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**CREATION, SALVATION, AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE.
SOME REMARKS ON THE THEOLOGICAL ORIGINS
OF THE COSMOPOLITAN POWER IN THE THOUGHT
OF PAUL OROSIUS**

Introduction

The question of the formulation of a universalist concept of power in the thought of Orosius¹ has been the subject of numerous analyses in the history of ideas². The consensus among scholars is that the author of *History Against the Pagans*³

¹ The author in question was a Spanish priest who emigrated from his homeland to North Africa in the early fifth century, where he came into close contact with Saint Augustine. Influenced by the latter, he wrote the *History Against the Pagans*, an account of the history of the world from the creation of the world to the reign of the Emperor Honorius. More on the biography of Orosius: B. Altaner, A. Stuiber, *Patrologia*, Warszawa 1990, p. 325; R. Suski, *Orozjusz i jego źródła*, Białystok 2023, p. 18; K. Obyrcycki, *Życie i działalność literacka Orozjusza*, "Vox Patrum" 1987, No. 7, pp. 308–324. On the relationship between Orosius and Augustine: E. Corsini, *Introduzione alle "Storie" di Orosio*, Torino 1968, p. 199; P. Martínez Caveró, *Orosio historiador "Adversus paganos" Orosio u Agustín, la estructura de las historias (cuatro fórmulas de una historia universal), la ideología histórico-política*, "Antigüedad y cristianismo, Monografías históricas sobre la Antigüedad tardía" 2002, No. 19, pp. 151–154.

² M. Tomaszewicz, *Koncepcja państwa i władcy w myśli politycznej Pawła Orozjusza*, "Kra-kowskie Studia z Historii Państwa i Prawa" 2020, Vol. 13, Issue 4, pp. 443–468; E. Peterson, *Monoteizm jako problem polityczny*, "Respublica Nowa" 2012, No. 20, p. 55 et seq.; R. Suski, *Szczepienie historii. Wpisanie przez Orozjusza historii Rzymu w historię Zbawienia [in:] Male miasta, Duchowość kanoniczna. Księdzu Profesorowi Januszowi Mariańskiemu w osiemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin z uznaniem i wdzięcznością*, ed. M. Zemło, Białystok–Supraśl 2020, pp. 57–78; H. Sproll, *Die Inkarnation des Logos in der <Pax Augusta> als eschatologische <Fülle der Zeit> (Gal 4,4): Jesus Christus als <Civis Romanus> im heilsgeschichtlichen Diskurs des Orosius*, "Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte" 2017, Vol. 111, pp. 247–265.

³ This work was written as a companion to Augustine of Hippo's *City of God*. Unlike his master, however, Orosius did not concentrate on describing the growth of the mystical community of the saved, but sought to show that humanity suffered far greater calamities and wickedness in pagan times than during the reign of the Christian emperors. Orosius, *History Against the Pagans*,

ascribed a pivotal role to the Roman Empire. The parallels drawn by Orosius between the beginning of Augustus' reign and the birth of Christ, which link the *Pax Romana* and the *Pax Christiana* and thus allow the formulation of the ethos of the good ruler, have been recognised and described in many disciplines. This may give the impression that the discussion is now concluded and that no further original insights can be added. However, this is not a fully justified conclusion. A cursory examination of the extensive literature on the subject reveals that the majority of researchers aim to describe Orosius' position by focusing almost exclusively on a literal analysis of the historical material. Alternatively, they compare the conception of empire that emerges from the pages of *History Against the Pagans* to the considerations of other authors, in particular Augustine and Eusebius of Caesarea.

This does not mean, however, that the present text aims at a polemic on Orosius' interpretation of the universality of the empire. On the contrary, while acknowledging the validity of the positions put forward by leading scholars, it seeks to complement them with an aspect that has not been sufficiently emphasised. The perceived gap concerns the answer to the question: which specific theological figures and how did they influence Orosius' conviction that the Roman Empire was not categorically one of many other states, but had a legitimate claim to universal authority?

The following argument will therefore focus not so much on the presentation of the concept of the universal authority in Orosius' thought, but rather on tracing the protological and soteriological arguments that lead to the definition of the nature of this authority. The research hypothesis can thus be summarised as follows: Paul Orosius derived the concept of imperial universalism from two figures from the field of dogmatic theology, namely creation and salvation. Their inclusion in the concept of empire clearly projected the universality of the power of the Roman emperors.

