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EDITORIAL

REV. **IOAN CHIRILĂ**

*Glory of God in the Old Testament – Introductory
Reflections*

GLORY OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT – INTRODUCTORY REFLECTIONS

In this thematic issue on ‘The Glory of God in the Old Testament,’ we aim to achieve three main goals: to highlight the theological importance of ‘*kavod Yahwe*,’ to offer a concise overview of key scriptural appearances of divine glory in Old Testament theophanies, and to underline the concept’s openness to patristic interpretation and Eastern Orthodox iconography. We believe that God’s glory is more than a mere religious term; it is a vital theological category that illustrates the human encounter with God’s transcendent presence, evolving from ideas of ‘weight’ and societal significance to the mystical experience of uncreated light.

The Semitic root *kvd*, which leads to the noun *kavod*, functions on two related but distinct levels of meaning: a ‘material’ or social aspect—such as weight, wealth, and prestige—and a ‘spiritual’ aspect—honour, respect, and glory. In scripture, *kavod* mainly signifies divine glory, and its frequent appearance in important texts indicates a rich semantic range that requires interpretation based on context. Glory can be seen as an ontological ‘weight,’ representing absolute significance, but also as a personal experience when encountering the divine—such as holy fear, worship, and humility.

This dual aspect clarifies why *kavod* in the Old Testament is linked to a broad range of elements: royal throne and crown, cloud and fire, temple and sacred objects, as well as terms within a connected semantic network — *oz* (‘power’), *ošer* (‘wealth’), *panim* (‘face’), *or* (‘light’), *ieša* (‘salvation’), *anavah* (‘humility’), *tehila* (‘praise, prayer’). Therefore, glory represents not just an external sign of divine sovereignty but also a force that saves, enlightens, and transforms human lives through communion.

In the narratives that record the pilgrimage through the Sinai desert, God’s glory is often shown through natural signs such as clouds of smoke, pillars of fire, thunder, and earthquakes. These images also symbolize guidance, like the cloud leading through the



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wilderness, and judgment, exemplified by the consuming fire that punishes rebellions. The Sinai theophany serves as the model, where light, sound, smoke, and earthquakes inspire holy fear and encourage a renewed relationship between God and His people. Both the exodic texts and patristic interpretations highlight that, although this glory is perceived through sensory images, it points to a radiant light beyond ordinary perception—a ‘uncreated light’ that is longed for but remains largely inaccessible to the human eye.

The glory dwelling in the sacred space — the Tent and the Temple — signifies the shift from a nomadic presence to God’s permanent residence among His people. The cloud filling the Tent and the Temple, the divine fire consuming sacrifices, and the radiance seen on Moses’ face all confirm that glory embodies Yahweh’s actual presence in these cultic locations. It’s also important to distinguish between ‘shekhinah’ and ‘kavod’: *shekhinah*, meaning ‘dwelling,’ emphasizes the closeness and warmth of the divine presence, while *kavod* highlights its overwhelming, luminous, and transfiguring aspect.

In Psalms, glory often relates to life, salvation, and divine abundance. The royal Psalms, using the links ‘kavod – ošer – ieša,’ demonstrate that God’s glory isn’t just about power but is also life-giving, providing deliverance and blessings. This aspect of salvation practically ties worship, prayer, and holy praise to acknowledging the divine presence that transforms human history.

Prophets reveal echoes and nuanced theological insights. Isaiah’s first vision (chapter 6) depicts the temple’s glory as radiant light shrouded in smoke, symbolizing a presence that also signifies judgment. The seraphim’s cry ‘Holy, Holy, Holy’ highlights the sacredness and intensity of the light, requiring purification of the gaze. St. John Chrysostom and other Church Fathers interpret this radiance as ‘unspeakable light,’ an uncreated light that draws and moves the soul. Ezekiel (chapter 1) offers intricate images: cherubim, wheels, fire, flaming metal, and the rainbow—together constituting a synesthetic revelation of glory, where light, sound, and movement of divine presence merge. Like Isaiah, Ezekiel perceives God’s luminous presence as overwhelming; although he is receptive to sight, he cannot fully gaze upon the divine face. Yet, the distinction between viewing glory head-on or from behind—receiving the light gradually, as Moses did, or being overwhelmed by it—is vital for understanding Old Testament revelation.

The tradition of the Eastern Fathers associates glory with the uncreated light, viewing prophetic visions as encounters with a divine theandric reality that illuminates

and transforms. Moses, as a bearer of light; the seventy prophets filled with the Spirit; and the liturgies and mysteries reflecting openness to grace—all show how glory is transmitted without being diminished, supporting a theology of participation: divine glory is not consumed through communication but overflows and enriches heavenly life. This view also connects to iconography: icons serve as windows of glory, places where one encounters the uncreated light, with saints depicted as emanations of light for worshippers. The icon as a ‘pure perspective’ of glory links theology, aesthetics, and liturgical practice. As bearers of grace, icons guide viewers towards participation; contemplating them models spiritual pedagogy, enabling individuals to become ‘bearers of light’. Artists like Andrei Rublev demonstrate this experience, where the painter, before an icon, allows himself to be illuminated, making liturgical creation a spreading of glory.

Glory of God, rooted in Old Testament texts and Eastern Orthodox exegetical tradition, remains a profoundly luminous theological concept: a divine manifestation that enlightens, saves, judges, and invites communion. It appears in various forms—such as clouds, fire, intense light, facial radiance, and temple presence—and is consistently linked with the Holy Spirit. Patristic interpretation confirms the significance of these theophanies, emphasizing their soteriological importance: glory is not merely an aesthetic display but a conduit for communion and transformation.

Contemporary Old Testament theology sees the theme of glory as opening rich avenues: deepening the link between *kavod* and the Holy Spirit, examining the cultic roles of glory manifestations, engaging in dialogue between historical-critical exegesis and patristic hermeneutics, and fostering interdisciplinary conversations with iconography and liturgical spirituality. Furthermore, expanding research into psalms and psalmody is important, as God’s glory often emerges in salvific and liturgical settings.

This thematic issue aims to gather contributions that advance the ongoing exploration—from analysing the semantic meaning of *kavod* in a Semitic setting, to interpreting Sinai, psalmic, and prophetic texts, as well as studies emphasizing the links between the biblical worldview and the Church’s iconographic tradition. In today’s world, where crises of meaning and presence are common, it is vital to remember that God still reveals Himself as Light—a light that transforms rather than destroys, judges but also saves—calling us to humble participation and worship. Let us explore together the mystery of God’s glory in the Old Testament: not to fully cover the topic, but to open

our eyes and hearts to the light that inspired the prophets, entered the tent and temple, and, through grace, continues to illuminate the Church and its icons.

The studies in this volume primarily originate from an international biblical conference focused on the Glory of God and its theological implications in the Old and New Testaments. The conference took place in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, from November 24 to 27, 2025, as part of the ROOTS project. It was organized by Rev. Ioan Chirilă, a professor of Old Testament at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, 'Babeş-Bolyai' University of Cluj-Napoca.

ORTHODOX EXEGESIS

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DIVINE LIGHT AND PARTICIPATION IN THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE HYMNS OF ST. SYMEON, THE NEW THEOLOGIAN

Abstract

The study examines the theme of divine light and communion within the context of the glory of God as depicted in the hymns of St. Symeon the New Theologian. It investigates how the motif of light functions as an uncreated energy that reveals, transforms, and facilitates the creature's entry into Trinitarian communion (*theosis*). Beginning with an analysis of the hymn texts—particularly *Hymns 2–12, 14–16, 26–34, and 44–49*—the research combines a philological and hermeneutical approach with a clear perspective rooted in mystical experience. The methodology incorporates both synchronic and diachronic analysis, lexical examination of key terms (*φῶς, δόξα, μετουσίωσις* etc.), and liturgical-pastoral contextualization. The findings demonstrate that in St. Symeon, light is not merely a symbolic metaphor, but an active, Trinitarian energy conveyed sacramentally through the Eucharist and realized via ascetic practices and monastic life. The Eucharist inaugurates and renews communion; asceticism shapes the receptive capacity; and mystical language—including metaphors, antinomies, and questions—serves as a hermeneutical strategy. The study highlights a theandric anthropology, wherein the body is called to deification while maintaining its distinct identity, and where apatheia results from the cooperation of effort and grace. In the historical dialogue with Palamism, a continuity is identified: Symeon offers experiential data that Palamas later formalized doctrinally through the essence–energies distinction; however, the anachronistic application of subsequent terminology should be avoided. The implications are both theological and pastoral, affirming experience as an epistemic source, emphasizing the necessity of pastoral criteria for discernment, and underscoring the importance of balancing poetic mystical language with conceptual rigor in contemporary energy



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theology. The conclusion underlines the doctrinal and practical value of Symeon's legacy for theology and the life of the Church.

Keywords

Light, Communion, Theosis, Eucharist, Divine energies

Introduction

The theme of divine light and communion in the glory of God embodies the theological and mystical focal point of the hymns of St. Symeon the New Theologian. In these poetic-liturgical compositions, light transcends mere metaphor, representing a theandric reality—an energetic, uncreated manifestation of the Divinity that emanates toward the creature, facilitating ontological communion between the created and the Creator. From the earliest hymns to the most recent, St. Symeon regards light as a means of revelation, as a space for encounter and transformation. Through this process, humanity is led from the darkness of sin, sealed with the grace of the Holy Spirit, and incorporated into a shared union with divine glory. The intrinsic connection between light and communion is rooted in the fact that light is not an external phenomenon, but rather a gateway that introduces the creature into the life of the Trinity through deification (*theosis*). The Eucharist and monastic asceticism serve as the sacramental and moral frameworks within which this communion is actualized. Accordingly, this study seeks to elucidate how the motifs of light and communion in divine glory are articulated in the hymns, the theological and mystical significance ascribed to them, and how they challenge or redefine the boundaries of religious experience in the late Byzantine context.

Beginning with the work's central idea, we will develop multiple lines of analysis that collectively delineate a theological and practical portrait of the Symeonian concept of light and communion. Firstly, we will emphasize the ontological nature of the light in St. Symeon — it is not merely a moral or poetic image, but a reality intrinsic to God as a mode of divine self-disclosure, representing an implicit distinction between what remains inaccessible within the divine essence and what overflows into creation as energies or uncreated glory, through which God manifests Himself as a giver of life and presence. Secondly, we will explore the dynamics of communion—in particular, how the encounter between humanity and this light becomes feasible within the concrete experience of faith—highlighting the significance of the Eucharist as the

sacramental point of encounter, as well as the importance of spiritual disciplines such as fasting, prayer, tears, humility, and monastic asceticism in purifying the eyes of the heart and enhancing the capacity to receive and retain the outpouring of grace. A third aspect concerns the Trinitarian dimension of the Symeonian vision, with the light understood as a unique divine presence that manifests in the three Persons; this experiential Trinitarianism shapes how the believer perceives and relates to God. Next, the anthropological dimensions will be examined, focusing on the transformations experienced by the body, soul, and will when in contact with the light—from the notion of deification of the limbs and sanctification of the body to the attainment of incorruptibility—including provocative assertions where Christ's presence is affirmed even within the most intimate aspects of the self. The social-pastoral dimension of the experience will also be addressed, particularly the transition from personal piety to the mission of the illuminated, emphasizing the role of the model monk, who, through his life, serves as a lampstand, guiding others toward the light. Lastly, the analysis will consider Symeon's theological language; the employment of antinomies, rhetorical questions, and other stylistic devices is not merely literary figures but deliberate hermeneutic strategies—methods through which the mystery is preserved, the reader is challenged, and the mystical experience is transmitted (Krivocheine 1997, 229).

Contemporary research regarding St. Symeon the New Theologian has undergone a notable revitalization through the publication of critical editions and modern translations of his hymns, as well as via theological and historical-liturgical commentaries. In our research, we will primarily employ the Greek critical editions and Romanian translations of his hymns^[1], catecheses, and ethical discourses, alongside Dumitru Stăniloae's commentaries and annotations (2017), monographic analyses by Basile Krivocheine (1997) and Ilarion Alfeyev (2010), and several additional studies concerning St. Symeon personality and mystical contributions (Ică Jr. 1997, 2001, 2002; Teșu 2004; Chirilă et al. 2021; Dușe 2023-2024). Furthermore, we will consult works on Saint Gregory Palamas for theological contextualization (Tomoioagă, 2015; Calvário, 2018; Chirilă et al., 2019), studies on mystical hermeneutics, and comparative mysticism to evaluate the dimensions of Saint Symeon's thought.

Methodologically, this study will employ hermeneutic tools such as synchronous reading (transversal thematic analysis) and diachronic reading (examining the evolution of the motif of light in the Symeonian corpus). We will also use a hermeneutic approach to the liturgical and pastoral contexts to emphasize the hymns' practical role.

Our primary goals include: a) exploring how light functions as a uncreated energy in Symeonian theology; b) clarifying the link between personal experiences of light and traditional forms of communion like the Eucharist and sacramental life; c) identifying anthropological elements supporting the idea of body deification; d) situating the Symeonian contribution within the patristic discourse on divine energies and essence; and e) offering interpretations to support contemporary pastoral work and mystical studies.

This study aims to establish a framework for the systematic investigation of how light, as uncreated energy, and participation in God's glory shape not only the poetic themes of St. Symeon's hymns but also a lived doctrine with significant theological, ascetic, and anthropological implications. The work strives to contribute coherently to the comprehension of a fundamental aspect of Orthodox mysticism and to foster meaningful dialogues between patristic studies and contemporary theology.

The Hymns of St. Symeon and Its Role in Liturgical Practice

St. Symeon the New Theologian articulates in his writings a testimony to an internal transformation that emanates directly from monastic existence and personal mystical experience (Ică Jr. 2002, 5). His hymns are not merely abstract treatises but serve as confessional narratives: the progression from an initial state characterized by sin to profound repentance, culminating in the purification of the heart and ultimately culminating in the worthiness of luminous visions, is depicted as a coherent and verifiable spiritual journey within his own life. The presence of a spiritual advisor — St. Symeon the Eloquent^[2] — is consistently identified as a critical formative element. The ascetic discipline, the canon of prayer, and the criteria for evaluating mystical experiences are all situated within the authority of a living spiritual tradition. Contextually, St. Symeon operates within the framework of late Byzantine asceticism, asserting connections to the earliest Christian witnesses (e.g., St. Stephen^[3] and the Apostle Paul) and patristic authors, thereby affording his testimonies canonical legitimacy and continuity with tradition. His theological lexicon — abundant in Trinitarian imagery, apophaticism, and terminology associated with glory and light — reflects a patristic sensibility: the experience is portrayed as a personal encounter with the Persons of the Trinity, rather than as doctrinal speculation, integrating spiritual practice with theological reflection (Chirilă et al. 2021: 5–18).

St. Symeon's Hymns are at the crossroads of poetry, confessional prayer, and mystical teaching. They do not seek to establish systematic doctrines but aim to share lived experiences validated through ascetic practice. Their lyrical style allows the author to depict inner states with vivid imagery, while the confessional format transforms reading into an active participation. Readers are not just given theories but are invited to engage in repentance, weeping, and ecstasy. Symeonian rhetoric features powerful oppositions: light versus creature, fire versus grass, body versus the unseen. These contrasts are not mere stylistic devices but ways to express the paradox of theandric: how the uncreated influences the created, and how grace can transform nature without nullifying it. Rhetorical questions (*Hymn 6*) provoke wonder by suspending rational explanation and opening space for revelation^[4]. Concise images—like the 'immaterial arrow', 'luminous garment', or 'red-hot iron'—embed ephemeral feelings into memory (*Hymns 5, 30, and 44*). The stylistic variety reflects the author's multiple aims. Some texts use clear poetic meters (e.g., *Hymn 5*, versified), while others adopt a prosodic, confessional, and dialogic tone (*Hymns 4–6, 10–12*), tailored to the pastoral purpose of exhortation, warning, comfort, or visionary storytelling. This variation signifies a dual role: conveying mystical truths directly and guiding practitioners in ascetic discipline.

From an epistemological point of view, St. Symeon often uses autobiography, making his personal experiences a basis for confirming divine 'knowledge.' Descriptions of visions, body tremors, and feelings of 'going out of oneself'^[5] (*Hymn 11*), as well as the loss and rediscovery of light (*Hymns 12 and 29*), are not just symbolic but serve as proof of mystical truth. These experiences lend authority to the theological claims: the author's statements are testimonies to encounters with the Light (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2021a, 79–81).

St. Symeon's hymn captures a deeply sacramental perspective, viewing the Eucharist not just as a symbol or an act of remembrance but as both a means and an actual site of sharing in divine glory. In *Hymn 2*, the author states that through Holy Communion, 'the human body and blood are mixed with the divine Body and Blood,' making the human form 'transparent and luminous' (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 58). This portrays an ontological transformation rather than a symbolic one, as further argued in *Hymn 2*. *Hymn 7* emphasizes the union achieved through the Eucharist^[6], suggesting that liturgical communion imparts divine nature to the believer, facilitating real participation in the Trinitarian life. *Hymn 26* stresses the importance of a proper inner disposition—repentance, faith, trembling—to ensure the participation is genuine,

embracing the light of life rather than remaining superficial. Dumitru Stăniloae's pastoral-theological viewpoint interprets these images by positioning the Eucharist as 'the most direct means' of *theosis* according to St. Symeon, serving to prepare, trigger, and sustain human transformation in grace (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2017, 282–7, note 69). Consequently, these hymns weave liturgical practice into the salvation narrative, in which Eucharistic participation serves both as a cause and a sign of communion with divine light and glory.

Lexicon and Imagery of Divine Light at St. Symeon

St. Symeon employs a precise, technical, yet poetic vocabulary to articulate his mystical experience. Terms like *φῶς* ('light'), *δόξα* ('glory'), and *πνεῦμα* ('Spirit') convey deep realities beyond simple images: light as an active divine manifestation, glory as an overflow, and the Spirit as a means of communication. Concepts such as *μέθεξις* / *ἐνθεωσις* ('participation', 'deification') illustrate their impact on the human soul, while *λέπτειμα* / *διαύγεια* evoke 'transparency' and 'radiance' in the illuminated being. The second hymn formula – 'The One Light of the Holy Trinity divided in an undivided manner into Three'^[7] – serves as a theological core, affirming divine unity and its distinct Personhood without confusing essence and manifestation. *Hymns* 33 and 34 expand this lexicon: 'The Father is Light, the Son is Light, the Holy Spirit is Light,'^[8] showing that 'light' functions as an active divine energy, the medium of divine encounter—not just a metaphoric image (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 199–200). Dumitru Stăniloae emphasizes the uncreated, active nature of light in St. Symeon, indicating that these terms point to a transformative divine presence rather than mere contemplative images.

Symeonian imagery is rich in visual and thermal metaphors that concretise the experience of grace. Terms such as 'immaterial arrow,' 'fire,' 'sun,' 'lamp,' or 'luminescent garment' recur frequently to translate the phenomenon of uncreated light into images accessible to feeling. Thus, *Hymn* 5 describes the light as 'an immaterial arrow shot from the Immaterial'^[9], an image that suggests both something originating from a transcendent source and the transformative force through which it pierces and deifies. In other places, the light is likened to a hidden sun or a mantle that cloaks the being, signaling the transfiguration of the body and heart in the presence of divine glory (cf. *Hymns* 7 and 49)^[10]. In *Hymn* 30, St. Symeon explicitly intertwines the metaphor of fire with that of light: divine fire burns and purifies, and light opens the sight and understanding, so that inner illumination becomes simultaneously cleansing and

enlightening (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 185)^[11]. Dumitru Stăniloae observes that this semantic proximity between fire and light reflects a theology in which passionate purification and cognitive-mystical revelation are inseparable moments of deification. Symeonian metaphors do not merely decorate discourse but form a practical language: they guide the seeker in recognising and learning to receive grace (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2017, 320–48, note 522).

St. Symeon consistently uses antinomies as a hermeneutic tool to explore divine mysteries. Opposites such as light/darkness, created/uncreated, vision/unchanged, and body/unsensed are not merely stylistic devices but represent the ontological shifts brought about by grace. By highlighting these contrasts, the author shows that encountering the Uncreated Light is not a mere moral change but a profound ontic transformation: darkness turns into light, the created is penetrated by the Uncreated, and rational sight gives way to an ‘unchanged’ perception that surpasses the senses. *Hymns 2* and *12* express this apophatic tension: the light is ‘known in an unknown way’ and ‘as much as it wills,’ maintaining the divine mystery while acknowledging its manifestation in being (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 60). Similarly, the rhetorical questions in *Hymn 6* shift the theological statement into active wonder: questions like ‘How do you make men gods... how do you enclose the heart in light?’ do not seek argumentative answers but point to an epistemic limit—reason cannot fully explain grace; only experience can reveal it (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2011, 67). Therefore, antinomy and questioning serve complementary roles: one frames the paradox of the divine-human relationship, the other fosters the contemplative attitude essential for receiving the light (*Hymns 2, 6, and 12*).

St. Symeon the New Theologian explains that the light is not just a neutral phenomenon or a simple moral metaphor, but the very means by which God is perceived, inherently linked to the Trinity. The phrase from *Hymn 2* – ‘The One Light of the Holy Trinity, divided in an undivided manner into Three’ – does not suggest multiple essences but shows that God’s energetic presence is unified yet expressed through the lives of each Person. Therefore, the light acts as a medium through which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit reveal and act, while maintaining the unity of Divinity. *Hymn 11* describes this trinitarian experience explicitly: perception begins with seeing the Holy Spirit’s light; within this light, the Son appears; and those who see the Son can, in a limited way, also ‘see’ the Father (cf. Jn 14:9). This process is not a chain of logical steps but a description of how grace transforms perception: the Holy Spirit opens the way,

the Son appears in the light, and the Father is recognized through the entire revelation (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 77). *Hymn 12* emphasizes that true trinitarian vision depends on the condition of the person's heart: it must be pure, humble, and simple (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 1977, 67) with 'clear eyes of the mind.' St. Symeon does not regard sight as an automatic gift but as the result of spiritual purification and grace received; thus, human virtues such as repentance, humility, and purification are essential for experiencing the divine Light in its trinitarian fullness (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 79–83). For St. Symeon, genuine faith, sacramental life, and spiritual cleansing are necessary for truly perceiving Divinity in its grace-filled, trinitarian form.

St. Symeon describes the experience of light as a dynamic process. Initially, the light appears externally as a manifestation, then it penetrates the soul, 'piercing' the limbs and transforming the entire being. *Hymn 29* depicts the light entering the cell, descending inward, and producing a radical effect — the leaving of oneself, ecstasy, and the loss of usual measures, indicating a direct encounter with grace^[12]. Conversely, *Hymn 16* highlights how the light quenches the desire for the divine as it fills all the members, fulfilling the spirit's longing (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 98–9). This process is not merely visual: seeing is accompanied by strong emotions (longing, tears, consolation) and moral shifts (repentance, humility, surrendering the will). In Symeon's view, the light is not purely abstract but involves perception, sensitivity, and ethics, transforming the person's identity in a theandric sense.

Participation in the Glory of God—covering the Eucharist, monasticism, and ascetic disciplines

St. Symeon considers the Eucharist a central sacrament where true encounter with divine illumination occurs—not merely as a symbolic act but as a profound ontological union. In *Hymn 2*, he depicts this union as the human body and blood merging with the divine, becoming transparent and luminous (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 58). This reflects a shift in being: the human element, infused with Christ, turns into a conduit of light, allowing divine glory to pass through. Similarly, *Hymn 7* states that through communion, believers 'become a partaker of His nature,' emphasizing real participation in divine life, which sanctifies and inspires deification. For Symeon, the Eucharistic impact is both personal—transforming the soul and body—and relational—reconfiguring humanity within the Church community (Lossky 1995, 136). The emphasis lies in describing the lived experience rather than abstract theology.

The transparency and radiance of the shared body serve as visible signs of divine work (Teșu 2004, 171). The Eucharist is also a source and means of ongoing grace, not an isolated event but a liturgical core that energizes spiritual life, repentance, and the purification of the heart. Ultimately, the Eucharist is at the heart of salvation, where divine and human communion is experienced, and believers, through the reception of the Body and Blood, carry divine light within to transform themselves (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 68–70).

St. Symeon emphasizes the Eucharist as the core of the mystical and sacramental experience. For him, Holy Communion isn't just a symbolic act or a memory but a genuine encounter with the luminous Divinity that leads to transformation. The imagery from *Hymn 2*, which states that 'the human body and blood are mixed with the divine Body and Blood, and the former becomes transparent and luminous,' suggests an ontological change — human matter, when receiving Christ's presence, becomes capable of reflecting and transmitting the uncreated Glory, thus becoming the 'garment' where grace is revealed. This perspective rejects viewing the Eucharist as merely symbolic; instead, communion is the means through which humans actively participate in the divine nature and partake in the divine energy that illuminates and sanctifies (*Hymn 7*).

The Eucharistic role is closely tied to salvation. Through incarnation, sacrifice, and resurrection, Christ elevates His humanity, 'pneumatized, deified,' into the Trinity's fold. The Eucharist then reveals and shares this divine state with believers. St. Symeon often refers to 'body' and 'blood' to highlight the real presence and its transformative power, not merely symbolic but affecting the receiving person. Dumitru Stăniloae notes that in St. Symeon's teachings, the Eucharist is the most direct means of conveying grace to human nature, serving as the central moment in the process of *theosis* (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2017, 81–3, nota 69).

The link between vision and sacramental communion is also explicitly shown in *Hymn 11*, where the experience of vision stems from the same source as the divine light that manifests through sacraments in the Church. Therefore, the Eucharist serves as a 'sacrament of encounter'—a liturgical setting where 'the eyes of the heart' can see the light, and the body is adorned with grace's glory. Symeon highlights that approaching the chalice requires a genuine inner attitude—humility, fear of God, repentance, purity—so that one can receive the gift fruitfully rather than for judgment (*Hymns 26*^[13] and 32). Hence, liturgical and moral preparation are integral to the Eucharistic experience.

While the Eucharist grants light, truly receiving it requires a purified heart and a life aligned with grace.

For St. Symeon, monastic life is not a social option or merely a cultural ideal, but a fundamental existential choice: a way of ordering your entire being so that it becomes welcoming and receptive to divine light. In *Hymn 3*, the monk is depicted as ‘unmixed with the world and speaking ceaselessly only with God; he is watched as he watches, loved as he loves, and becomes light’^[14] — a formulation that emphasises the dialogical nature of contemplative life: the monk is not an isolated solitary, but a living witness to the presence of God, someone who, being filled with light, becomes himself a lampstand for others.

St. Symeon describes monastic life—comprising the cell, ascetic practices, and obedience to the spiritual father—as an effective pedagogical and healing framework (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 1999, 338). The cell is not a place of escapism but a safeguard: it shields the ‘eyes of the heart’ from worldly noise and temptations, fostering an environment where spiritual perception becomes sharper (*Hymn 28*)^[15]. Obedience influences the will, validating it under the spiritual father’s authority; ascetic practices such as fasting, silence, tears, and renunciations serve as practical means to purify the heart, enabling it to receive grace. *Hymns 4* and *5* explicitly highlight these practices: fleeing worldly distractions, cultivating humility, crying over sins, and maintaining silence—all to ‘cleanse the eyes of the heart’ to perceive the divine light. Dumitru Stăniloae observes that monastic discipline, through its strict rituals, forms a ‘geography of the heart’ where one can encounter and dwell with God.

Paradoxical, yet essential for Symeonian anthropology, grace growth leads to humility: the more a monk shines in the light of the Spirit, the more his conscience claims modesty and repentance. This dynamic — the light that generates humility, and humility that fosters the growth of communion — is emphasised in *Hymns 3* and *14* and marks the spiritual maturity of the called one. At the same time, monastic life is not understood as ascetic individualism: the disciple–spiritual father relationship, the liturgical community, and personal example create mutual formation and fellowship in the glory of God, so that the holiness of one becomes a light for many (Alfeyev 2010, 51).

From the Symeonian view, ascetic practices are more than mere acts of will or exercises; they are active means by which grace becomes accessible and effective in an individual’s life (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001b, 144). In *Hymns 4–6, 8, and 32–34*,

St. Symeon outlines a coherent set of spiritual disciplines: sincere repentance, tears as a heartfelt piercing, the cutting of the will, fasting, silence both inward and outward, remembrance of death, spiritual courage (manliness), humility, and obedience to a spiritual father. These practices are not merely listed but are directly linked to the ability to ‘see’ the Light: *Hymn 4* advocates for ‘pure humility, free of hatred’ and ‘the gift of tears,’ which are essential for opening the heart’s eyes to God’s light. *Hymn 5* employs an ergonomic image of asceticism’s efficacy: when effort is sincere and intense, the light acts like ‘an immaterial arrow’ that penetrates and transforms the recipient—illustrating the active interplay between human effort and divine grace. Thus, the focus is on the cooperation of human freedom and grace: ascetic effort alone does not create the light but fosters receptivity (St. Symeon the New Theologian 2001a, 62–66).

Tears hold a central role, with pure crying serving as a sign of repentance that appeals to divine mercy and prompts inner change. *Hymns 15* and *16* highlight the cycle of comfort, crying, and deepening repentance. Dumitru Stăniloae notes that crying opens the heart to grace, and the comfort from God encourages further longing and purification^[16]. Fasting, silence, and the suppression of the will act as ‘sharpenings’ of the soul by diminishing sensory distractions and passion’s dominance, thus enabling a clearer internal choice for God. *Hymn 8* shows how practicing good through commandments habituates the soul to the light, while *Hymn 9*^[17] shows how this light brings about apathy—where passions no longer hold sway. Therefore, the Symeonian ascetic practice significantly influences the human being: shaping the will, recalibrating sensitivity, and developing a tangible ability to receive and hold the transformative light—not as a merit, but as a cooperative response to divine grace.

St. Symeon’s hymns depict participation in divine glory as a comprehensive, sacramental, and transfigurative process, where the Eucharist, monastic life, and ascetic practices are interconnected elements of a unified spiritual pedagogy. For St. Symeon, Holy Communion is more than a symbol; it is the source and actual place of communion, initiating, renewing, and continuously maintaining the luminous grace within the soul of the worthy (*Hymns 2* and *7*). Monastic life offers the right existential environment for this gift: the cell, persistent prayer, spiritual guidance, and asceticism foster an inner discipline that guards the ‘eyes of the heart’ and boosts the ability to preserve the light (*Hymns 3* and *28*). Ascetic practices—such as deep repentance, tears, voluntary severance, fasting, silence, and remembrance of death—are not only moral virtues but essential tools that cleanse and refine sensitivity, will, and understanding,

preparing the soul to receive grace and sustain participation (cf. *Hymns* 4–6, 8, and 15). The collection clearly diagnoses human nature as spiritually blind and imprisoned by passions but also offers practical remedies—ascetic effort, humility, and communion—to restore the individual to life in Christ (cf. *Hymns* 26, 32–34, and 46–48).

The deification of the body at St. Simeon

Symeonian anthropology emphasizes the unity of the person through a theandric perspective. While man remains created with his individual personality, he becomes a site of ontological transformation through grace, which affects not only the soul but also the body. In hymns (notably 2, 9, 15, 28, 29, 30, and 44), St. Symeon portrays the body not merely as a sensitive support but as a limb that participates in divine life. The body can appear ‘transparent,’ ‘radiant,’ and ‘clothed in light’—often through Eucharistic communion (*Hymn* 2) or mystical visions (*Hymns* 11 and 29). This ‘deification of the body’ affirms the created identity rather than suppressing it. The language used by Symeon points to participation graced by divine grace, not absorption into the divine essence (*Hymn* 15). From an existential standpoint, this transformation results in apatheia: the divine light enables mastery over passions and reshapes the will’s freedom (*Hymn* 9). As a ‘pneumatized’ body, it remains morally responsible; holiness does not justify excess but calls for humility and obedience. Contemporary scholars (Krivocheine 1997; Alfeyev 2010) emphasize the link between this anthropology and the tradition of *theosis*: experiencing grace practically grounds the theology of deification, highlighting the body as the locus for encountering luminous Divinity.

St. Symeon frequently resorts to visual and tactile images to capture the transformation of the body under the action of divine light, thus operating a profoundly corporeal anthropology. At the centre of this imagery is the formulation from *Hymn* 2: through Communion, ‘the human body and blood are mixed with the divine Body and Blood, and the former becomes transparent and luminous’ — a statement that involves two essential interpretative directions. On the one hand, it emphasises a real, not merely symbolic, communication between the two ‘bodies’ – Christ’s presence in the Sacrament is not abstract but effectively contacts the human matter, and on the other hand, the image signals a perceptible change in the subject – the body, clothed in grace, becomes ‘transparent’ to the unseen reality, capable of receiving and manifesting light, that is, becoming a medium for a presence that transcends the strictly material plane. The same dynamic is evident in *Hymn* 28, but from a practical and existential perspective.

There, St. Symeon recounts how the one who has seen the light withdraws into his cell and asks to be allowed to die before God, wishing to maintain communion with that grace-filled state; in this experience, the body is compared to 'grass' — a biblical image expressing human fragility — yet, as grass receiving the light, it gains a transfigurative life: the body remains a body, but is penetrated and transformed by the divine presence. The metaphor of grass (cf. Is 40:6–7) thus emphasises the continuity of human nature in the process of deification: not annihilation, but transformation (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 175–6)^[18].

The 15th Hymn pushes imagery to a provocative limit by asserting that, through grace, even the 'indecent' parts of the body can become signs of Christ's presence. The phrase 'Christ becomes like the indecent organ' has sparked debate, but within Symeon's context, it functions as a mystical hyperbole meant to illustrate that grace covers all aspects of humanity without replacing their created nature. Dumitru Stăniloae sees this as a way for mystical theology to emphasize the universality and depth of grace: deification doesn't erase the creature but transforms it from within, making the body an active element in divine life.

Christ is not divided, not partitioned, but is entirely present in each of the faithful until the very depths of each one's being. St. Symeon goes so far as to demonstrate this fact, showing that even the reproductive organ [*balanon*] is irradiated by God's grace. These words that Christ would become 'like an unseemly organ' in the sense of being filled with His grace have probably caused a huge wave of polemics and heated disputes. However, St. Symeon shows that the one who has clothed himself in Christ, who has received the luminous garment of grace over his entire body, will not be ashamed of those words nor be disturbed. Because Christ unites or mingles with each member of our body. Speaking at this level, with an enlightened mind, he no longer considered bodily aspects. But those who did not understand him, and perhaps still do not, wondered how it could be that Christ is thought of in relation to unseemly members. Those who have kept their old garment and only a small patch of it (cf. Mt 9:16) and have added a new piece to it, naturally do not understand this. They have not fully clothed themselves in the luminous garment, and therefore they feel ashamed when they hear such statements. To offer them an alternative that would make them think without any sexual connotation, the author suggests imagining Christ in the womb of His Mother, and then where He passed to come into the world; then to realise that He became man like us, a perfect man and a perfect God. Therefore, they should not be

distressed by what he says. And, to reinforce this with a more contemporary example from his time, St. Symeon mentions his spiritual father, St. Symeon the Eloquent, who was not ashamed to see someone else naked. This is because he

had Christ entirely, and he himself was entirely Christ, and all his members and the members of anyone else, in part and altogether, he saw as Christ, and therefore he remained unmoved, uninjured, and unperturbed, as one who himself was entirely Christ, and saw all the baptized and those clothed in Christ as Christ himself. (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 90–3)

St. Symeon clarifies that *apatheia* (ἀπάθεια in early Christian tradition) doesn't mean a lack of feeling but rather a state in which passions no longer control the individual. In his hymns, this isn't seen as psychological numbness but as an active victory of inner life: the heart stays alive, sensitive, and capable of love and compassion, yet it is no longer driven or enslaved by desires and degrading impulses. *Hymn 9* vividly illustrates this ultimate state of the light witness: the 'rapt' person in the light is detached from worldly attachments, lifted above material concerns, and becomes apathic; he acts 'as if he has a dead body in the sense that he still has a soul in the body, but he will be dead to passions' — highlighting that the body remains but is no longer ruled by passion (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 73–4).

This *apatheia* manifests not only internally but also externally through behaviour: resisting worldly temptations, controlling thoughts and impulses, and maintaining moral stability amidst temptation. St. Symeon uses technical imagery to illustrate this transformation. *Hymns 34* and *44* depict the metaphor of iron heated in a fire to show how grace leaves its mark on the individual. Just as heated iron retains the fire's qualities without blending with it, the illuminated person preserves their created nature while adopting the properties of grace—such as purification, generosity, and *apatheia* (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 248). This suggests that *apatheia* is an 'acquired property': feelings, emotions, and perceptions remain, but are transfigured so passions no longer dominate life. In Symeonian theology, *apatheia* results from a cooperative effort between ascetic practice and grace—a form of positive freedom that preserves the created self and elevates it to divine participation.

From St. Symeon to St. Gregory Palamas – Experiential Continuity and Doctrinal Formulation of the Uncreated Light

The connection between Symeonian mysticism and later Eastern theology, especially Palamism, offers a valuable perspective for understanding the continuity of experiential knowledge and the evolution of Orthodox thought. The comparison is organized into three levels. First, the prefigurative elements in the hymns—such as uncreated light as a revealing energy (*Hymns* 2 and 33), the growing experience of the Trinitarian vision (*Hymn* 11), and the anthropological conditions of perception (*Hymns* 12 and 34)—constitute a body of ideas that St. Gregory Palamas would later develop. Second, similarities and differences are considered at a methodological level: St. Symeon works within a mystical, poetic, and experiential framework (St. Nicholas of Stithatos 2003), using images and autobiographical elements, while St. Gregory provides a methodological and theological framework, notably the essence-energies distinction (Calvário 2018, 227–34). The Symeonian vocabulary (*φῶς, δόξα, μετουσίωσις*) foreshadows but does not explicitly define the Palamite distinctions. Third, their influence on contemporary theology of the energies is twofold: St. Symeon affirms grace as an epistemic experience, and Palamas provides the doctrinal framework to preserve this experience from conceptual distortion. Modern scholarship (Krivocheine 1997, Alfeyev 2010) appreciates their complementarity—Symeon offers experiential insights, Palamas formulates doctrinal clarity, and their ongoing dialogue enriches present-day theological reflection.

Central to the Symeonian hymns is the belief that God reveals Himself not as a simple idea, but through an uncreated ‘light’ that permeates and transforms creation. *Hymn* 2’s line — ‘The One Light of the Holy Trinity, divided in an undivided manner into Three’ — is more than an aesthetic image; it is a theological statement: the light represents the divine energy by which the Godhead is revealed, without confusing its essence with creation. Consequently, the light serves as the active expression of divine presence, the medium through which the relationship between Creator and creation is articulated. This view highlights God’s dynamic and communicative nature, showing that He is not only transcendent but also reveals Himself through an uncreated manifestation.

Hymn 11 describes how the Trinitarian revelation is experienced as a gradual journey: initially, the Spirit’s light opens the inner eyes, revealing the Son, and those who ‘see’ the Son can, within their limits, access the Father. This progression — Spirit,

Son, Father — is not an abstract hierarchy but a vivid account of how God's divine manifestations are perceived in mystical life. This perception is participatory, meaning the believer is not just an observer but a transformed person who responds through repentance, humility, and sacramental communion. From a doctrinal view, these Symeonian insights lay the groundwork for the later Palamite ideas on uncreated energies. They support the idea that encountering God is a real and effective experience, with epistemic value for grace. The mystical language of St. Symeon also maintains necessary apophaticism — the light is known 'in an unknown way' — highlighting the limits of conceptual language and emphasizing the role of sacraments and ascetic practices for genuine perception.

In his hymns, St. Symeon emphasizes an uncreated light that is active rather than passive, continually pouring out upon the creature and transforming it. Imagery such as the 'immaterial arrow' in *Hymn 5* highlights the dynamic and powerful nature of this experience: the light does not merely appear but penetrates and changes the recipient. *Hymn 30* explores the connection between fire and light, indicating that the energy emitted serves both to purify and illuminate. The focus is that this divine energy, though uncreated, can be communicated — a grace-filled, personal transfer that enables the creature to participate in divine life. This image serves as a practical theology of energies, foreshadowing themes from the mystical realm that Palamas later formalized (Chirilă et al. 2019: 221–30).

