

LUKE'S ORIGINAL VISION ON TRANSFIGURATION STORY (LUKE 9: 27-36)

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ABSTRACT. Our study is trying to identify the main instruction of the Transfiguration story, reflecting St. Luke's point of view, using both patristic opinions and helpful modern commentaries. Apostle Luke depicts an original version of the Transfiguration Mountain: eight days passed after the promise of seeing the Kingdom of God; the transfiguration of Christ happens while He was praying; the noun *ἐξοδος* points out Lucanic original vision etc. The foremost *kerygma* that the disciples are about to learn is that of their own personal transfiguration, the only path of rediscovering the lost Image of a liturgical membership. The presence of the most towering prophets of the Old Testament here on the mountain, certify that before you enter into the Kingdom of God, you have to cross the Golgotha scene, a journey that all of us have to take in order to inherit eternal life. Trying to achieve a proper exegesis of the Sacred Texts is not easy to reach, that is why our work is far from being accomplished.

Keywords: Kingdom of God, transfiguration, garments of skins, theophany, deification.

Introduction

The text, which Saint Luke the Evangelist proposes (9:27-36) is not at all easy to interpret precisely because of its mystical interferences.¹ Because both Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Methodius of Olympus, Dionysius the Areopagite, Gregory the Theologian and Maximus the Confessor sees in the process of our deification, the exclusive work of the sanctifying grace². The event of the Transfiguration proposes us the manner in which each of us may be transformed – from the blessed way of the Cross (*Luke 9:31*) to the Resurrection

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¹ A more detailed approach of this theme can be found in Cătălin Varga, *Few New Testament Studies: An Orthodox Apology* (Saarbrücken: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2016), 111-140.

² See more detailed in Nichifor Crainic, *Cursurile de mistică* (Sibiu: Editura Deisis, 2010), 187-189.

(ἀναγεγεννημένοι) in the Transfigured Christ (1 Peter 1: 3. 23), as Isaac – “the beloved son” (τὸν υἱὸν σου τὸν ἀγαπητόν) from Genesis 22:2, who, urged by his father, was to sacrifice his life in order to recuperate it later on through an intermediate “resurrection”. The eastern tradition is convinced that it was not Christ Who was transfigured, but the eyes of the Apostles, enlightened to understand Christ as He already was: the Son of God, born from the Father, the glory and brightness of God (John 1:14; Hebrew 1:3). Of these Saint Maximus the Confessor says: „... they moved from body to spirit, before they left life in their body”³.

As a matter of fact, the three participants (Peter, James and John) contemplating the brightness of the transfiguration (Psalm 96:9; 104:2), recognized in this timeless event which seems to take place in the Kingdom of God (Mark 9:1), their own desideratum: the call to perfection (Matthew 5:48; John 17:24), or at least they looked as though they understood⁴. The Transfiguration story occurs at the heart of the synoptic Gospels (Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:1-10; Luke 9:27-36). The Transfiguration to which Saint Apostle Peter also participates takes place shortly after the cutting experience to which Christ subjects him because of his uncontrollable temper, when from “foundation rock” (τῆ πέτρα– Matthew 16:18) he becomes “stumbling block” (σκάνδαλον–Matthew 16:23)⁵. The supreme Theophany (superior to that from Sinai – Exodus 19; or Horeb – 1 Kings 19) is nothing else than an anticipated Resurrection and a prefigured Parousia, offering three axiological coordinates: theophany, soteriology and Resurrection, all of them bearing an Lucanic vision as we will see below.

³ Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Ambigua*, in *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 80, ed. Dumitru Stăniloae (București: EIBMBOR, 1983), 125.

⁴ In many places of the Gospel, Christ sees with sadness that His disciples are not able to understand Him, cases in which they become as narrow minded as the people *outside* the Christic message. And Christ is again in the delicate situation to reprimand them: Can't you understand? Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? (Mark 4:13). Such is the case of the parable of the sower or of the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves of bread, or of the announcement of His future Passions etc. Saint Luke concludes: *The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what He was talking about* (Luke 18:34).

