JOHN CHRYSTOS TOM, HOMILY 50 ON MATTHEW 14:23-36 (PG 58,503-510). A PERSPECTIVE ON HIS HOMILETIC ART

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The general structure or composition of the exegetical homilies of Chrysostom reveals a clearly defined twopart division—an exegetical first part, followed by an ethical or moral second part. Regarding this general structure the following aspects should be noticed:

(i) Many scholars have pointed out that both the exegetical and ethical part are seldom constructed around a single problem.

(ii) Regarding the exegetical part the aspect mentioned in (i) is the result of the fact that there is no obvious reason why Chrysostom comments on a particular set of verses within the scope of a particular homily. This absence of any regular plan consequently gave rise to the plurality of themes within a particular homily.

(iii) Scholars have also pointed out that the ethical second part is usually linked superficially to the first part, and that here also the particular homily reflects no systematic construction of thought.

Yet it would be an injustice to Chrysostom to define his exegetical homilies as exhibiting a disjointed structure with no systematic construction of thought. In fact, there are also numerous homilies that reveal a remarkable homiletic and thematic unity. Homily 50 on Matthew 14:23-36 offers us one such an example, and the following analysis of its structure and thought sequence aims at underlining this point.

Outline

According to the generally accepted twopart structure of his homilies, as stated above, the first or exegetical section comprises columns (PG 58) 503,51-507,35a, while the second, ethical section is presented in columns 507,35b-510,32a (the closing doxology is contained in 510,32b-33).

The homily contains four major themes:

Section A

Theme 1: searching for quietness in our prayers—503,51-504,49a.

Theme 2: endurace amidst trials and struggles—504,49b–505,52a.
Theme 3: drawing near to Christ with faith—505,52b–507,35a.
Transition to second part—507,35b–507,49.

Section B
Theme 4: practising almsgiving and avoiding avarice—507,50–510,32a

Section A: Exegetical Part
Theme 1: Searching for quietness in our prayers
The opening theme of the homily relates to the reason why Jesus retired to the mountain. According to Chrysostom there were indeed two reasons: the first he mentions serves to introduce theme 1, while the second introduces theme 2.

As to why Jesus retired to the mountain, Chrysostom states that Jesus has done this to teach us to search for quietness and solitude in our prayers, as He did. The theme is formally enhanced by the accumulation of related words and concepts as well as its structure, which can be schematized as follows, listing merely the main related concepts:

1. Why has Jesus gone up the mountain?
2. To teach us that solitude is good when we pray to God
3. For this reason He went to lonely places when He wished to pray
4. He thus teaches us that we should seek solitude in our prayers
5. For solitude is like a calm harbour freeing us from turmoils
6. This is the reason why He went up the mountain

Statements 1–2 are repeated in 3–4: Jesus withdrew to the mountain to teach us to seek solitude when we pray to God. In statements 5–6 the pattern of 1–2 and 3–4 is reversed: it first states the beneficial effects of praying amidst tranquillity (5—quietness sets us free from turmoils), which is then given as reason why Jesus went up the mountain (6). This reversed order is devised so as to cause statement 6 to function as inclusio, serving to resolve the question put in statement 1.

Theme 2: Endurance amidst trials and turmoils
The use of γαλήνη/λήμαν in statement 5 strongly suggests the image of a ship having crossed a stormy sea, reaching the calm of the harbour—an image often employed by Chrysostom in his homilies. It is here clearly related
to the fact that in the relevant passage of Matthew 14:23ff an occurrence on a stormy sea is narrated. At the same time it also serves as striking transition to the second theme. For immediately after having stated that Jesus withdrew to teach us to seek tranquillity when praying to God, and that loneliness delivers us from turmoils, Chrysostom relates in stark contrast the situation of the disciples: they were tossed with the waves, undergoing a storm at sea—χλωρίζοντας ... χειμώνα ὑπομένουσιν—the word θαρύζων (turmoils) obviously serving as foil for the above quoted phrase.

Having in this way effected the transition, Chrysostom now moves on to one of the major themes of his homily—endurance amidst turmoils—a theme which is repeated in several related statements, and twice illustrated by examples from the Old Testament.

