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LOVE AND HOLINESS: THOUGHTS ON GREGORY OF
NAREK'S USE OF CITATIONS FROM THE *SONG OF SONGS*
(PART I: *BOOK OF PRAYERS*, BAN 46A)

Keywords: Citations from the Song of Song, commentary, prayer, spiritual experience, vardapet, "Know yourself. "

The present essay is not intended as a scholarly article. Rather, it is an initial attempt at a polyvalent reading and appreciation of St. Gregory of Narek's allusions to the *Song of Songs*, based on the assumption that Gregory composed his prayers in such a way as to engage the widest possible range of readers and hearers in exploring and praying them.¹

It should be noted that citations and allusions to the Song of Songs are not limited to the *Book of Prayers*, but are to be found in Gregory's writings of all genres: his festal odes on the Ascension, the Church and the Nativity as well as the encomia on the Holy Apostles, Jacob of Nisibis, the Holy Cross

¹ Sergio LaPorta's article "The Image of the Lover and the Beloved in Grigor Narekats'i's *Book of Lamentation*," *Hask Hayagitakan Taregirk'*, n. s. 10 (2002-2006), 83-99 looks at the seeking and finding of the Beloved as an overall mystical theme, but does not focus on the *Song of Songs* citations per se. Similarly, Valentina Calzolari, "Noces mystiques et Narek," *Revue théologique de Kaslik* 3-4 (2009-2010), 333-354 likewise addresses the esoteric use of the *Song* in Gregory's writings. Both reference the ecstatic aspects of the metaphor, rather than the sacramental experience that lies at the root of Gregory's prayers. See Antranik Granian, "Saint Grégoire de Narek et la liturgie arménienne," *Revue théologique de Kaslik* 3-4 (2009-2010), 177-194. (See also H. T'amrazyan, "The Theology of Desire and Grigor Narekatsi's *taghs*," Տարփողական աստվածաբանությունը և Գրիգոր Նարեկացու տաղերը in idem, *Gregory of Narek and the Narekean School Գրիգոր Նարեկացին և Նարեկյան Դպրոցը*], vol. 3, 244-260, as well as "Areopagite Ecstatic Theology's Concepts of Wonder and Astonishment in Gregory of Narek's Work" [Զարմանքի և հիացման հասկացողությունները արեոպագիտյան Էփեսոսիկ աստուածաբանության և Գրիգոր Նարեկացու ստեղծագործության մէջ in the same volume, pp. 294-308.)

and the Theotokos all contain Song of Songs imagery and allusions,² as does the *Brief Word of Advice Concerning Orthodox Faith and Purity of Virtuous Life*.³ The Song is even present in Gregory's *Commentary on Job 38-39*, albeit less overtly.⁴

Within the *Book of Prayers*, Song of Songs is referenced at least fifteen times.⁵ These references are concentrated in nine *Bans* — 27, 46, 52, 75, 77, 85, 91, 92 and 93. In other words, Gregory appears to have found the Song especially appropriate to his words on the chrism; *Ban* 93, which is devoted to the holy myron, contains some eight references. However, he also placed the Song in dialogue with his writing on confession (*Ban* 27), the parable of the Prodigal Son (*Ban* 46), the Church (*Ban* 75), Holy Friday (*Ban* 77), the prayers for the night hour (*Ban* 91) and the symandron (*Ban* 92).

Gregory's Commentary on the Song of Songs

Gregory's interaction with the Song of Songs lasted throughout his adult life. When he was in his late twenties, Gregory was asked by the young Artsrunid prince Gurgen, to produce a commentary on the Song. The commentary was written in light of the possibility that although Gurgen was a younger son, he might reign at some future time.⁶ Thus it was carefully tailored to the young prince's interests and position, and was made accessible to someone with his level of scriptural and patristic knowledge.⁷ Gregory stressed that as a work authored by Solomon, a royal scion like Gurgen himself, the Song had special relevance to him.

Without downplaying or denigrating the physical love so clearly portrayed in the Song, and without using mystical, esoteric vocabulary, Gregory introduced the prince to the deeper, spiritual and cosmic realities of love that

² See **Abraham Terian**, *The Festal Works of St. Gregory of Narek: Annotated Translation of the Odes, Litanies and Encomia*, Collegeville, MI: Liturgical Press, 2016. The index of scriptural citations notes some seventy-five Song of Songs references.

³ *The Writings of Our Holy Father Gregory, Monk of Narek* [Մրբոյ հօրն մերոյ Գրիգորի Նարեկայ վանից վանականի Մատենագրութիւն], Venice: San Lazzaro, 1840, 515, 531.

⁴ For a careful reconstruction and critical text of this work, see Arusyak T'amrazyan, *The Commentary on "Who Is This" Attributed to Gregory of Narek* [Գրիգոր Նարեկացուն վերագրվող «Մեկնութիւն 'Ով է դա՛-ի» երկը], Erevan: Nayiri, 2019, 369-415.

