

I. BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

LET THERE BE LIGHT! GEN. 1:3 IN THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PRIMORDIAL LIGHT

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ABSTRACT. The concept of light occupies a prominent place in most religions and cultures and can be understood both at a literal and a metaphorical level. Ever since antiquity, people have created and, later on, have developed a mutual connection between light and divinity. Noticing that the sun was the one that provided them with light, the people of ancient times came to attribute human qualities to the light in the sky and to serve it. Unlike them, the hagiographers specified from the very first book of the Holy Scripture that light is God's creation (Gen. 1:3-5; Is. 45:7) and that it differs significantly from the lights in the vault of the sky (Gen. 1:14-18). The light made by God on the first day of creation to give light to the world is different from the natural light that the sun and the moon shed. Prophet Isaiah underlines this distinction, foretelling a time when the sun will no longer have to shine during the day, as God Himself will be an everlasting light for man (Is. 60:19-20; acc. Rev. 21:23; 22:5). In other words, the Old Testament grants a deep theological dimension to the primordial light, highlighting the fact that its radiance is due to God and that it cannot exist separately from Him. Thus, in this study we shall demonstrate that the uncreated light which was commanded into being by God is nothing else than the radiance of God's glory and, implicitly, a manner of revealing the mystery of the uncreated light that overflowed the world from the very first day of the text of creation.

Keywords: light (of God), darkness, divine grace, the day of the Lord, Hexaemeron

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Introduction

It was mostly the Fathers who have homilies on the Hexaemeron (Origen¹, St. Basil the Great², St. Ambrose of Milan³, St. John Chrysostom⁴ etc.) that wrote on the nature of light and on its role in the text of creation. It was natural that they would notice the very special qualities of this godly light and specify its different nature compared to the physical light that God made visible only on the fourth day. The rabbis (Rashi⁵, Maimonides⁶ etc.) who interpreted the text of creation carried out a similar undertaking. However, their interpretations are imbued with rational nuances that differentiate their discourse from that of the Church Fathers. Only their mystical accounts found in the Midrashim (*Genesis Raba*) are entirely consonant with the patristic perspectives which identify the primordial light with the radiance of godly grace. With regard to the vision developed by the Fathers as to the light of the first day, we also notice an interpretation on a Christological note (Origen, St. Cyril of Alexandria). This light that was meant to fill all matter with God's presence cannot be dissociated from the One Whom John the Evangelist calls the Light of the world (Jn 8:14) from the very prologue of his writing.

In the international literature, the subject of the primordial light is tackled from a scientific point of view in biblical dictionaries⁷. The authors of

¹ Origen, *Omilia la Cartea Facerii* [Homilies on the Book of Genesis], in *Părinti și Scriitori Bisericești* [The Fathers of the Church] 6, transl. by Teodor Bodogae et al. (Bucharest: IBMBOR, 1981).

² St. Basil the Great, *Omilia la Hexaemeron* [Homilies on the Hexaemeron], in *Părinti și Scriitori Bisericești* [The Fathers of the Church] 17, transl. by Dumitru Fecioru (Bucharest: IBMBOR, 1986).

³ St. Ambrose the Great, *Hexaimeronul* [The Hexaemeron], in St. Ambrose of Milan, *Tâlcuire la Sfânta Scriptură* [The Interpretation of the Scriptures], in *Părinti și Scriitori Bisericești* [The Fathers of the Church] 52, transl. by Teodor Bodogae et al. (Bucharest: IBMBOR, 2007).

⁴ St. John Chrysostom, *Omilia la Facere* [Homilies on Genesis], in *Părinti și Scriitori Bisericești* [The Fathers of the Church] 21, transl. by Teodor Bodogae et al. (Bucharest: IBMBOR, 1987).

⁵ Rashi, *The Torah with Rashi's commentary translated, annotated, and elucidated. Genesis*, vol. 1, ed. Yaakov Blinder (Mesorah Pubns Ltd, 1999).

⁶ Ramban, *The Torah with Ramban's commentary translated, annotated, and elucidated. Bereishis*, vol. 1, ed. Yaakov Blinder and Yoseph Kamenetsky (Mesorah Pubns Ltd, 2004).

