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## EARLY CHRISTIAN ANTI-SYMBOLISM (I)

### *Korakeresztény anti-szimbolika (I.)*

At the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, Christians distanced themselves not only from the state religion of the Roman Empire, but also from the Jews, oriental religions and mysticism or rather from Gnosticism, the religious trend incorporating Greek thought. To keep their faith pure, they created their own ethics and an organization serving its maintenance and propagation. However, Christians of the 1<sup>st</sup> century created their own rose symbolism, denying the Roman religion that maintained the rose cult most together, with the flower cult of the well-to-do, by permanently narrowing its framework and by Christianizing its content.

According to the Greeks, for Christians, in the elaboration of the minute differences of rhetoric and spiritual possibilities, the rose gives a chance to compare the lapidary statements. First of all, the thorny nature of the rose was made to contradict the flower. The differences gave way to a comparison on the spatial, temporal, biological and psychological levels; however, the consequence is always of a moral character. The thornless rose is the most excellent environment, it can be considered the indicator of Paradise, and its thorny variant is the creature after the Fall. And this duality raises the memory of the plant having an allegorical function, notable only for its beauty and lack of harmful features, and the pursuit of it.

This era, with the change of the sense to a Christian one, given the appropriate reasoning, used the group of symbols with pleasure, in which the rose, based on only one botanic feature, is compared with other kinds of flowers. The plants of Paradise embody excelling in the Christian virtues. The immaculate lily and the rose reddening like the blood of the martyr in the first Christian sources could not have referred to one single person: the virtue of the lily was the characteristic of women who offered their virginity and the martyrdom of the rose was that of men offering their lives for Christ.

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At the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, Christians distanced themselves not only from the state religion of the Roman Empire, but also from the Jews, oriental religions and mysticism or rather from Gnosticism, the religious trend incorporating Greek thought. To keep their faith pure, they created their own ethics and an organization serving its maintenance and propagation. Christians (about two million in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and about 6 million in the next century) came together from

marginalized population groups living in towns and in great poverty. The big social distances triggered segregation. Christianity had a negative attitude towards a state representing pagan tradition and law, according to which people were not equal, and persecution of Christians contributed to this with varying ferocity. However, Christians of the 1<sup>st</sup> century created their own rose symbolism, denying the Roman religion that maintained the rose cult most together with the flower cult of the well-to-do, by permanently narrowing its framework and by Christianizing its content.

Faith, fidelity, virginity, neighbourly love, goodness, together with modesty and the endurance of suffering in the hope of eternal life, were virtues that attracted God-seekers to the Christian camp and that subjected them to the clear, pure and self-respecting goals of believers. The respect of those encountering torture, humiliation, and death for their Christian beliefs grew significantly. Christian martyrs tolerated their suffering as partakers in divine mercy, which was not acceptable to be desecrated with anything (flowers, crowns, fragrant oils), at least in the first centuries. Clemens Titus Flavius considered crowning with roses as a sin, because Jesus had to wear a crown of thorns.<sup>1</sup> Paradoxically, this is the reference that designated the future possible use of the rose. Clemens Titus Flavius disapproved of the curing effect of the rose: “The fragrance of the rose and the violet is of refreshing effect. It reduces and cures headaches. In spite of this, let us not be led astray by their fragrance, what is more, on no occasion should we inhale it...”<sup>2</sup>

Old Christianity refrained from the pagan use of crown and volatile oil, but in some areas, with considerable modification, it was willing to tolerate them. The acceptance of the use of symbols may have taken place in a manner similar to what was suggested by Clemens. He suggested the Christians use all the symbols accepted in the Roman culture, which could be given a particular, Christian sense.<sup>3</sup> These symbols with their particular meaning can be seen on the walls of catacombs, and most of them, like the pigeon or fish, do not have an exclusive Christian interpretation.

Not even when Christianity was acknowledged as the state religion was the use of the crown stopped in the Roman Empire. Crown competitions of a pagan character took place as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century, which is demonstrated by St. Aurelius Augustinus.<sup>4</sup> For whatever reason pagan crown wearing remained and

<sup>1</sup> Clemens Titus Flavius *Paedagogus* II. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Clemens Titus Flavius *Paedagogus* II. 71,4.

