

Reception of Divine Light in Christ's Transfiguration

The story of the Transfiguration places Christ on Mount Tabor, where he arrives with Peter, James and John, and hears the voice of God. At the coming of this voice, the apostles fall in terror to the ground, and shudder and quiver until Christ comforts them. Byzantine mosaics of the scene depict the moments of their recovery, placing Christ in the middle ringed by God's light, and the apostles arrayed about or under him in various contortions of the body. Such contortion and abjection before the divine light result from and explain the necessity of fear before God, a necessity that is equivalent to faith. The mediating presence of Christ is equivalent to the love of God, presented as flesh to flesh in the ultimate manifestation of divine mercy.

The Transfiguration mosaic at Daphni, an eleventh-century monastery near Athens, sits in a squinch of the main dome beside the stern face of Christ Pantocrator.¹ The apostles are arranged below Christ, pierced by rays of silver light that emanate from his suspended form. The curvature of the squinch fixes them at a constant distance from him, cast down to the earth while he shines above, flanked by the exalted figures of Moses and Elijah. The open, welcoming gestures of these holy men stand in explicit contrast to the physical fright of the apostles, calling into question the necessity of fear in the apprehension of divine presence and judgment, which is represented by the burning light, and the process by which that fear begets receptive love.

This question can be addressed through the comparative analysis of the positioning of the eyes and bodies of each character, along with ekphrastic and liturgical texts on themes of fear, love and redemption general or particular to the scene of the Transfiguration. These texts are selected from classic references of

¹ Diez, Ernst and Otto Demus. *Byzantine Mosaics in Greece: Hosios Lucas and Daphni*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1931. p. xiii.

Orthodox thought, such as the writings of John Climacus, Anthony the Great, Andrew of Crete and Maximos the Confessor, as well as the liturgy of the Eucharist and of the Feast of the Transfiguration. It is certain that such material would have been read in the presence of the mosaic during service and private prayer at the monastery, especially since some sources – such as Climacus’ *Ladder of Divine Ascent* – were explicitly meant to guide monastic life. Even if not contemporary to the mosaic itself, they would have borrowed from and influenced the concepts interpreted in the scene at Daphni, and so are precious material in the investigation of how fear and love modulate interactions with divine judgment and divinity.

The thirteenth-century churchman Nikolaos Mesarites provides a detailed description of the Transfiguration scene in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Istanbul, a mosaic that is now lost to time.² A reconstruction by Dumbarton Oaks based on Mesarites’ account very closely resembles the scene at Daphni, as does the account itself; the characters are identical in arrangement, expression and behavior, barring only the orientation of the prone John and the still hand of Moses.³ The Church of the Holy Apostles predates Daphni by many centuries, and as one of the most important churches in Istanbul, the style and content of its mosaics would have influenced the mosaics at Daphni.⁴ Thus Mesarites identifies in his descriptions prototypical elements of the Transfiguration at Daphni, and his descriptions travel from character to character, examining the degree of wakefulness of each of the apostles as they emerge from their sudden paralysis.

The paralysis results from their inability “to endure at all the rays which came, as though from the most brilliant cloud, from the color of the flesh of the divine hypostasis which dwelt in the unapproachable light.”⁵ However, Moses and Elijah avert neither eyes nor bodies from the source of the light; their ability to confront it is unchanging through time. The unendurable quality of the light thus has to do with judgment

² Mesarites, Nikolaos. *Description of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople*, trans. Granville Downey. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1957.

³ “The Holy Apostles: Visualizing a Lost Monument.” Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2015.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Mesarites, 871

and death: in the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, John Climacus describes how “like the sun’s ray passing through a crack and lighting up the house, showing up even the finest dust, the fear of the Lord on entering the heart of a man shows up all his sins.”⁶ The fear of the Lord is thus inextricable from the fear of judgment: as the fourteenth-century theologian Nicolas Cabasilas explains in his *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, knowledge “of the severity of his justice and judgment [instills] in our souls the fear of the Lord, [enkindles] in us love for him, and thereby [arouses] in us great eagerness and zeal for the observance of his commandments.”⁷ He who is so eager to observe the will of God also knows and fears, in his heart, the consequence of disobedience.

