that has never been there before. This also is *Kaini*. *Diathiki* is the material inheritance of a father to his son, or the inheritance of a nation to its youth. It is also a testament—*omologia*. *Diathiki* also has to do with segments: every segment of something is a *thiki*, but *diathiki* covers and orders all of the segments as well. So, when you hear this word you understand that this is something absolutely new, but that it covers all of the parts as well. *Diathiki* is also about property, about leaving a witness, a declaration of what is to be inherited. Can you imagine? This is the material property that God the Father is leaving us—His Son who was incarnate for us. But if you just say “New Testament” where is this materiality? It’s just a phrase. (Even “New” isn’t right.) Where is the inheritance, where is the property of my father? This is just an example of one word. You can find thousands of such examples in the Bible. If you lose the Greek Church language, replacing it with a simplified modern Greek or English or French or a German variant, you are going to lose all of this wisdom.

RTE: Some Orthodox English-speaking converts ask why ethnic Orthodox should keep their own old church languages on foreign soil, or even on their native soil. I frequently hear people say, “The Greeks and the Russians don’t even understand their own services, why should their churches keep the Slavonic and old Greek languages? It’s just hanging onto a dead past.” How would you answer this?

GEORGE: We can translate the services into English, or into Indonesian, or into the Papua New Guinean language, because understanding their basic meaning is very important. We must translate them, but we can never forget



Glagolitic (pre-Slavonic) Psalter of Dimitri the Altarnik, 12th century. St. Catherine’s Monastery, Sinai.



that keeping an ancient tradition alive is not keeping a mummy in a glass case. A living tradition gives inspiration for new things. The healthiest tree is one that has very deep roots, but if you cut the roots, the tree will fall. This is why it is foolish to say, “No, we don’t need this old tradition.” You need the tradition to stay alive yourself.

It’s not necessary for everyone to learn the ancient Greek language, but it must be preserved for those who are interested as a living tradition, so that these people can help the rest of us understand the real meaning of these words.

I have the same problem with the Old Testament. Although we have the Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament which is, as we say, “God-inspired,” I still need to know elements of Hebrew to really understand and appreciate this text.

RTE: Can we speak now about Greek itself? As the original language of Christian scripture and the eastern Church Fathers, it holds a primary place for all of us. How many forms of Greek are we speaking about?

GEORGE: The earliest Greek we know of is Mycenaean Greek. The next stage, Ancient Greek, is the term used for the development of the Greek language from the Archaic (c. 9th to 6th centuries BC), Classical (c. 5th to 4th centuries BC) and Hellenistic (c. 4th century BC to 6th century AD) periods of the ancient world. Different forms and dialects of Classical Greek were used by most of the famous Greek philosophers and dramatists. The Attic dialect of the Classical Greek period was the language of the intellectuals, and the dialect of ancient Athens. This was followed by Byzantine Greek (5th to 15th centuries AD), and then modern Greek.

The Hellenistic phase, with the Greek known as Koine, arose during the reign of Alexander the Great in the 4th-century BC. Koine had a simplified grammar and was used as a common language throughout the Hellenized world as it was easily learned by foreigners and for simple people who needed to communicate across cultures. Koine was the language of the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, and the New Testament was written by the Evangelists in Koine as well. Educated Greeks, however, rejected Koine as being too simplistic, and they reintroduced Classical Greek for writing. Thus, Byzantine Greek, which is the Greek of the Orthodox services and what many of the Church Fathers wrote in during the 5th to 15 centuries AD,

remained rooted in the Attic-Classical tradition, while the spoken language continued to develop. Modern Greek, dating from the 15th century has many local dialects.

The Koine Greek of the Bible was simpler than the Greek that had come before, and also simpler than the Greek sermons and commentaries of the Church Fathers who came later. The Fathers used a form of Koine that was enriched with a classic Attic dialect. Even with these different phases, I have to emphasize that from at least 1,600 years before Christ until now, Greek is the same language: the letters of the alphabet are all the same, and even modern Greek keeps the essence of the older Greek inside the words.

RTE: As a modern Greek speaker, do you understand the Greek of the Church Fathers?

