

The Human Person as God’s Creation in the “Great Canon” of St. Andrew of Crete²

Oсоба ludzka jako stworzenie Boże w „Wielkim kanonie” św. Andrzeja z Krety

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Słowa kluczowe: Andrzej z Krety, *Wielki kanon*, stworzenie Boże, obraz i podobieństwo Boże, stworzenie upadłe, grzeszność człowieka

Abstract

The “Great Canon” of St. Andrew of Crete is a masterpiece of Byzantine hymnography which has played an important role in the Eastern Christian liturgical tradition for over a thousand years. This piece of poetry is dominated by anthropological content. The Bishop of Gortyna addresses various issues concerning the mystery of the human person. This short analytical study, relying on the “Great Canon”, is a reflection on three important Biblical issues, namely: man’s creation by God, the fact that the human being is created in God’s image and likeness, and the fact of the ontological collapse of man, as a result of which he lost his original bond with God and has become a sinner. The examination of concepts and Biblical texts, used by St. Andrew of Crete in his “Great Canon”, leads to the conclusion that his vision of the human being combines important problems of anthropology

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and soteriology on the basis of history of salvation. The fact of human sinfulness is presented with an appeal to God's redemptive mercy.

Streszczenie

„Wielki kanon” św. Andrzeja z Krety to arcydzieło hymnografii bizantyńskiej, które od ponad tysiąca lat odgrywa ważną rolę we wschodniochrześcijańskiej tradycji liturgicznej. W tym poemacie dominują treści antropologiczne. Biskup Gortyny porusza różne kwestie dotyczące tajemnicy osoby ludzkiej. Niniejsze krótkie studium analityczne, w oparciu o tekst „Wielkiego kanonu”, skupia się na trzech zagadnieniach biblijnych, a mianowicie: stworzeniu człowieka przez Boga, stworzeniu człowieka na obraz i podobieństwo Boże oraz ontologicznym upadkiem człowieka, w wyniku którego utracił pierwotną więź z Bogiem i stał się grzesznikiem. Badanie pojęć i analiza tekstów biblijnych, z których korzystał św. Andrzej z Krety w swym „Wielkim kanonie”, prowadzi do wniosku, że w jego wizji bytu ludzkiego istotne jest łączenie antropologii z soteriologią na gruncie historii zbawienia. Fakt grzeszności człowieka jest przedstawiony z odwoływaniem się do odkupieńczego miłosierdzia Boga.

The “Great Canon” is a monumental penitential work which plays a very important role in the Orthodox Church. It is appointed to be read during the first four evenings of the first week (Clean Monday through Clean Thursday) at Great Compline and at Mattins for Thursday of the fifth week of Great Lent. It is characterized by extensive typology and existential explanation of various passages from both the Old and New Testaments. The “Great Canon” is written in the form of a dialogue of St. Andrew of Crete with his soul. The main theme of this masterpiece of Byzantine hymnography is an urgent exhortation to change one's life. A reflection on the human person in relation to God should serve as the basis for this task. It is obvious that the question ‘Who is man?’ is inseparably connected with the question ‘Who is God?’. Both from the Bible and Christian doctrine we know that every human person is created by God and is by nature theocentric (Karidoyanes FitzGerald 2000, 23-29). Man's dependence on God is shown in the first pages of the Old Testament. The initial relationship of man with God is presented in the

Book of Genesis in a poetic and symbolic narrative. From a Christian point of view, the reflection on the human person begins with a reminder that it is God Who is the Creator and man is the creation. This extremely important truth has been underlined by the Fathers of the Church in order to reveal the identity, value, and dignity of every human person. It is worth examining the "Great Canon" in order to indicate how St. Andrew of Crete understood the identity of human beings. This article is an attempt to present the most important anthropological views of the Bishop of Gortyna based on the first chapters of the Book of Genesis as they are presented in the "Great Canon" (Costache 2008, 51-66). There will be analysed three main issues in the subsequent parts of this article, namely: man created by God, man created in the image and likeness of God, and man as a fallen creature (Zizioulas 2008, 98-101). The analysis of the properly selected troparia will include the identification of various verses from the Bible and references to anthropological thought of some contemporary Orthodox theologians and commentators on of the "Great Canon".

