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The Salvation of Mankind in Late Antiquity: concerning a recent Study

In the history of the Roman Empire the third century A.D. was a period full of changes and transformations. Indeed, owing to the interweaving of various political, economic, social and religious points of view, this century can be considered an historical moment in which there was the end of one era, and the beginning of a new one. The factors that act on this transformation influenced both the exterior and the interior aspects of the Roman world, producing in the inhabitants of the Empire a kind of anxiety, worry, and distress, which in a very insightful way E. R. Dodds called an *age of anxiety*.¹ Within this chaotic and insecure environment, there evolved the problem of man's salvation.

Recently one of the last studies of Michael Bland Simmons² sheds light on this issue, felt as the central problem during an era that is defined by most historians as «late antiquity».³ Simmons, indeed, points out that Porphyry is the first Neo-Platonic philosopher who, analyzing the problem of salvation, asks whether there existed or not a universal salvific path for all mankind. The controversy between Porphyry and Christianity, on one hand, shows the philosopher of Tyre who denied the existence of one way of salvation for all people; and on the other hand, it shows the Christian purpose that indicates Christ as the universal savior of mankind.

Simmons' study is divided into twelve chapters in which the author analyzes in a broad and comprehensive manner not only the issue of universal salvation, but also other aspects linked to the main problem.

In the first chapter (pp. 3-19) Simmons analyzes the life of Porphyry and its historical context, highlighting some important aspects. Indeed, according to Simmons, the philosopher of Tyre, after meet Origen of Alexandria, acquired a solid knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, their exegesis, biblical allegory (pp. 10-11), the sermons and

¹ Cf. E. R. DODDS, *Pagans and Christians in an Age of Anxiety. Some Aspects of religious experience from Marcus Aurelius to Costantine*, Cambridge University Press, London 1965. Dodds takes the expression by the poet W. H. Hauden.

² M. B. SIMMONS, *Universal Salvation in Late Antiquity. Porphyry of Tyre and the Pagan-Christian Debate*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 2015.

³ Cf. P. BROWN, *The World of Late Antiquity*, London 1971; A. CAMERON, «The “Long” Late Antiquity: a late twentieth-century model», in T. P. WISEMAN (ed.), *Classics in Progress: Essays on Ancient Greece and Rome*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 2002, p. 166.

the Christian theology developed by the Alexandrian theologian (pp. 12-13).⁴ Simmons also claims that Porphyry during the period in Rome in which he studied at the school of Plotinus, «did not abandon his interest in the traditional cults» (p. 16), overcoming in this way the old dichotomy proposed by Bidez and Cumont.⁵ Indeed, for the two Belgian scholars, Porphyry, when he was young, was interested to the religious cults and, after meeting Plotinus, he abandoned his interest in the ancestral religion, working *toto corde* on philosophy. This dichotomy *preplotinian/postplotinian*⁶ is no more accepted by most scholars.⁷

In the second chapter (pp. 20-31), the author presents Porphyrian soteriology, criticizing G. Wolff⁸ and J. Bidez⁹ who argued Porphyry's thought «can be chronologically pinpointed as moving from a highly superstitious and religious focus in the pre-Plotinian period, to a more rationalistic, philosophical outlook in the post-Plotinian era. [...] The present study finds this hypothesis extremely weak and thus completely rejects its premises as representing a plausible explanation for the development of Porphyry's thought» (p. 21). As we shall see shortly, Simmons argues that the idea of salvation in Porphyry is developed in three ways: the first, addressed to the masses and to those who in life are not dedicated to philosophy (pp. 24-27); the second, directed to the novice philosophers (pp. 27-30); and the third, to mature Neoplatonic philosophers (pp. 30-31).

The third chapter (pp. 32-51) focuses on *Philosophia ex oraculis*, in which Sim-

⁴ Cf. G. MUSCOLINO, *L'allegoria di Didimo contro l'ironia di Porfirio sull'onnipotenza di Dio: analisi del Commentario a Giobbe 10, 13* (P. Tura 280, 1-281, 13), in «Auctores nostri» 9 (2011), pp. 317-331.

⁵ Cf. J. BIDEZ, *Vie de Porphyre. Le philosophe neo-platonicien. Avec le fragments des traités ΠΕΡΙ ΑΓΓΑΜΑΤΩΝ et De regressu animae*, E. Van Goethem-Teubner, Gand-Leipzig 1913 (repr. 1964); F. CUMONT, *Antiochus d'Athènes et Porphyre*, in *Mélanges Bidez* (Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales, II), Bruxelles 1934, p. 136.

