

The Transfiguration of Christ: A Study of Matthew 17:1-9 in relation to the Believers' Transformation and Senses in the Matthean Transfiguration Narrative

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THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST:
A Study of Matthew 17:1-9 in relation to the Believers' Transformation
and Senses in the Matthean Transfiguration Narrative

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To my parents,

Johanna and Antonio

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INTRODUCTION

The Gospel narrative of Christ's transfiguration story is a captivating story which has received the special attention of the Church since the very early days of Christianity. The Church Fathers approached the narrative, mostly focusing on the trinitarian, christological, soteriological, spiritual, and eschatological meanings of the transfiguration. These implications of the transfiguration have been confirmed and extended through the process of the dynamic, complicated development of the Gospel narrative. After studying the transfiguration from multiple approaches, scholars have turned to the text itself, making use of literary theories and placing the text in today's context to unlock the message of the Gospel narrative.

The problem that led to this study is that it is rare to find a study which focuses on the role of all human senses and emotions in the biblical narratives. There has been little consideration of the importance of sensory and emotional perception in studying preconceived notions and conveying the message of the transfiguration. One reason is, arguably, our negative view of human senses and emotions, shaped by the traditional Western body-mind dichotomy. A second reason is that some tend to overlook the place of sensory experience in the narrative, while others focus on the centrality of 'sight' or 'hearing' as key senses in the context of knowledge, learning, and perceiving. If we read the text carefully, however, we can find that Matthew uses not only visual and auditory senses but other diverse sensory and emotional expressions. What are the roles of sensory description in the Matthean transfiguration narrative in informing reader's contemplation and transformation?

This thesis will argue that the senses and emotions in Matthew 17:1-9 play a key role in communicating the message of Christ's transfiguration and the believers' transformation in a holistic way, and stress the positive role of embodied and sensory experience in contemplating

the transfiguration narrative.

This thesis seeks to shed more light on the important role played by all human senses and emotions in perceiving Christ and his messages posed by the Gospel. Human sense and emotion show the depth of our embodied experience of God. It will demonstrate how Matthew's transfiguration narrative brings vivid, holistic, and positive messages to readers in a way that can be very powerful in its effects on their ways of contemplation and transformation. In Matthew, the extraordinary event of the transfiguration is described by the means of the concrete, sensory, emotional experiences of the characters.

Chapter one is an exegesis of Matthew 17:1-9 in light of modern scholarship and focuses on the author's appeal to sensory perception and metaphorical language. Then, it articulates the motif of 'metamorphosis' in connection to other NT writings: Romans 1-12; 1 Corinthians 15:8-11; 2 Corinthians 2:16, 3:12-18; and 2 Peter 1:16-18. It will demonstrate common patterns or ideas behind their accounts as well as some distinctive differences in communicating their messages. **Chapter two** places the transfiguration narrative in history and does some selective readings to trace how the Church Fathers interpreted the transfiguration and developed the link between the transfiguration and the believers' transformative journey. This chapter will consist of two major parts: the Greek patristic exegesis and the Latin patristic exegesis. This study clarifies various implications and spiritual richness of the transfiguration tradition. **Chapter three** is the heart of this thesis. Here I locate the meaning of Christ's transfiguration in today's context of the consecrated life. This chapter examines the teaching of *Vita Consecrata* in dialogue with other Church documents. Then, it will consider contemplation as an integral part of the consecrated life and reread Matthew's transfiguration story, making use of the *enactive approach* to sensory experiences of consecrated persons in contemplation.

CHAPTER I

Christ's Transfiguration in Matthew 17:1-9 and its Relation to other NT Texts

The goal of this chapter is to study Matthean transfiguration narrative (17:1-9), taking into consideration the link between Christ's transfiguration and human perception which guides readers throughout the whole event in a powerfully vivid way. The first part of the chapter will do the literary analysis of Matthew 17:1-9 based on modern scholarship on Matthew's Gospel. The point of this first analysis is to show that Matthew's sensory, emotional perception plays a key role in describing 'the transformative journey' of Christ and his disciples. The second part of the chapter will relate the gospel narrative to the Pauline contexts and to 2 Peter in order to show differences and some common ideas of metamorphosis which early Christian traditions shared.

Before beginning the exegesis, one note about using Matthew's transfiguration narrative is required: this thesis is dedicated to Matthew's version of the transfiguration. There are some reasons for this choice. First of all, though Matthew's Gospel was considered to be a revision of Mark, scholars have recently heightened the idea that Matthew is not a simple review of Mark. Joining Mark with other materials from a collection of Jesus' saying and other sources,¹ Matthew made significant editorial changes with new motifs and new ideas in order to relate his transfiguration story to the rest of the gospel stories.² For Matthew, it was necessary to make the gospel fit into its new narrative contexts and the needs and agendas of his community.³ Secondly,

¹ Daniel Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1991), 5.

² Simon S. Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration and the Believers' Transformation* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 92-93; 126.

³ Lee thinks that Matthew uses the transfiguration story to legitimate his community's recent separation from mainline Judaism. See Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration*, 127.

Matthew's Gospel is placed at the beginning of the New Testament.⁴ D. Williams states that Matthew is the most excellent segue from God's law to God's Messiah.⁵ As a genesis of the New Covenant and the Gospel of fulfillment, Matthew conveys both the prophetic nature and the continuity with antiquity.⁶ For this reason, readers can catch a certain positive nuance in Matthew's portrayal of Moses and Elijah at Christ's transfiguration event. Third, of all the three gospel versions, Matthew is marked with its fuller and more vivid descriptions of the vision than the other gospels. Finally, Matthew's transfiguration story is closer to Mark's, but he gives additional elaborations on Christ's transfiguration and takes a more positive view of Peter's role and response than the two gospels.⁷ There is something special about Peter and the disciples in Matthew's story of the transfiguration. These marked differences and characteristics make Matthew's transfiguration story more profound in its meaning, fascinating scholars and readers.

1. Exegesis of Matthew 17:1-9 in Modern Scholarship

1.1. Literary Analysis of Matthew 17:1-9

The exegetical work starts with some preliminary observations based on the Greek text

⁴ There is no existing canonical collection or listing of the four Gospels that does not put Matthew first. See D. H. Williams, "The Gospel of Matthew in Service of the Early Fathers," *Pro Ecclesia* 23 (2014): 83.

⁵ Williams, "The Gospel of Matthew," 81. See also Mt 1:22: "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the Prophet. (Mt 1:22)"; Jesus' saying in Mt 5:17: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill."

⁶ Cf. Williams, "The Gospel of Matthew," 81-83.

⁷ John. P. Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus: Narrative Meaning and Function of Mark 9:2-8, Matt 17:1-8 and Luke 9:28-29* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2000), 31-32.

of Matthew 17:1-9.⁸ It observes the structure, the setting, and the characters of the pericope. Then, it examines the functions of the Greek words μεταμορφώθη and ὄραμα in the context of the Scriptures.

1.1.1. The Structure of Matthew 17:1-9

The pericope of 17:1-9 shows traces of a chiasmic structure. This structure demonstrates the dynamics on the journey of the transfiguration through striking contrasts and comparisons between the verses.⁹

<u>Ascent</u>	A	17:1	Jesus' ascent to a high mountain with the three disciples (v. 1)
<u>Visible/Divine</u>	B	17:2-4	Jesus' transfiguration in company with Moses and Elijah (vv.2-3)
<u>Human reaction</u>			Peter's proposal to building three tents (v.4)
<u>Audible/Divine</u>	C	17:5-6	The voice of God from the cloud &
<u>God's Command</u>			God's credentials of Jesus' Sonship and authority (v.5)
<u>Human reaction</u>			Fear of the three disciples (v. 6)
	B'	17:7-8	Jesus alone without Moses and Elijah (v. 7)
			Jesus' touching and saying not to have fear (v. 8)
<u>Descent</u>	A'	17:9	Jesus' descent from the mountain with the disciples &
<u>Jesus' Command</u>			Jesus' command of secrecy until the Resurrection (v. 9)

The transfiguration story begins with Jesus' initiation to 'going up' a high mountain with the three disciples (A) and ends with 'coming down' from the mountain (A'). Jesus' transfiguration scene manifests *visible (B) and audible (C) divine phenomenon*, in sharp contrast

⁸ All the subsequent Greek text is taken from *The Greek New Testament*. 4th Edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2010). The English text is from NRSV (American Bible Society, 1997).

⁹ Cf. Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration*, 13-15.

to the *human reaction of fear* (v. 4, 6). While Peter suggests *staying and building three tents* (B. v. 4), Jesus wills to *conceal his divine identity* to accomplish his ministry (A'. v. 9). Jesus' ordering of secrecy obtains profound authority as God enjoined the disciples to listen to the Son (v.5). This testimony of God to Jesus' Sonship reaches the climax of the story (C. v.5).

1.1.2. The Setting of Matthew 17:1-9

1 Καὶ μεθ' ἡμέρας ἕξ παραλαμβάνει ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὸν Πέτρον καὶ Ἰάκωβον καὶ Ἰωάννην τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀναφέρει αὐτοὺς εἰς ὄρος ὑψηλὸν κατ' ἰδίαν.

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.

The narrator opens the story with temporal and spatial senses, along with two kinetic expressions: “took with,” or “led them up.” This first verse provides μεθ' ἡμέρας ἕξ as the time and ὄρος ὑψηλὸν as the place of the setting, and these detailed elements and animated description stimulate reader's imagination of the atmosphere, movement, gesture, action, emotions and bodily experiences occurred before the transfiguration. Since they keep the narrative moving from their ascent to the mountain to their descent from the mountain, readers can easily sense and follow some significant changes in the environment and the reaction of the characters.

A. The Time

The time indicator permits some possibilities of association and allusion to Jewish

traditions.¹⁰ In its immediate contexts, “after six days (μεθ’ ἡμέρας ἕξ)” expresses *an interval of time* between the two events:¹¹ what the audience heard from Jesus in Matthew 16 and what is about to happen in Matthew 17:1-9. These two events are separate, but they are interconnected. The role of Mt 17:1-9 is to interpret what Jesus said and predicted previously, and connect it to the following narratives of Jesus’ Passion and Resurrection, which is a view that is widely shared among scholars. J. Heil suggests that what happens in Mt 17:1-9 could be the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise in Mt 16:28,¹² not limited to a relationship with the immediately preceding events and predictions.¹³ Heil’s view underscores the eschatological meaning of the transfiguration, but the transfiguration event in Matthew is not merely a preview of the Parousia in which the Son of Man will return with his kingly and juridical authority. Although the kingdom motif is not less significant in Matthew, it is more likely that Christ’s transfiguration looks forward to his predictions, suffering, and resurrection.

B. The Place

There has been no consensus among scholars about the actual location of “a high mountain (ὄρος ὑψηλὸν).” Because early tradition identified the mountain with Mount Tabor, Mt.

¹⁰ While many found an allusion to the Sinai Theophany found in Exodus 24, others make another interesting parallel to the feast of Tabernacles. The “after six days” in Mt 17:1 reminds Exodus 24:16, but it does not make an exact parallel with “the cloud covered it *for six days*” because it expresses *the duration of six days* within the same event.

¹¹ Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus*, 201-202.

¹² “Amen, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

¹³ Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus*, 202.

Tabor has been most favored by scholarship as the place of the transfiguration.¹⁴ Recent scholarship on the motif of a high mountain tends to discover theological and symbolic meanings, rather than making effort to determine the actual location. For example, Heil explains that a nameless and vaguely located mountain provides the setting appropriate for a private manifestation of heavenly phenomena specially chosen individuals.¹⁵ C. Ducker insists that Matthew employs “a high mountain” as a literary device with a symbolic meaning, and therefore the location is immaterial whether it be Mt. Tabor or Hermon.¹⁶

The term ὄρος ὑψηλὸν is reminiscent of Moses’ experiences on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:1-18; 34:29-35): Moses’ ascent into the cloud-covered Mount Sinai and the transfiguration of Moses’ face by beholding the glory of God. Christ’s transfiguration and Moses’ experience are not precisely identical in details.¹⁷ For one thing, Christ leads *the three disciples* up to the high mountain while Moses was accompanied by *the three companions and the seventy elders*. For another, Moses stepped *alone* into the cloud, and his face became radiant *after* God has spoken with him, whereas Jesus is transfigured *before the eyes of the three disciples in the presence of God, Moses, and Elijah*. Nevertheless, there is a striking parallel between what happened to Moses and to Christ.

¹⁴ Kenneth Stevenson, “Rooted in Detachment: Transfiguration as Narrative, Worship and Community of Faith,” *Ecclesiology 1.3* (2005): 17-19. See also Harrington, *Matthew*, 253: “Mount Hermon and Mount Olives, located in Caesarea-Philippi, are also good candidates.”

¹⁵ Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus*, 43. A high mountain is often employed as the meeting place for heavenly and earthly beings in the Scriptures.

¹⁶ Christopher Ducker, “A Literary Analysis of Matthew 17:1-13” (2006): 5, accessed September 8, 2016, <http://www.theduckers.org/media/the%20transfiguration%20in%20matthew%2017.pdf>.

¹⁷ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*, Hermeneia Series (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 396.

The term ὄρος ὑψηλὸν gets new emphases in a new context of Matthew's account by connecting the transfiguration scene to other scenes related to these various mountains of Jesus' life.¹⁸ ὄρος appears sixteen times in Matthew, an equal frequency with θάλασσα (sea). Six cases are specifically set for Jesus' earthly ministry and the revelation of his identity and authority.¹⁹ However, ὄρος ὑψηλὸν occurs only two occasions in 4:8 and 17:1. The transfiguration is clearly reminiscent of 4:8-10: the satan *took along* Jesus *to a high mountain* in order to challenge Jesus, requiring him to prostrate himself and worship the satanic way if he wants to get all the kingdoms of the world. Luz argues persuasively that in Mt 17:1-9 Matthew suggests a positive counter-image to 4:8-10 and the life of Jesus in hiddenness, homelessness, and hostility.²⁰ The positive image reiterates Jesus' rejection of the satanic way of avoiding suffering and death, and his willingness to going on the path of the Cross, which is God's way laid out for him (16:21-23).²¹ In the story of the Gethsemane, Matthew draws on another positive counter-image, in which Jesus' divine will gains victory over the human will (26:36-56).

1.1.3. The Characters in the Transfiguration Narrative

Another important co-operating element is the main characters who are chosen to witness the vision of Christ's transfiguration. The role played by these characters is an important factor in the narrative. There are the divine characters (Jesus and the Voice from the Cloud) and the human characters (Peter, James, John, Moses, and Elijah).

¹⁸ Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration*, 93.

¹⁹ Mt 17:1-9 is linked to the stories of the Temptations (4:8); the Sermon on the Mount (5:1); the Healing of the sick (15:29); the Transfiguration (17:1); the Gethsemane story (26:36); and Jesus' missionary speech on a Galilean mountain (28:17).

²⁰ Luz, *Matthew*, 398.

²¹ Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration*, 98.

A. The Divine Characters: Christ and the Voice of God

The transfiguration is essentially Christ-centered. To be sure, Christ is the main character in all that happens in the scene. Matthew does not mention the reason for Christ's ascent to the mountain but gives readers a hint of his initiative and purposeful action, using the three expressions: "taking along (παραλαμβάνει)," "leading up (ἀναφέρει)," and "by themselves (κατ' ἰδίαν)." ²²

5 ἔτι αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος ἰδοὺ νεφέλη φωτεινὴ ἐπεσκίασεν αὐτούς, καὶ ἰδοὺ φωνὴ ἐκ τῆς νεφέλης λέγουσα· οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα· ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ.

He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

The correlation between hearing and sight and knowledge is self-evident in this verse. The voice of God from a bright cloud says that Christ is "the beloved Son" in the presence of Moses, Elijah, and the three disciples. A significant spiritual interpretation of the transfiguration sees this 'cloud' as an image of the Holy Spirit.²³ God confirms the previous credentials and Peter's confession of Christ's Sonship. God's command, "*Listen to him*" identifies Jesus as the one who now has to be heard in place of Moses and Elijah.²⁴ The Sonship of Christ is Matthew's consistent Christological claim that guides the whole narrative structure of his Gospel. In

²² 17:1 is the one of the two pericopae where Jesus appears alone with the three disciples in Matthew. The other pericope is the Gethsemane narrative found in Mt 26:36-56.

²³ "Tota Trinitas apparuit: Pater in voce; Filius in homine; Spiritus in nube clara," Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, III, q.45, a.4, ad 2; *Vita Consecrata*, 19.

²⁴ A. D. A. Moses, *Matthew's transfiguration story and Jewish-Christian controversy* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 122.

Matthew's infancy narrative and at the baptism, Christ is already appointed as God's Son (3:17). The Sonship motif reoccurs in 16:16 when Peter rightly confesses "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The motif is finally consummated in the kingly authority of the Son coming in his kingdom (16:28). The transfiguration narrative shows how Matthew understands Christ Jesus by describing him as "Lord" according to Peter (17:4); "My Son" called by God (17:5); and "Son of Man" used by Jesus himself (17:9, 12).

B. The Human Characters: the three disciples

Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, the disciples are portrayed both positively and negatively, and Matthew's portrayal of the disciples is rather complex due to this inconsistency.²⁵ In the transfiguration narrative, however, Matthew makes some significant changes to the negative and simple presentation of the disciples found in the other gospel versions.

4 ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Πέτρος εἶπεν τῷ Ἰησοῦ· κύριε, καλὸν ἐστὶν ἡμᾶς ὧδε εἶναι· εἰ θέλεις, ποιήσω ὧδε τρεῖς σκηνάς, σοὶ μίαν καὶ Μωϋσεῖ μίαν καὶ Ἠλίᾳ μίαν.

And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."

In v. 4, Matthew presents a positive portrayal of Peter, James, and John in a kinetic style along with the sense of speech that is related to their enlightenment of Christ's identity. They are among the first disciples called by Christ (cf. Mt 4:18-22) and separated by Christ from the other disciples to become witnesses to the beauty and light of the transfigured Jesus (v. 1). In vv. 2-9, Matthew rehabilitates the image of the disciples, especially Peter, in a positive nuance by

²⁵ Richard A. Edwards, *Matthew's Narrative Portrait of Disciples* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1997), 1.

removing any negative statement about Peter found in Mark and Luke. In Matthew's transfiguration story, Peter appears to be a spokesman who represents for the rest of the disciples,²⁶ and his attitude and gesture are humble: "*Lord, if you wish, I will make three tents here* (v. 4)." Peter appears to understand the significance of the vision and know who Christ is because he elevates Him to "Lord (Κύριε)."²⁷ Matthew avoids applying the title of 'rabbi' to Christ because it is an honorary title among the Pharisees²⁸ and Judas calls Him 'rabbi' at the time of betrayal (Mt 26:25, 49). For Matthew, the title of 'rabbi' has a negative connotation that implies the spiritual blindness regarding the true identity of Christ. In this way, Matthew removes the disciples' spiritual blindness and legitimizes the Church built upon the "rock," which is Peter (16:18).²⁹ In comparison to Mark's version, Peter's acclamation of "Lord" demonstrates his better understanding of Christ's identity and destiny. While Peter in Mark simply identifies Jesus as the 'Christ,' Peter in Matthew affirms that Christ is "the Son of the living God (16:16)," or "the beloved Son (17:5)."

6 καὶ ἀκούσαντες οἱ μαθηταὶ ἔπεσαν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον αὐτῶν καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν σφόδρα.

When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.

7 καὶ προσῆλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἀψάμενος αὐτῶν εἶπεν· ἐγέρθητε καὶ μὴ φοβεῖσθε.

But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear."

The most important Matthean change is the addition of 17:6-7, thereby causing his

²⁶ Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus*, 207.

²⁷ Mark and Luke he calls Jesus "Rabbi" (Mk 9:5) and "Master" (Lk 9:33).

