

Light in the *Fortalitium Fidei*

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1. Introduction

Celestial light holds a significant influence over some of the events narrated in the *Fortalitium Fidei* (1458-1460), an encyclopedic pentalogy on religious controversy authored by the Castilian Franciscan Alfonso de Espina. Although many scholars have analyzed numerous apologetic and polemical episodes within this treatise, yet none have attempted to explore one of its most plethoric themes: the intricate intimacy between humanity and divine light. The perception and understanding of light permeate many of Alfonso de Espina's main arguments in the *Fortalitium Fidei* and are vividly described throughout. Indeed, the encyclopedic approach, which characterizes this treatise, facilitates the comprehensive compilation of literary sources that offer valuable insights into the ideological underpinnings of the Christian Middle Ages. In the *Fortalitium Fidei* , Alfonso de Espina displays many the ideas and the beliefs prevalent among Christian medieval authors, highlighting the cosmos and, more concretely, celestial light as potent symbols of the divinity.

2. Context and production of the *Fortalitium Fidei*

The cultural enlightenment in fifteenth-century Castile, which allowed the circulation and transmission of theological ideas, encompassed several specific perspectives that played a significant role in shaping Alfonso de Espina's sentiment as a zealous theologian and preacher and in nurturing his style with the rhetoric of the Christian sources. Indeed, his scholarly journey primarily took place within the surroundings of the convent of San Francisco in Valladolid. It was during this time that his devotion to the Christian faith strengthened, eventually leading to his appointment as the head of the Franciscan Observant Order. Subsequently, Alfonso de Espina embarked on an itinerant preaching mission across Castile, spreading his doctrine far and wide. In 1452, he found a position at the prestigious University of Salamanca. There, he played a key role in overseeing the Franciscan theological studies, while simultaneously engaging as a court preacher and confessor of King Enrique IV of Castile (Ana Echevarría, 1999, 47-48, Rosa Vidal Doval, 2013, p. 21). His eloquent sermons and his enthusiastic sentiment in defending the Christian faith earned him the admiration and trust of the royal court.

The University of Salamanca, where Alfonso de Espina became rector of Theological Franciscan Studies, was highly regarded as one of the most prestigious educational institutions in Europe during the fifteenth century. The long-standing tradition of its academic prestige attracted scholars from various parts of Europe, establishing a reputation for academic excellence, intellectual exchange and innovation. Salamanca itself was a vibrant cultural and scholarly hub with a rich stock of manuscripts, fostering an atmosphere of erudition (Antonio García y García, 2002, 21-38). Surely, the University of Salamanca

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played a critical role in the dissemination of the most updated and cutting-edge ideas in Europe, shaping the educational curriculum of Alfonso de Espina and the intellectual climate of the city. The renowned skills that distinguished him as one of the most authoritative personalities of his context would have been sharpened in the scholarly ambient of Salamanca. Additionally, Alfonso de Espina effectively engaged with his audience, as evidenced by the multiple editions of his opus magnum *Fortalitium Fidei* being printed and distributed throughout Europe.² The positive reception of the *Fortalitium Fidei* across the European courts and the popularity of his polemical arguments were in synchrony with the main ideas of the fifteenth-century Christian Church. Most important, its widely praised exploration of theological topics and its practical guidance for defending the Catholic faith contributed to strengthening and promoting intellectual knowledge, spreading simultaneously the fundamentals of how the divinity and the cosmos were cognized in the academic context of one of the most influential scholastic areas of Castile. Hence, the encyclopedic scope in which the *Fortalitium Fidei* was conceived and written is a vivid testimony on who were the preeminent authors and what were the dominant ideas of the fifteenth century. Alfonso de Espina's university education endowed him with a solid foundation in theology and philosophy. Assuredly, his affiliation with the academic community afforded him with access to various scholarly resources. This educational network facilitated the exchange of ideas and enriched his theological development, nurturing his intellectual growth.

