

The Works of St. Gregory of Narek



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THE DOCTOR OF MERCY

The Sacred Treasures of
St. Gregory of Narek

Michael Papazian

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*In memory of Robert W. Thomson (1934–2018)
Calouste Gulbenkian Professor of Armenian (1992–2001),
Oxford University*

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Acknowledgments

The seed of this book was planted in 2003 at a symposium at Harvard University dedicated to the millennium of the completion of the *Book of Lamentation* of St. Gregory of Narek. I had been asked by Archbishop Oshagan Choloyan, at that time prelate of the Eastern US Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church, to contribute a paper. My topic was Gregory's theology of salvation. Today, having read and learned much more, I would probably question many of the paper's conclusions but the favorable responses from other participants encouraged me to continue my efforts to articulate the theology that informs Gregory's writings. This book is in many ways the fruit of my first very modest attempt to read the saint's works theologically.

But a confluence of events would be needed for that fruit to grow. The most important of these was Pope Francis's declaration in April 2015 of St. Gregory as a Doctor of the Church. That event was for me a powerful impetus that made me recognize the need for a book in English that would introduce Gregory's life, writings, and spirituality to broad readership. The great Armenian *vardapet* was now recognized as a universal doctor whose works belong to the world and not just to Armenian Christians. There are already many very good translations of Gregory's writings in modern languages. But I did not see any book-length work in English or other major languages that addressed the relevance of the monk's theology and spirituality to contemporary world concerns. There is no doubt that Gregory's prayers are powerful medicine, remedies for the spiritual afflictions still present in the twenty-first century as much as in the tenth.

By a happy coincidence, the pope's declaration occurred just before I was eligible to apply for a sabbatical leave by Berry College. I could not have written this book without that generous grant and I am especially grateful for colleagues' assistance beginning with my dean, Thomas Kennedy, and chair, Jeffrey Lidke, who wholeheartedly endorsed my project. I am immensely grateful for the support of all my department colleagues and the faculty of the Evans School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, who encouraged me and also graciously assumed the duties I was freed from during the sabbatical. A special note of gratitude is due to Peter and Rita Lawler, my best friends at Berry. Peter, who was Dana professor of government, sadly did not live to see this book published. But the influence of his brilliance and devotion to the Catholic intellectual tradition abides in and inspires every page here.

Nor could I have accomplished anything without my family. They nurtured and raised me to love the culture and language of the Armenian people. My maternal grandparents, Krikor and Veronica Pilbosian, my paternal grandmother, Hripsime Papazian, and—though I never met him—my paternal grandfather, Barour Papazian, embodied for me the strength and resilience of this nation that has produced even in times of hardship a rich spiritual and intellectual heritage that includes Gregory's singular achievements. My parents, Pierre and Iris Papazian, made every sacrifice to support my education. My mother taught me with extraordinary Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

devotion to read the Armenian alphabet and modern Armenian and she continues to inspire me. She is the foundation of the learning that led to this book. They along with my aunts and uncle, Margaret Papazian, Elizabeth Pilbosian, Rosely and Wally Stronski, have steadfastly supported my studies. My wife, Andrea Lowry Papazian, was my ever devoted companion and supporter throughout my research and writing. This book is an expression of my profound love for them all.

Many others helped me during my research and writing. I am especially grateful to Hans Christoffersen of Liturgical Press for his enthusiastic interest in my book proposal as well as all of the editors and staff with whom I have collaborated for the care and diligence they have shown in their work. I am also grateful to Abraham Terian, Mike Aquilina, Haig Utidjian, and Stephen Little for their perceptive thoughts and suggestions on my manuscript. All errors herein are, of course, my own.

I dedicate this book to my teacher, Professor Robert W. Thomson. When I went to Oxford in the mid-1990s to study classical Armenian under him, he encouraged me to extend my interests beyond philosophy to theology and biblical exegesis. His initial encouragement led me ultimately to the study of St. Gregory, and his kind yet exacting instruction in classical Armenian made me into the inquisitive if imperfect Armenian scholar I am today.

Michael Papazian

July 6, 2019

Feast of the Discovery of the Relics
of St. Gregory the Illuminator

Abbreviations

<i>BL</i>	<i>Book of Lamentation</i> (section numbering based on MH 12, 49–605)
<i>CSCO</i>	<i>Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium</i> (Paris-Louvain, 1903–)
<i>GCS</i>	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller (Leipzig-Berlin, 1897–)
<i>JSAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>MH</i>	<i>Matenagirk' Hayots'</i> [Armenian Classical Authors] (Antelias, Lebanon: Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia)
<i>NBHL</i>	<i>Nor Bargirk' Haygazean Lezui</i> [New Lexicon of the Armenian Language] (Venice, San Lazzaro Press, 1836)
<i>OCA</i>	Orientalia Christiana Analecta (Rome, Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1945–)
<i>PG</i>	Patrologiae cursus completus, Series graeca (Paris: Migne, 1841–64)
<i>REArm</i>	<i>Revue des Études Arméniennes</i>
<i>SC</i>	Sources chrétiennes (Paris: Cerf, 1941–)
<i>TLG</i>	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Graecae</i>

Armenian Transliteration

Based on the Library of Congress system

<i>u</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>q</i>	<i>η</i>	<i>t̄</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>t̄</i>	<i>p̄</i>	<i>p̄</i>	<i>d̄</i>
a	b	g	d	e	z	ē	ě	t'	zh
<i>h</i>	<i>l</i>	<i>ħu</i>	<i>ð</i>	<i>ły</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>ā</i>	<i>η</i>	<i>ā</i>	<i>u</i>
i	l	kh	ts	k	h	dz	gh	ch	m
<i>l</i>	<i>ū</i>	<i>ż</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ɛ</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>ż</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>u</i>
y	n	sh	o	ch'	p	j	r̄	s	v
<i>in</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>ı</i>	<i>ψ</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>ɸ</i>	<i>ni</i>	
t	r	ts'	w	p'	k'	ō	f	u	

Introduction

Saint Gregory of Narek, an extraordinary interpreter of the human soul, offers words which are prophetic for us: “I willingly blame myself with myriad accounts of all the incurable sins, from our first forefather through the end of his generations in all eternity, I charge myself with all these voluntarily” (*BL* 72). How striking is his sense of universal solidarity! How small we feel before the greatness of his invocations: “Remember, [Lord,] ... those of the human race who are our enemies as well, and for their benefit accord them pardon and mercy.... Do not destroy those who persecute me, but reform them, root out the vile ways of this world, and plant the good in me and them” (*BL* 83).

—Pope Francis

On April 12, 2015, during a mass in St. Peter’s Basilica commemorating the centennial of the beginning of the Armenian Genocide, Pope Francis formally pronounced the tenth-century Armenian monk, poet, and theologian St. Gregory of Narek a Doctor (from the Latin word for teacher) of the Universal Church. Gregory thereby became the thirty-sixth of these acknowledged great masters of Catholic faith and spirituality. Among the doctors are renowned theologians like St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas; mystics and visionaries like St. Teresa of Ávila, St. John of the Cross, and St. Hildegard of Bingen; and Gregory’s fellow poet from the East, St. Ephrem the Syrian. Books, both scholarly and popular, about the most prominent doctors easily fill many library shelves. A reader knowing little about any of these august figures would be able to find readily at least one and often many books that would introduce their teachings. Just recently, a new English translation of Augustine’s *Confessions* has been published, joining scores of other English translations of this classic. Many books will gently guide anyone desiring to learn more about Aquinas’s philosophy. There are several popular translations and presentations of Hildegard, the most recently proclaimed Doctor of the Church prior to Gregory.

Many of Gregory’s works have been translated into English in recent years. But, unlike most of his fellow doctors, there has been to date no English language monograph presenting his life and theology to a broader audience. The present book seeks to fill that void. Apart from his now being in very elite company, Gregory also deserves to be better known because of his unusual circumstances. Outside of his native Armenia he is little known and rarely studied. He is perhaps the most obscure of the doctors. Even more remarkably, he lived his entire life outside of visible communion with the Catholic Church. He was a priest and monk of the Armenian Apostolic Church, which had by the sixth century rejected the Council of Chalcedon of 451, the fourth of the great ecumenical councils that defined orthodox doctrine, thus taking his church out of communion with most of the rest of the Christian world. On a number of websites, people responded to Pope Francis’s declaration with the question “Is the new Doctor of the

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Church a Catholic?" The quick answer to this question is negative: Gregory was never during his earthly life a member of a church in communion with Rome. Consequently, the declaration of Gregory as the first "non-Catholic" Doctor of the Church is an extraordinary development in ecumenism and a gesture of charity by the Catholic Church toward another Christian church that it once deemed heretical and schismatic.

Gregory's addition to the ranks of the doctors thus has a significance that goes beyond just his writings, as impressive and important as they are. The pope's address at the beginning of the mass made clear that, beyond its ecumenical significance, his declaration was also meant as a message relevant to contemporary world affairs. Gregory bears witness to the presence of a once vibrant and flourishing Christian culture in the Middle East that today is on the verge of extinction. His monastery was abandoned during the 1915 Armenian Genocide and subsequently demolished, as were so many other churches and religious institutions in recent years in nearby countries torn apart by war. Gregory is a witness for us of an earlier period in Middle Eastern history, a time that was certainly not ideal, but when the region was more pluralistic, with members of various Christian communions as well as other religions coexisting and working together. The various ethnic and religious communities were not closed off to each other but interacted both socially and economically, and they inspired each other culturally. Gregory's native land today looks very different. The once prominent Christian presence in eastern Anatolia is almost completely nonexistent today as a result of the genocide that killed over a million Armenians and other Christians, and scattered the survivors into a diaspora that extends throughout the world. The monasteries and churches that filled the landscape of the Lake Van basin are today unused and in ruins. Gregory's life reveals to us today that the destruction and religious intolerance that has engulfed much of the world—and especially the Middle East—in recent history is by no means inevitable.

But besides testifying to a possibility of a different reality in the Middle East and other places where intolerance appears to flourish, Gregory focuses in his writings on a number of themes that are important to Francis's papacy. Among these themes is God's mercy, which Gregory illustrates and celebrates throughout his works. The prevalence in Gregory's thought of mercy, which Francis has remarked on in several of his homilies and addresses, makes him a fitting choice as the first Doctor of a papacy in which God's mercy has been a leading theme. Because mercy is so central to Gregory's works, I have thought it appropriate to refer to him as *Doctor of Mercy*.

In the last few decades, there has been a burst of new scholarship that has brought to light more details on Gregory's background, as well as on his works. This book aims to present some of the results of that scholarship, much of which is currently only available in Armenian. Now that he is a Doctor of the Universal Church, Gregory's wish that his works would reach all the people of the world has begun to be realized. My hope for this book is that it will make a modest contribution toward his goal of composing spiritual poetry to inspire and heal all the nations of the world.

This is a book primarily of theology rather than a biography of its subject. We know very little about the details of Gregory's life, an ignorance that he would encourage due to his monastic humility and his desire to represent, through his penitential prayers, not just himself but all of humanity in its reconciliation with God. Nor is this book a history. Of course, we

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cannot understand Gregory and his writings apart from the history and culture that shaped him, so there will be considerable attention to the history of the church and monasticism in Armenia. But the purpose of this historical information is to allow us to understand Gregory's teachings and to apply them to our lives and spiritual journey. The only reason he wrote was to offer solace and peace in the light and love of God to an agitated and alienated world. Accordingly, I will try as best I can to honor his wish that his voice may give to all people "tender inspiration, sweet embraces so that the grace of the Lord's light may enter and dwell among us."

I wrote this book not strictly for specialists. Its purpose is to introduce Gregory's poetry and thought to any interested reader having some familiarity with Christian history or theology. To that end, I have attempted to keep details of a more specialized scholarly nature in the footnotes. Armenian and Greek words will occasionally intrude into the body of the text, but details of a more tangential nature are left in the footnotes. Armenian words are written according to the Library of Congress system of transliteration. However, I use common English equivalents of names whenever they exist. This is in keeping with the custom followed in the cases of names in other linguistic traditions. For example, we are used to encountering in English books not *Ioannēs* but *John Chrysostom*. So, too, it seems appropriate to refer to the subject of this book not as *Grigor Narekats'i*—the transliteration of his Armenian name followed by the name of his monastery's location appended with the Armenian place name suffix *ats'i*—but to the English equivalent, *Gregory of Narek*. In the case of names with no common English equivalents—for example, Gregory's father, *Khosrov Andzewats'i*—I keep to the Library of Congress transliteration.

The footnotes contain references to editions of the primary sources in the original languages. For Armenian authors, most of the texts are taken from the *Matenagirk' Hayots'*. I cite passages by volume, page number, and section number (or in the case of the *Book of Lamentation* and hymns, the line number). So *MH* 12:178.20 refers to volume 12, page 178, line 20. For the *Book of Lamentation*, I also cite the prayer number and section according to the *MH* arrangement. When English translations are available, I give the page reference to the translation, although my translations will often differ, usually not significantly, from the cited version.

Biblical citations and verse numbering (including the numbering of the psalms) are based on the New Revised Standard Version. The only exception is that I translate Gregory's version of biblical passages in those cases in which his text differs significantly from the NRSV.

Reading St. Gregory in Translation

Those readers wanting to read Gregory's writings in English translation now have available to them a number of good translations. His great poem, the *Book of Lamentation*, was translated by Thomas J. Samuelian under its alternate title, *Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart*. The most recent editions of this translation include revisions made with the Armenian-American poet Diana Der Hovanessian. For those who know French, the translation by Annie and Jean-Pierre Mahé has the advantage of a detailed introduction and extensive annotations. Translating Gregory is a difficult task. Virtually every page of his great poem

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contains neologisms and obscure expressions. He introduced a large number of words into Armenian, for we find hundreds of entries in the monumental Armenian lexicon *Nor Bargirk' Haykazean Lezui (New Lexicon of the Armenian Language)* that cite just a single passage from Gregory's corpus. When I discuss any such words in this book, I designate them as *hapax legomena* or simply a *hapax*, which means that they are words that occur only once in the known body of ancient and medieval Armenian literature.

Beyond just the presence of these singular words in Gregory's poetry, his style is also highly complex and demanding. He makes use of wordplay and equivocation that often defies translation. Although I consulted both of these translations in the course of writing this book, I generally offer my own translations from the Armenian text of the *Book of Lamentation*. When I deviate from other translations, whether of this work or Gregory's other writings, I do not mean to suggest that the other translations are in error. Usually my revisions are done to emphasize a point I wish to make or to bring forward the theological or historical context of Gregory's text. Samuelian and the Mahés have both produced fine translations that allow the reader to get a good sense of Gregory's poem.

For Gregory's commentary on the Song of Songs there is an excellent and elegant English translation by Roberta Ervine. Ervine's introduction also provides important insights on the historical and theological background of the work. The French translation by Lévon Pétrossian is a valuable resource that includes a detailed set of introductions and notes.

Abraham Terian's skilled and inspiring translations of the festal hymns and encomia make available to English readers even more of Gregory's corpus. The hymns show that Gregory's poetic genius extends beyond the *Book of Lamentation* to his liturgical compositions, while the encomia are important sources of Gregory's theology and his perspective on church history. Thamar Dasnabedian's French translation and more extended treatment of the encomium on the Virgin Mary is also highly recommended especially for those interested in Gregory's Mariology.

It is hoped that more translations and studies, especially of his enormous body of hymns, will soon appear now that Gregory is gaining a wider profile within the universal church.

Chapter One

The Advent of Christianity in Armenia

The road leading to Khor Virap monastery runs south from the present-day Armenian capital of Yerevan toward the massive peaks of Mount Ararat. At the monastery, they appear to be within one's reach, even though their summits are several miles away on the other side of the closed border dividing Armenia and Turkey. The monastery is named for the deep pit or dungeon in which St. Gregory the Illuminator, the fourth-century patron saint and apostle to the Armenians, was imprisoned for over a decade. The pit is still there beneath a chapel, and pilgrims today can climb down a ladder into the depths of darkness below to Gregory's cell. Just as the new humanity represented by Noah's family is believed to have descended from these mountains to the plain below as the flood waters receded to recreate human life, so too Gregory the Illuminator ascended from the torment of the pit up to the very same plain to bring the light of Christ to the Armenian nation, baptizing the nation in the new and living water. Confined in the pit by order of the Armenian King Tiridates, Gregory was revealed to be the only salvation for the king ravaged by a disease that rendered him into the form of a wild beast.

Or so goes the account in the hagiography of St. Gregory, written by the shadowy figure named Agathangelos. If we relied only on the account found in the Armenian version of Agathangelos's history, we would suppose that there was no Christian presence in Armenia prior to the fourth century. But other narratives speak of a much older form of Armenian Christianity practiced privately and without official sanction, dating back to the missionary activity of two of Christ's apostles, Thaddeus and Bartholomew. Several Armenian chronicles and martyrologies relate Thaddeus's mission. According to these narratives, Thaddeus journeyed to Armenia from the kingdom of Edessa (present-day Şanlıurfa in Turkey) to the southern regions of Armenia after having converted the Edessan king Abgar. There he met with some success even among members of the royal family, when he converted Sandukht, the daughter of the Armenian king Sanatruk. Sandukht refused to apostasize even after her father had imprisoned her in an effort to persuade her to renounce her faith. In the end, she was put to death by order of the king and thus became the first recorded martyr of Armenia. Thaddeus himself is believed to have been killed several days later in Artaz (present-day Manku in northwestern Iran).

The existence of a significant Christian community in Armenia before the conversion of the royal family in the fourth century is supported by the testimony of the Christian historian Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260–339), who records the name of a mid-third-century bishop of Armenia, Merouzanēs, most likely a Greek rendering of the Armenian name Meruzhan. The need for a bishop implies a sizable Christian community in Armenia at this time. All indications are that this early presence of Christianity emanated from the south, particularly from Syria. Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

Accordingly, a strong Syriac influence characterizes the most ancient forms of Armenian Christianity not only in terms of language and culture but also theology and the practice of the faith. Among the most significant Syrian imports into Armenia were the ascetic monastics and hermits, whom we will encounter in the discussion of monasticism in chapter two. But the Syriac influence on Armenian Christianity extends to its literature, liturgy, and even church architecture. Syriac literature and theology would continue to inform the development of Armenian Christianity even after the earliest centuries of Christianity. The Armenian translation of the Bible was produced in two stages in the first half of the fifth century. The translators used both Greek and Syriac manuscripts, so the Syriac version of the Old Testament in particular had a profound effect on the Armenian version of the Bible. Beginning in the fifth century, Armenian scholars produced Armenian versions of Greek literature, but they also translated Syriac writings, ensuring that Armenian theology would also have a strong Syrian as well as Greek influence. In chapter nine our attention will focus on Gregory's Mariology and how Syriac writings, especially the Marian poetry of the great theologian St. Ephrem the Syrian (306–73), shaped the Virgin's portrayal in Gregory's own poetic compositions. The examples of Syriac influence include vestiges of a more ancient form of worship that shows continuity with Judaism. Syrian Christianity had a closer relation to Judaism than did Greek Christianity due to a shared Aramaic language and culture. Consequently, some of the Armenian borrowings from Syriac Christianity have conferred on the Armenian rite a closer relation to ancient Judaism. A conspicuous example is the altar curtain reminiscent of the curtain that conceals the holy of holies in the Jerusalem temple. In Byzantine-rite churches the iconostasis has taken the place of the curtain. Armenian churches, by contrast, tend to be marked by a relative paucity of icons.

While Syrian-oriented Christianity in Armenia existed independently of the Armenian political authorities—and was at least sometimes at odds with it—the Greek-oriented Christianity influenced mostly by the church in Cappadocia would gain the support of the Armenian royalty in a dramatic way. The Armenian royal family enjoyed a close relation with the Persian Empire, whose emperors were members of a branch of the same Arsacid family until the Persian Arsacids were overthrown in 226 CE by the Sassanian dynasty. Because of the suspicion and mistrust that developed between the Armenian Arsacids and the Persian Sasanids, the Armenian royalty began to turn more toward the West and look to the Roman Empire for political and military support. The Armenian shift toward the West, where Christianity was growing rapidly, and away from Iran and its ancient Zoroastrian religion would prove to be consequential. It is within the context of Armenia's westward turn that the most far-reaching event in Armenian history took place. The conversion and baptism of the king and the royal family would touch every aspect of Armenian culture—its art, literature, music, and architecture—and permanently alter Armenia's political relations with its neighbors.

According to Agathangelos, these tensions between the Armenian Arsacids and the Persian Sasanids formed the background to the eventual conversion of the Armenian king. The success of the Arsacid armies in their invasion and plundering of Persian territory enraged the Persian emperor, Artashir, who dispatched a Parthian nobleman named Anak to the Arsacid court on the pretext of aiding the Armenians. His true mission was to assassinate the Armenian king, whom Agathangelos names as Khosrov. Anak succeeded in killing Khosrov, who just before he died ordered his princes to execute Anak's family. Two of Anak's infant sons were saved by

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their nurses, one being sent to Persia and the other to Greek territory. Meanwhile Artashir had enslaved the Armenian royal family with the exception of the Armenian king's infant son Tiridates, who was furtively dispatched to Rome, where he was raised and received his education.

The son of Anak who had been removed to Greek territory—specifically Cappadocia, already an important early Christian center in central Anatolia—was named Gregory and his caretakers raised him as a Christian. When he had grown up, Gregory learned about his father's crime and decided to offer his services to Tiridates without revealing his identity. With Roman backing, Tiridates was restored to the throne of Armenia. Although Gregory served the king, his unwillingness to worship the pagan gods enraged Tiridates, who ordered Gregory to be tortured in an effort to force him to renounce his Christianity. Agathangelos provides detailed accounts of these tortures and Gregory's miraculous ability through prayer to withstand them and refuse to abandon his faith. In his commentary on the Song of Songs, Gregory of Narek refers to his namesake's prayers to God during his torment:

[T]he saints would have liked, had it been possible, to have died for him not once but ten thousand times; nay, daily, as they said in so many words. Thus, Saint Gregory said to Tiridates, “I have requested Him to make me endure it.” Likewise, in his prayers he begged God to make him endure it. Now since the desire of the just is acceptable to Him, He grants them endurance.

After one of the Arsacid princes revealed Gregory's true identity to Tiridates, the king commanded that the saint be confined in a deep dungeon in the city of Artashat, what is now the Khor Virap monastery. The length of Gregory's imprisonment varies depending on which version of Agathangelos's hagiography we read. The Greek version says his imprisonment lasted fourteen years, while the Armenian recensions say thirteen. There are also differing explanations of how Gregory managed to survive. According to one tradition, a pious Christian widow who lived in the castle of the dungeon threw down a loaf of bread for him every day.

Toward the end of Gregory's lengthy imprisonment, a convent of nuns residing in Rome fled the persecutions of Christians under the Roman Emperor Diocletian (r. 284–305). They reached Armenia where they were brought to Tiridates's attention. Tiridates was attracted to one of the nuns, Hripsimē, who resisted his advances and fled from the palace. Eventually she was captured along with her abbess, Gayanē, and their thirty-three companion nuns, all of whom were executed.

As a result of Tiridates's wickedness, the king was afflicted with a debilitating illness that transformed him into a “wallowing pig.” His doctors were unable to cure him, but his sister Khosrovidukht had a vision in which it was revealed to her that only Gregory, now long believed dead in the dungeon, could heal the king. Retrieved from his pit, his skin as black as coal, Gregory was brought to Tiridates, who begged for his forgiveness. Gregory proclaimed that only God could heal Tiridates, and then only if he confessed his sins, ended his persecution of Christians, and was baptized. After Tiridates's penance, Gregory proceeded to deliver homilies to the royal family to instruct them in the teachings of Christianity. Agathangelos includes in his history a text now called “The Teaching of St. Gregory” that purports to be the words of the saint's homilies, but it is most likely a later elaboration and development of Gregory's

teachings. Gregory of Narek knows these homilies and cites them several times in his interpretations of the Song of Songs. For example, in his commentary on [Song of Songs 8:5](#)—“Under an apple tree I will awaken you”—Gregory inserts a remark on apples drawn from these homilies: “The apple is a wholesome food, and very appealing to the sick, and very appropriate for kings, and through its diverse fragrances makes the palate of those who smell it sweet, as St. Gregory our Illuminator says.”

Tiridates remained ill through all this, and it was only when Gregory gave the martyred nuns a proper burial that he was fully healed. In a vision, Gregory saw a man in the form of light descend to the ground and strike the ground with a golden hammer. Interpreting the man of his vision to be Christ, Gregory built on that spot, in the city of Vagharshapat, a church that would be known as Ējmiatsin, or “the Only-Begotten One descended.” This was to become the cathedral that is today the see of the catholicos (chief bishop) of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Gregory also had built three chapels forming a triangle centered on Ējmiatsin at the locations of the nun’s martyrdom, one dedicated to St. Hripsimē, one for the abbess St. Gayanē, and one named Shoghakat’ (“drop of light”) for an anonymous nun who was discovered and executed apart from her sister nuns.

Now that the king was healed, he declared Christianity the official religion of the realm. He ordered Gregory to be ordained and to begin efforts to convert the people to the new faith. Gregory received his episcopal ordination from the bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, the see on which the Armenian Church would depend until it became autocephalous in 374. As an ordained bishop, Gregory was now able to consecrate the church buildings that had already been erected, and he began to destroy pagan temples and build churches in their place. Especially important for understanding Narek’s story is that this earlier Gregory also established monastic institutions throughout Armenia. He ended his life as a hermit in the caves near Mount Sepuh near the modern northeastern Turkish city of Erzincan, an area that would later become a major monastic center. He would come to be known as St. Gregory the Illuminator (*Lusaworich'*), for he brought the light of Christ to and baptized the Armenian nation. In order to avoid confusing him with Gregory of Narek, I will henceforth refer to him as the Illuminator.

Armenia’s official conversion is usually said to have taken place in 301, although it is impossible to be certain that this is the exact year. We can be confident that it occurred in the first decade of the fourth century and that it preceded the edict of Constantine that gave Christianity a special privilege among the religions of the Roman Empire. For this reason, Armenia is generally acknowledged to be the first Christian nation, a matter of pride and distinction for many Armenians today. Countless churches are dedicated to the Illuminator, and his relics are among the most venerated in the Armenian tradition. Visitors to the Vatican today will see a statue of the Illuminator in one of the external niches in the north façade of St. Peter’s Basilica, erected in 2005 and blessed by Pope St. John Paul II.

When the Illuminator withdrew from his office as catholicos, he entrusted the see to his son Aristakēs, establishing a precedent that would continue for several generations as his descendants occupied the patriarchal see. Aristakēs took part in the Council of Nicaea in 325, the first of the ecumenical councils that defined the orthodox faith. Although the royal family was Christian and the church in Armenia enjoyed their support and patronage, pre-Christian beliefs and rituals persisted among the people. The work of converting the people and

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suppressing those practices that were considered contrary to Christian doctrine continued to occupy the hierarchy of the church, notably during the pontificate of Catholicos Nersēs I (r. 353–73). Nersēs was the great-grandson of the Illuminator and is often called the Second Illuminator for his ambitious philanthropic program of building hospitals, monasteries, and inns throughout the country. Concerned by the plight of the poor, he welcomed to his home and dining table “the poor, the alien, and the stranger.” He built houses for the homeless so that they would not need to live and beg in the streets. He exhorted the wealthy to acts of charity and admonished them to be mindful that their “sins must be expiated through compassion and their iniquity through charity and gifts to the poor.” In these efforts to serve the people, he was inspired by and followed the lead of his mentor, the Cappadocian Father St. Basil of Caesarea (329–379), also renowned for his philanthropic endeavors.

Nersēs was murdered by the Armenian king Pap in 373. Their enmity was the result of Pap’s adherence to the teachings of Arius, an early fourth-century cleric who taught that the Son of God was a created being subordinate to the Father. The Council of Nicaea in 325 proclaimed that Father and Son are one in essence, and thus they are both uncreated eternal persons of the one God. The Nicene bishops declared Arius a heretic. But Arianism still had adherents after Nicaea, and the Armenian king was among them. Like his predecessors and his mentor Basil, Nersēs was a staunch defender of the Nicene doctrine. Nersēs had barred the king from entering any churches until he renounced Arianism. Provoked by Nersēs’s rebukes, the king invited the catholicos to a banquet under the pretext of requesting penance, but instead had him poisoned.

The Origins of Armenian Writing and Literature

Nersēs’s son Isaac (Armenian: *Sahak*) eventually succeeded him in 387, after a hiatus during which catholicoi unrelated to the family of the Illuminator occupied the patriarchal throne. That same year Armenia was partitioned between the Roman and Persian empires. The division of Armenia was a formidable impediment to the unity of the church, with Armenians in the Roman part of the country writing in Greek and those in the Persian sector using Syriac for their written language. Up until then, Armenian was strictly an oral language; there is no evidence of any written Armenian before the fifth century. Since the Bible was only available in Greek and Syriac, priests would have to give impromptu translations of the readings in their homilies. With this problem in mind, Isaac commissioned a monk named Mashtots’ to devise an alphabet suitable for the Armenian language.

An earlier attempt to invent an Armenian alphabet proved to be a failure. It was devised by a Syrian monk named Daniel, but the Syriac-based alphabet that Daniel used was not suitable for the unrelated Armenian language. The alphabet designed by Mashtots’, which contains thirty-six letters, was unique; while some of the letters vaguely resemble Greek characters, most do not look like the letters of any other writing system. The new alphabet came into use in the early fifth century. Almost immediately after its introduction, Isaac, Mashtots’, and their disciples began to translate the Bible into Armenian. The first version was deemed imperfect, and after some of the disciples brought back other manuscripts, a second, corrected version based on Greek and Syriac translations was produced. Besides translating the Bible, these

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fifth-century scholars produced liturgical texts. For the first time, the church could speak directly to the Armenian people in their language. For several centuries afterward, scholars belonging to what has more recently been called the “Hellenizing School” translated many Greek texts, both sacred and secular, into Armenian. Some of the works of Aristotle, as well as Neoplatonic commentaries on Aristotle, appeared in Armenian and became the basis of the philosophical curriculum of the monastic academies even as late as the eighteenth century. Armenian scholars translated patristic writings—including those of the Cappadocian Fathers, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus (known in the Armenian tradition, as in the Byzantine, simply as “the Theologian”), and those from the Syriac tradition. Gregory of Narek draws heavily on the Cappadocian fathers, especially in his commentary on the Song of Songs. In particular, he makes copious use of Gregory of Nyssa’s commentary on the Song but also frequently cites Gregory of Nazianzus too. Especially important for the scholars of Narek was the corpus of writings attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite. The Pseudo-Dionysian works, as they are now called, had a significant influence on ecclesiastical organization and practice. Gregory was familiar with these writings and bases various facets of his thought on them.

The new alphabet also advanced the Armenians’ sense of belonging to one nation, for although they were divided politically into Greek and Persian jurisdictions, they could communicate by writing in one language and also produce not only translations but original works of theology and literature. The alphabet enabled gifted authors like Gregory to develop a rich literature and forms of expression that both transformed the language and preserved it for later generations.

Armenia’s Isolation

During the remainder of the fifth century, two events isolated the Armenian church from much of the rest of the Christian world while also allowing it to develop its distinctive identity. One was a devastating war with Persia beginning in 451 that grew out of the aggressive policy of the Sassanian monarch to impose Zoroastrianism in Armenia. Earlier in the century, the Armenian satraps—the governors of the various provinces in Armenia, who were always resentful of the Armenian kings’ dominance—had persuaded the Persians to abolish the Armenian monarchy. The last Arsacid king of Armenia, Artaxias (or Artashēs) IV, was deposed in 428. Without a strong central government, the Armenians were now more vulnerable to Persian aggression. The Armenians’ faith posed a greater threat to the Persians now that the Roman Empire was also officially Christian too, and thus the Armenians living within the Persian Empire would have cause to align themselves with Rome and resist Persian rule. The Persians, with their enormous armed force and the aid of Armenian defectors, had the upper hand militarily, but the vehemence of the Armenian opposition caused the Persians to relent and allow the Armenians to practice the Christian faith without interference. The Persians also needed the support of the Armenians to defend the empire’s eastern borders from the incursions of the Huns. In 485, envoys of the Persian king Vagharsht met with the Armenian nobility to conclude a peace treaty that guaranteed the Armenians the right to practice the Christian faith.

The war with Persia drew the attention of the church hierarchy away from the fifth-century

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debates and controversies on Christian dogma. After the council of Nicaea, two other ecumenical councils took place, one in Constantinople in 381 that clarified the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and articulated the basic Trinitarian doctrine of the orthodox church that is represented in what is now called the Nicene Creed. The fifth-century debates focused not on the Trinity but on the person of Christ. Disagreements about Christology—the branch of theology that studies who Christ is and how his divinity and humanity relate to each other—would tear the church apart. In 431 an ecumenical council held in Ephesus defined Christ in a way that was acceptable to most Christians but not to those who followed the teachings of the patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius (ca. 386–450). Nestorius's Christology seemed to imply the existence of two persons in Christ: the divine Word of God and a human, Jesus. The relation of these two persons was a very close association rather than a perfect union. Those who preferred Nestorius's Christology broke off from the church and established a distinct hierarchy. At the same time, Christians who accepted the christological definition approved at Ephesus considered the Nestorians to be heretics. Along with the christological debate that was, at least in most Christians' eyes, settled at Ephesus, there was a closely related question about the status of Mary. Could we say of Mary, as some hymns already did, that she is the Mother or Bearer of God? The Greek word for this title of Mary is *theotokos*. There were obvious problems with saying that the mortal human Mary gave birth to the eternal Word of God rather than just the human Jesus. The bishops assembled at Ephesus, led by the Alexandrian patriarch St. Cyril of Alexandria (ca. 375–444), affirmed the union of the divine and human in the one person of Christ. It followed that whatever one can say of Christ's humanity can equally be applied to the incarnate Word. If Mary is the mother of Jesus the human being, she is also the mother of the Word of God. Any attempt to distinguish between the human and the divine in Christ drives a wedge between the two and thus subverts the oneness of Christ's person. The Armenian church had accepted the conclusions of all three of these councils: Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesus. But then, in order to repair the schism with the Nestorians and to resolve some questions that emerged from Ephesus, another council was convened without Armenian participation, this time in Chalcedon, near Constantinople, in 451. This was the same year that the Armenian war with the Persians began and so no Armenian bishops were present at Chalcedon. This council issued a new christological formula, one that the Armenian church would formally reject about a century later. I devote the next section to the specifics of the theological debate and the reasons for the Armenian church's rejection of Chalcedon. It will suffice here to note that the rejection of Chalcedon led to schism with most other churches, in particular with the sees of Rome and Constantinople. Numerous attempts during the following centuries to enact a compromise and reunite the churches failed. The Armenian church never again accepted an ecumenical council and essentially went its own way theologically, though it remained in communion with the non-Chalcedonian churches that emerged with their separate hierarchies in Syria and Egypt. Yet there were still many Chalcedonians in Armenia, including bishops. And many more bishops, priests, and monks fell under suspicion of accepting Chalcedon. Such accusations were made not only against Gregory, who may have been charged with heresy late in his life, but also his father, Khosrov, a bishop of a diocese adjoining the province in which the monastery of Narek was located, and perhaps Anania of Narek, the founding abbot of the monastery. In the cases of Gregory and Khosrov

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(and probably also Anania), the allegations against them were that they were covert Chalcedonians. These accusations were almost certainly unfounded, but that they were made at all indicates that the level of vehemence and outrage surrounding Chalcedon and the attendant christological conflicts had not abated even after five centuries.

As the Persian threat to Armenia waned, another nation would come to dominate Armenia politically and also influence its culture. Beginning in the middle of the seventh century, the Arabic-speaking people began to expand rapidly and were able very quickly to alter the political dynamics of the entire Mediterranean world. The Arabs succeeded in defeating the Persians at the battle of Qadisiyya in 636 and soon after that conquered Syria, Mesopotamia, and Egypt. Uniting them was not only their language and culture but also the adoption by many Arabs of the new faith of Islam, the religion that would come to dominate the region and reduce the Christian population in much of the Middle East to the status of a minority. Armenia also endured the invasions of Arab armies and came under the domination of Arab governors. While in some cases Arab rule was tolerant, the Arab governors of Armenia could also be very harsh. The first governor, Muḥammad ibn Marwān, the brother of the Umayyad caliph who appointed him, and his successor ‘Abdullah are remembered in Armenian sources as especially cruel rulers. The tenth-century catholicos and historian John (Yovhannēs) of Draskhanakert calls the latter a “wicked, insolent man, extremely malicious by nature, who tortured the princes and nobles with bonds and plundered the property and possessions of the people.” Ibn Marwān imprisoned the Armenian catholicos, Isaac (Sahak) III, and sent him into exile in Damascus. Arab rule often imposed burdensome taxes on the Armenians, and the nobility suffered torture and executions or forced apostasy at the hands of Arab rulers. At other times, though, Arab rule was less oppressive than Byzantine rule, which could be heavy-handed in its treatment of non-Chalcedonians. For the Muslim Arabs such fine christological distinctions were not of much consequence. An Arab source, the ninth-century historian al-Balādhuri records the agreement between an Arab general and the capital Armenian city of Duin that pledged to honor the lives, possessions, and houses of worship of the Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians living there. It is not known if the general actually honored the agreement, but the fact that the Armenian church could convene councils without the interference of the Arab rulers, as occurred twice during the pontificate of John of Ōdzun (Ōdznets’i; r. 717–28), indicates the church at least during some decades was free to function autonomously.

Although at first the Arab domination was primarily a military occupation and did not bring with it significant civilian Arab settlements on Armenian lands, beginning in the ninth century several Arab emirates were established in Armenia. Some of the Arab emirs married into Armenian noble families and even converted to Christianity. The Arab population tended to center around the urban centers, with the Armenians mainly residing in rural areas. The Arab presence also had a lasting effect on Armenian culture. By the time of the invasions, Arabs had already created a rich tradition of both oral and written poetry that utilized techniques, such as end rhyme, that were previously unknown in Armenia. The Qur'an was composed in verse, and Armenians would have heard its recitation now that there was an Islamic presence in their country. Impressed as well by the captivating cadences of Arabic folk poetry and music, Armenians began to appropriate the styles of their new neighbors into their own oral poetry. The resulting cultural fusion would be momentous for Gregory's own poetic creations. He is the

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first Armenian writer of poetry, whether secular or sacred, to use rhyme and to attempt to conform his literary poetic style to the folk poetry of his time. His achievement is all the more notable given that his genre was sacred poetry, which tends to be more conservative and less open to adopting folk styles than secular poetry. Certainly, the poetry of the psalms was foremost in Gregory's mind, so he had an exquisite sacred poetry to draw from within his own tradition and scripture. The psalmist makes use of many of the poetic devices that Gregory exploits, including alliteration and assonance. But rhyme, which Gregory uses in some of the prayers of the *Book of Lamentation*, is not found in the psalter.

Gregory's immediate aim in writing poetry that resembled the inflections of Armenian oral poetry, now refashioned through contact with Arabic models, was to heighten its popular appeal in the same way that religious music does by mimicking the melodies and rhythms of its contemporary secular music. In this way, the Arabic influence on Gregory's poetics is indirect, mediated through Arabic-influenced Armenian folk culture. But we cannot discount direct contact with Arabic poetry and its methods. One is tempted even to consider the intriguing possibility that Gregory had the Qur'an in mind when composing his poetry. Besides the poetic commonalities, there are other similarities too. For example, almost every prayer of the *Book of Lamentation* begins with the same refrain just as each *surah*, or chapter, of the Qur'an begins "In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful." The influence of the Qur'an and Islamic religious poetry on Gregory cannot be ruled out. We know that his near contemporary, the nobleman and prodigious scholar Gregory Magistros Pahlawuni (ca. 990–1058), produced a concise rhymed narrative of biblical events in response to a Muslim interlocutor who had boasted of the superiority of the Qur'an to the Bible because it was written entirely in verse. In composing the first extant work of completely rhymed Armenian poetry, Gregory Magistros consciously followed Arabic models, even noting that he used the Arabic *qâfiyah* rhyme scheme. Gregory of Narek may not have been directly motivated to write his poetry by a polemical Islamic argument for the divine inspiration of the Qur'an, as Gregory Magistros was. But he may still have consciously desired to keep up with the latest developments in sacred poetics by composing a new book of poems that would provide a Christian alternative to the Qur'an's novel and enticing lyricism.

Gregory may have welcomed the introduction of Arabic poetry and music into his country but his attitude toward Islam was not as amiable. He makes few direct references to Islam, but when he does mention the religion he connects it with Christian heresies like Nestorianism. For example, in the commentary on the Song of Songs he equates the doctrines of the "Mohammedans" (*Mahmetakats'n*) to the thoughts of the "vile Nestorius." This attitude toward Islam as equivalent to Christian heresy—based on Gregory's conflation of the Islamic belief that Christ, though a prophet, is merely a man and not the Son of God, with what he takes to be Nestorius's denial of Christ's divinity—is in basic agreement with the assessment of St. John of Damascus (ca. 676–749). The Damascene, one of the earliest Christian witnesses to the burgeoning faith, suggested that Muhammad fell under the influence of an Arian monk.

Restoration of Autonomy

By the middle of the ninth century the Arab hold over Armenia had weakened. Two of the

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noble houses of Armenia began to enjoy greater autonomy. In the north, the Bagratuni family emerged as the dominant political force. In 862 the Arab caliph confirmed Ashot Bagratuni as “prince of princes” of Armenia. A few years later, around 884, the Byzantine emperor recognized Ashot as the legitimate ruler in Armenia and bestowed on him the crown. Ashot thus became the first recognized king of Armenia since the demise of the Arsacid dynasty. Meanwhile, in the southern regions of Armenia around Lake Van, another noble family, the Artsruni, began to consolidate their power. With the support of one of the Muslim emirs, an Artsruni prince named Gagik declared himself king of his realm, Vaspurakan. By offering these privileges and distinctions to the rival families, the Byzantine and Arab rulers were, of course, playing a tactical game against each other as they attempted to gain the favor and military support of the Armenian nobility.

As rival royal houses, the Artsruni and Bagratuni made grandiose claims about their pedigree to bolster their standing. The Bagratids boasted of their descent from King David while the Artsruni recognized the Assyrian king Sennacherib as their ancestor. They both also took great interest in the affairs of the church, and for a time the residence of the catholicos—who was considered the bishop of the Armenian royal family since the time of Tiridates—shifted back and forth between Bagratuni and Artsruni lands. Both houses also spent lavishly to build formidable palaces and churches. The pride of the Bagratuni was their capital city of Ani, today a desolate field dotted with the ruins of churches on the Turkish side of the Akhurian river that forms the border with Armenia, but once a vast metropolis. The centerpiece of Artsruni architectural achievement was the island of Aght’amar in Lake Van. There, Gagik built his palace and a uniquely magnificent palatine Cathedral of the Holy Cross. Since Narek is located on the southern shore of Lake Van in the Vaspurakan realms under Artsruni dominion and not far from Aght’amar, I will begin the next chapter by focusing on the kingdom of Vaspurakan and in particular the Artsrunis’s patronage of the church and then turn to the theological background of Gregory’s work.

Chapter Two

The Political and Theological Background

The Kingdom of Vaspurakan

As the two new Armenian royal families obtained some measure of sovereignty over their lands, Armenia began to experience a cultural renaissance, one in which the church would take a leading role. New monasteries and churches were established, but in addition to this flourishing of material culture, Armenia also experienced a spiritual renaissance born from a sense that the Christian faith needed to penetrate more deeply into the daily lives of the faithful in order to sustain the new church structures and monastic institutions.

The Artsruni family played a central role as patrons of this renaissance. They charged their resident historian, a priest named Thomas (T'ovma) Artsruni, with the task of glorifying the family's ancestry not only by tying the rulers of Vaspurakan to ancient Assyrian kings but also by affirming a bond with the earliest Christians in Armenia. A prince of their house named Khuran is said to have been baptized at the hands of the apostle Thaddeus himself. According to Thomas, it was the first Arsacid king of Armenia who conferred on the Artsruni family the lands of Vaspurakan. The king also granted them the right to display an eagle on their coat of arms. From then on, they would be called the *Artsruni* (supposedly meaning "bearers of the eagle," from Armenian *artsiw*, "eagle"). Displaying the valiance of eagles, the Artsruni, Thomas impresses on us, bravely resisted even under extreme torture and threat of death any assault on their freedom and their faith. Thomas cites the examples of the princes Gregory and Koriwn Artsruni, who on refusing to pay a ransom to the Ummayyad caliphate were tortured and crucified. The Arab governor of Armenia, Khouzayma, who served under the Abbasid caliph al-Hadi (r. 785–86), angered by the presence of the three Artsruni brothers—Hamazasp, Isaac (Sahak), and Meruzhan—had them imprisoned for three years, after which he demanded on pain of death that they convert to Islam. Although Meruzhan pretended to convert, his brothers were tortured, beaten, and decapitated. While being tortured, Sahak prayed to God in silence but his soul was shaken by interior sobs. Even crueler acts of brutality were committed under the caliph Moutawakki (r. 847–861). These narratives of the tortures and martyrdom of the members of the Artsruni family were meant to show that their faith was no superficial pretense but a deep devotion that extended back for generations to the apostolic age and for which the family paid dearly with its own blood.

Despite this history of violent encounters with Arab governors, it was an Arab emir who granted Gagik Artsruni the coveted royal crown. The Bagratid monarch, Ashot I, had already been presented with the crown by the caliph as well as the Byzantine emperor. Gagik desired the same dignity, and the emir of Azerbaijan, Yoûsoûf, wishing to counterbalance the growing Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

power of the Bagratid kingdom that posed a threat to him, was more than willing to oblige. Yoûsoûf sent Gagik the royal crown in 908 and the erstwhile prince now reigned as the king of Vaspurakan.

Gagik distinguished himself as a formidable builder. He had an impressive system of underground water pipes built between the cities of Varag and Van and also constructed palaces, fortresses, and banquet halls throughout his realm. But his architectural projects on the island of Aght'amar (located about four kilometers off the southern shore of Lake Van) were his most memorable achievements. Aght'amar, with its serene beauty, attracted Gagik, who was also impressed by its strategic advantage as an island in a large sea that would afford refuge from invasions. He established there a city that his chronicler described as containing many parks and gardens. Having made ramparts with imposing towers to protect his island city and a port to allow for access from the mainland, he began the construction of his luxurious palace and beside it a palatine cathedral, the Church of the Holy Sign (*Nshan*) or Cross. The work on the church was assigned to a noted architect named Manuel who worked on the project from 915 to 921. According to the continuator of Thomas Artsruni's history, after Gagik had demolished a fortress of the Arab Zurarid tribe, he had the stones of the fortress transported to the island "over the waves of the lake" to form from them a "temple of glory in place of the impure houses of idolatry." The cathedral is distinguished by the ornate bas-reliefs on the external walls and the murals on the interior. The church also contained in its southern apse a loggia with a balustrade reserved for the royal family. There was direct access from the palace to the loggia, so that the king would have a private "oratory where he could commune with God completely apart from men."

The bas-reliefs that cover the exterior walls include depictions of Old Testament figures: Adam and Eve in the garden, Abraham's binding of Isaac, Moses receiving the tablets on Mount Sinai, David and Goliath, Daniel in the lion's den, the three youths tortured in the furnace, and the prophet Jonah cast into the mouth of a sea-monster. While these are well-known biblical themes, at least some of them resonate with the environment and history of Vaspurakan. The three youths in the furnace, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were victims of King Nebuchadnezzar. Do they not call to mind the plight of the three Artsruni princes, Sahak, Meruzhan, and Hamazasp, tortured together by the Arab governor Khouzayma? And while the sea-monster that swallows Jonah has the scales and body of a fish, its head looks more like that of an ox. Is it a representation of the sea-monsters known as *vishap* that were believed to inhabit the waters of Lake Van? Prehistoric carvings in the shape of the *vishap* monster appear on stones along the banks of the lake. They may have served as charms to ward off the monsters. Was the bizarre sea-monster carved into the wall of the cathedral a tribute to these ancient steles, a marvelous blend of pre-Christian Armenian and biblical lore?

Not only do biblical vignettes adorn the exterior, but there are also more direct references to the royal dynasty. Depicted in the center of the west façade is the king himself donating a model of his cathedral to Christ. Portraits of both real and fabulous animals are found on every wall. Among the existing animals are wild animals, such as a lion, deer, eagle, and pelican, and domesticated animals like camels and sheep. The mythical creatures include a siren and griffin. The artists may have used the ancient Greek bestiary known as the *Physiologus*, a work that existed in Armenian translation and was frequently consulted by medieval Armenian authors.

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The *Physiologus* contains descriptions and allegorical interpretations of many of the beasts that appear on the walls of the cathedral.

Another distinctive feature of the cathedral are the murals on the internal walls. There are very few Armenian churches whose walls are completely covered with paintings. In its current state after years of neglect the frescoes are in poor condition and only some are discernible. On the drum are portrayals of the fall of Adam and Eve. Also depicted are the creation of Adam, Eve's creation from Adam's side, Adam's naming of the animals, and the expulsion from paradise. There are paintings of the life of Christ: the annunciation, visitation of Elizabeth, the nativity, the flight into Egypt, Christ before Pilate, and the crucifixion. The images of the twelve apostles encircle the apse of the main altar.

In describing Gagik's patronage and support of the church we would be remiss not to include his consort, Queen Mlk'ē, who was actively involved in her family's sponsorship and direction of the construction on Aght'amar and monuments elsewhere. Her name today is mainly remembered from the Queen Mlk'ē Gospel, a masterpiece of medieval art containing brilliant illuminated miniatures, produced in the 860s and in the possession of the royal family until the queen donated it to the monastery of Varag.

For two decades (927–47), the catholicos of all Armenians resided at Aght'amar, a matter of prestige for the Artsruni, since the catholicos was regarded as the bishop of the Armenian king and moved with the royal retinue. Three of these catholicoi were members of the noble Rshtunik' family, vassals to the Artsruni at this time and whose estate was located in the territory south of Lake Van that also included Narek. In 947 the seat moved back to Bagratid territory, to Argina near Ani. The return of the see to the Bagratuni kingdom would be a sore point for the Artsruni and soured relations between the catholicos and the Vaspurakan rulers.

In addition to his churches, Gagik must have given considerable support to the establishment of monasteries. Among these new foundations were Narekavank' (the monastery of Narek) and farther to the south, Aparank'. These new monasteries were part of the king's program of revitalizing Christianity in his realm. They served as centers of learning and worship, and the monks formed there would subsequently educate and elevate the spiritual lives of the faithful by preaching in the churches of the surrounding towns and villages.

Gagik's reign lasted until his death in 943, when he was succeeded by his son Derenik-Ashot. The reign of the Artsruni in Vaspurakan ended in 1021, when Senek'erim-John (r. 1003–21) relinquished the throne under Byzantine and Seljuk pressure and moved to Cilicia, where emperor Basil II granted him an estate. A vestige of Artsruni rule over the church remained in the guise of the catholicate of Aght'amar, established in 1113 and at first schismatic but later subordinate to the catholicate of all Armenians. The catholicate's jurisdiction was limited primarily to the dioceses located in the former kingdom of Vaspurakan.

Although the cathedral has remained in poor condition since its abandonment after the 1915 Genocide, the Turkish government authorized renovation in 2007, though its official status is as a museum rather than a house of worship. Today the cathedral is a popular tourist destination and, for many, a place of pilgrimage. In 2010 the Turkish government permitted a divine liturgy that was celebrated by the interim Armenian patriarch of Constantinople with the attendance of many Armenians as well as members of the diplomatic corps and local government officials. The government has pledged to allow the celebration of liturgy there

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once every year since. Gagik's cathedral remains today an imposing yet forlorn monument of a vibrant Christian culture that has almost entirely vanished from the region.

The Theological Background

"Who do people say that I am?" Jesus posed this question to his apostles in the gospels. The disciples gave different answers until Jesus asked who they thought he was. In the telling of [Matthew 16:16](#), Peter answers for them: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Questions about Christ's nature did not end there with Peter's response. The successors of the apostles, the bishops of the church, would continue to wrestle over the implications of confessing Jesus as the Son of God. The controversies surrounding the correct way to understand how Jesus can be both God and man would threaten the stability of the church and shatter its unity. The Armenian church would establish its distinct identity as a separate communion as a result of its rejection of the doctrine of Christ propounded in middle of the fifth century and adopted by the majority of the world's Christians. Knowing the reasons behind this disagreement is essential for understanding not only the theological doctrines of the Armenian church but also many of the events and controversies surrounding the monastery of Narek. This section of the chapter provides a brief overview of those doctrines and their development in order to appreciate the theological context of Gregory's work.

It would not be inaccurate to summarize the history of the dogmatic theology of the Armenian church as a history of a struggle against dualism. The earliest surviving original theological treatise by an Armenian, the *De deo* or "On God" of Eznik, bishop of Koghb, is mostly an attempt to refute a variety of dualistic religions and philosophies thought to pose a threat to the orthodox teachings of Christianity. Dualism manifests itself in two forms. There is a cosmic version in which the universe is divided into two forces or principles that are in unrelenting struggle against each other. One of these is the good principle, often associated with light. In its Zoroastrian guise, the principle is represented by the deity Ahura Mazda (hence Zoroastrianism is sometimes referred to as Mazdaism). Its countervailing evil force is Ahriman or Angra Mainyu. Likewise, in Manicheanism, another religion founded by an Iranian, there are two principles, neither of which created the other. Some of the Greek philosophies are dualistic, too, most notably Platonism at least in some of its forms.

The second kind of dualism is anthropological, a dualism of the human person: humans are a compound of two elements, a good soul and an evil body that is the source of sin and wickedness. Plato, for example, sometimes speaks of matter, and thus the human body, as inherently evil while he claims that the soul is inherently divine. The life of the philosopher, according to Plato, is aimed at overcoming the burdens of the body and distancing the soul from its corporeal prison. Such a life eschews material pleasures and resembles in many ways that of a Christian ascetic. And yet there are important differences in the way that Platonic and Christian asceticism think about the body and its moral status. Although orthodox Christianity affirms a cosmic duality of the Creator and his creation and a personal duality of soul and body, it rejects the existence of two uncreated beings. God is the creator of all beings, including Satan and the fallen angels, who are by nature good but through their free will chose to reject God. Likewise, through the free choice of the first humans, humanity fell from its ideal state in Eden.

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In contrast to Plato's claim that the body is inherently evil, orthodox Christian theology recognizes the inherent goodness of the body and the physical realm, both of which are created by God and into which God enters in the incarnation.

But there have always been persistent dualist currents among Christians. These dualist influences were especially strong in Armenia because of its proximity to Iran and its dualist religions. But the attractions of dualism existed throughout the Christian world. That is the reason why some Christians in the earliest centuries rejected the belief that Jesus had a real body and instead argued that he only appeared to be incarnate. These Christians are sometimes called Gnostics, but the term that specifically refers to the heretical teaching that denies that Jesus had a body is Docetism (from the Greek *dokeō*, "to seem"), for Jesus only seemed to have a body. Sometimes his body is called a *phantasm* (from the Greek *phantasma*, "apparition, phantom"), as it was supposed to be ethereal and ghostlike, unlike our solid and impermeable flesh.

There is an understandable logic underlying the Docetists' teachings. If, as Christians proclaim, Jesus Christ is the Son of God, then he must appear to the world in a manner befitting God. God would dress himself not in our disgraced and demeaning clothing of flesh but in finery appropriate to his glory. Those who consider the body to be inherently wicked must diminish or deny Christ's humanity in order to preserve and uphold his divinity. Yet in orthodox—that is, non-Docetist—Christianity, Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human and thus possesses a body that is like ours. His complete humanity is essential to his role as the bridge or mediator between God and humans. In the striking proclamation of St. Athanasius of Alexandria (ca. 296–373), "God became man so that man may become God." Athansius's statement of the purpose of the incarnation may seem blasphemous with its bold claim that humans are capable of becoming God. But it is the most direct and blunt statement of the doctrine of the Greek word *theosis*, sometimes translated as "divinization" or "deification," an idea that expresses the essence of the Eastern Christian understanding of the incarnation's purpose and the true end of all human existence. Without appreciating the centrality of *theosis* in Eastern Christian theology, we will understand neither the theology of the Armenian church nor Gregory's thought. Nor will we begin to comprehend why the debates on the nature of Christ were often so vitriolic, even to the point of producing inveterate schisms and, in some cases, acts of violence among the partisans of the different theological outlooks.

Today we may look back at the polemics and animosity and wonder why the theologians were so animated by these questions concerning Christ's divinity and humanity. These disputes seem so arcane, with little direct connection to the practice of faith. Yet we should not dismiss these seemingly academic theological concerns without first asking why they were so salient to the early church and why they occupied the attention of the leading theologians of the fifth century. In trying to answer these questions, we will learn not only about the ancient Christians but also about ourselves and how much we may differ from them in our assumptions about Christianity. In viewing these theologians and disputants charitably, we do not imply that they are without fault. Many of the main figures in these debates were impetuous and unfair when presenting their opponent's arguments. But we will not understand them properly if we do not make an effort to meet them on their own ground.

One thing should be clear: for the early theologians, these questions about Christ were

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never merely academic debates. The questions are intimately connected to the practice of the faith and even to the vital issue of what a human being is and should be. For if Christ is the perfect human, by studying Christology we also study humanity in its most ideal and pristine form. And if one truly believes that the goal of all human life is *theosis*, then any teaching that denies that humans can unite or come to be one with God will be a barrier to the life that God intends for us and which alone can deliver supreme happiness. Anyone who has an intense desire to achieve some goal and yet reads only books that imply that this goal is unattainable will end up frustrated and disappointed. Eventually, they will abandon their pursuit. The early Christians who considered *theosis* to be the ultimate end of existence thus viewed as pernicious any Christology that implied the impossibility of genuine union with God. If Christ is divine but does not perfectly share our humanity, then a rift opens up between him and humanity that obstructs complete reconciliation with God. Conversely, there is a danger that by making Christ too human, we diminish his divinity. If, like us, he hungers and thirsts, and experiences fear and grief, in what sense is he still the almighty God who is beyond all human weakness and infirmity?

Among the most strident participants in the debates concerning Christology were the monks and ascetics. They devoted their lives entirely to the project of *theosis*. Their occupation was to come to know God and become one with him. That is why the early Desert Fathers retreated to the desert away from the distractions and disturbances of the cities and secular life. Just as astronomers build their observatories away from the artificial lights of populated areas and retreat to darkness in order to see the stars more clearly, so too the ascetics withdrew into the wilderness in order to see God better and develop a relation with him. The sole aim of their exertion was *theosis*, and thus they needed a theory that undergirded and justified their practice.

After having worked through problems about the Trinity and the relation of the three persons of God at the councils of Nicaea and Constantinople, attention turned more immediately to questions of Christology at the third ecumenical council held in Ephesus in 431. Since Christ is one person who is both divine and human, he must possess the qualities of both. Like us, Jesus had a body made of flesh and blood, but since he is also God, unlike us, he did not sin. The problem is that many human attributes are incompatible with the properties of God. God is everywhere, but humans are limited by their bodies and can only be in one place at a time. God knows everything, but humans are severely restricted in our knowledge. God is immortal, but all humans die. How can Christ, being fully God and perfect human, be both omniscient and ignorant, omnipresent and yet confined to a particular body that entered the world in Bethlehem, a person who is at the same time immortal and mortal? Perhaps Christ is really composed of two distinct elements: a divine Christ who is immortal and omnipotent, and a human Christ who is mortal and limited in power.

It is easy to see why this approach to Christology would raise objections. The Christ composed of both a divine and human element seems to imply the existence of two persons: a human Jesus and a divine Christ—two persons, not one. If there are two separate persons who simply appear to us as one, then the unity of humanity and divinity is illusory and masks a discontinuity that is never repaired. In essence, the chasm that separates us from God continues to exist within Christ and he becomes an ineffective mediator between humans and

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their creator.

Something like this two-person view of Christ was suggested by Nestorius, the archbishop of Constantinople from 428 until his deposition and exile in 431. The fathers at Ephesus had rejected the Christology attributed to him there. Ephesus's leading theologian was St. Cyril, the patriarch of Alexandria, who preferred to speak of Christ as the "one nature (*mia physis*) of the incarnate Word of God," emphasizing the perfect unity of the divine and human in the one person of Christ, without any chasm or division. We can appreciate why Cyril, who represented the concerns of many of the desert monks of Egypt, objected to a doctrine that would, from the monks' perspective, forestall their longing for a full union of God and humans through the one indivisible nature of Christ. But problems remained. There were serious questions about the logical coherence of Cyril's formula and whether by being so tightly bound to God, Christ's human attributes would be swallowed up or obliterated by his divinity. In that case, one could no longer speak of Christ as truly human in any form that resembled our humanity. As well, in the wake of Ephesus, the first lasting schism in the church occurred, with the so-called Nestorian Christians forming a separate church no longer in communion with the other churches that had accepted the doctrines proclaimed at Ephesus.

In an attempt to clarify some of the problems posed by the Christology of Ephesus and to mend the breach with the anti-Ephesian churches, another council was convened in 451 at Chalcedon. The bishops at Chalcedon agreed that Christ had two natures, human and divine, and that although these two natures form one person, they are not mixed or confused into one nature but maintain their identity in a union "without confusion or change, indivisibly and inseparably." The first two adjectives were meant to prevent an extreme one-nature view that minimized or denied Christ's humanity in the manner of the Docetists. The latter two adjectives emphasized that the two natures were joined together in a union that was so tight that there was no gap between Christ's person that would block God's encounter with humanity. The indivisibility of the union of the two natures was intended to allay the suspicions of the adherents of Cyril's one-nature Christology that the christological definition of Chalcedon conceded too much to the Nestorians and could be interpreted as supporting a two-person Christology.

Chalcedon was an admirable attempt at compromise, but it was a failure in the sense that it did not restore communion with the church that separated after Ephesus but instead brought about another lasting schism. That separated communion, now known as the Church of the East, still did not accept the doctrine of Ephesus and, at the same time, many of the bishops of Egypt and Syria who considered Ephesus to be the last word on Christology deemed Chalcedon an unacceptable deviation from Cyril's one-nature Christology. The Coptic Church of Egypt and the Syriac Orthodox Church, together with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Eritrean Orthodox Church, and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India are the modern descendants of these non-Chalcedonian bishops and hierarchs, and these churches—usually called Oriental Orthodox to distinguish them from the Chalcedonian Eastern Orthodox churches—each have their own distinct hierarchies and rites separate from each other (though they remain in full communion with their sister Oriental Orthodox churches).

The Armenian bishops were not closely involved in the christological disputes centering around Chalcedon. As we have seen, Christianity in Armenia was facing its gravest crisis since

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becoming the established faith of the country. Given the Sassanian monarchy's pursuit of a vigorous policy imposing its state religion, Zoroastrianism, the Armenian nobility and bishop were preoccupied with defending their faith. Thus, the Armenian church did not take an official stand on Chalcedon for many decades.

But the church would eventually have to make a decision on which christological course to follow. There were, as there would continue to be, adherents of both the Chalcedonian and the non-Chalcedonian position in Armenia and in the neighboring countries of Georgia and Caucasian Albania. Only at the First Council of Duin, held in 506 and later confirmed at the Second Council of Duin in 551, did the Armenian bishops together with their Georgian and Caucasian Albanian counterparts formally reject the christological definition of Chalcedon and affirm Cyril's one-nature formula as the best expression of the orthodox teaching about Christ.

If we go back to the original context that connects these christological debates with the practice of *theosis*, we can begin to understand the objections to Chalcedon. For most supporters of Cyrillian christology, which above all else focuses on the "oneness" of Christ in his divinity and humanity, any talk of two natures in Christ entailed an unacceptable imposition of a barrier or boundary that separates humanity from God. Only by speaking of the oneness of Christ in his humanity and divinity could one do justice to the firmness and immediacy of the Word's embrace of our human flesh. This extremely close relation of what were once two distinct natures into one nature is difficult to express and perhaps even harder to comprehend. Perhaps the best way is through images and metaphor. Gregory gives one such figure in Prayer 93 of the *Book of Lamentation*. This particular prayer is about the holy oil (*muron*) used in sacramental anointing. Describing the wick that will be placed in the oil lamp and lit, he writes:

You wove and fashioned the wick,
A figure of the union of your impassible nature
Intertwined with our own,
Knit together and constructed
Out of your love of humanity, ...
So that we may be illuminated with the flame of faith.

This image of the wick that is woven together describes Christ's union in terms of the art of weaving, a craft that for a medieval audience would be familiar. Gregory uses the wick to illustrate how tightly bound the connection of Christ's humanity and his divinity is. Unless one looks very carefully at the wick, it looks like one uniform piece. Examined more closely, however, one makes out threads braided so tightly that it becomes difficult to distinguish one from another. That is how snug and taut the union of Christ's humanity and divinity is. No earthly image can do justice to this union, but Gregory's metaphor comes very close to representing the one-nature conception of the incarnation that would come to be characteristic of orthodox Armenian Christology. Also important is Gregory's description of the union as impassible or incapable of suffering, indicating that the Word's divine impassibility is united with our passible flesh to produce a paradoxical "impassable suffering," a characteristic feature of Cyrillian Christology.

Recently the term *miaphysitism* ("one-naturism") has been adopted to distinguish the non-Chalcedonian doctrine of the Oriental Orthodox from the heretical doctrine of

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monophysitism (“sole-naturism”) as well as the Chalcedonian *dyophysitism* (“two-naturism”). Monophysitism is the belief that Christ has *solely* or *only* one nature, which would comprehend the heretical Docetist position that denies full humanity to Christ, as well as the views attributed to Euthyches, an early fifth-century priest who supposedly stated that Christ’s humanity “dissolved like a drop of honey in the sea.” That doctrine is not the same as the miaphysite position, according to which the incarnation unites Christ’s divine and human natures into *one* nature, a position that all but the most recalcitrant Chalcedonians can recognize as orthodox. The position adopted by the Armenian church at the Dvin councils and shared with the other Oriental Orthodox churches is this *one-nature* Christology of miaphysitism. By contrast, the doctrine of Chalcedon is a *two-nature* Christology, or dyophysitism. The *two-person* doctrine, sometimes associated with Nestorius and his followers, is a heresy in the eyes of the Chalcedonians and the miaphysites, but some of the Armenian miaphysites did not recognize any difference between dyophysitism and Nestorianism. As I will try to show, Gregory does distinguish between these two doctrines and considers the Chalcedonian dyophysite position to be within the sphere of orthodoxy even while affirming the Armenian miaphysite Christology in his writings.

The Julianist Controversy

One of the best known and most moving works of religious art is Michelangelo’s Pietà, a sculpture that today rests behind glass in St. Peter’s Basilica. It depicts the Virgin Mary holding in her lap the body of Christ taken down from the cross. Its intent is to instill in us compassion and pity, but in studying it more carefully, we notice its anomalies. The body of Christ does not look like the body of a man who has suffered the excruciating pain of the cross after brutal torture and scourging. There are few, if any, signs of his passion. The body looks serene and ideal. It is not Christ’s body that evokes pity, but Mary, the *mater dolorosa*, the sorrowful mother grieving for her son. The viewer experiences Christ’s suffering mediated through the Virgin, her heart having been pierced.

Contrast the Pietà with a painting of the crucifixion by Michelangelo’s contemporary, the German painter Matthias Grünewald (ca. 1470–1528), in the *Isenheim Altarpiece*. The altarpiece was made for the monastery of St. Anthony in Isenheim, known for its care of people suffering from the plague. Compared with the idealized body of the Pietà, Christ’s body in Grünewald’s portrayal is harrowing: his flesh appears putrid, blood flows from the wound on his side, his fingers are rigid and contorted by the ravage of death. The body of Christ here is grotesque; there is no beauty or serenity. Most significantly, we can make out sores on his body that resemble those of the patients at the monastic hospital. Mary is off to the side, fainting into the arms of John, but the focus of one’s pity is not on her, as with the Pietà, but on the agony exhibited in Christ’s body. The intended effect on the patients is the realization that Christ shares their suffering. The Son of God endures the very same pain and anguish that they experience. Likewise, the caregivers at the monastery would be reminded to see Christ in their patients.

Some would say that Grünewald’s depiction is more realistic. His depiction is a more accurate portrayal of the body of a tortured and crucified man. But whether Michelangelo’s or

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Grünewald's depiction is more realistic depends upon what background beliefs we bring to their art. If we believe that Christ is God, we may suppose him incapable of suffering in the way that mere humans are. The body of Christ would not look not like a normal crucified human body because Jesus is not merely human. Given this assumption we may expect the crucified Christ to look like the idealized form of Michelangelo's sculpture and not the gruesome image in Grünewald's altarpiece.

Rather than asking which portrayal is more realistic, one may instead ask what effect the depictions have on the viewer. Both are masterful works of art that have a profound affective force. But one might say that Michelangelo's Jesus is remote. The pristine corpse of the Pietà is not the body of a man who has shared fully in our suffering. There is a distance between his experience of the cross and ours. On the other hand, the body of Christ on the altarpiece is all too familiar for the patients of the monastery. It is their body too, bearing the same wounds as theirs. Assuming that they do not turn away in revulsion, the patients in St. Anthony's monastery would see themselves in Christ's body. The distance that the Pietà creates is crossed, and the observers of the altarpiece come closer to Christ, comforted in the knowledge that God shares their torment.

Disputes about what Christ's crucified body looked like are not new. They were part of a controversy that emerged in the sixth century in connection with the question of whether Christ's body was corruptible. The principal interlocutors were not Armenian, but because the debate was first conducted by their fellow miaphysite theologians, Armenian theologians closely followed this mainly intramural dispute among adherents of the one-nature Christology. As with the broader christological debate connected with Chalcedon, here too the issues were not strictly theoretical but had implications for the efficacy of *theosis*. For if the body of Christ is incorruptible, like the Christ of the Pietà, then genuine union with Christ becomes impossible. He does not meet us directly in our suffering but keeps his distance from the full range of human misery. Yet if Christ suffers exactly as we do, can he still be God, a being immune to hardship and adversity? If we seek to unite ourselves to Christ, are we just uniting ourselves with another human being, perhaps more virtuous than we but nevertheless a mortal and not the almighty God? "What He has not assumed He has not healed" wrote Nazianzen in his letter against Apollinaris, a third-century bishop who denied that Christ possessed a human intellect or rational soul. Nazianzen elaborates:

If only half of Adam fell, then that which Christ assumed and saved may be half also; but if his whole nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of the Begotten One and thus saved as a whole.

If Christ does not suffer as we suffer, can we in our afflictions truly be healed? And if he is not also God but a man, why do we need him to heal us? Can we not then heal ourselves?

These questions arose subsequent to the christological debates about the relation of the divine and the human in Christ. In particular, the debate focused on whether Christ's body was corruptible (given to the deterioration characteristic of the human body) and passable (capable of suffering the passions such as hunger, thirst, pain, grief, and fear). This subordinate controversy is not as widely studied or written about as the central debates surrounding Chalcedon in part because most of the relevant extant documents are written in Syriac, not

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Greek. The controversy over Christ's suffering began with Julian of Halicarnassus, an early sixth-century bishop of Halicarnassus (now Bodrum in Turkey). Very little of Julian's writings has survived and that which does is presented in a distorted form in the works of his opponent, Severus, patriarch of Antioch from 512 to 518, a gifted champion of miaphysitism. The groundbreaking work of the Belgian scholar and priest René Draguet (1896–1980) has provided a more accurate perspective of the disagreement between Julian and Severus. Julian proposed to Severus that Christ assumed the body of Adam before the Fall, and thus his body was incorruptible in the way human bodies were before the expulsion from paradise. Julian held that Jesus, unlike the rest of humans born after the fall, did not have a body corruptible and passable by nature because his virgin birth exempted him from the transmission of original sin. Julian agreed with the Augustinian theory that Adam's sin is transmitted to his descendants through sexual desire. Consequently, Jesus' body was immune from the effects of Adam's disobedience.

Nevertheless, Julian did acknowledge that Jesus suffered the nonculpable passions of hunger and thirst through an act of will rather than because his body was naturally given to such deprivations. But there could be in Christ no passions entailing some deficiency, emotions like fear or despair which only those without the virtue of hope and benefit of omniscience would experience. Even in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, Christ knew that he would soon rise and triumph over death. For Julian, passages in the gospels that represent Jesus in agony and despair must be interpreted differently or rejected as inauthentic.

Although Julian hoped to convince Severus that his teachings on Christ's body were correct and cohered with their shared miaphysite Christology, Severus harshly rejected Julian's views. Severus considered Julian's doctrine to be a form of Docetism called *aphthartodocetism* (from the Greek *aphthartos*, "incorruptible"). Severus's objection was that by insisting that Christ's body was free by nature of corruption and suffering, Julian had turned Christ's body into something very much unlike ours and more like the body depicted by Michelangelo, one that does not seem to bear any of the effects of torture and execution. The incorruptible body of Christ may have the appearance of our flesh, but in fact it is very different from the ordinary human body. And if the Word did not assume our flesh, how can our afflicted body be healed? Julian's doctrines, if accepted, would push miaphysite Christology, whose orthodoxy Severus steadfastly defended, in the direction of a monophysite teaching that both supporters and opponents of Chalcedon recognized as heretical.

In opposition to Julian's teachings, Severus affirmed that Christ assumed Adam's fallen body. He argued that since the prelapsarian bodies of Adam and Eve were only free of corruption through God's grace, the fall did not result in a change in the nature of human flesh but rather a withdrawal of that grace. Likewise, the assumed flesh of the incarnation is by nature corruptible and it is only after the resurrection that Christ's body acquires incorruptibility. The body remains corruptible prior to the resurrection and is not dissolved into the Word's divinity.

Although Severus resisted Julian's doctrine with its aphthartodocetic implications, Julianism persisted. Its adherents were especially vocal in Armenia. Its most prominent advocate in Armenia was the controversial and charismatic cleric John (Yovhannēs) Mayragomets'i (seventh century). Because he had a large and loyal following, his writings have survived and thus give us

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direct insight into the thoughts of an Armenian Julianist rather than as represented through the distorted lens of an anti-Julianist. Of particular concern to Julianists like Mayragomets'i were any gospel verses that implied Christ's suffering and agony. One of the most striking of these verses is the pericope that describes Christ's bloody sweat in Gethsemane. The only occurrence of this pericope is [Luke 22:43–44](#). In the agony in the garden before his betrayal and arrest, Jesus' "sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground." This unusual phenomenon is a sign of extreme distress that would seem clearly to counter the Julianists' belief that Christ did not experience anguish and despair. The pericope occurs in some early manuscripts of Luke but not in others, so it is a matter of debate among biblical scholars whether it was an anti-Docetist addition to the original text or a genuine verse in Luke that was suppressed by Docetists. Mayragomets'i is understandably insistent that the pericope is extraneous, dismissing the verse in part on the basis of the impossibility of sweating blood.

Julianism may have also affected the liturgical practices of the Armenian church, in particular the use of unleavened bread and wine unmixed with water in the Eucharist. Like the Latin rite but in contrast to most of the other Eastern rites, the Armenian church consecrates unleavened bread for communion. Unique to the Armenian rite is the unmixed chalice. Since leavened bread spoils more quickly than unleavened, the absence of yeast in the host may signify the incorruptibility of Christ's body. So too the unadulterated wine offered for consecration may be read as symbolic of Christ's unblemished flesh. But here we need to be careful since liturgical symbols, like other "texts," are ambiguous and opponents will often interpret deviant practices in malicious and unfounded ways. The Armenian use of unleavened bread became a point of contention with the Byzantine church. But the Armenian practice most likely predates the Julianist controversy and may represent the sinlessness of Christ rather than the incorruptibility of his body, symbolism that is based on Jesus' admonition in [Matthew 16:11](#) to beware the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The existence of a substantial faction of Julianists in the Armenian church caused tension with the Syrian miaphysites, who remained faithful to the teachings of their revered patriarch Severus. The Armenian catholicos John of Ōdzun convened the Council of Manazkert in 726 with the participation of miaphysite Syrian bishops to reconcile the Armenian and Syriac churches on the Julianist controversy. The council rejected both the Julianist and Severian positions and traced a middle position that combined elements of both extremes to define what would become the orthodox Armenian position. Jesus is free of all sin but, in contrast to the stance of an extreme Julianist like Mayragomets'i, the body that he assumes is passable. At the incarnation, and not the resurrection (as Severus held), his body becomes impassable. Nevertheless, through an act of his will, Christ accepts in his body all the sufferings and afflictions of humanity apart from sin. Because he is almighty, Christ does not have to suffer; because he is love, he freely chooses as an act of grace toward humanity to share our afflictions even to the very depths of human despair.

Let us turn our attention back to the two artworks described at the beginning of this section in order to get a better sense of the implications of the Julianist controversy on Armenian spirituality. If John Mayragomets'i were asked his preference, he would choose the serene and beautiful body of the crucified Christ free of any signs of suffering and distress. Michelangelo's work befits the majesty of the divine Christ. His opponents would be more drawn to the

Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

tormented and mutilated body of Grünewald's altarpiece. While Mayragomets'i would regard Grünewald's depiction to be an affront to Christ's divinity, John of Ōdzun and the bishops of Manazkert would see in the altarpiece's depiction God emptying himself willingly to be like us and joining us in our suffering. Christ is the suffering servant who not only participates in but also relieves our misery. By bearing our tormented flesh, he is able to heal it and lift it up to God.

Although a residual Julianism informed Armenian theology well after the Council of Manazkert, Gregory and the scholars of Narekavank', as I will later show in chapter eight, explicitly rejected any theology that compromised the real humanity of Christ. We need a human Christ who lives and suffers with us to give us a connection with God. Just as the patients of the hospital of St. Anthony's monastery could see their lesions in the body of Christ, so too we can see there the marks of our wounds. A remote and distant God hinders a full engagement with a Christ who touches the heart of the faithful. Any theological doctrine that minimizes Christ's full humanity makes it more difficult for us to connect with the divine and prevents us from feeling Christ's solidarity with our suffering. And since among the primary missions of the monastery of Narek was to instill in the faithful a more profoundly emotional and personal piety, insistence on and attention to Christ's real suffering in all its intensity became a cardinal feature of their program of spiritual reform and revival.

The T'ondrakean Movement

Heresy is usually defined as a false teaching or doctrine contrary to the official creeds of the church. But it may be more helpful to think of heresies not as falsehoods but as partial truths, or at least ideas that emerge from a fixation on just some of the truths professed by the church. Such was the case with the Arian heresy that focused on Christ's humanity to the detriment of his divinity. Conversely, in their attempt to uphold Christ's divinity, Docetists negate the belief that his humanity fully shares our corporeal nature.

As early as the sixth century, a heretical movement known as Paulicianism had gained favor among various segments of the Armenian population. By the middle of the eighth century, the Paulicians had become a formidable religious and political force within the Byzantine Empire. Like the iconoclasts, the Paulicians rejected the use of images in worship, but they went beyond them in also rejecting monasticism and the sacraments, including the Eucharist and ordination. They thus also rejected the legitimacy of the hierarchy of the church. The Byzantine Empire conducted a harsh campaign to suppress the Paulicians, exiling many of them to the Balkans, where they may have had a role in the development of the Bogomil heresy in Bulgaria and even in the emergence of Catharism in southern France. According to some scholars, all of these heretical groups rooted their opposition to the sacraments and the church in a form of dualism and its concomitant christological doctrine of Docetism. There is however some disagreement about the philosophical underpinnings of the Paulicians' beliefs. Garsoian argues that the earliest Armenian Paulicians were not dualists but only adopted dualism when they came into contact with Byzantine iconoclasts. Others believe the movement was from its outset a continuation of Manicheanism or the Christian Marcionite heresy that rejected the Old Testament and much of the New Testament in the belief that the God of the Old Testament

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was a wicked and vindictive deity distinct from the loving God who sent Christ to save humanity.

One of the problems in settling these questions is that in most cases the writings of heretical movements are lost, usually because they were suppressed or destroyed by the church. The one exception in the case of the Armenian heretics is a manual known as the *Key of Truth*, a document discovered and seized by Armenian church authorities in the nineteenth century during an inquisition of suspected heretics in Akhaltsike in present-day Georgia. The origins of this book are mysterious, but some have argued that it was written by a Paulician in the middle of the ninth century. The work advocates an adoptionist view of Christ in which Jesus was not born the Son of God but adopted by God at his baptism. Rather than rejecting the sacrament of baptism, the unknown author demands that baptisms be performed only after the candidate has reached the age of maturity.

While the Byzantine and Armenian authorities ruthlessly suppressed the Paulicians, a heresy that shared some of the same doctrines emerged in Armenia during the ninth century. The new heretics were known as the T'ondrakeans, probably after the town of T'ondrak, then within the jurisdiction of one of the Arab emirates where they had settled after being expelled from territory under Armenian control. The exact relation between the Paulicians and the T'ondrakeans is also a matter of debate, but the sources, which include an admonitory letter written by Gregory to a monastery that had apparently been infiltrated by pro-T'ondrakean monks, indicate that the heretics adhered to antisacramental and antiecclesial views very similar to those attributed to the Paulicians. According to Gregory's letter, these doctrines included rejection of the sacraments of baptism, the Eucharist, and marriage as well as a refusal to venerate material objects such as the image of the cross.

The leader of the T'ondrakeans was a man named Smbat of Zahrehawan. He apparently attracted a wide following, especially among the more economically and socially disadvantaged classes in Armenia. His charisma was strong enough to keep his movement alive even after an Arab emir executed him when Smbat claimed to be the messiah sometime in the middle of the ninth century. The movement continued to pose a serious threat to the authority of the Armenian church during Gregory's lifetime. As we will see, in addition to his anti-T'ondrakean letter, many of Gregory's other writings are at least in part directed against the teachings of this heresy. There are hints in the introduction to his commentary on the Song of Songs that concerns about T'ondrakean influence were behind an Artsruni prince's commissioning of the work. The prince may have desired Gregory to instruct the faithful in the orthodox doctrine of marriage in opposition to the alleged T'ondrakean rejection of marriage as a sacred bond instituted by God. According to the anti-T'ondrakean writings, the heretics believed that mutual love between spouses in the absence of ecclesial approbation sufficed to validate the marital bond.

Although the T'ondrakean movement may have begun as a popular lay organization among the poor and peasants alienated by the excesses of the nobility and the church, members of all classes, even the clergy, came to be associated with the heresy. The movement was probably part of a more general dissident trend in Armenian society that comprised a diverse range of beliefs. Some of the dissenters may have rejected the Eucharist completely, but others, like the bishop Jacob of Hark', Gregory's contemporary and another highly charismatic religious leader,

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accepted the validity of the Eucharist but insisted that the sacrament be given sparingly, at most three times per year. He also thought that mere participation in the sacrament of confession did not suffice by itself for admission to the Eucharist. With regard to penance, Jacob may have been reacting to the formulaic and mechanical approach to confession that prevailed in the tenth century and, as we will see, was also a matter of concern for the monks of Narek. Jacob also attacked the Armenian practice of *matagh*, in which an animal is ceremonially slaughtered in front of churches as an act of penance or petition to God. *Matagh* is still practiced in Armenia and the diaspora today, but Jacob, like others both within and outside the Armenian church, criticized the practice as a relic of pagan sacrifice.

Even though Jacob was critical of the church, his views do not conform exactly to the beliefs attributed to the T'ondrakeans as described in the sources written by their opponents. Nevertheless, there does seem to be some connection between Jacob's followers and the T'ondrakeans, however loose or informal it may have been. It is perhaps best to see the late ninth and early tenth century as a time of intellectual and spiritual ferment in Armenia, a consequence of the abatement of the calcifying effects of foreign occupation that limited the freedom of the church and the people. The medieval historians mention many intriguing figures who heralded a new asceticism and popular spirituality among the people. The tenth-century chronicler Stephen of Tarawn in his *Universal History* lists such names as Basilios the Elder, Stephen the Spiritual, and David the Lover of Poverty and Frugality. With them Stephen also names the two founding monks of Narekavank'—Peter "the authoritative interpreter of holy scripture" and Anania "the great philosopher"—indicating that the establishment of Narekavank' was one of several movements unsettling the church establishment at this time. The monastery of Narek enjoyed a longer life and greater influence on the church in part because it respected and affirmed the traditional teachings and practices of the church while also calling for moderate reforms that would bring it closer to the people. Many of these other reforming or dissident leaders are remembered today if at all only as obscure names in medieval manuscripts. In contrast, the monastery of Narek would make a profound imprint on the subsequent course of Armenian Christianity, thanks mainly to the efforts and accomplishments of its greatest monk. But before we turn to Gregory and his monastery, it will be helpful to consider in greater detail the development of monasticism in Armenia.

Monasticism in Armenia

Just as Armenian Christianity in general was shaped by two major influences, the Greek influence from the west (especially Cappadocia) and the Syrian influence from the south, so too was Armenian monasticism formed from these currents. The Syrian form of monasticism entered Armenia earlier, perhaps from the very beginnings of the ascetic movement that flowered in Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and elsewhere. When Christianity became the official faith in Armenia and the favored religion in the Roman Empire, devout Christians no longer had the opportunity to prove their faith through martyrdom. Taking its place for those eager to demonstrate their commitment was the trial of retreating into the desert or mountains and living the harsh life of a solitary monk. For others, though, the reason for withdrawing into the wilderness was simply to escape the temptations of urban life.

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Unlike the later established monastic communities like Narekavank', these ascetic monks lived mostly solitary lives often in caves or other natural shelters where they practiced severe forms of deprivation in order to extinguish their worldly passions and come closer to God. Several early Armenian chronicles—the *Buzandaran*, for example, a fifth-century chronicle that provides a detailed account of events in Armenia from the later Arsacid period to Armenia's partition between Iran and the Byzantine Empire in the middle of the fourth century—depict the lives of Syrian anchorites like Shaghitay, noted for his diet of grass, his many miracles, and for living with wild animals. The way of life of these Syrian ascetics was itself shaped by the stories told about the legendary Desert Fathers of Egypt, accounts of whose lives circulated throughout the Christian world and were preserved in written form in many manuscripts. These Desert Fathers developed reputations as spiritual masters who sometimes had to hide from the many admirers and pilgrims who sought them out. They cultivated lives of self-control and incessant prayer. Arsenius, a Roman who retreated into the Egyptian desert toward the end of the fourth century, was noted for his prayer regimen:

They said that on Saturday evening Arsenius used to turn his back to the setting sun and stretch out his hands toward heaven and pray until, at dawn on Sunday, the rising sun lit up his face, and then he sat down again.

Their spiritual exercises, which involved compunction (the careful examination of conscience), were designed to develop in them a profound humility, selflessness, and an unwillingness to judge others:

Macarius was once returning to his cell from the marsh carrying palm leaves. The devil met him by the way, with a sickle, and wanted to run him through with it but he could not. The devil said, "Macarius, I suffer a lot of violence from you, for I can't overcome you. For whatever you do, I do also. If you fast, I eat nothing; if you keep watch, I get no sleep. There is only one quality in which you surpass me." Macarius said to him, "What is that?" The devil answered, "Your humility; that is why I cannot prevail against you."

...

Evagrius said, "To go against oneself is the beginning of salvation."

...

A brother sinned and the presbyter [elder] ordered him to go out of church. But Bessarion got up and went out with him, saying, "I, too, am a sinner."

These hermits are usually called Desert Fathers, but that description neglects the existence of a significant number of women ascetics, most famously St. Mary of Egypt (ca. 344–421), and many other Desert Mothers who lived as solitaries and whose sayings and deeds exist beside those of the Fathers. While the lives of these austere ascetics is of great interest in their own right, they are especially relevant for our study because, even though Gregory was primarily a cenobite rather than a hermit, meaning that he lived in an organized community with other monks in permanent buildings, he often withdrew in solitude to a cave overlooking Lake Van. The solitary life modeled on the early desert ascetics had a profound effect on the course of Armenian monasticism for many centuries, and we will see how many of the features of the eremitic life, as the way of the hermit is called, influenced the practice of monasticism both at Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

Narekavank' and the other monasteries of Armenia.

The *Buzandaran* records the names and deeds of several of these early fourth-century hermits of Armenia. One of these is Daniel, a Syrian bishop and missionary. The author of the *Buzandaran* claims that Daniel was a disciple of the Illuminator, but Nina Garsoian considers this a later gloss on the text intended to associate asceticism in Armenia with the established church in the northern parts of the country. Renowned for his miracles, Daniel lived in isolation "in uninhabited mountains, though he was never unmindful of care for the needs of mankind. He had only a single garment of skins and wore sandals; his food was the roots of plants, and he had no occasion for a staff." Daniel, who bore the title *chorepiskopos*, a kind of minor bishop with jurisdiction primarily in rural regions, appeared to have numerous anchorites as disciples, two of them named in the *Buzandaran*. One was the Syrian Shaghitay, mentioned earlier, while his fellow hermit Epiphanius (*Epip'an*), described as a rather severe though charismatic leader, was Greek. The prevalence of Syrian and other non-Armenian names among the early hermits indicates that eremitism in Armenia was, at least in its origins and earliest periods, mainly a foreign and especially Syrian phenomenon that functioned apart from the ecclesial hierarchy. Brought up from an early age in the desert, Shaghitay is said to have eaten herbs or grass with the "desert-dwelling anchorites." Supposedly, Shaghitay surrounded himself with lions. One anecdote recounts his healing of a lion with a wounded paw, a story familiar from the lives of other early saints. Epiphanius is also depicted as a wonder-worker who, as in the popular lore surrounding St. Patrick in Ireland, drove away the snakes and other reptiles (the text specifies that they were adders, asps, and basilisks) upon his arrival on an island in Byzantine territory with his five hundred disciples. The *Buzandaran* reports that before leaving Armenia for the land of the Greeks he enacted "righteous regulations" for the ascetic communities he established in the land of Cop'k' (known to the Byzantines as Sophanēnē), evidence that his presence in Armenia made a lasting impression on monastic practice.

But this profound eremitic strain in Armenian monasticism was not just the result of the influence of Syrian hermits residing in Armenia. Many of the earliest hermits whose lives are recorded were themselves Armenian. In *Spiritual Meadow*, a book in which John Moschus (ca. 550–619) describes his travels to the monastic centers throughout the Eastern Mediterranean world, the author mentions a certain Sergius the Armenian, a disciple of his namesake, Sergius the Anchorite, both active in the vicinity of the Dead Sea. Other references to Armenian monks in the Judean desert are found in Theodoret of Cyrus (ca. 393–458), who mentions a certain Euthymius (377–473), an Armenian whose monastic establishment provided lodging for Armenian pilgrims. This early activity of Armenian monks and pilgrims in the Holy Land was the beginning of the Armenian presence in Jerusalem, which continues to this day in the form of the Armenian patriarchate and monastery in its own quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. That Armenian monks were to be found there and elsewhere beyond the borders of their country testifies to the impression the Syrian monks made on Armenians, many of whom were inspired to abandon their native country to tread the same ground as Christ and his disciples.

Eremitism was not isolated to southern Armenia but appears to have spread throughout the country. The practice in western Armenia was no doubt a more Greek-inflected, Cappadocian asceticism esteemed by the highest levels of church leadership, as evinced by the withdrawal of the Illuminator to a secluded cave after he relinquished his see, and that of his son Aristakēs,

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who according to Agathangelos lived in “the desert in his own hermitage” before his ordination as bishop and subsequent occupation of the patriarchal see as his father’s successor. And just as there were women ascetics in the Holy Land and Egyptian desert, so too there were female anchorites in Armenia. An especially notable example is the gifted hymnographer Sahakdukht of Siwnik’, who lived in the early eighth century. She resided in a cave in the canyon of Garni near the current Armenian capital of Yerevan. The thirteenth-century bishop and chronicler of Siwnik’, Stephen Ōrbēlean reports that Sahakdukht would teach students while seated behind a curtain. The words of three of her hymns survive. But for the women religious, as in the case of their male counterparts, it was communal monasticism that prevailed over eremitism as convents began to flourish throughout Armenia.

Cenobitism came to dominate mainly due to the difficulty of sustaining the eremitic life, which has no organized structure and often operates outside of direct authority and without support of the church hierarchy. But there are reports of hermits in Armenia just prior to and during Gregory’s life. Around 923, John of Draskhanakert, the Armenian catholicos, wrote about his pilgrimage to the place of the Illuminator’s retreat where a large group of hermits conglomerated at the foot of Mount Sepuh, a sacred site because it was believed to house the remains of the Illuminator. They had neither a spiritual leader nor any monastic buildings but lived separately in the rocky cavities of the mountain “dressed in hair-shirts, praying with continual groans and imploring supplications.” The hermits individually provided for their own material welfare “through the sweat of toilsome work.” The only thing that seems to have brought them together in this place was its renown as the retreat of the Illuminator after his retirement as catholicos and the place where his relics were first interred.

While eremitic monasticism spread from the south into the other parts of Armenia, cenobitic forms of monasticism, in which the monks lived in close proximity to each other and met regularly for communal prayer and meals, gradually came to dominate throughout the country. This cenobitic monasticism was based on the monastic teachings of Eustathius (300–377), a friend of St. Basil of Caesarea. Because of Eustathius’s association with Basil, the so-called Rule of St. Basil, which was translated into Armenian at the end of the fifth century, became the inspiration for the organization and daily life of most of the monasteries in Armenia. In contrast to the rule of St. Benedict of Nursia (ca. 480–543), which guided monastic discipline in the West, the “Rule” of St. Basil, which is in fact a compilation of responses to questions on the religious life, was less rigid and comprehensive. For example, Basil’s rule does not contain any details about how the monks take their communal meals, while Benedict’s rule devotes a chapter to this topic and even specifies who is to wash the utensils and towels. The Basilian rule also does not specify a course of studies for the monks. It leaves to the discretion of the abbot or superior to set the proper course of studies. As a result, the monasteries in Armenia enjoyed a great degree of freedom, and the abbot or abbess of each individual community was free to experiment and implement their own plans.

In surveying the extent and diversity of the forms of monasticism present in Armenia, one gets the impression that the country was a crucible into which were mixed various monastic influences from other lands, especially from the Desert Fathers of Syria, Egypt, and the Holy Land, and the communal monasticism of Cappadocia and the Pontus. From them were forged a distinctive form of religious life. But even though a kind of monastic syncretism formed in

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Armenia, the different elements that composed it are still detectable. Even in its most organized form of communal living, Armenian monasticism never lost its original flavor of desert asceticism. We sense this especially in the spirituality of Narekavank'. Not only did monks like Gregory occasionally live as hermits, but more generally the peculiar ethos of desert monasticism infused their daily lives.

Thus it seems cenobitic and eremitic lives coexisted within the same monastery and were alternatively practiced even by the same individual, if Gregory's periodic retreats from his monastery are instances of a more widespread practice. Mahé notes that in the thirteenth century, Mkhitar, the abbot of Ayrivank' (more commonly known as Geghardavank' or "monastery of the spear," so named because it housed a relic of the holy lance used to pierce Christ's side), without leaving his monastery's enclosure, locked himself in a cell where he continued to practice in solitary the daily office but otherwise separated himself from the communal affairs of his monastery.

Even such matters as where the monks slept is unclear. The Armenian text of the Basilian rule does not provide any information. Nor does the architecture of the medieval monasteries provide much help. There do not seem to be anything resembling dormitories until the later Middle Ages. The monks at Mount Sepuh and Ayrivank' no doubt slept in artificial grottoes surrounding the monastery. In other monasteries, monks may have slept in the *gawit'* (corresponding to the narthex of a church, a courtyard that was often in open air but beginning in the eleventh century would have had a roof). A monk would repose in an *ankoghin*, often translated as "bed" but more likely something like a sleeping bag or a set of blankets unfolded for the night and stored during the day in boxes. There does not seem to have been anything resembling a modern fixed bed. Monks could have slept in different places from one night to the next, based on weather and other circumstances. We do not find any refectories until the thirteenth century, so even the details about where and when the monks ate is open to speculation.

Unlike in the West, there were no distinct monastic orders such as the Benedictines or Carthusians that had monasteries in various locations. Each monastery functioned independently of the others, although as monks from one monastery left to establish another institution they may have taken with them some of the ethos of their former house or maintained a sense of kinship with their former brother monks. An example of this amity between monasteries is exemplified in Gregory's encomium concerning the monastery of Aparank', which was founded several years after Narekavank'. This encomium, discussed in chapter four, narrates the monastery's establishment and the story of how it received its illustrious reliquary, a gift from the Byzantine emperors.

Another important feature of Armenian monasticism is the proximity of many of the monasteries to cities and towns. Because the cenobitic monks in Armenia generally lived near secular communities, they remained in contact with the world, preaching in the churches in towns and villages near their monasteries, and also engaging in commerce with the people. Perhaps due to this proximity between the religious and secular, there was never any need for movements like the mendicant orders such as the Dominicans and Franciscans, who eschewed monastic life for an itinerant life of preaching and service in the world. In a sense, the monks in Armenia were already serving as preachers, and at least in some of the monasteries, monks

were expected to serve their neighboring communities.

As in other parts of Christendom, the Armenian monasteries became the main centers of learning and the transmission of the literary heritage, both secular and sacred, and some could be considered nascent universities, most notably the eastern monasteries of Gladzor and Tat'ew. The latter was home to the prolific scholar and theologian Gregory of Tat'ew (1346–1410), who composed the *Book of Questions* (*Girk' hartsants*), a kind of theological *summa* reminiscent of the style of St. Thomas Aquinas. Narekavank' itself, as we will see, had a lofty reputation for learning and scholarship from its very founding.

The general impression left by the Armenian monastery complexes in the early Middle Ages is that of a haphazard juxtaposition of churches and other buildings constructed at different times and conditioned by the designs of the abbot at the time as well as the availability of donors. The autonomy granted to each monastery and even to the individual monastics by this loose form of Basilian rule meant that the Armenian cenobitic tradition continued to be permeated by a spirit of earlier ascetic and anchoritic traditions. This spirit of eremitism is especially visible in the monasticism of Narekavank' and, more specifically, in Gregory's spirituality. The circumstances and the ethos of the monastery of Narek and its school are the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Three

The Monastery and School of Narek

The Monastery of Narek

Gregory's monastery was founded about a decade before his birth during the height of the renaissance of Armenian monasticism and spirituality that followed the recovery of political autonomy in the latter half of the ninth century. It was named for the town of Narek, located about five kilometers from the southern shore of Lake Van and in the principality of Rshunik', which by this time was under the jurisdiction of Vaspurakan and its Artsruni princes. Its founding was most likely supported financially by the Artsruni family, especially its monarch Gagik I, who had a strong interest in reviving the church and the monastic institutions within its realm. The Artsruni may have heard of the reputation of a monk named Anania who had been active in two monasteries of Bagratid, Armenia. A relative of the Artsruni, a learned patrician by the name of Khosrov Andzewats'i, whose wife was Anania's cousin, perhaps recommended Anania as a suitable abbot for the proposed new monastery at Narek. Anania together with his brother monk Peter, a noted biblical scholar, settled there and began the work of building the institution.

One might suppose that after Gregory's death around 1003 and the abdication of the last Artsruni king in 1021, Narekavank' would have entered a state of decline, especially after having lost its royal patronage. But the manuscript tradition reflects continued activity even into the later Middle Ages. The art historian Thomas F. Matthews reports the discovery of a couple of pages of an illuminated vellum codex with an inscription indicating the manuscript was produced at Narekavank' in 1181. This was a century after the Seljuk invasions that, coupled with Byzantine pressure on the Armenian nobility to evacuate their lands and move westward away from the frontier, brought to an end Artsruni rule over Vaspurakan. Matthews notes the artist's borrowing of Islamic themes: the dedicatory prayer written in Armenian imitates the foliate Arabic script found in contemporary manuscripts of the Qur'an. There are also a number of folios of a book produced at Narekavank' in the fifteenth century depicting Christ's miracles. The illuminations reveal the influence of the prevailing political situation at the time, with Christ wearing the fur cap of a Mongol prince while at the wedding at Cana. These and other surviving manuscripts show that Narekavank' maintained an active scriptorium many centuries after its founding.

Anyone visiting Narek today (it is in the district of Gevaş, in southeastern Turkey's Van province) will find little if anything above ground that remains of the monastic complex. Starting in the 1960s, Jean-Michel and Nicole Thierry, both of them physicians and art historians, made numerous expeditions to historic Armenian lands to observe and study the Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

state of the monuments. They noted in 1989 that almost nothing of the monastery of Narek remains. The Thierrys describe the buildings that made up the monastery based on written accounts from the nineteenth century. At that time, the monastery consisted of two churches: the church dedicated to St. Sandukht, the princess-martyr of the first generation of Armenian Christianity, and the smaller church of the Mother of God adjoining its south wall. The former, which dates to the beginnings of the monastery, was a triconch cross-in-square while the layout of the latter included a domed nave. Gregory's mausoleum, covered by a small domed drum, was connected through a vestibule to the northern apse of the church of St. Sandukht. The tomb that was erected in 1867 had a stele with an inscription. The large *gawit'* or narthex served both churches. Relics of St. Thomas and St. James of Nisibis were housed there along with the graves of Anania and John, Gregory's brother. The churches were built at about the same time as the monastery's founding, but substantial renovations were made in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A bell tower built in 1812 stood in front of the narthex. The complex also included auxiliary buildings along the courtyard wall that housed a school and rooms for monks and pilgrims, though it is not certain when these were built. Abandoned during the 1915 Genocide, the monastery was completely destroyed in 1951.

The School of Narek

Gregory's achievements are unique, but they emerged against the backdrop of a vibrant intellectual and spiritual life fostered by his abbot, Anania. As the impressive body of work produced by the late scholar Hrach'ya T'amrazyan has demonstrated, one can speak of a veritable school of Narek that comprised not only Gregory and his abbot and mentor but also the cofounder of the monastery, Peter, whose exegetical works unfortunately have not survived. Though never a member of the monastery, Gregory's father, Khosrov, had a great interest in and surely contributed to the community's formation. Among Gregory's peers, there is of course his brother, John, who assisted in the compilation of the *Book of Lamentation*, and Ukht'anēs, also a student of Anania and the author of several historical works. As a result of T'amrazyan's scholarship we no longer have to treat Gregory as an isolated figure but can better understand the intellectual and spiritual milieu from which he emerged.

Though we should not forget that the school of Narek consisted of many talented figures, some no doubt unknown to us, in theology, music, biblical studies, or any of the other arts studied there, our interest here is in Gregory and the major influences in his life and on his work. Thus we will focus on the two men who had the greatest effect on his development. These are Khosrov, his father by birth, and Anania, his spiritual father and master. The large and interesting body of work that we have from them will help us to understand better Gregory's formation and the context in which he wrote.

Gregory's Father: Khosrov Andzewats'i

After his wife's death, Khosrov was consecrated a bishop by catholicos Anania of Mokk'. It is not known if he was already ordained as a married priest and then assumed the rank of a celibate priest when he was widowed, or if he was a layman who was ordained to the

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priesthood and to the episcopate concurrently. There are precedents in church history for both scenarios. His extensive knowledge of the liturgy and theology would suggest that he already had clerical training, but on the other hand his aristocratic privileges would have afforded him the opportunity to acquire an education usually unavailable to laypersons and also would have made him a natural candidate to serve as bishop of his native Andzewats'ik'.

Once installed in his office as spiritual leader of his diocese, Khosrov began to meet his clergy and to assess the conditions of the churches in his jurisdiction. His writings make it very clear that he was not pleased with what he found. The married priests who served in the parish churches suffered from serious intellectual and spiritual deficiencies that prevented them from understanding the very words of the liturgy that they celebrated. The situation of the laity was even worse. For many, the liturgy and the sacraments had become empty rituals that were witnessed without any sense of participation or inner transformation. Khosrov insisted that mere thoughtless mouthing of prayer had little value:

For if the tongue strikes the air without thought following it, it produces no benefit. For God who knows the heart looks at the heart and mind, not the tongue. Therefore, let us render prayer to God with alert mind, undistracted thoughts and soul fully aware, to be of benefit to ourselves and others and thus gain from others' prayers.

Khosrov also implies that beyond mere ignorance, there were many instances of clerical abuse and corruption, most notably the buying and selling of pardons and other ecclesial privileges. Such corrupt practices are called simony after Simon Magus of [Acts 8:18–24](#), reproached by St. Peter for offering money to the apostles to gain the power of transmitting the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. Though it was recorded more than 200 years after Khosrov's death, a fable in the compendium of the priest and jurist Mkhitar Gosh (1130–1213) suggests that simony was neither isolated nor uncommon. According to the fable, one Easter all of the birds in a certain village gathered together before the priest to confess their sins before partaking of the Eucharist. Among the birds were a raven and a cormorant (both unclean birds according to the law of Moses) who stated that they were not aware of having committed any sins other than that they hunted and ate mice and frogs. The priest declared the two birds to be unclean, denied them the sacrament, and sent them away. They later returned with clean fledglings that they offered to the priest. Seduced by their bribe, the priest absolved them and gave them communion. Mkhitar ends the fable by noting that he told this tale as a parable of avaricious priests who expel prostitutes and other sinners by terrifying them, but that later when they accept their bribes, they find an excuse to allow them to receive communion. This kind of corruption that Mkhitar's fable depicts may also have infected some of the clergy in Khosrov's diocese.

Based on his observations of the poor condition of the clergy and laity in his diocese, Khosrov concluded that he would have to write a commentary on the liturgy of the hours and the Eucharist that would be read and studied in the monasteries. The monks would then visit the parish churches of the diocese and expound the meaning of the rite for the faithful:

When it fell to my lot to become bishop and, on taking office, I perceived ignorance was rampant in everyone and, realizing the impossibility of communicating all this to everyone myself verbally, I deemed it appropriate to commit it to writing to alleviate the task of those

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eager to learn.

Immediately after this, Khosrov asks those who happen to hear his commentary being read to pray for him. So most likely he intended the book to be read out loud in the monastic schools of his diocese.

The guiding idea of Khosrov's commentary—that the mind and heart, the inner person and the deepest thought and feelings, must be engaged with the body in worship—is a major theme of the school of Narek. We will find it emphasized throughout the works both of Anania and Gregory. To be genuine and effective, faith must not only involve our external actions but penetrate into the deepest levels of our being. As Khosrov states in the very first sentence of the commentary, when we speak with God and about God we must consider the words that we say attentively and cautiously. He presciently began his major work with the same phrase—*speaking with God*—that would begin almost every prayer of his son's *Book of Lamentation*.

Another major theme of Khosrov's work that Anania and Gregory also emphasized was the universality of the church. Commenting on a verse from the liturgical hours that speaks of the Church as “catholic and apostolic,” Khosrov expounds on the meaning of *catholic*:

What does *catholic* mean? It means *universal*. For all the orthodox churches, which exist throughout the universe, are one. There is one Christ in all the churches that are founded on the apostolic faith, which is why we also call the church *apostolic*. Although the churches are distinguished according to place, they are not separated by nationality. For from one end of the earth to the other, wherever the true faithful may arrive at an orthodox church, it is their church and neither the strangeness of the country nor the language separates it [from them], but like a mother it accepts them into its bosom with fervent love. Thus it is called *universal* everywhere because its doors are open and its bosom embraces all the faithful of the universe.

This passage highlights a couple of remarkable features of Khosrov's ecclesiology. First, Khosrov must have considered the Chalcedonian churches to be orthodox. For he knew that the non-Chalcedonian churches did not extend throughout the inhabited world. And yet he exhorts his faithful to accept the embrace of the orthodox church wherever they may find themselves. It is also interesting to note his understanding of the church's apostolic character. It is not the fact that the bishops are successors of the apostles *per se* that defines the church as apostolic but that they teach the apostolic faith. Finally, the jurisdictional divisions of the church are determined not on the basis of the composition of the population that inhabits the region but by location. Khosrov thereby rejects what has more recently been termed *phyletism*, the association of a church with a particular ethnic group, a problem that continues to beset many of the Eastern churches.

Khosrov's broad-minded ecumenism and openness to the world beyond Armenia would have a profound effect on his son but it would also provoke the suspicion and anger of his superior, the catholicos Anania of Mokk'. The nature of Khosrov's offense is hidden behind a number of errors that Anania attributed to him. Khosrov's real affront was to challenge the authority of the Armenian patriarch both over neighboring sees and the Armenian episcopal college. Anania resorts to bizarre innuendos that suggest Khosrov held pro-Byzantine and

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Chalcedonian sympathies. The charges are provided in Anania's brief letter of explanation of the anathematization.

Anania's letter, written in 954, justifying his condemnation of Khosrov notes that he had entrusted to him the Diocese of Andzewats'ik when he was a "modest and learned man, white-haired and advanced in old age." But Khosrov suddenly began to act as though possessed by a "demonic spirit" and pronounced the words for *Sunday* and *Jerusalem* in the manner of the Greeks. Moreover, Khosrov apparently ordered that the hair of youths be cut until their beards began to grow, after which they were to let their hair grow plaited down to their legs. Khosrov supposedly justified this practice through a dubious etymology of the words *ktrij'* ("brave, youth") and *manuk* ("child, boy"), which he takes to be related to the verbs *ktrem* ("cut") and *manem* ("braid"). This criticism reveals two features of Khosrov's thought. One is his interest in etymology and developing arguments from what he takes to be the origins of words, a habit he shared with Anania of Narek. The other is his wish to conform the practices of the Armenian church more closely with those of the Greeks. Although Anania of Mokk' does not make it obvious, one may infer that the dictates on hairstyle were meant for monastics and not intended as a general rule of grooming for the males of his diocese. As bishop, Khosrov had direct authority over the monasteries in his diocese. Armenian monks kept their hair shorn, unlike their Byzantine counterparts who grew their hair long. Khosrov, so Anania implies, wanted the monks in his diocese to adopt something more like the Greek custom. Beyond his general Byzantine sympathies, though, Khosrov's interest in hairstyle provides us with evidence of the influence of the Pseudo-Dionysian writings, another feature he shares with the other members of the school of Narek. The Dionysian treatise known as the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* includes advice on the importance of the proper tonsuring of monks.

These two accusations are consistent with Khosrov's universal vision of the church and his openness to learning from and adopting the traditions of other churches. But the third allegation at first glance appears puzzling and anomalous. Anania charged Khosrov with teaching that a cross blessed by a priest and an unblessed cross are equally worthy of veneration. The belief that a blessed cross is of equal worth as a plain piece of wood at first may seem to associate Khosrov with the T'ondrakeans, who rejected veneration of the cross. Anania of Narek was accused of being a T'ondrakean and, according to some scholars, Gregory himself may also have been the object of such suspicions. But Anania of Mokk' is equivocal about whether Khosrov believed the cross generally unworthy of any veneration or instead that a priestly blessing was not necessary to make the cross an acceptable object of reverence. It is more likely that the dispute here was whether a priest had to anoint a cross before its veneration. It seems the Greeks thought it sufficient for an icon or object of veneration to bear the name of God or a saint, while the Armenians insisted on anointing in order to avoid the appearance of idolatry. Here too Khosrov's error was his wish to conform Armenian practice closer to that of the Byzantines.

Anania of Mokk' conceded that these three errors are relatively minor matters and says that he would be willing to ignore them but for the final affront, which he claims introduced a new schism into the church of God. Anania alleges that Khosrov, basing his argument on the equal honor given to archangels and angels in the Pseudo-Dionysian writings, asserted that the catholicos and other bishops enjoy the same privileges and honors. In the Pseudo-Dionysian

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Celestial Hierarchy, which describes the orders of the heavenly beings, the archangels are said to “join with the angels to form a single hierarchy and rank.” Furthermore, in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* there are only three orders: hierarch, priest, and deacon, and the hierarchs, who are the bishops, “fully possess the power of consecration.” This was also another point on which the Armenian church differed from the Byzantines, for the Armenian catholicos receives a distinct anointing upon assuming office. The final accusation of Anania of Mokk’ coheres with the general charge against Khosrov of Hellenization, since the patriarch of Constantinople, unlike the Armenian catholicos, did not undergo a second anointing after his consecration as a bishop.

There were clear ramifications for church governance, with Khosrov advocating a decentralized administration led by the synod of bishops in Armenia, with the catholicos simply presiding rather than having sacramental powers beyond those of the other bishops. If all bishops had the right to ordain bishops without needing the approval of the catholicos, then the dioceses could function relatively independently.

Anania could abide the idiosyncrasies of Khosrov’s tonsure policies and prescriptions on proper diction, but he could not tolerate the challenge to his authority as catholicos. Khosrov’s ecclesiological theories were not simply theoretical; they set him against Anania in a crisis in which the catholicos was concurrently embroiled. The catholicos of neighboring Caucasian Albania had been consecrated and installed in the presence of three bishops, but without Anania’s approval. The ordination was consistent with the original Nicene canon, which stipulates that when it is not possible for all the bishops of a region to be present, three validly ordained bishops will suffice to consecrate the new bishop. The Armenian version of the fourth canon of Nicaea, however, specifies that the catholicos, rather than a metropolitan bishop, must ratify the installation. Anania invalidated the consecration because of this canon, but Khosrov argued that since the ordination was done in accordance with the original Greek canon it was valid. This dispute about the jurisdictional authority of the Armenian catholicos over the see of the Albanians seems to have been the real source of Anania’s animus and why he took particular umbrage at Khosrov’s claim that patriarchs do not enjoy any special authority beyond a primacy of honor. Khosrov, writing four years before being anathematized, anticipates what was to happen to him:

When they quarrel with Christians of other nations, they justify themselves in an ignorant way as if only Armenians possess the truth ... and they treat anyone who shows that other nations are correct on some matter out of love of truth as if they were heretics [*tsayt'*] deficient in their faith. They are ridiculed, persecuted, and threatened with death to the point that they escape with barely a hair.

The term translated here as “heretic” is an epithet normally applied to people suspected of being Chalcedonians.

If Anania’s intent was to remove Khosrov from office, his anathema was a failure. Khosrov continued to serve as bishop of Andzewats’ik’ for the rest of his life. The catholicos was relatively weak at this time and he had incurred the hostility of the Artsruni royalty, who resented the transfer of the patriarchal see from their capital in Aght’amar back to Bagratid territory. Furthermore, Vaspurakan was pursuing a pro-Byzantine policy and had little interest

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in enforcing an excommunication order against a bishop who favored reconciliation with the Chalcedonians. Nor would the Artsruni be inclined to act against their own kinsman.

In any event, Khosrov's writings reveal that his teachings were not heretical. His main offense was to carry out bold new measures to revive the spiritual life of his faithful. He was a committed reformer, and people who set out to reform the church often face the opposition of hierarchs threatened by change. But in doctrinal matters, Khosrov consistently affirmed the received Armenian teachings on all matters of theology and Christology. He clearly articulates the standard Armenian Cyrillian or miaphysite formula:

[The Word] united with the flesh without confusion for He effected no change or diminution to either the divine or human nature. Rather he united the natures to be both God and man, so that God the Word might be flesh and that which was incarnate of the Virgin might be God, and He Himself both God and man, and Mary, who bore God the Word, might be the Mother of God and Virgin.

And he clearly rejects any Julianist tendencies while explicitly affirming the real suffering of Christ:

Christ lived out his life but committed no sin, bearing all of the passions of the flesh, i.e. He was born, nourished, hungered, thirsted, grew tired, ate, drank, felt, became anxious, sorrowed, wept, and took upon himself all else entailed by flesh.

While remaining faithful to the traditions of his church, he also looked for inspiration from other communions and adopted a conciliatory approach to other Christians. We cannot know for certain how often he saw Gregory after his son was dedicated to his monastery, but there is little doubt that Khosrov's teachings had a profound effect on his son. Like his father, Gregory remained committed to Armenian orthodoxy while also upholding the universality of the church and possessing a passion for a reform that would turn the hearts of the clergy and the laity from lukewarm indifference to a deep and heartfelt love of God and his church. In this program to revive spiritual life in Armenia, he was joined by another gifted clergyman, the abbot of Narekavank'.

Gregory's Abbot and Teacher: Anania of Narek

Though we cannot say anything with confidence about Gregory's relations with his father, we can be certain that Anania of Narek was with Gregory throughout his formative years as his abbot and teacher. Thanks to Hrach'ya T'amrazyan's scholarship, we now have available to us a large body of Anania's writings and we are in a position to speak confidently about his teachings and his influence on his most famous pupil.

Anania's year of birth is unknown but most likely was in the first decade of the tenth century. Unlike Khosrov, he was not a native of Vaspurakan but came from northern Armenia, most likely the province of Ayrarat. Of his early life we only know that he and his colleague Peter resided in Bagratid realms at the monasteries of Antak' (or Anduk) in the canton of Hawnunik', and Khawaradzor ("the dark valley") in Arsharunik'. Around 935 he moved with Peter to the province of the R̄shtunik', just to the east of Khosrov's diocese of Andzewats'ik'.

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The province was ruled by its eponymous noble house, vassals of the Artsruni royalty and three of whose members served as catholicoi when the patriarchal see was at Aght'amar from 927 to 947. There, in the town of Narek, with the patronage of the Artsruni king and Khosrov's intellectual support and encouragement, Anania established and was installed as abbot of a new monastery, Narekavank'.

In addition to his work founding and leading Narekavank', Anania produced an impressive body of writings. He shared with Khosrov a desire for spiritual renewal among the people. The goal of his monastery and his writings was to promote and advance that renewal. As we have seen, Khosrov was concerned about the indifference among many of the laity to the teachings of the church and their merely mechanical performance of ritual without any understanding or emotional connection to their actions. Just as Khosrov wrote his commentary on the liturgy to help instruct the faithful in proper worship, Anania too composed a series of parentheses (or treatises of exhortation and recommendation) to instill in the people a deeper and more potent piety. These were written at the behest of his relative, the catholicos Khachik I Arsharuni (r. 973–82), whom Anania had known before arriving at Narek.

Central to Anania's thought is the distinction between the interior and exterior persons. The human person is in fact a compound of these two "persons" or aspects. The exterior person is the part of us that acts within the sensible world while the interior person is the heart or soul containing one's hidden thoughts and feelings. In many cases the two parts do not operate in tandem but exist in opposition to the other. While the exterior person may act in accordance with moral rules and church rituals, the interior person may be filled with base thoughts and passions instead of the virtues of piety and love. Anania recommends spiritual exercises designed to purify the inner person and harmonize the two aspects of personhood into one integral whole.

This process of harmonization involves three steps: purification of one's heart through the prayer of tears and lamentation, the cultivation of the moral virtues, and finally the achievement of a mystical relation with God through ascetic practices. This threefold process was inspired by the three levels of initiation in Pseudo-Dionysian mysticism. This threefold progression, leading ultimately to union with God, plays a prominent role in Gregory's writings, and its presence here in Anania's writings indicates that Gregory first learned about it from him.

The first step in this course of spiritual exercise is a retreat into the inner person, a prayerful discernment of the state of one's soul and the causes of sinfulness. Prayer accompanied with tears begins the process of purification. This prayer of tears arouses within us the love of God which begins to wash away the sins that have soiled the inner person and obscured the image of God within. Anania provides biblical support for the connection of tears and love:

Now the grace of tears is a sign of loving Christ and desiring his kingdom. As the Lord said about the sinful woman, who wept tears upon his feet—*May her sins be forgiven, for she loved much* ([Luke 7:47](#)). So too the prophets revealed their love of the people through their tears, as Jeremiah said—*Who will give water to my head and a fountain of tears to my eyes that I may weep day and night for this people?* ([Jeremiah 8:21](#)).... And even the Lord himself revealed his love for Lazarus through his tears when he wept upon his grave. Seeing this, the people were astonished and said—*See how much he loved him!* ([John 11:36](#))

Anania's brief exhortation on prayer outlines the basic approach:

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Never neglect the prescribed common prayers whether during the day or at night. Perform your required private discipline of prayers and fasting without any hindrance and keep your fasts in a state of holiness. Keep all your senses in a state of attention, especially your eyes, ears, and touch. You should eat and drink moderately. Do not give into laughter and frivolity nor be one who favors crowds or foolishness. Neither be drowsy nor dawdle in your labors and in your contemplation of the Holy Scriptures and in other good works, especially in your mercy toward the poor and needy. Be humble, compassionate, gracious, and modest, and not arrogant, proud, or weary when you do your good works. Always be engaged in dialogue with the divinely-inspired Scriptures. Keep your distance from vain and cheerless men, but ceaselessly wash away your sins with tears as much as you are able.

How should one soften one's heart to allow this interior prayer of tears? Imagination and memory play an important role in Anania's exercises. Reflection on expressions of contrition can move the soul to penance:

By way of example, when people enter a house of mourning, and there, where they cry over the corpse, they let out a pitiful sound, those who hear it also grieve involuntarily and shed tears. When people enter a house in which a wedding is being celebrated and the guests exchange frivolous pleasantries, those hearing it laugh involuntarily. So you, too, when your heart is like stone and you cannot weep should call to mind penitent words and images so that your heart is moved to penance and tears flow out from it.

Anania observes here the powerful effect of sympathy. When surrounded by mourners, one naturally shares the sadness of one's companions as one also shares in merriment at times of joy. One would similarly expect that by joining a group of penitents one would be moved to penance. But Anania recognized that simply calling to mind the images and memories of mourning and penance can bring us to tears. He is also aware of the power of words and literary devices like assonance and repetition to soften the soul. To that end, he composed poetry designed to engender tenderness in hardened hearts. Accordingly, he intersperses some of his parentheses with verse. Mahé notes that Anania's poems are the first example of Armenian religious poetry not intended strictly for liturgical use. As such, they had a profound influence on Gregory's poetry, though Anania's poems are simpler and more formulaic than Gregory's richer and more imaginative compositions. Here, for example, Anania reflects on the transience of earthly life:

Come, O south wind, and arrive, O north wind,
Blow upon the garden of my soul;
Melt the frost of my sins,
My Lord, make for me a spiritual spring;
You who raised the water from the stone.
Make my heart a vessel of tears.
And say in your mind,
"Do you not see the worldly,
How they hurry about and toil in their fields?
But you have left your spiritual field untended;
Morning has dawned
Yet you have not labored,

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Evening has come
And you leave empty-handed.
Have you not considered
That your body dwells in an inn,
For this day passes like a dream,
And tomorrow is like a shadow of the evening?
Set your mind to this:
Yesterday our brothers were with us,
Yet today they do not appear,
They have gone to their Lord and ours.”

Anania has us focus on the fleeting passage of time and the evanescence of this world in order to rouse us to care for our spirit with the same urgency and diligence as the farm laborers do in tending their crops. The language is simple and direct and employs vivid imagery. We are asked to imagine a wedding, a funeral, a garden emerging from the winter's frost, a field of laborers, all part of the daily experience of the people. These images evoke memories that we all have experienced; they produce a powerful affective force on us as we contemplate them. Although he may have directed his advice primarily to his monks, his clear and accessible style and his use of events familiar from everyday life indicate that he intends his advice on spiritual life for a wider audience. Anania expects his exhortations to move all people regardless of class or status. Once the heart is moved by these images, the inner person aligns with the external acts of piety, and the total person is prepared to engage in genuine worship.

Though God created the physical world and filled it with goodness, it always falls short of absolute goodness and leaves us unsatisfied. This world, even with all its beauty and riches, is never enough for our restless souls. Reflection on the impermanence of our mundane pleasures leads us away from the goods of this world to the permanent and eternal goodness of God:

If you enter an elegant palace, painted in many colors,
And you delight in the sights,
Yet when you go out from there, it has passed.
It's as if you hadn't seen it at all,
And you are in need of another sight.
For it is not only when a man dies,
When he is deprived of this life,
But even while he is alive that
Glory passes away one day to the next,
And from one hour to the next.

Anania's poem on the transience of this world and its delights recalls Plato's description of the lover of sights in the *Republic*. The beautiful things of this world are in the end vain, unable to satisfy our deepest longings. Elsewhere in this poem he alludes to Plato's dialogue, the *Gorgias*, and its play on the similarity of the words in Greek for body (*sōma*) and tomb (*sēma*) ("for the body becomes the tomb of the soul"), but he could also have taken this from the Armenian version of David's *Prolegomena of Philosophy*, which was the standard introduction to philosophy used in Armenian monastic academies as late as the eighteenth century.

Even if this allusion is not directly from Plato but mediated through a Neoplatonic

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commentary, Anania seems familiar with Platonic texts that were not widely studied in Armenia at this time. Anania does on occasion refer explicitly to the works of Plato. He must have been familiar with some of Plato's dialogues in the original Greek since the medieval Armenian versions of Plato's works were probably first made in the eleventh century. For Plato, the lover of the sights and sounds of this world is never satisfied; only through contact with what never changes, the eternal Forms, do we find everlasting joy and satisfaction. Anania presents this same essentially Platonic philosophy but places it within a Christian context as so many Christian Platonists, most notably Augustine, had done before him:

And there is nothing firm in this world,
But everything is in flux,
Like a shadow and a candle
That is quickly extinguished;
Such is the life of man:
It is suddenly taken away,
And the time of our youth is a few days,
Then grey hairs begin to grow, the invitations of death,
And the worn-out body loses its strength.

He closes this treatise with the goal of this reflective exercise on the transience of the world:

Now when the majesty of the world entices you, you should keep all this in mind and ask God for help and with the grace of Christ overcome the world in the glory of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit now and forever.

Reflection on the vanity of this world draws the mind's attention away from worldly glories and prepares it to give full attention to the glory of God. Central to his spiritual exercises is the cultivation of humility, which he calls "the head of the virtues" and to which topic he devotes one of his treatises. The tears and prayers that purify the interior person also wash away pride and instill the virtue of humility that allows us to love our neighbors as well as God:

Humility is when you see someone's faults and you do not speak ill of them or judge them, but instead say "If I am a sinner, how can I judge another?" This is why the Lord said—*Do not judge lest you be judged.* ([Matt 7:1](#))

Humility is also loving one's brother. For these are the commandments of love: to humble oneself before one's companions, to share their pain when they are sick, to comfort them when they mourn, to give yourself in service to them.

In contrast, the proud are incapable of loving anyone besides themselves:

The proud person does not do these things and does not regard his brother worthy of his humility but regards himself superior to all.

The purified and humbled soul experiences an inner peace and tranquility; consequently it can love both its neighbor and Christ. The inner and outer persons unite so that external acts of love emanate from the internal states of purity and peace. The whole person is now filled with the love of God rather than remaining in discord by acting in one way while thinking and feeling

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in another way.

In achieving this internal peace and personal integrity, one is prepared to love God and to enter into union with him. Anania sees his spiritual exercises as preparation for receiving the Holy Spirit within us:

As long as the enemy is outside the fortress, it is easy to guard against him. But if he engages in battle and captures and enters the fortress, then it is difficult to expel him. Likewise, you should be on your guard when you battle the thoughts outside the fortress of your mind. For if they attack and enter inside, you will have to prepare for greater toil. This is why you should always be fortifying your thoughts and keeping them pleasing to God so that you will become a temple of the Holy Spirit.

In contrast to the parentheses, which are written in a clear and lively style, Anania's doctrinal and polemical writings are often dense and arcane. His anti-Chalcedonian treatise is also at odds with the more irenic tenor of the school of Narek, and with positions that Anania himself accepted in his other writings. The antidyophysite treatise was commissioned by catholicos Khachik. Anania may have felt compelled to assume a more combative approach to defend the harsher policies that Khachik had imposed, including the requirement of rebaptism of Chalcedonians. Some scholars have also argued that the arguments for rebaptism are an extraneous addition to the text. In any event, by the time of Khachik's order, the period of rapprochement between the Byzantines and the Armenian churches was over. Both sides repudiated the other's orthodoxy and moved to create rival hierarchies in the same dioceses, something that they had previously refrained from doing. Anania's hostile tone, more critical of the Chalcedonians than his other writings, may have been a concession to the new, more bitter ecclesial reality. The work was completed sometime in the 980s, when Anania personally handed the work to Khachik at the patriarchal see in Argina.

Anania's treatise against the T'ondrakeans was commissioned by Khachik's predecessor, catholicos Anania of Mokk' and is, with the exception of a fragment preserved in a fourteenth-century manuscript, no longer extant. This portion of the treatise is too short to enable reconstruction of the work's overall argument with any certainty. It is a general exposition of the universality of the church in which Anania displays the same flair for fanciful etymologies and linguistic analysis found in Khosrov's writings. Anania goes as far as to relate the Armenian word for catholic, *kat'oghikē* to *kat'* ("milk") and its verbal cognate *kat'im* ("to flow drop by drop") in order to illustrate that the universal church distributes the milk of doctrine to all. The general thrust of the analysis of the words *catholic* and *church* in the fragment is to affirm the uniqueness and universality of the church and to establish that the T'ondrakeans, being a sect limited to a particular geographical region, cannot constitute the true church.

Despite these efforts in defense of Armenian orthodoxy, Anania, like Khosrov, faced accusations of heresy. The circumstances surrounding his removal as abbot are more mysterious than those of Khosrov's excommunication. Anania of Mokk's irritation at Khosrov's perceived insubordination through his support of the validity of the Albanian patriarch's installation, though not explicitly stated in the Armenian catholicos's letter, is rather transparent. The charge against Anania of Narek, by contrast, was that he was a T'ondrakean,

and at least according to one tradition he was exiled to another monastery, Kchaw, where he was required to do penance. It was his relative and former colleague, catholicos Khachik, who made the accusation. The motive for the accusation remains unclear. It may be due to Anania's focus on the interior spiritual life that appeared to align him with the T'ondrakeans, for whom faith is an entirely internal condition unencumbered by sacraments and sacred objects. There may also have been a more diffuse suspicion of his attempts at reform and perhaps even envy from other monasteries at the rapid success and fame that his monastery enjoyed. In any event, Anania accepted the catholicos's verdict and resigned as Narek's abbot. It is natural to wonder why Anania accepted his punishment while Khosrov continued to function as bishop with impunity. Anania, of course, lacked the family connection to the royal house of Vaspurakan that furnished Khosrov with a good measure of immunity from maltreatment. But it may have also been due to personality: the aristocratic bishop had fewer scruples about ignoring the commands of his superior, whom he did not acknowledge as having juridical authority over him anyway, in contrast to the obedient monastic who extolled the virtues of humility and obedience. Anania may have willingly accepted his punishment out of his respect for the authority of the catholicos. The former abbot of Narekavank' composed one last work, a confessional letter in which he expresses his equanimity and peace with God:

Blessed be the name of the Lord and glory be to God for all things. We must give thanks to the Lord in all things ... for it is good to hope in the Lord throughout one's life, in happiness and in adversity, in times of abundance and poverty, in times of exaltation and in dishonor, in tranquility and in agitation, in glory and in humiliation.... If anyone has been persuaded and believes in what I have written, let them give thanks to God, and I will say, "Cursed is the one who places his hope in man and not in the Lord God of heaven and earth, and cursed is the one who places his hope in the strength of his own arm." [\[Jer 17:5\]](#)

The Cornerstones of Narekavank'

Apart from their fondness for etymological arguments, Anania and Khosrov share many features that would come to inform Gregory's own thinking and his literary works. Anania and Khosrov both affirm the universality of the church and recognize the orthodoxy of both the Chalcedonian and miaphysite churches—though in Anania's case, this recognition is qualified by the harsher tone taken in his late treatise against the dyophysites. Khosrov in particular is eager to learn from and borrow practices from other rites, and he chafes against what he deems narrow-minded and xenophobic suspicion of his interest in other traditions.

Both also see themselves as reformers of a church that has lost touch with many of its people. The problem is the lack of harmony between the inner and the outer person: priests simply mouth the words of the breviary without an understanding of the significance of the prayers and sacraments. The laypeople witness the services without an accompanying sense of awe and mystery at the divine sacrifice that takes places in their midst. Anania and Khosrov were united in the desire to revitalize the church so that both clergy and laypeople would participate fully in the gifts of the Holy Spirit that flow through the church and its sacraments. One should therefore see Narekavank' and its adherents not simply as a school but as part of a reform movement within the Armenian church, one with a definite and coherent program to

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restore the spiritual life of a church and its people who had suffered the damaging effects of external invasion and internal indifference and ignorance.

This reform movement was in several respects a popular one. Although the monks would take a leading role in implementing the reforms, it is clear that both Anania and Khosrov wanted their reforms to touch the lives of all the members of the church. While Anania's treatises and Khosrov's liturgical commentaries were intended primarily for educated monks, it was understood that their content would be transmitted to laypeople for their edification and spiritual growth. One part of this populism is reflected in the focus on the affective components of worship. Their program was not simply an intellectual one. It is not enough simply to understand the articles of faith. The Christian must also sense the depth of God's love and the need for his forgiveness. That is why Anania used rich and vivid images in his writings, above all in his poems that utilize the devices of meter and repetition to impress themselves on the minds of the listener. And it also explains Khosrov's desire to reform the liturgy to make it more accessible to the people.

Given their different roles in the church, one should expect to find some notable differences between the two figures. Khosrov's focus is on the liturgy and communal prayer, which befits his role as a diocesan bishop managing the affairs of parish churches. Anania was more interested in personal devotion and spiritual exercises, as is appropriate for a monastic who devoted his life to prayer and meditation. Together, though, they constitute the cornerstones or foundations of Narekavank', and it is Gregory who will be foremost in building upon this foundation and linking together both its liturgical and ecclesial aspects, as well as its personal and devotional dimensions through his extraordinary poetry, hymns, encomia, and other works.

Chapter Four

Gregory's Life and Prose Works

Gregory's Life and Legends

One occasionally reads comparisons made between Gregory and other medieval authors. For example, Gregory has been called Armenia's version of Dante or Augustine. But these comparisons do not do justice to any of these writers. There are of course some superficial similarities. Dante wrote an epic poem in three parts describing the successive stages of his journey from hell to paradise, culminating in the beatific vision of God. Gregory's great poem also appears to have a tripartite structure describing his journey toward God. Beyond these common features, though, there are significant differences. Dante is a secular poet engrossed in the political and ecclesial intrigues of his time, and these worldly concerns pervade the *Divine Comedy*.

Augustine seems closer to Gregory, since he is also a cleric and, although not himself devoted to a cloistered life, he admired and influenced monasticism and asceticism. Comparisons between Augustine and Gregory focus on Augustine's *Confessions*, which is in part an autobiographical account of Augustine's conversion to Christianity. A self-reflective attention to the soul's condition and the struggle against sin runs throughout both Augustine's *Confessions* and Gregory's *Book of Lamentation*, but here again there are significant differences. Augustine narrates for us very exacting details of his life. The reader learns about the famous episode of the stolen pears, mirroring in Augustine's own life the primal sin that also involved the stolen fruit of a tree, and his relations with his mother St. Monica as well as his concubine and his son. After reading the *Confessions* we feel that we have come to know its author very well.

Gregory's *Book of Lamentation* is also very personal and expresses a deep contrition and desire to know God and seek God's love, but autobiographical details are brief and elusive. Gregory seems not to want the personal details of his life to distract us from the purpose of his work, which is to guide his readers to pray for God's forgiveness and proceed on the path of reconciliation and union with God. While Gregory gives some hints in the *Book of Lamentation* about his life, we must turn elsewhere to learn more about him.

Our main sources on his life, in addition to the few autobiographical references in his works, are the colophons (a typically brief statement at the end of a manuscript giving details of its production) of his works, a short biography written by St. Nersēs of Lambron (1153–98), the twelfth-century bishop of Tarsus and a gifted scholar and ecumenist, the Armenian synaxarion or collection of the lives of the saints, and a rich tradition of folklore surrounding the saint.

Two of our sources identify Gregory's father as Khosrov. In the colophon to his commentary Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

on the Song of Songs, Gregory states that the bishop of Andzewats'ik was his father. Saint Nersēs also identifies Gregory's father as Khosrov, adding that Gregory's mother, whose name does not appear in any of our sources, was the first cousin of Anania, whom Nersēs calls "the diligent tutor and abbot of the monastery of Narek." Gregory does not mention his father in the colophon to the *Book of Lamentation*, an omission that has induced some scholars to question whether Gregory was Khosrov's son. These doubts were first raised by the Armenian Catholic priest Kiwregh K'iparean, who argued that the omission of Khosrov from the colophon suggests that Khosrov's son must have been another Gregory, perhaps a parish priest of Narek who copied Khosrov's commentary on the liturgy and also authored the commentary on the Song of Songs. In the colophon to the Canticle commentary, the author identifies himself as "Gregory, a priest (*k'ahanay*) of Narek," which need not imply that he was a monk of Narekavank', since Narek was the name of the town where the monastery was located. In contemporary Armenian usage the term *k'ahanay* is usually applied only to married priests. K'iparean also notes an age discrepancy based on Khosrov's description in Anania of Mokk's letter of excommunication. The letter, composed in 954, describes Khosrov as already white-haired and advanced in age, which would make him too old to be the husband of Anania of Narek's cousin. Apart from these personal details, the supposed "pedantic" style of the commentary in contrast to the brilliance of the later *Book of Lamentation* suggests different authorship.

These objections to Gregory's authorship are not compelling. It is true that in modern Armenian the word *k'ahanay* refers to a married priest, but the premodern usage is generic and may refer to celibate priests as well. Indeed, in his colophon to the *Book of Lamentation* Gregory says that he is a *k'ahanay*, albeit a religious (*krawnawor*) one. Pétrossian proposes also that Anania's letter of anathema was written later than 954, perhaps as late as the early 960s, which would significantly reduce the age difference between Khosrov and Gregory's mother. Finally, the commentary on the Canticle is a work of Gregory's youth, perhaps written while still in his twenties. Though obviously the work of a gifted scholar, Gregory's commentary need not possess the same spiritual depth as his *Book of Lamentation*, which received its final form just prior to his death. As well, the commentary genre places limitations on the author; even the best of exegetes at least occasionally falls into pedantry. By contrast, the poetic medium of the *Book of Lamentation* gives the author greater freedom to express his genius. The commentary on the Canticle should be read along with the rest of Gregory's work to reveal how it coheres with the general tenor of Gregory's mystical theology. For now, though, we can conclude in agreement with the overwhelming majority of scholars that the commentary on the Canticle and the *Book of Lamentation* are the products of one author, Gregory of Narek, the monastic priest and son of Khosrov Andzewats'i.

The precise year of Gregory's birth is unknown but it must have been sometime during the 940s. Khosrov had three sons. The eldest, Sahak (Isaac), remained with his father and appears to have served him as a secretary. At any rate, he is the scribe of the first copy of his father's liturgical commentary, completed in 950. After their mother's death, John, the middle brother, and Gregory were entrusted to the care of Narekavank', where they would remain for the rest of their lives. The circumstances and date of their mother's death are unknown. One may suppose that she died after complications from giving birth to the youngest child, Gregory, but the one reference to her in the *Book of Lamentation* suggests that Gregory has memories of

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her. There, he writes of “my mother, who suffered labor pains [and whose] compassion declined as her life receded.” The mention of her labor pains implies that her death was connected to her pregnancy, though it need not have been a complication of Gregory’s birth but a later stillbirth. In any event, her death must predate 950, when Khosrov was ordained a bishop. At Narekavank’, Gregory came under Anania’s tutelage and distinguished himself promptly as a gifted and pious student. He and his brother excelled in particular in the study of the Bible. Anania’s colleague, Peter, known for his biblical studies, must have been their instructor in scripture. Unfortunately, none of Peter’s writings have survived. If they had, they would doubtless have provided important insights on the formation of Gregory’s thoughts on biblical interpretation. Gregory must already have been recognized for his exegetical abilities, for he was commissioned by an Artsruni prince to compose the commentary on the Canticle. One might have thought that Peter, as the monastery’s senior biblical scholar, would have been the prince’s first choice, but he must have either died or been too infirm to write by this time. Gregory completed the commentary in 977. It would be the first of many works of poetry, hymns, encomia, and theological treatises, all culminating in his masterpiece, the *Book of Lamentation*.

Nersēs of Lambron says that John predeceased Gregory, but the colophon to the *Book of Lamentation* states that John, who succeeded Anania as abbot, assisted Gregory in the book’s compilation toward the end of Gregory’s life. Nersēs notes that Gregory died while still young, not having completed the course of life. If he died soon after the compilation of the *Book of Lamentation*, his death would have occurred around 1003, so he may still have been in his fifties, well short of his biblical allotment of three score and ten as stated in [Psalm 90:10](#), if that is what Nersēs means by the “course of life.”

Gregory divided his time between the monastery and his retreat overlooking Lake Van where he led the life of a hermit, undergoing the rigorous spiritual exercises that Anania taught. It was in this cave that one of the many miracles ascribed to him occurred. According to various accounts, Gregory had a vision of the Virgin Mary standing above an island in the lake, enthroned in the clouds, and holding the infant Christ. She spoke to Gregory, saying, “Gregory, come to the Lord (ար Տէր).” On hearing these words, Gregory ran along the waves of the lake to this island where he venerated the Mother of God. The island, located about four kilometers to the northwest of Aght’amar island, was from then on known as Arṭēr.

Given Gregory’s renown, it is not surprising that there are a host of stories and legends about him and his miracles. James Russell enumerates some of these in his monograph on the fourteenth-century lyric poet John (Yovhannēs) T’ikurats’i. One legend states that Gregory herded sheep for seven years to provide for the children of a deceased shepherd. In another story, he helps a villager in the city of Mush who had incurred an onerous debt by working for him for free as long as the debtor agreed to attend church regularly. While visiting another village, he supposedly resurrected a groom who had died on his wedding day. A curious poem recounts the visit of two priests to Narek. When they requested water from the monk, Gregory made the sign of the cross and, like Moses, struck a dry rock from which water proceeded to flow. This was not ordinary water but a fountain of youth, for the poet recounts that “[the priests’] old white beards became young ... they became immortal there.”

Tales of visiting priests occur in a number of sources. The Armenian synaxarion may be the

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source of all these tales, since it begins with the credible claim that Gregory was accused of heresy, as both his biological and spiritual fathers were. But unlike in their cases, Gregory was able to acquit himself of the charges by performing a miracle in the presence of the monks ordered to bring him to trial. The synaxarion for February 27 reports that when Gregory occupied himself with the task of reforming the institutions and rituals of the church that had fallen out of use, several jealous people accused him in front of the bishops and prince, saying that he was a heretic and a schismatic. The term translated as heretic here is *tsayt'*, the very same word that Khosrov says is the epithet used for those who show an interest in learning from other Christian traditions. Because the term is normally applied to those suspected of Chalcedonian sympathies, if Gregory was accused of heresy, he was most likely charged with dyophysitism. When the monks arrived at his cell, Gregory requested that they eat something together before embarking on the journey. After he brought out two doves and began to roast them, his would-be captors protested and said, "Teacher (*vardapet*), isn't it Friday?" a day of fasting and abstinence from the consumption of animal products. The saint responded, "I beg your forgiveness, my brothers, I acted out of ignorance." Then he spoke to the doves: "Arise and return to your nest and your flock, for today is a day of abstinence." Immediately the birds came back to life, flapped their wings, and flew away. The men were astonished; they threw themselves at Gregory's feet and asked for forgiveness. Later they returned to the bishop without Gregory and recounted what they had witnessed. Gregory's accusers, seized with fear, no longer spoke out against him.

Was Gregory actually accused of heresy? He prays that God forgive his accusers in Prayer 83 of the *Book of Lamentation*, asking that God not be angry at them for his sake but "forgive their sins/as though they rebuke my evil deeds/ and rightly reproach me." Apart from appealing to the veracity of the miracle, though, how can we explain his ability to escape excommunication and punishment? This episode most likely occurred late in Gregory's life when the catholicos was Sergius (Sargis) of Sewan (r. 992–1019). Sargis favored asceticism and most likely admired Gregory. He would have been loath to prosecute Gregory and probably dismissed the charges against him quickly.

These fanciful tales that have entered into Armenian folklore reveal the extent to which Gregory's person and reputation for piety had penetrated the Armenian collective imagination. Gregory's place in Armenian popular piety is not just a medieval phenomenon but has persisted to the present. Prayer 18 of the *Book of Lamentation* is a popular prayer read still today over those who are ill, and the entire book, even if not regularly read or studied, occupies a place of honor in most devout Armenian homes. Even during the period of Soviet repression, Armenians looked to Gregory for comfort and spiritual nurture. Armenuhi Drost-Abgarjan cites the example of a woman named Margarit Alexanian, living in Shushi, at the time part of Soviet Azerbaijan but today in the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh under Armenian control. Alexanian produced an illuminated gospel with depictions of Gregory and his vision of Christ at the beginning of each gospel book. An unnamed woman attributed her survival through the hardship of the gulag to her activity of transcribing Gregory's words during her imprisonment. Through all the tragedies and disruptions that the nation suffered, Gregory's life and works remained an inspiration and consolation for his people.

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The Prose Works

Though best known for his *Book of Lamentation*, Gregory expressed himself in a variety of formats and genres not only through his poetry and hymns but also encomia, biblical commentaries, and theological treatises. Here, I will provide a survey of his prose literary corpus before turning to his better known poetic works in the next chapter.

The Commentary on the Song of Songs

In the colophon to the commentary, Gregory reports that the Artsruni prince, Gurgēn—one of the three sons of Abusahl Hamazasp (king of Vaspurakan, r. 953–72) and who, after Abusahl’s death, reigned in the principality of Andzewats’ik’—commanded him to compose a commentary on the “awesome words of Solomon and to make clear the things hidden deep within it.” Gregory provides some clues for the prince’s interest in the Canticle. He notes the erotically charged nature of the book, which never mentions God but does praise the “breasts and reddened lips, the beautiful cheeks and desirable eyes” of the bride. Gregory observes that when people “with uncomprehending minds” hear these words, they fail to comprehend the spiritual dimension of the book. To correct this tendency for people to focus on the literal and carnal sense of these romantic verses, Gurgēn asked the young monk to write a commentary. The people who do not understand the book properly may include the T’ondrakeans with their dissident views on marriage and sexuality. The T’ondrakeans may have pointed to the Song’s lack of any explicit mention of God as evidence for their belief that marriage was not a sacrament nor did it require the blessing of the church, but that the physical bond of love between the couple was enough to validate their marital relation. The Artsruni rulers were always solicitous of the church, seeing its health as essential to the stability of their state, and so concerns about the threat posed by T’ondrakism would be reason enough for Gurgēn to order the young monk to compose a commentary that would affirm the church’s teachings on marriage.

Although the T’ondrakean crisis may have precipitated Gurgēn’s behest, the scope of the commentary goes well beyond the threat that the heresy posed. Gregory’s work is not merely a defense of the church’s teachings on marriage. Although it may have been occasioned by Gurgēn’s interests in suppressing T’ondrakism, in Gregory’s hands the commentary becomes much more. Keeping with the traditional Christian allegorical approach to the book, Gregory interprets the expressions of erotic desire between the bride and the groom as symbols of the love of God that impels the individual soul to union with Christ as well as the love between Christ and his church that Paul in [Ephesians 5:32](#) already understood as the model and archetype of all earthly love. Accordingly, the commentary is especially relevant to the pursuits of the monks and ascetics who devote themselves to spiritual exercises of purification and illumination, leading ultimately to a union with Christ. But the commentary also pertains to the lives of the faithful and presents the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, as foretastes of the heavenly and eternal union of the soul with God. In this way, the book is a defense of the necessity of the church and its sacraments for salvation.

With characteristic modesty, Gregory initially demurred from accepting Gurgēn’s request, considering it beyond his abilities and entailing a boldness on his part that would expose him Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

not only to ridicule from his fellow monks but even to God's punishment for his pride. But alluding to [Romans 13:1](#), he says that Christ enjoined obedience to kings as well as to God, and so he must comply with Gurgēn's order. In composing the work, he made use of and sometimes explicitly refers to previous commentaries on the Song, most frequently Nyssen's commentary. Occasionally he will refer the reader to Nyssen's commentary for further elaboration. He is well aware that Nyssen did not complete his homiletic commentary on the Song and despairs of finishing the work himself, for compared to the Cappadocian father, who was "a perfect teacher ... in whom the Spirit dwelt," he is ignorant and devoid of grace.

For Gregory and all who adopt the allegorical approach to reading scripture, not only is the written word a symbol of a higher reality, but all of creation is saturated with meaning. Everything in the physical world proclaims the glory of its creator, and the skilled interpreter uncovers all the splendor hidden within even the most mundane of things. Taking the author of the Canticle to be Solomon, Gregory writes:

Solomon, wishing to relate the ineffable, did it by means of an allegory in carnal form, that is, by means of a groom and bride, nephew and maiden, daughter and dove, breasts and myrrh, and oil poured out, apples and mountain goats, Solomon, a king, Jerusalem, a garden, and all such things that the eyes desire to see, the ears enjoy, and the mind longs for.

These images and figures all point to something greater:

All this the Song of Songs recounts: the splendid adornment of the Church with the cross and altar, with the flesh and blood of the Lord, the holy font and holy oil, the Old and New Testaments, the apostles, prophets, and teachers, priests and ascetics, virgins and martyrs, Christian kings, and all of the people of purity planted in the Church.

The very name of the book reveals its rank and importance in the biblical canon:

Now first it is worthy to say how "Song of Songs" is interpreted and thereby learn about its endless dignity. The song of songs is a blessing of blessings. In the same way, we call the holy apse where the holy altar stands the *holy of holies*, as the apostle says [[Hebrews 9:3](#)]. That is, if the church is holy, then the altar is doubly holy. So too this book is above and beyond all songs and blessings. Just as the Gospel is holier than the other books of the New Testament, so too this book is holier than [the other books of the Old Testament]. About it one should know that it was sung aloud in the temple with greater suitability and prophetic spirit than David's psalms, for the mystery concealed within its awesome words is beyond words. None of the carnal beings can understand it except those who are in spirit like Paul ... for our ears cannot bear to hear the mysteries of God, just as our eyes cannot bear to see God [[2 Corinthians 12:3–4](#)].

Gregory here follows Origen of Alexandria, the great Christian biblical scholar of the third century, in reading the title "Song of Songs" as a superlative that expresses the superiority of the Song to the other songs of scripture. Origen himself lists the subordinate songs of the Bible in his commentary and explains why the Song of Songs is greater than them. But Gregory says he does not want to prolong his commentary by filling it with such detail. He goes on to the expression *holy of holies* and compares the book to the holiest part of the temple and by

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extension to the altar of the church. This comparison of a book to the structure of a church is a characteristic feature of Gregory's writings. We will see it again in the *Book of Lamentation*. Gregory's interest in structuring his literary works in the architectural form of a church is in part a response to the T'ondrakean rejection of the physical or incarnate church and preference for worship in private houses or outdoors. In his commentary on [Song 6:8](#), he cites [Psalm 57:4](#)—"sinners are alienated from their mother; from the womb they are led astray"—as a reference to the church and those estranged from it. Gregory writes:

They detested and removed themselves from the confession of faith and oath they took at their birth at the font to love God the Father and their Mother Church. For Satan, like a slave merchant who steals children whom he finds separated from their parents, imprisons anyone whom he finds estranged from their mother, the Church. One must make prayers in the church before the altar where the Holy Trinity dwells, but they [the T'ondrakeans] make their offerings in the roads and marketplaces and profane places; they give the honor due to the church over to the vulgar and the streets. They will find not mercy but condemnation because of this sin of holding the church in contempt and worshipping outside her.

The T'ondrakean practice of worshipping outside the church was based on their belief that worship is a private matter and may be conducted anywhere. In contrast, Gregory continually reminds us of the importance of sacred spaces. He compares books and prayers in their construction and form to the built and established structures of the church. In the *Book of Lamentation*, he asks God to grant him strength that he may "construct an edifice of faith" through his book of prayers. He intends by this analogy between linguistic and architectural structures to illustrate the essential connection of prayer to the house of prayer and to emphasize that proper worship is always conducted within the confines and maternal care of the church. The point is not just that one must worship indoors in a sacred space to shield oneself from the profanity of the streets, but that the church building is itself symbolic of something greater, the one holy catholic and apostolic church of Christ that is the foundation of proper worship of God and the source through which all graces flow. The heretics have separated themselves from the house of God and to them, Gregory says, "we must offer words of lamentation and grief."

But it is not only the physical structure of the church that points to something that transcends its constituents of stone and wood. The richness of the Song's images provides Gregory with an abundance of opportunities to display his allegorical imagination. All the elements of creation offer themselves up to interpretation. The pomegranate is a fruit but also an emblem of the hardships and reward of virtue. Commenting on the groom's words to the bride in [Song 4:3](#)—"As the rind of a pomegranate are your cheeks behind your veil," Gregory writes:

In their visible nature, pomegranates are unpleasant, but their invisible natures are appetizing and the cause of health. Now the Bride of Christ, which is the Church, has hidden her face behind a veil of virtuous habits and a rough and tired manner; these are on the outside like a pomegranate's skin. But what is stored up inside is hope, faith, and love ([1 Cor 13:13](#)) toward God. It is through this hope that she endures all things. For just as the things stored up in the pomegranate can be very desirable to eat, in the same way the works of virtue are filled with sweat and with great labor but the fruit of virtue is extolled in all its

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glory. As the prophet has said—*all her glory as the king's daughter is within* ([Ps 44:14](#)).

Here, Gregory follows Nyssen and uses the pomegranate to illustrate the difficult process of cultivating the virtues. Anyone who has tried to cut apart the rough outer shell of a pomegranate will appreciate the analogy. But once the difficult task is complete, one can enjoy the fruits of one's efforts, the sweetness of the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. In expectation of this reward we persist in our labors.

Even the parts of the lovers' bodies possess meaning, sometimes even multiple meanings. The bride's breasts are interpreted not only as the two testaments of scripture, which nourish the faithful with spiritual food (commentary on [Song 6:9](#), “my dove is one, she is perfect”) but also the bride's purity of heart, which is all that God seeks from humans (commentary on [Song 4:5](#), “The bride says to the groom, there I will give my breasts to you”) as well as the soul and the mind which are “perpetually attached to the heart, where the breasts are located” (commentary on [Song 7:4](#), “your two breasts are like two fawns of a gazelle”). Gregory explains that gazelles possess keen sight that enables them to avoid hunters' traps, just as the vigilant soul and mind evade Satan's snares.

These readings of the pomegranate and breasts are not original and follow the same lines of interpretation found in the earlier commentary tradition. But there are some peculiarities in Gregory's commentary that set it apart from the rest of the tradition. The most glaring of these is that the Armenian text of the Song of Songs has six extra verses that are not found either in the Hebrew text or the Septuagint or in any other translation of the Old Testament. In most versions of the Armenian Bible these six verses are appended to the end of the book. But Gregory comments on these verses at the beginning of his commentary and gives them the title “Ecclesiastes” (*Eklesiatēs*), indicating by this perhaps that he thought them to be part of the second book of the Solomonic trilogy comprised of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. The expression *blessing of blessings*, which Gregory offers in his introduction as an alternative title for the Song, is in fact found in one of these additional verses as it appears in the commentary:

The Lord made you and established you; he prepared you from the womb; your mother is most beautiful among women; a body will be born for him without fault or blemish from another providence, for He has prepared such, and it was the blessing of blessing.

Gregory takes this verse to be a reference to baptism, through which fallen humanity is restored to the original state of paradise from the font represented here as the womb of the church, the bride of Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, the “other providence” whom God will provide ([John 14:16](#)), humanity is granted a new and glorified body. Gregory may have placed these extraneous verses at the beginning of the Song rather than at the end where the Armenian Bible normally locates them because he thought this reference to rebirth through the baptismal font served as a kind of verbal vestibule where the body is purified through baptism before entering into the Song of Songs (or holy of holies) where the soul is ready to seek communion with Christ. The presence of these uncanonical verses in the Armenian version of the Canticle is a mystery. Gregory gives no indication that he thinks they are uncanonical or that he even knows that they do not appear in the Septuagint. But he recognizes that they are not strictly part of the Song since he partitions them from the rest of the commentary and places Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

them under a separate heading.

Another distinctive feature of Gregory's commentary is his use of uniquely Armenian sources. His main Armenian patristic source are the homilies recorded in the *Teaching of Saint Gregory* and the accounts of the Illuminator's tortures described by Agathangelos. Commenting on [Song 3:11](#)—"Love from the daughters of Jerusalem. Arise and let us look, daughters of Jerusalem, at King Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of his happiness"—Gregory remarks that the Illuminator sees Solomon's crown as a type of the crown of thorns placed on the head of Christ, thus placing on his own head the curse of Adam—"thorns and thistles shall it bring forth for you" ([Gen 3:18](#)). He also remarks that Nyssen interprets the crown differently. For Nyssen, the crown represents the Church and the jewels are the virtues of the saints adorning it. Gregory does not give any details about Nyssen's interpretation but simply remarks that he cites Nyssen more often and so presumably thinks it fitting to report the Illuminator's interpretation here instead. The Illuminator's trials and tortures are mentioned several times. In one passage, Gregory plays on the meaning of the name he shares with the apostle of the Armenians. Commenting on [Song 5:2](#)—"I sleep yet my heart is awake"—he notes that the ascetic fathers remained alert and vigilant through all their hardships, and that "our Illuminator," beaten with sticks by ten men for seven days, nevertheless remained *awake* and *alert* with his mind lifted up and ceaselessly praying to God. In a motif that recurs in his other writings, the poet ties his name to its origin from the Greek adjective *grēgorikos*, meaning "watchful, awake." In his own case, though, he notes the inappropriateness of his given name:

From the font, I have been called "Awake,"
And yet I sleep in death's slumber;
On the day of salvation, I was named "Watcher,"
But I shut my eyes to vigilance.

Gregory's wordplay does not work in Armenian since the word for *awake* (*art'un*) and its synonyms are unrelated to the Greek word for alertness. Readers would have to know Greek to catch Gregory's puns. However, since *Art'un* is a masculine Armenian given name and its name day is celebrated on the feast days of the Illuminator, even Armenians ignorant of Greek may have some awareness of this connection in meaning.

Gregory also makes use of Armenian apocryphal writings. In explaining why Solomon portrays the love of God in terms of romantic love, Gregory says that of all the forms of earthly love, it is the love of a married couple that most resembles the love of God. This is because of all lovers, it is spouses who are most willing to sacrifice themselves for their partners:

Adam, out of love for his wife, gave up paradise and the light of glory and fell outside it not because he wanted to become God, but because it seemed to him too unbearable to be separated from [Eve]. He knew very well that God would punish him, for he was not ignorant but filled with prophetic spirit, and he had not yet fallen away from the graces of the Spirit because he had not yet transgressed the commandment.... Even now, out of love for their wives, men obey their commands, knowing that their will can be very wicked or that what they want is improper, but still they are constrained by love. Now Solomon understood that in humans this love is greater than any other love, and so he allegorized it

to the love of Christ and the Church for each other.

This particular explanation of the resemblance of marital and divine love draws from the lore surrounding the first couple recorded in what is known as the Armenian Apocryphal Adam literature. The account of Adam's motives for eating of the fruit stems from the short narrative known as the *History of the Creation and Transgression of Adam*, or *Transgression* for short. The *Transgression* portrays Adam encountering Eve after she ate the fruit:

When Adam came and saw his wife stripped of the light, he grieved and said, "Why have you eaten of the fruit?"

Eve said, "Because the fruit is very sweet. Taste and see how sweet the fruit is!"

Adam said, "I cannot eat it and become like you."

Eve said, "I ate too much and was stripped because of that. Just taste a little."

Adam said, "I cannot taste it and be stripped like you."

Eve said, "Even if you eat it, God won't get mad at you because he really loves you very much."

Adam took the fruit and examined it, but he was afraid he would be stripped like the woman. If he did not taste it, the woman would cry and beg him, saying, "Let us die together or live together. Don't leave me!" But when Adam looked upon the beauty of the woman, he lost his mind. Even though she had been stripped of the light, she was still beautiful, her flesh dazzling white like a pearl since God had just recently created her and adorned her with his own hands. Adam gave it much thought and said, "Maybe God will have mercy on me and won't strip me? When would I be stripped? It would be better for me to die than to be separated and be away from this woman."

For Adam did not realize that if he kept the commandment, God would have been able to create a woman even more beautiful. He studied the fruit in his hand for three hours and said, "I can't live without this woman." So he ignored God's decree and listening to the woman's words, he ate the fruit and was stripped of the light."

Gregory must have been familiar with this apocryphal tale and uses the story to explain the special status of marital love that leads the lover to sacrifice his own good for the good of his beloved. Although the story is quaint and problematic in a number of ways, Gregory's use of it is interesting for reasons that go beyond just his willingness to bring in noncanonical texts to aid in the interpretation of scripture. Gregory's discussion of Adam's motives and the nature of his love clarifies some points on a topic that has been widely discussed by theologians and scholars since the publication by the twentieth-century Swedish Lutheran bishop and theologian Anders Nygren of the book *Agape and Eros*.

According to Nygren, there is a stark difference between these two loves. *Eros* is a passionate desire and longing for the object of one's love. God's love is *agapē*, a sacrificial love that does not seek its own, while *eros* is the human, acquisitive form of love. Although Nygren draws a sharp distinction between these two loves, Gregory indicates that the romantic love of a married couple, based as it is on erotic desire, is nevertheless the closest human equivalent to God's love. Gregory's example shows that Adam's erotic arousal on seeing Eve's flesh in its still pristine form moves him against his better judgment to sacrifice what he knew to be his own good. Gregory does warn us that not every sacrifice for love of one's spouse is commendable. Alluding to the contemporary reality of forced apostasy to Islam, he reminds his readers that in

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times of persecution many have fallen away from Christ out of their love for their family members. What appears to be a noble choice by Adam actually brought about the cataclysmic downfall of the human race, henceforth tainted by his disobedience. So sacrificial love need not be a virtue. It is only virtuous if it is done in accordance with the will of God and out of love for him.

Eros and *agapē* are Greek words and have no exact correlate in either English or Armenian. Gregory's terms *love of God* (*Astutsoy sēr*) and *conjugal love* (*amusnut'ean sēr*) do not correspond exactly to *agapē* and *eros*. Conjugal love need not be exclusively erotic. Adam's love for Eve, as Gregory shows, is at least in part sacrificial or kenotic. Likewise, Christ's love for the church, as described in the Song of Songs is not purely agapic. It resembles and can be understood in the language of a human romantic relationship, as is made clear in the highly erotic descriptions of the groom's desire for the bride.

In place of Nygren's stark dichotomy of erotic and divine love, Gregory's interpretation of the Song connects carnal love with the love of God. Such a reading is already present in Origen and reaches Gregory through Nyssen. It is a clear break from a dualistic approach that separates the two loves and sees physical love as operating in a different realm. Instead, physical love is itself a reflection of and a way toward the higher love of God. The things of this world are signposts to the divine. As such the Song of Songs is a powerful reply to the Tondrakeans who seem to have accepted some of the dualist precepts of earlier heresies and therefore do not see any point in the sanctification of marriage. For them conjugal love is not a sign of some higher reality but is nothing more than the interior feelings and passions experienced by human lovers. For Gregory, though, marriage elevates and sanctifies carnal love, turning it into an earthly image of God's love. Gregory affirms the value of marriage: "there is nothing greater and more honorable on earth than the love of man and woman.... Those who approach marriage in a pure and undefiled manner and who are united together by the ineffable love of the Holy Spirit are blessed with the same blessing by which Adam and Eve were blessedly united." The groom and bride are figures of the mystery of Christ and the church, and since in our fallen state the eyes of our hearts have been blinded to the higher spiritual mysteries, we must approach the spiritual through the physical—that is, through the marital love that resembles it.

Besides being a defense of sacramental marriage, Gregory's commentary is also an account of the monastic life, restoration of which was crucial for the vitality of the church. The early commentaries on the Song tend to focus either on the union of the individual soul with Christ or the love of Christ for his church. Gregory does not see these two interpretations as at odds with each other. The individual souls of the faithful seeking the love of Christ are all collectively part of the church, which is the body of Christ, so it is one love that all the members of the church experience in their union in the body of Christ. When the groom praises the different parts of the bride's body, he is expressing his love for all the members of the church with their distinct roles and graces, just as Paul compared the members of the church to the parts of the body ([1 Cor 12:12–26](#)). Gregory writes:

One can understand the eyes to be the prophets, who acquired foresight through this grace, as Solomon and those like him did. The neck, on which the head remains fastened, and which joins all life from above and below with all the senses, and which was compared to

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David's tower that he built in Talpiot for the administration of warriors, is the great Paul and those like him upon whom Christ stood and from whom all life is distributed to the Church. And the belly are men like our holy Illuminator and John and those like him about whom the Lord testifies when he says *out of his heart will flow rivers of living water* ([John 7:38](#)), that is, the grace of the Spirit. Likewise also the teeth with the reddened lips bring up the words of scripture from the belly and ruminate on them finely, making what is unclear clear and making it understandable to men, and illuminating the other modest members of the body, that is, the Church. By this the whole man becomes the bride of Christ.

The Song describes encounters with Christ that are fleeting and elusive. As such it is an especially apt description of the life of the Christian on earth who is given only a brief foretaste of the presence of God through the Eucharist. This point comes to the fore in the commentary on [Song 5:5–6](#), whose lemma (the section heading that presents the verses commented on) reads:

I rose to open to my nephew. My hands dripped with myrrh and my fingers filled with myrrh were upon the handles of the lock.... I opened it for my nephew, but my nephew passed by, and my soul went after him with his word.... I searched for him and did not find him. I called for him, but he did not respond.

Gregory, speaking in the person of the bride, remarks on this verse:

When I lifted the eyes of my mind to the mind of scripture in order to see the unfathomable depth of its understanding of grace, and I opened my heart to gather within it the brief glimpse and to examine and be instructed in and attain an understanding of his depths, what remained outside the grasp of my weak mind so astonished me that in desiring it I forgot what knowledge I had received when I opened. This is why she says *my nephew passed by*. It is as if while seeing him, he suddenly went away like swift lightning. *And my soul went after him with his word*. That is, though I received but a small ray of his word, my soul left me and I went to his word. It is as if I recognized him and united in his love, ebullient with his commandments. And in supposing that I had reached him, I recognized myself to be even more removed from understanding. For in seeing the true sun, I recognized by the light how far I was from knowledge, I recalled the saying of the divine Solomon elsewhere—*he who increases knowledge will increase suffering* ([Eccl 1:18](#)).

The desire for God is never satiated, but these brief encounters impel the soul to long for more. Gregory describes here an aspect of Nyssen's mystical theology, which is called *epektasis* (from the Greek, literally, a “reaching out after”). The food of Christ fills us but also leaves us hungry and ever more desirous of him. The person yearning for knowledge of God is like a drunkard who cannot stop drinking. Those who taste the love of Christ become drunk with his love and come to despise all other loves, including the love of spouse and children. Gregory implies that however exalted marital love may be, at least some Christians, such as the monks committed to celibacy, are able to transcend the desire of earthly love and seek only the perfect and endless love of God. It is a frenzied madness that impels the soul out of itself, but it is the madness of divine love.

In addition to the interpretations that see the bride as emblematic of the soul and the Church, there is also a Marian interpretation that treats the bride as a figure of the Virgin Mary.

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While this Marian interpretation only became prominent in the exegetical traditions of the West with the Song commentary of the Benedictine theologian Rupert of Deutz (ca. 1075–1129), the connections between the bride and the Virgin run throughout ancient patristic commentary. In Gregory's commentary the Marian aspect is present but does not have the same prominence as the individual or ecclesial readings of the bride. The focus on the ecclesial reading is the most salient, given Gregory's intent to respond to the T'ondrakean rejection of the church. But the Marian reading does have a minor role in the commentary. In one instance, Gregory identifies Mary with the bride when the daughters of Jerusalem remark, "our sister is small and does not have breasts; what will we do for our sister on the day she is spoken for?" ([Song 8:8](#)). After giving the ecclesial reading of this verse according to which the daughters, who are the angelic powers, are speaking about the new church of the gentiles, Gregory notes that the sister may also be the *Theotokos* at the annunciation. The mortal young girl is to all appearances too weak to bear the incarnate Lord in her womb, but when the bride hears the doubts of the angels, she is emboldened and responds to their bewilderment, "I am a wall, and my breasts are as towers; I was in his eyes as one who has found peace." In chapter nine on Gregory's Mariology, I will discuss how even though the Marian reading is suppressed in the commentary, it is clearly on Gregory's mind and becomes more pronounced in one of his hymns.

The Song of Songs presents us with a glimpse of the holy of holies, the summit of human happiness when the individual soul together with the church pursues and unites with Christ, but that happiness is described in erotic language comprehensible for our carnal minds. As such, the work is relevant to Gregory's mystical theology. Writing the commentary may also have inspired Gregory's idea of constructing a book in the form of a church. Realizing that the Song serves as a figure of the holy of holies, the altar of the church, Gregory may have conceived of composing a longer song that would represent the entire journey of the faithful through the church to God. The commentary even suggests that the noncanonical verses placed at the front of the Song serve as a kind of a narthex before the sanctuary. Those verses, which invoke baptism, served as a kind of baptistry to prepare the reader prior to entering the sanctuary. The thought of conceiving the sections of a book like the chambers of a building, as we will see, guided his later construction of the *Book of Lamentation*. But already in his commentary on the Canticle, Gregory appears to have implemented this concept on a smaller scale.

We do not know if Gurgēn was pleased with the results of the commission he had given Gregory, but given the monk's burgeoning reputation, we may suppose that it was another distinction that conferred upon the new monastery of Narek even greater prestige and prominence as a center of learning and creativity.

The Encomia

In the case of his encomia or panegyrics—formal literary expressions of praise—Gregory was adding to a long tradition in Armenian literature, dating back to the fifth century, beginning with Koriwn's biography of his teacher, Mashtots', the inventor of the Armenian alphabet. Gregory's encomia, as befits the genre, are written in an elevated, highly ornate literary style.

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He wrote the *History of the Holy Cross of Aparank'* for Stephen (Step'anos), the bishop of Mokk', probably in 983 just after the donation of the relic of the True Cross to the monastery of Aparank', about 40 kilometers southwest of Narekavank' and located in Stephen's diocese. Although there is a tradition that the Illuminator established a monastery at Aparank', the earliest written record of the monastery is Gregory's encomium. It was there in the tenth century that a bishop named David built the church of St. John the Baptist. Even if there were religious communities at this location prior to David's building efforts, the establishment of a formal monastery probably came later in the middle of the tenth century, part of the general flowering of monasteries and convents throughout Armenia and especially in Vaspurakan and the Lake Van basin. As a monk of a monastery that had been established just a couple of decades before Aparank', Gregory's affinity for the monks of Aparank' may have motivated him to accept Stephen's request to compose the encomium. Aparank' monastery had achieved renown as a result of David's remains buried there. His tomb, under the "solid vault of the altar" became a place of pilgrimage where "amazing and remarkable healing miracles" were reported. According to one account, Stephen, who succeeded David as bishop of Mokk', sold the soil surrounding the tomb in an effort to finance his project of building a church dedicated to the Virgin there. As word reached Constantinople, the Byzantine emperors, Basil II (r. 976–1025) and his younger brother Constantine VIII, who officially shared the throne but did not reign until after Basil's death, became interested in financing the construction.

Gregory's history expressly denies that Stephen had any desire or need to sell the miraculous soil. In Gregory's account, Stephen's unnamed uncle decided of his own accord to renounce his family inheritance and journey to Constantinople to pursue a military career in the imperial court. He took with him some of the miraculous earth from David's tomb as a memento of his native land. The emperors, impressed with the abilities of Stephen's uncle as well as the miraculous powers of the soil, pledged their support to the bishop's construction projects at Aparank'. Stephen politely declined any material assistance and instead asked for a spiritual gift, which turned out to be a piece of the relic of the True Cross. Honoring the request, the emperors ordered an elaborate reliquary be built to house the sacred wood, "a four-winged artifact cast in gold, in the shape of the divine cross, and placed in it a piece cut from the life-giving Wood which held the glorious Lord." To it they added other relics of Christ's crucifixion: the sponge soaked in vinegar, the towel by which he was girded, thorns from the crown, one of the nails that pierced his body, and one relic of the nativity: the swaddling cloth with which the infant Jesus was wrapped "like a homeless being on the day of his birth." Stephen's uncle returned to his native land with the reliquary, which was received with ceremonious solemnity and placed "under covers made of precious and golden threads" next to David's tomb. Stephen had built elaborate and imposing buildings on the site, with altars "replicating in a most attractive way the seraph-inhabited courts at Zion." Gregory's encomium lavishes its praise not only on Stephen and his uncle but also on the emperors Basil and Constantine, who ruled "with dignity, peace, and tranquility, extending their own most-trusted progeny, high and marvelous branches stemming from the lordly, royal, and well-rooted tree." Gregory's praise of the emperors is in part due to Basil's pursuit of a policy of peaceful coexistence with the non-Chalcedonian Armenians. But beyond any religious motives he may have had, there were compelling political and military reasons for Basil to maintain warm

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relations with the Artsruni house. The gift of the reliquary to a monastery in Vaspurakan would go far in cultivating goodwill.

The *History of the Holy Cross of Aparank'* formed part of a triptych of encomia, all written at the behest of Stephen of Mokk'. The other two panels of the triptych are the *Encomium on the Holy Cross* and the *Encomium on the Holy Virgin Mother of God*. Both of these works exist in two different recensions. There was already a tradition in Armenian theological literature of writing encomia on the Holy Cross, beginning in the seventh century with David of Nergin's panegyric on the God-receiving cross, a work often wrongly attributed to David the Neoplatonic philosopher. Gregory adds to this tradition, mindful also of the importance of extolling the cross in the context of T'ondrakean rejection of its veneration. He sets the cross before us as a fitting object of our reverence, for it is a sign of Christ's redemption:

You are praised, O redemptive sign of the glory of Jesus. You hold the gift of life in the form of death. The wise man, the author of the Songs, observed ahead of time your amazing mystery which he expressed with the flow of the Spirit, saying with gratitude—*blessed is the wood by which righteousness comes* [[Wisdom of Solomon 14:7](#)].

At first glance, an encomium to the Virgin Mary does not seem to fit in with the other two panels of Gregory's triptych. But just as the cross bore Christ's body at his death, so too Mary bore his body at his birth. Because both Mary and the cross are life-giving "bearers of God" the inclusion of an encomium of the *theotokos* in the trilogy is entirely appropriate and lends Gregory's triptych a congenial symmetry. Gregory himself makes the connection of the Virgin and the cross explicit in his litany for the feast of the Assumption. There, he describes the word of God being nailed to Mary's body in the incarnation. We will study this encomium on the Virgin in detail in chapter nine.

Two other encomia are devoted to St. James (Yakob) of Nisibis and the Apostles. St. James, a Syrian who served as bishop of Nisibis (modern-day Nusaybin in southeastern Turkey, straddling the border with Syria) in the early years of the fourth century, was a popular saint whose cult was especially observed in southern Armenia. The saint had a particular significance for the monks of Narek since their monastery housed his relics. James was a contemporary and, according to the Armenian tradition, a cousin of the Illuminator. He took part in the Council of Nicaea and was a noted miracle worker. Apparently James had a fondness for mountain climbing; during his climb to the top of Mount Sararad, he believed that he recovered a piece of Noah's ark. Sararad should not be confused with Mount Ararat or Ağrı Dağ farther to the north and currently on the Turkish side of the border with Armenia. Ararat is associated in more recent times with the ark. Mount Sararad is most likely Mount Judi, near the point where Turkey, Syria, and Iraq meet, where the early Armenian tradition together with the Syriac and Qur'anic traditions locate the ark's resting place. In the course of praising James's works of piety, Gregory expounds on the significance of his discovery:

By remembering Noah's wooden ark, a means of salvation for a few out of countless many, he brought its mystery to attention.... The preeminently honorable Saint James longed to have a blessed piece of a plank from the old ark, which became a refuge for clean and unclean animals, as a reminder of the experiences of past generations. For there were those in his days who, having shut the eye of faith, considered the stories and acts of old ages to

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be fables and deduced that certain events never happened. Thus they considered these accounts useless and laughable, born of the pangs of mental blabber. For among the pagans the story bears the name of Deucalion instead of Noah, and the ark was purportedly made by him. Because of this misleading hearsay, and to straighten out unbelievers, he displayed the slice of wood granted him from the ark, and this shattered the misconceptions and doubts.

In Greek mythology, Deucalion built a boat to save himself and his wife Pyrrha from the deluge unleashed by Zeus's wrath. Those who questioned the biblical account may have pointed to parallel flood myths in other cultures and written off the Genesis story as one more fiction. So at least in Gregory's mind James's discovery served to disabuse the skeptics of their doubts. But beyond that, the relic was a symbol of the church, the New Ark "that carries all" safely along the "tempestuous sea, upset not by turbulent waves but by various happenings and violent passions."

The encomium on the apostles affords Gregory the opportunity to display some of the numerological skills learned from Anania and that were part of the broader Neoplatonic patrimony of the school of Narek. The number of apostles, three times four, symbolizes the "praiseworthy goodness" of the "daring preachers" who proclaimed the Trinitarian God to the four corners of the earth. Foremost among the apostles is Peter,

first in number and primacy, the solid Rock, the seven-word confession to his credit, the chosen and glorified in harmony with the mystical cycle of this world's beginning and end, is Cephas, who was pronounced blessed by the lips of the Giver of Life, was inspired by the Father's benevolence, and made wise. Moved by the Spirit of Wisdom to confess rightly, having discerned the eternal purpose for the inscrutable birth, he was deservedly blessed by the statement of the uncreated One, "Blessed are you, Simon, heir to Jonah" [[Matt 16:17](#)].

Gregory achieves dubious success in making Peter's confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God," have seven words in Armenian by treating the definite article—which is in fact a demonstrative suffix appended to the modified word "Christ"—as though it is a separate word. The seven words harmonize both with the six days of creation followed by the seventh day of the Sabbath, and the seven millennia of the world's existence before Christ's second coming.

Alluding to the apostolic succession, Gregory praises the apostles not only for their own deeds, but for those done by their disciples whom they ordained to carry on the mission of the church. Including Paul among the apostles, Gregory notes that two of the evangelists were disciples of the apostles—Mark, a disciple of Peter, and Luke, of Paul:

Mark, the saintly youth who was named High Wall, a disciple of the Rock; Luke, the bearer of the resplendent Resurrection, teller of the story of the Ascension, an Antiochian young man, a master healer of souls rather than of bodies; others from among you were shepherds and teachers.

Here again, Gregory is influenced by both Anania and Khosrov's penchant for etymology, interpreting Mark (*Markos*) in the sense of "boundary" or "wall" (as in English "march"). Presumably Gregory is connecting the apostle's name with the unrelated Armenian word *marz*

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(“border”). He is correct, though, in associating *Luke* with light.

In keeping with the school of Narek’s broad ecumenical convictions, Gregory ends this encomium by lauding the universal range of the apostles’ preaching, which resulted in producing disciples of the Gospel throughout the world: from the “famed regions of Kedar” to the “islands of the Cretans descended from Canaan,” “the easternmost regions of the Parthians and Persian hordes,” Libya and Ethiopia, “Tyre with the Phoenicians,” and the Latins and Romans where “their message was well received.”

Advice on the Orthodox Faith and the Pure and Virtuous Life

This treatise is among the least known and studied of Gregory’s works but it offers important insights into his doctrinal beliefs as well as moral teachings. As far as I know it has not been translated into English or any other Western language, but it deserves wider exposure because it serves as a kind of summula (mini-summary) of Gregory’s theological doctrines and ethical advice, not unlike the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (1096–1160) in the Western Christian tradition. Gregory’s work consists of seventy-six “sentences.” Much of this material is repeated elsewhere in his writings, but the Advice is a convenient compendium of his teachings.

Gregory begins with his doctrine of the Trinity and the incarnation. God the Father is “true essence, perfect, uncreated, without beginning, eternal, uncaused, incomprehensible, invisible, ineffable.” But in addition to these attributes of the Father, Gregory also lists terms that indicate God’s transcendence of all our descriptions: God is *superessential*, *superexistent*, *superlight*, and *superineffable*. Gregory again shows the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius. The Greek equivalent to “superineffable” occurs in several places in the Pseudo-Dionysius corpus—twice in the *Divine Names*, in particular—so Gregory must have been familiar with this work and been influenced by its approach to mysticism. The negation of all the names of God requires that we negate even the negated names (like *uncreated* and *ineffable*) that deny affirmative properties. To say that God is ineffable is to define him with our own concepts, but his ineffability is such that it even evades our ability to describe it with our word “ineffable.” His ineffability is itself ineffable. We will say more in chapter eight about the role of these names and descriptions in Gregory’s mystical theology.

The Son of God is the very form and brilliance of the Father, expressing his image ([Heb 1:3](#)) and sharing his essence. He is God from God, uncreated from uncreated, eternity from eternity, life from life, light from light. Though he is the Son of the Father, he is not younger than the Father but they are coexistent. For without the Son, the Father is not the Father, nor without the Father can the Son be the Son.

The Holy Spirit flows from the Father ineffably. He is not begotten with the Son but proceeds from the divine essence, in support of which Gregory cites [John 15:26](#)—“the Spirit of truth proceeds from the Father.” The Spirit shares the essence of the Father and the glory of the Son.

At the annunciation, the Word came to dwell in the womb of the all-holy Virgin Mary, purified by the Spirit. He is perfect man and true God, mixed with what cannot be mixed in an unconfused union, in a new and miraculous composition. Gregory affirms that Christ suffered all the human passions except for sin. Paradoxically, the one who feeds all living things

Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

experienced hunger, and the one who grants the water of life to all his faithful thirsted. He who gives rest to all the afflicted wearied; the ever-vigilant guardian of Israel slept. And the one who removed every tear from each face himself wept.

Concerning ethics and proper conduct, Gregory cites [James 2:26](#)—“faith without works is dead”—to support his claim that salvation cannot be achieved without virtuous works. Faith is not sufficient since even the demons believe in and tremble before God ([James 2:19](#)). The law and prophets and the Gospel together teach that in all things we must love. Jesus said that he recognizes his disciples by their love for one another ([John 13:35](#)), not through their healing the sick or exorcising demons. He knows that when we truly love God and our fellow humans, we will perform all the other commandments. Virtuous living requires that we close the eyes of both our body and mind to the temptations of lust, envy, and all other sins but open them to the beauty of creation. We ought to marvel at the miraculous works of God, as David did—“I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established” ([Ps 8:3](#)). We must hasten in pursuit of this life of Christian virtue so that like the wise virgins we may be found pleasing by the heavenly groom and may with lit lamps enter the heavenly bridal chamber ([Matt 25:1–13](#)).

Against the T'ondrakeans

Kchaw must have been a forbidding monastery, a place of exile and penance for wayward and troublesome monks. Centuries earlier before Christianity became the established religion in Armenia, according to the region’s folklore, malignant demons inhabited the place. When the nuns who were fleeing Rome, Gayanē, Hripsimē, and their companions, arrived they exorcized the demons and planted a cross on the site where the monastery was later built.

Though he was one of the monks of Kchaw in Gregory’s day, Mushegh was not contrite. After arriving at Kchaw he began to preach T’ondrakean doctrines and turned the monastery into a haven for the heretics. Or at least that is what the reports that reached Narek stated, and Gregory considered these accounts trustworthy and free of malicious intent. Gregory’s concern about T’ondrakean heresy runs throughout his works. In the commentary on the Song of Songs, he upholds marriage as the most honorable and greatest of earthly things, and criticizes those to whom it “does not appear of great value or importance,” among them the T’ondrakeans. Gregory’s emphasis on the material character of the sacraments and worship is a pervasive theme of the *Book of Lamentation*. Examples include his celebration in Prayer 92 of the wooden semantron, a percussion instrument struck with a mallet to call monks to prayer, and of the sacramental holy oil in Prayer 93. While Gregory is presenting a constructive sacramental theology in his writings, his focus on the physical dimension of worship is also intended to counter the T’ondrakean’s rejection of the sacraments. His encomium on the Holy Cross, as well as his history of the Holy Cross of Aparank’, while commemorating and honoring the relations between Byzantium and Vaspurakan, emphasize the importance of the veneration of the cross in opposition to the T’ondrakean contempt for material veneration. But it is in his letter in response to the situation at Kchaw that Gregory provides the most sustained and explicit treatment of the heresy. His letter to the monks there was not written at anyone’s request but was composed only through his desire to “free them from their evil ideas.”

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Gregory lists the ideas that Mushegh propagated and that his brother monks at Kchaw did not consider “foreign to the apostolic faith.” The list reveals the antisacramental and antimaterial nature of T’ondrakean teachings and practice. Ordination was inefficacious. Communion did not transform the elements of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ but is merely a “common meal.” The water of baptism was nothing more than “bath water” with no higher spiritual significance. They disparaged marriage as well, refusing to acknowledge, Gregory writes, that marriage was “blessed by the Lord himself, honored by his miracles and the presence of his mother, the *Theotokos*.” Nor do they regard Sunday as a special day set apart for the Lord and his worship, even though it is “the image of the blessed day on which God created the first light, perfected the light of His Resurrection, and dispensed the life-giving light of the Advent.” They rejected the veneration of the cross, the “sign that the Incarnate God lifted up and carried on his shoulders.” And the leader of their sect, Smbat of Zahrehawan, blasphemously declared himself to be a Christ, though he was in truth, Gregory says, one of those about whom “Christ had earlier testified when he said that false messiahs and prophets would arise” ([Mark 13:22](#)).

Gregory refers to the treatise against the T’ondrakeans by Anania of Narek, whom he identifies here as his teacher and uncle, a wise champion of the orthodox faith, who had examined the false teachings of Mushegh and “demolished the fanciful blasphemy of the iniquitous heretics.” But in contrast to the remnant of Anania’s treatise with its ponderous arguments and contrived etymologies, Gregory’s letter is direct and personal. He even employs stylistic devices like alliteration. This is my attempt to reproduce his alliterative denunciation of the heretics:

They are a drove of dogs, a throng of thieves, a welter of wolves, a den of demons, an assembly of assassins, a collection of crucifiers ... a society of sorcerers, contemptible not only to the clergy but even to the pagans!

The pagans, offended by the T’ondrakeans, are in fact Muslims and, in particular, the Arab emir Abu’l-Ward, who executed Smbat and massacred many of his followers. Though considering him a pagan, Gregory is content to recognize God’s hand in the emir’s persecution of heretics: “the avenging heathen emir Apl-Vard has justly become the rod of the Lord Jesus’ wrath.” In Gregory’s account, Abu’l-Ward taunted Smbat and expressed his desire to test his claim to be a Christ. If after being put to death and buried, Smbat rises from the dead like the true Christ, Abu’l-Ward pledged to recognize him as Christ. Gregory praises these words, stating that “God, and not something of this world, had planted this thought in the [emir].” God’s providence acts even through Muslims so that “evil may be reprimanded or killed through evil, just as the monstrous Indian dragon feeds.”

Mushegh had asked by what authority Gregory chastised him and which scripture permitted him to condemn a fellow monk. Gregory responded by noting that Paul was not ashamed even to condemn twice an angel who preaches an alien gospel ([Gal 1:8](#)). And the church condemns those whose teachings deviate even in part from orthodoxy. These include the Arians condemned in the anathema of the Council of Nicaea, as well as the Nestorians repudiated by Cyril of Alexandria. If these reprimands directed at those who deviate only in part from orthodoxy are proper, then we are even more justified, Gregory argues, in denouncing

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those who are “much more separated from us, and [who] have cut themselves off from Christ and bound themselves to Satan!”

Gregory ends by asking the abbot of Kchaw not to be offended nor to presume that his words of chastisement are motivated by hate rather than by love. He asks that the abbot order the copying of Anania’s “wisdom-filled books against the heretics.” Ironically, the monastery of Kchaw’s most prized relic was the autographed manuscript of Gregory’s letter. At the time of the Thierrys’ visit in the 1970s, Kchaw’s monastic church was still partially standing, although its narthex had been leveled.

Chapter Five

A New Song to the Lord: Gregory's Hymns and Poetry

Hymns and Liturgical Poetry

Gurgēn, the prince who had commissioned Gregory to compose his commentary on the Song of Songs was perhaps drawn to the monk because he had already made a name for himself through his innovative composition of hymns. Gregory's desire to adorn the liturgy with new melodies and words was no doubt inspired by his father's efforts at liturgical reform.

Khosrov's main concern was to reform the liturgy and make it more accessible to the people. Gregory shared his father's desire to enrich the liturgy so that it would more effectively touch the hearts of the faithful. He understood the power of music to stir people's sentiments. His own experience of the church's rich hymnody would have impressed this on him, but also as a young student in the academy of Narekavank' he must have read books like the textbook of the Neoplatonic philosopher David that provided theoretical support for what he also perceived from direct experience:

Music possesses great power, for it can plunge the soul into various states and restore it to good humor, to which laments (*oghb*) and elegies bear witness, for these can dispose the soul accordingly. Thus some people tell the tale of how when at a feast Alexander [the Great] heard a musician play a war song, at which he instantly took up arms and departed. But when a musician began to play a festive tune he returned to join his fellow guests.

This passage may have planted in his mind the seed of the idea of composing not only hymns but a book of lamentation (*oghbergut'iwn*). Anania may have encouraged Gregory's main poetic innovation, the genre of sacred litanies called *gandz*, which means "treasure." Later Armenian sacred composers would add to Gregory's treasures to produce an impressive anthology known as the *gandzaran* or "treasury." Each of these "treasure-hymns" begins with the word "treasure." An example is the treasure-hymn for the nativity and baptism of Christ, which are celebrated in the Armenian church on the same day, January 6. Although dedicated to the nativity of Christ, this treasure-hymn is addressed to the Virgin Mary, as is common for hymns celebrating this feast:

Treasure incorruptible, greatness concealed,
Awe-inspiring, ineffable mystery that appeared on earth, Holy Bearer of God—
The unfathomable God the Word
Whom you bore physically within you and gave birth to the Savior of the world,
Lifting him up into your bosom to suckle,
The One who was revealed today for the rejoicing of the human race,

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To deliver the first Adam from the former curses,
Also to erase the seal of condemnation placed upon the foremother Eve

By giving birth to the Only-Begotten Son.
Please intercede with Christ the King
To come to our help; we plead.

A treasure-hymn is often paired with a *tagh*, or *ode*, a celebration of the event with a responsorial in the form of a refrain. In his Ode for the Holy Cross, Gregory symbolically transforms the sacrificed lamb into the resurrected and triumphant lion. The imagery of Christ as lion is already familiar from the Old Testament, as in [Hosea 5:14](#): “for I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah.” Terian also mentions the Aramaic Targum to [Isaiah 53](#), which explicitly transforms the lamb into a defiant lion. Remarkably, Gregory’s ode is sung from the perspective of a soul held captive in the depths of the earth, in Hell, who expects to be released from the bonds by Christ’s harrowing. Perhaps it is Adam himself who sings. Also notable is that the last word of each line is repeated at the start of the next verse. This verbal linking together of the verses is a poetic figure of the chains binding the soul in Hades. The only break in the chain occurs between the penultimate and last lines, signifying Christ’s undoing of the bonds of captivity as he descends into Hell:

I speak of the Lion’s roar,
 crying on the four-winged cross,
On the four-winged cross, crying,
 calling to the depths of the earth,
The depths of the earth trembled,
 they shook beneath his mighty voice.
This mighty voice I heard
 loosens the bonds I’m in,
He longs to loosen my bonds,
 to reverse the captivity of the captives.
I say, “Blessed are the captives
 whom the Lion raised.”
Those raised by the Lion
 expect no further suffering;
They expect no suffering,
 they await the wreaths that wither not.
They receive the braided wreaths
 from the Lion, the immortal King.
Let us give glory to the Redeemer
 who rescued the captives from prison.

One other genre of sacred poetry that Gregory composed is the *mehedi*, or “melody,” a type of ode that is usually sung during the preparation of the gifts. One example is this melody on the raising of Lazarus:

Good news to Mary
 And also to Martha, beloved sisters.

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Sister following sister approached the Savior with the request:

“Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, had you been here
Our brother would not have died.”

The Giver of Life cried out with a loud voice,
“Lazarus, come forth.”

Gregory's hymnodic creations spread from his monastery throughout Armenia and became part of the rich liturgical heritage of the rite. Unfortunately, the treasure-hymns and odes were assembled in separate collections, so the continuity between the two was mostly forgotten. The original intent was for the treasure-hymn commemorating the feast for the day to be paired with a corresponding ode. In this way, the faithful would acquire both an understanding of the meaning of the feast and an emotional attachment through the music and evocative imagery of the lyrics. For the exaltation of the Holy Cross, one may begin with the treasure-hymn proper for the day:

Treasure ineffable, greatness concealed,
Mighty, awe-inspiring, always good,
Thrice-holy, unbounded, blessed, living Name,
Indescribable reality, shut beyond sense perception, altogether inexplicable,
Transcendent, beyond reach, yet accessibly near, eternal King,
Behold, our petitions rise like incense before you, Almighty; we plead.

...

Forecaster of spring and upward flights,
Example of your will upheld for the world,
To adhere to the light, to Noah's ark
Image of redemption, representation of miracles, refuge of hope,
By covenant you interceded for a new people, above those in heaven,
Drawing them to you by the wing of your cross.
Behold, our petitions rise like incense before you, Almighty; we plead.

This treasure-hymn for the Holy Cross would then be followed with an ode for the cross. One such ode imagines a visitor to Jerusalem addressing a bird that has perched on one of the wings of the cross. Terian compares the structure of this ode to the medieval Italian *canzone*, a poem resembling sonnets but with greater flexibility in terms of meter and number of stanzas. The visitor informs the bird that the Good News of Christ's resurrection is addressed to it too, indicating that Christ came to redeem not only all of humanity but also all of creation. The bird also symbolizes the resurrection. Like the cross, it has two wings, and in spreading its wings and flying from the site of the crucifixion, the bird represents the new life that emanates from the cross:

I go up to Jerusalem,
To that city built by God,
To that beautifully built temple,
To that lily-like Zion.
Who is like the one unlike others?
O unlike One!