⁵ The Greek word *skandalon* is usually translated with: “madness, abomination”; and its correspondent *skandalēthron* means “arm for the bait in a trap”. In classical Greek for example, the word is used by Aristophanes with the purpose to draw someone into dialectic so as to defeat him later with arguments. Hence, the word has two interchangeable meanings that have as purpose to deceive someone, that is why we are no longer surprised by the cold shower that Saint Peter is subjected to.

The Original Vision of Apostle Luke: Some Independent Statements

The Lucanic version of the Transfiguration, in comparison with the other accounts, maintained a personal touch⁶. Although at first sight it seems that Saint Luke comes into opposition with the other two synoptics, in fact he completes them. For example, if Matthew and Mark mention the fact that six days have passed (Καὶ μεθ' ἡμέρας ἕξι) from the promise of seeing the Heavenly Kingdom until Transfiguration; this time Luke interferes and mentions a number of eight days (ὥσει ἡμέραι ὀκτώ)⁷. As we have already showed, at first sight we might talk about a contradiction in the synoptics' account, that if we remain strictly at the level of the literary interpretation.

The problem is linked strictly to the chosen moment for the reference of the Evangelists to the two great moments that took place, if Matthew and Mark speak about "six days" it is because they choose to refer directly to the episode on apprenticeship from *Matthew* 16:24-28 respectively *Mark* 8:34-38. But Luke chooses to link the episode of the confession of Messiah (*Luke* 9:18-22)⁸ with that of Tabor, that is why he speaks about "eight days". Besides, the historical accuracy of Saint Luke is rescinded by the adverb ὥσει ("about", "almost", "some") leaving room for the theological interpretation of the eighth day, the salvation of the whole creation (*2 Peter* 3:10-13), the day of eternity. The evangelist thus contributes decisively through the presentation of the eschatological tension, necessary for the understanding of the mystery from Tabor.

⁶ In the Lucanic text, we will find at least five key details (for example vv. 28, 29, 31, 32, 33) which unfortunately are missing from the other two synoptics, details that contribute essentially to the understanding of the great event. According to the originals, if in Matthew the narration comprises 160 words, and in Mark 152; the Lucanic version has 172 words, which shows a much more detailed approach by Luke – he certainly is the most impressed of the evangelists.

⁷ C. Evans states that in this case Saint Luke uses the same precision which is also present in the beginning of his Gospel when he speaks about the ritual of circumcision (*Genesis* 17:12; *Luke* 2:21); we may also mention here the purification of the Temple of the Lord in *2 Chronicles* 29:17. See Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, in *New International Biblical Commentary*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 151.

⁸ According to (*Matthew* 16:24) between the episodes: "Peter's confession" and "The theme of the apprenticeship" there is a temporal delimitation underlined by the time adverb τότε – which depending on the context may be translated with "then, after that; etc.". In the narrative accounts, such as that from *2:7* or *4:1*, it may be doubled by the idea of an action that is about to happen right in the following time units. See for example Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, kindle edition, (Baker Books, 2000). Probably the news of the Passions from the end of the episode of confession (9:22) supported by the discussion between Christ and the two great prophets of the Old Testament (9:31) impress Saint Luke profoundly, the correlation of these two events occurring naturally.