3. Divinity and the cosmos

While there may be occasional disagreements among the diverse range of authors and sources compiled in the *Fortalitium Fidei*, the principles of this work unquestionably rest upon the praising of Christianity and, consequently, the disapproval of the other religions established in Castile. The rhetorical apparatus that Alfonso de Espina presented in the *Fortalitium Fidei* was devised in the *prohemium*, which states that the “Fortress of Faith” is besieged by the spiritual enemies of Catholicism, which are heretics, Jews, Saracens and demons. Concretely, to succeed in this rhetorical project, Alfonso de Espina often pleads to God and, by doing so, he describes the proportions and the kinematics of the cosmos as manifestations of the divinity. Indeed, Alfonso de Espina acknowledged a cosmic hierarchy, supporting the notion that the influence and nobility of the most external spheres of the firmament were always gradually superior to the internal spheres, as well as the Sun with regard to the Moon or God with regard to man.³ He declared that the cosmos is composed by three fundamental essences, distinguishing angels as the supracelestial beings, skies as the celestial fabric and elements as the subcelestial substance.⁴ This arrangement provides a

² The seven known Latin editions printed in Europe are: Strasburg (Johannes Mentelin) [ante 1472], Basel (Bernard Richel) [1475], Nürnberg (Anton Koberger) [1485], Lyon (Guillaume Balsarin) [1487], Nürnberg (Anton Koberger) [1494], Lyon (Étienne Gueynard) [1511], and Lyon (Étienne Gueynard) [1525].

³ In the *Fortalitium Fidei*, Alfonso de Espina acknowledges the hierarchical system of the cosmos: “In hoc eius perfectio consistit: res enim quelibet perficitur propter hoc quod suo superiori subditur, sicut corpus per hoc quod ab anima uiuificatur et aer per hoc quod a sole illuminatur” (III, 4, 24). This statement can be found in: Thomae Aquinatis, *Opera Omnia*, 9, ed. Leonis XIII P. M., II-II q81 a7, pag. 184.

⁴ “Et patet primo quod mundus in se unus per essentiam distinguitur in supercelestia, que sunt angeli, et in celestia, que sunt celi, et subcelestia, que sunt quatuor elementa cum elementatis” (III, 4). Specifically, this tripartite division of the cosmos can be also traced in Juan Gil de Zamora: “In obsequium namque hominis sunt creata superiora, media et inferiora, scilicet angeli et celi et elementa et quecumque terre nascentia”. Cf:

compelling testament of the hierarchical structure of the universe in the *Fortalitium Fidei*, stratifying the cosmos in three areas: a metaphysical surface, a celestial middle-layer and an elemental base. This division of the universe has, ultimately, a very clear objective, to determine the power of God as superior to human power and, therefore, to exalt the cosmic order of Christianity as the real foundation of the universe. Indeed, in the *Fortalitium Fidei*, luminaries and planets possess idiosyncratically allegorical meanings, not only because of their physical influence, but because their Christian symbolical properties. Concretely, fire is expressed many times as a symbolic force of the divinity because its resemblance to solar power. Some representative cases can be found when discussing about the fire of the burning bush encountered by Moses, where the text directly alludes to the symbolical parallel between fire and God;⁵ when describing the fiery properties of the chalcedony, where Alfonso de Espina epitomizes the ember of the Holy Spirit as an agent of harmony;⁶ or when analyzing the word of God, where the splendor of the Sun, as well as the power of fire, are an allegory of Christ.⁷ The parallelism between fire and the Sun is, actually, one of the most straightforward symbols within the *Fortalitium Fidei* and the Christian doctrine.

The clearest and unequivocal symbolical representation of the Sun in the *Fortalitium Fidei* is found in the statements of Diego Gómez of Toledo and it consolidates the notion that celestial bodies were fashioned as symbols of the divinity in the Middle Ages, even in heretical reports. When the heretical bachelor of Toledo submitted the three symbols of Christ, he identified the circular shape of the sacramental host, with that of the Sun, and later he established that Jupiter, the Sun and Mercury were symbols of the Christian faith, respectively embracing the habit, the sermons and the sacrifice.⁸ Alfonso de Espina is firmly reluctant to these symbols because of their blasphemous predisposition. The uniqueness of the Sun and its allegorical interpretations bore some symbolism that, although rooted in pagan traditions, were refined with renovated and canonical meanings. The motif of the Sun as an image of Christianity can be perfectly grasped when analyzing the calendric systems

Johannes Aegidius Zamorensis, *Historia naturalis*, eds. Avelino Domínguez Garcia and Luis García Ballester, I. 21-23, pag. 112.

⁵ “Simile habetur quodammodo Exodo ·iii·, ubi dicitur quod Christus apparuit Moysi in flamma ignis in medio rubi, et non est dubium quin Moyses adoravit Deum quando Dominus dixerat Moysi: Solue calciamentum de pedibus tuis etc. Nec tunc adoravit ignem illum siue flammam tanquam Deum, sciebat enim Moyses hoc impossibile esse, sed adoravit Deum inuisibile sub similitudine uisibili apparenter.” (III, 4, 24). Regarding the worship of the invisible God under visible phenomena, different examples can be drawn within the biblical corpus, for example: the soft breeze in III Re. 19,12, the sound of fire in Deut. 4:12 and God’s revelation in Ro. 1:18-21.