⁷ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 239-40; James Strong, *The new Strong's dictionary of Hebrew and Greek words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), H215; R.L. Harris, G.L. Archer, Jr. and B.K. Waltke (eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 25-7; Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 3, transl. by John Willis (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 148; Dominique Mathieu, "Lumière I. Étude Biblique," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique et mystique*, vol. 9 (Paris: Beauschesne, 1976), 1142-9; Pierre-Thomas Camelot, "Lumière II. Étude patristique," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique et mystique*, vol. 9 (Paris: Beauschesne, 1976), 1149-58; Otto Böcher, "Licht und Feuer," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 21 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991), 83-119.

these specialised studies intended to infer the etymology of the word **רֹאשׁ**, which can be both a noun and a verb, to present the evolution of this concept in the Semitic area or in biblical Judaism and to make thematic syntheses. The later studies of Bible exegetes significantly followed these directions. In the Romanian literature on the Bible, we would like to mention the presence of a study carried out by father Constantin Oancea, which presents systematically the main directions for tackling the concept of *light* in the Old Testament⁸. Noteworthy is also the research of father Cătălin Vatamanu⁹, who identified the Scriptural foundation on which father Dumitru Stăniloae¹⁰ based his discourse on the light of the first day of creation. Besides these works of reference, we could also mention some personal studies in which we have highlighted the Old Testamental specificity of the theology of godly light. My interest in this subject started with a synthetic study published more than 25 years ago¹¹ and now, recently, I have developed various perspectives on the manifestation of godly light within creation and within eternity¹². In order to provide this theological

⁸ Father C. Oancea presents the most frequent uses of the term *rAa*, grouping them in the following categories: natural light, light as a symbol (for life), light as a metaphor, light as God, God's light for Israel and God's light for all the nations. Constantin Oancea, "Utilizarea termenului *lumină* în Vechiul Testament [The Use of the Term *Light* in the Old Testament]," *Revistă Teologică* [Theological Journal] 2 (2006): 112-121.

⁹ Cătălin Vatamanu, "Fundamente biblice ale teologiei luminii dumnezeiești, în scrierile Părintelui Stăniloae [Biblical Fundaments of the Theology of Godly Light in the Writings of Father Stăniloae]," *Theologie și Viață* [Theology and Life] 9-12 (2013): 22-33.

¹⁰ Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae is one of the most important dogmatists of European Orthodoxy. His most representative writings have been translated into several international languages. The Holy Cross Publishing House published, among other works, his five-volume treatise on dogmatic theology, entitled: *The Experience of God*.

¹¹ Ioan Chirilă, "Teologia luminii în Vechiul Testament" [The Theology of Light in the Old Testament], in *Anuarul Facultății de Teologie Ortodoxă din Cluj-Napoca* [Annual of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology], 2nd tome (1992-1994), ed. Alexandru Moraru (Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 1994), 47-58.

¹² Ioan Chirilă, Stelian Pașca-Tușa, Ioan Popa-Pota and Claudia-Cosmina Trif, "Light – Icon/ Stained Glass – Illumination," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 50 (2018): 96-108; Ioan Chirilă, Stelian Pașca-Tușa, Adrian Mărincean, Bogdan Șoțorean, "The Divine Light. The Sight and Experience of It in Gregory Palamas Theology," *Astra Salvensis* 13 (2019): 221-230; Ioan Chirilă, "Luminează-te, luminează-te, Ierusalime!" (Is 60,1) – revârsarea luminii dumnezeiești și devenirea întru lumină [Arise, Shine, Jerusalem! (Is. 60:1) – the Overflowing of Godly Light and the Transformation into Light]," in *Sfânta Scriptură în Biserică și Istorie. Studii Teologice în onoarea pr. prof. dr. Vasile Mihoc* [The Holy Scripture in the Church and in History. Theological Studies in honorem Fr. Prof. Vasile Mihoc, PhD], eds. Alexandru Ioniță and Daniel Mihoc (Sibiu: Ed. Andreiană/Astra Museum, 2018), 166-85; Ioan Chirilă, "Întru lumina Ta vom vedea lumină" (Ps 35,9) – despre lumină și taina întunericului în care se află Dumnezeu (Ieș 20,21) [In Your Light Do We See Light (Ps. 36:9) – about the light and mystery of the darkness in which God is (Ex. 20:21)], in "Voi pune înainte Ierusalimul, ca început al bucuriei mele". *In Honorem Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Dumitru Abrudan la împlinirea vîrstei de 80 ani* [I Consider Jerusalem My Highest Joy. In Honorem Pr. Prof. Dumitru Abrudan, PhD,

discourse with more coherence, I deemed it necessary to focus my attention on the first day of creation, namely on the moment when light received God's order to be on earth as it is in heaven.

In this respect, I have set out to tackle the text in Gen. 1:3-5 from an exegetic point of view, by resorting mainly to the Eastern instruments of interpretation of the Scriptural text. The Tradition of the Church shall represent the main source of inspiration, yet, whenever necessary, I shall also resort to the Judaic tradition in order to observe the way in which the first addressees of this pericope received the godly light. First of all, we shall insist on the elements that define the nature of this light. Then, we shall specify the differences between the primordial light and the astral light, highlighting the fact that there is no antagonistic relation between this light and the darkness that hovered over the face of the deep and we shall underline the connection between the light of the first day and the light that characterises the age to come.