²⁸ Cf. "They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students." (Mt 23:6-8)

²⁹ Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration*, 102.

transfiguration story to gain a new conclusion that is positive for the disciples.³⁰ In Mark, the fear motif is used when Peter proposes to erect three tents in ignorance after seeing Moses and Elijah talk with Jesus (Mk 9:5-6). Matthew, on the contrary, omits Mark's comment: "*For he did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid* (Mk 9:6)," and relocates the sense of fear after hearing the voice from the cloud (Mt 17:6). He also adds Christ's response to the terrified disciples: touch and words of encouragement (Mt 17:7).³¹

The fear and human gesture of Peter and the disciples in Matthew is presented as a devout human response to God's presence. Because the disciples recognize the implications of the authority from above, they fall on their faces in great fear with respect. The word ἐφοβήθησαν is derived from the noun form φόβος that means 'fear in awe or reverence.' In the OT, people fall on their faces to express fear with awe, which was a common response to divine manifestations in antiquity.³² The disciples in Matthew are making continuous progress in recognizing Christ's identity and the significance of his teaching. The transfiguration of Christ is the milestone, in which 'what they have seen' is the key to developing their knowledge of Christ and informing their transformation into true disciples who share the same destiny of Christ.

C. Moses and Elijah (Mt 17:3)

³⁰ Luz, *Matthew*, 395.

³¹ The same pattern is reflected in Jesus' attitude in Mt 14:22-33. Mt 14:22-33 presents another visual significance related to the faith of the disciples and Jesus' Sonship. Jesus tells the disciples, "Take heart, it is I; *do not be afraid*" when they were terrified by 'seeing' Jesus walk on the water and thinking that Jesus was a ghost (14:26-27). When Peter tried to walk on the water but sank into the sea in fear of the strong wind, Jesus *reached out his hand and caught him*, saying to him, "You of little *faith*, why did you doubt?" When the wind ceased, the disciples say, "Truly you are *the Son of God*" (14:30-33).

³² Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration*, 102; Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus*, 140-141; In the OT, Nm 16:4, 22; 17:7-10.

3 καὶ ἰδοὺ ὤφθη αὐτοῖς Μωϋσῆς καὶ Ἡλίας συλλαλοῦντες μετ' αὐτοῦ.

And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

Through a non-verbal imagery and visual description, Matthew portrays Moses and Elijah in a positive way by which Christ becomes a more important figure in the salvation history of Israel as the long-awaited Messiah.³³ Unlike Luke, Matthew leaves readers to imagine what they may talk about.³⁴ The generally accepted view of Moses and Elijah in the transfiguration scene is that they represent the law and the prophets. In Matthew, Christ is viewed as a new law-giver and teacher (Mt 5-7: the Sermon on the Mount), but he fulfills the law and the prophets, not abolish them (Mt 5:17).

Matthew's positive portrayal of Moses and Elijah is consonance with the biblical presentation of their lives and death in the OT. Both Moses and Elijah are reflected as holy ones or heroic figures who personally encountered the presence of God. Moses is made a 'god' (Exod 7:1) and a 'friend' of God to whom God speaks face to face (Exod 33:11). Elijah is called 'Tishbite (/ stranger)' in 1 King 17:1, but he challenges to Baal as a great prophet and miracle worker. However, the scriptures give no clue as to their death or burial.

As for Elijah, it is reported that he was taken up to heaven alive "by a whirlwind" in 2 King 2:1 and widely known as that he does not die. In the case of Moses, many scholars have remained open to the notion of Moses' deifying transformation with the caveat that the deified Moses does not have the same nature as God.³⁵ M. Litwa gives a useful insight which helps

³³ Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration*, 12.

³⁴ Luke 9:31 says, "They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem."

³⁵ M. David Litwa, "The Deification of Moses in Philo of Alexandria," *The Studia Philonica Annual* 26 (2014): 5.

readers understand Moses' appearance in Christ's transfiguration. He suggests that Moses is a 'god' as a 'participant' in the divinity of God. More precisely, because no one can participate directly in God, Moses needs to participate in the highest manifestation of the sharable divinity of God to gain the name of a 'god.'³⁶ Moses is thus the model of what it means for the human to incorporeally participate in the divine reality of Christ who is the Image of God³⁷ - the Transfiguration.

1.1.4. The Transfiguration of Christ

2 καὶ μετεμορφώθη ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῶν, καὶ ἔλαμψεν τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος, τὰ δὲ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο λευκὰ ὡς τὸ φῶς.

And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

In v. 2, Matthew presents a spectacular visual scene,³⁸ reporting what the disciples see when Christ is transfigured. The scene provides profound meaning and involves the main verb μετεμορφώθη and visibility that demonstrates a significant correlation between the sense of seeing and the disciples' perception of Christ's divine identity.

A. Lexical Analysis of μεταμόρφωσις

- μεταμόρφωσις as 'Transfiguration' or 'Transformation'

Matthew uses the Greek verb μετεμορφώθη (was transfigured / transformed) in 17:1. It means in a general sense 'to transform/transfigure' or 'to change in form in keeping inner reality'

³⁶ Litwa, "The Deification of Moses in Philo of Alexandria," 7-9.

³⁷ Litwa, "The Deification of Moses in Philo of Alexandria," 10.

³⁸ Harrington, *Matthew*, 255.

of some kind, but what it means specifically is determined by the context.³⁹ In the NT, the term μεταμορφώω (to transfigure / transform) occurs only four times: Mt 17:2; Mk 9:2; Rom 12:2; and 2 Cor 3:18.⁴⁰ Both Matthew and Mark use the aorist passive form μετεμορφώθη to describe *what happened to Jesus*: the transfiguration of his external appearance visible to the physical eyes. The passive form μετεμορφώθη signifies that the transfiguration of Christ was initiated by God. However, that does not necessarily mean that the role of Christ is insignificant in the transfiguration. Jesus is the very one with whom God is pleased. If it was not Jesus, there would have been no transfiguration story to tell. Paul's use of μεταμορφώω in Rom 12:2 and 2 Cor 3:18 is related exclusively to human existence and the life of faith. Unlike Matthew, Paul employs the verb to describe the internal transformation of a believer, rather than a change in appearance or form. Paul uses μεταμορφουῖσθε (to be transformed) in Rom 12:2 and the progressive passive form, μεταμορφούμεθα (are being transformed) in 2 Cor 3:18. Paul's two different usages of μεταμορφώω will be discussed more in details in the second part of this present chapter.

- **μεταμόρφωσις as 'Glorification'**

The word μεταμόρφωσις can be understood to have a meaning of 'glorification' in light of the Moses parallelism. NRSV translates Exodus 34:29 that "as Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he did not know that the skin of his face *shone* because he had been talking with God." In the LXX, however, 'shone' is interpreted as δεδόξασται ("had become glorified"). The LXX

³⁹ Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus*, 76.

⁴⁰ In Lk 9:29, Luke does not use the same verb for his transfiguration story: "the appearance of his face became different or other (ἕτερον)." Paul uses the similar verb μετασχηματίζω to describe a change in or disguise of a bodily figure (1 Cor 4:6; 2 Cor 11:13-15; and Phil 3:21). Most English bibles including NRSV confusedly translate μετασχηματίζω as 'to transform,' but μετασχηματίζω is different from μεταμορφώω in signification.

understands that Moses' face was glorified as a result of his encounter with God on the mountain.

M. Ramsey suggested that the significance of μεταμορφώω is better expressed in the glorification. Although Matthew's transformation motif is not related to 'glory (δόξα),' according to Ramsey, the story summarizes the dominant idea of the glorification of Jesus affected by God.⁴¹ It is Luke's Gospel where Jesus' transfiguration is explicitly connected to "his glory" (9:32). Mark simply refers the disciples' experience to "what they had seen" (9:9). Matthew edits Mark's reference and quotes Jesus' referring His transfiguration as the "vision" (17:9).

Ramsey is right in a sense that Christ's transfiguration can be seen as the manifestation of glory and that the transfiguration prefigures the glory of Christ's resurrection and the future glorification of the righteous. However, there are two important aspects to be noted. First, it seems that Matthew intends not to adopt the glory motif, which recalls Moses glorified by God, in order to outstrip the Mosaic typology. The Moses parallel is not the only hermeneutic key to Matthew's transfiguration account. Second, Christ's radiant appearance comes out of the glory that *exists within* his divine nature, *not from outside* at the moment of the transfiguration. The glory of Christ is his own glory, which is exposed temporarily to the human eyes.

B. The Significance of ὄραμα in the OT and NT texts

9 Καὶ καταβαινόντων αὐτῶν ἐκ τοῦ ὄρους ἐνετείλατο αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς λέγων· μηδενὶ εἶπητε τὸ ὄραμα ἕως οὗ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκ νεκρῶν ἐγερθῆ.

And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."

⁴¹ Michael Ramsey, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ* (London: Longman & Todd, 1967), 101. It is likely that Matthew's use of μεταμορφώω involves in part the revelation of Jesus' glory and heavenly status, together with his physical transfiguration.

This concluding scene recalls Jesus' order to tell no one that he is the Christ (Mt 16:20) after Peter's confession of Jesus as the Son of the living God (16:16). The secrecy motif offers more profound character of Jesus as the Son of God and the Christ, which cannot be fully understood until God raises Jesus from the dead (17:9).⁴² In v. 9, Matthew quotes Jesus referring to the unusual experience of the three disciples as ὄραμα.⁴³ The term ὄραμα provides some important issues that call for further observations.

Literally, ὄραμα refers to 'that which is seen' or 'a spiritual seeing.'⁴⁴ The noun is derived from the verb form ὁράω, which means 'to see spiritually.' A spiritual seeing is focusing on the impact it has on the one who beholds the vision. Though ὄραμα (a vision/spectacle) is associated with human sight, sense of seeing, it would be impossible for anyone to have a vision unless the divine existence expresses or reveals the Self. Thus, the term ὄραμα involves not only human's act of seeing but a relationship building between the seers and God.

First-century Jews including the early Christians believed that holy women and men could have visions of their God appearing to them – speaking to them - in human form.⁴⁵ The

⁴² Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus*, 224.

⁴³ Some scholars, like C. Talbert and Dodson, categorize the Matthean transfiguration story as the genre of dream-vision narratives based on the setting and components of 17:1-9: Cf. Charles Talbert, *Matthew: Commentaries on the New Testament* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010), 206. See also D. Dodson, "Reading Dreams: An Audience-Critical Approach to the Dream in the Gospel of Matthew" (PhD diss., Baylor University, 2006): 291-308. Heil claims that the transfiguration narrative exhibits the essential characteristics of the literary genre of an epiphany, rather than a vision: Cf. Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus*, 37-73. However, Harrington points out that the precise genre of the transfiguration story is elusive. He explains that some of the literary feature and the content of the story suggest that it be called an apocalyptic vision: Cf. Harrington, *Matthew*, 255.

⁴⁴ "ὄραμα," Bible Hub, accessed October 12, 2016, <http://biblehub.com/greek/3705.htm>.

⁴⁵ C. B. Kaiser, *Seeing the Lord's Glory: Kyriocentric Visions and the Dilemma of Early Christology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 25. Some scholars, especially Protestants, understand that 'seeing

Jewish Scriptures are special places for ὄραμα that has the power to build up a beholder's faith and relationship with God.

According to Heath, the Pentateuch established some important parameters in Jewish visual piety:⁴⁶ the panoptic gaze of God in Creation; the covenantal visual signs (e.g. rainbows, stars, circumcision, and the lawgiving at Sinai); the miraculous signs (e.g. pre-exodus signs in Egypt, the parting of the Sea, snake-rod, and manna); and the visions of Moses (e.g. the burning bush and the transformation on Mount Sinai).

The apocalyptic literature and the Prophets provide the effect of ὄραμα on the history of Israel. The Israelites saw and heard through the visionaries what God did for them or how God will save the suffering and the righteous through the Messiah. For the people of Israel, ὄραμα was fundamental to sustain their faith in God and the covenantal relationship with God. On the basis of the faith, they confessed in Genesis that God created humankind in the image of God, which was the first visual sign of God's plan for salvation. The salvation history of Israel is the visual and historical sign that expresses God's consistent saving will for Israel and all creation.

The New Testament tells how God comes to be among people and in what way they should access God to gain life. As for Matthew, ὄραμα, a word full of apocalyptic nuances,⁴⁷ is a sign that implies God's consistent approach to human and human's ascent to become participants in the life of God through Christ. In the Gospel of John, 'seeing' consistently plays a critical role

God' in the Bible means 'hearing God's word' because humans cannot see God directly. They tend to put an emphasis on 'the word' and overlook visual significance in the believers' faith practices.

⁴⁶ Cf. J. M. F. Heath, *Paul's Visual Piety: The Metamorphosis of the Beholder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 105-113.

⁴⁷ T. Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain: A Study in Matthean Theology* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 149.

in the ‘understanding’ of Christ-believers.⁴⁸

Paul does not mention the term ὄραμα in his letters but employs the motifs of the mirror-vision motif and the image in relation to the theme of transformation. For Paul, it is important to lead a transfigured life here and now because the current transformation shapes the final form of transformation in the risen Christ. In Paul’s teaching, Christ is the perfect image of God to which believers should be transformed by the power of the Spirit.

As a whole, the significance of ὄραμα in the Scriptures is humanity’s intrinsic relationship with God and the seer’s transformation, whose transformation, in turn, brings about the transformation of the larger bodies. ὄραμα is gifted by God for believer’s transfigured life in right relationships to God, to oneself, and to others.

C. The Motifs of Face and Clothing

Another important character of ὄραμα is its connection to the motifs of ‘face’ and ‘clothing.’ Matthew 17:2 portrays the Jewish apocalyptic vision that involves the explicit change in Jesus’ face and clothing. Only Matthew specifies the transfigured face of Christ shone like the sun:⁴⁹ all three gospel versions of the transfiguration report that his clothing became extremely white. The description of Christ’s radiant face and white garment serves Matthew in the evangelist’s understanding of the story as an apocalyptic vision.⁵⁰

The resemblance to the scene on Mount Sinai is made plain in Mt 17:2, but the contrast

⁴⁸ John does not report the transfiguration of Christ. Instead, in his much more developed form of Christology, the fourth evangelist quotes Jesus’ statement, “whoever has seen me has seen the Father,” responding to Philip’s request to show them the Father (14:7-11).

⁴⁹ Mark does not mention ‘face’ at all. Luke 9:29 simply reports that “the appearance of his face changed (NRSV)” without an explicit description about how Jesus’ face became different.

⁵⁰ Lee, *Jesus’ Transfiguration*, 95.

is the new Moses. Christ's face shines not with a reflected glory like Moses' face but with the unborrowed glory as of the sun's own rays.⁵¹ Moses' face became radiant as a result of his exposure to the glory of God. On the basis of his new perspective on Jesus, Matthew affirms that the old covenant utterly surpassed by the new covenant, like Paul claims in 2 Cor 3:7.⁵²

In relation to a facial radiance of Christ, many discovered similar ideas in the Jewish apocalyptic writings, especially in Dan 8:17-18; 10:6; 12:3; 4 Ezra 7:97; 1 Enoch 14:20; 62:15-16; 2 Enoch 1:5, 19:1; and Revelation 1:16, 10:1.⁵³ In the writings, a facial radiance, together with white garments, is a general characteristic of belonging to the heavenly world.

The LXX Daniel shows many parallel ideas in connection to 'vision' and 'face.' Lee thinks that Matthew modifies his transfiguration narrative using the literary model of Daniel because the same term ὄραμα occurs twenty-four times in the Book of Daniel.⁵⁴ Daniel sees a vision and then hears a voice, which is comparable to the three disciples' experience in Matthew. Harrington and Luz interpret that Matthew emphasizes Jesus' transfiguration by assimilating the disciples' reaction in Mt 17:6-7 to those of Daniel (Dan 8:17-18; 10:7-9, 16-19) and by labeling the event as a "vision" (Mt 17:9).⁵⁵

In the angelic vision in Dan 10:6, the face of the angel was like "lightning" similar to the face of Jesus "shone like the sun"(Mt 17:2). Angelic beings are often portrayed with radiant faces and white garments in the apocalyptic literature. Dan 10:6 bears a remarkable resemblance to the

⁵¹ Ramsey, *The Glory of God*, 120.

⁵² "Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses' face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory?"

⁵³ Cf. Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus*, 80-84; Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration*, 94-96.

⁵⁴ Cf. Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration*, 103; Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus*, 80-81; Luz, *Matthew*, 398; and Harrington, *Matthew*, 254-255.

⁵⁵ Harrington, *Matthew*, 255; Luz, *Matthew*, 398. See also Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration*, 103-104;

angel's appearance that is like "lightning" and his clothing is white as snow at the entrance of the empty tomb (Mt 28:3).

In the Bible, the transformation of the righteous into eschatological bodies with glory is symbolized by their reception of new white garments. In 4 Ezra 7:97 and 2 Enoch 1:5; 19:1,⁵⁶ the face of the righteous is transformed into an angel-like and heavenly figure before her or his death and while still on earth.⁵⁷ Matthew also mentions the transformation of the righteous in the parable of the weeds of the field, and the importance of the radiant face in Matthew is both eschatological and present.⁵⁸ Paul speaks of the mystery of the ontological change of the faithful in the future in 1 Cor 15:51-52.⁵⁹

The parable of the weeds, as Lee rightly points out,⁶⁰ hints at Matthew's theological idea that the righteous people should share the same destiny as Jesus and radiate the light in the present time and space. They are expected to be persecuted for righteousness' sake (Mt 5:10-12; 16:21) and called the "children of God" (5:9) like Jesus is called "the son of God (17:5)." Then, they will finally shine like the sun in the Father's kingdom like the transfigured Jesus with the radiant face.

⁵⁶ Translation of 4 Ezra by M. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 237, 244-245. 4 Ezra 7:97: their face is shine like the sun. 2 Enoch 1:5: their faces were like the shining sun. 2 Enoch 19:1: their faces were more radiant than the radiance of the sun.

⁵⁷ Cf. Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus*, 83-84.

⁵⁸ Cf. Mt 13:36-43; Mt 22:11-14; 25:31-46.

⁵⁹ "Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."

⁶⁰ Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration*, 96.

2. Matthew 17:1-9 in relation to Other NT contexts

2.1. In its immediate contexts

Matthew 17:1-9 immediately correlates with the previous chapter. In Matthew 16, the Pharisees and the Sadducees test Jesus by asking him to show them “a sign from heaven” (Mt 16:1-4). Warning against the religious leaders (16:5-12), Jesus questions his disciples about “who the people think he is and who they themselves consider him to be” (16:13-20). Peter answers in the name of the disciples with a confession that is strikingly different from the opinion of other people (16:16).⁶¹ Jesus then foretells his Passion and Resurrection (16:21-23) and teaches the way of discipleship (16:24-28). Finally, the narrative of Jesus’ Transfiguration (Mt 17:1-9) follows.

Matthew 16 is thus an important landmark on the future destiny of the disciples of Jesus. Although they already believed in Jesus, their faith had to be strengthened and rejuvenated by seeing Jesus’ transfiguration and hearing the voice of confirmation from heaven, speaking directly to them. Matthew’s description of the vision in Mt 17:1-9 is linked to the mystery of Jesus’ Passion and Resurrection (Mt 26:36-28:10).⁶² In the context of Jesus’ final journey up to Jerusalem, the transfiguration balances off the passion predictions and the calls to follow Jesus in his suffering, which provides a preview of the glory of the resurrection.⁶³ The image of Christ’s brilliant face in Mt 17:2 contrasts the disfigured appearance of Christ on the way of the Cross and foreshadows the transfigured face of the risen Lord.

⁶¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: from the baptism in the Jordan to the transfiguration* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 287.

⁶² Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 288.

⁶³ Harrington, *Matthew*, 256.

2.2. In connection with other texts within Matthew

Apart from Matthew 16, there are two significant passages which are interrelated to the transfiguration narrative: 2:1-12 (The Visit of Magi) and 5:8, 14-16 (the Sermon on the Mount 5-7). There is a striking similarity between Mt 17:1-9 and Mt 2:1-12 in terms of Matthew's sensory description of seeing and walking. The characters in both events are involved in foot travel to encounter Christ. As for a difference, the transfiguration of Christ is a visible sign for the chosen disciples and, by extension, believers, and the Church. The star in Matthew 2, however, is a poignant sign of the good news coming to the gentiles.⁶⁴ The star functions as a proto-evangelium for the gentiles.⁶⁵ As the Law and the Prophecy were given to believers (1 Cor 14:22b), the star is given as a sign for unbelievers and pagans. The star and the gentiles have a special place in Matthew's description of the mission of Christ. Matthew shows how Christ approached the gentiles and how they embrace him and his message. At the transfiguration scene, Matthew seems to argue that there is no longer need to seek for a star in heaven because Christ himself is the radiant light present among people.

