

ROMANOS THE MELODIST: ‘ON ADAM AND EVE AND THE NATIVITY’: INTRODUCTION WITH ANNOTATED TRANSLATION¹

J.H. Barkhuizen
(University of Pretoria)

Abstract

Since the complete English translation of the works of Romanos (poetic homilies usually called ‘kontakia’) by M. Carpenter,² which is not only out of print but is also marred by frequent errors, two English translations³ have been published, but both contain only a small selection of his works. The present kontakion is not included in either of these two recent translations, and the purpose of this article is therefore to provide such a translation, including a short introduction in which the main characteristics of the homily and the outline of its argument are provided. The translation is accompanied by notes covering various aspects including references to Biblical citations or allusions. This early homily deals with Adam and Eve and their request to Mary to defend their cause after they have heard in Hades of the birth of Christ. Apart from this reference to the birth of Christ, the plot of the homily has no relation to any Biblical episode, and is therefore an invention of the preacher-poet himself. Adam and Eve are therefore presented as symbols of fallen mankind rather than biblical figures: as the new Adam and Eve they represent the new creation in Christ. The homily focuses mainly on the Virgin in her role as universal intercessor.

1. Introduction

This verse homily⁴ pictures Adam and Eve who, at the birth of Christ, come to the cave and beg Mary to defend their cause. The plot of the homily is therefore not based on Scripture but is a free invention of the preacher,⁵ and Adam and Eve are depicted not so much as biblical persons but as symbols of humanity celebrating the mystery of redemption. The principal theme of the homily is therefore not so much the nativity itself as the salvific efficacy of the event for fallen humanity, presented by the two personages of Adam and Eve,⁶ as G. Gharib writes in this connection: ‘Romano illustra in modo originale nell’ inno il tema caro al pensiero patristico del Nuovo Adamo e della Nuova Eva.’⁷ At the same time it is clear that Romanos *primarily* focuses on the role of the Virgin as ‘co-rédemptrice et de médiatrice universelle,’⁸ and this overall central position of Mary is confirmed by the refrain (ἡ κεχαριτωμένη). Finally, although the primary event around which the plot is constructed relates to the birth of Christ and its effect for mankind, Romanos also has the Christ-child

point briefly, but importantly, to his suffering, thus confirming the idea that the homily is more concerned with the salvific outcome of the birth of Christ for mankind than with the nativity itself.

The homily is – but for a few lines of narrative – dramatically constructed, i.e. it is almost completely presented in dialogue mode. This dramatic dimension – the use of monologue and dialogue – is one of the most salient features of the kontakia or verse homilies of Romanos in general. Although they were never composed to be staged,⁹ one of ‘the most impressive techniques to fulfil the homiletic demands’ of the genre of verse homily, ‘is Romanos’ skill in presenting his scriptural or hagiographical material in a dramatic context.’¹⁰ By means of interior monologue, dialogue and even interior dialogue,¹¹ Romanos succeeded admirably in creating dramatic elaborations of scriptural passages or historical events, and even free inventions or fictitious creations of scenes.¹² The latter fact is also true of the present verse homily on Adam and Eve, containing only a few allusions to scriptural events related to the topic of the homily. This dramatic dimension of the kontakion can be traced back to both its Syrian precursors¹³ and the preceding Greek prose homilies.¹⁴ But in both cases what is remarkable of Romanos’ technique of dramatising his material, is the sobriety and brevity with which he constructs his plot or argument in comparison with his precursors.¹⁵

The dramatic plot of the present homily consists of the following scenes:
[In the **Prooimion** Romanos (addressing Mary) highlights the essential aspects connected with the birth of Christ: his divine and human nature/origin, the star, the Magi, the angels and the shepherds].

Scene 1 (strophes 1-2) - taking place IN the cave of Bethlehem.

The homily opens with the praise of the Christ-child on the part of Mary: she first refers to her immaculate bringing forth of Christ, and then to the power she carried in her womb. This calls for earth, sea and earthlings to rejoice with her.

Scene 2 (strophes 3-7) – taking place IN Hades.

Eve, having heard the praise of Mary, shares this joy with Adam: the coming of the one who is the prefigured Saviour, the branch blooming forth from the staff of Jesse, whose fruit she will eat and not die! Adam should awake from his sleep and contemplate with her the defeat of the serpent (3-4);

Adam awakes but immediately expresses doubt when he realises that it was the voice of a woman that has awoken him. He fears another form of deceit (5);

Eve assures him that the old has gone and a new order has arisen with the birth of Christ, and that he should follow her to Mary (6);

Adam responds by stating that he smells the scent of paradise, and agrees to accompany her to Mary, the new paradise.

Scene 3 (strophes 8-11) –taking place OUTSIDE the cave of Bethlehem.

Adam addresses Mary begging her to pity her ‘parents’ and have compassion on their tears and poverty (8);

Eve also adds her prayer that Mary should remove her shame, referring at the same time to Adam’s reproach because of what she has done to him and mankind (9).

Mary’s compassion moves her to respond to Adam and Eve with words of hope: she is going as mediator and ambassador to her son, and they are thus urged to cease weeping (10-11).

Scene 4 (strophes 12-18.6) – taking place IN the cave.

Mary now addresses her son and puts the case of Adam and Eve before him (12);

The Christ-child assures her that it is through her and on account of her that he has come to save them. This is the reason why he became flesh through her, and is now undergoing the humiliation of being born as man, he who is the Perfect born of the Perfect (13-14);

Consequently Mary enquires after his plan and intention (15);

The Christ-child then points to his future passion, which he will suffer voluntarily for the sake of mankind (16-17.4);

When Mary expresses her deep concern, Christ assures her of the necessity of his suffering, and refers to the fact that his death will be merely sleep, and that he will arise and renew earth and those of the earth. He urges her to proclaim this to Adam and Eve (17.5-18.6).

