

An “Unprecedented” Prayer in the Ordinances of the Funeral (short historical-liturgical analysis)

Nicolae PREDA

*Rev. Lect. PhD
Faculty of Orthodox Theology
University of Bucharest, ROMANIA*

Abstract:

On the prayer “Remember, Lord, our God...”, present since antiquity in funeral rites, liturgists unfortunately speak relatively little.

This prayer is, in my opinion, one of the fundamental elements, but also unique in the structure of “The Prayer Ordinance after the Soul Leaves the Body”.

Although the prayer seems to be unpublished at first sight, it is very probable that it existed entirely in the manuscripts after those of the 11th-12th centuries, such as Coisl. 213 (a. 1027), E.B.E. 662 (12th century) and Grottaferrata gr. G. b. 1 (11th century), which reproduce a prayer whose first parts coincide with that of the prayer “Remember, Lord, our God...”.

Keywords: *prayer, God, manuscripts, ordinances, burial, Euhologhion*

1. The Prayer “Remember, Lord, our God...” – Overview

According to my research, the prayer “Remember, Lord, our God...” it has as a usage a small area, but well determined, being part of the structure of the so-called “Prayer Ordinance after the Soul Leaves the Body” (Preda 2015).

This prayer (“Молитва по исходе души”, in *Молитвослов*, 1943: 334), about which even the Russian liturgists speak relatively little, is one of the fundamental elements, but also unique in the structure of “The Prayer Ordinance after the Soul Leaves the Body”, an ordinance of Slavic (probably Russian) origin, which is to this day in the practice of the Orthodox Churches of Russia, Ukraine, and Bessarabia, and most probably of other Slavic-speaking Orthodox Churches.

It is gratifying, however, that the prayer “Remember, Lord, our God...” was also introduced in the last edition of *Panihida* [“*Panihida* it is

also called the church book comprising the funeral service and other services performed for the dead (memorials); this book was originally part of the Euchologion...”] (Fr. Braniște and Prof. Braniște 2001: 337), in the context in which are mentioned “guidance on vigil readings” [“Vigil (lat. *per-vigilium*) – staying up during the night, watching a dead man, in his house...”] (Fr. Braniște and Prof. Braniște 2001: 390); (*Panihida adică slujbele înmormântării și alte slujbe pentru cei răposați* 2016: 198).

Therefore, I think it is worth mentioning at least some aspects related to it, given its beauty and antiquity, but also the scriptural foundation, highlighted by the many biblical references in the text.

2. The Prayer “Remember, Lord, our God...” – Text

Here is the text of the prayer:

<p><i>Remember, Lord</i> (cf. Nehemiah 6: 14) <i>our God the one who has fallen asleep in faith and in the hope of eternal life</i> (Titus 1: 2), <i>Thy servant our brother (the name of the deceased) as You are good and loving of man</i> (Exodus 34: 6), <i>You forgive their iniquity and their sin</i> (cf. Jeremiah 36: 3), <i>loosen, leave, and forgive all his most willingly and unwilling mistakes, deliver him from eternal labour and the fire of hell</i> (cf. Matthew 5: 22; 18: 9; Mark 9: 47), <i>and give to him communion and delight in Thy everlasting goodness, which has been prepared for those who love Thee</i> (cf. 1 Corinthians 2: 9); <i>that even if he was wrong, he did not turn away from You, and with no doubt he believed in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. You Who are God glorified in the Trinity; and one Unity in the Trinity, and the Trinity in one Unity, with glorification to the last of his breath confessed; therefore have mercy</i> (Luke 18: 13) <i>on him, and his faith which is in Thee, instead of deeds, that you may consider it, and with Thy saints that You may give him rest: for he is not a man, that</i></p>	<p><i>Pomenește Doamne</i> (cf. Neem. 6, 14) <i>Dumnezeul nostru pe cel ce a adormit întru credință și întru nădejdea vieții veșnice</i> (Tit 1, 2), <i>robul Tău pe fratele nostru, (cutare) și ca un bun și iubitor de oameni</i> (Ieș. 34, 6), <i>Cel ce ierși păcatele, și pierzi nedreptățile</i> (cf. Ier. 36, 3), <i>slăbește, lasă, și iartă toate ale lui cele de voie și fără de voie greșeli, izbăvește-l pe dânsul de munca veșnică și de focul gheenei</i> (cf. Mat. 5, 22; 18, 9; Marc. 9, 47), <i>și-i dă lui împărtășire și desfătare întru bunătățile Tale cele veșnice, care s-au gătit celor ce Te iubesc pe Tine</i> (cf. 1 Corinteni 2, 9); <i>că de a și greșit, însă nu s-a depărtat de la Tine, și fără de îndoială a crezut în Tatăl, și în Fiul, și în Sfântul Duh. Cel ce ești Dumnezeu în Treime slăvit; și pe o Unime în Treime, și pe Treime întru o Unime, cu preaslăvire până la cea de pe urmă a sa suflare a mărturisit; pentru aceasta milostiv fii</i> (Luc. 18, 13) <i>aceluia, și credința care a avut-o în Tine, în loc de fapte să o socotești, și cu Sfinții Tăi ca un îndurat să-l odihnești, căci nu este om, care să fie viu și să nu greșească, că numai Tu Însuți ești</i></p>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