Unlike speculative writings, St. Symeon highlights the concept of direct encounter: the light is perceivable and tangible within the body and soul. It induces trembling, a sense of departure from oneself, ecstatic states, and psychophysical effects that demonstrate the real nature of the encounter (*Hymns 11* and *29*). *Hymn 11* describes how the vision of the light progresses through an embodied journey, while *Hymn 29* details its entry into the cell and its existential impact. This experiential aspect of divine knowledge — 'seeing' and 'feeling' grace — underpins Palamas' later argument for the distinction of energies: since the experience of grace has observable and reproducible properties within the Church's life, it cannot simply be dismissed as symbolism or illusion (Sf. Grigorie Palama 1977, 263–372).

St. Symeon does not pursue elaborate philosophical theories, but his writings consistently reflect a distinction: Divinity remains 'hidden in its essence,' inaccessible to pure reason, yet it 'shines everywhere' through its glory and manifestations (*Hymns 12* and *33*). This dual point suggests a functional separation: what humans can access

is not the absolute core but its revealing energies, the rays of glory conveying divine presence without confusing it with the essence itself. Consequently, St. Symeon presents an experiential and interpretative model of a practical distinction between ‘what God is in Himself’ and ‘how God reveals Himself,’ laying the groundwork for later definitions of uncreated energies, while still preserving an apophatic and mystical approach (Stăniloae 1993, 65–78).

St. Symeon recognizes these truths and boldly addresses the Lord Christ, praying that the omnipresent, eternal, and glory-revealing God might allow him to see Him as if through a mirror (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 1996, 39). This highlights the paradox of perceiving divine light: one sees God’s glory yet does not see Him fully, for no mortal can gaze upon God’s face and live (cf. Ex 33:20). Dumitru Stăniloae explains that God’s light and glory are inseparable from His essence; we see Him in it, but it is not identical to His core. This indicates that divine essence and divine energies are distinct—an insight more explicitly developed by St. Gregory Palamas. Interestingly, St. Symeon, about three centuries earlier, sensed this distinction, suggesting that when humans see divine light, they encounter God as if facing a mystery (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2017, 472–8, note 802).

The gap between St. Symeon’s mystical-experiential project and St. Gregory Palamas’s systematic approach exists on multiple levels, each emphasizing a distinct aspect of theological discourse within Orthodoxy.

a) St. Symeon remains primarily a witness to an experience: his discourse is narrative, confessional, poetic. Metaphors, antinomies, and rhetorical questions are tools intended to awaken in the reader the inner state corresponding to the reception of grace, not to construct a theoretical framework. Palamas, on the other hand, appears as a systematic theologian: he introduces and refines philosophical and theological notions (essence, energy, uncreated) to articulate a coherent doctrinal defence of authentic mystical experience in the face of objections. Thus, St. Symeon provides phenomenological data; St. Palamas transforms them into theological argumentation.

b) St. Symeon speaks using language of light, glory, and grace, which carry theological significance but remain metaphorical and fluid. He does not adopt a formal methodological approach to differentiate essence and energies within a philosophical framework. Conversely, Palamas catalogs and establishes specific terms that support a juridical-dogmatic dialogue: the distinction between essence and energies becomes a tool for clarification and defence. Consequently, the analogies between them should

be viewed with subtlety: St. Symeon offers the experiential substance, while Palamas provides the doctrinal structure essential for legitimizing that experience.

c) Symeonian hymns serve as spiritual guidance material, including prayers, ascetic exhortations, and testimonies aimed at shaping spiritual life. These support the Church's practice. Palamas, on the other hand, engages in apologetics and systematic theology, addressing theological and political debates of his era. He provides a doctrinal framework to safeguard mystical experience within the church's institutional structure. Ultimately, the difference is not one of fundamental opposition but of function: St. Symeon as an experiential forerunner and Palamas as a systematic theologian—both are complementary in the development of Eastern theology.

In Eastern tradition, the reception of St. Symeon balances experiential admiration with the need for doctrinal explanation. His texts serve as living records of encounters with the uncreated light: some view them as genuine evidence of mystical experience that require theological validation; others find the extreme expressions (like in *Hymn 15*) unsettling. St. Gregory Palamas, centuries later, introduced the essence–energies framework to legitimize and safeguard the Symeonian experience, clarifying how God truly acts in creation without confusing His essence with His manifestations (Tomoioagă 2015, 142–53).

Conclusion

The study reveals that the concepts of light and communion in God's glory form the core of St. Symeon the New Theologian's hymns, in which light is understood as an uncreated energy that manifests, purifies, and transforms created beings. Analysing the hymns shows that for St. Symeon, light is the direct expression of the Trinitarian presence: it reveals itself gradually (Spirit → Son → Father), is sacramentally experienced in the Eucharist, and is practiced in daily life through asceticism, repentance, and monastic discipline. Therefore, communion is more than just a theological idea; it functions as a sacramental and formative process shaping the person.

The study's main contributions include: (1) emphasizing the energetic-ontological nature of light in St. Symeon's teaching—a form of prefigurative theology of energies expressed through mystical language; (2) explaining how the Eucharist, monastic life, and ascetic practices form a cohesive pedagogy for receiving and preserving light; (3) presenting a theandric anthropology where the body is called to deification while

maintaining its identity; (4) examining mystical language—such as metaphor, antinomy, and question—as hermeneutical tools that validate experience and uphold the mystery.

This study has several implications for contemporary theology: (a) it reaffirms the legitimacy of mystical and sacramental experiences as sources of knowledge; (b) highlights the need for a hermeneutic that is attentive to the poetic language of tradition while maintaining conceptual clarity; (c) stresses the importance of pastoral criteria—such as humility, moral fruits, and stability—in evaluating mystical phenomena; and (d) underscores the value of the Symeonian model in ecumenical dialogue regarding participation in divine life.

Overall, the Symeonian legacy continues to serve as a crucial resource: offering ongoing data on how the Church engages with the Light and prompting theology to express this encounter with doctrinal and pastoral care.

Notes

[1] In this research, we will primarily use the translation of hymns by Ioan I. Ică Jr. published by Deisis Publishing House in Sibiu (2001).

[2] The experience of witnessing divine light and the significance of Symeon the Eloquent, St. Symeon's spiritual father, are central themes in *Hymn 18* (see also Krivocheine 1997, 15). This hymn can be considered propaedeutic regarding divine light, as it explains what the light is, its effects on the observer, and how the act of seeing it occurs (Sf. Symeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 111).

[3] In Hymn 11, St. Symeon recalls a vision of God, linking it to the experiences of Deacon Stephen and the Apostle Paul. He aims to situate himself within a tradition preserved over time, showing that he has encountered something like what early righteous Christians experienced. At the start of the hymn, St. Symeon asks whether the God who once ascended to heaven and remains hidden now chooses to reveal Himself to sinners. He seeks an answer, recalling Deacon Stephen's testimony of seeing heaven open and the Son of Man standing at God's right hand (Acts 7:56). St. Symeon also reports having had this divine vision multiple times, witnessing Christ in Light alongside the Father and Holy Spirit, even during the night and in darkness (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 76).

[4] The author employs an antinomic style, using interrogations to shed light on divine mysteries. Instead of explaining God's work logically, he asks how God accomplishes these deeds, revealing that God acts, works within each person's life, and guides believers toward perfection, while leaving the answers open. Among these questions, the most representative ones for our theme include:

How do you make men into gods / how do you turn darkness into light? / How do you bring out of hell, / how do you make mortals incorruptible? / How do you draw darkness towards light, / how do you hold night in your fist? / How do you envelop the heart in light, / how do you transform the whole?

From these, we can derive clear assertions: God transforms men into gods, turns darkness into light, pulls the soul out of hell, renders mortals incorruptible, draws darkness to light, holds night in His fist, enshrouds the heart in light, and changes the entire being. Yet, framing these as questions preserves a mysterious aspect of these truths (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2011a, 67).

[5] St. Symeon describes an ecstatic experience where he became stiff, his body trembling as he struggled to withstand the power of the divine glory. This compelled him to retreat into the darkness of the night, where he was before the vision. He then regained clarity, seeking safety within himself. During those mystical moments, he believed he had left his body and forsaken reason. Yet, afterward, he understood that he had not lost God when seeking refuge; even within his own body, he could find the One who gives life to all. (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 77).

[6] Hymn 7 expresses the author's amazement at the following paradox: he can worship God within himself and yet see Him so far away; he feels Him working within him but locates Him in heaven; He shines in his material heart in an immaterial way. And he immediately notices that he is marked by a pain now that he sees His shining light within him. It is that pain and longing to grasp Him as fully as possible, to quench his thirst for Him. And even if he can never fully be satisfied, he finds that it is enough to see Him, to feel Him. And this is made possible through Communion, through the Eucharistic act in which he unites with God and becomes a partaker of His nature. Through Holy Communion, the believer is given divine nature; through this wondrous Mystery of the Church, the distant are united: human nature and divine nature. (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 68–70).

[7] In *Hymn 2*, St. Symeon highlights various aspects of the uncreated divine light. Using a language full of antinomies, he explains 1) that angels and humans share the same uncreated glory or light; 2) that this Light belongs to all three Hypostases of the Holy Trinity; 3) that we come to know God only through it; and 4) that this knowledge is limited to what God chooses to reveal. St. Symeon clearly states that it concerns

The One Light of the Holy Trinity, divided in an undivided way into Three, which is One in Three manifestations, known in an unknowable way, as much as it will; for it is impossible for a creature to fully know the Creator as He knows Himself through His nature. However, all angels and created beings see and understand with the mind through grace, not by grasping, but by understanding as much as the Light wills to reveal. (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 60).

[8] The *Hymn* 33 opens with the statement, ‘Light is the Father, Light is the Son, Light is the Holy Spirit.’ St. Symeon then highlights that the three Persons of the Trinity are one Light—fully present in each Person and collectively. God is seen as a simple Light, yet within this unity, the Three Hypostases are distinguishable yet perfectly united. They illuminate the world in this unified way, reflecting mankind created in their image and likeness. By manifesting the divine image within, humans share in the light of the Uncreated Being, enabling them to transcend passions and move from darkness into light (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 199–200).

[9] After highlighting these ascetic practices that the monk must submit to, it shows towards the end whether he will succeed in purifying himself through them: he will see the Divine Light, which is ‘an immaterial arrow shot from the Immaterial.’ From God radiates the Divine Light, which, piercing the believer, deifies him. (Sf. Symeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 65–6).

[10] Divine light transforms and enlightens man, making him transparent and immaterial. The individual becomes like a lampstand that radiates light around him, connected to the spiritual Sun—the One who is the Sun of righteousness, the Upper East, and the Light of the world. Dumitru Stăniloae explains that the spiritual man ‘becomes the subject of the light he receives,’ but this subject also recognizes that the light comes from an infinite source. He sees Christ clearly yet also sees Him united with himself—like a window illuminated by the sun, appearing with another sun but not merging with it. The supreme Sun, aware of itself, makes man conscious of the light that enters and spreads within him, as a secondary subject emanating from the primary Subject from whom the light originates (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2017, 486–92, nota 825).

[11] Similar to natural fire, divine fire provides light. Its illumination reflects on both the soul and body of the worthy individual. The fire purifies by burning away sins, ignites the soul, and lights it up, enabling union with the Creator. Therefore, the roles of fire and light are intertwined, with both being vital for the process of deification (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 185)

[12] The hymn’s opening seems to vividly catch us in a moment of discovery by St. Symeon: ‘Where do you come from?’ he wonders aloud. ‘How do you enter my

tightly secured cell?’ He finds it strange that this presence is foreign and beyond understanding. Yet, suddenly, this luminous presence fully enters him, shining like a full moon, leaving him speechless and unthinking, my God. He recognizes that You are the one who enlightens those in darkness (Lk 1:78-79), and he is transported beyond himself and language, witnessing a miracle that surpasses all creation, nature, and speech. This vision unfolds as the monk, isolated in his cell in prayer, suddenly sees a light initially outside him. At a certain point, it enters his soul, elevating him to a higher spiritual level. He feels as if he is leaving his body and material self behind. During these moments, words and reasoning fade as he enters a realm of vision, gaining the certainty of faith—knowing, deep in his soul, that He is God, the Savior. (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 178).

[13] In the Eucharist, Christ is genuinely present, but the right attitude is essential before the chalice. Those approaching Him should be trembling and deeply repentant, recognizing their sinful nature and sincerely believing in Jesus Christ. Faith will light their hearts and lead them out of darkness and death (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 164–5).

[14] St. Symeon centres the third hymn around the image of the monk, emphasizing his calling and the heights he can attain. Notably, the hymn illustrates that

the monk remains unmixed with the world, constantly communicating only with God; he is observed by God, loved in return, and becomes an indescribably shining light. As he is glorified, he appears to grow poorer, and having become familiar with God, he seems like a stranger.

The meaning of the monk becoming a light is not explicitly explained by St. Symeon. Dumitru Stăniloae points out that this relationship with God is active—when the monk loves God, he also feels loved, and this love—felt and demonstrated—serves as a light that illuminates both the loved and the lovers (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 61, nota 40).

[15] St. Symeon was deemed worthy to see the true light, the Creator of all lights. He realized that sunlight is merely a faint reflection of the divine light that flowed from God at the beginning of creation, before the celestial bodies were formed, or that radiated from Christ during the Transfiguration (Pașca-Tușa, Trif, Popa-Bota 2021: 153-7). This understanding led him to retreat into his cell, seeking communion with the Lord. Now, he regrets all those days when he only enjoyed the visible light, unaware of the life-giving divine light. Once it was revealed to him and shone through his entire being, he understood that He is truly ‘a God

of all, a God whom no one of the people of the world has seen' (1 Tim 6:16; Jn 1:4); for He exists outside the world, beyond light and dark, beyond air, mind, and sensation. Seeing Him, St. Symeon was lifted above sensation itself. No one has seen God's essence; He manifests Himself through His glory as light, clarifying the relationship between God's unseen and seen aspects. (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 173).

[16] Dumitru Stăniloae observes – from a philosophical perspective – that there is a passage through internal theses and antitheses:

when I distance myself from God, I weep. But the weeping brings me God's mercy, which consoles me. This causes me to weep differently, a weeping of compassion for His mercy. However, this also makes me see even more clearly my unworthiness, which brings me to weep with dissatisfaction with myself. And, being in this state of deep lamentation, God examines me and envelops me in His light. And, full of wonder, I begin to weep again because I see more clearly my impurity.

Thus, we observe that the ascetic must, in his longing for God, be constantly marked by repentance and humility. "God, says Saint James the Apostle, resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Jam 4:6). This fact is also highlighted within this hymn. The heart of a person who is constantly humble and open-hearted will be examined by God and illuminated. (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2017, nota 153).

[17] The *Hymn* 9 of St. Symeon reveals a paradox: the light is visible physically, yet it isolates the witness from worldly concerns. It elevates him beyond materiality and sinful inclinations, granting apatheia by showing that everything worldly is insignificant compared to God's eternal gifts. St. Symeon illustrates that such a high level of apatheia causes a person to behave as if dead—retaining a soul but being unaffected by passions. The divine light that fills him prevents him from falling out of love with God and from allowing any passionate thoughts to take root in his mind (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 73–4).

[18] Man's duty is to pray fervently and maintain the flame of longing for God within his soul. If this fire burns, he must stay alert, because laziness can extinguish it. When active, this fire inspires ongoing repentance and tears, as man yearns for eternal joy and wishes to attain it quickly. Although it is a flame, it does not consume the 'herbaceous being' (Is 40:6-7) of man; instead, it unites with it, preserving rather than destroying it (cf. Ex 3:2). St. Symeon emphasizes this in the seventh prayer before Holy Communion, describing it as a fire he partakes in with wonder:

Rejoicing and trembling, I partake of the fire; being dry grass myself, and—a strange miracle!—I am cooled without burning, like the ancient bush which, though aflame, was not consumed.

His sense of awe prompts a profound question: how can the Almighty God unite with man, yet allow him to retain his being while undergoing change? St. Symeon asks:

Christ, my God, how do You mingle with the grass with Your entire divine being, my God, You who dwell in a light utterly unbearable? How, remaining unchanged and entirely unapproachable, do You preserve the being of the grass and, while transforming it, keep it unchanged? The grass becomes like the light, which is You, the Light, united without confusion, transformed without change.

This question hints at an answer, yet its form maintains the mystery of God's work with man. Reflecting on this helps us understand the concept of man becoming deified—becoming God through grace (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 2001a, 175–6).

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THE MANIFESTATION OF THE GLORY OF GOD AS AN EXPRESSION OF DIVINE LOVE

Abstract

This study explores the manifestation of God's glory as a concrete expression of divine love, tracing continuity from the Sinai theophany through Israel's cultic life to Christ's Transfiguration. It begins with Moses' encounter at the burning bush and the revelation of God's name, grounding divine existence in self-subsistence and historical action. The Exodus narrative and the covenant ceremony culminate in the descent of the divine glory (*kabod*) onto Sinai and its subsequent transfer to the Tabernacle, where God's dwelling among Israel becomes the tangible sign of covenantal presence. The paper emphasizes *kabod*'s dual character: nearness and transcendence perceptible as radiant, heavy presence yet veiled within cloud and fire. The analysis connects biblical, rabbinic, and liturgical traditions (including the Shekinah motif and temple imagery) to the Johannine and patristic visions of divine presence. Moses' plea, 'Show me your glory,' finds fulfillment in the mercy and steadfast love revealed in God's self-disclosure, while Israel's apostasy complicates but does not nullify divine fidelity. The study then shifts to Christ, proposing that the incarnation and Transfiguration actualize Sinai's glory in person: Christ bears the fullness of deity bodily, and the Transfiguration unveils divine light not as created luminescence but as uncreated energy accessible to transformed human perception. Drawing on Gregory Palamas and John of Damascus, the paper argues that witnessing divine glory effects *theosis*—restoring humanity toward its intended likeness—thus framing glory foremost as an act of divine love that sanctifies, judges, and consummates covenantal communion between God and creation.



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Introduction

The revelation of God on Mount Sinai is one of the most pivotal moments, not only in the sacred history of the Old Testament but also in world history, since that event and the Covenant that followed became the starting point for a world-changing transformation in humanity's spiritual course.

This course begins when a self-exiled courtier of Pharaoh, wandering in the desert of Sinai, comes face to face with a strange sight: from within a bush that burns without being consumed, Moses hears a voice calling to him. As he approaches, he hears God introduce Himself with a name that points back to his people's past: "I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Ex 3:6).

As the conversation unfolds, God presents Himself to Moses with a name that reveals something of His nature: 'I am Who I am' (Ex 3:15). God is the only self-existent One, whose being depends on nothing and no one, while all things derive their existence from Him. In contrast to the gods of Israel's cultural environment—who do not exist—the God who reveals Himself to Moses is characterized primarily by existence. Moreover, this divine existence is demonstrated through concrete actions in human history, in which God intervenes dynamically.

Furthermore, the reference to previous and future generations shows that God's existence remains unaltered through time, as is characteristically proclaimed in the Book of Revelation, where the name of God is expressed as "He Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come" (Rev 1:4,8), and vividly depicted in Church iconography with the inscription "Ο ΩΝ" ('He Who Is') in Christ's halo.

At the beginning of the Decalogue, God presents Himself saying: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery," (Ex 20:2) while a little later the reason for this deliverance is made clear: "They shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them and be their God" (Ex 29:46).

This is why the Book of Exodus devotes so much space to the organization of God's worship (Ex 24:15 – 40:38), with the most detailed instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle of Testimony, for the Tabernacle is intended to become the place where God will truly be present among His people.

The Manifestation of the Glory of God as an Expression of Divine Love

In Exodus 24:11, the second part of the book, which recounts the establishment of the Covenant between God and Israel, comes to an end, and from 25:1 begins the third part, which deals with the organization of divine worship. Between these two sections, the descent of the Lord upon the mountain and the ascent of Moses are described, serving as a link between what has preceded and what will follow.

More specifically, the confirmation of the Covenant takes place within the context of a ceremony in which sacrifices are offered to God (24:4–8), followed by a sacred meal (24:11). Immediately afterward, Moses is commanded by God to ascend the mountain to receive the stone tablets containing the fundamental terms of the Covenant just ratified (v. 12). Obeying God's command, Moses, accompanied by Joshua, climbs toward the summit, while leaving the seventy elders of Israel under the leadership of Aaron and Hur to wait below (vv. 13–14).

As Moses ascends, a cloud covers the mountain for six days, while the glory of the Lord settles upon its summit (vv. 15–17). Finally, at the Lord's invitation, Moses enters the cloud, where he remains for forty days (v. 18). This entire event of Moses' encounter with God simultaneously highlights both the presence of the Lord among His people and the uniqueness of Moses as mediator between God and the people, since he alone enters the cloud. The sacredness of this encounter underscores the importance of the instructions concerning the Tabernacle of the Testimony that follow, for the 'glory' of God subsequently moves from the mountain to the Tabernacle (Exo cap 25ff).

The presence of God among His people is a central theme throughout the Old Testament. In this passage, that presence is described as the 'descent of the glory of the Lord.' The term 'glory' translates the Hebrew word **כְּבוֹד** (*kabod*), which literally means 'weight' or 'heaviness' of a person or thing, expressing its social standing or value (Weinfeld 1974, 22–37). The theological use of the term appears primarily in traditions associated with the Temple of Jerusalem (Is 6; Ez 1–3; 8–11; 43–44; Ps 24; 29, etc.).

In 1Kg 8:11 it is said that when the glory of God filled Solomon's Temple, the priests were unable to enter it—this is not poetic exaggeration: the presence of God has weight, occupies space, and is tangible to human beings. In Isaiah's vision within the Temple, the angels surrounding God's throne continually sing: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory" (6:3).

In rabbinic texts, the phrase of Leviticus 26:11, ‘I will set my dwelling among you,’ is rendered in Aramaic as ‘I will place the Tabernacle of My Glory (ܫܝܚܝܢܬܐ ܕܝܩܪܝ – *Shekhinta di-Yiqri*) among you,’ emphasizing the nearness of the divine to humanity^[1]. The same idea appears in the Gospel of John: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory” (Jn 1:14). For ancient readers, glory was not something symbolic; it was something that touched the earth.

The luminous character of the Lord’s glory is especially emphasized in the Sinai traditions (Ex 24:16–17; 40:34–35; Lev 9:6, 23) as well as in the visions of the prophet Ezekiel (8–11; 43–44). The Israelites gathered at the foot of the mountain experience the descent of God’s glory as ‘a consuming fire’ upon the summit (Ex 24:17). From this and similar passages (cf. Ez 8:1–3) it follows that the glory of the Lord is visible to human beings as a radiant phenomenon. Through his careful choice of words, the biblical writer emphasizes both God’s nearness to His people—since the Lord makes His presence perceptible to them—and His transcendence, for this presence remains veiled within the cloud, beyond human grasp.

Remarkably, in this description of God’s ‘descent,’ the cloud covers Mount Sinai for six days, and on the seventh day the Lord speaks to Moses (Ex 24:16). Once again, the careful choice of words evokes in the reader’s mind the narrative of the creation of the world and the sanctification of the seventh day. Just as God creates the world in six days and sanctifies the seventh, in a similar way the cloud covers the mountain for six days, and on the seventh day the glory of God descends and sanctifies the mountain’s peak, making it a holy place. Thus, the purpose of Exodus 24 is not merely to describe a wondrous encounter between God and Moses. The descent of God upon Sinai and the sanctification of the place indicate that the divine commandments proclaimed there acquire special significance for the life of the community and hold binding authority for the people of God.

As the story continues, the people repeatedly abandoned their God, but the people’s apostasy did not nullify the plan of divine economy. God remained faithful to His promise: “I will dwell among you and will not reject you. I will walk among you; I will be your God, and you shall be my people” (Lev 26:11–12). The glory of God dwelt in the Tabernacle of the Testimony (Ex 40:28–32; Lev 9:15–23) and later in the temple built by Solomon in Jerusalem (1Kg 8:10–11). The prophet Ezekiel, in anguish, saw it depart from the temple (10:18–19), only to see it return later (43:1–4). God did not abandon His people, even when His presence was no longer perceptible to them.

The expressed will of God to be with His people shows how deeply the worship of the golden calf, described in Exodus 32, disrupted the relationship between God and Israel, and explains the stern decision–threat that God announces to Moses in the next chapter: “I will bring you to the land flowing with milk and honey, but I will not go up with you, lest I destroy you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people” (Ex 33:3). God remains faithful to His covenant with the people and will fulfill the accompanying promises, yet their infidelity has perilous consequences for themselves. It is characteristic that after the incident with the golden calf, every time God speaks to Moses about the Israelites, He refers to them as ‘your people, whom you brought out of Egypt’ and no longer ‘my people’ (Ex 32:7; 33:1), thus showing that He has now distanced Himself from His people.

The danger of violating the covenant’s terms becomes clear in the dialogue between Moses and God in Exodus 33:11–23 (see Childs 1974; Propp 1999; Meyers 2005).

The text begins by stating that “the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (33:11). This intimacy allows Moses to speak with increasing boldness to his ‘friend.’ Yet even God’s assurance, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest” (33:14), does not satisfy him, for Moses knows that what distinguishes Israel from all other nations is the certainty that God is truly with them (33:16). Moses does not want God merely as a vanguard, helper, or guide—but as One who is present among them (Billings 2004: 427–44). Thus, he presses further: “If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here” (33:15).

Strangely enough, God seems to yield to Moses’ persistence (33:17), but Moses is still not content. He understands that the restoration of the broken relationship between God and Israel depends not on who humans are or what they do, but on who God is. Therefore, to be assured, he does not hesitate to make a request that at first sounds excessive: ‘Show me Your glory’ (33:18). And yet God consents. He consents to reveal yet another deeper aspect of His character. Moses will learn that the name ‘Lord’ does not refer only to the God of the ancestors—the One who was, is, and will be; the liberator from the slavery of Egypt; the One who desires to be with His people—but also to the One who affirms: “I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion” (33:19). God’s mercy and compassion are stronger than human choices. When, on the next day, God fulfills His promise, Moses will learn from God’s own mouth that: “The Lord, the Lord God, is merciful and gracious, slow to

anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness; keeping mercy for thousands” (34:6–7). But the apostates must not misunderstand God’s forgiving nature, and for this reason He warns them that forgiveness does not mean that God overlooks sin: “He forgives iniquities, injustices, and sins, but He does not leave the guilty unpunished; for the iniquities of the fathers, the children and grandchildren will pay, up to the third and fourth generation” (34:7). This warning, however, will be revoked by God Himself when, through the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah, He proclaims the establishment of the new Covenant (Jer 31 [38]:29–34).

It was the love of God that granted Moses to behold His glory on Mount Sinai (33:22–23) as an expression of divine mercy. The same love granted Christ’s disciples to behold His glory on Mount Tabor, ‘as far as they could bear it,’ so that, as the *kontakion* of the feast of Transfiguration proclaims:

When they saw You crucified,
they might understand Your Passion as voluntary,
and to the world might proclaim
that You are indeed the radiance of the Father.

Since in Christ “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9), the glory abides with Him throughout His earthly life—even in the moments of His deepest humiliation. Yet the ‘assumption of the flesh’ veils this glory, a veil lifted only briefly now of the Transfiguration. This does not mean that Christ’s human nature is dissolved or lost in the divine light. During the Transfiguration, Christ underwent no change; rather, the disciples were enabled to see what they had previously been unable to see.

The light that the disciples of Christ saw was not a natural light but the light of divinity—a light that does not belong to the created world but to the realm of the divine. Nevertheless, the disciples saw the divine light with their bodily senses. Saint Gregory Palamas, the theologian who would make the vision of the divine light the center of his theological thought, emphasized that God is called ‘Light’ not according to His essence but according to His energy; and it is precisely this uncreated energy of God that can, under certain conditions, become perceptible. This participation in God’s grace transforms the human being into what he was before the image of God within him became tarnished. And as Saint Gregory again explains:

Therefore, that light was not a perceptible, physical light, nor did those who beheld it see it merely with their bodily eyes. Rather, having been transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, they underwent a change, and in this way, they beheld the change. (Gregory Palamas 2008, 374)

If then, through His incarnation Christ became human, through His Transfiguration He reveals what the human being is meant to become.

Conclusion

This truth is beautifully summarized by St. John of Damascus, who writes in his homily on the Transfiguration:

He was transfigured, not by assuming what He was not,
but by revealing to His own disciples what He was,
opening their eyes and making them, from blind, to see.
And this is what is meant by ‘He was transfigured before them’:
remaining what He was, He appeared to the disciples as He truly is.
(*Homilia in Transfigurationem Domini*, PG 96:564C)

Just as in the theophany on Sinai the cloud covered the presence of the Lord who proclaimed His law—thereby defining the life of the people of God—so also, at the Transfiguration, a cloud covers the scene, and from within it comes a voice that defines the life of the new people of God: “This is My beloved Son, My chosen One; listen to Him” (Mt 17:5).

Note

[1] Targum Pseudo-Jonathan. The Hebrew word for *tabernacle* used in Leviticus 26:11 is *Mishkani* (מִשְׁכָּנִי), which derives from the root שָׁכַן, meaning ‘to dwell’ or ‘to reside.’ The rabbis drew on this root to form the noun *Shekhinah*, denoting the indwelling, abiding presence of God in the world. The earliest rabbinic text that explicitly identifies the *Mishkani* of Leviticus 26:11 with the *Shekhinah* is the *Zohar*, *Vayikra* 26:11: מִשְׁכָּנִי — דָּא שְׁכִינְתָּא (*Mishkani*—this is the *Shekhinah*).

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DIVINE GLORY IN THE PENTATEUCH – HISTORY AND THEOLOGY

Abstract

This study explores the concept of ‘glory’ (Heb. *kabod*) in the Pentateuch, examining its appearance in Sinaitic theophanies, the establishment and operation of the mobile sanctuary (the tabernacle), and its roles in cult practice, law, and history. Combining a philological analysis of key passages from Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, it offers a unified interpretation where *kabod* is not just a visual manifestation but also a performative sign: indicating Yahweh’s presence, legitimizing priestly authority, signaling sacred judgments, and supporting the remembrance of Egypt’s liberation. The research shows that the mobility of the tabernacle and the visibility of the glory are interconnected, and that the expressions of dwelling—*kabod*, cloud, filling of the sanctuary—form a coherent narrative-ritual system. By integrating philology of terms like *kabod*, *shekinah*, *miskan*, and *moed* with form criticism and comparison with post-exilic texts (Haggai, 1 Kings, Ezekiel), the study uncovers both continuities and nuances: the Pentateuch highlights a luminous, mobile glory, whereas some postexilic writings focus on material grandeur and temple fullness. Using literary exegesis, philology, and comparison, it identifies duplications and editorial insertions explaining textual differences. Overall, it presents *kabod* as a pragmatic marker of divine presence and cultic legitimacy, shedding light on the relationship between theophany, cultic institution, and priestly authority.



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Introducere

This paper investigates the intricate concept of ‘glory’ (Heb. *kabod*) within the Pentateuch, emphasizing its manifestation in Sinaitic theophanies, the establishment and function of the portable sanctuary (the tabernacle), and its various cultic, legal, and historical roles. The study traces the development of *kabod*’s meaning and function across key biblical texts, examines the interaction among cloud, light, and divine presence, and illustrates how appearances of glory reinforce priestly authority, influence ritual practices, and uphold sacral and legal rulings. Through the analysis of essential passages from Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, the research demonstrates that *kabod* functions not only as a motif of divine epiphany but also as performative acts, signifying Yahweh’s ongoing or temporary presence, affirming the cultic order, and indicating judgments and social distinctions via visible signs.

The study’s focus area intersects the religious history of ancient Israel with the theology of the sacred as depicted in Pentateuch literature. It begins with a detailed analysis of how glory appears in the canonical texts of the Pentateuch, examining each occurrence and how these are articulated within a cohesive model that connects theophany, sanctuary construction, and cultic practices. The innovative aspect of this approach is its attempt to synthesize these fragmented passages into a unified framework; while many prior studies have explored Sinai episodes, the motif of the hand/manna, or dwelling formulas separately, few have examined these elements through the prism of the pragmatic-theological role of the *kabod*. Consequently, the work offers an interpretation that highlights the relationship between the visibility of divine glory and the legitimacy of the priestly hierarchy, as well as the connection between the sanctuary’s mobility and the community’s perception of divine presence.

Current biblical research on the temple and theophany encompasses a diverse array of studies, including philological and historical-critical analyses of key terms (such as *kabod*, *shekinah*, *miskan*), detailed commentaries on Sinaitic passages, and examinations of Israelite cultic practices. However, the literature often leans either towards a historical focus—reconstructing cultic practices—or towards a theological perspective emphasizing the significance of epiphany. Few works integrate these approaches to demonstrate how theological meanings are embedded in ritual procedures and narrative forms. This work aims to address this gap through an interdisciplinary approach, linking textual interpretation with insights into ritual and historical-religious

reflections, highlighting both continuities and discontinuities between the Pentateuch traditions and post-exilic visions of Divine glory.

This study primarily relies on the Masoretic text of the Pentateuch (BHS/MT) for philological analysis, supplemented by critical translations and both recent and classical scholarly commentaries. To explore the appearances of glory, relevant prophetic and historical texts—such as Haggai, 1 Kings, and Ezekiel—were examined, along with secondary sources in religious history, Templar studies, and biblical hermeneutics. Essential philological resources include critical editions, biblical Hebrew lexicons, and studies of key terms such as *kabod*, *shekinah*, *miskan*, and *moed*. Additionally, recent research on Israelite ritual, comparative ritual models, and methodologies for analyzing form and source criticism was reviewed to explore theological continuities and potential editorial adjustments or literary expansions within the text.

The approach is multidimensional, integrating literary and philological exegesis with comparative and historical methods. Textual analysis examines the frequency, subtlety, and narrative context of terms linked to glory, dwelling, and each epiphany. Philology helps clarify lexical meanings and spot dialectal or editorial differences. Additionally, form and source criticism address textual variations, such as duplications in the account of the tabernacle's construction. The comparative method involves contrasting Pentateuchal formulations with post-exilic texts like Haggai, Kings, and Ezekiel, to show how the same theme varies across different theological and historical settings. The core focus is on uncovering the pragmatic roles of the Glory's appearances—such as priestly endorsement, signals related to the tabernacle's movement, judicial-sacral sanctions, and ritual remembrance of Egypt's liberation.

The study's structure promotes a gradual and integrated reading experience. It begins with an introduction, then moves into chapters that establish a terminological and philological foundation, followed by sections on the Sinaitic theophanies and the initial appearances of *kabod* in Exodus (such as Ex 14; 16; 24), linking these to the instructions for building the tabernacle (Ex 25–31). It continues with an in-depth exploration of the dwelling of glory within the tabernacle (Ex 29; 40), discussing its connection to the concept of *shekinah*. Subsequent chapters examine the cultic and legal roles of *kabod* in Leviticus and Numbers, including sanctification, priestly authority, and sacred judgments. Comparative analyses address the evolution of the luminous glory from the Pentateuch to post-exilic depictions. The concluding chapter synthesizes the findings, explores theological implications, and suggests future research directions,

such as reception in rabbinic and patristic sources and liturgical traditions. This approach blends close textual analysis with theological and historical insights, fostering a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of ‘glory’ in the Pentateuch.

Sinaitic Theophany and Sanctuary Construction—Glory, Cloud, and Tabernacle (Ex 19; 24; 25–31; 35–40)

A key narrative in the Pentateuch vividly details the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea (Ex 14). This account is the first scriptural instance of the term *kabod*. God revealed His glory to Pharaoh (using the root כָּבֹד, in niphal form), which led to Pharaoh’s hardened heart (McAfee 2010, 331–54). Consequently, Pharaoh sent his army after the Israelites, resulting in their being lost in the Red Sea’s waves. The divine purpose was to cause the Egyptian people to acknowledge God, while the Israelites recognized Yahweh as the living, true, and sovereign God.

At Exodus 16, God’s glory is visible from afar. Israel observes God’s glory not only in historical acts but also through the daily provision of manna. *Kabod* thus plays a key role in guiding Israel toward the knowledge of God and recognizing His deliverance. This understanding unfolds in three major steps: first, God’s almighty guidance; second, the transmission of divine words through Moses and Aaron and the distant vision of glory; and third, the miraculous provision of food, which further leads the people to recognize Yahweh (v. 12). The divine glory becomes more apparent at Exodus 24: 15b-18, where God instructs Moses to set up the tabernacle of testimony (Strupe 1988, 37). The divine presence intensifies with the appearance of glory on Mount Sinai and Moses’ forty days in the dark cloud (Kittel 1964, 628), bringing Moses into direct contact with divine glory and enabling him to receive divine teachings. This passage closely relates to the theophany in Exodus 19:16, where divine glory signifies how God meets Moses. Such encounters can be dangerous, especially for unbelievers or those unprepared spiritually, as evidenced by the visible phenomena. The theophany in Isaiah 30:27-30, during a storm, symbolizes a threat to unbelieving and malevolent individuals who can be scorched by divine wrath (Von Gall 1900, 17).

Exodus 24:15b-18 marks a new phase in revealing God’s divine glory before His dwelling in the sanctuary (Ex 40:34). It advances the narrative by introducing key elements: God speaks to Moses in His glory, providing instructions for building and blessing the tabernacle (Struppe 1988, 39), and once completed, He dwells among the Israelites. The visible fire is a new element that helps Israelites recognize Yahweh’s

presence more clearly. In Exodus 25, this theme of the holy tabernacle is revisited (Dohmen 2004, 208). When God shows His glory to Moses (Neher 2002, 29) and the Israelites, the fiery radiance is immediately seen by the people at the foot of Mount Sinai (Ex 24:17). Therefore, divine glory appears as a fiery, visible manifestation in the theophany.

Exodus 16:10 and 24:17 depict how people can only glimpse God's glory from a distance, seeing it as a cloud that obscures direct view to prevent harm^[1]. Similarly, Exodus 40:34 shows the glory veiled by a cloud as it leaves the tabernacle. *Kabod Yahwe* represented an abstract, personified element within the Temple. The light around and beyond the sanctuary demonstrated God's presence and vitality among the community. This highlights the link between the Exodus from Egypt and God's glorious revelation through historical events, emphasizing Yahweh's ongoing presence among His people (Struppe 1988, 39).

The passage in Exodus 29:38-46 highlights certain differences from other accounts of divine glory in the Pentateuch. Exodus 29 emphasizes God's sustained presence among His people, with the divine glory sanctifying the tabernacle (Westermann 1970, 255) and preparing it as God's dwelling. Unlike Exodus 40:34, this passage describes the *shekinah* (Skolnik 2007, 440-4), with the divine glory (*kabod*) serving solely to establish the sanctuary, thereby symbolizing the enduring divine presence. According to Exodus 24:15b-19, glory appears as a fire-like manifestation, indicating divine presence. Sanctification occurs through illumination of the sanctuary, into which the Lord will enter. The purpose of God's dwelling (Vollenweider and Janowski 2013, 16) is for the Israelites to recognize Him as the almighty Lord who freed them from Egypt, to be worshipped through daily sacrifices. Thus, God's residence in the sanctuary also functions as a remembrance of the Exodus, maintaining a perpetual memory of liberation.

The presence of divine glory in the tabernacle clearly signals God's presence through a luminous form. Unlike in Exodus 16:7,10, and Exodus 24:15b-18, where divine glory is associated with a theophany, Exodus 40:34 does not explicitly mention a divine manifestation. Divine glory functions as a symbol of divine presence. Additionally, this idea that the house is filled with glory can be seen from a text from the early post-exilic period (Hag 2:7-9).

This passage from God in the book of Haggai describes the filling of the temple's sanctuary with glory, which differs from the depiction in Exodus 40:34. In the Pentateuch,

kabod is represented as a glow symbolizing divine presence, whereas in Haggai 2:7-9, the filling of glory is associated with the offering of gold and silver^[2]. Material wealth thus transforms the temple into a space of grandeur and honor. Despite these differences, the core idea remains the same: filling a space with glory renders it magnificent. The location where divine glory manifests is particularly special (Willi-Plein 2007, 33).

