

LOVE IN THE GREAT CANON THEOLOGY OF ST. ANDREW OF CRETE

Wojciech SŁOMSKI

University of Economics and Human Sciences In Warsaw, Poland

INTRODUCTION

The theology of St. Andrew of Crete belongs to liturgical theology, a special branch of theological sciences that finally took shape only in the second half of the 20th century [16]. The texts of liturgical books can serve as a source for the study of theological doctrines and individual concepts that are important for Christian doctrine. The methodology of Liturgical Theology includes not only the traditional methods and techniques of hermeneutics, but also the methods of poetics and liturgy. It is also necessary to take into account the deep symbolism of the liturgical texts and the place of the considered concepts in the order and structure of the divine service. This article discusses the concept of love and its place in the liturgical theology of the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete.

Saint Andrew, Archbishop of Crete lived in the 7th and 8th centuries AD. The period from the 5th to the 9th centuries is marked by the flourishing of church poetry in the Byzantine Empire. It was during this period that most church hymns were written [2]. The work of St. Andrew anticipates the work of such hymnographers of the Church as St. John of Damascus and St. Cosmas of Maiuma, who worked mainly in the middle and end of the 8th century.

At the same time, during this period, the Empire was shaken by disasters, which were perceived by the Orthodox Byzantines as “the Scourge of God” – punishment for their sins. The African and Eastern provinces of the Empire were occupied by Muslims. They besieged Constantinople twice (in 674-678 and 717-718), and the future of the Empire remained in question, since the long-term threat of a military invasion from the East and the Islamization of the Byzantine population remained as a constant factor influencing all spheres of the Church life. The Bulgar tribes captured the Danube provinces of the Empire and formed the Bulgarian Khanate independent of Constantinople in 681, inflicting a heavy defeat on Emperor Constantine IV. Only in 865 the Bulgarian Khan Boris I accepted Orthodox Christianity and the title of *tsar*, and until that time the

Bulgarian state was perceived as a threat not only to the power of the Byzantine emperors, but also to the Church.

The external threats were closely linked to internal troubles. Disputes with the Monophysites and Monothelites did not subside, which led to schisms and the weakening of the entire united Catholic Orthodox Church, which stands on the position of dyophysitism and dyothelitism. In 726, Emperor Leo III the Isaurian decided to intervene directly in the internal affairs of the Church and launched an iconoclastic campaign, placing his imperial will above the will and opinion of the Church. The iconoclasm was partly inspired by the influence of Islam and the emperor's foreign policy interests. Monophysitism and Monothelitism gained a foothold and institutionalized in some provinces of the Empire in connection with the Arab and Bulgarian invasions. Before the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843, the unity of the Church was torn apart by theological disputes and heresies, which influenced church hymnography.

Saint Andrew was born in the 7th century in Damascus, where he received his home education. It should be noted that it was Syria at that time that was the main center of church poetics and hymnography [9]. According to Orthodox tradition, Andrew was mute until the age of 7 and received the gift of speech after the Holy Communion [3]. At the age of 14, St. Andrew left his parental home for the Jerusalem monastery of St. Sava. Here he became a clerk at the court of the ruler of the Jerusalem Patriarchate Theodore, continuing a strict ascetic life. In 679, he, along with two other trustees of the Jerusalem Patriarchate, went to Constantinople for the VI Ecumenical Council and brought back a list of the definitions of the Council. Archbishop Philaret believed that Andrew was summoned to Constantinople for the second time by the Patriarch of Constantinople and there he was consecrated by them as a deacon of the great Sophia Church [5]. Although, according to other sources, he already had the rank of archdeacon.

During the reign of Emperor Justinian II, Andrew was appointed Archbishop of Crete. During his archbishopric in Crete, Andrew launched an active activity. Many miracles were attributed to him, such as saving Crete from the invasion of the Saracens, or sending down rain in a drought through his prayers. Information regarding the exact date of the death of St. Andrew is contradictory. There are indications in his Great Canon that the pastor of Crete wrote this work at an old age. It is known that St. Andrew died on the island of Lesbos in 712, 726 or 740, returning to Crete from Constantinople.

