

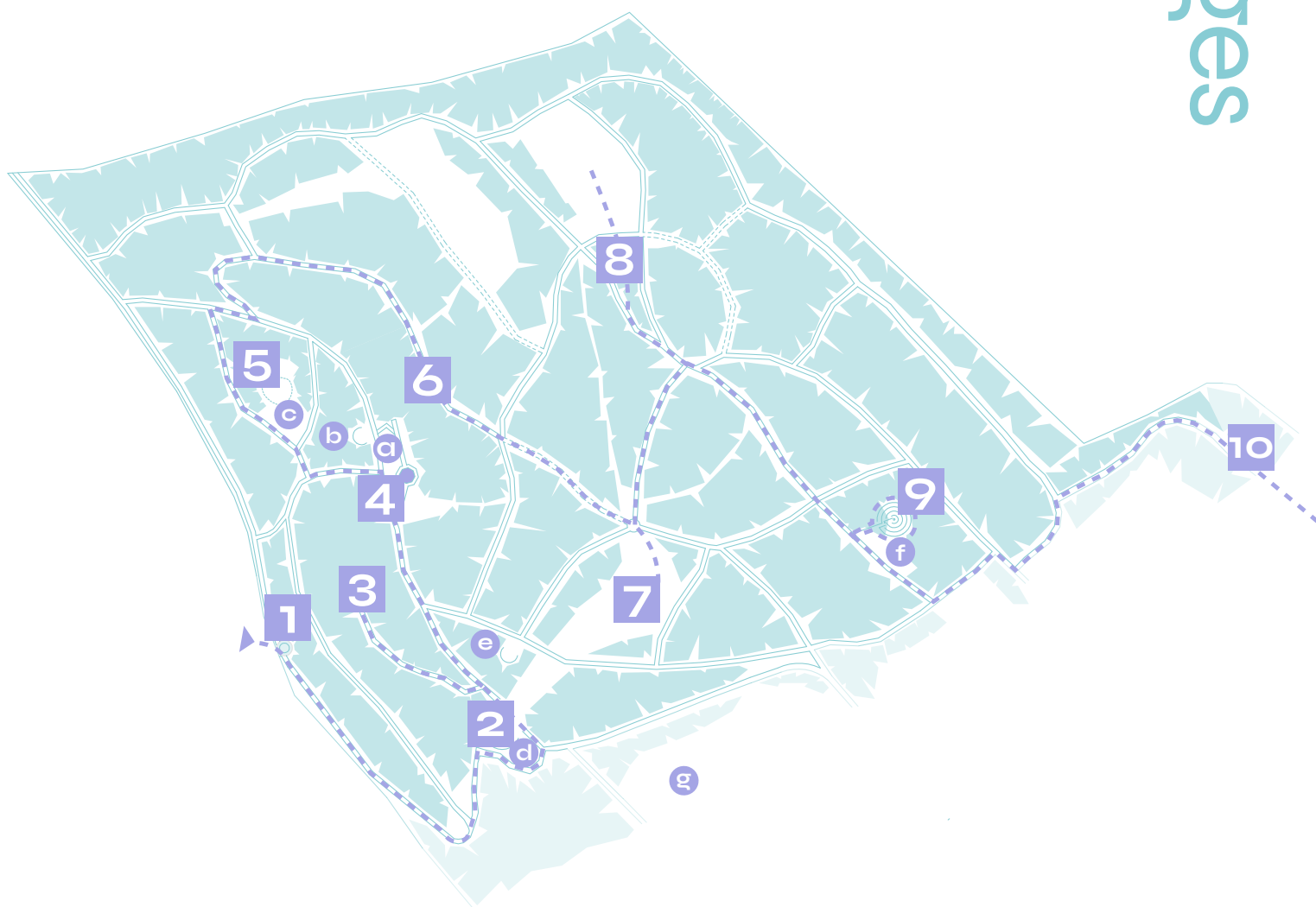


Gosztola Kitti

Ants in the Labyrinth

Arboretum (Botanical) audio walk in 10 steps, 1–7 minutes

Path and Passages



- a Baroque pavilion
- b Saint Benedict's grotto
- c Garden lake
- d Panoramic view
- e Virgin Mary grotto
- f Labyrinth
- g Lavender, Herbal Garden