<p>he should live, and not sin; that only You yourself are without sin, and Your righteousness is righteousness forever (Psalms 118: 142); and You are the One God of mercy and mercifulness and of the love of men, and we glorify You, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, now and ever (Daniel 7: 18) (cf. <i>Psaltirea</i> 1818: 314r-315r; see also the “updated” form in <i>Panihida...</i>, 2016: 198); (<i>Молитвослов</i> 1943: 334-335; <i>Іерейскіі Молитвословъ</i> 1913: 459v-460r; <i>Оучѣбнаѧ Ѳалтирь</i> 1887: 152v-153r; <i>Ѳалтирь</i> 1907: 484v; <i>Psaltirea</i> (from Slavic) 1856: 464v-465r.).</p>	<p>fără de păcat, și dreptatea Ta, este dreptate în veac (Ps. 118, 142); și Tu ești Unul Dumnezeuul milelor și al îndurărilor, și al iubirii de oameni, și Ție slavă înălțăm, Tatălui, și Fiului, și Sfântului Duh, acum și pururea, și în vecii vecilor (Dan 7, 18).</p>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

3. The Prayer “Remember, Lord, our God...” – in the Russian Liturgical Tradition

It should be noted that among the few Russian liturgists who mention the prayer “Remember, Lord, our God...”, is Archbishop Averky Taushev, who indicates it in the context in which he speaks about “The Prayer Ordinance after the Soul Leaves the Body”, but without specifying anything in particular: “The reading of the Psalms is interrupted at every «Glory», where the prayer for the deceased one is uttered: «Remember, Lord, our God...», which is found at the end of the ordinance «At the exit of the soul»” (Taușev: http://www.krotov.info/libr_min/19_t/tau/shev_05.htm) [“At the reading of the Psalms, after each Kathisma, the following prayer is said for the one asleep in the Lord: Remember, Lord, our God...”] (*Panihida...*, 2016: 198).

4. The Prayer “Remember, Lord, our God...” – Title

As to the title of this prayer, the books of worship do not give us many clues; it is simply called “prayer” (*Panihida...*, 2016: 198) or “prayer when the soul leaves the body” (“Молитва по исходе души”, in *Молитвослов* 1943: 334).