Scene 5 (strophe 18.7-11) – taking place OUTSIDE the cave.

Mary goes outside to Adam and Eve and brings them the good news (18.7-11).

2. Characterisation

Within the context of the dramatic nature of his homilies, Romanos’ sense of theatre – especially on the level of characterisation - is underlined by W.L. Petersen as one of several reasons for the fame of his kontakia. It would be apt to quote him in full in this regard. He writes:

‘By means of their speech, Romanos endowed his characters with a hitherto unknown psychological depth. His characters reveal their motives, doubts and fears; they are more than one-

dimensional “teaching aids” or foils for divine action. The people in Romanos’ hymns are, above all, believable psychological portraits. The result is that the hymns take on an extraordinary immediacy for the listener. A drama is being played out in his mind; he hears the voices, has the physical setting described, and is now invited to enter the scene: “Come! Let us accompany the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary!” is the opening of Romanos’ *Hymn on the Annunciation* (IX.1.1).¹⁶

In this homily it is not the preacher himself, but one of his characters (Eve) that *indirectly* invites the listener to approach with her and Adam the cave of Bethlehem, where Mary and the Christ-child are present. And what follows is a brief outline of the psychological profile and symbolical function of the figures of Adam and Eve, Mary and the Christ-child within the homily.

The drama - ‘put on scene’ as it were by the word-images of the homily - transfers the audience to **locations** which are not only far removed from each other in time and space, but are also painted in *contrasting colours*. This *antithetical dimension* finds its basic formulation in Eve’s words addressed to Adam (in strophe 6.3-4): “For the old order has gone,/ and Christ, the child of Mary, points to an all new order” – a formulation that echoes and imitates Paul’s statement in II Cor. 5:17 (“... the old order has gone, a new order has already begun.”). It is this antithesis between the old and new order that pervades the whole of the homily and serves as point of view from which the various **characters** on the ‘verbal stage’ of the homily are portrayed.

(a) Firstly *Hades*, where Adam and Eve are sleeping the sleep of death, is contrasted with *the cave at Bethlehem*, where Christ has been born from the womb of Mary: he is the fruit of joy that will take away the sorrows of mankind.

(b) Secondly the audience, on hearing the dialogue between Adam and Eve, and that between them and Mary, obtain as it were glimpses of *paradise of old*: they hear of - and through hearing can visualise - the deception, the disobedience, the transgression, also the victory and joy of the serpent, and the sorrowful outcome for Adam and Eve. And this paradise of old is also contrasted – just as Hades has been - with *the cave of Bethlehem*, where Adam and Eve perceive the new paradise, i.e. Mary, from whom the tree of life has been produced, a tree the fruit of which does not bring death, but

liberation from the curse of paradise of old.

(c) Thirdly – when the Christ-child addresses his mother and explains to her how he will save mankind – he paints a grim scene that lies ahead, that of *Golgotha with its cross* – a scene that would be in sharp contrast with *the cave and the joy* it is now celebrating. For he was destined to be crucified – although voluntarily – in order to finally realise the salvation of Adam and Eve, i.e. mankind.

It is against such a background of contrasting scenes that Romanos paints his characters, whose words and actions reflect the antithetical dimension of the plot:

(a) It is **Eve** who first hears from the depths of Hades the voice of Mary addressing her child in the cave of Bethlehem, calling upon earthlings to put their sorrows aside, for her child is the destroyer of that corruption which mankind suffered in paradise of old. And it is fitting that Eve should be the first to hear of the birth of Christ, since it was she who first sinned and brought God's curse upon Adam and mankind and caused them to fall into sin. And as opposed to her listening to the voice of the serpent, who wounded her and overpowered her, she now hears the voice that brings joy to mankind. As opposed to the detrimental advice she gave Adam and which caused him to fall into this abyss, she now brings him the joyful news of the birth of Christ – of the coming of spring, the symbol of new life. And although Adam at first is filled with mistrust at hearing her voice, he can in the end rejoice with her. As opposed to the joy of the serpent for having overpowered Eve, when he could raise his head against her in triumph, she can now glory in the fact that the serpent is crawling and fleeing away in humiliation in the light of the birth of Christ.

(b) The same picture of the old vs. the new is reflected in the character of **Adam**. His ears, blocked previously by disobedience, are now receiving news that will change his situation. As opposed to the voice, the instrument, that long ago deceived him in paradise, he now hears the sweet melody of salvation. As opposed to the rags he is wearing, and which the serpent has woven for him, he can now beg the virgin to change his poverty and renew his life, which has grown old in Hades.

Thus the aspects of pain and shame on the part of Eve because of what she brought upon mankind, and the mistrust and reproach on the part of Adam because of the delights he has lost and the misery and poverty he finds

himself in as a result thereof - because he has listened to the voice of a woman - are aspects of their characterisation that point to their homiletic function as symbols of mankind: its misery and yearning for salvation and liberation, which is then fulfilled by the fact that in both cases shame and pain, mistrust and reproach are turned into joy because of the birth of Christ.¹⁷

(c) The contrasting colours in which Romanos has painted Adam and Eve and the locations in which they figure (Hades and paradise of old as opposed to the cave and the new paradise, i.e. Mary), are continued in the scene between **Mary** and the Christ-child, and between **Mary**, Adam and Eve.

(i) On the one hand the audience is confronted right from the beginning of the homily with Mary's immaculate conception and her perpetual virginity, for the whole of the first strophe is devoted to this aspect of her character: she became pregnant without human intervention, gave birth to Christ contrary to nature, and after giving birth to Christ her virginity is still intact. She refers to her womb as 'immaculate', and is therefore rightly called a mother without blemish. Christ (=the divinity) was in her like a fire, but he did not consume her.