The second key aspect is inserted by the evangelist in v. 29: καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ **προσεύχεσθαι** αὐτὸν⁹, which, together with the one from *Mark* 9: 2 (καὶ **μετεμορφώθη** ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῶν¹⁰) offer to reader the necessary direction for a correct orientation. Through prayer (προσεύχεσθαι) we are revealed the glory of Christ's deity and thus we will see freely, says Saint John Damascene¹¹, inside ourselves the Kingdom of God (τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ), which „is in our midst” (ἐν τὸς) – *Luke* 17: 21. For Moses was surrounded by the glory that came from outside, but Christ was surrounded by the „dazzling white” (*Mark* 9:3) of His natural glory. But as it happened in the Gethsemane Garden (*Luke* 22:39-46), the apostles are yet incapable to participate fully to the Christic co-service, because they are frightened underlines (*Mark* 9:6), and because they were very sleepy mentions (*Luke* 9:32). Meaning that they are to a certain extent absent from the great Christic event, or at least so it would seem at first sight. For the presentation of the most unexpected event in the lives of the Apostles, the narrator (Luke) choses to use three verbs that seem to underline a spiritual progression: προσεύχεσθαι = “he was praying”; ἐγένετο = “became” and ἐξαστράπτων which may be translated by “shining”. Because before the great adventure of becoming into the spiritual body (σῶμα πνευματικόν), prayer in solitude in the Judean desert (*Matthew* 4:2) is first required, then the tearing of the prayer in the Mount of Olives (*Luke* 22:44), so that later it all culminates in the agonizing cry of the prayer on the Cross of sufferance (*Matthew* 27:46). And from here everything is declined in that state of purity (*Psalms* 119:130; *1 John* 1:5), of transfiguration (*2 Corinthians* 4:6), shining (ἐξαστράπτων) as the sun in the sky. In all the cases, the action belongs to God, and the faithful are only the objects of this action. This splendour was not presented in a moment of collective unconsciousness, it was not consumed at the level of the imagination of the apostles, but it was real – in

⁹ “And it was while He was praying...He became” (Anania 2001); “And while He was praying...He became” (Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură, 1988); “And He became, while He was praying...” (Biblia adică Dumnezeuasca Scriptură a Legii Vechi și a celei Noi, 1914) etc. Because ἐγένετο derived from the aorist verb in the passive voice: ἐγένηθην translated by “to come to being; to become; to be” (*Mark* 2:27; *Luke* 4:24; *John* 1:3; *Acts* 4:22), that is why the correct translation is dictated by the context. Hence, according to the Lucanic original (9:29), the transfiguration (μετεμορφώθη) of Christ (*Mark* 9:2) happens during His prayer, a key detail which, if it hadn't occurred in Luke we would have had a poorer knowledge of it.

¹⁰ According to some researchers, the Transfiguration in the version of Saint Mark has a Paschal mark, adding with originality the glory revealed here on Tabor, with that of the Resurrected Jesus Christ (*Matthew* 28; *Luke* 24 and *John* 20) but revealed from the Paschal present to the narrative past of the Christic activity. See Amy-Jill Levine, Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 78.

¹¹ Ioan Damaschinul, *Cuvânt la Schimbarea la Față/Chip a Domnului și Mântuitorului nostru Iisus Hristos*, in *Despre Lumina taborică, rugăciunea lui Iisus și curăția inimii*, ed. Ioan I. Ică jr (Sibiu: Deisis, 2013), 77.

the person of the Son of God¹², in the spiritual light of His kindness (*John* 3:18-21; *1 John* 1:7); although this revelation of the spiritual world through substance is a great mystery. The theophanic light anticipates our future relationship with it, anchoring us into the destiny of the supreme transfiguration, through a dialogical communication of the deified bodies (*1 Corinthians* 15:42-49)¹³.

In the narration of the Tabor, only Luke infers the wonderful mystery through the construction: Μωϋσῆς καὶ Ἠλίας, οἱ ὀφθέντες ἐν δόξῃ („...Moses and Elijah appeared in glorious splendor”). The verb in the passive voice (ὀφθέντες with the root: ὀράω), in our case after the passive aorist (ᾤφθη) and probably borrowed from *Mark* 1:11 where the verb ᾤφθη is used to describe a divine appearance, presents an action suffered and completed by a subject (Moses and Elijah) in the perfection of the attributes of glory. That is why one cannot talk here of a meteoric appearance, the two great prophets are presented in the Lucanic vocabulary as guests from Heaven whose existence transcends darkness¹⁴. Moreover, the fact that the apostles perceived both the presence of the great prophets and the brightness of the divine glory on Christ's Face, as something real, palpable, is confirmed to us by the Petrine anamnesis from *2 Peter* 1:16-18. Because Peter does not present to Mark the Evangelist the miracle of Tabor according to „cleverly devised stories” (Ὁὐ γὰρ σεσοφισμένοις μύθοις ἐξακολουθήσαντες). „The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power” (v. 16) was confessed both vocally and by the epistles, from the perspective of the eye witness: „we ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with Him on the sacred mountain” (v. 18).

