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## Plato's Allegory of the Cave and the Early Christian Concept of 'True Light' in the *Metaphrasis Psalmorum* (138.9-23) of Apollinaris of Laodicea

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### Abstract

This paper explores the connection and renegotiation of Plato's allegorical simile of the cave and the spiritual exodus from darkness towards 'true light' in Apollinaris' *Metaphrasis Psalmorum* 138.9-23. First, to inform non-specialists, I outline scholarly views and debates on Plato's allegory of the cave and the concept of True light. Second, I compare the fourth-century metaphrase to the Septuagint text and interpret stylistic embellishments in the former as influences of a long tradition of conceptualising light allegorically, together with explorations over the knowability of the divine. Apollinaris' use of the light imagery is, paradoxically, connected with the concept of God as the one who makes darkness bright. Finally, I present Origen and Gregory of Nyssa as pivotal sources to our understanding of the mystical colouring of darkness in the *Metaphrasis* and the enigmatic verse 12 of the Septuagint's *Psalm* 138.

### Keywords

Plato; allegory; early-Christian theology; Apollinaris; Origen; true light; late-antiquity paraphrase; knowability of God

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Over the past few decades, there has been a growing interest in early Christian interpretations of Scripture, directed not only towards the understanding of patristic hermeneutics in its own right but also towards a more integrated understanding of each author's views.<sup>2</sup> The discussion has especially turned to the pivotal and unifying role hermeneutics played in Platonic philosophical thought.<sup>3</sup> In addition, scholars have demonstrated a keenness to see *exegetai* of patristic hermeneutics as writers whose beliefs and spirituality were not only interconnected, but virtually indistinguishable, and who perceived scripture and philosophy as complementary and overlapping means of expressing and grounding their theological beliefs.

In this paper, I focus on two influencing factors: Plato's well-known allegory of the cave and the imagery of light; and the interpretations of Scripture and mysticism, which is one of the most critical features in explaining and understanding the context of Scripture. First, I consider allegory in connection with mysticism to suggest a long tradition and intertexts behind word choices and theological tenets in a fourth-century rendition of Psalm 138. Second, I explore how the spiritual itinerary from darkness to 'true light', an expression attested in Plato's allegorical image of the cave and the perception of the Good (*Resp.* 514a-520a), influenced the *Metaphrasis Psalmorum* 138.9-23, a fourth-century CE epic metaphor of the biblical Psalms by Apollinaris of Laodicea. Third, I investigate how the cave allegory and Early Christian philosophical interpretations of the Scripture correspond to the theological context of this 'Homeric' Psalter, particularly the allusions to its classical Greek and biblical intertexts and, of course, to the Septuagint's Psalter. In this paper, I acknowledge the variety and ambivalence (to the point of being polemical) of the approaches of early Christian thinkers to the classical tradition.<sup>4</sup> However, I analyse Apollinaris' metaphor of Psalm 138 and explore similarities and differences in his approach to philosophical accounts of the divine and the Good. I suggest that Apollinaris did not necessarily distance himself from Platonic philosophy; instead, I observe that the metaphrast engaged in dialogue and negotiated the boundaries and connections between classical and Christian philosophy.

Allegory can be a dogmatic interpretation of Scripture because it relies on interpretations and decipherments of sacred texts without substantial requirements of proof or logic. As a means to interpret Scripture, it depends upon the elucidation of symbols therein. Allegory creates new narratives, interpretations, and intertextuality that challenge the intended meaning and literal content of the original text.<sup>5</sup> Theologians and ancient scholars of biblical interpretation have long acknowledged allegorical reading as a means of determining deeper spiritual meanings and, by contrasting it with typology, repudiated it because it sought to replace scriptural with non-scriptural interpretations. However, they often agree that allegorical reading can displace the text from the centre of focus in favour of more important, in terms of spirituality and symbolism, elements.<sup>6</sup> For example, allegorical

<sup>1</sup> For the patristic texts cited in the text, I use the following editions: Migne, J.-P. and Cavallera, F. 1857-1912. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca*, 167 vols. Paris: J. P. Migne; Fratres Garnier. Pitra, J. B. *Analecta Sacra Spicilegio Solesmensi Parata*, Volumes 2 and 3: Patres Antenicani, Paris: Tusculum. Rahlfs, A. and Hanhart R. (eds.) 1979. *Septuaginta: Id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes*, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

<sup>2</sup> O'Keefe and Reno, 2005; van 't Spijker, 2009; Edwards, 2011; Martens, 2012, on early Christian exegesis of Scripture.

<sup>3</sup> Gersh and Kannengiesser, 1992; O' Meara, 2003; Heath, 2009; Hoffmann, 2009, on Platonic exegetical role.

<sup>4</sup> Karamanolis, 2021: 1-7, on early Christian thinkers and the rational/philosophical foundations of concepts such as the immortality of the soul and the creation of the world by a divine intellect, which are of Platonic origin and influenced Middle- and Neo-Platonists.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Dawson, 2000: 90-95.

<sup>6</sup> Auerbach, 1984: 11-71, for this sort of allegorical typology and contrast.

interpretations of Scripture are particularly influenced by Platonic doctrine and Origenian philosophy, as far as the conceptualisation of true light is concerned, and this sort of typology is the one in which Neoplatonic mystical teaching usually is couched.<sup>7</sup> Contrary to the platonic conceptualisation that the Good is by definition the only true light, Christian authors re-contextualised and re-narrativised the Platonic original and, as we shall examine below, suggested that darkness is not necessarily the malevolent counterpart of light. With these in mind, this paper explores how the itinerary from darkness to the 'true light', attested in Plato's allegorical image of the cave (*Resp.* 514a-520a), influenced the *Metaphrasis Psalmorum* 138.9-23, a fourth-century CE epic metaphrase of the biblical Psalms by Apollinaris of Laodicea.

The paraphrase of Scripture is a well-documented tool for biblical interpretation in early Christian literature. The paraphrastic technique as a rhetorical exercise in the *Progymnasmata* from the second to the fourth centuries CE entailed the transformation of an abstruse poetic text into a prose text intelligible to a broader audience, or vice versa, the transliteration of prosaic text into refined poetic text; in any case, the implicit aim was not to alter the meaning of the original.<sup>8</sup> As I argue below, early Christian paraphrase has a strong exegetical purpose. In light of this, my discussion invites the reader to consider the allegorical image of Plato's cave as means to interpret a puzzling passage in Apollinaris' *Metaphrasis* of the *Psalms* about the omnipresence of divine light in the *cosmos* and in every stage of the psalmist's quest to exit darkness and head towards the light (*Met. Ps.* 138.9-23). The hexametric *Metaphrasis* of the Septuagint's *Psalms* conveys some typical elements of Christian poetry in the fourth and fifth centuries CE: intertextuality, refined language, and rhetorical *topoi*. It stands as a contribution to the composition of lofty poetry within a Christian context, which adopts the Homeric metre (hexameters) and engages with Homeric language and poetry, as shown by the use of formulaic phrases, literary *topoi*, and *hapax legomena*. Indeed, Apollinaris of Laodicea paraphrases the *Psalms* employing an unmistakably epic language.<sup>9</sup>

A discussion of early Christian philosophy helps us understand Apollinaris' influence or deviation from the Platonic intertext. Christian thinkers, such as Justin, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebios of Caesarea, and Gregory of Nyssa, argued that Christianity is a philosophy, in fact the only 'true philosophy', and considered themselves exponents of this philosophical doctrine.<sup>10</sup> On the contrary, classical philosophers, such as Galen, Lucian, Celsus, and Porphyry, disputed the philosophical qualities of Christian thinkers or that Christianity possessed a philosophy worthy of study. More specifically, Celsus argued that Christianity lacked a rational basis and Christian thinkers did not critically examine their views but instead were entrusted to faith (πίστις).<sup>11</sup>

In this paper, I take a different approach to the Christian philosophers' views on the knowability of God, one which, I hope, will shed more light on the issue than would a straightforward enumeration and evaluation of the relevant theological and allegorical exegetical passages of the epic metaphrase of the *Psalms*. This particular angle focuses on the concept of 'intellectual (true) light'. I consider in some

<sup>7</sup> Ramelli, 2011: 335-371; Fowler, 2014; Martens, 2015: 594-620, on the platonic influence upon Origen. For Origen's deviation from platonic philosophy, Edwards, 2017. See also Armstrong and Markus, 1960: 11, who note that the Good and the divine 'is form and definition, light and clarity, as opposed to vague formless darkness'.

<sup>8</sup> Lausberg, 1998; Miguélez-Cavero, 2008: 264-370; Faulkner, 2019: 210, on the rhetorical exercises in the *progymnasmata*.

<sup>9</sup> Faulkner, 2020: 30-32.

<sup>10</sup> Clem. *Strom.* I.9.52.2, II.11.48.1, II.131.2, VI.8.67.1; Greg. Nys. *De inst. Chr.* 48.13; Eus. Caes. D.E. I.6.56, P.E. XIV.22.7; Basil *Letter* 8 (p. 48 Deferrari); Greg. Nys. *Vit. Mos.* 305B; Malingrey 1961, for the concept of 'true philosophy' and its connection with ascetic life as a means for the faithful to see the real nature of things in the light of Christian revelation.

<sup>11</sup> Or. *Cont. Cels.* 1.9.



detail the significance of the imagery of light used in the Platonic works, mainly the *Republic*, which was subsequently developed by early Christian and Middle- and Neo-Platonism in further connection with the knowledge of God, or the *Logos*. This aspect helps us discern platonic views on the notion of the Good, or interpretations and renegotiations of platonic views, in the spiritual quest and logical question over the ability of mortals to know God, the Father.

## Plato's Allegory of the Cave and 'True Light'

In this section, the discussion is arranged thematically rather than chronologically and informs non-expert readers on the Platonic conceptualisation of true light and its later treatment by Christian thinkers. I outline the main trains of thought on this topic from the valuable works of van Kooten and Dillon and I explore the Neoplatonic interpretation of *Resp.* VI (the passage on the concept of Good). According to Neoplatonists, Plato intends to speak of the Good, which is unknowable and describable by apophatic means. Yet, contrary to Neoplatonists, Plato argues that Good must be regarded as knowable (γνωστὸν). First, I discuss the connection of Good with light, since both are omnipresent and lifegiving. Second, I present an educational aspect observed in the pair of true light and natural light, where the exodus from ignorance to knowledge develops into a different path, that is knowing Good. Third, I observe that light becomes essential in the Christian conceptualisation of Good, as we shall examine in Origen's passage and the idea described in John's Gospel that God is light.