In examining Orosius' political thought from this point of view, it is important to consider the extent to which the ecumene, subject to the authority of the Roman emperors, was perceived: firstly, as a universe, and secondly, as a recipient of the promise of salvation. This topic seems to be of interest inasmuch as the historiography of the author under discussion can be seen to have had a significant influence on the scholarship of the Middle Ages, as a great and attractive source of knowledge about ancient history⁴. It also fits in with the study of the structure of views on universal authority in medieval and later thought.

prol. 11, trans. R.J. Deferrari, Catholic University of America Press 1964, p. 4; A.A. Murphy, *Augustine and the Rhetoric of Roman Decline*, "History of Political Thought" 2005, Vol. 26, No. 4, p. 603; K. Löwith, *Historia powszechna i dzieje zbawienia*, Kęty 2002, p. 168; W.E. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Decline of the Roman Empire*, Princetown 1968, p. 146 et seq.

⁴ W. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Decline...*, p. 158 et seq.; D.E. Kelley, *Faces of History, Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder*, Yale University Press 1998, p. 105; E.L. Fortin, *Augustine's "City of God" and the Modern Historical Consciousness*, "Review of Politics" 1979, Vol. 41,

The text discusses Orosius' political thought, exposing not so much his definitive findings on the universality and historical role of cosmopolitan government, but rather the theological schema that influenced Orosius' views. In other words, the Spanish priest's line of reasoning will be reconstructed, proceeding from theology to politics and consisting in a hermeneutical combination of theological and political motives. This allowed him to derive conclusions of a systemic nature, namely the justification of the idea of a universal ruler.

It should be remembered that the theistic component of the universe played an important role in the mentality of medieval people, for theology provided the framework for political thinking. Therefore, any attempt to reconstruct the views of the people of that epoch that omits this aspect or treats it in a contributory way is open to a serious charge of anachronism. The same applies to a superficial reading of the theological concepts that guided the socio-political thought of medieval authors. Often only the pastoral level is perceived, enriched by simple biblical explanations. What is missing is a broader reflection from the field of dogmatic theology.

Universal history as the history of great empires

It is evident that the concept of a universal kingdom has gained significant popularity since the Hellenistic period. Even Aristotle, as evidenced in his *Politics*, was unaware of the profound changes brought about by the expansion of Alexander of Macedon. The philosopher's search for the ideal form of government oscillates around the polis as the most appropriate form of political organisation for citizens. The figure of the Stagirite marks the end of the period of theoretical reflection on the organisational form of the city-state. Simultaneously, an entirely new quality of socio-political life – a multicultural and multinational Macedonian empire – enters the historical scene.

Admittedly, there were great states long before the Hellenistic period, referred to in literature as the Eastern Despots. Their presence on the historical stage has been noticed not so much by the Greek philosophers, but by historiographers. This is reflected in their periodisation of world history based on the dominance of successive powers. We can already see this process in Herodotus, and later in other Greek historians such as Ctesias⁵ or Dionysius of Halicarnassus. The latter mentions in turn Assyria, Media, Persia and Macedonia, which

No. 3, p. 330; H.-I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin, Orose et l'augustinisme historique*, "La storiografia altomedievale. Settimane di Studi del Centro Italiano sull'Alto Medioevo" 1970, No. 17, pp. 64–65; M. Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History*, Manchester 2012, p. 47; M.-P. Arnaud-Lindet, *Orose, Histoires contre païens*, Vol. 1, Paris 1990, p. LXVII.

⁵ R. Suski, *Orozjusz i jego źródła*, p. 52.

was then defeated by Rome. He notes that each successive state was more powerful than the previous one⁶. The concept of changing world powers (*translatio imperii*) is also found among Roman historians. It was used by Valerius Paternus, Pompey Trogus and Justin⁷.

In Christianity, however, the succession of empires has taken on a deeper theological meaning, derived from the revelation in the Book of Daniel. The question of world power appears in the passage where Daniel explains Nebuchadnezzar's dream [Dan 2:31–35]. The inspired prophet foretells that a state will emerge on the stage of history to which all nations will be subject and which will not be destroyed [Dan. 2:36–45]. The author of the book also returns to this concept in the vision of the four beasts. The terrible beasts appear one after the other, with the fourth of the beasts symbolising the most powerful kingdom, whose extent covers the whole earth. It will appear as a great persecutor of the faithful, for which it will receive deserved punishment, while after its fall the holy people will take over [Dan 7:3–7; 15–28]. Allegorical interpretations of the apocalyptic events of the Book of Daniel have been an inspiration to Christian writers. In the time of Orosius, the four great powers are found in Jerome, who mentions Babylon, Persia with Media, Macedonia and Rome. This scheme is also used by Augustine (Assyria, Persia, Macedonia and Rome)⁸.