As such Mary is depicted as the exalted one. This is expressed in various ways: she is depicted, for example, as the one who rules the world and has power over all because of Christ. Her giving birth has wounded the serpent that has wounded mankind, and she gave birth to the liberation of the curse. She is therefore aptly called the new paradise as opposed to paradise of old, the most favoured woman who carried in her womb the very tree of life producing the fruit of life. And Eve consequently calls her the hope of her soul (and that of mankind) and therefore begs her to remove her shame and restore her. Mary acts upon their request positively and refers to herself as the ambassador to her son and mediator for the sake of mankind. When she addresses the Christ-child on behalf of mankind, she consequently refers to her exaltation by him, and to the fact that he gave her every form of glory. Christ responds by saying that he is saving mankind *on account of her and through her*. At the end of the homily Christ empowers her to act as sovereign and tell the good news to Adam and Eve.¹⁸

(ii) But on the other hand, in contrast to Mary's exalted state, Romanos also underlines her humility, the fact that she not only is the holy one, the immaculate mother of Christ, but also his servant, and in a spiritual sense

his child, the one who praises and worships him as her God and Master. She refers to her humble state before him and the fact that she is merely a mortal in whom he, Christ, came to dwell as divine fire. Before him she can but bow her head and entreat him and offer prayers to him as God in the manger, her Creator. And when she prays to him she begs him not to act in anger, for she is but clay before her Creator, from whom she received grace. And significantly, at the end of the homily, after Christ has told her how he is to suffer for the sake of mankind, he calls upon her not to weep over what *she does not understand and is ignorant of* - Romanos thus clearly and fully underlining her humility as human mother of the divine Christ.

Allied to this is her compassion: Eve calls upon Adam to follow her to the cave and approach Mary, for, is her motivation, Mary will show compassion. Adam consequently begs Mary to have pity on him, her plaintive forefather, to have compassion with his tears, and kindly incline her ear to his lamentations. Their expectation is fulfilled, and Romanos describes Mary – in terms of endearment, typical of a human mother - as one with tears in her eyes, acting as a compassionate mother of a compassionate child (Christ), and calling upon Adam and Eve to cease their lamentations. And through her compassionate nature she is able to console Eve and her companion.

(d) The fact that the **Christ-child** is explaining events to Mary as if he is an adult, as the Christ already walking the earth, moving towards his final destiny, points to Romanos' conception of his perfect divinity which he has revealed right from the first moment of his life in the flesh. And this forms the very basis for drawing contrasting images that pertain to the present, the future, and the past:

(i) As regards the present situation, *Christ, the child in the manger, is contrasted with Mary*, his human mother: Christ is her God, he is the immutable Word, born of the Father before the dawn. He is Master, Creator and the Holy One, the one not seen by the cherubim. In his compassion, and as Lover of mankind, he became flesh through her. And apart from her exalted state by being the immaculate mother of the Saviour, she is but mere clay, and in a spiritual sense, his child, whom she glorifies and to whom she prays in all humbleness (see the description of Mary's humility above).

(ii) Secondly: Looking at future events, Romanos has the Christ-child paint a dark contrast between *the joy in the cave*, the joy of mankind, spring that symbolises the new order, the renewal of man and earth - and *his suffering on the cross*. Various contrasts or antitheses between what he is now in the cave and what he will have to suffer on the cross are described in strophes 16 and 17, to which the reader is referred.

(iii) Thirdly: Looking back to the past, Romanos (in strophe 14) has the Christ-child draw a contrasting picture between *himself and Adam and Eve*: he is wrapped in swaddling clothes on account of Adam and Eve, whose nakedness was covered with clothes made from skin, symbol of their banishment from paradise. At the same time Christ also points to the cave as a sign of his humiliation, but which became for him something desirable, whilst Adam and Eve rejected the delights of paradise for the sake of sinful corruption.

3. Imagery

The following important images occur in the homily:

(a) Mary is described as the vine that produced the grape or fruit of life (Christ) without natural labour (human intervention), and her arms, in which she carries the Christ-child, are like the vine branches on which the grapes grow (1.1-3). In strophe 7.11 Adam refers to Mary as the one who caused the fruit of mankind's life to blossom forth. Mary, addressing Christ, refers to him as her grape, which has blossomed forth from her (for she is the vine) and prays that the lawless (Jews) may not crush him (strophe 17.6-7), while Eve, in strophe 3.10-11, refers to him as the fruit on the branch produced by the staff of Jesse, a fruit which she can and will eat without dying, for it is the fruit of life.

(b) In strophe 4, 6 and 7 the image of the swallow and spring refers to mankind's recreation. First Eve tells Adam that he should awake from his deep sleep in Hades for she has heard the swallow singing to her at the dawn of day (4.1-2). She calls upon him to smell the moisture of Christ, who blows like a sweet breeze, freeing them from the severe heat in Hades (6.5-8). Adam then responds by saying that he recognises the spring and the scent of paradise. This paradise becomes Mary, who carried in her womb the tree of life (7.1-4).

(c) Mary is especially characterised as ambassador (10.8) and mediator before her son (11.8), bringing before her son her prayer for mankind, like a court petition before an emperor, which he then subscribes, i.e. acknowledges and accepts (15.1-2). Linked to this image is the idea that she is an empress, who rules the world, for since she carried Christ's power in her womb, she has power over all (2.3-4). At the close of the homily Christ furthermore calls upon her to proclaim to all the fact that he has renewed earth and those on earth, and that she should be a sovereign owing to this fact (18.4-6).

(d) In strophe 4.5-6 we have a medical image in which Mary is addressed as the one who heals the wound of mankind (Adam and Eve) through Christ her son.

(e) In another image popular in patristic and Byzantine texts, Christ is the fire which came to dwell in Mary, who is perceived as the bramble bush of Exod.3:2 ff. but which was not consumed by Christ as the divine fire (11.3-4).