The Nature of the Primordial Light

When God utters the words *Let there be light*, the meaning given by God's will takes the form of a command¹³. What God utters is fulfilled immediately. This fact is mentioned in the Hebrew text, which uses the same words to certify the reality of what happened. The phrase יְהִי אֹור is repeated in an identical form after the coordinating conjunction ו, underlining the fact that when God utters the word, His will simultaneously becomes real¹⁴.

This command that highlights God's almighty and His capacity to create *ex nihilo* marks the moment when the Holy Trinity revealed Themselves for the first time *ad extram*. This fact is extremely important and represents the

on his 80th Anniversary], eds. Aurel Pavel and Nicolae Chifăr (Sibiu: Astra Museum, 2018), 214-37; Ioan Chirilă, "Veniti să umblăm în lumina Domnului" [Is 2,5] – discursul isaian despre lumina dumnezeiască" [Let us Walk in the Light of the Lord (Isa. 2:50) – Isaiah's Discourse on the Godly Light]," in *In honorem pr. prof. univ. dr. Vasile Stanciu [In honorem Fr. Prof. Vasile Stanciu, PhD]*, ed. Daniel Mocanu (Cluj-Napoca: PUC, 2018), 91-107; Ioan Chirilă, "Lumina dumnezeiască în teologia profetilor mici [The Godly Light in the Theology of the Minor Prophets]," in *Anuarul Facultății de Teologie Ortodoxă* [Annual of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology], tome 18 (2017-2018), ed. Vasile Stanciu (Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2019). Ioan Chirilă, "Kavod și Şekina – Slava lui Dumnezeu spre luminarea creaturii [Kavod and Shekinah – God's Glory for the Enlightenment of the Creature]," in *Anuarul Facultății de Teologie Ortodoxă* [Annual of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology], tome 14 (2011-2014), ed. Vasile Stanciu (Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2014), 19-26.

¹³ St. Basil the Great, *Omulii la Hexaemeron*, 93.

¹⁴ Where the verbal form יְהִי is used after the particle ו we are dealing with a prophetic perfect which justifies the fact that God's command has been fulfilled at the same time.

key to the interpretation of the entire text of creation, in particular of the one day that announces the future age. The manifestation *ad extram* clarifies the mystery of the primordial light, which is not a light that came into being following an act of creation. This light shining forth from God's Being is uncreated. It is, in fact, the radiance of God's glory, which reveals itself freely outside the Trinity as soon as the Lord utters the words *let there be*¹⁵. To be more explicit, we shall use an expression from the *Lord's Prayer* which can be applied in this context. God commands light to be on earth as it is in heaven. As such, on God's command, the radiance of His glory exists not only in heaven, but also on earth,

Also on God's command, those elements which were in the light of His grace in heaven begin to exist on earth. This is also the reason why God first called upon the light and then commanded the existence of all that is seen. Authentic creation cannot be achieved in darkness, which is why the six days of creation unfolded from morning until evening. To better understand these assertions, we shall refer to the subject of godly rationales developed by Saint Maximus the Confessor. These thoughts of God, according to which all beings were created, existed before the creation of the world, as "all the things that are or that will in some way be created by Him in their substance were willed and pondered beforehand and known beforehand. Everything is always encompassed in God's will through foreknowledge, in accordance with His endless power."¹⁶ Did these not exist in the light of His glory? And then, was it not in the same light that all that was "pondered and known beforehand" had to be created? Therefore, the way in which Saint Maximus thought of cosmology helps us understand the mystery of light and to realise that the primordial light is nothing else than the greatness of the godly grace, which is uncreated.

Godly Light and the Lights in the Sky

In the Jewish mentality, the light of the first day was meant to put order in creation until the lights in the sky appeared. Once the sun, the moon and the

¹⁵ In previous research we proposed a translation that captures this nuance: "Let there be light or take it from Me." The void began to fill with light and from the filling to reveal its *nomosic*, eloquent, and doxological substance. All take shape, in the image of His light, good light in which, contained, they are also shown in their goodness as participation. Ioan Chirilă, "Reflexii filologice – ziua una (Facere 1,1-5) [Philological reflections – The First Day (Genesis 1:2-5)]," *Romanian Orthodox Old Testament Studies* 2 (2009): 96.

¹⁶ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua*, in *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* [The Fathers of the Church] 80, transl. by Dumitru Stăniloae (Bucharest: IBMBOR, 1983), 280. All were in a paradigmatic form in the Divine Omniscience. That is why there is a major connection between the wisdom and glory of God.

other lights were created, the primordial light was replaced by the physical light shed by these heavenly bodies. Rashi believes that, starting with the fourth day, the light of the first day concealed itself far away and distanced itself from the earth¹⁷. Its place was taken by the heavenly bodies that God put in the sky to give light to and to rule the day, the night, the seasons and the times. The new sources of light were generically called “lights” by God¹⁸.

