

Lublin
Theological
Studies

Krzysztof Leśniewski

Man in Metanoiacal Dialogue with God

The Biblical and Hesychastic Message
of the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete



Lublin Theological Studies

in connection with
The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

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Volume 1

Krzysztof Leśniewski

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Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

The project is funded by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education within the program “Regional Initiative of Excellence” in 2019–2022, project number: 028/RID/2018/19.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek:
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;
detailed bibliographic data available online: <https://dnb.de>.

© 2022 by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Theaterstraße 13, 37073 Göttingen, Germany,
an imprint of the Brill-Group
(Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands; Brill USA Inc., Boston MA, USA;
Brill Asia Pte Ltd, Singapore; Brill Deutschland GmbH, Paderborn, Germany,
Brill Österreich GmbH, Vienna, Austria)
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Typesetting: le-tex publishing services, Leipzig
Cover design: SchwabScantechnik, Göttingen

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage | www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com

ISBN 978-3-647-57349-6

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“Lublin Theological Studies” (LTS) is a series sponsored by the Faculty of Theology of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (KUL). It contains the finest studies and edited collections written both by members of this faculty and by other collaborating theologians. The title of the series indicates that all the books published will be theological in their content but, beyond that, might be related to any of the disciplines of theology, broadly speaking: biblical, systematic and practical theology. The common factor linking all of these studies is their provenance, namely Lublin.

The Faculty of Theology in Lublin, founded in 1918, has managed to evolve its own original “take” on theological discourse. For one thing, it is grounded in personalism. This orientation is especially evident in the field of systematic theology, which even developed its own semiotic-personalistic method of research. Indeed, within academia the Lublin School of Theology is sometimes referred to as the “Lublin Personalistic School”. Historically speaking, theologians in Lublin were rather forced, due to the relative isolation of the “iron curtain” era, to develop their own original approaches. Thus, in different fields of theology they have come to present an innovative *relecture* and reception of various Western and Eastern theologies and theologians. Moreover, theology in Lublin is cultivated within the context of Eastern and Central Europe, as a dialogue between the Western Churches (including various Protestant denominations) and the Eastern (Orthodox and Catholic) Churches. In this way, Lublin has long been, and still is, a meeting point at the crossroads between West and East, a geographical distinction that has had a unique, visible impact on the research emanating from here.

The theological faculty in Lublin actually represents the largest theological school in all of Central and Eastern Europe. Currently, this faculty consists of about 90 highly qualified academics and some 1,100 students. The professional teaching staff focus heavily on research, each year producing several monographs, as well as edited volumes presenting the results of international conferences organized by this faculty. Many of these works, we are pleased to note, have been embraced, and deemed influential, by members of the wider academic community.

Until now, our many publications have been dispersed among various publishing houses, and have thus far been written predominantly in the Polish language. Now, however, with the advent of the LTS series – publishing exclusively in English – comes what we believe will be a more methodical and focused approach. It is our sincere hope that this new series will, in the years to come, more effectively expose many important theological works to the worldwide readership they deserve.

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Introduction

The first Christians formed a community of faith founded on the proclamation of the Word of God and liturgical gatherings. They were animated by “one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32), for in each one and in all of them together there was the love of God the Father, the grace of Jesus Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit. Experiencing God as the Most Holy Trinity, they tried to live in the image of the One who led them from death to life. Liturgical gatherings of the first Christians were theological mystagogies, serving as an introduction to the mystery of God’s love towards man. Eastern Christianity has preserved its liturgical identity in a particularly special way. This truth was expressed in a synthetic way by Archimandrite Basil (Gondikakis) of the Holy Mount Athos:

Outside the framework of the Divine Liturgy, where God manifests His glory by the offering and self-emptying of His Son, and the faithful confess the trinitarian truth by their love for one another, it is impossible to understand Orthodox faith and theology.¹

For Orthodox Christians, *lex credendi* is revealed through *lex orandi*. The orthodoxy of their faith relates to the prayer of the Church, especially liturgical prayer. Every day, the Church prays that the time of this world becomes a new time in which new life is revealed. This prayer is part of not only the daily cycle, but also the liturgical year, the most important event of which is the celebration of Easter – Christ’s Pascha. Its magnificence was proclaimed by St Gregory the Theologian:

The Lord’s Passover, the Passover, and again I say the Passover to the honour of the Trinity. This is to us a Feast of feasts and a Solemnity of solemnities as far exalted above all others (not only those that are merely human and creep on the ground, but even those that are of Christ Himself, and are celebrated in His honour) as the Sun is above the stars.²

The Feast of the Resurrection of Christ is an eschatological event in the life of the Church through which Christians participate in the “new time”, the time of grace

1 Archimandrite Vasileios of Stavronikita, *Hymn of Entry. Liturgy and Life in the Orthodox Church* (trans. E. Briere; Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 30.

2 St Gregory of Nazianzus, “Oration XLV. The Second Oration on Easter”, in Ph. Schaff (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (2 Series; 7 vol.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1983) 832–853, on p. 833.

of the Kingdom of God.³ The eschatological significance of the Resurrection of Christ is revealed above all in His victory over death. Christ's Pascha is the path from darkness to light, the emergence from the abyss to the earth, the entrance from earth to heaven, the transition from death to life. It is for this very reason that the Resurrection of Christ is celebrated as a manifestation of the Saviour's omnipotence,⁴ for if Christ had not risen, the faith of Christians would have been ineffective (cf. 1 Cor 15:17).⁵ The Resurrection is not only the culmination of Christ's work and his earthly life, but the very centre and true essence of the Christian Gospel: "It is the beginning of a new life, a new Reality, a sudden revelation of Eternal Life, which has entered the structure of our lives and appeared as a transforming Power."⁶ The new Life, which almost two thousand years ago raised from the tomb, was given to believers in Christ to share in the joyful experience of victory over death. This truth is expressed in the troparion sung by Orthodox Christians during the Paschal cycle: "Christ is risen! He has overcome His death and endowed those in His graves with life". The proclamation of the victory of life over death is heralded to believers at the end of the Paschal matins: "Christ is risen and life reigns! Christ is risen and there are no dead in the graves any longer". All Orthodox services gravitate around the Pascha. The year-round cycle of feasts and Sundays is a great walk and pilgrimage towards this goal.⁷