In addition, of all the speeches in 5:3-12, the most related verse to the transfiguration is "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (5:8).⁶⁶ This promise gives a paradoxical

⁶⁴ In antiquity, there was a common belief that a new star appeared at the time of a ruler's birth, which is a celestial phenomenon.⁶⁴ In the OT, Balaam prophesied, "A star shall come out of Jacob (Nm 24:17)," where the star means a king born in the family of Jacob. See Talbert, 38.

⁶⁵ Williams, "The Gospel of Matthew," 92.

⁶⁶ The background is Ps 24:3-4. "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully." Harrington suggests that "pure in heart" characterizes people of integrity, whose moral up-righteousness extends to their inmost being and whose actions and intentions correspond. Cf. Harrington, *Matthew*, 79.

effect because the Hebrew Scriptures suggest no human can see God's face,⁶⁷ but Matthew outstrips the old idea through the transfiguration story: the disciples are able to see God in the radiant face of Christ and by listening to his teaching attentively. In Mt 5:14-16, Matthew offers a portrait of true disciples of Christ who calls them to "walk in the light of God" (cf. Isa 2:2-5).⁶⁸ This light imagery is linked to the light that shines forth from the transfigured Jesus. For Christ-followers, the more they are exposed to the light of Christ, the better they can let their light shine before others. Christians are called to make Christ visible and known to the world, by directing the eyes of believers to Christ.

2.3. In relation to other NT Contexts

The present part seeks to examine the role of visual sense for the believers' transformation found in some Pauline texts (Rom 1-4; 5:1-8:39, 12:1-8, 1 Cor 15:8-11; 2 Cor 3:18) and 2 Peter 1:16-18.

While some scholars argue that Paul's idea of the transformation of believers is influenced by the Gospel narrative of the transfiguration, others think that Paul is influenced in part by his own Damascus Christophany.⁶⁹ J. Willitts claims that rendering the relationship between Matthew with Paul is extremely difficult because it requires the highest level of synthesis.⁷⁰ They have in common in a sense that both Matthew and Paul deal with the same

⁶⁷ E.g. Exodus 33:20 "you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live."

⁶⁸ Jesus says to people in expectation, "You are the light of the world...and it gives light to all in the house... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. Matthew draws the prophetic message of Isa 42:6 and 49:6, which describes Israel's vocation to be a light to the nations."

⁶⁹ Heath, *Paul's Visual Piety*, 181.

⁷⁰ J. Willitts, "Paul and Matthew: A Descriptive Approach from A Post-New Perspective Interpretative Framework," in *Paul and the Gospels: Christologies, Conflicts and Convergences*, edited by M. Bird; J.

motif of metamorphosis, but they are different because Paul focuses on ‘seeing’ which he considers as the key sense to informing the renewal of mind, in comparison with Matthew. Although similarity and direct connection between the Gospel narrative and Paul’s texts are slight, it is constructive to analyze Paul’s texts on the topics of ‘transformation’ and ‘visual sense’ in order to achieve the depth and richness of Christ’s transfiguration.

A. Romans 1-4; 5:1-8:39; 12:1-8

In her monograph, entitled *Paul’s Visual Piety: The Metamorphosis of the Beholder*, Heath is strongly convinced that Paul’s visual piety, which has been neglected in Pauline exegesis and Scriptural hermeneutics, should be recaptured as the key to Paul’s message. Rejecting the idea that visual piety is un-Pauline, she demonstrates how visuality plays a key transformative role in Paul’s new perspectives on Christian piety and transformation found in Romans and 2 Corinthians.

Paul’s letter to the Romans provides the theme of transformation, together with visual significance.⁷¹ The verb μεταμορφόω is rare in the New Testament, and the actual word μεταμόρφωσις (metamorphosis/transformation) does not occur in the epistle until Rom 12:2, but the theme is present in Rom 1-4 and becomes more prominent in Rom 5:1-8:39.

- Romans 1-4

The believers’ transformation and visual piety are not the major themes of Paul’s overall argument in Rom 1-4. Paul does not even mention the terms ‘transformation’ or ‘seeing’ in the chapters. However, some passages are dealing with certain aspects of visual piety and transformation, engaged with larger themes, such as covenantal signs, sin, justification, and

Willitts (NY: T&T Clark, 2011), 62.

⁷¹ Cf. Heath, *Paul’s Visual Piety*, 150-151, 168.

righteousness.⁷²

In **Rom 1:19-21a**,⁷³ Paul emphasizes the intellectual perception of the invisible aspects of God's created works. In his emphasis, there is a 'visual appeal' that the physical world is created to be seen by sight. The beauty and truth of God's creation can be appreciated by the physical sight and the inner eyes of soul. Paul argues that faithful believers are able to recognize and worship God in the visible manifestation of creations because "God made evident to them (1:19)." In **Rom 1:21-32**, as a type of visual impiety, Paul shows how the idolaters exchanged the glory of the immortal God for perishable images (1:23). They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped the creature rather than the Creator (1:25). For Paul, their gaze is blasphemous by seeing the physical realm as gods, not sacred by acknowledging God in the created realm.⁷⁴

In **Rom 2-4**, Paul talks about the implication of the outwardly visible markers for Jews: the covenantal signs of law tablets and circumcision 'in flesh.' In Jewish belief, the mark of circumcision secures justification before God. Paul revalues the Mosaic laws in the context of Christianity to show a new eschatological significance of the laws revealed through Christ (3:22-23). He argues for the inward visible mark, such as the law written or circumcised 'on the heart' (Rom 2:29; Deut 29-30). It is for the covenantal equality of Jews and Gentiles in Christ.⁷⁵ In

⁷² Heath, *Paul's Visual Piety*, 168.

⁷³ "Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not accord him glory as God or give him thanks."

⁷⁴ Heath claims that human acts of looking are acts of faith which inform the believers, and when the eye beholds what is physical, it has a choice whether to see 'that which is knowable of God' which God has revealed in it, or not. What they worship and serve determines the route of their faith and destiny. Cf. Heath, *Paul's Visual Piety*, 156.

⁷⁵ Heath, *Paul's Visual Piety*, 161.

Rom 4, Paul draws on Abraham's faith story (Gen 15:5-7) to secure the equality of the uncircumcised gentiles⁷⁶ and to show how Abraham was transformed into God's chosen one. Gentiles can be righteous 'through faith in Christ,' just as Abraham was credited as righteous through faith in God before he was circumcised (Rom 4:3; 4:10-11). For Paul, since all that is required is faith in Christ, both Jews and Gentiles can be righteous without the visible mark of circumcision.

In Rom 4:17-25, the theme of transformation in relation to visual piety begins to surface. Abraham's story allows reflecting upon two visual motifs. *The starry sky* is one visual sign of God's promise of abundant offspring that prompts Abraham's faith (Gen 15:5-7).⁷⁷ Abraham's act of reading God's sign in creation is an act of believing in God and His promise.⁷⁸ In another description of *Abraham's perception of his own body*, "which was already as good as dead" (Rom 4:19), Paul explains how God acted through Abraham's physical weakness and Sarah's infertility (Gen 17:17; 18:11-15). Then, Paul begins to bind Abraham's visual piety to Christian model of faith, describing God as the One who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist (4:17) as God raised Jesus from the dead for those who have faith in Him (4:24-25).

- **Romans 5:1-8:39, 12:1-8**

The issue of the believers' transformation is more prominent in Rom 5:1-8:39 as it is linked to Paul's perspectives on Christ's death and resurrection. The passages detail how

⁷⁶ E. P. Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle's Life, Letters, and Thought* (MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 628.

⁷⁷ The promise of God through the sign of stars is repeated when God grants circumcision as a sign of the covenant (17:6-14).

⁷⁸ Cf. Heath, *Paul's Visual Piety*, 167.

believers should be transformed from the pattern of Adam to the pattern of Christ,⁷⁹ using the language of dying and rising with Christ (6:11). While discussing the current participation in the life of Christ, he reiterates God's creative transformation of mortal bodiliness in Christ (8:11; cf. 4:19-25). Paul believes that God will really transform the whole person into the life of the resurrection. In Rom 8:29, Paul asserts that God called people to 'be conformed to the image of the Son' so that they can live in the newness of life (6:4) by the Spirit. Rom 8:29 is closely related to Rom 12:1-2 as an important passage pertinent to the themes of 'conformity to Christ' and 'transformation of all believers.' Conformity to the image of Christ is Paul's background idea for his transformation account.⁸⁰

I appeal to you, therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

(Rom 12:1)

Paul's exhortation in 12:1 brings together several earlier threads of Romans, including the 'reversal of having a degenerate mind' (1:28) and 'presenting oneself to God' (6:13). He communicates using some expressions that reflect his strong faith in Christ's death as a sacrifice. Paul's definition of 'presenting bodies' as 'spiritual worship' suggests a total consecration of the whole human being, who is body and spirit,⁸¹ for God's purposes.⁸²

⁷⁹ Heath, *Paul's Visual Piety*, 168. Paul's discussion on the believers' ethical transformation was already set out in Rom 1-4. Adam's pattern is associated with the image of sinful people "who exchanged the glory and truth of God for the likeness of an image of mortal man and for a lie." (1:23-25)

⁸⁰ Cf. Heath, *Paul's Visual Piety*, 170-171; J. G. Samra, *Being Conformed to Christian Community: A Study of Maturity, Maturation, and the Local Church in the Undisputed Pauline Epistles* (NY: T&T Clark, 2006), 97.

⁸¹ Paul's use of the term 'body' in his letters is another big issue. In this thesis, the issue will not be

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12:2)

In Rom 12:2, Paul introduces both ethical and prophetic transformations of believers, using the actual word μεταμόρφωσις. For Paul, ethical transformation is an issue of the *present* world that can be renewed by faith in Christ and *God's* promise of union with Christ in the *future* resurrection (6:5).⁸³ “The renewal of mind” constitutes to the believers’ current transformation into the image of Christ and the future transformation in Christ.⁸⁴ The new mind is “the mind of Christ” as he gives the affirmation in 1 Cor 2:16: “we have the mind of Christ.”

The newness of life possesses a prophetic nature of transformation guided by the Spirit. The Spirit moves believers’ mind to get out of the self-focused struggle under the law (7:14-15) and reach out to others in God’s love that fulfills the law (13:8-10).⁸⁵ The Spirit also enables believers to discern the truth about God and act in the larger context of Christ’s body, diverse

discussed in details, but its position needs to be mentioned. It rejects some forms of dualistic and Gnostic thought, but considers that Paul’s language of ‘body’ refers to the whole human existence with body and spirit joined together, not separate.

⁸² Cf. C. Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit* (MI: Grand Rapids, 2016), 145.

⁸³ Cf. Heath, *Paul’s Visual Piety*, 173; Samra, *Being Conformed to Christian Community*, 98.

⁸⁴ Cf. Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 144; Cf. Samra, *Being Conformed to Christian Community*, 96-97.

In Philippians 3:7-21, Paul closely links his knowledge of Christ with “the sharing of His suffering and the power of His resurrection, in the process of being conformed to Christ’s death (3:10).” This statement provides a clue that ‘enduring suffering’ is central to how conformity to Christ happens. The reason for conformity to Christ’s death is to attain resurrection from the dead in the future. When Christ, the Savior, returns, he will transform believers’ bodies of humiliation so that they will be conformed to His glorious body (3:21). This future transformation shapes the goal of believers’ present life.

⁸⁵ Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*, 155.

with gifts that differ according to the grace given to them (12:3-8). This prophetic dimension of the believers' transformation is associated with the missionary nature of the Church.

To sum up, the same verb μεταμορφώω, which Matthew uses in Mt 17:2, appears in Rom 12:2. Paul's transformation motif is developed with his new ideas of the covenantal relationship to God and justification through faith in Christ. That involves several concepts, including 'exchange,' 'dying to sin and rising with Christ,' 'conformity to the image of Christ,' and 'transformation through the renewal of the mind.'

The implication of Romans is that the believers' transformation is eschatological and present, spiritual and bodily, and ethical and prophetic. The transformation by the renewal of the mind in the present world constitutes to the final transformation in God's kingdom. The renewal of mind calls for a total dedication of the whole existence to God. The renewal begins with one's ethical transformation from Adam's pattern to Christ's pattern by dying to sin and rising in Christ. It brings about the transformation of the larger bodies as a result.

Paul's visual piety in Romans 1-12 is developed on the basis of his reinterpretation of God's creative capacity; covenantal signs; and sacrificial images. Paul binds the traditional visual motifs to Christian model of piety in his strong faith in Christ's death and resurrection. For Paul, it is Christian faith to believe that God, who transforms all things into a new form, will make the total person, with spirit and body joined together, enter into the life of the resurrection.

B. 1 Corinthians 15:8-11; 2 Corinthians 3:18

In 1 Cor 15:8-11, Paul addresses two key topics: his conversion as a result of meeting the resurrected Christ and the Gospel that brings Christ in transforming grace to individuals. Using the same Greek word, "ὤφθη (appeared)," used in the list of other appearances of Christ

(vv. 5-7), Paul clarifies his experience is a life-changing encounter with the risen Christ which was parallel with those of other apostles and disciples. Then, he claims:

“Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” (1 Cor 15: 8-9)

Paul calls himself “the least of the apostles” but states that Christ reached out him and transformed him to become an apostle: “By the grace of God, I am what I am” (v.10). Paul’s witness in this pericope tells a significant story that the encounter with the risen Christ informs the transformation of an individual and makes the one fit to proclaim the Gospel to others to believe.

In addition, 2 Cor 3:18 indicates that Paul clearly has in mind the Moses parallel at Exodus 34 where Moses was glorified and transformed by beholding the glory of God. The Mosaic transformation story in the Exodus text functions as the main framework for Paul’s theology in 2 Cor 3:18.⁸⁶ Apart from the Mosaic transformation tradition, many have suggested that the transformation motif and the mirror metaphor can be found in the Jewish apocalypticism and the Hellenistic mystery cult.⁸⁷

And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Cor 3:18)

In 2 Cor 3:12-15, Paul engages in a complicated discussion of the Exodus text,

⁸⁶ Lee, *Jesus’ Transfiguration*, 49.

⁸⁷ For details, see Lee, *Jesus’ Transfiguration*, 77-78.

employing Moses to talk about his actions in relation to Israel's perception of the lawgiver.⁸⁸

The language of "with unveiled faces" involves a visuality that ties Paul's thought to the covenantal faithfulness in Jewish mysticism. The vis-à-vis status of the Corinthians is compared to that of veiled Israel,⁸⁹ and in the comparison there is a stark contrast between the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant.

In 2 Cor 3:18, Paul explains how the same transformation power of God is available to all Christians. The power of God's presence was accessible to Moses alone, and God's glory reflected on Moses' face had to be veiled due to the hardness of Israel's hearts and mind (cf. 2 Cor 4:4). However, God "set aside the veil in Christ" (2 Cor 3:14) as the new covenant, and by the work of the Spirit, anyone who believes in Christ is exposed to God's transforming power as a result.

Due to the transformative actions of the Triune God, all believers are being transformed into the same image they behold, which is Christ. Paul exhorts that believers, with the unveiled faces, should fix their gaze upon the glory of Christ to become more and more like Christ, the perfect image of God. The importance of the verb μεταμορφούμεθα is that the believers' transformation is taking place *here and now*. It emphasizes an ongoing and time-consuming process through the transforming power of the Spirit, not a swift event at the moment of face-to-face encounter.⁹⁰

Paul's language of *imago Dei* recalls the teaching in Gen 1:26-27 that human beings (Adam) are created in God's image. As a result of the first creation, all humanity bears the image

⁸⁸ P. B. Duff, *Moses in Corinth: The Apologetic Context of 2 Corinthians 3* (MA: Brill, 2015), 186-187.

⁸⁹ Duff, *Moses in Corinth*, 4, 187.

⁹⁰ Cf. Heath, *Paul's Visual Piety*, 181-183.

of Adam.⁹¹ Paul links the creation language with God's new creation in Christ, who gained victory over death and gives the gift of life to all (cf. 1 Cor 15:57). He claims that "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Cor 5:17).

2.4. In Connection with 2 Peter 1:16-18

2 Peter 1:16-18 is the only other canonical pericope in the New Testament that makes reference to Christ's transfiguration other than the three gospel versions. The language of 2 Peter 1:17-18 sounds strikingly similar to that of Matthew 17:5, in spite of the minor differences in the Greek wording and the less detailed description of the transfiguration scene.⁹²

¹⁷ λαβὼν γὰρ παρὰ θεοῦ πατρὸς τιμὴν καὶ δόξαν φωνῆς ἐνεχθείσης αὐτῷ τοιαύσδε ὑπὸ τῆς μεγαλοπρεποῦς δόξης· ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός μου οὗτός ἐστιν εἰς ὃν ἐγὼ εὐδόκησα,
¹⁸ καὶ ταύτην τὴν φωνὴν ἡμεῖς ἠκούσαμεν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ ἐνεχθεῖσαν σὺν αὐτῷ ὄντες ἐν τῷ ἁγίῳ ὄρει.

¹⁷ *For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."*¹⁸ *We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain. (2 Pet 1:17-18)*

Acquiring new emphases and new elements, the early transfiguration tradition offered

⁹¹ In Rom 5:12, Paul describes the universal and mortal power of sin that came into the world through Adam. However, Christ destroyed and gives life, far surpassing the offense of Adam and bringing righteousness and life for all (5:15-18).

⁹² For more details see Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration*, 137-139. See also R. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter, Word Biblical Commentary* (Texas: Word Books, 1983), 206-210.

this pericope to answer contemporary issues of emergent Christian communities. One critical issue facing the early Christians was Jewish objections to Christian claims about Jesus' Messiahship and the future coming of the Messiah as the prophetic promises of the Scriptures.

The author of 2 Pet 1:16-18 places Christ's transfiguration in eschatological and ecclesial contexts,⁹³ by portraying the transfiguration as a historical event in which Christ received honor and glory as an eschatological judge.⁹⁴ Rejecting contemporary eschatological skepticism and false teachings (cf. 2 Pet 1:16; 3:4-5, 16-17), the author envisages that Christ's transfiguration functions as a proof for the first coming of the Messiah and the promised future coming, though it appears to be delayed (2 Pet 3:8-13),⁹⁵ in order to promote the eschatological expectation of the early Christians.⁹⁶

The apologetic defense of the promised Parousia is made with the name of Peter who is acknowledged as a historical eyewitness of Christ's transfiguration. Although the author does not name James and John, the privileged status as the witness is subsumed under the plural subject "we" (1:18). By locating Christ's transfiguration in the apostolic tradition, the author authenticates the tradition of the Parousia and contends with the false idea of the opponents calling it "devised myths" of the apostles (1:16).⁹⁷

The overall teaching of 2 Peter is that the glory of Christ, once shown to the three disciples at the transfiguration, will be revealed to the whole universe at the Day of the Lord as

⁹³ A. Canty, *Light & Glory: The Transfiguration of Christ in Early Franciscan and Dominican Theology* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 10.

⁹⁴ In 2 Pet 1:17, the author emphasizes the eschatological implication of Christ's transfiguration, anchored in the transfiguration tradition in the Church. Cf. Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration*, 137, 140.

⁹⁵ The author of 2 Peter asserts that the delay expresses God's generosity for the false teachers (3:9).

⁹⁶ Cf. Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration*, 129; 131; 135; 139.

⁹⁷ Lee, *Jesus' Transfiguration*, 134.

the promise of “the new heavens and earth where righteousness dwells” (3:13). The author relates this eschatological expectation to the present transformation of believers who are promised by Christ to become sharers in the divine nature (1:4; 3:11-12). For this, believers are encouraged to obtain the ethical and spiritual virtues (1:5-8) so that they may experience a new life and enter into the eternal kingdom of Christ (1:11). The new life is acquired by the knowledge of Jesus as the Lord and operated by his divine power of transforming every existence into a new form (1:3, 8).