1. Man created by God

Man has no autonomous identity (Yannaras 1984, 19-22). He is created by God in the Trinity of the Most Holy Persons (Prokurat 1989, 331-349; Florovsky 1989, 43-78; Staniloae 2005, 67-118). St. Andrew of Crete expresses this using three biblical concepts: τὸ ποίημα, τὸ πλάσμα and κτίσις. The first one, τὸ ποίημα, refers in the Old Testament to both the creative work and the creative activity of God. In the Greek translation of the Book of Genesis, there appears the word ἐποίησεν, which expresses the truth that God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1 – LXX). The same word ἐποίησεν was used to express the creative work of God which led to the creation of man (Gen 1:27; Preuss 1996, 114-117). In the New Testament, the term ποίημα can be found in the Epistle to Ephesians (2:10), where it refers to Christians. Here the inspired author reminds the Ephesians: "For we are what he

has made us [ποίημα], created in Christ Jesus [κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ] for good works”. In the “Great Canon”, the notion of *ποίημα* in relation to man appears only once in the context of expressing regret for the sins committed and asking for God’s mercy. The Bishop of Gortyna begs the Saviour to have mercy on His creation: “But as God take pity on Thy creation, O Saviour [τὸ ποίημά σου]” (PG 97, 1336C {Ode II.3})³.

In the Septuagint, God’s creative activity is described with the word *ἐπλασεν*, the semantic content of which is related to such activities as moulding or forming something. For God is the one who “formed [ἐπλασεν] man from the dust of the ground” (Gen 2:7, cf. Gen 2:8). This kind of activity of God the Creator was specified in the Old Testament by indicating specific actions of God. Among others, God creates man’s eyes (cf. Ps 94 {93}:9), breath (cf. Prov 24:12), spirit (cf. Zech 12:1) or heart (cf. Ps 33:15). The absolute sovereignty of God (cf. Job 10:8-9; Ps 95 {94}:5) over His creation was emphasized through the use of the verb ‘mould’, ‘form’. In relation to God’s actions, this verb appears 36 times in the Old Testament, while as the noun *πλάσμα* – it is used 6 times, including only once in relation to man: “For he knows how we were made [τὸ πλάσμα], he remembers that we are dust” (Ps 103 {102}:14). In the New Testament, St. Paul used the term *πλάσμα* to emphasise the absolute sovereignty of God over creation: “But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is moulded say to the one who moulds it [τὸ πλάσμα τῷ πλάσαντι], «Why have you made me like this?»” (Rom 9:20). Although in the Septuagint, the term *πλάσμα* is only used to refer to Adam, in the New Testament, and more specifically in the First Epistle to Timothy, it is also used with reference to Eve: “For Adam was formed first [ἐπλάσθη], then Eve” (1 Tim 2:13). In the “Great Canon”, the term *πλάσμα* is used twice, for the first time in the triadikon of Ode II, beginning with the invocation of the Holy Trinity and ending

³ In this article, the author uses the English translation of the “Great Canon”, which was made for the “Lenten Triodion”. See „The Great Canon by St. Andrew of Crete” 1984.

with the supplication for the salvation of the sinful man who is a creature [πλάσμα] of God (cf. PG 97, 1241B {Ode II.40/11.Triadikon}). The request not to abandon the creation that is God's work is also repeated in the troparion that starts Ode IV:

Τὰ ἔργα σου μὴ παρίδῃς τὸ πλάσμα σου μὴ παρόψῃ.

Do not despise Thy works; do not forsake Thy creation. (PG 97, 1348A {Ode IV.1})

The third concept expressing the truth that God is the Creator and man is His creation – ἡ κτίσις – is used three times. Each time, it refers not only to man, but to all living beings (Nellas 1987, 173). The biblical message clearly shows an image of God as the Creator of the world, of all creatures and of man. For God in His mercy saves all nations [τὰ ἔθνη πάντα], and they worship [προσκυνοῦσι] before their Creator. He opened [ἀνεώγνυτο] Eden closed [ἡ Ἐδέμ κλεισθεῖσα] for creation [ἡ κτίσις] both above [τὰ ἄνω] and below [τὰ κάτω] (PG 87, 1349D {Ode IV.19}); cf. „Magnus Canon in commentario Acacii Sabaïtae.” 2007, 284-295). The Creator, crucified on a tree by His own will [ἐκουσίως ξύλῳ ἀνεσταύρωσαι] (PG 1349D {Ode IV.19}), spoke to His creation in a special way. Upon seeing Him crucified [σταυρούμενον], creation was in anguish [συνείχετο] (PG 97, 1384D {Ode IX.23}); cf. „Magnus Canon in commentario Acacii Sabaïtae.” 2007, 375-379). The heirmos of Ode VIII is an ode of praise to God sung by both the Heavenly Hosts [οἱ Στρατιαὶ Οὐρανῶν] and by all beings with the breath of life⁴. St. Andrew of Crete includes angels, “everything that

⁴ “To breathe in the face of someone else was always for the Hebrews (and for the Semitic peoples generally) and act of the deepest symbolism: it means that you transmit to the other your breath, something very inwardly yours, your own self-consciousness or your spirit. This is so since breathing is a presupposition of life, the element which constitutes you as an active being, and all the experiences – fear, anger, joy, pride – all influence breathing, the show a relationship of breathing with your deepest being, your own self. When, then, the Scripture says that God blew his own breath in the earthly face of man, this image demonstrates the communication to man of certain marks of the very existence of God” (Yannaras 1998, 54-55).

has breath” [πᾶσα πνοή] and the whole of creation [κτίσις] in this ode of praise and exaltation of God (PG 97,1373D {Ode VIII. Heirmos}; cf. „Magnus Canon in commentario Acacii Sabaitae.” 2007, 342-343).

