



1983

## Christology and the Marian Kontakia of Saint Romanos the Melodist

Andrew. Plishka  
*Loyola University Chicago*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_theses](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses)



Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Plishka, Andrew., "Christology and the Marian Kontakia of Saint Romanos the Melodist" (1983). *Master's Theses*. 3386.

[https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_theses/3386](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/3386)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact [ecommons@luc.edu](mailto:ecommons@luc.edu).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).  
Copyright © 1983 Andrew. Plishka

301

CHRISTOLOGY AND THE MARIAN KONTAKIA OF  
SAINT ROMANOS THE MELODIST

by

Andrew Plishka

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

November

1983

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to those who helped in the preparation of this paper. First, I am deeply indebted to Father Patout Burns, S.J., Father Eamon R. Carroll, O. Carm., and Father Earl Weis, S.J. for their criticisms and suggestions throughout the course of my work. A special thank you to Pat Krutsch for sacrificing her time to type the paper. Finally, thanks to my family and most especially to Stephany for their love, support and patience.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .	ii
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. THE LIFE AND WORKS OF ROMANOS . . . . .	7
His Life . . . . .	7
His Works . . . . .	10
III. THE CHRISTOLOGY OF ROMANOS . . . . .	19
Some Preliminary Remarks . . . . .	19
Romanos' Polemic Against the Heretics . . . . .	22
Romanos' Portrayal of the Divine and Human in Christ . . . . .	25
The Human Knowledge and Consciousness of Christ . . . . .	32
IV. MARIAN KONTAKIA AS AN EXPRESSION OF CHRISTOLOGY . . . . .	43
Mariology Expressing Christology . . . . .	46
The Akathistos Hymn . . . . .	49
V. CONCLUSION . . . . .	62
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	67
GLOSSARY OF TERMS . . . . .	71

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Ever since the earliest days of Christianity, Jesus Christ has been the central figure of the Church's worship. In the oft-quoted phrase of Rudolf Bultmann, the Proclaimer became the Proclaimed. Believers gathered "in his name" and he was present among them (Matthew 18:20). They ate the Lord's Supper, proclaiming his death until he would come again (1 Corinthians 11:17-26). Converts were baptized "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38) or "into Christ" (Romans 6:3).

God had revealed himself in the man Jesus Christ "under the opposite kind," sub contraria specie.<sup>1</sup> This paradox of God becoming human is already expressed in the hymn of Philippians 2:5-11. Beginning with the incarnation, he who was "in the form of God" was "born in the likeness of men." The crucifixion intensified this paradox, for this same person "humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." But then he was exalted by the Father and became "Lord". The single person throughout this katabasis and anabasis was Jesus Christ. It is no wonder that this mystery was expressed in poetry from the earliest days of Christianity. What astonished believers was the idea that God should become human and even die for the love of humanity. This indeed evoked praise from those who believed in him.<sup>2</sup>

Beginning with apostolic times, Christians in awe of that mysterium tremendum of God intervening in human history in a definitive

and irrevocable way, have throughout the ages praised God through hymns in their liturgical worship.

The hymnal of the Early Church was chiefly composed of the psalter and some poetic excerpts from Sacred Scripture. In the Byzantine Church of the fifth and sixth centuries, however, an important liturgical development took place--the large scale adoption of hymnography of a Hellenistic nature. During this period, with the emphasis on liturgical solemnity in the great urban churches, and the unavoidable Hellenization of the Church, the influx of new poetry was certain to occur.<sup>3</sup>

The introduction of hymnography into the "cathedral rite" or practice of the churches in major cities as opposed to that of the monastic communities, is connected with Saint Romanos the Melodist. This sixth century ecclesiastical poet and his hymns, known as kontakia, played a cardinal role in the shaping of Byzantine Christianity as distinct from the Syrian, the Egyptian, the Armenian, and the Latin.<sup>4</sup>

This study aims to investigate the writings of Saint Romanos the Melodist and their Christological content. This will be done by probing the explicitly Christological kontakia, as well as those dealing with the Theotokos, the Mother of God.

But is this a legitimate enterprise? Can the hymns of the Byzantine liturgy such as those of Romanos be used as a "source" of theology? Do these poetical compositions have any theological value?

When evaluating the theological value of hymnography, one's definition of "theology" plays a certain role. Systematic expositions of the faith usually are not found in ecclesiastical poetry. The hymn-writer's primary purpose was not to present a learned theological

treatise, but to verbally express in poetic language the self-giving love of God extended to his creatures for the sake of their salvation. Is not, though, this verbal articulation of one's faith-experience "theology?" The late Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky maintained that ". . . theology must be praise and must dispose us to praise God."<sup>5</sup> And indeed, this can be applied to liturgical hymns, since they are "praise" and "dispose us to praise." Theology according to this view, is doxology.

In the Byzantine Church, "theology" was not only used in reference to the erudite reflection upon, and systematization of that which was believed, but to those doctrines taught through instruction and worship. It was worship which had a special function in this theology, for it made known the unknowable, bringing it to life.<sup>6</sup>

What we are speaking of here is a liturgical theology, which by Byzantine definition, is one in which the liturgy, expressing the church's praise and worship, determined and was determined by the doctrine of the church.<sup>7</sup>

Worship is the locus for the reception and transmission of that which is believed, formulated and reflected upon. The "melody of theology" was the place which brought together both the scholarly and devotional interpretations of Scripture; the technical dogmatic language of the learned and the uncomplicated affirmations of the simple.<sup>8</sup>

The liturgical hymns of the Church can indeed be used as sources of theology--for in them the Scriptures and Tradition come alive and are given to the living experience of the Christian people.<sup>9</sup> In the East, the liturgy was, and still is, considered a criterion of orthodoxy.

The liturgical texts are said to contain no deformations or errors of the Christian faith, and can be said to reveal authentic doctrine.<sup>10</sup> Intellectual speculation, the magisterium, and the schools were never as important in the East as in the West. The centuries-old hymnographical tradition is deemed an expression of Church Tradition par excellence.

Needless to say, some liturgical hymns are more explicitly "dogmatic" than others.<sup>11</sup> This is certainly the case with Byzantine hymnography. Beginning in the eighth century and extending over the next few hundred years, Byzantium's hymnographers were primarily theologians expressing the faith of the Church in poetic form.<sup>12</sup> It was especially this era of ecclesiastical poetry which helped to mold the dogmatic theology of the Byzantine Church and establish its system of hymnody which is still used today.<sup>13</sup>

While Romanos was certainly not an original theologian or philosopher, his genius lay in his ability to express the faith dramatically, poetically, and from a theological standpoint, simply and on the level of popular piety.

In sum, the hymnography of the Byzantine Church is a poetic expression of theology ". . . translated through music to the sphere of religious emotion."<sup>14</sup> The faith of the Church as teaching and as theology is rooted in her faith as experience--her experience of that "which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands" (1 John 1:1).<sup>15</sup> Her lex credendi is revealed in her life, in her liturgy, in her lex orandi. And one of the contributors to that great and glorious treasure which is the



Byzantine liturgy, one who helped shape Byzantine Christianity, was a deacon-poet whom later generations honored as ho Melodos--Saint Romanos the Melodist.

Before launching into a study of his Christology as expressed in his Christological and Mariological hymns, it will be indispensable to give some background information regarding the life of Romanos and the literary genre which Byzantine hagiographers credit him with inventing--the kontakion.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup>Geoffrey Wainwright, Doxology. The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life. A Systematic Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 205. The expression is Luther's.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 205-6.

<sup>3</sup>John Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology. Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), p. 30.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Orthodox Theology. An Introduction (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), p. 14.

<sup>6</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan, The Christian Tradition. A History of the Development of Doctrine, vol. 2: The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700) (University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 135.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>9</sup>Thomas Hopko, The Orthodox Faith, vol. 1: Doctrine (New York: Department of Religious Education, The Orthodox Church of America, 1976), p. 119.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology, p. 123.

<sup>12</sup>Casimir Kucharek, The Byzantine-Slav Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. Its Origin and Evolution (Allendale, New Jersey: Alleluia Press, 1971), p. 398.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 396-98.

<sup>14</sup>Egon Wellesz, A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography, 2nd. ed. (Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 155.

<sup>15</sup>Alexander Schmemmann, Church, World, Mission. Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979), p. 134.

## CHAPTER II

### THE LIFE AND WORKS OF ROMANOS

#### His Life

On the first day of October every year, the Byzantine Church commemorates the feast day of Saint Romanos the Melodist. He is incontestably considered the greatest of all Byzantine ecclesiastical poets.<sup>1</sup> This "Prince of Byzantine Poets" has also been called the "Pindar and Dante of Byzantine literature,"<sup>2</sup> and critics view his best poems among the masterpieces of world literature, while the Eastern Church sings them today with a new and deeper appreciation.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, biographical information on Romanos is scant indeed. The only sources for the life of the poet are the synaxaria<sup>4</sup> of the Greek liturgical books. The most modern version, written by Saint Nikodemos of Mount Athos (1748-1809), derives from a longer and older vita which is no longer extant. The account reads:

Our Holy Father Romanos, now among the saints, was born in Syria, Emesa on the Orontes being his native city. At Beirut he served as deacon in the Church of the Resurrection. He left this city during the reign of Anastasios I and came to Constantinople. There he served with perfect piety and dignity in the Church of the Panaghia Theotokos in the Kyrou quarter. Romanos often kept all-night vigils in the Church of the Theotokos at Blachernae. In the morning, he returned to the Church in Kyrou, where once he received the divine gift of writing and setting to music kontakia for the whole year. The Lady Theotokos appeared to him in a dream, and handing him a scroll, she commanded him to eat it. The holy man obediently opened his mouth and swallowed the paper. Upon awakening, he climbed into the pulpit and began to chant the Nativity Hymn, Hē parthenos sēmeron ton hyperousion tiktei because it happened to be the holy day of Christmas. Having composed hymns for the other holy days, and hymns in honor of the saints, he wrote all

together more than one thousand kontakia. After a life of piety and holiness, he went home to the Lord. His poems written in his own hand were preserved for a long time in the church where he was also buried.

Before this miracle, Romanos had been uninspired (*amouosos*), awkward in both voice and song. For this reason he was ridiculed, even though he was extremely virtuous. Often he prayed before the Theotokos' miracle-working ikon, begging her to grant him a *charisma*, the gift of poetry. Here, then, one Christmas eve, the theios Romanos received the divine grace of poetry.<sup>5</sup>

Still another *vita* of Romanos in the famous Menologion of Emperor Basilius II (Codex vaticanus 1613) is not as decisive as to the identity of the emperor who ruled in Constantinople when the saint first arrived there. From this source, we learn that Romanos lived "in the days of Emperor Anastasius" (epi tōn chronōn Anastasiou tou basileōs).<sup>6</sup> There were two emperors of that name, Anastasius I (491-518) and Anastasius II (713-16). However, at the turn of the century a discovery was made which substantiated the account of the modern synaxarion.

In 1905, A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus found a report of a miracle in Codex 30 of the University Library in Messina, one where a boy was healed while singing the hymns of "the humble Romanos."<sup>7</sup> This healing occurred in the days of Emperor Heraclius I (610-41), meaning Romanos must have lived in the sixth century, since he was known in the seventh.<sup>8</sup>

A study published by Paul Maas in 1906<sup>9</sup> also proved that Romanos belonged to the sixth century on the basis of irrefutable internal evidence. Basically, this evidence points to the fact that the poet lived during the Nike revolution (532), and saw the destruction and rebuilding of the Hagia Sophia.<sup>10</sup> The kontakion "On Earthquakes and Fires" mentions the punishment of the wicked and the rebuilding of the church in Strophes 14-18. Strophe 16, line 6 may refer to the Nike revolution through a

play on words, and Strophe 20 refers explicitly to the Hagia Sophia and the Hagia Eirene. Strophe 24 of the same poem also indicates that the new church was not yet ready for celebrating the liturgy--the first dedication of Hagia Sophia took place in 537.

The kontakion "On the Presentation in the Temple" suggests that Romanos wrote it at the time the feast of the Presentation (Hypapante) was introduced in Constantinople in 542. Romanos speaks of only one ruler (anakti) in his hymn "The Forty Martyrs II"--Empress Theodora died in 548, and it is doubtful the saint would have ignored her had she been living. His poem "The Ten Virgins II" alludes to the earthquakes which rocked Constantinople on July 9, 552 and August 15, 555. These all establish beyond a reasonable doubt that Romanos lived in the sixth century.<sup>11</sup>

The synaxaria, then, provide few facts about the life of the deacon-poet. Even his ethnic origin is uncertain, for Emesa was "a cosmopolitan center inhabited by a mixed population."<sup>12</sup> Due to his frequent use of Semitisms, Jewish forms and Jewish names, translations of Jewish words, and vehement attacks against Judaism as a religion, one tradition makes Romanos a Jew who had converted to Christianity.<sup>13</sup> Eva Topping, however, contends he was born to a Christian family of Semitic origin.<sup>14</sup>

During his youth Romanos was probably educated and nourished by Hellenism and the Syriac culture, both of which co-existed in his native city.<sup>15</sup> He no doubt studied Greek in schools which had a classical rhetorical curriculum, and obtained a thorough knowledge of Greek and Greek form.<sup>16</sup>

He came to the capital of the Byzantine empire sometime between the years 491 and 518. The date of his death is unknown, though it must have been after 555, as the aforementioned second earthquake is the last event mentioned in any of Romanos' poems. This places Romanos in the age of the great Emperor Justinian (527-65). Although we have no indication that he held some official position at the imperial court, as the most famous hymnographer of his time, he must have been known to the Emperor, who was also a writer of hymns and a theologian.<sup>17</sup>

He was buried in the Church of the Panagia Theotokos in the Kyrou quarter, and was added to the Byzantine calendar of saints sometime during the next century.<sup>18</sup> Romanos was venerated not only in Byzantium, but in Armenia and in Russia, where after the ninth century he was revered as sladkopivets--"the singer of sweetness."