⁵ It is always possible that more will emerge with further study.

⁶ He later became Gurgen-Khach'ik, fifth king of the Armenian Kingdom of Vaspurakan (999-1003), having taken the throne from his older brother's sons.

⁷ **R. W. Thomson**, "Gregory of Narek and the Song of Songs." In *Hask Hayagitakan Taregirk'* n. s. 10 (2002-2006), 35-49 attributed the tone of the *Commentary* to Gregory's as yet academic and unformed understanding of the Song.

underlay the Song's imagery.⁸ The commentary made it clear throughout that spiritual growth is an ongoing process of self-realization, in which all people naturally participate, to one degree or another.

The desire to make deeper spiritual understanding and experiences available to the widest audience possible is a hallmark of Gregory's teaching style, his *vardapetut'awn*.⁹ On the one hand, he was quite capable of producing a text for non-specialists, as the commentary demonstrated. On the other, his encomia catered to the most discriminating and scripturally erudite. Gregory was equally at home at both ends of the spectrum.

However, it is in his *Book of Prayers*, the mature product of his later years, that Gregory demonstrates his ability to produce writing that would teach and uplift people at all levels and stages of life, specialists and non-specialists alike, from within a single text.

The audience of Gregory's Prayers

Gregory's prayers were surely written for the community within which he lived, whose members he knew well, and whose devotion to the Church's liturgies he fully exploited in the structure and vocabulary of the prayers.¹⁰ But he also intended the prayers to have value for future generations of people inside and outside the monastic setting, who would in a sense pray together with him, using his words as a vehicle for their own growth and deepening in faith. As he writes in *Prayer 66A*, Gregory envisions his future reader as engaging with him in a joint process where, unbeknownst to one another, he and his yet unborn audience would help one another towards a full unfolding of their salvation:

So, whoever takes the medication of the intercessions
Of this humble book, to pray by means of them,
If the one who draws near is a sinner
I too will join him through my prayer,

⁸ See **Chahan Sarkissian**, "La signification spirituelle du Commentaire de saint Grégoire de Narek sur le Cantique des cantiques," in **J. -P. Mahé and B. L. Zekiyan**, eds., *Saint Grégoire de Narek Théologien et Mystique* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 275), Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2006, 247-254. **Levon Petrosyan**, "Gregory of Narek and the Narekian Fathers: The Mystery of Love from the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* to the *Book of Lamentations*," *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 21 (2012), 27-51 remarks that the purpose of the Commentary was to help Gurgén combat scandalous statements made regarding the *Song* by T'ondrakians, who rejected the sacrament of marriage. (30)

⁹ For a preliminary study of the term *vardapet* see **Robert W. Thomson**, "Vardapet in the Early Armenian Church," *Le Muséon* 75. 3-4 (1962), 367-384. Gregory's techniques, while uniquely his own, are also typical of vardapets in the earlier period of Armenian Christian thought.

¹⁰ See **Michael Daniel Findikyan**, "St. Gregory of Narek's *Book of Prayers* and the Eucharist: Another Holy Communion," *Revue théologique de Kaslik* 3-4 (2009-2010), 291-311.

While if the one pleading be righteous
I also through him shall be benefited hereby together with him. ¹¹

Thus, the prayers had to be written in such a way that many types of people, in circumstances known or unknown, would find them accessible for their own spiritual benefit. Gregory's *Prayers* envisioned an audience including at least the following four types of people:

First, people of faith but not necessarily of deep learning, who might resonate with the beautiful sounds and rhythms of Gregory's words. These people would be attracted to the elegance of his metaphors, and resonate with his unmatched command of both the Armenian language and the language of the heart. One might argue that it is not necessary for people at this most basic level to have a command of *grabar*, or even to understand Armenian; the vibrations of the words are in and of themselves sufficient to produce significant benefit to the hearer. ¹²

Second, people who in addition to the attractions just described, would also be alert to Gregory's use of well-known biblical stories and paradigms. Among this group would be people whose knowledge of the sacred stories could be brought into play by the way that Gregory used biblical characters and stories as the backdrop to his and the reader's own spiritual experiences, using the biblical material to bring out the meaning of those experiences. This group would derive additional benefit from seeing how the ancient stories were intimately applicable to their own life.

Third, monks, priests and others habituated to the Armenian Church's liturgies, would be able to detect the underlying liturgical structures of the prayers and thus to contextualize the highly personal words within the larger setting of the Church's corporate life of prayer. For these readers, the scriptural allusions might well produce resonances with the lectionary readings for certain feasts and observances, as well as calling up connections with the liturgical and hymnodic expressions that they were accustomed to using on a daily basis. These readers would also be sensitive to the presence of implicit allusions lying hidden beneath the more obvious stories.

