1. Introduction

Romanos' kontakion 'On the Ten Virgins' is of great importance for at least two reasons: firstly it is one of few hymns from the hand of Romanos that can be dated with any certainty,\(^1\) and secondly it is next to kontakion 54\(^2\) ('On Earthquakes and Fires') an important source for contemporary events, which again, of course, form the basis for dating the specific kontakion. As to the first, Gatier has convincingly shown that this kontakion should be dated to the first period of Romanos' activities as deacon, viz. his stay in Berytos: 'L'hymne 51 de Romanos, second hymne des Dix Viéries, date probablement du printemps 503, quelques mois après le séisme qui avait ravagé la côte sud de la Phénicie.'\(^3\) As to the second, Romanos in several strophes alludes to contemporary events, just as he does in kontakion 54, some of which Gatier has related to events of the years 498–503:\(^4\) these references occur in strophes \(\gamma'.3-6, \delta'.5-7,\) and especially \(\iota'.5-9,\) and \(\iota'.10-11.\)

The purpose of this study, however, is not a historical, but a literary one: an interpretation of its overall meaning, including, of course, references to contemporary events. In establishing this overall meaning three aspects of the kontakion will be investigated: its thematic, theological, and rhetorical dimensions.

2. Theme, image and motif

Of foremost importance is the basic message of the hymn as a poetical homily. Its main aim, therefore, is of a pastoral nature. Taking the parable of the ten virgins as point of departure (the parable is already present in the prooimion), the congregation is exhorted to abandon their obsession with what is of only a transient nature; to abandon also their insouciance, especially in the light of the disasters that have happened in recent times.\(^5\) They are also exhorted to awake from their 'sleep' and thus follow the example of the wise virgins, in order that they may not in this way be found 'outside' the wedding feast, for already the trumpets of the signs (\(\gamma\chi\nu\sigma\tau\alpha\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\nu\sigma\mu\omicron\nu\tau\omicron\sigma\mu\epsilon\iota\omicron\omega\nu\alpha\iota\varsigma\alpha\lambda\nu\gamma\gamma\epsilon\varsigma\), \(\gamma'.8\)) signal the return of Christ.
The hymn is thus characterised by a specific apocalyptic-eschatological tone which, though it is typical Byzantine, can be traced back to Syriac sources. At the same time the hymn is pervaded by a deep sense of pessimism on the part of the poet: for though his audience has heard of the calamities which have befallen other people surrounding them, they have shown no or little repentance (τῇ). This pessimism, however, has induced both Maas and De Matons to date the kontakion to the poet’s last years, an assumption which, as we have noted above, has been convincingly refuted by Gatier.

The audience is immediately confronted in the prooimion with the kontakion’s Leitmotif in the form of the image of the wedding feast, based on the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13, etc. Luke 13:25). The parable is spiritualised in the first line with the phrase λαμπάδα ἀσβεστον τὴν ψυχήν νυμφίας δἐξιωμεν τῷ Χριστῷ: ‘Let us render our soul to Christ, the Bridegroom, as inextinguishable lamp!’ It is no doubt this opening phrase with its figurative use of the parable that anticipates associatively the poet’s apostrophe to his ψυχή in the rest of the kontakion. This Leitmotif at the same time provides the hymn with its short refrain consisting of the petition Ἀνοιξον! With this image of the wedding feast as point of departure, the poet, addressing his soul no less than eleven times, a feature characteristic of his penitential hymns, develops his theme, employing no less than 14 different motifs, or 16 if we include references to eschatological and contemporary events.

2.1 The ἁθυμία-motif:
After the prooimion, in which the audience is confronted with the Leitmotif, the poet begins in the first strophe with the motif of insouciance on the part of both his soul, and, as it becomes evident in the hymn, also on the part of his audience. Already the expression ταπαυη λου ψυχή reflects the seriousness of the poet’s deep-felt repentance, while the concept expressed in the verb ἁθυμίας is typical of Romanos’ penitential hymns—see e.g. especially his other famous penitential hymn (54) in which contemporary events also play a major role: α’8 τὸ νυφρόν τὸ τῶν ἁθυμίων; β’7 ὀργίζεται δὲ πεύ ἁθυμίας; τ’7.9 ἣν τῆς ψυχής τὸ ἁθυμιμόν ἀφυνίας. The latter phrase especially recalls the sleep-motif to be discussed below under 2.3 (cf. ἀρνητικόθητα 51.γ’:7). The poet thus exhorts his soul not to be indifferent and not to yearn for that which is transient. In this respect the word ἁσχολη reminds one of its use in another penitential kontakion (1 SC, prooimion line 1). While the poet in kontakion 51 (SC) admonishes his soul against indulging in what is of no use in times to come, he exhorts his soul in kontakion 1 (SC) to devote itself to repentance: σχόλασον, ψυχή λου, ἐν μετανοιαί. As to the phrase πᾶν ἄνωφέλητον (the correction of Maas) τῶν μελλόντων καιρῶν in α’1-2, Grosdidier de Matons is perhaps correct.
in stating that it is probably related to the parable of the rich man of Luke 12:16–21, and that ἀνωφέλητον refers to materialistic profits. In α’.3 the poet, still reprimanding his soul, neatly juxtaposes the transient with what is of eternal worth: τὸ παρόν ὡς ἄωνικό τοῦτο. His admonition in this passage finds its climax in lines 5–6, which, together with ideas expressed in lines 1–4, reflects the eschatological perspective of the kontakion, as already noted above: the final hour is the beginning for his soul to contemplate the phenomenon of vanity. The concept of ἡθυμία is again picked up at the beginning of the sixth strophe. The poet, having referred in the previous strophe in eschatological terms to the affliction of this final hour he spoke of in the first strophe, reflects on the pain this will be to all those who were indifferent: πόσην ὀμόνην ποιεῖ ἡ μονή τοῖς ῥαθυμήσασι καὶ πᾶσιν ἀμαρτώλοις. By adding the words ὅν πρῶτος ἐγὼ ἔμε, the Pauline formula from 1 Tim. 1:15, the poet again underlines his feeling of remorse and repentance.

