

INTRODUCTION

As a relationship based on personal choice, not consanguinity, friendship is one of the most precious elements of human culture. The institution of friendship, both in private and social life, played a very important role in ancient literature and philosophy. The story of Achilles and Patroclus, the heroes of the Trojan War reported by Homer, remains unforgettable. Achilles grieving over Patroclus, ‘his most beloved friend’, who died in his armour and in his place, as it were, is among the most touching parts of the *Iliad* (XVIII, 78–126) and of world literature in general. The friendship of Orestes and Pylades, narrated by Euripides in *Iphigenia in Tauris* and known, thanks to the drama of Marcus Pacuvius, to the Latin authors, including the Christian ones, had a similar meaning.

For most ancient philosophical schools, starting from Socrates, friendship was both the setting and the topic of philosophical discussions.

In the Bible, the institution of friendship is not unknown either. Besides many sayings on its value in the wisdom literature (e.g. Prov. 27:17; 27:6; Sir. 6:14–17; 7:18; 9:10), the Old Testament narrates the story of the friendship between David and Jonathan, which was even confirmed by a special agreement and by Jonathan giving David his clothing and his armour, too (1 Sam 18:1–4). As the New Testament witnesses, Jesus wept for his friend Lazarus after his death (J 11:11.35) and he called his disciples, including Judas (Mt 26:50), his friends (Lk 12:4; J 15:13–15). In the same vein, Abraham and Moses were even titled ‘friends of God’ (Is. 41:8; Jm. 2:23; Ex 33:11), as pointed out by Philo of Alexandria and the Christian authors after him.

Besides the theological application of the term of ‘friendship’, the patristic authors entered friendships – friendships between bishops seem to have been a special social instance – and they also referred to it in their correspondence, biographical or autobiographical narratives, and philosophical dialogues imitating Plato or Cicero.

The contributions which follow show different facets of friendship in patristic literature, including its indispensable inspiration in the work of the Jewish scholar Philo of Alexandria. They were presented at the conference ‘Friends and Opponents: How did Church Fathers Write about Their Friends and Opponents’, held on 20th – 21st September 2018 at the Theological Faculty of Trnava University in Bratislava, Slovakia. Besides this faculty, the other organisers of this conference, attended by twenty-six speakers from six countries, were the Slovak Patristic Society and the Patristic Society of the Czech Republic.

In what follows, we publish a selection of contributions from this conference, dealing with the friendship with God in Philo of Alexandria (Markéta Dudziková, Czech Republic), the friendship lived in the Christian community according to the Pseudo-Clementine writings (Jiří Hoblík, Czech Republic), the true and false friendships in the poetry of Gregory of Nazianzus (Erika Brodňanská, Slovakia), ‘the friends of God’ according to Theodoret of Cyrillus, as interpreted by the Ukrainian theologian Dymytriy Tuptalo (Daria Morozova, Ukraine), and the role of friendship in Augustine’s Confessions (Lenka Karfíková, Czech Republic).

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