

**Orsolya Tóth**

## **The Roman Saturnalia and the Survival of its Traditions Among Christians<sup>1</sup>**

Saturnalia was originally counted as one of the sowing festivals, since planting the winter seeds finished in the middle of December, the feast itself was held on 17 and lasted for only one day, meanwhile, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. it was certainly a seven-day long holiday (from December 17 to 23) as Novius, the Atellana poet gives evidence of it in one of his lines: “*olim exspectata veniunt septem Saturnalia*”.<sup>2</sup> At certain times, for instance under the reign of Augustus, the length of the festival was limited to three days. Consualia, the festival of Consus – the god of harvest – was two days prior to Saturnalia, and Opalia, the feast of Ops – the goddess of rich and plentiful crop – was held on 19. These celebrations repeated similarly at the time of the summer harvest (Consualia was on August 21, Vulcanalia-Opis Opifera’s feast was on August 23, Opiconsivia was on 25).<sup>3</sup>

The most detailed description of Saturnalia’s origins and traditions can be found at Macrobius, the Roman author from Late Antiquity.<sup>4</sup> We know from him that Accius, the tragedy writer traced Saturnalia back to the Greek Cronia festival, while Varro had the opinion that the first celebration of this kind had been held at the time of the dictator Titus Larcus, who bore his office in 501 or 498 B.C.<sup>5</sup> Under his leadership the Saturn temple was consecrated, although the construction of it had been ordered by Tarquinius Superbus. According to another tradition, the first Saturnalia was organised during the reign of Tullus Hostilius, regarding the traditional date between 672 and 641 B.C., as the above mentioned temple was actually consecrated by this king to Saturn as a votive gift for his victories over the Albans and the Sabines. Relative to the *consecratio* of the Saturn temple other possible dates are also known: according to one

1 This study was prepared with the support of Hungarian National Foundation for Scientific Research (OTKA), grant no. 104789K, and the János Bolyai Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

2 Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 1.10.3.

3 In connection with the order and significance of the celebrations mentioned above see Th. Köves-Zulauf, *Bevezetés a római vallás és monda történetébe*. [Introduction to the History of Roman Religion and Mythology] Budapest, 1995. 75–80.

4 Macr. *Sat.* 1.7.18–37.

5 Titus Larcus consul in 501 or 498 B.C. bore the title of dictator in one of the two years mentioned, however, there is a diversity of opinions relating to which year.

view, it was built by the senate's order, under the control of Lucius Furius, a military tribune with consular power, possibly around 390 B.C.,<sup>6</sup> but Livy<sup>7</sup> and Dionysius of Halicarnassus<sup>8</sup> dated the dedication of the temple to 497, to the year of A. Sempronius and M. Minucius' consulship. The treasury took place in this temple, according to the idea that during the earthly reign of Saturn the crime of theft was unknown, as people did not have private wealth, their possessions belonged to the public property. The great honour of Saturn is well demonstrated by the expression the Romans used for his feast: *festum omnium deorum principis*<sup>9</sup>.

By examining the question of the feast's origins Macrobius concluded that the roots of Saturnalia would go back to the ancient, pre-historic times. He talked about four possible theories of the origin: according to the first one, Ianus,<sup>10</sup> the Italian ruler founded the feast to the honour of Saturn, or it was founded by the companions of Hercules, who were left in Italia, because they thought Saturn would protect them from their hostile neighbours. The third option is that the Pelasgians, who immigrated into Latium, established the feast, or maybe Saturnalia was the adoption of the above mentioned Greek Cronia feast. Besides these four versions the

---

6 Between 444 and 367 B.C. consular tasks were carried out by military tribunes with consular power. There are three military tribunes named Lucius Furius known from this period who took this office all together twelve times from 432 to 370 and one of them probably had the responsibility to restore the temple after the Gallic invasion in 390. Cf. *Macrobius, Saturnalia 1-2*. Ed., transl. R. Kaster. Cambridge, Massachusetts – London, 2011. n. 118.

