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IMAGES OF MARTYRDOM IN THE SEQUENCES OF ADAM OF ST VICTOR

“Every epoch has its own goals and forgets yesterday’s dreams¹ – Adam Asnyk wrote in one of his works. There is certainly a lot of truth in the thesis of the 19th century Polish poet. However, there are examples of attitudes that remain unchanged in every era. Martyrdom certainly belongs to the latter group. Although at the turn of the past centuries one can grasp the differences in the intensity of persecution, as well as in the understanding of the concept of martyrdom itself, it is impossible not to conclude that martyrdom has always been deeply respected among Christians, and the witness of such an end to life led to heaven.² Adam of St Victor was aware of this, in whose *Sequences* we can find colourful descriptions of praise for martyrdom that attract and fascinate people from every era.

The Catholic Encyclopedia defines martyrdom as follows: “the voluntary and conscious bearing of death for the faith or a moral value pertaining to God, usually in times of religious persecution; as the highest expression of Christian faith, hope and charity, it is a borderline form of heroism, witness and imitation of Christ.”³ Given this understanding of martyrdom, the author of the article set out to examine how images of the martyrdom of Christ, the Apostles and other saints, and meditation on them, played a role in the life of a particular man, Adam of St Victor, and influenced his desire to pass on his faith to others. The article aims to contribute to the dissemination of knowledge about the medieval intellectual, scholar and poet who, despite the passage of time, still remains a figure to be discovered. The aim of the article is to show the image of martyrdom in the work

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¹ Adam ASNYK, “Do młodych,” in *Poezye*, vol. 2 (Lviv: Gubrynowicz i Schmidt, 1898), 58.

² Cf. Adam KUBIŚ, “Zarys chrześcijańskiej koncepcji męczeństwa,” *Communio* 7, no. 5 (1987):86.

³ Stefan SZYMIK, “Męczeństwo,” in *Encyklopedia Katolicka*, vol. 12, 695-696.

of Adam of St Victor. In order to have a good understanding of the martyrdom shown by the author, it will be necessary to divide the article into three sections. In the first two, the ancient and medieval teaching on martyrdom will be briefly discussed. These two sections will help to better understand the characteristics of martyrdom present in the *Sequences*. The historical-comparative method used in the article will help to properly formulate and draw the right conclusions.

1. MARTYRDOM IN ANTIQUITY

Until 313, the Church remained in hiding. At that time, there were persecutions of both a particular and a universal scope. Each type of persecution involved thousands of testimonies of fidelity to Christ to the end. Martyrdom in the Church has been recognised since antiquity as a sign of great faith.⁴ In antiquity there was a conviction that a martyr was a special follower of Christ, who, through his passion on the cross, became the first martyr and model of martyrdom.⁵ By dying for Christ, the Christian gave the greatest proof of his love for Him.⁶ Blood shed for the faith became the seed of Christians.⁷

According to ancient authors, martyrdom was evidenced by the presence of two elements inextricably intertwined. The first was the public witness to Christ, while the second was the voluntary and conscious acceptance of suffering and death for Christ. The presence of both testified to its perfection.⁸ Martyrdom was regarded as the surest way to attain salvation because death for Christ was conceived as a baptism of blood which, by analogy with baptism of water, took away sins. It was, after all, impossible to sin after death. Thanks to this interpretation, it was believed that through the forgiveness of all sins, the Christian becomes righteous before God and is thus freed both from hell and from all other punishments.⁹ The Fathers of the Church understand

⁴ Cf. Ewa WIPSYCKA, and Marek STAROWIEYSKI, ed., *Męczennicy* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1991), 192-194.

⁵ Cf. Stanisław LONGOSZ, "Niektóre aspekty teologii męczeństwa w literaturze wczesnochrześcijańskiej," *Tarnów Theological Studies* 7 (1979): 49-73.

⁶ Cf. Piotr SZCZUR, "U źródeł wczesnochrześcijańskiego tytułu «męczennik» (μάρτυς – martyr)," in *Kościół w Polsce. History and Culture*, vol. 10, ed. Jan Walkusz (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2011), 23-27.

⁷ Cf. TERTULLIANUS, "Apologeticus, 50, 13," in *Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina*, vol. 1, ed. Eligius Dekkers, and Jean Fraipont (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954).

⁸ Cf. CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS, "Στρόματα, IV 4, 14," in *Patrologia Graeca*, 8.