<sup>3</sup> Clemens Titus Flavius *Paedagogus* III. 59,2. Griechische Christliche Schiftsteller. 12,270.

<sup>4</sup> Augustinus *Confessiones* IV. 2,1.

Christians always felt the difference from their own religious interpretation. No matter whether these events were organized for the glory of gods or the dead, or not even for any special purpose, Tertullian, who was considered to be impatient, passionate and a heretic, could consider it idolatry even in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>5</sup>

What is the reason for the Christians of the church fathers' era to have used the crown? According to researchers of the history of religion and symbols, the reason might be rooted in the fact that their predecessor Jews also acknowledged and wore it as a symbol, e.g. on the eighth day of the high festival, though they themselves may have taken it over from the pagans, most probably from the Greeks (VANYÓ 1997: 148). References in literature to Solomon also mention the crown, (VANYÓ 1997: 148–149) and so it can be found in initiations. Jews took and wore crowns made of myrtle, olive-branches and roses, and they referred to happiness, everlasting life and life of suffering (VANYÓ 1997: 149).

Historians of religion, based on the features referring to the time and place, consider *The Book of Wisdom* a masterpiece written in the period of Ptolemy Soter II (116–80 BC). The work, which is often connected with Solomon, promises wisdom available to everybody. Although it was written in Greek, its author is considered to be a Jew from Alexandria, who is aware of Hellenistic knowledge. The stylistic role of the rose is one of the pieces of evidence that Jewish scholars from Alexandria selected their similes from the store of motifs of the Greeks. The second part of the work, which became one of the books of the Old Testament, sets Solomon's life as an example, and talks about what considerations coming from God and the decisions based on them meant to the ancestor considered the wisest. Thus the moral guidance is also the rose simile in *The Bible*: "Let us lay a crown of blossoming roses on ourselves, before they wilt."<sup>6</sup>

The content of this statement encouraged the nurturing of the early appearing, beautiful and fresh faith, but it also referred to the flower of the simile, to the use of the rose designating man as a crown. Roses referred to the faith of their carriers, and to the morals of them, just as in the case of the Greeks.

## JUSTIN AND TERTULLIAN

Christian simplicity, which, according to God's perspective, selects and rejects every kind of material vanity, viewed Christ's life, his body and blood, as a victim. Based on this, in the rituals of Christians, the victim without bloodshed (living with a different name, mysterious) became usual. In the Christian masses, which were fundamentally different from those of the pagans, and which were

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<sup>5</sup> Tertullianus *De spectaculis* XII. 1.–XIII. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Liber Sapientiae* 2,8.

held first in private houses, and later in churches and cathedrals, which were first ornamented only modestly (with fabrics, paints and mosaics), the believers took Christ's body and blood to themselves in the form of bread and wine.

Christians, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, needed to organize their Church while they also had to protect themselves from pagan view so as to avoid publicity; they had to persuade educated laypeople even those who were followers, they had to distance themselves from sects, springing up here and there, and they had to do all this in the framework of a united proclamation.

The Greek apologist, Justin (100/110–163/167) did not refrain either from the description of proper Christian behaviour in his work *Apology*, while he was on the defensive against the slanders of pagans thrown at Christians. He put the despised characteristics that were irreconcilable with the proper view of God up against the behaviour that had not been totally accepted as a common norm yet, just because it was so different. According to his uncompromising view, e.g.: “Neither with regular sacrifice nor with flower crowns do we venerate man's deeds that have been exhibited in churches and called gods; we consider them senseless and dead...”<sup>7</sup> From among their new habits he thought it important to mention that “...we don't put drink, fragrance, food sacrifice or crowns on the graves of the dead.”<sup>8</sup>