Deepening the mystery of Christ's resurrection requires appropriate spiritual preparation. For this reason, the period of Great Lent is essential in the Church's liturgical cycle. Lent is intended to help believers see and taste new life, by purifying their hearts, changing their intellect, and promoting deep repentance and compunction. However, before Orthodox Christians are introduced to these special forty days of the Great Lent, they have to experience five weeks, each of which has its own theme, as expressed by the name of Sunday, and refers to a relevant pericope of the Gospel. Each of the Lenten Sundays is intended to serve as a call for in-depth reflection on life and recognition of one's own sinfulness. The first is the Sunday of Zacchaeus (cf. Luke 19:1–10). The person of Zacchaeus symbolizes the soul that awakens from sinful lethargy and overcomes the deceitful shame of the

3 Cf. A. Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (trans. A.E. Moorehouse; Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 216–219.

4 Cf. L. Ouspensky, "The Descent into Hell", in L. Ouspensky/V. Lossky (ed.), *The Meaning of Icons* (trans. G.E.H. Palmer/E. Kadloubovsky; Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Press, 1989) 187–8, on p. 187.

5 All the quotes from the Old and New Testament in this monograph are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, 1989. In addition, some words and phrases will be given from the Greek original.

6 M.S. Arseniev, "Resurrection and Transfiguration", *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 4/1 (1957) 16–28, 16.

7 Cf. A. Schmemmann, *Great Lent* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Press, 1996), 11–13.

world's judgments. It also awakens an ardent desire to give up one's previous life to follow the Saviour. The second Sunday of the Pre-Lenten Season is the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee (cf. Luke 18:10–14). The Gospel read during the Divine Liturgy shows the contrast between pride, self-praise and self-complacency and humility,⁸ embodied in Christ himself when saying: “learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matt 11:29). The Sunday of the Prodigal Son (cf. Luke 15:11–32), which calls for a way out of the pit of lust and a return to the home of the good and merciful Father,⁹ is preceded by the fourth Pre-Lenten Sunday, known as the Sunday of the Last Judgment (cf. Matt 25:31–46) or Meat-Fare Sunday. The second name has a pastoral character, as from this Sunday a period of abstinence from meat consumption begins. Christ's parable of Last Judgment prompts us to reflect on the criterion according to which the Saviour will judge people when He comes again. The parable clearly indicates that this measure will be the criterion of love for all others we meet on the path of our life.¹⁰ The last Pre-Lenten Sunday is the Sunday of Forgiveness (cf. Luke 21:8–9, 25–27, 33–36; Matt 6:14–21), also known as Cheese-Fare Sunday (because it is an introduction to a period of rigorous fasting, during which the faithful also give up eating dairy products), or the Sunday of Adam's exile from paradise.¹¹ The observance of strict fasting should help the faithful resist the impulses of their fallen nature by strongly rejecting the absolute rule of the body and matter over the spirit. The Church recalls the recommendation of Jesus: “But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret” (Matt 6:17–18). Fasting is intricately linked with the need for forgiveness: “but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt 6:15). Sin appears in divisions, signalled by quarrels, discord or hatred. The demolition of the fortress of sin requires forgiveness, which presupposes the return to harmony, unity and love. Forgiveness enables the Kingdom of God to enter the fallen and sinful world. In the liturgical practice of the Orthodox Church, the evening service on the Sunday of Forgiveness gives the priest and the faithful the opportunity to ask for forgiveness. During this communal act of mutual forgiveness of sins and reconciliation, paschal songs are sung, which express anticipation for the celebration of the Resurrection of Christ.¹²

The Monday following the Sunday of Forgiveness starts the period of forty days of Great Lent which is then followed by Holy Week. The duration of Lent is based

8 Cf. Schmemmann, *Great Lent*, 18–21.

9 Еп. Дионисий (Лукин), “Богослужения Великого Поста как путь души христианской через Голгофу к Воскресению”, *Журнал Московской Патриархии* 4 (1967) 51–62, on pp. 51–53.

10 Cf. Schmemmann, *Great Lent*, 23–26.

11 Cf. N. Denysenko, “Rituals and Prayers of Forgiveness in Byzantine Lent”, *Worship* 86 (2012) 140–160.

12 Cf. Schmemmann, *Great Lent*, 27–30.

on Old Testament events. Suffice it to mention that Moses fasted for forty days on Mount Sinai (cf. Exod 34:28), and the prophet Elijah refrained from eating for forty days when he was heading for Mount Horeb. Christ himself also fasted for forty days and forty nights in the desert, tempted by the devil (cf. Matt 4:1–2). In the first centuries of Christianity, Lent was counted differently. In Eastern Christianity, Saturdays and Sundays were not included in this period. In Constantinople, starting in the 7th century, a few weeks of Shrovetide were introduced as an adaptation time, helping to better prepare for the beginning of Lenten spiritual struggle.¹³ The two Sundays preceding Great Lent, i. e. the Sunday of the Last Judgement and the Sunday of Forgiveness, in reverse order, recapture the history of salvation, as they direct the spiritual gaze of believers towards its beginning (Adam in Paradise) and its end (Christ's parousia).

Just as the individual Sundays of the Pre-Lenten Period have their own names and references to important evangelical themes, each of the Sundays of Great Lent have a special significance which stems from the Gospel and their reference to patterns and symbols which help in the process of spiritual transformation.¹⁴ Although the first two Sundays of Great Lent are not directly connected with this period of the ecclesiastical year, they are indirectly connected with it, because they make the faithful aware that the basis of Christian identity is to profess the true faith. Both celebrating the Triumph of Orthodoxy (the first Sunday of Great Lent) and remembering the person and work of St Gregory Palamas (the second Sunday of Great Lent) help Orthodox Christians understand that worshiping God “in spirit and truth” (John 4:23) requires not only knowledge of the Church's dogmatic teaching, but also calls for defending it when it is attacked. The celebration of the Triumph of Orthodoxy is a celebration of the victory the iconodules claimed over the iconoclasts on the 11th of March, 843, on the first Sunday of Great Lent. As a result of this event, the veneration of icons was restored in Constantinople.¹⁵ The appreciation of the struggle of the Archbishop of Thessaloniki, St Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), in defending the teachings and practices of the holy hesychasts, is nothing more than a repeated triumph of Orthodoxy.¹⁶ The memory of the Great Defender of hesychasts is an opportunity to remind the faithful of the teaching of Eastern Christianity about the one God in the Most Holy Trinity, who is unknowable in His Being and who manifests Himself through uncreated personal energies. This

13 Cf. K. Ware, *The Meaning of the Great Fast*, in *The Lenten Triodion* (trans. Mother Mary/K. Ware; London: Faber & Faber, 1984) 30–34.