⁶ Cf. F. BÖRTZLER, *Porphyrius' Schrift von den Götterbildner*, Diss. Erlangen 1903, p. 23; J. BIDEZ, *Vie de Porphyre*, cit., pp. 25-26, 143; R. BEUTLER, s.v. *Porphyrios*, PRE XXII, De Gruyter, Berlin 1953 col. 295; F. BUFFIÈRE, *Les mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1973², pp. 535-540; J. PÉPIN, «Porphyre exégète d'Homère», in *Porphyre*, Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique, t. 12, Vandoeuvres-Genève, 30 août-5 septembre 1965, Fondation Hardt, Genève 1966, p. 246-247; P. CROME, *Symbol und Unzulänglichkeit der Sprache*, W. Fink, München 1970, p. 123; V. FAZZO, *La giustificazione della immagini religiose dalla tarda antichità al cristianesimo*, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, Napoli 1977, pp. 183-206; F. ROMANO, *Porfirio di Tiro. Filosofia e cultura nel III secolo D.C.*, Università di Catania, Catania 1979, pp. 108 ss.

⁷ Cf. G. MUSCOLINO, «Porfirio astronomo e astrologo. Osservazioni sull'Introduzione alla Tetrabiblos di Tolomeo», in R. L. CARDULLO-D. IOZZIA (cur.), *ΚΑΛΛΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΑΡΕΤΗ. BELLEZZA E VIRTU'. Studi in onore di Maria Barbanti*, Bonanno, Acireale-Roma 2014, pp. 409-421; *PORFIRIO MATHEMATIKÓS. L'Introduzione al "Trattato sugli effetti prodotti dalle stelle (Tetrabiblos)" di Tolomeo e le Testimonianze e i Frammenti relativi alle opere di matematica e di geometria*, a cura di G. Muscolino, Bompiani (Il pensiero Occidentale), Milano 2016 (forthcoming); C. ADDEY, *Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism. Oracles of the Gods*, Ashgate, Farnham 2014, pp. 5-6.

⁸ Cf. *Porphyrii de philosophia ex oraculis haurienda librorum reliquiae*, edidit G. Wolff, I. Springer, Berlin 1856 (repr. G. Olms, Hildesheim 1962), p. 38

⁹ Cf. J. BIDEZ, *Vie de Porphyre*, cit., pp. 15-16.

mons claims was not composed «when Porphyry was young» (p. 32), but around 302-303 A.D., shortly before the outbreak of the persecution of Diocletian, launched on February 23, 303,¹⁰ and the critical edition of the work, proposed by G. Wolff in the early 1856, followed by «an overwhelmingly vast majority of scholars» (p. 33), who «have uncritically accepted his arbitrary thematic classification».¹¹ Furthermore, the author argues that the *Philosophia ex oraculis* is directed to polytheistic culture, is partly an anti-Christian work and contains some prophecies taken from the work entitled *Chaldean Oracles*, which the philosopher of Tyre was the first to introduce within the Neo-Platonism.¹² According to Simmons, *Philosophia ex oraculis* is a work that is «a proactive defense of religious and philosophical paganism during a time of decline» (p. 38), and presents the theurgic rituals directed to the purification of the lower part of the soul, that is the irrational soul. Therefore, for Simmons *Philosophia ex oraculis* contained three different paths of salvation, «the first way was for the lower or spiritual part of the soul and emphasized the importance of the traditional cults, including the practice of animal sacrifice, and theurgical rituals. The other two ways were designed respectively for the novice and mature Neoplatonic philosopher. And each of the three books of *Philosophia ex oraculis* covered each of the three ways in consequential order: Book I for the masses; Book II for the novice philosopher; and Book III for the mature philosopher»¹³ (p. 39).

The other anti-Christian work, the so-called *Contra Christianos*,¹⁴ is analyzed

¹⁰ Cf. G. GIRGENTI-G. MUSCOLINO, *Porfirio, La filosofia rivelata dagli oracoli. Con tutti i frammenti di magia, stregoneria, teosofia e teurgia*, Bompiani, Milano 2011, pp. CXXIV-CXXV; G. MUSCOLINO, *Porfirio: la Philosophia ex oraculis. Per una nuova edizione dei frammenti*, Tesi di Dottorato di Ricerca, Università degli Studi di Macerata, 2013, pp. 74-86.