#### His Works

There is nothing equivalent in English literature to the kontakion. The kontakion (also kondakion) is a hybrid form, "a sermon in verse and set to music. It is, therefore, both hymn and homily."<sup>19</sup> The name "kontakion" was not used by Romanos in conjunction with his works--as a matter of fact, the word "kontakion" appears for the first time in the ninth century.<sup>20</sup> Instead, the deacon-poet called his works poiēma (poem), epos (song), ainos (praise), odē (ode), hymnos (hymn), psalmos (psalm), and deēsis (prayer).<sup>21</sup>

Romanos' kontakia consist of eleven to forty stanzas, with twenty-four being the preferred number, and each stanza varying in length from three to thirteen lines.<sup>22</sup> A single stanza is called a troparion or oikos.

All of the troparia are patterned on a model stanza, the irmos. The kontakion is built upon an irmos specially composed for it, or follows the pattern of an irmos written for another kontakion or group of kontakia.

Standing at the beginning of the kontakion is a short troparion, independent melodically and metrically from the rest of the poem. This is the prooimion or koukoulion. It serves to announce the theme, or the feast day for which it is written. A refrain, the epymnion or anaklōmenon, links the prooimion with the kontakion, and provides the ending for all the stanzas or strophes.

The initial letter of each strophe forms an acrostic, which generally gives the name of the author, the title of the poem, or sometimes simply the letters of the alphabet in its usual order. The acrostic is indicated in the title of the kontakion. The title also gives us the day on which the hymn is sung, the feast for which it is composed, and the musical mode according to which it is sung.<sup>23</sup> The final stanza is almost always a prayer, which sometimes is placed on the lips of one of the poem's characters.

Based on some biblical theme or exalting a biblical personality, the kontakion was chanted from the pulpit by the priest or deacon following the reading of the gospel. He was accompanied by the choir or the congregation singing the refrain at the end of each stanza. The kontakion as liturgical poetry, "like the architecture of the church, the ikons, the priestly vestments and acts, assists the Divine Liturgy in praising God and in understanding His mysteries."<sup>24</sup>

The impetus towards the new literary genre of the kontakion most probably came from the main forms of Syriac poetry of the fourth and fifth centuries: the Memra, the Madrasha and the Sugitha.<sup>25</sup>

The Memra was a poetical sermon with a simple meter and no acrostic or refrain. Meanwhile, the Madrasha contained the more complicated meters, the acrostic, and the refrain, though these differed from those of the kontakion. The Sugitha was a biblical episode presented in the form of a dialogue. The free use of the Scriptures found in the kontakion and the Sugitha can also be found in the Greek prose sermons of Cyril of Alexandria (+ 444), Basil of Seleucia (+ 459), Proclus of Constantinople (434-46), Eusibius of Alexandria (c. 500), and in spurious sermons attributed to John Chrysostom, Athanasius, Hippolytus and Amphilochius.<sup>26</sup> There is nothing in the Greek literature of the period paralleling the Syriac forms. Those that are similar are either translations from Syriac originals, or are directly influenced by Syriac literature.<sup>27</sup>

Through the combination of these three forms, along with the addition of the koukoulion, the kontakion was born.

The kontakion flourished and reached its peak in the sixth century, thanks to the genius of Romanos and a handful of other hymnographers, such as Anastasios, Dometios, and Kyriakos. However, from the seventh century on, the literary genre of the kontakion began to decline. Monastic opposition mounted against these poetic compositions, for they constituted a substitute for the biblical psalms and canticles, and encouraged the use of music which the monks considered too secular.<sup>28</sup> This situation changed in the eighth and ninth centuries, when the monks



themselves became the leaders in hymnographical creativity.<sup>29</sup> By this time the kontakia of the sixth century had been shortened and lost their homiletic character.<sup>30</sup>

Some of Romanos' kontakia still remain in the Byzantine liturgical books in an abridged form. Often the koukoulion and first stanza are those remnants from the golden age of Justinian which are still chanted today as hymns on the feast day for which they were written.

The hagiographical legend in the synaxarion attributes more than one thousand kontakia to Romanos. This, however, is probably no more than a metaphorical way of saying that he composed many hymns.<sup>31</sup> Eighty-five kontakia ascribed to the Melodist have survived, more than a few of them being spurious.<sup>32</sup> Fifty-nine of these hymns are considered genuine, and their subject matter may be broken down as follows: thirty-four deal with the person of Christ; five are on various New Testament episodes; seven are based on characters from the Old Testament; ten are dedicated to subjects such as fasting, repentance, baptism, earthquakes, and life in a monastery; and three are on martyrs and saints. Modern scholarship has also attributed to Romanos the most famous hymn in the Eastern Church: the Akathistos. We will say more about this when we come to the Mariology of Romanos.

None of Romanos' original manuscripts have come down to our day. They have survived only in kontakaria, medieval collections from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries containing kontakia of various authors.<sup>33</sup>

Romanos wrote in a Atticized literary koine, which lies side by side with New Testament Greek, the simple popular language, and

semitisms.<sup>34</sup> His style is characterized by the use of antitheses, plays on words, dialogues and soliloquies, metaphors and similes, and vivid imagery and dramatization.<sup>35</sup>

For sources, Romanos primarily used the Old and New Testaments, the Apocryphal books, and the lives of the saints. For dogmatic and moralizing passages he also draws from the Church Fathers, such as John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, and Basil of Seleucia. He tends to expand on the biblical narratives, whereas he compresses the more verbose writings of the Fathers. Due to this dependence on a number of sources, his poems lack uniformity and, at times, individuality of style.<sup>36</sup>

There are three full critical editions of Romanos' hymns. In 1952, N. B. Tomadakis and a team of scholars undertook the compilation of a critical edition at the University of Athens.<sup>37</sup> This text is considered of little consequence, as the editor's strange ideas about Byzantine metrics lead him to a total disregard of Romanos' meters.<sup>38</sup>

The two other editions we will make reference to throughout our study. The earlier of these is the critical text edited by Paul Maas and C. A. Trypanis.<sup>39</sup> This work is also called the "Oxford edition" and is used as a basis for the only English translation available of Romanos' corpus--the two volumes translated by Marjorie Carpenter.<sup>40</sup> Finally, we will also use the so-called "French edition" edited by Josè Grosdidier de Matons.<sup>41</sup> This version contains a French translation side by side with the Greek critical text, useful introductions to each kontakion, and helpful footnotes.

Of all Romanos' extant kontakia, undoubtedly the most important are those concerning the person of Christ. They comprise over half of

the existent genuine corpus and must certainly be considered primary sources for the christological teachings found in the hymns of our poeta vere Christianus. Romanos, just as other Christians before and after him, wished to express his praise, awe, and wonder at that paradox, that mystery which we call the Incarnation.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup>Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique, s.v. "Romanos le Mélode," by E. Amann.

<sup>2</sup>Eva Catafygiotu Topping, "St. Romanos the Melodos: Prince of Byzantine Poets," Greek Orthodox Theological Review (Spring, 1979): 65.

<sup>3</sup>Idem, "St. Romanos: Ikon of a Poet," Greek Orthodox Theological Review (Summer, 1966): 92.

<sup>4</sup>The synaxarion (also termed the Menologion) is a short account of the life of the saint whose feast it is, or a commentary on the meaning of the mystery that is being celebrated. The synaxarion is read daily at matins in the Greek Church. These readings are contained in a special book, also called the "Synaxarion," which corresponds more or less to the Roman Martyrology. They are also incorporated at relevant points into the Greek Menaia, which contains the services for the fixed feasts throughout the twelve months, from September 1 until August 31. The book corresponds to the "proprium sanctorum" (proper of the saints) in the West. See The Festal Menaion, trans. by Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware (London: Faber, 1969), pp. 540, 558.

<sup>5</sup>Synaxaristes (Athens, 1868), I, pp. 91ff., quoted and translated by Eva Topping in "Ikon of a Poet": 92-3 and in "St. Romanos the Melodos and his First Nativity Kontakion," Greek Orthodox Theological Review (Fall, 1976): 233.

<sup>6</sup>Wellesz, Byzantine Music and Hymnography, p. 183, note 1.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 194, note 1.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>"Die Chronologie der Hymnen des Romanos," Byzantinische Zeitschrift 15 (1906): 1-45.

<sup>10</sup>Marjorie Carpenter, trans., Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist, 2 vols. (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1970-73), vol. 1: On the Person of Christ, p. xiv and note 1.

<sup>11</sup>For a more thorough study of the dating of Romanos, see, Maas' "Chronologie."

<sup>12</sup>Topping, "Prince of Byzantine Poets": 66.

<sup>13</sup>C. A. Trypanis mentions some of these linguistic peculiarities in the Introduction of Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica. Cantica Genuina, ed. by Paul Maas and C. A. Trypanis (London: Oxford, 1963), p. xvi, note 1.

<sup>14</sup>"Prince of Byzantine Poets": 66. In her earliest article, "Ikon of a Poet," p. 93, she also took the position of Romanos being Jewish by birth. Unfortunately, she does not go into specifics as to why she changed her mind over a decade later.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Trypanis, Cantica Genuina, pp. xvi-xvii. See also Topping's "Ikon of a Poet": 93.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. xvii, and Topping, "First Nativity Kontakian": 232.

<sup>19</sup>Topping, "Ikon of a Poet": 94.

<sup>20</sup>Wellesz, Byzantine Music and Hymnography, p. 179.

<sup>21</sup>Carpenter, Kontakia, 1: xv.

<sup>22</sup>For this section regarding the structure of the kontakion, we are heavily indebted to Wellesz' study, Byzantine Music and Hymnography, pp. 179-82. See also Topping's "Prince of Byzantine Poets": 69, and Carpenter's Kontakia, 1: xv.

<sup>23</sup>Let us take, for example, the kontakion "On the Entry into Jerusalem." The title reads as follows: "Tē kyriakē tēs heptos hebdomados tōn nēsteiōn, kontakion eis ta baia pheron akrostichida tēnde eis ta baia Romanou. Echos plagios deuterios." This kontakion was to be sung on the sixth Sunday of the "fast" (Lent), commemorating literally, "the palm branches" (Palm Sunday). The acrostic is "eis ta baia Romanou" (by Romanos for Palm Sunday), and the poem is to be sung according to the second plagal mode.

<sup>24</sup>Topping, "Ikon of a Poet": 94.

<sup>25</sup>Trypanis, Cantica Genuina, p. xii. Also Wellesz, Byzantine Music and Hymnography, pp. 184-5.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. xii, especially note 4.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. xii-xiii.

<sup>28</sup>Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology, p. 122.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>30</sup>Trypanis, Cantica Genuina, p. xv.

<sup>31</sup>Topping, "Prince of Byzantine Poets:" 67.

<sup>32</sup>Nearly all of the hagiographical kontakia are considered "cantica dubia." The problems of authenticity are too involved to get into details here. Basically, the difficulties lie in acrostics falsified by lesser writers, inferior meters of the falsified poems in comparison to the genuine works, a less homogeneous grammar and syntax, a language displaying a wider vocabulary and tone, and in epithets accompanying the name of Romanos in the titles. For a hymn-by-hymn analysis of the grounds on which each individual kontakion is condemned as spurious, see Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica. Cantica Dubia, ed. by Paul Maas and C. A. Trypanis (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Company, 1970), Appendix II, pp. 186-209.

<sup>33</sup>Trypanis, Cantica Genuina, pp. xxv-xxvi.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp. xviii-xix.

<sup>35</sup>Carpenter, Kontakia, 1: xxxiii-xxxvi.

<sup>36</sup>Trypanis, Cantica Genuina, p. xxi.

<sup>37</sup>N. B. Tomadakis, Rōmanou tou Melōdou hymnoi ekdidomenoi ek patmiakōn kōdikōn, 4 vols. (Athens, 1952-61).

<sup>38</sup>Trypanis, Cantica Genuina, p. xxv.

<sup>39</sup>Cantica Genuina.

<sup>40</sup>Carpenter, Kontakia, vols. 1 and 2.

<sup>41</sup>Romanos le Mēlode: Hymnes, Sources Chrētiennes Series, vols. 99, 110, 114, 128, 283 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1964-81).

## CHAPTER III

### THE CHRISTOLOGY OF ROMANOS

#### Some Preliminary Remarks

When over five hundred bishops met for the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451, it was the largest such assembly held until that time. Compared to the previous councils, its proceedings were more regular and orderly, they allowed room for discussion and for the study of texts in commission. More importantly, Chalcedon resulted in formulating a christology which appropriated the best of both the Antiochene and Alexandrian christologies, enabling the Church to express a permanent truth in a language not bound by the limits of an isolated local tradition.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the Chalcedonian definition, balanced and careful as it was, caused a schism within Eastern Christianity that lasts to our day. As is the case with most dogmatic formulae, it created new problems while solving the old ones.

By stating that Christ was consubstantial to God in his divinity, the council failed to clarify the point of how the Trinity is one in God but not one in humanity.<sup>2</sup> Does the "one hypostasis" of Christ designate the pre-existent Logos, or is it the Antiochene "prosopon of union"--the historical Jesus only?<sup>3</sup> And who was the subject of suffering and crucifixion?<sup>4</sup> The Chalcedonian formula lacked the soteriological and charismatic impact which made the theological positions of Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria appealing. Ecclesiastical and political rivalries, imperial pressures to impose Chalcedon by force, Monophysite

interpretations of Cyril, and misinterpretations by Nestorianizing Antiochenes all led to the first major schism in the history of Eastern Christendom.<sup>5</sup>

And so, at the beginning of Justinian's reign, the emperor was faced with a number of different christological positions.

Meyendorff enumerates four basic reactions to Chalcedon present in the sixth century.<sup>6</sup> First, there were the Monophysites, who considered the council as a return to Nestorianism. For them, only the theology and terminology of Cyril of Alexandria was acceptable.<sup>7</sup> To say with Chalcedon that Christ was "in two natures" as opposed to "of two natures" was tantamount to admitting two beings in the incarnate Word.