His opinion is somehow continued by Maimonides, who tries to justify the appearance of the astral light on the grounds of a lack of light. He claims that God created the lights in the sky due to the fact that there was no longer light on earth. Starting with the second day of creation, the capacity of the primordial light to radiate decreased significantly. The apparition of the firmament, of the expanse, on the vault of the sky reduced the overflow of light onto the elements beneath. When the dry land appeared, darkness spread again over the face of the earth. Therefore, God had to make other lights that would shine over the entire visible creation¹⁹. If the former light came to be “outside the raw matter *hule* in the sky”²⁰, the latter had to physically originate from a big body of light and a small one that would shine during the day and at night, respectively. The rabbi’s interpretation is rational. Although he claimed that the light created on the first day was a very special one, his words denote the fact that it could not cross the firmament. Differently put, its capacity to shed light and to shine on earth was limited. Nonetheless, Maimonides claims that the lights in the vault of the sky were made from the light of the first day²¹.

The Church Fathers reject such an approach. Indeed, the primordial light had the role of ordering creation, but its mission did not end on the fourth

¹⁷ Rashi, *The Torah. Genesis*, 15.

¹⁸ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, in *A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 104.

¹⁹ “Light was created on the first day and it shone over all the elements of the earth, but on the second day, when the firmament was created, the latter prevented the light from shining over the elements beneath, so that on the third day, when the dry land appeared, there was darkness, not light. But now, the Holy One, may He be blessed, saw on the fourth day that it was necessary to have lights on the surface of the sky to shed light on the earth.” Ramban, *The Torah. Bereishis*, 53.

²⁰ Ramban, *The Torah. Bereishis*, 54. The primordial light and its source became subjects of speculation for the Jewish mystics. This was also due, in part, to a psalmic text in which God, in the act of creation, is covered with light as with a garment (104:2). In *Genesis Rabbah* (3.4), the primordial light is considered to be the radiance of God’s glory. Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, in *The JPS Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 7.

²¹ “According to the wise men, the first light existed during the first four days; the lights that were put on the vault of the sky were made from it. This is how they took shape and give light, the greater to the day and the lesser to the night, together with the stars.” Ramban, *The Torah. Bereishis*, 54.

day of creation; it continued to fulfil the reason for it existed on earth including after the seventh day²².

In his commentary on the Hexaemeron, Saint Basil the Great describes the impact of the light as soon as it appeared in the world. Its presence revealed everything that was in the dark: the sky with all its beauty and the depth of the earth. The air was filled with light and, suddenly, there was no more sadness and everything looked merry and pleasant: "And the air is more pleasant after the light, and the waters brighter, since they not only admit but also return the brightness from themselves by the reflection of the light, the sparkling rays rebounding from all parts of the water. The divine word transformed all things into a most pleasing and excellent state. Just as men who throw oil in deep water create a clear space, so the Creator of all things, by His word instantly put the gracious gift of light in the world."²³ In this description, we notice that the light shining forth from God was spread further by the waters that were filled with light. Thus, the waters reacted to light, sending its radiant reflections everywhere. Like this, light was present in all that is seen from dusk until dawn and from midnight until midday. In other words, light filled all parts of the earth, reaching up into the aether and into the sky. Likewise, Saint Basil also underlined its qualities: the light was "rare and transparent"²⁴, its rays being able to pass through the air to its uttermost bounds, at a speed similar to that with which man's eyes scrutinise the horizon.

This hierarch from Cappadocia is one of the Fathers who explain the relation between the two lights. On the first day of creation, the nature of light was made and, on the fourth day, the vehicles of this first-born light were created. This explains the connection between the primordial light and the lights, by means of association. He compares the primary light and its vehicle with fire and the lamp: "fire having the power to give light, and the other made to show that light to those who need it." In other words, the sun and the moon (but also the other vehicles of light – the stars, lightning) spread the light they receive from the primordial source of light that shines forth from God's Being.

²² Saint Basil the Great warns us of the fact that the astral light was influenced by the primordial light. The former takes over the order established by the latter and continues it, without changing anything: "Now, henceforth, after the creation of the sun, it is day when the air is illuminated by the sun shining on the hemisphere above the earth, and night is the darkness of the earth when the sun is hidden. Yet, it was not at that time according to solar motion, but it was when that first created light was diffused and again drawn in according to the measure ordained by God, that day came and night succeeded." St. Basil the Great, *Omilia la Hexaemeron*, 94. The hierarch from Cappadocia signals the fact that the only difference in this case is marked by the appearance and withdrawal of the heavenly light.

²³ St. Basil the Great, *Omilia la Hexaemeron*, 93.

²⁴ St. Basil the Great, *Omilia la Hexaemeron*, 93.

