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**“The Light” (*ἴλιξ* – *or*): Semantic Senses,  
Theological Understandings and Iconographic  
Representations**

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## **Introduction**

In the Old Testament light is associated with God and His words, with salvation, with kindness, with truth, with life, where His eternal light is the environment of His creation. The importance of the theme is given by the fact that light represents one of God's attributes, which reveals the various aspects of His character, the sun being the visible source. There are two types of light in the Old Testament: the *uncreated light* and the *created light*, given by the celestial objects (the sun, the moon and the stars), since these are the ones who allow a regulation of life.

The thesis has as a starting point the presentation and composition of the lexeme אור (*or*) – *light*, the definition of the fundamental concepts related to the semantic family of the term, the argumentation of the position in relation to other treatises, the critic assessment of bibliography and last but not least, the presentation, description and interpretation of the data and examples, with an emphasis on my personal contribution. It is well known the fact that in all the languages the origin of the majority of the words is completely lost. The main purpose of the thesis was to identify the meanings of the words that follow a disposition of the theme of *light* as a manifestation of God in various biblical episodes, as well as man's power to recognize God within the *light* through the visual ability of experiencing God's uncreated energies, which manifest within humanity and, finally, a presentation of light in iconography and in the interdisciplinary context (philosophy, quantum physics, medicine-microbiology). The perspective of the approach is analytical and of theological systematization.

## **The structure of the doctoral thesis**

The thesis is structured in three parts, preceded by a section of *Methodological preliminaries* in which I presented the methods of approach, semantic and terminological reference points, as well as the biblical, patristic premises and those from the academic literature. The Holy Scripture can be read as a cultural act, but it was written in order for its lecturing to generate an answer of man to God's calling. The ancient man thought in paradigms that were considerably different from those of the modern man. The political leaders themselves had an important sacerdotal role or at least they functioned in close relationship with the religious life. The ancient man can be signally defined as *homo religious*.

Light is the means through which man discovers the Universe. The rays of light come within the Universe from every star (most of them being light-years away from the Earth) and

within the micro-cosmos from the emission of photons to atoms (which contain information on the moment of their emission and on the process as a whole). Through physical light the present world is accessible to us, the world in which we live and the past of the Universe from ancient eras, for a part of his history is imprinted within the light. Physical light intermediates the meeting of man with the universe, transporting its unseen distances for billions of light-years, to the surface of the observation lenses, offering a testimony of his structures and his dynamics.

The beginning of the thesis is marked by an introductory study dedicated to the term of *light*, the lexeme *or* being analyzed from an etymologic, semantic, morphological, historical, cognitive perspective and, last but not least, from the perspective of the commentaries on the text, where the specific lexicological aspects were emphasized. Indeed, the miracle consists of the fact that we are able to trace the etymology of a word so far behind in time. The Scripture of the Old Testament materializes substantially all the remains of the Hebrew language, and when we find a word that is destined to research within the whole existing literature, we may often be misled in knowing the exact meaning that it was destined to convey. The teaching on *light* was indicated broadly in the Old Testament, insisting especially on the relationship between God and the light in the mindset of the ancient Israelites. God established order and within the order all things are linked to one another depending on the manner in which they are connected. God's first action was to create *Light*, dispersing the inherent darkness. We never observed that darkness ceases light's existence, instead we are told that light and darkness have nothing in common. Reading attentively the Holy Scripture we may easily identify several concepts of the Old Testament of great theological importance, such as: *covenant, righteousness, purity, mercy* and *love*, etc. A term that stands out from afar is that of *light*, which comprises both the human senses and the divine attributes, being always associated to *the light of God*, referring to His Glory. In many places of the Holy Scripture, God is called *Light* or is identified with the light.

The introductory chapter of the thesis demonstrates the fact that the scientific opinion regarding the concept of *light* in the Old Testament has changed in the past fifty years since the TDOT was published, in addition to the birth of a new approach in the light of this evolution, a new and comprehensive explanation of the concept of *light* in BH is necessary, which uses research instruments to offer a new complex exegetical model of the lexeme אור instead of a simple philosophical analysis.