- 1 Arbor Fuit Benedictus
- 2 Hortus Mundi
- 3 The Burden of Futility
- 4 The Garden of Today and Tomorrow
- 5 Garden School
- 6 Paraclimax
- 7 Commandment for Life
- 8 Nos Omnes Unum
- 9 Labyrinth Walk
- 10 New Land

The gardens of hermits who withdrew into the wilderness and the gardens of monastic orders served partly for self-sustainability, partly to model paradise, and to represent faith in salvation. Over the centuries, monastic gardens often became part of the system of arboretums, which aimed both at education and enjoyment. But is it possible to have a Catholic, or universal, botanical garden?

The monastic gardens of medieval Europe had similar plant communities and also operated as a network for exchange. However, in a globalized world, today every arboretum must reflect the vision of nature and the future it presents. This can be influenced by geographical location, the aim to showcase the landscapes of the given country—or ecoregions—their views on exotic and invasive plants, the desire to preserve rare species, and the pressure to prepare for the future.

What do global ecological changes mean in this context, which pose unique challenges to every arboretum? How do we relate to the confused seasonal and aseasonal conditions? Do we still consider the earthly paradise conceivable? Do we dominate nature by taming it, and do we exercise restraint when we actively reclaim it? Should we find ourselves in the arboretum, or lose ourselves? Can ants carve their way through the stone slabs of a labyrinth without walls?

The most significant record of Pannonhalma's often fragmented garden history is found in the diary of Fábíán Szeder, a Benedictine teacher, estate manager, curator, and garden designer, who recorded daily the changes in nature, botanical work, the arrival of guests, and the planning strategies that continuously adapted to the given situation over the course of one and a half decades. In this audio walk, excerpts from the long interview material of eleven speakers connected to the arboretum—students, dendrologists, landscape architects, librarians, monks, and theologians—reinforce each other, questioning one another, and together they offer a snapshot of the network of ideas currently shaping the flora and fauna of Pannonhalma.

Contributors:

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horticultural engineer, theologian, master perfumer

Kinga Szűcs

theologian, Evangelical Theological University

Aurél Theisz

is a senior student of the Pannonhalma Benedictine High School

Sound and music:

Bence Kovács-Vajda

1. Arbor Fuit Benedictus (00:50)

Antal Hirka OSB

2. Hortus Mundi (04:00)

Márton Szabó OSB

3. The Burden of Futility (03:00)

Antal Hirka OSB, István Rácz, Márton Janzsó, Ambrus Pintér OSB

4. The Garden of Today and Tomorrow (07:00)

István Rácz, Zsolt Debreczy, Márton Janzsó, Márton Szabó OSB

5. Garden School (05:30)

Márk Bokros OSB, Márton Szabó OSB, Antal Hirka OSB, Aurél Theisz, Zsolt Debreczy, Márton Janzsó