GEORGE: Yes, I have studied it. I would guess that a modern Greek person who hasn’t studied it would understand from 30% to 60%, but it takes time. As a comparison, Shakespeare is probably more difficult for English-speaking people today than the biblical Koine is for us—more like the Attic dialect is for us now. Nevertheless, for a modern Greek speaker, the roots of these words are clear, and for an intellectual, the Koine is fully understandable. Later Byzantine Greek, which the *Lives* of the saints were written in, is very close to modern Greek and we would understand 95%, but it’s much more difficult to read a sermon of St. Basil or St. John Chrysostom, because they use the Attic dialect. The liturgy is a mixture of anachronisms from the Attic language and Koine.

For example, in the Greek of the Pascha service, we say, *Defte lavete fos*, which is sometimes translated into English as “Come, receive the light” or “Come and take the light,” but this not at all the fullness of its meaning. *Defte* means “Come to us—leave your place and come to our place, leave your situation and come to us.” And *lavete* is not only “take” or “receive” but it also means to “share with us” “conquer” “include” “accept” “being convinced”. *Fos* is not only “light” but “life” “happiness”, “joy” and “glory” too. To be precise in English, you would have to say: “Leave your place and come and have a communion of light and joy and life and glory with us. Share them with us and conquer them also, in receiving them.” This is absolutely different from “Come, receive the light”. If you don’t understand the essence of Orthodoxy in its own Church languages, then you can never really understand



Serbian Slavonic psalter, 13th century.

your roots. It's the same with Hebrew, but the problem with the Hebrew language is that it was dead for so many centuries that we cannot recover all of its ancient components.

Another example is from the Divine Liturgy: *Tas thyras, tas thyras, en so-fia proshomen*: “The doors, the doors, let us attend.” If you say “The doors, the doors,” in English that signifies the physical door into the altar. In modern Greek it has this meaning as well, but in the old Greek *thyra* also means “the house”—and allegorically “paradise” or “the entrance to Paradise.” *Thyra* is also used in theatre—it is the door through which the actors and actresses pass onto the stage. *Thyra* also refers to the eyes and ears, so when a Greek hears, *Tas thyras, tas thyras ...* he thinks not only of the physical doors before the holy altar, but about the doors to paradise, and this is also a call to concentrate, to open our eyes and ears to Our Lord Himself, because we are seeing a reenactment of the life of Jesus Christ. It has four meanings, two of which you cannot get in translation.

We can also say *paedia*, which is usually translated into English as “education” but this is not what it really means—it’s not just education, but a whole system of training a person how to be free, how to socialize, how to communicate with God, with nature, with community, and with people. The word “education” comes from the Greek *ekpedefsis*, which means “to give skills (mainly to a slave)”. But *paedia* is to make free people. So, if you translate both of these words as “education” without knowing the old tradition, you have lost their essence. Modern Greek preserves the ancient Greek tradition, as modern Russian represents the ancient Slavic tradition, although both are getting more simplistic every year. We must keep the ancient forms because these languages hold the essence of our eternal truths.

We also have the common example of having many Greek words for love—*agape, eros, filia, storge* (to be tender), *thelema* (to desire something). *Agape*, for example, is the real love between mother and child, or the feeling for a spouse. *Agape* is also the love of God. If you are to reduce this in translation to just the one word “love,” you are losing all of this richness and variety. How can one word encompass everything?

Then we have the word “cosmos”. In ancient Greek, the word *kosmos* means jewel. It is the jewel of the Lord. But if you use *cosmos* in the way the English understand it, you lose the ancient Greek essence and the Christian essence, that this is the jewel that God himself presented to His people and to the whole universe. You understand it as simply “a world, or universe”

but it really means “a jewel that is more than everything, and yet is inside of everything.”

RTE: What does Greek use for the word “spirituality”, which is such a general category in English?

GEORGE: In Greek we have the word, *pneumatikotika*. This is usually translated in English as spirituality or spiritualism, but both terms are extremely bad, because *pneumatikotika* has nothing to do with the spirituality of the pagans or the spirituality of the intellectuals. It is something absolutely different—it means “to live under the Orthodox way of life, and to be connected to the Holy Spirit.”

For pagans and Hindus we would use *pneumatismos*, which means “to be under the spirits.” It’s the same root but an absolutely different meaning. This also means to call the spirits and to be obedient to them. I think your English “spiritualism” means the same.

