

LIGHT FROM THE BEGINNING
(... AND THE WORLD WAS FILLED WITH LIGHT -
PATRISTIC-SCIENTIFIC MEDITATIONS ON THE TEXT:
“AND GOD SAID: LET THERE BE LIGHT.
AND THERE WAS LIGHT” - GN 1:3)
AS ETERNAL FOOD FOR THE SOUL

Abstract

The study presents a theological exploration of the scriptural teachings and the role of God as the Creator. It highlights the contrast between viewing the world with confidence in the divine truth versus denying the existence of a Creator. The text emphasizes that the author of Genesis did not intend to provide a scientific account of creation but aimed to reveal the Creator's presence and truth. Evolutionism is seen as contradictory to Revelation and the biblical account, which portrays God directly acting and willing creation into existence. The text delves into the significance of light as both symbolic and physical, representing divine presence and revelation. It acknowledges human fallibility due to ancestral sin and the need for God's enlightenment. Overall, the text advocates for accepting the scriptural account of creation and recognizing God as the ultimate Creator.

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Introduction

Viewed with confidence, scriptural teachings reveal the truth, bring us out of darkness and put us into the light needed to do “works worthy of light and of the day”. However, those who claim that “those things that exist were self-made” are “being foolish and foolish”, for they “deprive the creation of the Creator’s care”, claiming “that so much adornment and so many sagas can be managed without a ruler, who holds them all”. Just as a ship cannot sail the waves without a helmsman, or a house cannot be built without an architect, so this world could not come into existence “of itself and at random” without a Creator and a ruler to match. That is why God brought man and this world into being “not to lose us” or “to send us to hell, but to save us” (St. John Chrysostom 1987, 49-51).

If we try to visualize the creation of the world, we could describe it as the “first gleams of the divine light” (St. Augustine 2021, 35), but as we enter “into the light of knowledge”, we also receive “the knowledge of unknowing” (St. Simeon the New Theologian 1977, 55). If unbelief operates with questions like: “how?”, “where?”, “when?” (questions which are not bad in themselves), the Christian, without abandoning research, motivates his answer, appealing also to faith, according to the scriptural exhortation (“By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” (Heb 11:3 – ESV).

The author of Genesis did not intend to provide a scientific account of creation, but rather, he wanted to reveal the Creator to us and give us the truth about the origin and development of creation (Crawford 1978, 295). From the very beginning, the Book of Genesis attributes everything to the Living God, Who creates, makes, acts, moves and speaks. By accepting evolutionism, we deny Revelation; the two cannot coexist, if one is true, the other is false. Everything God has worked on has been labelled “good” (Gn 1:4,10), “great” (Ps 111:2); and living things have been blessed to grow and develop, not to change or evolve into other species. The biblical account of creation presents us with a God who directly wills and acts. No less than 46 verbs are used to present creation (Bullinger 1951, 7): He creates/does, moves/ “behaves” (עָשָׂה – Gn 1:2), speaks/speaks (Septuaginta 2004, 352), sees, divides/divides (בָּרָא – Gn 1:4,6-7,14,18), makes (causes to be made), settles (יָסַד – Gn 1:17), blesses, fulfills/completes (בֵּרַךְ – Gn 2:1.2), rests (שָׁבַת – Gn 2:2-3) and finally sanctifies (קִדְּשׁ – Gn 2:3).

This “wondrous creation” and “unspeakably good division”, Scripture presents to us as being made “by word and by command”. Because Revelation goes beyond rational understanding, “the God who loves mankind” uses “the mouth of the prophet to teach mankind to know the order of creation, to know who the Creator of the universe is, to know how each one was brought into being”. “The Holy Spirit thus recounted all this, lowering the prophet’s tongue to the power of understanding of the hearers”. This is how God uses this “descent” to reveal Himself usefully (St. John Chrysostom 1987, 49).

However, man has fallen into ancestral sin, especially in the Old Testament period, being unable to know the divine will by his own efforts, “needs to be enlightened and asks God to make His face shine upon him” (Ps 67:1; 119:135) or to enlighten his eyes (*Dicționar Biblic* 1996, 270). Although most scriptural texts referring to light are symbolic references (“the kingdom of light” cf. Col 1:12-13, “the armour of light” cf. Rom 13:12, “... light you are in the Lord, ... sons of light ... the fruit of light” cf. Eph 5:8-9), light “is physical rather than symbolic”, possessing the following “physical properties that characterize it”: it is “emanating from a source; it illuminates the darkness and makes human sight possible; it is a source of life” and it is “immaterial but real”. In the Old Testament, the light of the candles of the Holy Tabernacle and the Holy Temple, as well as the light of the sun, “expresses the mystery of the divine presence”, and is, therefore, a “holy light”. In the New Testament too, light is present and is perceived by those who encounter the supernatural (*Dicționar de imagini* 2014, 572) (shepherds and magi at the birth of Christ, Saul at his conversion, the Apostle Peter released from prison).

Scripture’s message about light

As one of the most important and complex biblical symbols, with some 200 occupations, the theme of light, both literally and figuratively, is often used by hagiographers. At the beginning of the sacred text, light is mentioned as the first created thing (Gn 1:3-4), and at the end, it is pointed out that “the light of God destroys every trace of darkness” (“... night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.” – Rv 22:5 - ESV), we can say that the Holy Scriptures “are filled with images of light” (*Dicționar de imagini* 2014, 570).