The light of the Transfiguration reveals the sins of man to the judging eye of God, acting as a dual mechanism of judgment and revelation, since it is a pure manifestation of God. Yet man only comes to know his sins by fearing this same light; it is his fear that reveals these sins to his own heart and mind, and reminds him of the hour of his death and judgment. Yet the sinner is not necessarily condemned to Hell after death, for he is able to redeem himself in life: Climacus reminds us in the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* that “tears can wash away sins... and souls lacking tears [can] beat and scour away their sins with grief, groans, and deep sorrow.”⁸ These tears require fear, since “fear of death is a property of nature due to disobedience, [and] remembrance of death and of sin comes before weeping and mourning.”⁹ Thus the light of judgment, “that non-material light which shines beyond all fire,”¹⁰ has the burning power of fire and is unbearable to the flesh that carries sin, for it immediately precipitates the moment of death. The same fear of death that averts the apostles’ eyes is the mechanism by which they “pray and plead, tremble like a convict standing before a judge, [that] the disposition of [their hearts] may overcome the anger of the just Judge.”¹¹ One can only apprehend the divine light directly if he is devoid of fear, meaning either that he

⁶ Climacus, John. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1987. p. 258.

⁷ Cabasilas, Nicholas. *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, trans. J. M. Hussey. St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997.

⁸ Climacus, 259

⁹ Climacus, 132

¹⁰ Climacus, 137

¹¹ Climacus, 137

has passed beyond it, like the dead Moses and Elijah, or that he does not know of and so cannot properly mourn his own sin. For such a man, the divine light is scorching as the “dark fire [of hell]”¹² that will burn and destroy him, for he has died an unredeemed death. Moses and Elijah are able to gesture sweetly towards the light, for they have exited the period of life on earth where they would have been compelled, by way of compunction and of piety, to compensate for the sins they had accrued as creatures of the flesh.

Accounts of the Transfiguration in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and Mark all note that when the apostles fall “facedown to the ground,” their eyes are hidden from the light not only by their assumed physical positions, but also by a “bright cloud [that comes to cover] them,” and so occludes the source of God’s disembodied voice.^{13,14,15} Yet neither the cloud nor their limbs are sufficient protection; they are able to rise only when Jesus calls them up, and explicitly tells them “Don’t be afraid.”¹⁶ Moreover, the apostles are not forced to hide their eyes until the voice of God comes down to them, although Jesus himself is previously “transfigured before them, face [shining] like the sun, and his [clothes] white as the light.”¹⁷ This suggests that there is a special quality to the light that comes from Jesus’ body, that it is bearable to the bodies of the apostles. The Transfiguration is therefore revealed to contain a double meaning: it refers not only to the transformation of Jesus’ flesh into light, but to the transformation of the light itself into human flesh, so that it might be known by those vested in flesh. The body of Christ modulates, diminishes and transfigures the divine light, for it is made of flesh that can die. By dying for Man, Christ allows us the grace of death before death; the dissolution of his flesh in death is the redeeming sacrifice by which we receive otherwise unbearable knowledge of God.

To gain this knowledge, we must bring our flesh close in nature to Christ’s flesh. We do so by sharing in his dissolution and sacrifice through the Eucharist: all who eat his flesh and drink his blood

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ Luke 9:32

¹⁴ Mark 9:5

¹⁵ Matthew 17:6

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *ibid.*

become united to him. His sacrifice becomes the central vehicle of union between the mortal and the divine, joining the mortal nature of human beings to the exalted nature of his spirit, and to the divine power and love by which he gave his body up to the Cross.¹⁸ The *Great Kanon* of bishop Andrew of Crete describes how “Thou didst lay down Thy body and blood for all, O crucified Word: Thy body in order to renew me, Thy blood in order to wash me, and Thou didst surrender Thy spirit, O Christ, in order to bring me to the Father.”¹⁹ This “bringing of the believer to the Father” is equivalent to the altered presentation of the Father’s light to the apostles, as alluded to in the *Canon of Preparation for Holy Communion*, which is the corpus of prayers said in the evening or morning before the Eucharist: “May the Burning Coal of Thy Body, O God and Word of God, be a Light in my darkness, and may Thy Blood be the Cleansing of my defiled soul!”²⁰ The image of the coal suggests how body of Christ itself becomes a source of mortal light, tolerable to the mortal eye. As intercessor, Jesus’ figure physically obscures the light of God in the Transfiguration, supplying the apostles instead with the sparing flame of his flesh. Similarly, when consumed by sinful man, Christ’s flesh becomes the physical intercessor between man’s soul and the Judge of his soul. Man’s soul is made cleaner, purer, and more alike to Christ’s nature as his flesh becomes alike to Christ’s flesh, for he resembles Christ by eating of Christ, and is cleansed by drinking of him.