*Light* represents a universal symbol of the divinity, life and knowledge for all nations and religions. The universe is revealed in light. The world is revealed in light. The mind in light comprises the sparkles of the unseen, and the images and colors reveal in light as well. *The Word of God is the Light* which stands at the foundation of the creation, of man and of the Kingdom of Heaven. Wrapping in the Word of God leads to finding the meaning of human existence. The first Word of God was spoken when He created *light* (Gen 1:30). The God Himself considered *light* to be good (*beautiful*) (Gen 1:4).

Russel R. Reno says that “one should never think in term of initial light as if there were rays before the sun was created”, most probably light should be understood as such, that is “Light of the divine wisdom” (which has its origin in the *Word of God*, through which everything was made during history) of the first three days of creation. *The Word of God is existentially Light* similar to the invariable role of an unchangeable nature and similar to an unchangeable good. When God brought to existence the nature of light, only then he created the stars, moon and sun in the fourth day. These had the role to transport the first-born light. The sun as emitter of the material light is considered a symbol and a comparison term for the uncreated light. The *divine light* is the visible dimension of the divinity, of the uncreated energies or of the grace through which God reveals Himself and His existence. Christianity is not only an academic subject, but a reality. Christianity is *life* and *light* alone. The uncreated light surpasses both the sensible and the intelligible things. The light of the first day was the very *essence* of the unseen light, and the light of the fourth day was conveyed by the celestial bodies. The creating act manifests within light and in the continuous inrush of the divine uncreated energies. The uncreated light surpasses both the sensible and the intelligible things. Since darkness and night were not created, evening and morning mark the sequence of the moments. In the discourse of the Old Testament there is a close relationship between darkness and light. D. Bonhoeffer considers the relation between darkness and amorphous to be so integrating that when God spoke of the light in existence, the first light already started to regularize chaos and to reveal form.

The thesis is structured on three chapters. In chapter I, *Methodological prolegomena and semantic and conceptual senses*, we presented the etymology of the word *light*, the methods used, the morphological analysis, the semantic meanings and the commentaries on the text, emphasizing the characteristic lexicological aspects. Etymologically, the Hebrew word אור (*or*) – *light* has a rather broad semantic area. Joel D. Ruark includes data referring to the complete

lexeme (both the nominal and verbal forms, as well as the derived noun *אמאור* – *enlightenment*), also taking into account *גה* – *to shine*, *נור* – *lamp* as well as other related lexemes. The process of constructing such a model of research includes the semantic applicable data obtained through the use of these terms, derived from data of the consistent cognitive and logic processes that govern the use of this lexeme in BH.

We insisted on the texts which contain the word *light* in the Old Testament, extracted from BH, BV and LXX, trying to find the specific senses, through biblical, historical, etymological and logical argumentation of the text. Our intention was to search both the Hebrew texts and the Greek and Latin translations that refer to the term *light*, in order to observe whether the senses of the term were preserved or if they suffered any changes in time. Even a casual reading of the Old Testament proves that the ancient Jewish writers clearly perceive a type of concrete relation between *light* and *YHWH*, and the nature of this relation is not at all clear at a first look on the text. For example David writes that “YHWH is my light” (Ps 27:1). When the psalmist places the personal pronominal suffix to the noun – *my light* – it indicates an inner light that the psalmist possesses that is something intrinsic for humanity, or he refers to something external or extrinsic to the author, such as a *lamp* or a sort of *flame* to shine on the road to follow.

The thesis focuses on identifying the semantic senses of the term *light* that require a highly prudent approach and labored in the same time, due to the distant beginnings in the use of this term. Language is a means through which a speaker communicates something into the world of experience or thinking of a listener. The French linguist Emile Benveniste suggests that language is based on two types of entities: *semiotic entities* (meaning signs) and *semantic entities* (conveyers of meaning). Signs are distinctive and combative unities in a specific system: *sounds* (phonemes) within the phonological system, words and parts of words (morphemes) within lexical systems and grammatical patterns (phrases) within the syntactic system. Signs become semantic entities when attached to meaning, and they cannot be detached in exercising language. Elements of language create a code formed of signs that indicate meaning: in psychological terms, we may say that language involves images and concepts as long as we remember that they are mediated by words. All the interpretations given to the term of *light* may be reduced essentially to four words with close meanings: *kavod*, *murkavah*, *ykr*, *shakan*. However, from a

broader exegetical perspective, the interpretative hypostases may be classified in several categories.