The construction „and His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning”, may also be regarded from the following perspective: the theme of the garments of skin. According to (*Genesis* 3:21), these were added to man after the fall so they do not represent an ontological element. Because of the original sin this illness was born into us to death, our nature was completely dominated by this nekrotēs. Hence, the “garments of skin” express the biological mortality (nekrotēs) which became man's second nature after the fall. It is the new state in which man lives, that of „life in death”, as he does not own life as a constitutive element, but lives through the view of deferring death. His life was changed into survival¹⁵. But

¹² H.D.M. Spence, Joseph S. Exell, *St. Mark*, in *The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 36 (London: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1913), 2.

¹³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Iisus Hristos lumina lumii și îndumnezeitorul omului* (București: Anastasia, 1993), 202-205.

¹⁴ Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, eds. Howard Marshall, W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 384.

¹⁵ Panayotis Nellas, *Omul – animal îndumnezeit. Perspective pentru o antropologie ortodoxă* (Sibiu: Editura Deisis, 2009), 80.

Christ comes and restores this second nature of man which is perishable and natural (*Ephesians* 5:8), His transfigured body becoming the „shining garment” (ἱμάτια) – *Mark* 9:3, of His divinity, transfiguring us gradually (*2 Corinthians* 3:18), our spiritualized body (σῶμα πνευματικόν) becoming free from the corruptible substance, free from passions and affects, thus participating fully to the glory of God. For in the Person of Jesus Christ the glory becomes accessible. The transfigured body of Jesus Christ recuperates the human dignity, filling us with eternal life (*John* 6:40), the Body of Christ Resurrected becomes the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep (*1 Corinthians* 15:20), the sign and the guarantee that they will all resurrect after Him in imperishableness. Because „the body that is sown is perishable (νεκρῶν), it is raised imperishable (ἀφθαρσία); it is sown in dishonor (ἀτιμία), it is raised in glory (δόξη); ...it is sown a natural body (σῶμα ψυχικόν), it is raised a spiritual body (σῶμα πνευματικόν)” as Saint Apostle Paul reminds us (*1 Corinthians* 15:42-44¹⁶).

The following key point in the Lucanic narration, which is unique as a matter of fact, is the support of the discussion between Christ and the two great prophets of the Old Testament: καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄνδρες δύο συνελάλουν αὐτῷ, οἵτινες ἦσαν Μωϋσῆς καὶ Ἡλίας, οἱ ὀφθέντες ἐν δόξῃ ἔλεγον τὴν ἔξοδον αὐτοῦ, ἣν ἤμελλεν πληροῦν ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ (vv. 30-31¹⁷). Since the One Who is transfigured is the Lord of the alive and of the dead, we must not be surprised by the appearance of Moses and Elijah especially *today* when Moses is allowed to enter into the Promised Land (*Deuteronomy* 34:4), in the land „flowing with milk and honey” (*Exodus* 3:8). In ancient times both Moses and Elijah received the commandment to go up to

¹⁶ After presenting several analogies regarding the body and the seed (vv. 36-41) Apostle Paul chooses to exemplify what he had already stated through an eschatological discourse, as a possible answer to the question in v. 35. In a series of antithetical couples (vv. 42b-44a), four qualities of the immortal body are presented which surpass the four features of the mortal body. Four antitheses are underlined by the verbs in the passive voice *speiretai* and *egeiretai*: “the natural body’ is mortal, lacking glory, weak and pray to the psychological instability; but the “spiritual body” is immortal, shining, powerful and spiritual. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, in *The Anchor Yale Bible*, vol. 32 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 591.

