

THE PRESENCE OF PATRIARCHS IN THE CANON OF SAINT ANDREW OF CRETE: A HYMNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Abstract

This study examines the presence and theological significance of the Old Testament patriarchs in the *Great Canon* of Saint Andrew of Crete from the perspective of Byzantine hymnography. Employing a theological–literary and philological methodology, the research explores how the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are integrated into a theological discourse of profound moral and symbolic depth, becoming paradigms of repentance, faith, and obedience to God. Through scriptural analysis and comparative study of the original Greek text and its Romanian translation, the paper highlights the poetic and theological expression of the Canon, emphasizing the pedagogical and soteriological value of these biblical figures. From a hymnographic standpoint, the study analyzes the structure of the *troparia*, the relationship between versification and theological meaning, and the way in which Saint Andrew of Crete achieves a synthesis between the history of salvation and the personal call to *metanoia*.



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Introduction

Byzantine hymnography unites theology and poetic expression, transforming Church doctrine into spiritual experience and catechetical teaching. In this sense, the *Great Canon* of Saint Andrew of Crete represents one of the most profound theological and literary syntheses of Byzantine hymnography. Through his symbolic language, the

author transposes the history of salvation into an inner journey of repentance, where biblical exemplars become moral and mystical landmarks for the believer on the path of purification, illumination, and deification.

This study analyzes the presence of the Old Testament patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the *Great Canon* of Saint Andrew of Crete from hymnographic, theological, and philological perspectives. It seeks to highlight the spiritual role of these patriarchal figures within the Canon and to show how they become icons of repentance, faith, and spiritual ascent.

The main objectives are: To identify and classify the *troparia* referring to the patriarchs, emphasizing the liturgical and thematic context of each passage; to provide a theological interpretation of these *troparia* in relation to the corresponding biblical passages and patristic commentaries; to underscore the poetic and hermeneutical dimension of Byzantine hymnography by examining the rhetorical, allegorical, and anagogical techniques employed by Saint Andrew of Crete; to determine the pedagogical and ascetical function of these scriptural images in shaping the penitential consciousness of the Orthodox believer.

The analysis is based on a comparative reading of the hymnographic text (in both the original Greek and the English translation) alongside its biblical contexts, guided by classical patristic hermeneutics. Methods of textual and thematic analysis are employed, complemented by philological observations on key Greek terminology. The theological dimension is enriched by a hymnographic interpretation that situates the *troparia* within the liturgical framework of the *Triodion* and the spirituality of Great Lent.

Through this interdisciplinary approach, the study demonstrates that the patriarchs in the *Great Canon* are not merely evocative figures, but true spiritual archetypes through which the author achieves a poetic transposition of humanity's ascent toward God.

Byzantine hymnography may thus be understood as a form of poetic theology, in which the mystical dimension is intertwined with aesthetic expression, transforming dogma into lived spiritual experience and catechesis. Through its symbolic and metaphorical language, the hymn becomes a bridge between divine revelation and human experience, granting the heart access to the mysteries of faith.

In this context, the *Great Canon* of Saint Andrew of Crete stands as one of the deepest theological and poetic syntheses within the Orthodox tradition. A creation of extraordinary penitential power, it portrays the drama of fallen humanity and the call

to restore communion with God, proposing as models the great righteous figures of both the Old and New Testaments. Through its extensive structure and rich network of *troparia*, it becomes a true catechesis of repentance, guiding the believer's conscience toward *metanoia* and *theosis*.

Within the Lenten context, the Canon's purpose is to cultivate a communal penitential conscience through a biblical and poetic pedagogy that unites the theological and moral dimensions. Saint Andrew employs analogical, allegorical, and moral hermeneutics, transforming historical events into icons of the soul's inner pilgrimage. The dominant motif of the Canon the "piercing of the heart" (*katanyxis*)—expresses this inner conversion, in which knowledge becomes prayer and biblical memory turns into personal experience.

From this perspective, the presence of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Canon has a revelatory significance. They embody successive stages of faith and spiritual perfection: Abraham's departure from sin, Isaac's voluntary sacrifice, and Jacob's ascent to the vision of God. By invoking these figures, Saint Andrew of Crete bridges salvation history with the ascetic experience of the believer, offering a living theology of conversion and hope.

Comprising 11 *irmos* and approximately 250 *troparia*, the *Great Canon* stands as a liturgical synthesis of repentance, sung in sections during the first four days of Great Lent and in its entirety on the Thursday of the fifth week. The analysis of the patriarchs in this Canon thus forms part of a symbolic and theological reading of Byzantine hymnography—one that transforms the narratives of the Old Testament into ascetical paradigms of repentance.

In the following sections, we will explore these hymnographic portraits, beginning with the figure of Abraham, the first patriarch evoked, as the symbol of the beginning of spiritual life and of faith that "leaves the Haran of sin" for the land of incorruption.

Patriarch Abraham in the Great Canon

Departure from Haran – renunciation of sin

The first reference to Abraham appears in the Canon as a call to the soul to leave the "land of Haran", that is, the zone of comfort and sin, and to go to the promised land.

15. “From the land of Haran—that is, from sin—come out, my soul, and come to the land that ever flows with living incorruption, which Abraham inherited.” (*Ode III, troparion 85*)

“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.’” (Gn 12:1, ESV)

Ἐκ γῆς Χαρράν ἐξελθε, τῆς ἀμαρτίας, ψυχὴ μου, δεῦρο εἰς γῆν ῥέουσαν ἀείζων, ἀφθαρσίαν, ἣν ὁ Ἀβραὰμ ἐκληρώσατο. (Ωιδὴ Γ΄, τροπάριον πε΄)

«Εἶπεν δὲ Κύριος τῷ Ἀβραμ· ἐξελθε ἐκ τῆς γῆς σου καὶ ἐκ τῆς συγγενείας σου καὶ ἐκ τοῦ οἴκου τοῦ πατρός σου εἰς γῆν ἣν δείξω σοι.» (Γένεσις 12:1, LXX)

The biblical references (LXX 2006; Bible 2001) and hymnographic sources (Triodion 2010; *PG* 97, 1330D–1386C) placed in parallel indicate the scriptural and liturgical foundations upon which the hymnographer built the composition of this canon.

