



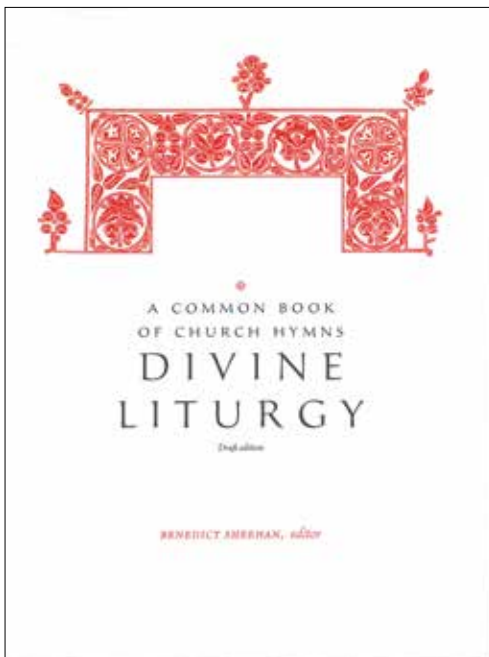
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A COMMON BOOK OF CHURCH HYMNS: DIVINE LITURGY

Edited by Benedict Sheehan
Draft Edition. St Tikhon's Monastery Press, South Canaan, Pennsylvania 2015. 218+8pp.
ISBN 978-0-9905029-8-2

This collection is a huge step forward in the provision of liturgical music in the English language. It endeavours, as Benedict Sheehan explains in his Editor's Preface, to be "the first attempt to rival the existing Slavonic obikhods both in its comprehensiveness and its easy adaptability to small ensembles or solo chanters", and that is precisely its value. A chanter, with this book in hand, would have a very large part of the material he needed for Liturgies throughout the year, in Znamenny melodies set to English texts; in effect, an English-language *Sputnik Psalomshchika*.



Naturally, one would have to seek elsewhere for particular troparia and kontakia, but those for Sundays, weekdays and for the major feasts are given here, as are the respective antiphons, prokeimena, substitutions for the Megalynarion and the Communion hymns. There is a fine selection of melodies for the Megalynarion itself, as also for the Cherubic Hymn, and seven versions of the Anaphora (including one with longer melodies suitable for the Liturgy of St Basil the Great).

The question of translations has naturally to be dealt with in any project of this kind, and the choice made here has been to set those in regular use at St Tikhon's Monastery with additional material from the translations of Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia, thus ensuring a high level of consistency. It would in fact be relatively easy to make a further adaptation of the melodies to a more contemporary form of English

if so desired, but this thought makes one the more aware of the great sensitivity that has been lavished on the setting of the words, on preserving natural stress patterns in English, and the avoidance of melismata where they would sound unnatural or give rise to a false accent.

Vladimir Morosan provides a fine historical introduction to the enterprise, and quotes trenchantly from the Preface to the *Sputnik Psalomshchika* as follows: "It is common to find church choir directors and chanters who do not adhere to any particular direction in their work simply because they only have a very dim notion concerning ancient church chants." If this was the case in Russia in 1914, it is clear that for English-speaking countries a century later, the need for such materials, and the need for understanding them as the basis of liturgical singing, is urgent. That this new collection – to be issued in a revised version after this draft edition has circulated

– goes so far towards filling this liturgical, musical and educational gap is a real achievement on the part of Benedict Sheehan and his fellow editors. It begins to make the traditional chant of the Russian tradition available in English in the systematic way that has been characteristic of recent work on the Byzantine tradition, and as such must be considered a major contribution to the continuing efforts to make available the multifarious riches of the chant traditions of the Orthodox Church.

Ivan Moody