⁶ “Hec amore Christi incarnationis assensa et digiti Spiritus Sancti igne inflammata peccatores sibi coniungit, cum non solum amicos sed etiam inimicos propter Deum cara unitate coniungit” (IV, 5, 3); This statement can be found in Hugo de Sancto Charo; cf. Hugo de Sancto Charo, *Postilla*, ed. Nicolaus Pezzana, *Liber Apocalypsis*, XXI, pag. 426.

⁷ “Hinc est quod verbum Dei dicimus filium Dei, sicut si sol de se generaret talem splendorem qui esset sol illum solem et splendorem diceremus filium solis (...) Non enim christiani dant Deo filium tanquam ex muliere, sed sicut est calor ab igne et splendor a sole et verbum a dicente, ut dici; que omnia nasci vere et generari dicuntur, et non ex femina vel muliere; filius enim splendor est et verbum eterni Patris, coeternus et consubstantialis et coequalis ei”. (IV, 5, 2). Alfonso de Espina borrowed Ricoldus de Monte Crucis to make these statements; cf. Ricoldus de Monte Crucis, *Contra legem Sarracenorum*, ed. J. M. Mérigoux, 15, 135-145, pag. 135; 9, 167-171, pag. 105.

⁸ “Dicebant enim quod sanctum sacramentum altaris ordinatum fuerat in forma hostie rotunde sicut sol quia erat sacrificium solis, et quod Iupiter, sol et Mercurius ordinauerunt legem christianorum sic quod Iupiter accepit habitum, Mercurius sermonem, sol vero sacrificium”. This reference is indeed quite obscure, therefore there are certain problems in tracing its origin.

of each religious group of Castile in the Middle Ages. Whereas the Sun represented Christianity, the Moon designated its opposite. Hence, within the *Fortalitium Fidei*, while the Sun had a preponderance in Christian descriptions, there are plenty of narrations, rooted in the Quranic tradition, where the Moon enjoyed a protagonist role.⁹ The Christian cosmological fundamentals, detailed in the *Fortalitium Fidei*, suggest that because the Sun occupies a superior position in the sky than the Moon, its influence may signify a highest and more true state of divine worship. Concretely, the most extensive episode, gathered by Alfonso de Espina, introduced the dispute between the Sun and the Moon, narrated by Rabbi Simeon. The nature of this dispute revolves around where the divinity, having created the Sun and the Moon with the same size, rectifies the disparity by reducing the Moon's size and granting her radiant presence not only during the day but also throughout the night. Furthermore, the divinity elevates the Moon's significance, positioning her as a paramount measure within the Hebrew calendar and symbolizing their periodic ritual sacrifices:

Dicit rabi Symeon in hora creationis equales erant sol et luna; et luna uenit ante Deum et dixit: Domine, non est bonum quod duo reges fruantur una corona. Et illa hora precepit Deus quod esset minorata. Et dixit illa: Domine, quia dixi tibi uerba rationabilia minorasti me; et sic fuit illa sibi ipsi nimis displicens. Sed Deus, ut consolaretur eam, dixit ei: non tristeris nec tibi displiceat, quia sol non apparebit nisi de die, et tu apparebis de die et de nocte. Sed ipsa non fuit contenta, immo dixit: Domine, candela ante solem quid prodest? Et dixit ei Deus: ego faciam quod populus meus Israel faciat computa sua per menses tuos. Cum toto hoc non fuit contenta, in tantum quod Deus cognouit se culpantem et precepit Moysi quod in fine lune Israel faceret sacrificium unius hyrci, ut Deus haberet ueniam de predicto peccato.¹⁰

This narration not only exemplifies an episode where the divinity interacts with the Moon, but, more important, it establishes the Moon as an active character, whose aims and desires energize her to confront God's will. Clearly, this narrative mismatches the Christian theological fundamentals of order and hierarchy and, for obvious reasons, it clashes with Alfonso de Espina's beliefs. More important, Alfonso de Espina, reluctant for the personification of the Moon, labeled this episode as a fable. It is undoubtable that the calendrical systems mold the temporal interconnectedness amongst different religious groups: while the Christians calculate time with the solar calendar, both Hebrews and Saracens share a lunar calendar.¹¹ In the same fashion as the Sun and the Moon, religion was

⁹ Some of these narrations are the darkening of the moon by Gabriel's wing (IV, 3, 3) from Ricoldus de Monte Crucis, cf. Ricoldus de Monte Crucis, *Contra legem Sarracenorum*, ed. J.-M. Mérigoux, 9, l. 228-231, p. 107; and the fraction and merger of the moon by Muhammad (IV, 3, 5), also from Ricoldus de Monte Crucis, cf. Ricoldus de Monte Crucis, *Contra legem Sarracenorum*, ed. J.-M. Mérigoux, 7, l. 5-31, pag 87-88.