In Exodus 40:34, the description of God's divine presence and the dwelling of divine glory closely relate to His appearance and echoes the connection between God and His name: 'that My name may dwell there' (Mettinger 1982, 30). The depiction of the divine glory in the tabernacle resembles the tradition that considers the name as an abstract, personified element through which God manifests His presence in the temple (Wagner 2012, 91-92). While the name can be spoken and heard, *kabod* is a luminous phenomenon visible that illuminates the sanctuary (tent or temple). When the tabernacle is described as a sanctuary, it reflects aspects of prefigurative temple theology; *kabod* serves as a means through which God appears to His chosen people. The illuminated cloud covering the tent signified God's presence among the Israelites in their camp (Wagner 2012, 93). The Pentateuch emphasizes that God's presence is embodied in the splendor of the sanctuary, with the movement of the tabernacle symbolizing God's long-term dwelling, blending the dynamic act of moving with the static presence. *Kabod* embodies God's enduring presence through a mobile sanctuary.

The announcement of Yahweh God's presence in the tabernacle of the testimony (Ex 29:38-46) should be considered alongside the narrative of the sanctuary's construction. The instructions for the sanctuary's furnishings are clearly separate from the construction guidelines and are closely linked to the account in Exodus 36-40. The literary interruption seen in Exodus 27:19 no longer appears in this description (cf. Ex 39:1). Additionally, the fragment of Exodus 38:21-31 stands apart from the main story, with references to the holy ones breaking up the description of building the sanctuary. These references originate from the list of materials that the people were required to bring. Exodus 38:1-20 explains what will happen to the copper offered, while Exodus 39 details the making of priestly garments from blue, red, and purple. All of this aligns with the sequence in Exodus 35:4-9.

In Exodus 40, the repetition encourages us to explore a literary extension of the text. In Exodus 40:1-14, Moses observes the preparation of the tabernacle of testimony/meeting. Verse 2 states that the tabernacle should be set up on the first day of the first month, while verse 17 confirms that this command was carried out and the tabernacle

was pitched. Verse 18 notes again that Moses pitched the tabernacle, highlighting that its construction followed the vision Moses saw. This alignment aligns so closely with the instructions given in Exodus 25-31 for building the tabernacle that specific chronological details are omitted. In Exodus 40:18-33, the ritual washing in verse 31 is especially significant^[3].

While the phrase used was as God commanded in the arrangement of the objects (Ex 40:19, 23, 25, 29), the functions of these objects are not specified. Verse 31 emphasizes the lifting of the laver between the tabernacle and the altar, as Moses and the Aaronites were to wash there. In verse 33, like v. 17, a closing note appears, followed by the account of God's glory dwelling in the tabernacle. The double conclusion in v. 17 and v. 33 suggests that the second account, which lacks the washing party's ordination details, was the original conclusion of the building instructions (Ex 25-31). The fact that Moses, rather than the craftsmen, was to pitch the tent aligns with the initial directions. Overall, Exodus 35:1-9; 40:18-30; 33-38 largely constitutes the conclusion of the initial building account of the tabernacle (Wagner 2012, 57), with the dwelling of divine glory in Exodus 40:34 marking the completion of the sanctuary's construction and the divine presence.

Exodus 40:34 mentions two different ideas for the sanctuary (Wagner 2012, 86). The cloud rests on the tabernacle of assembly, while the glory is associated with movement—referred to as the 'tabernacle'^[4]. These concepts have distinct meanings: the movement indicates the holy place mentioned in the building instructions from Sinai (Ex 25:9). As stated in verse 8, God will dwell there permanently: 'And they shall make me a sanctuary, and I will dwell in the midst of them.' Following this declaration, chapters 26 and 27 specify the dates, provisions, and surrounding space of the sanctuary. These details are revisited in chapters 35 and 39, where they are enacted. Ultimately, Exodus chapter 40 describes God's presence in the sanctuary by placing the cloud over the meeting tent and filling the space with divine glory.

The term *miskan* refers to the designation of a location where God's presence is continuously felt; it pinpoints the specific area in front of or within which worship activities occur (see Lv 8:10; 15:31; 17:4; Nm 1:50; 53, etc.). The concept of the tabernacle appears in the narrative concerning its construction (Ex 25-31), mainly in later sections that describe its layout and the priestly tribe's function, particularly in passages like Ex 28:43; 29:4, 10u; 30:32, 42, 44; 30:18, 20, 26) (Wagner 2012, 87). Concerning its endowment, the focus is on the tent of encounter, emphasizing the service offered to

God there rather than solely the sanctuary as His dwelling place. Consequently, both concepts are used in descriptions related to its construction (Ex 35-40). The term *miskan* specifically refers to the divine dwelling place, distinct from other parts of the sanctuary (see Ex 38:31). The Pentateuch uses *miskan* exclusively in a theological sense, linking the sanctuary's meanings to the service of God. Exodus 26 illustrates that *miskan* designates the space where the divine presence, expressed by the verb 'skn,' can be found (Owczarek 1998, 276).

Conversely, the term *moed* 'tabernacle of the assembly/testimony, tabernacle' consistently refers to the shape of the sanctuary and the types of ministries conducted within it (Owczarek 1998, 276). This distinction between the tabernacle of the testimony, the sanctuary where the Aaronites served, and the moving dwelling of God—meaning the space where God resides—is supported by all biblical references to the dwelling formula in Exodus 40:34.

Variants or formulas for this dwelling are seen in multiple Old Testament passages (Ex 40:34-35; 2 Chr 5:13-14; 7:1-3; Ez 44:4). These references collectively show that the formula used has a consistent purpose: to denote the dwelling of divine glory within God's chosen sanctuary. The term 'tabernacle of the testimony' appears only once in Exodus 40:34, whereas elsewhere, the temple of the Lord is called the house of Yahweh (Wagner 2012, 88). Consequently, the idea of 'moving' can be linked to the concept of the 'temple,' especially in its external form. However, the specific meaning of the dwelling varies with the context. Prophetic texts do not describe the cloud's appearance nor question its presence in the sanctuary; they simply affirm the presence of a temple where divine glory resides. In 1 Kings 8 and implicitly in Chronicles 5, the cloud and glory fill the sanctuary, and God's presence prevents the priests from entering. In the Pentateuch, cloud and glory are considered synonymous. Unlike 3 Kings 8; 2 Samuel 5 and 7, where the cloud is within the temple, Exodus 40:34 places the cloud above the tabernacle, linking it to the signs in Exodus 40:36-38 that mark the Israelites' ongoing wilderness journey. The cloud over the tabernacle signals the camp's readiness to set out.

The context of the dwelling formula emphasizes a long-term view of the cloud, symbolizing either rest or continued journey for the Israelites, and thus the cloud needed to be visible above the tabernacle. The mixing of temporary and permanent elements in Exodus 40:34 ties closely to the tabernacle's significance as indicated in the broader context. God's dwelling in the space built for Him is intended to be permanent, but its physical form depends on the circumstances of the narrative. During the wilderness

wandering, the Israelites' need to relocate meant their sanctuary was designed to be portable, symbolizing a transitional phase.

Considering how God's prolonged presence in the sanctuary was envisioned, a separation between glory and cloud was unnecessary. During the wilderness journey, divine glory lasted only under specific conditions. Whenever God permitted the people to proceed, the tabernacle was dismantled, and glory manifested as a cloud enveloping the sanctuary. Divine glory explains God's presence, while the cloud signifies the wilderness journey.

Exodus 40:34-38 concludes with instructions for building the sanctuary and a brief final report (Ex 35:1-9; 40:18-30, 33-38), which describes the tabernacle without mentioning other participants. In this final note, verse 34 mentions God's presence in the tabernacle of the testimony, asserting that divine glory resides there if the cloud rests on the tent. Linguistically, this note employs a verb clause and an inverted verb clause, shifting from imperfect to perfect tense, to express that the divine dwelling occurs simultaneously and duratively (Wagner 2012, 95). Two terms are used to refer to the tabernacle: *xhl moyd* and *mskn*. Among Old Testament dwelling formulas, *mskn* specifically designates the tabernacle as God's dwelling place, whereas *xhk* and *moyd* refer to its current, possibly temporary, exterior appearance.

Glory emerges from the sacred space, cloaked in clouds. Divine glory symbolizes an abstract, personified element within the temple. The term *sm* refers to a phenomenon that is heard and spoken, whereas *kbd* refers to a visible phenomenon. When the light *cxs xclt* illuminates the sanctuary, emanating from the tabernacle, it signals to the people that God is present. Therefore, there is a strong link between the Exodus from Egypt and God's glorious revelation through historical events, emphasizing Yahweh's constant presence with His people (Wagner 2012, 95).

The privilege of witnessing divine glory is exclusive to Israel. The *kabod*, as a visible sign, is not seen by the many Egyptians who drowned in the sea. The first appearance of *kabod* to the Israelites occurs in Exodus 16. In this passage, which describes the people's gossip in the wilderness, divine glory manifests over the desert as a sign of confirmation, accompanied by the food Moses announces. It is mentioned that the glory will be observed the next morning (vv. 7-10), but it appears that very evening. This appearance results from God's message to Moses that the people received food both in the morning and in the evening (vv. 11-13). In Exodus 16, this initial aspect of the divine presence is

evident and is further reflected in subsequent texts: *kvd* represents the visualization of God's presence through which He communicates with Moses.

From Exodus 16, it cannot be determined whether *kabod* and Yahweh are the same. The way divine glory's appearance triggers God's speech can be inferred from God's longest speech to Moses (Ex 25-31) (Wagner 2012, 116). In Exodus 24:15b-18, the instructions for constructing the meeting tabernacle are introduced by the divine glory's epiphany. Ultimately, Exodus 24:15b-18 concludes the giving of divine commandments to Moses on Sinai. Initially, this account was connected to the camp details in Exodus 16. After Israel camped before the mountain, the cloud covered Mount Sinai, and divine glory rested over it (Ex 24:15b-16). Over 40 days, Moses received instructions to build the tabernacle (Ex 25-31).

Only after giving the instructions did Moses return to the Israelites' camp to execute them (Ex 35:1-9; 40:18-30; 33-38). Once the sanctuary was completed, divine glory dwelled within it (Ex 40:34). This marks the arrival of the long-awaited divine presence among the Israelites. In Exodus 24:17, divine glory is described as a consuming fire—what people saw when God's glory appeared. They observed a bright, intense light that was too overwhelming to endure for long. To prevent harm to His people, God veiled His glory in a cloud, through which the divine presence was revealed to mankind.

Exodus 40:34 stands out as a key verse (Wagner 2012, 125; Noth 1948, 8). It signifies that God's glory resides in the tent of meeting. The verse's formula highlights the significance of the tabernacle. When compared to other Old Testament dwelling formulas (such as 1 Kgs 8:10; Ez 44:4; 2 Sam 5:14; 7:1), it shows that the tabernacle was a movable sanctuary during the wilderness journey, with movement explicitly included. This movement signified the location of God's enduring presence, referred to as the house of Yahweh in other texts. Since the word 'temple' can't be used here, the term *miskan* is employed to indicate the sanctuary. This term appears in the dwelling formula where other texts might use 'temple.' From this, we see that the tent of encounter served as a sustained divine dwelling for the wilderness generation, making the tabernacle a symbol of God's continual presence.

Glory signifies the divine presence within the sanctuary. It resides there, fills the tabernacle, and can depart if God requires the journey to continue. For Moses and the people, *kabod* is the visible indicator of God's presence. Its appearance also confirms God's presence. *Kabod* is often seen as a synonym for God's visible presence. In temple

tradition, the reason for the sanctuary being filled with divine glory is a luminous phenomenon connected to God.

Through radiant brilliance, humans perceive the divine presence. The tradition of the Pentateuch depicts Godhood concealed in cloud, later associated with glory. Divine glory is seen enveloped by clouds. The transient appearance ties God and His glory to the cloud; they are present only temporarily. This imagery is reflected in Exodus 40:34, where God's presence—both temporary and enduring—is linked to its dynamic or static state. When the tabernacle is set up, God and His glory are present for an extended period. As the people move on, the glory rises in the cloud at God's command, ensuring the sanctuary's mobility.

The cult represented God's dwelling among the Israelites, central to guiding their recognition of Him. In this context, the author elaborates on the phrase "I am Who I am!" While earlier formulas briefly introduced God, Exodus 29:46 combines His self-revelation with the exodus from Egypt and His dwelling place. It states, 'And they shall know that I am their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them and be their God.'

From a literary perspective, the narration of the Exodus is even more intimately linked with the ordination of the sanctuary through the successive visions of divine glory. The phrase, 'I am the Lord,' is supplemented by the apposition 'their God.' Through this, the people acknowledge the identity of the God who initiated the Exodus from Egypt; this recognition becomes the foundational object of faith, with the people acknowledging God and accordingly rendering Him daily worship. In this context, divine glory functions to ordain a specific location and characterize the service for the divine presence. Consequently, glory assumes a fundamental role in the ritual festivities at the sanctuary.

***Kabod* in Worship and Jurisdiction – Sanctification, Priestly Confirmation, and Judgment (Lv 9; Nm 14-20)**

In Chapter 9 of Leviticus, the concept of *kabod* assumes a significant role in the preparation of the cultic ministry. The sanctification declared in Exodus 29:43 is here exemplified through action (Neher 2002, p. 136). In Leviticus 9:4b-6, the people are assured that following the consecration of the priests (see Lv 8), divine glory would be manifested. This assertion is articulated in parallel with Exodus 16:7. The manifestation of glory in Exodus 16:7 functions as confirmation that the ordinance

regarding the sanctification of priests and the initial sacrifices has been carried out in accordance with divine directives. While in Exodus 16:10, glory appears more rapidly than initially announced, in Leviticus 9:4b-6:23, the proclamation and the manifestation are fully synchronized. After the offerings of the first sacrifice and the blessings pronounced by Moses and Aaron, divine glory was revealed. The presence of God among the Israelites, as announced in Exodus 29:45, is perceived as a bright light visible without a veil. From that point onward, the daily sacrifice may be offered. The narrative clearly demonstrates that divine glory serves to authenticate the legitimacy of the Aaronic priesthood, as evidenced by the continuation of the account (Lv 10).

While the burnt offering described in Leviticus 9 was received by God Himself, Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abiud, were slain by divine decree for presenting an inappropriate sacrifice. Consequently, for the first time within the Pentateuch, a clear distinction emerges among the various priestly tribes (Wagner 2012, 119). The text of Leviticus 9 emphasizes that only the Aaronite tribe, through Eleazar and Ithamar (cf. Lv 10:6; 12:16), possesses the exclusive right to officiate within the tent of meeting. This affirmation is reinforced by the people's perception, evidenced by the immediate appearance of divine glory following the initial priestly act.

In the passage from Numbers 16, the Aaronites' claim to be the exclusive nation authorized to present sacrifices to God is reaffirmed. This is illustrated within the context of the destruction of Korah's household. Alongside 250 other individuals, Korah opposed Moses and Aaron, asserting that they alone were entitled to serve God. Within this context resides the divine judgment leading to Korah's demise. Aaron's distinguished status relative to the other tribal leaders is ultimately evidenced by the placement of the staff before the ark. Unlike the staffs of the other tribal leaders, Aaron's staff was elevated, indicating his special standing within the sanctuary (Rendtorff 1961, 30).

In Leviticus 16, divine glory appears twice—once in the main text and again at its conclusion. His appearance signals a divine judgment proclamation. The message in Numbers 16:21, warning to stay away from this community to prevent their destruction, holds weight. Similarly, Numbers 17:10 repeats this warning but uses the verb *bdl* instead of *rmm*. The deliberate separation of Moses and Aaron from the crowd (Nm 16:6-22; 17:1-5, 16-28) highlights their distinction from the unclean. As a result, the wilderness event gains theological significance within the Pentateuch, portraying the crowd as unclean and subject to divine destruction. God's pronouncement functions as

a sacramental-juridical act, and divine glory's appearance confirms that this judgment scene is inherently cultic.

Glory manifests only after Moses and Aaron are spoken to briefly (Wagner 2012, 120). This glory emphasizes the divine pronouncement, which issues a warning about imminent punishment to Moses and Aaron. Notably, God addresses Moses and Aaron in His glory, shielding them from judgment. Although a divine punishment is announced, it targets only the rebels among the people, not the entire population (Schart 1990, 186–7).

In Numbers 14:10, the manifestation of divine glory is associated with a divine decree. The presence of God is perceived, and the manifestations of divine intentions, reinforced by glory, are manifested into action; that is, they become observable. As the luminous light appeared, the people recognized that God was addressing Moses. Divine communication includes a pronouncement of judgment. Verse 28 explicitly demonstrates that this pronouncement possesses a sacred-legal nature. The decree comprises formulas and fragments of a solemn oath, comprising elements characteristic of the sacral-legal domain. This decree announces the destruction of the 'generation in the wilderness.' Only through Moses' intercession is the punishment mitigated, and the generation in the wilderness is merely prohibited from entering the Promised Land. Moses herein acts as an intermediary for the divine message, unaffected by the punishment. He and the subsequent generation were permitted to enter the Promised Land. This passage highlights a connection between Numbers 13 and Numbers 16. While in Numbers 13, the punishment for rebellion against Moses and Aaron prevented the generation 'in the wilderness' from entering the Promised Land, in Numbers 16, those who rebelled against Moses and Aaron were slain. This illustrates a close relationship between the context of Numbers 16 and Numbers 14:8 (Wagner 2012, 121). While Moses delivered this message to the Israelites, guiding them toward the land flowing with milk and honey, Dathan and Abiron accused him of actually leading them out of a prosperous land and now allowing them to die in the wilderness: "You have brought us out of the land flowing with milk and honey and brought us to perish in the wilderness!" (Nm 16:13u). Moses and Aaron are both depicted as figures of special status in both texts, seemingly unaffected by divine punishments. They had the right to enter the Promised Land alongside the new generation. Immediately following the epiphanies, the appearance of divine glory introduces sacral-juridical procedures, with divine discourses being formally established.

Moses and Aaron ultimately lost their right to enter the Promised Land, as specified in Nm 14. Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:1-13 illustrate why both had to share the fate of the wilderness generation. In this story, Moses oversteps his authority by disregarding God's instructions: God asked him to speak to the rock to make it produce water, but Moses struck it with his staff instead, as described in Exodus 17:1-7. Due to this act of disobedience, Moses and Aaron were barred from entering the Promised Land.

Divine glory manifests in this text and is intricately associated with God's command to Moses to speak to the rock. It appears as a manifestation of demand, with the divine sentence following the deed. In other narratives set in the 'wilderness,' divine glory consistently appears when the people rebel against Moses and Aaron. This narrative pattern is also maintained in the revised version of the passage in Exodus 17:1-7. In this account, there is no longer any statement about God's subsequent dealings with the people; rather, Moses is assigned a task that again corresponds to the passage in Exodus 1:1-7 (Westermann 1970, 255). This preserves the motive—the literary procedure—of introducing a divine sentence through the appearance of divine glory. After Moses and Aaron were excluded from the group entitled to enter the Promised Land in Numbers 20:1-13, the divine glory was no longer manifested.

Not only did the people lose their closeness to God, but Moses and Aaron were also deprived of the divine protection and favor they once had, which God had provided through Moses to the (chosen) people (Wagner 2012, 112). The divine glory no longer manifests itself directly before them but is instead associated with Aaron's and Eleazar's worship and the cloud of Moses that rests on Joshua (Nm 14:6-9; 20:25-28; 27:12-23).

Conclusions

This study's results highlight key insights and suggest directions for future research. Firstly, the analysis indicates that *kabod* in the Pentateuch is more than just a visual depiction of an epiphany; it functions as a performative element that affirms cultic structures, establishes priestly authority, conveys sacred judgments, and embodies the collective memory of the Exodus. In the examined texts—particularly Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers—glory, cloud, and sanctuary filling are interconnected within a cohesive narrative and ritual framework, where the movement of the tabernacle and the visibility of the glory mutually influence each other. Therefore, *kabod* serves as a pragmatic signal of presence, legitimacy, and occasionally, divine approval.

Additionally, the study points to a strong connection between the dwelling descriptions in the Pentateuch and post-exilic models, though with notable differences: the Pentateuch focuses on a luminous, movable, and visually striking image of glory, whereas some post-exilic writings, such as Haggai, highlight the material and majestic aspects of the temple filling. This variation indicates both thematic consistency and adaptations in theology and liturgy, shaped by the historical setting and the evolving roles of worship.

From a philological and editorial perspective, there are duplications and insertions that likely stem from traditional editing methods or layered revisions, such as repeated stories about tent construction and different uses of the *miskan/moed* terms. These features require careful editorial analysis to balance thematic consistency with potential perspective shifts. Methodologically, integrating philology with form criticism and comparing prophetic and historical texts has been effective in revealing the pragmatic roles of *kabod*.

In summary, *kabod* in the Pentateuch serves multiple functions but remains underutilized in understanding its ritual-theological and editorial contexts. Interdisciplinary methods could enhance both the semantic and historical comprehension of Glory and provide a more accurate reconstruction of how divine presence was experienced and enacted within the Israelite community.

Notes

[1] Thomas Wagner, Moshe Weinfeld, and especially Claus Westermann acknowledged the ambivalent nature of the term *kabod* by demonstrating that divine glory could be harmful to both God's opponents and to Israelites who engaged in idolatry. However, it was advantageous when the elected people or even Gentiles carried out the divine will (Wagner 2012, 93–4).

[2] This passage highlights the prophet's reassurance to the despondent city, emphasizing that its final glory will surpass the first. He encourages the people to witness the city's transformation—from a ruined, hopeless place to one of brilliant beauty—and to recognize God's power in this renewal. The prophet urges them to share this testament of divine care and resilience, reminding them that God has always been our protector, defender, and shepherd (Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur 2011, 182)

[3] The first account of the Tabernacle of Testimony's endowment, found in Exodus 40:1-17, lacks this explanation. The ritual washings, prescribed in Exodus

40:31, were necessary for Moses, Aaron, and his sons to enter the tabernacle (Ex 40:11-15). These washings are connected to the anointing of priests and their priestly garments. However, Exodus 40:18-33 does not mention the anointing or priestly vestments.

[4] The term *miskan* is translated as ‘place of dwelling’ or ‘habitation.’ This dwelling is inherently permanent. R. Hendrix proposes a criterion for translating *miskan*: Exodus 24-40 describes an object (the tabernacle) composed of distinct, transportable components that still functions as God’s enduring dwelling. If the tent is set up in a specific location, it can be considered movable. The account indicates that the site was abandoned when the Israelites moved elsewhere to establish a new residence. Therefore, the concept of a dwelling place or dwelling is fitting for translating *miskan* (Hendrix 1991, 216).

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THE THEOPHANIC GLORY OF GOD: REFLECTIONS ON JOB 38–42

Abstract

This paper offers a theological reflection on the theophanic manifestation of divine glory in Job 38–42, focusing on the interrelated themes of divine presence ('glory'), creation, suffering, and human knowledge. Although *kavod* is not explicitly attributed to God in the divine speeches, the article argues that glory is manifested through God's appearance from the *se'arah*, the disclosure of creation, and the transformation of Job's epistemological position. The divine speeches provide no causal explanation for Job's suffering; instead, their rhetorical questions displace an anthropocentric perspective by revealing a created order that exceeds human knowledge, utility, and control. Job's movement from 'hearing' to 'seeing' (42:5) expresses the relational and epistemological consequence of the encounter. Divine glory thus emerges through transformative encounter with divine presence within mystery.



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Keywords

Theophany, Divine glory, Suffering, Creation, Divine presence, Epistemology

Introduction

The book of Job, which also belongs to sceptical literature (Dell 1991), has seen many ancient versions and received numerous theological interpretations throughout the history, which witnesses to its attractive and relevant content^[1], and a specific legacy (Harkins 2017). Job 38–42 records the unique direct response God gives to human suffering in the entire book, offers a model for human action that upholds empathy and compassion (Hildebrand 2006). As such, it is unique in the Bible. Here, God does not offer justification for Job's anguish, but confronts him through a theophany from

the whirlwind (מִן־הַסְּעָרָה) (38:1; 40:6), with the tone of compassion and comfort (Ham 2013), revealing divine glory via creation's vastness and mystery rather than explanatory discourse. God's speech throughout the chapters 38-42 can also be explained as the transformation of Job through the renewal of his mind (Lockwood, 2010) where Job's words are both a capitulation and a reiteration of his complaint. Clines describes Job as *wisdom in extremis*, testing whether theological order stands under traumatic conditions (Clines 2016, 35). This encounter raises the central theological tension: Is divine glory found in rational answer, or in relational encounter?

Unlike Proverbs (predictability of wisdom) or Ecclesiastes (wisdom's limits), Job enters the realms of protest and divine encounter. Job becomes a case study in whether theological order survives trauma, and instead of passive acceptance, Job cries out against God, demanding justice. In this respect, such an approach transforms wisdom to existential struggle. Job does not abandon faith; instead, he wrestles with God while still addressing God, which can also be understood as an act of wisdom. Also, the book of Job challenges simplified theology of cause and effect. It gives theological legitimacy to lament and unresolved tension. It opens space for divine encounter beyond rational explanation, i.e., in the whirlwind. Finally, it demonstrates that true wisdom may include challenging God faithfully.

Furthermore, many rhetorical questions dismantle anthropocentric vision: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (Job 38:4). Rhetorical questioning functions here not to humiliate Job, but to decenter humanity as the primary interpretive lens of reality. God invites Job to contemplate a world that thrives independent of human purpose (e.g., the lion, raven, mountain goat, wild donkey). These creatures are portrayed not for their utility, but for their existence before and beyond humanity's concerns (38:39 – 39:30). The questions thus lead Job into theological displacement, revealing that divine wisdom orders a universe where justice is not contingent upon human expectation but grounded in God's sovereign delight.

One can say that the theophanic speeches of Job 38–42 manifest divine glory not through a rational explanation of suffering but through divine presence, the disclosure of creation, and the transformation of Job's epistemological position. The absence of explicit *kavod* terminology is not incidental: glory is manifested rather than defined. The divine response moves Job from an anthropocentric demand for comprehensible justice toward an encounter with a created order that exceeds human mastery and culminates in the movement from hearing to seeing. Hence, the paper discusses three

related questions: How does the theophanic manifestation of God in Job 38–42 reframe the perception of divine glory? What do the divine speeches contribute to the theological problem of suffering when they provide no causal explanation for it? How does Job's transformation reshape his knowledge of and relationship with God?

Textual, Structural, and Semantic Features

The Hebrew text of Job is composed predominantly in poetry, although the book also contains prose sections, particularly in 1:1–2:13, 32:1–5, and 42:7–17^[2]. Job 38–42 may be divided into several major units. The first divine speech (38:1–40:2) concentrates primarily on the created order and on dimensions of creation inaccessible to human knowledge and control. Job responds briefly in 40:3–5. A second divine speech begins in 40:6 and leads into the extended descriptions of Behemoth (40:15–24) and Leviathan (40:25–41:26). Job's final response follows in 42:1–6. The poetic dialogue gives way to the prose epilogue (42:7–17), in which God rebukes Job's companions and subsequently restores Job^[3]. Greenstein (2020) similarly distinguishes the texts as the Deity's First Discourse (38:1–39:30), Job's response (40:1–5), the Deity's Second Discourse (40:6–41:26), Job's second response (42:1–6), and the epilogue (42:7–17). Both divine speeches begin with God answering Job from the tempest (38:1; 40:6). The *se'arah* does not function just as the setting of the first divine appearance. It frames the divine discourse itself. The structure also reveals a development in Job's position. His trajectory moves from lament (Job 3), through increasingly explicit demands for justice and an encounter with God (cf. 31:35–37), toward his brief response in 40:3–5 and finally the language of hearing and seeing in 42:5. This movement establishes the literary framework within which Job's transformation can be evaluated: crisis leads to divine encounter, and divine encounter produces a change in Job's manner of speaking and perceiving.

Semantic Fields: Glory, Theophany, Knowledge, and Justice

Several terms and expressions are particularly relevant for understanding the theological and semantic framework of Job 38–42: כָּבוֹד (*kavod*, 'glory, honour'), סְעָרָה (*se'arah*, 'tempest, storm, whirlwind'), the language of knowledge and perception in Job 42:5, and מִשְׁפָּט (*mishpat*, 'justice, judgment, decision')^[4].

The term כָּבוֹד (*kavod*) occurs two hundred times in the Hebrew Bible, but only twice in the book of Job, in 19:9 and 29:20. In both instances the term refers to Job rather

than to God. In 19:9 Job complains that God “has stripped me of my glory” (כְּבוֹדִי). In 29:20, recalling his former condition, Job declares: “My glory was fresh with me, and my bow was renewed in my hand.” Thus, the term *kavod* itself is not used for God in the divine speeches. This lexical absence is important, and requires a distinction between the explicit terminology of glory and the manifestation of glory through theophany, divine speech, and creation. Furthermore, the term סָעָרָה (*se‘arah*) occurs sixteen times in the Hebrew Bible (2 Kgs 2:1, 11; Is 29:6; 40:24; 41:16; Jr 23:19; 30:23; Ez 1:4; 13:11, 13; Zh 9:14; Ps 107:25, 29; 148:8; Job 38:1; 40:6). Its two occurrences in Job introduce both divine speeches. In 38:1 and again in 40:6, God answers Job מִן־הַסָּעָרָה, “from the tempest.” The repetition gives the *se‘arah* a structural function within the narrative, while its use elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible places Job’s encounter within a broader semantic field associated with divine power, manifestation, judgment, and cosmic disturbance.

The epistemological dimension of the encounter is expressed most clearly in Job 42:5: לְשִׁמְע־אָזְן שָׁמַעְתִּידָּ וְעַתָּה עֵינִי רָאִיתָּךְ, “By the hearing of the ear I had heard of you, but now my eye sees you.” The expression is distinctive in the Hebrew Bible, although the combination of אָזְן (‘ozen, ‘ear’) with the verb שָׁמַע (*shm‘*, ‘to hear’) also occurs elsewhere (e.g., 1 Sam 15:22; Is 6:10). The contrast in Job 42:5, however, is not between ignorance and knowledge, but between two modes of perception: hearing and seeing. The Septuagint preserves this contrast: ἀκοήν μὲν ὡτὸς ἤκουόν σου τὸ πρότερον, νυνὶ δὲ ὁ ὀφθαλμός μου ἑώρακέ σε (“Formerly I heard you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye has seen you”)^[5]. Furthermore, the term מִשְׁפָּט (*mishpat*) occurs more than four hundred times in the Hebrew Bible and appears repeatedly throughout Job (8:3; 9:19, 32; 13:18; 14:3; 19:7; 22:4; 27:2; 29:14; 31:13; 32:9; 34:4–6, 12, 17, 23; 35:2; 36:6, 17; 37:23; 40:8). Its frequency reflects the centrality of justice and judgment to the dispute developed throughout the book. Particularly significant for the divine speeches is Job 40:8, where God asks: הֲאֵפֶּה תַפְּסֵנִי לְמַעַן תַּצְדִּיק, “Would you indeed annul my judgment? Would you condemn me so that you may be justified?” The question brings *mishpat* directly into the second divine speech and places Job’s demand for justice in relation to divine judgment.

The Tempest (*Se'arah*) and the Theophanic Appearance

The divine speeches are introduced by the statement that God answered Job מִן־הַסְעָרָה (*min-hasse'arah*, “from the tempest”; 38:1), a formula repeated at the beginning of the second divine speech in 40:6. The tempest is not an atmospheric detail accompanying God’s first appearance but forms the setting of the divine address as a whole. The expression places God’s response to Job within the wider biblical language of theophany, while at the same time giving the manifestation in Job its distinctive character. The book of Job itself employs related storm terminology. In 37:9, for example, סוּפָה (*suphah*) describes the tempest that comes from its chamber. The Septuagint makes the transition even more explicit. At the beginning of 38:1 it adds the statement, “And after Elihu had ceased speaking,”^[6] thereby directly connecting the end of Elihu’s discourse with the beginning of God’s response. It also expands the description of the divine manifestation: the Lord speaks to Job διὰ λαίλαπος καὶ νεφῶν, “through a whirlwind and clouds.”^[7] The addition of ‘clouds’ strengthens the conventional theophanic character of the scene. The *se'arah* also evokes other biblical accounts of divine manifestation. Particularly Ezek 1:4, where the prophet’s vision begins with ‘a stormy wind’ coming from the north, accompanied by a great cloud, fire, and brightness. The vision subsequently culminates in the appearance of “the likeness of the glory of God” (Ezek 1:28). Isa 29:6 similarly associates divine visitation with thunder, earthquake, great noise, tempest, storm, and consuming fire.

The relationship between God and the tempest is not uniform throughout the Hebrew Bible. For instance, in 1 Kgs 19:11 God is explicitly said not to be ‘in’ the wind that breaks the mountains before Elijah, whereas in 2 Kgs 2:1 and 2:11 Elijah is taken up in the *se'arah*. Elsewhere, particularly in Jr 23:19 and 30:23, the tempest becomes an image of divine wrath. The semantic field of *se'arah* therefore does not possess a single fixed theological meaning. It can accompany divine manifestation, divine action, or divine judgment, but its precise significance depends upon its literary context. This distinction is visible in Job. The tempest from which God speaks is not explicitly identified as an expression of wrath. Nor does the text describe the elaborate visual manifestation associated with the divine glory in Ezekiel. There is no throne vision, no detailed description of God’s appearance, and no explicit declaration that Job sees the *kavod* of God. What the narrative emphasizes instead is the divine voice: God ‘answered Job from the tempest.’ The theophany is therefore simultaneously revelatory and

concealing. God becomes directly present to Job, yet the divine presence is mediated through the tempest and, above all, through speech.

This restrained form of manifestation is particularly suggestive for the question of divine glory. In Ez 1:4, the stormy wind forms part of a spectacular vision that culminates in an explicit identification of divine *kavod*. In Job, by contrast, the tempest remains while the visual splendour associated elsewhere with glory is largely absent. One may therefore speak of a form of glory that is manifested without being explicitly named: divine majesty is disclosed through God's presence, voice, and sovereignty over the created world rather than through a description of divine splendour. The *se'arah* consequently functions as more than the dramatic setting of the speeches. It marks the transition from discourse about God to encounter with God. Throughout the dialogues, Job and his companions have debated divine justice, wisdom, and action. From 38:1 onward, God becomes the speaker. Yet the divine presence does not abolish mystery. This combination of presence and concealment provides the appropriate theological setting for the speeches that follow: Job receives an answer, but not an explanation; a manifestation, but not a comprehensive vision of God.

Behemoth & Leviathan

The first speech directs Job's attention toward a created world whose processes and creatures exceed human knowledge and control. In the second speech this theme reaches an intensified form in the descriptions of Behemoth (40:15 – 24) and Leviathan (40:25 – 41:26). These creatures represent dimensions of creation that cannot be domesticated or subordinated to human purposes^[8]. Behemoth is introduced with the command, "Look at Behemoth, which I made with you" (40:15). Whatever zoological or symbolic identification is assigned to the creature^[9], the text explicitly places it within the created order. Its extraordinary strength is described through its body: power resides in its loins and belly, its bones are compared to tubes of bronze, and its limbs to bars of iron (40:16-18). Yet this formidable creature is not presented as a rival creator or as an independent power opposed to God. It is God's creature, indeed "the first of the works of God" (40:19). Its strength therefore belongs within, rather than outside, the world governed by its Creator. The description of Leviathan intensifies this confrontation with the limits of human power. The rhetorical questions directed to Job emphasize repeatedly what he cannot do: "Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook?" (40:25). The creature cannot be captured, domesticated, or converted into an object of ordinary

human exchange and utility. Human beings retreat before it, and weapons prove ineffective against it. Leviathan thus represents a form of created existence that resists human possession and control.

The theological significance of these descriptions lies precisely in the contrast between human inability and divine sovereignty. What appears terrifying and uncontrollable from the human perspective does not constitute a threat to God. Behemoth and Leviathan expose the limits of an anthropocentric understanding of creation: not everything that exists has been made available for human use, comprehension, or domination. Creation contains forms of life whose power, freedom, and even danger remain outside the boundaries of human mastery. For this reason, Behemoth and Leviathan need not be reduced either to zoological curiosities or simply to personifications of evil. Their imagery may evoke traditions associated with chaos and threatening cosmic powers, but within the divine speeches they are presented as belonging to the world over which God exercises sovereignty. The text places that character within a theological vision in which even what human beings experience as untamable is neither autonomous from God nor excluded from creation.

We have seen that glory in Job 38–42 is manifested through creation rather than explicitly named as *kavod*. Behemoth and Leviathan extend that manifestation beyond the ordered, harmonious, or immediately beautiful aspects of the world. Divine majesty is disclosed also through what is excessive, powerful, dangerous, and resistant to human control. The wildness of creation does not stand outside divine sovereignty. On the contrary, God's ability to address such creatures as part of the created world reveals a relation to them fundamentally different from Job's. There is therefore a certain irony in the culmination of the divine speeches. The creatures before which human power reaches its limits become objects of extended divine description. What Job cannot master, God demonstrates as part of creation. The speeches thus shift the theological question from whether creation conforms to human expectations to whether human beings can recognize a divine order whose scope exceeds those expectations. Behemoth and Leviathan become extreme examples of the larger movement already present in chapters 38–39: creation is not anthropocentric, and divine wisdom cannot be measured by the degree to which the world is intelligible, useful, or controllable from the human point of view. In this sense, Behemoth and Leviathan contribute directly to the transformation of Job's theological horizon. They radicalize the displacement initiated by the earlier questions concerning creation.

Job's Response: From Hearing to Seeing (42:1-6)

Job's final response in 42:1-6 marks the culmination of the encounter initiated by God's appearance from the tempest. The brevity of Job's words contrasts sharply with the length of his earlier speeches and with the extensive divine discourses of chapters 38 – 41. Yet this brevity should not be understood simply as Job's defeat or capitulation. Job begins by acknowledging the scope of divine power: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (42:2). He then takes up the language of the divine challenge from 38:2: "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?" (42:3). Job thus responds to God by repeating the very question with which the divine speech had begun. He acknowledges that he has spoken concerning realities that exceeded his understanding: "Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (42:3). The statement concerns the limits of Job's knowledge, but it does not by itself amount to an admission that the moral claims of the friends were correct or that Job's suffering resulted from previously concealed wrongdoing. The decisive statement follows in 42:5: **לְשִׁמְעָאֲזָן שָׁמַעְתִּיךָ וְעַתָּה עֵינֵי רָאִיתִיךָ**, "By the hearing of the ear I had heard of you, but now my eye sees you." The contrast between hearing and seeing provides one of the clearest indications of Job's transformation. Before the divine encounter, Job possessed knowledge of God through "the hearing of the ear"; after the theophany, he can speak of seeing. The contrast does not necessarily imply that Job previously lacked knowledge of God. Rather, the form of that knowledge has changed.

The language of seeing is crucial because the narrative itself provides no description of God's visible form. God speaks from the *se'arah*, but the text does not describe a divine body or an object that Job literally sees. Job's statement creates a tension between concealment and revelation. God who remains concealed within the tempest can nevertheless be described by Job as having been 'seen.' Seeing here expresses the immediacy of the encounter and the transformation of Job's relation to the God whom he had previously known through hearing. Job does not emerge from the encounter knowing why the events of chapters 1–2 occurred. Nevertheless, he claims a new mode of perception. In fact, the theophany changes the position from which Job knows and speaks about God.

The interpretation of Job 42:6, however, requires particular caution. The verse is frequently translated along the lines of "Therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes," and on such a reading Job's response appears to culminate in repentance and

submission^[10]. Yet the Hebrew here is complex, and the precise objects and meanings of אֲמָאס ('em'as) and וְנִחַמְתִּי (wenihamti) can be disputed. Consequently, the verse should not be made to carry more interpretive weight than its ambiguity permits. Depending on how the syntax and vocabulary are understood, Job may be expressing rejection, retraction, or a changed disposition concerning 'dust and ashes,' rather than confessing a previously hidden moral transgression.