Although 2 Peter 1:16-18 and Matthew and Paul provide different emphases and elements to answer different issues, they show a strikingly similar idea in terms of the transformative power of Christ’s transfiguration which informs the present and future transformation of believers from all walks of life who are united in the Christian belief and consists of the Church with their own characters and special roles.

CHAPTER II

Christ's Transfiguration in the History of Patristic Exegesis

The Church explored the topic of Christ's transfiguration in the period which extends from the early patristic era to the medieval era. Scholars in the East and West in this period contemplated in multiple ways the role that the transfiguration plays in Christian piety, valuing its visual dimension to greater or lesser extent. The scope of scholarship on the transfiguration during the time is so vast and varied that it is impossible to consider all aspects. This chapter thus provides a succinct overview of the exegetical development in the early and medieval patristic interpretations of the transfiguration.

1. The Greek Patristic Exegeses of the Transfiguration

The Matthean transfiguration narrative had its primary place throughout the early patristic era in the Eastern Church. Most of the Greek authors' exegesis on the transfiguration is controlled mainly by the Matthean account prescribed by the lectionary for the transfiguration liturgy. The Greek patristic interpretation of Christ's transfiguration served as anti-heretical, apologetic, devotional and liturgical expressions in the early Christianity.⁹⁸ Some scholars today suggests that the Greek patristic interpretations of Christ's transfiguration can be reduced to three literary categories: christological (the vision of Christ's radiance as a manifestation of his two natures); soteriological (the vision of the human being deified); and eschatological (the

⁹⁸ Cf. Ramsey, *The Glory of God*, 128-129; Canty, *Light & Glory*, 13; Anita Strezova, *Hesychasm and Art: The Appearance of New Iconographic Trends in Byzantine and Slavic Lands in the 14th and 15th Centuries* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), 83.

apocalyptic vision of Christ coming in glory).⁹⁹

In the epistles of Apostolic Fathers,¹⁰⁰ the Metamorphosis was not a central theme. A full-blown reflection on the transfiguration was first set by the Greek Fathers in challenging the claims of Gnosticism in which Christ's humanity was denied or his divinity was attained only through gnosis. Their response to the biblical narrative of the transfiguration contributed to the establishment of a background for later exegetical development of the transfiguration in both East and West. Their exegetical approaches to the transfiguration are different from the modern methodologies of biblical criticism but full of poetic merit, profound religious spirit, and mystical vision.¹⁰¹

The Greek commentators' interests and stressing points were varied; some of them were more interested in 'human's experience and participation in the vision of the transfiguration,' while others focused on the grace of God, Christ's deity and the inner life of God revealed through the transfiguration. The significant exegetes in the former group are Irenaeus of Lyons, Origen, John Chrysostom, Maximus the Confessor, Andrew of Crete, John of Damascus, Anastasius I of Antioch, Anastasius of Sinai, and Gregory Palamas.

- ***Irenaeus of Lyons*** (early 2 C -202) first mentioned Christ's transfiguration in Christian literature in reference to his writing on the vision of God, entitled *Adversus*

⁹⁹ Barbara Bucur, "Exegesis and Intertextuality in Anastasius the Sinaite's Homily on the Transfiguration," *Studia Patristica* vol. LXVIII (2013): 253. See also Strezova, *Hesychasm and Art*, 85. Cf. J. McGuckin's categorization is slightly different from others; the transfiguration as Theophany, as soteriological event, and as epiphany of the New Age. John A. McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition* (N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 100.

¹⁰⁰ E.g. Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, the *Didache*, *Epistle of Barnabas*, and *Shepherd of Hermas*.

¹⁰¹ McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, 100.

Haereses.¹⁰² Irenaeus asserted that seeing God means the believer is able to see God in God's works through the Son and the life-giving Spirit on earth. The point of seeing God is the begetting of divine life in the Christian faith, and the receiving of God's life is to participate in the vision of God. He interpreted the transformation of Christ's physical appearance as the fulfillment of the fervent desire of Moses to see the face of God,¹⁰³ claiming that Christians may acquire the state of incorruptibility or deification by participating in 'the uncreated light of God.'¹⁰⁴ Confronting the contemporary Gnostic ideas, Irenaeus emphasized that Christ brings salvation to the world through vision according to the flesh, not through gnosis according to the spirit.¹⁰⁵ The vision of the transfigured Christ is a vision of God's face which made possible through the mystery of the Incarnation.¹⁰⁶ Irenaeus' anti-Gnostic interpretation is formative in the early development of Christian theology of the transfiguration.

- ***Origen of Alexandria*** (185-253/4)¹⁰⁷ developed a doctrine of the spiritual sense and of

¹⁰² Peter Chamberas, "The Transfiguration of Christ: A Study in the Patristic Exegesis of Scripture," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly, Journal of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis* 14, no. 1-2(1970): 49. See also Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, IV, 20. 5-7, trans. Dominic J. Unger; John J. Dillon (New York, N.Y.: Paulist Press; Newman Press), 1992.

¹⁰³ Irenaeus of Lyon links Exodus 33:19-23 to the vision of Christ's transfiguration: "Two facts are thus signified: that it is impossible for man to see God; and that, through the wisdom of God, man shall see Him in the last times, in the depth of a rock, that is, in His coming as a man. And for this reason did He confer with him face to face on the top of a mountain, Elias being also present, as the Gospel relates, He thus making good in the end the ancient promise," *Against Heresies*, Book IV, 20: 9. See also Chamberas, "The Transfiguration of Christ," 49; Canty, *Light & Glory*, 11; McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, 101.

¹⁰⁴ Vladimir Lossky, *The vision of God* (London, Faith Press; Clayton, Wis.: American Orthodox Press, 1964), 34.

¹⁰⁵ Canty, *Light & Glory*, 12.

¹⁰⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV, 20:2.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Origen is not canonized as a saint due to his heretic teachings rejected by Christian orthodoxy. But his exegetical work on the transfiguration narrative gave huge influence on later

the eyes of contemplation, by reflecting on the believer's hope of beholding Christ in His glory.¹⁰⁸ Origen is the first to identify the mountain as the symbol of the contemplative life and the apostles' ascent as being one of prayer and virtue that prepares the manifestation of God's glory in the hearts of his faithful disciples.¹⁰⁹ For Origen, Christ's transfiguration is both trinitarian and christological events, in which the bright cloud may well be the presence and power of the Father who speaks approbation upon the beloved Son, or even the Holy Spirit who prophesizes of the things of God.¹¹⁰ In his *Commentary on Matthew*, Origen discerned the relationship between the literal and spiritual senses of the scripture and the humanity and divinity of the Incarnate Logos.¹¹¹ He paid attention to Matthew's intention and words in the transfiguration narrative, and at the same time, he saw the Transfiguration scene as the perfect tableau of the coming together of divine descent and human ascent.¹¹² Christ was transfigured before the three disciples who witnessed historically the Wisdom "*in forma Dei*," while the rest saw Jesus only in His humanity according to His appearance "*in forma servi*." Just as there are the chosen people who saw Christ differently, so can the Gospel readers also witness by reading the gospel story. Readers process conversion from seeing Christ only as a man to beholding Him

exegesis of the narrative.

¹⁰⁸ Brian E. Daley, *Light on the Mountain: Greek Patristic and Byzantine Homilies on the Transfiguration of the Lord* (NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2013), 57. See also Paul Blowers, "Mystics and Mountains: Comparing Origen's Exegesis of the Transfiguration and Gregory of Nissa's Exposition of the Sinai Theophany," *Phronema* 30 (2015): 4.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Origen, *Mattaeum* 12:36-43, in McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, 107, 155-164.

¹¹⁰ Blowers, "Mystics and Mountains," 7.

¹¹¹ William. M. Wright, "The Literal sense of Scripture According to Henri De Lubac: Insights from Patristic Exegesis of the Transfiguration," *Modern Theology* 28 (April 2, 2012): 254-255.

¹¹² Blowers, "Mystics and Mountains," 3; McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, 108.

in the form of God. Through the process of conversion, they no longer gaze on things visible or desire for bodies which distract and draw the soul from the better and more divine things.¹¹³

Origen's spiritual interpretation of the transfiguration assured that believers who ascend the mount of the transfiguration with Christ will share in the intimacy of the Son with the Father. The intimate relationship comes not by straightforward intellectual apprehension of the Father–Son –Holy Spirit relation but by following the Son up onto the mountain and down again. Origen emphasized that the mature believers may attain to an epiphany on the mountain of spiritual experience, but then must come down to the real world of ascetical and contemplative struggle in order to assist Christ in the work of their salvation.¹¹⁴

- **John Chrysostom** (344/54-407) was interested in reflecting on the reaction of various characters and Jesus' purposes in the transfiguration story, by relating the transfiguration to Jesus' teaching of the final coming and the daily life of Christians.¹¹⁵ **Maximus the Confessor** (580-662) emphasized each believer's faith, diligence in virtue, and spiritual advancement on the way to purification of the senses and spirit. For Maximus, the light of the glorified Christ is really divine grace which empowers believers to enter into the mysteries of the divine life.¹¹⁶ **Andrew of Crete** (660-740) emphasized the theme of the soul's spiritual ascent to a radiant transformation in Christ,¹¹⁷ and **John of Damascus** (675-740) stressed the importance of 'the prayer in stillness'

¹¹³ Cf. Origen of Alexandria, *Commentary on Mt 12.36-4*, XII: 36, in Daley, *Light on the Mountain*, 55-56.

¹¹⁴ Origen, XII: 43; Blowers, "Mystics and Mountains," 8.

¹¹⁵ Daley, *Light on the Mountain*, 68.

¹¹⁶ Chamberas, "The Transfiguration of Christ," 53.

¹¹⁷ Andrew of Crete, *Oratio 7, In Transfigurationem*, in McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, 108, 200-202.

(hesychia) in which the prayer can participate in the light of Christ.¹¹⁸

- *Anastasius I of Antioch*, the eastern Orthodox Patriarch in the sixth century, provided a moral reflection on Matthew's transfiguration account, by relating it to the implication of Paul's transformed life and his teachings about the believers' transformation. Anastasius encouraged believers to change their former way of life like Paul did, denying all their human patterns of willing, leaving themselves behind, and transforming all their soul's powers.¹¹⁹ He interpreted Christ's transfiguration as a pledge of the believers' transformation and of the reshaping of their bodies at the time of resurrection.¹²⁰

- *Anastasius of Sinai*,¹²¹ the informed exegete in the seventh century, is known as the earliest witness to a liturgical celebration of the feast of the transfiguration, together with the vivid mosaic representation of the transfiguration.¹²² On the one hand, Anastasius emphasized that during the transfiguration the two natures in Christ remained unconfused, and their properties retained their integrity even after the union. By virtue of the hypostatic union of his two natures, Christ gave humanity a share in the divine honor.¹²³ In his festal homily, on the other hand, Anastasius used many allegorical and visual languages to articulate the significance

¹¹⁸ John of Damascus, *Oratio, De Transfiguratione*, in in McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, 108, 205-225.

¹¹⁹ Anastasius, *Homily on the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ*, 1:1, in Daley, *Light on the Mountain*, 132.

¹²⁰ Anastasius, *Homily*, 1:2, in Daley, *Light on the Mountain*, 133.

¹²¹ Scholars agree that the text of Anastasius' Homily on the Transfiguration is not in a good state and the text of some passages is uncertain. After A. Guillou's critical edition of the existing manuscripts in 1955, B. Daley first published English translation in 2013.

¹²² Cf. Daley, *Light on the Mountain*, 161-162; Bucur, "Exegesis and Intertextuality in Anastasius the Sinaite's Homily on the Transfiguration," 250.

¹²³ Strezova, *Hesychasm and Art*, 85.

of Christ's transfiguration for the transformation of all those who know Christ into a sharing of His divine beauty. It is also notable that Anastasius mentioned Mary in his homily on the transfiguration. He refers Mary to "a cymbal of a mystic sign" and "God-bearer" that formed Christ in flesh without transforming him.¹²⁴

- **Gregory Palamas** (1296-1359), the great Greek advocate of the doctrine of Christ's transfiguration, contributed to the development of ascetical implication of the transfiguration in relation to Christian visual and mystical practices.¹²⁵ Building on 2 Corinthians 3:18, the concept of "transfiguration of the believer" had stabilized by Gregory who stressed "true knowledge of God" to be a transfiguration of man by the Spirit of God.¹²⁶

By the thirteenth century, the Greek exegesis of the transfiguration expressed elaborately in multiple forms of the eastern Orthodox worship, including hymnody, iconography, and festal homilies. Gregory and other authors found their ultimate justification in the theology and practice of the **Hesychast Fathers** in the fourteenth century.¹²⁷ In 1375, the Eastern Church

¹²⁴ Daley, *Light on the Mountain*, 166, 177.

¹²⁵ Gregory Palamas, *Homily 34 and 35*; McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, 225-235.

¹²⁶ John Meyendorff, "Palamas, Saint Gregory," in *The Triads* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1983), 14.

¹²⁷ Cf. Chamberas, "The Transfiguration of Christ," 54; Strezova, *Hesychasm and Art*, 9-61; Canty, *Light & glory*, 13; McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, 231. The Hesychast Fathers were the supporters of Hesychasm, the process of retiring inward by ceasing to register the senses, aiming at the experiential knowledge of God beyond images, concepts, and languages. The experience of the uncreated light of Christ, manifested to the three disciples at the transfiguration, is the highest goal of the Hesychast practice. The term Hesychast was used from the 4th century by the Greek Fathers, such as John Chrysostom and the Cappadocian Fathers, and systematically developed by John of Sinai from the 6th century. In the 14th century, the Hesychast controversy occurred but the Hesychast tradition and practice were defended by Gregory Palamas, who emphasized the spiritual transfiguration of those who perceive Christ's divinity by beholding the uncreated light.

accepted its traditional theology of the uncreated light,¹²⁸ revealed on Mount Tabor at the transfiguration of Christ, as an official dogma. This ecclesiastical affirmation of the uncreated light of Christ prompted the advancement of more complex images of the transfiguration in the 14th and 15th centuries.¹²⁹ The figurative expression of the transfiguration in this period informed believers with a better understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation that helps them feel Christ's presence in their life.¹³⁰ At the same time, the spiritual transfiguration of the believer has continued to remain a central theme for achieving a closer union with God in the Eastern Church.¹³¹

2. The Latin Patristic Exegeses of the Transfiguration

Some argues that the transfiguration has long been an essential part of the Eastern tradition, but it has often seemed foreign to the Western rational minds. However, the Latin authors in early Christian era, such as Tertullian (160-220)¹³² and Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258),¹³³ acknowledged the riches and depth of Greek commentaries on Christ's transfiguration.

¹²⁸ The uncreated light of Christ at the transfiguration was reflected by numerous Greek authors, including Irenaeus of Lyons in the second century.

¹²⁹ Strezova, *Hesychasm and Art*, 81, 85-88. Strezova explores the five different stages of the development of the iconography of the transfiguration.

¹³⁰ Pope John Paul II, "Angelus: Eastern Theology Has Enriched the Whole Church" (11 August 1996).

¹³¹ J. Majerník; J. Ponessa; L. W. Manhardt, *Come and See: The Synoptics: On the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Ohio: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2005), 121.

¹³² Tertullian's comments on the transfiguration: *De Praescriptinone*, 21-22; *Adversus Praxean*, 15; *Adversus Marcionem*, 4.22; *Ad Martyras*, 2.8; *De Resurrectione Carnis*; *De Carne Christi*, 24.3; *De Jejuniis*, 6; and *De Monogamia*, 8. Cf. McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, 250-256.

¹³³ Cyprian of Carthage, *Ep.* 63. 15; *Testimonia, Ad Quirinum*, 1. 10. Cf. McGuckin, *The Transfiguration*

They were attracted to the Greek exegetical traditions,¹³⁴ and there are few differences in theology or the exegesis between Latin and Greek texts in the early Christian era.

By the fourth and fifth centuries, the Latin Fathers, including Hilary of Poitiers (315-367), Ambrose of Milan (339-397), Jerome (347-420), and Augustine of Hippo (354-430), introduced several additional elements into exegesis of the transfiguration, appropriating the story for various theological purposes.¹³⁵ The works of Augustine of Hippo provide a particularly creative exegesis of the transfiguration in relation to the believers' transformation and visual piety. His exegesis of the transfiguration was generated by the marked advance in Western theology, especially the developing Christology and Ecclesiology.

1) Augustine of Hippo

Two hermeneutic keys can be found in Augustine's interpretation of Christ's transfiguration: *the extramission theory* and *the sign theory*. Kari Kloos sees that Augustine was affected by *the extramission theory*.¹³⁶ In the extramission theory, the agency of the viewer alone is not sufficient for vision, but vision should involve a physical connection between the viewer, light, and visible things. The connection is initiated by the viewer's inner light, but for which the

of Christ in Scripture and Tradition, 256-257.

¹³⁴ Cf. D. H. Williams, "The Gospel of Matthew in service of the early Fathers," *Pro Ecclesia* 23 (2014): 89-90.

¹³⁵ McGuckin introduced the treatises of the early Latin Fathers from Hilary to Augustine in *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, 257-280.

¹³⁶ Kari Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God: Augustine's Transformation of Early Christian Theophany Interpretation* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011), 45. Kloos suggests that there are two main categories in ancient philosophical theories of vision: intromission and extramission. According to Kloos, these theories influenced on how the Church Fathers see God in the scriptural theophanies, helping them consider how the stories of physical visions might metaphorically express the believer's need for the interior illumination of grace in the spiritual vision of God.

viewer requires external illumination.¹³⁷ The extramission theory provides the basis for the spiritual strand's emphasis on grace and action in spiritual vision and the viewer's transformation. Augustine develops this ancient extramission theory of vision to emphasize the spiritual and physical connection between the viewer and the objects of its attention.¹³⁸

Michael Cameron argues that most of Augustine's exegetical practices basically stem from his *sign theory*, in which he sees a word as a sign that is itself sensed with either audibility or visibility, pointing toward another end, something beyond the sign itself.¹³⁹ In the same vein, Tarmo Toom also sees that Augustine's central idea is that both words and sensible things are somehow involved in one's gaining of knowledge.¹⁴⁰ Augustine emphasizes that true knowledge of things should be interiorly enlightened by Christ whose light enables the inner eye to have the intellectual vision of truth.¹⁴¹ For Augustine, it is God who gives wisdom, and from His face there is knowledge and understanding.¹⁴²

Augustine developed his own theological scheme of 'transformation/transfiguration' and 'visual significance,' which occurs throughout his writings and scriptural expositions.¹⁴³ To begin with, *De vera religione* (390) presents Augustine's early thought on how Christian faith and visual practice informs the spiritual ascent of believers.¹⁴⁴ The reader can notice that

¹³⁷ Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God*, 47.

¹³⁸ Cf. Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God*, 46-48.

¹³⁹ Augustine, *De dialectica*, 5. See also Tarmo Toom, *Patristic Theories of Biblical Interpretation: The Latin Fathers* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2016), 76-79.

¹⁴⁰ Toom, *Patristic Theories of Biblical Interpretation*, 89-90.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Augustine, *De magistro*, 11. 38. 46.

¹⁴² Cf. Augustine, *De doctrina Christina*, 3. 37. 56.

¹⁴³ Michael Cameron, "The Christological Substructure of Augustine's Figurative Exegesis," in *Augustine and the Bible*, edited by P. Bright (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 85.

¹⁴⁴ Augustine's main motive is to describe Christianity as the true religion, focusing on the

Augustine's developing idea of 'sacramentality' in which physical and visible signs represent invisible realities, not merely indicate, just as Christ's divinity is encountered in and through His humanity.¹⁴⁵ Augustine reflected on the scriptural theophanies in general and emphasized the connection between bodily experience and spiritual vision.¹⁴⁶ He valued visible, tangible phenomenon in the theophany stories and underscores the significance of sense perception for the believer's spiritual growth.¹⁴⁷ For him, visibility is the means of inspiring faith and of progressive healing of the human soul, and sensory perception of visible reality corrects the human mind's creation of false images ("phantasm").¹⁴⁸ God uses creatures to communicate 'visibly' what God intends for human beings to learn.¹⁴⁹ The visible words and miracles in the scriptures are 'provisional and useful' till the inner eye is healed and no longer needs outward visible sights and signs.¹⁵⁰ However, they are also 'providential' as part of God's overarching

importance of Christ's becoming a human being and His role as teacher and healer with authority that shows people what to believe and how to live. Cf. *De vera religione*, 16. 30; Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God*, 110.