As the very foundation of life on earth, Scripture presents “a light of a physical nature, prior to life itself”. This “primacy of light over life” is rendered in divine words: “Let there be light!” (Gn 1:3), which also captures “the miracle of existence that springs from non-existence” and which “astonish by its unexpected emergence and the power of its radiance”. The Apostle Paul (2 Cor 4:6) expresses the same awe at this miracle, and “links the primordial act of the creation of physical light with the transforming experience of conversion” (*Dicționar de imagini* 2014, 570).

With reference to the light presented by Scripture, Orthodox theology makes a clear demarcation between uncreated and eternal light on the one hand and created light, which can be perceived as physical (photonic) reality, on the other. God is the “First Light”, the “unapproachable and unending light”, a light that has no beginning, no end, cannot be measured, eternal and “intertwined-bright” (St. Gregory of Nazianz 2019, 120-1). If uncreated light can only be understood spiritually, created light, though physical, through its “impressive depths”, gives us an “earthly image of uncreated light” (Andronic 2015). Created light is a “secondary” light, a “glow of the First Light” (St. Gregory of Nazianz 2019, 121). Through the “utterance of the first divine words”, the “beginningless” Light brought into existence the “created light”, through which “all creation was given existence in order to increase the light”, for, “all that ‘is’ is light” (Stăniloae 1993, 11). The original or “beginning light was a reflection of uncreated energies” (Chirilă 1994, 48-50), “a sign of the presence of the One who is Light” (Chirilă et al. 2018, 97), a reflection of divine uncreated energies, a sign of the presence and fullness of divine creative grace (Cristea and Filipov 2019, 41).

If we believe that the divine, “intra-trinitarian”, uncreated, “pure and simple” Light has always existed, therefore before creation, we can say that created light has two levels of manifestation. The first level is that of the first three days of creation, which is not sufficiently well presented in the creation account but is outlined only in general terms. The second level is that of astral light, the actual level to which we refer when we consider natural light. Following the psalmist’s observation (“You have established the light and the sun” cf. Ps 72:16), in terms of created light, we can distinguish, on the one hand, the light of the first day of creation, one of “spiritual communication between God and man”, an “immaterial” light, and, on the other hand, the light of the fourth day, a “diaphanous material” light, given by God through the stars “for our daily life” (Nicolescu 2019). We can therefore say that the Old Testament makes a major distinction between the light created by God on the first day of creation and the natural

light spread by the Sun and the Moon from the fourth day onwards, thus affirming that the brilliance of this light originates in God and testify that it cannot exist independently of Him.

Saint Gregory of Nazianz considers that the light at the beginning of the world is not “organic” or “material”, but “non-fleshly and non-material”, only then was the Sun created “to flood the whole world with its light”. All this was brought into existence according to a precise order, since God creates “the image [...] before matter”, for light is “the image of the sun” (St. Gregory of Nazianz 2019, 121).

Regarding the light of the first day, whether it is uncreated or created, the scriptural text “Let there be light” (Gn 1:3) leaves little room for interpretation. God then commands the light to exist, to shine, which implies that this light is subject to time, like any creature. Without disagreeing with the Scriptures or the Church Fathers (Holy Tradition), St. Cyril proposes a deeper exegetical level, showing that the light of the first day of creation is “the radiance of God’s glory” and “a means of revealing the mystery of the uncreated energies” poured out on the world from the beginning of creation. Thus, the light of the first day, “which the Lord commanded to be”, is “uncreated” (Chirilă 2020, 8-9.19). This conception is supported by St Maximus Confessor’s conception of divine reasons, according to which “all that is or will be made [...] was willed beforehand and thought beforehand and known beforehand. All things are always contained by the will of God through foreknowledge, according to His infinite power” (St. Maxim the Confessor 1983, 280).

Since the scriptural text does not settle this question, and it was probably not the intent of the hagiographer to mention whether it is an uncreated or a created Light, biblical exegetes consider the light of the first day of creation to be “God’s light” in the sense of being of divine origin. Those who argue for a created light have no problem identifying its appearance/creation here, but those who argue for an uncreated light must explain the divine words: “Let there be light”, as being only an activation, with Creation, of God-Light. The Old Testament must be seen as a light, for the Law of God “gives light to the eyes” (Ps 19:8) and the Prophets are like a lamp “shining in a dark place” (2 Pt 1:19).

Creation Days

The orderly division of creation into six divine days suggests that “the world had been carefully and orderly designed. The literary pattern: command – fulfilment

– inspection – approval” seems to indicate a construction, where God “consecrates an untouched place from which to build an altar” (Gn 1:1-3). The created world seems like a “dome” (Gn 1:6-8), which has the earth as its floor, the seas as its basins, materials (Gn 1:11-12, 20-25), the ritual calendar (Gn 1:14-19) and people as “servants” (Gn 1:26-31) (*Biblica – Atlas biblic* 2011, 94). Even though Scripture glosses over some things, it is important to point out that everything that was created was brought into existence during the six days of creation. Although Moses mentions nothing about the creation of clouds or fire, they must have been created on the first day. It is obligatory (essential/fundamental) that all creation has its beginning in these six days of creation (St. Ephrem the Syrian 1994, 77-8).

