Deus in se et Deus pro nobis: The Transfiguration in the Theology of Gregory Palamas and Its Importance for Catholic Theology

Cory Hayes

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DEUS IN SE ET DEUS PRO NOBIS:
THE TRANSFIGURATION IN THE THEOLOGY OF GREGORY PALAMAS AND
ITS IMPORTANCE FOR CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Cory J. Hayes

May 2015
DEUS IN SE ET DEUS PRO NOBIS:
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ABSTRACT

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Dissertation supervised by Dr. Bogdan Bucur

In this dissertation, I claim that Gregory Palamas’ teaching on the uncreated light of the transfigured Christ is best understood when interpreted through the category of theophany, namely, the appearance or vision of God. For Palamas, the Transfiguration is the theophany which manifests the full implications of the hypostatic union. As a revelation of the uncreated divinity of Christ (the vision of God), the Transfiguration anticipates, makes present, and partially effects the eschatological deification that takes place fully in the face to face vision of God. Palamas’ teaching on the Transfiguration as theophany synthesizes insights from the Eastern patristic tradition regarding theology of revelation, deification, and eschatology. Palamas’ theology of the Transfiguration and theophany presupposes a theophanic and therefore Christocentric economy of salvation which sees the Son of God as the theophanic mediator between God and man beginning with creation, through the theophanies of the Old Testament, and culminating in his
Incarnation and the face to face vision of God in the fully glorified Christ in the eschaton. Palamas’ theology of revelation (essence and energies), deification, and eschatology cannot be properly understood without taking into account their theophanic foundation. Furthermore, I claim that Palamas’ synthesis of the Eastern patristic tradition concerning the Transfiguration and theophany can aid Roman Catholic theology in recovering a series of insights concerning the Transfiguration as the vision of God in this life contained in its shared patristic heritage with the Christian East. Central to this claim is that Thomas Aquinas’ teaching on the Transfiguration and theophany is inadequate for the task of such a retrieval (his view of theophany does not permit it) and that Palamas’ synthesis can show Roman Catholic theology the way back to its theophanic Eastern patristic heritage.
DEDICATION

To my wife Jennifer; the completion of this project is just as much her achievement as it is mine.

To my children; Samantha, Abigail, Bennett, Aidan, Magdalene, Augustine, and Caeli, who finally get their father back.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ABSTRACT** ........................................................................................................................................ iv

**DEDICATION** ..................................................................................................................................... vi

**INTRODUCTION** ................................................................................................................................. x

**CHAPTER 1: PALAMAS’ EXEGESIS OF THE TRANSFIGURATION IN HOMILIES 34 & 35** .................................. 1

**SECTION 1: INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL** ........................................................................................ 5

1.1 A Few Notes Concerning Patristic Exegesis .................................................................................. 5

1.2 Context and Provenance of Homilies 34 & 35 ........................................................................... 7

1.3 The Transfiguration as Promised θεοφάνεια ............................................................................... 9

1.4 The Promise/Manifestation Structure of the Transfiguration in the Fathers .......................... 12

**SECTION 2: “HIS FATHER’S GLORY” (REVELATORY THEOPHANY)”.......................... 14

2.1 The Light of the Trinitarian Godhead ...................................................................................... 14

2.2 “His face shone like the sun” The Light of the Son ................................................................ 17

2.3 “A bright cloud overshadowed them” The Light of the Holy Spirit ....................................... 19

2.4 “And a voice from the cloud said” The Light of the Father ..................................................... 21

2.5 The Uncreated Light of Christ .................................................................................................. 25

**SECTION 3: THE PURIFYING POWER TO BEHOLD HIS OWN KINGDOM**
(ESCHATOLOGICAL AND DEIFYING THEOPHANY) ................................................................ 29

3.1 The Kingdom Present in the King ............................................................................................. 29

3.2 The Deification of Human Faculties of Perception ................................................................. 34

3.3 The Transfiguration and Salvation History ............................................................................. 37

3.4 The Light is God’s Glory, Not His Substance ......................................................................... 41

3.5 Conclusions from Chapter 1 ..................................................................................................... 46

**CHAPTER 2: THE TRANSFIGURATION AS REVELATORY THEOPHANY IN BIBLICAL SALVATION HISTORY** ................................................................. 49

**SECTION 1: THE TRANSFIGURATION AS REVELATION OF THE HIDDEN GODHEAD** ............................................................ 51

1.1 A Revelation of the Divinity of Christ ........................................................................................ 51

1.2 ἡ θεότης Seen and Unseen in Patristic Sermons and Commentaries on the
Transfiguration ................................................................................................................................. 54

1.3 The Taboric Light as Created Symbol in Barlaam ................................................................ 59

1.4 The Uncreated Light of Theophany ........................................................................................ 62

1.5 Symbols and Theophany ........................................................................................................... 65
1.6 Natural and Non-natural Symbols ................................................................. 70
1.7 Taboric Light as Natural Symbol ................................................................. 74
1.8 Manifestation by Natural Symbol always Leaves a Remainder ....................... 77
1.9 Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 78

SECTION 2: THE THEOPHANY OF THE INCARNATE CHRIST .............................. 79
2.1 Palamas’ Chalcedonian Christology ............................................................... 80
2.2 The Background of the “Theandric Hypostasis” of Christ ............................... 83
2.3 Theandricity as Basis of the Theophany of Incarnation .................................. 87
2.4 The Transfiguration as Vision of God through the Theandric Christ ............... 89
2.5 Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 91

SECTION 3: THE TRANSFIGURATION AS THE CENTER OF THE THEOPHANIC
ECONOMY ............................................................................................................. 92
3.1 Theophany in the Old Testament ................................................................. 92
3.2 Tabor and Sinai ............................................................................................... 97
3.3 Old Testament Theophanies as Verbum Incarnandum .................................. 101
3.4 Conclusion ..................................................................................................... 107

CHAPTER 3: THE TRANSFIGURATION AS DEIFYING AND ESCHATOLOGICAL
THEOPHANY ........................................................................................................... 108