Justin believed with confidence that persecution of Christians would cease once he was able to introduce the more widespread Christian doctrines and all the expectations that were canonized slowly and spread in ever-increasing circles from synod to synod, from volume to volume, from codex to codex, to the pagans. His rationalism was rooted in the fact that in all the trends of second century ancient philosophies, he was able to argue about questions concerning genuine Christians for lay people so that their superiority and philosophical systems were also enhanced. His proselytism, with which he asked for tolerance towards his fellow believers, indicates the spreading of Christianity, but it also indicates that the number of his opponents did not diminish. Furthermore, it indicates that institutions remaining hidden from publicity evoked real fear and the religious procedures evoked real consternation in people with other religions in the Empire. Justin was the first to explicate Christian doctrines in detail, and so he made them comparable first of all with Stoicism, which he despised deeply, and Platonism, but he also got involved in disputes with the Jews, who acted like the pagans. The proposing of Christianity, a religion struggling for recognition as a self-consistent philosophy, is the Justin's achievement, and so is the fact that he defined its values in contrast to the Greek and Jewish traditions.

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<sup>7</sup> Justinos *Apologia* IX, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Justinos *Apologia* XXIV, 2.

Justin accepted the truth of many Greek philosophers and poets because he saw them as Christians before Christ. To preserve the values, and seeking similarities and correspondences was a favourite procedure of the philosopher, who visited Rome from Ephesus twice, and founded a philosophical school there. For instance, he made a parallel comparison between Mary and Eve (based on the Apostle Paul's comparison of Christ and Adam).

Justin's antipathy towards the crown increased in others. And with the prohibition of the use of the crown, the hatred towards the rose was natural – at least until the pagan meaning of the rose changed.

The rose was so much excluded from Christians' life in the second century that it was impossible either to lay it on the corpses of those dead or killed or to leave it as memorial on the grave or to plant its bush on graves because the more prominent representatives of the Christian schools, deriving from the Greek traditions in the Eastern part of the Mediterranean saw it as even worse: the flower of the vanity of the body, to be denied in it.

No Christian references can be found which allowed or encouraged the use of the rose or of rose oil or any rose-based medicaments.

Early Christians thought that illness was of spiritual origin and not material, and that it was Christ, who in his body (i.e. in his Church) was the balm itself. Christ served the members of the congregation even in their illnesses, and the treatment of the patients with oil could be done exclusively by the Church (SZÁNTÓ 1983: 118–119). Oil treatment and any other use of oil or anointing by anybody else were considered indecent. According to the *Book of Exodus* (30:33), the consequence of profane use of anointing was capital punishment (HAAG 1989: 1694). The composition of the holy oil was regulated: it was made of myrrh, cinnamon, calamus and cassia, and it was forbidden to use it for anything apart from holy purposes, and this is the fragrant compound that might have resembled the odour of Paradise, in which the rose did not have a place.

Justin and his followers made Christianity if not attractive, then at least acceptable to the civilized world. Together with their criticism of pagans, they also made it clear that Christians with their blameless lifestyle, with their attitude of deference to the state, did not pose threat to the state, and with the exception of one they considered all its laws obligatory for themselves. The one is that the veneration given to the emperor belongs only to God. However, in criticising pagan religion, more implacable followers were born.

Believers aspiring to the Christian life demanded asceticism, which became attractive for others with its high standards. Tertullian, a prolific early Christian author from Carthage (c. 160 – c. 220 AD), who in his work stood up against state power and pagan behaviour that was destroying Christian morals parried the accusations directed against his Church, totally condemning the manifesta-

tions of pagan cultures. His rigour was nurtured in the footsteps of the apologists writing in Greek; however, his anger outgrew Roman moral puritanism. Because of his strict nature, he abhorred the theatre, mass spectacles, cultic events and festivals, because they are ignoble and are connected with paganism, the finery of women, the remarrying of widows, the appearance of virgins without a veil, since all these might give rise to impurity. They are unnecessary, and what is more vicious, as they go together with temptations. He considers all forms of pleasure shameful when he asks his reader: “Or may God like the charioteer, who disturbs so many souls, who is the servant of so much madness, so many changing moods, who is decorated by the devil himself so as to seize him with his chariot, like a priest painted as a fancy man decorated with a crown, like a distorted Elijah.”<sup>9</sup>