For Basil the Great, the sun is nothing else than a body filled with light. To better clarify these words which might seem unbelievable, the hierarch resorts to yet another association: "And, just as the Apostle says that there are certain lights in the world, but the true Light of the world is something else, and by participation in it holy men become the lights of the souls whom they have taught, drawing them out from the darkness of ignorance, so also now, having prepared this sun for that most bright light, the Creator of the universe has lighted it around the world."²⁵ By mentioning who the true Light is, Saint Basil urges us to acknowledge the fact that there is a strong connection between Jesus Christ and the light of the first day²⁶.

In Saint John Chrysostom's opinion, God created the sun to render the light of day even brighter. The moon was not created for the same reason. The Antiochian hierarch draws attention to the fact that God created the lights only on the fourth day so that people would not believe that it was due to the sun and the moon that the day existed²⁷. John's desire to fight the idolatrous beliefs that promoted the sun's supremacy is evident. Indirectly, Saint John underlines the importance and the role of the primordial light in the economy of the first three days, but also in the entire act of the creation of the world. Saint Ambrose the Great has a similar apologetic discourse: "Look first upon the firmament of heaven which was made before the sun; look first upon the earth which began to be visible and was already formed before the sun put in its appearance; look at the plants of the earth which preceded in time the light of the sun. The bramble preceded the sun; the blade of grass is older than the moon. Therefore, do not believe that object to be a god to which the gifts of God are seen to be preferred.

²⁵ St. Basil the Great, *Omilii la Hexaemeron*, 133. Saint Augustine makes a clear distinction between the created light and the begotten one. The former springs from God's Being and overflows the angels and the entire creation and the latter is God's very Wisdom, namely Jesus Christ, the One Who would call Himself God's Light. He also claims that the created light is something that changes, whether it be corporeal or lacking in materiality. St. Augustine, *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis* 5.20, in *Fathers of the Church* 84, transl. by Roland J. Teske, S.J. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 158.

²⁶ In an allegorical interpretation of the place the lights have in the sky, Origen considers we can associate Jesus Christ, the "Light of the world", with the sun and the Church and her Christians with the moon. Just like the moon takes its light from the sun to give light to the night, so do Christians take their light from Christ and spread it toward the ends of the world, dispelling the darkness of sin from the night of ignorance. Origen, *Omilii la Cartea Facerii*, 131. Even if the association made by the exegete from Alexandria does not totally correspond to the idea launched by Saint Basil, the emphasis still falls on Jesus Christ and on His attribute of being the Light of the world (Jn 8:14).

²⁷ St. John Chrysostom, *Omilii la Facere*, 82.

Three days have passed; no one, meanwhile, has looked for the sun, yet the brilliance of light has been in evidence everywhere. For the day, too, has its light which is itself the precursor of the sun.”²⁸ We notice here the last sentence, according to which the day has its light which does not come from the sun. Following the logic of the text, we should extol God’s work and His light that ordered all that was created.

Therefore, we shall keep in mind the fact that the primordial light that represented the object of the first day of creation²⁹ becomes a *sine qua non* condition for the whole undertaking of creation that took place during the other days³⁰ and that the main purpose of the lights that emphasised the beauty of creation was to be signs that help tell apart seasons, days and years, as well as means of setting a boundary between days and nights. Likewise, we would also like to stress the fact that life on earth was not conditioned by the light offered by the heavenly bodies. The trees and the vegetation appeared on earth under the bright rays of the godly light³¹. Life can exist even without the sun, according to prophet Isaiah (60:19), who claims that during the very last days, during eschatological times, the sun will lose its light and will no longer have a role in maintaining life as God Himself shall be a light for His people and no other source of light will be necessary³².

²⁸ St. Ambrose the Great, *Hexaimeronul*, 45. Saint Ephrem the Syrian specifies that the light that was in the beginning did not come from the sun. The primordial light was bestowed by God upon the earth to spread over it, without the possibility of being constrained or fixed by anything from beneath. It dispersed the darkness that ruled on earth and that was motionless. Upon the advent of light, darkness withdrew into the deep. After three days during which light fulfilled the mission for which it had been created, God put the sun in the sky to make grow and mature that which had germinated and sprouted under the first light. Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on Genesis* 1.8.3; 9.2, in *Fathers of the Church* 91, transl. by Edward G. Mathews, Jr. and Joseph P. Amar (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 81.

²⁹ Fred Skolniket al., *Encyclopaedia judaica*, vol. 5 (Farmington Hills: Keter Publishing House, 2007), 273.

³⁰ Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis. Chapters 1-17*, in *New International Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 114. For these reasons, in the Jewish mentality, the primordial light was assumed as a symbol of life, of joy and of the liberation from darkness. Sarna, *Genesis*, 7.

³¹ In the rabbinic literature, there is a clear difference between the light of the first day and that of the lights. In this respect, the texts in prophet Isaiah (30:26) and in Job (38:19-20) are brought as testimony. They also consider the simple observation that when the sky is covered with clouds so dark that the sun can no longer pass through, there is still enough light on earth. Sarna, *Genesis*, 7.