SECTION 1: THE INCARNATION AND TRANSFIGURATION AS PARDIGM OF
DEIFICATION ......................................................................................................... 109
1.1 The Transfiguration as Vision and Occasion of Our Deification ....................... 109
1.2 Deification is Theophany ............................................................................... 112
1.3 Deification as Participation in Energy of the Holy Spirit ................................. 116
1.4 The Hypostatic Union as Primary Analogue for Deifying Union κατ’ ἐνέργειαν ... 121
1.5. Conclusion ..................................................................................................... 128

SECTION 2: THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE BODY ......................................... 129
2.1 Seeing with New Eyes ................................................................................... 129
2.2 The Necessity of Spiritual Vision .................................................................. 132
2.3 Nature and Grace .......................................................................................... 136
2.4 From Soul to Body ......................................................................................... 139
2.5 Deification by Theophany as Purpose of Creation ......................................... 143
2.6 The Transfiguration of the Human Person in the Transfigured Son as Foreordained from All Eternity ................................................................. 147
2.7 Conclusions to Chapters 1-3 ......................................................................... 150
CHAPTER 4: BREATHING WITH BOTH LUNGS ................................................................. 153

SECTION 1: CIRCUMSTANTIAE TRANSFIGURATIONIS IN THOMAS AQUINAS .......... 159
  1.1 The End of Future Glory ................................................................................... 161
  1.2 The Six Days, the Apostles, and the Mountain .............................................. 164
  1.3 Imperfect Contemplation and Theophany ....................................................... 169
  1.4 Rapture ........................................................................................................... 175
  1.5 Conclusions .................................................................................................... 179

SECTION 2: TRANSFIGURATIO .............................................................................. 180
  2.1 The Meaning of Transfiguration .................................................................... 180
  2.2 Claritas Glorae and the Beatific Vision ............................................................... 186
  2.3 Claritas Glorae and the Beatific Vision in Christ ............................................... 191
  2.4 Conclusions to Sections 1 and 2 ..................................................................... 194

SECTION 3: LOOKING EAST ................................................................................. 197
  3.1 Thomas: Why Not? ......................................................................................... 197
  3.2 Tabor and Sinai? ............................................................................................... 200
  3.3 A Light from the East ...................................................................................... 207

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................. 214
INTRODUCTION

In the Orthodox Church, the Feast of Transfiguration (August, 6) is one of the Twelve Great Feasts of the liturgical year. The festal hymns of the various offices for the Feast give a clear indication as to why the Transfiguration is held in such high regard. On the vigil for the Feast it is sung:

Today Christ on Mount Tabor has changed the darkened nature of Adam, and filling it with brightness He has made it godlike.

Christ, the Light that shone before the sun…has mystically made known on Mount Tabor the image of the Trinity…making manifest the excellence of the original beauty, though not in its full perfection. For while giving them [the apostles] full assurance He also spared them, lest perchance at the sight they should lose their lives: yet they saw as much as their bodily eyes were able to receive…He is the true brightness of the essence of the Father…”

On Mount Tabor, O Lord, Thou hast shown today the glory of Thy divine form unto Thy chosen disciples, Peter, James, and John. For they looked upon Thy garments that gleamed as the light and at Thy face that shone more than the sun; and unable to endure the vision of Thy brightness which none can bear, they fell to earth, completely powerless to lift up their gaze.

The Glory that once overshadowed the tabernacle and spake with Thy servant Moses, O Master, was a figure of Thy Transfiguration that ineffably shone forth as lightening

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1 Second in importance to Easter (the feasts of feasts), the Twelve Great Feasts of the Orthodox Church are those liturgical feasts concerning the major mysteries of the economy of salvation. They are divided into two groups: Feasts of the Mother of God (the Birth of the Theotokos, the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple, the Meeting of Our Lord, the Annunciation, and the Dormition) and Feasts of the Lord (the Exaltation of the Cross, Christmas, Theophany, Palm Sunday, the Ascension, Pentecost, and the Transfiguration). When one of the seven Feasts of the Lord falls on a Sunday, it takes precedence over the normal liturgical texts for that Sunday. See Kallistos Ware’s introductory material to The Festal Menaion, trans. Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber&Faber, 1969), 41, 61-63; hereafter referred to as FM. For the texts of all of the liturgical offices and the Divine Liturgy for the Feast of the Transfiguration see FM, 468-503. In addition to consulting liturgical texts in order to get a sense of the place of the Transfiguration in Orthodox theology, there are two excellent studies about the theological and liturgical import of the various iconographic depictions of the Transfiguration in Eastern Christianity that are worth consulting: Andreas Andreopoulos, Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005) and Solrunn Nes, The Uncreated Light: An Iconographical Study of the Transfiguration in the Eastern Church, trans. Arlyne Moi (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007). Cf. Andreopoulos’ shorter, popular treatment of the Transfiguration in This is My Beloved Son: The Transfiguration of Christ (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2012).

2 Small Vespers, Stricheron, Tone 4, FM, 469.

3 Great Vespers, Litya, Tone 2, FM, 475.

4 Great Vespers, Aposticha, Tone 6, FM, 477.
Those with whom Thou hast conversed of old in fiery vapor, in darkness and the lightest of winds [i.e., Moses and Elijah], stood before thee in the manner of servants...  

Every ear trembled with fear at hearing of the ineffable condescension of God... To show plainly how, at Thy mysterious second coming, Thou wilt appear as the Most High God standing in the midst of gods...  

According to the small selection of Byzantine festal hymns I have selected (corroborating examples could easily be multiplied), the Taboric light emanating from the transfigured Jesus and shining on Peter, James, and John (Mt 17:1-9, Mk 9:2-8, Lk 9:28-36) has four interrelated characteristics which highlight its place in salvation history: (1) it is the revelation of the “original beauty” of the Trinity and the “divine form” of the incarnate Logos, the vision of which the apostles’ “eyes” could not fully bear, (2) it is a deifying event in which Christ manifest the “brightness” by which the “darkened nature of Adam” is made “godlike,” (3) the transfiguration is eschatological in that it shows “plainly” the eschatological manifestation of Christ at the Second Coming with the saints in the Kingdom, and finally (4) the revelatory, deifying, and eschatological theophany of the transfigured Christ is the fulfillment (as type to antitype) of the theophanic glory manifested to Moses “in fiery vapor” and “darkness” (Exod. 19:18-19) and to Elijah in “the lightest of winds” (1 Kgs. 19:12) because just as the Son of God had “conversed” with Moses and Elijah on Sinai/Horeb, he does so again on Tabor.