¹⁴⁵ Michael Cameron, "Augustine's Construction of Figurative Exegesis Against the Donatists in the 'Ennarrationes in Psalmos,'" Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Chicago, 1996, 70-71.

¹⁴⁶ Addition to the points, *De vera religione* shows a strong affinity for Neoplatonic spirituality and also defends the Catholic faith against Manichean argument.

¹⁴⁷ "Quae cum credita fuerit, mentem purgabit vitae modus divinis praeceptis conciliates, et idoneam facit spiritualibus percipiendis," *De vera religione*, 7. 13. All the Subsequent Latin text taken from "Sant'Agostino," accessed November 16, 2016, <http://www.augustinus.it/latino/index.htm>.

¹⁴⁸ "Cui si nondum possumus inhaerere, obiurgemus saltem nostra phantasmata, et tam nugatorios et deceptorios ludos de spectaculo mentis eiicimus," *De vera religione*, 50.98. Augustine's definition and use of phantasm is found in his later treatise, *De Musica (387-391)*, VI.11.32. Phantasms are generally known as fanciful, false, and illusory images that the human mind creates, drawing from its experience of sensation.

¹⁴⁹ "rationali creatura serviente legibus suis, per sonos ac litteras, ignem, fumum, nubem, columnam, quasi quaedam verba visibilia," *De vera religione*, 50.98.

¹⁵⁰ "Cum enim figmentis ludicris nimium delectati evanesceremus in cogitationibus nostris," *De vera*

plan of redemption that culminates in the incarnation of the Word made visible to the world.¹⁵¹ Thus, according to Augustine, all that was demonstrated and taught by Christ is a sign that signifies how God communicates to human beings under created forms, thereby informing their spiritual transformation, the ascent of the soul.¹⁵² In *De vera religione*, Augustine speaks of the theophanies in general, without actually mentioning Christ's transfiguration. However, he provides a meaningful foundation for interpreting the visual reality revealed in the transfiguration and its effect on the faith and spiritual transformation of believers.

Contra Adimantum (394), Augustine's anti-Manichean work, offers three different types of scriptural vision of God, which are interrelated: (1) 'bodily vision (*corporale*)' in which physical objects are seen with bodily eyes; (2) 'imaginary vision (*spiritale*)' in which one sees images of things that can be sensed through the body, as in a dream; and (3) 'mental vision (*intellectuale*)' in which invisible realities like truth and wisdom are seen with the gaze of the mind.¹⁵³ By means of the three types, Augustine considered the vision of Christ's transfiguration as 'the first type of bodily vision,' simply mentioning the physical vision seen with bodily eyes of the three disciples.

Other uses of transfiguration occur in Augustine's *Epistolae* and *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (403). He focused on Christ's Passion through which Christ transfigured human

religion, 50. 98.

¹⁵¹ "Utamur gradibus quos nobis divina providentia fabricare dignata est," *De vera religione*, 50. 98.

¹⁵² Cf. Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God*, 101,108.

¹⁵³ "Unum, secundum oculos corporis... Alterum, secundum quod imaginamur ea quae per corpus sentimus: nam et pars ipsa nostra cum divinitus assumitur multa revelantur, non per oculos corporis, aut aures, aliumve sensum carnalem;...Tertium autem genus visionis est secundum mentis intuitum, quo intellect conspiciuntur veritas atque sapientia," *Contra Adimantum*, 28.2. For more explanation about Augustine's gives of the three types of vision of God and how they are interrelated, see Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God*, 123-125, 169-171.

sinfulness and fear in His humanity.¹⁵⁴ In addition, in *Sermons on Matthew*, Augustine used the allegorical exegesis to explore the meaning of Christ's transfiguration. Augustine's reading of the Matthean transfiguration narrative holds explicitly ecclesiological connotations. He saw in the radiant Face of Christ "the enlightenment of the Gospel," in the Garment of Christ "the Church in all her purity," in the fall of the disciples "the condition of death," and in their reassurance by Christ "the Resurrection," when the law and the prophets are no longer necessary.¹⁵⁵ Further, in *Book of Rules* (427),¹⁵⁶ Augustine interpreted the legitimate number, "six days" in Matthew 17:1 as referring to the whole time, the time of the Church when she remains a "sojourner among the aliens."¹⁵⁷ In this way, he gave the transfiguration of Christ great significance for the life of the Church, which lives with the tension between the present age and the age to come.

Finally, *De Trinitate* (399-420) provides the fullest and most complex interpretation of vision in light of Augustine's developed theology of the Trinity. The framework of *De Trinitate* is

¹⁵⁴ *Epistolae*, 140. 6, 10, 11, 12, 13; Pamela Bright, "A Conflict of African Hermeneutics Augustine and Tyconius," in *Augustine and the Bible*, edit. P. Bright (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 84. By contemplating Christ's prayer in the garden (Mt 26:39, 42), Augustine explained, "In the person of the human He assumed, transfiguring his own in himself, he displayed as it were humanity's own will... He showed you, and he rectified you. Look, he says, see yourself in me"; "Sed ex persona hominis transfigurans in se suos, quos in se transfiguravit...ostendit te, et correxit te. Ecce vide, inquit, te in me;" *Enarrationes in Psalmos* II, 32, Sermo 1. 2.

¹⁵⁵ Augustine, *Sermon on Matthew 78, 79, and 79A*. English translation taken from *The Works of St. Augustine: A translation for the 21st Century, Sermons III (51-94) on the NT*, translated by E. Hill, O.P. and edited by J.E. Rotelle, O.S.A (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991), 340-349.

¹⁵⁶ *Book of Rules* was included in the concluding section of Book 3 of the *On Christian Doctrine*. It was Augustine's summation of Tyconius' original hermeneutic theory. In his commentary on the fifth rule of Tyconius, Augustine describes the two kinds of biblical times: "synecdoche," the whole for the part and the part for the whole, and "the legitimate numbers."

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Bright, "A Conflict of African Hermeneutics Augustine and Tyconius," 118-119.

seen as a journey through the three stages of knowing God: from sense perception (Books I-IV) through reflection on this perception (V-VII) to the turn inward (VIII-XV).¹⁵⁸ Augustine's interest throughout the journey is the correspondence between the interior vision/contemplation of Christ and the whole transformation of believers in faith, love, and hope.¹⁵⁹ In Book I, Augustine emphasized that "vision/contemplation is the recompense of faith"¹⁶⁰ because the contemplation of God through Christ corresponds to the hearts purified by faith. In Books II - IV, Augustine underscored the importance of spiritual vision, and yet appreciates the role of sense perception as the starting point in spiritual process. He reiterated visible signs indicate the saving intent of the Father to bring people back to Him through the Son and transform them spiritually,¹⁶¹ since images impressed upon the physical eyes have the power to shape the soul spiritually in its desire to view higher realities.

Building on his view of the theophanies as signs, Augustine developed the Trinitarian exegesis of the theophanies in general, and then explained how the theophanies relate to spiritual growth and the contemplation of God.¹⁶² The language Augustine used in Book II, 28 expresses

¹⁵⁸ Khaled Anatolios, "Oppositional Pairs and Christological Synthesis: Rereading Augustine's *De Trinitate*," *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 244.

¹⁵⁹ Augustine distinguishes the visible and audible phenomena of the theophanies from the revelation of God in the theophany. In this way, Augustine resists the literal Christological reading of the theophany, but instead stresses the Trinitarian reading. Thus, the question of "who appeared?" becomes less significant, but the question of "what did the theophanies mean?" takes on primary importance. Cf. Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God*, 141-143.

¹⁶⁰ "Contemplatio quippe merces est fidei," *De Trinitate*, I. 17. Cf. Thomas Aquinas cites Augustine's statement on the intimate connection between vision and faith in *Summa Theologiae*, II, q.4, a.1.

¹⁶¹ "missa sunt nobis divinitus visa congrua peregrinationi nostrae quibus admoneremur non hic esse quod quaerimus sed illuc ab ista esse redeundum unde nisi penderemus hic ea non quaereremus," *De Trinitate*, IV. 2.

¹⁶² *De Trinitate*, II. 27-31. For Augustine, every work of revelation in the world is Trinitarian, in the

the progressive and transformative sense in the desire of Moses to see God and God's grants in a limited way.¹⁶³ Just as Moses' transformation is informed by seeing God, so too will Christians be transformed by seeing and loving the face of Christ visible to the world.¹⁶⁴ The vision of Christ increases the believers' spiritual desire for the direct vision of God.¹⁶⁵ For Augustine, faith that is effected through the encounter with tangible things – Christ, scriptures, sacrament, God's actions in creation, and the Church – cultivates hope and desire to see "God's face," in other words, desire for being with God in eternity.¹⁶⁶ In Book VIII and XIV, Augustine studied human soul which is called to ascend from the level of God's image to the contemplation of the Divine Reality. Augustine reiterates the significance of spiritual vision which empowers believers to believe, hope, and love in greater depth.

2) Exegesis of the Transfiguration in the Early and High Middle Ages

Augustine's exegetical works paved the way for later exegetical developments of Christ's transfiguration. Many significant Latin authors, during the period of the Early Middle Ages, worked on the transfiguration, combining the traditional exegesis with their own questions

sense that the Trinity works inseparably and that various visible revelations equally signify either the invisible Father or the Son or the Spirit. Cf. Kloos, *Christ, Creation, and the Vision of God*, 144-146.

¹⁶³ "Illa est ergo species quae rapit omnem animam rationalem desiderio sui tanto ardentior quanto mundior et tanto mundior quanto ad spiritalia resurgentem, tanto autem ad spiritalia resurgentem quanto a carnalibus morientem," *De Trinitate*, II. 28.

¹⁶⁴ "Tanto enim certius diligimus quam videre desideramus faciem Christi quanto in posterioribus eius agnoscimus quantum nos prior dilexerit Christus," *De Trinitate*, II. 28.

¹⁶⁵ Michael R. Barnes, "The Visible Christ and the Invisible Trinity: Mt. 5:8 in Augustine's Trinitarian Theology of 400," *Modern Theology* 19:3 (2003): 332; Basil Studer, "History and Faith in *De Trinitate*," *Augustinian Studies* 28:1 (1997): 22-23.

¹⁶⁶ *De Trinitate*, II. 28.

to provide contemporaries with sermons and commentaries on the transfiguration: Leo the Great (400-461), Gregory the Great (540-604), and Bede the Venerable (672/3-735). Ambrose Autpert (730-784), Rabanus (780-856), John Scotus Eriugena (815-877), and Remigius of Auxerre (841-908).

Erik Thunø observes that the commentators in the Early Middle Ages generally considered the transfiguration a preview of the glorified body of Christ following His resurrection. *Autpert* linked Christ's appearance to His disciples in Luke 24:13-49 to the Transfiguration narrative of Matthew 17:2 and stated that in both cases, "Christ was changed to a different form, not of nature, but of glory."¹⁶⁷ *Bede* emphasized the eternal joy of the elect after the resurrection which compensates their labors of temporal struggles in the world.¹⁶⁸ *Remigius* discussed the true reality of the transfigured Christ's body and the visible radiance of His face, which prefigures His glorious coming in the kingdom.¹⁶⁹ However, as some exceptional cases, *Gregory* highlighted the ecclesial meaning of the transfiguration with an emphasis on the role of Peter in the transfiguration event¹⁷⁰ while *Leo* emphasized the soteriological meaning of the transfiguration in which Christ wanted to confirm the faith of believers in anticipation of temporal suffering, though it is not right doubt the promises of happiness.¹⁷¹

These treatises influenced on the exegetical development of the High Middle Ages

¹⁶⁷ Ambrose Autpert, *Hom. De Transfiguratione*, in McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, 297. Also see Erik Thunø, *Image and Relic: mediating the sacred in early medieval Rome* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2002), 141-143.

¹⁶⁸ Bede the Venarable, *Homily 28*, in McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, 290-292.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Remigius of Auxerre, in Thomas Aquinas' *Catena aurea in quator Evengelia*, Lectio 1, chap.17.

¹⁷⁰ Gregory the Great, *Moralium in Job, 40*, In *Primum Regium Expositio*, in McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, 288-290.

¹⁷¹ Leo the Great, *Homily 51*, in McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, 283.

which is often characterized with the era of an intellectual renaissance. Recently, Aaron Canty has offered a meaningful resource to examine the theology and scriptural exegesis of the transfiguration in medieval Christianity.¹⁷² According to Canty, as scholastic theology became more complicated in the High Middle Ages, the writers raised various disputed questions about Christ's transfiguration in exegetical and theological genres.

- **Hugh of St. Cher** (1200-1263) wrote *Postilla super Matthaeum*, in a strong reliance on *Glossa Ordinaria*, in which he employed an ecclesial allegory of Christ's face ("head of the mystical body) and garment ("members of the Church) for the physical integrity of priests and the transformation of the clergy and the laity.¹⁷³ He also provided a meaningful spiritual allegory of the face and garment, by juxtaposing "six days" in Mt 17:1 with the six days of creation in Genesis. This allegory illustrated the six steps whereby believers should be transfigured into Christ. These two allegories attached the effects of Christ's transfiguration to the transformation of the whole person, by depicting a movement of self-knowledge, through the role of will and good works, to the transformations of the intellect, of the will, and of the body.¹⁷⁴ Most significantly, Hugh perceived that a personal transformation of a believer begins with Christ's transfiguration, emanates through His apostles, and affects others' transformation. He said that this personal transformation is "a perfect transformation so that the face of the mind may be

¹⁷² Canty's *Light & Glory* traces the contributions of the 13th century Franciscan and Dominican theologians who addressed a number of significant points of Christ's transfiguration: Hugh of St. Cher, Alexander of Hales, Gueric of St. Quentin, John of La Rochelle, Albert the Great, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas.

¹⁷³ Cf. Canty, *Light & Glory*, 23-33.

¹⁷⁴ Hugh of St. Cher, *Postilla super totam Bibliam*, in Canty's *Light & Glory*, 26-28.

radiant to God and the garments to one's neighbor."¹⁷⁵

- **Albert the Great** (1200-1280) presented scriptural commentaries on Christ's transfiguration in *De Resurrectione* and *Super Mattheum*. Neither visual piety nor the influence of the transfiguration on the believer's transformation is the central theme of his exegetical works. However, in *De Resurrectione*, building upon the lessons of his predecessors, Albert saw in the transfiguration a proof of the resurrection, with a more explicit eschatological focus. For Albert, the clarity of Christ's transfiguration is a sign pointing to the reality that will penetrate the bodies of the elect, the clarity of immortality that is God's unique gift to His beloved.¹⁷⁶ Albert also articulated the spiritual and ecclesial significance of the whiteness of Christ's garments and the brightness of the cloud which is referred only in Matthew's Gospel.¹⁷⁷ In *Super Mattheum*, Albert further developed the ecclesial dimension of the transfiguration, by linking the transfiguration to the hierarchy and power of the Church.

- **Bonaventure** (1221-1274) presented impressive sermons for the second Sunday of Lent on Matthean transfiguration narrative in *Sermo dominicale 16* and *Sermones de tempore*. In *Sermo 16*, Bonaventure's point was on the spiritual transfiguration through 'contemplation' in close connection with an ecclesial orientation. He thought that the three disciples represent different facets of the Christian life, more specifically, the threefold rank of the Church Militant:

¹⁷⁵ "Haec est perfecta transfiguration, ut splendeat facies mentis Deo, et vestimenta proximo," *Postilla super totam Bibliam*, fol. 59vb, in Canty's *Light & Glory*, 29.

¹⁷⁶ Canty, *Light & Glory*, 148.

¹⁷⁷ Albert explained that the whiteness of Christ's clothes signifies the communication of Christ's glory to the saints and the brightness of the cloud means the light of truth descended upon the radiant Church. Cf. Canty, *Light & Glory*, 154.

prelates (Peter), actives (James), and contemplatives (John),¹⁷⁸ which act as a matrix through which one can see the development of spiritual life, signified by the disciples' ascension of the mountain. Bonaventure was convinced that Christ's transfiguration is intrinsically linked with faith because Christ underwent His transformation expressly to strengthen the disciples' faith.¹⁷⁹ In *Sermones de tempore 200-203*, Bonaventure focused on the qualities of the face and garments of glorified souls and the spiritual gifts of resurrection, including wisdom, a pure conscience, modesty, and love (*Sermones* 201, 220). Further, he explained that the transfiguration is a lesson that one must not only have contempt for the world but keep one's eyes fixed on the heaven, that is, on Christ (*Sermones* 202, 221).

- **Thomas Aquinas** (1225-1274) provided a synthetic work on the transfiguration of Christ in a variety of genres and literary contexts, combining varying works of the gifted predecessors and peers. *Catena aurea in quator Evangelia* (the mid-1260s) is Thomas Aquinas's earliest exegetical work on Christ's transfiguration. In the gloss on Matthew 17:1-9, he arranged a large body of patristic exegesis of the transfiguration narrative:¹⁸⁰ Chrysostom's comments on the spiritual implications;¹⁸¹ Jerome and Remigius on the true reality of the transfigured Christ's

¹⁷⁸ "triplicis status Ecclesiae militantis, scilicet praelationis, actionis et contemplationis," *Sermo* 16, 244-45. For more details, see *Sermo* 16, 249.

¹⁷⁹ Canty, *Light & Glory*, 190-191.

¹⁸⁰ *Catena Aurea* is Thomas' exposition of the four Gospels by way of binding comments from early Church Fathers in a chain of commentary. He draws John Chrysostom, Hilary of Poitiers, Jerome, Origen, Remigius of Auxerre, Rabanus Maurus, and the *Glossa ordinaria*. He cites the interpretations of Origen and Jerome more often or longer than those of the other patristic exegetes in the commentary. Cf. Canty, *Light & Glory*, 210; Williams, "The Gospel of Matthew in service of the early Fathers," 84.

¹⁸¹ "He [Jesus] does not take them up immediately...because the other disciples might not be touched with any human passion, as a feeling of jealousy; or else...the three disciples might become kindled

body and the visible radiance of His face.¹⁸² In Thomas' appropriation of Jerome, the appearance of Moses and Elijah was defined to be 'a sign' shown for to the disciples to increase their faith.¹⁸³

Thomas also included the Trinitarian exegesis of the *Glossa ordinaria* which links the theophany to the working of the Trinity at Christ's baptism,¹⁸⁴ as well as Hilary's spiritual understanding of Jesus' admonition, which emphasizes the disciples' becoming witnesses of spiritual deeds."¹⁸⁵

Scriptum super libros Sententiarum (the mid-1250s) offers Thomas' earliest theological approach to Christ's transfiguration.¹⁸⁶ Thomas considered scholastic questions on the reality of Christ's clarity,¹⁸⁷ in response to the objections against Christ's clarity at three points.¹⁸⁸ ***Super***

with a more eager desire," *Catena aurea in quatuor Evangelia*, on Matthew 17:1-9, Lectio 1. All subsequent Latin text and English translation taken from John Henry Parker, v. I, J.G.F. and J. Rivington, London, 1842, Dedication translated by Joseph Kenny, O.P., accessed Dec. 13, 2016.

<http://dhspriority.org/thomas/CAMatthew.htm>.

¹⁸² Cf. Remigius, "et ut ostendat discipulis quatenus gloriam divinae claritatis non in huius saeculi profundo quaerant, sed in caelestis beatitudinis regno."; Jerome, "Certe transformatus est dominus in eam gloriam qua venturus est postea in regno suo."; huiusmodi autem corporale est et tactui subiacet, non spirituale et aereum, quod illudat oculos, et tantum in phantasmate aspiciatur."