Our thesis wishes to be a congruence point between the Old Testament and the patristic tradition. The Fathers of the Church speak of the fact that the experience of the world is the conscious spiritual life which discovers the grace given to man. Saint Gregory of Nyssa and Saint Dionysius the Areopagite describe man's mystical experience with God in terms of darkness. The *sight* of that world is above all sight and understanding. Saint Gregory of Nazianzus underlines the brightness, according to their nature, with which the angels were created, but also the darkness in which they sunk, according to their will: "and the one who for his brightness is considered and named Lucifer, and for his pride darkness, similar to the powers rebelled under his command, who act evilly through their distancing from good, evilness that they have passed onto us as well".

In the second chapter, titled *Theological understandings*, we approached the theme of *uncreated light* and its relation to the created world, respectively with the *created light* coming from the celestial bodies. There is in the Scripture a first meaning: the *light of divinity*, as uncreated and eternal light, and the light as a created photonic reality, which has two levels of manifestation: a general level, which is not clearly defined, that of the first three days, and a level which is actual and clearly defined: *the astral light*. The difference is made clear by the notion of *creature*. Light is also an element of creation, being subjected, according to the theological presentation, to spiritualization in order to become eternal, and its temporal character derives from here. The first three days of creation represent the temporal stage in which God brings into being the material support of all the hypostatized elements of the species. We cannot measure how far or how much. In fact it is impossible to know such a thing. We don't need to know the number of stars in the sky, but God wants us to know why stars exist. He tells us: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Ps 19:1). The Lord, the one who commanded light to shine in the dark, shone in our hearts. When light shines above us, it is relevant for our corruption. On the second day He brings before us the separation, followed by the manifestation of light. The third day symbolizes the resurrection of the earth, a coming out of the waters, growth of the plants, herbs and trees prepared to bear fruits. In these three days, God is in a continuous overflow of energies that generate light which is life-giving. Creation is constituted of elements that are concretely customized and defined by the divine reason through



which they participate to the Logos. God is light – His purity and holiness are complete. By contrast, sin brings darkness. When the man and the woman sinned, they did not want to confront the light. Jesus Christ says that light came into the world, and that “people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

The origin of the divine light is unknown in the beginning. It is a new and fascinating appearance. Its transforming and transfiguring beauty is not from this world. It comes from God and not from objects. It is the ambiance of a person not that of an object or a thing. It is not created. Creation does not have light as a hypostatized entity. It is not the light of a created thing. This light is active, it moves and it is free from time, space or any other restrictions. It exists and it does not exist. It may occur and it may disappear. It is not subjected to a thing or any other determination. And yet, this light can enter into a form of communication, of relation, of intercrossing, of veiling, but not in intermingling, of union between persons, but not of suppression of the identity of the respective persons. It is sent inexhaustibly from God to the human being. It is invisible for the physical eye and inaccessible to any sensorial experience, because it is over-sensitively. It is the brightness and manifestation of God Himself. For this reason we cannot express its essence, but its multiple energies can be described.

The discussion on the theology of light must start from these two variables: *God* and *light*, firstly from a metaphorical point of view. Knowing the *light* on a metaphorical level, respectively knowing a thing through another is a process used more frequently by the contemporary theological research. The knowledge of God can be achieved through the sight of the *divine light*.

This systematic exposition of the term of *light*, as presented by the Old Testament, is followed in the third chapter, titled *Iconographic representations*, in which we focus on the research of light within the iconographic art. The Sacred Art has achieved the meaning of life, the meaning of man’s existence. It helps us see and know the path that leads to salvation, to eternal life.

The sacred image, similar to the Holy Scripture, does not convey human ideas and notions on truth, but the truth itself – *the divine revelation*. Neither the historical reality nor the spiritual reality accepts fabrication. That is why the Church art is realistic in the strictest sense of the word, both in iconography and in its symbols. There is no idealization in the real ecclesiastic art, as there is none in the Holy Scripture or in the Liturgy. Today, the icon represents an answer

to the state of disorientation of the contemporary world that has lost the meaning of life, struggling in a void of helplessness to rise over the material. Furthermore, it means a communion for all creatures and a defeat of the devil, who is the eternal enemy of God and of man. Nonetheless, the anthropological dimension of the icon is an expression of the fact that it is part of the natural of or existence. It shows the permanent divine grace for man since Christ has come into the world to serve the world and “that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). The icon shows that life is more powerful than death, confessing for eternity the truth of the Resurrection of Christ as handsel of our resurrection.