6. Paraclimax (06:30)

Márton Janzsó, Zsolt Debreczy, István Rácz, Márk Bokros OSB, Kinga Szűcs

7. Commandment for Life (01:30)

Antal Hirka OSB, István Rácz

8. Nos Omnes Unum (03:00)

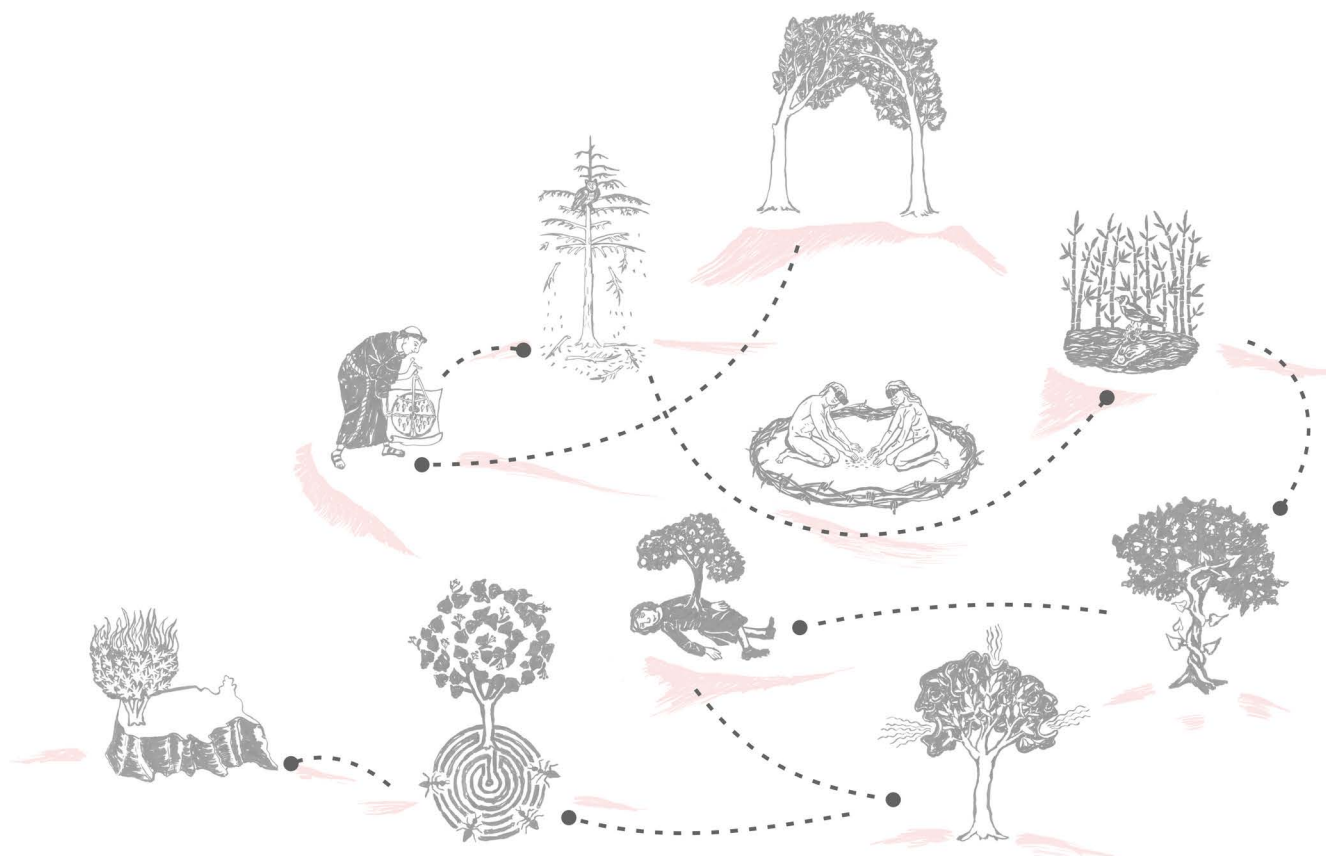
Titusz Hardi OSB, Ilona Ásványi, Kinga Szűcs

9. Labyrinth Walk (02:00)

Márk Bokros OSB

10. New Land (02:00)

István Rácz, Zsolt Debreczy



Transcript of the audiotrack

1. ARBOR FUT BENEDICTUS (00:50)

Antal Hirka OSB (theologian, teacher)

Right at the gate, beneath our feet, there is a small marble detail with an inscription. The inscription reads, "Arbor fuit benedictus". This refers to the garden of the monks who followed the Rule of St. Benedict, where one enters, and it reminds the visitor that the founder of this form of monasticism in the fifties was a man whom Saint Bernard describes as "arbor fuit benedictus", meaning Benedict was a tree, a mighty, fruit-bearing tree. From its fruits comes holiness, truth, and piety.



