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16. Religion in Society

(Length of the paper: 20 minutes).

Ego flos campi et lilium convallium (Ct 2,1-2).
The lily and his symbology in the patristic exegesis of *Song of the Songs*.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the various interpretations of the Fathers of the Church on the image of the lily of the *Song of Songs* 2,1-2 underlying the origeneian exegesis which had created, about this flower, a cristological- messianic symbology that has influenced the western exegetic literary production. The variuos symbolic interpretations of the flower are different: according to Methodius Olympius (*symp.* 7, 1, 151)the lily is the symbol of the chastity; according to Ambrosius (*Virgin.* 51) is the symbol of the humility of Christ becoming, in the course of time, the symbol of the virtue, as well as in Bernardus Claravallensis (*in Cant.* 71,1).

Gregorius Nyssenus, who ascribes the verse to the bride of the *Song of Songs*, identifies in the white flower the image of the soul (bride) that, in her way towards perfection, becomes a lily thanks to the love and the “cultivation” of the spouse/Christ.

But the development of the cristologic and messianic symbology starts with the exegesis of Origen in which the image of the lily in the *Song of Songs* represents the Incarnation (*hom. in Cant.* 2,6) as, later, we find in Theodoretus Cyrrensis (*in Cant.* 1, 2), and in the exegesis of Ambrosius who will see in this flower the image of Christ as a sprout of Iesse’s tree (*Spir.* 40 e *Psal.* 118, 5, 7). Ambrosius extends the cristological interpretation of this symbol to the community of the consecrated virgins and to the whole Church because both were born, like Christ, from the womb of

Mary (*Inst.* 94). The bishop, besides, develops, according to an anti-Arian interpretation, also the image of the lily as the symbol of the Resurrection of Christ and of the Elect (*Inst.*, 94 e *Spir.* 40).