

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE PERFECT MAN

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by

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE PERFECT MAN.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Avoiding Heresy	2
Relevance for Today.....	3
Questions for Study.....	5
Sources	5
Overview.....	6
CHAPTER 1: FRAMING THE ISSUE.....	8
Emphasis and Christology	8
Thesis	11
The Problem	13
CHAPTER 2: ENGAGING CURRENT RESEARCH.....	15
Engaging Stephen Williams	15
Introduction.....	16
Body	24
Conclusion	32
CHAPTER 3 <i>SURVEY OF EVANGELICAL COMMENTARIES</i>	35
Lack of Scholarship	35
Engaging Evangelical Commentaries	38
A Consensus?	45
CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION.....	47
The Transfigured Man.....	47
BIBLIOGRAPHY	51

INTRODUCTION: THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE PERFECT MAN

Introduction

The Transfiguration of Jesus as described in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-10 and Luke 9:28-36) is one of the most mysterious of the events recounted in the life of Jesus. In his classic book, *The Training of the Twelve*, Dr. A. B. Bruce writes that the transfiguration of Christ is one portion of the Word of God that he would prefer to pass over in silence.¹ Stephen Williams another prominent theologian says it this way: “Relatively speaking, the transfiguration is a theme that is neglected in Western Christianity.”²

Taking Peter, James and John, Jesus goes up a high mountain, which tradition identifies as Mount Tabor in Galilee. While praying He is transfigured, His face shines like the sun, and His clothes become white as light. Moses and Elijah appear, talking with Him. They demonstrate the witness of Law and the Prophets of Israel to Jesus as Messiah.³

The voice from heaven, which has already proclaimed Jesus' divine Sonship at His baptism, does so again here. This ends with Jesus' command to the three disciples, to tell no one about the vision until the Son of Man is raised from the dead. According to G.

¹ A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1971), p. 190.

² Stephan Williams, “The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ,” *Themelios* 28.1 (Autumn 2002): 13-25. Internet. Available: http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_transfiguration1_williams.html#1. Accessed February 22, 2011.

³ Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New international Greek testament commentary (Exeter [Eng.: Paternoster Press, 1978), 384.

Campbell Morgan, “it was the culmination of the earthly life of Christ and the prelude to His death.”⁴

This paper seeks to examine the Transfiguration as laid out in the Synoptic Gospels to determine the emphasis sought by the Synoptic authors. It is the contention of this paper that this great event was recorded not so much to emphasize Christ’s Divinity as to emphasize His perfect Humanity.

Avoiding Heresy

The key for this paper is emphasis. This is important at the outset for if the subject were to go beyond this it would enter the realm of heresy. When one speaks about Christology it is important that the Deity of Christ and the Humanity of Christ are fully expressed in this one individual Jesus of Nazareth. In short, no matter what emphasis one expresses about Jesus, He always remains 100 percent God and 100 percent Man. It is obvious from the Gospels however that the Gospel writers were seeking to bring out different aspects of His personhood in different ways. Matthew emphasizes Jesus as the King of Israel, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy while Mark seems to emphasize Jesus as the superhero Son of God, the perfect servant of all. Luke takes on the task of emphasizing Jesus as the perfect Man; the second Adam while John boldly emphasizes Jesus as God in the flesh. The key in each description is emphasis. Jesus is of course all of these things and He is all of these things all of the time but it is important to understand what is being emphasized so as to feel the real impact of what is being presented.

⁴ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Crises of the Christ* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1936), 229-232.

Relevance for Today

This study of the Transfiguration is relevant because it has the potential to correct a possible misunderstanding of this great event and may give faithful readers a clearer understanding of what it looks like to live for God. If the Transfiguration is really about the glory of God the Father reflected in the perfect Man it becomes less a Theophany as it is a preview of what every believer can expect in Glory and an instruction right now for perfect obedience and submission to God's will in life. It becomes less a display and more an example of how to live right now in perfect submission and obedience to God. When the modern reader stops short at emphasizing solely that Christ is God this example of Christ as Man is overshadowed by a proof text to be admired for its benefit in proving an argument rather than an example to be emulated and a preview of what is to come.

This study has the potential to correct the 'me first,' consumerist ideal of God as some sort of Divine vending machine. If believers were to see the Transfiguration as an event that exemplified and emphasized what submission to the will of the Father actually looked like, acted out by a human like themselves, they would be able to better see what their submission to the Father, or lack of it, looks like. This is the type of emphasis that has the potential to stem the tide of unbiblical 'self-help' books that are passed off as discipleship manuals in many Christian bookstores and churches. In short, the reorienting of this culminating event, the Transfiguration of the perfectly obedient Man, can do for the Christian today what it did for the disciples who actually saw it; namely instruct on how to follow and submit to God right now.

In the world today, submission is viewed as a weakness, especially in leadership. Leverage is the chosen commodity rather than love. Mark contrasts the Transfiguration of the obedient Man to great effect in the next paragraph of the same chapter with the disobedience and lack of submission shown by the disciples:

And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.” (Mark 9:33-37)

And then again in chapter ten:

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” And they said to him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:35-45)

What this suggests is that indeed the obedience of Jesus is to be emphasized and emulated in contrast to the selfishness of Jesus’ disciples. Sadly, the modern day church seems to be looking more like the disciples in this case than Christ. When the

previous act of Jesus' submission is not taken as the opposite example to be emulated it is no longer instructive or even relevant. This study seeks to begin changing that.

Questions for Study

Certain questions will need to be examined and sought answers for in this study namely: Who was the Transfiguration for? What was it to accomplish? Why is it that most commentators seem to focus largely on the Deity of Christ knowing John leaves this event out even though he was the only Gospel writer personally on the mount with Christ and even though he writes with the intention to show Jesus as God? How can Peter mistakenly equate Jesus on equal terms with Moses and Elijah if the event distinguished Christ above all else present? Observing that God spoke from heaven at both the baptism of Jesus and the Transfiguration of Jesus, what relationship do these two events have to one another? How significant is the passive use of *transfigured* (μετεμορφώθη) in this event and how does it relate to the context of Jesus' prayer and submission to the will of the Father? How does this event relate to the broader context of its placement in the Gospels near the disobedience and un-submission of the disciples?

Sources

As for sources, this study is limited as it must be to sources from a conservative evangelical tradition. At first the desire was to research broadly across a wide spectrum of sources both liberal and conservative. It became immediately apparent however that the opinions of those not holding to a grammatico-historical hermeneutic of the Bible

would be, in a paper this short, too broad and in any case not relevant. Though Augustine's allegorical interpretations may indeed support the premise of this work (it does not) it would be irrelevant. Any debate about the specifics of a given passage from an allegorical point of view is really a debate about hermeneutics. A debate about hermeneutics is indeed beyond the scope of this work. For clarity then it is important to state at the outset that this paper seeks to engage those commentators with a grammatico- historical hermeneutic. According to J.I. Packer:

The grammatico-historical method of approaching texts is dictated, not merely by common sense, but by the doctrine of inspiration, which tells us that God has put His words into the mouths, and caused them to be written in the writings, of men whose individuality, as men of their time, was in no way lessened by the fact of their inspiration, and who spoke and wrote to be understood by their contemporaries. Since God has affected an identity between their words and His, the way for us to get into His mind, if we may thus phrase it, is *via* theirs.⁵

All of this to say that the sources used are necessarily narrowed to those sources broadly within the evangelical tradition and reflect, as much as possible, the idea that words mean what they say in context and are to be interpreted in this said context.⁶

Overview

Chapter one is about problem formulation and as such lays out the general reasoning of the argument that the Transfiguration is an event meant to emphasize the

⁵ James Packer, "Hermeneutics and Biblical Authority," *Themelios* 1.1 (Autumn 1975): 3-12. Internet. Available: http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_herm_packer.html. Accessed February 22, 2011.

⁶ This is not necessarily the case in sources regarding original languages. In which case grammar and mechanics are more in view than interpretation by another.

perfect humanity and obedience of the God-Man Jesus Christ. In this section the general research questions will be restated.

Chapter two will engage the work done by the internationally known theologian Stephen Williams, a Professor of systematic theology at Union Theological College in Belfast and a former editor of *Themelios*.⁷

Being that his work is from 2003 it is a wonderful place to start, enabling the scope of this paper to be sufficiently relevant to modern scholarship. Also this gives you the reader a sense of where this work is situated in the field of modern scholarship on the subject. Engaging Professor Williams in this initial chapter ensures that central concepts regarding the Transfiguration are not neglected.

Chapter three is a survey of commentaries and opinions seeking to ascertain the general emphasis and consensus if any among likeminded scholars. The key is in observing whether the emphasis is mostly writing on the Divinity of Christ, the Humanity of Christ or somewhere in between.

The conclusion lays out the case for the Transfiguration of Christ as an emphasis of Christ's perfect humanity. This will attempt to answer the research questions from chapter one. Final conclusions, applications and relevance for today will be here along with suggestions for further study and the limitations of this one.

⁷ Stephan Williams, "The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ," *Themelios* 28.1 (Autumn 2002): 13-25. Internet. Available: http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_transfiguration1_williams.html#1. Accessed February 22, 2011.