2. HORTUS MUNDI (04:00)

Márton Szabó OSB (horticultural engineer, theologian, teacher)

I believe that the garden is the central place for humanity, and especially so in the Jewish-Christian tradition. The six-day creation story, the creation out of nothing, the existence of the wilderness as a very strong image and symbol, and next to it the opposite pole, where the opposite of nothingness is juxtaposed with the existence of everything in the Garden of Eden. With the retreat into the wilderness, one almost relives the primordial point of the creation of the universe. And then, monasticism reaches the point where it makes the wilderness blossom, and from nothing, living spaces emerge, the small monastic oases, with vegetables and fruits. In the swirl of daily prayer and manual labor, they essentially create an incredible world from nothing. With Western monasticism and Saint Benedict, the community life and this type of lifestyle begin; the introduction of herbs and other plants appears, which were then carried along during missions. A prime example of this is Saint Gallen. There you have a vegetable garden, a herb garden, a fruit orchard, and together with the cemetery, there is the south-facing cloister garden, which exists as a symbolic framework. There, the structure, geometry, and arrangement of the Eden garden become significant. And as the world of science, or what we might call something more systematic, begins to gain ground, the legitimacy of ornamental gardens grows, and along with it, the legitimacy of collection gardens, but these appear only later. These gardens belong to the upper ten thousand, the aristocracy. It was their privilege to have access to unlimited material and human resources. This also became a status symbol. People began to create collections that condensed entire continents into one place. Clearly, the aristocratic gardens and episcopacies had the means for this. And then, it became clear that these limited-access spaces were occasionally opened up for a few hours, and people could walk through them. In the case of monasticism, it is also likely that the collection aspect and this rich biodiversity made it possible for these places to open up for visitors. And then, in the early 1960s, perhaps in 1963, the arboretum officially became a nature conservation area.



3. THE BURDEN OF FUTILITY (03:00)

Antal Hirka OSB (theologian, teacher)

They planted spruce trees here 120 years ago. One spruce tree was planted in the small inner garden of the monastery, and it had to be removed two years ago because it had become so old and dangerous. But its four siblings were planted down in the botanical garden, and they too met a similar fate. So we were very sad, and our hearts bled when we had to cut it down.

István Rácz (dendrologist)

The decline of the pines is partly related to the frequent drought summers and the fact that less precipitation reaches the root zone, and much less remains there.



Janzsó Márton (horticultural engineer)

For pines, a 1-2 degree global temperature increase is enough to change the resin level, and from this point on, the tree's susceptibility to various pests and pathogens may change. The same applies to the giant sequoia. This is a nationwide phenomenon, the peak mortality of giant sequoias. The pest bores into the tree, and the part above it dries out.

István Rácz (dendrologist)

So, there is a pest working in the tree that destroys it, and this seems unstoppable. It's not just happening in Pannonhalma, but in many parts of Hungary. The silver fir and the spruce are actually only recommended for long-term planting in Hungary in areas where the land's carrying capacity is sufficient, but more importantly, where there are no such drought summers. But they exist, and this means that they can now only be planted in a limited manner, or in areas where they get enough moisture to survive.

Ambrus Pintér OSB (theologian, teacher)

Actually, my homeland is here in the Bakonyalja. When I was a teenager, I worked as a forest laborer every summer. And so, at that time, I became very close to the pines. Unfortunately, these are now disappearing here beneath the Bakony hills. They were easy to plant back then. They stayed in the nursery until they were three years old, and then they were planted out, and we had to take care of these three-year-old pine saplings, making sure they were not overtaken by other plants, weeding them around or cutting them with a sickle. So, I got very close to the pine forests. There are still many parts of the forest in the Bakony that I worked on as a child. I've known these trees since they were three-year-old saplings, and now they are about to perish.

István Rácz (dendrologist)

There is another type, the so-called pine blight or pine dieback, which refers to black pine, and it occurs in many places in the country. It is also the result of the dense planting of black pine seedlings next to each other. While they are still small plants, it is not a problem; they survive the transplantation, the planting, and start growing. But the further along the growth process goes, the more water the tree will need, and the greater the canopy mass it must sustain and nourish. After a while, they start competing for the soil moisture available, and the carrying capacity of the land can no longer support such a dense stand of trees.



4. THE GARDEN OF TODAY AND TOMORROW (07:00)

István Rácz (dendrologist)

We were primarily engaged in the renovation of the arboretum at that time.