The flesh that covers the light is reminiscent of the cloud that covers the face of God: water comes from clouds as blood comes from the body, and so the baptismal image of water joins with and lends power to that of the cleansing blood. As water from the earth cleanses original sin, makes neutral the sin that brought man to earth,²¹ the human blood and water of Christ’s body cleanse the sins of human nature, and make neutral the sins man commits by being man.²² The comparison extends to tears of compunction, which the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* introduces as “greater than baptism itself, [for] baptism washes off those evils

¹⁸ st basil prayer

¹⁹ <https://www.orthodox.net/greatlent/great-canon-fifth-week.html>

²⁰ Canon of Preparation for Holy Communion

²¹ baptism citation

²² communion citation

that were previously within us, whereas the sins committed after baptism are washed away by tears.”²³ So the rain of the cloud resembles the raining, spurting blood of Christ on the Cross, while his sacrificed flesh weeps his blood in the same way that we must weep to “consume the impurity of [our] body and soul.”²⁴ Thus the mortal flesh of Christ is the true substance of God’s mercy, because it gives the blood and gives the light that tell us of our sins and allow us to erase them; because it reminds us of the mechanism of this redemption, which is our own conscience; and because his flesh is what spares us immediate confrontation with God, as physical material that occludes his light and instructs and prepares us for a later audience with him. Christ is mercy, for Christ is flesh; he is offered up as protection and salvation to the living, who must absolve their body of sins before the death that divides body and spirit.

This sacrificial aspect of the Transfiguration is emphasized by the embedded Crucifixion imagery, which places Moses and Elijah on both sides of Christ, as Mary and John will later stand on both sides of the Cross. Each of the characters is pierced by a ray of light that emanates from Jesus, suggesting not only that they are pierced as Jesus would later be pierced, but also that Jesus himself is penetrated by those rays, which could be viewed as originating in the bodies of Moses, Elijah and the apostles and terminating in Christ’s body. Christ is momentarily protected by the mandorla and sustains no wounds, but the rays enter into flesh that will be penetrated numerous times, not only by the nails of Crucifixion, but also by Longinus’ spear and Thomas’ finger. Furthermore, the pricking of the apostles’ bodies as their sins are revealed recalls the concept of *katanyxis*, which historian Derek Krueger describes as “a puncturing or pricking of the heart or the conscience, [which] serves as a motivation to repentance.”²⁵ This concept affirms the view of light as means of judgment, and of the presence of Christ as an intercessor that transforms this light into nothing more than the painful motivation for repentance, and so into a chance to achieve salvation. Without his intercession, the light would spell immediate damnation for all who carry sin.

²³ Climacus, 137

²⁴ Climacus, 139

²⁵ Krueger, 108

Mesarites describes James as having “part of his body still nailed to the ground,”²⁶ an image that explicitly recalls Jesus’ wounds on the Cross. While James’ flesh suffers from the divine light that has nailed him down, that suffering grants him precious oblique experience of God. He is unable to behold God with his own eyes, “in fear lest these lights of the body suffer from it,”²⁷ yet by virtue of the nails he sustains a number of wounds that serve as new eyes. The wounds are firsthand experience of a pure aspect of God, for they mimic Christ’s sacrifice. Thus he receives through the flesh a kind of knowledge of God that would otherwise be inaccessible to all things made of flesh. Because it accepts and carries this knowledge, the prone and wounded body of the apostle brings new purity to his soul. It is as if his fear has tunneled wounds into his body, which allow the light of God seep into him, and the seeping light reveals the sins for which he must beg God’s mercy.

Of the apostles, Peter is “the most vehement, springing up from the ground”; he gives the most intense reaction of all the apostles when they realize that “what they saw being done was not an illusive dream but a vision of reality.”²⁸ The other two “[seem] rather to be stricken with thunder and not to have the strength to rise from the earth,” but still we see that “the one of them who was older, James, partly [rises] with difficulty on his knee.”²⁹ The emphasis on James’ age compared to John, who as the younger brother “does not wish to look up at all,”³⁰ centers the remembrance of death as the source of all urgent and compelling desire for redemption. Following a similar theme as the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, the sixth-century abbot Dorotheos of Gaza – a contemporary of Climacus – states in his *Discourses and Sayings* that “a man gains possession of the fear of God by keeping the thought of death before his mind and remembering eternal punishment.”³¹ The thought becomes more insistent and immediate with greater proximity to death, and so Peter, the oldest apostle, is most stricken by the “vision of reality” that is truly

²⁶ Mesarites, 872

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ Dorotheos of Gaza. *Discourses and Sayings*. Cistercian Publications, 1977.

the vision and the reality of his imminent judgment; he therefore reaches out with his whole body, while John, the youngest, remains sweet and quiescent.