¹¹ I have shown a new edition of fragments of *Philosophy from Oracles*, because I do not accept the division in three books of G. Wolff and A. Smith (*Porphyrii philosophi fragmenta* edidit Andrew Smith, fragmenta arabica David Wasserstein interpretante, in aedibus B.G. Teubneri, Stuttgartiae et Lipsiae 1993, pp. 351-407). I have suggested a new edition of the fragments divided in *Testimonia, Fragmenta, Dubia*, to which I have added new fragments absent in the previous critical editions. Cf. G. MUSCOLINO, *Porfirio: la Philosophia ex oraculis. Per una nuova edizione dei frammenti*, cit., pp. 216-298.

¹² Cf. M. B. SIMMONS, «The Function of Oracles in the Pagan-Christian Conflict during the Age of Diocletian: the Case of Arnobius and Porphyry», in E. A. LIVINGSTONE (ed.), *Studia Patristica*, Vol. XXXI, Peeters Publishers, Leuven 1997, p. 350, n. 6.

¹³ *Contra C. ADDEY, Divination and Theurgy*, cit., p. 46.

¹⁴ The canonical edition, considered *dogmatic* by most scholars, is the edition of A. von Harnack (*Porphyrius, Gegen die Christen 15 Bücher: Zeugnisse, Fragmente a Referate*, [edidit A. von Harnack, Abhandlungen der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Jahrgang 1916, Philosophisch-historische Klasse, I, Berlin 1916]) in which the German theologian inserts, among others, the objections of a work entitled *Apocriticus*, written by the bishop Macarius of Magnesia, considering them in the same way of the other porphyrian fragments. For this problem see G. MUSCOLINO, *Porfirio: il Contra Christianos. Per una nuova edizione dei frammenti* (Tesi di Dottorato di Ricerca, Università degli Studi di Salerno, 2010), in which, after the analysis of the critical edition of A. von Harnack, I have suggested a new possible edition of the *Contra Christianos*. See also R. M. BERCHMAN, *Porphyry, Against the Christians*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2005; E. A. RAMOS JURADO et al. (eds.), *Porfirio de Tiro, Contra los Cristianos*, Recopilación de fragmentos, traducción, introducción y notas, Universidad de Cádiz, Cádiz

by Simmons in the fourth chapter (pp. 52-91) in which the author argues that the treatise was composed by the philosopher of Tyre around 300 A.D.,¹⁵ that is, a few years before the *Philosophia ex oraculis*, and also – as the oracular work – the *Contra Christianos* is important for the issue of salvation in Porphyry's thought. After showing data concerning the life and works of these authors from which are derived the fragments attributable to the *Contra Christianos*, focusing on Eusebius, Simmons notes that in addition to the works of the bishop of Caesarea, the *Demonstratio evangelica*, the *Preparatio evangelica*, and the *Historia ecclesiae*, there is an apologetic work called *Theophania*,¹⁶ written probably around 337-338 A.D., which is «one of the most neglected works in the history of patristic scholarship. Only a few fragments of the original Greek text are extant, but the *Theophany* survives in a Syriac translation of the fifth century. Since very little has ever been written on this apology of Eusebius since the 1840s, it is significant for an understanding of the response of the bishop of Caesarea to Porphyry's works. [...] The *Theophany* is very significant not only for understanding Eusebian soteriology, but also for the Pagan-Christian debate on universalism at the end of the Constantinian Age» (p. 65). Simmons in this section claims that the criticism of the philosopher of Tyre to the Christian doctrines is contained within a polemical argument in which Porphyry aims to prove that Christ is not the only way to salvation of souls, as Augustine reports,¹⁷ quoting the work *De regressu animae*. Indeed, according to Simmons, it is possible that the latter was written before the *Contra Christianos*, that is around 290 A.D., and in the work against the Christians, that is in 300 A.D., the philosopher resumes some themes of the *De regressu animae*, as he did a few years later, that is around 302-303 A.D. in the *Philosophia ex oraculis*. Therefore Simmons concludes that «one of the main themes which Porphyry