2.2 The motif of the crippled woman and the image of slavery:

In the first strophe, between the concept of the insouciance of the poet’s soul, and his exhortation to wake from the sleep, the poet refers briefly to the crippled woman of Luke 13:11–13. The expression used for the crippled woman, ἡ συγκύιπτουσά, has induced Romanos to the same type of antithesis as used by Luke. Luke added an explanatory phrase, involving an antithetical play of words: μὴ δυναμένη ἀνακύψαι. Romanos, on the other hand, uses the phrase ἀνάκυπτος … πρὸς Ἰησοῦν, but with equally great effect! Moreover, the whole expression contained in line 7 brings him associatively to the concept of slavery–freedom: being liberated from the bonds (of sin), his soul should not bend its back again, for there is no liberation from willing subjection: The phrase μὴ συγκύψης τὸν νότον σου ingeniously reflects ἡ συγκύπτοσα, while the play on words between ἐλύθης–λύσις adds to the overall effect.

2.3 The sleep-motif:

I : strophe α’.10–β’.2 the poet expresses his theme further by means of the concept or motif of awakening–from the sleep, that sleep which the foolish virgins experienced because they were taken unawares by the bridegroom’s sudden arrival (τὴν ἄθροον ἔλευσιν). The poet’s exhortation to his soul in α’.10 γρηγόρησον ὡς ἀπὸ ὑμῶν directly links up with Christ’s closing exhortation in Matthew 25:13 γηγορεῖτε οὖν, ὦτι οὐκ ἀδικήσετε τὴν ἡμέραν οὐδὲ τὴν ὥραν.

By means of association the poet returns in strophe γ’.1–2,7–11 to the concept of awakening from the sleep and the coming of the bridegroom. Again he addresses and exhorts his soul with phrases similar to those
used in the previous two strophes: "Τις ως άλων, σφυχή μου, κενόν ... γρηγόρησον. The poet, however, cleverly combines this with a motif taken from Jonah: κείσα καὶ δέγγες ... ὁς Ἰωάννα καὶ ἄφυπνισθη (lines 1 and 7). Jonah was sleeping so deeply that he was quite unaware of the danger the ship was in, so that the captain had to wake him and confront him with his action of fleeing from God’s calling (Jonah 1:6). That this motif, taken from the biblical narrative of Jonah, is aptly woven into the motif of the sleep of the foolish soul, based in turn on that of the foolish virgins, becomes clear in the light of the fact that Jonah is the figure of the sinful soul that flees from God.15

2.4 Day–night motif:

The poet’s use of the sleep-motif links associatively in β’.3–7 with the day­­­night motif, based on Christ’s words in John 9:4: the poet exhorts his soul to action, seeing that it is day (the time to be wide awake and act), and that the night is coming (during which one sleeps and does not work). And by not acting (οὐ γὰρ ἐξάμομον), the believers remain poor (μένομεν πτωχοί καὶ πέννητες), and will not be pitied by those who, in future, will be rich. This idea is again explained by the motif of the ten virgins: the wise did not take any pity on the foolish!

2.5 The trumpet-motif:

At the end of the third strophe the poet again works in an associative way by linking to the sleep-motif, the motif of the trumpets giving the signal that Christ is returning at the end of times. Although the expression τῶν σήμειων αἱ σάλπιγγες recalls ταῖς σάλπιγξιν τῶν σήμασιν of 1 Macc.4:40, noted by Grosdidier de Matons,16 I find it strange indeed that he comments at length on the passage from 1 Macc.4:40, but not on its obvious connection with the eschatological statement of Jesus in Matthew 24:31, especially since he is aware of the fact that this verse from the Gospel of Matthew forms the basis for strophe γ’.8!