¹⁷ Almost all the Romanian editions translate the noun ἔξοδον with the end of the existence, in this telluric frame of the Saviour, which was to accomplish in Jerusalem, the leaving from this world, inculcating the idea of His close Resurrection, according to (*Matthew* 16:21; 20:18-19; *Mark* 9:31; *Luke* 17:25; *Acts* 17:3). “The end” (ἔξοδον) of Jesus announces that journey from the Taboric glory to the glory of the Father in the Kingdom of God (*Luke* 9:26; 24:26). To the same line of interpretation, we may ascribe other editions such as: “The Eastern/Greek Orthodox Bible New Testament (The EOB)”; “English Standard Version (The ESV)”; “New American Standard Bible with Codes (The NAS)”; “Revised Standard Version (The RSV)”; or “Traduction Oecuménique de la Bible (TOB)”. They translate the Greek ἔξοδον with the noun “departure” (leaving, exodus). But the version “King James with Codes” or KJV translates it with the noun “decease” (death) which complicates the text, with the emphasis more than welcome of the human nature of Jesus Christ, a reminiscence of the Nestorian philosophy as it seems.

Mount Horeb (*Exodus* 24:12-18; *1 Kings* 19:7-12) the first entering into cloud and darkness and the latter into a thin ray of light, so that both are able to participate to the glory of God. However, here on the same "inner Horeb" free from all conjunctures, the first witnesses of the first theophany participate fully to the spectacle of the second theophany that of the uncreated light, Christ calling them in one moment.

Some think that the appearance of Moses underlines the fact that Jesus is not come to dismiss the Law, as for Elijah his presence also certifies the messianic prophecies¹⁸. Others see Moses as the representative of the prophets and Elijah as the symbol of eschaton¹⁹. Prophet Malachi (4:4) speaks of the return of Elijah in an atmosphere preceding „the day of the Lord” (ἡμέρα κυρίου), and another eschatological reference regarding the two great prophets may be interpreted in the book of revelation (11:6). That is why, Carlston concludes, it is necessary to put the two together in an eschatological circumstance (that of their return) in order to explain their presence on Tabor²⁰.

The fact that Moses and Elijah appear in this moment talking with Jesus about „the days of His glorification” (John 7:39; 16:13) proves their faith into His Incarnation and sacrifice. For the transfiguration started on the mountain bears a note of inner intensification up to the moment of Christ's Resurrection, the moment of the final transfiguration. Christ had already begun to speak to His disciples about His Passion followed by the majestic Resurrection, on many occasions. What Saint Luke inserts here underlines the fact that the apostles understood that something dramatic was about to happen in Jerusalem²¹. Following Jesus was equivalent to death, but they knew (Christ had told them) that „whoever loses their life for Christ, will save it” (*Luke* 9:23-24).

This word ἔξοδον (that we find only here and in *2 Peter* 1:15) emphasizes the fact that Luke understands the great mystery of redemption that would soon happen. He had already used the standard word for death (θάνατος) in the context of the narration from 9:27. But he wants to show that Moses and Elijah refer to a different kind of death in their discussion, moreover, since the typology Sinai/Moses occupies the scene, and Moses is as present as the other actors, the

¹⁸ Craig A. Evans, *Luke...*, 161; Robert Stein, *Luke*, in *New American Commentary*, vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 284; Francois Bovon, *Luke: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50*, vol. 1, in *Hermeneia*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 376.

¹⁹ Darel L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:53*, in *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 568; John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, in *Word Biblical Commentary*, (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 499.

²⁰ Charles Edwin Carlston, "Transfiguration and Resurrection", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80 (1961): 237-238.