2006; G. MUSCOLINO (cur.), *Porfirio, Contro i cristiani*, nell'edizione di A. von Harnack, Bompiani, Milano 2010²); ID., *L'Apocritico di Macario di Magnesia: un dialogo polemico o un'apologia?*, in «*Mediaeval Sophia. Studi e ricerche sui saperi medievali*» 8 (2010), pp. 75-92; A. MAGNY, *Porphyry in Fragments: Jerome, Harnack and the Problem of Reconstruction*, in «*Journal of Early Christian Studies*» 18/4 (2010), pp. 515-555; S. MORLET (ed.), *Le traité de Porphyre Contre les Chrétiens. Un siècle de recherches, nouvelles questions*, Actes du Colloque international organisé les 8 et 9 septembre 2009 à l'Université de Paris IV-Sorbonne, Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, Paris 2011; A. MAGNY, *Porphyry in Fragments: Reception of an Anti-Christian Text in Late Antiquity. Ashgate studies in philosophy and theology in late antiquity*. Farnham, Ashgate, Burlington VT 2014; M. BECKER, *Porphyrios, "Contra Christianos"*. Neue Sammlung der Fragmente, Testimonien und Dubia mit Einleitung, Übersetzung und Anmerkungen (Texte und Kommentare, 52), De Gruyter, Berlin 2015.

¹⁵ Cf. R. M. BERCHMAN, *Porphyry, Against the Christians*, cit., p. 3; E. A. RAMOS JURADO et al. (eds.), *Porfirio de Tiro, Contra los Cristianos*, cit., pp. 32-36; G. MUSCOLINO (cur.), *Porfirio, Contro i cristiani*, cit., p. 36; ID., *Porfirio: il Contra Christianos. Per una nuova edizione dei frammenti*, cit. pp. 107-110; A. MAGNY, *Porphyry in Fragments*, cit., pp. 14-20; M. BECKER, *Porphyrios, "Contra Christianos"*, cit., pp. 22-27.

¹⁶ Cf. M. B. SIMMONS, «Universalism in Eusebius of Caesarea: The Soteriological Use of "The divine power of the Saviour of us all" in Book III of the *Theophany*», in M. VINZENT-L. MELLERIN-H. A. G. HOUGHTON, *Studia Patristica*, Vol. LIV, Peeters Publishers, Leuven 2013, pp. 1-9.

¹⁷ Cf. Aug., *De civ. dei*, X, 32.

addressed in the *Contra Christianos* was Christian universalism, albeit in a negative sense, characterized by the polemical method of proactively disparaging the most important soteriological doctrines to show that the Christians' claim to universalism are absolutely false» (p. 89).

In the fifth chapter (pp. 92-104) Simmons analyzes the relationship between Porphyry and Eusebius, and highlights that the *Theophany* of the bishop of Caesarea is «certainly one of the most neglected works in the history of patristic scholarship» (p. 92). Simmons analyzes data on the history and historiography of this work, now lost in its original form in Greek – of which only a few fragments are extant – and has survived only in a version translated into Syriac, in which there are interesting passages on Eusebius' thought. For example, in the *Theophany*, the bishop of Caesarea, identifying Christian heretics, mentions Marcion, Valentinian, Basilides, Bardesanes, Mani, Simon Magus, Montanus, but not Arius (p. 319, 39). In the fifth book of *Theophany* (V, 2) Simmons highlights a passage in which he speaks about the new men that the author connects to the *virii novi* of Arnobius (*Adv. Nat.* II, 15), who – according to Simmons – could refer to Porphyry (p. 98). Similarly Simmons points out that in the fifth book of *Theophany* the expression *the common Saviour of all* could be a reply given by the Bishop of Caesarea to the philosopher of Tyre on the issue of salvation. Indeed, while Porphyry answers negatively to the question posed in the *De regressu animae*, that is whether there exists a universal way of salvation for all – proposing several possible ways – for Christianity, conversely, there exists only one way to universal salvation, represented by Christ. Therefore, Simmons argues that the *Theophany* is a very important work within the theme of universal salvation in the debate between paganism and Christianity.

