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# History and Evolution of Funeral Services in the Orthodox Church

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## **Abstract**

The present study refers to the traditional liturgical arrangements related to the end of human life, emphasizing the historical evolution of the arrangements for commemorating those asleep, as they appear reflected from the documents of the fourth century to the current forms of funeral arrangements. At the end of the study, some general conclusions about the research undertaken are presented.

## **Keywords**

history, evolution, service, funeral, Church, Orthodox

## **I. Introduction**

The Church is with the human person and accompanies him with her grace and blessing in all the most important moments and circumstances of his life, from birth to the grave. She greets man from his birth and accompanies him to the last moments of his earthly existence, accompanying him on the path to eternity. However, the care for the departed is extended beyond the threshold of the grave. She does not forget those who have left this world, but keeps the unseen but close connection that must exist between the living and the sleeping, according to the primary teaching and practice

of the Church, constituted in the teaching on “communion of saints”. She remembers the latter, praying and interceding for the forgiveness of sins, for the rest and happiness of their souls in the Kingdom of Heaven.

In the religious life of all Orthodox peoples and especially among our people, the worship of the departed, that is, the special prayers and liturgical ordinances by which the Church of the Living cares for the departed is highly developed, being one of the characteristic and essential manifestations of Orthodox religious life. In addition to their main soteriological purpose, these services also have a catechetical and pedagogical role. Through them, the Church seeks not only to intercede before God for the departed, but to comfort those who are left alive, to ease their pain, to remind them of the instability of earthly things, and to strengthen their hope and faith in the immortality of the soul and in the resurrection of the dead, which are capital teachings of the Orthodox Christian faith<sup>1</sup>.

There are four special prayers of this type:

1. *The prayer of the hard separation from the soul,*
2. *Panichida,*
3. *Funeral service,*
4. *Memorial service.*

Of these, I will refer in this study only to the first three parts, emphasizing the historical evolution, the order and the mystical-symbolic significance of the funeral services as well as offering some pastoral considerations regarding the performance of these ordinances.

## **II. The antiquity and evolution of the liturgical funeral service**

We have no records of the liturgical ordinance used by the Church for the burial of Christians in the first three centuries. It is probable that in the beginning the usual customs and formulas of prayer in the Jewish order or in paganism were observed in this respect, many of which, moreover, were preserved even later, but the Church endeavored to give them a Christian meaning<sup>2</sup>. But soon the carrying of the sleeping bodies to the burial place

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<sup>1</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Specială*, Editura Nemira, București, 2002, p. 364.

<sup>2</sup> For the ordinances performed at the burial of a Christian up to the year 250 see Cyrille VOGEL, “L’environnement culturel de défunt durant la période paleochrétienne”, in: *La maladie et la mort du chrétien dans la Liturgie*, Roma, 1975, p. 381-413.

began to be accompanied by songs with Christian content. After the peace of the Church, crowds of believers and clerics accompanied the bodies of those asleep on the way to the cemeteries. In addition, the relics of the holy martyrs were exhumed and brought to the cities carrying lights in their hands and singing psalms or various hymns. For example, this is how the relics of the Holy Martyr Babylas from Daphne were moved to Antioch during the reign of Emperor Julian the Apostate. (361-363)<sup>3</sup>. St. John Chrysostom says that the lights and songs which the sleeping were accompanied with express gratitude to God because those who leave our midst were crowned like athletes<sup>4</sup>. In the houses where they were placed or in the churches, the departed ones were watched, day and night, from the day of death until the funeral, as was done, for example, with the body of the emperor Constantine the Great<sup>5</sup> or of St. Ambrose<sup>6</sup>. St. Apostle Paul said: “But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope...” (I Thes 4 13). It was forbidden to mourn the sleeping and to wear the clothes of mourning (black color), because death was not a cause of mourning and sorrow, but of joy, as a transition to the happy and eternal life<sup>7</sup>.

Undoubtedly, the first holy songs and readings which Christians used besides the sleeping ones with and accompanied them to the grave would have been the biblical psalms, especially those about life and death. Thus, St. Gregory of Nyssa says that at the death of his sister Macrina, “psalms

<sup>3</sup> SOCRATE, *Istoria bisericească*, III, 18, quoted by Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Specială*, p. 375.

<sup>4</sup> Sf. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, “Omilia IV-a la Epistola către Evrei”, in: *PG LXIII*, 43.

<sup>5</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea recounts how the sleeping body of Emperor Constantine the Great was placed in the imperial palace and guarded day and night: “After this the soldiers lifted the body from its couch, and laid it in a golden coffin, which they enveloped in a covering of purple, and removed to the city which was called by his own name. Here it was placed in an elevated position in the principal chamber of the imperial palace, and surrounded by candles burning in candlesticks of gold, presenting a marvelous spectacle, and such as no one under the light of the sun had ever seen on earth since the world itself began. For in the central apartment of the imperial palace, the body of the emperor lay in its elevated resting- place, arrayed in the symbols of sovereignty, the diadem and purple robe, and encircled by a numerous retinue of attendants, who watched around it incessantly night and day.” (EUSEBIU DE CEZAREEA, “Viața lui Constantin cel Mare”, book IV, 66, in: *Scrieri. Partea a doua*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 14, p. 185).

<sup>6</sup> PAULIN, *Viața Sfântului Ambrozie*, 47-49, in: *PL XIV*, 46-47.

<sup>7</sup> Sf. CIPRIAN, *De mortalitate*, 20-21, in: *PL IV*, 618-619: “We must not weep for our brothers (sleeping)... nor wear gloomy clothes for them ...”.

and hymns were sung”<sup>8</sup>. St. Gregory of Nazianzus tells us the same thing about the death of his brother, Caesar<sup>9</sup>. Jerome also says that at the funeral of Matron Paula in Bethlehem, “psalms were sung in Hebrew, Latin, and Syriac, because they were gathered together by many Gentiles, and each sang or listened to psalms in his own language”<sup>10</sup>.