Orosius also notes that world history is an arena for the rule of great powers. Following the example of other historians, he mentions four states, but his choice is quite original. In the beginning there was the Babylonian Empire, then the Macedonian Empire, then the African or Carthaginian Empire, and finally the Roman Empire⁹. Another element that also characterises Orosius' thought is the ordering of powers on a geographical level. The Babylonian state was in the east, the Macedonian in the north, the African in the south and the Roman in the west¹⁰. Finally, it is worth noting that Orosius links the periodisation based on the four powers to the mysticism of numbers, and in particular to the number seven. He writes as follows:

The Carthaginian Empire, from its founding until its overthrow, lasted a little more than seven hundred years, likewise the Macedonian Empire, from Caranus to Perses, a little less than seven hundred; yet both will be terminated by the number seven, by which all

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 52.

⁷ *Ibidem*; I. Lewandowski, *Historiografia rzymska*, Poznań 2007, p. 244.

⁸ Augustinus, *De Civitate Dei* XX, 23, J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 41, Paris 1864, col. 695.

⁹ Orosius, *History...* II, 1, pp. 3–5.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*. According to Paolo Siniscalco, by detailing the rule of the four powers, Orosius gives meaning and purpose to universal history, and thus creates a historiographical thought. P. Siniscalco, *Le sacré et l'expérience de l'histoire Ammien Marcellin et Paul Orose*, "Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé" 1989, No. 48, pp. 360–361.

things are decided. Rome herself also, although she was continued to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with her Empire intact, nevertheless, she, too, had difficulty on meeting this number. For in the seven hundredth year of its foundation, a fire of uncertain origin destroyed fourteen of its districts, and, as Livy says, never was the city damaged by a greater conflagration [...]. I would be also to show that twice of this same number of years remained for Babylon, which, after more than fourteen hundred years, was finally captured by King Cyrus¹¹.

The following sections of the text present a series of examples demonstrating the mystical influence of the number seven on universal history. It is noteworthy that the incorporation of interpretations derived from the mysticism of numbers into arguments was not uncommon in the ancient era. In his work, Plato sought to establish a model for his ideal state based on numerical principles¹². Augustine also shared a fascination with the spiritual content of numbers. The bishop of Hippo based the periodisation of history on three, the number signifying God¹³. Seven, in turn, was the sign of the Holy Spirit, as well as a number symbolising creation¹⁴. The creation of the world was completed in seven days. Consequently, the number seven signifies completeness and closed wholeness.

Paul Orosius demonstrates a clear interest in the mysteries of this number¹⁵. This can be observed from the outset in the redaction of the *History Against the Pagans*, which is divided into seven books, each of which describes a separate epoch in the history of mankind. Of course, in this seven-epoch scheme, a proto-logical motif is audible. Indeed, the description of creation provides the matrix for universal history, where the seventh period corresponds to the fullness of time – the millennium. For Orosius, this period, crowning the whole of universal history, begins with the inauguration of the reign of Octavian Augustus, which in turn coincides with the birth of Christ. Consequently, the Christian era marks the conclusion of the historical process. At this juncture, another dimension to the semiotic depth of the number seven in Orosius becomes apparent: its connection with salvation. This conclusion is also supported by the observation made by the Spanish priest regarding the timing of the births of Abraham and Jesus Christ, noting that Abraham was born in the forty-third year of Ninus's reign,

¹¹ Paul Orosius, *History...* VII, 2, 9–12, pp. 286–287.

¹² B. Russel, *History of Western Philosophy*, New York 1945, p. 105.

¹³ Augustinus, *De Trinitate* IV, 4, 7–8, J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 42, Paris 1863, col. 892–893.

¹⁴ Augustinus, *De Civitate...* XI, 31; Augustinus, *De Catechizandis Rudibus* XXII, 39, J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 40, Paris 1863, col. 338; K. Obyrcki, *Znaczenie liczb w „Historii” Pawła Orozjusza*, “Roczniki Humanistyczne” 1996, No. 44, pp. 243–248.

