

## “BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS” IN THE CONTEXT OF LEGAL-PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS\*

### Abstract

This article presents a methodological analysis of Grigor Narekatsi’s famous work “The book of lamentations” from the point of view of the theory and practice of judiciary science. The author offers a detailed study of Grigor Narekatsi’s conception of the main types of judicial trial. This article reveals the specificities of the description of the main participants of judicial trials – the judge, the prosecutor, the accused, and the defender in Narekatsi’s work “The book of lamentations”. Since Narekatsi’s work is dedicated to the trial of human souls, this article pays a good deal of attention to moral and religious aspects of the problems under discussion.

*Keywords:* Grigor Narekatsi, “The book of lamentations”, judiciary science, the trial of human souls.

“Narek”, undoubtedly is a unique and distinctive composition created by divine inspiration. No such literary work existed ever before, during or after Narekatsi’s lifetime, nor will anything of the kind ever be created.

For centuries the Book by Gregory of Narek was a subject for many comprehensive research projects. The theological, moral, and philosophical aspects of the Book were studied; efforts were made to reveal its poetic features, its connection to neoplatonism and so on. However, surprisingly, the book had never been researched by lawyers, regardless of the numerous legal terms, concepts, notions and formulations in it. In the Book there are such legal notions as law, right, judge, prosecutor, witness, attorney, investigator, investigation, trial, de-

fendant, accuser, criminal offender, police officer, jail, verdict, punishment and others. Such legal terms are used throughout the Book, and based on this fact we can argue that the Book also has a legal dimension, because the terms are not used as simple notions but are rather used in their philosophical, legal and practical meanings.

In the very first chapter of the Book, Gregory of Narek suggests two different trials. The first one is the trial initiated by Gregory of Narek, the second one is that of retribution, which will take place at the end of the world in Iosafat or Kedron valley.

In order to reveal the content and aims of the trial, initiated by Gregory of Narek, the following should be taken into consideration. The Lord himself wants people to come to trial in front of him. He tells about it through his prophet Isaiah: “And when ye spread forth

\* In a short form published in *Mousikos Logos* (Μουσικός Λόγος), Athens 1 (2000) 4sq.

your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood!” (Isaiah 1,15)<sup>1</sup>”.

According to the Christian doctrine, human sins are subdivided into two types: original sins and actual sins. The original sin is inherited from the ancestor Adam, who voluntarily violated the commandment of the Lord and eventually gave in to the power of Satan. Christians are released from this sin by baptism in the name of Christ and purification by Holy Spirit. But, man is created in the image and likeness of God; he is a free and reasonable creature and can commit sins even after being baptized. Those sins are called actual and for washing of them the sacrament of penance was created. Penance is the key which opens the doors of God's mercy. Without penance and purification from actual sins salvation is impossible, perfection is impossible, and it is also impossible to merge with God in the end.

Active repentance and redemption of sins, as the aim of criminal punishment and as legal institutional notions, are currently prescribed by criminal procedure codes of all countries.

Gregory of Narek thinks that repentance and penance (penitence) should be equal to the gravity of the committed crime and sin. Otherwise, it may entail mental illness or lead to other negative consequences, affecting the morale and the psyche.

“Both unruly sin and deep regret  
plunge us into damnation,  
Being essentially similar even  
though from different sources”.  
(Prayer 10, A)<sup>2</sup>

The sacrament of penance has three elements two of which - repentance and confession - are the creating parts of sacrament and the third one - retribution - completes the integrity of the sacrament. The last one, in its turn, consists of prayer, lent and mercy. Although those elements are closely interconnected, and function as a whole, but repentance plays the most important role in the sacrament of penance, and is, as a rule, accompanied with tears. The Book by Gregory of Narek is absorbed with repentance and is soaked with tears of repentance.

How does Gregory of Narek initiate the trial of penance? He, placing the fruits of his wavering mind as savory sacrifices on the fire of his grieving soul to be delivered to God in the censer of his will (Prayer 1, A). Gregory of Narek thinks that this grieving mourns that he delivers to Heaven, is speaking liturgy and he hopes that the Lord will find this simple string of words acceptable and will not turn in disdain. He wants this unsolicited gift to reach God, this sacrifice of words from the deep mystery-filled chamber of his feelings, consumed in flames fueled by whatever grace he may have within him (Prayer I, A). This way he mournfully comes to a trial with God, in other words he appears in front of God for trial.