The legacy of St. Andrew of Crete is extensive. According to the investigation of the Lenten Triodion, there are about seventy canons of Andrew of Crete according to ancient hermology [8]. Many works of Andrew of Crete have a clear

theological meaning. It should be recognized that a significant part of his works and activities remains insufficiently researched.

THE THEOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF THE GREAT CANON

The Great Canon of St. Andrew gained the greatest fame. The canon is read at Matins on Thursday of the fifth week of Great Lent, as well as in parts at Great Compline on the first four days of the first week of Great Lent. Archbishop Philaret of Chernigov asserts that during the life of St. Andrew of Crete there was no canon as such. The Great Canon was called the Sticheron or "The Sticheron of Holy City-Dweller", as well as "The Succession of the Songs of the Holy City-Dweller" (meaning the Holy City of Jerusalem and one of the variants of the author's name – Andrew of Jerusalem). This Great Sticheron of the venerable Archbishop of Crete only later acquired the form of canon. At the same time, some troparia to St. Mary were written and added to it.

This transformation of the Great Sticheron of the Holy City-Dweller into the form of a canon is attributed by some authors to the works of St. John of Damascus, while other authors associate this transformation with the name Theodore the Studite. St. Andrew took the irmoses of the Songs of the Great Canon, apparently directly from the biblical songs. Of key importance here was the second song, which is directly related to the deep feeling of repentance, to which the entire Great Canon is devoted [10].

The researchers of St. Andrew's works unanimously admit that his works were extremely lengthy and were later reduced. The triodia were also reduced, in spite of their high qualities. There are abbreviations in the ninth ode of the Great Canon. In the practice of church worship, many canons of St. Andrew of Crete were eventually replaced by the canons of St. John of Damascus and St. Cosmas of Maiuma. It is possible that one of the reasons for this replacement was that the canons of St. Andrew were extremely lengthy.

The Great Canon contains up to 250 troparia and, according to some researchers, initially did not have any typical irmoses, and was not clearly divided into songs. Later, St. John of Damascus added the Irmoses of Songs in their modern sound, and the Troparia in honor of St. Mary of Egypt and St. Andrew himself were also written later by the venerable brothers Theodore the Studite and Joseph the Confessor (the Studite) when they put the Triodion in order (according to the testimony of Nikephoros Kallistos). Troparia in honor of St. Mary even have their own independent acrostic.

Professor Evgraf Lovyagin, while translating liturgical canons from Greek into Russian, points out that St. Andrew's Great Canon deserves the title of a great work not only because of its content, but also because of its extensiveness.

If the usual canons, according to Lovyagin, “contain about 30 songs or a little more, it [the Great Canon] contains up to 250 troparia with irmoses” [11]. The Great Canon is considered by some authors as the main work of the whole life of St. Andrew. It is called “the repentant autobiography of St. Andrew of Crete” [8], compiled in the last years of Andrew’s life. This version refutes the words of Nicephorus Kallistos that the Great Canon was allegedly brought by Saint Andrew to the VI Ecumenical Council in 679-680. In the Great Canon itself, data are found that rather correspond to the late dating of this work.

Perhaps the Great Canon of St. Andrew initially had no connection with the Great Lent, and this connection was established later by chance. The opposite view is that the Canon has an organic connection with the days of repentance that fall on the Great Lent [11]. It is not accidental that the Canon is called Repentant, since the theme of repentance permeates the entire work. But the theme of repentance refers not so much to Andrew himself, but to all Christians.

The word “theology” is mentioned in the Great Canon only once in the troparion of the sixth song, “The wells of Canaanite thoughts, my soul, you have prized above the Rock with the cleft from which the river of wisdom like a chalice pours forth streams of theology”. [1] (ἐξ ἧς ὁ τῆς σοφίας, ὡς κρατὴρ προχέει, κρουνοὺς θεολογίας) [18]¹ In this case, the word “theology” is used as a poetic image as a synonym for “wisdom” (σοφία), which “can only be recognized by good deeds, by spiritual transformation, renewal and rebirth of man, by spiritual struggle and the Christian life”. [15] In addition, the images of water and a spring are used to signify “truth”. The Living Truth is Christ, who is compared in the gospels with the cornerstone (Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17). This can be seen from the subsequent troparia of the same song, where Christ is just called the Stone, striking at which, Moses “mysteriously pre-elected Your life-giving rib, Savior, from which we all have the drink of life”.