¹⁸³ "quod Scribis et Pharisaeis de caelo signa poscentibus dare noluit; hic vero, ut apostolorum augeat fidem, dat signum de caelo."

¹⁸⁴ "et similiter in transfiguratione, ... tota Trinitas apparuit: pater in voce, filius in homine, spiritus sanctus in nube."

¹⁸⁵ "Silentium etiam rerum gestarum quas viderant imperat, ut cum essent spiritu sancto repleti, tunc gestorum spiritualium testes essent."

¹⁸⁶ Thomas' commentary on Peter Lombard's *Libri Quattuor Sententiarum* which was written by Peter Lombard (1100-1160) in 1150. Although it did not explicitly consider Christ's transfiguration, Thomas chose Peter's reflection on Christ's suffering and body (particularly Book III) for a discussion of the transfiguration.

¹⁸⁷ The clarity was generally considered as one of the four gifts that Christ's resurrected body manifests. The four gifts are known as 'impassibility,' 'agility,' 'subtlety,' and 'clarity.' Thomas discusses the clarity of Christ's bodily glory in the *Summa theologiae* III, q.45, a.2.

¹⁸⁸ (1) the truly inhered clarity in Christ's transfigured body; (2) the pleasing effect of Christ's spiritual clarity on the disciples' vision; and (3) Christ's clarity as a sign of future clarity which will be in the

Evangelium S. Matthaei lectura (compiled between 1269 and 1270)¹⁸⁹ deals with the bodily clarity of Christ from the clarity of His inner soul filled with grace.¹⁹⁰ For Thomas, the clarity of the transfiguration comes from Christ's soul, which was glorified by its vision of God, and the glorified soul, then full of love, radiates clarity into the body.¹⁹¹ This process and the equality of bodily glory in Christ and in the faithful are revised more fully in the *Summa theologiae*, q. 45.

The *Summa* III, q. 45 stresses the miraculous nature of Christ's transfiguration, its intimate connection to His suffering and death, and its significance for the Christian life.¹⁹² The *sed contra* in a. 1 is particularly notable for believers because Thomas discussed 'the fittingness of Christ's transfiguration,' focusing on the transformative journey of Christ-followers in the simultaneous contemplation of Christ's suffering and glory. Christ's transfiguration, as a present sign, involves "dynamic function"¹⁹³ which moves believers to take up bravely the way of Christ's passion and be conformed to Him through the way.¹⁹⁴ Using the visualized image of a

saints. The overall point of Thomas' teaching is the miraculous nature of the transfiguration in the simultaneous contemplation on Christ's glory and suffering. For Thomas, Christ's glorious clarity resulted from an act of divine power that occurs in His mortal and passible body which must suffer and die.¹⁸⁸ Cf. *Sent.* III, d. 16, q. 2, a. 1.; Canty, *Light & Glory*, 197-208.

¹⁸⁹ In *Super Evangelium S. Matthaei lectura*, Thomas divides the whole Matthew's Gospel into three parts and locates the transfiguration narrative in the second part: The entrance (ingressu) of Christ's humanity into the world (Matthew 1-2); the course (processu) of His humanity in the world (Matthew 3-20); and His departure (egressu) from the world (Matthew 21-28). Cf. Canty, *Light & Glory*, 214-215.

¹⁹⁰ "Hic futuram gloriam revelavit, ubi erunt corpora clara et splendentia. Et haec claritas non erat ab essentia, sed ex claritate interioris anime plene caritate."

¹⁹¹ Canty, *Light & Glory*, 217.

¹⁹² Q. 45 comprises of four questions which address 'the fittingness of the transfiguration,' 'the clarity in Christ's transfigured body,' 'the witnesses of the transfiguration,' and 'the testimony of the Father's voice.' Cf. Canty, *Light & Glory*, 224. Canty points out the prominence of "fittingness" and its significant role in the questions, which was scarcely mentioned in the *Scriptum*.

¹⁹³ Canty, *Light & Glory*, 227.

¹⁹⁴ "Pia provisione factum est ut, contemplatione simpliciter manentis gaudi ad breve tempus delibata

“road,”¹⁹⁵ Thomas emphasized the transformative journey which involves the on-going mission of Christ-followers. He further mentioned the contemplative nature of the transfiguration, by quoting Bede’s saying that Christ’s transfiguration permits temporarily the contemplation of eternal joy.

In addition, the *sed contra* in a. 4 considers ‘the appropriateness of the testimony of Father’s voice’ to be heard. Thomas addressed adoptive sonship and the conformity to Christ’s image through baptism in which the operation of the whole Trinity was made manifest.¹⁹⁶ He linked the word of God heard at the scene of the transfiguration to Christ’s baptism in order to show diverse modes in which believers can participate in the likeness of the eternal sonship.¹⁹⁷ Thomas’ final response quotes Jesus’ saying to the three disciples, “*Rise, and fear not*” (Mt 17:9). Christ’s glory powerfully revealed in the transfiguration surpasses the sense and faculty of all mortal beings (cf. Ex 33:20). No human can bear to gaze on such great glory, due to its infirmity. However, Jesus’ language in Mt 17:9 heals the human frailty and brings human beings into

forties adverse tolerarent,” *Summa* III, q.45, a.1.

¹⁹⁵ The image of a road occurs two times in the passage: “Oportet autem ad hoc quod aliquis directe procedat in via,” “Et hoc praecipue necessarium est quando via est difficilis et aspera, et iter laboriosum, finis vero iucundus,” *Summa* III, q.45, a.1.

¹⁹⁶ “The adoption of the sons of God is through a certain conformity of image to the natural Son of God. Now this takes place in two ways: first, by the grace of the wayfarer, which is imperfect conformity; secondly, by glory, which is perfect conformity, according to 1 John 3:2: “We are now the sons of God, and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be: we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like to Him, because we shall see Him as He is. Since, therefore, it is in baptism that we acquire grace, while the clarity of the glory to come was foreshadowed in the transfiguration, therefore both in His baptism and in His transfiguration the natural sonship of Christ was fittingly made known by the testimony of the Father: because He alone with the Son and Holy Ghost is perfectly conscious of that perfect generation,” *Summa* III. q. 45, a. 4.

¹⁹⁷ “diversum modum quo homines participare possunt similitudinem filiationis aeternae,” *Summa* III. q. 45, a. 4, obj. 1.

glory.¹⁹⁸ His comforting language serves to encourage the disciples and strengthen their souls to follow in the way of His suffering.

3) An overview of the exegetical development after Thomas

After Thomas, *Nicholas de Lyra* (1270-1349, French Franciscan) carried out the exegetical principles of his predecessors effectively and brought to the Church the knowledge of Hebrew and rabbinical learning. Nicholas wrote *Postillae perpetuae in universam S. Scripturam* in Latin (1331), in which he stressed the literal sense of the transfiguration, rather than an allegorical or a mystical interpretation, and discussed the philosophy, grammar, and historical context of the text. He utilized all available sources, fully mastered the Hebrew, attempted to reconstruct the original texts, and drew from the valuable commentaries of the Jewish exegetes.¹⁹⁹

Hereafter, some new, meaningful changes entered into the exegetical studies in the late Middle Ages, and its influence extended into the exegetical development in the Modern Era. The influx of Greek scholars into Rome after the fall of Constantinople (1453), the invention of the printing press (the 1450s), the rise and spread of Protestantism (1510s -), and the publication of polyglot Bibles, gave renewed interest in the study of the transfiguration among scholars.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ *Summa* III. q. 45, a. 4, obj. 4.

¹⁹⁹ *Postillae perpetuae in universam S. Scripturam* is the first biblical commentary printed in Rome in 1471. The *Postillae* soon became a leading, influential manual of exegesis in the Middle Ages and early Modern times. It is known that Martin Luther and others owed much to it. Arguably, his approach is considered as an early glimmer of the techniques of textual criticism in modern term. Nevertheless, his works have not been fully studied or translated into modern languages yet. Cf. *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1913), Volume 11. "Nicholas of Lyra." by Thomas Bernard Plassmann, accessed March 8, 2017, [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_\(1913\)/Nicholas_of_Lyra](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_(1913)/Nicholas_of_Lyra).

²⁰⁰ Many scholars committed to acquiring a mastery of the biblical languages to compose a valuable

Furthermore, the gospel story of Christ's transfiguration continued to be the essential part of the Christian life, frequently annotated by pastors and favored by preachers for the liturgical use. In 1456, a universal feast of Christ's Transfiguration was made on August 6 by Pope Callixtus III to commemorate the victory of the Siege of Belgrade. From the fifteenth century, the Matthean transfiguration narrative was the standard gospel-lectionary until the post-Vatican II liturgical changes.²⁰¹ The Roman rite reads the transfiguration narrative on the second Sunday of Lent and August 6, forty days before the Feast of the Cross (September 14). This setting of the liturgical calendar shows that the classic Christological interpretation of Christ's transfiguration in close relation to His Crucifixion and Resurrection has descended into the modern approach.

In the Reformation period, historical criticism grew out of the Protestant reformation ideology, in wanting to free from the traditional interpretations of the Bible. In addition, 'seeing the face of Christ' began to be interpreted as 'hearing the gospel preached,' downplaying the significance of visual piety for transformation.²⁰² Martin Luther said, "Christ's kingdom is a hearing-kingdom, not a seeing-kingdom; for the eyes do not guide and lead us to where we find and get to know Christ, but rather the ears do this."²⁰³ Luther's conversion involved transformative encounters with the scriptural words, and upon his influence, the primacy of the word surpasses the significance of visual matters in most of the Reformation churches.

Despite such signs of changes, the transfiguration continued to be a significant subject,

commentary on the Scriptures: *Juan Maldonato* (1533/4-1583/4, Spanish Jesuit); *Robert Bellarmine* (1542-1621, Italian Jesuit); and *Cornelius a Lapide* (1567-1637, Flemish Jesuit).

²⁰¹ Kenneth Stevenson, "'Rooted in Detachment': Transfiguration as Narrative, Worship and Community of Faith," *Ecclesiology* 1.3 (2005): 15.

²⁰² Heath, *Paul's Visual Piety*, 21, 174.

²⁰³ Martin Luther, *Sermon delivered at Merseburg* (WA 51:11), in Heath, *Paul's Visual Piety*, 21.

keeping its centrality in the biblical studies during the modern times. *Antoine Calmet* (1672-1757, French Benedictine) wrote *Commentaire de la Bible* (1707-1716) in which he interpreted the transfiguration in connection with Mt 16:24-28 and as a prediction of His vengeance against the Jews through the arms of the Romans based on the historical context.²⁰⁴ He read that the transfiguration was made during the night and Moses and Elijah returned to the places where they await the second coming of the Messiah and the Resurrection or resurrection in general.²⁰⁵ In reflecting on the limits of modern historical criticism and redefining the literal sense of Scripture, *Henri de Lubac* (1896-1991) appealed to patristic and medieval exegeses, especially those of Origen, Jerome, and Augustine. His aim was to discern the historical reality of the literal and spiritual senses of the transfiguration.²⁰⁶ According to De Lubac, Christ's transfiguration is the concrete, historical reality of salvation history which contain and disclose the divine mystery of the Incarnate Logos and which are expressed linguistically and interpreted theologically by the commonly apprehensible words of the biblical texts.²⁰⁷

Most recently, John A. McGuckin, Brian E. Daley, Aaron Canty, Kari Kloos, and other

²⁰⁴ "Il parloit sans doute ou de la Transfiguration, ou de la vengeance qu'il devoit exercer contre les Juifs par les armes des Romains." Cf. *Sainte Bible en latin et en françois : avec des notes litterales, critiques et historiques, des préfaces et des dissertations, tirées du Commentaire de Dom Augustin Calmet, de Mr. l'abbé de Vence, & des auteurs les plus célèbres* (Paris: Chez Antoine Boudet, 1767-1773), vol. 13, 49, accessed March 8, 2017, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=pst.000023765467;view=1up;seq=65;size=175>.

²⁰⁵ "...les corps de Moïse et d'Elie, qui apparurent avec Jesus-Christ dans la Transfiguration, qui s'étant fait voir glorieux dans cette rencontre, rentrèrent l'un & l'autre dans leur état naturel ? Elie retourna au lieu où il attend le second avènement du Messie, & Moïse rentra dans son tombeau, pour y attendre cette résurrection particulière ou la résurrection generale," *Sainte Bible en latin et en françois* vol. 13, 503. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=pst.000023765467;view=1up;seq=519>.

²⁰⁶ Cf. William M. Wright, "The Literal Sense of Scripture according to Henri de Lubac: Insights from Patristic Exegesis of the Transfiguration," *Modern Theology* 28 (2012): 254-272.

²⁰⁷ Wright, "The Literal Sense of Scripture according to Henri de Lubac," 253.

scholars have dedicated themselves to studying early treatises on Christ's transfiguration with their mastery of the biblical languages. Many other scholars, including John W. Wand, Alexander Jones, Andreas Andreopoulos, Anita Strezova, Dorothy Lee, John P. Heil, and Simon Lee, have contributed to the modern understanding of the transfiguration. Although Christ's transfiguration holds the long and honorable tradition, it needs to be more studied and to implement continuous transformation in the Christian living through a better understanding of the mystery of the transfiguration.

CHAPTER III

Christ's Transfiguration in the Consecrated Life and Sensory Experience in Contemplating Matthew 17:1-9

Exploring the exegetical development of Christ's transfiguration, it is obvious that the transfiguration has played a key role in forming the Christian faith and spirituality throughout history. Recently, the Church has shown particular interest in relating Matthean transfiguration story to the meaning of consecrated life through the Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata* (1996). *Vita Consecrata* is one of many works which looked into the significance of consecrated life for the Church and for the world. The Exhortation was reflected by Pope John Paul II, which confirmed and extended the evangelical teaching contained in the Church's Tradition, especially in the Magisterium of the Second Vatican Council, from *Lumen Gentium* (1964) to *Perfectae Caritatis* (1965), and in the spirit of the *Code of Canon Law*.

Following *Vita Consecrata*, the Church has continued to encourage further reflections on the consecrated life and provided up-to-date guidelines for formation, vocation promotion, and new forms of consecration. The Church has presented new insights not only through sermons, homilies, or letters but various occasions like *Start Afresh from Christ* (2002),²⁰⁸ *Joy of the Gospel* (2014),²⁰⁹ the promulgation of the Year of Consecrated Life (Nov. 30, 2014 – Feb. 2, 2016), and *Vultum Dei Quaerere* (2016).²¹⁰ All has been a valuable aid and a sure guide in

²⁰⁸ *Starting Afresh from Christ* emphasizes a renewed commitment to the consecrated life in the third millennium, issued by Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in 2002.

²⁰⁹ *Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)* is Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis to the bishops, clergy, consecrated persons and the lay faithful on the proclamation of the gospel in today's world.

²¹⁰ "Vultum Dei Quaerere" (*Seeking the Face of God*) is Pope Francis' Apostolic Constitution on

stating the means for faithfully and creatively living the consecrated life in the midst of humanity.

1. The Transfiguration of Christ in *Vita Consecrata* (VC)

1.1 The Purpose of *Vita Consecrata* (1996)²¹¹

The main purpose of *Vita Consecrata* is to encourage the renewal of the consecrated life and to increase the hope and joy of the whole people of God (VC, 13). Pope John Paul II says, “The spiritual and apostolic contributions of revitalized consecrated life encourage believers to commit themselves with fresh enthusiasm.”²¹² He hopes that this Exhortation leads to a deeper understanding of the great gift of the consecrated life and encourages all consecrated women and men to be actively engaged in directing the Church and the world to the Kingdom of God.

1.2 The Four Features of *Vita Consecrata*

First, *Vita Consecrata* provides a unique and profound interpretation of Matthew’s transfiguration narrative. This is the one and only Apostolic Exhortation which presents an exegesis of the transfiguration to articulate the meaning of consecrated life. The exegesis in *Vita Consecrata* balances the spiritual, christological, eschatological, and ecclesial implications of the transfiguration in consonance with the traditions in East and West. This Exhortation is regarded

Women’s Contemplative Life.

²¹¹ Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (25 March, 1996). *Vita Consecrata* confirms and extends the previous evangelical teachings and theological reflections on the consecrated life. Specifically, it responds to the desire expressed by the Ninth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops held in 1994.

²¹² John Paul II says, “As they become better acquainted with the consecrated life, they will be able with greater awareness to thank Almighty God for this great gift,” *Vita Consecrata*, 13.

as the most significant and necessary point of reference that is guiding the path of fidelity and renewal of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.²¹³

Second, *Vita Consecrata* emphasizes *the Christological and ecclesial dimensions of consecrated life in a Trinitarian theological perspective*, shedding new light on the theology of consecration, of communion in community, and of mission. In a Trinitarian perspective, *Vita Consecrata* shows a strong Christological emphasis that marks Peter's words, "Lord, it is well that we are here" (Mt 17:4). This confirms the teaching of *Lumen Gentium* (1964) which powerfully presented the Christ-like image of consecrated life, saying that "the profession of the evangelical counsels has the power to conform Christians more fully to Christ, and that the Church truly shows forth Christ through them."²¹⁴ It emphasizes that the first duty of consecrated persons, as witnesses of the fidelity to Christ like the chosen disciples at the transfiguration, is to make visible the marvels and beauty of God to human family through the Holy Spirit.²¹⁵

Third, *Vita Consecrata* presents the marked characteristics of the consecrated life by using *various symbols and sensory descriptions*. The rhetorical sensory images serve to communicate and to motivate those who see them or listen to them.²¹⁶ Bringing images before the reader's mind, *Vita Consecrata* describes the consecrated life as a tangible and visible reality, neither abstract nor marginalized. (cf. *VC*, 3). The consecrated life is first described as "a gift of

²¹³ Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium* (2002), 3.

²¹⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, chap. 4, 46.

²¹⁵ *VC*, 8, 15, 20. Cf. "Vultum Dei Quaerere" also says that Peter's desire to be with Christ in Mt 17:4 has a special meaning for all consecrated persons, especially the contemplative life, 1-3.

²¹⁶ David G. Horrell; Bradley Arnold; Travis B. Williams, "Visuality, Vivid Description, and the Message of 1 Peter: The Significance of the Roaring Lion (1 Peter 5:8)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132, no. 3 (2013): 698.

God” given to the Church through the Holy Spirit, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ posed by the Gospel (*VC*, 1). People who have called to the life of consecration commit themselves as “a gift of self” for the sake of human family through the variety of charisms and institutions (*VC*, 2- 3).²¹⁷ In addition, the consecrated life is “a sign of God” shared by all of Christ’s disciples (*VC*, 2-3) and a “witness” to God’s plan of salvation for all (cf. *VC*, 7-10, 35).

These images of ‘sign’ and ‘witness’ are most favored and frequently used by the Church and theologians. The Decree of *Lumen Gentium* (1964) saw the profession of the evangelical counsels as ‘a sign’ which can and ought to attract all the members of the Church to an effective and prompt fulfillment of the duties of their Christian vocation.²¹⁸ The Symposium (2005), held on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of *Perfectae Caritatis* (1965), recreated some guidelines that help consecrated persons to be ‘witnesses of God's transfiguring presence.’²¹⁹ Most recently, *Vultum Dei Quaerere* (2016) emphasizes that consecrated persons are exclusively called to seek God’s face and offer the world Christ’s life as “a credible and trustworthy sign,” thus becoming “a living ‘exegesis’ of God’s word.”²²⁰

²¹⁷ Cf. “The purpose of the religious life is to help the members follow Christ and be united to God through the profession of the evangelical counsels,” Pope Paul VI, *Perfectae Caritatis*, Decree on the adaptation and renewal of religious life (October 28, 1965), 2. e.

²¹⁸ The Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (November 21, 1964), chap. VI, n. 44. Cf. “The Second Vatican Council was undoubtedly a historical turning point in theological reflection on the consecrated life. No Ecumenical Council had ever spoken at such length and with such depth of this important charism in the Church,” Archbishop Franc Rodé, “Renewing Religious life, attaining perfect love,” on occasion of the 40th anniversary of *Perfectae Caritatis*, Congregation for institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life (2005).

²¹⁹ Rodé, “Renewing Religious life, attaining perfect love.”

