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**THE GREAT CANON OF ST. ANDREW OF CRETE.
SCRIPTURAL, LITURGICAL
AND HESYCHASTIC INVITATION
FOR AN ENCOUNTER WITH GOD**

St. Andrew of Crete has been commonly acknowledged as the inventor of the canon, a new type of liturgical hymnody that replaced the sequence of nine Biblical Odes (ὕδαί) chanted at the Orthros, the Morning Office¹. These Biblical Canticles praise God for His work in history for our salvation. They appear throughout the Great Canon². Initially, as Robert Taft suggested, these Biblical Odes, were used as a complete cycle at Matins. All nine canticles were chanted during the monastic office of agrypnia, celebrated on Saturday night vigil. Testimonies have been preserved that such a practice was known to John Moschos and Sophronios in the late sixth or early seventh century in Palestine and Sinai. Apart from that there are references that nine Biblical Odes were sung as a part of morning prayer in the cathedral rite³. Frederica Mathewes-Green explains the invention of the canon in a very simple way:

“As [St. Andrew] encountered these Canticles over and over every day, he began to weave his own prayers around them. Eventually he was composing canticles of his own, and a simple phrase form a Canticle could be enough

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¹ Cf. E. Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, Oxford 1962, 198-239; J. Grosdidier de Matons, *Liturgie et hymnographie: Kontakion et canon*, DOP 34/35 (1980-81) 31-43; A. Louth, *Christian Hymnography from Romanos the Melodist to John Damascene*, “Journal of Eastern Christian Studies” 57 (2005) 195-206.

² The Biblical Odes are: 1. The First Song of Moses (Ex 15:1-8); 2. The Second Song of Moses (Deut 32:1-43); 3. The Song of Hannah (1Sam 2:1-10); 4. The Song of Habbakuk (Hab 3:2-19); 5. The Song of Isaiah (Is 26:9-21); 6. The Song of Jonah (Jon 2:2-9); 7. The First Song of the Three Young Men (Septuagint Dan 3:26-56); 8. The Second Song of the Three Young Men (Septuagint: Dan 3:57-88); 9. The Song of the Virgin Mary in Latin called the *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-55) combined with the Song of Zacharias in Latin called the *Benedictus* (Lk 1:68-79).

³ Cf. R. Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West. The Origins of the Divine Office and its Meaning for Today*, Collegeville MN 1993, 198-199; G.W. Woolfenden, *Daily Liturgical Prayer: Origins and Theology*, Burlington VT 2004, 63-65.

to inspire a whole realm of contemplation. A common theme could then be explored through a series of nine Canticles which, taken together, make up a canon⁷⁴.

The shift from canticles to odes was a gradual process. Probably the increased activity during Great Lent provided opportunities for replacing Biblical Odes with a new hymnography. However, throughout St. Andrew's of Crete life the cycle of nine Biblical Odes was still in use on most days of the liturgical calendar. The Odes of the *Great Canon* reproduce the sense of chronological movement of the events of salvation history that structures the original organization of nine Biblical canticles⁵. Yet the Odes of the *Great Canon* have different emphases in comparison to their Biblical patterns. Basically they are characterized by the penitential mood in contrast to the original cycle of nine Biblical canticles. The *Great Canon* replaces Biblical hymns praising God with narratives of sorrows because of committed sins. Instead of doxology, there is penance.

The circumstances and the exact time of writing of the *Great Canon* are not known. Although in this work there are St. Andrew of Crete's personal indications, they should be treated with reserve because of their purpose, which was the stimulation and instruction of the faithful to repentance and sorrow for sins. There such personal statements as: "In my old age (ἐν τῷ γήρει)"⁶, "From my youth (ἐκ νεότητος)"⁷, "The end draws near, my soul, the end draws near (ἐγγίζει, ψυχή, τὸ τέλος, ἐγγίζει)"⁸, "The time of my life is short (ὁ χρόνος ὁ τῆς ζωῆς μου ὀλίγος)"⁹, or "O wretched soul [...] at least in thine old age (τάλαινα [ψυχή] [...] κἄν ἐν γήρει)"¹⁰, which can serve as the basis relating to the age of the Author. We can deduce that St. Andrew was already elderly at the time of writing of the *Great Canon*¹¹. The Theotokion of Ode 9 contains such information as: "Watch over thy City, all-pure Mother of God (Τὴν Πόλιν σου φύλαττε Θεογεννήτορ ἄχραντε)"¹², which indicates that the *Great Canon* was written in Constantinople and probably implies his election as Archbishop of Crete.

⁴ F. Mathewes-Green, *First Fruits of Prayer: A Forty-Day Journey Through the Canon of St. Andrew*, Brewster MA 2006, XXXV.

⁵ Cf. D. Krueger, *The Great Kanon of Andrew of Crete, The Penitential Bible, and the Liturgical Formation of the Self in the Byzantine Dark Age*, in: *Between Personal and Institutional Religion: Self, Doctrine, and Practice in Late Antique Eastern Christianity*, ed. B. Bitton-Ashkelony – L. Perrone, Celama 15, Turnhout 2013, 70-71.

⁶ Andreas Cretensis Archiepiscopus, *Magnus Canon*, Ode 1:13, PG 97, 1333A.

⁷ Ibidem, Ode 1:20, PG 97, 1333C.

⁸ Ibidem, Ode 4:2, PG 97, 1348B.

⁹ Ibidem, Ode 4:23, PG 97, 1325B.

¹⁰ Ibidem, Ode 8:6, PG 97, 1376B.

¹¹ Cf. Π.Κ. Χρήστου, 'Ο Μέγας Κανών Ἀνδρέου τοῦ Κρήτης, Θεσσαλονίκη 1952, 9.

¹² Andreas Cretensis Archiepiscopus, *Magnus Canon*, PG 97, 1385C.