The Canon cannot be reduced only to the penitential autobiography of St. Andrew because of its structure. Each of his songs has a certain structure. In the first part of each song, the author “talks with his soul”, and in the second part he appeals “with a cry to God for mercy” [8]. The songs of the Canon do not always preserve the exact biblical chronology. So, St. Andrew speaks of the Great Flood after mentioning the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Old Testament narratives predominate in the first eight songs of the Canon, while New Testament narratives predominate in the ninth.

¹ Here and below the original Greek text of the Canon is cited by: [18].

However, the study of the Great Canon of Andrew of Crete reveals that in all the songs of the Canon, starting from the very first, which tells about the creation of man and his fall, there are troparia completely built on the New Testament revelations concerning the laws of New Testament grace. Already in the first song, St. Andrew is captured by the image of the penitent prodigal son, as well as the image of the good Samaritan.

Saint Andrew begins his confession to God, as if reflecting on the affairs of his life, and immediately embarks on the path of saving repentance and bringing tears of repentance to God. This reflection is given as if on behalf of the author himself, and on behalf of all people who find themselves before God in an act of saving self-contemplation and self-analysis. St. Andrew finds such a way of turning to God that in his deep Christian love he seems to take every human soul, sigh with it about the untruths of life and together with it seek, ask for a way out.

From the very beginning of the Canon, biblical analogies and allusions are used to describe the state of the human soul. The sequence of presentation of biblical stories in the Canon is not subject to biblical chronology, but to a consistent immersion in the spiritual states of a penitent person, as well as in his feelings, including the feeling of love. At the same time, the author of the Canon does not strive for a chronologically consistent biblical narrative, unlike the authors of other liturgical texts. For example, in the first song of the Canon, having spoken at the beginning about the crime of the primordial Adam (troparion 3), later (in troparion 10) Andrew returns to the thought of the creation of man by God, so that again, reflecting on the greatness of the gifts given to man, incline him to repentance. The sequence of presentation in this case is subject to the goal of leading a person to repentance.

St. Andrew sometimes returns to the same biblical story to describe different states of the soul, but he presents and interprets this story in completely different ways. There are also repetitions of moral admonitions and edification associated with certain biblical stories, as if the author is trying to fix certain ideas in the minds of listeners by repeating [17].

There are also transfers of St. Andrew from Old Testament stories to New Testament stories. Such New Testament insertions can be counted from five to seven troparia only in the first song. This fact speaks against the opinion of those scholars of the Great Canon of Andrew of Crete who believed that its New Testament part begins only with the ninth ode. The alternation of images of the Old and New Testaments is typical not only for liturgical works, but also for other genres of Christian literature. In general, the key provisions of Christian

theology are substantiated by the Old Testament, including by comparing New Testament personalities and plots with those of the Old Testament.

This approach is also characteristic of Andrew of Crete, who, in his address to his soul, indicates that he cites examples from the Old Testament “as analogies”. At the same time, in the Great Canon the aforementioned alternations are subject to a certain logic. New Testament insertions seem to soften and smooth out Old Testament images and plots.

Thus, the structure of the main part of the Great Canon is characterized by the free use of New Testament appeals to Christ the Savior against the background of the primacy of Old Testament reflections, with the retention of the main points of chronology. There are also multiple returns to a previously expressed thoughts or facts in order to deepen their understanding or give them a different content required for following the line of reasoning.

THE PLACE OF LOVE IN THE CANON

Love is not the focus of the Great Canon. However, it occupies an important place in the disclosure of the main theme of this work – repentance and forgiveness. To evoke a repentant mood among those who believe in Christ, St. Andrew of Crete used a special oratorical technique: a monologue conversation with the human soul [6]. With love and compassion, he addresses to the sinner’s soul ardent appeals, exhortations, reminders and encouragement, and arouses deep repentant feelings.