⁹ Cf. IGNATIUS ANTIOCHENUS, "Epistula ad Romanos, 6, 1-2," in *Source Chrétienne*, vol. 10, ed. Pierre-Thomas Camelot (Paris: Cerf, 1998); MELITO SARDENSIS, "Fragmenta, 12," in *Source*

martyrdom not as a human decision, but rather as like a grace and a testimony of love for God through which the martyr ultimately confirms his faith in God, and emphasise the connection between the Eucharist and martyrdom. The Mass is a sacrifice, and the martyr offers himself as a sacrifice for others asking for faith for them.¹⁰

In Christian antiquity we find many testimonies of martyrdom.¹¹ At the end of the era, the bishop of African Hippo, St Augustine, wrote as follows: “The whole earth is as purple as the blood of the martyrs; the sky is festooned with wreaths of the martyrs, the churches are adorned with their tombs, time is marked according to the days of their death, healings are more and more frequent thanks to the merits of the martyrs.”¹²

It should certainly be pointed out that ancient times were full of testimonies of martyrdom. It touched practically every corner of the world at that time.

2. THE MARTYR IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Martyrdom in the Church was not just a feature of the period of persecution. In the Middle Ages there were also cases of martyrdom. However, it was perceived

Chrétiennes, vol. 123, ed. Othmar Perler (Paris: Cerf, 1966); TERTULLIANUS, “De resurrectione mortuorum, 10, 7,” in *Patrologia Latina*, 2; TERTULLIANUS, “De anima, 45,” in *Patrologia Latina*, 2; CYPRIANUS, “Ad Fortunatum, praefatio, 4,” in *Patrologia Latina*, 4; ORIGENES, “Exhortatio ad martyres, 39,” in *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*, vol. 2, ed. Paul Koetschau (Berlin: Hinrichs, 1899); AUGUSTINUS, “De Civitate Dei, 13, 7,” in *Patrologia Latina*, 41.

¹⁰ Cf. IGNATIUS ANTIOCHENUS, “Epistula ad Ephesios, 20, 2,” in *Patrologia Graeca*, 5; IGNATIUS ANTIOCHENUS, “Epistula ad Romanos, 4, 1-7, 3,” in *Patrologia Graeca* 5; CYPRIANUS, “Epistula 57,” in *Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina*, vol. 3B, ed. Gerardus F. Diercks (Turnhout: Brepols, 1994).

¹¹ Cf. Timothy David BARNES, “The Pre-Decian Acta Martyrum,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1968):509-531; Herbert Anthony MUSURILLO, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Marcin WYSOCKI, “Męczennik jako świadek w aktach męczenników,” *Verbum Vitae* 28 (2015):365-372.

¹² Cf. AUGUSTINUS, “Enarrationes in Psalmos, 118, 30, 5,” in *Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina*, vol. 38-40, eds. Eligius Dekkers, and Jean Fraipont (Turnhout: Brepols, 1956): “Purpurata est universa terra sanguine martyrum; floret coelum coronis martyrum, ornatae sunt Ecclesiae memoriis martyrum, insignita sunt tempora natalibus martyrum, crebrescunt sanitates meritis martyrum”; Polish translation: St AUGUSTINE, *Explanation of Psalm 118, Ps. 103-123*, ed. Emil Stanuła, and Jan Sułowski (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo UKSW, 1986), 336; Herbert VORGRIMLER, *Nowy leksykon teologiczny*, transl. Tadeusz Mieszkowski, and Paweł Pachciarek (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Księży Werbistów, 2005), 189-190.

somewhat differently.¹³ It must be said that the concept of martyrdom has undergone a certain evolution. It should be noted that the very understanding of martyrdom has broadened somewhat.¹⁴

At the end of antiquity and the beginning of the Middle Ages, after the cessation of persecution and the Christianisation of many peoples on the European continent, new forms were sought that could be directed towards martyrdom. It was believed that the life of a Christian was all the more perfect the more it was likened to giving one's life for Christ. Martyrdom was thus equated with Christian perfection. Among the many examples calling for giving one's life for the faith in Christ was the concept of continuous mortification of soul and body throughout one's life. In this way, the so-called white martyrdom was achieved.¹⁵

In the Middle Ages, the memory and the desire for martyrdom were still alive. The most eminent scholar of the age, St Thomas Aquinas, writing about the attitude of martyrs towards death, used the phrase "per imitationem operis."¹⁶ He believed that every martyr imitates the martyrdom of Christ himself. Aquinas sees martyrdom as love combined with faith and fortitude. In his reasoning, St Thomas points to the virtue of love, which is the 'primum et principale motivum' of the martyr. Faith, in turn, is expressed not only by "credulitas cordis," but also by the witness of confession "exterior protestation."¹⁷ Thus, it can be concluded that the title of martyr is due to the soldier of Christ who not only wages war in his life, but also prevails in it and thus bears valuable witness and defends the faith in his life.

The Middle Ages also recognised as a martyr the one who went into unknown territories to bear witness to Christ. A good example of such a life would be the martyrdom of St Adalbert or the Five Polish Brothers, the martyrs of Miedzyrzecz.¹⁸ Among the martyrs we will also meet those who decided to come

¹³ Cf. Jaroslav PELIKAN, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 202.