1. The greatness of the Great Canon. This particular Canon of St. Andrew is “Great” for two reasons. Firstly, it is magnificent due to its contents, and secondly, to its size: it consists of 245(234) troparia. In the Eastern Orthodox liturgical use of the *Great Canon* there are several repetitions and additional prayers to saints and the apostles, so the total is higher. This masterpiece of the Byzantine hymnography was built up from a very close and intimate examination of the Bible. It must be stressed that this work has a very personal tone. Perhaps St. Andrew initially wrote it for his own private use. One can be astonished by the text of the *Great Canon*, which indicates that its Author, considering each passage of the Scripture, tried with all his strength to present the gist of the events and characters there, using a very small numbers of words. This way he looked for wisdom for his own life and urged himself to love God more completely. St. Andrew thoroughly searched both the Old and the New Testaments with great humility matched by grateful confidence in God’s compassion¹³. The entire text of the *Great Canon* is a proof of a great intimacy of its Author with God in the Trinity. St. Andrew of Crete was in a living relationship with the Word of God. The way of referring to the individual passages of the Bible indicates that they were a source of spiritual life for him.

2. Editions and Commentaries on the Great Canon. The *Great Canon* of St. Andrew of Crete lacks a critical edition¹⁴, which causes scholars problems related to the contents of the text and order of some stanzas. The edition from *Patrologia Graeca*¹⁵ includes a number of other prayers and liturgical directions taken from later Orthodox liturgical practice. A similar text can be found in Τριώδιον κατανυκτικόν, which is the Lenten service book of the Orthodox Church. The original performance context was during a single Matins service. On the basis of the 13th centuries triodions, we can state that the practice of reading the *Great Canon* in parts during Compline in the first week of Lent, is of later origin.

There is also an open question why it was never analyzed in a consistent manner in the history of Byzantine scriptural interpretation¹⁶. There is only one homiletical commentary from the Byzantine period written by Acacius Sabaites, which was edited by Antonia Giannouli, a scholar from the University of Cyprus¹⁷. The same is true of the contemporary theological attempts, which refer to this splendid liturgical poem only marginally¹⁸. There

¹³ Cf. Mathewes-Green, *First Fruits of Prayer*, p. IX-X.

¹⁴ Cf. Krueger, *The Great Kanon of Andrew of Crete*, p. 58, footnote 2.

¹⁵ Cf. Andreas Cretensis Archiepiscopus, *Magnus Canon*, PG 97, 1330D - 1386C.

¹⁶ Cf. D. Costache, *Reading the Scriptures with Byzantine Eyes: the Hermeneutical Significance of St. Andrew of Crete’s Great Canon*, “Phronema” 23 (2008) 51.

¹⁷ Cf. A. Giannouli, *Die beiden byzantinischen Kommentare zum Grossen Kanon des Andreas von Kreta. Eine quellenkritische und literarhistorische Studie*, Wiener Byzantinische Studien 26, Wien 2007, 182-383.

¹⁸ For such attempts, see: J. Breck, *The Power of the Word in the Worshipping Church*, Crest-

are only two monographs on the *Great Canon*, which have been published so far. One of them is a book written by Athanasios B. Glaros, under the title *Θεία παιδαγωγία. Παιδαγωγικά στοιχεία στο Μεγάλο Κανόνα του Ανδρέα Κρήτης (Pedagogical Elements of the Great Canon of Andrew of Crete)*¹⁹. Its Author interpreted the *Great Canon* from a pedagogical point of view. As an introduction to his analysis he presented dogmatic teaching of the *Great Canon*, briefly discussing Triadology, cosmology, anthropology, Christology, Mariology, ecclesiology, soteriology, moral theology and eschatology²⁰. Then he showed the *Great Canon* as the way of liturgical pedagogy in the Orthodox Church²¹ and formulated the six basic pedagogical principles, such as: the principle of directed self-reliance, the principle of experience (βιωματικότητα), the principle of supervision (ἐποπτικωτάτης), the principle of internal selection (περισυλλογής), the principle of individuality and the principle of ecclesial togetherness²². Referring to biblical texts from the Old and New Testaments, he distinguished eight stages of learning assigned to eight Odes of the *Great Canon*, namely:

1. Lethargy of man and awakening him by God (Ode 1);
2. The fall of man and God's punishment (Ode 2);
3. The refusal of man and the power of God (Ode 3);
4. The effort of man and the blessing of God (Ode 4);
5. Faith of man and a miracle of God (Ode 5);
6. The humility of man and the forgiveness of God (Ode 6);
7. The obedience of man and the divine economy (Ode 7);
8. The contrition (συντριβή) of man and the love of God (Ode 8)²³.

In the final chapter Athanasios Glaros indicated several pedagogical measures (τὰ παιδαγωγικά μέσα) of the *Great Canon*. On his list there are: addiction (ἔθισμός); encouragement (ἐνθάρρυνση); reinforcement (ἐνίσχυση) by the threat of punishment and control, as well as by the reward in subsequent life; commands (ἐντολές); advice (συμβουλή); and three kinds of examples: templates (τὰ πρότυπα), the parables (οἱ παραβολές), and narrative illustrations (ἀφηγηματικὲς εἰκονογραφήσεις)²⁴. The crowning of the monograph

wood 1986, 128; G. Florovsky, *The Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century*, Vaduz 1987, 24; Th. Hopko, *The Lenten Spring: Readings for Great Lent*, Crestwood NY 1983, 42; A. Schmemmann, *Great Lent*, revised edition, Crestwood NY 1974, 64-66; E. Theokritoff, *Praying the Scriptures in Orthodox Worship*, in: *Orthodox and Wesleyan Scriptural Understanding and Practice*, ed. S.T. Kimbrough Jr., Crestwood NY 2005, 84.

¹⁹ Cf. A.B. Γλάρος, *Θεία παιδαγωγία. Παιδαγωγικά στοιχεία στο Μεγάλο Κανόνα του Ανδρέα Κρήτης*, Νέα Σμύρνη 2000, passim.

²⁰ Cf. *ibidem*, 70-166.

²¹ Cf. *ibidem*, 197-198.

²² Cf. *ibidem*, 205-247.

²³ Cf. *ibidem*, 263-300.

²⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, 300-389.

is presenting twenty-sixth conclusions which summarize the analyses of its individual chapters.