14 Cf. G. Bertonière, *The Sundays of Lent in the Triodion: The Sundays without a Commemoration* (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1997).

15 Cf. J. Gouillard, *Le Synodikon de L'Orthodoxe. Edition et commentaire* (Paris: Editions E. de Vaccard, 1967), 129–138.

16 Cf. Schmemmann, *Great Lent*, 73.

teaching also results in practical recommendations for living in a hesychastic way, that is to say, through spiritual struggle, to submit to the transforming action of God, which is so important in the Lenten period. The third Sunday of Great Lent (the Sunday of the Holy Cross) prepares us to remember the Crucifixion of Jesus on Good Friday and his victory over death. For believers this is an indication to die for passions.¹⁷ The fourth Sunday of Great Lent is dedicated to St John Climacus (6th – 7th century) – the famous hesychast, ascetic and superior of St Catherine’s Monastery on Mount Sinai. His work entitled *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*¹⁸ is one of the spiritual texts particularly recommended for reading in the Lenten Period. The fifth Sunday of Great Lent is dedicated to the person of St Mary of Egypt (344–421), who is the model of fervent contrition and a radical penitential life¹⁹. The faithful are reminded of the whole life of the Penitent, described by the Patriarch of Jerusalem – St Sophronius, on Thursday of the fifth week of Great Lent.²⁰ In the liturgical calendar, she is remembered on the 1st of April. In the liturgical book of the Orthodox Church for Great Lent, namely the *Lenten Triodion* (*Τριώδιον κατανυκτικόν*),²¹ two characteristic constitutive elements can be distinguished: the Psalter cycle and other biblical readings from the Old Testament and the liturgical hymnography cycle (canons, stichera, hymns).²² Reference to the times of the Old Covenant is supposed to help the faithful realize that, just like the Chosen People, they are heading towards Christ, who is the fulfilment of the history of salvation. Entering the spiritual situation of the Chosen People proves indispensable because of the sinfulness with which we so often fall away from the new life already received from Christ through our baptism, which means going back to the times of old. The double reading of the Psalter, the Book of Genesis, the Book of Isaiah and the Book of Proverbs has been a sign of the Eastern Church’s concern for the awakening of faith and the quality of moral life of believers for many centuries.²³ Listening to the description of God’s activity in the work of creation and showing His concern for the salvation of mankind should help one use the inexhaustible riches of His

17 Cf. Ware, *The Meaning*, 53.

18 Cf. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (trans. C. Luibheid/N. Russell; New York/Ramsey/Toronto: Paulist Press, 1982), 71–291. (PG 88, 632A–1205D).

19 Cf. J. MacRory, “St Mary of Egypt”, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York 1910, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09763a.htm>) [access on 23 March 2022].

20 Cf. Sophronius of Jerusalem, “The Life of St Mary of Egypt”, in *The Great Canon. The Work of Saint Andrew of Crete* (Jordanville, NY: The Printshop of St Job of Pachaev, 2017) 79–94.

21 Cf. *Τριώδιον κατανυκτικόν* (Αθήναι: Εκ της Εκκλησιαστικής Τυπογραφίας του Φοίνικος, 1994).

22 Cf. Ware, *The Meaning*, 38.

23 Cf. J. Miller, “The Prophetologion: The Old Testament of Byzantine Christianity”, in P. Magdalino/R. Nelson (ed.), *The Old Testament in Byzantium* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library & Collection, 2010) 55–76, on pp. 67–68.

wisdom.²⁴ For Orthodox Christians, the Lenten period is a time of special intimacy with the Word of God, a time of listening to the living voice of God so that one's faith may deepen: "So faith comes from what is heard" (Rom 10:17). The saints, to whom the successive Sundays of Great Lent are dedicated, through their ascetic life and intimacy with the Word of God, give the faithful an example of care for consistent adherence to the true faith (St Gregory Palamas), spiritual ascent towards God through a change of intellect and compunction (St John Climacus), as well as for fervent contrition and a radical penitential life (St Mary of Egypt). These three saints also represent three types of Eastern Christian monasticism: Athonic, that of Sinai and Egyptian, which in their essence are based on abiding in the Word of God and are united by the ideal of a hesychastic life. Great Lent in the tradition of Eastern Christianity is a time which prepares the faithful for a celebration of the Pascha of Christ.

Although the liturgical practice of the successive Sundays of the Pre-Lenten Season and Great Lent itself has evolved significantly over the centuries, individual Sundays are characterised by thematic coherence. Through God's Word and penitential practices the faithful are encouraged to engage in a spiritual struggle.

For more than a thousand years, a special help in the process of a holistic opening for the love of God in the Most Holy Trinity during Great Lent is provided by a masterpiece of Byzantine hymnography – the *Great Canon*. Its author is St Andrew of Crete (660–740), the Bishop of Gortyna, and at the same time one of the most outstanding Byzantine hymnographers.²⁵ When evaluating his work, Makarios Makri emphasized:

24 Cf. Schmemmann, *Great Lent*, 38–41.

25 St Andrew of Crete was born around 660 in Damascus. There he learned grammar, rhetoric and philosophy. At the age of fifteen, he joined the Lavra of St Sabbas the Sanctified near Jerusalem. Around 685, when the files of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (3rd Council of Constantinople – 680–681) were sent to Jerusalem, the Bishop of Jerusalem, Theodor (745–770), appointed Andrew, a monk at that time, as an archdeacon and sent him to Constantinople to pass on to the Emperor Constantine IV Pogonatos the consent of the Church of Jerusalem to the Council's decisions. After completing his mission, Andrew stayed in Constantinople, where he was ordained an Archdeacon of the Temple of Divine Wisdom (the Hagia Sofia). For twenty years he managed an orphanage and a shelter for the elderly. Then he was ordained the Bishop of Gortyna in Crete (between 692 and 711). In 712 he participated in the synod in Constantinople, which condemned Monothelism. Although he was initially a supporter of this heresy, after the fall of Emperor Philippikos Bardanes (713) he submitted to the teachings of the Church. Under Emperor Leo III Isaurian (717–741) he was involved in defending the worship of icons. He also organized the defence of Crete against the Saracens, and during plague and famine on the island he went to Constantinople to organise help for the faithful. He died in 740 on the island of Lesbos, on his way back from the capital of the empire. Cf. N.B. Τομαδάκης, "Ανδρέας ο Κρήτης", in *Θρωσκευτική και Ηθική Εγκυκλοπαιδεία* (2 vol.; Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Αθ. Μαρτίνο, 1963) 674–93; M.-F. Auzépy, "La carrier d'André de Crète", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 88/1 (1995) 1–12; G. Bardy, "André de Crète", in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*

He wrote books with great wisdom and knowledge, in a state of spiritual contemplation. He praised the light of the Immaculate Mother of the Word of God in numerous praises, and he also worshiped the life-giving Cross of the Saviour [...]. He beautified many feasts in honour of the Mother of God and saints with his songs. He wrote the texts and composed the melodies to many canons and troparia, thus adorning the feasts and prompting the people to experience spiritual joy. Desiring to encourage those praying for repentance in their hearts, expressed with the streams of tears, he created the *Great Canon*, which not only brings about deep contrition and a change of the intellect [...] but also constantly stimulates believers to learn about the whole sacred history in order to contemplate heavenly realities.²⁶

The *Great Canon* is a special work which has played an important role in the Eastern Christian liturgical tradition for over a thousand years. Initially, believers listened to its contents on Thursday of the fifth week of Great Lent, which helped them reflect deeply on their spiritual state in relation to the Word of God, mobilise for the final stage of their spiritual struggle during Holy Week and experience the Pascha of Christ. After the fall of Constantinople (1453) and the growing spiritual crisis resulting from Turkish captivity, one of the Byzantine hierarchs, in order to stimulate believers to be more intimate with the Word of God and to undertake penitential practices, introduced the *Great Canon* also in the first week of Great Lent. Interestingly, while in the fifth week of this liturgical period, the *Great Canon* is performed in its entirety as part of Matins, in the first week it is divided into four parts (Monday to Thursday) and constitutes an integral part of the Great Compline. In this context, an obvious question arises: What is so special about this poem that it begins and ends the 40-day preparation period for the Resurrection of Christ in Eastern Christianity? The search for an answer to this question, which includes a set of other, more specific questions, is the main research objective of this monograph.

The present monograph is entitled: *Man in a Metanoiacal Dialogue with God. The Biblical and Hesychastic Message of the Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete*. The aim of this monograph is to analyse the main message of the *Great Canon*, which provides guidelines for Christians to open up to God in the Trinity of the Most Holy Persons and thus to discover who He is, as well as to become aware of various kinds of one's own entrapment in sins. To facilitate the diagnosis of man's spiritual state, the *Great Canon* contains references to persons, events and wisdom, which St Andrew of Crete derived from the books of the Old and New Testaments. The *Great Canon* is a special work of hymnography of the Christian East, as it features hesychastic

Ascétique et Mystique. Doctrine et histoire (1 vol.; Paris: Beauchesne, 1937) 554–5; S. Vailhé, "Saint André de Crète", *Échos d'Orient* 5 (1902) 278–87.

26 Quoted after: N.B. Τομαδάκης, "Ανδρέας ο Κρήτης", 676–677.

terminology, which enables both an in-depth analysis of the state of one's soul and points to specific spiritual remedies for imaginative thoughts planted by evil spirits and sinful passions that plague man. This hymnographic masterpiece can be seen as an introduction to liturgical hesychasm, through which the faithful gathered in worship, communally and individually, are invited to an intellect-transforming dialogue with God and thus are encouraged to examine themselves in the mirror of the Word of God.

Since no critical edition of this work is available, the source basis of the text is taken from *Patrologia Graeca*,²⁷ which basically corresponds to the text included in *the Lenten Triodion*.²⁸

The liturgical use of the *Great Canon* was regulated for the first time by sources from the 9th century (Theodore the Studite's *Ipotyposis*),²⁹ which recommend singing this hymn on Thursday of the fifth week of Great Lent. The text of the *Great Canon* is also found in the oldest known Greek and Slavic *Triodia*. In the Greek *Lenten Triodion*, dated back to the 10th century (a manuscript from St Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai – *Sinaiticus* Gr. 734–735), the *Great Canon* is separated from the body of the texts of daily worship on Thursday of the fifth week of Great Lent, which according to A.A. Lukashewich may indicate that the hymn was added to *the Triodion* during this period. In *the Lenten Triodion* from the 11th century (a manuscript of Vatopedi Monastery – Vatopedi 315–949), the *Great Canon* is recommended to be sung in fragments from Monday to Friday during the fifth week of Great Lent. A similar division of the order of reading the *Great Canon* (without the possibility of stating whether it concerns the first or fifth week of Great Lent) can be found on the margins of the Slavic *Lenten Triodion* dating from the 12th–13th century (РГАДА. Тип. 137). The Greek *Lenten Triodion* from the 11th century (a manuscript of the Vatopedi Monastery – Vatopedi 771) recommends singing of the *Great Canon* on the fifth Sunday of Great Lent, which suggests that the liturgical use of this hymn since ancient times was associated with the fifth week of Great Lent, but was not necessarily assigned to a particular day.³⁰

The *Great Canon* is very difficult to translate into modern languages. An accurate translation is virtually impossible. Greek syntax and lexis retain originality and ambiguity only in the original text. The play on words, which refers to biblical content, is more or less lost in translations into other languages. Each more difficult fragment

27 Cf. *Κανών ο Μέγας*, PG 97, 1330D–1386C.

28 Cf. “Κανών ο Μέγας. Ποίημα του αγίου Ανδρέου Κρήτης”, in *Τριώδιον κατανοητικόν* (Αθήνα: Εκ της Εκκλησιαστικής Τυπογραφίας του Φοίνικος, 1994) 626–663.

