CLASSICAL PHILOSOPHY IN THE *HOMILY ON THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD* BY ANDREW OF CRETE

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ABSTRACT. In his *Homily on the Transfiguration*, Andrew of Crete (ca. 660-740) employs a number of concepts, metaphors, and expressions from classical philosophy, including the dialogues of Plato, Aristotle's concept of the unmoved mover, and symbolic arithmology of the Neopythagoreans, known to Andrew by mediation of Philo of Alexandria.

KEYWORDS: Andrew of Crete, Transfiguration, Plato, Unmoved Mover, numerology, Philo of Alexandria.

Andrew of Crete is primarily known in the Eastern Christian tradition as the author of the *Great Canon*. However, Andrew was also a prolific homilist; over forty homilies, sermons and *enkomia* are known under his name, many of which remain unedited.[1] According to the biographical data from his *Vita*, he was born in Damascus ca. 660 and received there his initial education in grammar, rhetorics, and the basics of philosophy. The next stage of his life was spent in Jerusalem where Andrew became tonsured. In 685 he was sent with the ecclesiastical mission to Constantinople. Andrew remained in the capital city and was ordained a deacon at St. Sophia. Before 711 he became the Archbishop of Gortyna in Crete, and died in 740. His life connects the Holy Land, Constantinople, and Crete in the early eighth century and the beginning of the Iconoclastic Controversy in Byzantium, associated with the revival of Christian Platonism.[2]

[1] On Andrew of Crete, see Vailhe 1901–1902, Eustratiades 1934–1935, Mercenier 1953, Auzépy 1995. On the literary activity of Andrew of Crete, see Cunningham 1998.

[2] For detailed argumentation, see Baranov 2003, Baranov and Lourie 2009, and Baranov (forthcoming). On Andrew's theological stance in relation to religious images, see Cunningham 2014, 55-57.

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The treatment of the Transfiguration account in his homily on this feast (CPG 8176) makes it interesting to look at the sources of Andrew of Crete and his methods of using the preceding tradition, which may reveal not only his own theological views, but also the intellectual atmosphere in the Byzantine Dark Ages when he was formed as a writer and theologian. This study will focus on identification of concepts, metaphors, and expressions from classical philosophy, which Andrew chose to embed in his essentially moral and mystical interpretation of the Transfiguration account.

The topic of the Transfiguration drew the attention of Byzantine theologians not only by the need to harmonize the accounts of the event in different Evangelists, but also by its exciting scope of events surrounding the vision of Christ in His true divine form, which opened the door to discussing the questions of the vision of God in wider mystical and philosophical terms.[3] This is exactly what Andrew of Crete aimed to do. He embarks from the Gospels' account to demonstrate the spiritual and intellectual vision of the Word of God Incarnated in His true divine form, inaugurating this message in the beginning of the *Homily* with the theological pun – by his self-emptying the Word (Λόγος) removed the "cloak of irrationality (ἀλογία)" from those who desire to ascend to the high mountain with purified minds, gave them "the robe of spiritual virtue" (PG, vol. 97, col. 932c) making them ready to accompany Christ in his ascent to the Mount.

The opposition of intellectual contemplation and material life emphasized in the introductory passage is reminiscent of the Platonic epistemological system; however, it is too generic to claim any adoption of or inspiration by the texts of Plato. Yet, Andrew of Crete then goes on to say that the Logos wishes those "who have been given the spiritual wings of sincere thoughts" (*Ibid*., transl. Daley 2013, 181) to ascend with him. The metaphor of the wings which assist in lifting the soul from the "material shadowy life" to the "ascent of what conforms to nature, towards what is above nature" reminds us of Plato's famous metaphor of the human soul likened to a chariot driven by a pair of winged horses from *Phaedrus*. The soul, which loses its wings through "vileness and evil", settles down and takes the earthly body, becoming a mortal living being.[4] In another passage of the *Homily*, Andrew unequivocally refers to *Phaedrus*, admonishing those strong in faith to help their weaker brothers by giving them wings through instruction and love:

> He [a true disciple of Christ – V.B.] would point out to reason the emotions and our sensuality (θυμὸν καὶ ἐπιθυμίαν) – those twin horses of the passible part of our soul –

[3] On the Patristic exegesis of the Transfiguration, see McGuckin 1986, Veniamin 1991, Andreopoulos 2005, and Anthony 2014.