His *Apologeticus* (*Defense of Christianity*) was written about 197, *De Corona* (*On the crown*) sometime after 211. The latter was triggered by the martyrdom of a soldier who refused to obey to lay a crown on the head of Septimus Severus, who had just come to power, in honour of his sons. In the work, describing a moral question, he castigates those who display pagan behaviour, and at the same time, he shepherds those unable to recognize the right behaviour onto the true way: “You may now be crowned with laurel, and myrtle, and olive, and any famous branch, and, which is of greater worth, with hundred-leaved roses too, culled from the garden of Midas, and with both kinds of lily, and with violets of all sorts, perhaps also with gems and gold, so as even to rival that crown of Christ which He afterwards obtained. For it was after the gall He tasted the honeycomb and He was not greeted as King of Glory in heavenly places till He had been condemned to the cross as King of the Jews, having first been made by the Father for a time a little less than the angels, and so crowned with glory and honour. If for these things, you owe your own head to Him, repay it if you can, such as He presented His for yours; or be not crowned with flowers at all, if you cannot be with thorns, because you may not be with flowers.”<sup>10</sup>

In his view, the creator of the truth cannot be like what is false, as the latter is fake, and indeed a forgery. In exchange for worldly and sinful experiences he offered the struggles that God approves, and in which ‘we gain the crown’, and he himself accepted wearing the crown which expresses the new moral values. Western Christianity arrived at an acceptance of the crown through him – though the crown is not identical with that of the pagans. While one of the most outstanding pioneers of this process, Clemens Titus Flavius, made the crown to be seen as the sign of Jesus’ excellence, Tertullian considered the man-made

<sup>9</sup> Tertullianus *Apologeticus*. I, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Tertullianus *De corona militis* XIV, 4.

crown of leaves worn in pagan times as something directly from God, as a sign of honour given to martyrs.

The Christianizing of the crown was completed by the third century. Should the rose have been known only as a crown flower, this would have meant the end of the flower symbol. The inevitable logic of Christian authority in the Latin world would not have needed the Midas rose admired by the early Greeks. But he also required the reward of a life of virtue, which might have been the rose as well.

The rose spun into a crown may only be the gift of the martyrs; and this gift comes from Heaven to indicate that the soul of the martyr has gone to Heaven at once. In Tertullian's view, martyrs are the only ones that can experience eternal life, while others, after death, may leave their places only on the day of the Last Judgement, after Jesus' and the saints' resurrection and their thousand-year reign together. Until then they wait in 'ad infernos'.

It was also the apologists and the Christianity of the early church fathers' era that undertook the charting of the heavenly world. Tertullian himself contributed to what it became like and where and why the rose has a role in it.

This hot-tempered church leader, who was reluctant to refer to Greek philosophy, contrasted the despised rejoicings of the pagans with the sufferings and glory of martyrs of Christian persecution. He recruited followers to his view, and setting forth an example he published his *Acts of Perpetua and Felicitas*, which served to idolize martyrdom and enriched ideas about Paradise. Tertullian – contrary to Clemens Titus Flavius and Origen of Alexandria – forbade fleeing from the persecution of those in power, and he promised the flowers of martyrdom to all that did not shrink from the death awaiting them because of their faith. With the same flowers did Ambrose and Augustine, his follower, who were not only the rhetorically sophisticated and effective orators for Latin Christianity, but they also established the foundation of a Western Christianity which was less linked to the Greeks.

### ST. CYPRIAN'S TRACTATES

St. Cyprian of Carthage's (200/210–258) sermon-like *Tractates* and his argumentative letter were studied with pleasure even by pagans, as well as by Christians, in spite of the fact that he never made any references to pagan authors, only to the *Bible*. Although he never mentioned his master, Tertullian (c. 160 – c. 204), a respected Latin Church father (though his morality was formed and defined by the latter's work), his reasoning, resembling collections of quotations, followed in the steps of Tertullian, and he carried on criticising pagan forms of behaviour with Tertullian's rigidity. No wonder he did not mention the rose, the characteristic sign of luxury and levity. For him the sign of martyrdom, in the

sense of the fossilized tradition, is the palm and crown, and neither could he make Paradise as having this plant, since it was not considered simple enough.

On the other hand, the possibility of making symbols strengthened with him, as he realized that links can be created between things with allegorical features, based on the comparisons of their higher meanings. His methods were canonized as soon as his work became sources of references.