From an early age, however, in addition to the singing of psalms, prayers and funeral hymns of Christian origin began to appear.

In the third century, referring to the prayers of the living for the departed, Tertullian says: “We bring offerings to the dead every year on the day of their death”<sup>11</sup>.

In the fourth century, St. Epiphanius of Salamis also shows the prayers of the Church for the sleeping: “For the dead, memorials are made by name, prayers and public services and almsgiving are performed”<sup>12</sup>.

One of the oldest Christian documents, also written in the fourth century, which provides us with information about the worship brought for those asleep is the work *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus of Rome*, which came to us in a later translation or processing under the name of *Egyptian Church Order*<sup>13</sup>. Chapter 40 of this writing shows the following:

“Do not put a high price on burying people in the cemeteries, for they are for all the poor. However, they shall pay the wages of a workman to whoever digs the hole, and the price of the bricks. The bishop will provide for the caretaker there from what they offer at the assemblies, so that there is no charge for those who come to the place”<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Sf. GRIGORIE DE NISSA, *Viața Macrinei*, in: PG XLVI, 992 D-993.

<sup>9</sup> Sf. GRIGORIE DE NAZIANZ, *Cuvântarea a VII-a*, in: PG XXXV, 755.

<sup>10</sup> Fericitul IERONIM, *Epitaphium Paulae (Epistola CVIII)*, 29, in: PL XXII, 904-905, quoted by Pr. Prof. Dr. ÉNE BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Specială*, p. 375.

<sup>11</sup> TERTULIAN, *Liber de corona militis*, III, in PL II, 79 B and *De exhortatione castitatis*, XI, in: PL I, 975, quoted by Pr. Conf. Dr. Alexandru I. STAN, “Temeiuri doctrinare ale rugăciunilor pentru cei răposați”, in: *Studii Teologice*, XXXIX (1987) 4, pp. 82-83.

<sup>12</sup> Sf. EPIFANIE DE SALAMINA, *Adversus haereses*, III, LXXV, 7, 27, in: PG XLII, 513.

<sup>13</sup> See this document at Bernard BOTTE, *La Tradition Apostolique*, coll. *Sources Chretiennes*, Paris, 1968, pp. 14-17. The text in Romanian translation is published under the title IPOLIT DIN ROMA, *Tradiția Apostolică*, in: diac. Ioan I. ICĂ JR., *Canonul Ortodoxiei I. Canonul Apostolic al primelor secole*, Editura Deisis/Stavropoleos, 2008, pp. 573-595.

<sup>14</sup> IPOLIT DIN ROMA, *Tradiția Apostolică*, in: diac. Ioan I. ICĂ JR., *Canonul Ortodoxiei I. Canonul Apostolic al primelor secole*, p. 587.

Another apocryphal document from the fourth century is the *Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Book I of this work, chapter XXXV, contains the litany spoken by the deacon at the Holy Mass for those asleep: “For those who have fallen asleep from the Church let us beseech, that the Lord may bestow upon them a place of rest”<sup>15</sup>.

In the 4th century, St. Macarius the Alexandrian gives clear testimonies regarding the times of remembrance of the sleeping<sup>16</sup>.

In the same century, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, in the *Mystagogical Catechesis*, shows the following: “...Then we commemorate also those who have fallen asleep before us, first Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, that at their prayers and intercessions God would receive our petition. Then on behalf also of the Holy Fathers and Bishops who have fallen asleep before us, and in a word of all who in past years have fallen asleep among us, believing that it will be a very great benefit to the souls, for whom the supplication is put up, while that holy and most awful sacrifice is set forth”<sup>17</sup>.

Also, in the 4th century, St. John Chrysostom urged his listeners to pray for those who fell asleep, especially during the celebration of Holy Liturgy:

“...if the dead is a sinner let his sins be forgiven, and if it is a right to gain an addition of payment and reward ... not in vain did the Apostles order the remembrance of those who departed to be made upon the dreadful mystery. They knew it was very useful for them, bringing a lot of good to the dead. When the people stand, the fullness of the priesthood with outstretched hands and in front of them stands the fearful Sacrifice, how will they not persuade God (for those who are asleep)? But this is only for those who have departed in the faith”<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> *Testamentul Domnului nostru Iisus Hristos*, ediție bilingvă, Editura Poliron, Iași, 1996, p. 121.

<sup>16</sup> Sf. MACARIE ALEXANDRINUL, *Sermo de exitu animae justorum et peccatorum*, in: *PL* XXXIV, 390.

<sup>17</sup> Sf. CHIRIL AL IERUSALIMULUI, “Cateheza a V-a mistagogică”, in: *Cateheze*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2003, p. 362.

<sup>18</sup> Sfântul IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, quoted by Pr. Prof. Constantin Cornițescu, “Starea sufletelor după moarte”, in: *Îndrumări Misionare*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1986, p. 875.

The same Holy Father points out the remembrance of those who fell asleep at the Holy Liturgy, that it was ordained by the Holy Apostles: “It is not in vain that the Apostles have given us the law to mention the dead in the dreadful Sacraments; they knew that this was a precious charity, a great relief, for those who fell asleep”<sup>19</sup>. In another word, St. John Chrysostom teaches us the same:

“... For not unmeaningly have these things been devised, nor do we in vain make mention of the departed in the course of the divine mysteries, and approach God in their behalf, beseeching the Lamb Who is before us, Who takes away the sin of the world – not in vain, but that some refreshment may thereby ensue to them. Not in vain does he that stands by the altar cry out when the tremendous mysteries are celebrated, For all that have fallen asleep in Christ, and for those who perform commemorations in their behalf. For if there were no commemorations for them, these things would not have been spoken: since our service is not a mere stage show, God forbid! Yea, it is by the ordinance of the Spirit that these things are done”<sup>20</sup>.

