

"Ages of ages" or "Ever and ever"

Editor's note: With the introduction of the new translation of the Divine Liturgy, which is the result of a great deal of study, effort and prayer and beginning with the official Greek text and continuing with the official Arabic translation of the Greek approved by the Holy Synod of Melkite Bishops and promulgated by His Beatitude, our Holy Patriarch Gregorios III on 15 February, 2005 the official English translation was promulgated on 15 February, 2009.

The new text differs very little from the text that has been in use for many years. For parishioners of Holy Cross Parish one notable change is the reintroduction of the doxology "now and always and forever and ever" in place of "now and ever and unto ages of ages". His Excellency, Archbishop Cyril offers the following explanation. "The use of *now and always and forever and ever* was chosen as the conclusion of the Trinitarian doxologies over *both now and always and unto ages of ages*, the usage in most Orthodox Churches. As with almost all words of the Divine Liturgy, these particular words come from Holy Scripture, specifically from Revelation 4:9. It should be noted that every major modern translation of these words in Scripture—including the King James Version, the *Jerusalem Bible*, the New Revised Standard Version, the *New American Bible*, as well as the *Orthodox Study Bible*—employs the former, *forever and ever*. Hence, given this, as well as the fact that the usage of *forever and ever* has been the norm in the official English text of the Divine Liturgy for many years, we saw no valid reason to adopt the other usage, his Excellency writes in the introduction.

Why then, a number of years ago, did Father James introduce the doxology, *ages of ages*? In fact this controversy goes back to discussions many years at Melkite clergy conferences regarding the updating of the English translation. The intensity of the feelings of some clergy was enough to cause the effort to update the translation to be put aside for many years. Recently, at the Melkite Clergy Conference held in Boca Raton, Florida, the clergy voted overwhelmingly to use the doxology *age of ages*. This information, hopefully, was transmitted to the official committee regarding the English language translation which met recently in Mexico. Why did the clergy prefer *ages of ages*?

First of all, the usage in Greek and Arabic still say *ages of ages*. No change was made for these languages. Secondly, as noted, most of our Orthodox brothers and sisters use the doxology *ages of ages*. By differing from the usage of our Orthodox brothers and sisters we set ourselves apart from them and create yet another reason for our scandalous separation. The Official Instructions issued by the Oriental Congregation in Rome specifically prohibit doing anything different from our Orthodox counterparts, in this case the Antiochian Orthodox Church.

Finally let us consider the words of St. John of Damascus:

He made the ages who exists before the ages, of whom the divine David says: 'From eternity and to eternity thou art' (Ps 89:2); and the divine Apostle: 'By whom also He made the ages.' (Heb 1:2)

Now, one should note that the term *age* has several meanings, because it signifies a great many things. Thus, the span of life of every man is called an age. Again, a period of one thousand years is called an age. Still again, this whole present life is called an age, and so it the age without end to come after the resurrection. And again, that is called an age which is neither time no any division of time measured by the course and motion of the sun—that is to say, made up of days and nights—but which is co-extensive with eternal things after the fashion of some sort of temporal period and interval. This kind of age is to eternal things exactly what time is to temporal things.

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