The above characterization of the Transfiguration by the Byzantine liturgy represents Eastern Christianity’s liturgical reception of what John McGuckin identifies as the three main themes of patristic exegesis and commentary on the Transfiguration: “[t]he
Transfiguration considered as Theophany [i.e., revelation]; the Transfiguration as soteriologival event; and the Transfiguration as epiphany of the New Age.” 8 As such, the above festal hymns represent the liturgical culmination of the theological tradition of Eastern Christianity concerning the Transfiguration as theophany (lex orandi lex credendi).

The focus of this work is the theological reception and synthesis of the Eastern theological tradition concerning the Transfiguration as theophany (as found in the Fathers and the Byzantine liturgy) in the work of Gregory Palamas (1296-1357), Athonite monk and archbishop of Thessalonica, whose feast is celebrated in the Orthodox Church on the second Sunday of Great Lent. 9

Palamas is perhaps best known for his formulation of what he called the “indivisible” (ἀδιαίρετος) and “divine distinction” (θεία διάκρισις) between God’s ineffably transcendent and incommensurable essence (οὐσία: God as he is in himself and knows himself to be) and his uncreated and yet communicable energies (ἐνέργειαι: God as

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8 John McGuckin, The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition (Lewiston, NY/Queenston, Ontario: Mellen, 1987), 100, see especially pp. 99-125 for McGuckin’s summary of how each of these themes are treated by a wide selection of Fathers, both East and West. My only issue with McGuckin’s characterization is that he tends to conflate the categories of theophany and revelation. I will show that Palamas’ theology of the Transfiguration makes clear (as a synthesis of the Eastern theological tradition) that revelation, deification, and eschatology are all aspects of theophany, and that theophany is not one aspect among others, but the architectonic category. For treatments of the Transfiguration that examine the thought of the Eastern Fathers exclusively see P.A. Chamberas, “The Transfiguration of Christ: A Study in the Exegesis of Scripture,” St. Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly 14 (1970): 48-65 and especially Christopher Veniamin, “The Transfiguration of Christ in Greek Patristic Literature: from Irenaeus of Lyons to Gregory Palamas” (Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 1991) which, though not yet published, is the most extensive study of the Transfiguration in the Eastern Fathers available.

he acts or manifests himself.\textsuperscript{10}

Palamas gave systematic voice to the distinction between God's essence and energy during the well known Hesychast Controversy,\textsuperscript{11} which was brought about, in part, by the accusations of Messalianism (that one could see the essence of God with the eyes of the body) made by Barlaam of Calabria\textsuperscript{12} (1290-1348), against certain Hesychast monks.


\textsuperscript{11} The practice of Hesychasm takes its name from the Greek hesychia (stillness or quietude). Hesychasm is a method of asceticism and prayer which begins with a moral and ascetical regimen that prepares one for a life of prayer and union with God which can involve the focusing of one's self through means such as the repetition of the Jesus prayer and certain body postures. For a history of the controversy and Palamas' role in it see Meyendorff, *A Study*, 13-85 and his *Byzantine Hesychasm: Historical, Theological and Social Problems* (London: Varorium Reprints, 1974).

\textsuperscript{12} Regarding Palamas' essence/energies distinction, Robert Sinkewicz notes ("The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God in the Early Writings of Barlaam the Calabrian," *Mediaeval Studies* 44 (1982), 182-242) that "the nucleus of what would become Palamas' doctrine of essence and energies in God" is in evidence before the outbreak of the Hesychast Controversy (c. 1337) during Palamas' initial epistolary polemic with Barlaam the Calabrian (see note below) concerning the human person's knowledge of God and the use of syllogism in theology in 1335-36 (221). In his *Second Epistle to Barlaam* Palamas writes, "But although the realities around God (τὰ περὶ θεοῦ) participate in some existence, they do not do so as substances…but as energies which belong to God (ἄλλʼ ὡς ἐνέργειαν οὖσα τὸ θεοῦ). But if someone should mention the effects of energies, they are substances derived from the energies but are not at all divine…If the realities referred to as around God are substances of God and if created things are spoken of as around God, the substance of God will be created, as it is in Barlaam's theory," Palamas, *Epistle 4: Ad Barlaam*, 32 in Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ Συγγράμματα, vol. 1, ed. P.K. Chrestou (Thessalonica: Oikos Kyromanos, 1962), 278; translation in Sinkewicz, "Early Writings of Barlaam," 221.

Barlaam, a Greek speaking monk from Seminaria in Calabria, was a philosopher who, upon his arrival in Constantinople in 1330, began writing commentaries on the works of Pseudo-Dionysius. He acted as an official legate of the Greek Church in talks with Catholic theologians sent by Benedict XII. In his Anti-Latin treatises, he claimed that since theological premises based in Divine Revelation are not self-evident, theological demonstrations regarding God in himself (like the Catholic doctrine of the *filioque*) are futile by their very nature. Demonstrations by way of apodictic syllogisms are only possible in terms of premises arrived at by “direct acquaintance” with things. For the most recent critical edition of Barlaam's Anti-Latin treatises see Barlaam Calabro, *Opere contro i Latini, introduzione, storia dei testi, edizione critica, traduzione e indici*. Studi e Testi 347-348, 2 vols., ed. Antonis Fyrigos (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998). Despite Palamas' vigorous objections to these claims—claims which Sinkewicz shows
These monks claimed to experience the vision of God as uncreated light. In Barlaam's account, this light is either the “super-essential essence of God,” which is “absolutely invisible and inaccessible to the senses” (which validates his charge that the monks are Messalians), an angel, or the soul itself, the image of which mediates God by a sort of reflection (in both these cases the monks are misinterpreting their own experience).\(^\text{13}\)

Palamas responds to this attack with his *Triads in Defense of the Holy Hesychast*, where he not only takes Barlaam to task for his attack on Hesychasm, but where he also challenges Barlaam on something far more fundamental, namely his interpretation of the light of the transfigured Jesus as a created “symbol of divinity.”\(^\text{14}\) This interpretation of the Taboric light resulted in the condemnation of Barlaam, along with Gregory Akindynos (1300-1348) and Nicephoras Gregoras (1295-1360)\(^\text{15}\) at a series of Councils.

