

ON THE PASSION¹*Acrostic: ON THE PASSION A CHANT OF ROMANOS**Proemium 1. Idiomel.*

Today the foundations of the earth were shaken²,
 The sun was changed³, for it could not bear to watch.
 For the One who gives life to all was being put on a cross,
 Paradise had been opened to the transgression of old⁴.

Only Adam dances.⁵*Proemium 2. Idiomel.*

The tyranny of the enmity⁶ was abolished, Eve's tears were ended
 Through your passion, Lover of mankind, Christ God.
 For by it the one who died has been renewed,
 While through it the Thief has found a home⁷.

Only Adam dances.

1

Heaven, tremble and be amazed. Earth, sink down in chaos.
 Sun, do not dare to look on your Master
 Willingly hanged upon the Tree.
 Let rocks be shattered⁸, for the Rock of life⁹ is now being wounded by the
 nails.
 Let the veil of the temple be rent in two¹⁰,
 As the Master's body is pierced with a lance¹¹ by the lawless.
 In short, let all creation tremble, groan at the passion of the Creator.
Only Adam dances.

¹This Kontakion only occurs in three MSS, only that from Patmos has both Proemia. It is no longer used liturgically, though the MSS prescribe it for Good Friday, since Kontakion 20 is now the only one used on that day. The main part of the poem (Stanzas 3-17) is concerned with the Trial of Christ before Caiaphas and Pilate. The Gospels according to Matthew (chapter 27) and John (19) are the main sources of the poem, but traditions represented in the *Acts of Pilate* and in some of St Ephrem's hymns are also present in the scene before Pilate. It is set in Tone 3, one of the more joyful tones, this underlines the boldness of the refrain. The Crucifixion in all its horror, is a cause of joy for redeemed humanity.

²Cf. Psalm 81,5.

³Cf. Luke 23,45.

⁴The punctuation and meaning of the last two lines is difficult. The French editor puts a stop after 'opened' and takes the rest of the line with the refrain. Because of his ancient transgression only Adam can dance. Nature, the angels and the demons can only lament. One might compare the ancient Latin *Exultet*, 'O happy fault', 'O truly necessary sin of Adam that earned such a Redeemer'.

⁵The Patmos MS adds throughout, 'because he is being saved'.

⁶An allusion to the 'enmity' between the 'seed of the woman' and the 'seed of the serpent' in Genesis 3,15, where the LXX has the same word for 'enmity' as St Romanos.

⁷Paradise, as he was promised on the cross. Cf. Luke 23,43. The idea that the Thief has now made his home in Paradise is frequent in the liturgical texts.

⁸Matt. 27,51.

⁹Cf. 1 Cor. 10,4.

¹⁰Matt. 27,51.

¹¹John 19,34.

2

You took what is mine, my Saviour, that I might acquire what is yours.¹²
 You accepted to suffer the passion, that I now
 Might despise the passions. By your death I lived again.
 You were placed in a tomb, and granted me Paradise for my dwelling.
 By descending to the depths, you raised me up.
 By destroying Hell's gates¹³, you opened for me the gates of Heaven.
 Truly you bore all for the sake of the one who fell. You endured all,
So that Adam may dance.¹⁴

3

Arresting you, who grasp the whole round of the earth¹⁵ in your hand,
 Lawless men now lead you,
 Whom the world cannot contain, into Caiaphas's courtyard.
 No sooner did they, whose minds are blind, see you, than they raved and
 shouted,¹⁶
 "The one who insults Moses and the Law has come.
 So let whoever honours Moses and reverences the Law show their zeal.
 Let none be slothful. For the deceiver¹⁷ has come to suffer, as he said,
So that Adam may dance.

4

As the people shouted this, the priest said,
 "Did I not say well before, 'It is better
 That this man alone perish and not the whole nation'?"¹⁸
 Has anyone seen a viper offering sweet honey in place of its venom?
 Has anyone beheld a flame dropping dew?
 Has anyone ever heard a lie telling the truth like Caiaphas?
 Without wanting to, he prophesies that you, my Saviour, die for all,
So that Adam may dance.

5

So spoke the priest, but did not understand it,
 For envy did not let him,
 But he urged murder; for murder follows envy¹⁹.
 And Abel is a witness, envied by Cain, afterwards murdered²⁰.
 And Christ also underwent this.

¹²A n idea that goes back to St Irenaeus and St Athanasios. 'God became man so that man might become divine'.