The other book, which is a very popular commentary on the *Great Canon* of St. Andrew of Crete, was written by a Russian monk. This extensive commentary (850 pages!) was written by ihumen Philip (Simonov) under the title *The School of Penance. The scholia on the fields of the Great Canon* (Moscow 2008)²⁵. The purpose of this book is to help churchgoers in deeper reflection on the main message of the *Great Canon*. Ihumen Philip referring to the Holy Scripture, the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, the saints, Russian theologians, and liturgical tradition of Eastern Christianity, encourages the faithful to recognize one's own sinfulness and the need for conversion. The text of this commentary is not so much focused on the analysis of the contents of the *Great Canon*, but it is rather a moralizing incentive to transform life of a reader. Therefore it should be considered as a collection of loose associations related to the themes of irmoses and troparia of the *Great Canon*.

The *Great Canon* was also a point of interest for one of Russian Orthodox priests, namely Father Sergij Pravdolubov, who had written a very big doctoral dissertation and defended it in the Moscow Theological Academy in 1988. This dissertation is titled: *The Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete. History, Poetry, Theology*²⁶. It is a monumental work due to the number of pages. The five volumes of typescripts amount to 1.409 pages! The Author concentrated on presenting the *Great Canon* as a model of ecclesiastical rhythmic poetry in the Orthodox Church which plays a very important role for the faithful. In the first volume there are: an introduction to the life of St. Andrew of Crete and a discussion of his works (pages: 17-98), the background of the canon (pages: 100-160), and the poetics of the *Great Canon* (pages: 161-270). The second volume starts with the chapter called *the penitential faith* (pages 4-39), then the author discusses the *Great Canon* in the liturgical life of the Eastern Orthodox Church (pages: 40-95), and in the final part there is an extended bibliography of manuscripts and printed works. The third volume contains the texts of translations of the *Great Canon* in the Old Church Slavonic and Russian languages (X + 295 pages). The fourth volume is the index to the Old Church Slavonic text of the *Great Canon* (VII + 189 pages). The fifth volume is not directly related to the *Great Canon*, because it includes the Russian translations of various works by St. Andrew of Crete (XXXIV + 362 pages). On the basis of a short presentation of Father Sergij Pravdolubov's doctoral dissertation it is obvious, that it does not contain in-depth theological reflection. This is probably the reason why it has not been published so far.

²⁵ Cf. Игумен Филипп (Симонов), *Училище покаяния. Схологии на полях Великого канона*, Москва 2008, passim.

²⁶ Cf. С. Правдолюбков, *Великий Канон святого Андрея Критского. История. Поэтика. Богословие*, т. 1-5, Москва 1988 (диссертация на соискание учебной степени магистра).

Apart from these bigger elaborations of the *Great Canon* there are several booklets and chapters and introductions to its edition in various languages. I think that two works by Greek authors deserve to be mentioned, namely: Ὁ Μέγας Κανὼν Ἀνδρέου τοῦ Κρήτης by Panagiotis K. Christou²⁷, and Τα ἀνθρωπολογικὰ καὶ κοσμολογικὰ πλαίσια τῆς ἔνωσης με τὸ Θεό. Μελέτη στὴν ἀκολουθία τοῦ Μεγάλου Κανὼνα by Panagiotis Nellas²⁸.

3. The *Great Canon* as an aid to personal reception of salvation history in order to enter into a deeper relationship with God. Usually the *Great Canon* is appreciated as an aid for reaching the state of repentance (μετάνοια) and compunction (κατάνυξις) in the beginning and the middle of Great Lent. The impact of this particular liturgical poem is enhanced through the Author's personal state of repentance and compunction expressed in a poetical way. The *Great Canon* is worth studying in detail not only for its particular intimate tone but also in order to catch the spirit of Byzantine hermeneutics and particularly St. Andrew's of Crete interpretive method which is existential in nature, because its purpose is the reshaping of one's life according to the Divine Wisdom²⁹. The Greek word for repentance, namely μετάνοια, requires a precise explanation. In the New Testament the term μετάνοια means a transformation or a change of the intellect (νοῦς). The transformation of the intellect can only be possible if we listen to the Word of God, the Good News, and on this basis we acknowledge our identity as sinners and at the same time we accept the truth about God in Trinity Who is Love, and loves us anyway. We cannot identify repentance with bad feelings about ourselves and considering ourselves only as guilty and miserable. For Christians, life is a process of continual μετάνοια, a mental transformation, coming to the uncreated God's light in order to be healed³⁰. St. Paul wrote, "Be transformed by the renewal of your intellect" (Rom 12:2).

Derek Krueger notes that the Bible in its entirety is for St. Andrew of Crete "an anthology suitable for gauging individual disobedience"³¹. Looking through a gallery of negative and positive examples in the *Great Canon* we might have an impression that the Bible is a penitential text for the faithful. The major events and persons of the Holy Scripture which are recalled in the course of two hundred and fifty troparia organized into the nine Odes stimulate the conscience of sin and prompt the soul to seek Divine rescue. The entire

²⁷ Π.Κ. Χρήστου, Ὁ Μέγας Κανὼν Ἀνδρέου τοῦ Κρήτης, Θεσσαλονίκη 1952.

²⁸ Π. Νέλλας, Τα ἀνθρωπολογικὰ καὶ κοσμολογικὰ πλαίσια τῆς ἔνωσης με τὸ Θεό. Μελέτη στὴν ἀκολουθία τοῦ Μεγάλου Κανὼνα, in: Ζῶον Θεοῦμενον. Προοπτικές για μιὰ ὀρθόδοξη κατανόηση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, Αθήνα 1979, 181-224; P. Nellas, *The Anthropological and Cosmological Context of Union with God*, in: *Deification in Christ. The Nature of the Human Person*, transl. N. Russel, Crestwood NY 1987, 161-196.

²⁹ Cf. Costache, *Reading the Scriptures with Byzantine Eyes*, p. 51.

³⁰ Cf. Mathewes-Green, *First Fruits of Prayer*, p. XIII.