¹⁵ F. Paschoud, *Roma Aeterna. Études sur le patriotisme Romain dans l'Occident latin à l'époque des grandes invasions*, Rome 1967, pp. 276–277.

while Christ was born in the forty-second year of Augustus's reign¹⁶. The aspect of salvation is particularly relevant here. The message of Orosius can be reconstructed as follows. The number seven, signifying completeness, is a number symbolising the entirety of creation. It therefore has an aspect of universality. However, it also symbolises salvation and is specifically linked to the fate of Rome. Thus, already at this stage, three motifs emerge whose interrelationships need to be developed: creation, salvation and the Roman empire.

The Roman Empire as a new creation

The theme of creation is already present in Book One *History Against the Pagans*, where Orosius provides a comprehensive description of the entire known universe, including its geographical lands and the numerous peoples who inhabit them¹⁷. This theme is further developed in the next book, which opens with a mention of the creation of the world and man by God¹⁸. It is noteworthy that immediately after providing this information, Orosius smoothly takes up the subject of the four powers, the most important of which is, of course, Rome¹⁹. Nevertheless, the information on creation also appears in the seventh book, which is of pivotal importance to the narrative as a whole. Orosius writes as follows in this book:

[...] one and true God, whom the Christian religion preaches, made the world and its creatures when He so willed, and through many separate acts set the universe in order, although He was not recognized in many of these acts, and that He established it for one purpose, when He was revealed by one event, and, at the same time made clear His power and patience by proofs of various kinds²⁰.

¹⁶ Orosius, *History*... VII, 2, 12 et seq.

¹⁷ *Ibidem* I, 2.

¹⁸ *Ibidem* II, 1, 1.

¹⁹ *Ibidem* II, 1, 3–5, p. 44: “[...] all power and all ordering are from God [...]. But if all powers are from God, how much the more are the kingdoms, from which the remaining powers proceed; but if the kingdoms are hostile to one another, how much better it is if some one be the greatest to which all the power of the other kingdoms is subject, such as the Babylonian kingdom was in the beginning and, then, the Macedonian afterward also, the African and, finally the Roman which remains up to this day, and by the same ineffable at the four cardinal points of the world, four chief kingdoms preeminent in distinct stages, namely: the Babylonian kingdom in the East, the Cartaginian in the South, the Macedonian in the North, and the Roman in the West”.

²⁰ *Ibidem* VII, 1, 1, p. 283: “Sufficientia, ut arbitror, documenta collecta sunt, quibus absque ullo arcano, quod paucorum fidelium est, probari de medio queat, unum illum et verum Deum, quem Christiana fides praedicat, et condidisse mundum creaturamque eius cum voluit, et disposuisse per multa, cum per multa ignoraretur, et confirmasse ad unum, cum per unicum declaratus est, simulque potentiam patientiamque eius multimodis argumentis eluxisse”. Orosius, *Historiarum adversus paganos libri septem* VII, 1, 1, J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 31, Paris 1846, col. 1059.

The above quote contains several crucial points. Firstly, it opens the seventh book, which describes the final period of history, the millennium. This is the time of grace, in which universal history reaches its final stage. Secondly, Orosius distances himself from chiliastic views, which saw the millennial kingdom of the righteous as a happy period where the saints would take earthly joys in the Heavenly Jerusalem. Rather, he adheres to the tradition of Hellenistic millenarism initiated by St. John²¹. For the author in question, the final period in history is primarily a time of dynamic spiritual growth of humanity, the expression of which is, of course, the spread of the Christian message. However, this circumstance cannot obscure the highly significant fact that the turn of the epochs is also associated with the political transformation of Rome. The instability of the Roman Republic is finally overcome, and peace returns to the Roman Empire under the protective gaze of Octavian Augustus.