Even if an “ultra-literary” interpretation of the Biblical Cosmogogenesis would lead us to claim that “the world is only 144 hours older than man” (Crawford 1978, 219), i.e., six days of creation (Philips 1997, 19), such a view is consistent with Revelation, but not with evolutionary science.

Through Moses, the Holy Spirit teaches us quite precisely “what things were created on the first day and what things were created on the other days”. This Revelation must be considered “a descent of the lover of men, God”, Who could “bring all things into being in one day ... in the twinkling of an eye”. However, God decided to create them gradually, in order “to teach us clearly about what has been done, so that, knowing them well, we may not fall into the errors of those who judge, moved by human thoughts” (St. John Chrysostom 1987, 50-1).

When/how darkness appeared

Of the three phases of the process of dispersing chaos, equivalent to the first three days of creation (Gn 1:3-13), in the first phase, equivalent to the first day, God worked with darkness. “It is unmistakable” that the simple divine statement “let there be light” simply “dispersed the darkness” (Philips 1997, 17). “Before the Lord poured light upon the world”, everything was “plunged into darkness” because the brightness of the light was lacking, ... because the very air itself was dark ... and the water under the cloud was dark”. Even though the face of the buildings is “beautiful” (St. Ambrose the Great 2007, 39), without light they would have remained hidden, unseen and unknown. Because no one among creation knows exactly what darkness is, nor can they say how long the darkness that preceded that special day lasted: One, we assume the darkness was of “indefinite duration” (Crawford 1978, 311).

The Church Fathers clearly affirm the supremacy of light over darkness: God “dispelled” the darkness (Origen 1989, 123), immediately, at the command of the Creator, the darkness, which reigned in the primordial chaos, “quickly recedes and ceases and with great haste, light is brought in its place” (Sf. Neofit Zăvorâtu 2016, 32). “Darkness is not an existence, but an accident”, being the absence of light and because air has no light in its being, God calls darkness, “air devoid of light” (St. John of Damascus 2004, 44). We see, then, that light has in it the power, received from God, to dispel (to bring to non-existence) darkness, the two not being able to co-exist together. If “Light is Creation itself”, “darkness is chaos”, for “Light was created”, but “darkness is but an ephemeral eclipse” of light, for “good was created”, but “evil is but a temporary weakening of it” (Rosen 1992, 54). Only God “can light the darkness, can make life spring forth, can replace chaos with order”, and truly, “works worthy of God” (Mackintosh 2012, 9).

However, there is also a dichotomous conception of light and dark, seen as two competing principles in an endless struggle for supremacy. Such a view is alien to Scripture, which shows that “when light arises, chaos is removed”. Even the biblical expression: God “has separated the light from the darkness” (Gn 1:4) refers to a way of expressing antithesis, to understand that the two cannot coexist, that light is the victor over darkness (*Dicționar de imagini* 2014, 570-1)). This idea has its basis in Scripture: “... what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? ...” (2 Cor 6:14-15 – ESV).

Depending on our conception of this world, whether we consider it “one of good, of light, in which evil and darkness are but fleeting”, or, on the contrary, whether “we live in a valley of weeping dominated and guided by the forces of evil, and the faint rays of good end up being covered by the clouds of darkness”, we can also give an answer about earthly life and how we understand how to live this life: Either “as a wonderful gift worth striving to make it as beautiful as possible”, or to have a negative attitude towards this earthly existence, to consider it useless and to have a “sceptical attitude” and negative (Rosen 1992, 54).

In trying to identify the origin, nature and meaning of primordial darkness, several directions have emerged. Those who argue that as God created light, so He did with darkness, bring in support statements such as the one in the sixth Sura, called “of the cattle”, wherein the first verse says: “Praise be to God who made the heavens and the earth and ordained darkness and light” (Coranul 2001, 117). Even the prophet Isaiah

tells us that God is the One who “prepared the light” and made “darkness” (Is 45:7). The idea of a link between Divinity and darkness can only be explained in a correct exegetical key. A certain filiation between God and darkness can only be accepted if we consider that God is the “maker of light” and that “the home and maker of darkness is the world” (St. Ambrose the Great 2007, 49), i.e., created matter. In this sense, primordial darkness can refer to prime matter, to that “Creatio prima”, to a state of utter disorder, of *וְבֵהוּ וְתֵהוּ* and lack of light.

To those who believe that darkness refers to fallen angels, St Ambrose the Great reminds them that evil was not “a sharer in the building up of the world”, because “the dark things” are not to be “mixed up” “in the divine work and in the most beautiful building”, the darkness mentioned in the second verse is to be understood “simply”, therefore, it does not refer, even allegorically, to the powers of evil (St. Ambrose the Great 2007, 49). In this sense, light and primordial darkness “are not antagonistic”, but “distinct realities that have a well-defined role by God”. Just as “the darkness into which Moses entered on Mount Sinai cannot be regarded as a Godless space”, neither does “the darkness that was above the deep have negative connotations” (Chirilă 2020, 19).