[4] Plato, *Phaedrus* 246c–e.

> by reasonable argument, and give them wings, and a new start in the spirit, towards what is right.[5]

Andrew immediately continues this admonition with another famous metaphor of Plato, that of the prisoners in the Cave from the *Republic* VII, weaving together the image of the enslaving yoke of the Law from the Epistle to the Galatians and the image of fetters on the legs and necks of Plato's prisoners, both preventing people from true and free vision of the truth:

> Going beyond this, he would approach the one who is held back by the darkness of ignorance, who is prevented from seeing the light of infallible knowledge, and taking a thoughtful stand in a dark place, he would break the bond of ignorance, letting the Word illuminate that person's reason like an angel's. He would lead that person to the light of a free way of life in Christ, a life no longer "held captive by the yoke of slavery," (Gal 5:1) nor prevented from making its way towards the beauties of heaven by the power of understanding.[6]

Since this description is given in the text of the *Homily* in the context of spiritual help to the weaker brothers, Andrew seems to follow up upon the idea of Plato's protagonist from the description of the Cave – the person who became free, went out from the Cave, saw the true source of light, and then returned to the darkness of the Cave to liberate other prisoners.

Explaining that the human being is twofold and consists of a soul and material body which also is in need of help, and thus the help must also be twofold and be directed to both, not just to the soul, Andrew goes on to qualify in Plato's vein that "Matter bears in itself a principle of disorder and inconsistency (καὶ παρ' ἑαυτῆς ἡ ὕλη φέρει τὸ ἄτακτον καὶ ἀνώμαλον), or is subjected to attacks and misfortunes from outside sources."[7]

If Andrew did use the metaphor of the Cave for describing spiritual progress and liberation from the realm of material captivity to sin to the freedom of contemplative life in God, there is another passage with less explicit literal dependence on Plato but with clearly the same conceptual framework of the soul from the *Phaedrus*, who ascends to see the "truly existing essence, with which all true

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[5] *PG*, vol. 97, col. 944B, transl. Daley 2013, 190.

[6] *PG*, vol. 97, col. 944C, transl. Daley 2013, 190.

[7] *PG*, vol. 97, col. 945A, transl. Daley 2013, 190. In Plato, matter which is always changing is bound to the realm of becoming and is the "object of opinion with the aid of unreasoning sensation, since it becomes and perishes and is never really existent" (*Timaeus* 27d-28a, trans. W.R.M. Lamb); "receptacle, and as it were the nurse, of all Becoming" (48e-49a, trans. W.R.M. Lamb; cf. 52ab). On the principle of matter in Plato, see McMullin 1963, Borodai 1982, Borodai 1988, and Gill 1987.

knowledge is concerned."[8] The allusion to Plato's Cave with the prisoners may also explain the quote from Jeremiah, which otherwise may seem arbitrary:

> Praising God in full measure is beyond even the angels, who beheld the first rays of his brilliance, and ceaselessly circle around the Godhead, which rules over all things. So it surely surpasses what the divine Jeremiah calls "the prisoners of earth" (Lam. 3: 34), those on whom the darkness of this miserable and wretched and heavily burdened body bears down. Often we are not permitted to form even a vague image of those blessed intelligible visions, since our intelligence is dominated by its attraction towards sensible things, and therefore our hearts find it difficult to desire what is ultimately desirable.[9]

This situation is not the ultimate ontological dualism, but the free choice of those who choose not to be receptacles of grace generously outpoured by God upon all creation. For expressing this idea Andrew seems to use the Platonic idea of participation of beings in the Good:

> For even if nothing in the world is without a share in the Good, still not all of it is shared in an absolute way. Rather, as much as is accessible to the participants comes into their possession, in whatever way it can; and this comes about, through the highest Goodness, by flashes of unlimited grace and brilliance, coming forth and being poured on all things.[10]

Andrew must have had access to this concept via some Neoplatonic source since his treatment implies certain differentiation between the receptacles of grace in accordance with their capacities, which is a corollary of the Neoplatonic ontologies of the hierarchic structure of beings depending on their proximity to the One and remoteness from the material realm of sensible material beings and multiplicity.