The fact is that the idea of the trumpets taken from Matthew 24:31 is linked by Romanos in lines 10–12 with the Leitmotif of the wedding feast, especially the idea of the closing of the doors. Line 11b is mutilated, but two remarks may suffice regarding its contents: (i) I agree with Grosdidier de Matons that τῶν σήμειων is suspect and derives from the preceding line 8; and (ii) that, on the analogy of all the other strophes (see note 9), some form of βοῶς must directly precede the refrain. Perhaps line 11 should read:

"Τὴν ἄγιαν εἴσοδον· μὴ ἀπομείνωμεν ἐξω βοῶντες
"Ανοιξόν!"
2.6 The motif of judgement/retribution, and related motives:

The image of Christ as Judge occurs frequently in Romanos, as is evident also in this kontakion. As conclusion to the day-night motif, by means of which the poet exhorts his soul (and audience) to work and toil, lest they become poor and beggarly, for the rich will at the final hour (εἰς τὸ μέλλον) not pity the poor, as the wise virgins did not pity the foolish ones, his reference to εἰς τὸ μέλλον, brings him to the final judgement: ἐξετάζοντας ἔξω τῷ μὴ ἔλεούνται. Grosdidier de Matons is thinking in terms of the parable of the servant who did not pity his co-worker, although he himself received pity from his master (Matthew 18:23-35). He rightly observes: 'Ici, ce thème n’est pas en place'. Line 10 is in fact unintelligible to me. What is the sense of warning the audience that they will not find pity at the final hour if they will be found poor and deficient for not having toiled while it was still day, just as the wise virgins also did not (quite rightly) pity the foolish virgins who went to sleep, and then immediately stating that the judgement at the final hour will be severe to him who has shown no pity? This just does not make any sense.

The poet returns to his image of judgement and retribution in strophe 7. In line 2 he calls it the day of ἐκδικήσεως, and refers to the future fire (τὸ μέλλον ... πῦρ) which will rage against them, but which they themselves have kindled. The firewood for this fire is retribution (ἀμοιβή πυροί τὴν κάμνον). At this stage the poet introduces the image of the bramble bush (ἡ βάτος), which is nothing else than their wickedness (ἡ κακία), and which cannot be extinguished, except by the tears of those who cry out below: 'Open!' Grosdidier de Matons observes in connection with this ingenious image as follows: 'Nous ne savons pas d’où provient cette exégèse originale de l’épisode du buisson ardent. Nulle part, à notre connaissance, celui-ci n’est donné comme un type eschatologique'.

The next reference to this image of judgement occurs within another motif, that of the children sitting on the market-place and crying: 'Even though the Judge is coming, let us in the meantime enjoy ourselves, and at that time call out: Open!' The use of the image of the judge in this context serves to emphasise the certainty of retribution in relation to the present foolishness of man. The reference to the coming of judgement day further serves as foil for the use of this motif in the next two to three strophes (18:1-18:1). With 1 Peter 4:7 probably in mind (πάντων δὲ τὸ τέλος ἣν γίγνεται) the poet refers to the imminence of judgement-day. Then the Son will judge and point to his sufferings for their sake, for the love He has shown for them—a word to which the poet has no reply. In this context Romanos introduces the related image of the debtor: not Christ was in debt to them, but they unto Him, although He suffered as if He indeed were the debtor—εἰ χρεωστῶν τοιαῦτα πέπονθα (18:7); αὐτὸς ἢς χρεωστῶν, ἕγε δὲ
σοι οὐχ ἔχεις ἀποκαλύψεις (τ' 7). The poet cannot but exhort his soul to prepare his defense in order to be justified by God—but the only defense would be to be wounded by his love for Christ and call upon his mercy as the One who wishes that all be saved (τ' 8-11). Of this defense the poet also speaks in the context of the motif of the doors of compassion (see below): it would consist in giving account of all that he said, and done, and thought. The poet therefore calls upon Christ to erase the marks which sin made on his soul, using the image of τὰ στύγματα ... τῶν κακῶν (τ' 10). As Grosdidier de Matons has indicated,20 the use of this image operates on two levels of meaning: first it relates, as pointed out, to the marks which sin made on the soul, but at the same time, by means of ἀναγινώσκων (10), it also relates to the characters, that is to the sins of man written down in God's book, but cancelled out by Christ's death on the cross because it is engraved upon it. It is for this erasion on the cross of his sins, which are written in God's book and marked on his soul, that the poet prays. And, addressing now the audience as ἄδεξαρι γινομενον, the poet exhorts them to pray for this as long as they live, before the wrath of God overtakes them—πρὸν ἐπέλθῃ ἡμῖν ἡ δοκιμασία ὡς ὠδὴ τῇ ἑν γαστρὶ ἐχούσῃ αἰφνίδιον (τ' 3-4). This gripping image in which God's wrath is compared to the sudden pangs of child-birth, also recalls the experience of the foolish virgins related by the poet in β' 1-2—οὐ συνήκαν τοῦ νυμφαίον τῆν ἀδρον ξελειον. This sudden arrival of God's wrath is effectively set against the background of recent contemporary events: the poet warns his audience that the inhabitants of Tyre, and those in the vicinity of Carmel, are no worse than they, and that they could perish in the same way, if they are not vigilant (the latter related to the sleep-motif previously discussed). What happened to the inhabitants of Ptolemais21 must serve as a warning against their hardness of heart and disobedience. What is required is repentance in the face of these events! The poet again touches on what we have above identified as the motif of insouciance: their mind is hardened, for though they see these disasters which others experienced, yet they do not seek God. Romanos here alludes to Psalm 52:3-4 and Romans 3:11-12, and then moves on to more biblical examples and contemporary events: the repentance of the inhabitants of Nineveh at the calling of the prophet, the tears of Ezechiels, who put the Assyrians to flight, and the recent Arabic raids on Palestine and Phoenicia.22