Love in the Great Canon is mentioned in three main contexts.

1. God’s love for man. Starting from the Irmos of Song 4, St. Andrew addresses God as the Lover of men (Φιλάνθρωπε’ in the vocative case). Such an appeal to the Lord is used repeatedly in the context of the expected forgiveness of the penitent soul. The Lover of men himself desires the salvation of each human being, and therefore accepts sincere repentance. The author of the Canon appeals to God’s love for man, mentioning punishment and forgiveness. In addition, God is repeatedly referred to as the Lover of men when pleading for enlightenment and guidance to fulfill the will of God. Mention is also made of the philanthropic Lord, who extended his hand to Mary for her salvation. In this case, the salvation of Mary serves as an example and model for the salvation of all mankind.

2. The love of the Mother of God for God and man. Andrew of Crete mentions the love of St. Mary to God, asking her to intercede for people before God. She “with love” worshiped the “Tree of Life” and was honored with glory. This glory gives hope for the salvation of man, and her love serves as a model for man of love for God. Mary’s love for Christ also gives

people hope for God's mercy. The Mother of God connects man with God through her love. She becomes both a role model and a mediator between God and man.

3. Man's love for God. A penitent soul prays to God for forgiveness "with love". In his own name, the author praises God with "faith and love". These virtues appear in him after "getting rid of the sinful passions". A sinner at the beginning of his path to God does not have love, since it is replaced by sinful passions. But along the long and difficult path of repentance, the penitent sinner awakens and the feeling of love for God grows.

In general, the understanding of love by Andrew of Crete becomes clearer when comparing love with the virtues, sins, qualities and feelings of a person. In the Great Canon, love is repeatedly mentioned together with fear. At the same time, a person "repents with fear", but "calls to God with love", as if repentance in fear precedes love. Original sin, according to the Canon, broke the peace of mind of the first sinners. It brought anguish and languor into their souls, confusion into their minds and feelings, desires for carnal pleasures into their wills. The fallen human soul is directed at itself. It withdraws from God in herself, clings to the material side of life and ceases to shed rays of warm love around herself. Finding no satisfaction in material life, the soul greedily seeks its full satisfaction, chases after it, and finds it nowhere outside of God. The fall means the loss of love, and the main condition for its return is repentance and gaining forgiveness.

The condition for a man's true love for God is deliverance from sinful passions, which are repeatedly mentioned in the Canon (adultery, love of money, covetousness, gluttony, and others). With the focusing of reverent heartfelt attention on God alone, the penitent soul is calmed and pacified. It is no longer tormented by the passions. It begins to pray to God easily with a feeling of warm love for Him, gratitude, contrition and humility.

The Canon does not directly speak of the author's love for a person, or love between people. However, this love is clearly manifested in relation to the penitent human soul. The sayings of the Old Testament in this work of St. Andrew are full of reflections on the essence of human affairs, they are gradually offered to the penitent soul with great depth, compassion and love. The author tries to support the penitent soul, urges her not to despair, even if it is "leprous".

In his relation to the human soul and in describing God's relation to man, St. Andrew often uses the epithet "warm" (θερμός). This definition expresses feelings of love, compassion and intimacy. It should not be confused with χλιαρός (rather tepid than warm), which is used in the Revelation of St. John the

Theologian (Rev. 3:16) in the sense of “loathsomely warm” (like the nasty warm mineral water in the spa resorts near Laodicea). The definition θερμός is used to define warm light, warm air, cordiality of human relationships.

In relation to God, the terms “gracious” and “merciful” are often used, even more often than the definition of the Lover of men. These definitions are sometimes used together. For example, the author of the Canon points out that the Savior (Σωτήρ), the Lover of men (φιλόανθρωπος) “punishes graciously and shows mercy warmly” (πλήττεις συμπαθῶς, καὶ σπλαγχνίζει θερμῶς).