¹⁴ Cf. Andrzej BRUŹDZIŃSKI, "Średniowieczny męczennik – «miles» et «athleta Christi». Męczeństwo w Polsce w okresie średniowiecza jako wyraz tożsamości i wiarygodności Kościoła," in *Kościół w Polsce. Dzieje i kultura*, vol. 10, ed. Jan Walkusz (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2011), 41-51.

¹⁵ Cf. Jerzy STRZELCZYK, *Iroszkoci w kulturze średniowiecznej Europy* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1987), 211-222.

¹⁶ THOMAS DE AQUINO, *Summa Theologiae*, IIIa, q. 66, a. 12, Corpus Thomisticum, accessed February 2, 2024, <https://www.corpusthomaticum.org/sth4066.html>.

¹⁷ THOMAS DE AQUINO, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIae, q. 124, a. 1-5, Corpus Thomisticum, accessed February 2, 2024, <https://www.corpusthomaticum.org/sth4066.html>.

¹⁸ Cf. Jan KANAPARIUSZ, "Świętego Wojciecha Żywot pierwszy," in *W kręgu żywotów świętego Wojciecha*, transl. Brygida Kürbis, ed. Jan Andrzej Spież (Kraków: Tyniec Wydawnictwo

forward in defence of the faith and the rights of the Church and thus endanger the ruling monarchs. Often, in such cases, the price for the stance taken was death at the hands of the ruling.¹⁹ A good example of this would be the martyrdom of St Stanislaus,²⁰ or the martyrdom of the vicar of Krakow Cathedral, Fr Marcin Baryczka.²¹ We can also distinguish martyrdom for the faith at the hands of invaders in the medieval period. As an example, it is necessary to mention the martyrdom of the Cistercians from Koprzywnica or the martyrdom of 48 Dominicans together with Prior Sadok and the rest of the inhabitants of Sandomierz, who died during the Tatar invasion of Poland.²² The concept of martyrdom thus underwent some development. It consisted either in leaving one's native lands, going into the unknown, or in defending the faith of the Church. The model for such behaviour was seen in the Apostles who proclaimed the Good News of Christ.²³ In this way, life became a pilgrimage for Christ and to Christ.²⁴

In conclusion, martyrdom in the medieval period was, compared to antiquity, rare. However, it was possible through the work of Christianisation in missionary lands, where death for the faith suffered at the hands of pagans or heretical invaders occurred, or by giving the ultimate witness to Christian faith and piety by dying in defence of the faith and the rights of the Church at the hands of rulers, also baptised. The path to the realisation of this degree of Christian perfection also led through daily life, monastic or active life consisting, however, in

Benedyktynów, 1997); BRUNON Z KWERFURTU, "Żywoć pięću braci męczenników," in *Piśmiennictwo czasów Bolesława Chrobrego*, transl. Kazimierz Abgarowicz (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo: PWN, 1966); Teresa DUNIN-WĄSOWICZ. "Najstarsi polscy święci: Izaak, Mateusz i Krystyn," in *Kościół – kultura – społeczeństwo. Studia z dziejów średniowiecza i czasów nowożytnych*, ed. Stanisław Bylina et al. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2000), 41-47.

¹⁹ Cf. Brad GREGORY, *Salvation at stake. Christian martyrdom in early modern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 31.

²⁰ Cf. Edward SKIBIŃSKI, "Biskup i monarcha," in *Docendo discimus. Studia historyczne ofiarowane profesorowi Zbigniewowi Wielgoszowi w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, ed. Krzysztof Kaczmarek, and Jarosław Nikodem (Poznań: Instytut Historii UAM, 2000), 100-106; Adam KUBIŚ, "Refleksja teologiczna nad męczenstwem św. Stanisława," in *W nurcie zagadnień pooborowych*, vol. 12: *Być człowiekiem i chrześcijaninem*, ed. Bohdan Bejze (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo SS. Loretanek-Benedyktynek, 1980), 165-170.

²¹ Cf. Mieczysław NIWIŃSKI, "Biskup krakowski Bodzanta i Kazimierz Wielki," *Collectanea Theologica* 17 (1936):239-241.

²² Cf. Krzysztof STOPKA, "Męczennicy sandomierscy – legenda i rzeczywistość," *Nasza przeszłość* 80 (1993):65.

²³ Cf. Edina BOZOKY, "Martyrs de faits divers au haut Moyen Age," *Quaestiones Medii Aevi Novae* 14(2009):6.

²⁴ Cf. Hanna ZAREMSKA, *Banici w średniowiecznej Europie* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper, 1993), 29-30.

despising the world. In this way, white martyrdom, that is, martyrdom of the spirit, was accomplished. It should also be noted that in the Middle Ages we have the different dimensions of martyrdom outlined above, which were difficult to accomplish in antiquity.