Fourth, Gregory provided a level of meaning that, whilst not detracting or distracting from the experience for people at any of the first three levels,

¹¹ Արդ, որ ոք էւ անցէ զայս դեղ մաղթանաց / այս մատենի պարկեշտականի՝ պաղատիլ սովաւ, / եթէ ի մեղատուաց իցէ մատուցեալն, / եղէ՛ց եւ ես իմովս բանիս կցորդեալ նմա, / իսկ եթէ յարդարոց գուցէ յառաջեալն, / գտա՛յց եւ ես սովիմք ընդ նմին ողորմեալ նովաւ:

¹² Recordings of Narek Therapy [նարեկաբուծութիւն] being used with people who do not know Armenian are available on YouTube, courtesy of Narek Therapy proponent Armen Nersisyan. See also www.narekabujutyun.am.

could be accessed by the relatively rare individuals who, like Gregory himself, were beneficiaries of the advanced biblical and patristic training available to *vardapets*, or doctors of the Church. For these readers, a single, carefully chosen word could spark a train of associations. While following the trail of these associations might perhaps lead the reader far from the matter immediately at hand, he would inevitably return to the prayer laden with additional insights. For these readers, Gregory employed a kind of erudite shorthand. Taking advantage of their shared education, he made it possible for this cadre of readers to vastly enrich their experience of the prayers. As professional religious teachers, *vardapets*, too, needed spiritual refreshment and renewal from time to time, and they would find special joy and profit in following the thought process behind each allusion to new and greener pastures of understanding.

The context of Song of Songs 1:7-8 in *Ban* 46A

An allusion to the Song of Songs is embedded in *Ban* 46A as part of a dense tapestry of biblical references and allusions that include Jude 1:22; Mt 8:23-34 / Mk 4:35-5:18 / Lk 8:22-37; Lk 15:17,19; John 10:11-16 and Gen 41:2-4, 19-21, as well as So 1:7-8, Dt, Gen 1:26-27 / 5:1-3, and Mt 22:17-21 / Mk 12:14-17. This network of references forms the context into which So 1:7-8 is placed.

Carrying on the thought from the end of *Ban* 45D, Gregory begins *Ban* 46 in mid-sentence:

So, I who have erred am all the more to be punished.
 Always difficult, wild in behavior,
 Threatening myself with death.
 A reproach to hirelings,
 I pasture obscene flocks of disgusting sins,
 A herd of grazing, wild-born pigs.
 I am a shepherd feeding a flock of wilderness-dwelling goats
 Amid the tents of the shepherds, as the Song of Songs describes me;
 I have not even known how to know myself –
 By whom, or in whose image, or for whom I was created.¹³

¹³ Արդ, վրիպեալս ես յաւտ ամենապատիժ, / միշտ դժնեայ, վայրենաբարոյ, / Անձամբ անձին մահու կշտամբիչ, / Արածողս զերամակս զագիրս, վայրագաստունս խոզից արատականաց / Գարշոյթեան մեղաց՝ նախատ վարձկանութեանց: / Հովիս տածողական զհաւրանս ուղոցն ամայաբնականաց / Ի վրանս նովուացն, ըստ երգոյն երգոց առ իս առակին, / Որ ոչ իսկ ծանեայ զիս երբեք գիտել, / Թէ յո՞վ եւ յո՞յր պատկեր եւ վասն ո՞յր գոյացայ:

The prayer falls neatly into two sections: the first six lines have to do with grazing pigs. The imagery of the last four lines involves herding goats. The first six lines contextualize the last four, and the last four are the culmination of the previous six. The entire section focuses on the changing identity of Gregory and the reader.

Taken together, the two herding metaphors form a preamble to *Ban 46B*, where Gregory describes the beauty of the physical human image. He then progresses to a description of the spiritual image (C) and closes with a self-exhortation to consider the reasons why he had willingly abandoned that beauty, and expressing reliance upon God's ungrudging, generous, paternal compassion.

Lines 1-6: Knowing the self as swineherd

A reader at the first level described above, even one completely unlettered in the scriptures, would surely be struck by the image Gregory presents of himself as a swineherd, *pasturing gaunt flocks of disgusting sins, a herd of wild-born pigs*. Such a reader might be led to wonder about the *pigs* in his own life. Rather than fighting against his own swinish and untamed tendencies or seeking healing for the harm he has done and the harm he has suffered because of them, has he instead domesticated those tendencies? Does he in fact actively seek to fatten them and keep them safe as if they were valuable assets, not realizing that they are in fact wild and will never bring him profit?

This startling image alone, in Gregory's deft hands, might well be enough to trigger a spiritual awakening within even the simplest mind.