Yet, in his *Homily on the Transfiguration* Andrew of Crete seems not to limit himself to Platonic sources. In two instances, we can detect the use of Aristotelian and Neopythagorean concepts. Thus, for his description of the Christological union and the confirmation of the divinization of human nature in Incarnation, which become completely revealed in the Transfiguration, Andrew emphatically uses the Aristotelian notion of the Unmoved Mover with the philosophical con-

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[8] Plato, *Phaedrus* 247c.

[9] PG, vol. 97, cols. 933C-935A, transl. Daley 2013, 183.

[10] *PG*, vol. 97, col. 949B, transl. Daley 2013, 194. On the participation in Beauty according to Plato, cf. "if anything is beautiful besides absolute beauty it is beautiful for no other reason than because it partakes of absolute beauty; and this applies to everything" (*Phaedo* 100c, transl. H. N. Fowler); see also *Symposium* 211b and Schindler 2005.

notations it implied in its original source,[11] the unchanging first cause of every movement and change:

> Only the otherness of the Unmoved is preserved immovable in this Mystery (μόνης τῆς ἀκινήτου διαφορᾶς, ἀκινήτου φυλαττομένης τῷ μυστηρίῳ), because of the unconfused union, according to which the more perfect element dominates.[12]

In using the expression, Andrew departs from the concept of the "moving God" of pseudo-Dionysius who otherwise was one of the important sources for the mystical expressions and imagery Andrew used in the *Homily*. Andrew intends to juxtapose the "inter-Trinitarian" supernatural eternal being of the Logos, first born from the Father beyond time and space, and temporal dispensatory being of the Word and his second birth in time and space in the Incarnation without altering his Godhead and divine Sonhood.[13]

The idea on the unmoved God could have been mediated to Andrew by Philo's exegesis of the seventh day of creation, the day when God rested. In his *De opificio mundi* Philo thus discusses the symbolical meaning of the number seven, not resulting from multiplication and not producing any numbers up to ten by its own multiplication ("begetting" in Philo's terms).

> It is the nature of 7 alone, as I have said, neither to beget nor to be begotten. For this reason other philosophers liken this number to the motherless and virgin Nikè, who is said to have appeared out of the head of Zeus, while the Pythagoreans liken it to the chief of all things: for that which neither begets or is begotten remains motionless; for creation takes place in movement, since there is movement both in that which begets and in that which is begotten, in the one that it may beget, in the other that it may be begotten. There is only one thing that neither causes motion nor experiences it, the original Ruler and Sovereign. Of Him 7 may be fitly said to be a symbol. Evidence of what I say is supplied by Philolaus in these words: "There is, he says, a su-

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[11] Cf., for example, *Physics* VIII, 6, and *Metaphysics* XII, 3, 1070a; 6, 1071b, 1072ab, and esp. "…there is some substance which is eternal and immovable and separate from sensible things; and it has also been shown that this substance can have no magnitude, but is impartible and indivisible <…>; and moreover that it is impassive and unalterable" (1073a, transl. H. Tredennick). On the notion of the unmoved mover in Aristotle, see Lang 1978; Merlan 1946, Stewart 1973, Solmsen 1971, Defilippo 1994, Gotthelf 1976, and Olson 2013.

[12] *PG*, vol. 97, col. 933AB, transl. Daley 2013, 182.

[13] Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* IX, 9, 15 (Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita (1990), 213). It should be mentioned that in this passage on the movement of God, Dionysius in his paradoxical language does speak one time about "the movements of the unmoving God" (κινήσεις θεοῦ τοῦ ἀκινήτου), probably following the concept of spiritual movement of the Neoplatonists (see Gersch 1973).