In works of the early Christian and Neo-Platonic tradition, we read the development of the concept of 'true light' (ἀληθινὸν φῶς), attested first in Pl. *Phd.* 109e7, to 'intellectual light' (νοερὸν φῶς),<sup>12</sup> 'mental light' (νοητὸν φῶς),<sup>13</sup> the light which falls in the province of the mind (νοῦς),<sup>14</sup> as opposed to the visible and perceptible light. A distinction was drawn between an ὑπερκόσμιον φῶς (supramundane light) and νοητικὸν φῶς (intellectual light)<sup>15</sup> similar to a well-known, stark dichotomy between the perceivable world and the world of forms, prevalent in Platonic ontology.<sup>16</sup> First, it is pivotal to discuss the Platonic passage of *Phaedo* (109e7) briefly, given its analogy with the allegory of the cave in *Resp.* 514a-520a. Socrates argues that we dwell in a hollow of the earth (similar to the Platonic cave), which we think is the upper layer of its surface (οἰκοῦντας γὰρ ἐν τινὶ κοίλῳ τῆς γῆς οἶσθαι ἐπάνω αὐτῆς οἰκεῖν) and that the air is the heaven where the stars move (καὶ τὸν ἀέρα οὐρανὸν καλεῖν, ὡς διὰ τούτου οὐρανοῦ ὄντος τὰ ἄστρα χωροῦντα). However, due to feebleness, humans are unable to reach the upper surface of the air and gaze upon the upper world (or exit the cave in the *Republic*). If our nature were strong (as the prisoner-philosopher's), we could bear the sight of this upper world that is the real heaven, the true light (οὕτως ἂν τινα καὶ τὰ ἐκεῖ κατιδεῖν, καὶ εἰ ἡ φύσις ἱκανὴ εἴη ἀνασχέσθαι θεωροῦσα, γινῶναι ἂν ὅτι ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν ὁ ἀληθὺς οὐρανὸς καὶ τὸ ἀληθινὸν φῶς). The concept of 'true light', as we shall explore in the following section, is also crucial to our understanding of the *Metaphrasis*, mainly because of its semantic relation with the faithful's effort to acknowledge God's presence in his lifetime. In the *Metaphrasis Psalmorum*, God is presented as the only source of

<sup>12</sup> Eus. *Dem. Ev.* 9.1.14.3; Bas. *Caes. Hom. in hex.* 1.2.47; Procl. *Theol. Plat.* 4.72.23, 6.61.15.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Greg. *Nys. Contr. Eun.* 3.7.57.8, *De virg.* 5.1.6; Eus. *Praep. ev.* 8.14.19.2; Bas. *Caes. Hom. sup. Ps.* 29.424.52.

<sup>14</sup> Did. *Caec. Fram. In Ps.* 132.4; Cyr. *Alex. De ador. Et. Cult. In spir. Et verit.* 68.785.34, *Coll. dict. Vet. Test.* 77.1233.8.

<sup>15</sup> Herm. *In Plat. Phd. Sch.* 152; Dam. *De Princ.* 1.81. For a distinction between these two forms of light, Ps.-Caes. *Ques. Et Resp.* 128.61.

<sup>16</sup> van Kooten, 2005: 152-153; Tieleman, 2005: 139-140, for a Platonic distinction between the imperceptible and the visible cosmos.

'true light' (e.g., *Met. Ps.* 3.16 σεῖο φάος, βασιλεῦ); He is the one who provides the psalmist with His knowledge and wisdom (e.g., *Met. Ps.* 12.8 δὸς φάος).<sup>17</sup>

The dichotomy and connection between the divine and light is attested in *Timaeus* (28c-29d), where the visible κόσμος is discerned from the invisible paradigm after which God, as a craftsman or *dēmiourgos*, constructed it. Plato does not elaborate on 'true light' in *Timaeus*, but makes passing references to the fire that God lit, that is, the sun in the sky (*Ti.* 39b), to the created animals nourished under this light (*Ti.* 91d), and the interaction between the light in the sky and the light within the human eye that enables humans to see (*Ti.* 45b-c, 46c).<sup>18</sup> This universal and infinite radius of the noetic light which shines everywhere is frequently attested in ancient philosophy. Epiktetos describes God as the great illuminator of all that is true and the one who imparted true knowledge to all humanity. Moreover, he warns that it is shameful to honour Triptolemos, the one who taught humans the arts of agriculture but tended to be negligent in his service to God, who is 'the true light' (*Disc.* 1.4.31). Iamblichos (*Myst.* 1.9; 31.11-14) stresses that the one and indivisible light of the gods (τὸ ἐν καὶ ἀμέριστον τῶν θεῶν φῶς) is omnipresent.<sup>19</sup>

It is in his *Republic* that Plato outlines the qualities of 'true light'. The verb φωτίζω (to illuminate) bears a deep spiritual meaning, according to Alcinous, who argues that God is the primary intellect who provides intellection and intelligibility to His creation.<sup>20</sup> However, its function manifests in *Resp.* 515c-d, where we learn about the crucial role of philosophy in releasing the prisoners from the cave with its shadows cast from the light of a fire by enabling them to ascend to the true light outside the cave.<sup>21</sup> However, this passage is better understood in the light of the two similes in the sixth book of the *Republic*, namely that of the sun and the light (505a-509d) and that of the bisected line segment (509d-511e). Socrates, being urged by Glaucon to define Good, draws an analogy and talks about 'the child of good' (ἐκγονός τε τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ), which, he argues, is the sun and suggests that the sun illuminates, thus bestowing the ability to see and be seen by the eye. In the same way, the idea of Good illumines, with truth, what is intelligible. Plato uses the simile of the sun to define the true meaning of the Good. The Good illuminates knowledge so that our minds can see what is true. Without the Good, we would only be able to see with our physical eyes, not the mind's eye. The sun bestows its light so that we may see the world around us; without it, we could not understand the true realities that surround us.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, in the simile of the cave, true philosophy helps the prisoner to see the true nature of things and cast away the shadows surrounding him. As we shall see below, this task of true philosophy was later adopted by early Christian thinkers and Neoplatonists, such as Clement and Plotinos, respectively.<sup>23</sup> Clement defines his readers as the sons of true light (οἱ τοῦ φωτὸς τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ υἱοὶ) and advises them not to shut the door against this light, but to turn in on themselves, illuminate the eyes of the hidden man (the infidel), and gaze at the truth itself.<sup>24</sup> Plotinos similarly encourages his readers to look into their inner selves and discusses the virtuous' goal of unifying humans with the intellectual light.<sup>25</sup> By 'virtuous' (ἀνδρες ... ἀγαθοί), Plotinos

<sup>17</sup> On other occurrences of light imagery, cf. *Met. Ps.* 26.22, 29.11, 36.86, 39.32, 45.1, 59.38, 70.35, 79.42, 84.20, 87.28, 107.29, 122.3, 131.34, 143.26, 145.8.

<sup>18</sup> Gill, 1987: 34-53; Hunt, 1998: 69-80.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. van Kooten, 2005: 158.

<sup>20</sup> Alcinous *Handbook on Platonism* 27.3; 180.22-28, with Dillon, 1993.

<sup>21</sup> Pappas, 2004; Taylor, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Marmysz, 2012: 49.

<sup>23</sup> Malingrey, 1961.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Clem. Alex. *Paed.* 2.9.80.

<sup>25</sup> Plot. *Enn.* 1.6.9.

refers to the purified soul that has become aware of itself as part of the Intellect and thus becomes 'true light' (φῶς ἀληθινόν, I.6.9.18). These philosophers bestowed upon the Platonic concept of 'true light' a clear educational purpose aiming at the edification of the soul. This concept is also found in Apollinaris' metaphor of the *Psalms*, probably derived by Philo, who, in his *On Drunkenness* (§44), says that in the visible *cosmos* the purpose of human beings is to find his way back to the 'true light', the rays of which are visible only to those who are 'pure from all defiling mixture and piercing to the furthest distance, flashing upon the eyes of the soul'.<sup>26</sup> Thus, Plato presents a philosophical idea that provided the foundations of Christian philosophy and the Neoplatonic tradition of Late Antiquity: the concept of 'Good as the cause for all things, of all that is right and beautiful, giving birth in the visible world to light and the sun ('and its Lord'), and [having] its own power in the intelligible world producing truth and reason'.<sup>27</sup>

Whereas Plato talks about true light and the possibility that the prisoner can see the good and acknowledge the true nature of things, the doctrine of the imperceptibility of Good can be traced back to the second century CE and Noumenios' *On the Good* (fr. 2 Des Places). He links human cognition of material objects to a comparison between objects of a similar nature, although, in the case of Good, no object either present or sensible can advance human understanding of the nature of Good. Noumenios provides us with a lively description of the mystical vision of Good, and, as Dillon notices, the most important aspect to acknowledge is the negative effect of the Sun simile, since Socrates emphasises at the outset that he cannot give an account of Good, but only a series of images (*Resp.* 506c-e).<sup>28</sup> For Plato, the Good is the ultimate cause of everything, the embodiment of all Forms. It is worth noting here that Socrates calls the Sun a god (*Resp.* 508a) and argues that the Form of the Good 'lies beyond' (*Resp.* 509b), thus, insinuating a mystic colouring in his account of the conceptualization of the Good. Pappas argues that 'the traits of the Form of the Good make it not a divinity but a Form of Form-ness, a next level up from the Forms in abstraction and reality and a capstone to Platonic metaphysics'.<sup>29</sup> In other words, the Good is the formalisation of the form-ness, which enables us to understand the true nature of things. The Platonic concept of true light is pivotal to our understanding of a superior knowledge only God can have. In the works of Plato, one does come eventually to the vision of the Good, while in early Christian philosophy, knowledge of the Good is imperceptible for mortals.<sup>30</sup> The conceptualisation of divinity became more complex, as did the perennial question of the mortal's ability to truly know God. This complexity was precipitated by the Middle Platonists' tendency (and of Philo of Alexandria) to identify the Supreme Good with the *Dēmiourgos* (or the Λόγος).<sup>31</sup> It grew even more complicated with Origen's views on divine knowledge and his metaphorical use of the

<sup>26</sup> Trans. by van Kooten, 2005:160. Bremmer, 1983: 40-41, on the Platonic origins of this tenet. For the concept of the eyes of the soul in Philo, cf. *Mig.* 39 (divine light opens wide the soul's eyes); *On Dreams* 1.113 (the binding of the soul with incorporeal light); *Abr.* 119 (God and divine light surround the soul and cast out its shadows); *Virt.* 164 (God is the spiritual light who disperses the gloomy darkness of passion). Discussion in Bradshaw, 1998: 483-500; Calabi, 2007: 71-109; Katsos, 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Trans. by van Kooten, 2005: 185; Plat. *Resp.* 517c: ὥς ἄρα πᾶσι πάντων αὕτη ὁρθῶν τε καὶ καλῶν αἰτία, ἐν τε ὁρατῷ φῶς καὶ τὸν τούτου κύριον τεκοῦσα, ἐν τε νοητῷ αὕτη κυρία ἀλήθειαν καὶ νοῦν παρασχομένη. Cf. Beierwaltes, 1957: 37-57 (esp. 51-52), on the similarity between the idea of Good and the sun; Menn, 1992: 543-73; Desmond, 2007: 73-99; Gerson, 2008: 93-112.

<sup>28</sup> Dillon, 1988: 226.

<sup>29</sup> Pappas, 2015: 102.

<sup>30</sup> Louth, 1981: 80-97; Jugrin, 2016: 71-94, for a discussion of the concept and a comparison between Platonic and early Christian philosophy.

<sup>31</sup> Phil. *De Post. Cain.* 168-9; *Leg. All.* 1.36-38; *Leg. All.* 3.100-102; *Congr.* 103-105; *Praem.* 36-46, for some ideas about Philo's views on the knowledge of God. Philo believed that knowing God's existence (ὑπάρξις) is distinct from knowing God's essence (οὐσία). Cf. Dillon, 1988: 219.

imagery of light in Book One of his *On First Principles*, where he discusses God's nature.<sup>32</sup> Origen's text is vital for connecting the cave allegory, the platonic imagery of light, and Christian conceptualisations of the Good. One example is Origen's conception of God, which could be characterised as apophatic. Similarly to the platonic conception of the Good, Origen argues that God is a perfect, undivided, and incorporeal unity superior to anything material; therefore, He is inconceivable and incomprehensible.<sup>33</sup> He is the One, the 'Idea of the Ideas'. However, it is worth noting that Origen structures his theology on the Scriptures and does not appeal to platonic tenets without supporting first his argument with a scriptural basis.<sup>34</sup> Origen uses the imagery of light precisely because, in Late Platonism, light was unanimously viewed as incorporeal, probably in response to an accusation by a Platonic source that Christianity ascribed a corporeal nature to God:

Ista nempe lux est, quae inluminat omnem sensum eorum, qui possunt capere veritatem, sicut in tricesimo quinto psalmo dicitur: in lumine tuo videbimus lumen. Quid enim aliud lum dei dicendum est, in quo quis videt lumen, nisi virtus dei, per quam quis inluminatus vel veritatem rerum omnium pervidet vel ipsum deum cognoscit, qui veritas appellatur?