³¹ Krueger, *The Great Kanon of Andrew of Crete*, p. 68.

scope of the salvation history is revealed in the course of the composition of the *Great Canon*, starting with Adam and Eve (cf. Ode 1 and 2), Cain and Abel (cf. Ode 1), the generations from Cain to Noah and the tower of Babel (cf. Ode 2), Sodom and the story of Lot (cf. Ode 3), then Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, through Jacob (cf. Ode 3), Job (cf. Ode 4), followed by Joseph and his brothers, and Moses (cf. Ode 5), to the exodus from Egypt and the wandering in the desert, and Joshua (cf. Ode 6). The Old Testament personages also mentioned in the *Great Canon* include people from the book of Judges, as well as Hannah, Samuel, and David (cf. Ode 6). An important role in the *Great Canon* is also played by the dynastic history of kings and prophets from David through Ahab, including Elijah (cf. Ode 7); further prophets following Elijah, like Elisha, Jeremiah, and Jonah (cf. Ode 8). The crowning of St. Andrew's of Crete masterpiece relates to the Gospels (cf. Odes 8 and 9). Generally, the first eight Odes of the *Great Canon* summarize the history of salvation as it was presented in the Old Testament. In the first five Odes, St. Andrew of Crete shows persons depicted in the book of Genesis, starting from Adam and finishing with Joseph. The book of Genesis with two other books, namely Proverbs, and Isaiah, were an essential part of the Byzantine lectionary intended for Great Lent. Lections from these books were included in a system of continuous reading, although none was read in its entirety. Genesis and Proverbs were read during Vespers (Ἑσπερινός) and Isaiah during the mid-day prayers³². According to some scholars the overwhelming prominence of Genesis among Old Testament lections during Great Lent may reflect an expansion of a primitive Easter vigil that focused on the events from the history of salvation essential to understanding the Paschal Mystery of Christ, and particularly His incarnation, death and resurrection³³.

St. Andrew's treatment of personages from the Holy Scripture highlighted his techniques and objectives. He refers shortly to some essential details in order to direct the listener's attention to a particular passage from the Bible. His purpose is to raise awareness of the soul in order to help her to discover the contrast between her sinful condition and her vocation to be holy. In this way the soul can clearly see the difference between what she has been doing and what she ought to have been doing. St. Andrew of Crete uses the biblical narratives in a very consistent way, avoiding a typological reading of Old Testament figures as prefiguring Jesus Christ. He rather treats all these figures

³² Cf. S.G. Engberg, *The Prophetologion and the Triple-Lection Theory – the Genesis of a Liturgical Book*, "Bollettino della Badia greca di Grottaferrata" 3 (2006) 67-92. R.F. Taft opposes Engberg's point of view in his article *Were There Once Old Testament Readings in the Byzantine Divine Liturgy. Apropos of an Article by Sysse Gudrum Engberg*, "Bollettino della Badia greca di Grottaferrata" 8 (2011) 271-311.

³³ Cf. J. Miller, *The Prophetologion: The Old Testament of Byzantine Christianity?*, in: *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, ed. P. Magdalino – R. Nelson, Washington DC 2010, 71-72; A. Rahlfs, *Die alttestamentlichen Lektionem der griechischen Kirche*, Berlin 1915, 168-171.

and episodes as a mirror reflecting one's soul's spiritual condition³⁴. The line of Old Testament exemplars of repentance and compunction enters a list of savable sinners from the Gospels in the penultimate Ode of the *Great Canon*:

“Like the Thief I cry to Thee, «Remember me» (cf. Lk 23:42); like Peter I weep bitterly (cf. Mt 26:75; Lk 22:62); like the Publican I call out, «Forgive me, Saviour» (cf. Lk 18:13); like the Harlot I shed tears (cf. Lk 7:38). Accept my lamentation, as once Thou hast accepted the entreaties of the woman of Canaan”³⁵.

The purpose of recalling the above mentioned Biblical figures is to introduce one into the heart of Gospel pericopes and to invoke sorrow, regret, atonement and lamentation because of sins. The New Testament persons are barely mentioned in the *Great Canon*. They are introduced in the text without any detailed description of the context of the event because the late seventh- and early eight-century congregants were well-acquainted with the personages by regular listening to the Word of God during services and private readings at home. Congregants' familiarity with the Gospel stories was additionally enhanced by the cycle of liturgical hymns composed in previous centuries which were in widespread use. The hymns written by the sixth-century hymnographer Romanos the Melodist also have a direct reference to the same persons in the same Gospel contexts.

St. Andrew of Crete shows that the door of the Kingdom of Heaven is wide open through the incarnation of Christ. He reminds the faithful that thieves and harlots described in the Gospels make haste in response to the invitation of the Saviour and they pass through this door into the Kingdom by “changing their life” through radical repentance and compunction. Everybody is called “to lay aside cowardice and to enter into the place where sinners are transfigured into saints”³⁶.

“Christ became man (ἐννηθρώπησε), calling to repentance (εἰς μετάνοιαν) thieves and harlots. Repent (μετανόησον), my soul: the door of the Kingdom is already open, and pharisees and publicans and adulterers pass through it before thee, changing their life (μεταποιούμενοι)”³⁷.

The *Great Canon* depicts the process of spiritual formation of the faithful “in a typological and dialectical relationship with the biblical narrative, particularly as the narrative might be experienced liturgically”³⁸. St. Andrew of Crete directly explains the essence of his method in the fourth troparion of Ode 9:

“I bring thee, O my soul, examples from the New Testament, to lead thee to compunction (πρὸς κατάνυξιν). Follow the example (τὰ ὑποδείγματα) of the righteous (δικαίους), turn away from the sinful (ἀμαρτωλούς); and

³⁴ Cf. Krueger, *The Great Kanon of Andrew of Crete*, p. 76.

³⁵ Andreas Cretensis Archiepiscopus, *Magnus Canon*, Ode 8:14, PG 97, 1376D. Cf. Mt 15:22.

³⁶ Nellas, *The Anthropological and Cosmological Context of Union with God*, p. 170-171.

³⁷ Andreas Cretensis Archiepiscopus, *Magnus Canon*, Ode 9:6, PG 97, 1381A.