I have stated above that John ascribes two reasons for Jesus' withdrawing to the mountain. The first, we have seen, has introduced theme 1, while the second reason for his action introduces theme 2. For after having described the perilous situation of the disciples, and the fact that they were all on their own, Chrysostom states that Jesus was not with them in order to lead them little by little on to greater things so that they could bear all nobly: καὶ εἰς τὸ φέρειν πάντα γενναίως.

When the disciples had experienced a storm at sea on a previous occasion, Jesus was with them, and although He was sleeping at the time of the storm, He could by his mere presence give them consolation. Now He was absent and the purpose, Chrysostom repeating his theme for a second time, was to lead them to a greater degree of endurance: νοῦν δὲ ἐπὶ μείζονα ἄγων ἁπτός ὑπομονήν—the latter word obviously reflecting ὑπομένουσιν used above of the disciples' enduring a storm at sea.

But not only was Jesus absent, He actually caused a storm at sea, and let them be tempest-tossed the whole night long, the purpose being—Chrysostom repeating his theme for a third time—that they might not look for a hope of deliverance from their situation from any quarter—which is another way of stating that they might bear their situation nobly. This is confirmed by Chrysostom's expressing his theme for a fourth time: Jesus allowed them to be tossed with the waves that He might awaken their hardened heart, saying as much as that this was Jesus' way of leading them to greater things.

Chrysostom, having stated that the purpose of Jesus' action was that the disciples might not expect salvation from any quarter, now repeats this same idea in positive terms: His purpose was to cast into them a greater longing for Himself, a continual remembrance of Him. In this way—Chrysostom would suggest—they could bear all nobly, by keeping Him in mind and at heart, instead of being the victims of their fear.

It is for this reason, Chrysostom continues, that Christ did not come to them immediately, but that He did so only in the fourth watch. The
purpose (ταξιδέων) of this ‘delay’ again relates to theme 2: to instruct them not to look too soon for deliverance from their pressing dangers (μη τάχεως λίγαι επίσης τῶν συνεχόντων δεινῶν), but to bear all that befalls them nobly (φέρειν τὰ συμπίπτοντα γενώς), Chrysostom using almost exactly the same phraseology as previously in 504,53–54.

This delay of Jesus also has Chrysostom state a general principle related to theme 2: when Jesus is on the point of removing the turmoils of his people, He brings upon them worse things. In this way He trains them and instructs them, by the continuance of their fears, to endure all in a more manly way—ἀλεξίων αὐτοῦ (athletic image) . . . ἐν τῇ συνεχείᾳ τῶν φόβων . . . καὶ παθεῖν εἶναι καρπηρικοῦς. This happened when their fears were heightened (ἐπετάθη . . . ὁ φόβος) by the fact that, together with the storm, they saw Jesus walking on the waters, but He was all covered in darkness, Jesus not having made Himself manifest as yet.

Chrysostom now illustrates this principle of purpose on the part of Christ from two Old Testament examples, which is typical of his exegetical style, as McKibbens has rightly observed. Chrysostom refers in this instance to Job9 and Jacob.10 In using them as illustrations of his theme of endurance, the network of words and phrases again establishes the overall pattern of his presentation: the words φόβοι—πειρασμοί . . . τὸ τέλος χαλεπώτερον . . . τακτικές—θόρυβον—θάνατον—χιλιών in the case of these two Old Testament figures obviously reflect those used in connection with the disciples: φόβοι—δεινὰ—χαλεπώτερα—φοβερότατα—ἐθοροβήσε—φόβοι.

After these two Old Testament examples, Chrysostom repeats the general principle stated above and illustrated from the Old Testament examples: when the righteous are on the point of coming to an end of their turmoils, He increases their struggles, wishing them to profit the more: βουλόμενος αὐτοὺς πλέον κερδίαν, ἐπιτείνει τὰ γυμνάσια—ἐπιτείνει clearly picking up ἐπετάθη used above in 505.17 and said of the disciples’ fear.

Chrysostom again turns to the Old Testament, in this case referring to God’s demanding from Abraham the killing of his child11 as his supreme conflict: τὸ ἐρχόμενον ἄθλον.