He, indeed, is that light which illumines the whole understanding of those who are capable of receiving truth, as it is said in the Thirty-fifth Psalm, 'In your light shall we see light.' For what other light of God is being spoken of, in which one sees light, except the power of God by which someone, being illumined, either sees clearly the truth of all things or comes to know God himself, who is called the truth?

Orig. *On First Principles* 1.2 (Trans. by J. Behr, 2017: 25)

Origen probably had in mind the Platonic simile of the sun in *Resp.* 507a-509c.<sup>35</sup> In *Contra Celsus* (7.31), Origen explicitly refers to Plato's *Phaedo* (109e) and Celsus' interpretation of true heaven and true light in the platonic passage. More specifically, Origen argues for an arcane knowledge of tenets attested in Plato. Moses and the prophets, he tells us, also knew of the duality between the perceptible world and the world of forms; in the latter, they believed, there exist the true forms of the perceptible 'true light' and heaven, and the perceptible sun is different from the 'sun of righteousness' therein.<sup>36</sup> Yet it is also important to note here that the concept of the incorporeality of light also appears in Aristotle (*De An.* 418b9-10), who states that 'light is the activity of this transparent substance *qua* transparent' (φῶς δὲ ἐστὶν ἡ τοῦτου ἐνέργεια, τοῦ διαφανοῦς ἢ διαφανές).<sup>37</sup> Aristotle perceives light not as having a substance of any kind but as a condition of a substance. However, for later Platonists and Aristotelians, the incorporeal nature of light was connected with its preeminent role in the function of vision.<sup>38</sup> Vision is the primary among senses in Plato (*Ti.* 45b-d), and was later used by Alexander of Aphrodisias as an analogy for God in the activation of the human intellect (νοῦς) and its cognising of

<sup>32</sup> Steidle, 1942: 236-243; Harl, 1961: 57-67; Crouzel and Simonetti, 1978: 161-186; Behr 2018, on the meaning of the three acknowledged 'first principles' – God, Ideas, and Matter – in Origen's *First Principles*.

<sup>33</sup> On Origen's apophatic conception of God, Stroumsa, 1983: 345-358; Papanikolaou, 2006; Ramelli, 2017: 177-198.

<sup>34</sup> Greggs, 2009: 55-56; Scott, 2012: 58-60, on Origen's keeping faithful to the Scripture.

<sup>35</sup> Contra Edwards 2017: 80 n. 63, who sees reliance on earlier Christian tradition rather than debts to platonic theology.

<sup>36</sup> Chadwick, 1953: 419, for an English translation.

<sup>37</sup> Trans. by Hett, 1936: 105.

<sup>38</sup> Charlton, 2014; De Groot, 2015, on the importance of the incorporeality of light found in Aristotle's on the soul which had a great impact on Neoplatonists, such as Philoponos.



the 'True Entity'.<sup>39</sup> Alexander's perception was also influenced by Plato's simile of the sun, which later informed Plotinos' view on the qualities of light in *Enn.* 1.6.3 (φῶς ἀσώματον καὶ λόγος καὶ εἶδος).<sup>40</sup> Thus, we see that the incorporeal light harks back to the period of Middle Platonism (probably to Noumenios).<sup>41</sup> More specifically, as far as fragments of his *On the Good* preserved in Eusebios allow us to tell, Noumenios of Apamea opines that the existence must itself rather be incorporeal and removed from all mutability (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 15.17), in eternal presence, without being subject to the variation of time, simple and imperturbable in its nature by its own will as well as by external influence (Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 11.10). True existence is identical with the first God existing in and by itself, that is, with Good, and is defined as spiritual (νοῦς; Eus. *Praep. Ev.* 11.18).

To return to Origen, a few sections below his debt to Plato's simile of the sun and the allegory of the cave becomes apparent, as he argues that light leads to divine knowledge:

Omni igitur sensu, qui corporeum aliquid de deo intellegi suggerit, prout potuimus, confutato, dicimus secundum veritatem quidem deum inconprehensibilem esse atque inaestimabilem. Si quid enim illud est, quod sentire vel intellegere de deo potuerimus, multis longe modis eum meliorem esse ab eo quod sensimus necesse est credi. Sicut enim si videamus aliquem vix posse scintillam luminis aut brevissimae lucernae lumen aspicere et eum, cuius acies oculorum plus luminis capere quam supra diximus non valet, si velimus de claritate ac splendore solis edocere, nonne oportebit no sei dicere quia omni hoc lumine quod vides ineffabiliter et enaestimabiliter melior ac praestantior solis est splendor?

Orig. *On First Principles* 1.1.5

Having then refuted, to the best of our ability, every interpretation which suggests that we should attribute to God any material characteristics, we assert that he is in truth incomprehensible and immeasurable. For whatever may be the knowledge which we have been able to obtain about God, whether by perception or reflection, we must of necessity believe that he is far and away better than our thoughts about him. For if we see a man who can scarcely look at a glimmer or the light of the smallest lamp, and if we wish to teach such a person, whose eyesight is not strong enough to receive more light than we have said, about the brightness and splendour of the sun, shall we not have to tell him that the splendour of the sun is unspeakably and immeasurably better and more glorious than all this light he can see?

(Trans. by J. Behr, 2017: 29)

In the allegory of the cave, Plato describes how some of the prisoners, after viewing the shadows on the wall, realise that this light is produced by a fire and is not natural light; then, they advance to a vision of the outside world. Viewing the sun and light sources outside the cave implies that knowledge of the intelligible world, and thus of Good, is possible. The simile of the bisected line (*Resp.* 509d-511d), following the simile of the sun, helps us understand the prisoner's path from darkness and the shadows to true light and the true nature of things. Socrates uses the allegory of the bisected line segment to distinguish between different forms of knowledge and truth. Projected on a line segment, the

<sup>39</sup> Alex. Aphrod. *De anim.* 43. Dillon, 1988: 222; Ganson, 2003: 383-93; Hendrix, 2010; Crampton, 2017, on Alexander's perception of vision and light.

<sup>40</sup> Also in Plotinos, *Enn.* 2.1.7, 4.5.6-7 with different wording.

<sup>41</sup> On Plotinos' influence, Armstrong, 1967: 54-57; Schroeder, 1984: 234-245; Todorovska, 2020: 47-60; Domaradzki, 2020: 139-50, on Noumenios' perception of the incorporeal light.

fundamental division is between what is visible and what is intelligible, with the visible portion being smaller than the intelligible one. Socrates asks Glaucon to not only envision this unequally bisected line (γραμμὴ δίχα τετμημένη) but to imagine further dividing each of the two segments. Socrates explains that the four resulting parts represent four separate 'affections' (παθήματα) of the psyche. The lower two sections represent the visible, while the higher two are intelligible. These affections are described in succession as corresponding to increasing levels of reality and truth from conjecture (εἰκασία) to belief (πίστις), contemplation (διάνοια), and finally to comprehension (νόησις). Origen adheres to similar tenets in his doctrine about the knowability of God. He refers to God as being of a nature similar to the human mind, although God's true, pure nature is well beyond the mortal's ability to behold. Dillon notes the same distinction between Plato (*Resp.* 515e-516b) and Origen's *On First Principles* (1.1.6). When brought into the true light, prisoners would be overwhelmed by the sudden exposure to light and unable to tell which things they see are real. Thus, a gradual process of acclimatisation is required. Conversely, Origen claims that one cannot reach the true light, the sun (an allegory for 'true light'), within the timespan of mortal life.<sup>42</sup>

## Divine Knowledge and the Imagery of True Light in *Met. Ps.* 138:9-23

### Author, Text, and the Imagery of Light

The 'Homeric' Psalter, as Golega very aptly names it, is a fourth- or fifth-century CE hexameter paraphrase of the Septuagint Psalms, to which a *Protheoria* (programmatic prologue) of 110 hexameter lines is attached, probably a later infiltration. Its attribution to Apollinaris of Laodicea (310-390), a Christian bishop and rhetorician whose Christological ideas were anathematised at the Council of Constantinople in 381, has now been convincingly confirmed.<sup>43</sup> Faulkner firmly attributes the work to Apollinaris and notes the significant impact of early Christian *exegesis* on the *Metaphrasis*, drawing on passages from Gregory of Nyssa and his treatise *On the Inscriptions* (i.e., introductory superscriptions) of the Psalms as well as, of course, from Origen.<sup>44</sup> The early Christian *exegesis* and the influence of Origen and Gregory on the *Metaphrasis* presupposes a mystical (spiritual) theology and allegorical *exegesis* of Scripture, and, here, of the Septuagint Psalter. Therefore, it is easy to confuse allegorical and mystical discourse, although, given that allegory explains symbols, it should be possible to distinguish between them.<sup>45</sup> In my interpretation of Apollinaris' paraphrase, I use the allegorical imagery of light as a symbol of truth and God, which subsequently leads to a spiritual knowledge of God's nature. In view of this, I explore the allegorical imagery of light and its spiritual affiliation with the knowability

<sup>42</sup> This difference between Plato and Origen is also reflected in their respective wording. There seems to be an explicit contradiction between *Resp.* 516b: αὐτὸν καθ' αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ χώρᾳ δύναιτ' ἄν κατιδεῖν, and *On First Principles* 1.1. 6: *mens nostra ipsum per se ipsum deum sicut est non potest intueri*. Cf. Dillon, 1988: 225.

<sup>43</sup> Apollinaris' authorship is based on references in church historians Socrates and Sozomenos, who list Apollinaris and his father, a priest and a grammarian with the same name, as skilled poets and scholars who paraphrased scripture in classical forms, including hexameter verses (Kaster, 1988: 242-243). For a summary of early doubts over Apollinaris' authorship (starting with Ludwig's retraction after 1912), Faulkner, 2020: 1-31; De Stefani, 2008: 3, n. 12. Persic (1998: 193-217) suggests that fragments of Apollinaris' commentary on the Psalms preserved in *catenae* are not incompatible with the *Metaphrasis*.

<sup>44</sup> E.g., Faulkner, 2020: 8-9, 52-56. Heine (1995: 20-49) surveys potential influences on the form and exegetical method of Gregory's treatise, amongst which Origen and Iamblichus figure prominently. He concludes (28) that Gregory probably had access to Origen's homilies on the Psalms, which included Psalm 42.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Macleod, 1971: 362-379, who discusses the blended qualities of allegory and mysticism within a definition of allegory as symbolic; the language of mysticism is inherently symbolic.

of God in the *Metaphrasis*. I examine whether these allegories of Plato's, which early Christian thinkers creatively transformed in the light of the Christian understanding of God, are also compatible with the Christian *exegesis* of the metaphrase, as theories inserted into the *Metaphrasis* deviated from its *Vorlage* – mainly in vocabulary and epic language.