Knowing the self in light of the Prodigal Son parable

A reader with some biblical exposure would certainly recognize in Gregory's lines a reference to Jesus' well-known parable of the Prodigal Son, told in Luke 15:11-32. As the parable goes, a man divides his property between his two sons. The younger son goes to a far land and there wastes his inheritance on riotous living. When a famine begins, the young man finds himself without resources, his former friends disappear, and he is forced to hire himself out to a local citizen, who gives him subsistence work as a swineherd — a loathsome occupation for a man raised to consider pigs unclean. Naturally the prodigal son cannot help noticing that his porcine charges are an accurate reflection of his former, profligate ways, as they spend their days wallowing in the mire and eating garbage. He comes to himself, and returns to his father's house, where he is warmly welcomed.

One imagines that Gregory's reader, praying this prayer with Gregory at

a higher level of access, would immediately apply the lines to himself. Had he too, like the prodigal son, left his father's house? Had he fallen low in his moral and spiritual life? Had he willfully squandered his God-given resources through his own fault? Was he living a life beneath his dignity, catering to his base needs and yet failing to find fulfillment in them? The parable would certainly hearten this reader, reminding him that the day he came to his senses and remembered how well his heavenly father cared for the needs of even his lowliest servants, he could make the decision to forsake his swinish past, go home again, and be received with love by his waiting father.

Both of these readers, having prayed Gregory's lines in the realization of their own foolish attachment to harmful and undignified habits, bear the responsibility for changing their own ways, abandoning their pigs, and adopting a more sane and healthy way of being.

Knowing the self in light of John 10:11-16

Having seen and benefited from Gregory's overt use of the famous Prodigal Son parable, a reader more steeped in religious life and practice, would detect beneath that obvious parable a healing story from the life of Jesus, as well as a saying of Jesus especially appropriate to a dedicated practitioner of the faith.

The word *hireling* [վարձկանութիւն] in line 4 would bring to this reader's mind Jesus' discourse on the Good Shepherd, recorded in John 10:11-16. There Jesus describes himself as the shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. He contrasts himself with the *hireling, who is not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not; when he sees the wolf coming he forsakes the sheep and flees, and the wolf ravishes them and scatters them.*¹⁴ In other words, it is not enough for the priest or other dedicated servant of the Church simply to leave aside his swinish habits and return home. As a shepherd of Christ's sheep, he must be faithful to his calling, not abandoning or neglecting the flock.

Knowing the self in light of the Gadarene swine

In association with the imagery of pigs, the word *hireling* also brings to mind the story of the Gadarene swine, told in Matthew 8 and repeated, with variations, in Mark 4-5 and Luke 8. Following a tempestuous crossing of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus and his disciples encounter a man tempest-tossed by demons, dwelling in the deserted tombs outside the nearby town and behaving

¹⁴ Իսկ վարձկանն որ ոչ է հովիւ, որոյ ոչ իւր են ոչխարքն, իբրեւ տեսանէ զգայլն զի գայ, թողու զոչխարսն եւ փախչի. եւ գայլն յափշտակէ զնոսս եւ ցրուէ: (John 10:12)

with uncontrollable wildness. When Jesus commands the demons to leave the man, they ask him to allow them to enter a herd of pigs grazing not far away. Jesus permits this. When the demon-possessed pigs run down the slope, fling themselves into the sea and drown, the hireling swineherds abandon their charges and flee. The citizens of the town are alerted; out of fear, they ask Jesus to depart from their region.

Noticing the implicit presence of this story, the reader would be reminded that the citizens of the town were probably Jews, to whom the eating of pork was forbidden. In other words, although presumably they did not overtly sin against their dietary laws by eating the pigs or herding them themselves, they nonetheless profited by selling the unclean animals to others. Gregory's reference to this story implies that for a clergyman like himself, or any other person dedicated to the life of the Church, keeping oneself away from swinish habits is an essential beginning, but it is not enough: even indirectly making it possible for others to pursue what is harmful is itself a sin for one who serves in the role of a shepherd.

The same liturgically immersed reader would also recall that Jesus' discourse on the Good Shepherd is read multiple times during the liturgical year: during the seasons of Nativity, Easter and the Cross it points to the acts of Christ's incarnation as the shepherd who *lays down his life for the sheep*.

The passage is also read for celebrations of great pastoral figures such as Sahak Bart'ew; Gregory the Theologian; Cyril of Jerusalem; the grouping of pastoral martyrs comprising the Patriarch Peter, Bishop Blaise and Deacon Absolom; and the discovery of the relics of Gregory the Illuminator.

Thus, Gregory leads his devoted reader to understand the greater responsibility of clergy and servants of the Church regarding *herding pigs*. He also connected the reader's mind to an array of *good shepherds* who, having followed Christ's example, became themselves worthy of emulation. Their lives were ample commentary on what it means not to be a *hireling* in the context of service to the Church.

Knowing the self in light of special vocabulary

A vardapet might use any or all of the above connections in his teaching for various audiences. In fact, they were probably quite familiar to him already, even before reading Gregory's prayer. So, what could Gregory offer specifically to his erudite peer, over and above the parable, the healing story, and the examples of the Good Shepherd?