There were beautiful, old ash trees, cherry oak, pedunculate oak, some other exotics, but they didn't seem to be in any organic relationship with each other. So, we started thinking about whether it would be possible to create regional geographical areas and say that if there are two or three remarkable North American or East Asian species in a certain area, we could group new species, shrubs, around them that evoke the forests of that region, that distant country.

Zsolt Debreczy (dendrologist)

In 2008, one beautiful day, we got the news that we were commissioned. We brought almost all the plants that were needed for Pannonhalma, and the rest we gathered from various places. It was quite a big job, we brought plants from Italy and even from Turkey. Then, the layout was finished, and we started planting, but it was promised that the irrigation would be solved. Without this promise, we wouldn't have planted species on the slopes that we were sure would not survive if two dry years came. But unfortunately, Pannonhalma is right at the edge of the Kisalföld region, so it's precipitation-poor. The problem isn't even with the average precipitation, which is low, but with the extremes. Right when we were planting the arboretum, there was so much rain that we were stomping in mud, and then there was hardly any rain for the next two summers. Hungary is very rich in water, more water flows out than comes in. We know this. And I think some of the roof waters have been collected for the supply of Pannonhalma, but in many places, there would have been

enough roof water or water collected from asphalt surfaces or walking paths that could easily have created a pond where now there is a large meadow. I thought the pond would be the resting point. I could walk around it, sit down, enjoy it, with the abbey above me and fish jumping around me, and there would be peace and flowers blooming from the East American trees, with Hungarian insects buzzing around. So, Pannonhalma didn't become a place where we could present the world's flora, but what is there is now developing beautifully. After the period of neglect, I already hear that it's beginning to be well-maintained.

Márton Janzsó (horticultural engineer, theologian)

I lived in Pannonhalma as a member of the community and I was also the manager of the arboretum. This past experience is why it came up that I could somehow professionally guide the current reconstruction. And we are in a difficult period, the whole profession, the horticultural profession, is constantly facing questions about what is worth planting and what is no longer advisable to plant in these climatic conditions. Today, in the arboretum, it is much more experimental in nature, and we are leaning towards more subtropical, Mediterranean plants. Although in the 2010s, there was a significant renewal, a richening of the plant stock, and many Mediterranean plants were tried, and many of them thrived. There are many problems with the so-called indigenous mature trees, with ash, maples and linden trees, which are very abundant. Many trees in the arboretum have perished or are perishing. For example, the current treatment has roughly halved the amount of wood, while preserving the intact parts. We are not planting ash at the moment because we do not see a future for it. Ash trees have some kind of bacterial disease that causes root mortality, and it affects very large areas, very large quantities, all over the country. In the Zirc arboretum, over a hundred specimens have to be felled. So, at the moment, there's still no selected new plant material in the propagation stock. There are already experiments ongoing, trying to involve the healthy specimens in propagation to select the future hope from them.

Márton Szabó OSB (horticultural engineer, theologian, teacher)

We don't know what the garden of the second half of the 21st century will be like. One could almost say that every century had some kind of garden style. The question is whether the 21st century will have such a style. And what society, or humanity, will do with these existing collection gardens. The tendency that was once taken for granted, to bring the world together in one place and condense it, may no longer be an essential drive for maintaining these. Rather, I think that gardens will exist in the digital reality. It is also possible that there may be a process of reclaiming these spaces. I will let nature take it back according to its own dynamics. And you can still decide how much space, how much area, you add something extra to through your effort. It could be that there will be a three or four-square-meter area where there will be an incredible kaleidoscope of colors, with special elements. In some sense, we must recognize that with the changing climatic conditions, maintaining these gardens will require much more effort and energy. We have moved far from the world of gigantic greenhouses and palm houses.



5. GARDEN SCHOOL (05:30)

Márk Bokros OSB (economist, coach, teacher)

It's often said that we are lovers of a place because we choose a location and live our life there. This means that I don't want to gain new experiences by constantly changing or discovering new places, but I stay in one place and try to recognize its novelty or diversity. This is similar to plants. An animal moves around and explores its environment, but a plant stays in one place and doesn't change its location. Instead, it experiences how the surroundings change.