The *troparia* dedicated to Patriarch Abraham in the *Great Canon* of Saint Andrew of Crete constitute a paradigmatic example of the theological transfiguration of the biblical narrative through poetic means. The scriptural references to this episode are found in Genesis 11:31–32; 12:1–5 (the departure from Haran at the divine call); Gn 12:7; 13:14–17; 15:18–21 (the promise of the land); Heb 11:8–9, 13 (Abraham’s departure without knowing his destination, his life as a “stranger”); and Acts 7:2–4 (the apostolic retelling of his call). This *troparion* becomes a concise synthesis of the entire theology of repentance: departure, calling, journey, and inheritance are transformed into stages of humanity’s spiritual exodus—from the bondage of sin to the kingdom of grace.

The imperative *Ἐξελθε* (“Come out”), taken from Gn 12:1, retains the force of the divine summons and functions as an inaugural soteriological moment, opening the horizon of conversion. “Going forth” thus becomes the first movement of the soul detaching itself from the fallen world. The phrase *ἐκ γῆς Χαρράν* (“from the land of Haran”), immediately explained by the gloss *τῆς ἀμαρτίας* (“that is, from sin”), marks the semantic passage from geography to spirituality: Haran, once a historical location, becomes a symbol of attachment to the world, of bondage to the passions, and of inertia in the old life (St. Maximus the Confessor 2005, 222). Here the hymnographer employs an allegorical hermeneutic rooted in the Alexandrian tradition: the concrete place is transformed into a theological category, and history itself becomes a spiritual parable.

The address *Ψυχή μου* (“my soul”) gives the entire *Canon* its introspective and pedagogical tone, turning it into a dialogue of conscience. It is the inner voice of repentance that admonishes and calls, an instance of penitential self-catechesis characteristic of Byzantine hymnography. The invitation *Δεῦρο εἰς γῆν* (“come to the land”) introduces a vivid existential note: the word *δεῦρο* (“come here, now”) does not refer to a distant destination but to an immediate, present summons. Conversion must occur in the very moment of prayer. Those who heed the divine call learn, like Abraham, “to prefer the unseen to the seen, the future to what lies before their eyes” (St. John Chrysostom 2003, 420).

The phrase *ρέουσιν αἰζων ἀφθαρσίαν* (“flowing with ever-living incorruptibility”) poetically encapsulates the entire theology of eternal life. The adjective *αἰζωος* (“ever-living”) evokes the continuous flow of divine grace, while *ἀφθαρσία* (“incorruptibility”) signifies the eschatological state of deification. The Romanian rendering “living incorruptibility” succeeds in preserving this unity between life and immortality, anticipating the eternal condition of the saved. Finally, the verb *ἐκληρώσατο* (“he inherited,” from *κληρόω*, “to receive by inheritance”) transcends its material sense to denote the inheritance of grace—the participation in the heavenly blessings.

The biblical correlation with Genesis 12:1 is evident, yet Saint Andrew introduces a decisive semantic shift: the “unknown land” of Abraham’s calling becomes the “land of incorruption.” The geographical movement is transformed into a spiritual one, and the external pilgrimage becomes an interior journey. Through this transposition, the *troparion* proposes a mystical reinterpretation of Scripture in which each believer is invited to retrace Abraham’s journey as an archetype of personal conversion.

In the light of Hebrews 11:8, which emphasizes the patriarch’s faith and obedience, the *troparia* of the *Great Canon* elevate Abraham’s example to that of a model of *metanoia*: leaving behind the comfort of sin and entering the realm of grace-filled freedom. From a theological perspective, the structure of the *troparion* articulates three interrelated themes: repentance as exodus, the separation from the old life; obedient faith, the full and trusting response to God’s call; the promised land—a symbol of life in Christ, of Eucharistic and eschatological fulfillment.

Liturgically, the text finds its natural place within the economy of the *Triodion*: it is sung during Great Lent, the season in which every Christian is invited, like Abraham, to “come forth” from themselves and walk the path of repentance.

A stranger and traveler on earth

A second troparion about Abraham, in the same hymn, deepens the theme of alienation from the fallen world:

“You have heard of Abraham, my soul, who once left the land of his fathers and became a stranger; do you also follow his choice.” (*Ode III, troparion 86*)

Τὸν Ἀβραὰμ ἤκουσας, πάλαι, ψυχὴ μου, καταλιπόντα γῆν πατρώαν, καὶ γενόμενον μετανάστην· τούτου τὴν προαίρεσιν μίμησαι.
(Ὡιδῆ Γ΄, τροπάριον πς΄)

The text takes up the idea of leaving the “land of one’s fathers” (Gn 12:1-4) and emphasizes Abraham’s status as a stranger in the land of Canaan (cf. Gn 23:4, where Abraham calls himself a “stranger and sojourner”; Heb 11:9–10, 13–16 life as a stranger, waiting for the city to come).

“I am a sojourner and foreigner among you; give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.” (Gn 23:4, ESV)

πάροικος καὶ παρεπίδημος εἰμι ἐγὼ παρ’ ὑμῖν· δότε οὖν μοι κτῆσιν τάφου παρ’ ὑμῖν, καὶ θάψω τὸν νεκρὸν μου ἐκ τοῦ ὀφθαλμοῦ μου. (Γένεσις 23:4, LXX)

The *troparion* dedicated to Abraham — “You have heard of Abraham...” — continues the pedagogical logic of the *Great Canon*, articulating a second stage of conversion: from the departure from sin to the attainment of spiritual estrangement. The Greek text (*Τὸν Ἀβραὰμ...*) combines narrative clarity with symbolic density, reconfiguring the patriarch’s figure into an ascetic archetype.

The connection between the hymn and its biblical source lies in the way the *troparion* encapsulates Abraham’s condition of “strangeness” (Gn 23:4: “*a stranger and a sojourner*”), which the New Testament reinterprets as the believer’s attitude of “awaiting the city which is to come” (Heb. 11). Strangeness thus becomes the paradigm of detachment from the world through fasting and repentance.

The Canon transposes this physical status into a spiritual principle: the Christian, like the patriarch, must live in the world yet not be of the world, seeing himself always as a traveler toward the city to come (Simeon, 49).

Lexical analysis reveals the intensity of hymnographic discourse. The verb ἤκουσας (“you heard”), derived from ἀκούω, carries both epistemological and moral significance: it denotes not mere auditory perception but the acceptance of responsibility that comes with knowledge. The hymnographer opens the *troparion* with a discreet reproach, the soul has heard Abraham’s example but has failed to follow it, thereby drawing a distinction between *hearing the faith* and *doing the faith*, a key theme throughout the *Great Canon*.