CHAPTER 1: FRAMING THE ISSUE

Emphasis and Christology

This paper is about emphasis in the realm of Christology. That Christ is both fully God and fully man is not in question, rather the question is: what aspect of this nature were the Gospel writers emphasizing in this story? Understanding at the outset the various contexts and emphasis of these synoptic authors will be extremely important. It is clear that the Gospel writers telescoped out certain details and magnified others. They were working hard to emphasize certain things. James Still says it this way:

A misconception still exists that refers to the gospels as a biography of Jesus—due to Justin Martyr’s reference c. 150 CE that the gospels were the "memoirs of the apostles" and the fact that early Christians came to see them that way—the evidence suggests that the Evangelists arranged the stories about Jesus in an order to suit their telling of an aesthetic story, rather than as a chronology of the events as they actually took place. It is important to fit the gospels into an appropriate genre in order to understand them.⁸

For the sake of definition it is important to articulate what the genre of Gospel is not. It is not a biography it is surely something more. More to the point it is not simply a pronouncement but more of a biographical pronouncement. There were no gospels before Mark’s, if one assumes that his was first, for there was nothing to announce. No figure in history has ever required a Gospel nor will any figure in the future. The uniqueness of Christ seems to require a unique genre of literature just to fit Him in the pages of Scripture. Even the “extra biblical” gospels of later centuries were about Christ. Even in their falseness, they were still conveying a message about the Christ of God. The three Synoptic Gospels (from the Greek 'syn,' meaning "together," and 'optic,' meaning "seen")

⁸ James Still, “What is a Gospel?,” *The Secular Web*, 2011. Internet. Available: http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/james_still/gospel.html. Accessed: February 22, 2011.

are similar in their general layout while John is a different animal altogether. John takes a more theological approach to his Gospel as seen from the very start with the word *logos* to describe Christ. He manages, in the very outset of his work, to distinguish Jesus as God from the start and then proceeds to demonstrate this fact through bold statements of Christ to this effect. His Gospel is also more poetical than the other three and follows a different chronology than the other three.

Keeping all this in mind emphasis becomes quite relevant to this study when speaking of the two natures of Christ. Scripture, rather than relieving the paradox implicit in this arrangement seem instead to heighten it.⁹ Mark gives us an example of this juxtaposition when he shows Jesus asleep on a cushion, exhausted it would seem. This is evidenced by the fact that there was a storm and He was soundly asleep in the first place, very much like a man. One verse later He wakes up rebukes the wind with a phrase and the wind ceases, very much unlike a man (Mk. 4:37-39). All told the Incarnation defined at the outset by John is shrouded in an air of impenetrable mystery: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14).” The Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible sums up the issue well in this way:

“Communication of attributes,” “communion of attributes,” “incognito,” “kenosis”—these and similar theological terms all testify to the impenetrable mystery at the heart of Christology... Our answer, therefore, to the question: Can we illumine the inner consciousness of Jesus? is: No, we cannot. Is, then, the doctrine of the incarnation an absurdity? To believe that God became a man—is such a belief a *sacrificium intellectus*? We answer that it is not absurd, but we confess that it is incomprehensible. To believe it is not to assassinate reason, but it is to admit the creaturely limitations of reason. It should be noted in this respect that the doctrine that is contained in the term “incarnation” follows the

⁹ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 438.

structure of John 1:14: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” It *would* be absurd to believe that the movement could be the other way, that flesh could become the Word, that man could cross the line that separates the creature from the Creator and become God.¹⁰

The term *communicatio idiomatum* is important in that it speaks of the relationship between the divine and human natures in the person of Christ. In discussing this term *Dogmatic Theology*, makes this illuminating statement:

In the Reformed understanding, because the God-man is a single person with two natures, the properties of each nature can be predicated of the theanthropic (i.e., “God- man”) person. Thus, it would be correct to say “Jesus Christ is eternal” as well as “Jesus Christ was born in the fullness of time,” since both divine and human attributes and activities can be predicated of Jesus Christ, the theanthropic person. On the other hand, it would be incorrect to predicate the attributes of one nature to the other nature, as in “Christ’s human nature is omnipresent.”¹¹

The Reformed understanding of this term is helpful then in defining the issue of Christology in regards to the Transfiguration. Though the Incarnation and the dual nature of Christ is a Divine mystery it is important to remember that indeed there are two natures not one. In the case of the Transfiguration it is not enough to say that Christ’s humanity was shining out as well as His Divinity for to say this would ascribe glory to His humanity. One must say that either Christ’s personal Divine nature was shining through on the mountain or it was God the Father’s Divine nature shining onto or reflected in the very human Jesus. It cannot be said however that Christ’s human nature was shining through himself for he would cease to be human in any ordinary sense of the word. One is left with the term emphasis. Though this event is touching the very heart of the mystery of the incarnation it is nevertheless in a context where one nature is being exemplified.

¹⁰ Ibid., 439.

¹¹ William Greenough Thayer Shedd and Alan W. Gomes, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2003), 952.

Thesis

It is the contention of this paper that the transfiguration of Christ was recorded by the Synoptic Gospel writers not so much to *emphasize* Christ's Divinity as to *emphasize* His perfect Humanity. In turn it is more about the perfect obedience of the perfect Man pleasing God, reflecting His glory than Christ revealing His own deity. The author of Hebrews reminds believers that they can relate to Jesus because of His humanity.

Though perfect, He was indeed a human like us and as such we may relate to Him. This human identification is the very reason believers are encouraged to draw close to the throne of grace with confidence:

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:14-16)

Jesus did not Himself take this position of high priest but was appointed to this office in a passive sense. This is further enforced by an example of His reliance and submission to the Father in His flesh, as a man:

So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. (Heb. 5-10)

The point of this paper is that this very human Christ was seen in one of His greatest moments on the mountain of Transfiguration. In this event one sees God shining His glory on the perfect Man the second Adam who was in perfect obedience to the will

of the Father. Jesus was restoring the image of God in man. He was doing the very thing man was intended to do, namely bear God's image to creation (Gen. 1:26-28) something that fallen man cannot adequately do. The first half of Romans 1:18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness," could be paraphrased to say that God is angry at every person who does not in fact look like Him. Jesus did in fact bear God's image. A fact brought out explicitly in the Gospels two times by God the Father's voice from heaven, first at the baptism of Christ an event where Jesus was identifying Himself with mankind,¹² and second at the Transfiguration (Matt. 3:16; 17:1-8; Mk. 1:9; 9:2-8; Lk. 3:21-22; 9:28-36). John's Gospel, which is less about the humanity of Christ and more about His Divinity, does not contain either event, an omission that makes sense if these events were indeed meant to emphasize the human role of Christ. John speaks of the incarnation this way: "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known (Jn. 1:18)." John begins with the subject of Christ's Deity and never departs from the subject and even in this verse ends up emphasizing the Divinity of the God-Man. The fact that John, the only Gospel writer personally on the Mountain of Transfiguration and the Gospel writer most concerned with Christ's Deity, left this event out of his account is further proof that this event is to be viewed as emphasizing the humanity of Christ.

¹² In each case immediately after this identification with man through baptism Christ is seen to have been 'thrown' (e'kba;llel) into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by Satan (Mk. 1:12). It is the exact antithesis to the garden where Adam was tempted. In the case of Jesus the garden was a wilderness and unlike Adam, Jesus was submissive to the Father quoting Deuteronomy as His authority. Jesus the second Adam did not claim power as the first Adam had done but instead remained in the creature role reliant on the Father. Luke inserts a genealogy linking Christ back to Adam in between His baptism and wilderness temptation further emphasizing this point.

The Problem

This emphasis on the humanity of Christ seems to be lacking in earlier scholarship. A cursory look at older commentaries reveals that this event was viewed much more as pure Theophany than anything else. J.A. McGuckin, presents the problem this way: “Undoubtedly, the major tenet of the Patristic exegesis of the Transfiguration is the interpretation of the epiphany as a manifestation by Jesus to his disciples of his own divine status.”¹³ It is difficult to see how this can be a popular opinion when the word *transfigured* (μετεμορφώθη) is used passively. The contrasting take of the early church fathers is troubling to the stated contention of this paper and is really only the beginning. The modern take on this event seems to continue in this tradition, which again seems puzzling. A major task of this paper will be to engage the biblical text and survey the scholarship on this issue to see whether there is a consensus of opinions and, if so, their validity and relationship to the stated hypothesis of this paper.

As the opinions of scholars and the evidence of the Biblical text are examined certain questions need to be kept in mind: Who was the Transfiguration for? In other words who was its intended audience? What was it to accomplish? Can this even be known? Do most commentators focus on the Deity of Christ in this event? If so why would they, knowing John leaves this event out even though he was the only Gospel writer personally on the mount with Christ and even though he writes with the intention to show Jesus as God? How can Peter mistakenly equate Jesus on equal terms with Moses and Elijah if the event distinguished Christ above all else present? In other words if the

¹³ J.A. McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1986), 110.

event was meant to be Jesus expressing His Divinity how could Peter not distinguish His appearance from that of Moses and Elijah? Observing that God spoke from heaven at both the baptism of Jesus and the Transfiguration of Jesus, what relationship do these two events have to one another? How significant is the passive use of transfigured (μετεμορφώθη) in this event and how does it relate to the context of Jesus' prayer and submission to the will of the Father? How does this event relate to the broader context of its placement in the Gospels near the disobedience and un-submission of the disciples?

