

THE VEIL ON MOSES' FACE, A CHARACTERISTIC FEATURE OF MOSAIC REVELATION

Abstract

This study examines the significance of the veil worn by Moses as a distinctive feature of the Mosaic revelation during his encounters with the divine. The veil, which covered Moses' radiant face, symbolizes both the fear and respect that the people of Israel had for the direct manifestation of God's glory, as well as the limitations of human understanding regarding God's goodness and greatness. Moses used the veil to shield the people from the brightness of his face—and, implicitly, from the divine glory itself. This action can be interpreted as a gesture of humility and care for the people's inability to perceive and fully comprehend that radiance. Additionally, the veil serves as a metaphor for the duality of divine communication—simultaneously concealing and revealing God's will. This duality reflects the complexity of the relationship between God and humanity in terms of revelation and concealment. Etymologically, the Hebrew term **מסוה** appears only in the context of Moses' veil, emphasizing its uniqueness and significance within the biblical narrative. Moses also plays a vital role as a symbolic mediator between the sacred and the profane. Through his veil, he acts as an intermediary, establishing the covenant with God while providing both a threshold for accessibility and a protective barrier. In rabbinic and patristic literature, Moses' veil is reinterpreted from a hermeneutical and soteriological perspective. Here, the themes of salvation and knowledge of God are conveyed through a symbolic and prophetic understanding of sacred texts, paving the way for subsequent teachings and revelations. Overall, this study highlights the complexity of the natural and supernatural in the Old Testament narrative through the lens of a physical veil. It serves as a precursor to the theological iconostasis, bridging the past and the future in an ongoing search for the divine.



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Introduction

The veil covering the face of the great lawgiver can be seen as a “characteristic feature of Moses” (Hochstein 2021, 3). Moses served as the vessel through which God delivered His Word, first inscribed in stone at Sinai, and later preparing, “in the fullness of time” (Gal 4:4), for the Incarnation of the Logos. This veil was meant to shield the brightness of Moses’ face, which, on one hand, instilled fear in the Israelites and, on the other hand, reflected the glory of God that remained visible on him.

To alleviate the people’s fear, Moses took a “simple and logical” approach: he covered his face. Even though it was the Israelites who were afraid, it was Moses who chose to veil himself, understanding that to “be with the people,” he needed to “hide” and wear a “mask,” all due to their vulnerability (Hochstein 2021, 2).

When Moses descended from Mount Sinai again with new tablets of the Law, he was unaware of the additional presence he bore that immediately struck fear in others. Like a mother soothing a frightened child, Moses had to gather the people around him, encouraging them to approach the divine glory rather than flee from it (Johnston 2022). Moses did not exploit the fear of the people; he neither turned it into an opportunity nor abused his authority (Marzouk 2025). Despite being “humble and timid,” Moses felt “embarrassed.” To avoid being seen, he wore a veil, which functioned like a “mask.” This action provides us with a fascinating insight into Moses’s psyche. Faced with the fear of his peers, he chose not to take advantage of it to enhance his authority. Instead, he felt “embarrassed and burdened with shame,” ultimately deciding to “hide” what was frightening and “cover” himself (Hochstein 2021, 4).

The display of divine glory through Moses’s shining face represented “the goodness of God,” while the veil symbolized humanity’s inability to comprehend that goodness. To “be part of the covenant is to know God,” so covering this glory with a veil indicated that the Israelites failed to understand the core of the covenant—the knowledge of God (Philpot 2013b, 113). Thus, on one hand, “the veil was meant to mask the divine light so that it would not be wasted.” On the other hand, men could perceive the brightness itself. It served as “an optical and tangible confirmation”^[1] of the Word of God, which was proclaimed to them and could be seen in the “brightness on the face of Moses” (Haran 1988, 162).

There are several reasons why Moses wears a veil. Firstly, Moses is concerned about alleviating the people’s fear. His humble nature also plays a role; he does not want to be viewed as “the voice of YHWH” when he is not preaching divine teachings,

especially in the intimate moments of daily life. Secondly, regarding God, the veil serves a dual purpose: it both conceals and reveals divine glory. In a proper exegetical context, the significance of the veil is profound. It acts as a “symbol – pivot – around which other themes revolve, and its interpretation serves as a hermeneutic principle for other Old Testament themes” (Lazarus 2024, 77).

The Meaning of the Veil on Moses' Face (Etymological Perspective)

In modern Romanian translations, the term “veil”^[2] can be found in the Book of Genesis, where it appears in three^[3] instances (Gn 24:65; 38:14,19). In these passages, Rebekah and Tamar use veils to cover and wrap themselves, which conveys the meaning of a shawl. The Hebrew term used is **תְּעִיָּה** (translated as *θήριστρον* in the LXX, although it is omitted in 38:19). This term refers to a type of clothing, specifically a veil or shawl, that women traditionally wore in ancient Hebrew culture. This garment covered women's heads, shoulders, and faces, often signifying modesty or serving as a cultural expression of femininity and social status.