The motif of judgement and retribution is also set against calamities of both an eschatological and a contemporary nature. Referring to Christ's prophetic utterance in Matthew 24:7 = Luke 21:10-11, the poet points out in strophe β' 1-9 that nothing of Christ's prophecies is lacking. They are now indeed, as Christ foretold, witnesses to famine, plagues, earthquakes and war, and there is no way out, but flight for all. This is in fact a continuation of what the poet has already observed in a previous strophe
(γ’.3–6) in the context of the sleep-motif of lines 1–2, and 7: menacing events, earthquakes, wars. Moreover, this very motif is further developed in strophe ε’.3–12, mixing eschatological with contemporary events and introduced by the well-known biblical motif of weeping (cf. e.g. James 4:8—κλαωσατε και πενθήσατε και κλαωσατε): κλαωσαν, φυσικη στεναζον ηδη κατα γνωμην, προν η φθασθης και κλαωσας μη θελουσα (lines 1–2). The repetition of the words κλαωσαν–κλαωσης in connection with the antithetical pair κατα γνωμην—μη θελουσα, underlines the urgency of the poet’s instruction. The weeping-motif is also present in two other passages: in strophe γ’.11, already discussed above, which refers to the fact that only tears (of repentance) can extinguish the fire of God’s wrath, and also strophe ζ’.8, referring to the devastating effect of Ezechiel’s tears. This weeping-motif is of course typical of Romanos’ penitential hymns (e.g. kontakion 21 SC, γ’.10—κλαωσης γαρ ειπε. «Κυρε, λυτρωσαι με του βορβορου των έργων μου»). As to strophe ε’: the disasters listed in lines 3–7 clearly have a cosmological perspective: earth, heaven, the abyss, luminaries, stars, and heavenly powers are involved, all events which the audience will experience to their sorrow if they do not listen and come to their senses and repent.

2.7 The motif of the doors of compassion:

The image of the closed doors, in combination with the refrain ‘Open!’, forms an important element of the parable of the Ten Virgins. As such it occurs already in the prooimion (line 2): νομιμων γαρ ἄποκλεισθαι. But Romanos develops this element into a recurring motif with its own significance. As early as the second strophe, the poet uses it as a transition to the refrain with the significant description of ‘door of the Compassionate One’: τον του ευσπλαγχνου πυλον (line 11). At the end of the third strophe (lines 10–11), although the text is in a poor state, the poet picks up this motif within the context of Christ’s coming to earth as follows: δι’ έλεεσθαι και ένθημησας ἄποκλεισε την άγιαν έσοδον. This is continued in strophe ι’.10 where the poet returns to the idea of ‘door of compassion’: η πυλη κεκλεισται, η ευσπλαγχνια ἐσφραγισθη. The motif is linked with the reproach of the audience not wishing to be part of the wedding banquet due to their insouciance, as the poet points out several times in the kontakion, and who therefore find themselves on the outside. The horrible result of their insouciance stands out clear: the door is closed—and so is the compassion of God! Finally, the poet opens the fifteenth strophe with a prayer that the Lord should open for him (and his audience) this door of compassion before his departure from life, and before he is condemned by God:
2.8 The agricultural motif:

The theme of the kontakion also finds expression in another image, presented in agricultural terms, and extensively treated in strophes ζ'3-ζ'12. The poet links the image with the motif of παρακατά and ἀμαρτία. Those among the negligent and sinners, of whom the poet considers himself, in line with Paul's expression in 1 Tim.1:15, to be the first and foremost, will be uprooted like the figtree of Luke 13:6-9, which did not yield its fruit. They will in fact become the pasture of gehenna (γενναία) after having been cut off (cf. Matthew 3:10; 7:19). Christ is fittingly called ὁ τῶν φυγάων κληροῦχος (7). The poet consequently exhorts his soul to yield good fruit, the result of good seed of the good sower (Matthew 13:3ff), in order that they may be gathered into the granary as good fruit when Christ comes (Matthew 6:26; 13:30). The image is continued with a tone of great urgency, with the inclusion of elements from Mark 4:29 and Matthew 3:12; 13:30. The tone of urgency is expressed by the technique of repetition with which the strophe begins: ἔφθασεν, ἔφθασεν ὁ θερισμός, and where Mark merely has παρέστηκεν ὁ θερισμός. The poet then moves on to the idea of the sickle being ready (Mark 4:29). The note of urgency is consequently expressed by the reference to the swiftness of the reapers to gather in the harvest: οἱ ταράττες τερισται (5). Christ is now referred to as ὁ καλὸς γαζοῦχος (7). The whole tone of urgency brings the poet to question his soul as to what must be done, for it is full of weeds, and therefore fit to be separated from the wheat, and to be bound into bundles to be burned. Moving into the motif of weeping, the poet points out that tears and lament are the attitude to adopt in order to anticipate this terrible ordeal, and cry unto the Lord to open the doors! In strophe ι' the poet briefly returns to the agricultural image by referring to the inconsistence of their heart, which is apparent from the fruits they bear. For it is only in times of distress that they call upon the Lord—cf. also kontakion 54.γ'5-6, a kontakion in which Romanos, incidentally, also uses the image of the tree and its fruit in reference to the sinful nature of man.