The description of creation in the “Great Canon” combines theology, anthropology, cosmology and the history of salvation in a complex synthesis which draws its inspiration from the Book of Genesis (Costache 2009, 38; cf. Fretheim 1996, 70).

2. Man Created in the Image and Likeness of God

The fact of man’s creation in God’s image and likeness is presented in the “Great Canon” from a Christological perspective, which is characteristic of the anthropology of the Greek Church Fathers (Xintaras 1954, 48-62). Jesus Christ, through his Incarnation, became a human child [ἐννηπίασε] and shared the flesh [σαρκὶ προσομιλήσας] (Lossky 1989, 36-39.90-94). He also became an example [ὑπογραμμόν] and image [εἰκόνα] of His condescension [συγκαταβάσεως] for the human soul (PG 97, 1381A {Ode IX.5}; cf. Green 2008, 61-65). St. Andrew of Crete is fully aware that through his sinfulness he has lost the image of the Saviour, and compares himself to the long lost royal coin (cf. PG 97, 1360C {Ode VI.15}). St. Luke placed the parable of the lost coin at the centre of three parables revealing the essence of God’s forgiveness. Chapter 15 of the Gospel according to St. Luke begins with an attack by the Pharisees and scribes, appalled by the attitude of Jesus, who “welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2). For “all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to” (Luke 15:1) the Saviour. After the parable of finding a lost sheep, the Messiah compares the converted sinner to the coin that has been found: “Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost’” (Luke 15:8-9). To find the lost coin, the woman from the parable “lights the lamp”, or literally “touches the lamp” [ἄπτει

λύχνον]. St. Andrew of Crete associates the motif of the lamp with the person of St. John the Baptist, who “was a burning and shining lamp [ὁ λύχνος ὁ καίόμενος καὶ φαίνων]” (John 5:35) asking the Saviour to “light the lamp of His Predecessor [ἀνάψας λύχνον τὸν Πρόδρομόν σου]”. The mission of St. John the Baptist was to prepare the way for the Messiah (cf. Luke 1:76) by being the voice of one crying in the wilderness (cf. John 1:23). Being a lamp full of light and heat, when the true Light came, he humbly confessed, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). Though, as it is written in the Gospel according to St. Matthew: “Among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matt 11:11).

Being aware that he is an image of Christ, the Bishop of Gortyna therefore addresses a request to him: “O Word, seek and find again Thine image [Λόγε ἀναζήτησον καὶ εὐρεῖ τὴν σὴν εἰκόνα]” (PG 97, 1360C {Ode VI.15}). This cry to find God’s image, coming from the bottom of the heart, stems from the realization that through one’s sin this image has been gradually denied (Romanides 1998, 103-127). This negation of the image of God in man is shown in a dynamic way. First, in comparing his spiritual centre to the “tabernacle/tent built by God [θεοστυπώτου σκηνῆς]”, the author of *the “Great Canon”* ascertains that he neglected [ὑπεριδών] this “internal” [τῆς ἔνδον] tabernacle, because he cared only for the “outward adornment” [τῆς ἕξωθεν εὐκοσμίας] (cf. PG 97, 1337C {Ode II.19}). As a result of this lack of concern for the “beauty of the original image” [τῆς πρὶν εἰκόνοσ τοῦ κάλλοσ], this tabernacle has been discoloured by giving in to passions [τοῖσ πάθεσιν]. The Bishop of Gortyna returns once again in Troparion 18 of Ode VII, admitting he violated the Saviour’s commandment [ἐντολήν] and, in falling into a state of passions [πάθεσιν], destroyed all beauty and goodness [ὄλον κάλλοσ] in himself (PG 97, 1372B {Ode VII,18}).

St. Andrew of Crete, convinced that he is unable to make a change on his own, asks the Saviour to find him like a “once lost coin” (PG 97,

1337C {Ode II.21}). Living a life of passion (cf. PG 97, 1337B {Ode II.14}) leads to the devastation of the human person, which in Troparion 15 of Ode II is expressed in the following words:

Ἐσπίλωσα τὸν τῆς σαρκός μου χιτῶνα καὶ κατερρώπησα τὸ κατ' εἰκόνα, Σωτήρ, καὶ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν.

I have stained the garment of my flesh, O Saviour, and defiled that which was made in Thine image and likeness (PG 97, 1337B {Ode II.15}).

Only the One who did miracles [θαύματα], healed lepers [ἰασάμενος λεπρούς] and the paralysed [παραλύτους], as well as a woman suffering from the flow of blood – as soon as she touched his garment – can lift a man from this state of collapse. Being God, the Saviour became similar [ἐμορφώθη] to man and gave him a new identity, thus forgiving him of his sins (cf. PG 97, 1356C {Ode V.17}).