It is important to note that, as Orosius begins his narrative about the imperial era, he makes a clear distinction between the view that the world was created by God in great diversity and the subsequent ordering of this diversity. This distinction allows him to draw a parallel between the moment of the work of creation at the dawn of history and the beginning of the seventh epoch, which he views as a new creation. In this way, a parallel is drawn between the moment of the work of creation at the dawn of history and the beginning of the seventh epoch, which begins to be seen as a new creation. However, the motif of order and disorder undoubtedly also has a political dimension, as it is a clear reference to the turmoil of the civil wars of the last century of the republic and the peaceful Augustan era. It should be noted that a motif of a cosmological nature echoes here as well. In the writings of Philo of Alexandria, there is a passage which proclaims that Octavian, in the likeness of the Platonic demiurge, brings order out of disorder²². A similar idea can be found in the writings of another Alexandrian, Origen²³. Philo's insight that the political order is intertwined with the cosmic order is also evident in the polemic that Origen engaged in with the pagan philosopher

²¹ The division between Hellenistic and Asiatic millenarianism was introduced by J. Daniélou. Asiatic millenarianism flowed mainly from Semitic circles and often identified the kingdom of the righteous as a purely temporal state. The spiritual dimension of the millennium, on the other hand, was a central feature of the Hellenistic version of Chiliazism. J. Daniélou, *La typologie millénariste de la semaine dans le christianisme primitif*, "Vigiliae Christianae" 1948, No. 2, pp. 1–16. St. John's eschatology leans towards the Hellenistic version, in the view of the author of the Apocalypse, the first resurrection is the acceptance of faith – and therefore takes place in a spiritual space.

²² Philo of Alexandria, *Legatio ad Gaium 147* [in:] E. Peterson, *Monoteizm jako problem...*, s. 43.

²³ Orosius was well acquainted with the thought of Origen. This is evidenced by one of his works, in which he polemicised the views of the Alexandrian. Orosius proved Orosius, *Consultatio sive commonitorium de errore proscilianistarum et origenistarum*, J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 31, col. 1211–1216.

Celsus. He protested against the thesis presented by his adversary that Christian monotheism is incompatible with the polytheism of the empire. In response, the Alexandrian theologian presents a new vision of the empire, in which all aspects of life are subordinated not only to one ruler, but also to the one God²⁴. It is evident that Origen's perspective is closely aligned with his soteriological concept, which emphasises the universality of salvation. It is noteworthy that this unity is also a motif that emerges in the quote under discussion in Orosius. The aforementioned considerations lead us to the conclusion that Orosius combines the issues of creation, salvation and empire.

In particular, the person of Octavian Augustus, as the one who brought peace to the vast expanses of the Empire, receives a great deal of attention. Orosius comments as follows:

[...] this peace and most tranquil serenity of the whole world existed, not by the greatness of Caesar, but by the of the Son of God, who appeared in the days of Caesar, and that the world itself, according to general knowledge obeyed, not the ruler of one city, but the Creator of whole world, who like the rising sun pervades the day with light, and thus by His coming mercifully clothed the world with prolonged peace²⁵.

In this passage, the motifs indicated above are expanded. Peace, which was an unquestionable merit of Augustus' policy, acquires a soteriological meaning. This is because it constitutes a reference to the messianic times. In the prophetic writings, the messiah appears as the Prince of Peace [Isaiah 9:5], while his kingdom is to be free of wars and feuds²⁶.

Isaiah presents a particularly vivid description of these future days [Isaiah 2:4]. Orosius uses the illustration of Messianic peace to emphasise that the era inaugurated by Augustus has special significance for salvation history. Moreover, the figure of the emperor himself is expanded. Octavian is no longer one of the many rulers whose rule extended over many peoples. He is juxtaposed with the creator of the entire Universe, i.e. God. In this way, the political transformation he accomplished is imbued with a sense of historical and salvific significance, while Octavian himself is elevated to the role of an obstetrician of divine plans. Moreover, in Orosius' narrative, the entire world appears to be endowed with a single will, which chooses without hesitation the political form of empire for its duration. This represents a merging of the universalism of creation with the universalism of one state and one power. If the world is constituted according to the regularity of the number seven, then it can be argued that the world assumes an organisational form of existence in the form of an empire and submits to the rule of a single emperor. Consequently, it can be posited that the Roman state also

²⁴ E. Peterson, *Monoteizm jako problem...*, p. 50 et seq.

²⁵ Orosius, *History...* III, 8, 8, p. 89.

²⁶ T. Jelonek, *Prorocy Starego Testamentu*, Kraków 2007, p. 128 et seq.

acquires the attribute of universalism. This assertion can also be illustrated elsewhere in the *History Against the Pagans*, where Orosius returns to link the motif of Rome with the universal.