2.9 The Egypt comparison:

In the second strophe, lines 3ff, the poet has referred to Christ's saying concerning the day which calls us to work in the face of the coming night, in which no one can work. This saying is transferred by the poet to the level of his audience's present life-style, implying that they are running the risk of the night overcoming them and leaving them poor and beggarly. This idea is picked up at the beginning of the ninth strophe and then developed.
further by means of the Egypt comparison, a comparison that is in line with the traditional conception of Egypt as symbol of the old, sinful world of the old man and of man’s bondage to sin and idolatry. The poet, using the idea of the night, points out that night before the night and dusk before the darkness has suddenly overcome all people, and they (the poet and his audience, mankind in general) are now like the Egyptians of old. The situation of Egypt is described by three terms (διαφέρει, θυελλα, ζοφε) which are used in the Septuagint for the ninth plague (Ex.10:22). But worse than this was to follow: the destruction of life in the Red Sea. And this also applies to the present and future. The Red Sea is perceived as γένεα ἐκεῖ (7), the eternal doom and perdition. In line 5 the poet has referred to God’s wrath (ὁ ὀργή) against them. He picks up this idea in line 8, pointing to Jesus’ wrath (παρωργίσθη) because they did not believe his miracles. He therefore punished the unbelievers. The audience is for this reason exhorted at the beginning of the tenth strophe to hate till the end their bitter slavery at the hands of the spiritual Pharaoh, for they have now become the Israel of God. They are not to return to Egypt. In line with what has been said above, the poet explains the concept of ‘Egypt’: it is that disposition which reveals a heart that is hard and disobedient, which in the midst of affliction becomes fearful, but hardens again when the trouble ceases. According to the fruits of their lives, it is plain that the audience has obtained just such a heart! For although the plague is looming above their heads, their heart is not overcome by remorse (strophe ω’1-2). This induces the poet to yet another motif as illustration of his basic theme.

2.10 The motif of the μάστιγ/ιμάς:

In talking about the plague above their heads, the poet has associatively linked up with his Egypt comparison. Despite this plague, neither their heart nor their mind have come to its senses. Still keeping within the context of the Egypt model, the poet moves on to the lashing or whipping image (μεσατιγωτα πᾶς): although all have experienced the lashing hand of God, no one calls unto Him (οὐδεις εξ ήμῶν παρωκαλει θεμως τὸν μαστιζοντα). Romanos then introduces into this image the reference to Jesus who, in his fervour for his Father’s house, made a whip and drove the people from the temple (John 2:15). Because of their sins and insouciance Christ has renewed this action (ἀνέκδικοσεν) in present times!

2.11 The children motif:

Immediately following this image of the whip, Romanos uses a comparison taken from 1 Cor.10:7 (= Ex.32:6): the audience is likened to children eating and drinking and playing. And the poet adds an element taken
from Jesus’ saying in Matthew 11:16 (Luke 7:32): 27 the audience is sitting on the market-place and shouting: ‘Even if the Judge is coming, let us in the meantime enjoy ourselves!’ The reading in Matthew 11:16 (καθημένοις ἐν ταῖς ἀγοραῖς καὶ προσφωνοῦντα τοῖς ἔτεροις) is closely paralleled by Romanos: ἐν ἀγοραῖς ἐσμὲν καθήμενοι καὶ προσφωνοῦντες.

2.12 The purse motif:

A final motif as illustration of the poet’s theme can be found in strophe 18’.8–10:

Εἰς τι οὖν κοπιῶμεν; Διὰ τί δὲ μοχθήσαντες ἐνεβάλομεν οὐδὲν τῷ βαλαντίῳ; Καὶ εἰ οὐφρον ἢν καὶ μὴ πεπλήρωτο ἀδίκιας.

The poet refers to the useless toil of the audience, using the image of the purse: considering their toil, it should have been filled with what is worthwhile. It is in fact filled with injustice! As such it is a stumbling block in their way to bring themselves to call out: ‘Open (the doors of your compassion)’!