29 А.М. Пентковский, “Ипотипосис”, in Кирилл Патриарх (ed.), *Православная Энциклопедия* (26 vol.; Москва: Церковно-научный центр «Православная энциклопедия», 2011) 193.

30 А.А. Лукашевич, “Великий Канон”, in Кирилл Патриарх (ed.), *Православная Энциклопедия* (7 vol.; Москва: Церковно-научный центр «Православная энциклопедия», 2004) 453–4.

of the poem in translation offers only one of several possible interpretations. In this monograph, the author uses the English translation of the *Great Canon*, which was made by Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware for the *Lenten Triodion*³¹, and his own literal translation from the original Greek. The quotation of words and phrases from the original Greek text will not, in principle, be given in nominative forms, but will be quoted in their original form. The source text will be quoted in accordance with the division indicated in Annex, and references to the text in the main body of this monograph will be indicated by square brackets.

Although the *Great Canon* has been widely known in Eastern Christianity for over a thousand years, it was not widely commented on either at the end of the first millennium or in the second millennium, i. e. until the 19th century. Only two commentaries have survived. The first one is the commentary of Acacius Sabaita from the early 13th century, published by A. Giannouli in 2007.³² The second one is an anonymous commentary dating back to the 15th century, originating from the Athonic Monastery of Iviron, stored in the Synodic Library in Moscow.³³

For several decades, the *Great Canon* has been a research field for theologians from various countries. The studies in Greek worthy of particular attention include the monographs by L. Chatzekostas,³⁴ P.K. Christou,³⁵ A.W. Glaros,³⁶ S. Kutsas,³⁷ E.K. Prigkipakes³⁸ and T. Tzormpatzoglou,³⁹ and works by A. Kalamata,⁴⁰

31 Cf. Mother Mary/K. Ware, “The Great Canon by St Andrew of Crete”, in: *The Lenten Triodion* (London/Boston: Faber & Faber, 1984) 378–415.

32 “Magnus Canon in commentario Acacii Sabaitae”, in A. Giannouli, *Die beiden byzantinischen Kommentare zum Grossen Kanon des Andreas von Kreta: eine quellenkritische und literaturhistorische Studie* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaftern, 2007) 225–383. Cf. M. Richard, “Le commentaire du grand canon d’André de Crète par Acace le Sabaita”, *Επετηρίς Εταιρείας Βυζαντινών Σπουδών* 34 (1965) 304–311.

33 Владимир архимандрит (ed.), *Систематическое описание рукописей Московской Синодальной (Патриаршей) библиотеки, ч. I, Рукописи греческие* (Москва: Синод. тип., 1894), 426–7.

34 Cf. A. Χατζηκώστας, *Ανδρέας ο Κρήτης. Ο Μεγάλος Κανόνας* (Λευκοσία: Έκδοση Όμιλος Πνευματικής Ανανεώσεως, 2001).

35 Cf. Π.Κ. Χρίστου, *Ο Μέγας Κανόν Ανδρέου του Κρήτης* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Έκδοση Άνάτυπο, 1952).

36 Cf. Α.Β. Γλάρος, *Θεία Παιδαγωγία, Παιδαγωγικά στοιχεία στο Μεγάλο Κανόνα του Ανδρέα Κρήτης* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Ακρίτας, 2000).

37 Cf. Σ. Κούτσας, *Αδαμαίος θρήνος. Ο Μέγας Κανόν Ανδρέου του Κρήτης. Εισαγωγή-κείμενο-μετάφραση-σχόλια* (Αθήνα: Αποστολική Διακονία, 1988).

38 Cf. Ε.Κ. Πριγκιπάκης, *Η Θεοτόκος και το μυστήριο της Οικονομίας κατά τον Άγιο Ανδρέα Κρήτης* (Ρέθυμνον: Έκδοση Ι.Μ. Τιμίου Προδρόμου Ατάλης Μπαλή, 2011).

39 Cf. Π. Τσορμπατζόγλου, “Ο Ανδρέας Κρήτης (660–740) και απίθανος χρόνος συγγραφής του Μεγάλου Κανόνος”, *Βυζαντινά* 24 (2004) 7–42.

40 Cf. Α. Καλαμάτα, “Η θεολογική διδασκαλία του αγίου Ανδρέου Κρήτης”, in: *Ο Άγιος Ανδρέας, αρχιεπίσκοπος Κρήτης ο Ιεροσολυμίτης, πολιούχος Ερεσού Λέσβου* (Μυτιλήνη-Λέσβος: Ιερά Μητρόπολη Μυτιλήνης, 2005) 221–35.

Th. Ksides,⁴¹ S. Mpalatsoukas,⁴² P. Nellas,⁴³ A. Papadopoulos-Kerameos,⁴⁴ P. Paschos,⁴⁵ N. Politos,⁴⁶ Ch. Themelis⁴⁷ and Th. Zisis.⁴⁸ Monographic studies in Russian referring to the *Great Canon* are predominantly intended for the general public. This applies to the monographs by I. Troitsky,⁴⁹ Hegumen Filip (Simonov)⁵⁰ and K. Vereemeenko,⁵¹ as well as articles by M.I. Bogoslovskiy,⁵² V. Milov,⁵³ with the exception of the studies by T. Borisova,⁵⁴ Monachinia Ignatiya (Petrovskaya)⁵⁵ and