### **Status quaestionis**

The formulation of the research hypothesis, of the fundamental ideas of the thesis was accomplished through the analysis of the academic literature, meaning the treatises that approach the theme of *light*, avoiding the repetition of acts or deeds that are already consecrated and thus creating the premises for the subsequent development of science.

In the first volume of the series Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT) there was an article on the theme of light that was first published in German in 1973, and then translated into English. The Norwegian researcher Sverre Aalen, professor of New Testament at the Theological Seminary in Oslo presented the paradigmatic principles of several studies from the 20<sup>th</sup> century regarding the concept of *light* in the Old Testament. Firstly, in the mind of an ancient person from the Near East, the phenomenon of *daylight* existed independently from the phenomenon of solar light, because scientific research had not progressed to the point where the ancient people knew that daylight came from the sun. Secondly, although it is used metaphorically in various ways, the concept of *light* in the ancient literature of the Near East, including the Old Testament, including the Old Testament, never represents a sort of metaphysical link with the divinity, with the possible exception of Isaiah 5:20. Finally, the various meanings of the term *or* were not perceived on a common basis as a distinctive category, based on the specific context of each individual testimony. The researchers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century considered the lexeme *or* based on a categorical analysis without offering any conceptual analysis. This approach was appropriate and fruitful for its time. The nowadays exegetes still depend on this type of categorical analysis.

In the past 30 years two important dissertations have been published which refer directly to the concept of light in the Old Testament. The first study, by W. David Reece, offers a more detailed lexical analysis in comparison to the previous interpretations by S. Aalen, W.D. Reece still deals only with categorical meanings and never explores the potential cognitive relations between the various senses of the literature of the Old Testament. The second study, written by Shawn Zelig Aster, refers to the subject in several important ways, although his work is focused not on the Hebrew lexeme *or*, but on the parallels from BH with the Akkadian specific term *melammu*. However, S. Aster's research is significant for this thesis, especially his approach of the phrase *glory to YHWH* in the Old Testament and its relation to the representations of the presence of YHWH with physical radiance.

In the ancient world there was a norm that the divinity should be imagined as a bright or a flaming aura. The brightness of the divine greatness (Isaiah 2:10) in the Egyptian literature is described as a winged solar disc accompanied by storm clouds. The Akkadians used the term *melammu* to describe this visible representation of the *glory of divinity*.

In 1960, Jaroslav Pelikan presented the series Gray Lectures from the University of Duke, proving that St. Athanasius of Alexandria used and exposed John's image in which *God is the light* in his theological defense of the *formulation of the Council of Nicaea*. These lectures were refined and published in 1962 in the volume *The Light of the World: A Basic Image in Early Christian Thought*. He says that *light is the image of the Lord*. This is not an ontological statement in itself, but it communicates an ontological reality. The readers of the Bible, both Jewish and Christian always acknowledged that there are parallels between this biblical theme and the prayers to light in various pagan religions. However, until our century the profoundness and the power of this thing situated at the heart of the scientific research. Unfortunately, J. Pelikan leaves unexplored, essentially, 14 centuries of theological discussions in his approach concerning *light*. He identifies James Breasted, Franz Joseph Dölger and Rudolf Bultmann as researchers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whose works have produced influences that established the basis for his own lectures, but he does not interact critically with any of their specific works. The volume resulted after the Templeton Symposium regarding light, which reunites both theologians and physicists, offered a useful matrix to evaluate the nature of the philosophical relation between physics and metaphysics regarding light and YHWH, from various times, in an *ad-hoc* manner, either metaphorically or analogically. Applying a methodology to the lexical data proves

beyond any doubt that there is a metaphorical relation, but not an analogical one, although it does not deny the existence of an analogous relation.

In the Romanian biblical literature we mention the presence of several researches of father Ioan Chirilă, professor of Old Testament in Cluj (and coordinator of this thesis), who emphasized the characteristics of the Old Testament regarding the theology of the divine light. His approaches started with a *synthetic study* published more than 25 years ago, “Teologia *luminii* în Vechiul Testament” (“The Theology of *Light* in the Old Testament”), and more recently he developed, *through his almost 10 studies on light*, various perspectives which refer to *the manner of manifestation of the divine light* in creation and in eternity. The manner of approach used by father Ioan Chirilă, namely the analysis of the main biblical texts, through the Fathers of the Church and the opening of ways of research in the direction of iconography, was assumed as a *pattern of research* for this thesis.