It would require a separate study to examine the plethora of views on the genre and context of Psalm 138 in the Septuagint,<sup>46</sup> nor is there enough evidence to determine the occasion or date of composition. It may be that the psalmist had been accused of idolatry or that he avows his loyalty to the Lord to avail himself of divine protection. The theology of the Psalm is often considered too advanced for King David (listed as the composer in the Psalm's superscription). This aspect has led scholars to view it as a post-exilic composition.<sup>47</sup> There is no substantial evidence to suggest the underlying concepts of the Psalm had to be late, mainly because we would simply assume that a psalm from the Davidic collection had been brought down to a later period to address similar circumstances.<sup>48</sup> Regardless of context and date, scholars of the Bible are drawn to this passage when studying the omniscience and omnipresence of God, the creator and redeemer. This section is arranged thematically as the focus progresses from the psalmist's realisation that he cannot fully comprehend the knowledge of God to its comparison with Plato's allegory of the cave and the true light. First, I compare the metaphrase with the Septuagint's text and examine Apollinaris' treatment of true light with the paraphrastic technique of amplification to explain divine omnipresence in the psalmist's life. Second, I compare the *Metaphrasis* to the platonic allegory of the cave and explore similarities and deviations: Plato argues that the philosopher-prisoner can actually view the Good, while in the *metaphrasis* the psalmist cannot fully comprehend divine knowledge.

- θαῦμά μ' ἔχει, ὅτε σεῖο περιφράσομαι φρεσὶ μῆτιν  
 10 οὐδὲ νόῳ δύναμαι κρατερώτατα πολλὸν ὁρᾶσθαι.  
 πνεύματος οὐκ ἄρα σεῖο μέγα κράτος ἦεν ἀλύξαι  
 οὐδὲ τεῆς ἀπάνευθε κατακρύπτεσθαι ὁπωπῆς.  
 οὐρανὸν αἶ κε μόλοιμι, τεδὸς θρόνος οὗτος ἐτύχθη·  
 ἦν Αἶδην δ' ἔλθοιμι, καὶ ἐν νεκύεσσιν ἀνάσσεις·  
 15 ἦν δὲ καὶ ἰθυπόρους πτέρυγας ἀνέμοισι πετάσσας.  
 αὐλισθῶ νεάτοισι πολυσμαράγιοι θαλάσσης,  
 ἐνθά κε σῆς παλάμης δευήσομαι ἡγεμονῆος  
 καὶ σεο δεξιτερῆς, ἵνα μοι βίος ἔμπεδος εἴη.  
 εἶπα δέ· “μὴ τάχα με στείψει φθισίμβροτος ὄρφνη.”  
 20 νύκτα δὲ καίνυτο τέρψις, ἀτὰρ κνέφας ἤλασε φέγγος·  
 ὄρφνην γὰρ δεδάηκε τὸν φάος ἀμφικαλύπτειν  
 καὶ νύκτα δνοφερὴν τελέειν φαεσίμβροτον ἡμαρ·  
 οὐ τις ἀναγνοίη, ποῖον κνέφας ἢ φάος εἴη.

*Met. Ps.* 138.9-23

<sup>46</sup> There is some agreement over the content of the major sections: verses 1-18 are more hymnic, and verses 19-24 are akin to lament psalms. Allen (1977: 5-23) suggests that the psalm is a fully developed yet individual lament, wherein the entire first part provides the psalmist with relevant support for his prayer. Anderson (1873[1977]: 904) thinks that it is a thanksgiving psalm written after the psalmist was accused and then acquitted of idolatry, thus making verses 19-24 an affirmation of innocence. Eaton (1967: 83-84) argues that the psalm was written for King David who was beset by enemies. Kraus (1988: 511-513) suggests that whereas the psalm draws from the intellectual sphere of wisdom poetry, it is not a wisdom psalm *per se*, and technically not a hymn, but a didactic poem. For an overview of the discussion, Ross, 2016: 816.

<sup>47</sup> Ross, 2016: 816.

<sup>48</sup> The question was raised by Allen, 1977: 327.

I am amazed when I consider in my heart your wisdom, I am not able to look long upon its great strength. I was not able to escape the great strength of your spirit Nor to hide myself from your face. If I were to go to heaven, this is your throne; If I should go to Hades, you also rule amongst the dead; And if, spreading my straight wings upon the wind, I should dwell at the limit of the loud-roaring sea, There I will have need of your guiding hand And your right hand, that my life should be firm. And I said, 'Perhaps man-destroying darkness will soon trample me.' But joy overcame the night and light drove away the dark; For your light was able to cover the darkness And make the dark night as a shining day; No one would recognise which is darkness or light.

(Trans. by A. F. Faulkner, 2020: 423-425)

- 6 ἐθαυμαστώθη ἡ γνῶσις σου ἐξ ἐμοῦ.  
ἐκραταιώθη, οὐ μὴ δύνωμαι πρὸς αὐτήν. ποῦ πορευθῶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματός σου  
καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ προσώπου σου ποῦ φύγω; ἐὰν ἀναβῶ εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, σὺ εἶ ἐκεῖ.  
ἐὰν καταβῶ εἰς τὸν ᾅδην, πάρει· ἐὰν ἀναλάβοιμι τὰς πτέρυγάς μου κατ' ὄρθρον.  
10 καὶ κατασκηνώσω εἰς τὰ ἔσχατα τῆς θαλάσσης, καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖ ἡ χεὶρ σου ὁδηγήσει με,  
καὶ καθέξει με ἡ δεξιὰ σου. καὶ εἶπα Ἄρα σκότος καταπατήσεται με,  
καὶ νύξ φωτισμὸς ἐν τῇ τρυφῇ μου· ὅτι σκότος οὐ σκοτισθήσεται ἀπὸ σοῦ,  
καὶ νύξ ὥς ἡμέρα φωτισθήσεται· ὥς τὸ σκότος αὐτῆς, οὕτως καὶ τὸ φῶς αὐτῆς.

Ps. 138.6-12

Your knowledge was made wonderful from me; it became strong. I can never attain to it. Where should I go from your spirit? And from your face where should I flee? If I ascend to the sky, you are there; if I descend to Hades, you are present. If I were to take up my wings at dawn and make my covert at the farthest limits of the sea, Indeed, there your hand shall guide me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. And I said, 'So then, darkness shall trample me, And night will be illumination in my delight'. Because darkness will not be made dark due to you, and night will be illumined as day; as its darkness, so also its light.

(Trans. by T. Booij, 2005:18-17, with emendations)

The psalmist acknowledges that the Lord knows every detail of his life in advance. He finds it impossible to hide from that all-seeing presence and duly, yet passionately, affirms his loyalty to God and seeks divine guidance. He concludes that the Lord's infinite knowledge insuperably controls him; his actions are defined and restricted by God, who imposes His will on him.

In this section of the Psalm, the psalmist seems to be making an implicit statement about the ability of human beings to truly know God. At the beginning of a monologue, he admits that his knowledge (γνῶσις) of God 'was made wonderful' to the extent that the psalmist feels trapped and overwhelmed, so much so that he cannot hide from the Lord's presence. The psalmist can only conclude that this kind of knowledge is beyond his ability to understand, let alone control. In what follows, I examine the paraphrast's effort to understand divine light by noting similarities and deviations between Apollinaris' paraphrase and the Septuagint psalter on the subject of the unknowability of God. The differences between the two texts, as I argue below, can be explained twofold: first, Plato's allegorical simile of the cave is examined in connection with light imagery and the tenets of the knowability of God. Second, I observe that Apollinaris takes recourse in Homeric language to replace obscure or uncomfortable meanings in the original Psalm with more comprehensible ones, as well as to embellish his paraphrase.



The psalmist realises that God knows every aspect of his life as His knowledge traverses the *cosmos* and the psalmist himself. In particular, in verses 1-8, the psalmist expresses that God knows his every move and the motivation behind them. God knows every word of the psalmist before he even utters it. This realisation of divine omnipresence is especially stressed in verse 9, where the metaphrast changes the Septuagint's passive voice verb ἐθαυμαστώθη into a more typical Homeric phrase θαῦμά μ' ἔχει (in active voice),<sup>49</sup> suggesting that divine knowledge is beyond reach and understanding. What is more, the metaphrast changes the Septuagint's γνώσις into the epic phrase φρεσὶ μῆτιν to define the omniscience and wisdom of God for the psalmist.<sup>50</sup> Apollinaris changes the structure of the Septuagint text only to convey the incomplete meaning in Ps. 138.6, with a secondary clause indicating time (ὅτε ... μῆτιν). The psalmist says that he stands in awe at God's wisdom and omnipresence. Psalm 138 starts with a reference to self-knowledge: in v. 6 of the Psalter, the psalmist/narrator refers to the divine knowledge that, by nature, seeks to be united with the psalmist himself, transcending time and space. God bestowed knowledge upon humans, therefore, self-knowledge comes from God, partakes in His nature, is a medium to know God, and is interpreted by the psalmist as the inescapable divine omnipresence. Thus, the psalmist regards the Self as the medium to understand the Lord, who denotes a kind of self-knowledge which originates in divine presence and strength (Isa. 29.15-16), and this kind of self-knowledge is implied by the Psalm's phrase ἐξ ἐμοῦ (by me). The tendency to replace γνώσις with φρεσὶ μῆτιν is very well attested in antiquity, not only for deities but also for heroes and poets and is probably connected with divine inspiration.<sup>51</sup> The kind of knowledge he has been describing is supernatural and, as we shall see below, is omnipresent in the psalmist's life and the cosmos.<sup>52</sup> The speaker thus expresses his ardent admiration of God's presence in his life in positive terms, as opposed to the visual and distant experience of Plato's prisoner-philosopher.

Apollinaris deviates from the Septuagint text in the sense that the psalmist cannot fully comprehend the knowledge of the Lord, nor can he withstand His divine light. This is also a significant deviation from the platonic intertext, where the Good can be fully comprehended as γνωστόν. Thus, the knowability of God is cleverly blended with the true light, and Apollinaris includes the psalmist's inability to face divine knowledge since the psalmist states οὐδὲ νόῳ δύναμαι ... ὁρᾶσθαι (v. 10).<sup>53</sup> The poet amplifies the Psalm with the addition of the words οὐδὲ νόῳ δύναμαι ... πολλὸν ὁρᾶσθαι ('I cannot fully see .. in my mind', v.10); the psalmist cannot see (ὁρᾶσθαι) the inner light, and νοῦς is probably a metaphor for the divine and spiritual light. Elsewhere in the Septuagint, the phrase οὐ μὴ δύνωμαι πρὸς αὐτήν means to prevail against, to overcome (e.g. Gen. 32:26; Num. 13:30;

<sup>49</sup> For variations of the phrase θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι in the Homeric epics cf. *Il.* 5.725, 10.439, 20.344; *Od.* 6.306, 8.366, 13.108.

<sup>50</sup> Attested in Hom. *Il.* 9.423 and *Od.* 4.739.

<sup>51</sup> E.g., Hom. *Il.* 9.423, 10.497; *Od.* 3.120, 4.678; Hes. *Theog.* 472, 881 (a personified goddess); Sc. 28, fr. 195.28, 343.6; Pi. *Pyth.* 4.262, 9.38; Ap. Rh. 1.423, 463; Opp. *Hal.* 3.168, 4.77; *Cyn.* 1.248, 1.354, 3.415, 459.