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- 41 Cf. Θ. Ξίδης, “Ανδρέας ο Κρήτης: ο πρώτος κανονογράφος”, *Νέα Εστία* 45 (1949) 292–8.
- 42 Cf. Σ. Μπαλατσούκας, “Ανθρωπος και κτήση στον Μέγα Κανόνα του αγίου Ανδρέου Κρήτης”, in *Ο Άγιος Ανδρέας, αρχιεπίσκοπος Κρήτης ο Ιεροσολυμίτης, πολιούχος Ερεσού Λέσβου* (Μυτιλήνη-Λέσβος: Ιερά Μητρόπολη Μυτιλήνης, 2005) 329–43.
- 43 Cf. P. Nellas, “The Anthropological and Cosmological Context of Union with God. A Study of the Service of the Great Canon”, in *Deification in Christ. The Nature of the Human Person* (trans. N. Russel; Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Press, 1987) 161–196.
- 44 Cf. Α. Παπαδόπουλος-Κεραμεύς, “Ο Μέγας Κανόν του Αγίου Ανδρέου Κρήτης”, *Εκκλησιαστικός Φάρος* 3 (1910) 501–513.
- 45 Cf. Μ. Ψάχος, “Ο Μέγας Κανών του Αγίου Ανδρέου Κρήτης. Μικρή εισαγωγή στην κατασκευτικήποίησή του”, *Ριζάρειος Εκκλησιαστική παιδεία* 4 (1988) 315–326.
- 46 Cf. Ν. Πολίτος, “Ἐκστασις και ανάστασις κατά τον «Μέγαν Κανώνα». Φιλοσοφικές προσεγγίσεις”, *Επετηρίς Εταιρείας Βυζαντινών Σπουδών* 47 (1987–1988) 149–200.
- 47 Cf. Χ. Θέμελης, “Σχόλια εις τον Μέγαν Κανώνα Ανδρέου Κρήτης”, *Αγιορείτικη Βιβλιοθήκη* 16 (1951), 46–50, 103–7, 208–211, 273–6; 19 (1954), 368–370; 20 (1955), 10–13, 72–5, 167–70, 281–3, 354–7; 21 (1956), 13–16, 116–8, 138–40, 220–6, 282–4, 348–52.
- 48 Cf. Θ. Ζήσης, “Ανδρέας Κρήτης ο Ιεροσολυμίτης (660–740). Περί της ζωής και του έργου του”, *Επιστημονική Επετηρίς Θεολογικής Σχολής Αριστοτελείου Πανεπιστημίου Θεσσαλονίκης* 4 (1995) 9–19.
- 49 И. Троицкой, *О мудрости. Размышления над двумя тропарями Великого канона Андрея Критского* (Москва: Издательство Православного Свято-Тихоновского Богословского Института, 1998).
- 50 Филипп (Симонов) игумен, *Училище покаяния. Схолии на полях Великого канона* (Москва: Паломникъ, 2008).
- 51 К. Веремеенко, *Уроки покаяния в Великом каноне Андрея Критского* (Москва: Издательство Московской Патриархии РПЦ, 2013).
- 52 Μ.Ι. Βογοςλοβσκιί, “Βελικίη κανον σβητογυ Ανδρεια Κριτскогоγ”, *Χριστιανικόο κτηνε* 1 (1836) 129–84.
- 53 Β. Μιλοβ, *Κτηνε πο λιτургическому богословию* (Москва: Издательство Сретенского монастыря, 2012), 162–78.
- 54 Cf. T. Borisova, “Old Church Slavonic Translation of the Great Canon of Repentance by St Andrew of Crete: The Earliest Stages of History”, *Cyrrillomethodianum* 19 (2014) 53–65.
- 55 Игнатия (Петровская) монахиня, “Μεστο Βελικого κανονα πρεποдобного Анδρεια Κριтского и других его произведений в песнотворческом достоянии Церкви”, *Αλφά υ Ομειγ* 1/23 (2000) 298–319; 2/24 (2000) 289–310; “Γιμνογραφическое творчество πρεποдобного Анδρεια Κριтскогоγ”, *Βογословские труды* 25 (1984) 260–75.

V.M. Kirillin.⁵⁶ Research on the *Great Canon* is also conducted by two Romanian theologians: I. Durlea⁵⁷ and A. Prolipcean.⁵⁸ It is worth noting the studies written in French: O. Clément,⁵⁹ J. Getcha⁶⁰ and V. Iljine,⁶¹ and in English: D. Costache,⁶² M.B. Cunningham,⁶³ D. Krueger⁶⁴ and F. Mathewes-Green.⁶⁵ The list of scholarly

56 В.М. Кириллин, “Великий Покаянный канон Святого Андрея Архиепископа Критского в древнерусской переработке”, *Древняя Русь. Вопросы медиевистики* 3/13 (2003) 79–94.

57 Cf. I. Durlea, “Metanoia în Canonul cel Mare al Sfântului Andrei Criteanul”, *Anuarul Facultății de Teologie Ortodoxă Universitatea București* (2001) 569–77.

58 Cf. A. Prolipcean, *Η δογματική διδασκαλία του Μεγάλου Κανόνα του Αγίου Ανδρέα Κρήτης* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Αφοι Κυριακίδη Εκδόσεις Α.Ε., 2017); *Antropologia în Canonul cel Mare al Sfântului Andrei Criteanul* (Botosani: Axa, 2004); “Canonul cel Mare al Sfântului Andrei Criteanul – aspecte tehnice”, *Ortodoxia* 1/2 (2009) 100–134; “Creatia ca Euharistie în Canonul cel Mare al Sfântului Andrei Criteanul”, *Teologie și Viață* 21/1–4 (2011) 105–113; “Erori traductologice în Canonul cel Mare al Sfântului Andrei Criteanul”, in C. Tărnăuceanu (ed.), *Antiquitas Vivens*, (Iasi: Universitatea Alexandru Ioan Cuza Iasi, 2014) 195–211; “«From Adam to Moses»: the Typology of the Old Testament Characters from the Kontakia of Romanos the Melodist and its Assessment on the Great Canon of Andrew of Crete”, *Revista Ecumenica Sibiu* 7/3 (2015) 388–421; “O evaluare a imaginației creștine: Canonul cel Mare al Sfântului Andrei Criteanul sau despre Biblia în miniatură”, *Mitropolia Olteniei* 61/1–4 (2009) 204–248; “Sensul și întrebuițarea conceptului de μετάνοια în Canonul cel Mare al Sfântului Andrei Criteanul”, *Anuarul Facultății de Teologie Ortodoxă “Patriarhul Justinian” din București* 7 (2007) 641–66.