He immediately follows the example of Abraham by yet again expressing theme 2: Thus things unbearable will become bearable when they are brought at our very doors, with the deliverance near to us. Therefore, according to Chrysostom, Christ did not reveal Himself until the disciples cried out, and thus, only when their agony reached breaking point, were they more ready to welcome his coming to them—the phrase ἐπετάθη τὰ τῆς ἁγίασας, especially the verbal form ἐπετάθη, being used the third time in a short space of time.12

Chrysostom concludes his second theme by referring to the final solution of the disciples’ fear when Jesus encouraged them not to fear any longer. His concluding statement: Τοῦτο τὸ ρήμα τῶν φόβων ἔλυσε, καὶ
Theme 3: Drawing near to Christ with faith

The third theme of homily 50 is realised by Chrysostom by referring to four levels of human conduct involving Jesus: Peter’s walking on the waters towards Jesus, Peter and the other disciples confessing Jesus as truly the Son of God; the people of Gennesaret coming to Christ with more faith; and finally the directive to the present audience of Chrysostom (and by implication, all Christians) to imitate the people of Gennesaret.

Peter and Jesus

Taking Peter’s request that Jesus permit him (to) come to Him as point of departure, Chrysostom first gives his audience an in-depth look into the character of Peter. Three features of his character are highlighted, which form an important part of Chrysostom’s exposition of theme 3: his fervour, his faith, and his love.

Chrysostom defines Peter’s fervour by pointing out that he has always and everywhere (even after the resurrection of Christ) forestalled the other disciples in some way or other, something that has often placed him in danger, by seeking what is beyond his limits. On the other hand no other disciple loved Jesus as much as Peter did, and the great thing he was asking Jesus—to be able to come to Him and his desire to be quickly near to Jesus—resulted from the love he had for Him. But at the same time it also points to his faith: Peter did not only believe that Jesus could walk on the waters, but that He could also have others do the same.

In his exposition of the scene in which Peter is walking on the waters towards Jesus, Chrysostom subsequently dwells on each of these three features, but it is on his faith that Chrysostom essentially focuses. Like a refrain Chrysostom thrice shows Peter walking to Jesus, after having descended from the boat. In the first two of these statements involving καταβαίας, he emphasizes Peter’s fear and lack of faith, but in the third instance he underlines Peter’s love as motive for his request to go to Jesus.

(i) Peter’s faith. Chrysostom points out, eventually proved to be little faith (Jesus addressed him as ὀλιγόποστε): seeing the wind, he became afraid, and subsequently he began to sink in the waves.

From Peter’s lack of faith, Chrysostom moves on to his fervour, asking his audience why Jesus yielded to Peter’s request. This was, according to
him, due to Peter's being θηρμός: he would therefore by nature be prone to object (ἀντίπαθεν ἰδίον) if Jesus were to deny him his request. Jesus therefore wished to teach him, through this experience, to become more self-contained and sober (σωφρονίσθη).

(ii) Chrysostom returns to Peter's fear and lack of faith: having descended (καταβας), he was tossed with the waves, for he was afraid of the winds—χλωδώνιζεται ... χλωδώνην ... ἐφοβηθη ... φόβον clearly reflecting ἐφοβηθη ... καταπνευσθα quoted above.

(iii) For a third time Chrysostom refers to Peter's having descended from the boat (καταβας), but now stressing his love as ultimate motive for his request: Peter went to Jesus, not rejoicing so much in walking on the water, as in coming to Him.

But seeing that Chrysostom here has in essence Peter's faith in mind, as I have already indicated above, Chrysostom returns to his faith, or rather: the lack of it. For although he overcame the greater obstacle of walking on the water, he was on the point of suffering defeat from the lesser obstacle—the wind.

This brings Chrysostom to state a general truth concerning the frailty of human nature: Often (human nature) effects great things, but exposes itself in the lesser (πολλὰς τὰ μεγάλα καταρθοῦσα, ἐν τοῖς διάτοσιν ἐλέγχεται). This truth is illustrated by another set of Old Testament figures: it can be seen in the conduct of Elias in the case of Jezebel, Moses in the case of the Egyptian, and David in the case of Bathsheba.13

Thus Peter in essence reflects this general truth: when his and the other disciples' fear was at its height, he had the courage to walk on the waters, but in the end he could not withstand the power of the wind and succumbed to its onslaught; and this happened, Chrysostom stresses, although Peter was near to Jesus!