5. The Prayer “Remember, Lord, our God...” – Origins

Although this prayer seems at first sight unpublished, it is very probable that it existed entirely in the manuscripts after those of the 11th-12th centuries. [*Coisl. 213* (a. 1027: 110r; cf. Χριστοδούλου 2005a: 506); *E.B.E. 662* (12th century): 195r; cf. Χριστοδούλου 2005a: 492-493); *Grottaferrata gr. G. b. 1* (11th century): 117v; cf. Χριστοδούλου 2005a: 485-486)], which render a prayer whose first parts coincide with that of the prayer “Remember, Lord, our God...”:

Μνήσθητι Κύριε ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν τοῦ ἐν πίστει καὶ ἐλπίδι ζωῆς αἰωνίου κοιμηθέντος ἀδελφοῦ ἡμῶν τοῦδ<ε> καὶ ὡς ἀγαθὸς καὶ φιλόανθρωπος ὑπερβαίνων ἀμαρτίας καὶ ἐξαλείφων ἀδικίας ἄνες ἄφες συγχώρη<σ>ον πᾶν ἐκούσιον αὐτοῦ πλημμέλημα καὶ ἀκούσιον ἐξανιστῶν αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ ἀγίᾳ δευτέρᾳ σου παρουσίᾳ εἰς μετοχὴν τῶν αἰωνίων σου ἀγαθῶν ἀνθ’ ὧν μόνον εἰς σὲ ἐπίστευσε τὸν ἀληθῆ Θεὸν καὶ φιλόανθρωπον (Arranz 1996: 315; Goar 1730²: 437; Χριστοδούλου 2005b: 648).

If the first part of the prayer “Remember, Lord, our God...” seems to have a primary version, how the final part of it will come into being is very difficult to guess. But it is very probable, as I mentioned above, that it exists somewhere in the manuscripts, precisely in this form.

It therefore remains for those interested to investigate these issues in more detail and to formulate a fair, text-based hypothesis.

I would also *like to point out that the prayer* “Remember, Lord, our God...”, *as well as the ordinance containing it*, could be of Slavic origin, relatively recent, because the old liturgical forms (*Euchologions* [“Euchologion (εὐχολόγιον, τό, εὐχή λόγος – *Evhologhion, evhi logos* = prayer, word; from εὐλογῶ – *evlogo* = to bless) – it is the liturgical book in which are included all the services required by the spiritual needs of the Christian, from birth to death...”] (Fr. Braniște and Prof. Braniște 2001: 309) Greek manuscripts), as well as the illustrious *Slavic Euchologion*, dated to the end of the 15th century or the beginning of the 16th century (see Shemet 2002: 16-17), do not contain it in its current form.

6. The Prayer “Μνήσθητι Κύριε ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν...” – Peculiarities

Returning to the prayer “Μνήσθητι Κύριε ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν...”, we must say that, unfortunately, as few things have been written about it.

The only documents that mention the type of its usage (time and place) are the three manuscripts already mentioned: “Εὐχὴ ἐν τῷ τάφῳ ἡνίκα βάλῃ μύρον ἢ ἔλαιον σταυροειδῶς τρίτον ἐπάνω τοῦ λειψάνου” (Arranz 1996: 315) [“Prayer at the grave, when myrrh or oil is poured in the form of the cross, three times, over the dead body”].

According to these manuscripts, it is a prayer that we no longer meet today in liturgical practice, although the liturgical act that accompanied it survived, and which the priest said at the tomb [“Ad sepulcrum”] ((Arranz 1996: 315), when he poured over the body of the deceased myrrh or oil [“oratio in effundendo oleo supra cadaver”] (Arranz 1996: 315), in the form of the cross, three times.

Very interesting to note, if it is shown that the prayer “Remember, Lord, our God...” is a further development of the prayer “Μνήσθητι Κύριε ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν...”, is the way to “convert” its usage from the grave, to the exit of the soul from the body [It is very probable that those newer manuscripts, which would contain it in full, also record indications of its liturgical usage].

Conclusions

About the prayer “Remember, Lord, our God...”, present since antiquity in funeral rites, liturgists speak, unfortunately, relatively little.

This prayer is, in my opinion, one of the fundamental elements, but also unique in the structure of “The Prayer Ordinance after the Soul Leaves the Body”.