The Strict Dyophysites upheld the Antiochene christology, objected to Cyril's theopaschite formula "One of the Holy Trinity suffered in the flesh," rejected Nestorius and perceived the council as a partial disavowal of Cyril.

The Cyrillian Chalcedonians, who represented the majority party at the council, did not view Chalcedon and Cyril as mutually exclusive. For this group, the Cyrillian terminology retained its value in an anti-Nestorian context, while the council's teaching on the two natures (en duo physesin) was necessary only to affirm the double consubstantiality of Christ, thereby condemning Eutychian Monophysitism. Contrary to the Strict Dyophysites, the Cyrillian Chalcedonians accepted the Alexandrian Doctor's theopaschism. This tendency was the dominant one in the sixth century and won the support of Justinian I.

The fourth and final christological interpretation was that of the Origenists. In an effort to find a creative solution to the



terminological problems of Chalcedon, this school of thought, whose main exponent was Leontius of Byzantium, turned to Origenist metaphysics, particularly as found in the works of Evagrius Ponticus. They maintained that Christ was an intellect (nous) united essentially with the Logos.

All of this was part of a theological ferment beginning immediately after Chalcedon, one which moved steadily toward a Cyrillian interpretation of the council, and therefore closer to the Monophysite position.<sup>8</sup> A catalyst in this process was a document which attempted to resolve the post-Chalcedonian dogmatic impasse by making concessions to the Monophysites--the Henoticon of emperor Zeno issued in 482.<sup>9</sup> The Henoticon affirmed that the only binding statement of orthodoxy was the creed of Nicaea (325), as interpreted by Constantinople I, Ephesus, and Cyril's twelve anathemas. Although politically the Henoticon failed to appease the Monophysites and precipitated a schism with Rome, dogmatically it was somewhat an exaggeration of the growing trend to view the decree of 451 through the eyes of Cyrillian theology.<sup>10</sup>

Such was the christological milieu during Justinian's reign and during the lifetime of Romanos the Melodist. Where does the deacon-poet fit into this picture, if at all? Which position do his writings reflect? Or does he fall into a class of his own?

One does not have to study Romanos' texts in a scholarly manner to realize that the poet lacks the natural dispositions peculiar to theologians. He has no taste for speculation or abstraction, no sense of terminological nuances or precision, and is far from being an accomplished exegete.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it would be naive to look for an original

theology in Romanos, one which makes a definitive contribution to the history of theology in general, or to christology in particular. Nonetheless, his works do indicate the preoccupations common in his time with christological disputes,<sup>12</sup> and will give us a look into the lex orandi of the sixth century Byzantine Church. One can only admire how Romanos wove a point of theology into a poem by using various figures of speech and antitheses.

This chapter will focus first on the christological heresies that Romanos attempted to refute. This will be followed by an inquiry into how Romanos portrays the divine and human natures in Christ, and will end with a discussion on the human knowledge and consciousness of the earthly Jesus of Nazareth.

#### Romanos' Polemic Against the Heretics

Romanos rarely names those heretical doctrines which he attacks.<sup>13</sup> The only heresy he names explicitly is Arianism:

Put to death by the command of the lord, the disease of the leper fled, for the sickness trembled on seeing the Creator and Redeemer, no more indeed than the Arians trembled before the absolute power, the authority of the Word, the Son of God; for he is before the centuries, eternal, born from a Father eternal, His Son, independent of time. He remains through the centuries as He was through all time . . .<sup>14</sup>

A stronger condemnation is found in the fifth hymn on the resurrection:<sup>15</sup>

In the world, great is the mystery of Thy advent, which the followers of Arius blaspheme since they betray Thee who art consubstantial with the Father, calling Thee "made" and "created," putting an improper sense to the words of the Scripture. Take thought of this--O terrible hard-heartedness--if you call the Creator created, and if you babble of God made by God, you also make gods of the angels who are of immaterial substance; but a time exists when they were not.<sup>16</sup> He who has destroyed the weapons of Belial, the victory of Hades, and the sting of death.

Less open references to the Arian error can be located in the hymns "On the Wedding at Cana"<sup>17</sup> and again in "Resurrection V."<sup>18</sup>

Romanos reproaches the Arians for making the Son a creature (ktisma), denying him lordship or absolute power (despoteia) and authority (authentia).<sup>19</sup>

Outside of these few instances, Romanos refers to the heretics by their doctrine rather than by name. Matons points out two basic positions which were the targets of Romanos' polemic.<sup>20</sup> First, there were those who attributed to Christ a celestial body, an ouranion sōma. The ninth strophe of the second hymn on the Epiphany is directed by the poet against the defenders of such a doctrine:

A new Heaven has appeared for us, and on it the God of all descends. The prophet has called the body of the Incorporeal One "Heaven of Heaven," for even if he was born and wrapped in swaddling clothes, He is the blameless Heaven; for He is Heaven and not a celestial body (ouranion sōma), for He was born of Mary the Virgin, and united to God, we know not how . . .<sup>21</sup>

The kontakion "On the Presentation"<sup>22</sup> mentions those who maintained that Christ's body was celestial, a mere phantom (fantasia-- a probable reference to Docetism), or that he assumed his body from Mary without a soul (an allusion to Apollinarians).

The fifth hymn on the resurrection points a finger at a group which "interpret(s) mischievously . . . that Christ took on a flesh from heaven (epouranios sarx) and not from His mother."<sup>23</sup>

There is a possibility that these champions of the ouranion sōma could be Apollinarians. According to Epiphanius of Salamis, some of them held that Christ's body had a celestial origin, and Gregory of Nyssa attributed this opinion, wrongly so, to Apollinaris himself.<sup>24</sup> As Apollinarians were not very numerous in Romanos' time, it is more

probable that our poet is alluding to Eutychian Monophysites. The ouranion sōma was attributed to them, and Justinian himself branded Eutyches as a "phantasiast."<sup>25</sup>

Also criticized by Romanos were those who adhered to the opinion that, while Jesus Christ is perfect man (teleios anthropos), he is but a "mere man" (anthropos psilos) or "mere mortal" (brotos psilos).<sup>26</sup> "Let no one say that the side of Christ was merely human (psilou anthropou), for Christ was God and man," writes Romanos in the kontakion "On the Passion."<sup>27</sup> A more powerful statement is found in "Resurrection V," strophe 13:

O terrible, slanderous hardness of heart! O opinion of the faithless who think what is opposite to the Scriptures; for they hide the truth, inventing various paths. Not recognizing one Son, the Christ, some wish to divide the divine essence and call a mere mortal (brotos psilos) the One who appeared in the world in the flesh for us. But he has been recognized as God, remaining immortal in nature, even though he appeared as a mortal, since He took the form of a slave . . .<sup>28</sup>

Maas has pointed out that the expression anthropos psilos occurs several times in the writings of Justinian.<sup>29</sup> The emperor imputed it to Nestorius, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Origen.<sup>30</sup>

Both Maas and Matons feel that, given the context of the strophe, the above is an accusation of Nestorianism, without naming that error explicitly.<sup>31</sup> Another anti-Nestorian passage can be found in the kontakion on the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, strophe 8.<sup>32</sup>

Summarizing, Romanos explicitly criticizes Arianism, and implicitly attacks Docetism, Apollinarianism, Eutychian Monophysitism, and Nestorianism. In so doing he affirms without much theological elaboration, that Jesus Christ is homoousios with the Father, and because he truly took his body with a human soul from the Blessed Virgin Mary,

he is fully human, as well as fully God.

Romanos' Portrayal of the  
Divine and Human  
in Christ

Beyond the attacks upon christological errors, one may obtain a more precise idea of Romanos' teachings about the person of Jesus Christ not only by examining the explicitly dogmatic passages in the kontakia, but also those which portray Christ as speaking or acting.

The second person of the Trinity is hyperousios,<sup>33</sup> the uncreated Word,<sup>34</sup> God before time,<sup>35</sup> "engendered before the Morning Star."<sup>36</sup> He is the unapproachable One,<sup>37</sup> the King of the Universe,<sup>38</sup> present in all places,<sup>39</sup> the One at whom the powers of heaven tremble,<sup>40</sup> and whom the cherubim bear on their wings.<sup>41</sup> He "commands the clouds to cover the Heavens as a cloak",<sup>42</sup> being the Master of all.<sup>43</sup> He is of one substance with the Father and the Holy Spirit, undivided in the Trinity.<sup>44</sup>

The incarnation of God, which is "ineffable to every logos and unknowable to every intellect,"<sup>45</sup> inspires Romanos with the greatest of awe and wonder. The divine Mother speaks for the poet and for all believers when she is made to say:

Shall I call Thee perfect man? But I know that Thy conception was divine, for no mortal man was ever conceived without intercourse and seed as Thou, O blameless One. And if I call Thee God, I am amazed at seeing Thee in every respect like me, for thou hast no traits which differ from those of man, yet Thou wast conceived and born without sin (Presentation, strophe 4).<sup>46</sup>

This act of God becoming human is completely voluntary, stemming from divine philanthrōpia--a point which Romanos consistently emphasizes.<sup>47</sup>

The Word assumed flesh without change (atreptōs) from the Virgin Mary, being like us in everything except sin:

Examine me, readily do I allow it and see that you will find no unjust word or deed. For I have not done wrong in any action, nor have I uttered anything deceitful in word. Therefore I speak, "Who of you will accuse me of sin?" For among all the dead, now I am shown to be free in every respect, and of all sensual mortals I am the one who is unacquainted with sin.<sup>48</sup>

While remaining consubstantial with the Father, he is also consubstantial with us, being one from both without confusion (asynchētos).<sup>49</sup>

The use of the negative adverbs atreptōs and asynchētos brings to mind the terminology of Cyril and the symbol of Chalcedon.<sup>50</sup>

The result of the Incarnation is a single, undivided Christ:

". . . Christ was God and man; He was not divided in two (schizomenos eis duo); He was one from one Father. . ." <sup>51</sup>

To emphasize this unicity, the poet makes brilliant use of antitheses, describing the earthly Jesus as possessing both divine attributes and the corresponding or opposite human attributes. One of his favorite literary devices is contrasting Christ's presence with the Father in heaven, yet dwelling among us here on earth:

He who experienced childbirth without wedding came to the marriage.  
He who alone is borne upon the wings of the Cherubim, He who exists in the bosom of the Father, inseparable from Him, reclined in a mortal home.<sup>52</sup>

And He who is inseparable from His home, hastens to journey far in the flesh to Adam. He who was not separated from the bosom of His Father still brings to pass all events.<sup>53</sup>

While holding the infant Jesus in his arms, the righteous elder Simeon declares:

Since I have seen Thee in the flesh, and have been deemed worthy to hold Thee, I behold Thy glory along with Thy Father and the Holy Spirit, for Thou hast at the same time remained on high, and come here below, Thou, the only friend of man.<sup>54</sup>

The kontakion for Palm Sunday sings, "In Heaven on Thy throne, on earth carried on an ass, O Christ, God, receive the praise of the angels and

the song of the children."<sup>55</sup> The following is placed on the lips of the Christ child as he lies in the cradle, conversing with his Mother: "Thou dost bear me in thy arms for their sake. The Cherubim do not see me, but thou dost behold me and carry me and cherish me as son, Mary full of grace."<sup>56</sup>

The beauty of these excerpts is that not only do they underscore the unity of Christ's person, but they convey another important truth--for it is in the central Christian doctrine of the Incarnation that God is revealed as both transcendent and immanent.

In strophe 16 of the hymn on the Innocents, Romanos contrasts the omnipresence of God with the human presence of Jesus: "O Thou who art everywhere and who rulest over all, where dost Thou flee? Where dost thou lead? In what city shalt Thou make Thy dwelling?"<sup>57</sup>

Jesus is also described as being uncontainable, yet at the same time is limited to a certain space:

The lawless have seized Thee, who dost control in Thy hand the whole globe of the earth; now they have led Thee, who are not to be contained in the universe into the court of Caiaphas.<sup>58</sup>

Carried away by the warmth of her affection and by her fervent love, the maiden hastened and wished to seize Him, the One who fills all creation without being confined by boundaries . . .<sup>59</sup>

"He who is not to be contained in space is held in the arms of the Elder," writes our poet in the hymn on the Presentation.<sup>60</sup>

There are a number of other examples where the Melodist predicates both divine and human attributes of Christ. Strophe 3 of "Resurrection V" asserts that "As incomprehensible Word, Thou are uncreated, but Thou art created in the flesh and seen in the form of a slave for the race of mortals."<sup>61</sup>

"He is tired from walking," says the kontakion on the Samaritan Woman, strophe 4, "He who tirelessly walked on the sea . . ." <sup>62</sup> And in the hymn on Judas, the earth is told it should tremble, and the sea should flee ". . . for murder is being arranged; the price of the Priceless is being discussed, the slaughter of the Giver of Life." <sup>63</sup>

Jesus "appeared accessible to men on earth, but inaccessible to the angels," <sup>64</sup> and Romanos confesses him to be ". . . one, visible and invisible, finite and infinite," <sup>65</sup>

Two passages underline Christ's tangibility as human and his divine intangibility: <sup>66</sup>

Why do you say to me, Simon Bar-Jonah, that the crowds of people were pressing me? They do not touch my divinity, but she, in touching my visible robe clearly grasped my divine nature . . . <sup>67</sup>

O marvel! the forbearance! the immeasurable meekness! The Untouched is felt; the Master is held by a servant, and he reveals His wounds to one of his inner circle. <sup>68</sup>

It is quite evident that Romanos has no difficulties whatsoever with the communicatio idiomatum, that theological principle which holds that in view of the hypostatic union the properties of both the divine and human natures can and must be predicated of the one Person Jesus Christ. It means as well, that the divine and human attributes can be interchanged. This interchanging of properties is also employed by Romanos with great expertise and freedom.