The conceptual association of the Holy Spirit and fire had long before led to the visualization of spirits by means of flames – and so in Cyprian’s case it is also the return to the use of a popular trope. That to this conceptual pair a third can be linked, which has the meaning of the rose, is not at all evident at this time, unlike in the Christianity of later ages. An example of the development is the chapter “The Holy Spirit has appeared as fire several times” of *Testimoniorum libri tres ad Quirinum* (248/249) (CI). Cyprian’s Kiv. Reference to 3.2 and its argumentation: “With sacrifices accepted by God, fire descended from the sky to burn the sacrifices. The same way, the Angel of God appeared in the thorn bush in a flame in the Book of Exodus.”<sup>11</sup>

Similar references offered the possibility that the Moses thorn, with a doubtful botanic heritage, in the course of time could be interpreted as the rose based on the identical and so mutually exchangeable colours of the flame and the rose leaves. On the other hand, the ambivalence of the fire that it could originate from the spirit and from evil, from Paradise and from Hell its relation to the accepted sacrifice and to sin made it possible later to interpret the colour of the rose, and the double interpretation of the rose based on this tradition. If the descending fire of God is the acceptance of the offered sacrifice, while his anger was exemplified by the judgement of fire and brimstone<sup>12</sup>, the fire colour rose had to put on this fancy dress of duality.

The rosy colour of the Greeks characterizing the human face, finger, skin is the indicator of the value of the creature and is proof of the creature’s value as long as it is natural – being the result and gift of God’s work. However, it is false and despised and considered against their Lord and faith as soon as it is made up with paints or when clothes or ornaments resemble it. Cyprian’s *De habitu virginum* (*On the dress of virgins*, 249) he repeats definitely that “... the virgin and singleperson cares about what is the Lord’s, that she be holy in body and soul.” (I Cor, 7.32)<sup>13</sup>

St. Cyprian, similarly to the Roman church fathers, hardly ever used symbols promised by the rose in his arguments. Others did not exclude themselves

<sup>11</sup> Cyprianus *Testimoniorum libri tres ad Quirinum* III. CI.

<sup>12</sup> Cyprianus: *Ad Fortunatum de exhortatione martyri* III.

<sup>13</sup> Cyprianus: *De habitu virginum*



so much from this, but they did it in a much prescribed manner putting them in opposition. The white and the red are flower colours, but for the visualization of their ideas the thornness-flowerness associated with each created better opportunities. The barrenness and prickliness of the thorn was very close to the rose bush in its basic state – their meanings overlapped. The plant's blossoming as symbol can also be opposed to them. However, the rose flower that makes it possible to refer to in many different ways did not find immediate expression.

### THE SPEECHES OF SAINT GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS

The Greek church father, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus (329–390), who at the 381 synod in Constantinople could be accused by the bishops of not serving satisfactorily the church's activities, since he did not behave like a senior priest and was not opulent enough, considered religiosity and worldly vanities with their new or traditional trappings as antagonistic. Gregory, in 363/64, after the death of Julian the emperor, condemned him in two passionate speeches as the embodiment of the pagan world because of his apostasy. In these pieces of work the above-mentioned – and otherwise intellectual – emperor, who in his educational reform made it possible to teach doctrines older than Christianity, was introduced as the symbol of paganism, and was like Hellenistic paganism as well. Gregory did not totally deny Hellenistic literature or the knowledge of it, but considered the practices coming from it humiliating and to be ignored. He wrote about the main leaders taking part in celebrations with irony and in an unfriendly manner: “Purple decorates them, headband, and the pomp of flower crowns them. It is well-known that they aspire to gaining power everywhere and for excelling over the common people because they despise the audience and the common people.”

He summarized his own thoughts as if they were the follow-up of from one hundred years before, written as Saint Cyprian's views: “Respectability and outward appearance do not mean much to us, we are more interested in the inner person, and we aim to direct the viewer to the object of the contemplation...”<sup>14</sup>

Quite understandably, he tried to make pagan gods and their cult ridiculous to his readers and wrote about them in a derogatory manner. In one of the chapters of the *First Inveictive against Julian the emperor* he pilloried the gods of Homer, and for instance, he even asked: “How, pray, is the same Juno, according to you, sister and wife of the supreme Jove, at one time suspended in the air, and amidst the clouds, and pulled down by iron anvils at her feet—though she is complimented with fetters of gold—she, the white-armed and rosy-fingered so that

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<sup>14</sup> Gregorius Nazianzenus *Contra Julianum imperatorem*

even the gods who sought to beg for her pardon found their humanity not without danger to themselves...”<sup>15</sup>

This twisting of the reputation of the actors of pagan tradition had to lead to the overwriting of the symbols and attributes belonging to them.

