

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

THE
CHURCHMAN

JULY, 1904.

ART. I.—THE TRANSFIGURATION.

THE writers of the Synoptic Gospels are careful to place the Transfiguration, the most sublime and impressive event in the life of our Lord, immediately after His first prediction of His rejection, sufferings, and death. This connection is the key which unlocks the mysteries of the solemn scene. The Apostles were ever thinking of Messiah's kingdom. They expected a prince to reign, not a priest to suffer. Christ's announcement of His approaching death was an astounding blow to their hopes. The Transfiguration was vouchsafed that the disciples might learn that, while their expectation of a Messianic kingdom was no mere illusory dream, it was through suffering that Christ would enter into glory. I say, with reverence, that it was needed for the encouragement of Jesus Himself. Our Lord's words to St. Peter, "Get thee behind Me, Satan," tell us that He realized that the remonstrance of the disciple was but a re-enactment of the great initial temptation of the Devil after the forty days' fast in the wilderness—the thought of a kingdom without a cross.

In a subject so suggestive I can only bring out the leading lessons of this august and transcendent scene.

"And after six days, Jesus taketh with Him Peter and James and John" (Mark ix. 2). Probably these three disciples had a greater moral fitness for the spectacle. St. Paul mentions them together as the pillars of the Church. In the words of Archbishop Trench, "they were the Coryphæi, the flower and crown of the Apostolic band." They had previously witnessed the raising of the daughter of Jairus, to prepare them for this anticipatory view of the resurrection body of Christ. Had they but known it, these three were allowed to witness the glory that should follow His decease,

that when they beheld the agonies of Gethsemane they might recall the Transfiguration, and think of the glory to which these sufferings would lead. In later times, with minds enlightened by the Holy Spirit, they would realize that the scene on the holy mount afforded them a glimpse of their own glorious future, which would enable them to say, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed."

When I remember the deep importance of the Transfiguration, when I think of the assaults of scepticism—that Renan should ignore the scene, that Strauss should say that the narrative is a poetic imitation of the shining of the face of Moses, that Neander should speak of it as a dream, and that even writers in the Anglican Church should describe it as a vision of the night—I recognise the Divine wisdom in the selection of accredited spectators, so that out of the mouth of two or three witnesses every word should be established.

St. John says: "We beheld His glory." St. Peter says: "We were eye-witnesses of His majesty."

The Sabbath sun had set ere Christ and the three began to ascend the "high mountain apart," the slopes of the snow-capped peak above them. They see the afterglow. The dome of Hermon is bathed in rose-coloured light. Then a deepening flush steals over the scene, as the warm purple shadows creep slowly on. Still they climb. With the departing light a death-like pallor covers the higher slope, and for a time the darkness is only relieved by the whiteness of the snow. Ere long the moon appears, and the stars hang down like lamps from the Syrian sky. Jesus and the three are alone amid the solitude and silence of the mount. The Master retires for a space to pray. He prays for Himself. His heart is troubled. Never before has the Cross been brought so distinctly into view. From this time, as never before, His prayer was, "Father, save Me from this hour. Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." He prays for strength to accomplish His awful task. He prays, too, doubtless, for His weak disciples. His cry is, "Who hath believed our report?" The Father hears; the Father answers, blesses, comforts. He reveals the glory of the eternal future. Not for the disciples merely, but for the Master was this prelibation of glory: "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross." The face that was "marred more than any man" is suddenly transfigured. He who had climbed the steep ascent with weary limb and aching and burdened heart is now radiant with superhuman glory. "The fashion of His countenance was altered" (Luke ix. 29). The effulgence shines, not as with Moses from without, but as

with Stephen from within. The light of His Deity shines through the lantern of His humanity. His very raiment is white and glistening as the surrounding snow, white as the robes which the glorified wear. Well might the disciples, struggling against sleep, be aroused to a perfect wakefulness. Well might St. John record, "We beheld His glory."