Additionally, three other Hebrew terms carry a similar meaning. The term **מִטְנֵף** appears four times and designates the wedding veil worn by the bride (Sg 4:1, 3; 6:7) and the veil worn by the “Daughter of Babylon” (Is 47:2); in the LXX, it is translated as *κατακάλυμμά*, the plural form of the noun *κατακάλυμμα*, meaning “covering,” “veil,” or “curtain.” The term **רִדְיָה**, appearing twice, refers to the house shawls worn by the “daughters of Zion” (Is 3:22, which is verse 23 in the TM) and the shawl worn by the beloved woman in the Song of Solomon (Sg 5:7). In the LXX, this is translated as *ἐπιβλήματα*, the plural form of the noun *ἐπίβλημα*, which translates to “cloak,” “negligee,” “a piece of clothing,” or “house coat.” Lastly, it is also associated with the light covering used in summer. The term **רִעְלָה**, translated by Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania as “the necks of the glorious proud” and rendered in the LXX as *τὸν κόσμον τοῦ προσώπου αὐτῶν*, appears only once in the context of the ornaments worn by the “daughters of Zion” (Is 3:19).

None of the four Hebrew terms mentioned is found in Exodus 34:33-35. During this event, the term **מִסְוָה** is specifically used^[4], appearing only three times in this episode. It refers exclusively to a covering worn by a man (Hamilton 2011, 588). Moses, in this context, wears a different veil (**מִסְוָה**) to cover his shining face after having spoken with God. After leaving Sinai, there are no further references to this veil over the next 40 years. Neither Moses nor anyone else from that time in the

Old Testament is described as wearing such a veil again. The veil (מִסְוֵה), which prevented others from looking at Moses, seems to be ultimately replaced by the veil (פְּרֻכָּת) that separated the Holy from the Holy of Holies, ensuring that the people would not gaze upon the Holy One (Hamilton 2011, 589).

Interestingly, the most used Hebrew term for the veil is פְּרֻכָּת, which appears 25 times exclusively in the books of Exodus, Numbers, and 2 Chronicles. This term originates from the verb פָּרַץ, meaning “to break” or “to separate.” In the Septuagint (LXX), it is translated as *καταπέτασμα*. It refers to the curtain made of thin linen and dyed blue, purple, and scarlet threads, with woven cherubim (see Ex 26:31). This curtain was used in both the Holy Tabernacle and the Temple to separate the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. It symbolizes a physical barrier between the holiness of God and the sinful state of humanity, as well as a boundary between the divine and human realms. Only the high priest could pass through this veil once a year on the Day of Atonement to offer sacrifices for the sins of all the people (Lv 16:2-34). The veil also serves as a “meeting place between the two parts of the Covenant” (Eerdmans 1987, 1036).

In the New Testament, this term refers to the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place as well (Mt 27:51). When the Israelite camp moved, the Tabernacle was dismantled, and the “veil that covered” (פְּרֻכָּת הַמִּסְוֵה) the “ark of testimony” was also “veiled” (Nm 4:5). Interestingly, the same term is also used to refer to another curtain at the entrance to the Holy Tabernacle (Ex 26:37). In this context, Moses can be viewed as a “walking Tabernacle,” which both “manifests and yet hides the splendor of Jehovah” (Propp 2006, 621).

The Function of the Veil on Moses' Face

The function of the veil has three critical points worth considering understanding its meaning. Firstly, the term מִסְוֵה translates to “cloak” or “robe,” though its rare usage makes this interpretation difficult to argue effectively. Secondly, any translation other than “veil”^[5] or “scarf” is challenging to conceive, as the purpose of the veil was to “hide the image of Moses.” Thirdly, the text indicates that Moses used the veil in response to the people’s reaction upon seeing his shining face (Philpot 2013b, 93-94).

Moses “returns” to the people, who cannot bear the brightness of his face, as he “irradiates the divine light.” He covers his face “to make the overwhelming rays of the divine light more bearable,” acknowledging that they are not spiritually prepared

for such intensity (Cyril of Alexandria 1992, 369). By placing a covering over his radiant face, Moses dims the overwhelming power of the light, allowing the people to tolerate it, as they are not spiritually ready for such a profound divine communication (Stăniloae 1992, 369). Therefore, Moses “profitably” covered his face, as “the law has a shadow or thickness to its letter.” From a spiritual perspective, this covering must eventually be removed, a process that will be fully realized when we stand before God and “see the glory of Moses without the shadow, understanding the law in a spiritual sense” (Cyril of Alexandria, 1992, 370).