(f) A musical image is connected with Adam and Eve. Adam, awakening from his sleep by the voice of Eve, refers to it as a sweet song, a charming melody softly sung, but the sound does not please him, for it is the voice of a woman, which he fears! But, he says, the sound pleases him, for it is clear, but it is the instrument that agitates him, for it (i.e. Eve) is a deceptive instrument, which has caused him disgrace and poverty (5.5-11).

(g) Finally, and also connected with the world of Adam and Eve, is the clothing image: Adam, addressing Mary, points to his ragged clothes, which the serpent has woven for him: they are the clothes of (spiritual) poverty, and he begs her to change this (8.9-11). This poverty is the result of the fact that the serpent stripped them naked of all honour, and his wish is that his and Eve's nakedness should be covered again with honour (=salvation) (12.9-11). This image also occurs in strophe 14.3-4 where the Christ-child refers to him being wrapped in swaddling clothes on account of Adam and Eve who long ago wore clothes made of skin – the latter obviously a reference to their transgression and subsequent banishment from paradise (as has already been pointed out above).

4. Translation with notes

Prooimion¹⁹

1. He who was born without a mother, born of the Father before the dawn,²⁰
2. today²¹ became flesh²² on earth, born of you without a father.²³
3. Therefore the star proclaims the good news to the Magi,²⁴
4. and angels, together with shepherds, praise²⁵
5. your conception without (human) sperm,²⁶ most favoured one.²⁷

Strophe 1

1. Having produced the grape without natural labour,²⁸ the vine²⁹
2. carried it in her arms like on branches,³⁰ and said:
3. “You, my fruit, you, my life,
4. you, from whom I know that I am what I was,³¹ you, my God:
5. when I see the seal of my virginity intact,
6. I proclaim you as immutable Word that became flesh.
7. I know of no procreation, I know you as destroyer of corruption,³²
8. for I am pure, though you came forth from me.
9. For you left my womb as you found it,
10. having preserved it intact.³³ For this reason the whole creation³⁴
11. rejoices³⁵ with me, calling to me: ‘Most favoured one’.

Strophe 2

1. “I do not disregard your grace of which I have experience, Master.
2. I do not impair the dignity I received when I gave birth to you.
3. For I rule the world.
4. Since I carried your power in my womb, I have power³⁶ over all.
5. You changed my poverty through your condescension³⁷
6. when you humiliated yourself³⁸ and exalted my race.
7. Earth and sea,³⁹ rejoice together with me!
8. For I carry in my arms your Creator.
9. Earthlings, put aside your sorrows
10. seeing the joy I produced⁴⁰ from my immaculate
11. womb,⁴¹ and was called: ‘Most favoured one.’”

Strophe 3

1. And then, while Mary was praising the one to whom she gave birth,
2. and worshipped the infant whom she alone brought forth,
3. Eve, she who amidst birth pangs
4. brought forth children,⁴² heard it, and with joy called to Adam:

5. “Who has now made resound in my ears that which I was long hoping for?
6. A virgin giving birth to the liberation of the curse,⁴³
7. whose voice alone put an end to my difficulties,
8. and whose offspring⁴⁴ wounded the one who wounded me.⁴⁵
9. It is she whom the son of Amos⁴⁶ prefigured:
10. the staff of Jesse which produced a branch⁴⁷ for me,
11. whose fruit I will eat and not die,⁴⁸ she – the most favoured one.”

Strophe 4

1. “Adam, having heard the swallow⁴⁹ singing to me at the dawn of day,
2. quit your death-like sleep, and arise!
3. Listen to me, your consort.
4. I, who long ago caused mortals to fall (into sin), am now rising.⁵⁰
5. Contemplate the miracles, and behold the virgin⁵¹
6. healing our wound through her offspring.
7. For once upon a time the serpent overpowered me, and he is filled with joy,
8. but now, seeing my descendants, he flees, crawling⁵² away.
9. He raised his head⁵³ against me,
10. but now, humiliated, he flatters, he is no (longer) mocking,
11. for he fears the one to whom the most favoured one has given birth”.

Strophe 5

1. Adam heard the words, which his consort uttered,⁵⁴
2. and having immediately wiped the heavy drowsiness from his eyelids,
3. he raised his head like one waking from his sleep,
4. and opened his ear, which disobedience⁵⁵ blocked up, calling out as follows:
5. “I hear a sweet song, a charming melody softly sung,
6. but the sound of the one singing (it) does not please me now.
7. For it is a woman whose voice I fear indeed.
8. I have experience of it, therefore I fear the female race.
9. The sound pleases me, for it is crystal clear,
10. but the instrument agitates me: I fear she may deceive me like before,⁵⁶
11. bringing (me) disgrace - the most favoured one.”

Strophe 6

1. “Husband, trust completely the words of your consort,
2. for you will not find me giving you again bitter advice.
3. For the old order has gone,

4. and Christ, the child of Mary, points to an all new order.⁵⁷
5. Smell his moisture and come immediately into bloom again,
6. stand erect like an ear of corn. For spring⁵⁸ has come upon you.
7. Jesus Christ blows as a sweet breeze of air.
8. Having fled from the severe heat where you were,⁵⁹
9. come, follow me to Mary,
10. and when she sees us prostrated at her feet,
11. the most favoured one will immediately show compassion.”

Strophe 7

1. “Woman, I perceived spring, and I smell the scent of paradise,⁶⁰
2. from where formerly we were banned.⁶¹ And I see indeed
3. another, new paradise: the virgin,⁶²
4. carrying in her womb the very tree of life, the holy one, which once
5. the cherubim were guarding that I may not touch it.⁶³
6. Well then, while seeing this untouchable (tree) growing,
7. I felt, o wife, the life-giving breeze
8. that turned me, dust that I am and unanimated clay,
9. into a living being.⁶⁴ Invigorated now by its
10. scent, I may go⁶⁵ to her who caused
11. the fruit of our life to blossom forth, she, the most favoured one.”