CHAPTER 2: ENGAGING CURRENT RESEARCH

Engaging Stephen Williams

What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. (Eccl. 1:9)

Though Solomon gives one little hope to do so, this paper desires to add to the existing knowledge base regarding the study of the Transfiguration. To that end, this chapter will engage the work done by the internationally known theologian Stephen Williams, a Professor of systematic theology at Union Theological College in Belfast and a former editor of *Themelios*.¹⁴ His work on this subject is accessible and recent, within the last ten years, as well as being well-respected and brief enough to address here. The idea is to give this paper a sense of context within the broader scope of study on the subject. Further, engaging Professor Williams in this initial chapter ensures that central concepts regarding the Transfiguration are not neglected at the outset.

Even though much of what Williams writes regarding the Scripture in question will be

addressed later in this paper, his work enables us to take the temperature of modern scholarship in regards to this study. To do this, his work will be divided into three parts: an introduction, body and conclusion. His main introductory remarks will be addressed giving one a sense of the aim of his study. The body of his work will be examined and selective points will be observed to show his scholastic focus. Finally, his conclusion will be addressed and related to the thesis of this paper.

¹⁴ Stephan Williams, "The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ," *Themelios* 28.1 (Autumn 2002): 13-25. Internet. Available: http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_transfiguration1_williams.html#1. Accessed February 22, 2011.

Two main observations are in order at the outset. First: Williams does not really make much of John's omission, a point heavily argued as being important in this paper. And second: some of the main questions this paper poses seem to be off limits to him. He says this towards the end of his paper:

It is also possible to judge as inappropriate some questions that are asked on the basis of a traditional conviction of deity, such as whether Jesus shone with the light of his essential deity or of his earthly humanity infused but not confused with the principle of deity. Here, however, we must leave questions of this sort, leaving with them a host of questions which may or may not be appropriate and which might be mentioned, for example: did Jesus shine with the light of his own future glory? Did he shine with the light of the future glory of the saints?¹⁵

In this quote he is referencing J.A. McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, who makes the point that questions concerning the relation of the divine essence to the divine economy were regularly discussed in reference to the Transfiguration. According to McGuckin: "Undoubtedly, the major tenet of the Patristic exegesis of the Transfiguration is the interpretation of the epiphany as a manifestation by Jesus to his disciples of his own divine status."¹⁶ Baring the fact that this goes against the passive use of the word *transfigured* (μετεμορφώθη), it also seems curious that this somehow makes the Christological questions asked in this paper 'inappropriate.'

Introduction

Williams begins his article, entitled appropriately, *The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ*, with this historical background:

¹⁵ Stephan Williams, "The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ," *Themelios* 28.1 (Autumn 2002): 13-25. Internet. Available: http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_transfiguration1_williams.html#1. Accessed February 22, 2011

¹⁶ McGuckin, 110.

Relatively speaking, the transfiguration is a theme that is neglected in Western Christianity. In Eastern Orthodoxy, generally speaking, it has been kept more lively, at a theological and liturgical level, although some non-Eastern churches join the Orthodox in marking August 6 as its festival day. In 1456 Pope Callistus III ordered its celebration on that date as thanksgiving for victory over the Turks - an irony, if we connect the transfiguration with the call to suffering or self-denying discipleship in the passages which precede the accounts of it. But commemoration of the transfiguration in the churches actually goes further back than this in Western church history, predating the separation of Western and Eastern communions in the eleventh century. Still, the subject will strike some as better adapted for consideration by the more mystical mentality of Orthodoxy (as is often supposed) than the more rational Western one (even if the West is changing).¹⁷

Although Williams is himself a Presbyterian, he nonetheless addresses this subject fully aware of the catholic history being addressed in this subject. Williams has been “in conversation,” or gentle debate, regarding such catholic doctrines as the Mass and Transubstantiation, making him well acquainted with catholic history.¹⁸ Understanding the separation of Western and Eastern communion is beyond the scope of this paper but what is important is an understanding of how the subject of the Incarnation has caused difficulty and debate in the past. A brief survey into the history of Christological debate within the church brings one to the Confession of Chalcedon, a document providing a clear statement well before the 11th century split where the divine and human nature of Christ was clearly articulated. According to one site:

The Confession of Chalcedon is a product of a Council held at Chalcedon in the year 451 AD. It was born out of the various Christological controversies of the day, which sought purchase in a rapidly expanding Christendom. The specific language of the Chalcedonian Confession did not translate well into other languages, and the resulting controversy caused a rift to form between what are

¹⁷ Stephan Williams, “The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ,” *Themelios* 28.1 (Autumn 2002): 13-25. Internet. Available: http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_transfiguration1_williams.html#1. Accessed February 22, 2011.

¹⁸ James O’ Fee, “Presbyterian-Catholic Conversation,” *Impala Publishers Blog Page* (March 2009). Internet. Available: <http://www.impalapublications.com/blog/index.php?/archives/3605-Presbyterian-Catholic-Conversation,-by-James-OFee.html>. Accessed February 22, 2011.

today known as the Oriental Orthodox churches and the rest of the Church. In essence, the two sides held very similar beliefs but because of the differing phraseology between languages and the ever-present (even in our own age) challenges found in translating such precise statements into other tongues, they separated. As of the year 2010, while progress has been made and aspersions have been withdrawn, only limited instances of reunion between Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Christians have been realized.¹⁹

The Chalcedonian Confession states:

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach people to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; (ἐν δύο φύσεσιν ἀσυγχύτως, ἀτρέπτως, ἀδιαιρέτως, ἀχωρίστως - *in duabus naturis inconfuse, immutabiliter, indivise, inseparabiliter*) the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person (*prosopon*) and one Subsistence (*hypostasis*), not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten God (μονογενῆ Θεόν), the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.²⁰

What is immediately apparent in this statement is the clarity by which the writers affirmed the dual nature of Christ. If the early Chalcedonian Confession is any indicator it seems that this mystical mentality of the Orthodox is not related so much to Christology per se as it is to their practice and tradition. The difficulty in determining Christological emphasis in this event seems to be solved by the Orthodox in chalking it up to mystery. On one level this may be appealing but it does not address the very real issue of

¹⁹ <http://www.resynod.org/beliefs/the-confession-of-chalcedon/>

²⁰ http://www.earlychurchtexts.com/main/chalcedon/chalcedonian_definition.shtml

understanding the emphasis sought for by the Synoptic authors. In the specific case of the Transfiguration it must be restated that no matter how much mystery one inserts into this event, the humanity of Christ cannot be divine. As such, the event in question cannot be simply chalked up to mystery.

Professor Williams goes on to discuss the structure of the text and makes two broad points demonstrating the centrality of the Transfiguration in the Synoptic accounts. First he notes that the Transfiguration is contained as a central part of these three gospels, a point that will be developed in chapter four of this study.²¹ His main point is that the chronology is central and really is the turning point in each account, taking Christ up to Jerusalem and the cross. His second point is worth quoting in full:

Still speaking in terms of broad structure, there is at least one other indication of the centrality of the transfiguration, which warrants mention here. It is connected with the baptism of Jesus. Only twice, in the Synoptic Gospels, do we hear a voice from heaven: the first time is at the baptism, the second at the transfiguration of Jesus Christ. If the baptism signifies and initiates the opening phase of Jesus' public ministry, the transfiguration apparently inaugurates the next, climactic phase. We have only to think of the content of the transfiguration accounts to have our sense of its importance in the Gospels reinforced. In some respects its visually dramatic features exceed those of any other part of the Gospels, with the possible exception of Luke's account of the ascension. The resurrection stories contain mysteries of recognition, appearance, disappearance and motion. There is drama enough at the empty tomb. But none are as visually spectacular as the transfiguration. Nor do the miracles performed by Jesus seem as dramatic as this, whether or not we describe it as a miracle performed upon him. Puzzling this all may be, but marginal it is not.²²

Williams observes above that at both the baptism of Christ and at the Transfiguration of Christ a voice from heaven affirms God's pleasure in Jesus. What he does not address though, is that the common theme in both cases may be important. This common theme

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

being, the very human act of submission by the very human Christ. If this were the case it would account for the fact that the three Synoptic gospels make much of this event while John does not.

Williams notes that the only other place outside the Synoptic gospels referencing the Transfiguration is 2 Peter 1:16-18.²³ He writes this statement perhaps knowing that any reader at this point will note the glaring omission by John of this event. Two sentences later Williams does address John's omission with the following statement:

John's Gospel is intriguing on this score. It contains no reference to the transfiguration, but it is a Gospel all about 'glory' and a voice from heaven thunders that God has glorified his name 'and will glorify it again' (12:28). The question about why John does not specifically mention transfiguration belongs to the wider discussion of its relationship to the Synoptics. We must bear in mind that John does not refer directly to the Last Supper either or directly report the actual baptism of Jesus, where the Synoptics do. John can be concerned with the surrounding interpretation of events that he does not report, as do the Synoptists.²⁴

Though Williams mentions the omissions by John, it seems that he does not spend enough time on it. For starters, John's Gospel is about glory but it is also very clearly about divinity. The Gospel begins with a plain statement of the full deity of the 'Word made flesh,' and ends with Thomas' confession, 'My Lord and my God' (John. 1:1,14; 20:28). The purpose of the gospel is clearly laid out in the twentieth chapter with a call to believe based on proof of this said deity:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31)

²³ Williams, "The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ."