Besides these reference works, we may also mention several researches that belong to father Constantin Oancea, professor of Old Testament in Sibiu, in which he presents systematically the main directions of relating to the concept of *light* in the Old Testament. Also notable is the research of father Cătălin Vatamanu, professor of Old Testament in Iași, who identifies the scripturistic fundamentals that stood at the basis of the discourse of father Dumitru Stăniloae on the light of the first day of creation.

### **Personal contribution**

Primordial light, which opens the creature the possibility to taste in advance the eternity in the act of creation, is subjected again to sight, not randomly, but *in a mysterious way with the help of the icon*. Our opinion is that there is the possibility of achieving a *more ample research of the light*, from the first chapter of Genesis, *with applicability to the iconographic art*.

Hence, the iconographer *has the role to put the faithful* before the *realities of eternity*, which are *full of light*, exactly the way it was in the beginning. The central axis of the thesis is constituted by the essential moment in which the divine light is on earth as it is in heaven. God reveals Himself to man through theophany, revealing the fact that He is Light. The icon carries within it the light that once experienced, enlightens the faithful and brings him closer to holiness, revealing therewith the importance of walking in light, through the icon that embodies the light,

the way to *eternal light*. This research tries to offer the contemporary man the premises to experiment the sight of the deifying light with the help of the religious image.

Each icon should be considered as the unique source of light. But this only if the divinity comprised by the icon through the work of the Holy Spirit, enlightens the looker, otherwise he will not be able to see the light. Icons with their golden background and their images weaved from light, target the transfiguration of matter. They present as eternal radiances, reflection of the divine, uncreated light. The sight of this light transfigures the whole nature of the one developed in light. The human body participates to this mystical experience that is full of light. The icon as a symbol of the Incarnation (“the heart of Orthodoxy”) has always been able to record and reflect in a subtle manner the most complex rhythms of the historical realities. The possibility of the unification with God with the help of the icon becomes one of the main features of the Christian anthropology, which was explained by the Byzantine theoreticians of the image first of all through Incarnation and the participation of humankind to the divine essence. The way of iconography as a means of expressing the things referring to divinity, is the way of theology. Through this research we managed to demonstrate and reinforce what has already been demonstrated: the importance of traveling through the Christian life in light, through and together with the icon which incarnates the Light, the way of life on this earth, the way to eternal light. While life cannot be considered energy – this would mean centuries of research to be discovered – the Genesis acknowledges light as the essence of the universe.

### **Final Conclusions**

The archetypal pattern light-darkness, spirit-matter, heaven-earth, represents the primordial reality and in the history of humanity, this dualism is imitated in as many ways as possible. The history of art and iconography, by choice, expresses clearly this fact. Despite of the context there is this oscillation between light and darkness which separate and wrench each other, in the ceaseless attempt to imitate and reach the archetype. Now more than ever one may observe that each time, through the consciousness accumulated, new experiences can be achieved in understanding the archetype.

“We reflect as a mirror the glory of God”, an icon is this mirror full of the distinguished feature of glory: light. The divine grace represents the manifestation of the uncreated divine energies.

In order to understand the manner in which the ancient Israelites understood the concept of אור, we analyzed the manner in which this concept was used in real linguistic contexts. From a linguistic point of view, all the interpretations given to the term of “light” can be reduced essentially to four words, with close meanings: *kavod*, *murkavah*, *ykr*, *shakan*. In a broader exegetical perspective, the interpretative hypostases may be classified in several categories. Most of the researchers considered that the origin of the mandorla, respectively the light reflected in the icon, can be found in the Judaic concept of *ykr*. In addition to the direct references to the divine light, we have also identified conclusive supplementary certifications regarding the physical reference characteristic to the metaphorical phrases: light of the fire, sunlight, light of the dawn, light of the cloud.

The features and effects of the primordial light are innumerable as attribute for the support of life. Physical light is a constitutive part of the biological life. Light does not have a dwelling place on Earth or in Heaven and it cannot be retained within a space. Despite of the three millennia of human investigations carried on by brilliant detectives, light refuses to reveal all its secrets.