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\(^\text{15}\) For an edition of Akindynos’ letters, which were first critical of Barlaam and then critical of Palamas (his former mentor) see *Letters of Gregory Akindynos*, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 21, ed. and trans.
in Constantinople between 1341 and 1351. These condemnations, taken up into the

*Synodikon of Orthodoxy* declare:

To them who at times think and say that the light which shone forth from the Lord at His Divine transfiguration is an apparition, a thing created, and a phantom which appears for an instant and then immediately vanishes, and who at other times think and say that this light is the very essence of God, and thus dementedly cast themselves into entirely contradictory and impossible positions; to such men who, on the one hand, raving with Arios' madness, sever the one Godhead and the one God into created and uncreated, and who, on the other hand, are entangled in the impiety of the Massalians who assert that the Divine essence is visible, and who moreover, do not confess, in accord with the divinely-inspired theologies of the saints and the pious mind of the Church, that that supremely Divine light is neither a created thing, nor the essence of God, but is rather uncreated and natural grace, illumination, and energy which everlastingly and inseparably proceeds from the very essence of God, *Anathema, Anathema, Anathema.*

Among the central concerns for these councils in canonizing the main aspects of Palamas' distinction of essence/energies, namely, that the “light,” witnessed by Peter, James and John, is neither “a thing created” (μήτε κτίσμα), nor “the essence of God” (μήτε οὐσίαν Θεοῦ), but it is rather “uncreated and natural grace, illumination, and energy (ἄλλα ἀκτιστὸν καὶ φυσικὴν χάριν καὶ ἐλλαμψιν καὶ ἐνέργειαν) which everlastingly and inseparably proceeds from the very essence of God,” is the protection that it affords to a certain view of the theophany of the Transfiguration. The *Synodikon* denies any characterization of the theophany of the Transfiguration which would affirm that the light emanating from Christ, seen by the apostles, Moses and Elijah, was a created

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16 The *Synodikon* is the solemn affirmation, during the first Sunday of Great Lent (“The Sunday of Orthodoxy”), of the main tenets of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, together with anathemas directed at the iconoclasts. Previous councils and controversies are mentioned in brief. The *Synodikon* was expanded and eventually included the two synods held in Constantinople in 1341 and 1351 regarding the Hesychast Controversy. For the critical edition, see Jean Gouillard, “Le synodikon de l’Orthodoxie: Édition et commentaire,” *Travaux et Mémoires* 2 (1967): 1-316; present English translation [online] available from http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2010/02/synodicon-of-orthodoxy.html. For the offices of the Sunday of Orthodoxy see LT, 299-313.
phenomenon or symbol which God stands behind. The Synodikon affirms that the light, energy, and illumination seen by the apostles is truly God, i.e., uncreated and divine in the proper senses of those terms. In other words, as a theophany, the Transfiguration of Christ discloses, reveals or manifests God in such a way that it is God himself that is seen or experienced in a direct way, and yet the directness of the manifestation does not compromise the transcendence of God. If one chooses to interpret the festal hymns for the Feast of the Transfiguration in light of the Synodikon, then the Byzantine liturgy’s assertion that, on Tabor, the apostles saw the “true brightness of the essence of the Father” and the “divine form” of the Son, is an assertion that the apostles were recipients of the vision of God in this life at the Transfiguration.

In this work I argue two theses, one interpretive and the other ecumenical. First, I submit that Palamas’ claim that the Taboric light is “uncreated” (ἀκτιστον) and therefore the “natural ray of the divinity,” “the light which deifies those who contemplate it” and “His kingdom...revealed through the power of the divine Spirit,” 17 is best understood in terms of θεοφάνεια, that is, the appearance or vision of God. For Palamas, it is precisely because the Transfiguration is a vision of God (i.e., theophany) that it encompasses revelation, deification, and eschatological advent: the Transfiguration is the Christological revelation of God’s uncreated divinity in via which anticipates and thus makes present our deification in the eschatological theophany of the face to face vision of God in patria. God, otherwise utterly transcendent, hidden, incomunicable and beyond all being and naming (Deus in se) theophanically reveals and manifests himself to

17 Palamas, Cap., 146; Triads III.iii.9; Homily 34.7; all citations from Palamas’ homilies are taken from Gregory Palamas, Saint Gregory Palamas: The Homilies, ed. and trans. Christopher Veniamin (Waymart, PA: Mount Tabor Publishing, 2009); hereafter referred to as Hom. For the Greek text of the homilies see Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ ἡ μάρτυς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, vols. 9-11, Ἔλληνες Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας 72, 76, and 79, ed. P.K. Chrestou (Thessalonica: Πατερικαὶ Ἐκδόσεις Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς, 1985-86).
creatures as energy (kat'energeia) preeminently in the theophany of the glorified Christ (Deus pro nobis). The divine energy, God himself, is simultaneously that which is manifested in Christ (Theophany or Christophany), that in which we participate (deification) and that which we become by that participation (eschatology). By interpreting Palamas’ teaching on the Transfiguration through the lense of theophany, I show that his theology of revelation (essence and energies), soteriology (deification), and his eschatology are all theophanic and therefore Christocentric.