Our first lesson is that moments of real prayer are moments of transfiguration. St. Luke writes, "As He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered."

"We kneel, how weak! we rise, how full of power!
Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong
Or others: that we are not always strong;
That we are ever overborne with care;
That we should ever weak or heartless be,
Anxious or troubled, when with us is prayer,
And joy and strength and courage are with Thee?"

I return to the narrative. St. Peter, St. James, and St. John saw more than the Transfiguration of their Lord. They saw "with Him," says St. Luke, "two men," radiant forms, whom they recognised as Moses and Elijah. They heard the subject of their conversation with Christ. "They spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke ix. 31), the very theme which had been such a stumbling-block to Peter and the rest of the disciples. They spake of "His decease"; as it is in the Greek, "His exodus." The death of Christ, the true Paschal Lamb, and the Resurrection of Christ, the true Firstborn, were His exodus and the exodus of His Church, the Israel of God, from the captivity of sin and the grave. Moses is seen as the representative of the law, and Elias appears as the representative of the prophets, and the Atonement is the subject of both. The Cross of Christ is the only key which unlocks the mysteries of the moral empire of God. In the persons of these two ambassadors from the court of heaven Christ saw the representatives of the Old Testament Church, and in them the firstfruits of a multitude which no man can number who owed their immortality to His decease. He is thus strengthened to do His Father's will by making His soul an offering for sin, and from the night of His Transfiguration "He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem," the city of sacrifice.

The words spoken on this holy mount tell us and the Church in every age that whilst the Cross of Christ is a stumbling-block to some and foolishness to others, it will be the theme in the heavenly world on which glorified intellects will ponder, and for which glorified tongues shall utter endless praise. Moses and Elias talked with Christ. The thought of

a future eternally silent world is insupportable. The Transfiguration speaks of a time when the glorified saints shall sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, when praise only shall break the silence, when nothing shall jar with the melody of the eternal chime, when the roll of the pealing Hallelujahs shall be like the voice of many waters, when every saint shall have a song, when each shall offer his tribute of thanksgiving, when all shall refer their blessedness to the decess which Christ accomplished at Jerusalem.

This night of glory is not ended. St. Peter, in his impulsive ardour, exclaimed: "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three booths, one for Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias, not knowing what he said" (Mark ix. 5). Observe, he placed Moses and Elias on an equality with Christ! "While he thus spake, there came a cloud and overshadowed them," the Shekinah cloud, the symbol of God's presence, the cloud that sometimes filled the Temple with its mystic radiance, and shone for ages over the mercy-seat; a bright, luminous cloud, to use Milton's phrase, "dark with excess of light." And "there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son, hear Him," and "when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone" (Luke ix. 35, 36). This is that prophet of whom Moses said, "unto Him shall ye hearken." "God, having of old time spoken unto the Fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of the days spoken to us in His Son." Christ is the *supreme* revelation. He was "the Word," the articulate expression of the mind and heart of God to the human race. "No man knoweth the Son but the Father. No man hath seen God at any time. The only-begotten Son . . . He hath declared Him." He was not only the supreme, but the *ultimate* revelation of God. The prophets were the chords through which the heavenly music sounded. The incarnate Son of God was the complete instrument which gave to man the perfect melody of heaven. This voice of the eternal Father proclaiming the Deity of Christ declares the infallibility of the Revelation. Believe that the Son of God in His human nature shared the ignorance of the men of His generation as regards the statements which He made, and I for one must either wander into the morass of scepticism or seek rest in that Church which professes the infallibility which my moral nature demands. A standard of infallibility is a necessity of man's thinking mind, a need of man's moral nature. Let all voices be silent, and with adoring reverence let us listen to the word on the mount: "This is My beloved Son, hear Him."