<sup>52</sup> To the psalmist's surprise, compare *Od.* 10.326: θαῦμά μ' ἔχει, ὥς οὐ τι πῶν τάδε φάρμακ' ἐθέλχθης, and Circe's subsequent surprise when her magic fails; cf. also Hes. fr. 278.1; Soph. *Phoen.* 686; Opp. *Hal.* 4.322. Booiij (2005: 2-3) assumes that the wonder expressed in v. 6 of the psalm, which is paraphrased in v. 9 (θαῦμα) of the *Metaphrasis* and preserves the same idea expressed in the psalm, stems from a strong and continuous sense of God's proximity and knowledge (cf. Ps. 138:14). Mazor (1997: 262) argues that the narrator admires God's control over the lives of humans, the daily activities of the faithful, even their most intimate thoughts.

<sup>53</sup> In light of vv. 5-7 of the Septuagint Psalm, some scholars argue that in the first half of the psalm (or at least in some parts of it), the Lord's proximity is a threatening reality. Voiced, however, by one who knows that God will guide him wherever he ends up (such as at 'the end of the sea', where he is deep in chaos; vv. 9-10. and *Met. Ps.* 138.16), the psalmist can scarcely conceal his apprehension with regard to God's presence. In fact, as we will see below, the opposite is indicated by vv. 11-15. Cf. Baumann, 1951: 187-190 (esp. 188-189); Mazor, 1997: 260-271; Gerstenberger, 2001: 402, for a discussion of positive feelings of the faithful concerning divine omnipresence.

*Judg.* 16:5), yet it could be that the underlying meaning in Hebrew was to be able to reach or understand. As it would make little sense for the psalmist to say that he is 'no match' for the Lord's knowledge (which is self-evident), we must assume that the missing infinitive in v.6 of the Septuagint Psalm (οὐ μὴ δύνωμαι ... [ὁράσθαι] πρὸς αὐτήν) means 'understanding' (cf. the usage in *Job* 34.35). Hence, Apollinaris supplements the incomplete meaning with the infinitive ὁράσθαι, by explaining in allegorical terms that the psalmist cannot 'see' divine light, and the adverb πολλὸν impresses the inability to understand it fully. Apollinaris cannot cope with God's omniscience and omnipresence, both agonisingly close and inconsolably incomprehensible.<sup>54</sup> The psalmist delights in the formidable, unapproachable knowledge of God. Shaken, he momentarily considers the impossible: to flee from the omnipresent, omniscient God.

Moreover, Apollinaris changes the direct questions of the Septuagint text into indirect speech, conveying the psalmist's surprising declaration that he cannot withstand divine light. Of particular importance are the following wordings in *Met. Ps.* 138.9-12: **θαῦμά μ' ἔχει, ὅτε σεῖο περιφράσομαι φρεσὶ μῆτιν | οὐδὲ νόῳ δύναμαι κρατερώτατα πολλὸν ὁράσθαι. | πνεύματος οὐκ ἄρα σεῖο μέγα κράτος ἦεν ἀλύξαι | οὐδὲ τεῆς ἀπάνευθε κατακρύπτεσθαι ὁπωπῆς**, as a result of which the psalmist hides himself from divine light. In the metaphor, we notice a distinction between the boundaries of human intellect and the ability to know God (φρεσὶ μῆτιν), who cannot be fully perceived and understood (πολλὸν ὁράσθαι). Whereas the Septuagint text suggests there is no place the psalmist can seek refuge (*Ps.* 138.7 τοῦ πορευθῶ), the metaphrast alters this inability from emotional to perceptual, an incapacity to see divine wisdom. A clear exegetical distinction arises between the Septuagint's verb of movement and the metaphor's verb of perception (οὐδὲ νόῳ ... ὁράσθαι). Apollinaris chooses to define this biblical term for knowledge with the word μῆτις, which refers to divine wisdom and providence in Greek poetry.<sup>55</sup> Hence, he interprets knowledge (μῆτιν) in the Septuagint text as divine wisdom, whereas the psalmist clearly distinguishes between divine wisdom and human intellect. Consequently, Apollinaris' amplification here explains that the intellectual knowledge, the spiritual, inner understanding of divine light, is unbearable for the psalmist to see.

This is reminiscent of Plato's concept of true light, which Christian philosophers later integrated into a deeper theological context. In Plato (*Resp.* 514a), Socrates recounts that his interlocutors should imagine prisoners in a well-lit cave.<sup>56</sup> A few sections below follows a definition of Good as the source of all Forms: 'the cause for all things of all that is right and beautiful, giving birth in the visible world to light and the sun ('and its lord'), and having its own power in the intelligible world by producing truth and reason' (517b-c).<sup>57</sup> The release of the prisoners is followed by an exodus from the shadows to the images that cast them and therefrom, to the light (532b). Van Kooten explains that this Platonic conversion (περιαγωγή) concerns the soul as it supposedly possesses 'vision but does not rightly direct it and does not look where it should, an art of bringing this about' (518b-d).<sup>58</sup> In other words, this conversion involves redirecting one's eyes and channelling one's power of vision, rather than inserting vision into blind eyes as if vision were not already existent.

Regarding this conversion, Apollinaris evokes the Platonic imagery of prisoners' astonishment at returning to true, natural light. However, unlike the prisoners, the psalmist's soul could not

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Gen.* 18:14; *Exod.* 34:10; *Josh.* 3:13; *Ps.* 78:11, on the inability of the faithful to understand God.

<sup>55</sup> Detienne and Vernant, 1989; Holmberg, 1997: 1-33; Faraone and Teeter, 2004: 177-208; Bracke, 2019, on *mētis* in Greek poetry.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Pl. Resp.* 539e-540a; van Kooten, 2005: 176.

<sup>57</sup> Trans. by G. H. van Kooten, 2005: 166.

<sup>58</sup> van Kooten, 2005: 183.

fully bear and understand the intelligible light (*Met. Ps.* 138.10-11: οὐδὲ νόω δύναμαι κρατερώτατα πολλὸν ὁρᾶσθαι. | πνεύματος οὐκ ἄρα σείο μέγα κράτος ἦεν ἀλύξαι). The metaphrast here amplifies the Septuagint text (*Ps.* 138.6-7: ἐκραταιώθη, οὐ μὴ δύνωμαι πρὸς αὐτήν) with the addition of νοῦς and the infinitive ὁρᾶσθαι, which strengthen the imagery of noetic light and the psalmist's inability to see. According to John Chrysostom, the psalmist benefited from divine providence and recognised God's omniscience. At this point of his *exegesis*, a resemblance to the paraphrase's πολλὸν (v. 10) appears, but we cannot tell whether John Chrysostom was aware of Apollinaris' metaphrase of the Psalter. A meaning similar to the metaphrast's wording 'οὐδὲ νόω δύναμαι κρατερώτατα πολλὸν ὁρᾶσθαι' is traced in Chrysostom's words: 'Ὅταν δὲ εἴπῃ γινώσκιν, οὐ τοῦτο λέγει, ὅτι Ἀγνοῶ τὸν Θεὸν, ἀλλ' ὅτι Παντελῇ καὶ σαφῇ τὴν περὶ αὐτοῦ γινώσκιν οὐκ οἶδα. He explains that humans cannot fully grasp divine knowledge and have an incomplete understanding of divine wisdom.<sup>59</sup>

This inability to 'see' is metaphorically conveyed in the *Metaphrasis* and alludes to the shadows and darkness in the Platonic cave (*Resp.* 515c and 516a). Plato argues that when the prisoner 'set himself free of his bonds and look up toward the light, he would be unable to see the things whose shadows he had seen before (ἀδυνατοὶ καθορᾶν ἐκεῖνα ὧν τότε τὰς σκιὰς ἐώρα), because of the flashing lights'. The philosopher then asks whether, upon exiting the cave, the sunlight would cause him to 'be unable to see a single one of the things now said to be truly real.' Plato immediately responds 'No, he would not be able to – at least not right away'.<sup>60</sup> However, the paraphrastic context of this section of the Psalm differs from this Platonic scenery. The psalmist does not inhabit a cave but lives in the physical world, and the images around him are not shadows but the Lord's creation. Consequently, divine knowledge and the true light are for the psalmist akin to the divine miracles around him and the realisation that he is part of this divine world.

This deviation from Plato's imagery of the cave is repeated when the psalmist renounces any hope of escaping the Lord's gaze (v. 12: οὐδὲ τεῆς ἀπάνευθε κατακρύπτεσθαι ὁπωπῆς), whether he flees to heaven, the underworld, or the sea (as he further elaborates, in vv. 13-16). Thus, against this Platonic background of the cave and in the theological context of the omnipresence of God in the paraphrase, we see that the 'true, intellectual light' can at the same time impart physical light to the eyes of the 'blind' and stand as the physical light of this world. This idea was further developed and enhanced in the Christological tenets of John's Gospel and the incarnation of Christ as the true, intellectual light – the Son of God and the Light of the Light.<sup>61</sup> However, the Platonic background of this concept and the view that the original intellectual light belongs to the order of the incorporeal world deviates from the theological view that the true light is also the perceivable light in the physical world.

## The Light-Darkness Dichotomy

In this passage of the Psalm, there appears to be an opposition with philosophical connotations between light and darkness. In fact, this polarity of light and darkness seems to have had an intertwined affiliation with the divine creation of the cosmos; an idea first expressed in *Genesis* (1.3b-4, 1.5, 1.9) and further developed in the prologue to John's Gospel (1.5, 1.9) on divine creation. In this section,

<sup>59</sup> Joh. Chrys. *Exp. In Ps.* 55.413.17-31.

<sup>60</sup> ἐπειδὴ πρὸς τὸ φῶς ἔλθοι, αὐγῆς ἂν ἔχοντα τὰ ὄμματα μεστὰ ὁρᾶν οὐδ' ἂν ἐν δύνασθαι τῶν νῦν λεγομένων ἀληθῶν; (transl. by C. D. C. Reeve, 2004).

<sup>61</sup> van Kooten, 2005: 149-94; Bieman, 2016.

I compare the metaphrase with Gregory of Nyssa's writings and his mystical colouring of darkness: his assertion that night can be as bright as day may be the key to interpreting the puzzling verse 12 of the Septuagint's text.

The Lord created light; darkness was there before, and he separated day from night (*Gen.* 1.3b-4). After the light's creation, darkness was unable to seize it (*John* 1.4-5). *John* (1.5) seems to be deliberately ambiguous here: the darkness did not grasp it, nor did it lay hold of it or grasp it with the mind; it did not comprehend it.<sup>62</sup> Verse 19 of the *Metaphrasis* preserves the direct speech of the Septuagint's text (εἶπα δὲ/εἶπα). As is the case with the *Metaphrasis*, many authors and translators read *Ps.* 138.11 as a conditional clause. Yet, parallel readings of the Hebrew text suggest that the metaphrase probably follows the Hebrew text and the Septuagint.<sup>63</sup> The metaphrast also follows the Septuagint's conceptualisations in the second half of v. 19 and adds the Homeric epithet φθισίμβροτος (killer of mortals) to qualify the night and its threatening qualities to humans. In Archaic and Hellenistic epic this adjective describes the menace of war.<sup>64</sup> In the *Metaphrasis*, it creates an antithesis between φθισίμβροτος ὄρφνη and φαεσίμβροτον ἡμᾶρ (v. 22: the day that brings light to men) and conveys the impact of this light-dark dualism to the physical and spiritual world of the faithful. The first compound of the adjective in φθισίμβροτος ὄρφνη ([the] dark that destroys humans) is a derivative of the verb φθί(ν)ω (to decay). In contrast, the first compound of the adjective in φαεσίμβροτον ἡμᾶρ is the word φάος/φῶς (light), which is etymologically related to the word φῶς (man, mortal). According to Plutarch (*Mor.* 1130A-D), the term denotes 'life', in which the soul itself is configured as a kind of spiritual light. In his interpretation of the Psalm (v. 22), Athanasios refers to darkness as a way to cover and hide the psalmist from divine eyes.<sup>65</sup> Origen and John Chrysostom also interpret darkness allegorically as a sadness from which the psalmist cannot escape since he is perpetually entrapped in sorrow and suffering.<sup>66</sup>

However, in vv. 20-23 of the metaphrase, a paradox challenges the adverse effects of darkness on the faithful who live in the Lord's omnipresent light (even in the destructive night). The metaphrast amplifies a strange section of the Psalm (vv. 11-12), an amplification that serves to better ground a potentially bright side of darkness. In the Platonic allegory of the cave, captives are used to 'seeing' shadows cast by the fire inside the cave; they consider these fake images as part of the artificial light of a fire. Plato extols the true form of intellectual light that shall cast away darkness and the shadows of ignorance. The Good produces truth as the Sun produces light. And the intellect renders objects intelligible as light renders possible sense perception.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, Apollinaris writes that divine light shall cast away the darkness, although, in the end, he warns that no one shall be able to distinguish between light and darkness (v. 23: οὐ τις ἀναγνοίη, ποῖον κνέφας ἢ φάος εἶη), since true light shall make

<sup>62</sup> van Kooten, 2005: 149-150.

