

The Singing of the Many Years

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There is not much written liturgical history regarding the acclamation known as the *Many Years* in the Orthodox Church. This prayer, intoned by the Deacon and followed by a chant by the choir, is nowadays mostly a tradition of the Russian Orthodox Church, inherited also in the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) and other Orthodox churches worldwide. The use in the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America derived directly from the Church of Russia, dating from that period in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when St. Raphael of Brooklyn oversaw the Arabic-language Orthodox congregations in the U.S. and Canada which comprised "the Syro-Arabian Mission of the Russian Orthodox Church" on this continent.

While there is no specific liturgical text described in the manuals of the Byzantine Liturgical family, there are references that are particular to the Imperial Order of services. In fact, it is safe to suppose that the singing of the *Many Years* originated as an acclamation known also in the Western Church, namely: God grant Many Years to the Emperor (or King, Queen, etc.). Doesn't this bring to mind the text of the British National Anthem, "God save the Queen"? It probably is related to the *Many Years*.

The *Many Years* did not originate in the Church. The primary place of such acclamations was in the secular society. It was inherited by the Church and became a part of the Imperial Rite, and was only reserved for the Emperor. Later, the immediate family of the Emperor might have been added, and with time the Patriarch had the privilege of hearing this chant in his own honor as he entered the temple.

The *Many Years* was simply one form of wishing someone good health and good luck. The Church then modified it so that it would be a prayer for God to grant health and a prosperous life. Often such acclamations would be sung in Latin, the official language of the Empire. Eventually this practice evolved and people became accustomed to singing similar acclamations, notably the Greek "Eis Polla Eti Despota" for any Hierarch.

At some point, probably in Russia since this practice is not encountered in Greece or the Balkans, the practice of acclaiming the royal family and the high ranking ecclesiastical figures came to be extended more and more to other people and went on to such an extent that everyone is acclaimed at one point or another. It was really a natural evolution of the practice.

Although there is no specific text for an acclamation for the people in any liturgical book, the Church of Russia has a tradition of using this acclamation:

Grant, O Lord, a prosperous and peaceful life, health, salvation, and furtherance in all good things to Thy servant(s) (Name), and preserve them for MANY YEARS!

The choir then would usually sing *Many Years* three times while the priest would bless the people with the Venerable Cross three times. As stated earlier, there is neither any text, nor rubrics for how to actually go about this rite. However, traditionally, it is simply handed down from generation to generation.

In the Russian Church, the role of the Deacon has a musical *nuance* to it. Russian Deacons are usually famous for their *Basso Profundo* voice. The Russian writer N. S. Leskov describes how, when there would be a vacancy for a Deacon in a parish, the test that would determine which Deacon would get the job was in fact the acclamation of the *Many Years*. The Deacon must sing the acclamation of the *Many Years* with great solemnity; the most solemn times are when the Great Archdeacon of the Church would acclaim the Patriarch during a feast day. Nowadays there are special melodies, usually sung in ancient Greek, only reserved for His Holiness; these are indeed very beautiful. It is also interesting to note that in the Russian tradition when a *Many Years* is acclaimed for a monastic, then the choir would respond with the words: *Christ God, save him for many Years!*

There are a number of melodies for the chanting by the choir of the "Many Years". Famous musicians and composers have composed certain melodies; others are simply an ecclesiastical variation of popular chants. At any rate, there is a wide variety of music that was written for two words: "Many Years"

These words are synonym of joy and happiness as wished by the community to a person or people on such days as a Name day, or Birthday, or other festivities. The chants are always intoned with majesty and sung with rhythms that are fast and jolly, stressing the fact that it is a feast and that the Church as a whole is expressing its best wishes, and praying that God may grant, indeed, *Many Years!*

Many Years

Intonation No. 1

Grant, O Lord, a pros-per-ous and peace-ful life, health,
sal-va-tion, and fur-ther-ance in all good things to Thy ser-vant(s)
(Name) and (Name),- and pre-serve them for man-y years!

The musical notation is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat. It consists of three staves. The first staff contains the lyrics 'Grant, O Lord, a pros-per-ous and peace-ful life, health,' with a triplet of eighth notes over 'pros-per-ous' and another triplet over 'peace-ful'. The second staff contains 'sal-va-tion, and fur-ther-ance in all good things to Thy ser-vant(s)' with a triplet over 'fur-ther-ance'. The third staff contains '(Name) and (Name),- and pre-serve them for man-y years!' with a triplet over 'pre-serve'. The piece ends with a double bar line.

Intonation No. 2

Grant, O Lord, a pros-per-ous and peace-ful life, health,
sal-va-tion, and fur-ther-ance in all good things to Thy ser-vant(s)
(Name) and (Name),- and pre-serve them for man-y years!

The musical notation is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat. It consists of three staves. The first staff contains the lyrics 'Grant, O Lord, a pros-per-ous and peace-ful life, health,' with a triplet of eighth notes over 'pros-per-ous' and another triplet over 'peace-ful'. The second staff contains 'sal-va-tion, and fur-ther-ance in all good things to Thy ser-vant(s)' with a triplet over 'fur-ther-ance'. The third staff contains '(Name) and (Name),- and pre-serve them for man-y years!' with a triplet over 'pre-serve'. The piece ends with a double bar line.

NOTE: Both the pitches and the note values shown above are not intended to be interpreted strictly, but merely to serve as a guide. The pitch level may be raised or lowered, so as to fit comfortably within the vocal range of the deacon or priest, but this should be done in such a way so as to correlate with the starting pitch of the choir. The rhythm above assumes a one-syllable name and a two-syllable name, e.g. "John and Mary"; for other names, appropriate rhythmic adjustments will have to be made.