In 42:7-8, immediately after Job's response, God rebukes the three friends because they have not spoken rightly concerning God 'as my servant Job has.' Whatever transformation occurs in 42:1-6, therefore, it cannot simply mean that the friends were correct and Job was wrong throughout the dispute. The divine verdict preserves a fundamental distinction between Job's speech and that of his companions. Job's protest, questioning, and demands for justice are not retrospectively reduced to the false theology condemned in the friends^[11]. Job's response is therefore best understood, as an epistemological and relational reorientation rather than simply as a confession of moral guilt. His earlier speech gives way to acknowledgment of the limits of his understanding, while 'hearing' gives way to 'seeing.' The transformation does not consist in receiving an explanation of suffering but in encountering God differently. Job's questions have not all been answered conceptually; rather, the questioner himself has been repositioned through the encounter. This distinction is essential for understanding the theological function of the theophany. Job moves from demanding that God become intelligible within the framework of his dispute to recognizing a divine reality that exceeds that framework. Yet the movement should not be construed as the destruction of Job's protest or as a simple triumph of divine power over human questioning. The epilogue's affirmation of Job prevents such a conclusion. Instead, Job 42:1-6 presents a more complex transformation: Job remains the one who has spoken rightly, but his encounter with God has changed the way in which he perceives both God and the limits of his own knowledge.

Theophany and Divine Glory

The theophany does not eliminate divine mystery. God speaks from the tempest, but no description of the divine form is provided. In this respect, the *se'arah* simultaneously reveals and conceals. Job encounters God directly, yet God remains beyond comprehensive human perception. The divine speeches thus resist the assumption that revelation necessarily entails exhaustive explanation. God is revealed

without becoming fully comprehensible. As noted above, the term *kavod* is not used for God in Job 38–42. Nevertheless, the absence of the term does not entail the absence of the theological reality associated with divine glory. The narrative presents God as the one who speaks from the tempest, establishes and governs the created world, attends to creatures beyond human observation, and exercises sovereignty over realities that remain inaccessible to human control. Divine glory is therefore manifested narratively and theophanically.

Creation is central to this manifestation. Beginning with the question “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” (38:4), the speeches progressively displace Job from the centre of the created order. The questions concerning the earth, sea, stars, weather, and animals disclose a world whose existence and flourishing are not determined by human needs. Rain falls even on land “where no one lives” (38:26); wild animals receive divine attention independently of human management; Behemoth and Leviathan remain beyond human mastery. The world presented to Job is therefore creation-centered rather than anthropocentric: its meaning cannot be reduced to its usefulness or intelligibility to humanity. This displacement does not mean that Job’s concern for justice is declared irrelevant. Indeed, *mishpat* appears explicitly in the second divine speech when God asks whether Job would annul divine judgment in order to justify himself (40:8). The speeches place the question of justice within a wider theological horizon. Job has approached his suffering through the question of whether divine governance can be reconciled with his experience of undeserved suffering. God’s response situates that question within a creation whose order is vastly more extensive than Job’s individual experience and whose governance exceeds his capacity to perceive it in its entirety. The result is an epistemological displacement. Before the theophany, Job repeatedly speaks, argues, challenges, and demands an encounter with God. After the divine speeches, his words become markedly fewer. The contrast can therefore be expressed as a series of related movements: from demanding justice to receiving an encounter; from an anthropocentric perspective to contemplation of a creation that exceeds human purposes; from sustained theological argument to acknowledgment of epistemological limits; and, finally, from hearing to seeing. These movements should not be understood as absolute oppositions. Job does not cease to matter within creation, nor is justice replaced by arbitrary divine power. Likewise, seeing does not abolish knowledge gained through hearing. Rather, each movement represents an expansion of Job’s theological horizon.

In this sense, the divine speeches transform the meaning of glory (*kavod*). Glory emerges through the relation between divine presence and the created world. The God who remains concealed in the tempest nevertheless makes divine sovereignty perceptible through creation. Glory is encountered in the excess of creation over human knowledge and mastery: in what Job did not create, cannot govern, and cannot fully comprehend. This interpretation also clarifies the relation between glory and wisdom. The speeches display a wisdom embodied in the governance of a world whose complexity exceeds human categories of utility and control. Divine wisdom is therefore encountered through the created order, while divine glory becomes perceptible in the freedom and sovereignty with which that order exists before God. The two themes converge without becoming identical: wisdom concerns the divine ordering and governance of creation, whereas glory becomes manifest through the encounter with the God whose wisdom exceeds Job’s epistemological horizon. The theophany consequently does not resolve Job’s theological crisis by supplying the missing premise in an argument. It changes the horizon within which the crisis is perceived. Job’s suffering remains real, his earlier protest is not invalidated, and the epilogue affirms him over against his companions. Nevertheless, after the *se‘arah*, creation, Behemoth and Leviathan, and the movement from hearing to seeing, Job can no longer approach God from precisely the same epistemological position. The theophanic character of Job 38 – 42 may therefore be summarized as a paradox of presence and transcendence.

Before theophany	After theophany
Demands an account of justice	Receives divine encounter
Human suffering as primary horizon	Suffering situated within creation
Extended theological argument	Recognition of epistemological limits
Speaks and challenges	Hears and sees

Theological Reflections

The interpretation developed above has several implications for the theological problem of suffering and for the relationship between divine sovereignty, human knowledge, and revelation. The divine speeches do not answer Job by disclosing the hidden cause of his suffering. Nothing in Job 38–41 explains the events narrated in the prologue, nor is Job given access to the heavenly scene of chapters 1–2. From

Job's perspective, therefore, the question of why he has suffered remains unresolved. Nevertheless, the absence of a causal explanation does not amount to the absence of a divine response. God answers Job, but the answer takes the form of theophanic presence and a reorientation of Job's perception of creation.

Suffering without theoretical explanation

One of the most striking features of the divine speeches is the distance between the questions Job has raised and the subjects God addresses. Job has repeatedly spoken about his innocence, suffering, and desire for justice. God responds with questions concerning the foundations of the earth, the boundaries of the sea, the movements of the heavens, the weather, wild animals, Behemoth, and Leviathan. At first sight, the response may appear to evade Job's central concern. God does not tell Job why he has suffered or identify a moral or causal principle that would make his experience comprehensible. Yet this apparent lack of correspondence is itself theologically significant. The speeches resist reducing the problem of suffering to a theoretical problem for which sufficient knowledge would provide a satisfactory solution. Job's suffering is not explained by restoring the retributive logic defended by his companions. Indeed, the epilogue prevents such a reading when God rebukes the friends and distinguishes Job's speech from theirs (42:7-8). The divine response therefore does not vindicate a simple correlation between suffering and guilt. Instead, Job's suffering is placed within a much broader horizon. The world disclosed to Job cannot be reduced to a moral mechanism organized solely around the immediate correspondence between human conduct and human experience. This does not solve the problem of suffering. Rather, it changes the theological framework within which the problem is considered. The speeches expose the inadequacy of any theological system that claims to comprehend divine governance entirely from the perspective of individual human experience.

Divine Sovereignty and the Limits of Human Knowledge

The divine speeches also establish a close relationship between sovereignty and epistemological limitation. God's sovereignty is not presented primarily through abstract assertions of omnipotence but through the sustained description of divine involvement with creation. Job's limitation is a condition of creaturely existence. The repeated questions addressed to Job such as 'Do you know?', 'Can you?', 'Have you?', 'Where were you?' establish a distinction between divine and human perspectives.

Job inhabits creation from within, and cannot occupy the standpoint of its Creator. The divine speeches challenge the assumption that human beings possess a sufficiently comprehensive perspective from which the totality of divine governance can be judged. This distinction is important because an appeal to divine sovereignty can otherwise become a theological means of silencing suffering. Job 38–42 is more complex. Job has been permitted to lament, accuse, challenge, and demand an answer, and the epilogue does not condemn him for having done so. Divine transcendence and presence, as seen with Job, does not invalidate human protest.

Presence rather than Explanation

God's presence establishes a new relation between Job and the one whom he has addressed throughout his suffering. Job's transformation is expressed most clearly in 42:5: "By the hearing of the ear I had heard of you, but now my eye sees you." The outcome of the divine speeches is not primarily that Job knows more *about* the cause of his suffering. In this respect, he knows no more than before. What has changed is the mode of his knowledge of God. The movement from hearing to seeing indicates that the encounter itself has become epistemologically significant. The distinction can therefore be expressed paradoxically: Job receives no explanation of why he suffered, yet he does not leave the encounter unchanged. The divine response provides neither a conventional theodicy nor a justification of suffering. It provides presence which does not remove mystery but transforms Job's relation to it.

Glory as Relational Manifestation

God's glory is disclosed through presence in the tempest, through the divine relation to creation, and through the transformation produced by the encounter. Such glory is relational. The theophany holds together revelation and concealment. Job encounters God without gaining comprehensive knowledge of God and of divine governance. The created world participates in this manifestation. Divine glory is not manifested only in those aspects of creation that appear harmonious or beneficial from the human perspective. Behemoth and Leviathan demonstrate that what exceeds human control may nevertheless belong within God's relation to creation. Glory is consequently manifested through a divine sovereignty capacious enough to encompass what human beings experience as ordered and wild, familiar and strange, intelligible and mysterious. The theological movement of Job 38–42 is therefore not from suffering

to explanation but from suffering and protest to encounter. Nor is it simply a movement from ignorance to information. It is a movement from one mode of knowing to another. The problem of suffering remains unresolved at the level of causal explanation, but the sufferer's relation to God has changed. It is precisely here that theophany and glory converge: divine glory is manifested through a presence that transforms the horizon within which Job encounters God, creation, and his own limits.

Conclusion

The divine speeches of Job 38–42 do not resolve the problem of suffering by explaining its cause. Instead, God answers Job through theophanic presence, speaking from the *se'arah* and directing his attention toward a created order that exceeds human knowledge, utility, and control. The encounter shifts the theological horizon from the demand for comprehensive explanation toward recognition of human creaturely limits before divine wisdom. Within this movement, divine glory is manifested rather than explicitly named. Although *kavod* is not attributed to God in these chapters, the theophany discloses divine majesty through God's presence, sovereignty over creation, and relation to realities beyond human mastery, culminating in Behemoth and Leviathan. Glory emerges through the paradox of revelation and concealment: God becomes present and speaks, yet remains beyond comprehensive human understanding. Job's final words express the consequence of this encounter: "By the hearing of the ear I had heard of you, but now my eye sees you" (42:5). His transformation is fundamentally epistemological and relational rather than the result of receiving an explanation for his suffering. Job leaves the encounter without knowing why he suffered, but no longer knowing God in the same way.

Notes

[1] For instance, the Old Greek text differs from the presumed Hebrew Vorlage, and brings idiosyncratic readings. See Häberlein 2024.

[2] The Greek textual tradition presents the material differently: the distinction between prose and poetry characteristic of the Hebrew text is less evident. According to Claude Cox, in the LXX "the entire book is in prose, even though arranged stichometrically, in the manuscript tradition." (See *A New English Translation of the Septuagint. 28 Job*)

[3] The divisions are based on my reading of the text.

[4] This article uses the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS). To check the occurrences, I used a linguistic database of the Old Testament, known as BHSA (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia Amstelodamensis) and available via the SHEBANQ interface (<https://shebanq.ancient-data.org>). Concerning the Septuagint (LXX), the edition Rahlfs-Hanhart (2006) is used. For the English translation of the Septuagint, I consulted NETS (New English Translation of the Septuagint: *NETS: Electronic Edition*). Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the original languages are my own. For an understanding of Hebrew terminology in general usage, see Clines (1993-).

[5] NETS translates: “Whereas before I would hear an aural report of you, now, however, my eye has seen you.”

[6] NETS: “Now after Elious stopped his speech”

[7] NETS

[8] More recently, it has been argued that they recapitulate the trauma experienced by Job and, by extension, that of post-exilic Israel. See Wu 2026.

[9] Behemoth is commonly identified with the hippopotamus, while Leviathan has traditionally been interpreted as either the crocodile or a mythological dragon. however, argues that the Leviathan depicted in the theophany of Job, as also in Psalm 104:26, is based on the whale. For discussion, see Fox 2012.

[10] For discussion see Prideaux 2011.

[11] God praises Job for speaking in honesty, unlike his friends. See Greenstein 2019, XXV.

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THE DIVINE LIGHT IN THE PSALMS

– FROM THE ILLUMINATION OF THE FACE TO THE SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT (Ps 1-40)

Abstract

This study explores the theme of divine light throughout Psalms 1–40, suggesting that references to light in the psalms form a unified spiritual path that guides believers from initial enlightenment to ongoing participation in God’s uncreated radiance. Emphasizing Eastern patristic exegesis and Gregory of Nyssa’s epectasy model, the research views light not just as a metaphor but as an ontological and soteriological reality: a theophanic presence, sacramental power, and transformative grace. Focusing on nine key psalms (Ps 4:6; 12:3; 17:31; 18:9; 27:1; 30:16; 35:9; 36:6; 37:20 – LXX), the study demonstrates a progression: God’s face imprinted on humans (restoring the divine image); awakening the ‘eye of the heart’ (spiritual sight and discernment); receiving commandments as luminous forces that illuminate and direct moral understanding; and contemplative vision leading to ontological deification. Patristic writers (Origen, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory Palamas) support a Christocentric and Trinitarian interpretation in which the Father is perceived through the Son as Light, and the Spirit transmits luminous energy. The psalms thus offer both experiential theology and practical guidance: continual prayer for light, ascetic obedience, participation in liturgy and sacraments, and communal discernment. Ultimately, the paper contends that Psalms 1–40 outline an epectatic journey in which illumination serves as a gift, a duty, and a goal—shaping, testing, and transforming the believer into the likeness of the One who is Light.



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Introduction

Light holds exceptional significance for human spiritual life, as God is described as light. Every visible sign of His glory is accompanied by a brightness that captivates those who behold it. Consequently, the longing for enlightenment, for understanding divine light, and for living effectively in its radiance is a spiritual aspiration embraced by individuals dedicated to virtue and spiritual growth. The authors of the Psalms express these themes, aiming to introduce the faithful to the theology of light and the concept of epectasy—a continual striving for divine union. The Psalmic Discourse on Light, as it appears in the Psalter, shows a thematic development that begins with illumination and culminates in deeper penetration into the luminous darkness, where God is fully revealed, and humanity joins in doxological manifestations that honour the radiance of heavenly glory.

This research explores how the discourse on divine light in the Psalms evolves through different stages of spiritual growth, as outlined by St. Gregory of Nyssa in his commentary on the psalm titles. I chose this angle to demonstrate that the epectatic perspective, which St. Gregory advocates in interpreting the Psalms, can also be applied to various theological themes. Specifically, we examine how St. Gregory's spiritual approach to interpreting the Psalms relates to a key aspect of spiritual life: the illumination and transformation of man into light. Rev. Ioan Chirilă examined this subject in a study on the Old Testament's theology of light (Chirilă 1994, 50). His research explored the theme of light in the Psalms, highlighting that individuals can partake in divine, uncreated light by cultivating virtue and continually ascending toward the One who is light, soaking in His radiance as if it were a cloak. This aligns with my interests, and I aim to verify Rev. Chirilă's insights through a detailed analysis of human development, taking them into account. In international biblical literature, there are no studies that track the development of psalmic discourse on light. Additionally, biblical scholars from the critical school generally do not employ the interpretative paradigm or patristic principles characteristic of Orthodox exegesis. For the Church Fathers, references to light in the Psalms are Christological. While some interpret the psalmic light as a direct reference to divine illumination, most Western biblical scholars view it more as a symbolic concept. Nonetheless, some researchers (P. Craigie, R. Bratcher, S.E. Tesh) have engaged with Orthodox interpretative approaches. We find it useful to cite their analyses when aligned with the Church Fathers' views, thereby reinforcing the patristic perspective through contemporary exegesis^[1].

This study employs contextualization and linguistic analysis, driven by the text's inherent approach. However, the research's specificity aligns with the methods used in Eastern Orthodoxy. Based on St. Gregory's classification, this work concentrates on the analysis of the psalms in the first of the five sections^[2] identified by the bishop of Nyssa. Specifically, it examines the discourse on light within Psalms 1-40. Out of 27 psalms^[3] referencing light in the Book of Psalms, only nine are analysed: Ps 4:6; 12:3; 17:31; 18:9; 27:1; 30:16; 35:9; 36:6; and 37:20 – LXX. Before interpreting the texts from the first psalm collection, we will outline the stages of spiritual ascent from St. Gregory's perspective to facilitate understanding of how the psalmists envisioned human growth towards or within the light.

Psalmic Discourse on Light in the First Book of Psalms (1–40)

The initial step towards perfection involves renouncing evil and firmly committing to doing good. Immediately, God grants the individual a share in His blessing as a reward for pursuing good: A novice in the virtuous life, having tasted a little of goodness through the opening section of the Psalter, comes to long for greater goodness (St. Gregory of Nyssa 1998, 145). When the divine light dwells in the soul of someone committed to changing their behaviour, it lays the foundation for them to settle in the Good and take root in God—like a tree that, once rooted, cannot easily be overturned. As long as it stays connected to the water source, it remains vibrant and fruitful. Applying this analogy to the concept of light, we can say that a person who receives the light can only enlighten and bring life to others if they stay forever linked to the Source of light.

The divine light reflected on a person's face (Ps 4:6)

The Psalmic Discourse on the Divine Light starts with a plea asking the Lord to lift the light of His face above humanity (Ps 4:6)^[4]. The psalmist prays for the Lord to manifest prosperity, peace, and mercy to all, illuminated by His face. The Hebrew term פָּנָה, symbolizing God's tangible presence (Freedman et al. 1996, 744), is inseparable from light. Any theophanic event involves the sight of a luminous light or darkness in which God reveals Himself and imprints His radiance on the faces of those who are worthy of divine sight. The Greek text captures this idea with the verb σημειόω, meaning 'to signify'. Although the Septuagint translators do not explicitly highlight the notion that the Lord's face, as a source of light, guides the way to divine illumination^[5], they lay the groundwork for interpreting the luminous mark of God's presence as visible on the

faces of those who share in divine glory. In this context, St. John Chrysostom explains that, according to the Psalmist, the light of God's face was not directly seen or shined upon but signified—much like a mark on the forehead that is visible to everyone, leaving nothing hidden. Such a mark, imbued with light and radiance, is clearly recognizable by all, demonstrating that the radiant image imprinted on the face is evident to everyone (St. John Chrysostom 2011, 49). The Church Fathers highlight how God graces the face of man with His luminous image, like how a king's image is stamped on a coin (St. Augustine 1997, 10). Building on this idea, Origen connects the Psalmic text to the episode where Moses radiated light during every conversation with God. Origen argues that, as Psalm 66 indicates, the Lord's face—radiant to those able to receive its rays—serves as the source of our understanding and enlightenment (Origen, *Selection from the Psalms*, in PG 12,1165 – Blaising et al. 2004, 35). St. Cyril of Alexandria interprets the passage trinitarianly, identifying the Son as the hidden face of God and the Spirit as the light sent to us: through the Spirit we were sealed when we were made in the original image (St. Cyril of Alexandria 1989a: 49)^[6].

The divine light is seen as the clearest sign of God's presence (Craigie 2002, 81)^[7]. Within this psalm, light should be evident on the face of the person who declares that the Lord supports him (Kraus 1988, 149). St. Augustine believes that the divine light reflected on human faces encapsulates all the goodness and truth bestowed by God. This light isn't visible to the physical eyes but only through the eyes of understanding (St. Augustine 1997, 10). Origen suggests that a person who gains the ability to see the divine light can easily notice how this light appears on the faces of those who reflect God's likeness (Origen, *Selection from the Psalms*, in PG 12,1165 – Blaising et al. 2004, 35). The presence of God's face's light upon us is seen as a sign of the restoration of the divine image in humanity, a process completed through Jesus Christ's incarnation (Bede the Venerable, *Homilies on the Gospels* 1.6, in CS 110:55 – Blaising et al. 2004, 35).

The enlightenment of spiritual eyes through divine light (Ps 12:3)

In this psalm, darkness represents death, while the light in the eyes indicates God's saving action. Without this light, the darkness would deepen, leading the person to succumb to death. The psalmist's heavy eyes can only be renewed by divine light. It is solely through this light that a person can perceive the light of life (Kraus 1988, 215). The light from the Lord's face, shining through His love, is the foundation of human life (Kirkpatrick 1905, 64). Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea states that God's face,

radiant with heavenly light, can bestow this illumination on everyone, much as the sun shines on one who looks at it. When a person sins, they turn their face away from God and naturally lose that light. This shadowed state continues until the individual turns back to face God (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Commentary on Psalms* 13.3-5, in PG 23,144 – Blaising et al. 2004, 105). Fellowship in this divine light awakens a longing in the human soul to dwell in it permanently. Consequently, the Lord's continuous call to light is met with a reciprocal desire from those seeking enlightenment. The benefits of this divine light motivate individuals to request the Lord's constant presence within the soul. The illumination of the eyes (Ps 12:3) aims to keep the conscience vigilant, preventing spiritual death. The Church Fathers unanimously agree that the Psalmist's words do not refer to physical eyes, as they cannot perceive divine mysteries^[8]. The divine light cannot be seen with physical eyes but can be perceived through spiritual vision^[9]. The psalmist is not referring to a revelation of divine truths, but rather to an illumination or direct communion with the uncreated light emanating from God's Being. This radiance of the Spirit is not merely an unveiling of meanings or a transient grace-illumination, but a steady, continuous manifestation of hypostatic (personal) light within the soul.

The Lord is the source of light and enlightenment (Ps 17:31)

In scriptural language, light symbolizes prosperity, happiness, and holiness. The psalmist is confident that God will grant him all of these if his lamp or torch remains constantly lit. God's aid is compared to a light that cuts through and removes darkness, with the Lord Himself depicted as this illuminating light (Kraus 1988, 263)^[10]. In this context, the lamp does not serve as a metaphor for wisdom or knowledge; instead, it symbolizes the energy and excitement of the psalmist's life (Bratcher and Reyburn 1991, 176). Due to sin, humanity descends into darkness and loses the radiance that reflects God's image within him. As the source of light, only God can illuminate the darkness in which man has dwelled (St. Augustine 1997, 52). Bishop Eusebius interprets this as a Christological statement, affirming that Jesus Christ, who through the Incarnation rose from the line of David, is the ultimate light that enlightens all humanity through his radiance (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Commentary on Psalms* 18.29,30, in PG 23,178-180 – Blaising et al. 2004, 141)^[11]. God's light within the soul determines the enlightenment of all human nature. The divine spark within awakens and begins to illuminate the depths, transforming darkness into brightness. The phrase 'Thou shalt light my candlestick' (Ps 17:31), used by the psalmist, reflects this truth and highlights humanity's dependence

on God. It signifies that humans are meant to be sources of light, to illuminate their surroundings. In this way, man is depicted as a candlestick, torch, or beacon that shines and continuously calls toward the Light and the everlasting fellowship with the One who is Light and the source of all light. St. Cyril of Alexandria emphasizes that we are not independent lights but share in the Word, which enlightens us. He explains that—since our minds can be likened to a torch, as in Psalms—light is bestowed upon us by the Lord. Ultimately, the darkness within us is only illuminated by the Only Begotten; thus, He truly is the Light, while we remain in darkness without Him (St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* I.8).

God's commandments open the spiritual eyes (Ps 18:9)

The perfection of divine laws is distinctly praised in various ways. As a source of joy for the heart and illumination for the eyes, God's commandments enable humans to truly live. The brightening of the eyes probably symbolizes gaining understanding and wisdom or revitalizing the body, but most importantly, it signifies renewal of the soul (Bratcher and Reyburn 1991, 193). Peter Cragie interprets this eye illumination as a divine revelation of human truth and reality, because it is bestowed by God, the origin of life. Just as the sun offers light and warmth, divine commandments similarly brighten the eyes and enlighten those who serve the Lord (Cragie 2002, 182). St. Cyril suggests that when the Psalmist makes these statements, he is referring to the forefather Adam, who, before disregarding God's command, had a pure eye filled with the sight of God and good thoughts. He was undisturbed because he was illuminated by divine light (St. Cyril of Alexandria 1989a, 54). Archimandrite Aimilianos interprets the Greek version of this verse as: 'The commandment of the Lord [is] shining, enlightening the eyes.' This suggests that God's commandment is so bright that it radiates and commands attention. He explains that 'The commandment of the Lord' is radiant because it is a manifestation (energy) of God. Since God is luminous, the commandment isn't just a command but an emanation and a sending from His very being — an uncreated divine energy. When the Lord issues a command, He isn't merely laying down rules, but is the Lord who commands and being light, sends forth light. The command issuing from His mouth is Light from Light, emitting both gentle illumination and fire. Regarding the eyes the psalmist refers to, Archimandrite Aimilianos clarifies they are spiritual eyes^[12]. Therefore, this divine light aims to purify and illuminate the recipient's soul.

As the archimandrite mentioned, a person can choose to accept or reject it, closing their soul's eyes.

The Psalmic texts complement one another, with the discourse on divine light unfolding as we approach the Psalter's doxological endings. The Psalmist's plea for the Lord to enlighten his eyes (Ps 12:3) culminates in Psalm 18, where the eyes are filled with brightness (Ps 18:9). The Lord's commandments, through their brilliance, illuminate the eyes of those longing to meet the Lawgiver Himself. This idea appears in Philokalic writings, which recommend fulfilling commandments to meet the Commander. The path outlined by the Lord's words leads to light; as one follows it, the shining light at the end already illuminates his eyes. The Church Fathers explain that this divine light brightens the soul's eyes with clarity—not in the sense of physical vision, but as a sharper mental gaze, allowing the inner eyes to see beyond ordinary perception^[13].

The Lord is light (Ps 27:1)

The opening affirmation of Psalm 26 reveals how the psalmist perceives God: as light! (Ps 26:1). Such statements, where God is described as light, are quite unique in the Old Testament. The psalmist asks for light—seeking illumination and clarity—but rarely refers to God directly as light. Instead, he says, 'Thou art my enlightener, O Lord,' because you have removed sorrow's cloud from his eyes and filled them with the light of your divine presence (Euthymius the Zigaben and St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite 2006). Exegetes generally agree that Euthymius's statement highlights God's role in rescuing the psalmist from overwhelming darkness (Tesh and Zorn, *Psalms* 1999, 233). Darkness symbolizes fear, sorrow, and sadness, while light represents joy, life, and fostering community. Notably, for the psalmist, God is not just associated with light but is his specific light. This suggests an identification between the Light itself and the light within the Light. The psalmist sees his own reflection in the communal state; his light is so intertwined that it mirrors the divine light poured over him. This aligns with St. Gregory's statement that 'God is called the light of David,' highlighting how the light of knowledge shines upon those who are enlightened. God is called light by David because he is the light of knowledge that shines in those who are enlightened (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 2.15, in *NPNF* 2 5:133 – Blaising et al 2004, 205). Bishop Diodorus emphasizes that during times of trouble and darkness, God served as a shining beacon for the Israelites, providing them with help and hope (Diodore of Tarsus, *Commentary on Psalm 27*, in *WGRW* 9:82 – Blaising et al. 2004, 205). For the psalmist,

God is the origin of light, guiding humanity toward illumination. Darkness symbolizes suffering, sorrow, and sadness, while light signifies their opposites. The Lord provides such abundant light that any discomfort from body and soul's darkness is promptly banished. This aspect of God's nature highlights his role as a saviour, especially for those facing difficulties (see Am 5:18, 20; Mih 7:8; Is 9:1). The psalmist, confident in the Lord's proximity, rhetorically asks, 'Whom shall I fear?'

The radiance of God's face and the illumination filling man (Ps 30:16)

Seeing God's shining face signifies His merciful and benevolent presence, whereas hiding His face signifies His wrath (Kraus 1988, 364)^[14]. Archimandrite Aemilianos explains that God's face brightness reflects His personal presence:

The brightness of God is His luminous appearance, symbolizing His greatness and glory. It represents His presence, His glory, and His very self, which appeared to the children of Israel. God is Lord and has revealed Himself to us (Ps 117:27). He is the visible God of Israel, and His brightness reveals the Lord Himself, presented in brilliant radiance..." [our translation] (Aemilianos Simonopetritus 2011, 159–60)^[15]

The brightness of God is most often associated with the current idea (Ps 30:16). The face of the Lord, shining brightly, emits an unmatched light that only the righteous desire to witness. The Church Fathers believe that only those striving for perfection partake of the divine light emanating from God. St. Cyril of Alexandria emphasizes that only the humble, meek, and those filled with divine reverence are worthy of this divine manifestation. Conversely, God

turns away from those who are difficult to influence, unwilling to soften, and who disregard what pleases Him. It's understood by all rational minds that those who receive His help will overcome every temptation and scheme of their adversaries. Just as the sunrise dispels darkness and sunset brings night, releasing wild animals and evil men from their hiding places, so too does turning away from God awaken the enemies of the soul. When His divine light, referred to in Scripture as the face of God, shines, all darkness-working entities scatter. The prophet also seeks to be worthy of this, not through his deeds but through God's

mercy, because, as he states, the only path to salvation is the appearance of Your face.” [our translation] (St. Cyril of Alexandria 1990, 126)

The saint’s final statement reminds us that our salvation hinges on seeing God’s face, which he equates with bright light. When we connect this idea with what St. Seraphim of Sarov said about divine light, it clarifies things further. According to St. Seraphim, our goal in this life is to receive the Holy Spirit. His experience with Nicholas Motovilov illustrates this beautifully, showing how divine light illuminates his face as he becomes deified. When he asked Motovilov to look at him, he admitted he couldn’t because his eyes were like lightning, and his face was brighter than the sun. When he said his eyes hurt and he couldn’t bear to look, St. Seraphim realized he had also become luminous. Later, when he looked up, he grasped what it truly meant to behold such brilliance: imagine, in the glare of midday sun, a man’s face speaking to you—his lips move, you hear his voice and feel his hands on your shoulders, yet you perceive no bodies, only a radiant light scattering around and lighting the snow beneath both of you (St. Seraphim of Sarov 2013, 60–2). By relating this experience to the psalmist’s words, we see that when the Lord’s face shines upon a person, they immediately transform into light. Without this divine illumination, they cannot partake in His appearance.

The divine light forms the foundation of her vision (Ps 35:9)

God is the source of all light. Consequently, the light originates from Him, and we cannot truly see or understand anything unless we see God first. Surrounded by His divine light, we can comprehend and discover answers to our questions. Only by focusing on God can we perceive things in their true form. There is no other true source of light and truth besides God. By contemplating Him and observing the light of His glory encircling Him, we can uncover the mysteries of His creation through the uncreated light that has been visible since the beginning of the world. Everything distant from God is darkness; everything close to Him is light. Theodore of Mopsuestia highlights the importance of light for mankind, noting that without it, we cannot perceive what God has created. In darkness, we are unable to recognize or even identify what is near us. To understand our surroundings, we need light, which, in turn, is all we need to see. Through the light itself, we can see and discern everything, even the light itself. The purpose of light is to reveal God’s generosity and abundant gift (Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on Psalms* 36.10a-b, in WGRW 5:405-7 – Blaising et al.

2004, 283). Syrian Bishop Sahdona suggests that the psalmist is referencing the light that emanates from the Holy Scriptures. He asserts that without this divine light, we cannot perceive God, the Light itself, nor comprehend His judgment, which is illuminated. Our active engagement with the Scriptures is beneficial, especially as it enlightens us in prayer. A soul that has been cultivated through reading and spiritual meditation becomes filled with love for God, and when it prays, it is surrounded by light (Sahdona, *Book of Perfection* 2.50-51, in CS 101:223 – Blaising et al. 2004, 283).

The sharing of God's light enables man to see the divine light himself, as the psalmist states: 'in Thy light we will see light' (Ps 35:9). This gift of sight is innate in human nature, planted by God. When God wishes, and man is prepared to perceive it, the eyes of the mind open, allowing him to perceive divine illumination. As St. Callistus observes, God fashioned the mind to see and planted Himself within creation so that, through these openings, He might appear to the intellect in a light of understanding—overcoming it, enlightening it, and drawing it toward Himself (Callistus Catafygiotes, *On the Contemplative Life*, 21). By embracing this vision, man allows himself to be surrounded by light and overwhelmed by the brilliance he perceives in all light. The divine state where light dominates the human soul is explained by St. Gregory Palamas, theologian of uncreated light:

Light is seen in light and in a similar light. And he sees, if he does not act otherwise, emerging from all else, also becomes the whole light and resembles what he sees; rather, it unites in a pure, undefiled way, light being light and light perceiving through light. If he looks at himself, he sees light; he looks at what he perceives, and that is light. This unity means making all things one, so that the observer no longer distinguishes between what he observes and himself but simply recognizes that he is a light and sees a light, distinct from all other beings. [our translation] (St. Gregory Palamas 1977, 36).

It is worth noting that the Church Fathers give this text a Trinitarian interpretation: we see the Father, the Source of Light, through the Son, the true Light^[16]. This perspective confirms that although it is not clearly stated that God is light, as St. John does in the New Testament, in the Psalmist's vision God is perceived as light.

Light represents the medium through which revelation occurs, and divine justice is manifested (Ps 36:6)

Exegetes note that the light the psalmist refers to is at its brightest, like the sun's rays at noon. Spiritually, this moment corresponds to the height of divine revelation. According to St. Ambrose, God's interventions in the world are evident because they occur through light and bring light. Everything God does shines unmistakably, making it impossible to deny or attribute these works to anyone else; God's mark is clear. He exposes justice openly, refusing to let judgment remain concealed; it will disclose the good one has chosen and the evil one has shunned, shining forth with the brilliance of the noon sun (Ambrose, *Commentary on Twelve Psalms* 37.15, in *ACTP* 61 – Blaising et al. 2004, 290). In other words, this is the outcome of divine intervention. The righteousness of the Psalmist's cause has been concealed, but it will shine brightly like the sunrise emerging from night's darkness; His righteousness, though hidden now, will become fully evident as bright daylight (Kirkpatrick 1905, 190). The influence of light permeates all human actions. Everything is illuminated; everything becomes light (Ps 36:6). The deeds of the righteous, aligned with God's works—who is Light—are seen as full of light, capable of revealing the One who commissions these actions to help humans become like Him. Venerable Euthymius reads the passage as a confessional promise: those who live by divine justice become public witnesses to God. By 'justice' he means a right verdict which God will display like a radiant light before all—since the Father, who sees in secret, will openly reward or reveal one's good deeds—and by 'judgment' he also understands the whole course of a life lived rightly, shown to the world as clearly as the midday sun (Euthymius the Zigabene and St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, 2006).

Light symbolizes inner balance and spiritual life (Ps 37:10)

In the Psalmic context, the brightness of the eyes symbolizes optimal health. Moses is described as having maintained vigorous eyesight and strength until his death at about 120 years old, as stated in Deut 34:7. The mention of the eyes losing brightness in the psalm should not be taken literally, as doing so might suggest that the psalmist was blinded (Bratcher and Reyburn 1991, 367). Therefore, it is essential to interpret this description within the spiritual realm. Generally, issues with the eyes and the consequent weakening of vision serve as signs of physical decline for the psalmist. His eyes deteriorated prematurely, partly due to pain and partly because of enemies plotting maliciously. Some suggest that David's eyes were troubled when he was angry

at his enemies; it is believed that intense anger can disturb bodily senses and vision (Euthymius the Zigaben and St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite 2006, 101). According to St. John Chrysostom, the psalmist also describes the soul's disorders—the unrest in the mind and fear of God's wrath. He refers to the eye of the soul, the faculty of judgment and conscience, which becomes troubled when it constantly recalls its faults and fears God's anger. This living awareness brings sorrow and trembling, not calm. Yet, such disorder fosters tranquility—this fear underpins true fearlessness. A person troubled by this inner conflict can overcome any storm (St. John Chrysostom 2011, 87).

Referring to our ancestor, St. Augustine explains that even Adam could not see 'the light of His eyes.' Since this *light* was God Himself, Adam, after disobeying His command, moved into the shade and hid among the trees of Eden. He fled from God and sought refuge behind the trees, and in doing so, he lost the 'light of his eyes'—the ability to look at and enjoy God's presence (St. Augustine 1997, 107). The Church Fathers view sight as essential for fully experiencing fellowship in a theophany. Archimandrite Aemilianos highlights that the eye is man's strongest sense, stating,

Everything that is imprinted in it goes into the depths of the soul. Almost all of them start from sight. If the eye is dark, the whole body is dark. If the eye sees, everything inside us sees. If the eye learns to see God, then man lives in God. [our translation] (Aemilianos Simonopetritus 2011, 163).

Light is essential for the psalmist. Without it, he feels abandoned by God, lost in tribulation as if in a dark abyss. Psalm 37:20 mentions the loss of the light of the eyes, and Church Fathers highlight that this metaphor of vision loss helps us understand a deeper spiritual truth. When forsaken by God, a person no longer feels His care and is deprived of the life-giving light. Mystics often describe the moment when the Holy Spirit departs, leaving everything feeling lost. The divine brightness, once filling man's nature with uncreated light, is replaced by terrifying darkness. Even the brightest sunray or greatest joy becomes a pale shadow compared to the profound experience of God's direct vision.

From illumination to spiritual discernment – theological perspective

The theme of divine light in the first forty Psalms sketches a spiritual journey where illumination and discernment follow and intertwine, expressing a theology of

sharing in God's luminous life. Beginning with the psalmic text and Eastern patristic tradition, a process unfolds in which divine grace, as uncreated Light, leaves its mark on the individual who responds through repentance, obedience, and epectasy toward becoming more like God.

Light symbolizes the imprint of the divine face and the renewal of the human image. Psalm 4:6, with the plea 'let your face shine,' indicates that God's theophanic presence is engraved on the body and soul through a luminous *signing*. The Church Fathers, including Origen, John Chrysostom, and Cyril of Alexandria, interpret this light as a sign of the restoration of God's image in humans — not just a spiritual metaphor but an ontological participation in divine glory. The light on a person's face signifies the renewal of the image and the ability to reflect and witness the Presence, who is Light.

The illumination of the spiritual eyes and the awakening of conscience are discussed. In Ps 12:3 and Ps 18:9, 'eye illumination' refers not to physical sight but to the 'eye of the heart,' which perceives wisdom, discernment, and life. Grace awakens the conscience from spiritual darkness, enabling it to 'see' divine reality: commandments shine as luminous energies, and the mind gains sharper vision to distinguish good from evil. The Fathers describe this process as collaborative: God provides the light, which humans receive through repentance and obedience.

God is described as the Source and Light in passages like Ps 17:31 and Ps 27:1. The Psalms highlight the unity between God and light: He not only provides light but is the Light itself. This has salvation-related implications—drawing closer to the Source is how one receives the light that enables them to become a torch for others. The psalm depicts the believer as a candlestick lit by God—not inherently luminous but carrying the light they've received. In this view, illumination serves both as a gift and a calling: those who are enlightened are meant to display and testify to that light. The commandments are described as luminous energies and serve as a practical path of discernment (Ps 18:9; Ps 36:6). According to Patristic interpretation, God's commandments are not mere abstract rules but 'luminous' energies that illuminate the eye of the heart and guide toward life. Following the commandments fosters spiritual sensitivity, and divine justice manifests as a revealing judgment, like the sun at its peak (Ps 36:6). Discernment is cultivated through obedience; moral attentiveness becomes the key to recognizing the Spirit's activity and distinguishing truth from deception.

Seeing God and experiencing ontological transformation (Ps 30:16; Ps 35:9) highlight the goal of the Lord's face as salvation: his face's brightness not only guides but

also transforms. Patristic writings, from Seraphim of Sarov to Gregory Palamas, indicate that beholding the uncreated light results in deification—viewers become part of the light, essentially absorbing and becoming it. This concept echoes Gregory of Nyssa's idea of epectasy: spiritual ascent is an endless, progressive journey where light serves as both the drive and the destination. Light serves as a criterion for community judgment and for eschatological reality (Ps 36; Ps 37:20). The Psalms emphasize light's social and judicial roles: what is illuminated is revealed, and what is in darkness is uncovered. Spiritual discernment goes beyond personal insight to include the community's ability to identify the effects of light in people's lives. Additionally, light has an eschatological meaning: divine justice will shine openly like the midday sun, and those filled with light will enjoy eternal communion with God.