<sup>63</sup> For the comparison of the Septuagint's text with the Hebrew text, Ross, 2016: 825-826. On the basis of similarities, this interpretation, as ancient as Symmachus *apud* Theod. *Int. in Ps.* 80.1937.18 (ἐὰν εἶπω ...) and Jerome vulg. *Ps.* 138.11 (*si dixero* ...), has found its way to modern times via the well-known Hebrew grammar of Gesenius (1910, par. 111), according to Booi, 2005: 4, n. 10-11.

<sup>64</sup> Hom. *Il.* 13.339 for a battle; in Hom. *Od.* 22.297 to describe the aegis of Athena; in Hellenistic poetry to describe Ares (Ap. Rh. 3.1357), and much later in Quint. Smyrn. 4.433, 8.446, 9.218, Triph. 313, and Ps.-Apoll. *Met. Ps.* 10.14, in various martial contexts.

<sup>65</sup> Ath. *Exp. In Ps.* 27.533.9-11.

<sup>66</sup> Orig. *Fr. in Ps.* 138.11, 12.5-7; Jn. Chrys. *Exp. In Ps.* 55.414.39-43.

<sup>67</sup> I thank the anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this point.



the dark night like a bright day.<sup>68</sup> Against the Platonic background of this passage, where darkness is set in stark contrast with the intellectual light and the Good, in the paraphrase, we observe that the true light embraces darkness as part of the divine creation and not as something imaginary, fake, or separable from the faithful's life. The joy and happiness of the faithful under the true light of God help the psalmist endure his existence even in darkness, so that darkness is no longer ominous and threatening to him.

Early Christian thinkers offered allegorical interpretations of this strange section of the Psalm. For example, Origen argues that darkness possesses a mysterious power and that the dark night can give birth to something good. As a result, something perceived as painful by one believer can be bright for someone else since the metaphrase says that darkness shall be as bright as day (v. 22: καὶ νύκτα δνοφερὴν τελείειν φαισίμβροτον ἡμᾶρ). Divine light, in other words, can transform a dark night into day, which can, in turn, bring light to humans:

ἄλλως δὲ, σκότος ἐνταῦθα τὴν θλίψιν καλεῖ, ὑφ' ἧς, φησὶν, οὐ προσεδόκων διαφυγεῖν, καταπατούσης με καὶ νικώσης· ἄθροον δὲ εἰς ἀγαθόν μοι τὰ δεινὰ μετεβλήθη· μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ μενόντων, πολλῆς ἀπέλαυσα τῆς χρηστότητος· [...] Τὸ δέ· σκότος οὐ σκοτισθήσεται ἀπὸ σοῦ, παρὰ σοῦ, ἐξέδωκεν ἕτερος· πάντα γάρ σοι ῥᾶστα βουλομένῳ μεταποιεῖν, ὡς τὴν νύκτα μηδὲν διαφέρειν ἡμέρας· μεταφορικῶς δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν στοιχείων δείκνυσσι τὴν ἐν θλίψεσιν ἄνεσιν, ὡς καὶ τοῖς ἐν ἀνέσει τυγχάνει ὅμοιον. Ἰωσήφ γοῦν ἐν ἀτιμίᾳ τιμὴν ἔσχε βασιλικήν. — Ἄρα σκότος ἥτις ἐστὶ, φησὶν, ἐμοὶ δύναμις ἀπόρρητος, καὶ αὐτὴ σοι τῷ Θεῷ φανερά τυγχάνει· καθάπερ ἐμοὶ ζοφώδης ἡ νύξ, οὕτως ἐστὶν σοι φωτεινή.

Otherwise, he [the psalmist] calls darkness an affliction, from which, he says, he does not expect to escape, 'tramping me down and prevailing over me. Suddenly, my suffering turned into good. And even if suffering persists, I enjoyed goodness [...]'. The phrase 'σκότος οὐ σκοτισθήσεται ἀπὸ σοῦ, παρὰ σοῦ', is interpreted as both. 'Because everything you want to easily alter, that night is not different from the day'; metaphorically, he reveals the remission of sorrow from the elements, as if it happens to be the same in remission. Josef, in his lowliness, acquired royal loftiness. 'As a result, darkness', he says, 'is such to me, a mystical power and shall be revealed to you by God; insofar as the night is gloomy for me, but at the same time, bright to you'.

Orig. *Fr. in Ps.* 138.11, 12. 7-10, 13-24 (author's translation)

Origen, in his interpretation of this passage of the Psalm, argues that darkness is indeed connected with sadness and sorrow. He explains this strange notion that darkness can also be bright by noting that the faithful endure suffering and sorrow day and night. Each person chooses a way to endure and experience suffering. The most optimistic ones view darkness more brightly than others. There, Origen suggests, lies the mystical power of darkness (δύναμις ἀπόρρητος), which, ultimately, is part of God's creation too and can be gloomy or bright. This idea further recalls Apollinaris's wording ὄρφνην γὰρ δεδάηκε τεδὸν φάος ἀμφικαλύπτειν, which means that divine light does not consume darkness, but embraces it as part of divine creation. John Chrysostom also uses metaphorical language to explain these strange verses and argues that there is a positive side to suffering. Thus, he argues that the psalmist

<sup>68</sup> This positive side of darkness has deep roots in literature, and especially in Plutarch's inquisitive remarks on the Egyptians, who are said to have deified the fieldmouse because of its blindness, since they regarded darkness as superior to light (Plut. *Mor.* 670B). This passage clearly suggests that 'the road to spiritual enlightenment is not chosen automatically' (van Kooten, 2005: 161).

takes some pleasure and courage from his gloomy condition because he perceives these troubles positively. This conception of the sufferings of the faithful indicates that divine intervention helps the righteous embrace sadness; thus, they come to a position of light from a prior state of anguish.<sup>69</sup> Tellingly, Athanasios states that darkness is the result of divine will, and gloomy night can be bright as well.<sup>70</sup>

The last three verses of the *Metaphrasis* (vv. 21-23: ὁρῶν γὰρ δεδάηκε τεὸν φᾶος ἀμφικαλύπτειν | καὶ νύκτα δνοφερὴν τελέειν φαεσίμβροτον ἡμαρ· | οὗ τις ἀναγνοίη, ποῖον κνέφας ἢ φᾶος εἶη) contain a vivid imagery of divine light enfolding (ἀμφικαλύπτειν) the night that makes it impossible to discern between the two; these images recall the writings of Gregory of Nyssa, a proponent of the mysticism of darkness.<sup>71</sup> Gregory of Nyssa's flourished in the fourth century CE, yet we do not know if he read Apollinaris' *Metaphrasis* of the Psalter. However, his apophatic conception of God is due to his belief that God was infinite and, thus, incomprehensible to the limited mind of the created beings.<sup>72</sup> Gregory's coherent and well-grounded perception of spiritual experience was probably influenced by Philo of Alexandria.<sup>73</sup> However, in this section, I suggest that Gregory was also aware of the *Metaphrasis*, mainly because of the similarities traced in the Apollinaris' text and Gregory's doctrine that mortals cannot comprehend the superior knowledge that only God could have.<sup>74</sup>

*De vita Moysis* contains perhaps the clearest example of Gregory's perception of the noetic ascent as a movement from light towards increasing darkness.<sup>75</sup> Gregory reminds us of Moses' encounter with God. First, God appeared to Moses in light (φῶς), then spoke to him in a cloud (νεφέλη), and afterwards, Moses saw God in darkness (γνόφος). Indeed, the ascent begins in light and moves into progressive darkness. Having identified Moses as a great thinker who revealed the master pattern of noetic ascent and knowledge of virtue, Gregory then suggests this path to the faithful (echoing the exodus of the captives from the cave).<sup>76</sup> First, the faithful must withdraw (ἀναχώρησις) from false opinions (ὑπόληψις) about God; this entails a passage from darkness (σκοτός) to light (φῶς). Next, the soul moves from misconceptions and superficial knowledge towards fuller appreciation of God's mysterious nature, symbolised by the cloud that overshadows (ἐπισκιάζω) His epiphanies; thus, the soul becomes accustomed to beholding what is hidden. Finally, the soul continues its journey toward loftier things and forsakes (καταλείπω) what can be attained by human nature, everything that can be comprehended (καταλαμβανόμενος); the soul penetrates the impenetrable, enters the sanctuary (ἄδυτον) of divine knowledge (θεογνωσία), and is surrounded by divine darkness (θεῖος γνόφος).<sup>77</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Jn. Chrys. *Exp. In Ps.* 55.414.45-55: Ἐγὼ, φησί, ταῦτα μὲν εἶπον, ἀπὸ τῆς τῶν πραγμάτων φύσεως ἀναλογιζόμενος· ἀθρόον δὲ τὰ δεινὰ εἰς ἀγαθὰ μετεβλήθη· μᾶλλον δὲ οὐ τὰ δεινὰ εἰς ἀγαθὰ μετεβλήθη, ἀλλὰ μενόντων τῶν δεινῶν ἐγὼ πολλῆς ἀπέλαυον τῆς χρηστότητος. Οὐ γὰρ εἶπεν, ὅτι Ἡ νύξ ἡφανίσθη· ἀλλ', ὅτι Ἡ νύξ φωτεινὴ ἦν· τουτέστι, μένουσα νύξ ἢ νύξ, δηλον δὲ, ὅτι τὰ δεινὰ καὶ αἱ συμφοραὶ (ταῦτα γὰρ τῷ τῆς νυκτὸς ὀνόματι δηλοῖ) οὐκ ἴσχυσάν με καταπατήσαι, ἀλλ' ἐγένετο ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ φῶς, τουτέστιν, ἀντίληψις περὶ ἐμέ.

<sup>70</sup> Ath. *Exp. In Ps.* 27.533.11-13: Ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦτο, φησί, τὸ σκοτός οὕτως ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ σῇ γνώσει, ὥσπερ ἂν εἶη καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ φῶς.

<sup>71</sup> Laird (1999: 592) notes that references to mystical darkness abound in Gregory of Nyssa; cf. Puech, 1978: 119-141; LeMaitre, 1868: cols 1868-1872. Divine darkness is a uniquely Judaeo-Christian theme rooted in the Bible (Puech, 1978: 133, 175) and McGinn (1992, 175) notices the absence of any consideration of the mysticism of darkness in the works of pagan Neoplatonists. Divine darkness is also alluded to in Origen. *Contra Celsum* 6.36.