Another way of trying to understand the meaning of this darkness, present both before the days of creation and throughout the Hexaemeron, as well as in other biblical episodes, is to resort to symbolism. In this sense, one can bring up the symbol of apophatic (negative or mystical) knowledge, which is likened to the taboric light (Bria 1994, 119). The “entering of Moses into darkness (Ex 20:21) and the seeing of God in it” seems contrary to the first revelation, when “He appeared in the light” (Ex 3:2), but this is not so. The more the mind “comes nearer to sight (contemplation), the more it sees that the divine nature is unseen (unknowable, incomprehensible)” (St. Gregory of Nyssa 1995, 122-3), that is, shrouded in darkness.

Light

The term used in Hebrew, *אֵלֶּךְ*, is translated into Greek as *φῶς* (Bullinger 1951, 162). In a literal sense, light can be explained as an “emanation of luminous energy” spread by some celestial bodies (the sun), flames and lamps. Created by God, Scripture shows that this light predates the planetary flora and fauna (Gn 1:3,5). To perceive it, “an organ is necessary to receive it”, without which “light is useless”. Few things created by God can compare with light, “and the capacity to receive and use it is extraordinary”. Light plays an essential role in human life, for without it there is

“no growth, knowledge, the satisfaction of physiological needs, cleansing, comfort, joy” (Dictionar Biblic 1996, 270-1).

Figuratively, the idea of light is often associated with the Godhead itself (“God is light” cf. 1 Jn 1:5), with Christ (“true light” cf. 1:4,9; 8:12; 12:35,46), with the Word of God (Ps 119:105). Both in His Being and in His works, “God manifests Himself” by illuminating human life through various actions. Light is that which “describes the work of the Word” “under the guidance of the Spirit”, it is a symbol of Christians who, armed with “the weapons of light” (Rom 13:12), can become sons of light (1 Thes 5:5) and has the duty to spread this light further (Mt 5:14,16; Jn 5:35; Phil 2:15) (*Dictionar Biblic* 1996, 271).

Although received through Revelation, the idea of light “is shrouded in mystery”, a quality it retains in the scriptural content (*Dictionar de imagini* 2014, 571). While some Church Fathers believe that there was some light, which was “made with the sky, for the sky was the realm of light”, “the clouds that covered the earth prevented it from reaching the earth” (Rose 2001, 73), St. Ephrem the Syrian believes that light was created at the dawn of the first day. At the end of the twelve hours of that night, light was created between the clouds and the waters and thus drove away the shadow of the clouds which shaded the waters and made them dark. This happened on the first moon (Nissan) when the number of hours in the day was equal to the number of hours in the night, and so the light continued to shine for twelve hours. However, although light and clouds were created in the blink of an eye, the day and night of the first day of creation were completed in twelve hours. The saint considers that the created light was either like a shining mist over the surface of the earth, or like a sunrise, or like the “pillar of fire” (which guided the Israelite people in the wilderness cf. Ex 13:21). Thus, the light drove away the darkness, which covered all creation, either by its being/matter/essence/substance or by its brightness. The light spread over the whole of creation, but it was neither fixed anywhere nor did it move, though it seems, when the day ends and night begins and again at the beginning of the day (St. Ephrem the Syrian 1994, 80-2).

Even if we look at it only from the point of view of a simple “phenomenological account”, whose first element “is the creation of light”, the biblical account of creation underlines it, showing its “indispensable necessity for life and growth”. The creative word is the One who “brings order out of chaos, light out of darkness, life out of death” (*Dictionar de imagini* 2014, 293).

As Scripture shows us, the voice of God begins with light, so the adornment of the world begins with light (St. Ambrose the Great 2007, 47). The world would have no purpose if it were not seen. God was in the light because He “alone has immortality and dwells in the light” (1 Tim 6:16), He was the “true Light, Who, coming into the world, enlightens every man” (Jn 1:9). This light from the beginning of creation, God willed to make it so that it could be perceived by the eyes of the flesh (St. Ambrose the Great 2007, 48). Like a person who wants to build a house, he first positions it so that it will benefit from as much light as possible and only then digs the foundation. This is the first requirement/condition (a necessity), without which, the whole house is devoid of beauty, or even becomes uninhabitable. So it is the light that brings out the other beautiful objects in the house (St. Ambrose the Great 1961, 38). “It is the light that makes the other ornaments of the house worthy” (St. Ambrose the Great 2007, 48).

The light created by God on the first day is “the beauty and adornment of all creation seen”, without which “all remain unknown in darkness, unable to show their beauty”. Some argue that this light is the “cosmic fire, which is above the air”, the ether. So, one of the four elements, fire, “is light and rises higher than all others; it is caustic and illuminating at the same time”, was created on the first day (St. John of Damascus 2004, 44).

The order of creation is placed first in God’s light, an “indestructible light, which darkness cannot cover” (Bria 1994, 197. 242), for the Scripture testifies: “The revelation of your words will make light” (Ps 119:130). As soon as the divine Word speaks, light appears. According to the scriptural texts, light “does not spring from itself”, but “comes (usually unexpectedly) from outside the earthly sphere [...] giving it a transcendent splendour”. As a symbol, light represents both “transcendence” and “the immanence of God”, for it possesses a “simultaneous character”: it is from above, but it penetrates and spreads into everyday life. In Scripture, light is “at the heart of central themes”, including creation, and it “embodies much of the teaching” about God, which explains its prominent place “in the history of theology” (Pelikan 1962, 14). Even in its literal and physical manifestations, “light contributes significantly to the elemental quality of the biblical world” (*Dictionar de imagini* 2014, 574).