When writing for one another, vardapets might compress an entire exegetical inquiry into a single, carefully chosen word. This allowed them to offer a nexus of scriptural and/or patristic allusions for elaboration and expansion, without distracting anyone who would not know how to go about unpacking the word and its associations. Gregory uses at least two such words in lines 1-6.¹⁵

Կշտամբիչ

The word կշտամբիչ [one who accuses, reviles, denounces, threatens, rebukes, blames, inculpates, recriminates] appears in line 3. While the word fits seamlessly into its context there, it also carries specific connotations for the responsibilities of a vardapet, which go beyond those either of the lay faithful or of the other servants of the Church.

The verb կշտամբեմ and the noun կշտամբութիւն appear some forty times in scripture. These references are indeed helpful in broadening one's understanding of what Gregory means by line 3. However, the word կշտամբիչ itself appears only in Jude 22. In its context, the verse reads:

But we, beloved, let us build ourselves up through the holiness of faith; let us stand in prayer through the Holy Spirit to keep ourselves through the love of God, anticipating the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ in life eternal. Also, become *rebukers* [կշտամբիչք] of some, who are going to be condemned; and save the life of others by snatching them from the fire; and have compassion toward others with godly fear, to make worthy the garment that may have been soiled by the body. (Jude 20-23)¹⁶

The passage goes on to give praise to God, *who is able to present us as immaculate* before his glory. (25)

In short, by means of his self-rebuke Gregory reminds his vardapet colleagues that like him, they are responsible to wield their teaching powers as a tool for the salvation and growth of their hearers: rebuking those who are in

¹⁵ Other candidates might include the word տածողական/տածեմ, which has connections with the Armenian translation of Philo, the word նախատ, and the phrase անձամբ անձին. These remain to be investigated more closely.

¹⁶ Իսկ մե՛ք, սիրելի՛ք, եղիցո՛ւք շինել զանձինս արքութեամբն հաստոց, ի հոգին սուրբ կացցո՛ւք յաղօթս. պահել զանձինս սիրովն աստուծոյ, ակն ունել ողորմութեանն տեսան մերոյ Յիսուսի Քրիստոսի ի կեանսն յախտենական: Եւ ոմանց դատապարտելոց լինիչի՛ք կշտամբիչք, եւ զոմանս ապրեցուցանիչի՛ք յափշտակեալ ի հրոյ. եւ ոմանց ողորմեսցի՛ք երկիրդիւ, դատել եւ զպատմունանն որ ի մարմնոյն իցէ աղտեղեալ:

danger of condemning themselves, using words to snatch out of the fire those who are already suffering in it, and compassionately encouraging others to make their [baptismal] *garment* clean.¹⁷

Զազիր

The adjective *quaqh* in line four aptly describes the pigs of sin as fetid, disgusting, vile or obscene. The word does not strike the average reader as noteworthy, yet its presence alerts a vardapet to another level of meaning.

The word *quaqh* appears only in Gen 41:2-4 and 19-21. The story is that of Pharaoh's first dream. In the dream, he sees seven sleek, well-favored cows emerge from the river. They are followed by seven cows that are the opposite: ill-favored and gaunt. The seven ill-favored cows then swallow up the seven sleek ones, yet they remain as gaunt as before. Finding this dream disturbing, Pharaoh asks what it means. Joseph is brought out of prison to interpret the dream; he tells Pharaoh that the cows represent seven years of plenty, to be followed by seven years of famine that will devour the bounty of the good years, yet it will not be sufficient. Pharaoh puts Joseph in charge of storing up the surplus of the seven good years in order to have enough for the seven years of famine.

Substituting pigs for cows, in light of the context in Gregory's prayer, one might develop the idea that not only are the pigs of sin vile creatures in and of themselves, but they may well devour the good and beautiful things of those who herd them. One might also cast the vardapet in the role of Joseph, who because of his knowledge becomes responsible for laying up stores of spiritual nourishment in order to provide for himself and others during difficult times.

Knowing the self from a higher perspective: from swineherd to goatherd

In contrast to the implicit scriptural allusions in the first six lines, Gregory clearly states that the last four lines derive from the *Song of Songs*. In

¹⁷ The *garment* was associated with the original glorious garment of Adam and Eve, or with the *garment* of baptism, when the newly baptized "put on Christ." (Gal 3:27) Gregory makes the image of soiled clothing explicit in *Ban* 46. D: Why did you make the fabric of your cloak abominable with vile actions? / [ընդէ՛ր գլուացեալ ձորձ վերարկուին գարշելի գործով՛ գազ-րացուցեր. Հի՛մ գեղեալ հանդերձին մեղաց պատմունան անառակութեան վարով քեզ ար-կեր: Բնդէ՛ր գտանողացդ ոտից սրբութիւն հանապարհաւն ժանտից աղտելեր] These lines reference *Song of Songs* 4:3 – *The Bride says this, "I have taken off my robe; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I soil them?"* [Հարսնն ասէ գայս ինչ. Մերկացայ գպատմունան իմ, զիա՛րդ ազանիմ գնա. Լուսցի գոտս իմ, զիա՛րդ աղտեղացուցից գնոսա]:

other words, he puts it within the capability of the average reader to discover the story without much effort.¹⁸

Other contrasts between the first and second sections of *Ban* 46. A are also obvious. It is clear to readers at every level that the animals being herded have changed; unclean pigs in the first section and clean goats in the second.