The function of the veil worn by Moses is relatively straightforward. It was used in response to the fear of the Israelites (Ex 34:30) and served to hide his face when he was not acting as an intercessor. The text indicates that the people were not prevented from seeing Moses’ shining face—the radiant goodness of YHWH Himself—if he communicated the divine word to them. Moses wore the veil only when he was not conveying the word of Jehovah, which meant he was acting as an ordinary Israelite for personal reasons, without his role as a mediator. Therefore, it is evident that the shining face of Moses, which signifies the presence of Jehovah, not the veil, is the primary focus of this episode (Ex 34:29-35) (Philpot 2013b, 94-95, 101).

Did Moses teach with his face covered by a veil?

This passage is often misunderstood due to the similarity between the veil that Moses wore and a wedding veil, which conceals a bride’s face. Because of this resemblance, some assumed that Moses hid his face to indicate divine holiness after his encounters with God (Wines 2019). It has been suggested that “Moses wore this covering constantly, except at times when he entered the Tabernacle to speak with God” (Morgenstern 1925, 1). Transfigured by his close relationship with God, Moses, upon returning to the people, needed to “create a veil so that he could continue his work before them without causing fear.” The veil served as a visible and concrete symbol of Mosaic authority. Moses wore the veil when addressing the people, “for his face shone with transfiguration due to the presence of God” (Coats 1988, 131, 138).

In patristic literature, the idea is also present that this veil was necessary when he preached, as “according to Jewish understanding, not even the light of the law could be fully comprehended” (Cyril of Alexandria 1992, 369).

As Moses entered into a more intimate communion with men, he showed them the destination he intended to lead them toward. After that, when he was speaking solely through the law, he again put on his veil. It was only when he engaged in more intimate communication with God that he lifted the covering and entered back into loving communication (Stăniloae 1992, 369).

Proposing a different approach to understanding the episode, Rashi emphasizes that the Israelites could not even bear to look at Moses' face. He believes this reaction was a result of sin, stating, "the power of sin is great." Before they engaged with idolatry, they were not afraid of the divine glory on the mountaintop, described as a "consuming fire" (Ex 24:17). However, after the incident with the golden calf, "fear will seize them." They will "tremble at the mere sight of the rays of light coming from Moses" (Rashi 1950, 436-7). Consequently, the people can never return to the exact spiritual state they were in before. Sin "affected" them, "vitiating them," and their descent compromised their spiritual refinement into idolatry. Moving forward, the people will "have to work hard to regain their spiritual level" (Israel 2019).

It should be noted that Moses did not wear the veil for his own "comfort," nor did he need it to protect himself from God or reflected glory. He did not wear a veil around the divine presence, on Mount Sinai, or at the Tabernacle. Instead, he covered his face "for the sake of the people," not because his unveiled face would physically harm them, but because he frightened the Israelites so much that they no longer dared to approach him (Stuart 2006, 739).

Those who have examined the biblical text observe that verses 29-33 depict Moses with a shining face, which instills fear in the people. Some believe that the Israelites would only approach Moses to hear his teachings after he covered his face with a veil. When he finished speaking, he would then remove the veil. Verses 34-35 indicate that each time Moses entered the presence of God to receive His words, he took off his veil. When he left to convey those words to the people, he wore the veil until he returned to the Lord. The phrase "lifted his veil until (עָרַף) when he went out" refers to the conclusion of verse 35, which states, "and when he went out, he told the children of Israel what the Lord had commanded him." This implies that Moses donned his veil upon exiting the Tabernacle, thus speaking to the people with his face covered.

The Apostle Paul offers a Christian interpretation of the veil of Moses, suggesting that the Israelites were unable to fix their eyes on Moses' face because of its glory.

Consequently, Moses covered his face with a veil, which symbolizes their confused minds and hearts. According to Paul, when reading the Old Testament, their understanding remains obscured by the same veil. He sees the veil as a representation of the spiritual meanings of the Old Testament, which become clear only through Christ. This interpretation was later echoed by Origen, who linked the veil as a symbol of Old Testament mysteries with the idea of returning to the Lord as a means of lifting the veil.

There is an interpretation that the glory on Moses' face needed to be covered, not because it would have harmed the Israelites, but because it was temporary, it was "only for the moment." Eternal life, according to this view, would be found on another face. The glory on Moses' face eventually faded ("withered away," as noted in 2 Cor 3:7), but whenever he communicated with God, the brightness would be restored. When he came out again to speak to the people (cf. Spurgeon 1890, 254), that brightness would shine forth. However, eventually, there would come a day when, alongside Moses, the people of God would see His face (Johnston 2022). The veil that Moses wore prevented the Israelites from witnessing the glory of the Old Testament, which was fading. God did not want the Israelites to see this fading glory, as it might lead them to "lose faith in Moses" (Guzik 2019, 304).