Gregory of Narek attaches particular importance to the bases which provide the successful course of the trial he initiated, that is - the penance trial. These bases are faith and hope. Gregory of Narek is hopeful that the sinner comes out in atonement, the villain leaves justified, the unclear is purified and the sinner with unredeemed sins is non-convicted, is liberated from the slavery of bliss and granted heavenly freedom. There is nothing more magnificent than the heart of a sinner who has rediscovered his sense from the darkness and re-

<sup>1</sup> English text is quoted from The Holy Bible, Authorized King James Version.

<sup>2</sup> English text here and hereinafter is quoted from “Book of Prayers” translated by Thomas J. Samuelian.

ceived the help of God, on the one hand the person bears and outward smile, on the other, he his grievous in his soul. This sinner, although encumbered with his renovated and absolute sins, is deeply drowned in the bottomless abyss of destruction, but keeps sacred relics in his mind and soul as a token of salvation. That is why the sinner bent under immense sadness, hopeless to find the anticipated good and deprived of the courage for virtue, can hope that he can again obtain the adornments, granted to him originally. Repentance and penance are created by God and are presented as signs of his almightiness in the Gospel.

God confirms repentance and penance as pleasant incense, and they are based on sincere faith and strong hope. The Savior took a token of faith before restoring light to the eyes of blind people (Prayer 11, A).

In order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the legal dimension of the Book by Gregory of Narek it is also necessary to touch upon the issue of retribution trial. One of the important parts of the Christian doctrine is eschatology, the theory of the end of world, the Second Coming, resurrection of mortals and Judgment Day.

Gregory of Narek sees all this with the eyes of his soul, hears the horrible sounds of the Judgment Day, compelling him to stand up and fight in a battle. Even in this earthly life he feels a deep and inherent anxiety and hosts of chaotic disturbances; pieces of evil and good advice clash and make him a prisoner of death. Gregory of Narek understands that if one does not repent for their sins and does not achieve absolution, then:

“Thus, the kingdom of God  
in a visible form has come  
already, charging me on truthful

testimony with wrongs graver  
than those of the Edomites,  
Philistines and other barbarians –  
wronges that brought down  
the hand of God”.

(Prayer A, B)

And if, according to Gregory of Narek, his sufferings are not long lasting, the punishment for his sins will not have an end or boundaries. Fear, abyssal fall, inevitable alarm, endless shame and other punishments await him. It is obvious that Gregory of Narek used the term “Accuse” in a sense of bringing accusation in a trial.

Because on the Judgment Day the sinners and the righteous will receive retribution for their actions, Gregory of Narek calls the Judgment Day “Retribution trial”. Thus, the legal interpretation of the Book by Gregory of Narek will give a chance to reveal that there are images of both penance and retribution trials in the Book. Those images in the Book are often intermingled but the Book is mainly devoted to penance trial. The legal interpretation of the Book gives a chance to reveal the peculiarities of both penance and retribution trials in comparison with each other and the eternal judgment.

Gregory of Narek believes that God is beneficent, almighty, awe-inspiring, gracious, kind, a good Father, a charitable donor of mercy, whose very name heralds the good news of his grandeur, compassion and fatherly affection; he is gentle even toward the bitter and discontented. And the Son, who is like the Father, whose hand is strong like Father's, whose awesome reign is eternal like the Father's, whose exaltation, is shared with him in creation. So to the Holy Spirit of truth that flows from the Father without end, the perfect essence of existence and eternal being, is equal to the Father in all things, reigning with the Son in equal glory. Later, Gregory of

Narek in a small number of lines presents main provisions of the Symbol of Faith. He says:

“Three persons, one mystery,  
separate faces, unique and distinct,  
made one by their congruence and  
being of the same holy substance and  
nature, unconfused and undivided,  
one in will and one in action. One  
is not greater, one is not lesser, not  
even by an eyelash, and because of  
the unobscurable light of heavenly  
love revealed in our midst both  
have been glorified with a single  
crown of holiness from  
before the ages.”

(Prayer 13, A)

When describing God, Gregory of Narek uses both positive and negative definitions. God, on the one side, is inconceivable, immense, inaccessible, unknowable, indescribable, incomprehensible, inscrutable, beginningless, timeless, underived, endless, borderless, reasonless and so on, on the other hand, He is kind, merciful, gracious, fairly judging, careful, formidable, terrible, mighty, or He is the fair sun, a blessed ray, a radiant image, a longed craving, the joyfulness of kindness, a reassuring vision, a praised earthly ruler, an ambitious king, a confessional life and so on. In these different definitions of God there is an obvious contradiction. If God, for example, is inconceivable, unknowable, indescribable, how can we call Him kind, fairly judging, merciful, glorious and so on. These are seeming contradictions, and in order to understand this comprehensively, we should discuss the issues of influence and cognition of God.