²¹ Maria Yen Do, *The Lucan journey: A Study of Luke 9:28-36 and Acts 1:6-11 as an Architectural Pair* (Bern: International Academic Publishers, 2010), 115.

use of a word such as ἔξοδον will bring into the minds of the readers the thought of an „end” higher than a natural death, one which is swollen by life – because „whoever loses His life for Christ will save it” (9:24). Thanks to this premises we may think that the existence of this ἔξοδον bears a key theological detail. St. Luke understands the prophetic role of Jesus Christ also from the fact that He will be rejected by His own people. According to the Jewish tradition, the great prophets such as Elijah and Elisha, Jeremiah, Ezekiel or Amos were violently rejected by their townsmen, in some cases even martyred. That is why whoever calls himself “great prophet” must accept this in order to gain credibility. It seems that this tradition was still fresh in the mind of Luke the Evangelist, as B. Ehrman states²². In conclusion, we may summarize the following on the appearance of these prophets: some of the disciples thought that Christ was Moses or Elijah (*Luke* 9:18-21), their presence both invalidates this opinion and shows the difference between servant and Lord. Christ allows the appearance of these two great prophets of the Old Testament to prove His apostles that He is the Lord over life and death, thus strengthening and supporting them for the forthcoming Passion²³.

Another key detail recorded only by Saint Luke may be found in v. 32: “Peter and his companions were *very sleepy...*”. Anticipating the moment from Gethsemane, this interpolation hides an allegorical character, it is presented after the narration of the event, because it is obvious that the awakening of the apostles happened before. They were certainly tired because they had climbed the mountain, and probably they too prayed with Jesus for a while, but the fact that they “became fully awake” (διαγρηγορήσαντες) – verb that may also be translated with “completely awake”, shortly after they fell asleep attenuates the gravity of their act. In the Greek text of the Gospel, the active form of the verb διαγρηγορήσαντες shows their sharp fight to rest completely present, or at least the narrator wishes to express the wakeful conscience of the three apostles. The conclusion is that until this troubled moment, they are spared of any role in this scene.

„As the men were leaving Jesus” (ἐν τῷ διαχωρίζεσθαι αὐτοῦ ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ) is another Lucanic motif, which appears only here, with the purpose to amplify the dramatism of the Taboric experience. Through this motif of the departure²⁴

²² Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament. A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 114.

²³ Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilia la Matei*, in *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 23 (București: EIBMBOR, 1994), 646.

²⁴ The infinitive verb in the passive voice (διαχωρίζεσθαι – διαχωρίζω) shows that the action suffered by the two prophets is ongoing. The leaving, respectively their departure may be interrupted at any time (that is why the nostalgic intervention of Saint Peter). For more details regarding the functions of the verb διαχωρίζω see Johannes E. Louw, Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 324.

the author wishes to present for which Apostle Peter exclaims enthusiastically: „it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters” (v. 33). Peter’s manner of addressing is very interesting and it differs from one Evangelist to the other: at Saint Luke: ἐπιστάτα (“Master”), at Saint Mark: ῥαββί (“Rabbi”) and at Saint Matthew: κύριε (“Lord”). The name κύριε shows a manner of addressing full of respect from His disciples, as for a Man whose divine authority is acknowledged. What is surprising this time in the narration of Saint Luke is this gesture through which he places the “great fisherman” on an inferior level of knowledge: ἐπιστάταις not a name equivalent with the glory that Christ dresses with (*Psalms* 104:2: “The Lord wraps Himself in light as with a garment”) on the Mount²⁵. This leads us to the thought that Apostle Peter together with the other two apostles, still don’t fully understand the whole picture of the Taboric revelation.

The idea to build shelters becomes the most sensible point of this narration, it contains the man’s desire for infinity, or the nostalgia of the Paradise lost. Thus, Peter contemplating the glory of the divine transfiguration, feels his lips suddenly exalting the Adamic elegy: Ἐπιστάτα, καλόν ἐστιν ἡμᾶς ὧδε εἶναι not knowing that they will remain only on the mountain, God’s plan to redeem the world will not come to an accomplishment. Peter seeks with obstinacy to avoid sufferance (*Mark* 8:32), his behaviour is clarified by Evangelist Mark: „he did not know what to say, they were so frightened”, probably an observation that Mark received directly from Peter.