> preme Ruler of all things, God, ever One, abiding, without motion, Himself (alone) like unto Himself, different from all others (Ἔστι γάρ, φησίν, ἡγεμὼν καὶ ἄρχων ἁπάντων θεὸς εἷς ἀεὶ ὤν, μόνιμος, ἀκίνητος, αὐτὸς αὑτῷ ὅμοιος, ἕτερος τῶν ἄλλων)."[14]

The idea of the ungenerated and ungenerating God of Philo could not be accepted by Andrew who believed in the Christian Begetting Father and the Begotten Son. Thus, the concept of the unmoved is applied by Andrew to the Godhead as the common substance of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Andrew's acquaintance with the arithmology of Antiquity is revealed in the passages on the symbolical meaning of the number six. All authors who interpreted the Transfiguration, faced the exegetical problem: according to Matthew and Mark, Christ led his chosen disciples to the Mountain after six days, while Luke mentioned eight days. Andrew is not satisfied with the classical and simple explanation that Luke counted the day before and day of the Transfiguration, while Matthew and Mark counted the days in between. Andrew entwines the six days of Matthew and Mark, six days of creation from the Book of Genesis, and six types of charity Christ commanded his disciples to give to those in need as to Himself (Mt. 25: 34-36). For bringing into accordance these three points, Andrew focuses on the symbolical perfection of number six as their common denominator, and turns to the Neopythagorean and Philonian interpretation of the number:

> The number six, say the experts on these things, is the only perfect number within the first ten [integers] (Τὸν ἕξ ἀριθμόν φασιν οἱ περὶ ταῦτα σοφοὶ, μόνον τῶν ἐντὸς δεκάδοστέλειον εἶναι), because it consists of and is completed by its own parts. "Christ, the Wisdom and the Power of God" (1 Cor 1:21), the Logos who is above all goodness, "the only Son, who exists turned towards the Father's bosom" (John 1:18), in six days created all that appears before us, as well as the human person, consisting of the immaterial soul and the matter of the body. And clearly we can count six forms of love, than which no good thing is higher or is even its equal. [15]

Enumerating six forms of love one should give to his neighbor in need, Andrew concludes: "So that love alone, working itself out through its own six parts, constitutes the most perfect and purest kind of practical philosophy among the human race, the goal of which, they say, is the good, which is God himself."[16]

In Antiquity, perfect numbers were those equal to the sum of their factors (including the number one). Therefore, number six, whose parts were one, two, and three, was considered a perfect number. Philo of Alexandria thus explains the

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[14] Philo, *De opificio mundi,*. XXXIII, 100 (Philo 1981, 78-81).

[15] *PG*, vol. 97, col. 940C, transl. Daley 2013, 187.

[16] *PG*, vol. 97, col. 941B, transl. Daley, 2013, 188.

symbolic meaning of the days of creation on the basis of the Neopythagorean numerology, which is an important part of his exegetical method[17]:

> He says that in six days the world was created, not that its Maker required a length of time for His work, for we must think of God as doing all things simultaneously, remembering that "all" includes with the commands which He issues the thought behind them. Six days are mentioned because for the things coming into existence there was need of order. Order involves number, and among numbers by the laws of nature the most suitable to productivity is 6, for if we start with 1 it is the first perfect number, being equal to the product of its factors (i. e. 1 x 2 x 3), as well as made up of the sum of them (i. e. 1 + 2 + 3), its half being 3, its third part 2, its sixth part 1. We may say that it is in its nature both male and female, and is a result of the distinctive power of either. For among things that are it is the odd that is male, and the even female. Now of odd numbers 3 is the starting-point, and of even numbers 2, and the product of these two is 6. For it was requisite that the world, being most perfect of all things that have come into existence, should be constituted in accordance with a perfect number, namely six (ἔδει γὰρ τὸν κόσμον, τελειότατον μὲν ὄντα τῶν γεγονότων, κατ' ἀριθμὸν τέλειον παγῆναι τὸν ἕξ).[18]

However, the righteous path for Andrew is not just doing good deeds, but through charitable work acquiring divine love, which would drive a person to spiritual progress and advancement to what is truly good. Andrew keeps in mind that the good deeds which Christ speaks about are tested at the Great Judgment, and those who excel in them, receive the blessed destiny of the righteous sheep – everlasting spiritual advancement in the glorious Kingdom of the eighth day (thus returning to eight days before the Transfiguration according to Luke), which is only a continuation of the life of love and spiritual progress here on earth:

> Knowing that the material and visible world, which came to be in six days, is the type of what lies far above perception, one will see the invisible clearly through the visible, transporting the beauties of the perceptible things harmoniously into the luminous loveliness of the spiritual world. And so one will have creation guiding his intelligence towards its own source. As a result, through both types of activity – the ascetical, I mean, and the contemplative – after one has reached perfection in them both (a perfection, signified by the six divine commandments and also by the six days in

[17] See Runia 1995.