²²⁰ Pope Francis, “*Vultum Dei Quaerere*” : Apostolic Constitution on Women’s Contemplative Life (June 29, 2016): 2, accessed January 21, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/papa-francesco_costituzione-ap_20160629_vultum-dei-quaerere.html.

In addition, T. Radcliffe, a Dominican friar theologian, hopes that today's consecrated life will be "a sign of hope" and "a sign of the Kingdom" for the whole humanity which faces a severe crisis of hope for future.²²¹ His insight is that the presence of consecrated life is an explicit sign that indicates the truth of the human vocation to say 'Yes' to God's call and to each other's call. With the 'fiat'²²² said by consecrated persons, the vocation of all humanity is made visible in the world. In obedience to God, they live with the uncertainty of the world in joy, embracing crisis in trust that it will bear fruit.²²³ Joyful life in the midst of crisis is a sign of hope for those who see no future ahead of them. Radcliffe further emphasizes that the consecrated life is a sign of the Kingdom, which is mysteriously present here on earth; when Christ comes, it will reach its full expression.²²⁴ Prophetically, consecrated persons refuse the security of making their home with people who are like them because they are called out of their own boundaries, sent on mission, as a sign of God's boundless love for the whole human family. The consecrated life is an eschatological sign of living the life in the Kingdom which has already begun but yet to come.

Fourth and last, the consecrated life is expected to be a sign of *the organic unity of the commandment of love* in the inseparable link between love of God and love of neighbor, which brings forth abundant fruit in every season of the Church's life (*VC*, 5). *Vita Consecrata* visualizes the consecrated life using the metaphors like 'plant' and 'leaven,' which reminds of each and every aspect of life: birth, growing, communion with other parts, rootedness into its source, and dying. These metaphors symbolize the present journey of consecrated persons, living

²²¹ Cf. Timothy Radcliffe, O.P., "The Future of Religious Life: Called To Be Signs of Hope," *Canadian Religious Conference* (June 6, 2008): 1-8.

²²² It means, 'Let it be done' in Latin.

²²³ Cf. Radcliffe, "The Future of Religious Life," 2-4.

²²⁴ The Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 39.

and dying with-in Christ, towards the fullness of life in the Kingdom. Rooted in the example and teaching of Christ, they walk on the path with their eyes fixed on the future restoration of all things in Him, announcing the glory of heaven in advance.²²⁵

1.3. The Significance of the Transfiguration for the Consecrated Life

Just as the Church Fathers often relied on highly visual metaphors in their reflections on the transfiguration, *Vita Consecrata* also attaches the metaphoric imageries to what Christ's transfiguration teaches about the consecrated life. Chapter I of *Vita Consecrata* rereads the transfiguration narrative in Matthew 17:1-9 to state concretely the meaning of the consecrated life, of communion in community, and of its mission. The teaching in *Vita Consecrata* 14-40 addresses five key topics:

First of all, *Vita Consecrata* sees that the origins of the consecrated life are found *in the mystery and communion of the Trinity*. Christ's transfiguration is exceptionally helpful to get an overall picture of the Trinitarian characteristic of the consecrated life.²²⁶ The consecrated life is always the initiative of the Father ("A Patre ad Patrem," *VC*, 17), is a specific call to totally conform to the Son in following His footsteps ("Per Filium," *VC*, 18), and is consecrated by the Holy Spirit ("In Spiritu," *VC*, 19).²²⁷ The profession of the evangelical counsels is "a gift of the

²²⁵ *Vita Consecrata*, 59; *Code of Canon Law*, can. 573. § 1; "Vultum Dei Quaerere," 2.

²²⁶ "This special way of "following Christ," at the origin of which is always the initiative of the Father, has an essential Christological and pneumatological meaning: it expresses in a particularly vivid way the Trinitarian nature of the Christian life and it anticipates in a certain way that eschatological fulfillment towards which the whole Church is tending," *Vita Consecrata*, 14.

²²⁷ Cf. "Throughout the history of the Church, Consecrated Life has been a living presence of the action of the Spirit, a privileged space of the absolute love for God and others, a witnessing of the divine plan to gather all of humanity within the civilization of love, the great family of the children of

Trinity.” (*VC*, 20) The transfiguration is God’s call to live chastity with an undivided heart and placing Christ above every other love. The disciples’ fear in awe before the all-powerful God is an indication of living poverty in humility and trust in God’s goodness. The disciples’ contemplation of the transfiguration reveals to consecrated persons God’s special call to participate in the obedience of Christ: “*This is my beloved Son: listen to him!*” (Mt 17:5). In living the evangelical counsels faithfully, consecrated persons experience the transformative power of the Holy Spirit like “*A bright cloud overshadowed them*” (Mt 17:5), which leads them to the profound “configuration to Christ” (*VC*, 19-20). The consecrated life is thus a call to be transformed into a special sign and confession of the Trinity, which bears joyful witness to God’s loving concerns for every human person and share in the communion of the Trinity (cf. *VC*, 16; 21).

Secondly, *Vita Consecrata* attaches the significance of the transfiguration to *both contemplative and active aspects* of the consecrated life. It sees that the transfiguration is not only a revelation of Christ’s light and glory but also a preparation for setting off the way of His Cross. The transfiguration suggests the dynamics of “going up the mountain” to be surrounded by the Trinitarian life and “coming down the mountain” to see Christ in the lowliness of His humanity and follow the way of the Cross (*VC*, 14).²²⁸ The transfiguration is a pivotal event,

God,” Ninth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, “Concluding Message” (October 27, 1994).

²²⁸ Many authors, particularly Origen and Augustine and Thomas, have discussed the dynamics on the journey of transformation. In the *Commentary on Matthew XII: 43*, Origen mentions the transfiguration scene as the perfect tableau of the coming together of divine descent and human ascent. He emphasizes that the mature believers may attain to an epiphany on the mountain of spiritual experience, but then must come down to the real world of ascetical and contemplative struggle to assist Christ in the work of their salvation. Also, Augustine’s *De Trinitate* (cf. thesis chap. II, p. 14-17) and Thomas’ *Summa theologiae* III, q. 45, a. 1 (cf. thesis chap. II, p. 20-21) discuss the

which links God with humanity, contemplation with action, body to spirit, suffering and glory, and faith with life.

Third, Christ's transfiguration speaks of *visual significance* for the faith and transformation of the disciples, which affects others. Consecrated persons are called to see Christ with a gaze of faith and to live out devotion for others in the humility of a hidden life and sacrifice, as Christ did while on earth. Like the three chosen disciples, by fixing their eyes on the transfigured Christ they are confirmed in faith and avoid being discouraged by His disfigured face on the Cross. This foreshadows the Kingdom as "a living eschatological sign" that indicates the Christian hope of a new future (*VC*, 16, 26-27). In addition, the markers of consecrated persons, including the cross, modest clothing or habit, collar, and ring, are the outward sign that recalls the garment of Christ, reminds the world of their otherness, and expresses their specific acceptance of the life of the evangelical counsels.²²⁹

Fourth, *Vita Consecrata* draws readers attention to the particular dimension of "we" marked in Peter's words: "*It is well that we are here*" (Mt 17:4). This focus on "we" is to consider the place which the consecrated life occupies in the mystery of the Church. The word

dynamics in the transformative journey of Christian believers.

²²⁹ Cf. Herbert. W. Basser; Marsha Cohen, *The Gospel of Matthew and Judaic Tradition: A relevance-based community* (Boston: Brill, 2015), 437. The Jewish religious clothing, such as 'tallit (shawl),' 'tzitzit (tassels),' and 'tefillin (a small black container of scrolls),' serve as the sign and reminder that God's saving act – the Exodus. The word tzitzit means *shining*, and the Midrash understands the fringes that Israel is now commanded to wear shining *with the light of the divine*. The Rabbinic Jews dye tzitzit with blue-violet called 'tekhelet' (Numbers 15:37-38). In Rabbinic Judaism, blue is generally considered as the color of God's glory. According to Rabbinic sages, tzitzit is found worthy of beholding God's presence: "Said Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: When a person rises in the morning and dons the *tefillin* and *tzitzit* ... the Divine Presence dwells upon this person and proclaims: "You are My servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified!," Zohar Chadash, Terumah 41d.

“we” bespeaks “the mystique of living together, of embracing and supporting each other.”²³⁰ If consecrated persons take this route of “we” together with brothers and sisters, the ecclesial dynamism of the special vocation will be an antidote to indifference and to individualism.²³¹ In addition, *Vita Consecrata* stresses the otherness and distinctive character of the consecrated life in the mystery of the Church, as well as the unity of the Christian life. The consecrated life, like the other vocations (the laity and ordained ministers), is born within the Church, nourished in and for the Church, and is sustained and expressed by the Church.²³² United with one another in the Christian life, the various vocations, like many rays of the one light of Christ, reflect the mystery of Christ through their own different characters: the laity (the mystery of the Incarnate Word); ordained ministers (the living images of Christ); and consecrated people (the Incarnate Son who is the eschatological goal, the most splendor light, and the infinite light).²³³

Finally, *Vita Consecrata* pays attention to Matthew’s wording in Mt 17:6: “*When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with fear.*” It expresses the sense of fear which overcomes the disciples’ fascination at the light and beauty of the transfigured Christ. Consecrated persons are called by God to “*listen to*” Christ (Mt 17:5), have the profound yearning for complete conversion and holiness, and become a transfigured being (*VC*, 35) who

²³⁰ Pope Francis, *Joy of the Gospel*, 87.

²³¹ Pope Francis, “Message of Pope Francis on the occasion of the 53rd world day of prayer for vocations: The Church, Mother of Vocations” (November 29, 2015), accessed January 20, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/vocations/documents/papa-francesco_20151129_53-messaggio-giornata-mondiale-vocazioni.html.

²³² Pope Francis, “Message of Pope Francis on the occasion of the 54th world day of prayer for vocations: Led by the Spirit for Mission” (November 27, 2016), accessed January 20, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/vocations/documents/papa-francesco_20161127_54-messaggio-giornata-mondiale-vocazioni.html.

²³³ *Vita Consecrata*, 16.

lives fully in and for Christ. *Vita Consecrata* makes five important points concerning this transformative progression to holiness:

1) The profession of the evangelical counsels is a “*special path to holiness and a transfigured life,*” guided by the Holy Spirit (*VC*, 35; 37). By living chastity, poverty, and obedience, consecrated persons are able to bear witness to the transfigured Christ to inspire others to conform themselves to Him. 2) There is the deep need for “*faithfulness to the founding charism and subsequent spiritual heritage of each institute*” because every charism leads to God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit (*VC*, 36).²³⁴ 3) In accordance with each charism, all consecrated men and women *respond to the new signs and different needs of the times* in courage, creative fidelity, and competence in their mission. 4) God’s call to a transfigured life is cultivated in *prayers, spiritual activities, and ascetic practices*. Seeing God means coming down the mountain of spiritual combat with a radiant face and a contemplative heart, which is “a powerful aid to authentic progress in holiness”²³⁵ (*VC*, 38). 5) A renewed commitment of consecrated persons to holiness is *the means of fostering every Christian’s true longing for perfection* (*VC*, 39). Locating Christ at the center of their lives means descending from the

²³⁴ “Renewal of the consecrated life, as the Council described it, should be lived through a return to the sources that are represented primarily by Sacred Scripture, hence, by the very person of Christ, and subsequently by the authentic charism of founders,” Rodé, “Renewing Religious life, attaining perfect love.”

“The renewal of the Religious life...comprises both a constant return to the sources of the whole of the Christian life and to the primitive inspiration of the Institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time,” *Perfecte Caritatis*, 2.

²³⁵ Pope Benedict XVI says, “It is necessary to make the word “holiness” a common word, not something exceptional, one that not only designates heroic degrees of Christian life, but that shows in the reality of everyday a decisive response and openness to the action of the Holy Spirit,” “Message to Participants in the 14th General Assembly of Italian Catholic Action” (May 6, 2011).

mountain with Christ and following Him with brothers and sisters. Their ever-renewed longing for perfection inspires people to keep going for the life of perfection.

2. The Senses and Enactive Experience in contemplating Matthew 17:1-9

After studying Matthew 17:1-9 in the three aspects: modern scholarship, history, and the consecrated life, it is necessary for consecrated persons to explore the role of sensory, emotional perception in contemplating the transfiguration narrative. The significant place of senses and emotions in the narrative stands out from the exegetical study in chapter one. The emphasis on the contemplative aspect of the transfiguration is marked in the multiple interpretations of the Church Fathers. However, there still is need to give more attention to how sensory experience plays an important positive role in contemplating the narrative in depth. This study is helped by a recent trend of cognitive study for an embodied reading of Matthew 17:1-9.

Today, we are bombarded with a rush of the current culture which excites all our senses and affects our psychological, spiritual, and physical states, positively or negatively. We become more and more knowledgeable, enthusiastic recipients of new information, but other times we are bewildered by illusory images and wrong information which distance our eyes from truth and reality. In multiple ways, our intellectual minds, emotions, and senses experience the effects of today's convoluted and stimulating culture.

As children of this age, consecrated persons also sense and experience the impacts of the culture which offer positive values and new possibilities, which can also limit, condition, and harm their perception of God and ways of living.²³⁶ The embodied aspect of sensory experience is intrinsically and deeply associated with their faith and contemplative life. Pope Francis points

²³⁶ Pope Francis, *Joy of the Gospel*, 77.

out that the great challenge faced by consecrated persons is to persevere in seeking God with the eyes of faith in a world which ignores the presence of God and to continue to offer the world Christ's life of chastity, poverty, and obedience as a credible and trustworthy sign, thus becoming a living exegesis of God's word.²³⁷ This call to become "a living exegesis" of the Word requires consecrated persons to develop the contemplative life in a holistic way, with mind and body.

2.1. A Fresh Angle for Contemplation in relation to Cognitive Study

Yael Avrahami observes that until recently biblical scholarship was largely limited to lexical discussion, sporadic verses, or tangible areas with little interest in the study of senses and non-verbal communication. Since several studies, including S. Levin, and M. Malul, and M. Gruber, on sensory and non-verbal motifs in the biblical legal system, scholarship has given greater focus to the sensory experiences embedded in the scriptural text.²³⁸ They discard the traditional body-mind dichotomy and heighten the idea that human sensory and cognitive perception has a close association with our readings and contemplation of the biblical narratives.

It has been reported that mental imagery is one of the commonest things we remember about our narrative reading. Images in our minds correlate with various other dimensions of our response.²³⁹ Inspired by the striking progress in cognitive science, there has been a growing zone of contact between literary studies and cognitive research in twenty-first-century mind.²⁴⁰

²³⁷ Pope Francis, "Vultum Dei Quaerere," 2.

²³⁸ Cf. Yael Avrahami, *The Sense of Scripture: Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible* (NY: T & T Clark, 2012), 17-19. 22-23.

²³⁹ Cf. Anežka Kuzmicová, "Literary Narrative and Mental Imagery: A View from Embodied Cognition," *Style* 48. 3 (Stockholm University, Fall 2014): 274.

²⁴⁰ Alan Richardson, "Imagination: Literary and Cognitive Intersections," *Oxford Handbook of Cognitive*

Some scholars have recently suggested a new rhetorical reading of the epiphanic narratives, based on the recent trend of cognitive studies to analyze literature. The focus of their discussion is on the narrator's interactive and multi-sensorial perception, so-called, “*embodied*” and “*enactive perception*.”²⁴¹ They convincingly argue that our readings and contemplations are pretty much informed by our embodied perception and imagination which interact with one another.

The term ‘embodied’ is a newly defined model in recent cognitive science which suggests human perception is shaped by the interaction of body and mind with the inclusion of the different senses and emotions, not purely by visual or by abstract, propositional representations.²⁴² It stresses the role of the body in human cognition. The emphasis on the interaction of mind and body in the recent cognitive study looks like a radical departure from a tendency of today's world which segments human body into a disparate, isolated thing, not a whole complementary, interconnected, living organ. It has a great deal of significance because we experience the same pattern of disparity and isolation occurs in our relationships and our encounters with God. According to the biblical epistemology, human sense is the divinely created physical experience: “The hearing ear and the seeing eye – the Lord has made them both” (Prov 20:12).²⁴³ Although prominence is given to hearing and sight in the Bible, it is reasonable to assume that all human senses are divinely created as the essential part of human vitality,

Literary Studies, ed. Lisa Zunshine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 225; Aldo Tagliabue, “An Embodied Reading of Epiphanies in Aelius Aristides’ Sacred Tales,” *Ramus* 45(2) (Aureal Publications, 2016): 214. Tagliabue names some significant scholars who use cognitive studies to analyze literature in her footnotes.

²⁴¹ Cf. Tagliabue, “An Embodied Reading of Epiphanies in Aelius Aristides’ Sacred Tales,” 213-14.

²⁴² Tagliabue, “An Embodied Reading of Epiphanies in Aelius Aristides’ Sacred Tales,” 214.

²⁴³ Avrahami, *The Sense of Scripture*, 195, 221.

knowledge, understanding, and contemplation. In the belief in the divine creation of senses, consecrated persons need to challenge the widespread rupture and division, by approaching to sensory perception in a positive and holistic manner.

Some scholars, including E. Thompson, S. Hurley, K. O'Regan, A. Noë and A. Tagliabue, stress the role of bodily sense in human perception and identify a subcategory, the '*enactive perception*.' Alva Noë argues for the enactive perception in a conviction that sensory perception is 'something we do,' not a mental state that only serves as an input to action. For him, the enactive perception is 'a thoughtful activity,' a kind of action and a way of thinking about the world.²⁴⁴ For Tagliabue, more specific enactive perception is expressed by 'kinetic style,' namely 'references to movement, gesture, action.'²⁴⁵ His argument is based on Noë's definition that human perception of any object is made possible if one gets close to and moves around it. In other words, we perceive the world through our physical movement and interaction with a given object in a precise environment.²⁴⁶

2.2. Embodied Reading of Matthew 17:1-9

The recent cognitive study fits into not only scholarly analysis of literature but also the renewal of consecrated persons to fully engage in their daily practice of contemplation and reading the biblical narratives. Matthew's transfiguration story conveys the interactive and multi-sensorial perception of the disciples presented by the omniscient narrator. The transfiguration event is described by concrete, different senses and emotions of the disciples which shape their

²⁴⁴ Dialectic, "Pace-Noë's Action in Perception," review of *Action in Perception*, by Alva Noë(2004), The blog of the University of Newcastle Philosophy Club, November 21, 2005.

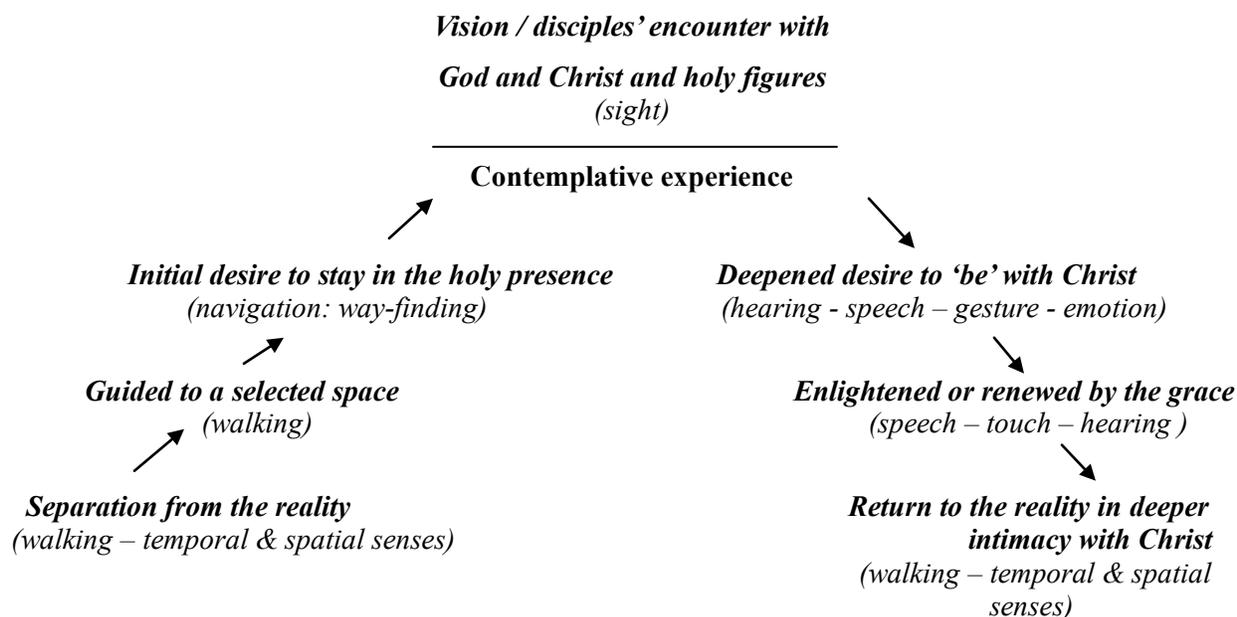
<http://uniofnewphilosophyclub.blogsopt.kr/2005/11/pace-nos-action-in-perception.html?m=1>.