3. Man as a Fallen Creature – a Sinner

Human sinfulness is one of the main themes of the “Great Canon” (Mathewes-Green 2006, XIII-XXXV). St. Andrew of Crete states the fact that man is sinful in the first eight odes of his work. In most cases it is a simple statement, of which the most important element is the word: “I have sinned [ἤμαρτον]”. On many occasions, the painful confession “I have sinned” is combined with a reference to God the Saviour who wants to save His children (Getcha 2003, 105-120). In individual troparia, in directly referring to a personal confession of sinfulness, the author of the “Great Canon” concentrates on God, because He is the God who loves man [φιλόανθρωπος]. Poetic phrases referring to biblical images are infused with hope and emotional fervour. Deep repentance expressed by crying comes to the foreground. The sinner’s submission to the merciful God who cares about the fate of His creation is one of the main threads of the “Great Canon”, owing to which this Lenten liturgical poem offers special hope for saving the prodigal son. Already in the first personal confession of his own sinfulness, which is formulated in

Troparion 12 of Ode I, the Archbishop of Crete is not so much focused on himself but rather on God who saves:

Εἰ καὶ ἥμαρτον, Σωτήρ, ἀλλ' οἶδα ὅτι φιλάνθρωπος εἶ πλήττεις
συμπαθῶς καὶ σπλαγχνίζῃ θερμῶς δακρύνοντα βλέπεις καὶ προστρέχεις
ὡς Πατὴρ ἀνακαλῶν τὸν Ἄσωτον.

Though I have sinned, O Saviour, yet I know that Thou art full of loving-kindness. Thou dost chastise with mercy and art fervent in compassion. Thou dost see me weeping and dost run to meet me, like the Father calling back the Prodigal Son (PG 97, 1333A { Ode I.12}).

Starting this troparion with the word "though" [Εἰ], St. Andrew of Crete shifts the emphasis from the undeniable fact of human sinfulness to the Saviour, the Father [Πατήρ] "loving man", running to the rescue of his stray child. The repeated confession "I have sinned against Thee" [ἥμαρτον σοι] is combined with a request for forgiveness (cf. PG 97, 1341C {Ode III.4}), mercy and pity (cf. PG 97, 1376A {Ode VIII.1}), for only Jesus can lift the sinner from the fall and, being the compassionate God [εὐσπλαγχνος], take from him the heavy yoke of sins [ἄρον τὸν βαρὺν τὸν τῆς ἁμαρτίας] (PG 97, 1333C {Ode I.22}). The Saviour hears the desires of heart of the person calling: "I have sinned against Thee, O God [Ὁ Θεός ἡμάρτηκά σοι], be merciful to me" (PG 97, 1357 {Ode VI.1}; cf. PG 97,1344A {Ode III.10/1}). This phrase is taken from the prayer of the tax collector who, aware of his sinfulness, said: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner! [Ὁ Θεός, ἰλάσθητί μοι τῷ ἁμαρτωλῷ]" (Luke 18:13). Sin not only concerns the spiritual sphere of man but is also a violation or depravity of the flesh. Being aware of this, the hymnographer from Crete calls out to the Merciful One: "I have sinned and violated the vessel of my flesh [Ἐξῆμαρτον ἐνυβρίσας τὸ σκεῦος τὸ τῆς σαρκός]" (PG 97, 1352C {Ode IV.25}). Even in sin, man remains a creation [πλάσματος] of God that in a state of sinful fall can only cry out: "Spare, spare, O Lord!" [Φεῖσαι, φεῖσαι, Κύριε] (PG 97, 1356C {Ode V.16}). By remaining in the state of sin, man abandons