[18] Philo, *De opificio mundi*, III, 13–14 (Philo 1981, 12–15). See also Philo, *De opificio mundi,* XXX, 89 (*Ibid*., 73), cf. Plato's "Now for divine begettings there is a period comprehended by a perfect number" (*Republic*, 546b). On the use of numerology in Philo, see Moehring 1978, Berchman 2013, 179-180 on #6, 191-192 on #8, Kalvesmaki 2013, https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/6304.2-generating-the-world-of-numbers-pythagorean-and-platonist-number-symbolism-in-the-first-century; accessed on May 19, 2018.

which the visible world came to be), one will be able to understand clearly what is the mystery of the eight days.[19]

Given the conceptual and not textual correspondences, it is difficult to say whether Andrew had access to Philo directly or via some intermediary source. Origen, whose exegesis of the Transfiguration from the Commentary on Matthew Andrew was likely to have known, mentions six as "the perfect number,"[20] but does not explain the reasons of its perfection, while Clement of Alexandria in the Philonic vein explains its perfection by the middle position between 2 and 10, and multiplication of the male number 3 and female number 2.[21] However, Philo was also not an obscure figure at the time when Andrew lived. Several sources of the late seventh and eighth century quote or mention Philo, sometimes in positive terms.[22]

The analysis of Andrew's conceptual framework of the *Homily on the Transfiguration* shows that classical philosophical texts and ideas continued to be used by Byzantine thinkers and to supply them with vivid imagery even in the "Dark Ages" of Byzantium. Thus, in his *Homily on the Transfiguration*, Andrew of Crete employs a number of concepts, metaphors, and expressions derived from almost all main philosophical schools of Antiquity, masterfully harmonizing them with his moral and mystical interpretation of the Transfiguration. His Platonic sources provided vivid metaphors of imprisonment of people by their vain material attachments and the loss of wings enabling the human soul to rise towards God as the source of all goodness and true knowledge. The Aristotelian concept of the unmoved mover is applied to emphasize the essentially Chalcedonian nature of Andrew's Christology, while symbolical arithmology gives Andrew the opportunity to intertwine the Gospel's account with his mystical and ethical exhortation. For Andrew the vision of God-made-man in his divine form given to the Apostles on the Mount is a template for the righteous path of life of each Christian who

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[19] *PG*, vol. 97, col. 945B, transl. Daley 2013, 191. Cf. Basil, *On the Holy Spirit,* XXVII, 66 on the eighth day as the future unchanging state after the end of the present time (Basile de Césarée 1947, 237b).

[20] "ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἐν ἓξ ἡμέραις, τελείῳ ἀριθμῷ, ὁ σύμπας γεγένηται κόσμος" (Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, XII, 36; *Origenes Matthäuserklärung* 1935, 151, 1-2). On Origen's use of Philo, see van den Hoek 2000.

[21] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, VI, 139, 2. For the symbolical interpretation of numbers six to eight in Clement of Alexandria, see *Stromateis*, VI, 139,1-140, 6, and 143, 1-145, 3.

[22] David Runia lists the following sources of the late 7th–9th centuries: Anastasius Sinaïta (ca. 610–ca. 700) *Duae Viae; Chronicon Paschale* (ca. 650); John of Damascus (c. 675–ca. 750) *Sacra Parallela*; Photius (ca. 820–891) *Bibliotheca*; George the Monk) (ca. 830–ca. 890) *Chronicon*; Anastasius incertus (9th century) *In hexaemeron* (Runia 1994, 120-121).

excels in this life in love through the works of mercy to those in need, and the knowledge of God through natural contemplation, and moves over to enjoy glory and vision of God of the eighth day in the Heavenly Kingdom.

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