The Melodist speaks of the God before time being born and lying in the cradle; <sup>69</sup> God lodges with Simon in his home; <sup>70</sup> God is betrayed by Judas who wishes to sell the blood of the Ever-living One, <sup>71</sup> and is later voluntarily seized in the garden (Judas, strophe 1). <sup>72</sup>

Our deacon-poet demonstrates his faithfulness to Cyril and to



Emperor Justinian through the use of the so-called "Theopaschite" expressions. These were statements which either implied or said outright that the Logos, being incarnate, truly suffered and died. In other words, the subject of Christ's death was the Logos himself. It was Justinian's concern not simply to appease the Monophysites, but to affirm the doctrine of the communication of idioms against the Strict Dyophysites.<sup>73</sup> For if the Logos could not die due to his divine nature, how then could he be born of the Virgin? And if he is not born of the Virgin Mary, how is she to be called "Theotokos?" The formula "One of the Trinity suffered in the flesh" became the slogan of a theology which the Western Church accepted, since it was reflected in the fifth section of Leo's famous Tome to Flavian.<sup>74</sup>

Romanos has no fear in stating that God is crucified,<sup>75</sup> that God suffers,<sup>76</sup> and is handed over to death and the tomb.<sup>77</sup> The Creator is sacrificed;<sup>78</sup> the Living One is killed.<sup>79</sup> In the kontakion on the Mission of the Apostles, Romanos has Jesus commanding the Twelve, "Say that, being God and ineffable, I took on the form of the flesh."<sup>80</sup>

Preservation of the unity of person in Christ is such a priority for the poet, that he does not separate the Lord's divinity from his humanity even after his death on the cross: "So He was carried into the tomb, and yet in the grave He was alive, for His divinity was not separated from the flesh."<sup>81</sup>

Notwithstanding this emphasis on the unity of Christ's person, one is left with the impression after reading Romanos that the divine nature shines forth much more brightly than the human. Romanos rightly points out that Romanos seems to avoid speaking of the human nature of

Jesus at the expense of the divine.<sup>82</sup> How does he do this?

First there is the poet's usage of the word physis. There are but two instances where physis can refer to Christ's human nature, and Matons finds both doubtful.<sup>83</sup> Other texts employing this term are considered explicit references to the divine nature.

We find Jesus, while addressing the woman with a hemorrhage, speaking of his divine nature--theia physis,<sup>84</sup> while the sinful woman alludes to the invisible nature (physis aneideos) of the Son of David.<sup>85</sup>

The hymn on the Presentation contains an important text from the christological point of view, one which we have already seen is anti-Nestorian. It asserts that Jesus Christ is the Son of God kata physin, an allusion to his divine nature.<sup>86</sup> That same strophe calls attention to our Lord as Son of the Virgin hyper physin--beyond nature.<sup>87</sup> There is a possible implication here that Christ's birth was a supernatural one, ie. a virgin birth. However, the phrase more than likely points to Jesus himself as "supernatural" (divine), rather than to the method of his birth.<sup>88</sup>

A second method through which Romanos brings the divinity of Jesus Christ to the fore is by having all those characters who believe in him recognize his divine nature.<sup>89</sup> The Blessed Virgin Mary exclaims in a soliloquy,

Thou, my fruit, my life, by whom I am known as I am and was; Thou are my God. As I behold the seal of my virginity unbroken, I proclaim Thee the immutable Word become flesh.<sup>90</sup>

The forerunner John the Baptist is made to complain that if he holds the head of his God, how will he not be burned by the "unapproachable light?"<sup>91</sup> After acquiescing to Christ, John proclaims him God of

all, who gave him the strength as a weak mortal to baptize "the abyss".<sup>92</sup>

Romanos relates to us the story that the disciples Peter and John are terrified upon seeing the empty tomb, and are equally dismayed that the Risen Jesus had appeared first to the women and not to them. They affirm that the tomb ". . . is not really a tomb, but in truth, it is the dwelling of God, for He was in it, and He dwelt in it of His will."<sup>93</sup>

In the kontakion on the Sinful Woman, Romanos retells and embellishes the gospel account of Luke 7:36-50. A woman who has been leading a sinful life wishes to go to the home of Simon the Pharisee so that she might anoint Jesus. Knowing who Jesus is in reality, she wants to repent and hastens to a perfume merchant to purchase some costly ointment for her friend who has won her heart and soul, and whom she loves purely and with good reason, although she has never met him.<sup>94</sup> When the merchant inquires for whom the perfume is, the woman responds, "He is the Son of David, and for this reason beautiful to behold; Son of God and God, and hence the source of my delight."<sup>95</sup>

The leper of Matthew 8:1-4 is also portrayed by the poet as knowing who Jesus is before meeting him and being cured. "Nothing stands out against Him as God and Creator".<sup>96</sup> He is eternal God, Master,<sup>97</sup> born of the Virgin without seed, Word of God,<sup>98</sup> God of the whole universe.<sup>99</sup>

The Samaritan Woman of John 4 is depicted by the author as busy-ing her mind with thoughts such as these:

Is He not, then, from Heaven and yet He wears earthly form, If, then, being God and mortal, He was revealed to me as man and thirsted; as God He gave me to drink and prophesied.<sup>100</sup>

Those characters who confess the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth are Romanos' vehicles for his own belief, as well as that of his true-believing contemporaries and believers of future generations.

The Human Knowledge and  
Consciousness of  
Christ

The third means adopted by Romanos through which he stresses the divinity of Jesus is his taking a firm position regarding the human psychology of Jesus.<sup>101</sup> This dimension of christology was never really fully elaborated by Byzantine theologians. Certainly Romanos does not go into the scholastic distinctions of beatific knowledge, infused knowledge or acquired knowledge--but he never fails to demonstrate that the earthly Jesus enjoys that omniscience which is attributed to his divinity.

While speaking to his disciples before feeding the multitude, Jesus is made to say:

Sometimes you suppose I think as a man; you do not recognize that I know all things before they happen. Because of my power to foresee hidden things, I knew before that you had no bread.<sup>102</sup>

And before embarking to raise Lazarus from the dead, Jesus explained to the Twelve, "He is dead. As mortal I am away from him; but as God I know all things."<sup>103</sup>

Elsewhere, Christ is characterized as knowing secrets,<sup>104</sup> and knowing all thoughts.<sup>105</sup> He knows in advance that Judas will betray him,<sup>106</sup> and what Peter will say in Caiaphas' courtyard.<sup>107</sup>

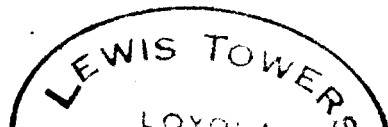
The deacon-poet plainly denies any human ignorance in the human

person of Jesus. This is not very unusual, however, for it was rather common for Byzantine theologians of the period to predicate omniscience of Jesus.<sup>108</sup> Meyendorff postulates that this was due not so much to christology as to two other concepts prevalent at the time.<sup>109</sup> First, to the Greek mind ignorance was associated with sin. Christ being sinless, this feature of humanity could not be attributed to him. There was also a philosophy of gnosis which made knowledge the ultimate criterion of unfallen nature. In Jesus, the New Adam, natural humanity, that is, humanity participating in the glory of God, has been restored. Such a man would not be subject to the laws of "fallen" humanity.<sup>110</sup> This being the case, omniscience in Christ would not be a sign pointing to his divinity, but instead to his perfect humanity!<sup>111</sup>

In denying human ignorance in Jesus, Romanos does not agree with Cyril, who held that ignorance was a characteristic of humanity:

What else, after all, would the end be, except the last day, which, He says, in view of His Incarnation, He does not know, thus preserving again in His humanity the rank befitting it? For it is proper for humanity not to know the future.<sup>112</sup>

We saw above that Romanos explicitly teaches that Jesus is all-knowing because he is God. This is especially true in view of the fact that in those texts, he compares the humanity of Christ to the divinity, but in the end stands the divine over against the human. Romanos does not give us any evidence in his hymns that Jesus' omniscience is due either to his sinlessness or perfect humanity. We do not think that the poet is trying to emphasize the human nature of the incarnate Logos through an omniscient Jesus.<sup>113</sup> It is more in tune with Romanos' viewpoint throughout the kontakia to conclude that his all-knowing, earthly Jesus is a pedagogical device for reiterating the doctrine of the



divinity of Christ.

The two direct quotations from "Multiplication of the Loaves" and "Lazarus II" used above for evidence of Jesus' omniscience also touch upon the problem of our Lord's self-consciousness. Here, Romanos paints us a picture of a Jesus who knows who he is from the moment he first sees the light of day. In an extraordinary sequence in our poet's famous first Nativity kontakion, the infant Jesus communicates telepathically with his Mother:

Admit them (the Magi), for my word led them and shone upon those who are seeking me. To all appearances, it is a star; but in reality it is a power. It went with the Magi in service to me . . . .<sup>114</sup>

Now receive, revered one, receive those who received me; for I am in them as I am in thy arms, nor was I away from thee when I accompanied them.<sup>115</sup>

While at the wedding in Cana, Jesus in a conversation with Mary asserts that he is God before time, even though he has become man.<sup>116</sup> Speaking to the leper he has healed, Christ admits being Lord and Master, merciful, and Guardian of the Law.<sup>117</sup> Before exorcizing the possessed man, Jesus tells his disciples:

I have come from Heaven to save all men, unsolicited aid for all. For this reason I became man that I might redeem from the curse the race of my flesh. Hence I became incarnate, I, the Merciful took on living flesh; for I wish to save man on whom I took pity and willed to come in a Virgin's womb without leaving heaven, I, indivisible, Master of all.<sup>118</sup>

Prior to multiplying the loaves and the fishes, Jesus answers his disciples' query of how the loaves can be sufficient for such a multitude by saying:

You are mistaken if you do not know that I am Creator of the universe; I provide for the world; I know clearly what these people need. I see the desert and that the sun is setting. Indeed, I arrange the setting of the sun . . . I myself shall cure their

hunger, for I am the bread of immortality,<sup>119</sup>

After rising from the dead, Christ has a dialog with Hades, during which he affirms himself as a man, but also as faultless, the Word of God, Creator of all men, God and ruler of all.<sup>120</sup>

Through his poetry, Romanos teaches that the incarnate Word knows all, including his identity as God, from manger, to cross, to glorification. The psychology of Jesus reflected in the poet's writings certainly gives us the impression of a Jesus who is much more than human, almost to the point where the human is relegated to the distant background.

Such is the christological icon which Romanos paints in his strictly "christological" kontakia. But is this the complete picture? Can it be improved by going beyond the hymnody dealing with the life and works of Christ? There are other hymns from the pen of Romanos which may put the finishing touches on Romanos' icon of Christ. These are the four mariological kontakia, which will be the next object of our scrutiny, as we attempt to fill out the deacon-poet's teaching on the person of the Word Incarnate.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup>John Meyendorff, Christ in Eastern Christian Thought (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>Idem, "Emperor Justinian, the Empire and the Church," The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982), pp. 54-55.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Pelikan, The Christian Tradition, vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600) (University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 265.

<sup>5</sup>Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology, p. 33.

<sup>6</sup>Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology, pp. 33-35; Christ in Eastern Thought, pp. 29-30; Byzantine Legacy, pp. 56-61. Meyendorff's works, especially his Christ in Eastern Thought are considered truly authoritative studies on post-Chalcedonian christology in the East.

<sup>7</sup>Hence, the "mia physis" formula of Cyril "one single incarnate nature of the God-Word" was the only admissible formula for Monophysites.

<sup>8</sup>Pelikan, Emergence, p. 274.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 275. A more detailed treatment of the period can be found in Patrick T.R. Gray's The Defense of Chalcedon in the East (451-553), Studies in the History of Christian Thought Series, vol. XX (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1979), especially pp. 25-53. Gray shows that the period between Chalcedon and Constantinople II was unsettled, with one emperor after the other attempting to quell the fierce opposition of great numbers of Eastern Christians to the Chalcedonian definition.

<sup>11</sup>Josè Grosdidier de Matons, Romanos le Mélode et les origines de la poésie religieuse à Byzance (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1977), p. 264.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. See also Carpenter, Kontakia: 1, p. xxviii.

<sup>13</sup>Maas, "Chronologie": 13-18.



<sup>14</sup>On the Leper, strophe 16, Carpenter, Kontakia: 1, p. 82.

<sup>15</sup>Strophe 14, *ibid.*, p. 301.

<sup>16</sup>This is an allusion to a famous Arian formula, ēn pote hote ouk ēn. See also Matons, Hymnes, IV, p. 519.

<sup>17</sup>Strophe 15, Carpenter, Kontakia: 1, p. 73: "For what He who engendered me has done, these things I also do, since I am consubstantial (homoousios) with Him and His Holy Spirit, I who Have in wisdom created all things."

<sup>18</sup>Strophe 2, *ibid.*, p. 296: "For thou art not a created being (ktisma), but a creative force, Word always coeternal of the same nature (homoousios) as the One who engendered Thee. Thus Thou art of one substance (en mia ousia) with the Father and the Spirit, proclaimed by the faithful as indivisible in the Trinity."

<sup>19</sup>Matons, Romanos, p. 266.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup>Carpenter, Kontakia: 1, p. 62.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>23</sup>Strophe 16, *ibid.*, p. 302.

<sup>24</sup>Matons, Romanos, p. 266.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>Strophe 19, Carpenter, Kontakia: 1, p. 214.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 301. The terminological precision of the passage brings to mind the theology of the Cappadocians. See Matons, Romanos, p. 267.

<sup>29</sup>"Chronologie": 14, note 3.

<sup>30</sup>Matons, Hymnes, IV, pp. 516-517, note 1.