God's way. St. Andrew of Crete therefore follows the Psalmist: "I went astray" and he adds, "I have set aside Thine commandments [ἠθέτησα τὴν ἐντολήν σου]" (cf. Ps 119(118):67) and "in sins have I progressed [ἐν ἁμαρτίαις προήχθην]" (PG 97, 1368C {Ode VII.1}). He also wonders to whom his "soul of many sins [πολυαμάρτητε ψυχῆ]" have become similar (PG 97, 1368C {Ode VII.1}). With reference to the biblical figures⁵, the Bishop of Gortyna states that none of Adam's children have sinned as he has sinned against God (PG 97, 1337D {Ode II.24}. cf. Costache 2009, 41-42), for he became like Cain (cf. Gen 4:3-8) and Lamech (cf. Gen 4:19-24; cf. PG 97, 1340B {Ode II.31/2}) and the brothers who sold Joseph (cf. Gen 37:12-28). It should be noted that Joseph is "the fruit of purity [τὸν τῆς ἀγνείας καρπὸν]" who consolidated wisdom and self-control [τὸν τῆς σωφροσύνης] (PG 97, 1353B {Ode V.3}). Even the sin of David's forefather is not as great as the sins of his own soul, although he has sinned twice [ἤμαρτε διττῶς], so he was pierced with the arrow of adultery [βέλει τοξευθεὶς τῆς μοιχείας] and stabbed with the spear of murder [τοῦ φόνου] (PG 97, 1369A {Ode VII.4}). David once joined sin to sin [ἀνομήματι], adding murder to fornication, but he showed a twofold repentance. But the soul, which committed even greater evil than that of David, did not repent before God (PG 97, 1369A {Ode VII.5}). In the psalm he himself wrote, David confessed his sin to God and accused himself in words: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!" (Ps 51:1-2), which St. Andrew of Crete paraphrased briefly in the following words: "Have mercy upon me [Ἐλέησόν με], for against Thee only have I sinned, O God of all. Do Thou cleanse me [καθάρισόν με]" (PG 97, 1369A {Ode VII.6}). This state of sinfulness is incomparably greater than that of the harlot [Πόρνη], for no other man

⁵ "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" (Krueger 2013, 68).

on earth is as sinful as the author of the Great Canon (cf. PG 97,1372B {Ode VII.17}). Thus, the reproach addressed to his soul that is more wicked [σκαλιότερα] than that of all sinners “before the law [πάντων τῶν πρὸ νόμου]” and “after the law [πετὰ νόμον]” is not surprising (PG 97, 1376C {Ode VIII.8}).

The hymnographer confesses six times that he considers himself to be the greatest sinner (Iljin 1951, 8-16). How should his words be interpreted? Did they result from his doctrinal fall and his joining the heresy of Monothelitism? The context of such statements remains problematic. We will never know whether St. Andrew of Crete identified himself with the speaking subject. The work appears to be universal, allowing everyone who listens to it to discover their sinfulness. One can hear in it an echo of the words of Paul the Apostle, who in the First Epistle to Timothy wrote: “The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost” (1 Tim 1:15). In relation to salvation in Christ, human sinfulness takes on a completely new meaning. To consider oneself as the greatest sinner is not an empty declaration and has nothing to do with a low self-esteem. St. Paul knew from his own experience that Jesus Christ loves him unconditionally and the Saviour’s love is more powerful than human sinfulness. The Apostle of the Nations, “formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence” (1 Tim 1:13) received mercy so that in him, “as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making an example to those who would come to believe in Him for eternal life” (1 Tim 1:16). The awareness of the immensity of one’s own sinfulness opens a person, through the action of the Holy Spirit, to give witness to others of the endless love of God. If the Holy Spirit proves man wrong about sin (cf. John 16:8) and Jesus comes into the world to “call not to the righteous but sinners” (Mark 2:17), this recognition of one’s own sinfulness becomes possible only when one discovers that God is love (1 John 4:16). In the text of the “Great Canon”, the statement

of the existential spiritual condition of Bishop of Gortyna, similarly as in the case of St. Paul, directly refers to the salvific mission of Christ:

Ἡμαρτόν σοι μόνος ἐγώ, ἤμαρτον ὑπὲρ πάντας Χριστέ Σωτήρ, μὴ ὑπερίδης, με.

I alone have sinned against Thee, I have sinned more than all men; reject me not, O Christ my Saviour (PG 97, 1341C {Ode III.5}).

The basic idea of this troparion is repeated in subsequent variations like a leitmotif in consideration of one's own sinfulness, from which one can only be liberated by the One in Whom there is no sin. In the same ode, the Archbishop of Crete once again returns to confessing his sinfulness, while at the same time pleading with the Lord to be merciful, although there is no one among mankind who had committed sins like him (cf. PG 97, 1344A {Ode III. 12/3}). He confidently entrusts himself to the righteous Judge [Δικαιοκρίτα], whom he also considers the Lover of Mankind [Φιλάνθρωπε], and asks Him: "Despise not Thy works, forsake not Thy creation [Τὰ ἔργα σου μὴ παρίδης τὸ πλάσμα σου μὴ παρόψη]" (PG 97, 1348A {Ode IV.1}). The next two troparia – the first of which contains a warning of imminent death (cf. PG 97, 1348B {Ode IV.2}), the second a wake-up call (PG 97, 1348B {Ode IV.3}; cf. „Magnus Canon in commentario Acacii Sabaitae” 2007, 275-278) – prepare the author for the painful conclusion that there is “no sin, no evil deed, no wickedness” in life that he would not have committed. In this place of reflection on his own sinfulness and life in immorality [ἐπιλημμέλησα]⁶, St. Andrew of Crete tries to express how he has sinned, that is “in mind, word and intent, in disposition, thought and act [κατὰ νοῦν καὶ λόγον καὶ προαίρεσιν καὶ θέσει καὶ γνώμῃ καὶ πράξει]" (PG 97, 1348B {Ode IV.4}). The examination of the actions performed [τὰ ἔργα] by the author clearly shows that he has surpassed all people in his sins (cf. PG 97, 1356C {Ode V.15}). For the last time in the analysed work, the motive of being the greatest sinner appears in Ode VIII and is combined with