“Light from the Light”, “the brightness of the Father” (Pelikan 1962, 23. 27), Christ not only “came down from heaven as the light of the world” (Pelikan 2004, 114), but moreover, He is “the beginning light of the world and its brightness” (Origen 1989, 520). That “emptiness” at the beginning of creation “began to be filled”

with a “good light”, through which all created things were called into existence “by the image, in the image of the light” divine (Chirilă 2009, 119).

“Brightness is the result of incandescence” because any solid body becomes bright (incandescent) by heating (to about 430 C), just as any liquid that absorbs heat emits light. The biblical statements of verse 3, describing the process from darkness to light, refer to “the beginning of activity in the matter”, for in scientific terms the production of light is the result of “molecular activity”. So, in scientific terms, “the nebula becomes luminous” as a “result of condensation”, and not because of the Sun. A bright day, but without the Sun, is still “compatible” with science, which claims that “the nebula would naturally be bright” and that the Earth, “which reached its present form before the Sun”, would have been “a self-luminous, molten mass”. So, it is Moses who, through the Scriptures, puts light before the Sun. According to the concepts of modern physics, there is a difference between the term “lux” (light that has its own source) and “lumen” (reflected or radiated light). According to this theory, called “the metaphysics of light”, “with the creation out of nothing of as yet unformed matter, God brings into existence the first form, spiritual light”. This light, “lux”, can be conceived “as an extraordinarily rarefied form of corporeal light”, which gave “birth to space ... and was the source and primary cause of all created things”. Light is both the “power” by which God “produces the corporeal world” and the instrument by which the soul meets the body and the senses. Seen in this light, lux becomes lumen. The light of creation “fills all space from the farthest star to the interspaces of the atom”. In accordance with the “modern hypothesis of the convertibility of matter and energy”, light can be understood “as the source of all movement and life”, but also “as the basis of sound”. This theory of the creative function of light is “strikingly” like the modern physicists’ tendency to regard “radiant energy as the supreme irreducible of matter”. The biblical passage shows that “the entrance of the Word into the world always brings light”, whether it is “the impenetrable darkness of primordial chaos or the dark depths of the human soul”. “Where the Spirit of God works through the Word, darkness flees before the light”. Although in the beginning there was non-being and darkness in Creation, the Divine called into existence light and being (Crawford 1978, 296-8).

Recognised as “one of the most mysterious entities in the Universe”, modern scientists can easily tell us “what makes light” but cannot tell us “what light is”. In physics, light “has become the new absolute”, being part of the famous equation that ushered in the atomic age: $E = mc^2$ (energy equals mass multiplied by the speed of light squared) (Philips 1997, 18).

One can speak of a “fascination” of “physics with light and its phenomena”, which is why, from this perspective, “the history of light research” can be said to be “as old as man”, but this research is truly “realistic and precise, only in the last three centuries”. It was only in 1666, studying the phenomenon of diffraction, that Newton stated that “light is composed of colours”, the rainbow being “the illustration of this phenomenon” (Andronic 2015), mentioned long before in the Book of Genesis.

Both Christian theology and astrophysics declare that light was one of the primordial materials of the Universe. So, even scientifically, light is at the heart of the most remarkable explorations of the truth of creation. It was only in 2015 that Einstein’s theory that light behaves both as a wave and as a particle was proven to be true, which was a major turning point on the border between science and religion. Beyond the scientific demonstration and the experiment, itself, the quantum understanding of light brings into focus another paradigm of the wave-particle duality, that of mystery. It was probably this mystery that made Einstein declare in 1916 that for the rest of his life, he would want to think about this theme of light (Cristea and Felipov 2019, 41.43).

The events recounted during the creation days are “miraculous, not subject to the laws of nature that govern the world today, and we cannot understand them by projecting our present experience onto them”. Thus, Abbot Varsanufie of Optina points out that we do not know “what kind of light” it was because after the fall, everything changed (Rose 2001, 28. 66).

The Church Fathers understand this light, both literally and symbolically (*Dictionar de imagini* 2014, 573; St. Cyril of Alexandria 1992, 329. 389), both as the light that “darkness did not encompass” (Jn 1:4-5) and as a “Christological attribute” (Septuaginta 2004, 52).

Just as “ancient man did not believe that all light came from the sun”, neither does the scriptural text (Oancea 2006, 14) contain “any suggestion that daylight was caused by sunlight”. The angels were perceived as “propagators of light”, but “daylight was present even when the sun was behind a cloud or there was an eclipse. The light made its appearance before the sun was seen and persisted even after the sun was no longer seen” (Walton, Matthews and 2021, 28).