²⁴ Ibid.

This presentation is unique and though the other gospels do indeed present, as well, the deity of Christ, it seems that it is John's emphasis of it that draws this conclusion. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* has this to say:

Contrary to what some have argued, the Synoptic writers, as well as John, present a divine Messiah. But John's Gospel is so clear and pointed in his Christology that his theology has greatly enriched the church. The text, "the Word became flesh" (1:14), became the central focal point of the early church fathers' meditation and study. John presented the Incarnation—God manifest in the flesh—as the foundation of the gospel.²⁵

This does not mean that John needed to include every instance of Jesus' divinity. In fact, it is John's exclusivity in the way he presents this proof that leaves room for doubt as to why he did not include the Transfiguration. In this vein, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* went on to add:

When one compares the Gospel of John with the other three Gospels, he is struck by the distinctiveness of John's presentation. John does not include Jesus' genealogy, birth, baptism, temptation, casting out of demons, parables, transfiguration, instituting of the Lord's Supper, His agony in Gethesemane, or His Ascension. John's presentation of Jesus stresses His ministry in Jerusalem, the feasts of the Jewish nation, Jesus' contacts with individuals in private conversations (e.g., chaps. 3-4; 18:28-19:16), and His ministry to His disciples (chaps. 13-17). The major body of the Gospel is contained in a "Book of Signs" (2:1-12:50) which embraces seven miracles or "signs" which proclaim Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. This "Book of Signs" also contains great discourses of Jesus which explain and proclaim the significance of the signs.²⁶

Williams is right then to conclude that this subject enters into a wider discussion of the Synoptic relationship to John. That said, Jesus' genealogy, birth, baptism, temptation, casting out of demons, parables, transfiguration, instituting of the Lord's Supper, His agony in Gethsemane, and even His Ascension can all be related to His

²⁵ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-), 268.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

humanity and transformation. Genealogy relates to humanity and earthly parents, birth does as well.²⁷ Baptism relates to identification, in this case with humanity, evidenced by its relationship to temptation; another human quality not found in deity. The casting out of demons is an act done by other humans empowered by God even in the Gospels. The Lord's Supper relates to the covenant promise of messiah looking back to Jeremiah 31:31, but is not distinctly divine per se. The Agony in Gethsemane is as human as it gets, and even the Ascension is a preview of what is to come for the faithful; this is after all the *Blessed Hope* of Titus 2:13, where believers will meet Christ in the air (1 Thess. 4:13).

As mentioned above, Williams ties the two events, the baptism of Jesus and His Transfiguration, together at the outset of his paper but does not mention that, not only is the Transfiguration and the voice that goes with it absent from John's account but so is the parallel voice speaking at the baptism:

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God. (John 1:29-34)

John emphasizes the Baptizer's witness to the divinity of Christ and the Baptizer's personal revelation identifying Jesus as the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

This is definitely in contrast to the synoptic accounts where the voice borne from heaven

²⁷ In a sense John does include a genealogy of Christ, he begins with not His genealogy but ours linking Him as Creator in the very first line, linking back to Genesis 1:1. To John, Jesus was not begat but He was Himself the Creator. His birth is not in this context relevant nor are His human qualities so much emphasized. If the Transfiguration were an event emphasizing the divinity of Christ it would be difficult to top. John linking the Transfiguration with these other omitted events further heightens its human emphasis.

exclaims that this is my Son in whom I am well pleased (Matt. 3:17; 17:15; Mk 1:11; Luke 3:22). God makes this same statement at the Transfiguration. If this voice was to emphasize the divinity of Christ it is curious to see John leave it out. John not only leaves out the voice from heaven at the baptism but also the Transfiguration itself and the voice saying almost the exact words as those proclaimed at the baptism. This dual absence is indicative that these two events are somehow linked.

If these events are, as this paper points out, meant to emphasize the perfect humanity of Christ than this omission makes sense. If these events are illustrating the divine character of Christ than John's omission is difficult to fathom. Williams gets to this later in his work but he does not develop it. Again, at this early part of his paper he mentions one other place where the transfiguration is present:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. (2 Pet. 1:16-18)

In Peter's accounting of this event he quotes Matthew's gospel where the voice says verbatim the same words at both the baptism and the Transfiguration. Peter draws the same conclusion then, linking these two events together in such a way that they affirm the same thing about Christ. If interacting with the work of Williams enables one to see where the modern scholarship is focused, it is important to observe that one of the main points of this paper, John's omission, is not even addressed directly.²⁸

²⁸ In the second half of his article, Williams, focuses on the larger issue of the event itself and its relation to deity and Christology but never comes back around to his initial observation made in the beginning about John's omission.

Body

The first subsection of Williams' work is titled, *Credible Report*, and addresses critical approaches to the Transfiguration whereby some believe that this event is really a misplaced resurrection account. He addresses the question this way:

...should we take the historicity of the accounts seriously at all? A range of views is possible. Some have no difficulty in believing the accounts as they stand. Others will take such belief as evidence of an almost unbelievably superstitious mind-set. Others again will believe, but only with hesitation. They do not doubt that God exists, that Jesus rose from the dead, and that in such a context all things are possible. As a matter of theological logic and the ontological order, they do not deny the possibility of transfiguration. However they find this particular scene disturbingly strange, leaving them uncertain about exactly what to make of it and generating a touch of incredulity in the matter.²⁹

Of note is his observation that the event of the Transfiguration seems strange and disturbing to some and even confusing. Though this is not really a focus of his here, it does bring out the difficult nature of the event itself and epitomizes the relevance of this study. Williams goes on to address the various claims with a short treatise on reasonable norms, rational logic and assumptions he comes to the table with. He states his presuppositions this way:

My operational assumptions here are (a) the God of Israel, to whom witness is borne in the Old and New Testaments, truly exists as the Creator of this world who has revealed himself; (b) Jesus is the definitive revelation in history of the nature and purposes of this God; (c) the NT witness grasped this and reliably conveys to us the shape of Jesus' life and ministry and the actuality of his resurrection. These are, as far as I am concerned, minimal claims. If we grant the truth or plausibility of these suppositions, what sense can we make of the transfiguration?³⁰

²⁹ Stephan Williams, "The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ," *Themelios* 28.1 (Autumn 2002): 13-25. Internet. Available: http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_transfiguration1_williams.html#1. Accessed February 22, 2011.

³⁰ Ibid.

This section does well to establish him as conservative and he rightly concludes that to go further in this arena is to address the larger questions of Biblical inspiration and inerrancy. Suffice it to say, Williams is coming at the subject in a worthy manner as a conservative Biblicist and moves his argument further in his next section.

He entitles his next subsection, *Alternative Approaches*, and deals with the idea of perspective. This section, while interesting in itself, seems a bit tedious and does not serve his previous presuppositions well. He addresses whether the event actually happened or whether it was a type of vision experienced by the disciples. A plain reading of the text leaves no room for the later, as there is really no reason to draw the said conclusion except that one wants to. In other words the entire discussion seems a bit forced. He concludes this way:

The question of the form in which Moses and Elijah appeared, and how the disciples' perceptions were operating at this point, seems to me hard to answer precisely though it seems that Jesus was bound to Moses and Elijah in mutually conscious communion. Calvin's refusal to be dogmatic here is still instructive.³¹

Quoting Calvin at least addresses the relevance of his examination of the issue but he nonetheless says it best when he says it is 'hard to answer precisely.' Calvin seemed to draw the same conclusion:

It might be asked whether it was really Moses and Elijah who were present or whether only their spectres were set before the disciples, just as often the prophets saw visions of absent things. Although there is much to be said on both sides, as they say, yet it seems more likely to me that they really were brought to that place.³²

³¹ Ibid.

³² Jean Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, II (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 1972), 199.

This entire examination seems to be contrived. The irony, is that Williams thought this a worthy subject to spend time discussing while at the same time pointing out, as mentioned above, that it is ‘inappropriate to discuss whether Jesus shone with the light of his essential deity or of his earthly humanity infused but not confused with the principle of deity.’³³ This is not written to criticize Williams but to bring out what he considers relevant to the study of the Transfiguration.

His next subheading entitled, *A Glimpse of Glory*, compares the event and glory of the Transfiguration to the glory seen and experienced by those throughout the Old Testament. Specifically he points out Moses in this way:

More striking still is the record of Moses' shining face: when he came down from Sinai, his face was radiant; whenever he entered the presence of the Lord, his face shone (34:29-35). More or less the final word in the Pentateuch on Moses is that he was an incomparable prophet 'whom the Lord knew face to face' (Deut. 34:10). This prophetic stature or role is brought to mind by the voice that spoke at the mount of transfiguration, for the injunction to 'listen to' Jesus apparently echoes Moses' parting announcement that 'the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him' (Deut. 18:15).³⁴

This comparison is important. What Williams establishes is the idea that the glory shining on or around Christ during the transfiguration is similar to that of Moses' face being radiant in the Old Testament. Though the example is not exact, it does establish that the glory seen could very well be that of God the Father reflected in the person of the perfect man Jesus. Further he makes reference to Dale C. Allison, who writes in, *The New Moses: a Matthean Typology*, along the lines that these connections are not flights of

³³ Stephan Williams, “The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ,” *Themelios* 28.1 (Autumn 2002): 13-25. Internet. Available: http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_transfiguration1_williams.html#1. Accessed February 22, 2011.