The definitions of the Almighty as “gracious” (ar-Rahman) and “merciful” (ar-Rahim) are repeatedly found in the Qur’an, as the most frequently used definitions of Allah. These definitions are obligatory when mentioning Allah in Islamic prayers, including in Salah, with rare exceptions (it is inappropriate to use ar-Rahman and ar-Rahim in a prayer before a sacrifice (kurban), since a person cannot call to the mercy of Allah, preparing mercilessly slaughter an animal). St. Andrew was born in Damascus (about 660) after its conquest by the Arabs (635) and studied and worked for a long time in Jerusalem, which was also under the rule of the Caliphate. The author could not have been unaware of the Islamic doctrine and definitions of Allah. But at the same time, it should be noted that the graciousness and mercy of God in the Great Canon is connected with God’s love for man.

THE GREAT CANON AS A WAY TO THE DIVINE LOVE

In the Great Canon, love accompanies the path of the soul to active and perfect repentance. Even denouncing the ulcers and sins of the soul, St. Andrew convinces the sinner of the mercy of God and of his love for the sinner. The very structure of the canon is built on the principle of dichotomy – the opposition of good and evil, sin and righteousness, the fall of man and the grace of God. At the very beginning of the Canon, in Song 1, the author, when comparing his sins with “Cain’s murder”, below contrasts it with “Abel’s righteousness” (compare Τὴν τοῦ Κάϊν with Τῇ τοῦ Ἀβελ) [1], observing symmetry, including sentence structures [4]. This balance is maintained throughout the Canon. As the tension of repentance grows and the depth of the fall is revealed, confidence in the salvation of the human soul also grows, the theme of God’s love and mercy is revealed.

Repentance reaches its extreme expression by the seventh ode of the Canon, where St. Andrew speaks of man’s “bestial lusts”, “the gravest deeds”, and his “passionate aspirations”. In this song Saint Andrew calls human life “cursed”, speaks of the “abomination of passions”, of “foul voluptuousness”, of the multiplication of “indignation”. But before reaching this apotheosis of

repentance, the penitent soul's trust in God is built, based on confidence in God's mercy and the willingness to forgive a person any sin, even the most serious one. Paradoxically, tense repentance is combined with peace, calmness and confidence.

After the seventh song, the New Testament images begin to prevail over the Old Testament ones. The author is clearly trying to relieve tension, instill peace and tranquility in the souls. The ninth song generally contains an appeal to "love repentance", to "kiss repentance" as an already accomplished fact. The seventh song acts as a kind of door that opens into the grace of repentance. It is not accidental that at the end of the work of St. Andrew refers to the repentance of the robber on the cross, to whom the door to the Kingdom of Heaven was opened. The forgiven robber, who repented in the last moments of his earthly life, must convince all penitents of the granting of forgiveness. If, up to the seventh song, repentance is presented as a long, difficult and painful path, then in the image of the forgiven robber a short path to the Kingdom of Heaven opens up.

In the view of Christian theologians, predecessors and contemporaries of St. Andrew, love is the highest virtue in relation to repentance. In particular, the great theologian and philosopher John Climacus in his "The Ladder of Divine Ascent" placed repentance (μετάνοιά) on the fifth step in his Ladder, and love (ἀγάπη) on the thirtieth, highest step, along with the other two main virtues, faith (πίστις) and hope (ἐλπίς) [7]. These three cardinal virtues represent the pinnacle of a Christian's spiritual path. Obviously, Andrew of Crete was familiar with the works of John Climacus. The path from repentance to true Christian love along the Ladder is very long, but repentance already grants a person forgiveness [13] and strength to climb up this Ladder. In the fourth song, St. Andrew uses the image of the Ladder for edification in the consistent achievement of virtues. Virtues can be achieved "by deed, and by reason, and by sight", that is, by all possible means and ways.

In general, the Great Canon does not reveal the theological conception of the Divine Love, but only points the way to it. Love grows quietly in the heart in the midst of repentant sighs and keeps the soul amid the most varied misfortunes, anxieties and unhappiness of the life path and interprets and explains all the circumstances. It is these interpretations that have theological significance.