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A bright bird perched
On that wing of the cross.
It had a silver-plated wing,
Like the rays of the sun.
Who is like the one unlike all others?
O unlike One!

It let out a fine sound
Like Gabriel's trumpet,
Filled its eyes with tears
Like the morning dew.
Who is like the one unlike all others?
O unlike One!

O most beautiful bird,
Perched on that wing of the Cross:
How do you produce that melodious sound
Like Gabriel's trumpet?
How do you fill your eyes with tears
Like the morning dew?
Who is like the one unlike all others?
O unlike One!

O most beautiful bird:
The summons of the good news is addressed to you.
Keep rejoicing with your superb song.
Who is like the one unlike all others?
O unlike One!

The text of fifteen of these festal collections or cycles survives in manuscript collection, although the original music for most of the hymns has been lost. In some cases, later composers have written new melodies or arrangements for the lyrics. Since hymns have an important and even fundamental role as a source of theology in the churches of the East, I will in the subsequent discussion of Gregory's theology draw from his hymnography, as well as his other works.

The Book of Lamentation

A Cathedral of Words

While his other poetic works display his brilliance and creativity, Gregory's crowning achievement is the *Book of Lamentation*, also sometimes given the title *Speaking with God* as almost all of its prayers begin with the prelude: "Speech with God from the depths of my heart." Expressing even more the intimacy felt toward this work, Armenians often just call it the *Narek*. For many Armenians, it has assumed the role of a second Bible. Some Armenians even attribute to it magical powers. The prayers comprising the work were recited, placed under pillows, even eaten for good luck.

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The opening of the poem, bearing the title *Threshold* or *Tenets*, states that the words of the book are intended to provide help for the afflicted by providing rules for living the penitential life and confessing one's sins. The book is a "salve for incurable wounds/effective potions for unseen pains/remedies for multifaceted life-threatening throes." It is meant to move the reader or listener to tears and motivate them to pray. Gregory says that he composed the poem at the request of "the monastic fathers and many hermits." At the end of the work is his colophon in which Gregory adds that he compiled the poems in the years 1001–2 during the reign of Basil II, three years after the emperor had arrived and subsequently subdued the "enemies of the church" in Bulgaria. During this time, the poet "planned, structured, arranged, collected, inscribed, compiled, amplified, established in detail, and assembled into one the many facets of this sacred book" with the assistance of his brother John. His claim to have spent this time collecting and compiling the various individual poems into one structure is consistent with the hints in some of the poems that they were originally written much earlier. Thus, in Prayer 51, Gregory speaks of his "earthly father, whose care diminishes in his waning days" as though he were still alive. By 1001 Khosrov would surely have been dead for at least two decades. It is plausible that Gregory began to write some of these poems as early as the 970s when his father was still alive and then added to them over the years until finally toward the end of their own lives he and his brother assembled them in their present form.

The format and style of composition is remarkable in many ways. I will mention here some of the most striking features. The book consists of ninety-five "words" or "discourses." The Armenian word is *ban*, which corresponds to the Greek word *logos* and shares much of its ambiguity and range of meaning. I follow Samuelian, though, in translating *ban* as "prayer." Perhaps a more apt translation would be "prayerful words," since in Gregory's mystical understanding, the prayer of words will one day be supplanted with a prayer of utter silence and stillness in God, the Word who is beyond all words. But since in our ordinary experience prayers are verbal, "prayer" will do as a translation of Gregory's *ban*. Although in the manuscript tradition the prayers are written as if they were prose, it is clear that Gregory intended them as verse. The meter is fairly flexible; mostly Gregory favors groupings of five syllables. More striking is his extensive use of various poetic devices including alliteration, assonance, repetition, and rhyme to heighten the emotional effect of his prayers. Gregory is the first known Armenian to write poems using both internal and external rhyme, all of which were already present in oral folk poetry influenced by Arabic models. In some cases, the repetition and rhyme are intended to bring about an incantatory effect in the listener, as in the following verses where each line begins and ends with the words *I have sinned*, which in Armenian is one word (*meghay*):

I have sinned against your beneficence, in my worthlessness I have sinned,
I have sinned against your ray of dawn, in my darkness I have sinned,
I have sinned against your countless kind graces, truly I have sinned....

The repetitive rhythm of this prayer makes it suitable for the kind of ceaseless prayer counseled by Paul and which also accords with Anania's teaching on prayer as a spiritual exercise. It also has obvious connections with the Byzantine hesychast practice of prayer of the

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heart involving repetition of the phrase “Lord Jesus, have mercy on me,” or the repetition of single words in the Western work *The Cloud of Unknowing*, written by an anonymous author.

Some of the poems contain end rhymes. The value of the vowel of the rhyme may have some hidden significance, something that Gregory playfully suggests at one point. Prayer 26.2 ends every verse with the Armenian vowel *i*, the letter that also represents the numeral 20 in Armenian notation. Here, I take a few minor liberties in order to maintain a rhyme:

I will affix my lamentations here in a different way,
I will alter my bitter tears with this sound that I say,
I will state the very same condition by way of wordplay,
With the indivisible, mystical number ten and two convey.

The significance of the number 20 here is unclear, and commentators continue to speculate over its meaning. There is much more that should be said about Gregory’s impressive use of language and rhetoric, a topic that would easily fill many books. But our focus in this book is more on the content of Gregory’s works, so we should turn to another difficult question: Is there any guiding principle of the organization of the prayers?

Given that Gregory and John worked together to compile the book, it is natural to suppose some overarching logic to the organization of the ninety-five prayers. The Mahés have put forward the convincing thesis that the prayers are partitioned into three unequal parts. Noticing that some of the prayers are much longer than others, they propose that these longer prayers were not extraneous insertions but serve as the boundaries or vestibules between the chambers of a church. For example, Prayer 34, which is a profession of faith in the Trinity and prayer to the Holy Spirit, is approximately twice the length of the immediately preceding and following prayers. So too is Prayer 75, an extended creed that focuses on the church. Then there is the diptych formed by Prayers 92 and 93, the former a meditation on the semantron and the latter on the holy oil or *muron* used in chrismation and ordination. Because these prayers are more traditionally theological than the other prayers, some scholars have deemed them extraneous to the book and have even excluded them from their editions. But the Mahés believe that the differences are deliberate and serve as markers of “monumental porticos” that partition the three chambers of the church. They were not the first to recognize the tripartite structure of the book, but they are the first I know of to read the architecture of a church in the book. The first part of the book, Prayers 1 to 32, constitutes the *gawit*, or narthex, of the church. The narthex served as a place for the gathering of the penitents and unbaptized who were not permitted in the sanctuary during the liturgy of the Eucharist. The order of dismissal of the catechumens right before eucharistic celebration remains a part of the Armenian divine liturgy, though it is rarely enforced today. With the profession of faith in Prayer 34, Gregory indicates that the reader who has made it to this point is entering the nave of the church from the narthex. The focus of the previous prayers was on confession of sin and penance. Now that the faithful are prepared to enter the nave after having been baptized, they are ready to receive communion after professing the creed. Although they have received the initial sacramental grace of the Eucharist, the faithful must still work to receive the supplementary graces that allow them to grow in virtue. Strengthened through participation in the sacraments, they can now pray for their enemies and discern those sins that have evaded the initial

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examination of their conscience. With the meditation on the church in Prayer 75 they pass into the tabernacle or sanctuary where the church is revealed as not only a visible edifice but also a spiritual temple that bridges heaven and earth. The foretaste of the kingdom and union of God that the communicants receive from the Eucharist is consummated in the last judgment. Gregory prays for the intercession of all the saints, apostles, martyrs, and angels, and especially the Mother of God, who is the focus of Prayer 80. Prayer 91 is the compline prayer as Gregory retires to sleep, followed by his awakening at the sounding of the semantron, on which the following prayer is a meditation, and his anointing of immortality with the holy chrism in Prayer 93, and ending with the dawn of the new life in Christ in Prayer 95.

While some details of the Mahé's analysis of the poem are questionable, I think that they are fundamentally correct that Gregory sees himself constructing a poem in the form of a church and that the different sections represent the different parts of the church structure, as well as the life of the faithful in the journey toward God. Gregory himself compares the words of his poem to stones used to build churches, although they are, at least at first, stones that he uses to torment his sinful soul:

And because I have made of you a target
In front of my mind's eye,
O my worthless soul,
I mercilessly cast these stones
Like pillars of words at you
As if you were some untamed wild beast.

Yet those same stones can be used to construct a building:

May I, a sinner, afflicted, mortal,
Receive from the beneficent Heavenly Father
The fruit of salvation and healing
That I may at the outset of this
Book of lamentation and prayers
Construct an edifice of faith.

Building on the Mahé thesis of the architectural structure of the poem, I want to propose that the church of poems that Gregory has assembled is not just any church but the majestic cathedral standing on the island within view of his cave and which he must have visited on numerous occasions: the Cathedral of the Holy Cross of Aght'amar. This unique and majestic architectural achievement, the palatine cathedral of King Gagik, is alluded to at least once in his poem:

Will I see again your holy temple,
I who cry out with the prophet's voice,
From the belly of the sea-monster?

The reference to Jonah and the sea-monster calls to mind the relief on the cathedral's exterior wall of the prophet being thrown from the ship into the mouth of a fantastic scaly sea creature. Just as the exterior walls of the cathedral are covered with bas-reliefs depicting biblical scenes and the interior walls with brilliant frescoes, so too Gregory's poem is dotted Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

with biblical vignettes with just enough detail for anyone versed in scripture to appreciate. Jonah and the sea creature make a fleeting appearance, as do Adam and Eve tempted by the serpent and eating the forbidden fruit. In Prayer 71 he writes, “I abandoned the Lord’s commandment and followed the serpent’s suggestion.” Likewise, the depiction of Isaac being bound by his father ([Gen 22](#)):

As the first scripture gives a subtle figure
Of a vow at the altar,
An offering of the blood of the slaughtered,
In the allegory of Abraham’s sacrifice,
Revealing in advance your will, O giver of life,
To save the wretched.

Like the relief on the cathedral wall of David with the Philistine giant towering over him, Gregory’s prayer sings the praise of Christ’s victory through the cross over Satan, prefigured by the king of Israel slaying his foe: “You unleashed the stones against Goliath with your slingshot of wood.”

So, too, the three youths in the furnace of [Daniel 3](#), who appear on the southern façade of the cathedral, are celebrated in the poem:

Like the three blessed youths,
Who were tested in the blazing fire
In Babylon and were not harmed,
I sigh their song of grief.

These vignettes are meant to evoke an emotional and personal connection with the biblical stories. Gregory sees himself in the plight of the three young men just as he expects us to share in their experiences and aspire to their faith. His brief references to the biblical figures are glimpses of the narratives that make the depicted events as concrete and personal as the reliefs on the exterior of the cathedral.

Just as the Artsruni king envisioned his cathedral as the crown jewel of his plan to glorify God and revitalize the church, so too this great poem of lamentation represents Gregory’s design to offer to God a sacrifice of prayer for the edification not only of his brother monks at Narekavank’ but for “every race of rational beings/wherever they may be planted on earth.” It is therefore fitting that Gregory’s universal poem be likened to a cathedral, especially one so prominent and within Gregory’s visual field. In Armenian, cathedrals are often called catholic or universal (*kat’oghikē*) churches. Gregory’s poem aspires to be the literary equivalent of this architectural achievement, a canticle built in words of stone, a cathedral of poetry and song.

The Journey to God

The tripartite structure of the book not only gives it the form of a church, but each of the parts represents a stage in the development of the Christian faithful in the journey toward union with God. This connection between the three sections of the poem and the ascent to God is an insight of Sergio La Porta, who explores the relation between the structure of the poem and the three Dionysian levels of initiation: purification, illumination, and perfection. Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

Combining the insights of both the Mahés and La Porta on the significance of the tripartite structure of the *Book of Lamentation*, I devote the next three chapters to the three chambers of the cathedral, each corresponding to the three stages of spiritual development as delineated in the Pseudo-Dionysian writings. Beginning with purification, I develop Gregory's theology of sin and confession in the next chapter. Then we will explore Gregory's understanding of the next stage in Christian life—illumination through the sacraments (above all, baptism and the Eucharist)—and the spiritual exercises that instill the virtues, especially the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. The third chapter will focus on union with God. There, I will discuss Gregory's doctrine of God, specifically the Trinity and his Christology, as well as his pronouncements on *theosis* and the distinctive features of Gregory's conception of the divine. But my discussion in each of the next three chapters does not just draw from its corresponding section of the *Book of Lamentation*, for Gregory meditates on sin and confession throughout the book, although the prayers of the first part of the book especially emphasize the purification of the soul. The persistence and interweaving of these themes throughout the book are consistent with Dionysian theology. The dominant themes of one stage of Christian formation are never completely discarded or neglected in the later stages. The effects of the three levels of progression subsist in and flow from each of the three sacraments. While baptism represents the washing away of sin, it also bestows illumination on the baptized, and through the anointing with holy oil at the conclusion of baptism, the sacrament is tied to perfection and union with God. Even after illumination through baptism, the baptized Christian still stands in need of penance and confession. And at the very outset during the enumeration of sins that one has committed, the penitent must keep in mind the ultimate goal of penance, which is salvation and eventual union with God. The act of penance would be a futile and perverse exercise in self-flagellation if the penitent lacked any hope of redemption. So none of the three levels of Christian formation are ever completely separated from the rest. Nevertheless, each of the parts of the poem has a discernible theme of Christian formation on which it dwells. Thus, the lengthy meditations and confessions of sin are mostly in the first part of Gregory's book. And the later prayers focus more on the theme of union with God, with Prayer 93 devoted to the holy oil that in Dionysian spirituality signifies perfection and union with God.

In discussing these themes, I will not only draw from the *Book of Lamentation* but from Gregory's other writings when relevant to shed light on the theological ideas underlying his poem and to show a consistency of thought that runs throughout his writings. Gregory is not a systematic theologian as traditionally conceived. He is not like Aquinas or other schoolmen, laying out clear theses backed by arguments using precise and exacting logic. But he is still a theologian, albeit a poetic theologian in the manner of Ephrem the Syrian and even St. Anselm who composed theology in the form of prayer. It will fall to us to extract the theology that underlies his poetic prayers. With these caveats in mind, let us, the unbaptized but repentant sinners, enter the narthex of Gregory's cathedral.

Chapter Six

Gregory's Theology of Sin and Penance

For whom does Gregory write his great poem? In the opening of the *Book of Lamentation*, he makes clear that he prepared his prayers at the request of the “hermit fathers and the multitude in the desert.” Who are these hermits wandering through the wilderness? Although Gregory on occasion retreated to his grotto to seek solitude, he was foremost a cenobite dedicated to the communal life of his monastery. When he writes at greater length about his book’s intended audience, it becomes evident that the wilderness is a metaphor and that it is we, his readers and hearers, who are the solitaries wandering and lost in the desert of sin. Responding to the command to compose an icon of words, a new book of psalms and lamentations, he says that his poem is for all the members of the universal church, and from all the ranks and stations of society and at every stage of life:

For those in the first hour of their lives,
And for those called to the second,
Having reached the age of marriage,
And those at the end of their days,
Frail from their advanced age.
To both sinners and the righteous,
To the arrogant infatuated with themselves,
And to those reproaching themselves in self-examination,
To the good and the wicked,
The contemptible and the valiant,
To slaves and subordinates,
To nobles and the supernal,
To the middle class and aristocracy,
To peasants and patricians,
Men and women,
Rulers and subjects,
The elevated and the humble,
The majestic and the small,
The venerable and the commoners,
The cavaliers and infantry,
For city-dwellers and villagers,
For those subdued by the cruel bridle of insolent kings,
To hermits who converse with higher beings,
To the chaste with God-given temperance,
To the priests, chosen for their blessed piety,

Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

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To the bishops, vested in their good stewardship,
To the primates, granted the sacred duty of supervision.

Following the architectural reading, here in the first part of the poem all of us stand in the narthex in preparation for the sacrament of baptism. We are gathered as unreconciled sinners together with all of the unbaptized not yet ready to enter the nave. It follows that Gregory addresses his poem to all, not only baptized Christians, but those who are not yet baptized, infants in the first hours of their lives, and all else who are candidates for baptism. Understood in this way, the church comprises all of humanity, since God seeks reconciliation and union with all people. So Gregory directs his poem to the entire world that it may satisfy the spiritual needs of all:

May this book in the form of prayers
Dispense prayers of supplication to some,
Good counsel for others;
Through the power of Your Spirit,
I have endeavored to compose these multifaceted entreaties,
And to present the petitions of all for whom I intercede
That through this book they may each day
Stand in the presence of your great compassion.

His prayer intercedes for all. Although he presents his prayer in his own person, as a priest he stands before God offering the petitions and requests for remission of sins given by all people. He stresses in the later prayers that he is taking on this universal intercessory role:

I hold within myself every one of the earth,
I am an emissary offering prayers for the whole world.

Addressing his monastic brothers in Prayer 72, Gregory remarks that he bears witness to and willingly assigns guilt to himself for the myriad incurable sins committed by humanity, from Adam, the first father, extending even into the future “to the end of his generations.” Gregory is exercising his sacerdotal authority as an intercessor between humanity and God, praying to God and asking forgiveness for the entire world.

Uncountable Sins

Concerning the question of the origin and nature of sin, Gregory expresses confusion. He understands that the primordial disobedience of Adam and Eve produced a fallen world prone to sin and rejection of God. But it is a mystery how that sin came about and why we are implicated in that first transgression. Gregory speaks of the “dark origins of the first sins.” The poet does not offer any precise theories on the origin or propagation of sin, as did the Julianists who believed that original sin is transmitted through sexual relations. Perhaps Gregory is trying to distance himself here from Julianism, which continued in his own day to influence Armenian theology:

In attempting to measure the depth of my perdition
I was never able to discover its quantity;

Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

I strove to display it in determined words
With the hurried beating of my mind's wings
But I did not even comprehend its shadow.

Sin itself has enervated his mind; he can no longer think clearly about how he has fallen prey to it. Even Solomon, with his legendary wisdom and comprehensive knowledge of the law, sinned:

If Solomon stumbled this much, what will happen to me ...?
From where did his love of idols come?
Why this longing for augury?
Didn't he remember Samuel's scolding of Saul?
Sorcery is a sin, he said, and idols
Only bring grief and pain [[1 Sam 15:23](#)].

We cannot eradicate sin through learning and knowledge; if that were possible, the wise Solomon would not have sinned. Rather than resulting from ignorance, sin is a product of a disobedient will. We cannot understand why our will does not conform to reason but somehow as a consequence of the fall we exist in a state of obstinate insubordination to what we know to be right. Gregory's approach to sin is based on Paul's understanding of disobedience arising from the will of the flesh that is corrupt and resistant to the will of the spirit—"for I do not do the good that I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" ([Rom 7:19](#)).

Although the origins of this disobedient will within me may be a mystery, Gregory insists that the attempt to number and identify one's sins can still be a valuable exercise. It may be bound to fail in the end, but such self-examination will bring to light many sins that previously had gone undetected. He is aware of various efforts to categorize the species of sin, going back to the fourth century and the work of the monastic theorist Evagrius of Pontus. Instead of Evagrius's division of sinful thoughts into eight kinds, Gregory seems to acknowledge the existence of seven sins, the number familiar to Western theology. Yet these seven species of sins are compounded further into innumerable subspecies too large for the mind to consider. Ultimately the sins are too massive and unruly to enumerate. When we try to identify our sins, our exercise in compunction unveils ever more sins that had until then been hidden:

For as many little things become immense
Like sand amassed on the water's edge,
Each distinct and singular in growth and origin,
So too are my sins and transgressions countless,
Impossible to comprehend:
One with its progeny,
The other with its sprouts;
One with its blemishes,
The other with its dangers;
One with its thorns,
The other with its roots.

Even the effort to assign a finite number to our sins is an exercise in pride and self-deceit, a futile attempt to minimize the true extent of our culpability. The individual sins we amass within the storehouse of our souls resemble the dust from which our bodies are formed, but

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these grains of sin are a disordered and indefinable accretion of particles like a cancer malignantly growing out of control. This frenetic disorder within us is the reverse of the image of the triune God, serene and still, and thus reveals the extent to which we have effaced God's pristine image in us and turned it into a disordered blur. As depressing as it may be, this practice of looking within and examining one's sin is not useless. Realizing that our sins are countless, we can begin to get a sense of how sick we are and how desperately we need God's healing mercy:

Now these are just the supreme sins,
The corrupters of all souls;
Arrayed under them are the subordinate parts,
Each one of them myriads upon myriads,
Thousands upon thousands,
The total number of only He knows
Who sees as deeds that have been done
What to us seem nonexistent....

These I did not write in vain,
Though I could not define the true essence of
The diverse failings swirling within our nature.
But I have revealed at least to an extent
The myriads of the fruits of evil
So that you may then contemplate the rest,
Even if that too will be without end.

Gregory makes clear that sin is a disease and God is the only effective physician. The first step of therapy is to recognize the gravity of our illness and to ask for help. That is why it is important to become aware of the extent of sin:

Look with mercy, Lord, on this figure of bitter distress,
The many lethal afflictions and suffering
That I lay out before you;
Be my companion like a physician;
Don't summon me to court like a judge.

Appropriately, God is not a stern judge but a "physician to the suffering," because sin is a spiritual disease that distorts and corrupts the soul in such a way that the image of God in which we are created is barely perceptible and made hideous:

If I could see my soul,
Ugly, lethargic, completely exhausted,
I would be to the end in a state of embarrassment.

The glorious human image that once resembled God has sunk not just to the state of a thoughtless brute, but even worse, into a senseless plant or stone:

How will I say to myself that I am human
When I esteem myself among the inhuman?

Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

How will I name myself a rational being
When I consort in the foolishness of the irrational ...?
Indeed, I cannot even call myself a moving or ensouled being,
Much less one that admits of a spirit and mind.

The wages of sin are themselves the twins of the sins. They are not punishments that are arbitrarily attached by God to our transgressions but reflect the nature of our actions:

The punishments are genuine likenesses
Of the sins whose nature they share,
Co-images, two of a kind,
Converging along the same path,
Both signifying the same idea.

Because I did not comfort
My companion with the warmth of love,
Now I am frozen with anguish
At the first sign of danger.

Because I did not rein in
My insolent appetite,
I rightly suffer this miserable
Unquenchable burning [[Luke 16:24](#)].

Because I did not love
The good news of your light,
I am justly condemned to grope about
Errantly in the snares of darkness,
In the fog of destruction.

There is a logic and symmetry to the penalties for sins. If we walk away from the warmth of God by failing to warm the hearts of those who need our comfort, then neither will we be protected from the frigid indifference of others in our times of need. If we do not moderate our passions, we will be consumed with desires that can never be assuaged. And if we fail to love the light, who is Christ, the light of the gospel ([John 8:12](#)), we should not be surprised to find ourselves in darkness. Gregory asks us to see the punishments for sin as self-inflicted; they are afflictions we impose on ourselves rather than sentences handed down by God for our misdeeds. Again, Gregory rejects a juridical model of sin and instead understands it as a disease, though one that we suffer through our neglect and rejection of the physician.

Further evidence for Gregory's understanding of our sufferings not as punishments exacted in response to sin but as a natural outflowing of our wrongdoing is provided in his treatment of the Flood. In contrast to a traditional allegorical reading of the waters of the deluge as a punishment that cleanses the world of iniquity and thus prefigures the purifying water of the baptismal font, Gregory compares the flood waters to the accumulation of sins:

All the mass of torrential waters, the inundation of every sea,
That submerges even the mountaintops.
Only breathe your wind of sweetness [[Gen 8:1](#)],

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As in the time of Noah,
And your power melts the mountains,
And dries the multitudes of billowing waves,
As well as my world-destroying debts,
And the towering height of my sins.

God's purification of the inundated world occurs not through the water but by the Spirit that breathes upon it and dries the world of the overflow of sin. If we live in a world of death and desolation, it is not God's doing but rather a result of our own failure to love God. Alluding to [Wisdom 1:13](#)—"because God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living"—Gregory notes that death is not a creature of God:

You did not create death,
Nor rejoice at our destruction,
As David and Solomon testify.

Death is a result of our own will; it is "the mature offspring of sin" ([Jas 1:15](#)).

This ruinous state into which we have willingly thrown ourselves is dire. But as burdensome and unyielding as this mass of sin seems to us in our weakness, it is a drop of rain in the eyes of God:

How does the sin piled up throughout the world
Appear to your eyes, Almighty, in your generosity?
Is it not but a lump of clay, easy to crush?
With a swift blow it is dispelled.
Is it not but a drop of rain,
Burst asunder and vanished at once through your will?

Though it is impossible for us to heal ourselves, God willingly and with ease relieves us of the burden of sin and begins to restore us to our original state. Once we realize the seriousness of our plight and our utter dependence on God for the cure, we can begin to seek forgiveness through the confession of our sins. But the confession must be sincere and come from our hearts. It must not be merely an outward act based on fear of God's wrath. Sin penetrates into the very depth of the inner person; it is not a superficial wound. Gregory writes that "an imperceptible furnace of vehement heat burns unquenchably/an invisible crucible boiling violently, inextinguishable/piercing the depths of my heart like poisoned darts."

Since sin permeates deeply in us, confession itself must not be a superficial act. The cure must penetrate our hearts to root out the malady there. It must not be insincere like the contrition of Achan, who confessed only after he was caught stealing money and clothing from Jericho ([Josh 7:16](#)), or Saul, whose confession Samuel rejects because it is not heartfelt ([1 Kgs 15:24–26](#)). These Old Testament examples of inauthentic confession foreshadow Judas, remorseful over his betrayal of Jesus, but only after he realized that he was condemned ([Matt 27:3–4](#)). Their forced confessions were not made, Gregory says, from perfect love and thus they were unworthy of "complete salvation." Basing his thought on Anania's distinction between the inner and outer person, and the need for the two to operate in harmony, Gregory decries the emptiness of an outward act of confession, the bare utterance of the words "I have sinned"

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that does not flow from love.

Moreover, one must approach confession in humility and not compare oneself favorably to other sinners, as the Pharisee does with the publican of [Luke 18:9–14](#). The penitent must genuinely believe, as Gregory asserts, that “no one is as sinful as I.” Addressing the monks in Prayer 72, Gregory recalls hearing one of his brother monks boast:

I heard someone say he was not guilty;
I was not pleased by his inappropriate speech to him
Before whom no earthly flesh is justified,
“I have never committed adultery,
Nor have I ever fornicated,
Nor tasted any of the mortal flavors of this world.”

Monastics, who set themselves apart from the world, are especially in danger of acquiring a sense of superiority, an arrogance that must be vigorously resisted. Gregory intends to disabuse the monk of his conceit:

But he was no different in his iniquity.
May God grant him forgiveness for this.
Even if what he had written were true,
He did not walk but stumbled
When he spoke the unbecoming words of Zechariah
before the people of Israel:
“Blessed be the Lord, for I have grown rich” [[Zech 11:5](#)],
A foreshadowing of the Pharisee’s voice.

Prayer of Tears

In contrast to these inauthentic confessions, Gregory puts forward as his model of genuine contrition the sinful woman of chapter seven of Luke’s gospel. She did not say a word but stood at Jesus’ feet and wept behind him ([7:38](#)), washing his feet with her tears and anointing his head ([7:44–46](#)). Her example shows that it is not even necessary to utter a word to be forgiven. Gregory asks that his tears may be equally acceptable to God:

And accept this dew of lamentation,
The tearful weeping of my lustful eyes
On the immaculate feet of your Incarnation, O Christ,
My turning back to you and my confession of faith
Prefigured by the symbol of the sinful woman’s hair.

But while holding the sinful woman as an ideal model for their own contrition, the penitents must also acknowledge that their love falls far short of the love that saved the woman. The virtue of humility above all is essential to proper confession. Whatever sins the woman committed, the poet’s transgressions must be worse as he is not bold enough to stand near the Lord as she did:

As one who am condemned,

Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

I cannot approach the life-giving sole of your feet
To anoint them with oil as the sinful woman
Nor to offer the drops of my eyes and hair.

Once more the influence of Gregory's teacher comes out very clearly. The prayer of tears plays a central role in both Anania and Gregory's penitential exercises. Tearful prayer is, however, by no means original to the school of Narek but has a long tradition in Christian spirituality. Tears and weeping play a prominent role in Augustine's writings, most notably in the *Confessions*. The famous scene of his conversion is preceded by a "mighty storm" within the depths of his soul "accompanied by a mighty shower of tears" brought about by the sight of his accumulated miseries. In Western Christianity, the gift of tears has a prominent place in the spiritual exercises of the Basque mystic St. Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556), founder of the Society of Jesus. In his second exercise, Ignatius asks for "a great and intense sorrow and tears for [his] sins."

Though most likely not familiar with the *Confessions*, Anania and Gregory are probably aware of Evagrius's *On Prayer* and its call for prayer with tears. Evagrius's advice on prayer is to ask for the gift of tears in order to tame what is savage in the soul. There are also numerous biblical examples of tearful supplication that inspired the two monks of Narek. Anania too presented the sorrowful penance of the sinful woman of Luke as his ideal of contrite piety and love of God.

The prayer of tears has several functions in the school of Narek's spirituality. Since the tears and sighs are expressions of emotions emanating from the heart, they help to connect the external acts of penitence with an internal ardor and affection. The prayer of tears is not simply an external act but the manifestation of an intensely passionate affection for God. The human person is a union of both soul and body. Accordingly, there are both physical tears and also spiritual tears. It is easy to shed physical tears simply by feigning sadness or distress. But the tears that Gregory seeks to instill are deeper; they have their source in the heart. The physical tears are signs of the spiritual tears that come not from the physical eyes but from the eyes of the soul. To shed these spiritual tears, it helps to meditate on the accounts of God's mercy and love in Gregory's poem. That is why he calls his prayers "occasions for tears." The exercise of reciting these prayers can assist the penitent to shed these spiritual tears.

In addition, the tears, like a powerful disinfectant, can ward off the hidden assaults unleashed on us by Satan:

A few teardrops from the eyes
Suffice to wither away the whole company,
The evil hosts of the accuser,
Like the creeping vermin, the millipedes
oozing out faintly from the earth's miasma,
On which a drop of oil or
A pinch of some fatal poison falls.

A slight sigh of lament rising from the soul,
Like the blowing of the warm south wind
Mingled with the sun,
Melts away the harshness of the frost.

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For easily born are these things,
And easily killed are those that oppose them.

The tears also have a purifying effect on the soul, washing away the accumulated dross of sin that has polluted the soul and deformed the divine image: “Accept me, Lord, and fashion me once more in the image of the Spirit/I who am unworthy of life, deserving of death, a malefactor.” In this sense the prayer of tears serves as a preliminary washing of sin that is consummated in baptism, preparing the soul to receive even more grace from God and to live a life of holiness. Our tears are an image of the tears that Christ himself shed in mourning the death of Lazarus ([John 11:1–44](#)):

O beneficent Son of God,
Restore me to life
With the blessed dewdrops of your eyes,
As you did your beloved friend
From breathless death.

Not only are Christ’s tears a sign of his sadness at the death of his friend, but they are also dewdrops that raise Lazarus from the grave, an allegory of the morning dew that awakens the earth each day from the slumber of night. Gregory employs this image of salvific dewdrops in his commentary on the Song, where it is connected not only with the tears of Christ but also his sweat in the garden of Gethsemane. Commenting on [Song 5:2](#)—“Open to me, my sister, my neighbor, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is wet with dew and my hair with the raindrops of the night”—he writes:

[The groom] says, “Through my sweat you have put on this purity of the dove and perfection, and have become my sister and bride. It was through my sweat that I in that night removed the sweat of the curse; and suffering with you, I endured my sweat. Now guard what you have received, that is the innocence of the dove and your perfection, and do not lose it again, for there is no second cross nor will I die a second time for you.”

This imagery has an interesting parallel in the poetry of the Carmelite doctor St. Thérèse de Lisieux (1873–97), who often uses the figure of dew to symbolize Christ’s passion and sacrifice, and in this excerpt of her poetry uses the metaphor of dew to refer to Christ’s tears and bloody sweat:

Remember that on your night of agony,
Your tears mingled with your blood.
Dew of love, its infinite worth
Made virginal flowers spring up.

Genuine contrition that releases the tears of the soul can conquer even the gravest of sins. No matter how great our sins, if we approach penance in the right way, we need not despair. Gregory himself offers as an earlier, Old Testament example of the power and extent of God’s mercy the Judean king Manasseh’s reconciliation with God. Only twelve when he succeeded his father, Hezekiah, Manasseh is said to have done “evil in the eyes of the Lord,” worshipping idols, practicing divination, and shedding the blood of innocents ([2 Kgs 21:1–17](#)). The accounts

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in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles do not provide that much detail about Manasseh and his deeds or his penance. Gregory uses a couple of apocryphal texts to fill out the narrative. He seems familiar with the Jewish pseudepigraphical *Martyrdom of Isaiah* and its description of Manasseh's torture and murder of Isaiah, which are not explicitly mentioned in the canonical Bible. Gregory also knows the *Prayer of Manasseh* which exists in Armenian translation and may have been in his day part of the biblical canon. The Bible mentions that Manasseh's prayer was a "cry heard by God" ([2 Chr 33:13](#)). Manasseh's sins are many and grave; Achan's pilfering of clothing and coins pales in comparison:

He broke the wall of the Mighty One and offered to fortune tellers
The altar of the great sacrament of the sprinkling of blood.
He extended the many paths that run toward scandal,
A shepherd of perdition for the destruction of his flock,
A violent teacher of deviance,
All this while knowing the law of worship,
As his father was the great Hezekiah, the likeness of David.

And yet Manasseh's contrition, unlike Achan's, was not forced but heartfelt and sincere. Therefore, God received his prayer and forgave Manasseh:

God granted him once again
Forgiveness of his sins,
And restored him to the kingdom,
So that You, Beneficent Lord, may multiply and arrange
The ineffable and unceasing praise
Among all nations and tribes, all ages and times,
And that you may keep the door of hope open for entry,
For the glory of Your exaltation,
And for my salvation, I who am condemned.
May Christ, the giver of the gifts of immortality,
Be praised forever.
Amen.

If Manasseh's great crimes, including his brutality against a prophet, may be forgiven because of his sincere sorrow, we need not lose hope over the weight of our sins. Gregory refers to the story of Manasseh as a "faint image" of the gospel of God's mercy and forgiveness wrapped up within the veil of the Old Testament. For he says that while the Old Testament emphasizes the justice rather than mercy of God and is an "effaced letter" that serves to condemn sinners, it also contains depictions of God's extraordinary mercy, a foreshadowing of the mercy proclaimed by Christ in the New Testament.

Gregory's plea for sincere and reflective confession must be understood in the context of a general concern about the practice of confession in his time. Confession of sins is mentioned in the New Testament and early Christian texts like the Didachē, a short catechism written in the first century and attributed to the apostles, but its implementation took different forms depending on the time and location. Both individual and collective forms of confession seem to have existed from the beginning of the Armenian Christian tradition. The two practices may

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have alternated throughout the centuries, with private and more spontaneous confession sometimes dominating and at other times a public and more formulaic mode prevailing. In Gregory's time, reconciliation generally followed a conventional recitation of sins by the penitents. That, at least, is the conclusion that we can draw from a letter, cited by the Mahés, written by the Syrian patriarch John (Yōhannān) bar Shushan to the Armenian catholicos Gregory II Vκαγασέρ ("the Martyrophile," r. 1065–1105) criticizing a method of confession that simply enumerated sins, even ones that the patriarch considered outlandish. The patriarch's concern was that this contrived approach to confession did not encourage the proper contrition necessary for genuine reconciliation. We have already seen Mkhit'ar Gosh's fable of the corrupt priest and his congregation of birds that implied abuse of the sacrament was a problem at least during the twelfth century, but most likely even earlier. Gregory himself is seeking to instill in the faithful a more fervent, personal penance in opposition to the passionless expression of remorse promoted by the recitation of a formal statement of confession.

Gregory's focus on confession thus was occasioned in part by the need to instruct the faithful in proper penance. He emphasized the need for the penitent to turn inward and through the prayer of tears and lamentation allow the words of the confessional to penetrate one's heart and kindle a love of God, a corrective to a superficial and mechanical approach to confession. Yet we should not think that confession is ever adequate if it is simply a withdrawal into oneself done to the exclusion of one's relation with the church and fellow penitents. Gregory sets his main professions of sin here in the first part of his poem, the narthex of the cathedral, in which we are surrounded by our fellow penitents seeking entry into God's house. Sin is never a solitary affair. Gregory is well aware of the impact of the first sin on all the generations of human beings. Since humanity sank into iniquity as a whole, redemption is only possible collectively as one body standing before God and through the mediation of the church and its priests. When Gregory offers his prayers of penance, it is always in solidarity with another sinner, usually a figure drawn from the Bible. In this case it is again Manasseh with whom the poet identifies:

And now, joining my laments with those of the great sinner,
He who willingly sinned unto death,
I will repeat his cry and say with him,
"I have sinned, Lord, I have sinned;
To my lawlessness I myself testify." (cf. [Prayer of Manasseh 12](#))

Throughout the book Gregory imagines himself with biblical persons and asks that he be granted the same graces that they were. For example, he adduces the man blind from birth of [John 9:1](#) and asks to be healed of his spiritual blindness just as the man in the gospel is cured of his physical blindness. Even more dramatically, he imagines himself imprisoned with the captive souls of hell pleading for Christ to release them from their bondage. These supplications for God's salvation indicate that confession is a communal act done in solidarity with those who share our afflictions.

Millennial Concerns

Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

One might think that Gregory's preoccupation with sin and confession is driven by an urgent resolve to call people to penance in anticipation of the turn of the millennium, when many Christians expected Christ's imminent return. While we cannot preclude that such apocalyptic concerns affected Gregory's thinking, we should first keep in mind that for the Armenians the millennial year would have been counted as 450 because their calendar was set at year 1 at the Council of Duin in 551. Nevertheless, people would have been aware, as they clearly were in Byzantium, that the thousandth anniversary of Christ's birth, and three decades after that (his resurrection), was drawing near and that the end of this world may have been imminent. That expectation may help to explain one of the great enduring mysteries of Byzantine history, why the emperor Basil II never married. Basil's behavior is highly unusual, given that monarchs are usually very anxious about their succession. But it could be explained if Basil believed that the end of his earthly empire was near and that no ruler but Christ would henceforth be needed.

Whatever conclusions Basil may have drawn from calendrical speculation, Gregory did not think that the turn of the millennium would presage the end of the world. In the commentary on the Song, he states that in the eighth millennium the saints will be glorified in Christ. Since the incarnation occurred at the beginning of the sixth millennium, the world still had, in Gregory's reckoning, about a thousand years to go before the *parousia*, or second coming. While concerns about the millennium may have been on many people's minds during Gregory's life, there is no indication that his urgent call for penance and vigilance is due to the calendar. Given his fondness for the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, he believed that Christians must be ready at all times to meet the Lord regardless of the hour or year. It is much more likely that Gregory was troubled by indifference to the sacrament of confession rather than any specific apocalyptic presentiment, and thus he offered his great book as a series of spiritual exercises that would renew and revitalize the discipline of penance.

These exercises of purification are demanding and fraught with danger if not done with the proper direction. That is why this work is first addressed to the monks, who constitute the frontline in spiritual battles. They are supposed to provide the necessary education so that the faithful can benefit from the healing that the *Book of Lamentation* is meant to offer. With the proper instruction, the faithful will be prepared to receive the grace of absolution. For even though these exercises demand the serious efforts of the individual Christian in the path toward reconciliation and union with God, Gregory never lets us lose sight of the essential role of grace in every step of this journey. Without the grace freely dispensed by God, the way leads nowhere and any attempt to reach God is futile. Gregory impresses this point on us in Prayer 31:

More than to my works I hold fast to your grace,
Many times more exalted and glorious,
More sublime than the weight of my words.
There is but one forgiveness of sins,
The conciliator and mighty redeemer of my agitation.

Gregory includes the remission of sins together with baptism and ordination in his poetic discourse on the church and its unity in Prayer 75, indicating that he recognizes it as a distinct sacrament entrusted exclusively to the church through which God's graces flow:

Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

There is but one forgiveness of sins,
More through grace than acts of penance,
So that the truth not be confounded with appearance.

Having confessed our sins and received the grace of absolution, we now stand at the threshold of the nave prepared to receive the sacrament of baptism that will mark our transition to the next stage, the life of holiness and virtue pursued by the baptized faithful.

Chapter Seven

Baptism, Eucharist, and the Virtuous Life

A Sacramental Vision

According to Pseudo-Dionysius, those who ascend to the second level of Christian initiation “enter upon the contemplation of certain sacred things and being well purified, they commune in these sacred things to the extent possible for them.” This second stage in the journey to God is illumination. Through participation in the sacraments, above all the Eucharist, and through their continued advance in learning and contemplation of holy things, the faithful progress toward a greater love of God and come to reflect his glory ever more brilliantly.

For Origen this intermediate station in the ascent to God corresponds to the teachings of the book of Ecclesiastes. Certainly the author of the book, traditionally held to be Solomon, wanted to convey the emptiness of material concerns. That is why Gregory refers to it as the “vanities,” identifying the book with its opening statement—*Vanity of vanities, all is vanity* ([Eccl 1:2](#)). The notion that the natural world is filled with vanity—things that seem to have great value but are in truth empty—courses throughout Ecclesiastes. The author has learned to hate life because all the work done under the sun was evil ([2:17](#)). No one is ever satisfied when they acquire what they covet. The man who loves money is not satisfied with his wealth ([5:9](#)). Everything that appears good perishes and is given over to death, a power over which no one has authority ([8:8](#)) but which consumes all else.

As pessimistic an assessment of the world as this may be, Ecclesiastes recognizes something of lasting value. Wisdom excels foolishness as light excels darkness ([2:13](#)). But what is true wisdom? It is to fear God and keep his commandments ([12:14](#)). For all the goodness in the world is from God, who has made everything beautiful in its time ([3:11](#)). And so the wise look at the things of this world and see a dim reflection of the divine splendor. Thus is the world redeemed and made whole.

Understood in this way, Ecclesiastes provides us with a sacramental vision of the world. A sacrament in the broadest sense is God’s use of a material thing, something that may have little value but from which divine graces flow and through which we encounter God. The bread and wine of the Eucharist are merely material substances but through their consecration they become something more: our offering to God and God’s offering of himself back to us. The water of the font may be mere bathwater, as Gregory says the T’ondrakeans believed, but when it is sanctified it becomes more than water. It becomes the instrument by which the faithful are restored to the original state of glory washed of sin and brought into the body of Christ. So Gregory makes clear:

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We believe that in our descent into the luminous font,
And through the washing of our flesh,
We assume holiness.

The Armenian word that I translate as “luminous font” literally means a place of illumination, and it is used in religious contexts to refer to the baptistry. This linguistic association of baptism with light makes clear the relation between baptism and illumination.

But, more broadly, whenever we reflect on the presence of God in the world and evaluate things in the manner of Ecclesiastes, we are experiencing the kind of illumination familiar from the Dionysian tradition. This is what it means “to commune with the divine symbols” for the sacraments are material symbols of the divine. By extension, the entire world, being God’s creation, consists of signs and symbols pointing to God and reflecting in their own finite ways the divine glory. In this chapter I will present more fully Gregory’s teachings on the sacraments, particularly baptism and the Eucharist, and how we are expected to live in order to reflect more clearly God’s glory in our own lives. Since for Gregory the sacraments are mediated through the church, and we now have left the narthex to be received into the congregation that comes together in the body of Christ, I will also discuss Gregory’s ecclesiology, his understanding of what the church is.

Faith, Hope, Love, Baptism

In his anti-Chalcedonian treatise, Anania of Narek argued that Chalcedonians had to be rebaptized in order to be received into the Armenian church. This matter was clearly a sore point between the Byzantines and Armenians now that the period of mutual tolerance had come to an end. Anania’s argument was based on a presumption that the Chalcedonians believed that Christ died only in his human and not divine nature. For, according to [Romans 6:3](#), all who are baptized into Christ are baptized into his death. Yet Chalcedonian baptism, Anania claims, is only baptism into the death of a man and therefore cannot be a means of salvation. Consequently, such baptism is invalid. The question of rebaptism was by no means peculiar to the christological controversies of this time. Much earlier, the church in North Africa was plagued by similar debates concerning the validity of baptisms performed by priests who had collaborated with the Roman authorities rather than undergo martyrdom. There, the matter was not over the validity of the sacraments of heretics but rather the conduct of the priests administering baptism. No less a figure than Augustine entered the debate on the side of those who did not require rebaptism and argued for the validity of the baptism performed by the compromised priests.

Characteristically, Gregory does not explicitly take a stand on the rebaptism question, but several lines of Prayer 93 indicate that he opposed the position of his teacher and recognized the validity of baptism even in Chalcedonian churches:

For in [the Church] there is but one washing
Into the death of Christ, lest his Divinity,
Offered freely to those who do not know him,
Suffer a second death for those who already do.

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Gregory alludes here to [Hebrews 6:4–6](#):

For it is impossible for those who were once illuminated, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.

The author of Hebrews is talking about baptized Christians who have fallen away from the faith. The letter addresses Jewish Christians who are contemplating a return to Judaism. In that context, it is a harsh doctrine that seems to preclude any return to Christianity after an act of apostasy. But in the context of tenth-century Armenia, with the attention of the church authorities on the validity of the baptism of distinct communions, Gregory applies these verses to the opposite effect: lenience toward Chalcedonians and acceptance of the validity of their sacraments lest by demanding rebaptism we risk crucifying Christ a second time. Those who received the rites of initiation in Chalcedonian churches, Gregory implies, already know Christ and so are not in need of rebaptism. But these verses are also directed against the Byzantines, who had themselves begun to require rebaptism of non-Chalcedonians. Against the general deterioration in relations between the two communions at the end of the tenth century, Gregory continued to affirm the unity of the churches who, in the words of [Ephesians 4:5](#), share “one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”

In the Armenian rite of baptism, the officiating priest asks the sponsor what the candidate for baptism requests. The answer is “faith, hope, love, and baptism … to be cleansed of sins … and to serve God.” Through the initiation of baptism the candidate begins to enter fully into the Christian life and is prepared to receive the full graces of the Spirit and to grow in virtue, especially the three theological virtues of [1 Corinthians 13:13](#): faith, hope, and love.

For Gregory, these three form a trinity that mirrors the trinitarian God:

[Faith] is honored in the name of the glorified Trinity
Together with love and hope.
For these three exist separately,
But if you view them as the same,
United in one mystery
You will always be magnified in God,
For if you believe in Him
You will also love Him,
And through love you will have hope in
His invisible gifts.

Without faith, we cannot come near to God or receive his salvation:

For not even the Lord of glory
Will work his miraculous powers on us
Without first asking that our faith be tied
To the same yoke as his bounty.
It has the power to give life,
Sufficient to itself, being near God,
For “Your faith has made you well” ([Matt 9:22](#))

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The blessed mouth of God testified.

The power of faith is revealed by the gospel accounts of Jesus' healings. The author of Hebrews asserts that faith is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" ([Heb 1:11](#)). The apostles and the people whom Christ healed witnessed with their own eyes Christ's miracles. They did not need the same faith that we need to believe because Christ was visibly with them. The disciples saw the risen Christ. But even those who had seen, like Thomas, needed faith to believe. We who do not see Christ with our physical eyes and are not touched by his physical hands may still see and be blessed by Christ through our faith in his presence. Faith is the virtue that spans the distance between us and Christ, and it is faith that brings us near to God. While many of the examples in the gospels of Christ's healing are done through his physical presence and the laying of his hands on the sick, the example of the centurion (in the version of [Luke 7:1–10](#)) shows that through faith one can be healed from a distance:

There is no room for doubt in your word
Nor any indication of uncertainty
Between your will and mercy,
But you will to heal, for you are compassionate,
And you can heal, for you are the Creator,
Say only the word and I will be healed,
Let me join the centurion in his faith.

The curing of the centurion's servant is an important example because it is done at a spatial distance and vicariously through the centurion's faith. For Gregory, the servant's healing shows us that, even though we are separated in physical time and space from Jesus, we, too, may be restored to health with the same faith as the centurion's. The sick servant was only a few tents removed from Christ, while we are even farther removed. But still through faith Christ is near and with us:

And it is not only when you are a short distance away,
Being as far away as one tent from another
That I believe your power is effective
For resurrection and healing
But even when you are seated on high in heaven,
Or fully in the bowels of the earth.

The import of these verses for the infinite reach of Christ's resurrection and healing is lost in translation because the Armenian contains an ambiguity that is difficult, if not impossible, to represent in English. The word that bears a double meaning in Armenian is translated here as "tent." Read literally, it refers to the dwellings in Capernaum and signifies that Christ neither met the centurion nor his servant, but healed the servant through the centurion's envoys, the Jewish elders and his friends ([Luke 7:3, 6](#)). Jesus literally remained several tents away from the centurion's home where his sick servant lay. Still, through the centurion's faith, he and his servant encountered Christ and found salvation. But the Armenian word that means "tent"—*khoran*—also refers to a tabernacle or the canopy of an altar. The implication here is that even though Jesus is no longer with us as a man walking on earth, he is still fully present to

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us on the altar. His sacrifice on the divine altar of the cross is brought down to us and placed on the altar of the Eucharist. There is thus a eucharistic aspect to this account of healing. We are in a position similar to that of the centurion. We encounter Christ not as his disciples did, as a man walking the earth, but through the grace of the Eucharist that is mediated through Christ's envoys, the elders, who are the priests, a word derived from the Greek word *presbyter*, which means "elder."

I read the last line of these verses differently from other translators. Both Samuelian and Mahé translate the last two lines as "over the whole world below." But I understand this last line to be a reference to Christ's descent into the bowels of the earth after his death and before his resurrection. On my reading Gregory's point is that not only when Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven but even in death, when he descended into hell, his saving graces still operate on earth. Thus, when Gregory says that faith brings us next to God, he means that however removed we may be from the physical presence of Christ on earth, through our faith and through our participation in the Eucharist, itself an act that proceeds from faith, we remain near Christ and are healed through his spiritual touch.

The Trinitarian analogy that Gregory applies to the theological virtues entails that all three share the same nature even though they may be distinct in their relations to each other, with love proceeding from faith, and hope coming from love. There is a unity of virtue, so that whenever faith increases, love also deepens and hope is strengthened. As the three virtues blossom in the soul, the soul begins to recover its divine image as it more clearly reflects the Trinitarian image through the three virtues. It is not the case that the Trinitarian image is ever completely lost even at the lowest depths of the soul's sinfulness. Though it is a warped and deformed trinity, the image is still apparent in the threefold nature of its depravity. The poet conveys the tarnished Trinitarian image through the verses that describe his fallen state in triplets: "wandering, exiled, spurned" and "filled with doubt, miserable, dejected":

Ashamed, trampled upon by the Accuser,
Delivered over to incurable ills,
I have reached the bottom of death,
Deformed, your call has found me vile,
Fallen suddenly into destruction;
Wandering, exiled, spurned;
Filled with doubt, miserable, dejected;
Overthrown, crushed, broken;
Afflicted, saddened in my soul, reproved.

Even in the most hopeless and desperate of conditions, the underlying divine image appears in a dim and shadowy form. And that is enough to give the poet hope for salvation. As his soul is cleansed of its impurities, he begins to manifest the three virtues and more clearly display the splendor of the divine image within him.

The path toward God begins with faith, even faith that is as small and insignificant as a mustard seed:

For if there is just a little seed,
Faith as small as a mustard grain,

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It will have the power to move the greatest mountains

Into the heart of the sea.

Therefore, let us accept this gift

As the first path toward the author of life.

Strengthened by faith, one will also have hope in God's gifts. For if we believe in the resurrection and Christ's triumph over death, we will also believe that he can restore us to life from the death of sin:

Even the sinner drained by sorrow,
All expectation of goodness removed,
All certainty of grace lost,
Can still hope once more to attain
Anew the glorious ornaments of the first gifts.
For it is from God that this hope is prepared and acts in us.
This hope proclaims the good news of the almighty power of its giver;
In this hope God smells the pleasant incense,
Sweeter than any perfume,
More than the mixture once broiled in the service of the tabernacle,
It is a figure of the humble soul laid low by its dissolution,
Reaching to union in its likeness.

The broiled mixture of the tabernacle is a reference to [Exodus 30:7–8](#) and the altar of incense on which Aaron is commanded to burn "a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations." Like this fragrant incense, a figure of our soul aspiring to reach God, so too is the hope of the humble soul that wafts into heaven and is pleasing to God.

If we live a life of faith and repent for our sins, then we, too, may have hope for the future. Just as Gregory invoked the story of Manasseh as an Old Testament model of penance that prefigures God's forbearance and mercy under the new covenant, so too the example of Enoch shows us that through a life of faith and repentance death can be overcome:

Even before the giving of the Law
He who guarded the ancestral traditions,
So that he was closer to our first father in faith,
Took the ancestral debt to be his own,
Made amends for it by dulling his passions,
And instead of being forgiven by being interred,
But because he was tormented in the flesh,
He was taken up,
A precursor of the life of rational beings,
Triumphing mightily over the grip of death.

This Enoch is not the son of Cain mentioned in [Genesis 4:17](#) but the father of Methusaleh who appears in [Genesis 5:18–24](#). The assertion in [Genesis 5:24](#)—"Enoch walked with God; then he was no more for God took him"—is cryptic and does not provide much detail for understanding the significance Enoch has for Gregory. The phrase "he was taken up" is based on [Sirach 44:16](#): "Enoch pleased the Lord and was taken up, an example of repentance to all generations." The

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more detailed background that Gregory alludes to comes from Armenian apocryphal literature. Michael Stone cites an Armenian miscellany in which Enoch is said to abstain from eating and did not look at the heavens, making him the first penitent. As such he is a figure of hope for those who follow his practices of penitence. For through his acts of piety and asceticism, Enoch was freed from the curse of Adam and the inherited bondage of death. And if this act of God's mercy took place under the old covenant, Gregory asks rhetorically, how much greater should be our "hope in the new and pure illumination/without veil or shadow/through Christ our Lord's covenant"?

Indeed, when Gregory turns to the New Testament accounts of healing and resurrection, he emphasizes how Christ's grace is given to all who simply believe in his word without their having to undergo Enoch's arduous asceticism. The examples he brings forward show that Christ's mercy and compassion are boundless and offered to all. We have already discussed the example of the centurion, but the centurion's faith took some effort on his part as he had to send his emissaries to meet Christ. The other examples show Christ's miraculous mercy bestowed on those who are reduced to complete passivity and lack any capacity to move toward Christ. In these cases of total infirmity, it is Jesus who comes to the person in dire need. Jesus' urgent advance toward the afflicted is best revealed in the story of the good Samaritan ([Luke 10:25–37](#)), perhaps the most familiar of the gospel parables.

Gregory devotes Prayer 14 to this parable. Modern interpretation of this story has focused on the moral applications of its lesson. The good neighbor is the one who helps people in need even if doing so may be dangerous. And there are good people in all nations, including the Samaritans, against whom Jesus' audience harbored strong prejudices. But Gregory's approach to the parable is different. His portrayal is based on the ancient tradition of Christian interpretation that reads the story as an allegory. While this allegorical approach does not exclude the moral reading, it also understands the characters and figures of the story as symbols. As usual, although Gregory follows this allegorical tradition, he also displays his originality. Instead of simply presenting a breakdown of the symbolism, he asks us to imagine ourselves in the place of the traveler who has been severely beaten and left for dead:

There is no indication that he cried out to you
When he was pierced by the robbers' sword,
For he was petrified;
He could not even let out a groan,
For he was unable to speak;

Nor with trembling fingers
Could he point out to you who see all
The vicious assault he suffered,
For he had been badly bruised.

But just as our compassion for the victim builds, we are told that he is an unrepentant sinner:

He could not fix his eyes,
Filled with plaintive tears of sadness
On you, Beneficent One,
For he was a sinner;

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Nor did he try to move your compassionate heart
By showing you his crushed body,
His blood-stained clothes,
For he was without hope.

Does that change our attitude toward him? Do we try to justify the violence done to him because he was a sinner? We might think: he was traveling on a dangerous road; he should have known the risks; he should have known better. We may think this way when we hear about someone in trouble and needing help, but the good Samaritan does not. He does not judge the victim but simply acts to help the beaten man and restore him to health. The difference between us and the good Samaritan is like the difference between sinners, judging others and perhaps blaming them for their misfortunes, and Christ, who simply aids those who are downtrodden, knowing that they may never repent of their sins. Indeed, Gregory makes it very clear that the good Samaritan symbolizes Christ:

But You, Benefactor of myriad gifts,
Without fault, Giver of all life,
Not only did you not keep a memory
Of his wicked, sinful deeds,
But you did not even reproach him;
You did not trample him with your feet
When he fell,
But you ran to him with affection,
Showing him the utmost care.

The connection between the Samaritan and Christ is not new. It predates Gregory by more than 700 years. It is first found in the writings of Origen. Gregory probably knew about Origen's allegorical reading from the eighth-century gospel commentary of Stephen of Siwnik'. Stephen was well-versed in Greek patristic texts, especially the works of Origen, and he rarely shies away from displaying his erudition. Here is what, following Origen, he wrote in his commentary on the Gospels:

The man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho signifies Adam and all those who sin in imitation of Adam's transgressions. Jerusalem signifies the paradise from which they were expelled and Jericho this world which he entered after leaving paradise. The robbers signify Satan and his legions.... The priest and the Levite signify, it seems to me, the prophets and teachers who came before Christ. The Samaritan is Christ, for He was called both a Samaritan and a demoniac [[John 8:48](#)].

Not only was Christ accused of being a Samaritan, but also the question, "Who is my neighbor?" which occasioned the telling of the parable, brings to mind the Song of Songs in the Old Testament. The bride and groom refer to each other periodically as neighbor. In [Song 5:16](#)—"this is my beloved, my neighbor, O daughters of Jerusalem!"—the bride lovingly describes her groom to her attendants. Readers of English translations will miss this, because most English translations render the word for neighbor as friend (see, for example, the NRSV). But the word in the Song that the bride uses to describe her groom is exactly the same word in Greek (and Armenian) in the lawyer's question to Jesus, "Who is my *neighbor*?" Thus, there is Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

already in the Old Testament a symbolic prefiguring of Christ as the true neighbor.

The allegorical reading that the ancient interpreters preferred does not obviate the moral reading. The vocation of Christians is to live like Christ and, ultimately, unite with him and become like God. Christ ends his parable by commanding his listeners to show the same mercy that the Samaritan did ([Luke 10:37](#)). The parable is therefore not only an allegory about Christ and the unfolding of salvation in history, but also about how Christians are to live. They are called to be like the good Samaritan, not the priest or Levite, because the good Samaritan acted as Christ. We should not think of these two interpretations as mutually exclusive. They are in fact perfectly complementary, since Christ, as perfect man, exemplifies what humans are meant to be.

Later in the same poem Gregory continues to reflect on the Samaritan. He states that the word “Samaritan” means guard, and he alludes to the biblical account of the Samaritans’ origins:

Like the pagans of Assyria whose name means guard
Because they received the Law from the Jews,
And did not forget it as they did,
But guarded it in its entirety.
You have come to unite Yourself with us.

Here, Gregory is referring to the passage in [2 Kings 17:24–28](#), in which the inhabitants of Samaria are said to be the descendants of Babylonians settled there by the Assyrian king. Because they were not pious, the Lord sent lions that devoured some of them. As a result, the king dispatched a priest from among the exiled Jews who taught them the Law. According to the Samaritans, at least, they guarded the Law while the Hebrews deviated from their own traditions. This reference to the Assyrian origin of the Samaritans and Gregory’s affirmation that they are the true guardians of the traditions of Israel has a special significance since, as we know, the Artsruni dynasty claimed descent from the Assyrian king Sennacherib. Gregory was no doubt aware that by implying a relation between the Artsruni and the Samaritans (and thus, at least symbolically, with Christ) he would enhance the standing of his Artsruni rulers over the Bagratuni. This is a rare and subtle instance of Gregory’s nod to Artsruni political aspirations in his poem, which alludes sparingly to specific local landmarks and circumstances, perhaps in order to accentuate the universal appeal of the prayers.

Encouraged by the accounts of God’s bountiful grace extended to both Enoch and the beaten traveler, and filled with the hope of God’s love, Gregory exults:

But taking refuge in this shadowless confidence,
I who was laid low am raised;
Once miserable,
I have conquered;
Having been deceived,
now I am converted to life;
From the most miserable evil deeds,
I have come to hope;
I was handed over to death,
But now I am restored to life;

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Once combative and quarrelsome,
Now I am forgiving.

Love completes the trinity of virtues that the baptized faithful are called to perfect in order to restore in themselves the image of God. Of the three virtues, it is love that scripture most clearly identifies with God. Paul says it is the greatest of the theological virtues ([1 Cor 13:13](#)). So the life of faith and hope culminates in love of God and love of neighbor. Yet this love is not selective but offered to all. Its highest form is a seemingly incoherent form of love: the love of one's enemies. For Gregory, love is perfected when it goes beyond the natural love of friends and neighbors and is offered to those who revile and persecute us. To possess this supernatural love, we need the greatest of grace. But it is only by achieving this most extraordinary form of love that we can dare approach God's love.

Remember your magnanimity, Lord,
In regarding my unworthiness,
And with my prayer that good come to my enemies,
May you too work your ineffable miracles on them,
In accordance with your magnanimity;
Do not destroy those who oppress me,
But convert them, uproot our vile ways,
And plant goodness in me and them.

God's love extends to all, even to the souls in hell, as we have seen in the hymn of the crucified lion. Gregory remembers these tormented souls also in the *Book of Lamentation*:

You turned the shadow of death into dawn,
as the prophet says,
And willingly descended into Tartarus,
To the prison of the ones confined below,
Whose door was closed even to prayers,
You cut the destructive bond of death
That held captive the plundered souls exiled there,
You scattered all thoughts of sin.

The author of Ecclesiastes thought that death would overpower all else ([Eccl 8:8](#)) while the author of the Song recognizes love as equal in strength to death ([Song 8:6](#)). But Christ's love vanquishes even death. Now we can speak more boldly than Solomon as we apprehend more clearly that this greatest of loves—the love of the wicked and accursed—is even stronger than death and transcends all other forms of love. To be fully in the image of God means that we too must share in Christ's love for sinners and for enemies, for those who crucify him and us.

For Gregory, the root of such love is found in humility, the virtue that Anania especially praised in his writings. Humility requires that we not judge others nor condemn them for their sins. It demands us to recognize that God offers his love to all regardless of their sin:

You created all, and all are yours,
You have mercy on all, you alone are compassionate,
For although they sin, they are yours,

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They are in your accounting.

It is not our place to judge others or to claim to know who is righteous and who is an unrepentant sinner in God's eyes. This forbearance toward others manifests the same refusal to judge found in the sayings of the desert ascetics. Inspired by their model, Gregory insists that we reserve all judgment to God and approach others in a spirit of humility:

I am never fit to judge correctly
About who among the earth-born
Is predestined to be your heir;
You alone reproach with impartiality,
By the authority of your righteousness,
The impious who seem pure
And the prostitutes who repent.

This humility born of contrition allows us to love others even though they sin. The love Christ embodied is the love that scandalously ate with and ministered to the poor and oppressed, the criminals and prostitutes. That love is the one Gregory desires to imitate, but which he realizes he can only achieve through God's grace. He reads the admonition of [Proverbs 25:6](#)—"Do not put yourself forward in the presence of the king, or stand in the places of the great"—and its echo of Christ's words in [Luke 14:8–10](#)—"When you are invited to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place ... but go and sit down in the lowest place"—as a call not to exalt oneself among the proud and vain but to sit in fellowship with the humble and disgraced and share in their humility:

Now especially desirable to me here is
The ancient admonition, newly received, of the spiritual sage
That the Lord himself repeated
Not to go and sit before the throne of the proud,
When the impious assemble with their vain thoughts,
Which David and Jeremiah,
Standing firm in the law of the covenant, renounced,
But with those who repent in their heart and are ashamed at their sin,
Who are terrified and in fear of the great day of judgment,
And willingly equal in their humility the least of those on earth;
For their sake God on high exults and rejoices.

Taken to its furthest extent, humility even permits us to love our enemies. Recalling Jesus' equation in [Matthew 5:21–22](#) of anger and abusive expressions with murder, Gregory observes first that God has granted him the grace to master his hateful feelings and words against his enemies. The profundity of this prayer for one's enemy is underscored by the explicit presence of the entire person of the supplicant. Gregory pledges to commit himself to reconciliation with his enemies with all his mind, heart, and body, which is symbolized by the knees on which he prays:

The cruel desires of my wicked voice having been shut up by you,
I now in all my thoughts grant pardon to my debtors,

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With all my heart, I seek to be reconciled
With those who have violently betrayed me
Together with those who have done me good;
For their sake, I pray on my knees repeatedly.

With even greater magnanimity Gregory asks to be granted the grace to bless not those who curse him, but rather those whom he had offended. If he is unable to pray for those whom he has hurt, all of his other prayers are in vain:

Now what prayers in this book may be pleasing to you,
What smoke of incense acceptable to you shall I offer,
O Christ, praised Heavenly King,
If I do not pray to you to bless those who are cursed by me,
To release those whom I have bound,
To free those I have condemned,
Benefit those I have anathematized,
Crown those whom I have offended,
Console those whom I have made sad,
Tend to those I have bruised,
Care for those I have alienated,
Give refuge to those I have betrayed,
And heal the souls of those whom I have wounded in body?

Among those whom Gregory has condemned and anathematized, of course, are the T'ondrakeans and Nestorians and those of other faiths. But here he asks that God allow him to console and care for these people as well. We should also understand Gregory to be speaking not only for himself but in his role as a priest asking forgiveness for his congregation, pleading for all the members of his Church, including the hierarchs who have through lack of charity condemned their fellow faithful, among whom were Gregory's own father and abbot.

The Centrality of the Eucharist

As the Mahés have observed, these prayers for the extraordinary grace to bless those who are hateful to oneself come immediately after the prayers of communion and the Eucharist. This juxtaposition is meant to show that progress in the virtues is accomplished not through one's own efforts alone but only through participation in the sacraments of the church, and especially through the Eucharist. By taking within oneself Christ's body and blood, one becomes conformed and restored to his image, the image of perfect love that knows no bounds. Indeed, the theme of the necessity of the Eucharist in cultivating the life of Christian virtue is apparent throughout these central prayers. The way of illumination highlighted in these middle prayers is thus connected to the nave of the church which the congregation enters through baptism and where they now assemble to receive holy communion:

How long would it take the members of our bodies,
Inclined toward sin, to be saved?
It could happen only when you, God of all,

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According to your will and desire,
Accepted the sacrifice and bore death,
And shared yourself for our forgiveness.

For it is not that you, source of purity,
Are obliged to die each day,
But according to your will,
Through the cooperation of your Spirit,
And to please the Father,
For our reconciliation,
You offer yourself continuously.

Although the Eucharist is a focus of this part of the book of prayers, the centrality of the sacrament underlies the entire work, though usually it is done subtly and in ways that are difficult, if not impossible, to convey in translation. Consider, for example, these verses from Prayer 11:

[The Word] holds nearby a portion of salvation, a glimmer of life,
Like a spark of light guarded in his mind and soul,
Like the remarkable and amazingly intense fire
That miraculously was ignited at the command from on high,
After lying dormant at the bottom of the well.

The fire is a reference to the miraculous light of [2 Maccabees 1:18–23](#) that shone forth from a thick liquid. That residue was the remnant of the temple altar fire hidden at the bottom of a well after the return of Nehemiah from captivity to Jerusalem to restore the city walls and the temple. This is one of the miracles commemorated in the Jewish Feast of Lights (Hanukkah). For Gregory, though, the dormant substance is a symbol of the bread and wine that when consecrated become Christ's body and blood. The connection with the Eucharist here is clear from the word I translate as "portion" (Armenian: *nshkhar*), but which can also refer to the host or the bread that is consecrated. As unimpressive as the matter of the host may appear, like the viscous substance found at the base of the well, through the gift of the Spirit it is transformed into the most brilliant and enduring light that restores those who receive it to holiness.

Not only is the Eucharist present throughout the work, but Gregory implies that his book itself can be compared to the sacrament. Returning to his eucharistic prayer, we read:

I will pray to you with your prayer,
As is appropriate to the matter of these words,
The letters of lamentation in this book,
Which I will fill with sorrow and deep sighs.
But I will mix in to it what I have received from you,
that it may be pleasing to you who have given it.

Here, the key word is *matter*, which translates the Armenian word *niwt'*. The word *matter* carries some of the same ambiguity of the Armenian word. The English can refer to a material substance but also the words or contents of a literary work, as when we speak of reading matter. Gregory is playing on a similar ambiguity in Armenian, since *niwt'* can mean matter but

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also can refer to the letters or elements that the poet is weaving together, since the verb form of the noun, *niwt’em*, means “to weave, contrive.” The poet’s words are compared to matter, like the elements of the Eucharist that by being mixed with what is received from God are transformed into Christ’s flesh and blood. The word for mix here is also significant since it is the same word that he uses to describe the incarnation, the mixture without confusion of the Word with the flesh. Thus, the book is itself a poetic sacrament that Gregory offers to God to be consecrated and distributed among the faithful for their spiritual sustenance. Understood in this way, the book takes on an inspired quality akin to scripture.

The prevalence of the subject of the Eucharist in Gregory’s poem is meant to impress upon the faithful the vital importance of communion in Christian life. He is presenting a counterpoint to the T’ondrakean rejection of communion as well as to those charismatic clerics like Jacob of Hark’ who discouraged frequent communion. For Gregory, the Eucharist is indispensable as the means to encounter God in our world and to fortify and magnify the virtues that bring us closer to God and restore his image in us. There are limits to how often one can receive communion. But Gregory does not object to daily participation in the Eucharist:

[The Church] does not allow one
to come forward twice on the same day
for the ineffable sacrament of the Lord
lest the offering be carelessly dishonored.

Although communion twice in one day is barred, daily communion is by implication neither forbidden nor discouraged.

Since the sacraments are effected through the church and its priests, the way to God must be taken through the church. As we have seen, for Gregory fidelity to the apostolic teachings is a sign of the presence of the true church guided and inspired by the Holy Spirit. We can be sure of the validity of the sacraments because they proceed from the universal church that has its origins in the descent of the Spirit upon the apostles at Pentecost:

[The apostles] are our forebears, our parents who begot us through the holy font, the pedagogues of our learning, teachers to us who are being discipled, our instructors in good confession, the founders of the holy Church, the conveyors of true worship, the prodders in real piety, the ordainers of our priesthood—which they received from Christ and passed on to us, the faithful covenanters, the foremost witnesses to our order established by God.

The Church Universal

We have already seen that Gregory, in agreement with the general ecclesiology of the school of Narek, identifies the apostolic church not only with those who profess the miaphysite Christology and do not accept Chalcedon, but also with the Chalcedonian church. Unlike some Armenian miaphysite theologians who equate Chalcedonianism with Nestorius’s heretical teachings, Gregory realizes that Chalcedonian Christology is within the sphere of orthodoxy. He praises the Chalcedonian emperors Basil and Constantine and recognizes them as defenders of the faith. The oil of confirmation unites all Christians into one body throughout the world without regard for ethnicity. In a surreal portrayal of the diversity of peoples that constitute the

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church, there are even strange beings like the dog-headed giant who seems to exist on the fringes of the human species:

This wonderful oil brings the light of blessing
To Jew and savage alike,
The Indian and barbarian,
Scythian and Greek,
The violent brute, the fearsome dog-headed giant,
To the free master and his serf born into slavery,
Making of them all Christians.

The creatures with a dog's head, the cynocephali, appear in various legendary tales, including the *Romance of Alexander*, a work that was translated into Armenian in the early Middle Ages. They were supposed to be an exotic race living on the edges of civilization. Augustine discusses in the *City of God* whether they are humans. He does not pronounce a verdict on their status, but insists that regardless of whatever unusual appearance rational animals may have, they are human, and thus children of Adam. Gregory is more forthcoming on the question of the cynocephali. Not only are they children of Adam but through the sacraments they also may become children of God, members of the body of Christ.

Although Gregory acknowledges the unity of the universal church, embracing both the Chalcedonian and miaphysite communities, he does not venture into questions of jurisdiction and primacy. His reticence is a mark of prudence, given the troubles his father encountered in arguing against the catholicos for the equal privileges of all bishops. In Prayer 3 of the *Book of Lamentation*, in his listing of all the ranks of people for whom he writes his poem, he distinguishes the bishops from the primates who occupy a see. Samuelian translates this phrase as "patriarch" but the Armenian is not as definite and could more generally be applied to diocesan bishops instead of only the patriarchs. The ambiguity is perhaps deliberate in order not to offend either party in the dispute on the authority of the patriarch over the bishops. Gregory describes Peter as the "rock of faith," "chief of disciples," and "first in number and primacy," but he does not connect this status of primacy to any see. If the T'ondrakeans inherited the antipathy toward Peter of their precursors, the Paulicians, then Gregory would have ample cause specific to his time and place to exalt Peter as a corrective to the heretics' disparagement of the apostle. In any event, he does not show any interest in disputes about the ranking and ordering of the patriarchal sees.

The congregation assembled now in the nave of the church stands before the altar following the way of the sacraments and the theological virtues in order to come closer to the altar, where God dwells as on his throne in heaven. It is a motley and wondrous spectacle, this collection of God's children: some appear to have canine heads and others are adorned in the peculiar dress and utter the strange speech of the nomadic Scythians. But all have received the grace of the Spirit and all have come to seek God. God is the end of all human longing, and we yearn to encounter him immediately and eternally, not only through the mediation of the church and its sacraments. Some of the faithful have devoted all of their efforts to this journey to union with God. They are the monks, who lead the way. But all Christians are called to consummate their love of God. This consummation and perfection of the journey to God is *theosis*, our becoming one with God, and it is for Gregory as for all the Eastern Christians the Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

only goal of all the exercises and exertions that constitute the Christian life. It is the topic that we turn to in the next chapter as we enter the sanctuary of the church and ascend to the altar.

Chapter Eight

Theosis and the Doctrine of God

To many Christians in the West, and for some Eastern Chrsians as well, the concept of *theosis* appears alien and perhaps even heretical. It seems to imply that humans and God merge into one being in some version of pantheism. Perhaps even worse it appears to honor the blasphemous conceit that we are gods. But the idea of *theosis*, although sometimes suppressed or disguised in other Christian traditions, is part of the common patrimony of the Christian faith. The idea that human beings are made in the image and likeness of God should be familiar to all Christians. If the fall of Adam is understood as tarnishing that image, then everything that Christians do should aim at recovering that primordial and pristine divine likeness. Yet it is only through Christ's incarnation, in which he descends to humanity in order to raise it back to God, that this likeness can ever be restored. If one sees *theosis* as that process in which Christians receive the grace of God to be reconciled with him, then the idea of becoming like God no longer seems so strange or heterodox. Indeed, the gospels themselves make clear that Christians are to achieve such divine perfection: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" ([Matt 5:48](#)).

Gregory understands deification to be the ultimate goal of his life as a monk but he also makes clear that it is the end of all human beings, the fulfillment of our promise as God's beloved creation. The commentary on the Song gives Gregory ample opportunity to develop his conception of *theosis* since the Song is a poem of God's love of human beings, allegorized as the love between a bride and groom. The bride, representing the human soul or collectively the Church, the body of the faithful seeking God, yearns to be with her groom. Read allegorically, the entire book is a symbolic display of the love between Christ and humans presented in terms of earthy and sensuous images and metaphors that arouse our affection for God. Commenting on verse [6:4](#)—"The groom says to the bride, 'You are beautiful, my neighbor, like sweet fragrance, you are beautiful like Jerusalem, arrayed in wonder'"—Gregory remarks that Christ the groom notices the beauty of his bride, who has recovered her former brilliance after being baptized. But he also notes that by looking at the groom and drawing near to him, she has acquired his beauty in the same way that a wick brought near a flame becomes the very light that it touches. And yet immediately after acclaiming her beauty, the groom commands the bride to avert her gaze—"turn your eyes from me for they have roused me" ([Song 6:5](#)). This is a puzzling verse, but Gregory interprets it to mean that the groom has been roused with wonder at the bride's sharp vision but also that he fears that in gazing at him the bride would be blinded by his divine splendor. Gregory compares the bride's situation to Moses, who had to hide his face from the burning bush ([Exod 3:6](#)), and to Elijah, who wrapped his face with a mantle when the Lord's voice came to him ([1 Kgs 19:13](#)). Of course, Moses and Elijah also Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

appear to the transfigured Christ and converse with him while his disciples fall on their faces at the sound of the voice of God from the cloud ([Matt 17:6](#)). This interpretation of the groom's words indicates that in our current state we are not prepared for anything more than fleeting glimpses of the divine but that only as we are perfected will we be able to abide the divine light in its fullness.

An especially striking depiction of *theosis* also appears in the commentary's description of the bride's body and words becoming like the groom's. This depiction occurs in the commentary on [6:7](#) where the groom says (in Gregory's Armenian version of the verse): "Your lips are like a red thread, and your words are beautiful, like a pomegranate's rind are your cheeks from silence." Gregory's reading is based on Nyssen's interpretation:

Her eyes come near the divine eyes, her locks to his luminous locks, her head to Christ the head, her lips to the lips that produced life, for her lips became red from the blood of Christ, and they speak the very words that He taught her to speak: to pray for her enemies and to bless those who persecute her, and all such like things.

The reddened lips of the bride symbolize the Eucharist through which the sacramental graces flow. Just as we saw in the last chapter that the Eucharist has an essential role in the growth in virtue, here too Gregory indicates that the progression toward likeness to God's image is accomplished through the reception of Christ's blood in communion.

We also find numerous references to *theosis* in the *Book of Lamentation*. In Prayer 19, Gregory paraphrases the famous statement of Athanasius on deification:

You for our sake alone became flesh with us,
So that you may make us for your sake like yourself.
Light for all, in all things merciful, almighty, heavenly.

And in Prayer 32, Gregory implores Christ to come and dwell inside him:

O most-bounteous hand of Jesus Christ,
May you turn also toward me and
Extend the grace of your holy right hand;
Dwell within me, become one with me, and never leave
My anguished heart, my chamber of love.

The erotic language here echoes the romantic imagery of the Song of Songs, evoking the bridal chamber of [Song 8:2](#): "I would lead you and bring you to the house of my mother, and into the chamber of the one who bore me." On this verse, Gregory comments:

Now having found him outside and having been made worthy of a kiss, and then having taken the groom into the chamber and into the house of the soul and into the heart, and having become the abode of the Trinity, she promises to have him drink the wine of happiness and the fruit of pomegranates.

Gregory alludes in this passage to the food offered to God as a sacrifice, but he makes clear that it is the heart's awareness of his goodness that is truly nourishing and pleasing to God.

The human soul, like the bride of the Song, longs most of all for this spiritual wedding with God. But what does Gregory say about this God with whom we seek union and in whose image Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

we are made? We already know that God is Trinitarian and that one of the Trinity became incarnate for our salvation and restoration. But are there any other details about Gregory's doctrine of God that are distinctive or especially notable? In this chapter I will focus on what Gregory has to say about Trinity and Christ, and how through Christ humans are reconciled with God.

The Trinitarian God

The long profession of faith in Prayer 34, which the Mahés read as the creed that the candidates recite in the vestibule between the narthex and the nave before their baptism, proclaims faith in the three persons of the Trinity. The unity of the three persons is a mystery that transcends all attempts to describe or understand it:

We confess and proclaim, worship and bow down to
The unity of the All Holy Trinity, equal in glory,
Ineffable divinity, ever good, one in being,
Equal in honor, inaccessible to the mind's soaring wings,
Higher than any image, beyond any likeness.

Denying both the Arian heresy that makes the Son a created being as well as the heresy of Macedonius (d. ca. 360) that considers the Holy Spirit a creature, the church recognizes the Father as creator of everything besides the other persons of the Trinity:

Compassionate Father, Ruler of all and God of the universe
Of all that is in heaven and on earth
Except for the Only-begotten Word,
Through whom He rules all things;
The Creator and Giver of breath to all beings
Except for the consubstantial Spirit,
Through whom He gave form to the world.

There is no ranking or order of the three persons, all of whom exist in an essential relation with the other persons. The doctrine of subordinationism, which renders the Son and Spirit subservient in their nature and essence to the Father, is thus repudiated. Nor does the unity of the persons result in a confusion that produces a fourth being distinct from the three persons or the existence of three distinct gods each with their own wills:

For placing the Father first in the Trinity
Does not mean that one is greater than the other,
Nor by naming one after the other
Does it mean that one is lower than the other.
Nor by saying that they form a unity
Do we imply any confusion among the persons;
Nor by distinguishing the three persons
Do we imply a separation of their wills.

The identity of each of the persons is essentially bound to the other persons. The Father

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without the power of the Son would be bereft of glory, and without the Spirit would lack breath or life. Likewise, the Son without the Father would be an abandoned orphan capable of being annihilated by some mortal being. The Spirit too would be a chaotic wind if it were detached from the origin from which it proceeds. Gregory does not specify here from which person the Spirit proceeds though he does use the singular to refer to the Spirit's principle or cause. This omission is not surprising given that questions about the procession of the Spirit surrounding the insertion of the *filioque* into the Nicene Creed that would aggravate relations between the Eastern and Western churches were not a major concern for the Armenian church, which has not taken a dogmatic stance on the matter.

The Motherhood of God

The trinitarian theology expressed in Gregory's profession of faith is standard and certainly orthodox from the perspective of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed professed by all the orthodox ecclesial communions. More remarkable are Gregory's claims about the motherhood of God. Gregory is not unique in speaking of God as mother. The patristic and medieval Christian tradition contains many such descriptions of God. God is even portrayed as a mother in the Bible, most notably in Isaiah, where God is compared to a comforting mother ([Isa 66:13](#)) and described as a woman in labor ([Isa 42:14](#)). In the gospels, Jesus compares himself to a hen gathering her chicks ([Matt 23:37](#); [Luke 13:34](#)). So Gregory's use of feminine and maternal images to describe God is not a radical departure from tradition, though it may seem so to many who are unaware of its presence in scripture. While recognizing the first person of the Trinity as Father, Gregory also speaks of the Father as a mother or at least he attributes traditionally maternal and feminine qualities to him. In Prayer 17, a meditation on God's grace, the poet writes:

For when dawn arrives and the light of day breaks,
Who can still dread the dark?
Or can fear death when life is at hand ...

Who can hunger when there is a wealth of bread,
Thirst when flowing streams are near,
Feel betrayed when there is motherly compassion,
Hatred when under care of the right hand of God?

And in Prayer 5, a prayer of confession addressed to the Son, Gregory brings together both the masculine function of God as begetter and God's feminine role as nourisher:

You begot me as a father,
Nourished me as a wet-nurse.

We may add to these verses of the *Book of Lamentation* some other examples of God's motherhood from the commentary on the Song. Notably, verse [1:2](#) in Gregory's version based on the Septuagint—"for your breasts are better than wine"—is a declaration made by the bride about her groom. Symbolically, therefore, Christ is the nursing mother whose breasts, here representing the two testaments of scripture, nourish the church. In her discussion of the

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theological themes in the commentary, Roberta Ervine points to Gregory's remarks on [Song 8:5](#), a verse spoken by the groom and which reads in Gregory's commentary: "I shall awaken you under the apple tree; there my mother was in labor with you, there she who bore you was in labor." Here, Gregory's lemma mistakenly replaces the word *your*, which occurs in both the Septuagint and the Armenian version, with *my*, thereby facilitating his reading of the mother as Christ's. Gregory comments that labor pains pertain specifically to mothers, and so the groom, as Christ, is speaking of the Father as his mother. He notes that God was in labor "in his messages through the Law and prophets" and, in a reference to [John 3:5](#), that he gave birth to his children "through water and the Spirit as brothers of Christ." He concludes that "our Mother is One—the Father begetter, the omnipotent God."

The motif of God as a mother in labor in Gregory's work evokes also the circumstances of his own mother's death. At the beginning of prayer 18, Gregory seems to assume some guilt for his mother's death:

I was born in sin, the child of deathly labor,
One who must pay back in one day
A penalty of countless myriads of talents;
I beg for your forgiveness.

And in the opening of the poem he presents his work as "remedies for the multifaceted life-threatening labor pains." I do not mean to reduce Gregory's contrition and search for a maternal God to a mere projection of his personal psychological trauma and feelings of guilt. If God is the end of all human desires, and one of the deepest longings of the human soul is for the care and love of a mother, then it makes sense that God would be revealed to us as both father and mother. And if Gregory's personal experience made him especially solicitous of maternal protection, it may have been that very sensitivity that heightened his attentiveness to biblical references to God as mother and his acceptance of the appropriateness of imagining God in terms usually associated with women. In the next chapter, we will see that the same longing for maternal love and concern about the pain of childbirth inform his devotion to the Virgin Mary. But because theological questions surrounding the second person of the Trinity, the eternal word of God, were in Gregory's time (as they remain today) of key importance to the doctrine of the Armenian church and its relation to other churches, let us turn to matters of Christology.

Gregory's Christology

As we have seen, the school of Narek, with the exception of Anania's anti-Chalcedonian treatise, normally approached Chalcedonian Christology in a conciliatory and charitable manner, recognizing that it differed from the Christology of Nestorius and that it fell within the parameters of orthodoxy. Nevertheless, they affirmed the primacy of the miaphysite position of their own church because of the conviction that it better expressed the perfect interpenetration of the divine and the human in the person of Christ without any space or interval separating them. Any such gap would keep the word of God from fully entering the fallen human condition and bringing about its redemption. It would prevent a consummation of

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theosis, since humanity would still remain at a distance from God, who would not touch the entirety of humanity and its afflictions.

Gregory professes his devotion to this one-nature Christology. While remaining one in essence with the other persons of the Trinity, the Son descended and assumed the humanity that he shared with us:

The only Son of the only Father,
The first-born, only child of the Virgin,
The Mother of God, Bearer of the Lord,
The Creator who became in his creation
The genuine first-formed man.
Not after the likeness of the earth-formed beings,
But as a new and blameless man,
Among the kings the most sublime,
Never before seen in the centuries,
Never before existing in the ages.

There are some interesting linguistic peculiarities in these verses. Gregory uses the term “Bearer of the Lord,” perhaps the only occurrence of this term, a single word in Armenian (*tiratsin*). Its Greek equivalent (*kuriotokos*) is equally rare, occurring only in one of Athanasius’s homilies. Gregory also uses “only-begotten” (*miatsin*), but instead of employing it in its more common sense of Christ as the only-begotten of the Father, he says that Christ is the only-born—I translate it here as “only child”—of the Virgin, presumably to confirm the perpetual virginity of Mary before also referring to Christ as Mary’s “first born.” The repetition of the Armenian suffix *-tsin*—derived from the verb *tsnanem* (“to give birth to” or “beget”) and yielding terms such as *first-born*, *Lord-born*, and *primal-born*—places the emphasis on Christ’s nativity. The last designation—which I translate above as “first-formed”—corresponds to the Greek *archegonos*, a rare word but one most often found in the writings of Nazianzen, who uses it to refer to Adam. Thus, Gregory connects Christ’s assumed flesh to that of Adam’s pre-fall flesh, with Christ taking over Adam’s role as the genuine first man.

Gregory proceeds to offer several analogies for the incarnation:

The first born, according to the psalmist,
Higher than the kings of the earth ([Ps 88:28](#)),
Assuming our form in the flesh,
In an incorruptible mixture,
As in the example of the soul and body,
And gold with fire,
Or light with air,
Neither changed nor separated.

The christological language here is familiar. The union of the divine and human is a mixture without confusion, the same language that Gregory uses in Prayer 93 (as discussed in chapter two). Here, though, instead of the example of the intertwining wick, we have the mixture of the soul and body to form the unity of the person, although the soul and the body do not dissolve nor lose their own distinctive identity and powers. This particular metaphor of soul and body

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could be construed as a heretical denial of Christ's full humanity, for if the Word, on analogy with the soul, simply assumed a human body without a soul, Christ would not be a complete human. That conception of the incarnation was advocated by Apollinaris and condemned as Docetism at the first council of Constantinople in 381. Gregory makes clear, though, that he affirms the full and perfect humanity of Christ, "lacking in nothing as to his humanity." So he intends the soul-body analogy simply as a metaphor for the union, a natural example of how two substances can exist together in an intimate bond without either one losing its integrity. Likewise, the refining fire does not cease to be fire but produces a pure metal when the dregs of the original gold are skimmed off from a molten mixture. This image of the purification of gold through fire is significant because it suggests that through the incarnation, the divine Word, like fire, effects the purification of impure humanity, the debased gold. If we extend the metaphor to the question of the incorruptibility of the assumed flesh, then it would seem that the assumed flesh, like the gold, is impure and corruptible and it is through its assumption in the incarnation that it becomes incorruptible. The metaphor therefore coheres with the anti-Julianist position affirmed as orthodox at the Council of Manazkert, the council that would define the emerging orthodoxy of the Armenian church in relation both to the Chalcedonian definition of Christ and to the debate between Julian and Severus. Likewise, the metaphor of the light and air illustrates the light of God that illuminates the obscure body just as the light of the sun turns the dark, misty air of night into the clear splendor of dawn.

Though the incarnation turned the naturally corruptible and passable flesh of humanity into the pristine body of Christ, Christ deigned willingly to suffer with us:

He came himself voluntarily to the cross of death,
Like the immaculate lamb led to slaughter;
He prepared through his mighty free will
The salvation of his creatures;
He truly suffered in the way all living beings do;
He was placed in the tomb
While never separated from his divinity.

Gregory's creed on the incarnation sets his Christology firmly in line with the doctrines affirmed at Manazkert. If there is any further doubt that Gregory rejects the currents of Julianism still in his time influencing theology in Armenia, we need only turn to his commentary on the Song to dispel it. Armenian Julianists like John Mayragomets'i did not deny that Jesus suffered. Because the body he assumed was impassible by nature, his suffering was both voluntary and the result of a miracle through which the body's natural impassibility was overridden. But for Mayragomets'i there were certain kinds of suffering unbecoming of God. Among these were fear and mourning. These passions seem to entail some deficiency of virtue or power, particularly a lack of faith or hope in God. And yet Jesus is depicted mourning at the death of Lazarus and in a state of profound fear and despair in the garden of Gethsemane on the eve of his crucifixion:

They went to a place called Gethsemane; and [Jesus] said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake."

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([Mark 14:32–34](#))

An even more striking depiction of the depths of Jesus' distress is the pericope of the bloody sweat. After asking that his Father remove the cup before him but then assenting to the Father's will, an angel came to minister to him and he began to sweat drops of blood ([Luke 22:41–44](#)). Mayragomets'i would not deny that Jesus perspired like an athlete in intense competition with his opponent. But for Mayragomets'i the peculiar and pathological sweat of blood could only indicate an extreme distress and anguish inconsistent with Christ's divinity. He could not accept that the Lord would need the comforting of an angel and that he was so severely distressed that he perspired blood. Mayragomets'i's surviving writings and those of his opponents indicate that he believed the pericope of the bloody sweat to be an addition to the gospel text made by Nestorians who were, Mayragomets'i implies, intent on emphasizing Jesus' frail humanity to the detriment of his divinity.

The absence of the pericope from most of the pre-eleventh century Armenian Luke manuscripts is one more indication of the impact Mayragomets'i's Christology had on Armenian theology centuries after his condemnation at Manazkert. So it is all the more remarkable that Gregory's exemplar contains the pericope and that he directly cites it in his commentary on the Song. Commenting on the groom's declaration to the bride in [Song 5:2](#)—"my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night"—Gregory writes:

Here [the groom] reminds the bride of the sweat that he bore in the evening from fear of death, and about which the Gospel says *his sweat flowed from him in great drops* ([Luke 22:44](#)). He says that through my sweat you have put on this purity of the dove and perfection, and have become my sister and bride. It was through my sweat by which in that night I removed the sweat of the curse.

Noteworthy here is that Gregory says that the sweat resulted from Christ's *fear of death*, the very passion that the Armenian Julianists contended was inappropriate for Christ. There is a difference in the wording of the verse here and in the form found in the Armenian Bible and the Septuagint. The Zohraperian edition of the Armenian Bible reads: "and sweat like drops of blood flowed from him and fell drop by drop to the ground." Gregory does not mention blood, most likely because his focus is on the dew in the groom's hair as a figure of Christ's sweat in the new garden, which annuls the sweat of the curse imposed on Adam in the garden of old ([Gen 3:19](#)). Furthermore, the Armenian anti-Julianists considered the reference to drops of blood to be a simile rather than a literal depiction of the sweat. The important point for us remains that Gregory disavows the Julianist denial that Christ experienced the fear of death.

Likewise, in opposition to John Mayragomets'i's rejection of Christ's sorrow and grief, Gregory presents a genuinely sorrowful Christ:

For truly did the compassionate Lord weep
Just as we humans do
At the burial of his friend,
So, too, for Jerusalem gone astray [[Luke 19:41](#)]
And for Judas gone mad. [cf. [Matt 26:24](#)]

In presenting Jesus as one who shares in all our sorrows and afflictions but who remains sinless,

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Gregory is faithful to the general anti-Julianist thought of the school of Narek. Khosrov had already affirmed the passions of Christ in his commentary on the liturgy:

Christ lived out his life but committed no sin, bearing all the passions of the flesh: He was born, nourished, hungered, thirsted, grew tired, ate, drank, felt, became anxious, sorrowed, wept, and took upon Himself all else entailed by the flesh. And remaining free from sin, He became victorious over fleshly shortcomings.

Echoing his father's words, Gregory goes even further by adding that Christ experienced death as God:

[He] suffered and took on himself all that humans suffer save for sin: he was spat upon, slapped and whipped, mocked with robes and a crown of thorns, His divine head beaten with a reed, nailed naked to the cross with criminals, and fed with bile and vinegar. God died and was pierced with the spear of the soldier, and was wrapped and buried, and all else.

This affirmation of Christ's sufferings in opposition to Julianism fits well with the general plan of the school of Narek to bring the church closer to the people. A Julianist Christology that mitigates Christ's suffering presents serious obstacles for an effective pastoral theology. Consider how Julianists would counsel a person in grief. Since mourning is for them a symptom of human sinfulness, they would have to advise the bereaved to resist the normal process of grieving. They could not point to Christ and declare that he shares the grief of the bereaved, since they do not believe that Christ mourns in the way we do. For Gregory, though, Christ's mourning, sorrow, and fear are identical to our own feelings. Not only can the afflicted take comfort in Christ's participation in our suffering but also through his passions Christ has sanctified the entire range of emotions that humans experience. Gregory's Christ, in contrast to Julian's, is a Christ who is extremely close to us and whose experience is our experience as well.

Gregory displays Christ's compassion perhaps most vividly in Prayer 18 of the *Book of Lamentation*, which is devoted to the gospel accounts of healing and resurrection. Here, Gregory portrays Jesus sharing in our suffering as a fellow human while also recognizing that he provides more than just solidarity with those who are in pain. Christ is both human and divine and, as God, is capable of healing the sick and restoring the dead to life. Gregory associates himself with the afflicted of these stories and asks for Christ's comfort and healing. One of the many remarkable features of this prayer is that Gregory identifies most of all with women, presenting himself as similar to the sinful woman of [Luke 7:38–50](#) (Prayer 18.5) and the woman having a flow of blood for twelve years (Prayer 18.4). However, he also identifies with Lazarus raised from the grave after four days (18.7). Since the next section of the prayer, which portrays the episode of the widow of Nain ([Luke 7:11–17](#)), also depicts Jesus resurrecting a man from the dead, one might suppose, as some translations do, that Gregory associates himself with the raised young man. But in reading the verses more carefully we find that Gregory connects his own laments with those of the mourning widow whose son has died. He asks that Jesus say to him the same words that he spoke to the widow: "Do not weep" ([Luke 7:13](#)):

Like the pitiful voice of despair,
The wails of lamentation
Of the widow of Nain,

Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

The mother of an only son,
Her fingers trembling,
Her breast heaving,
Tears flowing on her face from grief's pain,
I too implore You with my last sigh,
And say, "Give me in my despair
The encouraging comfort
of your compassionate word."
Say to me also, most blessed Lord,
Creator of the world, worthy of praise,
"Do not weep" like a captive with much to lament.
But as you restored the young man to life
In consolation of his afflicted mother,
May I too receive from you
my most indebted soul renewed.

The analogy drawn here is somewhat perplexing. As the widow has lost her son, so too has Gregory lost his soul. He has not suffered literal death but rather spiritual death. The relation between the widow's son and the poet's soul seems problematic. But one clue about what Gregory is doing here is provided by the Armenian word in the last line that is translated here as "my soul" (*hogis*). In colloquial Armenian, it is common to call one's child or any other close person "my soul" as a token of one's affection. This usage is already attested in Middle Armenian as early as the fourteenth century and may derive from the analogous Persian custom, also found among Armenians, in which *jan*, a Persian word for soul, is used as a term of affection. Assuming this usage was also current in Gregory's time, it would explain the connection between the widow's son and Gregory's soul. Just as the widow has lost her metaphorical soul, so too Gregory has lost his literal soul to sin and moral debt. And just as Christ restores the widow's "soul" by resurrecting her son, so too Gregory asks that his own soul be renewed and restored to him.

Gregory evokes Christ's compassion for the widow also by drawing parallels between the woman of Nain and the Virgin Mary. The widow's affliction foreshadows Mary's grief, both of whose sons die and are resurrected. When he arrived in Nain and witnessed the burial of the only son of the widowed mother, Jesus' attention was drawn to his own mother and the torment she would endure at his crucifixion. That is why without even being asked to, Jesus is moved by compassion to restore the widow's son to life. With these words—"as you restored the young man to life/In consolation of his afflicted mother"—Gregory emphasizes the gospel's statement that Jesus performed the miracle above all out of compassion for the mother who was left with no close male relative. This too ties the widow to the Virgin, for in describing the widow as the mother of an *only son*, Gregory recalls the designation of Christ as the *only child* of Mary in Prayer 34 of the poem, discussed above.

In addition to the clear pastoral advantages of this very human, suffering, and compassionate Christ, the notion of a Christ who is immersed in all the problems of humanity and who descends to the very depths of human despair and suffering is also important for systematic theology. Only such a fully human Christ can truly redeem humanity in its totality and restore us to the divine image. *Theosis* requires a Christ who is both fully human and fully

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divine. The worry is that a Julianist Christ is not human enough to redeem humanity thoroughly and to reconcile us completely with God. All of Gregory's theology focuses on that ultimate goal of returning humanity as a whole to the Lord; consequently, he disavows all the principles of Julianism that stand in the way of this goal.

The Sacrament of Chrismation

By now it should be clear from our study of his work that for Gregory, the path toward *theosis* is essentially sacramental. The grace to be like God and with God comes from the Eucharist. Commenting on [Song 7:9](#) according to the Septuagint—"I go with my nephew in uprightness, being made sufficient in my lips and teeth"—Gregory remarks that the soul becomes perfect by observing Christ's teachings, which he himself exemplified for us through his actions. Christ's lessons were not just his words but also his deeds. Jesus first acted and then taught, as expressed in the opening of the Acts of the Apostles: "Jesus began to do and then to teach" ([Acts 1:1](#)). For our edification, he modeled the virtues:

He became man so he would do all that he taught in word, and through his works he would teach us mildness and humility.... He displayed absence of malice in praying for his crucifiers—*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do* ([Luke 23:34](#)).... Likewise he demonstrated the completion of his work through a donkey and his humility by sitting on it [[Matt 21:5–7](#); [John 12:14–15](#)].... At the wedding he shared in the joy of those who rejoiced and offered them a gift, and in mourning, too, he demonstrated the extent of his sadness by weeping, and taught us to mourn with our brethren in sadness."

Yet we are unable to emulate Christ's perfect life through our own devices. We need the grace of God every step of the way. The grace of becoming like Christ is granted first through the Eucharist:

Now from where was given such power to the bride to accompany Christ in uprightness? By the awesome sacrament of communion in the body and blood of Christ, which he gave to us for strength. He made us bold to drink with our lips and break with our teeth that on which you angels, the *daughters and queens*, did not dare to gaze, and made us sufficient to break with our teeth the one of whom no bone was broken on the Cross, as the prophet had said before ([Ps 33:21](#)).

The Eucharist grants us the strength and power to become like Christ, a privilege not even bestowed upon the angels, who in the Song are represented by the daughters of Jerusalem attending the bride. Taking into one's inner being the body of Christ allows us to exhibit and perform in our outer behavior the virtues epitomized in Christ's life. But it is in the sacrament of chrismation, or anointing with the holy oil (*muron*), that the divine image is perfected. Gregory alludes to Anania's anthropology of the inner and outer person in claiming that through anointing the two aspects of our being are reconciled and together sanctified:

This oil of salvation,
Perfected through light,
Is poured on us
To anoint the outer temple,

Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

But invisibly, unseen,
Penetrates the inner person
And restores it to life.

Having anointed my head
With your immaculate heavenly oil,
I come before you in gladness,
Rejoicing and not in sorrow.

The sacrament of anointing unites us with God and restores us to Adam's original state. Here, the poet considers the sacred oil as the fruit of the tree of the crucifixion that reverses the effects of the fruit of the tree in Eden, just as earlier we saw that Christ's sweat in Gethsemane undoes the curse of sweat imposed on Adam:

You gave the oil ...
So that we who find ourselves
Exiled in the shadows of death
Through the guilt incurred
From the tree of primal perdition
May be illuminated by the flame of faith
And be restored to our original glory
Through the fruit of the tree akin to it.

A Mysticism of Light

The association of anointing with perfection is one more instance of the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius on Gregory's understanding of the sacraments and their role in the ascent toward God. We have already noted the relation of baptism to purification and the role of the Eucharist in illumination. There are, however, some significant differences between their sacramental theologies. Gregory adds the sacrament of confession in the first stage and grants a sacramental character to marriage in his commentary on the Canticle, while the Dionysian corpus mentions neither marriage nor confession. But Dionysian theology clearly informs the basic tripartite structure of the *Book of Lamentation* and the focus in each part on particular sacraments. Although the general idea of three levels of Christian initiation predates Pseudo-Dionysius's mysticism, the specifically sacramental character of Gregory's arrangement of his poem points to a direct Dionysian influence. We have already remarked on the Dionysian aspects of Khosrov's ecclesiology. Given the imprint of Dionysian thought on the school of Narek, it is natural to ask to what extent the mystical theology of the Areopagite has shaped Gregory's own mysticism. In particular, we may wonder to what extent Gregory's mysticism reflects one of the most distinctive elements of Dionysian mysticism: *apophatic* or negative theology. Although we can make positive statements about what God is—how God is one and goodness and life—this *cataphatic* or affirmative approach to theology fails to do justice to the otherness of God and his separateness from the things of our world. If we describe God as king, we must also be aware that he is not like any of the kings of this world, his creation. Consequently, when we describe God in terms of what he is not, such as when we say that he is *not mortal* or *not corruptible*, we are speaking more truly than when we say what God actually Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

is. All our attempts to define God in our own terms, using the images and metaphors of this world, fall short and must be abandoned in our ascent to God. God is ineffable: we can never use our language and images to express in full what God is. Ultimate knowledge of God is beyond words, even beyond thought. The best we can do in words is to transcend even the apophatic approach and speak of God as beyond the immortal, beyond the ineffable. To express these transcendent concepts, Pseudo-Dionysius spoke of the superimmortal and the superineffable. For God is beyond all being, beyond everything that we perceive and can conceive. Pseudo-Dionysius calls this transcendence of all worldly images the darkness of God. Based on ideas already present in Nyssen, which the Cappadocian drew from the biblical account of Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai recounted in Exodus, where *Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was* ([Exod 20:21](#)), Pseudo-Dionysius speaks of God being dark in the sense that when we truly encounter God and are assimilated to him, our knowledge of him is unmediated by any words or images. Breaking free of these images, the mystic, like Moses, "plunges into the truly mysterious darkness of unknowing ... supremely united to the completely unknown." Knowledge of the divine is a knowledge beyond all perception and all thought, a knowing that is beyond even knowing itself.

To what extent does Gregory share these features of Dionysian mysticism? In speaking of God, Gregory uses both cataphatic and apophatic language. In Prayer 3 of the *Book of Lamentation*, he addresses God in cataphatic language:

O Lord, my Lord, giver of gifts, bearer of goodness,
Ruler of all equally, creator of all things out of nothing ...

He then shifts to strictly apophatic terms for God:

Unbearable, inapproachable, incomprehensible, unintelligible,
Ineffable, invisible, imperceptible, intangible,
Unsearchable, without beginning, timeless.

In the *Book of Lamentation*, Gregory avoids the use of the transcendent terms but, as we noted in chapter four, in his theological treatise *Advice on the Orthodox Faith and the Pure and Virtuous Life*, he does describe God the Father using these peculiarly Dionysian terms after listing the apophatic descriptors:

limitless, timeless, nowhere, infinite, immutable, unchangeable, super-essential,
super-existent, super-light, super-ineffable.

All of these transcendent terms are the Armenian equivalents formed as calques, or translations that reproduce in Armenian the same compound structure of the distinctive Greek terms found in the Dionysian corpus. Gregory's use of these names of God and his procession, beginning with the cataphatic terms followed by the apophatic, and then, at least in his theological treatise, the transcendent terms, reveal a clear Dionysian influence on his approach to speaking about God.

Gregory also repeatedly affirms the ineffability of God:

The way of the providential creator surpasses
The limits of the mind of the angels and humans,

Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

And if I were to try myriad times
I could not capture it in verse,
For his limitless beneficence is ineffable.
Ineffable divinity, always good ...
You cannot be expressed by names
Nor signified by titles,
Nor likened to a quality,
Nor bound by a quantity.

But despite this clear Dionysian influence on his mysticism, there is one conspicuous difference: Gregory rarely attributes darkness to God. Instead, Gregory almost always speaks of God as pure light. God is a “shadowless brilliance who dwells and reposes in unapproachable light.” He is “by nature light and the ever-splendid sun.” The only passage in the *Book of Lamentation* in which Gregory admits darkness or obscurity in God is in Prayer 93.19:

For as God is truly said to be unapproachable light,
But on account of his boundless, infinite glory,
He is conceived as though hidden
Under an impenetrable darkness,
Sealed off on the outside from our intellect’s grasp.

Elsewhere in his writings Gregory prefers to concentrate on the light of God rather than the darkness that characterizes many of the mystics’ experience of God as they approach union with God. Gregory’s preference for light over darkness is all the more remarkable, given that Nyssen, an important theological source for Gregory and on whose writings he relied in composing his commentary on the Song, also propounded a mysticism of darkness, especially in his *Life of Moses*.

In trying to explain this preference for a mysticism of light over darkness, we should keep in mind that Gregory is not only a theorist of mysticism but a practitioner. So in describing in words what mystical encounters are like, he is drawing from his own direct experience. And perhaps for him such visions of the divine were better described in terms of unapproachable light rather than as darkness.

Of course the mysticism of darkness found in Nyssen and Dionyius is not the only form of Christian mysticism. There is also a mysticism of light that is found, for example, in the writings of Origen. And there is no reason to rule out Gregory’s familiarity with Origen. Although Origenism was condemned at the Second Council of Constantinople held in 551, the Armenian church neither participated in that council nor formally adopted its conclusions. Armenian theologians were familiar with and read many of Origen’s works. As we have noted, in the eighth century Stephen of Siwnik’ drew copiously from Origen’s books.

But another explanation of Gregory’s tendency to eschew darkness relates to the so-called Iranian substrate of Armenian culture and folklore, a substrate that influences Gregory’s work. Armenia had been for centuries within the political and cultural orbit of the Persian Empire, and its language and cultural institutions bore a strong Iranian imprint long after Armenia’s Christianization. Examples of this Iranian substrate in the *Book of Lamentation* include the night demons of Prayer 12.3–4, the agents of Ahriman, the evil deity of darkness in Zoroastrianism,

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and the wolf-monster (*gaylgazan*) of Prayer 66. Given that Zoroastrianism attributes to the good deity, Ahura Mazda, only light and no darkness, which is the sole province of the benighted Ahriman, Gregory's mysticism of light may be a vestige of this pre-Christian Iranian theology. But such claims remain at the level of speculation. All we can say with certainty is that Gregory favors a mysticism of light even as other aspects of Dionysian mystical theology have profoundly influenced his theology.

Universalism

We noted in the last chapter that the nave of the church in which the baptized and confirmed Christians gathered was a diverse group drawn from many ethnic groups. Now that we are in the sanctuary preparing for the restoration in us of the divine image and reconciliation with God, we may ask who else is with us. Is the assembly of perfected Christians as expansive as those in the nave? Or since the way is narrow ([Matt 7:13–14](#)), are the elect an exclusive group? In recent Catholic theology there has been a revival of the ancient view found in Origen and Nyssen, among others, that all are saved. This view is called universalism (Greek: *apokatastasis*), and Catholic theologians such as Karl Rahner (1904–84) as well as several Protestant and Orthodox thinkers have in recent times advanced the thought that God's plan of salvation may be extended to all. A more cautious but hopeful form of universalism is found in the writings of the Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–88). In the light of this recent development in Catholic thought, and given Gregory's emphasis on mercy and the universality of the church, it may be worthwhile to consider what Gregory has to say about this question of who is saved.

The evidence is equivocal. In Prayer 40, Gregory presents a terrifying vision of the future life:

From a distance I see with my mind's eye
A vision of blazing terror of what is to come;
I glimpse from here long before
The day of light, the hope of the saints,
And the day of darkness, the punishment of the guilty,
From which none can flee to a place of refuge.

And in Prayer 64, he cites [Isaiah 66:24](#)—"for their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be extinguished"—and adds to these verses that "the fire is inextinguishable/the punishment unending/the place eternal/its image dreadful." Certainly these are very clear statements that some will face eternal torment.

And yet later in the book we read this supplication:

Through these sighs of sorrow and laments
Arranged in numerous forms,
Have mercy on all souls,
O blessed, forbearing King,
And especially on those souls
Cut off from any hope

Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

Of a life of salvation,
Those who have gone to their rest unprepared,
Their lamps extinguished from lack of oil.
Remember them, my Lord of compassion.

Gregory alludes here to the foolish virgins who did not prepare for the coming of the Lord ([Matt 25:1–13](#)). Assuming that these unprepared virgins represent the souls condemned to hell, Gregory dares even to ask for God's mercy on them, suggesting that he has some hope of universal salvation consistent with his faith in the infinite mercy of God. We have already discussed in chapter five his Ode for the Holy Cross, a hymn sung by the souls in hell at the time of the crucifixion in expectation of Christ's harrowing. That ode represents a particular time in the past and there is no indication that Christ's atonement will be applied to those souls in hell after the resurrection when he escaped hell with the prophets and patriarchs. But there is also a timeless quality to Christ's salvific action and Gregory wants at least to consider that the souls in hell, with whom he seeks solidarity, may themselves still have hope of redemption.

There is one notable exception in Gregory's adumbrations of universalism. Satan is beyond any hope of redemption:

[Satan] was not granted this multitude of graces;
Instead [Christ] poured them all upon me abundantly.
He was not tortured for Satan's sake,
But for me he is sacrificed every day.
[Satan] does not commune with the Life
But I partake of it always for salvation.

Gregory's eucharistic language here implies that by being excluded from Christ's offering of His body, Satan cannot attain salvation. Yet all humans, no matter how sinful, may be redeemed through Christ's sacrifice. The theme of universalism in Gregory's work requires further study. If he does indeed entertain the concept of universal salvation, then we would have another important patristic witness in favor of universalism, and in particular one much later than either Origen and Nyssen.

Above the main altar of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, as in every Armenian church, stands the central icon of the Virgin Mother holding the Christ child. It is through the Mother of God that the Word became incarnate and the hope of salvation was extended to the world. She, being closest to the Lord, was the first to experience the perfection and union with God that we have been exploring in this chapter. So, too, it was through the Virgin that Gregory was introduced to the world beyond Armenia. Given her importance in Gregory's theology, we will devote the next chapter to the place of Mary in Gregory's writings and thought.

Chapter Nine

Gregory's Devotion to Mary

It is through Mary that Gregory of Narek came to the attention of the universal church. The first pope to mention him was St. John Paul II in his 1987 encyclical *Redemptoris Mater (Mother of the Redeemer)*. There, the pope wrote:

In his panegyric on the Theotokos, St. Gregory of Narek, one of the most renowned figures of Armenia, deepened with a powerful poetic gift the various aspects of the mystery of the Incarnation, and each of them is for him an opportunity to sing and praise the extraordinary grandeur and wonderful beauty of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Incarnate Word.

Subsequently, the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, issued in 1992, named as distinct forms of Marian devotion—along with the rosary in Latin Christianity and the Byzantine *Akathistos* hymn—the prayers of St. Ephrem in the Syriac tradition and those of St. Gregory in the Armenian. Gregory's prominent position among the great Marian doctors should come as no surprise given that throughout his works he makes clear that the veneration of the Virgin is crucial for his spirituality and his overall theology. Mary has an essential role in the economy of salvation. It was only through her consent that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Because of her we become worthy to call God *Abba, Father*. For it is only through her that we come to share in the humanity of Christ and it is through his incarnation that we are able to achieve fellowship with God:

Praised are you, O bright reflection of the Creator's virtue, for the great reward of glory which you passed on to us—who are the least—through the marvelous miracle performed in you. For that fatherless Child, O Mother, you embraced as a son; and holding up in your arms that unbounded Being who became a human, you drew him close to your lips and greeted him with a kiss. Being found as coheirs with him, we cry out to God, *Abba, Father*, because of your intermediary role, O holy Mother of God.

Gregory describes the union of Mary and the Word in the incarnation in very graphic terms. Mary is a living ark, likened to Noah's, on whose wood the Holy Spirit nails the Word so tightly that there is no “partitioning gap.” Mary's body is a correlate of the cross from which the salvation of humanity proceeds. The difference is that the nailing to Mary's body bestows human life upon the Word, while the cross wrenches that life away.

The Daughter of Eve

In this chapter I discuss and develop Gregory's Mariology based primarily on a reading of Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

the two recensions of the encomium to the Virgin Mary, Prayer 80, addressed to the Virgin, of the *Book of Lamentation*, and some of his Marian hymns.

But we should also consider the connection in Gregory's mind between Mary and the bride of the Song of Songs. As we have seen in chapter four, in Gregory's commentary on the Song, the Marian symbolism of the bride, though present, is muted in favor of the ecclesial interpretation of the bride, whom Gregory considers to be an image of the church. Traditional Christian exegesis has treated the romantic and erotic poetry of the Canticle as an allegory of a "spiritual marriage" between Christ and his church or with the individual soul. Although Christian interpreters did acknowledge the bride as emblematic of Mary, the Marian reading did not come to the fore in any known commentary on the Song prior to the twelfth century. Nevertheless, Gregory is very much mindful of the Marian symbolism of the Song. Elsewhere in his writings, he makes explicit the very close relation between Mary and the church. Speaking of the church, he writes in the *Book of Lamentation*:

This spiritual mother, celestial, luminous,
Caressed me as her son
More than my earthly, human, physical mother.
The milk of her breasts was the blood of Christ.

Having lost his earthly mother early in his life, Gregory was entrusted by his father to the care of the church, which became his spiritual mother. He then adds that the motherly care of the church resembles and is an image of the love of the Mother of God.

If one were to write that the Theotokos
Is the icon of the Church,
One would not be unjustified.

Alluding to *theosis*, by which Christ's image is restored in the children of the church, the poet notes that just as Mary gave birth to and cared for Christ, so too the church gives birth to and fosters the growth of the saints, these "divine creatures, pure icons of the one God, Christ." Given this close relation between Mary and the church, the ecclesial and Marian readings of the Song are perfectly consonant in the poet's mind.

Indeed, Gregory draws this connection between the bride and Mary in numerous places in his writings. Nowhere does he do this more eloquently and brilliantly than in an antiphon for the nativity, which begins with the words of the bride in [Song 1:5](#) and continues to borrow from the verses of the Song. The first part of the hymn is like a recapitulation in miniature of the Song with the voices of the bride and groom alternating. Here, I have divided the verses according to who appears to be speaking, beginning with the bride, though it should be noted that this is an artificial device not present in the manuscripts. The last stanza of the hymn commemorates the birth of Christ:

Black am I, beautiful,
A daughter of Eve, Jerusalem.

Behold this my delightful bride,
Bound through love with her groom.

Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

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My nephew is like the gazelles,
The young deer.
Behold the voice of my beloved,
Made tender and soft through love.

Come my neighbor, come my companion,
My bride from the cedars of Lebanon.
See how she exults:

Cover me with apples and
Lead me to the house of wine!

Her eyes are like a dove's
her arm a cord of red, her necklace of gold.
Behold she is a mountain of incense
redolent of nard and myrrh.

My beloved was beautiful,
An infant child yet eternal.
Behold he is a lofty mount,
a lily of the valleys, a flower of the plain.

The ranks of the prophets
sing from on top of that hill,
Behold he is the mount of the lily,
his fragrance of rose, cinnamon.
Arise and look to Bethlehem,
O children of Zion,
Go forth to the cave;
Bow down before the King.
Sing with the shepherds,
Worship with the magi.
Behold the gold of the King,
the incense of the Only-Begotten of God the Father,
To Whom we give glory and thanks,
And endless exaltation;
Now and forever may
Christ be blessed together by all.

We can understand the bride as the church expectant of the Lord's advent. Just as the bride delights in the presence of the groom, the church is to rejoice at the imminent birth of Christ. But there are also clear indications that Gregory intends this to be an allegory of Mary and the Christ child. The Marian reading is first suggested by the bride's reference to herself as a "daughter of Eve," a distinctive designation that may point back to [Genesis 3:15](#) and God's curse of the serpent that places enmity between his seed and the seed of Eve. The description thus suggests Mary's role as the New Eve, an ancient designation that can be traced back to the earliest centuries of Christian literature. In calling Mary the daughter of Eve, Gregory is drawing not on Greek patristic literature, but the Syriac tradition, in particular the poetry of Ephrem the

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Syrian. In his Hymn on the Nativity, Ephrem writes:

Man imposed corruption on woman when she came forth from him,
Today she has repaid him—she who bore for him the Savior.
He gave birth to the Mother, Eve—he, the man who was never born;
How worthy of faith is the daughter of Eve, who without a man bore a child!

Further confirmation for the Marian reading of Gregory's hymn is found in the bride's calling her groom "an infant child yet eternal." We find examples of Gregory portraying Mary with the imagery surrounding the bride of the Song also in his *Encomium on the Holy Virgin*. There, he describes Mary as both a flower and an apple, metaphors drawn from [Song 2:1](#) and [2:3](#). She is also said to be "a sanctified bride for the Father of Christ." So even though the ecclesial symbolism of the bride dominates the commentary on the Song, the Marian reading was certainly present in Gregory's mind. And since he considers Mary as an icon or image of the church, the symbolism of the bride as the church coheres with that of the bride as a figure of Mary. Mary is the prototype of the church, given that the Holy Spirit descended on her as it did later in the upper room on the apostles at Pentecost, the birthday of the church, and also because her body became the first abode and tabernacle of Christ's body.

Mary's role as the New Eve goes beyond her giving birth to Christ, the New Adam. For Gregory, redemption comes to humanity through Mary and her obedience to God's word. The early theologians and exegetes read Jesus' life as a recapitulation of the fall of Adam, overturning at each step the first man's original disobedience. Jesus' acceptance of the Father's will in the garden of Gethsemane is the mirror image and reversal of Adam's rejection of God's will in Eden. As humanity fell through an act of disobedience at a tree, so too we are raised by obedience to the Father's will at the wood of the cross. In the same way, Mary's acts recapitulate the life of Eve. Her fiat of obedience to God's will, spoken to the archangel Gabriel—"let it be to me according to your word" ([Luke 1:38](#))—undoes Eve's fiat of disobedience, given to the serpent, another angelic being, albeit in disguise. So just as Christ's actions redeem Adam, we can understand Mary's actions as canceling the curse on Eve. And since Eve, as the first mother, represents all women, Mary's reversal of Eve's sin also signifies the salvation of all women. The belief that Mary assumes a special role in the salvation of all women is not new but is found in patristic texts as early as the third century, for example, in the writings of Origen. Proclus, the archbishop of Constantinople (d. ca. 446) with whom the Armenian bishops consulted on doctrinal matters, gives a forthright affirmation of Mary's leading role in the salvation of women: "All women are blessed because of her. No longer does the female sex stand accused. For it produced the offspring that will surpass even the angels in glory." Gregory adopts this patristic idea of Eve's absolution in Mary and represents it in his hymnography as a symbol of the redemption of women. In the treasure-hymn for the feast of the Assumption, Eve and her daughters, representing all women, dance in celebration at the news of Mary's assumption into heaven and her elevation to the rank of the angels, a dignity that they too will share:

Through you does our forefather Adam prosper,
You who are his daughter and virgin,
Through whom was born the One who takes away sin.

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Eve dances with her daughters,
Joyously adorning herself for the banquet,
Having become part of the circle of the seraphim through you,
Mother and Virgin, most blessed among women.

As the first of creation to achieve *theosis* through the incarnation, Mary undoes the curse of Eve. Since she is the new Eve, Mary takes over from Eve the role of being the icon of all women. Through her unique holiness, she is exempt from the curse of Eve, and her exemption from this curse presages the lifting of that curse from all the daughters of Eve:

In you were fulfilled the words of the chosen prophets
And of the predicting seers
Speaking for God,
That you will become in place of Eve
The mother of the living Word of God
By whom the creatures were adorned.
To be restored from ancient sin to glory,
Thus were the birthing pangs of the curse on the foremother
Dissolved and replaced with a blessing,
And the writ of condemnation for sinning was annulled, torn apart.

The belief that Mary gave birth without suffering is not original to Gregory. The apocryphal works on Mary and the nativity, most notably the *Protoevangelium of James*, suggest a painless birth. Several of the apocryphal infancy narratives were translated into Armenian as early as the sixth century, so Gregory could have had access to them. The depictions in these infancy narratives accentuate the extreme harshness that Mary faced as she prepared to give birth. The nativity account in Luke's gospel makes clear that she was traveling without knowing where she would have her child. But the Armenian Infancy gospel also describes the extremely unfavorable weather, noting that the day of Christ's birth was "a cold, wintry day." The cave of the nativity was normally used to house animals, not an especially sanitary location. Yet Mary was able to give birth easily without the services of a midwife. In a time when giving birth even in ideal surroundings could still be very dangerous, the ease of Jesus' birth stood out as a powerful sign of something supernatural and miraculous. The patristic tradition elaborates on the lack of labor pain; one of Gregory's sources, Nyssen's commentary on the Song, refers to Mary's pregnancy as "unique, [Christ's] birth unstained, its pangs, painless." But Gregory takes that thought further and indicates that somehow through Mary's painless delivery of Jesus the curse of painful labor placed on Eve and her daughters has been removed. In the *Book of Lamentation*, he writes that Mary is the "healer of Eve's labor pains." But even this idea that Mary relieves the suffering of bearing children is not original to Gregory. It is already present in the Armenian tradition as early as the beginning of the eighth century in a hymn on the nativity, addressed to the Virgin, by the anchorress and hymnographer Sahakdukht of Siwnik':

Door of heaven and descent of God,
Intercessor of peace,
You lifted up the labor pains from the first mother, Eve,
Who was conquered by death.

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Blessed are you among women,
Graceful virgin and mother of the Lord.

Yet Gregory fixates on this thought. Mary's exemption from labor pain and the attendant annulment of the curse of Eve take on a particular significance as a recurrent theme running throughout Gregory's Marian works, a persistence that assumes a special poignancy in the light of his own mother's sufferings and death. We have seen that he describes God as the Creating-Mother undergoing the pangs of birth. This contrast of God's labor pains with the Virgin's painless birthing produces an interesting reversal of nature: God who is by nature impassable experiences the pangs of birth, while Mary, formed of mortal flesh, gives birth free of any discomfort. This reversal is itself an image of Christ's passion, in which the impassible Word of God takes on the sin and sufferings of humans in order to relieve us of our afflictions.

Some scholars have noted that Mary's exemption from the ordinary experiences of women serves to distance and alienate her from the normal human condition. In her book *Alone of All Her Sex*, Marina Warner sets out a compelling case for the detrimental effects of such Marian exceptionalism. Through the magnification of her special privileges as the Mother of God, Mary begins to lose her humanity in much the same way as the Julianists, in insisting on the incorruptibility of Christ's body, make Jesus more remote and less suitable for the role of mediator between God and humans. Warner argues that by exaggerating the differences between Mary and other women, the church fathers have in effect encouraged an association of women in general with the disobedient Eve and thus fostered the misogyny that has infected much of Christian thought and practice through the centuries.

Warner's critique of traditional Mariology is worthy of particular attention as the church in modern times struggles with questions not only of the legacy of contempt toward women but also in debates on the role of women especially in the ministry. But with regard to Gregory and his praise of Mary's privileges, we should note that her special status heralds the future blessed state not only of all women but of humanity as a whole. The daughters of Eve see in Mary that which they will become. Mary is the archetype of human salvation. Her holiness and purity are the prelude to the blessings and graces extended to all humanity and the daughters have special occasion to rejoice because the promise of sanctification has been fulfilled first of all not in one of the sons of Adam but in one of their sisters. Surely, Gregory imagines among the dancing women his own earthly mother.

Although Mary is ranked among the cherubim, she does not become a normal angel, a bodiless being, but she is assumed among the celestial beings with her incorruptible body, again a preview of our own bodily resurrection. As Proclus noted, she has surpassed even the angels in their glory. And that superiority to angelic glory is a result of her being not simply a spirit like the angels, but an embodied spirit. This notion of humans, composed of both earth and soul and exceeding the angels, also appears in Gregory's commentary on the Song. The daughters of Jerusalem marvel at the bride, the Shulamite, and ask her to turn that they may look at her ([Song 7:1](#)). Gregory interprets this as the angels amazed at the transformation of the human body from afflicted and sinful dust to a glorious garment that now adorns the bride, who has surpassed the celestial beings in power and whom the groom regards with greater admiration. The body that once weighed us down now lifts us up above the angels; what was "sown in weakness is raised in power" ([1 Cor 15:43](#)).

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Mary's Perpetual Virginity and Assumption

Among the mariological doctrines that Gregory affirms is Mary's perpetual virginity. Gregory follows the traditions and liturgy of the church, which bestow the title of "ever virgin" on Mary. He calls Mary the ever-virgin Mother of God, for example, in his Litany for the Assumption. Gregory does not elaborate on this title, but the Armenian tradition of biblical exegesis accounted for Jesus' brothers and sisters by viewing them as Joseph's children by another marriage. For example, Stephen of Siwnik' writes in his commentary on the gospels that Jesus' brothers mentioned in [Matthew 12:46](#) are in fact not Mary's but Joseph's children by a previous marriage. As well, Gregory's association of the Virgin with the widow of Nain, the mother of an only son, in Prayer 18 of the *Book of Lamentation* discussed in the previous chapter, implies that Mary too had but one child.

In addition to the question of her perpetual virginity, another concern that drew the attention of theologians was the manner of Mary's departure from the earth. Death normally entails a shadowy bodiless existence awaiting the final judgment when our bodies, now glorified, will be restored to us. In Mary's case, however, there is no delay between her departure from the mortal life and the restoration of her bodily life. Her incorruptible body is assumed on the very same day as her soul:

The riches of greatness culminated today in a tangible way in you, who soared to the heights of heaven in a body incapable of corruption and disintegration, in the presence of which the indebtedness to death shamefully dissipated. And you were deemed a worthy resident in the land of the living, a cohabitant with your Lord, O holy Mother of the Lord. Plead for mercy always for those who sojourn in this deep abyss.

Although the belief that Mary was assumed into heaven is ancient, the bodily assumption was not officially a doctrine of the Catholic Church until 1950, when Pope Pius XII issued the apostolic constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*. The belief in the assumption, while not defined as an article of faith in the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches, is proclaimed in the Orthodox liturgy and calendar, with August 15 marking the feast of the Dormition, as it is usually designated in the Eastern churches. The patristic tradition in the East, however, appears to have been unsettled on the question of Mary's bodily assumption. The Coptic Church commemorates the dormition and the assumption on two different days, celebrating the former on January 29 and the latter on August 22, perhaps a reflection of a belief in the Alexandrian tradition that Mary's body was assumed not at the same time as her death but later. According to a tradition once current in the East, Christ assumed Mary's soul but took her body to the garden of Eden at the foot of the tree of life to await the general resurrection. That tradition, of course, diminishes Mary's exceptionalism, as her own integral presence in heaven takes place at the same time as the rest of humanity. Although there were different views about Mary's assumption in both the Eastern and Western churches, it is notable that Gregory unequivocally affirms the belief that Mary was assumed body and soul into heaven.

Mary Immaculate

The most contentious of the Marian doctrines, at least in terms of the relations of the Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

Catholic Church and the Eastern churches, is the immaculate conception. Controversies surrounding this understanding of the conception of Mary by her parents, Joachim and Anna, divide the communions to this day. It was only in the middle of the nineteenth century that the Catholic Church officially proclaimed the immaculate conception as official doctrine. The dogmatic constitution *Ineffabilis Deus* of Pope Pius IX, issued in 1854, declared that Mary, through a grace granted uniquely to her, was preserved free of original sin from the moment of her conception. But it would be wrong to view this as a doctrine that emerged out of a theological vacuum. For belief in the immaculate conception was much older and was debated by the medieval scholastics with a consensus developing in its favor in the West well before Pius IX's decree. In part, the doctrine emerged as a way to account for a singular feature of the calendar of feasts: the only saint whose conception is commemorated in the calendar is the Virgin. The feast of the Conception of the Holy Mother of God is ancient, dating back as early as the fifth century. Given that human beings are conceived in original sin, it did not seem proper to commemorate an event tainted by sin and the sexual desire of Mary's parents. Jesus' conception was different since his conception was virginal and thus free of all sin. At first the church attempted to suppress celebration of the feast. The failure of that attempt revealed the extent of the popularity among the faithful of this pious observation. As a result, Catholic theologians made an effort to justify the popular practice. This is a good example of theology being used to justify the traditions embraced by the people. Theology need not be an imposition from above of some novel theory but often is grounded in the deep-rooted piety and sense of the faithful. One proposal to justify the feast was to recognize Mary's conception as free from original sin. The church in both East and West had with some exceptions early in the patristic tradition come to the conclusion that Mary never committed any actual sins. It did not seem to be too radical a move also to acknowledge that Mary was preserved by an act of grace from original sin, understood as the human proclivity, inherited from Adam's primal sin, to disobey God. This recognition would validate the preexisting veneration of Mary's conception and also underscore her special status as the blessed woman chosen to bring Jesus into the world. While for the rest of us the stain of original sin is removed through baptism, Mary was not in need of baptism since she was kept immune from the contamination of sin from the very beginning of her existence.

Nevertheless, there was considerable opposition to the immaculate conception among Western theologians. The great thirteenth-century doctor St. Thomas Aquinas, often regarded as the greatest of Catholic theologians, argued against the doctrine. His fellow Dominicans remained mostly opposed to it as late as the seventeenth century. Above all, it was the Franciscans and their distinguished philosopher John Duns Scotus (1266–1308) who championed the immaculate conception, so that by the time Pius IX issued the decree, a consensus had been achieved at least in the West in favor of the doctrine.

The Eastern churches generally rejected the teaching. This was partly due to their different understanding of sin, one not based on the Augustinian doctrine that original sin itself, rather than merely the consequences of sin, was transmitted by parents at conception through concupiscence—that is, sexual desire. But there was (and remains) in the Eastern church an aversion to the Western inclination to define doctrines formally rather than simply to let them be expressed through the liturgy and prayers of the church. Expressing the common belief that

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Mary did not commit any actual sins, the Orthodox speak of Mary as all-holy (*panagia*). If they specified a time of sanctification at all, the Eastern theologians focused on the moment of Mary's fiat, or her overshadowing by the Holy Spirit ([Luke 1:35](#)), rather than the moment of her own conception. Also problematic from the Eastern perspective was that the pope's promulgation of the doctrine was made *ex cathedra*, meaning that he was exercising a prerogative, recognized in the Catholic but not Orthodox churches, as successor of St. Peter to define doctrines on faith infallibly and without needing the decision of a church council. The Orthodox have never accepted this as a prerogative of the bishop of Rome or any single bishop.

In his constitution, Pius IX noted that the ancient writings of the church fathers in both the East and West testify to the doctrine of the immaculate conception. Later commentators have brought forward St. Ephrem among other patristic authors as an example of an early advocate of immaculacy, the doctrine that Mary was conceived free of the taint of original sin. In his *Hymns on Nisibis*, Ephrem writes:

Only You and your Mother
Are more beautiful than everything.
For on you, O Lord, there is no mark;
Neither is there any stain in your Mother.

Since, as we have seen, Ephrem's veneration of Mary influenced Gregory, who extols the Virgin in equally exalted terms, it is reasonable to ask if Gregory belongs to this same choir of patristic authorities who appear to bear witness to the immaculate conception. Armenia would seem to be a promising place to look for expressions of immaculacy. Some of the Eastern objections to the doctrine do not apply as well in the Armenian context. For example, the objection that the East rejects Augustinian notions of original sin and that as a result the question of whether Mary was conceived without original sin is otiose may be a compelling argument in the general context of Eastern theology, but the Armenian theologians were familiar with something like the Augustinian account of sin through the influence of Julianism there. Nevertheless, the question of whether Gregory believed in immaculacy is difficult to answer in part because the question was not clearly defined or a matter of immediate concern in his historical context. He explicitly affirms that Mary is the bearer of God because he knows Nestorians who question that title. But the problem of the immaculate conception was not a major point of theological polemics in his time and place. Nevertheless, by examining Gregory's writings we may be able to get a better sense of how he understands Mary's sinlessness. In Prayer 80 of the *Book of Lamentation* she is said to be marked by "spotless purity, unblemished goodness, immaculate holiness, solicitous intercession." But a mere assertion of Mary's spotless and immaculate holiness is not sufficient to establish that Gregory affirmed immaculacy, because essential to the doctrine is that Mary is immaculate from the moment of her conception and that she is preserved from the stain of sin rather than purified of it. It is the moment of her sanctification and preservation from sin that is in question.

The Benedictine scholar Emmanuel Lanne, basing his conclusions on Dasnabedian's research on the *Encomium on the Holy Virgin*, presents a meticulous and well-argued case against immaculacy in Gregory's Mariology. Lanne notes that the orthodox doctrine of the Armenian church articulated at the Council of Manazkert holds that the Word assumed

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corruptible flesh by nature and by grace transformed it into incorruptible flesh. By being united with the Word at the incarnation, Mary's flesh shares in the same incorruptibility. If we interpret incorruptibility to mean Mary's preservation from original sin, Mary receives this grace only when she accepts the divine Word within her through the Spirit's action. Lanne cites a number of passages from Gregory's work to support his contention that Mary is purified at the *fiat*. For example, in the second recension of his *Encomium*, Gregory says of Mary that she was "praised as the sinless child of the first woman." While this seems to indicate that Mary was always free of sin, Lanne says that Gregory made this assertion in the context of the annunciation. After reviewing a number of passages from Gregory's Marian works, he concludes that all of the attributions of Mary's immaculate condition are related to her fiat. While Gregory never doubts her absolute purity, her sinlessness is always connected primarily to the incarnation and the fact that Mary carries the incarnate Word within her. It is this intimate unity with her Lord that bestows a unique glory on her. Although many of the statements that Gregory makes about Mary are equivocal and may be interpreted in an immaculist light, Lanne thinks in agreement with Dasnabedian that when these assertions are placed within their textual context, as well as against the theological background of Gregory's thought, they all point to a nonimmaculist reading.

I agree with Lanne and Dasnabedian on the theological context of Gregory's thought. He does adhere to a position midway between Julian's view that Christ's body is by nature incorruptible and Severus's position that Christ's body is corruptible until the resurrection. The Armenian position, we recall, is that at the incarnation the corruptible flesh assumed by the Word becomes incorruptible. This middle position does suggest that Mary's flesh was corruptible but that when Christ made her body his abode, it became incorruptible. Hence it was only at the incarnation that Mary was cleansed of incorruption.

But the conclusion that Gregory's position is anti-immaculist follows only if incorruptibility in this case refers to exemption from sin. Corruption, especially within the context of the Julianist controversy, is a notoriously ambiguous concept. In that controversy, corruption primarily signifies impassibility; the debate focused on whether Christ's body suffers by nature or by will. But corruptibility could also refer to a liability to moral corruption from the effects of original sin. There is no doubt that something dramatic happened to Mary at the fiat. But we need not conclude that it is the grace of exemption from sin or its effects. Furthermore, whenever Gregory speaks of the change effected in Mary at the annunciation, it usually involves not a change with respect to sin but a transformation in which her "frail nature," incapable of bearing God in her womb, "became the vessel and bearer of the unbearable word of God mixed with flesh from her." Her frailty is not a moral deficit on her part but a physical limitation of being a finite mortal being incapable of containing the infinite eternal Word. Similarly, when in the Song of Songs the bride's companions express their concern about her future because of her small size and lack of breasts ([Song 8:8](#)), Gregory reads this as an allegory of the angels doubting the ability of Mary to be the bearer of God. Defiant and emboldened, the bride responds to the companions' doubts by proclaiming herself a battlement and her breasts like a tower ([8:10](#)). Gregory interprets this as a reference to Mary's fortification at the incarnation:

Through the power of the Almighty, my littleness will become greater and more solid than a
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(Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

wall, and from having no breasts, my breasts will become like a tower. For the One who made the heavens and earth and our nature and yours from nothing will magnify my breasts and make them larger than yours. So that which you are unable to hear and bear and suffer, my weak nature made greater than yours, has heard, borne, and believed.

Just as a dramatic change takes place in Mary at the incarnation, so too, Gregory indicates, something extraordinary happens at her conception. The relevant text is from the second recension of the *Encomium on the Holy Virgin* as translated by Terian with slight modification:

O blessed among women, a worthy abode for the descending Word, a pot for the planting of the divine body, and a reliquary for the oil of divine anointing, you were preserved in immaculate innocence by the shielding wings of angels prior to the birth of the Word in utmost perfection. You whom the glory of the Triune God was pleased to make his resting place, for the Holy Spirit—the author of impeccable sanctity—came upon you, and *the power of the Most High Father overshadowed your mother [Anna]* in order to prepare you to be the receptacle of the Son.

This passage, understood in the way Terian translates it, is among the most congenial in Gregory's corpus to the immaculist thesis. For the Holy Spirit here descends not upon Mary at the annunciation, but upon her mother, Anna, at Mary's conception and bestowed upon her "impeccable sanctity." The words of the angel to Mary at the annunciation ("the power of the Most High will overshadow you") are repeated almost exactly here, but in this case addressed to Anna ("the power of the Father overshadowed your mother"). The connection that Gregory draws between the conceptions of Mary and of Jesus goes well beyond the language of the Armenian versions of the *Protoevangelium*, which depict an angelic annunciation to Anna but without any indication that her conception involved the same overshadowing of the Most High as her daughter's. Gregory implies that Mary is protected from the stain of sin from the moment of her conception rather than simply being fortified to receive the Lord in her womb. If Terian's reading of this passage is correct, then there are two stages to Mary's preparation to receive the Word. First, the Holy Spirit descended on Mary at her conception and preserved her from all sin. Then, before Jesus' conception, Mary's body was strengthened to prepare her physically to be the bearer of God. However, there are reasons to doubt that this is the correct translation of the passage. Dasnabedian, in her French translation, takes the passage to be addressed to Mary and renders it as "and the power of the Father Most High overshadowed you, O Mother." If Dasnabedian's translation is correct, then this passage does not support an immaculist reading. My own view inclines toward Dasnabedian's version, though Terian's translation cannot be ruled out on strictly grammatical grounds.

There is however another passage from Gregory's Marian writings, this time the first recension of the encomium on the Virgin, that seems to me to contain a more incontrovertible expression of immaculacy. There, Gregory describes Mary as a "spotless lamb" presented to the Jerusalem temple. According to the Armenian versions of the *Protoevangelium of James*, Mary was presented to the temple when she was three. Although the Virgin's dedication was many years before the incarnation, Gregory already describes her as immaculate at this event and calls her dedication "a foreshadowing" of Christ's own sacrifice as the undefiled lamb of God ([1 Pet 1:19](#)). So this particular passage of the encomium is noteworthy as an especially clear

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assertion of Mary as immaculate while still in her infancy.

On the other hand, there are passages in Gregory's works that appear explicitly to reject immaculacy. There is at least one verse in Marian Prayer 80 of the *Book of Lamentation* that seems to deny that Mary was exempted from sin from her conception. In language that resembles the description of the annunciation in [Luke 1:35](#), Gregory says that the Virgin was "prepared and purified by the resting of the Spirit." The word translated as "purified" is a distinctive verb that literally means "to effect purity." The mention of purification by the Holy Spirit apparently at the annunciation implies that Mary is only at that moment purified of sin. Even this, though, is not decisive evidence against the immaculist thesis. Alluding to the infant Jesus' presentation to the temple in [Luke 2:22–24](#), Gregory says, "He was purified, thus he was lauded." If Gregory says of Christ, who is without doubt sinless, that he was purified at his presentation, then the assertion that Mary was purified at the annunciation need not entail that she was purified of sin rather than prepared for her mission.

A much more extensive study will be needed for a more definite assessment of Gregory's position on the immaculate conception. Any further exploration of his Mariology must begin with an engagement with the impressive body of work produced by Dasnabedian, the foremost authority on Armenian Mariology. My tentative conclusion at this point is that although the evidence remains somewhat equivocal, Gregory inclines toward an immaculist Mariology, and that he may accordingly be added to the list of the Eastern doctors whose writings provide support for the doctrine, not only St. Ephrem in the Syriac tradition but also Greek fathers such as St. John of Damascus. The fact that the works of preeminent teachers in three of the major Eastern Christian traditions, if not explicitly affirming immaculacy, are at least strongly suggestive of it, is a significant and a hopeful sign for a developing convergence in the Marian doctrines of different churches.

One may well ask what is at stake in the immaculist debate, especially since both the Eastern and Catholic churches agree that Mary did not sin, and the disagreement essentially boils down to when and how her sinlessness began. Mindful also of Marina Warner's and other feminist scholars' cautionary depictions of how Mary's privileges and exceptionalism have historically been used to malign women, we should also ask how Gregory's support for the immaculate conception fits in with his general spirituality and desire to make the church more engaged with the people. For in emphasizing distinctions between Mary and the rest of her sex, he risks turning Mary into an unapproachable, forbidding demigod rather than a real woman who shares in the experiences of other women. In response to this concern, one may note that in some ways the immaculate conception teaching may have a reverse effect. By revealing that a mortal being can be conceived free of sin even as the result of normal sexual intercourse, the teaching undoes an Augustinian-inspired disparagement of sexuality, and indeed of marriage, as the conduit of original sin—a belief that in many ways has had a negative effect on the course of Christian history. In this way, Mary's immaculate conception may actually help to affirm the inherent goodness of ordinary life and sexuality that is sanctified by God's will. It is perhaps no accident that the most forceful advocates of the immaculate conception in the West were Franciscans, whose spirituality, inherited from their founder, St. Francis of Assisi, emphasized simplicity and humility as well as the sanctity of ordinary life. Gregory's own spirituality, informed by the school of Narek's emphasis on the virtue of humility, bears many

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similarities with Franciscan ideals and perhaps, also not coincidentally, comes very close to affirming the immaculist doctrine as well.

In this rarefied air of grand theological disputations, though, we should not forget Mary the human being, chosen by God for the most sacred of responsibilities. Gregory never loses sight of the person of Mary and her place in popular piety. For Gregory, Mary is to be treated not simply as an object of theological speculation, but above all else as his intercessor with her Son and the Mother of God to whom we “lift up our arms, believing with unwavering hope that we will live.”

Chapter Ten

From Narek to Rome and Beyond

The previous chapter began with a passage from Pope John Paul II's encyclical on Mary, *Redemptoris Mater*, that mentioned with admiration Gregory's devotional prayers to the Virgin. It was this reference to Gregory and his veneration of the Mother of God that set in motion his cause to be declared a Doctor of the Universal Church. In this chapter I will present some details on the process that led to Pope Francis's official declaration in 2015. But I also want to develop some thoughts on the broader implications of Gregory's new status as a universal Doctor not only concerning the more obvious ramifications for Christian ecumenism and unity but also for the insights that Gregory's writings and theology offer for the problems that the church and the world face today.

Becoming a Doctor

John Paul II was the first pope known to have mentioned Gregory in his writings and public statements. After his 1987 encyclical, he continued to refer to the Armenian monk in a number of speeches and homilies. For example, in his 2001 apostolic letter on the occasion of the 1,700th anniversary of Armenia's official proclamation as a Christian nation, he quoted several verses from the *Book of Lamentation* as well as the *Encomium on the Holy Virgin*. There, the pontiff described Gregory as the "great Marian doctor (*vardapet*) of the Armenian Church." John Paul was himself noted for his profound devotion to Mary; his motto as both bishop and pope was *Totus Tuus* ("totally yours"), an expression of his personal entrustment to the protection of the Virgin Mother. It is therefore understandable that he would have a particular affinity for Armenia's gifted saint who shared his deep affection for Mary.

It was that affinity that prompted the hierarchy of the Armenian Catholic Church—the Eastern Catholic Church that follows the Armenian rite while also being in full communion with Rome—to propose that Gregory be named a Doctor of the Church. In 1988, the then-catholicos patriarch of the Armenian Catholics, John Peter XVIII Kasparian formally submitted to the pope a request that Gregory be granted the title of Doctor. The pope forwarded this request to the relevant Vatican offices that would determine if Gregory was a suitable candidate. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is entrusted with the duty of establishing whether the candidate has a record of eminent teaching (*eminens doctrina*), while the Congregation for the Causes of Saints examines the evidence for a life of exceptional holiness (*insignis vitae sanctitas*). Gregory was already recognized as a saint of the Catholic Church since he has been venerated as such in the Armenian Catholic Church for centuries. But the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at first responded that Gregory's work would need to be studied more Michael Papazian, *The Doctor of Mercy: The Sacred Treasures of St. Gregory of Narek* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019).

carefully to enable an informed decision on the question of his *eminens doctrina*. Following this initial answer from the congregation, a number of academic conferences and symposia dedicated to Gregory's works were held, and scholars began to produce critical editions of his writings. With this scholarly work accomplished, in 2010, John Peter's successor as Armenian Catholic patriarch, Nersēs Peter XIX Tarmuni, asked John Paul's successor, Benedict XVI, to recommend that the congregation reopen its investigation. The patriarch also had the support of Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, the apostolic nuncio to Armenia. Archbishop Gugerotti recommended that Gregory, who embodies the "sacrificial and penitential consciousness of his nation" be named a Doctor in 2015 as part of the commemoration of the centennial of the Armenian Genocide. In particular, the archbishop noted that Gregory is a symbol of his people and faith and a sign of unity for the faithful of the Armenian Apostolic and Catholic Churches, both of which venerate him as a beloved and celebrated saint.

With the extraordinary resignation of Pope Benedict in 2013 and the subsequent election of his successor, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, archbishop of Buenos Aires, as Pope Francis, the circumstances seemed especially favorable for Gregory's cause. The new pope had a history of close relations and friendship with the large Armenian community in Argentina and must have taken a special interest in expediting the process. On December 17, 2014, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith decided unanimously that Gregory's writings were marked by eminent doctrine. Shortly after that, in the early days of 2015, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints certified Gregory's life as one of exceptional sanctity.

The third and final condition needed for elevation to the rank of Doctor of the Church is a declaration of the church (*Ecclesiae declaratio*), which is ordinarily made by the pope in his capacity as the supreme pastor of the universal church. Pope Francis made the solemn declaration that Gregory is a Doctor during the mass commemorating the Armenian Genocide on April 12, 2015, the Second Sunday of Easter and the liturgical feast of Divine Mercy. He did this in the presence of the Armenian Catholic patriarch, as well as the two Armenian Apostolic catholicoi, Garegin II, catholico of all Armenians, and Aram I, catholico of the Great House of Cilicia, the president of the Republic of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan, and a large number of Armenian clergymen and lay faithful.

The Catholic Church has experienced some extraordinary changes in the years since Gregory's cause was first proposed. The church has witnessed the rare event of a papal resignation followed by the unexpected and unprecedented election of a pope from the New World, a Jesuit who took the name of St. Francis, a name never before taken by a pope. The course of events need not have turned out this way; the pope who named Gregory a Doctor could very well have been Benedict if he had remained in office, or a new pope other than Francis. But it is tempting to suppose that there is a special bond connecting Francis and the themes of his papacy with the first, and as of this writing, only Doctor proclaimed by him. Gregory's works are marked by a deep faith in and desire for God's mercy. The greatest of all God's gifts to us is his mercy, which is not given as payment for our works, but is offered freely to sinners:

The rewards are yours, and yours too the mercies,
And yet I exult not as much
In your rewards, as in your mercy.

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For the latter increases your glory,
While the former recognize the works of ascetics;
The rewards are compensation for labor,
But the mercies are acts of generosity toward sinners.

The theme of mercy that runs throughout Gregory's poem is also central to Pope Francis's understanding of Christ's message. It may not be mere coincidence that Francis named Gregory a Doctor on the Sunday of the feast of Divine Mercy and that on the previous day he issued the formal proclamation of the Jubilee of Mercy. In an interview with Andrea Tornielli published in *The Name of God Is Mercy*, the pope said, "The message of Jesus is mercy. For me, and I say this with humility, it is the Lord's strongest message." Francis points out that we need mercy because "humanity is wounded, deeply wounded." Gregory too speaks repeatedly of the wounds of humanity that need God's salvific healing:

However much my wounds are incurable, hopeless,
Twice as great is your artful wisdom;
Illuminate me, O exalted, celebrated physician.

To illustrate Christ's mercy, Francis recounts the story of the widow of Nain from [Luke 7:11-17](#). He speaks of Christ's "visceral love" that moves him to compassion for the widow. Her sorrow is compounded by her having no remaining close male relatives and thus she is left defenseless and vulnerable, given the status of women of her time and place. Jesus may also see his own mother's grief foreshadowed. As Francis says, "Jesus does not look at reality from outside.... He lets himself get involved." So too as we have seen in chapter eight, Gregory depicts the widow's grief in Prayer 18 of the *Book of Lamentation*, remarkably identifying himself with her and crying out to God alongside her.

Another theme of Francis's papacy has been his insistence that we remember those on the peripheries and margins of the human community. He speaks of many kinds of peripheries: geographic, economic, and social. In going to the peripheries, he sees the church following the example of Christ, whose birth was announced in Galilee, "in a peripheral city whose reputation was not particularly good," as the pope remarked in a homily given in March 2017 in Milan. Christ ministered to all but especially to the poor, the sick, those burdened by grave sins. We may add to these also those who live on the margins of life—the unborn, the elderly, the deathly ill—as well as those who subsist precariously along the boundaries of territorial nations, the migrants and refugees.

Here, too, it is evident that St. Gregory is himself a man of the peripheries. In terms of geography, he lived on the edge of Europe, on the frontier with Asia and the Middle East in a part of the world that has suffered and continues to suffer from oppression and violence. From an ecclesial perspective, he was a priest and monk of a church alienated from most of the major hierarchical sees and considered even by some today schismatic and heretical. Among his own people and by some in his church's hierarchy he was viewed with suspicion and accused of heresy. That he is today a Doctor of the Church testifies to how far the Catholic Church has advanced in its relations with separated churches. Gregory provides a clear historical model of how God's salvific grace operates outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church. This is not to imply that we should look for a Protestant doctor—much less a non-Christian—anytime

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soon. There are very few doctrinal differences between Gregory's writings and those of the other Catholic doctors. As I argued in the last chapter, on at least one matter of doctrine Gregory appears closer to modern Catholic teaching than the church's Doctor *par excellence*, St. Thomas Aquinas. But Gregory's status as a Doctor is nevertheless one more significant step along the path of reunion of the Western and Eastern churches and hope for the future of closer relation and eventual union with other Christians as well.

The confluence of these themes of mercy and the margins in Francis and Gregory suggests to me that Gregory's role as a Doctor is to provide one more sacred witness testifying on behalf of Francis's vision of the church that never neglects the peripheries. That this witness comes from the product of a medieval Christian culture far removed from our modern liberal and individualistic presuppositions underscores the fact that Francis's approach does not stem from a modernist rejection of tradition but flows from within the very heart of the ancient and venerable Christian tradition.

Gregory and the Contemporary World

Gregory's world, tenth-century Vaspurakan, is a long way from our modern condition. And yet there are some similarities that make his work especially relevant for us today. A significant segment of his contemporaries felt estranged by the established church that seemed to them too distant and formal. Instead, they opted for an interior spirituality that rejected the institutions of the church, even calling into question the church's traditional teachings on marriage. The church itself faced a crisis among its clergy, with many priests either ignorant of the liturgy's significance or involved in corrupt practices. In addition to being occupied in polemical conflict with other Christians, which at least in the case of the Byzantines had mercifully abated during much of Gregory's life, the church was challenged by its encounter with a new religion—even though many Christians did not recognize it as such—in the form of Islam, which would remain a dominant presence in the land, and whose adherents were at times tolerant and at others brutally violent. Powerful empires led by megalomaniacal rulers and menacing armies were a perennial peril to the peace of the country.

It was a different world, but we can recognize some faint gleams of our own condition. Especially in Western countries, not only in Europe but increasingly in North America as well, there is a growing indifference to organized religion. The school of Narek, as we have seen, responded to a similar disengagement from the church. Their answer was to recognize that in many ways the church itself and its hierarchy were partially to blame, due either to venality or an overly cautious conservatism. As we have seen, Khosrov Andzewats'i embarked on a program of educating his clergy on the meaning of the religious rites and liturgical prayers. He studied practices in other traditions and recognized the need for reform in worship. That need to educate the clergy was an impetus for the founding of the monastery of Narek, which would become a center of learning that produced highly educated monks capable of preaching knowledgeably and effectively. Anania of Narek wrote of spiritual exercises that promoted a more personal, interior spirituality that would satisfy the spiritual needs of the faithful while also helping them to reconnect to the church, the sacraments, and the act of public worship. Their goals were most brilliantly realized in the body of spiritual poetry produced by their

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devoted disciple and son. The school of Narek was informed by the desire to chart a middle way between the excessive individualism and stifling interiority of private spirituality and the distant and ossified institutional church. They advanced a spirituality that would engage the people but at the same time was firmly moored in the traditions and practices of the church as the true body of Christ. They showed that genuine ecclesial reform should be guided by a fidelity to the beliefs and practices of the ancient church, even as those teachings and practices are renewed and developed according to the needs and circumstances of the time.

Many Christians, alarmed by the growing secularism and even hostility toward religion in the mainstream culture, have called for a return to a kind of monasticism in which Christians live apart from the general community. The most prominent advocate of this idea is the American author Rod Dreher, who has called for Christians to form arks that would allow them to live through the storms besetting the post-Christian culture surrounding them. He calls this the “Benedict option,” a concept first described by the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre in his book *After Virtue*. The Benedict in question is St. Benedict of Nursia, recognized as the founder of Western monasticism and author of the rule that guides monastic life especially in the Western church. MacIntyre and Dreher are correct at least in the sense that there is a pressing need for a revival in and an expansion of our definitions of monasticism. Perhaps study of Gregory and his monastery with its intriguing synthesis of both eremitic and cenobitic life as well as its mission to educate and provide spiritual formation to those outside the monastery can serve as another model, one that shares many features with Benedictine monasticism but also has a number of distinctive qualities. Gregory’s monasticism embodies both an inward-looking, contemplative, and penitential mode *and* an active and outward-looking zeal for reform of the church and the world. With MacIntyre we can say that perhaps the church and the world need not only a new Benedict but a new Gregory as well, bearing in mind MacIntyre’s qualification that such persons will be very different from their original exemplars.

Another critical issue facing many churches today is the matter of the role of women, who are in both the Catholic and Orthodox churches barred from ordination. Indeed, in several ways there are fewer opportunities for women today than in earlier centuries when there was a more vibrant religious life available to female monastics. Likewise, the female diaconate has largely become obsolete in the Eastern churches. There is now a growing movement in the Eastern churches to revive the diaconate for women, most notably in the Greek (Chalcedonian) patriarchate of Alexandria, which recently ordained several women as deacons. The Armenian Apostolic Church has been exceptional in maintaining, albeit sporadically, the ancient tradition of ordaining women to the diaconate, and today has a few women deacons. In the West, too, there is the promising development of a Vatican commission on the female diaconate, established by Pope Francis in 2016. The virtual extinction of the practice of ordaining women to the diaconate, one that is ancient and biblical, is one of the major failings of the church today. Paradoxically, it has made the church in the modern, more egalitarian world even more male-dominated than it was during the Middle Ages, when there were many more women deacons, nuns, and esteemed hymnographers and theologians such as Gregory’s fellow Doctor Hildegard of Bingen in the Latin tradition, Kassianē in the Byzantine, and in the Armenian, Sahakdukh, whom we have met and whose hymn to the Virgin is discussed in chapter nine. Gregory’s willingness to speak of God as a woman and a mother was audacious in his day, but

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even today some may view this biblically and theologically sound characterization of God with suspicion. Perhaps a recovery of this way of thinking about God will help in fostering an open dialogue on the greater role of women in the ministry of the church.

While I have focused on Gregory's significance for unity of the church, we should also be mindful of the implications of his writings for relations with the world religions. One of the refreshing features of Gregory's works is the almost complete absence of polemics and hostility toward not only other Christian communions but even other religions. His intemperate outburst at Nestorians, Jews, and Muslims in one passage in the commentary on the Song of Songs as well as his apparent enthusiasm over the execution of the T'ondrakean leader Smbat are isolated and uncharacteristic exceptions to his overriding irenic and conciliatory tone. The general graciousness of his writing is all the more striking when compared with other Armenian authors who rarely shy away from invective and triumphalism. One need only compare him with Stephen of Siwnik', whose exegetical works are preoccupied with the principle of Christian supersessionism and frequently express a contempt for Judaism. In contrast, Gregory asks us to focus on our own sins rather than berate others for their apparent failings:

No one is as sinful as I, ...
I alone, and no one else,
I am all this, and the sins of all are in me.
Not the pagans, for they did not know,
Not the Jews, for they became blind.

His generally merciful approach to other nations and religions, all the more striking in the context of the often antagonistic language of medieval theological discourse, as well as the hints of universalism in his writings, make his works promising resources for contemporary interfaith and ecumenical dialogue. In particular, his relationship with Islamic culture is an auspicious area for further research and encounter between Armenian and Islamic scholars. I have already suggested that Gregory, at least in his poetic style, may have been influenced by Islamic spiritual poetry, perhaps even the Qur'an. As well, future research on Gregory's work will no doubt be enriched by comparative study with the monasticism and mysticism of other religious traditions, not only the Sufi tradition in Islam and its great poets as well as the mystical tradition in Judaism, but also the Eastern religions such as Buddhism that have eminent monastic traditions.

While decidedly not a political thinker, Gregory does in a few passages express his thoughts about politics. Though he extols the Byzantine emperors Basil and Constantine for their struggles on behalf of Orthodox Christianity, he expresses pessimism about the moral worth of political power, noting that "the kingdoms of this world, perhaps, are always more artful in killing than giving life." Maybe he had some premonition of Basil's policy toward the end of his reign of relocating the Armenian nobility to estates farther west in the empire, a policy that would have devastating consequences for the Armenians as their lands became more vulnerable to invasions from the East. He does however recognize the biblical injunction to obey kings and political authorities, by which he justifies his acquiescing, albeit with reluctance, to compose the commentary on the Song of Songs at the command of Prince Gurgēn. He praises the prince for his interest in scripture and learning and for his avoidance of impure

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pursuits.

All legitimate political authority, Gregory avers, ultimately derives from God, symbolized by the anointing of rulers with holy oil:

The kingdoms of this world could not boast,
Of conforming to your image, O Creator,
Were they not anointed with the horn of the oil of your blessing
Nor were they not adorned on their head with a crown,
a diadem in your name, Christ.

Among the responsibilities of the church and temporal rulers is the solemn duty to care for the poor. An equitable distribution must favor the needs of the indigent over the wealthy, based on the description of God's distribution of manna to the Israelites in [Exodus 16:18](#):

That the poor may not want
Nor the rich be proud,
You have distributed your grace equally to all,
Like the air and sunlight,
The waters of flowing streams,
Like the manna given in common to all,
But to the poor more than the wealthy.

Though not as pronounced in his writings, in a number of passages Gregory indicates that Christ's redemption is extended not only to all humans but to nature itself. Perhaps the most striking expression of this concern for all living things is found in the *Ode for the Holy Cross*, where the bird on Christ's cross is informed that the good news of the resurrection is addressed to it as well. The implications of Gregory's thought on our responsibilities to the environment, an important concern of Francis's papacy, would also be a fruitful area for further investigation.

A full study of Gregory's works will reveal many other areas in which his writings provide us with rich resources for the renewal of the pilgrim church in its journey on earth toward the final place of rest in the eternity of God. Gregory's writings, his monuments of prayer, have provided spiritual shelter and sustenance for generations of Armenians dispossessed of their lands. Today, as his writings become known more widely, his work can serve a similar role for all the migrants and pilgrims—both physical and spiritual—of this world.

Compline

Having come to the end of this book, it is fitting for us to join St. Gregory in his prayer of rest at the end of the day. This request for rest is from Prayer 12 of the *Book of Lamentation*. Many believe it to have the power to ward off the demons of the night and grant peaceful sleep:

Grant me the joyful rest
Of death-like slumber
In the depths of the night,
Through the intercession
And the petitions

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Of your Holy Mother,
And of all the Elect.

Cover and surround
The window of my sight,
The senses of my mind,
In unshakable firmness;
Secure them from agitation
And the worldly distractions
Of dreams, reveries,
Foolish delusions.
I am safe and guarded
By the memory of your hope.

And when I wake again
From this heavy sleep,
Most vigilant and alert,
Spirit renewed by joy,
Firmly grounded in You,
Then will I send my voice of prayer,
Redolent of faith, to heaven,
All-blessed King of glory beyond words,
In harmony with the heavenly choirs
That sing of your glory.
For You are glorified by all of creation,
Forever and ever,
Amen.

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The Blessing of Blessings

Gregory of Narek's Commentary on the Song of Songs



Translated from the Armenian by Roberta Ervine

CISTERCIAN STUDIES SERIES: NUMBER TWO-HUNDRED FIFTEEN

The Blessing of Blessings

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Translation, introduction, and notes by
Roberta R. Ervine



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For Ruth

Truly, God's is a maternal love

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Roberta R. Ervine

Saint Nersess Armenian Seminary
New Rochelle, New York

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Agathangelos

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Press, 1976.

Aristakēs

Aristakēs Lastiverts'i, *Patmut'iwn* [History].
Tiflis, 1912.

Asoghik

Step'anos Asoghik, *Patmut'iwn Tiezerakan*

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	[Universal History]. Saint Petersburg, 1885.
<i>Discourses</i>	Gregory the Illuminator, <i>Girk' or koch'i Yajakhapatum</i> [The Writings Referred to as 'Frequently Related']. Istanbul, 1737.
Elishē	Elishē, <u>History of Vardan and the Armenian War</u> , trans. Robert W. Thomson. Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies 5. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.
Euringer	Sebastian Euringer, <u>'Ein unkanonischer Text des Hohenliedes (Cnt 8 15–20) in der armenischen Bibel'</u> , <i>Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i> 33 (1913) 272–294.
Ghazar	<u>The History of Ghazar P'arpets'i</u> , trans. Robert W. Thomson. Columbia University Program in Armenian Studies: Suren D. Fesjian Academic Publications 4. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991.
<i>Matean</i>	Grigor Narekats'i, <u>Matean Oghbergut'ean [Book of Lamentations]</u> , introduction by James R. Russell. Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1981.
Mkryan	M. Mkryan, <u>'Hay zhoghovrdi kazmavorman ev hay grakanut'ean skzbnavorman harts'ě'</u> [<u>The question of the Armenian people's formation and the beginning of Armenian literature</u>], <i>Banber Erevani Hamalsarani</i> 1967/1, 29–56.
P'awstos	<u>The Epic Histories Attributed to P'awstos Buzand (Biwzandaran Patmut'iwnk')</u> , tr. Nina G. Garsoian, Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies 8. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.
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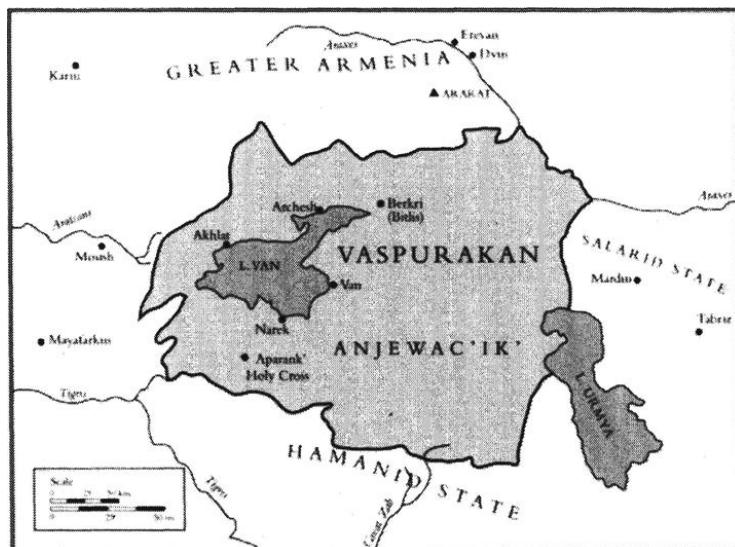
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Introduction

The Armenian tradition of *Song of Songs* interpretation is not extensive. Thus the work introduced here is all the more interesting for its rarity. Though universally acclaimed as being the work of the great Solomon, the problematic *Song of Songs* does not seem to have inspired among Armenians the same outpouring of monastic spirituality that it did in the West. But those who attained entrance to the inner sanctum of that Holiest of holies felt that they had indeed been made partakers in the *Blessing of blessings*.

Gregory of Narek, to whose *Commentary on the Song of Songs* this volume is devoted, was the only one of the Armenian commentators, as far as we know, intentionally to share the *Blessing of blessings* with a secular audience. His own experience of 'our Mother ... the Father Begetter, the omnipotent God' was a lifelong deepening in awareness of the ultimate intimacy and ultimate distance of the Parent who is at the same time also the soul's Spouse and Judge. The incarnation of the Word in Christ and of Christ in the Church, he felt, brought all humanity into the divine tension of that descending and ascending love, and Gregory experienced that tension both personally and on behalf of the human race. He was rooted as firmly in the vast expanse of salvation history as he was in the soil of his own tenth-century life in an Armenian kingdom around Lake Van.

Fewer have read his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* than have read Saint Gregory's more famous poetic works, but a reading of the former does much to illuminate one's understanding of the latter. The spirituality whose basic lines are first drawn in the *Commentary* is the forerunner of the mature, complex spiritual expression in verse which has made Gregory of Narek one of the most revered figures in the Armenian Church's pantheon of saints. Poet, priest, monastic, and mystic as well as commentator, he was both a seer of visions and the inventor of a vocabulary in which to express them. In his poetic prayers, he showed that it is possible to speak with God both frankly and beautifully at the same time. His conviction that words are healing as well as expressive has been borne out in the medicinal uses to which his writings have been put across the millennium since they were written. His prayers are incorporated into the liturgy; his visions have inspired great music. Of his poetic work there are more copies and editions—manuscript and printed alike—than of any other original text in Armenian.

Although Gregory has proved to be a saint for all times and for several cultures, he was nonetheless very much a part of his own tradition, and a product of his own times and his own physical setting. Before turning to a consideration of his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, therefore, something must be said concerning the context out of which the work and its author Gregory of Narek, *The Blessing of Blessings: Gregory of Narek's Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Roberta R. Ervine, vol. 215, Cistercian Studies Series (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications; Liturgical Press, 2007).

grew.

A WORD ON THE GENERAL BACKGROUND

As the first nation to have undergone, as a state, an official conversion to Christianity in the early years of the fourth century, Armenia has always felt a special connection to its Christian faith. Christianity became Armenia's official religion through the agency of people whose relationships were, initially, purely political. Persia and Armenia shared a common dynasty, that of the Arsacids. The backdrop for Armenia's Christianization is the Sasanian overthrow of the ruling Arsacid dynasty in Persia. Armenia's greatest saint and the man responsible for its official conversion, Gregory the Illuminator, was the son of a Parthian who, acting on behalf of the Sasanian government, assassinated the Arsacid king of Armenia, Khosrov, and was himself killed shortly thereafter. King and assassin each left behind a young son. After certain vicissitudes of fortune, Khosrov's son Trdat succeeded to his father's throne. The assassin's son was raised in Cappadocia as a Christian. The story of how the two men's paths crossed—the one a convert to Christianity and the former a loyal client of the Roman Empire and persecutor of Christians—has become a national Armenian epic of mythological proportions. Gregory's return to Armenia, Trdat's discovery of Gregory's identity, Gregory's imprisonment by Trdat, and his subsequent emergence from an isolated pit to cure the king of mental illness (a story reminiscent of Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation in [Daniel 4](#)) set the stage for Armenia's state Christianity, and helped to determine that Christianity's orientation towards Cappadocia and thus towards the Roman/Byzantine Empire.

Faith and politics were never far apart in pre-modern Armenia. Not surprisingly, then, faith has helped to precipitate many political events throughout Armenian history. Through all the vicissitudes of the national Church's more than 1700 years of existence, faith and ethnicity have traveled hand in hand, producing a unique, organic blend that comes near to being a seamless, if sometimes uneasy, whole.

Classical Armenian literature—which covers everything written in the classical idiom from the fifth through the fifteenth centuries, and even beyond—is almost entirely clerical literature, and the overwhelming majority of it was produced in monastic settings. Study of this literature is still in its infancy, for a number of reasons, not least because of the lack of well-translated texts that would make these writings more readily available to people in other traditions who have a longer, less interrupted, experience of patristic scholarship and related disciplines. In its pages, and in those of Armenia's ancient sister churches' writings, we have a significant portion of the 'trunk', so to speak, which connects Christianity's Jewish roots with its modern branches. Without an examination of this 'trunk' the transition from root to branch cannot be adequately understood. As it grows and deepens, study of Armenian literature will inevitably make great contributions to an understanding of Christianity as a whole; all the more so as works of certain early Church Fathers which have otherwise been lost in their original languages have not infrequently survived in an Armenian version.

From the moment of the invention of the Armenian script in ca. 405, it was put to work in the service of the Armenian Church, whose interests at that time coincided largely with those of

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the Armenian State. The need to forge an independent Christian identity motivated the powers of both institutions. In the fifth century, Armenia's territory lay between the two great empires of Byzantium and Sasanian Persia. On the one hand relations between Armenia and Sasanian Persia were politically tense because, as mentioned above, the Sasanians had been responsible for ending the Arsacid dynasty's rule in Persia, and a cadet branch of the Arsacids then ruled Armenia. Over and above the lingering political animosities of the dynasty, Christian sectors of Armenian society also resented the presence among them of adherents to the Persians' Zoroastrian faith.

Byzantium, on the other hand, was usually at enmity with the Persians, and too close an alliance with it would bring unfortunate repercussions from Persia. In addition, the exact color of Byzantium's Christianity was changeable; for example, as Arians and Orthodox succeeded one another on the Imperial throne, Armenian kings wishing to show loyalty to the Empire by maintaining the Emperor's Christianity found themselves at odds with hierarchs at home, for whom Arianism was not an option. Armenian hierarchs felt, too, that an overly close relationship with Byzantium's religious hierarchy would involve the Armenians in disagreements over doctrinal issues that were not necessarily germane to Armenia's own spiritual life. In short, Armenia needed to forge an identity which, ideally, would be neutral enough not to be unacceptable to either the Byzantines or the Sasanians, and which would give Armenians the opportunity to distinguish themselves from their neighbors without alienating them.

The alphabet, a tool in the forging of this identity, was invented by a civil servant turned scholar monk, Saint Mesrop Mashtots', who with the support of both the country's king and its catholicos enlisted a cadre of clerics like himself to research existing models, to refine the new set of symbols once it had been decided upon, and then to spread its use across the region.

With the new alphabet spread a flood of Christian ideas, written and thereby to a large degree standardized, in Armenian. Translations of the Bible, liturgical writings, and patristic works were produced with impressive speed, giving Armenians access in their own language to the thinking of the universal Church. Original works soon followed; histories, geographies, hymns, encomia, homilies, liturgies, canons, and letters. Further waves of translation would follow periodically, as would great efflorescences of original writing and thought.

By the time its alphabet was created, Armenia had already been christianized officially for a century—since the days of Saint Gregory the Illuminator at the beginning of the fourth century. But it had in fact been christianized, at least in part and unofficially, much earlier. Thus Armenia already possessed a developed Christian tradition before it possessed the ability to express that tradition in writing in its native language. Relations between Armenia and Christian communities in Mesopotamia, Syria, and Jerusalem hark back to the second century if not earlier, and Armenian Christianity bore the marks of its southern heritage for centuries, even as it developed a new relationship with the Christian Empire of Byzantium.

In addition, Armenia was already involved in Christian ascetic lifestyles long before it had an alphabet. By the fifth century a number of monastic foundations laid claim to considerable antiquity; several traced their origin to the late apostolic age. The history of Saint Gregory the Illuminator's early ecclesiastical foundations included descriptions of the brotherhoods he

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established, and the fifth-century historian Eghishē offers an exhortation to monks already seasoned in the life. Armenian monasticism felt a conscious connection with Egyptian monasticism, and Armenians participated in the early monastic movements of both Palestine and Egypt.

Monastic and eremitic lifestyles were to be an integral part of Armenian Christianity's self-expression across the centuries. A seventeenth-century map of Armenia shows the locations of several hundred monastic establishments and sanctuaries. Even in the twentieth century, when first the Armenian genocide and then religious restrictions imposed by the Armenian Republic's communist regime all but obliterated Armenian monastic life, its few remaining bastions—primarily those outside the Armenian homeland in Jerusalem and Cilicia—continued to exert a profound influence on Armenian culture. And in the twenty-first century, a renewal of interest in monasticism has been one of the organic outgrowths of a renewed religious freedom.

Armenian monastic life does not seem to have constituted a withdrawal from the life of the world in the sense of creating a sharp division between the two. Monasteries were most often situated amidst a lay population; monks influenced kings, and kings retired to monasteries. Monks were consulted on the problems of the outside world, and monasteries were considered important sources of healing. In addition, monasteries were major landowning institutions and played a significant role in agriculture.

While it is sometimes mentioned in the Armenian sources that a particular medieval monastic community followed a particular rule—one that derived from Basil, for example—the relative rarity of such comments testifies to a general lack of reliance on written codes for ordering Armenian monastic life. And although certain communities were formed by members of an older monastery who moved out specifically to form a new group, there were no monastic orders in the western sense. Much more significant was the relationship between a revered monk or hermit and his disciples, a relationship which created genealogies of holiness, so to speak, which passed from one spiritual generation to the next a way of life inculcated by personal example. Monastic life gave rise to a kind of literature within the literature, as bits of advice were passed down in more permanent form.

The monastic life was informed by the notion of 'the angelic life'. This multi-faceted ideal included celibacy, of course, and it also influenced the regimen of monastic prayer, which sought to imitate the ceaseless prayer and praise of the angels and their alacrity in the divine service. Ultimately, it was felt, humankind was intended to take the place of the fallen angels: by its obedient devotion to God's praise, humanity would restore the nine ranks of the heavenly hosts to their original and proper number of ten. This restoration to glory would give humanity the added satisfaction of repaying Satan with poetic justice for his original jealousy of Adam's glory, a jealousy which had issued in mankind's expulsion from glory. It is not surprising that monastics, who were seen as having attained the quality of angels while still in the flesh, were frequently well-known as miracle workers.

As well as being centers of ascetic endeavor, angelic life, and social influence, monasteries were also the seats of Christian thought and learning. The *vardapets*, as Armenian calls the doctors of the Church, were most often monastics. These men were held in reverence as being

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the living repositories of the traditional teaching of the Church, both catholic and Armenian, on a wide range of topics from scriptural exegesis to world history and geography to canon law. Throughout the middle ages, they issued compendia of knowledge, including history, mathematics, and geography as well as theology, law, and philosophy, and they educated the young. They were also the vanguard of contemporary thought in their day. Viewed as at least potentially inspired, they were entrusted with the application of tradition to non-traditional situations and issues, such as interfaith relations and ethical problems. Their influence extended far beyond the monastery walls; *vardapets* tutored royalty, offered predictions of the future to inquiring nobility, and had considerable value as hostages. It was they who built new structures of thought and spirituality on the foundations of the past.

It went without saying then that the *vardapets* were men of letters; transmitters of ideas across generations and across geographical distances. In fact, of the fifty-odd writers from the fifth to the tenth centuries whose work we have (together with at least some biographical data), a mere three were, so far as we can tell, laymen.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SAINT GREGORY OF NAREK (c. 945–1003)

Gregory of Narek, to whose *Commentary on the Song of Songs* the present work is devoted, was a monastic and a priest. He also calls himself a teacher, albeit ‘the least of teachers’; others did not hesitate to call him *vardapet*. The details of his biography are sketchy, and apparently have always been so. With a fitting monastic humility, he does not give particulars of his own life and accomplishments, though a certain amount can be gleaned from his writings and those of his contemporaries.

Gregory’s birth is variously calculated to have taken place between 940 and 951. Whatever his exact date of birth may have been, it is clear that from an early age Gregory lived and worked in the newly-founded monastery attached to the village of Narek, on the south shore of Lake Van (fig. 1 map; plate 1 photo of Narek). Gregory describes the monastery as ‘many-mountainied and hard-pedestalled’. Built of white stone, it stood on a hilltop with the village of Narek spread out down the slopes below. Later, Gregory’s oratory, a cliff or rocky outcropping with nine stone rooms, would be shown a little to the north of the monastery, on the shores of Lake Van.

The monastery of Narek was one of the new foundations which sprang up as part of a resurgence of monastic life in the tenth century. The historian Step’anos Asoghik includes Narek in a list of such institutions:

In this time the order of religious life flourished ... and brotherhoods sprang up in many places, and members came together for the love of Christ. First, the famous congregation of Kamrjadzor in the province of Arsharunik’. And in the province of Shirak, the monastery called Horomos was built by John ... Also at the same time Narek was constructed in the province of R̄shtunik”, with the same rule, with a large population of worship-enhancing singers and literary men.

He goes on to list monasteries in the provinces of Taron, Derchan, Karin, and Vayots’ Dzor.

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Some are said to have been ‘large’; the number of brothers at Kamrjadzor is specifically given as three hundred. Other monasteries founded at around the same time in Armenia’s northern kingdom included Haghbat and Sanahin, both of which soon became famous centers of learning and guardians of tradition.

Narek was thus part of a larger monastic movement. From Gregory’s point of view, however, it was also a family monastery. Its founder was his maternal cousin, Anania, who became his teacher. Gregory’s fellow monastics included his own eldest brother, John. It has been held that, although John predeceased Gregory, he first succeeded Anania as abbot. The future historian and bishop Ukhtanēs, who may have been another relative, was also a member of the brotherhood.

Gregory of Narek had the good fortune to live between interesting times. Narek was in the province of Řshtunik’, at the southern end of the Armenian homeland and within what had become the Artsrunid kingdom of Vaspurakan. From the middle of the seventh century, Armenia had been ruled by the Muslim Caliphate. In 858, however, prince Ashot Bagratuni gained recognition as Armenia’s prince of princes, and in 885 became the country’s king.

At the death—a mere generation later—of Ashot I’s successor, Smbat I, the southern region of Armenia around Lake Van broke away and became an independent kingdom under its first king, Khach’ik-Gagik Artsruni. Rivalry between the Artsrunids—who traced their ancestry back to the regicide sons of Sennecherim of Assyria—and the Bagratids—who traced theirs to King David of Israel—was sometimes fierce, despite not infrequent intermarriage between the two families. During the period of Gregory’s life and work, however, the political situation was relatively peaceful, both in the narrow realm of Armenian internal relations, and in the broader realm of relations with neighboring powers.

The tenth century was consequently marked by growing prosperity, flourishing trade, urban development and an efflorescence of the arts. The eleventh-century historian Aristakēs Lastiverts’i describes the city of Artsn, on Lake Van’s north shore, as being ‘like the city set on a hill ... decked out like a bride’, full of clement princes, just judges and church-building merchants.

The period of peace and creativity was not to last. By the end of Gregory’s life in 1003, pressure from the east was building as newly arriving groups of Turks strained the resources of the Armenian kingdoms to resist them. But Gregory did not live long enough to see the end: it would be 1025 before Vaspurakan’s last Artsrunid king, Senek’ērim, exchanged his kingdom for the region around Sebastia, within the protection of the Byzantines.

The details of Gregory’s physical biography seem not to have been important to the establishment of his reputation for sanctity or to the popularity of his writings. This is evident from the earliest biography of him which survives. It appeared in 1173, attached to the earliest extant manuscript of his *Book of Lamentations* (Matean Oghbergut’ean), the work for which he is best remembered.

The biography occupies a single sheet in the manuscript. Its author was the spiritual and ecclesial prodigy Nersēs of Lambron (1153–1198), who would be ordained bishop of Tarsus, at the age of twenty-two, a mere two years after penning the biography. The miniatures adorning the manuscript make it clear that Nersēs was more interested in Gregory’s spiritual

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development than in the actual details of his life. The manuscript contains four miniatures depicting Gregory. Three of these are captioned. The first shows Gregory as ‘philosopher’; the second, as ‘vigil keeper’; and the third as ‘ascetic’. The fourth bears no title. It depicts Gregory in a garden, kneeling before Christ. The series, in the opinion of scholar James Russell, visually describes Gregory’s development from scholar to mystic, wordless in the paradise of Christ’s presence.

The written content of Nersēs’ brief biography of Gregory is spare. The most important of Gregory’s biographical details are alluded to only very obliquely. The first paragraph of the written biography places Gregory’s life in the chronology of the larger world: he was the contemporary of the Byzantine emperors Basil II (976–1025) and Constantine VIII (976–1028). There is nothing unusual about a biographer’s conveying this information. Nersēs goes on to place Gregory within the reign of the Artsrunid king Senek’ērim (968–1026). Again, ignoring the fact that Gregory’s life actually spanned the reign of four kings, one of whom commissioned one of Gregory’s more important works, and focusing only on the king who was in power at the time of Gregory’s death is not in and of itself illogical.

But in the same sentence Nersēs places Gregory in the reign of Catholicos Vahan I of Siwnik’ (968–969). This is certainly unusual, and must have drawn the attention of Nersēs’ contemporaries. Vahan reigned for only one year. Most of Gregory’s younger years were lived under the reign of Vahan’s predecessor, Catholicos Anania Mokats’i (941–965), and his mature years under the reigns of Vahan’s three successors, Step’anos III of Sewan (969–972), Khach’ik Arsharuni (973–992) and Sargis I of Sewan (992–1019). It seems that Nerses of Lambron, desiring to highlight the spiritual greatness of Gregory, quite pointedly chose to pass over several rather painful episodes of both a personal and a church political nature in the monk’s relationship with the hierarchy of the Church whose devoted son he was, and whose beloved saint he was to become.

While the secular political situation in Gregory’s lifetime was stable and prosperous, there was considerable upheaval in religious life and church affairs. On the one hand, it was an era replete with figures of remarkable sanctity. Both the tenth-century historian Asoghik and the thirteenth-century historian Matthew of Urfā give lists of notable holy men who lived in this period: Basilius the Elder and his disciple Step’anos the Spiritual; Grigor the married priest; David the Poor (also known as David Leatherfoot); Petros the Exegete—and Anania the Philosopher of Narek. An emphasis on personal asceticism and holiness is clear: although all the men listed above were viewed as *vardapets*, only two are characterized as intellectuals. The rest were known for their ascetic feats. One Moses, in particular, was lauded for having imitated his Old Testament namesake’s forty-day fasts. The pursuit of individual ascetic holiness extended to those in the secular realm as well. The Bagratid king Ashot III, the Merciful, was said to have dined daily with the poor and the sick, for whose needs he cared personally. The presence of Gregory’s great uncle and mentor among these holy individuals is significant, especially in light of his unfortunate involvement in the other face of Armenian religious life, the church political aspect.

In the broader ecclesiastical political sphere, there was conflict between the non-chalcedonian Armenians and their Chalcedonian Christian neighbors in Byzantium. Thanks

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to the Byzantine Empire's political dominance, Armenians who persisted in their non-chalcedonian convictions were persecuted with considerable vigor in many parts of the Byzantine territories, though the emperors of the period were themselves Armenian by ethnic origin. Conversions of Armenians to Chalcedonian Christianity were numerous. As bishops were among the converts, painful rifts and ruptures were caused between sectors of the Armenian church hierarchy, between bishops and populations of the faithful who did not share their hierarchs' views, and between sectors of the lay population.

Whether or not this broader conflict directly impacted Gregory's life is not clear. Perhaps as late as the year 1000, he produced a work entitled *On the Cross of Abarank'* in which he lauds an invasion of northern Armenia by Emperor Basil II, and—unlike his great uncle Anania and his fellow monastic, Ukhtanēs—he never produced any writing of a specifically anti-chalcedonian nature. The common pejorative term *duophysite* does not occur in his writings, nor is Chalcedon mentioned.

There was, however, another level of conflict which did touch Gregory intimately. A rather widespread grass-roots movement, already active before his lifetime, questioned the authority of the clergy—from the catholicos on down—and the traditions of the Church. Tension between the church hierarchy and lay populations who expected them to maintain a high standard of spiritual example and leadership was certainly not unique to this era. But in Gregory's time, there was an especially broad spectrum of people calling for church reform with varying degrees of zeal.

At the extreme end of that spectrum were violent elements. The historian Step'anos Ōrbēlian recalls in graphic detail an armed rebellion which took place in 915 against the Bishop of Siwnik' and his monastery seat at Tat'ew. Accompanying a monastic revival under its bishop Yovhannēs, the Tat'ew monastery received large gifts of land from the provincial nobility. Among those land gifts was the fortress of Ts'ur. We are told by Step'anos that the residents there were 'godless, brazen and thieving'. In a nighttime attack, they robbed the monastery church and workshops, as well as the cells of the monks, wounding some monks and putting others to flight. The attackers intended to capture and assassinate the bishop, who, fortunately for him, happened not to be in residence at the time. The historian goes on to say that the bishop cursed the fortress, producing an earthquake there, but ultimately had to resort to secular force to wipe out the fortress and remove its inhabitants. Though the violence might well have been prompted by discontent at having their land placed under monastic control, the inhabitants of the fortress also seem to have had a religious complaint. It is specifically said that they seized the silver vessel containing the holy chrism and 'poured it down the cliff'.

The province of Siwnik' continued to prove a thorn in the flesh of the church authorities. Catholicos Anania of Mokk' (941–965) encountered a rebellion there which threatened to remove from his jurisdiction the Church of the Caucasian Albanians, together with the province of Siwnik'. A certain Yakob, bishop of Siwnik' in those days, spearheaded this movement. Holy chrism began to be distributed among bishops in Armenia's northeast by the Albanian catholicos, whose seat was nearer to the region than that of the catholicos of Armenia, who at that time resided on the island of Aght'amar in Lake Van. Catholicos Anania, as he tells us in his own words, went with an entourage of bishops to Siwnik' and convened a synod there with the

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assistance of the local prince, who favored reunification with the Armenian Church. One of the issues before the synod was the ‘reinstatement’ of the repentant Albanian catholicos. This Catholicos Anania and the Armenian loyalist bishops rejected. As a result, the separatist hierarchy of Albania and Siwnik’ continued in opposition to Anania, despite his vigorous anathema, until their deaths.

Underlying the issue of Siwnik’ and Albania’s secession, and particularly that of the independent distribution of the essential holy chrism by the Albanian catholicos, was the question of the authority of the episcopate and the position of the catholicos as chief bishop among his episcopal brothers. The Armenian Church is not completely pyramidal in its authority structure, though it is hierarchical, and the degree of authority actually exercised by any given catholicos seems to have been determined by a variety of factors.

Questioning of authority and jurisdiction—to say nothing of open secessionist tendencies—is enough to make any hierarch uneasy. Catholicos Anania was no exception. And as this question directly affected Gregory of Narek’s own family, we will return to it momentarily. But it is important first to add another complicating element to the conflict.

Questions of religious life, Christian teaching, and the place of the Church in both were already to be found in abundance at the very time these questions of authority were being raised. Dissenters from mainstream Armenian Christianity appear to have been particularly abundant in the tenth century. Many were plain layfolk, albeit some were layfolk of exalted rank; but some were from among the church hierarchy itself.

A case in point was that of Bishop Yakob of Hark’, a contemporary of Saint Gregory of Narek. His episcopal see lay slightly to the north and west of Lake Van. An ascetic of considerable reputation, he disagreed with his Church’s teaching on several points. We are told by the historian Aristakēs that Yakob and his entourage were characteristically to be seen ‘in rough garments, simple, severed from pleasant, rich foods, and they ever occupied themselves with singing the Psalms’. By reason of his piety, Yakob’s influence was such that ‘those who were haughty with pride because of their authority humbly gave themselves over to obedience to him; so much so that, had he ordered them to give up the ghost, there was not one who would have resisted, or even have presumed to open his mouth and let out a peep’. Apparently, Yakob held his clergy to a high standard as well, defrocking those who were found unworthy. This, the historian says, proved pleasing to the people.

Yakob’s teachings on two points were troubling. First, we are told, he ordered the Eucharist to be celebrated only three times in the year. Second, he taught that having confessed one’s sins was not in and of itself sufficient grounds for admittance to communion. In addition, he set out to abolish the very popular custom of accompanying requiem masses with the ceremonial slaughter of animals (called *matagh*) which would be cooked and distributed to the community on the occasion. It seems evident that the ascetic bishop interpreted this custom as a sacrifice, a kind of posthumous expiation for the sins of the deceased, and considered it unchristian: ‘His henchmen would ridicule this, and bring before him animals and say, “Oh, poor beast. If your master sinned in his day and died, what sin have you committed that you should die with him” ’?

The historian goes on to say that Bishop Yakob’s teaching was divisive. He was protected by

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the nobility of his province, but Catholicos Sargis Sewants'i (992–1019) had him imprisoned sometime in the last decade of the tenth century. When Yakob succeeded in fleeing, he went first to Constantinople, but later returned to the area of T'ondrak.

His choice of refuge was telling. T'ondrak, which lay just north and east of Lake Van, gave its name to a large, dissenting group who rejected the ordained priesthood, and indeed all of the sacerdotal trappings of liturgy and sacrament, including the mainstream Church's monopoly on sanctioning marriage. Its adherents, moreover, opposed the acquisition of worldly goods and appear to have stressed ascetic principles and a high moral character. It was a rather fluid group, with a variety of ideas; some apparently preached what we might today call a return to Christian basics and a cleansing of the Church from the perceived greed of monks and clerics, while others washed their hands of the established Church altogether. The dissenters were from all social classes. It was to their sphere of influence that Bishop Yakob gravitated, as did princes and women of important families. In Gregory's days, the presence of this element in Armenia was a significant factor in the life of the Church.

The social implications of the T'ondrakite movement worried secular and religious authorities alike. A catholicos like Anania Mokats'i may well have realized that there was a real need to reform certain practices and abuses of his clergy. But to the ears of a hierarch sensitized by the erosion of his and his Church's authority through secessions political and ideological, any criticism must have sounded threatening. After all, the lines between adherents to and dissenters from the established Church were not at all clearly drawn. To what point did a critic remain a loyal son of the Church, and when did his criticism put him beyond the pale? And if beyond the pale, what types of dissent constituted heresy?

It was in this rather tense and sensitive period that Gregory of Narek's father, Khosrov, was consecrated as bishop. Having become a celibate clergyman following the death of Gregory's mother, he was promoted to the episcopate, probably by Catholicos Anania of Mokk', and became bishop of Andzewats'ik', while two of his sons entered Narek's monastery under the tutelage of Anania, their mother's cousin. Bishop Khosrov authored both an *Explication of Church Orders* and a *Commentary on the Eucharistic Liturgy*. These may originally have formed a single volume, produced around the year 950. He was clearly both an erudite and a deeply spiritual man. It was perhaps his erudition that led him to side with Bishop Yakob of Siwnik' in the latter's altercation with Catholicos Anania. Although it is mostly Anania's viewpoint on the situation that we now have, it seems that Khosrov agreed with Yakob's assessment that election to the catholicosate conferred no rank higher than that of the episcopate. Thus the catholicos, especially as far as his bishops were concerned, was first *among equals*.

For Anania, beleaguered as he was and in need of ways and means by which to assert his authority over recalcitrant clergy, such a declaration by a respected bishop whose see was among those geographically nearest to the center of catholicosal authority on Aght'amar, was not welcome. Khosrov was invited to review his opinion. He found it to be sound, if inconvenient, and did not retract it. The Catholicos felt he had no alternative but to remove Khosrov. He anathematized him as well, thereby elevating disagreement over an ecclesial-political matter to the rank of heresy. There is no record of the anathema ever having been lifted; technically, at least, one of the Armenian Church's most celebrated commentators

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on her central liturgical sacrament was left beyond the pale until his death, somewhere around the year 963.