¹³Cf. Matthew 16,18, Job 38,17, Wisdom 16,13 and also Psalm 106,16. These two lines recall the icon of the Descent into Hell, in which Christ raises up Adam and Eve and stands on the smashed gates of Hell and Death.

¹⁴From this stanza onwards the refrain changes to a final clause.

¹⁵Isaias 40,22.

¹⁶The French rightly points to the similarity to the arrest of St Stephen in Acts 6,11-14.

¹⁷Cf. Mathew 27,62.

¹⁸John 11,50-52.

¹⁹Cf. Wisdom 2,24.

²⁰Gen. 4,1-8.

Loving a malicious people, by showing his affection he moved them to anger,
 He healed the sick. And instead of thanks he suffers, he is crucified,
So that Adam may dance.

6

For a multitude of wonders instead of sufferings the crowd of the lawless
 Shouted out, 'Away with him. Crucify him',²¹
 Having arraigned before Pilate the one who upholds all things.
 The one who is going to judge kings and beggars they escort to judgement.
 One who is himself condemned judges the just judge.
 And one who lived obscurely²² threatened to slay the Deliverer like a thief,
 While he, that he may suffer, is silent as he endures, standing without speaking,²³

So that Adam may dance.

7

Voiceless stood the Thunderer²⁴, the Word without a word.
 For had he broken into speech, he would not have been worsted.
 Victorious, he would not have been crucified and Adam not have been saved.
 And so, that he might suffer, the one who catches the wise,²⁵ conquered by keeping silence.
 But the judge, seeing one who did not utter,
 Was a prey to doubt and said, 'What can I do to one who does not speak?'
 But they, 'He is guilty of the charges we bring. That is why he is dumb,
So that Adam may dance.'

8

'Have I now incurred²⁶ death,' said my Saviour
 To the lawless people — as for Pilate,
 He did not so much as grant him a word, considering him an irrational²⁷
 animal, —

²¹ John 19,15.

²² A comparatively minor Roman official sits in judgement on the Creator of the universe, but he also lives 'uncertainly', without the light of the Gospel. As his question 'What is truth?' implies, he lives in the dark.

²³ The silence of Christ at his trial is mentioned by St Matthew [27,14] and St John [19,9]. St Romanos develops it further in Kontakion 22,9.

²⁴ The thunder is the voice of God in the Psalms [17,14. 'The Lord thundered from heaven. The Most High uttered his voice'. 28,3. 'The voice of the Lord upon the waters. The God of glory thundered'.] and in the Song of Anna [I Kingd. 2,10. 'The Lord has gone up to the heavens and thundered. He will judge the ends of the earth'.]

²⁵ 1 Cor. 3,19, quoting Job 5,13, though St Paul does not use the Septuagint.

²⁶ The metaphors in this stanza are all taken from the world of finance. Christ asks whether he 'owes a death' in repayment of his having 'exactd' like a debt the daughter of Jairus, whether he suffers 'in repayment' for all these miracles.

²⁷ There is a familiar play on *logos*, 'word' or 'reason', and *alogos*, 'without word i.e. 'speech', 'irrational', that is 'animal' as opposed to 'human'. In Modern Greek a 'horse' is *alogo*. It does not mean, as MC imagines, 'unspeakable'.

'In return for having once with a single word demanded back Jairus's daughter²⁸,

In return for having raised the only son of the widow²⁹

And with a cry shown everyone lifeless Lazarus running?³⁰

Is it then because of all this, or rather in return for it, that I suffer and die,

So that Adam may dance?

9

When the people heard these words that flowed with honey,

As though filled with bitterness, they answered,

'You are not being crucified for these, but as a Sabbath breaker'³¹.

'And which is better, to have mercy on the sick or to honour the Sabbath?³²

You have often broken the Sabbath yourselves,³³

Nor did I leave my Father's bosom³⁴ for the sake of the Sabbath.

Nature had become sick and, seeing this from above, quickly I came down

So that Adam may dance.

10

Hell does not fear Sabbath, nor does illness flee at it,

It does not heal the sick. Only

The Master of the Sabbath³⁵ can, I the crucified.

The blind man³⁶ was the keeper of many Sabbaths, yet he was yoked to darkness.

The paralysed man had doubtless honoured

Many Sabbaths during the thirty eight he had been sick,³⁷

But he had not been cured, had not go up from his bed until I came

So that Adam may dance.

11

You have heard the reproach of many who live round about you,

That you observe Sabbaths and yet are sick.

For all the nations said, "Where is their God?"³⁸

Let him, who is honoured by them through the law, chase away their diseases."