7 2.21.1.

8 6.1.4. Here the author mentions the year of Postumius Cominius' consulship as a possible date that can be put between 501 and 493. About the construction and history of the Saturn temple see in greater detail: L. Richardson, Jr., *The Approach to the Temple of Saturn in Rome*. = *American Journal of Archeology*, 84, 1980. 51–62.

9 *Macr. Sat.* 1.7.13, in translation of R. Kaster (see n. 6): “celebration of the foremost of the gods”.

10 About the figure and appearance of Ianus in Roman mythology, literature and art a thorough description is given by the Roscher's mythological lexicon in its entry ‘Ianus’ that can be used well up to the present (W. H. Roscher, *Ausführliches Lexikon der Griechischen und Römischen Mythologie*. Leipzig, 1890–1894. II. 1. 15–55); the deity's role played in Roman religion is clarified from the aspect of topography, through the buildings and monuments connected to him: L. A. Holland, *Janus and the Bridge*. Roma, 1961; recently the issue has been examined together with its survival by V. Gasperoni Panella – M. G. Cittadini Fulvi, *Dal mondo antico al Cristianesimo sulle tracce di Giano*. Perugia, 2008. To Macrobius' Ianus and Saturn interpretation, furthermore to the origins of Saturnalia see E. Syska, *Studien zur Theologie des Macrobius*. Stuttgart, 1993. 4–95.

author is aware of the existence of one more theory that is related to the secret nature of the deity, but he does not give an account of it. He does not commit himself explicitly to any of the listed versions, however, he explains the first theory in more details than the others and it can be reckoned the most coherent one.

The first version, the euhemeristic approach combines the figures of Saturn and Janus closely. According to that, neither Janus nor Saturn was originally a deity, but a human being. In the ancient times Janus reigned in the area that later became Italia, and only after his death he started to be worshipped as god for his deeds. Janus shared his power with a certain Camese who was replaced by Saturn in power after some time. Saturn arrived at the coast of Italia by ship and Janus received him with hospitality, furthermore, he learnt from him how to farm and make the lands fertile and gave this knowledge to his people. Saturn's Italian reign finished with his disappearance and after this event he started to get worshipped as god. Although in connection with Saturn it is not stated that he was human, the description of Macrobius makes us think of it unambiguously: *aram deinde cum sacris tamquam deo condidit; observari igitur eum iussit maiestate religionis*.<sup>11</sup> If he talked about a deity he would not have to emphasize that an altar had been set up for him, *as though for a god*, and it would not have to be commanded that people worshipped him, which could be also natural in case of a deity. In this respect the author must have relied on the Virgilian tradition as well, since some texts of the *Aeneid*'s 7th and 8th books mention Janus and Saturn as *vir* (man),<sup>12</sup> and Servius also calls attention to this word's significance.

Protarchus of Tralles<sup>13</sup> is the earliest known writer who mentions Janus as a human being and at around the beginning of our era this story occurs at several authors. In another version of this account Janus is of Greek origin and moved to Italia with his wife, Camese or in other places Camesene and with his two children.<sup>14</sup> Virgil also must have known the

11 *Sat.* 1.7.24. ("he established an altar, as though for a god, and sacred rites that he called the "Saturnalia"", transl. R. Kaster)

12 Virgil, *Aeneid* 7.177–182, 8.356.

13 About Protarchus not much information is known, actually we can only be certain that he wrote about the geography and history of ancient Italia and he must have lived in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. or before as Hyginus mentions him as a source.