Catholicos Anania may have found Bishop Khosrov's refusal to compromise with the practical exigencies of the day all the more aggravating because, according to some, Khosrov's cousin by marriage, Anania of Narek, had been a classmate of the Catholicos in their youth. In fact, both men bore the same name. The suspicion of disloyalty—and possibly worse—certainly extended from Khosrov to Anania and Anania's monastic foundation—and, inevitably, to Khosrov's son Gregory, who was living his monastic life there.

Catholicos Anania heard rumors that Narek's Anania outstripped his episcopal cousin Khosrov in error and was in sympathy with the T'ondrakite movement. The catholicos wrote the monastic scholar what was, apparently, a blistering letter demanding that Anania recant—though Anania had not been examined to determine whether or not he was, indeed, in error.

When he received the letter, Anania was, it seems, deathly ill. But, stung to the quick, he wrote the reply himself, refuting the Catholicos's accusations, taking the Catholicos to task as one who had known him intimately 'by parentage and province, race and taste, training and shared life', yet had failed to know him at all. Writing the response must have stirred up Ananias blood, because he survived his illness and went on to outlive Anania the Catholicos by at least fifteen years. Among Anania of Narek's writings there was also a work *Against Smbat the T'ondrakite*, mentioned in the twelfth century by the great Catholicos Nersēs Shnorhali. Although this work has not survived, and it is not clear whether it was written before or after his accusation by the Catholicos, it did make Anania's opposition to the sect clear.

Since Gregory himself would later author a letter refuting any connection between his own views and those of the dissenters, it seems clear that the accusation of T'ondrakite sympathies extended to him as well and was sufficiently serious to require a response.

In spite of these unfortunate events, the orthodoxy and personal sanctity of Gregory's family were recognized by their contemporaries, and certainly by succeeding generations, as is obvious from the list of holy men, cited above, in which Anania of Narek's name appears. There is also an hagiographical story, with a number of variants, which shows the level of sanctity attributed to the Narekats'i's. The same story, in several versions, is recounted of both Anania and Gregory. According to one rendition of the story, Anania (or Gregory) was called to defend his faith before an unnamed Catholicos. Anania (or Gregory) mildly invited the two bearers of the message to stay for a meal; he offered them roast squab. Upon being reminded by them that it was a fasting day, he told them to bid the birds fly away. They could not. But when Anania (or Gregory) commanded them to do so, the birds immediately flew off. According to another variant, the protagonist of the story, incarcerated prior to his trial for heresy, asked for squab for dinner. When he realized that it was a fast day, he bade the birds fly away, which they did.

In a more prosaic vein, the twelfth-century chronographer Samuēl of Ani would say that 'the holy man of God Gregory of Narek ... shone like the sun in wisdom and virtue'. And around the same time, his biographer Nersēs of Lambron called him 'an angel in the flesh', and incorporated the entirety of Gregory's prayer 'All-powerful benefactor ...' into his own

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Commentary on the Divine Liturgy. The fourteenth-century *vardapet* Matt'ēos Jughayets'i said that one stanza of Gregory's was 'better than all the Psalms of David'. In addition, Gregory's tomb was reputed to have healing powers.

At the time when Gregory began to write, however, the traditions and the stories of sanctity were yet to come. It was in the shadow of the painful suspicions against his family, and his father's death under anathema, that his spirituality and his literary gift developed. In almost all his writings, a gentle defense of his family is clear. In his *Story of the Cross of Aparank'*, mentioned above, he says, 'I Grigor, least of *vardapets* and most junior of philologists, am son of the daughter of the brother of the father of Anania, spiritually adorned and intellectually astute philosopher, praised and renowned for the purity of his religious life'. In his poetry, Gregory speaks of his father's faith. Indirectly, he defends the faith of his teacher Anania as well: in his *Book of Lamentations*—of which more will be said below—Prayers 33, 34, 75, 92, and 93 are notable statements of the family faith. Also, several of the *Bans*, or Prayers, in the *Book of Lamentations* are meditations specifically on the Church as the eternal expression of Christ's body, and the church as physical structure. These underline Gregory's devotion to the very institution which the T'ondrakites rejected, and are thus also implicitly in defense of his family's orthodoxy.

THE COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS IN THE CONTEXT OF GREGORY'S OTHER WRITINGS

While a full study of Gregory's writings is outside the scope of this book, his other works should be mentioned briefly in order to put his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* in context. All but three works are undated.

The Book of Lamentations

The most famous of Gregory's writings is his *Book of Lamentations*, a book of ninety-five prayers in three hundred sixty-seven sections. It was his last work, written during the extended illness which preceded his death. Gregory relates that he destroyed it—and then was forced to rewrite it, just as Moses had been obliged to rewrite the tablets of the Law. Its completion date is given as 1002. The prayers vary in mood and imagery; they display a keen sensitivity to the human being's separation from God who is 'unapproachably distant; immediately near'. At the same time, they also display a joyful hope, an overwhelming realization of divine grace, much rumination on Gregory's own shortcomings and on the mystery of human nature and the human condition in general, meditations on divine light, expressions of the many ways in which the spirit may be wounded, exquisite descriptions of what it feels like to be consumed in the fire of God. Each prayer is called a *Ban*, that is, a unit of thought. The faith with which they are suffused is far from calm; it is not steady, nor is it even consistently sure. It is, in the final analysis, honest.

The language of the Prayers is complex and studiedly abstruse. It also evinces great creativity. Though not all the words Gregory coined therein have made their way into standard Armenian vocabulary, he unquestionably enriched the way Armenians thought about and used

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their language. To express the inexpressible, to clothe the Word, he created a new world of words.

In his introduction to the *Book of Lamentations*, Gregory called its Prayers ‘powerful medicaments for incurable wounds, effective drugs for invisible pains’. In addition, several of its *Bans* are specified as being intended ‘for various types of healing’ (28f, 35a, 42b, 43a,b) or ‘for defense from a demon’. These statements, perhaps in combination with the arcane nature of his vocabulary and the depth of his mystical thought, opened the way for Gregory’s poetry to be used quite literally for healing. The prayers are still today read by clergy over the sick; Russell mentions a copy of the *Book of Lamentations* which contained a handwritten list of specific *Bans* that served this purpose. The uses to which the *Book of Lamentations* has been put also included several which fall clearly into the realm of magic.

The Story of the Holy Cross of Aparank'

This piece, together with its accompanying *Encomium on the Holy Cross* and *Praise of the Theotokos*, is written in the same style as the *Book of Lamentations*, which it preceded by some twenty years. The receiver of the three part work, Bishop Step’anos of Mokk’, and indeed the audience intended for the encomiastic retelling of the story, must have been of considerable erudition, with an appreciation for poetic style.

The story commemorated is that of a military man from Mokk’, of noble class, whose deceased uncle, one Bishop Dawit’, enjoyed recognition as a holy man. The nephew took a bit of soil from his uncle’s grave with him to Byzantium, where miraculous events occurred. The co-emperors Basil and Constantius honored the see of Mokk’ and the grave of the saintly bishop by sending a relic of the Cross there, together with other relics. At the final deposition of the holy gifts in the Church of the Theotokos, the kingdom of Vaspurakan was represented by three royal princes, Ashot, Senek’ērim, and Gurgēn Artsruni. The event took place in 983, which is likely also to have been the date of Gregory’s composition.

The *Praise of the Theotokos* which accompanies the *Story of the Cross* contains a notable litany of the Virgin’s types, including many uncommon ones: she is the true Letter of the foreshadowing Law, the rooster crowing in night’s darkness, gold of Ophir from earthly dust, the divine King’s robe of light.

Encomium on the Patriarch Jacob of Nisibis

Written in thirty sections, this extensive praise of one of Armenia’s most revered saints also displays the poetic qualities of Gregory’s mature work, though there are no indications of its date. It is addressed to the Church as ‘Holy Sion’, and, in fact, the first four sections are devoted to an exaltation of the Church, setting the stage for Gregory’s presentation of Jacob as the Church’s most exalted saint. The audience, familiar with the hagiographical details of Jacob’s life, would have been able to fill in the oblique references to his many miracles. It closes with a request for the saint’s intercession. Although this encomium is more predictable in its treatment of the saint’s virtues than was the *Praise of the Theotokos*, it still represents a

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stylistic *tour de force*.

Encomium on the Holy Apostles

In its address to the apostles as ‘flowers of the Cosmos and beloved trees of Paradise’, this slightly shorter encomium calls upon phraseology from the *Frequently-related Discourses* of Saint Gregory the Illuminator, a source for which Gregory had a particular affinity. The mystical value of the apostolic number twelve is considered from the point of view of its factors as 3×4 and as $5 + 5 + 2$; the larger group of the 70 is also touched on. One is tempted to speculate that the drier, ‘more academic’ language of this work marks it as earlier than the *Encomium on Jacob of Nisibis*, which it precedes in the Venice 1840 printed edition, but this is speculation.

Writings in the Gandz, Tagh and Meghedi genres

Gregory is credited with having invented the poetical form known as the *gandz*. Whatever the actual derivation of the word in its poetic usage, in normal speech it carries the meaning of ‘thesaurus’ or ‘treasure’. Each *gandz* of Gregory’s work begins with the word *Gandz*, offers some type of play on the word, and is structured around an acrostic spelling out the phrase, ‘A Song of Gregory’.

There are three representatives of this genre which are universally acknowledged to be from Saint Gregory’s pen: the *Gandz* on the Coming of the Holy Spirit (which begins, ‘Treasure of light ...’), the *Gandz* on the Church (which begins, ‘Treasure of good to be desired ...’), and the *Gandz* on the Holy Cross (which begins, ‘Treasure ineffable, greatness concealed ...’). More meditative than the encomia, these *gandzes*, like the shorter poems written in the forms *meghedi* (melody) and *tagh* (hymn) are among Gregory’s finest writings.

The *tagh*, of which some two dozen examples have been collected, represents Gregory at his most succinct, and shows his sense of imagery at its most dense and idiosyncratic. His *tagh* on the last words from the Cross presents the dying Christ as an attacking lion ('I speak of the Lion's roar, crying from the four-winged cross ...') and is written from the point of view of a soul in hades; another on the Crucifixion is a meditation addressed to a bird perched on the arm of the cross. Gregory’s own visions seem to have provided the material for a number of these most beloved songs.

Letter to the Congregation of Kjaw

In addition to his poetical and encomiastic works, two pieces of hortatory writing are attributed to Gregory. At an unknown point in his life, Gregory authored a letter to the abbot of the congregation of Kjaw. Apparently, the abbot suspected Gregory of T’ondrakite sympathies. In response, Gregory points out to the abbot that, while Gregory himself is innocent of any such sympathy, there are suspect elements among the abbot’s own monks. In the very politest and most careful of terms, Gregory shows how unclear the line between orthodoxy and sectarian thinking can be.

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A Brief Word of Advice on Orthodox Faith and the Pure and Virtuous Life

This quite lengthy work in seventy-five sections is found at the end of the Venice 1840 edition of Gregory's collected works. Its heading says that it was requested by an individual named Vardan. Following a standard introduction in which the author explains why one must respond to those who request information, there is a detailed exposition of the faith: first, of those articles that are essential to Christian confession, including belief in the Trinity and the mysterious sufferings of the Son ('Being uncontained and boundless in Nature, he was on the cross *and* at the Father's right; in the grave *and* upon the cherub throne'). Then, the articles of faith on whose exact details Christians can and do differ, while remaining, nonetheless, Christian. The major part of the work, however, is devoted to a discussion of right living, and is based on an understanding of the spiritual and the physical senses and their proper functions, a theme which derives from Gregory the Illuminator's *Frequently-related Discourses* and which will recur in Gregory's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, as will be pointed out below.

SOME ASPECTS OF SAINT GREGORY'S COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SONGS

The *Commentary on the Song of Songs* was the earliest of Gregory's works. It dates to 977. Gregory's biographer Nersēs characterizes the work only as 'brief'. This is true—at least in comparison with two of the other Armenian commentaries on the book, of which more will be said below. Despite the fact that it was written in Gregory's youth and composed for a layman, however, it is not a simple document. And Gregory was to ruminate on the themes introduced in it for the rest of his life. They surfaced from time to time in his other writings, reaching a mystical maturity in his final work, the *Book of Lamentations*.

Allusions to the Song of Songs in Gregory's Other Works

References to the Song of Songs are scattered throughout Gregory's writings. In his *Encomium on the Holy Cross* he uses [Song 1:7](#) in a list of prophecies concerning Christ as the Shepherd. His description of the Virgin Mary in the accompanying *Encomium on the Theotokos* uses [Song 4:14](#) with its list of fragrant spices in a depiction of the Virgin as a divine censer. [Song 1:13](#) is also used in the same *Encomium*.

Jacob of Nisibis, in the *Encomium* dedicated to him, is described in terms of [Song 4:2/6:8](#); he is 'like the sheep of the Proverb writer, bearing twins, none barren'. The apostles, too, in their *Encomium*, are called 'offspring of the hart', referring to the hart's propensity for treading on serpents, an element in Gregory's exegesis of Song 2:17 and [7:1](#).

The *Gandz on the Holy Church* speaks of the faithful as a 'sealed door of cedar', combining [Song 8:9](#) and [4:12](#). Gregory's *Tagh* with the opening line *Hawun, hawun ...*, combines [Song 2:14; 4:8](#) and [6:13](#) in the space of four lines. In addition to these lesser citations from the Song, there is a *tagh* for Christmas which, in an extended passage, speaks of the newly born Christ child in the words of the Song. It concludes in the words of [Song 2:1](#) and [4:4](#):

How beautiful, how praiseworthy,

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the Child unattainable, timeless.
He is the mountain tower,
lily of the valleys,
flower of the fields.

The Song of Songs also appears twice in Gregory's *Brief Word of Advice on Orthodox Faith*. Early in the exhortation he quotes [Song 1:3–4](#), applying it to those who have 'drawn Life to themselves'. Towards the end of the work, he brings together multiple allusions to Christ as the Groom and the Church as the Bride. Following a quotation from the Gospel of John he goes on, 'not to mention the Song of Songs, which from start to finish rings changes on this same idea; through corporeal things it impresses upon us the spiritual'. The love of groom and bride, as the greatest example of earthly love, was the only thing that could viscerally express the love of Christ for the Church.

Interestingly, in his final work, the *Book of Lamentations*, Gregory makes use of the Song no less than seven times. Prayer/ *Ban* 46A uses [Song 1:7](#)—'The image of the shepherd's tent in the Song of Songs aptly applies to me, for I do not know or understand by whom, in whose image, or why I was created'. In section D of the same *Ban*, Gregory asks himself, in the words of [Song 5:3](#), 'Why did you put off the clothes given you and put on the cloak of sin? Why did you infect the purity of your feet by taking the path of the fallen?' Rather than being simple quotations, the references to the Song include echoes of his own exegesis on the verses alluded to. Prayer/*Ban* 75, one of several meditations on the nature of the Church, refers to the Bride's maidens as the assembly of the patriarchs (§ J), an exegetical theme featured in the *Commentary*.

Prayer/*Ban* 52A uses [Song 2:9](#), but focuses on the explanation that the metaphor of the Nephew's peering 'through the window' depicts our partial knowledge:

Lord, with a new showering of grace and streams of mercy from on high,
who delights in pouring forth enlightenment miraculously without end,
more abundantly than upon the nations of old
and opened and broadened those narrow windows
through which knowledge glimmers as Solomon said,
for him and with him for me a wretched sinner.

In words reminiscent of his *Brief Word of Advice on Orthodox Faith*, Gregory's *Ban* 93 H ('A Prayer of Instruction on Holy Chrism, the Light-giving Oil of Consecration') combines [Song 8:2](#); [1:2](#); [4:4](#); [10](#); [5:1](#); [3:6](#); [4:14](#) and says,

In praise of Christ's bride, the holy Church,
the Song of Songs, from beginning to end,
explains the divine mystery,
comparing incarnation to spiced wine,
and virtue to myrrh mixed with choice oil
and perfect morals to a sweet perfume of myrrh and incense
mixed with delicious powders.

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Section I of the same *Ban* refers to [Song 2:5](#) and [6:2](#), concerning the oil or balsam, ‘that fine substance, filled with your Spirit, whose light enables us to see your finer, higher, ungraspable element, praised Lord’. Section K, carrying on with the metaphor of oil as applied to Christ’s nature, takes in [Song 2:1; 1:3, 4](#).

Instead, turning your name [anointed one] into reality,
You mixed yourself into this pure oil,
making it radiant with heavenly light.
And although the savors of your sweetness are beyond
expression and cannot be compared to anything,
although you have variously been referred to
as the flowers of the field or the lilies of the valley,
exquisite nard or sandalwood mixed with aloe,
the scent of saffron, the blossoms of the vine or a fine wine,
you, Lord beyond understanding, deemed it fitting
that your name be glorified simply as ‘oil poured out’,
for you are the consummation of all things
and lacking in nothing....
With Solomon the anointed and adopted of God,
I sing with the mouth of a bride to you,
 you heavenly bridegroom,
a song of praise and thanksgiving,
yearning with the fervent desire of my heart
for your sweet, scent more than for any incense.
In the inspired words of the wise man
 and the theological evangelist,
let us hasten in your footsteps and the trace of your scent,
like one who has the words of eternal life....

The overarching theme of Gregory’s *Commentary on the Song of Songs* is this understanding of the Incarnation; it is as if in his last work he returns to his beginnings, giving deeper, poetic expression to what he had first said in simple prose.

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For Ruth

Truly, God's is a maternal love

Commentary on Solomon's Song of Songs

elucidated by the inspired Lord Gregory, spiritual teacher, son of Bishop Khosrov

Prologue

Your pious majesty's command, O royal lord, was more forceful and higher than our capacity, for such a request—to comment upon the Song of Songs—is a matter for those who are Solomon-like in spirit. If Gregory of Nyssa, who was a perfect doctor of the church and indwelt by the Spirit, was deterred from completing a commentary on this book, how much more shall I, who am ignorant in every way and devoid of the grace of the Spirit, be incapable of following the thoughts uttered by the solomonic spirit! Particularly since there is no little condemnation and punishment for those who, in order not to appear ignorant, distort the words of Holy Writ through alien interpretation and with vainglorious pride display as true

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things which are nothing of the kind. Nonetheless, since we are commanded to be obedient to the orders of kings, I make so bold as to say what my weak mind is capable of attaining to, hoping in the Holy Spirit, and carrying out the command of him who said, ‘Remain subject to kings’.

Now, first and foremost I rejoiced that you have evinced such an intention to examine Scripture, and to attend to learning; this betokens a fear of the Lord and an alienation from vile concerns, idle speculations and sin-loving ways, and an approach to that bliss of which the Prophet says, ‘Blessed is the man who has not walked in the way of the wicked’, and so on.

A little farther on he remarks, ‘But he meditates on the law of the Lord day and night’ And then, adding the reward of meditating on the law of the Lord, he says ‘He shall be like a tree which is planted by the rivers of water’ ([Ps 1:1–3](#)). For as a tree which is planted by the rivers of water is never withered, so also is the one who examines the injunctions of God and is attentive to them day and night. He likewise will remain ever green in this life, and whatever he does God will prosper, as he prospered David himself, who was a king. Great king that he was, he spurned the cares of war and all bodily necessities, and thought only on the things of God. Because of this, he remained invincible to his enemies.

See the same in Solomon; how universal a king he was! And yet his continual concern was for that which you are reading, along with so many other writings that the world would not have sufficed to bear them all, had all his writings survived. But since the world was not worthy, and since it was not good for people to acquire such boundless knowledge, God removed Solomon’s writings from the earth, because he had brought to light everything which God had done upon the earth. And had he not fallen, he would have attained yet greater grace. Thus, it is right to emulate such kings, and insatiably to study the law of the Lord.

But for now, let that be, that we may involve ourselves in the beginning of our commentary.

First, it is proper to say how the title *Song of Songs* is interpreted, and thereby to learn about the limitless dignity of it. The *Song of Songs* is the Blessing of blessings. In the same way we are used to call the holy apse where the holy altar stands the *Holy of holies*, as the Apostle himself says. That is, if the church is holy the altar is doubly holy and more so. This Song of songs, in a similar way, is above and beyond all songs and blessings; just as the Gospel is called holy and honorable above all writings in the New Testament, so this is above all writings in the Old. Concerning it, one must know that it was sung aloud in the temple, with greater suitability and prophetic inspiration than the Psalms of David, because the mystery concealed in its awesome words is ineffable.

And no corporeal being can comprehend it, except those who are in spirit like Paul, who was caught up into the third heaven and heard unutterable words which it is beyond the power of a human being to utter ([2 Cor 12:2–4](#)). For our ears cannot bear to hear the mysteries of God, just as our eyes cannot bear the sight of God.

Thus Solomon, desiring to relate the ineffable, did so by means of a corporeal parable: by means of groom and bride, nephew and princess, daughter and dove, breasts and incense, and oil poured out, apples, mountain goats, Solomon, king, the city of Jerusalem, a garden and such like things which the eye aspires to see and the ear enjoys and the mind desires. In just such a way do the parents of children conceal special things in a good-looking package so that [the

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children], seeing the exterior to be desirable, will consider what is inside to be the greater treasure, and will thereby be encouraged to preserve carefully what is within. Likewise a sweet and expensive unguent like nard, which Solomon specifically mentions, is contained in a vessel; moreover, its fragrance cannot last apart from that.

As the Lord Himself says in the Holy Gospel, ‘Do not cast your pearls before swine’ ([Mt 7:6](#)); that is, do not present ineffable things to weak ears. The same Spirit instructed Solomon neither to disseminate openly the things which he had seen by the Spirit’s light, nor to conceal completely the mysteries of the Church and salvation and the incarnation of Christ and all that he suffered for love of humankind, and his death and resurrection, and his second coming, and the unimaginable rewards which are stored up for the saints, and the intensity of the saints’ love for Christ, which they bore within themselves to the extent of suffering and death, loving Christ as He loved us ([1 Jn 4:19](#)); who in order to express His boundless love towards us was obliged to put on flesh, and even to spill his holy blood for us. He who as God would have been able by *fiat* to save us from Satan’s clutches, did it through righteousness, and restrained him by force. He accomplished this quietly, and not through domination. Thus our servitude was to be redeemed both legally and mercifully; the death, that is, by which it was lawfully decreed for us to return to dust because of our disregard for the commandment not to eat of the fruit [of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil]. That just judgment he did not remove without the Law, although he had the authority to do so. Rather, he put on the flesh of Adam, and took upon himself his death, and redeemed us through righteousness. Moreover, he mingled mercy with righteousness and righteousness with mercy, and it was through all this that he displayed his love towards us, which is beyond telling.

All of this the Song of Songs relates; by parables, it shows us the brilliant adornment of the Church through the cross and the altar, the body and blood of the Lord, the holy font and the sacred chrism, the Old and New Testaments, apostles and prophets and *vardapets*, priests and hermits, virgins and martyrs, Christian kings and all pure peoples who were to be planted in the Church, together with other ineffable and so inexpressible gifts. Yet, even he did not recognize the whole of it, nor was he able to acquaint us with it all; he could not even clearly express what he himself knew, but rather did so by analogy.

Should one then ask, ‘How could he allegorize this using a bride and groom? How is it possible to signify the mystery of God by means of physical desire, and to illustrate the limitless love of God by analogy with passionate love?’ We ought first to bewail our licentious ways, we who are so far estranged from God’s mysteries that the Holy Spirit, through Solomon, was constrained to relay these insupportable things to us by means of an animal desire. It is because of such realities that the blessed universal teacher John asserts that we ought to adopt such a saintly way of life that Scripture would become unnecessary—as was the case for Noah and Abraham and his sons and grandsons, and as it was for Job and Moses and the apostles, who instead of Scripture had Him dwelling in their hearts, and He taught them and wrote on the tables of their hearts rather than in books ([2 Cor 3:3](#)).

We would thus have obtained a heart so illumined and angelic that we would have had no need of such parables of bride and groom to formulate the mysteries of Christ and the Church and whatever intelligible good things are in heaven. However, since we have lost that kind of

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dignity and have blinded those eyes, let us turn, sighing, to the second-best, and view the spiritual things through the physical, as Solomon, having received the grace of the Holy Spirit, relates them.

In addition, holy matrimony, and the love of a groom for his bride and of a bride for her groom, as it is free from defilement, is not foreign to the grace of the Spirit through whom its mystery is consummated in that of Christ and the Church. The Apostle, confirming the words of Solomon, says, ‘This mystery is great. But I speak of Christ and the Church’ ([Eph 5:32](#)). Thus, whoever defiles holy matrimony by defiled relations and evil acts, defiles the mystery of the Church and dishonors Christ, for [Christ and the Church] are the archetype of [marriage].

Let us expound yet more on the mystery set before us and show that God has love towards humanity as great as a groom’s for his bride Isaiah says, ‘As the bridegroom rejoices in the bride, so does the Lord rejoice in you’ ([Is 62:5](#)). David himself also says this in his lament over Jonathan, ‘Love of you pains me more than the love of women’ ([2 Sam 1:26](#)).

Now, there is nothing more honorable or greater on earth than the love of a man and a woman. If to some individual it seems not to be especially great or important, it seems so because he has either not come to marriage in a sacred way or has not maintained his virginity in a holy manner, but by his prodigal defilements he has thrust away from himself the grace of the Spirit. Whereas all who approach marriage in a pure and spotless manner, and by the Holy Spirit’s ineffable love are united to one another, are blessed with the blessing whereby Adam and Eve were blessedly united. Those who are united with this kind of love and blessing die for one another, literally to the degree that they will spill their blood for one another.

It is the case that for love of family many have fallen away from Christ and apostacized because of the persecutions of our time. But even Adam gave up Paradise and the light of glory for love of his wife and fell outside, not because he wanted to become God, but because it seemed to him too onerous to be separated from her love. He well knew that he would be punished by God—because he was not an ignorant person but rather was filled with the prophetic spirit—and he had not yet fallen from the grace of the Spirit, because he had not yet transgressed the commandment.

Even after eating the fruit, he did not completely lose the Spirit, but while he was in Paradise he understood through the Holy Spirit the ways of all living creatures; and when God brought them to Adam, he gave them names one by one according to their individual habits. While he slept, Eve was created and when He brought her to him, he prophetically declared, ‘This now is bone of my bone’ ([Gn 2:23](#)), and he foretold as well the procreative increase which would derive from woman, and the leaving of father and mother to go after one’s wife, and their becoming one flesh ([Gn 2:24](#)).

Moreover, after eating the fruit, he prophetically recognized our salvation, which was to come through woman, that is, through the Holy Mother of God; for which reason he named his wife ‘Life’ ([Gn 3:20](#)). If this had not been so, how could he have called ‘Life’ her, who became the cause of death to all Adam’s generations? The Holy Illuminator, too, says, ‘saying this, he understood all the deeds which were to be on earth until the accomplishment, even salvation through Christ’.

Now if, when he had fallen from glory, he retained the spirit of prophecy, how much more

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must he have had it while he was yet in glory! Thus it is obvious that, as the Apostle says, ‘Adam was not deceived’ by the snake’s lying promise through Satan, ‘but the woman was deceived and transgressed’ ([1 Tim 2:14](#)); Adam ate of the fruit in order not to be separated from his wife, and for love of her, not in order to become god—as the woman had eaten.

It is the same even now; for love of their wives men honor their wives’ injunctions, knowing perfectly well that what they will is wrong and not appropriate, yet for love of them they are constrained to do it. Hence Solomon, being aware that in humans this love is greater than any other love, used it as a parable of the love of Christ and the Church for one another. Not that the love of God is simply equivalent to this one; God’s love is greater than that of marriage, to the same extent that the inequality between God and humanity is great.

Nonetheless, anyone who reads this book needs to purify his mind and understanding of all thoughts of bodily marriage, and then to devote himself to the hearing of it. For this is Mount Horeb, where God dwelt, and just as when any beast approached that mountain it was stoned, the same fate will befall anyone who approaches the revealed words of this book in an animal manner. For which reason we ought to place ourselves beyond all fleshly thoughts, closing the eyes of the body and opening those of the spirit, so that we may be able like Moses to ascend this conceptual mount where God lives, and to express, according to our ability, the secret, deep things of God which are in it. May the Holy Spirit lead us, giving to us a tongue to speak, and to you who listen, a mind to hear.

Ecclesiastes

That is, the ingathering of the *Ecclesia*, which was divided into futile cults; it is the people that is called the *Ecclesia*, the Church.

I understood that the flesh strengthens youth.

That is, the *youth* of Adam, aged by sin, attained to Solomon’s knowledge through the Holy Spirit; the *flesh* is our own, which Christ was to put on. By means of that flesh was our decrepit nature strengthened to return to youth, putting on the glorious light of which it had been stripped.

He shall elevate it into our barns,

Whether you understand this as Paradise or heaven—both are possible interpretations—into it the Lord shall *elevate* us who have been brought low through sin. And if anyone should ask who accomplished this salvation, he will hear

our king, Christ, who sits on the throne like a date palm, golden and full of myrrh.

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The flesh reigning united with the Word of God *on the throne of God*, like *a golden date palm* pure of sin as gold is pure, foretells the divine united with the flesh, that is with the *date palm*. How is it that our flesh was called a *date palm*? It is because His flesh was unspotted by sin. For if David says ‘The righteous flourish like a date palm’ ([Ps 92:12](#)) because of their propriety, how much more would this metaphor apply to the divinized flesh! Because He suffered mortality, He is also *full of myrrh*, which was brought to Him by the very magi themselves as a gift, with the two other gifts, to foretell this; I need not remind you that He was wrapped in *myrrh* at His burial.

The king shall return thence to his youth,

This utterance repeats the previous ones, which said that *the flesh strengthens youth*. Man is here referred to as *king*, because he was made in the image of God. *The king shall return thence to his youth*; that is, to the original glory which he possessed in Paradise.

my beloved to his chamber.

Whereas in the preamble he called the Kingdom a *barn*, where the just are to be ‘stored up’, here he refers to it as a *chamber*. He is the *beloved* because He loved man more than the angels, by virtue of which love He put on our nature.

Sing his love.

That is, bless the love of Him who loved so much, who granted such gifts to us again by means of His death.

Even I am in the Psalter.

This sentence has two interpretations: one, that ‘I am the One described in the Psalms. What I achieved in the direction of salvation, and what I suffered, is written in the Psalms’. I do not want to adduce witnesses in support of this interpretation one by one, since I am trying to be concise.

The second interpretation is that, ‘If someone desires to sing and bless my love by means of the Psalms, it is I who instruct him, how he should bless Me’. The Apostle attests to this, saying, ‘When one stands in prayer, we do not know how it ought to be, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with soundless groaning’ ([Rom 8:26](#)). In other words, when you groan in prayer the Holy Spirit wordlessly and soundlessly teaches you the words of blessing.

I shall sing with my companions;

That is, with the angels. How can the angels be called our *companions*? For one thing, we came into existence through the Creator, as did they; and for a second, we were not far from angelic glory, but ‘only a little lower than the angels’, as David says ([Ps 8:6](#)).

we shall sing and rejoice in the beloved King,

That is, when we receive again our lost glory we shall rejoice in our King, Christ, who loved us, Gregory of Narek, *The Blessing of Blessings: Gregory of Narek’s Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Roberta R. Ervine, vol. 215, Cistercian Studies Series (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications; Liturgical Press, 2007).

and we shall sing to Him with blessing.

although we may be hidden from sight,

Hereby he expresses that although God is invisible to us because we have physical eyes, we shall bless Him unseeingly.

our eyes by fifties.

Among the numbers, ten is perfect. And if one counts higher, he returns to one, saying ‘ten-plus-one’ and so on. The Theologian affirms this too. Now, what applies to the units, also applies to the tens—ten tens are a hundred, and five tens are fifty. One hundred is a perfect number, like ten; while fifty is half that number, like five is half of ten. Thus, humans have half eyes—that is, *by fifties*—not perfect ones. So how could one see what is concealed *from our sight*; that is, from our *fifties*? It is invisible even to the hundreds!—that is, it is also invisible to the angels. Albeit not to the same degree as it is for us, yet their vision also is imperfect.

The Lord created you and established you.

He made the first man, and He also re-established in that same glory the one who had fallen.

*He prepared you from the womb;
your mother was the most beautiful among women.*

The womb is the font, and it is the Church which is called *Mother Sion*, for ‘Sion is called mother, and a man was born in her’ ([Ps 86:5](#)).

A body shall be born for him without fault and without blemish, by another Providence.

That is, by the Holy Spirit. The Apostle, too, says, ‘Born again, not of corruptible seed, but of the incorruptible, living and eternal Word of God’ ([1 Pt 1:23](#)).

For he had possessed such,

That is, previously they had had a body without blemish, spotless, luminous, before he ate of the fruit.

and it was the blessings of blessings

By saying *blessing of blessings*, he herewith adduces as evidence the words of his father David, ‘The Lord said to me, thou art my son, and this day have I begotten thee’ ([Ps 2:7](#)).

1:1 The Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s

Solomon means peace. Thus, he symbolizes Christ, for ‘He is our peace’, as the Apostle says ([Eph 2:14](#)).

Now since we have been born a new generation, we beseech our parent to kiss us with maternal love, to bring us near to the divine mouth, so that when She kisses us, we may drink

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from Her mouth that which Her all-holy mouth said: 'If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink' ([Jn 7:37](#)) [Nyssa 779a].

Because of that, it says:

CHAPTER ONE

1:2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth,

Moreover, being the prodigal son, we are kissed by our heavenly Father, as the Gospel parable relates. So under the guise of the kiss, we beseech Him to increase 'the love wherewith He loved us' ([Eph 2:4](#)).

for your breasts are better than wine,

The commandments which are 'sucked' by the spirit from the *breasts* of Scripture, *are better than wine*; as the Prophet says, 'The words of your mouth are better to me than thousands of gold and silver' ([Ps 118:72](#)). For the milk which flows from the breast is the cause of life, whereas wine merely gives strength.

1:3 and the odor of your unguents is better than all fragrant incense.

Thus are the virtue and good works which emanate from the divine *unguent* [Nyssa 781B-C]; in other words, that which the Holy Spirit teaches to those who draw near and savor it.

Your name is like ointment poured forth;

And as what is poured out of the vessel is unexaminable, and only by means of the vessel is the ointment in it recognized, by the same token the nature of the godhead is unfathomable and inconceivable and invisible, *like ointment poured forth*. Yet it perfumes the souls of the righteous [Nyssa 784A] and those who, in terms of sin, are like little children ([1 Cor 14:20](#)); the ointment, like its vessel, is precious.

Now, since the godhead's name is *like ointment poured forth*, and is unattainable by human knowledge, even by the perfect saints—and not only the saints, but also the entire panoply of the heavenly beings—nonetheless, by means of His union with our nature through the holy Virgin, we have seen the *ointment* insofar as it is possible to see it. This the Lord himself said to the blind man: when He asked, 'Do you believe in the Son of God?' and he responded, 'Who is he, Lord?' the Lord added, 'You have both seen Him, and the one who speaks with you is He' ([Jn 9:35–37](#)). He meant that, having seen the divinized flesh, he had seen the invisible *ointment* Himself.

therefore do the maidens love thee.

He identifies as *maidens* those who in terms of sin have become like children ([1 Cor 14:20](#)), and the angels as well.

1:4 We shall run after you because of the fragrance of your ointments.

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Those who become worthy to sample the flavor of the Word of God, and to take in His fragrance, *run insatiably after the fragrance* of His *ointments*, and never desist from the pursuit [Nyssa 785A]. Even though it might happen that they suffer prison and bonds or be obliged to forsake their children, as the first saints who detected this *fragrance* took it upon themselves to do, they do not swerve.

The bride tells the maidens concerning what the groom has granted her.

The Church and the people are called *the Bride*. And the *maidens* are the angels and saints; those who, as has been mentioned, have become as little children with regard to sin. So the Bride is addressing the *maidens*, that is, the first Fathers and the prophets and the righteous, and the angels as well.

The king led me into his chamber.

In other words, ‘He translated me into the Kingdom, to His abode; thus, in the stead of Paradise, our natural abode from which I was expelled, He has given me that which is even better’.

The bride addresses the maidens, and they say:

*We shall rejoice and be glad in you,
and we shall love thy breasts more than wine.*

That is, the righteous join in the joy of the gentiles’ salvation, and they *rejoice* mutually in the Saviour Jesus, and together they love the *breasts* of love, which are the commandments of God.

The maidens speak the name of the bride to the groom.

The *maidens* mean the friends of Christ the Groom. Quite often, any commentary is superfluous!

Uprightness loved thee.

David also says this: ‘The Lord our God is upright’ ([Ps 24:8; 91:16](#)). Now, if He who is upright has loved us, He requires the same love from you, His beloved.

The bride says,

1:5–6 I am black and beautiful daughters of Jerusalem, like the tent of Kedar, and like the tabernacle of Solomon. Do not look at me because I am black, because the sun has looked upon me fiercely. The sons of my mother fought with me, and they set me as the keeper of the vineyard, so my own vineyard have I not kept.

Now, if the words of the prophetic books do not coincide with one another, do not expect absolute precision. For the blessed universal teacher John says ‘Translating from the Hebrew language into Greek, one cannot convey the meaning completely’. Even more so in our circumstances; when translated from the Greek or the Syriac, the meaning is obscured in

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Armenian. Gregory of Nyssa says the same in this very commentary [Nyssa 796 A-B].

That notwithstanding, the gist of the utterance is this; when the maidens have said to the Bride—that is, to the gentile believers—‘With what great love has the Upright One loved you! Therefore do not stray any more and move away from Uprightness’, the Bride responds by praising Christ the Groom; she relates her earlier transgressions and the chastisements which she suffered. *I am black, and am become beautiful now through His mercy, O Daughters of Jerusalem.* It calls the righteous *daughters of Jerusalem*, and, as often occurs in the books of the prophets, it is usual to call the angels *daughters* as well, because they possess a modesty like that of women, inasmuch as the female sex is more modest than the male.

It says *like the tent of Kedar*. Kedar means ‘dark’; that is to say, ‘I was the tent of Satan, and through the mercy of God I am now fit to be the tabernacle of Solomon’. It says *the tabernacle of Solomon*, referring to the Temple; in other words, ‘Now, like the tabernacle of Solomon, I have become God’s house’. Hereby, it anticipates the Church of the gentiles [Nyssa 792 A].

Then again recalling her earlier ugliness, she adds, ‘*Do not look at me because I am black*’, meaning the blackness of sin, ‘*because having caught me in transgression, God the Sun looked on me fiercely*’. By this she indicates the bitterness of the punishments which He inflicted upon her, and her expulsion both from God’s presence and from Paradise. Because of whose transgression did this come about? The Bride says, ‘*The sons of my mother fought with me*’. She calls Satan ‘*my mother’s son*’, for they were both made by one Creator.

And they set me as keeper of the vineyard, so my own vineyard have I not kept. This is what ‘God set him in the paradise of delight, to dress it and keep it’ ([Gn 2:15](#)) means. It is not as if Paradise, where all was enjoyment and divine protection, needed any dressing or keeping, other than his doing right, and keeping the commandment which He had previously taught him [Nyssa 797D].

The bride says to the groom,

1:7 Tell me, whom my soul loves, where do you shepherd, where do you rest your flock at midday, lest I become like one who goes after the flocks of your companions.

Now, the Bride having recounted from what ugliness and blackness to what beauty she was transformed, the Groom being willing to forget the Bride’s wickedness because of His love for her, she is likewise inflamed with love for Him. She beseeches the Groom to tell her what the path is along which she may be shepherded under the hand of her Shepherd, so that, going towards the shadowless Light she may remain invulnerable to the predatory Enemy.

At *midday* the sun’s light is without shadow; for that reason she mentions noonday: ‘Let me not be blackened by demonic ways of life with my previous companions in sin and stray from the place of good pasture’.

As the Lord Himself says in the holy Gospel, ‘I am the good Shepherd’ ([Jn 10:14](#)); ‘Whoever enters in by me will be saved’ ([Jn 10:7-9](#)), and so on [Nyssa 801 A].

The groom says to the bride,

1:8 If you do not know yourself, O most beautiful among women, follow the footprints of

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the flock, and pasture your goats by the tents of the shepherds.

The Groom answers according to the Bride's question, reminding her of the beauty which He has given her, and cautioning her to know herself; as the Prophet said, 'Look to yourself' ([Dt 4:9](#)). Now, he is saying 'Remember the previous gifts—that is, Paradise and glory—having received which you contaminated them through sin; you again found mercy, not by virtue of good works which you performed, but through me who, in your place, made recompense for your sins'. As the Prophet says, 'In my stead, the Lord recompenses' ([Ps 137:8](#)).

'But if you do not remember all this, and you do not look to yourself, and you do not humble yourself from your arrogance, and if like your forefather you are proud of your upright ways or your good works which you have done in your repentance from evil, and if you do not hereafter walk aright, you will leave my flock, who are fruitful in wool and milk. Instead of my flock you will join the herd of goats, who are unproductive, for they have neither wool nor milk; who have strayed from the good Shepherd's tent, following the tracks of strange flocks which think themselves to be the flock and which are not the flock. Thereafter you will not find the Good Shepherd again [Nyssa 804C].

So be careful for the salvation which I have accomplished for you, fighting with the chariots and horses of the invisible pharaoh by my formidable power'. This is what it means when he says,

1:9 I shall compare you, my Near One, to my horse among the chariots of Pharaoh.

'Overwhelming his chariots, I made you my Near One, carrying you through the sea of sin'

Now, I am trying to be brief; if you desire to hear more extended statements, you should go to Gregory of Nyssa.

The maidens say to the bride

These are the friends of the Groom, the apostles and prophets, and *vardapets*, who continually advise us to regard how much our re-creation excels the original creation by comparing it to a dove, a necklace, gold, silver and horses.

1:10 For your cheeks are beautiful like a dove's,

That bird loves purity. If its mate should happen to die, it never, until its death, unites with any other of its kind. So, by praising her *cheeks* as being *like a dove's*, he conveys that, 'You are the countenance and likeness of God, adorned with purity like a dove. The awe of His commandments adorns you like a circlet around your neck ([Prv 1:9](#)), pure and cleansed from sin, like gold and silver'. Metaphorically, that is; not actual silver and gold. For that spiritual beauty with which humanity is adorned, is beyond human thought.

He who has heard unutterable words ([2 Cor 12:4](#)), like Paul and his spiritual ilk, is also God's resting place, like a *horse*. Now, the maidens said this in support of the Groom's words comparing his *horse*, which fought with *Pharaoh*, to the Bride in virtue.

Those who are adorned with good works are shown to have attained to yet greater gifts; not only does He rest upon you like a *horse*, but He receives you into His bosom. As it

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continues:

until the king shall receive you into his bosom.

It occurs to me, however, that you have not fully comprehended the commentary on these words. So let me perforce recapitulate:

I shall compare you to my horse among the chariots of Pharaoh, O my Near One

Now, one must ask him about the *horse*, ‘If it be yours, why is it *among the chariots of Pharaoh*? And who may *Pharaoh* be?’ Listen, and I will explain it. God’s *horse* is our human nature, because it was the resting place and abode of the godhead. Like an obdurate *horse* it became arrogant in conceit, and through sin it turned into a steed of Satan, who is described as *Pharaoh*. With him Christ the Saviour fought by means of the cross. The prototype of that cross was the rod of Moses, which parted the sea and drowned *Pharaoh*, that is, Satan. [God’s] image, which like a *horse* had been harnessed to [Satan’s] *chariot*, He again gathered to Himself. This is that it means when it says, *to my horse among the chariots of Pharaoh*: the efficacious power of the godhead destroyed the chariots of *Pharaoh*.

Or again, ‘That metaphorical *horse*, royally adorned and harnessed to *the chariot of Pharaoh*, was also Mine, for all creation is Mine, Now, I shall compare you to that adorned *horse* of Mine, which I rode so forcefully that they said, “Let us flee from the face of Israel”’ ([Ex 14:25](#)).

Likewise, He made you His steed, adorned with a circlet, and the other things he listed in order, drowning the invisible *Pharaoh* in the fiery sea. Having decked you out in so much virtue, He took you, who had been His *horse*, to Himself; instead of riding you, He took you into His bosom, and even more, carried you on His shoulder, as the Lord says in the Gospel ([Lk 15:5](#)).

The bride says to herself and to the groom,

1:12–14 My spikenard has sent forth its fragrance. My Nephew is a bundle of myrrh; he shall rest between my breasts. My Nephew is to me like a blooming cluster in the vineyards of Engedi;

That is, among the luxuriant fruits of the vineyards.

First of all, know that the one called the Groom is also called her *Nephew*, for the Word of God became incarnate of the Jews, and the Jews and the gentiles are also brothers because they are both from Adam.

My Nephew is a bundle of myrrh; he shall rest between my breasts. This is what the word means in the Gospel: ‘Whoever believes in me, has affirmed that God is true’ ([Jn 3:33](#)) [Nyssa 824 C]. Now whoever believes in Him and gathers His commandment and the fear of Him into his heart is like precious ointment and fragrant incense, especially because he spreads that fragrance to others. As the Apostle says, ‘We are a sweet savor of Christ to God among the saved, and among the lost’ ([2 Cor 2:15](#)) [Nyssa 825 B].

There is, however, an animal which dies from sweet fragrance, like the sinners who do not accept the instruction of the fragrant Scriptures which *rest between the breasts*; that is, in the Gregory of Narek, *The Blessing of Blessings: Gregory of Narek’s Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Roberta R. Ervine, vol. 215, Cistercian Studies Series (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications; Liturgical Press, 2007).

hearts of the saints [Nyssa 825 B]. Those who receive [that fragrance] will be translated from life to life, and those who do not receive it, from death to death ([2 Cor 2:16](#)). As Christ's great martyr Ignatius said, 'I bear in myself Christ'. Hearing this Trajan said, 'I give order to burn that Ignatius who bears the Crucified One in himself, so that the Crucified One will be burned together with him'.

The groom says to the bride

1:15 *Behold, my Near One, behold, my beautiful one, your eyes are doves.*

'Because you have come *near* to Me, and have become estranged from sin, you have received the previous beauty which you possessed in Paradise, and you have attained not to this gift alone, but by regarding Me you have received the *eyes* of a *dove*; that is, of the Holy Spirit' [Nyssa 836 B]. For whatever a person looks at, he becomes in thought.

Now, if I do not prolong the words of my commentary, know that it is because I prefer brevity.

The bride says to the groom

1:16–17 *Behold my Nephew, and beautiful as well; there are canopies to our seat. The beams of our house are cedar; our rafters are fir.*

Once the Groom has shown her the eyes of the Spirit, pure as those of a dove, the Bride testifies, 'What I could not see then, when I had not been transformed into the nature of a *dove*, I can now see, having become a *dove*—my *Nephew*. For although you became *my Nephew*, taking on the flesh of my ugliness, yet you are *beautiful* to me because you mingled your divinity with my nature'. As the Prophet says, 'Fairer in appearance than all the children of men' ([Ps 44:3](#)).

There are canopies to our seat; that is, she calls Christ in His incarnation our *canopy* and *house* [Nyssa 836 B]. *The beams of our house are cedar*: that wood is sweet smelling and incorruptible, and good for building. Likewise the body of our Lord, 'Whose house we ourselves are' ([Heb 3:6](#)) [Nyssa 840 A], according to Paul, is good for building this *house*, or for purifying us to dwell there.

CHAPTER TWO

The groom says to himself and to the bride

The Groom more clearly reveals His beauty, invisible and inexpressible. What the Bride perceives dimly with the eyes of the Spirit, He relates:

2:1 *I am a flower of the fields, a lily of the valleys.*

What an amazing thing! Like the bodily incarnation of the Lord, by which He brought the invisible into visibility for us, He tries by a similar metaphor to display the lovely adornment which the earth put on at receiving Christ. How the earth's appearance, crowned with flowers, Gregory of Narek, *The Blessing of Blessings: Gregory of Narek's Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Roberta R. Ervine, vol. 215, Cistercian Studies Series (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications; Liturgical Press, 2007).

delights the eye of the beholders, and the *lily* which is in *the valleys*! Just so are those who spread out their souls, *like fields*, for my habitation, and they burgeon because of Me, like *the valleys*. They flower around Me to the inutterable joy of the beholders'. And this is not all, but,

2:2 *Like a lily among the thorns, so is my Near One among the daughters.*

'Not only am I the Groom beautiful after the manner of these flowers, but the Bride, who is near to me, becomes as beautiful *among the daughters as a lily among thorns*'.

He calls *daughters* those wedded to Satan; that is, the sinful. There is no need to explain *thorns*, remembering the parable in the Gospel of the thorns and the tares ([Mt 13](#)), which the Lord did not allow to be plucked up from among the wheat until the time of harvest, which is the end of this world. The Song of Songs, as well, considered it appropriate for the righteous to be among the sinners. First, because the way of life of the righteous would appear all the brighter, as the precious stands out amidst the cheap. And secondly, because the *thorns* may perhaps turn into *lilies*, seeing the worth of the latter.

The bride says to the groom

2:3a *Like an apple amid the forest, so is my Nephew among the sons.*

See how step by step she augments her praise of the Groom. He who was at first called *a lily* and *a flower*, now is *an apple*. A flower delights only the eye, whereas the apple delights the eye with its appearance, the palate with its scent, and then comes into its own as a food [Nyssa 844 B].

What she spoke of there as *thorns* is here a *forest*—that is, people who are 'afforested', so to speak, with sin; as it says 'The wild boar of the forest laid it waste' ([Ps 79:14](#)).

He also calls the children of wicked fathers *the sons*.

2:3b *Under his shadow did I desire to sit down, and I sat, and his fruit was sweet in my throat.*

This does not need much interpretation. We who had made offerings to forests and leafy trees, having now made the acquaintance of the *apple* which was given to us from the Tree of Life, have taken refuge in *his shadow* with eagerness. We sit around Him with immovable faith: to *sit*, means not to 'stand up' for false doctrine.

And His fruit was sweet in my throat. Hereby you should understand the life-giving sacrament and the fruit from the Tree of Life, and also the words which were given to us by His divine mouth. Both interpretations are possible. As the Prophet says, 'Your words are sweet to the palate, sweeter than honey to my mouth' ([Ps 118:103](#)) [Nyssa 844 C].

The bride says to the maidens

2:4 *Take me to the house of wine.*

She says openly, 'I am not satisfied by the bringing of the cup, or by the divine words. For I have an insatiable desire, and indolent ways. So *take me to the house of* these very good things, for I

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have no great desire towards the Groom, and towards His commandments; if I see Him and hear them through you, I shall be satisfied'.

Wine is an occasion for gladness. In this life people like to cause forgetfulness of sorrow; for that reason she calls the giving of God's gifts *wine*.

Set love upon me,

Do not demand too much consistency between expressions, as I have previously stated; just grasp the explanation of them. Here, it says *set love*, just as it says in another place, *arouse love*. [Nyssa 845 B]

God is Love. Love is recognized as God's name; the Apostle says, 'God is love, and whoever remains in love dwells in God, and God in him' ([1 Jn 4:12](#)). So the Bride, warmed with love of the Groom, beseeches the friends of the Groom not to speak for Him distantly, as did the prophets, but in an apostolic manner to introduce her into the *house* of Christ, whom she described as *wine*. For by the sight of one another's faces is love of the beloved inflamed in both. This is what *set love upon me* means.

2:5 *and establish me with ointments.*

Mercy is called *ointment*. So this means, 'When I see the Groom, by the opening of my spiritual eye I shall recognize yet more the boundless mercy which He has worked for us, and I shall be the more *established*', and I shall discover it through mercy, as the Theologian says.

Pile up for me apples,

The beauty of good works is called *apples* [Nyssa 849 C-D]. For as by its appearance and scent an *apple* is appetizing even before one tastes it, likewise the sight of various virtues exhilarates those who see it.

for I am overcome by love.

Love dwelt among the saints with immeasurable celebration, through the coming of Christ. They who tasted the savor of that Love became insatiable; they were not satisfied with the various trials which they suffered, whether from Satan or from human beings, but they voluntarily added innumerable tribulations for themselves. They resembled the Prophet David, who, concerning the tribulations which come from others, said, 'The pangs of death surrounded me, and the sorrows of hell found me'. He increased his soul's tribulation yet more: as he adds, 'I discovered tribulation and difficulty' ([Ps 114:3](#)). Similarly, the Holy Illuminator and the great Paul and other saints like them considered the tribulations which came for Christ's sake to be gifts, like *apples*; thus, Trdat said to Saint Gregory, 'Is that happiness?' and he responded, 'Yea, this is happiness'!

2:6 *His left hand is upon my head and his right hand embraces me.*

He repeats this in another place: 'Length of life is at *her right hand*, and on *her left hand* are glory and wealth' ([Prv 3:16](#)) [Nyssa 856 A]. Now this means that there is no other fulfillment for

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my love or expression of my heart but to cling to Him, and to see Him: though various trials and tribulations come upon me, he will hold *his right hand* and *his left hand* as my only shade and protection.

The bride says to the maidens

The angels, and humans who have become angelic, are called *maidens*.

2:7 *I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the powers and the forces of the field, that you raise up and wake love, while he wishes.*

This world is referred to as a *field* [Nyssa 856 A]. Heaven is as well. And the *power and force of the field* is God, through whom the world was established—and the heavens, too—and remains bound together and locked by the immovable *power and force of the field*; that is, God.

It is the angels and humanity, who dwell in the *fields*, who are mentioned as being *adjured*. Thus, ‘by that *force* do I adjure you to rise and pray, and to *arouse* that selfsame *love*, Christ, entirely’! This is what the Lord Himself commanded us to pray: ‘Thy will be done’, He said, ‘on earth as it is in heaven’ ([Mt 6:10](#)).

Thus, those who were *adjured* are the *daughters of the heavenly Jerusalem*, the angels, and the saints who are from this earth.

Hearing the voice of the groom, the bride says

2:8 *The voice of my Nephew!*

See how, though she recognizes the hidden things before confessing them with her mouth, she pauses in announcing them, so that others too may recognize His justice. For if He is merciful, He is also just in judgment. Her calling out to Him, and her eager pleading, are for the payment of our debts’ account.

When the Bride, that is, the Church which is from the gentiles, cried out to the maidens to *take her to the house of wine* and not away from the Groom’s presence, as was appointed for transgressors, and when she *adjured the daughters of Jerusalem to arouse love*, until His good will towards humanity might be accomplished, the Groom did not wait for the pleading of intercessors, but having heard the supplication of her who besought Him, He announced a reconciliation, and ran to meet her, as it says in the Gospel in the parable of the prodigal son ([Lk 15](#)). For He goes about seeking the ones who are worthy, and those who love Him and seek His will, having recognized it by foresight.

The bride says

The voice of my Nephew; behold he comes running upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.

She calls *voice* that which we heard from the prophets: ‘As we have heard, so have we also seen’ ([Ps 47:8](#)) [Nyssa 861 A]; that is, the Word of God ‘Who in many partial ways and with many archetypes spoke to our fathers through the prophets, at the end of these days He spoke

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to us through His son' ([Heb 1:1–2](#)). This is what it means, *Behold he comes running upon the mountains, leaping upon the hills*. The tyranny of Satan he calls *mountains and hills*, which He trod down by His coming. As the Prophet said, 'The mountains and hills were moved, they shook, and trembling seized them' ([Na 1:5](#)). The Lord gave to the apostles the same authority over mountains; not only to *skip upon the mountains* of sin, but even to send them into the sea ([Mt 21:21](#)) [Nyssa 861 D-864 A].

2:9 My Nephew is like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bethel.

Though this is not particularly appropriate, she compares her Nephew to a *roe* because of its eyesight. Even before the creation He saw what pertained to humanity; as it says, 'Before He created you from the womb, I knew you' ([Jer 1:5](#)). Since there is no better sight among the beasts than the *roe*'s, for that reason she makes it the metaphor for Christ's vision.

The *hart*, too, kills snakes, as the Lord did the invisible Serpent.

Upon the mountains of Bethel; in Hebrew *Bethel* means heaven, where He brings those who have been saved from the Serpent [Nyssa 864 B].

The bride gives a sign of the groom to the maidens Behold, he stood behind our wall,

He calls the body which was from the Virgin, *wall*.

rising to the window,

He calls the prophets *the window*.

looking through the lattice.

That is, *through* the Law. In other words, in former times the light of the godhead shone upon us *through* these things; then, later, it did so through His coming in the flesh from the Virgin [Nyssa 864 C].

2:10 My Nephew answered me and said, Arise and come, my Near One, my beauty, my dove,

This is the call that came through Christ, who said, 'Come to me all you who labor' ([Mt 11:28](#)), and so on. He says *my beauty*, because of the washing of the *dove*; *my dove*, because of her having put on the Spirit; *my Near One* because we have become sharers in Christs body ([Eph 3:6](#)).

for, behold, the winter has passed,

He calls the idol worship which had spread worldwide, *winter*. It *has passed*, moreover, by the self same coming of the *Nephew*, who is Christ [Nyssa 865 C]. Likewise,

2:11 the rains have passed; leaving, they have gone away.

This stands for the deceit of Satan, who takes on the shape of a good thing ([2 Cor 11:14](#)). The *rain* is one of destruction, like that in the days of the Flood, by which the demons were Gregory of Narek, *The Blessing of Blessings: Gregory of Narek's Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Roberta R. Ervine, vol. 215, Cistercian Studies Series (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications; Liturgical Press, 2007).

expelled; that is, *leaving they have gone away*.

2:12 *Flowers have appeared in our land, the time for pruning has come.*

By this he indicates the beauty of the spring which came through Christ in the winter of persecution. He calls the crowd of the Just, flourishing in virtue and piety, *flowers*. *The time has come for pruning*; for cutting off and removing the polluted from among the saints.

The voice of the turtledove was heard in our land.

As birds in springtime twitter and are spread out across the land, so also at the coming of this spiritual springtime do the saints rejoice, especially the apostles and prophets, and *vardapets*, and those who through their preaching bless God night and day with angelic and spiritual songs. This is what *The voice of the turtledove was heard in our land means*.

2:13 *The vineyards blossomed, and gave forth their fragrance.*

He refers to as a *vineyard* those faithful people who *blossomed* into a variety of diverse colors and fruits and *fragrances*; one person through martyrdom, another through various virtues, and yet another through good works.

Rise and come, my Near One, my beautiful one, my dove, my perfect one,

He repeated the same original, previous words, affirming his call, ‘*Arise and come*, not through *the window* and *the lattice*—that is, through the prophets or the Law—but at this, My own call!’ By repeating the words, he indicated that one does not come to a halt on the way to the Kingdom, so long as one is in the flesh. As the Lord says, ‘Oh, rise, let us go hence’ ([Mt 26:46](#)). This is also consonant with the Theologian’s interpretation.

2:14 *And come, my dove, under the shelter of that rock, near the retaining wall.*

See, although she has become a *dove*, yet he demands that she continually increase in purity, and not consider herself to be perfect in purity; ‘And let him who thinks that he stands take heed, lest he fall’ ([1 Cor 10:12](#)).

Under the shelter of that rock. He calls Christ a *rock*, for the Apostle says, ‘The rock was Christ himself ([1 Cor 10:4](#)).

And he calls the commandments a *wall*, as it is in Scripture. Now, he orders her hereafter to conform with the Gospel and its preaching, and not with the Law [Nyssa 877 B-D]. To this the Apostle testifies: ‘Christ is of no effect for you, if you are justified by the Law’ ([Gal 5:4](#)).

And near the retaining wall. It is as if he says that by keeping the Gospel commandments you are not far from the Law: as the Apostle says, ‘The fulfillment of the Law is Christ’ ([Rom 10:4](#)). And the Lord Himself says, ‘I came to fulfill the Law’ ([Mt 5:17](#)). So by carrying out what has been fulfilled, you draw *near to the wall*, that is, to the Law.

*Show me your face, and let me hear your voice,
for your voice is sweet, and your face is beautiful.*

Gregory of Narek, *The Blessing of Blessings: Gregory of Narek’s Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Roberta R. Ervine, vol. 215, Cistercian Studies Series (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications; Liturgical Press, 2007).

These the Song of Songs says are the words of the Groom. Gregory of Nyssa divides it, and says it is the words of the Bride. [Nyssa 880 A-B] We agree with this.

Now, having become a *dove*, the Bride beseeches the *rock*, understood to be Christ, ‘*Show me your face*, and do not speak to me any longer through the prophets and the Law! Instead, insofar as you are visible to corporeal creatures, show me your face visibly, so that I may see it and be sated with your glory’s appearing. Insofar as human hearing can bear it, let me hear your *voice* so that, grazing in the shade of your gospel preaching, I shall not go after a foreign shepherd. For if your *voice* was so enticing to me through the *window*—that is through the multitude of the prophets—how much more shall it be so if I am made worthy of seeing your *face*, of hearing the good news of my own salvation?’

The groom says to the maidens

2:15 *Let us catch us the little foxes that spoil the vines, so that our vines may flourish.*

This He says to the angels, which are ministering spirits, sent for the service of humanity. On the other hand, He says it even more to the apostles, who became ‘hunters’ of the entire universe [Nyssa 881 A-B]. First they hunted the *fox* to destruction, expelling him from the vineyard. It is Satan that he calls a *fox*. A *vineyard* is what he calls the Church, which is the souls of the faithful—whom the apostles snatched from the claws of the *fox*, who was the opponent of the truth—so that they were transferred from death to life ([Jn 5:24](#)).

The Lord Himself too, when the apostles returned rejoicing and said, ‘Lord, even devils obey us in your name’, told them, ‘Lo, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and on all the power of the enemy as well’ ([Lk 10:19](#)). He who at another time called Satan a ‘mountain’ and a ‘dragon’ and a ‘prince’, here by contrast calls him a *fox*, and a small one at that, because of the awesome power which the apostles received over him.

The bride says this

2:16 *My Nephew is mine and I am his, who shepherds among the lilies, until the day dawns, and the shadows disperse.*

The Bride, seeing herself liberated from the predations of the *fox*, joyfully gives herself to the One made earthly, who took down the wall of separation ([Eph 2:14](#)). And because the wall of the Law no longer divides her from the One she desires, then she says, ‘I am my Nephew’s, and my Nephew is mine’ [Nyssa 882 D]. And again, ‘Because I have tasted of His love and seen His alluring *face*, and heard His enticing *voice*, I am in Him and He in me. So hereafter neither earthly desire nor need can separate me from Him’. This indeed came to pass, and we saw this demonstrated in the martyrs and the ascetics. As the Apostle says, ‘Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation or difficulty, or persecution?’ and so on ([Rom 8:35](#)).

*Who shepherds among the lilies,
until the day dawns and the shadows disperse.*

That is, no longer does He feed them with grass, which is the food of bestial men. It is the

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pleasures of the flesh which one refers to as ‘grass’; however it is not with that, but rather with spiritual food, that He feeds them. Indeed all the saints ate and marveled at it, and spurned vain desires. They wait in the hope of the *dawning* of that *day* which is the final day, when they shall not be moved—in other words, they shall not pass away—forever. Then it is that the saints will slake the boundless thirst they have for Christ the Groom.

2:17 *Again, my Nephew is like a roe or a young hart upon the incense bearing mountains.*

This means, ‘See the works of the wicked with your sharp eyes, you who sit in the heights, and trample the serpent and the dragon’. It is indeed the nature of *harts*, to tread on snakes and kill them [Nyssa 884 C].

CHAPTER THREE

3:1 *On my bed at night I sought him whom my soul loves. I sought him and did not find him, I called him, and he did not answer me.*

These phrases require many words of explanation, and it is not to be concluded in a few. Nonetheless, I will relate a few; I refer those who desire more expansive statements to Gregory of Nyssa [Nyssa 892–893 C].

When the Bride’s knowledge had progressed through the many metaphors that He listed, and she attained to the pinnacle of this knowledge of Christ at which we find ourselves, she thought that her knowledge had come to a resting point; as it were, ‘Now I have arrived!’ She became careless. Like a person tired and resting in *bed*, likewise she rested, as if *on her bed*, from having sought out great treasure—that is, the great, enlightened, true knowledge to which she had attained through her desire.

She rested, as if *on a bed*, and she did not recall Paul’s saying, ‘We know more or less, and we prophesy more or less’ ([1 Cor 13:9](#)), and ‘Now I understand more or less’ ([1 Cor 13:12](#)). In comparison with the life to come, he calls this life ‘night’ ([Rom 13:12](#)), dark and tenebrous. The spirit is concealed by the body as if in a house, or even in a prison, invisible to those standing outside. The Prophet speaks of it as prison and bonds, saying ‘You have broken my bonds’ ([Ps 115:16](#)), and ‘Lord, take my soul from prison, that I may praise your name’ ([Ps 141:8](#)).

Thus, *on my bed at night I sought him whom my soul loves, I sought him and I found him not, I called him, and he did not answer me* means that however much I seek God’s power or the vision of His glory, or the greatness of His name, or the gifts which are prepared for the righteous, and the like, I find myself distanced therefrom. Having attained to the knowledge which is told us by the prophets and apostles and *vardapets* through the Holy Spirit, and by the Lord Himself in the Gospel, all of this was accounted by perfect understanding as being no discovery at all. Those who are knowledgeable of the world to come, those who are worthy of it, consider that it has not communicated, or even spoken, through these. For the corporeal tongue cannot utter the things of that life, as the Apostle Paul himself says: ‘I heard unutterable words, which it is not right for man to utter’ ([2 Cor 12:4](#)). (Here, *not right* is used with the

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meaning of *impossible*.)

3:2 I rose and went about the city, in the squares and in the streets, and I sought him and did not find him. I called him, and he did not answer me.

He calls the heavens *city and street and square*, and those in them are the angels, from whom she could obtain no knowledge of the supernal mysteries.

3:3 The guards who were going about the city found me. I asked, Have you seen him whom my soul loves?

They too, by not answering, made her understand that even they have not attained to this knowledge. For to whatever measure of knowledge a person attains, it is but the foundation of yet higher knowledge.

3:4 When I passed a little beyond them, I found him whom my soul loves.

There is a knowledge the attainment to an acquaintance with which blocks the seekers' discovery. It says, '*When I passed a little beyond them, I found* because at that point, I relied on faith and the Holy Spirit'. The words of Paul, too, are similar: 'When the world by wisdom knew not God, God was pleased by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe' ([1 Cor 1:21](#)).

Having found the groom she says

I seized him,

and I did not let him go until I brought him into my mother's house and into the room of her who conceived me.

He alludes to the *seizing* of faith, by which we bring Him in to our *Mother*, into the *house* and *the room of Her who conceived us*; that is, Paradise and Heaven.

The bride again adjures the maidens for a second time

3:5 adjure you daughters of Jerusalem by the powers and the forces of the field, that you arise, arouse love while he wishes.

This I have once explained. But see the augmentation of Christ's love in those whom He indwells: how insatiable it makes people! It is as though she had not attained to so much grace and knowledge: she repeats the adjuration which she had made in unattainment and ignorance; she *arouses love* as if she had not perfectly received it.

The groom says concerning the bride

3:6 Who is this who comes up from the desert like pillars of smoke, scented with myrrh and frankincense and with all powders of sweet ointments?

The Groom wishes to show off the beauty of the Bride—that is, of the faithful—by asking the angels, who are described as *maidens*, 'I know that she is black, having lost her form in

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Paradise; now, whence has she received this form and fragrance, having taken which *from the desert, she comes to the heights of heaven?*' He calls those who have deserted evil works *desert* [Nyssa 897 B]; there David also desired to fly with the wings of the Spirit. He describes her as surrounding herself with virtue and good works *like a pillar of scented smoke, like incense, and myrrh, and frankincense, with all the powders of sweet ointments.* Myrrh is the symbol of death; frankincense, of a fragrant way of life. Observe that the body of sin ([Rom 6:6](#)) must first be put to death and made a partaker in Christ's death, and by a fragrant way of life become the equal of Christ's purity [Nyssa 897 C-D], and then become a Bride and ascend to Christ the Groom.

The maidens say something like this

Desiring to acquaint the Bride yet more fully with the Groom's beauty and propriety, they call the Groom *Solomon*, because Solomon means 'Peace'; that is, Christ, who became our peace, and broke down the dividing wall, and reconciled God to humanity ([Eph 2:14–16](#)) [Nyssa 897 D].

3:7 Behold Solomon's couch, sixty soldiers round about it of the valiant of Israel,

Israel was divided into twelve tribes, and twelve fives is *sixty*; also, the senses in a person are five. Now, he wants to say that as the twelve tribes became Israel through the Law, they each became pleasing to God by being purified through the five senses.

In the literal realm, Israel were doers of the will of Solomon's kingdom, and were his *couch*; likewise, here and now, the *couch* of this *Solomon* is the entire universe, where the will of God rests [Nyssa 901B-905A].

Soldiers round about it from among the valiant of Israel In this new *Israel*, the valiant are all the believing saints.

3:8 they all have swords and are studied in war.

This *sword* is 'the blade of the Spirit, which is the word of God' ([Eph 6:17](#)), wherewith they were instructed to war against the invisible Enemy.

Each man's sword was at his thigh,

For 'it is not a battle against flesh and with blood', where it would not be essential to have [the sword] with one at all times; rather, it is inseparably fixed *at the thigh*, ready to fight 'against principalities and powers' ([Eph 6:12](#)).

because of the terrors of the night.

It is obvious that the one who fell from heaven is referred to as *terrors of the night*.

3:9–10 King Solomon made himself a palanquin of the trees of Lebanon. Its pillars he made of silver, and its bottom of gold, and its covering of purple, and in the middle of it he spread out bejeweled love from the daughters of Jerusalem.

I have often said that *Solomon* signifies Christ, for he was from the offspring of David, and a king Gregory of Narek, *The Blessing of Blessings: Gregory of Narek's Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Roberta R. Ervine, vol. 215, Cistercian Studies Series (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications; Liturgical Press, 2007).

who judged justly and made peace and built a temple [Nyssa 908A]. Nonetheless the words which concern him are few, while those concerning Christ are many, for He is the root of David, and King of heaven and earth, and more just in judgment, and merciful, and the occasion of peace for the whole earth, removing from the world idolatry and the discord between heavenly things and earthly. Thereby all the earth was made into the temple of God, through Christ, transforming the type, with its king and temples, into the Truth, which is the Church.

King Solomon made himself a palanquin of incorruptible wood: the *wood of Lebanon* is the gentiles. David too affirms it for you: ‘He shall break the cedars of Lebanon’ ([Ps 28:5](#)). And again, He will break them like the calf which Moses shattered ([Ex 32:15–20](#))—Satan, that is, and those who work his will [Nyssa 912D]. Taking us out of idolatry, he made us his *palanquin*, for ‘the Lord is holy, and he rests upon the holy’ ([Is 57:15](#)); through Isaiah he says, ‘Where shall I rest, and pause, if not in the meek and in the humble and those who tremble at my words’ ([Is 66:2](#)). The Apostle also says, ‘In the house of a rich man are vessels not only of gold and silver, but also of clay and wood’, adding, ‘If anyone cleanses himself from such things, he will be a vessel of honor’ ([2 Tm 2:20–21](#)), and so on.

He showed that man is not like other plants and shoots which are for nourishment, but by his own will he may become gold, or silver, or an apple; he may produce bitterness, or sweetness, or thorns, as our Apostle and Illuminator says in his *Frequently Related Discourses*. Now, some of the *trees of Lebanon* become *silver* and some *purple*, transforming evil into good. It is appropriate for the *palanquin* to be understood as the Church, as well as the apostles and prophets and *vardapets* and virgins and saints adorned with various virtues who are within it. The Apostle expresses this by saying, ‘These are whom God has set in the Church: first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers (*vardapets*)’ ([1 Cor 12:28](#)) [Nyssa 913B–C]. Afterwards he lists more with them, but he does not count them individually, for the really honorable parts of the *palanquin*, that is, the building of the Church, are these three ranks.

Love from the daughters of Jerusalem.

3:11 *Arise, and let us look, daughters of Jerusalem, at King Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, and on the day of his happiness.*

Love from the daughters of Jerusalem: He calls the angels—fellow rejoicers, and fellow lovers, and fellow praisers with him—the *daughters of Jerusalem*. For His sake was Lebanon, “enforested” with sin, transformed into the *palanquin* of Christ, adorned with various virtues: with the *crown* of thorns, which *King Solomon*, that is, Christ, put on his head and blessed the earth, taking on his own head the curse which He had spoken, ‘Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth for you’ ([Gn 3:18](#)). The Holy Illuminator also interprets it thus. Gregory of Nyssa says otherwise, but we cite the latter more frequently than the former.

When it says, *Arise, look, daughters of Jerusalem*, it is the *daughters* of the heavenly *Jerusalem* who are intended, calling them to view their Lord bearing such a *crown*, He who for the Church’s sake undertook great wonders. On the other hand it also refers to the earthly Jerusalem’s daughters, to whom the Lord Himself turned and said, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem,

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weep not for me' ([Lk 23:28](#)).

With which his mother crowned him. He calls Sion *his mother*, because Sion is translated 'mother'. And those who *crowned* the Lord dwelt in her. For that reason, his crowning is said to have been *by his mother*.

On the day of his wedding, and the day of his happiness. Now, do not be surprised that he calls the day of His sufferings *the day of his happiness* and *the day of his marriage*. For the Lord Himself called that day and hour His glory, saying 'The hour has come, that the Son of Man be glorified' ([Jn 12:23](#)). He speaks of what is ours, as His; for that reason he took such a *crown*. On that day we were wedded and rejoiced—we who had existed in sadness for five thousand years because of our loss of Paradise, and who had fallen from the glory which we had possessed together with the garment of light, by the stripping away of which we were dishonored.

CHAPTER FOUR

The groom says

4:1 *Behold my Near One, my beautiful one, your eyes are doves.*

In other words, 'That beauty of yours has now come into being through my strange crowning. By it even you too were beautified, when I made the ugliness of your sin my own, together with my crown of thorns'. Lo, it is this beauty the purification of the font reveals, which became a 'new birth by the Holy Spirit' ([Jn 3:5](#)). By repeating this, he made it clear that they who are created anew have a more beautiful form and preserve it spotless; and it is much greater than the previous form which Adam had in his glory. As the blessed Gregory the Theologian says, it is a divine creation and greater than the previous one. For that creation, although it was illumined and possessed a life without pain, without sadness, and with immortality, yet the temptation interrupted it—'If he keeps the command, then he will remain immortal'.

Now, however, to become even the son of God is a boon to which all people can attain. The divine Solomon, stupefied and amazed, portrayed this under the guise of what seems most desirable to us earthly creatures; he intends to make apparent our free gift of grace by this means. Nonetheless, even he was not adequate to reach ultimate knowledge, though he tries to describe it metaphorically.

But now, tell me, O Christ our Groom, among visible phenomena is there any fit metaphor for that beauty in which we have again been created? It seems to me that, rather, you wish to feed us milk, like children, and not solid food ([1 Cor 3:2](#)), because since we are still corporeal, being in this life, we cannot understand spiritual things.

Open your dove's eyes from your silence.

Lo, he testified to the statement that you are pure, and innocent like a *dove*. But no matter how much you are so, it is sealed off by *silence*, since one cannot express it, because you cannot hear. For your ears are vessels of clay and are not adequate to hear the 'unutterable things' ([2 Cor 12:4](#)).

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Your tresses are like the flocks of goats which appeared from Gilead,

In other words, you are beyond all passion—just as hair is dead—lifeless, without desire, without pride, estranged from the world and dead—as hair has no sensation [Nyssa 921C]. By the same token, the eyes have vision, and do not turn aside to what is evil, and are wholeheartedly for the good.

4:2 Your teeth like the flocks of shorn sheep which go up from washing;

Because that which has been washed and relieved of the burden of its wool is pure and pleasing [Nyssa 925B].

they have all borne twins, and there is none barren.

In other words, ‘the offspring of the desolate are more than those of she who has a husband’ ([Gal 4:27](#)). Now, these *teeth* having ‘chewed’ purity, do not instruct only you, but they also *give birth to* others by admonishing them thoroughly with words of doctrine, and ruminatively instructing them through a close exegesis of Scripture.

4:3 Like a red thread are your lips, and your words are beautiful.

First, the person whose *lips* are painted with blood is to be praised for their redness [Nyssa 928C]. Then, the one whose *lips* speak with the words of the Gospel and all spiritual sayings.

One should not omit to mention the *thread*, for there are many things which are snared by this *thread*. Now, he says that the *words* which arise from reddened *lips* are like a *thread*; they hook men, and draw them up towards God, in a good way.

Like the skin of a pomegranate are your cheeks, except for your silence.

A *pomegranate* has two natures: its appearance is unpleasant, while its unseen parts are appetizing and the occasion of much good health. Now the Bride of Christ; that is, the Church, has veiled her face with a virtuous way of life and an unsophisticated and homely manner [Nyssa 929B–C]. These are external, like *the pomegranate’s skin*. Whereas laid up within her are hope and love and faith towards God. By that hope she endures it all. Just as what is stored up within the pomegranate is much sought after for food, likewise the life of virtue is strenuous and is perfected with great effort, but the fruit of it is all glorious, and glorified. Concerning it the Prophet says, ‘the king’s daughter is all glorious within’ ([Ps 44:14](#)).

Except your silence. How beautiful you are is muted, and is not revealed for now, for as long as you are enwrapped in the weakness of your flesh. As it says, ‘What eye has not seen, neither has ear heard’ ([Is 64:4](#); [1 Cor 2:9](#)).

4:4 Your neck is like the tower of David, which is built in Talpiot;

David built a famous tower; to its elegance he compares the Bride’s neck.

a thousand shields hang from it, and all arrows of weaponry.

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A *thousand* denotes multiplicity. As it says, ‘The chariots of God are tens of thousands and a thousand are their drivers’ ([Ps 67:18](#)) [Nyssa 936A].

The Apostle calls faith a *shield*, saying ‘Take the shield of faith’ ([Eph 6:16](#)), which hangs around the *neck*. Beautified with it, she is *like the tower of David*.

4:5 Your two breasts are like two twin kids, which graze among the lilies.

He mentions *two breasts*, because there are *two* natures in a human being: flesh and spirit [Nyssa 937B–C]. The body also has *two* eyes, and it has spirit and mind. They *graze* selectively, so that, avoiding the thorns, they may feed on *lilies*, that is, on spiritual food.

4:6 Until the day breaks, and the shadows dissipate

Who is *day* and light, if not the Holy Spirit, and even Christ Himself, who chases away the shadows from the mind. As it is said, ‘From you Lord, is the fountain of life and in the light of your countenance do we see light’ ([Ps 35:10](#)). By it the mind too is illuminated, and the heart as well, which lies between the *breasts* [Nyssa 936C–D], whose milk is collected and processed, by agency of the spiritual way of life, to be given as food to others.

Now, the Apostle, too, briefly explains this: the soul is the entire Church, and the graces which are distributed within it are the senses—members in the body, as it were ([1 Cor 12:12–26](#)). Those things this writer has enumerated one by one, calling them the *eye* and the *lip* and the *tooth* and the *cheek* and the *neck* and the *belly*. The *eye* is to be understood as the prophets who foresaw these graces; in other words, Solomon himself, and those like him.

The *neck*, upon which the head stands erect and by which everything alive above and below is joined together with all the senses—which was compared to *the tower of David which he built in Talpiot* for the prefecture of warriors—is the great Apostle Paul and those like him, upon whom Christ “stands”. From them all life is distributed to the Church.

The *belly*, too, applies to our holy Illuminator, and John, and their like. The Lord bears witness to this: ‘From their belly rivers shall pour out living water’ ([Jn 7:38](#)); that is, the grace of the Spirit.

Likewise also the *teeth* with the *reddened lips* bringing up the words of Scripture from the *belly* and ruminating on them break them down into digestible pieces, making the unobvious things obvious, and offer them for people’s understanding, illuminating the lesser members in the Church body.

By this, humanity is made complete, and becomes the Bride of Christ.

I went alone to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense.

The blessed John mentions that this saying resembles what the Prophet says: ‘I have trodden the wine press *alone*, and of the gentiles none was with me’ ([Is 63:3](#)). Now the *mountain of myrrh* signifies the death which He suffered for us, having fought in single combat. *And the hill of frankincense* means that He trod the wine press on the Cross, united with God [Nyssa 944C].

4:7 You are all beautiful, my Near One, and there is no spot in you.

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In other words, ‘It is through My crucifixion and death that you have become so spotless and beautiful, and it is by the blood of Me, the Lamb who took away the sins of the world’ ([Jn 1:29, 36](#)). Too, whoever draws near to Him and partakes in His death, receives His fragrance, here compared to *frankincense* [Nyssa 940B].

4:8 *Come from Lebanon, bride, come from Lebanon, come and pass from the beginning of faith, from the peak of Sanir and Hermon, from the lions' den and from the mountains of leopards.*

That is, coming from the *mountain* enforested with sin to faith, being born *in the beginning* from Jordan—the font. The Jordan arises between these two mountains and spills forth. In it the Bride was washed and became beautiful, she who had dwelt with beasts, with *lions* and *leopards*, mighty and dominant and ‘spotted’ with idolatry, as it seems to me [Nyssa 944D–945A].

4:9 *You have heartened us, our sister bride, you have heartened us with one of your eyes, and with one chain of your neck.*

This the friends of the Groom, who are the angels, say to the beautiful one who is the Bride. *You have heartened us*; that is, ‘You have given us soul and heart to see what we had not known; that is, the provident love which He has displayed towards humanity—birth through the font, adoption, and the kingdom as well—which He accomplished through the death on the Cross [Nyssa 948B]. With His *myrrh* you became a partaker in His death, and with His *frankincense*’s fragrance you will share in His glory. Now, through you, I have recognized Him, and His power, and His love towards humanity’.

Thus, the angels say to their *Sister*, who is the Church: ‘*with your deficient eye*’, (which is referred to as *one*) ‘you, with your *one eye*, have surpassed us who are superior to you in our multitude of eyes and in our *neck*. We are mighty in two natures—that is in *eyes* and *neck*—yet through you do we see, and from you do we hear, being instructed in such unspeakable mystery and salvation’! This is what the Apostle is talking about when he says, ‘Through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God shall be revealed to the principalities and powers which are in heaven’ ([Eph 3:10](#)).

The intent of calling the Church *Sister* is to show our nature’s pure relatedness to the angels. And the *chain of the neck*, shows that we have submitted to the yoke of Christ with eager will [Nyssa 952C].

Thus, he said, ‘At the call of the Groom you have *come from Lebanon*, and put on such grace. However, do not consider that coming to have been sufficient by itself; rather, *come* yet more and keep daily on the path; that is, on the way of virtue’. As the Prophet says, ‘He shall go from strength to strength’ ([Ps 83:8](#)). Gregory the Theologian also attests that one must be ever moving towards virtue, and agile.

Therefore, he again repeats what he said at first, *Come from Lebanon*.

4:10 *How beautiful have your breasts become, my sister my bride; they have become beautiful from wine, and the scent of your garments is better than any incense.*

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Breasts are accustomed to give food to human beings who come to the earth through birth. By the same metaphor of the *breasts*, he presages the purity of the hearts of the saints who sprang up in the Church, for the heart is near the *breasts*.

But since he said earlier that *breasts* give milk, how does he now change it to *wine*, saying that *they are beautiful from wine*? One should thus understand the Apostle Paul's statement, 'Whoever drinks milk is ignorant of the word of righteousness' ([Heb 5:13](#)). Or the other one which says, 'Like children in Christ, I have fed you with milk and not with solid food' ([1 Cor 3:2](#)) [Nyssa 956A]. By this he indicates the feeding of the Church's 'childhood' with the milk which comes from the *breasts*. Now its perfection is fed with wine, for solid food and drink is for the mature ([Heb 5:14](#)). And as wine rejoices those who are replete with food, likewise the words of the Holy Spirit flowing from the hearts of the saints—that is, from their *breasts*—rejoice the hearers and grant them indescribable vitality and joy.

The *scent of the garments*, which wafts like *incense*, is to be understood in the same way: those who hold fast to fragrant virtue and good works are causes of salvation not only for themselves, but also for those who draw near to them [Nyssa 957C]. They assist those who look to them, not only in their lifetime, but all the more after their death, even though much time may elapse.

4:11 Your lips drop honey, my sister my bride, honey and milk are underneath your tongue, and the scent of your clothes is like the fragrance of frankincense.

This requires no lengthy explanation. He calls sweet and appetizing doctrine *honey*, which is fed to humanity by those who are near to Christ and wedded to Him, and the hearts of the hearers are sweetened. As David says, 'Your words are sweeter to my taste than honey' ([Ps 118:103](#)). I forebear saying that for the Prophet what was bitter in the mouth before the eating, became sweet in the swallowing. For at the outset virtue is bitter, and afterwards it is sweet.

Milk and honey are under your tongue: milk is for the young, and *honey* for the mature [Nyssa 960C]. First of all, the *tongue* which gives these sweet foods, is to be understood as the blessed universal teacher John, and the Theologian likewise, and those who like them feed us sweet food.

Again he repeats himself, saying *and the scent of your garments like the fragrance of frankincense*. This is a fragrant sacrifice, which God smells as a sweet savor [Nyssa 957A]—those who offer their will and thoughts and bodies to God as a living sacrifice ([Rom 12:1](#)).

4:12 My sister my bride is an enclosed garden, an enclosed garden and a sealed spring

See, although she is a *garden*, yet she needs to be *enclosed*, and although she is a *spring*, she needs to be *sealed*, so as neither to become food and drink for strange flocks nor to let fall her pearls before swine ([Mt 7:6](#))—nor give them to strangers' ears.

4:13–14 Your emanation is a paradise of pomegranates with the fruits of its trees, a flower with fragrance, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon with all the trees of Lebanon, myrrh and spices with all foremost ointments,

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If I expound on this word by word, you my hearers will find it tedious, but since I have opened the door to those meanings which other *vardapets* explore minutely, I shall summarize them. And I shall conclude with the Apostle's word which says, 'This is the fruit of the spirit; love, joy, peace' ([Gal 5:22](#)); and elsewhere, 'Compassion, mercy, faith, hope, love, meekness, humility, sweetness, brotherly love, unvengefulness, detachment, simplicity of mind and purity of soul, and other like things.' Some of those to be implemented are austere, like *myrrh*, and some are sweet, like *ointment*. Some are delightful like *flowers*. Through these things, the Bride becomes God's *garden*.

Sweet *ointment* compounded of many substances, which was burned in the Mosaic tabernacle, was a veritable type of the myriad virtues that are in the saints, which God smells with greater delight than that erstwhile incense and than the evening and morning sacrifices.

The pomegranate tree, before its *pomegranates* are ripe, brings no enjoyment to those who eat; it is encased with thorns. So also is everyone who becomes God's garden and *paradise* in this life; first he must live with difficulty, with hunger and thirst and striving and exertion, and whatever other sufferings there are for virtue. Thus he constrains himself, and whatever trials come upon him involuntarily, whether caused by companions or by Satan, all of this he patiently and voluntarily bears for love of God. Afterwards, there will be appetizing fruit for God, like the *pomegranate*, which grows among thorns until it is ripe [Nyssa 969Bff]. In this way should one who will become Christ's Bride and His garden, live at first among the thorns, that is among the virtues; later there will be fruit for Christ the Groom.

Moreover, there will also be *flowers*, like *nard* and *saffron*, the one warm and the other sweet; thus, the warm one should ignite us with the love of Christ, and inflame the *fragrance* of virtue and all good works. They say concerning *saffron*, that it is intermediate, neither especially cool nor especially warm, but having instead a moderate power. By such a metaphor he teaches us that it is necessary for the garden of God to produce virtuous fruit, but one should avoid excess and keep to the mean, lest one stumble through lack of moderation [Nyssa 972A]. It is the same in faith: one should accept the Scriptures with firm faith, and not infer more than what is written, nor scrutinize the inscrutable, but consign all impossible, unlikely and unbelievable matters to the power of God, who in all things is able.

By the same token, if someone is in mourning over a sin which he has committed, he should not mourn excessively, lest he fall into despair and say, 'There is no salvation for me', and because of that either not turn from his sin or suffer the suffering of Judas, who hanged himself because there was no possibility of repentance: that was excessive mourning. But why should I recount these things individually? As the symbol of *saffron* instructs us, every manner of life and mode of behavior must remain within bounds, and not turn aside either to the right or to the left.

Calamus and *cinnamon* were cultivated by the Bride in the pomegranate orchard. We know *calamus* to be sweeter than all incense—so much so that it was commanded to mingle it with the incense which was to be burned to God on the altar [Nyssa 972D]. And they say that when *cinnamon* is introduced into a vat of briskly boiling water, it lowers the heat of the boiling water in it. Likewise if it enters into a hot bath, it instantly cools the house. There are other such things, which seem unbelievable to their hearers: they say that when a man is sleeping and

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cinnamon is nearby, whatever anyone asks the sleeper, he will answer; one has only to lay the *cinnamon* on his mouth, and though he is asleep, he will be awake and answer the questions of the inquirers articulately and appropriately. He seems to be asleep, yet he is awake. Thus, this spice teaches us that the man who gives himself to God seems to be human, and yet is not human; for if thoughts of fornication trouble him, or of anger, or greed, or any other corporeal passion, he does not entertain them, but instead in his way of life he is like the angels, who are awake and never sleep, and are without passions and without needs. He is human, and not human, for a human is ‘asleep’, compared to the wisdom of angels [Nyssa 973A–C].

He compared to the Bride the fruit which is from the spiritual garden and *paradise*, as well as *myrrh and spices with all the foremost ointments*. *Myrrh* symbolizes the death of Christ, and His burial [Nyssa 976C], while *spices and the foremost precious ointments*, signify the unity of the godhead with the flesh, through which He suffered death.

He has shown that man was from the forest of sin like *a tree from Lebanon*. Having come from *Lebanon* and having become a fellow sufferer with Christ and partaken in His death, and having put sin to death, he became the fragrant Bride of Christ, united with Him in purity of life. As the Apostle says, ‘We who were once baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into his death; we are buried with him in the baptism of death, so that as Christ rose from the dead with the glory of the Father, so also we might walk in newness of life. For as we were planted in the likeness of His death, so shall we also be partakers in His resurrection’ ([Rom 6:3–5](#)). And he is redolent of divinity [Nyssa 977C]. As the divine Solomon said,

4:15 *a fountain of gardens, a well of living water and flowing from Lebanon.*

Herewith, he augments the Bride’s beauty more than it was at first. Previously, he called the Bride a *garden*; then, a little farther on, *a fountain of gardens*. In other words, ‘Not only did you become a garden, but having irrigated many others, you make them God’s garden and paradise, to bring forth the fruit of righteousness’ ([Heb 12:1](#); [James 3:18](#)).

God Himself has been called a *well*; as He said through the Prophet, ‘They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water’ ([Jer 2:13](#)). Again, the Lord said to the Samaritan woman, ‘If you knew the gifts of God, and who it is that says to you, “Give me to drink”, you would have asked of him, and he would give you living water’ ([Jn 4:10](#)). And again, ‘Whoever believes in me, rivers of living water will flow from his belly’ ([Jn 7:38](#)) [Nyssa 977C].

Now, just as those who share in His death partake in the fragrance of His divinity and are wedded to Him, so also do they who are wedded to Him become *wells of living water*, like Himself, even though they have come from *Lebanon*, that is from the forest of sin—for Lebanon is a forest. John the Evangelist explains this and what follows: ‘This He said concerning the Spirit, which those who believed in Him were to receive’ ([Jn 7:39](#)).

4:16 *Awake north, and come south,*

That is, go *north*, and come *south*. Satan and his works are called *north*. As the same Solomon says, ‘The north wind is fierce’ ([Prv 27:16](#)), for it is far from the warmth of the sun, and for that reason it is frigid. Likewise those who live far from the Sun of Righteousness are filled with satanic thoughts and are frozen in sin [Nyssa 984C]. They are not melted by the warmth of the Gregory of Narek, *The Blessing of Blessings: Gregory of Narek’s Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Roberta R. Ervine, vol. 215, Cistercian Studies Series (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications; Liturgical Press, 2007).

sun; that is, they are not taught by the words of the sacred scriptures, which melt the ice of impenitence and sow contrition with the wind of the Holy Spirit, which is the *south*. He invokes the *south* wind; that is, the grace of the Holy Spirit, to come to the garden and chase away satanic works. For that reason he says, *awake north*—which means, go—and come, *south*; that is, the Holy Spirit and its warm wind, which chases away the winter.

blow upon my garden, and its spices will give forth fragrance.

This is the generous *blowing* of the Holy Spirit on the *garden* of Christ, which has been called the Bride, whence various graces have blossomed among humankind. As the Apostle says, ‘To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith, to another working of miracles, to another discernment of the Spirit, to another prophecies’ ([1 Cor 12:8–10](#)). Why should I list one by one the manifold graces which he has said are in the Church? He concludes, ‘All this one and the same Spirit brings to success, and distributes each grace as He wills’ ([1 Cor 12:11](#)).

This is what *Blow upon my garden, and my spices will give forth fragrance* means. The foremost *spices* were Paul and Peter and their ten companions, and our Holy Illuminator, and John Chrysostom and countless others like them [Nyssa 985A].

CHAPTER FIVE

The bride pleads that her groom may descend

5:1 *Let my Nephew come down into his garden, and let him eat the fruit of his trees.*

Seeing her great virtues, which she had learned by experience from the Groom and the angels, flourishing as in a paradise and in a *garden*, the Bride begs Him to *come down* and *eat*.

This indicates the regard of God towards those who do good. God is without lack, nonetheless He hungers and longs for our salvation. As He Himself said to His disciples, when they were constraining him to eat bread, ‘My food is to accomplish the will of Him who sent me’ ([Jn 4:34](#)), which was our turning to Him and keeping His commandments [Nyssa 985C].

He Himself also said, ‘I was hungry, and you gave Me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink’ ([Mt 25:35](#)). These words teach us humility; not to be proud of our virtuous way of life and to become careless, trusting in our good works, but to plead with broken heart and humble spirit to receive the *fruit* of righteousness. He Himself commanded us to plead and say, ‘Thy kingdom come’ ([Mt 6:10](#); [Lk 11:2](#)). The Groom sees this pleading, He who says through the Prophet, ‘Before you call on me, I will hear you, and while you are speaking, I shall say Behold, I stand ready’ ([Is 65:24](#)). Likewise the Groom, hearing the Bride’s pleading, says, ‘I have heard your prayer, and

I have entered my garden, my sister my bride.

I have gathered my myrrh with my spices,

I have eaten my bread with my honey.

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He calls her *Sister*, and then *Bride*, for whoever does the will of God then verily becomes His *Bride*.

And I have gathered my myrrh with my spices. That is, ‘*The fruit of the death which I died for you I have gathered from you, my garden, and my Bride, fragrant with spices of virtue.* I died, as indicated by the symbol of the *myrrh*, and by virtue of the love of the divinity united with my flesh, I am fragrant.

I have eaten my bread with my honey. Not only have you become food for Me, feeding Me with the *bread* of virtue, but you have been as sweet to Me “as *honey* with the *honeycomb*” ([Ps 19:10](#)), like the blessed teachers the Theologian and John, who speak as if from the mouth of God and say, “Feed Me with virtue.”’

He commanded Peter to feed on this same food, showing him the sheet in which were all living creatures; that is, telling him to present the gentiles to God as food, just like the Jews, without discrimination, and not to consider them unclean [Nyssa 992A].

I have drunk my wine with my milk.

This He said to the sons of Zebedee: ‘Are you able to drink the cup which I shall drink?’ ([Mt 20:22](#); [Mk 10:38](#)); that is, the death which He ‘drank’; also, the *wine* that came through His blood.

In addition, He was given *milk*; that is, human childhood. By this drink, they who have drunk the cup of death became children in innocence, like sucklings. The Lord Himself said, ‘If you do not return and become like children, you cannot enter the kingdom of God’ ([Mt 18:3](#)).

Not to mention what the Lord drank and gave to the Disciples, saying, ‘This is my blood; take, and drink’ ([Mt 26:27](#)), and so on. That is:

Eat, my Near Ones, drink and be drunken, my brethren.

As the other Gospel writer says, ‘If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in your selves’ ([Jn 6:53](#)). Now, by His own drinking, and by then giving it to the Disciples, He showed that the Church and the Bride were to *drink* this very cup and become partakers in His death. Thus, the sacrament which we carry out recalls His death; by placing the awesome sacrifice on the altar before the Father, we hold up before the Father the death which He died for us, and through it we anticipate salvation for ourselves [Nyssa 989B–C].

Now, the blessed John says that He drank of His blood so that He might encourage them to drink, lest they say, ‘How can we drink His blood?’ However, the real explanation is, ‘My true *drink* is death and innocence; that is, *wine* and *milk*. You ought to drink it, and, as I have fed you with my blood, so you ought also to feed Me with your childlikeness and your death to everything that pertains to this life’. As the Apostle puts its, ‘If anyone wants to become wise in this world, he will become a fool, so that he may be wise in that world’ ([1 Cor 3:18](#)). And he shall feed Christ with his *wine* and with his *milk*, in order to take on himself His way of life. As the Apostle says again, ‘Be emulators of me, as I am of Christ’ ([1 Cor 11:1](#)). And in another place, ‘Christ is in you, unless you be unworthy’ ([2 Cor 13:5](#)). Gregory the Theologian also says, ‘I understand Christ to be those who live according to Christ’.

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Now, having said *drink and be drunken*, he adds

5:2 I sleep, and my heart remains awake.

In other words, this drinking is not the drunkenness which brings numbing sleep, like the wine which is from the vine; rather, ‘As I was *awake* in the grave in terms of my divinity, and *asleep* in terms of my flesh’s death, so likewise they who drink this drink, awaken with Me, with the Lord’s own immortality’ This is what it means when it says, ‘He shall live forever’ ([Jn 6:51, 58](#)). Albeit having a human nature they “sleep”, yet bearing the grace of the Spirit within themselves, they are awake.

Now, if it were not thus, how, with this weak flesh, could the apostles have suffered so many torments and the martyrs so much tribulation—as also did the ascetic fathers? Especially our Illuminator—whose spiritual wakefulness ten men, hanging him upside down on a gibbet for seven days and beating him, were not able to numb by means of such bitter tortures. Rather, elevating his mind wakefully towards God in those days he laid before God compassionate intercessions for the salvation of our country. A beating with a single stick is sufficient to bring numbing sleep to our minds, but the blessed one—maintaining his mind undistracted amid those boundless tortures and his tongue constant in requests to God—could not but resemble the *wakeful heart* of Christ and the *sleep* of His flesh; by putting to sleep the natural passions, he was a partaker in Christ’s death with wakeful mind. This is what it means when it says, *drink and be drunken, my brethren*, for ‘having drunk suffering, I slept according to the flesh, while My heart remained awake according to My divinity. Likewise, you are to resemble me by this *drinking* of my death.’

The Bride senses the Groom’s knocking at the door

The voice of my Nephew, he knocks at the door.

Observe well, how wakeful a mind they receive who drink that cup and wine in this slumbrous life, according to the Gospel exhortation, ‘Let your belt be girt about your waist, and your lamps lit, and be like people who expect their Lord, when He may return from a wedding, so that when He comes and knocks, they may open to him at once. Blessed is that servant, whom His Lord shall find awake when He come’ ([Lk 12:36–38](#)) [Nyssa 996C, 997B]. The saints who were wedded to Christ the Groom were like this, standing at watch and hearing the voice of their Nephew Christ, who *knocked at the door*, calling them to enter into the kingdom of heaven. The Groom, who is Christ, says when *He knocks at the door*,

Open to me, my Sister, my Near One, my dove, my perfect one. For my head is filled with dew, and my hair with the fine rain of night.

Briefly, now, this is the interpretation. *Open to me my Sister, my Near One, my dove, my perfect one.* With these words he foretells the illumination of the Bride through baptism: ‘through the birth of the Spirit and the drinking of the mystical blood, you have become *my Sister* and *my Near One*, and you have been justified by the Spirit, taking on the nature of a *dove*, and you have become *perfect*. For you have become God’s child, and whoever is worthy to become God’s child is perfect in everything, for what higher glory is there than this on earth or in Gregory of Narek, *The Blessing of Blessings: Gregory of Narek’s Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Roberta R. Ervine, vol. 215, Cistercian Studies Series (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications; Liturgical Press, 2007).

heaven?'

Nonetheless, if we do not preserve that grace and utilize it and the glory which we have been given, we shall be like our forefather Adam, who, having received illumination and life without need or pain or death, and Paradise as well, lost them again by not keeping them or utilizing them. He teaches us, too, not to become careless about our being perfected through grace, but to be solicitous of it, 'as though we had not received it' ([1 Cor 4:7](#)). For the giving of perfection is His prerogative, and the preserving of it is up to us, as the blessed Teacher says. Concerning this he says, 'Open the door of the road which leads to life, and do not presume that you will rest and sleep and have an easy life by means of your perfection!' As the Apostle says, 'If anyone considers himself to know something, he has not yet understood as it is right to understand' ([Gal 6:3](#)). And again, 'I do not consider myself to have attained. But there is one thing; that, having forgotten what is behind, I press forward—I run carefully after the call of God in Christ Jesus' ([Phil 3:14](#)).

Now, *open to Me your entrance, for my head is filled with dew, and my hair with the fine rain of night.* It is as if He is displaying, at the Second Coming, the wounds which He received for our sake. But there, He displays them in order to rebuke us, who are found ungrateful for His benefits, whereas here He displays them in order to exhort us. He reminds the Bride of the sweat which He suffered for fear of death in that night—as it says in the Gospel, 'sweat flowed from Him in great drops' ([Lk 22:44](#)). He says, It is through My sweat that you have put on that innocence of a dove and that perfection, and have become my Sister and Bride; by My sweat on that night, I removed the sweat of the curse ([Gn 3:19](#)), and being wounded with you I endured with sweat. Now, preserve that which you have received; that is, the innocence of a dove and that perfection, and do not lose it again, for there will be no second Cross, and no second death for your sake.

The bride says this

5:3 *I have taken off my robe; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I dirty them?*

That is, *having taken off the robe* of punishment for my transgressions through those great favors of yours, and your sweat for my sake, *how shall I put it on* again? [Nyssa 1004D]. Perish the thought! And how could I, who have been dressed in light and been given the authority to direct myself toward heaven and to join the ranks of the angels, *dirty the feet* which You have *washed* through baptism like the feet of the blessed apostles [Nyssa 1008B], and bound up from the poison of the biting serpent, by walking in the ways of sin—fornication or murder or fraud or the like?!

5:4 *My Nephew put his hand through the hole, and my belly was moved for him.*

Look here: even though someone may be enlightened through the Spirit like Paul or Peter, and attempt to become a seer of the mystery of Christ, he will still, instead of the whole person, see only the *hand*, and that through a narrow and small place, as *through a hole*. Thus the Apostle says, 'Now we see as in a mirror, in likeness, but then face to face. Now I understand a little of

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much, but then I shall know even as He knew me' ([1 Cor 13:12](#)) [Nyssa 1012A]. He is saying, 'Whatever grace the Groom has given me, and whatever He has promised to give, and whatever He has borne for me, and whatever grace has come to us through His death, and whatever other such immeasurable and unspeakable gifts He has here shown to the saints, compared to what He will show us and give us knowledge of in the life to come, these are like a person seeing only the *hand through a hole*, or like a drop of water compared to the water of the sea, or like a lamp compared to the sun, or like a babe in its mother's womb compared to an old man'.

Note, too, that even at this fleeting, tiny glimpse her *belly was moved*; as it said, *my belly was moved for him*. In the same way Paul, too, was dazzled by a small glimpse, and it blinded his eyes. The same was true of John the Apostle in his vision, and true of Ezekiel as well—and his was merely a vision of angels! As Daniel, too, said, 'Lord, my belly was moved within me at your appearing', and so on ([Dn 10:16; 2 Cor 12:4](#)) [Nyssa 1012B]. Just as feeble eyes cannot behold the sun, by the same token human nature cannot behold the divine things nor comprehend them, so long as one is in this life. For which reason, it was by taking Paul out of the body and leading him to the third heaven that He there showed him things which cannot be spoken of. And when he returned to earth, he could not relate with his corporeal mind and lips the ineffable things which he had seen and heard. Instead he said 'I heard unutterable things, which it is not right for a man to speak' ([2 Cor 12:4](#)); that is to say, the corporeal tongue cannot render the mystery of the incorporeal.

Finally, if anyone should say that *the hand* of the Nephew which was put *through the hole*, is the Son, because He is called the Father's 'right hand', and that *the hole* is to be construed as the flesh which He joined with His divinity, this is not far removed from the true meaning. For as the days of the Temple were a small *hole*, so also was our nature united with the divinity *a hole*. Nonetheless, I prefer the prior explanation; consonant with Scripture, especially with the prophets, it can be extended to many applications.

5:5 I arose to open for my Nephew. My hands dripped myrrh, and my myrrh-covered fingers were upon the handles of the lock.

When I saw *the hand* stretched out through the *hole*—that is, certain mysteries revealed by God through a narrow aperture—the eyes of my spirit were opened. I saw as much as it is possible for corporeal eyes to see, and my spirit awakened from the stupor of sin. I rose up from the enchantment of earthly passions, laying aside those lusts, and I made myself die to sin, dead with the One who died, the Immortal One who died for me. Dying, as the Apostle says, with Him by baptism into death, whereby also we have also risen with Him by the operation of faith in God', and so on ([Col 2:12](#)).

Now it is clear that first it is needful to die, and to 'put to death the members of the flesh' ([Col 3:5](#)), as the same Apostle affirms, and then there will be an entering of God and the divine mysteries into a person. This is what he means by saying, *I opened for my Nephew* [Nyssa 1016C].

My hands dripped myrrh, likewise also my fingers were upon the handles of the lock. The *myrrh* foretells death, and the *hands* are agents of work. Now, the hand of the Nephew Christ

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reaches for the hand of the Bride—that is, of the faithful—and their *hands*, the *hands* of the Bride, equally draw near to the hand of the Groom through being cleansed of sin and by dying with Him. This is as the Lord Himself succinctly said, ‘If anyone comes to me, and does not hate his entire family, and even his own soul, he cannot be my disciple’ ([Lk 14:26](#)). Again, ‘strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leads to life’ ([Mt 7:14](#)) [Nyssa 1024C–D].

Now, obviously, that road is followed with difficulty and by dying; yet for the person in whom the love of the Groom finds place, the difficult seems easy through hope in Him. Rejoicing over this the great Apostle Paul encourages us saying, The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, which is to be manifested in us’ ([Rom 8:18](#)).

You observe this at present: many kings and queens have led their lives as they pleased, but on their last day they went to their death and left the world repenting, and in advance of the day of judgment they are tormented by conscience at their evils and by fear of the Judge. By the same token, however, many kings and rich men have despised this world, and at the final day of their summoning, they have departed the world joyfully, going with the hope of what lay before them, rejoicing with unspeakable joy at the bargain they had made; for they had exchanged earth for heaven, and before the day of recompense it was as if they had already here received their reward, and were in a state of rejoicing as well. They bless God ceaselessly, who allowed them to recognize the futility of this vain life, and to seek out life eternal.

Now, it is Christ who is called the *Groom* and *Nephew*, as I have often said. He is called the *Groom*, because He loved humanity as a groom loves his bride. The Apostle affirms this, saying, ‘I shall betrothe you to one husband, to set you before Christ as a chaste virgin’ ([2 Cor 11:2](#)). And this same Christ is called the *Nephew*, because both Jews and gentiles are descended from Adam; for this reason they are called brethren. Since Christ is from among the Jews, the Church also—that is, the newly believing gentile peoples of Christ—calls Christ *Nephew*. And the gentiles are called *Bride* and *Sister* and *garden*. A bride ought to preserve her purity and love for her groom, the one man to whom she is betrothed, and if she preserves it not, and loves another, she has defiled the bed of her groom, and has become estranged from him. So also the faithful who have been joined to Christ through baptism and have become partakers in His flesh and blood, but thereafter separate themselves from Him through love of this world and partake of various delusory desires—fornication, murder, pride, greed, vainglory, hatred, jealousy, and such like evil things—have dissolved the love of Christ their Groom and the vow which they made to one another, and have been wedded to Satan, the teacher of evil. They will rightfully receive unfailing torment. If, however, they return to Him, the Lord is a lover of humanity even under those circumstances, for He is merciful, and He does not desire the death of the sinner ([Ez 18:32](#)). For that very reason He even took on flesh and died a despised death. In like manner should the *Sister* have pity, and the *garden* bring forth fruit for its Cultivator, and not become food for strangers.

But let us grasp the words, in order:

5:6 *opened to my Nephew; my Nephew had gone, and my soul went out with his word.*

See how, as she *opened*, He *had gone*. This means that once I had lifted the eyes of my mind to the meaning of Scripture, to behold the inexaminable depths of the knowledge of His grace,

Gregory of Narek, *The Blessing of Blessings: Gregory of Narek's Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Roberta R. Ervine, vol. 215, Cistercian Studies Series (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications; Liturgical Press, 2007).

once I had opened my heart to embrace that fleeting glimpse, and to examine and become informed of and comprehend the depths of His knowledge, what eluded my weak mind's grasp so awed me that for desire of it I would have forgotten that knowledge which I had received when *I opened*.

For that reason she says, *my Nephew had gone*; it is as if no sooner was He seen than He at once withdrew, swift as the lightning. *And my soul went out with his word*; that is, 'having obtained a small glimmering of his words my soul left me and pursued His words'. To put it another way, I recognized him, and I was united to his love, and I was ebullient with His commandments. And thinking that I had attained something, I recognized myself to be all the more distant from attainment; seeing the true Sun, I recognized by His light how distant I am from knowledge.

I brought to mind that which this same divine Solomon said in another place: 'Whoever increases knowledge, increases pain' ([Qo 1:18](#)). By saying this, he does not discourage one from gaining knowledge of Holy Writ, lest one's pain increase; rather, he exhorts one to grow yet more in knowledge, and by that amount of knowledge to understand that the knowledge of what eludes one is knowledge unfathomable. For as a drunkard but thirsts the more, no matter how much he drinks, so also is the person who yearns after the meaning of the divinely inspired Scriptures: no matter how much he learns, he desires to learn yet more, knowing that he will never uncover the full understanding of the sacred Scriptures. Once his desire for its meaning has been kindled, it becomes a kind of hurt in his spirit, for by means of a little understanding he recognizes the boundlessness of what eludes him, and the desire for that knowledge infects him like a pain, albeit that pain and solicitude increase his healing discoveries [Nyssa 1028A–B].

I sought him, and I found him not; I called him, and he did not answer me.

This attests to what I have said, that in comparison with what eluded her, it seemed as though '*I have not seen, nor have I so much as heard the voice of the One whom I glimpsed and to whom I opened*'.

5:7 The watchmen who were going about the city found me; they struck and wounded me, the guardians of the ramparts took from me my garments.

Now, the *guardians of the ramparts* are to be understood as the ministering spirits, the angels. The Apostle Paul declares, 'Are they not all spirits under obligation, who are sent for the service of those who are to inherit salvation?' ([Heb 1:14](#)). And the psalm-singer Moses says, 'He set the boundaries of the heathen according to the number of the angels of God' ([Dt 32:8](#)). So the angels are guardians of unbelieving mortals, according to their provinces and cities; while for the faithful, every soul has its own angel. This is all the more true for the saints; as the Prophet says, 'Armies of the Lord's angels are around those who fear Him, and they preserve them' ([Ps 33:7](#)).

Now, if the angels are guardians, to *strike and wound* and *rob* is an activity, not of theirs, but of thieving spirits. So it is obvious that *they struck and wounded me* and *took my garments* means, 'I could not attain to and search out the mysteries of God; nonetheless I had hope that in my quest I might at least learn from *the guardians of the ramparts*, from the saints or from Gregory of Narek, *The Blessing of Blessings: Gregory of Narek's Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Roberta R. Ervine, vol. 215, Cistercian Studies Series (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications; Liturgical Press, 2007).

the angels. Concerning themselves, they attested that they suffer the same disabilities. Then I despaired when I heard that they experienced the very same failure of wisdom, and it was as difficult for me as if they had *wounded me*, and *taken my garments*, for the *garment* of my expectation was stripped from me. Nonetheless, although they had dashed my hopes in this precious quest, I yet persisted in my search because of the great longing and desire and thirst of my soul, and the love which joined me to the Nephew. Not accepting the prospect they offered, I laid them under oath and said,

5:8 I charge you, daughters of Jerusalem by the powers and the forces of the field, that you find my Nephew, tell him that I am overwhelmed by your love'.

See how incomprehensible and insupportable is the Church's love for God! The ranks of confessors bear witness to this, those who for the sake of Christ undertook such sufferings as are beyond the capacity of flesh to sustain. While Christ, seeing the warm zeal of such love on their part, caused them to go on living amid the pain of their sufferings, according to their desire—as is also the case for sinners in eternal torment.

He did this for three reasons. First, because the saints would have liked, had it been possible, to have died for love of Him not once, but ten thousand times; nay, daily, as they said in so many words. Thus Saint Gregory said to Trdat, 'I have requested Him to make me endure it' Likewise, in his prayers he begged God to make him endure it. Now, since the desire of the just is acceptable to Him, He grants them endurance.

Second, so that He may make the heathen understand the saints' passionate love for Him, and create among the former a zealous desire to burn with that kind of love. Thus Hadrian, witnessing the bitter plight of the saints, adjured them saying, 'Tell me truly, what reward do you expect, that you bear such torments? It must be extremely great!' Because of that, he too believed in Christ, and was martyred with them.

Third, so that the saints, surviving such dangers, may know that life is from God, and that He is Lord of life and of death.

I have charged you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the powers and forces of the field. This I have once demonstrated—that she calls this world a *field* [Nyssa 1041C], and *adjures* them by that whence the world's *force and power* comes—whereby it is established, and by which it is preserved in unshakeability; that is, by Christ.

If they *find the Nephew, tell him that* the Bride is *overwhelmed by His love*. Now, to the soul which possesses it, the questing for love is blissful. As Paul himself boasts, 'Neither angels nor principalities ...' and so forth, 'is able to separate us from the love of Christ' ([Rom 8:38-39](#)). Behold, this is love! which has praise in heaven and on earth, now and in the day of Christ—not the distorted love either of goods or of authority or of beauty or of other such things, which in this world brings disrepute and in the world to come, eternal torment.

The daughters of Jerusalem and the guardians of the ramparts ask the Bride

Having taken an oath, they ask the Bride about the form which He took from us, for they have not seen Him. As I wrote earlier, they have come to experience it through us—and they are still learning.

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5:9 *What is your Nephew more than other Nephews, o beautiful among women? What is your Nephew, that you do thus charge us?*

The Bride describes the Nephew:

My Nephew is white and red, one among ten thousand.

By this she denotes the body and blood of our humanity, which He took from the Holy Virgin; *white and red* because He took on mortal existence from the Virgin, with flesh and blood. Nonetheless, the Virgin did not conceive by means of a man's seed, nor is this a corrupted generation. Rather, it was a conception by means of the Holy Spirit, and a birth from the Virgin who remained the same Virgin after that birth. He came through 'locked doors' ([Jn 20:19](#)) in a way not comparable with other births. Thus, she says *one among ten thousand*, for there were no pangs at His birth, and neither pain nor sadness. Rather, as the angel had announced joy and rejoicing to the Virgin, His birth was correspondingly replete with happiness [Nyssa 1052C–1053C].

5:11 *His head is of finest gold.*

As that *finest gold* is purer and more valuable than other gold, so also is our *Head*, Christ, purer than all the pure things which are in heaven or on earth. As the Prophet said, 'He committed no sin, and there was found no guile in his mouth' ([Is 53:9](#)). The Lord Himself said, 'Which of you will rebuke me for sin?' ([Jn 8:46](#)). He became moreover the purifier of all sin, Who was 'tempted in all ways like as we, yet without sin' ([Heb 4:15](#)), as the Apostle says [Nyssa 1056A–B].

His locks are curly, black as the raven.

In a scriptural context, these are not ordinarily to be praised, but are ignoble. Nonetheless, stooping to our level, she describes His goodliness, for deep black hair is extremely beautiful for youths. He is also 'fairer to look upon than all the children of men' ([Ps 44:3](#)), as Solomon's father said presciently.

Now, do not be surprised that the Bride describes the beauty of the Nephew under the guise of gold and jewels and other earthly delights. For the Apostle says, 'The invisible things of Him from the beginning of the world, are understood to be seen through the creatures' ([Rom 1:20](#)) [Nyssa 1049B].

5:12 *His eyes are like doves upon abundance of waters, washed with milk, resting upon the abundance of the waters.*

In other words, He is innocent. The Lord praised the *dove* for being thus ([Mt 10:16](#)). That is how His eyes are: He does not possess an array of maleficent, perverse, deceptive glances like those of human beings, but straight, true and piercing ones [Nyssa 1057D]. They see what is carried within a person, and are not erring, deceived by appearances, as the Evangelist John said ([Jn 7:24](#)). Rather, they see even before creation; the Prophet Jeremiah said, 'Before you were created, I know you' ([Jer 1:5](#)).

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Washed with milk, for the appearance of milk is not like that of water or other things in nature, which show in themselves that which they are not. Instead, it displays only its own nature, and it cannot show anything else in itself like other liquids do [Nyssa 1060B].

But what does it mean, *resting upon the abundance of waters*? Water reflects and mirrors the sun; in the same way, He appears in those who refine and purify themselves from the grime of sin, and to those observing, He seems to be *resting upon* them. ‘And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, bringing forth fruit that does not wither ([Ps 1:4](#)) [Nyssa 1061 A], and bearing fruit endlessly.

5:13 *His jaws, like dishes of incense, emit a fragrance of processed ointments.*

This indicates the meticulous, deeply ruminated words of the teaching of *vardapets*. They are guides of the Church, who by the continual, unwearied motion of their *jaws* sweeten the minds and thoughts of humanity with sweet, *processed ointments* [Nyssa 1065B]. The things collected in pure hearts, as in a *dish*, they spread out before people, neither obscuring the incomprehensible things in great profundity, nor making the mysteries of God too plainly obvious. Instead, they dispense the knowledge of Scripture at an intermediate level of instruction, so that it may neither be despised as something negligible, by being too easily acquired, nor cause despair among those who desire to learn, by its unintelligibility. Rather, with a modest effort, they are able to garner the words of Scripture into their hearts’ store. As animals which graze and ruminate regurgitate their food, so also do *vardapets* bring up again the words of the Holy Spirit gathered in their hearts. Regurgitating and ruminating on them, chewing them fine by the unwearying motion of their *jaws*, they dispense from their mouth the enlightenment of the sacred Scriptures, like *processed ointment*, into the minds of humanity.

His lips are lilies; they pour out myrrh in abundance.

Now see this praise repeated: as the *jaws* become *dishes*, proffering the delectable, unalloyed chalice to the spirits of the hearers of the Word, by the same token the lips become *lilies*. They *pour our myrrh in abundance*, for they advise us to die to the flesh and to put to death the members of the body ([Col 3:5](#)), not by any partial mortification, but fully; that is, by a complete death—mortifying the thoughts of the mind, so as not to think on things earthly but on things heavenly; mortifying the belly by restricting its intake of foods; mortifying the eyes by gazing not with lascivious appetite, but on legitimate beauty and on the face of the longed-for Groom, Christ, to whom we have been verily wedded [Nyssa 1065D].

Following this same line of thinking, you will understand that all the members, and all the senses, by whose mortification we shall receive true life, are admonished by the *lilified lips* of the saints.

5:14 *His hands are turned gold, filled with gems of Tarsus.*

See how she articulates the praise of each individual member one by one. As *turned* vessels are altogether refined and pure of anything vulgar or ugly, so are the Nephew’s *hands*, like *gold*, pure of sin. [Nyssa 1069A–B]

Not only does it lay hold of its work, like a human hand, but it is *filled with gems of Tarsus*. Gregory of Narek, *The Blessing of Blessings: Gregory of Narek’s Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Roberta R. Ervine, vol. 215, Cistercian Studies Series (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications; Liturgical Press, 2007).

As Ezekiel put it, Their wings are filled with eyes' ([Ezek 10:12](#)). Now, if all the members of the angels, God's servants, are eyes, and they are filled with vision, how much more is this true of Christ, God's Incarnate Word, who, although He took on our nature from the Virgin, yet every member, united with His divine nature, was an eye, and had vision. Our Illuminator Gregory says, 'God is utterly Ear; He is utterly Eye; He is utterly Word'. He is not like us, whose individual members have individual functions—the eye cannot hear, nor the ear see, nor the mouth walk, nor the foot speak, nor can they perform any other member's function.

Although He joined with our nature in the flesh, yet together with it He maintains the whole of His divinity's omnipotence and all-seeingness.

His belly is like a tablet of ivory set with jewels, with jewels of sapphire.

She shows that the divine *belly* is not like ours, a mere receptacle for food and drink, but although He was fed by our food, yet was his *a tablet of ivory set with jewels, with jewels of sapphire*, that is, à vessel of divine teaching and scripture. Thus, whoever believes in Him receives a divine *belly*, and 'rivers of living water shall flow from his belly' ([Jn 7:38](#)). Then, however much that divine *belly* may be subject to the passions of the flesh, it remains a receptacle, as it were, *a tablet*, for His divine wisdom, which is incorruptible, as they say that *ivory* is [Nyssa 1073A–1076B].

5:15 *His legs are pillars of marble set upon golden bases.*

See how accurately the divine Solomon describes the incarnation of Christ! In the Bride's words, he signifies the perfect humanity of the Nephew, completely mingled with His divinity. Let the vile Nestorius be ashamed, that undoer of the churches, participant with the Jews and sharer in the ideology of the Muslims! Desiring to substantiate the divine incarnation, indistinguishable and united, Solomon symbolically expresses the commingled divinity, member by member and sense by sense. Beginning from the head he goes on through all the members, thereby leaving the vile Nestorius at a loss for words. What else could the *pillars of marble with golden bases* be, but the incorruptible, pure, impassible power of the godhead, united with the flesh!

His stature is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars.

What does this signify? Having declared the divine in flesh as one Person, how can He be compared to the multitude of the *cedars of Lebanon*—cedars whose multiplicity is proverbial: 'The just shall flourish like palm trees, they will be as many as the cedars of Lebanon' ([Ps 91:13](#)). He is obviously announcing to both the rational and the insensate [alike] that although He was confined in flesh by virtue of that union, yet His power and stature is taller than the *cedars of Lebanon*, and more plenteous. He is not saying that His power and stature is only that great, but because He took upon Him what is ours, one should use metaphors taken from what pertains to us. By the same token, the Prophet says, 'He shall sit on the throne of David, and His kingdom shall succeed' ([Is 9:7](#)). As Gabriel also said to the Virgin, 'The Lord God shall give to Him the throne of His father David, and He shall rule over the house of Jacob forever' ([Lk 1:32–33](#)). In condescension to us, He who was King of every land deigned to be called king Gregory of Narek, *The Blessing of Blessings: Gregory of Narek's Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Roberta R. Ervine, vol. 215, Cistercian Studies Series (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications; Liturgical Press, 2007).

merely of Jacob's house.

5:16 *His throat is full of sweetness,*

By *sweetness*, she signifies the divine *throat*'s utterance, full of *sweetness*; raising His voice He called out therewith, 'Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' ([Mt 11:28](#)), and again, 'I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners' ([Mt 9:13](#); [Mk 2:17](#); [Lk 5:32](#)). There are other such *sweet* calls to sinners and the wicked: as He said to the fornicating woman, 'Your sins are forgiven you' ([Lk 7:48](#)), and to the other fornicatress, 'Nor do I condemn you; go, after this sin no more' ([Jn 8:10–11](#)).

and he is altogether desirable.

Behold, she says *altogether desirable*; that is, He is above every desire—in Him every desire ceases, for there is found no further desire to desire. In line with this, the Lord said, 'Many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it' ([Mt 13:17](#)). Elsewhere, the Lord said to the disciples, The day will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you shall not be able to see it' ([Lk 17:22](#)). The tax collector Zaccheus desired to see Him and, having spiritually seen God concealed in flesh, he stripped off his status, and his possessions, recognizing that he desired only the Lord. The apostles, having seen the *altogether desirable* One aright, left everything—wife and children, father and mother and goods, and so on—and followed Him ([Mt 19:2–7, 28](#)), for they recognized with certainty that among all the things we desire to see, only He is true. Even Herod 'had for a long time desired to see' the Lord ([Lk 23:8](#)), but the eyes of his spirit, blinded by sin, darkened the sight of his corporeal eyes, which induced him to denigrate the very thing he had desired. This happens now, too, among those who are unworthy to see the wonders of His deeds; they do not see aright, for their guiding mind has been blinded.

That is my Nephew, and that is my Near One, O daughters of Jerusalem.

Insofar as she was able, she showed Him to the *daughters of Jerusalem*, He who is beyond words and metaphors, seeing His beauty to be greater than any of the children of humankind.

The daughters of Jerusalem ask where her Nephew has gone

5:17 *Where has your Nephew gone, O beautiful among women? Where has your Nephew gone? We too will seek him with you.*

Here he calls the angels, dwellers in the heavenly Jerusalem, *daughters of Jerusalem*. Now observe well, that the One who is invisible to them they desire to see in the flesh. He was seen by us in the flesh, having been among us. Through us they came to learn of His descent from heaven and His incarnation, and they still continue to learn. As the Apostle affirms, 'so now it will be revealed to the powers which are in heaven, through the Church' ([Eph 3:10](#)); hearing from us of His salvific incarnation, they will become knowledgeable of it, and being astounded with a boundless wonder at the measureless love which He has towards us, and at His incomprehensible humility, uniting their voices with ours they will bless Him and join in our Gregory of Narek, *The Blessing of Blessings: Gregory of Narek's Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Roberta R. Ervine, vol. 215, Cistercian Studies Series (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications; Liturgical Press, 2007).

celebration, as the *vardapets* explain.

Moreover, they call the Bride *beautiful among women* because of the *beautiful* way of life which the Church has received through the coming of Christ, of which we hold up the Bride as an example. Similarly, it says *women*, because bridehood is properly for women.

CHAPTER SIX

6:1 *My Nephew has gone down into his garden.*

The faithful who have been wedded to Christ she calls a *garden*. In another place the father of this same Solomon calls them a *vineyard* ([Ps 79:9, 16](#)), and Isaiah does likewise ([Is 5:3–7](#)), while the Nephew Himself, Christ, says in the Gospel, ‘I am the Vine, and you are the branches’ ([Jn 15:5](#)).

*My Nephew has gone down to his garden, among the fields
of incense, to shepherd his flock in the meadow and to gather among the lilies.*

What is called a *garden* is also called a *meadow*; the *Nephew* also calls Himself a *Shepherd*, saying ‘I am the good shepherd’ ([Jn 10:11](#)). He came to *shepherd* and to pasture the sheep, that they might no longer be shepherded by avaricious shepherds. As He says through Ezekiel the Prophet, ‘They have eaten the good pasture first themselves, and drunk the clear water first themselves, and they have left the trampled, leftover food and the water muddied by hooves, for the flock’ ([Ezek 34:17–19](#)), and, ‘They slaughtered the fat ones among them, and did not care for the wounded’ ([Ezek 34:3–4](#)), as well as other like statements in which He protests, through the prophets, against the wickedness of the shepherds.

Through the same Prophet, He declares that He Himself is become a *shepherd* ([Ezek 34:11–16](#)) who skillfully pastures and tends the sheep and does not allow a thief to take them. Feeding us with virtue and justice, *He gathers from us lilies*; that is, the ‘flowers’ of faith in the Word, and sanctity [Nyssa 1093A–B]. In these, Christ the Groom rejoices.

6:2 *I am my Nephew's and he is mine, who shepherds among the lilies.*

With these words the Bride expresses the warm love which she has towards her Nephew, and she does not desire to be parted from his pastoring and go after a flock to a strange pasture; as the Nephew Himself, Christ, said, ‘My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me’ ([Jn 10:27](#)); They will not follow a stranger, but rather flee from him’ ([Jn 10:5](#)). For the flock, having received visionary eyes, follow the shepherd Who feeds them *lilies*. He first gives as food His body and blood, and afterwards ineffable benefits: here in this world the savor of the understanding of Scripture, which is sweeter to the taste of the saints than honey to the mouth ([Ps 118:103](#)), and yonder, in the next world, that which is beyond understanding. As the Theologian describes it, ‘His teaching, and our learning’. This He spoke of as ‘to drink it new with you in the kingdom of the Father’ ([Mt 26:29](#)).

The groom says to the bride

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6:3 *You are beautiful like fragrance, my Near One, you are beautiful as Jerusalem, recounted as a wonder.*

6:4 *Turn your eyes from me, for they have roused me,*

Here you see the uncontained praise of the Bride by the Groom. The Bride has recognized the Groom, and has described with praise each of the incarnate Word's senses. With inexpressible wonder she has depicted, insofar as was possible, the object of her desire by means of our own visible and corruptible images. She has acquainted them, to the extent that they desired to learn, with His beauty, which is beyond our nature and beyond visible and corruptible things, as well as with the warmth of her insatiable love towards Him. Seeing this, with His divine mouth Christ the Groom blesses the faith of the Bride, and the beauty into which, in her every member and sense, she has been transformed through the font. For it came about exactly as the Theologian said: 'Gazing upon God, to become God'. This shows that those who look to God and draw near to Him, acquire God's beauty, just as a wick, by approaching the lamp, is transformed into its very light.

Now, as the Bride has denoted the beauty of her Groom and Nephew, the Groom indicates that the Bride has become, or taken on, the same semblance. He says, *You are beautiful, my Near One, like fragrance*. You see, the Bride, by being *Near* to the Groom, Christ, has by virtue of that become *beautiful like fragrance*. For just as whoever draws near to a fragrant thing also smells sweet, so likewise whoever draws near to God, is theified.

You are beautiful as Jerusalem; for she has become the abode of the beautiful Groom, like the heavens and the heavenly *Jerusalem*.

Recounted as a wonder: that is, you have been *recounted* as a marvel, so that the very angels will be amazed, seeing your transformation from the sinful blackness which you had before you approached Me, into the marvelous beauty of purity whereat they *wonder*. The Lord Himself marveled thus at the faith of the centurion and said, 'I have never found such faith, no not in Israel' ([Mt 8:10/Lk 7:9](#)).

Turn your eyes from me, for they have roused me. 'This signifies the clarity and accuracy of *your eyes*' gaze at Me, whereby you comprehended the beauty of My incarnation; that I came into being through a weak and earthly nature. This was not comprehended by the angels but you comprehended it and saw Me with sight that exceeded nature. Those eyes *roused me*. *Turn your eyes from me* to search out the beauty of My unattainable nature, lest by seeing too much and by lingering in your examination, the eyes of your mind be dazzled and blinded as were the bodily eyes of Paul by looking at the fierce light.' For just as peering at the sun renders the eyes of the viewer defective, so also does excessive attachment to the depths of the knowledge of God cause bedazzlement to the mind's eyes. For the extent of God's Being in insight and power and wonderworking no one can attain to; it is unattainable even to the angels, let alone to humanity.

Now Christ the Groom says, *turn your eyes from me, for they have roused me* with fear and wonder. With wonder, by virtue of their sharp vision, and with fear, lest you be blinded by too much looking. Moses, too, turned his face when he had seen a little, and did not dare to look. Elijah likewise covered his face with his leather cloak when he saw only the back; as it were, a mere echo of the Voice.

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*your tresses like shorn flocks which have appeared from Gilead;
6:5 your teeth like shorn flocks which come up from the washing.*

Her tresses approach the Groom's tresses, blackened for our sake when He took ours upon Him, and 'He who knew no sin became sin for us, that we through Him might become righteousness' ([2 Cor 5:21](#)). We were justified, whitened through baptism and *the washing* of the font, flocking *from Gilead* with a multitude of believers wedded to Christ. By the same token, *teeth chewing on the Word of life* are *like shorn flocks which come up from the washing* of the spiritual water, which washes us cleaner than clean sheep.

All of them bear twins, and there are no barren ones among them.

This washing of the faithful flocks Isaiah attested to earlier; 'Rejoice, O barren one, who have not given birth; call out and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor; for the sons of the barren woman are more than those of the married woman' ([Is 54:1](#)). Hereby, he predicts the fruitfulness, in upright living, of the multitude of believing gentiles. Just so, at one point, the same Prophet Isaiah, crying out from the Lord's mouth asks in wonder, 'Who are these, who come flying like the clouds, and who come to me like a flock of doves with their chicks?' ([Is 60:8](#)).

Your lips are like a red thread, and your words are beautiful.

6:6 Your cheeks are like the rind of a pomegranate, from your silence.

He repeats again what He said previously in praise of the Bride drawing near to the Groom: her eyes draw near to the divine eyes, her hair to His luminous hair, her head to Christ the Head, her *lips* to the Lips which poured forth life. Thus her *lips* were *reddened* with the blood of Christ [Nyssa 1105D], and they speak as He taught her to speak: to pray for her enemies, and to bless those who persecute her ([Mt 5:44](#)), and the like.

And as the *pomegranate* by the ruddiness of its *rind* silently causes one to anticipate the sweet nourishment stored up within for the health of the sick and for those who desire it, so also do God's chosen ones, by giving a small, visible manifestation of good works, silently tell of the boundless store of virtue and piety within their heart and mind; for whatever a person seeks out with wisdom is apparent on his face [Nyssa 1108A-B]. This is what *from your silence* means. However beautiful you are, however filled and adorned with various senses, you remain *silent*, and it cannot be told until the day when all deep things will come to the surface, and all invisible things will be seen, and the silent things be heard, because the Groom Himself will display them at the awesome Judgment of angels and men.

Now, by enumerating these few things, he implies the multitude of saints who, in this era of six thousand years, have been refined and purified from sin though trials and various tribulations which they have endured at the hands of Satan and of Satanic humans, and have become *queens and concubines and princesses* of the Groom Christ.

Commensurate with their individual efforts and exertions they have been designated as—and have become—*queens and concubines and princesses* As he actually specifies,

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6:7 Sixty queens and eighty concubines and princesses without number;

By this, he expresses the multitude of those who in the eighth millennium will be glorified with Christ, and rejoice at rest with Him. Inasmuch as they labored with Him during their time, in the six millennia, they are also to rejoice with Him, as our Holy Illuminator says.

The number *sixty* can have two applications, because sixty can be divided into six tens or five twelves. Here, it is five twelves: these indicate those who by their five senses were chosen from among the twelve tribes of Israel during this six thousand year time span. Because of their status as firstborn, these are called *queens*, for they were pleasing to God before the gentiles were. As it says in the Revelation of the Evangelist John, counting every tribe individually, there were twelve thousand from each tribe ([Rv 7:4–8](#)).

The *eighty concubines* and the *princesses without number* are those who were pleasing to God from among the gentiles. By using this number, he is not setting a numerical limit on the saints, but rather he expresses this—whether in units or in tens—to show that through Christ's coming the justified ones among the gentiles have become more numberless than the Jews.

And secondly, by means of the *sixty* he alludes to the six thousand year age, and to those who during it—by dint of much sweat and labor—have been tried like silver in the crucible ([Zec 13:9](#)) and, as I said previously, have received the title of *queenship* because they have become more dear to God. Even here in this world they were glorified by human beings, and there in the world to come, they are to be yet more glorified. Such were the Holy Mother of God, and John the Baptist, and the Protomartyr, and the apostles, and our Illuminator Gregory, and the universal teacher John, and that proponent of the Trinity, the Theologian.

The *eighty concubines* are junior to the above in productivity but greater than the princesses. Those *eighty concubines* will be crowned in the eighth millennium. And those who by their various modes of life and their penitence have found reconciliation and will attain the kingdom in the eighth millennium, are called *princesses*. They have no number, for those who are saved through repentance are innumerable. Thus he calls the martyrs *concubines*, and the hermits and penitents, those poor in the flesh, he calls *princesses*, together with those who at the hour of their departure from this world find forgiveness of sin through tears and repentance and attain the kingdom through communion in the body and blood of Christ. The Holy Illuminator, too, considers the penitent and the confessors to be one class together with those who repent at the hour of their death. He includes the martyrs and the hermits and the *vardapets* and so on, and he assigns no number to them. Now, take whichever of the two interpretations pleases you—or both of them—for the meaning of Scripture is interpreted in many ways.

6:8 My dove, my perfect one is unique, only daughter of her mother, the chosen one of her parent.

You see, although the *queens* and *concubines* and *princesses* are various in terms of their names and glories, nonetheless in terms of the font and of their tearful confession they are *one*, being *doves* of the *Mother Church*, being *only children also of their parent*, the Holy Spirit. For this reason he says, *my dove, my perfect one is unique, the only daughter of her mother the Church,*

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the chosen one of her parent the Holy Spirit, through the birth of the font. For the Holy Spirit brings forth through baptism, and the Church nourishes by means of the body and blood of Christ. Basil attests to the same, saying, ‘Likewise also your true Mother, the Church, has called the multitude of her obedient children who do her will; I mean, you faithful people’. And he says further, ‘Being faithful children of a loving Father and a faithful Mother; that is of God and of the Church, maintain unshaken love towards your Father. Regarding the congregation of the saints, who are the treasures of your Mother, the Church, rejoice delighting in hope, so that the grace which illuminated them may make you, too, worthy to attain to “the portion of the lot of the inheritance of the saints in light” ([Col 1:12](#)). Continuing onward, he refers to ‘stephen, holy son of holy Mother Church, and boast of Her whole assembly’.

Note how he called the Church *Mother* both of faith, and of Stephen, as well as of the other holy apostles and prophets and martyrs, and of all the faithful. For although the saints are not equal in glory, yet they are equal as offspring of the holy Church, and from this Church they are translated into the One Church in the heavenly Jerusalem. Thus, one ought to love the Church more than one’s physical parents, because of her greater birthing. For as the spirit is greater than the flesh, so also is the Mother of the spirit greater than the mother of the flesh.

Now, as those who are estranged from their mother’s milk and from her nourishment die, so also those who are estranged from the Church and her breasts—that nourishment by means of Scripture which is the Church’s *breasts*—and do not enter into [the Church] with desire and longing and are not fed in her with Scripture, cannot live, but die an eternal death. Seeing such people, the Prophet bemoaned them saying, ‘Sinners have been estranged from their mother, they have been deceived from the womb and have spoken falsehood’ ([Ps 57:4](#)); that is, they have held in odium the confession and the oath to love their Father God and their Mother Church which they swore at their birth of the font, and have become estranged. Whomever Satan has found outside their Mother, who is the Church, he takes captive, like a slave trader who steals children whom he finds far from their parents.

Moreover, the prayers which one should make in the Church, before its altar, where the Holy Trinity dwells, they offer among the rabble and in the public squares and in unsanctified places, and the honor of the Church they hand over to vulgar folk and to the streets. For these transgressions they will find not mercy but condemnation, they who denigrate the Church and enact their worship outside of her! Many words and mournful lamentations should be devoted to those who do these things, and on another occasion these should be made explicit, for there is no small damage caused by these people.

But we shall continue to expound on what lies before us.

The daughters saw her and praised her; the queens also blessed her.

Daughters and queens saw the Bride and blessed her. Here it is the gatherings of the angels which he calls *daughters and queens*, ‘The assembly of the firstborn, written in heaven’ ([Heb 12:23](#)).

See to what glory we humans have attained! The angels, who are immortal and honored with brilliant glory, and are enspirited with a surpassing nature, and are near to God, call humanity *blessed*. And rightly so, for God is with human beings, and moreover our nature has

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been made god, and has been united with God, the God of the angels. In awe and trembling the angels praise our divinized nature and bow down to it and regard it with trembling. For ‘no one has ever seen God’ ([Jn 1:18](#); [1 Jn 4:12](#)), and our nature, which was united with God, is by virtue of that union also invisible to the angels.

And again, the angels, who are incorporeal, are called ‘servants of God’ ([Ps 103:4](#) / [Heb 1:7](#)), while humans, who are made of dust, are offspring of the Holy Spirit and hold the rank of sons, and feed on His body and blood. Receiving through us that to which they did not even dare to approach and were not able to see, the angels actually need us, and they are jealous of the immeasurable gift which has been given to us by the Groom. As the Lord says in the Gospel parable, in the words of the elder son, ‘How many years is it that I have served you, and have never transgressed your command? You have never given me a goat that I might make merry with my friends, but for him, who ate up your living with harlots, you have killed the fatted ox’ ([Lk 15:30](#))—that is, the Son of God slain in the flesh which He took from us.

In addition, they, who were superior to us, have even become our servants. As the Apostle says, ‘Are they not all ministering spirits, who are sent to serve those who are to inherit salvation?’ ([Heb 1:14](#)).

Now, when *the daughters and queens* are blessing the Bride, they say,

6:9 *Who is she who has appeared beautiful as the morning, choice as the moon, as the sun, recounted as a wonder?*

Truly, it is *a wonder* for someone of an earthly nature to become like *the morning* and like *the moon* and like *the sun, recounted* for the angels’ *wonder*. The Lord attests to this, too, saying, ‘Then the righteous shall shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of Heaven’ ([Mt 13:43](#)). The righteous shall shine forth even more than the sun, but since there is not on earth anything brighter than they, the righteous are perforce praised through this simile.

The groom says to the bride

6:10 *I went down to look at the garden of walnuts, to look at the fruit of the watercourses, to see whether the cypress has blossomed, the vine has blossomed, the pomegranate has blossomed.*

This is worth investigating; He has called the Bride a *walnut garden*, but then He sought to see what other plants—*the vine, the cypress and the pomegranate*—were producing, and not the garden.

Now, it seems to me that here the *walnut garden* means the earth, and the people living in it he calls *walnuts*—for the walnut is composed of two natures, one being the shell, which has a woody nature, and one being the fatness within it. The soul, too, encased by the flesh, is ‘fat’ with power, provided that they join together in righteousness and are not working against one another. As the Apostle says, ‘The flesh desires in opposition to the spirit, and the spirit in opposition to the flesh, and since they are in opposition to one another, you cannot do what you would’ ([Gal 5:17](#)).

So if those which are opposite to one another are found to be in agreement, by drinking in

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the *watercourses* of the Spirit *the fruit* will flourish, and with fitting beauty in appearance they will grow tall, like *the cypress*, and the flesh will be as incorruptible as the spirit; *the vine* will bring forth such wine that the cluster may be trodden for the cup of the heavenly Groom and become food for the Heavenly Sovereign, just as *the pomegranate* is for kings.

As for the descent which he mentions—I *went down to the walnut garden*—that indicates the incarnate descent of the Word of God, who in due time descended to earth, to those who had been ‘cultivated’ by the Law and the prophets, in order to make them display to perfection, by their flourishing harvest, the genus of salvation’s fruit. For the former had preached the coming of the Saviour that was the *blossom*. And at the time indicated, God’s Only Begotten came, to gather in the *fruit* of the vineyard through His incarnation, as is explained in the Gospel parable.

The bride says to the groom

6:11 *There shall I give you my breasts. My soul did not know; it made me as the chariot of Aminadab.*

When the Bride heard the *descent* of the Groom and His quest for the *blossoms*, she responded, ‘Not only have I flowered with noble *blossoms*, but I shall feed you what you seek from humanity, as your divinity pleases, feed you without depletion from *my breasts*, feed you with the purity of my holy heart which is in proximity to my breasts’.

My soul did not know; that is, as the milk from the invisible *breasts* becomes immaculate food for children, so do thoughts warmed by an immaculate love, together with a person’s unknowing, become ‘food’ for God, who seeks nothing from humanity but a pure heart wherewith ‘they may see God’ ([Mt 5:8](#)), and wherein He may rest. As the Prophet says, ‘Where shall I rest, if not in the meek and the humble of heart, and those who tremble at my words’ ([Is 66:2](#)). And like *the chariot*, they will be the resting place of the Groom with supreme glory.

The daughters and the queens say to the bride

6:12 *Return, return Somnite, return, return, and we will look on you.*

See the angels’ wonder at the transformation of human nature from evil to good. *We will look* shows the astonished vision of the angels; we who were a breed apart from angelic ways have now surpassed the angels in angelic vision. For they, having an impassive nature, unblemished and effortless, have been bested by us; with our earthy, passion-filled and frail nature, we have surpassed them in power, conquering our lusts and passions and the needs of our nature. Rightfully do they wonder, and seek the sight of this.

The Groom causes the angels, whom He calls *daughters and queens*, to look with even greater wonder, by saying to them:

CHAPTER SEVEN

The groom says to the daughters and to the queens

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7:1 What do you see in the Somnite who has come like the troops of armies?

That is, what can you see of the *Somnite*'s beauty, who through the fruits of her good works has multiplied *like the troops of armies*? Nonetheless, I will make it known to you. And then he gives indications of it, descriptively.

He calls the Bride a *Sidonite* because of their greater evil; for they have been more assiduous in idolatry and in every wickedness, like the Sidonites.

How your walking has become more beautiful with shoes, daughter of Nadab.

Observe that the Groom first called the Bride a *Sidonite*, as the angels also had previously called her a *Sidonite*. But here he names her *daughter of Nadab*, showing that those who were the offspring and *daughters* of defiled ancestors became the offspring, *daughter* and Bride of Christ, so they no longer have bare feet susceptible to the bites of the serpent, but having been reinforced *with shoes* of righteousness, they are impervious to the venom of the biting Serpent.

Moreover, they have been washed of sin 'with water and spirit' ([Jn 3:5](#)) by the Saviour, as were the feet of the apostles, who also received authority 'to tread on serpents and scorpions and all the power of the enemy' ([Lk 10:19](#)). For that reason they have increased in beauty, for they have 'shod their feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace' ([Eph 6:15](#)), as the Apostle says.

The fit of your pillows resembles beads fashioned by the hand of a craftsman.

Now, as Her feet were strengthened against the biter, and were *beautified* by such *shoes*, so also has her head, which had fallen level with the ground from the heights of Paradise, been raised from destruction, by means of a *pillow* like *fashioned beads*.

The brain's intelligence resides in a person's head. Now, it is obvious that as a *pillow* lifts and rests the head; so also does knowledge of Scripture and understanding of God's commandments raise and rest the head, for thereon does all the turbulent rocking of storm-tossed thought come to rest, leaning thereon as on a *pillow*. The *pillows* do not allow one to be vainly drawn into the pitching waves of idle speculations. It is for this reason that he said, *the fit of your pillows resembles beads fashioned by the hands of a craftsman*.

The *fashioned bead* gathers into itself the diverse range of the beauties of pearls. In the same way, the knowledge of Scripture—*fashioned* by the prophetic books, the Law, the apostles, the *vardapets*, the martyrs' heroic exhibitions, and the struggles of ascetics, and by the self-same Gospel's injunctions and good news—like a *pillow* placed beneath the cranium, does not allow it to drop to the ground.

The 'pillowless' head of the schismatics dropped to the 'ground' of errant knowledge. Being unable to *fashion* an understanding of Holy Scripture, they divided Christ's incarnation into two natures, and they understood the words of Scripture in a variety of divergent ways: such were Arius and Macedonius, and the vile Nestorius, destroyer and devastator of the world, and a myriad other heretics. Concerning behavior and food and all the created beings of heaven and earth, angels and human beings, and the Second Coming and the awesome Judgment and the everlasting Gehenna, they also invented erroneous tenets and taught them to others.

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Now, too, there are many who impart such erroneous teaching. They do this because of two things. One, because they have not examined Scripture, but have instead considered their own wisdom sufficient for investigating knowledge. So did the ancient philosophers; with all their wisdom they were unable to tear themselves away from idolatry, and through wisdom to recognize God ([1 Cor 1:20–21](#)). Hence the Apostle complains that if one had wanted to investigate wisely, it would have been possible to discover the Creator by means of the creatures ([Rom 1:19–21](#)); that through understanding the impermanent, feeble and changeable nature of the creatures, one could realize that there is Another, their Creator: it was for this very reason that God conferred on us the advantage of wisdom.

The second reason is that because, through sin, people are far from the protection of the Spirit's wings, a profane, contentious spirit has infiltrated and teaches his own understandings and makes them 'rest' therein, deserted by the spirit of rectitude. The saints' heads come to 'rest' on no such *pillow* as this, but on the one which is made and *fashioned* by the hands of that *skillful craftsman*, the Holy Spirit.

7:2 Your navel is a turned goblet, not lacking mixed wine.

The navel likewise contains the same meaning. *Turned* and shaped *goblets* are desirable in and of themselves, and they spur the minds of drinkers, and more especially those of stewards, to create in them *mixtures of wines*. Likewise also the *navel*, made true and pure of sin, becomes the receptacle of the Spirit's grace, and of the unadulterated wine, and of the sweet drink of the words of the Old and New Testaments *mixed* together. The sight of the latter's beauty incites one to drink deeply even before the hearing of it—the hearing of what has been purified and refined, gathered in the *navel*.

Your belly is like a heap of wheat ringed with lilies.

Our Holy Illuminator recounts, often and minutely, singular praise concerning the *belly* and other beautified senses. Such things are actually the earthen vessels of spiritual treasure: as the Apostle says, 'We hold this treasure in clay vessels' ([2 Cor 4:7](#)).

If this is so, why is it that such valuable treasure is placed in earthen vessels? Paul himself explains it: 'That the superiority of the power should be God's and not ours' ([2 Cor 4:7b](#)). For the power of God appears all the greater in a weak vessel's bearing the weighty and unbearable.

This is to be seen even among the creatures; the heavens and the earth, having been placed upon a weak foundation remain firm, and maintain everything unshakable.

The frail nature of the *Theotokos*, too, became the vessel and bearer of the unbearable nature of God's Word, combined with the flesh which derived from her.

In the same way, weak human beings, having received the graces of the Spirit in their *bellies* piled one upon the other *like a heap of wheat*, have with the 'teeth' of teaching ground them into bread to feed the hungry and those who long for such spiritual food.

And *ringed with lilies*: by their marvellous color, like lilies, they invite the angels to *look* on them. As it was said previously by *the daughters and queens*, 'Return, and we will look on you'.

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7:3 Your two breasts like two twin fawns of a gazelle.

As the Theologian says there are two modalities in the human being—soul and mind. Both are perpetually attached to the heart, where the *breasts* are also located. Because of this, he refers to as *breasts* those things which reside near them. As the *breasts* are vessels of milk and give life to infants, so also are the mind and the spirit alert, illumined and sharp-sighted as a *gazelle*; seeing the distant divine things as they do those things near at hand, they unerringly show the way, for themselves, and also for others who follow them, and they preserve them from the snares of hunters. Too, they feed those who, in terms of sin, have become like children, in the same way as *breasts* feed children.

7:4 Your eyes like the pool of Esebon by the gates of many daughters.

That land is very far away in terms of distance, and no one gives any information concerning it. But I imagine that that land is high, and at its foot it has a great lake opposite it. By the same metaphor, the *eyes* of the Bride, the Church, enlarged by the greatness of the Spirit, look unwaveringly towards the *gates* of heaven, where the *daughters* of the multitude of the angels are encamped, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left. They await the King of Heaven, watching avidly so that they may be worthy to enter through those *gates*, where the *daughters* of that city abide.

Your nostrils like the tower of Lebanon situated towards Damascus.

As the *tower of Lebanon* is properly situated towards *Damascus*, so also do your *nostrils*, properly situated, desire to scent the sweet, savory fragrance of the oil of purification which comes from the supernal *Damascus*, that is from the City of Heaven.

Not to mention that Paul first received the precious knowledge of the Trinity there, on the approach to *Damascus*, and from Anania the Damascene he received the cure for his eyes' blindness, through the laying on of the latter's hands ([Acts 9:17](#)). He smelled that intoxicating, thrilling fragrance, and caused all the gentiles to smell it as well. Their *nostrils* having once smelled that fragrance, they were not sated but were enraptured as though inebriated with good wine. Imbuing the casing of the brain with satisfying, angelic slumber, it brought rest also to those exhausted by sin.

7:5 The tresses of your head like purple, like a king with his crown on his head, at the race course.

Purple is the proper prerogative of kings. A king alone has authority to adorn himself with purple. So also those *heads* which have the *hair* and the form and the glory of the heavenly Bridegroom are resplendent with purity as if with *purple* raiment, or like a *crown* on the head of a king among his troops, *at the race course*.

Now, one might ask, of what kind are the *crowns* granted to martyrs, such as those which have appeared for many of the saints like the Forty Martyrs of Sebastia and the companions of Ghewond and many others.

A crown is placed on the heads of kings because the most honorable of all the sensory

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organs of a human being is the head. In it is stored the brain, whence intelligent thought arises, and [the head] is the beginning of life. In it are also the eyes which see the light, and it is the location of the palate, and of the nose, and of the ears' hearing; the mouth, too, which preserves vitality through food and drink and through words reveals to listeners the understanding and wisdom of the heart. One *crowns* it, so that the brain may teach to the soul and to the understanding, the works and words and virtues and devotion and love and mercy which are pleasing to God, and whatever other intentions and activities may be like them.

Now by ringing the head with a *crown* one wreathes it as the cause and advisor of all good. By crowning the head, one causes the whole person to appear as if wreathed with munificence. A *crown set on the head* signifies the ineffable illumination and power of God clothing the *head*, the intermediary of so many good thoughts and helpful studies. As the same Solomon says elsewhere, 'You will receive a crown of grace for your head' ([Prv 1:9](#)). He refers to as *grace* the divine power's clothing of the head, which is adorned as with a *crown*. By means of corporeal things, he is giving an image of the invisible glory, and by means of illusory and vain things he is giving an image of the invisible things which are truly to be desired.

Therefore, blessed are they who are worthy of the unfading *crown* and are wedded to Christ, for they will share His *crown* in the endless kingdom of Christ.

7:6 *How beautiful and delightful you have become;*

7:7 *love to your delicacy!*

Look precisely at the praises listed for all the Bride's senses; see how, having listed them one by one and praised them, he summarizes them again, by saying *how beautiful and delightful you have become*. The real beauty of a human being is to cause all one's senses to serve God, and to divinize them by drawing near to God, by participating in the divine works, in order to become worthy of hearing such words from Christ the Bridegroom: *you have become beautiful and delightful to me*.

What immeasurable bliss! by the mouth of God to be professed *beautiful and delightful* to Him whom all the saints, apostles and prophets desired, the martyrs and ascetics, and the *vardapets* of the Church with all her clergy. Becoming the Daughter and Bride of God, they forgot their people and their fathers' house ([Ps 44:11](#)); becoming strangers to the world and whatever is in this world, they became *delightful* through their virtuous ways of life, and were loved by the Groom, who said, *love to your delicacy*; that is, 'I love your great *delicacy* just as bodily bridegrooms love their physically delicate brides'.

Your stature has become like a palm tree's, and your breasts like clusters of grapes.

'You have become as dear to my sight as the height of a palm tree, and your breasts are appetizing to me as to children' Building on this he adds,

7:8 *I said, I will go up the palm tree, I will lay hold of its height,*

See here the immeasurable love of God towards the saints and the just; He is as pleased to rest upon the saints as to sit on the cherub throne. And this is a proof to you: He descended to the patriarch Jacob and, grappling with him lovingly as peer with peer, he contended with him as if Gregory of Narek, *The Blessing of Blessings: Gregory of Narek's Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Roberta R. Ervine, vol. 215, Cistercian Studies Series (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications; Liturgical Press, 2007).

to lay him low, and taking hold of his sinew he immobilized it. He said through Isaiah the Prophet, ‘Where shall I rest, if not in the meek and humble, and those who tremble at my word?’ ([Is 66:2](#)). So does He dote upon and yearn for the saints, as for those immeasurably dear.

Seeing the delightful stature of the Bride like that of a *palm tree*, the One who ‘bowed the heavens and came down’ ([Ps 17:10](#)), and *laid hold* of our nature for the sake of the indescribable love which He had for us, said *I will go up, I will lay hold of its height.*

*and your breasts will be like clusters of the vine,
and the fragrance of your nostrils like apples,*

7:9 and your throat like noble wine.

A *cluster* of grapes first rejoices the eyes with the sight of it before it is eaten. Likewise, the words of grace which flow from the heart’s *breasts* cheer first the ears and then the heart of those who have an appetite for the Word.

And the fragrance of your nostrils like apples; that is, the *fragrance* of the holy way of life, which reaches out to great and small like the fragrance of *apples*. The Heavenly Bridegroom smells this more than those ‘shadowy’ sacrifices and gifts which were referred to as ‘a sweet savor to the Lord’ ([Ex 29:18](#) et al). For it was not the odor of cooked flesh which was a sweet savor to God, but it was the purity of those making the offering which rejoiced Him, and was a sweet savor to God, as was the case with Abel’s sacrifice.

And your throat like good wine. As wine makes those who drink it happy, so also does the song of those who are holy and spotless, and the words of their *throats*, make the Heavenly Bridegroom happier than do the sung doxologies of angels. For the latter praise Him by virtue of their potency and passionlessness, which makes their song not surprising; whereas it is most marvelous that a human being, who is made of earth, and suffers passions and needs, should resemble those who are without passion and without need, taking on the *throat* of the seraphs and singing what they sing. How could this fail to make the Groom happy?

The *daughters and queens* were astonished at the marvelous beauty and appearance of the Somnite—that is, the Bride—and said to her, ‘Return, return, O Somnite, that we may see your new and exquisite appearance’. Taking up this call of the angels—that is, the call of the *daughters and queens*—the Groom responded and said, ‘What do you see in the Somnite? You cannot see how desirable she is except through me, who am able to reveal publicly the concealed virtues of humanity’. Then, recounting one by one the marvels of her senses, He made known to them the beauty of the Bride. In a similar way,

*the Bride says this in the presence of the daughters and queens Going with my Nephew in
uprightness, sufficed with my lips and my teeth*

This means, ‘I have become marvelous to you because, renouncing the worldly, sin-loving, serpent-induced deceptions of my forebear I have followed my Nephew in an *upright* way of life. He put on what is mine, and with what is mine, He overcame, and showed me the upright way; having first done it Himself, He then instructed me.’ As the evangelist Luke says in his

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second book, ‘Jesus began to do, and then to teach’ ([Acts 1:1](#)). For this reason He became man: so that He should first do all which He taught in words, and teach meekness and humility by deeds. As the Lord Himself said, ‘Learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls’ ([Mt 11:29](#)).

In the same way, He would teach benevolence; to the one who struck His divine face He responded benevolently, ‘If I have spoken anything evil, bear witness concerning the evil. But if good, why do you strike me?’ ([Jn 18:23](#)). And when they called Him a demoniac, He did not respond with abuse, but benevolently said, ‘There is no devil in me’ ([Jn 8:49](#)).

The One who prayed for his crucifiers, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do’ ([Lk 23:34](#)), taught tolerance in the same manner. Likewise he demonstrated the completion of his work through a donkey, and epitomized his humble life by riding on an ass ([Mt 21:5–7](#); [Jn 12:14–15](#)).

He did the same at the wedding: changing the water into wine ([Jn 2:1–11](#)); he shared in the joy of those who rejoiced, and offered them a gift. In mourning, too, he demonstrated the extent of his sadness by weeping, and taught us to mourn with our brethren in their sadness ([Jn 11:33–35](#)). And by making up the amount of food with the barley loaves and the fish, and seating the people on the grass ([Mt 14:19–20](#); [Mk 6:39–42](#); [Lk 9:14–17](#); [Jn 6:10–11](#)), he showed us how to satisfy our modest, brute needs. And everything else, too, which it is needful to learn, he has first borne in himself and demonstrated to us that same path.

For this reason the Bride says, *Following my Nephew in uprightness*. In other words, ‘I have followed Him in all the *upright* things which he did on earth, and I have imitated him’. As the chosen vessel ([Acts 9:15](#)) Paul says, ‘Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ’ ([1 Cor 11:1](#)).

By what was the Bride empowered to be a fellow traveler on Christ’s way? By the awesome mystery of Communion—by the body and the blood of Christ which He gave to us for strength. ‘He made us bold to drink with our lips and break with our teeth that on which you the angels, you *sisters and queens*, did not dare to gaze; we were allowed to break with our teeth Him of whom no bone was broken on the Cross, as the Prophet had predicted aforetime ([Ps 33:21](#)). In our easily incinerated flesh we are not consumed by the uncontrollable and flaming fire, whereas you angels are not able to look upon it—nor do you dare to. I have become the container for the Uncontainable, like the *Theotokos*, who received Him into Her womb and was not burned, and like her archetype the burning bush.’

Thus does the Bride boast before the angels; as it were, boasting in the unspeakable gift of the Groom. Going on she adds,

7:10 I am my Nephew’s, and His returning is to me.

That is, having been joined to Him through this food, I am His and He is mine. As the Lord Himself said in the Gospel, ‘Whoever eats my body and drinks my blood will live in Me and I in him’ ([Jn 6:56](#)). And again, ‘As you, Father, are in me, and I in You, so that they also may be in Us’ ([Jn 17:21](#)), and ‘I in them, and You in Me’ ([Jn 17:23](#)).

His returning is to me; over and above this unity, she also says that He is coming again to take us to Himself ([Jn 14:3](#)), and to rank us in His glory, and to gird Himself and serve us, as He Himself said ([Lk 12:37](#)).

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7:11 *Come, my Nephew, let us go out into the fields, let us rest in the villages.*

7:12 *Let us go out early into the vineyard, let us see if the vine has blossomed, the cypress has budded, the pomegranates have blossomed.*

Here you see the unity of the Bride with the Groom. Previously, the Groom said *I descended to the orchard of walnuts to see if it had blossomed* with those very fruits which the Bride now mentioned. That indicated the coming of Christ to earth to see if the seeds which the prophets had sown, had *blossomed*. These came to fruition with His coming.

Now the Bride, united with the Groom, desires to partake in His viewing of the productive fruits and flowers. Previously, the Groom said *I descended*, that is, 'I came down from heaven' ([Jn 6:38, 41](#)), whereas here the Bride says, *Let us go*, for, being on earth, she loves to go about with Him who 'appeared on the earth and went about with human beings' ([Lv 26:12](#)). As He said, 'I have other sheep who are not of this fold, and I must bring them hither as well, and they will hear my voice and they will become one flock and one shepherd' ([Jn 10:16](#)). He actually did go about with the Bride—that is, with the apostles—not only throughout Judea, but also among the gentiles, where were the Samaritan and the Syro-Phoenician woman and many others.

After the Ascension, too, He went about with the apostles and with their disciples, and with the *vardapets* and with the martyrs, to preach and to see the *blossom* and the fruit of the word of faith. His dominical promise bears witness to this: 'I am with you always, until the end of the world' ([Mt 28:20](#)).

Now, the apostles did not attain to the end of the world; thus, it is clear that until now He still goes about with all the faithful to see the *blossoms* and to rejoice in the production of fruits. Mark the compassion of both the Groom and the Bride towards the faithful: she does not wait for an order, as did the prophets of old, but having received the same love as the Groom's, she begs to go about in search of the wandering and in quest of the lost. Many of the apostles and *vardapets* dedicated themselves to the work of cultivating this compassion, as did our Illuminator, who, leaving his wife and children, came voluntarily to Trdat, and besought God for the conversion of all humanity. There are various pleading requests in his prayers, which this is not the time to repeat.

She mentions *the vine and cypress and pomegranate*, for some of those who have turned to faith and became wedded to Christ bear fruit, but not through knowledge. Such were the centurion and Cornelius, and even Paul himself, who was 'blameless in terms of the Law's righteousness' ([Phil 3:6](#)). The latter are clusters of grapes, and *pomegranates*, but are not complete in their knowledge of God. While some are without fruit, like Onesimus, and like the *cypress*.

7:13 *The mandrakes have given forth their scent, at our gates are all fruits, the new with the old; what my mother gave me will be laid up for you, my Nephew.*

The mandrakes have given forth their scent. Thanks to the attestations with which I have instructed you, the phrase before us has no need of further interpretation. Nonetheless, in brief it means this; they give thanks for the *fruits* of faith in those who, through the preaching of the apostles and the numberless *vardapets* after them, became pleasing to God through a panoply

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of virtues—some through the blood of their witness, some by the prowess of their ascetic life, some through celibacy, some through their oversight as prelates and priests, some through poverty and sickness, some through wealth, by making their goods available to all. As well as all those who in a similar fashion have been united by love of God, faith, hope, charity, humility, holiness, fraternal love, benevolence, tolerance, long-suffering, lack of attachment to goods, and disregard of earthly things, desire for heavenly things, fear of Gehenna and desire for the King and the Kingdom.

All of this that she said—*the mandrakes have given forth their scent, at our gates are all fruits, the new with the old; what my mother gave to me will be laid up for you, my Nephew*—these are the apostles' and prelates' words of praise for the faithful in Christ, whom they offer to him as 'a people prepared ([Lk 1:17](#))', now and on the great day of Judgment. They too will say the words of the Prophet, 'Behold I and the children whom God has given me' ([Is 8:17–18](#); [Heb 2:13](#)). Whoever gives an account of the people without shame, and offers them to God, is like this statement of hers, *I have kept it for you my Nephew. The new with the old*—from among contemporaries and from among the ancients.

But when she says, *what my mother gave me*, the mother is the catholic Church, and the Holy Spirit, who gave birth through the font, and Christ who nourished us with His blood.

CHAPTER EIGHT

8:1 *Who will cause you, my Nephew, to suckle at my breasts?*

It is as if to the saints, because of their unquenchable desire, attainment of God's glory becomes incredible, even taking into account their efforts and striving, and the longing of their heart. It is because of the saints' spiritual humility, that they do not feel they have the right to open their hearts' *breasts* to Him. As the Apostle Paul said, 'I do not consider myself to have attained' ([Phil 3:12–13](#)).

The other saints were the same. Knowing that the destruction of our forebear, and even more so that of Satan, came about through arrogance and pride, they have struggled for spiritual humility, to consider themselves more lowly than all, and to be oblivious of their own labors, and to account themselves unworthy of God's service. They have been instructed by the Lord who said, 'When you have done all which is commanded, you should say, "We are useless servants; we have done what we were obliged to do"' ([Lk 17:10](#)). That is to say, a servant who does not go beyond what is required in his service, is useless. Thus they schooled themselves to remain humble, and to count themselves unworthy of His grace. As the Apostle said, 'I am the least of all the apostles' ([1 Cor 15:9](#); [Eph 3:8](#)).

This is likewise an activity of all the saints and those filled with the Spirit—however much rectitude one may achieve, or however much love for God one may demonstrate, with humble mind one should not consider that he is cognizant of God, but should consider himself as one of the unworthy. It is for this reason that she says *Who will cause you to suckle at my breasts*—that is, to accept the love of my heart towards you.

Then she adds,

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Finding you outside, I shall kiss you, and you will not despise me.

What does this mean? Is your love something *to be despised*? No, this wild love is worth boasting of, and displaying in public. Anyone who has tasted of that Love, has become inebriated with love of it and has *despised* wife and children and goods and possessions and authority and glory, nay and even his very self. Made perfect through death and blood and poverty, they have *kissed* Christ and been kissed by Him. This is a love proud and beatific, praised both by angels and by human beings.

8:2 Taking you, I shall lead you to the house of my mother, and to the chamber of her who bore me.

She said, *finding you outside, I shall kiss you*, and then *taking you I shall lead you to the house of my mother and to the chamber of her who bore me*. The Apostle interprets this saying, ‘Whose house we ourselves are’ ([Heb 3:6](#)), having become the abode of the Holy Spirit and of our Mother’s Father. Clearly, as Basil says, ‘Wherever the Holy Spirit is, there the Father and the Son are recognized to reside’. As He says through the Prophet, ‘I shall dwell in them, and walk among them’. Now, the Bride has become the *chamber* and *house* of the Groom. The way to that *house* is humility, and whoever is not humble drives the Holy Spirit away, and does not give Him rest, as Basil says.

*Then, having brought you to the chamber,
I shall make you drink spiced wine, the juice of pomegranates.*

This is what it means. She said, *Who will cause you to suckle at my breasts?* Now, having found Him *outside* and having been made worthy of a *kiss*, and then having taken the Groom into the *chamber* and into the *house* of the soul and into the heart, and having become the abode of the Trinity, she promises to have Him drink the *wine* of happiness and the *juice of pomegranates*. These are the heart’s consciousness of the mysteries of God’s goodnesses, unintelligible to sinners, whereby God is fed and by which drink He is nourished, for this is the ‘food of God’.

She adds, ‘Not only did I become the dwelling of God, or of the Groom, but by Him was I overshadowed and protected’. As she continues,

8:3 His left hand was under my head, and his right hand embraced me.

By this she expresses His ineffable protection and solicitude on behalf of the Bride, who is the Church.

8:4 I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the powers and the forces of the field, that you arouse and awaken love while He pleases.

This I am explaining for the second time. Having noted the manifold grace there is for us, and the incomprehensible gifts, she *adjures* the angels with an oath to glorify and praise with her God’s love towards us and to *arouse* it. For she does not consider herself alone sufficient to bless God’s benefits in such a way that Love will be yet more *awakened* through our praise and glorification of Him.

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One of ten lepers returned to the Lord and gave such thanks, with a great voice of praise, for his physical healing that he received spiritual illumination and eternal life as well ([LK 17:11-19](#)). Whereas the nine who proved ungrateful to their Benefactor were deprived of one of the more perfect gifts, as well as of commendation by His divine mouth.

Now, the Bride is not ungrateful for God's incomprehensible favors, and for such great gifts. She *arouses* the Groom's love by giving thanks to Him herself, and calling upon the angels to share in our thanksgiving for those gifts which He desired to give us, and which our forebear was not worthy to receive. That is what *arouse Love while He pleases* means: He sought thanks from the nine and did not find in them what His will sought.

The daughters and queens say

8:5 *Who is this, who goes up whitened, leaning on her Nephew?*

The angels marvel at the purity and luminosity of our disgraced and sullied nature, which has encountered such unfathomable grace. Having been united with her Nephew Christ and *leaning on* Him, [our nature] ascends where the hosts of angels dwell. She has become the traveling companion of Christ who, taking us by the hand, has led us into the place of the fallen angels, with the result that the ones whom Satan could not bear to see in Paradise, he should see occupying his own place in glory.

*The groom says to the bride
I shall awaken you under the apple tree;
there did my mother bear you, there did she who bore
you travail.*

First, it is appropriate to look at the nature of *apple trees*, and then to understand the *awakening* which takes place under one. The apple is a healthy food, and especially appetizing to the ill. It is fit even for kings, and it tickles the palate of those who smell it with a medley of different scents.

Saint Gregory our Illuminator says this too. He likens to an *apple* the words of the Law and the prophets, given to us by the Holy Spirit; first, on Mount Sinai through the agency of Moses, and then at various times He caused it to grow through the prophets. Birds, by sitting on their eggs for an extended time, transmit life to them through their warmth at the Creator's command. In the same way our nature, having been placed beneath the Law and the prophetic messages for an extended time, was incubated by God the Father, and by the Son, who is referred to as our Groom and Nephew, and was given birth to by the *Mother* of All, who is His begetter by nature and ours through grace.

He uses the word *travail*; *travail* is indicative of a *mother*. Therefore it is Christ's Father and ours to whom he referred as *mother*. The Father, however, was *in travail* in His messages through the Law and the prophets, and *gave birth to* His children through water and the Spirit ([Jn 3:5](#)) as brothers of Christ. So our Mother is One—the Father Begetter, the omnipotent God.

Christ was born first. By His baptism and through the font and by the coming of the Holy Spirit, He opened the heavens closed by Adam, and bestowed on us the same birth of the Holy

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Spirit. He was called Son of Man, and made us sons of God. As the blessed teacher John says, 'absolutely do not doubt that you are God's son'. For it was even more impossible for the Son of God to become Son of Man, than for the son of man to become the son of God.

Now when the Bride adjures them to *awaken the love* of the Groom, she is responding to that love long since *awakened*, which Adam rebuffed by his transgression. Yet according to His forbearing mercy and according to His creatorly love, He did not forsake us, but taking pity on us again, through the Law and the prophets, as through an instructor, He cared for us, and *travailed*, and brought us to birth again, 'Not by corruptible seed', as the Apostle Peter says, 'but by the incorruptible, living and eternal word of God' ([1 Pt 1:23](#)).

Thus he says, *under the apple tree shall I awaken you; there did my mother bear you, there did she travail who bore you*. That is to say, His love was awake towards us, and to benefit from it required only willingness on our part. So, 'Because of the Spirit's influence and by that new birth from My Father, you have come to know the great love for you of Him "Who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for the sake of us all"' ([Rom 8:32](#)), as the Apostle said.

Now,

8:6 Set me as a seal upon your heart, and like a ring on your arm,

That is, preserve and *seal your heart and your arm* with *Me*, so that you do not fall once you have arisen, and do not forget the benefits which I have conferred you through My incarnation, when I made you the son of My Begetter. Do not give *your heart* again to Satan's councils, nor stretch out your hand and *arm* to him,

for love is strong as death, and jealousy is fierce as hell.

In other words, *death is fierce* for those to whom it comes; so also is *jealousy* powerful as *hell*. In the same way, those who have been loved by Me with such love and in return for that love relinquish My love and love the adversary—that is, the sin and wickedness and love of this world—*Jealousy*, the Lord's sadness and wrath, will attack him *like death*, and as a result he will undergo incurable sufferings.

If women beloved by their husbands requite their husbands' love by offering their love to an adulterous lover, not only do they extinguish their husbands' love, but, above and beyond that, they call down upon themselves a hatred which is greater than all hatreds, and become estranged from their husbands; many even meet a wrathful death at their husbands' hands. As this same Solomon says, 'The sadness of her husband is filled with jealousy, and it will not abide until the day of wrath' ([Prv 6:34](#)). How much more, then, will the wrath of our Groom and God and Saviour be *strong as death and hell* against us, who are wedded to God, when we display hatred towards Him for His assiduous love, and against Satan who, like an adulterer, steals away our sacred marriage with Christ and usurps it. Having fallen in with all his vile councils and deeds, we open our souls wide to him. For this reason we rightly find that immortal *death* is our recompense, and bottomless *hell*.

So what mouth can adequately praise the one who, having recognized such love, realizes both how to exalt God and how to maintain His love and not spoil it with sin. And on the other hand, what mouth can adequately bemoan those who have become estranged from such love Gregory of Narek, *The Blessing of Blessings: Gregory of Narek's Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Roberta R. Ervine, vol. 215, Cistercian Studies Series (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications; Liturgical Press, 2007).

through sin and have become denizens of a deathless hell!

Concerning this he adds,

Its wings are wings of flaming fire,

8:7 and many waters cannot quench love, and rivers will not deter it.

This is obvious in physical love, too; wherever holy love resides, be it parental or marital or whatever, *rivers* cannot *deter it*, neither can sword nor fire nor death. How many have been betrayed to fire and water and the sword, and to famine, for their children's sake, and likewise for the sake of their lords! In the same way, love towards God, too, cannot be sapped from human beings; it overcomes fire and water and bonds and flayings and imprisonment and wife and children; all of these the saints—the apostles and prophets and martyrs and ascetics—overcame by means of it, intoxicated with the love of Christ.

If a man give all his living for his love, they will despise him with contempt.

This is to be understood in this way: love of God is not like love of human beings, particularly love of sin which, the more it increases, the more one is *despised* and treated with *contempt* by people. By contrast, love towards God is worthy of limitless praise and exaltation. Thus David boasts, 'I have loved you, O Lord my strength' ([Ps 17:2](#)), and 'My heart fainted, and my flesh; God of my heart, God my portion forever' ([Ps 72:26](#)); that is, You are my portion, and when I remember You, my heart faints—and 'My heart will rejoice in the living God' ([Ps 83:3](#)). You will find many other such delightful words of his, replete with the warm love of God. Paul has innumerable words in the same vein, as do the other apostles, and innumerable *vardapets* and saints of God, too. Warmed by that love they overcame the world with all its wants and temptations.

8:8 Our sister is little, and she has no breasts; what shall we do for our sister, on the day when it will be manifest to her?

8:9 If she be a wall, we shall build upon her towers of silver. And if she be a gate, we shall build for her cedar panels.

This statement is to be understood in this way: it is said by the angelic powers concerning the Bride, who is the new Church which is from the gentiles ([Acts 15:19](#)). She is called *sister* because of her having come from the same Creator and creation; *little sister* because of our less honorable nature, for we are earthy. Even though the other, fiery nature; that is, the spirit, was yoked with our body, yet we are less than the angels. The Prophet testifies, 'You have made him a little lower than Your angels, but with greater glory and honor have You crowned him' ([Ps 8:5](#)), and so on.

God glorified humanity with such honor that Satan, conceiving jealousy against them, wished to snatch it from them. For that very reason he fell from heaven, and from his own glory. Now, the angels are bewildered at how our weak nature has attained to both the sight and the knowledge of the unbearable, divine mysteries and glory.

As I have written many times, it is the storehouses of the heart and mind which he refers to

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as *breasts*. And the angels are puzzled, knowing that our nature cannot bear that immaterial cargo. Thus he says, *What shall we do for our sister on the day when it will be manifest to her?*; that is, when it is told to the *small* and *breastless* and witless nature of humanity that God has taken on earthly nature—in the belly and in the womb at that—and has been born of a virgin womb, as are we ourselves, albeit the Virgin remains a virgin—and He has been nourished with milk. It would take too long to enumerate all that God bore, taking upon Himself everything humans bear except for sin. He submitted to being spat upon and slapped and beaten with a whip and mocked with robes and crowned with thorns and struck about His divine head with a reed, and being nailed to a cross naked with criminals and being fed with gall and vinegar. And God died and was pierced with a spear by the soldier and was wrapped and buried and so on. How could a *small* and *breastless* creature, upon hearing such a tale, believe and accept it?

This may be applied to the *Theotokos* as well, hearing from the angel, ‘You will conceive’ ([Lk 1:31](#)), and accepting it and bearing Him in her womb, and so on. Truly, this is puzzling, ‘a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the gentiles’ ([1 Cor 1:23](#)) as the great Apostle says. But one can only submit to the Spirit of God, ‘Who does great things and unsearchable, and marvelous works without number’ ([Jb 5:9](#)).

Not all people were able to believe concerning that, for there was no place found in them for the Holy Spirit, who would have shown them the impossible things as possible. So it is that the angels, who are dubious about our *small* and *breastless* nature, go on to say, *if she be a wall, we shall build upon her silver towers. And if she be a gate, we will create for her cedar panels.*

Now in the prologue to this book I said that there is no prophetic consistency in meaning, because this has been translated through many languages: from Hebrew to Hellenic, and from Hellenic to Greek and Syriac, and then to Armenian. But the gist is this: ‘had she not been a human being and a living creature created by the Creator of all, and had she been *a wall*, we could have added to her, and we would have made the addition of very *silver*, building a *tower*. If she had been a *gate*, we could have created for her *cedar panels* and augmented her diminutiveness, so that the mass of the *wall*, or the entryway of the gate, would have become sturdier’.

Hearing this, the Bride makes bold to answer the doubting angels. As it is actually written,

The bride dares to say

8:10 *I am a wall, and my breasts are like a tower;*

That is, ‘Don’t be overly concerned about my weak nature, for through the power of the Almighty, I who am *small* am greater and more solid than *a wall*, and though I am *breastless*, *my breasts are like a tower*. For He who created heaven and earth and our nature and yours from nothing, has made me great and has made my *breasts* greater than yours. So what you cannot hear and bear and endure, my weak nature, having been made more capable than yours, has heard and borne and believed’.

Then she goes on to say,

I was in his eyes like discovered peace.

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'I was lost like the piece of money and the sheep which are mentioned in the Gospel parable by my Groom ([Lk 15:4-10](#)), and I aroused war and upset between the heavenly and earthly beings because of our rebellion. Now through the Groom's Cross I have become *in His eyes* true peace, and have been *discovered* from my lost state'.

Again adding to his allegory, the divine Solomon says,

8:11 Solomon had a vineyard in Beghmawon

Beghmawon is a fertile land in Judea. By it he indicates the earth, and the human race which is in it. *Solomon* stands for Christ, who 'became our peace' ([Eph 2:14](#)), for the name Solomon is translated 'Peace'. The *vineyard* is the faithful: David the Prophet and Isaiah and the Lord Himself in the Gospel call them a vineyard.

Moreover,

*He gave his vineyard to husbandmen;
each man he says shall bring of his fruit a thousand pieces of silver.*

This does not need many words of interpretation. But blessed are they who give the *fruit* in due season when the heavenly *Solomon* demands it, whether it be personal *fruit*, or the *fruit* of those to whom a people has been entrusted. For whether they possess much or little grace or people or goods, spiritual and physical leaders must give account to the heavenly King *Solomon*—this includes bishops and priests, kings and princes, and other functionaries, whether physical or spiritual.

By the same token, the layman and the soldier must give account of wife and children and servants. For if he attends only to his own needs for service and sympathy and loyalty and taxes and percentages and so on, and does not exert himself to care solicitously for their spiritual and physical needs as well, he will be punished by Christ. And if he sees any faulty sin in anyone, he ought to heal it with love and tears, and apply remedies with compassion as he would to his own self, not tyrannically and with a haughty mind, inflated with the authority which he holds, whether it be spiritual or physical, whether it be over his family or his servants.

Through the prophets, the heavenly *Solomon* blames anyone who takes the fleece and milks the milk, and slaughters the fat ones, and does not take them to fertile places of pasture. This applies to anyone who does not take care of his comrade and his servants and his brother as he does his own self, by teaching them holiness and charitable ways and humility and assiduousness in prayer, diligence in fasting and in going to the house of God and in instruction, visiting the sick and the imprisoned, going out to receive guests and to send them off, honoring the churches with gifts and offerings and vessels, and marking the dominical feasts with wakeful praises, with lighting of lamps, and gifts. In the same manner also teaching them to observe the memorials of the saints, and to honor priests as servants of God and leaders of the people of Christ, and not to serve kings and masters superficially, but from the heart, and other such principles of Christian life, which we cannot enumerate here.

God, who is referred to as *Solomon*, requires of spiritual and physical leaders, that they do what is appropriate to each, and give instruction humbly: it is for this reason that they rule us. Spiritual leaders ought to battle Satan together with us. Physical leaders ought even to spill Gregory of Narek, *The Blessing of Blessings: Gregory of Narek's Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Roberta R. Ervine, vol. 215, Cistercian Studies Series (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications; Liturgical Press, 2007).

their own blood on our behalf and to war against enemies, and to liberate us from enemies either by paying tribute or by slaying them.

In addition, they ought to judge righteously, with unceasing impartiality, as God's servants, and to consider every man's house as if it were their own. Thus King Trdat the Great, even while he was still a pagan, wrote to his country, 'As a landowner who tends his own property, so ought we to tend this land of Armenia'. Thus could a pagan take such care for the prosperity of the land and for the salvation of its people that, to achieve that end, he would torture the saints in order to turn them from Christianity to the worship of idols, saying, 'The gods require it of us, and all our service to them is of no account if we are not diligent concerning this'. Of Saint Gregory Trdat said, 'For fear of the gods I did not remember his great and faithful service'. The Persian king also wrote to Vardan and his companions in the same vein. And there were many others who did so as well, even though they had no apprehension of hell and torment and judgment.

Now, as for us, who are in a state of understanding and have believed in Christ and await His coming, and who know certainly that we have to give account of all that, as also of our personal thoughts, words and deeds, how much more should we have a care lest we stand ashamed on the terrible day before the heavenly *King Solomon*, when He requires *fruit* of His *vineyard*! They who render their *fruit* plenteously are blessed a myriad times, but woe ten thousand thousand times to those who have no *fruit* to offer up!

Now, Solomon began this disquisition with the allegory of our forefather's creation in Paradise and his fall from glory, and his resumption of glory through the coming of Christ, and the marriage to the latter of the gentiles and their encountering various and diverse graces, which we have arranged and set in this book. Now, he brings it to a conclusion with an allegory of the Bride, called the *vineyard*, and His Second Coming, and His demanding of *fruit* from the righteous, who were previously referred to as the Bride. This illustrates His exceeding love towards humankind, in that not only are we wedded and united to Christ the Groom, but we are also His food; as fit grapes in His *vineyard*, we have been laded onto serving dishes for Christ the King.

He gave his vineyard to husbandmen. The *husbandmen* are those whom I mentioned. To repeat, every individual is His *husbandman*.

Every man shall bring of his fruit a thousand pieces of silver. Now, he called it a *vineyard*, and said its fruit is *silver*; how could this be consistent? unless, as is obvious, we have to do with an allegory—which, in fact, the whole book of the Song of Songs is. So, it is the multivarious and perfect fruits of the just that he refers to as *thousands*. And he calls them *silver* because like choice silver is tried in the furnace, so also are the saints tried like *silver* here on earth and purified and refined sevenfold of earth' ([Ps 11:7/6](#)).

8:12 *My vineyard is before me;*

This was not so while humanity was on earth, and was below heaven, separated from it as by a curtain; rather, it is *mine*, and for me, and *before me* always. The Apostle also attests to this, saying, 'Now we see as with a mirror, in semblance, but then face to face' ([1 Cor 13:12](#)). Many other such things were also said by the saints to reassure us of this.

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thousands for Solomon, and two hundred for those who keep its fruit.

Here you see the measureless love of God for humankind, concerning which the Theologian also says, ‘God rejoices at nothing so much as at humanity’s uprightness and salvation’. That is, God does not enjoy anything so much as He does a just and holy human being. For that reason He made the heaven and the earth, and whatever is in the earth, and for that reason He Himself became human, and all the rest of it.

Now, *thousands for Solomon* He says of Himself: ‘It is a greater gift and joy for Me to find an upright and fruitful human being than it is for the human being himself. The difference is as great as that between a *thousand* and *two hundred*; a *thousand* for me, and *two hundred* for the one who has *two natures*, spirit and flesh, united in one. They are perfect to Me, Who am perfect in My godhead and My humanity’.

Perfect man was likewise perfect God, in order to transform us perfectly. For ten and one hundred and one thousand are perfect numbers. One is perfected in ten, and not before, and if one repeats the pattern, ten is the same; ten tens make a hundred, and no more. Likewise, ten hundreds make a *thousand*.

Next he mentions giving wages to the *husbandmen*: not only those who *keep* themselves, but those who in their leadership capacity, whether spiritual or physical, *keep* and are true cultivators of the *vineyard*, receive wages from the Lord Jesus Christ.

The bride says

8:13 *You who sit in the garden, others hearken to you; make your voice audible to me.*

The Groom called the Bride a *vineyard*, and others had already called her a *garden*. Repeating this same thing now, the Bride calls herself the *garden* of the Groom who requires *fruit* from the *vineyard*. What she says means this: ‘You are my strength, and by your help and empowerment do I give *fruit*. Only *make audible to me Your voice* which said in the Gospel, “Come to me all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest” ’ ([Mt 11:29](#)).

The Bride pleads, ‘Only *make your voice audible to me* so that without erring I may follow after You, the Shepherd who said “My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me, and they will not go after a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not recognize his voice” ’ ([Jn 10:3–5](#)). She asks that she may keep close to the *voice* of the Desired and Wished for One. Following Him without erring, she will give Him the *thousands of silver* and the *fruit* of the *vineyard*, and the produce of the *garden*.

‘*Others hearken to you*. It is as if they are all awaiting You. You are the expectation of all—of heaven and earth, and all that has been created in them. This is what *others hearken to you* means. *Make your voice audible to me*, too, as it is to the angels who are nearer than we, and are illuminated by Your light; they are illuminated by You in the same way that we are illuminated by the sensible and comprehensible sun’.

8:14 *Fly, my Nephew, and be like the roe or like the young hart upon the mountains of spices.*

See the addition to the requests of the Bride, to hasten Him to her help. She is like the Psalmist Gregory of Narek, *The Blessing of Blessings: Gregory of Narek’s Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Roberta R. Ervine, vol. 215, Cistercian Studies Series (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications; Liturgical Press, 2007).

Prophet, who said, ‘Hasten to help me’ ([Ps 39:15](#)), and ‘Do not delay’ ([Ps 39:18](#); [69:6](#)). And again, ‘My heart fainted’ ([Ps 72:26](#)), ‘Hear me speedily’, and ‘Make haste to help me Lord, of my salvation’ ([Ps 37:23](#)), and others of similar nature.

Saying *Fly, and be like a roe or a young hart*, she begs Him to arrive swiftly, as in David’s requests, like *a roe* and *a young hart*, who are sharp eyed and swift in coming. It also brings in something concerning the Second Coming, when the Groom will require *fruit* of all; then there will be a cry in the middle of the night, ‘Behold the Bridegroom comes, go forth to meet Him’ ([Mt 25:6](#)) who sees every thought and deed.

As in the imperfect metaphor of the *roe* and the *hart*, He lives on the *mountain* heights: that is, in people who, in this world, are like *mountains* in virtue, and through their virtuous way of life are fragrant like *mountains of spices*. There in the next world, they will *fly* up to the heavenly *mountain* with the Groom.

As the Theologian says, He will go in swiftly, after the fashion of the allegorist’s words here: *Fly, my Nephew*. For *fly* means the same thing as *run swiftly*. Now, having said that He will enter in *swiftly*, he adds that some—those wedded to the Groom—will enter in with Him, while others will remain outside, prevented, ‘having wasted in preparation the time when they should have been entering. Afterwards many will weep, having learned too late the penalty for sloth, when there is no more possibility of entering into the wedding chamber. They will wish many times over for that which they wickedly closed to themselves’.

In another parable, they are likened to the people whom the good Father would have caused to rejoice at the Groom’s good fortune, but who hesitated to come to the wedding—one for the sake of his newly wedded wife or for the sake of a yoke of oxen obtained with difficulty—thus forfeiting the greater things for the lesser ([Lk 14:16–24](#)).

Now the Theologian says, as Solomon had already written, that when the Groom *flies* or *goes swiftly* to heaven—when the One who judges sinners and invites the just, comes—taking those who are worthy to go with Him, He will enter *swiftly* like one who *flies*, and the door will be closed to sinners. ‘For the time that they should have spent preparing to go, they wasted instead on useless things, worrying about the things of this world—yokes of oxen and wife and children and fields and other things which are preoccupations of the world. Later, they will weep tears in vain, having learned too late and understood their loss when it was no longer possible to mend it’.

Adding to this he says, ‘For none of the scornful enters in, nor the lazy, nor the unclean, not even if one has been able to sneak by, here in this life, without a wedding garment, being deceived by vain hopes’. He means that in this life we deceive ourselves with vain hopes, one person talking about such-and-such, and another about thus-and-so: ‘For Christians there is no hell’, or, ‘God is merciful, who became human for our sake and suffered and died on our behalf; how could He forget His compassion, and send us to eternal fire or cast us out of the wedding chamber?’ This is what it means, to ‘be deceived by vain hope’.

And he goes on, ‘When we shall be inside, then the Groom will recognize those whom He will teach; those souls who have gone to be near Him will be with Him—as it seems to me, He will teach them the most perfect and purest things’.

Now grasp what the Theologian is saying here: everything which was said or taught to us by

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the Scripture, the Law and the prophets, and the Gospel—that is, Christ and the apostles and the *vardapets*—those who spoke plainly, and those who spoke in parables, were all imperfect and indirect compared to the teaching which is to come, the most perfect and the most pure things which the Groom, as *Vardapet*, will teach to the perfect in glory as perfect as the angels, and to the pure in a purity as perfect as the seraphs and cherubs.

The same Gregory the Theologian, in another place, interprets the Lord's saying, 'I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new with you in the kingdom of my Father' ([Mt 26:29](#)), as referring to the perfect teaching which is His to teach and ours to learn.

Now, it is the highest and greatest of mysteries that Solomon has allegorized by means of the Song of Songs: the entirety of Christ's coming and His death, together with His sufferings, and the resurrection and the Second Coming and the wedding of the gentiles to Christ the Groom and the illumination of the Church, and the outpouring of the Spirit's grace in prophecy and mission and teaching and martyrdom and virginity and priesthood and the ascetic life and ways of penance, and the hope of sinners and the dead, thanks to the sacrifice of Christ. Yet, in comparison with what the saints are going to learn in their state of renewal and perfection through the Groom's love, these things which were said by Solomon pale—as does everything else concerning all these miracles of God which have happened and which are going to happen, everything that has been related by the ancients and by people of more modern times, no matter how capable of speaking and teaching the Lord Jesus has made them.

Let us conclude these words of interpretation on the Song of Songs, by saying that both we who have interpreted these words and you who study them will participate in the things of which the Theologian has just reminded us, through our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, to whom be glory forever and to the eternity of eternities.

Again, ever more praise to our Lord Jesus Christ, the Giver of grace, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, to the eternity of eternities.

Amen.

COLOPHON

In the Armenian date 426 (= AD 977) and in the Armenian kingdoms, I, the priest Gregory of Narek, son of Bishop Khosrov of Andzewats'ik', was constrained by the pious and Christ-crowned ruler Gurgēn, son of King Abusahl Hamazasp, to interpret the awesome words of Solomon and to explicate the deep, hidden things in them. These are enjoyable to hear, because he speaks about a groom and bride, as well as about breasts and red lips, beautiful cheeks and ravishing eyes, and about a sister and a nephew and maidens, and all the other like things that have to do with falling in love and throbbing hearts, the conjunctual union of generative love. Hearing this, people with uncomprehending minds have understood it in various terms. Consequently the ruler, out of concern for this, sent to me once, and then twice. At that point, I did not dare to demur, for I recognized that his directive was pleasing to God, and at his instruction, I explicated the Song of Songs.