If we are talking about the spirituality of an intellectual, we say, *pneumatiko*, “through the mind”. These are absolutely different. But we would never call someone like Socrates *pneumatiko*. We would call him, *illumino* or “philosopher”.

An Orthodox *pneumatikos* could never be referred to by these words, because he is dedicated to the Lord. He is enlightened by the Holy Spirit and speaks out of this enlightenment. This is why I believe it is sometimes better to leave words as they are, as we left *Alleluia* and *Hosanna* in the Bible. These ancient Hebrew words were better than the Greek, so the Septuagint translators left them as they were. Translating *pneumatikotika* into the English “spirituality” is absolutely destructive, because you cannot get into the idea of spirituality. You cannot refer to pagan, Hindu, Jews, or even other Christian denominations, as *pneumatikotika*. The simplistic phrases of “Orthodox spirituality” or “pagan spirituality,” or “spiritualism”, absolutely lose the essence of this word, but English-speaking Orthodox could leave the word as it is, *pneumatikotis*, and adopt it into their vocabulary. This is like saying Pascha instead of Easter.

I’m a very strong defender of leaving the words we cannot translate as they are. An alternative would be to create a word that is absolutely new (as the Chinese Orthodox are now trying to do to convey the fullness of theological thought.) A reader who is completely new to Orthodoxy will be easily misled if he reads about “spirituality” when his whole background has been

something connected with, for example, general sociological concepts or “esoteric” teachings. It’s much better to leave the Greek or Slavonic term or to construct an absolutely new term that cannot be confused with other English terms, so that you can impress upon the reader that this is a new form of spirituality that he’s never known before—something absolutely Orthodox.

Poor translations also distort your understanding of the Bible and Church history. For example, in the Acts of the Apostles, in the passage about St. Dionysios the Aereopagite, the Greek translation says, “...and there were some males, and amongst them was Dionysios the Aereopagite and the woman called Damaris.” This mention of a woman wouldn’t make sense unless she was the wife of one of them. The English translations I’ve seen are often completely wrong, because they read, “There were some men [meaning people in general], and among them was Dionysios the Aereopagite and a woman called Damaris.” These poor translators see this verse as singling out two individuals in a crowd.

However, if you go to the modern and ancient Greek, we still say, “George and the woman named Olga,” meaning myself and my wife. If my wife and I go to any Greek village today, they will say exactly the same thing: “Georgios came and the woman, Olga.” It is perfectly clear that this means my wife, and it is absolutely clear in both Koine and modern Greek that Damaris was Dionysios’ wife. That’s why St. John Chrysostom and St. Ambrose of Milan understood it literally that she was the wife of St. Dionysios. In the West, they’ve turned this into a controversy.

This is a very clear example of how modern Greek still carries the meanings of the older forms, and how many mistakes you can make in translation if you don’t know the essence of the language.

RTE: In regard to mistranslation, someone once asked Elder Paisius of the Holy Mountain if they could study theology abroad. He said, “You have to be very careful where you go to study. The thing that happens is that our young people go to England, to France and other countries to study, and while there they catch all kinds of viruses and then go on to do their dissertation. They study the Greek Fathers in translations from our own language prepared by the foreigners who either because they could not render the meanings correctly or by design they added their own erroneous notions. Our own Orthodox scholars who are learned in foreign languages will catch this foreign virus, carry it to Greece and spread it with their teaching. This is

not to say that someone who is careful will not be able to separate the gold from the amber.”<sup>5</sup>

George, in light of all of this, what do you suggest for English-speaking converts or converts of other languages? Many traditional Orthodox are alarmed by some western converts who would like to ignore or even break ties with the older Orthodox traditions and patriarchates: it’s like a school-child raising himself.

GEORGE: As I said before, the ancient Greek tradition and the ancient Greek liturgy keep the real essence of the Christian faith, as does the Slavonic and other old Church languages. These traditions and languages are not just something for quaint foreigners. It’s like trying to teach the Koran without knowing Arabic, or teaching the Vedas without knowing the Indian languages. It’s senseless to try to become Orthodox without respecting these ancient cultures and languages. Converts are not obliged to know Greek, but you are obliged to respect the ancient ways. If this is neglected, you are destroying the roots and essence of your own faith.