14 According to this version he came from Perhaibia in Thessalia, cf. Plutarch, *Roman Questions* 22; Athenaeus, 15.692; John Lydus, *On the Months* 4.2. According to the first version Janus is a native, his co-regent, Camese is probably a man, in the other variant he

two types of tradition as he refers to Janus among the ancestors of Latinus besides Italus, Sabinus and Saturn<sup>15</sup> (and if we accept the commentary of Servius relating here, then he also comes from the Aborigines), while the Arcadian Euander<sup>16</sup> calls him *Ianus pater*,<sup>17</sup> so he also counts him among his ancestors, which can support his Greek origin. Macrobius was definitely aware of the Greek relations' possibility since he mentions Antevorta and Postvorta as Janus' companions, and it is a matter of common knowledge that they were the sisters or supporters of Euander's mother, Carmenta,<sup>18</sup> moreover, Servius' commentary also reports about this in details.<sup>19</sup>

---

is an immigrant stranger and the other character in the story is a woman. It is certain that Camese and Camesene – even a man or a woman (although G. Radke, *Götter Altitaliens*. Münster, 1965. 77 deduced convincingly that the name Camese grammatically cannot be taken by men) – are the same person. Regarding the personality even Macrobius could have been uncertain as he talks about this person quite laconically. Not much is known only that they shared power with Janus in a way that this person ruled over the land that was named after him Camesene and Janus governed the city that took the name Janiculum. (The cult of the heroes generally has an urban feature, cf. A. Brelich, *Gli eroi Greci*. Roma, 1958. 313.) According to the Greek version Janus arrived in Italia by ship and as he found the native people uncivilized he taught them how to farm and gave them political institutions. The latter version assigns Janus with the deeds of creating civilization that had been attributed to Saturn previously. The example is not unique: in the mythology of different nations the first rulers are often recognised as culture heroes creating civilization traced back into mythical times. The general feature of these heroes is that they gain or create different cultural benefits for people for the first time (acquiring fire, spreading cultivated plants, producing tools). They teach people certain crafts, arts, introduce rites and celebrations, and in general they play an intermediary role between people and the transcendental powers. Janus does not belong to the type of heroes who as a demiurge interferes with organising the world and he himself is the creator of nature's order like Prometheus or the Sumerian Enki and Enlil – although the figures of the demiurge, the culture hero and the progenitor are often so closely correlated that it is impossible to separate these phenomena –, but to a type appearing on a more developed level of myths, which lay the foundations of society and civilization establishing the conditions for a higher standard of life.

15 *Aen.* 7.177–182.

16 Euander is the son of Carmenta or Carmentis and Mercurius, cf. Verg. *Aen.* 8.138; 8.335–6; Ovid, *Fasti* 1.461; Plut. *Rom. Quest.* 56.

17 *Aen.* 8.357.

18 Ov. *Fasti* 1.633–36; Servius, *ad Aen.* 8.336; it should be noted, however, that both authors use the name Porrima for Antevorta, and Postverta instead of Postvorta.

19 Serv. *ad Aen.* 7.180; 8.357. Although Servius does not claim that Italian rulers were to be worshipped as deities but that certain kings took the names of different gods.

Before Saturn's arrival Ianus and his people had a *ferus* (wild) and *rudis* (uncouth) lifestyle,<sup>20</sup> namely it shows the irregularities and incompleteness of the Origins. This ancient world is ruled by chaos that does not recognise the divine, the human and the natural laws so the gifts of Saturn become creations like miracles that cannot be reckoned as the deeds of an average human. According to Macrobius the changes caused by Saturn's appearance are also commemorated on the temple's tympanum by Tritons being carved there that are blowing horns, and these Tritons' tails submerge under the surface and are hidden from humans' eyes. This representation expresses that from the time of Saturn the history of mankind is clear, so to say talkative while prior to that it was obscure and unknown. Through his activities chaos becomes an organised world, the microcosmic imitation of the macrocosmic creation is realised. The archaic man's mentality is reflected in this account who attributes every significant and conscious deed to an archetype and who can see his acts' verity be justified by repeating this archetype. Similarly, the act of the world's creation is reproduced by the foundation of cities. Here Ianus and Saturn found neighbouring cities that they name Ianiculum and Saturnia after themselves and they reign together sharing power. This detail of the story can be partly connected to the institution of dual kingship also existing among the Italian nations and partly supposes the knowledge of deeply rooted Indo-European traditions.<sup>21</sup> The descendants dedicated months next to each other to Saturn and Ianus to express their relation, namely December and January, setting the spatial neighbourhood into an aspect of time.

