

# **The Prayer Uttered in Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918. An Approach from the Perspective of the Liturgical Theology**

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## **Abstract**

The changes occurred in the political, social and economical life of the Romanians after December 1, 1918 also had consequences in the Church life, bringing about changes and new elements in the liturgical service (we refer here to the prayer from Alba Iulia, especially made for this event). Our study presents the documents referring to the two changes occurred in the liturgical order after this moment, trying to evaluate them from a liturgical perspective.

## **Keywords**

The Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia, prayer, Liturgics

## **I. Introduction**

Unquestionably the Union of Transylvania with the Motherland accomplished on December 1, 1918 brought major changes in the political, social and economic life of the Romanians. Of course, there were changes

*The Prayer Uttered in Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918...*

in the Church life too. The careful study of the documents of the Union surprisingly reveals mutations in the liturgical order of the Orthodox Church and even novelty elements: it is about the special prayer at the end of Divine Liturgy on December 1, specially made for this national feast.

Our study will present the papers related to the prayer from Alba Iulia, trying to evaluate them from the perspective of the Liturgical Theology.

## II. The preparations for the religious services of the Alba Iulia Assembly

At the Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia the priesthood was to fulfil a particularly important role, and this aspect results from the document the Romanian National Council formally convened through this National Assembly. The document stated that “the Romanian bishops from «Hungary and Transylvania» will take part and all the protopresbyters of the two Romanian denominations (Orthodox and Catholics - our note) and one delegate of each consistory and chapter...”<sup>1</sup>. In the document it was also announced that the works of the National Assembly were to be preceded by the celebration of the Divine Liturgy in the two churches from Alba Iulia: “the Eastern Orthodox and the Greek-Catholic”<sup>2</sup>.

The Romanian National Council headquartered in Arad, addresses the bishop Ioan Papp, asking for a special prayer dedicated to the event on December the 1<sup>st</sup>, to be read in all the Orthodox churches. Here is the last part of this address:

“(...) Desiring that a small part of the spirit that directs our steps to Alba Iulia should be reflected in each church for the strengthening

<sup>1</sup> Diac. lect. dr. Mihai Săsăujan, „Contribuția ierarhilor români ortodocși și greco-catolici din Transilvania la realizarea Unirii de la 1 Decembrie 1918”, in Alexandru Roz (ed.), *1918-1998 - Aradul și Marea Unire*, Editura Universității “Vasile Goldiș”, Arad, 1999, p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> See also *Foaia oficioasă*, V(1918) 28, p. 79. The organizing committee established the program of the Great National Assembly according to a very rigorous deployment: “...at 7 am (it was to take place) the divine service celebrated in the two Romanian churches, Greek-Orthodox and Greek-Catholic, by all the priests of the national churches” (din \*\*\*, *Unirea Transilvaniei cu România- 1 Decembrie 1918*, ediția a II-a, Editura politică, București, 1972, p.664).

of the faithful and the understanding of the meaning of that day, please kindly arrange that in all the churches should be read a prayer of thanksgiving to God that He has allowed us to reach these great days. We ask Your Holiness to guide the clergy what prayer to read about the significance of the day”.

The text of the letter is followed by a note by Bishop Ignatie. Here is the content of the note:

“This letter was received on the day the Episcopal Synod was already assembled to make its duty to the clergy and people following the great changes in the country’s governing system, and when it was dealing with the matter of the desired prayer, which was already composed and now it is printed and please find enclose”<sup>3</sup>.

From the note written by Bishop Papp it is understood that the Episcopal Synod of Arad had already discussed, drawn up and published a special prayer appropriate to December the 1<sup>st</sup>.

This also results from the Circular 147/1918, issued on November 10 (that is one day before receiving the Address from the Romanian National Council), which at its last point provided that - after the prayer before the Ambo – it should be read *The kneeling prayer* during all the Divine Liturgies, the whole content of this prayer being reproduced. The circular also announces the abdication of the Emperor Charles of Habsburg, proclaiming the authority of the Great National Assembly, which becomes “the highest authority of the Romanian people”, and the formula of commemoration of the new state authority is regulated in the liturgical order<sup>4</sup>. This circular was sent to all the protopresbyter centres from the

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<sup>3</sup> *Address of the Romanian National Council in Arad*, no. 89/1918, signed by dr. Ștefan CICIO POP, President of the Council and issued - Arad, November 8/21, 1918. Bishop Papp’s notice at the end of the letter is dated November 11/24, 1918. It is kept in the Archives of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of Arad, Prezidiale November 10/23, 1918. Doc. 147/1918. The text of the address is published in Vasile POPEANGĂ, Ion B. MUREȘIANU, *Aradul cultural în lupta pentru înfăptuirea Marii Uniri (1908-1918)*, preface by Bishop dr. Timotei SEVICIU, Editura Episcopiei Ortodoxe Române a Aradului, 1991, pp. 367-368.