³⁸ Krueger, *The Great Kanon of Andrew of Crete*, p. 63.

through prayers (προσευξάις) and fasting (νηστείσις), through chastity (ἀγνεία) and reverence (σεμνότητι), win back Christ's mercy³⁹.

It can be stated that the main topic of the *Great Canon* is a description of the distressful and hopeless situation of a human person living in sin and giving him hope that his liberation is possible thanks to God. The presentation of the miserable state in which man exists as a result of committed sins, encourages one to pose the fundamental question, which opens a lament over the deeds which have been done so far. The sinful human condition is presented in such a way that it is evident that the change can only be brought about by God who is his "Helper (Βοηθός) and Protector (σκεπαστής)"⁴⁰. Only God can take off the heavy burden of human sins and forgive committed evils. This definitely requires a decision on the part of man to accept God as his Savior⁴¹. In the *Great Canon*, therefore, an important role is played by a request for salvation, that the sinner dares to express in his cries to God. The hope for salvation, expressed shyly in the beginning verses, becomes stronger in Ode 3:7:

"Thou art my beloved Jesus, Thou art my Creator; in Thee shall I be justified (δικαιωθήσομαι), O Saviour"⁴².

And in the Triadikon of Ode 9 this hope turns into worship of one God in the Trinity of the most Holy Persons:

"Trinity one in Essence, Unity (Μονάς) in three Persons (ἡ τρισυπόστατος), we sing Thy praises: we glorify the Father, we magnify the Son, we worship the Spirit, truly one God by nature, Life and Lives, Kingdom without end"⁴³.

4. The *Great Canon* as "an ecclesial liturgical act". Although, taken as a whole, the *Great Canon* is a literary text, a theological treatise and a masterpiece of Byzantine hymnography, it is above all "an ecclesial liturgical act", as Panayiotis Nellas stressed in his study *The Anthropological and Cosmological Context of Union with God*⁴⁴. For him it was obvious that this "ecclesial liturgical act" is an act which changes the human being and the whole created world, and saves them. That uniqueness of the *Great Canon* stems from the fact that the faithful can enter into the experience of the other time and the other space through a very special ecclesiastical celebration. The main task of the service of the *Great Canon* in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition is to help man to become aware of

³⁹ Andreas Cretensis Archiepiscopus, *Magnus Canon*, PG 97, 1381A.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, Ode 1:1, PG 93, 1330C.

⁴¹ Cf. Χρήστου, 'Ο Μέγας Κανών Ἀνδρέου τοῦ Κρήτης, p. 21.

⁴² Andreas Cretensis Archiepiscopus, *Magnus Canon*, PG 97, 1341C.

⁴³ Ibidem, PG 97, 1385C.

⁴⁴ In: *Deification in Christ. The Nature of the Human Person*, p. 169.

“the tragic nature of the unnatural situation in which he finds himself as a result of sin, and of strengthening him in his resolve and his struggle to return to the prelapsarian life in accordance with nature, as it has been perfected in Christ”⁴⁵.

The *Great Canon* and the other canons written by St. Andrew of Crete, provide a series of liturgical reflections in the form of a prayerful song. It can be characterized as “meditative rather than didactic” and its form is “more as soliloquy than as dramatic dialogue”⁴⁶. There was a connection between the canons and the lectionaries used in the liturgical seasons⁴⁷. According to Derek Krueger,

“In the Great Canon, Andrew gathers the sweep of salvation history into a single literary unit, bringing the entire cast of biblical characters to bear on the formation and wounding of the Christian conscience. But the difference also seems to indicate a difference in liturgical aesthetics, away from the exegetical and toward litany”⁴⁸.

From a tenth-century liturgical manuscript at St. Catherine’s Monastery on Mount Sinai, we may infer that already then the *Great Canon* was so popular that it moved at some point from the Matins to the Vespers service of the fifth Thursday of Lent⁴⁹.

Both the poetical form and structure and a reference to nine Biblical Odes show that it was intended for worship. However, it is not known when it was introduced to the liturgical use. Probably it happened during the time when St. Andrew was the archbishop of Crete⁵⁰.

The liturgical performance of the *Great Canon*, since its very beginning, played a very important role for its listeners. Every participant of this liturgical service could identify oneself with biblical figures in a very personal way. They could discover that their faults and sins were their own ones. Through hearing that particular “I” sounding so often from the *Great Canon* they could find out a deep insight into their own souls and start a fervent lamentation and self-reproach. Crying over one’s own disobedience to God in unity with others opened up new possibilities for sincere penance and contrition. The presence of other participators in this “ecclesial liturgical act” made it clear that personal sins of one believer is a wound inflicted on the entire community of the Church. Both the singers and the hearers of the *Great Canon* are sinful persons

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 172.

⁴⁶ M.B. Cunningham, *The Reception of Romanos in Middle Byzantine Homiletics and Hymnography*, DOP 62 (2008) 257.

⁴⁷ It was demonstrated by Andrew Louth in his book on St John of Damascus. Cf. A. Louth, *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology*, Oxford 2002, 258-82.

⁴⁸ Krueger, *The Great Kanon of Andrew of Crete*, p. 87.

⁴⁹ This manuscript in two volumes is called *Triodion*. It is a service book containing liturgical hymns for the period of Great Lent used by the Orthodox Church. See: Τριώδιον, St. Catherine’s Monastery, Codex Sin. Gr. 734-735.

⁵⁰ Cf. Χρήστου, Ὁ Μέγας Κανὼν Ἀνδρέου τοῦ Κρήτης, p. 10.

who are in need of the divine presence and forgiveness. Hence, as Panayiotis Nellas brilliantly summarized it,

“The Great Canon as a liturgical act constitutes a specific application of this teaching and a living out of its implications. But at the same time it is also of decisive help to us in understanding fully the Church’s dogmatic teaching on this point, since knowledge in the Orthodox tradition is fundamentally tied to practical living”⁵¹.