Second, I argue that Palamas’ theophanic view of the economy of salvation, which has the Transfiguration at its center, is a synthesis of the Eastern patristic tradition regarding the Transfiguration as theophany and, as such, his synthesis is of great importance for the ongoing ecumenical dialogue between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. Palamas’ account of the Transfiguration grounds itself in a prior interpretive tradition of biblical theophanies (especially the Transfiguration as an ultimate case) which includes Fathers revered by both East and West. This tradition (especially Irenaeus, Anastasius of Sinai, Andrew of Crete, and John of Damascus) makes explicit the exegetical connection between the theophanies of Sinai and Tabor so as to affirm the continuity (to the point of identity) of the glory which passed by Moses and the radiance of the transfigured Jesus.18 This tradition tends to affirm that just as Moses, the one who encountered God “face to face” and “mouth to mouth” (Ex 33:11, Num 12:8) saw the

18 Perhaps few Fathers express this connection more clearly than John of Damascus: “Today Moses…is presented on Mount Thabor to Christ, who authored the Law, as to his Lord; he gazes on Christ’s divine work, which had long been represented in mystical figures—for I would say myself that this was the significance of ‘the back parts of God’—and he sees the glory of God clearly, while sheltered in a hole in the rock, as Scripture says. But the rock is Christ…who opened a kind of tiny cave, as it were, in his own flesh, and from it flooded those in his presence with boundless light, stronger than any powers of vision,” Oration on the Transfiguration of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, 2 (Patristische Texte und Studien 29, 438; hereafter referred to as PTS) translated in Light on the Mountain: Greek Patristic and Byzantine Homilies on the Transfiguration of the Lord, Popular Patristic Series, n. 48, trans. Brian E. Daley, S.J. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2013), 206; hereafter referred to as PPS.
very glory of God on Sinai in figure, so too does he again, this time along with Elijah and the apostles, experience this same glory now more fully “revealed in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:4-6) at the Transfiguration.\(^19\) The continuity between Tabor and Sinai pivots on the commitment (present in the ante-Nicene Fathers and maintained in Eastern Christianity) that the pre-incarnate Logos is the proper subject of Old Testament theophanies.\(^20\) This tradition generally sees what Andrew Louth calls the “great arch” of salvation history, unfolding from the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit, as constituted by the two poles of creation at one end and the deification or \textit{theosis} of that creation at the other.\(^21\) The same \textit{Logos} by whom the world was created and whose economy manifested the divine to Israel, is also the one through whose incarnation, passion, death and resurrection that same creation is deified.

A major component of my argument is that if Catholic theology desires to find the theological resources to arrive at a shared view of the Transfiguration as the vision of


\(^{20}\) I recommend all of the essays written by members of the Theophaneia School in \textit{Scrinium: Revue de patrologie, d’hagiographie critique et d’histoire ecclésiastique}. Tome 3, \textit{The Theophaneia School: Jewish Roots of Eastern Chritain Mysticism} (Saint Pétersbourg: Byzantinorossica, 2007) as a helpful starting place for understanding the crucial role that theophany viewed as Christophany plays in Eastern Christian thought. As my chapters bear out, particularly important to the form and content of this study is the work of Fr. Bogdan Bucur, a member of the Theophaneia school. Cf. Charles A. Gieshen, “The Divine Name in Ante-Nicene Christology,” \textit{Vigilae Christianae} 57, 2 (2003): 115-58.

God with Orthodox theology, it cannot find those resources in Thomas Aquinas’ teaching on the Transfiguration and theophany. As I show, Thomas’ view of theophany entails creaturely mediation which obscures the vision of God. Instead, Catholic theology must look deeper into its tradition. My claim is that Palamas’ synthesis of the above tradition regarding the Transfiguration and theophany can point the way for Roman Catholic theology to retrieve profound insights concerning theophany from its shared patristic heritage with the Christian East.

STATE OF THE RESEARCH

The early 20th century saw a resurgence of interest in Palamas after a period in which his theology had largely been forgotten. A learned patrologist at the University of Athens, Gregorios Papamichael produced in 1911 a serious study which, however, appears to have had little impact on Orthodox theology at the time. It was Martin Jugie’s two entries in the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* on Palamas and the Hesychast Controversy that sparked a renewed interest in Palamas' theology on the part of Orthodox scholars. Though very scholarly, these were not very flattering of Palamas' theology, branding it a heresy. In 1938 Basil Krivoshein’s “The Ascetic and Theological

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24 Martin Jugie, “Grégoire Palamas,” and “Palamite Controverse,” in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, tome XI/2, ed. M. Vacant et al (Paris, 1932), cols. 1735-1818. Cf. Jugie’s unfortunately lesser known *Theologia dogmatica christianorum orientalium ab Ecclesia Catholica dissidentium*, vol. 2 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1933), see especially pp. 142-147. I address some of Jugie’s dogmatic concerns regarding the “heretical” nature of Palamas claims involving the vision of God in one of the notes in Chapter 4. Also noteworthy is Joseph Pohle, *God: His Knowability, Essence, and Attributes*, trans. Arthur Preuss (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1938), which briefly mentions the “errors” of Palamas (101, 145-148) concerning the vision of God and divine simplicity using only secondary literature. This manual first appeared in German in 1911 and thus pre-dates Jugie, but due to its brief mention of Palamas seems to have had no significant impact.
Teaching of Gregory Palamas” sought to introduce the thought of Palamas to a wider audience as the first comprehensive study to exist in English. Dumitru Stăniloae’s *Viața și învățătura Sfântului Grigorie Palama* [The Life and Teachings of St. Gregory Palamas] was published the same year in Romania. In this monograph Stăniloae delivered a detailed analysis of the debate about the distinction between essence and energies and the apophatism of Palamas. “The Sources of the Doctrine of Gregory Palamas on the Divine Energies” by George Habra was the first full-length apologetic to the charges of innovation by Jugie and others that sought to show the solid patristic foundation of Palamas' distinction.

The standard works on Palamas and the Hesychast Controversy are still John Meyendorff's *Introduction à l’étude de Grégoire Palamas (A Study of Gregory Palamas)* and *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*. Both not only situate Palamas' theology in its historical context in detail, but also (and especially the former) give a systematic picture of Palamas' theology. Among Orthodox scholars, Vladimir Lossky’s treatment of the divine energies and the Uncreated light in his *Mystical*
Theology of the Eastern Church is also very important. He unquestionably follows Palamas and treats the Hesychast Controversy as a controversy about the Transfiguration as the foundation of mystical experience. His study The Vision of God offers a survey of the Greek Fathers on the question of the visio beatifica and how historically and theologically, the antinomy between God's transcendence (incommunicability) and immanence (communicability) is eventually resolved without being suppressed in Palamas’ defense of the Taboric Light and his doctrine of essence and energy. The main focus of all of the above works has been, in part or in whole, to explicate the essence and energies distinction and show how it functions as an integrating concept in Orthodox theology. Georges Mantzarides’ The Deification of Man: St. Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition is a fine excursus on the topic of deification, but the relation between essence/energies and the Transfiguration stands in the background. In all of the above works, Palamas’ teaching on the uncreated light of Tabor is treated as a component of larger concerns dealing with essence, energies, and deification. In none of these works, is Palamas’ teaching on the Transfiguration or theophany the main point of departure.