Strophe 8

1. “Behold, I am at your feet, o virgin, mother without blemish,
2. and through me the whole human race lies at your feet.
3. Do not ignore your parents,
4. seeing that your offspring has now given new birth⁶⁶ to those in their state of corruption.
5. Daughter, have pity on your father sighing aloud, (= 6)
6. who grew old in Hades, on me, Adam, the first-created man.⁶⁷ (= 5)
7. Seeing my tears, have compassion on me
8. and incline your ear kindly to my lamentations.
9. And you see my ragged clothes, which I wear,
10. which the serpent wove⁶⁸ for me. Change my poverty
11. before him to whom you gave birth, most favoured one.”

Strophe 9

1. “Hope of my soul, listen also to me, Eve,
2. and remove the shame of her who gave birth amidst pain,⁶⁹
3. because you have seen that, much more

4. than Adam, I, miserable one, pine away in my soul because of the lament of Adam.⁷⁰
5. For he, remembering paradise's delight,⁷¹ rises up against me,
6. crying out as follows: 'Ah, if only you had not blossomed forth from my side!⁷²
7. It would have been good if I had not taken you as my help.⁷³
8. For I would not now have fallen into this abyss.'⁷⁴
9. And thus I, not able to endure further the reproaches
10. nor the reproving, bow my head⁷⁵
11. until your restore me, most favoured one."

Strophe 10

1. And the eyes of Mary, having seen Eve
2. and looked upon Adam, were longing to shed tears.⁷⁶
3. She nevertheless endures and strives
4. to conquer nature, she who contrary to nature⁷⁷ gave birth⁷⁸ to the Christ as her son.
5. But her compassion for her parents put her innermost in turmoil,
6. for it was fitting for the Compassionate One to have a compassionate mother.
7. Therefore she said to them: "Cease your lamentations.
8. I am for your sake an ambassador to my son."⁷⁹
9. But you, chase off your distress,
10. for I gave life to joy! Therefore, having destroyed
11. what is painful, I have now come, the most favoured one."

Strophe 11

1. "I have a son, compassionate and full of mercy,⁸⁰
2. of which I, through experience, have full knowledge. I observe how he acts mercifully:
3. He, though fire, came to dwell in me,
4. a mortal being, yet he did not consume me in my humble state.⁸¹
5. Like a father who pities his sons, does my child show pity
6. to those who fear him, as David foretold.⁸²
7. Therefore, hold back your tears, and receive me
8. as your mediator before my son.
9. For the cause of joy is he who was born
10. God before the ages.⁸³ Be quiet, free of pain,
11. for I, the most favoured one, am going in to him."

Strophe 12

1. With these words and many others more, Mary
2. consoled Eve and her companion,
3. and having gone in to the manger,
4. she bows her head⁸⁴ and entreats her son saying as follows:
5. “Child, since you exalted me through your condescension,
6. my needy race implores you now through me.
7. For Adam came to me sighing bitterly,
8. and Eve, in her suffering, joins him in lament.
9. And the cause of this is the serpent
10. that stripped them naked of honour. Therefore they beg
11. that they be covered, calling out to me: ‘Most favoured one’”

Strophe 13

1. And when the unblemished one⁸⁵ offered such prayers
2. to God lying in a manger,⁸⁶ he immediately accepted and subscribed to them.
3. Explaining the matters belonging to the end of times,⁸⁷
4. he says: “Mother, both on account of you and through you I save them.
5. Unless I wanted to save them, I would not have dwelled in you,
6. I would not have shone forth from you, you would not have been called my mother.
7. I make the manger (my) home because of your race,
8. and willingly⁸⁸ am now drawing milk from your breasts.
9. For their sake you carry me in your arms.
10. Me, whom the cherubim do not see, behold: you do see and carry,
11. and caress me like a son, most favoured one.”

Strophe 14

1. “I obtained you as mother, I, the Creator of creation,
2. and like an infant I grow, I, the Perfect from the Perfect.⁸⁹
3. I am wrapped in swaddling clothes
4. on account of those who long ago wore clothes made from skin,
5. and the cave is for me something desirable⁹⁰ on account of those who hated
6. the delights of paradise,⁹¹ but who loved corruption:
7. They transgressed my life-bearing commandment.
8. I descended to earth that they may have life.⁹²
9. And if, noble lady, you would also learn of the other deed
10. which I intend accomplishing for them: together with all the elements⁹³
11. the event will distress you, most favoured one.”

Strophe 15

1. But when he, who created every language, spoke such words,
2. and quickly subscribed to the prayer of his mother,
3. Mary further said:
4. “If I speak, do not be angry with me - clay⁹⁴ that I am, Creator!
5. I shall speak freely as to a child; I have the confidence because I gave birth to you.
6. For you have given me through your birth⁹⁵ every (form of) glory.
7. That which you intend accomplishing, I now wish to learn what it is.
8. Do not conceal from me your will from eternity on.
9. I gave birth to you wholly; reveal your intention
10. which you have concerning us, that I may indeed learn from it
11. what grace I received, I the most favoured one.”

Strophe 16

1. “I am conquered by the love I have towards mankind”,
2. the Creator replied. “I, my servant and mother,
3. will not cause you pain. I will reveal to you
4. what I wish to do, and I will take care of your soul, Mary.
5. The one being carried in your arms, with his hands pierced by nails⁹⁶
6. you will shortly see, because I love your race.
7. The one whom you are feeding, others will give gall to drink.⁹⁷
8. The one whom you are kissing is bound to be covered with spitting.⁹⁸
9. The one whom you called ‘life’, you will be able to see
10. hanging on a cross,⁹⁹ and you will lament him as one who has died.
11. But you will greet¹⁰⁰ me when I have risen, most favoured one.”