The Apostle Paul's interpretation of the veil in 2 Cor 3:7-18 presents some challenges. He states that Moses covered his face so that the Israelites would not see the brightness fading. According to Paul, Moses had no valid reason for this action. He suggests that this move, which may seem arbitrary, shifts the focus of the veil from Moses' face to the hearts of his opponents, representing their inability to understand the Torah. This barrier can only be removed in Christ. While the book of Exodus suggests that the veil served as a practical measure to alleviate the discomfort that people experienced when looking at Moses' shining face, Paul interprets these actions from a Christian perspective, considering them "absurd from the point of view of what Moses says" (Garrett 2010, 729-30). The apostle Paul explains that Moses wore a veil over his shining face until he went in to speak with God. Similarly, Christians can "approach the glory of God with unveiled faces and experience the same transformation." This contrasts with the unbelieving Israelites, who "have a veil that covers their hearts" (2 Cor 3:15). In contrast, Christians have had their veil removed (2 Cor 3:16), allowing them to "endure the bold and direct revelation of the glory of God because their hearts have been changed" (Garland 1999, 198).

Moses taught with his face uncovered (without a veil)

If verse 29 describes Moses coming down from the mountain with the tablets of the law in his hands, and unaware that his face was shining, the following verse illustrates the fear of Aaron and the elders of Israel as they approach him because of this. The text does not indicate that Moses puts on a veil; instead, it states that he calls them and communicates the divine commandments without covering his face. Only after he finishes conveying the message does he cover his face (Ex 34:33).

By considering the semantic structure of the following verses, we can clarify their meaning. For example, if we maintain the current division into verses, we have: “And when Moses came in before the Lord to speak to him, he lifted his veil until he went out; and when he went out he told the children of Israel what the Lord had commanded him” (Ex 34:34). This suggests that Moses put on his veil immediately after leaving the Tabernacle, which is how he addressed the people. However, we can interpret this semantic construction differently by dividing verse 34 into two distinct ideas: “And when Moses went in before the Lord to speak to him, he lifted his veil until he went out” (Ex 34:34) relates to his interaction with God. The following verses, 34-35, describe the interaction between Moses and the people: “And when he went out, he said to the children of Israel what the Lord had commanded him, and the children of Israel saw that Moses' face was full of glory.” This interpretation suggests that Moses kept his veil raised, as the Israelites could see his face shining. He maintained the lifted veil until he completed communicating the divine words, and only then did he lower it. The same idea is expressed at the end of verse 35 about the biblical episode: “And Moses put the veil on his face again, until he came in to speak to Him (the Lord)” (Ex 34:35). This signifies that Moses covered his face with a veil only after he finished conveying the divine will.

It can be observed that this descent from the mountain parallels other exits from the Tabernacle. Just as Moses covered his face with a veil when he descended from the mountain—having communicated the divine words to the people—he would follow the same practice in later encounters with God in the Tabernacle. Thus, the Tabernacle serves as “a portable reflection of Mount Sinai.” The rules to be followed descending from the mountain mirror those that apply after leaving the Tabernacle. The key difference is that while Moses was initially unaware of the radiance of his face when he came down from the mountain, he later became conscious of this aspect, which he had to embrace (Haran 1984, 162) permanently.

After fulfilling his “public and official role,” Moses hid the dazzling brightness of his face,” not only out of ‘modesty’ but also to delineate the distinction between his role as a divine servant, the “prime minister of the old covenant,” and his private life. The veil serves a pedagogical purpose; it acts as “spiritual preparation,” as it teaches the people about divine providence, which “adapts” to their “spiritual weakness.” The veil allowed only a limited amount of brilliance to shine through, providing the people with “foresight and proof” of what was to come (Murphy 1866, 345). The veil was worn for two reasons: first, in response to the fear of the Israelites, and second, to cover Moses’ face when he was not acting as a mediator between God and the people. The biblical text suggests that the people were not prevented from seeing the shining face of Moses—symbolizing the radiant goodness of Jehovah—whenever he revealed the divine message (Philpot 2013a, 10).

Moses covered his face because he felt embarrassed when people looked at him with their mouths agape at the brightness of his face. However, whenever he received instructions from God, he was asked to remove the veil (Luntschitz, 2009). The wise leaders of the Israelites believed that someone who was shameful could not teach others^[6]. Naphtali Zvi Yehudah Berlin (Netziv) noted that when Moses spoke to God, he would completely remove the veil. Before going out to the people, he would place the veil on his head, tilted upward, so that while delivering the laws, they could still see his face. After he finished speaking, he would then lower the veil over his face (Hochstein 2021, 4-5).