From both the Western/Catholic and the Orthodox sides there have been attempts to bring Palamas into contact with traditional Catholic positions (mainly Augustinian and Thomistic), especially concerning issues such as divine simplicity, the

31 Vladimir Lossky, Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997).
33 Lossky, Vision, 127.
vision of God, and the nature of grace, e.g. André de Halleux's "Palamisme et scholastique: exclusivisme dogmatique ou pluriformité théologique?"36 and Jürgen Kulhmann's Die Taten des einfachen Gottes: eine römisch-katholische Stellungnahme zum Palamismus,37 the latter of which attempts to show that Palamism entails no necessary conflict with Roman Catholic dogmatic pronouncements like those of the Council of Ferrara-Florence.

More recently, Anna Williams has argued that a return to the texts of both Palamas and Thomas regarding deification might overcome polemical evaluations on both sides.38 While she acknowledges that for Palamas the Transfiguration “functions not just as a favorable rhetorical figure but as one of the most important keys to the doctrine of deification,”39 and that the role it plays in Thomas’ overall theology is relatively minor, she gives no extended treatment on exactly what that role is. David Bradshaw's Aristotle East and West: The Metaphysics of a Divided Christendom40 has recently traced the

development of the category of *energeia* from its Aristotelian roots to its usage in Palamas’ distinction and has shown how the West’s Augustinian/Thomistic inspired suspicion of the Palamite distinction is due to its acceptance of an excessively entitative view of being as “undivided wholeness,” in which any distinction in God implies a division.\(^{41}\) While Bradshaw does give a full account of the function of the essence/energies distinction in Palamas and then compares that view with both Augustine and Aquinas, his focus is on questions of divine simplicity and associated problems with identifying the divine essence with the divine will. The implications and connections with theophanies and the Transfiguration specifically are muted so as to cover no new ground.\(^{42}\)

Most recently, Édouard Divry’s *La Transfiguration selon l’Orient et l’Occident: Grégoire Palamas - Thomas d’Aquin vers un dénouement œcuménique*\(^ {43}\) is the first and only book-length comparative treatment between Palamas and Thomas on the Transfiguration. Beginning with an excursus on the biblical categories of light/glory and face/vision, Divry thoroughly traces the theological reception of the Transfiguration both East and West. While examining the role that the essence/energies distinction plays in Palamas’ theology of the Transfiguration, Divry focuses primarily on Palamas’ claim that uncreated energy is enhypostatic, i.e., both its *terminus a quo* (the Son) and *terminus ad quem* (the deified human being) are persons and as such it is a manifestation of a personal


\(^{42}\) Bradshaw does cover the topic of theophanies (mainly by discussing the vision of God in Augustine) in a rebuttal to an essay by David Bentley Hart in “Augustine the Metaphysician,” in *Orthodox Readings of Augustine*, ed. George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008), 227-251. For Hart’s original essay “The Hidden and the Manifest: Metaphysics after Nicaea” see pp.191-226 of the same work.

kind. Divry uses this as the basis for calling the Taboric light a hypostatic property of Christ so as to find a mode of expression on which both East and West can agree. However, I do not think that Divry takes sufficient account of the importance of theophany in Palamas’ teaching on the Transfiguration, nor the fundamental differences between Palamas and Thomas concerning the nature of theophany. I show in Chapter 4 why this is so. In sum, the majority of scholarship on Palamas (regardless of its ecumenical orientation) has yet to treat theophany as a major aspect of Palamas’ teaching on the uncreated light of Tabor. This study hopes to play a part in filling this lacuna.

**LIMITATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY**

As I have tried to make clear in this introduction, my task is to analyze Palamas’ teaching regarding the Transfiguration as a theophany; specifically that the Transfiguration is the eschatological vision of God in this life. At no point will I treat in detail questions concerning the nature of Palamas’ distinction between essence and energies, i.e., whether it is real, notional or somewhere in between, nor will I offer a comparative reading of Palamas’ doctrine of God (God is both essence and energy) alongside the Thomistic doctrine of absolute divine simplicity (God is *actus purus*). I will treat Palamas’ distinction between essence and energies only insofar as it illuminates

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44 Divry, *La Transfiguration*, 329-351; See also Palamas, *Triads*, III.1.9.
46 There are a few notable exceptions to this general state of things. First, there is John Manoussakis, “Theophany and Indication: Reconciling Augustinian and Palamite Aesthetics,” *Modern Theology* 26:1 (January 2010): 76-89, in which the author, with mixed success, tries to mediate between the differing understandings of theophany in Eastern and Western Christianity using the phenomenological concept of indication, namely, that by which a sensible phenomenon not only evokes, but also embodies a supersensible reality whereby the relation between the indicted and the indicator is non-arbitrary, as is the case with a sign. See Manoussakis, “Theophany and Indication,” 80. Also there are three studies by Bogdan Bucur which note the place of Palamas in the theophanic tradition of Eastern theology: “The Theological Reception of Dionysian Apophatism in the Christian East and West: Thomas Aquinas and Gregory Palamas,” *Downside Review* 125 (2007): 131-146; “Dionysius East and West: Unities, Differentiations, and the Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies,” *Dionysius* 26 (Dec 2008): 115-38; and “Theophanies and Vision of God in Augustine’s *De Trinitate*: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective,” *Saint Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 52 (2008): 67-93.
his teaching on the Transfiguration as theophany. My study is a rare instance in Western engagement with Palamas that does not take one of the above factors as its point of departure.