The patristic methodology, especially in Eastern traditions, employs the epectatic paradigm to articulate modern doubts about metaphor through an ontology of light. This is understood not merely as a figure of speech but as an activity of uncreated energies. Using this model clarifies the progression in Psalms 1–40: starting with awakening and the initiation of virtue, then imprinting the divine face, deepening through commandments and prayer, and ultimately participating in the uncreated light. The school trains discernment progressively—from asking for light, preserving it via obedience, to eventually perceiving with the light itself. Practical implications for spiritual life. From the theological view of the Psalms and the Church Fathers, a clear spiritual program emerges a) continual prayer and repentance for divine light; b) obedience as the main arena where this light appears (by fulfilling commandments as luminous energy); c) sacramental and liturgical practices as ways to mediate the uncreated light; d) developing discernment through communion, the Philokalic tradition, and patristic theology. Light serves both as a means and an end — it trains the heart's eye, enabling not only sight but active participation in divine life.

In Ps 1–40, light functions as a vital theological framework, fostering and confirming spiritual insight. It signifies the start of conversion, refines the heart's vision, guides ethical conduct, and facilitates the individual's ontological change. The patristic understanding, particularly the epectatic approach, offers a consistent view where illumination is more than symbolic—it's participation in God's uncreated energy. Through grace and obedient response, humans are called to perceive the light and become transformed into the image of the One who is Light.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that the motif of divine light in Psalms 1–40 serves as a dynamic theological and spiritual framework that guides the believer from initial illumination to ongoing participation in God’s luminous life. In the chosen psalms, light has multiple roles: reflecting God’s face upon the individual (Ps 4:6), awakening and clarifying inner vision (Ps 12:3; 18:9), serving as the source and sustainer of human well-being (Ps 17:31), and acting as the moral and eschatological channel through which divine justice and mercy are expressed (Ps 36:6; 30:16). Patristic exegesis—particularly from the Eastern Church Fathers—offers a consistent interpretive approach that sees light as not just a metaphor but as an ontological participation in divine presence, through theophanic, Christological, and soteriological readings.

Using St. Gregory of Nyssa’s epectatic framework clarifies how psalmic discourse depicts spiritual development: the initial call to turn away from evil and desire good results in the soul being marked by divine radiance. This radiance matures as it obediently receives God’s commandments, seen as luminous energies, leading to a steady, illuminating life. The consensus among the Church Fathers that spiritual vision resides in the eye of the heart highlights the experiential and transformative nature of this light: it both reveals God and transforms the beholder into His likeness. Thus, the Psalms teach that illumination is a complex gift—both a blessing, a task, and a result—that depends on divine condescension and human openness.

The psalmic corpus portrays light as essential for both community and individual well-being: God as ‘light’ offers refuge, guidance, and the defeat of darkness; maintaining the soul’s brightness relies on obedience and prayer, while sin and divine withdrawal cause spiritual dimming (Ps 37:20). The text’s references to New Testament and early Christian traditions — such as John’s light, Transfiguration theology, and the Palamite distinction between essence and energies — connect the Psalms to the broader Christian understanding of deification. This perspective encourages spiritual practices focused on attentive devotion to God: fostering inner vision through prayer, practicing ascetic obedience to divine laws, and engaging in liturgical and sacramental life that reveals the uncreated light. Thus, the study redefines the psalmic light as both the path and goal of spiritual growth: an ongoing deepening of participation in God’s luminous presence that heals, judges, teaches, and ultimately transforms the believer into unity with the Divine.

Notes

[1] To examine the key perspectives on the theme of light in the Psalms, several established commentaries were consulted. These are part of recognized international series and serve as reference works for Psalm exegesis, including the *Word Biblical Commentary* and other international commentaries. Additionally, I consulted leading scholars in Psalm research, including A. Kirkpatrick, H.-J. Kraus, and E. Hengstenberg.

[2] St. Gregory's five parts are: I – 1-40; II – 41-71; III – 72-88; IV – 89-105; V – 106-150. Each part reflects a stage in the journey toward perfection: I – purgation and pursuit of virtue; II – longing for communion with God; III – attachment to God; IV – awareness of God's unchanging nature and human insignificance; V – remembrance of God's providence and expressing gratitude through doxology (see St. Gregory of Nyssa 1998, 145–63).

[3] The Hebrew concordance in psalmic writings lists various occurrences related to the root or its derivatives: to illuminate—Ps 12:3; 104:39; 118:130; to make shine—Ps 66:1; Ps 79:3,7.19; Ps 118:135; to be burning—Ps 17:28; to give light—Ps 18:8; to make luminous—Ps 117:27; light—Ps 4:6; 26:1; 35:9; 37:10; 42:3; 43:3; 48:3.19; 55:13; 77:14; 88:15; 96:11; 103:2; 111:4; 118:105; 135:7; 138:11; brightness—Ps 30:16; 138:12; full of light—Ps 75:4; illuminated—Ps 76:18; ignited—Ps 96:4; dawn—Ps 36:6; shining—Ps 148:3 (Kohlenberger and Swanson 1998, 239–40).

[4] The reference to the Aaronite blessing (Nm 6:24-26) echoes throughout this text. It symbolizes God's protection over his chosen people (Hengstenberg 2010, 69).

[5] The verb **נשא** – meaning 'to lift up' – also involves raising a marker or standard. Therefore, it seems the psalmist intended not just to show a sign of divine providence, but to provide a guiding reference that signifies the correct path (Pașca-Tușa 2018, 201).

[6] The concept of divine light imprinting on the faces of the worthy to see God appears in icon theology, where saints serve as light sources through which God continuously invites enlightenment.

[7] The Lord's face shining is 'a symbol of His presence, bright and open for dialogue and communion' (Bulai et al. 2005, 22).

[8] Origen rhetorically asked whether the psalmist was referring to physical eyes. He, along with the Alexandrian exegete, believes that divine light brightens the eyes of the mind. For them, God, as the light of the mind, illuminates the

eyes of those He considers worthy of receiving His enlightenment (Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 13.135-37, in FC 89,96 – Blaising et al. 2004, 105). St. Augustine interprets the eyes mentioned by the psalmist as the eyes of the heart (St. Augustine 1997, 44).

[9] No one is so naive as to suppose that bodily eyes grasp divine mysteries, or that God's command enlightens literal sight, or that a mere slumber could bring about spiritual death. (Origen, *Against Celsus* VII.34). For St. Cyril, the shining of the eyes aligns with the enlightenment of the soul's senses to grasp the truth. (St. Cyril of Alexandria 1989b, 67).

[10] E. Hengstenberg describes how God's intervention in David's life, using the psalmic imagery, elevates him from darkness and lowliness—particularly under Saul—toward honour and prosperity. This divine action continually brightens the surrounding gloom, allowing God's salvation to shine upon David and his people through every challenge (Hengstenberg 2010, 310).

[11] Arnobius the Younger, using the same interpretative keys, states that Christ's mercy functions like oil, illuminating both the eye—symbolized by a torch—and the mind, which is also represented as a torch (Arnobius the Younger, *Commentary on the Psalms* 18, in CCL 25,22 – Blaising et al. 2004, 141).

[12] The Greek theologian explains that a commandment illuminates your eyes when it sheds its light, but you can choose to close your eyes and remain in darkness. The phrase 'lighting the eyes' illustrates the nature of free will in acceptance and action. Through its brightness and brilliance, the Lord's commandment prepares the soul, illuminating its deepest aspects and helping to reveal and purify passions (Aemilianos Simonopetrus 2011, 235).

[13] According to the esteemed Euthymius, the light that reaches the soul's eyes ultimately influences the physical eyes. This divine illumination guides individuals away from destructive paths, particularly those that lead to sin through sight. He explains that God's commandment illuminates the mind's eyes from a distance and, through the soul's eyes, also enlightens the body's eyes. This dual illumination helps prevent humans from wandering into sinful and abyssal ways (Euthymius the Zigaben and St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite 2006).

[14] The face of God embodies enlightenment of the observer's mind, the outpouring of divine mercy, the revelation of salvation, and His desire to draw us closer. Essentially, David pleads with the Lord for mercy amid his suffering, requesting His face be turned toward him, and an opportunity to return to the communion lost through sin. He understands that God, deserving of His gaze,

is reflected in the humble—those filled with divine fear and unwavering hope for salvation (Pașca-Tușa 2015, 144).

[15] The spiritual man who reaches a vision where everything is shining and illuminated describes this experience:

When something shines, it takes over your perception and blocks everything else. Imagine being in complete darkness and a bright spotlight suddenly turning on. You would instinctively look toward the light, but its brilliance would be so overwhelming that you'd have to close your eyes because it becomes impossible to look at it without being dazzled. [our translation] (Aemilianos Simonopetrus 2011, 163)

[16] Origen, *On Principles* I,1,1; St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratione* 31,3; St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit* XVIII; Jerome, *Brief Commentary on Psalm* 36.

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THE THEOLOGY OF GOD'S GLORY (DOXA) AS RE-INTERPRETED BY THE EVANGELIST JOHN

Abstract

This study examines the theology of God's glory (Hebrew *kabod*; Greek *doxa*) and its re-interpretation by the Evangelist John. It traces the concept from its Old Testament roots – where *kabod* denotes weight, magnificence, and the Shekinah as a mediating, often storm- or fire-associated theophany – through the Septuagintal shift that renders *kabod* as *δόξα*, reframing glory from social reputation to an attribute of divine presence. Contrasting classical Greek usages of *δόξα* as renown with LXX theology (and noting Philo and Josephus as partial intermediaries), the paper shows how John appropriates Priestly, prophetic (Ezekiel, Isaiah), and Wisdom (Sirach) traditions to hypostatize divine glory in the Logos. Focusing on the Prologue (Jn 1:14), the Cana sign, Nathanael's vision, temple imagery, the Farewell Discourses, and the High Priestly Prayer, the study argues that John redefines eschatological glory as already present in Jesus. Through motifs of light, seeing, revelation, and the temple-as-body, Jesus functions as the incarnate Shekinah – the hypostasis of *kabod* – whose presence both reveals covenantal truth and executes judgment, enabling participation in divine life. The Gospel's seven signs and the 'eighth day' typology culminate in the paschal glorification of cross and resurrection. Methodologically, the study reads John's literary structure, wordplay, and intertextual echoes to demonstrate a deliberate theological synthesis that anticipates later patristic concerns yet stands as a distinct Christological achievement: the transformation of an Old Testament liturgical and theophanic category into a person-centered revelation – Jesus as the saving glory of God.



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Keywords

Divine glory (Kabod/Doxa), Shekinah, Johannine Christology, Septuagintal translation, Temple imagery

Introduction

The theme or concept of the Glory of God (the *Kabod*: כְּבוֹד) is a major element of Old Testament theology: a primary way that the ancient theologians tried to conceive, and express the action of, the divine majesty in the world, and in particular that glory as a reserved revelation for the chosen covenant people. This paper will very briefly consider the main outlines of that theology of the glory, its refurbishment as it passed into the Greek of the Septuagint (as the *Doxa Theou*: δόξα θεοῦ), and its magnificent re-application in the profound theology of St. John the Evangelist.

In classical Greek, deriving from δόκειν, the word δόξα denoted 'what seems to be' or an 'appearance'. From this, the idea of δόξα expanded to mean generally person's (good) reputation^[1], or alternatively what one thought about something: thus a concept to do with renown or opinion^[2]. The wider Greek world, obsessed as it was with the concept of one's honourable standing in the eyes of others, used the term to argue that a person's reputation, or δόξα, was his core personal worth or essential value. Because of the root semantics the term would remain wedded to this external and reputational definition of personhood until almost a millennium later when the Christian world more or less redefined the entire concept of individual identity in the aftermath of the Christological disputes of the fifth century turning as these did around notions of substantial personhood, or *hypostasis*, flowing out of the Trinitarian and Christological controversies of the high patristic era^[3].

In the classical period, δόξα was, though rarely, sometimes applied to the idea of the glorious repute of the local deity, as appears in an ancient inscription dedicated to Bacchus, in a plaque offered: 'For his κόσμος and δόξα': which we would here translate as 'For the god's adornment and renown'^[4]. This is one of the few instances in classical Greek where we might say the idea of divine glory appears, though notably it is never divorced from the root notion of 'estimation' or 'opinion among society'. There is no sense among the non-biblical Greek writers of the glory of the divinity as a proper attribute, or as a divine character having an essence peculiarly its own. The only two non-Christian writers in Greek who show a (very brief) aspect of the sense that the δόξα of God is something inherent to Him, are Philo and Josephus, both of whom, of course, being Jewish, bear the impact of the Old Testament theology of the *Kabod*^[5]. It is this biblical theology of the glory which will deeply impact the Christian Greek writers and to such an extent that a massive development of the theology of divine δόξα is something

that represents one of the most distinctive developments of early Christian thought. Let us first look briefly at the burden of the earlier Hebraic theology of the *Kabod*.

Kavod and Shekinah in the Hebrew Bible

The term is clearly a significant one in the Hebrew Bible. It occurs 199 times in all and semantically carries meanings similar to the Greek pre-Christian usage: namely a person's wealth, or prestige, or magnificence in the eyes of society. So, for example, Abraham and Jacob have much *Kabod* in their gold and silver and cattle (Gn 13:2; 31:1). And the brothers of Joseph describe his high status as an Egyptian official as his *Kabod* (Gn 45:13). Gerhard von Rad demonstrated (Von Rad 1964, 238-42) that a clear theological development took place in Hebraic thought, when it began to assign the term *Kabod* as a distinct characteristic of the God of Israel. This seems to have been a trend that the Hebraic Priestly tradition presided over: so much so that even the chronologically later uses of God's *Kabod*, or glory, remain marked by linguistic archaisms and traditional tropes that show the concept had, long before, achieved a fixed condition of ritual acclamation.

In this context, the prophet Ezekiel added his own distinctive elements to this theology, extending the visionary aspects of the notion. In the Priestly tradition, the divine *Kabod* was associated especially with the looming magnificence of the thunderstorm. The oppressive 'weight' of atmospheric tension exactly met the word's original significance of 'heaviness'; but the desert storm opened up in layer upon layer of impressive magnificence culminating in the fearful lightning flash. All of this was taken poetically (as in Ps 97:1f) to be a suitable descriptor of the awe-inspiring glory of the Godhead.

This dyad of gloomy oppressive cloud and startling light of electricity leads the Exodus writer to describe the divine glory as a devouring fire within the cloud upon the mountain of Sinai (Ex 24:15-17). It is this electric presence of glory, the presence of the deity itself, that the priestly writers speak of as transferred, after the visions of Moses, into the accompanying presence of the deity within the Tabernacle, into which God pours his glory (Ex 29:43; Ex 40: 34-35; Lv 9:6; Lv 9:23). The cloud, or the tabernacle itself (later the holy of holies sheltering the ark as God's throne) are the baffle, or protective medium, that shelters mortal creatures from the overwhelming force of the divine glory. This important concept gave rise in later Jewish theology to specifying the twin notions of the *Shekinah* and the *Kabod*; the former being the veil or medium of the

divine glory itself; the chariot of fire, the tent, the cloud: ultimately the manner in which the ineffable, invisible and un-survivable glory of the Godhead could be communicated as a revelation to mortal beings on the earth. The idea is anticipated when Ezekiel (Ez 1:1-28) himself adds the idea of the angelic Cherubim as a chariot offering protective baffles of the divine glory when manifested. In Isaiah, the Seraphim perform this function (Is 6:1-5). This mediating *shekinah* (imaged by the fire, or the cloud or the chariot) is thus primarily communicable. Even in the Sinai account the concept of the communicability of the incommunicable is present: as when after Moses sees the hindmost parts of God, he comes down the mountain with his own face radiating light (Ex 34:29-35).

They key aspects of the theology of glory in the Hebrew scriptures are thus shown in the theophany narratives and in the theme of the divine glory in the temple: both of which are closely related themes, in so far as the glory first witnessed on Sinai is then transferred to the Tabernacle where the priestly rites celebrate it (Ex 29:43-44; Ex 40:34; Nm 14:10; Nm 16:19; Nm 20:6; 1 Kgs 8:11), and thence to the Temple itself (Ps 26:8; Ez 43:4-5), whose motif the evangelist John is to lift and creatively refashion as we shall see. In the psalms and in parts of Isaiah this liturgical theme of the divine glory manifested in the Temple is extended in the prophetic vision that from the Temple, the glory of God will shine out over the entire world (Ps 96:3; 97:6; 102:15; 108:5; Is 40:5; Is 59:19).

When the Septuagintal translation (LXX) began to render the Hebraic scripture into Greek for use of the Alexandrian Jews, between the 3rd and 1st centuries BC^[6], a major shift can be observed in the use of the term *δόξα*. It is the Septuagint which serves as the medium to deliver the biblical notion of divine glory to the Evangelists. Here, the word now wholly departs from the classical Greek tradition. It no longer has anything to do with honour or opinion, for which the translators use the semantic of *βουλή* (*opinion* or *repute*). In the LXX the term *δόξα* is used more heavily than in the Hebrew text^[7] but closely follows the root Hebraic theology of the *Shekinah* and *Kabod* to describe a specific theology of divine revelation. Glory now becomes wholly and entirely a character of the divine presence itself, as revealed in the cosmos as the presence of the covenanting (that is the saving) God.

So, before passing on to our consideration of John the Theologian, let us briefly sum up what this ancient biblical heritage of the theology of glory amounted to: a revelation of a character of God's overwhelming majesty and creative power, often using

the Sinai archetypes of lightning-bright radiance or fire, or brooding darkness of the cloud; a sense of overwhelmingly commanding presence as symbolized in the holiness of the indwelling of God in the Temple, and bursting out from there to hold sway over the entire cosmos; and above all a particular revelation that is given to the elect people as the heart of the making of the covenant between God and the world. If we are to make a technical distinction in the 'phases' of this theology we might also note that the idea of the radiant or fiery *shekinah* is used to connote the 'givenness' of this revelation – that is, its communicability; while the concept of the *Kabod* is specially used to deliver the idea of the awesomeness of the unapproachable and utterly majestic divine presence.

St. John the Evangelist's perspective on God's Glory (*Doxa*)

While the theme of the glory is used in the Synoptic Gospels chiefly to describe how the Son of Man will be glorified at the Second Coming ('When he comes in glory') (Mt 16:27; 24:30; 25:31; Mk 13:26; Lk 9:26; 21:27), John sets out to correct this form of eschatological future-projection by demonstrating that the Son of Man has come already in his glory, the very glory of the Father. The Evangelist John knows all the aspects of the biblical theme of the divine *Kabod* intimately and uses it like a master musician applying his skill to make variations upon a classical motif throughout his Gospel. We begin on the very first page, quite literally, the prelude of the Gospel, where the Evangelist, like many another ancient author, sets out his basic leitmotifs of theology which his subsequent work will elaborate. I refer of course to the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel: a highly creative re-working of the Hymn to Wisdom taken from Sirach 24. The original text spoke of how Wisdom, divine Sophia, looked down on earth to see where she might take up her residence, and chose the people of Israel. Her indwelling among them constituted the covenant for it was by this gift of the indwelling Sophia that the people of God possessed their knowledge of the Lord, and thereby became his covenant children. John will break the direct parallelism of the Sirach re-write by his opening paragraph *Berishith* (*En Arche*: 'In the beginning') which is clearly a cosmic-scaled rewrite of the dramatic Genesis narrative to show that what we are talking about here is the descent of the Divine Logos, the Word that constituted all things. And he also breaks the parallelism of Sirach 24, by a triad of insertions about John the Fore-Runner: three times insisting that John is not the one of whom he is writing about; not the promised one; not the Wisdom incarnate. In a precise fashion thereafter,

whenever John the Baptizer is mentioned again, this theme of the true identity of the indwelling Sophia is reprised.

But the obvious text we look at as the climacteric verse of the prologue, reveals to us the very place where the evangelist most heavily underlines what he wants his readers to mark. It comes, of course, in John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." To read it in the Greek obviously gives us the literary effect the evangelist was after. We see the culminating stress lies in: *ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν*: where the word often rendered 'dwelt' is actually 'pitched the tent' (*eshkenosen*) – exactly as in Sirach – and has been evidently chosen as a Greek homophone for the Hebrew *Shekinah*.

We also note how the theologian here repeats the word glory (*δόξα*) twice for emphasis: connecting it with the several references to light and vision that have immediately gone before (Jn 1:4-5; 1:7-9), and with the qualification of the reference to *δόξα* that follows immediately after: *πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας* full of grace and truth (that is, the covenant characteristics). Some commentators connect that latter phrase as a descriptor of the earlier subject *μονογενοῦς* but this, I think is mistaken. Here it is a precise qualifier to the key term immediately preceding it: namely, *δόξα*. We note immediately, therefore, the full panoply of what John intends to do with the concept of glory he has inherited. He joins it to the tradition of Sophia-Wisdom, that constitutes the gift of the covenant knowledge of God as given to his elect nation. He makes it redolent of the classical themes that this divine Wisdom is pre-existent, creative, cosmic in scale, specifically gifted to a chosen race who in accepting it thus become sons of God, and thereby enter into its divine light, its grace and its truth. To mark, most simply, what the evangelist has done, already in this 'first act' in the Prologue, as it were: He has taken the theme of the divine glory and made it into a synonym for the very person of the Word, the Incarnate Christ: who in his own presence (*Shekinah*) thus demonstrates himself to be the saving glory of God. In short, the Evangelist has hypostatized the concept of *Kabod*. This is an extraordinary *tour de force*. The only element missing here from the classical imagery of *Kabod* he has inherited is the theme of the glory in the context of the temple. But soon John will also turn his attention to that.

Having thus implied the opening theme of the personal identity of the Incarnate Logos with the *Shekinah* of God (his tangible presence upon the earth) in the Prologue, the next statement about the theology of the *Kabod* is given by John in the narrative of

the first of the 'seven signs'^[8] that structure his Gospel: the miracle of Cana. The key interpretive text here is the evangelist's own interpretation of the sign of the abundance of wine given at Jn. 2.11: 'This was the beginning of the signs which did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, *and allowed his glory to be shown*; and his disciples believed on him.' The phrase closely echoes the synopsis of the Sinai narrative as given in LXX Deuteronomy 5:24: *ἰδοὺ ἔδειξεν ἡμῖν κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ* 'Behold, the Lord our God has shown to us his glory.' Deuteronomy goes on to say that on this day the people of God heard the divine voice from the fire and saw from experience that they could hear God speak to them and, even so, still live^[9].

It is clear that the evangelist sees Jesus as so possessed of the divine *Kabod* that he chooses to allow some of that divine power and grace to be revealed in signs and baffles (the famous Johannine *aporiai*) so that his hearers may understand the awesome revelation and thus come to life by it, or else fail to understand it and, at least, be protected (as mere mortals) by their incomprehension of what is occurring^[10]. This theme of not understanding that in the presence of Jesus, one stands in the radiance of the divine *Shekinah*, is finally made patently evident by John in the final discourses of Jesus at John 14:9, where Philip is told explicitly that to have seen Jesus is to have seen the face of the Father (not just hear divine words) which has never been possible before.

This theme of the glory that reveals and, in so doing, judges here and now (as used by John to correct the so-called 'futurist eschatology' of the synoptics so as to make it clear that the eighth day of the *eschaton* has already dawned) is also referenced in several texts which contrast the glory of men (the false *δόξα* of human repute) with the mysterious glory of God which challenges it, by demanding from mortals faith in the unseen reality that they sense themselves to be present before (Jn 5:44; 7:18; 8:50; 8:54). In John 12:37-43 this theme comes to a climacteric in the evangelist explicitly citing Isaiah's prophecy about seeing but not seeing, hearing but not believing, also used in the synoptics (Mk 4:10-12; Mt 13:11-15) to explain why Jesus' parabolic teachings were not accepted). In a stark divergence from the synoptics however, John explains this biblical proof by underlining what he sees as the core element of the prophecy that the others have not mentioned: namely that: 'Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory (*εἶδεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ*) and was speaking about him' (Jn 12:41). He is making the strong implication that those who hear the Logos and come to faith have likewise 'seen the glory' in and through Jesus; while those who reject the message and the person

of the Word are they who 'have loved the glory of men more than the glory of God (τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ)' (Jn 12:43).

It is clear, then, that the Johannine theology is subtle, deep and allusive, and that this theme of the revelation of divine glory runs throughout the entire Gospel like a golden thread. It is closely allied to the equally prevalent Johannine theme that Jesus is the New Temple, the eschatological place of the new covenant sacrifice which takes place in his body. As we have noticed, Ezekiel (developing the earlier priestly narratives of the Pentateuch) had already made the transfer of the concept of the *Kabod* revealed, from the context of the Sinai theophany to the locus of the Temple: the holy place which contains the power of the divine *Kabod*. John reworks this theme several times. As with Ezekiel seeing the life-giving water flow from under the altar of the Temple (Ez 47:1-2), so John points to this fulfilment in the water flowing from the side of Jesus (Jn 19:34).

The idea has been prepared twice already at John 4:14 and 7:38 to demonstrate the water as a symbol of the Spirit bringing the life of faith. Underpinning it, evidently, is the Johannine insistence that Jesus himself is the holy of holies, the New Temple of the Eighth Day. The idea is openly launched early in the Gospel narrative when Jesus purifies the Jerusalem Temple and speaks of the rebuilding of the New Temple, which is how his body symbolizes the glory manifested in the Resurrection after its sacrificial immolation (Jn 2:18-22). Several times John underlines how it is inside the Temple that the glory of initiation is given by Jesus (Jn 5:14; 7:14; 7:28; 8:2; 18:20). He is implying, by this device, that the *Shekinah* of the *Kabod*, which dwells there, is the Lord himself who presents his teaching (His Word) bodily.

But this mystical theme of Jesus as the hypostasis of the indwelling glory of the Temple, the presence of God in the midst of his covenanted people, is given also in an extraordinarily deep *aporia* in the story of Nathanael's coming to faith in John 1:45-51. The Nathanael story is clearly a major episode in the Johannine narrative that is deliberately left 'unexplained' and yet which, because of its very dynamic and mystical nature demands the reader's attention and scrutiny. In this the story serves as an *aporia*: a teaching device that requires the reader to puzzle out the clues. It is clear, for example, that Nathanael has been asking some question of himself, and God, before he encounters Jesus. We are not told what it is. And it is equally clear that Jesus knows what the question was and gives its answer so as to provide Nathanael with a certain 'proof' of his identity. But what is it that this secret communication is about?

The clue is given in the climacteric verse of the pericopé (Jn 1:51): 'And Jesus said to him: Amen, Amen, I say to you, you shall see the heaven laid open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.' This latter title (used by the synoptics to associate with the martyrdom of Stephen as a futurist eschatological sign), is radically repurposed by John and brought back to its original biblical context: namely the vision of Jacob at the Temple in Bethel. In this episode (Gn 28:10-17) Jacob innocently decides to sleep within the sacred site of *Beth'El* (the 'House of God' in Hebrew) and chooses a sacred stone he finds there, upon which to lay his head. The sacredness of the stone opens up for him his vision of the ladder between heaven and earth and the ascent and descent of the angels: a dream-vision that makes him understand this this is indeed the holy place of God and that he is witnessing the promise of a universal covenant. But the stone is not simply a random one. It is a cipher for the tradition continuing to the Jerusalem Temple (and thereby the 'Temple' meaning the locus of the divine *Kabod*) of the keystone of the Temple being the 'Stone of Foundation', also known as the 'Stone of Anointment': but literally designated as the 'Stone of Blood' in Hebrew (*Aben Dam: אבן דם*). This is the sacred place upon which the Holy of Holies, the Ark itself, and its mercy seat are all founded: the very place in the Temple where God dwells.

The evangelist, however, explains that when Nathanael sees the revelation Jesus will give him he will understand that the angels are ascending and descending upon the head of the Son of Man. But why bring the two ideas into such proximity precisely here? Precisely in this enigmatic place where Jesus is inviting Nathanael to 'see the mystery'? It is because the whole thing is a word-play: a *metathesis* that would have been apparent to anyone who was bi-lingual in Greek and Hebrew (but which escapes most of us moderns today). The stone of Blood (the sacred place of the Temple) is, simply put, the Son of Man (Jesus himself). In the Hebrew, the mystery is given secretly by the metathesis: *Ben Adam / Aben Dam*. In understanding this Nathanael has been admitted to that same shocking revelation of Jesus' synonymity with the divine glory that Thomas will also experience in one of the final revelations of the Gospel, after the resurrection (Jn 20:28). Jesus is himself the Holy of Holies. His body is the Temple (Jn 2:21): his sacrificial betrayal and death will be the manifestation of his glory (Jn 13:31) and the fulfilment (Jn 19:30) of the universal covenant promised so long ago. Both Nathanael and Thomas make a shocked confession of faith that serves to book-end the mystery of Jesus as slowly appearing to the disciples in all its full glorious revelation.

This 'Johannine Secret' of the mysterious revelation of the glory, is finally laid open, though in the closed context of the deeper initiation of the disciples in the Upper Room, in what has been called by modern Roman commentators the 'High Priestly Prayer' of Jesus. But while they are right to recognise the entire context of this initiation narrative is that of the Temple, Jesus is not functioning here as a mediatory High Priest, rather as the very *Shekinah* revealing the otherwise Unapproachable *Kabod* of the Father's glory, in the presence of his own self as the living Temple on earth.

In John 17:4-5 we see the intimate closeness of the *Shekinah* glory, with that of the *Kabod* which it manifests on earth: 'I glorified thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do. And now, Father, glorify Thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.' We learn, then, that the *Shekinah* and the *Kabod* have an intimate union which is in fact a mystical synonymity that brings all the covenant community into unity (Jn 17:22): 'And the glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them; that they may be one, even as we are one.' It is this revealed mystery of the hypostatized glory (Jn 17:24) that allows the disciples to 'partly see' (though Philip almost misses the point here): 'And Jesus replied, "Do you not know me, Philip, even after I have been with you all this time? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. So how can you say, 'Show us the Father'"? (Jn 14:8-9).

Conclusion

Post medieval Orthodox theology has spent much time considering the Palamite distinction of the divine essence and energies. Important though this stream of soteriological and revelational theology is, it pales before the profound import of the Johannine theology of the divine *Kabod* and its revelation in the hypostatized *Shekinah* of the person of Jesus. In making the edits to achieve this synthesis, John has shown himself to be a masterly reader of the Old Testament Priestly traditions via Ezekiel, the prophetic ecstatic traditions via Isaiah, and the Wisdom traditions via Ben Sirach. His own inspired weave, however, by means of the magnificently subtle structuring of his Gospel narratives, bring the entire theology of divine glory to a new Christological pitch, of an unsurpassed majesty.

Notes

[1] Demosthenes. *Oration* 2.15; *Oration* 3.24.

[2] As for example a philosophical theory, or a common belief: Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. 2.2.

[3] 'Further, see: McGuckin 2024, 6–21. (McMaster University, *Center for Patristics & Early Christianity*. Hamilton ON). <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/journals/patristictheology/#current-volume>

[4] Temple inscription to Dionysius/Bacchus in: Dittenberger 1898, 1109.

[5] Cf. Philo, who out of 251 instances of his use *δόξα* has only one (*On the Special Laws*.1.45) where he departs from the classical Greek tradition and imagines the angels surrounding God as his 'Accompanying glory' which he longs to see since he knows he cannot see God himself. This is clearly the rabbinic concept of the *Shekinah*: also, Josephus, *Antiquities* 8.166. where Queen Sheba came to Solomon *πολλῆς δόξης* (see Kittel 1964, 236–7).

[6] A massive work of translation that was still being carried on, for some texts, even into a time contemporaneous with John the Evangelist.

[7] 280 times in the canonical books. 180 of these occasions as a direct rendering of *Kabod*.

[8] Jn 2:1-11 (Cana); 2:12-17 (cleansing the Temple); 4:46-54 (healing the nobleman's son); 5: 1-15 (healing the lame man); 6:1-20 (feeding the multitude and walking on the sea- the latter episode being the immediate 'corrective' of the false conclusion of the crowds in the former miracle); Jn 9 (healing the blind man); Jn 11 (the raising of Lazarus). What ought to be stated also (though it is often omitted in the commentators) is that these seven signs of structuring the historical ministry in John, culminate in the 'eighth day' or eschatological sign of the crucifixion which is also the glory of the Lord. The latter stands (as does the eighth day in eschatological symbolism) outside the list of historic events, as the completion of all things, including time (the indication of which is given by the keynote utterance of Jesus in Jn 19:30. *τετέλεσται* ('All has reached its Telos' – often (appallingly) badly translated as 'It is finished').

[9] The whole reads: *καὶ ἐλέγετε ἰδοὺ ἔδειξεν ἡμῖν κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ ἠκούσαμεν ἐκ μέσου τοῦ πυρός ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ταύτῃ εἶδομεν ὅτι λαλήσει ὁ θεὸς πρὸς ἄνθρωπον καὶ ζήσεται.*

[10] A prime example of these (many) *aporiai* is the contrast drawn between the man born blind who hears, then sees, then believes, and the leaders of the people who fail to, as recounted in Jn 9.

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THE GLORY OF JESUS CHRIST IN THE CONTEXT OF THE TRANSFIGURATION ON MOUNT TABOR – BIBLICAL, PATRISTIC, AND ARTISTIC APPROACH

Abstract

This study examines the glory of Jesus Christ in the Transfiguration episode on Mount Tabor through an integrated exegetical, patristic, and art-historical lens. Beginning with close readings of the Synoptic accounts (Mt 17; Mk 9; Lk 9), it considers the narrative elements – Christ’s radiant face and garments, the luminous cloud, the voice of the Father, and the presence of Moses and Elijah – as theological signs that disclose Christ’s divinity, fulfilment of Law and Prophets, and anticipation of paschal and eschatological glory. The work traces reception in the patristic tradition, contrasting Eastern hesychastic and Palamite emphases on experiential access to uncreated light with Western medieval and scholastic readings that stress pedagogical and eschatological functions of the vision (Aquinas, Bonaventure, Hugh of Saint-Cher). An extended iconographic survey explores how Byzantine and Western visual vocabularies – mandorla forms, compositional schemes, and the depiction of Taboric light – mediate theological claims and shape liturgical imagination. Methodologically, the study combines literary-philological interpretation, reception history, and semiotic analysis of images, aiming to show how textual, doctrinal, and visual registers interact. Its principal contribution is a systematic integration of these three dimensions, demonstrating that the Transfiguration functions simultaneously as a doctrinal revelation, a model of mystical participation in divine light, and a formative visual grammar within the Christian tradition. The study points toward further interdisciplinary research on the visual reception of *dóxa*, the theology of uncreated light, and the liturgical-performative role of Transfiguration imagery in East and West.



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Keywords

Divine glory, Uncreated light, Iconography, Mandorla, Patristic reception

Introduction

The Transfiguration of the Lord occupies an essential place in Christian theology and spirituality, representing an exceptional manifestation of divine glory and communion between God and man. The event on Mount Tabor is recorded by all three synoptic Evangelists and serves as a fundamental reference for understanding Christ's divine nature and humanity's restorative destiny. The radiance of His face and garments, the voice of the Father in the luminous cloud, and the presence of Moses and Elijah form a setting in which the theological dimension of light and glory becomes accessible to human experience, making this epiphany a paradigm of divine revelation in history.

Throughout the centuries, this episode has been reflected upon and explored in depth in the writings of the Church Fathers, who emphasized both the Christological dimension of the Transfiguration and its soteriological and eschatological value. The importance of the Transfiguration extends beyond dogmatics and biblical interpretation, decisively influencing liturgical life and artistic creation. Christian iconography has found in this episode an inexhaustible source of inspiration, developing a specific visual language for representing divine glory. In Byzantine and Eastern art, as well as in Western interpretations, the Transfiguration has remained one of the most theologically rich themes of sacred painting, shaping how light and glory may be expressed both visually and theologically.

The following analysis seeks to reveal the multiple dimensions of this moment, investigating how the Transfiguration was understood, embraced, and represented in the life of the Church and in Christian art. Thus, the Transfiguration on Tabor is situated at the confluence of revelation, tradition, and artistic expression, illustrating an inner journey of faith and a communitarian dimension of the experience of glory. Through this perspective, the Transfiguration becomes a continual point of reference for theological reflection, liturgical experience, and artistic creation, inviting a dynamic understanding of the relationship between humanity and God in history.

The current state of research reveals both convergences and interpretive tensions. Contemporary exegetical studies frequently situate the Transfiguration within paschal and Christological frameworks (notably in the writings of Ratzinger / Benedict XVI), while Eastern patristic scholarship and recent Palamite theology accentuate experiential

access to the uncreated light (St. Gregory of Sinai, St. Gregory Palamas). Art-historical scholarship has thoroughly documented iconographic types – mandorla variants, compositional schemes, and liturgical functions – but comprehensive interdisciplinary syntheses that bring together exegetical, patristic, and aesthetic analyses remain comparatively scarce. The present study draws on a broad corpus: critical readings of the Synoptic texts; primary patristic witnesses from Origen and St. John Chrysostom to St. Gregory of Sinai and St. Gregory Palamas; medieval and scholastic commentaries (Aquinas, Bonaventure, Hugh of Saint-Cher); modern theological interpreters (e.g., Ratzinger); and an extensive body of iconographic evidence, including Byzantine mosaics, manuscript miniatures, and major Western paintings. Supplementary secondary literature in hermeneutics, the history of the icon, and visual studies supplies the historical-liturgical context for these representations.

Methodologically, the study combines literary and philological interpretation of the Gospel accounts with reception-historical reconstruction and iconographic-semiotic analysis. The approach is deliberately inter- and multidisciplinary: textual interpretation establishes theological parameters; reception history traces doctrinal and spiritual appropriations; art-historical methods decode visual conventions and theological signification; and comparative theology evaluates East–West divergences. The study’s structure follows this integrative logic: an introductory interpretation of the Gospel narratives; a chapter on patristic reception and theological development; a section on medieval and modern reflections; an extended iconographic survey of Byzantine and Western types; a synthesis addressing liturgical and soteriological implications; and concluding proposals.

The novelty of the research lies in its systematic integration of exegetical, patristic, and artistic perspectives, showing how the Transfiguration’s theme of glory functions concurrently as doctrinal revelation, spiritual praxis (the teaching and experience of uncreated light), and a formative visual grammar within Christian liturgical-artistic tradition. This unified reading invites further interdisciplinary inquiry into the visual reception of *dóxa* in relation to the paschal mission and the theology of deification.

The Theological Dimension of Glory and Light in the Biblical Account of the Transfiguration

The scene of the Transfiguration of the Saviour is significant in the New Testament, being described by the Synoptic Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This moment

highlights both the divine nature of Christ and His central role in the restoration of the entire creation. At the same time, divine glory is visibly manifested, and the disciples enter deep contemplation and awe-filled veneration.

In Matthew 17:1–9, the Transfiguration occurs after a time of spiritual preparation. The setting on a ‘high mountain’ symbolises elevation and divine encounter. Jesus takes with Him Peter, James, and John, forming a select group who are granted the privilege of witnessing this manifestation of divinity, experiencing a profoundly intimate event meant to convey a spiritual lesson “and He was transfigured before them; His face shone like the sun^[1], and His clothes became white as the light”. Through these words, Matthew introduces the concept of *dóxa* as radiance that emanates from within Christ. This is not a superficial process (Hagner 1995, 489); it is a testimony to the hidden divinity of Jesus, who becomes incarnate. The comparison of the light on Christ’s face to the sun’s indicates both His grandeur and the spiritual depth He imparts to the lives of those who have faith (Blomberg 1992, 262).

