141 Flower (*Flos*)

Concerning man, it is said, Job 14[:1-2]: “Man born of a woman,” and it follows, “Who comes forth like a flower, and is destroyed.” Where Gregory, *Moralia*, 13,[[1]](#endnote-1) What is it for men to be born into the world except like flowers in the field? We direct the eyes of the heart in this compass of the present world and behold like so many flowers it is full of so many men. Therefore, life is in the flesh, the flower in the grass. Wherefore, through the Psal. [102:15]: “Man's days are as grass, as the flower of the field so shall he flourish.” And Isai. 40[:6]: “All flesh is grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of the field.” Therefore, man is like the flower which just as in the time of the flower it is doubtful concerning fruit, because with a little wind it can be scattered, so concerning man of which a little good which in him appears it vanishes with a little wind of temptation, about which Job. 8[:12]: “When it is yet in flower, and is not plucked up with the hand, it withers before all herbs.” But just as literally the flower is better preserved by the hardness of penance than among delights, Can. 2[:2]: “As the lily among thorns, so is my love among” the faithful.

Again, a flower is generated from a delicate humor drawn from the root through the branches and if the branches are of diverse nature even from the same root the flowers become diverse of nature. So, the flowers of virtues proceed from grace which is the root of them and accordingly the influence proceeds through the diverse powers of the mind. The flower of virtue arises separately, Eccli. 39[:19]: “Send forth flowers … and bring forth leaves in grace.” For the flower which does not proceed from competent and enough humor does not attain to the fruit. So, work that does not proceed from grace, Isai. 40[:6]: “All flesh is grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower.” The grass has dried, and the flower died.

¶ Thus man in his first fruits flourishes, in youth he flowers, in old age he grows lean, but in death he falls, and thus he passes, Psal. [89:6]: “In the morning he shall flourish and pass away: in the evening he shall fall, grow dry, and wither.” Wherefore, Bernard *Super Cantica*,[[2]](#endnote-2) a new life in a religious community is a flower and formula of the emendation of life, but I fear the burning, not the stealing of the flowers, but the burning by the cold. I suspect the north wind and the morning cold which are accustomed to kill early flowers and take away fruit.

Wherefore, the flowering of worldly prosperity is vain, Isai. 28[:1]: “Woe to the crown of pride … to the fading flower.” This flower is like the flower of the rose, which for a time lasts and quickly falls, no fruit, but after itself it leaves a thorn. So, such prosperity leaves behind itself a thorn of remorse of conscience, Eccli. 50[:8]: “As the flower of roses in the days of the spring.”

¶ Such a person is like the flower of the elder tree, which is fragrant, but the tree itself is ill smelling. Thus, some men are fragrant by their exterior appearance, however, they are ill smelling by their interior life. Wherefore there is a certain poem:[[3]](#endnote-3)

¶ The flowers of the elder are better than the elder itself / For the elder stinks, but its flowers are accustomed to emit a scent. Can. 2[:12]: “The flowers have appeared in our land; the time of pruning is come.”

Except concerning the trees about which there is no hope of fruit, thus also in the analogy, but it was not so concerning the rod of Aaron which placed in the tabernacle of the Lord flowered and fructified, Num. 17[:7-8]. Thus, ecclesiastical persons flower likewise and fructify, Eccli. 24[:23]: “my flowers are the fruit of honor and riches.” Can. 7[:12], the bride says to the bridegroom, “Let us see … if the flowers be ready to bring forth fruits,” as if saying, it is not enough to flower unless it brings forth fruits. Wherefore in Psal. [91:13]: “The just shall flourish like the palm tree.” According to Ambrose in the *Hexameron*,[[4]](#endnote-4) the palms always flourish nor do the leaves change, so man ought to preserve the greenness of an innocent person.

¶ The flower in the pictures is only a painted figure, / He who paints the flower does not paint the perfume of the flower.[[5]](#endnote-5)

¶ Again, a flower can be said to be the joy of the world, of which kind is temporal prosperity or bodily beauty and grows in the field of fortune and this flower ought to be little esteemed because of two matters. First, because it lasts too little time, so man sells a horse which quickly is exhausted, Psal. [89:6]: “In the morning man shall grow up like grass … in the evening,” that is, in old age, “he shall fall,” in death, “grow dry,” into dust, Job. 14[:1-2]: “Man born of a woman,” and it follows, “Who comes forth like a flower.” Second, because he is inclined to evil. The example of Nabugodonosor, Dan. 4[:1]. And in Psalm. [102:15]: “Man's days are as grass.” Grass in being born is green, in growing it is beautiful, but in falling it is rottenness, so it is concerning man through the succession of ages.

¶ Second, a flower is the delight of sin which grows in dung of concupiscence and this is to be rooted out because of two reasons. First, because it quickly falls, Isai. 28[:1]: “Woe to the crown … of Ephraim, and to the fading flower.” Second, because it is shut off from glory. No wise man gives his kingdom for a wreath of flowers, Jer. 48[:9]: “Give a flower to Moab, for in its flower it shall go out.” But, alas, because many say that, Wis. 2[:7]: “Let not the flower of the time pass by us.”

¶ Third, the flower is of a meritorious work which grows in the garden of grace and this is to be nourished and to be multiplied because of two reasons. First, because it makes us please God on the journey just as the flower adorns the meadow, Can. 2[:5]: “Stay me up with flowers,” that is, by examples of honesty lest I fall through the infirmity of members, “compass me about with apples,” that is, with works of sanctity so that I might reap fruit from them. Second, because it makes me attain the Lord in the fatherland, just as in the flower is the hope of fruit. For in a laden flower is the hope of glory, Can. 7[:12]: “Let us see … if the flowers be ready to bring forth fruits.”