### FIRMICIUS MATERNUS

Firmicius Maternus, a lawyer from Sicily (300?–after 350), who became a Christian under the influence of the imperial order in 346 and 341, which prohibited the pagan cult, in his work *The Error of the Pagan Religions* acted as a missionary. He collected all the arguments of the early masters of apologetics, i.e. Clemens’, Justin’s and Lactantius’ thoughts – and the themes – and he made a stinging attack against the pagan religions left without any social background. Undoubtedly, in a witty manner, as is seen in the transcript: “Many proposed to Ceres’ only daughter, whom the Greeks called Persephone, we called her, changing its sounds, Proserpina. The mother considered each aspirant’s worth one by one. But because the mother’s decision had seemed unsure, a rich peasant, who was called because of his richness Pluto, who was not able to bear the postponement in his mad passion, and because he burnt with the flames of a sinful love, when finding the girl nearby Percus, he kidnapped her. By the way, Percus is a lake next to the town Henna; it is quite nice and charming. Its attractiveness is given by the diversity of its flowers, because it is surrounded with crowns of flowers alternating with each other all the year round. You can find all kinds of shooting hyacinth, the daffodil, or what paints the rose yellow from above...”<sup>16</sup>

### THE ADAPTATION OF ROSE DUALITIES TO CHRISTIAN CONTENT

#### ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA: *THE LIFE OF MOSES (DE VITA MOYSIS)*

Like St Gregory of Naziansos, the admirer of Origen St. Gregory of Nyssa (335–394) is also a Cappadocian father. In his work about the life of Moses, he described and also explained the life of the Jewish leader allegorically. In Gregory’s views, awakening, cloud (contemplation) and darkness (mystic experience) can be considered the three levels of spiritual life. The sense of the cloud that floated above Israel to direct the nation in the course of their escape from Egypt,

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<sup>15</sup> Gregorius Nazianzenus *Contra Julianum imperatorem*

<sup>16</sup> Firmicius Maternus *The Error of the Pagan Religions* 7.

opened up as a result of contemplation, and gave a description of both God's and Man's characters. "The nation was directed with a divine strength. It was not of ordinary character (it was not from steam or vapour, which due to its humid character is formulated as a result of the wind's pressure, but it was much more lofty, unimaginable for Man). In this cloud, according to the Scripture, there was such a miracle, that if the sun was hot, it gave shelter for the nation; it shadowed the ones below it and sprinkled them with mild rosy dew, and at night it changed into fire, and from evening to morning it gave light to the Israelites like a torch."<sup>17</sup>

In the mystical scene, the appearance of spiritual power, the fire, the cooling dew offered experience of divine care and about the place where they came from, i.e. about the character of Paradise, the environment of the Lord. St Gregory of Nyssa indicated colour, with the shade of the rose, continuing with the tradition stemming from the beginning of the Greeks and made it seem as a phenomenon of the divine world.

ST. BASIL THE GREAT: *ADDRESS TO YOUNG MEN*  
(*AD ADOLESCENTES*)

Saint Basil the Great (c. 330–379) was also born in Cappadocia, a territory closed to Hellenistic traditions. Like the two Gregories, the other two Cappadocian fathers, he also sympathized with the idealism of the Alexandrian theological school, which followed the Origen tradition. His sermon 22, *Address to Young Men*, the first Christian humanistic speech was frequently cited by masters of the Renaissance 1100 years later. He urged the separation of good from bad knowledge, the acquisition of useful knowledge from the pagan writers, and the refusal of anything harmful. For this purpose he used many similes, the majority of which might have not only served as sources for oral references, but they were also built into the visual world of iconologies in the late Middle Ages: one such picture is that of the bees that take from the flowers only the parts useful for them, and the useless remain untouched. In line with other examples calling for selection from among these pagan pieces of work the rose also appeared. Its presence may be explained by the allegoric interpretation of the vegetable feature, which often comes up with the Cappadocian church fathers. The youth was encouraged to make a distinction between the valuable and valueless in the speech: "If we are sensible, we also acquire from these books only what is suitable for us and what is related to truth. We will beware of the rest. As when picking flowers, we avoid the thorns; in such books we enjoy the useful and take heed of the harmful."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Gregorius Nyssenus *De vita Moysis* I.