Parallel to the disappearance of Saturn we can also mention the mysterious vanishing of Romulus who was worshipped as a deity by the name of Quirinus after this event: the city founder, the lawmaker cannot die in ordinary circumstances and it is also doubtful whether these heroes

20 *Sat.* 1.7.21.

21 The heroes creating civilization do not often act alone but they have a helper in their duties and it is most often their brother (e.g. Prometheus and Epimetheus, Castor and Pollux or Romulus and Remus), or their friend (e.g. Gilgames and Enkidu). In most cases this companion is able to give effective help but there are also examples when in contrast with the hero he appears as an evil or comic anti-hero who only tries to imitate the other or intentionally acts against him. His asocial behaviour that manifests itself mainly in the constant wrong-doing, intrigue and the profanation of the sacraments foreshadows the figure of a jester appearing later on festive carnivals like Saturnalia. Electing the festive or mock king personifying Saturn was part of Saturnalia's traditions. The *rex Saturnaliorum* (or *Saturnalicus princeps*) could order anything to his subjects and everybody had to obey him. Cf. e.g. Tacitus, *Annals* 13.15; Lucian, *Saturnalia* 2; 4.

would die at all, by all means their existence leaves a mark both in space and time.

The reign of Saturn placed in mythical time is the Golden Age. The happiness of the Golden Age is caused by peace, abundance and the equality between people. This latter, namely that there are no masters and servants, furthermore, that everybody is equally entitled to liberty, can refer to the harmonic state of the first times after order had evolved. The identification of Saturn with abundance is not only obvious because people learn how to farm from him but because he is called *Sterculius*,<sup>22</sup> and his wife is said to be *Ops*<sup>23</sup> who had been mentioned above to be the goddess of fertility, sowing and plentiful harvest and who had her feast as part of the Saturnalia festivals which was also the day of Ops Opifera's temple's foundation. Goddess Ops had great honour and it is well demonstrated by considering her to be Rome's secret patron god by many people. Macrobius, who also touches upon this topic in his work, estimates this possibility the most probable as well.<sup>24</sup>

According to the story of origin connected to the Pelasgians, this nation was dispelled from their land and as they did not know where to go, they asked for advice from the oracle in Dodona. The prophecy led them to the land of Latium where they conquered the island in the Cutilian lake,<sup>25</sup> but the same prophecy contained the following command as well: καὶ κεφαλὰς Ἄϊδη, καὶ τῷ πατρὶ πέμπετε φῶτα (“Send heads to Hades and a man to the father!”). Because of this order a small shrine was erected to Dis and an altar to Saturn, to the father whose feast got the name Saturnalia. For a long time human heads were sacrificed to the former and men to the latter deity.<sup>26</sup> The habit of bloody sacrifices was

22 Macr. *Sat.* 1.7.25.

23 Macr. *Sat.* 1.10.20.

24 *Sat.* 3.9.4.

25 Cf. Seneca, *Natural Questions*, 3.25.8.

26 The sacrifice of humans by the Pelasgians warns that the feast of Saturn was not only a happy celebration. A type of tradition is known that at certain periods of time and at certain places the mock king of Saturnalia became the sacrifice on the altar of the god. The documents reporting Saint Dasius' martyrdom give examples for this and it turns out that the Saturn cult had a dark side even in the 300's A.D. in the popular tradition. Dasius was one of the Roman soldiers stationed at Durostorum who was selected by a draw as the king of Saturnalia by his companions. He could have practised his power for thirty days in this position as the earthly counterpart of Saturn then he should have killed himself on the deity's altar. Dasius was not willing to play the role of a pagan deity and to take part in unchristian feasts so he was sentenced to death. (About the story and its interpretation see J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*. New York, 1925. [copyright 1922])