It should be noted that negative definitions of God relate to the nature of God, while the positive ones relate to His influences. And when Gregory of Narek, affirmingly, states that God is kind, fair, merciful, charitable and so on, none of these definitions relates to the nature of God but to His influences, and when he, states by nega-

tion that God is non-proceeded, endless and so on, all these definitions relate to the substance of God. The definitions give us an understanding of what God is like as the Judge in the Book. Our powerless mind should not be misguided and consider God as a judge to be the same as a judge in the worldly sense. Although God is a judge in the Book, he is more than a judge.

In the penance trial, initiated by Gregory of Narek, an important role is given to the prosecutor, who acts as the accuser during this trial. In its modern sense, a prosecutor is a participant of the trial, who presents the criminal offence, committed by the defendant before the court and demands to apply the relevant type and measure of punishment.

In the penance trial Gregory of Narek himself plays the role of a prosecutor. He considers himself a severe prosecutor, who decorates his indictment by brief quotations from the speeches of prophets (Prayer 33, B). Moreover, he considers himself a prosecutor who has the necessary qualities inherently, at the bottom of his heart acting against himself. Gregory of Narek says:

“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, Look with favor  
upon this relentless expression  
of contrition for my wrong doing,  
and the reproach I heap upon myself  
from the depth of my heart.”

(Prayer 57, B)

The central participant of the penance trial in the Book by Gregory of Narek is the defendant. It is notable that in the penance trial Gregory of Narek is not only a prosecutor, but also a defendant. As a prosecutor, he is ready to repeat self-reproach in the same imagery and in the same manner and the Lord will possibly consider these painful words of condemnation verdict

as a true confession. He writes:

“And now I continue to accuse my  
cursed soul, in different terms  
confessing all my undisclosed evil  
doings that perhaps the all-knowing  
might record in my favor these  
anguished words of penitence  
and contrition.”

(Prayer 22, A)

Gregory of Narek, representing both the prosecutor and the defender is fully determined to make everything publicly known, convict and condemn his essence. In this regard he says:

“And because I have risen against  
Myself with words like harsh  
Prosecutor and have even taken  
up the sword of righteous anger  
that cannot be sheathed, who  
among the earth-born will plead  
for me? I shall confess every  
scandalous detail. I shall submit  
my being to judgment. I shall  
beat down the army of destruction.  
I shall prosecute the marauders  
wounding me. I have sinned  
in everything and in all ways”.

(Prayer 22, D)

But it would be too primitive to consider only Gregory of Narek himself as the only defendant in the penance trial, depicted in the Book. The defendant is the human being as such, who embodies the collective image of humanity. It means that at penance trial the defendant is any human being, who ever lived, lives now, or will live in the future, after Gregory of Narek. For that reason readers see their own selves in the pages of the Book, and this is where the immense enchantment of the Book is hidden.

Along with the judge, prosecutor and defendant defenders are participants of the penance trial, too. Gregory of Narek considers Holy Mother of God as his main defender during the penance trial. He has special treatment towards

the Holy Virgin. He thinks of the Mother of God as an angel in bodily form, heavenly queen, pure as air, clean as light, clear as the image of the sun at its height, higher than the forbidden dwelling place of the holies, place of the blessed covenant, a breathing Eden, tree of immortality, guarded by a fiery sword, strengthened and protected by the exalted Father, prepared and purified by the Holy Spirit that rested upon him, adorned by the Son who dwelt in him as his tabernacle, only Son of the Father, and for his first born, and his Lord by creation, together with his unsoiled purity, spotless goodness, together with his immaculate holiness, guardian intercessor (Prayer 80, A).

At the penance trial angels, in particular the guardian angel, also act as defenders. Angels are virtuous, created good by the God - doer of good; they are ignorant of evil, established by God’s command. They are mighty force at God’s disposal; they are holy, pure, spotless, blessed, splendid, victorious and invincible, swift as a flash of the mind (Prayer 81, A).

These guardian angels serve us and plead for us, just as for the barren fig tree that did not give fruit for three years, an eternity encompassing past, present and future, for a long period it took root in the vineyard of this world, decorating with useless foliage, but gave no fruit, and this is the very image of wretched mankind.