In Judaism, the Light was created by God, it “is not identical with the Godhead”, it is neither “a divine power ... and is not the light of the Sun” (which was created only on the fourth day), nor can it be understood in a dualistic sense (for there is no adversary equal to God, who “radically transcends cosmic sacredness”). Judaism considers light

to be holy because it is “God’s creation” (Eliade 1995, 49-50), and it “emanates”, like a ray, from God (Goodenough 1969, 8). In this sense, Philo (Philo 1999, 338-9) considers that those who seek the truth “see God through God” (*θεόν θεώ*), and, likewise, “light through light” (*φωτι φώς*). Some consider that, three hundred years later, the Nicene creed: “Light from Light, true God from true God, ...” is nothing but the “echo” of this expression of Philo (Johnson 2003, 161).

How did God speak?

The “utterance of God” is nothing other than “the act by which His will becomes deed”, “the participation of the Word in the act of creation”, and “in the birth of time”. In the biblical account of creation, the phrase “God said” is used ten times (Gn 1:3,6,9,11,14,20,24,26,28,29), once at the beginning of each day of creation, but twice on the third day and four times on the sixth day. These ten phrases in the first chapter of Genesis introduce the divine “first set of ten commandments” “and not one of them was broken”, in contrast to “the second set of ten commandments (Ex 20), which were never fulfilled, by anyone except God incarnate in the Son” (Philips 1997, 18).

The formula of the creative decree: “God said: let there be ...” is repeated throughout the biblical Cosmogony on the second and fourth days (Gn 1:3,6,14), suggesting “that the divine Will acted through ... the laws of nature” (Crawford 1978, 294). Divine words are not only “legislative, but also executive ... when he says, it is done” (Philips 1997, 18). When God said, “Let there be light,” the doing did not follow these words, but rather the doing was accomplished with the Word (St. Ambrose the Great 2007, 48). As the Scripture says (“He said, and they came forth, He commanded, and they were built” Ps 148:5), we understand that the fulfilment (accomplishment, realisation, execution) of the action (divine decision) accompanied the Word (St. Ambrose the Great 1961, 39). In this sense, Augustine wonders whether these first “divine words” were spoken in time, or in the “eternity of the Word” (St. Augustine 2008, 21).

God “spoke only and the light was brought into being and darkness departed” (St. John Chrysostom 1987, 48). When Scripture mentions the “Voice”, “Word” or “Commandment of God”, by these terms we are not to understand a sound “uttered by the vocal organs, nor air struck with the tongue”, but we are to understand that “in order to be easily understood by those to whom it is addressed”, the meaning given by God’s will “takes the form of a commandment” (St. Basil the Great 1986, 93). God did not

speak like humans, who make sounds by means of vocal organs, through a movement of the tongue, nor like a sound of words striking/kissing the air. His purpose was to reveal Himself, to make His will known through His work (St. Ambrose the Great 1961, 39).

If for the Mosaics God creates through “Reason” (Philo 2015, 7-8) and His Word, for Christians the creative Word is the Logos, the Son of God Himself. Thus, in a Christological key, Augustine shows that the divine voice which gave birth to light could sound “real/material” like the voice of the Epiphany at the waters of the Jordan (“this is my beloved Son” Mt 3:17). More than “a material sound”, these words are “the voice of God” which “belongs to the being of His Word” (Jn 1:1). For “all things were made through him” (Jn 1:3), and “light was made through him”. Although “the Word of God is coeternal with the Father”, “the words are temporal” (St. Augustin 2008, 21-2), i.e., “in His Word, the Father thought from eternity the universe and the things in it, and through His Word, created them in time”. “In the Word of God, every creature is both eternal (because “in the Word of the Father there is no temporality, He being the Creator of time”) and temporal”. “The divine Logos does not create the world as if speaking words in time, but at once, by a divine sign of His power, causes and reasons for being are created after the patterns eternally existing in Him” (St. Augustin 2008, 478).

Let there be light!

“How simple and yet how godly!” (Mackintosh 2012, 12), the expression sums up what the psalmist develops: “For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.” (Ps 33:9 – ESV). These words are God’s “unsearchable ... and unsearchable” that brought “all things into being by thought and word alone” (St. Basil the Great 1986, 134). They express the divine “personal will” which “produces” light, “the most sublime of the elements”. In contrast to the “darkness of chaos”, and in perfect correspondence “with the commanding will of God”, the light will “fill the abyss between God and the void of formlessness” (Brown, Fitzmayer and Murphy 2007, 9).

These divine words were the “prerequisite” “to put an end to chaos” (תְּהִי אֵלֶּיךָ יְהוָה) and “to step into the great work of creation” (Rosen 1992, 54). “Because darkness reigned over the deep, God made light,” without which “no work or growth of human beings to be created was possible” (Todoran and Zăgreaan 1991, 160). “It was necessary for the Great Light to begin the creation of the world from the light” to dispel “the darkness and the lack of beauty and order” (St. Gregory of Nazianz 2019, 121). Thus, “we can affirm that light is ontological to the world”. Not exactly easy to decipher, the

appearance of light on the First day was imagined “through a poetic figure of speech”: a “first vault”, (for “what was before the beginning of the world was unbolted”) a “vault of light”, a light “of spiritual communication between God and man”. All that God created on this world, “he made with the help of light, in light, to light” (Nicolescu).