Though it was through fear of disobedience, lest the royal dictate remain unfulfilled, that I took upon me a work greater than myself, it was nonetheless great audacity on my part, and worthy of criticism by all, and I might well have anticipated reproof from God as well. Yet, holding before me the royal order, I hope to be exonerated by both God and man. For it is Christ's own commandment to 'be obedient to kings as to God'. God considers that whoever is obedient, is obedient to Him, and whoever is found to be disobedient, God accounts that also as disobedience to Him. So I beg you, studious readers, do not heap blame on me because I have undertaken a work which was greater than my worth, for considering who was making the request, I could not well hang back. Rather, hoping in the One Holy Spirit, I reflected that He would not ignore requests made to Him. I began to seek with prayer and tears the help of Him who, looking upon my unworthiness, and upon the zealous desire of the one who had given the commission, opened my mouth to make these brief remarks,

to the glory of Christ.

Amen.

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THE FESTAL WORKS OF ST. GREGORY OF NAREK

Annotated Translation of the
Odes, Litanies, and Encomia

Abraham Terian

Abraham Terian

The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek

Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia

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For Maestro Haig Utidjian

*"Gathered we all in the holy, universal, apostolic church,
we earthlings in circles, sing there in many groups,
praising with the myriads of spiritual beings, angelic;
we join the circles of the luminous kind."*

St. Gregory of Narek
(*"Litany for the Church and the Ark of the Lord"*)

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Preface

On April 12, 2015, Pope Francis officially declared St. Gregory of Narek a Doctor of the Universal Church, after an earlier pronouncement he made on February 21. Western followers of the papal declaration suddenly found themselves desirous to learn more about the tenth-century Armenian saint and his works. In general, the popular and scholarly appreciation of Gregory of Narek hinges on his book of penitential prayers, titled *Book of Lamentation (Matean Oghbergut'ean)*. To many who are familiar with it, it is unlike anything one has ever read in the mystical tradition. Fortunately, the book is available in some Western-language translations.

The same could not be said about the present collection of his works, comprised of all his writings in the genres of odes, litanies, and encomia, presented here for the first time in translation. With the exception of some of his odes, these have long been neglected even in Armenian studies in favor of his *magnum opus*, the celebrated prayer book.

By all literary considerations, Gregory of Narek is the first great poet in Armenian literature. Some would even claim that he is the most outstanding figure in the Armenian literary heritage. Even his prose writings reflect a profound poetic talent, rich in imagination and inspiring. As in all areas of artistic endeavor, so in literature, an important criterion for measuring greatness is originality, especially in thought—even though texts do not exist without other texts. His creative and alliterative use of language has a gripping effect even when incomprehensible to readers or hearers of the classical text. His use of compound words in novel form is deeply impressive, neologisms of his creation that open new vistas of thought. Moreover, overlapping thoughts, multiple at times and as though conceived simultaneously, combine reality and imagination in a unique way. Interesting as his thoughts are, they often create a degree of incomprehension on the part of readers—even for those well acquainted with his language. Some of his lines are quite enigmatic, but not exegetically impenetrable, as I have tried to demonstrate in this book.

As a teacher of Armenian theology and patristics at St. Nersess Armenian Seminary for more than a decade, I often had to translate excerpts from medieval sources for my students. Thus began the present translation. Were it not for the constant interest of students and others distantly following some of my presentations, however, this work would not have been completed. Among those following from a distance yet very closely, was Maestro Haig Utidjian of Charles University in Prague. Were it not for his keen, constant, and multifaceted interest in the odes, his penetrating questions and scholarly curiosity in what another person working on the same difficult texts has come to observe, this book would have remained as meager handouts. I therefore dedicate this book to him, with gratitude for all his suggestions.

I take this opportunity to express thanks to the Patriarchate of Catholic Armenians for

sponsoring the two most significant conferences on St. Gregory of Narek thus far: the first in Rome (2005) and the second in Kaslik, Lebanon (2009). These international conferences, ably organized by Professors J.-P. Mahé of Paris and L. B. Zekian of Venice (whom Pope Francis has since appointed Apostolic Administrator *sede plena* of the Archeparchy of Armenians in Istanbul, elevating him to the office of archbishop), exemplify the best of recent “Narekean” scholarship—all the more so with the publication of the conference papers in two volumes.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my daughter Sonia for editing the translated encomia. Surely, no words are sufficient to thank my dear wife, Sara, my critical reader for fifty years. She waited many a long hour, patiently, putting much “on hold” while I was “praying” with Narekats’i.

At the 2014 annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) in San Diego, CA, I asked Mr. Hans Christoffersen of Liturgical Press if the present book would be of interest to the editors. His personal interest was nearly immediate. Providentially, the editorial decision coincided with the papal pronouncement. My deep gratitude is hereby expressed to all decision makers and editors at the esteemed press; and, yes, humbly to His Holiness.

Abraham Terian
April 24, 2015

Introduction

A tenth-century author, Gregory of Narek (ca. 945–1003) is rightly considered the best representative of medieval Armenian spirituality. He is often acclaimed as the foremost Armenian writer and one of the greatest Christian mystics of all time. These acclamations rest primarily on his well-known prayer book, the *Book of Lamentation* (*Uwuntulu Ողբերգութեալ, Matean Oghbergut'ean*), the product of the closing years of his life and reflecting the height of his spiritual and literary attainment. By contrast, the works included in this volume belong to the beginning of his literary career and are less known. With the exception of the odes, they do not always reflect the quality of his later writings; nonetheless, they are literary gems that deserve not only scholarly attention but also lay readers' appreciation. While not literarily as advanced as his later works, they are no less significant in determining the shape of their respective genres within the Armenian literary heritage—be they odes, litanies, or encomia. They are highly important works for the study of medieval Armenian lyric poetry and of the liturgical creativity of the time.

Unlike his mournful, penitential prayers, a celebratory mood permeates these works. As his colophons indicate (see “[Appendices](#)” at the end of this volume), the *Encomium on the Holy Cross* and the *Encomium on the Holy Virgin*, along with the *History of the Holy Cross of Aparank'*, were commissioned works as was his earlier *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. He must have attained substantial recognition for his literary ability early in life in order to have been asked to produce these compositions. In his prayer book, he alludes to his festive works collectively as “ardently joyous praises”: “But now, since I have entreated with many ardently joyous praises that are not written in this mode (i.e., as penitential prayers in the *Book of Lamentation*), hear them all, O compassionate One, along with these words” (Prayer 34.10.18–20). He refers to two of them by title: to the *Encomium on the Holy Virgin* in Prayer 80.1.20–21, an intercessory prayer addressed to her; and to the *Encomium on the Holy Apostles* in Prayer 82.1.6–11.

Gregory was born in ca. 945, the third and youngest son of Khosrov, later bishop of the Province of Andzewats'ik' and author of two liturgical texts: *Exposition of the Daily Office* and *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* (d. ca. 960). As a widower in ca. 950, Khosrov received episcopal ordination and turned his two younger sons, Yovhannēs and Grigor, over to the care of a paternal cousin of his late wife—the abbot Anania of Narek, who had established the monastery in 935. The elder son, Sahak, stayed with Khosrov as his assistant. Gregory spent his entire adult life at the monastery of Narek, not far from the southernmost shore of Lake Van, in what was the province of Rēshunik' within the kingdom of Vaspurakan. Consequently, in Armenian he is invariably called Narekats'i, after the place with which he is always associated (this loonym will be used every now and then as a cognomen).

Most of what is known with certainty about Gregory's life is gleaned from his four colophons, three of which are appended to his own writings and one to that of his father. A translation of these is provided as appendices in this volume, along with his first, brief biography by Nersēs of Lambron (1153–1198; bishop of Tarsus from 1175), gleaned from the same colophons. Nersēs shows profound appreciation for Gregory's prayers, which seem to have been popularized during the pontificate of Nersēs's great uncle, Catholicos Nersēs IV of Klay (in office 1166–1173), known as Shnorhali ("the Gracious"). No medieval Armenian writer was more influenced by Gregory than Catholicos Nersēs, who may well have been instrumental in having certain of our author's prayers, odes, and litanies incorporated in liturgical books.

Further autobiographical remarks may be gleaned from the *Book of Lamentation*, where Gregory remarks about his family in Prayer 51.1.9–14. When contemplating [Psalm 146:3](#), on not putting one's trust in human beings, to whom it is but vain to cry out, he refers rhetorically to his brother(s) and parents: "To a blood brother, who is himself longing for serenity? To my earthly father, whose care diminished with his dwindling days? To my mother, who suffered labor pains, whose compassion ceased with her departure from this life?" In his colophon to the prayer book, however, Gregory expresses deep gratitude to his brother Yovhannēs, who succeeded Anania as abbot of Narek (see "[Appendix A 4](#)"). His gratitude to the abbot Anania is equally profound, as another colophon shows. Gregory describes him as "the spiritual and intellectual philosopher much renowned for his pious life ("[Appendix A 3](#)"). The abbot's surviving works bear witness to this. Elsewhere Gregory refers to himself as a teacher, using the Hebrew equivalent of the title, *rabbi* (Prayer 72.4). In his usual, self-deprecating way, however, he acknowledges: "For though I was indeed called by some of the highest names, yet the worst aspects of these define me" (Prayer 56.1.57–58). In his *Discourse (Ճան, Չար)*, he states: "I was dropped in the womb of the church; and being nursed with milk from her spiritual breasts, I was honored as a priest in her great house, and was privileged to partake of her old and new treasures, albeit unworthily" (MH 10:1041).

Gregory's theological education is amply displayed in this sample of his writings and amplified with deeper mysticism in his later works. Composed as liturgical works for the various Dominical and related feasts, following a long-established liturgical calendar, these poetic writings—the odes, especially—have attracted considerable interest over the years by enthusiasts of lyrical verse and narrative in medieval Armenian literature. Yet no scholar has hitherto done justice to these works in their liturgical and theological context, where they rightly belong and from where they derive their true meaning. Nor have these works in their entirety been translated to any language. Found in a number of separate editions, only recently were these works in different genres brought together in a single volume, first in 2003 in the Antelias Millennial Edition (edited by Archbishop Zareh Aznavorian), and more recently in the *Matenagirk' Hayots'* series (MH 12), the textual basis of the translations provided here.

Until this translation, the texts of many of the odes were considered too corrupted to be comprehensible, and, as evidenced by earlier translations, in many instances they were misunderstood. These texts and the other writings translated here open a new chapter in the study and appreciation of Gregory's use of symbolism, drawn from the Scriptures and the natural world around him. The way he brings the theology of these symbols to bear on his sacramental theology in the prayer book, and liturgical theology in these writings, remains to

be studied. The same could be said of his poetical-theological method in both the prayer book and these writings.

The Festal Works

Speaking of the symbolism of the church, Catholicos Yovhan of Ōdzun (in office 717–728) declares: “The joyous feasts therein point to the earnest of the hoped-for joy of those who see God; they reflect the all-around beauty and the rejoicing in heaven. As it is written: ‘Everlasting joy is upon their heads’” ([Isa 35:10](#); [61:7](#) LXX and Arm.). Accordingly, these surviving liturgical samples of odes and litanies offer glimpses into the “heavenly” experience of the festive community, in worship at Narek. Such jubilation emanates from the faith of those celebrating; it reflects the doctrinal perspectives not only of the author but also of the community, with our author as a major contributor to its joyousness. Moreover, these compositions are literary works meant for public worship by a community that must have been musically oriented. A number of the festal works contain lines that clearly indicate active communal participation in song and recitation; some of these lines are quoted below.

Like other Armenian fathers of the church, Gregory loved to employ a great variety of images drawn from the Bible; no other father, however, juxtaposed as many images in his thoughts as Gregory did. Consequently, familiarity with the contents of the Bible, its imagery, and the medieval history of interpretation of at least its most striking parts, is a requisite to understanding his works. A deep misunderstanding of the odes and most of the author’s other writings prevails in “Narekean” scholarship since the middle of the twentieth century—for lack of biblical and medieval theological awareness in Soviet Armenian scholarship devoted to our author. Consequently, absurdities abound in secular interpretations of the odes and of much else by Gregory. These I find unnecessary to recount in this introduction. There are, to be sure, some traces of pre-Christian mythical elements in his poetry. They are, however, extremely rare and come in a Christianized form.

Apart from the scattered individual odes in translation, cited at the end of the respective odes rendered in this volume, mention must be made of translations of Gregory’s collected odes. Mkhit’ryan’s work, which also has the classical text en-face, antedates K’yoshkeryan’s edition and thus lacks the contribution made by her textual analysis. Although he shows awareness of eleven manuscripts at the Matenadaran, which he lists at the end of his introduction, the text he provides is simply that of the nineteenth-century Venetian editions. His arrangement of the odes is unsystematic and the Eastern Armenian translation poorer than the wanting text. So too is Geworgyan’s translation, provided at the end of his Eastern Armenian translation of the *Book of Lamentation*. It abounds with absurdities indicative of misunderstanding the text. French translations do not fare better. Godel follows Mkhit’ryan in nearly every respect, following his sequence of the odes for the most part. Godel’s French translation, however, in its guise of dynamism, distorts further Mkhit’ryan’s flawed translation, on which it relies rather heavily. It is curious that Godel omits [12A, “Ode for the Church,”](#) possibly because of the difficulty of the text through which Mkhit’ryan navigates rather incoherently. Moreover, Godel punctuates his translation of the odes with translation of several prayers from the *Book of Lamentation*, selections that have no thematic coherence with

the odes. Equally amiss is Marcel's earlier translation of the odes.

There are no systematic studies of either the litanies or the encomia of our author, and only rarely may a study of an individual litany or an encomium be found. Of the latter, Dasnabédian's meritorious work on the *Encomium on the Holy Virgin* deserves special mention here. No less noteworthy is Archbishop Pogharian's Western-Armenian translation of the encomia, inclusive of the *History of the Holy Cross of Aparank'*, with which the encomia begin.

The Odes

Little is known about the formation of the Armenian Church's hymnal, the *Sharaknots'*, prior to the substantial additions and likely revisions of the twelfth century—when scores of hymns composed in verse by the aforementioned Catholicos Nersēs Shnorhali (and some by his kin) were added. The same could be said about the formation of the *Tagharan*, the collection of hymnic odes to which Gregory of Narek is a major contributor and which underwent editorial work in the same Cilician period. These compositions have to be seen as songs of praise, complementary to the canonical hymns for the mostly Dominical and Marian feasts, adding to the festive spirit of the days of celebration. Their early liturgical use, however, remains uncertain. To the end of this period of editorial activity belongs also the formation of the *Gandzaran*, the collection of litanic compositions, a genre of which Gregory is the progenitor; more on this below.

During these editorial activities, especially those entailing the formation of the *Tagharan* and the *Gandzaran*, there appears to have been considerable duplication of contents and interchangeable and inconsistent use of terms tagged to the individual compositions within each of the two collections. The word *tagh* was used mostly for versed odes of several verses and at times for detached verses, and *gandz* for the more litanic compositions in free verse and irregular lines. A third word, *meghedi*, a term used mostly for short melismatic pieces such as those sung during the Preparation of the Gifts during the Divine Liturgy, appears in the titles of odes of varying length.

The word *tagh*, however, generally translated “ode,” is never used by Gregory with reference to his odes. Literally, the word means “song”; just as *Tagharan* stands for a collection of such compositions, “a song-book.” Two synonyms predate the word *tagh*: they are *erg* (“song”) and *k'ert'uats* (“poem”). Achaýan observes that the word *tagh* does not occur in the literature of the Armenian Golden Age (fifth century), and the examples he gives of its early usage are from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. In one of Gregory's two acrostic odes ([4A](#); cf. [4B](#)), now titled «Տաղ Սրբնց Քառասունից ել այլ վկայից» (“*Tagh Srbots' K'árasnits' ew ayl vgayits'*” / “Ode for the Forty and Other Holy Martyrs”), the initial letters of the lines read ԳՐԻԳՈՐԻ Ե ԵՐԳԱՅ ԱՅՍ (GRIGORI E ERGS AYS / “This Song Is by Grigor”). Similarly, he uses the word *erg* when labeling his acrostic compositions in a predominantly litanic form (hence my and others' calling them “litanies”); only one of them he labels *gandz*. Moreover, he uses the word *gandz* as the initial word of nearly all his acrostic compositions in this genre (nos. [2](#), [9](#), [10](#), [13–16](#), and [Suppl. 2.5](#)), becoming its progenitor—all the more so as others after him began their litanic compositions imitatively with the same word, *gandz* (on which more will be said below, under the subheading “Litanies”). Thus *erg* (“song”) is his common designation for

poetic compositions, be they odes or litanies. As for *meghedi*, generally translated “canticle” in the lexica, it appears in only two titles of Gregory’s odes ([5B](#) and [14A Var.](#)), where it is clearly an editorial input. These three literary terms were variously and inconsistently applied in the Cilician period to various hymnic compositions by different authors, and their inconsistent use in later manuscripts continued in the printed editions.

Gregory was fortunate to have had the good company of talented monks at Narek. The historian Step’anos Asoghik of Tarōn (d. ca. 1015), who was educated at the same monastery, mentions the presence of “multitalented, highly accomplished singers and literary scholars” residing there. Gregory was one of them. Those singers and scholars at Narek, a place of charismatic mysticism not unlike hesychasm, were theologically informed, and their worship was guided and shaped by centuries of psalmodic traditions and more. They were earnest about the psalms, hymns, and spiritual canticles recommended by St. Paul to the churches of Corinth ([1 Cor 14:26](#)), Ephesus ([Eph 5:19](#)), and Colosse ([Col 3:16](#)). They experienced regularly the spirit into which one must be absorbed in order to understand and sing them properly; they were imbued with the spirit of the psalmodic chants sung to free melodies and the praises that followed—some conceivably of their own composition.

Illustrative of the singing at Narek are the opening lines of [12, “Litany for the Church and the Ark of the Lord”](#):

Gathered we all in the holy, universal, apostolic church,
we earthlings in circles, sing there in many groups,
praising with the myriads of spiritual beings, angelic;
we join the circles of the luminous kind.

So also [14, “Litany for the Assumption of the Most Blessed Holy Bearer of God,” lines 6–8:](#)

With encomia of praise and the singing of the “Thrice Holy,”
with ceaseless voice, celebrating in concert,
we sing to you, most blessed of women.

And again, in [Suppl. 2.4, “Ode for the Coming of the Holy Spirit,” lines 1–4:](#)

With melodious voice (and) sweet sound
We sing to you in seraphic tongue,
O union of Three Persons in the Godhead,
One Divinity, of the same nature.

A favorite literary form, and a convenient mnemonic device in recitation or singing, is the “chain verse” in which the last word of one line becomes the first word of the next line. Several of Gregory’s odes are composed with this poetic technique ([3A](#), [5A](#), [5B](#), [5B Var.](#), [5C](#), [6A](#)). A related form utilized a word in each first part of a line from the second part of the preceding line (employed in part in [13A](#); both forms employed in [15A](#)).

It is not at all surprising that certain features of odes, litanies, and encomia overlap, making the genres somewhat blurry at times but not unrecognizable. After all, odes also fall into a more general category of praise. Moreover, there are two whole acrostic litanies embedded in the encomia and meant to be more pronounced in their manner of recitation—indeed chanted

or sung. One such alphabetic acrostic litany in the *Encomium on the Holy Cross* is introduced with these words (quoted above): “As for us, to the measure of our ability, we shall sing in laudation of the life-giving sign of the divine cross, with the clarity of a gifted voice ...” ([A 40 = B 8.53](#)). In the *Encomium on the Holy Virgin*, he introduces three paragraphs that begin with the words “Blessed are you” with these words: “Those who behold with their non-physical eyes and who sing blessings with pleasing and melodious voices, bless you perpetually ...” ([A 36 = B 13.36](#)). And again, when introducing an onomastic acrostic litany which spells his name: “And beneath this ornate arch we will honor you ...” ([A 74 = B 22.84](#)). Similarly, he inserts an ode in the *Encomium on the Holy Apostles* ([13.64–66](#)).

Obviously, some of the odes were used—with or without adaptation—for feasts other than those for which they were originally composed. This practice seems to have necessitated certain adaptations witnessed in the manuscripts with their abundant variants. It is not difficult to observe, on theological grounds, how a nativity ode could be used for a Marian feast and become a Marian ode in the process; or for a Marian ode to become an ode for the feast of the church or be used for a church dedication—underscoring the theological commonality between Mariology and ecclesiology. Just as clearly, one could see how an ode for the Forty Martyrs of Sebastia could be used for commemorating other martyrs. Repeated musical adaptations are among other contributing factors to the range of the odes’ variants. The odes’ broad popularity seems to have compounded their textual problems, with stretched melismata giving rise to shorter versions.

Several stanzas from Gregory’s various odes are utilized as “variables,” known as *Patshachk’* (“Propers” in the Divine Liturgy), for selection—among others—as befits the significant feast day, and sung as a *meghedi* during the *Prothesis* (the Preparation of the Gifts for the Eucharist). Some of these were translated into English by Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan: “Variables of the Divine Liturgy Proper to Various Feast Days,” in his first English edition of the Armenian Divine Liturgy and revised by him in subsequent editions. The following are the utilized stanzas, in the order of the “Propers”:

- Proper 1. For Ordinary Sundays (among the options).
 - (a) [15A, “Ode for the Holy Cross,” lines 1–4.](#)
 - (b) [10B, “Antiphon,” lines 1–2.](#)
 - [6C, “Ode for the Resurrection,” lines 1–6.](#)
- Proper 10. For the Transfiguration.
 - [13A, “Ode for the Transfiguration,” lines 1–4.](#)
- Proper 11. For the Feast of the Church.
 - [Suppl. 2.2, “Ode for the Holy Cross,” lines 1–4.](#)
 - [6B, “Antiphon,” lines 1–8, 15–18.](#)
- Proper 12. For the Marian Feasts (among the options).
 - [14A, “Ode for the Church,” lines 9–10.](#)
- Proper 13. For the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross.
 - (a) [15A, “Ode for the Holy Cross,” lines 1–4.](#)
 - (b) [Suppl. 2.2, “Ode for the Holy Cross,” lines 7–16.](#)

There are extant melodies, transcribed during the nineteenth century, for some five or six St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).
Page 6. Exported from [Logos Bible Study](#), 11:09 PM March 13, 2025.

of the odes. These melodies are associated with the remnants of the oral tradition of the time and in some cases are particularly likely to represent relatively recent compositional activity on the part of church musicians, rather than reflecting aspects of the neumatic notation found in the medieval codices. This, of course, need not reduce their musical value. The odes for which melodies exist are: “*Hawun, hawun*” ([10B](#), “Antiphon”); “*Gohar vardēn vař áreal*” ([13A](#), “[Ode for the Transfiguration](#)”); “*Ach’k’n tsov i tsov*” ([14A](#) Var., “[Ode for the Church](#)”); “*Yes dzayn zařiwtsun asem*” ([15A](#), “[Ode for the Holy Cross](#)”); “*Sayln ayn ijjanēr*” ([Suppl. 1](#), “[Ode for the Resurrection](#)”); and “*Hawik mi paytsar*” ([Suppl. 2.2](#), “[Ode for the Holy Cross,](#)” the authorship of which is occasionally questioned).

The Litanies

Conforming to a literary form or genre, the composition known as *k’aroz* (from Syriac *karuzútha*) or *gandz* (from Gregory’s contribution to the genre) is an array of litanic and para-litanic prayers, distinct from litanies or bidding prayers recited by deacons during the Liturgy of the Hours—from which it derives. In general, and as seen in the author’s litanies, the composition consists of linked prayers that begin with confessional statements and invocation addressed to the Triune God, followed by occasional reference to the commemoration of the feast (whether Dominical or Marian), and followed by petitionary prayers of intercession. The recollection of the festal occasion often partakes of the nature of a prayerful homily, addressed not so much to the congregation as to God and punctuated with refrains addressed to God. In their present form, Gregory’s works in this genre show an evolution that seems to have preserved the traditional *k’aroz* with addenda, transformed into a chain of prayers including diaconal bidding with a standardized couplet of the collect (“To commit ourselves and one another / to the almighty Lord God, we pray” or an equivalent by Gregory beginning with the letter «п» to yield the acrostic «Եղիք» [erg, “song”]). The petitionary prayer—whether as part of the larger prayer or as its sequel—progresses from the general to the specific, asking blessings for the church patriarch and bishops, priests and *vardapets* or Doctors of the Church, deacons and the rest of the clergy to the least of the clerical officers, the king, princes, military commanders and their troops, and believers in general. The ascription, or the concluding litany of the saints, follows a long-established order invoking (1) the Blessed Virgin Mary, (2) St. John the Baptist, (3) St. Stephen the Protomartyr, (4) the Apostles and the Prophets, (5) St. Gregory the Illuminator, who sometimes precedes the Apostles and the Prophets, and (6) the martyrs with the ascetics collectively.

The author’s calling the litanic compositions *erg* (“song”) in his acrostic arrangements distinguishes them from the usual litanies known as *k’aroz*—a common term in the *Breviary* (*Zhamagirk’*) where it is also used as a rubric for litanic parts; e.g., diaconal proclamations, whether short or long with appropriate responses, priestly prayers, and melodic invocations. While in such usages the term *k’aroz* leaves no doubt about its Syriac origin, the origin of the designation *gandz* for litanic arrangements such as Gregory’s—and of the derivative *Gandzaran* for a collection of such compositions—calls for further philological and literary-historical analysis.

Although the word *gandz* brings to mind the Old Persian word *ganz* (meaning “song”) and

St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).

the common Semitic term *knz* (variously borrowed term, meaning “treasure”), a cursory analysis of the form of these compositions yields sufficient reason to associate the Armenian development of the genre and its appellation with Gregory himself. Nearly all of his litanies begin with the word *gandz*, except for nos. [7](#) (the only acrostic litany without his name), [11](#) (the only such litany among the acrostic litanies with his name), and [12](#) (the only nonacrostic litany). His predilection for the opening word *gandz* is invariably bound to his name, as he begins acrostically with the letter “G” ([Q](#)). Moreover, his initial word constitutes an expression of his profound appreciation of the subject on which he is writing, coupled with the fact that he often begins with doctrinal statements on the Holy Trinity as revealed in Jesus Christ—whose coming the Blessed Virgin made possible. It is the rich theology of this revealed mystery that is expressed in the word *gandz*, truly “a treasure within a treasure.” Since most of these compositions begin doxologically with this word, and since compositions were better known by their opening words than by their respective titles, the word *gandzaran* became descriptive of the primary collection to which Gregory was the major contributor. His compositions were a prized part of the collection, and they inspired several subsequent authors to begin not a few of their respective contributions similarly with the word *gandz*. Thus, Gregory’s indubitable stamp remains on the collection as a whole. There is no evidence of this nomenclature of the form, or of the genre as we know it in Armenian, before him.

Older litanies are generally comprised of instructive remarks about the respective feasts and are informed by the early narrative of the celebrated events. In composing them Gregory drew from a stock of homilies for the liturgical year, woven around the life of Christ. This wealth in the native language was amassed over a period of five centuries, beginning with early translations and native works. Of the latter kind, the earliest are Yeghishē Vardapet’s homilies on the baptism of Jesus, the transfiguration, and those on the passion according to St. John—for the Holy Week, and Mambrē Vertsanogh’s homilies on the birth and baptism of Jesus, two on the raising of Lazarus, and two on the triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday; all from the fifth century. Of no less significance are the several homilies on the life of Christ by Catholicos Zak’aria of Dzag (in office 854–876), especially those on the passion, and his homilies on the Blessed Virgin Mary—from the annunciation to her assumption. And of the many Bible commentaries of Armenian authorship known to our author, special mention must be made of Bishop Step’anos of Siwnik’s (d. 735) commentaries *On the First Vision of Ezekiel* and *On the Four Gospels*. Of course, the interconnectedness of the various literatures of the Christian East should not be discounted, thanks to early translations.

The word “litany” comes from the Greek *litaneia*, “entreaty”; it is liturgically defined as a series of prayers with stases. These follow the instructive remarks about the respective feast, with proper biddings or calls to penitence and participation and concluding prayers of intercession in formulaic acclamations and invocations of the saints—foremost of whom are the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist, and Stephen the Protomartyr. Acclamations also include invocation of the particular saint(s) being commemorated, with the usual petition for their intercession with the Lord on behalf of the worshipers. Since most of the litanies here presented pertain to Dominical feasts, they culminate with the invocation of the principal saints just named. These formulaic commendations and invocations have acquired a canonical place in the daily offices of the liturgy, with the priestly prayer, acclamation, or ascription reserved

for the one most senior in rank among the assembled clergy. Their repetition at the conclusion of the morning prayers on the feast day marks the end of the liturgy for all pre-feast celebrations (*nakhatōn* or *nakhatōnak*).

Gregory's litanies provide an early attestation to a standardized usage, but not in every respect of the formulaic acclamations, such as in the prayer for bishops, priests, and deacons or other ministers of the church, and for kings and princes. There is also a degree of inconsistency in the invocation of the principal saints.

We now turn to a philological problem in two thematically related, acrostic litanies: [16, "Litany for All the Holy Apostles," lines 100–104](#), and [Suppl. 2.5, "Litany for All the Apostles and Hierarchs," lines 94–98](#). The acrostic reading of the paragraph initials yields ԳՐԻՎՈՒՇ ԵԶԳ in one and ԳՐԻՎՈՐ ԵԶԳ in the other. K'yoshkeryan leaves the problem of ԵԶԳ unresolved even when she discusses at length the corresponding lines in the various litanies, the part known as "collect" or *k'aroz*. It could neither be read as ԵՐԳ nor explained away as a recurring scribal error in both litanies since it is woven into the fabric of the text, thus:

Եւ եւս առաւել
Չյորդորումն սիրոյ եւ զգործս բարեաց պարզեւել մեզ, խնդրեմք:
Չանձինս մեր եւ զմիմեանս
Տեառն Աստուծոյ ամենակալի յանձն արասցուք, խնդրեմք:
Գովեալ ... / Գերազոյն ...

The nonword Եզգ (ezg), hence unaccounted for in the lexica, results from a formulaic substitution beginning with the letter «Ղ» for the less familiar lines by Gregory, which must have begun with the letter «Ռ». The substitution here and in the thematically related litany ([Suppl. 2.5](#)) is of the more common and familiar collect (Չանձինս մեր եւ զմիմեանս ...) for the less familiar collects used by the author ([Ռոնել Վերստին ...](#) [2, line 91](#); [10, line 17](#); [Ռոնել զմարսինս մեր ...](#) [9, line 110](#); [14, line 130](#); [15, line 68](#); [Ռամեա զամենեսեան ...](#) [7, line 136](#)).

The word *p'okh* («փոխ») is a problematic rubric in both the odes and the litanies. Usually found as a rubric in the margin and sometimes indicated with just the letter "P'" («Փ»), the word generally means change. It appears, however, in four different kinds of usage or context and with possibly as many different meanings. The first of these, and the only usage of its kind, is in the first ode ([1A](#)) where the word recurs with every other stanza in the most likely sense of antiphon: a part to be chanted or sung in response. The second kind of usage of the word is found in three odes ([3A](#), [5A](#), and [Suppl. 2.4](#)) where it occurs but once in each, presumably to indicate change in melody, thus serving to mark a section that is musically distinct. That this is the word's likely sense in these instances is further suggested—if not indicated—by its third kind of usage, found in the litanies. The following litanies have the concluding intercessory petition marked with the word *p'okh*: [7](#), [9](#), [10](#), [11](#), and [15](#) (absent in litanies [2](#), [12](#), [13](#), [14](#), [16](#), and [Suppl. 2.5](#)). In these five instances the word marks a transitional point, indicating a change in the music to which the ensuing section is recited. Some such change is followed liturgically to this day. Whereas the litanic recitation—including the collect—is a diaconal part with responses by the people, or at least by all the clerks, the concluding ascription (*maght'ank'*) is intoned by the officiating senior member of the celebrants, and that with a different melody. Thus, in

these instances the word indicates also change in assignment. Fourth, the word is used as title to an otherwise untitled, partial, or modified ode ([4B](#), [6B](#), [8C](#), [10B](#), [Suppl. 2.3 \[2B\]](#) and [Suppl. 2.3 Var. \[2B Var.\]](#)). In such instances it seems to indicate an “alternate” ode, possibly of later adaptation for the particular feast. Textually abridged texts, indeed, fragments thereof, appear to have been used for especially melismatic musical settings. The loss of the rubric in certain odes and litanies could well be the result, at least in part, of growing scribal tendency to omit marginal marks perhaps because of the scribe’s thorough familiarity with the liturgical text at hand. Surely, something of the scribal/liturgical understanding of the word *p’okh* has been lost to us, not to mention the original melodies of the odes.

The Encomia

The panegyrical tradition in Armenian literature is conspicuous, having its first and foremost example in Koriwn’s *Life of Mashtots*, the progenitor of literacy in the native language at the turn of the fifth century. Equally important are the several encomia on the Holy Cross and the Theotokos; e.g., “Praise to the Holy Bearer of God and Ever-Virgin Mary” by Bishop Petros of Siwnik’ (d. 557) and Dawit’ of Nergin’s (d. ca. 660) “Encomium to the God-receiving Holy Cross.” Other encomia by these same titles belong to several other authors, among them T’ēodoros K’f’tenawor (d. ca. 675), known for his “Encomium to the God-receiving Holy Cross” and “Praise to the Holy Bearer of God and Ever-Virgin Mary.” With the translation of a wide range of patristic literature, the tradition spread rapidly—as seen in the panegyrics on St. Gregory the Illuminator.

To these familiar encomia Gregory adds his own. At the conclusion of the *History of the Holy Cross of Aparank’* (*Պատմութիւն Ապարանից Սուրբ Խաչին*, *Patmut’iwn Aparanits’ Surb Khach’in*), itself a historical encomium in which he tells how a relic of the true cross was brought to the monastery of Aparank’ in the District of Mokk’ (Gk. Moxoēnē; Syr. Bēth Moksāyē, in the Khizan region near Lake Van), he introduces two of his better known encomia: the *Encomium on the Holy Cross* (*Ներբողի Սուրբ Խաչն*, *Nerbogh i Surb Khach’n*) and the *Encomium on the Blessed Virgin* (*Ներբողի Սուրբ Կոյսն*, *Nerbogh i Surb Koysn*).

We shall thus begin to bring together, following this historical account, an assortment of some short compositions in writing. First, on the very same, divinely ordained, life-giving cross; and after that, by the will of the Existent whose essence is inexpressible, to offer with joyous lips our gratitude as a fragrant offering, a fruit that is pleasing, to Our Holy Lady and Bearer of God. ([26.142](#))

He goes on to establish a thematic connection between this account and the Encomium on the Holy Cross, its sequel, and to connect the latter with the whole encomiastic tradition of exalting the cross, considering his own work as continuous with that tradition.

But, for now, let us recall the meaningful words of those who before us were trained by the Spirit and led by Wisdom from on high, who celebrated beforehand this magnificent and deep mystery in groups (and) with wonderful words. So, let us also, in tune with the resonance of the wisdom granted to us by the One who gives powerful words from on high, chant loudly this melodious praise to the sign of the cross, written anew with fairly new

expressions of praise in (this) newly arranged encomium. ([26.143–44](#))

He makes a further connection, in the colophon at the end of the *Encomium on the Blessed Virgin*, indicating that all three works were written for the bishop of the district, Step’anos. He refers to them as “my small book of little significance” (“[Appendix A 3](#)”).

His two other encomia, *Encomium on the Holy Apostles* (Ներբողի Սուլը Առաքեալսն, *Nerbogh i Surb Arak'ealsn*) and *Encomium on St. James of Nisibis* (Ներբողի Սուլը Յակոբ Մտսբնայ, *Nerbogh i Surbn Yakob Mtsbnay*) are invariably related, just as [16, “Litany for All the Apostles,”](#) and [Suppl. 2.5, “Litany for All the Apostles and Hierarchs,”](#) are related. These encomia have acquired lengthy subtitles in the course of their transmission: *An encomium recited in praise of the full circle of the twelve apostles, who are first in honor among the prominent heads, and to the seventy-two holy disciples of Christ; and To the great and blessed St. James, patriarch of the city of Nisibis, bishop and overseer of the ancient and heaven-like see,* besides its full, redundant title (*Encomium on Saint James of Nisibis: A Discourse of Praise*). This is not the place to detail the significance of St. James for the Armenian Church, where he is the embodiment of the Syrian vestiges in early Armenian Christianity. Suffice to say that he is made a cousin of St. Gregory the Illuminator, as our author points to this kinship: “Progeny from unclean, barbaric parents and close, blood-relative of our blessed Illuminator, the son of his progenitor’s sister” ([21.67](#) and note there).

Complementing these two encomia is the “[Litany for St. Gregory the Illuminator](#)” (11), which in technical terms is an encomiastic litany, composed in onomastic acrostic reading ԳՐԻԳՈՐԻ ԳԼՈՒ (‘A Litany by Grigor’). Most of its components are characteristic of encomium, replete with a rhetorician’s *topoi*.

In his prayer book the author refers to only two of his encomia: the *Encomium on the Blessed Virgin* (Prayer 80.1.20–21) and the *Encomium on the Holy Apostles* (Prayer 82.1.6–11). Nevertheless, his encomiastic works are not to be limited to the proper encomia grouped here, for odes are considered a form of praise as well, and no less so the major parts of his litanies. His “praise” cuts across all three genres of writings presented here. In fact, Gregory’s writings help illustrate the historical transformation of genres.

Gregory’s Other Writings

When considering the other works of Gregory, his *magnum opus* commands greater attention. The mystic soliloquies that characterize his *Book of Lamentation* (Մասնելու Ողբերգութեան, *Matean Oghbergut’ean*), essentially penitential prayers written near the end of his life, could well be classified among the very best of ancient Christian meditative literature. It was completed in 1002, with the help of his older brother John, then abbot of Narek (text in *MH* 12:49–605). The soliloquies appear to be an embodiment of the spirituality prevalent at Narek, mingled with the author’s own spirituality. The prayers, each prefaced with the words “Speaking with God from the depths of the heart” and called a *Ban*, a unit of thought, are thematically grouped and follow an inherent and broad outline in three major divisions.

As for Gregory’s works pertaining to biblical literature, they cover texts in which mystics find fertile ground for contemplation. There are four titles to consider, beginning with the St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).

Commentary on the Song of Songs (*Մեկնութիւն Երգոց Երգոյն Սողոմոնի*, *Meknut'iwn Ergots' Ergoyn Soghomoni*), his only complete biblical commentary (text in *MH* 12: 760–883). The colophon, dated AD 977, informs that he wrote it at the request of Prince Gurgēn Artsruni (coreigned as king of Vaspurakan with his brothers, 977–1003). Like all medieval commentators on the book, Gregory, with some nuances of his own, understood the text as an allegory of the love between God and his people or between Christ and his church. The *Commentary on Job: ‘Who is This ...?’* (*Մեկնութիւն «Ո՞վ է Դա»-ի*, *Meknut'iwn “Ov ē Da”i*) is but a partial commentary, on chapters [38–39](#), the first of two theophanic discourses comprising the epilogue of Job, beginning with the words “Who is this ...?” ([38:2](#); text in *MH* 12: 885–910). The Discourse, “Look Within Yourself: Perhaps There Is a Secret Word in Your Wayward Heart” (*Ճառ. «Յայեաց յանձն քն, զուցէ լինիցի բան ծածուկ ի սրտի քն անալրէն»*, *Char.* “*Hayeats’ yandzn k’o, guts’ē linit’si ban tsatsuk i srti k’o anawrēn*”) is as much a treatise of mystical theology as it is a homily on [Deut 15:9](#) with moral exhortation (text in *MH* 10:1040–72). The last, *Commentary by the Holy Teachers of the Church on “The Lord’s Prayer”* (*Մեկնութիւն սրբոց վարդապետոց եկեղեցւոյ արարեալ ի «Յայր մեր, որ յերկինս»ն*, *Meknut'iwn srbots’ vardapetats’ ekeghets’oy arareal i “Hayr mer, or yerkins”n*), is a sentence-by-sentence commentary on [Matt 6:9–13](#), with some repeated lemmata indicating a chain of quotations or catenae, compiled from anonymous fathers (text in *MH* 10:1106–10).

Most of the remaining four works of Gregory are part of a rich tradition of admonitory or cautionary literature in Armenian. A *Word of Advice on the Orthodox Faith and the Pure and Virtuous Life* (*Բան խրատու վասն ուղիղ հաւասարութեան*, *Ban khratu vasn ughigh hawatoyn ew mak’ur varuts’ arák’inut’ean*) urges, through seventy-six mandates, steadfastness in the faith and practice of Christian living (text in *MH* 12:1022–84). The *Letter to the Admirable and Prominent Congregation of Kchaw* (*Թուղթ ի հոյակասպ եւ յականաւոր ուխտն Կճաւայ, T’ught’ i hoyakap ew yakanawor ukhtn Kchaway*) was sent to the abbot of a neighboring monastic community to caution about the T’ontrakeans, the antihierarchical movement of the time, accused of sweeping yet vague heresies (text in *MH* 12:1087–89). This denunciatory letter, probably intended to distance the monastery of Narek from suspicions of heresy, has to be considered alongside the apparently coerced *Letter* by the abbot Anania. The *Order and Rules of Prayer* (*Կարգ եւ կանոն աղաւտից*, *Karg ew kanon aghawt’its’*) was written at the request of an anonymous monk. The treatise emphasizes appropriate demeanor for methodical prayer in private and during the liturgy of the hours (text in *MH* 10:1081–94). The *Eulogy for Vardapets and Wise Priests* (*Վարդապետոց եւ իմաստուն բահանայից վախճանի բան*, *Vardapetats’ ew imastun k’ahanayits’ vakhchani ban*) mourns the passing of an unnamed monastic teacher, probably the abbot Anania of Narek. It seems to have been used to eulogize later *vardapets* and priests—as the redacted title suggests (text in *MH* 10:1103–05).

Text and Translation

A fairly reliable critical text—albeit eclectic—of the odes and litanies (*Tagher ev Gandzer*, abbr. *TG*) was prepared more than thirty years ago by Armine K’yoshkeryan. The text edited by her has been endorsed and adopted, under the title of *Gandztetr* (*Booklet of Gandz*) and with a

St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).

revised introduction by her (Armēnuhi K'ēoshkērian), as part of volume 12 of the ongoing Armenian Classical Authors series, *Matenagirk' Hayots'* (pp. 609–745; abbr. *MH*). Hrach'ēay T'amrazyan (T'amrazian), the editor of the serial volume comprised of works by Gregory of Narek, however, does not follow K'yoshkeryan's text-critical method as he edits the rest of the works in the volume. Instead, he provides good diplomatic texts of the various other works by the author, with the best of the Matenadaran manuscripts collated against the received texts, which are conspicuously used as the base text. Far more noteworthy are the texts of the encomia (pp. 913–1005), where the editor has brought to light two manuscripts (more on these below) that provide different recensions or variant versions (Arm. *tarberak*) of the long-known encomia on the Holy Cross and the Blessed Virgin Mary. With such classification of the two manuscripts the need for interpretive criticism of variant readings is set aside. Accordingly, no effort is made to emend even obvious corruptions in one recension or the other, which are given back to back instead of being placed in parallel columns for quick comparison.

Thus, K'yoshkeryan's edition of the odes and litanies stands out as the only critical text in the volume. Yet her edition suffers at times from superimposed literary categorizations and applications of literary forms that do not seem to be original to the author. For example, the two odes for the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste ([4A](#) and [B](#)) are divided into quatrains, where a division to couplets would have been more in keeping with the lost original. Moreover, her hypothesis that odes and litanies were composed together as sets for particular feasts, or that there was a litany for every ode and vice versa, cannot be substantiated. The manuscript evidence is mixed, there being all sorts of compilations: some manuscripts with odes and litanies for various feasts entered after each other, some with odes only, but many more where the first half has just odes and the second just litanies—i.e., not paired but separately.

Variants of hitherto known odes are apt to be found in manuscripts outside the Matenadaran. In his *Grand Catalogue of St. James Manuscripts*, the late Archbishop N. Pogharian published an ode by our author which is unaccounted for in the collected and published odes, as well as a variant version of another, familiar ode (see [Suppl. 3.1](#) and [2](#)). The first of these odes is found in volume 1 of the *Catalogue* (pp. 378–79), an ode on the birth and baptism of Jesus, in a *Gandzaran* of 1575, copied at T'eghway Vank' in Soghats Giwgh, in Khlat' (J135, fol. 98r–101r). Though the ode in question is altogether unique in that the lines begin with the letter “Կ” (“K”), its authorship cannot be doubted on the grounds of compositional uniqueness alone. There are several one-of-a-kind odes by Gregory; moreover, the literary form employed here is seen also among his prayers (5.3). In the rich *Gandzaran* where it is found, it is designated for the fifth day of the feast of the Theophany and preceded by another of his well-known odes, [2A, “Ode for the Nativity.”](#) The second ode is found in volume 10 of the *Catalogue* (p. 592). It is a variant of [6c, “Ode for the Resurrection,”](#) preserved under the same title in an undated *Miscellany* (18) at Sts. James in Jerusalem (J3578, p. 198). It is preceded by two of the author's odes: [15A, “Ode for the Holy Cross”](#); and [10B, “Alternate”](#) Ode for the Church.

K'yoshkeryan's edition of the collected odes and litanies remains—its shortcomings notwithstanding—the best and most reliable text of the compilation as a whole, even as it has been replicated with minor errors in volume 12 of the *MH* edition. In certain cases, however, the *Gandzaran* text of certain compositions, as edited by Dewrikian (*MH* 13.1–2), is to be

preferred. Any text-critical consideration of the odes will necessarily have to employ scansion, since the author adheres to rules of syllabic meter. Unfortunately, K'eoshkeryan fails in this respect. She eliminates the *shēwa* (ñ) from most syllables, thus disturbing what might have been the original rhythm; whereas the *Gandzaran*, concerned with the recitative chanting of the text, abounds in these vocalized half-vowels and generally yields preferred readings. A number of fourteenth-century manuscripts of the *Gandzaran* contain most of the odes and litanies. The most significant among them are M7782, M3503, P Arm. 79 and 80, and V2070. As expected, adherence to the predominant syllabic meter helps determine authentic readings in these and other witnesses.

As stated briefly, the *MH* edition of the encomia introduces a new recension (A) of the *Encomium on the Holy Cross*, and another, new recension (A) of the *Encomium on the Holy Virgin*, with the familiar colophon following. Each of the hitherto known recensions of the two encomia is dubbed as recension B. The editor's assumption is that the text of recension A, based on two older manuscripts containing the two encomia (M5365 and M5558), surpasses the previously known text of recension B, which is reprinted from the earlier Venice edition(s) with section numbers added to it—as customarily provided in the *MH* series. While this assumption may be warranted, the editor makes no effort at emending obvious corruptions in the two recensions, each in the light of the other—not even between the two manuscripts of recension A. In recension A of *Encomium on the Holy Cross*, the first manuscript (M5365) is given the *siglum* A, and the second (M5558) the *siglum* B. For the *Encomium on the Holy Virgin* and its colophon, however, the *sigla* attached to the respective manuscripts are reversed: the second (M5558) is given the *siglum* A, and the first (M5365) the *siglum* B, thus creating a degree of confusion. Both recensions of the respective encomia suffer equally from a degree of corruption and show some early editorial reworking, taking the history of the transmission of the text into murkier waters. Although the recensions do not differ vastly from each other, each recension is here translated separately, with the annotation repeated for readers' convenience.

Biblical references in the *MH* edition are often inaccurate and certainly incomplete. For this reason I have refrained from pointing out the erroneous and/or overlooked instances. It is possible that I too may have missed registering some of the more distant echoes of allusions to Scripture in these works; those recognized I have cited in the notes. Understandably, some secondary and at times tertiary biblical allusions are interpretatively appended to the primary passages. Readers who are interested in Gregory's use of Scripture in these compositions may wish to consult the "Scripture Index" at the end of this volume.

I have used the *MH* edition of Gregory's works with considerable caution, at times preferring readings from the *apparatus criticus*. All such departures from the given text are acknowledged in the notes. Throughout the translation I have maintained the textual line divisions of the poems. The *MH* edition came in handy for its further division of the text into numbered sections. Although not all section divisions are at logical points, I have followed them for convenience in the course of translating and cross-referencing, also to provide the critical reader precise reference to the text, should one want to check it at any point. As for the variant versions or the recensions of the encomia on the Holy Cross and the Blessed Virgin Mary, I have cross-referenced their section enumerations in order to make up for the inconvenience of not having the recensions side by side, in parallel columns. Several section divisions in the *MH*

edition of the encomia distort the implicit sense of the narrative. I have not noted any of the misplaced divisions, allowing the editor's delineations to stand.

Gregory's language, however beautiful, is complex and not easy to translate—especially by one unfamiliar with medieval theology. His thought patterns are not necessarily unique to him; they belong to the thought-world of medieval mysticism that thrived on certain biblical passages and on their common interpretations. Yet unlike most medieval mystics, Gregory's thoughts are born within the folia of Scripture in its entirety, and in his native tongue. More often than not, he combines meanings from a variety of passages, entwining them into a single thought—as if he has the full canon of Scripture in mind when contemplating only a small part. Thus, familiarity with Scripture is yet another prerequisite to understanding him and to carrying the full semantic load of his sentences. Sensitivity to poetic forms is yet another prerequisite, especially when translating his odes and litanies, and sensitivity is needed no less when translating the narrative text of his panegyrics. There is a sacredness in his narrative that cannot and should not be breached. Giving true equivalence to his words is a must.

The literary beauty of the odes has attracted several translators in the last century, rendering certain of them into various languages—some quite freely at that. Where such translations exist in English, French, or modern Armenian (Eastern and/or Western), I have indicated them in the last footnote of the respective odes.

In Gregory's festal works, one could hear the echo of the solemn chant, the whisper of the impassioned petition, and the recitative of the sublime creed in nearly every ode, litany, and encomium.

Odes and Litanies

1A

Ode for the Blessing of Water by Grigor of Narek

(MH 12:623–626 [13:51–54] / TG 66–71)

In the *Tagharan*, the collection of ancient odes used as hymns, this ode is referred to as “*Tagh Zarmanali*” (“Ode of Marvel”). It is structured in five unequal parts of anaphoric lines beginning with the repeated word *awetis* (ալեսի, “good news”), set apart by stanzas marked with the word *p’okh* (կնի) for antiphonal responses. The same structure persists with some distortions in the *Gandzaran*, the multiauthor collection of festal odes and litanies, where the ode is at times attributed to St. Nersēs Shnorhali.

(1) Lines [1–12](#) emphasize the incarnation, “the great mystery” now revealed. Thus, the first stanza that follows highlights the Annunciation to Mary (lines [13–20](#)).

(2) Lines [21–28](#) contemplate the restoration anticipated since the fall of Adam, the effects of which extend to deterioration in the natural world. Hence, the message of the second stanza is aimed at nature (lines [29–36](#)).

(3) Lines [37–40](#) sum up the role of John the Baptist, to whom the third stanza is dedicated (lines [41–49](#)).

(4) Lines [50–59](#) focus on the Jordan River, followed by the fourth stanza, which draws attention to the tradition about the river retreating or parting at the time of Christ’s baptism (lines [60–66](#)).

(5) Lines [67–77](#) conclude with the universal implications of the redemption ushered in by Christ’s appearance.

A further structure is seen in the length of the lines: all anaphoric lines have seven syllables; all other lines have eight syllables, with a break or caesura separating the last four syllables throughout (excepting lines [8](#) and [38](#)).

There probably was an earlier litany (*k’aroz* or *gandz*) by the author for the Blessing of Water, distinct from the “Litany for the Holy Nativity” which follows. All were composed for the feast of the Theophany or the Baptism of Christ, a feast that also embraces the Nativity in Armenian observance.

Good news! The hidden mystery
of that great mystery has been revealed to us.
Good news! The Father's Light has dawned
from the very bosom of his being.
5 Good news! God has been revealed
to us of earthly substance.
Good news! The Archangel Gabriel
has been sent forth
Good news to announce to the holy one,
10 daughter of David the king:
"Good news to you, Mary,
rejoice, be glad, the Lord is with you."
Good news to you, Mother of the Lord,
Antiphon *Resembling the seraphim, the cherubim enthroned,*
15 *Close to the superior, Triune Light;*
 Soaring high with the sun's light,
 The kind that beams down to myriads,
 Radiant, streaking,
 Beaconing a secret path
20 *To one unfamiliar with the way.*

Good news to the house of Adam:
the curse of sin has been erased today.
Good news to the patriarchs:
behold, they saw the One they desired.
25 Good news to the prophets:
the Law has been fulfilled today.
Good news to you, Bethlehem,
land of Judah, house of Ephrathah.

Good news to trees, blossoms,
Antiphon *(Plants) in full bloom, leafy branches,*
 Beautiful in color, fruitful,
 Pleasing to the eye, sweet in taste,
 Delightful in fragrance; bouquets of mixed flowers,
 Roses with petals arranged radially,
35 *Leaves spread out, shining like gold,*
 Thick in foliage and verdant.

Good news! The great Forerunner John
bowed down in worship.
Good news! Elizabeth, the mother of John,
40 held him in her lap.

Good news did John announce

Antiphon *At the abundant fountains, the many brooks.
The gurgling waters burgeoned with laughter,
They streamed in swollen torrents,*

45 *In a powerful rush, in a gurgling flow,
Spilling over the fine sand,
Undulating, filling every crevice,
Rising high, piling up and flowing,
Hastening into the waters of the Jordan.*

50 Good news to you, Jordan,
 for Christ is coming to be baptized in you.

Good news to you, Forerunner,
 a voice calling in the desert.

“Good news to me, John,
55 for my hand shall consecrate the Lord.

Good news to me, the summoner
 of the pure bride of the holy Groom.

I am the proclaimer of the good news:
 stay not away from the wedding.”

60 Good news to the Jordan,

Antiphon *Falling deep and rising high as a mount,
Its surging stream backing up,
Blazing, conflagrant mountains,
Widening flare the parting of the deep sea;
It changed course quickly, turning upon itself,
Retreating hurriedly upon seeing (him).*

65 Good news to the universe
 did the Father declare today from above;

70 Good news to the sons of men:
 the Son is coming to be baptized today.

Good news to earthly beings:
 they beheld the Spirit in the form of a dove.

Good news have been revealed today:
75 the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

Good news shall we sing always.
 Blessed be Christ forever.

2

Litany for the Holy Nativity and Baptism Recited by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:627–632 [13:100–105] / TG 131–140)

This litany in ten parts (called *k'aroz* in the title, but which begins with the word *gandz*) has an acrostic arrangement, each part beginning with a letter. When taken in order, the letters spell out ԳՐՈՒԹԻՒՆ ("A Song by Grigor"). Five other litanies have the same structure, with the same letters (nos. [9](#), [10](#), [13](#), [14](#), and [15](#); cf. nos. [16](#) and [Suppl. 2.5](#), which originally had the same acrostics, as shown in the “Introduction,” and no. [7](#), which is unique; no. [12](#) is the only nonacrostic litany). By contrast, only two odes are in acrostic form ([4A](#) and its “[Alternate](#),” [4B](#); cf. [Suppl. 3.1](#)).

The litany manifests depth of theological understanding and is replete with associations as well as applications. Written for the eve of the feast of the Nativity/Theophany, celebrated as a single feast in the Armenian Church, the composition has little on either of the two events that mark the inaugural phases of Christ’s earthly life and ministry: his birth and baptism. Instead, its emphasis is on the Virgin Mary, her significance in the mystery of the incarnation—her being chosen to be the mother of the Only-begotten Son of God. The author thinks of her as he contemplates the full implications of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice ushered in by the incarnation. The litany reflects the ever-increasing emphasis on the figure of Mary after the Council of Ephesus (431), as this feast became also a celebration of her being the *Theotokos*, God-bearer or Mother of God. Hence the refrain stresses her mediatory role.

The concluding formal entreaty or intercessory petition implores the saints in their traditionally ranked order in the Armenian Church, beginning with the Virgin Mary (lines [95–107](#)). In this collection of litanies by Narekats'i, such formal entreaties appear with some variation at the end of all those compositions titled *k'aroz* or *gandz* (nos. [2](#), [7](#), [9](#), [10](#), [11](#), [12](#), [13](#), [14](#), [15](#), [16](#), and [Suppl. 2.5](#)).

Q T reasure incorruptible, greatness concealed,
 awe-inspiring, ineffable mystery that appeared on earth, holy Bearer of God—
 the unfathomable God the Word
 (whom) you bore physically within you and gave birth to the Savior of the world,
5 lifting him up into your bosom to suckle,
 the One who was revealed today for the rejoicing of the human race,
 to deliver the first Adam from the former curses,
 also to erase the seal of condemnation placed upon the foremother Eve
 by giving birth to the Only-begotten Son.
10 Please intercede Christ the King
 to come to our help; we plead.

15 O The True Teacher, the King of Light, uncreated and without beginning,
the inseparable Power, the indivisible Union
whom you truly bore with incredible power in your womb
without being consumed by the divine fire:
the bush that was not consumed, lifter of sins, forgiver of transgressions, holy
Bearer of God—
to him who was given gifts in the cave and worshiped by the magi,
who offered gifts signifying his Divinity,
to him who was revealed to the shepherds and was wrapped in swaddling clothes,
20 (for whom) earthly beings sang in company with the ranks of the blessed hosts,
saying, “Glory in the highest,” for the One born of you, most blessed of women.
*Please intercede Christ the King
to come to our help; we plead.*

25 b Among those of the heavenly hosts singing praises, those bodiless angels,
was the archangel Gabriel, who proclaimed the Annunciation:
“Rejoice greatly, the Lord is with you, most chaste among women.”
With the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, today you have become the east,
ushering the light of divine knowledge
into the hearts of those who hear the (heavenly) glorifiers of the Holy Trinity.
30 We bow down to the unapproachable Light who is from you,
to whom you, most blessed among women, gave birth: the joy of the universe,
Christ God.
*Please intercede Christ the King
to come to our help; we plead.*

35 Q You, the praised, precious gem, holy Bearer of God,
who bore in your womb God the Word
who is from the beginning, from eternity,
who in the likeness of our nature took body and suffered for our sake,
enduring the cross, being placed in a new tomb incorruptibly,
40 rising miraculously on the third day, with sun-like brightness,
adorning us, the newly-born from the (baptismal) font.
*Please intercede Christ the King
to come to our help; we plead.*

45 N The One who in his appearance is astounding and awe-inspiring,
enshrouded by the heavenly hosts
that could not endure his overwhelming power—
those praising seraphim that trembled in fear
and the many-eyed cherubim that covered their faces with their wings,
unable to withstand the immeasurable and unbearable Light
(and thus) in fear restricted their sight,
50 has appeared on earth today by the will of the Father,

having dwelt humbly in your virgin womb,
being born indescribably (as) perfect God and Man,
without being separated from the Trinity,
his throne ever full of perfect glory.

55 The One whose Divine mystery is not fully known to the heavenly hosts,
was made known with indescribable might to human beings.

*Please intercede Christ the King
to come to our help; we plead.*

60 ⌂ Mystery for the universe and sanctuary cleansed for God,
for from you was made known the indescribable mystery
that dispersed the darkness of the sin of idolatry,
making us glorifiers of the almighty Holy Trinity.

Sanctuary and haven for the divine Word, holy Bearer of God,
daughter of faith and mother of light:

65 Through you we came to know the indivisible Trinity,
the awesome day of the Savior's revelation.
Be our helper, us who celebrate you in remembrance, most blessed among women.

*Please intercede Christ the King
to come to our help; we plead.*

70 h You who appeared as the pride of virgins, holy Bearer of God,
to erase the condemnation of the first Eve
through your giving birth to the Only-begotten Son,
God the Word, who was revealed through you for the life of (his) creatures,
who is from before the creation of the world:

75 Intercede for us without ceasing the God who took body from you
to grant stability to his holy church
by keeping her always unaffected by the very evil deceptions of the enemy;
for our patriarchs to be overseers under divine supervision;
for priests and deacons to be stewards in holiness;

80 for kings and princes to be victorious in battles;
for travelers and sailors
to reach peacefully the haven of redemption;
for city-dwellers and country-folks health and prosperity in general;
for the penitents among us

85 mercy, grace, and forgiveness of sins;
to strengthen all with his Divine strength.
Please remember the souls of those who have fallen asleep
and have mercy on them on the great day of your coming, Lord, we pray.

90 ⌂ Moreover,
grant us that earnest desire for love and good works, we pray.

⌂ To reunite those who have severed themselves from you,

through the mediation of the One who took body from you, we pray.

Q May we always praise the One who has redeemed us,
the uncreated and immortal God born of the Virgin.

95 Accept now our petitions, (Lord),
through the intercession of Our Lady most blessed;
through the mediation of the great prophet
who laid his hand on you in the stream of the Jordan—
John the Forerunner;

100 through the martyrdom by stoning of Saint Stephen,
the first martyr, who saw you seated at the right hand of the Father;
through the courageous deeds of the holy apostles and prophets;
through the petitions of the confessor Saint Gregory, the enlightener of us all;
through the pleadings of the martyrs who shed their blood

105 for you, almighty Lord, who accepts it as fragrance.
And now, may the Lord our God have mercy on us
according to his great mercy.

2A

Ode for the Nativity by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:633–634 [13:109–110] / TG 72–74)

As in the preceding litany, the ode dwells on the mystery of the incarnation and Mary's role as *Theotokos*. It begins with the usual emphasis on Christ's divinity prior to his incarnation or descent, conveyed through the recurring images of "cloud" (lines 8, 10), "rain" (line 12), and "dew" (line 19). The ode employs plant imagery for Mary, in keeping with the preceding composition where she is identified with the burning bush of [Exodus 3:1–3](#) (2, line 16). The last triplet clearly shows the celebratory, liturgical use of the ode written in seven triplets of eight-syllable lines, with the caesura falling after the fourth syllable.

At the very right hand of the Ever-Existent (he sat),
At his very right hand, from right hand to right hand,
In the glory of the Father's Light from the left.

5 In the parental bosom he was called "the Dawn";
With the rising of the sun he came with love,

Being born of the Virgin, the flower of her bosom.

Flower of the bosom, the Paternal bosom,
He descended from heaven as a cloud,
Showering his love gently upon us.

10 Love within a cloud, a cloud moved by love
Pervading that same ethereal fleece,
Bringing down drops of rain.

He made known the love begotten of love,
Love blossoming with ardent desire
15 To unite love with love.

The moon, coming to its fullness of light,
With the gracefully gliding evening star,
Brought bright stars in its train.

20 By morning the dew had descended
Upon New Sion, the gentle Sun
Shining around Venus.

Harbinger of Spring, that wondrous Spring,
In laudable beauty, adorned in variegated hues,
Fit for the union of newlyweds.

25 Let us come anew, who have been rejoicing lately,
Lanterns lit, vestures in plaits.
Let us weave a garland for the bush.

3A

Ode for the Fortieth-Day Coming of the Lord by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:635–636 [13:300–301] / TG 75–77)

There may have been an earlier, lost composition with integral litanies (*gandz* or *k'aroz*) for the feast of the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple (and the purification of Mary forty days after giving birth, [Luke 2:21–40](#)).

St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).
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In the opening lines of this ode for the presentation of Jesus, the author draws on the paradox of opposites in the incarnation: the unbounded One becoming limited; the One who could ascend higher than the sun, descending to the uttermost (lines 1–8). He then turns his attention to the historical circumstances that brought forth the Septuagint (Greek LXX) translation of the Hebrew Bible, with its unique and significant rendering of [Isaiah 7:14](#)—regarding the virgin’s conception and giving birth to a child (lines 9–14), to which he goes on to connect the presentation of Jesus in the temple forty days after his birth (lines 15–32). Traditionally, the event is seen as fulfillment of the prophecy in [Malachi 3:1](#): “The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.” The words placed in the mouth of Jesus, summoning Simon to the temple, function as a crescendo (lines 25–30).

The section marked with the word *p’okh* (for change in melody) constitutes an amplified paraphrase of Simon’s prayer ([Luke 2:29–32](#)) known as the *Nunc Dimitis* (meaning “Dismiss now ...”), from the opening words of the Latin (Vulgate) translation.

The ode’s uneven lines (mostly pentasyllabic pieces) are replete with alliteration and are usually chained or linked, the last word of the line repeated at the beginning of the next, a poetic device called *patashkan* (Gk. *anadiplosis* or *epanastrophē*), used in several of the odes ([5A](#), [5B](#), [5B Variant](#), [5C](#), [6A](#), [13A](#), [15A](#)). Consequently, every distich or two lines form a complete thought, with intensification or a sense of completion in the second, even-numbered line(s).

One of the Existents (Ones) took leave of the coequal Two;
Ever blissful is (this) One, with the coexistent Two.
Ever unbounded is this wondrous Word,
Mystery-laden Word, lauded with seven-stringed lyre.
5 To a measured space he descended, a terrestrial place of (his) yearning—
A yearning from the yearned-for-height of the Sun,
A yearning for a sojourn in the opposite direction:
A flower’s sojourn in the Virgin’s bosom, a rose’s blooming in the Mother’s lap.
Drawn and sealed by the Father’s will was the set time,
10 The time that drew near (when) Ptolemy (summoned) the celebrated group,
The group of seventy rabbis (so) popular,
Who composed the popular volume of the resplendent Scripture,
The Scripture that has the particular line of assurance in three (words):
“Behold, a virgin shall conceive.” When will that be fulfilled?
15 That in itself is the most astonishing of sayings
Until it comes to be fulfilled when the miracle is seen
By the one who was granted a miracle—“You will not see death
Until this writing to you is fulfilled.”
In the writing narrated by the Spirit is a predictive word
20 (About) the mystery-laden Word (coming) on a day laden with good news,
Whose arrival was awaited day after day, until—
Until the blessed new era began.
The sage old man was commanded,
The favored sage abiding in untold favor:

25 “Arise, come to the temple; behold, I have arrived.
 Make your lap a cherubic chariot for me,
 An ascending chariot with the lifting up of your arms,
 With the swift flight of the two turtledoves presented.
 I present myself to the Father who has presented me.
30 Wake up quickly, make haste.”
 The old man arose quickly; with hurried steps toward the guests,
 He entered the temple, took Jesus on his lap (and said):

Change (in melody)

“O Jesus, little child, Son of the Father who never ages,
 Fulfiller of the Father’s will of conciliation:
35 I plead with my hands, implore with my lips:
 Dismiss me, Lord.
 My Lord, Lord Jesus, dismiss now the one you had bound;
 For, behold, I have seen you, the very Light to the Gentiles:
 Light of Light, you dawnd on us (like) a document of forgiveness.”
40 Through the intercession of the old man,
 Through the intercession of the one who gave you birth, cancel the document of our
 indebtedness,
 You, who through your perfection became for us a cloud of forgiveness,
 A (shading) cloud in the summer, who dawnd upon us like dewy snow,
 O you Infant, who were revealed as forty-day-old Child,
45 You, who are the Holy One in the Most Holy Place,
 Holy and lover of holiness:
 Cleanse us from sin through your life-giving coming,
 Who were revealed—God with us,
 (As) Glory to your people Israel.

4A

Ode for the Forty and Other Holy Martyrs by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:637–638 [13:483–484] / TG 78–80)

The original composition of this ode was most likely in couplets, for when the initial letters

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of the odd-numbered lines are taken together they yield ԳՐԻԳՈՐԻ Ե ԵՐԱՒ ԱՅՍ ("This Song is by Grigor"). In the published editions, however, the thirty unrhymed lines are unnecessarily divided into seven quatrains of thirteen syllables to each line, and a concluding couplet of eleven syllables to each line. The caesura or break falls after the fifth syllable throughout. This ode and its "[Alternate](#)" ([4B](#)) are the only acrostic odes in the corpus. Moreover, they were separated from the rest of the odes at an early date, surviving in but two manuscripts.

The feast commemorates the martyrdom in ca. 320 of forty Christian soldiers in Sebaste, in Lesser Armenia. They were serving in the army of Licinius, who was bent on persecuting Christians in the eastern part of the Empire. The details of their death by exposure on a frozen pond outside the city are memorialized in a sermon by Bishop Basil of Caesarea (in office 370–379), delivered on their feast day, March 9 in the East (*Homilies* xix in PG 31:507ff). According to Basil, as one of the soldiers apostatized and went for the hot water at the edge of the pond, a guard who was witnessing a supernatural light over them took the place of the apostate. The Forty Martyrs were accorded an early and widespread veneration among the Armenians; their relics were distributed in many cities where churches were newly built (cf. lines [23–24](#)).

The title suggests that the use of the ode was not limited to the feast of the Forty Martyrs. They are not mentioned specifically in the ode, which lends itself to being used also when commemorating other martyrs. The absence of specific mention of the Forty Martyrs is compensated for in the "Alternate" ode ([4B](#)), which also highlights some of their dreadful experiences.

- q Bands of holy confessors in that terrifying combat
 - arrived accomplished in their utmost calling on earth;
- Ը Their labor but a good token of blessedness,
 - rational sacrifices offered to God.
- 5 Ծ Eagerly willing in their perfection (through death),
 - they endured their tortures valiantly;
- q They embraced the sleep of death, its bitter sweat,
 - mixing their tears with their rosy blood.
- Ը They pleaded earnestly for (divine) mercy in their plight,
- 10 entreating (him) at the height of their suffering;
- Ը Good teachers (all), surpassing (other) earthly beings,
 - brave, with the aptness of the (red) color from Bozrah.
- Ծ Though they were of the same bodily nature as ours,
 - they ascended into heaven, joining the heavenly hosts.
- 15 Ե Distinguished examples for the universe (to behold),
 - they were registered in heaven's book by celebrating angels.
- Ե Welcomed into the blessedness of Jerusalem above,
 - you rejoice in seeing the Creator of the universe—

- 20 ♂ Having become part of the body of Christ,
 stars for the world, visible in the heights of heaven.
- ♀ Praise for the Creator of immortality
 who went before the martyrs to hearten them to the end.
- U Through them were the orthodox churches founded,
 the cornerstone of which is the Creator's work.
- 25 UQ Bestow a little of the manifold gifts on those who ask,
 O new children of New Sion—the city that is above;
- 3 O mediators for life on the awesome day of final retribution,
 you who reign (seated) facing the great court (of God).
- U Accept our prayers through them, O forebearing One,
 ours for their sake, All-merciful Lord. Glory to you.
- 30

4B

Alternate

(MH 12:639–640 [13:485] / TG 81–82)

As stated in the preceding introduction, this “Alternate” ode, titled “*P’okh*,” is quite specific in mentioning the Forty Martyrs and some of their unbearable experiences. Besides, like the preceding ode, it has an acrostic arrangement when read in couplets, yielding the words Ւ ՔԱՂՋՈՒՄՆ ԿԿԱՅՅՆ (“For the Forty Martyrs”). With its thirty lines, the length of the composition is equal to that of the preceding ode, except that the lines here consist of eleven syllables, with the caesura following the fifth syllable.

In the various editions of the text, the preceding ode and this, its “Alternate,” have been arbitrarily arranged in quatrains, a form that is alien to their original composition in couplets—with each couplet focused on a distinct thought. The original form is here restored, as it has been in the preceding ode.

- հ We now lift our voices with entreaties;
 soaring in thought, we present our petitions
- ♀ To the blissful band of the Forty (Martyrs) assembled (in heaven),
 those offered to the Lord God as slain sacrifices.
- 5 U They were made to drink of the wine of the Father’s Wisdom,
 they were purified by the flame of the divine fire.
- Ω They opened a path through heaven with their intangible wings,

- with which they soared and reached (heaven) before time.
- U They were crucified to the world, immortalized with the Lord,
10 comrades in death and companions in life.
- U Their bodies were drowned in water, in great agony,
(but) through their character they transcended the world's sea.
- U With gold-like and fire-like blood
were their members stained, withered like roses.
- 15 ¶ They were firmly united, the many having become one,
on fire with the Creator's love.
- U Always armed with the sign of the cross,
taking it upon their shoulders, they marched in with the Savior.
- U With the color of their blood like that of roses and glistening,
20 they held their ground in the frozen lake.
- U (While) their arms were outstretched to the Lord of All,
their breath vanishing in the bitter air,
- U The Sun of Righteousness arose (as) sunshine upon them,
melting away the ice of their human pain.
- 25 3 Considering the way (these) brothers conducted themselves,
let us plead with them, bowing down at their feet,
- U Asking to have ourselves, frozen in sin,
be likewise thawed by the rising flame of the Spirit.
- U Let us sing to the Trinity in concert with them,
30 with prostration: Glory always. Amen.

5A

Ode for the Raising of Lazarus by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:641–642 [13:553–554] / TG 83–85)

The lines of this ode, variously syllabified around a five-syllable module, are chained or linked: each line starting with the last word of the previous line. The linkage of certain lines is based on a degree of alliteration or some semantic relationship instead of the same word being repeated. Lines [13b–25](#) and the ensuing section, to be sung possibly with a “changed” melody (lines [26–45](#)—preceded by the marking *p'okh*), are almost identical to the following variant or “Canticle” ([5B](#)). The *p'okh* section, like the following “Canticle” ([5B](#), which probably is a detached *p'okh* that had a life of its own), connects the raising of Lazarus to the immediately following event: Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The association of

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these two events is based on the Gospel of John: the first in [11:11–44](#) and the second in [12:12–19](#) (cf. [Matt 21:1–9](#); [Mark 11:1–10](#); [Luke 19:29–38](#)). Moreover, liturgically the two events are celebrated on successive days and seem to have been treated as one continuous feast, with a night vigil linking them.

Beginning with reflection on eternity and the expulsion of Adam (and Eve) from the Garden ([Gen 3](#)), Narekats'i contemplates the further effects of sin: the intrusion of death and the ensuing “remedy” that necessitated Christ’s incarnation—the expression of God’s love to bring salvation (lines [1–6](#)). He views the death of Lazarus and the coming of Christ to Bethany and on to Jerusalem vis-à-vis this reality.

An earlier litany (*gandz*) dedicated to the feast of the Raising of Lazarus may be counted among those lost.

T
hat very place, well-ordered in the beginning, was left without man,
That lush place (where) lyres ushered in one year after another,
(Where) the death-sentence came early on (and) love allowed death
From the hour of death’s intrusion, the day on which that hour arrived.
5
That very day, greeted (and lost) in the blink of an eye, ended with remedy,
An ending that now is ever a beginning, love of a loving heart:
The love of that ever-watchful Watchman (who says): “Let us go to Jerusalem for the
feast.
I will go to wake up Lazarus, the one dead for four days.”
The one dead in life-bearing death
10
That brings us fresh good news about the One who comes anew,
Coming (as) on that awesome day, (after some) somber days,
Coming to Bethany—the house of suffering—
With the glory of the Mighty One, bearing good news to Mary
And also to Martha, those beloved sisters.
15
The sisters, strong in faith, hopeful, went forth to meet the Savior.
They bowed down at his feet, kissing them as they sobbed,
Their tears streaming (like) a flooded stream,
One stream joining another stream, running down their cheeks.
“Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, had you been here
20
My brother would not have died.
Come, consider the plight of the desperate heart.”
The path of the heart, the sound of the pleading laments,
Led unhurridly to the very entrance of the tomb.
“Take away the stone,”
25
The stone which is part of the stone-built pit.
The Giver of Life cried out with a loud voice: “Lazarus, come forth.”
The dead one came forth, proclaiming fresh good news to the awestricken bands:
The bands of young men (carrying) flowers in bloom,
Waving cut branches of palm, of cypress,
30
Bouquets of willow leaves, of those light-colored, straight stems of plants,

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Queen-roses in dark-violet color, plentiful,
Very lovely, a mix of rainbow colors
Delighting the baffled and mystified elderly in groups.
They spread olive branches before his feet,
35 Before the feet of the One who purifies like the scorching sun;
(Played) the three-stringed lyre, the low sounding lyre,
The lyre resounding a joyous note through Galilee,
Springtime joy, a gift to New Sion,
A heavenly gift, a message replete with motherly love,
40 Ample dew for those who thirst—(more) than for the cypresses,
For those who upon receiving it are raised unto glory.
To the One whom we resemble, the incomparable, universal (Lord),
The universal (Lord) of whose Image we partook,
The Existent who is himself from the Existent, ever from the Existent,
45 To the One who bestows glory, be glory now and ever. Amen.

5B

Canticle for the Raising of Lazarus

(MH 12:643 / TG 86)

On the thematic similarities of this canticle to the preceding ode, see the introductory remarks there. Lines [6–22](#) repeat much of the latter's *p'okh* section. Most of the lines, of uneven length, are chained or linked—starting with the last word of the previous line.

Good news to Mary
And also to Martha, those beloved sisters.
Sister following sister approached the Savior with the request:
“Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, had you been here
5 Our brother would not have died.”
The Giver of Life cried out with a loud voice: “Lazarus, come forth.”
The dead one came forth, proclaiming fresh good news to the awestricken bands:
The bands of young men carrying flowers in bloom,
Waving cut branches of palm, of cypress,
10 Bouquets of willow leaves, of those light-colored, straight stems of plants,
Queen-roses in dark-violet color, plentiful,

Very lovely, a mix of rainbow colors
Delighting the baffled and mystified elderly in groups.
They spread olive branches before his feet,
15 Before the feet of the One who purifies like the scorching sun;
(Played) the three-stringed lyre, the low-sounding lyre,
The lyre spreading a joyous note through Galilee,
Springtime joy, a gift to New Sion,
A heavenly gift, a message replete with motherly love.
20 The Existent is himself from the Existent, ever from the Existent.
Glory to the One who bestows glory; glory and honor always,
Now and every day; glory forever. Amen.

5B (Variant)

Ode for the Lord's Coming to Lazarus by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:644 [13:550] / TG 87–88)

While the first five lines of this variant ode are identical to the first five lines of the preceding canticle, the rest of the ode is unique. Yet like the preceding, lines [6–16](#) are chained or linked, each line starting with the last word of the previous line. Uneven lines and irregular syllabication characterize this ode, where the plight of the sisters culminates with “good news to us” (line [12](#)).

Good news to Mary
And also to Martha, those beloved sisters.
Sister following sister approached the Savior with the request:
“Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, had you been here
5 Our brother would not have died.”

Come and see the plight,
Come and see the plight of the desperate hearts,
The frightful path of the hearts
That leads (him) to the very entrance of the tomb.
10 At the stone-built entrance (of the tomb) the King commands:
“Remove the stone.”

15

The stone, like an eyelid (opens up) fresh, good news to us,
Vision of tidings of good news,
Awesome vision:
Wonders that amaze—
Those amazing series (of miracles).

5c

Ode for the Raising of Lazarus Recited by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:645–646 [13:558–559] / TG 89–90)

Like the preceding compositions dedicated to the raising of Lazarus, this ode is replete with chained or linked lines, each starting with the last word of the previous line. The lines of this ode are likewise of uneven length and syllabication.

Beginning with Christ's divinity, the ode shifts to his royal entry into Jerusalem (at line 9) and back to the raising of Lazarus (at line 19). Such poetic license in reversing the order of events is justified on three counts: (1) Christ's journey to Jerusalem marks the beginning of his passion with events in Bethany; (2) Bethany is part of the Mount of Olives, from where Christ proceeds to Jerusalem; and (3) the feasts of the Raising of Lazarus and Palm Sunday are in close chronological proximity to each other, the former celebrated on the eve of the latter.

5
10

The Existent, ever of his own essence,
The essence of the One Who Is, the Existent, the One distinct from all that is,
The First Cause of things that came to be out of nothing,
The First Cause of blessedness, on whom everything depends,
Archetypal Image of the praiseworthy, lesser ones:
Archetypal Image of the youthful (hosts of heaven) who appeared as (his) shadow,
Overshadowing the elements that were formed at the end—
The end of perfection toward which created beings strive.
So, with their laudations, did the youthful choirs of the Hebrews strive:
Youthful (choirs) praising with songs, olive branches being waved,
With songs of glad Hosannas (along) the royal highway—
The royal highway, the path covered with rags in rainbow colors,
The luminous path he took on a donkey,
As crowds of Jewish elders gathered, took palm branches

- 15 To give glory with palm branches to the Giver (of gifts) from above,
 Glory to the One riding the admirable donkey, the praiseworthy colt,
 The colt and the donkey at the command of the Lord of Hosts, the Word.
 The Word was coming to Jerusalem, descending like a charioteer from the
 mountainside,
 Coming to one who was a forerunner, a host in Bethany.
- 20 There was tender, sibling compassion in the broken hearts of the Marian (sisters),
 Such compassion for the dead, expressed with tears as the sisters met the Messiah
 with their plea.
 The sisters implored again the all-embracing Gift who breathes the breath (of life),
 The Gift able to transform the speechless, dead body,
 The dead body wrapped in burial clothes, to be clothed and sealed with breath again
 by the Caller to Life.
- 25 The seal of death was broken as were the torments of hell,
 The torments by the (evil) one who cannot harm the blessed assembly.
 The great Hebrew assembly, a galaxy of thousands, praises in song the glory,
 The glory of the One who bestows light, now and eternally. Amen.

6A

Ode for the Resurrection Chanted by Narek

(MH 12:647–648 [13:798–799] / TG 91–93)

An earlier litany (*k'aroz* or *gandz*) for the feast of the Resurrection is conceivably lost (cf. [Suppl. 1, “Ode for the Resurrection,”](#) MH 12:727–730, translated in this volume).

The ode begins with dogmatic statements on the Trinity that underscore the divinity of the risen Christ (lines [1–5](#)), followed by a description of the heavenly setting—in anticipation of his ascent and enthronement ([6–10](#)). Alternate images illustrative of the divine descent-ascent motif follow: His walking on the sea and taking the heavenly highway ([11–12](#)); his sitting on the tombstone and taking the royal seat ([13–14](#)); his passion, illustrated by the Isaianic image of the wounded warrior coming from Bozrah ([Isa 63:1–6](#)) and ascending the “watchtower”—an allusion to the crucifixion whereby the descent becomes the ascent, in keeping with Johannine theology of the cross ([15–24](#); see [John 12:20–36](#); cf. [1 Tim 3:16](#); [Heb 2:9](#)). His coronation is here compared to that of Solomon and thought of as the inauguration of the kingdom ([25–29](#)). The remaining lines describe the burial, the harrowing of hell, and the resurrection—in this order and still maintaining the descent-ascent motif ([30–40](#)), and conclude with praise to the risen Lord ([41–42](#)).

St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).

The odes for the resurrection and those for the ascension have commonalities of themes, conveyed through similar—if not identical—imagery. They also have similarities in vocabulary, even from the outset (cf. [8A–B, “Ode\(s\) for the Ascension”](#)).

The lines of the ode are linked, with the last word of each line appearing also at the beginning of the next, thus adding to the rich alliteration and use of onomatopoeia. Each line consists of ten syllables (except for the last three: 11, 11, and 13 syllables, respectively), with the caesura falling after the fifth syllable.

God is the name of the uncreated Existence;
The Existence is in essence beyond reach, always the same;
Himself is like unto Himself, One and the same.
Any of the Existence Ones is simply of that same number,
5 A number always defined as the Triad, the Glory.
“My glory extends to the hosts of beings before me,
The myriads of (heavenly) hosts abiding in that unbounded place”—
The place for the youthful assemblies at the river bright as day,
The glittering heavenly river flowing in four streams
10 With shimmering glitter, in endless light,
Exceptional light, a heavenly highway,
A royal highway for the One who walked over the sea,
Who walked to move the stone and took up his seat,
The royal seat, (after coming) from the hot desert,
15 From hot, parched land on earth to virgin heaven,
Virgin, pervaded with most-loving love,
Love that is self-giving, willing, (his) perfect will,
Whose will it was to bring about the Lord’s Day
On an ordinary day, (seemingly) wanting, yet a day known to the Lord,
20 The Lord who had decreed in writing: “I am ascending to my watchtower),
To my watchtower, to watch the One coming from the south,
Coming from Bozrah, with his robe stained”—
Stained in the color of blood from his pierced side
For the transgression of the one torn from the side, crying out:
25 “ ‘Cry to the daughters of Zion: Why do you weep?
Why do you weep and moan? I have a crown on my head.
My hair is full of moisture from the dew.
Fully and rightfully did my mother crown me;
So did my mother, following the One who set the appointed day.’
30 I was placed in the coffin for three days,
Placed to plunder hell with great strength,
With the greatness of the strength of the Mighty One.”
The strength of the Mighty One, his armies in full array,
The least of his armies bringing good news, hope,
35 The hope by the Giver of Hope: “Go to the mountain, quickly

To the mountain in Galilee. There you will see the Lord.
The Lord is risen! Let the women hurry together,
Hurry to tell about me to Peter's company."
May thousands upon thousands pronounce you blessed,
40 Always pronounce you blessed; for the Lord is risen today!
The Lord is risen today! Glory be to the resurrection of the Lord.
Thanks, glory, and honor be to the Lord always, eternally.

6B

Alternate

(MH 12:649–650 [13:796–797] / TG 94–96)

In this alternate ode of nine quatrains titled “*P’okh*,” with predominantly eight-syllable lines, Narekats’i draws on the Song of Songs (as of [1:5](#)), known also as the Canticles, attributed to King Solomon. Fortunately for us, Narekats’i has a full commentary on this biblical book (*Commentary on the Song of Songs*), the earliest of his works, where he interprets the text allegorically: Solomon and his love for the beloved as symbolizing Christ and his love for the church. Similar treatment of the biblical book is found in a number of his prayers. This allegorical approach is commonplace in early Christian interpretation, conceivably on the basis of [Ephesians 5:25](#) (“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”). In the second half of the poem, however, Narekats’i dwells on the canticles’ theme of seeking and finding (an endeavor in mystic contemplation) and relates it to the injunction by the angels to the shepherds, at the time of Christ’s birth, to go to Bethlehem to find the child Jesus, the newborn Messianic King ([Luke 2:8–20](#)). He seems to perceive similarities that connect Christ’s birth to his death, burial, and resurrection, possibly contemplating also [Luke 24:5](#): “Why do you seek the Living One among the dead?” Quite significantly, the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* pivots on the theme of the incarnation, which encompasses the passion-resurrection.

To facilitate the reading of the poem, I have supplied in brackets the identity of the imagined interlocutors, in keeping with the author’s *Commentary*. The alternation between them becomes progressively less frequent, and the poem ends with a monologue.

[*Bride*]

Dark am I, beautiful,
O Jerusalem, daughter of Eve.

[*Groom*]

St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).
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Behold her, my desirable bride,
Bound to her husband in love.

[*Bride*]

5 My nephew resembles the fawns of roes,
The young gazelles.
Behold him, my nephew, whose voice,
Exultant, is full of love.

[*Groom*]

10 Come my beloved,
Come, my close friend, my bride.
Behold her teasing: "Cover me with apples,
Take me to the winery."

Her eyes are like the dove's,
Her sleeves of red strands, her necklace of gold.

15 Behold her, a heap of myrrh,
Her scent like nard and frankincense.

[*Bride*]

He's beautiful, praiseworthy,
Simply a child in infancy.
Behold him, an observation mountain,
20 Lily of the valleys, flower of the fields.

The ranks of the prophets
Sing on that mountain:
"Behold him, God, the Ancient of Days,
Becoming a child, taking a body."

25 Children of Sion,
Go over to Bethlehem,
Go to the cave, behold
And worship the King.

Sing with the shepherds
30 And worship with the Magi.
Behold the King's gold,
The incense of the Only-begotten of God the Father.

To him be glory and thanksgiving
And praise without ceasing,
35 Forever, eternally,
To Christ, who is blessed by all.

6C

Ode for the Resurrection Recited by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:651–654 [13:800–803] / TG 97–102)

In this ode of twenty-seven triplets the author begins with a focus on “The Morning Star,” a Messianic epithet in [2 Peter 1:19](#) and [Revelation 22:16](#) (derived from [Num 24:17](#)), and goes on to combine it, as of the third stanza, with a related Messianic epithet: that of “the Sun of Righteousness” (derived from [Mal 4:2](#)). Though the second epithet is not spelled out like the first, its imagery is used throughout the first part of the ode, with that of the “Sun” (lines [1–36](#); the “Sun” being an allusion to the Messiah in [Luke 1:78](#)). This part ends with comparing Christ’s return to heaven to the sun’s return after its setting. The second part of the ode (lines [37–81](#)) employs terms, concepts, and imagery from the biblical Song of Songs, a favorite with Narekats'i, who in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* applies the theme of the book allegorically to Christ’s love for the church—as several church fathers do before him. Here, however, he applies it to the divine reunion in heaven after Christ’s resurrection and, as in the preceding “Alternate” ode, he utilizes the love theme of the book rather playfully to display passionate enthusiasm for the risen Lord.

It should be noted that the last two triplets (and certain others) are not found in the preferred manuscripts, including a *Gandzgirk'* of the year 1387 from Erzenka, where this ode has only nineteen stanzas. Another variant of this ode, which seems to preserve an older version, could well be classified as 6D (for a translation, see [Suppl. 3.2](#) at the end of this volume).

The first and third lines of each triplet have five syllables, whereas the middle line has seven syllables.

- Love at daybreak,
Love comes streaming at daybreak—
From the crack of dawn.
- 5 The One rising in the east,
 The name of the One rising in the east
 Is “Morning Star.”
- Could it be that (as it shines) upon a place,
Could it be that (as it shines) upon place after place,
It spreads out (its rays like strings of) a harp?
- 10 Or after a cycle of love,
 After completing a cycle of love,
 Would it be circled by stars?

The swiftly moving waters,
The swiftly moving waters were directed
15 Toward the eastern gate.

Over steep mountains,
Over the heights of steep mountains
Was a spread of dew.

At the setting of the sun,
20 At the complete setting of the sun,
It rejoined its source.

A loud appeal,
A loud appeal was made
To the ends of the sun;

25 Upon decorated paths,
Upon decorated paths does it shine,
In threads of gold.

Rays in varied hues,
Conduits of rays in varied hues
30 (Extend) to the valley of lilies.

A shiny adornment,
A shiny adornment, glittering,
Is drawing closer from the east.

Do not withdraw,
35 Do not withdraw, O moon,
Adornment of the night.

I am a message of love,
I have a message of love,
A word of greeting.

40 As a mountain,
As a mountain close to a valley,
Love (rises) for the nephew.

My hair (is wet) with dewdrops,
My hair is drenched with dewdrops,
45 With drops of pearls.

(My) curls with golden beads,
(My) curls braided with golden beads
Shine as sapphire.

- In the midst of fragrant gardens,
50 In the midst of fragrant rose gardens,
 Those sweet-smelling petals!
- Rose petals for the poplar,
 Rose petals for the poplar, rose petals
 For the Wood from the forest.
- 55 The southern breezes,
 The southern breezes blew
 All around there.
- Like a roe deer,
 Like a roe deer he turned around
60 From the incense-filled mountains.
- The fragrance,
 The fragrance of the incense
 Did he spread about.
- Like a young stag,
65 Like a young stag he rested,
 Lying by the saffrons.
- Beneath the rock,
 Beneath the rock did I find him,
 Yea, over the waves of the sea.
- 70 At noon,
 At noon I found him,
 (Him) with tender love.
- Over the watchtower roof,
 Over the watchtower roof did he sleep,
75 Over against Paran.
- He took delight in an apple,
 He took delight in the apple of love;
 Rejoicing as he left.
- He returned joyously,
80 He returned, retracing his steps joyously,
 Having revealed his love.

7

Litany for St. John the Baptist Recited by Narek

(MH 12:655–661 [13:706–712] / TG 141–151)

Like most of the litanies, this one is also an acrostic composition. Unlike the others, however, the first letters of each of its nine stanzas spell out հ ԶԱՅՈՒՅ ԵՐԳ (“Song in a Single Tone,” i.e., of the Armenian *octoechos*). In recounting the life of John the Baptist, the narrative elements seem to exceed the poetic qualities in this composition. The invocation of the principal saints has some added emphasis on the Baptist (lines [108–115](#)).

The last part of the litany (lines [138–168](#)), marked with the word *p’okh* (պինի) for possible recitative change, introduces a poetic adulation of Mary that is altogether unrelated to the life of the Baptist who is mentioned only in passing here, but again with reference to his feast day (line [164](#)). The prayer is replete with typology, with ever-recurring images common to Marian hymns (cf. [14, “Litany for the Assumption of the Most Blessed Holy Bearer of God,” lines 80–111](#)).

 Օ truly without beginning and Originator of those that came to be out of nothing,
 Constituter and Lord of all things material and immaterial,
 who determined the boundaries of life wherever found,
 including the ethereal and spiritual beings,
 the world above with its distinctive ranks established in glory
 to glorify you—who constituted (all)—ceaselessly, with endless joy.
 Being nourished with the Bread of Life, the intelligible Manna,
 we have become sinless and immortal.
 Yet one of the (heavenly) hosts mutinously rebelled,
 whose exact sort of sin remains unintelligible to us, earthly beings;
 who in his allotted place in that blissful realm
 and in the paradise of the living, flourishing plants
 constituted by your precise command, was left alone, with unrestrained will.
 This intelligent rebel, with his arrow of deception, took aim at the woman,
 to strip her—through trickery—of the lavishly bestowed, divine glory.
 Whereas you, compassionate Father, not bearing what actually happened,
 in your affected heart (and) love for humankind willed to restore (her).
Through the intercession of Saint John the Forerunner,
spare us, Lover of humankind, we plead.

 Q You summoned those chosen from before the world (came to be)
 and determined the announcement of good news to the grieving daughter of Zion.
 They were first to make known the entire good things to come, as expected by the

Word,
becoming revealers of invisible things and discoursers about things beyond
description;
announcers of future things and comforters of the forefather (Adam).

25 They became vehicles and winnowing forks for the One who struck Beliar;
cupbearers who served the deadly cup to the very one who made Eve drink of it.
In keeping with the conventions of those who invite,
they extended the invitation to the drinking party
and made us celebrate joyfully.

30 Chosen from the beginning and cleansed from the womb,
you became a pioneer in putting an end to the shadowy (types)
and in leading us to the new truth;
prophet and apostle, and in the words of the Almighty,
certified (as) the greatest of those born of women.

35 Progeny of good news, fathered by the old man who was made silent
when among other things he wanted to be sure
about the fulfillment of that very mystery.
Priest of the Lamb, you bowed down (to him) even in the womb,
the friend who attended the Bridegroom and became forerunner of the One who
brought salvation to the world,

40 the almighty One whom we, gathered together, beseech through you.
*Through the intercession of Saint John the Forerunner,
spare us, Lover of humankind, we plead.*

45 Q Bright Venus and a ray that cannot be hidden,
pathway to the Sun of Righteousness and foot-soldier of the immortal King
who set free the tongue of the elderly parent after he wrote the name on a tablet.
Joy to the grieving tribes indebted to the Law;
to exiles cause of survival, and of prosperity to those at the ancestral home.
From the cradle you were destined to the wilderness.
Sweet cooing of the turtledove, fulfilling the prediction made by the spiritual singer.

50 (Like) a bright morning you roused our indolent nature, made lethargic through the
dullness of the night;
you spoke with God in silence and fulfilled the divine mandates;
you were content with garments made of the hair of one kind of animal, (which
symbolizes) memory,
(and) wore a leather belt which symbolizes willingness to die
and readiness in the service of the Existent.

55 Watcher for the One who is (both) true and a newly laid ax to cut down unbelief;
content with things that grow naturally and eschewing superfluity.
Through the figurative insects (you were) in touch with those high aloft, and through
hunger satisfying God's Law.
Pretty flower of the valleys and lily of the pleasant plains,
you fought like the Word against the one who fought the forefather and was

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- defeated.
- 60 You were tested with temptations like one inexperienced in evil, by the one who tests (people) of all ages,
and eventually came to recognize for sure
how the deceiver was defeated by the power of the Most High.
*Through the intercession of Saint John the Forerunner,
spare us, Lover of humankind, we plead.*
- 65 3 In your desert life of devotion you pleased God, the Existential;
in view of this, the Father's statement was heard at the conclusion of the sacrament.
For this very reason you were whisked to the desert when the slaughter of the infants was decreed,
right from the cradle, by your parents, just as the infant Lord (was whisked) to the land of Ethiopia,
(and you were there) until his manifestation to Israel and revelation by (God's) voice,
70 the unrestricted One restricted in a body.
You paved the way for the coming of the Word into the rational souls of people;
you baptized Israel, (but) neither with fire nor with the Spirit;
rather, you spoke of the One who does this,
the One to whom God's finger was pointing: the fiery God concealed in a body,
75 the One declared Lamb of God, indeed, "who takes away the sin of the world."
The One who needed no cleansing, being superior to all that are cleansed,
the One who cleansed Adam, was baptized humbly, the Lord by his servant, the son of the barren,
he who was not worthy to untie a worthless thing,
as they descended into the stream of the Jordan.
- 80 The servant, apprehensive, awed and utterly fearful,
refused to come close to God's head—unreachable even to spiritual beings.
For this reason the Lord was encouraging him, "to fulfill all righteousness."
*Through the intercession of Saint John the Forerunner,
spare us, Lover of humankind, we plead.*
- 85 L A new wonder, indeed a marvel was yet to be seen,
as the servant completed the laying of hand on the Lord.
The One of the same essence came speedily to the One equal in power, descending upon the One equal in glory.
Upon seeing this, the one born of the barren rejoiced over the One born of the Virgin;
he even realized that Adam was renewed by him
- 90 90 who was to be preached from that day on to every nation by those who were to declare the wonder
(as) reprove to lawless people, (as) spur to wake up the misguided.
As for Herod, (dwelling) in spiritual darkness, and lawless as regards the law,
(was) rebuked for an illicit relationship.

For this he was vindictive, this bloodthirsty murderer and rational beast.

95 The one who deceived the first Adam with a tangible thing for something intangible, had (John) cast in prison, a dark place for prisoners (condemned) to death.

On the king's publicized birthday,
as the pretty damsel danced,
a long-haired puppet in the (cunning) ways of Beliar,

100 the dancer's dancing excited the earthly king.

The rewards and the price of prostitution were paid by the one dead in sin with the head of the one alive.

Angered over this, the Benevolent one leashed his divine fury.

*Through the intercession of Saint John the Forerunner,
spare us, Lover of humankind, we plead.*

105 ℣ We who are gathered together (to worship) you, Ancient (of Days), the Existent, lift up our petitions with the sound of festal celebration.

With your rewarding glory come to us who are gathered together, you who are close to everyone,
because of the mediation of your mother, the Virgin
who took away the anguish of the foremother Eve;

110 the intercession we plead with the Lord on this feast day
of the one who baptized you, the reason for our coming together;
the abundantly streaming blood of your servant Saint Stephen,
your crowned confessor and first martyr;

the many and diverse tortures of the Illuminator of the tribes of Hayk, Saint Gregory;

115 the assembly of those who love you, the apostles and prophets;
the mediation of ascetics, hermits, and martyrs.

Keep your holy church ever jubilant and always glorious,
for you have established her firmly upon the cornerstone of faith,
a (splendid) tower, beyond imagination:

120 the overseer appointed by you, the supervisor of rational souls,
our patriarch, Lord (*to be named*),
with bishops, *vardapets*, priests, and deacons,
the clerks and the least of church officers;

125 the one strengthened by your strength,
our pious king (*to be named*),
with his children and troops, his kin and dynasty.

Shield him with your mighty wings
and be his comrade in battle and helper in the wars against the Barbarians;
and to all of your little flocks of believers,

130 be guardian and visitor,
for you have strengthened them to this day and (you will) through the future, (when they are) presented to you.

Please remember and have mercy
upon those who have fallen asleep in faith and hope in you, we pray.

St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).

- 135 ♂ Moreover,
grant us that earnest desire for love and good works, we pray.
- 136 ♀ Gather (us) all
in your fear and love, God of All, we plead.
- (*Recitative change*)
- 140 ♀ Fabulous flower that does not wither and fragrant garden full of stars,
storeroom for the delicious Fruit
by whom the universe is nourished and sustained.
Bridal chamber of the immortal Groom and birthplace of those born of the Father's
Word.
In the proclamations of those who were called early on,
you were announced in various ways by those seers.
A living ark built for the dwelling of Jesus, the living One,
145 by whom Eve, your dead mother, was brought to life.
House of God, gate of heaven, and our way to ascend to heaven.
Named after Miriam of old,
interpretively meaning "bright," she who tirelessly played the drum,
echoing your immaculate virginity.
- 150 The bush in the words of Moses symbolizes your receiving God,
remaining unburned by the Sun's flame.
The container of the tables written by the finger of God was constructed in keeping
with your mystery,
you who are a golden jar, truly filled with the divine manna,
the gate firmly locked, impenetrable, predicted to us earthly beings.
- 155 You were revealed as the bridal chamber of the heavenly King,
a fenced garden and a sealed fountain;
you were proclaimed by Daniel as the mountain born of the rock
and the (sealed) register unread by man—a virgin who conceived without a man;
uninvolved in marital things, you gave birth to the child Emmanuel.
- 160 Mother of Life for the living, a pledge made to creatures,
Talitha, a luminous land.
With earnest entreaties and voice choking with tears we plead with you, Mother of
God,
composers and singers,
and our small gatherings in memory of the great John.
- 165 Please mediate with the God born of you
to come for our deliverance.
And now, may the Lord our God have mercy on us
according to his great mercy.

8A

Ode for the Ascension of Christ God Recited by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:662–65 [14:883–86] / TG 103–7)

There probably was an earlier litany (*k'aroz* or *gandz*) for the feast of the Ascension, now lost. The feast is observed on the fortieth day after Easter Sunday ([Acts 1:9–11](#)), as the final component of the paschal mystery. Thus, the initial stanzas or triplets present Christ in cosmic terms and in the light of his triumphant resurrection, as befitting the feast of the Ascension. As noted earlier, the odes for the resurrection and the ascension share considerable similarities (see the introduction to [6A, “Ode for the Resurrection”](#)).

The ode consists of twenty-five triplets, each beginning with the last word of the preceding one. Its lines are of varying length, but not without a pattern or rhythm. The first and third lines of each triplet have a caesura after the fifth syllable; the middle line has it after the sixth.

- T**he Existent, ever from the Existent without beginning,
The One concealed in the inscrutable bosom (of the Father),
Shone of the Father's Light (as) Light of the World.
- Light itself was created after his Image,
5 His Image being imprinted upon the Light;
The material sun being concealed behind his likeness.
- He took over the likeness of the Father that is in us,
Being born with a body as it was ordained,
To redeem nature by his cross and blood.
- 10 The fallen nature he renewed through his resurrection,
Raising it with himself unto glory,
Seating it on the throne of glory in the highest realm.
- The King of Glory arose to do battle;
He took captive the one who takes captives.
15 Ascending high, he distributed gifts to human beings.
- In human body, with the color of blood,
The incorporeal Lord was sighted by angels.
(Wondering), each asked the other: “Who is he?”
- “Who is this One coming from Edom?
20 In red garments from Bozrah,

- Pressing forward beautifully, robed in divine light—
The radiance of the fiery beings, (as) stated by the Word:
'By my very strength I have wrought (victory)
Over the one rightly thought to be mighty on earth.' "
- 25 As regards the color of the heavenly robe,
Questions persisted to find out by asking:
"Why are your garments red—for having tressed the winepress?"
"I thumped the winepress with the cross," he replied,
"I tressed upon the enemy of life,
30 Whose deceit inundated the earth with sin."
- Questioning him further from above, (they asked):
"What about the wounds in your hands
With which you created earthly beings in your Image, Lord?"
The Lord declared this regarding his friends' actions:
35 "I was wounded
In the house of my beloved, the rank and file of Israel."
His identity being announced to the ranks of angels,
From their countless stations high above
They cried out saying: "Open the gates."
- 40 The eternal gates long shut in heaven
Were lifted from their very foundations
And the King coming in glory entered into glory.
The heavenly King entered the heaven of heavens,
Where he was always, ever since the beginning,
45 Honored in the Father's bosom, with the Spirit's love.
Honored by the Father, he sat at his right hand,
The enemy having been laid permanently
Under his feet, for all future time.
The enemy's (evil) nature laid under his feet,
50 He sits upon the throne of the cherubim,
Being worshiped by the heavenly beings eternally.
Eternal joy to us earthly beings, (even) today,
For we have been made partakers of the indescribable glory
Through the Son who makes us sit down with the Father.
- 55 We bow down before your Only-begotten,
With the chosen company of the Eleven,

Beseeching you for the Spirit, bearer of good news.

May your benevolent Spirit guide us,
Draw us nearer to you spiritually,
60 Lift up our hearts from the valley of sadness.

From this valley we look forward to life
On the day of your awesome coming.
Make us ascend to the Father in the fullness of love.

65 You who are lovingly seated at the right hand,
Ask that the members be joined to the Head,
To be one with you, through you and the love of the Father and the Spirit.

Life-giving Spirit, effluence from the Father,
Grant your rational flock
To join the little flock in the holy upper room.

70 To you who ascended to your holy sanctuary
We sing with the sound of the trumpet,
Along with the seraphim, to you, O thrice holy.

Before your Most Holy Trinity may we be worthy
To hear always the spiritual sound of lyres,
75 To sing praises now and always, eternally.

8B

Ode for the Ascension by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:666 [14:887] / TG 107–9)

This ode is replete with alliteration, words that at first reading seem to serve the sound effect more than the necessary meaning. Although such an arrangement makes the ode difficult to translate, a literal translation is achievable—as here provided. The flow of each thought is contained within two lines or a couplet, thus necessitating occasional transposition of words within them in the course of translation. The lines are of varying length; nonetheless, a caesura follows the fifth syllable in nearly every line (except lines [1](#), [8](#), [16](#), [17](#), and [24](#)).

The author's effort throughout is to underscore the divinity of Jesus by pointing to his rightful place among the Trinity. He goes on to connect the divine glory of the preincarnate

Christ with that of his postresurrection / ascension glory, received as a result of his incarnation and earthly ministry intended for redemption from sin. Note the departure of the Son from the paternal bosom and his return there (lines 4 and 21, among other parallels). Equally noteworthy is the thought that the ascension of Jesus begins as of his elevation on the cross, a thought that owes to Johannine theology (see [John 12:20–36](#)). For more on this descent/ascent theme, see the introduction to [Suppl. 1, “Ode for the Resurrection.”](#)

The Existent, (himself) of the Existent, the Uncreated,
(One) of the Eternal, became (one) of those who at one time did not exist.
He who was eternally beyond reach, known to be unbounded, now became
reachable—
Whose rising from the bosom (of the Father is like) the ever-expanding circuit (of the
sun), immutable.

5 (For he is) One of the Existent kind, of the related Three,
Of the same essence, (needing) no path for his feet to tread.
“As for my being, I am like the Existent, the Unalike;
My properties come from high above the ethereal heaven.”
Pointing to the original Image (of God) after which the likeness was fashioned,

10 He directed his swift ascent in that path, rising to be with him.
Having tabernacled in the Virgin, fulfilling the will of the One who sent him
At the set time, (he declared that) that period was now over.
When lifted upon the cross, he looked forward to his ascension to the Father,
The upward flight to that wondrous height of the related Three.

15 With the flapping of their wings, those myriads of the finer ranks,
Alerted one another: “Quick, make yourselves ready.”
—“Who is this breathless One adorned with colors from Bozrah?”
—“He is the brave King, returning valiantly from battle.”
—“Lift up the gates, O princes, bring tidings of good news to the Father:

20 ‘Behold your heart’s beloved of whom you testified: This is my beloved Son.’ ”
“With a kiss of holiness (I) took (my) seat in the paternal bosom;
The Holy Spirit honored me with those of my company.
My gifts you shall surely receive, the commitment in promises that are true:
‘I am with you always.’ ”

8c

Alternate

(MH 12:667 [14:891] / TG 110)

This ode of three quatrains in the printed editions (more fittingly, two sestets), titled “*P’okh*,” is the shortest in the collection. In it Narekats’i depicts the sadness of the disciples after the departure of Christ and accentuates the anticipation of Pentecost. Thematically, the ode is a proper corollary to the preceding one.

- To that little, sad flock
With tears streaming,
To (those of) that small band
(May) mercy (be shown in their) intense grief.
- 5 Their eyes lifted up to the heavens
(They wait) for you who are Father of hopeful orphans.
“Whom would he appoint for us?
Uncertainty is our lot.
- Remember (us), remember; do not forget.
10 By the word that does not lie you promised (your) love
To be with us throughout the days of (our) lives,
Until the end of the world.”

9

Litany for the Coming of the Holy Spirit Recited by Grigor Narekats’i

(MH 12:668–73 [14:899–904] / TG 152–61)

After beginning with epithets and attributes of the Holy Spirit, Narekats’i describes the Spirit’s role in particular instances recorded in the Scriptures, beginning with creation and the inspiration of the Scriptures. This, in effect, is an amplification of the Nicene Creed’s statements concerning the Spirit (cf. Prayer 34.3–9). Although inspired by the Creed’s trinitarian formula and the account in [Acts 2](#), he contemplates the details of Pentecost in lines [53–73](#) only. These lines form a crescendo, followed by the typical imploration of the saints—a characteristic part of the litanies.

On the acrostic arrangement of this litany in ten parts see the introductory note to [2](#).

St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).

Page 34. Exported from [Logos Bible Study](#), 10:45 PM March 13, 2025.

["Litany for the Holy Nativity and Baptism."](#) Note also the two-line refrain following each of the first six parts, changing at the end of the seventh in order to accommodate the collect beginning at line [108](#).

5 **Q** **T**reasure of Light, the Son's coequal in glory,
inexpressible power, awesome greatness, infinite nature,
Light of Light, Spirit of the Most High, immutable Image, simple (yet) inscrutable,
originator of souls, preparer of bodies,
adorable Name, truly good, uncreated,
coexistent with the Father and Lord of All:
*Please accept the worship by those who confess you,
as it pleases you, we plead.*

10 **C** Teacher of the knowledge we possess
regarding the inscrutable recesses of God,
you are One of those unique in essence,
Lordly Spirit, the very Image of perfection
after which all we creatures were made,
which holds the pattern of our renewal through redemption.
15 The primeval darkness over the unordered world
of primordial state, devoid of beauty, unprocessed,
by your apt miracle—as you moved over the waters—
was transformed into light by the Word of the One from whom you proceeded.
*Please accept the worship by those who confess you,
as it pleases you, we plead.*

20 **H** In the glorification by the heavenly hosts
you are proclaimed holy, you the Fashioner of All;
in the testimonies of the Law and the Prophets, the proclamation and its cause;
in the Writings of wise men and preachers, the Sender and the Lord,
the awesome inspiration and living Voice;
the heavenly preparer of Noah
and the One who dried the sea that inundated the world;
confounder of the original tongue of the conceited assembly,
yet inviter to the new (and) glorious, harmonious impression;
25 mighty wind that destroyed the Egyptians and (became) covering cloud for the
House of Jacob,
and the same in might and calm to Elijah;
official narrator to those chroniclers inspired by you,
and as God you allowed looking into the future,
thereby making known in these last days
30 the course of the One who defeated death and Beliar.
*Please accept the worship by those who confess you,
as it pleases you, we plead.*

Q Praise to you, true and uncreated Lord,
Sovereign King of Heaven,
40 who carried out the anointing of God who became Man, by the might of your right
 hand
(and) through the form of the dove revealed at the Jordan.
You who are equal in glory with the Father,
guided Jesus in his work and (enabled) the prediction of the great things pertaining
to the Lord,
the Light above Mount Tabor made visible
45 to those privileged to behold the Creator;
his manifestations through his miracles
over the years and centuries since the time of the forefathers,
revealing the Truth in a tangible way—through illustrative replicas
contained in the earlier writings, anticipatory of the Kingdom.
50 (You) set the sphere and the origin of the sanctifying oil of anointing.
*Please accept the worship by those who confess you,
as it pleases you, we plead.*

Ω O amazing and most glorious One, effluence from the perfect nature of the
 Existent,
your personhood is no less ever since.
55 You are praised by those of fiery faces,
whose rising incense you mix with your breeze;
amazing, awesome storm accompanying the choice, fiery tongues
over the praiseworthy assembly of apostles on the day of Pentecost's light.
You offered the fiery cup of life to those whom you love;
60 you truly filled up the deficient,
scattered the doubt,
transformed ignorance to wisdom.
You reiterated the tradition of good things (to come),
affirmed the yearnings (of many).
65 You made yourself known to those who were waiting for you,
revealed yourself quickly to those pleading with uplifted arms,
arrived speedily for their supplications with sighing.
You made glad those submerged in fear,
sent them to the (whole) world.
70 As witness to the fullness of grace, the promised good news by the Messiah,
you led (many) to the water of the (baptismal) font.
Having come to the light of your heavenly grace, you registered them kindly
as heirs to eternal life in heaven.
*Please accept the worship by those who confess you,
as it pleases you, we plead.*

Ω Deliverer of the world (through) purging (from defilement),

One who cares mightily, intercessor and giver of peace,
we pray you, God without beginning,
Creator of breath, the visible soul, the person after the Image.

80 The Son's kin, King of All, One with the Father,
through whom the impartial distribution of gifts is realized in high and lowly places:
Receive your chosen people and strengthen them to keep your commandments,
our high-priest in his supervision (to safeguard) devoutly the sanctity of your
honor—
our patriarch, Lord (*to be named*);
85 in the coming judgment, the sorting out, (rank him) with those associated with you
for necessary edification, with those who confess you,
within the rank and file of the myriads who are gathered in your Name.
To our pious king with his progeny,
his troops and their commanders, to be with the ministers of your Divinity.

90 To the cavalry and foot soldiers,
to peasants and city dwellers,
pilgrims and donors,
the poor, people of all ages,
shepherd and uplift them, most generous Lord.

95 Fill them with the gifts necessary for the salvation of those who plead with you.
Please accept the worship by those who confess you,
as it pleases you, we plead.

100 b All eyes look upon you with expectation, O benevolent One,
refuge (and) hope of salvation, guide to life, to the light above;
liveliness to the living, rest to the dead,
caring, most trustworthy companion on (our) way,
(our) place of joy and home of rejoicing,
unbounded, all-embracing:
Restore unto the ranks (of believers) those who have renounced you,
105 you who are merciful to those who praise (your Name), forever blessed.
Please remember and have mercy on those who have fallen asleep
in the hope of resurrection, we pray.

110 t Moreover,
grant us that earnest desire for love and good works, we pray.

(*Recitative change*)

q O higher calling and living Voice,
awe-inspiring, intense, mighty,
Spirit of meekness, of compassion, of love for humankind, and of mercy:

115 Through the intercession of the Virgin, the Queen, Mother of the living,
the Mother through whom the Lord came, the Bearer of God;
through the mediatory pleading of the greatest of those born of women,
the Forerunner at the baptism, who laid his hand upon your equal in essence;
through the fragrant beseeching of the blessed apostles and prophets,
120 along with that of the martyrdom of Saint Stephen
and those martyrs strengthened by him;
through the meritorious virtue of the one who confessed you,
Saint Gregory the enlightener of us all,
and of the pious companies of solitaries, those who profess you as God
125 who on that final, great day
will appear to renew us who are constituted by you, the only merciful One.
And now, may the Lord our God have mercy on us
according to his great mercy.

9A

Ode for the Coming of the Holy Spirit by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:674 [14:905] / TG 111–12)

This ode is structurally divided into two parts of nine unequal lines each (see line 8): the first part constitutes the praise, and the second part the petition. The division in triplets is consequent to past editorial predilection. The caesura falls after the fifth syllable, throughout.

Another ode by the same title, also attributed to Narekats'i, is included in this collection of his festal works ([Suppl. 2.4](#)).

A sudden blast, effluence from the Father,
Streaming like fire, a path marked by bright flames from the heavenly portals,
Separate flames (driven) by blasting wind, many flames of assorted languages.

Celestial silence amid the multiplicity of sounds
5 Bringing good news to the sad assembly,
Invitation to good things for the Petrine company.

To the One who cleanses with fire we raise

A balanced song (of praise) in nine lines,
For the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit:

10 Spirit of the Father, coming from his very presence,
 Spirit of God, Spirit of might, Spirit of meekness,
 Spirit of knowledge (and) wisdom, Spirit of counsel and understanding.

I beg you not to convict me, ever.
Abide within me, a temple built by you.

15 Your will is an accomplished act.

You, whose will is good, show your benevolent act within me, a manifold sinner,
That by your will I may sing songs of praise to you who are the Existential,
And renew me unto glory.

10

Litany for the Church Recited by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:675–81 [14:938–43] / TG 162–72)

In this first of several compositions on the church, Narekats'i encapsulates his ecclesiology or doctrine of the church—much as he does in Prayer 75 of his *Book of Lamentation*. The other, related compositions here include [10A](#), [10B](#), [12](#), [12A](#), [14A](#), [14A Variant](#), [Suppl. 2.1](#), and [Suppl. 2.1 Variant](#). Since the mission of Jesus was concerned with the development of a community which formed the basis of the church that materialized after Easter and Pentecost, one finds allusions to the church in the compositions for these feasts as well.

As the mystical Body of Christ, the church is often personified in these compositions, the author taking further license for such personification from the Song of Songs, his favorite biblical source for ecclesiology, as also from [Revelation 12](#), the vision of “The Woman and the Dragon.” The latter also constitutes the biblical grounds for the assumption of Mary (on which see [14](#), which has a similar opening line) and accentuates the overlap between ecclesiology and Mariology in the author’s thought. The overlap is further conditioned by the fact that both the church and Mary are dwelling places for God and that they beget children of God.

The church is also a replica of the heavenly sanctuary or of heaven itself. The heaven-earth connection makes the church a place not only for the sacraments but also for mystic contemplation (see line [62](#) and note and the opening of the ode following this litany).

On the acrostic form of this composition in ten parts, see the introductory note to [2, “Litany for the Holy Nativity and Baptism”](#); note also the two-line refrain following each of the first six

parts, changing at the end of the seventh in order to accommodate the collect beginning at line [115](#).

- q **T**reasure of profound goodness, desired, discovered, and concealed,
absolute fullness that gathers everyone, never wanting,
hardly differing from heaven above:
Your altar extends beyond its space—into the inaccessible ether,
5 your boundaries are marked by the fiery hosts beyond the chasm;
immeasurable image of compassionate care,
glorious throne of the King on high, beyond imagination.
*Please accept our prayers of petition with befitting incense
offered in this place, the holy church, we plead.*
- 10 Ⓛ (There was) joyous celebration, familiar call,
pleasing sound—beyond description,
(when) on the light wing of the gentle breeze
you took your lordly seat to rule most confidently,
assuming the throne—signifying the completion of the mystery ushered in with
good news.
- 15 You established her (then) so perfectly,
considering her a place for your habitation—
the chasm notwithstanding, for the sake of our souls;
the one a throne (in heaven) and the other a footstool (on earth),
a light-imparting place for all nations.
- 20 *Please accept our prayers of petition with befitting incense
offered in this place, the holy church, we plead.*
- h Wise Craftsman, inerrant in creating,
Maker of all—most appropriately,
who made beforehand the prototype of this marvelously adorned edifice
25 (and) were pleased to be its resident at first and then the occupant of its throne,
having laid out heaven and the heavenly beings there.
You established Eden and then Adam,
the structure of the ark and those who survived in it,
Abraham's tent of that early hospitality,
- 30 the anointed pillar and (the naming of) God's House,
the ladder of our ascent and your descent,
the Aaronic tabernacle of worship,
the book of the covenant, arbitrator of its reciters on the heights of chosen Gerizim,
the luminous Temple of Solomon the Great,
- 35 the mount of the Lord and the house of God,
a sign held high for distant nations,
calling the world with the trumpet sound—

according to the seers of your indescribable mystery.
Please accept our prayers of petition with befitting incense offered in this place, the holy church, we plead.

40 Q Beautifully adorned tower, tall;
 unimaginable pillar of iron and strong rampart of bronze;
 light-giving lamp stand cast in gold;
 an island fortified by mighty waves.

45 In accordance with Ezekiel's twin oracles,
 by a new summons you were set against Tyre,
 you advanced against the wise men of Sheba,
 the alien nations descended from Canaan.

50 You came out of Babylon willingly—
 a wounded soul loved by the Groom—
 to the door made of cedar panels,
 to the smooth stones of turquoise,
 to the glittering, sun-like dials with monuments made of silver,
 to the living city built by God—

55 by the impact of the Spirit spoken of by Christ,
 to the prolific mountain held in holiness.

Please accept our prayers of petition with befitting incense offered in this place, the holy church, we plead.

60 O Be glad, O Queen, glorious Bride,
 crowned, great wonder,
 rejoicing with many children in (your) virginity,
 you, who were sketched from the beginning
 (and) were recently brought into charming existence with sheen of gold.
 Like the calling of Hagar,

65 you were transformed from servitude, from Sinai to Salem.

The Firstborn of the Father himself came
to join you to the overlooked tribes of Jacob
by laying down the venerable apostolic assembly for your foundation.

70 Beautified with stellar brightness,
 decked with glowing splendor,
 you are a pure womb and that for spotless children
 brought forth as heirs of God.

This is a token of the expectation hoped for,
which is to find true peace.

75 *Please accept our prayers of petition with befitting incense offered in this place, the holy church, we plead.*

 O The Teacher of light, the mighty King, the heavenly Groom
 established with inexpressible mystery and amid profound joy

your immutable canons,
80 (your) many parts in the likeness of the pattern,
a reflection of the whole universe—
in the likeness of (these) manifold things is the cathedral edifice.
(He made you) a common ground of obedience for the diverse tribes,
(safe) house and (safe) place, a sanctuary giving shelter,
85 (cool) meadow in the heat, rock of help to corporeal beings yearning for the
spiritual,
to make God known to humans—
to nations gathered in one Name, (to give) hope of atonement to sinners;
(you), vanguard of the daring,
the gathering together of those made perfect.

90 *Please accept our prayers of petition with befitting incense
offered in this place, the holy church, we plead.*

 h Abode of the Father's Wisdom
built upon seven starry pillars,
where the blessed One is offered willingly in the intinction of the communion bread
95 upon the elevated holy table.
The Manna of Life and the Heavenly Lamb
who takes away the sins of the living and the dead
was himself slain once and for all, (his blood) better than that of Abel;
who looks after the scattered ones,
100 welcoming (them) without compulsion into (his) bosom,
calling gently, with love, (lifting them) by hand to the fort inaccessible (to the
enemy),
to the refuge for those on the run, the upper room of spirituality
where the apostles were stunned,
where they will be installed mightily in the assembly of the overseeing elders,
105 those who rejoice in your honor for days (unending).
Those to have a share in the circle of the impeccable ones:
our patriarch, Lord (*to be named*),
with the bishops, the priests, and the deacons;
the *vardapets* with the clerks and the least of church officers;
110 our king with his progeny,
and the troops around him for (the protection of) the domains and the principalities.
Bless them all with your intimate, holy love.
Please remember and have mercy on the souls of those who are at rest
in the hope of resurrection, we pray.

115 t Moreover,
grant us that earnest desire for love and good works, we pray.

 t To reunite those who have severed themselves from you,
through the mediation of the One who sits (enthroned) in you, we pray.

(Recitative change)

Q O precious Pearl discovered
120 through inscrutable search in the sea of this world, holy Bearer of God,
Daughter of Light and Mother of Sion,
the foundation of faith laid without hands, the true image—
after which (heavenly) model you were anointed and sealed,
bridal chamber for God, the One who took body from you:
125 Please be an intercessor for our reconciliation, us who are transgressors.
O Forerunner, progeny of the saints called to eternal life,
wreath of the martyrs, along with the apostles and the prophets
and our own Illuminator,
and the solitary hermits who are heirs to God
130 with those who are born of the holy font for adoption into the family undivided by
 the chasm,
those whom you wish to restore—the lesser (family)
unto the greater one in exceptional glory:
the Mother with immaculate children
along with those installed in that heavenly bridal chamber through the covenant—
135 on that awesome day of the appearance of the great God.
And now, may the Lord our God have mercy on us
according to his great mercy.

10A

Ode for the Church Recited by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:682 [14:944] / TG 113–14)

Two biblical passages loom large in the author's ecclesiology expressed in these five quatrains: [Matthew 16:18](#) and [Revelation 12:14](#), which predict the triumph of the church under God's protective care. Within this theme, the author employs several other biblical passages, making greater use of the book of Revelation than in any of his other odes. Other, tertiary biblical passages are alluded to simply by the use of proper names, as indicated in the notes.

The view of the church as "heaven on earth" is a commonplace. Equating the church with the Garden of Eden and associated imagery is part of this broad view.

Each line consists of eleven syllables, with the caesura following the fifth syllable.

Heaven on earth and earth in heaven,
Descent into depths and ascent unto heights,
New heaven, heaven adorned with the Sun's Light—
The good news from above spread on earth.

- 5 Among predictions by the one who saw things in sevens,
The ethereal mystery (borne) upon the very wings of the wind;
(As) the seer made known through the two flying wings
(Given to) bridal women flying swiftly like eagles.
- 10 And winds from the four (corners) rise up unto the ethereal realm
From where the fourfold river gushes forth,
Flowing, streaming down into the first sea;
Winding down, spreading out, (rushing) into the next.
- 15 Over the first sea there are flocks of doves;
Their young flutter in blood over the second sea.
The full spread of the sea rejoices with calm waves moved by the wind,
Moving toward the Sabaean isles of frankincense.
- 20 A bluish cloud (hangs) over the Lord's vineyard in Kidron,
Garden of roses, aflame, by the streaming river,
Where the company of Cephas lies down
Beneath the cypresses, the firs. Glory and honor to Carmel.

10B

Alternate

(MH 12:683 [14:945] / TG 115–16)

In this theologically loaded ode of thirteen lines with thirteen syllables to each line (4–3–3–3), all but lines 4 and 13 begin with a repeated word, and only line 13—the last line—has twelve syllables (3–3–3–3). The first of these repeated words, *hawun*, *hawun*, is a generic word for any fowl, contextually a male fowl and by implication the uplifted Christ (cf. [Suppl. 2.2, “Ode for the Holy Cross”](#)). In his love for humanity he extends a call, an invitation to “the Gentiles” (“the dearly beloved turtledove,” the “Shunammite,” the “bride,” or the “new people”) to partake of the salvation offered through his sacrifice, recalled through the celebration of the Eucharist.

St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).

Two biblical passages are juxtaposed behind Narekats'i's imagery of the bird in the first line, just as several other biblical passages—especially from the Song of Songs—are interpretively juxtaposed in the rest of the ode. The first is [Job 39:26](#): “Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom and spread his wings toward the south?” In his christological *Commentary on Job 38–39*, Narekats'i, like others before him, applies the verse to the crucified Christ, “the all-seeing God” who came willingly to the cross; adding, “the One who contained heaven was shut in the rock below [the cross]” (*MH* 12:901, lines 187–93). The earliest application of this verse to the cross is found in one of the older hymns for the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross: “*Vor zanarat bazuks k'o i khach'in taratsets'er*” (Որ զանարաս բազուկս քն ի խաչին սարածեցին, “You Who Stretched Out Your Immaculate Arms on the Cross,” in the *Sharaknots'*, the *Hymnal* of the Armenian Church; *MH* 8:312.1, 8), a hymn that has its likely origin in fourth-century Jerusalem, in the festivities surrounding the dedication of the Constantinian edifice that became the Holy Sepulcher Church (thus hymns to the cross became also hymns to the church). The second biblical passage—albeit tacit—is [John 12:32–33](#), where the uplifted Christ draws the Gentiles (cf. the Greek of vss. [20–21](#)) into the sphere of redemption through the cross, thus constituting the church—the primary object of his love.

The thirteen lines are replete with images of the church, some less explicit than others, such as the implied heavenly ladder in Jacob's dream and the stone he used for a pillow, which he then erected, saying: “This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house”; both images are implied in the very mention of Bethel in line 5, a metonym ([Gen 28:10–22](#)). In the last five lines Narekats'i juxtaposes two other biblical passages: [John 2:1–12](#), the miracle at Cana with its eucharistic connotations (cf. the eucharistic banquet contemplated in [John 6:1–14](#), [25–59](#)), and [Prov 9:1–6](#), Wisdom's banquet. The church is where the Eucharist is offered as a redemptive sacrament, leading to eternal life. Several other biblical allusions are interwoven in this short ode, indicated in the notes.

In a manuscript at St. James in Jerusalem, this alternate ode for the church is no less properly titled “*Meghedi Yarut'ean*” (“Canticle for the Resurrection”) and placed in the middle of two related odes by Narekats'i: [15A, “Ode for the Holy Cross”](#); and a variant of [6c, “Ode for the Resurrection”](#) (*J3578*, a miscellany [18], p. 198; translated here under Suppl. 3).

T
he bird, the bird woke up (and) watching over the Gentiles,
Called out, called out to the dearly beloved turtledove:
Return, return Shunammite to the shelter of the Rock.
Come, (come) bride from leopards' mountains, from roes' fields;
5 Come over, come over to the gathering at Bethel in Ephraim.
Rise, rise up to the grounds of the vineyard in Kidron,
Treading the winepress, the winepress filled with color as from Bozrah.
Wood has been put, put into the bread, his sacrificial offering;
The sweet admixture has been mixed, mixed into the wine.
10 The cup, the cup is extended, invitation to the wedding—
Invitation, invitation to the wedding: Come, new people,
Eat, eat of my bread and drink of my wine,
That you may live perpetually, forever, eternally.

11

Litany for St. Gregory the Illuminator Recited by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:684–90 [14:978–84] / TG 173–83)

This litany in eleven parts is an acrostic composition, each part beginning with a letter that, when taken together, the letters yield ԳՐՈՂԱՐՈՂ ԳԼՈՂ (“A Litany by Grigor”). The author’s identifying his signed composition as *gandz* shows that he was using the term synonymously with *k’aroz*, the old designation maintained in the present title. Even though no other composition in this collection is identified as *gandz* by the author, no distinction should be made between *gandz* and *k’aroz*. Its general structure is similar to that of all such compositions that are titled *k’aroz*, regardless of the acrostics.

The composition is absolutely clear about its celebratory purpose, intended for the feast of the Discovery of the Remains of St. Gregory (on Mount Sepuh, near Erzenka, by a shepherd named Gařník). This was the only commemoration of St. Gregory in the author’s day. There are several other compositions for this feast by various authors from before and after Narekats’i.

- Q With overwhelming joy elated, the children of Sion
celebrate your memorial day,
with passionate zeal, O Saint Gregory,
great confessor and shepherd of the rational flocks.
5 With earnest petitions, heartfelt tears,
we beseech you, O good teacher and father,
to have tender compassion on your children,
to whom you gave birth in pangs, through the womb and the bosom
of the (baptismal) font, the mother of us all.
10 Please present with entreaties the petitions of the present celebrants,
constituents brought together by the power of the Word,
to grant his gift of atonement and grace of mercy
to the rational flocks, the children of men, we plead.
15 Of all tribes and nations, you were found to be superior among Adam’s
descendants,
By an amazing miracle, to evil ancestors who murdered their master,
a God-given child, a virtuous son,

a rose grown from a thorny bush,
saffron and graceful lily of the valleys,
a plant from dried-up roots
20 planted along the fertile windings of rivers,
feeding the children of New Sion, those starving for the heavenly Bread of Life,
a cooling cup (of water) gushed from the rocks
for the panting children of Eve, the tribes descended from Hayk.
Please petition the Lord, who chose us,
25 who called and crowned you,
to grant his gift of atonement and grace of mercy
to the rational flocks, the children of men, we plead.

¶ From the dense darkness of godlessness,
a nursling infant, you were brought to the edifice of light
30 where you suckled the twin breasts extending from Sion:
the New and the Old Testaments for a spiritual drink,
with which you were amazingly nourished,
growing to mature manhood in Jesus, the Savior of all.
You arrived in full command at his deep mystery—according to Paul,
35 a revealing teacher and preacher of the inscrutable, hidden mystery.
With a benevolent will, mediate with God,
the Creator from nonexistence, the Provider and Restorer,
to grant his gift of atonement and grace of mercy
to the rational flocks, the children of men, we plead.

40 ¶ Superior to the band of the Eleven, a preacher for the world and seasoning salt,
filled with the intelligible light, you appeared from the West
to the regions of the North, to the sons of T'orgom dwelling in darkness;
willing to die for them, brave shepherd,
you offered yourself courageously, like the Lord upon the cross.
45 You took upon yourself the agony of tortures, twelve in number,
corresponding to the cardinal sins of all humanity.
You dwelt in the snake-infested dungeon
for six-times-two plus one symbolic years.
You neutralized the deadly venom of the serpent.
Disembodied, you ruled over the snakes there.
50 Beseech the heavenly Father that we may be cleansed from the venom of the
writhing dragon;
to grant his gift of atonement and grace of mercy
to the rational flocks, the children of men, we plead.

¶ To the children of men abiding in darkness,
from a dark region you shone, a shining light, intelligible and sunlike;
55 a cure for the torments of demons and a healer of our souls.

You ascended into the ranks of the incorporeal beings,
you were set apart and were given for our redemption.
You brought the king back from his irrational nature, changed him to a man.
You brought the princes, together with the elders and the troops, to their senses.

60 You freed from demonic powers all the inhabitants of the land,
consigning them to the heavenly Father as children of light,
(born) of the womb of the (baptismal) font.
By your own blood and the travail of your ordeals,
you appropriated a people to yourself.

65 Would you earnestly beseech Jesus, the Hope of everyone and Lord of all,
to grant his gift of atonement and grace of mercy
to the rational flocks, the children of men, we plead.

¶ Good mentor, thoughtful teacher,
proclaimer of the Word of Life, lord Saint Gregory,
70 renowned in your fine progress, bearer of good tidings to Sion,
recounter of the unreachable things and revealer of those not found:
You revealed the infinite God to the nation gone astray,
the union of the Three Persons, along with the nature of the Divinity,
by whom the totality of things was wrought.

75 You taught ignorant people in darkness
about the descent of the Son into a body, the One whose birth is without when and
where.
You made the uninformed knowledgeable.
You talked about eternal life and the second death,
about his death on the cross for the human race.

80 You preached about becoming heirs of God and brother(s) of Christ
through resurrection after death.
By the grace of the Spirit, by whom you were renewed,
you summoned again, in glorious fashion, Adam with his progeny.
Please beseech with heartfelt love the grace-imparting Spirit of God

85 to be with us always,
to grant his gift of atonement and grace of mercy
to the rational flocks, the children of men, we plead.

¶ Truly called from on high, with a specific decree,
you were appointed patriarch and bridegroom of Christ's church, lord Saint Gregory,
90 distributor of the graces of the Holy Spirit to all (your) children,
to whom you gave birth, children of the daughter of Sion,
spread like a flowing river through the land of Armenia.
You cleansed, enlightened, and perfected the grandchildren of Ashkenaz.
Those alienated, as those at home, and those distant, as those who are near,

95 you led to Jesus' door, to the Spirit's home, and to the Father's bosom;
bringing, like a father, your children to God,

- nurturing with milk, like a mother, the countless children through your travail.
The One who once died and who is alive forevermore,
you offered as Eucharistic gift for the reconciliation of men to God,
as he offered himself on the cross.
- 100 You went into seclusion at the end of your life; at the end of it all,
you were taken to the Father's bosom by the grace of Christ's love.
Beseech the One to whom you are intimately close, the Three Persons and One
Divinity,
to grant his gift of atonement and grace of mercy
105 *to the rational flocks, the children of men, we plead.*
- Q Appearing in superior purity,
you shone on the children of Sion, lord Saint Gregory,
rising in the fullness of the sun—more than that of the stars;
universal preacher, greater than the band of the Eleven,
110 superior to the patriarchs who followed them, brave and courageous shepherd.
You obtained your flocks through your own blood,
O great among the confessors and altogether incomparable among those who were
crowned with blood,
you, who knew the mystery of Jesus more than the prophets,
true leader and head of ascetic clerics,
115 heavenly man and earthly angel,
seraph of clay and corporeal cherub,
corporeal seat and resting place for the will of the Great God:
I plead earnestly with you to appeal to the Lord
on behalf of all earthly humanity:
- 120 For patriarchs, right doctrine;
for bishops and priests, impeccable share of grace;
for deacons, readers, and all dedicated children of the church,
sanctity, holiness, and righteousness;
for kings and princes, courage and just judgment;
- 125 for soldiers and commanders, and for all men and women,
health and true confession;
for those who have fallen asleep, rest and resurrection unto life.
Please remember and have mercy on those who have fallen asleep
in the hope of resurrection, we pray.
- 130 Q Moreover,
grant us that earnest desire for love and good works, we pray.
- L To rededicate ourselves and one another,
to commit ourselves to the almighty Lord God, we plead.

(Recitative) change

Q With entreating voice, tearful pleading,
135 we ask you, Lord of All, Holy Trinity,
 Creator of all creatures that came into existence from nothing,
 Fashioner of our nature from two constituents made into one:
 corporeal and incorporeal, spiritual body, in your Image and Likeness,
 provident Provider, Restorer of the immaterial and the material,
140 Reviver of our fallen nature and Redeemer of the first Adam,
 Merciful, Lover of humankind, generous Benefactor:
 Through the intercession of the truly blessed Mary, the Bearer of God,
 mother of the incarnate Word,
 through the intercession of John the Forerunner,
145 the baptizer of your Son, hearer of the Father's voice,
 seer of your Spirit in the form of a dove,
 through the entreaties of the blood of Stephen, the first martyr,
 who saw you at the right hand of the Father,
 through the intercessory perseverance of Saint Gregory, who is commemorated
 today,
150 through the petitions of the apostles and the prophets,
 and the brave and blessed martyrs made perfect,
 through the constantly outstretched arms
 of the pure, ascetic bands of hermits,
 grant peace to the world and stability to the church,
155 guidance to leaders and sanctity to priests,
 and atonement and mercy to all people.
 And now, may the Lord our God have mercy on us
 according to his great mercy.

12

Litany for the Church and the Ark of the Lord by Grigor of Narek

(MH 12:691–94 [14:950–51] / TG 184–88)

This is the author's only litany devoid of acrostic structure. The integrity of the text and its authorship, however, cannot be doubted, given its typically rich imagery and ingrained vocabulary. The composition ends with the usual supplicatory and intercessory prayers or the

imploration of the saints. The latter, however, is missing in the shorter, *Gandzaran* version, which ends with line [82](#).

As it is to be expected, the litany is full of typology: Noah's ark, Abraham's tent at Mamre, the ark of the covenant, and Solomon's temple in particular; they all foreshadow the church—itself a replica of the Garden of Eden, of heaven itself, and/or of the foursquare Heavenly Jerusalem. Much of the same typology appears also in Prayer 75, a main chapter of the author's ecclesiology.

The refrain, in which "the One coming" to dwell in this heavenly abode is praised, seems to have been inspired by [Malachi 3:1](#), "The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple," a verse often associated with the Presentation of Christ (see [3A, "Ode for the Fortieth-Day Coming of the Lord"](#)).

Gathered we all in the holy, universal, apostolic church,
we earthlings in circles, sing there in many groups,
praising with the myriads of spiritual beings, angelic;
we join the circles of the luminous kind.
5 *We bless the One coming to you,
the Most Holy Trinity, (with whom) we plead.*

You who are above the cherubic arch, the watchtower of the four-faced beings,
and are worshiped by the full circle of the angelic kind,
O Triune essence
10 who willed to establish this rock at the hands of the holy apostles,
an impregnable city by (your) deliberate miracles,
foursquare, in the midst of the universe.
You made her glorious, radiant from the foundations (up),
brilliant, beyond the brilliance of the Ark.
15 And you adorned her beautifully, befittingly lavish,
the daughter of Sion that is above.
The many groups of singers there
join their voices with the heavenly ones.
*We bless the One coming to you,
the Most Holy Trinity, (with whom) we plead.*

A sanctuary built without hands, universal, holy,
you were established today in the midst of the universe, holy church,
a replica of the Garden where the work of creation—beautiful to behold—
(was accomplished), in the comfort of Eden,
25 (around) which—by the command of the Uncreated One—seraphim and cherubim
kept close watch over the passages to the tree of knowledge.
That great hedge around the comfort of Eden has been lifted;
and we, earthlings in circles, with joyous boldness
join the circles of the luminous seraphim.

30 *We bless the One coming to you,
Most Holy Trinity, (with whom) we plead.*

 Indescribable sanctuary, with incredible brightness
you were established today in the midst of the universe, holy church,
a replica of the high-domed ark

35 which the patriarch Noah—by the Creator's command—
built from the base up with fresh timber.
He constructed it for the salvation of all kinds of animals,
for the salvation of those who trusted (him)
facing the rapidly rushing waters.

40 Today, at the hand of the One who created the sun,
Holy Sion has appeared in lieu of the ark, for us—
people of the rational flock—
in a miraculously luminous fashion, worthy of our collective praise.

*We bless the One coming to you,
the Most Holy Trinity, (with whom) we plead.*

 A brilliant sanctuary, lit miraculously by the rays of the sun
in the midst of the universe today, holy church,
a replica of the (heavenly) sanctuary which the patriarch Abraham saw
when he was sitting at the threshold of heaven's gates

50 and gazing at heaven and earth—
(even) the Lord of Lords coming from there with his two angels
and drawing near to the shade of the tree
to reward his loved ones for their good deeds.

 Abraham went forth to meet him,
55 (and) offered the tender calf and three loaves
as an offering to the Lord God.

 This same God is coming to you today, holy Sion,
a heaven-like place for the atonement of sinners,
(where) your children are nourished beside the soothing water,

60 (whence) those born of the (baptismal) font
and those superior seraphim of the higher rank
are brought into the same circle.

*We bless the One coming to you,
the Most Holy Trinity, (with whom) we plead.*

65 Foursquare temple, magnificent in appearance,
radiating (your) light transparently
in the midst of the universe today, holy church,
a replica of the ark built by Moses
in the midst of the congregation of Israel.

70 In it were placed the golden censer—with its shiny round lid—

from which the frankincense released its fragrance,
the golden pot full of manna,
along with the two tablets of stone
and the budding rod.

- 75 Today, Melchizedek the priest
 appears within you at all times, instead of the tablets inscribed by God.
 That altar brilliant like the sun, on which the (eternal) sacrifice was offered,
 has been transferred, established in you, O holy Sion, Mother Church,
 where ranks of earthborn creatures
80 and bands of seraphim from on high join together in a circle.
 *We bless the One coming to you,
 the Most Holy Trinity, (with whom) we plead.*
- 85 The temple with four candlesticks
 lit by supernatural rays, radiating in the midst of the universe, holy church,
 a replica of the packed and bright halls filled with incense from golden (censers),
 (like) that which the wise Solomon
 built with cedar and pine wood.
 He made the temple glitter with gold,
 equal to the shine of the seven-branch candlestick
90 and full of beautifully crafted lily work,
 also cherubim made of gold,
 which he placed in the house of the Lord.
 *We bless the One coming to you,
 the Most Holy Trinity, (with whom) we plead.*
- 95 Haven and dwelling place for the exiled,
 city of refuge and house of atonement,
 we plead with the One of indissoluble union dwelling in you, the Heavenly King,
 to grant us heavenly peace, both spiritual and intelligible,
 to keep us nowadays
100 from the visible and invisible hostility waged by the enemy forces.
 And on the imminent day when the glory of your mighty power shall appear,
 may we truly rejoice in (your) light with those who were sanctified.
 Please remember and have mercy on those who have fallen asleep
 in the hope of resurrection, we pray.
- 105 Moreover,
 grant us that earnest desire for love and good works, we pray.
- To commit ourselves and one another
 to the almighty Lord God, we pray.
- 110 Through the intercession of Our Lady most blessed, the Bearer of God
 and ever-virgin Mary;

through the mediation of the great prophet John the Forerunner;
 through the prayers of the one who was crucified with you in suffering,
 your first martyr, Stephen;
 through the petitions of your confessor,
 Saint Gregory, the faithful high-priest;
 through the pleadings of all those who love you,
 the apostles and the prophets.
 And now, may the Lord our God have mercy on us
 according to his great mercy.

12A

Ode for the Church by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:695–96 / TG 126–28)

The ode spells out considerable understanding of the church, as a divine institution conceived by God ever since eternity, comparable to Solomon's temple (itself comparable to the tabernacle built in the wilderness, following a heavenly pattern shown to Moses [see note to line 5]). After resorting briefly to his favorite allegory of the church as the beloved in the Song of Songs, the author describes Pentecost in most creative terms, the event that marks the birth of the church—with the church as a bird aspiring to rise to the Spirit (note the author's unusual use of the "ascent" motif here, contrasting the "descent" of the Spirit as a dove at Pentecost). The ode concludes with commonplaces: the church as God's dwelling place and the locus for the Eucharist offered for our redemption. These complement the author's ecclesiology built around Marian typology.

The form of the ode is comparable to that of [14A](#) and all its variants, likewise composed for the feast of the church—initially to commemorate the inaugurations of churches in fourth-century Jerusalem, particularly of the Martyrium Basilica (later known as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher) in AD 335. But unlike the irregular lines of [14A](#) and its variants, each line of this ode consists of eleven syllables, with the caesura following the fifth syllable.

Before there was motion, the elemental things were quiescent
 In the thought of the Anticipator of good things (to come).
 The Word in wisdom brought forth, (indeed) created
 The things that came to be in keeping with Heaven's will.
 5 (So) was the indescribable edifice conceived, with adornments of triple strands.

Time went by and the days drew near for it to be built
At the hands of the father of wisdom, descended from David,
King Solomon, of great literary fame,
Adorning it with befitting glory.

10 The stones therein with seven eyes (as) those of doves;
Fitly set gems crowning the altar.
Of the pleasant fowl, the pleasing manner of its walk,
Its majestic gait as that of a peacock, it is said:
—“Who is this that has lifted its neck high into the air?”

15 —“I am about to take off, I am about to take off,
Coworker with the One who sent me,
Beaming down with the rays of the Sun
That light up faces with crimson glow,
Hovering as with wings, like the Sun.”

20 (The Spirit) pours out that beautiful flow of myrrh upon you,
Fashioning (you) as a beautiful place for our atonement,
With ethereal, overarching adornments,
An altar marvelously adorned with four tresses,
Standing foursquare, astonishing miracle.

25 The King of Kings who sits enthroned in you,
Whom the heavens cannot contain, the Word beyond measure,
Distributes his salutary, life-giving body
(And) sacred, immortalizing and incorruptible blood.
The heavenly hosts encircle you,

30 Those who cover their faces with awe mixed with fear;
They sing melodious praises
To the One who made all things by (his) Word,
Christ the Savior who crowned you,
To whom befits honor (and) glory always. Amen.

13

Litany for the Transfiguration by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:697–703 [14:1066–72] / TG 189–99)

The litany underscores the divinity of Christ, in keeping with the Gospel narrative on the Transfiguration ([Matt 17:1–13](#); cf. [Mark 9:2–13](#) and [Luke 9:28–36](#)). The narrative style of the

St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).

composition—its refrain notwithstanding—allows for little theological elaboration. The author contemplates earlier theophanies where the revealed God was later understood to be God's Word or the *Logos*.

On the acrostic form of the composition in ten parts and its conventional prayer of intercession, see the introductory remarks to [2, "Litany for the Holy Nativity and Baptism"](#); note also the two-line refrain following each of the first six parts, changing at the end of the seventh in order to accommodate the collect beginning at line [124](#).

- Q Treasure beyond measure and beyond description,
indefinable union of the Holy Trinity:
the Father, unattainable in thought, without beginning and Creator God;
light of light, consubstantial Son, born of the Father before anything,
5 eternally inseparable and undividable from the paternal bosom,
the same in equality and unity, indubitable and immutable nature;
in honor equal with the Father and the Son, sharing in their glory, Holy Spirit,
who proceeds from the Father and fills every creature
and is worshiped and praised with the Father and the Son, inexpressible in essence,
10 unseen by the seraphim and incomprehensible by the cherubim,
unattainable in thought, higher than anything.
O immortal King, unfathomable by authorities and principalities:
*Please accept the supplications and entreaties of your ransomed people,
as it pleases you, we pray.*
- 15 ⌂ Mighty Teacher and untranslatable,
uncreated and unfathomable,
untraceable and immeasurable in nature,
inexpressible in essence, imperceptible by the senses,
before whom the six-winged seraphim cover their faces
20 and the countless companies of (heavenly) beings
dare not look at the light of your Divinity,
for you are the God without beginning, giving beginning to existence.
By your sovereign will and divine hand
you established Eden and placed Adam therein;
25 and during the flood that destroyed the whole earth
you rescued your beloved Noah together with the countless animals,
(just as) you saved from that tragic downfall—
the tasting of that bitter tree of knowledge
of which the forebears ate because of the deceptions of the serpent and were
expelled.
30 *Please accept the supplications and entreaties of your ransomed people,
as it pleases you, we pray.*
- h Upon the four living creatures
and the throne made of four elements you were seated, installed,

you who are of the same essence as the Father and the Holy Spirit,
35 and are ceaselessly praised by the lordly ranks of incorporeal beings,
those fiery beings, O Infinite God,
whom the heavens could not contain.
You came leisurely to Abraham's tabernacle
in the heat of the day,
40 at noon, by the oak of Mamre,
while Abraham was sitting sadly at the entrance to his tent,
looking at heaven and earth.
You, the Lord of Lords and the Creator of eternity,
descending from heaven with two angels,
45 approached the shade-providing tree.
You, once invisible, now appeared visibly
and went forth to be met by Abraham.
He prepared the tender calf and three loaves
and offered them to you, Lord God.
50 For this, he received the good news regarding the barren giving birth to Isaac.
You came today to Mount Tabor with three of your chosen disciples
to fulfill the types
and to save us from the Sodomite destruction.
*Please accept the supplications and entreaties of your ransomed people,
55 as it pleases you, we pray.*

Q With greater and marvelous wonders (you revealed) to us who are newly
initiated into the mystery
that which was once revealed to Moses and Elijah;
and you made yourself known as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
and were proclaimed God and Lord
60 of the living and the dead, you who are the eternally Existent.
With a heralding cloud you thus enlightened your holy apostles.
With inexpressible mystery you revealed your Divinity today on Mount Tabor
to your holy and blessed apostles: to Peter and the sons of Zebedee.
And the Father from above acknowledged his beloved Son.
65 And in accordance with the word proclaimed by Moses and Elijah,
you became known (to them) as Ruler and Lord over life and death.
As they witnessed the overwhelming sight of your splendid transfiguration,
terrified by your light and divine radiance,
they fell to the ground half dead.
70 *Please accept the supplications and entreaties of your ransomed people,
as it pleases you, we pray.*

Ω Who today revealed the inexpressible and incomprehensible
mystery of your Trinity and One Divinity
foreknowingly on Mount Tabor

75 to your holy apostles and prophets,
the radiance of your Divinity to us transients, even after them.
Accordingly, you raised Moses from the dead, the first of the prophets, to life.
And the one who was taken up alive in a fiery chariot,
the charioteer and zealot Elijah,

80 you ushered into your luminous sanctuary and appointed him a true witness
to your holy apostles and prophets.

Those terrified and silenced (apostles) confessed you as Christ, Son of God.
In fear, Peter spoke, saying:

“Come, let us erect three tabernacles: for the Lord, Moses, and Elijah”;
85 for he did not know what he was saying.

*Please accept the supplications and entreaties of your ransomed people,
as it pleases you, we pray.*

Ὄ Head of teachers and immortal King,
who with the inexpressible and radiant light of your Divinity
90 appeared today to the apostles and prophets on Tabor
and covered with luminous cloud the sons of Jacob
as you did the prophets of old who saw God
and made them hear the Father’s voice coming from above, saying:
“This is my beloved Son in whom I am pleased.”

95 It was this voice that was heard by the Forerunner at the Jordan,
where the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove
and lighted upon the Only-begotten Son, equal in glory.

Seeing this, John said:
“This is the unblemished Lamb and Son of God.”

100 Where too the incomprehensible mystery of the Holy Trinity was made known.
*Please accept the supplications and entreaties of your ransomed people,
as it pleases you, we pray.*

Ὕ Looking at you the prophet clearly saw
the Lord of glory seated (there) and said:
105 “O Mount Tabor,
where God pleased to dwell, and will dwell.”
Rejoice now and be glad, “Tabor, together with Hermon,”
for today the Only-begotten Son revealed upon you
the concealed and inscrutable light of (his) Divinity.

110 Having set his throne upon you,
he drew the apostles and the prophets (there) following his departure from
Jerusalem.
For their intercession grant peace to the world,
security to your faithful people,
calm weather and fruitful fields;
115 stability to churches;

sanctity and prudence to priests;
overseeing ability to patriarchs and victory to kings;
to princes and freedmen to overrule the opponents of truth;
to the desperate congregations of believers, help in time of war;
120 to those who have fallen asleep in the faith, rest and life at the resurrection,
that God may be praised from day to day unto eternity.
Please remember and have mercy on those who have fallen asleep
in the hope of resurrection, we pray.

℟ Moreover,
125 grant us that earnest desire for love and good works, we pray.

℟ To renew us in the hope (and) love
that are of the Lord, we pray.

℣ We lift up our thanksgiving
to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

130 We ask and entreat Our Lady, immaculate and most blessed,
the Mother of the incarnate Word of God;
the holy precursor, the Forerunner John the Baptist,
the one who proclaimed and laid his hand on the Son of God;
the first of the deacons and first of the confessors,

135 the wreath of the martyrs, Stephen;
the fragrant mediation of the blessed ranks of the apostles and prophets;
the one who confessed you with his meritorious virtue,
the Patriarch Saint Gregory, the Enlightener of us all;
the pure companies of ascetics,

140 those who confess you God
who in that last, great day
will appear to restore, who alone is merciful—for we were constituted by you.
And now, may the Lord our God have mercy on us
according to his great mercy.

13A

Ode for the Transfiguration by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:704–5 [14:1050] / TG 117–19)

The vocabulary of this ode by Narekats'i has some commonality with that of several of his other odes, e.g., [1A](#), "Ode for the Blessing of Water," lines 29–36; [5A](#), "Ode for the Raising of Lazarus," lines 34–41; [6B](#), "Alternate," lines 17–24; and [6C](#), "Ode for the Resurrection," lines 10–12, 16–18, 28–57, where he juxtaposes the theophanies of the nativity, the transfiguration, and the resurrection. These and similar lines in the litanies evolve around the descent-ascent Christology surrounding the incarnation—the glorification of Christ corresponding to the descent of the Word which became flesh (following the Johannine theology of the *Logos*). The descent-ascent motif recurs (twice) in this highly symbolic and impressionistic ode for the transfiguration—the manifestation of Christ's divinity in his radiant appearance on a mount, traditionally identified with either Mt. Tabor in Galilee or Mt. Hermon in the Ante-Lebanon mountain range ([Matt 17:1–13](#); cf. [Mark 9:2–13](#) and [Luke 9:28–36](#)).

Instead of drawing on the Gospel narrative, however, Narekats'i resorts to the psalm for the feast of the Transfiguration, as provided in the *Lectionary (Chashots')* of his day: [Ps 89:11–12 \(88:12–13 LXX\)](#): "Heaven and earth are yours; you founded the world in its fullness. You created the north and the south, Tabor and Hermon rejoice in your name." He brings into these verses theophanic imagery from elsewhere in the Old Testament and its Apocrypha, from passages directly and indirectly associated with these mountains: [Pss 72:6, 16–17 \(71:6, 16–17 LXX\)](#); [133:3 \(132:3 LXX\)](#); see note to line [12](#) for other psalms; [Deut 32:1–2](#); [Hos 14:5–6 \(14:6–7 LXX\)](#); and [Sir 24:1–14, 29 \(24:1–19, 39 Arm.\)](#), a poem on the personified Wisdom of God, identified with his Word (cf. [Prov 8](#)). Narekats'i utilizes the figurative imagery of these passages, relating its symbolism metaphorically to the transfiguration.

Symbolism is used throughout to convey the ode's deeper meaning. The colors hinted with the named flowers reflect the christological descent-ascent motif, seen in the changing appearance of Jesus. The rose, assuming its red color, is symbolic of the incarnate, earthly Jesus having come to die (lines [1–12](#)); whereas the lily, assuming its white color, is symbolic of the heavenly Christ now revealed in his divine glory. It follows that the pink, mixture of these colors in the middle of the poem dealing with trees, bearing the oft-repeated allusions to the cross and/or Paradise, signifies the turning point of the descent-ascent (cf. [John 12:32–33](#)) aided by the wind—a common indicator of divine presence in Scripture (lines [13–24](#)). Furthermore, with the wind imagery, the author introduces the Holy Spirit, so as to complete the full presence of the Trinity—as it was at the baptism of Jesus where the words "This is my beloved Son ..." were also spoken.

The descent-ascent motif is repeated with the author's use of the word "dew" (*ts'ogh*) in four successive lines ([25–28](#)), a consistent metaphor in his odes and litanies that represents the descent of the Spirit-borne Son into the womb of Mary (paralleling lines [1–12](#)). Moreover, "dew" is an image for God ([Hos 14:5](#); cf. the word "mist" [*mēg*] in [Sir 24:4–5](#) Arm [24:3 LXX], where it is applied to the descent of the personified divine Wisdom). The ascent part that follows is represented by a projection of the *Globus Cruciger*, the golden cross-bearing orb circled with gems—usually pearls, contrasted with the luminaries. The imagery is a *gestalt* of Christ as *Pantocrator* or *Salvator Mundi*, who in iconography holds the *Globus Cruciger* as a symbol of his cosmic power or universal authority. The cosmic imagery at this point is aided by the traditional Philonic and Patristic interpretation of the *candelabrum* of the Sinaitic tabernacle ([Exod 25:33–34](#)), allegorized as representing the seven planets, and its ornaments of

lilies and balls, the stars. Here, the ode echoes the divine creation of [Psalm 89:11 \(88:12 LXX\)](#), the verse preceding the one naming the mountains—the springboard and frame of the author's thought.

The ode is replete with alliteration even from the outset, where the words of the opening line resonate with *Vardavar* (Վարդավար), the Armenian word for the transfiguration, used in the title and elsewhere—as also in the title of the “Litany” for the feast. Moreover, the original text seems to have had two-part lines (unduly divided in the published texts and followed here) linked not so much with each line beginning with the last word of the preceding (as in lines [11](#), [19](#), [25](#)) but with each first part utilizing a word from the second part of the preceding line—as in most lines. Its presently odd-numbered lines consist of seven syllables, and the even-numbered lines of eight syllables (or fifteen syllables per original line, as follows: 5–2–5–3), with the caesura falling after the fifth syllable throughout (except for lines [16](#) and [28](#), where it falls after the fourth syllable). The linkages of the lines and their syllabication are comparable to those of [15A, “Ode for the Holy Cross.”](#)

The gem-like rose was lit
from above, from the rays of the sun.
Over and above the rays
 a sea-blossom was spreading.
5 From the widespread sea
 the color of that blossom was bubbling.
The shade of that variegated blossom
 was that of fruit glittering on the branch,
Of saffron stalks, of fruit
10 nurtured by thick foliage,
The foliage commended by the harpist—
 of which the magnificent David sang.
In the bouquet of mixed roses
 colorful blossoms bloomed.
15 Those poplars and box trees
 shot pink branches;
Those cypresses and budding firs
 took the rose for an adornment to the lily.
The lily was shimmering in the vale,
20 glittering against the sun.
By that northern wind
 the gem-like lily was fanned;
From that southern mount
 a gentle mist showered the lily.
25 The lily was filled with dew,
 with a drizzle of dew, a row of pearls.
All the blossoms were wet with dew,
 the dew from the clouds, the clouds from the sun.

30 The stars, one and all, formed a circle,
 they formed constellations over against the moon;
The cross-shaped constellations formed an orb,
 a circle made of the heavens.
Glory to the Father and to the Son, always;
 to the Holy Spirit, now and ever.

14

Litany for the Assumption of the Most Blessed Holy Bearer of God Recited by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:706–12 [14:1135–42] / TG 200–211)

The feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, on August 15, is the oldest and greatest of the Marian feasts. Its celebration in the Armenian Church as a Dominical feast, held on the Sunday nearest to August 15, has quite an early history. The feast commemorates the death of the Blessed Virgin Mary and her being taken up, body and soul, into heaven by Christ himself. The biblical grounds for the Assumption of Mary derive from traditional interpretations of the “woman” of [Revelation 12](#), especially her being pictured in heaven.

The composition is replete with elements common to the litanies for the church and the nativity in this collection, and shares much of the earlier traditional imagery found in Marian hymns—especially as found in the earliest Armenian hymn to Mary, that by Bishop Petros of Siwnik' from the early sixth century: *Govest i Surb Astuatsatsinn* (Գովեստ ի Սուրբ Աստվածածնին, “Praise to the Holy Theotokos”). More elaborate, however, is Narekats'i's *Encomium on the Holy Virgin*, which has come down to us in two recensions (translated in this volume). He refers to the *Encomium* in Prayer 80.1.20–21, an intercessory prayer addressed to her.

On the acrostic form of this composition in ten parts, yielding ԳՐԻԳՈՐԻ ԵՐԱ (‘A Song by Grigor’), see the introductory note to [2, “Litany for the Holy Nativity and Baptism”](#); note also the two-line refrain following each of the first six parts, changing at the end of the seventh in order to accommodate the collect, beginning at line [128](#).

Q **T**reasure beyond corruption, concealed in holiness,
most marvelous and immaculate, adorned with purity,
saint and ever-virgin, holy Mary Bearer of God,
temple that held God and altar where God dwelt, heavenly built and adorned with

St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).
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- light,
5 where the Holy Trinity is jointly praised.
With encomia of praise and the singing of the "Thrice Holy,"
with ceaseless voice, celebrating in concert,
we sing to you, most blessed of women.
Please accept our prayers,
10 *to present them to your Son and our God, we plead.*
- Ⓐ A celebration to long for, praiseworthy,
renowned in sanctity, Our Lady, immaculate,
to whom the Lord from on high descended,
making you his resting place!
15 And in his divine, provident mercy
he made you the restored lot of fragrant flowers,
replacing the divinely planted Garden of Eden,
by setting in you the Tree of Life and of immortality,
to bring forth through you the Fruit of Life
20 by whom the whole universe is restored.
You were set aside for redemption unto immortality,
through your sanctity and righteousness, most blessed of women.
Please accept our prayers,
to present them to your Son and our God, we plead.
- 25 Ⓑ In you were fulfilled the words of the chosen prophets speaking for God
and of the predicting seers,
that you will become—in lieu of Eve—the mother of the living Word of God
by whom the creatures were arrayed,
(even) to be restored from primeval sin unto glory.
30 Thus were the birthing pangs of the curse placed on the foremother
removed, being replaced with blessing,
and the writ of condemnation for sinning was annulled, torn apart.
Through you does the forefather Adam prosper,
(his) daughter and saint, through whom (came) the One who takes away sin.
35 Eve leaps around with her daughters, joyously adorning herself for the banquet,
having become part of the circle of the seraphim through you,
Mother and Virgin, most blessed of women.
Please accept our prayers,
to present them to your Son and our God, we plead.
- 40 Ⓒ Always praised and worshiped, immaculate saint,
refuge of salvation for the renewal of life on earth,
you have been fashioned like Noah's (ark),
constructed in holiness, a living ark and wood of salvation,
the architect of which, the Holy Spirit, came into you,

- 45 adhered to you with the annunciation by the archangel Gabriel, with his holy greeting,
 was stuck firmly (as) with the glue of divine bonding,
 joining you to the living Word of God without a partitioning gap.
 Sailing calmly across the sea of the universe,
 the Only-begotten arrived (as) on a wing,
50 lighting physically in your bosom,
 elevating you unto the ranks of the cherubim.
 With hosts of angels you were translated to heaven,
 to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, most blessed among women.
 Please accept our prayers,
55 *to present them to your Son and our God, we plead.*
- O O immaculate saint and ever-virgin,
 altar of sanctity, fashioner of Jesus and protective cloud through the night, until
 daybreak,
 a place of convocation for New Israel and a temple built without hands,
 where the cherubim cover your holy womb with their wings, O Virgin.
- 60 The Son of God talked with you;
 as sure as your name, you received light in the light of your Only-begotten.
 Rejoice O sacred ark for God's Word,
 having in you the living testament (once) on the joint tablets of the Law,
 written by the finger of God, the Existent.
- 65 O golden jar full of sanctity,
 holding in you the sweet manna.
 O blossoming rod from the root of Jesse
 that brought forth for us Christ, the royal fruit.
- 70 O censer with three lifting hooks
 chained together in spirit, mind, and body;
 through you was the sweet fragrance spread that filled the whole universe.
 To those of us who are devoted to you, who are with you, and who follow you,
 please be receptive to and keeper of our petitions made (to you),
 to keep us united in one faith in you (and) in the holy apostles
- 75 who on this day assembled to gather you, O Mother of the Lord and Bearer of God,
 to partake of your good gifts of sanctity and righteousness,
 O most blessed among women.
 Please accept our prayers,
 to present them to your Son and our God, we plead.
- 80 O Mentor to the wise and superior light,
 the east for the Sun of Righteousness and morning for Peace,
 full moon, replete with light,
 light leading to the direct light of the morning
 that surrounds you (as) the bright Venus

85 full of light—that reaches the arches of holiness.
The mountain that gave birth to the rock, as Daniel the Great foresaw;
the dew from Hermon to fall on Zion descended hidden in you;
the tangible fleece which Gideon foresaw;
the closed gate and sealed fountain;

90 the diligent wife, the crown of glory, according to Solomon;
companion to the seraphim and intelligent, to the cherubim with many eyes,
according to the vision of Ezekiel
promising the return of the captivity of Israel,
who are the ranks of the redeemed by the blood of Jesus.

95 Please intercede without ceasing with your Only-begotten Son
to keep the holy church unshakeable,
to keep her pure until the great day that is coming;
for the chief shepherd of your rational flock who resides in the cathedral—
which is heaven founded on earth—

100 and for the visiting overseer
to lay hands in accordance with the religious honor of your sanctity;
and for those in charge of instructing the orthodox doctrine
to teach with sacred faithfulness those who confess you,
together with the clerks and officers of the holy church;

105 and for the priestly ranks,
to distribute worthily the body and blood of your Only-begotten;
and for all those who believe in you,
renew them in faith, hope, and love,
to the glory of your Only-begotten, most blessed among women.

110 *Please accept our prayers,
to present them to your Son and our God, we plead.*

115 We place our trust in you, most holy Bearer of God, ever-virgin Mary,
in the holy apostles who are gathered together today for your funeral.
Intercede without ceasing with your Son and our God
in the holy and honorable uppermost courts.

120 Please accept also our petitions
for the reconciliation of sinners
and grant us to abide by the decorum
mandated for the religious order(s).

125 Accept us, believers in you
who are born of the holy baptismal font for adoption
into the faith that confesses the Holy Trinity,
and those who have fallen asleep, preceding (us) in the true faith
of confessing your Only-begotten,

130 O adorable and worshiped one, most blessed among women.
Please remember and have mercy on the souls of those who are at rest
in the hope of resurrection, we pray.

- ℟ Moreover,
grant us that earnest desire for love and good works, we pray.
- 130 ⌂ To establish us firmly in (living) fragrant lives
in memory of your Mother and Bearer, O God, we plead.
- ℣ We praise you, Our Lady, immaculate, Mother of the Lord and Virgin Mary,
saint and ever-graceful, a decorous gift of faith to the world;
strengthened and protected by the Father on high,
135 adorned and cleansed by the Holy Spirit,
fashioned and tabernacled by the indwelling Son,
the Only-begotten of the Father and your Firstborn,
your Son by birth and Lord by creation.
- O Plant of Life for the blessed Fruit,
140 healer of Eve's pangs, we confess you,
Mother of the living Word of God, we ask of you
to intercede without ceasing with your Son and our God;
so too the greatest of those born of women, the Forerunner John the Baptist;
and Saint Stephen, the first martyr in suffering for the Only-begotten;
- 145 along with the mediation of the holy apostles who from the various parts of the
world
came on this day to celebrate your honorable rest,
and of our Illuminator, with the solitaries and hermits
who are always helped and supported by you—
to this great day of your memorial,
- 150 Our Lady, praised and glorified, most blessed among women.
And now, may the Lord our God have mercy on us
according to his great mercy.

14A

Ode for the Church by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:713–14 [14:1111–12] / TG 120–22)

This ode is a composition for the church, personified as the Virgin Mary. The author's constant linking of the two—to a point of equating them—is based for the most part on his allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs, his favorite biblical source for ecclesiology. His poetic license in this distinct composition derives from the pastoral and erotic imageries in this St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).

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biblical book, and is in keeping with the spiritual reading of the text in his deeply Christian world: the love expressed between Solomon and his beloved as indicative of Christ's love for the church and vice-versa. Thus, the author's casting the church in the image of the biblical "beloved" is quite common in the odes. Interpretively, the Virgin Mary is also the personification of wisdom, already personified as a desirable woman in Proverbs (chap. 8), Wisdom of Solomon (chaps. 6–9), and Sirach (chap. 24). These and other imageries are juxtaposed in the ode, much as earlier church fathers adopted certain flowers, plants, and trees from the Scriptures, the sapiential books in particular, as symbols of Mary's immaculate purity. The compounded similitude is conditioned by the belief, based on further theological grounds, that the church—like the Virgin Mary—is God's dwelling place and begets children of God through the baptismal font. Accordingly, in his book of penitential prayers the author states: "If one were to describe her (the church) as the image of the Bearer of God, it would not be impious" (Prayer 75.12.2 [4]).

This unusual ode of uneven lines, with its "Variant" version which follows, ought to be placed alongside the other odes for the church ([10A, "Ode for the Church"](#); [10B, "Alternate"](#) ode for the Church; [12A, Suppl. 2.1](#), and [Suppl. 2.1 Variant](#)). It should also be noted that [12A, "Ode for the Church,"](#) is a composition of equal length and ends with nearly identical lines: "(to) Christ the Savior who crowned you, to whom befits honor (and) glory always. Amen."

As for the textual problems of the ode, these will be discussed in the brief introduction to the "Variant" version which follows. Suffice it to indicate that the text followed here is the same as that of the *Gandzaran* manuscripts, utilized also in *MH 14*.

A
mazing song, ardently moving song (to her),
She who became a dwelling for the Maker of that which is good.
Mystery, compounded mystery!
(Her tresses) an adornment, adornment like flocks.
5 A cypress she, the mountain cypress; planter for the reedlike Plant;
Upright elm for the branching Vine.
Her sleek eyebrows a pair of arches.
Star, more than a star; yea, the noontime hour.
Her eyes, sea beside sea, widen cheerfully in the morn,
10 Bright shining like two suns,
Their light beaming down the high window as of morn.
From her pomegranate-like cheeks, laurel-fringed and beautiful, blossoms flower—
Stemming doubly from her heart, which throbs with vibrant love.
Her smooth arms join together in the shape of an arch.
15 She is jubilant, joyous fervor imbuing,
Weaving melody into melody,
Rocking gently, swaying to and fro.
Her mouth, two rose petals shed on the lips;
Melodiousness of lyre the movement of her tongue.
20 She has a flower at the parting of her hair,
Its very strands vivid in beautiful color as of wine,

The flock-like tresses an adornment, adornment like flocks;
Braids of triple strands frame her cheeks.
Her glowing bosom is strewn with red roses;
25 Her hands are sprays of purplish violets,
Rising frankincense from a censer brimming with divine fire—
Its jingle a melodious sound.
She is dressed in a beautiful robe,
In blue and purple, fine muslin and scarlet, its golden hue glittering;
30 Her belt of shining silver, with a sheen of gold, is studded with gems,
Sapphire gems embellished with detailed filigree.
When she moves, with the lustrous beauty of pearls,
Her footsteps leave luminous spots.
To that King, that newborn Savior,
35 The One who crowned you, glory always. Amen.

14A (Variant)

Canticle for the Nativity / Ode for the Church by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:715–16 / TG 123–25)

The introductory remarks are limited here to text-critical observations. For the implied meaning of the poem, see the introduction to and annotation of the preceding “[Ode” \(14A\).](#)

When compared to the preceding “Ode,” the text of the “Variant” version translated here has less to commend itself. Its divergent title, “*Meghedi Tsnndean*” («Մեղեդի Ծննդեան», “Canticle for the Nativity”) and the equally questionable division after the eighth line are noteworthy. The title is not found in the manuscripts; it appears for the first time in the 1827 Venice edition of Narekats’i’s odes and other poetic works. It results from mistaking the ode for a “Nativity” chant, for either Jesus (on the basis of line [32](#)) or the Virgin Mary (on the basis of the feminine elements throughout). Moreover, the word *meghedi* (մեղեդի) is not among the usual rubrics within this corpus of poetic writings by Narekats’i. It appears rarely with the odes, and that only in manuscripts of much later derivation where it occasionally replaces the generic title “*P’okh*” (when used for an “Alternate” ode). The caption between lines [8/9](#), “A Fine Ode by Narekats’i” («Տաղ ազնիւ, Նարեկացւոյ Ե», “*Tagh azniw, Narekats’woy ē*”), likewise seems to be secondary—regardless of the unquestionable attribution. Such a division, though attested to in the manuscripts, tends to distort the unity of the ode, for it separates its first eight lines either as a distinct stanza or as a variable. The separate standing of these lines, however, cannot be ruled out entirely.

St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).

Other distinctive features of this recension, when compared to the preceding, include omission of lines ([20–21](#)) and words (սարթեռունի սԵր, “vibrant love” [line [13/15](#)]; [նվեշողէր զոյն](#), “the golden hue glittering” [line [29/27](#)]), and transposition of lines ([22–23/12–13](#)) and words (սարդիառունկ, “laureled,” from [12/14](#) to [16](#)); these in addition to an added word, in line [30/28](#) (*duplus*, յականց, “of gems”), substituted words (հուռու [15](#) / Երգով [17](#); կապուալ [31](#) / պճուալ [29](#); ի քայլել՝ լոյն [33](#) / ի զևալ՝ շողն [31](#)) and distorted words, noted in the translation (in lines [5, 11, 13/15, 17/19](#), limited to substantive variants).

Hitherto unstudied manuscripts show further adaptations and/or distortions of the maligned ode, to a point of baffling the scribes.

A
mazing song, ardently moving song (to her),
She who became a dwelling for the Maker of that which is good.
Mystery, compounded mystery!
(Her tresses) an adornment, adornment like flocks.
5 A cypress she, the mountain cypress; planter for the reedy Plant;
Upright elm for the branching Vine.
Her sleek eyebrows a pair of arches.
Star, more than a star; yea, the noontime hour.

[A Fine Ode by Narekats'i]

Her eyes, sea beside sea, widen cheerfully in the morning,
10 Bright shining like two suns,
Their light beaming down as of the morning hour.
Her flock-like tresses an adornment, adornment like flocks;
Braids of triple strands frame her cheeks.
From her pomegranate-like cheeks beautiful blossoms flower,
15 Stemming doubly from her throbbing heart.
She has her smooth arms joined together, joined like an arch.
She is jubilant, expressing joy in singing,
Rocking gently, swaying to and fro,
Weaving melody into melody.
20 Her mouth, two rose petals shed on the lips;
Melodiousness of lyre the movement of her tongue.
Her glowing bosom is strewn with red roses;
Her hands are sprays of purplish violets,
Rising frankincense from a censer brimming with divine fire—
25 Its jingle a melodious sound.
She is dressed in a beautiful robe,
In blue and purple, fine muslin and scarlet;
Her belt of shining silver, with a sheen of gold, has gems all around,
Sapphire gems mounted on detailed filigree.
30 When she moves, with the lustrous beauty of pearls,

Her footsteps leave glittering spots.
To that King, that newborn Savior,
The One who crowned you, glory always. Amen.

15

Litany for the Holy Cross Recited by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:717–20 / TG 212–18)

After the divine epithets and attributes in the opening lines ([1–5](#)), this long litany follows a basic structure. It contemplates the implications of the cross, the richness of its theology and symbolism: from its cosmic power to reconcile and unify celestial things to its saving power on earth. It concludes with the usual entreaty or prayer of intercession (lines [70–87](#); cf. nos. [2](#), [7](#), [9](#), [10](#), [11](#), [12](#), [13](#), [14](#), and the dissimilar ones in [7](#), [16](#), and [Suppl. 2.5](#)).

Christ himself and his redemptive work are the overriding themes in all of Narekats'i's compositions on the cross—somewhat excepting the *History of the Holy Cross of Aparank'* (text in MH 12:913–29; trans. in this volume). Christology and soteriology are the same for him, especially in his *Encomium on the Holy Cross*, of which two recensions exist (pp. 930–52). These, together with this litany and some of his prayers (36.1–2, on the passion, and 77.1–4, composed for Good Friday), help clarify some of the subtleties in the odes to the cross, including those in Suppl. 2. All these compositions dedicated to the cross were most likely for the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the oldest of the feasts devoted to the cross, celebrated on September 13.

On the form of the composition, the shortest and last of the acrostic litanies in ten parts that yield ԳՐԻՂՈՐԻ ԵՐԱՎ ("A Song by Grigor"), see the introductory note to [2, "Litany for the Holy Nativity and Baptism."](#)

q T reasure ineffable, greatness concealed,
mighty, awe inspiring, always good,
thrice holy, unbounded, blessed, living Name,
indescribable reality, shut beyond sense perception, altogether inexplicable,
5 transcendent, beyond reach, yet accessibly near, eternal King.
Behold, our petitions rise like incense before you, Almighty; we plead.

Ը Within moments, from the four pure elements in existence,
you established the earth into a unified existence,
a twofold mystery, a heavenly project.

- 10 Constant Mediator of the harmony between the two opposites
and of the renewal (of the hope) to see the Tree of Life.
Behold, our petitions rise like incense before you, Almighty; we plead.
- 15 ↳ You cannot be contained, tracked in the heights,
you who are being praised festively, mighty, beyond reach.
With ceaseless music, praises offered by powerful nations,
with glorious song you are adored, God of All.
As high as heaven is removed from earth,
all the way to the wings of the four (living beings) in the likeness of the sun,
by countless (beings) you are honored beyond bound;
- 20 to the Garden of Eden, to the tree of calamity,
to the tree of blessing announced (long ago).
Behold, our petitions rise like incense before you, Almighty; we plead.
- 25 ↳ Forecaster of spring and upward flights,
example of your will upheld for the world,
to adhere to the light, to Noah's ark,
image of redemption, representation of miracles, refuge of hope.
By covenant (you) interceded for a new people, above those in heaven,
drawing them to you by the wing of your cross.
Behold, our petitions rise like incense before you, Almighty; we plead.
- 30 Ω O writ by the finger of God,
life-giving Wood, impregnable,
legacy of the New Law, impeccable in purity,
fulfillment of the prefiguring history of old, harbinger of expectations.
You were made known to us through many helpful substances.
- 35 A sign to be worshiped, an earnest for the world,
a path that could not be followed—marked by the Creator's blood to the glory of
(his) light.
Behold, our petitions rise like incense before you, Almighty; we plead.
- 40 □ Head of teachers and endowment to the wise, Lord Jesus Christ,
The sole teacher of things incomprehensible that cannot be comprehended now
(and) unto eternity,
Image of the transcendent Father, over and above any definition, Provider of this
sign:
Establish by the stability of this (sign) the pillars of the world,
keeping them in the firmness of your precepts;
the chief shepherd of your rational flock,
our patriarch, Lord (*to be named*);
- 45 the bishops, with the priests and deacons;
the *vardapets*, with the clerks and the rest of the church officers;
our king with his progeny,

together with the subjects of his royal domain.
Keep them contrite in heart,
50 strengthened by you through the glory of your cross.
Behold, our petitions rise like incense before you, Almighty; we plead.

unto you we lift up our hands and hearts
and the sentiments of our rational souls.
Establish us with an immovable steadfastness
55 beneath the shadow of the wings of your holy cross.
Grant victory to our kingdom, (just) vindication to the judiciary,
serenity to princes, edification to bearers of arms,
the reins (of restraint) to equestrians, purity to foot soldiers,
guidance to followers, counsel to city dwellers,
60 tranquility to benefactors, comfort to pilgrims,
rest to those who have fallen asleep, and to all your people
strength and protection by this very (sign),
atonement and health, you who are eternally blessed.
Please remember and have mercy on those who have fallen asleep
65 in the hope of resurrection, we pray.

Moreover,
grant us that earnest desire for love and good works, we pray.
To establish us firmly
in the sole path chosen by the Spirit of love, which is from the Lord, we pray.

(Recitative) change

To worshipers who make their petitions with thanksgiving may there always be
70 peace
through the protection of the Bearer of the Savior and provider of (his) incredible
body,
the ever-virgin and holy Mary, Bearer of God;
through the intercessions and entreaties of John the Baptist,
the great Forerunner who implored the Spirit upon the waters;
75 through the pleadings of the enthroned apostles,
anointed by the Spirit and robed in sanctity;
through the martyrdom of your first confessor, Saint Stephen,
who is the firstborn of the redemptive act of the Second Adam;
through the intercession and prayers of the brave and blessed
80 martyrs made perfect;
through the profession of faith of the confessor Saint Gregory,
the one who dedicated himself to things beyond reach, the Illuminator of Armenia;
through the constant vigil of those (standing) with outstretched arms,
those pure ascetics, chosen from among many

85 to be crowned with you on that great day for their cross-bearing lives.
And now, may the Lord our God have mercy on us
according to his great mercy.

15A

Ode for the Holy Cross by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:721 [14:1276] / TG 129–30)

The main thought in this ode pivots on the universal implications of the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ, theologically broad concepts reduced to few lines. In this, Narekats'i follows an early Christian pictorial understanding of the progression from one to the other: that though Jesus died as a lamb on the cross, he arose as a lion from the tomb. The author juxtaposes the two images, preferring to see the triumphant lion on the cross who, through his death and resurrection, raises from the dead “the captives” held hostage in death and crowns them in glory.

The image of the Messiah as a roaring lion owes to intertestamental Jewish apocalyptic interpretations of familiar Old Testament passages that speak of “the lion from the tribe of Judah” or of God “as a lion” ([Gen 49:9](#); [Ezek 19:3–6](#); [Hos 5:14](#); [11:10](#); [13:7–8](#); [Amos 3:8](#); [Mic 5:8](#); cf. [4 Ezra 11:36–46](#); [12:1–3, 31–34](#); [Apocalypse of Elijah 2:6–8](#)). Of special significance is the Aramaic Targum to [Isaiah 53](#), which transforms the “lamb” led to be slaughtered to a defying, roaring lion who slaughters the oppressing Gentiles like sheep. The lion image of the Messiah in Jewish apocalyptic writings was utilized by the author of Revelation ([5:5](#); cf. [10:1–4](#)) and made part of the Christian lore.

In keeping with several other odes in this collection, the lines of this poem are linked, each beginning with the last word of the preceding (assuming that the original did not have its long, two-part lines divided as here). Its presently odd-numbered lines consist of seven syllables and the even-numbered lines of eight syllables (or, fifteen syllables per long, undivided line, as follows: 5–2–5–3), with the caesura falling after the fifth syllable throughout (except for lines [2](#), [4](#), [6](#), where it falls after the fourth syllable).

I speak of the Lion's roar,
 crying on the four-winged cross;
On the four-winged cross crying,
 calling to the depths of the earth.
5 The depths of the earth trembled,

they shook beneath his mighty voice.
This mighty voice I heard
 loosens the bonds I'm in.
He longs to loosen my bonds,
10 to reverse the captivity of the captives.
I say, "Blessed are the captives
 whom the Lion raised."
Those raised by the Lion
 expect no further suffering;
15 They expect no suffering,
 they await the wreaths that wither not.
They receive the braided wreaths
 from the Lion, the immortal King.
Let us give glory to the Redeemer
20 who rescued the captives from prison.

16

Litany for All the Holy Apostles by Grigor Vardapet

(MH 12:722–26 / TG 219–25)

The litany recounts the calling of the apostles, their privileged place in salvation history, and their distinctive place in heaven. It highlights their preordained election as well as their eternal glory. In the concluding prayer of intercession they are upheld as martyrs.

The prayer of intercession, however, does not follow the usual form, in that it is limited to imploring the Blessed Virgin Mary (who is not mentioned earlier in the composition) along with the “saints” and the “martyrs” on this acknowledged feast day of the Holy Apostles. The form of the prayer here, without naming any of the other, usual saints (the Baptist, the Protomartyr, and the Illuminator, all three being considered among the “martyrs” in general) is comparable to a thematically related litany conceivably used for feasts commemorating certain apostles and/or their acolytes, successor bishops/patriarchs or church hierarchs—whether collectively or individually: [Suppl. 2.5, “Litany for All the Apostles and Hierarchs.”](#) Another feature limited to the two thematically related litanies is their identical acrostic arrangement (spelling out ԳՐԻՎՈՒՅԻ ԵԶՂ instead of the usual ԵՐԳ). The features limited to these two compositions help authenticate the “Narekean” authorship of the latter (see its introduction for more).

The author’s *Encomium on the Holy Apostles*, to which he refers in Prayer 82.1.6–11, has nearly all of his special thoughts found in these twin litanies for their feast(s) (text in *MH*

St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).

12:976–989; Eng. trans. in this volume).

- q Treasure of the glorious mystery of the self-generated Light
present ever since the beginning and eternally hid with the Father:
In the fullness of time you were revealed and called by the Son,
(you) who enriched the world and enlightened all nations and tribes,
5 O holy apostles of the One sent from heaven
for the sake of our wretched nature.
*We ask for mercy (through you) for us who believe,
from Christ, we plead.*
- l Good teachers who invited us mortals to immortality,
10 you who were fortunate to have been chosen from before the beginning of beings,
being made incomparably superior to the luminaries in glory,
those blazing in heaven.
You witnessed the embodiment of beings, the rise of the limitless matter,
and in the upper room you drank the cup of immortality from the hand of the One
most high;
15 and to the whole human race
you offered the life-giving drink.
Commanders of thousands as regards the great mystery
and trained theologians full of wisdom,
preachers of the economy that unites us to the Word,
20 *We ask for mercy through you for us who believe,
from Christ, we plead.*
- h You have been entrusted with celestial authority, having become coequal in
honor with the angels,
to reign in the impending eternity, in the glory of God's Son,
occupying the judgment seat(s) in the universal court.
25 The Spirit foreknowingly—through the prophets—
declared your unambiguous calling,
predicting it figuratively on earth
through the mysterious number of fountains gushing forth from the rock for the
thirsty people
and for palm trees to thrive,
30 providing shade to those delivered from laboring in Egypt.
Today, this same (stream) from heaven
came to join you with storming wind.
Thus, you were made into streams from the boundless sea (of heaven),
like the four rivers of Eden,
35 to flow even more, into the vast expanse,
founding the City of God, the church, the dwelling place of the Most High,

to give drink to the thirsty and to make them glad.
*We ask for mercy through you for us who believe,
from Christ, we plead.*

- 40 Q Miraculous boughs cultivated and made to bloom by the Existent,
fruitful branches of the Vine, cleansed by the penetrating Light,
blessed souls whose combined power (resembles) that of the Triad,
light to the world, in essence from that of the Word,
you were also called cleansing salt.
- 45 You were anointed by the Holy Spirit, by the right hand of the Father,
you were appointed princes around the world.
Empowered by God, you thought nothing of the (separating) gulfs;
the forces of darkness immersed in sin and the estranged human nature
you saved through rebirth.
- 50 By an indescribable grace the wondrous Son
you offered to God,
inviting (people) to inexpressible glory through the blood of the holy Only-begotten,
O universal luminaries who are worshiped in heaven.
*We ask for mercy through you for us who believe,
from Christ, we plead.*
- 55 □ In the likeness of the Sun, you are more than a marvel;
from the Creator of glorious fiery beings on high,
most pure vessels (though made) of the elements of nature.
You were recipients of grace of the highest honor,
- 60 being called into apostleship by Jesus,
becoming new counselors of the sovereign Creator from nothing,
pioneers of the glorious spread of the new faith in the world,
chiefs descended from the Second Adam, children of and kin to New Sion,
friends of the Benefactor and hope of forgiveness.
- 65 *We ask for mercy through you for us who believe,
from Christ, we plead.*
- 70 □ Indescribable teachers, rays of the Light and bearers of the Wisdom of the
Existent,
diligent tillers of the soil and spiritual hunters of the rational kind,
you who were obtained from the tangible sea,
who had the Maker out of nothing and the Constitutor of water creatures
through mysterious artistry
(as) your ally through the fiery tongues,
by whom you were strengthened with the courage of the Spirit
to crush unto death the lurking (serpent).
- 75 You became partners in the tortures of the One who is beyond torture,
inaugurators of the heavenly chambers and inheritance to us who celebrate you.

Be (our) intercessors and venue to life (eternal).
*We ask for mercy through you for us who believe,
from Christ, we plead.*

- 80 ↳ We cry out to you with our petitions,
 immortal King and life-giving Lord,
 as we are gathered together in memory of your chosen, holy apostles
 whom you placed as luminaries to traverse the sky with the stars,
 whom you formed in word and deed on earth.
- 85 And the universe with a newly created heavenly order
 you beautified again.
 Through them you transferred us who were eclipsed in ignorance
 to your intelligible light.
 Through them we ask you, who are always benevolent and abundant in mercy,
- 90 regarding the one who praises the glory of your great Lordship,
 our patriarch, Lord (*to be named*),
 with the chosen, holy overseers and our spiritual *vardapets*,
 to strengthen them through your fervent love against the deceptive rubbish of the
 accuser;
- 95 to empower our king
 by your mighty right hand,
 to enable him in battle always, to bring honor to Christians,
 for the glory and praise of your eternally blessed Name.
 Please remember and have mercy on those who have fallen asleep
 in the hope of resurrection, we pray.
- 100 ↳ Moreover,
 grant us that earnest desire for love and good works, we pray.
- Q To commit ourselves and one another
 to the almighty Lord God, we pray.
- 105 Q Praised by the fiery powers on high,
 you who were enshrouded with divine light on earth
 (and) are discoursed on by the wise and sang to in sweet voice by us, lowly ones,
 O Mother of the Lord, who were predicted by the prophets through diverse visions
 regarding your absolute virginity,
 because of which, in our joyous celebration of the feast of the apostolic band,
- 110 we praise you with singing, O Queen,
 who is always blessed
 in the circle of the saints and in the memorial services for the martyrs,
 whom we implore as intercessors together with you
 with the caring Redeemer of our (sinful) nature,
- 115 that he may always be intimately close to the company of believers,
 to save and to keep (us) from the hidden snares of the tempter

and to shield (us) from visible oppressors,
so that at all times, in joyous celebration,
we may cry out with right confession of faith, saying:

120 May the Lord our God have mercy on us
according to his great mercy.

Supplements

Supplement 1

Ode for the Resurrection Recited by Grigor Narekats'i

(MH 12:727–30 / TG 59–65)

Inspired by the gospel account of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (cf. [5c](#), [“Ode for the Raising of Lazarus,” line 18](#): “The Word was coming to Jerusalem, descending like a charioteer from the mountainside”), and more so by Ezekiel’s vision of God’s chariot-throne with its mystical connotations ([Ezek 1](#) and [10](#)), Narekats’i draws an analogous picture of the enthroned Christ’s entry into heavenly Jerusalem following his resurrection / ascension (lines [1–10](#), [59–65](#); the first and last stanzas form a frame or an *inclusio*). The cart carrying Christ’s throne is comparable to the cart on which the Ark of the Covenant—representing the presence of God and containing the Ten Commandments—was placed (see [2 Sam 6](#), David bringing the Ark to Jerusalem, and [Ps 132 \[131 LXX\]](#) which is commonly associated with the events of this chapter). Thus, the cart is identified with the Sinaitic revelation to Moses (lines [47–48](#); see the subsequent lines, [49–58](#), for the rest of the author’s interpretive clues to his metaphorical images), just as other metaphors represent the Hebrew patriarchs and prophets, down to John the Baptist—the “Messenger”—represented by the youthful driver (lines [36–42](#), [55–56](#); see [Matt 11:7–15](#), where the Baptist is said to be the last and the greatest of the prophets, even “the Elijah who was to come”; cf. [Mal 3:1; 4:5](#)); the “Messenger” at Christ’s first coming, now playing a similar role—having preceded Christ in death. Following up on the author’s assorted clues, it becomes apparent that he is parading the biblical history of God’s revelation, from the Law of Moses, the cart, to the Four Gospels, its four-sided bed and chassis (lines [47–58](#)). All these usher the coming “Son of a king.”

The mystical connotations of Ezekiel’s vision of God’s chariot-throne emerge time and again in Narekats’i, especially in his *Encomium on the Holy Cross*, where the cross is seen both as God’s throne and as his footstool. The chariot-throne of Ezekiel’s vision is variously applied to Mary and to the church in the author’s poetic compositions; its commonplace use is enough for the author to simply introduce it here as “that cart.” The freedom with which Narekats’i applies the chariot-throne imagery to the crucifixion as well as to the resurrection is dictated by (1) Paul, for whom the crucifixion of Jesus is directly related to his resurrection, in that the “power of the cross” is not separable from that of the risen Lord; and (2) John, in whose Gospel the St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).

crucifixion is but “the hour of glory,” the descent through the incarnation having led to the ascent through the cross. The descent-ascent motif is clearly in the background of this ode; for as the cart halts in its descent, when “its wheels do not turn” ([Ezek 10:11](#)), it is being lifted up. The recurring lines in the first part of the ode (lines [12–17](#), [20–23](#), [28–29](#), [34–35](#)) serve to heighten such emphasis, bringing it to a crescendo in lines [43–44](#), as “the wheels begin to turn.”

The geographical orientation is equally significant: the cart is coming “down the mountain Masis,” which is to be identified either with Azat Masis, the early Armenian name for Mt. Ararat (modern Ağrı Dağı), or Nekh Masis, Sip’ān in the district of Apahunik’ north of Lake Van, according to the *Ashkharhats’oyts’* (31/42; *MH* 2:2152.64; identified with modern Süphan Dağı). It is more likely that Narekats’i’s vision is geographically closer to home. As in biblical apocalyptic thought, the risen Christ comes for his people; here the faithful folk of an Armenian countryside, “Children of New Sion,” whose spiritual environment is equated with “Jerusalem” (lines [62–63](#)).