At penance trial the mighty defenders of man are holy apostles, martyrs, holy hermit fathers. Holy apostles were ordained with the heavenly hand of God, anointed by the Holy Spirit. They are leaders of life, the first to be graced with this honor, the glorified choir, the spiritual rivers, the sublime evangelists, the illustrious princes, those with sparkling crowns, and those adorned in the untarnished, brilliant radiance of the strength of grace, those who have been made perfect with the oil of gladness

of lordly light (Prayer 82, A). Together with his disciples, Christ God on high, and the self-sacrifice of his chosen martyrs, who through mortification and torments of the flesh, and peril to life and limb and all manner of suffering, and who despite their earthly nature struggled against every element of material existence to win halos, transcending and reborn in spirit. They departed this world, as the prophets said, as true witnesses to the trials and tribulations of death. They comprehended the unequivocal good, unseen and hidden (Prayer 82).

If there are the court, trial, judge, prosecutor, defendant and defenders, there should also be the issue of trial and judicial inquiry. In order to complete our ideas about the penance trial, we should define the issue of the trial, something for which a man - a defendant is accused; also we should disclose the peculiarities of judicial inquiry.

If we try to characterize the issue of the penance trial as a whole, we can say that man - the defendant is accused in sinning before God. According to the Christian doctrine, sinning in the mind, by word and action is the violation of the commandments of God.

Gregory of Narek compares human sins with sands of the shore, but unlike the sand of the shore, which do not have birth and growth, human sins and crimes have birth and growth, there are so many of them, that they cannot be remembered. That is why he touches upon the lessons of sins. Human sins are countless, they are impossible to comprehend, one with its kith, the other with its kin, one with its defects, the other with its dangers, one with its thorns, the other with its roots, one with its stem, the other with its fruits, one with its limbs, the other with its branches, one with its shoots, the other with its joints, one with its claws, the other with its fin-

gers, one with its shakiness, the other with its sturdiness, one with its causes, the other with its effects, one with its imprint, the other with its traces, one with its shadow, the other with its darkness, one with its tactics, the other with its strategy, one with its guile, the other with its intent, one with its trajectory, the other with its size, one with its depth, the other with its baseness, one with its spark, the other with its passion, one with its goods, the other with its treasures, one with its pipes, the other with its fountain, one with its torrents, the other with its lightning, one with its flames, the other with its shame, one with its oils, the other with its abysses, one with its embers, the other with its dullness, one with its thunder, the other with its raindrops, one with its currents, the other with its floods and frost, one with its gates, the other with its roadways (Prayer 6, C).

The penance trial initiated by Gregory of Narek begins with the prosecutor's speech. Gregory of Narek appears in the Book as a skilled investigator who investigates, discovers all the bends of the human soul, and revealing human sins, even the hidden ones, then as a prosecutor, he accuses man before the God. Gregory of Narek, as a prosecutor, presents the reasons of the agents of death - the roots of the bitter fruit of the tree of damnation, hostile kin, intimate adversaries, traitorous sons, whom he describes in detail by name (Prayer 56, A). Those fruits are sinister heart, gossiping mouth, lustful eyes, wanton ears, murderous hands, weak kidneys, wayward feet, swaggering gait, crooked footprints, polluted breath, dark inclinations, dried innards, mushy mind, inconstant will, incorrigible depravity, wavering virtue, banished soul, dissipated legacy, and so on (Prayer 56, B). These are the multitude of seductive devices, which he allowed to deceive in a naive way, al-

lowed to prevail over him in his weakness, condemning himself willfully to death (Prayer 56, B).

As a prosecutor, Gregory of Narek dared to say what is unspeakable: he has boasted in his humiliation, he has exposed his secrets, disclosed what he had covered up, shown what he had hidden, spread what he had stored up, splattered the gall of his bitterness, divulged his collaboration with the evil one, squeezed his pus-filled wound, acknowledged the abyss of his sins, put on the mask of hypocrisy, lifted the veil from ugliness, stripped away the clothes from shamefulness, laid open his baseness, thrown up the dregs of death, revealed the abscessed wounds of his soul to the God. This is how Gregory of Narek brings the prosecutor into appearance before the judge (Prayer 65, A).