It is worth mentioning one other point that was important in the centuries I have described. Leading a Christian life for the people of the Middle Ages meant a struggle leading them to radically keep the commands of Christ. This was the only way to attain the glory of heaven. Hence, life for people living in the Middle Ages meant a struggle in which one became not only *an athleta Christi* – a wrestler of Christ – but through martyrdom a *miles Christi* a soldier of Christ. In spite of a much smaller number of martyrdoms than in antiquity, this image was retained in the memory of people living at that time extremely strongly and certainly had a strong impact on subsequent eras.²⁵

3. ADAM'S SEQUENCES OF ST VICTOR – CHARACTERISTICS

In the *Sequences* of Adam of St Victor, there are works on martyrdoms whose protagonists were people living in antiquity and the Middle Ages, but it should be remembered that they are written in the medieval period. The characteristics related to martyrdom mentioned above concerning antiquity and the Middle Ages can be found in the *Sequences*. It is worth recalling *Sequence 16*, which is entirely devoted to the martyrdom of Christ Himself, at the beginning of the consideration of the issue described. The time allotted to the performance of the *Sequence* is interesting. Although describing the Saviour's passion, it is intended for the Friday in the Paschal octave. The author mentions the cross, which became the instrument of the passion. The value of Christ's passion and death for every human being is emphasised. The image of the shed blood by which man was redeemed appears. The sin of man for which Christ suffered the Passion is also mentioned. His death is shown as a cure for man. The uniqueness of the Saviour's sacrifice for man is also emphasised. And the fact that there was no other way for the redemption of the human race. The *Sequence* also glorifies Christ for opening heaven to man and washing away the crimes of the world, blotting out man's guilt and promising eternal life.

It is extremely interesting to note that the *Sequences* contain hymns in honour of some of the Apostles, Peter, Paul, Andrew or Bartholomew. However, the author does not focus entirely on their martyrdom. Instead of sequences describing the crime against Christ's disciples, there are images concerning

²⁵ Cf. BRUŹDZIŃSKI, "Średniowieczny męczennik," 60-62.

the heavenly glory enjoyed by the Princes of the Church for their fidelity to Christ. However, no reference to their martyrdom appears other than to mention the instruments of their ordeal, how they were martyred. Instead, one sees a picture of their earthly merits, which gave them the glory of heaven. There is also no lack of references to the Bible. These mainly concern their vocation. The only deviation from this rule is *Sequence* 46 dedicated to St Andrew. In it, the image of his two-day suffering on the cross and his condemnation to this punishment by Egeas appears. However, the image serves to emphasise his heavenly glory and is intended to serve as a contrast between his suffering on earth and the glory of heaven. *Sequence* 47 is dedicated to the glory of all the Apostles. Here again we have the instruments of the passion of the individual disciples of Christ highlighted. In the next piece, the poet touches on the glory enjoyed by the Princes of the Church in heaven. He also lists their merits on earth, in building up the Church of Christ.

In addition to the description of the torments of the Apostles, the *Sequences* show 10 other examples of martyrdom. They are entirely devoted to the martyrdom of individuals. In order, according to the Church calendar, they are St Stephen (26 December), St Thomas Becket (29 December), St Agnes (21 January), St Vincent (22 January), St Victor (21 July), St Lawrence (10 August), St John the Baptist (29 August), St Leodegerius (2 October), St Dionysius (9 October) and St Catherine (25 November). So we have a variety of saints, from other peoples and social strata, in most cases people from illustrious families. There is often controversy about the place of their birth, mostly only the place of birth for heaven is known. The martyrs mentioned lived in the first century, such as John the Baptist or Stephen, in later centuries, such as St Agnes, St Catherine or St Victor, and in the Middle Ages. In the *Sequences* we have two martyrs of this period, St Leodegerius martyred in 679 in France and a martyr from the second half of the 12th century, St Thomas Becket. Among the martyrs recalled by Adam of St Victor, there are only two women, St Agnes and St Catherine, they belonged to the secular state and today are venerated doubly as virgins and martyrs. Among the martyrs, on the other hand, we have the great prophet at the turn of the Old and New Testaments – St John the Baptist. Alongside this figure, much space is devoted to St Victor, a Roman soldier in Marseilles martyred under Maximian. The remaining group of men includes deacons, such as Saints Stephen, Vincent and Lawrence, and bishops, holy bishop who were also monks, such as St Leodegerius, Bishop of Autun in Burgundy, Dionysius, Bishop of Paris, Thomas Becket, Bishop of Canterbury, Primate of England. St Victor, who as the patron saint of the Victorians was venerated in a special way. This is reflected in the *Sequence* dedicated to the reception of his relics, which took place on 17 June.