59 Cf. O. Clément, *Le chant des larmes. Essai sur le repentir. Suivi de la traduction du poème sur le repentir par saint André de Crète* (Paris: Desclé de Brouwer, 1982); “Notes sur le Grand Canon de Saint André de Crète”, *Contacts* 32 (1980), 206–234, 294–330.

60 Cf. J. Getcha, “Le grand canon pénitential de saint André de Crète: Une lecture typologique de l’histoire du salut”, in C. Braga/A. Pistola (ed.), *La liturgie, interprète de l’Écriture. II. Dans la compositions liturgiques, prières et chants. Conférences Saint-Serge. 49e Semaine d’Études Liturgiques* (Roma: Clv, 2003) 105–120.

61 Cf. V. Iljine, “Le mystère de la pénitence et le Grand Canon de Saint André de Crète”, *Messenger de l’Exarchat du Patriarche Russe en Europe Occidentale* 6 (1955) 8–16.

62 Cf. D. Costache, “Byzantine Insights into Genesis 1–3: St Andrew of Crete’s Great Canon”, *Phronema* 24 (2009) 35–50; “Reading the Scriptures with Byzantine Eyes: The Hermeneutical Significance of St Andrew of Crete’s Great Canon”, *Phronema* 23 (2008) 51–66.

63 Cf. M.B. Cunningham, “Andreas of Crete’s homilies on Lazarus and Palm Sunday: the preacher and his audience”, *Studia Patristica* 31 (1997) 22–41; “Andrew of Crete: a high-style preacher of the eighth century”, in *Preacher and audience* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) 267–293.

64 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 B. Bitton-Ashkelony/L. Perrone (ed.), *Between Personal and Institutional Religion: Self Doctrine, and Practice in Late Antique Eastern Christianity* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013) 57–97.

65 Cf. F. Mathewes-Green, *First Fruits of Prayer: A Forty-Day Journey Through the Canon of St Andrew* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2006).

contributions relating directly or indirectly to the *Great Canon* of St Andrew of Crete can be supplemented by the articles of P. Milko (in Slovak).⁶⁶

The monographs and articles on the *Great Canon* published so far concentrate on the description of penitential, dogmatic and liturgical themes. The authors also draw attention to the richness of its biblical contents, which serve as an aid in guiding believers towards God in the Most Holy Trinity.⁶⁷

What is the *Great Canon* and how is it unique? The *Great Canon* is a masterpiece of Byzantine hymnography, which consists of nine odes containing 245 (234) short troparia. The first troparia of each ode serves as an introduction to the theme, while the following troparia develops this theme through examples from Scripture, supplications and requests and assurances to God.⁶⁸ St Andrew of Crete was not only a poet, but also a composer. The melodies of the heirmoi, i. e. the initial troparia of each canon ode, were models for other hymnographers who wrote troparia to the melodies he composed. To this day 60 heirmoi written by St Andrew of Crete, along with their own melody, have been preserved in Orthodox liturgical books. Each heirmos, referred to as an *idiomelon*, is characterised by great melodic richness. The *Great Canon* is distinguished by simplicity and very careful selection of words. Without imitating anyone, the author, in the rhythmic form of a troparion, was able to express both dogmatic truths and refer to important figures and biblical themes in order to make his soul aware, through a dialogue, of its sinfulness and encourage it to undertake spiritual struggles.

Previously published scholarly and pastoral reflections on the *Great Canon*, although they help in understanding this work, also make us aware that it is difficult to discover all the richness hidden therein.

This monograph is an innovative attempt to analyse and interpret the *Great Canon*. It is not intended as a commentary on the individual troparia, although it examines their contents as part of contextual research. Nor will this work be a synthetic presentation of the dogmatic truths contained in the *Great Canon*, although the main focus will be on trinitarian, Christological, pneumatological as well as anthropological issues. The present monograph can be viewed as an existential and personalistic key to the *Great Canon*. This masterpiece is in fact a treasury of wisdom of the Word of God, through which a Christian can learn about the God in whom he believes and reflect on himself as a creature of God, as well as learn the kinds of spiritual threats he is subject to and what is necessary for him to follow the path of salvation. The theology of the *Great Canon* is above all existential in nature, as its source is the personal experience of St Andrew of Crete, who for

66 Cf. P. Milko, "Služba Velkého Kánonu sv. Ondřeje Krétského z perspektivy hesychasmu", *Annales Historici Prešovienensis* (2005) 43–66.

67 Cf. Costache, "Reading the Scriptures", 57–60.

68 Cf. Χριστου, *Ο Μέγας Κανών Ανδρέου του Κρήτης*, 21.

a certain period of time succumbed to dogmatic misapprehension, convinced of the rightness of Monothelitism.⁶⁹ The realization of various dangers to which he and others for whom he was an authority were subject to, made him consider himself the greatest sinner at the end of his life (i. e. at the time when he created the *Great Canon*)⁷⁰ and he felt the need to expiate and help others in professing their true faith.⁷¹ This kind of spiritual sensitivity cannot be treated only as a poetic convention, which consists in identifying the lyrical subject with the author. The spiritual depth of the *Great Canon* is particularly evident when it is chanted during liturgical services. It is then that St Andrew's personal confessions transform into the confession of the collective subject, owing to which each listener treats the poetic utterance as a description of the condition of his or her soul. The masterpiece of St Andrew of Crete is infused with a deep reverie over one's own identity and spiritual condition. Although it includes the motifs of an examination of conscience, including contrition and deep repentance, these things do not dominate the basic message. The recognition of one's own immeasurable sinfulness is contrasted with the magnificence of the One God in the Most Holy Trinity, who "desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4). Having returned to the true faith, though with all sincerity acknowledging that no one was as sinful as himself, the Bishop of Gortyna did not concentrate on himself, but on the blessed God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercy and God of all consolation, who comforts man in every affliction (cf. 2 Cor 1:3–4). Although he found in himself the sentence of death, and thus acknowledged his sin and his falling away from God, as a result of which he discovered that he could not trust himself, he did not fall into despair, but, thanks to the Word of God, he trusted in God who raises the dead (cf. 2 Cor 1:9). It seems that the existential findings of the Apostle of the Nations: "Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God" (2 Cor 1:9)" can serve as a leitmotif to make the reading of the metanoiactal and soteriological message of the *Great Canon* of St Andrew of Crete more obvious. Entering the depths of one's own soul, which, as a result of excessive reliance on reason, has strayed, leading to

69 Cf. C. Hovorun, *Will, Action and Freedom. Christological Controversies in the Seventh Century* (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 2008), 5–51; F. Winkelmann, *Der monenergetisch-monotheletische Streit* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001).