A simple recollection or perusal of chapter 1 in the *Song of Songs* shows the Bride introducing herself, commenting on her swarthy complexion and the difficulties of her past life “under the sun”. She then asks her beloved Shepherd of the sheep to tell her where he pastures his flocks and rests them at noonday, so that she can follow him, rather than following other shepherds.¹⁹

He responds, *If you do not know yourself, O most beautiful among women, follow the footprints of the flock, and pasture your kids by the tents of the shepherds.* (1:8)²⁰

It is precisely this process of learning to *know oneself* that Gregory has yet to begin: *I have not even known how to know myself*, (9) and thus, *I am feeding my flock of wilderness-dwelling kids / Amid the tents of the shepherds*, not pasturing them with the flock of the Beloved.

Thus, the persona, character and aims of the two herders are also contrasted: the herder of pigs is male, a hireling, and (as the prodigal son) seeks the house of his father, to whom he is subservient; the herder of goats is female, not a hireling, and seeks her beloved’s pasture. The main form of relationship in the first six lines is implicitly that of hireling to master or dependent son to father; in the last four lines it is overtly the relationship of lover to beloved.²¹

By introducing the parallel figure of the goatherd Bride, Gregory moves

¹⁸ A more knowledgeable reader would make valuable associations with the words shepherd/shepherds. For the religiously observant reader familiar with the liturgical calendar, the feasts on which Song 1:7-8 is read (Palm Sunday, Annunciation, Presentation of the Mother of God to the Temple) would remind him of the time-honored interpretation of the Bride as the Virgin Mary — and by extension, as the Church — with Christ as the Beloved (see for example Thamar Dasnabédian, “Interprétations multiples du Cantique des Cantiques chez Saint Grégoire de Narek: Marie, figure de l’Église,” *Revue théologique de Kaslik* 3-4 (2009-2010), 355-371.

¹⁹ Պատմեա ինձ գոր սիրեաց անձն իմ. Ո՛ւր հովուես, ո՛ւր հանգուցանես ի միջօրէի. Գուցե լինիցիմ իբրեւ զընկեցեալն յերամակս ընկերս բոց: (So 1:7)

²⁰ Եթէ ոչ ծանիցես զանձն բո, գեղեցիկդ ի կանայս, ել դու զհետ գարշապարացն հօտից, եւ արածեա զուս բո ի վրանս հովուաց: (So 1:9)

²¹ Interestingly, Gregory makes this same pairing of the prodigal son and the Bride in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, chapter 1. Commenting on verse 2, *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth*, Gregory says: “Moreover, being the prodigal son, we are kissed by our heavenly Father, as the Gospel parable relates.”

his prayer out of the realm of lost children and hirelings, responsibilities and repentance, and moves it into the world of mutual love and the quest for the Beloved.

Thus, both Gregory and the reader have left behind their pigs; they are no longer aliens from home or aliens from their own principles. Instead of seeking for home or for profit, they have begun to desire the Beloved. However, they are not yet fully in harmony with Him; they do not know how to merge their flock with his.

For this harmonization to happen, says Gregory, one thing is necessary: *to know oneself*. As the Beloved said, “*If you do not know yourself, O most beautiful among women, go...pasture your kids amid the tents of the shepherds!*”

For three groups of Gregory’s readers — the average, the more knowledgeable, and the religious observant — the point is clear. They have taken two huge steps forward: first, leaving behind the swinish aspects of their experience, Gregory and the reader have ceased to feed those vile parts of themselves and have instead begun to care for the things that are clean, although still *wilderness-dwelling* and hard to control, or not fully domesticated. Second, they have come to understand their relationship with God not as that of a superior to a subordinate, or as simply that of caring father to dependent child, but as that of lover to Beloved.

From this vantage point Gregory — and with him, the reader — can effectively move on into *Ban 46C-D*, as they learn to *know oneself* by exploring the image in which humans have been created, in order to draw closer to the Beloved and to enter his pasture.

Lines 7-10 in light of specialized vocabulary

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For the *vardapet* or learned reader / teacher, however, there is more to be accessed in these last four lines of *Ban 46A*.

A *vardapet* would certainly notice the connection between Gregory’s use of the phrase յնյր պատկեր [in whose image?] in line 10 and Jesus’ famous dialogue with those who were sent to test him regarding the payment of taxes to Caesar.