finally left behind because of the influence of Hercules who suggested that they should give human images created with beautiful art to Dis instead of the human heads and that they should not worship Saturn's altar by sacrificing men but by lighting candles as the word 'φῶτα' in the prophecy does not only mean 'man' but 'light' as well. The tradition that people give each other candles as gifts at Saturnalia could evolve from this. The habit of giving presents became an important part of the feast and this tradition was so strong all through Antiquity that even Christians adapted it and up to the present it has been the most representative feature of Christmas. It was generally wide-spread that at the time of Saturnalia the clients brought presents to their masters but a lot of nobles led by their avidity wanted expensive gifts so Publicius, a plebeian tribune ordered that wealthy people can only receive candles as gifts.<sup>27</sup> This is the other possible explanation to the question why people gave candles to each other. At the same time the candle symbolizes its function to lead us from darkness to the light, from ignorance to the level of knowledge. Saturnalia was also the festival of light<sup>28</sup> and this meaning is naturally attached to the fact that its time coincided with the winter solstice when light starts to overcome darkness following the longest night of the year.

Previously another theory of origin had been mentioned which states that Saturnalia was established to follow the Greek Cronia festival. According to Accius' verses this was celebrated in almost all parts of Greece and at these times both city dwellers and country people prepared rich meals and invited their servants.<sup>29</sup> The tradition of changing roles between masters and servants came to Rome from this habit.

---

584–586). The practice of ritual sacrifice of humans was not unknown to the Romans, all through their history it was used several times until its forbidding in 97 B.C., cf. Livy 22.57.6; Plut. *Marcellus* 3.4; *Rom. Quest.* 83. For a special kind of human sacrifice, the *devotio* cf. Livy 8.9–10; Macr. *Sat.* 3.9–13.

27 Cf. Varro, *On the Latin Language* 5.64.

28 The earliest feast of the kind is known from Babylonia. The annual festival that lasted for seven days commemorated the consecration of Ningirsu's temple around 2nd millennium B.C. Herodotus (2.62) reports a feast from Sais in Egypt when candles were lit up during the night. The feast was held in honour of Neith, the patron goddess of the city who arrived home after the creation of the world gloriously with her son, Re who had overcome his enemies. For further examples see P. Bourboulis, *Ancient Festivals of „Saturnalia” Type*. Thessalonike, 1964.

29 Macr. *Sat.* 1.7.36–37.

Macrobius speaks about identifying Saturn with *Khronos*: he is time, the time that had not existed before him.<sup>30</sup> Cronus or Saturn, who swallows then throws his children up, is the symbol of time that consumes and then recreates everything.<sup>31</sup>

On the feast of Saturn, according to Greek rite, the Romans sacrificed at the altar in front of Senaculum<sup>32</sup> with uncovered head. They acted just like Hercules and the Pelasgians, then, the cult statue was brought out of the temple. During the year this statue was kept tight. The woollen rope was untied only in December, during the feast. Macrobius states with reference to Apollodorus that tying and later untying Saturn in the 10th month of the Roman year symbolizes the fetus becomes viable in the uterus by the 10th month and the gentle ties of nature keep it until it is born. Consequently the undoing of Saturn's woollen ties stand for birth as the symbol of creation.