⁶ Cf. Ps 119(118):67 – “Before I was humbled I went astray [ἐγὼ ἐπιλημμέλησα].”

a call to the merciful Saviour [εὐσπλαγχνε Σωτήρη] to accept the repentant [μετανοοῦντα]: "Against Thee alone have I sinned; I have transgressed, have mercy on me [Ἡμαρτόν σοι μόνω, ἠνόμησα, ἐλέησόν με]" (PG 97, 1377B {Ode VIII.18}).

As a result of the committed sins, man has found himself stripped naked of God [γυμνωθέντα Θεοῦ] and of the eternal Kingdom and its joy (cf. PG 97, 1332A {Ode I.3}), and his soul has tasted the deceptive food and has fallen (PG 87, 1332A {Ode I.4}; cf. „Magnus Canon in commentario Acacii Sabaitae" 2007, 231-233). The plot of the "Great Canon" reveals the fall of the soul through a voice that exposes and calls on the soul to wake up and not to persist in the state of fall. What can this sin-loving [φιλαμαρτημῶν] and wretched [τάλαινα] soul do when the consequences of its actions are reached? (cf. PG 97, 1349C {Ode IV.16}). From this life of darkness, being in the night of sin [ἡ νύξ τῆς ἁμαρτίας], it can only cry out to the Saviour for a transformation, as a result of which it will be able to become "a son of the day [ὡς ἡμέρας υἱόν]" (cf. PG 97, 1353B {Ode V.1}). The one that has become a dwelling place of fleshly defilements [σαρκικῶν] and passions [μολυσμάτων] can be transformed if it confesses its sins to God (cf. PG 97, 1369D {Ode VII.13}) and will quickly depart from these evil sins [τῶν ποιηρῶν τὰς ἁμαρτίας] (PG 97, 1376D {Ode VIII.12}; cf. „Magnus Canon in commentario Acacii Sabaitae" 2007, 345-349). The author of the "Great Canon" cries to his God in pain: "I confess to Thee, O Saviour, the sins I have committed, the wounds of my soul and body, which murderous thoughts, like thieves, have inflicted inwardly upon me [μιαιφόνου λογισμοί]" (PG 97, 1332C {Ode I.11}). Upon having an insight into its own interior, one becomes clear that there is no hope of a lenient judgment from God. Therefore, all that remains is to appeal to God's mercy (Clément 1982):

Μὴ εἰσέλθῃς μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν κρίσει, φέρων μου τὰ πρακτέα, λόγους ἐκζητῶν, καὶ εὐθύνων ὀπμάς ἀλλ' ἐν οἰκτιρμοῖς σου παρορῶν μου τὰ δεινὰ, σῶσόν με, Παντοδύναμε.

Enter not into judgement with me, bringing before me the things I should have done, examining my words and correcting my impulses. But in Thy mercy overlook my sins and save me, O Lord almighty (PG 97, 1333D {Ode I.23}).

The request to the Saviour is preceded in Ode I by the supplication for the forgiveness of sins [παραπτωμάτων ἄφεσι] (cf. PG 97, 1333A {Ode I.13}). It is expressed in the form of a cry to take away or remove the heavy yoke of sins [ἄρον τὸν κλοιὸν ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ τὸν βαρύν, τὸν τῆς ἁμαρτίας] (PG 97, 1333B {Ode I.18}). St. Andrew of Crete is fully aware that God knows both “voluntary [τὰ ἐκούσια] and involuntary [τὰ ἀκούσια] falls/offences [πταίσματά]”, and “manifest [τὰ φανερά] and hidden [κρυπτά]” sins (PG 97, 1333C {Ode I.19}). And just as He once saved Peter, who plunged into the depths of the lake (cf. Matt 14:24-33), in the same way the Father can save the soul calling to Him from the depths of sin [τοῦ βεθοῦ τῆς ἁμαρτίας] (PG 97, 1360B {Ode VI.13}). Hence St. Andrew of Crete perceives Christ, who is the Lord of human existence, “from the lowest depths of sin and despair” [ἐκ τῶν ἀδύτων βυθῶν τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ τῆς ἀπογνώσεως] as a calm haven [Λιμένα γαλήνιον] (cf. PG 97, 1360B {Ode VI.14}). Twice in the “Great Canon”, the author addresses the supplication for salvation from sins to God in the Trinity of the Most Holy Persons (cf. PG 97, 1337D {Ode I.24}; PG 97, 1341B {Ode II.40/11}). First, in Ode I, this request is preceded by a doxological declaration of faith in the divinity of the Trinity and His Unity:

Ὑπερούσιε Τριάς, ἡ ἐν Μονάδι προσκυνουμένη, ἄρον τὸν κλοιὸν ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ τὸν βαρύν, τὸν τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ ὡς εὔσπλαγχνός μοι δὸς δάκρυα κατανύξεως.