³² For further details, see Chirilă, “Luminează-te, luminează-te, Ierusalime!” (Is 60,1), 166-85.

The Primordial Light and Darkness – Distinct, yet not Opposing Realities

God ordained that the radiance of His glory be on earth as it is in heaven, then established that it should be separated from the darkness that hovered over the deep. This separation ought not to be interpreted in an adversarial manner. God merely ordains the two to be separated. In other words, light and darkness were assigned a space in which to manifest themselves³³. Nevertheless, light, which God considered to be good and beautiful³⁴, was given the power to pierce darkness without being overcome by the latter in any way. At the same time, one must realise that light does not aggress darkness and that darkness is in no way associated with sin. On the contrary, it can indicate the presence of a mystery which is unknown to us.

Maimonides makes a clear distinction between the darkness referred to in verse 2 and the one in verses 4 and 5, stressing the fact that there is a significant difference between them. In the former case, the darkness that hovered over the deep marked a specific stage in the act of creation. That darkness was in itself an absence of light. When God ordained the light to show itself, the time allocated to the darkness came to an end³⁵. The appearance of light marks the beginning of a new stage of creation. Within this new stage, God ordained a period during which the light should no longer shine. Thus, a period of darkness ensued which is different from that which existed before the appearance of light. The former darkness was not conditioned by a time

³³ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 98.

³⁴ God deemed the light to be good because it fulfilled the purpose for which it was created, namely that of driving out the darkness that hovered over the deep. The meaning of the Hebrew term *tob* comprises a vast array of interpretations. It may indicate a state of bliss, beauty, moral justice, superior quality or a superlative when referring to the value of something (A. Bowling, “תּוֹב (*tōb*)”, in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, eds. Robert L Harris et al. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 345-46). This quality of light, or rather, this observation which God makes with respect to light, is understood by the Jewish mentality as an invitation to become permanent. In other words, what Jews see in these words of God is the argument that all things created are meant to endure (Ramban, *The Torah. Bereishis*, 34). Saint John Chrysostom holds that this phrasing reveals God’s leniency in likening Himself to a man of some trade or other who knows what the thing he is about to make is going to look like and what purpose it is going to serve. In the view of the Antiochian hierarch, the hagiographer had no other interpretation in mind than the one mentioned (St. John Chrysostom, *Omilia la Facere*, 80).

³⁵ “This term of *darkness* is different from the darkness in verse 2, as the latter refers to the element of fire, that darkness which was the absence of light, which is why He did not call upon the light before a certain period of time had passed, for God assigned a period of time to each stage of creation and that period of darkness (fire) came to an end, which is why He called upon the light.” Ramban, *The Torah. Bereishis*, 34.

interval, while the darkness which followed the overflowing of the divine light was characterised by a certain rhythmicity. There is a period of light and one of darkness during which the light concealed its radiance. The verses that follow tell us how long the light and that apparent darkness lasted: "And there was evening and there was morning – the first day" (Gen. 1:5).

The act of separation mentioned five times in the first chapter of Genesis (v. 4, 6, 7, 14, and 18) bears no negative connotation. The separation of the waters above the vault from those below it (v. 6-7) and the separation of day from night (v. 14 and 18) cannot have a negative significance. Marked as we are by a kind of thinking which is acquainted with the existence of evil as well, we could find a negative side to the darkness of night, but, in the former case, we will not be able to conceive the situation in that manner. The waters beneath the sky are in no way evil, nor are the ones above the vault. As such, separation, or delimitation, or the establishing of a space that belongs to each element of creation does not involve any kind of negative connotation³⁶. The separation that God makes gives rise to a new order: light is separated from darkness, the waters beneath the vault are delimited from those above it, day is separated from night and, as we will see further on, the existential unity of man is also made up of two distinct hypostases, namely man and woman³⁷. Only after the fall may these separations be loaded with connotations which can cast a shade on the order that God initially instilled into creation. Returning to the idea which triggered this digression, we would like to stress once again that there was no tension between light and darkness, nor was any generated by separating the one from the other.

Maimonides brings another reasoning in support of this view, namely that, by naming day and night, and all things created, God merely marked those boundaries which nothing and no one could cross³⁸. Adam was going to do the

³⁶ When speaking about the act through which God separated light from darkness and the one through which he named light and darkness, Saint Augustine draws attention to the fact that God did not create darkness. Nowhere in the Scriptures is there such a statement. According to the Western hierarch, darkness is nothing more than the absence of light. The naming of light and darkness was done in order to render them more easily distinguishable. We would like to point out that these statements were made with an apologetic purpose as well, as these words were written against the Manichaeans. St. Augustine, *Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichaeans* 1.9.15, in Gen. 84:62-63.

³⁷ To the Jewish mind, separation or partition is rather a kind of differentiation. Moreover, it is a means through which the act of creation takes place. Light and darkness are seen as distinct entities especially when thought of in relation to God (Is. 45:7). Sarna, *Genesis*, 7.