In the sixth chapter (pp. 107-125) is shown the meaning of salvation within the Greek-Roman context. Simmons in this section focuses on a passage from Augustine (*De civ. dei*, X, 28), which recites «*posse continentiae virtute purgari*» in which he argues that the bishop of Hippo, referring to the philosopher of Tyre, is pointing to the virtue of continence as a possible way of salvation presented by Porphyry. Basing his research on the *Letter to Marcella* and on the *Sentences*, Simmons argues that the data provided by the Bishop of Hippo on the attempt made by Porphyry to find a universal way of salvation in opposition to Christianity, are very accurate. Starting from the analysis of the virtues of the *scala virtutum* in *Sententia* 32, the four classes of virtues are: 1) civil; 2) purificatory; 3) contemplative; 4) exemplary. Each one contains the four cardinal virtues of Platonism: 1) prudence; 2) courage; 3) temperance; 4) justice (pp. 114-115). According to Simmons, the third way of salvation indicated by Porphyry would correspond, on the *scala virtutum*, to the purificatory or cathartic virtues. Therefore the *continentia*, indicated by Augustine, would correspond to σωφροσύνη, while the verb *purgari* corresponds to καθαρίζω/κάθαρσις. As a result of the analysis of *continentia*/σωφροσύνη Simmons argues that the exercise of this virtue, in Porphyry's tripartite system of salvation, is related to the second way practiced by novice philosophers who use continence to purify the soul from the body's passions (p. 125).

In the seventh chapter (pp. 126-133) Simmons returns to the problems of the text of the *Philosophia ex oraculis*, according to Wolff's edition, arguing that the *Letter to*

Anebo and *De regressu animae* are earlier than the oracular treatise, that is – according to Simmons – around 302-303 A.D., the three books of the *Philosophia ex oraculis* articulated Porphyry's tripartite system of salvation: the first book would be directed to the salvation of the masses, the second to novice philosophers, the third to mature Neoplatonic philosophers.

In the eighth chapter (pp. 134-158) Simmons, comparing the doctrines of Porphyry and Iamblichus, sketches a picture, focusing his attention on the different concepts of salvation between the philosopher of Tyre and his pupil, especially for the role and the importance of theurgy within of the thought of the two philosophers.

The ninth chapter of the book deals with the eschatological problem and contains an interesting definition of the Platonic myth. Indeed Simmons argues that «we can define *myth* as a story perceived to be true, or containing truth, parts of which were supplied by older sources that contained poetic and symbolic meaning of deeper spiritual truth upon which Plato philosophically elaborated for his own purposes» (pp. 160-161). Simmons points out very correctly that the eschatology of Porphyry is indebted to the Chaldean cosmological vision of the universe divided into three distinct levels. After death the soul of those who were not philosophers, which is purified through the practice of theurgy – distinct from sorcery or black magic¹⁸ –, ascends to the Ether, while the soul of novice philosophers also reaches the Ether, but in this case, due to the practice of *continentia*. Simmons also notes that the use of the verb *purgari* does not imply in the rational soul a kind of purification from some stain or sin, but only that there has been a separation «of the mind from the temporal to the intelligible realms by means of discursive thought» (p. 172). Only a few souls, those of the philosophers who in life have practiced philosophy, attain to God, due to the purification of the rational part of the soul.¹⁹ Porphyry is conscious that in this life the soul cannot reach the *perfectio sapientiae*, but those who in life live according to the intellect and rationality, after death, can reach the intelligible realm by God's providence and grace.²⁰ Simmons concludes this chapter on eschatology highlighting that Porphyry has taken the liberty to tweak the original Platonic doctrine of the continual cycle of reincarnation of souls in order to align its policies on the definitive liberation of them from the cycle of rebirth. Iamblicus instead agrees to the conventional hermeneutical method that interprets the myth as the cycle of rebirth of souls which has no escape (p. 181).

In the tenth chapter (pp. 187-197) Simmons, analyzing the historical events of the empire from Caracalla to Constantine, argues that in politically and economically difficult times, and due to the stressful challenges of the environment, Christianity presented itself as a more accessible and cheaper religion than the polytheistic cults of the empire.

¹⁸ Cf. G. MUSCOLINO, *The Eastern contamination on the Porphyrian Thought in the Philosophy from Oracles: Magic, Demonology, Theurgy*, in «Mediaeval Sophia. Studi e ricerche sui saperi medievali» 13 (2013), pp. 126-139; Id., *Porphyry and Black Magic*, in «The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition» 9 (2015), pp. 146-158.

¹⁹ Cf. Porph., *Vita Plotini*, 23.

²⁰ Cf. August., *De civ. dei*, X, 29.