The common features of the *Sequences* entirely devoted to martyrdom are the praise of their attitude. The martyr demonstrates the Church's credibility and identity. Several examples can be cited to illustrate this.

In the various descriptions of the martyrdoms there are characteristic images, very often we have in them the agon depicted, i.e. the struggle. This motif is present in most of the *Sequences* describing the martyrdom of the above-mentioned persons:

Fight, don't back down from anyone
and payment certain
You, Stephen, manfully persevere.

In the false impact of witnesses
and Satan's synagogue
sock your speech.²⁶
And the dreadful prison dungeon,
and terrible torture wheels,
hunger and numerous fasts,

And everything that happens,
in the same way [Catherine] endures
For the love of God.²⁷
We this day wish to celebrate,
admiring the struggling
in Vincent of Christ.²⁸
Lawrence in Christ gathers treasures,
Christ guards them, wanting them
for this struggle give a wreath.²⁹
Let us praise Him with a joyful heart

²⁶ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 2, eds. Łukasz Libowski, and Agnieszka Strycharczuk (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Akademicon, 2023), 54. All quotations in this article are from this translation. Because of the interesting original wording concerning the agon, I give the Latin text: "Agoniza, nulli cede,/ certa certus de mercede,/ persevera Stephane/ Insta falsis testibus/ confuta sermonibus/ Synagogam sathanae."

²⁷ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 45, 247: "Carceris horrendi claustrum/ et rotarum triste plastrum,/ famem et ieunia/ Et quaecumque fiunt ei/ sustinet amore Dei/ eadem ad omnia."

²⁸ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 10, 87: "Nos hanc diem veneremur/ et pugnantes admiremur/ Christum in Vincentio."

²⁹ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 33, 192: "Hos in Christo coacervat/ huius pugna Christus servat/ triumphantis praemio."

in his competitor
Leodegerius.³⁰

A characteristic feature concerning the martyrdoms in the *Sequences* is the repetition of bloody images that illustrate the cruel crimes carried out. The instruments of torture of the characters described appear, as do evocative descriptions of keeping the faith to the last drop of blood, despite the terrible suffering and agony taking place:

This wreath will never wither,
So suffer a short torment,
and victory will come soon.

[Stephen] Death is your birth,
Your punishment is temporary
and the beginning of life will give.³¹
Stephen entrusts himself to the Saviour.
death for Him is so sweet,
though stones fly hail.³²
Stephen kneels down and prays,
and aches for their frenzy,
asks that those stoning
sin was not counted.
Thus in Christ he fell asleep alone
the one who obeyed Him,
and with Christ he always lives
martyrs first sheaf.³³
The executioner [Catherine] will win over the executioner,
will also win against the emperor
female constancy.³⁴
Finally, her head is cut off
and when death is the end,

³⁰ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 42, 233: "Collaudemus mente laeta/ suo illum in athleta,/ in Leodegario."

³¹ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 2, 54.

³² ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 2, 54.

³³ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 2, 55.

³⁴ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 45, 247.

[Catherine] enters the joy of life.³⁵
 To her Saviour [Agnes] she gives thanks,
 will put his neck under the licitor,
 death is not feared at all,
 in remembrance of her purity.³⁶
 You stood out [Thomas] during the dispute.
 and you resisted like a wall,
 you have laid down your head
 in sacrifice to Christ.³⁷
 By the horse's jerking hook,
 entered Wincenty on the grid
 with a strong spirit.³⁸
 They are dragging [Victor] through the city,
 the one being dragged hangs,
 hanging kill,
 but does not break the martyr
 no punishment.³⁹
 They cut [Victor's] leg off because he was standing strong;
 the wounded continued to walk
 Christ's footsteps.

Undaunted, he gave up his leg,
 because he had to fold up his very head
 for a sacrifice for Christ.⁴⁰
 Under the millstone starts,
 [Victor] suffered the most severe punishment,
 ended his life with such a death,
 that through his death he rejoices
 the already immortal prize.⁴¹
 Lawrence, on the coals turned,
 wants to be liberated from the body

³⁵ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 45, 247.

³⁶ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 53, 279.

³⁷ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 4, 65.

³⁸ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 10, 89.

³⁹ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 31, 182.

⁴⁰ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 31, 183.

⁴¹ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 31, 183.

and with Christ only live.⁴²
 [Leodegerius] the Holy of God is delivered
 to wicked servants
 for torture.

To the venerable Bishop
 they pluck out eyes that
 will benefit over the centuries.

They pierce them with augers,
 though they will return the light
 other people's darkness.