With words like these even your enemies

Despised you, reviling and insulting you,

While I by saving all granted greater glory to the Sabbath,

So that Adam may dance.

²⁸Mark 5,41, Luke 8,54.

²⁹Luke 7,14-16.

³⁰John 11,43-44.

³¹Cf. John 5,18.

³²Cf. Matt. 12,11-12; Luke 6,9.

³³Cf. John 7,22-24; Matt. 12,5.

³⁴cf. John 1,18.

³⁵Matt. 12,8.

³⁶John 9,1-34.

³⁷John 5,2-16.

³⁸Psalms 78,10; 113,10; Joel 2,17.

12

I was considered unjust when I justified the repentant harlot,³⁹
 Who obtained my feet as instructors
 In chastity and well did she believe in me,
 As, with the drops of her tears, she wetted feet that the deep had not wetted.⁴⁰
 As with fragrant oil she anointed my head
 That the Forerunner was afraid to touch until he had been ordered.⁴¹
 As she foreshadowed the things that I now undergo willingly and lovingly,
So that Adam may dance.'

13

The savage, bloodthirsty people heard
 Jesus saying this, and like a lion
 They roared to snatch the soul of Christ the lamb.
 Pilate, fulfilling their will, had you, the meek,⁴² scourged.
 So he worked upon your back,⁴³
 While you, by making his side⁴⁴ suffer, showed your strength.
 For his wife, crying out, revealed that 'You are judging your judge,
So that Adam may dance.'

14

The Redeemer bears scourges, the Liberator was bound,
 He was stripped naked and stretched on a pillar
 The One who in a pillar of cloud spoke of old with Moses and Aaron.⁴⁵
 He who established the pillars of the earth⁴⁶, as David said, is bound to a pillar.
 He who showed the people a way in the wilderness –
 For a pillar of fire appeared before them⁴⁷ – was attached to a pillar.
 The Rock is on a pillar, and the Church is being carved out for me,⁴⁸

³⁹Luke 7,36-38 and Kontakion 10 and the notes there for the identification of the sinful woman with the one in the house of Simon the leper.

⁴⁰Matt. 14,25.

⁴¹Matt. 3,14 and Kontakion 5 with the notes there.

⁴²Cf. Matt. 11,29.

⁴³Psalms 128,3.

⁴⁴I.e. Pilate's wife. A reference to the fact that Eve was formed from Adam's rib, as stanza 20 below makes clear.

⁴⁵Exodus 33,8-11.

⁴⁶Psalms 74,4.

⁴⁷Exodus 13,21; Numbers 9,14-22.

⁴⁸Christ is the Rock, the cornerstone of the Church, and he is being 'carved' by the scourging. In the context there is also an allusion to the rock in the wilderness, which, as St Paul says [1 Cor. 10,4], 'was Christ'. Cf. Exodus 17,6, Numbers 20,7-11 and Psalm 77,15. This stanza recalls not only Syrian hymnography but also the 15th Antiphon of Matins of Good Friday in the Byzantine rite.

To-day he is hung upon a tree, he who hung the earth upon the waters.

He is arrayed in a crown of thorns, he who is the King of the Angels.

He is wrapped in mocking purple, he who wraps the heaven in clouds.

He receives a blow on the face, he who freed Adam in Jordan.

He is transfixed with nails, the Bridegroom of the Church.

He is pierced by a lance, the Son of the Virgin.

We worship your Sufferings, O Christ.

Show us also your glorious Resurrection.

So that Adam may dance.

15

But having scourged the physician, Pilate washes his hands
 Of him, by this he expected
 To be held innocent, but he was found to be guilty,
 For having flogged him he handed him over to the cross and said, 'I am innocent'.

Who ever heard of a murderer saying
 To his sword, 'Since by you I kill, I shall not be punished'?
 Employing the sword of the lawless, Pilate slays the Creator,

So that Adam may dance.

16

'Crucify' the murderer heard the godless shouting,
 And he fulfilled their will,
 Under no constraint handing over the One who was willingly crucified.
 For when he heard that he would be Caesar's enemy, the coward trembled.
 Does he wish to be the enemy of the Almighty
 Rather than Caesar's, in now preferring life to Life?
 Innocent then he will not be, the one who through lawless men slew the Living,

So that Adam may dance.

17

Casting the crime on them, he kills Christ through them,
 Having found them as agents when they said,
 'His blood will be on them with their children'.
 For sons yet unborn the fathers made ready the tunic of the curse⁴⁹.
 For their descendants they have added blow to blow,
 Drawing down the condemnation of their evils upon their generations for ever.