<sup>31</sup>Maas, "Chronologie": 14, and Matons, Romanos, p. 266. Matons is also basing his conclusion on an anonymous hymn where the Nestorians are strongly alluded to: "On retrouve l'expression (psilos anthropos) et l'accusation dans l'hymne anonyme aux Pères de Nicee publié par P. Maas . . . dans cette pièce, dont l'attribution à Romanos est probable, les nestoriens sont manifestement visés, mais non nommés." See Matons, Hymnes, IV, pp. 516-517, note 1.

<sup>32</sup>"Yet I confess Thee, as Son of the Virgin, to be beyond natural law." See Matons, Hymnes, II, p. 183, note 2.

<sup>33</sup>Nativity I, prooimion, Matons, Hymnes, II, p. 50.

<sup>34</sup>Resurrection V, strophe 3, Carpenter, Kontakia: I, p. 296.

<sup>35</sup>Nativity I, refrain, *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup>Nativity II, prooimion, *ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>37</sup>Nativity I, prooimion, *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>38</sup>The Innocents, strophe 2, *ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>39</sup>Lazarus II, strophe 15, *ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>40</sup>Presentation, prooimion I, *ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>41</sup>Presentation, strophe 2, *ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>42</sup>Epiphany I, strophe 14, *ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>43</sup>Possessed Man, refrain, *ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>44</sup>Resurrection V, strophe 2, *ibid.*, p. 296.

<sup>45</sup>Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite, The Divine Names, II, 9 in The Divine Names and Mystical Theology, trans. by John D. Jones (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), p. 124.

<sup>46</sup>Presentation, strophe 4, Carpenter, Kontakia: 1, p. 40.

<sup>47</sup>Nativity I, strophe 2, 3 (Carpenter, Kontakia: 1, pp. 4-5); Nativity II, strophes 13, 14 (pp. 19-20); Epiphany I, strophe 2 (p. 50); Epiphany II, strophe 13 (p. 64); Leper, strophe 2 (p. 77); Lazarus I, strophe 3 (p. 141); Lazarus II, strophes 13, 17 (pp. 154, 156); Palm Sunday, strophe 2 (p. 160); Adoration of the Cross, strophe 4 (p. 242); Resurrection II, strophe 9 (p. 266); Resurrection V, strophe 3 (p. 296); Doubting Thomas, strophe 14 (p. 334); Second Coming, strophe 2 (p. 372).

<sup>48</sup>Resurrection IV, strophe 14, Carpenter, Kontakia: 1, p. 288. Also see Resurrection V, strophe 1 (p. 295) and Presentation, strophe 4 (p. 40). The sinlessness of Jesus is a point belabored by Romanos throughout the christological kontakia. He is the Impeccable One--anamartēte (Presentation, strophe 4; Resurrection V, strophe 28. See Matons, Hymnes, II, pp. 178-179 and Hymnes, IV, p. 535); "born without sin" (Epiphany I, strophe 7. See Carpenter, Kontakia 1: p. 52); "the only sinless One" (Leper, prooimion, *ibid.*, p. 77); sinless in His nature (Hemorrhaging Woman, strophe 1, p. 121). He alone is "without blemish"--dicha mōmou (Peter's Denial, strophe 21. Matons, Hymnes, IV, p. 136).

- <sup>49</sup>Resurrection V, strophe 1 Carpenter, Kontakia: 1, p. 295.
- <sup>50</sup>Matons, Romanos, p. 267.
- <sup>51</sup>Passion, strophe 19, Carpenter, Kontakia: 1, p. 214.
- <sup>52</sup>Cana, strophe 2, *ibid.*, p. 68.
- <sup>53</sup>Resurrection IV, strophe 4, *ibid.*, p. 284.
- <sup>54</sup>Presentation, strophe 16, *ibid.*, p. 45.
- <sup>55</sup>Palm Sunday, prooimion I, *ibid.*, p. 159.
- <sup>56</sup>Nativity II, strophe 13, *ibid.*, p. 19.
- <sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 33.
- <sup>58</sup>Passion, strophe 3, *ibid.*, p. 208.
- <sup>59</sup>Resurrection VI, strophe 11, *ibid.*, p. 319.
- <sup>60</sup>Strophe 1, *ibid.*, p. 39.
- <sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 296.
- <sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 88.
- <sup>63</sup>Strophe 14, *ibid.*, p. 174.
- <sup>64</sup>Presentation, strophe 2, *ibid.*, p. 40.
- <sup>65</sup>Presentation, strophe 8, *ibid.*, p. 42.
- <sup>66</sup>Matons, Romanos, p. 267.
- <sup>67</sup>Hemorrhaging Woman, strophe 15, Carpenter, Kontakia: 1, p. 125.
- <sup>68</sup>Doubting Thomas, strophe 13, *ibid.*, p. 334.
- <sup>69</sup>Nativity II, strophes 11 and 13, *ibid.*, p. 19.
- <sup>70</sup>Sinful Woman, strophe 8, *ibid.*, p. 104.
- <sup>71</sup>Judas, strophe 15, *ibid.*, p. 174.
- <sup>72</sup>Judas, strophe 1, *ibid.*, p. 169.
- <sup>73</sup>Meyendorff, "Emperor Justinian," p. 62.
- <sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>75</sup>Peter's Denial, strophe 16, Carpenter, Kontakia: 1, p. 187.

<sup>76</sup>Passion, prooimion II, *ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>77</sup>Resurrection I, strophe 1, *ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>78</sup>Passion, strophe 15, *ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>79</sup>Passion, strophe 16, *ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>80</sup>Strophe 23, *ibid.*, p. 346.

<sup>81</sup>Resurrection III, strophe 5, *ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>82</sup>Romanos, p. 268.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.* The two are found in "The Crucifixion," strophe 17, and in "Resurrection V," strophe 4. He feels that the former in actuality refers to the divine nature, while the latter is rejected on textual grounds.

<sup>84</sup>Hemorrhaging Woman, strophe 11, Carpenter, Kontakia: 1, p. 125.

<sup>85</sup>Sinful Woman, strophe 11, *ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>86</sup>Presentation, strophe 8, Matons, Hymnes, II, pp. 182-183.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup>Hyper in this particular text could be taken to refer either to Christ's divine nature or to the virginal birth. But if Romanos wished to make a point of the virginal conception, why did he not use the word para, as opposed to hyper? Any Greek lexicon will point out that para used with the accusative connotes "contrary to." Regarding this passage Matons in my opinion becomes inconsistent. In his monograph he writes: "Dans l'hymne de l'Hypapantè . . . le Christ est dit fils de Dieu kata physin (il s'agit donc de sa nature divine), et fils de la Vierge para(?) physin, expression qui désigne évidemment la conception virginale, et où physis signifie "ordre de la création" et non plus "nature d'un être" (Romanos, p. 268). The fact is that the phrase para physin is not to be found anywhere in the hymn on the Presentation. If it were indeed there instead of hyper, one could understand the possible allusion to the virginal conception. However, his own French translation of the passage reflects an emphasis on the divine: "Selon la nature je te conçois et je te crois fils éternel de Dieu, mais aussi je te confesse, au delà de la nature, comme fils de la Vierge" (Hymnes, II, p. 183.) This is not denigrating in any way the christological importance of the virginal conception, which we will see in the next chapter. It simply seems that Romanos does not wish to make an issue of it in this passage.

<sup>89</sup>Matons, Romanos, p. 268.

<sup>90</sup>Nativity II, strophe 1, Carpenter, Kontakia: 1, p. 15. Other confessions of Christ's divinity by Mary are in the refrains of "Nativity I" (pp. 4ff), and "Mary at the Cross" (pp. 196ff).

<sup>91</sup>Epiphany I, strophe 12, *ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>92</sup>Strophe 16, *ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>93</sup>Resurrection VI, strophe 5, *ibid.*, p. 316.

<sup>94</sup>Sinful Woman, strophe 9, *ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>95</sup>Strophe 11, *ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>96</sup>Leper, strophe 7, *ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>97</sup>Strophe 8, *ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>98</sup>Strophe 12, *ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>99</sup>Strophe 14, *ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>100</sup>Samaritan Woman, strophe 16, *ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>101</sup>Matons, Romanos, p. 269.

<sup>102</sup>Multiplication of the Loaves, strophe 14, Carpenter, Kontakia: 1, p. 133.

<sup>103</sup>Lazarus II, strophe V, *ibid.*, p. 152. Other passages showing Jesus to know all things are in "Hemorrhaging Woman," strophe 13 (p. 124), "Lazarus II," prooimion (p. 151) and strophe 4 (p. 152), and "Mary at the Cross," strophe 12 (p. 201).

<sup>104</sup>Sinful Woman, prooimion, Resurrection V, strophe 5, *ibid.*, pp. 101 and 277.

<sup>105</sup>Leper, strophe 9; Lazarus I, strophe 4, *ibid.*, pp. 88 and 141.

<sup>106</sup>Judas, strophe 5; Peter's Denial, strophe 9, *ibid.*, pp. 171 and 184.

<sup>107</sup>Peter's Denial, strophe 8, *ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>108</sup>Meyendorff, Christ in Eastern Thought, p. 87.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup>Idem, Byzantine Theology, p. 156.

<sup>111</sup>Nowadays, we know of the difficulties inherent in such an anthropology, especially regarding authentic human freedom. See Karl Rahner "Dogmatic Questions on the Knowledge and Self-Consciousness of Christ" in Theological Investigations V, pp. 199-211.

<sup>112</sup>"Treasury of the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity," Thesis 22, translated by William A. Jurgens in The Faith of the Early Fathers, vol. 3. A source-book of theological and historical passages from the writings of Saint Augustine to the end of the Patristic Age (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1979), p. 211.

<sup>113</sup>The idea of Jesus' omniscience reflecting his perfect humanity as opposed to his divinity poses interesting questions. If indeed knowledge of everything past, present and future is part and parcel, or the sign par excellence, of perfect human nature, post-Chalcedonian theology would get a reprieve from critics who feel it is monophysitic in its tendencies. Whatever the value of this argument in early Christianity, we cannot nowadays accept uncritically, or take for granted this philosophy of gnosis which Meyendorff pointed out in his study. If Jesus as the New Adam was omniscient in his human nature, would not the First Adam have been omniscient as well? But would not Adam's knowledge interfere with his freedom to choose either for or against God? In other words, would he have disobeyed God knowing the consequences of his choice? Meyendorff admits that humanity is "natural," that is, humanity is most human by being totally open to God. Yet this openness which constitutes humanity can be rejected in freedom by a human person. To be fully human is to be fully open to that mystery who is God, and to participate in his glory. Rahner holds that one makes a choice in his freedom to be fully open to God, to be fully human--and one cannot make this choice freely without some kind of ignorance. We would agree with Rahner here in maintaining that this Greek anthropology is weak, and that there had to be some ignorance of Christ's human knowledge for him to exercise his human freedom, and for him to be a perfect human.

<sup>114</sup>Strophe 8, Carpenter, Kontakia: 1, p. 6.

<sup>115</sup>Strophe 9, *ibid.*

<sup>116</sup>Cana, strophe 16, *ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>117</sup>Leper, strophes 13 and 15, *ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>118</sup>Possessed Man, strophe 4, *ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>119</sup>Multiplication of the Loaves, strophe 13, *ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>120</sup>Resurrection IV, strophe 11, *ibid.*, p. 287.

## CHAPTER IV

### MARIAN KONTAKIA AS AN EXPRESSION OF CHRISTOLOGY

Under your mercy we take refuge, Mother of God, do not reject our supplications in necessity, but deliver us from danger, (You) alone chaste, alone blessed.<sup>1</sup>

This famous prayer known as the Sub tuum praesidium, which may come from the third century,<sup>2</sup> uses the word Theotokos (Mother of God) in the vocative case. This lofty title of the Blessed Virgin Mary, defined at the Third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus in A.D. 431, had its roots in the liturgy and devotion of the Church. Both Theotokos and another name of Mary's, aeiparthenos (Ever-Virgin), have condensed within them the whole dogmatic teaching about our Lady.<sup>3</sup> The term "Ever-Virgin" was endorsed at Constantinople II in 553, during the lifetime of Romanos.<sup>4</sup> Theotokos is more than an honorific title or name. It is a one-word doctrinal definition, a touchstone of the true faith. Saint John Damascene wrote at a later date that this title contains the whole mystery of the Incarnation.<sup>5</sup>

The Christian East did not make Mariology into an independent dogmatic theme. Instead it was seen to be integral to the whole of Christian teaching. The person of the Blessed Virgin Mary can be properly understood and described only in a christological context. The emphasis of the appellation Theotokos is foremost christological. What is affirmed is the hypostatic union--the pre-existent Word of God becoming human. In this term there is a confirmation of the Church's

devotion to the woman who gave birth to God in the flesh. It demonstrates the interdependence of doctrine and worship--doctrine throws light onto devotion, bringing it into contact with the fundamental truths of Christianity, while devotion and worship enrich doctrine through the Church's lived experience.<sup>6</sup>

The theology of Cyril of Alexandria, which affirmed the personal hypostatic identity of Jesus with the Word served as the christological basis for the development of piety centered on Mary after the fifth century.<sup>7</sup> God redeemed humanity by becoming human, but this came about through Mary, who thereby became inseparable from the work and person of her Son. After Ephesus Marian devotion increased dramatically, as did Marian preaching and the number of churches dedicated to the Theotokos.<sup>8</sup> During or after Ephesus, Cyril preached what Quasten has called the most famous Marian sermon of antiquity.<sup>9</sup> In this sermon Cyril enumerates all that has been wrought through Mary: Through her the Trinity is glorified and the angels are gladdened, demons are chased, fallen humanity is restored, people are led to conversion, churches are built.<sup>10</sup> Although these seemingly divine actions are attributed to Mary, they are done so by virtue of her divine motherhood, for she is the one through whom the only Son of God shone as Light.<sup>11</sup> Jesus is the true cause of these wonders, but because Christ came into the world through Mary, she was the instrument through which all of these things came to be.<sup>12</sup>

In another sermon preached at the Third Ecumenical Council, Theodotus of Ancyra (+438-446) used a string of greetings to Mary, all beginning with the word chaire (hail).<sup>13</sup> Hence these greetings are



called chairetismoï. It is not known whether Theodotus was the first Greek Father to pioneer this form of literary genre. It did, however, become very popular among Byzantine writers and preachers, most especially in the Akathistos hymn and after.