³⁴ Ibid.

fancy and that what often takes us time to dig up would have jumped to the minds of those steeped in the OT.³⁵ This striking point strengthens the thesis of this paper for it shows that the deity of Christ need not necessarily be in view per se.

Williams goes on to point out that themes of glory and exodus were contextualized by the political hopes of the Jewish people and that the entire scene of the Transfiguration would be, to a first-century-Jew, a messianic hope of political deliverance. This goes with Matthew's theme and encompasses those of Mark and Luke as well. The political expectation is not as central to John and suggests another reason this event was left out. An important point to consider is that this political interpretation of the event would be completely overshadowed were it to be interpreted as an expression of deity. It is hard to imagine Peter, James and John mistaking Jesus as being a political messiah, or even of Peter himself mistakenly giving equality to Moses and Elijah if this were a theophany. Compare the reaction of Isaiah who cried:

Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts! (Isaiah 6:5)

Or the reaction of John, the beloved disciple, who in his vision of Christ while at Patmos tells us: 'When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead (Rev. 1:17).'

Incidentally, John also happened to be on the mount where Jesus was transfigured yet his reaction is nothing like this. Williams' depiction of glory is powerful but not in an exclusive sense to Christ's glory per se but in this case to that of God the Father's glory reflected in the humanity of Christ.

³⁵ Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses: a Matthean Typology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993).

In the next section, Williams, references a work by A.M. Ramsey, entitled, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ*.³⁶ Ramsey, in his work comments that: John's Gospel affords us 'a perpetual theophany - a permanent sighting of the appearance of God's glory in Christ, temporarily glimpsed at transfiguration.'³⁷ Williams rightly observes that Moses' relationship to the law compares to Christ as mediator of Grace and Truth. He makes the observation, quoting John 1:18 and 1:14, that Christ is making God known and is acting as a revealer rather than a recipient here.³⁸ What should be noted however is that Williams is not quoting any of the Synoptic authors to make this observation but instead is quoting John. The irony is that even though John makes this point, he does so without reference to this event that seems by so many to show this very thing.

It is important to reiterate that the argument of this paper is not that the Synoptic authors are not addressing the deity of Christ or that the dual nature of Christ is separated in any way. Rather, the point of this examination is to demonstrate that the emphasis of the Synoptic authors and consequently the Transfiguration was to emphasize something other than the deity of Christ. Williams turning to John to make his case betrays the weakness of it. He goes on however to address John in a more general sense in his next section.

³⁶ A.M. Ramsey, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ* (London: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009), 123.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Stephan Williams, "The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ," *Themelios* 28.1 (Autumn 2002): 13-25. Internet. Available: http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_transfiguration1_williams.html#1. Accessed February 22, 2011.

Williams turns to the work of James Dunn who points out that John's gospel is predominately the one making the case for the deity of Christ.³⁹ According to Williams' analysis of Dunn:

The language of sonship deployed elsewhere, and certainly in the Synoptics, predicated of Jesus high things that made him unique and unsurpassable, the redeemer and the revealer. But it did not constitute a theology of incarnation.⁴⁰

Whether this is the right reading of Dunn or not is beyond the research of this paper, but it is interesting that Williams addresses him at this point. Williams is establishing that the deity of Christ can be demonstrated outside of John's gospel, namely in the Synoptic gospels. This section is supremely interesting but can be summed up by saying that Dunn seems too narrow. This is a broad issue and not really addressing whether the other authors emphasize deity like John.

Again, the case is watertight that the deity of Christ is revealed in all the gospels. But that is not the issue. Williams is using a red herring here, perhaps inadvertently. He brings the discussion generally to the issue of deity and how John is not the only one to demonstrate it but never addresses the fact that John does not demonstrate it at all in the case of the Transfiguration, not even presenting the event itself. There is no significance, in this case, if all the gospels present the divinity of Christ. This is a presupposition at the outset in terms of orthodox Christology anyways. The issue in the exegesis of the Transfiguration is whether the emphasis is

³⁹ J. Dunn, *The Christ and the Spirit Volume 1: Christology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998).

⁴⁰ Stephan Williams, "The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ," *Themelios* 28.1 (Autumn 2002): 13-25. Internet. Available: http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_transfiguration1_williams.html#1. Accessed February 22, 2011.

there. Williams has already argued that the event is important to the flow of the Synoptics and is central to their movement. He has already shown that the event has the Old Testament typology of Moses. All of these things are tied up in the person, unified that is the Christ, both God and man. The roles emphasized are specifically unique but also specifically human. John's depiction of the Incarnation is decidedly emphatic and narrow showing above all else that Christ is God. The other roles of Christ while important to John are secondary as evidenced by his narrow selection of proofs. When this is taken into account, the multidimensional nature of the Transfiguration overshadows a theophany. For if the event were a theophany it would be that, more than anything else, overshadowing all other options, much like the Resurrection. Even in Matthew's Gospel that emphasizes that Christ is King, when it comes to the Resurrection, Matthew emphasizes, like all the gospels, that Christ is divine. When they see the risen Christ, there is no confusion, even though He is not fully as He is in Revelation, or even glowing as He is on the mountain. Their reaction is telling: "And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. (Matt. 28:9)"

Though there is no question that the Transfiguration demonstrates Christ's deity, there is a question as to whether that is the focus of the event or of the Synoptic accounting of it. Williams has slipped into letting the divinity of Christ overshadow what his own research is demonstrating, namely that Jesus is the perfect example of submission to the will of God, the perfect example, in this case, to be emulated.

Williams turns next to Elijah and the typology contained in his appearance. One of the many astute observations he makes, relevant to the discussion at hand is:

Just as the God-fearing life of Moses resembled, in its way, that of Jesus, so did the God-fearing life of Elijah, and they both, whether during or subsequent to their life on earth, were signifying the one who is to come, the Messiah. Yet, just as a contrast is drawn between Moses and Jesus in passages cited in the first part of this article, so a contrast emerges between Elijah and Jesus as we read the transfiguration stories in context. The vocabulary of Luke 9:51 which speaks of Christ's departure echoes that of 2 Kings 1-11, where it describes Elijah's departure and of course the ascension furnishes us with a further connection. But in the case of Jesus death precedes ascension. No one can be sure why Peter suggested that three shelters or booths should be built for Jesus, Moses and Elijah but given the transfigured appearance, it would not be surprising if he thought that Jesus was about to be assumed into heaven in the company of Elijah and that he was trying to detain the heavenly company for a little longer. As it was, Jesus would die, unlike Elijah, and die in agony, unlike Moses.⁴¹

Williams' comparisons linking Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, are centered on their God-fearing lives. Beyond all the possible typology presented, this is the most telling in regards to the intent of the Synoptic authors. Even though Elijah and Moses represent so much more in terms of their symbolism and roles, whether as the representative of the Law or the representative of the Prophets or even as the fulfillment to the role prophesied in Malachi, they appear as men alongside the perfect man. Again it is clear that the emphasis is towards Jesus' posture of submission and the place this submission has to the will of the Father. Williams addresses this but does not draw too many conclusions.

⁴¹ Stephan Williams, "The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ," *Themelios* 28.1 (Autumn 2002): 13-25. Internet. Available: http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_transfiguration2_williams.html. Accessed February 22, 2011.

Conclusion

Williams concludes his article this way:

We have done no more than make a beginning and have omitted more than we have included. The transfiguration is at least this: the sign and revelation of decisive action within salvation history. The content of the sign is at least this: the new dispensation of grace under the messianic lordship of Jesus Christ. It inaugurates a crucial phase within the story of divine action, as the disciples are instructed about a path from suffering to glory, through cross to ascension. In the context of the NT, it constitutes the fullest revelation, under earthly conditions, of the glory, and not just the destiny, of the person of the Son of God.⁴²

His first point is a good one and focuses on the chronological importance of the event to show mankind God's sovereignty and purpose in giving His Son as a sacrificial substitute. This is a powerful reminder that the cross was not an accident but a planned and purposed event that Christ worked toward. The Transfiguration then serves to push the narrative of the story away from the teachings of Christ and more towards The Passion of Christ. This first point is sufficiently broad, making a valid point while sidestepping Christological issues deemed, in his eyes, as inappropriate.