³⁸ This idea was promoted long before by Saint John Chrysostom, who stated that, through the act of naming, God established the limits of all the things He had created. "He assigned each of them its own place, tracing certain boundaries from the start, which they were meant to always maintain unimpededly. And any judicious man can see that, from that moment to this day, light

same when God asked him to name the animals that He had created. Each animal received the name that Adam thought fitting for its being. Thus, the first man traced certain limits and made certain separations. However, there was nothing in that act that had a negative connotation. There were no such thing as clean and unclean animals; they were all “very good”, according to the word of the Lord (Gen. 1:31). Only after the fall were some of the animals going to be considered unclean. But this has nothing to do with Adam. Such is the present case, in which God separates light from darkness only in order to trace a limit. In other words, God said to light: “your limit is night” and to night: “your limit shall be day”³⁹. Otherwise put, according to Saint Basil, God saw to it that “light and darkness should not mix, but remain separate from each other; He parted them and separated them very much the one from the other.”⁴⁰

The “Day One” and the Light of the Age to Come

The chorus “and there was evening, and there was morning” in verse 5, which appears at the end of each day of creation, ought not to be regarded as an element which marks a temporal computing unit, but rather as a reference to a time of rest, or, better yet, a time when one of God’s works has been completed. The act of creation is resumed only after the morning has passed⁴¹. Saint Basil the Great provides a few exegetic details which come to confirm the statements above. He points out that evening is nothing other than a common border between day and night. During this moment of the day, light and darkness intertwine without mixing. The same happens during the morning as well, except, this time, it is the darkness that leaves room for the light to come in. In the view of the Cappadocian hierarch, the morning represents “the night’s vicinity to the day”. Moreover, Saint Basil claims that the night gives precedence to the light, as to one that was created first. That is why the end of the day is mentioned before the end of the night is. This same exegete notes that, before the appearance of light, there was no night, but only darkness. This darkness

has not stepped outside of its own boundaries, nor has darkness trespassed against the ordinance imposed upon it to give rise to mingling and disorder. This alone is enough to make those who wish to persist in not listening to and obeying the words of the Holy Scriptures copy the ordinance of these elements – light and darkness – in their turn, for the latter unimpededly keep to their path and do not step outside their own measure, but know their own nature.” St. John Chrysostom, *Omilia la Facere*, 85.

³⁹ Ramban, *The Torah. Bereishis*, 38.

⁴⁰ St Basil the Great, *Omilia la Hexaemeron*, 94.

⁴¹ In the Jewish mentality, the evening and the morning mark a moment in time during which the act of creation is completed and resumed, respectively. Sarna, *Genesis*, 7.

was different from the one that God called night. The former marked the end of a stage in the act of creation, while the latter appears as an element of separation, one that delimits light, without bearing any negative connotations. The name that darkness received served to mark it as distinct from day⁴².

Most rabbis believe that a literal exegesis is necessary here, according to which we are indicated the duration of a day. Maimonides claims that the first day of creation, which is called “day one”, not “the first day”, had the same number of hours and minutes as it does today. In that sense, the days of creation become a paradigm for the days of the week⁴³. The said rabbi specifies that it is unfit to call this day the first day, as there was no other day at the time. His interpretation is in accordance with the one of another medieval rabbi, Rashi⁴⁴, who claims that the first day of creation had an entirely special connotation, as no one was present in that stage of creation except for God⁴⁵.

Saint Basil clearly stresses the special character of this day in the *Hexaemeron*. He postulates that this day is entirely distinct and ought not to be compared to those that followed. For such reasons, he calls it “day one”, using the cardinal numeral, as opposed to the ordinal one. First, the Cappadocian hierarch provides a literal interpretation. The “day one” is the one that sets the duration of a day. Even though the duration of the night and day varies based on the movement of the sun and the seasons, the day already has certain limits set by means of the evening and morning. The rotation of the sky from one sign back to the same sign (which takes place within a single day) marks the duration of a day. The arrival of the evening and the looming of the dawn mark the duration of a day, regardless of the fact that the interval during which there is light on earth can be longer or shorter. The great Basil goes on to identify a deeper meaning, which emphasises the importance of this day that foreshadows or reflects eternity. He points out that God ordained that the week should start from and return to the same day, thus marking the movement of time. Time starts from and returns to the same point. This circular movement foretells the realities of the age to come, which “revolves upon itself and ends nowhere. If then the beginning of time is called “day one” rather than “the first day”, it is because the

⁴² St. Basil the Great, *Omilii la Hexaemeron*, 94-5.

⁴³ “One should be aware that the *days* mentioned in the act of creation were real days, with hours and minutes, and that there were six of them, as there are in the working week, just as a simple understanding of the verses indicates.” Ramban, *The Torah. Bereishis*, 31.