Indeed, the rites and cults of the ancestral religions required more public and private costs. Simmons also notes that in the period between 260 and 300 A.D. Porphyry's literary production increased to try to stem the new religion (p. 189). Indeed after the death of Alexander Severus (235 A.D.), which led to the last imperial dynasty until the restoration of Constantine in 325 A.D., the emperors needed to use religion as a unifying agent for an empire «that was quickly coming unglued» (p. 191).²¹ But it was under Aurelian's policy that the concept of political-religious unification reached its *apex*: on the one hand, the military victories of the Illyrian allowed the emperor to reunify the empire broken in two parts, one of which was located to the East, to Palmira under the reign of the Queen Zenobia,²² and the other to the West, in the *Imperium Galliarum*.²³ On the other side, with the building of the cult of *Sol Invictus*, Aurelian unified all religions gravitating within the empire with this *all embracing* deity, to which all the other cults were linked as the sun's rays to their source,²⁴ thus becoming *diversae virtutes solis*.²⁵ Furthermore, because the illyrian emperor was the first of the Roman emperors to identify himself with the Sun God which became the image on Earth,²⁶ therefore, Simmons concludes that «Aurelian attempted to transform his predecessors' *Weltreligion* into a *Universalerlösung* conferred

²¹ Cf. G. MUSCOLINO, *Porfirio: la Philosophia ex oraculis*, cit., pp. 83; 386; 393.

²² Cf. *Vita Aureliani*, XXVI, 6-XXVII, 6; XXVIII, 1.

²³ Cf. *Vita Aureliani*, XXXII, 3-4; *Vitae XXX Tyran.*, XXIV, 2-3; Aur. Vic., *Caes.*, XXV, 3-5; XXXV, 1; Eutr., IX, 13, 1-2; Oros., VII, 23, 5.

²⁴ Cf. F. CUMONT, *Le religioni orientali nel paganesimo romano*, trad. it., Laterza, Bari 1967, pp. 225-226; B. M. DI DARIO, *Il Sole Invincibile. Aureliano riformatore politico e religioso*, Edizioni di AR, Padova 2002, pp. 75-77; G. MUSCOLINO, *Porfirio: la Philosophia ex oraculis*, cit., pp. 37-40, 383-384.

²⁵ Porphyry, during the reign of Aurelian, probably wrote a work entitled *Del sole*, now extant in fragments which remain in Servio (Buc., V, 66) and Macrobius (*De somn.*, I, 17, 7). An important attempt to rebuild the work is done by F. ALTHEIM (*Aus Spätantike und Christentum*, Niemeyer, Tübingen 1951) which, in the first part of the book entitled *Porphyrios' Schrift über den Sonnengott* (pp. 1-58) analyzes the solar theology of Porphyry starting from the testimony of Servius, Macrobius and Julian. According to Macrobius (*De somn.*, I, 17, 7), the Sun would be at the top of the planets whose divinity system before it, is no more than *diversae virtutes solis*, so that the correct name for the sun would correspond etymologically to the name of the god Apollo because it is *unique and not many* (ὅτι μόνος ἐστὶ καὶ οὐχὶ πολλοί), as the word One is precisely *not-many*. In the writing of Julian entitled *To the Helios King* the Sun is not the supreme god, as it was for Porphyry, but should rather be identified with the demiurge, and this demonstrates the mediation of Iamblichus. An interesting historical context of the work is done by F. Altheim who argues that the Porphyrian heliolatry correspond to the imperial policy of Aurelian, and with mythical tales within the Hermeticism, the Gnosticism and Manichaeism, and later in Christianity and in the Muslim theology of Ibn Muqaffa and Ibn al-Kalbi. In 1966 F. ALTHEIM with R. STEHL («Porphyrios' Schrift über die Sonne», in *Die Araber in der Alten Welt III: Anfänge der Dichtung - Der Sonnengott - Buchreligionen*, Berlin 1966, pp. 198-243) provide an in depth study on *De Sole*, analyzing the Latin text of Macrobius (pp. 217-240) in which, according to the authors, there is clear evidence for the dependence of Macrobius on the Porphyrian text. Cf. H. COHEN, «Le catalogue des monnaies d'Aurélien», in *Description historique des monnaies frappées sous l'empire romain*, t. 1, Paris 1886, p. 44, n. 73; A. PIGANIOL, *Histoire de Rome* (collection Clio), Les Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1939, p. 239; B. M. DI DARIO, *Il Sole Invincibile. Aureliano riformatore politico e religioso*, cit., p. 96.