3. Dogma and Piety

It is well-known that Romanos often inserts into the context of his kontakia statements of a dogmatic nature, or what has been called ‘dogmatic or exegetical digressions, always tiring, but even more so when introduced by a man with no real philosophical or theological training.’ 28 Among these ‘dogmatic transgressions’ those on the two natures of Christ (see e.g. 36.9) occupy a special place in Romanos. Since there is no evidence of such ‘dogmatic transgressions’ in kontakion 51, this is no place to judge Romanos as theologian. However, I doubt whether the statement of Trypanis is the whole truth, for Romanos gives the impression of having a thorough knowledge of dogmatic matters important in his times. One may also question the word ‘transgressions’, for if we acknowledge the fact that the kontakion is a sung sermon, a ‘lyrische Predigt’, then the mere absence of dogmatic statements would be incredible! One only has to take any homily of the Fathers in hand to realise how important such questions were for them!

However, another ‘theological’ aspect of far greater importance is the poet’s religious perspective, what we may refer to as his pietas, his ‘Religiosität’. Although this aspect is to be found in such components as doxology, exhortation, admonition, it is especially in his prayers 29 that the ‘religious’ Romanos is revealed, whether these prayers are uttered in his own person or on behalf of his audience (the congregation). The position of the element of prayer is usually in the prooimion and final strophe, although a few are also to be found within the main body of the kontakion.
In kontakion 51 we have a prayer both within the main body (strophe ιε') and in the final strophe, the first being typical of a prayer in the first person singular (the poet as representative of the audience), the second in the first person plural or second person plural (poet and/or audience):

(i) strophe ιε'

"Ανοιξον, χύριε, άνοιξον μοι τής εὑσπλαγχνίας σου τήν θύραν πρὸ τοῦ καιροῦ τῆς ἀποδημίας μου· ἀπελθεῖν με γὰρ δεῖ καὶ ἔλθεῖν παρὰ σοὶ καὶ περὶ πάντων ἀπολογίσασθαι ἃν ἐν λόγοις λαλῶ καὶ ἐν ἐργοῖς τελῶ καὶ ἐν καρδίᾳ διαλογίζομαι· καὶ θρούς γὰρ γογγυσμὸν τὸ σὸς τὸ σὸν οὐκ ἀποκρύβεται. «Εκτής τοὺς νεφροὺς μου», ὁ Δαυὶδ ψάλλων κράζει σοι, καὶ «ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ σου γέγραπται πάντα»· ἐν ὧν τὰ στίγματα ἀναγινώσκων τῶν κακῶν μου τῷ σταυρῷ σου ἡραξάζον, ὅτι ἐν τούτῳ καυχώμαι βοῶν σοι· «Ἀνοιξον».

(ii) strophe ιη'

"Υψίστε δέσποτα, πάντων κριτά, τί τῶν ἡμῶν μὴ περιμείλησθε· οὐ χρεία γὰρ σοι τῶν ἁγαθῶν ἡμῶν, δότα ἐγκεκατό πάς ἐπὶ τὰ πονηρὰ καὶ διανοία καὶ τῷ θελήματι. Διὰ τούτο, σωτήρ, τάς ἡμέρας ἡμῶν κατὰ τὸ θέλημα σου διώκονσαι, μὴ ἀνείπων ἐις ὀλγον, οὐκ ἐμμένει εἰς τέλειον, ὡς τὸ σπέρμα τὸ πεσὸν κατὰ τὰς πέτρας· ἄς χόρτος δώματος πρὶν ἀναβήναι ἔξηράνθη· ἀλλ' ἔφαπλωσον ἡμῖν τοὺς οἰκτιρμοὺς σου καὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς βοῶσιν· "Ἀνοιξον.

As to the formal elements of the Romanos-prayer, two major aspects concern us here: (a) addressing the divinity, an aspect comprising the divine titles and the verbal forms of address, and (b) the supplicants, viz. the poet and his audience.

(a) Addressing the divinity: The definite titles Κύριε (ιε’.1) and Σωτήρ (ιη’.5), are the two most used titles in his prayers.30 The title "Υψίστε δέσποτα (ιη’.1) occurs only here in the final strophe of kontakion 51,31 while πάντων κριτά (ιη’.1) is also the only form of its kind used in the prayers.32 Except for ἄνοιξον (which occurs also in kontakion 31), all the verbal imperative forms present in these two prayers—χάραξον (ιε’.11),
διοίκησον (τη' 6), ἔφαπλωσον (τη' 10)—occur only here in the Romanos-prayer.

(b) The supplicants: In the first of the two examples (τε') the style is in the first person singular, relating to the poet as representative of his community. The personal tone is conspicuous, and is expressed by the first person personal pronoun and verbal ending. In the prayer of the final strophe (τη') the poet speaks on behalf of himself and the community, the first person plural forms of pronoun and verbal endings replacing the first person singular forms.

But it is the contents and religious perspective of the prayers that are of importance. And it is to this aspect that I now turn my attention.