Death brought on by unmediated confrontation with the light results in eternal punishment: God is disposed to forgive only those who are aware of their guilt, and who therefore fear being judged by him; and those who fear this judgment do not dare meet his eye. Only those without fear face God without mediation: in his *Four Hundred Chapters on Love*, Maximos the Confessor argues that “fear of God is the result of faith in God,”³² for fear is a natural consequence of the awareness of sin, and sin is subject to divine judgment. Therefore the fearless man must either be unaware of or disbelieving of sin, or unaware or disbelieving of the terrible and inevitable judgment of God. In either case, he is bound to remain corrupt and spiritually untrue, for only that man “who has obtained the fear of the Lord has forsaken lying, having within himself an incorruptible judge – his own conscience.”³³ Through this pricking of the conscience and the experience of compunction comes penitence, comes repentance, and through such “acts of repentance, a fire of prayer [burns] and [consumes] everything material.”³⁴

The absence of compunction results in and reinforces a sinful, unredeemed character of the soul. In contrast, “good character begets fear, and fear begets observance of the commandments... of heaven and earth.”³⁵ The raw, unprepared death of the unrepentant soul is regarded with terror by those who undertake a lifetime of preparation through compunction, and through the “wearing [of] blessed, God-given mourning like a wedding gown.”³⁶ This is prompted by the knowledge that the life of the soul does not end in the death of the body, but that the soul passes into some kind of eternity, the nature of which is determined by God’s judgment. For the unfeeling man, this eternity is Hell and destruction in hell; but for he who continually redeems himself in life, that moment of death is equivalent to the long-awaited wedding of the

³² Maximos the Confessor. *The Four Hundred Chapters on Love*, trans. Philip Sherrard. University of Belgrade.

³³ Climacus, 161

³⁴ Climacus, 131

³⁵ Climacus, 260

³⁶ Climacus, 140

soul, which represents the eternity of divine union. As the marriage vow remains unbroken, so does the covenant between God and the forgiven soul that rises to God.

The material of this covenant is love. Anthony the Great states that “if a man wishes to attain to love of God, he must have fear of God. Fear gives birth to mourning, and mourning to courage. When all this has ripened in the soul, it begins to bear fruit in all things.”³⁷ Fear is thus presented as a precursor to love, which must fall away at the coming of love, and which remains the state of a soul that is a degree removed from loving: in the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Climacus writes that “fear shows up if ever love departs, for the man with no fear is either filled with love or dead in spirit.”³⁸ He continues that “love is the banishment of all contrariness, for love thinks no evil,”³⁹ and so must there be no evil in the mind of the man who loves God. Thus is fear a required basis for love, since “when fear arises from the deeper reaches of the soul, it destroys and devours impurity;”⁴⁰ and the impure soul cannot love, for it bears an evil mark.

The “presence [of God] destroys death, and when death is done away with, the disciple of sacred knowledge is illuminated.”⁴¹ Being dead and in the presence of God, Moses and Elijah have nothing to fear from death, and nothing to fear from God, for they exist in the light of the “consubstantial Word”⁴² to which they are privy. For the living man, the only way to pass beyond the fear of God into the love of him, is for his fear to be of such magnitude that it breaks his flesh into total, receptive compassion. This compassion may even manifest as a physical mirror of Christ’s sacrifice: in its final chapter “On Faith, Hope and Love,” the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* references Psalm 118, which calls to the Lord: “Nail down my flesh with fear of You,”⁴³ just as the flesh of James is nailed out of fear.

³⁷ Anthony the Great. *Philokalia*, Volume 1, Section on St. Anthony. Faber and Faber, London, 1979.

³⁸ Climacus, 287

³⁹ Climacus, 286

⁴⁰ Climacus, 288

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ Psalm 118. Referenced in Climacus 288.