<sup>4</sup> See Circulation text at Vasile POPEANGĂ, Ion B. MUREȘIANU, *Aradul cultura...*, pp. 374-375.

*The Prayer Uttered in Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918...*

Diocese of Arad and the Metropolitan of Transylvania. It was accompanied by a printing in several copies (in order to be distributed to all the priests in that deanery) containing the new changes regarding the mention of the state authorities, as well as the text of *The kneeling prayer*<sup>5</sup>.

The Divine Liturgy in Alba Iulia on the occasion of the Great National Assembly

Regarding the preparations for the Divine Liturgy on December 1, we will present the letter of Ioan I. Papp, Bishop of Arad, addressed to the protopresbyter Ion Teculescu from Alba Iulia<sup>6</sup>. The letter is dated November 8/21, 1918. We glean some ideas from its content:

“Most honoured and beloved, (...) you will be aware that the Great Council of the Romanian Nation of Hungary and Transylvania put the celebration of this moment of great historical significance during a national assembly that was established on November 18 (December 1) 1918 and chose the historic castles of Alba Iulia as place of meeting, your Holiness domain as a protopresbyter of the tract with this name. (...) The great counsel also mentioned in the program that the assembly should be preceded by prayers in both the Romanian churches, and I let you know that if God is willing, I will also take part in this festive gathering, and as

<sup>5</sup> For example, here is the text of the Address to the dean's manager from Chişineu-Criş: “Dear Sir, following the changes in the governing system, the Episcopal Synod of our Romanian Orthodox Church in Hungary and Transylvania, gathered in its meeting on 10 of this month, has taken the necessary measures to replace the prayers and memorials introduced in the ritual of our Church for the ruler of the country with other prayers and the commemoration of the present states and these provisions were included in the printout which we send You the requested number of copies to be distributed to all subordinated parishes to orientate and accommodate the parochial priesthood. Arad, November 11/24, 1918, Bishop Ioan I. Papp”. The document is kept in the State Archives, Arad, Dean's Fund from Chişineu-Criş, File 19/1918. Page 5, being published by Vasile POPEANGĂ, Ion B. MUREŞIANU, *Aradul cultural...*, p. 370.

<sup>6</sup> Dean Ioan Teculescu (1865-1932) was one of the organizers of the Grand National Assembly in Alba Iulia, as president of the National Council Romanian local. After Union, he was a military bishop; to be seen *Mărturii privind lupta românilor din părţile Aradului pentru păstrarea fiinţei naţionale prin educaţie şi cultură (1784-1918)- documente referitoare la Episcopia Ortodoxă a Aradului*, prefaţă P.S. Episcop dr. Timotei SEVICIU, studiu introductiv, note şi comentarii de prof. dr. Vasile POPEANGĂ, Arad, 1986, p. 381.

the head of our episcopate I will serve the Divine Liturgy myself in our church from there with the assistance of the clergy of our Metropolitan, its number being combined on the spot according to the Holy Altar space”<sup>7</sup>.

As for the service performed in Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918, we will use two documentary sources for its presentation: the newspaper *Românul* and the religious publication *Biserica și Școala*, both published at that time in Arad. So, the newspaper *Românul* writes it down:

“The divine service took place with special solemnity in both the Romanian churches in Alba Iulia. In the Orthodox Church, His Holiness Bishop Ioan I. Papp served and in the Greek-Catholic Church His Holiness Bishop Dr. Valer Frentiu, with a great assistance, and a huge number of devout believers being present. We will never forget the sweet moments of this uplifting divine service”<sup>8</sup>.

Miron Cristea, Bishop of Caransebeș, assisted in the bishop’s seat. Instead of the religious hymn, the choir from “*Andreian*” Seminary in Sibiu, led by Professor Timotei Popovici, sang the anthem of the Romanian Legions, composed by poet Ioan Broșu. At the end of the Liturgy, Bishop Miron Cristea read the prayer “for the liberation of the nation”. The profound content of the spoken prayer created a very strong emotion in the souls of those present<sup>9</sup>, so that “at the end of the divine service, the faithful were singing *Deșteaptă-te române* and to the words «We better die in battle...» all of us raised the right hand as oath...”<sup>10</sup>. The publication *Biserica și Școala* wrote about the mood of those present in the church as following: “There was no dry eye. The holy tears of our national resurrection flowed from all eyes”<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> The letter is found in the Archives of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of Arad, II- 25-1918. Doc. 4197, being published in vol. *Mărturii privind lupta românilor din părțile Aradului pentru păstrarea ființei naționale prin educație și cultură (1784-1918)- documente referitoare la Episcopia Ortodoxă a Aradului*, p. 381.