Through speech, Moses removes his veil and overcomes the moment when the people were “afraid to approach” him, allowing them to return to him. While the process of revelation can sometimes hinder connection — as the brightness and covering of Moses’ face make encounters difficult — he uses discourse to “meet” and “reveal” himself, ultimately unveiling God’s presence. Through “speech” and “dialogue,” an “opportunity for encounter” is created, serving as a “a small step toward imitating God and walking in His ways,” which helps alleviate fear (Hochstein 2021, 5-6). When Moses addressed the people in God’s name, he would remove his veil, allowing the brightness of God to shine through him. However, once he finished speaking, he would return to his private life, covering his face so that no one would feel the need to keep their distance. Although God honored him greatly, Moses did not wish to flaunt this honor or be seen by others; thus, he covered his face in ordinary conversation with people and revealed it only when he spoke to the Lord and in His name (Spurgeon 1890, 254).

Moses stood before God without a veil, just as he preached to the people. However, when he wasn't preaching, he covered his face with a veil. We can thus infer that for the remainder of his life, Moses would cover his face unless he was communicating with God or conveying a message about God to Israel (Propp 2006, 618). Moses acted as the mediator of divine law, and after delivering that law, he would cover his face again with a veil (Dozeman 2000, 21). When he returned from the Mount, it marked the beginning of a new phase and a change in his state of being (Haran 1984, 160).

The veil served as a means for Moses to cover his face whenever he was not in dialogue with God or with the people. It was a practical solution that Moses employed throughout his prophetic ministry; however, it was not used during his encounters with the Lord or when he conveyed divine messages to the people. Moses removed his veil when speaking to God, which caused his face to shine or his skin to harden. He also took off the veil when addressing the people, as his authority stemmed from his encounters with the divine. This authority relied on clear and transparent communication with the people, who might be frightened by his illuminated face, but needed to hear him speak clearly and not from behind a veil (Marzouk 2025).

When Moses was not speaking to God or communicating with the people on God's behalf, he would cover his extraordinary appearance as a form of self-humiliation. This veil limited his authority to that of a mediator. Additionally, the periodic covering of Moses' face reflects the Israelites' fluctuating experience of divine presence and absence. When Moses' face was uncovered, it allowed the people to see the reflected glory of the Lord. However, after explaining the law, Moses covered his face, concealing the glory of the Lord from the Israelites because the old law obscured God's presence. The Mosaic Law was not intended to save anyone, as it ultimately had an end; this "passing of the law" would eventually be replaced by the glory of the Lord, which was hidden from Israel (Garrett 2020, 2504).

While the biblical narrative primarily highlights the light radiating from Moses' face rather than the veil itself, the mentions of Moses putting on or taking off the veil suggest an oral tradition that remains somewhat unclear in its written form (Usca 2002, 162). It is also essential to note that Moses wore the veil only when he was not engaged in a prophetic mission. Therefore, the key focus of this episode is the brilliance of Moses' face rather than the veil that concealed it (Haran 1988, 163).

The veil can be understood as a separation between what is holy and what is not. It is suggested that Moses used it to "separate his life." Sacred things are made

“revealed, naturally,” making the conversation with God and the teaching of the people seem like “natural processes” for Moses. In contrast, the “mundane” activities of life—such as eating or discussing household chores—should be done with his face covered. From this perspective, the veil was not intended to stand between Moses and the people^[7], but rather between Moses’ piety and his humanity (Israel 2019).

The notion that Moses wore his veil only when he was not acting as an intermediary between God and the people is also present in rabbinic literature. Don Isaac Abrabanel (Abravanel or Rabbi Itzhak ben Yehuda Abrabanel), a Portuguese Jewish politician, banker, scholar, philosopher, rabbi, and exegete, believed that Moses “should not use this divine light when he ate, drank, and slept, or when he talked to his wife and family about matters unrelated to the Torah” (Israel 2019).

Another possible explanation for the role of the veil involves the brilliance of the Torah manuscript. Rabbi Judah ben Nahman, speaking on behalf of Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish, stated that Moses, “by passing over his head the pen with which he wrote the Torah,” was left with “a little ink,” which “was responsible for the bright rays” (Midrash Rabbah 1939, 542). The “parable of the drops of ink” suggests that the law, or the Torah itself, was responsible for this radiant effect. Since “Moses is the embodiment of the Torah,” his shining face reflects this connection (Israel 2019). Building on this idea, Ibn Ezra argues that Moses’ brilliance was “recharged” each time he received a new law from God. Therefore, the brightness of Moses’ face can be seen as “a reflection of the brightness of the Torah.” It has been proposed that Moses’ face shone only “as long as the Torah was given” and that this miraculous phenomenon may have ceased when they left Mount Sinai (Ibn Ezra 1996, 728).