Or in another homily, St. John writes:

“There is the Sacrifice in hand, and all things laid out duly ordered: Angels are there present, Archangels, the Son of God is there: all stand with such awe, and in the general silence those stand by, crying aloud: and do you think that what is done, is done in vain? ... It is a great honor to be named in the presence of the Lord, when that memorial is celebrating, the dread Sacrifice, the unutterable mysteries”<sup>21</sup>.

Showing later what is the use of prayers for those asleep, St. John Chrysostom urges:

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<sup>19</sup> Sfântul IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Homilia III, 4, in Epistulam ad Philippenses*, in: PG LXII, 204.

<sup>20</sup> Sf. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Homilia XLI, 4 in Epistulam I ad Corinthios*, in: PG LXI, 361.

<sup>21</sup> Sf. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Homilia XXI, 5 in Acta Apostolorum*, in: PG LX, 170.

“Let us then give them aid and perform commemoration for them. For if the children of Job were purged by the sacrifice of their father, why do you doubt that when we too offer for the departed, some consolation arises to them? Since God is wont to grant the petitions of those who ask for others”<sup>22</sup>.

At the same time, St. John Chrysostom shows that those who are asleep in the faith participate in the life of the Church, in the communion that passes beyond the grave:

“Let us not then be weary in giving aid to the departed, both by offering on their behalf and obtaining prayers for them: for the common Expiation of the world is even before us. Therefore, with boldness do we then intreat for the whole world, and name their names with those of martyrs, of confessors, of priests”<sup>23</sup>.

In conclusion, St. John Chrysostom urges Christians to come to the aid of those asleep “not by weeping and wailing, but by psalms, almsgiving, and service”<sup>24</sup>.

The first rules concerning the Christian order of burial are found in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, a document also written in the fourth century. Thus, in the sixth book (chapter XXX) of this document, the Jewish and pagan custom of lustral washing after fighting the sleeping ones is combated, the Christians being urged to take those asleep in good faith out of the house and to accompany them to the pit with songs. This is the text:

“But without such observations assemble in the dormitories, reading the holy books, and singing for the martyrs which are fallen asleep, and for all the saints from the beginning of the world, and for your brethren that are asleep in the Lord, and offer the acceptable Eucharist, the representation of the royal body of Christ, both in your churches and in the dormitories; and in the funerals of the departed, accompany them with singing, if they

<sup>22</sup> Sf. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Homilia XLI, 4 in Epistulam I ad Corinthios*, in: PG LXI, 361.

<sup>23</sup> Sf. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Homilia XLI, 4 in Epistulam I ad Corinthios*, in: PG LXI, 361.

<sup>24</sup> Sf. IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Comentariu la Epistola către Filipeni, Omilia a III-a, 4*, in: PG LXII, 203. Also see *Comentariu la Evanghelia Sfântului Ioan, Omilia a LXII-a, 5*, in: PG 59, 347-348.

were faithful in Christ. For «precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints». And again: «O my soul, return unto your rest, for the Lord has done you good». And elsewhere: «The memory of the just is with encomiums». Proverbs 10, 7 And, «The souls of the righteous are in the hands of God» Wisdom 3, 1 ... their very relics are not without honor ... Whence you also, O bishops, and the rest, who without such observances touch the departed, ought not to think yourselves defiled. Nor abhor the relics of such persons”<sup>25</sup>.

These texts mentioned in the *Apostolic Constitutions* contain passages that were probably sung or read on such occasions, next to the bodies of those asleep.

It is probably the origin of the custom to place the particles of the Holy Eucharist in the mouths of the sleeping, custom present in many parts of the old Church, but condemned by the Synod of Carthage in 393, by canon 18 and then by the Council in Trullo, through canon 83. Thus, canon 18 of the Synod of Carthage decides the following: “... It also seemed good that the Eucharist should not be given to the bodies of the dead. For it is written: Take, Eat, but the bodies of the dead can neither take nor eat. Nor let the ignorance of the presbyters baptize those who are dead.”<sup>26</sup>. And in canon 83 of the Council in Trullo it is stated in the same sense: “No one may give the Eucharist to the bodies of the dead; for it is written Take and eat. But the bodies of the dead can neither take nor eat”<sup>27</sup>.

Also, in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (book VIII, chapter XLI) is described the first ordinance of service for those asleep, in which we find the text of some litany and prayers for those asleep. Here is the full text of the ordinance for the sleeping, described in this work:

<sup>25</sup> *Scrierile Părinților Apostolici dimpreună cu Așezămintele și Canoanele Apostolice*, Cartea a VI-a, cap. XXX, Editura Facultății de Teologie din Chișinău, 1928, pp. 179-180.

<sup>26</sup> “The Synod of Carthage, Canon 18”, in: *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe. Canoanele Sinoadelor Locale*, introductory study, introductions, notes and translation by Răzvan PERȘA, ediție biligvă II, Editura Basilica, București, 2018, p. 145. See also Arhid. Prof. Dr. Ioan N. FLOCA, *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe. Note și comentarii*, Sibiu, 1992, p. 250.

<sup>27</sup> “Council in Trullo, canon 83”, in: *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe. Canoanele Apostolice și Canoanele Sinoadelor Ecumenice*, p. 321. See also Arhid. Prof. Dr. Ioan N. FLOCA, *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe. Note și comentarii*, p. 151.