<sup>8</sup> *Românul*, nr. 20, 20 Noiembrie/3 Decembrie 1918, pp. 1-3, in Iulian NEGRILĂ (ed.), *Ziarul Românul și Marea Unire*, Editura Politică, București, 1988, p. 374.

<sup>9</sup> See M. SĂSĂUJAN, „Contribuția ierarhilor...”, p.74.

<sup>10</sup> *Românul*, nr. 20, 20 Noiembrie/3 Decembrie 1918, in Iulian Negrilă (ed.), *Ziarul Românul și Marea Unire*, p. 375.

<sup>11</sup> *Biserica și Școala*, XLII (1918) 47, p. 2.

### III. The content of the prayer from Alba Iulia

#### a. The origin of “the prayer for the liberation of the nation”

The prayer of Alba Iulia is the work of Dr. Gheorghe Ciuhandru, the consistory of Arad, “one of the best-trained theologians of that time in Transylvania”<sup>12</sup>. He was delegated by the Episcopal Council to draw up a report “on what to do in the new state of affairs”, with reference to the need to write a prayer appropriate to the moment and to solve the problem of mentioning the new state authority in a consecrated liturgical formula. Ciuhandru presented his conclusions on these issues to the Episcopal Synod in Arad on November 10, 1918. Following the discussion of these conclusions, the Council issued the circular no. 147/1918, which contained the text of the prayer, as well as the new formula of remembering the authorities<sup>13</sup>.

As for the origin of this prayer and the history of its creation, it must be sought in the decades before. Thus, *the Prayer of the Romanian (Rugăciunea românului)* appeared in the publication *Tribuna* from Arad (year VIII, no. 208, from November 3/16, 1904) and it contained Old Testament biblical texts: from Psalms, the great Prophets, and Jeremiah, which “made a proper prayer to be uttered by the man who was wronged by the enemy, through the way they were arranged”<sup>14</sup>. Though the text of the prayer does not have the name of its author, it is known that it was written by Dr. Gheorghe Ciuhandru. In one of his memoirs he confesses that “the bitterness caused by the intentional attacks on the Romanian school, made him bring them together in a prayer he named «Rugăciunea românului» (*the Prayer of the Romanian*)”.

As to the content of this prayer,

“It was considered appropriate to illustrate the state of double exploitation the Romanian people were subjected to: social and national, comparable to the situation of the Biblical people in the Babylonian captivity that the books of the Prophets, the Psalms

<sup>12</sup> Prot. dr. Gheorghe LIȚIU, “Rugăciunea de la Alba Iulia”, *Mitropolia Banatului*, XVIII (1968) 10-12, p. 685.

<sup>13</sup> G. LIȚIU, “Rugăciunea de la Alba Iulia”, p. 685.

<sup>14</sup> G. LIȚIU, “Rugăciunea de la Alba Iulia”, p.683.

and especially Jeremiah's Complaints lament. Publishing these texts became a form of struggle and protest"<sup>15</sup>.

From the content of this prayer it is very clear they hoped a time of all Romanians unification in one state would come. In fact, in his memories Ciuhandru also notes that "the thought of this union was living in our souls as a more distant perspective over time"<sup>16</sup>.

The Prayer of Alba Iulia is in close relation with the Romanian Prayer, as both have the same author. As a structure, the two prayers resemble a great deal, being formed of several biblical texts.

### **b. The content of the Prayer from Alba Iulia**

We continue to reproduce the content of the prayer dedicated to the Union of December 1:

"Lord our God! (Daniel 9, 15) We have sinned with our fathers (Ps. 106, 6); we have wandered from the path of truth, and the light of righteousness has not shone upon us, and the sun has not risen to us (Proverbs 5, 6) and behold, we are servants this day, and *for* the land that You gave unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof, behold, we *are* servants in it (Nehemiah 9, 36)".

"You have made the earth to tremble, God! (Ps. 59, 60) Who *is* like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who *is* like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful *in* praises, doing wonders? (Exodus 15, 11)".