The first contribution I hope to make by this study is to show that the category of theophany is one of the keys to properly understanding Palamas theology, be it regarding his distinction between essence and energies, his teaching on deification, or anything else in his thought. Only once the crucial role that theophany plays in Palamas’ theology is acknowledged, can his place in the theological tradition of the Christian East be established with clarity and fully appreciated. This study is the first book-length treatment solely devoted to Palamas’ theology of the Transfiguration as theophany and the implications that this has for the rest of his thought.

The second contribution I hope to make relies heavily on the success of the first: I hope to contribute to the ongoing Western (specifically Roman Catholic) reception of Palamas. I hope to show that Palamas aims to creatively develop and remain faithful to the patristic tradition regarding the Transfiguration and theophany. The Fathers on which Palamas draws are not his alone, but they are also Fathers of the Roman Catholic Church and, as such, they are part of her tradition also. Furthermore, if the Palamite/Orthodox claim about the uncreated nature of the Taboric light has grounding in both scriptural exegesis and the Fathers that traditional Catholic accounts of theophany and the God-world relation cannot quite account for, then Catholic theology is ripe for development in this area. Of the various Western treatements of Palamas’ theology, this study if the first treatment by a Roman Catholic theologian that argues that Palamas’ teaching has something significant to offer Catholic theology.
While judgments that Palamas’ theology is a valid way of approaching the Christian mystery or that his way entails no necessary conflict with Catholic dogma are perfectly legitimate, I do not think that these judgments go far enough. If, as John Paul II claimed in *Ut unum sint*, that “the Church must breathe with her two lungs” (n. 54), then I think that more than just theological affirmation is called for. Theological integration between East and West is what is needed, what John Paul II called (in the same encyclical) an “exchange of gifts”: “Communion is made fruitful by the exchange of gifts between churches insofar as they complement each other” (n. 57). It is my deepest hope that this study can contribute to such an “exchange of gifts.”

**CHAPTER SUMMARY**

**CHAPTER 1: PALAMAS’ EXEGESIS OF THE TRANSFIGURATION IN HOMILIES 34 & 35**

In the opening chapter I show that Palamas understands the Transfiguration first and foremost as θεοφάνεια (a manifestation of God or the divine to the human person) characterized by three closely interrelated aspects, namely, it is revelatory, deifying, and eschatological. I do this by way of an introductory analysis and commentary on Homilies 34 and 35 in order to locate Palamas in the history of patristic exegesis and commentary on the Transfiguration. To this end, I pay special attention to Palamas’ patristic sources and how he weaves them together into a tapestry in which the category of theophany is the guiding thread. The chapter concludes with a set of summary observations concerning Palamas’ view of the Transfiguration as theophany which guide my inquiry in the next two chapters as to how that view informs his theology of revelation, deification, and his eschatology.
CHAPTER 2: THE TRANSFIGURATION AS REVELATORY THEOPHANY IN BIBLICAL SALVATION HISTORY

In the second chapter, I show that Palamas sees the Transfiguration as the θεοφάνεια of the Incarnation and, as such, represents the central point in salvation history whereby its plan, the definitive revelation of God in Christ, is theophanically laid bare such that the Transfiguration is that to which all Old Testament theophanies look forward for their fulfillment, because the Transfiguration is a direct anticipation of the eschaton. I first examine Palamas’ claim, inherited from the Fathers, that the Transfiguration is a true vision of the glory of God in this life and not a vision of the divine essence. I next look at Palamas’ arguments in defense of the Transfiguration as a vision of God in the face of the claims made by Barlaam of Calabria that all biblical theophanies are visions of created realities. In particular, I focus on Palamas’ argument that the light of Tabor is God revealing himself in the natural symbol of his glory. I then examine Palamas’ Christological warrants for his characterization of the Transfiguration. Palamas’ claim that Christ is the unique “theandric hypostasis” grounds his assertion that Christ, as man, reveals God and deifies our nature due to the imprinting of his divine energy on his human energy on account of the hypostatic union. Finally, I analyze Palamas’ teaching regarding Old Testament theophanies and the connections that the Transfiguration has with them, both theologically and textually. For Palamas, the Transfiguration stands at the center of a theophanic and Christocentric economy of salvation.
CHAPTER 3: THE TRANSFIGURATION AS DEIFYING AND ESCHATOLOGICAL THEOPHANY

In third chapter, I round out my treatment of the Transfiguration in the thought of Palamas by examining his claims concerning its transformative (deifying) and eschatological aspects by integrating them with some of the claims I made in the last chapter. For Palamas, the Transfiguration holds such a central theological position because, as the theophany of the Incarnation, it is the paradigm of eschatological human fulfillment. First, I show that the Transfiguration is deifying because, as the theophany of the Incarnation, it is the paradigm of deification. In deification, human nature is transcended, or rather transfigured, by theophany. I will suggest that if one wants to find an analogue for deification in Palamas, one need look no further than the Incarnation and Transfiguration. Second, I examine Palamas’ teaching that human beings can experience theophany (the vision of God) with their bodies and not just their souls. Palamas’ commitments about the spiritualization of the “bodily eyes” of the apostles at the Transfiguration is grounded in what he takes deification to be, namely, the purpose for which the human person was created. I argue that Palamas grounds the deification of the whole person (body and soul) by continuing a tradition present in Eastern theology, namely, that the Incarnation (or something very much like it) is the point of creation.