In a comprehensive section of Book Three, we read the following:

under Augustus Caesar for the first time [...] the whole world having laid down its arms and abandoned its discords, composed in a general peace and new quiet, obeyed the laws of the Romans, preferred the laws of the Romans to their own arms, and, spurning their own leaders, elected Roman judges, finally (if it is established) that there was a single will with a free and honest zeal to serve the peace and consult the common good of all nations, entire provinces, innumerable cities, countless people, and the whole world²⁷.

In a further instance, in the fifth book, Orosius develops the theme of the cooperation of all peoples, persuading his reader that through the power of the Caesars, all humanity can cooperate for the common good²⁸. Further reading reveals that the Spanish priest's considerations are similar to those previously put forth by Origen. Namely, he sees this unity not only in the political dimension, but also in the sphere of religion.

However, a question arises as to whether a similar attribute of universality should not also be attributed to the earlier great empires. It seems that the question posed in this way must be answered in the negative. Indeed, what distinguishes Octavian's state from the other empires is its role in the plan of salvation.

Universalism of salvation and the Roman Empire

It has already been established that Caesar Augustus cannot be equated with other significant figures in the political landscape of antiquity. The distinctive nature of Augustus's legacy in Orosius's writings is not based on the grandeur of the state he established, but rather on the hermeneutical connection between creation and salvation. This point is of paramount importance to the Spanish priest's argument regarding the universal authority of the empire. In the earlier history of patristic reflection, Christian theologians identified a coincidence between the birth of Christ and the rule of Augustus²⁹. Orosius builds upon this idea, expanding it in his own way to give the prosperity of Rome Christological characteristics: "the Lord Christ first enlightened this world by His coming and granted Caesar the most peaceful reign"³⁰.

²⁷ Orosius, *History...* III, 8, 5–6, pp. 88–89.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, V, 1, 13, p. 175.

²⁹ E. Peterson, *Monoteizm jako problem...*, p. 51 et seq.

³⁰ Orosius, *History...* VI, 22, 9, p. 282; see also: VI.1.7; VI, 17, 10.

Elsewhere, the eccentricity of Rome is even more pronounced:

After this empire had long prospered under kings and consuls, and after it had gained possession of Asia, Africa and Europe, He conferred by his arrangement all things upon one and the same emperor, who was most powerful and merciful. Under this emperor, whom all people with mingled love and fear justly honoured, the true God, who was worshiped with scrupulous observances by those who did not know Him, opened the great fountain-head of His knowledge and, to teach men more quickly through a man, He sent His Son, performing miracles that surpassed the powers of man, refuting demons whom some thought to be gods, that those who did not believe in Him as a man might believe in His works as of a God; also that the glory of the new name and the swift report of the announced salvation might spread in the midst of the great silence and widespread peace³¹.

Another passage in which Christological connotations are visible is where Orosius states that on the day of Epiphany, Octavian held a triple triumph, closed the gates of the temple of Janus and was called by the highly eloquent name “Augustus”. As the Spanish priest points out, this name means that “the supreme power to rule the world is fawful”³². It is evident that the triple triumph is not a mere coincidence, but rather a clear indication that we are dealing with theological content. The closing of the gates of Janus, on the other hand, directs our attention to the track of peace and messianic times. The coincidence with the day of Epiphany completes the whole symbolic setting. It is worth noting that Orosius’ account is somewhat inaccurate, as the liturgical date of the feast did not coincide with the triumph of Octavian³³.

Nevertheless, even if Orosius was aware of the inaccuracies in his work, this does not negate the hypothesis that he was attempting to construct a political philosophy that espoused the universality of imperial power. The inclusion of the empire in the plan of salvation is evident from the author’s use of semiotic symbols. It is important to note that according to ecclesiastical orthodoxy (and therefore Orosius himself), the Christian message is not reserved for a select group of Gnostics, but is an offer to the entirety of creation. The addressee of Christ’s salvific work is the entire world, and thus every human being, under certain conditions, is capable of becoming a beneficiary of this offer. It can be argued that the Spanish priest’s linking of theological concepts of salvation with the figure of empire necessarily imbues the latter with an aspect of universality.

³¹ *Ibidem* VI, 1, 6–8, p. 229.

³² *Ibidem* VI, 20, 1–3, pp. 274–275: “Caesar Augustus [...] returning from the East as victor on the sixth of January entered the City with a triple triumph and, then, for the first time, since all civil wars had been put to sleep and been ended, he himself closed the gates of Janus. On this day, Ceasar was first saluted as Augustus, which name held been inviolate up to that time by all, and up to the present had not been presumed by other rulers and declares that the supreme power to rule the world is fawful. From the same day, the highest power in the state began to be in one man and has remained so, which the Greeks call monarchy”.