¶ Fourth, a flower can be called Christ, Isai. 11[:1]: “There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse.” This flower is well-tasted through the gift of wisdom, full of light through the gift of intellect, slender through the gift of counsel, fragrant through the gift of fortitude, beautiful through the gift of knowing, delicate through the gift of piety, moderate through the gift of fear. This flower germinated in the annunciation, Isai. 27[:6]: “Israel shall blossom and bud.” It appeared in the nativity, Can. 2[:15]: “Our vineyard has flourished.” It grew weak in the passion, Nah. 1[:4]: “The flower of Libanus fades away.” It flowered again in the resurrection, Psal. [27:7]: “My flesh has flourished again.”

¶ Fifth, a flower can be said to be the virgin mother of God, Num. 17[:8]: “Moses found that the rod of Aaron was budded. This is the virgin being verdant in leaves through faith, shining in flowers through chastity, being fruitful in branches through richness. Thus, this same one through the miraculous fertility, Can. 2[:1]: “I am the flower of the field.” Concerning both it is to be said, Can. 2[:12]: “The flowers have appeared in our land.” Just as we see that flowers in their color make lovely the meadows, their leaves appear as the rays of the sun, their fragrances bathe the air, their green color refresh the eyes, from whatever injury they easily dry up. So these holy ones make lovely the world with their merits, they appear to the will as the divine commandments, they bathe men with their examples, they refresh souls with their teachings, but in no way are they injured by intemperance, because neither by the snorting of wrath, as the flower of the vines, nor the fog of vain glory, as the flowers of the olives, nor by the heat of concupiscence, as the flowers of the grass, nor by the coldness of sloth as the flowers of trees, Eccli. 39[:19]: “Send forth flowers, as the lily, and yield a smell.”

¶ Again, a flower is read to be triple, namely, the flower of the field, the flower of the garden, the flower of the temple. In the field naturally, in the garden by zeal, in the temple artificially. In the first, humility is noted which exposes itself to all things, Can. 2[:1]: “I am the flower of the field.” In the second, chastity is noted which is diligently to be guarded lest through touch it be corrupted and afterwards rot. In the third, the sublimity of contemplation is noted, 3 Kings 7[:48-49]: “Solomon made … for the house of the Lord … the flowers like lilies.” And note here what is said as if not according to the thing itself, but according to the likeness, because almost the devotion of contemplation has disappeared from man. Again, through the flower of the field being wide open we can understand the people of the world, through the flower of the garden being enclosed we understand those of religion, through the golden flower of the temple we understand the disagreeable superiors.

¶ Sixth, a flower can be said to be a flower of glory. This is to be sought after and purchased because of two things. First, because of incomparable love, Psal. [91:13]: “The just shall flourish like the palm tree.” Even the one-hundred-year-old palm tree bears fruit. Second, because in the eternity of reward, Ose. 14[:6]: The Just man “shall spring as the lily” and the flower in eternity.

¶ Again, the flower delights the vision by its color, it refreshes the smelling by its odor, it comforts the taste by its sweetness. Thus, Christ is the flower of flowers, the holy of holies, about whom, Can. 2[:1]: “I am the flower of the field, etc. It delights by its color, because Psal. [44:3]: “You are beautiful above the sons of men.” Upon whom the angels desire to look. Again, by its odor it refreshes because it runs in the odor of its ointments. Again, it comforts by its sweetness because the bread which he himself gave is his flesh and for the life of the world having everything delectable and every sweetness of taste.

1. Gregory, *Moralia* 11.50.67 (PL 75:983-984): Quid enim sunt nati homines in mundo, nisi quidam flores in campo? Tendamus oculos cordis in hanc latitudinem mundi praesentis, et ecce quasi tot floribus quot hominibus plenus est. Vita itaque in carne, flos in feno est. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Bernard, *Sermones in Cantica Canticorum*, 63.6 (PL 183:1083): Flos novella conversatio est, flos formula recens vitae emendatioris est. … Ustionem certe metuo floribus; non subreptionem, sed ustionem a frigore. Aquilo mihi suspectus est, et frigora matutina, quae intempestivos flores solent perdere, fructus praeripere. Iraque ab aquilone panditur vestrum malum. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. Archivio della Latinita Italiana Medioevo ll. 719-23 p. 469

   § 75. Sambucus - Lumbros ascarides sambuci sunt perimentes;

   Sambuci flores sunt sambuco meliores

   Nam sambucus olet, flos redolere solet,

   Et stomachum mollem reddunt vomitum facientes.

   Frondes appositae possunt auferre tumorem. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ambrose, *Hexameron* 3.17.71 (PL 14:186): Palma autem virens semper manet conservatione et diuturnitate, non immutatione foliorum. Nam quae primo germinaverit folia, ea sine ulla substitutionis successione conservat. Imitare ergo eam, o homo, ut dicatur et tibi: Statura tua similis facta est palmae (Cant., VII, 7). Serva viriditatem pueritiae tuae, et illius innocentiae naturalis, [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Cf. *Carmina burana,* 186.2: Flos in pictura non est flos, immo figura; / Qui pingit florem, non pingit floris odorem.

   https://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/Chronologia/Lspost13/CarminaBurana/bur\_cam6.html#186 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)