Strophe 17

1. “And all these events shall I experience willingly,¹⁰¹
2. and the cause of all these events will be the attitude¹⁰²
3. which from former times until the present time
4. I showed as God towards men, seeking to save them.”¹⁰³
5. But when Mary heard these words, she sighed from the depth of her heart
6. crying out: “My grape,¹⁰⁴ let the lawless not crush¹⁰⁵ you.
7. Now that you have blossomed forth,¹⁰⁶ let me not see the slaughter of my child.”
8. But he spoke to her as follows:
9. “Mother, stop weeping about what you are ignorant of,
10. for if this will not be accomplished, all these will perish

11. on behalf of whom you are entreating me, most favoured one.”¹⁰⁷

Strophe 18

1. “But consider my death to be mere sleep,¹⁰⁸ my mother.
2. For having remained willingly¹⁰⁹ in a tomb for three days,¹¹⁰
3. I will appear to you afterwards
4. having come to life again, and renewed the earth and those of the earth.
5. Mother, proclaim this to all, and be enriched by it.
6. Be a sovereign by it, rejoice through it.”
7. Immediately Mary went out to Adam
8. bringing the good news to Eve, and said:
9. “Be quiet for a little while longer.
10. For you heard him say what he must endure
11. on account of you who call out to me: ‘Most favoured one.’”

NOTES

- ¹ For the Greek text see P. Maas & C.A. Trypanis, *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica*. Volume I (Oxford (1963, reprint 1997) 9-16; and J. Grosdidier De Matons, *Romanos le Mélode. Hymnes II* (SC 110). (Paris 1965) 86-111. In most testimonies (ADJMNP) the liturgical date for this homily is given as either 25 or 26 December, while according to G and T it is the Sunday after the nativity.
- ² M. Carpenter, *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist I-II* (Columbia, University of Missouri Press 1970-1973).
- ³ R. J. Schork, *Sacred Song from the Byzantine Pulpit. Romanos the Melodist* (Gainesville, University of Florida Press 1995); E. Lash, *Kontakia. On the Life of Christ. St. Romanos the Melodist* (San Francisco 1995).
- ⁴ Modern scholars are in complete agreement on the fact that the ‘kontakion’ is in essence homiletic. The standard article on this, and the one on which subsequent articles and studies rely, is that by P. Maas, ‘Das Kontakion’, *BZ* 19 (1910) 281-306, especially 286-289. Scholars have consequently used various names to describe this genre (for both the word ‘kontakion’ as well as the names given to it by the ancient authors themselves, are too vague to define its nature adequately): sung sermon, verse homily, poetic homily, homiletic poem, lyrische Predigt etc.
- ⁵ Grosdidier de Matons (note 1) 82 points to the affinity this homily has with Romanos’ famous homily ‘On the Nativity I’.
- ⁶ Cf. Grosdidier de Matons (note 1) 79; also G. Gharib, *Romano il Melode. Inni*. (Roma 1981) 178.
- ⁷ Gharib (note 6) 178.
- ⁸ Grosdidier de Matons (note 1) 83.

- ⁹ See especially R.J. Schork, ‘Dramatic dimension in Byzantine Hymns’. *Studia Patristica* 8 (1966) 271-279. See also his remark in *Sacred Song* (see note 3) 13: ‘So vivid are many of these scenes that it has been suggested that the *kontakia* were not merely chanted, but actually staged ... There is no external evidence to support this hypothesis’.
- ¹⁰ Schork (note 9) 275. See also in general on the dramatic nature of homiletic texts: J. Kecskeméti, ‘Deux caractéristiques de la prédication chez les prédicateurs pseudo-chrysostomiens: la répétition et le discours fictif’, *Rhetorica* 14 (1996) 15-36; M.B. Cunningham, ‘Dramatic device or didactic tool: The function of dialogue in Byzantine preaching’, in: *Rhetoric in Byzantium*, ed. by E. Jeffreys (Aldershot 2003) 101-113.
- ¹¹ Both dialogue and interior dialogue occur in the present homily.
- ¹² These elaborations of the biblical material are frequently introduced by such phrases as εἰκότως, ὡς οἶμαι and τάχα or ταχέως.
- ¹³ The *sugita*, *madrassa* and *memra* of Ephrem and other Syriac authors. Almost all modern scholars are convinced that the origins of the ‘kontakion’ are to be traced back to these Syrian genres. Again the work of Maas (see note 4 above) was decisive in this regard. For more recent studies establishing the kontakion’s Syrian origin, see especially S.P. Brock, ‘Syriac and Greek Hymnography’, *Studia Patristica* 16 (1985) 77-81; *ibidem*, ‘From Ephrem to Romanos’, *Studia Patristica* 20 (1989) 139-151; W.L. Petersen, *The Diatessaron and Ephrem as sources of Romanos the Melodist*. Louvain = CSCO 475 (Louvain 1984/5); *ibidem*, ‘The dependence of Romanos the Melodist upon the Syriac Ephrem’, *V.Chr.* 39 (1985) 171-187; and L. Van Rompay, ‘Romanos le Mélode. Un poète syrien à Constantinople’, in: *Early Christian Poetry*, ed. by J. den Boeft & A. Hilhorst (Leiden 1993) 283-296.
- ¹⁴ One of the main sources of Romanos in this regard is the prose homilies of Basil of Seleucia.
- ¹⁵ See E. Wellesz. *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography* (Oxford 1949) 61; and I.H. Dalmais, ‘Imagerie syrienne et symbolisme hellénique dans les hymnes bibliques de Romanos le Mélode’, *Studia Patristica* 11 (1972) 24.
- ¹⁶ Petersen (*The Diatessaron and Ephrem Syrus* (see note 13, 1984/5) 6.
- ¹⁷ For Adam and Eve see also homily 19.1-10, and Schork (note 3) 29-30.
- ¹⁸ See also strophe 23 of his poetic homily ‘On the Nativity I’.
- ¹⁹ The prooimion recalls the prooimion of the first homily ‘On the Nativity I’. Compare lines 3-4 of Nativity I with lines 3-4 of this prooimion: ‘Angels together with shepherds bring glory, and Magi travel their way with a star (as their guide).’ See note 5.
- ²⁰ Ps 110.3.
- ²¹ For the liturgical function of the word ‘today’ at the beginning of patristic/Byzantine homilies, see J.H. Barkhuizen, ‘Amphilochius of

Iconium, Homily 5: 'On Holy Sabbath'. Translation and Commentary.' *AClass* 46 (2003) 57: The historical event celebrated in the homily is turned into a present experience for preacher and audience.