The phrase καταλιπόντα γῆν πατρῶαν (“who left the land of his fathers”) echoes almost verbatim the divine command of Genesis 12:1 (“Go forth from your land...”). The verb καταλείπω (“to leave behind completely”) suggests an ontological rupture rather than a mere geographical relocation: Abraham separates himself from his past, from inherited customs and the securities of the old world. In allegorical interpretation, γῆ πατρῶα (“the land of his fathers”) becomes the image of inherited sin and of attachment to human traditions that restrict spiritual freedom.

The term μετανάστης (“stranger,” “sojourner”) imparts to the *troparion* a deeply ascetic character. In Greek, its meaning extends beyond that of a mere foreigner: μετανάστης denotes one who has changed his dwelling and lives in a continual state of pilgrimage. In the monastic tradition, this condition is known as ξενιτεία, the virtue of voluntary estrangement from the world, a mark of spiritual maturity. To become a “stranger” means no longer to identify with the transient order of the world, but to live as a pilgrim of the heavenly homeland. Abraham himself exemplifies this total detachment from material things: “Abraham was also a stranger and did not possess even a single span of land; and when he needed a place for burial, he purchased it with money.” (St. Basil the Great 1986, 206)

Through the expression τοῦτου τὴν προαίρεσιν μιμησαί (“follow his choice”), Saint Andrew introduces the ethical concept of προαίρεσις, a fundamental term in the theology of Maximus the Confessor, signifying free will directed toward the good (St. Maximus the Confessor 1983, 75). The soul is urged not only to imitate Abraham’s action but also the moral intention behind it: the freedom to choose obedience. Thus, the *troparion* shifts the focus from the historical event to the inner act of decision, defining repentance as a movement of the will toward God.

The biblical correspondence is twofold. In Genesis 23:4, Abraham says to the sons of Heth, “I am a stranger and a sojourner among you” (πάροικος καὶ παρεπίδημος εἰμι ἐγὼ παρ’ ὑμῖν), acknowledging his earthly pilgrimage. The Epistle to the Hebrews

(11:13–16) develops this self-understanding into an entire *ethos* of faith: “*They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth... desiring a better, that is, a heavenly country.*” The Canon translates this theology of holy alienation into an ascetic pedagogy: once the soul has left Haran—that is, sin—it must learn to live detached from the world, oriented toward the “city to come.”

The hymnographer thus constructs a grammar of separation and inner motion. Repentance emerges as a twofold movement, *ἀπόβασις* (departure) and *μετανάστασις* (estrangement) which defines not only the beginning of conversion but its ongoing dynamic.

Abraham, therefore, becomes the paradigm of the spiritual man: one who dwells in the world yet does not belong to it, who hears God’s call and transforms his life into an unceasing pilgrimage toward the heavenly homeland. The sixteenth *troparion* of the third Ode is not merely a moral evocation but a true catechesis on the calling to holy estrangement, inner freedom, and the faithful perseverance of a heart that never ceases to journey forward.

The Hospitality at the Oak of Mamre – Faith Rewarded

The third *troparion* dedicated to Abraham evokes the scene of the Lord’s appearance at the Oak of Mamre (Gn 18:1–15):

“You have heard of Abraham, my soul, who once left the land of his fathers and became a stranger; do you also follow his choice.” (*Ode III, troparion 86*)

Ἐν τῇ δρυϊ τῇ Μαμβρῆ, φιλοξενήσας
ὁ Πατριάρχης τοὺς Ἀγγέλους,
ἐκκληρώσατο μετὰ γῆρας τῆς ἐπαγγελίας
τὸ θή. (Ωιδὴ Γ΄, τροπάριον πζ΄)

The text alludes to the episode at the Oak of Mamre — Gn 18:1–15 (the hospitality at the oaks of Mamre and the announcement of Isaac’s birth); Gn 21:1–7 (the birth of Isaac “in old age”); Rom 4:18–21 and Heb 11:11–12 (the confirmation of the promise and the birth through faith).

“And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre... three men were standing in front of him. The Lord said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” (Gn 18:1–2, 10, ESV)

«Ὡφθη δὲ αὐτῷ ὁ Θεὸς πρὸς τῇ δρυϊ τῇ Μαμβρῆ...καὶ ἰδοὺ τρεῖς ἄνδρες εἰστήκεισαν ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ.» «λέγει· ἐπιστρέφων ἐπιστρέψω πρὸς σὲ κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν τοῦτον εἰς ὥρας, καὶ Σάρρα ἢ γυνή σου ἔξει υἰόν.» (Γένεσις 18:1–2, 10, LXX)

The *troparion* “At the oak of Mamre...” represents the culmination of the Abrahamic theme in the *Great Canon*. While the preceding *troparia* describe the soul’s movement from sin toward holy estrangement, this hymn shifts the focus to *active faith*, a faith expressed through love and rewarded by grace. The scene at Mamre, drawn from *Genesis* 18, becomes a theological icon of synergy: man offers hospitality, and God responds by fulfilling His promise.

The phrase ἐν τῇ δρυϊ τῇ Μαμβρῆ (“at the oak of Mamre”) reproduces with precision the Old Testament toponym (ἐπὶ τῇ δρυϊ τῇ Μαμβῆ), preserving the solemn resonance of the theophanic setting. In biblical symbolism, δρυς (“oak”) represents stability and encounter, while Μαμβρῆ designates the space of divine epiphany. In hymnographic interpretation, this place of encounter becomes a metaphor for the human heart: the soul purified from passions becomes the “oak” under whose shade God manifests Himself.

The participle φιλοξενήσας (“having shown hospitality”), derived from φιλοξενέω (“to welcome strangers with love”), reveals a fundamental theological virtue. Φιλοξενία (“hospitality”) is not merely an act of human kindness, but a mode of *theandric communion*. In welcoming the three guests, Abraham welcomes God Himself in a prefiguration of the Trinitarian revelation (St. John Chrysostom 2003b, 109). Saint Paul reinterprets this gesture as paradigmatic for faith: “By showing hospitality to strangers, some have entertained angels unawares” (Heb 13:2).

Furthermore, the verb ἐκληρώσατο (“received by inheritance”), derived from κληρώω, expresses the gratuitous nature of divine grace rather than any human merit. Abraham’s faith is rewarded “in old age” (μετὰ γῆρας), at a time when nature can no longer bring forth fruit. This biological impossibility underscores the miraculous character of divine fulfillment: what human power cannot accomplish, grace brings to completion.