Repeated terms and varying syllables at equal intervals, similar to meter, create different and recurring rhythms of the lines—heightened with occasional rhyme and refrain in this ode of multiple juxtapositions.

That (small) cart coming down the mountain Masis
Has a golden throne on it,
Covered with purple muslin;
And (seated) on it is the Son of a king.
5 At his right are the seraphim with six wings
And at his left the cherubim with many eyes.
Beautiful children go before him
With Psalter and lyre in their arms,
The redeeming cross in their hands.
10 They are singing and saying:
“Glory to the all-powerful resurrection of Christ.”

The small cart is lifted;
It is lifted, it is stopped.
From the right slopes of Masis
15 The small cart is lifted, it is stopped.
Behold, the small cart is halted
And its wheels do not turn.

A hundred orchid stems, six of oregano,
A full bouquet of violets (adorn it).
20 From the right slopes of Masis
The small cart is lifted, it is stopped.
Behold, the small cart is halted
And its wheels do not turn.

The oxen are amber and white,

- 25 Decked with flowers; they are fast-footed, swift.
Their horns resemble crosses
And all their hair a spread of pearls.
Behold, the small cart is halted
And its wheels do not turn.
- 30 The bows are of silver, the yoke of gold,
And the reins of silk.
The straps are woven fabric
And the whip a blossoming rod.
Behold, the small cart is halted
- 35 And its wheels do not turn.
The attendant is young and skillful.
He is lithe, strong of arm
And broad-shouldered. He is blond; his voice forceful.
He shouts at the yoked oxen,
- 40 Calling from the little seat;
He prods the yoked oxen again,
Bouncing joyfully on his little seat.
And behold, the small cart starts to move;
The wheels begin to turn.
- 45 And the shaft pulls the base of the cart,
Still moving today, with fragrance all around.
- The cart is the Sinaitic
Recapitulation of the Law of Moses;
And the hundred orchid stems
- 50 Are the patriarchs and the prophets;
And the six oregano stems
Are the six-day works of God;
And the one bouquet of violets
Is the unified Trinity;
- 55 And that blond young man
Is John the Forerunner;
And the four-(beam) base of the cart,
The Gospel of Christ.
- The small cart moves on, moves on and on,
60 Down the right slopes of Masis.
The small cart moves on, moves on,
And creaking, it enters Jerusalem.
And the children of New Sion
Sing a new song, saying:
- 65 “Glory to the all-powerful resurrection of Christ.”

Supplement 2.1

Praise for the Temple of Solomon

(MH 12:731–32 / TG 232–34)

A single Bible verse, “In building the temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel, or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built” ([1 Kgs 6:7](#) NIV), provided ample grounds for much speculation in ancient commentaries. These speculations included the belief that angels helped build the temple. According to rabbinical legend, the edifice was miraculously constructed: the large, heavy stones rising to and settling in their respective places of themselves. Dwelling on this “miracle,” Narekats’i proceeds to draw on the historical details of the first temple. In the middle of his “Praise,” he breaks into a laudation of the symbolism of these details and their implicit and explicit meaning.

The liturgical use of this “Praise” was probably limited to local celebrations of the feast of the Dedication of the Church, which, as a commemoration of the dedication of the sacred sites in Jerusalem, was thematically and liturgically related to the dedication of Solomon’s temple. This “Praise” or *encomium*, together with its “Variant” that follows, should thus be classified with the litanies and odes for the church.

The author refrains from traditional poetry patterns in this free composition; so also in the “Variant” that follows.

Hosts from above came down to King Solomon;
They built the temple, laying the stones,
Dressing the slabs mounted on wood.
The earth trembled, the mountains shook;
5 The high places were torn apart, the idols were shattered
By the hammering, smashing sound.
This was foreseen by King David
When he was about to build God’s house;
It was, however, to be built by his son.
10 This, (then), was witnessed by the king’s son Solomon.
What of the twelve materials (used), the fourteen side rooms,
The thick wood beams, the angels’ work, the blue materials!
What of the initial pattern,
The veils reaching across the upper floors—
15 The inner floors, the sculpted almonds,
The silver-plated poles glittering like gold
From hook to hook!

Solomon had (the panels) adorned with bright gems, attached,

St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).
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From joist to joist,
20 With winged creature(s) of hammered metal, studded with pearls.
Hiram walked into the Lord's house,
(Made) the adornments in every color:
The radiant (objects) and the lilies in vermillion and purple,
Linen fabrics in flaming red.

25 To what are the heavens like? To what are the altars like?
To whom is the roof like? To whom are the wreaths like?
To whom are the pillars like? To whom are the ropes like?
To whom is the platform like? To whom is the temple befitting?
The heavens are like heavens; the altars like altars!

30 The roof is like the prophets; the wreaths are like the apostles;
The pillars like the martyrs; the ropes like the cherubim;
The platform is for the Holy Virgin; the temple befitting the Savior.

35 The capitals are like capitals and the pillars firm;
The platform pearly, the foundations deep as the abyss;
The gate and entrance beautiful to behold;
The ground purplish like the sea.

How many altars? How many arches?
How many joists? How many curtains?
How many lanterns? How many bells?
40 A thousand altars! A thousand arches!
A thousand joists! A thousand curtains!
A thousand lanterns and ten thousand bells!

Now, the temple was built, the work accomplished;
The colors were applied, the various (parts) adorned.
45 And it was called God's House.
The stewards of the great and holy temple were appointed;
The ropes were pulled (as) the pulleys cheered;
The temple vibrated, the swallows raised their shrill cry;
The bells rang, and King Solomon rejoiced!

50 They sang to the heavens, with instruments,
Saying: "Alleluia! Alleluia!"

Supplement 2.1 (Variant)

Ode for the Church and The Holy Temple

(MH 12:733–34 [14:1124–25] / TG 235–36)

The “Variant” here is that of the *Gandzaran* version. It reiterates the preceding “Praise” with some differences, omitting lines [7–10](#), [33–36](#), and [43–46](#). For a brief introduction and fuller annotation, see the preceding.

Hosts from above came down to King Solomon;
They built the temple, filing the wood,
Dressing the stones to lay against the wood.
The earth quaked, the mountains were torn apart,
5 The idols were shattered
By the hammering, smashing sound.

The twelve materials, the thirteen side-rooms,
The fourteen partitions, the blue materials
Are equally significant;
10 (So too) the veils reaching across
The inner floors, the silver-plated poles
From hook to hook.

King Hiram walked into the Lord’s house,
King Hiram saw all the adornments in every color:
15 The radiant (panels) and the lilies, in vermillion and bright white—
(Like) a brook streaming down the valley;
The winged creature(s) of hammered metal, studded with pearls,
Glittering, attached
From joist to joist.

20 How many joists? How many altars?
How many arches? How many lanterns?
How many curtains? How many bells?
A thousand joists! A thousand altars!
A thousand arches! A thousand lanterns!

25 A thousand curtains and ten thousand bells!

To what is that temple like? To what are those sacrifices like?
To what is that roof like? To what are those ropes like?
To what are those capitals like? To what are those pillars like?
To what is that platform like and to whom is the temple befitting?
30 The sacrifices (are like) the martyrs; the roof (is like) the prophets;
The ropes (are like) the cherubim; the capitals (like) the apostles;

The pillars (like) the seraphim; the platform (like) the Virgin;
The temple befitting the Savior.

35 The ropes were pulled, the bells rang;
 The temple vibrated, the pulleys cheered;
 King Solomon rejoiced!
 They sang to the heavens, with instruments,
 And cried out, saying: “Alleluia!”

Supplement 2.2

Ode for the Holy Cross

(MH 12:735–36 [14:1228–29] / TG 237–38)

On the bird motif in relation to the cross, see the introductory note to [10B, “Alternate”](#) ode for the church. The uniqueness of this ode, however, cannot be understated. As a lyric poem in five stanzas of short lines with refrain, it resembles the medieval Italian “canzone,” a form which it antedates. The poem, as its two following variants indicate, must have undergone considerable reworking in later times—to a point of having its attribution to Gregory questioned by some. Certain manuscripts omit the last stanza (J2015, p. 672; M4117, fol. 248v–249r).

I go up to Jerusalem,
To that city built by God,
To that beautifully built temple,
To that lily-like Zion.
5 Who is like the peerless One?
O peerless One.

A bright bird perched
On that wing of the cross.
It had a silver-plated wing,
10 Like the ray(s) of the sun.
Who is like the peerless One?
O peerless One.

It let a fine sound
Like Gabriel’s trumpet,

St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).
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15 Filled its eyes with tears
 Like the morning dew.
 Who is like the peerless One?
 O peerless One.

20 O most beautiful bird,
Perched on that wing of the cross:
How do you produce that melodious sound
Like Gabriel's trumpet?
How do you fill your eyes with tears
Like the morning dew?

25 Who is like the peerless One?
 O peerless One.

 O most beautiful bird:
The summons of the good news is addressed to you.
Keep rejoicing with your superb song.

30 Who is like the peerless One?
 O peerless One.

Supplement 2.3 (2B)

Alternate

(MH 12:737–39 / TG 239–41)

As noted in the preceding introduction, the textual history of this ode, an alternate to the preceding, is quite diverse. The short lines cast in quatrains and their repetitiousness here and in the variant “Alternate” that follows suggest a degree of reworking.

—I yearn to be on the cross.
O peerless One.
He is peerless.
Who is like the peerless One?

5 —I yearn to be lifted upon the cross.
O peerless One.
He is peerless.
Who is like the peerless One?

- I yearn to commit my spirit to the Father.
10 O peerless One.
He is peerless.
Who is like the peerless One?
- I yearn to enter the tomb.
O peerless One.
15 He is peerless.
Who is like the peerless One?
- I yearn to plunder hell.
O peerless One.
He is peerless.
20 Who is like the peerless One?
- I yearn to deliver the souls.
O peerless One.
He is peerless.
Who is like the peerless One?
- 25 —I yearn to rise on the third day.
O peerless One.
He is peerless.
Who is like the peerless One?
- I yearn to ascend to heaven.
30 O peerless One.
He is peerless.
Who is like the peerless One?
- I yearn to sit at the Father's right hand.
O peerless One.
35 He is peerless.
Who is like the peerless One?
- I yearn to send the Spirit.
O peerless One.
He is peerless.
40 Who is like the peerless One?
- I yearn to comfort the ranks of the saints.
O peerless One.
He is peerless.
Who is like the peerless One?
- 45 —I yearn to come again.
O peerless One.

He is peerless.
Who is like the peerless One?

—I yearn to condemn the sinners.
50 O peerless One.
He is peerless.
Who is like the peerless One?

—I also yearn to crown the righteous.
O peerless One.
55 He is peerless.
Who is like the peerless One?

Glory to the great Redeemer.
O peerless One.
He is peerless.
60 Who is like the peerless One?

Who saved us through the cross.
O peerless One.
He is peerless.
Who is like the peerless One?

65 By it he will keep us from temptation.
O peerless One.
He is peerless.
Who is like the peerless One?

To make us of the ranks of those above.
70 O peerless One.
He is peerless.
Who is like the peerless One?

Supplement 2.3 Variant (2B Variant)

Alternate

(MH 12:740 [14:1230–31] / TG 242–43)

On the altered, recast form of this variant, see the two preceding introductory notes.

—I yearn to be on the cross.
O peerless One.
—I yearn to be lifted upon the cross.
O peerless One.
He is peerless.
Who is like the peerless One?

—I yearn to enter the tomb.
O peerless One.
—I yearn to plunder hell.

10 O peerless One.
He is peerless.
Who is like the peerless One?

—I yearn to rise on the third day.
O peerless One.
—I yearn to ascend to heaven.

15 O peerless One.
He is peerless.
Who is like the peerless One?

—I yearn to sit at the Father's right hand.
O peerless One.
—I yearn to come again.

20 O peerless One.
He is peerless.
Who is like the peerless One?

—I yearn to condemn the sinners.
O peerless One.
—I also yearn to crown the righteous.

25 O peerless One.
He is peerless.
Who is like the peerless One?

Supplement 2.4

Ode for the Coming of the Holy Spirit by Grigor

Narekats'i

(MH 12:741–42 [14:909–10] / TG 229–31)

The lines of this ode are in eleven syllables, with the caesura or pause following—as often—the fifth syllable. This medial break creates phrasal rhythm and places somewhat greater emphasis on the second phrase (which could not be conveyed thoroughly in the translation). The effects of Narekats'i's phrasal shaping of these lines—contemplating more than [Acts 2:1–13](#)—are several, and they have considerable interpretive consequences not unlike the theologically loaded lines of [9A, "Ode for the Coming of the Holy Spirit."](#) The ode is divided into two equal parts, the second of which is marked for change in melody.

With melodious voice (and) sweet sound
We sing to you in seraphic tongue,
O union of Three Persons in the Godhead,
One Divinity, of the same nature.
5 The Father's Light has risen anew in the world,
Streaming ceaselessly from the person of the Son,
The Son being at the same time the Cocreator,
Most beloved of the Father and equal in honor with him.
There is renewal today for the children of Adam,
10 The accomplishment of the incarnate Word.
By his sovereign will he revealed to the apostles
The fiery tongues in the upper room today.
They drank of the joyous cup from the living Vine
As they were amazed by the divine fire.
15 This is the squeezed cluster from the wood of the cross,
New wine (given) today in holy Sion.
The Spirit adorned the Petrine company today
With a royal crown, glittering in the light.
A voice echoing with good tidings was proclaimed in Sion today,
20 To the nations and tribes in the city of Jerusalem.
The earth is renewed with fiery tongues,
Dancing joyfully, accompanied by angelic songs.

Change (in melody)

The chosen church celebrates joyfully
The coming of the Holy Spirit today in the upper room.
25 The Tree of Life has bloomed today in holy Sion,
Emitting its fragrance from there into the world.
The glorious rising of the sun today was bright,
Accompanied with fiery tongues and great sound of wind.

The Heavenly King has appointed his successor(s) today
30 By anointing the apostles' rank with the Holy Spirit.
Being filled with knowledge by the divine Spirit,
They grasped mystically the inexpressible mystery.
They declared by word to the rational flocks:
"Come, dine at the royal table."
35 The darkness of ignorance dissipated from the world,
Rays of light enveloped the earth.

Preachers of the Only-begotten and kind teachers:
Make us drink of the wine of immortality.
Be our helpers through the pathways of the world,
40 That we may become followers of the ways of divine men.
Crown us with the drops of your blood;
Be our intercessors with the Only-begotten Son.
From the prominence which you enjoy unendingly,
Grant us forgiveness of sins.

45 With the blessed martyrs in inexpressible glory,
May glory be given over and over again to the Trinity.

Supplement 2.5

Litany for All the Apostles and Hierarchs [Attribute to Whomever You May]

(MH 12:743–45 / TG 244–47)

This litany with its several textual lacunae survives in a generally reliable manuscript from the fourteenth century, containing the litanies of Narekats'i (Antelias 98). Each of the first three stanzas begins with an address to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, respectively. The fourth is addressed to the Holy Trinity, with apparently three more addressed to the Son (the third missing), before the composition turns to the bidding prayers.

Although the composition's general form and style conform to the other litanies in the main collection, it has a few more or less unique characteristics that did not escape the attention of ancient scholars and/or scribes who seem to have raised the authorship question in the extended title: "attribute to whomever you may." There is no good reason, however, to deny the "Narekean" authorship of this litany. Its seemingly exceptional features are nearly identical

St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).

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to those of [16, “Litany for All the Holy Apostles,”](#) including the acrostic arrangement that spells out ԳՐԻԳՈՐԻ ԵՂՋԱ ԵՐԱ (instead of the usual ԳՐԻԳՈՐԻ ԵՐԱ (“A Song by Grigor,” as found in most of the other litanies in ten parts), and the atypical prayer of intercession that does not name any of the usual saints invoked in such entreaties. What is unique to this prayer, however, is that it does not even allude to the Virgin Mary. It invokes “the holy patriarchs” or church hierarchs for intercession on “the feast of the holy confessors” (line [99](#); cf. line [57](#)). The unusual imploration is not so unusual—after all—when compared with that of the litany just mentioned.

The elements common to these mostly “nameless” invocations, with the other features these two compositions alone share, make them a unique pair in the corpus as litanies for the apostles collectively as well as for certain of their rank and for their acolytes, martyred bishops or patriarchs who succeeded them as church hierarchs.

- q **T**reasure so awesome and amazing,
beyond reach and beyond description,
transcendent King
who is praised with ceaseless voice by the fiery hosts in the heights,
5 you were pleased
to accept us, earthly beings, (as) glorifiers and worsh
with the ble>ssed apostles
<who with>stood the enemy,
<being val>iant in the battle
10 by your strength, Creator of all.
Their <martyr>dom we uphold for mediation with you, heavenly Father,
who is blessed forever.
*Please accept our pleadings through their intercession,
O Christ, immortal King of heaven and earth, we plead.*
- 15 Ⓛ Lord of teachers, Only-begotten Son and coequal with the Father,
we praise you, who are of the Father’s essence,
of transcendent nature, consubstantial with the Father and coequal with the Holy
Spirit in glory.
By your command the scattered nations of man<kind
were br>ought together, as it pleased the heavenly Father,
20 we who were
< aliens >... to you
O Jesus, Son of God.
*Please accept our pleadings through their intercession,
O Christ, immortal King of heaven and earth, we plead.*
- 25 Ⓜ We entrust ourselves to your kind caring Holy Spirit,
effluence from the Father, life-giver to humankind,
who strengthens us through your loving will.

Because of the blood shed by your confessors,
who sailed unharmed out of this life's preoccupations
30 and triumphed at the very front lines in the battle against the lawless ones,
keeping their minds and senses calm,
their martyrdom
we uphold for mediation with you, Savior, lover of humankind.
Accept our pleadings with their prayers
35 and grant us all to be in your heavenly Kingdom....
*Please accept our pleadings through their intercession,
O Christ, immortal King of heaven and earth, we plead.*

Q Praised and worshiped before there was anything,
Holy Trinity, indivisible,
40 Grant peace to our souls and bodies
because of the appeals and the intercession of your holy patriarchs
whose memorial is today,
who were made perfect by having pleased your divine will.
Accept our pleadings, from us who are commemorating ...
45 and have mercy....
*Please accept our pleadings through their intercession,
O Christ, immortal King of heaven and earth, we plead.*

Q O Lord, unreachable power,
we, your faithful worshipers,
50 have put our trust in you, Christ, Son of God,
who strengthened those leaders
whom we celebrate today,
who in their simple lives, walking in the path of righteousness,
kept your commandments;
55 and having received strength with help from on high,
defeated the incorporeal enemy (named) Beliar.
With them, grant us, who are celebrating the feast of the Holy Apostles, to be
ranked
with the wise virgins.
*Please accept our pleadings through their intercession,
O Christ, immortal King of heaven and earth, we plead.*

Q Mighty Teacher, Lord God,
shine now the light of divine knowledge in our hearts
(to be able) to rise from the fall,
to be saved from the snare and from the secret arrows of the accuser.
65 Lord, be the guardian of our thoughts
for the pleadings of the holy apostles,
for through them you opened for us the doors of mercy

to enjoy the tangible Paradise,
to forgive our sins

70 and to keep impeccable the patriarchal throne of Saint Gregory;
so also our present patriarch, Lord (*to be named*),
to save him from the weighty temptations of the accusing enemy;
likewise the bishop of our province,
with the priests and the deacons,

75 the *vardapets* of spiritually rich teaching,
summarizing the word of truth.
As for our pious king (*to be named*),
empower him over the enemies of the cross to which you were nailed
and grant him physical strength,

80 to his kin and progeny as well.

 ↳ Grant courage to the rulers,
strength to the military commanders,
help to the horse trainers, fast mobility to the foot soldiers,
victory to the cavalry, justice to judges,
for donors to be among the elect, rest to those who have fallen asleep,
protection to the population:
to men and women, the elderly and the young,
to the youth and to the virgins, to the religious ascetics,
to keep them according to your merciful will, Christ, Son of God.

85 As for the souls of those who have fallen asleep,
rank them with your saints in the heavenly Kingdom.
Please remember and have mercy on the souls of those who are at rest
in the hope of resurrection, we pray.

 ↶ Moreover,
95 grant us that earnest desire for love and good works, we pray.

 ⌚ To commit ourselves and one another
to the almighty Lord God, we pray.

 ⌚ Higher than heaven and more glorious than the sun
is the feast of the holy confessors

100 whom you, Lord, honored on earth today
and granted for believers ... to celebrate joyously.
Come now, believers,
let us bow down before the relics of the holy confessors of God,
who in their tortures overcame the lawless tyrants.

105 And we, your rational flock, Lord Jesus Christ,
have the holy patriarchs (as) intercessors with you,
those whose commemoration is today,
that you may look upon us with compassion, and care for us with (your) love for

humankind.

And now, may the Lord our God have mercy on us
according to his great mercy.

Supplement 3.1

Ode <for the Theophany> by the Holy Narekats'i Vardapet

(*Grand Catalogue of St. James Manuscripts 1:378–79*)

This ode, combining the birth and baptism of Christ, is found in two manuscripts at St. James in Jerusalem, and possibly in manuscripts elsewhere: (1) a *Gandzaran* of the year 1575 from Khlat' (J135) and (2) a *Tagharan* of the year 1476 (J1193), of unknown provenance. In both collections it is preceded by [2A, “Ode for the Nativity,”](#) and marked for the “Fifth Day” of the feast of the Theophany—where it rightly belongs. The late Archbishop Norayr Pogharian provides the full text in volume 1 of the *Catalogue* prepared by him.

The ode is referred to as “*Tagh i Sb. Narekats'i Vardapetēn, Kenerov*” («Տաղի Սբ. Նարեկածի Վարդապետն, Կերով»), “Ode with ‘Ken’s by Narekats'i, the Holy Vardapet”) in one, and “*Tagh Bazmaken*” («Տաղ Բազմակեն», “Ode with Many ‘Ken’s”) in the other—since each line begins with the letter “Կ” (“K”). Consequently, the ode stands out for its unique alliterative arrangement in this collection. However different its form, it may be compared with the two acrostic odes by Narekats'i: [4A, “Ode for the Forty and Other Holy Martyrs,”](#) and [4B, “Alternate.”](#) The stanzas of unequal length, essentially quatrains, consist of predominantly five-syllable lines.

The Virgin was in the cave,
She was rejoicing there,
Looking forward to giving birth
To the Life of humankind.

- | | |
|----|---|
| 5 | The Virgin gave birth,
The Virgin gave birth,
The Virgin gave birth
To the Life of humankind,
To the One coequal with the Father, |
| 10 | The blessed Savior, the Giver of Life. |

Lightning
From the reddish hue of the cloud
Revealed a fixed pillar of light
Set in heaven.

15 The privileged choirs
Announced from heaven:
“The Giver of Life is born,
The Restorer of Many.”

The Virgin gave birth,
20 The Virgin gave birth,
The Virgin gave birth
To the Life of humankind,
To the One coequal with the Father,
The blessed Savior, the Giver of Life.

25 Some from a choir,
A number from its ranks,
Proclaimed to the shepherds
An important message.
This was reiterated
30 In order to make known
With ardent hope
The heavenly care.
This was relayed
To the mother of the Messenger.

35 She hastened, dancing,
That notable old woman.

The Virgin gave birth,
The Virgin gave birth,
The Virgin gave birth
40 To the Life of humankind,
To the One coequal with the Father,
The blessed Savior, the Giver of Life.

The lost Eve,
45 Deprived of life,
Stood still
Next to the Virgin.
Her feet were aching,
Her waist bent,
Limping through life,
50 Lost compared to the Virgin.
Her cheeks blushing,

Her lips blue,
Her hair messy,
She kept shedding tears.

55 The Virgin gave birth,
The Virgin gave birth,
The Virgin gave birth
To the Life of humankind,
To the One coequal with the Father,
60 The blessed Savior, the Giver of Life.
With her body shriveled,
She stretched out her arms,
Gnashing her teeth,
Beating her chest.
65 She called with a loud voice,
Shouting to the forefather,
For Adam to rise up
From destruction.
With her shriveled arms,
70 With tears she implored:
“Life-giving Savior,
Give life to the lost.”

The Virgin gave birth,
The Virgin gave birth,
75 The Virgin gave birth
To the Life of humankind,
To the One coequal with the Father,
The blessed Savior, the Giver of Life.

The shepherds clapped
80 To call the lambs,
The bluish goats
Leaped at the clapping.
The whales were scared,
The mighty trembled,
85 The rivers backed off,
The sea stormed with waves.

The Lord appeared
At the blue river,
Wanting to be baptized
90 At the hand of the Messenger.

The Father appeared from heaven,

- Spoke to the Baptist:
 "This is my Son,
 Fulfilling my will."
- 95 The Holy Spirit also appeared
 With a blue cloud.
 With lightning,
 In the form of a dove.
- 100 Blessing now to the Father,
 To the Only-begotten Son,
 And to the true Spirit;
 Forever. Amen.

Supplement 3.2 (6c Variant)

Ode for the Holy Resurrection

(*Grand Catalogue of St. James Manuscripts* 10:592)

This ode is a variant of [6c, "Ode for the Resurrection,"](#) preserved under the same title in an undated *Miscellany* (18) at St. James in Jerusalem (J3578, p. 198). It is preceded by two of Narekats'i's odes: [15A, "Ode for the Holy Cross"](#); and [10B, "Alternate"](#) ode for the church. Its sixteen lines are variants of the following lines of [6c: 13–48, 73–78, 58–60, 79–81](#). Fuller, longer lines like these in manuscripts are generally older forms of the shorter, rearranged lines. Here, they are in twelve syllables, with breaks following the fifth and seventh syllables throughout, as follows: 5–2–5 (except the last line, which repeats the last five syllables for emphasis). Thus, the variant here translated represents an earlier form of the ode, beginning with the incarnation and moving on to the resurrection, rounding the descent / ascent theme.

For convenience, the annotation below repeats certain of the notes provided with the translation of [6c](#).

- The swiftly moving waters were directed toward the eastern gate;
 Over the heights of steep mountains was a spread of dew.
 At the complete setting of the sun it rejoined its source;
 A loud appeal was made to the ends of the sun.
- 5 Upon decorated paths it shines in threads of gold;
 Conduits (of rays) in varied hues extend to the valley of the lilies.

A shiny adornment, glittering, was approaching from the east;
Do not withdraw, O moon, adornment of the night,
I have a message of love, a genial writing.
10 Like a mountain by the valley, love (is shown) for the nephew.
My hair is sprinkled with light rain, with drops of pearls;
(My) curls braided with golden beads shine like sapphire.
He was watching from the roof of the watchtower over against Paran;
He was rejoicing with apples of love, leaping with joy over there.
15 Like a roe deer he returned to the valley of the lilies;
He turned around and came leaping with joy, revealing his love, revealing his love.

Encomia

1

History of the Holy Cross of Aparank' By the Monk Grigor of the Monastery of Narek

(MH 12:913–29)

1 A historical record of the divine cross, the almighty sign, which by providential guidance—foreseen from on high—was brought from the southern regions of the Greeks and kept within the boundaries of the district of Mokk', in the abode of the holy brotherhood at the place called Aparank'.

1. 2 In localities toward the regions of the Greeks, in the very turbulent days of the upheavals between the blood descendants of Esau and the children of the West, from where Europe ends and the Asian part begins and from the northern stretch of Libya as far as the embayment of the Red Sea, adjacent to Teman, which in certain languages means "midday" just as in Hebrew it means "southward," nowadays called Burhalk' on account of the smelting—as we presume—of the many precious ores, 3 there arose two (powers) like rational mountain chains: mighty and high, pitched in particularly fierce opposition. They were advanced, organized, disciplined, resolute, standing tall on their feet like (mounts) Seir and Hagar from the past, over against and opposite each other. 4 For countless days, indeed a long time, these (two) fought each other with sturdy and armored chariots, legions of armies, skilled lancers (and) combatants, until, according to Daniel, the he-goat from the sea (i.e., Basil II) with sheer might defeated the ram from the land, the king of Bulgaria: the eastern (defeating) the western, as once upon a time Cyrus (son) of Cambyses (defeated) the Babylonian (Belshazzar).

2. 5 And these two true brothers, Basil and Constantine, like-minded associates, dressed in purple, were elevated to the magnificent honor (and) glory of the golden (and) ornate imperial throne. And they occupied it with dignity, peace, and tranquility, extending their own most-trusted progeny, high and marvelous branches stemming from the lordly, royal, and well-rooted tree. 6 Those who opposed their God-given power did fall, having been overthrown and cast beneath the heels of these valiant ones; (others) duly subjected themselves in servitude to those they had once hoped to rule over. 7 The habitations of those who hated

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them were reduced to utterly deserted places; their roads were blocked, for they opposed God's compassionate will and his provident right hand.

3. 8 Declaratory, multifaceted, countless, lasting, and noneradicable memorials were inscribed on the surfaces of inanimate rocks, 9 so that the fame of their praiseworthy deeds may reverberate and resound universally, spreading as by word of mouth, steadily and perpetually. 10 For by virtue of their God-given genius and inventiveness even the natural courses of things were altered in various ways, 11 since wide streams coursing into overflowing rivers were restrained as if with a leather strap, held back like panting (beasts) kept under control; 12 as when trained horses charge according to the will of the charioteer, abandoning their previous traits along the way; or as the blessed David said prophetically: "rivers streamed through thirsty lands."13 And mighty, strongly built ramparts made of dressed stones on massive rocks, alongside commemorative walls, collapsed into a flat road, as if shaken by strong quakes. 14 Thus did their mighty arm prevail over vast territories, like that of the Creator of the world, of both heaven and earth.

4. 15 Even the universal expanse (of water), Poseidon's earthencircling domain, was at their service, like Sidon to Zion—with the prominent images of cherubs, with the altogether sanctified and most fitting cedars for wise and magnificent Solomon, for the wonderful court made of poplar wood. Like pairs of horses harnessed together, (their opponents) rendered their bodies docilely, their every member and muscle, in order to secure their bellies. 16 And (the brothers) opened ferrying paths with wooden ships: decks (that needed) no foundation; carriers (that needed) no breathing (animals), major configurations, fields under the colorful sky, mountain passes, unstable beds, or uneven grounds. They sailed over the swelling blue like two-winged creatures, birds cleaving the clouds, swift and light in flight. So they overtook all and ruled. 17 They measured countless places with the length of the hand and the stride of the foot, though not necessarily everything, and weighed many things in the scales of wise deliberations. 18 Let it be said at once that spreading their extensive wings doubly wide, these two good partners and coworkers easily seized the full expanse of the world with its countless coffers like one flock in a fold, one congregation in a church, a bride in a bridal chamber, a beloved in a room, a husband in a booth, a comrade in an armor, or a spouse at an altar for the sacrament (of marriage)—in love with the one desired at sight, (held) in the heart's court of longing or within the bounds of a compassionate embrace.

5. 19 With such favorable and fortunate outcomes, divine renown, and great courage, they razed to the ground, tore down, subdued, trampled upon, and destroyed the southern towering vice of the tyranny of the children of Hagar.²⁰ And they built upon broad foundations: they coordinated, constructed, restored, embellished, and beautified with bright and conspicuous adornments the Christian church. 21 And they stretched their world-conquering and sovereign arms over the four corners of the world, and with the mere touch of their hands they bravely and victoriously took hold of the horns of great kings and emperors: of the countless sand-like tribes of the Georgian nation, of the Khazar groups, of the courageous Tzans and Armenians, like the predictions made in Habakkuk and Zechariah.

6. 22 The glorious fame of the two truly sovereign rulers, physically portrayed on a white slate, reached the Barbarians and the Scythians.²³ And they (the brothers) hastened from the four directions like wind-driven clouds and besieged and conquered the lands of these

scattered peoples, taking them as in a net. 24 They erected a monument for themselves as a lasting memorial, built of colorful, varied, and polished Phrygian stones, engraved and sculpted. 25 They safeguarded the whole empire with a strong wall, a fence of fire, and mighty tower(s), and they enriched every part of the land with immeasurable benevolence. 26 They proclaimed lasting peace to everyone and doled out precious gifts as presents to my people descended from Ashkenaz.²⁷ And they reinforced, renovated, and beautified most gloriously the famed martyrium of Lady Sophia, nurtured in holiness and (most) blessed, that magnificent and wonderful gathering place of the fortunate ones. And they firmly restored whatever was shaken and ruined because of the wrath of the Most High. Moreover, they made known to all nations the luminous, incorruptible, and conquering word of truth. 28 Now, since this account truly lauds that which is good, (I should add) that they strongly opposed the bad religion and aberration of Theodore and Diodore. I must cut this short, however, since it is not proper to have both praise and denigration at the same time.

7. 29 Though distinct individuals in life, these two, Basil and Constantine, during the years of their joint universal reign were of one will, one heart, and one mind. Though dressed individually in their respective garments, the two maintained a single (royal) image, demonstrating in their very being the former saying of the wise man, that a brother benefiting from a brother is like an impregnable, fortified city. Thus they continued, truly one in (the spirit of) unity, unwavering, inseparable. They heeded that original counsel that (says): "Every kingdom divided against itself will be uprooted."³⁰ Consequently, they showed the way of forbearance to many troubled hearts, especially to us northerners. Out of their mercy, they bestowed upon the House of T'orgom fountains gushing forth gracious and life-giving showers.

8. 31 (Among) these people were eminent men from prominent ancestry, from noble lineage, from a clan of heroes, a house of lords, a praiseworthy stock, a line of valiant men from the direct bloodline of Melchizedek whose mystery of old was imprinted upon Canaan and Sidon. Thus they were distinguished in every way. As for their confession of the Christian faith, it was exceptional and incomparable. 32 One of them was chosen by God, a faithful servant of Jesus, and named after David who was (a man) after the heart of the Most High. He truly resembled the first (David), both in name and in real life. 33 With the help of God's hand, through foreordained calling, in keeping with the predictive Spirit of Christ, he was coached and tutored, educated and raised to maturity by his humble and pious parents, (becoming) like a strong, spiritual watchman on Mount Ephraim—the first and foremost of the blessed ones in the second round of the patriarchal order; a seer like the prophets, he was pleasing to both man and God because of his pure life. 34 He was eventually presented to partake in the apostolic share (through ordination), to be in the rank of those overseeing the divine household for the heavenly inheritance of the God-given glory. He was vested in the respectable honor of the episcopacy for the luminosity of the holy and blessed (monastic) covenant. 35 Having lived many days with the joy of such diverse privileges, he reached near the end of his life, like ripe husks of wheat ready to be harvested and stored; and so he rested in Christ. 36 The pure bones of this blessed and virtuous man were gathered with much and very pleasing, angelic singing and were placed in a narrow tomb, under the solid vault beneath the altar, in the gentle darkness of that resting ground. 37 Amazing and remarkable healing miracles were performed at his earth-shelled, earth-shrouded (tomb), and its fame spread everywhere.

9. 38 Now, as God allowed, after his death a saintly young man, the son of his niece, a good fruit from that well-blossomed genealogical tree, tutored by the saint himself and reared through the ranks corresponding to those of angels and ordained as priest by the same God-reaching hands, was installed as superior of the monks. 39 He emulated thoroughly the extraordinarily beautiful example (of the saint), following in the footsteps of the forefathers. 40 He cordially welcomed scholars versed in the apostles and familiar with the prophets, and who were heirs to the Gospel; and other intellectuals.

10. 41 In those days, the brother of his pious mother, for various reasons, abandoned everything and left the ancestral home in the district of Mokk', in the mountains of Korduk'. He traveled from the northeastern regions across Asia Minor to the border of Thrace, as far as the new station of Dalmatia. He arrived at the Byzantine palace in Constantinople on the sea, surrounded with water, ravines, and mighty walls, that very dwelling in the populous fortress-city. 42 Being wise and eloquent, and filled with divine, spiritual wisdom, he applied to the palace where the Augusti lived and became a soldier.

11. 43 When he left his ancestral land he remembered the sojourn of Jacob, who started his journey leaning on a cane, having received no material support from his parents save the heavenly blessing of being the firstborn, being crowned with that glory that does not wither away, being found superior to his sibling. 44 He likewise abhorred the whole wealth of his ancestral treasures and possessions. He sentimentally took only a handful of soil from the grave of his paternal uncle David, the saintly and Christ-ordained bishop whose desirable name we praised in our preceding description. Satisfied with this, he dwelt in Seir (so to speak) with unequaled and incomparable joy, exceeding that of the great Elijah with his pure cloak on the high summit of Carmel, over the Shephelah. 45 Like the latter, he was revered—just as equally—by those who observed the fervency of his enthusiasm. 46 For when the Byzantine sovereigns witnessed the miracles done with the relics (hidden) in the soil from his uncle's Christ-protected grave, in keeping with their inherently good attitude toward the saints, with awe and deep respect, and as it was customary for them to serve the saints willingly, they rewarded this stranger—away from relatives and loved ones—immediately, with great gifts, in the midst of a gathering of delegates from all over the world.

12. 47 Now, when these things occurred this way, the expatriate became an honored, respected, and familiar person before the emperors, daring to ask questions boldly and to solicit answers as necessary. 48 Even at the first, unexpected encounter, there was mention of the sacred tradition of these holy souvenirs which he had brought with him from his country. 49 When these acts were repeated and the source of these wonderful miracles was divulged again, and when everything had been verified and it was attested that the cause of this acclaimed and praiseworthy matter was his paternal uncle, their compassionate love for him was multiplied. 50 They also wanted to know who from among the chosen ones is the superior at the venerable resting place of the living dead. 51 When they heard him say, "My sister's son was chosen to serve in that capacity there," they promised to give beautiful gifts for the needed restoration of the resting place of those revered bones. 52 But he went on to tell the truth and the obvious fact, that "neither my sister's son nor his flock have need for anything material; 53 if, however, your highnesses would allow, let me inquire and find out what their wish and request would be."

13. 54 This commendable request touched the emperors' hearts very favorably because of its spiritual appeal. The prudent man then secured decrees from the two of them and sent a courier to his ancestral district. 55 As the sweet will of the uncreated One would have it to succeed, and as the Byzantine kings were still intent upon this good thought, the courier returned with a written, witnessed testimony tucked in a square wrapper under his vest. 56 When (the emperors) heard of the wish—a spiritual request, for they did not desire a material thing in accordance with human nature but rather a fraction of (the cross), the redemptive grandeur that does not pass away, of that life-giving (and) revitalizing treasure that is priceless and cannot be bought, of that heavenly gift, that shadowless light that proffers everlasting life, the symbol of Christ, part of that guiding and sacred possession—they praised, honored, and commended the perceptiveness of the requester's mind. 57 And they proclaimed publicly and affirmatively the uprightness of the one who piously wished and asked for this sublime thing.

14. 58 They then quickly formed and made ready a four-winged artifact cast in gold, in the shape of the divine cross, 59 (and) placed in it a piece cut from the life-giving Wood which held the glorious Lord. 60 And to heighten its glory they adorned it with relics from objects related to the torture of Jesus and (his) life-giving death, such as the sponge with which he tasted the vinegar, the towel with which he girded himself, the thorn with which he was crowned, the nail with which he was firmly nailed, and the cloth with which he was wrapped like a homeless being on the day he was born. 61 All these desirable relics were attached to the cross and the edges of the shafts that housed them were properly secured from both ends, fixed to the symbol of Light. Moreover, great expectations laden with hope were mixed into it. 62 Also the censer of aromatic life, so sparkling, filled with frankincense, fashioned by Manglöt, the same master craftsman (of the symbol) of the mystery. These gifts of goodwill were sent to the land of Armenia, to the eastern regions, to the mountains of Korduk', to the district of Mokk'. 63 They were brought over by him (David's nephew) under covers made of precious and golden threads and beautiful linens and were placed with overwhelming joy next to the revered resting place of the miracle-working, living bones of his paternal uncle, who was acknowledged to be the primary cause for this inheritance.

15. 64 The gracious gift-bearer, carrying this redemptive and praiseworthy treasure, saw his chosen nephew seated in his holy chair, wearing a cross, eminent, prominent in his God-given rank, in peaceful serenity, highly elevated, much praised, in superior grace, surpassing that of his own paternal uncle, his father's brother, in that mountainous and rocky district of Mokk', in the very resting place of the revitalizing body of his paternal uncle, the great bishop David. 65 He was the one who revived the remnant of his famous people through double naming: at the radiant (baptismal) font and at the (priestly) calling, a (whole) branch of his clan and the lineage of his family, (represented) in a number of chosen bishops. 66 His name, given on the redemption day, (that is) at his ordination, was Step'anos, which in Greek means wreath. 67 Truly, in keeping with his calling, he became a wreath of glory for these places; 68 for he did not fall short (in anything) but completed (everything); he did not reduce but added to the decorum of these dwelling places. 69 According to ancient history and the rich oral accounts of long ago, by elderly men and those advanced in age, there was a modest inheritance from earlier times and a few buildings in Aparank' left by their valiant ancestors.

16. 70 This same person had an attractive, wonderful (structure) built creatively, like a

beautifully constituted heaven made on earth. 71 He had the mightily erected, cherub-inhabited altars aptly constructed in the form of the blessed Sign, replicating in a most attractive way the seraph-inhabited courts of Zion. 72 And he had it raised so high, like the sky-high citadel at T’alpiovt’, the place where weapons were stored: sharp arrows, gilded bows, thousands of shields for the protection of one’s back, for the countless brave troops of Hebrew warriors. 73 And over the high arches he positioned the round dome perfectly. And he embellished with artful objects the holy nuptial chamber: the inspiring, spacious, and uplifting church (named) after the Mother of God, where he gathered the whole assembly of the firstborn in one group. 74 And he beautified it gorgeously, like a city built by God for the immortal ones Jesus spoke about: the mother of pure children, fit for the bridesmaids to meet the Groom, for those invited to the wedding, for dancers with singing. 75 And he covered the broad entrance with a curtain with hosts of angels on it. 76 And he declared the altar of the testimony, with its ringing bells, fabric of muslin and silk, and whitish and reddish medley—beautifully symbolizing the blood—far less shadowy than that of the Mosaic (tabernacle). 77 And he lined the hall artistically, like the graceful construction of the house by the Davidic scion, with planks of nondecaying fir. 78 He raised up stone walls upon bedrock foundations and adorned them masterfully with many colorful gem-like crystals. 79 And he transformed Ezekiel’s imaginative vision into a tangible reality. 80 And he made the whole building, held together beautifully like a seamless robe.

17. 81 Similarly, he outlined the future glory of the coming, invisible good things, making them visibly familiar in the present. 82 And he fenced the sacred, universally luminous site, as if it were the source of light-giving, blazing fire. 83 And he had the ornamental stones of the outer walls of this pleasing and hallowed site adorned with muslin covers; 84 and the entrances covered with marvelous and diverse carvings all around, like the floral and clean garments and gown of a beautiful bride on her way to the nuptial chamber. 85 And he had the door panels decorated with smooth, reddish wood, ivory, and diverse, multicolored pictures. 86 And he laid the floor of the central court, level, flat as a glass tray, firm as it should be. 87 As for the bema with its raised altar like a heavenly watchtower, he had it separated from the lower part edifyingly, in the likeness of the uppermost, bright, and untouchable ether. 88 And the partitioning, heavenlike, and layered curtains as a covering veil for the venerable preparation and cautious administration of the great mystery, he embellished with graceful patterns: Egyptian, flecked, multiform, golden, and flaming. 89 He beautified with colorful threads and fabrics, in sky-blue and purple from the sea isles of Elim, the magnificent cover of the holy altar: receptacle for the unbounded nature of the Lord’s body—the very apparatus of the liturgically revitalizing covenant made by the Lord, (an altar) resembling the holy of holies for the shadowy atonement (here made) luminous, the obscure here (made) clearer, the truth in lieu of the type, and the new to compensate for the shortcomings of the old. 90 As for the buckles of the straps, (they were in) precious gems from Ethiopia and Babylon: sparkling emeralds in the beauty of the spring season, starlit pearls, dark-blue aquamarines, joined together in several even rows. These he attached to the holy altar like a queen’s crown encrusted over the forehead of a bright icon of (her) visage. 91 As for the lofty, solid dome, like the topmost part of the body in palm (measurement), the head of a great empress, he constructed it of dressed, hard stone. 92 As for the beautiful, ornate, and faded images of old, then invisible to the eye,

he made them sharply visible, (like living) beings possessing breath and sense perception. 93 And everything made of various substances he conformed to one standard. 94 And he set it before the eyes of Jesus like the monumental rock of Zerubbabel which had seven eyes; 95 he established it on the rock of faith, as a footstool for God. 96 And like a wide harbor for humanity, he made it shine (like) the sun revolving around the earth, with lit lanterns, burning torches, and glittering lamps. He all but transformed the earthen body into a fiery one.

18. 97 As for the floors of the outer courts and the pleasant gardens, he furnished them brightly, each according to its proper significance. 98 And he planted, transplanted, and firmly rooted countless forest-trees, thick in foliage, having graceful branches, tall, sturdy, with medicinal properties, very fruitful, spreading with beautiful leaves; also shrubs with long branches and diverse delicious fruits that are delectable to the palate. 99 Moreover, he multiplied those that are more desirable, planting them in favorable spots, in rich and fertile soil, like “the trees of the Lord and the Cedars of Lebanon,” of the mound of Tyre. He made (the land) abundantly lush: bountiful, blooming, fruitful, (full) of well-rooted (trees), high-yielding, full of grafted, productive, and all-bearing (trees). The fields were irrigated and glistened with lilies, with rain-fed streams and the surrounding dew; 100 a land which God tends by his merciful care, according to Moses the Great. God’s overseeing eye is watching it constantly, from the beginning of each year to its end: to enrich, to nourish, and to take care of it.

101 Now, all this, the very cause of these words of my account, is the aforementioned bishop, the wreath of Sion and servant of Jesus. The one who may be called by these two names (even) in the language (of the descendants) of Esau and Ishmael, he was able to accomplish all this. 102 For like Solomon, the son of David, who after his magnificent father’s death built the temple that bears the name of God, a sanctuary for the redemption of the House of Judah and Israel, he brought over the grace of that old (temple) into the new.

19. 103 After he put in order all these things and lit up anew the second Eden with the glory of the first, they brought with caution and awe this grace received from the Lord: the Wood that makes the life of righteousness possible, the symbol of patience in Jesus’ voluntary death, the image of meekness in hermits, the goodwill of God the Father, the instrument by which the uplifting of Emmanuel’s glory was realized, the luminous sign of Christ. And lifting it up they placed it gently on the prepared magnificent altar of Saint Karapet (the Forerunner), the construction of which the saintly bishop—who was chosen to the holy office of overseeing—began and completed during his monastic days. 104 Likewise, prior to the arrival of the holy cross, he restored the martyrium of the holy and chosen apostle Stephen, the memorial to his name in the cemetery of the deceased forebears, in order to evoke the truthful promise of resurrection. 105 But (as for) the tabernacle of the Forerunner, inhabited by the Lord and graced by the Spirit, he had it consecrated prior to (assuming) the overseeing chair, in unwavering hope (and) anticipation that the cross would arrive. 106 Thus, when the redeeming Wood arrived as the fulfillment of the promised grace, it was designated for that place and set in the cathedral of the great prophet John. 107 As for (the construction of) the beautiful building for the wondrous abode of the Bearer of God, begun at the beginning of his lordly office, it was completed during his gracious episcopate. 108 Thus, very wisely, he arranged to have the cross transferred to this cathedral on the Great Friday of Pascha, 109 so that the adorable names of these two mighty ones, the cross and the Bearer of God, could be worshiped

together, both being commemorated simultaneously, one renowned (as) the parent and the other (as) the announcer of God incarnate, Jesus Christ, who shares in the glory of the Father.

20. 110 To the right, toward the north, the source of wind according to the author of Proverbs, is the holy martyrium of the apostles—honored by the Lord—and the Holy Illuminator; 111 and toward the south, over against Paran, (that of) the chosen Hebrew Abdalmeseh, the young martyr. 112 Above the main entrance to the blessed apostles, in the wall with the pilaster of the altar of the Holy Bearer of God, he placed the bones of Saint (John), who baptized with water the Creator, who cleansed him with the Spirit. (There too were the bones of) the Protomartyr, the Second Abel and the blessed progeny of the suffering of the New Adam who invited the dead to enter through the gate into the land of the living; James the son of Joseph, who was called the Just and Brother of Jesus for being nursed like him; (those of) the great apostle Andrew; the valiant and chosen Atomian confessors; those of the forty holy soldiers from the Pontic land of the Cimmerians; (and) those of the martyrs Kosmas and Damianos. 113 And on the left side, within the pillar of the altar, are those of the holy youth Abdalmeseh; from Africa, (the bones) of the Carthaginian holy and blessed bishop and martyr Cyprian; of the pure and wise virgin martyr Justina; of those martyrs from our nation, the relics of the glorified and God-blessed Leondian priests. 114 Thus Our Lady, the Bearer of God, as the blessed mother of all the immortal, has gathered beneath her wings the entire company of the saints.

21. 115 The radiance of the holy Sign which (once) shone from the west to the east over the inhabited mountains of Sion, has now risen anew over the northern regions—in the days when the House of Vaspurakan was ruled by three true brothers, noble and valiant, from royal blood, from marvelous seed, from a house of lords, from a stock of giants, from a succession of crowned heads, from the inherently brave, from a gallant race, from the ruling class, from the foremost in beauty, from the lineage of the strong, from the descendants of conquerors originating from prominent and blessed ancestors: from the sister of Ashuri, daughter of Shem the son of Noah, 116 from the line of the patriarch Nimrod, the son of Cush, the son of Ham. 117 This (Nimrod) succeeded (the latter two) as head and chief commander during the construction of the long doomed and ruined tower, ruling over Shinar, Kalneh, and Babylon, 118 from where Ashur, the maternal uncle of Nimrod, built Ashur by Nimrod's order, (the place) from where the brave and well-girded Assyrians (originated). The seventh from (Ashur), Ninos, changed its name to Nineveh, naming it after himself.

22. 119 Now, from so many distant years and the antiquity of so many centuries of ancient days, from the disgusting rebelliousness of idolatrous kings, appeared these three elect and devout offspring. 120 The youngest of them was named Senek'erim, after an ancestor; the middle one, Gorgēn; and the first, Ashot. 121 But after their adoption by God, through the redemptive birth from the renewing font, the firstborn (was renamed) Sahak, the second Khach'ik, and the last Yovhannēs. 122 They reigned and were glorified at the same time, good and God-fearing people, enriched with thoughtfulness and wisdom, and always pleasing in outward appearance. 123 They were unequalled in loving the saints, in honoring the elect, in respecting the meek, in welcoming the upright, in adorning churches by adding to the splendor of the sacred sites and to the symbols of Christianity, and in adoring the martyrs.

23. 124 With great faith, they brought with them a band of freemen, a company of

patricians from among the satrapies, and proceeded before the divine cross of which this is the history. 125 Holding it up, with great gifts, they brought it to its specified and dedicated place, which is in the jurisdiction of Mokk', in the ravines of the Kordu mountains; and welcoming it with an immeasurable embrace, they placed it in the cathedral of the holy covenant. 126 The date, according to the solar calendar used nowadays by my people descended from Japheth, was 432 (AD 983). 127 A great assembly of celebrants was gathered there, and a proclamation was made to hold blessing services for many days. 128 Gathering around it with spiritual devotion, they offered incense in the burning torches and presented aromatic frankincense and cinnamon as gifts. 129 And they sang pronouncements of blessing with joyous mouths, with sanctified lips, and with cleansed tongues; they praised with lyres, with enthusiastic sighs, with voices of rejoicing, with breathing harps, and with living trumpets; they feasted spiritually with clashing cymbals, clapping hands, and beating feet as they danced and recited the psalm: "You gave a sign to those who fear you, that they may survive in the face of the bow."

24. 130 And the truth far surpassed the token, with miracles and wonders; 131 so much so that the blessed bishop was bursting with joy, together with his God-loving parents and true brothers, with all his holiness-loving relatives and the countless clerics, along with the multitude of ordinary people. (They rejoiced) like newborn lambs in the flocks, more jubilant than David the Great when settling the shadowy ark. 132 The latter thundered the wrath from above, the death-ushering rebuke with clouds and hail; but as for this Sign which received God, it represents the mercy, the grace, and the truth in the likeness of Christ and brings and imparts the Good News of divine joy to countless nations. 133 It holds within it the full mystery of the redemptive suffering inflicted with torture, as the head is to the members of the body, the importance of sight among the five senses; making it clear that that which took place on the cross was neither a needless act nor a confused sentiment; 134 rather, the revelation of what was foreseen and foretold by the prophets, who testified to the life-giving suffering and the inherent, hereditary glory of Jesus in accordance with that which was shown to them beforehand by the Spirit of Christ.

25. 135 This Sign with its great miracles was much more efficacious than its many counterparts, 136 since those that were distributed and ended up in the four corners of the world were simply pieces of the life-giving Wood; 137 but this God-made and life-bestowing Sign of the new order of good things (stood) as though it were the very cross of the crucifixion itself, having the glory of the One who was lifted up. It attracted full concentration of thought; always bewildering, for it shone constantly like rays from the sun. 138 As for the cloth with which he was tightly wrapped (at birth), it was to recall Adam's lost glory; the towel with which he girded himself was symbolic of the fig leaf with which the forefather covered himself [(there is) a symbol pointing to a higher juncture in the example of the Father providing relief to the children's heels]; the tormenting thorns, in lieu of the flowery places in Paradise; the bloody red color, for (the consequences of) the transgressor's feeble-mindedness and an emblem of the Savior's clash in battle; the excruciating nails, to reprove the unrestrained arms that reached for the fruit of the forbidden tree; the sponge of bitterness, in lieu of the delightful and delicious meal; and the robe worn by the Savior's mother, to cover Eve's indebtedness to sin. 139 With these fragments attached to it, this God-bearing four-winged (cross) as a whole is like the treasure of life, the freely given gift of salvation. 140 So that the all-seeing Being with sevenfold

mercy may be glorified plainly in song by earthly creatures.

26. 141 And now, let us seal our historical writing here and switch to a different form of expression, weaving a variety of felicitous recitations in the manner of panegyrical art, as is proper and opportune, in order that the cycle of segments we have commenced as an orderly compilation of like testimonies be seamlessly joined (such as) to be perceived as a unit.

142 We shall thus begin to bring together, following this historical account, an assortment of some short compositions in writing. First, on the very same, divinely ordained, life-giving cross; and after that, by the will of the Existent whose essence is inexpressible, to offer with joyous lips our gratitude as a fragrant offering, a fruit that is pleasing, to Our Holy Lady and Bearer of God.

143 But, for now, let us recall the meaningful words of those who before us were trained by the Spirit and led by Wisdom from on high, who celebrated beforehand this magnificent and deep mystery in groups (and) with wonderful words. 144 So, let us also, in tune with the resonance of the wisdom granted to us by the One who gives powerful words from on high, chant loudly this melodious praise to the sign of the cross, written anew with fairly new expressions of praise in (this) newly arranged encomium.

2.1

<Encomium on the Holy Cross> Recension A

(MH 12:930–41)

May this writing, an encomiastic discourse by me, a deficient rhetorician, be composed by the sign of your luminous cross.

1 [1. 2] We begin here, following the message of Isaiah the son of Amos that flows out from the downpour of uplifting streams, with the hearty embrace of the advantageous saying closely related in its choice perspective, having the same overview: “Heaven is my throne and earth my footstool.” [3] Indeed, his revelatory saying in double imagery encompasses wondrous power in the religious realm. [4] How could the One who cannot be contained have expressed it in more measured language to fleshly beings, to those whose sole essence is constituted of various earthly elements? 2 While plain, luminous, and clear (in its) simplicity, why is it presented in such imagery?

3 [5] It must be acknowledged—for it ought be believed at all times—that all the fullness of his (Divine) essence was made known in the lower realm, inextricably connected with it (i.e., the cross). 4 Thus it was the mystery of the cross that the prophet predicted. [6] How (powerful) is the mind’s capacity to perceive, within its fleshly bounds, what the very summit of the heights of heaven could not bear nor could the face of the earth withstand—5 [7] even after it has ceased from soaring with the light wings of the wind, with unsurpassed speed, (and has

plunged) into the shadow of darkness, into a strange bosom with which it was unfamiliar! 6 [8] Because of that, (the prophet), with spirit-filled tongue, confessed heaven as God's throne and (earth) a wondrous resting place, the footstool of his immortal and steadfast feet. 7 [9] Since the greatest of seers, the flower of those blessedly derived, (one) from among created beings, expressed in such melodious words the veracity of such an abstraction, of the One who encompasses existence, how much more (then) does one who observes the brightness of the cross need the power of interpretive words of truth to be able to proclaim the resting (there) of the One who cannot be contained!

8 [2. 10] In the hot and parched (land), on the renowned high hill of the Amorite citadel, predictive of the mystical Sion, Israel celebrated the future hopes quite openly (and) with most proper reverence, with the accompaniment of the sound of lyres devoid of articulate speech. And with heartfelt devotion worshiped continually in the deficient sanctuary—according to Paul's saying—built by Solomon to house the treasured Ark covered with silver and gold, fashioned by Bezalel. (From this place) it was preached that righteousness through the covenant of circumcision dwells on Carmel. 9 And according to another strange line (it was remarked that) the trees and shrubs of all the forests rejoice together, (as though) uplifted spiritually upon hearing the announcement of the Creator's manifestation.

10 [11] Now, since these, the lesser creatures of the great creation, appropriately and with exuberant quietness sing through mouths incapable of utterance and in various ways (to) the life-ushering advent of the Planter and Sustainer, and (since they drum up) with invisible hands—of extraordinary kind—and with feet that cannot climb to a higher nature, as the shadowy Scripture (declares) regarding the honorable glory of the uncreated One, (how much more then) should the manifest sign of the cross, praiseworthy in every (conceivable) word, revealer of the hidden glory, be worshiped with confession (of faith), worthily! Also by double kneeling, with the facial expressions veiled, and by bowing down to touch the ground with the divinely etched beauty of humility!

11 [12] Would not the rational man, endowed with so much grace and being always crowned with blessedness, having obtained the likeness of the image of God, want to offer eagerly such vocal gifts? 12 [13] So it is with this melodious composition in (all of) its parts. It is unlike those executed with syllable count for the dubious training of children in the tender years; nor does it follow patterns held before one's eyes, like those engraved in hard stone: of the servitor Hagar—the Sinaitic (writings) bound to slavery, the Mosaic code, the height of killing. Rather, it surpasses (them), anticipating the unseen kind; for (it pertains to) the concealed Word spoken about, the joy that lies ahead, our very life, the incarnation of the coplanted Divinity, the Existenter becoming human. 13 [14] For the initial accusation against the house of Israel for its frenzied wickedness, the full measure of which brought about the reality of the end of the Law, is spelled out in the unequivocal voice of the narrator regarding the frame of (Christ's) body: "Come, let us put the wood of death in the bread of life."

14 [3. 15] The very same (Jesus), the chief sanctifier of all beings, who ascended without change into the heavenly Holy of Holies, was eternally glorified within the heavenly covering-veil described of old. [16] The captains of the incorrupt beings, upon seeing his quick ascent from this lower realm of earth tagged Edom, the habitat of earthly beings, noticed his raggedy clothes with dark stains of blood. Unspeakably surprised within their circle and ever

astounded at what they saw, they cried loudly (and) with astonishment to one another. It was because they saw the image of the cross on the shoulder of the Uncreated. [17] It was after this very observation that he was made manifest (to them) as the one who had the remedy for death, crowned with victory in the contest. 15 [18] He responded in line with the inspired word of old ... by the almighty sign of the cross, resembling a four-pointed lance, a mighty weapon, vanquishing unto death the one who caused death, our deceiver. [19] It was the certainty and the outcome of this laudable (act) that the praiseworthy seer presented clearly from afar, in a well-thought and considerable way, expounding the amazing mystery of the cross, its spiritual facet(s), (as) befits the glory of the Progenitor of the Kingdom.

16 [4. 20] Demonstrating glorious honor with royal dignity, he himself, with the consent of the consubstantial One, carried it on his divine back, on his life-sustaining shoulder, as the substance for renewal, for unequivocal authority, for the opportunity of blessedness of life (in) the Garden of Eden. He, who was beyond the suffering caused by sin, took it upon himself willingly. [21] The all-seeing Essence, who miraculously brought about all existence, (came) unashamedly to this appointed place before the eyes of (angelic) beings, with unhesitant strides, (bringing it) as the wood of fragrant incense, to fulfill the shadowy Scripture with the blood of the covenant of redemption. [22] For this reason he ascended high, comfortable in his lordly footsteps, his superior heels moving up with him, bearing the cross to the height of Golgotha. 17 [23] [24] For this reason, when that (awesome) reality took place, all creatures throughout the whole creation trembled, and the pillars which support the weight of the earth shook with recurrent quakes. 18 [25] Moreover, in a twinkling of an eye, the abyssal storehouse of amassed darkness shook. The firm masses of the elemental substances would have crumbled in pieces had they not been gloriously transformed into an altogether new existence by the sustaining word of the Word. 19 [26] On the same substance of the leafy plants in the spacious courts of the place (called) Eden, (which was) fenced with fire from its very foundations, [27] the sinless One was tortured, on ordinary wood, his head adorned royally with braids (of thorns), at the place of executions (called) Golgotha ... image of the first-created man. [28] Though nailed to this instrument of perdition, with it he faced the champion of the tyranny of death. Thus, through eternal renewal, creatures were restored to (receive) the gracious gifts from the Creator of the first man.

20 [5. 29] Oh for this great, indescribable and desirable blessedness: (not) from a fruitful (and) leafy plant taken from the inhabited hill of Bashan; or from among the lofty trees of the forests of Senir; or from the gorgeous forests of cypress trees with attractive branches suited for a swiftly rising composition; 21 but from the Wood of Life—under the cover of death—on which the dead body of our Life-giver was, (where he was) condemned as a sinner according to the wise discourses of Paul, owing to the loving gifts of the Father. [30] For he willingly gave his firstborn Son, the Only-begotten concealed in his bosom, to be on the deadly wood of the cross because of the sinners' indebtedness to punishment. [31] This was carried out upon the Son, in the presence of the Father, for (he says): "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd"; 22 and again, "I will strike the shepherd of the flock and the sheep will be scattered throughout the pasture."

23 [6. 32] Thus, the predictive revelations of the seers provide other names for this same redeeming Shepherd. From afar, in beautiful description they declare him sole sovereign Ruler who rules with authority over existence, who cares for the flocks he brought forth, who gathers

the newborn lambs with his arms. 24 (The Psalmist) says of Israel: "The Lord will shepherd me"; and "You, who shepherds Jacob with the house of Ephraim"; and "He led them like a shepherd through the desert of Sinai"; [33] and "He will shepherd us without deviation and beyond bounds, forever"; 25 [34] and "Shepherd them with care and carry them mightily." 26 To this corresponds the saying of the allegorist: "Where do you shepherd? Where do you rest (your flock) at noon?" 27 [35] And this correspondence from another songwriter: "I will shepherd them like lambs in calm places." 28 And again, "I, God, will shepherd them." And according to Isaiah's proclamation: "The shepherd of the flock, who brought them out of the land (of Egypt)." 29 And "I am the good shepherd," according to the Son of Thunder, adding, "I lay down my life for the salvation of the flock." 30 [36] The same magnificent Shepherd is confessed (as) Lamb by the great John, son of Zechariah; furthermore, "Like an innocent lamb being led to the slaughter," and "Like an unblemished sheep he was offered on the slaughter stone," according to Isaiah and Jeremiah. 31 [37] Thus, the One who is True, ever truly identified as the only mighty Shepherd of the one flock according to the historical account of the Gospel, [38] through the redeeming sign of the cross took upon himself—rightly so—the slanders of those who hated the Father; [39] and he yielded his human spirit to his will; and with inestimable choice, hefty commitment, he drew near to the pleasing glory of the consubstantial One, with sweet fragrance of incense.

32 [7. 40] But what is (the significance of) the place of sacrifice for the offering of the unblemished Bull? [41] The immortal Sacrifice cannot be contained in structures of various materials on high places nor weighed upon altars built with (human) hands; rather, upon the vessel of this cross of redemptive substance, [42] which is in the middle of the bosom of the whole universe—the mother of the earthborn, (a sanctuary) of a higher level, of heavenly vaults, not made with (human) hands (like) an arched (and) domed building, 33 (but) facing the luminous lamp stands, so that heaven and earth will be eternally cleansed by the pure [43] Light that knows no shadow, earth being inundated with heavenly, mutual rejoicing. 34 It dissipates completely the smoke-filled path of the dragon: the trouble-causing, obscuring, hazy, gloomy darkness. 35 [44] Moreover, this life-giving cross is the acknowledged sign of victory in the decisive battle waged in the divide between destruction and restoration. [45] The Adam above, leaving behind his glory with the Existential for the perfection of the one below, was hence transformed. Thus it was the Spirit—distinct from the force of breath that is subject to pain within the structural substance of the earthborn Man inexperienced in sin—that cried out like a sinner from the luminous tower of the cross. That is why he tore apart in an irreparable way the certificate (of debt) issued against the sin of the first (Adam). [46] And stretching his arms (on the cross), he grabbed the whole race of his kind that had fallen from election (and pulled them back) into the divine realm of creation, those who were indebted to the condemnation of the Law of the former Testament: [that which contains Deuteronomy, written by Moses, (and) begins with Adam in his Edenic home (and) the subject of creation]. Transforming those unaccustomed to that which binds as in the former case—bridling them calmly, he drew them closer to the cross. [47] For the sake of the one found disobedient to the will of the living One by nature and the Giver of Life, he was tied down to that bitter place of atonement and crucified firmly with large, thick nails, bound by the curse sanctioned by the word of the Law; [for there could have been no middle ground to mete out justice for those of such severed

kind]. [48] Thus, the rebelliousness (of one) and the patient obedience (of the other) were brought together in the mystery of the cross. 36 This is the projected mystery observed clearly in the scene (of the Crucifixion).

37 [8. 49] And now, how should we understand the core meaning of the ever-miraculous and God-erected cross? Is it a lordly constitution or a principle of servitude? A tower of divine outlook or a thing of human wisdom? A creative outline or a lowly principle? [50] It has nothing of human contrivance; rather, we string it as (something) celestial. 38 [51] After all, our rational being, fashioned as a single entity yet composed of various constituents, a blend of certain elements (and) constituted of diverse, unrelated parts brought together, corresponds in a way to the four wings of the form of the cross. Through fortitude and spiritual discernment, (the cross) affects the gamut of sense perception, it controls and safeguards the senses; it becomes a seal and a link for man's perpetuity. It restrains the rebellious traits within us as if by a strong, fourfold rope; and lifting up the full weight of unrefined man to the four weightless wings of cleansing, it whisks (him) swiftly to the spiritual realm (and) presents (him) to God.

39 [52] These are the powers of the divinely managed cross, the grace of which is beyond description. It brings sensibility to the strayed (mind); wholesome understanding to the irrational lustfulness of animals capable of speech; awareness, clear as the taste of salt, to devious, perverse perception; evenness to irregularities that ought to be straightened out, making them conform to its foursquare form, its desirable image.

40 [53] As for us, to the measure of our ability, we shall sing in laudation of the life-giving sign of the divine cross, with the clarity of a gifted voice, and shall utter pleasant sound with well-articulated words.

U. [9. 54] You are a fitting figure of the boundless wisdom of God, of the all-seeing vision of his eyes, O sign of Christ. In your predictive pattern were the foundations of the earth laid down firmly, in a square shape, at the beginning of the formation of the created beings by the Existent.

P. 41 [10. 55] You are glorified, O sign of God, Wood of salvation. You present to the One seated on you as pure glorifiers, with the myriads of the fiery angels, the countless children of humankind: those of the rational plant by nature who have been edified by you and made one with the ranks of that enthusiastic assembly, to sing with them in unison.

Q. 42 [11. 56] You are praised, O redemptive sign of the glory of Jesus. You hold the gift of life in the form of death. The wise man, the author of the Songs, observed ahead of time your amazing mystery, which he expressed with the flow of the Spirit, with gratitude: "Blessed is the wood by which righteousness comes."

Q. 43 [12. 57] You are celebrated, O holy (and) glorious sign of the magnificent cross, in keeping with the visage of the four (creatures) yoked together, in harmonious accord with the unfailing speed of the cherubic chariot—those many-eyed (and) much-seeing seraphs—gliding swiftly, soaring in flight, unerring in its course; as if your glorious appearance was attested early on, [58] through the wheel within the wheel, which depicts invariably the form of your cross. [59] The (all-)affecting Spirit of the living One has sustained your clear vision in the amber comprised of seen substances of various kinds. For from you sounded the bellowing voice of God el-Shaddai. [60] As the place of God's feet, on you they crown with beautiful singing the incorruptible Essence. Blessed is the glory of the Lord in his abode.

t. 44 [13. 61] You are beatified, O mighty sign of the cross, bright as the sun, which the seer with foreknowledge predicted in the inspired Word (as) God's exalted throne high above. [62] The One seated on you elevated you to be with the Trinity, guarded by the wings of the throngs of seraphs, (as expressed) at the conclusion of the "Thrice Holy" hymn: Lord of powers, of immortal ranks. The essence of this saying was revealed to John, who in vision testified about the glory of Jesus.

2. 45 [14. 63] You are endowed with power and worshiped with indescribable honor, O elegant sign. In the predicted meaning of your mystery you were revealed by the chosen prophet, who made known beforehand your hidden mystery through the image of the horse in reddish color for the contesting warrior in the battle to retaliate on behalf of the house of Israel held captive in Babylon—for the return of Jacob at the end of time.

t. 46 [15. 64] You are consubstantial with the glory of the Father's greatness, O adorable sign. Before the true revelation of your grace, a depiction of it was seen in a vision by Ezekiel who in marvelous amazement drew back from its wonder and went wandering in fear, (only) to return to you, being strengthened by the uncreated hands.

C. 47 [16. 65] You are an honored mystery, O cross, clearly and unequivocally joined to the body of Jesus. [66] You are called the likeness of (his) image because you carried the renowned One; for this reason, God who suffered is worshiped and bowed down to in your figure.

f. 48 [17. 67] You are an unfading crown for the adornment of Sion, O praiseworthy sign, [68] which the prophet indicated through the many flashing stones, [69] (as) the Most High wished for (his) habitation: assembled in the true pattern that was to be glorified in you, to be borne upon rational lips, reiteratively, recalling the fourfold praise for your incorruptibility—your imperishable wood—[70] in the repeated singing of praise by the cedar with the cypress and the fir with the white poplar, to the glory of the great God.

d. 49 [18. 71] You gather the multitude of rational flocks, O creative sign. The multiple flocks of lambs born into Laban's house were (marked) by your wondrous work of long ago. [72] For the mark depicting your symbol in beautiful color is of your strain; so you dye, in the color of blood as it were, the many races of various tongues. [73] And those of us who stray in the lurking color of sin, you immerse in the one font of cleansing grace (and) present to Jesus, rather than to Israel.

b. 50 [19. 74] You are truly renewed with light, O sign of Christ, lit by the inapproachable glory of God. Indeed, the One who fashioned the image, the Creator of the likeness, our very visage, the Lord Christ, is defined by you in the form (and) likeness of our kind. [75] Since he himself rested on you, you became associated with him.

L. 51 [20. 76] You are enshrined in light, O almighty sign of the cross of redemption. [77] In accordance with the singer of the wisely written words, we have taken your invincible sign, etched on our bodies, (against) the sharply pointed lances and winged arrows of those armed with bows.

tu. 52 [21. 78] You are confessed (as) counsel chamber of God's greatness, O glorious sign of the One who overcame death. [79] For the One riding with you, "who had dyed his garments in the blood of grapes," according to Jacob the great, (hastens) into the darkness hard to penetrate, the storeroom of hell, unknowable. [80] These belong to God, as Daniel illustrates the truth about shadowy things: "The One who stands in darkness and his light is with him."

Ὄ. 53 [22. 81] You gave us new birth through Christ's death, O creating sign. To the Sons of Thunder who were seeking a share in (his) redemption unto life, Jesus—the originator of good things—confessed your life-giving mystery (as) baptism in (his) blood and partaking of the cup of (his) death.

Ὕ. 54 [23. 82] You are the exclusive post of the miracles of the immortal Jesus, O invincible sign. 83 For the incarnate Word, fully equipped with you, ruled over countless heathen nations, inviting us all to the grace of adoption by the One who begot him.

Ὕ. 55 [24. 84] You were made by uncreated God, O cross, to partner with the first Witness to be martyred. [85] For God who was crucified became known on you, the Second Adam, the Creator of the first. 56 [86] For the One who expelled (him) from the garden of life, (with) the cotransgressor born of the rib, has by his own command brought the partner(s) in death back through you.

Ὕ. 57 [25. 87] You are an eminent shrine dedicated to the immortal Lamb, O almighty cross. 58 [88] For on the day of the Baptism the beginning of the apostles and the fulfillment of the prophets, the messenger of cleansing and the forerunner of the Creator, saw the One seated on you (as) the perfect Lamb of God the Father [89] (and) proclaimed him (as) the One who takes away the whole transgression of the world.

Ὕ. 59 [26. 90] You are a lamp that cannot be put out, its shadowless flame scorchingly bright, O most praiseworthy sign. [91] For on you the incarnate Lord, the One boundless in (his) Divine essence, was offered outside the camp, burnt alive in the all-consuming fire. [92] By dying like the shadowy burnt offerings, the immortal One exuded indescribably, through the fat (of the holocaust), obedience to the immutable greatness associated with the will of the Father on high.

Ὕ. 60 [27. 93] You are the cloister and the reception room of the King of Heaven, O God-receiving sign. [94] The wondrous acts of God are greater in you than in Solomon's Temple, for there the stars move luminously and a curtain hangs before us, for God's glory. 61 [95] But by virtue of your elevation, we always draw near to touch the unintelligible One and to partake of the communion of the Bread of Life.

Ὕ. 62 [28. 96] You are the sign pointing to Christ, the locus for cleansing and healing from the filth of sin, O life-giving cross. [97] God who descended to earth to restore it with fatherly care, eradicated with scorching and unquenchable fire the stench of the malodorous mire of sin. [98] This is what Malachi, whose name means "angel," made known the One lifted upon you, predicting early on: "For those who revere me, I will make the sun of righteousness rise with healing in its wings."

Ὕ. 63 [29. 99] You are the inviter to participate in the eternal glory, O blessed sign, [100] in the promissory covenant, the grace that was promised with absolute certainty. [101] We received you as the guarantee of the unequaled and unique goodness.

Ὕ. 64 [30. 102] You opened up for the first time the upward, unknown, unfamiliar and extremely narrow way, O wood of renewal. [103] You always lead in a lordly fashion those who love you. In your sovereign march you cross the seraphic sword at the abyssal fence.

Ὕ. 65 [31. 104] You are the usual bearer of the luminous gift(s) promised) in writing by the Lord, the Existent, O sustaining sign. You were set apart from the four distinct, sense-perceptible elements; for you were elevated, set beyond the heart's perception.

¶. 66 [32. 105] You are the holder of victory with utmost power, O almighty sign, witness to the lordly acts of the One who dwelt in you physically, who is described symbolically in the Apocalypse—(giving) the things sort of the past as those of the future—(as) the Lamb riding a white horse and repelling the dragon's deriding charge. He was proclaimed by those near to the throne on high: "Almighty Lord, who is and was and who will be revealed with things hoped for in the future." [106] For in your very visage the scene of salvation unto life was unfolded in full realization of the (promised) good things, to the glory of the uncreated One.

Q. 67 [33. 107] You are the protecting seal of the four ends of the bounds of the universe, O omnipotent sign. You confront the four going horns, according to Zechariah, satisfying the overwhelming fury of God's wrath against the assemblies of evil. Advancing with the speed of horsemen in four (directions), in accordance with (your) foreseen mystery, you thaw the hearts of tribes and nations, drawing them to (their) sense(s) by the pull of a single rein. [108] The tracks of the chariots were seen heading in the direction of your resting place.

¶. 68 [34. 109] You are a bright, dazzling torch, lit from above, O invincible sign of Jesus the Savior. You were predicted early on—to be fulfilled according to the Book—by the piled smooth rocks taken from the bank of the Jordan River, removed by (Joshua) the son of Nun (from the tribe of) Manasseh, scion of the lineage of Joseph, [110] as prefiguration of the truth about New Israel in the testament of Jacob of old who, as a prophet in hopeful anticipation of the redemptive grace toward the heathen clans on whom the name of Jesus is called, defined you.

Q. 69 [35. 111] You are the newly fashioned pond for the cleansing element, the living water, O worshiped sign. Like active yeast in fresh dough, (you have been) dipped in the source of all springs within the breasts of mother earth, deep down as sin, so that through the mix of the Life-giver's blood—in varying colors of red—you will bring about conversion and prepare (people) to be covered with garments of light.

¶. 70 [36. 112] You are a life-signaling pathway for the impeccability of the righteous, O heavenly sign. [113] Like a familiar (tutor) appointed by the Savior, you partner in the schooling of those who have been called, elected unto the ranks of those invited: to follow the Gospel of salvation—that speaks for God—bearing (their) cross personally.

U. 71 [37. 114] You are the sword of the highest-ranking Divine Visitor, O wonder-working cross: radiant weapon of strength, sworn for the salvation (and) restoration of humankind from servitude because of the arrogance of the evil one. [115] You were forged four-edged, to cut asunder (and) to avenge, in the successful right hand of Jesus; to sever the tough sinews of the tyrant's oppression, causing (his) utter downfall, dissipating (his) influence.

¶. 72 [38. 116] You are the divine proclaimer of the Creator who for our sake became man, O mysterious cross. [117] You are a stumbling block to the easily vanquished advantages of the contrary-minded Jews and stupidity to the differently thinking, contesting (and) knowledge-seeking company of pagan philosophers; [118] but to us who have put their trust in you, you are like a monumental (and) firm rock. [119] Thus, through you, (by pointing) to you, and in your mystery Paul summed up the act of redemption. He preached openly, expounding the one Christ who accomplished these indescribable things. You are the sent messenger of the deep mystery. The Sender's will was ultimately realized with your major role (and) partnership. [120] Therefore that which is ordinarily preached, "Jesus Christ the Power of God and the Wisdom of God," is in your remembrance.

S. 73 [39. 121] You are the caller of the divided nations of the world to the one church, O reconciling sign. [122] As with a harp, the soul-soothing musical instrument of the psalms, you lead—through you—multitudes of rational people (more) gently than the gathering of irrational flocks that live in sheepfolds, [123] and you strengthen (them) serenely with hope for repose.

P. 74 [40. 124] You are the cause of reunion in the conciliation of the Lord without beginning and the first servant who erred early on, O sign of peace. [125–26] For through you the blood of the new (and) beneficial sacrifice that forecasted with a loud cry the Savior's resurrection, speaks much louder than that of Abel, the forerunner of death.

S. 75 [41. 127] You are the entrance to the smooth way for those who yearn for the heavenly glory, O light-bestowing sign. [128] For through you the rulers of the tyrannical authorities of evil were eternally shattered in the old storehouses which were filled with impure bodies. This was accomplished through you.

F. 76 [42. 129] You are the substance of the divine grace of choice by the seers, the Christ-sent holy prophets who found repose in you, O miracle-working cross. [130] Regarding the fulfillment of their canticles, their early testimonies, the One lifted on you said: "All is fulfilled." Thus, the saying of God's Word, "Now is the Son of Man, the Son of God, glorified," corresponds with these predictions.

Φ. 77 [43. 131] You are unique glory to the One who grants inheritance to life in heaven, O light-enshrouded sign. [132] For the incarnate God, when he propounded the meaning of the deep mystery of his willful death, illustrating it by being lifted up, he fulfilled in his own words what the Psalmist had said figuratively (and) the apostle in (his) discourse: "He will drink from the brook along the way," "the mighty one who became poor." [133] By such humility he was elevated, the unequal in lordship, according to the great apostle's account, in the name of salvation and anointing; 78 hence this amplified pronouncement: "To the honor of this Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, both the living and the dead."

P. 79 [44. 134] You are a monument of life in the City of Light of the King of Heaven, O heaven-made sign. [135] You scatter beyond gathering the arrows aimed as it were against you by the heretical confessors of falsehood, those evil heretics with deluded hearts, lying lips—gateways to hell—that confess the humanity of the Savior, the Word of Truth, in terms of shadowy appearance to the eyes. 80 [136] For through your depiction is validated the truth about the appearance of the unseen One, the crucifixion of the bodiless One, and the death of the immortal One; and (how) the uncreated One who is of the Father's essence (and who) helped out in creation, was found obedient in (his) humanity.

81 [45. 137] With such and many words, even more choice (and) eloquent, you are always praised, O sign of Christ. We have inherited, by divine implementation through you, the glorious benefits of your honorable wreath, bestowed in your visible form. 138 And the fortification that was first locked to the forebear was unlocked by you; and the pillar of Sion, the citadel that is above, the universal assembly, was permanently established (as) a monument by you. 82 [141] Since the Creator of the universe became known through you, how much benefit could earthborn man admit by trusting in your inviolable power?

83 [142] Therefore, you are eternally praised with these melodic lines, with sacrificial and choice offerings, beyond measure and throughout eternity that knows no shadow, O radiant sign, which over against our unstable, ever-changing, (and) threefold motion you were revealed

in the form of (our) various parts to the point of becoming known as the reality of the shadowy type(s).

84 [46. 143] And now, you alone are receptacle of light, of irrevocable glory, the earth's Saturn, great trove of grace, watchtower for daybreak, the Creator's representative, tower of the One on high. [144] At the conclusion of the seventh period you will be spread out across the heights to be seen by all humans, on the day of the immortal King's coming. [145] Then will the triumph of Jesus' glory be fully realized, when by your distinct radiance you will vindicate those who glory in you. [146] And you will be revealed in incomparable beauty, with light surpassing the sun; and the appearances of the large luminaries will be dimmed by a persisting shadow; they will become dark. [147] Accept us then (as) partakers of your mystery, who have followed bearing the cross, with the privileged ones in clean robes, in pure, unspoiled coverings, those (standing) with uncensored boldness opposite those with uninhibitedly beautiful faces, with spiritual grace, expectation of life; to join the circle of those untouched by debt for the evil of transgression, to share in the glory granted to angels, those cautious and watchful glorifiers, worshipers of your sign, who sing without ceasing. [148] (May we be worthy), even at the conclusion of this day, of the dawn of tomorrow; to glorify you, giver of life, by early arrival for the unending (adoration); to belong to that line (of worshipers) widely spread, over a vast area; [149] to praise with affable singing the One who empowers your lordship, who was in you, with you and beside you when your wings spanned across the sky with the speed of lightning in your form. [150] (You are) like a tutor and instructor of our religion, in accordance with your mystery, being inseparably abiding with him, seated (with him), united (with him), and never far (from him). [151] Bodily he is perceived by us as part of your being, just as you are (perceived) with him, uniting us to his grace, [152] to (give) glory and praise with eternal encomiastic voice to the ever-remembered Jesus Christ, for the gifts that are from the Father with the participation of the kindred Spirit; to the One and only Holy Trinity to be honored, worshiped, and bowed down to by us who confess the Creed. [153] Unending songs of praise to him, in accordance with his eternal reality, his boundless rulership, and the timeless existence of the uncreated One; as it was at the first creation, so also at the second, (its) reconstitution, and more so through the changeless, incomparable, and eternal ages. Amen.

85 *We beseech you, O reader and hearer, ask of Christ forgiveness for the copyist of this (encomium) and for my father Momegh.*

2.2

Encomium on the Holy Cross Recension B

(MH 12:942–52)

1 *May this writing, an encomiastic discourse by me, a deficient rhetorician, be constructed by the sign of your cross in luminous form.*

1. 2 We begin here, with the historical, enduring word we have taken for its advantageous effect on our thoughts, this saying in the message of Isaiah the son of Amos, which we embrace heartily: "Thus says the Lord, 'Heaven is my throne and earth my foot-stool.' " 3 Truly, this saying indicates wondrous power, embracing in double imagery the bearing of (two) realms, the essence of heaven and earth. 4 How could it have been laid out (any better) to fleshly beings, to those whose essence is constituted of earthly elements? Moreover, how could such plain yet so sublime (truth), based on promise that is no lie, be conveyed (more) simply—to find its dwelling place among the meek and lowly? 5 It must be acknowledged plainly—for it ought to be believed—that this saying of old looks with the eye of the spirit into the future mystery, the ultimate fullness of the essence of God was made known in the lower realm, became linked with a jointed body, and, humbly obedient, took its place in the chariot of humility on the life-bearing cross. 6 How powerful is the mind's capacity to perceive, within its fleshly bounds, what the very summit of the heights of heaven could not bear nor could the vast expanse of earth contain—7 even after it has ceased from soaring with the light wings of the wind, with unsurpassed speed, (and has plunged) into the shadow of darkness, unfamiliar with its sacred, paternal bosom to which it was accustomed! 8 Because of that, (the prophet), with spirit-filled tongue, with the flow of words in the course of (inspired) speech, confessed heaven as God's throne and the wondrous redeeming cross—which became the resting place of the jointed body with its immortal essence—as footstool, on which to rest his feet.

9 Now, since the greatest of seers, the flower of those blessedly derived, (one) from among created beings, expressed in such melodious words the veracity of such an abstraction, of the One who encompasses existence, how much more (then) do we need the power of interpretive words to proclaim the shining truth of the mystery of the mighty cross!

2. 10 In the hot, southern (land), on the renowned high hill of the Amorite citadel, predictive of the mystical Sion, Israel celebrated the future hopes quite openly (and) with most proper reverence, with the accompaniment of the sound of lyres devoid of articulate speech. And with heartfelt devotion worshiped continually in the sanctuary of deficient priesthood—according to Paul's critical word—built by Solomon to house the treasured Ark covered with silver and gold. (From this place) it was preached that righteousness through the covenant of circumcision dwells on Carmel. And by another prophetic perspective it was remarked that the trees and shrubs of all the forests rejoice together, (as though) uplifted spiritually upon hearing the announcement of the Creator's manifestation.

11 Now, since these, the lesser creatures of the great creation, appropriately and with exuberant joy sing through mouths incapable of utterance and in various ways (to) the life-ushering coming of the Planter and Sustainer, and (since they drum up) with invisible hands of extraordinary kind and with feet that cannot climb to a higher nature, (as) the shadowy Scripture declares, how much more (then) should the openly manifested, praiseworthy, and great sign of the life-giving cross, the guarantor of the immutable grace and revealer of the hidden glory, be worshiped worthily, with confession (of faith)! Also by double kneeling, with restrained visage, the facial expressions veiled, and by bowing down to touch the ground with our faces, divinely etched in the beauty of humility! 12 Would not the rational man, endowed with grace to so great an extent and having reached the peak of blessedness, having obtained

the likeness of the image of God, want to offer eagerly such vocal gifts to the One who has given these things? 13 So it is with this melodious composition in (all of) its parts. It is unlike those executed with syllable count for the dubious training of children in the tender years; nor does it follow patterns held before one's eyes, like those engraved in hard stone: of the servitor Hagar—the Sinaitic (writings) bound to slavery, the Mosaic law code that kills. Rather, it surpasses those elementary anticipations of the joy that lies ahead, of which the Word testified that it is life, hidden from the scrutiny of the legalists. It does not concern material substance, for it is about God himself, concealed in a unique body. 14 For that reason the frenzied wickedness of Jacob's clan has been summed up in a predictive statement by those who hastened to conclude the narrator's discursive voice, admonishing one another: "Come, let us put the wood of death in the bread of life."

3. 15 The Lord of heaven and earth, Jesus, the chief sanctifier of all beings, who was verily nailed to that watchtower in the lower realm and on which he was lifted up, entered the heavenly Holy of Holies and from then on was eternally glorified within the heavenly veil described of old, in the bosom of the Father. 16 The captains of the incorrupt angels, upon seeing his quick ascent from this lower realm tagged Edom, habitat of the earthborn, noticed his raggedy clothes covered with dark stains of blood. Unspeakably surprised and eternally astounded at what they saw, they cried loudly (and) with astonishment to one another: "Who is this, adorned in the beauty of a robe from Bozrah, striding through this space awe-inspiringly?" It was because they saw the image of the cross on the shoulder of the Existent. 17 It was after this very observation that he was made manifest (to them) as the one who had the remedy for death, with the victory trophy as a crown of glory upon his head. 18 The cross-crowned Savior answered them in line with the inspired one of old, adding: "'I have trodden alone the winepress of sin' and have knocked down the enemy of life with this instrument of death, piercing him through with this four-pointed lance, a mighty weapon, vanquishing unto death the deceiving tyranny of the one who caused death." 19 It was the certainty and the outcome of this laudable act that the seer beheld clearly from afar. He examined closely, in a well-thought (and) considerable way, the amazing mystery of the cross, expounding the spiritual facet(s) of its unspeakable wisdom for those who were to come after.

4. 20 The Lord himself, with the consent of the consubstantial Father, demonstrating glorious honor with royal dignity, carried it on his divine back, on his life-sustaining shoulder, as the substance for the renewal of life, for unequivocal authority, for the opportunity to return to restfulness in the Garden of Eden. He, who was beyond the suffering caused by sin, took it upon himself willingly. 21 The all-seeing Essence, who miraculously brought about all existence, came unashamedly to this appointed place before the eyes of all (angelic) beings, with unhesitant strides, (bringing it) as the wood of fragrant incense, to fulfill the shadowy Scripture, to affirm the blood of the covenant of renewal. 22 For this reason he ascended high, comfortable in his lordly footsteps, his superior heels moving rhythmically with him bearing the cross, those feet that rested on the height of Golgotha. 23 There, on that foreordained place he set it up as an altar of sacrifice, on which he was offered as the unblemished Lamb, a sweet-smelling offering to the Father and a token of (our) reconciliation with God. 24 For this reason, when that awesome slaying of the sinless (Lamb) took place, all creatures throughout the whole creation trembled with great astonishment and the pillars of the firm foundations of the earth shook

with great fear like never before. 25 Moreover, in a twinkling of an eye, the abyssal storehouse of amassed darkness shook. The firm masses of the elemental substances would have crumbled in pieces had they not been beautifully transformed into a new existence by the sustaining word of the Word. 26 For the New Adam, gloriously adorned with the same substance of the deadly plant, willfully stretching his nailed arm from that leafy plant, reopened for the Old Adam the spacious courts of the place (called) Eden, (which was) fenced with fire from its very foundations. 27 The sinless One, tortured on ordinary wood, his head adorned royally with braids (of thorns), at the place of executions (called) Golgotha, reclaimed eternally that leafy plant with luscious fruit for the same man who was banished from it because of sin. 28 Though nailed to this accursed instrument of death, with it he faced the champion of the tyranny of death. Thus, through eternal renewal, creatures were restored to (receive) the gracious gifts from the Creator of the first man.

5. 29 O for this great, indescribable and desirable blessedness that was granted to us: not from a fruitful (and) leafy plant taken from the inhabited hill of Bashan; or from among the lofty trees of the forests of Senir; or from the gorgeous forests of cypress trees with attractive branches, praised in song; but from a visible piece of dead wood that had the root of life concealed in it. On it the dead body of our Life-giver, condemned as a sinner, became for us—according to the wise discourses of Paul—a redeeming sacrifice and a down payment for the forgiveness of our sins, owing to the loving gifts of the Father. 30 For he willingly gave his firstborn Son, the Only-begotten concealed in his bosom, to be on the accursed, deadly tree because of the sinners' indebtedness to punishment, making the cross a cause of blessing. 31 For near it the command of the Father's overwhelming will was carried out upon the Son, the beloved Shepherd on whom the sword was raised for the redemption of the scattered flock. "Awake," he says, "O sword, against my chosen shepherd.... With you I will strike him to death and I will scatter the flock, and I will draw them back to me."

6. 32 Consequently, the predictive revelations of the seers provide other names for this same redeeming Shepherd. From afar they declare him sole sovereign Ruler who rules with authority over existence, who cares for the flocks he brought forth, who gathers the lambs with his arms. (The Psalmist) says: "The Lord will shepherd Israel"; and "Lord, who shepherds Jacob with the house of Ephraim, consider the sheep of the pasture of your will." 33 The same goes on to add to the predictive talk about this Shepherd, saying: "This is God, our God, and he will shepherd us without deviation and beyond bounds, for ever and ever." 34 Add to this the Song of Songs, which shows you the Bridegroom's loving desire for the Bride, saying: "Tell me, brave shepherd, where do you shepherd? Where do you rest your choice flock at noon, having made your tent for their care?" 35 This, too, Isaiah proclaims while elevated from earth to heaven, about the Shepherd who goes ahead of the flock, 36 this Shepherd who is confessed (as) Lamb by the great John; for "He was led like an innocent lamb to the slaughter," "like an unblemished sheep he was offered on the slaughter stone," according to Jeremiah and Isaiah.

37 This mighty and true Shepherd, ever truly identified, gave himself for the sheep like an unblemished lamb on the slaughter stone of the life-sustaining cross. 38 And the true Son took upon himself with willing obedience the slanders of those who hated and disrespected the Father. 39 And he gave up the human spirit into his fastidious hand as sweet fragrance of incense, in pleasing reconciliation, for the salvation of humanity.

7. 40 But what is (the significance of) the place of sacrifice, or the altar for the offering where this Bull was offered for the renewal of redemption? 41 The immortal Sacrifice is not assessed by being weighed upon altars built with (human) hands on hills, of various materials, on high places; rather, upon this cross of redemptive substance, four-sided, pleasing in appearance, heaven-bound, seraphic in likeness, (like the) four (rims) full of eyes, the fourfold vessels. 42 Not (the altar) in the court of Solomon's Temple which accumulated parts of irrational animals, but the one in the middle of the bosom of the whole universe—the bearer of our earthborn race, (that which is) within the heavenly arch above not made with (human) hands, before the luminous lamp stands made there, so that heaven and earth will be eternally filled with the purity treasured there, 43 from where the Light that knows no shadow rises and from which creatures put on light, which dissipates completely the smoke-filled path of the dragon, the obscuring haze of gloominess, the fog of utter darkness. 44 Moreover, this life-giving cross is the positively acknowledged sign of victory in the decisive battle waged in the divide between destruction and restoration. 45 The Adam above, leaving behind his glory for the perfection of the one below, was hence transformed. Thus it was the Spirit—distinct from the force of breath—withn the structural substance of the earthborn Man inexperienced in sin that duly cried out to the Father like a sinner from the luminous tower of the cross. That is why he tore apart in an irreparable way the certificate of debt issued against the sin of the first (Adam). 46 And stretching his arms on the cross, he grabbed the whole race that had fallen from election (and pulled them back) into the divine realm of creation, those who were indebted to the condemnation of the Law of the former Testament. Transforming those unaccustomed to the bond of faith—bridling them calmly, he brought them into the status of adoption by God. 47 Rising in naked body upon that bitter and grueling place of atonement, he was tied down and crucified firmly for the one found disobedient to the will of the Creator who gave life to the one created after his image, (still) bound by the curse sanctioned by the Law. 48 Thus, the rebelliousness (of one) and the patient obedience (of the other) were brought together in the mystery of the cross—projected clearly to anyone who looks at the scene (of the Crucifixion).

8. 49 And now, how should we understand the core meaning of the ever-miraculous and God-erected cross? Is it a lordly constitution or a principle of servitude? A tower of divine outlook or a thing of human wisdom? A creative outline or a lowly principle? 50 Truly, it has nothing of human contrivance; rather, we string it as (something) celestial. 51 After all, our rational being is fashioned as a single entity composed of various constituents, of various parts: from four elements culminating in this heavy body—a gamut of sense perception—transformable into ethereal spirit by being suspended with cross-bearing fortitude from the (four) wings (of the cross). It restrains the rebellious traits within us as if by a strong, fourfold rope; and lifting up the full weight of unrefined man as if from a deep ravine, it whisks (him) swiftly to the spiritual realm (and) presents (him) to God. 52 These are the powers of the divinely managed cross, the grace of which is beyond description, which I shall sum up in the sequel of my discourse. It brings sensibility to the strayed crudity of the mind; wholesome understanding to the irrational lustfulness of animals capable of speech; awareness, clear as the taste of salt, to devious, perverse perception; evenness to irregularities that ought to be straightened out, making them conform to its four-square form, its desirable image.

53 As for us, to the measure of our ability, we shall henceforth sing laudably—with the clarity of a gifted voice (and) well-articulated words—to the life-giving sign of the divine cross.

U. 9. 54 You are a fitting figure of the boundless wisdom of God, of the all-seeing vision of his eyes, O sign of Christ. In your predictive pattern were the foundations of the earth laid down firmly, in a square shape, at the beginning of the formation of the created beings by the Existent.

P. 10. 55 You are glorified, O sign of God, Wood of salvation, bearer of life. You present to the One seated on you as pure glorifiers, with the myriads of the fiery angels, the countless children of humankind: those of the rational plant by nature who have been edified by you and made one with the ranks of that enthusiastic assembly, to sing with them in unison.

Q. 11. 56 You are praised, O redemptive sign of the glory of Jesus. You hold the gift of life in the form of death. The wise man, the author of the Songs, observed ahead of time your amazing mystery, which he expressed with the flow of the Spirit, saying with gratitude: “Blessed is the wood by which righteousness comes.”

Q. 12. 57 You are celebrated, O holy (and) glorious sign of the magnificent cross, in keeping with the visage of the four (creatures) yoked together, in harmonious accord with the unfailing speed of the cherubic chariot—those many-eyed (and) much-seeing seraphs—gliding swiftly, soaring in flight, unerring in its course; your glorious appearance was attested early on, through revelation. 58 For the form of your cross is depicted invariably in the mystery of the wheel knotted within the wheel; as though the (all-)affecting Spirit of the living One has incorporated in it your blameless idea. 59 Moreover, the amber of your wheels, comprised of molten substances of various kinds, reflected your transformation from afar; for from you sounded the bellowing voice of God el-Shaddai. 60 Being the place of God’s feet, on you they crown with beautiful singing the incorruptible Essence. Blessed is the glory of the Lord in his abode.

T. 13. 61 You are beatified, O mighty sign of the cross, bright as the sun, which the seer with foreknowledge predicted in the inspired Word (as) God’s throne, high and exalted over and above (all). 62 And guarded by the surrounding throngs of seraphs, you soar on flying wings. At the conclusion of the “Thrice Holy” hymn you are professed in perfect accord with the One seated on you: Lord of powers, of immortal ranks. The essence of this hidden mystery was simply and promptly revealed to John, who in vision described the glory of Jesus.

Q. 14. 63 You are endowed with power and worshiped with indescribable honor, O elegant sign. In the predicted meaning of your mystery you were revealed by the chosen prophet, who made known beforehand your hidden mystery through the image of the horse in reddish color for the contesting warrior in the battle to retaliate on behalf of the house of Israel held captive in Babylon—for the return of Jacob at the end of time.

E. 15. 64 You are consubstantial with the glory of the Father’s greatness, O adorable sign. Before the true revelation of your grace, a depiction of it was seen in a vision by Ezekiel who in marvelous amazement drew back from its wonder and went wandering in fear, (only) to return to you from there, being strengthened by the uncreated hands.

C. 16. 65 You are an honored mystery, O cross, clearly and unequivocally joined to the body of Jesus. 66 You are called his likeness and image, indeed his very symbol, because you carried him; for this reason, God who suffered is worshiped and bowed down to in your figure.

O. 17. 67 You are an unfading crown for the adornment of Sion, O praiseworthy sign, 68 the

verity of which the prophet, appointed long ago, indicated selectively through the many stones that flashed like lightning. 69 And he arranged them splendidly in the true pattern that was to be glorified in you, to be borne upon rational lips, reiteratively, recalling the mode of the fourfold praise for your incorruptibility: 70 by the cedar with the cypress and the fir with the white poplar, singing praises over again to the glory of the great God.

d. **18.** 71 You gather the multitude of rational flocks, O creative sign. The multiple flocks of lambs born into Laban's house were (marked) by your wondrous work of long ago. 72 For the mark depicting your symbol in beautiful color is of your strain; so you dye in the quality of the color of blood the many nations of various tongues. 73 And those of us who return from straying in the luring color of sin, you immerse in the one font of cleansing grace (and) present to Jesus, rather than to Israel.

h. **19.** 74 You are truly renewed with light, O sign of Christ, lit by the inapproachable glory of God. Indeed, the One who fashioned the image, the Creator of life, the very breath of our visage, the Lord Christ, is defined by you in the likeness of our kind. 75 Since he himself rested openly on you for a while, you became associated with him always.

L. **20.** 76 You are enshrined in light, O almighty sign of the cross of redemption. 77 In accordance with the admonition of the song(s) in the Psalter, we have taken your image as protector of our bodies, a sign of (our) salvation. You are an invincible shield against the blow of the lance and the bow of the evil one.

Iu. **21.** 78 You are confessed (as) counsel-chamber of God's greatness, O glorious sign of the One who overcame death. 79 For the One riding with you, "who had dyed his garments in the blood of grapes," according to Jacob the great, hastens with the rising Light of the divine Spirit into the darkness hard to penetrate, the deep storeroom of hell. 80 Daniel informed us clearly about him, "The One who stands in darkness and his light shines openly with him."

O. **22.** 81 You gave us new birth through Jesus' death, O creating sign. Jesus, the originator of good things, confessed you (as) baptism and cup: for cleansing from sin and for drinking unto life; and to those who were seeking a share in (his) glory, to the Sons of Thunder, he declared your life-giving mystery.

U. **23.** 82 You are the exclusive post of the miracles of the immortal Jesus, O invincible sign. 83 For the incarnate Word, fully equipped with you, ruled over countless heathen nations, inviting us all to the grace of adoption by the One who begot him.

R. **24.** 84 You were made by uncreated God, O cross, to partner with the first Witness to be martyred. 85 For God who was crucified became known on you, the Second Adam, the Creator of the first. 86 And the One who expelled (him) from the garden of life (with) the transgressor born of the rib has by his own command brought the partner(s) in death back into that desirable place through you.

Q. **25.** 87 You are an eminent shrine dedicated to the immortal Lamb, O almighty cross. 88 For on the day of the Baptism, the fulfillment and the beginning of the prophets and of the apostles, the messenger of cleansing and the forerunner of the Creator pointed out the One seated on you (as) the unblemished Lamb of God the Father. 89 After all, the One who took away all the sins of the world offered himself as sacrifice on you.

Q. **26.** 90 You are a lamp that cannot be put out, its shadowless flame shining brightly, O most praiseworthy sign. 91 For on you the boundless God, incarnate, was revealed to us (as)

sanctification outside the camp; the Divine offered as whole burnt offering in the all-consuming fire of his tortures. 92 Thus by dying like the shadowy burnt offerings, the immortal One exuded the fat of obedience to the Father; he released toward heaven his Divine spirit as sweet fragrance of that truly pleasing frankincense of conciliation.

F. **27.** 93 You are the cloister and the reception room of the King of Heaven, O God-receiving sign. 94 The wondrous acts of God are greater in you than in Solomon's Temple, for only the luminous stars move there leisurely and an inner curtain for God's glory. 95 But you delivered to us tangibly the One who was concealed by it and drew enlightened people to partake of the communion of the Bread of Life.

U. **28.** 96 You are the sign pointing to Christ for cleansing and healing from the filth of sin, O life-giving cross. 97 God who descended to earth, the caring Restorer through you, eradicated with scorching and unquenchable fire the stench of the malodorous mire of sin. 98 This is what Malachi, whose name means "angel" announced to us predictively: "For those who revere me, I will make the righteous sun rise with healing in its wings."

S. **29.** 99 You are the inviter to participate in the eternal glory, O blessed sign, 100 in the promissory covenant, the grace that was promised with absolute certainty; 101 for you represent the guarantee of goodness, the rest without par.

L. **30.** 102 You opened up for the first time the upward, unknown, unfamiliar, and extremely narrow way, O wood of renewal. 103 You always lead in a lordly fashion those who love you to the land of the immortal ones. In your sovereign march you cross the seraphic sword at the abyssal fence.

C. **31.** 104 You are the usual bearer of the luminous gifts from the Existent, O sustaining sign. For although you were formed of the definable, sense-perceptible four elements, you were marked out; you were elevated, set beyond the mind's perception.

N. **32.** 105 You are the holder of victory with utmost power, O almighty sign, witness to the lordly acts of the One who dwelt in you physically, who is described symbolically by the seer in the Apocalypse—writing the things of the past as those of the future—(as) the Lamb riding a white horse and repelling the dragon's deriding charge. For this reason he was proclaimed by those sitting around the throne on high: "Almighty Lord, who is and was and who will be revealed in the future, as hoped." 106 For in your very visage the scene of salvation unto life did truly unfold, in full realization of the (promised) good things, to the glory of the uncreated One.

Q. **33.** 107 You are the protecting seal of the four ends of the bounds of the universe, O omnipotent sign. You confront the four goring horns, according to Zechariah, satisfying God's wrath against the assemblies of evil. Advancing with the speed of horsemen in four directions, you thaw the hearts of nations and tribes, drawing them to (their) sense(s) by the strong pull of a single rein. 108 Above all, by inexplicable watchfulness, the tracks of the chariots were seen heading in the direction of your resting place.

T. **34.** 109 You are a bright, dazzling torch, lit from above, O invincible sign of Jesus the Savior. You were predicted early on, depicted in the Book by the example of Joshua the son of Nun, (from the tribe) of Manasseh, the firstborn scion of Joseph, who as prefiguration of our Testament, gathered stones from the Jordan symbolizing the Covenant with ancient Israel. 110 Whereas the New Joshua granted you to "the churches of the Gentiles" for salvation, for hope of the heavenly glory.

Ω. 35. 111 You are the newly fashioned pond for the cleansing element in the living water, O worshiped sign. Like yeast in the dough of incorruptible life, you are placed in the womb of the mother church, to convert with running (water) those immersed in (sin's) murkiness; and you adorn them with the familiar blood of Jesus, clothing the newborn with the luminous cover of Christ himself.

Π. 36. 112 You are next to the Savior, O cross, life-signaling pathway for the righteous ones. 113 For he has appointed you (as) unlocking key to those who long for the heavenly destination. He gave you to us, O holy (cross), a familiar place to be schooled in the direction of the Lord's footsteps.

U. 37. 114 You are the sword of the highest-ranking Divine Visitor, O wonder-working cross, forged in the shape of dazzling radiance, four-edged, made radiant by virtue of the right hand of Jesus. 115 For the salvation (and) restoration of humankind, with you he severed the tough sinews of oppression by the evil one, annihilating (him) utterly, piercing (him) strongly, deep, rendering (his) influence ineffective.

Ψ. 38. 116 You are the divine proclaimer of the Creator who for our sake became man, O mysterious cross. 117 Though you are a stumbling block to the easily vanquished advantages of the contrary-minded Jews and stupidity to the differently thinking (and) knowledge seeking pagan philosophers, 118 yet you are a monumental (and) firm rock to us who have put their trust in you. 119 On you did Paul establish the faith and in you he summed up the act of redemption; and he preached openly, expounding the one Christ who accomplished these indescribable things, with your major role (and) partnership in ultimately fulfilling the Sender's will. 120 For through you we have embraced Christ in our midst, "the Power and Wisdom of God."

S. 39. 121 You are the caller of the divided nations of the world to the one church, O reconciling sign. 122 As with a harp, the soul-soothing musical instrument of the psalms, you lead multitudes of rational people (more) gently than the gathering of irrational flocks; 123 since you fondle everyone serenely, tending in green pastures and with hope for repose.

Γ. 40. 124 You are the cause of rejoicing in the conciliation of the Lord without beginning and the erring servant, O sign of peace. 125 For on you the blood of the Savior's beneficial sacrifice cried out with a loud voice to the One in heaven. 126 As Abel, the son of Adam, was found to be the announcer of the sad news of death, so also you became the forerunner of life, announcer of the good news of resurrection.

Σ. 41. 127 You are the smooth way for those who yearn for heaven's glory, O light-bestowing sign. 128 For through you the rule of the tyrannical authority of evil was eternally shattered, and the gateway to Paradise was laid broad and wide before humankind.

Γ. 42. 129 You are the substance of the divine grace predicted by the Christ-sent holy prophets who found repose in you, O miracle-working cross. 130 For the fulfillment of their early canticles came to pass with Jesus lifted upon you like a rider; where by tasting the bitterness mixed with vinegar he fulfilled everything fully. And the glorified Son of God who became man was worshiped in one name, Christ, by the heavenly and earthly beings.

Φ. 43. 131 You are unique in glory to one who inherits the Kingdom of Heaven, O light-enshrouded sign. 132 For Jesus, when he propounded the mystery of his willful death, named you, appropriated (and) established (you). 133 With you he inherited the perpetual

glorification through the singing of the *Trisagion* by those in heaven and those on earth, (he), the Peacemaker of the universe, who with you forced the old enmity into retreat.

P. 44. 134 You are an unassailable monument in the City of Light, New Jerusalem, <O heaven-made sign>. 135 For your famous, sacred tower wards off the heretical falsehood of erroneous confession, for with lying lips they defame the human body of the Word; you scatter away their evil, venomous arrows. 136 And in your honorable depiction in four strokes you validate the nailing of the One (once) invisible; the nails driven into the One (once) bodiless; the immortal One who died; and the uncreated Father's Son, who is of the same essence, reaching your height in obedience while in our nature.

45. 137 With so many and such words, even more choice (and) eloquent, you are always praised, O sign of Christ. We have inherited, by divine implementation, the glorious benefits of your honorable wreath, bestowed in your visible form. 138 And the narrow passage into Paradise, guarded by the fiery sword, has been opened by you for the human race. 139 And you have been firmly established as a pillar and support of the all-embracing, universal assembly, the unshakable citadel of Sion that is above. 140 For this reason, the profession in this acrostic description is too little and wanting in admiration, since you are above adulatory words. 141 Since the Creator of the universe became known through you, how much benefit could earthborn man admit by trusting in your inviolable power? 142 Therefore, you are blessed with far superior gifts than these melodic lines, with immaterial, impeccable, noetic offerings; you are censed and praised beyond measure and throughout eternity that knows no shadow, O most radiant sign, lordly cross: instrument of the Savior's victory, support of our stability, rod of the Good Shepherd, seal of strong protection, guarantor of eternal peace, adored by angels and men, striking awe among demons—their eternal prosecutor.

46. 143 Blessed are you, O Wood of life: you alone are receptacle of light, of irrevocable glory, trove of grace, the earth's Saturn, watchtower for daybreak, the Creator's representative, intrepid mediator, strong tower. 144 For this reason, at the conclusion of the cycle (of time), the completion (of the age), at the end of the seventh millennium, when the elemental nature will dissolve, you alone, the finest of the elements, will be spread like lightning in the heights of heaven, to be seen by all beings, on the day of the immortal King's coming. 145 Then will the triumph of Jesus' glory be fully realized, when by your distinct radiance you will vindicate those who glory in you. 146 And when the incomparable beauty of your brilliant radiance spreads over the world, the appearances of the large luminaries will be dimmed, covered with persisting shadow; they will become dark. 147 Make us join the circle of those who worship your sign, those privileged ones in clean, pure robes, (standing) with uncensored boldness opposite those with uninhibitedly beautiful faces, with spiritual grace, expectation of life; to be with those untouched by debt for the evil of transgression, sharing in the glory granted to angels, those cautious and watchful glorifiers who sing without ceasing. 148 May we be worthy, even at the conclusion of this day, of the dawn of the everlasting tomorrow; to glorify you, giver of life, by early arrival for the unending (adoration); to belong to that line (of worshipers) widely spread, over a vast area. 149 You that are always worshiped with affable singing, the mighty weapon of Jesus, inundated with the blood of the One who was in you, with you and beside you when your wings spanned across the sky with the speed of lightning in your form, O cross. 150 You tutor us about him and instruct our religion with your copious teaching in accordance with

your mystery, being inseparably united with him, seated (with him), and never far (from him). 151 With you he catches us—who were alienated—and draws us beneath your pleasant yoke. And entirely through you he is caught by us, here and for the impending future.

152 For that (cross), at the conclusion of my discourse in this encomiastic praise, glory to Jesus Christ, with the Father and kindred Spirit, the One and only Holy Trinity to be honored, worshiped, and bowed down to by us who confess the Creed. 153 Unending songs of praise to him, in accordance with his eternal reality, his boundless rulership, the timeless existence of the uncreated One, and his creating power; as it was at the first creation, so also at the second, its reconstitution through renewal, and more so through the changeless, incomparable, and eternal ages. Amen.

3.1

Encomium on the Holy Virgin Recension A

(MH 12:953–63)

1 [1] *Placed in this series as in line with the same mystery, alongside the Encomium on the Cross, is this song of praise to you, Our Lady.*

2 [1. 2] The countless choirs within the rank of the happy ones (offer) recitative and passionate praises in so many words, joining their utterances in honoring the primeval Light that gave life to (all) existence. They extol over and over, as with the emotive lyres of the animating heart, the Most High (enshrouded) in the rising of the unapproachable Light. [3] And they recount in a lordly fashion the indescribable wonders of his all-creating Being, referring to his creatures as reason for their praise to the immeasurable glory of the Creator's essence.

3 [4] Thus (he is blessed) by the fiery and swift glorifiers, praised by the high-soaring messengers, the undefiled living beings, who by nature rank higher than us—who are lower in our order and a second reflection of the First Light—and who present themselves in a most invisible way, with exuberant joy to the excellent nature of the uplifted Word. Yet the Holy Divinity, who is praised by them with thanksgiving from afar (and) across a vast chasm, is eternally (concealed) from them by radiance.

4 [2. 5] How then should one honor her with songs of praise, [6] who in close familial relationship provided room for the body of the invisible One and pathway for the One who is great? She who was the tabernacle of the Lord and the altar of God; the mixing bowl for the incorruptible banquet; the pure sanctuary and humble receptacle; the aim of virginity and the example of blessedness; the secure chamber of the eternal Bridegroom; the abode that is pleasing to the will of the uncreated Divinity! [7] Who dares describe one who found so much blessedness? (5)3 For she is not to be defined (as) someone confined to a bodily form, a mass of earthly substance in flesh; for she is beyond description! Even the heavenly beings do not really

dare value the inscrutable Bearer of the Creator in his unfathomable lordship. (6)4 [8] For, according to the apostolic voice of Paul, the spiritual person is not scrutinized by anyone. How then would the earthly tongue, with the aid of the lips, consider her who bore within her body the fullness of the essence of the Word in his divinity, in order to know her? (7)5 [9] Because the prominent ranks of the immortal ones in the heavenly abodes were made to comprehend the marvelous acts (of God) through the church above, they have greater (understanding) of these things than we, who are lower creatures, earthborn (yet) quite rational beings, have of the (sacred) narrative.

6 [3. 10] And now I shall sing my dedicatory words with all the vigor streaming from my heart's desire, a gift of praise to his overseeing glory. As surely as the heavens declare the righteousness of the One who inhabits them, as the forefather of the holy Virgin sang, and many of the returning people of the exiled tribe of Judah anticipated the glory of the Spirit-filled Word of the uncreated One, 7 so it is with the manifestation of the Word, personified in the flesh, in the likeness of Adam. Therefore the God-bearing earth bursts with the sound of joy, rejoicing exuberantly with words (of praise), [11] joining the God-bearing heaven above. Thus the two choruses join together into one grouping to celebrate the longed-for, radiant, and great annual feast; (they make) the theoretical perceptible to beings endowed with sense perception and reveal that which was concealed to incorporeal beings. 8 [12] Now, let us form a circle in spiritual love, (as) we gather in groups, we who will inhabit the heavenly nuptial chamber. [4. 13] To you (we express) our desire for the spiritual wedding, O most holy, Our Lady, recipient of the Creator and Bearer of God.

9 For the Lord, who cannot be held by the heights of heaven, the breadth of the earth, the depth of the sea, or the darkness of the abyss, took body from you. [14] The blessed Job spoke figuratively of him, to emphasize his infinite greatness; 10 he had one say, "it is not with me," and the other, "it is not in me." 11 [15] Joining him in the song of the lower realm, John said with admiration in the great Revelation: "The earth and the heavens fled with one shaking from the presence of the Existential, and there was no place (for them)." Consequently, the earth really braces itself with eternal longing in order to be able to contain comfortably the Creator Word consubstantial with the Father. 12 [16] Whereas you, holy Bearer of God, chosen child of holy progeny and entity, (became) the private land for the Rational Plant and the tangible field for the Bread of Life, a radiant fireplace for the unquenchable Fire and a fertile ground for the Flower from the (Father's) bosom, a heaven-reaching tree for the imperishable Apple, a workshop for the shining Pearl, a high mountain for the Stone that filled the earth, a sunlit dawn for the Morning Star, a dwelling for the Superintendent of the rational flock, a palace of light for the immortal King, a nursing mother for the Creator of the universe, and a sanctified bride for the Father of Christ.

13 [5. 17] Rejoice and be glad with the sound of singing, arranged by us to praise your blessedness. 14 Be exulted with the greeting voice of Gabriel, O blessed among women: a worthy (abode) for your cohabitant, a coplanter of the divine glory, (and) a reliquary for the anointing oil of Christ the Lord. For prior to the birth of the personified Word from you, in utmost perfection, he was announced by groups of angels nearby to assemblies of shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch at dawn; that the Anointed One was born in the city where David dwelt, to the house of the anointed king. 15 For by him he was predicted, as a true heir of

the deceased (king) buried there. 16 [18] As for you, Our Lady, who gave physical birth to him who is One in (Divine) Essence, your purity was attested to by the Trinity; for the One revealed through you is confessed God who became man; 17 for “the Holy Spirit will come on you,” the One who dwells in sanctity and the Power of the Most High—like the Fatherhood of All—will overshadow you with incomparable predestination, O holy one. [19] And references to the Lordship of the One to be revealed does not begin as of his birth from you. 18 For, according to David the Great, “His wonderful name is Lord.” 19 And according to Luke, the unbroken lineage, the physical connection to the ancestral family of origin, is stated in the words of Gabriel: “And the Lord God will give him the throne of David, his father according to the flesh, and he will reign, will rule over our people in that city.” His wooden compass will have a pathway of light (pointing) superbly to the yonder. 20 And he will restore, will build the physical altar of David; or, according to another prophet, (he will atone) for the fall of Adam. 21 And he will reestablish and gather into one calling, into the unification and renewal (that comes with) the conciliation of the Christian covenant; for the restoration begins and is realized by the mystery of redemption.

22 [20] Now, O recipient and distributor of such countless and superb blessings, (you are) the only pure, unstained censer of virginity; 23 for you raised the pleasing fragrance of purity like a strong blend of frankincense (and) choice myrrh. 24 For all these reasons, [6. 21] for a life overflowing with praiseworthiness, rejoice always, ineffable Bearer of the uncreated God. For upon death you were raised like light to the heavens above, with marvelous glory, by the One who received your care. And with the lightness of the Spirit, you soared to the comprehensible ones [22] and embraced within your soul that which is unattainable for the faculty of reason, that which lies beyond the reach of the heart’s perception, O recipient of the glory of the uncreated One.

25 [7. 23] Praised are you, O holy Mother of God, bright reflection of the Creator’s virtue, for the great reward of glory which you passed on to us—who are the least—through the marvelous miracle performed in you. 26 For you embraced in a motherly way, as a son, that unexpected Child; and holding up in your arms that unbounded Being who became human, you drew him close to your lips and greeted him with a kiss. Through him and because of him we cry out “Abba” to our heavenly Father; (and) being adopted like coheirs, we are privileged to call on God through you (also).

27 [8. 24] You are held in high esteem, path of sanctity, forerunner of virgins, O holy Bearer of God; you who satisfied the very One who holds the complete fullness of existences. You made the invisible One bodily visible to the eyes of humankind.

28 [25] The pure tongues of fervent lips bless you, O holy Mother of God. For although you are constituted of the mix of four elements, you remained separate from our common lot who are earthborn, resembling the cherubim in (your) purity, not bearing the general, natural weight of creatures. 29 [26] Thus, you were swiftly whisked, presented in the inapproachable heights of the sun.

30 [9. 27] Delight with eternal joy, O blessed among women, you who seem to have been schooled in the challenging instruction linked to the cross, by being associated with the unequaled forbearance of the One born of you, in bearing (his) grievous, physical agony; ever suffering personally (his) soul-wrenching trial by fire and scorchingly tortuous death. You were

chosen and presented as a spotless lamb with priestly dedication, an early foreshadowing, with (your) soft and long hair, curly (and) shiny. You were given to austerity; no less, you were being stabbed with the sword. 31 [28] For it was written previously by the prophet that “a broken spirit is a sacrifice to God.”

32 [10. 29] Delight with all elation, O blessed Mother of the Lord, who gave birth from a virgin and pure womb to the Seed of the foremother of the rational beings born to Adam of old, the first created being. From you, from your virgin and inviolate womb, from your altar, emerged the Second Adam, the spiritual and heavenly One, who took body from you [30] in order to save from sin.

33 [11. 31–2] Delight with immeasurable rejoicing, O holy Bearer of God, who introduced the incomparable One to us who are of ordinary constitution and raised up the Unlike as (one of) us humans who are a lump of flesh. You brought him up unto handsome maturity, “(like) a branch from Lebanon,” according to Solomon.

34 [12. 33] Delight with the initial greeting by the heavenly messenger bearing good news, O holy Bearer of God, you who are surrounded with the joy of the glorious light and who with earthly body are praised in song as a heavenly being. With such utterances you are remembered wholeheartedly, in keeping with what is written in the Gospel speaking of God. [34–5] The praise offered in words on the lips of people of many nations bears witness to you, extending Elizabeth’s word symbolically to the universal church, the bearer—through the living water—of the cleansed foreign tongues of tribes and nations. 35 And thus, ever-increasing in grace, you are truly praised in song that is pleasing to cordial listeners, heaping—one and all—(their) unanimous agreement to “Lo, from now on the universe will call me blessed.”

36 [13. 36] Now, in keeping with your saying inspired by God, “the church of the firstborn,” those who behold with their non-physical eyes and who sing blessings with pleasing and melodious voices, bless you perpetually with longing in their hearts, thrill on their tongues, and joy on their lips: O progenitor of immaculate virginity. For they praise the One who took body from you, the personified Word who is inseparably united in honor with the Spirit and with the Divinity of the Father.

37 [37] Rejoice with ineffable rejoicing, as uttered by the mouth of the inspired, great seer, the precisely speaking Saint Zachariah, O lauded Bearer of God. For your role in the fulfillment of the miraculous, amazing word, is told again and again; for you gave birth to the unique Firstborn, to the One of divine essence. 38 Not as one celebrating simply the birth of a child or a wedding, but rather as the one who rejoiced exuberantly over the coming of the predicted, canopied, and immortal Bridegroom, the One you bore as your Son, the Restorer, Emmanuel. You even nursed him, the One who created you, the Savior of all, O Mother who shines brightly on the ranks of the daughters of heavenly Sion rather than on those of earthly Salem.

39 Blessed are you, the only immaculate, chosen one from among the line of virgin women, O personal chariot of the living will of the Giver of Life. 40 [38] For he has been not only with you but also in you; he has not only sat on you but also dwelt, tabernacled, in you; he not only joined himself to the mass of a body but also became a man after your prototypical image. 41 He was not only a man pairing off the two (natures) but also (a divine being) submerging himself into the heavier, ordinary element. 42 And in the union of the (divine) Person with the flesh, he not only appropriated (it) in his appearance but also brought (it) into conjunction with

the Three (divine) hypostases without confusion. [39] Through his birth, the Only Son, who is worshiped eternally, appropriated the nature of our kind (and) brought the unequal (nature) to the throne at the right hand of the loving Father Most High.

43 [14. 40] Blessed are you and altogether adored, O happy Bearer of the One who is truly eternal. You held within yourself in his fullness, not in part, the One who in everything is praised by all with spirit-filled songs. Not irresolutely but steadfastly; not partially but completely; not changeably but unchangeably; not on the periphery of a certain place but [41] in your womb you carried the One who brought everything into existence out of nothing. You not only looked at him simply with your eyes but also felt him; you not only greeted the One who cannot be touched (but) held him to your lips; you not only examined the ordinary form of the incarnate Word but also named God's anointed Jesus. 44 You raised him up in stature, the One who transcends time, [42] the One born of you, whose Divine essence—inscrutable to discernment—is confessed. 45 [43] Thus did Jacob meet him on the day he was named Israel, holding firmly during that mystical wrestling the One who possesses everything. 46 [44] And having mentally attained the moves of the transcendent One, he paused to ponder in his mind the longsuffering (of the Lord); consequently, he received the highest honor. 47 [45] Surely, this is not strange to you who are familiar with the mystery of the incarnation of the Word.

48 [15. 46] Blessed by the Lord and proclaimed by people, O chosen, Our Lady, holy Bearer of God, you were honored beforehand by heavenly foresight; you were predicted long ago through that shiny substance, the gleaming pearl, the stone born of the sea; [47] you were glorified beyond measure, with infinite praise. 49 [48] The sayings and the rebukes, the counseling messages by the ranks of the holy prophets to the House of Israel were spoken as it were birthing pangs to beget spiritual progeny. Yet in your immaculate chamber was displayed physically the personified Word who is of the Father's nature, the One anticipated for the goodly redemption, who was revealed through you to those who were hoping (for him). 50 [49] You, who arose amazingly, with a cloak more like the sun than clothing, shining in unapproachable, supernal beauty; (who are) gifted with full grace (and) spiritual charm!

[16. 50] "Blessed are you among women," (as spoken) on the lips of the prophesying priestess, the mother of John. You are glorified by the whole race of our like, with desirable songs of encomiastic odes. 51 [51] For, according to Moses, the genesis of the rational man began long ago with the image of God, in the likeness of the Existent. The banished man, who first sinned, is eternally conscious of its Giver—all the more for what you made happen, O holy Bearer of God, by bearing the One who is in human likeness, even a servant, defined as your mirror image. 52 Therefore, with the fulfillment of this mystery the prophetic message is established, which says: "Let your hand rest on the son of man fostered by you." 53 [52] Your right hand, O Father without beginning, has been (on) the Bearer of your Only-begotten in his humanity, to strengthen (her) and to bear witness (to her). 54 [53] Thus, the significant sermon of the great preacher Paul falls fittingly here, its prelude singing of the reflection of the glory (of God) and the likeness of his essence.

55 [54] And now, we praise you truly and worthily, with stringed instruments that stir the soul, O holy Bearer of God; that with songs of many parts you may be blessed always—with body and breath revitalized to tell of (your) grace. 56 [17. 55] You are a heavenly angel from human ancestry, an immortal seraph from a corruptible lineage, a golden purity from earthly

substance, a bright pearl washed by the sea, a blossom of delicious fruit from the plant of Jesse, a blessed cluster of grapes from ancient days, a rain-bearing cloud of gentle dew, a sunlit eye of the rising sun, a morning star over a harvested vineyard, a pleasant gong in the darkness of the night, a truth-proclaiming letter of the shadowy Law. 57 [56] As the active agent of all these blessings, "blessed are you among women." You are the lasting glory for the primeval man who was stripped naked; the redeeming comfort for the pain-stricken and grieving mother who was cursed. 58 [57] And now, what comparative word(s) could proclaim your incomparable greatness? O Mother of the Creator, Bearer of the One beyond reach: you cuddled the One who cannot be contained, supported the Almighty, fed the One who works miracles, clothed the One who adorns with glory, caressed the One blessed on high. 59 [58] Lo, for all these, (and) in keeping with your true word, we bless you with unrestrained lips, O Mother of Jesus.

60 [18. 59] O luminous form looked upon with sleepless eyes; a permanent will set as a standard of purity; the bound of relative greatness; most suitable (and) unwavering bond of the two (natures); an accurate image of the very Image of the Most High; weightless simplicity constituted of substance; a universal script written carefully; a desirable book stamped "Inerrant"; a great codex illuminated gracefully; a choice letter full of pleasant sayings; a personified statue with rational joints; a seal stamped with the ring of the Lord; 61 [60] a vestment in threads of light for the King of Heaven, the immortal One inhabiting the holy mansions; a favorable place for the uncreated Builder, opportune for the humanity of the Word without beginning; an instrument for the incarnation of the One in the nature of the Most High; a proper cause for those who strive in piety; a right example for those who do not stray into error; an inconsumable fulfiller of the wanting; a verification of the heavenly land of the living; a partner (sharing) the gratitude for the Father's compassion; a sinless kin to the one coping with labor pain, announcing births through the eternal womb.

62 [19. 61] You nourished with milk (and) nurtured on earth the true Son of the Father of Light and sheltered with your caring arms the One who contains (all). 63 [62] Like a swift bird you were lifted from among the transients here and were openly proclaimed to all as the holder of the One who holds everything. You were introduced as pure spirit in ordinary body. [63] And like a sunlit cloud you were laden with dew. 64 An earthly being from earthen mass, you shone brilliantly in supralunar light. Among women collectively you were seen in the likeness of Venus, and the inexpressible mystery within you was concealed by your obvious human nature. You were adored in a special way by your Creator and by the angels, and you were called by the name "Mother" by the One who established the ends of the world. You were praised as the sinless child of the first woman who sinned and were always confessed as the chosen crown of sanctity of all the undefiled. You were offered like an unblemished and docile heifer for the Creator's yoke, and you followed the unattainable divine will like a meek colt. You were raised along pathways of lilies from the depths of the world's sea; you blossomed among the dense, thorny plants of worldly preoccupations; and you were uncovered like a delicious fruit from bitter roots. You were summoned to be a beloved cocounselor in the invisible deliberations of the Trinity, and you were assigned to be the luminous cloth to cover the culmination of the Word; and you were designated as the bounds for the inception of his Lordship, of the Existent who is boundless. You concealed between your breasts, nurtured with holiness, the infinite One: concealed (as) in a bundle of myrrh, and from your virgin branch you grew the cluster of

immortality. You became a mediator of salvation unto life in an amazing way: you were both an appointed counselor for peace in the midst of tumultuous (earthly) uproars (on earth), and an honored co-celebrant with an irrevocable name in the midst of the heavenly ones.

65 [20. 64] Now, you have been highly praised with many similar and superior choice songs by poets, O holy Bearer of God, pioneering leader in principled life. 66 [65] For as the Only-begotten who was revealed through you, the Firstborn of the Father's nature, is called the foremost of those who strove unto death on the cross, so also you, O blessed and praiseworthy one, appeared as the supreme example for those within the orders of religious piety. 67 [66] Through your incorruptible consumption we were (vicariously) consumed by the inapproachable, scorching Fire. Through you we saw the One speeding over the uplifting wings of the four living creatures. Through you we observed in human form the One who was not part of those visible. Through you we enjoyed the One praised as the Lamb who takes away sins. Through you we worshiped as God the One who was condemned by evildoers. Through you we praised as familiar Person the (once) unfamiliar Lordship of the Father. Through you we immersed in the water of the (baptismal) font the promissory note of indebtedness to the curse. Through you we embraced as a child the One who was invisible to the angels' eyes. Through you we kissed in tangible form the nature of the unbounded Word. Through you we beheld the new, spiritual Adam in the height of the former one. Through you we received the Sun of Righteousness (as) part of our life. Through you we recounted as of David the history of the eternal Word's being. Through you we sketched in our likeness the One who is unequal to our image. 68 [67] Now, you alone are the reason for all of the aforementioned holy acts, O sanctuary of purity for immaculate virgins, example of piety, Our Lady, holy Bearer of God.

69 [21. 68] For had the heavenly Branch not grown from you, the (once) inedible fruit of the Communion would not have reached the lips. Had the Father's righteousness not been revealed from heaven, there would have been no inception (on earth) for the One without beginning. Had he not been conceived in your virgin womb, he would not have had a body. Had he not been revealed in our nature, the unreachable One would have been neither touched nor seen. Had earthly arms not caressed him, he would not have been recognized. Had earthly lips not kissed him, he would not have been spoken about. Had he not walked around as a human being, he would not have been preached as the Creator by created beings. Had the Most High not poured out the incorruptible oil, we would not have been anointed. Had he not joined our (nature) to himself, he could not have been baptized. Had man not been exhorted with heavenly counsel, he would not have been sanctified. And had he not humbled himself from the height of his familiar glory, the one taken from the lower creatures could not have ascended.

70 [22. 69] Yet he took body, as he became man. He was revealed, thus he became known. His good news was announced, thus he was glorified. He was purified, thus he was lauded. He was baptized, thus he was witnessed to. He was spoken about, thus he was proclaimed. He was enriched, for he became poor. He was adored, for he became obedient. He was worshiped, for he was pierced. He was made alive, for he was buried. He was honored, for he was punished. He shamed (his torturers), for he was humiliated. He made (us) rejoice, for he was grieved. He clothed (us), for he was stripped naked. He gave (us) life, for he was nailed. He was raised, as secure (from death). He soared, as a heavenly being. He flew, as a spirit. He was concealed, as

the inexplicable One. He withdrew, as the unreachable One. He made his way through the clouds in the sky, he was praised as the Only-begotten—stained with red from Bozrah—and was questioned about his wounds. He was believed by the immortal angels above; he was glorified as victor in the contest and battle; he was proclaimed among all nations as the Judge who judges justly. 71 [70] For he infused the uncreated essence into humanity through you, and from your excellent (and) inexpressible grace we have received all these incomparable gifts. All these advantages of the blessed hope were realized for us through you.

72 [71] Now, we give all glory to the One born of you as human: for the blessed flashes of light of the (once) hidden mysteries above and below, for the wondrous acts, for the great regeneration of new creatures, for the inexpressible establishment of the holy church, for the dexterous hand of the Creator, and for the ranks of the blessed, O Mother of the firm foundation of the church and Bearer of the immaculate Word of God. 73 [82] Therefore, may you crown with eternal blessing this consecrated holy place, a tabernacle of light, a sanctuary named for you, where you may grant the wished-for gifts of holy Sion and Bethlehem; [83] that we may be worthy to obtain the portion of our redemption on the day of the resurrection (and) great revelation of the uncreated (and) immortal Savior, the One born of you in human form, the One God, the Lord Jesus. 74 [84] And beneath this ornate arch we will honor you as the progenitor of so much beneficence, O uplifted Bearer of the eternally Existent.

75 [86] q. You are superior to the scale of our earthborn nature and endowed with a status beyond that of the cherubim, O genuine reflection of the radiance of the Most High, privileged to be honored like one with the Creator whom you held within yourself, to whom you gave body and whom you behold. Please beseech on our behalf the One born of you.

76 [87] r. You are joy to innumerable parts of the world, their collective desire and ineffable glory, for being inseparably close to the unapproachable Light that knows no shadow, inundating with its immortal rising. Deliver from indebtedness to death those who wait with hope for the promised things of the future, for they hope in you.

77 [88] s. You, who are related to earthly substance (yet) untouched by the (sinful) life of humankind, (have become) a participant in the common worship by the angels, to whose eyes you made visible in the form of a servant the inscrutable One. [89] They have proclaimed you greatly blessed upon seeing the development of the One who is without beginning, who was concealed in silence for ages. 78 Because of this we ask for your help, for salvation and renewal of life.

79 [90] t. (True) richness culminated anew, in a tangible way in you, who reached the heights with utmost confidence, as one incapable of corruption and disintegration in death; and you were deemed a worthy resident in the land of the living. Plead mercy for us, forgiveness of sins.

80 [91] u. You hold within you the countless joys of the divine plant watched over by the Lord, O garden of its growth. The height of its branching boughs draws the attention of those who have been cleansed, inviting them to dwell in their allotted places of rest in the paternal dwelling. 81 Now, have mercy upon us who confess you, Our Lady and Bearer of God.

82 [92] v. We beg you with words of pleading out of our very existence, O holy one. You alone St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).

from among those created by the Most High God are blessed and praised, overshadowed by the Father's good will, Bearer of God in our likeness, him who is One with the Holy Spirit. 83 [72] Therefore we repeat our usual praise to you, in keeping with (the words of) the chosen bearer of the Messenger (John), the humble Elizabeth: [23. 73] "Blessed are you among women," as head of their pride and their luminous crown.

84 [74] O crown of virginity, of chaste marriage; choice crown, of unprecedented praiseworthiness; crown of purity, like light; crown of the gracious birth of the Existent; crown of mothering the Father's blessed Word; crown of pride in (pursuing) the higher life; crown of the glorious life of wisdom; crown of heavenly knowledge given by the Lord; essential crown for the adornment of the church; adorable crown for the children of New Sion; charming crown with the glitter of the seven planets; crown of reception into the heavenly kinship; immaculate crown for the radiance of righteousness!

85 [24. 75] Now, you are the desirable and blessed abode of all who are of the number of those ranked above, choice and pleasing receptacle for the will of the One who cannot be contained. We, the earthly progeny of Adam, of lower creation, confess you, 86 for you were erected (as) a wall for the protection of numerous and countless nations. 87 [76] For we always trust in your most worthy and powerful intercession, as those being cared for and finding repose under the shadow of the strong wall of protection established by the Lord.

88 [77] An ornate wall, gracefully inset with the purest gems; a wall encircled by fire, therefore impenetrable to the assaults of the old adversary; a wall with blazing flames, insurmountable and inaccessible to cruel invaders; a marvelous wall, the closed gate which the great Ezekiel described figuratively (and) correctly; 89 a surrounding wall with immovable foundations; a mighty wall of the City of Light, for the Creator and Receiver of angels. 90 [78] Since you gave birth to God in the flesh, you also (make) us spiritual Sion, who are carnal by nature. 91 [79] Therefore your divine virginity is blessed upon the lips of the elect. [25. 80] Justly, then, what the narrator said rightly applies to you: "Against the torrents on the day of trouble, you were our place of refuge." 92 [81] For those on high and those below confess unendingly the One who joined the body from you with his Divinity. And we hope to be saved beneath the protection of your arms outstretched in intercessory prayer.

93 [92b] And now, may you accept the words of our tongues, sung by our mouths (and) lips, (as) pleasing to you, O purity of virgins and (their) progenitor. O pure tabernacle of the One who alone is truly holy, please inscribe anew in the heavenly register my name read from the immaculate womb of the (baptismal) font; [93] and erect this, my song of praise—composed in but few parts—as a perpetual memorial with letters that cannot be erased. I lay down my body as inked line(s) and my spirit as the meaning of my words, [94] so that you may be glorified always with this laudation by a creature constituted of the blend of two elements—as (you are lauded) by your pure glorifier(s). [95] By virtue of your mighty petitions, may we be granted boldness (to stand) without condemnation before the great and awesome tribunal of the holy Judge. 94 [96] May we be found worthy of our election: in purity of life, in right confession, firm in the faith. And to come face to face with your blessedness there, to glorify you with gifts of words, along with those who are with you in your adorable, glorious, divine, and most luminous presence, with the inseparable and inscrutable essence of the Holy Trinity, One in Lordship and creating, [97] to whom befit honor and praise with endless songs, now and always, forever.

Amen

95Through the intercession of your Bearer and Mother, have mercy upon the scribe of this, Yovanēs, and on my father, Momeghn.

[In the manuscripts, as in the *MH* edition, this encomium is followed by a colophon, “A Dedicatory Memoir” by the author, addressed to his patron Step’anos, bishop of Mokk’; see [“Appendix A 3” Recension A.](#)]

3.2

Encomium on the Holy Virgin Recension B

(*MH* 12:965–75)

1 Placed in this series as in line with the same mystery, alongside the Encomium on the Mystery of the Cross, is this hymnic praise to you, Our Lady.

1. 2 T he countless choirs within the ranks of the happy ones offer praises in so many passionate words, joining their utterances in honoring the primeval Light that gave life to (all) existence. They extol the Most High (enshrouded) in unapproachable Light, over and over, joyfully, as with trumpets, lyres, and harps that stir the heart—the emotive, animating organ. 3 And they bless his all-creating, wonder-working and indescribable Lordship, referring to his creatures as reason for their praise to the essence of the Creator, as the true Word also indicates: “I created all these things while the myriads of armies of the happy ones blessed me with loud singing and all my angels shouted my praise.”

4 Thus he is blessed by the fiery and swift glorifiers, praised by the high-soaring messengers, the undefiled living beings, who by nature rank higher than us—who are lower in our order and a second reflection of the First Light—and who present themselves in a most invisible way, with exuberant joy to the excellent nature of the uplifted Word. Yet the Holy Divinity, who is praised by them with thanksgiving from afar and across a vast chasm, is eternally concealed from them by radiance.

2. 5 How then should one honor her with songs of praise (and) blessing, who in her earthly tabernacle held the One unreachable by the fiery beings; who enveloped the One indescribable by the seraphim in her sense-perceptible, jointed body; and who nourished with the milk of her breasts the One who nurtures the ranks of angels? 6 She who provided room for the body of the invisible One and pathway for the One who is great; she who was the tabernacle of the Lord and the altar of God; the mixing bowl for the incorruptible banquet; the pure sanctuary and humble receptacle; the aim of virginity and the example of blessedness; the secure chamber of the eternal Bridegroom; the abode that is pleasing to the will of the uncreated Divinity! 7 She became the recipient of so many glorious gifts, such as are not even fit for the hosts of angels

St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).

who are earnest in praising the Divinity and who long to honor those who are worthy. How much more an earthly being, thoroughly a mass of earthly substance, a bodily form in flesh, yet exceedingly and indescribably superior to all! Even the heavenly beings do not really dare value the inscrutable Bearer of the Creator in his inexplicable Lordship. 8 For, according to the apostolic voice of Paul, the spiritual person is not scrutinized by anyone. How then would the physical tongue, with the aid of the lips, consider her who bore within her body the fullness of the essence of the Divine Word, in order to know her? 9 Since the prominent ranks of the immortal ones in the heavenly abodes grasp this deep mystery through the church above, then it is clear that there is greater admiration among them for the marvelous act (of God) than among us earthly beings for what we gather from the words of the (sacred) narrative.

3. 10 Yet I shall sing with all the vigor streaming from my heart's desire, a gift of praise to his overseeing glory. Though "the heavens declare the glory of God" and many of the returning people of the exiled tribe of Judah beheld the glory of the uncreated One, yet (more so) now, with the manifestation of the Word in the flesh, in the likeness of the flesh of Adam, it behooves not only the incorporeal ones but also those endowed with sense perception to burst with the sound of joy, to rejoice exuberantly with words of praise. 11 For by receiving the Lord, this lowly earth was found to be yoked with the God-receiving heaven above. For this reason the two choruses, the corporeal genus of created beings and the incorporeal ranks of angels, moved by spiritual joy, join together in one circle to celebrate the annual feast of the Savior's radiant manifestation: (making) the theoretical perceptible to beings endowed with sense perception and revealing that which was concealed to incorporeal beings. 12 Thus, we also today, as a church, daughter of the nuptial chamber in the upper realms, form a circle in spiritual love to sing to you with the heavenly beings, with sanctified voices.

4. 13 O most holy, receiver of the Creator, Our Lady, and Bearer of God who cannot be held by the heights of heaven, the breadth of the earth, the depth of the sea, or the unreachable abyss, the One who truly took body of your essence, whom you were able to bear in the immaculate confine of your virgin womb. 14 In anticipation of him, the blessed Job spoke figuratively, emphasizing his infinite greatness, having one say "it is not with me" and the other "it is not in me." 15 Joining him in the song, the great John says with admiration in the word(s) of Revelation: "The earth and the heavens fled with one shaking from the presence of the Existent, and there was no place (for them)." Consequently, they really brace themselves with eternal longing in order to be able to contain comfortably the Creator Word. 16 Whereas you, holy Bearer of God, chosen child of holy progeny and entity, bore him in you with the easy comfort of a pleasing will, becoming the private land for the Rational Plant and the tangible field for the Bread of Life, a radiant fireplace for the unquenchable Fire and a fertile ground for the Flower from the Father's bosom, a heaven-reaching tree for the imperishable Apple, a workshop for the shining Pearl, a high mountain for the Stone that filled the earth, a sunlit dawn for the Morning Star, a dwelling for the Superintendent of the rational flock, a palace of light for the immortal King, a nursing mother for the Creator of the universe, and a sanctified bride for the Father of Christ.

5. 17 Rejoice and be glad with the sound of these songs of blessing, in praise of your blessedness, and be exulted with the greeting voice of Gabriel, O blessed among women: a worthy abode for the descending Word, a pot for the planting of the divine body, (and) a

reliquary for the oil of divine anointing, you who were kept undefiled by the shielding wings of angels prior to the birth of the Word in utmost perfection. 18 (You), whom the glory of the Triune God was pleased to make his resting place, for the Holy Spirit—the author of impeccable sanctity—came upon you, and the power of the Father above covered your mother in order to prepare you to be the receptacle of the Son. 19 And the Coexistent with the Father above, who dwelt in you, was from eternity; and the one who was born from you in a jointed body had his origin before the morning star; wherefore he combined his one, jointed body with the divine nature in an inseparable way and appropriated the throne of his father David forever, reigning over domains and cities, countries and worlds. And for a road compass he gave them the wooden cross in order to lift them up to the heavenly sanctuary; and he restored the fallen altar of the Adamic body, renewing it by the Messianic covenant.

20 Now, through pure sanctity, only you, Our Blessed Lady, holy Bearer of God, (became) the recipient and the distributor of such countless and superb blessings, a censer of the Existent. Burning with the fire of purity, you raised a pleasing fragrance to God and Father, like a blend of frankincense, myrrh, and the perfume of storax and acacia, (you who are) sanctified with pure life, filled with goodness, congealed with humility, made perfect with virtue, overflowing with sweetness, O holy Mother of God.

6. 21 Rejoice and be exulted, O indescribable dwelling of the uncreated God born of you; for upon death you were raised like light to the heavens above, with marvelous glory, by this very Child of your caring. And with the light wings of the Spirit you soared to the comprehensible stations (of heaven), flying high to your eternal resting place. 22 Thus, by embracing within your soul that which is unattainable by the faculty of reason, that which lies beyond the reach of the heart's perception, you have appropriated unto yourself the richness of the glory of the uncreated One, O holy Bearer of God.

7. 23 Praised are you, O bright reflection of the Creator's virtue, for the great reward of glory which you passed on to us—who are the least—through the marvelous miracle performed in you. For that fatherless Child, O Mother, you embraced as a son; and holding up in your arms that unbounded Being who became human, you drew him close to your lips and greeted him with a kiss. Being found as coheirs with him, we cry out to God, "Abba, Father," because of your intermediary role, O holy Mother of God.

8. 24 You are held in high esteem, path of sanctity, forerunner of virgins; you who satisfied as one in need of milk the very One who holds the fullness of existences, and made the invisible One bodily visible to the eyes of humankind. For this reason every mouth blesses you with gratitude and deep longing, O holy Bearer of God.

25 The pure tongues of fervent lips bless you, O flower of the Fruit of our lives who is from the line of Jesse. For although you are constituted of the mix of four elements, you remained distinct from our common lot who are earthborn, not bearing the general, natural weight of creatures but being inundated with the cherubic, fiery sparkle. 26 Thus, you were swiftly taken far away, presented in the inapproachable heights of the sun, O holy Mother of God.

9. 27 Delight with eternal joy, O blessed among women, you who were schooled in the challenging instruction of the cross, by being associated with your Son in unequaled forbearance, bearing the grievous agony of the Lord born of you; ever suffering personally his scorchingly tortuous death. You were presented as a spotless lamb with priestly dedication at

the altar of love, an immaculate sacrifice with your soft and long, shiny hair. You were burning with zeal for the austere life; no less, you were being stabbed with the sword. 28 Because of your sacrificial offering, you were protected by circles of angels. You were ranked with the band of the apostles, you alone being worthy of their veneration, O holy Bearer of God.

10. 29 Delight with all elation, O blessed among women, who gave birth from a virgin and pure womb to a child, a root of blessing (in lieu) of the pain of the curse, a child for the rejoicing of the forefather Adam. 30 For this we thank you, we who are blessed by the grace of your Son, the Savior of the world. And we pronounce you blessed, O holy Bearer of God.

11. 31 Delight with immeasurable rejoicing, O bride of light, robed in golden garments, who brought the heavenly One to us who are of earthly constitution (and) wretched passions, and presented the Unalike as a handsome and tall Branch from Lebanon to the likes of us who are but a human race of lumped flesh. 32 Having received from you the Archetype of the forefather's image now restored, we give you thanks, O holy Mother of the Lord.

12. 33 Delight with the initial greeting by the heavenly bearer of good news, O sanctuary shining with sanctity, you who thrived with the abundance of divine light and who with earthly body became a throne for the heavenly One, and who—having evolved like the sun—was taken up to the Morning Star. 34 For this reason, the son of the barren woman, opening his elderly mother's mouth, blessed you, O blessed among women, holy Bearer of God. 35 You filled Zechariah's house with utterances of thanksgiving, making it a prototype of the universal church, which praises you perpetually. Lo, all nations praise you since then, just as you confessed the divine so passionately, (you), the progenitor of the purity of virgins, always praised by the joyous mouths of angels, O holy Bearer of God.

13. 36 Now, “the church of the firstborn,” praises with the “Thrice Holy” the One who took body from you, who is none other than the Word, as equal in honor with the Father, the One to whom you were so close, seeing in him the awe-inspiring mystery, and whose indescribable joy you experience continually. 37 For you became known as the nursing mother of the One on whom they look from afar, through a veil. You held in your arms, with compassion, the Ancient of Days as a child, becoming the personal chariot of the One who sits on the cherubic throne. 38 He has thus been not only with you but also in you; he has not only sat on you but also dwelt, tabernacled in you; he not only joined himself to the mass of a body but also became a man after your prototypical image. In Christ not only two existences became one but also the body was elevated into an incorruptible existence, merged into an ethereal state. He not only became one with the earthly in his appearance, but also brought (that body) into oneness with the Three (divine) hypostases without confusion. 39 The Only Son, who in our nature (sits) on the throne at the right hand of his Father, is worshiped eternally by the heavenly beings.

14. 40 For this, we earthly beings bless you with longing songs, you who became the distributor and minister of this great mystery, O happy Bearer of the One who is truly eternal. You held within yourself in his fullness, not in part, the One who is praised by all with spirit-filled songs; not irresolutely but steadfastly; not partially but completely; not changeably but unchangeably; not on the periphery of a certain place but in the expansive chamber for the Spirit. 41 For you carried in your womb the One who weighed the heavens and the earth with his hands. You not only looked at him simply with your eyes but also felt him with your hands; you not only greeted with the lips the One who cannot be touched but also held him; you not

only examined the ordinary body of the Word who became human but also named God's anointed Jesus; you not only fed with your breasts the One who transcends time but also raised him up in stature: 42 the One whom the universal church confesses as true God, one with the Ever-Existent, inscrutable to our minds, 43 the Wrestler whom Jacob the cheater held firmly and from whom he accepted the name that means "seeing God." 44 Thus, the Body born of you was intermingled with God in the sacred chamber of your womb, and deceiving the enemy of humankind, Edom, triumphed physically over him. Consequently, he was not called "seer of God" but "true God," who transforms everyone (as he did) with the naming of Israsrael. 45 So we bless you with all our voices, O guardian of this great mystery of redemption, Our Lady, holy Bearer of God.

15. 46 Your prototype was definitely revealed by divine foresight in the precious, gleaming, and white stone, the pearl found in the sea. 47 For truly you are the prized gem, chosen from the sea of the world, you who bore the image of the divine fire. 48 O how great is the mystery that was fulfilled in you, O holy one. Since the prophets were called parents of Israel because of their spirit-filled sayings, how much more should you be worthy to receive deserved praise for the personified God the Word who is of the Father's nature, who was revealed in his fullness in your immaculate chamber? 49 O adornment, shining in unapproachable beauty as one covered by the radiance of the sun, full of grace (and) charm! O lowly meekness, humble in purity, wrapped in the fabric of the Spirit's Light! O recipient of the heavenly adornments, adorned with the purity of gold, the spotlessness of silver, placed like a diademed crown of glory upon your head, under the auspices of the Most High! O graceful, your holy chest, with a four-string necklace of clear beads, is occupied by the Son, combining in his body the Spirit of God, the One essence that weaves the Three.

16. 50 You alone are blessed among women, (as spoken) on the lips of the priestess, the mother of the prophet John. You are glorified by the whole race of our like, with desirable songs of encomiastic lines. 51 For since the genesis of the rational man began with the image of God, by which bequest he received the Creator's grace, we are all the more indebted to you, Our Lady, to bow down with gratitude to you for the gift of the birth of God in the likeness of a servant, for which you were the means. The prophetic message establishes this by saying: "Let your hand rest on the man, and your right hand on the son of man fostered by you." 52 The Only-begotten laid the right hand, the might, and the arm of the Father in you, compelling all the children of men to become witnesses to and adorers of the one he (thus) empowered. 53 The light, the likeness, and the character of the Father's essence abiding in you have made the whole world committed to you for holiness and righteousness. 54 For this we praise you truly and worthily, with stringed instruments that stir the soul, O holy Bearer of God.

17. 55 You are a heavenly angel from human ancestry, an immortal seraph from a corruptible lineage, a golden sapphire from earthly substance, a glowing pearl washed by the sea, a blossom of delicious fruit from the plant of Jesse, a blessed cluster of grapes from ancient days, a rain-bearing cloud of gentle dew, a sunlit eye of the rising sun, a morning star over a harvested vineyard, a pleasant gong in the darkness of the night, a truth-proclaiming letter of the shadowy law. 56 As the active agent of all these blessings, "blessed are you among women." You are the lasting glory for the primeval man who was stripped naked; the redeeming comfort for the grieving mother who was cursed; the call to peace for their livid

children. 57 And now, what comparative word(s) would be adequate to proclaim your incomparable greatness? O Mother of the Creator, Bearer of the One beyond reach, you cuddled the One who cannot be contained, supported the Almighty, clothed the One who adorns with glory, caressed the One blessed on high. 58 Lo, for all these, (and) in keeping with your word that does not lie, we truly bless you, O Mother of Jesus.

18. 59 O luminous form looked upon with sleepless eyes; a permanent will set as a monumental standard of purity; the bound of relative greatness; most suitable (and) unwavering bond of the union of the two (natures); an accurate image of the very Image of the Most High; weightless simplicity constituted of substance; a universal script written in a (straight) line; a desirable book stamped "Inerrant"; a great codex illuminated gracefully; a choice letter full of pleasant sayings; a personified statue with rational joints; a seal stamped with the ring of the Lord; 60 a vestment in threads of light for the King of Heaven, the immortal One inhabiting the holy mansions; a favorable place for the uncreated Builder, opportune for the humanity of the Word without beginning; an instrument for the incarnation of the One in the nature of the Most High; a proper cause for those who strive in piety; a right example for those who do not stray into error; an inconsumable fulfiller of the wanting; a verification of the heavenly realm of the living; a partner (sharing) the gratitude for the Father's compassion; a sinless kin to the one coping with labor pain, announcing births through the eternal womb.

19. 61 You nourished with milk (and) nurtured on earth the true Son of the Father of Light and sheltered with your caring arms the One who contains (all). 62 You extended the path of earthly life to the way of luminous life; and like a swift bird you were lifted from among the transients here and were recognized openly among the ranks of angels as the holder of God. 63 And being honored by them, you were raised higher, on a sunlit cloud, and (as) an earthly being took your place with the cherubim. Among women collectively you were seen in the likeness of Venus, and the inexpressible mystery within you was concealed by your obvious human nature. You were adored in a special way by your Creator and by everyone, and you were called by the name "Mother" by the One who established the ends of the world. You were praised as the sinless child of the first woman who sinned and were confessed as the chosen crown of sanctity of all the undefiled. You were offered like a docile and unblemished heifer for the Creator's yoke, and you followed the unattainable divine will like a meek colt. You were raised along pathways of lilies from the depths of the world's sea; you blossomed among the dense, thorny plants of worldly preoccupations; and you were uncovered like a delicious fruit from bitter roots. You were summoned to be a beloved cocounselor in the invisible deliberations of the Trinity, and for the confidential culmination of the Word you were to be like a luminous covering cloth; and you were designated as the bounds for the inception of his Lordship, of the Existent who is boundless. You hid between your breasts, nurtured with holiness, the infinite One (like) a bundle of myrrh, and from your virgin branch you raised the cluster of immortality. You became a mediator unto life in an amazing way: you were both an appointed counselor for peace in the midst of tumultuous uproars (on earth), and an honored cocelebrant with an irrevocable name in the midst of the heavenly ones.

20. 64 Now, you have been highly praised with many similar and superior, choice songs by poets, O holy Bearer of God, pioneer and leader in principled life. 65 For as the Only-begotten who was revealed through you, the Firstborn of the Father's nature, is called the foremost of

those who strove unto death on the cross, so also you, O blessed and praiseworthy one, appeared as the supreme example for those within the orders of religious piety. 66 Through your incorruptible consumption we were (vicariously) consumed by the inapproachable, scorching Fire. Through you we saw the One speeding over the uplifting wings of the four living creatures. Through you we observed in human form the One who was not part of those visible. Through you we partook of the One praised as the Lamb who takes away sins. Through you we worshiped as true God the One who was condemned by evildoers. Through you we praised as familiar Person the (once) unfamiliar Lordship of the Father. Through you we immersed in the water of the (baptismal) font the promissory note of indebtedness to the curse. Through you we embraced as a child the One who was invisible to the angels' eyes. Through you we kissed in tangible form the nature of the unbounded Word. Through you we beheld the new, spiritual Adam in the height of the former one. Through you we received the Sun of Righteousness (as) part of our life. Through you we recounted as of David the history of the eternal Word's being. Through you we drew in our likeness the One incomparable to the human image. 67 Now, you alone are the reason for all of the aforementioned holy acts, O goal of piety for immaculate virgins, Our Lady, holy Bearer of God.

21. 68 For had the heavenly Branch not grown from you, the (once) inedible fruit of the Communion would not have reached our lips. Had the Father's righteousness not been revealed from heaven, there would have been no rise of justice from earth. Had he not been conceived in your virgin womb, he would not have had a body. Had he not been revealed in our nature, the unreachable One would not have been touched. Had earthly arms not caressed him, he would not have been recognized. Had earthly lips not kissed him, he would not have been spoken about. Had he not walked around as a human being, he would not have been preached as the Creator by created beings. Had the Most High not poured out the incorruptible oil, we would not have been anointed. Had he not joined our (nature) to himself, he could not have been baptized. Had man not been exhorted with heavenly counsel, he would not have been sanctified. And had the Most High not humbled himself from his familiar glory, the one taken from among us lowly creatures would not have been elevated.

22. 69 Yet he took body, as he became man. He was revealed, thus he became known. His good news was announced, thus he was glorified. He was purified, thus he was lauded. He was baptized, thus he was witnessed to. He was spoken about, thus he was proclaimed. He was enriched, for he became poor. He was adored, for he became obedient. He was worshiped, for he was pierced. He was made alive, for he was buried. He was honored, for he was punished. He shamed (his torturers), for he was humiliated. He made (us) rejoice, for he was grieved. He clothed (us), for he was stripped naked. He gave (us) life, for he was nailed. He was raised, for he was in danger. He soared, as a heavenly being. He flew, as a spirit. He was concealed, as the inexplicable One. He withdrew, as the unreachable One. He made his way through the clouds in the sky, he was praised as the Only-begotten—stained with red from Bozrah—and was questioned about his wounds. He was believed by the immortal angels above; he was glorified as victor in the contest and battle; he was proclaimed among all nations as the Judge who judges justly. 70 For he infused the uncreated essence into humanity through you, and from (your) excellent (and) inexpressible grace we have received all these incomparable gifts. All these advantages of the blessed hope were realized for us through you. 71 And we give all

glory, with prostration, to the superior name of Jesus who was born of you in our likeness, for the blessed flashes of light of the (once) hidden mysteries above and below, for the exceedingly praiseworthy (and) bright regeneration of new creatures, and for the inexpressible establishment of the holy church. 72 Therefore we repeat our usual praise to you with the refrain, O blessed.

23. 73 “Blessed are you among women,” head of their pride and their luminous crown. 74 O crown of virginity, of chaste marriage; choice crown, of unprecedented praiseworthiness; crown of purity, like light; crown of the gracious birth of the Existent; crown of mothering the Father’s blessed Word; crown of pride in (pursuing) the higher life; crown of the glorious life of wisdom; crown of heavenly knowledge given by the Lord; essential crown for the beautification of the church; adorable crown for the adornment of New Sion; charming crown with the glitter of the seven planets; crown of guidance to the heavenly kinship; immaculate crown for the radiance of righteousness!

24. 75 Now, you are the desirable and blessed abode of all who are of the number of those ranked above, choice receptacle for the will of the One who cannot be contained. We, the earthly progeny of Adam, of lower creation, confess you, for you were erected (as) a wall for the protection of numerous and countless nations. 76 For by always trusting in your most worthy and powerful intercession we remain protected, O holy Bearer of God, being cared for and finding repose under the shadow of your strong wall of protection: 77 an ornate wall, gracefully inset with the purest gems; a wall encircled by fire, therefore impenetrable to the assaults of the old adversary; a wall with blazing flames, insurmountable and inaccessible to cruel invaders; a marvelous wall, the closed gate which Ezekiel described correctly; a surrounding wall, according to David, whose immovable foundations were laid by the Most High; a mighty wall of the heavenly city, according to Paul, where you welcome everyone as its inhabitants. 78 Since you gave birth to God in the flesh, you make those born of the flesh (become) children of the spiritual Sion that is above. 79 Therefore your true virginity is blessed upon their lips and all profess you as the incarnation place and temple of the One who is consubstantial with the Father.

25. 80 Justly, then, what the narrator said rightly applies to you: “Against the torrents on the day of trouble, you were our help and refuge,” O cleanser of virgins and progenitor of those in the ranks of the blessed, O mother, founder of the church’s stability and begetter of God’s immaculate Son. 81 We crown you perpetually with unending blessing within the sanctuary consecrated for you, and relying on the protection of your arms outstretched in intercession, we lift up our arms to you, believing with unwavering hope that we will live.

82 Now, we beseech, accept the words of praise on our tongues and reward us with the gifts of Sion and Bethlehem, 83 that we may be worthy to obtain the portion of our redemption on the great day of the glorious coming and revelation of the immortal Savior, your Only-begotten, the One God, the Lord Jesus. 84 And beneath this ornate arch we will honor you as the progenitor of so much beneficence, O uplifted Bearer of the eternally Existent.

85 More by him, following the letters of his name

86 ¶ You are superior to the scale of earthly nature and in status higher than the more excellent cherubim, O holy one, bright nuptial chamber of Christ the Savior, who are close to

St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).

him to intercede on our behalf. (Every) knee shall bow to your honorable image. Please beseech on our behalf the One born of you, God in the flesh.

87 Ή. You are joy to innumerable parts of the world, O root of blessing to all nations and peoples, shedding on the lower realm your light that knows no shadow, emanating its glow from heaven's desirable glory, being inseparably close to the unapproachable Light. Protect those indebted to death, the servants of your Son, who with the ineffable promise of the future hope seek refuge in you.

88 Ή. You, who are of earthly substance, of life in the body, joined the worship of the heavenly ones, O Mary, who made visible to them the inscrutable image of the Son. 89 Upon seeing the development of the One who is without beginning, they proclaimed your Root and Offspring blessed. Because of this we beseech renewal of life, O Mother of the Lord, and your help for protection.

90 Ή. The (true) riches of greatness culminated today in a tangible way in you, who soared to the heights of heaven in a body that is incapable of corruption and disintegration, in the presence of which the indebtedness to death shamefully dissipated. And you were deemed a worthy resident in the land of the living, a cohabitant with your Lord, O holy Mother of the Lord. Plead for mercy always for those who sojourn in this deep abyss.

91 Ή. You hold within you the countless joys of the eternal promises of God, O fragrant garden of the Lord's plant—the branching boughs of which excel any earthly contrivance. O holy Mother of Jesus, Our Lady, please let us enter there, those who confess you.

92 Ή. We beg you with words of pleading, O pleasant token from the world. You alone are blessed and praised, overshadowed by the Father's goodwill, Bearer of the Son, recipient of the Spirit, laden with the glory of the Trinity. Please inscribe anew in the heavenly register the name given me from the immaculate womb of the (baptismal) font; 93 and erect this song of praise—composed in but few parts—as a perpetual, indestructible memorial before your holiness. I lay down my body (as) inked line(s) and my perceptible spirit (as) image of my words, 94 so that you may be glorified always with this laudation by a creature constituted of the blend of two elements—as with the laudation by your pure ministers, (the angels). 95 By virtue of your mighty entreaties, may we have boldness (to stand) without condemnation before the great and awesome tribunal of the holy Judge; 96 and may we be found worthy, in purity of life, in right confession, firm in the faith, coming together with ever-new gifts of words befitting your blessedness, to glorify you along with those who are with you in your adorable, glorious, divine, and most luminous presence, with the inseparable and inscrutable essence of the coreigning and cocreating Holy Trinity, 97 to whom befit honor and praise with endless songs, now and always, forever and ever. Amen.

[In the manuscripts, as in the *MH* edition, this encomium is followed by a colophon, “A Dedicatory Memoir” by the author, addressed to his patron Step’anos, bishop of Mokk’; see [“Appendix A 3” Recension B.](#)]

4

Encomium on the Holy Apostles

(MH 12:976–89)

1 An encomium recited in praise of the full circle of the twelve apostles, who are first in honor among the prominent heads, and to the seventy-two holy disciples of Christ.

1. 2 O universal flowers and desirable plants of the Edenic home; progeny of the first-created Adam and scions of Sion; tall trees, heaven-bound (and) fragrant, (with) far-reaching boughs, colorful, with sweet-tasting and delicious fruit. Choice branches, extending to heaven, nurtured with light and established by the Lord, beneficial and productive, well-watered and rooted, nourished and enriched by the Giver of dew; choice seed of the fruitful orchard. 3 Constantly flowing streams, ever-sparkling (and) swift; calmly flowing rivers, broad, gurgling, and ushering in the spring (season); temperers of the freezing climate and providers of resorts and shelters during severe storms, O holy and happily assembled circle of the apostolic rank. 4 I (hereby) break the silence near you and for your sakes with the string of my words, in praise of the greatness of the glory of the Most High. May (this encomium) be constructed with undisturbed tranquility throughout. 5 For God, the Existent, is confessed not by buildings but by eternally inspired sayings.

2. 6 And now, through your intercessory prayers grant grace to my song of praise, in order to proclaim loudly your honorable greatness; 7 for the beautiful hue and the decorum of your high honor are proclaimed more admirably than discourses upon lips or the power of philosophical sayings. 8 And if what I write is not remarkable (enough) to hearers, let me disclose and reveal clearly the hidden mystery of my discourse by declaring you uncreated, you who were created in time and were adopted by grace (as) children of the Existent. And although not outside of time (like) the One who is unbounded, you were nonetheless (among) the first of those who are of eternal nature, established as of the founding of time, “chosen before the creation of the world,” according to the saying of Paul. 9 For as Sion above—the foremost and preestablished mother—is free (and) born pure, so also are her firstborn and luminously spirited children foreseen from the outset of the timeless and eternal ages, registered in the Word’s book of records, sketched in the glory of that grace from above, fashioned in the benevolent Father’s shadowless light, created in greatness unequaled among us lowly beings, ordained as associates of the Savior by the laying of his hand, included among the rank of the immortal ones.

3. 10 For the gloriously renowned (and) deep mystery of the Co-creator with the Father—the incarnate Jesus by divine providence—that was foreseen and preached by the prophets was proclaimed to the ends of the world through you in a far greater way than through any of the limited means of past times. 11 Blessed are you and also admirable, O long-honored ministers, who, being in our likeness in the flesh, have been united with God. (You are) like very choice

gold, oft-purified, refined from the earth; you have no part in our evil passions of the flesh, in committing sin. You are clothed in brightness and shining like silver; spotless in life and good in deeds, pure as the expanse of the air; firm in conviction, like cast iron. You are desirable and appealing like the longed-for light; 12 for truly you were appointed as eternally bright lights, of the very nature of the shadowless Light, in order to shine brightly on us who are of the lower realm. Thus, Jesus has ordained the renewal of heaven and earth through you.

4. 13 Similarly, the mystery of the fourth day (of creation) was concealed for years; for the bountiful and magnificently shining sun in conjunction with its companion the moon and the constellations of the stars following—though devoid of sense perception yet like breathing beings reined in by the will of the boundless One—as unerring symbols of your mystery continue to illumine the creatures. 14 For in anticipation of you, they were truly stamped early on in your likeness as watchers and guardians of the earth and (as) guiding principles. 15 For the benevolent Creator's gifts and (his) creation on that day were not grazing animals or edible fish or seed-bearing plants or fruitful trees with foliage (or) food for the nourishment of the body—these things which emerge from the earth and are lost in it, but rather heavenly adornments, lanterns in the vault of the sky, ever-burning and light-giving torches.

5. 16 Now, these various symbols pertain to you, both in similitude and relationship, O suns in countless orbits, eradicators of the effects of evil, healers of rational plants, supporters of the boughs of personified trees. You who thaw those with frozen minds, who ripen unripe thoughts and supplement those wanting, 17 who benefit people and make rejoice in the Light those in utterly dark thoughts, who like stars guide and lead those misguided by the tides of the world. 18 O radiant enlighteners, sevenfold lamps, flashes of lightning that set ablaze, innumerable rays, streams of flames, instructors of men, smelters of choice (ores), crucibles of souls. 19 For you were called for such things—to carry out the will of him who called (you). 20 And having been filled with the confidence of so many spiritual gifts, and being thoroughly cleansed, you were entrusted with the keys of the dwelling of the Most High. You were made to prosper and were enriched with lordly glory. You were made divine by the grace of the Word. You were made kings by the anointing of the Spirit, distinguished princes, chief leaders, grand ancestors, caring governors, well-oriented guides, capable hunters, heavenly watchers, unwavering overseers, rightly discerning commissioners, priests of the atonement, distinguished elders. 21 To such an extent are your glorious qualifications gifted by the Lord! 22 Above all, you were deservedly united to the renowned Head, having presented your lowly members with impeccable sanctity; having become so intimate, given to edification. 23 Having crossed the chasm altogether, your lives being united with Christ, you are glorified with him. 24 For this reason, by the following petitioning words, the Only-begotten asked of the One who is his coequal in honor: "Father, I wish to have them rejoice with me, in your gifts."

6. 25 Three times four in number, associated with praiseworthy goodness, O you daring preachers to the four ends of the world, apologists for the utterly loving nature (of God) toward creatures, inspired evangelists of the gracious Commissioner. Straight and gently advancing pairs, rational and sacrificial oxen yoked together in piety—like-minded and moving wisely, tillers of the fields of the human hearts with the cross-shaped (and) mystical instrument, lifters of the font of salvation and its carriers on your shoulders to your nations. 26 For, most notably, in four groups of three, twelve in number, (you are) like the artistically cast bulls facing north

and south, east and west; these are your forerunners bearing the cross-shaped bronze basin on their shoulders in Solomon's court. [(You are) like universal overseers in ecclesiastical deliberation, ever-renewing (and) sanctifying the baptismal water 27 with which the hidden (sins) of our unseen minds are cleansed—as in the mysterious, proverbial saying about joining the old to the new, (like the wine in the wineskins), the offered animals' membranous stomachs purged from defilement, which are (symbolically) related to our souls]. 28 These are clearly and certainly befitting symbols representing your very likenesses, O divinized beings, both valiant and serene.

7. 30 O constant eradicators of the deadly and fatal venom of Satan, 29 like the snake-killing genera of young deer. You were gathered together by virtue of the fervent care of the Spirit, lover of humankind and all-creating; and you were allotted portions of the Word's choosing—as Isaiah had predicted. 31 O victors over the terribly lethal breath of the dragon, that first deceiver! 32 O mighty angels, wakeful spirits, messengers of light, gift-bearers to the Judge who cannot be bribed, distributors of grace according to the will of the uncreated One. 33 Spiritual books of the hidden mysteries of the Existent, registers of births of the human race, writing boards lined by the Lord and sealed by God. 34 Joyous feasts with gentle singing of the psalms, superior in all praiseworthy things. 35 Clothed in glory rather than in fabric, residents of heaven rather than of temples, living together with those who appear as light rather than with earthly beings, light spirits in weighty bodies, immaculate persons constituted of matter, swift fliers in spiritual wisdom, intellectually penetrating impenetrable passages, earthborn chroniclers of heavenly miracles, preachers in mortal bodies of the glory of the immortal One.

8. 36 Catchers of the demons' chief with the hook of wisdom, players with a cruel tyrant as with a young animal that could be handled, 37 they crushed the snapper's head with bare fingers rather than with shod feet. 38 Its evil counterpart was thrown into the flames of the burning fire by the mighty, clean, chosen, gifted and bestowing right hand of Paul, in the first of the allotted gentile territories where Jesus was recognized in a wondrous way because of his daring disciple. 39 As in the heavily veiled allegory of Job, the blessed one obtained the prize of victory after a bitterly long struggle, in the course of which the insufferable, excruciating and unbearable hardship (caused) by the evil one was overcome; and (the latter), being shamed as (one) deserving punishment, was driven away from his life. 40 So it will be with this one and with all his conniving associates; as when, from the hull of a ship tossed by the waves of the world, a small band of the blessed triumph over the falsifying accuser, chopping off his head with all its scheming machinations and severing his senses, nipping them off at the shoulders.

9. 41 So did the chosen and amazing Cilician who in Arabia was called to become an apostle to the Gentiles, that famed and courageous champion who through his prayers subdued the sea waves stirred up by demons. 42 And although physically he hung on to a wooden raft, afloat over the deepest depths, he triumphed in a non-physical way over the depths and those that inhabit them; and he scorned with much contempt, like David the Great, the mother of the countless (demons) that inhabit the deep. 43 And advancing with steady steps over the untrodden bottom of the sea, he cleaved its one bosom like Moses the Great; and being knowledgeable about the skill of fishers, with the symbolism of the ship he saved the souls of many sailors from drowning. 44(a) With strong chains he muzzled the jaws of the destroyer and annihilated him, in keeping with the old oracle against Edom. With the power of the life-giving

cross he reduced and dried out the destructive and deadly venom of the serpent's fangs. [44(b) This is truly conveyed through the predictive writings that were a shadow. Thus they trampled upon and broke to pieces the serpents' teeth, as those also of collaborators with extreme heretics and venomous scorpions, those empowered by deadly evil and Beliar.]

10. 45 His foremost comrade and partner, first in number and primacy, the solid Rock, the seven-word confession to his credit, the chosen and glorified in harmony with the mystical cycle of this world's beginning and end, is Cephas, 46 who was pronounced blessed by the lips of the Giver of Life, was inspired by the Father's benevolence and made wise. And moved by the Spirit of Wisdom to confess rightly, having discerned the eternal purpose for the inscrutable birth, he was deservedly blessed by the statement of the uncreated One: "Blessed are you, Simon, heir to Jonah." 47 This indescribable gift of blessedness recorded in the Gospel, in the very voice of the Creator, is bestowed on all those who join in making this same confession of faith. 48 For when we are in accord with their confession, we become partakers in (their) glory. And by (their) petitioning the Existent who became man, we become fortified by the power of their words and shielded by (their) eternal hope. For the incarnate Savior asked for the redemption of Adam's progeny, saying: "O my Father on high, I pray that just as in their case, (you bless also) those who will believe in me through their word."

11. 49 These are the real effects and the basic advantages of the manifold benefits of this blessedness: 50 participants in the life of the incarnate One, conversers with the Creator of speech, ministers doing (his) will, observers of the image of the Giver of Life, discerners of the Savior's hidden glory, renowned ones among the number of the elect, remarkable among the ranking of the fathers, witnesses to the resurrection of the dead. 51(a) Descendants from the line of Shem, the elder son of Noah, most revered and holding the primacy; impeccable in life, comparable to Melchizedek; happy children of Abraham's bosom; commendable heirs to Isaac's affection; blessed children of Israel's covenant; kin and offspring of the good news (delivered) to Judah; superior students of the Law of Moses; contemporaries present at the awaited things that were predicted. 51(b) Indomitable cubs of lions; (individuals) paired to sacrificial lambs; sheep gathered by the Lord; a company of people grouped by God; heirs to the Firstborn of the Father; brothers to the Only-begotten in glory. 52 The body of Christ is comprised of you according to the testimony of the holy prophet: Christ among you in human form, and you bound to him spiritually. 53 Thus you have been honored and glorified with much superior praise, beyond measure, 54 O fruitful (and) wonderful branches of the luscious Vine, rich in foliage, extending from the Tree of Life.

12. 55 Now, you are being celebrated by many, with such rich expressions, with joyous phrases, with marvelous, deeply profound festivities and much rejoicing. 56 For although you fell asleep with your earthly eyes closed (and) were given over to the primeval, all-receiving maternal bosom that embraces all earthborn beings, yet the yield of the seeds of your life-giving message continues to be harvested in large and endless quantities. 57 You are alive in death, immortal in the body, uncreated among created beings, and eternal among the temporal. 58 O apostles of Jesus Christ and of his Spirit; fellow warriors for the Savior's religious teaching; collaborators with the One who gathers in; reflectors of the One who appeared. 59 O glorious disciples of the Only-begotten of the Father. You are the kin and family of the Existent who is without beginning and without end, as one of you taught certain others by quoting from

one of them. 60 You were sent with deserved glory by the One who descended from the concealed bosom. Through your ordination Agabus and Timothy became prophets. From your ranks the evangelists arose: Mark, the saintly youth who was named High Wall, a disciple of the Rock; Luke, the bearer of the resplendent resurrection, teller of the story of the ascension, an Antiochian young man, a master healer of souls rather than of bodies; others from among you (were) shepherds and teachers.

13. 61 O tongues of difficult languages, manifestations of alien voices, revealers of unseen things: You spread out and increased in power, visitations, wisdom, responses, daring acts, eloquence; excelling in exposure of falsehood, as in the case of Sapphira, and in restoring life, as to Tabitha. 62 You are full of fragrance; 63 thundering loudly, being called Boanerges by the Lord. Thus you were strengthened and empowered; trampling (the evil one) under foot, unhurt, inspired, serene.

64 Guided by the shining Light from the Lantern of Life,
 (like) a handy utensil on your journey,
 pouring grace on your way and light for you—
 who differ from us earthly beings.

65 Marked for renewal and for success
 by the right hand of the Lord,
 at work against the sorrows of sickness and death,
 you triumphed by the will of the Existent.
Victorious and valiant you are,
in partnership with the powers of heaven.

66 Your feet, once at the threshold of glory,
 were led into the blessed land
 to hop in circles at the wedding (of the Lamb),
 joining the immortal ones at the altar.
You were blessed by the hand of the Almighty
on the famed day of his ascension;
twelve in number, mysterious company,
judges on that solemn day of renewal.

14. 67 Now, you have been blessed with and adored for so many endearing, admirable, venerable, and marvelous attributes: constituted of light and not of earthly substance; spiritual and not of the flesh, triumphant and not of defeat, of heavenly and not earthly life, incorruptible and not mortal, pure as the seraphim and not earthly transgressors. 68 For although you are truly men of lowly origin, yet you are equal to the angels, having abstained from the earthly preoccupations that weigh down. 69 Twelve members joined to one head—Jesus; pleasing memorials to the life-giving will of the Most High. 70 For those (preoccupied) with the flesh cannot become dwellings for God. But you are not (concerned) about the flesh; you are spiritual, having received the Spirit of God. There is a distinction between the man endowed with soul and the spiritual (man). You chose the spiritual life, not that of the flesh.

15. 71 In your lineup you resemble the twelve varied signs of the zodiac which monitor and match the elements of the earth, the cycles and stability of the year, as the poets explain. 72 For one of these (signs) indicates sacrifice: the perfect Aries; another, labor: the yoked and thrashing Taurus; (another), kingship: the ruling and mighty Leo; 73 and so forth, all twelve of them—the perfect number. 74 Twelve is the number of the parts of the world; twelve are the daytime hours; twelve are the major parts of the body; twelve are the gems on the sacred, square breastplate; twelve are the springs and the captains who drank from them; twelve are the testimonial stones taken from the bed of the Jordan; twelve is the number of stones for the altar which Elijah built to replace the torn-down foundation of the altar of sacrifice. 75 Such is the mystical number twelve, the memorial for your holy names, verified by heaven.

16. 76 Relying as I have on the crowning and renewing Holy Trinity, the Almighty Name of the Existent, I shall raise the fruitful branch of my song from the comprehensible ones to the One who is beyond reach. 77 For when the letters in each of the three designations with which we address the equally glorified, equally honored, unbounded, and unlimited Lordship are added up: Father (*Rwjp*), Son (*Ոռղի*), and Spirit (*Ռողի*), these related Three, the number twelve is obtained. 78 You have thus been constituted and indescribably verified at the highest level, by such an appealing fact; 79 kin to God and fellow citizens with the saints, tangible buildings and indestructible tabernacles, abodes of the Creator and (his) desirable dwellings.

17. 80 Speaking of the Seventy, just to digress from our words, they manifest an endlessly appealing and desirable mystery. 81 With what other words could this panegyric on the great assembly be made more effective? 82 For, following the most sacred account of the Gospel, after a purifying tour of preaching about the Lord, they returned hastily to the One who had sent them and as they stood cheerfully before him they reported on the glorious might of the name of him who had called them: the healing of sicknesses and the casting out (of demons). At that point he announced to them the reality of a greater hope, saying: “Rejoice, for your names have been written in heaven.” 83 O what a desirable and unequivocal blessedness, for God who wrote them down has himself testified, proclaiming them heirs to and children of the holy Kingdom. 84 O you who have put on God, perfect in everything, laden with countless blessings, filled with true grace, satiated with endless gifts. 85 You converted the seventy-two languages of the world to a single language spoken on your lips. You became the loving, strong links to divided nations, instructors and teachers to gracious groups, judges over countries and continents, bands of heirs to imperial crowns, sovereign rulers over lands, attractive troops of honorable lords, sanctuaries to those elected to dwell in heaven, counselors with those in high places, definite and firm substantiations of the glory of the Immortal One, partakers of the knowledge that comes from Wisdom, daring fulfillers of the commands of the Most High, stars in a row within the nuptial chamber—the church, beautiful wreathes for the adornment of Sion, the seventy palm trees of mystical Elim.

18. 86 Having written all this as part of my encomium, I shall go on to adorn my discourse of praise with further imagery. 87 For God the Word, eternal in nature, the only One born of the inexplicable and inscrutable bosom of God, becoming the Firstborn and Only-begotten of the pure and immaculate Holy Virgin, being born of his Mother without the will of an earthly father, God in his essence and human in his simplicity, unique in his constitution, has ranked you as the holy order of apostles not in vain or unnecessarily but for a great purpose. 88 You were not only

attested to by your election but also venerated by your exalted and appropriate number, factors and seals of the mystical seven tens, symbolic of the successive centuries. 89 As for the two added to the number seventy, they are symbolic of things present and things to come, of heavenly and earthly things, of body and soul, of the two tablets in the Ark of the Covenant, of the two natures represented in heaven, of the two watchful eyes of the heavenly luminaries, of Eden and this earth, of the old Law and the new dispensation.

19. 90 There are so many symbolic mysteries and representations (in you). You are not only apostles but also willful sufferers; not only confessors but also witnesses; not only tortured but also killed; not only saints but also martyrs; not only dedicated ones but also sacrificial victims; not only offered sacrifices but also revered (souls); not only honored ones but also offered up ritually; 91 offered not only physically but presented as fragrant incense in heaven—as the wise Paul declared the praise of your rank, as a pleasant and endeared flock of Christ and of his Father; desirable and honorable ones; praiseworthy and eminent; fragrant and ready for (your) crowns. 92 O remnant of the House of Jacob, children untouched by the sins of Sodom, heirs to Abraham's faith. 93 For had the Lord of Hosts not preserved you as choice children of New Sion, you would have remained under the shadow of Sinai. 94 Through your preaching he was exalted from earth to heaven, ascending with the glory of the Existent, just as out of his mercy the ineffable One came down from above.

20. 95 Now, since the inscrutable mystery of the heavenly gifts has been revealed on earth, the reality of the Trinity made known by your tongues, and the Creator proclaimed and the Son of God preached by you, we confess you not as earthly but as heavenly beings, thoroughly spiritual, dwelling in the Light; children by grace of the heavenly Father. 96 For since Israel is called “the firstborn son” in the shadowy writings of Moses, and again, “you are the children of God and of your Lord,” and also those who were formerly called “sons of God” but who intermingled with the daughters of men and were condemned, and again, “I wrote that you are ‘gods’ and children of the Most High,” 97 who (then) will doubt or question the honorable adoption of the ministers of the newly (revealed) good news? Those who beheld the Truth, the heirs of Christ, the distributors of the inscrutable Body, the coworkers in planting the image of God? 98 For their word and preaching filled the universe. 99 Like (living) messages of God’s will they extended themselves to all (his) creation; like horses of the creative Word they galloped over the turbulent waves; they restrained the rebellious dragon with the mighty reins of the Word; courageously they seized the supplies of the tyrant’s storehouse and drowned the host of the Phoenician forces in living water; they ploughed thoroughly the mind’s hardened ground and brought humankind to piety and to (fear of) death; they transformed the noxious life of earthborn beings to wholesome, pure existence; as quick messengers of the Creator they reached distant places; they measured the whole world with their feet, as if it were a narrow corridor of a house; in the custom of old, they taxed the purses of mind and heart; 100 called from among fishermen, they netted rational multitudes; emboldened by the amassed persecutors, they preached God the Crucified; having received help from among the heathen, they destroyed the deluding idols; chosen in opposition to the malpracticing physicians, they enlightened the eyes of the soul; (as) domestic servants born of slaves, they ruled over commanding lords; and having come from such lowly positions, they attained the highest grace.

21. 101 Beginning from Jerusalem, they discipled the whole world like a single obedient

youth: the pleasant, famed regions of Kedar, named after the grandson of Hagar—a son of Ishmael; the islands of the C<r>etans descended from Canaan; the full expanse of the inheritance of Shem; the fabled Gadirus along with the vast and rectangular Assyria; Rhinocorura with the straits of Persia, which belonged to the tribe of Zimran—descended from Abraham through Keturah; 102 the easternmost regions of the Parthian Medes and Arians, Medan and Midian, and the Persian hordes; Libya—below the southern bay of the Great Sea; this side of Asia with Europe; 103 three-fifths of Ethiopia by one of them [and the rest by two (or) three others]; the land of the Philistines, and Sidon [along with that of the Indians] and Tyre with the Phoenicians; 104 the Satalans and the Scythians; the Latins and the Romans with the Dalmatians and the Elamites: (nations) of the north mixed with those of the east, where their message and tradition were well received. 105 For God expanded Japheth in accordance with Noah's prophecy and made him "dwell in the house of Shem"; that is, by giving him a place in the apostles' allotment. For as kin to beloved Shem they shepherded Japheth beneath their caring arms.

22. 106 Thus they hastened on foot, enduring hardships, exhausted in sweat, crossing the broad and wide expanse of the earth's surface to reach the Greeks and the Barbarians, those who have not heard the life-giving name of Jesus, those who have heard neither of the prophets nor of their messages. 107 And with openness of mind and with the clear flash of lightning as it were, they enlightened all creatures to the uttermost. 108 And lifting the tribes of the earth's nations out of the darkness of idolatry into glory, they presented them to the Savior of All, redeemed and set free—like spotless progeny of the immaculate womb of the font and impeccable heirs. 109 And more like children than servants of the Bearer of God, the mother of Jesus, they had a part in her pure life by worthily attending to her light-borne body at its renowned rest, having proclaimed to all the God born visibly of her. 110 Through him, and long thereafter, by indescribable miracles they purged away the deadly ailments from people; they doubly enlightened the eyes' vision once blinded; they restored to healthy life the withered members of sickly bodies; they raised the dead, restoring them to life and to true redemption. With the wind of God's wrathful will they chased to the uttermost the invisible, demonic forces of evil. They opened up for us earthborn beings the pathways leading to the entries of the heavenly mansions. The heathen on the left they assigned to the right. They restrained with authoritative voice the boldness of the Jews. They showed the beautiful light on Moses' face to be shadow. They kept the sharp rebuke of the heavenly wrath away from the earthly creatures. 111 And after they were filled with all these things and were (pronounced) blessed, they were offered up as sacrificial gifts upon the altar on high and were registered, confirmed in the heavenly book. 112 And with their dried bones they continue to be a means of redemption to us who are living. And they proclaim loudly the rewards of the Savior's triumphant and incorruptible death: baptism, propitiation, and the renewing resurrection.

23. 113 They are our forebears, our parents who begot us through the holy font, the pedagogues of our learning, teachers to us who are being discipled, our instructors in good confession, the founders of the holy church, the conveyors of true worship, the prodders in real piety, the ordainers of our priesthood—which they received from Christ and passed on to us, the faithful covenanters, the foremost witnesses to our order established by God. 114 Through their acceptable and pleasing entreaties and prayers may we also receive our share of

redemption from God's providential and compassionate mercy; may our hands be strengthened with grace, healings, (and) the distribution of the gift of life. 115 Because of them (and) with them we have been redeemed, freed, and justified by the same faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and eternal praise in ceaseless songs, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.

5

Encomium on Saint James of Nisibis: A Discourse of Praise (MH 12:990–1005)

1 *To the great and blessed St. James, patriarch of the city of Nisibis, bishop and overseer of the ancient and heaven-like see.*

1. 2 Rise up O spiritual, appealing, personified, incensed, and mystical Sion, heavenly sanctuary, luminous and most glorious, victor over Sinai that ushered in the mutable, rickety, and shadowy Law, that despoils and does not enhance. 3 (You are) built upon the crossing from the lowly to the exalted, from the killing to the life-giving, from the transient to the eternal, from the earthly to the heavenly, from the corruptible letter to the immortal spirit, from the enslaving (and) divisive Law to the lordly, unifying, and love-conveying Gospel, from a this-worldly covenant to a heavenly treaty. 4 Therefore, leap with everlasting joy, being the precursor of the shadowless, adorable, and celebrated (place) of the blessed ones, where the wedding party goes on without earthly limitations and altogether different from the ordinary; 5 concealed from the physical eyes, yet measurably discernible through the intellect. 6 So inadequate are my descriptive words when speaking of this unfathomable, hidden mystery; how small, dense, and narrow (my) line in relation to that broad circle; (my) physical joints in relation to the divine existence; (my) earthly substance in relation to the seraph singing the "Sanctus"; (my) mortal nature in relation to the heaven-born. 7 Although the wonderful, arched abode of the firstborn is highly esteemed, yet the children of light are acknowledged to be higher.

2. 8 I will praise one of them here, so that you will come to know and to have a close look at the inner mystery surrounding him. Yet my lengthy composition in honor of Saint James, the long strands of my descriptive words on this champion, are too weak even when pulled together. 9 Therefore, to speak of him who is kin to those most noble is tantamount to memorializing the whole company of the blessed ones who dwell in the Light, who have come to inherit heaven and who are enthroned in the heights.

3. 10 Just as it is proper to place the Morning Star at the beginning of the row of stars, or in a string of beads the most precious and expensive of the gems, or among people the wisest of men, or the gold of Sapphire or the brilliantly shining diamond among the weightier and most

St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).

beautiful materials, or Sion among the lofty mountains, or Jerusalem among the

Appendices

Appendix A

Gregory of Narek's Colophons

1. *Colophon in a Manuscript of His Father's Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*

By God's grace this Book of the Commentary was achieved by the hand of Khosrov, bishop of Andzewats'ik', a strict follower of God's commandments. It is improper for us to praise him, lest you be appalled by it; for he is my father according to the flesh. I am unworthy to be called his son, not even his hired servant—according to what is written. But may those who implore for him, those attentive in heart (and) mind, understand what he wrote. They ought to reciprocate through prayer for what has been given them in this. And may God the bestower of all things grant his very own gift to you who entreat. Yet I, Grigor, find myself overly embarrassed and troubled, a defaulter from the commandments of the Holy Scriptures.

Now, the first copy of this sacred book was achieved by the hand of Sahak, son of Lord Khosrov, the commentator of the same sacred book, in 399 of Armenian reckoning (= AD 950).

2. *Colophon to Commentary on Song of Songs*

1 In 426 of Armenian reckoning (= AD 977), I, the priest Gregory of Narek, son of Lord Khosrov, bishop of Andzewats'ik', was compelled by the God-loving and Christ-crowned sovereign Gurgēn (co-reg. with brothers, 977–1003), son of King Abusahl Hamazasp (reg. 958–968), to interpret the awesome words of Solomon and to explicate the deep, hidden things that are in them, that are pleasant to hear. 2 For he speaks about a groom and a bride, as well as about breasts and red lips, beautiful cheeks and charming eyes, and about a sister and a nephew and maidens, and all the other related words that have to do with passion and throbbing hearts, the conjugal union of generative love. Hearing these, people with uncomprehending minds have understood them in various terms.

3 Consequently, the king, out of concern for this, sent to me once and again. At that (point) I decided not to object, for I recognized that his command was pleasing to God, and at his command, I explicated the Song of Songs. 4 Though the task was greater than myself, I accepted it for fear of disobedience—lest the royal command be left unfulfilled. 5 This was, nonetheless, a great audacity on my part, and worthy of criticism by all; and I might well have anticipated chastisement from divine quarters. 6 But (having considered the matter) from both divine and human quarters, I opted for the royal command. I think I am justified. For it is Christ's own commandment to be obedient to kings as to God. Whoever obeys, God counts him St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).