The title Theotokos was reconfirmed at Chalcedon twenty years after Ephesus, and aeiparthenos appeared for the first time in conciliar acts at Constantinople II and afterwards, though it was never really defined as such.<sup>14</sup> Both mariological titles are also found in the well-known hymn attributed to Justinian known as the Monogenēs.<sup>15</sup> This troparion began to be a part of the Byzantine liturgy no later than 536.<sup>16</sup>

It is easy to see why the Eastern Fathers felt that the Incarnation of the pre-existent Son of God justifies and even necessitates the use of the title Theotokos. Refusing Mary veneration and honor as "Mother of God" was tantamount to denying the reality of the Incarnation and our redemption.

Mary's divine motherhood is shown by the Fathers to be closely connected with the Mariological theme of the "New Eve."<sup>17</sup> Writers such as Ephraem of Syria, Epiphanius of Salamis, Cyril and Theodotus all reduce the redemptive cooperation of Mary, the New Eve, to her giving birth to the Redeemer.<sup>18</sup>

Why was it equally necessary to affirm our Lady's perpetual virginity? It was due to the necessity imposed upon it by the logic of the Incarnation.<sup>19</sup> Athanasius was probably the first Father to link the two titles.<sup>20</sup> Mary was venerated as Ever-Virgin because of the Incarnation that was accomplished in and through her. Her fiat reflected

a choice freely made to devote herself entirely to God. This devotion to the Lord God was by the mind as well as by the body. Virginity is above all a spiritual attitude, an ardent longing for God alone.<sup>21</sup> It is this devotion of Mary the Mother of God to her Son and Lord that is recognized by the Church and is affirmed in the title "Ever-Virgin."<sup>22</sup>

The christological importance of the Virgin birth also cannot be understated. For Mary's virginity is a sign of her Son's uniqueness. Kallistos Ware points out three ways in which this is true.<sup>23</sup> The fact that Jesus had no earthly father points beyond his situation within time and space to his heavenly origin. Christ is within history yet above it, immanent yet transcendent. Secondly, the virginal conception by Mary underscores the divine initiative in the plan of redemption. Finally, Jesus' birth from a virgin mother points to his eternal pre-existence, for a child conceived and born in the usual human manner is a new person. Jesus Christ is not a new person, but the second person of the Trinity, who has "become" something which he was not, who now lives as a human as well as God.<sup>24</sup>

With this background in mind, let us now delve into the mariological teachings of Romanos. We will first see if there are any similarities or parallels between the two sets of kontakia. Then, we will go into Romanos' mariology proper, and finally, we shall include a separate section on the famous Akathistos hymn, which is generally maintained by modern scholarship to be the work of the deacon-poet.

#### Mariology Expressing Christology

The three Marian kontakia "On the Nativity of the Virgin Mary,"

"Annunciation I," and "Annunciation II," are similar in some respects to the christological hymns, and in other ways rather different. The works dealing exclusively with the person of the Blessed Virgin do not contain any polemic towards erroneous doctrines. Nor is the problem of Jesus' psychology posed in any way. As a matter of fact Jesus does not even appear as a character in these hymns. There are striking similarities between the two sets of kontakia, in content and in the literary devices Romanos used to bring his teaching home to his listeners or readers.

In Annunciation I Romanos reiterates the containable/uncontainable contrast. The archangel Gabriel exclaims, "The entire Heaven . . . and the throne of fire cannot contain my Master, and this poor maiden, how can she receive Him? On high, He is awesome; how can he be visible on earth?"<sup>25</sup>

In Annunciation II, Romanos once again makes the comparison of Christ dwelling both above in heaven and below on earth:

Therefore, Mary, sing a hymn to Christ who is carried in your womb here below, who on high shares the throne with the Father, who sucks at your breast and yet from on high dispenses divine nourishment to mortals, who on high inhabits the firmament as a tent, and who down below is bedded in a grotto for his love of humans . . .<sup>26</sup>

Romanos also comments theologically on the identity of Jesus in the narrative. He is God who assumes flesh from the Virgin, the One before all time who takes on our form and to whom the Virgin gives birth.<sup>27</sup> Mary's mother Anna declares that she has given birth to the one who will bear the Master and Lord before all time.<sup>28</sup>

We saw that Theotokos is most important for a proper understanding of the Incarnation. Romanos uses the title freely throughout his

hymns.<sup>29</sup> In the Marian kontakia Romanos never fails to remind us that Mary is truly the Mother of God: "The barren woman gives birth to the Mother of God and the nurse of our life;"<sup>30</sup> all generations call Mary blessed as the Mother of God;<sup>31</sup> Joseph did not have sexual relations with the Mother of God.<sup>32</sup>

Where Romanos does not use Theotokos explicitly, his belief in the propriety of the name is borne out in other implicit terms. Mary is the gate of the One from on high;<sup>33</sup> she is to bring the Lord into the world,<sup>34</sup> God will dwell in her,<sup>35</sup> she gave birth to the Word of God;<sup>36</sup> God assumed flesh from her and was born,<sup>37</sup> the Creator foreordained that she should bear Him,<sup>38</sup> and He dwells in her.<sup>39</sup>

The perpetual virginity of the Blessed Mother is a point which Romanos is never tired of emphasizing. Mary is the pure Virgin;<sup>40</sup> virgin undefiled, chaste, beautiful and full of grace.<sup>41</sup> During a soliloquy Mary thinks to herself:

And lo! another terrible thing assailed my ears; for He said, "You will bear and give birth to a son;" and yet I do not know a man. Perhaps he did not know that my seal of virginity is unbroken? And is he ignorant of the fact that I am a virgin?<sup>42</sup>

Later, an incredulous Mary replies to the angel Gabriel, ". . . how, then, will it happen, since I know no man? Am I, the unploughed, uncultivated land to produce fruit, when I have not received seed, nor yet a sower?"<sup>43</sup> Again, when Joseph inquires about her miraculous conception, our Lady answers:

Such a salutation when it struck my ears was sufficient, it made me a luminous one, it made me pregnant; yet I do not know about the conception of the child. Now see, I am great with child; and as you know, my virginity is intact for you have not known me.<sup>44</sup>

Her perpetual virginity is beautifully affirmed in Annunciation II,

strophe 6:

Flower, root, ark--they refer to Thy mother who bore Thee in her womb, which was opened up by the Spirit and after that remained closed in order that everyone might proclaim: "The Virgin gives birth, and after birth remains a virgin."<sup>45</sup>

Throughout his hymning of Mary, Romanos remains faithful both to Cyril and Justinian.<sup>46</sup> And although the mariological titles remind us that Jesus Christ is truly God, the true humanity of Jesus is not lost. Mary is not only the birth-giver of God, but of the God-man.

### The Akathistos Hymn

The most famous, the most beautiful and the most popular of all hymns in the Byzantine liturgy is the Akathistos hymn. This gem of Byzantine poetry is now sung in four sections during matins of the first four Saturdays of Lent and in its totality during the Vigil for the fifth Saturday of Lent. Hence this day is called "The Saturday of the Akathistos Hymn," and has its own divine office.<sup>47</sup> It is named "Akathistos" because during the chanting of the hymn the congregation had to stand (a-kathistos--not sitting).<sup>48</sup>

The Akathistos is a kontakion consisting of twenty-four stanzas, with the acrostic forming the Greek alphabet in its regular order.<sup>49</sup> The strophes are of unequal length--each strophe has seven lines which give an account from the Annunciation to the adoration of the Magi, and a commentary upon the mystery of the Incarnation. The odd-numbered strophes, however, have appended to the seven lines twelve chairetismoï in sixteen lines and one line of the refrain, "Hail, unespoused Spouse--Chaire, nymphē anympheute."<sup>50</sup> The even-numbered strophes have appended to them the one line refrain "Alleluia."<sup>51</sup>

The titles of the hymn in the Kontakaria indicate that the Akathistos was originally sung on the feast of the Annunciation, 25 March.

Early manuscripts of the Akathistos witness to two prooimia, a later one which praises the Theotokos for miraculously redeeming the city of Constantinople from the siege of the enemy,<sup>52</sup> and an earlier one which serves as an introduction to the content of the hymn, as a prooimion usually does.<sup>53</sup>

The question of authorship has been much discussed since the turn of this century.<sup>54</sup> Theories about who the true author was have ranged from as early as Apollinaris of Laodicea to as late as Patriarch Photius in the ninth century.<sup>55</sup> It is beyond the scope of this study to make a detailed analysis of the scholarship regarding this question nor is it for us to decide definitively who the author of the Akathistos was. Suffice it to say that the majority of modern scholars favor authorship by Romanos,<sup>56</sup> and this is the position we are taking in our study.

Structurally the Akathistos can be divided into two equal parts.<sup>57</sup> The first twelve stanzas contain the story of the Incarnation from the Annunciation to the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. The second half may be divided into two sections which praise the mystery of the Incarnation, the final six strophes being more of a homiletic character.<sup>58</sup>

Throughout the Akathistos, there is no doubt about the identity of Jesus. He is the Christ incarnate,<sup>59</sup> the Lord who assumed flesh,<sup>60</sup> the Inaccessible One,<sup>61</sup> the One who created man with his hands and

assumed the form of a slave.<sup>62</sup> He is perfect God, whose essence does not change,<sup>63</sup> the uncircumscribed Word, who is above the Cherubim and the Seraphim.<sup>64</sup>

Antitheses are common here as well. The Chaldeans (Magi) behold in the Virgin's hands the one who created humanity with his hands.<sup>65</sup> Mary contains God who is not to be contained in space,<sup>66</sup> and the angelic hosts behold the unapproachable, inaccessible God living among us.<sup>67</sup> Christ is the Lord who holds the universe in His hands, yet dwells in Mary's womb.<sup>68</sup> The contrast of Jesus being above and below simultaneously is brought out in strophe 15:

The uncircumscribed Word was complete for men below, and He was never completely absent from those on high, for the divine condescension was not a change in place, even though there was birth from the God-possessed Virgin . . .<sup>69</sup>

The poet criticizes the pagan philosophies of his day in a manner reminiscent of Romanos' hymn on Pentecost:

Hail, thou who dost show the philosophers without wisdom; hail, thou who dost refute the argument of the logicians; hail, since powerful disputers were made to look foolish; hail, since the weavers of skilled words have lost their strength; hail, thou who didst tear apart the webs of deceit of the Athenians . . .<sup>70</sup>

The title Theotokos appears nearly everywhere.<sup>71</sup> Mary gives birth to the Light;<sup>72</sup> her womb received God;<sup>73</sup> she is Mother of the Lamb and the Shepherd,<sup>74</sup> of the radiant King and the Inaccessible One,<sup>75</sup> of the star which does not set.<sup>76</sup> She gave birth to the Word<sup>77</sup> and Lord, the Lover of man.<sup>78</sup>

The titles or symbols expressing the divine motherhood of Mary are many. George Maloney has brought out the fact that there are two general types of symbolism used to emphasize the motherhood of our

Lady in Byzantine piety.<sup>79</sup> The first of these deals with "earth symbols." Strophes 4 and 5 of the Akathistos are especially apropos here:

Then the power of the Most High overshadowed her that knew not wedlock, so that she might conceive; and He made her fruitful womb as a fertile field for all who long to reap the harvest of salvation singing: Alleluia!<sup>80</sup>

Bearing God within her womb the Virgin hastened to Elisabeth; whose unborn child, knowing at once the salutation of the Theotokos, rejoiced, and, leaping up as if in song, cried out to her: Hail, vine whence springs a never-withering branch: hail orchard of pure fruit. Hail, for thou tendest the Husbandman who loves mankind: hail, for thou hast borne the Gardener who cultivates our life. Hail, earth yielding a rich harvest of compassion. . . hail, for through thee the fields of Eden flower again. . .<sup>81</sup>

The other type of symbol is that of the great mother, characterized as one who protects, nourishes, and preserves. The Akathistos praises Mary as the

. . . rock that offers drink to those who thirst for life . . . shelter of the world, wider than a cloud . . . food, the successor of manna . . . servant of holy nourishment . . . from whom flows milk and honey.<sup>82</sup>

She is the shady branch under which many are sheltered;<sup>83</sup> the ship for those who wish to be saved and the harbor for the sailors of life;<sup>84</sup> the womb of the divine Incarnation,<sup>85</sup> the tabernacle of God the Word, and the ark made golden by the Spirit.<sup>86</sup>

The poet emphatically asserts the mystery of the virgin birth and the Blessed Mother's perpetual virginity. Mary, who seeks the knowledge of the unknowable, asks the angel in wonderment, "How is it possible for a son to be born from a pure womb?"<sup>87</sup> Joseph was also troubled about this miraculous conception:

Since he was inwardly distressed by the ambiguous situation, the prudent Joseph was upset. As he saw thee unwed, blameless lady, he suspected illicit love; but when he learned of thy conception by the Holy Spirit, he said, "Hallelujah!"<sup>88</sup>



Indeed, the Creator caused Mary's womb to bear without seed-- but he preserved it chaste as it was before, and this is a miracle.<sup>89</sup>

She is the one who unites virginity and childbearing:

Let us observe the wordy orators, now silent as fish about thee, Mother of God; for they are in doubt about this: how indeed, dost thou remain a virgin and still have the power to give birth? But we, as we marvel at the miracle, cry out with faith . . . Hail, bride unwed.<sup>90</sup>

When it comes to the praise of Mary, the Akathistos hymns her with the boundless emotionalism which became so common in Byzantine hymnography.