(a) Strophe τε'

We have already discussed the motifs presented in this strophe. The prayer opens significantly with the repetition of the verbal form (ἀνοιξον), which is expressive of the urgency and seriousness of the poet’s disposition. This is confirmed if we take the fact into account that it concerns the doors of Christ’s compassion, the image of the wedding banquet, with its doors being closed for those who were surprised by the sudden arrival of the bridegroom, and therefore indeed expresses urgency. The poet has as time limit his departure from this world in view, and his prayer is set against an eschatological perspective: he knows that he is to account for his words, his deeds and the thoughts of his heart. His prayer finds its climax in the gripping image of lines 10-11: that Christ, after having read the στίγματα of his sins, must engrave them on his cross, for it is in the cross of Christ that he glories.

(b) Strophe τη'

The prayer of the final strophe has a deeply pessimistic outlook. The poet prays basically (using the positive verbal form in both instances) for two things: that Christ may govern them according to his will (lines 5-6), and unfold his compassion to them and all who call that He should open the doors of the banquet (or his compassion, according to the prayer in strophe τε'). His depressive disposition relates to the lack of depth of faith in his hearts of the community, and the poet therefore also uses negative verbal forms: Christ must not await anything from them, and specifically not their conversion, for it is not coming, and if it does, it will last for a short time only. The poet therefore compares them with seed which fell on the rocks, with grass on the roofs, which withered away before it could sprout.33 The statement of lines 3-4 (ὅτι ἔγνεται πᾶς ἐπὶ τὰ πονηρὰ καὶ διανοία καὶ τῷ θελήματι) that everyone of them is inclined to evil actions in mind and heart, pointedly recalls the personal tone of the prayer in strophe τε'.5-6—ὅν ἐν λόγοις λαλῶ καὶ ἐν ἔργοις τελῶ καὶ ἐν καρδίᾳ διαλογίζομαι.
One is tempted to compare kontakion 51 with 54, in which the poet also refers to the community's insouciance and short-lived turning to God when faced with calamities, which, as the poet points out expressly, are sent by God on account of their sins and insouciance. But here, it seems, the final tone is more pessimistic, and is perhaps an homiletic technique to stir the community's conscience.

4. Rhetorical dimension

What remains is a brief look at the rhetorical perspective of the kontakion, and specifically how style and rhetorical figures support the message of the kontakion. There is little doubt to the rhetorical skill displayed by Romanos in his hymns. My aim will be to examine a few examples illustrating this aspect of his poetic art.

Of the various rhetorical figures used by Romanos, none has been highlighted more than his use of antithesis. In α'.3-4 the poet reprimands his soul for clinging to the transient as if it were of eternal value. By using antithesis, in combination with chiasm, he effectively brings it home to his soul:

\[ \chi ρατείς (1) \text{ κό} \pi ρόν (2) \]
\[ \dot{\omega}ς \text{ αλώνω} (2) \cdots \text{ προσέχουσα} (1). \]

This same semantic antithesis is found in θ'.7, which certainly recalls α'.3-4: in the first passage the poet reprimands his soul for clinging to what is but transient, while in the second passage he warns against gehenna, which is not transient, but in fact eternal: \( \dot{\eta} \text{ γέννα} \dot{\epsilon} \kappa \varepsilon \iota, \text{ ο} \dot{\omicron} \text{ πρόσκαρως} (1), \dot{\alpha} \lambda \lambda' \dot{\epsilon} \iotaς \dot{\acute{a}} \pi \acute{e} \acute{r} \acute{a} \acute{r} \acute{a} \acute{t} \acute{e} (2). \)

In the very next line (strophe α'.5) antithesis, now in combination with parallelism, is again at work in conveying the message:

\[ \dot{\eta} \epsilon \sigmaχάτη (1) \epsilon \gamma \gamma \varsigma (2) \text{ καὶ} \dot{\alpha} \rho \chi \dot{\acute{h}} (1) \text{ σοι} \dot{\epsilon} \sigma \tau i (2). \]

In β'.8-9 the poet, to emphasise his message, first uses antithesis in the form of inclusio (no.1), then he uses juxtaposition (no.4), while the verbal form is repeated (3) at the end of line 8 and the beginning of line 9:

\[ \pi \tau \chi φους (1) \cdots \epsilon iς \text{ κό} \mu \ell \l oν (2) \text{ ο} \dot{\omicron} \text{ ο} \dot{\acute{a}} \kappa \tau \epsilon \dot{\acute{r}} \acute{f} \acute{r} \acute{o} \acute{s} (3) \text{ πλούς} \acute{t} \acute{o} i (1) \]
\[ \text{ ο} \dot{\omicron} \text{ γάρ} \text{ ο} \dot{\acute{a}} \kappa \tau \epsilon \dot{\acute{r}} \acute{f} \acute{r} \acute{a} \acute{n} (3) \text{ μωράς} (4) \text{ σοφαί} (4) \text{ παρθένοι.} \]