His second point is harder to clarify and seems cumbersome. It is not clear how the Transfiguration of Christ demonstrates a new dispensation of Grace more than any other event in the life of Christ.⁴³ Further, saying that 'it inaugurates a crucial phase. about the disciples' instruction 'about a path from suffering to glory, through cross to ascension,' is well made but lost in a bloated sentence that repeats a previous point. It is this last detail he makes that is really the point of this paper. It is the contention of this paper that the transfiguration of Christ was recorded by the Synoptic Gospel writers not so

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ If there were an event marking a new dispensation of grace it would be the Incarnation itself or the Resurrection or the Passion. To make the Transfiguration the culmination of this distinction seems abstract at best

much to *emphasize* Christ's Divinity as to *emphasize* His perfect Humanity and in turn is more about the perfect obedience of the perfect Man, pleasing God and reflecting His glory, than it is Christ revealing His own deity. Williams definitely addresses this fact but seems to do so as an afterthought, a fact evidenced by the way he concludes his paper. Again it will be helpful to focus on the point of this paper. Namely, that this very human Christ was seen in one of His greatest moments on the mountain of Transfiguration in obedient submission to God the Father. In this event one sees God shining His glory on the perfect Man the second Adam who was in perfect obedience to His will. It would seem that Williams would not necessarily disagree with this analysis but he would probably be quick to point out the narrow-ness of it. This seems a wise criticism until one remembers that Williams sidesteps the very Christological questions obviously demanded by the event in the first place. He himself points out McGukin's commentary on the Patristic Fathers, quoted above, which points out that: 'the major tenet of the Patristic exegesis of the Transfiguration is the interpretation of the epiphany as a manifestation by Jesus to his disciples of his own divine status.'⁴⁴ Their conclusion shows a magnification of the divine nature of Christ overshadowing the context argued for by Williams. Their conclusion notwithstanding, this comment alone demonstrates that the Transfiguration has always demanded that one address Christological issues. To say on the one hand, that the event means all of these things but mostly that Christ is divine is to really say that His divinity is the emphasis. This is the conclusion the early commentators made and is the only conclusion any interpreter must make if they don't, on the other hand, emphasize the human-ness of the event. Again, as stated in the introduction, though the Incarnation and

⁴⁴ McGukin, 110.

the dual nature of Christ is a Divine mystery it is important to remember that indeed there are two natures not one. In the case of the Transfiguration it is not enough to say that Christ's humanity was shining out as well as His Divinity for to say this would ascribe glory to His humanity. One must say that either Christ's personal Divine nature was shining through on the mountain or it was God the Father's Divine nature shining onto or reflected in the very human Jesus. It cannot be said however that Christ's human nature was shining through himself for he would cease to be human in any ordinary sense of the word. One is left with the term emphasis. Though this event is touching the very heart of the mystery of the incarnation it is nevertheless in a context where one nature is being exemplified. Williams, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, points out the inappropriateness of these types of questions:

It is also possible to judge as inappropriate some questions that are asked on the basis of a traditional conviction of deity, such as whether Jesus shone with the light of his essential deity or of his earthly humanity infused but not confused with the principle of deity. Here, however, we must leave questions of this sort, leaving with them a host of questions which may or may not be appropriate and which might be mentioned, for example: did Jesus shine with the light of his own future glory? Did he shine with the light of the future glory of the saints?⁴⁵

He writes a wonderful research paper and points out many relevant and important facts, making a large number of astute observations but he never addresses the very thing this event demands one examine: Christological emphasis. The only comment Williams seems to have in regards to this issue is 'no comment.'

⁴⁵ Stephan Williams, "The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ," *Themelios* 28.1 (Autumn 2002): 13-25. Internet. Available: http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_transfiguration1_williams.html#1. Accessed February 22, 2011.

CHAPTER 3
SURVEY OF EVANGELICAL COMMENTARIES

Lack of Scholarship

Moody Bible Institute professor, Wilbur M. Smith, in his book, *The Supernaturalness of Christ*, addresses the strange lack of Christological scholarship that seems to surround the event of the Transfiguration by saying:

Though the transfiguration is one of the most astonishing of all the experiences of our Lord while on earth, for no adequate reason (we would not say without any reason) it has not been given in Christological literature, the consideration to which it is entitled.⁴⁶

His point is well taken at this stage in the paper especially after engaging Stephan Williams in the last chapter and the strange way he avoided the Christological issues surrounding the Transfiguration. Smith goes on to quote Professor William Ernest Beet from his book, *The Transfiguration of Jesus*, who essentially says that as far as he was aware, his was, “the first attempt at a separate treatment of the transfiguration.”⁴⁷ He went on to give the reason why by saying that, “while its sublimity and splendor are readily admitted, it is regarded, perhaps for this reason, as having no very close connection with the every-day life and spiritual perplexities of men.”⁴⁸ Whether this is an accurate guess remains to be seen but what is interesting is the observed fact that this subject seems to be somewhat unexamined and in Beet’s estimation, irrelevant to contemporary application.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Wilbur M. Smith, *The Supernaturalness of Christ: Can We Still Believe In It?* (Massachusetts: W.A. Wilde Company, 1944), 165.

⁴⁷ William Ernst Beet, *The Transfiguration of Jesus*, (London: Books for Bible Students, 1905), 5.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ When beginning this work a search for other thesis work submitted worldwide on World Cat, the leading worldwide library database, with the keywords transfiguration and Christology turned up zero results. Not one person had done a thesis on this subject anywhere in the world it seems. In terms of

S. Lewis Johnson Jr., in his article in the Journal, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, manages to disagree with Beet while discovering exactly what Smith did, that the Transfiguration is a neglected subject in theology. He says:

The transfiguration of Jesus Christ is one of the most astonishing and perplexing of his earthly experiences. It is the one occasion in which the bright beams of His divine glory blazed through the sackcloth covering of His humanity. It is somewhat strange, then, that commentators and preachers, usually gushing blethers, have become as Peter who “wist not what to say” (Mark 9:6). It is also surprising to discover the omission of the theological significance of the transfiguration in the standard systematic theologies. This fact I discovered through personal experience some years ago. During a series of meetings for the ministry of the Word in the state of Pennsylvania, I had occasion to do some of my first work on this event, I asked permission of the pastor of the church in which the meetings were being held to use his very fine library, in which were a number of the standard sets, such as those of Charles Hodge, William G. T. Shedd, A. H. Strong, and others. I was not a little chagrined to learn that the transfiguration was almost completely neglected. Not a single one of the authors I consulted discussed the theological significance of that event. I was particularly embarrassed to find out that the systematic theology of Lewis Sperry Chafer, one of my own teachers, contained only unimportant references to the event and no real treatment of it.⁵⁰

Johnson asserts that this lack of attention is troubling and he spends the rest of his introduction examining why. He essentially argues against Beet’s point above, that the event has no contemporary significance, saying:

In the second place, it has been suggested that the event is one that does not have “any direct bearing on human experience,” that is, it is an impractical event. We are able to see the practical significance of the events such as the temptation, with its signal lesson of the importance of the Word of God, and the agony, with its message of the imperative need of obedience to the will of God, but what is the practical meaning of the transfiguration? What does it say to us that affects our life in the here and now? This viewpoint has contributed without question to the slighting of the transfiguration, but I hope to show that this is a serious

Christology there were 2,131 thesis/dissertations submitted worldwide in multiple languages. In terms of the Transfiguration there were 218 thesis/dissertations submitted worldwide.

⁵⁰ S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "The Transfiguration of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, (April 1967) BSAC 124:494.

misunderstanding of it. The transfiguration has a deep practical relevance to the life of the Christian.⁵¹

Johnson concludes his article summarily saying that the Transfiguration is God's authentication of His Son, much like the baptism of Christ (a point addressed in the last chapter), and an illustration of what is to come for us.⁵² What is relevant for this study is how he comes to this conclusion. He does not come to it based on the opinion of any systematic theology but rather through an examination of the Biblical text.

Johnson's conclusion goes against the Patristic consensus that saw the Transfiguration as a pure theophany.⁵³ When examining some of the more contemporary early views it seems that there is not any attempt to give reasons for this early emphasis but rather a simple assertion that this is indeed correct. Smith, after commentating on the lack of scholarship in regards to the Transfiguration, gravitates to the default position of the church fathers. He quotes Dr. G. Campbell Morgan who makes this bold assertion:

This glory was not the light of heaven falling upon Him from above. Nor was it a merely reflected radiance which resulted from communion... That was the glory of His own face. Of His own person shining through the veil that had hidden it, until the very raiment of His humanity sparkled and glistened and flashed with the splendor of light and snow and lightning. The Transfiguration was effected, not by the glory falling on Him, but by inherent glory flashing forth.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid. Johnson draws seven conclusions the Transfiguration was: 1- An authentication of the Son by the Father, 2- An anticipation of the coming kingdom, 3- an illustration of the inhabitants of the coming kingdom, 4- an illustration of personal resurrection, 5- the confirmation of Old Testament Prophecy, 6- a proclamation of the costly-ness of sin, 7- the evaluation of God's strength of passion to save souls.

⁵³ "Undoubtedly, the major tenet of the Patristic exegesis of the Transfiguration is the interpretation of the epiphany as a manifestation by Jesus to his disciples of his own divine status." J.A. McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1986) 110.

⁵⁴ Morgan, 227-228.

This strongly worded assertion seems to satisfy Smith who after quoting this rested his case saying: “This, I think, is as far as we can go in actually saying what happened to the body of Christ that day.”⁵⁵

Engaging Evangelical Commentaries

If Johnson’s general conclusions based on the Biblical text were any indication, it would seem that evangelical commentaries based on the Biblical exegesis would indicate a similar emphasis. Perhaps it is simply a matter of a theological oversight that is not seen in a verse-by-verse commentary? To that end, a brief survey of the various popular commentaries will do much to clarify where current thinking is headed. In order to limit the scope of this survey a host of popular evangelical commentaries examining Luke 9:28-36 will be consulted.