James represents a middle stage between John and Peter, for he is caught half risen and half transfixed; while Peter rises to reach in urgency to Christ, John continues to lie “like an undistracted man, without cares, and in every way maidenly and like Jacob a plain man.”⁴⁴ Unlike the kneeling Peter and unlike James, who is “waking from deep sleep,” John is content to persist “in deep sleep, wishing to know nothing save to love Jesus and beyond that to be loved very much by him.”⁴⁵ This emphasis on reciprocal love of Christ is reminiscent of the Gospel of John, which contains repeated invocation of the phrase “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” The authorship of this text has many times been attributed to John the Apostle by such writers as Papias, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and others.^{46,47,48} The identity of the “beloved disciple” has separately been connected to the same John by various sources, such as the fourth-century historian Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Church History*⁴⁹ and theologian Augustine of Hippo, a contemporary of Eusebius, in his *Tractates on the Gospel of John*.⁵⁰ Although Eusebius did not believe the Gospel was written by John the Apostle, he nevertheless identified John with Christ’s beloved, since he was one who “reclined on the bosom of the Lord.”⁵¹ The fact that John can be held equal to “the disciple whom Christ loved” even if he were to not have coined or used the term in his own writing, but rather been the object of its reference by a stranger, suggests something special about the nature of John that is embedded in the liturgy of love, which Eusebius and others might have referred to in their efforts of identification.

⁴⁴ Mesarites, 872

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ “Revelation, Book of.” *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F.L. Cross. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

⁴⁷ *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, ed. Michael Holmes. Baker Academic, 2007. p. 749

⁴⁸ Irenaeus. *Against Heresies*, tr. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1. ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.

⁴⁹ Eusebius of Caesarea. *Church History*, trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 1. ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890. Retrieved from <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.x.xxv.html>

⁵⁰ Augustine of Hippo. *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, tr. John Gibb. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, Vol. 7. ed. Philip Schaff. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888.

⁵¹ Eusebius

This special nature of John, which would distinguish him among other apostles in his reception of Christ's love, is revealed by part in Mesarites' description of the Transfiguration: unlike Peter and unlike James, John shows an earnest and unquestioning desire to be loved by Christ, and is content and absent of all other desires, wishing not even to look up or to know anything beyond Christ's love. This simplicity is emphasized in the term "a plain man,"⁵² and is emblematic of a total purity that does not require forgiveness. This pure love provides knowledge of God without the need for divine confrontation. Just as the body of Jesus intercedes on behalf of the mortal eye, and instead radiates the gentle and bearable "enlightenment... of the live coal of [His] body,"⁵³ so does the substance of love let out an eternal internal light. "It is an abyss of illumination, a mountain of fire,"⁵⁴ which inhabits John's loving heart. Possessed of this deep flame, John need not look up at Christ; he may keep his gaze averted, looking downward and inward, for therein lies the truth he seeks. Love has granted John bodily knowledge of God's nature, for "when a man's senses are perfectly united to God, then what God has said is somehow mysteriously clarified."⁵⁵

For Peter, apprehension of the light functions as a simulation of the moment of judgment; he is fearful and curious, compelled to reach up and face what he will soon face, and so experiences a vision of death in life. The phantom nails in James' flesh are a simulated mortification of his body, while Peter's confrontation of the light simulates mortification of his soul: by sharing in Christ's pain, James' flesh does not need to beg mercy from the light, for it knows by experience the meaning of Christ's sacrifice. Similarly, Peter exposes himself to judgment and death when he turns completely towards the light. He does not die, but rather "with his senses taken from him, [seems] to speak words."⁵⁶ As the light pours into him, it blinds his physical senses and places inside him the assisting substance of the Word, which is a property of God akin to the love felt by John, and to the pain of James's pierced flesh.

⁵² Mesarites, 872

⁵³ Canon of Preparation for Holy Communion

⁵⁴ Climacus, 289

⁵⁵ Climacus, 288

⁵⁶ Mesarites, 872

The three apostles may therefore be interpreted as typical depictions of the three principal ways to know God. Like Peter, one may apprehend God through the intercession of the Word: Peter reaches towards the pure substance of God out of an urgent desire for redemption, for he has heard God's Word in his mind. The light of knowledge is transformed and refracted by the Word into bearable form, and Peter receives the Word, and knows and fears by it the weight of his own sin. James receives no Word of God, but rather sees him through Christ's body: he feels the wound of Christ in his own flesh, which wakes him "as from deep sleep" to his mortality.⁵⁷ Although he "seeks immediately to look toward the sun, [he] is wise enough to protect his eyes with the shadow of his hand,"⁵⁸ for by a bodily premonition of Jesus' sacrifice he is aware of the meaning of his sin, and therefore senses what such light will do to him. This premonition of the flesh serves as a wing of intercession, keeping James' sight and James' soul from divine punishment, as does the physical flesh of Christ by obscuring the pure source of the light. And John, beloved of Christ, needs not raise his eyes in sight; he is permitted to remain in a sleep that mimics and so defeats death, for in sleep as in death, no sin is accrued or redeemed. Therefore the moment of death loses meaning, for it no longer indicates a terrible judgment, but rather serves as passage into an eternity that resembles John's living sleep. This sleep is the result of love, for the substance of his love is as the substance of intercession, which moves aside the judging rays of light that would wake him.