¹⁰ This dispute (III, 8, 3, 6) is taken from Hieronymus de Sancta Fide; cf. Hieronymus de Sancta Fide, *De Iudaicis erroribus ex Talmut*, PhD dissertation; ed. Moisés Orfali, pag. 126.

¹¹ About Saracens and their calendric system: "Quintum preceptum Machometi est quod obseruent Pasca. Notandum uero quod sicut hebrei, ita et isti menses secundum lunam computant. Vnde et Pasca eorum, quod ipsi post ieiunium faciunt, non semper uno tempore contingit. Pasca autem suum quod dicunt nihil aliud est quam quedam memoria et celebratio noctis cuiusdam, que est in ipso mense in qua Alchoranum descendisse dicunt. In ea enim nocte uigilantes per ecclesias suas, quas uocant mesquitas, garriunt, saliant, bibunt et insaniunt." (IV, 5, 13, 5). This statement is from Robertus Ketenensis; cf. Robertus Ketenensis, *Glossae ad Alchoran Latinum*, ed. José Martínez-Gázquez, 185, pag. 96. About Hebrews and their calendric system: "Secundo, quia angelus Domini loquebatur Danieli qui erat hebreus, hebrei autem computabant per annos lunares, ut dicit ipse Beda, et ideo angelus posuit numerum annorum predictorum per hebdomadas

also conveyed through the epitome of the distinct planets; Alfonso de Espina in the *Fortalitiū Fidei* reflected how, in the polemic literary scene, Venus embodied Islam¹² and Mars and Saturn symbolized Judaism.¹³ Although the influence of the planets and the luminaries in the subcelestial world enabled Alfonso de Espina to identify the human tendencies within the cosmos, at the same time, it raised some challenges. It is essential to note that during the Middle Ages, the interplay between religious beliefs, astrology and symbolism was quite difficult to trace its origins, but, nevertheless, this methodology often responded to polemical inclinations. Whereas the planets have some tendencies and bore some natural qualities, the religions that signified them acquired the same characteristics. Regarding these planetary comparisons, in the Middle Ages it was commonly held that Saracens were under the aegis of Venus (Norman Daniel, 2000, 168; John V. Tolan, 2002, 227), both because Friday was their day of prayer and because their religion, with a sensual paradise, was considered libidinous; otherwise, Judaism was commonly linked with Saturn because Saturday was their sacred day and because their temperament was identified as corrupt and melancholic like the emblematic fundamentals of their planet (Eric Zafran, 1979, 16-19).

4. Cosmic light

4.1. Substance, accident, and fundamentals of light

Whereas the polemical arguments in the Middle Ages could be expounded with cosmological narratives in the *Fortalitiū Fidei*, the most important and fundamental celestial phenomenon within the Christian faith was light. Even if the celestial circuit of planets, luminaries, stars, and comets exercised a crucial influence in the structural ensemble of the universe and in the Christian cognitive framework, light and its symbolical properties enabled medieval authors to directly comprehend the power of the divinity and its manifestation in the world. In medieval scholastic philosophy, the concepts of substance and accident were fundamental to understand the nature of reality and, concretely, the properties of light were discerned with some particularities. Concretely, the substance of planets and their luminescence were believed to have somehow different natures. One of the most popular distinctions, alleged by Aristotle and disseminated in the Middle Ages, was that the source of light for all planets was the Sun, because it was the only celestial body that possessed *lux* and *lumen* by itself (Edward Gant, 1996, 222). The distinction of the Sun with all other planetary entities, by its intrinsic properties, rendered that light was an accident in any celestial body of the planetary heptad except the Sun. And because of this, it was commonly accepted that the Sun was more noble than other planets.

annorum lunarium.” (I, 3, 6, 4, 1). Alfonso de Espina quotes Nicholaus Lyranus, cf: Nicholaus Lyranus, *Bibliorum Sacrorum*, ed. Gaspar Trechsel, vol. 6, *Contra Iudaeos*, pag. 54.