In an address to the holy apostles, the author asks to burn his passions with an "immaterial fire", which kindles love for God in all who pray. "Immaterial fire", most likely, stands for the uncreated Tabor Light and the uncreated divine energies. This doctrine was developed by hesychasts and other representatives of Eastern Orthodox apophatic theology [14]. Nevertheless, it is groundless to

literally define “immaterial fire” as any particular theological concept of divine energy. It must be borne in mind that the language of church poetry is symbolic and to some extent relative. However, this passage speaks of Andrew’s commitment to the Orthodox apophatic theology. The apophatic approach is also supported by the line about the “incessant darkness of vision”, in which the saints can see God. Judging by this statement, God is known “in darkness”, through negative approaches [12].

It is also possible to find in St. Andrew’s works a reflection of disputes with the Monothelites. In one of his poems, St. Andrew pointed out, “Two activities in Christ, two volitions in Him” [5]. This phrase is clearly directed against Monothelitism and can be interpreted as a thesis of apologetic theology. The confession of Christ as God and Savior is characteristic not only of the Great Canon, but also of other works of Andrew of Crete.

Monothelitism is also refuted in the Great Canon. In the sixth troparion of the ninth song, St. Andrew speaks of the incarnation of Christ, the communion of His human flesh, and the voluntary testing by Him of everything inherent in nature, with the exception of sin. This clearly testifies in favor of the presence of two volitions in Christ.

CONCLUSION

Love in the Great Canon is presented not as a systematically set out integral theological doctrine, but as the goal of a Christian’s penitent path to the achievement of higher virtues. Love is one of the three highest virtues along with faith and hope. In the process of repentance and deliverance from passions, the repentant sinner awakens love for God, which grows and reaches fullness and completeness by the end of the path.

The forgiveness of sins is given because of God’s love for man. The Lover of men responds to the prayers of a penitent soul. An important role in the process of repentance and forgiveness of sins is played by the love of the Mother of God for Christ. The love of the Blessed Mary unites man with God. Her love serves as a model for all people and contributes to intercession for sinful people before the Lord.

Andrew of Crete offers an apophatic way of knowing God and Divine Love, in accordance with the prevailing apophatic theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The knowledge of God is based on the denial of passions, the rejection of sins and the former way of life. Most likely, St. Andrew was close to mystic and hesychastic trends in the Eastern Orthodox Church, since he referred to “immaterial fire” and other mystic concepts.

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Wojciech SŁOMSKI, mag. ing. mech. Professor, University of Economics and Human Sciences in Warsaw, Okopowa 59, 01-043 Warszawa, Poland, e-mail: slomski@autograf.pl, 0048 609 003 199, ORCID: 0000-0003-1532-0341

Abstract

The article analyzes the conception of love in the theology of the Great Canon. The author of the Canon is St. Andrew, Archbishop of Crete. The Canon represents the spiritual way of a penitent soul. The key topic of the Canon is repentance. It does not contain a systematic and consistent theological doctrine of love. Nevertheless, love is one of the most significant conceptions for understanding the theological meaning of the Canon. The way of a repentant sinner is a ladder like John Climacus' "The Ladder of Divine Ascent". Repentance is one of the lowest steps, love is the highest step as the highest virtue of a Christian. So there is a long way from repentance to a man's love to God. In the process of repentance and deliverance from passions, a penitent soul awakens love for God, which grows and reaches fullness by the end of the path. Divine love to man accompanies a penitent soul during climbing up the Ladder. Due to his love God forgives human beings. The Canon represents apophatic way for the knowledge of God and salvation. The states of mind during the process of repentance are illustrated by the Old and New Testaments personalities. The Christology of St. Andrew rejects Monophysitism and Monothelitism. St. Andrew mentions "immaterial fire", probably, referring to the hesychastic conception of the uncreated Tabor Light or the uncreated divine energies.

Key words

Andrew of Crete, apophatic theology, divine love, liturgical theology, the Great Canon.