This sleep is invoked by Climacus in the final chapter of his *Ladder*, where he quotes the Song of Songs: "I sleep (because nature commands this) but my heart is awake (because of the abundance of my love)."⁵⁹ John may thus remain living even in death, for the same life is sustained in his heart by love. Just as his loving sleep defeats the concept of death, so it defeats time: John is not condemned to wait in fear for the moment of his sentencing, for Christ loves him and protects him with his love. John's life and John's death are entwined and eternal, for he must wait for nothing, not even for death, and so does not know the passage of time. Christ's intercession not only spares John the judgment of God, but also relieves him from

⁵⁷ Mesarites, 872

⁵⁸ Mesarites, 872

⁵⁹ Climacus, 287

the fear of death, for death is without meaning to he who lives forever, and John lives forever in the heart of God.

The Transfiguration at Daphni presents a powerful synthesis of themes of love and fear, of flesh and redemption of the flesh, of judging light and salvific light, which lie at the heart of Orthodox theology. It frames the gestures of the apostles as outward and inward expressions of love, urgency and desire, which are precipitated and matured by fear of God. These movements become a medium of interaction with God in a setting where contact with him would mean damnation or death, if unmediated by a lifetime of preparation through the redemptive acts of compunction and true devotion of the soul. This creates the need for intercession in our apprehension of God's light, that our mortal flesh might receive divine revelation of our own nature, and that we may better understand the nature of the divine.

The intercession of Christ is the most complete manifestation of the love and mercy of God. At the Transfiguration, he intercepts and transforms the pure rays of God's judgment, bringing true experience of God to the apostles' minds, hearts and bodies. After the Crucifixion, he will intercept all coming judgment of men through the sacrifice of his flesh, because he suffers with his flesh for the sins of all men before and after him. This union of this flesh with all flesh is achieved through the act of Communion, which transfers the meaning of this sacrifice to the body that eats Christ's body, and to the soul that is washed by Christ's blood. This function of the blood is paralleled by the redemptive quality of tears of conscience, which allow us to confront and repent for our sins. Such tears stem from the sincere mourning of the soul that cannot have true intimacy with Christ, for it is marred by the sin that it must bear as a result of its vestment in flesh. This mourning is sharpened by our remembrance and awareness of death, which releases the spirit from the body and presents it to the judgment of God. The faithful heart knows the severity of this judgment and fears this confrontation, a fear that is made explicit by the contorted bodies of the apostles in the mosaic of the Transfiguration. Only by virtue of this fear may the penitent man truly examine himself, and purify his soul through this process of mournful confession, so that he might hope to arouse God's mercy at the time

of final Judgment. This fear turns in the pure, hopeful and beautiful soul to love, and our total love for Christ invites Christ's answering love like a solid hand, like touch, which shields us from the wrath of God.

Bibliography

Anthony the Great. *Philokalia*, Volume 1, Section on St. Anthony. Faber and Faber, London, 1979.

Augustine of Hippo. *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, tr. John Gibb. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, Vol. 7. ed. Philip Schaff. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888.

Cabasilas, Nicholas. *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, trans. J. M. Hussey. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997.

Climacus, John. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell. New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1982.

Demus, Otto. *Byzantine Mosaics in Greece: Hosios Lucas and Daphni*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1931.

Dorotheos of Gaza. *Discourses and Sayings*. Cistercian Publications, 1977.

Eusebius of Caesarea. *Church History*, trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 1. ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890. Retrieved from <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.x.xxv.html>

Geffert, Bryn and Theofanis G. Stavrou. *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: Supplemental Texts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.

Irenaeus. *Against Heresies*, tr. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1. ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.

Krueger, Derek. *Liturgical Subjects: Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative, and the Formation of the Self in Byzantium*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014.

Mesarites, Nikolaos. *Description of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople*, trans. Granville Downey. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1957.

“Revelation, Book of.” *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F.L. Cross. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations, ed. Michael Holmes. Baker Academic, 2007. p. 749.

“The Holy Apostles: Visualizing a Lost Monument.” Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2015.