“Concerning those that are at rest in Christ: After the bidding prayer, that we may not repeat it again, the deacon shall add as follows: Let us pray for our brethren that are at rest in Christ, that God, the lover of mankind, who has received his soul, may forgive him every sin, voluntary and involuntary, and may be merciful and gracious to him, and give him his lot in the land of the pious that are sent into the bosom of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, with all those that have pleased Him and done His will from the beginning of the world, whence all sorrow, grief, and lamentation are banished ... And let the bishop say: O You who is by nature immortal, and has no end of Your being, from whom every creature, whether immortal or mortal, is derived; who made man a rational creature, the citizen of this world, in his constitution mortal, and added the promise of a resurrection; who did not suffer Enoch and Elijah to taste of death: the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, who art the God of them, not as of dead, but as of living persons: for the souls of all men live with You, and the spirits of the righteous are in Your hand, which no torment can touch; (Matt 22, 32; Wis 3, 1) for they are all sanctified under Your hand: do Thou now also look upon this Your servant, whom You have selected and received into another state, and forgive him if voluntarily or involuntarily he has sinned, and afford him merciful angels, and place him in the bosom of the patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles, and of all those that have pleased You from the beginning of the world, where there is no grief, sorrow, nor lamentation; but the peaceable region of the godly, and the undisturbed land of the upright, and of those that therein see, the glory of Your Christ; by whom glory, honor, and worship, thanksgiving, and adoration be to You, in the Holy Spirit, forever. Amen”<sup>28</sup>.

In the same Book VIII, in the next chapter, XLII, the times when the sleeping must be remembered are described. Here is the text:

“Let the third day of the departed be celebrated with psalms, and lessons, and prayers, on account of Him who arose within

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<sup>28</sup> *Scrierile Părinților Apostolici dimpreună cu Așezămintele și Canoanele Apostolice*, Cartea a VIII-a, cap. XLI, pp. 262-263.

the space of three days; and let the ninth day be celebrated in remembrance of the living, and of the departed; and the fortieth day according to the ancient pattern: for so did the people lament Moses, and the anniversary day in memory of him. And let alms be given to the poor out of his goods for a memorial of him”<sup>29</sup>.

We notice that the work remembers the times for the remembrance of those asleep that are kept until today: three days, corresponding to the day of burial, 9 days, 40 days, and a year, as well as the order of giving the things that belonged to the sleeper, as “alms” for the poor and helpless.

In the *Sacramentary of Bishop Serapion of Thmuis* (Egypt) from the fourth century we find the text of the prayer for those asleep, similar to that of the *Apostolic Constitutions*:

“God, who hast authority of life and death, God who killest and makest alive<sup>30</sup>, who bringest down to the gates of Hades and bringest up, who Greatest the spirit of man within him and takest to thyself the souls of the saints and givest rest, who alterest and changest and transformest thy creatures, as is right and expedient, being thyself alone incorruptible, unalterable and eternal, we beseech thee for the repose and rest of this thy servant or this thine handmaiden: give rest to his soul, his spirit, in green places, in chambers of rest with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all thy Saints: and raise up his body in the day which thou hast ordained, according to thy promises which cannot lie, that thou mayest render to it also the heritage of which it is worthy in thy holy pastures. Remember not his transgressions and sins: and cause his going forth to be peaceable and blessed. Heal the griefs of those that pertain to him with the spirit of consolation, and grant unto us all a good end through thy only- begotten Jesus Christ, through whom to thee (is) the glory and the strength in holy Spirit to the ages of the ages. Amen”<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> *Scrierile Părinților Apostolici dimpreună cu Așezămintele și Canoanele Apostolice*, Cartea a VIII-a, cap. XLII, p. 263.

<sup>30</sup> The text of this code is published at F. X. FUNK, *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum*, Paderborn, 1905, vol. II, p. 192, quoted by Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Specială*, p. 376. In the Romanian translation, the text of the prayer for those asleep in this codex is included in the translation by diac. Ioan I. ICĂ JR., *Canonul Ortodoxiei I. Canonul Apostolic al primelor secole*, pp. 866-867.

<sup>31</sup> The content of this prayer in the *Sacramentary of Bishop Serapion of Thmuis* is

In the anaphora of the Liturgy of St. James, the Brother of the Lord, the source liturgy from which the Byzantine Liturgies later developed, we find prayers of remembrance for the sleeping:

“Remember, O Lord God, the spirits and all flesh, of whom we have made mention, and of whom we have not made mention, who are of the true faith, from righteous Abel unto this day: unto them do You give rest there in the land of the living, in Your kingdom, in the joy of paradise, in the bosom of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, our holy fathers; whence pain, and grief, and lamentation have fled: there the light of Your countenance looks upon them, and enlightens them forever”<sup>32</sup>.

Also, at the end of the Anaphora in the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great and St. John Chrysostom, those asleep in the Lord are mentioned in Proskomidia<sup>33</sup>, after the reading of the Holy Gospel, in a special litany<sup>34</sup>, as well as after the sanctification of the Gifts: “Remember all those who have fallen asleep before us in the hope of resurrection to eternal life, especially ...; grant them rest, O God, where the light of Thy countenance shines on them”<sup>35</sup>.

Prayers for the sleeping are also present in the Armenian Liturgy, in the Liturgy of St. Mark, in the Coptic Liturgy, in the Ethiopian Liturgy, in the Liturgy of Theodore of Mopsuestia<sup>36</sup>, as well as in the Syrian Rite Liturgy<sup>37</sup>.

Prayers for the Sleepy are also found in the Roman, Spanish, and Galician Liturgy<sup>38</sup>.

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translated in the work of diac. Ioan I. ICĂ JR., *Canonul Ortodoxiei I. Canonul Apostolic al primelor secole*, pp. 866-867.

<sup>32</sup> Hermann Adalbert DANIEL, *Codex liturgicus ecclesiae universae in epitome redactus*, tom IV, Leipzig, Hildesheim Olms, 1853, pp. 120-121, quoted by Pr. dr. Ioan ZUGRAV, *Cultul morților*, Cernăuți, s.n., 1938, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> See *Liturghierul*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2012, pp. 125-126.