Márton Szabó OSB (horticultural engineer, theologian, teacher)

The main aim was to provide the Order with as many and as rich as possible archaic objects, minerals, antiquities and archaeological objects from the first half of the nineteenth century. We can say that new windows are opening up for scholarship, opening up the world in a way that I only exist within

that space. I don't have to go to Egypt, South America or China, to have certain things come close to me, and this would accumulate an incredible set of experiences and knowledge. In a way, this will be the aim of the arboretum and the collection garden, to bring as many elements as possible, and as many rich things as possible together in one place. Then, of course, these will be passed on to the students. In the 20th century, and even in the past decades, biology teachers took their students out to the arboretum to learn about plants.

Antal Hirka OSB (theologian, teacher)

In this botanical garden, the greatest experience is always the appearance of the winter graveyard, and then the appearance of the snowdrops. This blossomed, then came the turf-flower, followed by the hollyhock, then the green methenge and the lily of the valley. And then these yellow buttercups. At that time it was still allowed to collect flowers and plants, you had to do it for biology lessons, so here we dug them out of the botanical garden. Not too much, but we gathered the most important spring flowers, their bulbs, roots, and leaves. Then we pressed the petals and had to identify them. It was such a thematic part of our biology lessons and I still have these flowers. Nowadays, it's no longer allowed, precisely for the sake of biodiversity conservation. This little pond is also interesting because the birds loved to go there to drink. At a certain time, when József Rékási was the biology teacher, he was also involved in bird watching and bird ringing; he asked students who were willing to do this to help him. Similarly, this teacher promoted the birdhouses that were installed on the trees.

Aurél Theisz (Pannonhalma student)

The interest in birds still exists. We monitor the nests weekly or bi-weekly to see how they are developing, for example, in spring, how many eggs have been laid. When the weather is a bit drier, they tend to lay just one egg. We've created various tools, like a small bamboo plantation near the pond. We cut individual reed stalks and used them to make a kind of burrowing tool. You have to be careful, especially during the breeding season, to disturb the birds as little as possible when doing these surveys.

Zsolt Debreczy (dendrologist)

My vision is to have a school arboretum behind every educational institution. Because it's not enough for the youth to see these trees on a screen; the teacher should take them out to the real plants. The visual experience and diversity can also bring international tourism. There is no arboretum in Hungary right now that I would say, "Wow, this is the place where people come from all over the world to learn", but it could be.

However, you can't invite people to a poor or beginners' collection; the exchange would not happen. Only with very serious, comprehensive collections and well-documented species—with the ability to show where this or that came from—can you elevate it to an international level. Here, even on the website, there isn't a comprehensive species list, let alone highlighting the rarities, so people either notice that something is rare, or they don't.

Márton Janzsó (horticultural engineer, theologian)

It occurred to me that an area could be "adopted" by a class for the time they are here, and they could perform certain tasks. They would be helping out, in the past it used to be like that. So anything like this would definitely bring the garden and nature closer to those who participate.



6. PARACLIMAX (06:30)

Márton Janzsó (horticultural engineer, theologian)

Well, I think the arboretum has once again, even if just for a moment, shown us what it's like when we stop tending the garden. And when it's left on its own, plants appear that have a different kind of vitality. The appearance of vines is a particularly striking form of damage in the arboretum. The *Chinese clematis* is an absolutely fast killer. For me, this clearly indicates that people must help the garden remain a garden—and not just the private playground of one or two dominant, very vigorous and cunningly aggressive plants.

Zsolt Debreczy (dendrologist)

If a plant gets out of control, it's just a sign—an indication that something is out of balance. In fact, we should be glad it's showing us that. It's a very unfortunate direction if, when introducing exotic species, we worry about what might become feral and invasive—when in fact, no plant should become invasive in the first place. Because if a forest is in a climax state, nothing can really invade it. If I plant it like a forest and let it establish, the forest can't go wrong—because a forest is always perfect. And if it's utilized in the same way as in its native habitat, and if the proper vertical layering and species diversity are present—which is the whole purpose of presentation—then it's just a matter of adding a little path, and you can walk into a forest that is artificial, but I call it a “paraclimax”. The climax forest is the plant association that provides the most organic matter possible in a given area. The „para” part is when I recreate this with exotics. I could copy a part of Eastern America and plant all thirty types of herbaceous plants underneath, except the ones that can't yet handle the soil conditions. But later, with all the fallen leaves breaking down, humic acids will start to leach lime from the soil, and those characteristic lime-avoiding Eastern American plants will begin to green up and eventually flourish. No need to tend it—it's enough to have three hundred species of oak of this size, and time will take care of the rest. Like Michelangelo said, just remove the excess—it only needs to be revealed.