The perfect place to start is with Dr. Darrell L. Bock. His enormous two-volume commentary in the *Baker Exegetical Commentary* series is widely respected in evangelical circles. Bock takes the broad strategy in discussing the best way to classify this event, and in doing so covers every possible image portrayed, yet somehow neglects to speak at all of Christology. He sums up this section saying:

Luke 9:28-36 presents the transfiguration as a major event of confirmation. After Jesus received the disciples’ confession and warned them about his approaching suffering, three disciples hear the heavenly voice testify to Jesus’ uniqueness. Such an endorsement is significant...not only is Jesus pictured as the Messiah-Servant, he is portrayed as the “Prophet like Moses”...The one who follows Jesus must be taught by him about suffering, sharing in that suffering, and pleasing God.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Smith, 170.

⁵⁶ Darrell L Bock, *The Baker Exegetical Commentary of The New Testament: Luke 1:1-9:50* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 876.

Bock makes many points that have already been made, bringing in themes of suffering and Heavenly endorsement. There is no mention of an active theophany. Bock addresses this earlier in discussing verse 9:29 noting that the word *transfigured* (μετεμορφώθη) is not used by Luke even though it is by both Matthew and Mark.⁵⁷ The literal translation is that his face was “other,” perhaps to prevent confusion with an epiphany.⁵⁸ He goes on, in the next paragraph, to say that, “Jesus’ glory is similar to the description of Moses’ glory in Exodus 34:29-35, though the terminology is not parallel.”⁵⁹ This is a direct rebuttal to G. Campbell Morgan’s idea that Jesus was revealing His own deity in this event. If Bock is to be believed, Jesus was, in this case, like Moses reflecting the Glory of the Father.

Though Bock does not address Christology directly, he does make a strong case that the event of the Transfiguration is to be seen in a way that is at odds with the Patristic idea of an active Theophany. Bock’s case supports the idea that the Transfiguration emphasized themes and ideas surrounding the perfect man perfectly submitting to God the Father. The ramifications of Bock’s scholarship brush up against Christology without actually addressing it directly. This seems to be the nature of most commentaries in this regard.

Howard Marshal, in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, says this about Christology in his section on Luke 9:28-36:

Its christological content is complex, since it combines elements of Jesus as — most clearly — the Son of God and prophet like Moses, and — less directly — as

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

the Son of man who appears in the manner of Yahweh at Mount Sinai. The suggestion that the Son of God motif was originally a Servant of Yahweh motif is unlikely.⁶⁰

This is really all he says about Christology but it is more than Bock did. His statement about the complexity of imagery is well taken, re-enforcing the idea that this is not a pure theophany. It also challenges, at first glance, the emphasis argued for in this paper. It is important to remember however that the point, that the Synoptic authors were emphasizing the humanity of Christ, is sufficiently broad encompassing what Marshall and Bock are saying. This does not mean that it is unhelpful. It is precisely this broad point that has the ability to bring clarity to this passage and application to the reader, namely that submission to the Father glorifies the Father and the one submitting to Him.

Marshall, like Bock points out Luke's word choice and the relationship to Moses:

It is, then, during communion with God that Jesus is transfigured. Luke has dropped Mark's verb μεταμορφώω (on which see J. Behm, TDNT IV, 755–759), probably because it could be misunderstood in a Hellenistic sense (although this was not intended by Mark). The background is rather to be sought in the experience of Moses (Ex. 34:29f.), whose face shone because he had been speaking to Yahweh on Mount Sinai. The same motif is used by Paul in 2 Cor. 3:7, 13.⁶¹

Again, this makes the pure Theophany idea unlikely in that Moses is the precedent of one shining with Glory from above. Also his reference to 2 Corinthians 3:7, 13 brings out the New Testament illustration of the Moses typology by Paul. In other words, the idea that this event is similar to that of Moses' face shining with reflected glory is not being drawn without precedent in the New Testament.

⁶⁰ Marshall, 381.

⁶¹ Ibid., 383.

Robert H. Stein, in *The New American Commentary: Luke*, does a good job of laying out the options for what actually happened but does not really engage Christology directly. He says:

If one accepts the historicity of this account, the question of what actually happened still must be raised. There are three main explanations. (1) The preexistent glory of the preincarnate Son temporarily broke through the limitations of his humanity (cf. Phil 2:6–9; John 1:14b). (2) A glimpse of the future glory of the risen Christ is given to the disciples. Even as the first passion prediction (Luke 9:22) does not end in an announcement of death but in the promise of resurrection, so the discussion of Jesus' departure is followed by a glimpse of the glory awaiting him at the resurrection (24:26; cf. also Heb 2:9; 1 Pet 1:21). (3) A glimpse of the glory of the Son of Man at the time of the parousia is given to the disciples. In support of the last explanation is the fact that the glory of the Son of Man at his parousia has just been mentioned (Luke 9:26; cf. also 21:27, where Luke referred to "cloud," as in 9:34–35, rather than "clouds" as found in Mark and Matthew). Also 2 Pet 1:16–18 clearly understands it in this manner. Although the last explanation is the primary understanding of the event for Luke, elements of the second may also be present.⁶²

Stein's mention of the *parousia* or Second Coming of Christ fits well with the context of Luke 9:27:

But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:27)

All three Synoptic Gospels introduce the event of the Transfiguration with the discussion Jesus had with His disciples six to eight days previous (Matthew 16:28, Mark 9:1, Luke 9:27). This ties the Transfiguration contextually to the Kingdom of God and gives Stein the motivation to reference the event to the future literal coming Kingdom. This is a messianic point and does not emphasize the person of Christ but rather the role of the Messiah. It is an important point but it is not a Christological one per se. He does however address the nature of how Jesus was transfigured, saying:

⁶² Robert H. Stein, vol. 24, *Luke*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 283.

The transfiguration was not from the outside in but from the inside out. Jesus' "person" was transfigured before his clothing. Both Matthew and Luke referred to Jesus' face shining "like the sun" (Matt 17:2). It is difficult not to see in this some allusion to Exod 34:29–35 (cf. also 2 Cor 3:7–13). Moses' glory, however, came from the outside.⁶³

This is an assertion with nothing to back it up but that he says so. There is nothing in the text that would necessitate this conclusion. Further, it is the making of this statement that indicates that Stein has accepted the Patristic flavor of the event even going so far as to differentiate it from Moses' glory from the outside. There is no reason for him to do this, especially considering the results of his own scholarship relating to Moses and the Second Coming of which believers are to be a part. Stein, sides with Smith, and Morgan, who earlier did the same thing asserting with no evidence that the Transfiguration was an inside out change.

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown in, *The Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, do the very same thing. They assert with no explanation, critical or otherwise, as to why this must be the case. They write: "The light, then, it would seem, shone not *upon Him from without*, but *out of Him from within*; He was all irradiated, was in one blaze of celestial glory."⁶⁴ This point totally makes the Moses comparison moot and takes out the idea of how a first century Jew would view this event.

A. T. Robertson in his Greek laden commentary, *Word Pictures in The New Testament*, addresses this fact while drawing a conclusion not yet discussed:

Moses had led the Exodus from Egypt. Jesus will accomplish the exodus of God's people into the Promised Land on high. See on Mark and Matthew for discussion of significance of the appearance of Moses and Elijah as representatives of law

⁶³ Stein, 284.

⁶⁴ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, A. R. Fausset et al., *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), Lk 9:29.

and prophecy and with a peculiar death. The purpose of the Transfiguration was to strengthen the heart of Jesus as he was praying long about his approaching death and to give these chosen three disciples a glimpse of his glory for the hour of darkness coming. No one on earth understood the heart of Jesus and so Moses and Elijah came. The poor disciples utterly failed to grasp the significance of it all.⁶⁵

To Robertson, the Transfiguration was more for Christ than anyone else. It was to encourage Him for the task He was committed to. Whether this is the right way to view this event or not is beside the point. What is important to notice is that Robertson sees a very human Christ, one who would need encouragement. Though he does not discuss Christology per se he does demonstrate the emphasis of the Synoptic authors in this regard.

Walvoord and Zuck in, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, begin by relating Luke 9:27 to 9:28-36 stating plainly that, “the transfiguration was a foretaste of the glories of the kingdom.”⁶⁶ This would be in line with the idea that the glory shining on Christ was a preview that believers themselves would experience in the Kingdom. This is a very human Christology. They also point out that Jesus’ face and clothes becoming as bright as a flash of lightning, “would have immediately reminded those present of Moses’ face shining with a bright light when he received the tablets of the Law (Ex. 34:29-35).”⁶⁷ This relationship makes the inner light theory more difficult to maintain for the similarity with Moses seems to be a purposeful one. In other words, Christ is not so much being contrasted as He is being compared to Moses and Elijah.

⁶⁵ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Lk 9:31.

⁶⁶ Walvoord and Zuck, Lk 9:22–27.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

D. A. Carson in, *The New Bible Commentary*, makes the case that:

The real significance was to be found in the *cloud* (a symbol of God's presence) and the heavenly voice which repeated what had been said at the baptism of Jesus (3:22) but this time addressed it to the disciples. The Jesus whom Peter had confessed to be the Messiah was indeed the Son of God—not in spite of his imminent sufferings and death but because of them.⁶⁸

Carson's point keeps the Divine focus on the Father, not it seems, on Christ. He also points out that the sufferings of Christ in obedience to the Father is important, again relating the human role of the Son to the event of the Transfiguration. Like most commentators, he does not mention Christology per se.