<sup>34</sup> See *Liturghierul*, pp. 152-153.

<sup>35</sup> See *Liturghierul*, p. 179.

<sup>36</sup> See I. ZUGRAV, *Cultul morților*, p. 17-18.

<sup>37</sup> See Diac. Drd. Arupalla GHEERVARGHIS, “Grija pentru cei morți în cultul Bisericii Ortodoxe de rit sirian din India în comparație cu cel al Bisericii Ortodoxe de rit bizantin”, in: *Ortodoxia*, XXIII (1871) 3, pp. 415-428.

<sup>38</sup> See Păr. MITROFAN DE KONEWETS, *Viața repausașilor nostri și viața noastră după*

All this shows that the practice of prayer for the sleeping ones has been a general one since the early ages.

In the 5th century, in the Christian West, Blessed Augustine also learns about the benefits of prayer for the sleeping: “No one should doubt that indeed the prayers of the Holy Church, the saving sacrifice, and the almsgiving for the souls of the dead, help that the Lord be more merciful than they deserve, according to their sins.”<sup>39</sup>

In the fifth and sixth centuries, the catechumens were allowed to attend only the beginning of the funeral service, and were not allowed to remain until the time when the bishop said the prayers for release<sup>40</sup>. This is explained by the fact that at this time the funeral service was considered one of the Sacraments of the Church, and the catechumens could not remain in the mysterious part of the Sacraments, but only in the beginning, that is, in their catechetical part.

In the same century, in the Christian East, St. Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, in his work *On the Ecclesial Hierarchy*, describes and interprets the order of the service for the burial of a clergyman, as was probably done in parts of Antioch at that time. Gathering around the sleeping one, the family members sang hymns of praise to Christ the Source of redemption, asking Him to come to the resting place where the righteous dwell. Then they would take him to the hierarch, “to give him the holy crowns”. He gathered the crowd of priests, and if the sleeping man was a clergyman, his body was placed in the church in front of the Divine Altar, and if he was a monk he was placed “next to the honest presbytery, before the priests entered” the Altar. The hierarch himself began “the prayer and thanksgiving to God”, and when he had finished, the deacons read in turn, “the truly promises contained in the Divine Scriptures concerning our holy resurrection, and with reverence sing the psalms of the same content and meaning”. Then the first of the deacons sent the catechumens out of the

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*moarte*, trad. de Iosif (Gheorghian), mitropolit primat, București, Tipografia Cărților Bisericești, 1899, p. 104.

<sup>39</sup> Fericitul AUGUSTIN, *Sermo*, 172, 2, in: *PL XXXVIII*, 936, quoted by † DANIEL, Patriarhul Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, *Iubirea mai tare decât moartea. Înțelesul și folosul pomenirii celor adormiți în Domnul*, p. 22.

<sup>40</sup> Constantin STRUGARIU, “Grija pentru cei morți în cultul și spiritualitatea ortodoxă”, in: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, 9-10 / 1983, pp. 679-692. See also Preot Emanuel VALICĂ, *Tanatologia creștină între istorie, ritualul înmormântării, simbolism și actualitate. Abordare liturgico-pastorală*, Editura Christiana, București, p. 144.

church, then said a litany, mentioning the saints who had fallen asleep before and the one who had fallen asleep then, and urged all to pray for his happy ending in Christ.

Then, approaching the body of the sleeping man, the hierarch said a prayer for him and gave him the holy kiss, followed by all those present. Then he poured holy oil on the body of the sleeping one, and “making the holy prayer for all, he placed his body in the right place, together with the other holy bodies of the same rank”<sup>41</sup>. Pseudo-Dionysius renders the text of the bishop’s prayer for the one who fell asleep, before the holy kiss. The following explanation can be summarized as follows:

“Hierarch conduct to, and place the man fallen asleep, in the place of the same rank; for it shews reverently, that, in the regeneration, all will be in those chosen inheritances, for which they have chosen their own life here ... The Hierarch, having given thanks for this Divine righteousness, offers a sacred prayer, and extols the worshipful Godhead, as subjugating the unjust and tyrannical power against us all, and conducting us back to our own most just possessions (or judgments). Now, the Chants and Readings of the supremely Divine promises are explanatory of the most blessed inheritances, to which those, who have attained a Divine perfection, shall be eternally appointed, and [descriptive of him who has religiously fallen asleep, and stimulative of those, who are still living, to the same perfection ... for it will perhaps be profitable for them to have seen him, who has religiously finished his course, reverently proclaimed by the public proclamation of the Leitourgoi, as being certainly companion of the Saints for ever. And, perchance, even they will come to the like aspiration, and will be taught from the science of the Liturgy, that the consummation in Christ is blessed indeed. Then the Divine Hierarch, advancing, offers a holy prayer over the man fallen asleep. After the prayer, both the Hierarch himself salutes him, and next all who are present. Now the prayer beseeches the supremely Divine Goodness to

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<sup>41</sup> Sf. DIONISIE AREOPAGITUL, “Ierarhia bisericească”, in: *Opere complete și Scoliile Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul*, Editura Paideia, București, 1996, p. 98.