The executioner is already brandishing his sword,
 and the martyr lays down his head
 for Christhead.⁴³
 The old man [Dionysius] is subjected to an execution:
 flogging, dungeon, fetters, scaffold
 and an iron bed of fire
 overcomes.⁴⁴
 So the martyr [Dionysius] goes to battle,
 under the axe continues quietly,
 executioner strikes,

winner
 perfect makes the sword.
 But the corpse is rising fast,

beheaded takes a beheading,
 where he carries it, there it leads him
 legion of angels.⁴⁵
 On his birthday at the feast
 the King will order that John
 beheaded as punishment.
 Executioner to dancer, and dancer to

⁴² ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 33, 193.

⁴³ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 42, 234.

⁴⁴ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 43, 239.

⁴⁵ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 43, 240

his mother's head,
which she demanded.⁴⁶

An important point found in the works is the depiction of martyrs and martyresses. They are portrayed as if being between the earthly and heavenly zones. We can find examples in many *Sequences* dedicated to martyrdom:

Your witness [Stephen] is in heaven itself,
reliable and faithful witness
witness your innocence.⁴⁷
Soon the angels will take care,
to lay [Catherine's] body in the grave
away from this foreign land.⁴⁸
"O Agnes, you stand in glory
at the Lamb's right hand
and you comfort your parents,
inviting joy.⁴⁹
Then into the dungeon the martyr [Vincent] is thrown,
bound cast on shells,
He, however, enjoys a great deal of light,
haunted by angels.

Finally in bed laid,
deserved to go to heaven
and so the triumphant spirit
is presented to his Ruler.⁵⁰
Executioner assaults Victor
and in his rage he loses his mind,
Gives Victor strength
Christ's Visitation.⁵¹
The servant of God [Lawrence] has joy,
when the burden of the cross is borne,
like a baked dish

⁴⁶ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 52, 274-275.

⁴⁷ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 2, 54.

⁴⁸ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 45, 247.

⁴⁹ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 53, 279.

⁵⁰ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 10, 89.

⁵¹ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 31, 183.

is to become a spectacle
 for angels and pagans.⁵²
 So compressed,
 in the midst of suffering
 [Lawrence] baked,
 among the flame
 gives a fragrance
 even deeper
 this martyr full of virtues.⁵³
 Bring to the temple in heaven
 Your servants as we stand,
 Thy gifts are enjoyed,
 When we sing a song of praise,
 and make us heirs
 together with Christ – and unite with one another.⁵⁴
 When the old man [Dionysius] says mass,
 and the crowd stands around him,
 Christ is present together
 with a multitude of heavens.

He comforts him in prison,
 The bread of life He feeds him,
 before immortal glory
 crown him.⁵⁵
 The cross is the Lord's exaltation,
 for this beheading of John
 is its diminution.⁵⁶

Among the features common to all the depictions of the martyrdoms presented are their continued faithfulness and the description of their eternal reward. This is how it is depicted in the individual *Sequences*:

Look, Stephen, here is Jesus
 at the right hand of God stands
 and fights for you alone.

⁵² ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 33, 193.

⁵³ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 33, 195.

⁵⁴ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 42, 235.

⁵⁵ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 43, 239.

⁵⁶ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 52, 275.

That the open sky you see
 and that Christ is revealed –
 cry out boldly, raise your voice!⁵⁷
 Let [Agnes] not weep as over the dead,
 in heaven you are reunited with your spouse,
 He – the Lamb – has revealed to you
 yours and your glory,
 glory of the virgins.⁵⁸
 Palm enjoying the victorious [Agnes].
 and a virgin shining flower,
 grant that we, the unworthy
 Your honours,
 enshrined among the saints.⁵⁹
 This world Victor, a flower in bloom.
 yes, Christ won in him
 his grace.
 He has overcome the world and the flesh
 and a cruel enemy,
 by faith conquering all things.⁶⁰
 O Lawrence, of great fame,
 king, something has triumphed over the king,
 valiant warrior of the King of kings,
 you had the torment for nothing, rolling
 for justice fight.
 You have overcome so much evil,
 in Christ looking good;
 make us laugh at evil,
 And they rejoiced in good
 by the grace of Thy merits.⁶¹
 Thus it [Leodegerius] enters the doors of heaven
 as Christ's victim
 with his victory.
 Blue army
 sings with joy:
 To God be the honour and glory!⁶²

⁵⁷ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 2, 54.

⁵⁸ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 53, 279.

⁵⁹ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 53, 280.

⁶⁰ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 31, 181-182.

⁶¹ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 33, 195.

⁶² ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 42, 235.