70 Χρίστου, *Ο Μέγας Κανών*, 9. "The circumstances and the time of creation of this canon are unknown. Of course, the work also contains elements and personal instructions, but these must be treated with great caution".

71 According to P.K. Christou, there was a transitional period in the life of St Andrew of Crete, during which he moved away from God. Christou believes that *the Great Canon* cannot be seen as a work related to its author's return from Monothelitism, because St Andrew's *metanoia* should be of different character. The Greek theologian does not give any factual arguments underpinning the credibility of his thesis. Cf. Χρίστου, *Ο Μέγας Κανών*, 9–10.

the creation of a distorted image of God, combined with the realization that it has contributed to a lustful and sinful life, was probably a turning point in the earthly existence of the Archbishop of Crete. If this had not been the case, would His work have such a powerful effect on believers for so long? Is dialogue with his own soul, which is the structural axis of the *Great Canon*, merely a rhetorical exercise aimed at arousing the interest of his listeners? Is it not rather a poetic form of standing before God who knows “what was in everyone” (John 2:25) in the truth of the Word of God?

Opening up to the Word of God and listening to the story of salvation presented in it makes it possible to create structures of faith within the human person, because “faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17).⁷² Thus, how does St Andrew of Crete encourage believers, through his *Great Canon*, to be intimate with the Word of God? How, through his own experience of the fall, does he want to help others in fighting their demons and remaining in communion with God? In what terms does he describe salvation? What is the intellect for him? The *Great Canon* is helpful in discovering the truth about oneself by invoking biblical pericopes and phrases, as well as by referring to Philokalic wisdom. The cognitive aspect of the Bishop of Gortyna’s masterpiece is strengthened with its emotive function. Numerous questions and examples of negative and positive attitudes of the protagonists of the Old and New Testament serve this purpose.⁷³ Although the *Great Canon* includes references to specific biblical images, both to people and situations, the way they are interpreted is left to the imagination and associations of the listener. The hermeneutical key is the assumption that the listener is well acquainted with Scripture, and therefore is able to receive and interpret the message in his or her mind.⁷⁴ This is also achieved through elliptical statements, which greatly contribute to the universality and timelessness of the *Great Canon*.

A consistent internal dialogue between the narrator and his soul is not only an invitation, but also a model to follow. It shows how to transcend oneself and one’s own limitations and how to open up to God, which is possible only by the power of the Word of God. The believer is motivated to fight against demons and is guided towards the complete Truth. Only in the light of God’s Word is it possible to make

72 Cf. G. Florovsky, “Revelation and Interpretation”, in *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View* (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1972) 17–36.

73 Cf. Χριστου, *Ο Μέγας Κανών*, 24–7.

74 Krueger, *The Great Kanon*, 87: “In the *Great Kanon*, 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”.

a reliable diagnosis of one's spiritual state and to acknowledge oneself as a sinner.⁷⁵ By referring to carefully selected people, symbols and situations from the history of salvation, St Andrew of Crete gives man the opportunity to have a deeper insight into oneself and one's life.⁷⁶ Biblical associations directly and indirectly refer to the current state of awareness of the listener of the *Great Canon*. These associations acquire new meanings, conditioned by one's current stream of flowing thought, situation, spiritual-psycho-physical condition and/or level of concentration. Each reception of the masterpiece of the Archbishop of Crete is thus unique. While it is listened to during a church service, its reception is additionally influenced by the sacred space engulfed in twilight, illuminated only by burning candles, the presence of other believers and its rhythmic melodious recitation by priests.⁷⁷ Listening to the Bishop of Gortyna's dialogue with one's own soul, in which the "rational self" seems to be above the "spiritual self", raises many questions and associations with both the biblical and existential phrases heard.⁷⁸ Believers, listening to the content of the *Great Canon* and submitting to its rhythms, have an opportunity to enter into inner harmony and a specific kind of concentration. Listening to the successive troparia, they realize who is the God in whom they believe. The multitude of images they are unable to control leads to the conviction that God is always greater than anything one can think of Him.

Analysis of the *Great Canon* requires an appropriately selected research method. This masterpiece is multi-layered, and its particular value relates to the different kinds of tensions, connections and interplay found between the three layers of its contents – biblical, existential and spiritual. The *Great Canon* is a poetic work in which the most important structural element are rhythmic troparia which encompass several verses. Analysis of the contexts in which important concepts appear

75 Krueger, *The Great Kanon*, 68: "The *Great Kanon* recounts the major events and personages of the Bible to accuse the conscience of sin and to prompt the soul to seek divine rescue".

76 Krueger, *The Great Kanon*, 76: "Andrew's treatment of specific biblical figures illuminates his techniques and objectives. Because he aims to draw a moral judgement on the narrative self, his engagement with the biblical narrative remains fairly basic. He does not appear to draw significantly from ancient commentarial traditions. He refers to enough detail in the story to make contrast between what his soul has been doing and what he ought to have been doing, but he eschews a deeper inquiry into text so typical of Jewish and Christian exegesis in Late Antiquity. He does not expand the narrative by adding additional, extrabiblical detail, in the mode of midrash, nor does he compose additional dialogue giving depth to the characters as in earlier liturgical hymnography, as in the Syriac *soghita* or Greek *kontakion*. He generally avoids a typological reading of Old Testament figures and episodes as prefiguring Christ. Instead, the Bible comes mediated only by a hermeneutic of self-accusation".

77 Cf. Mathewes-Green, *First Fruits of Prayer*, 37.

78 Krueger, *The Great Kanon*, 63: "The *Great Kanon* illustrates and dramatizes a style of the self formed in a typological and dialectical relationship with the biblical narrative, particularly as that narrative might be experienced liturgically".