Saint Symeon in his work *Hymns of Divine Love* speaks about the divine light: “Everything that comes from God is light and what comes from light: life is light, eternity is light, love is light; peace, truth, the door of the heavenly kingdom is light, Christ, the Savior and King of the world is light; the bread of His pure body is light, the cup of His divine blood is light, His Resurrection is light, His finger is light, His hand is light, His eyes are light; the Lord and His voice is light, as light of light”.

While man involves in the uncreated light, its brightness will intensify with rays that are more and more brilliant, which come from God’s Life. The Holy Fathers say that the light of Tabor was divinity itself. This light is also transmissible. It does not lessen by transferring from one subject to the other, from God to angels, or from angels to saints. This is the way in which we believe that the transparency of the saints’ bodies can be understood better. While they maintain their morphology, the bodies are similar with those made of glass, which preserve the flame of the divine light, to spread around them.

Man’s enlightenment, deification or unification with God in love is fully achieved in the eternal life, although the saints experience it in advance even during the time of their earthly life, in an authentic and transfiguring manner. For the Eastern Fathers who use the divine darkness as

a metaphorical expression for the divine incomprehensibility, the notion of God as Light is indispensable, as for example in the case of St Dionysius the Areopagite. Archimandrite Sophrony observes the fact that, in comparison to the Old Testament, where the symbolism of the Glory of God (*Kavod Yahweh*) is used together with the “divine darkness”, the New Testament uses for the divine theophany only a bright terminology. The symbolism of light is of first importance for the iconography of the Eastern Church as well.

Our conclusion is that in the original manuscripts, the meanings of the Hebrew words were rather different, since they used the words that designate order and chaos. We believe that these words describe the work of the Holy Spirit for, with every day, God brought more and more order into the chaos that was the mass of elements contained in the initial structure of water. Each day, through the process called creation, He ordered these different elements into the adequate structures, so that He can create. The presentation of this concept is very simple and basic on many levels, but we consider that it represents appropriately the fundamental statement, without allowing us to particularize more than this thesis can afford.

The critical writings of St Maximus the Confessor, St Symeon the New Theologian and St Gregory Palamas are almost completely ignored by the work of Charlie Barber *Contesting the Logic of Painting: Art and Understanding in Eleventh-Century Byzantium* (2007), their discussion does not have a substantial theological context and, consequently, the adequate hermeneutical categories to calibrate the iconological questions. Taking into account that we bring to a theological, philosophic or iconographic body our questions and contemporary problems and we impose a dialogue, a revitalization, it is important to know whether hermeneutics must really engage the text and image, to take into account not only its morphological surface, which gives in easily to interpretation – but also the more profound catenae which support and fundament it. The continuity with the past is essential, especially in the case when the text or image belong dynamically to it (that is to tradition) and projects its elements from this point of view. It is important in the case of several Greek theological and aesthetical terms and the texts they constitute, to identify these strong points and to follow the paths that they shape. This is not at all an easy task, because it most often leads to ambiguity than certainty and, subsequently, to the temptation of enforcing a hermeneutical system, rather than to a discovery of an indigenous form within the text or work. Mentioning Heidegger, we may consider the truth that the hermeneut tries to be at work within the writing.

On the other hand, as it often happens with images or texts that exist vitally within a tradition, more than one voice can be heard in what they say or show. St Theodore the Studite uses the concept of hypostasis to explain the manner in which an image can represent Christ. This is a difficult concept and applying it to art in this context is very challenging. Instead of using this term to represent union, as his theology suggests, St Theodore the Studite marches upon the idea that art cannot convey spiritual realities. A painting is like a shadow he says; is Christ has a body and that body has a shadow, than it is correct that the painting reproduces this relation and paint its resemblance. The platonic character of this concept is obvious. So is the problem it involves. The Hypostasis of Christ unites the two natures and thus any image of him must show these two natures as fully existing, rather than a purely physical being. Hence, it is not enough to render his human existence. An icon must also convey His divinity. This is the aesthetical challenge of the roots that can be traced in Platonism, askesis in the desert and the influence of Origenism and Monophysitism on the Byzantine visions of the matter. The solution is an arrangement of the art to intellectual realities. In askesis, deciphering the mental image or eliminating it completely protects the soul against the attacks of one's own passions and those of the demons.