²⁴⁵ Cf. Tagliabue, "An Embodied Reading of Epiphanies in Aelius Aristides' Sacred Tales," 213-214.

²⁴⁶ Tagliabue, "An Embodied Reading of Epiphanies in Aelius Aristides' Sacred Tales," 214.

perception and knowledge of Christ. The relevance of sensory perception in the transfiguration story can be seen in two aspects: 1) the kinetic structure and the enactive perception, and 2) the prayer's sensory experiences in contemplation.

1) The Kinetic Structure and the Enactive Perception



The kinetic structure and enactive perception in the transfiguration narrative fit into the whole content of contemplation, which is not clearly identified in the chiasmic structure. The structure tells by itself about the journey of transformation and of contemplation; *navigating through space and time - the pinnacle of the journey: the contemplative experience of Christ's light - the transformation informed by the experience - the return to the reality*. The navigation is to get close to and moves around the center of the journey through time and space. Human senses are also involved in this journey of the transfiguration: sight, hearing, walking, speech, gesture, emotion, touch, and way-finding.

The starting and ending points of the journey are the same – fundamentally rooted in

the ground of reality. However, the experience at the high mountain made a huge difference to the disciples' faith in Christ – the transformation. The sequence of the journey is determined by each critical connecting point in which Matthew's sensory perception is expressed by the visual and auditory imagery, kinesthetic style, verbal or non-verbal expression, and presentation of the disciples' feeling.

Contemplation can be described as a '*way-finding*' with great spiritual intensity in the life of consecrated persons. In Eastern point of view, any form of life that is religious or consecrated is considered to be the life of finding or navigating ways.²⁴⁷ It may safely be said that consecrated persons are 'way-finders' who navigate and pave ways for themselves and for others on the journey destined to the Origin of truth and Perfection. Consecrated persons as way-finders are called to the positive signs that directly and adequately guide people to the destination.

Nancy Easterlin mentions the human cognitive predisposition of 'way-finding' in her literary studies on the implications of travel narratives, structured around journeys through space.²⁴⁸ She sees that the cognitive work involved in navigation significantly overlaps with the memory-imagination network. In other words, the sense of movement through space blends with movement through time and navigation draws on vivid episodic memories of spots along the way.²⁴⁹ The foot journey of Christ and the disciples from familiar environments to unpredictable environments along the mountain route – and the return – created a significant episodic memory in their minds and brains. By recounting the narrated journey in contemplation, consecrated persons enact the journey through imagination, which empowers to continue their way-findings

²⁴⁷ A consecrated person is called in Korean language a "su-do-ja": "su" means 'finding / paving / navigating,' "do" is a 'way,' and 'ja' refers to a 'person.'

²⁴⁸ Cf. Nancy Easterlin, "Cognitive Ecocriticism: Human Wayfinding, Sociality, and Literary Interpretation," in Zunshine, *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural studies*, 257-73.

²⁴⁹ Richardson, "Imagination," 237.

beyond the uncertainty and obstacles of the world.

2) Sensory Experience of the Prayer in Contemplation of Mt 17:1-9

- **Separation from the reality and Going up to a chosen place (Mt 17:1).** This introductory scene indicates that contemplation is not a static state but ‘an active journey’ in which the embodied senses interact with the spiritual mind. Unlike the three disciples, none of us today is allowed to live on the mountain of the transfiguration. We are on a constant journey of faith, moving ahead more in shadows than in light. For this very reason, we hope to be guided by the light of God so that we may not stumble but continue walking in His light. However, this does not necessarily mean that we should remain a passive manner to encounter God in both contemplation and life.

Once informed by the careful reading of the biblical narrative, prayers begin to navigate actively a route to get closer to the scene, by mobilizing all their senses with all their hearts and mind. Morton Kelsey, in tune with St. Teresa of Avila and St. John the Cross, calls this type of prayer ‘centering prayer’ in which prayers make active efforts to enter the Center and wait to be touched by God.²⁵⁰ Kelsey’s notion of centering prayer contains both active and passive aspects of contemplation. The activeness in navigation is an essential part to have the definite moment of contemplative experience that is mystic and passive.

²⁵⁰ Cf. E. Larkin, O. Carm, “St. Teresa of Avila and Centering Prayer”: 390-394, accessed March 22, 2017, <http://carmelnet.org/larkin/larkin083.pdf>. The term ‘centering prayer’ is new but an old reality, originating with Thomas Merton, and developed by Basil Pennington, Thomas Keating, and John Main. This form of prayer seeks to maintain a contemplative contact with God beyond any particular images and concepts through the use of the holy word or mantra. Thomas E. Clarke put centering prayer in a broader category and suggested new models of centering prayer guided by imagery and concept. Kelsey, on the contrary, proposes here ‘imageless centering prayer,’ by distinguishing meditative use of image and contemplation.

In contemplation, through embodied senses prayers reenact the same experience which the three disciples had in a tangible way. To begin with, the sense of walking, temporal and spatial references presented in Mt 17:1 match with prayers' separation from busy life and their engagement with a quiet place and time. In this stage, they may share the same expectation and questions which the three disciples might have raised while walking up to the mountain. They can ask Christ for conversation, just as the three disciples would have done so. In the Bible, walking is often linked to other sensory actions, particularly the senses of attentive listening and sight: "Today you have obtained the LORD's agreement: to be your God; and for you to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, his commandments, and his ordinances, and to obey him" (Deut 26:17); "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps 119: 105). In the NT, Luke links the sense of walking to personal acquiring of knowledge and to hearing and sight. The resurrected Christ came near and conversed with the two disciples while they were walking. They listened to Christ who interpreted the things about himself in all the scriptures and recognized him when he shared bread with them (cf. Lk 24:13-35).²⁵¹

All the sensory perception in Mt 17:1, both implicitly and explicitly, stimulates prayers' embodied senses and imagination through additional information about the transformative journey. They might smell the scents of mountain and air, feel the atmosphere given to the time and tickling sensation in their feet and other parts of their body, and share emotional feelings of Christ and the disciples. These sensory experiences draw one's mind close to the narrative environment, by the interaction between imagination and embodied senses. In this phase of contemplation, according to Richardson, prayers navigate by projecting themselves forward both in space and time of the narrative, especially in relation to the metaphor of foot travel through

²⁵¹ See also, Ps 81:13-14; Jer 7:23-24, 32:23; Prov 8:32, 12:15; Ps 56:14, 66:5, 141:1; Jn 1:39.

unpredictable environments, calculating times along with routes.²⁵²

- **Initial desire to stay in the holy presence - ‘Encounter’ with the light of Christ and the holy figures – Strengthened wish to ‘be’ with Christ (Mt 17:2-5).** In this pericope, the narrator’s perception further develops by interacting with the external senses (the visual, the auditory, and the tactile sense) and the internal senses (gestures, reactions, emotional upwelling, and fear).²⁵³ Before entering within the transfiguration event, though the narrator does not explicitly mention, prayers can imagine the three disciples’ aspiration to follow Christ wherever he may go and stay with him. The genuine desire to be with Christ is the prerequisite for good contemplation. St. Teresa of Avila says, “Contemplation is a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Christ who we know loves us.”²⁵⁴ Without the mind and heart that is open to the grace and divine will, it is impossible to recognize a surprise gift of God given during the time of contemplation.

In the transfiguration scene (Mt 17:2), sight is the key sense for proving that the legal event took place, by creating a memory of the transfiguration event and extending it apart from the boundaries of the time and place it happened and of people involved.²⁵⁵ The perception with the disciples’ eyes represents direct, undeniable experience of Christ’s transfiguration. None of us today can see directly the dazzling light of the transfigured face of Christ as the three disciples did, however, as Pope Benedict XVI rightly points out, the same contemplation can come about

²⁵² A. Richardson, “Imagination,” 236.

²⁵³ Cf. Kuzmicová, “Literary Narrative and Mental Imagery,” 276.

²⁵⁴ St. Teresa of Jesus, *The Book of Her Life, 8, 5 in The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, tr. K. Kavanaugh, OCD, and O. Rodriguez, OCD (Washington DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1976), 1, 67; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2709.

²⁵⁵ Cf. Avrahami, *The Sense of Scripture*, 237.

because the interior light is kindled in prayers by the Word of God.²⁵⁶ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* insightfully attaches sight to hearing sense. It claims that contemplative prayer is the hearing the Word of God who speaks to people through Christ, and words in this kind of prayer are not speeches; they are like kindling that feeds the fire of love,²⁵⁷ which is seen by a gaze of faith, a spiritual eye fixed on the mysteries of the life of Christ.

At a certain point in contemplation, just as the disciples were mesmerized and lost by the dazzling light of the transfigured Christ, prayers experience being surrounded by the light and drawn into the Center for deeper personal contact with God and true self. This contemplative experience is passive, mystic, imageless, and a pure gift from God. Kelsey explains, “When contemplation occurs, there is “total silence in darkness.” The prayer is to “remain quiet, receptive,” even stopping the mantra according to one school of thought. There is no need to split hairs and define exactly when centering prayer leaves off and contemplation begins. Centering prayer is active prayer, contemplation is passive, and the incipient contemplative will often be at a loss to distinguish the two moments.”²⁵⁸

The meaning of the appearance of Moses and Elijah in Mt 17:3 can be sought in our belief in the communion with the saints or who have gone before us. We have seen that Matthew’s presentation of the two figures, as well as that of the disciples, is positive. Together with the holy ones who accomplished earthly journey and rest in glory, the disciples on earth share the light and beauty of Christ. There is a timeless message of ‘inclusivity and hope’ in this scene, which was designed to gather and unite all people of the past, of the present, and of future.

²⁵⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, “Angelus” (March 12, 2006).

²⁵⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2716-2717.

²⁵⁸ E. Larkin, O. Carm, “St. Teresa of Avila and Centering Prayer,” 394. The Ignatian spirituality speaks of ‘*apophatic*’ and ‘*kataphatic*’ techniques. Some compare centering prayer to kataphatic prayer and contemplation to apophatic prayer.

Matthew's insight of unity and continuity is specifically expressed in the transfiguration narrative.

The narrator's sentiment expressed in Mt 17:3 informs us never to be discouraged by the demands and realities of consecrated life in today's context. We are called by God to follow Christ who neither avoided taking risks nor confronting critical situations. The crisis of today offers us an opportunity to deepen their intimacy with God, be a sign of His presence while on earth, and share the eternal joy and peace which the holy possesses. While keep praying for more vocations, we must remain steadfast in hope and belief that consecrated life will never stop being transformed into the very image of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 3:18) until the life reaches its final fulfillment in God. Our life is ultimately directed to the final surrender of their whole being to Him in death by the grace of God.²⁵⁹

The verbal and motional expression is the essential part of our faith. Some might say that Peter's appreciation of being there and his wish to erect the tents on the mountain top (Mt 17:4) sounds reckless and impromptu. We tend to regard more highly 'silent watching or listening' than 'speech' when it comes to a spiritual matter. This is probably one of the reasons why verbal imagery is largely unnoticed in our reading.²⁶⁰ However, there is a good side in Peter's courage to express appreciation and what he wants to do for the special occasion, which is quite impressive and approvable.

Matthew's speech perception develops by interacting with the verbal reference and humble gesture blended in Peter's image that is positive for Matthew. Peter's gesture and speech are designed to draw readers' attention to the divine image of Christ and to the voice of the unseen God from the cloud, "*Listen to him*" (Mt 17:5). Peter fell into silence after listening to the

²⁵⁹ *Vita Consecrata*, 70.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Kuzmicová, "Literary Narrative and Mental Imagery," 277.

words and the attentiveness in his ‘listening silence’ calls up a non-verbal image of his response of ‘Yes’ to God in the mind of a consecrated person – the *evangelical obedience*. For consecrated persons, the non-verbal communication of Christ and Peter is a clear indication of their own experiences of obedience to God. Therefore, the repeated practice of silence in contemplation and everyday life is an indispensable part for consecrated persons to listen up to Christ in obedience to the will of God.

Absence or silence of God is nevertheless felt painfully, especially in times of difficulty and turmoil. The Gospel tells that Christ also experienced the silence of the Father, portraying his response of silent listening to God. As Karl Rahner rightly stated, silence is neither the opposite of speech nor the absence of communication; but, in the divine–human relationship silence can be understood as being interpersonal, and as allowing a space in which the other may speak and be heard.²⁶¹ The painful experience of silence or absence of God can also occur in contemplation, and the meaning of silence occasionally remains hidden. However, silence as interpersonal communication in our relationship with God signifies a surrender of love made in faith leading through the darkness to light and a surrender of will made in our participation in Christ’s obedience.

- **Deepened desire to ‘be’ with Christ, Touched by Grace, and Return to the reality in deeper intimacy with Christ (Mt 17:6-9).** By hearing the voice, Peter and the two disciples fell on their faces and were terrified with awe (Mt 17:6). The sense of hearing is directly linked to the emotional experience of the disciples, change in gesture and reaction - the embodied and emotional awareness of God. The humble gesture and the feeling of awe, stimulated by hearing

²⁶¹ Shannon Craigo-Snell, *Silence, Love, and Death: Saying ‘Yes’ to God in the Theology of Karl Rahner* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2008), 75.

sense, are the metaphor that describes human's intrinsic sense of recognizing the divine power and grace. The disciples would have experienced several emotions simultaneously – fear in awe, sheer happiness, joy, and desire to remain in the light of Christ. The overall emotional experience of the disciples seems to be positive rather than the experiences of pain, sadness, or distress. The positive emotional experiences play an important role in strengthening the bond with Christ, deepening the desire to be with him.

The touch - speech – sight in Mt 17:7-8 is the key senses to awakening the disciples' consciousness that were captivated by all that happened to them. The touch and words of Christ reached the disciples' bodies and ears when their eyes were still facing down, probably not able to see things around properly. The tactile sense felt on their bodies and hearing sense make the disciples come down to earth and fix their gazes on Christ only. Then, they came to realize his will of action that the grace of special relationship created between God and the humans should be outreached to others in reality. The disciples might not have wanted to return to their realities, hoping to delay leaving from the wonderful moment. Prayers can easily assimilate into the feeling of disappointment which the disciples would have experienced at that time.

The narrator's description in Mt 17:6-9 involves variation in emotion, gesture, mood, characters, and senses: *fear with awe – sense of reality – disappointment / darkness – light / heavenly – earthly / falling – rising / multiple characters – Christ only / touch – tactile feeling – hearing - acquiring knowledge of Christ*. This variation indicates the process of the disciples' recognition of Christ identity and of the significance of his mission yet to be accomplished. The senses of walking and speech and attentive listening recur in their return journey, along with Christ's order of secrecy to the disciples (Mt 17:9). The recurrence signifies the journey of contemplation and transformation will continue and happen again and again through our lives.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that this thesis has clarified that all human senses and emotions, while scholarship focuses on the prevalence of visual sense, play an important positive role in reading and contemplating Matthew 17:1-9. The character's embodied stance in Matthew's transfiguration narrative includes all different senses and emotional feelings, with the interaction of body and mind, which show the disciples' embodied experience in depth and concreteness. The senses are correlated to one another and blended with temporal and spatial environments in the context of learning, knowledge, and understanding. Matthew's vivid portrayal permits the interaction between readers and the characters in the described environment. It gives holistic, positive impacts on the imagination and perception of prayers in contemplation. It is noteworthy that the kinetic structure of the journey in Matthew 17:1-9 fits into the sequence and content of contemplation. Contemplation is more enriched by the embodied and enactive perception than just looking at the scene or reflecting upon it. Contemplation vis-à-vis sensory, emotional perception is the concrete means of being really there, entering within the center of the scene.

The exegetical study has demonstrated some similar ideas as well as the distinctive features between the three transfiguration accounts in Matthew, Paul, and 2 Peter. On the one hand, Matthew and 2 Peter provide the event of Christ's transfiguration witnessed by the three disciples, authenticating the special role of the disciple. In such way, the ecclesial implication of the transfiguration is definitely notable in Matthew and 2 Peter. The Matthean narrative provides a particularly positive portrayal of the disciples, especially Peter on whom Christ affirmed to build the Church. This would be one of the reasons why Matthew's version has been most favored and annotated by the Church Fathers. In addition, Matthew describes the whole story of the transfiguration in vivid, direct, and conceivable way, making use of various sensory and

emotional languages. Paul, on the other hand, does not mention the actual event of Christ's transfiguration in his writings but discusses 'the transformation of people who have faith in Christ.' He exhorts the renewal of mind and a transfigured life by dying and rising in Christ. He binds the Jewish and Hellenistic visual, metamorphosis motifs to Christian model of visual piety and transformation.

This thesis has also come to the conclusion that Christ's transfiguration has traditionally informed the Church through the exegetical development in East and West. The Greek Fathers profoundly articulated the spiritual implications of the transfiguration, by dwelling upon the effects of the transfiguration on the believers' deification and participation in the uncreated light of God. They defended Christ's humanity and divinity from Gnosticism. Emphasizing the contemplative aspect of the transfiguration, they considered the mountain as the perfect tableau of divine descent and human ascent, which prompts the spiritual advancement of believers. This reflection and belief of the Greek exegetes expressed elaborately in the mystical practice, iconography, and liturgy.

The Latin Fathers were eager to receive the riches and depth of the Greek interpretations, but more preoccupied with attaching the transfiguration to the Church. They were interested in Christ's divinity within the reality of the Incarnation and developed the ecclesial and soteriological meanings of the transfiguration. Augustine developed in greater depth the spiritual strand that emphasizes an ever-deepening journey of faith starting from sensory perception arriving at the intimate contemplation of God. Then, scholarship in the Early and High Middle Ages discussed the reality of his transfigured body which allowed the transfiguration to acquire dynamic function as a sign shown to the clergy and the laity. It is notable that the scholastics linked the Matthean transfiguration narrative to the hierarchy and power of the Church, by

confirming the significance of the historical witness of the disciples. Scholars in modern period keep returning to the transfiguration traditions, while developing their own exegeses and translating new sources.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the Church especially links the Matthean transfiguration narrative to the consecrated life in *Vita Consecrata*. This Apostolic Exhortation reinterprets the narrative to encourage consecrated people to live a transfigured life in holiness as a living exegesis of God's word and an eschatological sign for the present and future of the Church. They are required to live as a sign by conforming their whole existence to Christ in all-encompassing commitment which foreshadows the eschatological perfection and the infinite beauty, which is more than a matter of following Christ. With this distinctive characteristic of consecrated life, they express the mystery of God's Kingdom through their lives, united with other vocations in the Christian belief - the laity and ordained ministers. As many rays of the one light of Christ, each vocation reflects the light and beauty of the transfigured Christ through its own special character and role in the Church and in the world.

All that this thesis has presented is preliminary and calls for further studies and reflections to explore Christ's transfiguration in a more holistic way. This study hopes to be a signature of joy and hope in harmony with the Gospel message that envisages the important positive possibility of our transformation into the same image of Christ, which is the will of God. It pursues a positive, integrated view of embodied senses and emotions in human cognition and of their roles in contemplative activities. Thus, it suggests a close collaboration between biblical studies and other fields of research, which seems to be challenging but worthwhile effort that can lead believers to the light of evangelical truth, informing more abundantly the transformation of believers of today and tomorrow.

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