¹² “Sed talis ablutio non pertinet ad orationem, ad orationem quidem pertinet Mundari intrinsecus, non extrinsecus. Mundicia autem de ablutione membrorum pertinebat cultoribus stelle Veneris, qui uolentes eam orare ad modum femine se aptabant ora et oculos tingentes; quia uero punctus stelle Veneris rex effectus est, ideo precipit hoc.” (IV, 5, 2, 1). The identification of Islam with Venus was a well-known topic, for this reason it is difficult to trace the specific source from which Alfonso de Espina reproduces this phrase.

¹³ “Tercia ratio est propter potestatem istis planetis datam super iudeos et terram suam, quia secundum astrologos iudei sunt sub constellatione Martis et Saturni.” (III, 3, 5). As is the case of Islam and Venus, the relationship between the Jews and their respective stars was such a widespread topic that tracing its origins is quite opaque.

Understanding light in terms of substance and accident had both philosophical and theological implications. For philosophers, it was a way to categorize and analyze natural phenomena and to differentiate between the unchanging essence, that was substance, and the variable, observable qualities, that were accidents, of the celestial bodies. Theological discussions often incorporated these concepts to explain aspects of the divine. In the Middle Ages, light was sometimes used as a metaphor for divine illumination and knowledge and, therefore, understanding the nature of light in terms of substance and accident could be related to discussions about the nature of God and the created order. Sunlight and moonlight had some intrinsic distinct qualities because its fundamentals of substance and accident. Whereas the Sun possessed light by itself, the brightness of the Moon was a mere reflection. And, consequently, their influence in the world affairs were completely opposite. Thus, in the *Fortalitium Fidei*, sunrays were described to auspice a victory in the battlefield,¹⁴ but moonlight was specified to boost the skimming of the devil¹⁵.

The symbolism of the Sun and the Moon, and their distinct and idiosyncratic characteristics, unveil certain narratives in the *Fortalitium Fidei* worth to mention. Specially, their conjunction, like the concurrence of planets, could cause catastrophes and intervene with humans' destiny. To provide a comprehensive appraisal of the depiction of these luminaries, it is imperative to include some briefs details regarding the eclipses that are outlined in Alfonso de Espina's treatise. Whereas the sunlight and the moonlight have their singular symbolical meaning, like the representation and epitome of Christianity and their antagonists, their conjunction may have special connotations. Hence, a total of eight eclipses are acknowledged in the *Fortalitium Fidei*. Although, they may convey separate meanings, mostly they converge to represent change in fate.¹⁶ From a spiritual standpoint, eclipses appeared to symbolize a transformative shift in fortune, yet, through an examination of historical evidence, their predominant connection lay with the mortality of kings and the destruction of kingdoms. Thus, eclipses, which often symbolized darkness and moral corruption, were seen as cosmic events that disrupted the natural order and were often interpreted as warnings or manifestations of divine displeasure as well as bad omens.

The mutability of light and its perception was not determined by the nature of the Sun itself, but rather by the human faculties that faced it. Concretely, Alfonso de Espina recognized that both the light of the Moon and the Sun were an invariable parameter:

¹⁴ An elucidation shall be provided of the paramouncy of sunlight as an allegorical representation embodying divine cognition. As a case in point, Alfonso de Espina address how Alfonso VII's victory in Baeza against the Saracens is predicted by sunlight (IV, 9, 114). Regarding the potential sources used for the depiction of the battle of Baeza, all material testimonies of the *Fortalitium Fidei* are demonstrably inaccurate. They erroneously indicate the year 1170 in contrast to the well-established dating provided by diplomatic documents and historical sources, which unequivocally assign the events to the year 1147. The existence of a potentially erroneous manuscript preceding all others or the possibility of Alfonso de Espina using an already flawed source adds complexity to the investigation and poses a significant codicological challenge for tracing the original source.

¹⁵ Discussing how the plenilune may magnify delirium and frenzy (V, 11, 2), Alfonso de Espina resorts to Nicholas Lyranus's commentary on Matthew, cf: Nicholas Lyranus, *Bibliorum Sacrorum*, ed. Gaspar Trechsel, vol. 5, *Matthaei*, 17, pag. 54.

¹⁶ A total of nine eclipses are acknowledged in the *Fortalitium Fidei*. They may convey separate meanings: the *genesis* of the cosmos (III, 4, 5); the conversion dream of Juan de Valladolid (III, 6, 24); the arithmetic of time and space (III, 8, 3, 2); the siege of Jerusalem (III, 9, 1, 1); the death of the emperor Louis *Le Pieux* (IV, 9, 48); the death of the king Enrique II (IV, 9, 151); the funeral ceremony of the queen Philippa of Lancaster (IV, 9, 153); and, finally, the clairvoyance of the demons (V, 2, 1).