⁴⁴ Rashi, *The Torah. Genesis*, 10.

⁴⁵ According to the treatise *Genesis Raba*, the angels were created on the second day of creation, when the vault which God called “sky” is mentioned. In the opinion of Saint Ambrose, the angels were created by God at some point in time and they existed at the time when God created light and the visible world. St Ambrose, *Hexaemeron* 1.5, in *Gen.* 42:18.

Scripture wishes to establish its relationship with eternity. It was, in reality, fit and natural to call “one” the day whose character is to be one wholly separated and isolated from all the others.”⁴⁶

The prophetic writings foretell a time when there will no longer be a need for the lights in the sky in order for there to be light in the world. This can be correlated with the first day of creation, when the divine light had no need for any celestial body in order to radiate and separate day from night. These prophetic texts highlight the idea that God will be the only source of light (Is. 60:19). In an initial stage, the celestial bodies will lose their light and, as a consequence, everything will be plunged into darkness (Is. 5:30; Jer. 4:23-24). The sun, the moon and the stars will stop giving their light (Is. 13:10; Ez. 32:7; Joel 2:10). The earth will quake and there will be great deprivation, as an apparent reminiscence of the darkness which preceded the appearance of the primordial light on the first day of creation (Zeph. 1:15). Such events represent the characteristics of “the day of the Lord”⁴⁷, of that eschatological time when God will pass just judgment both on Israel and on the other peoples (Is. 13:9; 24:21-23; Am. 5:18). On “the day of the Lord”, the sun and moon will be replaced by God’s eternal light and thus will begin the eveningless day which was foreshadowed by the “day one”, as Saint Basil the Great stressed. In the final chapter of *Revelation*, Saint John confirms this image, saying that there will be no more night, that men will no longer need the light of lamps or the sun, “for the Lord God will be their light” (22,5 acc. Rev. 21:23)⁴⁸. In other words, the

⁴⁶ St. Basil the Great, *Omilia la Hexaemeron*, 95-6. Origen believes that the first day of creation was called “day one” because, up to that point, time had not existed. It was only going to appear in the following days: “day One. [The reason is the following:] time did not exist before the world existed, but started to exist in the days that followed. For the second day, the third, fourth and all the others begin to designate time.” Origen, *Homilies on Genesis*, 123. For details, see Dumitru Rusu, “Studiu comparativ al exegizei lui Origen la carteia Facerii cu comentariile Sfintilor Trei Ierarhi [Comparative Study of Origen’s Exegesis of the Book of Genesis with the Commentaries of the Three Holy Hierarchs],” *Altarul Banatului* [The Altar of Banat] 4-6 (2011): 18-32.

⁴⁷ The text in Habak. 3:3b-4 portrays God as the One from Whom all light radiates: “His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth. His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from His hand, where His power was hidden”. However, it is unknown when this outburst of light will take place. The prophet Zachariah announces only that “it will be a unique day – a day known only to the Lord – with no distinction between day and night. When evening comes, there will be light.” (Zach. 14:7), while the prophet Joel provides a few preceding signs: “I will show wonders in the heavens and on earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” (Joel 3:3-4). The manifestations of light on that day will not be limited to the celestial bodies; on the contrary, their influence will decrease and they will withdraw as they see the Lord Sabaoth showing Himself in all His glory. Herbert G. May, “The Creation of Light in Genesis 1,3-5,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 3 (1939): 210-1.

⁴⁸ Botterweck and Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, 159.

divine light in Genesis 1 represents the beginning, the text in Isaiah 60 and other prophets are intermediary texts which foretell the overflowing of God's light onto the world in eschatological times, while Revelations 22 marks the beginning of eternity, when the radiance of divine glory fills the renewed heaven and earth with light.

Conclusions

The light which overflowed onto the world on the first day is identical to the radiance of divine glory. This light represents a reflex of the uncreated divine energies which flow from the Being of the Trinity and through which God reveals Himself to the world.

Between the light of the first day and the celestial light created by God on the fourth day there is a significant difference which has to do with their nature. As it is uncreated, the primordial light originates from God, while the other one comes from the celestial bodies which are bearers of the radiance of divine glory. Consequently, the light that we receive from the heavenly bodies makes us aware of God's presence in the midst of creation and leads us towards that primordial light in which communion with God is complete.

The light of the first day and the primordial darkness are not opposites. They are distinct realities which play a part that is well defined by God. The darkness that hovered over the deep bears no negative connotations, just as the darkness that Moses went into on Mount Sinai cannot be construed as a space that lacks God either. On the contrary, to mystical interpreters, the darkness on the mountain was a bright one, in which God revealed Himself in a maximal form. This view could be developed in a subsequent study.

And, finally, the divine light of the first day of creation and the light which will overflow onto the world when God reveals His glory in eschatological times are one and the same, for they both stem from the same source: God's Being.

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