The phrase *τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τὸ θήραμα* (“the game [or prey] of the promise”) is among the most poetic expressions in the entire *Canon*. The noun *ἐπαγγελία* refers to the divine promise, while *θήραμα* (“game,” “prey”) introduces an ascetic metaphor: the fruit of grace is “hunted” through faith and perseverance. Thus, the “*game of the promise*” becomes a symbol of the inner fruit of the soul, the spiritual Isaac, born through obedience and grace.

This *troparion* condenses, in a verse of remarkable density, the entire theology of *Genesis* 18: the act of hospitality followed by divine blessing. The hymnographer omits narrative details, preserving instead the theological essence, faith expressed through love invites the presence of God and brings forth the fruit of the promise.

Saint Andrew of Crete thereby articulates a theology of reciprocity: welcoming love becomes the doorway to grace. The encounter at Mamre is transfigured into a hymnographic parable of synergy, God reveals Himself where man responds with hospitality, that is, with the loving openness of the heart (Simeon, 49).

Hence, the *Great Canon* presents the episode at Mamre as a symbol of the meeting between humanity and God. Abraham, the patriarch of faith, becomes the image of the receptive soul who, opening the tent of his heart, partakes in the divine blessing.

Patriarch Isaac – The Voluntary Sacrifice and Christological Prefiguration

The Sacrifice of Isaac – Obedience and Foreshadowing of the Cross

The *Great Canon* of Saint Andrew of Crete refers briefly but profoundly to the figure of Isaac, closely connected to the episode of his sacrifice on Mount Moriah.

“Understanding Isaac, O wretched soul, as one who was mystically offered as a new sacrifice, a whole burnt offering to the Lord, follow also his will.”
(Ode III, troparion 88)

Τὸν Ἰσαὰκ, τάλαινα, γνοῦσα, ψυχὴ μου, καινὴν θυσίαν, μυστικῶς ὀλοκαρπούμενον τῷ Κυρίῳ, μίμησαι αὐτοῦ τὴν προαίρεσιν.
(Ὡιδὴ Γ΄, τροπάριον πη΄)

The biblical text alludes to the episode that took place on Mount Moriah

He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” (Gn 22:2, ESV)

«Λάβε τὸν υἱόν σου τὸν ἀγαπητόν, ὃν ἠγάπησας, τὸν Ἰσαάκ... καὶ ἀνάγαγε αὐτόν... εἰς ὄλοκάρπωσιν.»
(Γένεσις 22:2, LXX)

The *troparion* dedicated to Isaac in the *Great Canon* of Saint Andrew of Crete (“Understanding Isaac”) is one of the most lucid expressions of Byzantine typological theology. Through a dense, theologically charged poetic structure, the hymnographer transforms the biblical episode of Isaac’s sacrifice (Gn 22:1–13) into an icon of the Cross and of humanity’s complete submission to God (Simeon, 49).

Lexical analysis reveals the symbolic richness of the text. The placement of the name *Τὸν Ἰσαάκ*/on Isaac at the beginning has an invocative function, signaling the centrality of this figure within the economy of salvation. In Saint Andrew’s reading, Isaac becomes a prophetic image of Christ, while the episode of his sacrifice prefigures the offering on Golgotha. The phrase *Τάλαινα, ψυχή μου*/O wretched soul introduces the penitential tone characteristic of the *Great Canon*: the hymnographer confronts the sinful soul with the example of obedient purity, calling it imitation and to spiritual shame.

The participle *Γνοῦσα*/understanding, derived from *γινώσκω* (“to know”), denotes experiential knowledge rather than mere intellectual awareness. The soul is invited to “understand mystically” (*μυστικῶς*) the meaning of sacrifice, transcending the literal sense of the narrative. In the expression *Καινὴν θυσίαν*/a new sacrifice, the adjective *καινός* (“new”) carries both Eucharistic and Christological resonance: Isaac’s sacrifice becomes the figure of the “new sacrifice” offered by Christ, through which the Old Law is fulfilled in the Law of Grace (St. Gregory of Nazianzus 2004, 55).

Through the formula *Μυστικῶς ὀλοκαρπούμενον τῷ Κυρίῳ*/mystically sacrificed burnt offering to the Lord, the hymnographer reinterprets the biblical term *ὀλοκάρπωσις* (“burnt offering”) in a spiritual sense. The participle *ὀλοκαρπούμενον* emphasizes the total gift of being: Isaac is not merely the external victim but the embodiment of perfect obedience and total self-offering. The adverb *μυστικῶς* adds the typological dimension—the historical event becomes a symbol of the Cross, while *τῷ Κυρίῳ* underscores the theocentric orientation of the entire act: everything is offered *to the Lord*.

The imperative *Μίμησαι αὐτοῦ τὴν προαίρεσιν*/Follow his will concludes the *troparion* with an ethical exhortation. The term *προαίρεσις*, essential to patristic ethics, denotes *free will*—that is, the faculty of choice (*τὸ ἀντεξούσιον*) directed toward the good rather than mere passive intention (St. Maximus the Confessor 1983, 75). Saint Andrew urges the soul to imitate not only Isaac’s outward deed but his inner disposition: the freedom to choose obedience. Thus, the *troparion* shifts the focus from external sacrifice to the interior act of decision, defining repentance as the movement of the will toward God.

By correlating these meanings, Saint Andrew of Crete constructs a poetic theology of inner sacrifice. Isaac becomes both the type of Christ and the icon of the repentant soul that “offers itself as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (*Rom* 12:1). This *troparion* thus harmonizes perfectly with the ascetic theology of the *Great Canon*, where sacrifice is transformed into a metaphor for *metanoia*. Saint Andrew shifts the emphasis from the physical shedding of blood to the burning of one’s own will, recognizing therein the true “new sacrifice.” In this light, Isaac appears not only as an Old Testament figure but as the model of the soul that, through obedience and love, offers itself wholly to God.

Patriarch Jacob in the Great Canon

Saint Andrew dedicates to Jacob whom he often calls “*the greatest among the patriarchs*” a series of *troparia* distributed between the third and fourth odes of the *Great Canon*. The life of this patriarch is interpreted allegorically, step by step, as a veritable ascetic itinerary of the soul’s correction. In what follows, we will analyze the principal themes: the vision of the heavenly ladder, the struggle to obtain the two wives, the allegory of Leah and Rachel, the wrestling and the vision of God, and finally the birth of the twelve patriarchs.