The Τριώδιον provides information on how to perform the *Great Canon* during Matins celebrated on Thursday in the fifth week of Great Lent. One can learn that:

“On Wednesday evening, about the fourth hour of the night (that is, at about ten p.m.), we assemble in church and the priest says «Blessed is our God» [...]; and we continue with the prayer «O heavenly Kin» [...]; «the Trisagion», etc., and «Our Father» [...]; «Kyrie eleison» (twelve times); «Glory to be the Father» [...], «Both now» [...]; «O come let us worship»; [...], and Psalm 19 and 20, with the usual troparia and the short Litany. After we read the Six Psalms and then, after the Great Litany, we sing as usual Alleluia and the Hymns to the Holy Trinity in the Tone of the week, followed by the eight kathisma for the Psalter, and then the sessional hymns to the Apostles in the Tone of the week. Next we read the first part of the Life of St. Mary of Egypt, written by St. Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, Psalm 50 is read, and then, after the litany «O Lord, save Thy people» [...] we begin to sing the Great Canon, slowly with compunction. Before each troparion of the Canon, we make the Sign of the Cross and bow three times (in many places it is now the custom to make the Sign of the Cross and to bow only ones), and we sing: «Have mercy upon me, O God, have mercy upon me». We do not read the verses of the Biblical Canticles, apart from the fourth Cantic. The irmoi of the Great Canon are sung twice”⁵².

The precise indication of the order of prayers has the purpose of helping a person to acquire the state of concentration of all the aspects of his existence, namely his intellect (νοῦς), will (θέλημα, ἐνέργεια) and senses – on the presence of the Triune God. Although this service follows the basic framework of every celebration of Matins, “it has a distinctive character because of the special content and specific aim of the service of the Great Canon”⁵³. The Life of St. Mary of Egypt combined with the *Great Canon*, psalms and prayers serves as a powerful agent of a spiritual awakening of the whole human person.

⁵¹ Nellas, *The Anthropological and Cosmological Context of Union with God*, p. 174.

⁵² *The Lenten Triodion*, translated from the Greek original by Mather Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware, London – Boston MA 1984, 377-378.

⁵³ Nellas, *The Anthropological and Cosmological Context of Union with God*, p. 164.

It is worth mentioning that in the liturgical use, the *Great Canon* is extended to include troparia addressed to its Author. At the end of each canticle (ode) there is a special troparion referring to him, which is a sign of appreciation of St. Andrew's of Crete poetry expressed by the Church.

5. The *Great Canon* as a liturgical introduction into the hesychastic tradition. The *Great Canon* is not only a scriptural and liturgical work, but it is a hesychastic work as well. It is evident when we examine the terminology used by the Author. St. Andrew of Crete deliberately chose the range of vocabulary which was essential for the description of spiritual changes in a human person. The most essential term is repentance (μετάνοια), which literally means "a change of the intellect", as it was already stated above. One should also highlight the important role of the word compunction or contrition (κατάνυξις)⁵⁴.

For Egon Wellesz St. Andrew of Crete was "indefatigable in turning scriptural examples to the purpose of penitential confession"⁵⁵. It is characteristic for the *Great Canon*, taken as the whole, that its Writer laments and accuses himself in the first person. St. Andrew of Crete differentiate categories of sins in thought and deed. Such an attitude is typical of the hesychastic approach towards sins. For the neptic Fathers it was evident, both from the Holy Scripture and their own experiences, that every individual sin committed by man, has its roots in one of the main eight categories of evil thoughts (πονηροὶ λογισμοί). It is obvious, from the hesychastic perspective, that throughout the *Great Canon*, sins are classified in the realm of the intellect because this spiritual centre of man is attracted by evil thoughts and plays with them yielding to sinful desires. In the man who loves God the intellect is

"the sum total of his cognitive function and the center of their unity. It is the eye of the soul, [...] which illuminates and directs the human person"⁵⁶.

But when the intellect is alienated from God, it functions as simple intellectuality which can be easily trapped by evil spirits.

The sin of Adam and Eve in Paradise makes St. Andrew reflection:

"I looked upon the beauty of the tree and my intellect was deceived; and now I lie naked and ashamed"⁵⁷.

⁵⁴ Cf. I. Hausherr, *Penthos: The Doctrine of Compunction in the Christian East*, transl. A. Hufstader, Calamazoo MI 1982; M. Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making Images 400-1200*, Cambridge 1998, 101-105; H. Hunt, *Joy-Bearing Grief: Tears of Contrition in the Writings of the Early Syrian and Byzantine Fathers*, The Medieval Mediterranean 57, Leiden 2004.

⁵⁵ Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, p. 204.

⁵⁶ Nellas, *The Anthropological and Cosmological Context of Union with God*, p. 180.

⁵⁷ Andreas Cretensis Archiepiscopus, *Magnus Canon*, Ode 2:9, PG 97, 1137A.

This ascertainment is in line with a declaration from the first Ode:

“Instead of the visible Eve, I have the Eve of the intellect: the passionate thought (ἐμπαθῆς λογισμός) in my flesh (ἐν τῇ σαρκί), showing me what seems sweet; yet whenever I taste from it, I find it bitter”⁵⁸.

This contrasting an Eve of the flesh and Eve of the intellect is typical of the hesychastic reflection on Scripture. The neptic Fathers, on the basis of Jesus’ teaching and their own experiences stressed that every physical sin has, as its source, an evil thought which occurs in the sphere of human imagination and attracts the intellect. Jesus explains:

“That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts (οἱ διαλογισμοὶ οἱ κακοί), adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, and evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things (τὰ πονηρὰ) come from within, and defile the man” (Mk 7:20-23).

In the New Testament the heart of man is identified with his intellect. A lustful gaze on a woman, resulting from lustful thoughts of a man, Jesus equates with adultery: “if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mt 5:28). The reference to Adam and Eve serves as an example of a fall from grace into sin. Similarly, the person of King David exemplifies the attitude of a penitent sinner. The immediate association with his guilt due to adultery and murder and his prayer of repentance (Cf. Ps 51, LXX 50) is particularly important in the Christian prayer. Since the fourth century, this psalm has begun Matins and by the late sixth century it had preceded the nine Odes in the monastic communities of Palestine and Syria⁵⁹.