Another notable detail is the transformation of His garments into those ‘white as light.’ This symbol suggests purity and simultaneously reflects divine nature, pointing to the reality that Christ is revealed in a form that exceeds human perception. From this angle, one may draw a connection with the Temple of the Old Testament, where God’s glory was manifest. In this way, Christ becomes the locus of divine presence, supplanting the Temple. The Evangelist Mark draws a comparison to snow (Mk 9:3), evoking a splendour that surpasses natural standards. This reflects the unique typology of the Transfiguration, which admits no earthly repetition, as it speaks of a cosmic and divine reality.

The participation of Moses and Elijah in the vision is highly significant. They represent the Law and the Prophets, encompassing both the past and future of the people of Israel. The dialogue between Christ, Moses, and Elijah highlights Jesus as the centre of the Law and the Prophets, underscoring His role as the fulfilment of Old Testament revelation and the meeting point of prophetic and legal traditions. The messianic foundation of Christ is affirmed by the profound significance of the Transfiguration, which places Jesus within the historical and spiritual continuum of the prophets. The appearance of Moses and Elijah alongside Christ during the Transfiguration is no mere coincidence. Moses, representing the Law, and Elijah, symbolizing the Prophets, are central figures of the Old Testament. Their presence underscores the continuity between the old and new covenants, demonstrating that Jesus is the fulfilment of the divine

promises made to the chosen people. This extraordinary encounter emphasizes that in Christ, all past prophecies are brought to completion. The divine glory manifested in the Transfiguration confirms Jesus' status as the promised Messiah and Saviour. Moreover, this event ensures the permanence and validity of God's covenant with His people, now extended to all humanity through Christ's mission.

These attributes of veneration and justification are accentuated in Christ's encounters with the disciples, who would later become the martyrs of divine glory. Thus, the event becomes a landmark moment, bringing clarity and light through which spiritual leaders and the faithful can appreciate the meaning of divine inheritance.

A particularly notable moment of the event is the voice heard from the luminous cloud, proclaiming: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; listen to Him." This testimony acknowledges the divine identity of Jesus and His messianic role. It is a direct call to listen and to live according to the will of God. The divine voice amplifies the present glory, inviting the faithful to recognize and join God's plan. This declaration transforms the moments of revelation into spiritual commitments for all those touched by the *kabod* of God.

Christ's entry into 'glory' is not merely a personal triumphal moment but part of God's salvific plan for humanity. Within this vision, *kabod* serves as a lasting reference point for anticipating the future divine glory. As Christ approaches the Cross, He presents this identification with divine glory as an ongoing process. Even His mission of atonement carries within it the notion of 'glory'. All the deeds of Christ, including His sacrifices, are imbued with divine glory, transforming the entire experience of salvation into a revelation of the *kabod*, which serves as a source of inspiration for faith and devotion. The theme of 'glory' plays an essential role in the eschatological context, as evidenced in the New Testament (Nolland 2005, 699)^[2]. In this regard, the promise of Christ's return is regarded as the ultimate revelation of glory. *Dóxa* thus becomes the foundation of supreme hope for believers, who await the restoration of all things under the reign of a glorious King, as is Christ.

St. Luke the Evangelist recounts in detail the luminous episode of Christ's Transfiguration, a pivotal event in the New Testament that reveals both Christ's divine nature and the complex relationship between divine glory and humanity. His account highlights essential features pertinent to the theological understanding of this phenomenon, with profound implications for explaining the doctrine of divine glory, which runs throughout the entire Holy Scripture. The first part of the narrative leads

us into a solemn moment. Luke 9:28 informs us that Christ ‘went up the mountain to pray’^[3]. In this context, the ascent of the mountain is symbolic. The mountain represents a sacred place where God’s presence is revealed; here, we see a prefiguration of a profound encounter with God, one that will lead to a partial yet powerful unveiling of divine glory. Prayer becomes a decisive element for what is to follow. Luke recounts a promise of communion between Christ and the Father, a divine conversation culminating in the manifestation of God’s glory. This detail underscores that the encounter with God – His seeking in prayer – is crucial to attaining profound visions and mystical revelations.

Luke proceeds to state that “the appearance of His face changed, and His clothing became dazzling white”. This verbal depiction of the physical transformation undergone by Jesus is profoundly significant, as the phrase ‘the appearance of His face changed’ indicates a manifestation of the divine nature hidden in the incarnate Jesus while simultaneously externalizing it. This underscores a core value in Christian theology: Christ is true God and true man. The radiant garment symbolizes divine holiness, akin to the vestments worn by the priests in the Temple of Jerusalem. This emanation of light from Christ becomes a symbol of divine glory (Strauss 1972, 535), reflecting the proximity of holiness. The association with ‘light’ has its origin in biblical tradition, which, over the centuries, has linked light to divine revelation.

Another deeply meaningful component is the appearance of Moses and Elijah – the coryphaei of the Law and the prophets – conversing with Jesus. This suggests a symbolic dialogue between the Old and New Testaments, between the ancestors and the fulfilment of divine promises in Christ. Moses, an exponent of the Law, and Elijah, as a representative of the prophets, come to affirm Jesus’ mission, thus emphasizing his status. Witnessing this scene, the disciples are profoundly moved. The discussion between Moses and Elijah with Christ is a sacred moment in which all the elements converge toward the revelation of divine glory. This suggests that God’s glory is not abstract but is realized through Jesus’ presence and discourse with the two prophets. Thus, the entire experience of this encounter becomes sacred, bearing deep spiritual meaning.

Peter’s reaction to this revelation shows us that he is very surprised. Peter’s exclamation: “Master, it is good for us to be here” (Lk 9:33) reveals his desire to remain in that holy place and build huts for each of them – even if his commendable calculation simultaneously shows that he could not fully comprehend the meaning of the divine reality they were experiencing. Peter expresses a wish to remain within that unfamiliar

yet overwhelming existence, thereby demonstrating humanity's need for security in encountering the sacred. When the luminous cloud appears, the disciples are struck with fear and respond with deep reverence. We see from this that the encounter with God's glory is overwhelming and contact with divine holiness fills them with emotional power. This is a profound manifestation of divine glorification, foretold long beforehand.

A crucial moment occurs when a voice is heard from the cloud: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; listen to Him". This statement affirms Jesus' divine identity and makes the disciples responsible for obeying Him (France 2011, 647). The divine voice proclaims Christ and extends an invitation to the disciples – and indeed to all – to enter a personal relationship with Him. This call to listen is a summons to all humanity to enter communion and to give itself to God's plan for the restoration of creation. This unique divine utterance constitutes a culminating episode, once again affirming the intimate bond between the Father and the Son while highlighting the worship and *kabod* that envelop Christ. Here, the divine ordinances form an integral part of the believer's spiritual life, calling them to embrace divine worthiness and standards, regardless of the trials they may face.

The transformation experienced by the disciples represents another crucial aspect of this event. When they hear the voice of God and behold divine glory, they fall face down to the ground, marking a moment of deep reverence. This experience transforms them, enabling them to comprehend more fully the identity of Christ. Following this event, the disciples perceive their Saviour differently; they come to realise that He is indeed the Redeemer and the Son of God. This revelation has implications for all humanity in its search to understand the characteristics of divine nature. Throughout their time, the disciples would go on to form others both through their preaching and through the witness of their lives and the way they lived their faith. The episode on Mount Tabor forms the spiritual foundation of their formation, culminating in their mission to bring the Holy Gospel to all.

The Lord's Transfiguration on Mount Tabor is a moment of paramount importance for understanding Christian theology, especially for Peter the Apostle. This profound experience compels Peter to open his eyes to the mysteries of the Incarnation and provides him with the means necessary to disseminate the divine truth to as many as possible. Peter thus understands that God is not distant, nor does He deny us access to Himself, but is close and active within human experience, allowing people to know Him

and even to touch Him. This proves to be a fundamental manifestation: God allows Himself to be touched, assuring people of His existence.

In 2 Peter 1:16–18, the Apostle refers to the ‘light’ that was unleashed at the Transfiguration, showing that its source is the eternal Being of God. Peter retains in his memory the image of the Saviour full of radiance and His garments which were white as light. This phenomenon of illumination is expressed as a manifestation of divine glory, revealed to humankind to offer them the possibility of participation in the divine glory (Sf. Dionisie Areopagitul 1996, 15)^[4]. This ‘light’ becomes a symbol of the holiness of Christ and transforms into an essential element in the struggle against the darkness generated by sin and human ignorance. It represents the divinity of Christ and His power to enlighten and transform human existence. This divine light offers a decisive advantage in the confrontation with the negative forces of sin and ignorance, thus becoming a beacon of hope and spiritual guidance for humanity. A similar episode can be found in the writings of Saint John the Evangelist, in the prologue to his First Epistle, 1 John 1:1–7, in which he refers to the Lord’s Transfiguration. John reports that he experienced a special moment, and bears witness to the divine radiance of Christ, recalling the theology of light that occupies a central position in his writings. He identifies and proclaims Christ as the ‘Light’ that illumines the darkness, bringing deliverance and enlightening all those who believe in Him. In John’s conception, this light becomes a source of brilliance and a sign of divine truth, possessing the power to transform the existence of those who believe in Him. John reveals that those who claim to partake in Christ but do not lead lives that reflect the light are deceiving themselves. In this case, ‘light’ confers the true value of an unadulterated faith. From this light arises the responsibility to reflect divine glory in their actions. Thus, the concept of *kabod* is transformed into a dynamic reality in the lives of believers, calling them to moral and spiritual transformation according to divine grace. For John, the relationship between *kabod* and ‘light’ constitutes an important aspect of salvation. Through His work, the Son of God transforms darkness into light, urging those who believe to live a life that reflects the divine character.

The Reception of the Divine Glory from Mount Tabor in Church Tradition

The episode of the Lord’s Transfiguration on Mount Tabor is a firm revelation of divine glory, and the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, especially those of St. John Chrysostom (Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur 1994) and St. Gregory of Sinai (Balfour 1981),

offer us a broad vision concerning this mystical event. They highlight the opportunity that presents itself before every person: to contemplate Christ in His unapproachable and pure light, just as the apostles present at the Transfiguration experienced. However, they also affirm that this experience transcends human perception and requires a desire for intimate communion with the divine from the one who experiences it. This divine light is also a sign of spiritual enlightenment. The patristic tradition emphasised that only those with an open heart can understand the authentic nature of Christ's glory. The fact that the apostles fell asleep denotes a fleeting inability to deeply comprehend the significance of the experience. In the absence of a spiritual perspective, understanding the revelation of divine glory remains merely an abstract notion. Simultaneously, this notion of spiritual enlightenment is also found in the lives of other saints, such as St. Simeon^[5], who partook of the divine light and experienced union with God. This underlines that enlightenment represents a dynamic experience, characterized by unceasing action throughout the life of faith.

While the Eastern patristic tradition emphasizes the possibility of real mystical participation in the divine light of Tabor – understood as an uncreated energy that believers can experience even in this lifetime – medieval Western theology proposes a distinct interpretation of this theological reality. Thus, Thomas Aquinas treats the light of the transfiguration as a visible, temporary, and pedagogical manifestation of Christ's glory, meant to strengthen the apostles' faith, without suggesting the possibility of direct participation in this light in current spiritual experience. Aquinas emphasizes that the divine radiance of Christ was not usually manifested, being hidden beneath the appearance of His assumed body, but during the Transfiguration, this light was made visible to the apostles, as a sign of His divinity. Light is thus an external epiphany, reserved for a didactic purpose, and not a reality accessible to prayer or mystical contemplation in the present life.

In addition, Aquinas sees this event as an eschatological anticipation of the state of glory to which the righteous are called, not as an experience of deification in the present, as Eastern theology maintains. Unlike hesychastic spirituality, in which the light of divine glory is offered as a lived reality (being the expression of uncreated divine energies, accessible to man by grace), for Aquinas this glory remains a future reality that will be fully manifested only after the communal resurrection, the clarity of glory being the prerogative of the state of eternal happiness and not of the present life (Torrel 2003, 168–72).

The differences between the Eastern and Western approaches to the manifestation of divine glory on Tabor are also significantly reflected in the contemporary interpretation proposed by Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI). If the patristic tradition insists on the possibility of real and mystical participation in the uncreated light of Christ's glory – accessible to those who live a life of purification and contemplation in the Spirit – Ratzinger proposes a different theological perspective: The light that envelops Christ and the apostles is defined as the light of the Resurrection, representing an anticipation of the glorious state that will be fully revealed only after the Passion and Resurrection of Christ (Ratzinger 2007, 312). In this interpretation, direct participation in the light of Tabor's glory is not treated as a mystical possibility for the believer who is still living, but as a reality about the eschatological mystery of Christ and the final fulfilment of the kingdom of God.

St. John Chrysostom uses texts referring to the Transfiguration to speak of the person of Christ in His relationship with God the Father. He emphasises that the glory revealed to the disciples is a visible phenomenon, a rediscovery of divine identity as an integral part of Creation. Christ, the beloved Son endowed with glory, is identified as a constitutive part of the divine plan for man's salvation. Moreover, this revelation of divine glory is rich in profound meanings for the entire Christian world, constituting an opening towards a fuller understanding of Christ's messianic nature and role as King of Glory. The manifestation of this divine presence during the Transfiguration enriches believers with an example of self-giving and calls each one of them to live their lives in harmony with divine glory.

The event of great significance on Mount Sinai^[6] is decisive in the religious history of the people of Israel, and its prefigurative character is admirably highlighted by St. Gregory of Sinai. He analyses – from a symbolic and mystical point of view – the connections between this theophany and the manifestation of God on Mount Tabor, where Christ is transfigured. This way of interpreting the theophany of Sinai encourages a deeper interpretation of the way in which God manifests himself to people, offering a paradigm of exalted experiences in which the divinity displays its glory and power. In the Old Testament, God is often portrayed as having overwhelming and frightening character traits. On Mount Sinai, God appears through phenomena of imposing nature – lightning, thunder, dense cloud – which highlight His majesty and holiness. St. Gregory also states that this way of associating God with the Light – and implicitly as the source of light – is a central theme in the biblical tradition. Thus, divine glory cannot be limited

to one characteristic aspect, because it is also a point of spiritual connection, expressing human yearning to be closer to divinity and to understand it better.

The manifestation of glory on Mount Tabor, in which Christ displays His radiance through an overwhelming light, similar to that of the sun, intertwining qualities of light and forgiveness, is the stage at which Christ's divinity is revealed to the disciples – transformed from a theoretical theological concept into a personal and evident revelation. St. Gregory of Sinai declares that Moses^[7] recognised in the Face of Christ all the signs seen on Sinai, which, though veiled by divine darkness then, were now clearly and resplendently visible. Concerning God's manifestation in the theophany involving Elijah, its spiritual benefit is emphasised from a mystical perspective. When Elijah sees God in the wind and fire, St. Gregory of Sinai reiterates that divine existence is not confined to large-scale natural phenomena; it can also be encountered in the 'gentle breezes' that emit a delicate light capable of stirring emotion. This shows that divinity does not necessarily act as a volcano or something that causes trembling, but can act with gentleness, inviting people to encounter His glory through a profound personal connection.

This illumination was also the consequence of the declaration of the Father heard from heaven. The Father's words help us understand that the light that comes from God cannot be separated from the person of the Saviour, who testified that He is the Light of the world (Jn 14:8). St. Gregory of Sinai further elaborates and interprets the heavenly Father's testimony in Trinitarian terms:

This is My beloved Son, the Only-Begotten (Jn 1:14–18), who today was transfigured on Tabor according to His humanity; this is the impress of My hypostasis (Heb 1:3), the radiance of My glory, the unchanging identical icon of My superessential being; This is [...] the One through whom I have saved you, through whom I have revealed Myself and in whom I have shone and re-created the world [...] He has glorified Me and I have glorified Him today and I shall glorify Him with the unapproachable light (1 Tm 6:16); He is in Me unconfusedly, and I am in Him unchanged, flashing in a manner proper to God and to the Trinity; [...] He is the Begotten Light, I am the Unbegotten Light; [...] He is the Light (Jn 1:4–9), I am the Source of Light (Jas 1:17); [...] He is the Sun of Righteousness (Mal 4:2) who shines in Me, I am known as the Superessential Radiance in three suns who is in Him and who makes to shine in Him all the fullness of divinity (Col 2:9); [...] In Him I shine, I appear, I govern providentially, I purify, I enlighten,

and I sanctify you; in the light of His glory you shall see Me, the unapproachable Light (1Tim 6:16); [...] In the Spirit you shall see the Son and in the Son you shall recognise the Father; in the light of the Spirit you shall see the brilliance of My glory, in the image of God within you shall see the Archetype, from yourselves the superessential... (Sf. Grigorie Sinaitul 2007, 21–2)

The iconographic representation of glory in the episode of the Transfiguration

The episode of the Transfiguration of the Saviour, fulfilled on Mount Tabor, is a profound theological lived experience and a fundamental element in Christian iconography, shaping how the term *kabod* or *dóxa* is understood and depicted. Steven Bigham highlights that the icon of the Transfiguration is painted with Taboric light (Bigham 1998, 226–7) and further discusses two essential aspects of *kabod* and iconographic art: the use of light as an artistic element and the necessity for the iconographer to experience the uncreated light personally^[8].

The study will analyse these themes, emphasizing the spiritual significance and theological tradition behind the icon (Trif 2009, 401; Ghenescu 2009, 470). The rendering of divine glory in art is a theme that intertwines theology with aesthetics. When discussing the Transfiguration and the way divine glory is rendered in images, emphasis is placed on the light that originates from Christ. This is a light of divine origin, which manifests beyond the limits of human experience and transcends any material source. The *dóxa* of Christ is perceived as a light that envelops and transforms. In this vision, icons are more than artistic representations; they serve to convey divine grace and to facilitate the communion of the faithful with the divine light. The light of Tabor becomes a sign of our complicity with divinity, and the iconographer, inspired by the Holy Spirit, embarks on the path of rendering this spiritual experience on wall, canvas, or wood.

The relevance of the ‘uncreated light’ is essential in the discourse on divine glory. Bigham argues that the light of Tabor serves as a model for this concept. Even though Moses and Elijah experienced theophanies in the Old Testament, they did not experience God’s *dóxa* in its absolute form. On the other hand, the disciples were participants in a complete but limited revelation, which grants this vision an exceptional character. At this point, the notion of *dóxa* emerges in the theology of St. John Chrysostom (Bigham 2011, 117; Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur 1994, 539; Sf. Grigorie Palama 1993, 84). He argues that *doxa*, closely associated with light, emphasises the fundamental

characteristic of God's holiness, which is impenetrable and transcendent. This allows us to gain a broader perspective on absurdity: in a world so often drawn to darkness and immorality, the divine light is the sole source of clarity and purity.

In Dionysius of Fournas's interpretation, the Icon of the Transfiguration is a meaningful scene, rich in depth and bearing a sacramental character. Beyond this, however, it does not appear to enjoy the importance it rightfully deserves, particularly in relation to the depiction of the uncreated light (Rousseau 2004, 179–80). This light, deeply connected to the divine nature, forms the foundation of the theological understanding of the event and reflects the iconographer's skill in capturing the scene's sacred essence (Larchet 2012, 13).

The uncreated light, the one whose depiction is particularly important to include in sacred painting, is a central idea we encounter in the sacred scriptures, highlighting the sacramental character of encounters with the divine. In the Transfiguration episode, Christ is wrapped in light that mirrors both His divine glory and His essential nature (Cavarnos 2005, 88). For this reason, the iconographer's ability to reproduce this light is fundamental; without it, the sacred representation lacks depth and the theological power of its message.

Dionysius of Fournas notes the specific visual details that help shape this iconographic vision. For example, he records that the Savior, situated at the top of the mountain, is depicted at the centre of a 'radiant glory' (Dionisie din Furna 2000, 159). This visual reproduction transforms the divine encounter into an artisanal experience, in which light becomes a symbol of presence. Dionysius emphasises that Christ should be viewed in the light, suggesting an uncreated dimension of divine glory. The resemblance of this glory to the sun's brilliance indicates that *kabod* is a transcendent reality. This light symbolises revelation, which cannot be captured merely through material expressions.

The artistic representation becomes even richer through the presence of Moses and Elijah, who, through their appearance, bring the tradition of the Law and the Prophets. This conjunction of Christ with the two great prophets deepens the discourse and establishes the framework of an ongoing promise. Moses, on Mount Sinai, received divine glory as a reward, and now Elijah, who represents prophecy, stands beside Christ, affirming that He is the one who brings fulfilment. The placement of these historical figures on Mount Tabor underscores the idea that the Jewish tradition is interwoven with Christian revelation, connecting the faithful more closely with the divine mission. This connection is also important for understanding how tradition influences our

present-day reading of the Old Testament, and how it is reinterpreted considering the new consecrations brought by Christ. Gregory Palamas offers an interpretation of the event of the Transfiguration within the framework of the theology of light, emphasising its significance as a manifestation of uncreated light and of communion between God and humanity (Sf. Grigorie Palama 1993, 38)^[9]. The prophets of the Old Testament, when encountering the glory of God, were often overwhelmed by such revelations, but now, in Christ, the light becomes a tangible and accessible reality. This grants a theological understanding and provides a reference point for prayer, meditation, and contemplation. Thus, the *kabod* of God gains a transformative power over the spiritual life of believers. It calls for deep personal reflection on divine revelation and, at the same time, initiates continuous transformation.

This episode on Tabor shows us that ‘glory’ is not merely a theoretical concept but a truth that can influence life. The theology of light holds a primary place in the teachings of the Church Fathers, who speak of the sacred and transcendent nature of divine illumination. This portrayal calls believers to recognise that a life enlightened by Christ is not separated from the necessities and challenges of daily life. On the contrary, this light urges us to be continually engaged in the realisation of divine values, which herald transformation at both the personal and communal levels.

Another meaningful detail is the association between Christ’s Transfiguration and prayer. The three figures on Mount Tabor become witnesses to a sacred action that connects prayer with divine revelation. This idea highlights that through prayer, people can access divine glory and enter communion with God (Evdochimov 1993, 209). Therefore, prayer becomes the foundation for experiencing the *dóxa* of God. Faced with divine grandeur, prayer presents itself as a means of seeking out and reflecting glory, thus incorporating the spiritual characteristics of existence.

The biblical episode of the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ includes a Trinitarian dimension and raises several Christological issues, including the relationship between Christ’s divinity and humanity, as well as the nature of His body before and after His resurrection.

The narrative placement of this event before Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection invites reflection on soteriology and eschatology. The relationship between the Old and New Testaments is significant not only because the Old Testament figures Moses, Elijah, and three of Jesus’s closest disciples are present, but also because the iconographic representations of the event have evident parallels with several

Old Testament passages. The presence of the representatives of the Law, the Prophets, and the Church, and the significance of the event taking place on a mountain, have implications regarding the nature of the Church in history and Christian discipleship in general. In short, the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ unites a series of closely interrelated themes into a concise, dense, and profoundly rich narrative (Canty 2010, 4).



School of Andrei Rublev, *Transfiguration*, icon on wood, 1425, Moscow

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Transfiguration_of_Jesus_Christ_\(15th_c.,_Novgorod_museum\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Transfiguration_of_Jesus_Christ_(15th_c.,_Novgorod_museum).jpg)

The Transfiguration is recorded in all three synoptic gospels, and several common elements unite these Gospel narratives. The first common theme is that Jesus took Peter, James, and John to a mountain, where they witnessed his transformation: His clothes became exceedingly white and radiant. Then Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke with Jesus. In all three Gospel accounts, Peter addressed Jesus, saying, “It is good (καλόν) for us to be here” (Mt 17:4; Mk 9:5; Lk 9:33), and proposed building three tents: one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. A cloud overshadowed the disciples,

and a voice from the cloud proclaimed: “This is My Son, listen to Him!” (Mt 17:5; Mk 9:7; Lk 9:35). However, there are also differences in the evangelists’ descriptions of the Transfiguration. Although all three writers describe how Christ’s garments became white, Matthew and Luke specifically recount how Christ’s face was transformed. The metamorphosis of Christ – His transfigured appearance – astonished and frightened the disciples. In the Gospels of Mark and Luke, the evangelists attribute Peter’s suggestion – made under the influence of fear – to build three tents for Christ, Moses, and Elijah, to his confusion about what to say. However, in Matthew, fear plays a less prominent role in Peter’s proposal. The conclusions of each Gospel narrative are also slightly different. The Gospels of Mark and Luke record that the disciples realized Jesus Christ was alone only after the voice from the cloud had spoken. Matthew adds that the disciples had fallen with their faces to the ground, and that Christ came to them, touched them, and encouraged them (Canty 2010, 8).



**Church of St. Apollinarius, *The Transfiguration*, mosaic, 6th century
 Ravenna, Italy**

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mosaico_-_Basilica_di_Sant%27Apollinare_in_Classe_-_Ravenna_-_jpg



Church of St. Apollinarius, *The Transfiguration (detail)*, mosaic, 6th century, Ravenna, Italy

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cross_and_Hand_of_God_-_Sant%27Apollinare_in_Classe_-_Ravenna_2016.jpg

In all three Gospel accounts of the Transfiguration, Peter is overwhelmed by the vision and asks Jesus if he should erect three tents and remain on Mount Tabor. The Gospels of Mark and Luke add a comment after this question, which can be translated as “for he did not know what to say” or “he did not know what he was saying”. Peter’s question receives no answer from Christ in the Gospel text and is simply passed over. Nevertheless, early Christian writers commenting on this biblical passage provide an interesting explanation for Christ’s attitude. They write that Peter, John, and James were so overwhelmed by the ecstatic vision – which to their eyes was nothing less than the opening of heaven – that they desired to remain permanently in this state of bliss. This is an understandable temptation, but the ecstatic vision of divine light is not given for its own sake.

The purpose is not simply to behold an impressive light and to acquire an overwhelming feeling of well-being. Christ's response to Peter, as it appears in the Gospel narratives, was that this is by no means the end of the struggle. After the brilliance of the Transfiguration, Christ must return to the world and undergo the Passion and Crucifixion. Those who follow Him must do the same and be willing to sacrifice themselves for His name. The visionary experience of the light points towards the difficult path that leads to the Cross (Andreopoulos 2012, 104).



Monastery of St. Mark, Fra Angelico, *The Transfiguration*, 1440-1442, Florence

Source: https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fi%C8%99ier:Transfiguration_by_fra_Angelico_%28San_Marco_Cell_6%29.jpg

Thus, the Transfiguration reveals something significant about salvation: salvation is not a state of perpetual happiness, a garden of pleasure – even if we make sure to describe it as ‘spiritual pleasure,’ whatever that may mean – but rather an active participation in the presence, being, and work of Christ. Salvation means that the ecstatic experience, when it occurs, is no more than a step towards the goal of the salvation of the whole world. In this context, the desire for individual salvation is meaningless.

The saints understand this. Monasticism understands this, even if at first glance the monk appears to be a solitary ascetic who flees the city to save his own soul. The point is that although we ask for forgiveness personally and seek to take responsibility for our own sins, if we think as God does and share in God's love for the world, we will weep for those who have excluded themselves from salvation. We cannot remain happily, yet ignorantly, atop Mount Tabor, bathed in divine light and wishing to remain there, while the rest of the world needs Christ. Something is incomplete. Although a foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven was granted on the summit of Tabor, the actual path passes through the Cross (Andreopoulos 2012, 105).

In the biblical narrative of the Transfiguration, Jesus instructs the three disciples – who had seen what their eyes could scarcely believe – to remain silent until after His crucifixion and resurrection, when the full mystery would be revealed to the entire world. This is one of the many connections between Tabor and the Passion, between the Transfiguration and the Cross. The message here is compelling: we cannot understand the glory of the Transfiguration or the Resurrection if we have not made the Cross a part of our lives. Likewise, Jesus' command to the disciples to keep this matter secret until they know Him as the crucified and risen God implies that the mystery of the Transfiguration cannot be approached as a static object of worldly study, without due reverence, without fear and trembling. 'Such things' are not spoken of lightly (Andreopoulos 2012, 105).

The Apostle Paul mentions this aspect of the knowledge of the Cross, its assumption and its power, when he writes to the Corinthians: "For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel – not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (1 Cor 1:17). This biblical passage warns us that there may be something deceptive about eloquent 'wisdom of words' and a 'systematic' or academic theology based too heavily on human strength. This, as St. Paul testifies, may stand in contradiction to the power of the Cross of Christ and – I dare say – also to His Transfiguration. 'Eloquent' wisdom is a trap, a professional distortion into which theologians often fall, perhaps more often than anyone else.

The Transfiguration reveals how salvation comes into the world through Christ. This event stands at the center of His ministry – Mark places it precisely at the midpoint of his Gospel – because it sheds light on all the major events in Christ's life. For this reason, it reflects the connection between heaven and earth in a way consistent with what Christ's life and ministry reveal. As a self-revelation that speaks of both Christ's divine character and humanity, the Transfiguration is a manifestation of the Incarnation

of God (Andreopoulos 2012, 106). As a revelation of His glory, it speaks to His power over death and His Resurrection. As a reflection of His deliberate choice to descend from Mount Tabor into the world, it anticipates His Passion.



**The Floreffe Bible, *The Transfiguration.*
The Last Supper, miniature – Vol. II,
 folio 4r, ca. 1155, British Library**

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/
 File:Floreffe_Bible_02.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Floreffe_Bible_02.jpg)

Ultimately, this revelation of the inner life of the Holy Trinity demonstrates the convergence of the entire Godhead in the person of Christ for the purpose of the salvation of humanity. Thus, our participation in Christ is not limited to partaking of His radiance but also involves our engagement at all stages of the divine plan of salvation. This holistic participation connects us to the entire process of the divine economy, from the Incarnation to glorification, reflecting the complexity of our relationship with God

through Christ. To shine with Christ, we must experience His birth in the flesh, His baptism in the Jordan, His Passion and Resurrection, and recognize what all of this means in our lives. The Transfiguration constitutes an event that brings light and clarity to the entirety of spiritual existence, revealing the meaning of the other Christological moments as lived personally (Andreopoulos 2012, 107).

The Church Fathers speak of spiritual senses, or rather of the way in which the Holy Spirit awakens a different level of perception. The first such model is found in the narrative of the Transfiguration (Mk 9, Mt 17 and Lk 9), where the eyes of Peter, John, and James were opened by the Holy Spirit, and they saw Jesus Christ for the first time in His divinity. The various visions of the uncreated light found in a long tradition of the saints, as well as other theophanic visions, are also understood as visions granted by the power of the Holy Spirit (Andreopoulos 2013, 56).

In Western theology, an interesting interpretation of the Transfiguration is found in the Dominican theologian Hugh of Saint-Cher (c. 1200–1263). He states that Peter, James, and John represent faith, hope, and charity on the one hand, and the married, the ascetics (guardians of virginity and bodily purity), and leaders of the Church, on the other. There are, however, some interpretations unique to Hugh. One such interpretation concerns Moses and Elijah.

A connection to the Law and the Prophets is unsurprising, but Hugh also links Moses and Elijah to baptism and penance. Moses, he says, represents those who are baptized, because he was drawn from the waters of the Nile, while Elijah represents those who repent, due to his austerity. Their appearance – one alive (Elijah) and the other deceased (Moses) – teaches Christ's disciples that He 'has power over death and life.' Hugh argues that Christ uses their presence to show the disciples how to be meek like Moses and zealous like Elijah. Moreover, their lives of prayer serve as examples for the disciples, who are soon to become leaders of Christ's Church (with James later becoming the first bishop of the Church in Jerusalem) (Canty 2010, 39).

Alexander of Hales, another Dominican theologian, highlights the pedagogical aspect of the Transfiguration for the apostles present. Beginning from the premise that Christ's Transfiguration is a prefiguration of the Resurrection, pedagogically oriented for the benefit of Peter, James, and John, the question posed is why Christ revealed the glory of the Resurrection only through transparency (the 'diaphanous' nature of Dumitru Stăniloae's theology) and not through other possibly more effective qualities. Alexander of Hales provides the example of Moses: when Moses descended from

Mount Sinai for the second time, after receiving the Law of God again from the Lord, his face shone with such brilliance (albeit temporarily) that the Israelites could not look upon it (Canty 2010, 60).



**Cathedral of the Holy Transfiguration,
 School of Theophanes the Greek, *The
 Transfiguration*, icon on wood, 1403,
 Pereslavl**

Source: [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/
 File:Annunciation_ystuj.jpg](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Annunciation_ystuj.jpg)

Also, within the sphere of Western Catholic patristics, the theologian Jean de la Rochelle (1200–1245) proposes a categorization of the witnesses to the Transfiguration. He states that the glory of Christ is confirmed and communicated by three types of witnesses: the apostles (Peter, James, and John); Moses and Elijah (representing the Law and the Prophets); and the Father, who participates as a divine witness. Each of these categories plays a distinct role: the apostolic witnesses testify to the glory of Christ's humanity; the prophetic and legal witnesses affirm the dignity and mystery of

redemption; and the divine witness demonstrates the glory of the Godhead in Christ (Canty 2010, 125).

The same author refers to Peter's exclamation concerning the three tents, in which he discerns three effects of contemplating the glory: love, wonder, and fear deriving from love. Peter's request to build three tents is interpreted thus: he did not realise that the Prophets, the Law, and the Gospel (understood as 'natural law,' 'written law,' and 'the law of grace') cannot be separated. All three share a single tent, or tabernacle – the Church (Canty 2010, 129). Another Western interpreter, Bonaventure (b. Giovanni di Fidanza, 1221-1274), offers an ecclesiological interpretation of the event of the Transfiguration, attributing to each disciple a different facet of Christian life, in a threefold organisation, the three ranks of the Fighting Church: the priests, the actives, and the contemplatives.



Karanlik Goreme Church, *The Transfiguration*, fresco, 12th-13th centuries, Turkey

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Turkey-1862_\(2216686930\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Turkey-1862_(2216686930).jpg)

Peter signifies the prelates, James represents the active, and John corresponds to the contemplatives. Christ called (or 'assumed') all three disciples from one way of life and bestowed upon them new identities; their correspondence with one of the three

ecclesiastical ranks is tied to the respective missions they received. These three ranks also serve as a framework through which the evolution of the spiritual life may be discerned, symbolised by the ascent of the disciples from the base of the mountain. Peter, who represents the clergy, bears a particular responsibility, being the first to receive divine illumination. Bonaventure illustrates this with the following analogy: the sun first shines upon the mountains and then illumines the valleys; in like manner, priests – as high mountains – should be the first to receive within themselves the illuminations of divine light and then transmit the example of a good life to those in their pastoral care, likened to valleys (Canty 2010, 190).

Thomas Aquinas, in his interpretation of the Transfiguration, emphasises the following ideas: at the Transfiguration, the glory of Christ is revealed in its fullest power. Although Christ revealed this initially only to Peter, James, and John, the three would later relate the ‘sublime mysteries’ revealed there. While the discussion of the Transfiguration ends with reflections on the eschatological significance of this revelatory event, Thomas maintains his focus on the exhortative function of the transfiguration. Once the disciples had witnessed the Transfiguration, had heard Moses and Elijah conversing with Christ about His departure from the world, and had heard the terrifying voice of the Father, Jesus Christ strengthened the souls of His disciples with words of comfort, so that they might endure His forthcoming Passion and Death (Canty 2010, 242).

A more recent approach to the theme of the glory of God is found in the work of Suzy Dufrenne, in an article published in 1987 (Dufrenne 1987, 185-206). She revisits the principal themes of the icon of the Transfiguration: the light of Christ’s face, the radiance of His garments, the brilliance of divine glory, the voice of God the Father, and the luminous cloud – mentioning their appearance in the writings of Origen, Andrew of Crete, and St. John of Damascus. The luminous cloud is interpreted as the presence or manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s grace. This cloud and the depiction of the voice of God the Father are visually presented with certainty in a Byzantine manuscript – folio 75 of St Gregory of Nazianzus – from the National Library of Paris (cod. Gr. 510). The hand of God, interpreted as signifying the presence and voice of God the Father, emerges from a fragment of the sky marked by various clouds.

Related to the way the glory of God is represented iconographically, the biblical episode of Christ’s Transfiguration inherently entails its representation using the mandorla. The almond-shaped halo, derived from the symbol of the *vesica piscis* (‘fish bladder’) – the mandorla – has encircled Christ in representations of the

Transfiguration, the Resurrection, and the Ascension since early Christian art. Initially, the mandorla represented the cloud into which Christ ascended and gradually assumed the characteristics of a halo (Hall 2018, 103).



Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Byzantine manuscript, *The Transfiguration*, miniature – Cod. Gr. 510, page 75, 9th century, National Library of Paris

Source: <https://ru.wikipedia.org/>

The mandorla visually expresses the Hebrew concept of *kabod*, which connoted a more concrete, physical presence than the more abstract sense of the Greek *dóxa* (δόξα). Some scholars distinguish two principal meanings of *kabod*: *shekinah* (from *shakan*, ‘to dwell in a tent’ or simply ‘to dwell’) and *yeqara* (from *yqr*, the sensory splendour of light), to articulate this visual manifestation of the two natures of Christ. Thus, the oval mandorla corresponds to the luminous characteristics of *kabod* as *yeqara*. Here, the three concentrically darker oval layers represent the description of excessive divine light as the darkness of God’s unknowability – even in revelation. The round mandorla,

on the other hand, represents the manifestation of God's glory as *shekinah*/ tabernacle. In this reading, the emphasis on the spatial rather than the luminous nature of the mandorla served to depict the Trinity, as opposed to a less historicized interpretation that emphasized the continuous majesty/splendor of Christ (Tănase 2017, 325–6).

All iconographic representations of the Transfiguration of the Lord are based on the New Testament texts that describe this episode: Matthew 17:1–9; Mark 9:2–8; and Luke 9:28–36. However, the miracle of Christ's Transfiguration, as a theophany of the Holy Trinity, represents the highest mystical experience of the Saints and of the Church itself. Like the Apostles on Mount Tabor, numerous saints have borne witness to this manifestation of God in light, and the light, for them, is the very deifying grace that enables them to 'see' God, according to the word of the Psalmist David: 'in Thy light shall we see light' (Ps 36:9) (Pintilie 2009, 4).



St. Catherine's Monastery, *The Transfiguration*, mosaic, 6th century, Sinai

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saint_Catherine%27s_Transfiguration.jpg

The Church Fathers, from Origen to St. John of Damascus, refer to Christ as the visible image and consubstantial icon of the Father. Icons were more than mere vessels of God's grace; they suggested the real presence of the grace of the person depicted.

In the Old Testament, God denied the request of anyone who wished to see Him directly. The desire to behold God was impossible before the Incarnation of Christ. The mosaic of the Transfiguration at Saint Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai presents Christ in perfect glory, with eight rays emanating from His body, thereby introducing the luminous mandorla – a symbol that iconographically expresses the glory of God. The mandorla in the mosaic at Saint Catherine's is oval, whereas in other instances, it may be rendered as a circle. These two types of mandorlas express the glory of God differently, illustrating the correspondence between theological concepts and visual language (Tănase 2017, 325).

With the iconoclastic controversy of the 8th–9th centuries, two types of representations of the Transfiguration emerge: Christ within a circular mandorla, with Moses and Elijah included (either entirely or partially), and a second type in which Christ is depicted alone within the mandorla. An example of the latter can be seen at the Church of Saints Nereus and Achilleus in Rome, which was adorned with several valuable mosaics in the sanctuary area in the 9th century.

Referring to these two examples of mandorlas, Strezova asserts that they represent two distinct stages in the development of the iconography of the Transfiguration (Strezova 2014, 87). The circular mandorla also appears in a series of manuscript miniatures. For instance, in the Chludov Psalter (9th century), Mount Tabor is prominently featured, and a round mandorla encircles Christ alongside Moses and Elijah. This detail may also reflect the interpretations of the Church Fathers. For example, Origen and Anastasius of Sinai claim that both Elijah and Moses were transfigured in glory (Tănase 2017, 325).

Another example is found in the Feodorovskaya Psalter, in the representation of the Transfiguration on page 118r. What we see in the icon of the Transfiguration can be interpreted as an image of the Church. Christ, in the middle, seems almost 'made' of light.