Gregory of Narek, as the defendant, joins the prosecutor, and he shall never stop judging his condemned self with anguished words, or stop reproaching him for his sins, like a wicked irredeemable and incorrigible being. For although he has slain some of his tormentors, he helped others to live and lost his soul, like a plant with bitter branches, he had blossomed with the odor of wrongful ways, with corrupting and fatal fruit, which he has made into the wine of destruction, the offspring of Canaan, the child of hell and paradise, the heir of Flades, the stuff of torment, ungrateful and disgraceful, ever sinful, one who embitters the sweetness of God's beneficence, an evil and bad servant, diligent in the baseness of corruption, conscientious in angering the Lord, ever active in satanic ventures, a daily cause of grief to his Maker, weak in his flight toward goodness, lazy in the blessing of fidelity, slow in observing his promises, fainthearted in the necessary and useful, and unfaithful and un-

grateful servant (Prayer 7, B).

Gregory of Narek is sure that punishments always should match the sins they are for, like mirror images, identical, parallel, emblematic of the wrong. As he does not tend the needs of his fellow man with warm charity, he freezes with fear at the first sign of danger. And since he did not check his willful pride, it is fair that he should be consumed with unbridled disgrace. And since he did not love the light of the good news, it is just that he should be condemned to grope in the darkness of ignorance and fog of perdition. And since he paid no heed to small faults, considering them harmless, it is fitting for him to be wounded by the stings of insects. And since he did not lend a helping hand to those in danger, it is proper for him to be cast into a pit of filth (Prayer 19, C).

Any trial and court, any judicial process ends with the verdict of the court. The penance trial is not an exception. The judge is merciful, he forgives the sinner, which sinning multiple times during the day, repenting, turns to him, even if the choice is made with his last breath, or in the very midst of sinning (Prayer 30, A). God is all-compassionate, doer of good, blessed, long-suffering, potent, beyond understanding, beyond words, incorruptible and uncreated, He is the beginning and cause of all goods. He is not the accuser, but the liberator, he is not the destroyer, but the rescuer, not the executioner, but the savior, not the scatter, but the gatherer, not the traitor, but the deliverer, He does not pull down, but lifts up, He does not knock down, but stands upright, He does not curse, but blesses, He does not take revenge, but gives grace, He does not torment, but comforts, He does not erase, but writes, He does not shake, but steadies, He does not trample, but consoles, He does not invent the causes of

death, but seeks the means to preserve life. He does not forget to help, He does not abandon the good, He does not withhold compassion, He does not bring sentence of death, but the legacy of life (Prayer 82, E).

The trial of retribution takes place on the initiative of God, regardless of the will, or to put in more accurate terms, against the will of certain people. From this point of view, the trial of retribution, in accordance with contemporary legal perceptions, is a type of the inquisition process.

Gregory of Narek depicts the judgment day in details. The trial for judgment is terrifying, the judge that cannot be bought or deceived, awful shame, fearsome rebuke, inescapable reprimand, unavoidable torment, terror that cannot be comforted, trembling that cannot be stilled, inconsolable weeping, incurable gnashing of teeth, irreparable disease, the curse of awesome divine word, the shutting down of compassion, cutting off of mercy await the sinner (Prayer 79, B).

But the most terrible part is the trial itself. When the guardian angel who is our companion for life, accuses us like a stern official. Here the concept of the “stern official” reflects not the function of care for, protection and guardianship of a human during his earthly life, rather than the protection of public order. The Heavenly King, sitting at the trial, listens to the accusation of the guardian angel, and justly reprimands the sinners, the king's servants rush about without delay inviting some to life and condemning others to shame, showing to some a cheerful face, to others appearing fearsome and horrifying. To some they shall offer a halo of glistening light, and to others mortal perdition.

Is Gregory of Narek afraid of punishment after the Judgment Day? Undoubtedly, but not as a servant, who is afraid of punishments provided by the master, but as a loving son who is afraid to disappoint his parents. Is he expecting merits, provided for a righteous man on the Judgment Day? Definitely he is, but not as a mercenary who is doing his paid job, but as a loving son who wants to be closer to his parents by his gifts. To awe with no fear, to expect with no anticipation, this is the spiritual predisposition of saints, and Gregory of Narek is a Saint, who prefers to be in hell with God, but not in paradise without God; although where ever God is, there his kingdom is.

His Book of Prayers contains considerable legal knowledge, and even in the 10th century he used concepts in his Book which received their classical definitions and reflection in contemporary legal science and law enforcement. But Gregory of Narek, first of all, is a Christian hermit, whose heart was full of faith, hope and love, and his main purpose was human perfection and goodness.

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