Throughout the hymn in the chairetismoï there is a tendency which was already present in Cyril to attribute powers to Mary which belong to God alone. She is the resurrection of Adam and the deliverance of Eve's tears;<sup>91</sup> she is the downfall of demons, the sea that drowned the invisible Pharaoh (the devil);<sup>92</sup> she is the forgiveness of sinners,<sup>93</sup> taking away the filth of sins and washing out the conscience.<sup>94</sup> All of this she does because she is the Mother of the Word. It is most important to realize that the chairetismoï are a literary genre, and as such are not meant to be theologically precise.<sup>95</sup>

Concluding, we have seen that the expressions of Marian piety in Romanos' liturgical poetry, including the Akathistos, illustrate essentially the doctrine of the hypostatic union. They are a legitimate way of expressing the abstract concepts of the fifth and sixth century christological disputes on the level of the simple faithful. In this way, Romanos and other Byzantine hymnographers showed great liturgical wisdom and common sense.<sup>96</sup> They show the burning devotion of the author and the worshipping community to the woman who was and

continues to be called blessed. Because she was total virgin-mother to God, they greeted her as Mother of the Lord. They professed with joy that what was born of her was the Son of God. With Mary they praised God's greatness, for he looked upon his handmaid, exalted her, and made her his Mother.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup>Quoted by Michael O'Carroll in Theotokos. A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary, s.v. "The Sub Tuum." This reconstruction is G. Giamberardini's. See "Il 'Sub Tuum Praesidium' e il titolo 'Theotokos' nella tradizione egiziana," Marianum, 31 (1969): 348 ff.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. M.C.H. Roberts chose a fourth century dating, while E. Lobel, a papyrologist, favored the third. Giamberardini, a specialist in Egyptian Christianity, holds there is no reason not to believe that the prayer is from the third century. If this is true, the title must have existed for some period of time, possibly a generation before. See the article "Theotokos, God-bearer" in the same encyclopedia.

<sup>3</sup>Georges Florovsky, "The Ever-Virgin Mother of God," in Creation and Redemption. Volume Three in the Collected Works of Georges Florovsky (Belmont, Massachusetts: Nordland Publishing Co., 1976), p. 171.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. This expression appears for the first time in Peter of Alexandria (P.G. 18, 517). See Ignacio Ortiz de Urbina, "La Mariologia nella Patristica Orientale" in Mariologia, vol. 1, edited by Paolo Sträter, S.J. (Torino: Marietti, 1952), p. 93.

<sup>5</sup>De Fide Orthodoxa, III, 12.

<sup>6</sup>Vladimir Lossky, In the Image and Likeness of God, with an introduction by A. M. Allchin (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), p. 196

<sup>7</sup>Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology, p. 165. See also Ortiz de Urbina, "La Mariologia", pp. 100-101.

<sup>8</sup>Hilda Graef, Mary. A History of Doctrine and Devotion, vol. 1 (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), p. 112. See also Ortiz de Urbina, *ibid.*, and G. Jouassard, "Marie à travers la patristique: Maternité divine, virginité, sainteté," in Maria, Études sur la Saint Vierge, vol. 1 ed. by H. du Manoir (Paris: 1949), p. 136.

<sup>9</sup>Johannes Quasten, Patrology III: The Golden Age of Greek Patristic Literature from the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Chalcedon (Utrecht/Antwerp: Spectrum Publishers, 1963), p. 131.

<sup>10</sup>Homily 4, Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum, ed. by E. Schwartz (Strasbourg, 1914), 1, 1, 2, 102-103. A translation of this important

excerpt is in Paul Palmer, S.J., Mary in the Documents of the Church (Westminster, Maryland: Newman, 1952), pp. 50-51.

<sup>11</sup>Graef, Mary, p. 112 and O'Carroll, Theotokos, s.v. "Mediation, Mary Mediatress."

<sup>12</sup>Graef, *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>PG 77, 1393, G. G. Meersseman, L'Hymne Acathiste en l'honneur de la Mère de Dieu (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1958), pp. 12-13, has a French translation of the celebrated chairetismoï.

<sup>14</sup>Lossky, Image and Likeness, p. 195, note 1.

<sup>15</sup>The hymn reads: "Only-begotten Son and Word of God, thou who art immortal, who condescended for our salvation to become incarnate of the holy God-bearer and Ever-virgin Mary, who without change became man and was crucified, O Christ God, destroying death by death, thou are one of the Holy Trinity, glorified together with the Father and Holy Spirit save us!" See John Breck, "The Troparion Monogenēs: An Orthodox Symbol of Faith," St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly, vol. 26:4 (1982): 209-213.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*: 211.

<sup>17</sup>Walter Burghardt, S.J., "Mary in Eastern Patristic Thought," Mariology, vol. 2, edited by Juniper B. Carol, O.F.M. (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1957), pp. 98-99.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.* See Ephraem, Sermon on our Lord, 3, in CSCO 271,4; Epiphanius, Haer., 78,18 in PG 42, 728-729; Cyril, Comm. in Lucam, hom. 2 in CSCO 70, 11-12; and Theodotus, PO 12,331.

<sup>19</sup>Breck, "Troparion": 224.

<sup>20</sup>Exposition of the Psalms 84-11 (PG 27:373a).

<sup>21</sup>Florovsky, "Ever-Virgin," p. 184.

<sup>22</sup>Breck, "Troparion": 225.

<sup>23</sup>The Orthodox Way (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), p. 101.

<sup>24</sup>While Ware is correct in asserting that the Word "became" something which he was not previously, he is off-track when he seemingly would deny Christ's divine Sonship if he were born "in the usual human manner." Joseph Ratzinger in Introduction to Christianity (New York: Seabury, 1979), p. 208, points out that the Christian belief in the divine Sonship of Jesus does not hinge on the fact that he had no human father--that his divinity would not be affected if he were the product

of a normal human marriage. This is because his Sonship is an ontological reality, not a biological one.

<sup>25</sup>Carpenter, Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist, 2: On the Christian Life (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1973), strophe 2, p. 10.

<sup>26</sup>Strophe 13, *ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>27</sup>Annunciation II, strophe 2, *ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>28</sup>Nativity of Mary, strophe 7, *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup>The kontakia on the person of Christ contain the title in numerous places: Innocents, strophe 16 (Kontakia 1, p. 33); Presentation, strophes 1 (p. 39), 9 (p. 42), 18 (p. 45); Cana, strophes 3 (p. 69), 9 (p. 70), 21 (p. 74); Leper, strophe 18; Possessed Man, strophe 25 (p. 118); Multiplication of the Loaves, prooimion (p. 129), strophe 22 (p. 136); Second Coming, strophe 24 (p. 380). The title is implied in the refrain of "Mary at the Cross," which always comes from our Lady's lips: "My Son and my God" (p. 196, *passim*).

<sup>30</sup>Carpenter, Kontakia 2: Nativity of Mary, refrain p. 2, *passim*.

<sup>31</sup>Annunciation I, strophe 1, *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup>Annunciation II, strophe 8, *ibid.*, p. 22. This also asserts the virgin birth.

<sup>33</sup>Nativity of Mary, strophe 7, *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup>Annunciation I, strophe 4, *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>35</sup>Strophe 11, *ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup>Strophe 14, *ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>37</sup>Annunciation II, strophe 2, *ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>38</sup>Strophe 10, *ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>39</sup>Strophe 11, *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup>Nativity of Mary, strophe 4, *ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup>Annunciation I, strophe 1, *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>42</sup>Annunciation I, strophe 5, *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>43</sup>Strophe 9, *ibid.* This is full of earth symbolism, through

which the motherhood of Mary is emphasized. We will bring this up later when treating the Akathistos.

<sup>44</sup>Strophe 17, *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>46</sup>Graef, Mary, p. 125. See also O'Carroll, Theotokos s.v. "St. Cyril." Mary's perpetual virginity is a doctrine also found in the christological kontakia. Mary is the unwed mother, her virginity untouched and preserved (Nativity I, strophe 2, Kontakia I: p. 4), the mother and nurse of a fatherless son (strophe 4, p. 5). She is the unopened gate through which Christ alone passed, never giving up the treasure of her virginity (strophe 9, p. 7). She gave birth to Christ in a manner beyond nature (Nativity II, strophe 10, p. 18). Christ was conceived in a divine manner, without intercourse, without sin (Presentation, strophe 9, p. 42). Mary knew no husband, bore a son beyond natural law or reason and remained a virgin as before (Cana, strophe 8, p. 70).

<sup>47</sup>Egon Wellesz, "The 'Akathistos.' A Study in Byzantine Hymnography," Dumbarton Oaks Papers 9 and 10 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1956), p. 143.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.* See also Graef, Mary, p. 127.

<sup>49</sup>Wellesz, Byzantine Hymnography, p. 192.

<sup>50</sup>Wellesz, "Akathistos," p. 148, and Graef, Mary, p. 128.

<sup>51</sup>Wellesz, *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup>There are three possibilities here: the siege of A.D. 626 by the Persians; 673-677 by the Arabs, and 717-718 by Leo III the Isaurian. See Wellesz, Byzantine Hymnography, p. 195.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>54</sup>Wellesz, "Akathistos," p. 151.

<sup>55</sup>Other names brought up in the discussion are Patriarch Sergius, George Pisides, and Patriarch Germanos. See Matons, Romanos, p. 36 and Wellesz, Byzantine Hymnography, p. 194.

<sup>56</sup>Philologists accepting Romanos' authorship as at the least probable are Krypiakiewicz, Pantelakis, Carpenter, Mioni, Huglo, Trypanis and Mitsakis. See Matons, Romanos, p. 36 and note 190. Others believing that the deacon-poet was the author are Pelikan, Spirit of Eastern Christendom, p. 308; Demetrios J. Constantelos, Understanding the Greek Orthodox Church. Its Faith, History and Practice (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), p. 117; and Wellesz, Byzantine

Hymnography, p. 197 and "Akathistos," p. 155. Matons rejects Romanos (Romanos, p. 36) as does O'Carroll (Theotokos, s.v. "The Akathistos Hymn"), who bases himself on Matons. These two accept a dating from the late fifth or early sixth century, but believe the author is anonymous. Wellesz' argumentation in favor of Romanos is very convincing. Not only does the Akathistos bear similarities with Romanos' theology in hymns proven to be authentic, but the power of expression, boldness of similes, perfect harmony of the lines and poetic vision indicate the hand of Romanos. Wellesz maintains that the decisive argument is a musical rubric for the kontakion "Joseph II" (of the Old Testament), requiring the hymn to be sung according to the melody "An angel of the highest rank," the words which begin the early prooimion of the Akathistos. Since Byzantine hymnographers composed their poems to a new melody and meter, or to the melody and meter of other hymn-writers, or to hymns of their own, Romanos must have been referring to his own hymn, the Akathistos. For more details see Wellesz' "Akathistos," pp. 151-54.

<sup>57</sup>Wellesz, "Akathistos," p. 156. See also Placido De Meester, "L'Inno Acatisto," Bessarione, Series II, vols. vi and vii (1904): vol. vi., p. 138; Meersseman, pp. 8-10, calls the first twelve strophes "narrative" and the last twelve "theological." This is somewhat artificial, as we shall see that there is also considerable theology in the first half of the poem.

<sup>58</sup>De Meester summarizes the two halves of the Akathistos thus: "Dopo aver meditato i principali fatti dell' Incarnazione del Verbo eterno, è naturale che l'anima si effonda in parole d'ammirazione e di preghiera." See Bessarione, vol. vi, p. 139.

<sup>59</sup>Strophe 7, Carpenter, Kontakia 2: p. 302.

<sup>60</sup>Strophe 1, *ibid.*, p. 300.

<sup>61</sup>Strophe 8, *ibid.*, p. 303.

<sup>62</sup>Strophe 9, *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup>Strophe 12, *ibid.*, p. 304.

<sup>64</sup>Strophe 15, *ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>65</sup>Strophe 9, *ibid.*, p. 303.

<sup>66</sup>Strophe 15, *ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>67</sup>Strophe 16, *ibid.*, p. 306.

<sup>68</sup>Strophe 23, *ibid.*, p. 308.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>70</sup>Strophe 17, *ibid.*, p. 306. The reference to the "Athenians" may be an allusion to the philosophers of the School of Athens which was closed by Justinian in 529. See Wellesz, "Akathistos," p. 153. "Pentecost," strophe 17 reads: "Why do the Greeks snort and chatter? Why do they make a show of Aratus, the thrice-accursed? Why are they led into error by Plato? Why do they love Demosthenes, the weak? Why do they not see that Homer is a flitting dream? Why do they keep talking about Pythagoras who justly is to be muzzled?" Consult Carpenter, Kontakia 1: p. 367.

<sup>71</sup>Prooimion (Kontakia 2: p. 340), strophe 1 (p. 300), strophe 5 (p. 301), strophe 11 (p. 304), strophe 17 (p. 306), strophe 19 (p. 307), and strophe 23 (p. 308).

<sup>72</sup>Strophe 3, *ibid.*, p. 301.

<sup>73</sup>Strophe 5, *ibid.*

<sup>74</sup>Strophe 7, *ibid.*, p. 302.

<sup>75</sup>Strophe 8, *ibid.*, p. 303.

<sup>76</sup>Strophe 9, *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup>Strophe 24, *ibid.*, p. 309.

<sup>78</sup>Strophe 9, *ibid.*, p. 303.

<sup>79</sup>Mary: The Womb of God (Denville, New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1976), pp. 66-67.

<sup>80</sup>Strophe 4, The Lenten Triodion, translated by Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 424. This is a literal yet more poetic translation of the liturgical text.

<sup>81</sup>Strophe 5, *ibid.*

<sup>82</sup>Strophe 11, Carpenter, Kontakia 2: p. 304.

<sup>83</sup>Strophe 13, *ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>84</sup>Strophe 17, *ibid.*, p. 306.

<sup>85</sup>Strophe 1, *ibid.*, p. 300.

<sup>86</sup>Strophe 23, Lenten Triodion, p. 436.

<sup>87</sup>Strophe 3, Carpenter, Kontakia 2: p. 301.