The hesychastic Fathers taught that the heart is both the center of the soul and the source of life of the body. For this reason the heart has been conceived as the spiritual center of a human person, where God and devils meet man. God knows the human heart⁶⁰ and searches it out⁶¹. There is nothing hidden in the human heart for God so it is better to imitate the Author of the *Great Canon* and confess to the all-compassionate God all secrets of the heart⁶² and from the depths of the heart say: “I have sinned against Thee, O God; be merciful”⁶³ and

⁵⁸ Ibidem, Ode 1:5, PG 97, 1332B.

⁵⁹ Cf. Taft, *The Liturgy of Hours in East and West*, p. 41-42, 204, 212-213 and 277-282. Cf. Basiliius Caesariensis, *Epistula 2 ad Gregorium Nazianzenum*, PG 32, 224-233, transl. R.J. Deferrari: Basil of Caesarea, *Letter 2 to Gregory of Nazianzos*, in: St. Basil, *The Letters*, vol. 1, London 1926, 16-23.

⁶⁰ Cf. Andreas Cretensis Archiepiscopus, *Magnus Canon*, Ode 4:5, PG 97, 1348C. Cf. Jn 2:25.

⁶¹ Cf. ibidem, Ode 2:39.10, PG 97, 1340D.

⁶² Cf. ibidem, Ode 7:2, PG 97, 1368C; ibidem, Ode 6, hirmos, PG 97, 1357C.

⁶³ Ibidem, Ode 6:1, PG 97, 1357C.

cry: "Spare me"⁶⁴, "Save me also, Son of David"⁶⁵. Only the merciful Judge can bestow human being "an ever-contrite heart"⁶⁶.

The work of salvation depends on the co-operation (συνέργεια) of man with God. The sinner who wishes to be saved is invited to participate in a progressive healing and reconstruction of his psychosomatic functions, which can be accomplished by a specific return (ἀναδρομή) "to his iconic and Godlike integrity and health" and a "movement (προσαγωγή) of his whole being towards God"⁶⁷. This vision of the holistic change of man, depicted in the *Great Canon*, is precisely the same as preached in the hesychastic ascetical theology. St. Andrew of Crete as well as the neptic Fathers and hesychastic teachers are unanimous that salvation is gained in the body. It is not a reality which is related only to the soul, but to the body of man as well. When a believer is able to identify the deeply hidden sources of evil, an appropriate form of therapy can be applied and various functions of the human person can be purified and healed. The ascetic discipline is addressed to the whole man, so his body, soul and intellect are liberated from "unrestrained desires", "sensual pleasures"⁶⁸ and a variety of "murderous thoughts (μιαιφόννοι λογισμοί)"⁶⁹, deceitful thoughts (τοὺς ἀπατηλοὺς λογισμούς)⁷⁰ and various kinds of passions⁷¹. Through such ascetic practices as poverty, fasting and prayer, the body can break its servile dependence on material things and rediscovers its correct relationship with the soul. Obedience to the law helps in the process of acquiring a distance from filthy acts and enables one to "flee from the sins of the wicked"⁷². Then man can be led towards acts inspired by God and will be cleansed from "a life full of leprosy (λεπρωθέντα βίον)"⁷³. The most difficult task to be accomplished is to purify the thoughts of the intellect. Therefore there is a need for a strenuous effort to take control over thoughts, by means of which they cease to serve the sinful desires. When the thoughts are purified by the power of the Word of God and a constant invocation of God's Name and the intellect is concentrated on his Creator; man becomes unified and simplified. The progressive healing of man is being done within a wider cosmological and anthropological context, the one which God in the Trinity has created by His indwelling within creation. It is possible because the Church is the flesh of the God-man. It is Jesus Christ

⁶⁴ Ibidem, Ode 6:2, PG 97, 1357C.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, Ode 9:20, PG 97, 1384C.

⁶⁶ Ibidem, Ode 9:24, PG 97, 1385A. Cf. Lk 4:18.

⁶⁷ Nellas, *The Anthropological and Cosmological Context of Union with God*, p. 187.

⁶⁸ Andreas Cretensis Archiepiscopus, *Magnus Canon*, Ode 4:12, PG 97, 1349B.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, Ode 1:11, PG 97, 1332C.

⁷⁰ Ibidem, Ode 6:11, PG 97, 1356A.

⁷¹ Cf. ibidem, Odes 2:13, PG 97, 1337B; 2:16, PG 97, 1337B; 2:20, PG 97, 1337C; 2:21, PG 97, 1337C; 2:37-38, PG 97, 1340D; 4:26, PG 97, 1352C; 6:6, PG 97, 1360A; 7:11, PG 97, 1369C; 7:13, PG 97, 1369D; 7:16, PG 97, 1372A; 7:18, PG 97, 1372B.

⁷² Ibidem, Ode 8:12, PG 97, 1376D.

⁷³ Ibidem, Ode 6:4, PG 97, 1357D.

who has renewed the laws or mode of the functioning of nature⁷⁴. This fact is directly pointed out in the Theotokion of Ode 4:

“He who is born makes new the laws of nature, and thy womb brings forth without travail. When God so wills, the natural order is overcome; for He does whatever He wishes”⁷⁵.

The Saviour has renewed within His flesh the specific functions of man, changing his physical senses into spiritual ones:

“God, the Creator of the ages, taken human flesh, uniting to Himself the nature’s of men”⁷⁶.