(obedient) to him; and whoever is found to be disobedient, he counts that also (as disobedience) to him. 7 So I beg you, studious readers, do not heap blame on me for undertaking a task that was greater than my worth. 8 For considering the One who demands strict accounting, I could not find myself (as) being done with. Rather, hoping in the Holy Spirit, I came to realize that he would not ignore requests made of him. I began to seek with prayer and tears the help of him who, looking upon my unworthiness and upon the earnest desire of the one who had made the request, opened my mouth to make these brief remarks—to the glory of Christ. Amen.

3. *Colophon to Encomium on the Holy Virgin*

Recension A

A Dedicatory Memoir

By the Very Same Vardapet Overflowing with the Spirit Written in Response to the Blessed and Gracious Lord Step'anos

1 [1] O chosen and holy overseer, bearer of the grace of the Existent and recipient of his Spirit:

Pursuant to the kindly expressed wish by your extreme serenity, and in keeping with the letter written by you, I composed (and) arranged these words of panegyrical composition for your highness. 2 [2] And I sketched the codex beautifully, with its layout over the field of glossy-white (and) illuminated sheet(s). By committing myself earnestly to the task (with) my lips (attached) to the pen (like) a breathless speaker, making progress without moving, uttering (words) inaudibly, recounting (things) assiduously, (like) a preacher who does not stumble, I erected a memorial [3] for the desirable name by which you are called, O Lord Step'anos, keen overseer of the Mountain of Mokk', [4] so that (you) will remain associated for countless days and thousands of years with this my small book of little significance. 3 [5] I, Grigor, the least of teachers and the youngest of philologists, son of the fraternal niece of the father of Anania, the spiritual and intellectual philosopher much renowned for his pious life, 4 [6] do dedicate to your churches this gift of well-desired words. 5 Now, may you savor it along with your perpetual, spiritual joy of prayer. [7] And when you receive it, add it to the beautiful collection of your heavenly treasures of great value, the array of diverse writings. 6 [8] And do inscribe my humble name in a memorial in the vestibular chamber of your heart. At your God-dwelt (and) holy altar, before the Creator-receiving table, (remember) anew the two of us: myself and my elder brother, the beloved Yovhannēs by name, of the same order, who is a wise sage and in everything more knowledgeable (than I)—along with the songwriter Seb, called (the) Pamphylia(n). 7 [9] And may we be (deemed) personally present with you at all times, as your soul is ever-present with us through the bond of the intellect, that choice smelter of the common ore, through inseparable and warm thoughts, based on unwavering thoughtfulness, entrenched and rooted in Our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

8 [10] Since I am unfamiliar with your desirable location and your holy altars, not having seen (them), please excuse the lack of perfection or the shortcomings in the composition of this St. Gregory of Narek, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies, and Encomia*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016).

writing.

[9 [11] O you, who encounter this beautiful book of spiritual and grace-filled wisdom, please remember me, a miserable scribe, and my parents and brothers before the Lord, for the love of Christ who is everyone's hope.]

Recension B

A Dedicatory Memoir

By the Very Same Vardapet Overflowing with the Spirit Written in Response to the Blessed and Gracious Lord Step'anos

1 O chosen and holy overseer, bearer of the grace of the Existent and recipient of his Spirit:

Pursuant to the kindly expressed wish by your extreme serenity, and in keeping with the letter written by you, I composed (and) arranged this panegyrical history and the encomiastic discourses. 2 For this beautifully sketched codex in its layout over the field of glossy-white (and) illumined sheet(s), I committed myself earnestly to the task (with) my lips (attached) to the pen—(like) a breathless speaker, making progress without moving, uttering (words) inaudibly, recounting (things) assiduously, (like) a preacher who does not stumble. 3 With it I erected a memorial for the perpetual remembrance of the desirable name by which you are called, O Lord Step'anos, keen overseer of the Mountain of Mokk', 4 so that you will remain associated for countless days and thousands of years with this my small book of little significance. 5 I, Grigor, the least of teachers and the youngest of philologists, son of the fraternal niece of the father of Anania, the spiritual and intellectual philosopher renowned and praised for his pious life, 6 do dedicate to your churches this gift of well-desired words, the fruit of which may you savor with relished enjoyment, along with the perpetual, spiritual joy of prayer. 7 And when you receive it, add it to the beautiful collection of your heavenly treasures of great value, the array of diverse writings. 8 Moreover, do inscribe my humble name in a memorial in the vestibular chamber of your loving heart. Think of us always at your God-dwelt (and) holy altar, before the Creator-receiving table, of me and of my elder brother, the beloved Yovhannēs by name, of the same order, who in everything is more knowledgeable than I, and a wise sage. 9 And may we be (deemed) personally present with you at all times, as your soul is ever-present with us through the bond of the intellect, that choice smelter of the common ore, through inseparable and warm, cordial thoughts, based on unwavering thoughtfulness, entrenched and rooted in Our Lord, in Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

10 Now, since I am unfamiliar with your desirable location and your sacred altars, not having seen (them), please excuse the lack of perfection or the shortcomings in the composition of this writing.

[11 And help me, a sufferer, with (your) prayers, while I linger in reading and allocating no little time for labor.]

4. Colophon to Book of Lamentation

1 So it is with the passing of time since the dawn of creation: it goes on in accordance with the fully rounded, beautifully glistening, radiant light-bearing, day-measuring, darkness-dispelling, (and) watchful eye of the sun accumulating, tallying, (and) piling up the passing years into centuries along the wheezing yet ever-renewed path of eternity.

At the conclusion of the ninth jubilee and the commencement of the tenth according to the calendar of the House of Japheth (450–451 of the Armenian era = AD 1001–1002), three years after his arrival in the north-eastern regions, the victorious and great Roman Emperor Basil (II, reg. 976–1025) spread out and methodically and indiscriminately expanded on all fronts, raising up massive granite monuments wherever he laid his hand and (laying down) impenetrable, long boundaries. Without blinking an eye, he proceeded left and right, appropriating (and) accumulating in his bosom territories of domains of many lands.

2 During the peaceful interval (of three years), when the enemies of the church were pushed to the brink, I planned, structured, arranged, collected, inscribed, compiled, amplified, established in detail, and assembled into one the many facets of this sacred book. I, Gregory, a clerical priest, the least of poets and lowest of teachers, working with my blessed brother named Yovhannēs, a monk of the noble and honorable brotherhood of Narek, being not only one rational body, one image formed of two related persons initiated in the same way of life, but also one in inspiration, one in faith, in shared honor, in thought; four eyes in the same pathway, seeing the same mystic vision.

3 Now, we ask you who partake of this table with its various and scrumptious offerings, to remember us in just prayers and worthy supplications, in pure love and kind thoughts, that you be registered in the book of life in heaven above.

Appendix B

Gregory of Narek's Biography by Nersēs of Lambron (1153–1198)

Our holy father, the priest and cleric full of God's grace, Gregory, was from the monastery of Narek in Armenia, from the province of Vaspurakan, from the time of the Byzantine emperors Basil (II, reg. 976–1025) and Constantine (VII, reg. 945–959) who ruled over the land of Armenia, while the pious Senek'erim of the Artsrunis was king of Vaspurakan in 432 of the Armenian Era (= AD 983 [co-reg. with his brothers, 977–1003, sole reg. 1003–1021]), during the patriarchate of Lord Vahan (in office 965–972).

He was the son of Khosrov, bishop of Andzevats'ik', and of the daughter of the paternal uncle of Anania, the diligent tutor and abbot of the monastery of Narek. This blessed Gregory, together with his elder brother, whose name was Yovhannēs, were nurtured and instructed in accordance with the Holy Scriptures ever since childhood. And when his brother died, Gregory was left alone, striving tirelessly in virtuous deeds and arduous study. He thus became an abode for the Holy Spirit and excelled in the grace of learning.

Upon the request of pious brothers, he undertook the writing of *Prayers* he had recited in ninety-five addresses. In addition to these we have the following discourses by the blessed one: *History of the Life-giving Cross Brought from Constantinople to Armenia, Gifted by the Kings to the Monastery of Aparank'*. In keeping with the said mystery, and befitting the same, is the *Encomium on the Holy Cross*, in alphabetic arrangement. Following this, the *Praise to the Holy Bearer of God*, which he mentions in this very book; also the *Encomium on the Assembly of the Apostles*, along with the *Praise to Saint James, Bishop of Nisibis*. We also have his short *Commentary on the Song of Songs*; also his *Litanies* for the solemn feasts: "For the Holy Spirit," "For the Cross," and "For the Church." And with that number of addresses in the book of *Prayers* are those "On the Chime" and "On the Holy and Sanctifying Chrism."

He left these for the church of Christ as his living memorial; and he departed to the eternal city of the ever-living, to which he was translated from here, not having completed the course of his life here, having died while still young in age. His venerable body lies in the same monastery of Narek, adjoining the Church of Saint Sandukht.

O Christ, accept his prayers for which we ask with burning hearts, the conciliatory intercession of my holy father; and glory to you forever. Amen.

Appendix C

Reason for Anathematizing Khosrov, Bishop of Andzewats'ik', by Lord Anania (of Mokk'), Catholicos of the Armenians

1 The words of the divine oracles awaken us yet again to settle, albeit reluctantly, an issue that has risen in our days. 2 As it was said beforehand, "Listen, all nations of the earth" ([Ps 48:2](#)), so also it says, "Listen, elders, and inform your children should your days ever witness the same evil that has been uttered by Satan—the deceiver of old—[and] recur insidiously upon the tongues of the upright" (paraphrasing [Joel 1:2–3](#)). The supernatural voice anticipated our situation so long ago. Nine hundred years ago the Holy Spirit predicted this through the divinely inspired Paul who upheld his stewardship of God's countless mysteries in the verse, "Are you putting Christ to the test who speaks to you through me?" ([2 Cor 13:3](#)). 3 Surely, this was no test, but the whole truth, since all his Spirit-given teachings have been fully realized: some in his lifetime, others since then, and others in our days. This applies to us: "In later times some will abandon the faith and contemplate demonic error" ([1 Tim 4:1](#)). And again, "Liars will rise among you to lure their followers to pursue untrue fables" ([Acts 20:30](#)). 4 "They, trained by constant practice in devising fables contrary to the truth, will not cease attacking the word of right doctrine established by God. 5 They are utterly perverse and always unjust; disobedient, spiteful, ungrateful children, argumentative with the father of faith; they turned their backs on the divine imperative" (paraphrasing [2 Tim 3:1–2, 8b](#)).

6 "They arose from us, but were not from our number" ([1 John 2:19](#)). Although physically they are of our hue, grown from and nurtured beneath the good plant, in substance they

adhered to evil counsel and sucked its toxic milk which does not nourish (*pararē*) the palate, but chokes (*parurē*) the soul. Far from being a syrup sweet to the taste, it is disgusting and intolerably bitter, full of the deadly venom of the weed-sowing serpent. 7 As when, early on, he professed his teaching with ostensible, flattering rhetoric to the inexperienced ones, through the twin portals of the head—their hearing, convincing them by wily deceit of the supposed deification. He thus brought about their loss of what they already possessed and banishment from the bosom of their divinely nourished posts. The same evil deceit has now, in our time, penetrated the children of rebellion and has made them say despicable words, draw inappropriate comparisons, and speak what is unseemly.

8 In the year 403 (of the Armenian Era = AD 954), the fourteenth of my overseeing office, one of our bishops named Khosrov, to whom I had entrusted the see of Andzewatsik', a modest and learned man, advanced in his graying years, suddenly, as if prompted by an evil spirit, without any provocation, began to employ a pronounced dialect in keeping with the Greek language, calling Sunday (*Kirakē*) *Kiwřiakē* and Jerusalem (*Erusaghēm*) *Eřusaghēm*, and others like these that lend themselves to such a dialect. 9 Subsequently, he came up with other ridiculous absurdities. 10 He ordered boys' heads to be shaved until their beard grew in accordance with the term "brave" (*ktrich*); and thereafter to let their hair grow long in plaits (*manil*) to the shank, in accordance with the term "youth" (*manuk*). 11 This continued for a while, and then he introduced the trash of his absurdities into the church.

12 With regard to the cross of Christ, he said this: "The cross blessed by priests and that unblessed are equally venerable; I consider the blessing superfluous." 13 These things we forgave him. 14 He then started to propagate a new heresy and infiltrate it into God's church. 15 He said: "Angels and archangels enjoyed equal honor and glory; accordingly, the patriarch and bishop shared equal glory and honor," citing this text as proof: " 'They call this person from the office of psalmodist to that of deacon, and that person from the diaconate to the office of priesthood.' So far one can rise in office." 16 He went on to add: "Yet when they call this person from the priesthood to the episcopal throne, this is no longer an office; behold, he has been elevated to a throne. 17 And when they call that person from the episcopacy to the patriarchal throne, there is no further nomenclature. There is therefore one throne and one honor for the patriarch and bishop." 18 Moreover, the second calling, he maintained, was an abrogation of the first and not an added honor to the patriarchate.

19 He continued to pile similar views to the same effect, and although I pleaded with him many times to turn from those unorthodox, erroneous thoughts, even imploring him with tears, he refused to be corrected. 20 Thus, I was compelled at God's command to strike with the fiery sword and set his portion with the hypocrites. He bore this as his recompense, perdition in store in the world to come, for he did not repent before his last breath. 21 We were therefore constrained to write this as a lasting testament to future generations to beware of such wild speculations and rightly consider the implications for the life to come; for "Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" ([Matt 6:34](#)).

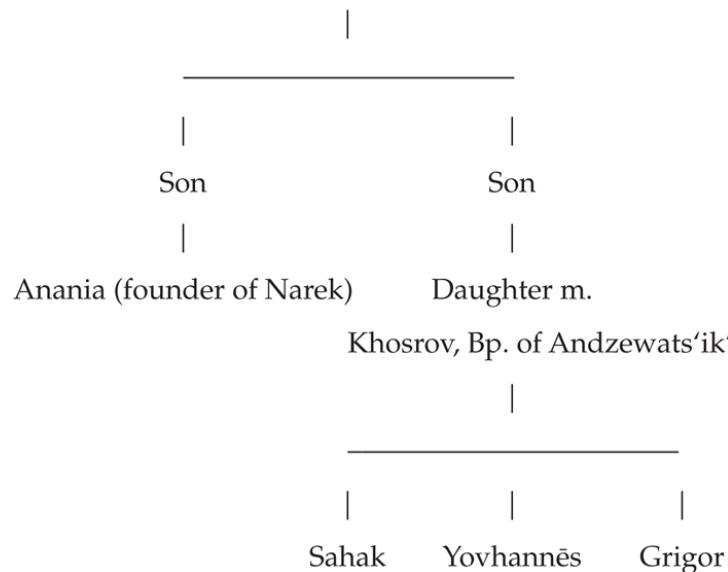
Genealogical Tables

Genealogical Table A

Narekats'i and His Kin

(ca. AD 900–1000)

(anonymous)



Genealogical Table B

Bishops of the District of Mokk'

(ca. AD 950–1000)

(anonymous)

|

| |

Bishop David Son

|

| |

Anonymous bearer of relics Daughter

|

Bishop Step'anos

(patron of Gregory)

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FROM THE DEPTHS OF THE HEART

Annotated Translation of the
Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek

Abraham Terian

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From the Depths of the Heart

Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek



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In memory of

*Hrachya Tamrazyan
(1953–2016)*

*Director of the Matenadaran
Mashtots' Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (2007–2016)
Yerevan, Armenia*

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Transcription of Armenian

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<i>u</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>q</i>	<i>η</i>	<i>t̄</i>	<i>ɥ</i>	<i>t̄</i>	<i>n̄</i>	<i>p̄</i>	<i>d̄</i>
a	b	g	d	e	z	ē	ě	t̄'	zh
<i>h</i>	<i>l</i>	<i>ħu</i>	<i>ð</i>	<i>ly</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>ħ</i>	<i>η</i>	<i>ħ</i>	<i>ħ</i>
i	l	kh	ts	k	h	dz	gh	ch	m
<i>j</i>	<i>ū</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ɛ</i>	<i>uy</i>	<i>ɿ</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>yl</i>
y	n	sh	o	ch̄'	p	j	r̄	s	v
<i>un</i>	<i>n̄</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>l̄</i>	<i>ħh̄</i>	<i>p̄</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>ɸ</i>	<i>n̄l̄</i>	<i>l̄</i>
t	r	ts̄'	w	p̄'	k̄'	ō	f	u	ew

Preface

The papal proclamation of April 12, 2015, declaring St. Gregory of Narek a Doctor of the Universal Church has lately created a profound and widespread interest in our saint. His prominence rests primarily on his prayers, each of which opens with the epigraph “Speaking with God from the depths of the heart.” Their inherent beauty in the native tongue and their depth of thought and feeling have endeared *Surb Grigor Narekats’i* to his Armenian readers for a millennium. I have chanted some of these prayers on my knees as a teenager at St. James in Old Jerusalem and have received copies of the prayer book as prizes at the local Holy Translators’ School (*Srbots’ T’arkmanch’ats’ Varzharan*). Growing up with them and having cherished them for decades, I sometimes felt destined to translate them someday (though I do not claim to be a holy translator), more so after becoming a theologian and teaching Armenian theology for years.

Much has been written about Gregory’s highly complex yet rhythmically gripping language.

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

Rendering his prayer book literally and coherently, with as little loss of the original beauty as possible, has been challenging. The text is not incomprehensible, and it is not difficult to follow. Complexities are exegetically and theologically explicable and the syntactical difficulties are grammatically soluble. Of course, these are relative statements. For one who has spent decades with the most difficult texts in Classical Armenian, especially those attributed to the Hellenizing School of translators and authors of the sixth through the eighth centuries, these prayers offer a heavenly respite in every sense of the word. Given this lifetime of preparation, I here offer the English reader what Gregory offered to Christ, his best—albeit with the inevitable loss of his entralling language.

I dedicate this translation to the memory of Hrachya Tamrazyan, the late director of the Mashtots' Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, the Matenadaran. More than any other devotee to medieval Armenian literature in our generation, he promulgated the study of the works of Gregory, beginning with the textual and historical basics, resulting in the latest published texts of Gregory's works (in the *Matenagirk' Hayots'* series), including the text translated here and others by local contemporaries of the saint. The latter works were grouped and studied by him as "the School of Narek," culminating in numerous publications, including a trilogy by the title *Gregory of Narek and the School of Narek* (the last volume of which was edited posthumously by his daughter, Arusyak Tamrazyan, a Narekats'i scholar in her own right). Among the various other indicators of his devotion to the discipline is his initiation of the annual scholarly conferences dedicated to the study of Gregory of Narek's works, held at the Matenadaran since 2015.

I want to express my thanks particularly to Sara, my wife of fifty-five years and counting, the only reader of this translation before leaving my desk. She has always been the first reader of my works and her critical observations have helped improve them all. Tom Samuelian, the first English translator of the complete prayer book, whose dynamic translation continues to inspire many a reader—including me—paved the way for this, more literal and annotated translation. For its present state, a debt of a very real nature is owed to the Liturgical Press editorial and production teams, especially to Colleen Stiller, Stephanie Lancour, Julie Surma, and Barry Hudock. Last but not least, I thank Hans Christofferson, whose enthusiastic support of my previous rendition, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek* (2016), led to this publication of the saint's *magnum opus*.

May the saint's prayer for those who help disseminate his prayer book (Prayer [26.4](#)) be answered.

AT

February 27, 2021
Feast of St. Gregory of Narek

Introduction

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The desire to learn more about the tenth-century Armenian saint and his works grew exponentially with the apostolic letter of Pope Francis, issued on April 12, 2015, declaring St. Gregory of Narek (ca. 945–1003) a Doctor of the Universal Church. In general, the popular and scholarly appreciation of the saint hinges on his book of penitential prayers, traditionally titled *Book of Lamentation* (Armenian, *Matean Oghbergut'ean*, a derivative title, as we shall see), composed in the closing years of his life. Fortunately, the book is available in several Western-language translations, in part and in whole, though none as literal as this translation, which also maintains—as far as possible—the likely form of the original composition in both verse and poetic prose.

As a late-tenth-century author, Gregory stands at the juncture between the Greek and Latin mystics of the Early Middle Ages and the better-known mystics of the High Middle Ages. But more than having his place in this chronological drift, he brings an added dimension from his Armenian spiritual environment that was influenced by Syriac spirituality. Yet in his higher and deeper reaches of thought, in both ascent for union with God and descent into the depths of human experience, he often seems to cross the hyperbolic borderline. In his utterances of remorseful feelings and reflections on biblical accounts, there is hardly a sentiment he has not expressed. He could not speak from the depths of the heart without being there, nor could he reflect on Scripture without placing himself in every biblical scene he describes, nor could he speak about God without being with him. In his *lectio divina*, the passage that is the subject of his prayer is seldom contemplated apart from others, resulting in a number of biblical imageries employed and presented simultaneously, in clusters, and applied to himself.

Gregory's spiritual heritage has a rich history. Along with works by the Cappadocian fathers (Sts. Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianos/the Theologian, and Gregory of Nyssa), Armenian writers were deeply influenced by the works of monastic theologians of the fourth century, like Ephrem Syrus and Evagrius Ponticus, a number of whose works were translated as of the fifth century. For these fathers of the church, the Psalter was God's provision of life-changing words, so also for Gregory: the Psalms were the cherished exemplars of prayer. He mentions David by name thirty-four times and as Psalmist thirteen times, and the Psalms are specified twenty-one times in the text, beside the many more allusions to the Psalms and their echoes throughout. As a monk following the routine of the daily services, Gregory would have the Psalms ringing in his ears all day long. More than any of the above, however, it is his understanding of the significance of the work of Christ, the Gospel story as it culminates in the passion narrative, that constitutes the source of his inspiration in writing the prayers; they are addressed to Christ. In many of them—and early on—he reflects on the recurring Eucharist as a constant reminder of God's utmost love for humankind, and in a central prayer he responds to Christ's eucharistic prayer in [John 17](#): “When pondering with grateful praise the grace of this new salvation, I am dumbfounded by its infinite breadth, left speechless by it. Cogitating the endless favors from your Light, from you to one entrenched in misery like me, I will implore you with your own prayer, fitting it into the substance of my words, the very letters comprising this book of laments” (Prayer [53.2](#)). The centrality of the Eucharist in the prayer book is unmistakable, so also the author's sacramental theology, as will be demonstrated in this introduction.

The spiritual appeal of Gregory's prayers brought about a partial publication in the relatively early years of Armenian printing, thanks to the efforts of Oskan Erewants'i, in Marseilles, in

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1673. Scholarly rivalries between the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople and the burgeoning Venetian Mekhitharists over the next two centuries gave rise to a number of publications of the text of Gregory's works, in part and in whole. The 1701–2 Constantinopolitan edition of the prayer book inspired an extensive commentary by the Patriarch Yakob Nalian. The year 1827 saw the publication of the entire corpus by the Venetian Mekhitharists (and again in 1840) with a considerable commentary on the book by Father Gabriēl Awetik'ian. By 1875 there were no less than fifty printings of the prayer book. His mystic poetry gave new impetus to secular Armenian poetry during the nationalism awakened in nineteenth-century Constantinople, earning Gregory such accolades as "the foremost Armenian author of all times," "the most sacred name in Armenian letters," and so on. In the Soviet era the corpus of his writings was viewed as primarily poetry rather than essentially prayer, thus justifying the publication of a critical text of the book, the first such edition, sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR. The latter edition, along with a more definitive text of Gregory's other works—thanks to newly collated manuscripts at the Matenadaran—appeared in volumes 12 (2008) and 10 (2009) in the ongoing series *Matenagirk' Hayots'* ("Armenian Classical Authors"), began in 2003 under the patronage of the Lisbon-based Gulbenkian Foundation and the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia. The translation provided here is based on this critical text.

Since I have provided a fair introduction to St. Gregory of Narek in the previous volume containing his festal works, and a comprehensive introduction to our author has appeared since then, I shall devote the better part of this introduction to the author's *magnum opus*, his prayer book translated and annotated within these covers. Still, a short review of Gregory's life and thought is essential to keep his prayers in historical and theological perspective—before considering them from a literary perspective.

The Life and Times of Gregory

Gregory was the third and youngest son of Khosrov, later bishop of the Province of Andzewats'ik' (d. ca. 960), the southwestern region of the Kingdom of Vaspurakan that once surrounded Lake Van, and author of two liturgical texts, *Exposition of the Daily Office* (the Breviary or Book of Hours, Arm. *Zhamagirk'*) and *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* (the Missal, Arm. *Pataragamatoyts'*). As a widower around the year 950, Khosrov received episcopal ordination and turned his two younger sons, Hovhannēs (John) and Grigor (Gregory), over to the care of a paternal cousin of his deceased wife, the abbot Anania of Narek, founder of the monastery in 935 near the southernmost shore of Lake Van. The eldest son, Sahak, stayed with Khosrov as his assistant. Gregory spent his entire adult life at the monastery of Narek, in what was the Province of Rēshunik' within the Kingdom of Vaspurakan. Consequently, in Armenian he is invariably called Narekats'i, after the place with which he has always been associated; and the loconym Narek has become a cognomen for the prayer book translated here. The Monastery of Narek was still in existence during the Armenian Genocide of 1915 but was demolished soon thereafter. Some residential caves, once monastic cells, may still be visited in and around the village of Narek, Nerik in Kurdish, renamed Yemişlik in Turkey.

Our knowledge about the family derives mostly from four colophons by Gregory himself,

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transmitted by subsequent scribes. The first was appended to a manuscript of his father's liturgical works, copied by Sahak and owned by Gregory (where Khosrov's title "Lord Bishop of Andzewats'ik'" is given with the date of completion, 950), and the others were appended to his own works. Apart from the information gathered from these colophons and the "inner man" that emerges from the prayers, we know little about Gregory's life. Some sparse, supplementary information may be gathered from his standard monastic education and the writings of his kin, especially the abbot Anania. His first eulogizer, Nersēs of Lambron (1153–98; Bishop of Tarsus from 1175), simply repeats the colophonic information in a colophon of his own, in a manuscript of the prayers copied for him in 1173 (Matenadaran no. 1568). Nersēs shows profound appreciation for Gregory's book of prayers and for his hymns or odes and litanies, which seem to have been popularized during the pontificate of Nersēs's great uncle, Catholicos Nersēs IV of Klay (in office 1166–73), known as "the Gracious" for his passionate ecclesiastical writings and pioneering ecumenical endeavors. No medieval Armenian writer was more influenced by Gregory than Catholicos Nersēs, who probably was the first to have certain of our author's prayers and hymns included in liturgical books. Were it not for this initial interest in Gregory's works, they could have been forever lost.

Further autobiographical remarks may be gleaned from this book of prayers, where Gregory remarks about his family in Prayer [51.1](#) (lines 9–14). When contemplating [Psalm 146:3](#), on not putting one's trust in human beings, to whom it is but vain to cry out, he refers rhetorically to his brother(s) and parents: "To a blood brother, who is himself longing for serenity? To my earthly father, whose care diminished with his dwindling days? To my mother, who suffered labor pains, whose compassion ceased with her departure from this life?" However, in his colophon to the prayer book (see translation at the end of this volume), Gregory expresses deep gratitude to his brother Hovhannēs, who succeeded Anania as abbot of Narek. His gratitude to the abbot Anania is equally profound, as another colophon shows. Gregory describes him as the spiritual and intellectual philosopher much renowned for his pious life. The abbot's surviving works bear witness to this. Collectively, they have a curricular character, revealing much of the content of his teaching. They include exhortative discourses on the priesthood, humility, transience (in verse), and careful administration of the sacraments; treatises on penitence with tears (in prosaic verse) and on morals in ascetic life; theological essays and a panegyric in praise of the universal church, defined in the fragmentary denunciation of the heretical agitators of the time, the T'ondrakeans.

Of the sweeping and often demonizing denunciations by the opponents of the T'ondrakeans, whose name in Greek transliteration—with the common mutation of vowels—yields *Theandrikoi* ("divine men"), one thing is certain: they were charismatics who disdained the sacraments and, by implication, the church where the sacraments are administered. This is borne by Anania's fragmentary work and by Gregory's *Letter to the Admirable and Prominent Brotherhood of Kchaw*, warning about these infiltrating heretics. What we gather about them especially from Gregory, including Prayer [72](#) with its passionate counsel to monks who considered themselves sinless and divine, is our best lead toward identifying the T'ondrakeans with aberrant hesychasts, believers in experiencing *theosis* in the extreme. For them experiential knowledge of God and union with him is attainable through solitary, uninterrupted prayer, and in this path of transcendence the significance of the church

and of the sacraments therein was diminished. For Gregory, the more intimate union with God is experienced through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. It is also noteworthy that Prayer [72](#) anticipates Gregory's lengthy exaltation of the church in Prayer [75](#), where at the transition to ecclesiology in Section [7](#), some manuscripts have in the margin "Against the T'ondrakeans." Attested as subheading in other manuscripts, these marginalia show that the implications of the message for the heretics known to scorn the church, the locus for the *sacramentum caritatis*, was readily recognizable.

The intellectual and spiritual environment that nurtured the formation of Gregory is best described as "the School of Narek," the gate to which in modern scholarship was opened by H. T'amrazyan, thanks to his editing and probing the works of all the savants associated with the Monastery of Narek in the tenth century. By placing Gregory's works in their immediate context, the more direct, local influence became apparent. Anania's writings show the strong impact they had on Gregory, whose theological education is amply displayed in his early works and amplified with deeper spirituality in his later writings. The literary and spiritual riches at Narek make it one of the most distinguished monastic centers in tenth-century Armenia.

Gregory refers to himself as a teacher, using the Hebrew equivalent of the title, *rabbi* (Prayer [72.4](#)). However, in his usual, self-deprecating way, he acknowledges: "For though I was indeed called by some of the highest names, yet the worst aspects of these define me" (Prayer [56.1](#)). The understatement is repeated in his colophon to the book, "I, Gregory, a clerical priest, the least of poets and lowest of teachers." Be that as it may, there are scattered indicators in the prayers of his role as a teacher. "Make the dawn of that unobsured miracle, the knowledge of your divinity, shine within me again, O Mighty One, to be worthy to do and teach and be an example of goodness to god-loving listeners" (Prayer [34.2](#)). In the immediately following lines he states, "As for the creedal statement about the consubstantial Holy Trinity, the rule of life and the grace of election, this is what I taught" (Prayer [35.1](#)). While in context these could be prayers for divine help in delivering the homily as part of the Liturgy of the Word, they are applicable to him as a monastic *vardapet*, a Doctor of the Church. Several of his writings were commissioned works, indicative of his reputation even at a much younger age (he lived less than three-score years). Because so little is known about his life as a holy monk, there have been numerous attempts to fill the gaps between the few facts gathered from his writings. Myths about his saintly life became commonplace and numerous miracles were attributed to him.

Gregory's Earlier Works

Although the popular and scholarly appreciation of the saint hinges generally on his book of penitential prayers, his literary prominence is not limited to the book. Before considering his prayer book in the second half of the introduction and his earlier works here, a general statement on his entire works is necessary.

Our author is rightly considered the best representative of Armenian spirituality of the Middle Ages. By all literary considerations, he is the first great poet in Armenian literature. Some would even claim that he is the most outstanding figure in the Armenian literary heritage. Even his prose writings reflect a profound poetic talent, rich in imagination and inspiring. As in

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all artistic considerations, so also in literature, greatness is measured by the extent of originality, especially in thought—even though texts do not exist without other texts. His creative and alliterative use of language has a gripping effect even when incomprehensible to readers or hearers of the classical text. His use of compound words in novel form is deeply impressive, neologisms of his creation that open new vistas of thought. Moreover, overlapping thoughts, multiple at times and as though conceived simultaneously, combine reality and imagination in a unique way. Interesting as his thoughts are, they often create a degree of incomprehension on the part of readers—even for those well acquainted with his language. Some of his lines are quite enigmatic, but neither exegetically impenetrable nor theologically inexplicable.

Like other Armenian fathers of the church, Gregory loved to employ a great variety of images drawn from the Bible; however, no other father juxtaposed as many images as he did. This is truer about his odes than about his prayers. Consequently, familiarity with the contents of the Bible and the history of its medieval interpretation—at least of its salient parts—is requisite to understanding most of his works. There was an established mode of biblical reading in his time, an inherited understanding of the text. There was the literal or historical meaning and the spiritual or allegorical meaning. The latter meaning, on which our author dwells (especially in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*), did not negate the literal meaning but served to validate it, and vice versa. Out of this figurative or tropological understanding came the moral application. Thus, Gregory often internalizes the powerful and complex biblical imageries. There is hardly a biblical subject with which he does not identify himself.

When considering Gregory's earlier works, his only complete biblical commentary, *On the Song of Songs*, deserves special attention. The colophon, dated 977, informs that he wrote it upon the request of King Gurgēn Artsruni of Vaspurakan (co-reg. with his brothers, 968–991, sole reg. 991–1003). Like most medieval commentators on the Song of Songs, Gregory, with some nuances of his own, understood the text as an allegory of the love between God and his people or between Christ and his church. The incarnation of Christ leading to the Passion—his suffering, death, and resurrection—in a schema best described as “descent and ascent”—signify God’s search for lost humanity and thus contrasts with the mystic’s search for God. The references and allusions to the Song of Songs in the book of prayers reveal much of his overriding thought. A mystic like Gregory, who is in search for union with God, finds in the Song of Songs the beloved object of his quest over and over again, implicitly through the Eucharist, that constant reminder of what the incarnation is all about: “Here you see the unity of the Bride with the Groom” (on [Song 7:11–12](#)).

A partial and very poorly preserved text of a commentary on [Job 38:2–39:30](#), titled *Who Is That?*, is attributed to Gregory. A recent and thorough study of this document, short of resolving the question of authorship, reveals an elaborate substratum on eucharistic sacrifice.

From a poetic perspective, next to the grandeur of the prayer book, Gregory's odes and litanies (Armenian, *tagh'* and *gandzk'*) are of particular interest. These hymnic compositions for the celebration of the major feasts of the Christian calendar were often misunderstood because they employ multifaceted biblical imageries. Until recently, they were repeatedly mistaken as mostly descriptions of nature. The word *tagh*, however, generally translated “ode,” is never used by Gregory. Literally, the word means “song” or “hymn”; just as *Tagharan* stands

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for a collection of such compositions, a “songbook” or “hymnal.” As for the word *gandz*, generally translated as “litany,” it must have been coined to describe recitative petitions such as composed by Gregory. Nearly all of his litanies are acrostic compositions that spell his name and thus begin with the word *gandz*. Subsequent authors, following his style closely, employed the same incipit to begin their compositions. Consequently, Gregory is considered the progenitor of the genre of such compositions compiled as *Gandzaran*.

Also belonging to festal occasions are the five panegyrics or encomia composed in prose: (1) the History of the Holy Cross of Aparank'. (2) the Encomium on the Holy Cross. (3) the Encomium on the Holy Virgin. (4) the Encomium on the Holy Apostles. and (5) the Encomium on Saint James of Nisibis, the patron saint of the region. The first three of these were sponsored writings, authored upon the request of Bishop Step'anos of Mokk'—another of the southern districts of the Kingdom of Vaspurakan—and reveal that Gregory's talent was recognized at an early age.

The rest of Gregory's works are mostly admonitory writings to fellow monastics. His *Letter to the Admirable and Prominent Congregation of Kchaw*, warning them of intrusion by the heretical T'ondrakeans, and *A Brief Word of Counsel on Orthodox Faith and Pure and Virtuous Life* were likewise written upon request and, like most of his early works, show affinities with his mentor Anania's works. The word *brief* in the latter title is an inaccurate description of the rather lengthy treatise. Among others attributed to him is *Order and Rules of Prayer*, which, as the title suggests, is on decorum in worship and bears some semblance to his father's writings. The authenticity of other minor works is still being debated.

Toward a Better Understanding of the Prayers

In the book of penitential prayers, Gregory has much in common with earlier mystical writers like Sts. Evagrius, John Cassian, John Climacus, Isaac of Nineveh, and his contemporary Symeon the New Theologian, as well as anonymous others like the pseudonymous Dionysius the Areopagite. They all had drunk from the same “living water” in desert or solitary places and in exchange for tears. The often-punishing introspection of self-discipline, the fasting, the vigils, the meditations on Scripture, the urge to pray without ceasing and with tears were followed, in the fullest sense of the word, religiously. The longed-for outcome was the promised encounter with God, briefly in time and then eternally.

Gregory follows biblical prototypes of prayer, such as found in the Psalms and in certain of the prophetic books. In the manner of biblical prophets, he finds opportunity in prayer to speak back to God, as though taking issue with a perceived injustice—God's patience with a sinner like him. He often stands as in a divine court and employs trial language, both prosecutorial and condemnatory, with himself as the ever condemned and the ever forgiven. He knows the cathartic effect of pouring out one's heart before God.

While these are personal, confessional prayers, characterized by sighs and tears (more on their genre below), they are at the same time communal, in that they emanate from one who is a member of a monastic community, where also his prayers were first offered or read. In fact, Gregory's older brother Hovhannēs was the abbot of the monastery of Narek at the time, and he is credited in the colophon for having helped in their transcription. But more than their

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immediate milieu and historical context, they are universal and timeless prayers, for they reflect the full range of human feelings when in contrition. Although Prayer 72 is addressed to ascetic brothers, the book in its entirety is recommended to all people.

To join Gregory in prayer and to approach the Lord with him, some understanding of his theological anthropology is essential. Invariably, his anthropology is informed by the Genesis accounts of the creation of humankind and conditioned by the perceived consequences of the fall of the forebears in the Garden of Eden ([Gen 1–3](#)). Attendant to this biblical perspective, however, there are countless notions of the human nature that derive from classical philosophy—thanks to Hellenistic Judaism and the adoption of the theological anthropology of Philo of Alexandria by the church fathers. In his interpretation of the double account of humanity's creation ([Gen 1:26–2:4a](#) and [2:4b–7](#)) as a single, composite creation, Philo equates the image of God ([Gen 1:26–27](#)) and the inbreathed divine spirit ([Gen 2:7](#)) as one and the same, allegorizing them as the human mind: the divine and rational part of the soul whereby humans are able to contemplate divine things and attain the virtues (especially wisdom) that bring the soul to happiness and immortality. Though marred by the fall but not eradicated, the divine image awaits restoration according to the theology of the fathers (and to the delight of Christian mystics). Alternately, Philo's theological anthropology seems to accommodate the apparently traditional, Platonized understanding of the two distinct accounts of humanity's creation as pointing to the dual nature of the human being: one spiritual, heavenly, and incorruptible, the other corporeal, earthly, and corruptible.

More immediate than Philo, however, Gregory's views on the creation and fall of humankind are imbued in the theology of the Cappadocian fathers, especially in Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Creation of Man*. Although these fathers embraced the Philonic interpretation of the divine image and breath in humanity as the mind, they elaborated on the Genesis passages christologically, especially in light of the Pauline hymn in [Colossians 1:15–18](#), equating Christ with “the image of the invisible God.” Thus for the fathers, Christ is “the archetypal image.” Moreover, they departed from the Philonic/Origenist deterministic notions of sin and salvation as they systematized their understanding of humankind's fall and redemption through Christ. In their view, sin is more a product of human weakness in succumbing to constant temptation than the result of original sin, since the ontological origin of humans is not in their biological being but in their being “in Christ.” Like Philo and the Cappadocian fathers, Gregory embraces the “image of God” and the “breath of God” as one and the same: the *logos* (Arm. *ban*), the mind or the spirit—more than just the soul, but rather its dominant or ruling part, the faculty of reason (Arm. *ishkhanakann*; Gk. *to hēgemonikon*). It governs not only the senses but also thoughts that find expression in speech, in uttered words that in their noblest manifestation (as in prayer) are akin to the Word, the Logos.

Though these prayers are Gregory's words (*bank'* or *logoi*), they are invariably related to Christ the Word, the Logos with whom Gregory is conversing, with whom Gregory feels a natural kinship because of the shared “image” and more so because of the Incarnation of the Word, whereby this kinship is reaffirmed. Christ understands the human condition well, hence these prayers, the *bank'* or *logoi*, are addressed to him, the Logos. Gregory could thus pray, “These are yours alone, Lord! By you I was moved to write them. Behold, I plead your own pleas, O Blessed One, from what belongs to you, grant grace” (Prayer [74.3](#)). He is offering to the

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Lord that which is from him, this book of prayers as a rational sacrifice.

Gregory approaches the Lord confidently, to have a conversation with him—as indicated through the recurring epigraph given to the prayers: *i khorots' srti khosk' ēnd Astutsoy*, literally and maintaining the Armenian syntax, “From the depths of the heart a talk with God,” rendered formally as “Speaking with God from the depths of the heart.” Like the Hebrew prophets, at times Gregory talks back to God and is not slow to ask questions, even to express doubt as he seeks God’s wisdom “for the reassurance of a doubter like me” (Prayer [30.5](#)). Knowing that the Lord is “long-sufferer with doubters” (Prayer [32.3](#)), Gregory seems to have been emboldened to ask more questions emanating from the heart. “Since I have allowed myself to lapse into my former expressions of endless despair, beating myself to death with the rod of doubt, I shall dare again with the slightest hope for pity to call upon the Holy Trinity to help a sinner like me” (Prayer [12.1](#)). He is more emboldened by the fact that the incarnate Christ, who experienced humanity in its fullness and suffered because of his utmost love for humankind, understands human suffering. Gregory finds kinship with Christ at the human level just as he finds kinship with him in the divine image.

Belying this boldness is the not-so-hidden anxiety over God’s judgment and the fear of hell. “Creator of heaven and earth, since I have begun conversing with you who hold in your hand the vital breath of my immensely sinful soul, verily I tremble and quake, greatly worried, in constant fear, remembering your inescapable and impartial tribunal, fearsome and unbearable, beyond the bounds of words for a rebuked sinner like me” (Prayer [4.1](#)). “And well advised by the prophet Hosea ([14.2](#)), let us join him in prayer and sing with your Spirit, with strong hope in your protection, as he says, ‘Take words with you and turn toward the Lord your God, and say to him, “You are able to forgive our sin,” that you might receive that which is good, that your souls might enjoy bliss’ ” (Prayer [28.4](#)). Confession of sin and assurance of divine forgiveness are inseparable; the more of one, the more of the other (forgiveness is granted and/or received in the measure of one’s repentance, and the realization of one’s utter “unworthiness” is the beginning of salvation). The chant of a remorseful lament, accompanied by the Spirit, turns into a joyous song as the penitent is reminded of the victory won on the Cross. Confession of sin is confession of faith, reassuring that all is well when thoughts move in the direction of God’s judgment and its aftermath. “You are able, O Compassionate One, to perform a miracle with your everlasting might, saying, ‘Be healed of your soul’s affliction,’ or ‘May your sins be forgiven,’ or ‘Go in peace, you are clean of sin.’ And whatever I am unable to implore at that hour (sc. on Judgment Day), accept from me today in keeping with your love for humankind” (Prayer [73.2](#)). “I pray you, O Compassionate One, I beseech you with all the saints, listen to my prayers in advance, so that they will not be forgotten at a later time (sc. on Judgment Day). You guided me, as the Psalm says, and saved my life. Relieve me, Lord, as with the Psalmist, of doubts and perplexities that cause me fear” (Prayer [87.4](#); cf. [Ps 61:2; 71:20–21](#)). His concern is made clear early on: “I reproach myself in accordance with the Psalmist, so that my thorough confession might not necessitate repeating” (Prayer [32.2](#)). After all, “there is no answering on the day of battle (sc. on Judgment Day)” (Prayer [4.1](#)); hence, these confessional prayers are offered “in advance.” His self-deprecation is self-implication in advance of the judgment, a confession accompanied with a deep sense of remorse that allows for little or no charges against him on the day of reckoning. “And now, Christ, Creator of all beings, Son of God on high,

I have been reprimanded with these words and struck with so many blows. Do not rebuke me again at the judgment on that great day" (Prayer [65.2](#)). Gregory seems to be following the exhortation by the apostle James, to weep now: "Grieve and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you" ([Jas 4:9–10](#)). Assured, Gregory could pray, "Stand by me as a physician rather than as a scrutinizing judge" (Prayer [23.2](#)); and again, "For the thought of what lies ahead is more grave than the encounter itself" (Prayer [79.3](#)).

To better understand our author, some further remarks on his pattern of thinking are necessary. He is one of those who understood fully the nature of the reality of union with Christ, a teaching advocated by the apostle Paul through the repeated use of the words "in Christ." The apostle's preposition "in" is indelibly infused with profound theological significance, liturgically expressed through the two most fundamental sacraments of the Church: baptism and the Eucharist (baptism as union with Christ is explained in [Romans 6](#); similarly, the Eucharist in [John 6:25–59](#)). The preferred theological tradition of what it actually means to say that one participates in or is united with Christ is elucidated in the doctrine of *theosis*, the belief that the transforming grace of God enables the believer to become divine through union or spiritual oneness with Christ, participating even in the glory and righteousness or justice of God (as explained in [2 Corinthians 3–4](#)). For Gregory, prayer is the venue for such a telos, the quest for the discovery of the beloved of the Song of Songs—an experience culminating in the Eucharist. Union with Christ is essentially sacramental. The continuous quest, the prayer without ceasing, that leads to such a telos is exemplified in the two-part prayer to the Holy Spirit ([33.6–7](#)), rightly understood as a prayer in anticipation of the Eucharist. This prayer is in turn anticipated by confession: "Now, which (of my sins) shall I disclose, or which shall I specify? On which kind shall I discourse, or how much of the hidden shall I uncover? Which shall I confess ...?" (Prayer [28.1](#)). Even in this surest way of becoming one with Christ, soul-searching and confession are a constant endeavor, preparatory requisites for the next experience of the mystical union with Christ. "And what is overwhelming for me to say in sequence here, in remembrance of your great beneficence, is to become divine by the grace of election and joining you, Creator, by partaking of your lordly body. Uniting with your luminous life is the fulfillment of the blessed promise, which, in accordance with Paul's words, the Law could not accomplish" (Prayer [52.3](#)).

Thus, the Pauline term *in Christ* must have held deep meaning for Gregory, perhaps more than the apostle's corporate metaphors: body, temple, marriage, and clothing, each of which offers a particular yet related perspective—union, participation, oneness, and incorporation, respectively—for envisaging life "in Christ." The recurring singular *in you* and *with you* are tantamount to reminding the Lord of this kinship with him, reinforced through participation in the sacrament that is itself a reminder of the extent of God's love for humankind. This concept of participation is central to understanding Gregory's faith and thought, a faith that responds to and participates in the search for deeper understanding especially of the Spirit, the bond in this relationship; it groans for such understanding. It seeks to know more about the incomprehensible mystery that enables participation in the "glory" and "righteousness/justice" of the indefinable God. Even when pondering the mystery of the chrism and chrismation—symbols of the bond—Gregory exclaims: "But how can I discourse on this,

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thinking that I understand it completely, when not even angels can verbally explain a fraction of it, let alone its essence!" (Prayer [93.14](#)).

Participation "in Christ" and in the Spirit become indistinguishably one and the same, meaning that salvation is at every point dependent on divine action, though not in such a way as to exclude human involvement. Believers "in Christ" are empowered by the Spirit to lead a life of holiness in the present world order, virtually indistinguishable from eternal life into which the present merges or evolves. All this could "mystically" be experienced in the present, as almost realized eschatology. Christ has numerous salvific benefits for fallen humanity, especially for those who believe in him, those who find themselves in him. These benefits hinge on the Son's union with the Father. It is in this Father-Son relationship that the believers' identity as children of God is defined, with the Spirit as the bond cementing their relation to and participation in the divine.

The privilege to ponder the indefinable God is conceivably the greatest blessing salvation/restoration brings in its train. Yet none, not even all the attributes of God together, cataphatic and apoplectic, are sufficient to define him, for he is beyond definition. The opening adulations and concluding doxologies are full of these divine attributes. Still, one is left not only to distinguish between the various attributes of God (between divine justice and grace, divine wrath and love, etc.) but also to reconcile their opposite verities. Gregory is a master at this, since for him God's love for humankind, demonstrated through the Incarnation, surpasses all his other attributes. Finding oneself in the presence of God can also be disconcerting. "But woe to my always miserable, wretched soul, because my composition in words makes me mix the voice of good news with mournful protestations, inviting justice and judgment, decision and penalty, investigation and exposure, scolding and torches, nakedness and embarrassment, disclosure and shame, impeccability and reward, offenses and punishments" (Prayer [38.2](#)). Vis-à-vis these paradoxes, the love of God becomes much more pronounced.

As noted earlier, the allegorical interpretation of [Gen 1:27](#) and [2:7](#), understood similarly as referring to the human mind, is widespread in early Christian mysticism—from Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria to the Cappadocians and beyond. The far-reaching effects of this understanding are demonstrable in Gregory's prayers. Believing that the mind is what constitutes the image or breath of God in humans compels the believer to extend his or her capacity of thinking to the uttermost: to reach out for God, the very Archetype of this divine element and source of human creativity; to seek God contemplatively, with an endeavor to unite with him experientially. Thoughts become the offerings one brings to God, with the more profound thoughts about God being deemed the best offerings one could bring to him, the Creator of All. Thoughts find expression in words that can be presented to God as a more tangible offering. Indeed, there is a divine invitation to do so: "Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to him: 'Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips'" (Prayer [28.4](#), quoting [Hos 14:2](#)). Since none should appear empty-handed before God ([Exod 34:20](#); [Deut 16:16](#)) and animal sacrifices are a thing of the past, Gregory finds words of true contrition and repentance as the best offering one could bring to the Giver of all.

Gregory's Esteem for His Book

As noted above, the prayer book is offered as a fragrant sacrifice of words to God, while at the same time it is offered as a help to ailing humanity. The book holds the promise of healing, first and foremost of spiritual malady, of which the author presents himself as the personification, one who has suffered all the consequences of sin. Hence, he could claim that the book is for all people and for the healing of all ailments, subject to the readers' confession with these penitential prayers—as the reader joins him in prayer.

With these confessions, revealing exceeding sinfulness, Gregory presents himself as one who has internalized every sin in the world since its very beginning. Speaking to his soul, he says: "For you have appropriated the full yield of vain deeds, all the evils from the first man to the last of his progeny, and that in great abundance—even new ones, odious and repugnant to God, your Creator" (Prayer [9.2](#); cf. [72.1](#)), and again: "I have all earthly (ills) within me and (thus) am a petitioning representative of the whole world" (Prayer [28:2](#); cf. [72.3](#)). With so much sin, he deserves every conceivable punishment. "And if harsher condemnations than these are needed against my unruly soul, I commit them to writing here, I write and do not spare myself from becoming the dry wood to fuel Gehenna" (Prayer [71.3](#)).

Having thus appropriated all sin of all time and of all people to himself and having identified himself as a book inscribed with woes all over (Prayer [39.2](#)), Gregory has in effect the credentials to claim a universal significance for his book, commanding it for its remedial effects. What makes the book salutary is the fact that it is a book of confession. *His emphasis is on the healing power of confession.* This focal point constitutes the context in which his statements about the book are to be seen, and this he states early on. The book is for all Christians, for all ages, and for all classes of people to be edified by it. Of the book, he writes at various points:

This newly sung book of laments is descriptive of (feelings) common to every race of rational beings, wherever they may be planted on earth, (expressed) by one aware of the passions besetting all, who as a companion well informed of everyone's needs has transferred them to his own image. It is for the whole body of diverse congregations of Christians worldwide.... May earnest supplications be made on behalf of some and good counsel be given to others through the prayers in this book. I have endeavored, through the power of your Spirit, to compose these diverse entreaties and to present the petitions of all, so that they may come daily with them before your great compassion. (Prayer [3.2](#))

Heal the souls and forgive the sins of those who read this (book) with a pure heart, release them of their debts and free them from the bonds of guilt. Let there be a gushing of tears from those edified by the same, and may it prompt yearnings for repentance. (Prayer [3.3](#))

Should the peril of death besiege a person in pain, may redemption be found through praying with this (book) for hope of life, O Giver of life. Should one agonize with doubt to the point of being pierced in the heart, may it be healed through your lovingkindness with this (book). (Prayer [3.4](#))

And may you make this book consisting of prayers of lament, begun in your name, Most High, into a life-giving remedy to heal your creatures' ailments of body and soul. (Prayer [3.5](#))

Now, whoever takes the salutary medication of this humble book, to pray with it, if the one who draws near is a sinner, I too will join him with these my words; and if the one drawing near is righteous, may I find mercy through these same (words) together with him. (Prayer [66.1](#))

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Most of Gregory's subsequent statements are commensurate with these, including the weaponization of the book to counter Satan and to uncover the snares of demons (Prayers [65.2](#); [88.3](#)). A couple of statements indicate that he considers his book to be monumental (Prayers [66.1](#); [88.2](#)).

The Genre of the Prayers and the Title of the Book

As we have seen in the preceding pages, the book has healing power because it is a book of confession, and this may be deemed sufficient to determine its genre. However, a little more ought to be said about the place of sighs and tears in prayers of confession and to address the meaning of the received title of the book, *Matean Oghbergut'ean*, and how to translate it.

There are several biblical examples of prayers with sighs and tears, especially in the Psalms; even Jesus, the sinless Man of Sorrows offered prayers and supplications “with loud cries and tears” ([Heb 5:7](#)). Praying in this manner became part of early ascetic life, particularly in conjunction with prayers of confession and as a charismatic expression. The tradition was carried on by the Egyptian monastic movement and popularized by Evagrius of Pontus (346–399), who spent his last fourteen years at the renowned Monastery of Cellia, or “the Cells” in the Nitrian Desert (Egypt). He advocated the practice with other strategies in his mystical theology as a means to counter the passions. Even though the greater part of his Greek writings was lost subsequent to his condemnation at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, where he was suspected of Origenism, many of his works survived in earlier Syriac and Armenian translations—the latter from Syriac. Their immediate influence could be seen in one of the earliest Armenian writings, *The Life of Mashtots'* by his disciple Koriwn, composed in 443. Commenting on the vigils of Mashtots', Koriwn writes: “With his equals he kept up the usual prayers, the vigils, the tearful pleadings, the life of austerity, and concern for the groaning world, remembering the saying of the prophet: ‘When you groan, then you shall live’ [[Isa 30:15](#)].” Koriwn’s “groaning world” echoes [Romans 8:22](#), “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now” (NRSV). In context (vv. [18–27](#), esp. [20–23](#)), the “inward groaning” is the Spirit’s intercession through “wordless groans” for universal salvation. In Origenian/Evagrian thought—no less Cappadocian—the restoration (*apokatastasis*) of fallen humanity is tantamount to the soul’s perfect reunion with God, for the attainment of which the monk is constantly engaged in prayerful combat to ward off demonic thoughts divided into eight categories. Renunciants cried with groans when words were insufficient to find suitable language to express their emotions in prayer. Meditative prayer with sighs and tears, in moans and groans, is pure prayer, imageless, without words. The practice was strongly encouraged at the Monastery of Narek, as the writings of the abbot Anania indicate. Though not quoted by him, nor by Gregory, the translation of [Proverbs 14:10a](#) in the Armenian Bible is suggestive, describing the human heart as *ëndmtatari*, that is, “contemplative,” “pensive,” or “reflective.”

Prayers from the depths of the heart, audible or inaudible, in words or wordless, are cries for the restoration of the soul to its state of purity, in union with God. Gregory contemplates [Romans 8:26](#) from the very beginning and at the very end (Prayer [1:1](#); [95.1](#); cf. [33.7](#); [52.1](#); [94.2](#)).

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait

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for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.... Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. ([Rom 8:22–23, 26–27](#) NRSV)

The passage constitutes the climax not just of [Romans 6–8](#), but indeed of [1:18–8:30](#), given the reiteration in these verses of all the major themes hitherto touched upon in the epistle. In this cosmic outworking of salvation, Paul brings up “the final reversal of man’s failure and climax of his restoration.” More immediately, these verses parallel [Rom 8:12–17](#), on “the Spirit of Sonship” which exhorts the denunciation of the flesh as a condition to becoming heirs of God and heirs together with Christ. It is inconceivable that Christian mystics would not be keenly aware of these passages.

Gregory refers to his prayer book five times descriptively as *matean oghbergut’ean*, “book of lamentation” (Prayers [2.2](#); [9.1](#); [70.3](#); [83.1](#); [88.2](#)), hence the acquired title. The rather disconcerting word *oghbergut’iwn* in the title had a different meaning than the English *lamentation* commonly does today; it meant penitential prayer comprised of tearful “confession” of sin (*khostovanut’iwn*). Indeed, on three occasions he describes his work as “this book of confession” (Prayers [33.2](#); [72.1](#); [83.1](#)) and at another time pleads “remember my words of confession in this book of lamentation” (Prayer [83.1](#)). On two occasions the book is described as “testament” (*ktak*) and once called by its cognate, “transmitted tradition” (*awandut’iwn*), in conjunction with the previously mentioned designations (Prayers [9.1](#); [87.1](#); [72.1](#)). The last quoted designation in Prayer [72.1](#) is significant, for it is found in his addressing fellow monastics for whom the form and genre must have been familiar. He refers to the book three times as *matean oghbots’*, “book of laments” (Prayers [3.2](#), [5](#); [53.2](#)), *oghbk’* being the word in the title of Jeremiah’s “Lamentations”—an exact equivalent to the Greek *Thrēnoi*, a plural noun—unlike the singular *oghbergut’iwn*. However, when comparing himself with the prophet Jeremiah (Prayer [71.5](#)), Gregory uses neither the word associated with the prophet’s book (*oghbk’*) nor the word *oghbergut’iwn*, but two other words: “The despondent calls in this *book of mournful singing* (*matean oghbergarkut’ean*) ... accept my *confession* (*khostovanut’iwn*) in these self-condemning words.” Much more significant are his earlier qualifiers of the book, in Prayers [32.2](#) and [54.5](#). In the first instance he states in no uncertain terms, “With my own voice I reproach myself in accordance with the Psalmist, so that none of *this prescribed, comprehensive confession* [*yandznaŕakan yaysm hamaynapatum khostovanut’enē*] would need repeating,” i.e., at the judgment; and again, in the second instance, “And thus, along my way of no return, I leave this *testament* (*ktak*) of sins committed as remembrance for readers, that they might pray to God through my words continually. May this (book) remain a *prescribed rule for confession* (*sahman yandznaŕakan khostovanut’ean*), evermore lifted in voice before you, Almighty, its letters like my body and its message like my soul ever longing for you, the boundless one.”

That he wanted the prayer book to be his last will and testament appears early on, when he refers to it as “this testamentary book of lamentation” (Prayer [9.1](#)) to be used by fellow monastics and others as a manual for confession, an intent he restates near the end of the book (Prayer [88.2](#)). Considering the derivative nature of the received title, it is equally justifiable to call the book *Matean Khostovanut’ean*, “Book of Confession,” in keeping with the

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well-established genre of penitential prayers.

The received title *Matean Oghbergut'ean* comes also at the end of a lengthy list tabulating all the perceived benefits obtained by the use of the book, a list that in turn became a subtitle. Consisting of nearly fifty words, it appears in the various editions and translations of the book. A cursory reading of the list leaves no doubt about its derivation from a later time. Replete with variant readings in the various manuscripts, its lines have telling omissions and additions. The rubric reads:

Propositions: Vastly salutary words for penitence, for repentance; spiritually beneficial counsel for self-chastisement, for voluntarily adopting rules of penance, for the revealment of hidden things, confession of sins, disclosure of secrets, exposure of the unseen, rebuke of concealments; powerful salve for incurable wounds, effective remedy for dire aches, cure for ills (accompanied) with diverse and grave pangs of pain, treatment for multifaceted struggles against all natural perils; occasion for tears, promptings for prayer; spoken by the monk Gregory of the monastery of Narek (in this) Book of Lamentation, upon urgent requests by solitary fathers and countless ascetics.

The Composition of the Book

By his own admission in the colophon, Gregory utilized scattered pieces of prior writings in the composition of the book. “During the peaceful interval (of three years), when the enemies of the church were pushed to the brink, I planned, structured, arranged, collected, inscribed, compiled, amplified, established in detail, and assembled into one the many facets of this sacred book.” Noticeably, Prayers [34](#), [75](#), [92](#), and [93](#) are clear examples of such adaptation. They are more like didactic discourses modified to fit a prayer form and made part of the book. In them we see examples of prayer as a means of doctrinal teaching, another example of which is found in Prayer [72](#), addressed to monks whose beliefs needed to be corrected.

That the creedal parts of Prayer [34](#)—replete with christological statements on the nature of Christ—were drawn from a previous composition on the Creed is clearly stated in the incipit: “I now exhibit these yearnings of my afflicted soul and my proper, *previously discoursed and repeated* confession of faith in you, God” (Section [1](#)), and repeated: “As for the creedal statement about the consubstantial Holy Trinity, the rule of life and the grace of election, this is what I taught, in the following order” (Section [3](#)). Similarly, at the beginning of Prayer [75](#), Gregory declares that this composition pertains to a segment of the Creed, namely, that on the church; and he adds that this composition is on a par with that on the Trinity as stated in the Creed, that is, on a par with Prayer [34](#), to which this is to be considered a thematic sequel, completing a commentary of sorts by him on the Creed. In fact, he uses the word *char'* (“discourse”) twice to describe the latter composition (Sections [1](#) and [2](#)). In the last two lines of the prayer, as in a postscript, he repeats, “That (Prayer [34](#)) was my (confession of) faith in the Holy Trinity and this (Prayer [75](#)) my avowed confession of faith in my Mother Church glorified with light” (Section [13](#)).

The same could be said about Prayers [92](#) and [93](#), in which he theologizes on the symbolism of the semantron (a wooden bell) and the chrism, respectively. These too ring like previous compositions adapted for the book. Gregory refers to them as “explanatory discourses in

prayer (form)." That these are integral to the whole, the high frequency of their *hapax legomena* notwithstanding, is demonstrable not only through thematic links with the rest of the book, as shown in the annotation, but also through the overall structure of the book—to which we shall now turn our attention.

The structure of the book is compared by some to a tripartite church building, where the reader moves from the narthex to the altar, traversing through the nave, toward union with God through the sacraments offered in the sanctuary. In a related way, others see the reader as mystically journeying through several stages toward union with God, from initiation to perfection. Interesting as these general perspectives are (the broadly defined parts of one and the trajectory of the other), there is a degree of incongruity between these superimposed schemes and the ordered sections of the book; simply, they do not always fit—they are hard to sustain systematically through the book. There is, however, a clearer perspective and a more dominant structure in the book, construed around the Eucharist.

As noted earlier, the centrality of the Eucharist in the prayer book is unmistakable; the sacrament (Arm. *khorhurd*, lit., "mystery," i.e., the mystery of salvation) begins to unfold gradually, reaching a climactic point in the middle of the codex or the *matean*, at Prayer [53](#), where Gregory has this to say: "When pondering with grateful praise the grace of this new salvation, I am dumbfounded by its infinite breadth, left speechless by it. Cogitating the endless favors from your Light, from you to one entrenched in misery like me, I will implore you with your own prayer, fitting it into the substance of my words, the very letters comprising this book of laments" (Section [2](#)). The prayer alluded to here is Christ's "farewell discourse" in [John 17](#), which by the author's acknowledgment serves as the inspirational model for his book—through which he longs for the promised (re)union with the Lord. The centrality of Prayer [53](#), falling in the middle of the codex, and the obvious allusion to [John 17](#) give this meditation on the Eucharist added significance, highlighted in the eucharistic prayer that follows (Section [3](#)) and in these words: "For this reason, at the first Eucharist in the Upper Room, as the cure for incurable ills, he distributed his body and blood for atonement" (Section [4](#)).

Prayer [53](#) is flanked chiastically by prayers related to the Eucharist. Among them the divided yet continuous creedal confessions of faith, in Prayers [34](#) and [75](#), stand out as equidistant markers. Yet the meditation on the Eucharist does not begin and end with these landmark prayers; it begins with the very notion of sacrifice—even the offering of the prayer book as sacrifice, overshadowed by the notion of the Eucharist as sacrifice. The meditation on the sacrament par excellence continues beyond Prayer [75](#), in the amplified sacramental theology attached to the symbolism of the wooden bell and the holy chrism, in the diptych of Prayers [92](#) and [93](#). The unfolding of the sacrament that reminds of the mystery of salvation ends with a chorus on the ultimate restoration (*apokatastasis*) of the divine image—realized in the eternal union with God. Also flanking the central prayer, preceding the landmark Prayer [34](#) and following the landmark Prayer [75](#), are Prayer [31](#) ("You are remembered") and Prayer [78](#) ("Your grace renewed by the blood drops from your side"). Further parallels on either side of the central point could be drawn, but this schema should suffice to underscore the centrality of Prayer [53](#), the literary and theological unity of the prayer book as a whole—sustained by the sacramental theology of the Eucharist, and the integrity of the often wrongly excluded Prayers [92](#) and [93](#).

Mix of Poetic Prose and Verse

To the end of the tenth century and into the beginning of the eleventh, the dominant Armenian script was still the *erkat’agir*, the uncial majuscules or “ironclad letters” with hardly any space between words and little if any punctuation. It is no wonder that in the manuscript tradition the prayers are written as prose. It is wrong, however, to assume that all were prose or that all were lineated or written as verse. In poetic, rhythmic prose for the most part, the prayers are interfaced with compositions in verse, thus yielding a beautiful mosaic in both poetic prose and verse. Even the compositions in verse are generally framed with divine adulations and doxologies in prose. By Gregory’s own admission, he incorporated a variety of forms in the composition of the book: “these sighs of sorrowful laments composed in various forms” (Prayer [86.1](#)). That combining prose and verse was not a novelty at his monastery is evidenced by Anania of Narek’s *On Guarding the Thoughts* (*Yaghags khorhrdots’ zgushut’ean*) and *On Compunction and Tears* (*Yaghags zghjman ew artasuats’*).

Gregory’s familiarity with various poetic devices or *technai* is well illustrated in his festal works, especially in his odes. Some of these *technai* are identifiable in the prayer book, as will be discussed below.

Given their cumulative effect on the whole and the rhythmic and often alliterative character of the language employed in most of the other prayers, it is not surprising that an editor or a translator would be tempted to cast the entire text in a lineated form or to translate the book as free verse. Such a trend began in 1948, with Garegin of Trebizond’s (Karekin Khach’aturian, later Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, 1951–1961) publication of the prayers’ classical text in lineation with a facing translation into Western Armenian, rendered as free verse. Curiously, in 1926, the same editor/translator had published a Western Armenian prose translation, albeit without the classical text. Just as intriguingly in 1926, T’orgom Gushakian, the latter’s schoolmate at the defunct Seminary of Armash in Turkey (and later Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, 1931–1939), had also published a prose translation of the prayer book in Western Armenian.

Inspired and equipped by the secular praise of our saint by Armenian literary critics active in Marseille, of whom Archak Tch’obanian was foremost, and Garegin of Trebizond’s lineation, scholars in Soviet Armenia—guardians of the ancient manuscripts—found sufficient justification to be allowed to produce a critical text of the prayer book as poetry. Praise for the book’s poetic excellence grew ever louder, to a point of tempering the prosaic character of most parts and understating the significance of the religious content. On their part, the editors, Khach’atryan and Ghazinyan, produced a superb critical text in 1985, based on sound methodology—albeit lineated and showing occasional erroneous punctuation and illogical divisions in the lineation, and at times unnecessarily broken prayers. Noticeably, they left Prayers [34](#), [75](#), [92](#), and [93](#) in prose. Their text forms the basis of the latest edition, which unfortunately omits the two editors’ valuable and lengthy introduction. Lineation thus became the norm for translators in the last three decades. Conversely, Gushakian’s prose translation continues to be popular among Western Armenian readers and seems to have influenced a recent Eastern Armenian translation in prose.

The prolixity of some prayers notwithstanding, there are, to be sure, exceptionally beautiful St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).
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poems among the prayers, variously rich in imagery, alliteration, assonance, repetition, and occasional rhyme to heighten their emotional effects. Gregory is the first known Armenian to write poems using both internal and external rhyme. All this at a time when rhyme was newly introduced in Christian literature due to the challenging sublimity of the Qur'an, renowned for its dominant rhyme and literary beauty. Consequently, it is difficult to define the generic boundaries of Armenian medieval poetry during this period, when hymns (*sharakans*) were still being composed in prose except for the few in acrostics. Comparison with traditional Byzantine forms is essential, including Greek poetry from Late Antiquity.

Prayer [26.1–2](#) is the only prayer the author declares to have composed in rhyme, even though he had employed rhyme earlier, especially in Prayers [23.2](#) and [24.1–3](#). He sustains the long poem, as he proposes, with the monorhyme «*ء*» (*i*, pronounced ee, the dominant vowel in qur'anic rhyme and indicative of the ever-increasing Arab influence), the letter which represents “the mystical number twenty,” but which he chose to employ for its moaning sound, in order to express his “wretchedness.” He employs the passive/reflexive agent suffixoys as a monorhyme in Prayer [39.2–3](#). More often than not, his rhyme consists of similarly inflected nouns and verbs.

In Prayer [27.1](#) he makes another announcement regarding the poetic form he is about to employ, which he describes as follows: “The very word of the beginning of each sentence I shall purposely place at the end, in such a manner as to form a single supplication in soul-saving humility.” This familiar form is known as *epanaplesis*, a form of repetition in poetry, where the first word of the line (here, *meghay*, “I have sinned”) is repeated at the end of the line. He returns to this form in Prayer [27.5](#). A related poetic form he employs frequently is known as *anaphora*, in which successive phrases or lines begin with the same word(s).

It must be said that Gregory employs more diverse poetic forms in his odes than he does in his mostly prose prayer book, but this does not lessen the poetic character of the prayers, replete for the most part with dazzling beauty in their original language. But more beautiful than his words is the consistent beauty of his thought, flowing beneath rhythmic waves and alliterative sounds, making the individual and literarily diverse prayers part of a harmonious whole.

Translating the saint's prayers is the closest thing to praying with him. Beautiful as his language is, it is quite complex but not incomprehensible, though full of neologisms—mostly compounds—that are *hapax legomena*. As noted earlier, the text translated here is that of the *Matenagirk Hayots'* edition (MH 12:49–605), from which I have departed only in matters of lineation, punctuation, and in the use of the vocative “O,” which Gregory uses very rarely—only ten times when addressing the Lord. Yet the vocative is called for in scores of places in translation. These I have tried to keep to a minimum, thus preserving a degree of the dynamic effect of the original. Words necessary to complete a given sense in English, are offered in parentheses (—), except, of course, for conjunctions, articles, pronouns, prepositions, and the vocative. Bible quotations in Gregory's text (indicated with bold font in the Scripture Index) are mostly interpretive renderings dependent on the Armenian Bible (ArmB), the Old Testament part of which is akin to the Septuagint (LXX). Here, in general, they are rendered apart from known translations. Moreover, there are some variant readings between the Psalter of the Armenian Church and the canonical Psalms. Unless otherwise indicated, Bible quotations are

my own translation.

As a further help to the reader, I have supplied headings for the prayers by taking a key phrase or a sentence from each prayer, descriptive of the prayer as a whole. These are enclosed within angle brackets <—>. By glancing through these headings (listed in the table of Contents), the reader will be able to observe a thematic progression through the prayer book, indicating a logical arrangement by the author. Prayer [53](#), “His body and blood for atonement” (especially as of Section [3](#), a creedal statement) occupies a central place in the book as a material codex or *matean*, with its overall emphasis on the Eucharist. Note the equidistant creedal prayers [34](#) and [75](#), as well as [31](#) and [78](#), as chiastic markers in the composition of the book (discussed earlier in the [Introduction](#)).

Translation of the Prayers

Prayer 1

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Plaintive cries from the heart I offer to you”>

1.1

Audible sighs with plaintive cries from the heart I offer to you, Seer of secrets. These I present, having placed them on the fire of my afflicted soul, fruit of the smoldered yearnings of my wavering mind, sent to you through the censer of my will. May you, compassionate one, savor their scent; may you consider them with favor, over and above that of sacrifices of assorted fruit offered with thick smoke. Accept these linked words in wanting segments. May you be pleased with them and not angered, for they rise from the depths of the mysterious chamber of my feelings, to reach you speedily, a freewill offering, this verbal sacrifice burnt whole with the (thin) fat of my ability, the (only) richness I possess; and with pleading I lay it down for your consideration, mighty one. May it not seem to you like that of the wicked in Israel with arms outstretched, whom Isaiah denounced along with the iniquity of Babylon, nor repugnant like the illustration used in the seventy-second Psalm. Rather, may it be acceptable in accordance with your will, like the pleasing fragrance of the incense at the altar in Shiloh, which David restored for the resting of the ark returned from captivity, a metaphor for my lost soul being found again.

1.2

Because your fearsome voice of recompense at the judgment echoes mightily in the valley of retribution, I am doubly fearful (as if) rising for battle. The predictable and conflicting emotions manifested within me are already at work. Crowds of turmoil rise against one another, sword against armor, floods of thoughts, evil against good. They drag me captive to death as in former times—before the (time) of grace reached me, the redemption by Christ, which Paul, chosen among the apostles, shows to be superior compared to (the Law of) Moses. For as the Scripture says, “The day of the Lord is near ... and in the narrow pass of the Valley of Jehoshaphat and down the Brook of Kidron....” The trial sessions of the past seem small to me in what they foreshadow regarding that with consequences for eternal life and the things to come.

Once more, in a lasting way, God’s Kingdom has confronted me tangibly, charging me on truthful grounds with compounded wrongs graver than those that brought about what was inflicted upon the Edomites and the Philistines and other foreign nations. Whereas their sentence was measured in years, the penalty for my sins is beyond measure, endless. Fear, dungeon, and inescapable upheaval, as the prophet and the speaker in proverbs warned, have arrived at my doorway, greatly disquieting, already projecting my eternal disgrace.

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Only you can miraculously make the medicinal outcome amenable to life for souls utterly perplexed by doubt, O Reconciler of all, exalted in ineffable glory in the boundless heights, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 2

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Grant the mercy of your grace”>

2.1

And now, since you are calling with articulate lips on God Most High, who is drawn to deeds alone and is not swayed by creative words, you, my sinful soul with a heart always inclined toward Egypt, to what similar or analogous thing shall I compare you?

I am punished along with Sodom’s destruction,
have charges brought against me by Nineveh’s prosecutors,
am more timorous and barbarous than the Queen of the South,
more despicable than Canaan,
more obstinate than Amalek,
incurable as the city of idols,
a remnant from the rebellion of ancient Israel,
a reminder of the broken covenant of Judah,
more reproved than Tyre,
more shunned than Sidon,
more depraved than Galilee,
more unpardonable than faithless Capernaum,
deplored like Chorazin,
slandered with Bethsaida,
shameless like Ephraim as he grayed,
a dove always (known) for feeble-mindedness instead of peace,
a dreadful serpent hatched among lions’ cubs,
like cobras’ eggs filled with rot.

I am an image of Jerusalem after the last calamity—
as in the saying of the Lord and the oracles of the seers,
a rejected tabernacle about to be destroyed,
a stronghold with broken gates,

myself a doubly filthy creature though capable of speech,
having relinquished my rightful inheritance,
having turned my
back to the house built by God—
as Moses, David, and Jeremiah wrote early on;
a rational edifice infected with leprosy,
chastened by itching stimulated by the Law,
smeared with the mildly soothing clay,
still unable to find a cure,
torn apart yet again by the Creator's hand,
thrown out into an unclean place—
this my just reward by order of the Almighty,
rejected, driven a great distance away, spared by none,
having buried my coin in the ground of wickedness
as did the one denounced for wasting his trust,
pointed out in the Gospel.

2.2

But you, God, God of souls and all flesh, as professed by one divinely graced, you are forbearing and abounding in mercy, in accordance with the plea of the saintly Jonah. Grant that I complete to your delight, by your holy will, this prayer book of lamentation now begun. And having sown these words tearfully and set forth on this path toward the dwellings you have prepared, may I arrive joyfully in the time of harvest with the return of the bounty of atonement, with the blessed fruit of the goodly sheaves.

O most compassionate (Lord), do not give me a barren heart like the childless womb that was Israel's and eyes (like) dry breasts, but hear me, a rational supplicant, O mighty and merciful One, who were before the heavens, and the heavens (before) the earth, and that (before) Jezreel's wheat, wine, and oil. May the pleadings of the heavenly ones who are with you have their influence upon my soul more than upon perishable elements. You are the Creator and I am the clay.

At the start of these prayers with sighs, may I be strengthened by your kind will even here, so that I, a waverer, might not be found unfit to enjoy the edification by your light when the heavens open; that I might not be consumed like the substance of a candle and be snuffed out. As a narrator cries out in prayer, "O breath for the ill-treated person," give strength to the fainthearted like me and life to one worn out by a bothered conscience; relieve my anguish for I seek you earnestly.

Receive these repeated supplications and grant the mercy of your grace. Accept this trifle from a weakling like myself and provide the major portion yourself, Almighty. Strengthen my words of contrition, having sent us the Spirit from on high with messages imbued with the breath of God (to rest) upon these things set forth. Grant, benevolent (Lord), that we might be enlightened in the truth, like Isaiah. Bestow upon me, although I am deserving of death, the gold of grace instead of the brass of an ignoble sound, instead of the blackness of unadorned

iron, the gloss of bronze burnished in Lebanon, symbolic of virtue.

2.3

Why have you hardened the heart of my deplorable being to not fear you, who are ineffable and astounding? Let not my negligible labor be fruitless like that of the planter vainly sowing the barren ground. Let me not be in labor without giving birth, lament without shedding tears, meditate without sighing, cloud over without raining, proceed without arriving, call on you without being heard, implore continuously without being heeded, groan without being pitied, beg without ever being helped, become a sacrificial offering yet without being consumed by fire, see you without being rewarded. Hear me, before I cry out to you, who alone are almighty. Do not hand me over to eternal suffering, punished as I am. Do not recompense me for my tallied days of sin, evildoer that I am.

2.4

Grant me life, compassionate one. Hear me, merciful one. Show favor, forgiving one. Save, forbearing one. Defend, protector. Be benevolent, mighty one. Deliver, omnipotent one. Revive, restorer. Raise up again, astounding one. Enlighten, heavenly one. Heal, resourceful one. Grant pardon, inscrutable one. Reward with gifts, generous one. Adorn with grace, affable one. Reconcile, immaculate one. Accept, charitable one. Wipe away transgressions, blessed one.

Thus, on that agonizing day, when I stare at the abyss on either side, I may also catch sight of your salvation, my hope and guardian. When I lift up my eyes to look at the most confounding, frightening path, may your angel of peace meet me kindly. Show me, Lord, on the day of my breath's departure, that pure spirit ascending with light to the happy ones in heaven, arriving there with gifts of your love. May you appoint me to the company of the departed righteous. May you grant me an unexpected kindness on the day of despair, evil though I am. Far be it for you, lauded one, who are the salvation of all, to designate a cruel beast (as) a travelling companion to (lead) me, your sick sheep (now) dead in sin; (rather, grant) incorrupt life, salvation to me, who am devastated by transgressions.

2.5

Will you, my expectation, possibly forget your being benevolent?
Will you, caring one, neglect your being compassionate?
Will you, immutable one, alter your love for humankind?
Will you, everlasting one, withdraw your life-giving?
Will you abandon the pleasant fruit of your mercy?
Will you mar the gracious flower of your kindness?
Will you dishonor the stately substance of your bounty?
Will you change the glory of your resplendent white hair?
Will you discard the fittingly pleasant splendor of your crown?

Since the merciful are blessed, then you, Kingdom unto yourself, are full of blessedness.

Will you not grant me full salvation?
Will you not offer a remedy for my wounds?
Will you not have a salve for my injuries?
Will you not provide a cure for my frailty?
Will you not let light shine in darkness,
for me who trusts in your strength?

You, gift of life to the universe, you alone have glory of your own, truly, and everlasting existence, attested ever since there was nothing, O blessed and glorified Trinity, eternally and beyond the limits of all conceivable infinities. Amen.

Prayer 3

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Through the prayers in this book”>

3.1

O Lord, my Lord, Giver of gifts, altogether Good, fair Ruler of all, sole Creator of all things from nothing, glorified, inscrutable, awesome, astounding, frightful, mighty, formidable, indomitable, unapproachable, incomprehensible, unintelligible, ineffable, invisible, unfathomable, intangible, unsearchable, without beginning, timeless, unobscured knowledge, unblurred vision, true being, exalted yet humble, blessed existence, bright dawn, most brilliant ray, professed light, unwavering assurance, undisturbed calm, indelible seal, infinite apparition, attested name, taste of sweetness, cup of joy, soul-nourishing bread, love amid strange darkness, explicit promise, desirable covering, protective garment, attractive cloak, glorious ornament, great helper, acclaimed refuge, undiminishing grace, inexhaustible treasure, refreshing rain, glittering dew, universal cure, free healing, robust health, utmost cheer, unambiguous call, good news for all, servant-honoring king, poor-loving protector, ever-rich giver, unfettering encounter, irrevocable command, extended hope, long-term vision, unsparing donor, all-dispensing right hand, equitable distributor, impartial eye, comforting voice, consoling news, the harbinger of bliss, living name, the providentially guiding finger, unimpeded exodus, sincere course, life-giving will, candid counsel, unequaled honor, broad possibility, narrow restriction, undetectable track, invisible path, immeasurable image, indefinable magnitude, inimitable example, unparalleled compassion, unlimited mercy, celebrated humility, saving kiss.

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And more than these apt epithets dedicated to your divinity, you who are blessed, praised, lauded, preached, proclaimed through the Gospel, declared, exalted, spoken of, sought with unflinching determination: whatever your streams of kindness bring us shall be illustrated by the images in the discourses to follow, reflecting your joy over my salvation, O Blessed One, as if filled to overflowing with a pleasing sense of satisfaction. It is not because of my vainglorious song that you shall be glorified, but because your great salvation shall take over my humble supplication.

3.2

This newly sung book of laments is descriptive of (feelings) common to every race of rational beings, wherever they may be planted on earth, (expressed) by one aware of the passions besetting all, who, as a companion well informed of everyone's needs, has transferred them to his own image. It is for the whole body of diverse congregations of Christians worldwide: for those who have reached (life's) first cycle, for adolescents called to the second stage, for those near the end of their days turned frail in old age, for sinners and the righteous, for the arrogant obsessed with themselves and the remorseful ones found reproaching themselves, for good people and evildoers, for the cowardly and the brave, for slaves and subordinates, for nobles and the elite, for the middle-class and the gentry, for laborers and feudal lords, for men and women, for rulers and subjects, for captives and the much less fortunate, for the eminent and the lowly, for persons of rank and commoners, for cavalrymen and foot soldiers, for city-dwellers and villagers, for those restrained by the cruel bridle of insolent kings, for ascetics conversing with heavenly beings, for chaste sages with godly decorum, for priests chosen because of their blessed piety, for overseers with proper oversight, (ecclesiastical) presidencies entrusted with the sacred duty of supervision.

May earnest supplications be made on behalf of some and good counsel be given to others through the prayers in this book. I have endeavored, through the power of your Spirit, to compose these diverse entreaties and to present the petitions of all, so that they may come daily with them before your great compassion.

3.3

Heal the souls and forgive the sins of those who read this (book) with a pure heart, release them of their debts, and free them from the bonds of guilt. Let there be a gushing of tears from those edified by the same, and may it prompt yearnings for repentance. May you grant me the will for contrition with them, and may my voice be a refreshing breath to them. May their prayers through this book be offered also on my behalf, and may their sighs with mine rise like incense with these words. May the grace of your light enter and dwell in them, with their partaking of this lamentation.

Should there be pious souls offering themselves through this (book)
after me, receive me with them, the living, for your sake,
O Compassionate One.

Should any ailment be brought with pure tears prompted

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by these (words), allow as you will also that they drop on me,
O Caring One.

Should any be marked for redemption, ranked with those
destined for the coveted life, may your will be done,
also that I be reckoned among them, O Blessed One.

Should divinely pleasing sighs emanate from the (heart's)
recesses through these words, may I also share in the benefit,
O Most High.

Should a pure hand be raised with incense to you,
may it reach you jointly with my voice,
presenting the pleadings by the supplicants.

Should there be diverse entreaties echoing my pangs,
may you, on account of this (book), grant us doubly.

Should the verbal sacrifice by this soul be honored
as pleasing to you, may it be consecrated by you
along with those of others who have gone before me.

Should any be disheartened, become despondent from weariness,
may they be reinvigorated through these sighs,
placing their hope in you.

Should the rampart of trust (in you) be ruined by sin, may it be
rebuilt by your protecting right hand with these fitting stones.

Should the thread of hope (in you) be cut with the sword
of transgressions, may it be reconnected by your almighty will,
made strong by your goodness.

3.4

Should the peril of death besiege a person in pain,
may redemption be found through praying with this (book)
for hope of life, O Giver of Life.

Should one agonize with doubt to the point of being pierced
in the heart, may it be healed through your lovingkindness
with this (book).

Should one be engulfed in the depths of an abyss for being overtaken
by irreparable losses, may he be lifted to light,
under your protection, with the hook of this (book).

Should one be ensnared by the stupor of narcotics and harmed
by deeds of darkness, may he be strengthened on your account
and be sheltered in you, sole Refuge.

Should one abandon the shield of security, may your hand reach him
by means of this (book) and draw him back to the former
steadfastness.

Should one stray from the safeguards into the open,

may he be watched over by these (words)
until he returns to you, Restorer.

Should one be seized by the tremors of demonic fever,
may he be awakened to the very sign of your confessed
and adored mystery of the cross.

Should a violent storm with catastrophic winds strike suddenly
the frame of the human body on its sea voyage in this world,
may it steady its course with these rowing oars which belong
to you.

3.5

And may you make this book consisting of prayers of lament, begun in your name, Most High, into a life-giving remedy to heal your creatures' ailments of body and soul. Complete what I have begun. Let your Spirit be joined with it. May the breath of your great might be united with these compositions by me, enabled by your grace, for you give strength to the disheartened and receive praise from all. Amen.

Prayer 4

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<"There is no answering on that day">

4.1

Creator of heaven and earth, since I have begun conversing with you who hold in your hand the vital breath of my immensely sinful soul, verily I tremble and quake, greatly worried, in constant fear, remembering your inescapable and impartial tribunal, fearsome and unbearable, beyond the bounds of words for a rebuked sinner like me. Moreover, there exists no remedy for my perilously serious and incurable wounds from the stinging bites by the deadly fangs of the mouth of him who hunts down my soul for perdition. More so, since according to the speaker in proverbs, "there is no answering on the day of battle":

no self-justifying with words,
no covering with cloaks,
no disguising with masks,
no flattering with pleasant remarks,

no deceiving with pretenses,
no lying with fitted statements,
no fleeing on swift feet,
no turning of the back,
no rubbing of the face on the ground,
no biting into the soil,
no sinking into the depths of the earth.

For the hidden things are bare before you,
the invisible things manifest.

4.2

My righteousness waned and totally vanished,
leaving my sins exposed and ever increasing.
My evils are permanent, and I am lost;
the scale of justice is wanting and that of injustice hefty.

My crop of goodness has rotted away,
and my faults have hardened like rock.
My deposit is lost, and now my sentence is sealed.
My death warrant is signed, and the covenant of good news voided.

The Benefactor is saddened, and the accuser is jubilant.
The hosts of angels mourn, and Satan dances in ecstasy.
The armies of heaven lament, and the infernal ones rejoice.
The murderer's storehouse is filled,
and the guardian's treasure is plundered.
The alien flank is intact, and the heir's inheritance is betrayed.
The Creator's gift is forgotten,
and the destroyer's snares are preserved.
The Savior's favors are mocked, and Beliar is thrilled.
The fountain of life is shut,
and the tyrant's venom has reached my inflicted person.

4.3

And now, verily, would it not have been preferable—
as the Scripture foretold early on,

not to have been conceived in the womb,
not to have developed in the belly,
not to have advanced to birth,
not to have been brought to the light of life,
not to have been numbered among men,

not to have reached adulthood,
not to have been adorned with a comely image,
not to have been clothed with reason,

than to be seized by such horrifying and most terrible sins that even the hardness of stones cannot bear—let alone perishable bodies?

4.4

And now, I pray you, O Compassionate One, grant me your mercy as you prescribed to us in your own words, saying, “Make that offering to God in the name of your salvation and be holy, for I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” Hence, be exalted anew with this remembrance, you who are venerated with incense. You are the possessor of everything, and everything is from you, and to you glory from all. Amen.

Prayer 5

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“How dare I come before your judgment?”>

5.1

And now how dare I, an earthborn man, consumed with the cares of an insecure existence, drunk with the deceptive wine of foolishness, I, who lie in all things and am truthful in none, come before your judgment with a markedly disfigured, contemptible face, O just Judge, fearsome, ineffable, unbounded and mighty God of all? Hence, when I lay down my sinful ingratitude next to your lovingkindness, I demonstrate that your Law is always grander and my lawlessness forever under its penalty.

5.2

You created me in your glorious image,
enabled a feeble one like me with your majestic likeness,
adorned me with reason,
burnished me with your breath,
enriched me with thought,
cultivated me with wisdom,

buttressed me with intellect,
set me apart from irrational creatures,
instilled in me a rational spirit,
enhanced me with a sovereign mind.

You begot me as a father,
suckled me as a wet nurse,
cared for me as a guardian.

You planted me—a wicked being—in your court,
irrigated me with the water of life,
cleansed me with the dew of the baptismal font,
had me rooted by the stream of life,
nourished me with heavenly bread,
quenched my thirst with your divine blood,
acquainted me with the incorporeal and unreachable existences,
emboldened me to turn my earthly eyes to you,
covered me with your glorious light,
drew the clayish fingers of my unclean hands near to you,
honored my abject mortal ashes as a ray of light.

And out of love for humankind,
you set your mighty, awesome, and blessed Father's seal
upon a wretch like me.

5.3

You did not scorch my mouth full of inanity
for calling myself your co-heir,
did not reprimand me for daring to become intimate with you,
did not darken the sight of my eyes for gazing upon you,
did not exile me in shackles with those condemned to death,
did not crush the wrist of my arm for being raised with impurity
 towards you,
did not shatter my knuckles for touching the Word of Life,
did not engulf me with smoke for the (eucharistic) sacrifice
 offered to you, O fearsome One,
did not break the rows of my teeth
 for chewing your (body unworthily), O infinite One,
did not turn in anger at me, your wayward follower,
 as at the errant house of Israel,
did not embarrass me, the unworthy one, while singing in a circle
 in your bridal chamber,
did not scold me, the lawless one, for my despicable clothes,

did not cast me into the outer darkness, my hands and feet bound.

5.4

For all these portions of goodness with forbearing forgiveness I have received from you, O Benefactor, blessed and tolerant with all, I have paid back with the depravity of sin, my countless and manifold transgressions, both in the flesh and the soul, in diverse and wavering thoughts, agitating and worldly. These, my God and Lord, I have proffered for your abundant goodness, my very evil I have given you in the manner of which Moses speaks with scolding to a lover of foolishness like me, having forgotten wisdom. This accumulation of good favors I have reduced to nothingness in the course of my vanity. This illumination of ineffable grace comprised of your caring, O Most High, I scattered in a storm of madness.

5.5

And although on many occasions you were known to have stretched your hand of visitation to draw me to you, I rejected it, as when the prophet reproached Israel. And although I promised and made a covenant to please you, I did not adhere to my vow, but again turned it to evil. In my former manner I drew near the precipice, I ploughed the field of my heart for the thorns of sin, the yield of weeds. The divine words of the holy prophets apply to me, for of the grapevine planted in me I sprouted thorns instead; I became unsavory fruit of bitterness, a stranger to my vineyard. I was beaten violently by unsteady winds, always being swayed by them, wavering back and forth. As the blessed Job exclaimed, I followed my path of no return. I built my house of foolishness upon the sand. Lured by the broad way, I missed the narrow path to life; I barred myself from the road to be journeyed; I willfully opened the abyss of perdition. I closed the windows of my hearing from receiving your Word of Life; I covered the eyes of my soul from seeing the medicine of life. I did not recoil from leaving my mind in a state of stupor, (ignoring) your trumpet's message of wrath; I was not sobered by the portents of the fiery trial on the day of election. I did not awaken at all from the slumber of mortal sleep that ushers in the determined doom. I did not provide an abode for your Spirit in my bodily temple. I did not mix into my natural breath the portion of grace you granted me. With my own hand I called perdition in, as the speaker in proverbs says, killing my living soul.

5.6

And why should I enunciate few and wanting delineations of quantifiable afflictions when they are way-beyond as regards quantity and far-off as regards healing! Now it is for you to offer life to me, dead in spirit, and to draw near to visit me—a condemned prisoner—without vengeance, O Son of the Living God. To you be glory in all things. Amen.

Prayer 6

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“The weight of my sins is scaled in heaps of sand”>

6.1

And now, what good will I derive or what is there to benefit me if I were to stop the flow of my audible sighs? Is it not better to drain the accumulated pus of my mortal wounds with the lance of my words? Or (take) the heaviness amassed in my heart, the spiritual pangs, as vexing annoyance to be thrown up in a loathsome way, with fingers thrust in (the throat)?

6.2

And since I am not found worthy to exalt in glory among the ranks of the saints, whose mouths are filled with laughter and their lips with rejoicing, according to the speaker in proverbs and to the Psalmist, I shall look forward to the second rank where those like me will be remembered collectively. Although the shortcomings in my flawed character are overwhelming, being penitent seems better than being impenitent.

Manasseh was notorious (for his sins); compared to him,
(behold) my more excessive sins.
The Pharisee was honored; compared to him,
(behold) the wickedness of a deplorable one like me.
The Prodigal Son was praised; compared to him,
(behold) the violation of vows by an impenitent one like me.
The duplicity of Amaziah’s son deserved mention
(in the Scriptures); compared to him,
(behold) the disgrace of an ingrate like me.
The thief was blessed, (becoming) the prosecutor of unbelievers.
The prostitute was honored, (becoming) the foremother
of those who repent.

6.3

No less than Pharaoh did I harden my heart’s inclination.
No less than the violent Israelite mob did I rebel against you,
Creator.
No less than the enemies of God I found myself in public and
did not refrain from denying the Creator of all from nothing.

I was raging like a turbulent, stormy sea, and at your stern command I did not tremble or
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stand in awe as did the waves of the sea before (reaching) the shores. The weight of my sins is scaled in heaps of sand, the boundless mounds of which come short against the mass of my transgressions.

6.4

Though countless are the grains (of sand) piled upon the watery shores, separate are they, devoid of growth by reproduction; whereas my innumerable transgressions are impossible to comprehend:

one (tangled) with its progeny, the other with its lineage;
one with its blemishes, the other with its hazards;
one with its thorns, the other with its roots;
one with its stem, the other with its fruits;
one with its clusters, the other with its branches;
one with its twigs, the other with its joints;
one with its claws, the other with its tendrils;
one with its fragility, the other with its sturdiness;
one with its effects, the other with its causes;
one with its imprints, the other with its traces;
one with its shadow, the other with its darkness;
one with its assaults, the other with its cunning;
one with its deceits, the other with its intentions;
one with its resources, the other with its dimensions;
one with its depths, the other with its corruptions;
one with its sparks, the other with its passions;
one with its reserves, the other with its treasures;
one with its streams, the other with its springs;
one with its rivers, the other with its thunders;
one with its conflagrations, the other with its dreads;
one with its precipices, the other with its abysses;
one with its exacerbations, the other with its drags;
one with its dark clouds, the other with its rains;
one with its currents, the other with its torrents;
one with its blizzards, the other with its gates;
one with its pathways, the other with its roads.

(My transgressions are like)
the furnace with its blistering heat,
the fire with its fumes,
the crucible of fat with its stink,
the wormwood shrub with its bitterness,
the plunderer with his underlings,
the tyrant with his thugs,

the aggressor with his armed accomplices,
the chief of bandits with his mob,
the wild beast with its whelps,
the mangler with the mangled,
the corrupter with his like.

6.5

Now, these are the foremost sins, the corrupters of every soul. They are further divided into subcategories, each of which has thousands upon thousands of lesser kinds, the total number of which are known to him alone who sees them as actual deeds, though we deem them nonexistent.

Now, if one does not engage in self-deception, nor in making pretenses, nor in playing the hypocrite faithlessly, but knows himself and behaves according to our shared nature, recognizing himself as an earthly being and knowing the bounds of one's limitations, he shall understand, he shall know that I did not detail the above-mentioned ills in vain nor defined in full the reality of these failings of various types reeling in our nature. Rather, he will know that I have revealed but few of the myriads of evils, so that through these you may contemplate the rest, though not quite in its entirety.

Prayer 7

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Woe to me!”>

7.1

To the end that I will not abandon the certainty of salvation and laying down my arms surrender to so many invisible adversaries, who are no more than the tribe of foes rising up spontaneously—in the categories just defined and in numbers and figures that are terrifying—I shall here display against these tyrannical warriors the mighty, godly champions, all-conquering and invincible even under difficult circumstances, those unreachable, hard-to-pick fruit from trees, or tireless and diligent (travelers) on untrodden paths. For a few teardrops from the eyes can eradicate all the evil regiments of the accuser's army, making them wriggle like festering insects, hurtful millipedes, or slimy creatures fallen in a dribble of oil or some deadly potion. So too with a faint groan of a sighing heart, rising from the soul, like the blowing of the warm southerly wind mingled with the sun that melts away the severity of the frost. For all

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

(adversaries) alike, they are easily born and die as easily when opposed.

7.2

I shall never cease to censure my condemned self with harsh words, to reproach my sinful self as a pernicious, irredeemable, and incorrigible being. Though I slay some habits that trouble me, I give strength to revive others at the peril of my soul.

I am the plant with bitter boughs that blossomed into abominable,
wrongful deeds;
the branch that bore a harmful and deadly cluster of grapes,
bringing forth the wine of destruction.
I am the offspring of Canaan and not Judah,
according to the saying of the great Daniel;
the child of Gehenna and not of the Kingdom;
the heir of hell and not of the desired glory;
the object of torments and not of rest;
the ungrateful for your benefactions;
the thankless after your many gifts;
the ever-sinful with regard to your forbearance;
the cause of bitterness as compared to the sweetness of your bounty;
the evil and bad servant, according to the Lord's reprimand;
the clever in doing evil, according to Isaiah's fortelling;
the diligent in the baseness of corruption;
the quick in angering the Lord;
the restlessly active in satanic schemes;
the constant cause of sorrow to my Maker;
the sluggard in my flight toward goodness;
the slow in adaptation to blessedness;
the languished in keeping my promises;
the coward in essential and useful acts;
the unfaithful and ungrateful servant of the Lord.

7.3

Woe to me, a sinful soul,
for I have angered my Creator.
Woe to me, a son of perdition,
for I have forgotten the Gift of life.
Woe to me, a debtor of countless thousands of talents,
for I am unable to repay.
Woe to me, a bearer of heavy loads of dire sins,
for I cannot turn to the Giver of rest.
Woe to me, a defaulting debtor to the Lord,

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for I cannot face the Almighty.
Woe to me, a flammable heap of dry reeds,
 for I am to be consumed in Gehenna.
Woe to me for I remember this,
 that the arrows of God's wrath are made of flames.
Woe to me for my foolishness,
 since I did not recall that the hidden shall be made public.
Woe to me, an impious man,
 for ceaselessly I have woven webs of wickedness.
Woe to my well-fed body, food for the undying worms;
 how shall I last their venomous nibble?
Woe to me for having drunk of the cup of death;
 how shall I express my regret at the loss of the eternal?
Woe to me when my unworthy soul leaves my pitiful body;
 how will I be presented before the Judge?
Woe to me for the little oil in my lamp,
 for its dimness is far from radiance.
Woe to me for the sudden alarm, the panic with dismay
 when the door to the nuptial chamber is shut.
And woe to me for the terrifying voice, the dreadful and fearsome words,
 sealed with the verdict of the heavenly King: "I do not know you."

Prayer 8

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<"What will you do, my lost soul?">

8.1

And now, what will you do, my lost soul? Or where will you hide? How will you survive? And how can you escape the dungeon of your sin? Your transgressions are many and their wages incalculable.

The scolding is severe and the reproach endless.
The angels are merciless and the Judge is unbribable.
The court is mighty and the tribunal impartial.
The threat is severe and the retribution merciless.

The sentence is terrifying and the reprimands bare all.
The rivers are fiery and the streams impassable.
The darkness is thick and the fog obscuring visibility.
The pit is foul and the suffering eternal.
Tartarus is all-engulfing and its sweep unrelenting.

Now, indeed you have piled up this stock of bitter things in abhorrent and horrifying cells of unbearable punishment, O my contemptibly sinful soul, evildoer, fornicator, a filthy dump site, littered to the uttermost. Here, then, the wages of your handiwork, you, who have turned away from the straight path and strayed from holiness; you, who were banished from the ranks of the just and the upright; you, who are devoid of the riches of spiritual gifts; you, the provoker of the benevolent and almighty King.

8.2

You have made your own prison and inescapable confine, you, who have confessed that your wounds are incurable and your bruises unequaled, admitting that your soul is worthy of death and incurably shattered.

You, who are evil among the good,
bitter among the sweet,
dark among the radiant kin,
despoiled among the adorned,
rejected among the extolled,
impious among the pious,
simply a breathing creature among the rational,
stupid among the intelligent,
foolish among the wise,
impure among the elect,
dying among the living,
filthy among the saints,
drunken among the sober,
hypocrite among the sincere,
useless among the useful,
ignoble among the glorious,
deficient among the prosperous,
underling among the superiors,
most lowly among the eminent,
poor among the rich,
unworthy among the saved,
disinherited among the rich in spirit,
excluded from among the blessed.

Prayer 9

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“I reprimand my soul”>

9.1

And now, O my wretched, most shameful soul, with what deserving accusations shall I describe you in prayers expressed in this testamentary book of lamentation? You are speechless in your response, unworthy to consort with God and the saints. If I were to fill a sea basin with a mixture of ink, and measure out parchment in the length and breadth of vastly expansive fields, and make pens out of the groves of reeds from many a forest, I would not be able to cover in writing even a fraction of my compounded iniquities. Indeed, if I were to gather the cedars of Lebanon to construct a balancing post, to set an upright measuring means, and to put Mount Ararat in the lighter scale, it would not come close to equalizing.

9.2

I am a towering tree with stately, leafy boughs, but bereft of fruit, of the same kind as the fig tree withered by the Lord. The strands of my foliage are but an outward comeliness, like one adorned with a wreath, a luring drumbeat from afar. When the Planter comes looking for the expected, he will find you (my miserable soul) devoid of any good, entirely lacking in the truly beautiful, a ridicule for onlookers, a spectacle for those who scorn. For the plant proud of its strands, yet barren and lifeless, is sort of an image of those unprepared, cursed in the unexpected, unforeseen hour, or of the land moistened with dew, yet abandoned and forgotten for not yielding the usual, plenteous crop, given the efforts made by the tillers of the soil.

How will you, O my miserable soul, a rational ground, a living plant that has not yielded timely fruit, not suffer the same penalty as in the parable of old? For you have appropriated the full yield of vain deeds, all the evils from the first man to the last of his progeny, and that in great abundance—even new ones, odious and repugnant to God, your Creator.

9.3

And because I have made you the focus of my attention, O my worthless soul, casting you as an untamed wild beast, I will stone you mercilessly with rock-like words. Although I may never be called just, following Wisdom’s word from ancient times, of my own free will I will wrestle with my soul as with an enemy.

Mental sentiments held secretly in my thoughts, as compartmentalized categories of evil deeds, I lay before you with confession, my God and Lord. For with the measure I use to reprimand my soul, let your undiminishing compassion be measured to me in return, that I may

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receive your abundant grace vis-à-vis my greater debts. However much the spread of my incurable and irrepressible wounds, may the genius of your (healing) art enlighten twice as much, O exalted and reputable physician. As for the increase of my debts, may it always be topped by your lauded generosity, O reciprocator, as told in your incense-worthy parable.

9.4

With you is salvation, and from you comes atonement;
with your right hand, restoration, and with your finger, strength;
with your commandments, justice, and with your mercy, freedom;
with your face, enlightenment, and with your countenance, delight;
with your Spirit, goodness, and with your anointing oil, consolation;
exhilaration with the dew of your grace.

You give comfort.
You banish despair.
You lift away the darkness of sorrow.
You turn the sighs of lamentation into laughter.

To you befits blessing with praise in heaven, from our forefathers and their progeny, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 10

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“I begin constructing an edifice of faith”>

10.1

And now, these two lead to perdition: deeply regrettable acts and intractable sin. They are similar though they belong to different tracks. However, when their characteristics are compared, they yield the same desperate result. One mistrusts the arm of the Almighty, considering it weak, the other, like bestial quadrupeds, being senseless, severs the line of hope. Thus, always flattered by the first, Satan constantly rejoices. As for the second, it is like a bloodthirsty hound, a hellish beast, feeding on blood as on food.

10.2

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).
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And now, panting like one who has received countless blows with a club and is left on the verge of death, I hardly catch my breath and (wait until) my soul is revived, rehabilitated, strengthened, uplifted, resuscitated from mortal perdition with the help of Christ's hand, the one merciful to all; and having from the hand of the benevolent heavenly Father the bounties of redemption and healing bestowed on me, a sinner sick and mortal, with this prayer of lament I begin constructing an edifice of faith. For one of the forefathers, armed with this, was transferred to the heavenly realm of immortality. Having taken repentance for a balm, a regimen of penitence, he received the pledge of incorruptibility even here—more than that to which the apostle refers regarding those who on earth completed their struggle for the prize, believing in the hope for future and heavenly things, and thrived on the opulence of the unseen.

10.3

Even one who has committed mortal sin and is hurled with twice as heavy metal (chains) deep into the abyss for the wicked has the prospect of salvation unto life by finding a way out through (Christ's) atonement—like the sinner with eyes raining (tears) for the mercy of the Almighty, (rain) gifted by the Spirit of God, which replenishes the earth, making it blossom miraculously. The adorable word of the Lord's counsel on this matter is worth remembering: "All things are possible for one who believes." There is a determined measure for our part in this, in considering anew what pleases God. We have received a similar injunction from the ancients: to approach the sacraments with such (faith), without which not even the Lord of Glory would have performed his miracle-working powers on us—unless our faith in his benevolence is first yoked together with (our) petitions. Wherefore life compels to yield with contentment to the all-sovereign will of God. For "your faith has saved you," the ever-blessed mouth of God has testified.

10.4

Truly, that special type of vision, that perfect wisdom and acquaintance with God or familiarity with the Exalted, are but an integral part of faith: that blessed and choice word which lasts forever, unaffected and unbounded, honored equally with love and hope. For when faith is nurtured a little, even when smaller than a mustard seed, it can mightily move a great mountain into the heart of the sea. Truly, then, let us embrace it as the first pathway leading to life. (Faith,) this simple form of worshiping God, which sees the future and hidden things clearly with the eye of the soul, is honored in the name of the glorified Trinity together with love and hope. For if you view these three distinct aspects as one and the same mystery, you will forever grow by them in God. For when you believe in him, you will also love him, the very one in whom you hope for his unseen rewards. Glory to him forever. Amen.

Prayer 11

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“In hope I believe”>

11.1

And now, I, the last in the line of confessors, devoid of goodness, contemplate with my mind's eye the beginning of my existence at the hand of him who created me from nothing.

In hope I believe that Jesus Christ is able to do anything he wills. “Since I believe, so have I spoken,” as counseled by Paul and taught by David. May I be visited by their living prayers so that through faith “I might know him and the power of his resurrection,” as the apostle says, “and that I may share in his suffering” and the sayings that follow. For true faith is closely linked to the transformation in this renewal: from sin to atonement, from wrongdoing to righteousness, from impurity to holiness, from unforgivable mortal sins to impeccable blessedness, and from the bondage of serfdom to the freedom of heaven.

11.2

Could there be a fairer word than that the heart of the sinner is freed, with the help of God, from the horror of utter darkness? For while he exhilarates physically, he sighs spiritually over the destruction of that heavy nest cast down from the highest summit into the utmost bottom of the deep. (Once) alienated because of unprecedeted sins, he (now) has access to the life-giving morsel of salvation, like a spark of light guarded in his mind and soul (or) like that amazingly astounding, miraculously condensed fire in the hollow of the dry cistern was inflamed by the Sovereign’s command. Thus the sinner, once consumed with sorrow—his expectation of heavenly goodness removed and certainty of grace abandoned—can still hope to reclaim the glorious, original gifts.

For this (hope) derives from God and affects renewal from within, heralding the omnipotence of its giver, God, who is pleased more with this (kind of) incense than with any sweet fragrance, more than the ancient blend once offered in the service of the tabernacle, which is symbolic of the humble soul laid low by contrition, that it may be united with its true likeness. For this reason, the Savior of All asked one of those deprived of sight, “Do you believe that I am able do this for you?” thus obtaining the pledge of faith before restoring light to their eyes. For what seems more hopeless to us than the revival of a corpse four-days dead? Yet the women, robed in faith, fell at the Creator’s feet and soon beheld God’s glory revealed in their brother brought back to life.

11.3

And there are countless witnesses to the fact that God’s boundless grace persisted after St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).
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(the intrusion of) sin. First there is Enoch, then Aaron, then David, and then Peter; among them also the child Eliezer, on whom the great God had great compassion, as the elders testify. It may be superfluous for me to add the parable of the Prodigal Son. (How) could I omit the prostitute praised by the Lord, the tax collector mentioned by the Benefactor, the fortunate thief, who through faith received his wreath at the parting of his last breath—or even those whose sins (seemingly) cannot be atoned for, those who took part in killing the Creator, among them Paul, foremost of the chosen, who once was chief of sinners! Some of those who stumbled, even knowing the Law, were able to stand up, excelling a thousandfold those who were long privileged with religious piety. And what of him who, before the giving of the Law, had kept the ancestral tradition, having remained most faithful to the commandment: the forefather of faith! So then, (Christ) took upon himself the progenitor's debt, paid it off in his bitter suffering, made atonement without remaining buried in the earth, and having triumphed mightily over death's grip through the torments of his body, was taken up, the harbinger of life for those rational by nature.

11.4

There are those who lingered in evil while in tender age but in maturity did not fall from their high state; rather, they rose from the loathsome miseries of their horrible lives unto the vault of heaven. Even in earlier times, the wayward changed their ways by willpower, turning the earthen substance into gold and carving the royal image that graces our form in majestic relief, imperishable and irreplaceable, transcending the failures to which our nature subjects us. How much more, then, is our hope because of the pure enlightenment, without veil or covering, through the covenant made by Christ our Lord, by whom the divine word is implanted firmly in us! According to the voice of the prophet, “the covenant of peace and the seal of constancy” belong to the mediator of reconciliation, the heavenly, immortal, living and perpetual intercessor. Therefore, in keeping with this testimony—that is most true—and the immutable bounds set by the Creator, with lips of faith I kiss the icon of the Logos and await the glory of grace. For verily, in the words of the apostolic statement, “no one has power to condemn us in our state of justification by God.”

11.5

Having taken refuge in this clearly written assurance,
I, who was shattered, have been restored;
who was miserable, have become a conqueror;
who was misled, have turned to living;
who was a most miserable outlaw, have found hope;
who was condemned to death, have found life;
who was sold unto corruption, have found favor;
who was given to hellish deeds, have found light;
who was bestially depraved, have found heaven;
who was doubly scandalous, have found salvation again;

who was bound by sin, have found the promise of rest;
who was afflicted with incurable wounds,
 have found the salve of immortality;
who was outrageously rebellious, have found the reins of tranquility;
who was an outright renegade, have found my calling;
who was brazenly obstinate, have found humility;
who was contentiously quarrelsome, have found forgiving.

To Christ Jesus, to his mighty and redoubtable Father, to the name and the will of the beneficent true Spirit, the blessed essence and one Godhead, all power and dominion, majesty and glory forever. Amen.

Prayer 12

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Remembering the hope placed in you”>

12.1

And now, since I have allowed myself to lapse into my former expressions of endless despair, beating myself to death with the rod of doubt, I shall dare again with the slightest hope for pity to call upon the Holy Trinity to help a sinner like me. For blessing and acknowledging God, the Giver of life from nothing to all—indeed, calling upon the familiar-sounding yet astounding name of him who grants all grace—are means of life to a mortal like me. As the prophet had foretold, “Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall live.”

12.2

Not only do I call upon him, but first I believe in his greatness. I seek not just his rewards but him, over and over, the very essence of life, the guarantor of giving and taking of breath, without whom there is neither motion nor progress, to whom I am bound not so much by the tie of hope as by the bonds of love. I always long not so much for the gifts as for the Giver. I yearn not so much for the glory as for the adorable glorified. I am constantly consumed not so much with the desire for life as with the remembrance of the Giver of life. I sigh not so much with the splendor of rapture as with visceral longing for the One who is coming. I ask not so much for comfort as for the face of the One comforting. I am worn out with anxiety, not so much about the bridal chamber as about (the words of) the Groom, (even though) by his

strength I wait with sure expectation, believing with unwavering hope and trusting myself into the hands of the Almighty, that in spite of the weight of my transgressions listed above I shall not just be pardoned but that I shall see him verily, that I shall find mercy and compassion and inheritance in heaven, even though I deserve to be ruthlessly exiled.

12.3

Humbled now by much embarrassment, my face marred with shame, my lips—the means of expressing myself—doubly sealed, my tongue hesitant to move, inhibited by distress, I shall still resort to intoning supplications with sighs, mournful sobs crying out to heaven again.

Accept kindly, mighty Lord God, the prayers of my embittered soul.

Draw near with compassion to my unsightly person.

Dispel, Giver of all gifts, my appalling sadness.

Remove from me, merciful One, my unbearable burdens.

Cast into the outer realm, resourceful One, my mortal habits.

Hold me back, ever-victorious One, from the deceiver's desires.

Disperse, exalted One, the fraudster's fog.

Block, Giver of life, the destroyer's ways.

Undo, Seer of secrets, the oppressor's evil gains.

Defeat, inscrutable One, the assailant's attacks.

Inscribe the skylight of my abode with your lordly name.

Support the ceiling of my chapel with your hand.

Mark the threshold of my room with your blood.

Exhibit your sign on the door-lintel of your petitioner.

Strengthen with your hand the frame on which I rest.

Keep the cover of my bed free from defilement.

Preserve my tormented soul by your will.

Steady the breath of life you bestowed upon my body.

Surround me with a band of your heavenly host.

Assign them to guard against the legion of demons.

12.4

Grant me that blissful rest of death-like sleep in the depth of this night, through the prayers of intercession by the Holy Mother of God and of all the elect. Veil thoroughly the window of my mental faculties, securing them from nightmares, floating anxieties, concerns of daily life, sleepless dreaming, and aimless wanderings. Remembering the hope placed in you, keep them safe from harm.

And when I wake from my sound sleep, fully alert, grant that I stand spiritually refreshed before you. Then will I raise heavenward cries of supplication scented with faith in you, O most blessed King of ineffable glory; so will I join the choirs of glorifiers assembled in heaven. For you

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are glorified by all creatures, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 13

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“The Holy Trinity to help a sinner like me”>

13.1

Benevolent, almighty, astounding God, good Father, generous in mercy, whose very name heralds the good news of your majesty's familiar compassion, your kindness to the embittered and estranged. With you also is your Son, who is like you, whose hand is strong like yours, whose astounding reign is eternal like yours, exalted with you through creation. So too is the Holy Spirit of Truth that flows from you without end, perfect essence in being, eternally existent, equal to you in all things, coequal in glory and lordship with the Son. Three Persons, you are altogether inscrutable, individually distinct, separate beings, brought into oneness by your congruence and being of the same divine, consubstantial nature, unmixed and undivided, one in will and interrelation. None is greater and none lesser than the other, not even for a wink of an eye; rather, constancy of heavenly love, of shadowless light, different from that familiar to us; One Divinity, glorified simultaneously through the timeless *Sanctus*.

13.2

For verily, the beatified Peter, the rock of faith, voiced a loud confession of your exalted Trinity. Whereas mine is by one condemned in sin yet miraculously justified anew, by your kind consideration, O seeker of a captive like me. Though the rewards are yours and yours too the mercies, I exult not as much in rewards as in mercies. For the latter add to your glory, while the former acknowledge the works of those who strive. For rewards are recompense for toil, whereas mercies are favors to a sinner like me.

13.3

And now, God of compassion, may human deeds never prevail over your grace, should they ever supersede the common law of transient nature. Rather, may your forbearance triumph so that your ways may never be less than those of earthly beings. Because they prided themselves in reliance on the Laws of Purity rather than on your righteousness predicted for the present, the failed Jews, abandoned to utter anguish and pitied for their perpetual exile, are found more

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needy of your love for humankind. And since everything is possible for you, O Benefactor, hear my sighs of supplication as I pray to you. Have mercy, revive and love us as humans. For yours is forbearance, kindness, salvation, atonement, and eternal glory from all nations. Amen.

Prayer 14

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“You resuscitated”>

14.1

I beseech you, Ray of Light, heavenly King, unlimitedly praised, ineffable Son of the great God: Incline your ear, O most high and merciful (Lord), refuge of life, by drawing near again and again to the enfeebled sighs of my wounded soul.

14.2

There is not a hint that the one pierced by the bandits' sword
ever entreated you, for he was traumatized;
or that he uttered any supplication afterwards, for he was numbed;
or that he signaled with trembling fingers his devastation to you
who notice, for he was shattered;
or that he fixed his plaintive, tearful eyes on you who are benevolent,
for he was a debtor to sin;
or that he pleaded through an intercessor for your good will,
who are compassionate, for he was inattentive;
or that he spread out the blood-soaked garments
of his shattered body to touch your heart, who feels sorrow,
for he was without hope;
or that he dragged himself on feeble knees, as one trying to rise
on his feet, for he was incapable—for being described
as half-dead is no less than being dead, though alive.

All the more, for after your words of counsel and being favored with your mercy and illumined with your glory, not only he did not cease to act contrary to you but had the audacity to rebel by joining the ranks of your enemies, allying himself with those who hated you.

14.3

But you, benefactor with many gifts, un vindictive, Giver of life to all, you neither kept a record of the offender's sins nor scolded him; you did not trample the fallen with your feet, but drawing near with aid, you showed the utmost care. Contrary to the priestly custom of the feeble Aaronic Law, which harshly condemns to death with curses and the cruelty of stoning that hastens the demise of the wounded man, (and) also contrary to the deficient Levitical precursor—for both are indistinguishably the same in discriminating—you, the end of the Old and the beginning of the New, presented yourself as the propitiation of those bereft of the Spirit. Upon seeing the endangered, wounded man, you did not consider yourself an agent of death who strikes with the axe at the root before giving another opportunity. Rather, you associated yourself with the pagan Assyrians who took the name "Keepers," those who received the Law from the Jews and kept it in its entirety, that which the latter had forgotten. You made yourself kin even to them by donning a body like ours and revealing yourself as the deliverer, the (bearer of) good news to alien races, and through your incorruptibly divine operation you stretched forth your arm and resurrected the first man who had sinned unto death along with his progeny.

You brought joy to the gloomy heart. You supported the hopeless. You restored happiness to the once despondent. You satisfied his want with the anointing of the life-giving baptismal font and the cup of light. You resuscitated him through the regenerative heavenly bread, your body. Through the watchful company of the happy elect, you guarded him, cuddled him, and cared for him until you brought him comfortably on the gently moving pack animal to the dwelling of light. Through the two intermediaries, the Old and the New, the living Testaments you gave him, you treated him with your love for humankind. And as it was once with Moses, like an eagle with outspread wings you carried him and brought him to the restful serenity in the land of goodness and prescribed that he be nourished with the teaching of the Word.

14.4

And now, you who have thoroughly and miraculously endowed all things in the universe with the light of your goodness and have reappropriated the usurper's treasure by reclaiming your inheritance, revive me also, wiping out the debt of my sins. You who give freely even to the unrepentant, grant me also atonement and healing with them, O Compassionate One, mighty, inscrutable, incorruptible, astounding, who are blessed forever, unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Prayer 15

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“*You are called Shepherd*”>

15.1

O God, I return to you with the same sighs of my imperiled heart, presenting my own words intoned in the same pitch. I seek your compassion, O Giver of all gifts, with my soul in anguish, always in peril, like one who is dead; I turn to you, living and immortal God, while I confess my iniquity before your glory, my evil deeds—by which I am overwhelmed and not comforted, ashamed rather than confident, having abandoned my vow and forgotten the sacred tradition—before your goodness. The parable that employs the metaphor of the lowly sheep left utterly numbed—lost on a mountain, beyond reach, wondering among ferocious beasts, demons, and monsters, not close in the slightest to the one flock—applies doubly to me. I have no words with which to recount my excruciating pain, no agile hands to communicate like the mute. Whereas you who alone are praised by those from timeless beginning to the newborn, found me, as the singer of petitions has it, a sinner who wandered off into utter darkness. You are called Shepherd because of your willing, caring oversight. You not only cared but also sought; you not only found, O worker of miracles, but you—who is ineffable in bestowal of love—lifted me upon your life-giving shoulder, you who rank us with the heavenly hosts to become heirs to your Father.

15.2

And now, mighty Giver of life, blessed Visitor and abounding in mercy, since you heard the silent supplication of one suffering on the verge of death and of another who like senselessly irrational animals wandered into desolate places, rejected, perplexed, bellowing incoherent roars devoid of meaning, and in your divine providence that miraculously sustains the universe you attended to the great misery of the lost, please reveal again now the depths of your compassion and the streams of your benevolence to me,

who in lawlessness has surpassed the examples mentioned above,
who am in debt to death in many ways,
who has mixed the peculiar taste of evil
 into the sweet taste of goodness,
who deserves to have the members of his body amputated,
who has a wounded spirit, thoroughly infected with every disease,
who has equaled irrational animals in senselessness,
who has been estranged from the company of the wise,
who has no semblance to fellow rational beings.
Had there been another example, I would have cited it.
Had there been someone like me, I would have described him.
Had there been a category, I would have defined it.
Had there been my equal, I would have remarked about him.

Had there been a parallel, I would have shown it.
Had there been a model, I would have displayed it.
Had there been a precedent, I would have pointed it out.
Had there been a (similar) case here and now, I would be hopeful.

But since my case exceeds any example and defies any resemblance, you alone can atone, heal, and do a miracle, Giver of life to all the dead, renewer of the universe.

15.3

It is said of one with a pure heart, the blessed David, that he considered his lawlessness rising over and above his head, his transgressions outweighing the heaviest burdens ever to bear. Yet the sins I bear surpass the piled-up water of the deluge, that universal, all-engulfing sea high above the mountaintops. So, may your pleasant breath blow over me as it did over Noah, that which can melt the strength of mountains and dry up the accumulations of the surging water, even my earth-shattering transgressions, my towering sins that rise high as the mountains.

15.4

Summing up your mighty word and, to the extent possible, judging me in brief for my prolonged transgressions, grant me a way out through forgiveness, in accordance with the prophet. And when forgiving my obstinacy, O forbearing, merciful, blessed One, be truly benevolent by forgiving all, having yourself paid for my unrepayable debt, including the justifiably accrued and crushing interest. You bear no grudge in your heart or fierce anger, nor is there deceit or any trace of darkness in you, for life and light are part of your will. You did not create death, and according to David and Solomon, you do not rejoice over human loss.

15.5

You set this major precept for humans in your well-grounded law, not to return evil for evil, but that every day we should forgive seventy times seven the sins committed against us. You addressed this to us who by nature have the inclination for evil, which keeps manifesting constantly, which regularly appears within the hedged field, these weeds of our thorny nature. As you testified in truth, "The human mind from childhood is fixated on evil." Even one who was utterly pure, John the Evangelist of your Word of Life, related himself to this common nature, affirming your truthfulness and very justly my lying. He says, "If we say that we have no sin, we make him a liar." And now, your hallowed word is fulfilled and borne out with absolute veracity by my waywardness and bitter iniquities. Deliver me therefore with your mercy, O sweet fount of lovingkindness, who alone are blessed through all eternity. Amen.

Prayer 16

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“The light of your mercy”>

16.1

And now, God in heaven, who alone is exalted and benevolent:

Yours is the power and yours the forgiveness.

Yours is the healing and yours the plenitude.

Yours is the granting of gifts and yours the grace freely given.

Yours are the atonement and protection

and yours the means beyond knowing.

Yours are the unattainable arts and yours the immeasurable bounds.

You are the beginning, and you are the end. The light of your mercy surely offsets the darkness of your fury, for you are not affected by vice—not in the slightest. You are too lofty for words, an image beyond definition, surpassing measurable weight, immense in glory, the reach of whose power is boundless, whose absolute supremacy is beyond demarcation, whose good works of compassion are constant.

You turned the shadow of death into dawn, as the prophet says. You willingly descended into Tartarus, to the prison of those held below, for whom the door of prayer was barred, and freed the amassed spoil of captive and damned souls. With the commanding sword of your victorious word, you cut asunder the repressive bonds of death and scattered the anguish of sin.

Turn unto me, trembling in the mire of my abyssal dungeon, held with the iron fetters of sin, wounded by the deep piercing of the accuser’s arrows.

16.2

Benevolent Lord of all, you are light in darkness, treasure of blessedness, merciful, compassionate, lover of humankind. You are capable and mighty, unbounded, inscrutable, ineffable, and, according to the holy Jacob, “sufficient.” You render all impossibilities possible, fire that consumes the tangle of sin, blazing ray that illumines the maze of every great mystery.

Remember me, O Blessed One, with your mercy rather than with your rightful claims, with your forgiveness rather than with exactitude. Should you weigh the load of my sins, let it be with your kindness and not with your justice; for with the former it would be greatly reduced, whereas with the latter it would be exceedingly heavy.

16.3

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

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Now, draw near to me, O goodness, even as you healed the ear of the one who arose against you. Take away the wind of death's anguish from me, a sinner, so that the peace of your almighty Spirit might rest in me. And glory to you, in all things, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 17

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“The more you show mercy ...”>

17.1

I pray you now, O guardian of imperiled souls, those suffering with deep sorrow, grieving in spirit.

Do not amplify my painful sighs.
Do not wound me, the injured.
Do not condemn me, the punished.
Do not torment me, the tortured.
Do not scourge me, the beaten.
Do not hurl me, the fallen.
Do not destroy me, the stumbled.
Do not reject me, the banished.
Do not exile me, the persecuted.
Do not shame me, the humiliated.
Do not scold me, the frightened.
Do not crush me, the broken.
Do not perturb me, the troubled.
Do not toss me around, the disquieted.
Do not shudder me, the shaken.
Do not confound me, the muddled.
Do not mangle me, the devoured.
Do not smash me, the shattered.
Do not spike me, the torn apart.
Do not blind me, for I am in the dark.
Do not terrify me, for I am perplexed.
Do not smolder me, for I am charred.
Do not kill me, for I am sick.

Do not add to my burdens, for I am weak.
Do not overload me, for my back is bowed.
Do not redouble my groans, for I am weeping bitterly.
Do not treat my earthen self severely.
Do not scatter my ashes violently.
Do not deal with me deservedly, who am but a creature.
Do not handle me dreadfully, who am but dust.

17.2

Do not measure exactingly your greatness against me, the little one;
your light against me, the shadow;
your good nature against me, the evil one by nature;
your clusters of blessing against me, the fruit of the curse;
your real sweetness against me, the wholly bitter;
your unchanging glory against me, the completely degraded;
your essence of life against me, the lump of clay;
your lordship over lords against me, the earthly mire;
your undiminishing fullness against me, the poor slave;
your boundless amenity against me, the miserably vulnerable;
your infinite goodness against me, the most wretchedly poor.

For who would dread darkness at the light of dawn
and when morn arrives,
or death at the threshold of life,
or bondage at liberation,
or condemnation at grace,
or betrayal at salvation,
or destruction at renewal,
or banishment at blessings,
or injury at healing,
or want at fullness,
or hunger at abundance of bread,
or thirst at the flowing rivers,
or conniving at motherly compassion,
or anxiety at the care of your Divine right hand?

17.3

And now, together with the man whose body was severely afflicted with leprosy, I pray to you with my imperiled soul, "Lord, if you want you can make me clean."

With the blind man groping in perpetual darkness, I cry with a loud voice. I not only call you "Son of David" but also profess your divine birth from the Existent. I not only call you, "Rabbi," an honor bestowed upon teachers for particulars they are supposed to know, but I also believe St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

you to be the Lord of heaven and earth. I expect to be healed not only by the immediate touch of your hand, O compassionate, immanent God, but also by the power of your word across the vast chasm. I make no distinction between your will and your mercy, for you express your will as the Compassionate One and act ably as Creator. Say the word and I will be healed; I too will join the centurion in his faith!

So I confess my faith in your power not only to narrow the chasm between (the heavenly) sanctuary and (the earthly) sanctuary, but also to resurrect and to make whole. While you are seated on high in heaven, you work wondrous miracles in the depths of the earth—for which I have nothing to give in return.

17.4

Grant me forgiveness, one with the debt of five hundred *denarii*, as you decreed acceptance by your word and welcomed the prostitute, O God of goodness and Lord of blessedness.

You are much praised for your frequent help
and equally loved for the plenty you bestow.
The more you show mercy, the more your magnanimity,
and for all your benevolence, you are rightly glorified.
Though you own everything, you made yourself our equal,
and though you are all in all, you stooped to our level.
For your ineffable favors you accept our (meager) reciprocity
and for our earthly offerings you cancel our eternal debts.
You value our response, thus you are greatly praised with thanks,
and you are not aloof from the little glory we give.

Show the same compassion to me who indeed owes countless debts, so that I may proceed with words of thanksgiving for your gifts in the very manner of the *Agapē*.
To you be the glory always. Amen.

Prayer 18

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“I beg healing for my soul”>

18.1

Now, I am progeny of sin, the child of deadly labor pains. Indeed, a penalty of countless St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).
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myriads of talents has come due in a single day. I beg forgiveness, not with the simplicity of human thought but pleadingly for the full measure of our Savior Jesus Christ's love for humanity.

Before I was, you created me.
Before I could wish, you shaped me.
Before I was exposed to light, you saw me.
Before I emerged, you took pity on me.
Before I called, you cared for me.
Before I raised a hand, you noticed me.
Before I pleaded, you had mercy on me.
Before I uttered a sound, you heard me.
Before I sighed, you attended to me.

Knowing my present condition, you did not ignore me. Having noticed with your foreseeing eyes my evil deeds that deserve punishment, still, you fashioned me.

18.2

And now, do not let me—whom you made and saved and took into your care to such an extent—be lost vainly to the blows of sin by the accuser's whims. Do not let the fog of my stubbornness prevail over the light of your forgiveness, nor the hardness of my heart over your forbearing goodness, nor my lethal flaws over your perfect wholeness, nor my weak flesh over your invincible divinity.

18.3

In your name, Almighty, I stretch the shriveled arm of my soul so you will make it whole as before, as in the luxurious Paradise, when I reached to pick the fruit of life. My pathetic soul, incorrigible, bound up, infirm, bent over, is like the stricken woman, bowed by sin, her gaze on the ground, in Satan's constricting shackles, prevented from receiving your heavenly greeting. You who alone are merciful, turn your ear toward me, and raise this humbled, fallen, dried up, rational piece of wood, to make it blossom in decorous piety, in accordance with the theology of the holy prophet.

18.4

Like the blind from birth, without light, I am sightless to look upon your figure, however I wish, almighty and compassionate Creator, my only Protector. If you turn the caring gaze of your ineffable love upon this your vessel, breathing and capable of speech, you could create light out of nothing (in me). With the wretched woman in the Gospels, afflicted by evils for twelve years, I am swamped in the bloody rivers of sin. Cloaked in your unapproachable light, look down upon me from the heights of heaven where there are no hems of robes sewn out of fabric but a spread of definite wonders everywhere.

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

18.5

Condemned as I am, I cannot draw near to the life-giving soles of your feet to anoint them with oil as the sinful (woman did), nor to offer the tears of my eyes together with the curls of my hair. Rather, (I draw near) with hands lifted in faith and with firm creedal confession, with a spiritual kiss. With sealed lips I kiss the ground, with sighs mingled with streaming tears I beg healing for my soul.

18.6

The very essence of my soul is consumed with sin, dilapidated in weakness, tilted to one side, unsteady on both of its supports, limping along its course, retreating in the face of evil. Would you, who alone are capable of saving, strengthen anew even the crumbling structure of my physical frame that it may venture to reach the fruit of the Tree of Life. And may the organ of glorification with which you endowed my image created by you, to ward off vocally the spell of the accuser and to silence him, be touched miraculously by the great mercy of your Spirit as told in the Gospel about the man who was healed, to grant me unerring speech, O merciful, living Word.

18.7

Struck down by evil, I lie on my filthy mat, in the bed of sin, a living corpse capable of speech, yet dead, needy in the midst of my suffering, lamenting with plaintive voice. O benevolent Son of God, with the dewdrops of your blessed eyes restore me to life as you did your beloved friend from breathless death. I am truly penitent, while hopeless in the pit of sin. Extend your hand, Sun that casts no shadow, Son of the Most High, and draw me to your radiant light.

18.8

With the desperate, pitiful, and faltering voice of the widow in Nain, the mother wailing over her only son, her fingers trembling, chest heaving, tears streaming down her grief-stricken face, I implore you with my last sigh: Grant me, who has lost hope, the encouraging comfort of your compassionate word. Say to me also, kind and praiseworthy Creator of the world: "Do not weep, you most pitiable captive!" May I, like the youth whose coming back to life brought consolation to the grieving parent, have my most sinful soul restored by you.

18.9

With the likes of the senseless, the demon-possessed and hardened as stone, those gasping for breath, pathetic people with appallingly disheveled hair, savage-looking, depraved blabbers who moved you with compassion, O Savior of all, I come to you as one of them. Will you expel the defiling legions of evil from my tabernacle which is yours, so that your kindly Spirit may

come to dwell there, to fill my body with a cleansed breath, to bedeck its members, and to bring sanity to one most miserably insane like me.

18.10

With the enslaved, banished souls living in hell, I am imperiled. May the ray of mercy radiate from your glory, O Light whom I desire. May you grant me life, free from the bonds of my oppressor. My soul is in a state of distress, drowning in the filth of my sins, in that insidious, subtly devious course. Heal with compassion, with your autonomous power, O Son of God, the evildoer's stings full of venom hidden from sight. The manifold varieties of deadly plagues, each with its pernicious yield of bitter roots established deeply in the field of my lawless body, weed out with your almighty hand, you who tills and cultivates the fields of souls, (to reap) a harvest (sown) by your Word of Life.

18.11

The wound caused by my transgressions exceeds the given examples; it is like a consuming cancer, spreading the malignancy in every part of my body. There is no salve, just as for Israel, to deal with the enormity of the sores. Every part of my body—from the sole of the foot to the palm of the hand—is sick, indeed beyond any cure. But you, merciful, benevolent, blessed, forbearing, and immortal King, hear the supplications of my disconsolate heart for relief, as in my distress I pray to you, Lord.

Prayer 19

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“I will testify against myself”>

19.1

Seer of all, revealer of the life hoped for, consider the loud cries of groans from my anguished soul. O unreachable greatness, astounding name, living word, desirable message, delectable taste, worshipful invocation, confessed beneficence, incensed proclamation, avowed reality, glorifiable essence, praiseworthy existence, Lord Jesus, who with your Father are honored and worshiped and with your Holy Spirit are exalted and proclaimed, who for our sake alone became embodied in flesh like unto us, so that you may make us like unto you for your sake.

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).
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Light unto all, in all things merciful, mighty, heavenly, restore with your divine, miracle-working power my disintegrating and crumbling earthen vessel, I pray you, compassionate one. In the crucible, with the spark of your Word, forge anew your image worn out in sin, I plead with you. Cleanse for your dwelling the shaky structure of my body—the buffer of my soul, a tabernacle for your repose, I pray you, benefactor.

Do not render in kind for my evil deeds. I am drunk, as the prophet says, but not with wine. Empty out the dregs of iniquity from my stupefying cup of death. By your liberating command, Giver of life to all, let me not be crushed on that last day of recompense.

19.2

You are righteous in your claims
and confounding in your judgment.

If you condemn me to death,
your action is right.

If you rebuke me before handing me over to be tortured,
your impositions are just.

If you plunge me into the abyssal depths
or take my vitality away,
if you silence my power of speech
or darken the windows of my eyes,
if you curtail my joy in life
or deprive me of common nourishment,

if you reduce the richness of my days
or shower fire instead of dew,

if you starve me of hearing your words
or shut the doors of my ears,

if you cut off the bounty of your grace
or make the earth quake under my feet,

if you shut me off the desirable light of your face
or expel me from this world altogether,

if you terrify me with lightning bolts
or sentence me to incurable pains,

if you hand me over to evil demons
or have me chewed up in the jaws of beasts,

if you blow me away in billowing wrath
or devise some new form of torture—

more evil than Tartarus,
more terrible than Gehenna,
more vile than worms,
more distressing than darkness,
more frightening than the abyss,

more piteous than nakedness,
I will testify against myself that I deserve more than these.

19.3

Since the penalties always correspond to the transgressions like mirror images in significantly mysterious parallels, commensurate, it is important to confess and remove the veil from my face to one who seeks to know me.

Since I did not approach with warm love my fellow man in need,
it is right that I freeze with anguish at the first thought of peril.
Since I did not bridle my inclination to audacity, it is fair that I,
the pitiable one, should bear the dreadful swelter
that cannot be cooled.
Since I did not love the good news of your light,
it is just that I should be condemned to fumble
like one lost in gripping darkness, in the mist of destruction.
Since I did not abstain from slight, minor transgressions,
considering them harmless, it is fitting that I be tormented
by the horrible, cutting bites.
Since I did not extend a helping hand to one in danger or visit him,
it is proper for me, under such circumstances,
to be summarily condemned to the pit of decay.

19.4

Surely evil is not from your divine treasures that are altogether good, nor is darkness from your radiant light, nor is dismay part of your protection. Rather, I have found that these are in me, a son of perdition. My iniquitous sins amassed and yielded such a crop that drew so much wrath. Having obeyed the prince who deludes the soul, I yielded your place to him—notwithstanding the warning counsel of the Book.

19.5

And since the secrets of my body's hideous members have been revealed, my shame has cast a disgraceful shadow upon my face. As in the parable of the prophet, I came to see my ugliness in its entirety, like the offensiveness of a naked prostitute. Shine your light of atonement in me, O heavenly King, so that shaking off the dust of my sins, I may stand straight, rising from the ground, like the people returning from Babylon, having heard the voice of good tidings; and I will be established on the firm foundation of your unshakable hope. In accordance with the words of the prophet Isaiah, I shall be clothed in my former purity by your mighty hand, owing to the lovingkindness of your all-granting divinity and your great glory, O blessed forever. Amen.

Prayer 20

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Confession laid in repentance at your feet”>

20.1

O Lord, O Lord, who is not vindictive but forbearing, forgiving, compassionate, mighty, and merciful: Behold, your works rest upon truth, your judgments upon confession, your decisions upon verity, O Seer of the unseen. With the three blessed youths who were tested in the blazing flames in Babylon but were not harmed, I sigh their sorrowful song: “I have sinned, I have violated the Law, I have transgressed, I have rebelled and have not obeyed your commandments.” They being innocent of any wrongdoing cried out this confession, while I with these very same pleas, joining them in chanting the same laments, have sinned unto death more than anyone. When I join Daniel, the blessed, holy, and great prophet from among your kin belonging to the lineage of Judah, in (repeating) his acceptable words and dedicated pleas, even then my punishable utterances reverberate with my sighing.

20.2

I proceeded along the path of pointless knowledge, I strayed, erring miserably; this is sinning in all ways in all things.

I ran beyond the bounds set by your will; this is indeed indicative of blameworthy lawlessness.

I reached the point beyond knowing the sum of evil deeds; this is a true portrayal of transgression.

You threatened, but I was not scared; you expressed compassion, but I never heard that; these are clear signs of rebellion.

20.3

O Benefactor, you are clothed with righteousness and prepared shame and disgrace for me.

For you, fitting glory;

for me, deserved insults.

For you, sweet remembrance;

for me, bitter bile for things committed.

For you, praise without ceasing;

for me, cries of tearful laments.

For you, songs of blessing with incense;

for me, the alienation of exile.

For you, all rights justly deserved;
 for me, every worrisome penalty.
For you, the height of ineffable laudation;
 for me, the abject punishment of licking dust.

20.4

And now, O desirable Goodness, beyond measure, who delights in sweet-smelling frankincense, the kind of fruit that pleases you: Whereas the innocent took upon themselves to offer prayer in this way, what vituperation shall I compose here and now, in lines and words of my own, I who have my share of reproach compounded many times over, who have always faltered more obdurately than anyone?

I have strayed into wayward paths in my unruly mind.
I have been blatant with my lips uttering earthly words.
I have been obsessed with shameful deeds.
I have become pretentious and haughty,
 though I will soon be lowered into the earthly grave.
I have become arrogant and conceited,
 though not even my breath I have in hand
 to give as collateral in a transaction.

20.5

I, pulsating dust, became haughty.
I, talking clay, became presumptuous.
I, despicable soil, became proud.
I, disposed ashes, became smug.
I, a fragile cup, strengthened my arms.
I expanded myself like a majestic (peacock)
 and retracted once more to myself, as if rejected.
I, rational mud, got burnished by the flames of wrath.
I grew supercilious, as if I were someone immortal—
I, who face the same death as a four-legged animal.

I gave my bosom to love-life and turned my back to you
 instead of my face.
I soared into dark thoughts in flights of fancy.
I wore out my pure soul forever by indulging my body.
I weakened my faculties on the right side, defeating them,
 while strengthening those on the left.
I saw your concern for me—that cannot be put in writing here—
 and paid no heed.

20.6

As in Hosea's word to Ephraim, I flew to my former ways like a vulture. In my sanctuary I was wrapped up in preoccupations of this life. I did not stop the horse of my mind with the reins of reason. I discovered novelties among my former wrong doings.

As in Job, I exacerbated my unprecedeted suffering and unbearable burden.

As in Jeremiah, I made myself into an irreparable rag.

As the presenter of proverbs said, my name is erased from the book of humankind like that of a miscarried child.

As Isaiah said, I have become soiled like the napkin of a menstruating woman, I am shattered like an earthen vessel beyond repair.

Like Edom, chastised by the prophet, I have prepared myself for a calamitous death because of my fourfold transgressions. And it would be no lie were I to add this, that a tabernacle to the demonic Molech I erected for myself, a portent of inheriting hell—having abandoned the heavenly, yea, an image in my own likeness, even an idol in the form of the Babylonian Star of Rephan, worshiped by the Israelites, as exhibited in the Sinai.

20.7

Now, being deprived of the privilege I had in my original grace, I am transformed, dispossessed, exiled, banished, separated, and permanently severed. Accept me now, O Lord, and fashion me once more in the image of the Spirit, I who am unworthy of life—

like one condemned to death, an evildoer;
like a humiliated person, trampled upon by the accuser;
like an incurable person, one who has arrived on death's floor;
like an abominable man, one who is considered unworthy
 of your calling;
like one left to be altogether lost, a wanderer;
like one who is chased away, a rejected fellow;
like a doubter, a miserable and hopeless person;
like a battered man, fallen and shattered;
like a despondent being, a sad soul, antagonized.

20.8

Again, O Compassionate One, lover of humankind, almighty: Consider these words of pleading, treat them as a contrition, a confession laid in repentance at your feet. You who weigh, record, and deem the cry of the soul and the utterances with heaving sighs, quivering lips, parched tongue, disconsolate face, good intent in mind, and willingness in the depth of the heart; you who are the salvation of souls, the seer of things to come, the Creator of all, the healer of invisible wounds, the protector of the hopeful, and the benevolent Lord of all.

Glory to you for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 21

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“I shall confess all over again”>

21.1

Since I willingly mortgaged myself to death, ever unable to stand on my feet as a human being, having failed to obtain a rational heart—as Scripture says, and since I have not changed my former ways in order to proceed in the path of goodness, why should I not confront the dark and calamitous consequences of my course in this sequel of writing? I shall therefore adapt my writing to this end, adhering to my word, keeping unchanged the commitment made above; I shall confess all over again, exposing in what follows the remaining stains of evil.

21.2

An alien vandal deserving punishment, I backed the legion of Beliar through my unrestrained acts. Through my inactivity I allowed the agile dances, the swift stunts, and the exploits of the abominable demons, those skilled deceivers. I suffered the secret floggings and invisible wounds inflicted by the impairing executioners. I failed to ward off their blows with Christ’s cross but strengthened them doubly instead. Because of the iniquities of my weak self, your name, O Jesus, was profaned among the evil spirits, as it was among the heathen because of Israel. The devastating vices I hammered into myself blow by blow, ate away at the flower of my soul like corrosives or damaging insects; as the saintly Joel described in proverbs of old about the wicked, in his impressive lament over the land of Israel. These I was quick to generate rather than exterminate. Indeed, I recruited against myself throngs of warriors armed with deadly weapons. I gathered around me the unjust and the shameless. I strengthened my imprudent and (now) invincible enemies. I took bitterness as my portion instead of sweet sustenance, constantly deceitful toward the Creator, and always faithful to the accuser.

21.3

Alas for my calamity, the anguish over my peril, the murk of my shame, the darkness of my humiliation. How dare I speak without indicting myself? The voice of my doom is loud and the cry of my protestation unbearable. If I could see my soul, ugly and wasted away, completely exhausted, I would sob painfully, being embarrassed to the end, messed and smeared with the ashen color of its baseness, like an underling at a pagan temple. For enslavement to sin is the same as worshiping a cast idol.

21.4

Now, I have gone the way of perdition, the path of darkness. Like the priests of Israel rebuked by the prophet, I have traded your pleasant plot of land for a barren desert. How can I call myself a human being while affiliated with the inhuman? How can I be called a rational being when I have joined in foolishness those devoid of reason? How can I be referred to as a visionary when I have snuffed out the light within me? How can I be reputed as a sage when I have shut the door on wisdom? Or how can I show myself as a representative depiction of the grace of the incorruptible One when I have caused the death of my soul? Moreover, I cannot be called a moving or ensouled being, much less a spiritual or thoughtful person.

21.5

I am useless among the vessels, rejected among the stones of the wall, disdained among the ranks of the called, ignoble among the files of the elect, consternated among those fearful of death, most dejected with the pain and agony of Jerusalem, as Jeremiah's word instructs. "My days are expended in crying, and the course of my years in sighing," as said in the chants of the singer; "like wool (eaten) by moths and wood by worms," in the words of the wise man, (adding) "I am consumed because of my heartache." In the words of the Psalmist, "I am like a torn cobweb and considered trash." In the words of the prophet, "I am vanished like the morning cloud and the dew at daybreak."

21.6

But I have not put my hope in any man, lest, cursed by the Seer, I falter in despair. Rather, (I have put my hope) in you, my Lord, lover of souls, who were moved with infinite mercy even at the hour you were nailed to the cross, beseeching your Father on high on behalf of your torturers. Now grant me hope of atonement, O life and refuge, so that when I yield my miserable breath, I might receive your good Spirit. And to you with the Father and the Holy Spirit, are might, victory, majesty, and glory forever. Amen.

Prayer 22

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<"My blameworthy soul">

22.1

I will continue to allegorize my blameworthy soul, chastising it in the same manner, setting St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).
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it up and presenting it again with pertinent imagery. Perhaps the Omniscient might credit me for this self-reprimand in anguished words of true penitence and contrition for all my hidden, evil deeds.

22.2

I am
a squealing horse, untamable, unbridled and incontrollable;
a stubborn colt of an ass, wild and intractable;
a feral heifer, unmanageable and unpracticed;
a drifted man, banished and doomed;
a sinful child, incorrigible and ostracized;
a convicted steward condemned to death,
 bewildered and ineffectual;
a rational being yet brutal, ferocious, and unclean;
a deserted olive tree, barren and withering;
a distressing body to my soul, reproved and tormented;
a wounded man, incurable, fallen, and abandoned;
a string of imperial *solidi*, now spent and lost;
a felonious servant, on the run and wretched.

22.3

Of my own volition I am self-destructive of soul and body, spiritually lost and always mentally deluded, perverse and brokenhearted, absentminded and dull, insensitive and devoid of reason, shamelessly inconsiderate and precariously unstable, inflicted with inflammations here and there, suffering mortal pains. In no conceivable way am I of any use to you, Lord of All. I deplore the womb that birthed me in pain and bewail the breasts that fed me. Why did I not suck curdled bile instead of milk? Why was I not given bitterness instead of the sweetness that nurtured me?

22.4

Since I have risen against myself with so many words, like an austere prosecutor, and have even raised the unsheathed sword of wrath, who among the earth-born will placate me?

I shall reveal every scandalous act.
I shall judge and penalize my whole being.
I shall thrash the whole devastating mass.
I shall prosecute the marauders that wound.
I shall reprove the entirety of my senses.

I have sinned in everything and in every way. Have mercy, O compassionate God. It is no new thing to find in me the haze of transgression, for I am always the same, culpable of

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

wrongdoing, appearing before you unrepentant, in my usual, irreparable rags. And only you, O truly compassionate, blessed lover of humankind, unwavering in forgiveness, can hasten to my right for my redemption.

22.5

Now, O provident, mighty, heavenly, good Creator of all out of nothing: Send forth the powerful lightning of your Word's wisdom to enable the invocation through the movement of my tongue, aptly cleansing the entire senses that are part of me, assembled by your hand, (so that) with these faculties created and healed by you, in renovated raiment I might offer grateful praise to you with unfailing voice and uninterrupted speech, to the glory of the majesty of your Father, our God, forever. Amen.

Prayer 23

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<"In the inner chambers of my heart">

23.1

Lord God of all, mighty in all things, infinite, unbounded in your unlimited space that encompasses all, (yet) near to all through your very essence: You are not confined to any place, yet without you there is no boundary; you are always invisible, yet without your bright dawning there is no sight. You are astounding glory, incomprehensible name, decreeing majesty, voice of infinity, inscrutable essence, inaccessibly distant, (yet) imminently close. You see affliction and notice suffering, you attend to grief and can heal all incurable ills, Father of compassion, source of mercy, God of consolation.

23.2

Consider with mercy, Lord, the bitter state of my anguish, the many lethal afflictions I lay out before you. Stand by me as a physician rather than as a scrutinizing judge. Heavy, indeed, are the anxieties exacerbated by uncertainty and doubt when the body is overwhelmed by sin; when the soul is not detached from evil deeds, is invariably bound to the routine of toilsome work, (and is subject to) the mass of inevitabilities related to deadly consequences; (when) the countenance of the heart's wisdom is pierced with remorse and the expectation of good things altogether abandoned.

Despite being rational, I have joined the ranks of dumb animals. My very existence has become tangled with the offensively abominable; having forsaken the contemplative life, my sense of comprehension has been weakened and the recollection of my overwhelming sins has caused me permanent despair. I am always worried because of concern about past deeds; (as though) on fire again, my mind is bothered by my conscience. Even when at work, the hand on the plow, I ponder over my last (deeds); when moving forward, as though my feet keep dragging behind. Knowing the Existential, I am constantly deceived by the nonexistent, and in my mental struggle I am defeated by the lesser (power). My throat is parched because of my burning heart, and the roof of my mouth aches all over for lack of fluid. All around I am covered with sunless fog, blocking the scope of my expectations completely. My senses are branded with unbearable pain; my mind is obsessed by the misfortune of perdition, and the decree for retribution is being written in the tribunal of my thought. It seems to me that the Benefactor's tender eye is filled with anger; and he, Light by nature, is at odds with me, an earthen mass. When the awesomeness of the Self-existent clashes with my insignificant nature and rages with thunderous words at me, rational ash, I deem myself deserving to be stoned to death with stones of justice.

Like a prodigal son I have wasted the talent given me and buried in the base ground the honorable gifts received. The fruits of my labor are covered with the darkness of sloth and fade out of sight like a candle when it is taken away. My tongue, unable to respond, a stranger to truth, is dumb, and my twisted lips have been justly silenced. My mind, in anguish, is scattered everywhere; unable to concentrate on what is advantageous, it knows nothing and seems stupid when it comes to choosing what is right, opting to retreat to the damaging evil. Its compartment of oil is filled with the residue of the furnace. The letters of my name are blotted out of the book of life and condemnations written in the place of blessing.

23.3

If I see a soldier, I expect death;
if it be a messenger, danger;
if it be a clerk, accountability;
if it be a jurist, condemnation;
if it be a minister of the Gospel, his shaking the dust off his feet;
if it be a righteous person, reprimand;
if it be a felon, grief.

If I be tried by the ordeal of (bitter) water, I am doomed.
If I accept punishment as sort of medicine, I will die.
If I catch sight of abundant goodness, I recoil to evil thoughts.
If a hand is raised, I cower.
If I see the least scary thing, I tremble.
If I hear the slightest noise, I flinch.
If I be invited to a drinking feast, I quiver.

If I stand before your majesty, I shudder.

If I be summoned for questioning, I stammer.
If I be justly scrutinized, I become numb.

23.4

Now, these very disheartening and piteous doubts, heaped upon one another in the unconscious depths and inner chambers of my heart, hurt incurably, piercing me with invisible arrows. They are unextractable, intolerable, permanently lodged in my soul, filling it with pus—doubly dangerous, forewarning a dreadful death. With every breath I draw, the laceration from these buried secrets, locked down in iron, cause unbearable pain. The cry of my voice strangled by these torments I lift up to heaven, mixed with tears and the throbbing grief of my soul, along with (a plea for) the intercession of the earthborn martyrs, O Benefactor for whom everything is possible.

With my final sighs and tearful laments, I lift up to heaven also the petitions of dedicated others here on earth.

Grant, Lord, tranquil life and rest to this pitiful laborer engaged in vain, earthly pursuits. To you, who are all in all, glory from all. Amen.

Prayer 24

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Spiritual distress”>

24.1

And now, for what cause do I deem myself worthy to approach you in prayer?

Is it for the Kingdom from which I had strayed or for your magnificent glory of which I was deprived?

Is it for your everlasting life from which I was rejected or for the company of angels from which I was alienated?

Is it for the fellowship of the just from which I was separated or for the branch of the living Vine from which I was cut off?

Is it the shoot of the delightful plant from which I had withered away or the gloriously flowering grace from which I had fallen?

Is it for the magnificent inheritance from which I walked away or for the rightful paternal bosom from which I was estranged?

24.2

Is it that I might be honored with the garment of light from which I was stripped or that I might hope for return to my Maker from whom I distanced myself?

Is it that I might turn my desires to the light from which I had digressed or that I might join the body of Jesus from which I was left out?

Is it that I might reach the hand of him from whom I kept apart or that I might seek refuge in the sanctuary from which I was spurned?

Is it that I might seek renewal of salvation from which I had died out or the joy of prudence from which I was abandoned?

Is it the rule of monastic life from which I had deviated or the bounds of steadfastness from which I had slipped?

Is it the buttress of the immovable rock from which I was shaken or the ranks of the remnant from which I had departed?

Is it that I might prosper in the city of the firstborn from which I was taken captive or that I might pray for my daily bread for which I did not work?

Is it that I might be compensated for labor for which I did not sweat or that I might be crowned with rewards for which I did not strive?

Is it that I might be inscribed in the book of life from which I was blotted out or that I might remember the bounty of your favors which I always forget?

24.3

And now the thread of hope for life has either run out or been severed. I am plagued by the causticity of leprosy, inflicted all over. My body has been utterly consumed by its devastation. I am overwhelmed, mortified before God. A small, light-colored, ugly, crescentic lesion remains from my earlier ambiguous symptoms, indicating my twofold uncleanness. All my grounds for pride were snuffed. Salvation was forfeited; that good thing was obstructed. The gate to eternal life was shut; comfort ceased. The tribunal of judgment drew near. The deadly poisons were disseminated in me. That which had died was resuscitated in me. The harbor for rafts was blocked with boulders. The path of hope ended. The cloak of grace was stripped away from me. The grandeur of majesty was eclipsed. The guiding intellect was hindered. The thorns of reprimand have multiplied; the spikes of iniquity have blossomed; the flames of Gehenna have been kindled in me. The yoke of bondage is made unbearable; the chains of slavery have been strengthened. The supporting pillar of the building has now collapsed; the surety of the upper story has crumbled; the whole dwelling has fallen into the abyss. The Spirit of God, which loves holiness, is grieved.

24.4

Indeed, I have embraced bitterness to the end: torments, remorse, sorrow, spiritual distress, incurable pains, doubt beyond reassurance, shame beyond measure, humiliations beyond concealment, brazenness beyond daring, flights beyond return, inhuman persecutions,

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long journeys without provisions. Whereas you are salvation, strength, help, mercy, enlightenment, atonement, and immortality, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, Creator of heaven and earth. You offer water to the thirsty in parched places of the desert.

O Blessed One, kind and mighty, lover of humankind, forbearing, provident, resourceful, visitor, defender, ungrudging, keeper, conqueror, unforgettable life, heavenly intercessor, undiminishing fullness, celebrated blessedness! Extend your mercy-loving right hand. Accept and present me, a manifold sinner, forgiven and cleansed, to your Holy Spirit, equal to you in honor, O living Word, that it might return to me when I am reconciled through you. And that through you and the will of the mighty (Spirit), I may be presented cleansed, offered to the Father, so that I may henceforth with him and through your grace, through the breath of salutation, be inseparably united with you. And because of this, to you, the Father and the Holy Spirit, Three Persons, one nature and one Godhead, (befits) grateful praise from your created beings, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 25

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Like the wrecked sailboat”>

25.1

But since in the preceding addresses I have repeatedly described—albeit in part—the many enslavements of my most pathetic, vulnerable self, dragged out time and again, I will change the tenor of my words but not the grievousness of my calamity. The burdens of my life are very much like things afloat on the sea. Countless clashes with numerous waves beat against my soul held in the frame of my body resembling a sailboat tossed around in this world. With such imagery, the prophet Isaiah represented the sudden destruction of Jerusalem and Samaria by the Persians of old. I will not be wrong in drawing similar analogy with my spiritual downfall.

25.2

While I was sailing carefree, with confidence free of doubt, thinking little of unexpected misfortunes during the short period between tenderness and toil—as though I had come of age—winter, with gusting winds, descended in the midst of summer. The calm gave way to thrice forceful waves, and so the sailboat sank, consequent to the beating of the ferocious waves.

The formation of the sails was destroyed,
the mast was unhinged from the base,
the mainsail was irreparably torn to tatters,
the elegant structure came apart,
the hoisting ropes broke loose,
the lookout at the bow was laid low,
the main cable snapped.

The security of the bottom crumbled,
the thick thwarts that brace like a yoke let go,
the skegs that track straight at the back were twisted,
the strake next to the base gave in,
the rudder hardware did sink,
the sailing mechanisms were gone.

Even the sturdy keel broke (in two),
the lower planks of the structure came apart,
the intersecting parts that hold the hull were in total disorder,
the rub rails along the sides came loose,
the seat-supports collapsed,
the smooth wale gave way,
the captain's chair tipped,
the planks split apart along the joints,
the clinched ends of the fastening nails protruded.

25.3

This description of the lamentable destruction is like unto my own, a sailor constantly lamenting the loss of his sailboat, with his hand to his chin, tears streaming, looking occasionally at what is left, tossed on the seashore by the waves. He sighs with pitiful sadness, a wounded rational being. Surely the good Captain of the world at sea, with his heavenly hosts, considers the ark of my fathomable existence. Nothing escapes his consideration. For truly did the compassionate Lord weep over his buried kin as we humans do. He also wept over errant Jerusalem and the deranged Judas, both having lost constancy, very much like the wrecked sailboat. But as for the former, (his kin), having descended into the abyss, thanks to him who holds out hope, was brought forth into peace and calmness.

25.4

Now, will it ever be too much to expect having the often-sunk ark of my body restored? Will I ever see the wrecked sailboat of my lamentable soul made whole? Will I, who am separated by so great a chasm, ever see myself rejoined (to you)? Will I, who am grieving, ever see my wearied heart rejoicing?

Now, could I ever expect to see the image (of God), long eroded within my nature, brought

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

back? Will I ever see the destroyed tabernacle of my miserable self rebuilt? Is there hope I might ever see myself, an exiled slave, set free?

Indeed, could one fallen from your grace expect to be lifted once more to the light?

Will I still see the splendidly familiar radiance of your mercy
shown to me?

Will I see my soul, a most pathetic image, beam again?

Will I hear amidst my laments the good tidings sent to me?

Will I see the thousand cracks of my damaged vessel repaired?

Will the windows of my mind's eyes ever see the torn bond
of my debt?

Will the atoning grace be revealed dawning kindly on me
on the day of my tribulation?

Will I be admitted into the banquet at the altar of light,
being led by you?

Will my bones, dried while I am alive, ever come to life
by the effective breath that strengthens, as in Ezekiel?

Will I see again your holy temple, who am crying out
with the prophet from the belly of the whale,
repulsed by the light or standing before you in shame?

Will there be daybreak for me, who am nurtured in utter darkness?

Will I, one distressed through an endless, freezing season,
come to see the nearness of spring?

Will I see the drizzling rain which makes verdant the pasture
of my soul?

Will I, a repulsed sheep, mauled by wild beasts,
be ever again considered among your flock
through your merciful will?

25.5

As said in Job, “the snares of evil are all around.” From these I cannot flee unless—

the light of compassion by your benevolent will is shown,
the door of your mercy is opened,
the rays of your glory are spread,
the care of your hand is revealed,
the dawning sun of life is risen,
the sight of your beautiful morn is greeted,
the bounty of your kindness is increased,
the stream from the Creator’s side is extended,
the flow of your pure love is streamed,
the good tidings of the dawn of your grace are made manifest,

the tree of your gifts is blossomed,
the morsels of your blessed body are distributed,
the succinct expectations are met,
the intermittent voice of your greeting, Lord, is heard,
the banished peace is restored.

Then, with these definite, perpetual blessings, faith shall obtain that which it hopes for steadily, trusting in your Holy Spirit, who with the Father is worshiped with sweet voice and together with you wrapped in that unapproachable light by which life and blessedness with forgiveness were granted to me, a sinner. I have kept this never-to-be-lost legacy within me, a real token, a deposit guaranteeing the anticipated incorruption; this, in the holy name of your ineffable eminence and mighty Oneness, the inscrutable lordship of your Triune person. For you are in essence and in existence eternally exalted, crowned, vested, and enthroned with kindness, mercy, and love for humankind. Indeed, you are mighty in all things and ways, and merciful to all. To you befits glory now as ever and through the eternity that will unfold on the great and undying day of (your) revelation. Amen.

Prayer 26

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<"At the head of the circle of those who sing in mournful verse">

26.1

And now, truly and rightly, I join those who harmonize their voiced sobs with their words, rhyming the ends of their stanzas with the same letter, thereby intensifying the anguish that rends the heart with agonizing distress to the point of shedding tears. Thus I take my place at the head of the circle of those who, restrained, sing in mournful verse. Sobbing with them, with cries of lamenting voice, I lay open the grief I bear in my soul, which is neither totally dead to the world nor truly alive to God, neither hot nor particularly cold, thrice abominable to the Triune Lordship and all-seeing Creator—as the Evangelist wrote metaphorically in the (book) of Revelation. Such are the fitting manifestations of my sorrow, doubly pitiful, noticeably set forth in monorhyme, laid down as a paradigm of wretchedness, linked together as follows:

26.2

For the talents given in trust, I am to be punished severely;

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feeble fellow, I am condemned by my acts, truly unworthy.
Squanderer of the royal riches, I am justly to be fined doubly;
liable before the great (King), I am being held inescapably.
Among the thousands of talents, not a single coin for accountability.
I am detained in utter confinement, without intermediary,
only to sup on sighs and pain in the dungeon of obscurity,
tormented without reprieve or sustenance, treated pitilessly.

Hence, for my prayer of lament I chose a different mode,
methodically
substituting these words for weeping bitterly,
arranged in the same manner, with regularity,
using this special letter, the mystical number twenty.
Flames are fanned on all sides of the furnace for (my) deficiency,
for one miserable like me, vulnerable,
 having pledged his heart to anxiety,
disquieted in the spirit, a man disgraced in his fallacy.
Indicted, judgment shall be demanded of me, unsparingly.
With my surreptitious senses impaired by the forces of sin
 and mortality,
my physical existence will be ripped away with sharp swords,
 the penalty
for an irredeemable captive of evil like me.
At the mention of the tribunal, the session of the judiciary,
my pessimistic eyes—seeing no light—become gloomy.
Helplessly bound, I am piteous, given to worry.
The overwhelming image of heaven I see reversely
in the utterly sunless Tartarus, in its nudity.
There, in the flames of Gehenna, burning without immunity,
I am lost without trace, trashed in the abyss of iniquity.

What I have is useless silver, with no validity,
acceptability, or admissibility in the Lord's treasury.
My petition is tainted and my offering hands filthy.
Rather, in the hope of repentance, brokenhearted, fingers trembly,
with my face to the ground, O Mother of Jesus, hear my entreaty.
Intercede and plead forgiveness for a sinner like me,
you who are mighty savior of life, truly heavenly.
To you we all here on earth raise our voices in glory,
with the oblation of sweet oils and incense-like fragrancy.

26.3

Now, let me add another part to the lamentation composed already.

To the Grantor of grace I have offered fruits tearfully.
No matter how often I measured,
I couldn't figure the depth of my calamity.
I tried to describe it in precise words,
but couldn't grasp it even outwardly—
much as I gave flight to my mind's creativity.
Given my frustration, I grabbed the cup of fury
and drank as a foretaste of death my besetting perplexity.
And now that with pitiful voice I chant about my constant iniquity,
an invisible inferno with flames that cannot be extinguished
blazes within me
like some invisible molten metal in the crucible, boiling violently.

Poisoned arrows lodge in the deepest chamber of my heart,
jabs of pain from mortal wounds
pierce through the veins of my liver,
persistent pangs of labor halt in the folds of my intestines,
the burning effects of unavailing medicine
spread through my twin kidneys,
the bitterness of bile becomes unbearable at the base of my gullet,
the fading exclamation of an "alas" echoes loudly in my windpipe.

The multifaceted elements of my nature
are endangered completely,
like enemies at war with one another, wavering with timidity,
or like kin betraying, destroying one another irreconcilably.
Neither dead nor alive, I am buried in sin's mire of depravity.

I gaze upon you, O Benefactor,
that though expecting punishment most likely,
I might be lifted out of this life's pit
into the desired light unexpectedly.

26.4

May he who copies these words be crowned among the blessed. May he, expecting your mercy, be joined to the ranks of the pure. May he be granted life through your beneficence, because of the sacrifice of God the Word. May the praiseworthy blessings (pronounced) on your lips be upon the head of him who disseminates this book. May the aspirations expressed in Solomon's proverbial sayings be fulfilled. May you, through your Spirit, O exalted God, draw your image (upon him) on the day of incorruptible renewal. For you alone are forbearing and forgiving, and glory to you in all things. Amen.

Prayer 27

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“I have sinned”>

27.1

Having applied the earlier poems to my situation, wailing and sobbing with sighs of anguish, weeping bitterly and in tears chanting with my lamenting voice, once more I begin addressing my prayers with confession and contrition, revealing in words my hidden secrets.

The very word of the beginning of each sentence I shall purposely place at the end, in such a manner as to form a single supplication in soul-saving humility.

27.2

I have sinned against your great beneficence,
in my insolence I have sinned.

I have sinned against the rays of your Dawn,
in my darkness I have sinned.

I have sinned against the boundless favors of your grace,
truly I have sinned.

I have sinned against the heavenly mercy of your love,
brazenly I have sinned.

I have sinned against you, Creator out of nothing,
verily I have sinned.

I have sinned against the tenderness of your ultimate embrace,
wantonly I have sinned.

I have sinned against the enlightenment of your undiminishing light,
deceitfully I have sinned.

I have sinned against partaking of your ineffable life,
frequently I have sinned.

I have sinned against the unattainable talents freely given,
daily I have sinned.

I have sinned against the praiseworthy body of God,
mortally I have sinned.

I have sinned against your venerated blood, Creator,
indeed I have sinned.

27.3

This single unit of a word, *I have sinned*, is truly blessed, setting the heart on hope. It is an St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

honorable tradition, unforgettable injunction, paternal tribute, a statute by our forefathers, our common inheritance, irrefutable statement, powerful response, bridge to life, pleasing to heaven, beloved of the saints, inseparable bond, wonderful words, inescapable logic, earnest supplication, desirable altar, heartrending cry, challenge to odds, shield against hardship, dogma for the faithful, letter to pagans, rule of the ancients, birthright of Christians, creation's triumph (over chaos), (bridge across the) mighty chasm, terrifying to adversaries, transcending art, incomprehensible depth, thrilling vision, sealed mystery that no one could solve—indeed beyond the grasp of the quickest mind. An apt, miracle-working sound that was not recalled at the final condemnation of the rejected group, for had it been, perhaps the just verdict regarding death would have been revoked, separation would have been unnecessary, eternal divisions struck down. The very Godhead delights (in such confession), being crowned with this ornament of great glory.

27.4

For who, having sought refuge by taking hold of the horn of the holy altar and being found innocent, was not spared the instant punishment? Would not Achan son of Carmi, Saul son of Kish, and Judas son of Simon have been justified had they said this ("I have sinned")? I vouch for sincere confession, a condition (attached) to this word, for involuntary confession is devoid of perfect love and therefore cannot bring full salvation.

27.5

Once more I embrace this blessed word, kin to baptism, repeating it willingly:

I have sinned by forgetting your favors,
again I have sinned.

I have sinned by slaying my soul with my hands of flesh,
foolishly I have sinned.

I have sinned by forfeiting the life you gave,
indeed and indeed I have sinned.

I have sinned by ignoring your word,
downright I have sinned.

I have sinned by hastening the day of my death,
disparagingly I have sinned.

I have sinned by mortgaging my lifeless self to death,
imprudently I have sinned.

I have sinned by my insolence before your highness,
irresolutely I have sinned.

27.6

Again I wail my soul's ultimate demise, for its loss and destruction were revealed to me, for I strayed beyond return, for I was counted a rebellious son, for I stumbled from the heights of St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

heaven, for I gathered thorns of life. Moreover, I lament the following, for I disgraced myself, for I turned myself into a tabernacle for the destroyer. There is also another ache in my heart, for I am considered to be someone I am not: a dirty cup which is outwardly sparkling, a whitewashed wall which is dirty, a vain man dressed in conceit—darkness cloaked in light, the miserable eye with the plank, an extinguished torch of glory. My attitude is always negative toward everything: toward the providence of the Lord, toward indications of godliness, toward manifestations by the Creator, toward overwhelmingly humbling things, toward that which I have seen with my own eyes, toward the weightier matters to be accounted for—even for the entire Gospel. Amazement, alarm, distressing cares, implausible intentions, calculations beyond the mind's capacity to solve, failed escapes, precarious landings, deserved disappointments, just reprimands, appropriate scorn, warranted anathemas, merited curses—such are the accusations and self-inflicted torments of my sinful self.

27.7

And you are able to forgive all these transgressions and heal the deadly wounds, Lord of mercies, God of all Christ King, Son of the exalted Father, Creator, compassionate, benevolent, blessed, generous, bountiful, astounding, mighty, merciful, overseer, rescuer, keeper, savior, reliever, sustainer, long-suffering, un vindictive, refuge, healer, praised, heavenly, ineffable, light, life, resurrection, renewal, atonement.

27.8

If you would consider me with your love for humankind as you ordinarily do, then, as I envisage you, in my anguish I will cry out:

If you would listen, I will sigh.
If you would incline your ear, I will plead.
If you would take note, I will beseech.
If you would forgive, I will implore.
If you would turn toward me, I will cry out;
 for if you ignore me, I will be ruined,
 and if you rebuff me, I will weep.
If you do not guard my soul, I will die.
If you show me your frightful countenance, I will perish.
If you scold me, I will tremble.
If you look at me with displeasure, I will shake.
If you are stern with me, I will shudder.
If you drive me away, I will whimper.
If you knock me down, I will shatter.
If you do not put out the flames of despair, I will agonize.
If you deal strictly, I will flee.
If you threaten, I will faint.
If you scrutinize me, I will be stoned.

If you look straight at me, I will sink.
If you do not spare me, I will be eliminated.
If you summon me, I will be disquieted.
If you stare at me, I will be embarrassed.
If you call me, I will be scared.

For I have betrayed the gift of goodness, forsaken blessedness, disregarded grace, abandoned my vow, forgotten the conventions of life, lost my confidence, angered the Creator of my being, trampled on that grace beyond words, disfigured the honorable image.

27.9

But if you, lover of humankind, Lord Jesus, reach out to me as I suffocate with sighs of deadly pain, then, the Scriptures' promise will be fulfilled in me: "Your cure will cleanse away the greatest sins." And through your boundless kindness I will be grafted onto you, having your image of light portrayed upon my soul, having ascertained my being found again, atoned and reborn into the redeemed, the sinless in eternal life, and giving glory forever to you with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer 28

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<"Forgive these many sins">

28.1

Now, which (of my sins) shall I disclose, or which shall I specify? On which kind shall I discourse, or how much of the hidden shall I uncover? Which shall I confess:

The present I am still pursuing
or the past I have tucked away?
The future that I doubt
or the slippery places where I stumbled?
Those transgressions I thought slight yet God considered serious
or the trivial that are not worth mentioning?
The minor that are many
or the few that are weighty?
The emotional passions that are destructive

or the physical ailments that are deadly?
Those that began as simple desires
 or those that ended in massive calamity?
Those that are invisible
 or those that are visible?
Those committed immediately by the hand
 or those committed remotely (as if) by one's breath?
The broad range of easy marks
 or the long range of arrow shots?
Those whose depth is immeasurable
 or those that totally cover the surface?
The many-headed harlotry
 or the incurable illness?
The body fattened with evil
 or the soul starved of goodness?
The penchant for things displeasing to God
 or the equally frenzied compulsion for malevolence?
The mortal sins
 or my vain thoughts?

28.2

Truly, like a willfully crazed person, stripped of his rags, I display my waywardness openly, contradicting the wise man who said that the prudent do cover up their shame. I who am alienated from religion, who am expelled from the ranks, in holiness (am found) profane; in celibacy, unclean; in justice, iniquitous; in piety, wicked; in (words of) my mouth, close to my Creator, but distant in my viscera. With my lips I offer praise, as the prophet says, but not with my heart. And if I were to recount my despicable acts here, my daring wickedness would receive more than punishment, for I am a useless servant of God, my mind vacillating between two paths, (both) leading to death.

I strive, but without any benefit.
I press on, but I do not arrive.
I hurry, but I fall behind.
I strain, but I do not see.
I desire, but I do not attain.
I yearn, but I do not reach.

I have all earthly (ills) within me and (thus) am a petitioning representative of the whole world.

28.3

Forgive these many sins, benevolent Lord, and do not hold them (against me). It is easier for St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).
Page 60. Exported from Logos Bible Study, 3:34 PM December 24, 2024.

you to erase them than for me, a vile person, to describe them with my right hand. Therefore I write without restraint so you, blessed (Lord), may blot them out generously, you, who for the sake of us sinners were called long-suffering. My soul, like the blessed Ezra's yearning heart, is anxious; my spirit, restless as I recount these things, showing how I am in danger of every mortal passion, how I am fallen into the pit of sin's degeneracy. And like Job, I do not believe that you hear me. Now, as a self-accused, self-condemned captive, bound by sin, I surrender willingly and shut off completely all of life's deviousness. For by redeeming me, who am bound by sin, your greatness is multiplied, praiseworthy (Lord).

28.4

And well advised by the prophet Hosea, let us join him in prayer and sing with your Spirit, with strong hope in your protection, as he says, "Take words with you and turn toward the Lord your God, and say to him, 'You are able to forgive our sin,' that you might receive that which is good, that your souls might enjoy bliss." Lo, God spoke, and who would not listen? He himself gave witness, and who would not believe?

28.5

These (words constitute) delectable judgment, committed condition, consistent definition, good news of life, a divine telos, gate to goodness, invitation to comfort, authentic picture, undiminishing treasure, unforgettable memorial. Because of this, I hence believe and hereby testify with the prophet that you are able to forgive all our sins, thereby magnifying, exalting yourself on behalf of this wretched, ruined soul.

You rule over all, providing sufficiently for all, reaching everywhere, triumphing over all tyranny, crushing all resistance, fending off all opposition, dispelling all severity, overcoming all hostility, mollifying all bitterness, enlightening all who are inconsolable, forgiving all transgressions, remitting all debts. You are able, mighty, resourceful, master of all arts, to submerge and destroy the sins of everyone and to clear them away—as with a flash of lightning which knows no space—by casting them into the depths, making them disappear and become lost in the universal sea.

28.6

Now, merciful Father, through the prayers of the readers of this book (and) for the sake of the cross and the suffering and death of your Son, have mercy on the initiator of this lament, the one raising his voice in tearful chant.

May he who prepared this remedy for the salvation of our souls be healed in your mighty name. May he who showed us the exit path of confession for this meritorious provision be cleared of all his transgressions. May he who taught us to clip the wings of pride with this message on the rule of life be released from the evil bonds of deadly sins—original, final, and those in between. May we who are enrolled in this renewing enlightenment be found happily blessed therein, through the beneficence of your Trinity.

28.7

Now, Father, you are the accomplisher of such countless miracles, Creator of everything, astounding name, shuddering voice, familiar calling, embraceable thought, splendid proclamation, stern command, inscrutable essence, ineffable existence, uncontainable reality, incontestable might, utmost goodwill, limitless dominion, immeasurable greatness, unbounded exaltation, unweighable quantity, unsurpassable supremacy, cause of the Son through fatherhood but not in priority.

Through your unbounded power, rebuke my tormenting and demonic, frenzied fever which cunningly entered with sin, so that it may be banished from humankind, scared away by your heavenly Lamb's wondrous and unending stream of blood, and so that we, sprinkled with it, might be cleansed forever.

28.8

And now, with due humility before your creative marvels, may Satan be shamed for the evil deeds of his angels; may he be tormented and driven away from the temple which is for your dwelling, banished and exiled into the outer darkness. Wipe the mourning tears clean from our faces and the sobbing and sighing of our voices from our hearts. And in memory of the hammering blows, shuddering, difficult to behold and soul-wrenching, by which your Only Begotten was nailed to the towering cross, may the evil one bear the pain. And for the heavy blow to the side with the piercing spear, which opened a gaping wound, may the progenitor of death be forever dead. And since he (the Son) bowed his exalted head as he yielded his spirit into your bosom, may rebellious Beliar with his evil ways be brought utterly down, be vanquished completely. Moreover, since the truly Immortal was concealed and buried in the womb of the earth, may the haughty one see himself as the tyrant bound in the shadows of darkness on the deadly floor of hell. And may he remember the initial deadly blow (he received), the antidote which put an end to the dragon's inimical poison: the vivifying agony of the Omnipotent.

28.9

For your glory, Father of mercy, and in praise of your Son and through the Holy Spirit, I confess this: In the deep mystery of your unity, one does not need the least power from the other. Rather, we glorify your incarnate Word without beginning, along with you, eternal Father. To you alone, Holy Trinity, equal in honor and common in lordship, indivisibly existent, blessings, thanks, and mightiness, and the ineffable splendor of greatness, felicitous parity, and equality forever. Amen.

Prayer 29

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“You taught us to be like you in forgiving”>

29.1

Now, you alone are the origin of goodness, ineffable mercy, Son of the one God on high, who designated the whole Day of Atonement for salvation and not for condemnation unto perdition. You are for me the expectation of great good news, instead of a day of dread.

You, healer of the afflicted like me,
shepherd to the lost sheep like me,
master of the servant under your care like me,
undiluted wine for the much distressed like me,
healing medicine for the wounded like me,
freedom for the captive to sin like me,
blessings with good things for the spurned like me,
seal of grace for the despised like me,
the anointing of one called (but) disrobed like me,
restoration of the vanquished like me,
mighty fortress for the fallen like me,
sublime helper of the scandalized like me,
the gate lifted up for the doubtful like me,
the stairway to bliss for the deprived like me,
the straight way for the strayed like me,
forgiving King of the debtor like me,
good cheer to the abandoned like me,
relieving hand unto life for the denounced like me.

29.2

You alone are great and generous in everything. You define goodness in its fullness, you pour forth constantly without measure, more than we ask or comprehend, as Paul said in gratitude. For you commanded that we should do good from dawn to dusk, throughout the day, nine times fifty plus four times ten (490) times; being always attentive, gracious toward one another, with unfettered heart, something more than the expectation of one's prayers. And if we place my wretchedness and shameful ness beside your glory, omnipotent and awesome power, God of all, blessed Lord Christ, by what measure of weight shall the balance be set between you, the Creator, and me, the clay? In such things you remain infinite and inscrutable, altogether good, having no part in wrath (or) darkness. Thus, the number of stars is far less than

your greatness, for you brought them into existence from nothing by calling their names. Or the mass of the earth floating in air, created from nothing, from which you established the spread of the firmament. These are far less than the number I formulated above, by which you taught us to be like you in forgiving.

29.3

Behold, the radiant light of your forbearing will has overtaken and vanquished all evil like some fog in the heat of the sun, exposing even here the natural impulses in our common behavior.

For who among humans has sinned and not regretted?
Who has been corrupted and not been embarrassed?
Who has been ignoble and not been humiliated?
Who has faltered and not repented?
Who has been ruined and not sobbed?
Who has been scandalized and not felt resentment?
Who has been defeated and not shut his mouth?
Who has been cheated and not groaned?
Who has tasted bile and not become bitter?
Who has fallen from the heights and not been discouraged?
Who has lost magnanimity and not mourned?
Who has been deprived of happiness and not cried?
Who has been stripped of the grace of glory and not lamented?
Who has done harm to his soul and not been ashamed?
Who has been banished from God's sight and not sighed with grief?
Who has heard God's warnings and not trembled?
Who has made one mistake
 and not exclaimed "alas" a thousand times?
Who has bared himself on a winter's day and not shivered?
Who has acted lawlessly and not stoned himself in his mind?
Who has seen his slave attain greatness and not been peeved?
Who has done evil and not cursed even himself?
Who has pursued vices and not condemned his soul?
Who has done shameful things and not despised his body?
Who has been hit with hard times and not cursed his day?
Who has remembered his (mis)deeds and not been stifled?
Who has thought of enigmas and not been agitated?
Who has seen his secrets (exposed)
 and not sought the perdition of death?
Who has imagined the invisible ones
 and not lowered his head back to earth?
Who has committed passionate sins
 and not fueled the inextinguishable flames of the furnace?

Who has violated nature and not been parched?
Who has done (wrong) willfully and not prayed for his own death?
Who has (done) an appalling thing and not been disturbed?
Who has awfully violated his very being and not grieved?
Who has become one of the distinguished and not been worn down?
Who has (committed) acts that corrupt innocence
 and not been burned?
Who has done things worthy of being handed for banishment
 and not been anguished?
Who has appeared with a repugnant face
 and not felt deserving heaven's disapproval?
Who has focused on one of his major sins
 and not been wounded by death's weaponry?
Who has committed a scandalous act
 and not lengthened the distressing woe with audible sighs?
Who has been deposed from his royal throne
 and not fallen down flinching?
Who has placed dirt on his head instead of a wreath of rejoicing
 and not suffered death without further agony?
Who has put on sackcloth instead of a bright robe and not been sad?
Who has gambled with his life
 and not suffered tears mixed with blood?
Who has clothed himself in darkness instead of light and not vanished?
Who has mourned for a loved one and not wilted?

29.4

Behold, these are accurate images of myself, a sinner to be reprimanded: a sad face, an extinguished ray, a dehydrated body, shriveled lips, a deformed mold, a dispirited soul, a distorted voice, a doubly bent neck. It would not be wrong to describe even my essence as a mind devoid of arrogance, a heart devoid of pride, a wretch who does not ask for donation, gasping without supplicating, self-scolding wanderer, starved by self-denial, hungry because of duly earned punishment, struck down by just condemnation, sentenced to death by self-incrimination, deservedly exiled, self-deprecating outcast. Interpretively, (all) this points to the Pharisee who was rebuffed and the sinful tax collector who was commended.

29.5

And now, since the accuser uses his evil devices on us, finding us vulnerable, and plants his seeds among us as part of his daily routine, why should you, Giver of life, not itemize the good things that you by your will and care have planted in us to fortify our souls—merciful Lord, mighty and victorious, you who pardon sinners and are able to do everything for the salvation of all? Since you can exchange the abyss for heaven or bring the utter darkness into the light,

and since you can turn the bitter bile into sweet manna or the groans of extreme grief into the merriment of circles at a joyful wedding, these being easy and possible for you, then you can do more than these, you who reign with astounding power over all. Glory to you, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 30

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“May the truth of your word be affirmed”>

30.1

Now, may the truth of your word be affirmed, merciful God of all, forgiving and blessed, who (calls) the most pitiful sinner to repent from the day of sin's appearing to the very last draw of one's breath, to choose to turn away from the midst of wickedness, especially my embittered self, the very ruling part of my soul an accomplice of the one always at war, deceiving, confounding, constantly lying, and in the words of the speaker in proverbs “the herder of wind,” the unruly fugitive from the Creator, the hunter who had my wayward body enslaved under most perplexing circumstances, this counter-planter (of weeds) who has done it many times—you know how often. Having sinned, (here are) my laments, that I may be truly pitied, I who am desperate, tormented, who has uttered many a woe before you, Lord; (here are) my pleas for pity, my writings with tears, my painful sighs in misery. (I am ill) with countless perilous harms, distressed by sin of which I am ashamed.

30.2

And though repetition leads to verbosity, I will be lamenting more than hitherto I have done. How dare one ask for a place in the Kingdom? A lighter measure of torment (is all one could wish). Certainly one cannot (ask) to be with those living in the Light when not having sobbed in the darkness of the graveyard of the senses, to be with the resurrected without being with the shattered and downtrodden. (Blessed are) those who strive to be in your rest, (to be admitted) into your joy when in sadness, those outwardly merry when anguished in their thoughts, who appear to be rejoicing while their eyes are mournful, whose faces reflect solace and whose tears attest to the contrition of the heart.

30.3

Two cups in two hands: one (filled) with blood,
the other with milk.

Two glowing censers: one with incense, the other with stench.

Two platters of small cakes piled: one sweet, the other bitter.

Two goblets overflowing: one with tears, the other with brimstone.

Two bowls held by the fingertips: one with wine, the other with bile.

Two opposite outlets of vision: one for weeping,
the other for erring.

Two foundry instruments conflicting: one gives off flames,
the other extinguishes.

Two facial expressions: one gently kind, the other violently angry.

Two lifted hands: one to strike, the other to shield.

Two faces of a sort: one despondent, the other furious.

Two reprimands at a time: one for now, the other for later.

Two chancy shelters: one "at least," the other "perhaps."

Two utterances in one mouth: one for misfortune,
the other for mayhem.

Two impulses in one heart: one of false hope,
the other of certain doom;

Two downpours from a dark, threatening cloud: one of arrows,
the other of stones.

Two fearsomely thunderous downpours: one of hail, the other of fire.

Two sorrows on a painful dawn: one of weeping,
the other of death;

Two insults on a mournful morning: one of rebuke,
the other of threats;

Two suns on opposite ends: one for darkness,
the other for scorching.

30.4

If the right hand is raised to strike, he (simply) cringes.

If the gift-bearing hand is extended, he refuses to notice it.

At one's commendation, he shies away.

At (another's) exaltation, he is disparaged.

At the mention of evil, he sighs.

At the praising of the saints, he is abashed.

At the mention of things to come, he trembles.

When blessed by someone well known, he quietly curses himself.

When he hears praise from someone, he blamefully vilifies himself.

When severely criticized, he testifies against himself.

When strongly ridiculed, he keeps adding to his offenses.

When he hears a wish for his death, he says "yes" and seconds it.

And should death smash from heaven, he is quick to raise his head.
His book of rights is closed,
his hope of being heard abandoned,
his path to challenge blocked.

And should he be a captive beyond redemption,
he would not hesitate to let go of himself.
Truly, the sinner is to be pitied,
for he stands confused at the fork of the two ways,
according to the inspired word of the wise man.

30.5

And now, why don't you take pity, O Compassionate One, after so much of my audible wailing and drawn-out sighing, you who are exalted by this name: "I am the merciful Lord"?

Behold your goodness for the wickedness of a slave like me,
your sweetness for the bitterness of one condemned to death like me,
your beacon for the finding of a lost soul like me,
your mercy for the waywardness of a risk-taker like me,
your humility for the disastrous immaturity of one like me,
your right arm for the deliverance of a perilous one like me,
your hand for the rescue of one drowning like me,
your finger for the healing of one incurably impaired like me,
your spirit for the protection of one terrified like me,
your patience with a transgressor of the vow like me,
your strength for the anointing of a scoundrel like me,
your commandments for the atonement of a sinner like me,
your steps for the protection of a runaway like me,
your arm for the shielding of a fugitive like me,
your light for the guidance of a drifter like me,
your wisdom for the reassurance of a doubter like me,
your blessing for the reacceptance of one accursed like me,
your advice for the encouragement of one disheartened like me,
your cup for the consolation of one despondent like me,
your will for the release of one distressed like me,
your love for the summons of a hater like me,
your word for the steadiness of a waverer like me,
your shed blood for one wounded in spirit like me,
your consideration for one burdened with unseen pains like me,
your sovereignty for the election long ago of one despaired like me,
your communion for the rejoicing of one severed like me,
your spark of life for one under the dark shadow of death like me,
your peace for the calming of one troubled like me,

your welcome for one wildly estranged like me,
your voice for the beckoning of a strayer like me.

For you rule all with mercy. With you there is no trace of darkness, and without you there is no goodness; and to you befits glory forever. Amen.

Prayer 31

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“You are remembered”>

31.1

And now, since my words have caused me to intensify the distress of my sighing voice with great cries for the inconsolable grief over my vulnerability, please then, merciful initiator of confession of hidden secrets, Son of the living God, Lord Jesus Christ, consider me with kindness and grant atonement. You are indeed able and truly sufficient with means to do amply as you will, as much as you want to, you, who are more enriched by giving than receiving. Your treasure increases more by sharing than gathering. Your estate grows more by disbursing than exacting. Your stores accrue more by distributing than hoarding. All this makes me believe that through you I might find the way to salvation. I, the disgraced, do believe, along with the distinguished. I hope with Abraham and Hannah, one of whom believed your word and the other listened to the words of the high priest—and for that, in old age, one became the father of countless sons. He hoped to see the desolate and barren womb of Sarah as the fertile and blessed field of many peoples: holy prophets and chosen kings. And the other, (despite) the stark field of her womb’s chamber, prospered with seven children, a mystical number symbolizing the boundlessness of the Existent and the unsearchable reaches of the omnipresence of the Godhead; also the unremitting number of children born of the baptismal font, this glorious number which is indivisible and infinite, sort of a virgin, always unique and chosen, whose nature is eternally ineffable and difficult for our minds to explain.

31.2

And now, count this brief, prayerful confession of faith toward the justification and salvation of my hopeless soul. Hear the quivering voice of the cries of my sighing heart, and rank and place me with those blessed ones just described, so that I too might live with them and rejoice with them, holding on tighter to your grace than to my works, more so since it is doubly lauded and glorious, superior to anything measurable in words.

Comforting and greatly relieving my distress, and higher than the reach of our deficient minds, is your astounding blood; so too your body (touched by) your adorable bearer, the circle of apostles, the ranks of prophets, the hosts of martyrs—both cavalry and foot soldiers armed with courage (like) contesting wrestlers in the nude, the bands of ascetics, the orders of chosen

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

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teachers, the assemblies of the pious: legions of heavenly spirits from earth, heavenly envoys who join us with their traditional offering of first fruits, the sacrifices of bulls, the lighting of torches, the fragrance of incense and oils, the triumphs with the sign of salvation, the erection of altars where God dwells, the hands of priests who were made perfect by grace.

31.3

You are remembered with the movement of the soul, with every step taken, with the stretch of the right hand, with the lifting of the arm, with thanks for good things, with petitions for mercy, in friendly conversations, in public addresses, in natural utterances, in meritorious works, in the fervor of virtue both day and night, in beneficial spiritual progress led by you, when sleeping and when awake, in battles against nations, in combats with demons, in small or large-scale confrontations with heretics, when drinking or eating, in all sentiments pertaining to our kind, whether pleasant or unpleasant. For in certain of these we pray to remain constant and to be saved from others through your marvelous, ineffable wonders, believing through it all that you are sufficient to take care of all: suckling infants, those in youthful age, the beastly thoughts of lawless tyrants, the theatrical scenes and the assembled motley mob, and the hopping dances that do not please your will, Almighty. You are not forgotten.

31.4

You who are all-compassionate, only merciful one, you created all and all are yours; even though they sin, they are yours, they are in your accounting, for they know your strength, according to the bidding of the speaker in proverbs, whom I join with my wretched words, testifying to it as a violator, daring to say that whoever praises you in prayer recognizes your existence. Though one may be tainted by the sevenfold sins, deserving of double punishment to set a proper example, he is still yours, is he not?

For sometimes amid black crows, one sees a flock of white doves;
amid wild, unkempt horses, a docile sheep;
amid ferocious dogs, a sacrificial lamb;

gentleness amid harshness,
perfection amid imperfection,
humility amid haughtiness,
truth amid lies,
simplicity amid immaturity,
purity amid perversity,
kindness amid wickedness,
honesty amid depravity,
mercy amid cruelty,
repentance amid despair,
pleasantness amid anger,
reconciliation amid hostility,

charity amid backbiting,
encouragement amid suffering,
and blessings amid piercings.

Given these, I am never fit to judge correctly about who from among us earthly beings are predestined to be your heirs, for you alone reprimand impartially, differentiate rightly between the impious who thinks himself pure and the prostitute who is repentant, O Benefactor of all, only King, forever blessed in the heavens and in all things. Amen.