Finally, we can speak of an apologetic dimension in the martyrdoms depicted in the *Sequences*. The calmness of those going to their deaths, their constancy in suffering, shown in the works of Adam of St Victor, was an eloquent sign of God's victory over the temptations of the world and, at the same time, a testimony not only of the athlete of Christ but, above all, of His soldier:

Having despised [Thomas'] physical death,
 you become a winning athlete,
 the palm of joy is offered to you,
 as evidenced by the remarkable
 and extraordinary miracles.⁶³
 A tireless soldier of Christ,
 [Viktor] the pay rejects and confesses
 Christianity.⁶⁴
 With a joyful soul
 athlete [Victor] stands,
 having despised the body,
 withstands
 sophisticated ordeals.⁶⁵
 Therefore [Lawrence] strengthened himself so much,
 achieved by an athlete
 in God's service his primacy.⁶⁶
 Let us praise Him with a joyful heart
 in his competitor
 Leodegerius.⁶⁷

It is worth mentioning that the martyrs depicted in the *Sequences* emphasised the credibility of the Church while being a witness to other people. Death for Christ was yet another emphasis on the truthfulness of the Church's teaching and directed towards the true good of man. It also pointed to the holiness of the Church herself, being at the same time a sign of fidelity to God to the end. Such statements are also not lacking in the works described.⁶⁸

⁶³ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 4, 65.

⁶⁴ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 31, 182.

⁶⁵ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 31, 182-183.

⁶⁶ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 33, 194.

⁶⁷ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 42, 233.

⁶⁸ Cf. ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 4, 31, 33 – 65, 182, 194.

In the *Sequences*, there is often an image of the future martyr's defiance of the ruler. The rage of those in power is described, as well as their possessiveness or desire for revenge. Often the behaviour of the rulers is analogous, for example, to the behaviour of Boleslaw the Bold towards St Stanislaus.⁶⁹ This suggests that the author of the *Sequence* is using a similar image appropriate to the Middle Ages:

And when [Vincent] teaches a sound faith
 population of Zaragoza
 with the help of grace,
 Governor's hatred,
 a fervent idolater,
 harsh on the Church.⁷⁰
 Prefect Asterius
 and its ungodly
 companion Eutyches
 oppose sternly
 with equal anger.
 They are dragging [Victor] through the city,
 the one being dragged hangs,
 hanging kill,
 but does not break the martyr
 no punishment.⁷¹
 They roar therefore [at Stephen] like beasts,
 the light opponents,
 defeated and without strength.

And false witnesses they give
 and sharpen their tongues
 these sons of dangerous vipers.⁷²
 Majordomus while royal,
 Ebronin, getting fired up
 a wild frenzy.

⁶⁹ It is about the murder of Stanislaw, Bishop of Krakow, which was allegedly ordered by the King on suspicion of treason.

⁷⁰ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 10, 88.

⁷¹ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 31, 182.

⁷² ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 2, 53-54.

The saint of God [Leodegerius] is delivered
to wicked servants
for torture.⁷³

When Domitian hears this
merciless, already raging
and sends Sisinius.

Famous for his faith, his life and his miracles,
The shepherd of souls [Dionysius] to the ordeal goes,
Enlisted.⁷⁴

The tyrant's power is upon him
and hence John's glory grows,
and the executioner awaits the tyrant.

The fool serves the rational
the righteous is washed
by a godless man.

On his birthday at the feast
the King will order that John
beheading for punishment.⁷⁵

The executioner [Catherine] will win over the executioner,
will also win against the emperor
female constancy.⁷⁶

There is a reference to white martyrdom in the *Sequences*. It occurs in a piece of praise on St Augustine. The author emphasises the greatness of the Doctor of the Church and praises his end of life being the sacrifice of everything for Christ. The *Sequence* is at the same time a hymn of praise to those who sacrificed their lives for Christ and thus glorified Him through white martyrdom:

Let the Church imitate
is a praise song,

When the day celebrates the annual
the birth of saints for heaven.

⁷³ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 42, 234.

⁷⁴ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 43, 239.

⁷⁵ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 52, 274.

⁷⁶ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 45, 247.

When, after battles fought
accept worthy awards

For the ordeal of the red colour,
for purity while sparkling white.⁷⁷

The link between chastity and martyrdom is also present in the image celebrating the virginity of St Genevieve. The author explicitly states that by preserving her chastity, the saint achieved a glory equal to that of the martyrs:

The Virgin, sympathising with her mother,
restores her former sight.

Generous Genevieve
fasting takes the body

And, sprinkling the ground with tears,
continuously enjoys martyrdom.⁷⁸

The cited passage is yet another proof showing how the so-called white martyrdom became widespread in the culture and understanding of medieval people. It was understood as the giving of one's whole life to Christ and, although it did not end in death for the faith, it was entirely subordinate to the Saviour.