Jacob’s Ladder – The Ascent of Virtues and the Elevation of the Mind

In the *Great Canon*, Jacob’s dream at Bethel (*Gn* 28:10–17) is mentioned twice. First, in a *troparion* of the third ode, the hymnographer reproaches the soul with these words:

“You know the ladder of Jacob, my soul, which was shown reaching from earth up to heaven; why have you not established a firm step—the right faith?” (*Ode III, troparion 91*)

“The ladder that the great among the patriarchs once saw, O my soul, is the revelation of active ascent and of the elevation of the mind; therefore, if you wish to live in action, in knowledge, and in the uplifting of thought, renew yourself.” (*Ode IV, troparion 103*)

The biblical text alludes to the ladder that Jacob saw.

“And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” (Gn 28:12, 17, ESV)

Τὴν Ἰακώβ κλίμακα ἔγνωσ, ψυχὴ μου, δεικνυομένην ἀπὸ γῆς πρὸς τὰ οὐράνια· τί μὴ ἔσχεσ, βάσιν ἀσφαλῆ, τὴν εὐσέβειαν.
(Ὡιδῆ Γ΄, τροπάριον 4α΄)

Τὸν Ἰσαάκ, τάλαινα, γνοῦσα, ψυχὴ μου, καινὴν θυσίαν, μυστικῶς ὀλοκαρπούμενον τῷ Κυρίῳ, μίμησαι αὐτοῦ τὴν προαίρεσιν.
(Ὡιδῆ Γ΄, τροπάριον πη΄)

«Καὶ ἐνυπνιάσθη· καὶ ἰδοὺ κλίμαξ ἑστηριγμένη ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ἧς ἡ κεφαλὴ ἤπτετο τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, καὶ ἄγγελοι τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀνέβαινον καὶ κατέβαινον ἐπ’ αὐτῆς.»
«καὶ ἔφη· φοβερὸς ὁ τόπος οὗτος· οὐκ ἔστιν τοῦτο ἀλλ’ ἢ οἶκος Θεοῦ, καὶ αὕτη ἡ πύλη τοῦ οὐρανοῦ.»
(Γένεσις 28:12,17, LXX)

The symbol of Jacob’s ladder stands among the most profound and complex images of spiritual ascent in the *Great Canon*. In the *troparion* “*The ladder that Jacob saw*,” the hymnographer condenses the entire theology of human synergy with divine grace and of continual *metanoia*.

The central term *κλίμαξ* (*ladder*) refers to the episode in *Genesis* 28:12–17, where Jacob beholds in a dream a ladder set between earth and heaven, upon which the angels of God ascend and descend. In the hymnographic text, this image becomes an ascetic metaphor for the union of the two realms: man ascends through the virtues, while grace

descends through the angels, revealing the synergy between human freedom and divine operation (Simeon 2012, 56). This symbol would later inspire Saint John Climacus' *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, where κλίμαξ becomes a technical term for spiritual progress (St. John Climacus 2013). Thus, the *troparia* of the *Great Canon* are integrated into a broader ascetic tradition: the image of the ladder becomes a synthesis of the synergy between virtuous praxis and contemplative theoria. The Canon poetically expresses this theology, urging the soul to ascend toward heaven like the patriarch Jacob.

The participial phrase *δεικνυομένην ἀπὸ γῆς πρὸς τὰ οὐράνια* (“which appeared from the earth toward the heavens”) conveys the dynamic of ascent inherent in the ladder—its dual movement of rising and descending represents the path of virtue and contemplation. The hymnographer systematically unfolds this dynamic in four stages: *Βάσις ἀσφαλῆς* (*firm step*) – the dogmatic foundation, the stability of true faith; *Πρακτικὴ ἐπίβασις* (*ascent through deeds*) – moral praxis, the purification from passions; *Γνωστικὴ ἀνάβασις* (*ascent through knowledge*) – the enlightenment of the mind; *Θεωρία* (*contemplation*), the vision and union with God.

The phrase *πράξει καὶ γνώσει καὶ θεωρίᾳ βιωῶν* (“to live through action, knowledge, and contemplation”) encapsulates, in a Trinitarian rhythm, the entire patristic anthropology of spiritual ascent. This triadic structure *praxis, gnosis, Theoria*, forms the foundation of Eastern Christian spiritual theology, from Evagrius Ponticus (Evagrius Ponticus 1947, 37) to Maximus the Confessor (St. Maximus the Confessor 1983b, 259), for whom the spiritual life is an ordered ascent: from action to knowledge, and from knowledge to the vision of God.

The imperative *ἀνακαινίσθητι* (*be renewed*) concludes the *troparion* with an appeal to the continual renewal of the mind. The noun *ἀνακαινίσις* denotes regeneration through repentance, an ongoing renewal that perpetually restarts the soul's journey toward God. Within the logic of the *Great Canon*, renewal is not a single act but a dynamic state, a constant re-beginning of the spiritual ascent.

Jacob thus emerges as the model of spiritual synthesis: if Abraham represents the beginning of faith and Isaac the virtue of obedient sacrifice, Jacob embodies perfection, the fulfillment of humanity's ascent to God. In Saint Andrew's interpretation, Jacob's ladder becomes the icon of the Church itself: the space where heaven and earth meet, where grace and human striving converge, and where the soul rises step by step toward divine vision. “Be renewed, my soul” thus becomes not merely a poetic exhortation but

the spiritual formula of an unceasing *metanoia*, transforming the entirety of human existence into a ladder ascending to God.

Jacob's Toils – Patience in Attaining the Promise

Another *troparion* (Ode IV, 102) recalls the hardships that Jacob endured in the service of his uncle Laban, laboring to obtain as wives his two daughters:

“The patriarch endured the heat of the day for lack, and suffered the frost of the night; in all his days he made gain, shepherding, toiling, and serving, that he might win his two wives.”
(Ode IV, *troparion* 104)

Τὸν καύσωνα τῆς ἡμέρας ὑπέμεινε δι’ ἔνδειαν ὁ Πατριάρχης, καὶ τὸν παγετὸν τῆς νυκτὸς ἤνεγκε, καθ’ ἡμέραν κλέμματα ποιοῦμενος, ποιμαίνων, πυκτεύων, δουλεύων, ἵνα τὰς δύο γυναῖκας εἰσαγάγηται.
(Ὡιδὴ Δ’, τροπάριον ρδ’)

The biblical text alludes to the image of the heat of the day and the cold of the night.