22 Jn 1.14.

23 The appellations 'without mother', 'without father' are taken from Heb 7.3, said of Melchizedek, and then typologically transferred to Christ. These terms – note especially the juxtapositioning and antithetical play upon words (ἐκ πατρὸς ἀμήτωρ ... ἀπάτωρ) underline his divine origin (Jn 1.1) and his divine conception (Lk 1.35).

24 Matt 2.1-2.

25 Lk 2.8-14.

26 Matt 1.20; Lk 1.34-35.

27 The actual refrain (ἡ κεχαριτωμένη) is based on Lk 1.28 (χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη). Cf. also Lk 1.41b-42.

28 The term confirms and continues the concept of Christ's divine origin and conception noted above.

29 If Christ is the vine and the Father the gardener (Jn 15.1ff), it follows naturally that Mary would be conceived as the vine that produced the grape (Christ) without natural toil (human endeavour), i.e. by means of divine intervention (the Father through the Holy Spirit).

30 The metaphor is somewhat mixed: the 'vine' is described as having 'arms', which are then defined by comparison as 'branches'. The full text would be: Mary carried Christ in her arms like the vine the grapes on its branches.

31 Lines 4-10 refer to the concept of Mary's *virginitas ante partum, in partu* and *post partum*. As such they are expressive of her 'immerwährende Jungfrauschaft' according to Erwin Fahlbusch, *Evangelisches Kirchen Lexicon* III (Göttingen 1992) 285, which resulted in the title ἀειπαρθένος as sanctioned at the Council of Constantinople in 553, although it was already used in the works of the fourth century homilists. See especially L. M. Peltomaa. *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn* (Leiden 2001) 126-128. This concept also forms the refrain of his homily 'On the Annunciation II':

Παρθένος τίκτει καὶ μετὰ τόκον πάλιν μένει παρθένος.

32 There is a purposeful assonance in σποράν (procreation) and φθοράς (corruption).

33 This again recalls 'On the Nativity I' (strophe 2 lines 8-9).

34 The involvement of creation (heaven and earth etc) as personifications in the affairs and relation between man and God, is a motif that often occurs in the Old (as well as New) Testament, e.g. Deut. 32.1; 1 Chron. 16.31; Ps. 96.11; 148.4; Isa. 1.2, 44.23, 45.8; Matt.27.51 etc), and is frequently found in patristic and Byzantine homilies. See Barkhuizen (note 20) 60-61. Romanos repeats this motif in this homily in strophes 2.7, 14.10-11 and

18.4.

35 Literally: ‘dance together with me...’ Cf. J. Koder, *Mit der Seele Augen sah er deines Lichtes Zeichen Herr. Romanos der Melode* (Vienna 1996) 41: ‘Deshalb tanzt die ganze Schöpfung voll Freude...’

36 Notice the *figura etymologica* in κράτος ... κρατῶ. Koder (note 35) 41 reflects this neatly in his translation: ‘Da ich dich, den Herrscher im Leibe trug, herrsche ich ...’

37 Συγκατάβασις on the part of God refers to his accommodation and concession to human limitations, which in this case caused a reversal in Mary’s lowly status. See also Lk 1.48-49.

38 Phil 2.8.

39 See note 34.

40 See note 29.

41 The phrase reflects the concept of Mary’s immaculate conception (see also strophe 1.8 ‘I am pure’). Erwin Fahlbusch (note 30) 286, writes in this connection that this implies that Mary ‘im ersten Augenblick ihrer Empfängnis ... von jeden Makel der Sünde rein bewahrt blieb.’ See also Peltomaa (note 31) 126-128.

42 Gen 3.16.

43 Gal 3.13.

44 Or: childbirth. See also strophe 4.6

45 Cf. Gen 3.13b.

46 I.e. Isaiah.

47 Isa 11.1,10; cf. Rom 15.12.

48 Gen 2.16-17; cf. Jn 6.48-50.

49 The swallow symbolises spring, which again symbolises the recreation of man (see strophe 6); cf. Grosdidier de Matons (note 2) 93.

50 A.C. Bandy, ‘Review Articles: Addenda et Corrigenda to M. Carpenter, Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist’, *BS* II.2 [1975:143] - in correcting Carpenter’s ‘now I rise again’ - translates: ‘now I raise them up’. But Grosdidier de Matons (note 1) 93, Gharib (note 6) 180 and Koder (note 35) 42 confirm Carpenter’s rendering.

51 Literally: ‘she who has no sexual experience with a man’.

52 Cf. Gen 3.14.

53 Cf. Gen 3.15.

54 Literally: ‘wove’ (ὑφανεν). See for this metaphorical usage note 68.

55 Gen 3.17-19.

56 Gen 3.12.

57 II Cor 5.17 reads τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρῆλθεν, which Romanos follows, inserting γάρ to suit his line of argument. Romanos’ νέα πάντα picks up the καινά of the biblical text. In the homily ‘On the Nativity I’ strophe 15 the Magi say: ‘The old has gone, for he renewed all things, a young Child, God

before the ages’

58 For the symbolic sense of spring = the new life in Christ, see note 49 above.

59 I follow the emendation of Grosdidier de Matons: ᾠ ἦς for ᾠ εἶς.

60 Τρυφή often serves as synonym for παράδεισος as is confirmed in lines 2-3. But one can also translate it with: ‘delights of paradise’.