Their opening question is simply a request for a yes or no answer: *Tell us, how does it seem to you — should we give taxes to Caesar or not?*

Jesus responds, *Show me the coin for the tax.*

Once the coin is brought, he asks, *Whose is this image or inscription?*

When they reply, *Caesar’s*, Jesus famously concludes *Go, give what is*

Caesar's to Caesar, and what is God's to God. (Matt 22:15-22 / Mk 12:13-17)

In other words, for a person who already knows *in whose image* he is created and is thus fully and harmoniously following the Beloved, there is a further step to be taken: the full, obligatory giving of oneself to God, whose image is imprinted upon one, over and above whatever one may owe to the society in which one lives.

Ծախնա զքեզ

A second key phrase in lines 7-10 is ծախնա զքեզ [know yourself]. However, as this phrase has no scriptural counterpart, one must resort to other means in order to answer the obvious question, “How does one come to know oneself?”

The answer is found in Gregory's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Gregory could reasonably assume that his learned colleagues, familiar with the commentary tradition to which Gregory's writing on the Song of Songs belongs, would be able to follow his train of thought from its earliest beginnings in that tradition.

Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (II. 5) stressed that Solomon had put forth this dictum before the philosophers made it a permanent part of their instruction.²² For Origen, the knowledge one should have of oneself was the knowledge that one had been made in God's image. Origen goes on to spend several pages giving a philosophical explanation of the two-fold nature of this knowledge.

For his part, Gregory of Nyssa stressed the importance of freeing oneself from the pseudo-knowledge of self that is really merely “the knowledge of what hangs about the edges of oneself... allowing what is their own to go unprotected.”²³ One should know that not only is humanity honored by being in God's image, but God himself dwells in human beings. The knowledge of this extraordinary fact will inevitably produce a change in perspective regarding the world overall: “If you see these things, you will not set your eye on anything earthly!”²⁴

In his own commentary, Narekats'i takes the thought line of Origen and Nyssa in a different direction.

²² **Origen**, *The Song of Songs Commentary and Homilies*, tr. **R. P. Lawson** (Ancient Christian Writers 26), Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1957, 128.

²³ See the dual-language Greek and English edition of the homilies, **Richard A. Norris**, ed. and trans., *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Song of Songs* (Writings from the Greco-Roman World 13), Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2012, 70/71.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 76 /77.

First, Gregory interprets Song of Songs 1:7-8 as the beginning of the real relationship between the Bride and the Beloved; it is the start of her quest to know herself, *by whom, or as whose image, or for whom she was created* as he says in line 10 of the prayer.

Second, He then answers the question that automatically arises in the mind of the learned reader: if to know oneself means to realize one's imagehood and to change one's view of the world accordingly, what is the mechanism or method through which that realization and change can take place?

According to Gregory's commentary, the answer lies in Deut 4:9 — *Look to yourself, and be very careful of yourself.*²⁵ The verbal parallel between Deut 4:9 and So 1:8 is not exact, but Gregory's explicit mention of it as the interpretive key to So 1:8 alerts the learned reader to the fact that it is in the context to Deut 4:9 that Gregory locates his thinking on the means by which one can *know oneself*. There one will discover what the content might be of this knowledge that will change the Bride from being a herder of unproductive goats to a shepherd of productive sheep.²⁶

Deut 4 is the culmination of Moses' address to the children of Israel before they enter the land of promise. In chapters 1-3 Moses offered a summary of all the ways in which God has helped and protected the people and established a special relationship with them. It is on the basis of this proven relationship that Moses tells the people, *Look to yourself, and be very careful of yourself*, so that you do not jeopardize that relationship, but rather increase and solidify it.

In other words, unlike the more philosophical approach of Origen or Nyssa, Gregory's notion of what it means to *know oneself* is both historical and proactive; it involves the self, present, past and future. To *know oneself*, one must be aware of the ways in which one's relationship with the divine has already established itself over the course of one's life. To *know oneself* is to know what God has already done for one; it is also to live accordingly, keeping God's covenant and teaching future generations to do the same.

Most particularly, one is to remember that *on the day when the Lord spoke to you on Mt. Horeb, from out of the midst of the fire, you saw no likeness* (4:15). God has no true metaphor; there are no adequate similes for the Ultimate Being. No matter how close one draws to the Shepherd, there will always be the indescribable fire between the lover, singular or collective, and the Beloved. Knowing oneself does not lead to mastery, but to mystery.

²⁵ Հայեաց ի քեզ եւ զգոյշ լեր անձին քու յոյժ:

²⁶ Commentary 1:8.

If one knows that the Lord is God, and there is no other but He, (4:35) and that He is ultimately unknowable, then one also knows oneself. This in no way belittles the human self; on the contrary, it elevates the self.

More than two centuries after Gregory, Vanakan Vardapet described the qualities that distinguish man as being in God's image: among others, he included among those qualities the same unknowability that applies to God. In his *Book of Questions and Responses* he says:

Question: What should we understand about the human soul?