The problem is not to promote the Greek language, the problem is to conserve it in the minds of the people who are willing to study it. This is enough. They can interpret for the rest. Not everyone needs to learn Greek, but there should be a nucleus of people in every Orthodox country who learn ancient Greek, Koine, liturgical (Byzantine) Greek, and even modern Greek, which keeps the essence of the old meanings. Then their translations would be more accurate and beautiful.

RTE: And perhaps even lead to Orthodox schools for translating church texts from Russian-Slavonic, Syriac, Arabic, Georgian, and the various forms of Greek.

GEORGE: Yes. May the Lord bless it. ✝



Russian Slavonic liturgical text, 13-14th centuries.

<sup>5</sup> Elder Paisius, *Spiritual Counsels, Vol. 1: With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man*, Holy Monastery of St. John the Theologian, Souroti, Thessaloniki, 2006, pg. 325.

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 առաջակս . մի յաջմե՛նորս եւմի . յահեկէ :  
 յԵ | Ի որսնցան էինն . հայհոյ էին շոտ , շար  
 ձինն զգլուխս իսրեանց կատելն . վահ  
 որքակէր զտաճարն կզերիսատոր ս  
 շինեիր զնա , ապրեցն զբեկ : լծե որդի եւ  
 այ կի ի տաչ եր :  
 յԵ | Ի սնպես եբահանայ սպեարն ճաղելն  
 հանդեր շարաւորն կծերովք կատելն :  
 զայլ ապրեցոյց , զինքն զկարեապրեցո  
 ցանսղ : Ելծե լծագատրէ իլի , էլ յե այժմ ի  
 ժաղեղ : Եհաստացող դմա , Ելծե յոսացա  
 յաժմ իրկեացէ այժմ զգա Ելծե կամի զգա  
 զանդի սասայ Ելծե այ որդի եւ :

յԵ | Ի Նայն կարազակքն որեաչեալ էին շո  
 րմա նստաստելն զնա :  
 յԵ | Ի Իբեկ ժամե առորն իստարեղէի վե  
 լայ ամնայն երկրի մինչեցինն ճաղ :  
 յԵ | Ի Իզինն ժաման զուցեաց յա ի ճայնմեծ Ե  
 ստե , եղի , եղի , լամա սաբար լծմի : այս  
 ինքնն , ամֆուս ամֆուս ընդեր (Չողերդեա :  
 յԵ | Ի Իմնք յայնցանէ որսնքն կային իբ  
 րեւտան ստեկն , զեղեա կարդայ դա :  
 յԵ | Ի Ի լաղվաղակի ըն (Չացեալ միոմն ի  
 նոցանէ . ստապունդ լի քացսխով , հա  
 թեալ յերդան կողմակ շմա :  
 Ի Իկեպնասէին . Չաղտեցողք Ելծեայ է  
 զնա իրկի զգա :  
 յԵ | Ի Ի յարձեալ աղաղակեաց ի ճայնմեծ .  
 կարճակեաց զոգին :  
 յԵ | Ի Իահա վարագոյր տաճարնն ցղա  
 յերկուս իսկերուստ մինչեկ վայր :  
 յԵ | Ի Ի որկեր շարձեցան : Ելծե պատատ Ե  
 ցան : կզերեղմանք բացան : կբազում  
 մարմնք նն լեցեղոյ սրբոյ յարեա ն :

Armenian passion scenes and liturgical text, 13th century. Erevan.

ሙ፡፡ሙ ዘግጥተ፡፡ወ  
 ወ፡ግጥጥተ፡፡ወ ከግዚ  
 ከግዚ ር፡፡ደ ሲ ሰ፡፡ሙ፡፡  
 ከግዚ ር፡፡ደ ፋ፡፡ደ ት፡፡ኒ  
 ት፡፡ሙ፡፡ ከ፡፡ሙ ት፡፡ ከ፡፡ሙ  
 ሰ፡፡ሙ፡፡ ከ፡፡ሙ ከ፡፡ሙ  
 ዘ፡፡ደ ተ፡፡ል፡፡ል፡፡ ስ፡፡ም፡፡ን፡፡ት፡፡  
 ት፡፡ኒ ፊ፡፡ደ፡፡ ዘ፡፡የ፡፡ዓ፡፡ፀ፡፡በ፡፡ፍ