Although the prayer seems to be unpublished at first sight, it is very probable that it existed entirely in the manuscripts after those of the 11th-12th centuries, such as *Coisl. 213* (a. 1027), *E.B.E. 662* (12th century) and *Grottaferrata gr. G. b. 1* (11th century), which render a prayer whose first parts coincide with that of the prayer “Remember, Lord, our God...”.

Unfortunately, the prayer “Μνήσθητι Κύριε ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν...” it is no longer in use today, although the liturgical act that accompanied it has survived; the priest said it at the tomb, when he poured over the body of the deceased myrrh or oil, in the form of the cross, three times.

It is also gratifying that the prayer “Remember, Lord, our God...” was introduced in the last edition of Panihidei, in the context in which are mentioned “guidance on vigil readings”.

References:

- ***, *Coisl. 213 [Euchologium Strategii presbyteri, (a. 1027)]*.
- ***, *Grottaferrata gr. G. b. I [Euchologium, 11th century]*.
- ***, *Îpereÿskÿi Molitvoslovъ*. 1913. Moscva: Cÿнодальная тÿпографÿя.
- ***, *Panihida adică slujbele înmormântării și alte slujbe pentru cei răposați*. 2016. Bucharest: Publishing House of the Biblical and Orthodox Mission Institute of the Orthodox Romanian Church.
- ***, *Psaltirea* (from Slavic). 1856. Kiev: Pechersk Lavra.
- ***, *Psaltirea*. 1818. Kishinev.
- ***, *E.B.E. 662 [Εὐχολόγιον τὸ μέγα, 12th century]*.
- ***, *Молитвослов*. 1943. Одесса: Издание Православной Румынской Миссии в Транснистрии.
- ***, *Оучѣбная Псалтирь*. 1887. Москва.
- ***, *Псалтирь*. 1907. Москва.
- Arranz, M. 1996. *L'Euclologio Costantinopolitano agli inizi del secolo XI. Hagiasmatarion & Archieratikon (Rituale & Pontificale) con l'aggiunta del Leiturgikon (Messale)*. Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana.
- Braniște Fr. Prof. PhD. E. and Prof. Ecaterina Braniște. 2001. *Dicționar enciclopedic de cunoștințe religioase*. Caransebeș: Diocesan Publishing House.
- Goar, J. 1730². *Εὐχολόγιον sive Rituale Graecorum complectens ritus et ordines Divinae Liturgiae, officiorum, sacramentorum, consecrationum, benedictionum, funerum, orationum etc.* Venetiis: Ex Typographia Bartholomaei Javarina.
- Preda, Nicolae. 2015. “Rânduiala rugăciunii ce se face după ieșirea sufletului din trup”, conform *Psaltirii de la 1818. (Noțiuni de Liturgică)*. Bucharest: Basilica Publishing.
- Shemet, I. 2002. *L'Euclologio Kieviano della Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, N. 15 del fondo Borgia-Illirico. Parte I (ff. 1-134)*. Dissertazione al Dottorato. Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale.
- Taușev, Arhiepiscop Averkij. *Liturgica*, 5th part. Cf. http://www.krotov.info/libr_min/19_t/tau/shev_05.htm (page accessed on 13.05.2011).
- Χριστοδούλου, Στ. 2005a. *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία κατὰ τοὺς χειρογράφους κώδικες 10ου-12ου αἰώνας*. Τόμος Β'. Εἰσαγωγικά, Κωδικολογικά καὶ Παλαιογραφικά Κείμενα, Ἱερὰ Μονὴ Προφήτου Ἡλίου Θήρας: Ἐκδόσεις Θεσβίτης.
- Χριστοδούλου, Στ. 2005b. *Ἡ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία κατὰ τοὺς χειρογράφους κώδικες 10ου-12ου αἰώνας*. Τόμος Α'. Γενικὴ Εἰσαγωγή, Κατάλογοι, Πίνακες (Ἱερὰ Μονὴ Προφήτου Ἡλίου Θήρας: Ἐκδόσεις Θεσβίτης).