This vision of the matter and of the image occurs in the Orthodox tradition, but as a fine thread. Some theologians reflect it more than others. But according to St Maximus, its traces are harder to detect. In St. Maximus, Orthodox theology achieves its ontological potential. In Maximus' ontology the lives of saints become iconic not in the manner of the platonic reflection, but in an overflow of graceful existence in which their beings are revealed. Thus, to discuss about the Orthodox icon without taking into account the Orthodox ontology means to subject it to an aesthetical depletion that it does not deserve. Similarly, incorporating an icon into the contemporary constructions of the image as pieces of an ideological or phenomenological imaginary or to present it with a semiotics of the show and of the sacred theatre means to involve a theoretical and cultural artifact and not the real image that we search for.

The integration by archimandrite Sophrony of light and darkness into a single theological scheme, but presented as two distinctive successive experiences. As an alienation of God, darkness does not mean light, nor does it coexist with light, "the coming and going" of the light does not take place at the level of energies, but of that of the person. Seeing the Light is perceived not as an illumination of the spiritual senses by a divine energy, but rather as the most



intimate personal contact with a hypostatic existence. The divine light is uncreated because it belongs to an uncreated being. Men are allowed to know God as light and become gods by grace.

Christian life actually represents our becoming, our transformation into icons of Christ. We may reconsider the role of the light and of the color in painting, from an aesthetical point of view, for these are problems that have been standing at the foundation of art along the centuries. In Orthodox terms, we may speak of a form of deification in art, in the same manner in which we speak of the aspect of deification of an asket.

The unseen is seen and experimented in a form that is superior to that which is exterior to sense and becomes visible. This type of vision allows spiritual people to acknowledge the work of deification that they have in their lives, through this light that flows from God. God the Father is light, in the sense of the existence of the entire creation, not only of life. God the Word is the light of life, the one that gives life to everybody, but He is, through His grace, also the light of understanding, the light of knowledge, the light of resurrection, the unsetting light. The greatest discoveries of physics in the past centuries, have been made or verified with the help of the features of light. The attempt to reproduce the saints' faces transfigured in light is a manner of praising the Lord.

Light unites creation with God and creation with itself, but this serving dimension of light makes these elements get acquainted with each other, in a superrational knowledge. The descent of the Holy Light in Jerusalem proves the fact that our Orthodox faith is the real one. The greater the detachment from the origin of Light the deeper the darkness. Darkness represents the alienation from God. God is Light, which allows each man who engages in the fight of faith to have the possibility to become light, as son of God by adoption. The existence of the created light is participation to the uncreated light, which is God Himself and His Word. His uncreated Light allows the existence and functioning of the created lights.

Following this research based on a set of methodological principles, we obtained several results that can be used as a basis for a future study that could fully articulate the hypothesis proposed regarding the relationship between light and YHWH, in the ancient conceptual world in Israel, and the relationship between light and icon, in the frame of the teaching of the Eastern Church. These results could have the possibility to situate the thesis in a broader theological context and to explore potential implications for future studies.

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### **Short Abstract**

This thesis represents the expression of a research, of a reflection and personal search, transformed into a coherent scientific message. It begins with an introductory study in which we presented the term of “light” and its semantic, theological and iconographic understandings. In the three chapters of the thesis, we presented the specific meanings of the term “light” starting from the biblical argumentation which occupies an important part of this study, followed by the historical, etymological and logical argumentation of the text. In order to synthesize the theological meanings of the term “light”, in the context of the Old Testament, it was necessary to emphasize several aspects regarding the historical context. The primordial light which opens to the creature the possibility to taste eternity in advance within the act of creation is subjected to sight again, but this time *in a mysterious manner, through icon*. Our opinion is that there is the possibility of developing *a more ample research of the light*, from the first chapter of Genesis, *with applicability in the iconographic art*. Hence, the iconographer *has the role to place the faithful* before the *realities of eternity*, which are *full of light*, exactly as it was in the beginning. The possibility of uniting with God through icon becomes one of the main features of the Christian anthropology, which was explained by the Byzantine theoreticians of image firstly through the Incarnation and the participation of humankind to the divine essence. Man has the possibility to become bearer of light, son of Light and light for his neighbors. Consequently, we showed how Light can be translated pictorial, in iconography, where, through light, intensity and color, the realities regarding the Kingdom of Heaven, the transfigured Christ and the deified man are rendered.