<sup>72</sup> On the apophatic conception in Gregory of Nyssa, Vogel, 2015: 214-230; Poe, 2018: 57-68.

<sup>73</sup> On the influences of Gregory from Philo, Lossky, 1974: 31-43; Daniélou, 1995.

<sup>74</sup> On the interaction of Gregory of Nyssa and Apollinaris' *Metaphrasis*, Faulkner, 2020: 9, 16, 29, 31, 51-53.

<sup>75</sup> Also Gregory's homily in *Canticum Canticatorum*, where he comments on the Sept. *Song of Songs* 5.2-7.

<sup>76</sup> Also Louth, 1981: 80-97, esp. 83-88. For a succinct statement on the relationship between Gregory's divine darkness and the allegory of the cave, Louth, 1986: 161.

<sup>77</sup> *Canticum XI* (GNO 6.322.13-32), on the noetic ascent towards divine darkness. Full exegesis in Maspero, 2017: 3-52.

However, it should be stressed that in Gregory's mystic conceptualisation of this swelling darkness, the light becomes part of this growing darkness. It disperses views about God that are false because they rely on the senses. Hence, it retains the same function attested in Apollinaris and Plato: it discloses the path towards knowing God not with our senses but through the soul's ascent to a higher level of cognition. When Gregory alludes to this first epiphany in *De vit. Moys.* II, 162, he connects it once again with the light of knowledge and its didactic value. He says the 'text teaches that religious knowledge is at first light for those who receive it.'<sup>78</sup> This light of knowledge gives way to the darkness of the cloud. Apart from divine light, Gregory claims that the ascent to God is also an ascent to the darkness of the unknown and reveals the farthest reaches of the divine-human encounter (cf. *Exod.* 20.21, on Moses encountering God in darkness). In the metaphrase (v. 9: οὐδὲ νόῳ δύναμαι κρατερώτατα πολλὸν ὁρᾶσθαι, and vv. 21-23), the psalmist's inability to understand God and the consequent blending of light and darkness as an *exegesis* to Psalm 138 allude to Gregory's mystic interpretation of Scripture. The 'apophatic ascent' is the guiding motif and emphasises the mind's inability to grasp God, a failure not so much due to the weakness of the mind as to the intrinsic unknowability of God.<sup>79</sup> Consequently, in the *Metaphrasis*, light does not cast away the darkness but enfolds it as part of the divine creation, where the unknowability of God reveals a part of the divine-human relationship in the *cosmos*.<sup>80</sup>

Thus, the negative effect of the dark night (*Met. Ps.* 138.19: φθισίμβροτος ὄρφνη) is succeeded by a positive impact since God shall allow His divine light to consume darkness (v. 20: νύκτα δὲ καίνυτο τέρψις, ἀτὰρ κνέφας ἤλασε φέγγος). In *Ps.* 138.12, God disperses His divine light around the psalmist by night. In the metaphrase, an *anadiplosis* of the Septuagint's line expresses this positive effect of night and darkness, since the paraphrast repeats the sense of the two hemistiches in the same verse. He also uses the phrase (*Met. Ps.* 138.20) νύκτα καίνυτο τέρψις to express his joy, even when covered by night, and then explains this statement by saying that divine light (φέγγος) shall dismiss darkness. Also expressed is the idea that joy conquers the darkness of the night;<sup>81</sup> subsequently, in the following verse (v. 21), the metaphrast again turns a negative statement in the Septuagint's text (ὅτι σκότος οὐ σκοτισθήσεται ἀπὸ σοῦ) into an affirmative one without altering the original meaning. Apollinaris elucidates the Vorlage and explains that divine light disperses the darkness from around the narrator (*Met. Ps.* 138.22: νύκτα δνοφερὴν τελείειν φαεσίμβροτον ἡμᾶρ). Darkness thus becomes almost equivalent to daylight. Finally, in v. 23, the narrator declares that the darkness of the night will be as light in the night. The Septuagint's simile, starting with ὥς (*Ps.* 138.12: ὥς τὸ σκότος αὐτῆς, οὕτως καὶ τὸ φῶς αὐτῆς), is replaced in the paraphrase with an indirect rhetorical question (οὐ τις ἀναγνοίη, ποῖον κνέφας ἢ φάος εἶη), which means that no one can discern darkness from light. Thus, his comparison in the previous verse is explicated as a conversion of night and day under divine light.

<sup>78</sup> Greg. Nys. *De vit. Moys.* II, 162.6-8: Διδάσκει γὰρ διὰ τούτων ὁ λόγος ὅτι τῆς εὐσεβείας ἡ γνώσις φῶς γίνεται παρὰ τὴν πρῶτην οἷς ἂν ἐγγένηται.

<sup>79</sup> Laird, 1999: 593 n. 5, on apophaticism in Gregory's analysis of divine darkness.

<sup>80</sup> Laird (1999: 616) pinpoints this special connection between light, darkness, and unknowability of God 'in, and only in, divine-darkness texts' of Gregory. Puech (1978: 119-142) traced long ago the roots of this tradition in Philo and Clement, a tradition to which Origen does not adhere.

<sup>81</sup> On this meaning of καίνυμι as to win or conquer, cf. also Hesychios (κ 254.1 Latte). The verb καίνυμι is a synonym of νικάω (to win) as in Empedocles, fr. 23.11: οὕτω μὴ σ' ἀπάτη φρένα καινύτω ἄλλοθεν εἶναι | θνητῶν, ὅσσα γε δῆλα γεγάκασιν ἄσπετα, πηγὴν, a gnomic statement pleading mortals not to allow fraud to conquer the human mind.

## Epilogue

It seems appropriate that a discussion of the metaphrast's use of light imagery in Psalm 138 should end, paradoxically, with a discussion of God as the one who makes darkness bright. I suggest that the theology of the second to the fourth centuries CE, through the judicious use and conceptualisation of the Platonic light imagery, drew creatively on two conflicting tendencies salient to second-century Platonist (and Hermetic) doctrine. First, it is God's knowability and his presentation as a *dēmiourgos* who makes himself known through his handiwork (the *cosmos*). Second, a conception of God as utterly transcendent, 'other' to everything material, who cannot be named, described, or known by anything other than the mind. Christian philosophical exegesis in the *Metaphrasis*, as we saw, presents us with both these aspects of divinity, in God the Father and God the Son, or the Logos. The metaphrase draws elements from the Platonic doctrine of 'light', wherein, when transferred to a theological context, the light of the Good represents the Lord who illuminates the faithful's soul. The main deviation from the Platonic understanding is that, for the psalmist, true light embraces, as we observed in the *Metaphrasis*, the whole of the created world —beyond the platonic dichotomy between sensible and intelligible realms— thanks to the omnipresence of God.

The *Metaphrasis Psalmorum*, thanks to Origen and Gregory's allegorical interpretation of divine light, is a much closer, often line-by-line rendition of its Septuagint original. As Faulkner argues, apart from factors of authorial choice and style, this quality may have something to do with the stichic structure of the Psalms, which could have encouraged close correspondence to the hexameter. Overtly faithful to the Septuagint's text, the *Metaphrasis* has often been judged rather poor literature, allegedly lacking the finer literary and exegetical qualities of Nonnos' paraphrastic techniques. However, in this paper, I note the echoes of Plato (and more specifically of the myth of the cave) in Apollinaris' passage, either directly or via earlier Christian authors who reshaped the Platonic tradition, articulated a new conception of God and approached the controversial question of the knowability of God in different ways. The metaphrast's effort to keep faithful to the original text indicates his intention to assimilate his exegesis and employ stylistic embellishments without altering the text significantly. The *Metaphrasis*, as a poetic paraphrase of the Psalter, has a clear aesthetic purpose: to render Scripture into a pleasing form of poetry (a Christian counterpart to pagan poetry). Yet it may also engage in *exegesis*, most characteristically with allusions and allegorical hints.

To conclude, this paper explores Plato's allegory of the cave as an intertext to an ambiguous passage of Apollinaris' *Met. Ps.* 138.9-23. This paper begins by considering allegory in connection with mysticism to suggest a long tradition and intertexts behind word choices and theological tenets in a fourth-century rendition of Psalm 138. It traces in brushstrokes the Platonic view of 'true light' in Middle and Neo-platonists and early church fathers. Then, I investigate how the cave allegory and Early Christian philosophical interpretations of the Scripture correspond to the theological context of this 'Homeric' Psalter, particularly the allusions to its classical Greek and biblical intertexts and, of course, to the Septuagint's Psalter. The comparison of the *Metaphrasis* with the Septuagint's text shows that Apollinaris slightly deviates from the *Vorlage*. With the paraphrastic technique of amplification and the use of epic language, Apollinaris incorporates the Platonic theory of true light in a theological and spiritual context of the knowability of God. The metaphrast deviates from Plato in suggesting that darkness has a mystical colouring and is part of God's creation. Gregory of Nyssa's mystic conception of divine darkness suggests that darkness can be as bright as day and is an effort to interpret the Septuagint's final verse.



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## Abstract (Greek) | Περίληψη

Η παρούσα μελέτη εξετάζει την σχέση ανάμεσα στον αλληγορικό μύθο του σπηλαίου από την Πολιτεία του Πλάτωνα και την πνευματική διαφυγή από το αχανές σκοτάδι στο «αληθινό φως» στην Μετάφραση του Ψαλτήρος από τον Απολλινάριο Λαοδικείας. Σε μία προσπάθεια να εξηγηθεί η «απόδραση» του ψαλμωδού από το σκοτάδι συνοψίζονται οι βασικές τάσεις στη βιβλιογραφία πάνω στην αλληγορία του σπηλαίου και την σύλληψη της ιδέας του αγαθού. Στην Πολιτεία του Πλάτωνα υπογραμμίζεται ο σημαντικός ρόλος της φιλοσοφίας στην απελευθέρωση του δεσμώτη φιλοσόφου από το σπήλαιο και τις σκιές που δημιουργούνται από το τεχνητό φως της φωτιάς. Η φιλοσοφία καθιστά δυνατή την άνοδο του δεσμώτη προς το αληθινό φως και την αληθινή φύση των πραγμάτων έξω από το σπήλαιο. Εν συνεχεία, εξετάζεται η αλληγορία του σπηλαίου σε σχέση με τις αλληγορίες του ήλιου (505a-509d) και της τετμημένης γραμμής (509d-511e) στο έκτο βιβλίο της Πολιτείας. Ο Σωκράτης, παρακινημένος από τον Γλαύκωνα να ορίσει το αγαθό, χρησιμοποιεί την αλληγορική τεχνική και μιλά για το «παιδί του αγαθού» (έκγονός τε τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ). Ο Σωκράτης υποστηρίζει ότι αυτό το «παιδί του αγαθού» είναι ο ήλιος και προτείνει ότι ο ήλιος φωτίζει δίνοντας σε εμάς την δυνατότητα να δούμε και να γίνουμε ορατοί με το μάτι. Με τον ίδιο τρόπο, η ιδέα του αγαθού φωτίζει το νου με την αλήθεια. Ο Πλάτωνας χρησιμοποιεί την αλληγορία του ήλιου για να ορίσει την αληθινή σημασία του αγαθού. Το αγαθό φωτίζει την γνώση ώστε ο νους μας να δει την αληθινή πραγματικότητα. Χωρίς το αγαθό, θα μπορούσαμε να δούμε μόνο με τα φυσικά μάτια και όχι με το «μάτι του νου». Ο ήλιος ρίχνει το φως του έτσι ώστε εμείς να μπορούμε να αντιληφθούμε τον κόσμο γύρω μας. Χωρίς την πηγή του φωτός θα βρισκόμασταν στο αχανές σκοτάδι όντας ανίκανοι να κατανοήσουμε την αληθινή φύση των πραγμάτων που μας περιβάλλουν. Ομοίως, στην αλληγορία του σπηλαίου η αληθινή φιλοσοφία ωθεί τον δεσμώτη στην απελευθέρωση και την θέαση της αληθινής φύσης των πραγμάτων και όχι των σκιών που είναι απεικασματα των ιδεών και αποτέλεσμα του τεχνητού φωτός της φωτιάς.