But we by taking the blood of the Saviour have found redemption,

So that Adam may dance.

18

The one born of earth was perishing from thirst, had been burnt by the heat
 Wandering in the desert, in a waterless place,
 And had found nothing, poor wretch, to cure his thirst.
 And so my Saviour, the fount of good things, made waters of life gush forth
 Crying, 'Through your side⁵⁰ you became thirsty.
 Drink from my side and you will never thirst again.⁵¹
 Its stream is double: those who are befouled it washes and it gives them drink,⁵²

⁴⁹Cf. Psalm 108, 18 'He put on cursing as a garment'. The whole Psalm is applied to Christ in his Passion, and is used in the Office of the Royal Hours of Good Friday in the Byzantine rite.

⁵⁰I.e. Eve. see the note on stanza 13.

⁵¹Cf. John 4,14; 7,37.

⁵²A reference to Baptism and the Eucharist.

So that Adam may dance.

19

Then let no one say that Christ's side is that of a mere man,⁵³
 For Christ was both man and God,
 Not separated into two⁵⁴. He is one from one Father.
 He was the same who suffered and who did not suffer, dying and not put to death.

For alive in his godhead, in his body he is put to death.
 The patriarch Isaac became his type on the mountain:⁵⁵
 In the lamb he was slain and alive he was brought down like my Saviour,

So that Adam may dance.

20

Another type of Jesus was the prophet
 Jonas in the belly of the whale.⁵⁶
 He was swallowed, he was not digested like the Lord in a tomb.
 Jonas came out of the whale after three days, like Christ from the grave.
 Jonas by preaching saved Nineve,
 Christ redeemed the whole earth and the inhabited world.
 Everything that he had foreshown us by prophets, he came to fulfil,

So that Adam may dance.

21

Granting victory to the humble, bearing like⁵⁷ a trophy
 The Cross on his shoulders he went out
 To be crucified and to crucify the one who had wounded us.
 Paying in full what we owe, he was hurrying towards death.
 He submitted to blows⁵⁸ the form
 That the Cherubim⁵⁹ cannot bear to look on, for their veil their sight.
 Spitting on shame,⁶⁰ he willingly clothed himself in a cloak of contumely⁶¹,

So that Adam may dance.

22

Vinegar they gave as drink to the source of sweet waters,
 And gall⁶² to the one who made the manna
 Rain down⁶³ and water spring out of the rock.⁶⁴

⁵³This expression—*psilos anthropos*—was much used in the Christological controversies in the Early Church from Origen onwards. He writes, 'Jesus is not a mere man, but God become man'.

⁵⁴This is almost a quotation from the definition of Chalcedon.

⁵⁵Gen. 22,1-14.

⁵⁶Jonas 2,1; Matt. 12,39-41.

⁵⁷The American translator appears unaware that *dikên* in Greek simply means 'like'.

⁵⁸John 18,22; 19,3.

⁵⁹One would expect 'Seraphim' [cf. Isaiah 6,2], and this, the reading of the western MSS, is preferred by the French editor. But it would be an obvious 'correction' by a scribe who is a stickler for biblical accuracy. In the Liturgy the 'Sanctus' is introduced with a reference to both Cherubim and Seraphim. See the note to Kontakion 29,7 below.

⁶⁰Cf. Hebrews 12,2.

⁶¹The translation tries to convey the feel of the Greek, *chlainin eis chlevin*.

⁶²Cf. Psalm 68,22, which links 'vinegar' and 'gall'.

Struck on the head with a reed⁶⁵, he signed the banishment of the foe.
Stretched naked upon a cross, he stripped
The adversaries of life and made them a laughing stock to dead and living.
He was taken down from the tree, wrapped in a shroud, laid in a tomb
So that Adam may dance.

23

Praise him, creature born of earth, hymn the one who suffered
And died for you. And when you see him living
In a little while, receive him into your soul.
For Christ is going to rise from the tombs and renew you, O mortal.
Therefore make ready a pure soul for him,
So that dwelling there your King may make it heaven.⁶⁶
Yet a little while and he will come⁶⁷ and fill with joy those who are afflicted,
So that Adam may dance.

⁶³Exodus 16,14-15.

⁶⁴Exodus 17,6; Numbers 20,10.

⁶⁵The word means both 'reed' and 'pen'.

⁶⁶The starting point for this idea is John 14,23. It is a commonplace in the prayers of preparation and thanksgiving for Holy Communion.

⁶⁷Hebrews 10,37.