

ON ADAM AND EVE<sup>1</sup>*Acrostic: THE HYMN OF THE HUMBLE ROMANOS**Tone 1**Prooimion*

Devote yourself, my soul, to repentance, be united to Christ by thought,  
 Crying out with groans, "Grant me pardon for my evil deeds,  
 That I may receive forgiveness and **eternal life**"<sup>2</sup>.

1

Let us await<sup>3</sup> the blessed hope<sup>4</sup> through works and faith  
 As many of us as observe the teachings of the Lord and Saviour.  
 That is why we honour and love the achievement of fasting  
 That is honoured by Angels,  
 By keeping it Prophets<sup>5</sup>, though earthly beings,  
 Became partners of the heavenly choirs.  
 Christ was not ashamed to accomplish  
 This; for he fasted willingly;<sup>6</sup>  
 Through this he underwrote<sup>7</sup> for us **eternal life**.

2

That Moses and Elias, those towers of fire, were great in works  
 We know, and that they are first among prophets,  
 Obtained the right to say freely to God whatever they wished,  
 To approach him and entreat him  
 And to talk with him face to face.<sup>8</sup>  
 Something that is wondrous and extraordinary.  
 Nevertheless they also had serious recourse  
 To fasting, because of this they were brought to him.  
 So fasting with works brings as reward **eternal life**.

3

By fasting as by a sword all the demons are routed

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<sup>1</sup> This Kontakion only survives in the second volume of the 11th century Patmos Kontakarion, covering the Triodion and the Pentecostarion. It is assigned to the Wednesday of the 2nd Week of Lent. The real subject is fasting and it may well have originally been intended for an earlier day.

<sup>2</sup> The metre of the refrain is the same as that of the Kontakion for Theophany.

<sup>3</sup> The word used in the Creed.

<sup>4</sup> Titus 2:13.

<sup>5</sup> Notably Moses and Elias.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 4:2.

<sup>7</sup> The Greek simply means 'signed', i.e. to write one's signature under a document.

<sup>8</sup> Deut. 5:4, 34:10.

Because they cannot bear nor do they have strength against its  
delight.  
They love pleasure seekers and drunkards; but if they see  
The face of fasting  
They cannot hold their ground, but flee far away  
As Christ our God teaches us  
When he says, "The race of demons  
Is vanquished by fasting and prayer".<sup>9</sup> And so we have been taught  
That fasting gives humans **eternal life**.

4

The holy mother of sobriety is the unsullied beauty of fasting  
It is a fount of philosophy<sup>10</sup> and grants the crown;  
It gains us Paradise, gives to those who fast  
The ancestral home,  
From which Adam was expelled; while by dishonouring  
The dignity of fasting he brought in death.  
For when God, the creator and master of all things, saw that fasting  
Had been outraged he was at once enraged;  
But those who honour it he rewards with **eternal life**.

5

For the lover of humankind himself first entrusted to the commandment  
Of fasting, as to a loving mother, as to a teacher, the man that had  
been created,  
Committing his life to its hands; and had he loved it  
He would have made his home with angels.  
When he set it aside he found toils and death,  
The roughness of thorns and thistles  
The affliction of a life of toil.<sup>11</sup>  
If then in Paradise fasting is shown to be useful,  
How much more here, that we may have **eternal life**.

6

Of every tree the Most High told Adam, the first formed<sup>12</sup> man, to eat,  
Having placed him in Paradise, as it is written;  
But from one tree he forbade food; and these were the loving  
Words of the Creator,  
"Enjoy, he said, everything I have given you,  
For I shall be pleased at your enjoyment of them,  
If you keep my commandment

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 17:21

<sup>10</sup> In Christian writers this word frequently to the monastic life.

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 3:16.

<sup>12</sup> A word found twice in Scripture (Wisdom 7:1, 10:1), and occasionally in Philo, Jubilees and the Pseudepigrapha.

I will keep you in your enjoyment; and so my grace will guard you  
Untouched by corruption but gaining **eternal life**.<sup>13</sup>

7

Listen well to my words, Adam, and pay close attention to this command;  
For of all these things I order you to abstain from only one,  
Not that it is bad by nature, but if you disobey  
It will be the instrument of your misfortune.  
For the essence of the tree is not useless,  
But partaking<sup>14</sup> of it will for you  
Be a cause of harm; for it possesses  
A hidden whetstone<sup>15</sup> for thoughts and a knife for the taste;  
If you eat of it therefore, you throw away **eternal life**.