²⁶ Cf. B. M. DI DARIO, *Il Sole Invincibile. Aureliano riformatore politico e religioso*, cit., p. 75.

by *Sol*, and thus brought his besieged state closer to the ideal of One God, One Emperor, One Empire» (p. 193). The analysis of Simmons continues with the emperors Diocletian and Constantine who, unlike his predecessors, recognized Christianity in the so-called Edict of Milan in 313 A.D., as a *religio licita*, requiring a few years later the dogmatic and religious unification of Christianity that would be implemented during the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D.

In the eleventh chapter (pp. 198-209), comparing Christianity with the cults practiced by polytheistic citizens, Simmons lists in detail «ten salient features of Christian universalism that contributed to the ultimate triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire» (p. 198), and analyzes some cults in Roman *ecumene* as the worship of Isis and Osiris, the adoration of Mithra, the devotion to Cybele, the cult of *Sol invictus*, and the civic religion of Rome. At the end of his analysis Simmons concludes that only Christianity offers universal salvation to mankind, regardless of the individual's political, economic and social status. This is one of the most important causes that emerges from the empire of Constantine.

In the twelfth chapter (pp. 210-226) Simmons summarizes the topics discussed in his study, focusing his attention on the concept of salvation in Porphyry opposed to the topics present in Christianity, as we shall see in detail shortly.

Simmons adds to his study eight appendices:

1. Appendix I (pp. 227-231) is entitled: *Porphyry's Philosophia ex oraculis Fragments from Smith (1993a)*. In this point every book of the *Philosophia* is related to each fragment according to Smith's edition.
2. Appendix II (pp. 233-235) is entitled: *Occurrences of Universalism in the Praeparatio evangelica*. Simmons finds 187 occurrences of the universalism in the *Praeparatio evangelica*.
3. Appendix III (p. 237-241) is entitled: *Occurrences of Universalism per book in the Demonstratio evangelica of Eusebius of Caesarea*.
4. Appendix IV (pp. 243-245) is entitled: *The Ten Subthemes of Universalism found in the Praeparatio evangelica*.
5. Appendix V (pp. 247-250) is entitled: *Subthemes of Universalism found in the Demonstratio evangelica*.
6. Appendix VI (pp. 251-253) is entitled: *The occurrences of Universalism per Book of the Theophany*.
7. Appendix VII (pp. 255-260) is entitled: *The Scriptural Citations in Book 4 of the Theophany*.
8. Appendix VIII (pp. 261-267) is entitled: *The Parallel Passages from Theophany V and the Demonstratio evangelica*.

The Study of Simmons ends with a good number of footnotes per sections (pp. 269-396), a bibliography updated (pp. 397-477), and a useful final index (pp. 479-491).

The central issue of the book concerns universal salvation in late antiquity and the questions posed for the first time in Neo-Platonism by Porphyry. The philosopher of Tyre, in fact, according to the testimony given by a passage of Augustine (*De civ. dei*, X, 32), in the work entitled *De regressu animae*, asks whether there exists a uni-

versal way for the salvation of mankind. The answer given by the philosopher is negative and Simmons, concerning the problem of salvation, finds in the works of Porphyry a tripartite system directed to different categories of men. Finally, Simmons compares the Porphyrian system with the Christian idea of salvation.

Simmons finds in the Porphyrian system three different ways related to three categories of men:

1) the first way, the lower, is directed to the masses, that is, to those people who in their life have not practiced philosophy. They do not have access to the highest levels of purification of the soul through the so-called rational soul, but they can purify the lower part of the soul, called irrational soul or spiritual soul which, during the descent on to the earth, is contained within the pneumatic vehicle or ὄχημα-πνεῦμα.²⁷ This part of the soul can be purified by theurgy, by the *telete* or *teletai*²⁸ – that is rituals of purification – and by the ceremonies of the polytheistic religion. Simmons believes that this way is addressed in the first book of the *Philosophia ex oraculis*, the *De stautis* and the *Epistula ad Anebonem* (pp. 24-27).