This brings him to an important statement regarding theme 3: Οὖν εἰς τὸν Χριστὸν, μὴ πίστει ὑπάρχει. Not nearness to Christ, but nearness in faith is required. And therefore Jesus did not quiet down the winds, but merely took hold of Peter's hand, and saved him, for He required faith from him, an explanation that brings Chrysostom to another general truth about the relation between man and God: For when our part is wanting, then God's part also is at a stand ('Ὅταν γὰρ τὰ παρ᾽ ἡμῶν ἐλλειμπάρῃ, καὶ τὰ παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ἵσταται). It was thus in fact not the onslaught of the wind, but Peter's lack of faith that caused his defeat. If his faith did not fail him, he would easily have withstood the power of the wind—ἐν οὐκ ἔχοντι ἤδωρῳ reflecting οὐκέτα ἤδωρον οὖν εἰς τὸν θεοῦ ἱστάμενα. Therefore also Jesus, in contrast to the disciples' first encounter with a storm at sea, suffered the wind to blow, thus showing that when faith is steadfast (ὅταν ἡ πίστευς ἡ πεπηγόει), no hurt comes by this.
This brings Chrysostom to employ, typical of his homiletic art, the (Homeric) simily (καθάπερ ... οὖσα) being one of three typical formulas 14—he compares Christ’s action towards Peter with the nestling’s falling from the nest before the proper time, and being on the point of falling onto the ground, the mother bears it on her wings in time, and back to the safety of the nest.

The disciples and Jesus

Following the narrative of Matthew 14:32-33, Chrysostom moves from Peter to the group of disciples as a whole, tracing the same development in their overall conduct as he did in the case of Peter. He repeats the principle stated in 504,53--54, and points out how Jesus was leading them little by little to greater things: πῶς κατὰ μικρὸν ἐπὶ τὸ ψηλὸτερον ἄπαντας ἤγε. For whereas before they were merely amazed and wondered what kind of man Jesus was to be able to quiet down the winds, their amazement was now being converted into faith and confession of his divine nature, and henceforth, after witnessing how He walked on the waters, and commanded another to do the same, and how He saved him when in danger of losing his life, their faith became great—πολλὴ λοιπὸν ἡ πίστις ἡ!  

The people of Gennesaret and Jesus

Moving on to the final section of the biblical passage on which Chrysostom is commenting, he applies his theme of faith also to the conduct of the people of Gennesaret. He points out how their reaction towards Jesus was different from their previous action, for previously they dragged Him into their houses, seeking to touch his hand, waiting for his commands. Now they have dispatched messengers throughout their region in order that all the sick could come and touch the hem of his garment, and all who did so, were healed.

Chrysostom defines this conduct as ὑψηλότερον πολλὰ ... φιλοσοφότερον (in a far higher strain, and more virtuous), and especially as μετὰ πλείονος τῆς πίστεως (with a more abundant faith). This kind of action, Chrysostom contends, was the result of the faith of the woman who had an issue of blood: ἣ ... αἰμορρούσα ... ἄπαντας ἔδίδαξεν φιλοσοφεῖν. 15 And the fact that it was a long time since Jesus again visited their region, his absence ‘did not lessen their faith, but increased it, and preserved it in full bloom’ (οὐκ ἔξελεν τὴν πίστιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ μείζωνα εἰργάσατο, καὶ ἄχμαζοναν διετήρησεν), for the Gospel implicitly states that they recognized Him.