remit to the man fallen asleep all the failings committed by reason of human infirmity, and to transfer him in light and land of living, into the bosom of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob: in a place where grief and sorrow and sighing are no more (cf. Rev 21, 4). It is evident, then, as I think, that these, the rewards of the pious, are most blessed ... he asks, that these things may come to pass, and that the right-teous returns be given to those who have lived piously, whilst being moulded beneficently to the Divine imitation, he beseeches gifts for others, as favors to himself. And, whilst knowing that the promises will be unfailing, he makes known clearly to those present, that the things asked by him, according to a holy law, will be entirely realized for those who have been perfected in a Divine life ... Therefore, the Divine Hierarch beseeches things divinely promised, and dear to God, and which will, in every respect, be given, demonstrating both his own likeness to the good loving God, and declaring explicitly the gifts which will be received by the devout ... When the Hierarch has finished it, he first salutes the fallen asleep, and next, all who are present; for dear and honored by all Godlike men is he who has been perfected in a Divine life. After the salutation, the Hierarch pours the oil upon the man fallen asleep. And remember, that during the sacred Birth from God, before the most Divine Baptism, a first participation of a holy symbol is given to the man initiated – the oil of Chrism – after the entire removal of the former clothing; and now, at the conclusion of all, the Oil is poured upon the man fallen asleep. Then indeed the anointing with the Oil summoned the initiated to the holy contests; and now the Oil poured upon him shews the fallen asleep to have struggled, and to have been made perfect, throughout those same contests<sup>42</sup>.

As can be seen, both the prayer in the *Apostolic Constitutions* and the one summarized in the description and explanation of the service in *On the Ecclesial Hierarchy*, of St. Dionysius the Areopagite, contain the same ideas and expressions that we find in the prayer: “God of spirits and whole body...”, specific to all services for those asleep in today’s Byzantine order.

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<sup>42</sup> Sf. DIONISIE AREOPAGITUL, “Ierarhia bisericească”, pp. 98-100.

According to some liturgists, this would be the oldest of the prayers for the sleeping ones used today<sup>43</sup>. Its text is found not only in the documents mentioned, but even in a previous document, namely the *Papyrus of Nessana*, around the year 600<sup>44</sup>, and its formulas are reproduced in a whole series of older Nubian inscriptions<sup>45</sup>. *Codex Barberini* gr. 336, from the 8th century, also contains the text of this prayer<sup>46</sup>.

In the 7th century, Saint Theodore the Studite composed the canon which is sung on the meatfare Saturday, contained in the Triodion, on the Saturday of the departed<sup>47</sup>.

In the same century, Saint Theophanes the Graptus composed four verses for those asleep at the Aposticha of the Matins on Saturday, the Canons for the departed from Saturdays on all the 8 tones of the Octoechos<sup>48</sup>, The canon of the departed, tone 6, from the funeral service<sup>49</sup> and several verses from the Service of the Monks' Burial<sup>50</sup>.

Also, in the seventh century is attested the practice of the general remembrance of the sleeping, which is performed on Saturdays of Lent<sup>51</sup>.

In the eighth century, St. John of Damascus expresses himself in this way when he speaks of the prayers for those who have fallen asleep at the Holy Liturgy: "We believe that it will be of great use to the souls to whom the prayer of the holy and fearful sacrifice which is put forward refers"<sup>52</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> See B. BOTTE, "Le plus anciennes formules de priere pour les morts", in: *La maladie et la mort du chretien dans la Liturgie*, Roma, 1975, p. 92.

<sup>44</sup> The text of this codex was published by Jr. C. KRAEMER, *Excavations at Nessana*, III, Princeton, 1958, p. 310; quoted by Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Specială*, p. 377.

<sup>45</sup> See Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Specială*, p. 377.

<sup>46</sup> See the contents of these prayers in codex *Barberini gr. 336* translated by diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., *Canonul Ortodoxiei I. Canonul Apostolic al primelor secole*, p. 1023.

<sup>47</sup> See "Canonul Sâmbetei Lăsatului sec de carne", in: *Triod*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2000, pp. 28-36.

<sup>48</sup> See "Canoanele celor adormiți din sâmbetele Octoihului", in: *Octoihul Mare*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2003.

<sup>49</sup> See "Canonul celor adormiți din Rânduiala înmormântării mirenilor", in: *Molitfelnic*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2019, pp. 259-265 and *Panihida*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, pp. 30-37.

<sup>50</sup> See in this regard the verses of those asleep in "The Service of the Monks' Burial", in: *Molitfelnic*, 2019, pp. 346-357 și *Panihida*, p. 120-131.

<sup>51</sup> See Preot Emanuel VALICĂ, *Tanatologia creștină...*, p. 145.

<sup>52</sup> Sf. IOAN DAMASCHIN, *Laudă la martira Varvara*, XII, in: *PG XCV*, 813; *Despre cei adormiți în credință*, XXI, in: *PG XCV*, 249.268; *Homilia XLV, 2 in Genesim*, in: *PG*

The oldest Greek manuscript document, *Barberinus gr. 536*, from the eighth century, does not include a funeral service order, but only isolated prayers for different categories of departed: clerics, men, women, children. For example, this codex, in addition to the prayer of the God of spirits..., entitled Prayer for the one who fell asleep (died), also includes a prayer of the bending of the heads. Here is the content of this prayer:

“Lord, Lord, You are the comfort of the afflicted, the consolation of the weeping and the help of the discouraged; those who are weeping and mourning the sleeping one comfort with Your mercy; heal any of the sorrows of their heart, and rest your servant that is fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection into the bosom of Abraham. (Luke 16, 22). That Thou art the rest of Thy servants and to Thy glory we exalt, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever and ever. Amen”<sup>53</sup>.

In the content of the same codex we find two more prayers, entitled *Another prayer for the one who departed (died)*, as well as *Another prayer for universal burial*<sup>54</sup>. The first prayer reads:

“Our God, the God of salvation (Psalm 67, 21), the Builder, Savior and Judge of the living and the dead, the one who leads to hell and brings out of it (1 Kings 2, 6), You who bring from non-being into being, You who made man from the earth (Acts 2, 7) and returned him to earth for sin, and for your love of men you call them to life again, rest in mercy forever the souls of Your servants, Lord, in place of light, in place of rest, in the bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, together with all the saints who have ever pleased you. In Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be due the glory, the honor, and the worship, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever and ever. Amen”<sup>55</sup>.