2) The second way or intermediary path, is aimed at the inexperienced or novice philosophers, that is, to that man who needs to train the body, separate it from the passions and teach the soul to move from the corporeal realm to the Intelligible realm. In this way it is possible to practice *continentia* or σωφροσύνη by means of the purificatory virtues (*Sententia* 32). The second way is conceived as a struggle that includes difficult and painful experiences, in which the novice philosopher must abandon the pleasures of the body. This way allows the young philosopher on the one hand to participate in traditional religious worship, as we read in the *Epistula ad Marcellam* (18), and the possibility to make animal sacrifices, as required by the civic tradition. On the other hand, thanks to the practice of *continentia*/σωφροσύνη, the progressive detachment of the soul from the body. Also in this intermediary way the purification of the lowest part of the soul is possible, that is, the irrational soul, primarily by means of *continentia*. This second way or intermediary level is found by Simmons within the second book of *Philosophia ex oraculis*, the *Epistula ad Marcellam*, the *Vita Pythagorae*, the *Sententiae ad intelligibilia ducentes*, the *De abstinentia*, the *Commentary to the Harmonics of Ptolemy*, and the *De antro nympharum* (pp. 27-30).

3) The third way is only for mature philosophers, those who during life have devoted themselves to philosophy, which can purify the soul through rational discursive thought. This third way includes the practice of contemplative virtue, and the focus towards Νοῦς of the paradigmatic virtues who turn to the One. For these philosophers it is absolutely forbidden to practice animal sacrifices²⁹ and the activities concerning

²⁷ Cf. G. MUSCOLINO, *La demonologia di Porfirio e il culto di Mitra*, in «Mediaeval Sophia. Studi e ricerche sui saperi medievali» 7 (2010), pp. 103-104.

²⁸ Cf. Aug., *De civ. dei*, X 23, 1-9; X 9, 20-35; X 28, 8-11; G. MUSCOLINO, *Porfirio, La filosofia rivelata dagli oracoli*, cit., pp. CLXXXIII-CLXXXIV.

²⁹ Cf. Porph., *De abst.*, II, 33-34.

religious cults.³⁰ According to Simmons this third way is addressed in the third book of the *Philosophia ex oraculis*, the *Enneads*, within the *Commentaries to the Platonic dialogues*, the *Isagoge to the categories of Aristotle* and within the *Vita Plotini* (pp. 30-31).³¹

The impossibility of Porphyry to find a universal way for the salvation of the soul is opposed to Christianity which shows Christ as the only way of salvation for mankind.

The great merit of this study is the originality of Simmons who highlights a fundamental problem, which became central during the third century: universal salvation, or one way of salvation for all people. In an era of great changes and mutations, because of the becoming unsteady of some political, economic and social *certainties*, the issue of salvation worried Porphyry who, thanks to his great intelligence and sensitivity, posed the question whether there existed a universal way of salvation. Simmons, starting from this point in his study, presents all the relationships between salvation and the period of the crisis of the Roman Empire during the third century A.D. Undoubtedly in the development of the topics there remain some outstanding issues, not due to the fault of Simmons, but because of the fragmented nature of many works of Porphyry. Many compositions, indeed, are now extant only in fragments and through the testimony of Christian authors who had the only aim to use some Porfirian passages to slander the philosopher of Tyre and Greek-Roman culture in generally, rather than faithfully reporting the real meaning of the text. Because of this fragmentary state of most of his works, it is impossible definitively to solve certain problems well known by scholars of Porphyry such as:

1. the dating of his works,
2. the existence or not of a work entitled *Contra Christianos*,
3. the identification of Porphyry with the *antistes philosophiae* mentioned by Lactantius,³²
4. the involvement or not of the philosopher of Tyre in the *Concilium principis* arranged by Diclezian before the persecution of 303 A.D.,
5. the reasons for the decadence of the Roman Empire and the victory of Christianity.³³

Simmons, despite the lack of the texts and the shortage of data, takes a position on these issues, without attempting to give a definitive answer.

For what I have presented, for the comprehensiveness of the content and for the originality of the issue, I consider this study very good and indispensable for the Porphyrian scholars and specialists of Late Antiquity.

³⁰ Cf. Porph., *Vita Plotini*, 10, 35-36.

³¹ Cf. Porph., *Vita Plotini*, 23.

³² Cf. Lact., *Div. Inst.*, V 3, 19; G. MUSCOLINO, *Porfirio: la Philosophia ex oraculis*, cit., pp. 65-67.

³³ A. DEMANDT (*Der Fall Roms. Die Auflösung des Römischen Reiches im Urteil der Nachwelt*, München 1984) has collected more than two hundred different explanations given on the issue of decadence of the Roman Empire and the victory of Christianity. See also R. MACMULLEN, *Enemies of the roman Order. Treason, Unrest and Alienation in the Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 1966; Id., *Changes in the Roman Empire. Essays in the ordinary*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1990.