"Behold, we come unto Thee; for Thou *art* the Lord our God (Jeremiah 3, 23) as You said: O, My people! Your wound *is* grievous (Micah 6, 3; Jeremiah 30, 12); the punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished (Lamentations 4, 22), arise (Isaiah 60, 1), I *am* the Lord your God (Ezekiel 20, 19); for I *am* with thee; though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee (Jeremiah 30, 11). For now will I break this yoke from off thee,

<sup>15</sup> G. LIȚIU, "Rugăciunea de la Alba Iulia", pp. 684-685.

<sup>16</sup> G. LIȚIU, "Rugăciunea de la Alba Iulia", p. 683.

*The Prayer Uttered in Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918...*

and will burst thy bonds in sunder (Nahum 1, 13); I will enlarge thy borders (Exodus 34, 24). I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered (Ezekiel 11, 16); and I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counselors as at the beginning (Isaiah 1, 26)". "And now, O Lord our God (Daniel 9, 15), the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keeps covenant and mercy (Nehemiah 9, 32); God - great in counsel, and mighty in work: for Thine eyes *are* open upon all the ways of the sons of men (Jeremiah 3, 11); Who set up on high those that be low; that those which mourn may be exalted to safety; Who disappoint the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform *their* enterprise (Job 5, 11-12) so not all the trouble seem little before Thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people (Nehemiah 9, 32)".

"Lord, You rule both life and death and possess the power to give life or to take it away (Wisdom of Solomon 16, 12); for we do not present our supplications before Thee for our righteousness, but for Thy great mercy (Daniel 9, 18). Arise for our help, and redeem us for Thy mercies' sake (Psalms 44, 26). Give us help from trouble (Psalms 108, 12), Help us, O, God of our salvation, for the glory of Thy name (Psalms 79, 9), that glory may dwell in our land (Psalms 84, 10), now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen"<sup>17</sup>.

The fact that the Romanian Prayer was the prelude to what the Prayer of Alba Iulia would be is proved by Gheorghe Ciuhandru's testimony in the same memories: "I thus had the great soul comfort to have seen an idea of my youth approved and embraced by the highest authority of the particular Church that I was part of"<sup>18</sup>. Ciuhandru notes about his feelings from the moment of the first reading of this prayer: "I do not know if in my life I would have passed or could go through more shocking emotions than those of then"<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> The text of this prayer first appeared in the official publication of the Arad diocese *Biserica și Școala*, accompanied by an introductory word under the title "*The time is to be done to the Lord*"; see *Biserica și Școala*, XLII (4/17 Noiembrie 1918) 45.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted at G. LIȚIU, „Rugăciunea de la Alba Iulia”, p. 687.

<sup>19</sup> G. LIȚIU, „Rugăciunea de la Alba Iulia”, p. 687.



### III. The theological and liturgical evaluation of the Prayer from Alba Iulia

#### *The theological and liturgical significance of the content of the Prayer from Alba Iulia*

The structure and content of the Christian cult was finalized in its general lines until the 11th century<sup>20</sup>. However, the content of the cult remains open to the renewals and additions made during the history of the Church, but of course in the existing frames and forms. In this regard as an example we recall the case of the new canonizations, which implies the composition of the service for the saint and the whole hymnography which constitutes the content of his celebration. Also, the Church has always made up prayers for the needs of the believers that have been added during the history of the Church, according to the context of her life and needs. For example,

“In the Romanian Orthodox Church and Russian Orthodox Church there has been a need to create whole independent services (Te Deum), for the individual believers or the religious community (the whole Church) to express feelings of gratitude, praise and thanksgiving to God in various festive, commemorative or jubilee circumstances in their domestic, professional or religious life”<sup>21</sup>.

In this category we could also place the Prayer set up for the Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia.

In this sense, the prayer cannot be regarded as a cultic innovation, since it responds to a special moment in our national history, where the faithful people feel indebted to exalt gratitude to God. Even though the prayer of Alba Iulia never entered the liturgical treasure of our Church and remained consecrated for a special service, being used only for December 1, 1918 at Alba Iulia, this prayer remains a testimony of the struggle of our forerunners for the preservation of our national being and old faith. The explanation the Church newspaper *Biserica și Școala* presented in

<sup>20</sup> See Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, “Originea, instituirea și dezvoltarea cultului creștin”, in *Studii Teologice*, XV (1963) 3-4, p.139.

<sup>21</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Specială*, Editura Nemira, 2002, p.362.