István Rácz (dendrologist)

Native trees have a certain potential height. At Pannonhalma, I'd say most trees reach a maximum of around 30 meters. In its natural habitat, the red oak might grow up to 40–45 meters in a very wet site, but in Hungary, that's unlikely. Still, red oak can potentially be planted in any deciduous forest environment here without outgrowing the others.

Márton Janzsó (horticultural engineer, theologian)

That ancient paper mulberry tree, and maybe one or two others, still exist. They've been here for a long time. 25–30–35 years ago, the issue of paper mulberry sprouting prolifically didn't even come up. At the time, we were right on the edge of being able to plant it without it freezing. Today, it spreads invasively, unchecked. I feel this only took a few degrees' shift to happen.

I definitely believe that in some high-profile areas, we need to maintain order, cultivate, and plant intentionally. But there are areas where we let things grow a bit wild. We try to respect situations where vigorous vegetation is trying to overpower something else—it may still be possible to give that something space to survive.

My dream is to have an icon of Christ the Teacher in the baroque house, as a reminder that amidst all this work, we need places to pause and learn. Not just our craft—but to reflect on questions like what should be cut down, and what should be preserved.

Márk Bokros OSB (economist, coach, teacher)

In recent years, there were times when plants started to overgrow the paths. Some people said it looked neglected, but to me, it expressed that life isn't always neatly ordered. So I think it raises an exciting question: how are we connected to nature? When we hear about the Garden of Eden in the Bible, it comes across as a tended, ordered place where humanity is placed carefully—and after the Fall, we must work the land, struggle with it.

But maybe the real change isn't in the garden—it's in our attitude. That from then on, we see the garden as work, and we lose our connection to it as something alive, just like us. This life is a shared life—a life of mutual influence.

Kinga Szűcs (theologian)

I think we often imagine love as some lofty emotion, but maybe we should approach it more humbly. At its core, it's a biological function—our capacity to connect with each other. That's also present in how we relate to plants.

It's probably possible to love even invasive species in this way. There are always conflicts of interest—between all groups of living things. But if love is present alongside those conflicts, then I think it puts things in their proper place much better than if we try to organize everything into rigid taxonomies and assign each thing its fixed place.

7. COMMANDMENT FOR LIFE (01:30)

Antal Hirka OSB (theologian, teacher)

There were people who asked for their ashes to be buried a bit downhill, near the statue of the Virgin Mary. One of them was a student of ours who passed away very young and was buried there. The other was an older man who was hit by a car in the village; his family also requested burial in that spot—so it's somewhat of a cemetery-like area. Just a few, not many—only a few such memorial places exist. It's not just a garden, not just flowers—it also supports remembrance.

István Rácz (dendrologist)

Death, life, death, life, death, life—but it's not even truly death, rather a kind of transformation. And this is what's wonderful about vegetation—it carries the command of life within. If I cut off a shoot, by next spring it's already growing again. I always feel this is the kind of life-command that can't be stopped. Even if I step on a caterpillar, it still continues—because it merges with the soil, which is full of microorganisms, some barely visible even under a microscope, and all organic matter and impurities will be utilized. That life-command, once it begins, simply continues. Be it a caterpillar or a peach tree, it's the same command that's inside us, too.



8. NOS OMNES UNUM (03:00)

Titusz Hardi OSB (theologian, teacher)

I'm always amazed by how decisive the sun, the light is in the plant world—how everything depends on how the sun rises, how it shines, from which direction, how it warms and gives life, and how everything strives toward it. Until the end of the Middle Ages, all churches were oriented eastward. Our basilica is also oriented that way—the rising sun illuminates the sanctuary. In monastic life, the sun is the symbol of the resurrected Jesus on Easter Sunday.