Conclusions

The biblical episode can be viewed as a “veiled revelation,” which signifies “the revelation of an infinite fullness, inexpressible in words.” In this context, God reveals His will while also concealing Himself. These two divine actions—revelation and concealment—illustrate the idea that one cannot fully encounter God by discarding created symbols; instead, we must experience them as symbols, acting as mirrors of the invisible. God’s presence is experienced “only in and through created symbols,” which are accessible only through the coverings that conceal Him. This highlights the dual nature of the symbolic, where concealment and revelation co-occur, or where revelation is achieved through concealment (Constas 2017, 317-8). The mystery is unveiled

both through the “language” that allows the transcendent to communicate with the sublunary realm and through “the veil” that not only hides but also adorns the invisible. To comprehend this, individuals must “transform their senses” to “read this veil,” not by engaging with it directly or entirely, but by recognizing it as a trace of an ineffable presence (Tofan 2024, 14).

As Andrei Scrima^[8] noted, “God shines through rather than appears.” This suggests that the mystery, the veil that covers and through which the divine presence can be perceived, does not set limits for those who seek it. Instead, it acts as a medium that captivates and guides us. The mystery must be traversed, not to be exhausted, but to help direct our gaze and lift our souls from the opaque forms of the world. It “urges us on the journey” and becomes “the breathable air of life, the source where we find our freshness and strength” (Tofan 2024, 12).

To understand and follow the divine message, we must walk “the hidden path that leads to mystical places, beyond the iconostasis of the altar, over the stumbling blocks, to the cornerstone.” However, to “reach the threshold of the door of the Pantocrator,” one must climb the “steps of Sinai” (Constas 2017, 11-2).

Like the iconostasis, which represents the veil through which the divine presence shines, sacred texts should also be viewed as a space of “seduction.” In this context, a person allows themselves to be captivated, follows the divine, and is enveloped by the light that emanates from it (Tofan 2024, 13-4). Just as the physical brilliance reflects Moses' encounter with God's glory, prayer serves as the means through which humanity communicates with the divine. It is through prayer that we draw closer to God, providing us the chance to encounter^[9] the Creator, who welcomes us into His home and transforms us into light^[10].

To live by the “spirit” of Scripture, the Church Fathers and Church Writers suggest that prayer is a vital key (hermeneutical method) for understanding the written Word. While the message of Scripture can be viewed as a “lesson” whose meaning needs to be explored, it is essential to note that “idle and self-absorbed” souls may feel “discouraged” and “disgusted,” whereas “zealous and free souls” will be “stimulated.” Understanding the “holy letters” requires more than just knowing how to read or merely studying; we must also ask the Lord to open the Scriptures, referred to as the “sealed book” (Jr 32:10-11). When we do this, it will inflame our hearts, enabling us to achieve a deeper and more spiritual understanding. If we fail to go beyond this initial level, we risk experiencing the “slavery of the veil,” where a veil covers our “heart”

(Origen 1981, 114, 119-121) and obstructs our connection with God, the source of wisdom. Therefore, it is essential to pray with great perseverance—sometimes for “whole days”—so that the Lord “will remove the veil from the eyes of our hearts” (Simeon the New Theologian 2001, 317).

To understand God, even if only “symbolically” and “as much as it is possible for us,” the divine light has been “enveloped in various holy coverings.” This is necessary because it must be “accommodated, through parental providence, in a way that is appropriate to our nature.” We can know God only through the “holy curtains” that conceal the spiritual from the sensible and the higher being from those enveloped in forms and images. Our understanding is limited, as we can only grasp God’s essence “mysteriously” and according to our own “measure.” In revealing Himself to humanity, “the unspeakable has been intertwined with the word.” The veil is essential for us, as theology (the study of God) is “double: one aspect is unspeakable and mysterious, while the other is more clearly revealed.” One aspect is “symbolic and manifested in sanctifying acts,” and the other appeals to the love of wisdom and proof. The former connects truth with what has been said, while the latter acts and elevates us towards God through divine initiations. This is how we should perceive theological or biblical symbols: as “curtains” that allow us glimpses of God (Dionysius 1996, 15, 137, 266).