Chrysostom’s audience and Jesus

From the people of Gennesaret, Chrysostom directly addresses his audience, and thus effects the link between the exegetical first part of his homily and
the ethical second part. The link is the hem of Christ's garment, which the audience must also touch in imitation of the people of Gennesaret: ἀφόμηθα ... καὶ ἡμεῖς τοῦ κρασπέδου τοῦ ἰματίου αὐτοῦ. But the hem of the garment is immediately replaced by ὅλον αὐτὸν ἔχωμεν. The audience, and all subsequent Christians do not have the hem of his garment, but Christ as a whole, represented in this instance by his body—for them not to only touch, but also to eat and be filled—a statement pointing to the subsequent celebration of the eucharist. Chrysostom follows with a second directive: what is of more importance here is the exhortation to approach with faith: προσερχόμεθα τούν μετὰ πίστεως, ἐκαστός αὐθέντευν ἔχων. The audience should imitate the people of Gennesaret, and much more than that. For if the people of Gennesaret could draw from Him such power by merely touching the hem of his garment, how much more could they who possess Him entire? Chrysostom subsequently explains what is meant by approaching with faith: it requires that the audience should not only partake of his body, but do so with a pure heart: μετὰ καθαρὰς καρδίας.

Thus theme 3 is concluded, forming at the same time the transition to the final theme: with the celebration of the eucharist as point of departure, Chrysostom urges his audience to practise ἐλεημοσύνη and avoid πλεονεξία.

Section B: Ethical Part

Theme 4: Almsgiving (Ἕλεημοσύνη) versus avarice (πλεονεξία)

Already in 507,36–49, in which he applies theme 2 also on the level of his audience, Chrysostom has pointed to the imminent celebration of the eucharist: καὶ γὰρ καὶ τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ πρόκειται νῦν ἔχωμ (507,37–38), and: ἄλλα καὶ τὸ σῶμα ... ὅπερ καὶ φαγεῖν καὶ ἐμφύλησθαι (507,39–40). The audience should approach the body of Christ as if approaching Christ Himself, and although they do not hear his actual voice, they see Him laid out (αὐτὸν κηκίσκω). Moreover, they in fact do hear his voice, for He is speaking through the Gospel writers.

But before discussing the theme of avoiding πλεονεξία and practising ἐλεημοσύνη, which can be defined as probably the best loved theme in the homilies of Chrysostom, he first dwells on the reality of Christ’s presence in the celebration of the eucharist, as well as on the nature of this.

As to the reality of Christ at the eucharist, the audience, according to Chrysostom, should see in the acts of the priest the act of Christ Himself. This Chrysostom relates to both what happens at baptism, and the adoption of children in the everyday life situation. At baptism it is God who holds one’s head with his invisible power, while in the case of the adoption of children the persons involved do not entrust such an act to their slaves, but go to the courts themselves.
As to the nature of the eucharist, Chrysostom calls priests and congregation to a disposition of trembling at the thought of that of which they are partaking: τῶν ἄγιων σαρκῶν αὐτοῦ ἐμπληροῦται ἔλθον ἡμῖν, ἑαυτὸν παρέθηκε τεθημένον (508,6–7), the latter being a repetition of 508,2–3: ἑαυτῶν καρδίας. In the eucharist priests and congregation are dealing with the sacred body and flesh of Christ, which He gave as sacrifice, having not spared Himself for them. This is also the ultimate blessing from God: τὸ ... κεφάλαιον τῶν ἄγαθῶν τούτῳ ἔστιν, ὅτι τοῦ ἴδιου υἱοῦ ὦν ἐφέσαστο (508,25–26).

Both the reality of Christ in the eucharist and its very nature require the right disposition, which Chrysostom subsequently expounds extensively and vividly in the second part of his homily.

Chrysostom defines the mystery of the eucharist as that which is characterised by εἰρήνη, and which therefore does not allow the participants to feed on such holy food, yet commit sins belying this εἰρήνη. These sins are then defined in particular as those constituting ἀφαγή, φιλή ἔχθρα—and especially ἀντιποιοεῖσθαι χρημάτων. Using anaphora (ὅτι) and arresting metaphor (λόγως γινώμεθα ... κατὰ λόγων ἀρπάζομεν), all in the form of a rhetorical question put to the audience, Chrysostom underlines the gravity of the situation.

Chrysostom, again confronting the audience with such a sinful attitude, now resorts to play on words (ἑαυτῶν υἱῷ ἐφέσαστο—χρημάτων φειδόμενοι—φυγής ἀρπαζόμενοι—οὐκ εὐεσπαιρο ἑαυτοῖς), all again in the form of a rhetorical question: Seeing that Christ did not spare Himself, the audience should not spare their money and behave recklessly regarding their souls!