The enumeration of calamities in strophes γ' and δ' gains in dramatic tension by the constant use of parallelism, chiasm, assonance, word repetition, and word play in juxtaposition. A few examples will suffice:

\[ \acute{\alpha} \pi \epsilon \iota \lambda \acute{a} (1) \text{ έκα} \chi \theta \acute{e} \acute{i} \acute{s} (2) \text{ καὶ} \text{ σευσμοί} (1) \text{ συνέχεις} (2) \]
\[ \text{ καὶ} \text{ τών} \text{ πολέμων} (1) \text{ κτύποι} \text{ ἐπάλληλοι} (2) \]
\[ \text{ συνετάραξαν} (1) \gamma \dot{\eta} (2) \cdots \]
\[ \text{ καὶ} \text{ ἑφυγό̓δευσαν} (1) \text{ καὶ} \text{ τήν} \text{ θάλασσαν} (2) (γ'.3-6) \]
Word repetition to render the effect of urgency is also used in ζ'.1 — ἐφθασεν, ἐφθασεν ὁ θερισμός, as well as in ω'.1 — ἄνοιξον, κύριε, ἄνοιξόν μοι, while the chiasmic structure at the beginning of θ' — νῦς (1) πρὸ νυκτὸς (2) καὶ πρὸ σκότους (2) ἀχλῶς (1) emphasises the predicament in which the community finds itself. Another effective use of chiasm is used in ω'.8–9. In this instance the chiasm is one consisting of verbal forms, case forms and sound, all combining to underline the inconstancy of the community’s faith:

χαρδίαν πτοουμένην (1) ἐπελθούσης τῆς θλίψεως (2) ἐπελθούσης δὲ αὐτής (2) τραχυμομένην (1).

A final elaborate example of chiasm and parallelism, involving 8 words, is found in ω'.1–2. The concepts, which form a parallelism in line 1, are presented as a chiasm in line 2, and the intricate rhetorical pattern most definitely serves to focus the attention on the real importance of the poet’s statement:

ὑπέρθε τῆς κεφαλῆς (1) ἡ πληγὴ (2) καὶ ἡ καρδία (1) οὔ λυπεῖται (2) ἀλγεῖ (2) ἡ σάρξ (1), καὶ ὁ νοῦς (1) οὔχ αἰσθάνεται (2).

The examples presented above are typical of Romanos’ style, and can be found in almost any kontakion with a slight variation in frequency of occurrence. The abundant use of such figures of speech may not always be of interest to the modern reader, but they must be judged against the background of ancient rhetorical practice in general, and Romanos’ use in particular: it is an important vehicle for his thoughts and overall message, as Hunger, for example, has amply demonstrated in his study of kontakion 19 SC.35 Although it is the message of the kontakion as liturgical text which is of primary importance, the rhetorical dimension renders this message the more effective and pronounced.

NOTES

5. Cf. Gatier, op.cit. 230: ‘Le premier hymne des Dix Viêgres est un appel à la conti­trition en même temps qu’une description de la dureté des temps…’
9. This kontakion offers a rare instance of the refrain being introduced by the same verb (bolow) in one or other form, which implies that some form of bolow is also required in strophe γ.11. For this problem see Grosdidier de Matons, Hymnes V, note 4, 301.
10. Except for one instance (β.3) the word puxh (as an apostrophised title of address) occurs in either line 1 or 8 in the particular strophe: α'.1, γ'.1, δ'.1, η'.1, ρβ'.1, ρβ'.1, ζ'.8, ζ'.8, ν'.8.
11. For this see especially Grosdidier de Matons, Hymnes I, Paris 1964 (SC 99), note 2, 71, on kontakion 1 (SC): ‘Ce genre de prooimion, d’allure très personelle, où le poète apostrophe son âme, est particulier aux hymnes pénitentiels.’ He refers in the note to 51 (SC). See in general also J.H. Barkhuizen, ‘Narrative apostrophe in the Kontakia of Romanos the Melodist with special reference to his hymn “On Judas”, Acta Classica 29 (1986) 19–27, in which apostrophe as a device in Romanos is discussed.
13. The climactic phrase ἡ ἐσχάτη ἐγγύς is anticipated by both τῶν μελλόντων καιρῶν and αἰών.
14. The passage as a whole recalls the profound ending of hymn 58 (lines 388–401) of Symeon the New Theologian.
15. See also Grosdidier de Maton’s remarks in note 2, 300–301 (Hymnes V).
16. Hymnes V, note 4, 301.
17. Hymnes V, note 1, 300.
19. Grosdidier de Matons (Hymnes V, 315) erroneously also refers to James 4:8, which has nothing in common with our passage in Romanos.
24. Cf. Gatier, op.cit. 234–237 for these events from contemporary history.
26. Cf. Grosdidier de Matons, Hymnes V, note 3, 313, who rightly rejects Ino Mikhaïli’dou’s suggestion that ἐξηλώσει in this allusion refers to the idea of imitation.
27. It is remarkable that Grosdidier de Matons has noted 1 Cor.10:7, but not Matthew 11:16 = Luke 7:32!


30. See note 29.

31. The single title δέσποτα occurs in the prayers 5 times, and 5 times in an extended form.

32. In kontakion 50 the form κριτᾶ δικαιότατε occurs 4 times.

33. For the juxtaposition of these two images, see Grosdidier de Matons (Hymnes V), note 1, 326–327.


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