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LIV, 416; *Homilia LXVII, 4 in Genesim*, in: PG LIV, 577.

<sup>53</sup> The prayer of bending the heads, *Barberinus gr. 336*, translated by diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., *Canonul Ortodoxiei I. Canonul Apostolic al primelor secole*, p. 1023.

<sup>54</sup> See the contents of these prayers in codex *Barberini gr. 336* translated by diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., *Canonul Ortodoxiei I. Canonul Apostolic al primelor secole*, p. 1023-1024.

<sup>55</sup> *Another prayer for the one who departed (died)*, translated by diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., *Canonul Ortodoxiei I. Canonul Apostolic al primelor secole*, p. 1023.



The second prayer for those who are asleep has the following text:

“Good and loving God, rest your servant in the dwellings of the righteous, and keep our end Christian and without sin, in all good deeds and words (2 Timothy 2, 17). With grace and mercy and love of men of the Only Begotten of Thy Son, with Whom thou art blessed with the Most Holy and good and life-giving Thy Spirit, now and for ever and ever. Amen”<sup>56</sup>.

The last prayer, that of universal burial, has the following content:

“Lord, the God of spirits and of the whole body (Numbers 16, 22; 27, 16), the One who instead of the spirit of depression / akedia (Isaiah 61, 3) gives the garment of glory and in Your unspeakable wisdom you united the soul with the body and again thou hast loosed sending the dust to the ground (Ecclesiastes 12, 7), and the spirit to Thy own, as thou hast given it; Oh, Master Christ, receive the soul of Your servant (N) and entitle Him to rest with Your saints in a lighted place, in place of rest, where pain, sorrow, and sighing have fled (Isaiah 35, 10); for to thy servants death is not death, but the moving of the soul. And if he has sinned by word, deed, or deed, overlook as a good and loving God. To those who mourn, be a helper and a comforter; with Thy spiritual light shines the mist of their depression, and make us who have gathered for the honor of his remnants make us strong and be merciful to our iniquities. That You are the forgiveness of our sins, and to You we exalt the glory, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever (and forever and ever. Amen)”<sup>57</sup>.

In the same *Codex Barberini 336* we find another *Burial Prayer for the Bishop*, with the following content:

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<sup>56</sup> *Another prayer for the one who departed (died)*, translated by diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., *Canonul Ortodoxiei I. Canonul Apostolic al primelor secole*, pp. 1023-1024.

<sup>57</sup> *Another prayer for universal burial*, translated by diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., *Canonul Ortodoxiei I. Canonul Apostolic al primelor secole*, p. 1024.

“Lord Jesus Christ, Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1, 29), Who comforts all the soulless in their affliction (Is 35, 4; II Cor 7, 4), be the consolation of Your sheep; for truly blessed is the one whom you have chosen and received (Ps 64, 4) as our shepherd. Give him the pious reward instead of pastoral toil (I Cor 3, 8), take him torchbearer to Your heavenly wedding chamber, give him angelic boldness, that without being ashamed he may sit by Your unapproachable throne, and make us as we ought, and it is pleasing to Your majesty. That Thou art our life and our hope, and to You is the glory, to the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, now (and for ever and ever. Amen)<sup>58</sup>.

The last prayer for the sleeping present in the codex Barberini 336 is the *Prayer to the sleeping monk*, with the following text:

“Lord, our God, the only one who has immortality, Who dwells in a unapproached light (I Tim 6, 16), Who kills and makes alive (4 Kings 5, 7), Who leads to hell and takes out of it ( I Kings 2, 6), You in Your wisdom created man from the earth and again returned him to the earth (Gen 2, 7; 3, 19) demanding back the duty of the soul (Sol 15, 8 ); We beseech Thee: receive the soul of Thy servant, and rest Him in the bosom of Abraham (Luke 16, 22), Isaac and Jacob, and give Him the crown of righteousness (II Tim 4, 8), the share of the saved for the glory of Your elect; that instead of those labored in this world for thy name’s sake, he may receive a rich reward in the sanctuaries of thy saints. With the grace and love of the people of Your only-begotten Son, with whom you are blessed with the Most Holy One (and the good and life-maker of Your Spirit, now and forever and ever. Amen)<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>58</sup> *Burial Prayer for the Bishop*, translated by diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., *Canonul Ortodoxiei I. Canonul Apostolic al primelor secole*, p. 1024.

<sup>59</sup> *Prayer to the sleeping monk*, translated by diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., *Canonul Ortodoxiei I. Canonul Apostolic al primelor secole*, p. 1024-1025.

### III. History and evolution of current funeral services

Only later manuscripts contain the ordinances of services for those asleep in today's Orthodox Church. The first printed editions date back only to the 17th century<sup>60</sup>. The current orders are a combination of prayers for those asleep from the old church ordinances and manuscripts of the Euchologion with the songs and readings of the ordinance of the All-Night Vigil (Pannikhis), which was performed in ancient churches on Sundays and holidays and was most suitable for this purpose.

Thus, Psalm 118 ("Blessed are the righteous in the way ..."), which makes up the 17th Kathisma, specific to the services for the departed, divided into three antiphons, was from the beginning the psalm of Matins on Sunday and Saturday, in the monastic order, as sung at the Patriarchal Cathedral of *Agia Sophia* (Great Church) in Constantinople<sup>61</sup>. It was once sung at the funeral service of the Lord on the Great and Holy Friday, and today it remains only in the form of isolated verses among the verses of Lamentations.