Warren Weirsbe, in, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, makes the connection with 9:27 and uses this as the point and goes on to make an interesting application. He says:

Our Lord's own words in Luke 9:27 indicate that the event was a demonstration (or illustration) of the promised kingdom of God. This seems logical, for the disciples were confused about the kingdom because of Jesus' words about the cross. (We must not be too hard on them because the prophets were also confused—1 Peter 1:10–12.) Jesus was reassuring them that the Old Testament prophecies would be fulfilled, but first He had to suffer before He could enter into His glory (note especially 2 Peter 1:12–21). But there is also a practical lesson here, for we can have a spiritual "transfiguration" experience each day as we walk with the Lord. Romans 12:1–2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18 tell us how. As we surrender body, mind, and will, the Lord transforms us from within so that we are not conformed to the world. As we behold Him in the Word (the mirror), we are "transfigured" by the Spirit "from glory to glory." The theological name for this experience is *sanctification*, the process by which we become more like the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the Father's goal for each of His children (Rom. 8:19; 1 John 3:2). Note that our Lord was once again praying, which suggests that prayer is one of the keys to a transformed life.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), Lk 9:28–36.

⁶⁹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996), Lk 9:18.

Weirsbe does not see a Divine theophany at all. Further, he draws an application immediately related to the believer's experience and relationship to the Father through obedience. He obviously emphasizes a very human Christ but does not mention Christology directly.

A Consensus?

These are an obviously small sample of various verse-by-verse commentaries. What is immediately apparent is that the emphasis of the commentaries is on the human aspects of the person of Christ. This is very likely because they are viewing the event in the context of the surrounding passages. For the most part there seems to be a consensus that the Transfiguration had something to do with the coming literal Kingdom of God. It also was rooted in the Old Testament imagery of Moses and Elijah in the context of submission and the Glory of the Father being reflected *onto* from above, not *out* from within. These points are quite obvious when examining the text but they seem to be swept under the rug when it comes to a Christological discussion of the event. It seems that for many the Patristic idea that Christ took His disciples up to the mountain to show them His Divinity is weightier than the actual Scriptural evidence to the contrary. This is not necessarily due to maliciousness or negligence by any one person but rather could be simply a matter of falling back to what is comfortable for the many. It seems that the authors making the case that Christ shone with His own Divine light, do so by simply asserting this said fact rather than making any sort of case to that end. The commentaries that do seem to draw the correct conclusions from the textual evidence do so, but in not discussing the Christological significance, fall short of being able to be applicable in any contemporary sense to believers. It loses value then as an example of submission and a

promise of submission's end, namely God's glory in us. Beet's point that the Transfiguration has, "no very close connection with the every-day life and spiritual perplexities of men," would be a sad reality rather than a textual necessity.⁷⁰ Johnson's quote is worth repeating at this point:

In the second place, it has been suggested that the event is one that does not have "any direct bearing on human experience," that is, it is an impractical event. We are able to see the practical significance of the events such as the temptation, with its signal lesson of the importance of the Word of God, and the agony, with its message of the imperative need of obedience to the will of God, but what is the practical meaning of the transfiguration? What does it say to us that affects our life in the here and now? This viewpoint has contributed without question to the slighting of the transfiguration, but I hope to show that this is a serious misunderstanding of it. The transfiguration has a deep practical relevance to the life of the Christian.⁷¹

The impracticality of the Transfiguration as an application worthy text is largely related to the mixed approach of its examination. On the one hand, almost all the commentators admitted to a very clear comparison of Jesus to Moses and Elijah, while in the next breath drawing a contrasting distinction of Christ from them. This takes the force of the comparison away rendering the radical-ness of the humanity of Christ, as not worthy of theological discussion. Further, the fact that the systematic theologies seem to neglect this subject means that the fullness of Christ's humanity is without one of its most vivid illustrations namely, The Transfiguration of The Perfect Man.

⁷⁰ Beet, 5.

⁷¹ Johnson, 124:494.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

The Transfigured Man

This paper has argued that the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ is an event that has been neglected in its rich Christology. It has been the argument of this paper that the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ was an event emphasizing the perfect humanity of Jesus Christ in perfect obedience to the Father. By the end of this paper this seems to be more than only plausible, it seems likely.

In many respects the research questions addressed in this study were too broad to be answered adequately in this work. This broadness does not negate the usefulness of these questions in coming to the rather narrow conclusion that the main Christological aspect of the event of the transfiguration is seen in a human emphasis rather than a divine one. The research of many of the commentators and theologians seem to suggest this even while the general conclusions they make deny it. It is a curious thing that so many would come to see the event on the mountain of Christ's transfiguration as a proof text of deity when most of their observations relate Christ in this case to man, whether Moses or Elijah. The main gist of most observations came by way of comparison to Biblical characters who were faithful and obedient and who in their obedience reflected the Glory of God. That said, many commentators distinguished or contrasted Christ from these same characters in their conclusion, even though every observation said otherwise.

Who was the Transfiguration for? Patristic thought seems to center on the idea that this event was for the benefit of the disciples. Some more modern commentators don't really address this directly but in at least one case the event was thought to be for

Christ Himself, as an encouragement to go on.⁷² This suggests a Christological emphasis that is very human. The general non-issue of this point by many only reinforces the fact that it is not apparent that this event was to show the deity of Christ, for if it were, the event would be certainly for the disciples in a very prominent way.

Likewise in answering what it was to accomplish many found the event as central to the synoptic journey to the cross. It accomplished much it seems in validating the person of Christ. This is a passive thing however seeing God the father as the acting agent in speaking from the “glory” of the thick cloud. The general consensus regarding the event itself seems to be that it is complicated. This is important. There are many overlapping themes and sub-themes addressed in the event making it difficult for any to be dogmatic as to its specific purpose. This demonstrates that this event is not clearly a divine theophany per se, for if it were this would be primarily what it was; it would be quite a bit less complex and multifaceted.

As to why most commentators seem to focus largely on the Deity of Christ, it seems that those arguing from a largely theological point of view do just that while commentators focused less on theology and more on exegesis are mixed in their conclusions if they have one at all. From an exegetical standpoint, it is supremely interesting that so few make much of John’s neglect of this event and the relationship of this neglect to their own conclusions relating this event in Old Testament **human** figures.

What was surprising and not expected at the outset was how little has been written on this subject overall. Perhaps this is the greater mystery and the neglect to discuss Christology in terms of the Transfiguration is a symptom. Further research might seek to

⁷² Robertson, Lk 9:31.

ascertain the trend and timing of the liberal attack on the deity of Christ and its relationship to the way this passage is sought so often as a way to show the deity of Christ by conservatives. The fact that the bulk of research for this paper comes from conservative sources might be related in some way to this idea.

Peter's ability to equate Jesus on equal terms with Moses and Elijah did not come up anywhere. It seems not to be a relevant question to anyone. Perhaps the question itself is a misunderstanding of the text but it seems that Peter's reaction to Christ, if He was revealing His deity to them, was blasphemous at best. The neglect of this observation and discussion seems to be related to the general relationship to conservative neglect to see in this passage anything other than a theophany.

Almost every source related the voice from heaven to the voice at the baptism of Jesus. The relation of these two events to one another centered in every case on Jesus as the passive recipient of God's approval. No conclusions went beyond the mere mentioning of this fact and no one seemed to think that this had any relation to the human Christology of the event.

Surprisingly the passive use of *transfigured* (μετεμορφώθη) in this event did not ring any bells for any it seems. Overall the reason for this could be related to the suggestion above that somehow this is related to the fact that conservative minds are myopic to deity to the exclusion of a human Christ. That said, most commentators placed the event in relation to the submission of Christ in prayer about the journey to Jerusalem and the cross. Some may have discussed the contrast of Jesus' submission with the unsubmission of the disciples in passing but beyond mentioning it no conclusions were drawn.

This paper, simply by existing, does much to point the conversation towards a richer Christological emphasis in regards to the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ. Whether someone comes away thinking of this event in terms of the human Christ reflecting God's glory in His perfect obedience or not takes nothing away from the fact that it is a subject not addressed in any significant way up to this point. To that end this paper serves less as a conclusion and more of an introduction. The greatest value in this could very well be the questions themselves in terms of guiding a deeper study of this great passage and its implications for believers today.

The desire in undertaking this subject for a thesis was to add to the existing knowledge base. The end result is a less detailed and more general introduction into the subject of Christology in reference to the Transfiguration. For further study, an exegetical paper on each Synoptic author's description with a view to Christology would be immensely helpful. Though commentaries are abundant, the detailed exegesis of this event has not been done to the degree the event demands. This future work ought to be less a survey of literature, as this is, and more a work done using primarily the Greek text of the New Testament. Perhaps a separate work specifically about Christology could be undertaken that is reliant on the results of these studies. When the dust settles, it would be wonderful to see this passage displayed for all its glory in demonstrating the way every believer ought to live for God. It would be wonderful to relate with Jesus who is empathic to our condition, as He knows what obedience feels like personally. It would also be encouraging to see the result of this obedience in our own lives, namely that we glorify God and reflect His glory to the world.

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