The *Great Canon* belongs to the hesychastic tradition both due to the use and the interpretation of the biblical material and vocabulary which is typical of this great ascetic tradition of the Christian East. It is worth noting that St. Andrew of Crete deliberately weaves the hesychastic vocabulary into his poetical meditation throughout the texts relating to the Old and New Testaments. For example, one can specify the frequency of the use of words relevant in hesychasm: soul (ψυχή) – 107 times, penance (μετάνοια) – 27 times, flesh (σάρξ) – 18 times, intellect (νοῦς) – 17 times, passions (πάθοι) – 16 times, body (σώμα) – 13 times, tears (δάκρυα) – 12 times, thoughts (λογισμοί) – 8 times, compunction (κατάνυξις) – 4 times, Christ – the Judge (Κριτής) – 4 times, spirit (πνεῦμα) – 3 times, fasting (νηστεία) – 2 times, thinking about the end of life and death – 2 times, uncontrolled desires (ἀκρασία) – 2 times. There are also several notions, important in hesychasm, which occur only once: watch (νήφε), abasement/humiliation (ταπείνοσις), watch oh soul – (γρηγόρησον, ὦ ψυχή), contemplation (θεωρία), virtue (ἀρετή), chastity (ἀγνεία), illusions (πλάνες), disordered desires (παράλογοι ὀρέξεις), sensual pleasures (ἡδοναί), animal appetites (κτηνόδεις ὀρέξεις), gluttony (ἀδηφαγία), adultery (μοιχεία), love of money (φιλαργυρία), murder (φόνος). This list of hesychastic terminology, used in the *Great Canon*, as well as its general message – that penance and compunction are the necessary conditions for a spiritual rebirth of man – should be considered as a sufficient proof that this splendid piece of Byzantine hymnography is inseparably connected with the great ascetical tradition of Eastern Christianity. Anthropologically, as well as diagnostically, the *Great Canon* has much in common with hesychasm. Therefore I would term it as an example of liturgical hesychasm.

⁷⁴ Cf. Nellas, *The Anthropological and Cosmological Context of Union with God*, p. 191-193.

⁷⁵ Andreas Cretensis Archiepiscopus, *Magnus Canon*, PG 97, 1353A.

⁷⁶ Ibidem.

The *Great Canon* occupies a very important position in the whole ecclesial poetry of Eastern Christianity. It is one of the noblest works arising out of a religious experience. This work is unique because of the dramatic form of a dialogue between the soul and God in the Trinity and the thorough description of the spiritual condition of man who remains in a long-lasting state of sin. This masterpiece of the Byzantine hymnography was intended as a voice against sin, especially in its physical form, which prevailed at that time and was the cause of many other crimes. The sinner is summoned to escape from the world by breaking away from sinful thoughts and cut off from lusty desires. St. Andrew's diagnosis of human sinfulness helps one realize the different forms of spiritual enslavement. Undoubtedly, we can assume that this diagnosis is both formally and essentially hesychastic. St. Andrew purposely used the terminology which can be found in the philocalic writings. Recalling the scriptural images of sinfulness, the Author encourages the soul of a believer to enter the state of spiritual introspection and a sincere dialogue with God in the Trinity. In this sense, the *Great Canon* is a prophetic call for penance (μετάνοια) and compunction (κατάνυξις). It is worth noting that this fervent call for spiritual transformation is not only a personal call for conversion, but it is also addressed to a praying community. During the Byzantine era, in which the faithful gathered together regularly in large numbers for services to pray to God, devotion was always communal. The *Great Canon* sung by the congregation during common worship expresses the widespread pain of those groaning under the weight of the sin of mankind. The incorporation of the *Great Canon* into the liturgical devotion of Eastern Christianity has fulfilled the pedagogical goal of exposing the bleak human condition and the possibility of a new life with God in the Trinity who is Love.

(Summary)

The *Great Canon* of St. Andrew of Crete is a masterpiece of Byzantine hymnography. Due to its liturgical use during the Great Lent in the Orthodox Church for more than a thousand years it has played a very important role in the process of spiritual preparing for the feast of the Resurrection of Christ. In the Orthodox consciousness the *Great Canon* is first of all the Lenten special invitation for personal repentance (and more specifically "a change of mind" – μετάνοια) and compunction (κατάνυξις). The whole content of the *Great Canon*, in the vast majority woven from biblical phrases and referring to the essential events of salvation history, has the purpose of reshaping a believer's life according to the Divine Wisdom. This "ecclesial liturgical act" helps to release the faithful not only from the bondage of sin but also from evil thoughts (πονηροὶ λογισμοί) and destructive passions (πάθοι). Based on an analysis of issues and terminology of the *Great Canon*

it seems to be a well-founded argument that it is a work that combines the Eastern Orthodox use of the Bible, and the hesychastic tradition in the liturgical context.

**WIELKI KANON ŚW. ANDRZEJA Z KRETY.
BIBLIJNE, LITURGICZNE I HEZYCHASTYCZNE ZAPROSZENIE
DO SPOTKANIA Z BOGIEM**

(Streszczenie)

Wielki kanon św. Andrzeja z Krety jest arcydziełem hymnografii bizantyńskiej. Od ponad tysiąca lat odgrywa ważną rolę w procesie duchowego przygotowania do uroczystości Zmartwychwstania Chrystusa, gdyż w użyciu liturgicznym podczas Wielkiego Postu. W świadomości prawosławnej *Wielki kanon* jest przede wszystkim wielkopostnym specjalnym zaproszeniem do osobistej pokuty, a dokładniej: przemiany umysłu (μετάνοια) i głębokiej skruchy (κατάνυξις). Treść *Wielkiego kanonu*, w przeważającej większości utkana z fraz biblijnych i odnosząca się do istotnych wydarzeń historii zbawienia, ma na celu przekształcenie życia wierzącego zgodnie z Mądrością Bożą. Ten „eklezyjalny akt liturgiczny” pomaga wierzącym uwolnić się nie tylko od niewoli grzechu, ale również od złych myśli (πονηροὶ λογισμοί) i niszczących pożądliwości (πάθοι). W oparciu o analizę zagadnień i terminologii *Wielkiego kanonu*, wydaje się, że jest uzasadnione twierdzenie, iż jest to dzieło, które łączy prawosławne podejście do Biblii z tradycją hezychastyczną w kontekście liturgicznym.

Key words: St. Andrew of Crete, *The Great Canon*, Byzantine Hymnography, the Great Lent, Hesychastic Tradition.

Słowa kluczowe: św. Andrzej z Krety, *Wielki kanon*, hymnografia bizantyńska, Wielki Post, tradycja hezychastyczna.

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