The Greek term σκηνή (“tent”) is used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew noun *’ohel* that defines the same thing (*Genesis* 13:3; *Exodus* 26:6; *Leviticus* 4:18; *Numbers* 4:4etc). In the history of the chosen people, this concept of “tent” was present in all times: starting with the tents of the patriarchs, with the nomads that also lived in tents, and even the enemies of Israel built tents (*Judges* 6:5), during wars the army lived either in plain field or in tents (*Judith* 7:18). One of the most important Jewish feasts (Tabernacles) comes into close relationship with this σκηνή (*Leviticus* 23:42²⁶). The cult of the Jewish existed in close relationship with this “tent”, as we may see in *Numbers* 4:2-16, where the service of the sons of Kohath took place in the “tent of meeting”, in the most holy place. The book of Exodus comprises two chapters (26-27) on how the “tent of meeting” must be built, where YHWH will meet with His people. Moses set his tent outside the camp, far from it, and this “tent of meeting”, in the middle of which „the Lord spoke with Moses”, was the last testimony for every son of Israel who wished to look for God (*Exodus* 33:7-11). God Himself told prophet Nathan before the

²⁵ Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke...*, 385-386.

²⁶ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 368-371.

building of the Temple, that His dwelling place is from tent to tent (*2 Samuel* 7:6), because Yahweh is the only beneficiary of this worship²⁷.

The leitmotif of the cloud (νεφέλη) and also his prophetic action of “covering” (ἐπεσκίαζεν) hide both the presence and the divine glory or providence (*Exodus* 13:21; 34:5). Passing over the “cloud” and what this symbol meant in the time of Moses (a very familiar story), I will present briefly a cultic reference of this νεφέλη. And this with the help of a single example: when the Lord’s covenant was brought to the Most Holy Place, the book of *1 Kings* 8:10-11 tells us that the priests could not serve because νεφέλη (נֶפֶל) filled the temple of the Lord. The Psalmist scenting the great mystery of the “cloud of God’s glory” exclaimed passionately: „Clouds and thick darkness surround Him, righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne” (*Psalms* 97:2²⁸). Once the Temple of Solomon is built, the wise king of Israel prayed to his Lord, exalting: „the Lord has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud; I have built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever...” (*2 Chronicles* 6:1-2).

The book of *Acts* speaks about Peter’s shadow which fell over the sick that were laid near the road and cured them, Virgin Mary becomes pregnant in the moment when the power of the Holy Spirit “overshadowed” her; and now on Tabor the same “bright shadow” (ἐπισκιάζω) overwhelms the landscape and defies the moment. For this is the paradox: the sacrifice bursts into redemption and death into the eternity of the resurrection (*1 Corinthians* 15:20).

The expression οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἐκλελεγμένος (“This is My Son whom I have chosen”) is not at all foreign to the ears of the apostles, υἱὸς θεοῦ completing the support of the prophecies of the Old Testament (*1 Chronicles* 17:11-14; *Psalms* 2:7; 89:26-27; 110:1; *Proverbs* 8:22; *Isaiah* 53:11; *Wisdom of Solomon* 2:18). The notion of Son of God enters in the traditional Hebrew circuit in close relationship to the promise of the birth of Messiah, but it was strictly reserved and lacking any additional explanations. Both the prophecy from *Psalms* 2:7 and the promise from *2 Samuel* 7:14 regarding the tribe of David, confirms this expression of υἱὸς θεοῦ as the one Who will come to reign, receiving his kingdom from the hands of God Himself, invested with divine authority²⁹. “The Son of God” is a Jewish notion that has both a royal and a sacerdotal character in this case anointed by the Holy Spirit for a work that defies the historical context through the manifestation of the Kingdom of God from these days³⁰. The voice of

²⁷ C. N. Hillyer, „First Peter and the Feast of Tabernacles”, *Tyndalle Bulletin* 21 (1970), 59-60.

²⁸ W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 38-39.

²⁹ B. M. F. van Iersel, *Fils de David et Fils de Dieu*, in *La Venue du Messie. Messianisme et Eschatologie* (Löven, 1962), 113-132.