This makes the plant world a profound lesson for me—its very existence depends on the sun. And I believe it's the same for the monk: without the presence of the Eternal One, he cannot exist. That's why I always feel more at home when I spend time in the arboretum—it teaches without speaking, it communicates through its being and its presence.



Kinga Szűcs (theologian)

We don't have reliable feedback on what it's like to live as a plant, but we can try to imagine what we do together. For example, breathing is a wonderful shared act. It's a bit different, of course—we breathe differently, the process flows in different directions—but if we go a little deeper into it, we might find a point where the two types of experiences intertwine or touch.

Ilona Ásványi (librarian)

There are those who say that with every breath, we speak the name of God—that anyone can try saying "Yah-weh" with an inhale and an exhale, and perhaps it's not just wishful thinking. When we speak of gardens, we can walk in such a way that we observe our breathing and say God's name with each inhale and exhale.

Kinga Szűcs (theologian)

There's a certain distance toward plants in the Bible, which partly shows in the fact that God doesn't create plants directly with His word—He commands the earth to bring them forth. The same is true for lower animals—they, too, are stirred up and multiply from the earth and the water.

There's a kind of mediation here, which definitely makes a distinction between these worlds. From a religious-historical perspective, it might reflect a layer that predates Judaism—something a bit more animistic or nature-religion-like. At the same time, the text distances itself from that worldview. It doesn't want to associate with it, yet it still appears in the text in some form—this mystery and partial unknowability of the plant world sneaks in, along with its wonder.



9. LABYRINTH WALK (02:00)

Márk Bokros OSB (economist, coach, teacher)

We've been holding the Silence Course for over ten years now, together with psychiatrist Gabriella Palotai. We describe it as a kind of self-awareness-based spiritual journey, and a very distinctive element of it is walking the labyrinth.

The tree that stands at the entrance of the labyrinth is also very significant for many people. Often, they embrace it upon arrival, either as a way of asking for help before entering, or upon exiting, they reconnect with it—it gives a kind of support. For others, the surrounding trees serve as a moment of pause, a new impulse, or a source of reflection.

And not just the clearly recognizable trees, but everything present in the labyrinth—sometimes ants, little bugs, or, if the labyrinth hasn't been cleaned thoroughly, leaves and pieces of the arboretum's natural life.

Some people start sweeping the path in front of them with their feet, instinctively clearing it. After a while, they begin asking themselves: What am I doing? Why is it important to make the path ahead of me clean? What does it mean?

Perhaps I'm doing the same in my life—trying to make everything as smooth and problem-free as possible. Not allowing small pieces, bits of soil, things that seem out of place or that "spoil" an ideal world. And then they realize—maybe those bits also belong to their life.



10. NEW LAND (02:00)

István Rácz (dendrologist)

Meanwhile, major construction work was underway in Pannonhalma—the new restaurant was being built and its foundation laid. This produced a massive amount of raw soil that had to be piled up somewhere. It was Zsolt Debreczy who suggested that we could use this raw soil to shape the terrain of the new arboretum area.

Zsolt Debreczy (dendrologist)

So we got a big machine, and I drew the lines: here would be the Anatolian Hill, behind it the Caucasus Valley—and it fit into the arboretum so beautifully. First the Mediterranean, then the Anatolian Hill and Caucasus Valley, and then it continues with Eastern America, China, and so on—Himalayas. The opportunity was truly unique. It would've cost a fortune to transport and deposit that much soil otherwise.

István Rácz (dendrologist)

It had a bombastic impact. I could say it was one of our biggest success stories—how well the plants grew in that raw soil.

Some species of California cypress are highly endangered because of the high risk of wildfires. For instance, Professor Debreczy once visited the area where the *Cupressus stephensonii*, a California cypress, suffered extensive fire damage.

Most of the population was burned—only a few tree clusters or shrubs survived. The professor documented the entire area, collected seeds, and we cultivated plants from those seeds.

Some of the saplings were distributed to various living collections; as far as I remember, there are three or four of them in the California edge planting here in Pannonhalma.