Η αλληγορία της γραμμής (509d-511d) που ακολουθεί την αλληγορία του ήλιου, μας βοηθά εξίσου να κατανοήσουμε το μονοπάτι του δεσμώτη φιλοσόφου από το σκοτάδι και τις σκιές στο αληθινό φως. Ο Σωκράτης χρησιμοποιεί την αλληγορία της γραμμής για να διακρίνει διαφορετικές μορφές γνώσης και αλήθειας. Η βασική διαίρεση είναι μεταξύ αυτού που είναι ορατό και αυτού που είναι κατανοητό, με το ορατό τμήμα να είναι μικρότερο από το κατανοητό τμήμα. Ο Σωκράτης ζητά από τον Γλαύκωνα όχι μόνο να οραματιστεί αυτήν την άνισα διαιρεμένη γραμμή (γραμμή δίχα τετμημένη), αλλά να φανταστεί μία περαιτέρω διαίρεση καθενός από τα δύο μέρη. Ο Σωκράτης εξηγεί ότι τα τέσσερα μέρη που προκύπτουν αντιπροσωπεύουν τέσσερα ξεχωριστά «πάθη» (παθήματα) της ψυχής. Τα δύο κατώτερα τμήματα λέγεται ότι αντιπροσωπεύουν το ορατό ενώ τα δύο υψηλότερα λέγεται ότι αντιπροσωπεύουν το κατανοητό. Αυτά τα πάθη περιγράφονται διαδοχικά ως αντίστοιχα σε αυξανόμενα επίπεδα πραγματικότητας και αλήθειας από την εικασία (εικάσια) στην πεποίθηση (πίστις), στη σκέψη (διάνοια) και τελικά στην κατανόηση (νόησις). Ο Ωριγένης εμμένει σε παρόμοιες αρχές στη διδασκαλία του σχετικά με τη γνώση του Θεού. Αναφέρεται στον Θεό ως φύση παρόμοια με τον ανθρώπινο νου, αν και η αληθινή, αγνή φύση του Θεού είναι πολύ πέρα από την ικανότητα του θνητού να την αντιληφθεί. Αυτή είναι μία σημαντική διαφορά των Νεοπλατωνιστών και του Πλάτωνα, ο οποίος θεωρεί ότι ο ανθρώπινος νους έχει την δυνατότητα να δει και να κατανοήσει το αγαθό (γνωστόν).

Έπειτα, η εστίαση προχωρά από τη συνειδητοποίηση του ψαλμωδού στην μετάφραση ότι δεν μπορεί να κατανοήσει πλήρως τη γνώση του Θεού στη σύγκρισή της με την αλληγορία του Πλάτωνα για το σπήλαιο και το αληθινό φως. Πρώτα, συγκρίνω τη μετάφραση με το κείμενο των Εβδομήκοντα και εξετάζω την ιδέα του αληθινού φωτός όπως περιγράφεται από τον Απολλινάριο ο οποίος χρησιμοποιεί την παραφραστική τεχνική της *amplificatio* για να εξηγήσει τη πανταχού θεία παρουσία στη ζωή του ψαλμωδού. Δεύτερον, συγκρίνω τη μετάφραση με την πλατωνική αλληγορία του σπηλαίου και διερευνώ ομοιότητες και αποκλίσεις. Ο Πλάτωνας υποστηρίζει ότι ο δεσμώτης φιλόσοφος μπορεί πραγματικά να δει το Αγαθό, ενώ στη μετάφραση ο ψαλμωδός δηλώνει ότι δεν μπορεί να κατανοήσει πλήρως τη θεία γνώση. Αυτή η αδυναμία «να δει» μεταφέρεται αλληγορικά στη Μετάφραση και παραπέμπει στις σκιές και το σκοτάδι στο πλατωνικό σπήλαιο (Πολ. 515c and 516a). Ωστόσο, το παραφραστικό πλαίσιο αυτής της ενότητας του Ψαλμού διαφέρει από αυτό το πλατωνικό χωρίο. Ο ψαλμωδός δεν κατοικεί σε σπήλαιο αλλά ζει στον φυσικό κόσμο και οι εικόνες γύρω του δεν είναι σκιές αλλά δημιουργήματα του Κυρίου. Κατά συνέπεια, η θεία γνώση και το αληθινό φως είναι για τον ψαλμωδό παρόμοια με τα θεία θαύματα που τον περιβάλλουν και συνειδητοποιεί ότι αποτελεί μέρος αυτού του θείου κόσμου. Αυτή η απόκλιση από την εικόνα του Σπηλαίου του Πλάτωνα επαναλαμβάνεται όταν ο ψαλμωδός αποκηρύσσει κάθε ελπίδα να ξεφύγει από το βλέμμα του Κυρίου (Μετ. στ. 13-16). Έτσι, σε αυτό το πλατωνικό υπόβαθρο του Σπηλαίου και στο θεολογικό πλαίσιο της πανταχού παρουσίας του Θεού στην παράφραση, βλέπουμε ότι το «αληθινό, διανοητικό φως» μπορεί ταυτόχρονα να μεταδώσει φυσικό φως στα μάτια των «τυφλών» και να σταθεί ως φυσικό φως αυτού του κόσμου. Αυτή η ιδέα αναπτύχθηκε περαιτέρω και ενισχύθηκε στις χριστολογικές αρχές του Ευαγγελίου του Ιωάννη και στην ενσάρκωση του Χριστού ως το αληθινό, διανοητικό φως – ο Υιός του Θεού και το Φως του Φωτός. Ωστόσο, το πλατωνικό υπόβαθρο αυτής της έννοιας και η άποψη ότι το αρχικό διανοητικό φως ανήκει στην τάξη του ασώματος κόσμου αποκλίνει από τη θεολογική άποψη ότι το αληθινό φως είναι επίσης το αισθητό φως στον φυσικό κόσμο.

Τέλος, οι τρεις τελευταίοι στίχοι της Μεταφράσεως (στ. 21-23) περιέχουν μια ζωντανή απεικόνιση του θείου φωτός που περικλείει (ἀμφικαλύπτειν) τη νύχτα και καθιστά αδύνατη τη διάκριση μεταξύ των δύο. Αυτές οι εικόνες θυμίζουν τα γραπτά του Γρηγορίου Νύσσης, ενός υπέρμαχου του μυστικισμού του σκότους. Η ακμή του Γρηγορίου Νύσσης τοποθετείται στον τέταρτο αιώνα μ.Χ., όμως δεν γνωρίζουμε αν είχε διαβάσει τη Μετάφραση του Ψαλτηρίου από τον Απολλινάριο. Η αποφαστική του αντίληψη για τον Θεό οφείλεται στην πεποίθησή του ότι ο Θεός ήταν άπειρος και, επομένως, ακατανόητος για τον ανθρώπινο νου. Η συνεκτική και καλά θεμελιωμένη θεωρία του Γρηγορίου περί πνευματικής και μυστικιστικής εμπειρίας πιθανότατα επηρεάστηκε από τον Φίλωνα της Αλεξάνδρειας. Ωστόσο, στο άρθρο προτείνω ότι ο Γρηγόριος ίσως γνώριζε επίσης τη Μετάφραση κυρίως λόγω των ομοιοτήτων που εντοπίζονται στο κείμενο του Απολλινάριου και στην διδασκαλία του Γρηγορίου ότι οι θνητοί δεν μπορούν να κατανοήσουν την ανώτερη γνώση που μόνο ο Θεός θα μπορούσε να έχει. Έτσι, την αρνητική επίδραση της σκοτεινής νύχτας (Μετ. Ψαλμ. 138.19: φθισίμβροτος ὄρφνη) διαδέχεται μια θετική επίδραση, αφού ο Θεός θα επιτρέψει στο θείο φως του να καλύψει το σκοτάδι (στ. 20: νύκτα δὲ καίνυτο τέρψις, ἀτὰρ κνέφας ἤλασε φέγγος). Στον ψαλμό 138.12, ο Θεός διασκορπίζει το θείο φως Του γύρω από τον ψαλμωδό τη νύχτα. Στη μετάφραση, η ερμηνεία του στίχου των Εβδομήκοντα εκφράζει την θετική επίδραση της νύχτας και του σκότους, αφού η παράφραση επαναλαμβάνει την έννοια των δύο ημιστιχίων στον ίδιο στίχο. Χρησιμοποιεί

επίσης τη φράση (Μετ. Ψαλμ. 138.20) «νύκτα καίνυτο τέρψις» για να εκφράσει τη χαρά του, ακόμη και όταν σκεπάζεται από τη νύχτα, και στη συνέχεια εξηγεί αυτή τη δήλωση λέγοντας ότι το θεϊκό φως (φέγγος) θα διώξει το σκοτάδι. Εκφράζεται επίσης η ιδέα ότι η χαρά υπερνικά το σκοτάδι της νύχτας. Στη συνέχεια, στον επόμενο στίχο (στ. 21), η μετάφραση μετατρέπει και πάλι μια αρνητική δήλωση στο κείμενο των Εβδομήκοντα (ὅτι σκότος οὐ σκοτισθήσεται ἀπὸ σοῦ) σε καταφατική χωρίς να αλλοιώνει την αρχική σημασία. Ο Απολλινάριος διευκρινίζει το κείμενο των Εβδομήκοντα και εξηγεί ότι το θείο φως διασκορπίζει το σκοτάδι γύρω από τον αφηγητή (Μετ. Ψαλμ. 138.22: νύκτα δνοφερὴν τελείν φαεσίμβροτον ἡμαρ). Το σκοτάδι γίνεται έτσι σχεδόν ισοδύναμο με το φως της ημέρας. Τέλος, στον στίχο 23, ο αφηγητής δηλώνει ότι το σκοτάδι της νύχτας θα είναι σαν φως μέσα στη νύχτα. Η παρομοίωση των Εβδομήκοντα, που αρχίζει με το ὥς (Ψαλμ. 138.12: ὥς τὸ σκότος αὐτῆς, οὕτως καὶ τὸ φῶς αὐτῆς), αντικαθίσταται στην παράφραση με μια έμμεση ρητορική ερώτηση (οὐ τις ἀναγνοίη, ποῖον κνέφας), που σημαίνει εἴη κνέφας. Μπορεί κανείς να διακρίνει το σκοτάδι από το φως. Η μετάφραση αποκλίνει από τον Πλάτωνα υπονοώντας ότι το σκοτάδι έχει μυστικιστικό χρωματισμό και είναι μέρος της δημιουργίας του Θεού. Η μυστικιστική αντίληψη του Γρηγορίου Νύσσης για το θεϊκό σκοτάδι υποδηλώνει ότι το σκοτάδι μπορεί να είναι τόσο φωτεινό όσο η μέρα και είναι μια προσπάθεια ερμηνείας του τελευταίου στίχου των Εβδομήκοντα.