The eucharist with the body and blood of Christ is subsequently defined as the cross, of which the audience should not be ashamed—it is that gift with which we adorn ourselves (notice the chiasm: κοσμούμεθα τῷ δόρῳ ... τούτῳ καλλιεργοῦμεθα), and that is the crown of God’s blessings (τὸ ... κεφάλαιον τῶν ἄγαθῶν), namely the fact that He did not spare His own son to save us. Nothing can ever be compared with this gift: not the fact that God stretched out the heaven, spread out earth and sea, sent prophets and angels! For this very reason no Judas or Simon, two typical New Testament examples of ἀφαγή, on account of which both perished (διὰ φαλαργίαν ἀπέλαυνεν), could partake of the eucharist.

With Φύραιμεν ... τοῦτο τῷ βαράθρον (508,29) Chrysostom introduces into his exposition the contrast between the audience adorning the table and attending the eucharist with outward vessels and appearances, but neglecting almsgiving (ἐλεημοσύνη) due to their avarice (ἐλπονέξα). For they should not think that they can be saved, after having stripped widows and orphans, by offering a gold and jewelled cup for His table—the concept of ‘gold’ (χρυσοῦς) being presented in his subsequent exposition
on two different levels of meaning—one pertaining to outward objects and the other to the souls of the partakers of the eucharist.

Chrysostom first develops this concept in a passage (508,33–63) which has as dominant motive the honouring of the sacrifice, that is the body of Christ, and which can be divided into two subsections by the repetition of a similar phrase—Εἰ βούλετί τιμήσαι τὴν θυσίαν ... (508,33) and Βούλετι τιμήσαι τὸῦ Χριστοῦ τὸ σῶμα (508,46–47).

(i) 508,33–46: honouring the sacrifice implies first of all offering a soul which has been turned into a soul of gold; secondly, when we bring vessels of gold, they should have been procured from honest earnings. For more precious than gold are those free from avarice—χρηστῶν τῆς ἵππου. Referring to the nature of the church, Chrysostom states that it is not a gold foundry nor a workshop for silver, but an assembly of angels—and therefore what is required are souls. Referring also to the very first eucharist, instituted by Christ, the audience should know that the table was not of silver nor the cup made of gold.

(ii) 508,46–63: honouring the body of Christ, Chrysostom—repeating the formula of 508,33—implies that we should not honour Him with silken garments while we neglect Him when naked or cold. Here Chrysostom introduces that well-beloved motive that figures so often in his homilies, taken from the passage in Matthew 25:31–46, in this instance quoting only verses 42 and 45: when we neglect one of the least in their nakedness, hunger etc., we are in fact neglecting Him. This saying of Jesus requires not garments, but a pure soul, the phrase ψυχῆς καθαρῆς, clearly reflecting χρυσῆν πολύν of 508,34 and anticipating χρυσῶν of 508,63. Honouring the body of Christ further implies that we honour Him as He wishes to be honoured, not as we think fit, as Peter did when he objected to Jesus’ wanting to wash his feet. This is true μισεῖται (see note 15). The repetition of related words in 508,56–61 serves to emphasize the point Chrysostom is making: τιμήν—τιμωμένω τιμή ἥδιστης—τιμή—τιμα τὴν τιμήν, all of course referring back to the two introductory and similar phrases of 508,33/46 noted above. Truly honouring the body of Christ is to spend one’s wealth on poor people (see especially the work of Leyerle, listed under note 16), thus offering God golden souls and not golden vessels.

With Καὶ ταῦτα λέγω in 508,64, repeated in 509,24–25 (Καὶ ταῦτα λέγω), Chrysostom moves into a following phase (508,64–510,2) in the development of theme 4, a phase that is not only characterised by these two introductory and similar statements in 508,64 and 509,24–25, but also by, inter alia, four questions as to the profit of offering precious objects but neglecting the basic needs of the poor.