Prayer 32

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<"I bare my soul before you">

32.1

And now, being far behind those worthy people already mentioned and counting myself among those who should be punished, I pray for mercy with the prayers of all others:

with the humiliated and the timid,
the weak and the small,
the fallen and the despised,
the banished and those who have returned to you,
the doubters and the true believers,
the downtrodden and the exalted,
the repressed and the established,
the stumbling and the standing,
the rejected and the accepted,
the hated and the called,
the stupefied and the sober,
the prodigal and the restrained,
the departing and the arriving,
the scorned and the loved,
the sad and the cheerful,
the bashful and the joyful.

32.2

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).
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I will not recount the sins of Jerusalem here, as the prophet was commanded to do concerning the people of old or as another spoke about the iniquity of the House of Jacob; rather, I will proceed to reveal my own.

I wail as when the peril of death strikes, in accordance with the prophet, and with my own voice I reproach myself in accordance with the Psalmist, so that none of this prescribed, comprehensive confession would need repeating but that I might be at once cleansed completely by your blessed command, O Existent.

Now, with double genuflection before your kind beneficence, I bare my soul before you, showing how I sank like an image of death, descended to the ground and crept on earth with transients in this life of perdition, willfully fastened there, dragging myself (as) with crawling beasts. Let me lean upon you, Lord, as a steadfast staff of life, in body springing from the root of David, inexplicably joined to your uncreated divinity. I shall henceforth stand bowed, humbled by your benevolence, with my face turned to the ground and my eyes to you on high, in my misery gazing upon you who are close to our sighing, altogether merciful, thoroughly kind; with the lake of my light filled with tears, I offer prayers of hope to your majesty.

32.3

Most generous (Lord), with your unceasing forbearance hear me, one who has embittered you. You alone are the norm of salvation for all, God of all, ineffable greatness, nature beyond containment, inscrutable essence, mighty power, effective beneficence, flawless perfection, ineffable inheritance, fitting fortune, abundant preparation, unobscured Wisdom, desirable gift, appealing offering, longed-for bliss, soothing rest, doubtless discovery, inviolable Life, unsellable estate, unequalled exaltation, ingenious healer, unshakable foundation, forewarner of the wayward, finder of the lost, hope to those who seek refuge, Light for those in darkness, pardoner of sinners, cover for runaways, calm for the troubled, salvation for the dead, liberator of captives, deliverer of those betrayed, shelter for the lapsed, griever with the scandalized, long-sufferer with doubters, unique Light, sign of rejoicing, rain of blessing, Spirit (blown) in our face, strength of our visage, covering of our head, mover of our lips, enabler of speech, charioteer of the soul, lifter of the arm, extender of the hand, holder of the heart's reins, familiar name, friendly voice, close kin, fatherly attentiveness, professed name, adorable Image, boundless archetype, worshipful lordship, lauded remembrance, entrance to joy, unfailing path, the gate to glory, way of truth, ladder to heaven, and worthy of a multitude of other praises in countless forms and unending verses, which an earthly mouth cannot utter and the body cannot withstand and the soul's yearnings cannot sustain.

32.4

All seeing eyes turn to you, O God of all. Consider your servants' pleas with audible sighs and those of any handmaiden who may be pleading.

Accept the dew of my lamentation, the tearful sobbing of my lustful eyes, on your immaculate, incarnate feet, O Christ; and through the mystical symbolism of the sinful woman's hair, (accept) my return to you and my confession of faith; and through the lips' kiss, (accept)

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my partaking of the Eucharist, your redeeming life, the very same breath of inseparable union; and may a token of that same great gift, the compassion shown mercifully to her by you, benefactor, be for me, one with little faith.

Through your compassionate love for your servant who confesses your cherished name, may the severe winter winds turn to tranquil air, the gusty storm to a pleasant breeze, the misgivings of fear to great confidence, the meting out of punishment to a blessed surprise, the perils of grief to spiritual rejoicing, the wrecking waves to a deep calm, the arm-wrenching oars lead to a safe harbor, and may the heavy burdens of sin be transformed into a stipend of grace.

32.5

And for the myriad of good things created by you, may your mighty name be magnified, confessed, and honored with incense. May the accuser be shamed at his evils, rejected, and driven away; may the mortgages of sin be annulled, entrapments disconnected, snares exposed, shackles broken asunder, the abyss eliminated, perils lifted, deceipts retracted, sins washed away, records of debt torn up, yokes thrown off, plows unhitched.

And instead of the gloomy darkness of evil transgressions and the armies of besetting demons, may the sun of your glory rise to give life, to save, and to illumine from the right and the left, from the front and the back.

And may the morning rays of the soul's springtime shine upon those who await your appearance. For you are the Benefactor of all, and all things are possible for you, who wills life and desires salvation for all.

32.6

O hand of Jesus Christ that bestows all gifts, may you turn also toward me and extend the grace of your holy right hand in an abiding, permanent way, without leaving my heart's chamber of love in anxiety. And may your indelible seal, a token of the glorious light that beckoned me to salvation through the Christian faith, remain with me to intercede with you for my entry in the book of your eternal covenant, the good news of which were proclaimed by your Spirit, O Creator of heaven.

And to you who alone are your Sole Cause, and to you, the Only One of the Sole Cause, and to you, Enabler of the Sole Cause, Three Persons in one Godhead, befits glory from the greatest in heaven and the ranks of saints, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 33

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

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<“This book’s confessions to affect multitudes”>

33.1

Now, blessed and compassionate One, may this arrangement of words of worship offered to you from the yield of my soul be added to that of the bearers of incense. May you mix it with the sweet blend of oil of the pious woman Mary, whom you accepted with most wondrous respect, equal to that elicited by the blessed prostitutes. May my humble words also extol you and may you, the exalted One, allow their reach to your unreachable and lauded head, having absolved me of the reproach in the Psalter, “Let not the leafy boughs of my head be anointed with the oil of the sinner.”

33.2

May you strengthen with redoubled intensity the fragrance of this book of confessions, to affect multitudes, to spread everywhere and fill the world as that house (was filled), in a manner warranting their remembrance. For you are the same Lord who brought the scheming, sinful women to their senses and transformed their character into your true image allegorized by the prophet’s role. By your ineffable act regarding them, you indicated the extent of the inner workings of your grace regarding me.

With the barley for animal feed, the abundant yield of the wheat
of your bread of life (is indicated);
with the corruptible silver (coins), your majestic image;
with the stupefying wine, the cup of your life-giving blood, Creator.
With the oil received from the wanton woman
who belonged to the people of old,
you ushered in my anointment with grace.
With the removed burial cloth from around the head,
an incorruptible robe (is implied);
with elaborate wristbands, uninhibited soaring toward ethical virtue
according to the Law and the Gospel;
with the finely ornate earring, the unfading memory
of your lordly voice;
with the glittery necklace, the bountiful inheritance
of the sweet yoke of your morals.

33.3

But why should I pride myself with these (favors)? Rather, I should feel shame again. Why change my tone of lamentation in this prayer book to something of my liking and, with all that, pay for my sins in punishment? Citing briefly the sayings of the prophets, I enter this chamber like a stern prosecutor (bringing charges against myself). I join them in their laments rather than in their joyous circles. I enter crying, with a sighing voice, in angry protest, with harsh St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

insults and somber wailing.

But your constant compassion, great God, brought me hope early on: good news, gifts, visions of light, divine encouragement, glorious inheritance, revealed wonders, attested miracles; hence my remorse and confessions. (Still, while) some things offer hope, others (not mentioned) are quite disconcerting. As for me, who willingly destroyed myself, perdition is my lot.

33.4

Given that Ezekiel speaks of people who set up rickety idols behind curtains, cloaked (as it were) in God's garment, and calls that prostitution, how much more (severe) will my punishment be for cloaking my unclean self—inside and out—in God? I am amazed that I am not scorched. I am astonished that I am not consumed. I am mystified that I am not abducted, tortured, abandoned, tormented, pounded, milled, cracked, crushed, torn to shreds in the notorious jaws of the destroyer, according to Scripture. All that is left for me is the glimmer of a memory of hope of salvation. For the Gospel of Christ is absolute life revealed in the very appearance of the Word in (our) likeness, where there is remittance for sins, forgiveness for debts, renewal for decay, atonement for iniquity, healing for wounds, calm for distress, pardon for punishment, peacefulness for war, rain for fire, relief for condemnation, boon for the dread of dying, freedom of life for the workings of death.

33.5

How can I enumerate so many things here and not include the ineffable? In remembering the exalted Father, (we remember our) tie to the Son; in the name of the only begotten Son, (our) familiarity with the Father; in referring to them, (our) communion with the Holy Spirit; in the cross, salvation; in the word, comfort; in the judgment by the Omniscient, reward of good will; in the life-giving font of baptism, mediation of reconciliation, as well as all other countless blessings, bestowed by the benevolent (Lord): freedom from compulsion, release from the yoke, self-rule and not being ruled (by others). In the midst of my bitterness about death, these are the harbingers of good news about the assured life. For if I did not possess these things, surely I would have perished long ago, as the Psalmist says.

I do not glorify the Father by disparaging the Son. Nor is the Holy Spirit subordinated by my naming the Son first. I hold the Trinity equal in glory and so too in creating.

I therefore make this supplication in the presence of the Holy Spirit prior to the beginning of the eucharistic sacrifice during which you the Heavenly Lamb are slain. I pray this:

<Supplication in the presence of the Holy Spirit>

33.6

Almighty, beneficent lover of humankind, God of all, maker of the visible and the invisible, savior and restorer, provident one and peacemaker, mighty Spirit of the Father: We implore you with outstretched arms and pray with cries and sighs in your astounding presence. We St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

draw near with much trembling and utmost trepidation to offer first this verbal sacrifice to your inscrutable power, as One who shares the inalienable honor of the Father in reign, in glory, and in creation, to you, the searcher of the hidden depths of the mysteries of the most perfect will of the Father of Immanuel who is your sender, (you) the Savior, the Giver of life and the Creator of all.

The Three Persons of the one Godhead were made known to us through you, the incomprehensible One, who is recognized as one of them. In you and through you, the early descendants of the patriarchal family, called seers, recounted in plain language the things past and the things to come, those that had happened and those that are yet to happen.

Spirit of God, by having proclaimed yourself through Moses as the One moving over the waters, boundless power that you are, and by your overwhelming, all-encompassing care, brooding and protecting the newly-born under your wings with compassion, you made known the mystery of the baptismal font.

In the pattern of the archetype, before fashioning the pliable substance down to its final covering, you, mighty one, ably formed in lordly fashion the complete natures of all things out of nothing: of all beings, of all existences out of no existence. Through you shall all these your creatures be renewed at the resurrection, in that time which is the last day of this life and the first day in the land of the living.

The firstborn Son, being your kin and of the same essence of the Father, obeyed you also with oneness of will, as he did his Father. While in our likeness, he proclaimed you as true God, equal to and consubstantial with his mighty Father. He declared blasphemy against you to be unforgivable and silenced the impious mouths of those who rebel against you, as of those who fight against God, while he forgave that which is against him, the righteous and spotless One, finder of all, who was betrayed for our sins and rose for our justification.

Glory to him through you, and praise to you with the Father almighty, for ever and ever. Amen.

33.7

I shall go on repeating with the same kind of words, until the certainty of light is miraculously revealed, announcing and bringing anew the good news: the twofold peace.

We beseech and implore you with tearful sighs, with all our souls, glorified Creator, incorruptible and uncreated, eternal and compassionate Spirit, who with inexpressible groanings intercedes for us with the merciful Father. You keep the saints, you cleanse the sinners, and you make them temples of the living and life-giving will of the exalted Father.

Deliver us now from all unclean deeds that are unsuitable for your indwelling, and may your light's rays of grace not be extinguished from the contemplative understanding of our (minds') eyes, for we have learned that you unite with us through prayer and commendable, fragrant lives.

And inasmuch as one of your Trinity is being offered and another accepts the same, pleased with us through the reconciling blood of his Firstborn, so may you also accept our supplications and prepare us to be honored dwellings, always ready to partake worthily of the heavenly Lamb, to receive without the sentence of condemnation this immortalizing manna of life, of the

new deliverance.

And may our faltering be consumed by this fire, as that of the prophet was consumed by the live burning coal offered to him with the tongs, so that in everything your mercy may be proclaimed as the lovingkindness of the Father that brought the Prodigal Son back to the paternal inheritance and led the harlots into the heavenly Kingdom, the blessedness of the righteous, was proclaimed through the Son of God.

33.8

Yes, indeed, I also am one of them. Receive me also with them as one who is in need of that great love for humankind and who lives by your grace obtained by the blood of Christ, that in all this your Godhead may be made known to all, being glorified with the Father, in equal honor, in one will and in one praised authority. For compassion, might, love for humankind, power, and glory are yours for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 34

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Confession of faith”>

34.1

I now exhibit these yearnings of my afflicted soul and my proper, previously discoursed, and repeated confession of faith in you, God, who encompassed all things by your Word. I offer these written exhortations for the masses of different nations, these interpretations and intercessory prayers for the people, along with intermittent praise with thanksgiving.

34.2

I beg your immutable Lordship, omnipotent Spirit, send the dew of your delightfulness and kindly bestow upon my soul and upon the ruling impulse of my senses the all-sufficient grace of your bounteous mercy. Plough the rational field of my hardened heart of flesh that it may be conducive to the yield of your spiritual seeds.

We attribute to your most wise Being all gifts that grow and flourish within us. You instruct the religious teachers and make them knowledgeable. You make the speechless fluent in speech and thriving, and open the ears of the deaf—you who ordained the apostles and with your Kin filled the prophets, the one consubstantial with the Father, the firstborn Son, who did

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all these things with your coworking, who proclaimed you God, in your essence coequal with the Father.

Grant even me, a sinner, to speak boldly of the life-giving mystery of the good news of your Gospel, that I might follow with swift mind the infinite course of the Testaments breathed by you. And when I embark upon the solemn interpretation of the Word, may your compassion reach me early on, and may it speak through me in a manner worthy, useful and pleasing to you, in season, to the glory and praise of your divinity and the upbuilding of the universal church. Extend over me your all-reaching right hand and strengthen me with the grace of your compassion. Clear my mind of the dark fog of forgetfulness, dispelling therewith the darkness of sin, so that alert in wisdom I might rise above this earthly life to heaven. Make the dawn of that unobsured miracle, the knowledge of your divinity, shine within me again, O Mighty One, to be worthy to do and teach and be an example of goodness to God-loving listeners.

To you all glory in all things, with the Father almighty and the only begotten and benevolent Son, now and through the eternal ages. Amen.

34.3

As for the creedal statement about the consubstantial Holy Trinity, the rule of life, and the grace of election, this is what I taught, in the following order:

We confess and proclaim, worship and bow down before the unity of the Most Holy Trinity, equal in glory, ineffable Divinity, ever good, consubstantial, equal in honor, unreachable to the soaring wings of the intellect, higher than any archetype, and far beyond any likeness, surpassing the indefinable limits of the utmost. Before the foundation of the ages, the existence of undifferentiated matter, and the categories of created species, he is eternally crowned with inexplicable blessedness, the richest greatness. He is the Creator of time and those formed in time, himself the cause of what came to be and the right artisan of the visible and invisible, who cannot be defined by names nor described by epithets, nor likened in quality nor weighed in quantity, nor illustrated by example nor known by kind, nor extended to exhaustion nor reduced in plenitude, nor occupying a space nor appearing in a place.

34.4

He is the compassionate Father, the Begetter of the universe and God of all in heaven and on earth—except for the only begotten Word through whom he begot everything, Creator and Giver of breath to all beings—except for the consubstantial Spirit through whom he fashioned the whole.

34.5

One of the Three blessed and glorified Persons equal in power and awe, descended from above to those of us here below, who in nature was indeed distinct from ours of the lesser kind, (yet) without relinquishing the throne of glory and without leaving the watchful gaze of the parent of love. He simply entered the chamber of the virgin's womb and emerged from there

joined with a body indistinct in essence (yet) without any flaw in (his) humanity and lacking nothing in (his) divinity, the one and only Son of the only Father, the firstborn and only (child) of the Mother of God, Virgin Bearer of the Lord. By becoming human, the Creator truly became the Firstborn, not in the later likeness of us who are earthbound creatures but new and sublime, most exalted among kings, (such as) not seen in (earlier) centuries nor existing in (earlier) ages, the Firstborn according to the Psalmist, (higher) than all the kings of earth, of incorruptible permutation, appearing like us in body, in the tenet of the soul with regard to the body or gold with regard to fire or, to say it plainly, light with regard to air, neither changed nor separated.

34.6

He came willingly to the cross of death, like the unblemished lamb led to slaughter, and girded himself with his mighty, sovereign will for the salvation of his creatures. He truly suffered as living beings do; he was placed in a tomb without severance from (his) divinity. During his three-day burial he preached to the downcast captives in the hell of Tartarus, revealing renewal and light. And having carried out his providential mission of redemption, he came back to life as God, and riding on the wings of the winds, rising upon the Cherubim, he was covered in an inscrutable cloud. He ascended into the highest heaven, sat in splendor upon the throne bequeathed to him from the beginning, equal with his Father, from whom he had never been separated, neither losing what had been acquired, nor reducing that which was his own. Therefore, he shall come to execute judgment, to examine the hidden things with the scales of justice, for which we wait and pray with all believers in his almighty Lordship over and through all, who truly is one of the only One, of equal glory with the One forever worshiped.

34.7

We always laud and pronounce blessed, along with the Son and Father, the Holy Spirit, who is of the same essence, omnipotent, true, perfect, and holy; who from nothing brought into being everything that exists; who acts independently and shares rule with the (other) two in the same eternal and boundless Kingdom. One and the same, with the First Cause and the astounding Word of his selfhood, is the exalted Spirit, good sovereign, who dispenses every gift from the Father in praise of the name and the glory of the Only Begotten, who put the Law into effect, inspired the Prophets, and was imprinted on the apostles by the Son's blowing. In the form of a dove he was shown at the River Jordan to magnify the glory of the one who had come, shone in the transmitted Scriptures, created sages, empowered the wise, filled the religious teachers, anointed kingdoms, aided kings, appointed overseers, proclaimed redemptions, granted gifts, fostered atonements, cleansed for his indwelling those baptized into Christ's death. What the Father and the Son have done, the same has the Spirit done also; and he is God, venerated with incense as Lord, All in All.

34.8

Being named first among the Trinity does not make one greater than the other, or being named next, less than the rest, or by saying that they are One, that there is a confusion of Persons, or by dividing into Three, a separation of wills. For the Father would have been less great had he not had the power of the Word; so too had he not had the Holy Spirit—he would have been speechless, lifeless, or less powerful to command. And the Word, had he not been known by the name of the Father, he would have been an orphan or an abandoned person or just another mortal nobody. Similarly the Holy Spirit; had he not been commissioned by the Cause, he would have been a vagabond of no importance, a random breath.

34.9

But if someone delves into polemics to sever the Father from his Word, assuming that there was a time when the latter was not, believing that such irrational speculations exalt the sublime greatness (of the Father), or if someone who by nature is not spiritual subordinates the One who proceeds (*sc.* the Spirit), thereby introducing an alien thought or some muddling mutability into the pure and sublime unity of the Holy Trinity, we must spurn such persons from our midst and with the sling stones of the confession of faith drive them away like fierce demons, vicious beasts, placing anathemas upon such individuals, shutting in their faces the doors to life, the narthex of the church.

We thus glorify the Holy Trinity, the same lordship in unified equality, singing the *Sanctus* in unison, in constant harmony, to the blessed and glorified on earth and in heaven, among the (heavenly) congregations of the Firstborn and the earthborn peoples, the rational beings on earth, for ever and ever. Amen.

34.10

Now, this appeal of inaudible mysteries, being arranged in this book, I have (already) presented to your all-hearing ears, O great God. Thus armed, I then embarked upon the celebration. Not that you need to be exalted by such a thing as my voice, for before you created everything, before the creation of the heavens with the immortal beings who praise you and the rational beings on earth, you yourself in your perfection were already glorified. Yet you, indescribable sweetness, might honor me, a reject, (by allowing me) to partake of you through the communion of this word. But what good is it to utter your royal command, your rule of life, (saying) “Adonai, Lord,” and not fulfill it?

Indeed, I myself was the articulate golden tablet, dedicated to your message and inscribed by your divine finger, which I defiled, or rather, I utterly destroyed. So I provide a second copy made sadly of soot.

But now, since I have entreated with many passionate praises that are not written in this mode, hear them all, O Compassionate One, along with these words. May the voice of this prayer be joined with those offered by pure suppliants obedient to your will, so that this offering—a loaf of unleavened bread kneaded with oil—might be offered upon your glorious altar.

34.11

But you, altogether beneficent lover of humankind, O Christ, one with the only God, mighty and omnipotent: You surpass all with your kind and caring compassion, not only humans in general, those constituted like me, who are always susceptible to confusion and all manner of contrariness, but also the untainted angels, even the pure and saintly glorifiers, with Elijah among them. Solemn signs were shown to him in three ways on Mount Horeb: in the great earthquake, in the strong wind, and in the burning fire; yet you act with the tenderness of forbearance and the calm peacefulness of the gentle breeze. For you alone, as Scripture says, delight in mercy. And although our kind found joy in virtue and adopted other heavenly ways, still, we remained earthly beings, though chosen among humankind. You, on the contrary, are not even capable of evil; you are good in your very essence and blessed in all things. You are the salvation for all, rest for all, calm for all, healing medicine for all the diseased, “the fountain of living water,” according to Jeremiah.

34.12

Turn toward me and have mercy upon me, O longed-for God, who so thirsts and hungers for my salvation that you have designated wakeful immortals, the heavenly glorifiers, as priests and intercessors for human salvation, so that on our behalf, living creatures who stand in need of your mercy, O Blessed One, (even) for the reconciliation of the abandoned like me, might pray with unending perpetuity, “Have mercy upon Jerusalem.” This is a luminous mystery, a revelation by you, O Great One, that the places left empty by the (fallen) angels might be filled by humans from the lower realm, those who have joined you by means of the Gospel in the symbolism of Jerusalem.

34.13

You truly listened, the compassionate one.
You gave heed, the King.
You lent an ear, the Life and Light.
You paid attention, the heavenly one.
You showed respect, the almighty one.
You took notice, the knower of secrets.
You saw through, the caring one.
You empathized, the infinite one.
You humbled yourself, the always exalted one.
You became lowly, the astounding one.
You were revealed, the ineffable one.
You were confined, the boundless one.
You were quantified, the inscrutable one.
You became human, the incorporeal one.
You became touchable, the immeasurable one.

You assumed a form, the unqualifiable one.

You truly fulfilled the yearnings of those who pray. Through the voice of the wakeful angels, you became even for me—a miserable man—a kind intercessor, a living mediator, an immortal sacrifice, a perpetual sacrificial offering, a purification offering, an inconsumable holocaust, an inexhaustible cup.

O Merciful One, lover of humankind, blessed: may you always fulfil for me—a sinner—the favor of your life-giving will, for you are praised, O Forbearing One. To you befits glory forever. Amen.

Prayer 35

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“The dew of your goodness”>

35.1

And now, Lord of hosts, astounding majesty, distinct vision, magnanimous in your will, undiminishing bounty: Could anyone sufficiently applaud, even when singing in a circle, a single drop of the dew of your goodness? You earnestly strive to promote my salvation but let me write about what is grander, that it might be told in the future.

You were not called “angel lover,” although you are the founder of their dominion. As for the heavens with their luminaries, all your handiwork, you were never described as loving them. Rather, to your greater glory and praise, you preferred to love humankind. For this reason, you doubly magnified your ineffable name, astonishing in mystery.

You called the heavenly beings, who appear as light, your servants and the heads of special ministries, and us mortals, of lowly birth, you made glad with your lordly and worshipful divine name. Moreover, exceeding all bounds of measure, you gave amply written Testaments with copious homilies, pouring out your pure and bounteous goodness from above. And by becoming human, you, one of the Existent, the generous Giver of life and of diverse gifts, blessed some for their own sake and others for the sake of others with divinely wrought wonders and actually witnessed signs.

Since you healed the paralyzed man who lacked faith and for the hope expressed by his helpers showed compassionate mercy, how much more able, then, is your almighty word to cleanse the disease from my body as I cry out to you with sighs? But truly, it is a greater miracle to cleanse my filthy soul, to purge away the insurmountable filth from my (once) washed image, for the latter was favored with the grace of the baptismal font, exalting the Father’s

glory.

35.2

It is you, Lord, who sanctify us,
as you did your chosen Moses at first.
It is you who looked over the House of Jacob in their sin
and lawlessness, when in the land of Egypt
they became accustomed to the darkness of paganism.
It is you who let the sinner know about the Law on his (errant) way,
in the words of the Psalmist David.
It is you who replace the hardness of the stony hearts
with the pliable softness of flesh, receptive to the Word.
It is you who lead the delinquent heart in a certain way
to respect you for the rest of one's life.
It is you who instill his awe firmly in the mind,
to heed you by faith, hearkening to the prophets' voice.

35.3

From your blessed lips, from your mouth that created the world, with the sprinkle of your life-giving divine rain, extend a key to the doors of my hearing. May you with it remove the cunning of the serpent, the venom of the accuser, and heal me. And with your almighty hand guide my speech organ, strengthen my voice, you who grant choice of words out of nothing, so that the essential might be taught, so that I will not speak boldly like the forefather, abandoning hope in you and succumbing into irrationality, being chased by the hunter.

Illumine again the darkened eye of my soul with the reach of your life-giving right hand, so that (my) lamp may neither be extinguished by the dragon's daring breath nor be hidden under a bushel.

Lift away my sins, Lord, and cast them into the depths of the sea, which is but a small illustration of your infinite greatness, according to the prophet, about submerging my evil.

Raise the sign of confidence on my wrecked soul, so that a monument of hopelessness may not be erected to testify to my hidden things.

Open, Almighty and Merciful, your handbook of healing, teachings of life, so that the destroyer's seeds cultivated within me might be cut down—root and branch—with the sickle of your will.

35.4

Having set my face to follow you, God of all, following the example of Peter I was swallowed by the waves of the sea of my sinful life. Extend your life-giving right hand to help me, for I am struggling. In the voice of the Canaanite woman, I pray from the bottom of my heart, (like) a starving dog yelping, most wretched and vulnerable: Allot a few crumbs of the bread from your

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bountiful table. Save my physical frame, you who came to rescue me, son of bitterness, lost fellow. For yours are majesty, victory, and power. And you are atonement and healing, renewal and blessedness. To you befits glory and prostration forever. Amen.

Prayer 36

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Your publicly demonstrated passion on the cross”>

36.1

The benefits of your saving grace are countless and outweigh by far the mounting debt of my sins. Through your publicly demonstrated passion on the cross, the instrument of death to which you confined yourself, Creator of all souls, you released my hands which had acted contrary to your will. You had your two life-giving feet fastened to that punishing wood, compassionately submitting them as down payment to set free a wretch like me running toward brutishness.

36.2

You, who could dry the fig tree instantly, did not command to shrivel the hands of those who beat your head. This gives me a foretaste of the good news that you might forgive me.

You, who are confessed God and turned the Morning Star into darkness, did not threaten those who acted wickedly; hence you might grant rest with goodness to me, a mortal soul.

You, who tinted the image of the moon with the color of blood, did not silence the blasphemers' offensive speech; hence you might strengthen my cowardly tongue to praise you.

You, who shook the earth's elements, did not rebuke the wanton insulters; hence you might anoint my miserable head with the oil of your compassion.

You, who rent the hardness of the rock, did not rip apart the jaws of the fraudster among the killers of God; hence you might mercifully grant my soul, which is incapable of goodness, a respite from the burden of emptiness.

You, who condemned the snake to crawl on the ground, did not run the swords of the guards through their bowels; hence you might preserve as in a treasury the bones of my tormented body, to be worthy of the resurrection life.

You did not crush and thrust into the abyss those who sealed your life-bearing tomb; hence you might rest the token of your light in the tomb of my soul.

You did not completely wipe out or end the progeny of those who tried to damage your St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).
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reputation by claiming that your body was stolen like an earthly one; hence you might bring me, unworthy as I am, into that remarkable, optimal goodness that neither perishes nor can be harmed, together with those who will be saved.

You did not turn into stone, as with the punishment of Moab in days of old, your frantic deniers who twice allotted silver for bribes from the offerings in your Father's treasury to betray and defame you, hence you might set me—the one erring from steadfastness and condemned to the power of death but redeemed by your blood—upon the steadfastness of your rock.

You are blessed over and over and blessed again and again, praised in all things, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 37

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<"Yours is all the boundless goodness">

37.1

Now, of all your accumulated gifts and favors to me, tabulated above with thanksgiving, O most merciful, beneficent, praised, and omnipotent Lord, only a few have been cited. But they all are (like) royal, sovereign princes, mighty progeny of noble descent, quite glorious, transforming light, and wondrously honorable. Proclaimed with the unfurling flags of victory, each gift, beautifully adorned with a crowning wreath on its head, brings countless other riches, praiseworthy, embraceable, gentle, joyous, peaceful, from those realms closest to God. Of these the prophet prayed, saying, "Awake, Lord, your (heavenly) forces and come to save us." For who is better armed to drive out sin and melt and repel the hail of despair than those who were first among the heavenly ranks to confront the darkness-loving Lucifer, first of the opponents of God who is good? It is impossible to recount all that the heavenly one showered me freely with, a weak, belligerent, and ungrateful servant. But if one were to dare to speak about even the least of this abundance, the plenitude of this reality, one would be at a loss (especially when) recalling the first element of which he was made. Like a puny weakling, one would be struck dumb in defeat by the great might of his maker.

37.2

Although I wrote in this manner, I testify again to the same imperfection of my immature soul when compared to your perfection, O Creator, and my unworthiness of your favors.

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However, the strength of your praiseworthy creative power, your everlasting light, generous and abundant, wards off the accuser's efforts to harden the heart, to make it the proverbial rock of despair by threatening to dry up the two springs of the Eden of my senses which were established by the Gardener, to irrigate and make the garden of good works planted in me flourish. Lest by having my tears dried up, I be taken by a heretical and painstakingly cunning deception that would banish me again from that former amiable state. But then, when the miraculously resurrected God stands as a peaceful mediator among the gods, bringing his own warrant of grace, all the injuries of deceit and shortsighted anxieties will be vanished as if dashed upon a rocky mountain or washed away as with water or pulverized into dust.

37.3

And so my reprimand shall come, as Job said, not from people but from the all-seeing eye of your high command, of which I am in terror down to my conscience, in dread and fear of all things imaginable. But refuge for my broken spirit lies in the firm, living, and unchanging hope in you, that you will look with mercy on me, as on one condemned to perdition, when I present myself empty-handed and without merit before your heavenly beneficence, bringing with me but the evidence of your untold glory. I beg that you allow me to remind you who never slumber in forgetfulness, who never shut your eyes, never ignore the sighs of grief, that with your cross of light you could lift away my suffocating peril; with your consoling care, my fitful sadness; with your crown of thorns, the blossoms of my sins; with the lashes of the whip, the blows of death; with the reminding of the slap on the face, my feels of shame; with the spitting of your enemies, my contemptible vileness; with your sip of vinegar, the bitterness of my soul.

37.4

Yours is all the boundless goodness, only begotten Son of God, by which I am reminded of my evils. With tangible supplications I call loudly on your all-blessed name. Look upon my embarrassed confessions of defeat and grant mercy to this son of perdition doomed to everlasting death, so that upon my manifold sins, ever growing in leaps and bounds, the goodness of your mercy might be proclaimed with resounding solemnity in heaven and on earth. And to you with the Father and Holy Spirit, glory forever. Amen.

Prayer 38

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<"The liberating law of spiritual life">

38.1

But now, following on what I wrote elsewhere, at the beginning of this work, about the dark origins of the major sins and the law regulating the parts of the body by virtue of which I became an inheritor of death, in this prayer I likewise choose to recount a little of the plenty—like a drop taken from the limitless expanse of the sea—about the liberating law of spiritual life born of the light that is in the Lord Jesus.

38.2

Some of these are truly royal, placed on a high throne, full of grace and richly rewarding:

the king and his loving subjects,
the emperor and his nobles,
the crowned and his princes,
the illustrious man and his good report,
the victor and his trumpeters,
the commander and his warriors,
the acclaimed and his glory,
the groom and his revelers,
the royal bride and her maids,
the best man and those with him,
freedom and its benefits,
visitation and its extended right hand,
the promise (made) and its fulfillment,
protection and its right hand,
the gift and its array,
the sign of life and its strength,
the seal and its imprint,
the cloud and its shadow,
artistry and its marvels,
the spirit and its incorruptibility,
the word and its realization,
the taking of an oath and its fulfillment,
the power and its orders,
the baptismal font and its wonders,
the manna and its imperishability,
the living rock and its streams,
the pillar of fire and its rays,
thunder and its echo,
the heavenly hope and its salvation,
the tree of blessings and its fruit,
the bough and its bounty.

I note my omissions so that I shall not err in the slightest by mentioning everything, like eyes debilitated by (looking at) the sun. Being silent about the many, I shall conclude with the mention of this few, content with my very meager ability.

38.3

But woe to my always miserable, wretched soul, because my composition in words makes me mix the voice of good news with mournful protestations, inviting justice and judgment, decision and penalty, investigation and exposure, scolding and torches, nakedness and embarrassment, disclosure and shame, impeccability and reward, offenses and punishments.

38.4

More and more (woes) to me, doubly wretched in this world, for with unbearable wrath the sickle is coming to harvest the tall grain, the Judge to the court, the strongman to the tribunal, the threatened to perdition, the arm to carry out the Judgment, the rod to reprimand, the arm to inflict revenge, the shepherd to separate the flock; for the word you have spoken to me shall judge me, the condemned, on the last day of recompense.

O Merciful One, hasten with your loving kindness as of old, to attend to the faint sighs of my apprehension, and grant strength by your blessed hand. With your immediate help, comfort, heal, forgive, and bestow life on me at my end-time trial. And to you glory in all things, forever. Amen.

Prayer 39

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Much to my shame”>

39.1

Since I abandoned my former image because of the destroyer’s counsel and lost it completely by my own laziness, I shall now address my former self with pitiful sobs and weariness of spirit, recounting publicly and honestly, crying out with a loud voice, declaring my scandalous ways before the congregation of the multitude of nations.

39.2

I am a breathing book, inherently intense, (written) within and without—lamentations, woes, and crying, as recorded in the vision of Ezekiel.

I am a vulnerable city, without ramparts; an empty house, without doors for protection; salt in appearance but lacking taste; brackish water unfit to quench the thirst; a land useless for cultivation, an abandoned acreage eroded by water, a parched field covered with briars.

My personal parcel (once) cared for by God, I cultivated with the deceptions of the accuser:

a fruitless olive tree,
a barren tree to be cut down,
a hopeless, twice dead, articulate plant,
a completely depleted lamp, without light.

39.3

Once more, in the same vein, I repeat many pathetic similes:

Bitter punishment, much to my shame,
awaits a feeble one like me;
gnashing of teeth and endless wailing
for the eyes of a wretch like me;
paternal anger that cannot be swayed
by filial regret from one like me.
Irremediable corruption for my sinful body
(brought upon by me),
initiator of evil for my ailing soul;
new reprimands for one like me.
Anxiety with lingering doubt
about the release of a captive like me,
to have been brought by a heavenly host
to a woeful fellow like me.
Bundles of weeds corroborate the peril
surrounding one like me,
the fearsome voice declaring incorrigible
a renegade like me.

39.4

Truly, these are but amusing songs of a harlot with her harp, beating and hammering her chest, brazenly letting out sorrowful and mournful wails, as Isaiah wrote in his proverbial admonition to Tyre. If she could—because of a minor misfortune with short-term effect—protest with all manner of fake moaning and groaning like hirelings for a dirge with rhythmic moves, then how much more and in what kind of desperate voice should I wail? I who should have been waiting sinlessly for the coming of the Lord have been left unprepared and without garment.

39.5

Now, as I reflect again on the fearsome scene (of the judgment), my recompense should be severe. For having known these things early on, I failed to repent even in retrospect. Please, spare me, merciful, lover of humankind, mighty, benevolent, all-giving Christ, King, blessed forever. Amen.

Prayer 40

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“*You, Lord Christ, are the answer*”>

40.1

Almighty and beneficent God, Creator of all, hear the sound of my distressful sighs from fear of imagined perils to come. Save me with your mighty strength, ridding me of my sins. For you are able to strengthen all, against every scheme, through your boundless greatness and infinite wisdom.

40.2

And through the faculty of my mind I could see from afar the gamut of horrible things to come. I glimpse from here, in advance, the day of light, the hope of the saints, and the day of darkness—the punishment of the guilty from which none can flee to a place of refuge:

neither in deep valleys nor in bottomless chasms,
neither on heights of mountains nor in (depths of) rocky passes,
neither on solid boulders nor in cavernous clefts,
neither in crevices of pits nor in flooded marshes,
neither in the labyrinth of inner chambers
 nor in the layers of storerooms,
neither in locked rooms nor in the darkness of valleys,
neither on the declines of steeps nor on the inclines of hills,
neither in the blowing of the wind nor in the vastness of the seas,
neither in wadis nor in distant ends (of the earth),
neither in sounds of lament nor in sighs of weeping,
neither in the numbness of fingers nor in the lifting of hands,
neither in pleas of the lips nor in cries of the tongue.

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For these terrible, unavoidable situations you, Lord Christ, are the answer and respite, the reprieve and calm for my most sinful soul's salvation.

40.3

Now, look upon the endless dangers besieging me, you who alone are kind to all. Cut asunder with the victorious sword of your life-giving cross the nets that have snared me, that surround me on all sides as a captive of death, and steady my shaky feet that I may journey with ease. Heal the burning fever of my anguished heart. Turn the demonic, scheming whisper away from me, who has sinned against you. Drive away the utter despair of my dark soul that cohabits with evil. Dispel the thick smoke of sin's dominion that seems to have pervaded me. Destroy the vile, dark idols that corrupt beyond my control. Renew in my soul the image of light from your adorable glory, in your great and mighty name. Increase your glowing grace to beautify my face and the perception of my mind, an earthly being. Refine me in comeliness, as you see fit, noticeably cleansing away the gloominess of a sinner like me with your divine, living, incorruptible and heavenly light that envelopes your Three Persons. For you alone are blessed with the Father and praised with the Holy Spirit forever. Amen.

Prayer 41

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Nothing is impossible for you”>

41.1

Son of the living God, blessed in all things, inscrutably begotten of your astounding Father: Nothing is impossible for you. Upon the dawning of the shadowless rays of your glorious mercy, sins fade, demons are chased away, transgressions are erased, shackles are loosened, chains are broken, the dead are brought to life, ailments are cured, wounds are healed, corruption ceases, sadness withdraws, sighs retreat, darkness flees, fog disperses, haze recedes, gloom scatters, obscurity clears, darkness dissipates, the night passes, anxiety is banished, evil is wiped out, despair is chased away. Besides, your omnipotent hand rules, Reconciler of all.

41.2

You who came not to destroy the souls of people but to give life, forgive with your abundant mercy my countless transgressions, for you alone are ineffable in heaven and

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inscrutable on earth, in the substance of existence unto the very ends of the universe, the beginning of everything and the fullness in everything, blessed in the highest heaven. Glory to you with the Father and the Holy Spirit, forever. Amen.

Prayer 42

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“I plead with the one who was crucified with you”>

42.1

Lord God of compassion, salvation and mercy, atonement and restoration, healing and health, enlightenment and life, resurrection and immortality: “Remember me when you come with your reign,” O mighty, astounding, beneficent Creator of all, the Living One, praised, altogether perfect, near to the sighs of all beings. I plead with the one who was crucified with you, though I am not arrested for your sake and am not bound, not hanged and not nailed, not beaten on account of your great name and not reviled, not tortured and not scorned, not crushed and not killed. I beg to be worthy of the Kingdom of the desirable Light, the reward of the just, and of the things sworn with an oath, the “Amen,” that affirms the immutability of the good things to be bestowed. May you be glorified for giving hope of salvation to one completely forsaken like me.

42.2

Blessed, blessed, and blessed again!
Having accepted me by that same faith,
raise me up from my fallen state, O Benefactor;
cure me of the maladies of disease, O Merciful;
bring me back to life from the edge of death, O Life,
for I am yours, so make me live, O Refuge.
Grant me, a dead person, the breath of life, O Resurrection.

You are life, immortality, and inexhaustible goodness, boundless grace, untiring forgiveness, omnipotent right hand, all-ruling hand, all-reaching finger. Will it, Lord, and I shall be saved. Consider me in your mercy, and I shall be justified. Say the word, and I shall be found instantly spotless. Forget the number of my wrongs, and I shall be confident again. Be generous to me, for I shall cleave to you who are glorified in all things forever. Amen.

Prayer 43

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“I shall be made whole in soul and body”>

43.1

Possessor of all conceivable means for the art of healing, cause of life free of ills, mighty heavenly King, Lord Jesus Christ, God of all things conceptual and visible: Behold, you are in me, according to the prophet who spoke in pleasing terms of the new relationship—this beautifully arranged alliance regarding union with you—whereby I shall be illumined again, made whole in soul and body by you who are omnipotent and renowned.

43.2

You need no ointments, no bandages prepared for our spiritual wounds, no time, no means of something, no lengthy days, no changing of prescriptions nor (resorting to) amputation, cauterization, or surgery as practiced in earthly medicine, which is always prone to error—even worse, hopelessness. But for you, Creator of soul and body, all is illumined, all is set forth, all is written, all is easy, all is possible; wisdom is in charge, promises are kept, wishes fulfilled. Your testament is gospel truth, your judgment freedom, and your law-code grace.

You are not restricted by laws,
nor bound by canons,
nor hampered by shortage,
nor humbled by obedience,
nor prevented by confines,
nor limited by bounds.

You do not err out of anger,
nor vary out of wrath,
nor misjudge out of harshness,
nor perturb out of indignation,
nor falter out of ignorance,
nor waver from showing mercy,
nor shrink from uplifting,
nor cease from caring,
nor slow down from saving.

You are the beginning and the end of all, and everything is from you. Glory to you and worship forever. Amen.

Prayer 44

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“You cared so much for my salvation”>

44.1

Boundless God, true Son of God, the Inexplicable, Creator of all beings, Christ King, Light for the darkness of darkened hearts, who were fully with us, yet in essence one with him who sent you, marvelously revealing your (divinity) through our (humanity): Blessed be your heavenly, ineffable Father, who sent you from above, whose equal you are in creation glory, who cared so much for my salvation, an exiled slave, that he delivered you into the hands of men. And you, though able to avoid agony, were pleased to fulfil the mystery of this economy by drinking the cup of death on my behalf, a debtor, doing so in full humanity and perfect divinity. And (blessed be) your life-giving Holy Spirit, of the same essence as you and the Father, equal in honor to the One who begot you and to you, the One begotten, one perfect Trinity in Three Persons, indivisible, without beginning or time, beneficent to all, life-giver to all, peacemaker with all, Creator of existence and Fashioner of all things, glorified in one indivisible nature.

44.2

O merciful Father, heavenly, almighty, one divine essence, for the sake of my transgressions for which I am condemned to death, you offered the only Son of your inscrutable bosom, not sparing your Son, your equal in honor, your beloved, but gave him willingly to death, to be killed by tormentors as told in Zechariah’s prophecy: “For upon the shepherd shall the sword rise, and shall strike down the chief shepherd himself, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.” Through similarly fine types of old, the covenant made at the altar (of sacrifice) with the offering of the blood of slaughtered animals and the mystery of Abraham’s sacrifice, you described beforehand, by your very will, Giver of life, the salvation of a wretch like me.

So then, “why do you grieve, my soul?” You are not destroyed by God’s intention but by your own acts of contrary mindedness. “And why do you disturb me,” my mind, being struck with satanic despair? “Trust in God, confess to him” and he will care for you, as in the Davidic Psalm and the stimulating word of another prophet.

44.3

The orderliness of the Creator’s providential care surpasses the limits of the mind of angels and earthly beings. And if I were to try thousands of times, it could not be estimated, for the beneficence of him who is unlimited remains ineffable. For the blessed One sent One of the lauded, consubstantial Trinity, who died to please the will of the Sender; and the Other, astounding, with the acquiescence of the Two, supported with great diligence. The genial

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manifestation of the singleness of their will (is clear) in their working together for the same good—

as the soul in relation to the living being
and thought to the rational being,
as radiance in relation to glory and form to substance,
as caring to life and mindfulness to mercy,
as readiness to charity and resolve to salvation,
as abundance to generosity and overflow to continuity,
as fullness to perfection and inexhaustibility to richness,
as bounteousness to forbearance and unreachability to heights.

They are one perfect Trinity, of Three Persons, blessed forever. Amen.

Prayer 45

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Confess your thoughts to God”>

45.1

Now, my ruined soul, with good hope planted in the heart and the belt of faith buckled around both kidneys, the organs of desire and doubly filthy thoughts, confess your thoughts to God, the Benefactor,

as if thoughts were deeds,
as if intentions were accomplished acts,
as if invisible things were manifest,
as if the heart’s secrets were voiced,
as if casual remarks were committed wrongs,
as if pronouncements from the lips were major evils,
as if (all) footprints were left by those fleeing God’s commands,
as if hands raised in anger were those of one
 with blood on his hands,
as if laughter over trifles were deliberate abandonment of grace,
as if swearing—whether random or not—
 were collaboration with the deceiver,
as if haughtiness were promotion of the old destroyer

of our forebear,
as if restlessness of heart were lack of faith,
as if slothfulness were defeat even for one considered strong,
as if gripes about the threats of the passions
 were betrayal of the vow made to the Lord,
as if impudence were tantamount to some lack of compassion,
as if condescension were no less than utmost arrogance,
as if pride were compliance with the very Progenitor of Evil,
(as if) the involuntary (sins are counted) with the voluntary,
(as if) the compelled (transgressions are counted) with the willful,
(as if) the occasional (sins are counted) with the habitual,
(as if) the transgressions of the Law (are counted) with ungodliness,
(as if) the trivial (sins are counted) with the weightiest,
(as if) the few (sins are counted) with the many.

As if the things I have left unspoken were spoken to the Omniscient,
as if the unwritten wrongs were carved on a lodestone
 for the All-seeing,
as if the slightly contentious thoughts were the heaviest of burdens,
as if some hidden issues were the equivalent to the demanded payment
 of the *stater*, the weight of four *drachmas*
 from the mouth of a whale calf,
as if the deeply buried deeds were speeding to the ear of God.

Go ahead, add these up and have them multiplied, recount them with much sighing, the undone as though they were done. Offer your utterly vanquished soul to God so that you might receive from the Reciprocator the forgiveness of sins that is by grace, like the sinner whom the Lord justified and commended exceedingly, with enthusiastic and repeated praise for the merits of repentance instead of condemnation for sin.

45.2

O my sinful soul, heap up and keep adding to the many charges against you. Your multifarious thoughts are reproached with many stern words: your wickedness, lawlessness, deviousness, desertion in the face of battle, capitulation, recklessness, evilness, stupidity, stupor, daydreaming, sluggardly course, weird deliberations, vain utterances, abominable pleasures, dilly-dallying, desiring what is hateful to God, irreverence, incorrigibility, rudeness, feebleness, deceitfulness, irresoluteness, narrowness, uncontrolled lustfulness, ludicrousness, boisterousness, teasing, scandalization, cunning, unseemly brazenness, needless clashes, injudicious daring, suffocation of the spirit, indecision that leads to cowardice, plethora of vanities, insolent indulgences, contentiousness, annoyances, indiscriminate hatred, easy provocations, lack of punctiliousness, breaching of promises, forgetting of vows, distortion of distinctions, glossing over falsifications, folly of ambitiousness, embracing arrogance, maliciousness, selfishness, craving for primacy, vindictiveness toward evildoers, the emptiness

of their gossip, their vainglorious attitudes, collaboration with the conniving accuser, twisting of words, murder for pay, disregard for tradition, wasting ancestral inheritance, bondage to addiction, inseparable ties to iniquities—like oxen strapped to the yoke, constant miring in filth, abandonment of that which is good, trashing the unexpected consequences, reverting to the same dire condition after renewal, to things new in the mind, to strange thoughts, unsteadiness of the will, the barking out of aspirations, the hot air, the trifles rather than adherence to established principles, the unrestrained absoluteness of (one's) sovereign mind, and other things that cannot be expressed or brought to the fore whether in writing or orally.

45.3

And now, how will you be healed, my poor soul, after being pierced with so many lances? You are like an abandoned, exiled man, incurable, as the prophet has it. For one would be condemned to death for any of the wrongs listed above, let alone when besieged by such hordes of killers, vicious executioners. Even these analogous descriptions fail to convey fully the weight of my misfortunes. They are like a swarm of vivacious, stinging scorpions, carrying their deadly venom on the lower tip of their tails. And as for my skin-covered vessel, restraining much that is concealed, though it looks good on the outside, it is a warehouse of evil within, a storeroom of calamity and a mass of grief, filled with killing agents and sowers of death.

45.4

Beyond the wages in miseries and suffering, you, my soul, stand doubly condemned to death. You willingly acquired to yourself that which the enemy sowed upon the grain fields of the world.

O unclean man, dishonest and slothful, completely hateful, gluttonous lover of all that is filled with debauchery. For such the apostle saved some of his most fearsome words of reprimand, having already indicated in full the basis for his ruling: "And those who know God's Law," he says, "and still do such things or are willing to do so, are deserving of death." Thus, I myself am deserving of the double wages: of perdition and death, the death sentence. But spare me with your mercy, O (God), compassionate, living, mighty, obliging, able, potent, blessed forever. Amen.

Prayer 46

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<"You are still the likeness of his image">

46.1

Now, my soul, you are forever adrift, most punishable, always obdurate, wild, condemned to death, foraging with a filthy pack, a herd of boars, of horrible sins—you, a despicable hireling, a shepherd tending a flock of desert goats among the shepherds' tents. That illustration in the Song of Songs befits me, for I do not know myself, can never understand by whom, in whose image or to what end I was created!

46.2

Behold, you were formed like an angel, ambulating on feet, configurationally akin to the two that carry aloft, as in flight on wings that enable soaring twice as high, to gaze at the Father's domain. O fool, why did you stray on earth, on your own, always preoccupied with concerns of the present, being counted with wild asses of the desert? Like a lamp with many spouts, your round head was placed on the lampstand of your body, so that henceforth you might not stray from what its grace represents, that you might see God and study the rest (of the cosmos). You were doubly adorned with the honors of reason, so that you might speak with an unfettered tongue of the trophy of advantages you were granted: the mastery of skills to perform practical tasks, like kin in partnership with the all-giving right hand of God, (wherefore) you are called god. You are assembled of three hundred and sixty jointed segments, having within you an equal number of essential parts, efficacious in measurement, with the five senses. Your dexterity is enabled by means of your fingers, and no aspect of your visible, physical comeliness is untouched by your mind's considerations. For some (parts) are hard and strong, some are small and essential, half are solidly built and efficacious, and there are those that are tender and most honored, those that are important and esteemed. The interpretation of these observations is engraved on you as on an ineffaceable monument, my wretched soul, so that (like) the elements of time and the continuous chain of days around the year, you with your parts may remain defined by a certain order, unerringly and unchangeably.

46.3

Another spiritual image is symbolized through you, pertaining to the bond of love uniting the church as one: those who seem to have but little in common yet are bound together by the yoke that unites the high with the low. Those endangering the purity of the assembly gathered in the name of Christ are impaired members attached to the body that are to be cut off and removed, a sort of reduction in the composition of humankind—affecting your compartment of feelings, replacing the familiar image with disfigurement.

And now, my enslaved soul, the miraculous constitution of God's unique image is marred (in you) for many and diverse reasons, and you are found stripped of that original likeness for disobeying the command in the Garden of Life, yet by the luminous grace of the baptismal font you have received the Spirit's breathing and you are (still) the likeness of his image.

46.4

And now, like the firstborn Adam, once in the heavenly lot of Eden,
why did you lose the heavenly glory?
Why did you shut yourself out of heaven and lock the gate to ascent?
Why did you mix the impurities of bitter tears into the pure water?
Why did you stain with abominable deeds
 the cloth of the washed robe?
Why did you put on the cloak of sin instead of the one given you?
 Why did you infect the purity of your swift feet
 by taking the pestilential road?
Why did you repeat the violation of the just oath
 as with the former commandment?
Why did you deprive yourself of the fruit of grace,
 as did Adam of the Tree of Life?
Why did you willfully abandon the constancy
 of the absolutely clear hope?
Why did you have your face smeared with dreadful shame?
Why did you arm your adversary against you,
 O repository of stupidity?
Why did you fall prey in the snare of death,
 straying from the trusted path?
Why did you get caught by the hook of deception,
 you who partook of the Life-Giver's body?

Put your hope in him again, call on him, the Redeemer of those seeking refuge, the restorer, Savior, giver and sustainer of life, the merciful and caring lover of humankind who is not revengeful but most compassionate, blessed forever. Amen.

Prayer 47

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Like the Prodigal Son”>

47.1

And now, what can I say, a shamed fellow in your astounding presence? I cannot but remain speechless and fill my mouth with soil and be silent at heart. Following the prophetic counsel, I shall wait with hope. But if I open my clamped lips and have them moving, wanting to say

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).
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something in my condemned condition, there will be more of the same mournful elegies following the train of my thoughts.

47.2

And now, weeping with the great sinner who willingly sinned unto death, I repeat his cry and join him saying, "I have sinned, Lord, I have sinned, and to my lawlessness I myself testify." Weaving this cry with the words of the fiftieth Psalm, I keep adding countless sins to those charged against my account; they are more than the particles of dust on earth and those scattered all over by the wind. "I have sinned against heaven and you." Like the Prodigal Son who was shamed, I am returning to your paternal compassion. I make my entreaty, pleading with pathetic voice, with tears and cries of lament, showing my face twisted in grief, falling prostrate before you: Father of compassion, God of all, I am not worthy in any way to be ever mentioned or called a son, not even a useless, irresponsible hireling.

Accept me, a starving exile, inflicted with losses, faint with gnawing, painful hunger. Heal me with your bread of life. Welcome me with mercy, for you are my first refuge. Clothe me, a lawless sinner, O merciful and un vindictive God, with the clothes of which I was robbed. Place, with your boundless generosity, the ring with the seal of valor on my filthy hand that lost the inheritance. Shield the soles of my vulnerable bare feet with the protection of the figurative sandals, symbolic of the Gospel. Guard me from the venom of the Serpent.

In your true love for humankind, for one deficient in goodness like me, offer your sacrificial, fatted calf of heaven, your blessed, only begotten Son, who is always offered yet remains unfailing in his fullness, who is perpetually slaughtered in the place of sacrifice upon innumerable altars without being consumed. He is the completeness for all and the entirety in all, in essence of heaven and in reality of here below, lacking nothing in humanity and without deficit in divinity. He is broken into morsels and distributed in individual pieces, that he may gather all into his very own body, of which he is head.

Glory to you with him, Father most merciful. Amen.

Prayer 48

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<"Solomon as an example">

48.1

Exalted, mighty God, who has no beginning, no becoming, beyond limit, Watcher with your St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).
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wakeful eye, Parent of your glorious and inscrutable Only Begotten: Justify before heavenly and earthly beings your granting mercy to a reject like me. Celebrate my arrival, who was lost, with the singing of the heavenly choir in circle. Announce through your blessed Word the good news of my survival, who was dying. Reveal your good will, praised (Lord), to all your creation. Be true to your name, ineffable, and grant me, the miserable one, renewed salvation. Cancel the mortgage of my sins acquired through rebellion. Wash away with the blood of your beloved Son the death sentence laid upon my soul. Mark with the blood of your Christ the certainty of the good things salvation brings. Show the majesty of your mercy at the wedding banquet of your Kin.

Do not shut me, a suppliant, out of the nuptial chamber in your abode of life. Do not bar me from those who recline (to sup) with you and do not deprive me of your bounty. Do not lock the tangible debts of my iniquity in your vault. Do not seal my disgusting abominations in your goodly purse. Do not cover for long my diseased body with the wounds of my sins. Do not prolong the aches that bring me close to rottenness in death. Rather, wipe out with your words of mercy the horridness of corruptibility, so that freed from the consuming disease I might be restored to health. For my piercing ills, Father of compassion, prepare a strong balm. Visit me with goodness in my considerable deterioration, for I am yours, Lord, Lover of souls. Although I have committed a multitude of sins, do not register me as altogether sinful, you, the benevolent Giver of my life, for in your spiritual gifts I have placed my trust. "Acknowledging you is utter righteousness, and knowing your power is the root of immortality," as the wise man wrote early on. And again: "Your sovereignty causes you to spare all." And again: "He is close to you; you can find him whenever you want."

48.2

I take Solomon as an example for my prayer of hope, for I am equaled by no greater sinner than he. Once a beloved son, but later despised, once to God's people a mediator of peace, but later a sower of much discord, once an advocate for the living Law, but later an established agent of death, trampling divine service under foot and invoking the name of a foreign (god), instigator of discord, privileged depriver, contented thief, indulgent complainer, coddled fugitive, hideous traitor, irresponsible vandal, nurtured blasphemer, father-hating child, betrayer of covenants, slanderer of Moses, forgetter of favors, wise delinquent, all-knowing transgressor, shameless lamenter, wavering penitent, supplicating idolater, sluggish convert, hypocritical recipient, vacillator in reconciliation, double-talker when conversing, dropping words of laments and failings everywhere, generous in blame and ungenerous in praise, like one who has cheated himself, mixing hilarity with seriousness, his words suited to please people of all ages, yet utterly doomed because of his mouth. The sadness evoked by these deep sighs describes me, a pathetic person.

48.3

I am amazed, I despair, being confused in my bewilderment. If Solomon stumbled so often, what will happen to me?

Why did the exalted one fall?
Why did the steady person falter?
Why did the sturdy one collapse?
Why did the familiar person become estranged?
Why did the chosen child become alienated?
Why did the close one flee?
Why did the shining one become tarnished?
Why did the freeborn become enslaved?
Why did the teacher become lawless?
Why was the famous person obscured?
Why was the glorious person dishonored?
Why was the affluent one lacking?
Why was the pious one perverted?
Why was the chosen one rejected?
Why was the wealthy one impoverished?
Why was the covenant with the Most High broken?

It gives me chills to say that he consortied with the one in charge of the underworld. For what has he to do with idols? From where did his love for graven images come? Why did he yearn for augury? Did he not remember Samuel's scolding of Saul, saying, "Sorcery is a sin, and the *teraphim* cause pain and agony"? What then of the ancestral reproof that says, "The idols of the pagans are lifeless and demonic, and their ministers are like them"? Did not Moses, in anticipation, reprove his people with scorn, saying, "Only the Lord leads them, and there is no foreign god in their midst, none that their fathers had known"?

48.4

Where is the death-ushering, amalgamated statue of Phegor? Where is the ugly and ill-reputed molten image, the most accursed female of the Sidonians? Where is the utterly embarrassing womanly shape of the most disgusting kind, in whose shamefulness her prophets drew near, indiscriminately, in the name of the unrestrained demon of wickedness, straying godlessly in her adoration? The essence of decency was taken away by her, who drew our progenitor into perdition, overcame even the greatness of the exceedingly wise, enslaved the prodigious, made a fool of the pampered. The corrupting silver dragged him. The old weapon of the destroyer doomed the soul of the celebrated man, plucked it from the bosom of God and cast it to the mercy of the stampede. Luxury killed him, sloth numbed him, intemperance inebriated him.

O durable, earthborn body, with what cries shall I mourn you? This contradiction dominates not only him but all those who err, all who willfully transgress. For from him we learn that it is wrong to promote the familiar things of the body—unless one chooses to be judged by God. For even if a person is stupid but with hope places his will in the Creator, he shall not suffer any of the consequences (of stupidity).

48.5

However, Solomon has left a most pathetic record of his conversion, with self-accusatory reproof—tantamount to being truly dead to selfishness that afflicts the whole world. This could be observed readily, as established in the Book of Vanities as well as in the books of the priests and in the writings of Ahijah the Shilonite. In these he bewails with tears his concern over his ways: a futile effort, wasted labor, mindless adherence, fruitless endeavors, erratic works, alien wisdom, unwarranted complements, scandalous burdens, improper conjectures, trivial concepts, buildings on sand, corrupting gains, contemptibly difficult tasks, struggle against oneself, judgment upon one's own soul, exertion in vain, hurtful desire, catastrophic course, wayward path, harmful education, unwholesome practices, constantly wrong perspective, movement with puzzled looks, whorish appearance, filthy substance, repulsive color, tragic splendor, spiraling smoke, evaporating steam, often bought and sold object, destructible temple, inappropriate cry, baseless ridicule, despicable ambition, self-incriminating writing, deadly voyage, ungodly thoughts, lying speech, vexing discourse, scrutinization of trivia, crazed inquiry, displays of embarrassments, revelations of scandals, looming gossip, regretful acts, uncontrollable story, paragon of laziness, concealed pit, dark-time prey, predictably deadly ravine, bottomless abysses, murderous travel companions, foolish talk, bandits' hideout, dilapidated abode, shaky building, wobbly bridge, fleeting phantom, deceptive flatterer, inhumane traitor, enmity toward the Most High. All these detailed confessional thoughts were planted (as) a code early on through (the book of) Ecclesiastes in the hearts of all, a code to those who ought to repent, so that no human should take pride in wounding oneself or a friend with the arrows of disparagement. For the person who only pretends (piety) and does none of the things that please the Creator is a veiled pagan.

48.6

And now, (Solomon) did not sin as much as he repented. Let him not be censured in vain, but let this man be remembered for the good, and for us supplicants at the Lord's feet, let this be grounds on which to lay our hope.

When he descends to visit with the Spirit in undivided Divinity, may he bring life to those of us who confess him, we the living to whom good news were surely brought (even) by the dead.

I, a sinner, make my plea with him whose wisdom cannot be reached; citing my sins only in part, I plead with your lauded Majesty, fill my writing deficiency with the wisdom of that blessed one. May my present supplications mingle with the significantly grander prayers of this sublime king. May my petitions be considered with those of your chosen royal son whom you likened to your Only Begotten, your coequal in glory to whom we are related by having partaken of his blood. Save your servant, all-conceiving (Lord), almighty and astounding. Add to your glory as Creator by wiping away our unpardonable sins.

In remembrance of his good counsel, renew (Solomon) with those who are shown mercy, for through his Proverbs written so discerningly, attractively, and intricately, he proclaimed your divinity in this book of the luminous Testament. Considerately, he bequeathed it to the church, approaching you with the confession (as) Father. For it is not beyond (your fatherly)

mercy to regard his word as indicative of this, since not a drip of despair fell into the enthusiasm boiling in his heart (or) that he did not pause for a little while to quickly repent.

48.7

Now, remembering your ineffable goodness, embrace him with your compassion. Instead of the blame with which he has been assaulted for many centuries, restore him to blessedness, the one who covered the floor of the palatial banquet hall with a stream of tears of utmost repentance. With the pathetic sighs of his soul he surpassed his father's anguish. May your long-suffering forgiveness, O Compassionate One, blend his tears with the tears from the eyes of your Word, who took upon himself our frailty. May the Psalm's praise, unduly thought to be regarding him, be sealed to the glory of your coequal Son, through whom kindly grant him life with "the poor of the people." A certain gracious poet was solicitous of Solomon, considering himself quite rewarded by empathizing with him as with a living man, talking to him. I plead with you on his behalf also, for he too was in your service. Do rank Solomon among those who were shown mercy for his creative work on (Job) of Uz, a most magnificent prophetic account, justification of the Divinity. It is commendable to pray (for him) rather than speak ill of him.

48.8

I too hope with great confidence that his sighs and, with them, mine will merit being offered to you. For if you destroy us, judging us by our deeds, your glory will not be diminished, for you are known for your justice. But if you accept us, you will be exalted as befits your majesty. For you are eternally praiseworthy by us who are second (to angels), for your mercifulness more than for your immediate wrath. Return to us, Lord, return with kindness, to deal with compassion, to freely give your most generous gift of love, to comfort us who are always distressed by grief in general because of concern over the poignantly incurable. Lay your hand of salvation on us. Renew us, forgive and keep us safe from the devastation of sin. And to you alone, who are the beginning without beginning, the source of all beginnings, to your Holy Trinity and One Divinity, glory and dominion forever. Amen.

Prayer 49

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<"Grace greater than all the miracles">

49.1

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And now, God of light for all, do not let iniquity rule me, made in your royal likeness as in the heavenly Kingdom. Do not let the rebellious tyrant steal away the grace of your breath from your creature's image. Do not let hidden sin rule my mortal body by enslaving me through it. There is no king to rule my soul except you, Christ, who without tyranny submitted me to your easy yoke, who lifted away the clout of sin with your all-powerful word, who purchased (me) with your blood and nourished (me) with your body, who set forth and established the immutable covenant of life, who by setting the seal of your spirit registered me as your partner, presented me to your Father as co-heir, who in the name of your sacrifice and perpetual memory of your suffering emboldened me to pray to the same Benefactor, the Creator of all and Life.

You are the God of all souls who made this gift of grace greater than all the miracles you performed. Through neither the heavens with their orderliness and the angels with brilliance, nor the earth and humankind and all the wonders related to them, nor the broad expanse of the sea and the creatures therein, nor the abysses with their substructures and the infinite things therein, through none of these many sublime creations were you exalted as much as through your compassion for me, (seen) in what you have said through the holy prophet regarding that pleasingly good hope, "Who is a God capable as I am, always pardoning sin and blotting out transgressions?" Behold your words are fragrant with incense, O Merciful One, and your benefactions are acknowledged. The depths of your mysteries are exalted, and the outpourings of your grace are adored.

49.2

Indeed, no being is able to convey through actual speech even a small part of your acts of compassion which you have shown me, O Creator. For the power to restore what is worn out to its former grandeur is greater than creating from nothing. And since weakness is not yours, who is mighty in all things, who with but a spoken word can bring all works to completion, arise and be glorified, O Benefactor, by receiving me, one who is doubly hopeless to be saved, that I may truly rise up to my oath, be firmly established, be the voice exalting your good news, proclaiming your atoning grace, guided by the light of your mercy no less than being led by that which was created. For by the latter you are known as Creator only, whereas by the former you are remembered as provident also.

With the fashioner (is recalled) also the redeemer;
with the restorer, also the beneficent;
with the establisher, also the compassionate;
with the maker, also the originator;
with the author, also the meek;
with the artisan, also the almighty;
with the guide, also the light;
with the grantor, also the shepherd;
with the keeper, also the caring;
with the sustainer of life, also the healer;
with the helper, also the ruler;

with the overcomer, also the king;
with the initiator, also the kind;
with the giver of all gifts, also the generous;
with the one who is all-hearing, also the pardoner;
with the one who is forbearing, also the charitable;
with the one who is acquainted with grief, also the omniscient;
with the one who is merciful with regard to sin, also the refuge;
with the one who is exceedingly affectionate, also God;
with the one who is unceasing goodness,
also the one who is blessed in all things.

49.3

Now, since you created me even when I did not exist and made yourself known as my maker, I pray that you might reinstate my soul together with the tabernacle of my body to the former spotlessness of their purity, so that your limitless marvels in constant giving to my renewed being might be more plentiful than the fading shadows of the bygones.

And when recounting my sins, however much the wings of my mind can recall those hard to remember, may I be justified in your name, Almighty. And when I tell of the stain I myself brought upon my soul, may you forgive the evilness of the many sins I confess, Almighty, Seer of secrets, Savior of all, so that I might not, in the utter absence of good news, long again for my former ways. As I eulogize with the Psalmist those who have been saved by grace, through baptism, while my soul is pierced with the thorns of sin, may your hand reach deeper in me, now and again, to lift the heavy burden of my sins exceeded by your kindly gifts.

Free me hence through your blessed Holy Spirit, I pray you, Lord of all, from the law of sin and death. It will never happen that your truth will fail to dawn for reason of weakness. As shown in Scripture, where forgiveness reigns, sins are banished; where your living word gives encouragement, there is no despair; and where your grace abounds, debts are wiped away. And the hand of God being near, nothing is impossible; rather, absolute light, utter strength, and invincible potency (dominate).

Yours is salvation, life, renewal, mercy with kindness, the Kingdom, incorruptibility, and glory forever. Amen.

Prayer 50

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<"Out of sympathy for me?">

50.1

Just as there is no salvation for souls without God's Christ, nor delight in light without eyesight, nor pleasant sunshine without the rays of dawn, so too there is no atonement without confession of secrets and chastisement of the soul. For what good is purity to you if you are to be judged with the Pharisee? Or what harm are my transgressions causing me if I am to be praised with the tax collector? Where is it said that the prophet Joel was rebuked for repeating three times the miserableness of his soul? Would a holy man be blamed for reminding of the great day (of judgment)? Would Isaiah be considered a man of unclean lips when he was far from the misdeeds of the House of Israel? And how can God, who necessarily is to be worshiped in Adamic body, pray to his Father like a sinner—out of sympathy for me?

How else can the proverbial saying be interpreted, that "the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of the fool is in the house of mirth," unless one applies the transgression of Adam to his own soul and credits to himself the sins of all people? This is what the blessed among the kings did, regarding the (sins) of his ancestors, relinquishing his own righteousness. As if our nature is incorruptible! Nor can a heart rejoice merrily over the good news of the (blessed) hope unless it learns from Christ's apostle, who says: "I sorrow with all, as God (would have me do)."

50.2

Now I wish to welcome anew the old counsel of the spiritual sage that the Lord himself repeated: not to go and sit in front of the throne of the haughty when the wicked assemble with their vain thoughts. Taking a firm stand in the Law of the covenant, David and Jeremiah proscribed the same; instead, to be with those who repent in their heart and are chastened by sin, who are stricken by the fear of retribution on the great day of judgment, who have humbled themselves willingly, equal to the least of those on earth. For their sake God on high rejoices greatly. I dare follow this same rule in order to be with him, among the chosen seated in bliss, and to escape the word of rebuke (as) remarked by the prophet about some of the arrogant, saying, "Do not come near me, for I am pure, and who can look upon me?" Thus, drawing advantageously upon blessed David's immeasurable humility, I say with him, "I am considered like an animal," "deprived of sensibility and besieged by evils." My wounds have festered and become putrid because of my incurable insensitivity. And with certain of the chosen in Assyria, those spotless in soul, who willfully rebuffed sin, I say, speaking in the words of the great priest Ezra, "I am unable even to lift up my face to you, God."

50.3

I, a true mirror of all on earth, mix with their sins my own and, compounding my own bitterness with theirs, sigh with them—although there is no need for bleaker color to an existing ugliness. I have surely sinned, acting without thinking, contrary to what pleases you, committing many stupid mistakes. Look upon me, O Compassionate One, for like Peter caught in the act of denial, I am completely devastated. Shed light upon me with the rays of your

mercy, you who are altogether benevolent, that receiving your blessing, Lord, I might be justified, live and be cleansed of things that are not of your creation but of my negligence. I do not dare spread out my sinful hands steadily before you until you offer your blessed right hand for the renewal of my condemned self.

Now, vanquish again my audacity with your meekness; visit me with your love for humanity. And with your might to accomplish all in all and with all, forgive my sins, those original, intermediate, and last, Christ, King of the light of the just and for whom the impossible is possible.

50.4

Doer of good, I am not worthy to mention your blessed name, since I am vulnerable to your mortal blows on account of (violating) my baptism, the grace, the breath, the gifts, the tradition, the talents, the name (I received), the adoption, the royal honor, the image, the seal, the anointing, the bounty, the confidence, the relationship, the life, the light, the blessedness, the hope, the glory, the majesty that cannot be laid low, the incorruptible wreath; (also with regard to) the promise of (your revealing) the concealed things, which through you, Lord Christ, was preached by many to me, who am as brazen as a serpent or adder, with deaf ears, shut tight to hearing any of your ever-increasing goodness, which far exceeds my frequent wrongdoings that have utterly destroyed me, denied me of life, and bound me with death, a slave assigned to disintegration.

50.5

Blessed in compassion, you alone are fair and just in your benevolent judgment. I have sinned against you. I have transgressed. I have been unjust. For these I am devastated, besmirched, guilty, debauched. I did not obey your confessed, adored, and praised Word. You who were revealed with your ineffable love, the mere narrative of which is great and the meaning of which is overwhelming, to you (belongs) justice and glory and eternal praise; and for me, ashamed before you my provider, (may there be) atonement, mercy, healing, help and protection for heart and soul.

In all things you are lauded forever. Amen.

Prayer 51

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“The salvation of Manasseh”>

51.1

Now, should I, a mortal who has been utterly misled,
plead with another earthborn to whom it is but vain to cry out?

With a rational mortal in whom it would be wrong to place
any real hope of salvation?

With a corruptible human whose word is weak and whose strength
is hollow?

With princes on earthly thrones whose goodness is as transient
as themselves?

With a blood brother who is himself in need of tranquility?

With my earthly father when he himself was short of helpers
in his feeble days?

With my mother in birth pangs, when her compassion ceased
upon her departure from life?

With the kingdoms of this world perhaps, which regularly master
the art of killing instead of giving life?

But rather with you, benevolent God, praised in heaven,
who lives and gives life to all, able to bring incorruptible renewal
after death.

51.2

For if we run away from you, you follow us.
If we become weak, you give us strength.
If we err, you lead us to the straight path.
If we fail, you encourage us.
If we are ill in body and soul, you heal us.
If we languish in sin, you purge us.
If we tell untruths, you justify us with your truth.

If we fall deep into the abyss, you point to heaven.
If we do not turn from our inclination, you make us turn.
If we sin, you weep.
If we are just, you smile.
If we are estranged, you mourn.
If we draw near, you celebrate.
If we give, you accept.
If we become obstinate, you remain patient.
If we are ungrateful, you still give abundantly.
If we resign, you are saddened.
If we are valiant, you rejoice.

51.3

The blessed and wonderful [Psalm 102](#) comforts my despondent heart and ushers in the good news of great hope of life, heralding salvation that triumphs over demons and dooms the accuser. It is salutary, like the lordly sign of the cross, glorious and resplendent, uplifted in its exalted light, invincible in its heavenly strength, standing like a renowned victor—evermore unmovable by anything—against the immoral ways of Beliar's tyranny. It is a spiritual treasure for the good of discerning minds, granted for the defeat of death and the absolution of sin; a doubly intensified hope, eternal; the renewal of promises of incorruptibility for the just; hailed precepts that give life, written by the Spirit of God. Such is every song of the Psalms, perceived by the pure in heart: a testament of life, written for all people.

51.4

For the Old (Testament) was a faint image of this that holds within it the once anticipated good news, the assurance of the great, blessed victory that demolishes death and (ushers) the ever-ineffable heavenly life, that of heavenly beings, whereas that, the revocable writ and temporary type, with its ministry that condemned transgressors to hopelessness, an earthly testament to be annulled, was weak, requiring intercessors to reconcile those who were themselves deficient even in words of prayer.

It must be admitted, however, that (the latter) confirms the salvation of Manasseh after so many incurable sins; of the one who filled with the blood of the righteous the ancestral city with great name and dedicated to the Great King, according to the trustworthy account of the prophet; of the one who had the greatest of the seers, his own tutor and that of his ancestors, the hard-working steward devoted to the protection and oversight of the historic edifice, sawed in two with a deadly instrument, afflicted by horrific torture. Thinking of his rebelliousness, (any) hope for salvation was cut off. There is more to his evil waywardness: he even dared to challenge the Most High, contending in high places. He never hesitated to disrespect the honor and name of the Creator at his very altar, revolting against the Spirit of God, having pledged himself to Beliar in the very Temple of the Lord set apart for adoration with incense—the most renowned site in the world, the sanctuary revered by the nations, where angelic visions and

exultant divine edicts were manifested as luminous revelations.

In that heaven-like place, awe-inspiring, resplendent, he set the four-faced idol of a certain Kaiwan as a rival deity, turning it into a vile cultic center, a bleak desolation, a place of demonic worship. He deprived the heavenly King of his royal place—the most bountiful one being disallowed his possession. The (new) occupant, the restless, wandering, buzzing Baalzebub was painted on the ceiling, and the one with powerful name was made a vagabond; the legacy of the praiseworthy one was taken hostage, the lot of the merciful one was woefully reduced, the palatial hall of light was transformed into a foxhole, and the one who owns the universe had not even a booth from his possessions to cover his head. The barrier of the mighty one was torn down, exposing to fortune-tellers the altar for the great mystery of blood-sprinkling. The many paths that lead to stumbling grew broader.

(Behold) the shepherd of the lost flock that was led to perdition, the pugnacious teacher of waywardness: someone versed in the piety of the Law, fathered by the great Hezekiah who resembled David!

51.5

He was so misled by holding on to evil that he blasphemed and disputed the honor bestowed upon God by the glory of his Kingdom. He thrusted with the sword the multitude at prayer, a traitor to his family, turning against those close to him, murderer of his kin, killer of his companions.

He could not turn toward God, for he had rejected him. He could not remember Abraham, for he was alienated from him. He could not plead through Isaac, for he was cursed by him. He could not take pride in Israel, for he was banished from the great mystery graced by that name. He could not sing a song of David, for he had become his litigant. He could not approach the place of atonement, for he had defiled it. He could not take refuge in the ark of God, for he had replaced it with the stench of a molten idol. He could not call on Moses, for his sins against him were beyond forgiveness. He could not pray to Aaron, for he was guilty of causing him harm. He could not turn to the band of prophets once close at hand, for he had them killed.

Yet his sins were forgiven and his reign over the kingdom was restored so that you, benefactor, may institute and multiply praise beyond words that cannot be silenced, from people of all nations and throughout the ages; so that you may keep the door of hope open for your exultant glorification, and for my salvation, I who am condemned, yet to whom Christ—who is praised forever—is the Giver of the gift of immortality. Amen.

Prayer 52

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

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<“Those narrow windows”>

52.1

Blessed in your lordly essence, boundless and immutable, truly good, adored with incense, happiness professed throughout the world, most perfect revelation of persistent hope, compassionate and merciful: You hold no grudge—not even for a blink of an eye—despite years of transgression; you were pleased to pour out your wondrous, marvelous grace more than in past generations, beyond measure, doubly and at once, in streams of mercy flowing from on high and brimming with incense, a distribution of gifts to us who are of the new order. You opened those narrow windows through which knowledge shone faintly, as Solomon said, for him, and with him for me. You broadened for a wretch like me the cosmic chamber from where your mercy, your freely given divine gifts, well up for me who am among those privileged, a bearer of the commemorated glad tidings, which in the old order were described obliquely, through types: “For if you return to me, I will return to you,” and “when you turn and sigh, then you shall live.”

52.2

For he changes the tenebrous color of black into the brightness of snow, and people inundated with blood he blanches, as it happens to wool, according to Isaiah and Zechariah. In the midst of anger he counters with mercy. For the desolate cities of Israel are inhabited again; the roads forsaken for lack of people are traversed yet again; and those wasting from spiritual famine have their hands strengthened. God leaving his abode in anger returns in mercy, granting pardon in exile and double protection in the midst of threatening punishment, and compassionate care when anger wells in his heart.

52.3

(Even) this fragrant voice of the prophets who foretold the liberating mandate of your blessed advent in a way that no physical tongue could recount because of its magnitude (is like) the temporal types and prefigurations of old that were meager and deficient to proclaim the glad tidings of your appearing and the redemptive effect of your cross.

You raised your altars everywhere as testimony to your covenant with blood, which cries out more resoundingly than the condemnable death of Abel. Your victory in the showdown for goodness, for abundant, immortal life of grace, baptism, resurrection, and renewal in kinship with you and union with your Holy Spirit, for forgiveness, freedom, and enlightenment, for perpetual purity, real blessedness, in communion with those in heaven, in unfading glory, is the plea voiced in words upon our lips for reconciliation to the Most High. And what is overwhelming for me to say in sequence here, in remembrance of your great beneficence, is to become divine by the grace of election and joining you, Creator, by partaking of your lordly body. Uniting with your luminous life is the fulfillment of the blessed promise, which, in accordance with Paul’s words, the Law could not accomplish.

You, Savior, redemption, who came with your Father's bounty, fulfilled and realized in perpetuity the undiminishing hope placed in you, Redeemer of all. To you glory with your Father, with praise and blessings to your Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 53

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<"His body and blood for atonement">

53.1

Lord, Lord of the mighty hosts, King of all creation, blessed mercy, God of all, who transcends the limits of the widespread expanses: You are the sum of all infinities. The solid is fluid for you, and the fluid solid. There is nothing impossible for you, triumphant Power, fearsome. Fire is a refreshing mist (for you) and rain a scorching flame. You can make a stone into a speaking figure or turn a speaking figure into a mute and breathless statue. You honor the penitent sinner, and the seemingly pure you scrutinize and judge justly. Those approaching death you release with the joy of good things (to come), and the humiliated you restore, anointing them with cheer. You rescue the one who has stumbled into a snare, and the insecure you set upon the rock of confidence. You make happy the one moaning heavily in affliction, and make the frontrunner return to the end of the line. And when our favors are depleted, you perform even greater wonders. For you know when to forgive sins and erase iniquity; when to pardon wrongs and cease to remember our sins, as told by Isaiah and Jeremiah.

53.2

When pondering with grateful praise the grace of this new salvation, I am dumbfounded by its infinite breadth, left speechless by it. Cogitating the endless favors from your Light, from you to one entrenched in misery like me, I will implore you with your own prayer, fitting it into the substance of my words, the very letters comprising this book of laments, which I shall fill with sorrows and sighs. I shall mix these with what you bestow with pleasure:

with pains, the cure;
with disillusion, encouragement;
with despair, the remembrance of your name, Creator;
with sadness, your consolation;

with my bitterness, your sweetness, Giver of life;
with the retribution of the Law, your grace;
with the consequences of the curse, your liberating blessing;
with the death of the body, your total restoration.

53.3

I believe, Almighty, in your Word; hence I confess. Hear the silence of my heart, Lord Jesus, which is the loud reverberation of my prolonged cry to you. You partnered with our body and image, and as high priest, the antitype who took away the yoke of the type, you offered your lauded body instead of animals slaughtered for sacrifice. You continue to be offered perpetually, in an undying manner, and to grant undiminishing pardon not only to those of few sins but also to those for whom there seems to be no hope at the end of life. How could bodily members, inclined toward sin, foster life—even if they were to carry on for countless years? For this reason you, God of all, who of your own free will took upon yourself to be the sacrifice, enduring death, are distributed for (our) atonement. Not that you, source of purity, have to die daily as a debtor to death; rather, it was your will to be offered perpetually for our reconciliation, with the cooperation of your Spirit and to please the Father. Since you, inscrutable God of all, took on my semblance for my sake and for my salvation, I too am united with you and participate in your very being through your all-embracing body. And you, benefactor, for me and those like me, took my sins upon yourself though you were sinless, accepted death that was the punishment meted out for me, and endured guilt in my name. As would be the case, I suffer willingly with you who die often yet remain alive, who is offered through the divine mystery and is distributed in indivisible pieces not by the hands of those who deny you but by the faith of those who confess you.

53.4

A certain suppliant, (at one time) an unbelieving official, made a great and weighty assessment, however presumptuous from a hopeful person nonetheless: “I believe that at the end of my transient life I will more readily attain glory and bliss through this ineffable sacrament than through martyrdom or any other means of right living to ameliorate (my) wretchedness.” He was thus acknowledging that even the pious cannot be truly made perfect without commitment to this (sacrament of) remembrance, not until they are united in spirit through this great mystery. When adding, “You offered yourself doubly for my sake, a sinner,” he wished to say this: “You truly became me, taking my vileness into your savoriness, sacrificing your body with its morsels of the light of life.”

For this reason, at the first Eucharist in the Upper Room, as the cure for incurable ills, he distributed his body and blood for atonement. This he made us deem higher than that of martyrs made perfect by the shedding of their blood. By this token of hope he sought to show beyond doubt that he has marked even me unto glory, through this redemptive (sacrifice) more than through other means of forgiveness, mercy, or grace. So much greater is the divine power compared to the human and the willful offering of the Lord’s body mixed with divinity than the

offering of animal sacrifices, the immortal compared to the mortal, the astounding light compared to the shadowy darkness, the eternal rather than the transient, the heavenly rather than the earthly, the uncreated rather than the created, the inherently good rather than the corrupt by nature. Even more, it was his will to give his life. He is the cause of blessings, not just because of the curse.

53.5

Now, I pray you, compassionate one, grant me, pierced in heart and spirit, the heavenly medicine of life. Come kindly to me, one who is inflicted with sin. Forgive my debts, most perfect Sufficiency. For me, the true and trustworthy character of these words is this: You, Creator of all, dwell in the saints. And in the true words of Paul, as the sowing goes, so shall the actual reaping. The infirm of sight are powerless even when the sun is at its zenith. Yet you, benefactor, Creator from nothing, truly and eternally honor all who confess you, considering it sufficient for (eternal) life, and you are not restricted by the limitations of the Law; rather, you triumph especially since you sever ties to (cultic) rules. You continue to be the guarantor of good news to all desperate sinners. To you with the Father and your Holy Spirit, glory and sovereignty forever. Amen.

Prayer 54

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“My salvation comes from you”>

54.1

And now, in all and for all, your mercy is their hope, Jesus, the first Light of seeing eyes and discerning hearts; all good deeds, life and immortality are from you. Turn with compassion toward me and make me return to you rejoicing, for without your will I cannot be renewed, and if your will is not in sympathy with me, I could not be saved since I am condemned to death. And if you, my guide, did not prepare for me the path that leads to you, I would fall into the deep abyss on the right and the left.

54.2

I am not proud, for I am scorned in every way.

I am not arrogant, for I am in the wrong.

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I am not haughty, for I am abandoned.
I do not exult, for I am silenced.
I do not rebel, for I am shamed.
I do not rejoice, for I am woeful.
I do not justify myself, for I am wicked.

A horse does not go straight without a leading rein,
nor does a ship sail forth without a rudder,
nor does a plow make a furrow without a plowshare,
nor does a yoked pair of oxen move properly without a teamster,
nor does a cloud move across the sky without wind,
nor do the stars appear and disappear without timing,
nor does the sun complete its round without the element of air.

Nor do I, like them, do anything except at your command, Benefactor. For you alone give life to rational beings, and you alone maintain order in the cycle of creatures. My salvation comes from you, as the Psalmist said, and you proclaim in joyous voice the good news that resounds in the ears of people of all ages: "Come to my rest, all you who labor, and I will cleanse you of your sins."

54.3

But what benefits me to be cleansed, if I am only to be mired again? Or what advantage is there in partaking of the Eucharist, if I am to be damned to Gehenna? Or why should I glory in Abraham, if I have strayed from his deeds, I, the abominable son of an Amorite father and a Hittite or Canaanite mother, in the words of the prophet, as if spelled for me. I deserve to be the disinherited offspring of the Ethiopian and not the offspring of Sarah's womb, in the prophet's words that are applicable to me. I am the brother of Samaria and Gomorrah. I am the unbathed and unsalted child, the unripe fruit of the unripe womb of Aholah and Aholibah, doubly condemned, according to Ezekiel.

54.4

And like one in dangerously swelling waters, greatly imperiled by waves agitated by the winds, I am in the throes of trouble, hopelessly terrified at sea, swept away by the turbulent currents, reaching this way and that for a fingertip hold onto something, as if swamped by the fierce torrents of a river flooding in spring, caught in an involuntary and dreadful downward course, gulping water, unable to breathe because of swallowed debris. Foul, slimy, rooted, and tangled weeds pull me into the pangs of death like those drowning, carried by the flood.

I am wretched, as here illustrated: They speak, but I do not understand. They call, but I do not hear. They shout, but I do not wake up. They clamor, but I do not move. They trumpet, but I do not rally. I am wounded, but I do not feel, like an abominable idol devoid of any sense of goodness. Truly, I am chronically more evil than the reality of these examples, heinous and reprehensible, deserving to be dragged before the tribunal of Christ.

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54.5

And thus, along my way of no return, I leave this testament of sins committed as remembrance for readers, that they might pray to God through my words continually. May this (book) remain a prescribed rule for confession, evermore lifted in voice before you, Almighty, its letters like my body and its message like my soul ever longing for you, the boundless one. Hear my pleas as from an incorruptible petitioner, my very voice, O compassionate lover of humankind, eternally blessed. Amen.

Prayer 55

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Acceptable prayers”>

55.1

Having soared on the wings of my soul over countless generations of humankind, weighing them in the scales of my rational mind, I found none my equal in sin. Therefore, I have appropriated this Psalm of David as my song, like an assignment by a strict tutor with a rod: “Who equals me in my wrongdoing and iniquity?” And since these words truly and fully apply to me, a mortal man, once more I testify against myself, emphatically and in writing, condemning myself—who justifies himself but in vain—rather than cause the banishment of many through my words (against them), so that perhaps you might thereby pardon me, who has pardoned his debtors.

55.2

What acceptable prayers and what pleasing fragrance of incense shall I offer you here and now, O Christ, praised heavenly King?

Hence I pray that you bless those I have cursed,
release those I have bound,
free those I have condemned,
do good to those I have anathematized,
crown those I have demeaned,
comfort those I have saddened,
tend those I have crushed,
care for those I have shunned,

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shield those I have betrayed,
heal the souls of those I have wounded in body.

Thus, when I draw near (to you) with blessings for someone, hear me, and when with curses, please reject, compassionate (Lord).

55.3

I am most miserably afflicted, the least of those who pray to you with this book. With all my mind I have forgiven (my debtors), so that you might shut out the heartless curses pronounced with my spiteful voice. On my knees I have repeatedly implored, with all my heart, for reconciliation with those who have betrayed me cruelly as for those who have done me good. May you visit me with a portion of mercy comparable to your greatness, praiseworthy guardian, you who are life for a mortal like me, strength for the frail, might for the unsteady like me, fountain of wisdom for the stupefied dupe like me. For I am always stumbling in error, like an inexperienced diver in the dark. Unknowingly in the snare of death, I did not recognize the peril. I did not see the hidden devices for capturing the prey. I did not suspect concealed traps. I did not sense the ambush all around. I did not feel the ensnaring net. As the Psalmist said, “Evils came upon me, and I was unable to recognize them.”

55.4

As a certain foreign sage had rightly said, “Unexpected death is evil, indeed.” I testify to this with my own words:

Like senseless cattle,
we are not terrified while dying,
not astonished as we perish,
not humbled by burial,
not worried while being exiled,
not regretful while we are corrupted,
not concerned while we are worn down,
not prepared while being robbed,
not cautious while we proceed,
not aware while being enslaved.

55.5

That happy man, Job, referred to his death as rest, and I would have agreed with the holy man had I not had a heavy burden of mortal sins to bear, were it not for these hidden traps where the plotter is invisible, the present circumstances nonexistent, the past unknown and the future uncertain.

Moreover, I am impatient and my nature is cynical, my legs unstable and my mind disoriented, my cravings beyond control and my habits intemperate, my body inundated with

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sin and my inclinations worldly, my defiance firm and my character at odds, my dwelling clay and the rain pouring, my needs innumerable and perils all-conquering, my mind nurtured with evil and my desires despising the good, my life dull and my (meaningful) preoccupations rare, my delusions foolish and my pastimes childish, my labor in vain and my joys illusory, my storerooms for nothing and my possession the wind, my likeness a mere shadow and my image ludicrous. For when the Law was applied, according to the Pauline saying, it found me altogether unprepared. Sin came alive when reproofed by righteousness, and I died for life and came alive for death.

55.6

As foretold in the Scriptures, alien and evil forces robbed my heart's treasure of wisdom. Consequently, wisdom has waned in me and the evil inclination has waxed, as the speaker in proverbs says. The eye of my soul was not fixated on Christ, the guide of my life, whom I should have followed on the straight path.

Racing on my own, I stumbled badly.
Reaching for the unattainable, I failed to reach my potential.
Trying to attain greatness, I fell from where I was.
Walking the heavenly path, I plunged into the abyss.
Being more cautious, I was forever harmed.
Keeping myself pure, I was utterly defiled.
Running to the left, I became vulnerable from the right.
Searching for the second, I lost the first.
Pursuing the lesser, I forfeited the greater.
Observing the vow, I jeopardized the covenant.
Breaking a habit, I embraced a vice.
Avoiding the petty, I fell prey to what is grave.
What I created on my own, I submitted to a harsh judge.

From all these, only you are able to deliver me, a captive, bringing to life a soul given to death. For you alone, Lord Jesus, revered benefactor, with the boundless glory of the Father and the Holy Spirit are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 56

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<"By my deeds I merited the worst">

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56.1

As for factors conducive to death, the hellish roots of the tree with bitter fruit, related enemies, hostile kin, traitorous progeny, I shall list them one by one, naming each.

They are: my menacing heart, my badmouthing tongue, my lustful eyes, my heedless ears, my murderous hands, my untested internal organs, my wayward feet, my daring advance, my misleading footprints, my polluted breath, my dark inclinations, my hardened liver, my soft brain, my indecisive will, (my) incorrigible vice, (my) wavering virtue, (my) banished soul, (my) faded legacy.

(I am like) a wounded beast, stricken bird, fugitive fallen off a precipice, apprehended criminal, drowning pirate, treasonous soldier, reluctant fighter, ill-prepared warrior, careless laborer, faithless worshiper, worldly cleric, impious priest, uncommitted legislator, indicted clerk, maddened sage, ridiculous orator, embarrassing presence.

(Behold my) shameless countenance, grotesque face, repulsive blush, unhuman image, disgraced beauty, spoiled food, sickening taste, weedy vineyard, worm-eaten vine, thorny garden, wilted ears of wheat, mouse-nibbled honeycomb.

(I am like) an unprotected outcast, despairing bragger, bigoted heretic, irreconcilably disfellowshipped person, nonsensical blabbermouth, blockheaded idiot, senselessly wicked person, hellishly greedy, unrestrainedly audacious, waywardly godless, determined murderer, sower of thorns, woefully contented.

(Behold my) sullied majesty, unsightly splendor, reduced ability, downtrodden greatness, trampled glory, persistent disobedience, willful misbehavior.

(I am like) a negligent steward, treacherous counselor, alienated friend, corrupt chief, tightfisted relative, stingy distributor, crooked supervisor, vicious soul.

(Behold my) uncharitable wish, habitual hate, unsympathetic viscera, imprudent course, invisible damage, secret spells, contrary outcomes.

(I am like) a prodigal merchant, insatiable exploiter, drunken official, duplicitous treasure warden, conspiring emissary, sleeping sentinel, the proud poor, the miserly rich, dishonest chancellor, disloyal guardian, backbiting housemate, tardy messenger, irresponsible courier, contentious envoy, unwise mediator, banished ruler, feeble king, impaired emperor, traitorous prince, ruthless commander, biased judge, vulgar commoner.

To enemies (I am) a scorn, to friends everything, to writers a subject for derision, to prosecutors a case for indictment.

For though I was at times called by the highest titles, yet by my deeds I merited the worst. These are the most treacherous hazards that so often seduce. By some I was deceived as a fool, while others are of my own doing in my weakness, sentencing myself willfully to death.

56.2

Now, which of the things listed above, abominable to you and excruciating for me, dare I dedicate to your service? Which of these things, wrapped in corruption, dare I set before your most holy majesty? For how long will your patience bear so many wrongs? How much will you forgive? How long will you remain silent? Will you even bear to listen? Will you not hand me

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over to be flogged, one who deserves to be beaten to death! Yet with the mercy of your light you visit those whose souls are in utter darkness, to heal, to pardon, and to give life.

Power that cannot be resisted, glory to you in all things. Amen.

Prayer 57

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Consider my agonizing contrition”>

57.1

Christ God, astounding name, vision of majesty, inscrutable image of sublimity, infinite power, expression of salvation's light, protector of life, gate to the Kingdom of heavenly rest, way of tranquility, restorer of trust and delightful blessedness, almighty sovereign of all existences, summons to blessing, sound of good news, proclamation of bliss, salve of immortality, ineffable Son of the One God:

What is impossible for me is easy for you.
What is ungraspable for me is reachable for you.
What is inaccessible for me is near for you.
What is concealed from a pitiable (one) like me is at hand
 for your serenity.
What is impossible for me is accomplished by you.
What is immeasurable for me is measured by your immensity,
What is despairing for me is consoling for you.
What is incurable for me does not affect you.
What is sighing for me is rejoicing for you.
What is heavy for me is light for you.
What is corruptible for me is consigned to your power.
What is lost for me is retained by you.
What is beyond words for me is comprehensible for you.
What is gloom for me is radiance for you.
What is infinite for me is held in the palm of your blessed hand.
What is somber for me is bright for you.
What sets me to flight is repelled by you.
What holds me in check is taken away easily by you.
What is lethal for me is counted for nothing

before the power of your essence.

57.2

But you, merciful God of all, Lord Jesus Christ, if you take pity, you can find me a way out of this predicament. For the sake of the name of the majestic glory of your blessed Father, for the sake of the compassionate will of your Holy Spirit, consider the agonizing contrition I express and the indictments I bring against myself from the depth of my heart.

Look upon the distracted unreadiness of my nature. Grant healing for my wounds and rescue me who am lost. Grant deliverance for me who am dying in many ways and a path to life for me who am corrupt. Grant renewal for me who am worn out and a possibility of hope for me who am wicked.

Since I have shown uncharacteristic consciousness, how much more will (you show) your characteristic, usual kindness! Since thorny plants produce sweet fruit, how much (sweeter) the taste of immortality from the Tree of Life! Since I can beg for mercy for those who hate me, how could you, Almighty, not grant me doubly from your inexhaustible bounty!

57.3

Now, consider your greatness, Most High, and look at my smallness. Accept these few confessions of my countless sins, you who see everything in its totality. And as you overlooked the fall of the Rock, may you ignore the shakiness of this small particle of sand. And as you pardoned David upon reciting "I have sinned," may your forbearance do the same for my audible sighs, for you grant to all generously and fairly, like a good and judicious conqueror, and you do not disdain me, the least of your captives, for you are merciful, Creator of all.

O Compassionate One, please welcome me back and do not let me stray, for I am sustained by your blood. For yours are salvation and forgiveness, and to you befits glory in all things, forever. Amen.

Prayer 58

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<"For one sinful like me, you are Savior">

58.1

Lord Jesus, blessed with the Father, with the pleasing will of your Holy Spirit: All blessedness St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).
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is through your blessing, O blessed only Son of the Blessed. No other king but you, Christ, rules over my breath.

As the prophet Isaiah says, “The blessing of Jacob is when I take away his sins.” So, have mercy on me now, merciful Lord, as is your custom of old, and bless your articulate vessel, as you did the utterances of David and Moses, those blessed by you, whom you hastened to atone with your saving word. As befits your divinity, perform a miracle on me, O merciful heavenly King, as you did on the paralytic confined to his bed for a long time, among those gathered in the porch at Bethesda. You did not hesitate to extend your healing hand to that doubly faithless man among them—whose joints were paralyzed for thirty-eight years—even though you knew the incurable wickedness he was to inflict on you on the day of your betrayal, on the bitter night of the battle against the Lord, against you, the great enabler and benefactor.

58.2

Lord, though you cautioned him early on, “Do not sin so that nothing worse happens to you,” it did not prevent him from collaborating with the despicable people who condemned you to the cross. Yet on such a crippled, treacherous man, crawling on his knees to death, you took pity. For you are ineffable goodness, utmost love for humankind, astonishing forgiveness, astounding forbearance, kindness beyond measure, praiseworthy meekness.

You are always moved by compassion, without animosity.

You are abundant in mercy, without blaming.

You are moved by love for humankind, without spurning.

You are compelled by goodness, without cursing.

You are constrained by love, without grudging.

You seek my return to you, without growing weary.

You run after me in my obstinacy, without giving up.

You call a deaf like me, without losing patience.

You rush for a sloth like me, without being hindered.

For one evil like me, you are Good.

For one in total indebtedness like me, you are Pardoner.

For one sinful like me, you are Savior.

For one in darkness like me, you are Light.

For one dying like me, you are Life.

58.3

Blessed Giver of all gifts, this is what all the inspired and beneficial books, which often bear heavenly fruit, indescribable and amazing, say to me also, wretched soul that I am: “Arise, take your mat of sins in the place of your destruction and go to the tranquil repose of the life without toil.” May you sever, with the omnipotent sword of your commanding word, the tied ribbons of my burial cloth, the bonds that confine to hell, and release me from the strangling knots that brutally demand my soul, delivering one like me, deserving death, to the liberation of

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unending bliss on high by your life-giving and divine word. Do not gradually postpone or delay it day by day, lest my heavy burden of sin should affect my back and destroy and annihilate me while staring at hell, lest the haughty one with tyrannical compulsion should disarm my spiritual defenses and enslave me to death. Rather, help me, O good co-sufferer, as I sigh because of the pangs of death, by lifting from me the plank of perdition—as you did once from the shoulder of the guard's (recruit) to construct the fitting (sign) of your mighty victory—so that I may be nailed with you, with steadfast faith, firm hope, and without stumbling. To you with the Father and the Holy Spirit, glory and dominion forever. Amen.

Prayer 59

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“So, come Lord”>

59.1

I believe and knowingly bear witness, through insights of my soul and visions of my conscience inspired by you, that for you, benefactor, the prayers of sinners are more desirable than the petitions of the just. For the former, baring his vanquished soul, longs for your grace and, being aware of the limits of his nature, rises up like a major scrutinizer, a combatant bent on self-mortification, a strict prosecutor and inquisitive judge. Whereas the second, looking upon his good achievements, places the hand of confidence on his soul, forgets the limitations of his nature, and expects rewards rather than mercy. For that reason, one is the subject of countless homilies trumpeting your mercy, and the other has been passed over in silence, O inscrutable, astounding, and all-caring (Lord)! I, an earthly being, am ashamed of speaking about the record of my deeds before you.

So come, Lord. Do not let a human hand seem stronger than yours. Let not your mercies be gaged in mortal measure.

59.2

Now, those who have healthy organs are not in need of healing, and those with eyes capable of seeing are not in need of a guide, and those who are rich in possessions do not linger at the gates of the affluent, and those who are well fed do not wait for crumbs of bread from the table, and those who lead a saintly life are not in need of mercy.

So, then, O Most High in heaven, almighty, have mercy on me,

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a most distressed wanderer.
For if I were like Job, I would say my soul was upright and pure
like his.
If I were like Moses, I would positively say with him,
“The Lord knows his own.”
If I were like David, I would say, “I have pursued judgment
and justice,” and outstripping our physical nature, would add,
“If I see sin in my heart, may the Lord not hear me.”
If I were like Elijah, I would call myself “man of God.”
If I were like Jeremiah, I would emulate your truth in my soul.
If I were like Hezekiah, I would proudly say with good justification,
“I have walked justly before you.”
If I were like Paul, I would call myself a dwelling,
a place where God’s Word is proclaimed and received.

59.3

But I, lawless despite knowing the Law, not only cannot present my soul to you, with respectful words like them, I cannot even mention myself, who am altogether evil, like any of these good men, nor praise your most praiseworthy name, Almighty, with my wicked tongue. But you, who are capable of everything, grant me the spirit of salvation, the sheltering right arm, the helping hand, the command of goodness, the light of mercy, the word of renewal, the result of atonement, and the staff to help me in life. For you are the hope of refuge, Lord Jesus Christ, blessed with the Father and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 60

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Dare I say with David ...?”> I

60.1

Since it is improper to have blessings from a sinner’s mouth,
as I learned early on, from a true proverb,
How can I, a very shameful petitioner, continue repeating
the same praises on a daily basis from the Psalms
that earn only curses for me?

How shall I sing my failures and build monuments to my disgrace
while gathering thorns with lilies in my bare chest?
How shall I dare to say with David,
“You shall break the teeth of sinners”?
Or, “None of the wicked shall dwell before your eyes”?
Or, “Judge me, Lord, according to your righteousness,
according to the purity that is in me”?
Or, “Let wickedness be visited upon the sinful”?
Or, “Let the arms of the sinner and wicked be crushed”
and all that follows?
Or, “Upon the wicked he will rain snares, fire and brimstone”?
Or, “The Lord shall cut off flattering lips and the boasting tongue”?
Or, “You have tested my heart and found no iniquity”?
Or the next verse, “My steps have held fast to your path”?
Or that, “I shall appear before you in righteousness”?
Or, “I will be upright before him”?
Or the other verse, “The Lord will reward me according to
my righteousness and the cleanness of my hands”?
Or how can I conceal my lies and say with the holy man,
“I have washed my hands in innocence”?
Or brag while reeling in sordidness,
“I do not consort with the impious”?
Or proudly put on a happy face, pitiful though I am, and say,
“Vindicate me, Lord, for I have walked in integrity”?
Or I, stranger to goodness, beg you, knower of secrets,
“Do not count my soul among the wicked”?
Or shall I curse others when I am accursed, saying,
“Requite them, Lord, according to their works”?
And shall I dare to continue in this order of words?

60.2

If I were to add sayings similar to the preceding, my grief would double, my bitterness would multiply. My tears well up beyond any measure as I daily seek the familiarly scolding voice of the Psalms, which constantly reprimands me, an offender that I am. The concluding part of [Psalm 49](#), the rebuking words in particular, reproach me constantly, abominable person that I am. They prevent my mouth from praising, expose my guilty soul to the prosecuting voice of God, and take away my anticipation of life.

For one who rejects the rule of being reproached by those who are near, there will be more (to hear) afterwards from the Seer, regarding the bloody suffering, the painful agony, and the anguish of the mind.

Were that one would humbly examine one's own soul, lashing and indicting oneself with solemn utterances of one's own tongue! He would be acknowledged and blessed by the

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all-ruling lips of the mouth of the Most High. For such a person would have rightly expressed his return to him, not having ignored the path of life—thanks to the defining love that cut the root of transgression without yielding to the slanderers' falsities.

The sheep of Christ's flock have found a cure in resorting to the healing salt for their inner wounds. Yet it is quite irrational for rational beings, raised in blooming places with life-giving counsel, to graze in deadly pastures for lack of good judgment.

60.3

And now, this last indicting image is appropriate to me, and the described evil fits my condition, where I myself fueled the consuming fire of eternal damnation poured from on high upon my head, the seat of thought.

What do I profit from the Psalms when I remain fruitless
despite my countless chants, failing to sing with my soul
as instructed by Paul?
How shall I mix our Lord's words with those of the prophet?
How can I, the greatest of sinners, the least of needed people, say
with the saint, "Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity"?
How shall I, who has not fulfilled any of the multitude
of commandments relating to grace or the Law,
cry with the happy man who first practiced what he passed on
as injunctions for us, saying, "For I, your servant,
have kept these commandments" and the sayings that follow?
How shall I, who am devoid of life's wisdom,
praise the Lord with the God-fearing?
How shall I append my prayer to that great one:
"I sought but one thing from the Lord,
to behold his splendor and to serve in his temple"?
How shall I strive for what I am deprived of, when I hear,
"It is fitting for the upright to bless"?
How shall I curse myself with my own lips, saying,
among other things, "The face of the Lord is against evil doers,
whose remembrance shall perish from the face of the earth"?
How, again as in another verse, "Soon shall the evil perish"?
Or, quite similar to my case, "The arms of the wicked
shall be stricken"?
How can I pray for my annihilation, "Behold the sinners perish"?
How shall I engage my boisterous tongue in the blessed saying,
"I shall watch my ways so that I do not sin with my tongue"?
How shall I, filled with thorns of sin, boast with the innocent,
"But you have supported me because of my innocence"?
How shall I, a sinner deserving double punishment,
disparage the companions among whom I live by saying,

"Deliver me, O God, from sinful and deceitful men"?

60.4

How shall I dare to say with David, as if I am not an idolater
and do not vaingloriously delight in vanities,
"Have we forgotten the name of our God,
or spread out our hands in prayer to strange gods"?
For only one laid low in the filth of sin erects idols
that incite lust, debauchery, and fornication,
as those of Ashtoreth, Chemosh, and the male Milcom;
so too the ferocious T'arahat,
unabashed among effeminate,
his naked genitals ludicrous, like those of donkeys.

How then shall I not be ashamed to pray with the martyr
who always took his stand for the good,
"For your sake we are slain all day long,"
and the rest of this Psalm?

How can I, the most unwise and perverse of humans, dare say,
"My mouth shall utter wisdom, my heart understanding"?

How can I, a flattering hypocrite, wish for the bones of men-pleasers
to be scattered?

How shall I recall the twice-repeated great blessing,
"May I walk before God in the land of the living"?

How shall I with my countless sins say with the righteous,
"I have no sin or fault, I walk without sin and am upright"?

How shall I condemn myself to oblivion by saying this:
"Show no mercy to those who practice lawlessness"?

How shall I say, "As wax melts before the fire,
so sinners before God"?

60.5

How shall I, who have indulged in degrading sensuality, define myself with such incomparable words as "I have humbled my soul with fasting," or with the similar, "When they were oppressed, I wore sackcloth, and bowed down as one in mourning and grief"?

Would it be possible to remain calm, when I am constantly reminded of punishments like: "The sediment of God's wrath is unending, and all the wicked of the earth shall drink of it"? And how about this one next to it: "You will shatter the horns of sinners"?

How shall I vituperate the ingratitude of Jacob's descendants, when I myself, embracing shadowy truth, have with them and like their shortcomings, forgotten Christ's favor through his divine act of redemption by means of the cross, no less than their forgetting the miraculous power of Moses' staff, which typologically foreshadowed the divine economy?

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

How shall I point to the perilous assaults of demons, as if they are barbaric tribes or alien hordes, saying, “They have thrown the bodies of the righteous among us as food to the birds of prey,” that is, to those (demons) of the air?

Would it be possible to consider my will’s alliance with evil holy, when it is like “the seed of the word fallen by the wayside”? Likewise those that follow in the hostile path of wickedness, namely, the rebellious conflicts concealed in my mind and conditioned by me, collaborating with the schemes of the accuser.

Thus, I cannot supplicate, “O God, do not be silent and do not be slow,” or “They have conspired against your saints and said ...,” or pray the rest of this Psalm, unless, quite possibly, these apply to the tyranny of deluding demons fighting constantly for turmoil, down to the present, both they and their coworkers.

60.6

Lord Christ, exalted son of the great God, keep and strengthen us by your encircling heavenly host against every wind current of the deceiver; defend us with your luminous cross, for although varieties of lawlessness may be found in me, there is no blasphemy.

You were not gratified by the destruction of the impious like me. Rather, with somber tenderness, you were doubly aggrieved by the devastation of the iniquitous in the flood, considering their death loathsome and resolving with words too amazing to hearers: “I shall never again curse the earth because of the deeds of man.” And you are greatly consoled, delighting in the deliverance of unclean men worthy of destruction, as you showed through the parable of the spreading plant that shaded Jonah, that you spare those deserving of destruction, O Merciful One. And in another instance how greatly were you annoyed by shutting the rain that would have refreshed your deniers. And in your last days, you manifested various good deeds through your apostles, beyond description and worthy of celebration, commanding them to spread your pleasant message to distant and alien peoples.

Sprinkle upon me your compassionate and fatherly love, O Living One, so I too may find salvation, being atoned by your most generous visitation. And to you, with the Father and through your Holy Spirit, glory forever. Amen.

Prayer 61

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Dare I say with David ...?”> II

61.1

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

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In what way could I utilize the Psalms, to appeal to such words and sing them daily with my harps, when they reprove me thoroughly and condemn me constantly?

How can I, who am doomed, compare myself even to the shadow of the blessed (David), to say with him “let perversion be far from my heart”?

How can I, a teller of the good news, a disciple of the New (Covenant), yet wanting in the reforms found in the ensuing verses by the legislator, soldier, king, and corporeal commander, all pleasing to heavenly beings, say, “I have not been despondent in my life”?

How can I, in the manner of the thoughtful righteous upon waking up, always in readiness, (repeat) the proverbial saying, “In the morning I will be armed against the wicked,” when I have not subdued and disciplined the members of my own body?

How can I take part in the great valor (of David) and exterminate the lawless in the Lord’s city, when I have not eradicated the growing mole in my own soul?

How can I lie to one who has the record of hidden things, that “I have eaten ashes like bread”?

How can I who have not mixed one impure drop of my passions with the pure springs of the Psalmist’s (eyes), say with him that “I have mingled my drink with tears” and “I have drenched my bed with tears”?

What shall I write about myself, one dying in sin, when he who loved God with all his heart assumed the sins of his forefathers as his own, saying that “We have sinned with our fathers and have done wickedly,” while the rest of the Psalm applies to me more accurately than to Israel?

By what privilege can I be ranked among the good, when I have not used those remedies considered efficacious by human estimates: abstinence from the appalling, deadly foods and keeping frequent vigils for souls suffering vexation, as religiously practiced by Jews and pagans?

How could “my righteousness endure forever” when I have never pursued it?

61.2

Lest I should become tedious, boring with my words, I shall hasten to be brief.

What more do I have to say other than the words the blessed David sang with his God-inspired voice: “I sought you with all my heart”?

How shall I say with him something greater than this: “I hold back my feet from every evil way”?

In what respect shall I offer this beside what has already been stated: “I have laid up your word in my heart so that I might not sin against you”?

In what manner shall I express my emptiness as if it were fullness, saying with the saints, “Through your precepts I have understanding; I hate every evil way”?

How can I place my perpetual lies beside the true vows of the meek, pledging with the faithful, “I have sworn, which I affirm, to observe your righteous judgments”?

How can I repeat the crucial verdict of the angel of death, the words of his message that “salvation is far for sinners”?

How can I, who am truly wicked, count myself among the good who receive their just reward from the Lord, reiterating this verse: “The Lord does good to those who are upright in

their hearts”?

How can I, who have erred, define myself by claiming this brief statement impartially, “The Lord will snatch away with evildoers those who stray”?

How can I, who have been shamed, cloak myself in pious grandeur, saying, “O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not haughty,” and the sayings that follow?

How can I, speechless as regards to actual words, be taken as a sign of encouragement to those who are desperate?

Is it for me, (marked) for Gehenna’s treasury, to say with the one anointed by the Spirit of God, “You saw beforehand that there was no cunning on my tongue,” and the rest of this Psalm from its incipit to the end?

How can I, who conspire with lawless people, a man condemned to death and son of perdition, say to the Benefactor, “Do I not hate them that hate you, Lord?” and the verses that follow?

How can you, my soul, a microcosm of the macrocosm, with confidence in that celebratory greatness, offer your spirit without condemnation and magnify with him who is crowned, saying, “Test me, Lord, and see if there is any iniquity upon my hands,” and all that follows?

How can I, being who I am, plead for life and join my voice with those who hope in God, saying, “Protect me, Lord, from the hands of the sinner and from evil man”?

How can I arise to pray with the glorified (David) saying, “You are my hope and lot in the land of the living”?

How can I come forward as in company with him who has persevered, when the prize of victory is offered to the king with such great pleading in prayer, “The righteous will surround me till you reward me”?

61.3

Laudable is this spiritual lesson that recalls the Lord’s own act of rebuffing his tempter, favoring only the foremost of his creatures while despising all others, saying, “Happy the people whose God is the Lord!”

Great is this exaltation of grace and prudent its forthrightness, full of blessedness, that says, “Your saints shall bless you!”

Envious is this intimate kinship of spiritual communion: to hope in God and to be fixated upon him, rejoicing in the words of the Psalm, “The Lord considers the desire of those who fear him and fulfills his word.” The same goes on to declare both the lamentable and the joyous: “The Lord watches over all who love him, and all the sinners the Lord will destroy.” Thus, in the last chapters of the Psalms, in the songs of praise, the final rewards of the just and the unjust are set as examples, in parallel and sung in sequence, saying, “The Lord welcomes the meek and casts the haughty to the ground.” What calamity, then, awaits me!

If indeed “the Lord takes pleasure in his holy people and uplifts the humble unto victory,” where, then, shall I, a reject who has no share in that good fortune, stand?

If indeed “God is blessed among his saints as Lord,” where, then, shall I, a stranger to sanctity, be ranked?

If next to those other warnings I set this reminder that chastises me, “Love the Lord, you his

saints! For the Lord seeks truthfulness, but punishes doubly the haughty," in which camp, then, shall I, a captive of the shrewd inventor of evil, be found?

61.4

As the leaves of the cedar tree wavering in the tempest, shaken by the strong winds battering them, fall down, so are my upward striving and fruitful branches threatened—though shaped by your nurturing hand, O uncreated Gardener. Please restore them, rooting them again in the field of life to yield new, incorruptible fruit under the care of your will, O Christ King, who bestows all gifts, blessed forever. Amen.

Prayer 62

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Passages from the Prophets”>

62.1

Now, why should I not add to the above quoted Psalms some other passages from the Prophets?

But what pleasure is there from food
if I eat while in excruciating pain?
And what advantage can I derive from the Psalter
if I am unable to learn from it?

I condemn myself with such passages but am not edified.
I am washed but am not cleansed.
(I see) the sun rising but am not illumined.
I eat honey but am not soothed.
I am filled with balm but am not healed.
I rise early for the common prayers but seem to be empty.
I am assailed persistently but have never gained knowledge.
I am once more saturated but have not revived.

62.2

Truly, “my sin and lawlessness dwell within me and I am consumed by them,” according to St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

the prophet's word against the transgressors and to the Lord's parable of the new wine in old wineskins. For as Isaiah proclaimed, "The lawless and the sinners shall be destroyed together." And the same is held in store for me, wretch that I am, for I recite the Psalm, "He shall repay those who act with excessive haughtiness," to which I connect the reading, "The Lord has a day against the proud and the haughty." Then I recite, "Sinners have strayed from the womb ..." and the like, to which I add, "Let the lawless on earth be destroyed" and "Let the wicked be wiped from the earth," and "Let the unjust be denied a place there."

62.3

Lament with a dirge for me when you read,
"As the reed is consumed by the tongues of fire,
so shall sinners be burned in the furious flames."

Weep at the Psalm that says,
"You shall let flames of fire fall upon them."

Tell all over the world
the words of the divine verdict the prophet foretold:
"The sword shall devour you if you refuse to heed me."

Mourn at this Psalm: "Death shall be their shepherd."

Prepare salty tears mixed with the sighs of my heart
for when the Lord on high shall say to me
along with Israel, in the words of the Psalm,
"My people did not listen to my voice."

Exclaim an alas for me, the miserable one,
when another prophet states the same:
"Woe to them, for they have strayed from me!"

Trumpet the words of my heart made heavy with a new cry,
when the seer has God shaming me,
reprimanding me with the insolent house of Jacob,
"Behold, you despisers, marvel, and be annihilated."

62.4

Turn away and withhold from me the raised sword of your threatening anger, for I am fear-stricken before you, O Great One, and extend the bounteous care of your right hand over me. Bestow the anointing oil of life upon your supplicant. And glory to you in heaven on high and from mortals on earth below, across the boundaries of all nations and from all, forever. Amen.

Prayer 63

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Your name is to be glorified, O Jesus”>

63.1

One and only King, benevolent and most compassionate, lover of humankind and long-suffering, honored with your Father and praised Lord of all, Son of the living God:

You are never to be blamed for my perdition,
you, who never partakes of evil,
who does not wish the sinner’s death,
who offers salvation according to your will,
who changes the tempest of sin into the gentle breeze of
atonement,
who replaces the flames of wrath with rain.
You, who transformed the woman fleeing twice as fast,
but who looked back and away from goodness,
into a solitary statue between two natures:
neither fully with the just nor fully with those to be punished;
who turned the undulating waves of the sea into a wall
constructed of stone;
who made the hard rock of the desert to gush forth
a streaming spring;
who turned around the fast flowing and turbulent waters of the
Jordan miraculously, pointing to the font for the cleansing of
the Gentiles;
who scattered like light straw the fortified walls of Jericho,
symbolizing the destruction of Satan’s tyranny;
who with the symbolic salt made the harmful water (of the city)
taste sweet, metaphorically signifying conversion to that
which is good, the salvation of the Canaanites;
who with the Wood of Life, destined for you, turned the bitterness at
Marah, the symbol of mental intransigence, into suitability;
who by your boundless command turned the river’s flow
into the incomparable color of your blood shed on dry land,
that new color obtained from Bozrah;
who transformed the lifeless rod into a venomous dragon
to prefigure your taking of our nature and to show the election
of the Gentiles;

who with the blessed right hand of Moses demonstrably foretold
both the wonder of your coming incarnation, O Lord on high,
and through you the cleansing of my impure body through an
immutable transformation;
who by so many indicators have foretold the unexpected finding
of long-lost sinners by the caring art of your love, O blessed and
compassionate Lord.

63.2

You, who makes the lifeless, breathless (seeds) sprout green
from the earth;
who disciplines the stationary (creatures) as well as those
that move about;
who calls those born of the lowly womb partakers of your image;
who gives to children molars with which to chew;
who makes beards grow on clean cheeks;
who turns the black foliage of hair into whiteness as snow,
showing yourself to be the mighty victor over all,
regardless of your transcendence;
who disrupts the natural movements of the lips, in the words of Job,
into trusted resolves;
who shakes the earth and its pillars from their foundations—
referring to the firmament that came to be,
for you alone are eternal;
who disperses the elements as transient constituents
and makes them cohere again as everlasting rudiments,
showing that you are likewise able to deal with the multitude
of sins, either to forgive or to punish;
who controls the unconscious wandering of Venus as with bridle,
thereby showing that you can, if you so wish,
tame the evil impulses of nature;
who regulates the speechless globe of the moon through its phases,
illuminating onlookers with good news, that
you are able to restore a sinful body depleted of goodness
to its original state of absolute abundance;
who scatters and gathers the silent constellations like a flock of sheep,
to the very last, symbolic of the hope of life that you,
through your kind and considerate oversight,
are able to dispense in abundant mercy
even to the slow of tongue in petitioning.

63.3

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).
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You, who charts a safe path between death and life on the sea,
plainly affirm that even in such perilous place
we are protected by you;
who calms with a word of your will the furious storm of sin
boiling like water in a cauldron over fire;
who with a mere glance causes tremors on earth,
and through irrational animals
brings rational beings to their senses;
who shakes the limitless density of the land like a small boat
tossing on the waves, thereby making all creatures
acknowledge you as the indisputable one;
who sustains the whole world by your mighty word;
who sows lifeless bodies in the earth and guards them there
to bring them back to life;
who receives the corruptible to be made incorruptible;
who joins the particle of life with mortal matter;
who with but a command created the entire universe,
established the orderly seasons out of utter disorder.

Strength and power belong to you,
who marks the cycles of years and the rotation of days
in accordance with your favorable foresight;
who commands inanimate things as if having life;
who by merely giving the signal sets them into motion;
who alone weaves the blend of twilight and daybreak—
you, by your creative art that is beyond description;
who after the premordial substance continues to perform great and
glorious miracles, altogether amazing, according to the book
of the blessed (Job), and more so since your incarnation—
countless and as significant as creating the incorruptible world.

63.4

You, who paid the penalty for our (sins),
who graced us with your righteousness,
who carried within yourself the ransom for our reconciliation,
who never withheld yourself from showing mercy:

Turn the wicked toward good, God-fearing works,
the stupefied toward the sobriety of a vigilant heart,
the impure toward the holiness of radiant character,
the much-blemished sinners toward the purity
of the impeccable image,
the shattered toward wholeness unaffected by calamity,

the weeping toward the joy of ecstatic bliss,
the hopeless toward the all-embracing, unifying love,
the humiliated toward the assuring stability,
the people in darkness toward the light
 of indescribable blessedness,
the captives of death toward life not subject to corruption.

For your name is to be glorified, O Jesus, professed with the Father and your Holy Spirit in heaven on high and on earth below, by all their inhabitants, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 64

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“I am still sustained by your willing compassion”>

64.1

And now, toward all and in everything you are just, O God. You judge impartially and weigh fairly. You measure rightly and follow up with blessings. You proceed with goodness and love steadfastness. You wish for clarity and embrace enlightenment. You admonish with experience and examine with forbearance. There is neither guile nor conceit in you, but absolute meekness, tranquility, and mercy.

64.2

You justly affirmed being the heavenly Wisdom of your Father’s unchanging forethought, as those adopted by grace reaffirm through their untiring praise. As told in the holy word of the Gospel of Life we received from you, “I did not mourn when they wailed, nor did I dance when they played their flutes.”

You told this lawless one, “Do not break the Law,” but I persisted in my evil; to this sinner (you said), “Do not lift your horn,” but I acted contrary to you, oblivious to the proverbial saying, or that “the horns of the kingdom of the overbearingly arrogant are in your hands, either to cast down or to lift up,” as told by Habakkuk, David, and Zechariah. You wanted blessings for me, O Merciful One, whereas I, cursed with utter banishment, strayed into the damnation I deserved. I loved wrath, not virtuousness, anger and not calm, “groping in darkness and not light,” as the Scripture says. I answered your living voice derisively, O Compassionate One.

Through Isaiah you said, “Their worm shall not die and their fire shall not be extinguished”; the retribution is unending, the place eternal, the case in point dreadful. As in the words of the Psalmist, “I neither heard nor understood, but walked in the haze of intellectual blindness.”

64.3

Through the prophet you revealed that “he who upholds the Law shall be blessed,” while I was quick to undermine it. Lord Jesus, you raised David with his writing as a spiritual monument, a rock inscribed by you; while he, one of the elect, said, “I shall keep your Law at all times,” adding, “for ever and ever,” affirming his commitment through the deliberate repetition of the word. But I remained indifferent, despite these splendid words to warn me. I hastened to worship Baal instead of God, as Elijah satirized. I limped along the two paths of doublemindedness, distancing myself from the good things.

Though I have the example of Moses with his Law returning from the dead, the Writings of the Prophets written on my soul, the Books of the Apostles immersed in my mind, your covenant of the Gospel, Lord of all, and your raising countless dead from the grave, I remained on the blacksmith’s anvil, unbending, stubborn, with a heart of stone—more disbelieving than the five brothers of that rich man who in that parable aptly represent my numbed senses, altogether irresponsible to callers for mercy, like Beliar, unrepentant.

64.4

Nevertheless, pronounce your mercy once more upon my forsaken self, eternal King, good, astounding, lover of humankind, provident, living, holy, enlightener through the power of the mystery of your exalted cross.

In my barren field hardened by sin, in the folly of my kidneys, and in the abandonment of my fruitless heart, I am still sustained by your willing compassion, Almighty. My soul shall be irrigated with springs gushing forth, replenishing my sorrowful eyes with streams of tears for my salvation and purification, to be pleasingly acceptable to you, all-giving Lord of all, who is glorified forever. Amen.

Prayer 65

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“When I leave this life”>

65.1

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).
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Now, I am foremost of the impious, chief of sinners, leader of the unjust, first of debtors, the epitome of transgressors, the Attican of vice, not of virtue. I have said about myself what is unspeakable: I derided the things I held in respect, publicized my secrets, disclosed what was covered up, revealed the hidden things, spread out what was heaped, splashed the gall of my bitterness, divulged my collaboration with the evil one, squeezed my pus-filled wounds, made known the enormity of my debt. I put on the mask of hypocrisy, lifted the veil from my ugliness, stripped away the clothes from my shamefulness, scolded my baseness, vomited the dregs of death, showed the lacerated scars of my soul to you, Christ high priest.

Not sparing my soul from peril, not conceding to the love of my body, I exposed my old roots. I showed no concern for my physical needs. I severed my ties with the brotherhood, demolished the castle of my heart, wrestled with the stalker of desires as with a trapper for death, laid open the storeroom of secrets, exhibited the accumulated stock before the great Judge, had myself as prosecutor before him. Anticipating the outcome, I broke the pact I had with the destroyer, disavowed the deceiver's deal. I took refuge in you, Lord Jesus, for a victorious outcome in this warfare. I motivated the battling cohort, placing my hope of resistance in your divine word, betraying the flank of the lovers of darkness to those armed with light.

65.2

And now, Christ, Creator of all beings, Son of God on high, I have been reprimanded with these words and struck with so many blows. Do not rebuke me again at the judgment on that great day, you, who are immortal, inscrutable, ineffable, benevolent, and eternal King. Be considerate with me who has humiliated myself with such vituperation, having judged myself with such great derision. Through the verses of this book smear the face of Satan with shameful disgrace, and enhance the stamp of your cross upon my face, censured as I am.

Let your luminous seal add luster to my countenance, the sign of your steadfastness be secured upon my face, the shape of the Wood of Life be fixed upon my cheeks, your miracle-working (instrument) cast its shadow upon my forehead. Let not the luster of your seal fade away from me, the radiance of your blessing be removed from my sight, the token of your assurance be withdrawn from upon my head, the glory of your lordly Scripture waver upon the steady threshold of my mouth. Let your adorable armor become one with the feelings of my heart, your four-winged radiance be spread through the four elements of my being. Let your saving authority aid my open arms as in this form my fingers reach out daringly to your council chamber for help.

65.3

May your holiness not forsake me when I leave this life.
May your honor not leave me when I am wrapped in the shroud.
May your unswerving salvation not be withheld from my spirit.
May the contour of your image engraved upon my soul,
 Giver of life, not be effaced.

May the mark of your powerful blood not be erased from my niche
bearing your lordly seal.
May it dwell with me in my grave.

When my miserable body is dissolved, may your anointing grace stay with me, that I might on the day of renewal meet you, O glorious Bridegroom; that by it I may be recognized as one of yours; that I may be clothed with your accomplishments, be honored by the assurances of your greatness, be gladdened with the robe of baptism, be pardoned with mercy.

Bring near, O Compassionate One, your cloak of incorruptibility to my sin-worn body. Let not the accuser harm my weary soul when with you, nor let the ploys of those who live in darkness haunt me.

May the pit of my rest be blessed by your name.
May the dungeon of my captivity be filled with your mercy.
May the place of my misery be ruptured by you.
May there be peacefulness, O Provident, in my prison
(instead) of wrath.
May that dark womb nourish me toward growth.
May hope in you preserve me in that place of anxiety.
May your hand protect me upon the cot of my uncertainty.
May your wings cover me in the house of anguish.

Be with me, (Lord) most praised, in my chamber of peril. Woe to me a thousand times, for once I was angelic, but now I am in the abyss, once I was celebrated, but now to be pitied.

65.4

Now again, you who are blessed by all creation, by the heavenly and the earthly, and by the dead residing in the underworld of Hades, you who are absolved of this banishment:

I was I who erred and was estranged.
I was stupid, defeated, and found worthless.
I was abandoned, barred, and destroyed.
I strayed, was betrayed and rejected.
I was alienated, enslaved, and scandalized.
I was cursed; I became wretched, drunken, and wasted.
I was swallowed up; I was deceived; I rebelled.
I was corrupted, died, and was consumed completely.

You have no part in this evil, for you alone are immutable and good.

65.5

Now, when your will is upon me, darkness turns to light for me. When your lamp of hope is there, night is like dawn. When I receive your body, I live by its supposed shame. But I do not

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).
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regard my soul as living, because of the inescapable end. Nor do I deem it lost, because of the unquestionable renewal. And though I consider the path to life closed before me because of my unpardonable sins, still paradise is open before me by virtue of the good news of salvation. For the encouragement of your hand extending salvation renders the disheartening bad news less alarming. Therefore, grant mercy, O Lord, for all those who raise their voices in grateful praise, O blessed forever. Amen.

Prayer 66

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“May the message of these words be engraved as an epitaph”>

66.1

Now, whoever takes the salutary medication of this humble book, to pray with it, if the one who draws near is a sinner, I too will join him with these my words; and if the one drawing near is righteous, may I find mercy through these same (words) together with him. And if he finds happiness for himself, leaving misery to me alone, I shall nevertheless bear witness for him. But may he remember Solomon and his inspired words: “Who can attest, I have a pure heart, or who can boast of being clean of sin?” For no man born on earth has emerged free of accountability. And not one of us is special because of our swiftness, not even if wings carry us to the heights. Therefore, one should be mindful, be doubly cautious, for even if firmly established on the rock, as Paul taught, he may fall to the ground, may become like the one thought of by the fair judge who defined this rule. But let the righteous take this warning for a crown, so as not to fall unintentionally from the unreachable heights. And may the condemned see this as an opportunity to gain freedom, by which to rise from the perdition of spiritual death and live in hope.

As for me, may the message of these words be engraved as an epitaph, never to be effaced, a replica of my wretched mortal soul crying out endlessly, unsilenced, with the echoes of uninterrupted sighing. May my bones, undone in the earthen cloak of the tomb, confess this with a silent voice, and may my body, reduced to dust, deliver the same petitions to you with an inaudible cry, Seer of secrets.

66.2

Lord of compassion, fount of mercies, bounty of goodness, Son of the one on high, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy, save us, and love us humans.

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

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Look at my vulnerability.
Consider my brokenness.
Attend to my misery.
See the perplexity arising from my unending anxiety.
Come to aid me in perilous times.
Touch my most wretched infirmities in a healing way.
Lend a kind ear to my pitiful sighs.
Listen to my silent cries from the depths of the abysmal grave,
the place of death.

May the voice of my failing members in prayer reach your all-hearing ears, and since the pledge for my life's redemption is irrevocable, so too let your love be also constant. Join me tenderly, weakened with infirmity as I am.

66.3

Do not hold a grudge against my dead form.
Do not scrutinize my breathless figure.
Do not add to my strikes while I am suffering death.
Do not deal roughly with this broken vessel of clay.
Do not double your wrath against me, devastated by your sentence.
Do not bring calamity to my dilapidated structure.
Do not throw stones at this dead dog.
Do not thunder loudly at this crushed flea.
Do not roar thunderously at this insignificant earth
—as if at an arrogant person.
Do not summon this discarded ash for trial by ordeal.
Do not count this vanishing dust as your opponent.
Do not deem this boggy mud as a foe.
Do not repel me, a loathsome abomination, as if I am a warrior.
Do not set me aside as worthless fodder for Gehenna.
Do not scold me again, who has been reproached with so many words.

66.4

These are the pitiable expressions, heart-breaking and woeful, from the most depressing grave closed in darkness.

Establish your blessed word in me indelibly according to the yearnings of my heart, who am pitiable. For although I meanwhile speak among the living, I am dead to you, who are beyond reach; yet when I succumb to death's demise, may I be saved through my faith in your eternal decree, you who are omnipotent.

Now, I pray you, Lord Jesus Christ, look upon me with compassion and do not relegate me to dwell with Beliar. At the time of my sorrowful burial, lifeless in the coffin and the echoing toll announcing death, please attend to the voice of crying with sighs for reconciliation with you, St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

sole benefactor, lover of souls, almighty, lover of humankind. May your kind Spirit dwell with me, shedding light upon me in the darkness. May the venerated relics of your life-giving passion stay with me, like a conventional treasure deposited within me for you, so they may bestow the gift of renewed life. With these inexhaustible weapons I am equipped as with accumulated stones for a sling of spiritual contrivance to ward off the legions of evil. With you, Lord, the battle waged against me shall be kept in check. For when (the enemy) rises up and attacks me, thinking the city is without troops and the alarms make no sounds, I have you, Lord, as my eternal and watchful keeper.

66.5

If (the evil one) hastens to prepare a prison without escape for me,
now or even before my last day, I will recite the Lord's Prayer
like a deathblow to him.

If he contrives to tear me down, I will kneel before the Creator.
If he makes me tumble in the dust of the earth, may God's face
in that same position repel him.

If he rewards my labor with pain, may the abundant sweat mixed
with the blood of the Savior of the world frustrate him.

If he takes my breath hostage, away from being in the path to goodness,
may the (burial) bindings of the Creator of All free me.

If he forces me to renounce the gifts of the Light,
may your patience in the face of mockery by the enemies of God
gag them, as you did.

If he should barrage me with secret arrows, may the arrowheads
from the quiver of the glorious Father confront him.

If his veil of darkness should conceal my eyes' light,
making them impervious, may the blow to the blindfolded head
of the one who is the fullness of all torment him.

If he ventures to bind my secure hands,
may the reed placed in the right hand of the Creator
subject him to suffering.

If with taunting jeers he mocks me, may the Omnipotent's fortitude
in the face of ridicule deride him.

If he conjures a magical spell upon me, may the Almighty
whose face was slapped humiliate him utterly.

If at twilight he attacks insolently under cover of darkness,
may he be mortified by the radiance of the light
of your appearance.

If in the heat of noonday he thinks he can rip me up by the roots
with scorching blasts of the sun's furnace, may he be uprooted
and wither by the power of your luminous sign.

If he contrives to rob me of the grace of your breath,

may he be disgraced by the spit, which the Lord of the Cherubim
endured for me, a sinner.

66.6

If he shows me his gnashing teeth, may the silence of the mouth
of the heavenly one hush him.
If he causes desires to gnaw at my soul, may the nails
hammered into the Creator of the universe pain him.
If he leads me astray along the paths of unjust thoughts,
may the spikes in the feet of the one beyond understanding
keep him bound.
If he makes me drink of a luring and vile potion,
may the vinegar mixed with bile that was given to
the Benefactor to drink embitter him.
If he causes me to eat of the former tree, may the terrible spectacle
of the cross seize and crush him completely.
If he teaches me to stop obeying God's commandments,
may the bent neck of the infinite one destroy him.
If he wounds me fatally, may the lance that pierced the side
of Adam's Creator cut him down.
If he envelops me in the pangs of hellish pain, may the burial
shrouds of the one who holds all creation tie him up.
If he tricks me into gazing into the abyss of death,
may the Living One who survived the stone tomb kill him.
If he takes joy in my human vulnerability, may he,
with his crooked will, be lost again when the immortal God,
resurrected in glory, renews all mortals with himself.
If he is cheered by the (prospect of) release from these lesser bindings
after a thousand years, may he tremble again for the later chains
that will hold him forever in the place of unremitting torment.
If the first blow is hard enough, let him hear about the bad news
of the second death in the inextinguishable fires of Gehenna
prepared for him and his angels on that great day
of the Last Judgment.

66.7

As for me, who has trusted in you, Lord Jesus, the only King, sovereign, mighty, Creator of heaven and earth and every splendor in it,

I await your coming and with hope anticipate your mercy, O Savior.
I fall at your feet and kiss the marks of your heels.
I confess my sin and publish my wrongdoing.

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I beat myself with stones of contrition and entomb myself
with sighs of my heart.
I am wounded by pangs of conscience and smoldered
by the flame of my breath.
I burn with the salty dew of my tears and am scorched
by the prodding of my viscera.
I am parched by winds of despair and suffocated by foul gusts.
I am swaying with words of grief and shaking with mournful cries.
I am troubled by bitter conflicts and shaken by my soul's alarm.
I am tossed around by the storm and shuddered
by the crashing of the waves.
I shudder by the abundance of notoriety and perish
at the thought of terror.
I melt at the sight of the tribunal and am mortified
by your threats, O Great One.

Hear me, compassionate Redeemer, lover of humankind and forbearing, who is kindness beyond words, good day, desirable dawn, for you are capable of all things. And when I give up my spirit, be my great salvation.

To you, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, glory forever. Amen.

Prayer 67

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Gazing at the bottom of hell”>

67.1

Certainly, the verdict of Christ God is more deliberate regarding me than regarding Satan, the forefather of evil, because of whom Christ was revealed that he might destroy his works. As for me, he came to restore my worn-out image. Taking my likeness in its full essence, he, the veritable Image of the great God, joined it to his own in indisputable unity.

(Satan) was granted none of this bountiful grace,
but upon me everything was poured abundantly.
There was no (divine) suffering for his sake, none,
but for me (Christ) is sacrificed daily.
He does not partake of the Life,

but I always have the privilege of salvation.
He is chased away by the cross,
 but I am fortified by this sign.
He is banished from the light,
 but I am brought to glory.

(God) did not promise him peace even on earth,
 but he made me a possessor of heaven.
(God) cut off his guarantee of hope
 but kept mine perpetually.
(God) confined him to a herd of swine,
 but in me he dwells mightily.
God compared him to scorpions,
 but he called me a light-beam.
(God) made him resemble reptiles,
 but he sealed me with his name.

67.2

Yet I abandoned the favors of God, the Creator of so many good things, and I inclined to follow the evil one, gazing at the bottom of hell with him. Here I am, unworthy of (anything) good, undeserving of favor, incapable of love, drawn in by the strands of sin, wounded deep in my viscera, a broken palm tree, spilled wine, damp wheat, breached mortgage, ripped up verdict, counterfeit seal, deformed image, charred clothing, lost goblet, sunken ship, crushed pearl, buried gemstone, dried up plant, broken cane, completely rotten wood, mutilated mandrake, collapsed roof, dilapidated altar, uprooted plant, oil poured on street garbage, milk seeping through layers of ash, a dead man in the battalion of the brave.

67.3

My pitiful soul, you were chastised with Jerusalem
through parables about Babylon spoken by the prophets,
but were never admonished:

at times despicable, at others reproached;
here accused, there reprimanded;
here mocked, there insulted;
here opposed, there rebuked;

at times confused, at others abandoned;
here groaning, there sobbing;
here doubt, there finality;
here grief, there punishment;
here calamity, there the court of judgment,

where not a word in self-justification nor a plea may be voiced,
(where) days are without number and time without end,
(where) there are no venues of hope nor doors of mercy,
no protecting right hand (there), nor visiting hand.

67.4

But you are refuge and you yourself are salvation, you are visitation and you are forgiveness, you are blessing and through you is healing. Mercy is yours, you alone are mighty, living, and ineffable. Lord Jesus Christ, benevolent God, blessed, blessed, and blessed again, with your Holy Spirit exalted forever, in the glory of the Father, in your great essence, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 68

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“How could the streams of tears from my eyes be dried?”>

68.1

And now, recalling the fearsomeness described above that awaits me as threat from God, how could I stop these new laments and how could the streams of tears from my eyes be dried? Were I to take the widely overflowing, rushing currents of the four rivers that water Eden and the rest of the earth and direct them from their springs to my eyes, they would not be enough to cool the scorching flames of my sins. Or were the holy prophet's wishes to come doubly true for me and my head were to be inundated with water, with fountains streaming from the lanterns of my vision, still it would not suffice to measure the devastation of my broken soul. And were the mournful dirges of all the wailing women joined together for those wounded in heart and soul, they would not suffice for my utter devastation to yield to either chant or intonation.

68.2

The day of my birth was cursed, and not that of Job or Jeremiah, because their day is to be celebrated and not to be ignored, for the world does not deserve either of them. But looking at me, who does not deserve the light (of day) or any particular favor, the day I happened to be uncovered should be cursed, myself a son of perdition, neighbor to death, sower of sin and

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satellite of iniquity.

I did not abide by the covenant of life that you,
 benevolent God, established.
I did not keep your life-giving, immortalizing commandments.
I did not gather the harvest of grain for my sustenance
 when the troubling, snowy days arrived.
I did not build firm walls and did not put a roof on my house
 to protect from the blowing, stormy gusts.
I did not pack further supplies of food for the endless journey
 to cure the turmoil of my hunger.
I did not address you with prayers of supplication,
 that I might have the audacity to stand before you.
I did not increase through unsullied life the benefits of salvation,
 whereby to ensure my renewal.

68.3

I did not pay attention on life's journey to my betrayer,
 so that I might now be able to escape the hand of the Judge.
I did not draw near with hands filled with blessed offerings,
 thereby to be exonerated, having the Lawgiver on my side.
I did not guard my front nor protect my back;
 neither was I armed on my right nor shielded on my left,
 to be spared harm in the battle.
I did not dress my horses in armor nor equip my fighters with arms
 that I might take charge of the battlefield.
I did not gather the early fruit nor act in time for the late harvest,
 and now I am perplexed, bereft of goodness.
I did not have the flower of innocence nor the oil of mercy.
 In the darkness of the night, without a flicker of light,
 I am drowsing into the sleep of death
 and the dreaded trumpet call is summoning.
I stripped myself again of the wedding adornment
 and again left the oil of comportment behind; and behold,
 the door to entry to the wedding was shut.

68.4

How, then, shall I find comfort for this much grief?
How much of the light of living hope can I mix
 with the darkness of doubt?

Where shall I dig in my heels?

Or, on whom shall I fix my eyes for reliance?
What soothing rhythms can I look forward to?
 Or, to what desirable serenity shall I lift up my hands?

Should (I gaze) at the high vault of heaven
 from where the fiery rain fell on Sodom—as recounted?

Should (I stare) at the depth of the earth which opened its engulfing
 throat and swallowed Dathan with the company of Abiram?

Should I dare to flee from my Keeper,
 I may be seized by the terrible dragon.

Should I roam for a while among beasts, they would be more quick
 to take revenge on me than when Elisha (asked for revenge)
 on the pagan youth of Bethel.

Should (I turn) to the expanse of clear skies, they might turn
 to tangible darkness—as (it happened) to the Egyptians.

Should (I turn) to the birds on high, they would be summoned
 to the kill, to the bloody corpses of victims.

68.5

Of what good is it for me to be a brave lion among the weak
 and be devoured by wasps?

Or to survive the claws of bears (only) to be assailed
 by bloodthirsty insects?

If I sit somewhere, carefree for a while, those despicable fleas
 will swarm around me like flecks of flaming ash from a fire.

If I escape being gored by the unicorn,
 the creeping and burrowing little worms will nibble at me.

If I huddle in the tight spaces of my crevices, the fetid stench of frogs
 will nauseate me.

If I stand anywhere in a field, swarms of annoying ticks
 will besiege me.

I leave aside the grasshoppers and beetles, a mighty army, together with the venomous caterpillars and the seemingly lifeless creatures, and the hardened water pellets of hail and the destructive frosts, which may to the eye seem less damaging but, when wielded by God with his eternal wrath and strength, have struck down, laid low, and driven out the high and mighty Pharaoh with his rod of violent repression, overcoming him. These are the manifestations of hidden, crushing afflictions, the spiritual chastisements and unseen torments, suffered by the Egyptians for their lawlessness.

68.6

But you, Omnipotent (One), Creator of everything, Lord of all, who rose against my enemies to scatter them, have mercy on me, with double compassion. Extend your hand of salvation to me, perplexed, beaten, wayward, and worthy of death. For you alone are known as God, glorified at all times with the Father and your Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 69

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Reminding me of [dreaded] things to come”>

69.1

And now, by your hand, O great and most ingenious artisan, the Lord and God of my being, I am daily melted down to boiling point in the crucible of your love but never formed, continuously stirred but not molded, not even leveled. It is in vain, O silversmith, my heavenly architect, that you squander effort working on a vain one like me, as in the familiar saying of the prophet, “my wickedness did not melt away.”

Because I have badly strayed, I dare speak out of turn like a pathetic, possessed maniac, increasing my sin instead of finding a means of reconciliation. And so that the impending torments awaiting me would not come as an unexpected event or unprecedented calamity, (the Creator) kept a reminder from thence in my body, a token from the remnants of that first curse, that through this small and insignificant element the larger (lesson) is learned.

69.2

For in the belly are found all manner of squirming maggots which reproduce themselves, intestinal worms gnawing in secret; burning sores, stinging ulcers, invisible curses. Then there are the many born of sweat, annoying, disgusting, and itchy; savage invaders of a kind, like demons attacking in the night, cruel marauders belonging to the legions of lovers of darkness, in bestiality as ferocious as Arabian wolves, limping as they walk, grayish in color. With angular jaws, like (pincers) of scorpions or a thorny bush with piercing thorns, they draw blood, sucking its moisture, and turn the bed of rest into an instrument of torture. And when one lifts one's hand to give them their due, they immediately sense the danger that humans pose and instantly take flight—as if on wings—with their hairless bodies and dwarfed size, and hopping this way and that like grasshoppers they scatter and, with the multifaceted slyness of foxes conspiring against the good, escape cunningly through countless exits, surviving the dread of death. And such vile and reprehensible creatures not only pursue ordinary people and the

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

motley mob, but also mighty and fearsome kings, chasing them and driving them to the attic of their castles or even forcing them to live outside. Courageous and brave men, who rule crowds and govern peoples and take cities of nations, admit defeat by such a virulent force, saying, "We were unable to resist the tyranny of these despots; we took flight and reached this point because of them."

69.3

And why have I discoursed about such tiny and abject things the repugnant existence of which is worthy of scorn? They are the most powerful and irrefutable apologies for the Divinity, reminding me of things to come, given these bitter fruits of my sinful body, including the intrusion of deadly pestilences and consuming plagues that could not be prevented. Surely, from these physical pains one learns what awaits in the future. And there is no place to seek refuge, to escape them by fleeing. For without the assent of your will, human efforts and resources fail. But you, Benefactor, hold in ample measure the resources for life. You have but to will it, in order to save, renew, pardon, heal, and give life. To you glory in all things forever. Amen.

Prayer 70

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<"You are life, you are salvation">

70.1

Now let me raise my discourse from the lowly things of earth, those unworthy of being considered part of creation, to the higher sort: to speak of the impartial judgment upon the great assembly by the one who is astounding.

Had you not extended your love for humankind, you who are abundant in your goodness, unchanging in your providential care, and unceasing in your mercy, I would have waited in vain for salvation from those closest to you, O God, such as the patriarchs known of old or those most saintly such as the prophets or those most immaculate such as the apostles or the truly chosen such as the martyrs.

70.2

For even if I were to call on Abraham himself, like that wretched man of whom the parable St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).
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teaches me, a drop of water will not be enough in the scorching heat; moreover, he too is restricted by our common limitations.

And if I were to call on Moses, he too is subject to frailty, unable to save even the man who was gathering sticks on the day to be observed.

And as for Aaron, he himself needed an intercessor.

And David, he too was blameworthy despite his abundant good deeds.

Then there are Noah and Job and Daniel, as the prophet Ezekiel made clear, mentioning them by name, those of whom he made a statement in the presence of God as it were: "As I live, says the Lord, they shall deliver neither sons nor daughters from the fury to come, only they themselves shall be saved."

As for Peter, the rock of faith, no sooner was he severed from your providential care than he succumbed to certain trials.

I leave unmentioned multitudes of others humbled in various situations, who are, nevertheless, eternally blessed, like the prophet Joash, who stumbled humanly even when on assignment by God, (an episode) which still remains inexplicable to many even though certain explanations could be given.

70.3

And since the capacity of humans to reach salvation is limited, they are to be shown mercy by you, benefactor;
strengthened by you, almighty;
called by you, protector;
pardoned by you, omnipotent;
graced by you, liberator;
healed by you, immaculate;
granted life by you, incorruptible,
enlightened by you, restorer.

Hence, acknowledging the limitations of my earth-born nature and being comforted by the example of those who were really hopeless, I petition you, Son of the living God, Christ blessed in all things.

What is written above is further justified when the wisdom—written in the same spirit as this prayer—is recalled: "It is good for a happy wise man to fall into the hands of the Lord than into the hands of men, for his mercy equals his greatness." These words were also sketched by David, who when faced with three divine penalties, willingly chose a horrible death, displaying faith reminiscent of the living Christ, preferring death to the two lesser (penalties) involving torment without mercy. If I apply these words to myself, searching to sustain my lost soul, it would not be inappropriate. For in this book of lamentation I do not disparage those who have been saved, for without them how would we keep imploring the Lord? More than that, I aim to crown the name of the Savior and praise his grace before all people; and taking my flight into the expanse of heaven, I confess with my own words the incessant longing for the salve of compassion.

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

70.4

You are life, you are salvation, you are healing, you are immortality, you are blessedness, you are enlightenment. Grant me serenity from the uproar of my sins, so that you might also have rest from my constant sighs, wearying self-reproaches, you who thrive on nothing but the salvation of us humans. You are blessed forever. Amen.

Prayer 71

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“And where is salvation in desperate situations?”>

71.1

As for the happy and glorified ranks of the saints, some of them stumbled slightly but were often steadied, wavered for a while but were greatly enlightened by the radiant purity of the Spirit: one exhibiting the commonplace weakness, another the angelic ways and virtues, transcending the law of nature. And now they are blessed by the all-authoritative mouth of the Godhead, the Father of Christ—those chosen ones, celebrated, adored with incense, and lauded with benediction, attended to as members of Christ’s (body) and prepared as dwellings of the Holy Spirit, in whom there is neither indication nor hint of darkness but who are completely guileless and shine with righteousness and resemble God as much as possible for godly people:

their faces open and unpretending,
their piety elevated and unyielding,
their lives sober and unoffending,
their worship fervent and unrelenting,
their ways courageous and untiring,
their truth consistent and unwavering,
their valor strong and unflinching,
their vision bright and unfading,
their wisdom heavenly and unfettering,
their image clean and unchanging.

God himself instructed (us) to pray with their (iconic) representations and (keep) the remembrance of their names, and your Word, Creator, elucidated (our) delight in them when in distress.

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).
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71.2

But I am altogether useless and, as much as could be said,
blameworthy.

While I am awake, I am asleep.
While I seem alert, I am drowsy.
In my piety, I am scandalized.
While praying, I also err.
In my progress, I also balk.
In my justification, I also sin.
In my resting, I am perturbed.
While on conquest, I retreat.
On my march, I turn on my heel.

With the share of light, I bring darkness.
With sweet flavors, I mix wormwood.
With the braid of goodness, I weave badness.
With standing, I keep falling.

I blossom but do not bear fruit.
I speak but do not act.
I promise but do not fulfill.
I vow but do not oblige.
I reach out but pull back.
I flaunt but do not offer.
I bring forth but do not give.

When tending my wounds, I become once more lacerated.
When reconciling, I cause discord yet again.

I make my case in vain and am justly condemned.
I have (my name) recorded and duly blotted out.
I set sail and veer out of line.
I set out and do not reach the harbor.
I brace myself and keep shaking.
I am filled and poured out again.
I carry on here and reach at the bottom there.
I am gathered here and burned there.
I lay a foundation and do not finish (the work).

I earn a small amount yet waste thousands.
I store very little yet consume a great deal.

I give others advice I do not practice myself.
I study constantly but never come to knowledge of the truth.

I flare up evil as much as I extinguish.
I take heart somewhat but then am more disheartened.
I prod myself but then as quickly hold back.

I patch this and rip that.
I root out nettles and sow thorns.
I try to soar but am dragged down.
I enter the nest as a dove and emerge from there as a crow.
I arrive almost white and leave totally black.
I claim to profess you yet commit myself to the murderer.
I press forward but then retreat.

71.3

I am cleansed but am covered with soot.
I am washed but am soiled just the same.
I pretend to be David but act like Saul.
I utter truths but lie in my viscera.
I build up with my right hand but destroy with my left.
I cultivate wheat but sow tares.

I have come down from the heights of wisdom
 to discover my real self.

I put on an angelic face but am demonic in my thoughts.
I am steady on my feet but wavering in my mind.
I pretend (to be good) when in fact I am crooked.
I feign to be righteous but am truly wicked.
I pretend to be in the circle of the meek but dance with the imps.
I am praised by humans but reproached by you, Seer.
I am blessed among the earth-born
 but pitied by the children of light.

I am pleasing to the most vulgar
 but am out of your favor, Great King.

I flee your tribunal but plea before the impious.
I reject the noble but associate with despicable people.
I dress up my body outwardly
 but my soul is known to be the plumed jackdaw.

I approach to make a pact but I am rejected as a traitor.
Today I am pure and filled with the Spirit
 but tomorrow I am a crazed fool.

I defied the Lord's command and followed the serpent's suggestion.
I became mighty strong but recoiled to the utmost.
I shoulder the burdens of the day
 but leave without my portion at pay time.

I talk bombastically from afar but am dumb when called to account.
I appear prosperous at sunrise but at sunset I loiter empty-handed.
I take my seat among the elders but consult with fools.
I fall asleep squinting and awake terribly frightened.

I keep ploughing the fields of my passions with heavy toil, quick in serving evil, always the prodigal son, the exiled with no return, the unrepentant of his course, the mourner without consolation in self-imposed captivity, servant of death and corruption, mercilessly tormented, condemned beyond salvation, severed beyond rejoining, smothered beyond resuscitation, irrecoverably dilapidated, irreparably destroyed. And if harsher condemnations than these are needed against my unruly soul, I commit them to writing here. I write and do not spare myself from becoming the dry wood to fuel Gehenna.

I am the obsessive progeny of the new, heavenly Adam, as Cain was of the first, old, and earthly Adam. Here and now, through my verbal reproach, I bear the mark of the rebellion of all upon my soul—not (just upon) my breath.

71.4

And where is salvation in desperate situations as when
the forefather of faith throws back at me the result
 of my unconscionable deeds,
the great prophet stones me with harsh words,
the brave and venerable one kills me with the thrust of a javelin,
the image of the Truth wipes me out completely with Achan,
the most sublime of God's chosen delivers me
 to the vengeance of the Gibeonites,
the seer born to be a prophet slays me before the Lord
 with the Amalekites;
the one zealous for God consumes with fire from heaven,
the consummation of the shadowy images gives way to the sorting
 with the winnowing fork of the New (Covenant),
the chief of the apostles takes my life with Sapphira's,
the one judged admirable by the Holy Spirit mixes for me
 the smell of death with the preaching of life?

Now, this assembly of the blessed are impartial toward me, those valiant forces poised to obey the heavenly command—as do both angels and humans, the universe and the elements of the world, inanimate and animate—by whom I am always condemned, troubled by the liabilities, the examples, and reminders of terrors to come. I am like one forever adrift on waves, my life's steadiness rocky for lack of stability. And if one were to examine diligently the diverse sea creatures, observing the species from the smallest to the largest, countless without number, swarming in infinite schools, bustling and crisscrossing the sea of my body, the truth of what I have written would be attested and confirmed.

71.5

O you inherently blessed, immortal King, good, heavenly, Christ the lover of humankind, only-begotten Son of the living God, almighty, exalted, inscrutable, ineffable, reconciler, astounding:

Scold the turbulent, wintry waves of my soul.
Calm down the vehemently spreading commotion
 of my troubled heart.
Keep my mind's wild imagination under control
 as with reins attached to the bit.
May there be peace by the grace of your command, O Majesty,
 (to still) the violently shuddering storm.
Destroy, do away with the multi-headed ghosts of shameful secrets,
 old embarrassments of earthly life.
Please take into account my constant prayers,
 these newly written characters crying for mercy,
 the despondent calls in this book of mournful singing.
Lift me out of the depths of death's abyss that I may live well,
 with the prophet who was saved.
Accept my confession in these self-condemning words
 as sweet fragrance.
Grant me, the hopeless one sighing heavily,
 comfort in my bitter pains.

To you with the Father and the Holy Spirit, glory, honor, and dominion forever. Amen.

Prayer 72

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<"I rather speak to you, ascetic communities and monastic disciples">

72.1

I rather speak to you, ascetic communities and monastic disciples, who in expectation and hope of infinite good gifts have enlisted as barehanded soldiers of the Lord; for you I set this table with my burnt sacrifice of words. Accept this transmitted confession for the edification and salvation of your souls. Come to know through it the submission of the body. Remember

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

the prophetic and apostolic counsel: “No flesh should exult itself before God,” and, “No one, not a single person, is righteous.” Do not forget the word of the Lord: “Even when you have done the things commanded, admit that you are useless servants.” Do not allow yourselves to become the prey of the deceiver; take heed from the Scriptures: “The chosen are also his food.” For even I, who nourish you with this meager yet choice fruit, willingly blame myself with myriad accounts of incurable sins, from our first forefather to the last of his progeny; I charge myself with all these voluntarily, taking upon myself the debt of all your wrongdoing.

72.2

I heard of someone (saying) he has not sinned, and I was not pleased by his improper speech to him before whom no earthly flesh can be justified: “I have never committed adultery, nor have I ever fornicated, nor tasted any of the mortal pleasures of this world.” But he was not exempt from iniquity. May God forgive him for this. For the written word is true indeed, for he did not walk but stumbled, speaking the unbecoming words in Zechariah, before the people of Israel: “Blessed be the Lord, for we have prospered,” prefiguring the Pharisee’s voice.

72.3

But since I am condemned before the tribunal of the omniscient God, who has placed the unseen passions of the mind on the scale of justice and seeks to judge me by these in the most just way of recompense,

I will not pretend before the one who sees;
I will not play the hypocrite before the one who scrutinizes;
I will not lie to the one who observes acts before they are committed;
I will not deceive the great one about things that cross the mind;
I will not conceal the evil of debauchery from the one who (alone)
 is good;
I will not respect my familiar image of a weakling, never;
I will not indulge in altered impression;
I will not bask in different splendor;
I will not put on finery to cover my ugliness.

No one is as sinful as I, no one so unruly, no one so wicked, no one so unjust, no one so criminal, no one so misguided, no one so much in error, no one so foolish, no one so wily, no one so mired, no one so embarrassed, no one so condemned. I alone, and no one else, am all this, and the sins of all are in me. Not the pagans, for they did not know; not the Jews, for they became blind; not the ignorant and the confused, for they were devoid of wisdom.

72.4

I was titled “Master,” a charge against myself.
I was called “Teacher, teacher,” detracting from the praise of God.

I was termed “good,” only to inherit misery.
I was considered a “saint” by people, though I am unclean before God.
I was deemed “righteous,” though by all accounts am wicked.
I reveled in popular praise, only to become a mockery
before the tribunal of Christ.

From the font, I have been called “Awake,” yet I sleep
as in the slumber of death.
On the day of salvation I was named “Vigilant,”
yet I shut my eyes to watchfulness.

Lo, the judgment! Lo, the scolding!
Lo, new reprimands and old condemnations!
Lo, shame to my face and turmoil to my soul!
Lo, trivial issues and weighty scales!

72.5

But you alone, Lord God, lover of humankind, are not vengeful but forbearing. On that terrible day of final reckoning, when my sinful soul is judged, take into account these heartrending words of self-reproach that I myself have written lest I hear them from you, God of compassion. Now, lift away and absolve the instances of my transgressing the (monastic) rules, for I am bound to you with the longing of my soul. Take away the reproach of my contemptuous embarrassments. Cover the ugly appearance of my naked body with your mighty right hand. Lead me, the one who has succumbed under the heavy burden of sin, to your rest. Set a good boundary for me, with a path to life with you. Remember me in mercy and with absolute life after death, O blessed in heaven and honored on earth, lauded always in all things, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 73

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“On the day of my life-breath’s release”>

73.1

King on high, mighty and astounding, blessed and only Lord Jesus Christ, you alone can transform the dire things of a hopeless life: this mortal curse into life-giving praise, the blame of St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

dejection into joyous praise, shame into confidence, humiliation into honor, banishment into the hope of goodness, separation into expectation of union, threatening words into reassuring consolation, irrevocable condemnation into another deliverance.

73.2

Lord, have mercy on me, one condemned to death, on the day of my life-breath's release. While my eyes' pitiful gaze implores the heavens, through my mind's imagination I visualize the road of manifold perils, the inevitable journey, the unavoidable and altogether dangerous passage. And staring at the ceiling of the cell I inhabit, the way I will be exiting with the countenance of my wretched and half-dead face changing, my fingers shaking, my sighs muffled, groans failing, voice barely audible, and my grieving soul shaken by a panoply of doubts, I shall continue to mutter with lament from the bottom of my invisible soul the things I have committed.

You are able, O Compassionate One, to perform a miracle with your everlasting might, saying, "Be healed of your soul's affliction" or "May your sins be forgiven" or "Go in peace, you are clean of sin." And whatever I am unable to implore at that hour, accept from me today in keeping with your love for humankind, O forbearing, generous, and all-sustaining (Lord).

73.3

Once so eloquent with my haughty voice, flaunting, holding my head high, I am laid out a lifeless corpse, dispossessed of speech, hands bound, limbs limp, lips sealed, eyes shut, still as a plank, a half-burnt log, irresponsive statue, speechless image, breathless being, pitiful spectacle, woeful sight, lamentable form, miserable face, semblance that moves one to tears, silenced tongue, dry grass, withered flower, dilapidated beauty, extinguished lamp, muffled throat, devastated heart, muted trumpet, dry well, wilted body, rotting belly, collapsed tent, broken branch, separated joint, cut tree, sawed off root, abandoned house, harvested field, uprooted plant, alienated friend, forgotten provisions, buried filth, disdained reject, trashed clutter, contemptible skeleton, like some useless thing trodden under foot.

I am needy of the prayers of others to rise to you, compassionate Benefactor, with the dew of tears accompanying my faith-filled pleas in chanted utterances of my wretched voice:

the responses chanted passionately to you, whom I praise;
the sign of your saving cross, which I worship;
the truth of the resurrection of the one in whom I believe;
the revelation of your glory, which I glorify;
the astounding session of your judgment, which I confess;
the reprimand of your words, which I fear;
the guidance given me by your Holy Spirit, whom I revere;
the confirmation with your Lordly seal, which I kiss;
the reign with you, Lord Jesus, to whom I pray.

Now, whether I am abandoned, rejected, cast away, separated, flown, soaring, or given to St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).
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the tumult accompanying my life, my hope in you—which is your gift—is cherished as a permanent and indelible reminder.

73.4

Glorified Son of God, who alone are compassionate, pardoning, healing, saving, protecting, renewing, representing, uplifting, sustaining, and recreating me in blissful purity, look with mercy upon me, endangered by my doubts.

Yours is the power, yours the salvation, and yours the mercy. Nothing is impossible for you, since to you belong the absolute might, exaltation, dominion, the Kingdom without end, true essence, sovereignty, total incomparability, beneficence, and enlightenment. You are glorified as Lord, without deficiency and without augmentation, worshiped with incense in your uninterpretable mystery in the Holy Trinity, perpetually praised with gratitude and even more for these same reasons, glorified equally, yesterday and today and forevermore.

Prayer 74

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Your mercy is truly there”>

74.1

Heavenly monarch, Lord of all, always and in all things forbearing toward all, inscrutable Son of the living God:

Your mercy is truly there when the expectation of reward has ceased.

Your benevolence is there when the mind’s contemplative reflection
is eclipsed.

Your love of humankind is (felt) at the hour when the danger
of weakness lays siege from without and from within.

Your divine hand’s healing is (felt) anew when all body parts
stop functioning.

Your visitation place is where there is no exit.

Your greatness is when you cure the wound of despair.

Your genuine kinship (with us) is when you dispense salvation
at unexpected times.

Your victory is exhibited when you open the shut door to life

in anticipation of my breath.
Your magnificent grace is there when you forget my evil
and remember your goodness.
Your charitableness is when you care for me, an ingrate,
along with the grateful.

By this I will surely know whether you have looked upon this offering of words with your usual compassion: when you lift away my evil habits.

74.2

Verses are composed and chants are sung:

when the good Lord bestows upon the evil servant the rewards
for those who have done good;
when he grants rest in the royal palace
to one who should justly be in prison;
when he pampers on cushions surrounding the throne
one who should be ushered to the mire pit;
when he lifts toward the heights of happiness
the eyes of one expecting them gouged;
when he presents the ring of bravery
to one dreading his fingers cut off;
when he draws into his comforting embrace
one waiting for whiplashes;
when he honors before a large group of spectators
someone prepared for his awaited demise;
when he bestows both life and glory
to one anticipating a horrible death;
when he adorns with a wreath the head of one fearing beheading.

These are the blessed fruits of your well-rooted branches,
O Compassionate One.

These are the living crops of your creative commandments.
These are the yearning thoughts inspired by fervor for you.
These are the rays of light of your all-encompassing radiance.
These are the pleasurable treats of your laudable kindness.

74.3

These are yours alone, Lord! By you I was moved to write them. Behold, I plead your own pleas, O Blessed One, from what belongs to you, grant grace. Open, Lord, the treasures of your good things, according to the prayer in Proverbs. Do not add my evil deeds to the stock of your good deeds. Do not store up vengeance and wrath, which are hateful to you, with compassion

and mercy, which you love. Do not keep among your venerable possessions the darkness and cruelty displeasing to you or the sin and misery harmful to me. Do not record with your blessed right hand in the book of life the mortgage of my accursed debts. Rather, bring to pass what seems impossible to me, exalt your name yet again, Lord, by showing how simple and very easy these are for you.

74.4

My debts are many, indeed beyond count,
yet not as immense as your mercy.
My sins are multiple,
yet always subtracted in your forgiving presence.
My evils are frequent,
yet your love for humankind, Almighty, triumphs over them all.
My soul's stains are countless for me,
yet they are very limited for you.

The instruments of sin produced by a miserable wretch like me are powerless vis-à-vis the memory of your death for life, to deter the tyranny of the destroyer, O Living One. What effect can a little darkness have on your daylight, O God? How can a slight dusk withstand the radiance of your greatness? How could the raw passions of my frail body be weighed against the cross of your suffering? How does the sin piled up throughout the world appear to your eyes, Almighty, who are overabundant (in mercy)? Is it not but a crumbly clump of clay shattered by a hard blow? Is it not but a bubble from a raindrop vanishing as it bursts asunder at your will?

74.5

Would your omnipotent power need any time to pardon my transgressions?

Not one blink of the eye,
not one hurried, indirect glance,
not one quick, flashing look,
not a split second of hesitation,
not the variable of a hurried footstep,
not that of a drop from one yard's height,
not one linear measure figured in the mind,
not the speed of light,
not the taking of a breath.

None of these insubstantial and inconsequential examples, evanescent illustrations with no lasting effect, so transient or instantaneous, (can equal) the disintegration, dissipation, and melting of the glacier of my sins by your power, God of All, Lord Jesus Christ, inscrutable Son of the living God.

You give, you grant the genial sun to the evil as well as the good and make it rain upon both indiscriminately. You weigh justly, you determine fairly the adverse consequences of things. Those who find great comfort in expectation of rewards you pay with slight prods of temptation for their few sins, yet those who have chosen the worldly life you forgive with mercy, extending your care to them as to the others, always awaiting their return to you. Glory to you, Omnipotent, for all the miraculous work done with your patient care. Blessed forever. Amen.

Prayer 75

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Representing heaven on earth”>

75.1

And now, engulfed, entranced, and utterly overwhelmed by the ineffable magnitude and multifarious favors from your magnanimity that flow infinitely with abundant, undiminishing plenitude, welling on the left and right, frontward and backward, I draw near to offer another testimony in praise of the true confession (of faith).

Although at times I was severed, drawn away from paradise by subversive heresies, pulled by the hook of the deceiver’s most insidious deceptions, now with this soliloquy in orthodox purity, this testimony truly of grace, I rise up again in flight on the wings of light, arriving in heaven herewith.

Since from the womb in which I was conceived she bore me with spiritual birth pains, it is right to monumentalize in this book—by using an established rule reminiscent of my discourse on the confession of faith in the Trinity—the great and blessed, immaculate queen, most real of all virgins, my magnificent and praiseworthy mother, so that the eminence of the fragrant one will be made known and shown and told to other, future generations as the pure body headed by the incarnate Word of God.

75.2

And now, with this replica, (this) verbal picture, a spirit-drawn icon fit for the altar of light, accept me, O compassionate and blessed (Lord), and let me be pardoned and cleansed through her. Remove the stains of sin from my soul. Seat me with the innocent and the pure under her canopy. Add me, the weak one, to the house of David, and move me from there to the house of God, as the prophet cries out, meaning you, Jesus. Do not count my entering vain and exiting useless attendance. Do not consider the fervor of my faith cold nor regard the embrace of my

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greeting as something out of place. Do not deem my attendance disgraceful nor dismiss my worship as thoughtless. May this contemplation of the image not be fruitless, and may this likeness not be without luster. May this fireless burnt offering not be forgotten. May the sacrifice of the vow made in this discourse not be scattered away. May tasting of your light not cause my death. May the cup of the blood from your side not be for my condemnation.

75.3

I pray you, Lord Jesus, one of the (divine) essence: By tasting you, we have come to know your Father and the Holy Spirit, for by you were taught the most gracious ordinances of the church. In this very place of prayer, of the Light of life and the good things of salvation, with open hearts and uplifted hands, we ever offer this verbal frankincense to you, thrice holy, who dwell here and rule over all, by means of this utterance of thanksgiving.

75.4

We glorify you by chanting melodious songs of praise, faithful to the ministry of the word, the kindly ordering Cause of created beings, the Holy Trinity without beginning, incomparably high in heaven, unfathomable to thoughts and incomprehensible to minds, indiscernible to sense perception and beyond the capacity of creatures to bear, whose greatness encompasses the heavens on high and the limitless depths below, end of all ends and beginning of all beginnings, One from Three distinct Persons, Three from One indivisible Essence, higher than the reach of the unfettered mind traversing endlessly in all directions, immutable goodness, unshakable uprightness, unadulterated image of love, greatness beyond greatness, height that cannot be lowered, vision that cannot be marred, undiminishing beneficence, steadfast will, living commandment, redeeming attentiveness, true blessing, assured expectation, veritable promise, generous inheritance, trustworthy good news, sublimity beyond reach: one Father of the only Son, honored with the singular Holy Spirit, possessor of the richest goodness, completely devoid of evil, praised with songs of thanksgiving and inscrutable, enthusiastic acclaim.

75.5

One, exalted, with astounding name, partaker of the shared honor of that ineffable kinship of the Three conjoined Lights, of perfection to which nothing can be added, who of his own free will, with love and honor towards the Father whose likeness he bears, humbled himself and came down from heaven with the aid of the Holy Spirit, without diminishing his inherent glory. He was pleased to enter the maternal womb of the immaculate Virgin, Mother of God, in whom he grew (as) the blessed plant, in that luminous field of purity, combining miraculously—in a permeating union—the breath of our existence with his divine spirit. In this way, with the irresistible reins of his guiding bridle, he calmed my unruliness. And willingly submitting to the cross, he arose (like) the flower of the fruit-bearing Tree of Life, unto full growth of the plant of immortality. He was wounded to death, without separating his divinity from the body that is of

the same kind as ours, by which he made the instrument of defeat into a life-giving means, binding inseparably and forever the essence of creatorship itself to that tangible, agonized body.

Descending into the dark regions of hell, he delivered the bound beings of his creation from the bonds of the alienator, and waking as from the stupor of sleep, he forced death's assault on him to retreat, and arose and came to life, divinely ascending from earth, this bread of life and shepherd of the rational flock. He was believed in the world, and he appeared (to his disciples) as he was, in no way diminished, for he had come back whole, and ascending in his wholeness, he sat on the exalted throne with the glory of his creatorship as manifested formerly. We confess him as God, Benefactor, and Lord of All who will judge the whole earth with distinctive justice on the great day, who himself is the beginning and himself is the end, himself the first and himself the last, who in his undiminished wholeness reigns in unapproachable light.

75.6

With the Father and the Son, we praise the inseparable effluence of their coequal in glory, the lordship of the Spirit who created everything and gave life to all, who was hovering from the very beginning—when the universe was completely enveloped in misty darkness—designing and shaping the infinite expanse of the sea which covered the earth with its all-encompassing water, thus enacting the mystery of the holy baptismal font of light. First he created, and now he acts. He brought into existence and constantly accomplishes his fine works: miracles, predictions through sayings of the saints, divine proclamations, amazing wonders, prophets, apostles, teachers, instructors who teach wisdom. He prepared the sanctuary for the offering of Christ's blood. With mercy, like Christ, he ordered the pardoning of souls and the healing of bodies. He baptized with that which is greater than water; he renewed and enlightened through his fullness.

He is ever powerful in his good works. He bore witness to the only begotten of God at the streams of the Jordan. He was revealed on Mount Tabor, in the symbolism of the cloud, with the voice of the Father. In this very same likeness he protected the house of Jacob in its exodus from Egypt. He drowned Pharaoh with terrible winds during the march under the leadership of Moses. He consummates priests. He forms sages. He strengthens kings. He accords pardon. He grants life to the dead in the renewal of the resurrection. He himself is the anointing of God made human, forever equally worshiped with the Father for the honor of the Son's greatness, eternally praised in boundless glory. Amen.

75.7

We confess with right, unwavering, and pure faith, with a kiss of the lips greeting this altar built from inanimate stones for the divine dwelling in this constructed church, which is exalted with the cosmic height of heaven, founded by the very ranks of the apostles themselves, made fragrant by the disciples of the one above, and served by the ministers of the word. This treasure of life had her beginning in the upper room, where the mystery took place, the place which the spirit of God filled with radiant power on the great day of Pentecost: first, granting an

added preeminence to this church, that beautiful house, a model of perfect purity; then, endowing her and those within with glorious renewing light.

Thus, the blood of the almighty God, distributed and offered forever, shouts with a loud and joyful voice, proclaiming life immortal therein—unlike Abel's, which wails the sad message of death. No one has the power under heaven (or) before the sun to celebrate this awesome mystery anywhere but under her protective wings, for heaven is not content with a gift of the Lord's body except when offered under the auspices of this blessed roof. For according to the Law, there is a curse of death upon the man who makes the divine offering at a place other than the altar of communal sacrifice; moreover, one who makes this blood offering, which is not (simply) the image of the soul, shall be called "guilty of bloodshed."

There is one baptism in her, into the death of Christ,
lest the Divine, who suffered for those who did not know him,
experience (suffering) again—as (Scripture) informs.

There is one laying on of hands,
the honored anointing with light,
lest truth be mixed with untruth.

There is one grace,
above justification through acts of penance,
lest reality be confused with illusion.

There is one doctrine of impending election,
lest the messages on reward and punishment
be considered strange.

There is one fair judgment of the two aspects of our being,
lest the inner and outer person be thought of separately,
in terms of two halves, split between good and evil.

<There is one resurrection of the dead,
lest> our familiar, earthly <body be deprived of>
the eternal power of the royal adoption,
the veritable grandeur of the heavenly Kingdom.

There is one hope of incorruptible life for the saints,
lest the certainty of the promises made known
be doubted in the minds of hearers.

75.8

This venerable queen, the inanimate church, gives life and rules over death—fittingly like the fruit Adam ate. Though inanimate, she surpasses animate beings. She performs miracles, undertaking to perfect and renew us by etching the image of the glorious light upon us again. It is written that she shares the grandeur of heaven's vault in its original form, before the hosts of

spiritual beings came to inhabit there. She uplifts bodies to soar again with the lightness of the soul, endowing the baser element with full dignity. She is not debased by her own shortcomings, but by being trampled by evil or faithless people. Her symbolism is amazing, overwhelming our mind's understanding, this unthinking thing, built by thinking creatures, that helps them as a superior does to a perpetual subordinate. She is greater than the individual, as the invincible rod was greater than Moses, God's chosen one; more than any rational being, as the mysteriously blossoming staff was greater than Aaron. She is superior to the wise, very much like the marvelous mantle of Elijah and Elisha, which parted the river, shining in the act. She aids doubly the hands consecrated in sanctity—more than arming the body (seated) on a stone or the ground—as she would partner with the truly perceptive beings and the saints. Her living, immortal rock is for the falling and rising of many. Like the judge of all souls, she comes forth with amazing pronouncements of curses and blessings. Like one who sees the unseen, she exposes some, shelters others. Like a commander-in-chief, she summons to herself all by name. Like an eternal mountain, she is impregnable against attackers. Like a contrivance made by the great Artisan, she catches souls. Sinless, unerring, she proceeds in the footsteps of Christ. Like the praiseworthy, she lifts up her head, high in sublimity, without shame, boldly.

75.9

She has such great sanctity that her canons draw distinctions among those created in God's image. If, despite her careful efforts, an errant person ventures into her courts, she is not desecrated, but rather distressed by this carelessness.

She is not cursed, but bestows as much grace as the deficiency of the ignorant person demands. Though clouded by our deeds, she is not found delinquent in her obligations.

She does not allow one to come forward twice on the same day for the ineffable sacrament of the Lord lest the offering be carelessly dishonored.

As one unaffected by corruption, she sympathizes with our hardships. Without a word she judges with lordly authority.

75.10

She is an ark of purity, doubly beatified, a shelter from life's tumultuous waves. She does not gather to herself a multitude of dumb beasts in their categories and few humans, but us earthly beings with the heavenly hosts. She is not tossed about on agitated waves, but rises to the heavenly heights. As a disciple trained by the Spirit of God, she avoids iniquity. She does not demand a death blow to the flesh but rather guides those in her keep to the good news of life. She is not a project achieved by the hand of Noah, but is built by the command of the Creator.

She is not adorned by Moses and Bezalel, but by the Holy Spirit of God's only begotten Son. She is not in perpetual motion, constantly moved around, but is steadfastly established upon an unshakable foundation. Still, like the ark made of planks of timber, devoid of speech and the sense of sight, she guides us. As a prefiguration of the immeasurable Existent, she goes ahead to prepare a place in the light of life.

She strikes one dead on the spot, like Uzzah, if she is not spiritually upheld like the cross.

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She kills, wipes out instantly, if she is carried off like some man-made vessel on a cart harnessed to beasts of earthly desires.

She does not speak with physical tongues but in the language of angels.

She does not listen with actual ears but comprehends directly with her mind.

She does not proclaim with articulated sounds of speech but tells the message of Jesus' works to all nations.

She does not have vibrating vocal cords but expresses herself with the utterances of the living God.

She does not have joints of bones and tendons, but just as the throngs of countless Hebrews, the armed company of God on high, were made to stand two thousand cubits from the ark of the covenant, she keeps at a distance from her those defiled with impurities, those rife with sin—even though they are survivors of the toil of brickmaking.

Even the essence of God incarnate was called the “rock,” from whose torn side they all drank.

It is not the flow of blood through veins but the rays of light from on high penetrating and becoming one for her renewal and protection.

It is not the administration of mortals, whether Solomon or Zerubbabel, but the wisdom of the Begetter of All that drew her.

It is not with the unconsecrated and common oil of Jacob that she is supplied, but it is with the awesome blood and glory of the great God that she is anointed.

It is not a house made with earthly matter but rather the body of the heavenly light of God where he baptizes and ordains its children.

It is not those born to the ways of the world whom she nurtures but rather those who are heirs to the heavenly Kingdom, so that she might offer to the bosom of Abraham those coddled by her.

The bridegroom of her wedding is the Son of the living God, the assembly of patriarchs the maids at the banquet.

She makes us forget the demonic high places of pagan worship, for she is well acquainted with God in heaven.

The images of pagan gods are total aliens to her, for in her every stone Christ is exalted.

She is the obvious ruin of the imaginary nymph cults of the forest, since above all other trees of this world, the Lord might be offered in her in the semblance of the Tree of Life.

She marks the destruction of all the false, magical fertility idols, since in her and with her the praised rock is established, set in bright gems and living stones.

75.11

This beautiful, God-receiving house is completely free of all servility. She is not the image of Zion on high; rather, she is recognized as the true Zion. She is neither a pagan fire altar nor a place of obligations under the yoke of the Law; rather, she is the Lord's storehouse of gifts which we welcome with a kiss. She is unshakable, never taking on a different image, but grows

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ever greater in the same resplendent glory, proclaiming the heavens and representing heaven on earth in brilliant light.

Just as there can be no Christ without the Father, there can be no fullness of the soul without the womb of this mother. The infinite God would wander homeless were it not for having this house for a tabernacle. The Lord of all would have no place to rest his head, if he did not come to lodge at this station of life. He is more thrilled in this material dwelling place than in the vault of heaven on high.

The infinity of God's light that had the prophet and his like cover their face, that made them flee from his glorious presence and from its semblance in the temple, kept them restless; whereas here it is praised festively and with singing by choirs of rational beings. Here it is adored with repeated, enthusiastic blessings—no less than in the splendor of paradise.

75.12

This spiritual, heavenly, luminous mother cuddled me as a son more than any earthly, breathing, physical one. The milk of her breasts is the blood of Christ. If one were to depict her as the very image of the Theotokos, he would not be in error. Like the sign of the cross of salvation with amazing powers and a plethora of artwork, she accomplishes miracles. The terrifying tribunal of the Last Judgment is unmistakably noticeable in her. Through her the errant mouths of the debauched heretics are silenced. She also has intelligent, articulate stones, by which she chases away into the open the beastly and unclean. She gives birth to divine creatures, pure images of the one God, Christ.

She faces east, our first allotted place of habitation. She gestures with her hand, clearly pointing out the direction of the coming of God, and teaches us to heed the Lord's saying about the lightning, meaning the coming salvation from that direction, the dawning light of Morning Star that ushers in the appearing of Christ on the last day of creatures on earth.

She drives away pain, heals the sick, and overcomes the tyranny of demons. The life-giving baptismal font is her womb. The apostles in their rank constitute the circle dance at her wedding. She has increased and flourished in blessings so much that she has been fittingly called by the name of the Savior himself, consecrated as the luminous Mother of the Lord by those close to the only-begotten Son. She is a safe harbor for adrift sinners; for the heavenly choirs, a place of jubilation; for perplexed offenders, a sure place of healing.

The Holy Trinity, beyond telling, is glorified in her, the blessed in all.

75.13

And woe to him who dares raise a hand in malice against the heavenly Kingdom, assuming the founding of the church and her defined traditions as something physical, human inventions or earthly, man-made constructs and not a gift for abundant life, a place for expectations from God, a prefiguration of the copious gifts of the Most High in their fullness, luminously revealed by the Holy Spirit. She is the incensed council-chamber of the Creator's will, the institution established with wisdom by the right hand of the apostles. In a word, she is the gate of heaven and the city of the living God, the mother of the living, free from indebtedness and a true

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replication of my appearance as a rational being: the noetic—signifying my spirit—and the tangible—an image of my body—yet with exceeding, new holiness of the inexpressibly sacred things there, crowned with the resplendent Sign of Christ.

Those who do not profess this are expelled from the almighty Father's presence by the hand of his consubstantial Word, withdrawing from them the inheritance of grace from the co-glorified Spirit and closing before them the gate to life, to the nuptial chamber. Whereas we who have written this bear witness to it, believing in her to whom we belong, in the name and for the glory of the almighty Trinity and of the one Godhead, for ever and ever. Amen.

That (prayer) was my (confession of) faith in the Holy Trinity and this (prayer) my avowed confession of faith in my Mother Church glorified with light.

Prayer 76

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Wishing salvation”>

76.1

O God, merciful, most compassionate, mighty, astounding, lover of humankind, blessed, living, beyond description: Nothing is ever impossible for your word, even when unthinkable to the mind. You alone can replace the severity of thorns with sweetness of fruit, you who are the progenitor of this new and amazing law of life: to do good to the one who hates, to pray for the one who persecutes, to seek salvation for the one who wounds, and to ask forgiveness for the murderer. These are the miraculous fruits you bestow, with ineffable sweetness—beyond comparison, made delectable by your laudable will, and savory by your praiseworthy lips, Lord Christ blessed in heaven, who is the breath on our face and the power of our comeliness.

Alas! Human beings, earth-born and prone to err, repay with evil the hand offering good.

Yet you, Light and Giver of light,
do not heed their blasphemy,
do not take pleasure in evil,
do not want their destruction,
do not wish their death.

Neither are you perturbed by turmoil
nor yielding to anger.

Neither are you compelled by wrath
nor waning in love.

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Neither do you waver in compassion
nor change in goodness.

Neither do you turn your back
nor your face away.

Rather, you are altogether Light
and wishing salvation.

76.2

Should you wish
to forgive, you are able;
to heal, you have the power;
to give life, you are sufficient;
to bestow grace, you are generous;
to make whole, you are capable;
to gift, you are munificent;
to justify, you are most resourceful;
to comfort, you are supreme;
to renew, you are omnipotent;
to perform miracles, you are King of all;
to establish anew, you are the Creator;
to re-create, you are God;
to care for us, you are Lord of all;
to rid us of sin, you are the Visitor;
to aid us, the unworthy, you are Blessed;
to protect from the hunter, you are Savior;
to pour upon us from your own, you are bountiful;
to reach us before we ask, you lack nothing;
to loosen from constrictions, you are comforter;
to call me who am last, you are caring;
to steady me who wavers, you are a rock;
to give me a drink when parched, you are a fountain;
to reveal the hidden things, you are Light;
to teach me what is beneficial, you are Good;
to overlook my stains, you are forbearing;
to refrain from judging a nobody like me, you are exalted;
to lend a hand to a servant like me, you are a fosterer;
to shelter with your right hand, you are solicitous;
to offer a remedy to me who am infirm, you are a nurturer;
to fatten me up, the ignorant, you are a teacher;
to accept me, the suppliant, you are a refuge.

76.3

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Now, all these are yours, Lord of mercy, not just in words, but also in reality and significance, for you are the foremost of martyrs, who endured patiently, who for my salvation came mightily to the frontline of the battlefield to soften the harsh tyranny of my overbearing body—given its habitual conflicts that inflict excruciating pain—by taking our nature, bearing on your blameless body the penalty of terrible tortures in order to show by your example the mercy you have for us. You are forever blessed. Amen.

Prayer 77

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Friday of the Great Pascha”>

77.1

This is a day of blessedness and renewed light, divided into two equal parts for the destiny of creatures, to transition to a different existence, to the inalterable heavenly life; (a day) to bring down those who are exalted and to elevate those who are lowly. It is the horrible Friday of the Great Pascha, a fitting time for me to write this melodious prayer with sighs of joy mixed with horror. I therefore consider it appropriate to speak here of some of the tortures you endured for me, God of all.

77.2

You stood in my likeness before a tribunal of your creatures.

You did not speak, Giver of speech.

You did not say a word, Creator of tongues.

You did not release your voice, Shaker of the world.

You did not sound your most effective, majestic trumpet.

You did not answer back with accounts of your favors.

You did not silence them with their evil deeds.

You did not deliver your betrayer to shameful death.

You neither resisted being bound

nor squirmed when slapped in the face.

You neither wriggled when spat upon

nor resisted when beaten.

You neither became insulted when mocked

nor were taken aback when ridiculed.

They stripped him of his cloak, as from a weakling,
and dressed him like a doomed prisoner.

Had my Lord not been forced twice to drink vinegar and gall,
I would not have been cleansed from the accumulated bile of old.
He tasted sorrow and thus put a stop to misgivings.
They dragged him violently and brought him back disrespectfully.
They condemned him, humiliated him to the uttermost
by flogging him before a motley crowd.

They knelt before him in ridicule and put a crown of disdain
upon his head.

77.3

They gave you, Giver of life, no rest.
They even forced you to bear the instrument of death.

You accepted it, as the forbearing one.
You took it up, as the meek one.
You bore it, as the patient one.

You, like a transgressor, submitted yourself to the punishing wood.
You, like the lily of the field, made it the means to life,
the site of condemnation as one of joyful banquet;
hence my bodily existence will be protected
from the fearsome despots of the night.

You were led out like a sacrificial lamb.
You were hung like the ram caught by the horns in the thicket.
You were laid on the altar of the cross like a sacrifice.
You were nailed like a criminal.

You were persecuted like an outlaw;
you, the heavenly peace, like a bandit;
you, in your infinite majesty, like a sufferer;
you, who are adored by the Cherubim, like a despised man;
you, the definition of life, like one deserving certain death;
you, the author of the Gospels, like one who blasphemed the Law;
you, the Lord and the fulfillment of the prophets,
like one who transgressed the Scriptures;
you, the radiance of glory and the image of the inscrutable mysteries
of the Father, like one opposing your Parent's will;
you, the truly blessed, like someone banished;
you, who untied the restraints of the Law, like a branded,

cursed man;
you, the consuming fire, like an outlawed convict;
you, astounding in heaven and on earth, like a confirmed culprit;
you, enshrouded in unapproachable light, like some earthly silt.

77.4

O lovingkindness and magnanimous forbearance! Because of your compassionate mercy toward your ungrateful and disobedient servant, Lord of all, you endured all this willingly and with gracious consent. You took all this upon yourself through the union of your perfect body. Even when you entered the bed of your ark, the tomb, you lacked nothing of the fullness of your likeness to God, the inscrutable one. You suffered all this indignity with inexpressible patience. You rose alive, sovereign, in exalted light, in undiminished body and flawless divinity.

Blessed are you in your glory, praised for your compassion, lauded for your mercy always, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 78

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Your grace renewed by the blood drops from your side”>

78.1

And now, lowering my face of earthly nature, humbly on my knees, prostrating in worship, I kiss your life-giving feet, merciful benefactor. I offer this draft of prayers to your majesty, pleading with you, Giver of life, the only provident, lover of humankind, compassionate, mighty, visitor, and guardian.

May your suffering for our salvation not be in vain, God,
who became human for my sake.

May the sweat mixed with blood on the night of your betrayal
not be pointless.

May the favors of your light not be eclipsed, gifts that you have given
freely and without compensation to a wretch like me.

May the good news of your grace renewed by the drops of blood
from your side not be erased.

May the fruit of your suffering, offered for my neediness,
not be ineffective.

May the banished accuser not gloat over possessing me,
whom you have purchased.

78.2

Indeed, you vanquish the desires of the evil one by your will. May the one who was once confounded be perplexed again; may the one who was forever condemned be defeated again. Do not hold back your liberating words, which will draw your dedicated creatures back to you. Your benefactions at the unexpected moment of despair are ineffable. When all movement of life had ceased and disappeared, you who are immortal died and brought the dead back to life. Since you changed the rule of reciprocity mandated in the Law, do not now hold back the simpler, uncomplicated, and more feasible (rule), O source of mercy, compassionate, blessed, and forbearing King. Speak through your all-powerful Word, by which you brought light into existence on the first day, and I will immediately be made well. And though I have not sought to

follow your light, may you visit me anyway, in the form of your Father's radiant dawn, and may I, a detrimental servant, be summoned before you for your mercy and grace. There is no time left to extend the payment of my debts, so turn your face toward me, a sufferer, you who are the light for the disheartened in darkness. Block and seal the escape routes through which your favors drain away constantly from my retentive memory. Preserve in me the grace of your most precious and lasting treasures, by which I might be found worthy to be called yours and be protected by your boundless goodness.

78.3

Have mercy upon me, compassionate Lord, I pray you.

Have mercy upon me, Almighty, again have mercy.

Do not repay my wrongdoing with pain,
you who are good in all ways.

Do not take away from my vulnerable self the gift of grace
bestowed by you.

Do not withdraw (from me) the breath of your all-blessed Spirit.

Do not erase the seal of your royal image honored with incense.