God is the Author (Maker, Creator) of light, and darkness has its cause and location in this created, material world (St. Ambrose the Great 2007, 48). The Good Creator spoke the word “light”, penetrating it with brilliance, so that He could reveal the world and give it a beautiful (Florenski 1999, 68) and pleasant appearance (Rose 2001, 74). Thus, suddenly, the air (the sky) became bright, and the darkness shrank in fear, due to the brilliance of the new (or novel, unusual) light (Rose 2001, 74). The light from the beginning appeared on earth “either as a bright cloud, or as the light of dawn, or as the lampstand that lighted the Jewish people in the wilderness”. This light “was everywhere, not confined to any one place; it scattered the darkness without having any movement; all its movement was only the dawning and the dying; when it died suddenly, the reign of the night came” (St. Ephrem the Syrian 1994, 81).

The Fathers and the Church Writers noted “the very special qualities of this divine light” and pointed out “the differences in nature that existed between it and the physical light that God reveals only on the fourth day”. These “patristic perspectives” can also be found in the Midrashic literature, where “primordial light” is identified with “the radiance of divine glory” (Chirilă 2020, 6).

“In the Jewish mind,” there was the conception that the light from the beginning was meant to “order creation until the appearance of the lights from heaven” (Chirilă 2020, 9-10). Quoting the rabbinic commentary to the Book of Genesis, “Genesis Rabbah”, Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (Ramban) states that “the original primordial light shone only in the first three days until the sun and moon were suspended in the sky”. Then Rabbi Solomon Yzaak (Rashi) states that this light “was hidden” (*The Jewish Bible*). The Ramban believes that the light created on the first day gradually faded: on the second day, “the firmament intercepted the light and prevented it from shining”, and on the third day, when the earth was created, “there was darkness on it, and not light”. This is why, on the fourth day, the stars were created, “whose light should reach the earth” (Ramban 1971-1976).

According to Philo, when God decided to create this “visible world, he first made that which is perceptible only through the intellect, to use an immaterial model as close as possible to the image of God... So, from the model of the world, perceptible

only by the intellect, the Creator first made the immaterial sky and invisible earth, then “the form of the air”, which he identifies as “darkness”, and then “the void”, which he calls “the abyss because empty space is very deep”. Next, God “created the immaterial substance of water and air”, over which, “he spread”, “the seventh thing he created”, light, an “immaterial one, perceptible only to the intellect, constituting a model for the sun and all the light-giving stars” (Chirilă 2002, 13).

“The march of history is a permanent fulfilment” of this first “creative word” (Rosen 1992, 54), by which, deliberately and with unbelievable ease, Almighty God brought light into/into existence. As the Book of Psalms (Ps 32:6,9) says: “By the word of the Lord the heavens were established, and their power by the spirit of his mouth, ... for he said, and they were made; he commanded, and they were built”. The light was “God’s answer”, the action by which he put an end to the “dominion of darkness” from the beginning of the creation of the world. The light was the “first move”, a “positive” one, that the Lord took as part of the “completion of the whole programme of creation”, without which, “the other stages would have no meaning”, or sense (The Wycliffe Bible Commentary 1968, 3).

“The first word of God created light, dispelled the darkness, put an end to sorrow, made the world cheerful, brought a joyful and pleasant sight to everyone and everything”. By means of light, “the sky was revealed, which before was covered with darkness”. The light not only filled the heavens but “had hung in it the light itself in its entirety”, able to send its radiance everywhere. Because the nature of light is “fine and diaphanous” and needed “no length of time to pierce the air”, “upwards” it “reached to the ether and the sky”, and “outwards”, “in the twinkling of an eye, it illuminated all parts of the earth” (St. Basil the Great 1986, 93).

Regarding the expression “let there be light” some commentators argue that it should be understood as “let there be light” (St. Ambrose the Great 2007, 48; St. Basil the Great 1986, 93), arguing that it is not the verb “to be”, as light can only be located on the Fourth day (The Companion Bible 1951, 2-3). Thus, on the first day of creation, it is not the light of the Sun, which was created on the fourth day (Gn 1:16), but of a “fixed source of light”, which was “outside the earth”, towards which the earth performed a complete cycle, night-day (Ryrie 1978, 3).

Metropolitan Bartholomew understands these first divine words as “the activation of the uncreated light of God, who Himself is light, just as His incarnate Word (Logos), Jesus Christ, is light”. This light will also be visible now of His change of face.

Thus, at the beginning of creation, “it is not the natural light” (of the stars, created only on the fourth day), “but that light which the eremites would later experience and which Eastern theology would come to know particularly through the writings of St. Gregory Palamas”. Perhaps the scriptural text which best “sums up the whole spectrum of meanings” that light can acquire (*Dicționar de imagini* 2014, 573), is transmitted to us by God through the Apostle Paul: “Let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God...” (2 Cor 4:6).

When the word “light” has been used/thrown, it does not mean that it is merely a preparation for future action, but we see here, in action, the “splendour of this action”. The creator of the world not only spoke the word “light”, but also created it. God’s word is His Will (Resolution), and His building is the created world (“the flesh”). When “the good Maker spoke the word light”, He revealed the world to us, “filling it with radiance” and making it “beautiful in appearance”. Suddenly “the sky became bright, and the darkness recoiled in fear from the unusual brightness”, which “suddenly penetrated the whole universe, overwhelmed the darkness, plunging it as if into the depths”. God created light and illuminated darkness (St. Ambrose the Great 1961, 38-9).