³³ R. Suski, *Szczepienie historii...*, p. 57.

Nevertheless, the most soteriological and messianic content is to be found in the passage where Orosius describes the circumstances of the assumption of power by Caesar Augustus.

When [M.T.] “Augustus entered the city, at about the third hour, though the sky was clear and cloudless, a circle in the appearance of a rainbow appeared around the orbit of the sun, as if to point out Augustus as the one and the most powerful man in this universe and the most renowned man in the world, in whose time He was to come who alone had made the sun itself and the whole world and was ruling them.

Then [...] Augustus [...] had restored thirty thousand slaves to their masters and [...] had decreed that all the former debts of the Roman people should be remitted and the records of account books also be restored, in those very days, a most abundant spring of oil, as I express it above, flowed for a whole day from an inn”³⁴.

In the subsequent sections, Orosius expands upon this idea, articulating it as follows:

And so, when at that time in which the tribunican power was decreed to Caesar forever a spring of oil flowed for a whole day in Rome, signs in the heaven and prodigies on earth revealed that under the principate of Caesar and under the Roman Empire throughout a whole day, namely, throughout the duration of the entire Roman Empire, Christ and from Him, Christians, that is, the Anointed One, and from Him, the anointed ones, would come forth in abundance and without cessation from an inn—from the hospitable and bountiful Church; that all slaves who, however, acknowledged their master should be restored by Caesar, and the others who were found without master should be given to death and punishment; and that the debts of sins should be remitted under Caesar in that City in which the oil had flowed spontaneously³⁵.

The opening reference to miraculous phenomena in the argument is a clear indication that the subsequent sections are not merely a recounting of certain facts, but also offer a deeper insight into the meaning and purpose of the historical events, and thus direct the reader’s attention to the mystical depth of the turn of history described next. Orosius describes the mysterious signs and prodigies that accompanied the inauguration of Augustus’ reign, indicating that they are not merely historical facts but should also be seen as indications of a greater divine plan. The judgement of the slaves, who were found to be strays, evokes associations with the motif of the judgement to come at the end of history. This alludes to the symbolism drawn from the Gospel of St. Matthew, where the moment of the coming of God’s kingdom is likened to the arrival of the bridegroom, who surprises the wise and foolish virgins [Matt. 25:1–13]. This is consistent with the Judgment motif, which originated in the Old Testament and was subsequently adopted by Christianity. Consequently, it can be posited that the

³⁴ Orosius, *History...* VI, 20, 5–6, p. 275.

³⁵ *Ibidem* VI 20, 7, p. 276.

reign of Octavian Augustus marks the commencement of the millennium. This theme is further reinforced by the information pertaining to the anointing, which is closely linked to the redemption of debts.

The amnesty of debts symbolises an element of the universal salvific will, which manifests itself by cutting off with a clear line what was from what is to come. This evokes associations with the new creation mentioned above. Nevertheless, it is evident that this theme is of greater depth and should be interpreted in conjunction with the reference to the breaking out of the olive spring and the information about the Anointed One and the Anointed Ones, expressed with clear emphasis. This anointing is another reference to the biblical figure of the messiah³⁶. The olive spring, on the other hand, is an element of clear supernatural provenance, has sacramentological connotations and is associated with Christian initiation³⁷. In essence, baptism represents a form of amnesty, a pardon for all sins committed in a previous life.

The above passage is noteworthy for its conflation of strictly political and soteriological motives. This may cause some discomfiture to the reader who anticipates finding in Orosius a comprehensive account of the factual history of antiquity. However, it is in no way surprising to addressees with broader philosophical and political interests. This apparent confusion of themes, in which the soteriological theme, illustrated extensively through the events surrounding the assumption of power by Caesar Augustus, is eventually highlighted, accesses justification through an interpretation that takes into account the previously discussed themes.