The feast organised in the honour of Saturn and the connecting sacrifice mean the new realization of the Golden Age. Successors were to symbolize perfect harmony of their age. Saturnalia was the period of peace and harmony and it was a sin to start wars or carry out prosecution.<sup>33</sup>

The final day of the festive period, December 23 was the day of Sigillaria. Clay figures were offered to Dis and Saturn on this day and people gave each other tiny presents. As of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, two days after Saturnalia, the festival of Sol Invictus – the Invincible Sun – was held.<sup>34</sup> It was the peak of the feast cycle symbolizing the new creation and Christians chose this day to be the birthday of Jesus.<sup>35</sup>

The origin of the Christian year's feasts root back to the Resurrection of Christ. This Resurrection was the beginning and the end of the Christians' holy year's cycle. The other festive from the 4<sup>th</sup> century was connected to the birth of Jesus. By the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century the Christian calendar

---

30 Macr. *Sat.* 1.8.6–7;10.

31 Cf. Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 2.64.

32 Senaculum was – probably outside – the meeting place for senators.

33 Cf. Macr. *Sat.* 1.10.1;5.

34 About the cult of Sol Invictus see G. H. Halsberghe, *The Cult of Sol Invictus*. Leiden, 1972; S. E. Hijmans, *The Sun Which Did Not Rise in the East. = BaBesch*, 71, 1996. 115–150; recently about the roots of the cult: László Takács, *A Sol Invictus-kultusz Nero-kori gyökerei*. [The Roots of the Cult of Sol Invictus in the Neronian Age] In: Orsolya Tóth (ed.), *Hereditas Litteraria Totius Graeco-Latinitatis* II. (Agatha XXVIII) Debrecen, 2014. 316–323.

35 In connection with this see S. Hijmans, *Sol Invictus, the Winter Solstice, and the Origins of Christmas. = Mouseion*, 47/3, 2003. 277–298.

had mainly been filled with new feasts, whereas some old Roman feasts still existed. During the 350s besides their own feasts, noble Christians kept the ancient Roman ones as well, without any objections. It can partly be explained with the fact that the rites of the traditional Roman calendar still ruled the flow of everyday life and ensured order. Many Christians, who had important state or public offices, convinced themselves easily that keeping these feasts do not have religious importance, since their sacred nature had faded away so much that Christian spirit would not be harmed.<sup>36</sup> During these so-called pagan feasts many of the Christian believers flocked to circuses and theatres not only in Rome but in other cities as well to see plays and other events. Even though everybody was aware of the original meaning of these spare-time activities, only some thought about the sin of idolatry. Celebrating January 1 can be mentioned as a further example. It used to be the public feast of the inauguration of new consuls and it was the time of personal rites, like expressing best wishes, making resolutions, praying for the lucky new year and last but not least revelry. As it was not regulated by imperial legislation, non-believers could celebrate according to their own customs. They were joined by their Christian peers, not worrying about the possible heathen nature of the event.<sup>37</sup> Tertullian complains that the pagans were much more consistent in this matter than the Christians, as they did not participate in any Christian feast to avoid being taken for believers: *Iudaeis dies suos festos exprobrat spiritus sanctus. Sabbata, inquit, vestra et numenias et ceremonias odit anima mea. Nobis, quibus sabbata extranea sunt et numenias et feriae a deo aliquando dilectae, Saturnalia et Ianuariae et Brumae et Matronales frequentantur; munera commeant et strenae, consonant lusus, convivia constrepunt. O melior fides nationum in suam sectam, quae nullam sollemnitatem Christianorum sibi vindicat! Non dominicum diem, non pentecosten, etiamsi nossent, nobiscum communicassent; timerent enim, ne Christiani viderentur.*<sup>38</sup> He considers the opportunist Christians pagans who are unable to realize their sin and worship their own feasts.