Do not allow the thorns of sin to appear in the sanctuary
of my mind.

Do not sever the tie that binds me to you with steadfast love.

Do not reject the art strongly suited to my tongue.

Do not weaken the ability of my right hand to distribute the morsels
of your light.

Do not record my debt to death in your book of life.

Do not hold (my sins) and do not assess them to me.

Do not recall them and do not embarrass me.

Do not blame me and do not trample me.

Do not register my slackness and do not add up my ruinous acts.

Do not accuse me as a reproachable person.

Do not let the tree of damnation grow within me.

Do not unleash in me the branches of devastation.

Do not let the flower of my sins proliferate.

Do not present me my debt note.

Do not allow the kernel of its fruit to reproduce.

Do not consider my prolific misdeeds as branching from plants
of your creation.

Do not pronounce a word to remind me of my appalling iniquity.

Do not allow my habitual willfulness to betray my soul into slavery.

Do not honor me here, only to condemn me in the hereafter.

Do not let the lesser, transient things diminish my eternal good.

Do not measure the endless glory to come by the brevity
of the present.
Do not swap the incorruptible life for the valley of sighing grief.
Do not exchange your ineffable light for this shadow of darkness.
Do not drop the reins of my thoughts to follow my wayward tracks.
Do not reckon the bridge of my passing life as sufficient repose
for me.
Do not keep the valley of my mind in the shadows only to be cleared
in the future.

If you were to add up my innumerable misdeeds,
I would thence be the living dead.
If you were to take all this to heart, I would be consumed
in flameless fire here and now.
If you were to examine my iniquities, I would completely melt away,
without even coming before you.
If you were to allow my sin to grow with me, I would be choked
by it and waste away.

78.4

You who are always powerful, Almighty, glance my way, so that the evil within me might be set to flight, so that your goodness might come in its stead. You who are compassionate, provident, praiseworthy, inextinguishable light, with unbounded power, command that the essence of my nature be established anew within the frame of my body and its parts, in order that you might lodge there comfortably, with happy fervor, and stay enthroned, without ever leaving, uniting my soul with you and banishing completely the corruption of sin, O immortal King, Lord Jesus Christ, who gives life to all, blessed forever. Amen.

Prayer 79

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“At the tribunal of the Last Judgment”>

79.1

Remember, Lord, Lord of mercies, lover of justice, true God, to look again at my ever-erring

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natural inclination. Search me again, the full extent of my blood circulation. Draw near like a physician to examine, for I am a man possessed of an unripe mind filled with faulty thoughts as you yourself know, Seer of the unseen, for you alone are devoid of the darkness of falsehood. This is why it is more proper to record me among sinners, I who repeatedly succumb to the weaknesses of human frailty like all other mortals with earthborn bodies; otherwise your word might appear untrue. For you indeed know that “we were made evil and our wickedness is innate, and our way of thinking will never change,” according to the predictive saying of the spiritually clever sage.

79.2

Ease the severity of the prepared torment that awaits me and those sons of Gehenna filed for eternal death. Lift away my shameful sins that are kept to be revealed to me, wretch that I am, during the chastisement at the tribunal of the Last Judgment. May your counsel of peace be granted me with an advance of mercy, so that no images of unbearable horrors will be shown to me, hopeless bewilderment having been preempted by contrition in life.

The judgment is terrifying. The Judge cannot be bought or deceived. The shame is dire, the rebuke horrific, the reprimand inescapable, the torment unavoidable, the dread beyond consolation, the shaking unstoppable, the weeping inconsolable, the gnashing of teeth incurable, the rot terminal. The curse of your divine word is horrific: the stoppage of compassion, the shutting down of mercy.

When the heavens roll away and the earth shakes to the very core of its foundations, it will be like the billowing waves of the raging sea, escaping one another (only) to collide with a second force, jolting and shaking the foundations of the earth's thickness across its expanse, with powerful blows rumbling through the depths of the abyss, leveling the mountains. The substance of stone and all the elements of existing things will melt with fire. The changeless heavens will be altered, and creatures—in their very elements—will be transformed into a new semblance. Our hidden deeds will be made public and our invisible passions will be revealed: the conduct of each person's inner beliefs will be displayed on our bodies. The King of heaven will sit at his tribunal with the due sentence in his hands.

79.3

Woe to me! Sevenfold woe, with double pitiableness, in the measure of this number, which contains the infinity of numbers! What shall my pitiful soul do on the solemn day of peril? For the thought of what lies ahead is more grave than the encounter itself. I recall the case brought up by one of the prophets about the inescapable, saying, “It will be like someone who escapes from the paws of a lion and encounters a bear; and he escapes from facing the bear and enters his house and rests his hand against the wall, and a snake bites him.” He makes the description of the scene in the vision even more terrifying, saying not in vain, “The Day of the Lord is darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and fog.”

79.4

When the guardian angel who is our companion through life accuses us rightly—like a strict official—and the formidable Judge justly reprimands us, the servants of the King rush about without delay, inviting some to life and condemning others to shame, showing to some a cheerful face but to me a fearsome and horrifying appearance. To some they offer wreaths of glistening light and for others they demand mortal perdition; to the just, their voice is good news, but to me the sad news of endless grief. When death's victory ends finally for those who are good, it prolongs doubly for me, an evildoer. Knocking at the door will have no effect then, for my share of mercy will have expired.

When the amazing and wondrous records are opened, the hitherto hidden acts committed in the body—given the very nature of humans for whose sake all things were created—will be disclosed in full detail, so that before our eyes shall ineffably appear that which is sealed away from our present awareness. Here and now, heaven may be obtained at the cost of lamentations and tears; there, these are detested and rejected as late vanity. Unless sighs with plaintive cries are expressed here, they will not be accepted there. Acts of mercy sown sparingly (here) shall not light the way before us, where the loud reprobation of the lawless during the deluge shall be the ark; of those who blasphemed the Lord, the Testament; and of those who are our contemporaries, the astounding sign (of the cross). In that terrifying place these will justly be first to take me to task: one for breaking the covenant made with the early patriarchs, the other for dishonoring the tabernacle of the testimony, and the other for the spilled blood of the great God.

Even here, I have subjected myself to so many tormenting situations. How shall I be consoled when my hope is cut short? Since the forces of light—the ranks of the just who are glorified in blessedness—tremble in fear, unable to bear the terrifying face of the great Judge, how shall I appear there, miserable wretch that I am, disinherited son of perdition who does not expect a wreath but unbearable punishment and endless ruin?

79.5

O ineffable Power who bestows all gifts, hasten to extend your hand of salvation to me, a doomed captive. For with your help I might turn back from the gates of hell. Having seen mentally the things to come, I might escape punishment completely—without harm—when I draw near properly prepared. I am sufficiently chastened by the terrifying reports of awful tortures. By your good will, I might be saved and not thrown to the young lions—who beg you for me as food so they can devour me with their ferocious teeth and fill the belly of death with me, one who has grown fat in this world to be consumed there—where one is kept in store endlessly, with the rest of the stock, to be burned eternally. For you alone are able to wrest me from the jaws of death and deliver me to everlasting life and bliss, refuge of all, King of light, Lord Jesus Christ, blessed forever. Amen.

Prayer 80

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“I pray to you, Holy Mother of God”>

80.1

And now, after so much despair and distressing heartbreak, with my endlessly agonized soul grieving because of the dreadful enormity of divine wrath, I pray to you, Holy Mother of God, an angel from humankind, a cherub in bodily appearance, heavenly queen, pure as air, clean as light, clear as the image of Venus at its height, superior to the untrodden dwelling place of the Holiest of All, the promised, blessed place, that breathtaking Eden, the tree of immortal life guarded by the flaming sword, strengthened and protected by the exalted Father, prepared and purified by the resting of the Holy Spirit, adorned by the Son who made his tabernacle in you, the only Son of the Father and your firstborn, your Son by birth and Lord by creation, given your impeccable purity, O perfect goodness—your absolute holiness, O caring intercessor.

Accept the petitions in these supplications by me, who confess faith in you and, with the words of my earlier encomium to your greatness, present them as an offering intermingled with your own pleas. Weave the bitter weeping of my sinful self with your own beatific and incense-perfumed requests, O plant of life with the blessed Fruit. Thus being always helped and having become a recipient of your beneficence, and trusting in and being enlightened by your immaculate birthing, I shall live for Christ, your Son and Lord.

80.2

Confessed Mother of the living, assist me on your wings of prayer, so that my departure from this earthly valley may be painless, leading to life in the prepared dwellings, that my death might be light, though I am weighed down by iniquity.

Healer of Eve’s labor pains, make the day of my anguish a festive day; intercede, plead, beseech, for I believe your ineffable purity and that your word is accepted.

Blessed among women, help me with your tears, for I am imperiled.

Mother of God, ask on bended knee for my reconciliation.

Altar of the Most High, care for me, for I am miserable.

Heavenly temple, lend me a hand, for I have fallen.

Handmaid and Mother of God, glorify your Son by performing upon me the divine miracle of pardon and mercy.

80.3

May your honor be magnified through me, and may my salvation be manifested through you.

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Should you take notice of me, O Mother of the Lord,
would you pity me, O holy one?
Would you rescue me, for I am lost, O immaculate one?
Would you care for me, for I am brought low, O happy one?
Would you commend me, for I have been shamed, O gracious one?
Would you intercede for me, for I am hopeless, O ever Holy Virgin?
Would you welcome me, a reject, O exalted of God?
Would you show me compassion, O lifter of the curse?
Would you steady me, a drifter, O serenity?
Would you calm me down, for I am worried, O peacemaker?
Would you direct me, for I have strayed, O praised?
Would you appear before the assembly for me,
 O vanquisher of death?
Would you mellow my bitterness, O kindness?
Would you tear down the separating barriers, O conciliation?
Would you lift away my uncleanness, O eradicator of corruption?
Would you save me, for I am condemned to death, O living light?
Would you end the sound of my wailing, O rejoicing?
Would you support me, for I am wrecked, O salve of life?
Would you look upon me, for I am ruined, O spirit-filled?
Would you visit me with compassion, O gift of his will?

You alone are blessed on the pure lips and tongues of the happy ones. Please, let a droplet of milk from your virginity drop on me, to foster me to life, O Mother of our exalted Lord Jesus, Creator of heaven and the whole earth, whom you bore wholly in the flesh, in his full divinity, who is glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit, uniting his essence and our nature inexplicably. He is all and in all, one of the Trinity. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 81

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Through the prayers of my angel”>

81.1

Accept, O Merciful One, with the prayers of the Mother of God, the petitions of the immortal angels in luminous form, who cry out without ceasing with their pure mouths in

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constant intercession for my sake.

They are virtuous, created as doers of good by you, O Benefactor.

They are ignorant of evil, established by your all-ruling command, O Existent.

They are a mighty force at your disposal, O Most High.

They are holy, pure, immaculate, blessed, remarkable, victorious, and invincible, swift as a flash of the mind.

They intercede (for us), accompany (us), and care for (us just as) for the fruitless fig tree that remained barren for three years—an eternity encompassing past, present, and future, beyond the long time it took to be rooted in the orchard of this world—adorned with useless foliage and devoid of fruit, a true image of humankind.

They move among us constantly, aiding us in our need. They look after our good and pray for our salvation unto everlasting life, saying these words: “Forsake not the work of your hands.” For truly, this prayer is ours. You, benevolent God, appointed them for our sake, for they were created by your word and we by the action of your hand.

They shall come with your only begotten Son, fearsome witnesses at the judgment, true prosecutors of the sins of earthly beings before the frightening tribunal, just revealers of their assignment toward us. There, too, they sympathize (with us), pleading with sighs, in perpetual chant of their voices: “Have mercy. You created (them). Do not destroy (them).”

81.2

With the gratefully praising voices and prayers of these immortal and sublime beings, savor our sighs also, Creator of all, whose compassion exceeds that of those above and below, since you extend your benevolence to us and them.

They are wondrous in their fiery forms, immaculately pure, sinless, made of fire and spirit, invincible, with immense advantage of a higher calling, abundantly brilliant in knowledge, fervent in enthusiasm that does not cool, with innate passion to love God. Considering the splendor of these incorruptible beings, may our lukewarm hearts be kindled like theirs, brightly at the sublime mystery on our holy table, which is in our sanctuary. And without drowsiness or lethargy, may we await the blessed command of your life-giving will, Creator of all, to be united with God inseparably in cherubic virtue.

They are the great heavenly principalities, soldiers, pure and astounding, your virtuous and noble ministers, O God in heaven, radiant rays from your cloud of light.

81.3

Through them, Jesus, extend your merciful love for humankind to me also, a sinner born of earth. Through the prayers of my angel, direct me toward the good path of your light, so that he may draw near with the handed task of my soul’s protection that you had entrusted to his supervision in this life, with a joyous heart elated about me, with a glad and cheerful face to present me blameless and blessed by you, exalted King of glory beyond reach, merciful, praised by the ecstatic choir in spirited jubilation.

And to you who are inscrutable, with your Father beyond reach, and your ineffable Holy

Spirit, befits glory, honor, and adoration, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 82

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“For the sake of the holy apostles”>

82.1

Lord, benevolent God, generous King, refuge of life, form of light, spacious place of repose, who came for my sake—a sinner—took body, accomplished things beyond telling and performed miracles, even making perfect with the fullness of your divinity those begotten (by you):

Now for the sake of the holy apostles ordained with your heaven-creating hand and anointed by your Holy Spirit—whose deserving praises I have lauded as much as I could for your glory, Lord of all, in another work—have mercy upon me in remembrance of these your chosen. Through them prepare for me a way to the most desired bliss. May the voice of their good shepherding be heard welcoming me gently to eternal life. May I partake of the celebrated hope of everlasting salvation with these guides to life: the pioneers of the grace with which I am honored, the glorified ranks, the spiritual rivers, the sublime evangelists, the illustrious princes, those with bejeweled crowns, and those shining as ornaments in the unbounded dominion of grace, those who have been made perfect with the oil of gladness, your lordly light.

82.2

Christ God on high, (receive me also) with the disciples under your great command and the martyrdom of your chosen martyrs, who in their mortal bodies subject to suffering (experienced) all manner of affliction in every part and were crowned despite their earthly and finite nature, struggling courageously against every element of material existence, transcending it and being reborn in spirit, who left this world as true confessors under the deadliest trials, like the prophet. Even in this world they realized the unequivocal good, unseen and hidden, with the hope of things that are seen, as did the disciples of the apostles and fellow-sufferers with them, who, having become equal to them through their labors—no less in utter perfection—form a circle in the merriment of endless bliss.

Together with the gratifying and acceptable pleas of their prayers—offered with their blood, dedicated with their meritorious labor, and made fragrant with their sweat—receive me once more, honorably, as part of their lot, standing strong in you with everlasting salvation.

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82.3

Son of God, accept me with those who—covered in blood—contended against fire and sword, and with the holy ascetics, the solitary fathers, and your (other) followers, who with invincible bravery and undistracted vigilance struggled courageously against the tyranny of the body and fended off the bodiless Beliar. Following their prolonged battle in this life's arena, without being worn down by the weight of the waves of this world's expansive sea and despite the heaviness of the bodily ark, their souls, soaring in lightness, reached the haven of eternal life. And like those who love the celestial realm wholeheartedly, boldly and with fitting decorum they had their heads crowned with the crown of victory, truly glorious, adorned with shining jewels. For the sake of their meritorious prayers and dedicated supplications, accept me with them, a sinner deserving punishment.

82.4

Lo, mixing my impure words with the glorious appeals of the aforementioned blessed ones, who for my sake call out to you in a pleasing manner, I too call out with them, like bitterness amidst the sweet, the thorny amidst the smooth, ugliness amidst comeliness, silt amidst beautiful pearls, dirt amidst pure gold, worthless rocks amidst silver, denial amidst truth, or teeth-grinding sand amidst soft bread.

Hear now, O mighty, ingenious, and praised One, their (prayers) for me and mine for them, their praise for my salvation and to your glory, O compassionate and blessed Benefactor, forbearing, potent, inscrutable, ineffable, incorruptible, and uncreated. Yours are the gifts, and yours is grace. You are the beginning and cause of all good.

82.5

You are not the prosecutor, but the liberator.
You are not the destroyer, but the rescuer,
You are not the executioner, but the life-giver,
You are not the scatterer, but the gatherer,
You are not the traitor, but the deliverer.
You are not the repressor, but the uplifter.
You are not the despoiler, but the restorer.
You are not the curser, but the one who blesses.
You are not the revenger, but the giver of grace.
You are not the tormentor, but the consoler.
You do not erase, but write.
You do not shake, but steady.
You do not trample, but comfort.
You do not promote the causes of death,
but seek the means to preserve life.
You do not try to find reason to kill,

but look for saving mercy.

You do not forget the visitation.
You do not abandon the good.
You do not withhold compassion.
You do not bring the sentence of death,
 but the legacy of freedom.

You are not opposed for your generosity.
You are not murmured against for your grace.
You are not blasphemed for your bounty.
You are not insulted for your free gifts.
You are not scorned for your patience.
You are not blamed for your pardon.
You are not accused for your goodness.
You are not dishonored for your kindness.

You are not despised for your meekness.

For these we raise not complaints,
 but endless praise with thanksgiving.
Take away my sins, almighty.
Remove the curse from me, blessed.
Pardon my debts, merciful.
Erase my transgressions, compassionate.
Extend your visiting hand
 and I will instantly be made perfect.

What is easier than these for you, Lord, and what is of greater concern to me, a debtor?
Thus, benevolent Lord, revive me, one made in your image, by a repeated breathing with that life-giving breath of your pure, enlightening grace that cares for my thoroughly sinful soul.

82.6

Do not dispatch me, O Merciful One, on a day before my time,
 departing from this life empty-handed, without my reward,
 my journey left incomplete.

Do not offer me the cup of bitterness in my hour of thirst.

Do not prevent me, O Compassionate One,
 from what is beneficial for my spiritual well being,
 and do not permit the nightfall of death to overtake me
 like a practiced bandit in ambush.

Do not let the scorching heat smolder and dry up my roots
 at an unexpected moment,

and do not allow lunar omens, coming in secret,
to cause me harm.
Do not keep my sins frozen nor let torrents inundate me
in the ravine of my life.
May rest not bring me death nor lying down lead to my demise.
May sleep not destroy me nor slumber corrupt me.
May my death not strike me at an untimely moment
nor the upward release of my (last) breath
be forced into abandonment in the lower realm.

82.7

You are Lord, you are compassionate, you are the Benefactor. You are forbearing and almighty. You are infinitely and ineffably omnipotent to pardon, to save, to grant life, to enlighten, to establish anew, to snatch from the claws of ferocious beasts or from the teeth of dragons and restore life, to bring from the depths of the abyss to the joy of light and from drowning in the waves of sin to be seated in glory among the blessed righteous.

Every soul awaits you with hope, longing for your grace, whether heavenly or earthly, whether fallen in sin or exalted with righteousness, whether master or servant, whether mistress or maid. Your hand holds the life-breath of every creature.

To you with the Father and the Holy Spirit, glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 83

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Praying for my enemies”>

83.1

Exalted and inscrutable, astounding Power, Lord of creation, King of heaven, Creator of angels, Initiator of spirits, Maker of the fiery beings, Good master of souls, trusted hand, tranquil repose, vision of enlightenment, brightness of joy, path to blessedness, cause of life, source of reason, salvation that knows no evil, guide to peace, rampart of strength, bulwark of protection, wall of fire for great blessing, definition of forgiveness: remember my words of confession in this book of lamentation, even for the good of those of the human race who are our enemies, and grant them pardon and mercy. Do not be angry at them for my sake, Lord, as (you would) at defamers of the saints. On account of your constant love toward me, forgive

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them as (you would) rebukers and sincere abhorters of evil. For when we both appear before you, just Judge, perhaps some of those have harmed me but little and justly spoken against me, whereas I have committed innumerable and immeasurable breaches of my vows, with respect to you, Giver of all gifts.

83.2

Remember your greatness, Lord, when looking upon my lawlessness. And while I petition you to do good to those who hate me, you, on your part, in accordance with your magnanimity, show them your ineffable, miraculous works. Do not destroy those who are bitter at me, but change them, root out the worldly weeds, and plant the good in me and them, especially since

you are light and hope, whereas I am darkness and foolish;
you are truly good, praiseworthy, whereas I am thoroughly evil, inept;
you are lord of earth and heaven, whereas I rule neither my breath
nor my soul;
you are exalted, free of any need, whereas I am in pain and danger;
you are above all earthly passions, whereas I am base, ghastly clay;
you, in the words of the prophet, live in perpetual infinity on high,
whereas I continuously perish, according to his words;
you know neither darkness nor deceit,
whereas in me they are utmost, since I have wasted my trust.

Release me from my prison, free me from my bonds.
Remove my chains, rescue me from drowning.
Free me from anxiety, unshackle my iron fetters.
Deliver me from my siege, banish my doubts.
Console me in my sadness, comfort me in my distress.
Dispel my afflictions, calm down my agitation.
Help me recover from crying, stop my sighing.
Hold me back from lamenting, palliate my sobbing.

Merciful God, liberal in kindness, do not despise me, whom you have redeemed with your almighty blood. Do not condemn me to a place of perdition. Lift me up for I have reached the brink of death due to my multiple and grave illnesses.

83.3

Behold, the cycles of my years swelled, piled up with vanity, for from the time I appeared on earth I have seemed useless, and from the field of my mother's womb I have become a reproduced thornbush of sin. Do not be a wounding sting for me, as you were for the tribe of Judah or the descendants of Ephraim. Since in my soul I cultivated prickly brambles, poisonous and numbing, instead of the good seeds of wheat, as the Scriptures older than the Gospels say, why should I not call my soul a horrible field, choked by the accursed thorns of sin? I did not

sow justice, as Hosea says, so why should I reap and gather the fruit of life? The virgin breasts of my soul's innocence dried, as the prophet speaks of Israel. Lord, you are able to reinstate. I spread out and opened the bed of my will to the demons of lust, in the wayward ways of Judah. It is in your hands to restore that chastity.

83.4

If the physical union of the prostitute with the seer purified her, how much more will you cleanse me, O Salvation, who are spiritually united with me? If this inanimate sun which you created, O Provider of the earth, dries the mire of the swamps and brings the unripe fruits to ripeness, how much more can you, Creator of all, Spirit of God, flush away the silt of my wrongdoing and eliminate the vile secretion of my accumulated sin? For this reason I hasten herewith to ask good for those who hate me, O blessed and compassionate (Lord). So, do not reject me, though I am deserving of death for my mortal sins and banishment from your all-protecting sight. Give me life that I might always contemplate your concerns, although I have sinned with every part of my body, in accordance with the natural order of my soul. To seek good for those who have done good is the law of nature, a usual, passionate response; and indeed, all manner of people are capable of following this first rule, whereas the second, which is foremost in meeting with your approval, is an emulation of the divine. For this reason, I considered praying for my enemies before asking good for those to whom I am grateful.

83.5

Now then, remember doubly those who in your exalted name accepted me, the unworthy one, and give them, most generous Lord, benevolent and ungrudging, the reward of the just and the prophets. Although I may forever be devoid of any worthiness—compared to their faith and their hopeful expectation—in their considered opinion they have regarded me, a slave to sin, as if I had a secret compartment in my soul filled with your life-giving relics. Approaching me with your infinite and kind compassion, cleanse me, whose sins cannot be hidden from your sight or from your just judgment. Protect me from the shame of that universal condemnation. And as for your beloved, those who for your sake delight in respecting someone unworthy as myself—for they look at my attractive religious garb without knowing the concealed defects and call someone pitiful as myself “blessed”—may you, resourceful, bountiful, truly blessed, lover of humankind and merciful to all, for the sake of the sighs of a most wretched person like me, deal with them according to their faith. On the terrible day of judgment, that most trying election, grant them your incorruptible greatness and your never-fading crown.

83.6

For you are the pledged surety of salvation, for this starving slave to acquire the heavenly prize—the largesse of inexhaustible and unending treasures. We are honored and flourish by the word that proceeds from you.

Rear me beside the calm waters.

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

Establish in me, you who are changeless,
assurance set like a monument.
Anchor in me, you who are praised, sincere and unshakable hope.
Accord me, you who care for all, secure protection.
Grant me, the unsteady one, the virtue of serenity;
the solace of light to me, the doubtful one;
great happiness to me, the mournful one;
help in life to me, the weary one;
steady support to me, the abandoned one;
unscathed return to me, the fleeing one.

For yours is the universe, and all of these are from you, and through you are distributed the necessities of all living creatures. To you is fitting glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 84

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“I commit to you today”>

84.1

Heavenly Monarch, exalted King, Lord of all, the expectation of everyone, Creator of the seen, establisher of the unseen, cause of being, shaper of things to come, giver of light, prompter of dawn, preparer of the morrow, revealer of the evening, composer of the night, ingenious artisan, applier of wisdom, blessed pardoner, dissolver of sin, banisher of pain, dissipater of bitterness, preserver of tranquility, inducer of slumber, arranger of sleep, grantor of rest, of rhythmic breath, and of persisting senses, scatterer of phantoms, moderator of dreams, displacer of fears, transformer of sadness, queller of anxiety, disperser of doubts, disintegrator of drifting thoughts, frightener of deceptions, basher of demons, vanquisher of disease, and suppressor of scandal:

Protect me with your hand that created the heavens.
Strengthen me with your exalted right hand.
Gather me under your almighty wings.
Cover me with your divine care.
Embrace me with the oversight of your heavenly host.
Encircle me with your assembly of immortals.
Surround me with the cohort of your angels.

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Chase away the enemy with the forces of your vigilant ones.
Support me, the shaking one, through the prayers
of your divine Mother.
Assign your armies of the Firstborn to guard me.

Open the eyes of my mind along with my ordinary eyes.
Calm down the passions that weigh me down
along with my troubled soul.

Lift away, Lord, the lingering foolishness from my senses.
Remove, sole Doer of good, my thick and heavy mask.

May your mercy dawn with the breaking of day.
May your Sun of Righteousness penetrate the gloom of my heart
with morning light.
May the ray of your glory light the torch in the council-chamber
of my mind.
May the lordly inscription of your cross cast (its shadow)
all over my soul and body.

I commit to you today this tabernacle made fit for you, with the reliquary of my soul in it.
For you are God, inscrutable, generous to all, perfect in every way, and blessed forever. Amen.

Prayer 85

*Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil
Speaking with God from the depths of the heart
<“Make me arrive at what I hope for”>*

85.1

Now, though our wakeful vigil appears like some kind of sleep to you, in true faith our silence even in stupor continues with open, unblinking eyes. Direct me, then, with your Spirit's wisdom to finish successfully this work of my hands, the prayers with my sighing voice.

Strengthen me, Lord, in my persevering, bold efforts.
Be my associate, given my weakness.
Lighten the beginning of this my task.
Quicken, you who are always able, the work I have set before me.
Ease the course to its completion.

Bring me joyfully to its conclusion.
Make me arrive at what I hope for.
Be my companion throughout my journey.
Speed me toward the beneficial, in my ascending flight.
Be at my right side when I am in danger.
Let your voice be heard in my time of need.
Grant me life with your hand at the time of my drowning.
Warn me with your finger in my time of trouble.
Level the most harmful, hindering obstacles.
Send me an angel as you did to Habakkuk.
Give me words at the assembly of the tribunal.
Plant wisdom in me when I am being scrutinized.
Shelter me miraculously, with the cloud of your will.
Calm my stormy sea with your Wood of Life.
Restrain my present way of life with your command.

For if your mercy wills it here, Lord, the liquid waves of the sea will become harder than rock. Or if you were to abandon me on dry land, the solid earth will shake in an unstable way and will slide from under me.

85.2

Jesus, accept with favor the supplications I make to you, and turn my most imagined apprehensions into great assurance. As in the time of the most destructive flood, those who were fearlessly unconcerned throughout the stretch of the earth were lost, bereft of your mercy, and those who trusted in your name, O Merciful One, stood on the rocking deck of the covered, constructed ark and were saved. Even so, rescue this suppliant with your love for humankind—though I keep swaying this way and that—and deliver me to the harbor of peace.

Bearing with me the spiritual rewards bestowed by you and leaving behind the heavy burden of sin that weighs down, I fall before you, Lord, in the words of your parable, uniting with you completely, inseparably, O blessed in all things. And when in prayer the purest heavenly beings join the earthly martyrs, who were tested by water and fire and who, upon their departure from this life, prayed for us—leaving us their remembrance for encouragement—may they join us saying in unison, “So be it! So be it!” Amen.

Prayer 86

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

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<“I plead for all the dead”>

86.1

Praiseworthy and forbearing King, have mercy upon all souls through these sighs of sorrowful laments composed in various forms, especially upon those souls who had lost hope of salvation, who died unprepared, with lamps extinguished for lack of oil. Remember me herewith, my compassionate Lord, and count me justified in this request also, for in your splendid and astounding majesty you combined opposites in the composition of humans: a little gravity, a little levity, on the one hand coolness, on the other heat, so that by keeping the opposites in balance, we might be called just, faithful to this state of equality. And however virtuous we might be judged in this, when ascending high, let us keep in view and not forget that we are made of insignificant clay and that we shall receive the crown for perseverance. But we deviated from this covenantal statute and strayed like animals, stooping low and being bound to the earth, in some instances by disease, in others by cruelty, and in some by gluttony and desire for fancy foods, as if a beast has long inhabited our nature. Sometimes one of the four (primary elements) lunges forward abruptly and in uncontrollable speed, acting savagely. And though warmed by the fervor of our love for you and by the token of your spark which is in us, the coldness that is its counterpart extinguishes it, hampering the good. And although we ascend to you with the airy ways of angels, the weight and density of our primary element, earth, hinders us by pulling us down.

86.2

And now, defeated on all fronts and completely forsaken, like a feeble cripple, I am utterly rejected, lost, and banished. Consumed by many things, I was captured by death. Having thus forfeited grace, I seek mercy with a shameful face. I, possessor of all (sin), plead for all the dead who are alive in you. For you are able, with infinite means, to save those who are lost, the dead like me. For you everything is possible, especially since you have power that knows no weakness, and you take delight in exercising your will. Therefore, when these two complementary and renewing graces—power and will—come together, the despair that afflicts the race of sinners is lifted away and the light of your good news arrives with your order to heal our souls, Lord of all, blessed forever. Amen.

Prayer 87

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<"If I reach old age">

87.1

And now, since I am nearing the beginning of the end of this modest testament of lamentation, Lord, with these prayers, put an end to those blameworthy acts I deprecate that have become a bad habit with me. You yourself established the expected good news for a condemned person like me, saying, "It is not the will of my Father, that any of these little ones should be lost." And further, "This is the will of my Father, that I shall not lose those he has entrusted to me."

87.2

Behold, you are blessed for your compassion,
ever lauded for your kindness,
confessed for your forbearing,
acknowledged for your visitation,
preached as Lord for your saving,
praised for your bounty,
honored for your protecting,
glorified for your redeeming,
worshiped for your infinite highness,
adored for your inscrutability,
extolled alone for your triumph,
acclaimed for your great power,
worshiped with incense for your mercy,
embraced for your ineffable meekness,
partaken of for your being lowly.

(You are blessed) with your heavenly parent, God of all consolation, and with your ever-good Holy Spirit, who legislated not to abandon the fallen beast of one's enemy nor the man who stumbles because of his irrationality, and whose gifts were bestowed on me because of you, Almighty. The virtue of your majesty is celebrated without ceasing by the eternal glorifiers in the heights. Please honor my pleading voice through the supplications of the martyrs, (rising) with pleasing scent, aromatic fragrance.

Through the redeeming effect of these prayers of reconciliation, Almighty, heal my original sin and invisible wounds, including the intermediate and the last, those that kill both soul and body, internal and external. Erase and clean with the medicine of your mercy the traces, the lines, and the stigma of these blows, the accumulated bites of various kind that show you the essence of my character, both the abominable and that which pleases you.

87.3

And if I reach old age, having been guided by you

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to my deserved death,
do not forsake me in my frailty;
do not disdain my gray hair;
do not destroy the broken;
do not bring down the bent;
do not bash the humbled;
do not abandon the flickering flame to the wind;
do not force the fainting to hard labor;
do not leave the freezing without a coat.

Let not the afflicted remain without a cure.
Let not the dilapidated dwelling be left untended.
Let not the aged image be disgraced.
Let not the bounteous (food) be tasteless.
Let not the slightest grace be dishonored.
Let not things of old be held in contempt.
Let not the ship of my soul be wrecked.
Let not the thread of hope be severed.
Let not the road bridge collapse.
Let not the sage's attention be diverted.
Let not what you have shaped be destroyed.
Let not the wings of flight be clipped.
Let not the charm of beauty turn to ugliness.
Let not the rays of light be withdrawn.
Let not the windows of the eyes be shut.
Let not their light get blocked.
Let not the articulate image fall.

87.4

I pray you, O Compassionate One, I beseech you with all the saints, listen to my prayers in advance, so that they will not be forgotten at a later time. You guided me, as the Psalm says, and saved my life. Relieve me, Lord, as with the Psalmist, of doubts and perplexities that cause me fear. Though I am not worthy to receive from you even the common sustenance of a hired servant, you are able—as usual—to do good even to the ungrateful like me. The wonders and the ineffable favors belong to you, the forbearing one in all circumstances, who alone works miracles, continuously blessed with the Father and your Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 88

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Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“The lasting prayers of this book”>

88.1

Now with my stricken soul, my derelict mind, and my crushed heart, I pour the water of my will and the droplets of my tears as I am reminded of the prophet Samuel of Arimathea, who upon taking the bowl poured the water before you who see all, placing himself as an example to the people, in confession and obeisance at your feet, Giver of life.

88.2

And now, King of heaven, accept this weave of prayers of contrition with sighs, as you breathe in the scent of this bloodless word-sacrifice. And blessing the letters of this book of lamentation, purify it and stamp it as an eternal monument among (books of) worship pleasing to you.

May it stand before you eternally
and be recalled in your hearing always.
May it be uttered upon the lips of your chosen
and voiced by the mouths of your angels.
May it be laid out before your throne
and offered in the court of your sanctuary.
May it be offered as incense in the temple of your name,
and may its fragrance rise to the altar of your glory.
May it be kept in your vaults
and accepted among your possession.
May it be recited to the ears of nations
and preached to all peoples.
May it be inscribed on the portals of the mind
and imprinted on the doorposts of the senses.
May it recount the iniquities I have confessed
as if (I am) with the living.
May I be deemed to live through the lasting prayers of this book,
even though I shall die as a mortal.

May it, by your will, Lord, remain indestructible, so that it might continue to counter me—the condemned—with the sins I have confessed. (May it do so) like an ever-active judge, fair criticizer, unreserved rebuker, unsparing indicter, relentless fault-finder, unwelcoming insulter, ruthless informant, pitiless torturer, unbribable executioner, unrestrained revealer, audacious discloser, a notorious protester declaring to the world as with a loud trumpet never

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to be silenced or stopped.

88.3

This book will cry out in my place, with my voice, as if it were me.
It will disclose what is covered up and proclaim the secrets.
It will bemoan the things done and declare the forgotten.
It will reveal the invisible and spell out the pretensions.
It will preach about the depths of the soul and tell of sins.
It will lay bare the unseen and display the shape of what is concealed.

Through this book may traps become discernible,
pitfalls be discovered,
the unspeakable faults rebuked,
remnants of evil wrung dry.

May the life of your grace and mercy reign, O Christ, even in the treasure trove of my dry bones, so that at the time of renewal, when the first light of spring dawns on that bright day of restoration and your dew of eternal salvation refreshes my soul, I may again become green and blossom anew and send shoots of intelligible goodness that will never dry out—according to the hope held out in your inspired Scriptures.

And to you, only Savior, and to your Spirit, of the same essence as the Father, to your united lordship and ineffable Trinity, all glory and adoration with mystic praise forever. Amen.

Prayer 89

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Son of God is your confessed name”>

89.1

God and Lord, you are Life and Creator, merciful, compassionate, Light, forbearing, ungrudging, lover of humankind, all-merciful, Giver of gifts, Savior, blessed, praised, lauded, protective stronghold, rampart of trust, good without guile, radiance without darkness, pardoner of sins, healer of wounds, mystery beyond reach, immanent among the transcendent, refuge from despair. Son of God is your confessed name, with your powerful and astounding Father, and with your almighty Spirit worshiped with you.

To you be glory and praise with thanksgiving. Amen.

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Prayer 90

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Mirroring again your changeless image”>

90.1

Lauded God in heaven, sole Creator, omnipotent Lord, astounding Majesty, you are compassion worthy of blessing, mercy to be confessed, benevolence to be adored, provident care to be revered, philanthropy to be celebrated, protection to be venerated with incense, inscrutably exalted, willingly immanent, trusted refuge, comforter of hearts, dissipater of grief, reliever of pain, end of despair, forgiveness of debts, remedy for shortcomings, checker of passions, regulator of words, restrainer of tongues, monitor of breath, controller of speech, collector of thoughts, educator of the will, soother of emotions, stiller of storms, calmer of waves. Yours are the wings of the ruling part of my mind, which, when wanting in wisdom, you draw back to yourself.

90.2

Benevolent one—always to be thanked with praise;
forbearing in meekness and humility, you dwell in the souls
of the saints fervently and through untold miracles.
King of all beings, known by all as merciful, you are the progenitor
and pioneer of the flow of love.
Way to life, you kindly lead me, the seeker, to your heavenly light.
Extender of the greatly trusted hand, you do not allow a stumbler
like me to fall down.
Image of hope, you appear clearly before praying hands
as the true assurance.
Awaited rest, you never lead to perilous condemnation.
Grantor of freedom, with yearning you proffer salvation
full and free.
Grandeur beyond envy, you adorn my ignoble matter of earth
with your glory.
Brilliance without shadow, with rays from astounding heights
you inundate me, a wretch, and make me flourish again.
Pardoner of countless sins, you restore those deprived of salvation
to their former brilliance, making them glorious again.
Enabler, you make reaching the infinite heights forever possible.
Sure way of departure, you lead to the promised joys.
Desired blessedness, it pleases me to yield my breath of life

that I might find you, the Living One.
Unwavering will, strongly bent on redeeming me, a slave,
 all praise to you.
Unerring balm of life, you perform miracles even over the dead
 who are completely decomposed.
Undoubted Creator of all, in the blink of an eye you resurrect
 in their undiminished physical being those consumed by fire,
 blown to the winds, or torn by the claws of beasts.
Valor without parallel, it is right to boast enthusiastically
 of your magnificence.

90.3

Look from heaven, O Lord, with cheerful kindness upon me, one beset by most destructive dangers, and calm my multiple anxieties that make me sob. The deadly throngs have risen against me, violent warriors heavily armed with all manner of torturing devices. Be they images of heinous sins hateful to you, manifestations of stabbing pain, or destructive maladies, repel them, take them away, cut them off, wipe them out—banish them to a distant place for their second destruction, never to return. And erect the sign of your cross as a lasting tombstone, raised as a destiny of life for me, who trusts in you, O Salvation.

90.4

And may, through this invincible, infallible, and irresistible power of your astounding majesty,

the Satanic secret snares be undone,
the machinations be disrupted,
the stumbling blocks be removed,
the set traps be foiled,
the ambush be discovered,
the tricks of the treacherous one be revealed,
the net covers be removed,
the weeds and tares be burned,
the tyrant's wicked spells be cursed,
the deception ropes of the hunter unto death be cut,
the liar's accusations be confounded,
the slanderer's weapons be caught short,
the swords be dropped from the hands of the bearer of death,
the provoker's preparations be thwarted,
the agitator's cables be broken,
the false appearances of the hypocrite be unmasked,
the vehement attacks of the haughty ones be stopped,
the flocks of vultures be scattered,

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the bands of thieves be disbanded,
the masses of barbarians be dispersed,
the rebels' strongholds be demolished,
the bluster of the audacious ones be prevented,
the rainstorms of the tempter be dispelled,
the fog of the schismatic be evaporated to dryness,
the horn of the tyrant be broken,
the raised ensigns of the fraudulent be grinded,
the bragging of the proud be shattered,
the confrontations of phalanxes be repulsed,
the joint troops of Beliar—
 both disembodied and embodied—be destroyed,
the invaders from one route be set to flight in seven directions
 and fall into the pits they have dug for me,
the winters of the sower of discontent be severe,
the ties that bind (me) to the tireless outlaw be severed,
the flatterer's kiss upon my forehead be deemed disgusting,
the barrage of the tormentor's arrows be halted,
the trickster's boat be always rocky,
the teeth of the biter be ripped from their roots.

90.5

Through the blessed Wood of Life, upon which you were bound,
 incomprehensible God;
through the memory of your spikes, with which you were stretched
 upon the instrument of death, Creator of heaven and earth;
through your lordly blood, by which, as with a fishhook,
 you caught the great dragon;
through the bitterness of the gall which you drank,
 by which you drained the deadly potion of the destroyer;
through the recounting in the desired history of your dreadful
 passion, by which you shamed and silenced the insolence
 of the opponent;
through your inscrutable, altogether inexplicable name,
 before which the visible and invisible natures
 tremble with utter consternation and are condemned:
may all these gifts of grace be for me—a confessor—protection, healing,
 and pardon.

As for the serpent that brought the bitterness of death, thereby afflicting the universe with evil, may these bring his own death. May he be captured and bound, condemned to blows of incurable suffering and annihilation.

O Creator, may your mercy toward me and the breath of my soul toward you be united
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inseparably as one.

90.6

And may anyone who reads these pleas of an intercessory voice crying out in expectant prayer, old or young, maiden or youth, or even a servant girl imploring with love of God, receive from you equally and impartially the blessed portion of freedom from sin, being reestablished in renewed immaculate purity, mirroring again your changeless image.

May you, for whose powerful, unutterable, inscrutable, and incomprehensible divinity (all things) are possible, look once more upon these cries with audible sighs offered to you from the lips of all—for the sake of your benevolent Father in heaven and the Holy Spirit, coequal in glory and Giver of life, through the intercession of your Mother of God and the prayers of all the saints. For you created everything and from you all things came into being, and you rule over all, and all creation gives glory to you, one with the very essence of the timeless Trinity, infinitely glorified together, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 91

Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil

Speaking with God from the depths of the heart

<“Watch over me with your heavenly hosts”>

91.1

Lord, Lord of mercy and God of compassion,
majestic name, astounding voice, serious summons,
inscrutable message, thundering speech, pleasing sound,
hope of good acts (and) of most merciful kindness,
before whom all creatures quake in fear.

Terrified by your threatening wrath,
the Seraphim take to flight and the Cherubim huddle together;
the choirs of luminous (angels) circle around;
the principalities of heaven—one and all—shake in amazement,
they rejoice with great trembling in one jubilant celebration.

The demons are frightened, their evil bands recoil;
the spirits that love darkness are foiled;
the alien angels are banished to the abyss;

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the attacks of the assailants are stopped by the sign of your cross;
the spiteful Amalekites are shut in the infernal prison;
the enemy troops are tied with knots which cannot be untied;
the armed warriors of death are inescapably imprisoned;
the demonic hordes are arrested as in irons
 by your fearsome command;
the rank-and-file opponents are reduced to silence;
the invisible mobs of evil spirits are bound and waste away;
the emissaries of the Antichrist are restrained with tight chains.

91.2

In this midnight hour I stretch out my hand to reach for your lordly sign, which does not dim in the darkness of ignorance; it is fully visible, since you dwell in unapproachable light. With grateful praise I implore you, Almighty, to take this endangered soul under the protection of your wings.

Save me from the onrush of murky illusions.
Endow my heart's eyes with clear vision.
Strengthen me with your Wood of Life in the midst of my nightmares.
Sprinkle the boundaries of my cell with your blood.
Mark my threshold with drops from your life-giving side.

May the ceiling of my dwelling bear the shape
 of your four-winged (cross).
May the mystery of your saving passion intersect the vision
 of my raised eyes.
May the instrument of your torment be fixed upon my door lintel.
May my hopeful faith hang upon your blessed tree.

With it, Lord, stop the slayer of souls. Let the protector of light enter freely to ease the heavy weight of my pains, to lighten the burden of my guilt, here in the silent chamber of my mind as I curve myself (in fetal posture) on the mat of my bed. Recalling the bitter fruits of despair, I confess to you, Omniscient, my wicked deeds in their countless forms.

91.3

Give me rest, the one wearied by multifarious toils. Remove the turmoil of doubt from my broken spirit, the bitterness along with the grief, the sighing along with the misery, the anxiety along with the wretchedness, the cries along with the calamities, the brokenness along with the stupor, the frenzy along with the confusions, the inertness along with the follies, the cooling of love along with the feverishly hot passion for filth.

Come to my aid—for I am weak with much grief and poor in spirit—with your right hand of beneficial grace, with your hand of renewal, with your life-giving fingers, your ever-radiant

glory, with your everlasting presence, with your cheerful countenance, with the essence of your venerable being, with your revered greatness.

End this oppressive sighing that is suffocating me, the new tricks of the evil one, the old deceptions of the accuser, the alien impulses (impelled) by the trainer unto death, the unfortunate imaginings (prompted) by the incessant destroyer, the illusions (caused) by the cruel demon, the bewitching fiery breath of the enchanting sorcerer.

Protect me in my place of rest in this tranquility resembling death, from hidden thoughts, from serious errors, from large stumbling blocks, from small missteps, from the misleading evil of idleness.

Banish from me, an errant servant, my improper thoughts of sensuality, degrading passions, repulsive behavior, unbecoming ambitions, wrong tendencies, ridiculous illusions, loathsome ideas, abhorrent waffle.

91.4

Since I have taken refuge in you, arm me with an unerring heart and an undefiled body against blowing winds, tyrannical rages, battering storms, pounding tempests, attacks of beasts. Let not my heart's vision turn dark with the closing of my eyes; rather, let it be awakened, become bright, spritely, shining in your presence, Lord Jesus Christ, with the brightness of the inextinguishable light.

With your word, cleanse my bedchamber of cunning, obsessions, memories repugnant to you, thoughts hostile to heaven, illicit follies, ingratitude to your Lordship, and heresies contrary to faith in God.

Watch over me with your heavenly hosts—dominions, principalities, invincible powers, pure ministers of your holy Godhead, the apostles with the good news of the Gospel, the prophets with their Testaments, and the prayers of the blessed ones offered at the end of their lives—that I might fall asleep with them in your fear, sorrowful, and wake up by your grace, doubly joyful.

Though I sleep with anxiety, may I rise again with spiritual joy. Though I drown in sin, may I stand again with clear conscience and spotless purity.

91.5

Hear my prayers, the sighing with my earnest voice, you who alone are most compassionate, through the intercession of your Holy Mother, all the righteous, and the chosen martyrs.

Glory to you from all people, raised up to you with that from me, along with that by the immortal choirs of Holy Angels, in praise of your Father, our God, and your Holy Spirit, the creator and renewer of everything, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 92

*Meditation on the blessed plank of wood, the merry chime of the semantron
An imploration composed in conformity with its symbolic significance*

92.1

I give you thanks, O Compassionate One, only lover of humankind, Creator of heaven and earth, Son of the living God. Upon waking up with the breaking sound of your inviting wood, I am seized by yearning for the commemoration of your love. By the resonance of its declarative strokes we are stirred, we stand up and rise from the death-like slumber. Summoned by a consoling voice, as it were, we are drawn to the blessed hour of worship, to be in your presence with joy, facing the altar of recompense.

92.2

Glory to you, indefinable name and unrestricted power, who cared for my salvation by so many means! Eternal essence, praised with thanksgiving, through wonderous types you prefigured back then the things to come. Through this soothing instrument, a modest wooden object, you thunder loudly to shake me from the stupor of sleep, as if you rouse me from my slothfulness with a mix of admonishing reproach, adding a spur of strictness to the gentleness of your fatherly love. Through the chiming strokes of the two mallets, you rain your love for humanity in a kind way: you neither sink me gently into a lull with gentle rhythm nor frighten my anxious soul with unconcerned trepidation.

On my knees I bow down to you, Creator of all, who has shown us even now a clear sample of that astounding sound (to be heard) on the great day of resurrection. You brought me back to life from stillness, the wordlessness of hell. You sought a fool like me to invite to (partake) your wine that gladdens. You made this (instrument) the dresser of the immaculate bride for your love, O Bridegroom. With this small spur you struck fear in the monstrous demons; you laid this object (like) a heavy yoke on the shoulder of the Rebel, to tame him; you placed it (like) a restraining bridle on the jaw of the Slanderer.

May your infinite highness be forever exalted, great God, who transformed the tree of transgression into the liberating grace unto life, who made wise again a decrepit fool like me through your spiritual wisdom. Never wanting us to forget, you always pointed out the signifiers of the incurably gnashing and ever-increasing strikes of the serpent. The Trinity's triple binding of this (creature) that has harmed me is indicated by the repeated three strokes (with the mallet) at the end (of the chime).

92.3

To you who care for all, I send up enthusiastic praise with the fragrance of incense, since on quite many occasions you pulled my indebted soul out of the pantheon of false gods into worshiping you.

With this Sacred Wood, robust and astounding,
you expounded the truth; you thus magnified aptly
the honor of your newly proclaimed Gospel.

Its very appeal declares loudly the power of your heavenly dominion,
Lord Christ, who rules over all imperial states on earth.

It is the sign of joy upon your final victory in battle, Jesus,
in which the metaphorical Pharaoh is seized and bound.

This dressed timber delivers constant blows on the head
of the haughty evildoer.

By its (sound) the children of Zion are summoned to battle against
the despot who rules the world of darkness.

Consecrated with chrism, it is a long-established house
of God that neither wears out nor decays—
following traditional divine teaching.

It is a marker of time for the future recompense,
openly denoting the message of its kin and counterpart—
the Tree of Life that is in your divine garden.

It (sends) a rallying call for safe and hasty gathering
in the house of blessing.

It resembles the tree of knowledge,
placed to distinguish good from evil.

It is a great reminder of the lordly sign of your cross,
depicted upon my face by your Holy Spirit.

It announces the good news of your glorious coming
to the Queen, kept pure for you, the King.

It is an encouraging exhorter to being in the ranks
of the rejoicing saints.

It is a chaste lover, inspiring an innocent yearning to join
the Virgin Queen, the mother of all, veiled in splendor.

It is a preparer for the hidden treasures that adorn the soul.

It is reminiscent of the Lord's message proclaimed at Sinai,
by which the ever-glorious maiden, the immaculate mother
of pure children, adorns herself.

92.4

With the sounding of this wood, stronger than the trumpeting of horns at Jericho, you overthrew flatly the tyranny of Beliar. With this wooden slingshot you released the stones at Goliath. You fashioned this new javelin as an awesome witness to the destruction of Satan, for with this tool you pulled up the deep roots of sin and through its beneficial work you recommitted me to duties I had forgotten. If I call this sound the predictive voice of the coming of God's Word, I would not be wrong but would be telling the truth. By this humble vessel—material yet bearing the spirit—the majesty of your works, Jesus, is proclaimed with

greater emphasis. Through this simple trustworthiness, you draw the attention of dwellers on earth to your bounteous help and gifts from on high.

92.5

Confessed is your inscrutable name, O lover of humankind, for your provident care, revered with the fragrant mystery of holiness, O indefinable form of light. With this wood of dual significance, you release properly aimed arrows that have long range and carry sound through the air—(as though) possessing a living soul within them, foiling the secret designs of the archer of darkness, forcing him into retreat with eternal defeat. As if you are waging battle from a mighty fortress, formidable, impregnable, hurling missiles through the knobs on this plank of wood, like sending a volunteer angel to confound the enemy. By virtue of your majesty's command, with the added grace of the unction with your blood, you had this horn—with which the deranged tyrant was stabbed—sharpened on a whetstone, like your cross of redemption. By its clamor, louder than a celestial chorus, the stability of the portal of the (human) will, the improper and most apprehensive debauchery of the shortsighted (people) was bashed, destroying the wisdom (expressed) through the Jewish heart and the shadowy house.

92.6

I offer you praise, immortal King. I pray that you renew that which your mighty right hand created and established.

With this (sound) you drove away from among us the wicked peril of the cunning accuser, the torturing intensity of sin, the bitter breath of the deceiver, the destructive elements associated with the fear of death, the delusions resulting in harmful and depressing feelings, the diabolical whines that cause us to faint.

With this wooden chariot helped by the wings of your sign, dispel again clouds that rain fire, thunders that bring hail, painful darts of deception spewed with fire and smoke by the many-footed dragon: the killing sword, the advancing line of battle, the wild thoughts that overtake like hopping demons. Terrified by this small object, they flee away with much trembling, knowing well that the Lord rises to judgment with a sound like this. And when (touched) by the various modes of this reminder through such atypical call that proclaims to all nations the most trying judgment by fire, the pious warriors, fittingly armed with the sword of the Holy Spirit, are spurred on with courage to duly pursue a happy martyrdom.

92.7

Lo, the main trumpet has sounded! With it God has ascended with (songs of) blessing. Let this be declared throughout the world, be resounded in the ears of the scattered heathen. In the words of Isaiah, the voice of the watchmen of the great God has grown louder, and we rejoice with them, using their very words! Through this (wood) the enemies of the cross have become separated like the waters. Ever since this substance (of wood) was celebrated with a designation as the symbol of life, eating of the fruit of the first tree had been brought into

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disrepute. Iron, as a necessity for war, had been discredited ever since the great symbolism of this wood emitting the sound of life came to be inscribed as “holy to the Lord” on the reins of the horse. The sword of authority in human hands had been sheathed in deference to the anointed staff of the heavenly Shepherd. No hammer of any artisan had left a scratch on a stone of the temple, yet over the altar built by God this sanctified wood hovers with the wings of the cross.

It does not trumpet for a limited time from a certain corner, at the beginning of the month or after the seven times seven years of the jubilee, but from the dawn of the universe to its far reaches—over the waters of many seas and their islands—it resounds loudly with unstoppable, divinely sustained proclamation of the good news.

The swords of the murderer were broken upon the sight of this Wood, and the useless (weapons) were transformed into ploughshares and pruning hooks.

92.8

Its sound is not like the harsh and intense echo sent
from deep ravines or gorges, nor does it do violence to the air,
in the words of a foreign sage.
It does not pierce the ear with annoying sharpness,
nor does it blast the skull with distressing aggravation.
It does not cause bones to grow startling thorns in the soul,
nor does it stun the mind in various ways.
It does not ring like a copper bell, nor does it bang unpleasantly
with the same noise, like a stone on the anvil.
It is one of the main traditional vessels in the invincible storeroom
of New Zion, which Christian clerics—like the Levites—
treat with care and reverence.
It is like the voice of an angel, and in the words of the speaker
in proverbs, it resembles the call of a bird that impresses
in a special way.
It is a new instrument for the graceful music of the Gospel,
awakening the Spirit of God more readily in us than the Psalter
did in Elisha.
It is the precursor of instruments with intestinal strings,
played passionately with mournful singing.
It is a cymbal clashing words with good admonishment to do good.

It is a new kind of flute, of a different sort that distances us from the old, both from the hollow noises of the pagans and the unripe thoughts of the Jews, about which the Lord said through the prophet, “Take these away from me.” He was rather pleased with this one and doubly honored it, for it wards off attacking demons and all other strokes of evil.

92.9

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And now, I have accepted with songs of blessing, lauding this sacred gift with praise, for my protection and to your glory, with thanksgiving from me and worship to you, a perfect artwork expressing your creative glory. May this divine sound pierce through the joints of my body to drive from my soul the deceptions of demons and block the inrush of corruption with the curse of sin. Make this object a symbol, a lyre of light, an invitation that cannot be retracted, an endless praise of your lordly distinctions.

O compassionate and mighty (Lord), I pray that you grant us again your protection against visible and invisible enemies. Give us, O generous hand, open and ready to offer and share all kinds of good things, a pleasant weather and beneficial rains. May by your order, voiced through this sound, the winds mixed with sweltering heat, the painful blasts, and the evil, deceitful attacks of old be curbed down. May all aggressive forces that lead us to difficulties be annihilated by this (instrument). May they melt, be cut down and killed by the joyous sound of this anointed wood: worms and mites and all their like, which, strengthened by our sins, wage war against us.

Make this plant of blessedness take root in us, so that by trusting in you, O great Protector, Creator of all, Lord of creation, it might become the tree of the thicket which held in its branches the foreseen sacred legacy of my renewed, present-day salvation blossoming into the fruit of eternal life through you, O Christ.

Upon the ringing of good news sounded by this glorious wood, may the demon-possessed enemies and the lying, many-handed creatures of the netherworld be set to flight and banished to the distant, deep, and dark abyss. May by this (sound) the consuming wounds and devastating blights be driven away from the boundaries of the fertile fields of our toil and from your cultivated and living land, and may the doubly unbecoming excesses caused by the devices of evil known to us be removed. May by this (sound) the faults generated by innate traitors in our two natures be truly done away with: one, alien and erroneous thoughts; the other, abominable and impure existences which stir defilements.

Deliver me, Lord Jesus, I pray you! Deliver me, O Benefactor! Reach out to me with your most praiseworthy right hand, and having helped me by it, keep me safe from these foes.

92.10

May your command be mingled with this (sound of the bell), so that my stupid, granite heart might again bear the fruits of your word. May you make it like a miracle-working staff to strike and pierce my (already) bleeding heart and forsaken soul, establishing it in uprightness and steadfastness, softening its hardness, so that I might awaken, sobered with a spirit of humility, like Paul and Matthew.

Lover of humankind, through this venerable wood remind me of the favors of your cross by which you did ineffable things. Lift away from me, Giver of life, the penalty of my sins by the glorious yoke upholding your new tabernacle. By your will, Almighty, may the ears of my stubborn heart be opened to this sound of life. May through it the ears of the deaf hear of your magnificent good works, of your concern, and may the tongues of the dumb be loosed through it. May the sight of the eyes be enlightened through it, that they might look upon you purely, in unwavering fixation. May gluttons, with restored wills, repent and be contrite.

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Lord, grant me, the bothered one, rain of tears. Let this be from you to us a message of joy, a sound of rejoicing, a voice of gladness, a soothing music, a substantial blessing, a means of salvation, an occasion for pardon, a banishment of grief, a freeing from entanglements, a release from anxiety, a letup of cares, a dispelling of sighs, an easing of groans, a protection for needs, a discipline of passions, a consolation for disappointments, a cure for pains, an ending to sluggishness, a warning to the invisible (foes).

92.11

May you lead me in the steps of the saints across this bridge of yearning, which neither hinders nor causes straying on the upward journey upon this heavenbound ladder, to present me to your blessed Father of astounding name, O Benefactor. May I be guided by your Spirit, to be united with you inseparably. And from your incorruptible creation—both animate and inanimate—to your one and only and united Lordship befits thanksgiving, glory, and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 93

Interpretive prayer on the light-giving oil of Holy Myron

93.1

Holy, astounding, and exalted name, infinite, constant, and yearning desire, praised without end by the glorifying singers of the *Sanctus*, you who dwell in the holiest place, who are filled with the most bountiful goodness, unreservedly generous, good light and praiseworthy dawn, worshipful glory, awe-inspiring and inscrutable, you are all in all. With these contractual words of hope, may I enter into a covenant of union with you, Almighty? Yes! Amen! Alleluia! Praised King of the universe, God of all, creator of beings and sovereign Lord, sole cause of all consequences, Savior, the Anointed, worshiped without ceasing.

93.2

For us, you are the interpreted meaning of this priceless treasure and irreplaceable wealth, Jesus Christ, heavenly King, whom the immortal and awe-inspiring beings, with mouths of light and breath of fire, serve with much trembling. Longingly and joyously—without distraction of the mind—they bow down to you on bended knee, in thanksgiving, Creator of all beings visible and invisible. You who are and were totally perfect and lacking nothing took our (nature) truly and fully, so that from your fullness you may fill us, O blessed and lauded forever, for the eternally incomprehensible mercy you showed for our salvation. Glory and praise to you, the

astounding one in ineffable sublimity, for your benevolence.

You are the source of grace given through the great mystery of anointing, wondrously revealing your light to us, O incomprehensible ray, boundless dawn, the sun that shines indiscriminately, star that defines equally the two elements (of time), lamp unto the feet and light upon the path, by means of which we see the meaning of this sacrament and compose this prayer. Like angels we celebrate by singing in a circle your Wisdom's generous giving of gifts, in purity of mind, offering fragrant frankincense worthy of the Savior through the gladdening oil of faultless confession.

For the first created man, my forefather, forever withering in the hands of sin, became a captive of death soon after he received the highest gift, the (divine) breath. He was pitifully and tragically bound to the rot of corruption, tied with a knot that cannot be untied to the tree that caused his fall—that fateful, most destructive tumble, depriving him of the Light and handing him over to this place of darkness. But you, compassionate Lord of mercy, always knew better the person you created than he knew himself. Because he longed for things that were not for him—given what he was, he could no longer look into your heavenly and unapproachable Light, your sublimity beyond definition.

You did not illuminate his surrounding with a perpetual and shadowless light, but for help in the slippery night, in the daunting darkness, you gave him oil with a wick immersed in it, a token of your immaculate union with us, braided with your love for humankind. So we who were exiled into the shadows of death through the formerly destructive tree of debt, lit with the flame of faith by means of the fruit of its related plant, will return with incense to the same place. Just as with your being spread upon the tree of death you had us spread upon it, by this great mystery you united us with the Tree of Life.

93.3

Now, just as the day is incomplete without night, house management is incomplete without the essential oil. For as ordinary, unconsecrated oil illuminates the sight of the physical eyes, so the oil sanctified and set apart by the mystery of your grace-imparting breath gives luster to our invisible souls, uniting us in a wondrously glorious way with you, who cannot be seen. For as we believe that by the immersion of the body in the illuminating baptismal font our souls are cleansed, so we are convinced without any doubt that when anointed with chrism, the oil enhanced with hope, we receive through it the power of the Spirit. And as by your lordly and blessed command you decreed in advance the pardoning of those afflicted with sin and performed miracles of healing as persuasive evidence against those who remained unrepentant and did not believe in this, so also with this oil made perfect with the light of salvation: when poured on us to anoint our outer temple, it enters the inner man in an unseen and mysterious way, giving him a new birth.

93.4

This admixed substance is a superb image of you, Creator of heaven, for those who bore the oil received the benefit of your mercy; also, in praise you defined yourself by such words as “I,

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the Lord, am merciful." Since your name is associated with love, O God, it follows that in part, and dependent on it, you are represented by your economy toward us.

This fatty oil is a fitting analogy for a great and sublime mystery, though of the density of the earth and of earthly reality. Since this (fatty) part of the animal is not for food, as commanded in the Law, but is specified in its entirety as fruit (offering) to you, O Creator, an analogy could be made here also. As a potent offering made to the Lord, fittingly presented as a token for your favor, O Exist God, true travel-mate of my soul, (may this oil be) set aside and pledged to you, O Creator. For neither the lifeblood nor the savory meat offering, which are symbols of my soul and strength—much less the flesh of my limbs—are consumed by fire, but this portion offered as collation before the lordly throne of your heavenly Kingdom, this substance with a flame burning ever brightly.

93.5

The first-born male could not preside as judge over examiners unless he was designated by anointing, nor could the priest set foot in the holiest place unless he was made perfect by this (oil).

Jacob poured oil upon the stone symbolically representing the mystery of the altar established long ago. He even saw your descent, O ineffably exalted, on that proper ladder, O God exalted beyond words, to accompany me on my upward journey. And he erected the anointed monument for later generations to behold.

The splendor of the Aaronic priesthood thrived by anointing, following your command, O great God. In the words of the Psalm, when oil poured down superbly over his head and beard, he was amazingly transformed in life, signifying awareness of the former glory (of Adam) and your life-giving grace through your union with us.

Kingship was not privileged with the dignity of your image, O Creator, were it not for the consecrating ordination with the horn filled with oil and the placing of the adorned crown upon the head in your name, O Christ.

And how could I forget the first among these sublime figures, Melchizedek, your servant, O Great One, the image of your infiniteness? Was not Melchizedek the symbol of your awesome truth on the Mount of Olives, where later your feet stood, God incarnate, with the heavenly angels, in that very place of the fruit which produces the oil? Thus he was invested by you as presiding overseer with royal dignity to guard the tomb of the forefather until you appeared, revealing fully the quintessence of your regenerating the Adamic race.

93.6

And now, since grace is yours and to you is befitting praise with thanksgiving, O blessed Son of God, through your kind consideration make these prayers offered with the oil (of faith), imbued with incense, filled with myrrh, a cause of glory to you, and for me a sinner an occasion of healing. Apply, Lord Jesus, this oil of light to my invisible hurts, and dribble into the cauterized pores of these deadly wounds droplets of the blessed oil of your salvation with the undiluted wine of your love, bound by the protective bandages of your providential care, so

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that this testament, my explanatory discourse in prayer, might take off on the wings of your Spirit to find its fine and proper niche.

Your Spirit, O Most High, hovered over David as of the day he was consecrated by anointing. Saul became a different man and joined certain prophets when the anointing oil descended upon his head.

The Assyrian Empire was conquered, taken captive by the Anointed, and joined to the house of Israel. Certain illustrious Caesars, august and prominent among the uncivilized and barbarous nations, upon whom was sprinkled the dew of this life-giving oil, were caught as if by a hook, joining your household in service to you, great God.

The word *anointed* was applied with a loud voice to Cyrus because of his honoring the heavenly one.

The Psalmist's voice esteemed the title *anointed* greater than that of *prophet*, giving it priority when stating the prohibition, "Do not touch ... and do not harm."

The divine mission was entrusted to Elijah on (Mount) Horeb, marking the end of Baal worship as of the anointing of Jehu and Hazael.

"Your name is ointment poured forth," O Bridegroom, was inscribed long ago, affirmed in the inspired words of the sage.

Just as our spirit is the eternal image and expression of God, so may this trifle reflect your great image, that we may be united with you by receiving your grace.

93.7

And why do I lay out such long, excessive, and overstretched examples and analogies in poetic prayers before you, the exalted and astounding one! You Lord and Giver of life, Creator of heaven and earth, began to preach the good news of the Kingdom upon being anointed and testified to by John as the Anointed (Messiah) and "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." At your blessed anointing, the Holy Spirit was with you, indeed the Godhead in fullness and absolute unity, so your name is worshiped through the mystery of the grace proclaimed marvelously among the saints, for you readily took upon yourself the servile body of Adam, henceforth to be forever exalted therein.

Opening the prophetic passage of Isaiah, you, the Incarnate God, read it yourself, true to the words dictated to your servants, Lord. And after revealing yourself as the Anointed indicated in those words, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me," you closed the book, thereby showing the sharp distinction between the varying anointings: ours with but a little luster with a drop of grace and yours indicated by the essence shared equally with the Father and your Holy Spirit.

When you first made yourself known to us earthly beings, in our likeness, you were superbly praised by the glorifying angels as the Messiah of whom the prophet spoke predictively early on, and of the very voice of your Father at the Jordan and on the chosen Mount Tabor, saying, "He announces his anointed among the people." The ordination you received was also predicted through the Psalter's voice, the glory and honor bestowed on you, Almighty, "God, your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness."

93.8

Lord Christ, “breath of our face,” your name is truly “Anointed”; thus, out of your benevolence you breathed in our face the breath of life along with your light.

O confessed Love for humankind! One blessed with wisdom spoke of another who has said, “He shall testify before the Lord’s anointed,” and who went on to confirm the good news, adding, “I have not taken so much as a pair of sandals from any man.”

In praising the bride, the holy church, the Song of Songs makes known the immediate and unfolding mystery of God as spiced wine, the myrrh of virtue, and the primary oil—even more myrrh and frankincense of a pure life kneaded with the powder of sweet oils.

When Daniel described with a voice beyond ordinary expression your life-giving death, Christ King of heaven, he clearly testified that “the anointed one will be killed after sixty-nine weeks,” calling you the anointed leader.

The lampstand of Zechariah, grandson of Iddo and son of Berechiah, through its ingenious system of oil supply to the seven bowls on its branches, keeping each torch constantly lit, symbolizes the anointing and salvation poured from your bounty upon us.

There is also that old prefiguration in the Law concerning the altar of the sanctuary, where it was customary to bring unleavened loaves and fine flour mixed with oil, calves marked with oil, portions named for the Lord, and certain fowl sprinkled with blood, which is related to fat and which in turn is closely linked to that of this mystery, fittingly signifying you, only begotten Son, blessedly lauded by God who is great.

You alone are anointed in a new and marvelous way, in your whole essence, through and through, lacking absolutely nothing.

93.9

But why multiply examples of this great, inexplicable mystery without tasting you, O sweetness! We understand the meaning of oil through you, that it is the means to be cured of the grief caused by the tree of our transgression, the gladness you provide, according to the Psalmist. And what is its richness if not making us forget the food (that led) to death—having had our fill of it!

What is anointing if not the transformation of our outlook, from ashen misery into the brightness of eternal joy, being saved by your name, being named for God, O Spirit of Might! And how should we understand the spiritual earnestness and most fervent desire of the prophet who spoke of his oil-enriched old age and the uplifting of his head with oil, other than being armed with your help through this medicine which restores to life—countering the old deception that brought immense mourning and death! And what gratitude for the light-giving lamp other than having you, Emmanuel, appear in me, united in likeness, even when in the midst of the fog of hopelessness because of sin and the darkness of idolatry!

Or what did the prophet speaking for God mean in his comforting consolation, considerately giving a clear sign of the blessed good news to some, “They will be anointed with oil free of impurities”? Or when the sage tells the bridesmaids in the presence of the bride, “Sustain me with oil and cover me with beautiful apples thrown at me,” and “Assign me to the balsam

orchard," what else (does he mean) with this choice substance but being filled with your Spirit! In this light we shall also see you, the inscrutable one who is praised, exalted by us.

And now, sole Provider, Cause of all good things that came to be, hear with compassion, Lord, my supplications in prayer to you, with my hands lifted up, with arms outstretched, with all my viscera, with the sighs of my heart, with the cries of my tongue and lips. Graced with these gifts, I praise you with gratitude, almighty, astounding, exalted, inscrutable, forever embraced with ever wistful longing, constantly blessed with the unending song, "Holy, Holy, only and always Holy." Extend more of your benevolence to me, the forever errant. Give me hope out of your kindness, though I happen to be unworthy of the least particle of your light, so that I might understand through you, who are good, the subtleties of this concealed mystery, adding thanksgiving to my supplication, saying with David, "We have received your mercy, God," and "your hidden and invisible secrets, you have revealed through your wisdom."

93.10

And now, majesty to you, Almighty, whose generosity never decreases, who is quick in compassion, always ready in healing, because you merged and mixed your ineffable miracles, astounding wonders, into such prevalent, common, and familiar substance. For that which the heavens in all their height, the earth in its breadth, the abyss in its depth, and the seas in their multitude could not hold, you fit in this little thing, a seemingly small, actually unattractive substance that you distinguished with power, so that a new wonder might be revealed through it; a different reality, like an illusion passing before one's eyes, healing in general the doubting minds rather than wounding them. Just as out of the flour of wheat, blessed Son of God, you constituted your body, in reality and not in semblance, and out of the blood of grapes the flow from your side, and out of the bountiful water the womb of spiritual birth, so also with this (oil) you bestowed the Spirit, even as you, the immortal one, breathed (on your disciples).

Through your labor you brought forth life; to people who sat in the world of darkness you brought the dawn that is in your semblance, the character of which cannot be eclipsed by paganism any more than the divinely wrought effect of the wood of the cross can be replicated. For by this image of grace you, the inscrutable one, revealed your perfect fullness to the world, enlightening it in such a way that the poor shall not want and the rich shall not be haughty—as the air is distributed and the sunlight is spread and the stream waters flow equally to all, as the manna was sent equally to those on earth, with more for the little ones than for the great.

93.11

The premise of the deep mystery of this substance is marvelously explained by its very nature, for it does not shift around from place to place like a sufferer from indecision, nor does it abandon its habitat like a disloyal, nor can it be removed entirely by the strongest soap, nor is it washed away by any other antidote. Just as color happens to be an indelible and necessary property of physical existence, since by its very presence it indicates being and by its absence nothingness, so is the power of this oil that takes hold of its recipient, whereby you, Lord Jesus Christ, bonded us with a substance that represents the significance attached to it. You rendered

visible that which was invisible for the eyes, and that which was incomprehensible for our minds' desires you laid before us tangibly in this substance pressed and squeezed out of the earth's fruit, which you have amazingly and miraculously prepared and given to us.

You prescribed the mixture of all manner of flowers into a single fragrant concoction not (as something) to be compared to the shadowy one of old but to replace it with this in which you yourself are admixed, in this pure oil of heavenly light. And although the savors of your sweetness are ineffable and cannot be compared to anything by way of analogy, you have variously been referred to as the flower of the field or the lily of the valleys, exquisite nard or sandalwood mixed with aloe, the scent of saffron, the harvested cluster of the vine or fine wine. But no other designation represents your glorious and unfathomable name better than the union with this oil, while you are the consummation of all things and lacking in nothing.

Thus, without confusion prompted by contrary forces dividing the will of the symbolized One, but rather being divinely contained in us through a loving consent, resembling us for our sake, you took on every decent likeness to us. Thus, a drop of oil, of this admixed substance by which one may truly be united with God, is perceptively understood by a pure mind as good light, warming fire, warmth of love without the slightest breath of any uncompassionate coldness. With Solomon, anointed and adopted of God, to you, O heavenly Bridegroom, I sing grateful praise and benediction with the mouth of the Bride, in my mind's desires kissing the scent of your oils, better than any incense.

May we follow you, in your scent, as the one who has the words of eternal life—in the inspired words of the wise man and the theologian-evangelist. Thus, having washed my face with the water of life, which is more exalted than the waters above the sky, and having anointed my head with your heavenly oil of incorruptibility, I come before you joyfully, cheerfully, and without sadness.

93.12

Had this oil worthy of incense, venerated and blessed, not been sealed with the lordly sign of your life-giving cross, it would neither have become an ointment for the chamber of my brain nor done the hair on my head any good.

This amazingly miraculous oil brings the blessing of the Light to the Jew and the Gentile, the Indian and the barbarian, the Scythian and the Greek, the cruel savage and the scary cynocephalus giant in fearsome appearance, the freeborn master and the slave by birth, making them Christians, sealing them in your name, dedicating them to your Holy Spirit, and establishing them as true sons of the Heavenly Father.

The manifestations of its effects are varied: first a physical illustration and then its powers. Just as a wooden vessel easily cracks and becomes useless and worthless unless it is rubbed with oil, so a person, if not anointed, is easily led astray and, separated from you, remains unenlightened. This (oil), Jesus, is your finger, with which you register wonders. For like an unscratchable, hard shield, it covers us most protectively, all around, from diverse, mysterious darts. For when sprinkled with it to become pure as wool, one can neither be stained with blood nor fade into somber colors. Moreover, this (oil) enters and penetrates spiritually the very substance of our being. And if the curse of the Psalmist could metaphorically spread like oil

through the bones of the evildoer, how much more will your Spirit through this oil of light heal and make whole our invisible inner beings, working from the depths of our windpipes to the very ends of our extremities, and stifle completely any thought of physical harm unto death. For your astounding, life-giving power, Lord Jesus Christ, is mixed in this (oil) and truly dwells in it.

93.13

This brilliant ointment, applied by wrestlers to their naked bodies as a potent enhancement in contests with perseverance, making their opponents unable to take hold of them, is rightly esteemed as a mighty frightener of demons and diseases. As in the quaint, colorful words of Ezekiel, addressed to the noetic Pharaoh in the form of a satirical allegory composed ruefully, it is said, "You were created and were clothed with the anointing of the cherub ... in the place where the fiery monuments are firmly set."

O blessed, astounding, and omnipresent Help, ever indescribable in words and surpassing scrutiny, always revered with incense as the newly born Anointed in the city of David according to the Gospel of Life; also, according to the question of the high priest, "Are you the Anointed, the Son of the Blessed?" and according to the beatified confession by Peter, "You are the Anointed, the only Son of the living God," and according to your faithless interrogators, "If you are the Anointed, as they say, tell us candidly"; but from your canonical (writing)s we believe in you, the Anointed, teacher and Lord of all. Even before this, Herod asked for you openly, by name, the Anointed. Moreover, you yourself responded, "How is it written that the Anointed of God, the Lord of David, the Son without beginning, could be his son in time?" So we gather this fitting interpretation, that the consummation of this mystic calling is realized in us who are privileged to be called Christians.

93.14

This astounding word *anointing* conveys much awe beside sanctity, the perfume of fragrant incense! Just as no heavenly creature would dare to call itself God, but merely "divine," no embodied being would presume to claim for oneself the name Christ, but only "Christian." Even the Baptist, first among the immensely great, the one who invited the Spirit by means of water, said, "I am not the Anointed, but rather am sent before him."

In the words of the evangelist Mark, the disciples set out in pairs with oil, and as if acting with the genuine hand of God they would anoint with it and without employing any other human contrivance would heal people in your name. For as darkness yields to light, ailment to health, night to day, and death to life, so by virtue of this substance, gifted by the Lord, all evil manifestations are rejected, vanquished, and completely subdued. And just as the (ordinary) substance is a deadly potion that completely eradicates annoying flies and tiny spiders and insects that crawl into the ears, so this oil—strengthened with the abundant blessings of grace—wards off demons, dissolves the mortgage of evil, and tears up the death sentence. The baptismal font is not complete unless accompanied by anointing. For this salve of salvation was applied to the first man left mortally wounded by brigands, and it served honorably for the incurable wounds of Jacob and Israel. David desired this oil, hoping to be like a fruitful olive tree

in the house of God, thus predicting abandonment of circumcision for the grace of baptism. But how can I discourse on this, thinking that I understand it completely, when not even angels can verbally explain a fraction of it, let alone its essence!

93.15

Glory to you always and in all things, immortal King. I shall now sing praise for what you have done and accomplished for me, O good, beneficent, compassionate, forbearing, abounding, and generous (Lord), triumphant over all. The type of anointing sketched by the patriarchs back then you truly brought to its full essence. You are light in your very nature and the ever-shining sun, and you called your band of disciples “light,” for through them you filled creatures with rays of blissful grace in all the earth. You accepted someone’s perfumed oil upon your feet as an example of accepting prayers offered to you. And by the anointing of your head by a fornicator, you showed your compassionate love for us. And you, the infinite one, smelled it with such great pleasure that you ordered (us) by an inviolable commandment, a perpetual, praiseworthy injunction for life, to preach about the merits of this modestly offered oil to the amazement of hearers throughout the world, to give hope to future generations.

“You have been anointed by the Holy One,” said that blessed of the apostles, explaining the mystery poured out upon us from your unending bounty, Giver of life. This drop of blessing from you who are praised on high, which is endlessly sprinkled on us, bears a close, fitting, and lasting resemblance to you who are light and to your Holy Spirit.

It is called “light” because that is the first element of things created and shares the very image of your creativeness; by it you drive away the gloomy darkness of sin.

As for “fire,” because there is some common distribution of it in every element of creation—to a measure equal to the (element’s) essence, hidden and manifest, silent and audible—it does not flare up by itself unless provoked by the adversary.

It is also called “anointing” because through it we are adopted into your majesty, that you may offer us to your Father as his inheritance, that we may shine brightly in the next life—since with your mercy you have been portrayed indelibly within us.

It is also called “spirit” because we are cleansed of the calamities of deceit instigated by the accuser, that we might worship our heavenly Father, renewed in spirit and in truth, being nailed with you, Giver of all gifts, in the hope of the faith.

93.16

Indeed, it is ever true that this oil brimming with light, filled with fragrance, is a manifestation of your love, O heavenly One! This is why Paul himself deemed it appropriate to state plainly in his discourse of grateful praise, “It is God who anointed us together with you into Christ Jesus, who also sealed us and gave us the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts”; and again, “Do not,” he says, “grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

“Anointed” is a more respected and reputable designation in the New (Testament) than in the Old. For the mystery of your providential and lordly suffering is truly stated in the words of

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

the Davidic Psalm, “The rulers of the people gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed,” a great prophecy that imprinted upon the Jewish throng the permanent sin of spilling your blood. Driven by evil delusion, they were audacious toward you, Lord, for “Who can put forth his hand against the Lord’s anointed, and be guiltless?” For although Saul was killed by one of his own, they were neither rejected permanently nor given to shame and dishonor by foreign nations—not until they were implicated in the spilling of your blood, Lord.

The following pleas and supplications in the Psalms are a great pledge, reminding of the inheritance of future generations: “For the sake of your beloved David, do not turn away your face from your anointed,” and again, “Behold and see the face of your anointed” and “show mercy to your anointed.”

93.17

This light-bearing fluid, O Christ, is the venerated gift of your hand, for the prophet had nothing higher than this to say of the Kingdom’s riches that are before you, “I have found David, my servant, and with my holy oil I have anointed him.” Thus, with this instructive reminder, we embrace your anointing with the light, Lord Jesus Christ, having come to know your eternal immutability: that you are all and in all, the only King of Kings and the truly Anointed among those anointed, glorified, and worshiped yesterday and today.

The wick soaked in oil, for example, does not give any light until lit with a flame, so is this anointing with light as it flows down to us, passed on with a torch. This illustration clearly explains the transmission from the ancients to the present, along with symbols imbued with wondrously brilliant colors.

93.18

Now, the cause of these sublime, life-giving, divine effects, characteristic of you, Creator, without which one cannot be considered a Christian or called a Nazarene, or be remembered as a son of Judah, or raise a battle cry in the name of the God of Jacob, is this liquid, the oil of blessing, in which your Holy Trinity is mixed and joined. It is a ray of grace, the splendor of our forehead, the image of our face, the comeliness of our peculiarity, the light of our eyes, the Lord’s imprint on our pupils, the beauty of our cheeks, the ornament of our countenance, the guardian of our lips, the escort of our faith, the monitor of our behavior, the tie that binds, the strength of souls, the fortitude of resistance, the barrier to spells, the destroyer of talismans, the repeller of conjurors, the confounder of magicians, the exposer of heresies, the vanquisher of demons, the dispeller of pain, the consummator of the baptized, the desire of catechumens, the inexplicable to outsiders, the bewilderment of pagans, the envy of nonbelievers, the unmasker of secrets, the honor of the humble, the glory of slaves, the adornment of women, the growth of children, the joy of the aged, the consecrator of the dedicated, the counsel of the pure, the crown of kings, the grandeur of monarchs, the excellence of emperors.

For as a sealed container indicates the value of the contents, so the sublimity of your grace sealed in us by being anointed in your name, God and Lord Jesus Christ, is beautifully represented by this symbol. And the name of this substance, *miwron*, according to the inspired

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sages, originated with the Egyptians and expresses its very essence as an image of an astounding mystery.

93.19

For this exaltedly blessed *miwron*, which the prophet foresaw, praying for it as it were the light of his eyes, according to the poetics of the word, according to comparative observation, (is related) to *homeron* (ὅμηρον), interpretively meaning “mother to me.” That is, what draws our nature strongly to itself, and through a wonderful transformation, bonds the fluid water securely to the illumination of the baptismal font; or like the ingredient that curdles milk, it stabilizes my untamed ravings and the constantly flooding streams.

Moreover, *marnamut* (“descent of fog”) is another word wherein this *miwron* appears, meaning “dark”; that is, becoming dim and concealed or hidden from sight. And this appellation is not unrelated to metaphor, for this word truly symbolizes something beyond itself since this (mystery) is always deeper than the holy of holies. For (*miwron*) does not wash away dirt like water or bolster the heart as bread does naturally. Instead, in a fittingly new way, in a lordly fashion, it imprints the Lord on the senses; nevertheless, it is exalted beyond comprehension and the name it bears is inscrutable. For as God himself is called “unapproachable Light” while in his boundless glory and such unlimitedness he is understood to be concealed in utter obscurity—shut beyond our attempted understanding—so is this flow of light fittingly and positively called *mrayl* (“obscure”) on the tongues of certain skilled sages because worldly natures cannot understand the real essence of things. The (*miwron*) holds each of these divine attributes richly and in a lordly fashion within it, for it resembles the very name by which the Exalted is called. This oil, offered with noble frankincense whose fragrance spreads throughout, redoubles its richness because “our God is a consuming Fire,” according to Moses; and also, he is “Light” according to John. Indeed, Isaiah rightly refers to the same, saying, “Israel’s Light will be as Fire.”

93.20

Once again, I shall explicate the same image with different words, with renewed praise and blessings, for I cannot forget my bitterness, which was sweetened by your great compassion.

For *meray*, which is “bitterness” (in Hebrew, and “I died” in Armenian), appropriately signifies unbearably acute suffering; so *miwron*, according to us, is (to be) explained interpretively as related to *merelut’iwn*, “mortality.” For by being anointed with this oil imbued with the Spirit, we are cut off or separated from the vanity-loving, death-bearing, and wearingly annoying vices of the adversary, whose suffocating dankness makes my lyre go out of tune and muffles the sound of the beats on the membrane of my drum which used to sound strong and toned but whose soggy wetness drags down to perdition—just like our existence.

Yet through this anointing we are bound again with hope to the ineffable mystery of your cross, O Christ. By being baptized into your death, O Living One, we share in your eternal life—even you yourself, O God—being enabled to the utmost, eternally, fully, inseparably.

93.21

This oil renders the four-pointed mark sealed in your name, Jesus, equal to your exalted sign. It confers grace parallel and similar to your life-giving blood; it uplifts by crowning with equally renowned glory. It is called the wood-blessing oil, in the predictive words of the prophet, for when it is mightily applied to common saplings of the forest, from their unripeness—due to bad conditions and wrong notions (about them)—they rise toward you, Creator, and become ripe with the same substance of life (as the wood of the cross). Similarly, the windows of our mind, which are always open to penetrating influences, when sealed in the powerful, lordly name of your astounding majesty, the ordinary faculties of thought become desirable lodges for your Holy Spirit, impervious to the evil delusions of the trickster with dark winds.

Constrained by this light, we gather for songs of thanksgiving at the evening service with the heavenly luminaries, illustrative of your grace burning within us; and its benefits emerge and blossom and bear fruit by way of this reminder of salvation. In anticipation of your return, O Great One, in readiness for the supper on the last night, we use this light for a lamp.

93.22

Moreover, by multiplying the numbers twenty (**հ**) and four (**Դ**) (= 80 = Q/dz = the first letter of Ալպա/ձէտ' ["oil"]) and by following the numerical values of the (Armenian) alphabet up to the twenty-second letter ($L/n = 400$), we are able to explain the deep mystery (of this oil) in a most convenient way, as follows: By replacing the letter representing the (numerical) value of eighty (Q/dz) with the letter representing the (numerical) value of four-hundred (L/n), we clearly obtain what truly amounts to *niwt'*, "substance," which symbolizes the new leaven that mightily transforms the lump of dough to its likeness, no longer remaining the lesser contained in the greater but, absorbing the whole unto itself, makes it grow—according to the Gospel parable.

93.23

This humble oil is a constant example and reminder of exaltation and humility. For when offered with a soft morsel to someone, it symbolizes a balanced and appropriate word, but when added to liquids, slippery and unstable elements, it rises above them substantially, an image of the excellence of its mystery. And when poured into a leather flask, unlike (what happens with) wine or water, (the flask) does not soften but keeps its proper shape.

Understanding the incomparable excellence of your goodness in this way, Son of the living God, we have our foreheads marked with this sacred gift of anointing as with your blood and our natural breath imprinted with your Spirit, believing with the conviction of our minds that this oil will forever show forth and shine anew with brilliant and far-reaching radiance across the varied and marvelous expanse, this fruit of the oil, the light unto the glorious things to come.

May this spiritual fat, full of bliss and heavenly glow in the shape of your sign, shine as a

torch before my face, your image.

93.24

This great power, though unattainable and incomprehensible, soars faster with the swift wings of the mind than do intelligent thoughts flying in endless pursuit and without trace into infinity, forever shut away from me, with a vast distance in between.

This (oil) has no equivalent, no parity with which to compare; it resembles no definable shape, nothing to weigh against it, for it is spiritually superior, like your divine sign of the cross, equal to your life-giving blood. And now, Lord, bless us through it and in it.

Moreover, your name is astounding, luminous, heavenly, and marvelous, made fragrant with incense by the censer of those who live in purity, who praise your ineffable glory. Holy, Holy, Inscrutable, Ineffable, Exalted, Merciful, Praised, True, Benevolent, and Holy: Save us through it, grant us forgiveness, bestow healing, clothe us with grace, be generous with blessing.

May I be found sinless, having been anointed with this oil, this heavenly shower of light.

Let not the sorrow of sinful infirmity invade and take over this anointed rational fabric of mine or commingle with my soul (made after your) image.

May those who present themselves to be anointed with this (oil) rejoice as at a wedding banquet, beautifully arrayed in holy splendor, their souls adorned with blessedness.

May this luminously glorious and divinely approved fire be a double tempering and warm, regenerating fervor to those who draw near for election by it.

May I be fully strengthened by it and remain firmly established upon your immovable Rock, always steadfast in my unwavering commitment to you.

May it be a sign of heavenly reward for those who are on fire with this gift: may they not be swept by water, not be burned by fire, not be frozen by the cold, not be extinguished by the harmful wind, not be stained by nocturnal pollution, not betray those in (Christ's) keep to the evil one, not forfeit foolishly the soul's treasures for life when departing (from this world), not be outside the protective help of your wings, and not through uncleanness be stripped of what has been accomplished in us by being anointed. But through you may we be set on fire by it, be filled with it, be enlightened through it, be justified by it, be liberated, crowned, and reign by it.

And to you, the only Anointed, together with the Father and your Holy Spirit, may songs of blessing rise from all, alleluias in tongues, resounding voices, triumphant praise, lips lauding your goodness, the hagiodesies of the Psalms, forever and ever. Amen.

That (Prayer [92](#)) was my project pertaining to holy things and this (Prayer [93](#)) a lasting inscription pertaining to the holiest of holy things.

Prayer 94

*Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil
Speaking with God from the depths of the heart
<“Life in death and Light in darkness”>*

94.1

Eternal God, benevolent and almighty, creator of light and author of night, Life in death and Light in darkness, hope for the expectant and patient with doubters, you in your resourceful wisdom turn the darkness of death into dawn, the sunrise into fullness, and keep the sun from setting. The night’s darkness cannot cover the glory of your Lordship, before which all creation kneels in worship—those in heaven and on earth and in the netherworld.

You who hear the sighs of those who are bound and attend to the prayers of the humble and accept their supplications, my God and my King, my Life and my Refuge, my Hope and my Trust, Jesus Christ, God of all, the Holy One who dwells in the souls of the saints, consolation for the afflicted and pardon for sinners, you who know all things before they happen, send the protective strength of your right hand and save me from the terror of the night and from the evil demon, so that by the very remembrance of your astounding and holy name—always kissed with the lips of my soul and the desires of my breath—I might live protected along with those who call on you with all their hearts.

94.2

And with the seal of your sign, which you renewed by staining it with your divine blood, thereby baptizing us into the grace of adoption and into the glory of your image, in which you fashioned and created us, with these divine gifts may Satan be confounded and his machinations foiled; may his snares be removed and forces defeated; may his sharp-edged weapons fall short; may his haze be lifted, his darkness dispelled, his fog cleared away. May your arm shield me and your right hand seal me, for you are compassionate and merciful, and your servants are called by your name.

To you with the Father and your Holy Spirit, glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer 95

*Another of the repeated supplications with sighing by the same keeper of the vigil
Speaking with God from the depths of the heart
<“Renewed by you with eternal life”>*

95.1

Sun of Righteousness, blessed radiance, manifest Light, cherished desire, exalted beyond scrutiny, unbounded in might, joy of goodness, hope that is seen, the heavenly one who is praised, King of Glory, Creator Christ, confessed Life: Complete with your all-powerful Word the deficiency due to my sins, (revealed) in my errant voice, the wretch that I am. Please present to your Father on high an acceptable petition, you who came to experience the effects of the curse by taking my likeness, you who are the blessed Life in its fullness, the provident Overseer of all—above and below. Since you took upon yourself to die for me, God and Lord of all, how much more pleased will you be to sympathize with the suffering of one endangered like me! By virtue of the body you had in common with us, you are (in effect) praying constantly with a sinner like me to your co-honored Father.

95.2

Because of your precious blood, offered perpetually to please the will of him who sent you, may the dangers be lifted from me, the condemned sinner.

May the debts be forgiven.
May the shame be rectified.
May the deceits be forgotten.
May the sentences be commuted.
May the worms shrivel.
May the wailing stop.
May the gnashing of teeth fall silent.
May the laments end.
May the tears be depleted.
May the mourning halt.
May the darkness be chased away.
May the fire of fury be consumed.
May the instruments of torture in all their forms be disallowed.

95.3

May your compassion, who wills and grants life, reach everyone. May your light dawn, your salvation be immediate, your help arrive, your visitation be soon.

May the dew of your mercy descend early; may it quench and quicken the parched field where my wretched bones have fallen into the pit of death.

May the cultivated land blossom and yield fruit for the day of light, for the heavenly chalice of your life-giving blood, so that the eucharistic commemoration of life—for the salvation of the souls of those who are asleep—be continuous.

And though my souled body will die altogether in sin, through your grace, Compassionate, may I find strength in you, be renewed by you with eternal life detached from sin, in the resurrection of the righteous, those blessed by your Father. To him be glory, together with you, St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

and befitting laudation with thanksgiving to your Holy Spirit, now and always, for ever and ever. Amen.

Colophon by the Author

So it is with the passing of time since the dawn of creation: it goes on in accordance with the fully rounded, beautifully glistening, radiant-light bearing, day-measuring, darkness-dispelling, (and) watchful eye of the sun accumulating, tallying, (and) piling up the passing years into centuries along the wheezing yet ever-renewed path of eternity.

At the conclusion of the ninth jubilee and the commencement of the tenth according to the calendar of the House of Japheth (450–1 of the Armenian era = AD 1001–2), three years after his arrival in the northeastern regions, the victorious and great Roman Emperor Basil (II, reg. 976–1025) spread out and methodically and indiscriminately expanded on all fronts, raising up massive granite monuments wherever he laid his hand and (laying down) impenetrable, long boundaries. Without blinking an eye, he proceeded left and right, appropriating (and) accumulating in his bosom territories of domains of many lands.

During the peaceful interval (of three years), when the enemies of the church were pushed to the brink, I planned, structured, arranged, collected, inscribed, compiled, amplified, established in detail, and assembled into one the many facets of this sacred book. I, Gregory, a clerical priest, the least of poets and lowest of teachers, worked with my blessed brother named Hovhannēs, a monk of the noble and honorable brotherhood of Narek. We are not only one rational body, one image formed of two related persons initiated in the same way of life, but also one in inspiration, one in piety, in shared honor, twins in thought, four eyes in the same pathway, seeing the same mystic vision.

Now, we ask you who partake of this table, with its various and scrumptious offerings, to remember us in just prayers and worthy supplications, in pure love and kind thoughts, that you be registered

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<u>9:4</u>	<u>93.4</u>
<u>9:4–5</u>	<u>79.4</u>
<u>12:1–5</u>	<u>11.3</u>
<u>12:3</u>	<u>58.1</u>
<u>14:18–20</u>	<u>93.5</u>
<u>15:6</u>	<u>31.1</u>
<u>17:5–6, 15–16</u>	<u>31.1</u>
<u>18:14</u>	<u>16.2; 23.4; 41.1; 49.2, 3; 53.1; 73.4; 76.1; 82.7; 86.2</u>
<u>18:18</u>	<u>58.1</u>
<u>19:1–29</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>19:17</u>	<u>61.1</u>
<u>19:24</u>	<u>53.1; 68.4</u>
<u>19:26</u>	<u>36.2; 53.1; 61.1</u>
<u>19:37</u>	<u>36.2</u>
<u>21:2</u>	<u>54.3</u>
<u>21:8–10</u>	<u>54.3</u>
<u>22:1–19</u>	<u>44.2; 92.9</u>

<u>22:13</u>	<u>77.3</u>
<u>22:18</u>	<u>58.1; 75.5</u>
<u>23:5</u>	<u>93.9, 11</u>
<u>24:7–10</u>	<u>95.1</u>
<u>27:29</u>	<u>51.5</u>
<u>28:10–17</u>	<u>93.5</u>
<u>28:10–15</u>	<u>51.5</u>
<u>28:12</u>	<u>29.1; 92.11</u>
<u>28:12–17</u>	<u>32.3</u>
<u>28:17</u>	<u>75.13</u>
<u>28:18–19</u>	<u>75.10; 92.3</u>
<u>28:18–22</u>	<u>93.5</u>
<u>31:42, 53</u>	<u>5.3</u>
<u>32:28</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>32:29</u>	<u>23.1</u>
<u>35:11</u>	<u>16.2</u>
<u>35:14</u>	<u>93.5</u>

Exodus (Exod)

<u>2:24–25</u>	<u>35.2</u>
<u>4:1–5</u>	<u>60.5; 75.8</u>
<u>4:1–9</u>	<u>63.1</u>
<u>4:17, 20</u>	<u>60.5</u>
<u>4:6–7</u>	<u>35.2</u>
<u>5:16–18</u>	<u>75.10</u>
<u>7:1–11:10</u>	<u>68.5</u>
<u>7:3, 13, 22</u>	<u>6.3</u>
<u>8:1–14</u>	<u>68.5</u>
<u>8:15</u>	<u>6.3; 93.12</u>
<u>8:16–18</u>	<u>68.5</u>
<u>8:19</u>	<u>6.3</u>
<u>8:20–31</u>	<u>68.5</u>
<u>8:32</u>	<u>6.3</u>
<u>9:12</u>	<u>6.3</u>
<u>9:18–34</u>	<u>68.5</u>
<u>9:34–35</u>	<u>6.3</u>
<u>10:1</u>	<u>6.3</u>
<u>10:3–6, 12–19</u>	<u>68.5</u>
<u>10:13</u>	<u>75.12</u>
<u>10:16</u>	<u>27.3</u>
<u>10:20</u>	<u>6.3</u>
<u>10:21</u>	<u>68.4</u>
<u>10:27</u>	<u>6.3</u>

<u>11:10</u>	<u>6.3</u>
<u>12:3</u>	<u>91.2</u>
<u>12:7</u>	<u>12.3; 91.2</u>
<u>12:13</u>	<u>12.3</u>
<u>12:21–23</u>	<u>12.3; 91.2</u>
<u>12:22</u>	<u>88.2</u>
<u>13:9, 16</u>	<u>33.2</u>
<u>13:21–22</u>	<u>38.2; 75.6; 85.1</u>
<u>14:1–31</u>	<u>68.5</u>
<u>14:4, 8</u>	<u>6.3</u>
<u>14:13–21</u>	<u>92.7</u>
<u>14:15–31</u>	<u>33.1</u>
<u>14:17</u>	<u>6.3</u>
<u>14:19–20</u>	<u>75.6; 85.1</u>
<u>14:21</u>	<u>75.12</u>
<u>14:21–22</u>	<u>63.1</u>
<u>14:21–28</u>	<u>75.6</u>
<u>14:22</u>	<u>85.1</u>
<u>14:24</u>	<u>38.2</u>
<u>15:8</u>	<u>63.1</u>
<u>15:23</u>	<u>39.2</u>
<u>15:23–25</u>	<u>24.3; 63.1; 93.20</u>
<u>16:3</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>16:16</u>	<u>93.10</u>
<u>16:33–34</u>	<u>38.2</u>
<u>17:1–7</u>	<u>24.3; 63.1; 92.10</u>
<u>17:6</u>	<u>38.2; 63.1; 75.10</u>
<u>17:8–16</u>	<u>2.1; 91.1</u>
<u>17:11–12</u>	<u>65.2; 75.8</u>
<u>18:4</u>	<u>11.3</u>
<u>19:4</u>	<u>14.3</u>
<u>19:13</u>	<u>75.12</u>
<u>19:16</u>	<u>38.2</u>
<u>19:16–19</u>	<u>77.2; 92.3</u>
<u>19:18</u>	<u>77.2</u>
<u>20:2–17</u>	<u>79.4</u>
<u>20:18</u>	<u>77.2</u>
<u>21:12–14</u>	<u>27.4</u>
<u>23:5</u>	<u>87.2</u>
<u>23:15</u>	<u>68.3</u>
<u>25:8–9</u>	<u>17.3</u>
<u>25:9</u>	<u>75.7</u>
<u>25:10–22</u>	<u>75.10</u>

<u>25:31–39</u>	<u>46.2</u>
<u>25:40</u>	<u>17.3; 75.7</u>
<u>26:30</u>	<u>17.3; 75.7</u>
<u>27:1–2</u>	<u>27.4</u>
<u>27:8</u>	<u>17.3; 75.7</u>
<u>27:20–21</u>	<u>31.2</u>
<u>29:2, 10, 15, 19, 40</u>	<u>93.8</u>
<u>30:7–8</u>	<u>11.2</u>
<u>30:22–25</u>	<u>93.11</u>
<u>31:1–11</u>	<u>75.10</u>
<u>32:1–6</u>	<u>11.3</u>
<u>32:19</u>	<u>34.10</u>
<u>32:23–35</u>	<u>70.2</u>
<u>33:19</u>	<u>30.5</u>
<u>33:20</u>	<u>75.5</u>
<u>34:1</u>	<u>34.10</u>
<u>34:6</u>	<u>30.5</u>
<u>34:20</u>	<u>68.3</u>
<u>34:29–35</u>	<u>75.10</u>
<u>37:1–9</u>	<u>75.10</u>
<u>37:17–24</u>	<u>46.2</u>
<u>40:34–38</u>	<u>75.6; 85.1</u>
<u>40:38</u>	<u>38.2</u>

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<u>1:4</u>	<u>93.8</u>
<u>1:8–13</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>2:4–5</u>	<u>93.8</u>
<u>2:14–16</u>	<u>31.2</u>
<u>3:1–17</u>	<u>93.4</u>
<u>3:2</u>	<u>93.8</u>
<u>3:8</u>	<u>93.8</u>
<u>3:13</u>	<u>93.8</u>
<u>4:4</u>	<u>93.8</u>
<u>4:15</u>	<u>93.8</u>
<u>4:24</u>	<u>93.8</u>
<u>4:29</u>	<u>93.8</u>
<u>4:33</u>	<u>93.8</u>
<u>7:10–14</u>	<u>93.4</u>
<u>7:11–21</u>	<u>93.4</u>
<u>7:12</u>	<u>93.8</u>
<u>7:16–18</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>7:26–27</u>	<u>93.4</u>

<u>7:28–34</u>	<u>93.4</u>
<u>8:6</u>	<u>5.2</u>
<u>8:30</u>	<u>93.5</u>
<u>9:22</u>	<u>75.8</u>
<u>10:1–2</u>	<u>5.3</u>
<u>13:1–28</u>	<u>24.3</u>
<u>13:1–46</u>	<u>65.1</u>
<u>13:38–46</u>	<u>24.3</u>
<u>14:1–32</u>	<u>65.1</u>
<u>14:5–7</u>	<u>93.8</u>
<u>14:40–45</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>14:50–53</u>	<u>93.8</u>
<u>16:1–14</u>	<u>31.2</u>
<u>16:1–34</u>	<u>29.1; 80.1</u>
<u>16:11–14</u>	<u>51.4</u>
<u>17:1–9</u>	<u>75.7</u>
<u>17:11</u>	<u>75.7</u>
<u>17:14</u>	<u>75.7</u>
<u>18:21</u>	<u>20.6</u>
<u>20:1–27</u>	<u>14.3</u>
<u>20:2–5</u>	<u>20.6</u>
<u>21:10</u>	<u>93.5</u>
<u>23:9–14</u>	<u>31.2</u>
<u>23:26–32</u>	<u>29.1; 80.1</u>
<u>24:10–23</u>	<u>14.3</u>
<u>25:9</u>	<u>92.7</u>

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<u>5:1–4</u>	<u>65.1</u>
<u>5:11–22</u>	<u>23.3</u>
<u>6:24</u>	<u>58.1</u>
<u>9:15–16</u>	<u>38.2</u>
<u>9:15–23</u>	<u>75.6; 85.1</u>
<u>10:33–36</u>	<u>75.10</u>
<u>11:23</u>	<u>10.1</u>
<u>14:1–4</u>	<u>6.3</u>
<u>14:3–4</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>15:32–36</u>	<u>70.2</u>
<u>16:5</u>	<u>59.2</u>
<u>16:22</u>	<u>49.1</u>
<u>16:31–33</u>	<u>68.4</u>
<u>17:1–13</u>	<u>75.8</u>
<u>20:1–13</u>	<u>24.3; 63.1; 92.10</u>

<u>20:8</u>	<u>38.2</u> ; <u>53.1</u> ; <u>63.1</u>
<u>20:11</u>	<u>75.10</u>
<u>22:22–35</u>	<u>63.3</u>
<u>22:34</u>	<u>27.3</u>
<u>24:17</u>	<u>93.2</u>
<u>24:20</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>25:7–8</u>	<u>71.4</u>
<u>27:15–16</u>	<u>49.1</u>
<u>28:5–6</u>	<u>31.2</u>
<u>29:7–11</u>	<u>80.1</u>

Deuteronomy (Deut)

<u>4:24</u>	<u>77.3</u> ; <u>93.19</u>
<u>5:6–17</u>	<u>79.4</u>
<u>6:8</u>	<u>33.2</u>
<u>10:17</u>	<u>8.1</u>
<u>11:18</u>	<u>33.2</u>
<u>12:23</u>	<u>75.7</u>
<u>3:1–11</u>	<u>14.3</u>
<u>16:16</u>	<u>68.3</u>
<u>17:2–13</u>	<u>14.3</u>
<u>18:3–5</u>	<u>31.2</u>
<u>21:18–21</u>	<u>14.3</u>
<u>22:4</u>	<u>87.2</u>
<u>22:23–27</u>	<u>14.3</u>
<u>26:1–10</u>	<u>31.2</u>
<u>28:7</u>	<u>90.4</u>
<u>28:39</u>	<u>56.1</u>
<u>31:27</u>	<u>6.3</u>
<u>32:5–6</u>	<u>5.4</u>
<u>32:10–12</u>	<u>14.3</u>
<u>32:12</u>	<u>48.3</u>
<u>32:15–18</u>	<u>5.5</u>
<u>32:23–25</u>	<u>1.2</u>
<u>32:29</u>	<u>33.4</u>
<u>32:34</u>	<u>48.1</u> ; <u>88.2</u>

Joshua (Josh)

<u>2:1–21</u>	<u>33.2</u>
<u>2:1–24</u>	<u>6.2</u>
<u>3:1–6</u>	<u>75.10</u>
<u>3:15–16</u>	<u>63.1</u>
<u>6:1–21</u>	<u>92.4</u>

<u>6:15–25</u>	<u>6.2</u>
<u>6:17</u>	<u>33.2</u>
<u>6:20</u>	<u>63.1</u>
<u>6:22–25</u>	<u>33.2</u>
<u>7:15–26</u>	<u>71.4</u>
<u>7:19–21</u>	<u>27.4</u>
<u>8:18</u>	<u>92.4</u>
<u>10:12–13</u>	<u>94.1</u>
<u>24:14</u>	<u>35.2</u>

Judges (Judg)

<u>2:11–13</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>2:13</u>	<u>48.4</u>
<u>6:25–32</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>8:33–34</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>10:6</u>	<u>48.4</u>
<u>13:17–18</u>	<u>23.1</u>
<u>14:5–9</u>	<u>68.5</u>

1 Samuel (1 Sam)

<u>1:1–3, 9–11</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>1:17</u>	<u>1.1; 31.1</u>
<u>1:24</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>2:2</u>	<u>76.2</u>
<u>2:5</u>	<u>31.1</u>
<u>3:21</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>4:1–11</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>6:1–7:2</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>6:6</u>	<u>6.3</u>
<u>7:4</u>	<u>48.4</u>
<u>7:6</u>	<u>88.1</u>
<u>10:1–12</u>	<u>93.6</u>
<u>12:10</u>	<u>48.4</u>
<u>15:22–23</u>	<u>4.4</u>
<u>15:23</u>	<u>48.3</u>
<u>15:24–31</u>	<u>27.4</u>
<u>15:32–35</u>	<u>71.4</u>
<u>16:1</u>	<u>93.5</u>
<u>16:13</u>	<u>93.5, 6</u>
<u>17:32–51</u>	<u>92.7</u>
<u>17:40</u>	<u>92.4</u>
<u>17:45</u>	<u>93.18</u>
<u>17:50</u>	<u>92.4</u>

<u>24:14</u>	<u>66.3</u>
<u>26:9</u>	<u>93.16</u>
<u>26:21</u>	<u>27.3</u>

2 Samuel (2 Sam)

<u>1:6–14</u>	<u>93.16</u>
<u>6:1–23</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>6:6–7</u>	<u>75.10</u>
<u>7:6</u>	<u>75.11</u>
<u>7:25</u>	<u>66.4</u>
<u>12:1–12</u>	<u>70.2</u>
<u>12:13</u>	<u>11.3; 27.3; 57.2</u>
<u>19:28</u>	<u>74.2</u>
<u>21:1–9</u>	<u>71.4</u>
<u>24:10–17</u>	<u>70.3</u>

1 Kings (1 Kgs)

<u>1:50–53</u>	<u>27.4</u>
<u>2:28–35</u>	<u>27.4</u>
<u>3:16–28</u>	<u>66.1</u>
<u>6:1–32</u>	<u>75.1</u>
<u>6:4</u>	<u>52.1</u>
<u>6:7</u>	<u>92.7</u>
<u>8:22–61</u>	<u>48.2</u>
<u>8:26–30</u>	<u>75.10</u>
<u>8:46</u>	<u>66.1</u>
<u>10:1–13</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>11:1–8</u>	<u>48.2</u>
<u>11:4–8</u>	<u>60.4</u>
<u>11:5, 7</u>	<u>48.4</u>
<u>11:5–7</u>	<u>20.6</u>
<u>11:23</u>	<u>20.6</u>
<u>11:29–39</u>	<u>48.5</u>
<u>11:33</u>	<u>48.4</u>
<u>11:41</u>	<u>48.5</u>
<u>12:6–11</u>	<u>71.3</u>
<u>13:11–32</u>	<u>70.2</u>
<u>14:1–16</u>	<u>48.5</u>
<u>16:29–33</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>17:1</u>	<u>60.6</u>
<u>18:1</u>	<u>60.6</u>
<u>18:16–40</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>18:21</u>	<u>28.2; 64.3</u>

<u>19:11–12</u>	<u>34.11; 63.1</u>
<u>19:15–18</u>	<u>93.6</u>
<u>22:51–53</u>	<u>2.1</u>

2 Kings (2 Kgs)

<u>1:9–15</u>	<u>59.2; 71.4</u>
<u>2:8</u>	<u>75.8</u>
<u>2:11</u>	<u>34.11</u>
<u>2:14</u>	<u>75.8</u>
<u>2:21</u>	<u>63.1</u>
<u>2:23–24</u>	<u>68.4, 5</u>
<u>3:15</u>	<u>92.8</u>
<u>5:1–14</u>	<u>90.6</u>
<u>9:1–13</u>	<u>93.6</u>
<u>10:18–29</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>16:16–17</u>	<u>84.1</u>
<u>17:24–41</u>	<u>14.3</u>
<u>19:15</u>	<u>35.4</u>
<u>19:35–37</u>	<u>92.5</u>
<u>20:1–8</u>	<u>53.1</u>
<u>20:1–11</u>	<u>53.1; 83.2</u>
<u>20:3</u>	<u>59.2</u>
<u>20:8–11</u>	<u>53.1</u>
<u>21:1–17</u>	<u>47.2; 51.4</u>
<u>21:1–18</u>	<u>6.2</u>
<u>21:16</u>	<u>51.5</u>
<u>22:17</u>	<u>8.1</u>
<u>23:10, 13</u>	<u>20.6</u>

1 Chronicles (1 Chr)

<u>23:15, 17</u>	<u>11.3</u>
<u>28:6</u>	<u>48.6</u>

2 Chronicles (2 Chr)

<u>6:12–42</u>	<u>48.1</u>
<u>9:1–12</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>9:29</u>	<u>48.5</u>
<u>26:16–20</u>	<u>6.2</u>
<u>28:25</u>	<u>8.1</u>
<u>30:9</u>	<u>93.4</u>
<u>32:20–21</u>	<u>92.5</u>
<u>32:24–31</u>	<u>83.2</u>
<u>33:1–20</u>	<u>6.2; 47.2; 51.4</u>

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

<u>33:13</u>	<u>51.5</u>
<u>34:25</u>	<u>8.1</u>

Ezra

<u>1:1–4</u>	<u>93.6</u>
<u>6:1–5</u>	<u>93.6</u>
<u>9:3–15</u>	<u>28.3</u>
<u>9:6</u>	<u>50.2</u>

Nehemiah (Neh)

<u>1:5</u>	<u>5.3</u>
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Job

<u>1:6</u>	<u>4.2</u>
<u>2:8</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>3:3</u>	<u>68.2</u>
<u>3:3–26</u>	<u>4.3</u>
<u>3:17, 22</u>	<u>55.5</u>
<u>5:17</u>	<u>37.8</u>
<u>8:21</u>	<u>6.2</u>
<u>9:6, 10</u>	<u>63.2</u>
<u>9:16</u>	<u>28.3</u>
<u>10:8</u>	<u>36.1</u>
<u>10:21</u>	<u>5.5</u>
<u>11:12</u>	<u>46.2</u>
<u>12:10</u>	<u>36.1; 82.7</u>
<u>12:20</u>	<u>63.2</u>
<u>12:22</u>	<u>6.5</u>
<u>12:25</u>	<u>64.2</u>
<u>14:4</u>	<u>66.1</u>
<u>15:11</u>	<u>37.8</u>
<u>16:22</u>	<u>5.5</u>
<u>17:2</u>	<u>55.6</u>
<u>18:5</u>	<u>2.2</u>
<u>19:21</u>	<u>49.3</u>
<u>19:24</u>	<u>45.1</u>
<u>19:26–27</u>	<u>12.2</u>
<u>21:17</u>	<u>2.2</u>
<u>22:10</u>	<u>25.5</u>
<u>27:4–6</u>	<u>63.2</u>
<u>30:4</u>	<u>31.4</u>
<u>31:40</u>	<u>83.3</u>
<u>33:4</u>	<u>36.1</u>

St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).

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<u>33:9</u>	<u>59.2</u>
<u>34:21–22</u>	<u>6.5</u>
<u>38:5</u>	<u>57.1</u>
<u>38:11</u>	<u>6.3</u>
<u>39:1–4</u>	<u>34.12</u>
<u>39:9–12</u>	<u>68.5</u>
<u>39:30</u>	<u>68.4</u>
<u>40:24</u>	<u>90.5</u>
<u>41:1–2</u>	<u>92.2</u>
<u>42:2</u>	<u>16.2; 23.4; 49.3; 53.1; 73.4; 76.1; 86.2</u>

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<u>1:3</u>	<u>5.2</u>
<u>2:2</u>	<u>93.16</u>
<u>3:7</u>	<u>5.3; 60.1</u>
<u>3:8</u>	<u>63.1</u>
<u>5:4</u>	<u>60.1</u>
<u>5:11</u>	<u>35.1</u>
<u>6:2</u>	<u>61.1</u>
<u>6:8</u>	<u>60.3</u>
<u>7:8–9</u>	<u>60.1</u>
<u>7:13</u>	<u>7.3</u>
<u>8:1</u>	<u>35.1; 77.3</u>
<u>8:5</u>	<u>35.1; 46.2</u>
<u>8:9</u>	<u>35.1</u>
<u>9:2</u>	<u>35.1</u>
<u>9:16</u>	<u>60.1</u>
<u>11:6</u>	<u>60.1</u>
<u>12:4</u>	<u>60.1</u>
<u>13:3</u>	<u>93.19</u>
<u>14:1–3</u>	<u>6.5</u>
<u>15:1</u>	<u>21.5</u>
<u>17:3, 5</u>	<u>60.1</u>
<u>17:8</u>	<u>84.1; 91.2; 93.24</u>
<u>17:15</u>	<u>60.1; 90.4</u>
<u>18:6</u>	<u>18.11</u>
<u>18:7</u>	<u>77.2</u>
<u>18:11</u>	<u>34.6</u>
<u>18:12</u>	<u>93.19</u>
<u>18:22–24</u>	<u>60.1</u>
<u>18:28</u>	<u>66.4; 93.9</u>
<u>18:51</u>	<u>93.16</u>

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<u>19:11</u>	<u>60.3</u>
<u>22:22, 25</u>	<u>60.3</u>
<u>23:2</u>	<u>83.6</u>
<u>23:3</u>	<u>87.4</u>
<u>23:4</u>	<u>59.3; 85.1</u>
<u>24:4</u>	<u>51.3</u>
<u>24:7–10</u>	<u>29.1</u>
<u>25:8</u>	<u>35.2</u>
<u>25:15</u>	<u>85.1</u>
<u>26:1</u>	<u>60.1</u>
<u>26:2</u>	<u>56.1</u>
<u>26:4</u>	<u>60.1</u>
<u>26:4–5</u>	<u>50.2</u>
<u>26:6</u>	<u>60.1</u>
<u>26:11</u>	<u>61.1</u>
<u>27:1</u>	<u>15.4</u>
<u>27:4</u>	<u>60.3</u>
<u>27:5</u>	<u>53.1</u>
<u>28:3</u>	<u>60.1</u>
<u>28:4</u>	<u>8.1; 60.1</u>
<u>31:4</u>	<u>55.3</u>
<u>31:10</u>	<u>21.5</u>
<u>31:19</u>	<u>67.1</u>
<u>31:23</u>	<u>61.3; 62.2</u>
<u>32:1–2</u>	<u>49.3</u>
<u>32:5</u>	<u>32.2; 91.2</u>
<u>33:1</u>	<u>10.3; 60.3</u>
<u>33:5</u>	<u>21.5;</u>
<u>33:6</u>	<u>49.2; 63.3</u>
<u>33:9</u>	<u>17.3; 49.2; 63.3</u>
<u>33:15</u>	<u>36.1</u>
<u>34:7</u>	<u>79.4</u>
<u>34:8</u>	<u>93.9</u>
<u>34:16</u>	<u>60.3</u>
<u>35:2</u>	<u>21.5</u>
<u>35:8</u>	<u>55.3</u>
<u>35:13–14</u>	<u>60.5</u>
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<u>36:9</u>	<u>15.4</u>
<u>36:10</u>	<u>23.1</u>
<u>37:9, 17, 20</u>	<u>60.3</u>
<u>38:4</u>	<u>15.3</u>

<u>38:5</u>	<u>48.1</u> ; <u>50.2</u>
<u>38:7</u>	<u>48.1</u>
<u>38:8–9</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>38:20</u>	<u>76.1</u>
<u>39:1</u>	<u>60.3</u>
<u>39:11</u>	<u>21.5</u>
<u>40:2</u>	<u>53.1</u>
<u>40:12</u>	<u>15.3</u> ; <u>50.2</u> ; <u>55.3</u>
<u>41:12</u>	<u>60.3</u>
<u>42:5, 11</u>	<u>44.2</u>
<u>43:1</u>	<u>60.3</u>
<u>43:5</u>	<u>44.2</u>
<u>44:20</u>	<u>20.21</u> ; <u>60.4</u>
<u>44:22</u>	<u>60.4</u>
<u>44:25</u>	<u>86.1</u>
<u>45:7</u>	<u>82.1</u> ; <u>93.2</u> , <u>7</u> , <u>11</u>
<u>47:5</u>	<u>92.7</u>
<u>48:10</u>	<u>93.9</u>
<u>49:3</u>	<u>60.4</u>
<u>49:12</u>	<u>15.2</u> ; <u>23.2</u> ; <u>55.4</u>
<u>49:15</u>	<u>62.3</u>
<u>49:20</u>	<u>23.2</u>
<u>50:16</u>	<u>60.1</u>
<u>50:16–23</u>	<u>60.2</u>
<u>50:20</u>	<u>56.1</u>
<u>51:3–5</u>	<u>47.2</u>
<u>51:4</u>	<u>19.2</u>
<u>51:5</u>	<u>6.5</u>
<u>51:6</u>	<u>79.1</u>
<u>51:8</u>	<u>93.9</u>
<u>51:10</u>	<u>73.4</u>
<u>51:15–17</u>	<u>4.4</u>
<u>51:17</u>	<u>11.2</u> ; <u>57.2</u>
<u>52:1</u>	<u>48.5</u>
<u>52:8</u>	<u>93.14</u>
<u>53:1–3</u>	<u>6.5</u>
<u>53:5</u>	<u>60.4</u>
<u>56:13</u>	<u>15.4</u>
<u>56:14</u>	<u>60.4</u>
<u>57:1</u>	<u>65.3</u> ; <u>76.2</u>
<u>58:3</u>	<u>62.2</u>
<u>58:4</u>	<u>50.4</u>
<u>59:3–5</u>	<u>60.4</u>

<u>60:3</u>	<u>5.1</u>
<u>61:1</u>	<u>21.5</u>
<u>61:1–2</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>62:2</u>	<u>54.2; 87.4</u>
<u>62:7</u>	<u>76.2</u>
<u>63:1</u>	<u>34.12</u>
<u>63:5</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>65:7</u>	<u>6.3</u>
<u>66:12</u>	<u>85.2</u>
<u>66:13–14</u>	<u>5.5</u>
<u>66:14</u>	<u>20.4</u>
<u>66:18</u>	<u>59.2</u>
<u>67:1</u>	<u>58.1</u>
<u>68:1</u>	<u>68.6</u>
<u>68:2</u>	<u>2.2; 60.4</u>
<u>68:8</u>	<u>77.2</u>
<u>68:20</u>	<u>15.4</u>
<u>69:5</u>	<u>6.5</u>
<u>69:28</u>	<u>23.2; 78.3</u>
<u>71:9</u>	<u>87.3</u>
<u>71:14</u>	<u>61.1</u>
<u>71:18</u>	<u>87.3</u>
<u>71:20–21</u>	<u>87.4</u>
<u>72:1–20</u>	<u>48.7</u>
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<u>72:6</u>	<u>25.4</u>
<u>73:1</u>	<u>51.3</u>
<u>73:9</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>73:22</u>	<u>9.3; 21.4; 50.2</u>
<u>73:23</u>	<u>83.1</u>
<u>75:4–5</u>	<u>64.2</u>
<u>75:8</u>	<u>60.5</u>
<u>75:10</u>	<u>60.5; 90.4</u>
<u>75:11</u>	<u>64.2</u>
<u>78:15</u>	<u>53.1</u>
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<u>78:60</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>78:65</u>	<u>75.5</u>
<u>79:1</u>	<u>75.8</u>
<u>79:2</u>	<u>60.5</u>
<u>80:3–7</u>	<u>37.1</u>
<u>81:3</u>	<u>92.7</u>
<u>81:11</u>	<u>62.3</u>

<u>82:1</u>	<u>37.2</u>
<u>82:5</u>	<u>64.2</u>
<u>82:6</u>	<u>46.2</u>
<u>83:1, 3</u>	<u>60.5</u>
<u>84:2</u>	<u>72.5</u>
<u>84:9</u>	<u>93.16</u>
<u>84:6–7</u>	<u>64.3</u>
<u>86:15</u>	<u>2.2</u>
<u>87:1</u>	<u>21.5</u>
<u>88:11</u>	<u>33.7</u>
<u>89:9</u>	<u>6.3</u>
<u>89:21</u>	<u>93.17</u>
<u>89:27</u>	<u>34.5</u>
<u>89:50</u>	<u>32.2</u>
<u>90:8</u>	<u>6.5</u>
<u>91:13</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>92:10</u>	<u>68.5</u>
<u>92:11</u>	<u>93.9</u>
<u>92:13</u>	<u>5.2</u>
<u>94:16</u>	<u>55.1</u>
<u>96:5</u>	<u>48.3</u>
<u>97:5</u>	<u>15.3</u>
<u>100:3</u>	<u>36.1</u>
<u>101:4, 8–9</u>	<u>61.1</u>
<u>102:9</u>	<u>61.1; 102:13; 34.12</u>
<u>102:19–20</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>102:20</u>	<u>94.1</u>
<u>102:26–27</u>	<u>83.2</u>
<u>103:1–22</u>	<u>51.3</u>
<u>103:8</u>	<u>63.4</u>
<u>103:9</u>	<u>52.1</u>
<u>103:12</u>	<u>31.1</u>
<u>103:21</u>	<u>35.1</u>
<u>103:22</u>	<u>90.6</u>
<u>104:1</u>	<u>20.3</u>
<u>104:2</u>	<u>25.5; 75.5</u>
<u>104:4</u>	<u>35.1</u>
<u>104:6–9</u>	<u>6.3</u>
<u>104:14</u>	<u>63.2</u>
<u>104:15</u>	<u>92.2; 93.9</u>
<u>104:30</u>	<u>91.5</u>
<u>104:32</u>	<u>63.3</u>
<u>104:35</u>	<u>62.2</u>

<u>104:30</u>	<u>33.6</u>
<u>105:15</u>	<u>93.6</u>
<u>106:6</u>	<u>50.1; 61.1</u>
<u>106:29</u>	<u>8.1</u>
<u>107:25</u>	<u>6.3</u>
<u>107:30</u>	<u>82.3</u>
<u>108:12</u>	<u>51.1</u>
<u>109:18</u>	<u>93.12</u>
<u>110:1</u>	<u>34.6; 75.5; 93.13</u>
<u>110:4</u>	<u>93.5</u>
<u>112:9</u>	<u>61.1</u>
<u>113:7</u>	<u>74.2</u>
<u>116:9</u>	<u>60.4</u>
<u>116:10</u>	<u>11.1; 53.3; 75.13</u>
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<u>118:8–9</u>	<u>51.1</u>
<u>118:22</u>	<u>21.5; 75.8</u>
<u>119:2</u>	<u>94.1</u>
<u>119:10</u>	<u>61.2; 94.1</u>
<u>119:11</u>	<u>61.2</u>
<u>119:25</u>	<u>86.1</u>
<u>119:38</u>	<u>66.4</u>
<u>119:39</u>	<u>72.5</u>
<u>119:44</u>	<u>64.3</u>
<u>119:58</u>	<u>94.1</u>
<u>119:73</u>	<u>36.1</u>
<u>119:81</u>	<u>72.5</u>
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<u>119:114</u>	<u>76.2</u>
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<u>119:145</u>	<u>94.1</u>
<u>119:155</u>	<u>61.2</u>
<u>119:173</u>	<u>83.1</u>
<u>119:176</u>	<u>15.1</u>
<u>121:4</u>	<u>66.4</u>
<u>121:6</u>	<u>82.6</u>
<u>125:1</u>	<u>75.8</u>
<u>125:4–5</u>	<u>61.2</u>
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<u>130:1–2</u>	<u>1.1</u>

<u>131:1</u>	<u>61.2</u>
<u>132:4–5</u>	<u>92.1</u>
<u>132:10</u>	<u>93.16</u>
<u>133:2</u>	<u>93.5</u>
<u>138:8</u>	<u>81.1</u>
<u>139:1–4</u>	<u>6.5</u>
<u>139:4</u>	<u>61.2</u>
<u>139:15</u>	<u>36.1</u>
<u>139:21, 23–24</u>	<u>61.2</u>
<u>140:4</u>	<u>61.2</u>
<u>140:5</u>	<u>55.3</u>
<u>140:10</u>	<u>62.3</u>
<u>141:2</u>	<u>75.3; 88.2</u>
<u>141:5</u>	<u>33.1</u>
<u>142:5</u>	<u>61.2</u>
<u>142:7</u>	<u>61.2; 83.2</u>
<u>143:2</u>	<u>72.2</u>
<u>143:6</u>	<u>72.5</u>
<u>144:4</u>	<u>51.1</u>
<u>144:15</u>	<u>61.3</u>
<u>145:10</u>	<u>61.3</u>
<u>145:14</u>	<u>53.1</u>
<u>145:15</u>	<u>84.1</u>
<u>145:19–20</u>	<u>61.3</u>
<u>146:3</u>	<u>51.1</u>
<u>147:4</u>	<u>29.2; 63.3; 75.8</u>
<u>147:6</u>	<u>61.3</u>
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<u>1:1–7</u>	<u>26.4</u>
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<u>2:22</u>	<u>62.2</u>
<u>3:1–2, 16–18</u>	<u>93.11</u>
<u>3:18</u>	<u>26.4; 92.7</u>
<u>3:19</u>	<u>63.3</u>
<u>3:21–22</u>	<u>93.11</u>
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<u>4:20–22</u>	<u>93.11</u>
<u>6:6–8</u>	<u>68.2</u>

<u>6:14</u>	<u>22.3</u>
<u>6:23</u>	<u>15.4; 93.11</u>
<u>7:1–3</u>	<u>64.3</u>
<u>8:13</u>	<u>45.1</u>
<u>8:21</u>	<u>74.3</u>
<u>9:1</u>	<u>75.10</u>
<u>9:5</u>	<u>92.2</u>
<u>9:12</u>	<u>30.1</u>
<u>11:2</u>	<u>45.1</u>
<u>11:20</u>	<u>22.3</u>
<u>11:30</u>	<u>26.4</u>
<u>12:10</u>	<u>56.1</u>
<u>12:15</u>	<u>30.4</u>
<u>12:16</u>	<u>28.2</u>
<u>13:9</u>	<u>2.2</u>
<u>13:10</u>	<u>45.1</u>
<u>13:12</u>	<u>26.4</u>
<u>13:14</u>	<u>93.11</u>
<u>14:12</u>	<u>30.4</u>
<u>15:18</u>	<u>45.1</u>
<u>16:18</u>	<u>66.1</u>
<u>16:25</u>	<u>30.4</u>
<u>17:20</u>	<u>22.3</u>
<u>20:9</u>	<u>6.5; 66.1</u>
<u>20:20</u>	<u>2.2</u>
<u>21:3</u>	<u>4.4</u>
<u>24:3</u>	<u>75.10</u>
<u>24:17</u>	<u>15.4</u>
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<u>25:6–7</u>	<u>50.1</u>
<u>25:20</u>	<u>21.5</u>
<u>28:13</u>	<u>9.3</u>
<u>29:23</u>	<u>45.1</u>
<u>30:2</u>	<u>21.4</u>
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<u>4:3</u>	<u>4.3</u>
<u>6:3–4</u>	<u>20.6</u>
<u>7:4</u>	<u>50.1</u>
<u>7:20</u>	<u>6.5</u>
<u>7:21</u>	<u>60.2</u>
<u>8:8</u>	<u>4.1</u>

<u>8:17</u>	<u>23.1</u>
<u>9:11</u>	<u>66.1</u>
<u>10:4</u>	<u>27.9</u>
<u>12:4</u>	<u>92.8</u>
<u>12:7</u>	<u>49.1</u>
<u>12:13</u>	<u>48.5</u>
<u>12:14</u>	<u>6.5</u>

Song of Songs (Song)

<u>1:3</u>	<u>93.6; 93.11</u>
<u>1:4</u>	<u>93.11</u>
<u>1:8</u>	<u>46.1</u>
<u>2:1</u>	<u>77.3; 93.11</u>
<u>2:5</u>	<u>93.9</u>
<u>2:9</u>	<u>52.1</u>
<u>3:6</u>	<u>93.8</u>
<u>4:10</u>	<u>93.8</u>
<u>4:14</u>	<u>93.11</u>
<u>5:1</u>	<u>93.8</u>
<u>5:2</u>	<u>85.1; 91.4</u>
<u>5:5</u>	<u>93.8</u>
<u>5:13</u>	<u>93.8</u>
<u>6:11</u>	<u>93.9</u>
<u>8:2</u>	<u>93.8</u>

Isaiah (Isa)

<u>1:6</u>	<u>18.11; 93.14</u>
<u>1:11–20</u>	<u>4.4</u>
<u>1:15</u>	<u>1.1; 56.1</u>
<u>1:18</u>	<u>31.1; 52.2; 93.12</u>
<u>1:20</u>	<u>62.3, 4</u>
<u>1:28</u>	<u>62.2</u>
<u>2:4</u>	<u>92.7</u>
<u>2:12</u>	<u>62.2</u>
<u>3:11</u>	<u>8.1</u>
<u>5:1–7</u>	<u>5.5; 39.2</u>
<u>5:21</u>	<u>7.2</u>
<u>5:24</u>	<u>7.3; 62.3</u>
<u>5:30</u>	<u>25.1</u>
<u>6:1</u>	<u>77.3</u>
<u>6:1–5</u>	<u>91.1</u>
<u>6:2–3</u>	<u>87.2; 93.1</u>
<u>6:3</u>	<u>34.9</u>

<u>6:3–4</u>	<u>93.9</u>
<u>6:4</u>	<u>90.5</u>
<u>6:5</u>	<u>50.1</u>
<u>6:6–7</u>	<u>22.3; 33.7</u>
<u>6:9–10</u>	<u>5.5</u>
<u>6:10</u>	<u>92.10</u>
<u>6:11</u>	<u>52.2</u>
<u>7:14</u>	<u>33.6; 93.9</u>
<u>7:23–25</u>	<u>39.2</u>
<u>8:14</u>	<u>76.2; 75.8</u>
<u>9:1</u>	<u>93.10</u>
<u>9:1–2</u>	<u>63.4</u>
<u>9:2</u>	<u>44.1; 78.2</u>
<u>10:17</u>	<u>93.19</u>
<u>10:20</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>11:1</u>	<u>32.2; 75.5</u>
<u>11:2</u>	<u>93.9</u>
<u>11:5</u>	<u>45.1</u>
<u>13:9</u>	<u>79.3</u>
<u>13:11</u>	<u>8.1</u>
<u>14:12</u>	<u>36.2</u>
<u>14:13–15</u>	<u>55.6</u>
<u>14:28–32</u>	<u>1.2</u>
<u>21:1–10</u>	<u>1.1; 67.3</u>
<u>22:21–25</u>	<u>67.3</u>
<u>23:1–18</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>23:15–16</u>	<u>39.4</u>
<u>24:17–18</u>	<u>1.2</u>
<u>24:19–20</u>	<u>85.1</u>
<u>25:4</u>	<u>2.2</u>
<u>25:6</u>	<u>93.9</u>
<u>25:8</u>	<u>28.8; 79.4; 88.3</u>
<u>25:12</u>	<u>94.1</u>
<u>26:9</u>	<u>72.5</u>
<u>26:19</u>	<u>10.3; 12.4; 88.3</u>
<u>27:9</u>	<u>58.1</u>
<u>27:13</u>	<u>88.2; 92.7</u>
<u>28:1–13</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>28:14–22</u>	<u>67.3</u>
<u>28:15</u>	<u>21.1</u>
<u>28:16</u>	<u>75.10; 75.8, 10</u>
<u>29:1–14</u>	<u>67.3</u>
<u>29:9–10</u>	<u>19.1</u>

<u>29:13</u>	<u>28.2</u>
<u>29:16</u>	<u>2.2</u>
<u>30:6</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>30:14</u>	<u>66.3</u>
<u>30:15</u>	<u>52.1</u>
<u>30:27</u>	<u>77.3</u>
<u>33:10</u>	<u>49.2</u>
<u>33:14</u>	<u>8.1; 20.6; 64.2</u>
<u>33:24</u>	<u>28.5; 35.3</u>
<u>34:4</u>	<u>79.2</u>
<u>35:3–4</u>	<u>92.10</u>
<u>35:5–6</u>	<u>92.10</u>
<u>37:1–14</u>	<u>33.6</u>
<u>37:16</u>	<u>35.4</u>
<u>37:36–38</u>	<u>92.5</u>
<u>38:1–8</u>	<u>53.1; 83.2</u>
<u>38:3</u>	<u>59.2</u>
<u>38:17</u>	<u>28.5; 31.1; 35.3</u>
<u>40:3</u>	<u>29.1</u>
<u>40:3–5</u>	<u>75.12</u>
<u>40:10</u>	<u>38.4</u>
<u>40:12</u>	<u>57.1</u>
<u>43:3</u>	<u>5.2</u>
<u>43:5–7</u>	<u>94.2</u>
<u>43:7</u>	<u>35.1; 36.1</u>
<u>43:25</u>	<u>15.4; 28.5; 31.1; 35.3; 53.1</u>
<u>44:6</u>	<u>16.1</u>
<u>44:22</u>	<u>31.1</u>
<u>44:26</u>	<u>52.2</u>
<u>45:1</u>	<u>93.6</u>
<u>46:1–7</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>47:2–3</u>	<u>19.5</u>
<u>47:1–15</u>	<u>1.1; 67.3</u>
<u>48:1–2</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>48:1–22</u>	<u>67.3</u>
<u>48:13</u>	<u>57.1</u>
<u>49:2</u>	<u>66.5</u>
<u>50:2</u>	<u>10.1</u>
<u>51:5</u>	<u>38.4</u>
<u>51:8</u>	<u>21.5</u>
<u>51:21–22</u>	<u>19.1</u>
<u>52:1–2</u>	<u>19.5</u>
<u>52:5</u>	<u>21.2</u>

<u>52:8</u>	<u>92.7</u>
<u>53:1</u>	<u>28.4</u>
<u>53:3</u>	<u>49.2; 77.3</u>
<u>53:4</u>	<u>63.4</u>
<u>53:7</u>	<u>34.6; 77.3</u>
<u>54:10</u>	<u>11.4</u>
<u>54:11–12</u>	<u>75.10</u>
<u>55:1</u>	<u>90.2</u>
<u>56:12</u>	<u>64.2</u>
<u>57:8</u>	<u>83.3</u>
<u>57:9</u>	<u>20.6</u>
<u>57:15</u>	<u>92.10</u>
<u>58:1</u>	<u>5.5; 32.2</u>
<u>59:1</u>	<u>10.1</u>
<u>59:5</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>59:6</u>	<u>21.5</u>
<u>59:12</u>	<u>62.2</u>
<u>59:16</u>	<u>38.4</u>
<u>60:2</u>	<u>8.1</u>
<u>60:17</u>	<u>2.2</u>
<u>61:1</u>	<u>75.6; 93.7</u>
<u>61:3</u>	<u>82.1; 93.2, 9</u>
<u>61:10</u>	<u>46.4; 65.3.</u>
<u>63:1</u>	<u>63.1</u>
<u>63:5</u>	<u>38.4</u>
<u>63:17</u>	<u>2.3</u>
<u>64:6</u>	<u>20.6; 22.3</u>
<u>64:8</u>	<u>2.2</u>
<u>65:5</u>	<u>50.2</u>
<u>65:17</u>	<u>79.2</u>
<u>66:1–2</u>	<u>90.2</u>
<u>66:2</u>	<u>90.5</u>
<u>66:22–24</u>	<u>8.1</u>
<u>66:24</u>	<u>7.3; 64.2</u>

Jeremiah (Jer)

<u>2:13</u>	<u>34.11</u>
<u>2:21</u>	<u>5.5</u>
<u>3:6–11</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>3:12</u>	<u>93.4</u>
<u>4:5</u>	<u>5.5</u>
<u>4:13–31</u>	<u>31.2</u>
<u>4:19, 21</u>	<u>5.5</u>

<u>5:22</u>	<u>23.1</u>
<u>6:4</u>	<u>32.2</u>
<u>6:29</u>	<u>69.1</u>
<u>7:1–15</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>7:12–15</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>7:21–22</u>	<u>4.4</u>
<u>7:31</u>	<u>20.6</u>
<u>8:3</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>8:22</u>	<u>18.11</u>
<u>9:1</u>	<u>68.1</u>
<u>9:21</u>	<u>32.2</u>
<u>9:22</u>	<u>72.1</u>
<u>9:24</u>	<u>90.2</u>
<u>11:1–12:17</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>11:17</u>	<u>8.1</u>
<u>11:18–20</u>	<u>59.2</u>
<u>11:23</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>12:10–11</u>	<u>21.4</u>
<u>13:7</u>	<u>20.6</u>
<u>15:4</u>	<u>51.4</u>
<u>15:17</u>	<u>50.2</u>
<u>16:17</u>	<u>6.5</u>
<u>16:19</u>	<u>76.2</u>
<u>17:1</u>	<u>45.1</u>
<u>17:5</u>	<u>21.6</u>
<u>18:6</u>	<u>2.2</u>
<u>19:2–6</u>	<u>20.6</u>
<u>19:3–5</u>	<u>51.4</u>
<u>20:14</u>	<u>68.2</u>
<u>20:14–18</u>	<u>4.3</u>
<u>22:28–30</u>	<u>45.3</u>
<u>24:8</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>25:15–38</u>	<u>19.1</u>
<u>26:4–9</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>30:12</u>	<u>93.14</u>
<u>30:12–13</u>	<u>18.11</u>
<u>31:15</u>	<u>30.3; 68.2</u>
<u>31:16</u>	<u>28.8</u>
<u>31:18</u>	<u>54.1</u>
<u>31:31–33</u>	<u>48.5</u>
<u>31:31–34</u>	<u>43.1</u>
<u>31:33</u>	<u>35.2</u>
<u>31:34</u>	<u>28.5; 35.3; 53.1</u>

<u>31:37</u>	<u>57.1</u>
<u>32:17</u>	<u>10.1; 49.2</u>
<u>32:27</u>	<u>2.2; 49.1</u>
<u>32:35</u>	<u>20.6</u>
<u>32:37</u>	<u>35.4</u>
<u>32:39–40</u>	<u>35.2</u>
<u>33:8</u>	<u>28.5; 35.3</u>
<u>36:18</u>	<u>76.2</u>
<u>42:17</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>44:7</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>46–51 chs</u>	<u>1.2</u>
<u>47:1–7</u>	<u>1.2</u>
<u>48:43</u>	<u>1.2</u>
<u>49:1–3</u>	<u>20.6</u>
<u>49:7–22</u>	<u>1.2</u>
<u>49:16</u>	<u>11.2</u>
<u>50:15</u>	<u>39.2</u>
<u>50:20</u>	<u>28.5; 35.3</u>
<u>51:7–8</u>	<u>20.5</u>
<u>51:30</u>	<u>39.2</u>

Lamentations (Lam)

<u>1:1–22</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>1:2</u>	<u>30.3</u>
<u>1:20</u>	<u>32.2</u>
<u>2:2, 9</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>3:1–26</u>	<u>44.2</u>
<u>3:22–34</u>	<u>68.2</u>
<u>3:28–29</u>	<u>47.1</u>
<u>3:55–56</u>	<u>68.2</u>
<u>4:20</u>	<u>93.8</u>

Ezekiel (Ezek)

<u>1:2–28</u>	<u>32.3</u>
<u>1:4–14</u>	<u>91.1</u>
<u>2:9–10</u>	<u>39.2</u>
<u>3:23–24</u>	<u>21.1</u>
<u>5:5</u>	<u>93.5</u>
<u>10:1–22</u>	<u>52.2</u>
<u>11:19</u>	<u>48.5; 64.3</u>
<u>11:19–20</u>	<u>35.2</u>
<u>14:12–20</u>	<u>70.2</u>
<u>16:3–4</u>	<u>54.3</u>

<u>16:9</u>	<u>5.2</u>
<u>16:15–16</u>	<u>33.4</u>
<u>16:26</u>	<u>8.1</u>
<u>16:45–46</u>	<u>54.3</u>
<u>18:4</u>	<u>49.1</u>
<u>18:23</u>	<u>63.1</u>
<u>18:23–32</u>	<u>76.1</u>
<u>18:32</u>	<u>63.1</u>
<u>20:7–8</u>	<u>35.2</u>
<u>22:3</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>23:1–49</u>	<u>60.4</u>
<u>23:3</u>	<u>35.2</u>
<u>23:4</u>	<u>54.3</u>
<u>23:20</u>	<u>60.4</u>
<u>26:1–28:19</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>28:13–14</u>	<u>93.13</u>
<u>28:20–26</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>30:3</u>	<u>79.3</u>
<u>32:11</u>	<u>63.1</u>
<u>33:10</u>	<u>86.1</u>
<u>33:11</u>	<u>76.1</u>
<u>34:11–16</u>	<u>15.1</u>
<u>36:20–21</u>	<u>21.2</u>
<u>36:26</u>	<u>64.3</u>
<u>36:26–27</u>	<u>35.2; 48.5</u>
<u>37:1</u>	<u>88.3</u>
<u>37:1–14</u>	<u>18.3; 25.4; 63.3</u>
<u>37:12</u>	<u>88.3</u>
<u>39:17–20</u>	<u>68.4</u>
<u>43:1–12</u>	<u>52.2</u>
<u>43:13–27</u>	<u>27.4</u>
<u>47:1–12</u>	<u>75.12</u>
<u>47:9</u>	<u>5.2</u>
<u>47:12</u>	<u>18.6</u>

Daniel (Dan)

<u>1:6</u>	<u>20.1</u>
<u>2:22</u>	<u>4.1; 25.5</u>
<u>2:25</u>	<u>20.1</u>
<u>2:45</u>	<u>75.10</u>
<u>3:1–30</u>	<u>53.1</u>
<u>3:8–30</u>	<u>50.2</u>
<u>3:29</u>	<u>50.5</u>

<u>3:50</u>	<u>53.1</u> ; <u>63.1</u>
<u>4:37</u>	<u>83.1</u>
<u>5:13</u>	<u>20.1</u>
<u>6:13</u>	<u>20.1</u>
<u>7:4</u>	<u>21.1</u>
<u>7:9</u>	<u>2.5</u>
<u>7:9–10</u>	<u>73.3</u>
<u>7:10</u>	<u>8.1</u>
<u>7:18, 22</u>	<u>73.3</u>
<u>9:4–19</u>	<u>20.1</u>
<u>9:5</u>	<u>50.1</u> ; <u>50.5</u>
<u>9:8, 11</u>	<u>50.1</u>
<u>9:13</u>	<u>50.1</u>
<u>9:25–26</u>	<u>93.8</u>
<u>9:27</u>	<u>51.4</u>
<u>12:2</u>	<u>88.3</u>
<u>12:3</u>	<u>82.1</u>
<u>13:56</u>	<u>7.2</u>
<u>14:32–38</u>	<u>85.1</u>

Hosea (Hos)

<u>1:2</u>	<u>33.2</u>
<u>1:3</u>	<u>83.4</u>
<u>2:18–22</u>	<u>83.4</u>
<u>2:21–22</u>	<u>2.2</u>
<u>3:1–3</u>	<u>33.2</u>
<u>5:3</u>	<u>6.5</u>
<u>5:12</u>	<u>21.5</u> ; <u>83.3</u>
<u>5:15</u>	<u>52.2</u>
<u>6:1–2</u>	<u>52.2</u>
<u>6:6</u>	<u>1.1; 4.4</u> ; <u>34.11</u>
<u>7:8–10</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>7:11</u>	<u>2.1</u> ; <u>20.6</u>
<u>7:13</u>	<u>62.3</u>
<u>8:1</u>	<u>5.5</u>
<u>8:3</u>	<u>28.4</u>
<u>9:11</u>	<u>20.6</u>
<u>9:14</u>	<u>2.2</u> ; <u>83.3</u>
<u>10:12</u>	<u>83.3</u>
<u>11:1–7</u>	<u>5.5</u>
<u>13:3</u>	<u>21.5</u>
<u>13:14</u>	<u>79.4</u>
<u>14:2–3</u>	<u>1.1</u> ; <u>28.4</u> ; <u>4.4</u>

14:5 88.3

Joel

<u>1:4</u>	<u>21.2</u>
<u>1:5</u>	<u>50.1</u>
<u>1:15</u>	<u>32.2</u>
<u>2:1</u>	<u>5.5; 50.1</u>
<u>2:10</u>	<u>90.5</u>
<u>2:11</u>	<u>50.1</u>
<u>2:15</u>	<u>5.5</u>
<u>2:26–29</u>	<u>67.1</u>
<u>2:31</u>	<u>50.1</u>
<u>2:32</u>	<u>11.5; 12.1; 94.1</u>
<u>3:2, 12</u>	<u>1.2</u>
<u>3:14</u>	<u>1.2; 50.1</u>

Amos

<u>1:11–12</u>	<u>1.2; 20.6</u>
<u>4:13</u>	<u>63.3; 93.7</u>
<u>5:8</u>	<u>16.1; 94.1</u>
<u>5:12</u>	<u>6.5</u>
<u>5:19–20</u>	<u>79.3</u>
<u>5:21–24</u>	<u>4.4</u>
<u>5:23</u>	<u>92.8</u>
<u>5:25–26</u>	<u>20.6</u>
<u>8:11</u>	<u>19.2</u>
<u>9:7</u>	<u>54.3</u>
<u>9:11–12</u>	<u>94.2</u>

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<u>1:2–14</u>	<u>1.2</u>
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<u>3:17</u>	<u>93.7</u>
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<u>12:41</u>	<u>2.1</u>
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<u>18:4</u>	<u>7.2</u>
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<u>18:9</u>	<u>8.1</u>
<u>18:10</u>	<u>81.1</u>
<u>18:12–14</u>	<u>15.1; 25.4; 29.1; 32.3</u>
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<u>18:15–17</u>	<u>46.3</u>
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<u>18:21–22</u>	<u>29.2; 31.1</u>
<u>18:22</u>	<u>15.5</u>
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<u>18:23–35</u>	<u>29.1; 58.2; 74.2; 85.2</u>
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<u>19:17</u>	<u>58.2; 65.4; 72.3; 84.1</u>
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<u>22:15–22</u>	<u>33.2</u>
<u>22:16</u>	<u>76.2</u>
<u>22:23–33</u>	<u>75.7</u>
<u>22:31–32</u>	<u>86.2</u>
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<u>24:51</u>	<u>95.2</u>
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<u>25:36</u>	<u>5.6</u>
<u>25:41</u>	<u>8.1</u> ; <u>66.6</u> ; <u>73.4</u>
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<u>26:65–66</u>	<u>77.3</u>
<u>26:67</u>	<u>66.5</u>
<u>26:69–75</u>	<u>57.2</u> ; <u>70.2</u>
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<u>27:5</u>	<u>77.2</u>
<u>27:11–26</u>	<u>77.2</u>
<u>27:12–14</u>	<u>66.6</u>
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<u>27:30</u>	<u>36.2</u> ; <u>66.5</u>
<u>27:27–31</u>	<u>36.2</u> ; <u>66.5</u> ; <u>72.2</u>
<u>27:32</u>	<u>58.3</u> ; <u>77.3</u>
<u>27:34</u>	<u>77.2</u> ; <u>90.5</u>
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<u>27:48</u>	<u>66.6; 77.2</u>
<u>27:51</u>	<u>36.2; 77.2</u>
<u>27:52</u>	<u>64.3</u>
<u>27:52–53</u>	<u>48.6</u>
<u>27:54</u>	<u>77.2</u>
<u>27:55–56</u>	<u>33.1</u>
<u>27:66</u>	<u>36.2</u>
<u>28:4</u>	<u>36.2</u>
<u>28:1–10</u>	<u>33.1</u>
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<u>28:11–15</u>	<u>36.2</u>
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<u>2:10</u>	<u>93.3</u>
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<u>2:17</u>	<u>59.2</u>
<u>2:19</u>	<u>5.3</u>
<u>2:19–20</u>	<u>75.10</u>
<u>2:22</u>	<u>62.2</u>
<u>3:1–6</u>	<u>18.3</u>
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St. Gregory of Narek, *From the Depths of the Heart: Annotated Translation of the Prayers of St. Gregory of Narek*, trans. Abraham Terian (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2021).
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<u>5:8</u>	<u>58.3</u>
<u>5:14</u>	<u>58.2</u>
<u>5:24</u>	<u>5.3</u>
<u>6:20</u>	<u>85.1</u>
<u>6:22–58</u>	<u>14.3; 67.1</u>
<u>6:27</u>	<u>5.2</u>
<u>6:35</u>	<u>75.5</u>
<u>6:35–48</u>	<u>33.2</u>
<u>6:39</u>	<u>33.6; 87.1; 93.24</u>
<u>6:54</u>	<u>5.3</u>
<u>6:49–52</u>	<u>33.7</u>
<u>6:68</u>	<u>93.11; 95.1</u>
<u>6:69</u>	<u>31.1</u>
<u>7:37</u>	<u>4.3</u>
<u>7:37–39</u>	<u>76.2; 93.11</u>
<u>7:38</u>	<u>5.2; 64.4</u>

<u>8:2–11</u>	<u>33.2</u>
<u>8:11</u>	<u>82.5</u>
<u>8:12</u>	<u>15.4; 27.7; 32.3; 44.1; 53.4; 57.1; 58.2; 75.2; 76.1; 76.2; 93.12., 19; 95.1</u>
<u>8:12–29</u>	<u>84.1</u>
<u>8:15</u>	<u>76.2</u>
<u>8:36</u>	<u>90.2</u>
<u>8:39–40</u>	<u>54.3</u>
<u>8:44</u>	<u>4.2; 67.1; 71.2</u>
<u>8:56</u>	<u>77.3; 95.1</u>
<u>9:1–12</u>	<u>18.4; 58.2; 84.1</u>
<u>9:2</u>	<u>76.2</u>
<u>9:5</u>	<u>27.7; 32.3; 44.1; 53.4; 75.2; 76.1; 76.2; 93.12, 19; 95.1</u>
<u>10:1–21</u>	<u>33.6</u>
<u>10:7</u>	<u>32.3</u>
<u>10:9</u>	<u>32.3; 57.1</u>
<u>10:10</u>	<u>32.5; 33.4; 75.13; 76.2; 82.5; 95.1</u>
<u>10:11</u>	<u>75.5; 92.7</u>
<u>10:12–13</u>	<u>46.1</u>
<u>10:14</u>	<u>75.5; 92.7</u>
<u>10:18</u>	<u>53.3</u>
<u>10:24</u>	<u>93.13</u>
<u>10:34</u>	<u>46.2</u>
<u>10:34–35</u>	<u>75.12</u>
<u>10:7–9</u>	<u>75.13</u>
<u>11:1–44</u>	<u>18.7</u>
<u>11:4</u>	<u>80.2</u>
<u>11:8</u>	<u>76.2</u>
<u>11:17–44</u>	<u>11.2</u>
<u>11:25–26</u>	<u>27.7; 32.3; 42.2; 66.4</u>
<u>11:33–41</u>	<u>25.3</u>
<u>11:35</u>	<u>48.7</u>
<u>11:38–44</u>	<u>58.2; 76.2; 78.2; 90.2</u>
<u>11:43–44</u>	<u>48.6; 58.3</u>
<u>11:52</u>	<u>47.2</u>
<u>12:1–8</u>	<u>33.1</u>
<u>12:3</u>	<u>33.2; 93.15</u>
<u>12:13</u>	<u>95.1</u>
<u>12:24</u>	<u>63.2</u>
<u>12:31</u>	<u>67.1</u>
<u>12:34</u>	<u>93.3</u>
<u>12:36</u>	<u>71.3; 75.10</u>
<u>12:47</u>	<u>76.2</u>
<u>12:48</u>	<u>38.4</u>

<u>13:6–19</u>	<u>5.5</u>
<u>13:13</u>	<u>76.2</u>
<u>13:13–14</u>	<u>93.13</u>
<u>14:2–3</u>	<u>75.10; 80.2</u>
<u>14:5–6</u>	<u>90.2</u>
<u>14:6</u>	<u>27.7; 29.1; 31.3; 32.3; 33.4; 57.1; 58.2; 67.1; 71.4; 75.13; 76.2</u>
<u>14:10–12</u>	<u>79.4</u>
<u>14:17, 23</u>	<u>19.1; 28.8; 53.5; 78.4; 84.1</u>
<u>14:27</u>	<u>77.3; 79.2</u>
<u>15:2</u>	<u>24.1</u>
<u>15:4–5</u>	<u>93.12</u>
<u>15:5</u>	<u>75.5</u>
<u>15:6</u>	<u>71.2, 3</u>
<u>15:12–13</u>	<u>90.2</u>
<u>15:16</u>	<u>93.21</u>
<u>16:11</u>	<u>67.1</u>
<u>16:12–15</u>	<u>34.2; 73.3</u>
<u>17:1–26</u>	<u>53.2</u>
<u>17:5</u>	<u>75.5</u>
<u>17:11–12</u>	<u>90.5</u>
<u>17:12</u>	<u>7.3; 68.2; 79.4; 93.24</u>
<u>17:23</u>	<u>67.1</u>
<u>18:3</u>	<u>36.2</u>
<u>18:4–8</u>	<u>53.3</u>
<u>18:9</u>	<u>33.6; 93.24</u>
<u>18:11</u>	<u>44.1</u>
<u>18:12</u>	<u>66.5</u>
<u>18:15–18</u>	<u>57.2; 70.2</u>
<u>18:19–24</u>	<u>77.2</u>
<u>18:22–23</u>	<u>36.2; 66.5</u>
<u>18:28–19:42</u>	<u>76.4</u>
<u>19:1–3</u>	<u>66.5; 77.2</u>
<u>19:1–16</u>	<u>77.2</u>
<u>19:3</u>	<u>66.5</u>
<u>19:17</u>	<u>63.4; 77.3</u>
<u>19:18</u>	<u>66.6; 77.3</u>
<u>19:25</u>	<u>33.1</u>
<u>19:27</u>	<u>80.2</u>
<u>19:28–40</u>	<u>77.2</u>
<u>19:29</u>	<u>66.6</u>
<u>19:28–30</u>	<u>77.2</u>
<u>19:30</u>	<u>28.8; 66.6</u>
<u>19:34</u>	<u>28.8; 66.6; 78.1; 91.2</u>

<u>20:1–18</u>	<u>33.1</u>
<u>20:5</u>	<u>66.6</u>
<u>20:19–21</u>	<u>33.7; 77.3</u>
<u>20:22</u>	<u>24.3; 32.3; 34.7; 49.1; 76.1; 78.3; 82.1; 93.8, 10, 23</u>
<u>20:24–29</u>	<u>5.3; 75.5</u>
<u>21:15–19</u>	<u>11.3</u>
<u>21:25</u>	<u>9.1</u>

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<u>1:9</u>	<u>34.6</u>
<u>1:9–12</u>	<u>93.5</u>
<u>2:1–4</u>	<u>75.7</u>
<u>2:2–4</u>	<u>82.1</u>
<u>2:3</u>	<u>93.15</u>
<u>2:21</u>	<u>11.5; 12.1; 94.1</u>
<u>2:22</u>	<u>93.18</u>
<u>2:23</u>	<u>11.3</u>
<u>2:34–35</u>	<u>75.5</u>
<u>3:25</u>	<u>75.5</u>
<u>3:26</u>	<u>35.4</u>
<u>4:10</u>	<u>93.18</u>
<u>4:12</u>	<u>32.3; 50.1; 67.1</u>
<u>4:26</u>	<u>93.16</u>
<u>5:7–10</u>	<u>71.4</u>
<u>5:30</u>	<u>11.3</u>
<u>6:4</u>	<u>75.4; 75.7</u>
<u>6:12</u>	<u>93.18</u>
<u>6:14</u>	<u>93.18</u>
<u>7:39</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>7:43</u>	<u>20.6</u>
<u>7:44</u>	<u>75.7</u>
<u>8:1–13</u>	<u>11.3</u>
<u>8:18</u>	<u>93.18</u>
<u>9:1–9</u>	<u>92.10</u>
<u>9:15</u>	<u>21.5</u>
<u>10:4</u>	<u>50.1</u>
<u>10:43</u>	<u>67.1</u>
<u>10:44–48</u>	<u>75.6</u>
<u>12:11</u>	<u>53.1</u>
<u>12:15</u>	<u>81.1</u>
<u>13:10</u>	<u>36.2</u>
<u>13:23</u>	<u>32.2</u>
<u>13:26</u>	<u>67.1</u>

<u>13:38–39</u>	<u>1.2; 49.3</u>
<u>13:39</u>	<u>52.3; 75.11</u>
<u>15:16–18</u>	<u>94.2</u>
<u>15:24</u>	<u>56.1</u>
<u>17:16</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>19:1–17</u>	<u>75.6</u>
<u>20:35</u>	<u>31.1</u>
<u>24:5</u>	<u>93.18</u>
<u>26:9–11</u>	<u>11.3</u>
<u>27:21–24</u>	<u>81.1</u>

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<u>1:18–32</u>	<u>6.3</u>
<u>1:21–32</u>	<u>45.2</u>
<u>1:28–32</u>	<u>45.4</u>
<u>2:5–10</u>	<u>73.3</u>
<u>2:5–16</u>	<u>25.5</u>
<u>2:11</u>	<u>57.2</u>
<u>2:24</u>	<u>21.1</u>
<u>3:4</u>	<u>19.2</u>
<u>3:9–12</u>	<u>6.5</u>
<u>3:10</u>	<u>72.1</u>
<u>3:21–26</u>	<u>63.4</u>
<u>3:25</u>	<u>48.1</u>
<u>3:27–28</u>	<u>1.2</u>
<u>3:28</u>	<u>75.7</u>
<u>4:1–12</u>	<u>76.2</u>
<u>4:1–25</u>	<u>11.3</u>
<u>4:3</u>	<u>31.1</u>
<u>4:7–8</u>	<u>49.3</u>
<u>4:11</u>	<u>5.2</u>
<u>4:16–18</u>	<u>31.1</u>
<u>4:18</u>	<u>10.4; 11.1</u>
<u>4:25</u>	<u>33.6</u>
<u>5:1</u>	<u>75.7</u>
<u>5:1–5</u>	<u>67.1</u>
<u>5:6–10</u>	<u>95.1</u>
<u>5:12</u>	<u>6.5; 50.1; 93.2</u>
<u>5:12–17</u>	<u>75.13</u>
<u>5:12–21</u>	<u>14.3; 46.4</u>
<u>5:15–21</u>	<u>63.4; 71.3</u>
<u>5:17</u>	<u>49.3; 65.1</u>
<u>5:20–21</u>	<u>49.3</u>

<u>6:1–10</u>	<u>24.1</u> ; <u>43.1</u>
<u>6:3</u>	<u>34.7</u> ; <u>75.7</u>
<u>6:3–4</u>	<u>75.1</u> ; <u>93.20</u>
<u>6:6</u>	<u>53.3</u> ; <u>93.2</u> , <u>8</u> , <u>15</u>
<u>6:12</u>	<u>49.1</u>
<u>6:12–14</u>	<u>74.4</u>
<u>6:14</u>	<u>38.1</u> ; <u>75.11</u>
<u>6:18</u>	<u>90.6</u>
<u>6:22</u>	<u>90.6</u>
<u>6:23</u>	<u>93.2</u>
<u>7:1–8:2</u>	<u>2.1</u>
<u>7:5</u>	<u>6.5</u>
<u>7:5–6</u>	<u>38.1</u>
<u>7:9–11</u>	<u>55.5</u>
<u>7:13–25</u>	<u>38.1</u> ; <u>86.1</u>
<u>7:14–25</u>	<u>6.5</u>
<u>7:15</u>	<u>62.2</u>
<u>7:18–23</u>	<u>30.1</u>
<u>7:21–25</u>	<u>53.3</u>
<u>8:1–8</u>	<u>1.2</u> ; <u>38.1</u>
<u>8:2</u>	<u>49.3</u> ; <u>90.6</u>
<u>8:3</u>	<u>52.3</u> ; <u>53.3</u> , <u>5</u> ; <u>76.3</u>
<u>8:3–8</u>	<u>6.5</u>
<u>8:5–8</u>	<u>48.4</u>
<u>8:9</u>	<u>33.7</u>
<u>8:9–11</u>	<u>19.1</u> ; <u>28.8</u> ; <u>53.5</u> ; <u>59.2</u> ; <u>84.1</u> ; <u>94.1</u>
<u>8:15–16</u>	<u>94.2</u>
<u>8:16–17</u>	<u>93.15</u>
<u>8:17</u>	<u>5.3</u> ; <u>31.4</u> ; <u>49.1</u>
<u>8:18–25</u>	<u>82.7</u>
<u>8:21</u>	<u>24.2</u>
<u>8:23</u>	<u>94.2</u>
<u>8:24–25</u>	<u>38.2</u> ; <u>67.1</u> ; <u>95.1</u>
<u>8:26</u>	<u>33.7</u> ; <u>52.1</u> ; <u>95.1</u>
<u>8:26–27</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>8:29</u>	<u>34.5</u> ; <u>67.1</u> ; <u>75.12</u> ; <u>93.23</u> ; <u>94.2</u>
<u>8:32</u>	<u>44.2</u>
<u>8:33–34</u>	<u>11.4</u> ; <u>76.2</u>
<u>8:34</u>	<u>17.3</u>
<u>9:11</u>	<u>52.3</u>
<u>9:33</u>	<u>75.11</u> ; <u>76.2</u>
<u>10:4</u>	<u>66.6</u>
<u>10:9</u>	<u>67.1</u>

<u>10:13</u>	<u>11.5; 12.1; 93.9; 94.1</u>
<u>10:18</u>	<u>75.10; 92.7</u>
<u>11:6</u>	<u>31.2</u>
<u>11:8</u>	<u>5.5</u>
<u>12:4–5</u>	<u>75.13</u>
<u>12:5</u>	<u>46.3</u>
<u>12:12</u>	<u>67.1</u>
<u>12:14</u>	<u>55.3; 83.1</u>
<u>12:17</u>	<u>15.5</u>
<u>12:21</u>	<u>83.1</u>
<u>13:12</u>	<u>3.4</u>
<u>14:10</u>	<u>72.3</u>
<u>14:10–12</u>	<u>79.4</u>
<u>14:11</u>	<u>94.1</u>
<u>15:4</u>	<u>67.1</u>
<u>15:5</u>	<u>90.1</u>
<u>15:12–13</u>	<u>67.1</u>

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<u>1:2</u>	<u>94.1</u>
<u>1:8</u>	<u>39.4</u>
<u>1:18–25</u>	<u>72.3</u>
<u>1:18–31</u>	<u>48.4</u>
<u>1:21–24</u>	<u>64.2</u>
<u>1:22</u>	<u>25.5</u>
<u>1:24</u>	<u>32.3</u>
<u>1:29</u>	<u>48.5; 72.1</u>
<u>1:30</u>	<u>32.3</u>
<u>1:31</u>	<u>90.2</u>
<u>2:7</u>	<u>64.2</u>
<u>2:8</u>	<u>10.3</u>
<u>3:2</u>	<u>30.3</u>
<u>3:9</u>	<u>33.7</u>
<u>3:11</u>	<u>31.3; 75.10</u>
<u>3:13</u>	<u>25.5; 79.4</u>
<u>3:16</u>	<u>19.1; 28.8; 53.5; 59.2; 84.1</u>
<u>3:16–17</u>	<u>33.7</u>
<u>4:5</u>	<u>4.1; 6.5</u>
<u>5:7</u>	<u>33.7</u>
<u>5:9–13</u>	<u>46.3</u>
<u>6:15</u>	<u>71.1</u>
<u>6:19</u>	<u>5.5; 19.1; 28.8; 33.7; 53.5; 59.2; 71.1; 84.1; 93.21</u>
<u>8:13</u>	<u>11.4</u>

<u>9:21</u>	<u>38.1</u>
<u>9:24–27</u>	<u>24.2</u>
<u>9:25</u>	<u>83.5</u>
<u>10:4</u>	<u>36.2; 38.2; 63.1; 75.10; 76.2; 93.24</u>
<u>10:12</u>	<u>66.1</u>
<u>10:13</u>	<u>74.5</u>
<u>10:15–17</u>	<u>47.2</u>
<u>10:31</u>	<u>31.3</u>
<u>11:17–34</u>	<u>53.4</u>
<u>11:20–22</u>	<u>75.9</u>
<u>11:25</u>	<u>34.10</u>
<u>11:27–30</u>	<u>5.3; 33.7; 75.1</u>
<u>11:33–34</u>	<u>75.9</u>
<u>12:6</u>	<u>17.4; 34.7; 47.2; 93.1</u>
<u>12:12–13</u>	<u>47.2</u>
<u>12:12–27</u>	<u>46.3</u>
<u>12:27</u>	<u>71.1</u>
<u>12:28–31</u>	<u>34.2; 35.1; 87.3</u>
<u>13:1</u>	<u>2.2; 75.10</u>
<u>13:13</u>	<u>10.4</u>
<u>14:2</u>	<u>75.10</u>
<u>14:8</u>	<u>68.3</u>
<u>14:15</u>	<u>60.3</u>
<u>15:1–20</u>	<u>73.3</u>
<u>15:3</u>	<u>95.1</u>
<u>15:9</u>	<u>11.3</u>
<u>15:12–19</u>	<u>51.1; 93.15</u>
<u>15:20–23</u>	<u>14.3; 46.4; 71.3</u>
<u>15:22</u>	<u>75.13</u>
<u>15:26</u>	<u>28.8</u>
<u>15:28</u>	<u>17.4; 34.7; 47.2; 93.1</u>
<u>15:42–44</u>	<u>63.3</u>
<u>15:45–49</u>	<u>14.3; 46.4; 71.3; 93.5</u>
<u>15:49</u>	<u>67.1</u>
<u>15:51</u>	<u>51.1</u>
<u>15:52</u>	<u>5.5; 68.3; 88.2; 90.2</u>
<u>15:54–55</u>	<u>79.4</u>
<u>15:56</u>	<u>51.1; 66.6</u>

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<u>1:3</u>	<u>87.2; 91.1</u>
<u>1:14</u>	<u>25.5</u>
<u>1:21–22</u>	<u>5.2; 93.16</u>

<u>1:22</u>	<u>49.1</u>
<u>2:16</u>	<u>71.4</u>
<u>2:7–8</u>	<u>46.3</u>
<u>2:10</u>	<u>33.6</u>
<u>3:3</u>	<u>35.2; 48.5</u>
<u>3:7–11</u>	<u>51.4</u>
<u>3:7–18</u>	<u>11.4; 14.3</u>
<u>3:13</u>	<u>75.11</u>
<u>3:18</u>	<u>40.3; 71.1; 75.12; 93.23</u>
<u>4:3–4</u>	<u>11.4</u>
<u>4:4</u>	<u>67.1</u>
<u>4:6</u>	<u>29.5; 40.3; 71.1; 93.23; 95.1</u>
<u>4:8</u>	<u>71.1</u>
<u>4:13</u>	<u>11.1; 53.3; 75.13</u>
<u>5:1–5</u>	<u>1.1; 51.1</u>
<u>5:8</u>	<u>90.2</u>
<u>5:10</u>	<u>79.4</u>
<u>5:14–15</u>	<u>95.1</u>
<u>5:17</u>	<u>14.3</u>
<u>5:21</u>	<u>76.3</u>
<u>6:15</u>	<u>4.2</u>
<u>6:16</u>	<u>19.1; 28.8; 53.5; 59.2; 84.1</u>
<u>7:3–10</u>	<u>50.1</u>
<u>7:6</u>	<u>90.1</u>
<u>7:9–10</u>	<u>91.4</u>
<u>9:6</u>	<u>79.4</u>
<u>9:15</u>	<u>48.5</u>
<u>11:2</u>	<u>92.3</u>
<u>12:9</u>	<u>16.2; 67.1; 76.2</u>
<u>13:5</u>	<u>19.1; 28.8; 53.5; 59.2; 84.1</u>

Galatians (Gal)

<u>1:3</u>	<u>11.3</u>
<u>2:15–16</u>	<u>1.2</u>
<u>2:16</u>	<u>75.7</u>
<u>2:20</u>	<u>53.3; 58.3; 93.2, 15; 95.1</u>
<u>3:1–14</u>	<u>1.2</u>
<u>3:6</u>	<u>31.1</u>
<u>3:8</u>	<u>58.1</u>
<u>3:10</u>	<u>75.11</u>
<u>3:10–14</u>	<u>77.3</u>
<u>3:13</u>	<u>95.1</u>
<u>3:23</u>	<u>75.11</u>

<u>3:28</u>	<u>93.12</u>
<u>3:29</u>	<u>5.3; 31.4</u>
<u>4:3–7</u>	<u>5.3</u>
<u>4:4</u>	<u>1.2</u>
<u>4:5–7</u>	<u>93.12; 94.2</u>
<u>4:6–7</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>4:7</u>	<u>31.4</u>
<u>4:26</u>	<u>75.11, 13; 92.3</u>
<u>5:1–5</u>	<u>38.1</u>
<u>5:3–4</u>	<u>75.11</u>
<u>5:11</u>	<u>90.2</u>
<u>5:13, 16–17</u>	<u>6.5</u>
<u>5:18</u>	<u>75.11</u>
<u>5:24</u>	<u>58.3</u>
<u>6:1–2</u>	<u>38.1</u>
<u>6:7–8</u>	<u>53.5</u>
<u>6:14</u>	<u>73.3</u>

Ephesians (Eph)

<u>1:3–6</u>	<u>94.2</u>
<u>1:7</u>	<u>48.1</u>
<u>1:10</u>	<u>34.6</u>
<u>1:13–14</u>	<u>32.5; 49.1</u>
<u>1:14</u>	<u>78.1; 83.6</u>
<u>1:18–19</u>	<u>10.4</u>
<u>1:20</u>	<u>17.3</u>
<u>1:21</u>	<u>90.5</u>
<u>1:22–23</u>	<u>47.2; 75.1</u>
<u>2:8–9</u>	<u>67.1</u>
<u>2:9</u>	<u>75.7</u>
<u>2:14–17</u>	<u>63.4</u>
<u>2:16</u>	<u>47.2</u>
<u>2:20</u>	<u>75.10</u>
<u>2:21–22</u>	<u>19.1; 28.8; 33.7; 53.5; 59.2; 84.1</u>
<u>2:22</u>	<u>34.7; 67.1</u>
<u>3:1</u>	<u>57.2</u>
<u>3:6</u>	<u>5.3; 31.4; 46.3</u>
<u>3:17</u>	<u>19.1; 28.8; 53.5; 59.2; 67.1; 84.1</u>
<u>3:19</u>	<u>47.2</u>
<u>3:20</u>	<u>29.2, 5</u>
<u>4:1–13</u>	<u>47.2</u>
<u>4:4</u>	<u>47.2</u>
<u>4:5</u>	<u>75.7</u>

<u>4:8–10</u>	<u>16.1</u> ; <u>75.5</u>
<u>4:11–12</u>	<u>75.6</u>
<u>4:15–16</u>	<u>47.2</u>
<u>4:24</u>	<u>35.1</u> ; <u>40.3</u> ; <u>46.3</u> ; <u>49.1</u> ; <u>63.2</u> ; <u>78.3</u>
<u>4:30</u>	<u>24.3</u> ; <u>49.1</u> ; <u>93.16</u>
<u>5:3–4</u>	<u>19.5</u>
<u>5:8</u>	<u>75.10</u>
<u>5:11</u>	<u>3.4</u>
<u>5:14</u>	<u>12.4</u> ; <u>85.1</u> ; <u>88.3</u>
<u>5:23</u>	<u>46.3</u>
<u>5:24–27</u>	<u>75.8</u>
<u>5:26</u>	<u>5.2</u> ; <u>93.11</u>
<u>5:27</u>	<u>92.3</u>
<u>5:30</u>	<u>24.2</u>
<u>6:10–20</u>	<u>65.2</u>
<u>6:12</u>	<u>92.3</u>
<u>6:14–16</u>	<u>45.1</u>
<u>6:15</u>	<u>47.2</u>
<u>6:17</u>	<u>92.6</u>

Philippians (Phil)

<u>1:6</u>	<u>25.5</u>
<u>1:21</u>	<u>53.3</u> ; <u>93.2</u> , <u>15</u>
<u>1:23</u>	<u>90.2</u>
<u>2:6–7</u>	<u>67.1</u>
<u>2:7</u>	<u>53.3</u> ; <u>93.2</u> ; <u>95.1</u>
<u>2:9–11</u>	<u>90.5</u>
<u>2:10</u>	<u>65.4</u> ; <u>93.2</u> ; <u>94.1</u>
<u>2:15</u>	<u>82.1</u>
<u>2:16</u>	<u>5.3</u> ; <u>25.5</u>
<u>3:10–11</u>	<u>11.1</u>
<u>3:12–14</u>	<u>85.2</u>
<u>3:20–21</u>	<u>51.1</u>
<u>4:3</u>	<u>23.2</u> ; <u>78.3</u>

Colossians (Col)

<u>1:13–14</u>	<u>49.3</u>
<u>1:15</u>	<u>32.3</u> ; <u>34.5</u> ; <u>57.1</u>
<u>1:15–16</u>	<u>67.1</u> ; <u>84.1</u>
<u>1:15–20</u>	<u>47.2</u>
<u>1:16</u>	<u>57.1</u> ; <u>90.9</u> ; <u>93.2</u>
<u>1:18</u>	<u>34.5</u> ; <u>46.3</u>
<u>1:24</u>	<u>46.3</u>

<u>2:2–3</u>	<u>32.3</u>
<u>2:6–23</u>	<u>1.2</u>
<u>2:7</u>	<u>5.2</u>
<u>2:9–10</u>	<u>47.2</u>
<u>2:11–12</u>	<u>5.2</u>
<u>2:14</u>	<u>25.4; 32.5; 48.1; 93.14</u>
<u>2:17</u>	<u>49.3; 60.5; 92.5; 93.11</u>
<u>3:1</u>	<u>17.3; 34.6</u>
<u>3:2</u>	<u>46.2</u>
<u>3:10</u>	<u>35.1; 40.3; 46.3; 49.1; 63.2; 75.12; 78.3; 94.2</u>
<u>3:11</u>	<u>47.2; 80.2</u>
<u>3:15</u>	<u>47.2</u>
<u>3:16</u>	<u>32.3</u>

1 Thessalonians (1 Thess)

<u>3:13</u>	<u>39.4</u>
<u>4:16</u>	<u>5.5; 68.3; 77.2; 88.2</u>
<u>5:2</u>	<u>25.5; 82.6</u>
<u>5:5</u>	<u>71.3; 75.10</u>
<u>5:10</u>	<u>95.1</u>
<u>5:15</u>	<u>15.5</u>
<u>5:17</u>	<u>22.3</u>
<u>5:23</u>	<u>39.4</u>

2 Thessalonians (2 Thess)

<u>1:10</u>	<u>25.5; 94.1</u>
<u>2:2–3</u>	<u>25.5</u>
<u>2:3</u>	<u>79.4</u>
<u>2:17</u>	<u>90.1</u>
<u>3:3</u>	<u>40.1</u>

1 Timothy (1 Tim)

<u>1:14</u>	<u>49.3</u>
<u>1:15</u>	<u>11.3; 65.1</u>
<u>2:4</u>	<u>63.1; 67.1</u>
<u>2:14</u>	<u>48.4</u>
<u>3:16</u>	<u>75.5</u>
<u>4:10</u>	<u>93.15</u>
<u>6:13</u>	<u>76.3</u>
<u>6:15–16</u>	<u>93.17</u>
<u>6:16</u>	<u>25.5; 75.5; 77.3; 91.2; 93.2, 19</u>

2 Timothy (2 Tim)

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<u>1:9</u>	<u>75.7</u>
<u>1:10</u>	<u>28.8</u>
<u>2:12</u>	<u>73.3</u>
<u>2:19</u>	<u>5.2</u>
<u>3:1–9</u>	<u>45.2</u>
<u>3:5</u>	<u>48.5</u>
<u>3:7</u>	<u>71.2</u>
<u>3:15–16</u>	<u>58.3</u>
<u>3:16</u>	<u>34.2</u>
<u>4:2</u>	<u>34.2</u>
<u>4:6–8</u>	<u>82.3</u>
<u>4:8</u>	<u>83.5</u>

Titus

<u>1:2</u>	<u>75.7; 93.15</u>
<u>2:13</u>	<u>73.3; 93.15</u>
<u>2:14</u>	<u>95.1</u>
<u>3:4–5</u>	<u>75.7</u>
<u>3:7</u>	<u>31.4; 75.7</u>

Philemon (Phlm)

<u>1:1, 9</u>	<u>57.2</u>
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Hebrews (Heb)

<u>1:3</u>	<u>17.3; 75.5; 77.3; 78.2</u>
<u>1:11–14</u>	<u>28.7</u>
<u>1:3</u>	<u>32.3; 34.6; 67.1; 95.1</u>
<u>1:6</u>	<u>34.5; 93.2</u>
<u>1:7</u>	<u>81.2; 83.1</u>
<u>1:9</u>	<u>82.1; 93.2</u>
<u>1:13</u>	<u>17.3; 75.5</u>
<u>1:14</u>	<u>35.1; 81.1</u>
<u>2:12</u>	<u>60.3</u>
<u>2:14</u>	<u>28.8</u>
<u>2:16–18</u>	<u>76.3</u>
<u>2:17</u>	<u>40.1; 53.3; 65.1</u>
<u>2:17–18</u>	<u>3.2; 95.1</u>
<u>3:1</u>	<u>53.3; 65.1</u>
<u>3:6</u>	<u>19.1; 28.8; 33.7; 53.5; 59.2; 84.1</u>
<u>4:12</u>	<u>16.1; 58.3; 92.9</u>
<u>4:13</u>	<u>6.5</u>
<u>4:14–5:10</u>	<u>53.3; 65.1</u>
<u>4:15</u>	<u>58.3; 75.9; 76.3; 95.1</u>

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<u>4:16</u>	<u>92.1</u>
<u>5:2</u>	<u>76.3</u>
<u>5:6</u>	<u>93.5</u>
<u>5:7</u>	<u>50.1</u>
<u>5:7–8</u>	<u>48.7</u>
<u>5:13</u>	<u>30.3</u>
<u>6:4–6</u>	<u>54.3; 75.7</u>
<u>6:7–8</u>	<u>9.2</u>
<u>6:17</u>	<u>31.4</u>
<u>6:18–19</u>	<u>67.1</u>
<u>6:19</u>	<u>83.6</u>
<u>6:20</u>	<u>53.3; 65.1</u>
<u>7:1–17</u>	<u>93.5</u>
<u>7:11–8:2</u>	<u>53.3; 65.1</u>
<u>7:14</u>	<u>32.2</u>
<u>7:18</u>	<u>51.4; 52.3</u>
<u>7:25</u>	<u>34.13; 95.1</u>
<u>8:1</u>	<u>17.3; 34.6</u>
<u>8:1–5</u>	<u>75.7</u>
<u>8:1–10:18</u>	<u>17.3</u>
<u>8:5</u>	<u>49.3; 60.5; 93.11</u>
<u>8:7–13</u>	<u>51.4</u>
<u>8:10</u>	<u>35.2; 48.5</u>
<u>8:12</u>	<u>31.1</u>
<u>9:1–28</u>	<u>44.2</u>
<u>9:8–10</u>	<u>51.4</u>
<u>9:11–12</u>	<u>75.7</u>
<u>9:11–14</u>	<u>53.4</u>
<u>9:11–24</u>	<u>91.2</u>
<u>9:11–10:18</u>	<u>29.1; 80.1</u>
<u>9:15</u>	<u>95.1</u>
<u>9:23</u>	<u>49.3; 60.5; 93.11</u>
<u>9:23–24</u>	<u>75.7</u>
<u>9:23–26</u>	<u>1.1</u>
<u>10:1</u>	<u>49.3; 52.3; 60.5; 92.5; 93.11</u>
<u>10:1–9</u>	<u>51.4</u>
<u>10:1–18</u>	<u>53.3, 4</u>
<u>10:12</u>	<u>17.3; 34.6; 53.3; 65.1</u>
<u>10:16</u>	<u>48.5</u>
<u>10:19–22</u>	<u>48.1</u>
<u>10:22</u>	<u>28.7; 93.11</u>
<u>11:1</u>	<u>10.4; 25.5</u>
<u>11:1–40</u>	<u>82.2</u>

<u>11:3</u>	<u>49.2</u> ; <u>63.3</u>
<u>11:5</u>	<u>10.2</u> ; <u>11.3</u>
<u>11:9</u>	<u>31.4</u>
<u>11:17–19</u>	<u>44.2</u>
<u>11:21</u>	<u>33.2</u>
<u>11:28</u>	<u>12.3</u> ; <u>91.2</u>
<u>11:31</u>	<u>6.2</u>
<u>11:32–40</u>	<u>82.2</u>
<u>11:37</u>	<u>51.4</u>
<u>11:38</u>	<u>68.2</u>
<u>11:39–40</u>	<u>10.2</u>
<u>12:1</u>	<u>85.2</u>
<u>12:2</u>	<u>17.3</u> ; <u>34.6</u> ; <u>65.5</u>
<u>12:9</u>	<u>49.1</u>
<u>12:18–29</u>	<u>34.12</u>
<u>12:20</u>	<u>75.12</u>
<u>12:22</u>	<u>75.11</u> , <u>13</u>
<u>12:22–24</u>	<u>92.3</u>
<u>12:23</u>	<u>24.2</u> ; <u>31.2</u> ; <u>34.5</u> ; <u>84.1</u>
<u>12:24</u>	<u>28.7</u> ; <u>52.3</u> ; <u>53.4</u> ; <u>75.7</u>
<u>12:29</u>	<u>16.2</u> ; <u>77.3</u>
<u>13:8</u>	<u>73.4</u> ; <u>93.17</u>
<u>13:20</u>	<u>75.5</u> ; <u>92.7</u>

James (Jas)

<u>1:12</u>	<u>67.1</u> ; <u>83.5</u>
<u>1:13</u>	<u>63.1</u>
<u>2:5</u>	<u>67.1</u> ; <u>75.10</u>
<u>2:25</u>	<u>6.2</u>
<u>3:3–4</u>	<u>54.2</u>
<u>3:17</u>	<u>83.1</u>
<u>4:5</u>	<u>19.1</u> ; <u>28.8</u> ; <u>53.5</u> ; <u>84.1</u>
<u>5:12</u>	<u>45.1</u>
<u>5:7</u>	<u>68.3</u>
<u>5:14</u>	<u>93.14</u>

1 Peter (1 Pet)

<u>1:1–2</u> , <u>18–19</u>	<u>28.7</u>
<u>1:19</u>	<u>33.7</u> ; <u>95.2</u>
<u>2:4–6</u>	<u>75.10</u>
<u>2:4–8</u>	<u>75.8</u>
<u>2:6</u>	<u>75.11</u>
<u>2:8</u>	<u>76.2</u>

<u>2:9</u>	93.24
<u>2:12</u>	5.25
<u>2:21</u>	76.3
<u>2:24</u>	63.4
<u>3:9</u>	15.5; 55.3; 76.1
<u>3:18</u>	63.4; 95.1
<u>3:18–20</u>	16.1; 18.10; 48.6; 75.5
<u>3:20–21</u>	75.10
<u>4:1</u>	76.3
<u>4:6</u>	16.1; 18.10; 75.5
<u>5:4</u>	75.5; 92.7

2 Peter (2 Pet)

<u>1:3–4</u>	52.3
<u>1:19</u>	25.5
<u>1:19</u>	44.1
<u>1:21</u>	34.2; 58.3
<u>2:4</u>	8.1; 52.3
<u>2:9–10</u>	73.3
<u>2:19</u>	50.4
<u>2:20</u>	45.2
<u>2:20–22</u>	54.3
<u>3:3–13</u>	25.5; 73.3
<u>3:9</u>	67.1
<u>3:12</u>	79.2

1 John

<u>1:1</u>	5.3; 89.1
<u>1:5</u>	32.3; 44.1; 76.1; 93.19
<u>1:7</u>	54.2
<u>1:8–10</u>	6.5
<u>1:10</u>	15.5
<u>2:1</u>	34.13
<u>2:2</u>	84.1; 90.2
<u>2:4</u>	5.1
<u>2:20</u>	93.15
<u>2:27</u>	93.2
<u>3:1–3</u>	5.3
<u>3:5</u>	90.2
<u>3:8</u>	67.1
<u>4:8</u>	93.4
<u>4:10</u>	90.2
<u>4:16</u>	90.2; 93.4

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2 John

[2](#) [40.1](#)

Jude

[1:1](#) [93.24](#)
[1:7, 13](#) [8.1](#)
[1:12](#) [39.2](#)

Revelation (Rev)

[1:5](#) [34.5](#)
[1:7](#) [92.10; 93.1](#)
[1:8](#) [43.2; 75.5](#)
[1:14](#) [2.5](#)
[1:17](#) [16.1](#)
[1:18](#) [42.1; 60.6; 66.6; 74.4; 90.2; 93.20](#)
[2:7](#) [18.6; 92.3](#)
[2:10](#) [4.2; 66.5](#)
[2:21–22](#) [74.5](#)
[3:5](#) [23.2; 78.3](#)
[3:15–16](#) [26.1](#)
[4:8](#) [34.9; 87.2; 93.1, 9](#)
[5:5](#) [32.2](#)
[5:9](#) [78.1](#)
[5:11–12](#) [87.2](#)
[6:12](#) [36.2](#)
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[6:15–17](#) [40.2](#)
[7:1–3](#) [73.3](#)
[7:17](#) [5.2; 28.8; 93.11](#)
[8:3–4](#) [34.12](#)
[8:4](#) [71.1](#)
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[9:4](#) [73.3](#)
[12:4](#) [33.4](#)
[12:7–9](#) [37.1; 90.4](#)
[12:9](#) [34.12](#)
[12:10, 12](#) [4.2](#)
[12:15](#) [35.3](#)
[13:8](#) [23.2; 78.3](#)
[14:1](#) [75.11](#)
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<u>14:10</u>	<u>20.5</u>
<u>17:1–5</u>	<u>28.1</u>
<u>17:8</u>	<u>23.2; 78.3</u>
<u>19:4</u>	<u>93.1</u>
<u>19:9</u>	<u>93.21</u>
<u>19:11–21</u>	<u>92.3</u>
<u>19:16</u>	<u>93.17</u>
<u>20:1–10</u>	<u>66.6</u>
<u>20:2</u>	<u>4.2; 90.4</u>
<u>20:2–3</u>	<u>92.2</u>
<u>20:4</u>	<u>73.3</u>
<u>20:6</u>	<u>73.3; 79.4</u>
<u>20:10</u>	<u>78.2</u>
<u>20:11–13</u>	<u>79.4</u>
<u>20:12</u>	<u>23.2; 78.3</u>
<u>20:13</u>	<u>88.3</u>
<u>20:14</u>	<u>28.8; 66.6; 79.4</u>
<u>20:15</u>	<u>23.2; 71.2; 78.3</u>
<u>21:1</u>	<u>79.2</u>
<u>21:2</u>	<u>75.10; 75.13; 92.2, 3</u>
<u>21:2–7</u>	<u>34.12</u>
<u>21:4</u>	<u>28.8; 57.1</u>
<u>21:5</u>	<u>79.2</u>
<u>21:6</u>	<u>5.2; 43.2; 75.5; 93.11</u>
<u>21:9</u>	<u>92.3</u>
<u>21:9–21</u>	<u>75.10</u>
<u>21:10</u>	<u>75.13</u>
<u>21:27</u>	<u>23.2; 78.3</u>
<u>22:1</u>	<u>5.2; 93.11</u>
<u>22:2</u>	<u>18.6; 38.2; 75.10</u>
<u>22:5</u>	<u>94.1</u>
<u>22:13</u>	<u>16.1; 43.2; 75.5</u>
<u>22:16</u>	<u>32.2; 93.2</u>
<u>22:17</u>	<u>5.2; 93.11</u>

Apocrypha

Baruch (Bar)

3:33–34 29.2; 63.3

Song of the Three Young Men (Sg Three)

6 20.1

1 Maccabees (1 Macc)

[4:38](#) [78.3](#)

2 Maccabees (2 Macc)

[1:18–22](#) [11.2](#)
[11:6–15](#) [65.1](#)
[15:14–17](#) [71.1](#)

Prayer of Manasseh (Pr Man)

[1–15](#) [27.3](#)
[12](#) [47.2](#)
[12–13](#) [51.4](#)

Sirach (Sir)

[2:12](#) [30.4](#)
[2:18](#) [70.3](#)
[24:5–6](#) [28.5](#)
[24:15](#) [93.11](#)
[25:2](#) [56.1](#)
[25:24](#) [48.4](#)
[44:16](#) [11.3](#)
[46:19](#) [93.8](#)
[47:11](#) [11.3](#)
[47:12–22](#) [48.7](#)

Wisdom (Wis)

[1:5](#) [75.10](#)
[1:12](#) [21.1](#)
[1:12–15](#) [93.2](#)
[1:13](#) [15.4; 76.1](#)
[1:15](#) [21.1](#)
[1:15–16](#) [5.5](#)
[2:3](#) [34.8](#)
[2:23–24](#) [93.2](#)
[2:24](#) [91.3](#)
[3:1](#) [36.1](#)
[7:1](#) [50.3](#)
[7:22–26](#) [75.4](#)
[7:24](#) [28.5](#)
[7:24–25](#) [16.2](#)
[8:1](#) [28.5](#)
[9:1–12](#) [63.3](#)

<u>9:15</u>	<u>84.1</u>
<u>10:13–14</u>	<u>74.2</u>
<u>11:21–12:2</u>	<u>74.5</u>
<u>11:26</u>	<u>48.1</u>
<u>12:10</u>	<u>79.1</u>
<u>12:16</u>	<u>48.1</u>
<u>13:1–19</u>	<u>6.3</u>
<u>13:6–9</u>	<u>48.1</u>
<u>14:3</u>	<u>63.3</u>
<u>14:7</u>	<u>91.2</u>
<u>15:2</u>	<u>31.4</u>
<u>15:2–3</u>	<u>48.1</u>
<u>16:12</u>	<u>17.3</u>
<u>16:16–19</u>	<u>53.1</u>
<u>17:21</u>	<u>40.2</u>
<u>18:1</u>	<u>40.2</u>

Pseudepigrapha

Cave of Treasures

23:19–23	<u>93.5</u>
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2 Enoch

<u>71:33–36</u>	<u>93.5</u>
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Testament of Abraham

26:3	<u>75.5</u>
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