Respondetur secundum peritum uirum Petrum Alfonsi, in Dyalogo, tit. 9^o, quod non est gens in mundo stolidior iudeis, qui putant quod corpus uel lumen lune Deus augeat siue solis. Sol enim, si quatenus nunc est maior esset dupliciter, totum profectum hominum combureret; ne dum si septempleriter. Quod si et lumen septempleriter magis esset, oculos nimirum nostros nimio splendore obtonderet. Lumen etiam lune, si splendore solis perfieret, nemo iam ultra quiesceret, semper enim dies esset.¹⁷

By doing so, the author acknowledged that there was a sense of harmony in the measure of the celestial luminaries: whether the Sun emitted a mightier radiance or whether the Moon had a brighter glow, the consequences would be unstable; on the one hand, the Sun would scorch nature, on the other hand, the Moon would cause a restless night. In these terms, Alfonso de Espina only acquiesced a cosmic transformation in the scenario of the Final Judgment, during which the celestial bodies would experience a state of upheaval.¹⁸

The fundamentals of light, in the scholastic context, were seen as a bridge between the celestial and the terrestrial realms. Light was believed to carry the divine influence of the heavens and to bestow order, harmony, and lawfulness upon the earth. The lack of light symbolized a transformation in this order, as well as the accidentality of light in the planetary bodies implied their inferiority to the Sun. However, in medieval thought, light was not limited to physicality, but extended to intellectual and spiritual enlightenment. In sum, light could illuminate the minds and souls of individuals, providing clarity, wisdom, and insight.

4.2. Divine light

Fundamentally, for Alfonso de Espina, the celestial phenomena were to be understood as a manifestation of the divine and, more specifically, light was expressed as a metaphysical vehicle for the comprehension of the divinity. In the *Fortalitiu Fidei*, light, and especially the metaphysical light of God, was determined as the main channel of comprehension and interaction with the divinity. Although this topic was rooted in ancient traditions, Alfonso de Espina's thought seems to emerge from Augustine's philosophy (Edward Gant, 1996, 390-391). Thus, the true design of the universe was only perceptible by the pure light of the divinity. For that reason, metaphysical light, in contrast to darkness, was identified as the primordial medium for all understanding. Evidence supporting this topic can be found in the initial consideration of the third book of the *Fortalitiu Fidei*:

Propter quam ignoranciam scripturam proprie legis minime intelligunt. Et quod in illa ad eorum directionem est ualde clarum in propriam damnationem uenit in obscurum, de quibus dicit Trenorum ·iiii·: Errauerunt ceci in plateis. Errare enim in plateis nichil aliud est quam deficere in scripturis claris et manifestis, circa quas non proprie dicuntur errare qui nolunt ipsas recipere, sed illi qui uolunt intelligere et tamen dicunt

¹⁷ Alfonso de Espina (III, 4, 17) replicates Petrus Alfonsi's arguments on how the sun and the moon cannot change their size, cf: Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogus*, ed. Carmen Cardelle de Hartmann, Darko Senekovic & Thomas Ziegler, 48, pag. 316-319.

¹⁸ Although this argument in the *Fortalitiu Fidei* (II, 4, 17) is said to be drawn from Nicholaus Lyranus's commentary on Isaiah, cf: Nicholaus Lyranus, *Bibliorum Sacrorum*, ed. Gaspar Trechsel, vol. 4, *Isaiae*, 30, pag. 57; and 60, pag. 99, the transcription of the passage is not as faithful as it is in other sections of the treatise. However, the passage unmistakably suggests a cosmic sorrow with the renewal of the celestial bodies in the Apocalypse.

se eas tenere, sicut non dicitur uere cecus cui est absens uisibile obiectum, sed qui presente obiecto non potest habere uisionis actum.¹⁹

By emphasizing the Jew's blindness, Alfonso de Espina suggested that their lack of faith stemmed from their profound spiritual incomprehension. One of the clearest topics about metaphysical light was its connection with eyesight. Indeed, the perception of the sacred truth of the cosmos was described to be only allowed to those who could grasp divine light. And, consequently, light was described as the cosmic material whose power could sear or kindle human's perception. Certainly, for Alfonso de Espina to be able to comprehend the motion of the stars, began by understanding the light of the divinity.²⁰ As a matter of fact, in the *Fortalitiium Fidei*, heretics were depicted as sightless bats²¹ and impious as owls.²² Not only do these analogies highlight the divine essence as incandescent, but they also crucially portray the adversaries of faith as being animalistic creatures, who lack any kind of humanity. In contrast, the capability to perceive and understand metaphysical light was what set apart Christian spirituality. Likewise, in the *Fortalitiium Fidei*, Jews were repeatedly depicted as blind or wearing blindfolds, while Saracens were also described as lacking sight.²³ Alfonso de Espina's approach on how the cosmos can impact on divine perception was effectively exemplified by the analogy of light compelling the world. In the *Fortalitiium Fidei*, sunrays and their blazing fires embodied both divinity's love and eternity, and yet, simultaneously,