<sup>88</sup>Strophe 6, *ibid.*, p. 302.



<sup>89</sup>Strophe 13, *ibid.*, p. 304.

<sup>90</sup>Strophe 17, *ibid.*, p. 306. Also see strophe 15, *ibid.* The refrain Chaire, nymphē anympheute is almost untranslatable. Graef renders it "Hail, unespoused Spouse" (*Mary*, p. 128); Wellesz "Hail, Bride unbrided" ("Akathistos," p. 149); Mother Mary and Ware "Hail, Bride without bridegroom" and Carpenter "Hail, bride unwed." It is amazing how this paradox is expressive both of Mary's motherhood and her virginity. Graef is certainly correct in asserting that this short refrain constitutes a compendium of Byzantine Mariology (*Mary*, p. 128).

<sup>91</sup>Strophe 1, Carpenter, Kontakia 2: p. 300.

<sup>92</sup>Strophe 11, Lenten Triodion, p. 426.

<sup>93</sup>Strophe 13, Carpenter, Kontakia 2: p. 305.

<sup>94</sup>Strophe 21, *ibid.*, p. 308.

<sup>95</sup>Graef, *Mary*, p. 129.

<sup>96</sup>Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology, p. 105.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Having arrived at the end of our study, what can we say about the christological teachings of Romanos the Melodist? His critiques of the heresies of his day are a testimony to the belief of the Church in the doctrine of the divine and human natures united hypostatically in Jesus Christ. The poet points out the errors of both those who denied his true humanity, and those who insisted that Jesus was merely human.

The use of antitheses and comparisons and contrasts of divine and human attributes, plus the acceptance of the theopaschite formula presuppose the interchange of properties (*communicatio idiomatum*) and underscore not only the duality of natures, but the unity of person as well.

If this were the only yard-stick by which we could judge Romanos' christology, we could say that his views on the person of Jesus Christ are fairly well balanced. But when one looks at the overall picture given by the poet throughout the corpus of writings, the scales seem to tip towards a heavier emphasis on the divine nature.

Although Romanos' terminology is usually non-technical, his use of physis in connection with the divine nature, his characters continually confessing Christ's divinity, and most especially his treating of the psychology of Christ--all push the humanity of Christ considerably into the background.

What about the mariological hymns? The terms Theotokos and aeiparthenos tell us that Jesus Christ is truly God and at the same time truly human. There are antitheses and contrasts here comparable to those in the christological kontakia, stressing the two natures and the unity of person. The Akathistos is replete with symbolism of Mary's divine motherhood, emphasizing once again the Word taking flesh and being born of a human mother, and demonstrating the unity of person and duality of natures in Jesus. The refrain of the Akathistos is a three-word summary of mariology in the East. The Marian kontakia do not leave us, as the christological hymns do, with such a stress on the divine that the human nature seems non-significant.

Meyendorff would hold that the Chalcedonian definition poses an "asymmetrical christology"--there is no symmetry between divinity and humanity, because Christ's hypostasis is divine and the human will follows the divine.<sup>1</sup> Such a christology reflects the fact that only God can save, while humanity can cooperate with the saving acts of God. The theocentricity which is a natural characteristic of humanity does not preclude an asymmetrical christology.<sup>2</sup> Christ could still be fully and actively human because he fully gave himself over to the will of the Father. While this may be true regarding the Chalcedonian statement, in practice this classical christology with its asymmetry has strayed unintentionally into a monophysitism, one which transfigures Jesus so that it is no longer evident that he was affected by the limits, dependency and baseness of our poverty-stricken nature.<sup>3</sup>

Such is the case with Romanos' christological kontakia. Those traits proper to human nature are always placed on a secondary plane.

Even in the hymns on the passion and death of Christ, passages describing Jesus' suffering and humiliation are rare compared to those depicting a triumphant, victorious Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

There is no doubt that Romanos' statements defining his faith are doctrinally orthodox. His affirmation of double consubstantiality is his answer to the Eutychian monophysites. However, the general tone of his works certainly would not offend monophysites of the Severian school, for Severus of Antioch also admitted double consubstantiality, and his christological system has been shown to be nothing but Cyrillian christology.<sup>5</sup>

It is not surprising that Romanos' position seems so extremely Cyrillian, given that he lived in the capital city under an emperor whose policy was to reconcile the monophysites, defend Chalcedon against the strict Dyophysites,<sup>6</sup> and whose wife, Empress Theodora, sympathized with the monophysite party.

It is also not surprising given that theology after Chalcedon gradually became concerned with equating the decree of Chalcedon with the theology of Cyril. This concern became evident in the works of Romanos the Melodist, in the lex orandi of the Church. We may therefore classify the great deacon-poet as a Cyrillian Chalcedonian.

His lack of speculation in his theology may have contributed to the development of a more explicitly doctrinal hymnography as a reaction to his poetry in the centuries after him.<sup>7</sup> His strong belief in the philanthrōpia of the Son and his unending trust in the Theotokos led him to create a liturgical poetry which not only sought to satisfy the worshipper's intellectual capacity, but to transform the whole person,

including one's soul and emotions, in and through the sacred drama of the liturgy. This is no doubt why Romanos' kontakia have had such a lasting impact upon generations of souls, and therein lies his brilliance and his contribution to Byzantine Christianity.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER V

<sup>1</sup>Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology, p. 154.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Karl Rahner, Theological Investigations, vol. XVII: Jesus, Man and the Church (New York: Crossroad, 1981), pp. 28-29.

<sup>4</sup>Matons, Romanos, p. 269.

<sup>5</sup>Meyendorff, Christ in Eastern Thought, p. 37. His exposition on Severian christology is found on pp. 37-45. What made Severus a monophysite was his stubbornness in retaining the teachings and terminology of Cyril after Chalcedon had already declared that Christ was in two natures and settled, at least officially, the meaning of the words which express this truth. We saw in our introduction to the christology of Romanos that Chalcedon in reality had "settled" very little.

<sup>6</sup>Meyendorff, "Justinian," p. 62.

<sup>7</sup>The Byzantine Church differentiated between doctrinal statements and poetry, because some hymns are called Dogmatika--Troparia meant to be confessions of faith as well as religious poetry. See Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology, p. 123.

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Breck, John. "The Troparion Monogenēs: An Orthodox Symbol of Faith." St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly, vol. 26:4 (1982): 203-228.
- Burghardt, Walter, S.J. "Mary in Eastern Patristic Thought." In Mar-  
iology, vol. 2, pp. 88-153. Edited by Juniper B. Carol, O.F.M.  
Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1957.
- Constantelos, Demetrios J. Understanding the Greek Orthodox Church.  
Its Faith, History, and Practice. New York: Seabury, 1982.
- De Meester, Placido. "L'Inno Acatisto." Bessarione, Series II, vols.  
vi and vii (1904): 9-16, 159-165, 252-257; 36-40, 134-142, 213-224.
- Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique. S.v. "Romanos le Mélode," by  
E. Amann.
- Florovsky, Georges. "The Ever-Virgin Mother of God." In Creation and  
Redemption. Volume Three in the Collected Works of Georges  
Florovsky, pp. 171-188. Belmont, Massachusetts: Nordland Publish-  
ing, 1976.
- Graef, Hilda. Mary. A History of Doctrine and Devotion, vol. 1. New  
York: Sheed and Ward, 1963.
- Gray, Patrick T.R. The Defense of Chalcedon in the East (451-553).  
Studies in the History of Christian Thought Series, vol. XX.  
Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1979.
- Hopko, Thomas. The Orthodox Faith, vol. 1: Doctrine. New York: The  
Department of Religious Education, The Orthodox Church of America,  
1976.
- Jouassard, G. "Marie à travers la Patristique: Maternité divine, Vir-  
ginité, Sainteté." In Maria: Études sur la Sainte Vierge, vol. 1,  
pp. 71-157. Edited by D'Hubert du Manoir, S.J. Paris: Beauchesne,  
1949.
- Jurgens, William A. The Faith of the Early Fathers, vol. 3. A source  
book of theological and historical passages from the writings of St.  
Augustine to the end of the Patristic Age. Collegeville, Minnesota:  
The Liturgical Press, 1979.
- Kucharek, Casimir. The Byzantine-Slav Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.  
Its Origin and Evolution. Allendale, New Jersey: Alleluia Press  
1971.

- Lossky, Vladimir. In the Image and Likeness of God. Introduction by A. M. Allchin. Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Orthodox Theology, An Introduction. Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978.
- Maas, Paul. "Die Chronologie der Hymnen des Romanos." Byzantinische Zeitschrift 15 (1906): 1-45.
- Maloney, George, S.J. Mary: The Womb of God. Denville, New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1976.
- Mary, Mother and Kallistos Ware, trans. The Festal Menaion. Introduction by Professor Georges Florovsky. New York: Faber, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Lenten Triodion. London: Faber, 1977.
- Matons, Josè Grosdidier de. Romanos le Mélode et les origines de la poésie religieuse à Byzance. Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1977.
- Meersseman, G.G. L'Hymne Acathiste en l'honneur de la Mère de Dieu. Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1958.
- Meyendorff, John. Byzantine Theology, Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes. Fordham University Press, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Christ in Eastern Christian Thought. Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Emperor Justinian, the Empire, and the Church." In The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church, pp. 43-66. Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982.
- O'Carroll, Michael, ed. Theotokos. A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary. S.v. "The Sub Tuum," "Theotokos, God-bearer," "Mediation, Mary Mediatrix," "St. Cyril," "The Akathistos Hymn."
- Ortiz de Urbina, Ignacio, S.J. "La Mariologia nella Patristica Orientale." In Mariologia, vol. 1, pp. 83-127. Edited by Paolo Sträter, S.J. Torino: Marietti, 1952.
- Palmer, Paul, S.J. Mary in the Documents of the Church. Westminster, Maryland: Newman, 1952.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav. The Christian Tradition. A History of the Development of Doctrine. Vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600); vol. 2: The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700). University of Chicago Press, 1971-74.



- Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite. The Divine Names and Mystical Theology. Translated by John D. Jones. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980.
- Quasten, Johannes. Patrology III: The Golden Age of Greek Patristic Literature from the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Chalcedon. Utrecht/Antwerp: Spectrum Publishers, 1963.
- Rahner, Karl. Theological Investigations Vol. V: Later Writings. New York: Seabury, 1975.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Theological Investigations Vol. XVII: Jesus, Man and the Church. New York: Crossroad, 1981.
- Ratzinger, Joseph. Introduction to Christianity. New York: Seabury, 1979.
- Romanos the Melodist, Saint. Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist, 2 vols. Translated and annotated by Marjorie Carpenter, University of Missouri Press, 1970-73.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Romanos le Méléde: Hymnes. Sources Chrésiennes Series, vols. 99, 110, 114, 128, 283. Translated and edited by José Grosdidier de Matons. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1964-81.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica. Cantica Genuina. Edited by Paul Maas and C.A. Trypanis. London: Oxford, 1963.
- Schmemmann, Alexander. Church, World, Mission. Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West. Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979.
- Topping, Eva Catafygiotu. "St. Romanos: Ikon of a Poet." Greek Orthodox Theological Review XII (Summer, 1966): 92-111.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "St. Romanos the Melodos and his First Nativity Kontakion." Greek Orthodox Theological Review XXI (Fall, 1976): 231-50.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "St. Romanos the Melodos: Prince of Byzantine Poets." Greek Orthodox Theological Review XXIV (Spring, 1979): 65-75.
- Wainwright, Geoffrey. Doxology. The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life. A Systematic Theology. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- Ware, Kallistos. The Orthodox Way. Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980.
- Wellesz, Egon. A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography, 2nd ed. London: Oxford University Press, 1961.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The 'Akathistos.' A Study in Byzantine Hymnography."  
Dumbarton Oaks Papers 9 and 10. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1956.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Akathistos: the most famous Marian kontakion of the Byzantine Church, sung during Great Lent. It consists of twenty-four stanzas and its acrostic forms the Greek alphabet in order. It is always sung standing (a-kathistos--not sitting). Romanos the Melodist is generally considered its author.

anablōmenon: the refrain of the kontakion which provides the ending for all strophes, and links the prooimion with the remainder of the kontakion. Also called the ephymnion.

chairetismoι: a string of greetings addressed to the Blessed Virgin Mary all beginning with the word chaire--hail

ephymnion: see anablōmenon

irmos: the model strophe in the kontakion upon which all the other strophes are patterned

kontakaria: collections from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries, containing kontakia of various authors

kontakion: a hybrid literary form, it is a sermon in verse set to music. Usually consisting of eleven to forty stanzas, the kontakion was based on some biblical theme or exalted a biblical personality. Romanos is deemed the "inventor" of this literary genre.

koukoulion: see prooimion

Madrasha: a form of fourth and fifth century Syrian poetry, containing complicated meters, an acrostic and a refrain. This form, along with the Memra and Sugitha probably gave the impetus for the creation of the kontakion.

Memra: one of the three forms of Syrian poetry, it was a poetical sermon with a simple meter and no acrostic or refrain.

Menologion: see synaxarion

oikos: see troparion

prooimion: a short troparion standing at the beginning of the kontakion, independent melodically and metrically from the rest of the poem, which serves to announce the theme or the feast day for which the hymn is written. Also called a koukoulion.

Sugitha: one of the three forms of Syrian poetry, it was a biblical episode presented in the form of a dialogue

synaxarion: a brief account of the life of a saint, or a commentary on the meaning of a particular feast day. Also termed the Menologion.

troparion: the technical term for a single strophe in a kontakion. Also called an oikos.

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Andrew Plishka has been read and approved by the following committee:

Rev. J. Patout Burns, S.J., Director  
Associate Professor and  
Chairman of Theology, Loyola

Rev. Eamon R. Carroll, O. Carm.  
Professor of Theology, Loyola

Rev. Earl A. Weis, S.J.  
Professor of Theology, Loyola

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

1 December 1983

Date

J. Patout Burns  
Director's Signature