ደሱ፡፡ ከ፡፡ን፡፡ት ሙ፡፡ ከ፡፡ም  
 ከ፡፡ከ፡፡ጥ፡፡ፍ፡፡ ሙ፡፡ ከ፡፡ም  
 ኒ፡፡ክ፡፡ሙ፡፡ በ፡፡ሐ፡፡ል፡፡ዮ፡፡ ዘ  
 ደ፡፡ክ፡፡ል፡፡ ወ ሰ፡፡ከ፡፡ በ፡፡ደ፡፡በ፡፡  
 ሀ፡፡ሮ ከ፡፡ዮ፡፡ ጽ፡፡ጊ፡፡ደ ት፡፡ገ፡፡ገ፡፡  
 ም፡፡ ዘ፡፡ከ፡፡ሙ፡፡ ደ፡፡ል፡፡ሀ፡፡ቱ፡፡  
 ከ፡፡ደ ሃ፡፡ም ወ፡፡ ወ ከ፡፡ደ፡፡ፊ፡፡  
 ት፡፡ሱ፡፡ ከ፡፡ግ፡፡ሰ ስ፡፡ክ፡፡ሙ፡፡ ሰ

ስ፡፡ሞ፡፡ን፡፡ጥ፡፡ ተ፡፡ በ፡፡ከ፡፡ሱ፡፡  
 ከ፡፡ግ፡፡ሩ፡፡ ከ፡፡ሱ፡፡ በ፡፡ሰ፡፡ ከ፡፡ሙ፡፡  
 ከ፡፡ም ከ፡፡ሱ፡፡ ገ፡፡ፀ፡፡ ሳ፡፡ን፡፡ጥ፡፡  
 ሀ፡፡፡ግ ሰ፡፡ረ፡፡ ገ፡፡ደ ም፡፡ ኒ፡፡ ዘ  
 ከ፡፡ሮ፡፡ ር፡፡ ደ፡፡ ፋ፡፡ ደ፡፡ ስ፡፡ ክ፡፡ሙ፡፡  
 ከ፡፡ሳ፡፡ ሙ፡፡ ሳ፡፡ን፡፡ ገ፡፡ ደ፡፡ ግ፡፡ ጥ፡፡ ት፡፡  
 ከ፡፡ን፡፡ ት፡፡ ሙ፡፡ ሳ፡፡ ከ፡፡ ት፡፡ ሳ፡፡ ሥ፡፡  
 ሙ፡፡ ዘ፡፡ ት፡፡ በ፡፡ ል፡፡ ሀ፡፡ ወ፡፡ ዘ፡፡ ት፡፡



ዮ፡፡ም፡፡ ሀ፡፡ሱ፡፡ ወ፡፡ ጊ፡፡ ሠ፡፡ ሙ፡፡  
 ወ፡፡ ሰ፡፡ ት፡፡ ከ፡፡ ሳ፡፡ ት፡፡ ደ፡፡ ት፡፡  
 ወ፡፡ ደ፡፡ ደ፡፡ ወ፡፡ ከ፡፡ ግ፡፡ ዚ፡፡ ከ፡፡ ግ፡፡  
 ሐ፡፡ ር፡፡ ከ፡፡ ሙ፡፡ ገ፡፡ ደ፡፡ ስ፡፡ ግ፡፡ ሰ፡፡  
 ሰ፡፡ ት፡፡ ዮ፡፡ ወ፡፡ ከ፡፡ ት፡፡ ጽ፡፡ ሐ፡፡ ት፡፡  
 ም፡፡ ከ፡፡ ስ፡፡ ሙ፡፡ ዘ፡፡ ን፡፡ ት፡፡ ስ፡፡ ከ፡፡  
 ሱ፡፡ ከ፡፡ ሐ፡፡ ዛ፡፡ በ፡፡ ሳ፡፡ ስ፡፡ ም፡፡  
 ዮ፡፡ ን፡፡ ሠ፡፡ ሠ፡፡ ም፡፡ ወ፡፡ ስ፡፡ ክ፡፡ ሙ፡፡

Ethiopian Ge'ez Gospel of St. Luke, circa 1730.