61 Gen 3.23.

62 For the concept of Mary as the new paradise, see e.g. Proclus of Constantinople homily 1 (ACO I.1.1.103.12), who calls her ὁ λογικὸς τοῦ δευτέρου Ἀδὰμ παράδεισος. In the Akathistos hymn she is referred to as the key to the gates of paradise (7.9) and the one through whom paradise was opened (15.15). See also Peltomaa (note 31) 128-134.

63 Gen 3.24.

64 Gen 2.7.

65 Or: ‘let me go to her...’

66 Romanos here uses the same verb (and concept) contained in I Pet 1.3: ‘God ... who gave us new birth’.

67 There is an ironic play on Adam as the *first*-created man (indicative of his beginning) and Adam who grew *old* in Hades.

68 The verb ὑφάν, said by Adam referring to his deception by the serpent, is probably meant to reflect the use of the same verb for Eve’s discourse in strophe 5.10. The verb carries the figurative meaning of contriving/scheming *inter alia* something evil.

69 Gen 3.16.

70 I have translated this sentence following Grosdidier de Matons’ suggestion (note 1) 99 n. 2 by inserting the name of Adam a second time: πλέον (τοῦ Ἀδὰμ) τοῖς κτλ. Although πλέον can stand on its own with τήκω: I pine away greatly/much more ... because of the lament of Adam’, Grosdidier de Matons’ reconstruction of an implied comparison seems very attractive: ‘I pine much more than Adam ... because of the lament of Adam.’

71 See note 60 above.

72 Gen 2.21-22.

73 Gen 2.18,20.

74 This refers to both his situation outside of paradise, described or prefigured in Gen 3.17-19, and to his abode in Hades (strophe 8.5).

75 The Greeks say: ‘bend my neck’.

76 Literally: ‘They were presses to shed tears’. Cf. Bandy (note 50) 143: ‘were longing to weep’ and Koder (note 35) 43: ‘wollten sie in Tränen ausbrechen.’

77 Note the phrase (in juxtaposition) τὴν φύσιν .. παρὰ φύσιν, in which Romanos cleverly moves from the level of human emotion to the level of theological or dogmatic expression.

- 78 = σχοῦσα υἱόν.
 79 Literally: ‘the one (born) of me’.
 80 Ps 103.8.
 81 This line is an allusion to the bramble bush of Exod 3.2, symbol of the virgin who was not consumed by the divinity, as the bramble bush was not destroyed by the divine fire. On a further level of symbolism, the word ἀκανθώδης (‘the thorny one’) refers to mortal man as opposed to the fire of the divinity. See e.g. Romanos’ homily ‘On the Nativity I’ strophe 11.7: πυρίνη θέα τὸν ἀκανθώδη. In the light of this use in Romanos, I have translated it as ‘mortal being’. See also Ps. 118.12: ὡσπερ πῦρ ἐν ἀκάνθαις.
 82 Ps 103.13; cf. Lk 1.50.
 83 The phrase ‘God before the ages’ forms the second part of the refrain of Romanos’ famous homily ‘On the Nativity I’.
 84 See note 75 above.
 85 See note 31 above.
 86 Cf. Lk 2.7.
 87 Cf. I Pet 5.1.
 88 Romanos, in his works, uses several expressions to refer to a concept that he likes to stress, namely the free will of Christ becoming man and suffering for the sake of man. In this homily we have: βουλόμενος (13.8) βουλήσει (17.1), and θελήματι (18.2).
 89 The word ὁ τέλειος serves as counterpart of ὡσπερ βρέφος αὐξάνω: ‘child’ as opposed to ‘adult’.
 90 For the phrase τὸ σπήλαιόν μοι ἐράσμιον see ‘On the Nativity I’ strophe 3.3: Σπηλαίου ἡράσθης...;
 91 I take τρυφήν καὶ παράδεισον here as hendiadys: delightful paradise, or one can translate, as I did, ‘delights of paradise’. Cf. Koder (note 35) 45: ‘Paradiesfreuden’.
 92 Jn 10.10. See also Grosdidier de Matons (note 1) 107 n. 1.
 93 Cf. Matt 27.45, 51-53.
 94 Cf. Isa 64.8: ‘we are the clay’.
 95 Grosdidier de Matons (note 1) 107 translates τῷ τόκῳ σου differently: ‘car tu m’as donné, à moi ton enfant...’ (my italics). I follow Bandy (note 50) 144, Gharib (note 6) 183 and Koder (note 35) 45, who have rendered the phrase with ‘through your birth,’ ‘con la tua nascita,’ and ‘durch deine Geburt’ respectively.
 96 Jn 20.27. The Greek reads: ‘being pierced regarding the hands’. Notice the antithesis in the line.
 97 Matt 27.34. Notice the antithesis in the line.
 98 Matt 27.30. The Greek reads: ‘filled with spitting’. Notice the antithesis in the line.

- 99 Jn 19.25. Notice the antithesis in the line.
100 Or: 'embrace me'. Cf. Koder (note 35) 45: 'umarmen'
101 See note 88.
102 For δίαθεις see also his homily 'On Jacob and Isaac' (strophe 2.10).
103 See *inter alia* Matt 18.11, Lk 9.56; 19.10, Jn 3.16; 12.47; I Tim 1.15 etc.
104 See note 29.
105 The verb further extends the image of the grape being crushed.
106 See note 29.
107 The theme concluding strophe 17 is developed fully in his homily 'On Mary
at the Cross' (strophes 4,9,10 and 12).
108 See Mark 5.39; John 11.11-13.
109 See note 88.
110 Cf. Lk 24.21-23; Jn 2.19,22.