The statement immediately preceding καὶ ταῦτα λέγω in 508,64—that God has no need of golden vessels but golden souls, concluding the previous section, also serves as transition to what follows: the offering of golden
vessels is not wrong in itself, but with it, and prior to it (μετὰ τούτων καὶ πρὸ τούτων, a phrase which is, incidentally, repeated in the second occurrence of the formula καὶ ταῦτα λέγω in 509,24—25: μετ’ ἐκείνων ... πρὸ ἐκείνων) should be the practice of almsgiving: τὴν ἐλεημοσύνην ποιεῖν. By means of a repetition of the formula ἐνταῦθα-ἐκεῖ Chrysostom points out that the offering of golden vessels profits only the one offering them, while in the case of almsgiving it is the receiver that benefits from it. Moreover, while the offering of golden vessels serves as starting point for φιλοτιμία (ambitious display), practising almsgiving is love of mankind (φιλανθρωπία).

Now follows the series of four questions as to the profit of the one attitude as set against the other—introduced by the formulas τι δρέλος (509,4; 509,9), τι κέρδος (509,11), and τι δέ (509,15). Of essential importance in this section, from this point on up to the second occurrence of the formula καὶ ταῦτα λέγω in 509,24—25, is the fact that Chrysostom constantly weaves the motive of Matthew 25:31-46 into his exposition.

The adornment of the table with golden cups in contrast to Christ’s perishing of hunger and thirst, and lacking the necessary covering for his head, forms the issue of the first two questions as to the profit of it all, introduced by τι δρέλος ...;

From the person of Christ in need, Chrysostom moves to one’s fellowman in need, but the issue at stake remains in both cases the same: what is the profit (τι κέρδος) if one does not provide for his fellowman’s need (ἀποροῦντα τροφῆς ... ἄρεις ... λύσαι τὸν λιμὸν), but overlays his table with silver. Such a person, instead of being grateful, will rather feel indignation (χάριν ... μᾶλλον ἡγανόκτησε). And again, what is the profit (τι δέ) if one does not provide a garment for his fellowman, who is clothed in rags, and is stiff with cold, but rather build him golden columns. Rather than an honour (τιμή—referring back to the frequent use of this concept above) such a person would deem it an insult of the worst kind (χάριν ... σαγανή). Chrysostom turns the audience’s attention again to Christ, again weaving the motive of Matthew 25:31-46 into his argument. Referring to Christ as wanderer and stranger (ἀλήτης καὶ ξένος), in need of a roof to cover Him (δεσμώτερος ὀρφητεί), and bound in prison (ἐν δεσμωτηρίῳ δεσμευμένον), Chrysostom ridicules in such circumstances actions like decking out a pavement, and walls, and capitals of columns, and the hanging up of silver chains by means of lamps!

This brings Chrysostom to introducing for a second time the formula καὶ ταῦτα λέγω, with which he repeats that such adornments (referring to them as acts of display—φιλοτιμεῖσθαι) as have been listed above, are not in themselves wrong, but the practising of almsgiving should accompany (μετ’ ἐκείνων), and rather, precede (πρὸ ἐκείνων) such actions. This Chrysostom elucidates by pointing out that the neglect of such acts of display has never been liable to punishment, but the neglect of the needy and poor
is threatened with Gehenna and unquenchable fire. Chrysostom, having
in his foregoing exposition used the table and golden cups as examples of
comparison, now moves to the biblical image of *man as the spiritual house
of God* as set against the *physical house of God*: he admonishes his audience
not to adorn the physical house, while neglecting the spiritual house of
God. 23 This biblical image is extended into the level of everyday life:
whereas precious objects become the booty of unbelieving kings, tyrants
and robbers, the acts of ἐλεημοσύνη become treasures which not even the
devil will be able to despoil. 24

After a digression (510,3–19) on the meaning of Matthew 26:11 ('You will
always have the poor with you'—probably anticipating an objection from
the audience), Chrysostom concludes theme 4 by exhorting his audience to
be very earnest about ἐλεημοσύνη, basing his exhortation on four important
truths regarding the advantage of practising almsgiving, each truth being
exemplified or confirmed by a biblical quotation:

(i) it cleanses our sins—with reference to Luke 11:41
(ii) it is more important than sacrifice—with reference to Hosea 6:6 = Matthew 9:18
(iii) it opens the heavens—with reference to Acts 10:4
(iv) it is more indispensable than virginity—with reference to Matthew
25:1–13