³⁰ Amy-Jill Levine, Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament...*, 254.

the Father from heaven comes to consolidate Saint Peter's confession uttered previously, but also to build once for all the faith of the apostles that Jesus Christ is the long awaited Messiah.

Scholar Joel Green sees in the departure of Moses and Elijah from Jesus the fulfilling of the Christic mission, since a voice from Heaven already testified the redeeming work of Jesus, the presence of the two heavenly witnesses was no longer justified. God Himself had revealed His Son, the end that must be accomplished in Jerusalem was His, the voice that the apostles needed to hear ended, the veil was removed (2 *Corinthians* 3:14³¹). The Lucanic fragment ends with the words: „... and they did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen” (v. 36), meaning that they kept in silence the revelation about the Heavenly Kingdom, to present it after the Resurrection of the Lord (*Mark* 9:9).

The public activity of Jesus Christ starts with the announcement of the close coming of the Kingdom of God (*Mark* 1:15), in Christ being fulfilled the eschatological event announced in the narrations about the exodus of Israel from Egypt, the passing through desert and the Covenant on Sinai³². Τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ is one of the important eschatological preoccupations both of the New Testament and of the Old Testament (*Deuteronomy* 33:5; *Psalms* 29:10; *Isaiah* 43:15), in which we may speak of the so-called theme of “the presence of the future”³³, because although the Heavenly Kingdom was inaugurated in Christ and revealed for the first time on the mount, it still waits for its final consummation – fulfilment which is identical with the Parousia. Although this had not fulfilled yet, it may be experienced in advance, that is why one may speak of τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ as being both present and future³⁴. Coming down the mountain with their steps full of mysteries, the apostles are commanded to keep to themselves the miracle from Tabor, both for the fact that such an experience could not be understood by the minds that stood aside and because the sad news of the passion could torment the peacefulness of their consciences. And who knows, maybe this was also a precaution not to incite the daemon of the envious Judas.

³¹ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 384.

³² Alexander Golitzin, *Mistagogia. Experiența lui Dumnezeu în Ortodoxie* (Sibiu: Deisis, 1998), 35-36.

³³ George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 195-197.

³⁴ Yordan Kalev Zhekov and Corneliu Constantineanu, “The Presence of the Future: The Eschatological Framework of the New Testament”, *Plērōma* 2 (2010): 21-25.

Conclusions

The purpose of our study was to draw from the beginning the main lines of the Tabor event, to extract its essence through a minor patristic lens but also with the help of the pertinent tools of the modern theology, that do not contradict nor deny the marks established centuries ago by the great mystics whose eyes were able to see through the “darkness” of God’s mystery. We chose a textual critique because there were many cases when a forced translation changed the intention of the original text.

It seems that Apostle Luke understood in a different way the great story of our deification, that it’s why he inserted new theological motifs, higher than Matthew and Mark. The clue of this Lucanic original vision, as it may well be seen from the title, underlines from one end to the other, the spiritual essence of the Transfiguration: our deification through grace, developed under the influence of the theophanic light.

This mystery of deification did not happen only with Christ on the mountain (καὶ μετεμορφώθη ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῶν) or when He entered to His disciples through closed doors (*John* 20:19) or with the great mystics before; but it is consumed until today always revitalizing „for we are members of His body” (*Ephesians* 5:30). Becoming through the experience of the Taboric light „participants in the divine nature” (*2 Peter* 1:4), living as if we were resurrected from the dead, because here is the essence of the Taboric grace: the Transfigured Christ offers us the chance to *resurrect* (ἀναγεγεννημένοι) long before the great Resurrection (*John* 11:24, 43-44; *1 Thessalonians* 4:15-18).

Trying to build a correct hermeneutics in order to decipher the sacred text is an difficult and ambitious mission, it is a tough struggle with the angel of that page, that fights back either under the influence of the authority of the “cherubim with the flaming sword” (*Genesis* 3:24) or under the influence of the helpless Angel that touched the “socket of the hip” (*Genesis* 32:24-25) to make your burden even heavier. That is why our exegesis is far from being over.

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