Once more—the Transfiguration speaks of "the power and coming" of Christ. St. Peter tells us that it was a prelude

and earnest of the coming glory. In the words, "they spake of His decease," we have Christ the Priest; in the words of the eternal Father, "hear Him," we have Christ the Prophet; in the scene itself we have Christ the King. Moses, raised from the empty tomb in the heights of Abarim, where he had been "sent to sleep," as the Arabs say, "by the kiss of God," was a forerunner of those who shall be raised from the dead at the coming of Christ. Elias, translated from the Plain of Gilead by a simoon of the desert,¹ a precursor of those who shall be alive at the Second Advent, and shall be transformed and transfigured. "Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." As of old the beacon fires, lit up from hill to hill, announced to those far away from Jerusalem the advent of the solemn feast, so does the glory kindled on the Mount of Transfiguration shine through the darkness of the centuries and tell of the Resurrection morn, when Messiah as King shall come to reign.

In the early centuries of the Church's history men like Jerome, in his cave at Bethlehem, or the hermits of the Thebaid or of the wilderness of Engedi, and, later still, the monastic system in Europe, said, "Let us make three tabernacles." Devout souls wished to abide with Christ in the solitude of the mount. The impartial reader of history believes that monasteries had their part in the development of our national history, and that they were for a time a source of blessing to our land; but the monastic system had one inherent evil, an evil of which St. Peter's words were but the germ. It separated the salt from that which it was intended to conserve. It erected religious *houses*, but it did not create religious *homes*. Men forgot the prayer of Christ: "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil." To-day the temptation of the Church is in an entirely different direction. Amidst the manifold and increasing activities of life we are apt to forget that the streams which are to fertilize the barren wastes of human existence can only be supplied from the spring in the solitude of the mountains, where souls hold communion with God. In proportion as we think of the decease accomplished at Jerusalem, in that proportion shall we get some glimpses of the coming glory of the final Easter dawn.

St. Matthew writes: "They came down from the mountain,"

¹ The narrative indicates that Elijah was raised by a whirlwind. The chariot of fire would symbolize not only the prophet's ministry of burning zeal and judicial righteousness, but the refining influences, also, which were needed to prepare and transfigure his body before entering into a state of immortality.

“They were come to the multitude,” a connection of thought which is strikingly illustrated in the last great picture of Raphael, which suggests a concluding lesson for us, a lesson of the deepest practical import—privilege is but the prelude to duty. We must ever go down from the mount of contemplation to mingle with our fellow-men in the business of life—our one desire to follow in the steps of Him who went about doing good, of One who left the Mount of Transfiguration and all its glory to comfort a father’s heart and heal his lunatic boy. May we, by our every thought and word and action, in little things as well as in great things, in our homes as husbands and wives, as parents and children, as masters and servants, in our business lives, in our social engagements, and in our seasons of recreation and rest, so live and act as those who have seen some glimpses of the glory revealed in the mount. People who live in the Riviera count the days in the season in which they have seen the distant island of Corsica. How often do we see in private prayer and in the services of the sanctuary, it may be faintly and afar off, the hills that are round about our eternal home, the holy mount, the city of our God, where our Lord is now unchangeably and eternally transfigured!

J. W. BARDSLEY.



ART. II.—LOISY’S SYNTHESIS OF CHRISTIANITY.

III.

I PRESENTED in my last paper two curiously conflicting answers to the question, “What is Christianity?” To the ordinary reader the difference in the definition of the “kingdom” of the Saviour is probably less startling than the license claimed by both Harnack and Loisy in handling the actual narrative of the Gospels. In this respect there is not much to choose between the two critics. It is assumed by each that the province of the exegete is to “devour and break in pieces, and stamp the residue with the feet,” and then claim a special veneration for his own footmarks. It is a method that, of course, would not be tolerated in the case of ordinary ancient literature. The comparison of the two interpretations of Christianity may, at least, be useful as illustrating its arbitrariness. Sometimes the elements in the Gospels dubbed spurious by Loisy contain for Harnack the essence of Christianity. On the other hand, the Acts, on which Loisy’s system really depends, is for Harnack a “late book,” whose reception is “perhaps the most striking