Trinity beyond all being, worshipped in Unity, take from me the heavy yoke of sin, and in Thy compassion grant me tears of compunction (PG 97, 1336B {Ode I.24.Triadikon}).

Similarly, at the end of Ode II, the first to be praised is the “Trinity uncreated and without beginning, undivided Unity [Ἄναρχε ἄκτιστε

Τριάς, ἀμέριστε Μονάς]". This is followed by a request for Him to accept a sinner in his repentance [μετανοοῦντα] and not to reject but spare and deliver from the fire of condemnation [φείσαι καὶ ρῦσαι τοῦ πυρὸς καταδίκης] His creation [πλάσμα] that is a sinner [ἡμαρτηκότα] (PG 97, 1341B {Ode II.40/11.Triadikon}).

The Christological motif of the forgiveness of sins is recalled only once in the whole of the Great Canon – in Troparion 20 of Ode IV (PG 97, 1352A {Ode IV.20}). St Andrew of Crete refers to the Saviour's sacrifice on the tree of the Cross (Prelipcean 2015, 413). He wants to be cleansed with the Blood and drink the Water that flowed out of the side of Jesus. For they are for the author the drink of forgiveness [ἀφέσεως] [of sins], purification [καθαίρωμαι] and anointing [χριστόμενος] (PG 97, 1352A {Ode IV.20}). This great gift of the Saviour is given by the Church, because the Church, like a chalice [κρατῆρα], has received that which gushed out from the side of the Lord and mixes the life-giving [ζωηφόρον] stream of forgiveness [πηγῆς ἀφέσεως] with the stream of knowledge [γνώσεως] in the image of two Covenants [Διαθηκῶν]: the Old and the New. The Greek term κρατῆρα essentially means a vessel for mixing liquids. Drinking from the chalice of the Church that contains the life-giving gifts of the Saviour, His Blood and Water, is to immerse oneself in the source of awakening [ἐξέβλυσε] (cf. PG 97, 1352B {Ode IV.22}). It is worth noting that in the Great Canon the request to remove from the sinner the "heavy yoke of sin" [ἄρον τὸν κλοιὸν ἀπ' ἐμοῦ τὸν βαρύν, τὸν τῆς ἁμαρτίας] is once addressed to the Mother of God. She is "hope and protection [ἐλπίς καὶ προστασία]" of those who praise Her in odes [ὑμνοῦντων] (PG 97, 1336B {Ode I.25.Theotokion}).

4. Conclusions

As has been presented in this article, the starting point for the understanding of the identity of the human person in the "Great Canon" is the observation made by St. Andrew of Crete that man is a creature of God. This fundamental truth of biblical anthropology firstly relates to

the very fact of man's creation by God, then to the indication that man was created in the image and likeness of God, and also, that, as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve, man is a fallen creature. References to the description of the creation of the human being in the Book of Genesis constitute a complex synthesis of theology, cosmology, anthropology and soteriology in relation to the history of salvation. The creation of the human being in the image and likeness of God is presented in the "Great Canon" from the Christological perspective, especially in relation to the Incarnation. St. Andrew of Crete also stresses the fact of human sinfulness. Six times he sincerely confesses that he is the greatest sinner. A closer approximation of the mystery of the human person has been made possible by focusing on the essential anthropological notions of Eastern Christianity.

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SPIS TREŚCI

IN MEMORIAM

<i>Prof. dr hab. Michał Pietrzak</i>	1097
--	------

ARTYKUŁY

MAREK JERZY UGLORZ, <i>Praktyczna duchowość według autora 1. Listu św. Jana</i>	1099
RAFAL MARCIN LESZCZYŃSKI, <i>Logos w sporach trynitarnych pierwszej połowy IV wieku</i>	1143
DOROTEUSZ SAWICKI, <i>Św. Spirydon – Dekalog żywotem zapisany</i>	1173
KRZYSZTOF LEŚNIEWSKI, <i>Human Person as God's Creation in the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete</i>	1213
ANDRZEJ KUŹMA, <i>Zagadnienie postu w dokumencie Wielkiego Soboru Kościoła Prawosławnego, Kreta 2016</i>	1233
ADRIAN KORCZAGO, <i>Duszpasterski wymiar komunikacji interpersonalnej i dialogu kulturowo-religijnego na przykładzie działalności Society for Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling</i>	1251
МАРОШ ШИП, БОГУСЛАВ КУЗЫШИН, <i>Спиритуальный аспект ухода за пациентом в паллиативной помощи</i>	1309
PIOTR NOWAK, <i>Kształcenie pracowników kościelnych w seminariach ewangelikalnych w Polsce, powstałych i działających w latach 1945-1950</i>	1329
ARTUR ALEKSIEJUK, <i>Rozwój osobowości integralnej jako nadrzędny cel pedagogii historyzoficznej Iwana Kiriejewskiego (1806-1856)</i>	1345
ELŻBIETA ALEKSIEJUK, <i>Duchowość i wychowanie dziecka w refleksji pedagogicznej Wasilija Zienkowskiego</i>	1381
PAWEŁ BORECKI, <i>Specyfika ustawowej regulacji statusu Polskiego Autokefalicznego Kościoła Prawosławnego. Ujęcie porównawcze</i>	1401
OLEKSANDR BILASH, MARIYA MENDZHUL, <i>Religious holidays in the legislation of Ukraine</i>	1425