<sup>18</sup> Basilus Magnus *Ad adolescentes* 4.

This behaviour, which advances Christian doctrines but which does not prohibit pagan books for a better understanding of them, is the characteristic of the Greek Church fathers with a Hellenistic culture. The number of references to the rose, the content and variety of these references significantly differs in the literature of Latin and Greek patrology, to the benefit of the latter. In the Greeks' rose references, the flower was connected to divine content, and served its designation. On the other hand, they refrained from its everyday use, just as the Latin Church fathers did, as they claimed the function of the rose to be allegoric.

The text describing Paradise and cited many times later was attributed to Basil and so it was attached to the end of his work. In this *Homiliae in Hexameron* worldly Paradise everything is available that had been out of reach for the contemporary people living under dire circumstances. In the eternal spring and happiness, the fields blossom and the rose grows without thorns.

The Edict of Milan of Constantine and co-emperor Licinius (313) made it possible to raise Christianity to the state religion in the Roman Empire. The attitudes of emperors in succession to Christianity were diverse; sometimes they stood up against heresy, other times they proclaimed patience towards paganism. In 380, when Theodosius the Great (379–395) reigned, Christian faith became obligatory for all Romans, and the emperor, based on the Constantinople synod, prohibited visits to pagan cult places. And this meant that rose symbols that had not been Christianised in the earlier centuries could not have poetic or rhetorical roles later.

#### CHRYSOSTOM: *ON SAINT STEPHEN, THE FIRST MARTYR*

Chrysostom (344–407), an outstanding preacher of Antioch, well-versed in pagan philosophy and rhetoric, was christened as an adult, and he became famous as the enthusiastic promoter of the gospel and as an eloquent orator. His literary activity, besides his function as a preacher in the oriental church, competed with that of Saint Augustine, but his pieces of work were richer in images and similes and his rhetoric was more transparent. His references to the notion of the rose were from the abundance of the Greek traditions, and they were less in harmony with the Latin standpoint.

On the other hand, some anti-symbolism can be observed with him, too. While he does not refer to the rose as a subject symbol, he uses it as a notional symbol, though not in the manner discussed. He gives our flower value as an indicator in the qualification of some notions linked to moral behaviour precious to Christians. In his moralistic petition addressed to the first martyr, St Stephen, he makes preparations for one of the formative liturgical celebrations. This celebration had not been present in the events of the liturgical year, but it had not been

prohibited for private reflection, either. The veneration of the martyr saint was directed at those in heaven, it showed the common communion with them: that is why their figures are stylised, lack individual features, and the description related to them was manifested by the characteristics of the heavenly medium and Christian martyrdom. These features of ‘*communio sanctorum*’ also appear in the petition *On Saint Stephen, the first martyr*: “Oh Saint Stephen, the confessor of Jesus Christ, the Man of God, sign your faith with your blood and your love with your forgiving prayer said for your enemies: I crown you with the flowers of praise and I decorate you with the roses of respect for you. Because you crowned yourself first in the struggle for sainthood, in which you followed him faithful to the encouraging words which sounded as follows: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body.” The victory of martyrs floated before your eyes and all the fear vanished and so did all the distress and dread of the worldly heart.”<sup>19</sup>

The rose of the text is the indication of the respect given to the martyr sacrifice. This is one of the first praises to a martyr tortured to death for Christ. The ethical esteem is the object of veneration, to which incidentally belong the crown and the flower (not necessarily forming this crown). The rose, compared to this, recedes into the background; its role is rather atmospheric, most probably rhetorical.

*(To be continued)*

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<sup>19</sup> Chrysostomus Szent István első vértanúhoz.