¹⁹ Alfonso de Espina (III, 1) employs Bernardus Oliverii, cf: Bernardus Oliverii, *Contra Cecitatem Iudeorum*, ed. Francisco Cantera Burgos, *incipit*, p. 67, to highlight the topic of Jewish blindness. By doing so, he establishes the polarity between the concepts *clarum et obscurum*. Indeed, very frequently, in the *Fortalitiium Fidei*, vision is commonly associated with light, whereas blindness is often juxtaposed with darkness. This classic dichotomy establishes the opposition between both the virtuous and the defective visions and, by extension, it determines one's involvement in Christian sanctity. As a selected instances of this duality: uita enim Christi illuminauit mundum contra noctem ignorantie (I, III, 6, 4); mentes obscure et tenebrosae ad uerum lumen gratiae reducuntur (III, 12, 8); et quia ista ponuntur uelate et obscure, ideo premittitur antedictum uerbum *hic est sapientia*, id est res occulta (IV, 1, 3); et petebam uisionis expositionem et respondebatur mihi totum mundum obscurum fuisse ante aduentum huius paruuli, et de ipso exiens lux resplenduit toti mundo. (III, 6, 24), among many others.

²⁰ On eyesight and the perception of light, Alfonso de Espina's (II, *preface*) arguments that comprehension is rendered by the luminous force of the divinity (*Eph.* 4, 18): "Et hec est ratio quare heretici sunt totaliter ceci, nec a Deo merentur illuminari, quia nihil stabiliter credunt, et se ab uno opposito ad aliud uertunt cum careant fidei lumine disponente, iuxta illud apostoli *Ad Ephes. 4: tenebris obscuratum habentes intellectum*; quia sicut oculus non potest uidere sine luce, sic intellectus nihil potest capere credibilium sine fidei lumine, qua carent heretici".

²¹ "Qui, etsi non puplice, in conuenticulis tamen suis uenenum effundentes de illis confabulantur quasi uespertiliones et noctue lucem fugientes, quia oculis egris odiosa est lux. Et non solum oculos egros habent heretici, sed ceci sunt, quod ostenditur ex fidei effectu: est enim fides diuini radius animam illustrans, disponit enim animam ad lumen summe ueritatis ex eo quod summe ueritati eam stabiliter inherere facit". Alfonso de Espina characterizes the heretics as venomous bats that flee from sunlight with their infected eyes (II, *preface*). Although tracing the origin of this exact phrase may pose some challenges, the basis of its topic may be tracked in *Is.* 2, 20.

²² "Exsufflat ab eis ignem concupiscencie et refulgent in eis radii amoris que excecant oculos noctue, id est malorum". The analogy of the impious as owls whose sight is blazed by divine light (IV, 5, 2) can be traced to Hugo de Sancto Charo, cf: Hugo de Sancto Charo, *Postilla*, ed. Nicolaus Pezzana, *Liber Apocalypsis*, XXI, pag. 426.

²³ On the blindness of the Jewish in the *Fortalitiium Fidei* there are multiple examples. One of the most enthralling cases is presented when comparing the blindness of the Jews in the battlefield against the sharp sight of the Christians (III, *preface*). There are also some allusions about the sightless of the Saracens, the most straightforward example assesses about the ill and blind eyes of the Muslims incapables to contemplate the light of the divinity (IV, 8, 5).

they could lead to sightlessness. In this regard, to be able to gaze the everlasting nature of the Sun signified to participate in faith.²⁴ Light and its contemplation are an underlying theme in the *Fortalitiū Fidei* since sun flares could channel the humans' spirit to fulfill its triumph as it could enable comprehension of the intricate wisdom of time and existence.²⁵ In the vast encyclopedic sketch of the *Fortalitiū Fidei*, Alfonso de Espina included a comparison of the translucent wing of a fly obstructing the sunlight.²⁶ This comparison served to establish a profound synchronicity between the Christian faith and the resplendence of light. And, most important, it reveals that metaphysical light, by its singular particularities of comprehension, is an underlying notion in Alfonso de Espina's thought. In fact, all the treatise of the *Fortalitiū Fidei* is saturated with allegorical constructions where the light of God enables the true comprehension of the cosmic laws: the catapults and arrows of the Saracens are said not to be able to obscure the Christian light²⁷ and, likewise, Jews are said to not comprehend the truth of the sacred texts, because if they did, the Holy Spirit would illuminate them with pure divine sunlight²⁸.