*The Prayer Uttered in Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918...*

its number from November 17, 1918, before reproducing the text of the prayer, leads us to this understanding:

“Among the ordinances of our righteous Church there is also one referring to the time of powerlessness or straits and public needs when we pray to God with special consideration to the needs that press us... The one who composed this prayer gleaned from Holy Scripture wants to accomplish exactly this duty”<sup>22,23</sup>.

Another issue is about the author of the prayer from Alba Iulia. It is known that in general the Holy Fathers are the authors, hymnographers and singers of the entire liturgical work of the Church. In this sense, the hymnographic text merely describes and confirms the framework of holiness, and in fact this gives it authenticity and authority. The text of the prayer from Alba Iulia appears as the work of the theologian Gheorghe Ciuhandru and it was submitted to the Episcopal Synod of Transylvania and Hungary, being thus authorized by the high ecclesial forum, which also had deliberative power in this respect. But the authority of this prayer text is also given by its biblical character, with no other contribution of the author than that of selecting and combining different Scriptural verses.

Therefore, in the consciousness of the Romanian Christians the prayer of Alba Iulia remains a monument of historical value, but also a liturgical text that served to express the feelings of request and gratitude directed to the Heavenly Father in those moments.

As to the structure and content of prayer, it expresses profound theological and spiritual ideas. Its beginning establishes a similarity between the slavery of the Jewish people fallen into captivity, and the “national and social bondage of the Romanian people”<sup>24</sup>. The state of bondage is a direct consequence of the passion and sin against the will

<sup>22</sup> The fact that the whole prayer is nothing but a set of biblical texts, harmonized as a message, builds us even more on the fact that it has an inspired character, being far from a composition of a more or less well-informed person, that would require a theological-doctrinal evaluation of its content to determine whether it retains the right of the authentic faith. Therefore, the prayer has a biblical character, being inspired as the whole Holy Scripture.

<sup>23</sup> See the publication *Biserica și Școala*, XLII (4/17 Noiembrie 1918) 45, the article “Vremea este a se face Domnului”.

<sup>24</sup> G. LIȚIU, „Rugăciunea de la Alba Iulia”, p. 687.

<sup>25</sup> G. LIȚIU, „Rugăciunea de la Alba Iulia”, p. 687.

of God. But this consciousness of his own sin gives birth to the feeling of man's humility and nothingness in front of the Creator's greatness. Although God is a righteous Judge who punishes the sin, He is also a "wonder-worker", rising us from the depth of error and perdition with the promise that "He will not destroy us", but on the contrary "He will break our yoke", "will burst our bonds in sunder", "will enlarge our borders", "assembling us out of the countries where we have been scattered" and "restoring our judges as at the first". At this moment of prayer we can see how "the biblical words go... until the complete identification with the states of that time"<sup>25</sup>, when the Romanians, coming out of the hard slavery of oppression, became united to their kin. The prayer continues proclaiming God "Mighty", "fearsome", "keeping covenant and mercy", "great in counsels and mighty in things, rising up the humble and lifting up those who weep to salvation", "thwarting the counsel of the wicked, that their hands may not fulfil their minds". Prayer continues by proclaiming God's care for the man He himself made: "Lord, You rule over life and death and descend at the gates of hell, but again rise". The words of the Scripture are chosen to faithfully define the state of soul exuberance of the Romanians in those moments, thus turning into a spiritual jubilation. If so far the prayer has an exclusive character of praise to God, in the latter part it will encompass requests: "before you we bring our prayers, not for our righteousness, but for your many mercies. Arise for our help and save us for Your mercy. Give us help to get rid of the trouble... help us for the glory of Your name, so that magnificence dwells in our land".

From one end to the other the prayer is crossed by the conviction and hope for God's care, and the power of His miracles, which descends to the hell of suffering and despair, exalting the faithful to the glory of His glory. This prayer expresses the destiny of the Romanian nation in the most authentic way, always situated between the Cross and the Resurrection.

#### IV. Conclusions

The changes made in the political, social and economic life of the Romanians after December 1, 1918, had also results in the Church life, leading to mutations and even some novelties regarding the liturgical order (it is about the prayer of Alba Iulia, made especially for this feast).

*The Prayer Uttered in Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918...*

Assessed from the perspective of Liturgical Theology, the Prayer of Alba Iulia is not a cultic innovation, since it responds to a special moment in our national history. It is well known that the Romanian Orthodox Church has always supported the Romanian people in all the crucial moments of its existence. In fact, in detail matters our liturgical cult lends itself to adaptations and even new formulations, provided that they remain in the general already existing framework.