In conclusion, the question must be asked: what is the role of the descriptions of martyrdom in the *Sequences* of Adam of St Victor? For the people of the Middle Ages, the images painted in words by the above-mentioned author fulfilled at least several functions. The martyr, by his attitude, reminded and admonished people, exhorted and warned. He then pointed out the need for asceticism in the Christian life, i.e. constant effort on oneself, and reminded people of the urgent duty to preach the Gospel and live according to its precepts. Evoking bloody images of martyrdom, he exhorted people to profess and courageously defend the faith with their whole lives, without compromising. It also warned against moral disorder, which is a tragedy for man himself and society. In the exhortations and prayers placed towards the end of the *Sequences*, one could find admiration for martyrdom, which at the same time turned into a fervent

⁷⁷ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 38, 219. It is worth quoting the original text: "Harum laudum praeconia/ imitatur Ecclesia/ Cum recensentur annua/ sanctorum natalicia./ Cum post peracta proelia/ digna redduntur praemia/ Pro passione rosea./ pro castitate candida."

⁷⁸ ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sekwencja* 8, 80. The original text is unique because of the link between chastity and martyrdom: "Matri virgo compatiens/ lucis dat usum pristinae./ Genovefa magnanimis/ carnem frangit ieiunio./ Terramque rigans lacrimis/ iugi gaudet martyrio."

prayer for a good life and abiding with Christ in eternity by those praying the *Sequence*. Although the descriptions of martyrdom were extremely cruel, the *Sequences* are dominated more by joy at the final victory than by horror or terror. It should also be mentioned that for the people of the Middle Ages, living with the desire for martyrdom meant a struggle in which one becomes not only *an athleta Christi*, a warrior for Christ, but a true *miles*, a soldier, ready, in the name of love and fidelity to Christ, to make even the greatest and most precious sacrifice, that of one's own life.

ABBREVIATION

- Patrologia Latina – *Patrologiae cursus completus: seu bibliotheca universalis, integra, uniformis, commoda, oeconomica, omnium SS. Patrum, doctorum scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum... Series latina prior in qua prodeunt patres, doctores, scriptoresque ecclesiae latinae a Tertulliano ad Innocentium III.* Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. Parisiis: Apud Garnier fratres editores et J.-P. Migne successores, 1844–1855.
- Patrologia Graeca – *Patrologiae cursus completus: seu Bibliotheca universalis, integra, uniformis, commoda, oeconomica omnium ss. patrum, doctorum, scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum, sive latinorum, sive Graecorum, qui ab aevo apostolico ad aetatem Innocenti III (ann. 1216) pro Latinis et ad Photii tempora (ann. 863) pro Graecis floruerunt.* Edited by Theodor Hopfner, and Jacques Paul Migne. Parisiis: Apud Garnier fratres editores et J.-P. Migne successores, 1856–1866.
- Encyklopedia Katolicka – *Encyklopedia Katolicka*, edited by Wincenty Granat, Feliks Gryglewicz, Romuald Łukaszyk, Zygmunt Sułowski, Ludomir Bieńkowski, Jan Walkusz, Edward Gigilewicz, et al. Vol. 1-20. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1973-2014.

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IMAGES OF MARTYRDOM IN THE SEQUENCES OF ADAM OF ST VICTOR

Summary

This article presents the various descriptions of martyrdom in antiquity and the Middle Ages contained in the Sequences of Adam of St Victor. In them, the author draws attention to the value of martyrdom. The functions of the extremely bloody descriptions depicting death in defence of the faith were as follows: to indicate the need for asceticism in Christian life, to valiantly profess and defend the faith, to live according to the precepts of the Gospel, to warn against moral disorder. In addition, the sequences were intended to be an encouragement to fight, a motif popular in the Middle Ages; man was to become not only an *athleta Christi*, a warrior for Christ, but a true *miles Christi*, a soldier, ready in the name of love and fidelity to Christ to fight in defence of the faith, but above all to give his own life for the Saviour.

Keywords: Adam of St Victor; Victorians; martyrdom in antiquity; martyrdom in the Middle Ages; persecution of Christians

OBRAZY MĘCZEŃSTWA W SEKWENCJACH ADAMA ZE ŚW. WIKTORA

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia poszczególne opisy męczeństwa w starożytności i średniowieczu zawarte w *Sekwencjach* Adama ze św. Wiktora. Autor zwraca w nich uwagę na wartość męczeństwa. Funkcje niezwykle krwawych opisów przedstawiających śmierć w obronie wiary były następujące: wskazywanie na potrzebę ascezy w życiu chrześcijańskim, mężne wyznawanie i obrona wiary, życie według wskazań Ewangelii, ostrzeżenie przed nieładem moralnym. *Sekwencje* miały ponadto stanowić zachętę do walki, w której dominował motyw popularny w średniowieczu; człowiek miał stawać się nie tylko *athleta Christi*, wojownikiem Chrystusa, ale prawdziwym *miles Christi*, żołnierzem, gotowym w imię miłości i wierności Jezusowi do walki w obronie wiary, ale przede wszystkim do oddania za Zbawiciela własnego życia.

Słowa kluczowe: Adam ze św. Wiktora; wiktoryni; męczeństwo w starożytności; męczeństwo w średniowieczu; prześladowania chrześcijan