MATERIAŁY

ZBYSZKO MELOSİK, <i>Pasja i tożsamość naukowca: o władzy i wolności umysłu</i>	1441
--	------

KRONIKA

<i>Inauguracja roku akademickiego 2021/2022 (7 października 2021)</i> (JERZY BETLEJKO).....	1453
<i>Sesja naukowa ku czci śp. ks. prof. Witolda Benedyktowicza w 100. rocznicę jego urodzin (22 października 2021)</i> (ZBIGNIEW KAMIŃSKI).....	1455
<i>Konferencja naukowa „Oblicza Pentekostalizmu Jako Chrześcijańskiej Tradycji Mistycznej. Perspektywa Międzywyznaniowa i Religioznawcza” (26 listopada 2021)</i> (PIOTR NOWAK, ANDRZEJ MIGDA).....	1467
<i>Ogólnopolska Konferencja Naukowa „Status prawny prawosławia we współczesnej Polsce” (8 grudnia 2021)</i> (TADEUSZ J. ZIELIŃSKI)	1473
Wykaz autorów	1476
Recenzenci „Rocznika Teologicznego” w roku 2021	1478

Contents

IN MEMORIAM

<i>Prof. Michał Pietrzak PhD habil</i>	1097
--	------

ARTICLES

MAREK JERZY UGLORZ, <i>Practical spirituality according to the author of the 1st Epistle of St. John</i>	1099
RAFAL MARCIN LESZCZYŃSKI, <i>The Logos in the trinitarian disputes of the first half of the 4th century</i>	1143
DOROTEUSZ SAWICKI, <i>St. Spyridon – the Decalogue written in life</i>	1173
KRZYSZTOF LEŚNIEWSKI, <i>Human Person as God's Creation in the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete</i>	1213
ANDRZEJ KUŹMA, <i>The issue of fasting in the document of the Great Council of the Orthodox Church, Crete 2016</i>	1233
ADRIAN KORCZAGO, <i>Pastoral dimension of interpersonal communication and cultural-religious dialogue on the example of the activity of the Society for Intercultural Pastoral Care and Counselling</i>	1251
MAROŠ ŠIP, BOHUSLAV KUZYŠIN, <i>Spirituality as an Aspect in the Care of a Patient in Palliative Care</i>	1309
PIOTR NOWAK, <i>Education of Church Workers in Evangelical Seminaries Founded and Operating in Poland from 1945 to 1950</i>	1329
ARTUR ALEKSIEJUK, <i>Integral Historiosophical and Humanistic Pedagogy of Ivan Vasilyevich Kireyevsky (1806-1856)</i>	1345
ELŻBIETA ALEKSIEJUK, <i>Spirituality and education of a child in the pedagogical reflection of Vasilij Vasilevich Zenkovskiy</i>	1381
PAWEŁ BORECKI, <i>The specificity of statutory regulation of status Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church. Comparative approach</i>	1401
OLEKSANDR BILASH, MARIYA MENDZHUL, <i>Religious holidays in the legislation of Ukraine</i>	1425

MATERIALS

ZBYSZKO MELOSİK, <i>Passion and identity of a scientist: about power and freedom of the mind</i>	1441
--	------

CHRONICLE

<i>Inauguration of the academic year 2021/2022 (7th October 2021)</i> (JERZY BETLEJKO).....	1453
<i>Scientific session on the occasion of the 100th birthday jubilee of the late Rev. Witold Benedyktowicz (22th October 2021)</i> (ZBIGNIEW KAMIŃSKI).....	1455
<i>Scientific conference: “Aspects of Pentecostalism as a Christian Mystical Tradition. Cross-denominational and religious studies perspectives” (26th November 2021)</i> (PIOTR NOWAK, ANDRZEJ MIGDA).....	1467
<i>National Scientific Conference “The Legal Status of Orthodoxy in Contemporary Poland” (8th December 2021)</i> (TADEUSZ J. ZIELIŃSKI)	1473
List of authors	1476
List of reviewers of “Theological Yearbook” in 2021	1478

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