Answer: The soul is God's image. For a god-fearing person to scrutinize God is not possible—where He is from, or where He is, or what size He is, or how He is, or where He reaches until. In the same way, (it is not possible to inspect/examine/scrutinize) the human soul!²⁷

To know oneself, then, is to know that one is unknowable, and to respect the beauty of that unknowability, in the same way that one respects the ultimate unknowability of God.

Conclusion

The progression of Gregory's *Ban* 46A culminates in his overt reference to *Song of Songs* 1:7-8.

Lines 1-6 lead the reader to realize his or her self-understanding as a hireling swineherd. The obvious parable of the Prodigal Son and the less obvious story of the Gadarene swine both contribute to this self-understanding, as does Jesus' discourse on the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-16).

By contrast, lines 7-10 offer a more excellent way, proposing the short exchange between the Bride and the Beloved in *So* 1:7-8 as a higher paradigm for self-awareness. At its highest, this self-awareness is based on the knowledge that God's unknowability is also characteristic of the human person. Both are a mystery best approached through love.

²⁷ Հ. Զմարդոյն ոգին որպէս իմանալ մարթի: Պտ. Հոգին պատկեր է աստուծոյ. Աստուածապաշտի զաստուած քննել չմարթի, քէ ուստի կամ ուր կամ քէ որչափ է, կամ քէ որպէս կամ քէ մինչ ուր. Նոյնպէս եւ ոչ զհոգի մարդոյ: While this important work remains unpublished, the present writer is in process of studying its questions and responses by topic. The first grouping, comprising Vanakan Vardapet's questions and responses on death, is due to appear toward the end of 2021.

Ռոբերտա Ռ. Էրվին

**ՍԵՐ ԵՎ ՍՐԲՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ. ՄՏՈՐՈՒՄՆԵՐ ԵՐԳ ԵՐԳՈՑԻՅ ԳՐԻԳՈՐ
ՆԱՐԵԿԱՑՈՒ ՄԵՋԲԵՐՈՒՄՆԵՐԻ ՄԱՍԻՆ**
(Մաս Ա՝ Մատեան ողբերգութեան, Բան 46Ա)

Բանալի բառեր՝ Քաղվածքներ երգ երգոցից, մեկնություն, աղոթք, հոգևոր փորձառություն, վարդապետ, «Ծանեա զքեզ»:

Գրիգոր Նարեկացու «Մատեան»-ի Բան 46Ա-ի պատումի ընթացքի կիզակետը ուղղակի մեջբերում է երգ երգոցից (Ա. 7-8): Բան 46Ա 1-6 տողերն ընթերցողին ստիպում են իրեն պատկերացնել վարձկան խոզարածի դերում: Թե՛ Անառակ որդու առակն ակնհայտորեն և թե՛ Գերգեսացվոց երկրի խոզերի պատմությունը (Մատթ. Ը 28-32) ոչ շատ ակնհայտորեն նպաստում են սեփական անձի այնպիսի ընկալմանը, ինչպիսին արտահայտված է Հիսուսի՝ Բարի հովվի խոսքում (Յովհ. Ժ 11-16):

«Մատեանի» Բան 46Ա 7-10 տողերում, ընդհակառակը, երգ երգոցի (Ա. 7-8) հարսի և փեսայի կարճ երկխոսության օրինակով ինքնաճանաչման մի ավելի կատարյալ միջոց է առաջարկված: Ինքնաճանաչման գազաթնակետի հիմքում այն պատկերացումն է, որ Աստծո անճանաչելիությունը բնորոշ է նաև մարդուն: Երկուսն էլ խորհուրդ են, որոնց լավագույնս կարելի է մերձենալ սիրո միջոցով:

РОБЕРТА ЭРВИН

**ЛЮБОВЬ И СВЯТОСТЬ:
РАЗМЫШЛЕНИЯ ОБ ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИИ ЦИТАТ
ИЗ ПЕСНИ ПЕСНЕЙ ГРИГОРОМ НАРЕКАЦИ
(Часть I: Книга скорбных песнопений, глава 46А)**

Ключевые слова: Песнь песней, толкование, молитва, духовный опыт, вардапет, "Познай самого себя".

Кульминация нарратива в главе 46А Книги скорбных песнопений Григора Нарекаци происходит в прямой цитате из Песни песней 1:7-8. Строки 1-6 заставляют читателя представить себя наемным свинопасом. Явная аллюзия на притчу о блудном сыне и менее явная – на историю гергесинских свиней (Матф. 8:28-32) приводит к самопознанию, которое воплощается в слова Иисуса о добром пастыре (Ин. 10:11-16).

Более совершенный способ самопознания предлагают строки 7-10. Через диалог между женихом и невестой в Песне песней 1:7-8 приходит осознание того, что непостижимость Бога характерна и для человека. В обоих случаях это таинство, наилучший путь к которому лежит через любовь.