8

See, my first-formed, I command you not even to touch the tree of which I  
told you;  
For if you touch it, at once like a thief, you will be given over to death,  
Not that you cannot have it, but because you will prove to be  
Faithless and useless.  
I have brought you to a small and easy divine law,  
And therefore I have given you the abundance  
Of the rest, so that of all these  
You may take your delight and not become subject to death,  
You that as God's image<sup>16</sup> have and possess **eternal life**."

9

So, holding firmly to God's law, Adam and Eve began by keeping it;  
But the <subtle><sup>17</sup> devil was watching their inclinations,  
And hastened to prepare a trap, and when he saw  
That they were wisely hidden,  
For a while he did not dare to approach the man;<sup>18</sup>  
But when the devious one saw Eve  
Standing alone by the tree,  
Through her he at once laid the stumbling block for the two  
who had earlier received through grace **eternal life**.

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<sup>13</sup> Gen. 2:15-17

<sup>14</sup> A play on words impossible in English. 'Partaking' is μετουσία, while 'essence' in the previous line is οὐσία

<sup>15</sup> Pindar uses the image of a whetstone of being inspired to write poetry, "I think I have on my tongue a shrill whetstone,/ which steals over me with fair-flowing breaths", δόξαν ἔχω τιν' ἐπὶ γλώσσῃ λιγυρᾶς ἀκόνας,/ ἃ μ' ἐθέλοντα προσέρπει καλλιρόαισι πνοαῖς (Ol. 6:82s.). Cf. § 15.

<sup>16</sup> In Greek κατ' εἰκόνα. Cf. Gen. 1:26s, 5:1.3, Sir. 17:3. The expression is frequent in the liturgical texts.

<sup>17</sup> The line is three syllables short. The French editor suggests δόλιος, 'cunning', Trypanis κακοῦργος, 'wicked'. I propose φρόνιμος, 'subtle', 'crafty'; the word used in Genesis 3:1.

<sup>18</sup> The French editor translates "l' être humain", but the contrast is with "Eve" in the next line. The Greek ἄνθρωπος has often to be translated "man", in the sense of "male".

10

For the wicked<sup>19</sup> one by guile approaches the woman like a friend and a familiar

And he weaves and produces his cunning question.  
As though sympathising he talks with her, "For what reason  
Has God given you  
Paradise, as though he loved you, but forbidden you to partake  
Of all the plants? How generous!  
Why then do you make Paradise  
Your home, but are deprived of its delight?  
So how can you <without it><sup>20</sup> have **eternal life**?"

11

Deceived by these words, Eve answered him as follows,  
"You are in error and do not know what the Lord commanded.  
God has given the whole of Paradise as their table to those he created,  
For their enjoyment;  
But he forbade us communion<sup>21</sup> of only one thing,  
That would become an obstacle to our life.  
It is useful for us both  
And is able to teach us the knowledge of good and evil,  
For we have already received as a possession **eternal life**."

12

So, to his death-bringing word, the enemy mixed a sweet taste;  
Reflecting, the great enemy said to himself,  
"Unless I mingle my plan with trickery, if I condemn  
God by my words,  
Eve will at once suspect me of hating God,  
And I shall become unacceptable to her,  
For up to now I do not know her opinion  
If I manage to confuse it, it may be she will favour me.  
So let me approach with craft those who have received **eternal life**."

13

After reflecting like this, the serpent addressed Eve as follows,  
"I rejoice with you at the abundance of pleasure you have received;  
I praise God's truthfulness, because he did not lie  
When he explained to you  
How great is the power of this plant,  
For it gives knowledge of both good and evil.  
But God alone has the power of discerning

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<sup>19</sup> Greek ὁ πονηρός, as in the Lord's Prayer, where 'wicked' would really be a better translation than 'evil'.

<sup>20</sup> The line is five syllables short. Trypanis proposes this correction.

<sup>21</sup> An allusion to the Eucharist is intentional.

Between all things. This is why he ordered you not to partake<sup>22</sup>  
Of it, for it gives **eternal life**.