But this is key to understanding the entire event through the icon: the body of Christ is light, and it extends beyond the physical boundaries of His human form. In more theological terms, what defines Christ is the union between the created and the uncreated, the human and the divine, the visible and the invisible. This union extends to Moses, Elijah, Peter, John, and James, as noted above, but they become part of Christ's

body in a different manner. The union of the created with the uncreated can also be perceived in them, but they must receive the light of union from Christ, who sends them the light of the Father (Andreopoulos 2013, 93).



Chludov Manuscript, *The Transfiguration*, miniature, 9th century, Moscow

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Miniature_of_the_Khludov_Psalter._Around_the_middle_of_the_9th_century._State_Historical_Museum,_Moscow._Transfiguration.jpg

The oval mandorla corresponds to the luminous characteristics of glory, *kabod*. Drawn around Christ's body in a way that signifies light rather than space, this mandorla

is consistent with the understanding of *kabod* as *yeqara*, and with the Johannine and patristic identification of Christ as light – or, more specifically, in the Transfiguration, as the glory of the Father.

Although the Transfiguration is primarily an event associated with Christ, we can see that the entire Trinity was revealed through it. The Transfiguration was a Trinitarian revelation, dynamically disclosed to those who witnessed it in varying degrees of participation. These levels of participation become apparent when one considers the Transfiguration scene as portrayed in Eastern iconography. Christ, flanked by Moses and Elijah – sometimes included within the luminous halo emanating from Him – corresponds to the Kingdom of Heaven. There, the dead are no longer dead, but serene participants in the divinity of Christ. Moses and Elijah converse with Christ, indicating that the Kingdom of God is to be understood as a continuous communion between Christ and the saints. Furthermore, the Church Fathers describe a different degree of communion between Christ and the two righteous prophets, as opposed to the three terrified and prostrate apostles. We can see this clearly in the schematic iconography of the Transfiguration as depicted in the Orthodox tradition (Andreopoulos 2013, 90).

The glory of the Spirit that is beheld in ecstasy is also the glory of the Lord, for it is the glory of the Trinity. Whenever Symeon the New Theologian attributes glory to one divine person, he does not do so to claim it exclusively for that person. He ascribes the possession of divine light alternately to one or another of the hypostases, knowing that the light is shared among the persons of the Trinity (Picioruş 2009, 34).

The oval mandorla that encircles the transfigured Sinaitic image of Christ – the prototype for the general type of oval mandorla – consists of three concentric oval layers that grow darker toward the centre. Metaphorical darkness or blindness is caused by excessive brightness ('darkness as an overabundance of light' – as described in the writings of Symeon the New Theologian) (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog 1999, 232).

With the advent of hesychasm and the Palamite controversy, other, more complex types of mandorlas also emerged, referred to specifically as hesychastic mandorlas. These served as visual expressions of the theology of Dionysius the Areopagite, who advanced the idea of hierarchical participation – that not all are able to participate equally in God's energies. Different stages of illumination were established, reflecting the tripartite stages of purification, illumination, and deification set forth by Saint Gregory Palamas and Gregory of Sinai (Shackelford 2019, 7). Strezova identifies a mandorla with an overlapping rhomboid or star shape as strictly hesychastic, since the

resulting octagon or six-pointed star symbolises both the eternity of the eighth day after the Parousia and the six days of creation. The shared representation of anticipated Parousia and creation aligns with the theological views discussed above concerning hesychasm, which emphasise the unity of body and soul and the material participation in the divine energies of God.

The mandorla has a similar usage across Bulgarian, Serbian, Macedonian, and Russian traditions and reflects changes in the theology of divine light that occurred in the Slavic realms. In addition to the complex mandorla, the tripartite representation of Mount Tabor links the experiences of God encountered by Elijah and Moses on Mount Sinai (Shackelford 2019, 8).



Parisinus Graecus, The Transfiguration, miniature - Code. Paris Gr. 1242, page 92v, 13th century

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Transformation.png>

The miniature above, a full page from the Parisinus Graecus manuscript, depicts the Transfiguration. It is an image of exceptional artistic quality. Christ, clad in white, is shown standing at the summit of Mount Tabor, holding a *rotulus* in His left hand and making a gesture of blessing with His right. The figure is surrounded by a mandorla rendered as a complex geometric configuration, composed of two superimposed shapes – a concave square and a rhombus – inscribed within two concentric circles from whose centre radiate beams of light. Positioned on rocky peaks above cave-like openings, the two prophets flank Christ's figure – Elijah on the left and Moses, holding the Tablets of the Law, on the right. Below, in the lower section of the composition, the three disciples are shown overwhelmed by fear. John, in the centre, and James, on the right, both fall with their faces to the ground, while Peter, on the left, is seated on the ground, gesturing towards Christ; unable to look upon the radiant body of the transfigured Lord, he shields his eyes with his left hand (Drpić 2008, 225).

The disorder manifested in the apostles' postures and garments indicates the dramatic impact of beholding the glory. The rays of light radiate in different directions, linking the apostles to Christ through a triangular composition (Christ, situated above, forms the apex, and the apostles below form the lower corners of the triangle). The octagonal mandorla provides a complex rendering of the vision of God's uncreated light. Moses and Elijah are not entirely integrated within the mandorla; rather, they stand at the edge of the circle. This element of the iconography directs the viewer's attention to the divine energies revealed by Christ during the Transfiguration (Strezova 2014, 92).

It is possible to interpret the three geometric forms as symbols of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, although associating the three shapes (two rectangles and a circle) with concrete hypostases remains problematic. The circle is a symbol of the Father; the two rectangles are symbols of the Persons of the Son and the Holy Spirit, signifying their relationship with the Father. Andreopoulos asserts that the Holy Spirit assumes the form of a vertical square, while the Son is represented by a horizontal rhombus (Andreopoulos 2005, 209–245).

As a cosmogram, the mandorla represents the world reduced to an essential model; it was a sign of the entire universe in its essential plan, in its process of emanation and reabsorption. The octagonal mandorla symbolically presents not only the sharing of the one into many, but also the reintegration of the many into one. The central part of the mandorla represented the unity, peace, and stability of divine and human nature in Christ. The centre also functioned as a point of revelation between the material-mental

world of space and time, and the calm, peace, and stability of heavenly reality – an *axis mundi* for both macrocosm and microcosm (Strezova 2014, 102).

The contrast between Sinai and Tabor also provided an opportunity to consider the interaction between the doctrines of apophaticism and deification, darkness and light, the ambiguity of silence, and the clarity of articulation. Sinai symbolised the aniconic quality of the divine being, where Moses encountered God in the darkness of the unknowable. Sinai also served as a symbol reminding humanity of God's freedom and complete inaccessibility. It demonstrated that no permanent guarantee of divine presence could be ascribed. In contrast, Tabor incorporated uncreated light, allowing the light of divine presence to be experienced by humankind. In turn, while participating in the Transfiguration, the disciples not only received a vision of uncreated light but also saw themselves illuminated and renewed (Strezova 2014, 102).

Constantine Cavarinos provides a detailed description of the Byzantine composition of the icon of the Transfiguration:

a mountain with three peaks (Tabor), on the highest of the peaks is Christ, rendered frontally, surrounded by an oval-pointed mandorla of light emanating from Him in all directions. Sometimes a geometric figure with four, six, or eight angles is inscribed in the mandorla. His garments are white, with his right hand he blesses, and in his left hand, he holds a phylacter, a symbol of the Gospel. Although He shows Himself in divine glory, the attitude and expression of His face manifest calm and humility. On the peak to the right of Jesus is the Holy Prophet Elijah, and on the left stands Moses. Both are easily inclined to the Lord, with humility. [our translation] (Cavarinos 2005, 88)

Cavarinos notes the apostles in the foreground – beneath Christ and the two holy prophets – lying on the ground, blinded by the bright light of Christ's glory and astonished by the voice of the Father in heaven. In this icon, only Christ, Moses, and Elijah have haloes, as only they are saints at that moment. Moses and Elijah had attained holiness and thus were able to behold the divine glory without being blinded by it or falling to the ground. They stand in an attitude filled with peace, grace, and reverence (Cavarinos 2005, 88).

The apostles' positioning in the icon remains traditional and canonical, even though, over the centuries, certain exceptions to the rule have been recorded. Peter is shown on the right, John is placed centrally, and James is on the left. Their limited

number – only three – is also required by the Law of Moses for the public validation of a testimony. If Moses and Elijah symbolise the Realm of the Dead and Heaven, respectively, the disciples called by the Lord represent the living on earth, under divine providence (Muntean 2024).

As previously mentioned, the entire Trinity is revealed at the Transfiguration. While at the Baptism of the Lord the Holy Spirit appears as a dove, at the Transfiguration He is manifested as a luminous cloud (*nephele photine*). This cloud is not represented naturalistically, as a physical cloud, but as a geometric figure, bearing a variable number of angles: four, six, or eight. God the Father did not appear visibly, but was heard as a voice from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ The voice cannot be depicted in the art of the icon, but in some icons of the Baptism (as well as in the previously mentioned Byzantine illustration from the Homilies of St Gregory of Nazianzus, dedicated to Emperor Basil the Macedonian, held in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, cod. Gr. 510, fol. 75)^[10], the voice is represented as a blessing hand emerging from the heavenly vault (Cavarnos 2005, 90).

Raphael’s 1520 painting, ‘The Transfiguration,’ was considered the most famous painting until it was eclipsed by the Mona Lisa. Possibly the most renowned Western representation of the Transfiguration, the painting was commissioned by Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici in 1516 to adorn the cathedral in Narbonne. The painting proved to be a masterpiece and never reached its originally intended location, as it was retained by the Vatican, where it remains to this day. The painting combines the moment of the Transfiguration with the subsequent episode from the Gospel of Matthew: the healing of the lunatic boy.

We are led from the narrative of the clear and definitive culmination of the Law and the Prophets in the person of Jesus, to a scene of chaos and frustration in the story of the possessed child. Raphael links these two episodes in a remarkable manner. The lunatic boy (in the lower right of the painting) appears to see the risen, glorified Christ, unifying the composition through his gesture and through the gestures of the surrounding crowd. Amidst the chaos below, we are directed toward the eschatological hope we have in Christ^[11].

Unlike the gestures of the three disciples on Tabor – as depicted in Byzantine representations – Raphael’s gestures become dynamic, precipitate: their joy turns into fear, a consequence of man’s fall into sin. From the 14th century onwards, however,

humanist influence becomes increasingly evident within Byzantine culture, leaving its mark on Eastern Christian iconography.



Raphael, *The Transfiguration*, oil on canvas, 1516-1520, Pinacoteca Vaticana

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Transfiguration_Raphael.jpg

In the case of the icon of the Transfiguration, several secondary elements were gradually added, and a series of modifications reconfigured the original balance of the icon, in some cases leading to reinterpretations of the event represented.

The focus is shifted – anthropocentrically – towards the representation of psychological reactions, particularly the terror and fear that overwhelm the disciples. The approach to the theme of the Transfiguration is altered, reducing the profound significance of this biblical moment to the level of appearances. In this interpretation, the three Apostles are depicted with increasingly tense expressions, collapsing in fright on a slope, their faces covered by the divine light they are unable to endure. In this

context, the icon comes to be interpreted as a depiction of the apostles' emotional responses, with an emphasis on fear and confusion, thereby leading to a loss of focus on the spiritual dimension and the deep theological meanings it is meant to convey. This redirection of attention underscores a superficial visualization of an event imbued with glory, resulting in the loss of the richness and depth of the original message.



Ludovico Carracci, *The Transfiguration*, oil on canvas, 1595-1596, Bologna

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Transfiguration_by_Lodovico_Carracci.jpg)

File:Transfiguration_by_Lodovico_Carracci.jpg

The human figure is portrayed in this variant in the guise of the fallen condition, devoid of spiritual transfiguration. The distance between Christ and the Apostles who fall at the foot of the mountain increases ever more. The two Prophets are placed on

pedestals that are increasingly remote and distinct from that of the Saviour. Thus, a considerable distance is introduced between God and man.

In conclusion, the meanings of the miracle of the Lord's Transfiguration are inexhaustible theological depths: the theophany of the Holy Trinity, the deification of human nature in Christ, the revelation of Christ's glory as uncreated divine energy, the prefiguration of His Resurrection from the dead, the foretaste of human deification, and the anticipation of the Kingdom of God. Therefore, according to the tradition of Eastern Christianity, the realisation of the icon of the Lord's Transfiguration represents, for each iconographer, both the beginning and the measure of his spiritual and artistic perfection^[12].

Conclusion

This study has shown that the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor functions as a multifaceted theological and cultural node: exegetically it articulates Christ's identity as the visible locus of divine glory; patristically it becomes a primary locus for competing yet complementary readings of participation in uncreated light; and artistically it generates a sustained visual grammar (mandorla, Taboric light, prophetic witnesses) that shapes liturgical imagination and devotional practice.

Key conclusions are threefold. First, *kabod* / *dóxa* in the Transfiguration operates performatively: the visible radiance both discloses ontological truth (the Son's divinity and fulfilment of Law and Prophets) and issues a soteriological summons – linking revelation to vocation, the Cross, and the promise of deification. Second, reception history reveals a productive tension between Eastern experiential theology (hesychasm / Palamism), which affirms present participatory access to divine energies, and Western medieval and modern readings that emphasize pedagogical and eschatological anticipations of glory. Rather than mutually exclusive, these perspectives illuminate different theological registers – immediacy of experience versus teleology of consummation. Third, iconography is not merely illustrative but hermeneutical: image-types codify doctrinal claims, embody devotional pedagogy, and mediate communal participation in the mystery of glory.

Methodologically, the integrated exegetical–patristic–art-historical approach proved fruitful for tracing how textual motifs migrate into visual practice and how visual forms in turn shape theological reception. Limitations include the study's primary focus on canonical and major patristic witnesses and emblematic iconographic corpora;

regional and vernacular variations, as well as non-elite visual cultures, merit further attention.

Suggested directions for research: (1) comparative studies of vernacular and local Transfiguration imagery across Eastern and Western contexts; (2) reception-oriented work on liturgical enactments of Taboric motifs (processions, hymns, rites); (3) theological-anthropological inquiry into how uncreated-light language informs contemporary spiritual practice; and (4) digital mapping of iconographic variants to trace transmission networks. Altogether, the study argues that the Transfiguration remains an essential bridge between doctrine, mysticism, and visual culture – vital for understanding Christian conceptions of glory and participation in the divine life.

Notes

[1] In the opinion of Maximus the Confessor, the transfigured face of the Saviour, who shone brighter than the sun, indicates the inaccessibility that characterizes the Divine Being (Sf. Maxim Mărturisitorul 2009, 139. See Blowers 2016, 81–2).

[2] We also take this opportunity to recall an Isaiah prophecy concerning the last times, which announces that the Lord will be a light for His chosen ones. (Is 60:19) (Chirilă 2018, 166–85).

[3] Jesus' prayer is "the giver of divine illumination, for Christ is the true light, and He gives His grace and brightness to those who call upon Him." (Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog, PG 155,541-549).

[4] For when the mind is swallowed up by that unspeakable light, and reaches outside of what is, it abolishes the feeling of all relations, and darkens the senses themselves with the light of that power; or, conversely, it separates through light the mind from the senses and senses of relationships and makes it possessed by the divine eros, removing all the attachment that the mind has through the senses to the sensible. (Grigorie Sinaitul 2007, 21)

[5] St. Nikita Stethatos recounts one of his spiritual father's experiences, which closely resembles what happened on Tabor:

...overcome by a light coming from somewhere above, which envelops him with a radiance like the sun. [This light] penetrates his mind, subdues it, and causes him to feel boundless joy. [...] Then, while lying on the ground and shedding tears, an unprecedented miracle occurred: just at the moment when he was worshipping the Lord, behold, a luminous cloud appeared descending towards him, making him

feel his soul filled with joy, peace, and divine love, as the earthly burden of thoughts tied to bodily pleasures began to vanish (Nichita Stithatul 2003, 34–3).

[6] There [at Horeb, our emphasis] darkness was a symbol of light, and here [on Tabor, our emphasis] the cloud is a symbol of the Spirit's cloud; there fire was a symbol of purification; the trumpet was the loud voice of the Divine Word; and the thunder was a symbol of preaching; there were lightning bolts, here a divine radiance beyond the sun; the Law a foreshadowing of the Gospel. (Grigorie Sinaitul 2007, 20)

[7] St. Maximus the Confessor believes that Moses can be a model for Christians who want to see him by God (Louth 2004, 94–5).

[8] Icon painters use various methods to depict the uncreated light of divinity. The most common way to describe it is the halo surrounding Christ's body, with three concentric circles pierced by sharp golden or white rays. What, in fact, was seen by the three witnesses cannot be represented in the icon. Any artistic attempt to depict the event realistically or photographically will only serve to obscure it further.

[9] See details also in Chirilă 2019, 221–230.

[10] See Byzantine Manuscript, *Transfiguration*, Miniature – Cod. Gr. 510, page 75, ninth century, National Library of Paris, p. 149.

[11] Billy KANGAS, Raphael's Transfiguration: The Kingdom of God as Both now and not yet in Patheos, https://www.academia.edu/38954904/Raphaels_Transfiguration_The_Kingdom_of_God_as_Both_now_and_not_yet, 19 October 2014, accessed on 20 May 2025.

[12] Gina-Maria Pintilie, Mihail Stanciu, *Mărturiile Icoanei – Schimbarea La Față*, 12–4, <https://www.academia.edu/35056382/M%C4%82RTURIILE_ICOANEI_SCHIMBAREA_LA_FA%C8%9A%C4%82>, accessed on April 8, 2025.

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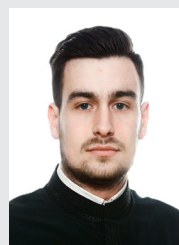
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THE SEMANTICS OF EVERLASTINGNESS IN SCRIPTURE: THE TERMS עולם, αἰώνιος, AND αἰδιος IN CONTEMPORARY ESCHATOLOGICAL DEBATES

Abstract

This article examines the semantic development of the terms עולם ('*olam*), αἰώνιος, and αἰδιος in the Old Testament, the Septuagint, and the New Testament, and evaluates their significance for contemporary eschatological debates. Attention is given to the relationship between the Hebrew concept of עולם and its Greek renderings, αἰώνιος and αἰδιος, highlighting both their continuities and semantic distinctions. The study argues that while these terms belong to a common vocabulary of permanence and transcendence, they cannot be treated as exact synonyms. Through a philological and exegetical analysis of key biblical texts, the article demonstrates that the language of everlastingness in Scripture is more nuanced than is often assumed in modern theological discussions. Finally, it explores how the interpretation of these terms continues to influence contemporary debates concerning eternal punishment, universal salvation, and the nature of eschatological fulfillment.



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Introduction

Few theological questions have generated more sustained debate in contemporary Christianity than the nature and duration of eschatological realities. Discussions concerning eternal punishment, universal salvation, final judgment, and the consummation of history frequently depend upon the interpretation of a small number of biblical terms traditionally translated as 'eternal,' 'everlasting,' or 'forever.' Among

these, the Hebrew עולם ('*olam*) and the Greek adjectives αἰώνιος and αἰδιος occupy a central position. Their meaning has become a focal point in contemporary theological controversies because differing interpretations often lead to markedly different conclusions regarding the final destiny of humanity.

The importance of these terms extends beyond lexical analysis. They belong to the fundamental vocabulary through which Scripture articulates divine permanence, covenantal faithfulness, eschatological hope, judgment, and salvation. Consequently, questions concerning their semantic range are not merely linguistic but also theological. Whether αἰώνιος should be understood primarily as denoting endless duration, participation in the age to come, or some combination of qualitative and temporal dimensions remains a matter of significant scholarly disagreement. Similar questions arise regarding the relationship between αἰώνιος and αἰδιος, particularly considering their differing patterns of usage within the Septuagint and the New Testament.

Modern discussions often approach these terms through the lens of later theological debates, sometimes if they possess fixed and self-evident meanings. Yet the history of biblical language suggests a more complex picture. The Hebrew concept of עולם developed within the historical and covenantal framework of Israel's faith, while its Greek renderings emerged within a linguistic environment shaped by both Jewish tradition and Hellenistic culture. As a result, the semantic development of these terms reflects a dynamic interaction between language, theology, and historical context.

This study examines the semantic relationship between עולם, αἰώνιος, and αἰδιος across the Old Testament, the Septuagint, and the New Testament. Attention is given to the continuity and transformation of meaning that occurred during the transition from Hebrew to Greek. The article further explores the significance of these developments for contemporary eschatological debates, especially those concerning eternal punishment and universal salvation.

The central argument advanced here is that while עולם, αἰώνιος, and αἰδιος belong to a common semantic field associated with permanence and transcendence, they cannot be treated as exact synonyms. Their meanings are shaped by literary, historical, and theological contexts, and therefore resist reduction to a single definition of eternity. A careful examination of their usage reveals a richer and more nuanced biblical vocabulary of everlastingness than is often assumed in modern theological discourse.

The Meaning of עולם in the Old Testament

Any discussion concerning the biblical concept of everlastingness must begin with the Hebrew term עולם, which constitutes the primary Old Testament expression used to describe permanence, continuity, antiquity, and future duration. The importance of the term extends beyond lexical considerations, for it provided the semantic foundation upon which the Septuagint translators and later New Testament authors built their understanding of eschatological realities. Consequently, contemporary debates concerning αἰώνιος and αἰδιος cannot be adequately understood apart from the Old Testament background of עולם.

Scholars have long recognized that עולם possesses a remarkably broad semantic range. Unlike later philosophical notions of eternity, the term does not primarily denote timeless existence or metaphysical infinity. Rather, it frequently refers to a duration whose limits are hidden from ordinary human perception. Ernst Jenni observes that the concept often points toward a temporal horizon extending beyond immediate experience, whether into the distant past or the indefinite future (Jenni 1997, 1076). The word therefore functions less as a technical definition of eternity and more as a description of realities whose temporal boundaries remain inaccessible or undefined.

This semantic flexibility is evident in the diverse contexts in which the term appears throughout the Hebrew Bible. In certain passages, עולם refers to remote antiquity. Deuteronomy 32:7 exhorts Israel to remember ‘the days of old’ (יָמֵי עוֹלָם), while Isaiah speaks of events occurring in former generations (Is 63:9–11). In such cases, the term clearly designates a distant historical past rather than eternity in the strict sense. The emphasis falls upon remoteness and continuity rather than upon infinite duration (Harris, Archer, and Waltke 1980, 672–3).

In other contexts, עולם points toward an indefinite future. One of the most frequently cited examples appears in Exodus 21:6, where a servant who voluntarily chooses to remain with his master is said to serve him לְעוֹלָם (‘forever’). Few interpreters understand this expression as implying endless existence. Rather, the phrase denotes permanence within the framework of the servant’s earthly life. The passage illustrates the contextual flexibility of the term and cautions against assigning a uniform meaning to every occurrence of עולם.

A similar observation may be made regarding cultic and legal institutions described as perpetual. Numerous ordinances within the Pentateuch are designated as

חֻקַּת עוֹלָם ('an everlasting statute'), including Passover observance (Ex 12:14), priestly functions (Ex 40:15), and various sacrificial regulations (Lv 16:34). From the perspective of later biblical developments, many of these institutions underwent transformation or fulfillment. Consequently, the designation עוֹלָם cannot automatically signify immutable perpetuity in every context. Instead, it frequently denotes enduring validity within the covenantal order established by God (Botterweck and Ringgren 1999, 545).

Particularly significant for the present study is the use of עוֹלָם in covenantal language. In Genesis 17:7, God promises Abraham: "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant" (בְּרִית עוֹלָם). Here the emphasis falls not merely upon duration but upon divine faithfulness and reliability. The covenant is everlasting because it remains grounded in God's enduring commitment rather than because the text seeks to define a precise temporal category.

The theological dimension of עוֹלָם becomes even more evident in the Psalms. Psalm 90:2 declares:

'From everlasting to everlasting you are God' (מִעוֹלָם וְעַד-עוֹלָם אַתָּה אֱלֹהִים).

This expression approaches what later theology would describe as divine eternity. Yet even here the language remains poetic and relational rather than philosophical. The psalmist does not construct an abstract doctrine of timelessness; instead, he emphasizes God's transcendence over human mortality and historical change. Divine permanence is expressed through the language of immeasurable duration rather than through metaphysical speculation (Mays 1994, 289–290).

The prophetic literature further expands the semantic range of the term. Isaiah 45:17 proclaims:

'Israel is saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation' (תְּשׁוּעַת עוֹלָמִים).

The focus of the passage is not upon temporal measurement but upon the irrevocable character of God's redemptive action. The salvation promised by God is enduring, reliable, and beyond reversal. The theological force of the expression derives from divine faithfulness rather than from an explicit theory of eternity (Oswalt 1998, 211–2).

Perhaps the most important Old Testament text for subsequent eschatological debates is Daniel 12:2:

“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life (עולם לְחַיִּי), and some to shame and everlasting contempt (לְחַרְפּוֹת לְדָרְאוֹן עוֹלָם).”

This passage is significant for several reasons. First, it represents one of the clearest Old Testament references to resurrection and final judgment. Second, it places the destinies of the righteous and the wicked in parallel structures that would later influence New Testament eschatological language. Third, both ‘life’ and ‘contempt’ are qualified by עולם, thereby raising questions concerning the precise meaning of the term within an explicitly eschatological context.

Traditional interpreters have often understood the passage as teaching endless reward and endless punishment. Yet the text itself employs the same vocabulary already encountered elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures. Consequently, the meaning of עולם in Daniel cannot simply be assumed to differ from its broader Old Testament usage. Rather, the passage illustrates how the term could function within an eschatological framework while retaining the semantic flexibility characteristic of biblical Hebrew (Collins 1993, 398).

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that עולם cannot be reduced to a single lexical definition. Depending upon context, it may denote remote antiquity, enduring validity, covenantal permanence, divine transcendence, or eschatological destiny. The unifying feature is not necessarily endless duration but the notion of a reality extending beyond ordinary human horizons. The term therefore belongs primarily to the theological language of permanence and continuity rather than to the philosophical language of infinity.

This conclusion is of fundamental importance for the present study. When Jewish translators rendered עולם into Greek, they were not translating a technical concept of metaphysical eternity. Instead, they sought to express a rich and multifaceted Hebrew understanding of duration, permanence, and divine faithfulness. Their choice of αἰών and αἰώνιος would profoundly influence the language of the Septuagint, the New Testament, and the subsequent history of Christian theology. The transition from עולם to αἰώνιος therefore marks one of the most significant developments in the biblical vocabulary of everlastingness.

From עולם to αἰώνιος and αἰδιος: The Septuagint Background

The translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek marked a decisive stage in the development of biblical language. The Septuagint did not merely transfer words from one language to another; it also mediated theological concepts between two distinct cultural worlds. As Jewish translators sought to render Hebrew notions into Greek, they faced the challenge of expressing concepts that had developed within the historical and covenantal framework of Israel's faith by means of a language shaped by centuries of philosophical reflection. The translation of עולם constitutes one of the most important examples of this process.

The evidence of the Septuagint demonstrates that the translators overwhelmingly preferred αἰών and αἰώνιος as equivalents for עולם. This preference is visible throughout the Greek Old Testament and would later shape the theological vocabulary of the New Testament. Rather than introducing a new terminology derived from Greek philosophical discourse, the translators selected terms that were sufficiently flexible to preserve the semantic breadth of the Hebrew original (Tov 1999, 187–8).

The noun αἰών possessed a long history within Greek literature. In Homeric texts it often referred to life or lifetime, while later authors employed it to denote an age, epoch, generation, or world-order. By the Hellenistic period, the term had acquired a broad semantic range encompassing both temporal duration and cosmic structure (Liddell and Scott 1996, 45–6). Such flexibility made αἰών particularly suitable as a translation of עולם, which itself lacked a narrowly defined meaning.

The adjective αἰώνιος inherited this semantic diversity. In the Septuagint it regularly appears in contexts involving covenants, statutes, priesthoods, and divine promises. For example, the 'everlasting covenant' of Genesis 17:7 becomes διαθήκη αἰώνιος, while the priesthood of Aaron is similarly described through αἰώνιος language (Hatch and Redpath 1954, 53). These examples demonstrate that the translators regarded αἰώνιος as an adequate equivalent for the Hebrew concept of enduring covenantal permanence.

The significance of this translational choice becomes apparent when one considers that many realities designated as αἰώνιος in the Septuagint are not necessarily eternal in the philosophical sense. The Levitical priesthood, sacrificial regulations, and cultic institutions all receive the designation αἰώνιος despite belonging to historical structures that later biblical tradition understood as transformed or fulfilled. Consequently, the adjective cannot automatically be interpreted as denoting absolute and endless duration

in every instance. Rather, it frequently signifies enduring validity within the framework of God's covenantal economy (Silva 1994, 96).

Equally important is the relative absence of *αἰδιος* from the Septuagint. The adjective was well known in Greek philosophical literature and commonly expressed notions of permanence, necessity, and eternity. Plato and Aristotle employed it to describe realities that exist perpetually and independently of temporal change. Yet despite its availability, the Septuagint translators rarely used the term (Ramelli and Konstan 2007, 68–9).

This phenomenon has generated considerable scholarly discussion. One explanation is that the translators sought to preserve the historical orientation of biblical thought. Whereas Greek philosophical traditions frequently distinguished between temporal and eternal modes of existence, the Hebrew Scriptures generally expressed permanence through relational and covenantal categories. God's faithfulness, kingship, mercy, and covenant endure through history rather than existing outside it. In such a context, *αἰώνιος* proved a more suitable vehicle than *αἰδιος* for communicating biblical ideas of permanence (Rösel 2008, 132).

The contrast may be illustrated through the designation of God Himself. In Genesis 21:33, Abraham invokes the Lord as אֱלֹהֵינוּ (‘the everlasting God’). The Septuagint renders this expression as *θεὸς αἰώνιος* rather than *θεὸς αἰδιος*. The translators evidently considered *αἰώνιος* fully capable of expressing divine permanence without resorting to the more philosophically charged vocabulary of *αἰδιος*. This choice suggests that *αἰώνιος* had already become the standard medium through which biblical notions of permanence were communicated in Greek.

Particularly influential was the repeated use of formulae such as *εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα* (‘forever’) and *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων* (‘unto the ages of ages’). These expressions became deeply embedded within Jewish liturgical language and later entered Christian worship. Their structure reflects a Semitic pattern of intensification rather than a philosophical definition of eternity. The emphasis lies upon permanence and continuity rather than abstract speculation concerning infinite duration (Louw and Nida 1989, 673–4).

The importance of the Septuagint for subsequent Christian theology can scarcely be overstated. The New Testament writers inherited not only individual words but an entire semantic framework. When they spoke of *ζωὴ αἰώνιος*, *κρίσις αἰώνιος*, or *βασιλεία αἰώνιος*, they did so within a linguistic tradition already shaped by centuries of Jewish

interpretation. Consequently, the meaning of *αἰώνιος* in the New Testament cannot be separated from its Septuagintal background.

This observation is particularly relevant to contemporary eschatological debates. Modern discussions often assume that *αἰώνιος* necessarily signifies endless duration because it is commonly translated as ‘eternal.’ Yet the evidence of the Septuagint demonstrates that the adjective functioned within a broader semantic environment shaped by the Hebrew concept of עולם. While this does not exclude the possibility that *αἰώνιος* may denote everlasting duration in specific contexts, it does caution against assuming such a meaning without careful contextual analysis.

The Septuagint therefore occupies a crucial mediating position between the Old and New Testaments. It preserves the semantic flexibility of עולם while simultaneously providing the vocabulary through which early Christianity articulated its understanding of salvation, judgment, and the age to come. The translators’ consistent preference for *αἰώνιος* and their corresponding avoidance of αἰδιος represent important evidence for understanding the development of biblical language concerning everlastingness.

By the time the New Testament was written, *αἰώνιος* had already become the established term for expressing many of the realities associated with God’s redemptive activity. The theological significance of this development would become fully apparent in the writings of the New Testament authors, who employed *αἰώνιος* extensively while using αἰδιος only sparingly. The reasons for this pattern, and its implications for contemporary eschatological interpretation, form the subject of the next section.

Αἰώνιος and αἰδιος in the New Testament: Semantic Distinctions and Eschatological Implications

The New Testament represents the culmination of the semantic trajectory that began with the Hebrew concept of עולם and continued through its translation into Greek by the Septuagint. Within this corpus, *αἰώνιος* emerges as the dominant adjective used to describe eschatological realities, while αἰδιος appears only rarely. This asymmetry has become a focal point in contemporary discussions concerning eternal punishment, universal salvation, and the nature of the age to come.

The adjective *αἰώνιος* occurs more than seventy times in the New Testament and is associated with a wide range of theological realities, including life, salvation, redemption, judgment, glory, and the kingdom of God (Bauer et al. 2000, 32–3).

Such diversity suggests that the term functions as a central category within New Testament theology rather than as a narrowly defined expression of temporal duration.

Perhaps the most influential occurrence of *αἰώνιος* appears in Matthew 25:46:

“And these will go away into eternal punishment (*κόλασιν αἰώνιον*), but the righteous into eternal life (*ζωὴν αἰώνιον*)”.

This verse occupies a pivotal position in Christian eschatology because it places punishment and life in direct parallel. Traditional interpreters have argued that the identical adjective applied to both realities implies an identical duration. If eternal life is understood as endless, then eternal punishment must likewise be endless (Morris 1965, 165; Peterson 1995, 68–79).

The strength of this argument should not be underestimated. The literary structure of the verse clearly links the destinies of the righteous and the wicked through a shared vocabulary. For many theologians, this parallelism has provided one of the strongest biblical foundations for the doctrine of eternal punishment.

At the same time, other scholars have noted that the adjective itself does not independently resolve the question. Because *αἰώνιος* derives from *αἰών* and possesses a semantic history shaped by the Hebrew concept of *עולם*, its meaning may involve qualitative as well as quantitative dimensions. According to this interpretation, *αἰώνιος* designates realities belonging to the age to come rather than specifying their duration in isolation from context (Ramelli 2013, 50).

This broader understanding finds support in other New Testament passages. In the Gospel of John, eternal life is not presented merely as a future reward but as a present participation in divine communion. Jesus declares:

“Whoever believes has eternal life.” (Jn 6:47)

The believer already possesses *ζωὴ αἰώνιος* in the present. Consequently, the expression cannot refer solely to endless future duration. Rather, it describes a mode of life characterized by communion with God and participation in the realities of the coming age (Ladd 1993, 568).

A similar pattern appears in Hebrews. Christ is said to have obtained ‘eternal redemption’ (*αἰωνίαν λύτρωσιν*) (Heb 9:12) and to be the source of ‘eternal salvation’ (*σωτηρίας αἰωνίου*) (Heb 5:9). In neither case does the adjective merely indicate duration. Instead, it emphasizes the enduring efficacy and definitive character of God’s redemptive action. The adjective therefore functions as a theological qualifier rather than a simple chronological marker (Bruce 1990, 207).

The semantic flexibility of *αἰώνιος* does not mean that the term excludes permanence. Rather, it suggests that permanence is expressed within a broader theological framework connected to God's eschatological purposes. The adjective may simultaneously imply duration, quality, and participation in the divine age.

The situation becomes particularly interesting when one turns to *αἰδίδιος*. Unlike *αἰώνιος*, this adjective appears only twice in the New Testament. The first occurrence is found in Romans 1:20:

"His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived."

Here Paul describes God's power as *αἰδίδιος*. The context concerns divine attributes revealed through creation and therefore addresses realities understood to transcend the temporal order. The adjective functions as a designation of permanence and transcendence associated directly with God's nature (Cranfield 1975, 123–4).

The second occurrence appears in Jude 6:

"The angels who did not keep their own position... he has kept in eternal chains (*δεσμοῖς αἰδίδιαις*) under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day".

In this passage, *αἰδίδιος* modifies chains associated with divine judgment. Significantly, the author does not employ *αἰώνιος* but instead chooses *αἰδίδιος*, the less common term. Although the precise significance of this choice remains debated, it demonstrates that both adjectives were available within the New Testament vocabulary and that the authors did not regard them as entirely interchangeable (Bauckham 1990, 55–56).

The coexistence of *αἰώνιος* and *αἰδίδιος* within the same corpus has generated considerable scholarly discussion. Some interpreters argue that *αἰδίδιος* expresses a stronger notion of absolute permanence than *αἰώνιος*. Because Greek philosophical literature frequently used *αἰδίδιος* to describe eternal realities in the strictest sense, its appearance in the New Testament has been viewed by some as evidence that the authors possessed a more precise term for expressing absolute eternity (Ramelli and Konstan 2007, 69).

Others remain cautious regarding such conclusions. They emphasize that meaning is determined by usage rather than by etymology or philosophical background alone. The fact that *αἰδίδιος* exists does not necessarily imply that *αἰώνιος* excludes endless duration. Language often contains multiple terms with overlapping semantic fields, and the presence of one word does not automatically restrict the meaning of another (Silva 1994, 138).

Nevertheless, the distinction remains significant. The New Testament writers overwhelmingly preferred *αἰώνιος* when speaking about life, judgment, salvation, punishment, and the kingdom of God. The consistent use of *αἰώνιος* in these contexts reflects continuity with the Septuagint and, ultimately, with the Hebrew concept of *עולם*. The biblical language of everlastingness therefore remains deeply rooted in the historical and covenantal worldview of Scripture.

From a methodological perspective, two conclusions emerge. First, *αἰώνιος* cannot simply be reduced to the philosophical notion of timeless eternity. Its semantic history reveals a broader range of meanings connected to age, permanence, divine purpose, and eschatological fulfillment. Second, the existence and limited use of *αἰδιος* indicate that New Testament Greek possessed more than one way of expressing permanence and eternity. The relationship between the two adjectives is therefore more complex than many translations suggest.

The New Testament evidence does not by itself settle debates concerning eternal punishment or universal salvation. It does, however, demonstrate that biblical language concerning everlastingness is more nuanced than is often assumed. The interpretation of *αἰώνιος* and *αἰδιος* must therefore proceed not only from lexical analysis but also from careful attention to literary context, theological purpose, and the broader scriptural narrative.

Contemporary Eschatological Debates

The semantic relationship between *עולם*, *αἰώνιος*, and *αἰδιος* has become increasingly important in contemporary theological discussions concerning eternal punishment, universal salvation, and the final destiny of creation. Although these debates often involve broader questions of divine justice, human freedom, and the nature of redemption, the interpretation of biblical language remains a central point of contention.

Traditional defenders of eternal punishment generally maintain that *αἰώνιος*, when used in eschatological contexts, denotes endless duration. According to this view, the adjective functions as the ordinary New Testament term for eternity and should therefore be understood consistently when describing both eternal life and eternal punishment. The parallelism of Matthew 25:46 is frequently cited as decisive evidence. Since the same adjective modifies both life and punishment, it is argued that the two

realities must possess the same temporal character (Morris 1965, 165; Peterson 1995, 79).

This interpretation is also supported by broader theological considerations. Scholars such as Robert Peterson and Michael McClymond argue that the doctrine of final judgment cannot be determined by lexical analysis alone but must be interpreted within the wider framework of biblical theology. From this perspective, the permanence of judgment is rooted not merely in the meaning of αἰώνιος but in the overall witness of Scripture concerning human responsibility, divine justice, and the consequences of rejecting God's grace (McClymond 2018, 511–2).

In contrast, several contemporary scholars have questioned whether αἰώνιος necessarily implies endless duration in every eschatological context. Their arguments frequently begin with the observation that the adjective derives from αἰών and emerged within the semantic environment of the Hebrew עולם. Consequently, they contend that αἰώνιος may sometimes denote what belongs to an age or to the age to come rather than what is infinite in a strictly temporal sense.

Among the most influential proponents of this position is Ilaria Ramelli, whose extensive research on the history of the doctrine of *apokatastasis* has drawn renewed attention to the semantic distinction between αἰώνιος and αἰδιος. Ramelli argues that the two terms should not be treated as exact synonyms and that the predominance of αἰώνιος in biblical eschatology leaves room for interpretations that emphasize the qualitative and age-related dimensions of the term (Ramelli 2013, 50).