The entire Old Testament contains clues that must be understood in terms of their typical meanings, symbols, and messianic prophecies. This is the direction indicated by the Savior, as reflected in His words: “... It is the Scriptures [...] that testify of Me” (Jn 5:39). The Apostles followed this path, noting that “the law was given to us as a guide/teacher to Christ” (Gal 3:24). This understanding was further developed by the Church Fathers and Church Writers. Blessed Augustine succinctly expressed the interdependence of the two Testaments^[11], stating that “the justice of God,” which is “hidden in the Old Testament,” is “revealed” in the New Testament^[12]. He also noted that “divine grace,” which was concealed in the Old Testament, is made manifest in the Gospel of Christ^[13].

Therefore, the veil of Moses extends beyond a merely Mosaic perspective and must be understood within a unified biblical context. This context provides a soteriological framework that explains why God chose to reveal Himself in this manner, both unveiling and concealing His divine essence simultaneously.

To avoid misinterpreting or straying from the divine Word, which is often difficult to understand (2 Pt 3:16), we must steer clear of obscuring the profound truths that it

holds. Otherwise, “everything that is understood changes into even greater meanings.” It is wise to embrace the sentiment of Lucian Blaga in his confession: “I do not crush the corolla of wonders of the world, and I do not kill with my mind the mysteries that I encounter on my path” (Blaga 1919, 5-6).

In God’s loving relationship with humanity, the Creator does not place a veil or barrier between Himself and people. Instead, it is humanity that can choose to create veils in our relationships with God and one another. In the pursuit of knowledge, as humanity reaches upward towards God, such a veil is necessary to help us perceive the divine that transcends earthly things.

Notes

[1] Moses had to wear a “mahrama on his face” to make the divine glory “tangible” (Maxwell 2007, 60).

[2] The early Romanian translations of the Bible used the term “brobodelnic,” derived from “broboadă,” which means “fairy tale, handkerchief, scarf.” This term appears three times in MS 45 (Romanian Manuscript 45 from the Library of the Cluj Branch of the Romanian Academy, which contains a revised copy of Nicolae Mescu’s translation of the Old Testament) and in the 1688 Bible. The term “brobodealnic” was used twice in the Blaj Bible, which prefers the term “garment” in Ex 24:65 but uses “brobodealnic” in Ex 38:14 and 38:19. In MS 4389 (Romanian Manuscript 4389 from the Library of the Romanian Academy, likely written by Daniil Andrean the Pannonian as a second seventeenth-century translation of the Old Testament), three different terms appear in the relevant scripture references: “stuffing” (a garment for covering the head, a cloth, a fray, or a covering) in Ex 24:65; “beautiful clothes” in Exodus 38:14; and “clothes of adornment” in Ex 38:19 (cf. MLD I 2004, 232-233, 277-278). The Radu & Galaction Bible, the Synodal Edition, and the Ananias Orthodoxy consistently use the term “veil” in all three passages.

[3] In the Synodal translation, which follows the model of the Vulgate that uses the term “velamen oculorum,” the word “veil” appears in Gn 20:16. In this verse, Abimelech addresses Sarrah, saying, “Behold, I give to your brother a thousand shekels of silver, which will serve as a veil over your eyes to those around you and the whole world. And behold, now you are counted righteous!” Here, the term translated as “veil” corresponds to the Hebrew word **כִּסְיוֹ**, meaning “covering.” This term also relates to other uses in the Bible, such as “garment” (found in Ex 21:10 and Dt 22:12), which indicates a covering (see Ex 22:27). The word appears eight times in the Old Testament, with four of those occurrences in the Pentateuch.