36 Cf. R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*. Cambridge, 1990. 97–107.

37 Cf. *Ib.* 101, 104.

38 *On Idolatry*, 14.6–7. (“The Holy Spirit upbraids the Jews with their holy-days. ‘Your Sabbaths, and new moons, and ceremonies,’ says He, ‘My soul hates’. By us, to whom Sabbaths are strange, and the new moons and festivals formerly beloved by God, the Saturnalia and New-year’s and Midwinter’s festivals and Matronalia are frequented – presents come and go – New-year’s gifts – games join their noise – banquets join their din! Oh better fidelity of the nations to their own sect, which claims no solemnity of the Christians for itself! Not the Lord’s day, not Pentecost, even they had known

Church Fathers like St. Augustine believed that Christians can voice their faith towards the Church by distancing themselves from the pagans and their feasts.<sup>39</sup> A tool could be the exact clarification of the Christian holidays. At the same time the extirpation of the traditional Roman feasts – as the examples mentioned above demonstrated – was not easy at all. Creating Christian context to the pagan feast could mean a possible solution. This was the fate of Saturnalia as well. Macrobius' particular mentality mixed with several traditions gradually dissolved in the celebrations connected to the birth of Christ: not only its ideals but the connecting customs as well (e.g. candle lighting, giving presents, festive meals, donations to the poor) became elements of the new feast, the traditions of Christmas – although in different interpretation.

St. Leo the Great in one of his Christmas preaches compared the birth of the Saviour to the regeneration of light: *hanc adorandam in caelo et in terra nativitatem, nullus nobis dies magis quam hodiernus insinuat, et nova etiam in elementis luce radiante, totam sensibus nostris mirabilis sacramenti ingerit claritatem.*<sup>40</sup> The birth of Christ marks a new era literally and figuratively as well. He represents the new beginning. He is the light born at the darkest hour so as to illuminate the world. Christ is *rex* creating new world order, bringing salvation to mankind in the dark. Celebrating his birth also symbolizes the birth of Christianity. As pope Leo words it: *...et dum salvatoris nostri adoramus ortum, invenimur nos*

---

them, would they have shared with us; for they would fear lest they should seem to be Christians.” Source of translation: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf03.iv.iv.xiv.html>)

39 Augustine, *Sermo* 198.2 (*De Calendis Ianuariis, contra paganos*): *Si non credis quod credunt Gentes, non speras quod sperant Gentes, non amas quod amant Gentes; congregaris de Gentibus, segregaris, hoc est separaris de Gentibus. Nec te terreat commixtio corporalis in tanta separatione mentis. Quid enim tam separatum, quam ut credant illi daemones deos, credas tu qui unus et verus est Deus? Sperent illi inania saeculi, speres tu aeternam vitam cum Christo? Ament illi mundum, ames tu artificem mundi? Qui ergo aliud credit, aliud sperat, aliud amat, vita probet, factis ostendat. Acturus es celebrationem strenarum, sicut paganus, lusurus alea, et inebriaturus te: quomodo aliud credis, aliud speras, aliud amas? Quomodo libera fronte cantas: “Salva nos, Domine Deus noster; et congrega nos de Gentibus”? Segregaris enim de Gentibus, mixtus corpore Gentibus, dissimili vita. Et quanta sit ista segregatio, videte, si modo facitis, si modo probatis.*

40 Sancti Leonis Magni *Tractatus* 26.1. (“This Nativity which is to be adored in heaven and on earth is suggested to us by no day more than this when, with the early light still shedding its rays on nature, there is borne in upon our senses the brightness of this wondrous mystery.” Source of translation: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf212.ii.v.xiv.html>)

ORSOLYA TÓTH

*nostrum celebrare principium. Generatio enim Christi origo est populi christiani, et natalis capitis natalis est corporis.*<sup>41</sup> Christian Christmas, slowly decolouring the traditions of pagan Saturnalia, preaches peace, solidarity towards those in need and mutual respect. Even though it kept some features of the secular celebration, the greatest benefit of the Christian interpretation of the ancient Roman feast is the highlight on benevolence, reconciliation with one another, because these things serve as the key to development and they are essential for the survival of our civilization.

---

41 Ib. 26.2. (“...and in adoring the birth of our Saviour, we find we are celebrating the commencement of our own life. For the birth of Christ is the source of life for Christian folk, and the birthday of the Head is the birthday of the body.” Source of translation: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf212.ii.v.xiv.html>)