A similar perspective appears in the work of David Bentley Hart. While acknowledging the complexity of the biblical evidence, Hart argues that many modern translations obscure important distinctions present in the original languages. In his view, αἰώνιος is more accurately understood as referring to realities associated with the age to come than as a straightforward equivalent of the modern concept of endless duration (Hart 2019, 79).

Thomas Talbott likewise maintains that the semantic flexibility of αἰώνιος should caution interpreters against drawing dogmatic conclusions solely from lexical considerations. According to Talbott, the New Testament language of judgment may be compatible with a broader vision of divine restoration than is often assumed within traditional accounts of eternal punishment (Talbott 2014, 170).

Despite their differences, both traditional and revisionist approaches face important methodological challenges. One of the most significant is the danger of

lexical reductionism, the assumption that theological questions can be resolved through the analysis of individual words alone. Modern linguistic scholarship has repeatedly demonstrated that meaning arises from context, usage, and discourse rather than from etymology in isolation (Barr 1961, 262; Silva 1994, 138).

This observation is particularly relevant to the interpretation of αἰώνιος. Even if the adjective originally referred to what belongs to an αἰών, its meaning in a specific passage must be determined by contextual factors. Likewise, the existence of αἰδιος as a distinct term does not automatically imply that αἰώνιος excludes the notion of permanence. The semantic relationship between the two adjectives is more complex than a simple opposition between ‘temporary’ and ‘eternal.’

The contemporary debate therefore reveals both the importance and the limitations of lexical evidence. On the one hand, the study of עולם, αἰώνιος, and αἰδιος has exposed assumptions that have often gone unquestioned within theological discourse. On the other hand, the interpretation of eschatological texts ultimately requires engagement with broader biblical, historical, and theological considerations.

What remains clear is that the biblical vocabulary of everlastingness cannot be reduced to a single concept of eternity. The linguistic evidence points instead to a rich and multifaceted tradition in which permanence, divine faithfulness, eschatological fulfillment, and transcendence are expressed through a variety of interconnected terms. Contemporary discussions concerning judgment and salvation continue to draw upon this vocabulary, demonstrating its enduring significance for Christian theology.

Conclusion

The present study has examined the semantic development of the terms עולם, αἰώνιος, and αἰδιος from the Old Testament through the Septuagint and the New Testament, as well as their significance in contemporary eschatological discussions. The evidence demonstrates that these terms belong to a common semantic field concerned with permanence, continuity, and transcendence, yet they cannot be treated as exact synonyms.

The analysis of עולם reveals that the Hebrew Bible employs the term with considerable flexibility. Depending on context, it may refer to remote antiquity, an indefinite future, covenantal permanence, divine faithfulness, or eschatological destiny. While certain passages approach the notion of eternity, the term itself does

not consistently denote metaphysical infinity. Instead, it frequently expresses realities whose temporal limits lie beyond ordinary human perception.

The Septuagint largely preserved this semantic flexibility by translating עולם through αἰών and αἰώνιος. The translators consistently preferred this vocabulary and rarely employed αἰδίοις, despite its availability within the Greek language. This preference suggests a desire to preserve the historical and covenantal character of biblical thought rather than to adopt the more abstract language of Greek metaphysics.

Within the New Testament, αἰώνιος became the dominant adjective used to describe eschatological realities such as life, salvation, judgment, and punishment. At the same time, the limited but significant use of αἰδίοις indicates that early Christian authors possessed more than one linguistic resource for expressing permanence and eternity. Although the semantic fields of αἰώνιος and αἰδίοις overlap, the evidence suggests that they are not entirely interchangeable and that their distinctions deserve greater attention within biblical scholarship.

The study has also shown that contemporary debates concerning eternal punishment and universal salvation frequently depend upon assumptions regarding the meaning of these terms. Nevertheless, lexical analysis alone cannot resolve such theological controversies. Words derive their meaning from literary, historical, and theological contexts, and therefore must be interpreted within the broader framework of Scripture as a whole.

Ultimately, the significance of עולם, αἰώνιος, and αἰδίοις lies not merely in their contribution to discussions of duration or eternity, but in the way they express the biblical understanding of God's enduring relationship with creation. A careful examination of these terms reveals a richer and more nuanced vocabulary of everlastingness than is often reflected in modern translations. Recognizing this complexity contributes to a more precise understanding of biblical eschatology and provides a firmer foundation for ongoing theological reflection on judgment, salvation, and the consummation of history.

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THE MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE – COMMUNION, CREATION AND FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST

Abstract

This study explores the Mystery of Marriage as a dynamic reality of communion, creation, and fulfillment in Christ. Grounded in the divine model of Trinitarian love, marriage is presented as a sacred union that transfigures human relationships and reveals their ultimate meaning in God. The work examines marriage as an icon of the mystical union between the soul and God, as well as a manifestation of Trinitarian communion within human existence. It highlights the Christian family as the ‘church at home,’ the primary space where loneliness is overcome, and personal identity is fulfilled through love and selfgiving. The study also analyses the family as a place of creative love and the realization of human vocation, while addressing the contemporary crisis of divorce as a rupture of communion and a distortion of the family’s spiritual calling. The conclusions affirm that Christian marriage is not merely a social institution but a path to holiness, mutual sacrifice, and cooperation with God, where love becomes incarnate and fruitful in the life of the family.



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Introduction

Conjugal communion finds its ultimate foundation in the divine reality. In family life, Christ – true God and true Man – becomes the bridge. Through Him, the grace, uncreated energies, and eternal love of the Holy Trinity are imparted to the spouses. Christ unites the Christian family with the ‘divine family’ of the Trinitarian Persons (Galeriu 1960, 485). He reveals that true communion has its source in God. Human life is born of love. The wedding symbolizes, both theologically and symbolically, humanity’s first great celebration. In the Mystery of Marriage, creation is celebrated and renewed. The love between husband and wife becomes an icon of God’s creative love (Galeriu 1960, 484). The great wonder of existence lies in this: God made ‘two from one’ and the two, through love, remain a mysterious unity. This “one” does not annul the persons but fulfills them in communion.

If there is anything that must be restored in the world before all else, it is love – the deep communion and authentic communication between the spouses who form the family. Without this communion, society itself loses its foundation. Human history begins in the family, through the creation and blessing of the first humans, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden. It also finds its eschatological fulfillment in the mystical wedding between Christ – the ‘Unwedded Bridegroom’ and the Church – the ‘Unwedded Bride’ (Apoc 19:7; 21:2,9). Thus, marriage is not merely a social contract or a natural institution, but a sacred reality, a Mystery of the Church.

At first glance, defining marriage as a Mystery may seem inappropriate, given that it is practiced equally by believers and non-believers, by people who neither know nor assume its spiritual dimension. Yet, in the Orthodox perspective, the Mystery of Marriage is not reduced to simple cohabitation; it reveals the profound meaning of the union between man and woman: participation in God’s love and in His work of sanctifying the world.

Marriage – Icon of the Mystical Union Between the Soul and God

The spiritual content of Marriage as a Mystery presupposes a profound understanding of the human being: he is not merely a biological, psychological, or social entity, but a citizen of the Kingdom of God, called to live every moment of his existence – especially decisive moments – In the light of eternal values and in the presence of God Himself. The purpose of the Mystery of Marriage is the free and responsible union of

two persons in real cooperation with divine grace, so that their communion becomes a threefold communion: husband, wife, and Christ.

In the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, Saint Paul offers the Christian interpretation of marriage, distinct from the utilitarian Jewish perspective or Roman legalism: “This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the Church” (Eph 5:32). The Apostle shows that husband and wife are called to transfigure their human agreement into a reality of the Kingdom, assuming the responsibility of transforming their love into an icon of the love between Christ and the Church. At the same time, the New Testament does not negate human responsibilities toward the world and society; rather, “true Christianity never calls for a denial of the world” (Meyendorff 2007, 19), but for its transformation.

In Christian understanding, the family is inseparable from marriage – more precisely, from marriage as a Mystery. The first communion instituted by God was the family, and the founding of a family presupposes “the association of two free beings to live together and to share all things” (Macariopolsky 1967, 232). The Mystery of Marriage, which in antiquity was closely united with the Holy Eucharist, is not merely a blessing of the union between man and woman, but the integration of this union into life in Christ. In the early centuries, weddings were celebrated within the Divine Liturgy and concluded with the spouses receiving Holy Communion, for – as St. Symeon of Thessalonica affirms – “the end of every church service and the seal of every divine Mystery is Holy Communion”^[1]. Thus, the Mystery of Marriage does not merely sanctify a natural phenomenon but elevates it, orienting it toward the Kingdom of God^[2].

Since the Resurrection of the Lord, love acts in the world as a divine force: creative, illuminating, purifying, and sanctifying. It generates truth, fidelity, joy, and justice. Yet, in the same history, the irrational forces of disordered eroticism also act, distorting human freedom and endangering marriage and family.

Contemporary society has profoundly altered the meaning of marriage and family. We live in an age in which people speak of ‘trial marriages,’ ‘unions between persons of the same sex,’ and, within families, many acts undermine stability: abortion, divorce, cohabitation, abandonment of children, and the relentless pursuit of pleasure. All these are deep wounds of the Christian family and of society. The departure from Christian values – love, humility, self-denial, and the spirit of sacrifice – inevitably leads to individualism and selfishness, which in turn cause the breakdown of marriages, the

disappearance of family life, and an increasingly acute social and psychological crisis. A person who distances himself from the God of love can no longer love his neighbour.

Given these realities and challenges, a deeper understanding of the Mystery of Marriage and a reflection on the role of the Christian family in contemporary society are necessary to rediscover the authentic meaning of conjugal communion and its vocation in God's plan.

Marriage – A Manifestation of Trinitarian Communion in Human Existence

From a Christian perspective, God is not an impersonal monad, but a Trinity of Persons united in love. A single divine Person could not fully express the dynamic of selfgiving and communion; without this reciprocal giving, we could not speak of a God of love. Love, in its essence, is always relational and trinitarian: “we love through God, the essence, source, and model of love” (Galeriu 1960, 486). Christian marriage, therefore, finds its foundation in Trinitarian communion, which becomes the supreme model of the union between husband and wife. In God, love and life are inseparable; likewise, in marriage, conjugal love and openness to the gift of children form an organic unity. God, unceasing and eternal love, is a Trinity of Persons who give themselves to one another and to the world. Thus, in marriage, we encounter not only the distinction of persons but also their profound unity. The divine Persons share the same nature, each containing the other two in perfect communion, the ‘circuit of intradivine love’ (Moldovan 2014, 22).

Holy Scripture presents the first human couple as the ‘image of God’: “And God made man in His image... male and female He made them” (Gn 1:27). The Church Fathers unanimously affirm that the ‘image of God’ does not refer merely to human nature, but to the human person, who encompasses in a unified manner both soul and body. The distinction between nature and person – essential in Christian theology – reflects the way God reveals Himself: “One in essence and three in Persons.” Thus, God is not an impersonal Essence or a primordial cause devoid of consciousness, but a hypostatic Trinity, a personal communion of love (Popa 1995, 147). The image of God in the human being is not a merit acquired through virtue, nor is it lost through sin; it is an ontological given, “a reality eternally inscribed in the structure of the human being” (Scrima 2005, 58), “an inalienable and indestructible attribute of human nature” (Ozolin 1998, 31). Man was created out of God's love to participate in God's personal mode of existence, in the freedom of love that constitutes true life (Pop 2001, 31).

The ontological unity of humanity does not annul the plurality of persons, just as plurality does not destroy the unity of nature. Precisely based on this unity, the relationship between spouses becomes a true communion, “a participation of one in the life of the other, a perception of the other in his or her intimate particularity” (Moldovan 2014, 23). Reflecting the unity of the Trinity, marriage becomes the most complete image of God in the world. Through the Mystery of Marriage, “the spouses share in one another’s gifts and virtues” (Clément 1996, 75), according to the Apostle’s words: “the unbelieving husband is sanctified through the believing wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through the believing husband” (1 Cor 7:14). As a bond accomplished by Christ through the priest, Marriage seals the union of man and woman in peace, wisdom, love, and holiness. They no longer appear as two separate individuals, but as a copersonal unity in which each discovers himself or herself through the other. The man acquires a new ‘self’ through the woman, and the woman a new ‘self’ through the man. They become ‘one flesh’ (Gn 2:24; Eph 5:31), completing one another.

The Church urges the husband to love his wife with the love he shows to Christ.

In marriage, the third between husband and wife is God, is Christ, and we must always have Him as the icon of love, that we may love as He loved us – with divine love. An ancient catacomb painting depicting the mystery of marriage shows Christ standing between the spouses, with His hands upon their heads, blessing and uniting them. (Galeriu 1960, 486)

Only in this light can the husband understand that his wife is not an object of pleasure, but a person in whom Christ dwells; and the wife, in turn, can help her husband grow in spiritual love, making Christ ever more present in their relationship. “Love grows from mutual responsibility, and responsibility grows from love” (Stăniloae 1978, 193-4). As each discovers the depth of the other, Christ becomes increasingly transparent in their life, guaranteeing the eternal value of each person.

Like all the Holy Mysteries, Marriage requires a continual cultivation of the grace received. Conjugal intimacy and communion with Christ are not obtained automatically, but through constant mutual sacrifice and the offering of both spouses to Christ. “The life of spouses is a continual sacrifice and resurrection, a continual overcoming of egoism for a full life in communion” (Stăniloae 1956, 204). Conjugal love is, by its very nature, sacrificial love. The grace of Marriage is God’s primordial gift to humanity, the

foundation of the love between spouses. It gives rise to free and conscious responsibility, calling them to perfection in love, to likeness with God. True conjugal selfgiving is fulfilled at the convergence of love and life, where grace transfigures everything.

United by Christ and in Christ, spouses are called to remain in Him through all that they accomplish. The Mystery of Marriage implies the transfiguration of bodily love into a perfected spiritual love. In communion with Christ, the spouses discover the inestimable value of the other and the power of grace that strengthens their love.

Every grace, in its fullness, stands at the end of a sacrifice. Spouses receive it when they commit themselves, in their sacerdotal dignity, to stand before the heavenly Father and offer Him in Christ the sacrifice, the ‘rational offering’ of their entire conjugal life. The grace of the wife’s sacerdotal service shapes and forms the conjugal being after the image of the Church. (Evdokimov 1994, 137)

Through Marriage, man and woman are no longer two distinct entities, but a copersonal unity (Stăniloae 1978, 190) in which each discovers his or her mystery through the other^[3]. Each carries the mystery of the other as his or her own, and love draws them closer in this intimacy. A human being can be fulfilled only through another person like himself, who stands before him as a unique and original face. “This face is always a cathedral, not a collection of stones” (Moldovan 2014, 23).

The Christian Family – ‘The Church at Home’

Family Communion – The Antidote to Loneliness and the Space of Personal Fulfillment

Within the family, man and woman offer themselves to one another in virtue of the image of God that each bear. This selfgiving is not a simple natural act, but a true spiritual art, comparable to iconography: just as the icon transfigures matter to make it transparent to divine light, so conjugal love transfigures persons, enabling them to see one another as manifestations of God’s love. It is no coincidence that St. Paul places his teaching on marriage within the context of ecclesiology, calling the family ‘the Church in their house’ (Rom 16:5). In the same spirit, St. John Chrysostom calls the family ‘the little Church’ (ἐκκλησία μικρά) (Evdokimov 1994, 135), emphasizing its sacred character and communal vocation.

The familial bond between man and woman mirrors the mystical union between Christ and the Church. Continuing Saint Paul's interpretation – who says that “Adam is a type of the One who was to come” (Rom 5:14) – the Church Fathers develop the idea that Eve prefigures the Church; just as Eve was fashioned from Adam's side, so the Church was born from the side of Christ. This image shows how spouses, themselves embraced within the union of Christ and the Church, are united in Christ when they marry. Extending the union of Christ and the Church in a particular form and for a specific purpose, they reproduce it in their own way and collaborate in its mission. Their union with each other is therefore grounded in their mutual union with Christ. Like a branch of a tree, it is at once an extension, an image, and an organ (Radu 1978, 313).

In this sense, the family is the first and smallest cell of the social organism, but also a ‘miniature church’ within the larger ecclesial community. It is founded through the Mystery of Marriage, that is, through the free and responsible union of a man and a woman for life. In the family, people are born and raised; here, personality, sociability, and the capacity for communion are formed – elements that shape one's entire existence.

The family is the place where loneliness is banished. The episode of the paralytic at Bethesda, who confesses: “Lord, I have no man...” (Jn 5:7), expresses the profound drama of human loneliness. Loneliness is one of the heaviest burdens a person can bear. It is healed when one opens to another, when one offers one's inner richness to another existence with whom one seeks to coexist. “Communion – says Ernest Bernea – cannot be achieved without living in the other, without giving oneself to another self, who is you” (Bernea 2004, 16). A house ruled by silence and isolation becomes like an inhabited tomb, where a forgotten being dwells. Loneliness is a painful emptiness, an ‘immense and hollow sack,’ as poets would say, weighing upon the soul even amid material abundance.

Romanian literature captures this drama masterfully: Bacovia calls loneliness ‘a burden of silences torn by sighs,’ while Octavian Paler writes:

“You who return home
and after closing the door
say ‘good evening,’
you do not know what it means
to enter through a door in silence” (Paler 2008).

For this reason, Paul Evdokimov affirms that “there is only one suffering: that of being alone” (Evdokimov 1994, 174).

There is, of course, a chosen solitude, beneficial for reflection and prayer, but it is temporary and oriented toward interiorization. Even in monastic life, solitude is not an end, but a prelude to communion with God and with others. Great ascetics seek the community, disciples, and spiritual dialogue, because absolute solitude becomes ‘the noonday demon’ – *akedia*, as the Philokalic Fathers call it, the bitter state of the soul. Even the greatest ascetics seek the brotherhood or gather a few disciples, for solitude dehumanizes^[4]. Monastic solitude transforms into hospitality: the cell becomes a place of welcome for pilgrims, the poor, the wealthy, the saints, and the sinners. In this way, even solitude becomes communion.

Thus, the Christian family is the space in which the human being finds fulfillment, the place where loneliness is healed through love, selfgiving, and communion. It is “the Church at home”, the place where love is learned, responsibility is cultivated, and the presence of Christ is lived daily.

The Family – A Space of Creative Love and the Fulfillment of Human Vocation

For Christians, the family represents the sacred union between a man and a woman, a communion of love that reflects the mystery of the union between Christ and the Church. Saint John Chrysostom emphasizes that the purpose of marriage is not limited exclusively to the birth of children, although this is a fundamental dimension grounded in the divine command: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...” (Gn 1:28). Yet the great Father of the Church also teaches that Marriage has a spiritual purpose: “Marriage was given for the creation of children, but even more to extinguish the burning of nature” (Mantzaridis, 311.201). Elsewhere, he states that there are “two reasons for which marriage was instituted: that we may become wise and that we may become parents,” and among these, ‘the reason of wisdom’ has priority, for marriage is the calling to transform desire into responsible love^[5].

When conjugal love does not open itself to a reality higher than itself, when it does not reflect Trinitarian communion and does not expand into selfgiving, it risks turning from an icon into an idol. The couple is called to transcend mere mutual reflection – a mirror of the self in the other – and to become a living icon of the Church. Just as the Church is ‘one, holy, catholic, and apostolic,’ so too the Christian family is called to reflect unity, holiness, fullness, and mission in the world.

Conjugal love must be fruitful, and its natural fruit is children. A marriage in which children are refused, or unwanted, is founded on an egoistic love reduced to its bodily dimension. By giving life, the human being participates in God's creative work; by refusing this openness, one not only distances oneself from the Creator but distorts one's own humanity.

Until the twentieth century, Western thought – especially Roman Catholic theology – was deeply influenced by the interpretation of Blessed Augustine, who viewed sexuality as the vehicle for transmitting 'original sin.' In this perspective, marriage was justified almost exclusively by procreation, and the conjugal dimension was regarded with suspicion (Meyendorff 2007, 72–3). The encyclical *Humanae vitae* (1968) attempted to move beyond this view, affirming the positive value of human life and conjugal love, yet it remains partly indebted to Augustinian conceptions of sexuality.

In Orthodox theology, however, sexuality and marriage are understood in the light of the Incarnation and Trinitarian communion. Conjugal love is called to be sacrificial, open, creative—a love fulfilled in selfgiving and fruitfulness. The family thus becomes the place where the human being fulfills the vocation to love, to create, and to offer oneself, participating in God's work in the world.

Divorce – The Breakdown of Communion and the Crisis of the Family's Vocation

A family that no longer functions in a natural and harmonious way becomes a disorganized family, and its dysfunctions are most visibly manifested in situations of divorce. When a marriage fails, the separation of the spouses generates, in most cases, harmful consequences for the entire family structure, affecting especially children who are minors or adolescents. Among all events that can destabilize the family, divorce undoubtedly exerts the strongest negative influence on the child, who is extremely vulnerable to such ruptures and often deeply traumatized by the separation of the parents.

Divorce may be defined as

a complex psychosocial phenomenon representing the final stage of the dissolution of conjugal life, altering the lives of the partners and their descendants. It involves tensions, conflicts, frustrations, and dissatisfactions whose effects extend beyond the court's ruling. (Voinea 1996, 65)

From a legal standpoint, divorce is “the judicial dissolution of marriage when, for wellfounded reasons, the relationship between the spouses is seriously harmed, and the continuation of the marriage is no longer possible” (Rusu 2003, 21).

Divorce is not a simple, isolated event but a process that is often traumatic, involving accumulations of tension, conflict, and frustration that extend far beyond the formal moment of separation. Beyond the civil analysis, the theological perspective emphasizes that maintaining conjugal communion represents the will of God, while the dissolution of this communion for human reasons constitutes a serious violation of this divine will, with often dramatic consequences for those involved. Divorce is, in essence, the breaking of a mystery, for the love that once united the two has weakened or disappeared. In contemporary society, divorce and family fragmentation have become a true plague, fuelled by secularizing ideologies that have diminished the sense of the mystery of the person and of conjugal communion. Marriages of interest, relationships based solely on physical attraction or the satisfaction of selfish needs, are destined to fail, for the spouses quickly grow bored with one another and seek the infinite in finite and empty realities (Radu 2007, 114).

Conjugal love, the foundation of family communion, has often come to be understood in a distorted manner. Psychologist Alfred Adler observes that the structure of authentic love presupposes a ‘definitive outcome,’ an orientation toward eternity, reflected in children and in their upbringing. The trivialization of love – visible in promiscuity, prostitution, perversions, or nudism – robs it of its greatness and beauty, sowing distrust between partners and making mutual selfgiving impossible. Adler emphasizes that the degradation of love leads to the disintegration of individual, family, and community life (Adler 1995, 47).

Sociological studies confirm the complexity of the causes of divorce. B. Strong, C. DeVault, and B. Sayad (1998) classify the determining factors into four categories:

- *societal factors* (changes in family structure, individualism, reduced social integration);
- *demographic factors* (occupational status, income, education level, ethnicity, religion);
- *lifecourse factors* (age at marriage, intergenerational transmission of divorce, premarital pregnancy);
- *familyprocess factors* (presence of children, marital satisfaction, family problems) (Iluț 1993, 177).

The most frequent causes identified in the literature are domestic violence, infidelity, excessive alcohol consumption, the economic emancipation of women, the liberalization of social life, and the level of education. From the perspective of revealed

theology, the profound causes of divorce are unbelief, sin, and the lack of reference to Trinitarian communion, to Christ, and to the life of the Church. When the family separates itself from the source of divine love, conjugal communion collapses, and divorce becomes an almost inevitable consequence.

Conclusions

Through the Mystery of Marriage, a true conjugal consubstantiality is realized, a unity of life and destiny in which the spouses no longer appear as two parallel existences, but as a personal communion founded in Christ. Before God, the husband is responsible not only for his own life but also for the life of his wife, and together they are called to live the same life in Christ. Through the sacramental union of Marriage, the two become members of the ecclesial body of the family, where each offers himself to the other, and the identity of each is fulfilled in communion. The family thus becomes an extension of the Church, a ‘church at home,’ in which Christ is served not only in liturgical worship but also in daily life.

As gifts of God, man and woman receive one another and offer themselves to each other, and Christ is the One who strengthens their bond and imprints mutual respect and responsibility. In this joy of communion, God also grants the blessing of children, who are the fruit of the parents’ love and the gift of Christ to the family. Through the birth and upbringing of children, the spouses become coworkers with God in His creative work, contributing to the increase of life in Christ.

The created world was, in the beginning, full of beauty and harmony. Today, however, the family often loses its beauty and stability, being affected by the accelerated pace of modern life, materialism, and division. Many contemporary families bear deep wounds that drive away communion and love. The sin of abortion, justified by arguments such as poverty, career, or unsuitable age, remains a grave violation of the gift of life, and no reason can legitimize the suppression of an existence. Consumer society, professional pressure, the lack of shared ideals, and inner isolation generate a sense of spiritual emptiness, and the family remains the only place where a person can still find safety, meaning, and love.

Christian marriage and the Christian family require the assumption of a cross. Spouses are called to crucify their egoism, selfsufficiency, and tendency toward selfidolization, as well as exaggerated attachments to their family of origin. Each must remain close to the other, supporting and accompanying the other on the path toward

salvation. Conjugal life thus becomes a continual exercise of sacrifice, selfrenunciation, and mutual giving, through which love matures and is transfigured into spiritual love.

In conclusion, the Mystery of Marriage is not merely a social institution but a calling to communion, holiness, and cooperation with God. The Christian family is the place where love becomes incarnate, is offered, and bears fruit, becoming the space in which the human being finds fulfillment and the true meaning of existence in Christ.

Notes

[1] The newlyweds...must be united before God, in the church, that is, in the house of God, for they are children of God, in a church where God is mysteriously present in the Gifts, where He gives Himself to us and where He is seen in our midst.... But to those who are not worthy of Communion – for example, those who are getting married for the second time, and others – the Divine Gifts are not given to them, but only the common cup, as partial sanctification, as a sign of good companionship and union with the blessing of God (Sf. Simeon al Tesalonicului PG 155, 512-513).

[2] Until the 9th century, the Church did not know any marriage ordinance separate from the Eucharistic Liturgy. Normally, after the celebration of civil marriage, the Christian couple received Holy Communion, and the reception of the Holy Eucharist was, according to Tertullian, the seal of marriage, implying all Christian responsibilities. From an epistle of St. Theodore, the Studite from the 9th century, we learn that the coronation (also known as the Sacrament of Marriage) was accompanied by a short prayer read by the priest or bishop before the entire congregation at the Sunday Liturgy. Also, liturgical books of the same period (such as the famous Barberini codex) include several short prayers like the one mentioned by Saint Theodore the Studite. All these prayers are designed to be read during the Holy Liturgy. We conclude that, until the end of the 9th century, religious marriage was performed within the framework of the Holy Liturgy, but it was not obligatory, as we learn from the writings of the great patriarch Photius; he also recalls that the union between husband and wife is done by blessing, by coronation, or by agreement. The decisive step by which religious marriage became a legal obligation was taken at the beginning of the 10th century; also at this time, an ordinance of the Sacrament of Marriage appeared as a service separate from the Holy Liturgy. This decision was attributed to the Byzantine emperor Leo VI (d. 912), who, by decree, requested a distinct Church ceremony for the Sacrament

of Marriage. The consequence of that decree was that the Church was entrusted with the responsibility of conferring a legal status on marriage. There were also 'disadvantages' of this decree of the Byzantine emperor, because until then the Church disapproved of second and third marriages, which from that moment could no longer be applied. Moreover, Emperor Leo VI, the author of the decree, himself forced the Church to approve his fourth marriage to Zoe Carbonopsina in 906. However, the only compromise that the Church could not accept was the disregard of Holy Communion; it could not, for example, commune a non-Orthodox, or a couple entering into a second marriage. The change was easier to accept because the obvious connection between church marriage and the Eucharist was lost as soon as church marriage became a legal requirement.

[3] Marriage is a true living mystery of duality, or of dual unity, which begins to be felt and realized from the moment the two are joined in marriage – or even earlier – yet it unfolds its potential throughout the entire course of their life together, without the spouses ever growing weary of one another (Stăniloae 1978, 193).

[4] You feel that you live differently when you live in communion. You always have someone to help you. Monasticism, too, is a form of communion, because monks themselves cannot live in complete and perpetual solitude. Solitude is an exceptional form of life, but if it were to remain absolute, it would fall into egoism. Even monks live in communities, where they seek counsel and support one another (Plămădeală 1983, 178).

[5] This does not mean, of course, that for St. John Chrysostom marriage is nothing more than a refuge for avoiding fornication. The same must be emphasized in the case of the Holy Apostle Paul who, addressing the issue of fornication in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, urges Christians to avoid it. According to the Apostle, bodily relations may exist only between spouses: „But because of fornication, let each man have his own wife and each woman have her own husband” (1 Cor 7:2) (Hieroteos 2001, 160).

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BOOK REVIEWS

1. Bogdan-Marius NEGREA, *Exploring the Modern understanding of Creation, Eden, and the Fall of the Proto-parents, bridging Revelation and Science*
2. Rev. Stelian PAȘCA-TUȘA, *From 'School of the Wilderness' to 'Theology of the Wilderness'*

EXPLORING THE MODERN UNDERSTANDING OF CREATION, EDEN, AND THE FALL OF THE PROTO-PARENTS, BRIDGING REVELATION AND SCIENCE

Bogdan-Marius NEGREA

Liviu Galaction Munteanu,
Creația lumii, Paradisul și Căderea în păcat,
ediție îngrijită de Ioan Chirilă și Stelian Pașca-Tușa
(Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2026), 247 p.

The Work *Creation, Paradise, and the Fallen Man*, re-edited from texts by Rev. Professor Liviu Galaction Munteanu originally published between 1929 and 1939, signifies a comprehensive exegetical, theological, and interdisciplinary effort. It has been carefully restored and made accessible to today's readers. The volume consolidates three core studies—on the Hexaemeron, biblical paradise, and the interplay of creation, freedom, and sin—examining them with philological precision, a rich patristic perspective, and a willingness to engage with natural sciences. This re-edition is timely: it retains the voice of a scholar from the early 20th century while surprisingly remaining relevant, focusing on harmonizing scriptural insights with modern scientific understandings rather than forcing a synthesis.

The monograph follows a logical structure. The first section, *The history of creation in light of scientific research*, explores the Hexaemeron using a dual approach—philological/historical-exegetical and comparative, contrasting it with ancient cosmogonies and scientific theories in areas like cosmogony, geogony, paleontology, astronomy, and the origins of life. The second section, *The biblical Paradise*, examines the authenticity of the Eden account, compares it with ancient traditions, discusses its localization, and explores the importance of the trees. The third section, *The fall of the proto-parents*, provides a detailed exegesis of Genesis chapter three, incorporating theological reflections on freedom, guilt, and the Protoevangelium. Methodologically, Rev. Liviu Galaction Munteanu combines (a) meticulous philological exegesis, including analysis of Hebrew terms, (b) historical interpretation reviews from patristic to modern times,

(c) an argumentative engagement with scientific findings, and (d) hermeneutic insights aimed at pastoral care. This hybrid methodology maintains both theological depth and scientific accuracy, representing a notable strength of the work.

1. *Hexaemeron* begins with the idea that inspiration requires dialogue with science. After exploring traditional origins and hypotheses about Babylonian influence, the chapter maps out various historical interpretations, including literalism, floodism, restitutivism, concordism/periodism, idealism, vision, allegorism, and liturgism. It suggests cautious criteria for a theological stance: viewing the *Hexaemeron* as primarily historical and revelatory, while recognizing that its form and cosmological elements reflect the language and religious aims of its time. A particularly useful aspect is the comparison with modern cosmogonies, advocating a hermeneutic that sees science and Scripture as non-contradictory: the Bible affirms the transcendent cause, and science explains the material mechanisms — two levels that complement each other. Rich in patristic and critical references, the chapter clearly supports a theology open to scientific understanding.

2. *Paradise*. Liviu Galaction Munteanu makes an exemplary foray into the question of ‘where’ and ‘what’ is Eden: he discusses the authenticity of the text, the repertoire of ancient traditions (Babylonian, Indian, Iranian, Greek, Egyptian, etc.), the semantics of the term ‘gan/paradise,’ and the multiple historical-geographical attempts at identification (Mesopotamia, Armenia, the Persian Gulf, Arabia, Africa, or exotic theories). The strength of this part lies in the balance between respect for the scriptural text and critical openness. The author neither idealises comparative mythologies nor rejects them wholesale; he shows how remnants of an ancient memory are found among many peoples, but the scale of convergences rationally points towards the area between the Tigris and Euphrates as the most plausible ‘cradle’ of the original tradition.

3. *The commentary on Genesis 3* is thorough. The author examines the temptation (the serpent/the devil), human responsibility, the meaning of ‘the knowledge of good and evil,’ the symbolic and actual importance of the trees, the moral and cosmic effects of sin, and the significance of the proto-evangelium (v. 15). Patristic interpretations are used to connect the dogmatic view with the historical narrative: sin is human freedom turned against the Creator, but the punishment does not cancel the promise of salvation. The text embodies patristic insight and a nuanced theology of hope.

Instead of suggesting a simple concordism, the author proposes a hermeneutic model: Scripture serves as the ultimate cause and teleological guide, while science

provides a mechanical and chronological account of processes. This nuanced and rigorous position offers theologians tools to defend the credibility of revelation without resorting to rigid literalism. Lexical studies (such as *midbar*, *eden*, *yom*, *kavod*, etc., across related sections) and attention to Hebrew nuances reveal a philological awareness that enriches theological interpretation. The author advocates for understanding the text's meaning in its context rather than ideological exegesis. He goes beyond mere apologetics by using the Church Fathers to explore spiritual themes like uncreated light, the symbolic importance of trees, and the Protoevangelium. This blend of patristics and science is, in our view, the core insight of the volume. Furthermore, Liviu Galaction Munteanu is not just an exegete; he draws pastoral lessons: the Hexaemeron as a weekly model, Paradise as a symbol of spiritual responsibility, and the fall as a foundation for practical salvation. This approach makes his work valuable to both academic theologians and pastors or catechists.

From a critical standpoint, some sections are heavily detailed with historical and scientific information, which might overwhelm non-specialist readers. Including a more concise introduction or brief summaries at the end of each chapter could improve accessibility. The discussion on Eden's location presents various opinions fairly for its time, but a schematic map and updated geographic appendix with maps and tables would aid understanding. For future editions, incorporating recent genetic and archaeological findings (post-1930) could enhance the discussion on human antiquity and migration. Nonetheless, maintaining the original text respects its historical significance and author's voice.

Creation, Paradise, and the Fallen Man is a serious work, well-argued and generously resourced with erudition, which brings together in a coherent corpus a dialogue between exegesis, patristics, and science. The novelty lies in the integrative way the author reconstructs the Hexaemeron and the account of Eden in contemporary context: not towards scientific conformism, but towards a responsible hermeneutic that preserves the revealed meaning and admits all the openness offered by natural knowledge. For theology students, exegetes, priests, and specialists in the history of ideas, the volume provides a solid foundation for reflection and a methodological model worthy of emulation.

I strongly suggest reading it and using it as a resource for understanding the modern relationship between faith and science.

FROM 'SCHOOL OF THE WILDERNESS' TO 'THEOLOGY OF THE WILDERNESS'

Rev. Stelian PAȘCA-TUȘA

Bogdan-Marius Negrea, *Teologia Pustiei. Implicațiile spirituale ale peregrinării poporului ales spre Țara Făgăduinței* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2026).

Mr. Bogdan-Marius Negrea's research is a significant contribution to biblical studies and modern biblical theology. Its originality lies in the unique perspective and integrative approach it presents. Beginning with the longstanding theme of the wandering of the chosen people and its spiritual meanings, the author provides a fresh, coherent synthesis that redefines the connections among history, sacred space, and spiritual growth. He transforms the concept of the 'wilderness' from merely a narrative element into a theological framework with broad, transdisciplinary relevance.

The volume's methodological innovation is its genuinely interdisciplinary approach, integrating philological exegesis with patristic interpretation, historical-geographical context, and hermeneutics of religious experience. While research on the Exodus and Sinai is extensive, the author emphasizes a conceptual unity and uses specific operational terms — such as 'House of Bondage', 'School of the Wilderness', and 'Theology of the Wilderness' — which facilitate an explanatory segmentation of the phenomenon. This segmentation distinguishes not only different historical moments but also pedagogical stages within a spiritual process of shaping collective identity. This systematization is a key strength of the work, as it creates a cohesive interpretative model from diverse textual and traditional testimonies, enabling an understanding of continuities and breaks in the biblical narrative and its later reception.

The clearly defined structure of the work underpins this conceptual innovation: it begins with a diagnosis of the research stage to justify the approach by highlighting gaps; uses semantic boundaries as analytical tools; employs historical and exegetical chapters to develop empirical material; and concludes with an evaluation that integrates all parts into a coherent theological framework. This architecture allows the author not only to synthesize critical debates but also to forge new connections between familiar

elements—such as shifting focus from simply 'crossing' the wilderness to emphasizing its teaching and soteriological roles, thereby establishing it as a paradigmatic example in the spiritual development of the chosen people.

The thesis makes a notable contribution to philology and semantics. Analysing the term *midbar* and the semantic theme of 'wilderness' reveals subtle distinctions often missed: the empty space is not merely a geographical gap but a symbol of testing, calling, and revelation. This clarification of terminology supports the development of the 'Wilderness School,' a site where the community shifts from slavery to forming a verbal identity through liturgical rituals, memory, and covenant. Consequently, the author offers a valuable conceptual framework for exegetes and theologians exploring the connections between place, ritual, and ethical development.

From a scholarly standpoint, the thesis offers a detailed yet balanced analysis of key passages from Exodus and Numbers. The author goes beyond a literal historical interpretation, reinterpreting the text through its formative role: episodes of doubt, the forty-year punishment, and the journey to the Promised Land serve as pedagogical tests that reveal how communities are strengthened. This approach shifts the view of 'wandering' to a 'process,' carrying significant theological meaning: the wilderness does not cancel the promise but tests and refines it, fostering the spiritual growth of the generation that will settle in the Land.

An original aspect is the analysis of Sinai's Mountain as more than just a site of the Law; it also functions as a geographical and symbolic landmark shaping Israel's theological framework. The author blends topographical information, textual sources, and patristic insights to illustrate how Sinai serves as a center for divine teaching: here, the covenant forms the basis of the collective will, and the Law functions as a tool for communal living, adapted to desert life. This interpretation offers new avenues for exploring the links between sacred geography and ritual ethics.

Another notable contribution is the clear and proven link between exodic vocabulary and Christian therapeutic or ascetic practices. By referencing the Church Fathers and rabbinic texts, the author provides a hermeneutic that reveals a model of spiritual growth relevant today: 'Desert Theology' is thus more than just a historical account; it offers a framework for retreats, ascetic exercises, and modern spiritual teachings. This connection is presented not merely as an analogy but as a potential typological continuity between biblical experiences and later Christian practices.

The research's practical contributions, grounded in theory, add significant novelty. The suggestions for integrating the 'Desert Theology' paradigm into modern spiritual formation activities—such as retreats, spirituality courses, and catechetical disciplines focused on contemplative experience—show that the work extends beyond academic theory. The author offers clear guidance for applying this knowledge practically within pastoral settings, making the thesis a useful resource for church and community life.

In conclusion, Mr. Bogdan-Marius Negrea's book stands out as an innovative addition to biblical and pastoral theology, thanks to its clear concepts, rich documentation, and ability to turn a traditional theme into a relevant modern explanatory framework. 'Theology of the Wilderness' not only gathers and systematizes diverse materials but also introduces a new interpretative approach — viewing the wilderness as a place of faith learning, spiritual experimentation, and identity development — with significant theological, historical, and pastoral importance. This work merits the interest of both academic and pastoral communities and opens new paths for research that can deepen the historical and practical understanding of this theological concept.

I strongly suggest reading this text, as it has the potential to reshape traditional views and inspire modern spiritual practices.