[4] In the LXX, the term is translated as *κάλυμμα* (with seven occurrences in the book of Exodus, of which the three in Ex 34 are translations of the Hebrew term *מִסְוֶה*, and the other four (Ex 27:16; 35:11; 39:34 and 40:5) translate *מִסָּךְ*). The Greek term is also used in 2 Cor 3:13-16 to describe the veil on Moses' face and metaphorically to describe the spiritual veil on the hearts of the Israelites. The term *κατακαλύπτω* appears only three times and is used exclusively in 1 Cor 11:6-7, referring to the practice of women covering their heads in prayer. The Hebrew term *מִסָּךְ* has 22 occurrences, all in the books of Exodus and Numbers, with the meanings of "screen, curtain, shield, barrier, curtain, partition wall, veil, fabric, cloth, material." The term refers to the Holy Tabernacle, specifically a curtain used at the "door of the tabernacle" (*לְפֶתַח הָאֹהֶל*), cf. Ex 26:36; 36:37; 39:38, or "the door of the tabernacle of meeting" cf. Nm 3:36 25; 4:25: *פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד*, or "door of the tabernacle" cf. Ex 40:5,28: *הַפֶּתַח לַמִּשְׁכָּן*, or "door of the entrance of the tabernacle" cf. Ex 35:15: (*הַפֶּתַח לְפֶתַח הַמִּשְׁכָּן*), as well as "at the gate of the court" of the Tabernacle (*לְשַׁעַר הַחֲצֵר*) cf. Ex 27:16; 35:17; 38:18; 39:40; 40:8,33; Nm 3:26, "at the gate of the entrance of the court" cf. Nm 4:26: *שַׁעַר הַחֲצֵר*). The term is also mentioned about the "veil of the covering" (*פְּרֹכֶת הַמִּסָּךְ*) cf. Ex 35:12), which was placed over the ark of testimony (*אֲרוֹן הָעֵדוּת*) cf. Ex 40:21, also seems to refer to the ark in Nm 3:31. In Nm 4:5 we have the expression: *וְהוֹרְדוּ אֶת פְּרֹכֶת הַמִּסָּךְ וְכִסּוּ-בָהּ אֶת אֲרוֹן הָעֵדוּת*: "They shall take down the veil, the covering/covering, and cover the ark of the testimony with it", the expression *פְּרֹכֶת הַמִּסָּךְ* being translated by Ananias: "the shade curtain". Moses tells us (39:31, v. 32 in TM) that "all the work of the tabernacle of the tabernacle of the tabernacle of the tabernacle of meeting (*מוֹעֵד אֹהֶל מִשְׁכָּן*) is finished". He mentions three kinds of "coverings" (dp. Anania translation): two of animal skins (*מִכְסֵה עֹר*) and one, called "the veil of the covering" (*פְּרֹכֶת הַמִּסָּךְ*) ("the middle curtain" cf. Ex 39:34 dp. Anania translation).

[5] Early Romanian translations, such as MS. 4389, MS. 45, and the 1688 Bible, use the term "covering" (MLD II 1991, 184-185). Peter Paul Aron translates the phrase as "they put the veil on his face," which he "uncovered until he came out," and then "covered his face again when he spoke to them," noting that it was "horned" (Ex 34:33-35), as referenced in the Blaj Vulgate Bible. Samuil Micu also opts for the term "covering," but in verse 35 prefers the verb "to cover," as seen in the Blaj Bible. Vasile Radu and Gala Galaction use a Bulgarian term, "zabranic," which refers to a delicate fabric made of silk or wool, typically in black, in Ex 34:33-34, and "veil" in Ex 34:35, according to the Radu & Galaction Bible.

[6] In the teachings of Hillel, it is stated, "He who is ashamed does not teach." Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura adds, "He who is ashamed will always remain unbelievable, for he is ashamed to ask" (*Pirkei Avot* 2004, 60-61).

[7] In the book of Exodus, we can observe the progression in Moses' life. We can follow a process of spiritual ascent that evolves from the individual to the prophet, and ultimately to the man of God. In rabbinic literature, this progress is considered a more tragic evolution, marked by a distancing of Moses from the people. This separation arises from his personal spiritual growth, which creates an increasingly clear divide between him and the Israelites. Moses' distance from the people was not solely perceived in their minds; there was also a real physical barrier that separated them. In a spiritual sense, Moses attained the highest level possible for humanity. He attained a state in which he felt more comfortable with God than with people, shining with divine radiance in his "natural" state, unveiled. However, this elevation comes with a tragic correlation: his distancing from the people. Moses became a man of God and the teacher of the Torah. The chosen people needed a leader like him, as they could not have received the Torah without Moses. This is why it is rightly called the "Torah of Moses" (Mal 3:22; 4:6). The rabbis believe that without a prophet of Moses' stature, there would never have been a Torah. At the same time, it is thought that Moses lost an aspect of his personality, making it difficult for him to relate to the people as he once did.

[8] "Dieu transpar, pourrait-on dire, plus qu'il n'apare" (cf. Fencing 2019, 41) can also have the meaning: God, instead, shows himself through something, rather than appearing suddenly.

[9] The encounter with divinity "in paradox and ambiguity, is a matter of relationship, rather than of logical argumentation", a "two-way relationship", in which it is no longer a question of "who I see, but of Whom I am seen", "the object of sight" becomes "a subject", which "approaches" man, from outside his being "and reveals the consequences of His work" in His creation (Constas 2017, 15-16).

[10] "He who speaks with the good God must impress himself with as much resemblance as possible to Him" (Dionysius 1996, 260-261).

[11] „... quanquam et in Vetere Novum lateat, et in Novo Vetus pateat ...” (Augustinus 1865a, 623).

[12] „Haec est justitia Dei, quae in Testamento Veteri velata, in Novo revelatur” (Augustinus 1865b, 212).

[13] „Haec gratia in Testamento vetere velata latitabat, quae in Christi Evangelio revelata est” (Augustinus 1865b, 217).

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