“There I was: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes.” (Gn 31:40, ESV)

Ἐμέρας ἀνέτρεχέ με καύσων, καὶ παγωνιὰ νυκτὸς, καὶ ἀπήχθετο ὁ ὕπνος ἀπὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν μου.»
(Γένεσις 31:40, LXX)

This description is inspired by Jacob’s confession to Laban: “By day the heat consumed me” (Gn 31:40), together with the account that Jacob served seven years for Leah and another seven for Rachel (Gn 29:20–28). The hymnographer unites these elements, presenting Jacob as the “patriarch” who steadfastly endured the burning heat and the chill of night, faithfully laboring as a shepherd and, at the same time, “gaining” under Laban’s harshness (Simeon 2012, 56). The expressions *καύσων* (“heat”) and *παγετός* (“cold”) evoke the extremes of physical suffering, transformed in the *troparion* into symbols of the inner trials and spiritual hardships of the soul.

The *anagogical* interpretation of this *troparion* lies in the parallel between Jacob’s two wives and the two peoples united in Christ. Just as Jacob became the husband of two sisters, so too the Lord is revealed as the Bridegroom of two people. Leah, weak

in her eyes, prefigures the ancient people of Israel, who, though blessed, “closed their eyes” and did not wish to see God. Leah bore six sons, symbolizing the fullness of the Law. Rachel, beautiful and pleasing to the sight yet barren, represents the Gentiles, loved for their purity of heart but unfruitful until the coming of grace. Through divine blessing, Rachel bore two sons and died in childbirth, a sign of the birth of faith among the nations through suffering and renewal. The Lord united these two peoples, transforming them into one Church. The once-barren people became fruitful through spiritual regeneration, giving birth to many children by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, through Rachel’s two sons, Joseph and Benjamin, are prefigured the Old and the New Testaments (Acachie 2021, 174).

The spiritual meaning of the *troparion* is evident: patience and daily labor are indispensable for attaining what is truly precious. The verb *ὑπέμεινε* (“he endured”) in the Greek text defines Jacob’s essential attitude an active, not passive, endurance, implying continuous *ἐνέργεια πνευματική*, or “spiritual energy.” This *ὑπομονή* (patience, steadfast perseverance) becomes the icon of the ascetic’s disposition: faithfulness to promise through persistent effort.

The sequence of participles, *ποιμαίνων* (“shepherding”), *πυκτεύων* (“struggling like an athlete”), and *δουλεύων* (“serving”) forms a crescendo of spiritual exertion. *Ποιμαίνων* suggests the careful tending of one’s inner flock, the guarding of thoughts and virtues; *πυκτεύων*, from *πυκτεύω* (“to box”), evokes the unseen combat against passions; *δουλεύων* expresses humble obedience, the service of one who labors for divine blessing.

Just as Jacob did not shrink from fourteen years of toil to win his beloved wives, so too the Christian must persevere through long and arduous labor in the spiritual life to obtain the virtues and blessings promised by God. In the context of Great Lent, this *troparion* becomes a hymn to ascetic endurance: fasting, vigils, and ceaseless prayer, harsh as the day’s heat and cold as the night, must be borne with hope in spiritual reward. The *Canon* thus teaches that nothing of eternal value is achieved without toil. Furthermore, Jacob’s designation here as the “patriarch who labored for both women” anticipates the next allegorical reading of Leah and Rachel, completing the cycle of his typological and moral significance.

Leah and Rachel – The Allegory of the Active and Contemplative Life

The *troparia* of the *Great Canon* moves here from historical narrative to explicit symbolic interpretation. The following *troparion* (Ode IV, 105) directly explains the allegory:

“Through the two women, understand action and knowledge within the higher vision: through Leah, action, for she was the mother of many children; and through Rachel, contemplation, for she toiled greatly. For without toil, neither action nor contemplation, O my soul, can be perfected.”

(*Ode IV, troparion 105*)

Γυναίκας μοι δύο νόει, τὴν πράξιν τε καὶ τὴν γνῶσιν ἐν θεωρίᾳ· τὴν μὲν Λεϊάν, πράξιν ὡς πολύτεκνον· τὴν Ῥαχήλ δὲ, γνῶσιν ὡς πολύπονον· καὶ γὰρ ἄνευ πόνων, οὐ πράξις, οὐ θεωρία, ψυχὴ κατορθωθήσεται.

(Ὡιδῆ Δ΄, τροπάριον ρε΄)

The biblical text alludes to the two dimensions of spiritual life — the active life (*praxis*) and the contemplative life (*theoria*).

“When the Lord saw that Leah was hated...” (Gn 29:31, ESV)

“When Rachel saw... ‘Give me children...’ (Gn 30:1, ESV)

Ἰδὼν δὲ Κύριος ὅτι μισουμένη ἡ Λεῖα, ἤνοιξε τὴν μήτραν αὐτῆς...»

Ῥαχήλ δὲ εἶπεν... δός μοι τέκνα...» (Γένεσις 29:31–35; 30:1–2, LXX)

In Saint Andrew of Crete’s interpretation, the biblical episode of Jacob’s marriage to Leah and Rachel (Gn 29) transcends its historical dimension, becoming an archetype of spiritual life. The hymnographer transforms the patriarch’s two wives into symbols of the two complementary paths of salvation: *praxis* (the active life, the life of deeds) and *theoria* (the contemplative life, the life of knowledge). This typological reading, rooted in the Origenist tradition and developed by the Cappadocian Fathers and Saint Maximus the Confessor (St. Maximus the Confessor 1983, 315), becomes, in the *Great Canon*, a hymnographic treatise on ascetic anthropology.

The introductory expression *Διὰ τῶν δύο γυναικῶν* (“through the two women”) establishes the allegorical framework: Leah and Rachel are no longer historical figures, but stages of the spiritual journey. *Λεῖα – πρᾶξις* represents the moral and active life, the

labor of the bodily virtues, while *Ῥαχήλ – θεωρία* signifies the luminous contemplation of the purified mind. The hymnographer makes this symbolism explicit through the phrase *δηλονότι πράξεως καὶ γνώσεως* (“that is, for action and for knowledge”), clarifying the correspondence between moral practice and spiritual understanding (Simeon 2012, 56).

The verbs *ἐκοπίασας* and *ἐμόχθησας* (“to toil,” “to labor”) express the dynamics of ascetic exertion: Jacob “*toiled wisely*” (*σοφῶς ἐκοπίασας*), that is, he worked with discernment, maintaining equilibrium between action and contemplation. In contrast, the exhortation *πλούτισον ἔργοις καὶ ἐννοίαις* (“enrich yourself in deeds and thoughts”) unites the moral (*ἔργα*) and intellectual (*ἐννοίαι*) spheres, revealing that perfection lies in their harmonious integration.