14

Do I not know that the creation that God has wrought is wholly good?<sup>23</sup>  
So how could the One who made all things good, have allowed  
Death to grow in the midst of Paradise? The plant of knowledge  
Is not a stumbling block,  
For you will not die if you eat it;  
But through it you will now become as gods,  
Like the Creator, able to discern  
Ways of good and evil.<sup>24</sup> This is why it has been placed  
In the middle of the whole of Paradise, for it has **eternal life**."

15

So when she saw that the tree was beautiful and fair,<sup>25</sup> Eve  
Was enflamed and yearned with hopes of tasting it.  
With thoughts<sup>26</sup> she stirred herself, saying, "Can the one who revealed this  
Be the enemy of God?  
For what enmity can the serpent have towards the One who fashioned it?  
Moreover the plant is most fair to look at.  
I will hasten to the food that makes one divine,  
And I will enjoy this thing, at the sight of which I waste away,  
And I will give it to my husband, that we may have **eternal life**."

16

Now you have accepted what brings death, O wretched Eve, and eaten of it.  
So why do you run to destroy your own husband with yourself?  
Examine yourself with care to see if you have become  
From tasting what you expected;  
If you are a god, as you hoped. Make sure of this first,  
And if it is so, invite your husband also,  
Woman, to taste it. Do not then make  
Your husband co-author of loss. Why do you hasten, thinking  
That eating from the tree has granted you **eternal life**?

17

When Eve, bewitched by the tree, had perished –for she had taken no  
pleasure –,  
She hurried and gave Adam of its fruit,  
And as though offering the greatest gift she acted thus,  
She said to him,

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. note 21. The Greek has the noun μετέληψις.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Gen. 1:31.

<sup>24</sup> Gen. 3:5.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Gen. 3:6.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. § 7.

"Until now, my companion, we have overlooked a treasure,  
 And we have been afraid of a blessed delight.  
 And now I know, my husband, and have experienced  
 That we have entertained a pointless cowardice, for I have eaten  
 And I stand by you alive and I receive<sup>27</sup> **eternal life**.

18

The word of the one who initiated me is sure, and has proof,  
 For having eaten I did not die, as God foretold,  
 But now I am with you still living, and God's order  
 Was a pretence.  
 For if it had been absolutely true, you would now be mourning me  
 As dead and lying here in death.  
 Therefore, husband, take and enjoy,  
 Receive through this the divine and spotless dignity.  
 A god you will become like him who grants **eternal life**."

19

The serpent, as I have already said, had not dared to approach Adam,  
 Afraid that it might fail in the hope on which its heart was set.  
 But another one appeared, a serpent more fearsome  
 And more serpentine than this serpent.  
 For the one the serpent had not bitten, she put to death.  
 For having enticed him, she then injects  
 Her venom, and breaks both herself  
 And him; and the deception of the food renders them  
 Serpent-smitten<sup>28</sup> corpses that have lost **eternal life**.

20

So wretched Adam is besieged by this deception;  
 For by a single blow through food he wounds all humankind.  
 Therefore through lack of discipline in pains of every kind  
 He was thrown to the ground.  
 For he was unable through fasting, which is measured and useful,  
 Not to get drunk through intemperance;  
 While all the races of Christians  
 Strive by fasting to accustom themselves to<sup>29</sup> and to rival angels,  
 Hoping thereby to gain **eternal life**.

21

Fasting is great, to which Adam had at first been destined;  
 For our ancestor's nourishment consisted of plants alone;

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<sup>27</sup> the Greek verb is used in this sense in Matthew 6:2.5.16 of receiving a recompense.

<sup>28</sup> A *hapax* in Greek.

<sup>29</sup> This word is difficult. The actual text is corrupt and the French editor adopts the correction of Trypanis, which is metrical, but still difficult. If the emendation is correct, I think St Romanos means that fasting enables humans to accustom themselves to live like angels.

22

23

24

<sup>33</sup> Romans 12:1.

Who deliver all  
Whom you fashioned from error. For you are our God,<sup>35</sup>  
Though you also became man, as you willed,  
From the Virgin and all-holy  
Mary, the immaculate Mother of God. And so we fall before you.  
At your mother's entreaties, give your servants **eternal life**.

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 10:31.

<sup>35</sup> 2 Maccabees 1:37.