In sum, the allegory of light as representing God in the Middle Ages was a powerful and pervasive symbol of divine wisdom. It conveyed theological, moral, and spiritual messages, emphasizing God's role as the ultimate source of illumination, truth, and spiritual salvation. The cosmological framework in which light is expressed underlined the importance of this topic within the medieval Christian faith. Alfonso de Espina's use of metaphysical light, as an expression of the divinity, certainly was coordinated with medieval literature and, by doing so, its symbolical emphasis enabled him to describe the true understanding of the divine design of the cosmos.

5. Conclusions

This selection of examples from the *Fortalitiū Fidei* underscores the enduring influence of stars and cosmic bodies in sources of the late medieval Christian intellectual scene. Certainly, the many authorities of different origins that Alfonso de Espina gathers, demonstrate that the cosmos was understood and perceived as a primordial source of wisdom. In the *Fortalitiū Fidei*, the astronomical events seem to be associated with a series of

²⁴ In the *Fortalitiū Fidei* (III, 8, 3, 2), when examining the Orient and the Occident, angels, and by extension God, are indicated to live in a perpetual light. This affirmation is reproduced from Petrus Alfonsi, cf: Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogus*, ed. Carmen Cardelle de Hartmann, Darko Senekovic & Thomas Ziegler, 62, pag. 34-35.

²⁵ There are plenty of examples that highlight the association of the divinity with the sun. To illustrate this, in the *Fortalitiū Fidei*, when describing the mystical proprieties of the sapphire (IV, 5, 2), Alfonso de Espina uses Hugo de Sancto Charo, cf: Hugo de Sancto Charo, *Postilla*, ed. Nicolaus Pezzana, *Liber Apocalypsis*, XXI, pag. 426, to compare sunrays with divine love. Likewise, to point out at least one occurrence in the *Fortalitiū Fidei* of how the sun in the Christian Middle Ages is the dominant chronological meter, Alfonso de Espina discusses the three possible interpretations of the word *dies* clearly associating the concept of time with the sun (I, 3, 6, 4, 1).

²⁶ "Sicut enim mille nocendi modos habet dyabolus, sic et iudeus, eius filius. Cum enim miserabiliter duo bella prima perdidit, tanquam homines sine lege ad speculum nature sic uertentes, uigintiquatuor impossibilia nature mouent contra nostrum fidei fortalitium, si forte possint illud expugnare ac si musca uolatu alarum suarum niteretur obscurare claritatem solis". Alfonso de Espina presents the Jewish War by arguments taken from nature, compiling 24 reasons of impossibility against the Law of Christ (III, 6). Because metaphysical light was a widespread topic, to trace its literary origins of the following examples is quite obscure.

²⁷ "Veruntamen lapides et sagitte suorum argumentorum ad eius propriam lucem amouendam non ascendit adhuc tam alte quantum nebula celo loco ubi est substantia solis exeunte altiore in mille et pluribus gradibus quam ascendit nebula in aere" (I, 3).

²⁸ "Non est dubium quin statim illuminarentur a Spiritu Sancto, si tales conferentias scripturatum cum eorum circumstantiis facerent uel uiderent ueritatem sole clariorem" (III, 12, 1).

powers that go beyond life and death. Stars and planets are not simply inanimate celestial bodies that orbit each other, but they have powers that surpass humans' understanding, guided by the force of the divinity. Alfonso de Espina reflects on the celestial principles through both the laws of physics and the laws of faith, associating each of the stars with divine qualities that let them be both worshiped and feared. To conclude, although the distinctiveness of the *Fortalitium Fidei* manifests itself in that it is a capital testimony of the polemic arguments against the enemies of the Christian faith, one must acknowledge how it also provides plenty of underlying narratives which are crucial for our understanding of the cognitive framework of medieval society. Whether the divinity is expressed within the skies or the human traditions are established under temporal parameters, the cosmos is a privileged fundament to recognize the many believes of the past. Hence, according to the *Fortalitium Fidei*, to have an insight into the celestial phenomena and to be able to perceive and understand the firmament may confer humanity the faculty to recognize the divinity and to participate in the wisdom of light.

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