According to tradition, St. Germain I, the patriarch of Constantinople in the 8th century composed some of the songs and prayers in the current ordinance of the services for the departed, which come from the old background of the all-night vigil service (Panichida). From the same century come the verses from the Blessings for the Dead ("The Choir of the Saints ..."), which are sung in the first part of the services for the departed, as well as the eight beautiful verses idioms from the Funeral Service due to the great hymnographer, Saint John the Damascene<sup>62</sup>. The canon of the services for the departed is the work of Theophanes the bishop of Nicaea († 850), but he probably incorporated in his text formulas and expressions from older compositions, in connection with the cult of martyrs. At the funeral service of the priests, after the Sixth Ode, the usual Kontakion and Ikos of the services for the sleeping are interspersed: "With

<sup>60</sup> The Greek editions of these Euchologies are: J. GOAR, *Ευχολογιον sive Rituale Graecorum*, Paris, 1647 and Venetia, 1730; the Slavonic editions are: *Potrebnic*, Moscova, 1623, 1636, 1651 and 1677; Lvov, 1645 and Kiev, 1646 (Petru Movilă's edition). See also M. ARRANZ, "Les prieres presbyterales de la *Pannychis* de l'ancien Euchologie byzantine et la *Panikhida* des defunts", in: *La maladie et la mort du chretien dans la Liturgie*, p. 69 sq. and Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Specială*, p. 377.

<sup>61</sup> M. ARRANZ, "Les prieres presbyterales...", p. 81-82.

<sup>62</sup> See Pr. Petre VINTILESCU, *Despre poezia imnografică în cărțile de ritual*, Editura Partener, Galați, 2006, p. 123.

the Saints give rest...”, but not alone, but followed by another 24 verses, which make up a complete Kontakion in its original form. Some liturgists attributed this Kontakion to Saint Roman the Melodist, and others to the monk Anasthios, probably the friend of Saint Maximus the Confessor, both living in the 6th century.

Until the 14th century, there was only one common burial service for all categories of Christians (clergy, laity, monks, children), which seems to have been the burial service of today’s monks. It included prayers for the various categories of departed, which had previously existed in the Manuscript Euchologies.

Today’s Laymen Burial Service appears in the Church of Constantinople during the 14th Century.

At the same time it seems that a special ordinance appeared for the burial of priests (clergy of laymen)<sup>63</sup>. Probably, the Ecumenical Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos composed it, as he is known for his role in the development of Byzantine liturgical creation. The order for the burial of priests was introduced into the Church of Russia from Constantinople by Metropolitan Cyprian, a former disciple of Patriarch Philotheos. The order of burial of clerics is not uniform in all Autocephalous Orthodox Churches, having some local differences<sup>64</sup>. This service, however, was not uniform everywhere, but had local differences; In some variants, for example, seven, eight, or nine Gospels were read, in others, 14 or 15 Gospels, the last of which, the one read by the grave, was usually the one of Lazarus resurrection<sup>65</sup>.

The special service for burying children is not found in manuscripts until the 15th century<sup>66</sup>. According to the notes in some of the ordinance books, it was written by a hieromonk, Gabriel, from the Holy Mount Athos<sup>67</sup>. As for the special litany of the children’s funeral service, the Romanian Euchologion borrowed it from Russian practice<sup>68</sup>.

<sup>63</sup> See “Trebnik slav (Molitfelnic)”, ed. la Grottaferrata in 1945, noted by Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene Braniște, in: *Liturgica Specială*, p. 378.

<sup>64</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Specială*, p. 372.

<sup>65</sup> For details on the various types of funeral services see Alexis KNIAZEFF, “La mort du pretre d’après le *Trebnik* slave”, in: *La maladie et la mort du chretien dans la Liturgie*, pp. 155-192.

<sup>66</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Specială*, p. 378.

<sup>67</sup> See in this regard the typikon indications at the end of the service on Easter Sunday, in: *Penticostar*, București, 1936, p. 16.

<sup>68</sup> *Trebnik*, Chișinău, 1908, p. 344.

#### IV. Conclusions

1. Liturgical orders for the burial of monks have certainly existed since the beginning of monasticism, but they were very simple. According to the testimony of *Paterikon*, the deceased hermit was buried in a pit dug in the ground by another monk, with or without the help of a grateful lion, or was placed in natural caves or dug into the rock while singing or reciting appropriate psalms, knowing that the Psalter were the only *prayer book* of the first hermits in the desert.
2. Monasticism played a decisive role in the development of the hymnography and, in general, of the cult of the Orthodox Church. Starting with the singing of the psalms of David, the holy monks initiated new genres of hymnography: the Kontakion and the canon. Urban monasticism also capitalized the cult of cathedrals and parishes, taking from it priestly prayers, litanies, processions and the system of biblical readings and thus achieving the Byzantine liturgical synthesis expressed in the typicon of the Church adopted during the hesychastic period (fourteenth century), in the Orthodox world. Thus, the funeral orders were gradually enriched.
3. In the fifth century, the Areopagite writings describe a single burial service for all members of the Church, in which the differentiation of priests, monks and lay people was made only by the place where the body of the dead person was placed in the sanctuary. During centuries, this order diversifies.
4. The oldest preserved Byzantine Euchologion, the codex Barberini graecus 336, dating from the 8th century, does not present a complete order of lamentation, but only a litany and prayers said by the priest, including a *Burial prayer for a bishop*, and a *Prayer to the sleeping monk*, which leads us to the reasonable assumption that, within a single service, only the final prayer will change, depending on the service performed by the departed one.
5. The manuscripts preserve various local ordinances, some shorter in length, others very extensive, intended for an all-night vigil at the head of the sleeping person, in which psalms, Kontakion, canons, and other Bible readings were sung. This ordinance is stan-

standardized with the printing of worship books after the sixteenth century, which achieves a standardization of the ordinances for the departed and other liturgical ordinances.

6. Currently, in the worship books of the Romanian Orthodox Church, we find 5 variants for the funeral service: the burial of the laity, the burial of deacons and ordained priests, the burial of infants, the burial of monks and the order of burial during Holy Week.