The hymnographer does not set Leah and Rachel in opposition, but in synthesis: *Ἄς ἀμφοτέρας ἐκτήσατο εἰς ἐργασίαν καὶ θεωρίαν* (“he acquired both for work and for contemplation”). The verb *κτάομαι* (“to acquire,” “to make one’s own”) indicates fruitful possession and spiritual maturity: Jacob does not renounce one for the other but unites them within a single movement of the soul. On a symbolic level, his “marriage” to the two wives becomes an icon of the soul’s union with the virtues, a synergy between body and mind.

From a biblical perspective, the episode of the *two seven years of service* (*Gn 29:20, 30*) receives both numerical and spiritual interpretation. The first period, for Leah, signifies the work of deeds, moral and ascetic effort; the second, for Rachel, represents knowledge and contemplation, the fruit of prior purification. The number seven, traditionally associated with fulfillment, denotes the perfection of virtues, while its doubling suggests the completeness of the two dimensions of spiritual life.

Theologically, Saint Andrew of Crete achieves here a mystical synthesis of the Eastern Ascetic tradition. Leah represents the beginning of life in Christ, the struggle of deeds, fasting, prayer, and obedience, her “weak eyes” symbolizing a limited yet fruitful vision. Rachel, beautiful but long barren, embodies contemplation, which bears fruit only after the body has been subdued and purified through ascetic labor.

In succinct form, these *troparia* articulate the essence of Orthodox ascetic anthropology: the human person is called to labor in action, to be illumined in knowledge, and to unite with God in contemplation. Jacob thus becomes the image of the perfected soul, which through toil, discernment, and divine illumination, attains

participation in both the active and the contemplative life, anticipating eternal rest in the divine light.

“Keep Vigil... and Become Perfect, Like the Greatest of the Patriarchs”

In a subsequent *troparion* (Ode IV, 106), Saint Andrew of Crete returns to the example of Jacob himself, exhorting the soul to vigilance and perfection:

“Keep vigil, O my soul, and become distinguished—perfect—like the greatest among the patriarchs, that you may acquire action together with lofty thought, become a mind that beholds God, ascend with your intellect into the ineffable cloud, and make yourself a merchant of great things.” (*Ode IV, troparion 106*)

Γρηγόρησον, ὦ ψυχή μου, ἀρίστευσον
ὡς ὁ μέγας ἐν Πατριάρχαις· ἵνα κτήσῃ
πράξιν μετὰ γνώσεως· ἵνα χρηματίσῃς
νοῦς ὁρῶν τὸν Θεόν, καὶ φθάσῃς τὸν
ἄδυτον γνόφον ἐν θεωρίᾳ, καὶ γένη
μεγαλέμπορος.
(Ὡιδὴ Δ΄, τροπάριον ρς΄)

The biblical text alludes to watchfulness (vigilance) — both physical and spiritual.

“Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel...”

“For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered.” (Gn 32:28–30, ESV)

«οὐ κληθήσεται ἔτι τὸ ὄνομά σου Ἰακώβ
ἀλλὰ Ἰσραήλ...»

«Εἶδον Θεὸν πρόσωπον πρὸς
πρόσωπον, καὶ ἐσώθη μου ἡ ψυχή.»
(Γένεσις 32:28–30, LXX)

The *troparion* „Γρηγόρησον, ὦ ψυχή μου...” “Watch, O my soul...” marks the culmination of Patriarch Jacob’s spiritual journey in the *Great Canon* of Saint Andrew of Crete and stands among the most profound expressions of Byzantine mystical theology. In this hymn, the author condenses the entire ascetic experience of the Old Testament into a call to vigilance and perfection addressed to the human soul.

The imperative “Γρηγόρησον” (*Watch*) introduces the fundamental *neptic* theme of the Eastern Christian tradition: the state of inner attention, unceasing prayer, and continual struggle against the passions. This vigilance evokes the nocturnal scene of Jacob’s wrestling with the angel (Gn 32:24–30), that decisive moment in which man,

through persevering prayer, prevails and receives a new name, Israel, meaning “*he who has seen God*.”

The hymn thus exhorts the soul to remain wakeful, recalling Jacob’s long night of struggle with “the Man/Angel” (*Gn 32:24*), during which he contended until dawn and was finally blessed. In this context, vigilance becomes the symbol of spiritual wakefulness, unceasing prayer and interior warfare. Through such watchfulness, the soul is invited to become “distinguished,” that is, *chosen* and *perfected*, like the patriarch. The purpose of this vigil is to acquire both *praxis* (active virtue) and *theoria* (higher contemplation)—the two “spouses” represented earlier by Leah and Rachel.

What follows is a list of spiritual gifts to which the soul must aspire, once again illustrated through the example of Jacob. The soul must become a God-seeing mind (*νοῦς ὁρῶν τὸν Θεόν*), since Jacob not only beheld the angels ascending and descending the ladder but also wrestled with God Himself at Peniel, exclaiming: “*I have seen God face to face*” (*Gn 32:30*). Jacob thus experiences, in figure, the *vision of God*; likewise, the purified soul attains illumination through the grace of divine encounter. As the commentary on the text observes, one is called to become a “*God-seeing intellect*” (*νοῦς θεόπτῆς*), like Jacob, who saw the angels of God ascending the ladder, and at its summit, God Himself.

The next phrase “*to reach the ineffable cloud*” (*νεφέλη ἄδυτος*), introduces the apophatic dimension of mystical theology. The “unspeakable cloud” recalls the luminous darkness of the divine presence into which Moses entered on Mount Sinai (*Ex 24:15–18*), and resonates with the teaching of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, for whom God is known only in “divine darkness.” Here, Saint Andrew calls the soul to the highest form of mystical theology: to penetrate the ineffable mysteries of divine light that lie beyond human comprehension.

The final exhortation, “*become a merchant of great things*” (*μεγαλέμπορος*), draws upon the Gospel parable of the merchant seeking fine pearls (*Mt 13:45–46*). It evokes the image of the ascetic as a spiritual trader who exchanges earthly labors for heavenly treasures, gathering the riches of virtue and grace through persistent effort.

Taken together, this *troparion* outlines a fivefold anagogy: vigilance (*γρηγόρησις*), deed (*πράξις*), knowledge (*γνώσις*), vision (*θεωρία*), and apophatic contemplation (*μυστικὴ θεολογία*). These stages delineate the movement from ascetic struggle to the illumination of the mind and, finally, to communion with God. Through the example of Jacob, “the greatest among the patriarchs,” Saint Andrew of Crete presents the image of

the *deified human being*: one who, through vigilance and prayer, comes to see God “*face to face*” and to partake of the true wisdom of divine grace.