In his final exhortation, Chrysostom uses an agricultural image: by sow­ing liberally, we shall reap in abundance: σπείρωμεν φιλοτήμως—τὰ μετὰ
πλείονος θερίσωμεν δακρύλεις! The use of the adverb φιλοτήμως certainly
relates to his concept of φιλοτήμα—the lavish spending of one's money on
the poor is an investment in heaven. Leyerle writes: 'Chrysostom located
it (i.e. the opportunity for such an investment) at the very bottom of the
socioeconomic ladder, in the antispectacle of the market, among the poor
and the destitute. To invest in these people was to lay up “gain and good
merchandise” in heaven'—compare Chrysostom *Hom.in Matt.5.5* (PG
57.61): καὶ οὖν ἐννοεῖς ὅτι ἔστι φανῶμεν ἀπολέσαι, καὶ μὴ φανῶμεν
χερδάναι.

**Conclusion**

In homily 50 on Matthew 14ff, Chrysostom has not only chosen in this in­
stance a close-knit unit (verses 22–36), but he has also succeeded in linking
the section on Jesus' retiring to the mountain to pray with the storm, which
the disciples were experiencing at the same time on the sea, by means of an­
tithetical association of ideas: quietness in prayer as opposed to turmoils at
sea. Again, within the scene of the storm at sea and the subsequent healing
miracles in Gennesaret, he employs two themes (endurance amid turmoils, and approaching Christ with faith) which in fact bind the whole section of Matthew 14:22–36 together as a closely knit thematic unit. One could thus refer to homily 50, as a well-devised homily from a homiletic and thematic point of view. And this could also be indicated in other exegetical homilies, so that we should be aware not to fall too easily into generalizations as to the overall structure or composition of his homilies.

NOTES


3. See Moulard, *op.cit.*, 62: ‘. . . la partie exégétique ou dogmatique elle-même est rarement construite autour d’un seul problème méthodiquement discuté’. Also D. Attwater, *St. John Chrysostom. Pastor and Preacher*, London 1953, 40: ‘. . . his powers of exposition are superb, but he rarely followed any regular plan and was by no means averse from digression when he thought digression might be useful’.

4. See Stoellger, *op.cit.*, 82: ‘Die Paränesen kann sich aus dem Text ergeben; das muss aber nicht sein; der Prediger kann das Thema völlig frei wählen, ganz nach seiner Einschätzung, was heute den Höern gesagt werden muss.’

5. Cf. note 3.

6. Homily 50 has also been the object of a study recently published by Amy Smyth McCormick (*John Chrysostom’s Homily #50 as an example of the Antiochene exegetical tradition*, *The Patristic and Byzantine Review* 12 (1993) 1–3, 65–82), presenting it as an example of the Antiochene tradition of exegesis as opposed to the allegorical approach of Origen and the Alexandrian school. Her aim being therefore different from the present study, she has confined herself to the exegetical first section, whereas my analysis takes the homily as a whole into account.

7. Note how Chrysostom repeats ἱερά used in statement 3 of the opening scene.


9. See especially Job 1–2,4–5,8,11,15,18,22 etc.

10. See Genesis 31 and 33.

11. See Genesis 22.

12. The word παραστάσις (505,46) referring to Jesus’ coming to the disciples, picks up παρείσχε used by Chrysostom in connection with Jesus’ presence during their first encounter with a storm at sea.
13. See for Moses and the Egyptian Exodus 2:11–15; for David and Bathsheba see 2 Sam. 11–12, and for Elias and Jezebel see 1 Kings 16.20ff and 19.1ff.

14. A second type of formula—διαπρ…οὐδὲς—can be found e.g. in the simile in Hom. 3 in Rom. (PG 60.412.25–34), and a third type—διαπρ…οὐδὲς—in Hom. 7 in Rom. (PG 60.445.52–58). A study of Chrysostom’s ‘Homeric’ similes is desirable.


18. Notice the technique of association of words in ἐφάρμοζέω—ἐφάρμοσθης.


20. αὐτό…διδάσκαλος … is associatively picked up in χρηστόν ἀγαθοῦς.


23. For the relation between eucharistic fellowship and the practising of charity see also C. Stöcker, ‘Eucharistische Gemeinschaft bei Chrysostomus’, Studia Patristica 2, 309–316, especially page 310.


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