The ground for an adequate explanation is prepared by precisely profiling the meaning of the figure of world power in history. As demonstrated above, the fullness of creation, on both philosophical and political grounds, is developed by the pantocratic empire. However, the protological content-referencing explanation of the empire's world power does not satisfy Orosius, so he seeks additional legitimacy for the universalist claims he makes on behalf of the Roman state. He locates this legitimacy in soteriology, which he employs to substantiate the entirety of his argument. The empire, as defined by Augustus and subsequently ruled by the Caesars, with the potential to extend its authority over all the nations populating the inhabited world, is an integral element within the history of salvation. Although the notion of Roman rulers imposing laws upon all peoples is a clear fabrication in practice, it nevertheless opens the door to far-reaching imperial claims. If the meaning and purpose of universal history, as well as the political history of humanity, can be encapsulated in the postulate of salvation, then attributing soteriological significance to the empire elevates it above other world

³⁶ The Hebrew word "māšīah" means "anointed one". The Old Testament narrative links it to the eschatological figure of the ruler under whose rule the whole of creation will experience universal happiness. J. Schreiner, *Teologia Starego Testamentu*, Warszawa 1999, p. 400 et seq.

³⁷ Under Orosius, usually baptism was administered together with chrismation, or anointing. M. Blaza, D. Kowalczyk, *Traktat o sakramentach [w:] Dogmatyka*, Vol. 5, Warszawa 2007, p. 310.

powers. This transforms it into a modern monarchy, an extraordinary state that transcends the conventional notion of an empire, becoming a clearly defined embodiment of the realised kingdom of God within the temporal saeculum.

Conclusion

The concept of the universalism of imperial power outlined by the Spanish priest, although it cannot be read as a particularly original view, nevertheless has a rather interesting rationale. This is based, as it were, on a hermeneutic triad – creation, salvation and empire. First, the universalism of creation corresponds to the philosophical meaning of Augustus' work, which builds the world anew after numerous chaotic turmoils. Secondly, the universalism of creation corresponds to the universalism of God's salvation offer. In other words, if something is saved, at least potentially, it must fit within the organisational framework of the empire. In this way, Roman power is able to make universalist claims.

It is important to note that the concept of empire was derived from the rigid framework of the concept of a state, which was undoubtedly a significant one. However, it was limited by the Roman *limes* and could be considered a theoretical framework for a world hegemon. Ultimately, the derivation of the concept of empire was not based on cosmology but on soteriology. The defined vision of salvation provided the Roman Empire with the legitimacy for world dominion. Since salvation is a good addressed to all people, and the Empire, according to Orosius, is the fullest political form of provider of this message, it follows that the Empire should necessarily possess the attribute of universalism.

The arguments reaching back to soteriological content undoubtedly constitute one of the most important motives for the political doctrines of papal and imperial universalism of later eras. The conclusions presented above can thus be read as an introductory overview of the scope of Orosius' political thought in medieval universalist legal doctrines, including those of the Papacy and the Byzantine Empire.

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Summary

The central concept in Paulus Orosius's political reflections in the work, *History Against the Pagans*, is the universal power of the Roman emperors. This concept is part of a long tradition of Christian thinkers who granted universalistic value to empire. In this context, the question was posed: what theological arguments allowed Orosius to justify this authority? The course of the argument demonstrated that Orosius derived the legitimacy of the existence of a worldly centre of power, in this case the power of the Roman emperors, from theological findings, namely reflections on creation (protology) and salvation (soteriology).

Keywords: Orosius, universal power, political doctrines, history, theology

STWORZENIE, ZBAWIENIE ORAZ CESARSTWO RZYMSKIE. KILKA UWAG NA TEMAT TEOLOGICZNYCH ŹRÓDEŁ KOSMOPOLITYCZNEGO WŁADZTWA W MYŚLI PAWŁA OROZJUSZA

Streszczenie

W centrum rozważań politycznych Pawła Orozjusza, zawartych w dziele *Historia przeciw poganom*, stoi koncepcja uniwersalnej władzy cesarzy rzymskich. Tym samym Orozjusz wpisuje się w długą tradycję myślicieli chrześcijańskich, którzy przyznawali imperium walor uniwersalistyczny. W tym kontekście zostało postawione pytanie: Jakie argumenty teologiczne pozwoliły Orozjuszowi na uzasadnienie owej władzy? W toku wywodu wykazało, iż legitymizację istnienia światowego ośrodka władzy, w tym wypadku władzy rzymskich cesarzy, Orojusz wywiódł z ustaleń o charakterze teologicznym, a mianowicie z refleksji na temat stworzenia (protologii) oraz zbawienia (soteriologii).

Słowa kluczowe: Orojusz, uniwersalne władztwo, doktryny polityczne, historia, teologia