The Twelve Patriarchs – The Mystical Ladder of Virtues

Finally, the *Great Canon* concludes its series of references to the patriarch Jacob with a symbolically rich image that recalls the birth of his twelve sons:

“Having begotten the twelve patriarchs, the greatest among the patriarchs has made them for you, O my soul, a mystical ladder for the ascent of deeds—his sons being as foundations and steps, as wisely ordered degrees of spiritual ascent.” (*Ode IV, troparion 107*)

Τὸς δώδεκα Πατριάρχας, ὁ μέγας ἐν Πατριάρχαις παιδοποίησας, μυστικῶς ἐστήριξέ σοι κλίμακα, πρακτικῆς ψυχῆ μου ἀναβάσεως, τοὺς παῖδας, ὡς βάρθρα, τὰς βάσεις, ὡς ἀναβάσεις, πανσόφως ὑποθέμενος. (Ὡιδὴ Δ΄, τροπάριον ρζ΄)

The biblical text refers to the *enumeration of Jacob’s sons*, the twelve patriarchs of Israel, who became the founders of the twelve tribes.

“Now the sons of Jacob were twelve. (Gn 35:22–26, ESV)

„οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰακώβ δώδεκα...” (Γένεσις 35:22–26, LXX)

The text of the *Great Canon* draws upon the biblical account of the birth of Jacob’s twelve sons and interprets it typologically: each son, and by extension each tribe, becomes a “step” in the soul’s ascent toward God. In this reading, Jacob’s progeny forms a moral ladder, a symbolic image of spiritual progress and inner transformation.

The final *troparion* in the cycle dedicated to the patriarch Jacob (“*Τοὺς δώδεκα Πατριάρχας...*”) provides both a symbolic and theological conclusion to the Jacobic sequence within the *Great Canon* of Saint Andrew of Crete. The birth of the twelve sons is no longer presented as a historical event, but as a symbol of spiritual perfection: the sons are transformed into *ἀναβάσεις* (*steps*) and *βάσεις* (*foundations*) of the spiritual life. Saint Andrew does not enumerate them individually; instead, he offers the comprehensive vision of a ladder of virtues, a mystical edifice in which the moral ascent of the soul mirrors the perfection of the chosen people (Simeon 2012, 58).

The image of the patriarch “ὁ μέγας ἐν Πατριάρχαις” (*the great among the patriarchs*) thus becomes paradigmatic. Jacob is no longer merely the father of the twelve tribes, but the archetype of the fruitful soul—one who has transformed the gift of revelation into the fruit of good works. His “sons” represent, in symbolic language, the births of virtues: faith, patience, righteousness, mercy, purity, discernment, and other moral qualities that constitute the architecture of the renewed human being.

In Saint Andrew of Crete’s vision, Jacob embodies the complete synthesis of the soul’s spiritual journey: he *receives the ladder* (revelation), *performs the deed* (Leah), *attains contemplation* (Rachel), *keeps vigil and beholds God* (Peniel), and finally *bears the fruits of virtue* (the twelve sons). The *troparion* of the twelve patriarchs therefore serves as the theological epilogue of the entire Jacobic cycle. Here, spiritual ascent becomes fruit, and the fruit itself becomes a new ladder, an endless anagogy leading the soul ever upward into the infinite mystery of God.

Conclusion

This study has highlighted the remarkable way in which the *Great Canon* of Saint Andrew of Crete employs the figures of the biblical patriarchs for pedagogical and spiritual purposes. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, central figures of the Old Testament, are presented not as mere historical characters, but as living icons of the soul’s struggle with sin and its ascent toward God.

From a hymnographic standpoint, Saint Andrew masterfully weaves together the scriptural text—especially in the Greek version of the Septuagint, which he frequently quotes or paraphrases—with poetic expression and allegorical interpretation rooted in patristic tradition. Philological nuances are evident in his use of key scriptural terms and images: “*departure*” from Haran as an exodus from sin, “*becoming a stranger*” as ascetic alienation, “*burning with fire*” as total self-offering, “*ladder*” as the summit of the virtues, and “*mind seeing God*” as the illumination of the intellect. These linguistic and theological elements reveal the author’s profound familiarity with both Scripture and the spiritual exegesis of the Fathers.

From a literary-theological perspective, the analyzed *troparia* outline a complete itinerary of repentance. The soul is first called to come out of sin and trust in God, like Abraham; then to be ready for self-sacrifice, like Isaac; and finally, like Jacob, to walk the long and arduous path of struggle through which it acquires both virtuous deeds (*praxis*) and divine contemplation (*theoria*). The patriarchs serve both as positive examples,

Abraham's faith, Isaac's obedience, Jacob's perseverance, and as moral counterpoints to be avoided, such as indifference and hardness of heart, personified in Esau.

On a historical and spiritual level, the *Great Canon* reflects the homiletic method of the Fathers: the *actualization* of biblical history within the personal experience of the believer. Saint Andrew takes events from sacred history and brings them into the liturgical present of the praying soul, addressing it directly in the second person. This internalization of salvation history transforms biblical narrative into a personal dialogue of conscience and repentance. The patriarchs thus become witnesses and intercessors in the court of the heart: together with prophets, apostles, and righteous men, they admonish, guide, and inspire the soul toward conversion.

The patriarchs, progenitors of the chosen people, also embody the beginnings of a new spiritual journey: Abraham represents the beginning of faith, covenant, and divine promise; Isaac, the sacrificial obedience that prefigures the New Covenant in Christ; Jacob, in whom faith becomes vision, bearing the divine name *Israel*, "he who has seen God."

Through them, the *Great Canon* proclaims that a return to God is always possible, no matter how deeply one has fallen, if one follows the path of faith, obedience, and perseverance exemplified by these scriptural models.

At the same time, the richness of imagery, from the *oak of Mamre* to the *ladder reaching to heaven*, endows the text with poetic beauty and symbolic depth that nourish not only the intellect but also the heart of the believer in prayer.

Thus, our analysis confirms that the presence of the patriarchs in the *Great Canon* of Saint Andrew of Crete is neither incidental nor ornamental, but structural and essential. They form a true bridge between the Old and New Testaments within the consciousness of the Church. Liturgically and spiritually, they become our companions and mediators in repentance, guiding the soul step by step on its ascent back to God.

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