The significance and symbolism of light in Scripture can be testified to by the so-called Theologian, St. John the Evangelist, who in the Apocalypse, in the Spirit, reveals to us, unveils, removes that veil and “enlightens” us on this important theme of Christianity. Not the Sun, nor other lights, but the Glory of God is the One who gives light to the whole earth (Rv 18:1). The earth was illumined from the first day of creation because the glory of God was present. Natural light, which comes from the sun or the moon, is important, necessary and beneficial for creation, but man in particular needs supernatural light, which “the glory of God has illumined”, and in the light of which Christians must walk (Rv 21:23-24), without “needing no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.” – Rv 22:5 – ESV)

And there was light

So great and wondrous was the command of this One Day, that the very observation of its nature and its immediate effects on creation reveals, if anything, the Almighty Power and Wisdom of the Creator. Just as light promptly illuminated the heavens, the earth and the seas, in a moment (suddenly) the earth is unveiled in the splendour of dawn. Perceiving this light enables us to marvel at how by the mere utterance of the word “light”, God has given radiance to a dark world (St. Ambrose

the Great 1961, 39). St. Ephrem Sirul believes that, at God’s command, this light shone for three days, “lest being created from nothing, it should return to nothing” (St. Ephrem the Syrian 1994, 81). During these first three days of creation, special and particular days, during each one there was (a kind of) day and (a kind of) night, for the light “spread” and “gathered”, “at the divine command” (St. John of Damascus 2004, 44). By this call of light into existence, Augustine understands “that it was made and illuminated” (St. Augustine 2008, 23), that is, “light was called to its Creator”, which implies a “return” of it (St. Augustine 2008, 478). The third verse of the first chapter of the Book of the Making concludes with an observation: the divine command “became a fact”, it became “a substance” so “pleasing to delight” that the human mind could not “have conceived it” (St. Basil the Great 1986, 93).

Conclusions

Beyond the cultural act, the reading of the Holy Scriptures is addressed to a “homo religiosus”, whom God seeks and awaits the answer to His call. Regarding this Old Testament biblical theme, without denying the divine origin of the Law of Moses, we must stress that its spiritual meaning will only acquire its true brilliance after the Incarnation. The light of the Old Law, hidden under a veil, will shine forth with the coming of Jesus, who will reveal Himself to those who seek Him, even in the pages of the Old Testament. The medium of creation, an attribute of God, light reveals the divinity, mediates the encounter with the Creator and (re)establishes order among the created. In researching such an important theme as Light at the beginning of creation, scholars should not be content with general notions alone, nor should they build their theories solely on what the physical eye can perceive. It is true that, initially, Christians strengthen their faith based on the testimony of the divine Scriptures, but they are no strangers to reason and science, and they seek to validate their faith through these discoveries of science and to identify external evidence.

Christian scientists point out that the “dividing line between a spiritual and a physical universe” is a rather abstract concept, and that the “spiritual universe” was called “spiritual” only because it could not be seen. With scientific development, it became possible to observe, “something tangible and inspiring, beyond location, mass and size”, “an unlimited source of static energy”. Then, it turned out that “the ultimate particles or forces of which matter is composed ... contain light and carry energy, following the model of “human thought processes”. Thus, “the spiritual universe could

turn out to be the static, space-based source of electrical energy”. All this proves that “energy belongs to space”, as does light (Crawford 1978, 275), an idea in line with the biblical accounts. Although modern man is always seeking to discover what light is, how it is formed, what its speed is, and much more, he is not even close to the final answer. Knowing full well that to arrive at the correct answer it is necessary to ask the question correctly, instead of looking for a “what”, in this case, from a theological perspective, it would be more appropriate to look for a “who”.

In theological thought, light is understood more as “the ambience of a person and not of a thing or object”, for “an infinite ocean of light flows from the risen Body of the Lord” (Lossky 1993, 59). God is the Light that shines even through created things and since His most important creation is man, he is called to be light: “You are the light of the world ...” (Although, on the one hand, the Truth does not lose its value because of those who do not know all its details, on the other hand, because of the weakness of our fallen human nature, we are unable to perceive that gleam of Truth which still shines in us, in these “earthen vessels” (2 Cor 4:7) and which can be discovered, to a great extent, from the Scriptures.

If, according to the model taught by St. Irenaeus, who said that to follow Christ “is to share in salvation” as well: “to follow the light means to perceive the light” (Pelikan 2004, 159) or to “receive it” (St. Irenaeus 1995, 478), finally, I wish to invoke what may be a prayer appropriate to our times: Lord, “let your light shine through me, not on me”. Such an invocation makes sense, in Orthodoxy, for it is the only way to approach God’s light. This requires overcoming a negative, intellectual, purely rational theology, for it is true that the apophatic is almost impossible to express, but God can be experienced in the Light of the divine. To glimpse the divine light, we do not need a speculative theology but a “theology of sight”, which is born from the recognition that “God is beyond sight and beyond all words” and from the confession that “God is nothing that can be seen, understood and expressed in the world’s plan” (St. Gregory Palamas 1977, 293).

“... in Your light, we shall see light” (Ps 35:9).

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