CHAPTER 4: BREATHING WITH BOTH LUNGS

In the fourth and final chapter, I supplement my reflections on the Transfiguration as theophany in Palamas by showing what his interpretation might have to offer Roman Catholic theological reflection on the Transfiguration, particularly in the area of ecumenism. I show that, based on my reading of Thomas Aquinas, fundamental aspects of his position on the Taboric light (and theophany) are incommensurate with the Eastern
position. Following from this, I argue that, if Roman Catholic theology desires to find common ground with the Orthodox tradition on the uncreated nature of the Taboric light (specifically that the Transfiguration represents a revelation of the beatific vision in this life) then it should look not so much to Thomas’ account of the Transfiguration, but rather East, so as to retrieve a series of insights from the Eastern Fathers that the Catholic tradition shares with the Orthodox; moreover, I argue that this project of retrieval must account for Palamas, who synthesizes the thought of the Eastern Fathers regarding the Transfiguration.
CHAPTER 1: PALAMAS’ EXEGESIS OF THE TRANSFIGURATION IN HOMILIES 34 & 35

My task in this chapter is to examine Palamas’ exegesis of the Transfiguration narratives (Matt. 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-8, and Luke 9: 28-36) by way of an introductory analysis and commentary on Homilies 34 and 35 in order to highlight Palamas’ appropriation of the three main themes of patristic exegesis of the Transfiguration: (1) the Transfiguration as theophany, or a disclosure of the divine to the human person, (2) the Transfiguration as soteriological event, or a transformative participation of the human person in Divinity, and (3) the Transfiguration as epiphany of the New Age, or an anticipation of the yet to be fully realized eschatological state.47 Regarding the ubiquity of these three themes across the patristic exegesis of the Transfiguration both East and West, John McGuckin claims that the “theological interpretation” of the Fathers in this area can be “reduced” to these three themes “which summarize almost all of their particular statements [about the Transfiguration].”48 As such, these themes may serve as a set of inherited ground rules for any interpretation of the Transfiguration (such as that of Palamas) which sees the tradition of patristic exegesis as authoritative.

To show that these three themes are at the heart of Palamas’ claims about the Taboric light would be no more than to show that Palamas is using the resources of his tradition. The further and more central purpose of this chapter is to show that by absorbing insights from patristic exegesis of the Transfiguration, Palamas achieves a synthesis of these insights through his own reading of sacred Scripture and his reception

48 McGuckin, The Transfiguration, 100.
of the Fathers. In short, I argue that instead of seeing Palamas’ interpretation of the Transfiguration as guided by the patristic themes of theophany, deification and eschatology, one ought rather to see his interpretation guided by the one, over-arching theme of theophany (θεοφάνεια) or manifestation (ἐπιφάνεια). It is because the Transfiguration is first and foremost a theophany that it is revelatory, deifying, and eschatological.

Palamas sees the Transfiguration of the incarnate Christ as the preeminent divine self-manifestation which is the culmination and fulfillment of the theophanies and manifestations of God in the history of salvation. The Transfiguration is the preeminent manifestation of God because it is the Transfiguration of the incarnate Logos by which the Logos definitively reveals God and who the human person is destined to be in God. As such, the Transfiguration has two attributes: (1) it is a revelation of God which has (2) transformative (or deifying) power for those to whom the revelation is given. For Palamas, one and the same theophanic light is both the “natural ray of the divinity”\(^{49}\) and “the light which deifies those who contemplate it.”\(^{50}\) These two attributes of the Transfiguration theophany imply a third: to say that the theophany of the Transfiguration is definitive is to say that it is (3) eschatological, i.e., an actual anticipation of Christian fulfillment in the resurrection yet to come. It is “His kingdom...revealed through the power of the divine Spirit.”\(^{51}\)

Rather than beginning with Palamas’ major works such as the Triads or the Capita, I have chosen his homilies on the Transfiguration as my point of departure. While it is true that these texts were most probably delivered at Thessalonica during

\(^{49}\) Palamas, Cap., 146.  
\(^{50}\) Palamas, Triads, III.iii.9.  
\(^{51}\) Palamas, Hom., 34.7.
Palamas’ tenure as Archbishop (1347-57)\(^{52}\) and thus represent primarily his concerns as a pastor of souls rather than a theologian engaged in the polemic which gave birth to the first systematic expression of his theology, there are good reasons to start with them rather than the *Triads* or the *Capita*.

First, beginning with these texts shows that Palamas’ claims concerning the Taboric light are mainly *exegetical* in nature. Since a crucial element of the Hesychast controversy involved opposing theological interpretations of a biblical event (the Transfiguration), it is reasonable that one might begin a study of Palamas’ position on the Transfiguration by first examining his homilies where his theological interpretations most directly meet and flow from the texts of Scripture. The homilies in question represent a sustained exegetical treatment of the Transfiguration in the tradition of patristic exegesis in the service of the preaching of the word. As the homilies themselves show, Palamas is clear that the antecedent tradition of patristic exegesis concerning the Transfiguration is utterly dispositive for his own (or anyone else’s) reading of the gospels. On his own account, he is doing nothing more than elucidating “the words of the prophets, apostles and fathers for the benefit of those who read them in honor of the Spirit who spoke through them.”\(^{53}\) It is important to see how Palamas appropriates the Fathers using the same form they themselves generally used when commenting upon the Transfiguration, namely preaching as the fruit of exegesis.

Second, the homilies afford the best venue in which to see how Palamas synthesizes and creatively retrieves the insights of patristic exegetical preaching. There

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\(^{52}\) According to Veniamin’s introduction (*The Homilies*, xxiv-xxvi), almost all of Palamas’ homilies were written during his tenure as archbishop of Thessalonica (1347-1359). Homily 53, *On the Entry of the Mother of God into the Holy of Holies*, written while Palamas was still a monk on Mt. Athos, is one of the more notable exceptions.

\(^{53}\) Palamas, *Hom.*, 34.1.
are ways which Palamas combines various strands of interpretation into a unified vision by drawing out latent implications in the thought of the Fathers with the help of some of his own insights.

As a final point, while the homilies are not free from polemic, they are less polemical in character than either the Triads or the Capita. The Triads were written in the thick of Palamas’ confrontations with Barlaam and the Capita soon after.\textsuperscript{54} In the main, the homilies in question are not written as a rebuttal to an interlocutor, nor are they written to clarify or defend his own position in the face of opposition. They are largely positive expositions of a settled nature, composed late in Palamas’ career.

Before beginning the analysis of the homilies proper, there is a brief introductory section in which I make some remarks about the nature of patristic exegesis, highlighting some its salient features and how Palamas sees himself in relation to it. Then I give a brief introduction to the scope and provenance of Homilies 34 and 35, setting the stage for Palamas’ use of the Fathers and the way he deals with the biblical text. Next, I begin the analysis and commentary on the homilies showing how Palamas interprets both the Transfiguration narratives and the Fathers’ interpretations of those same narratives.

\textsuperscript{54} For the Defense of Those Who Practice Sacred Quietude (Hyper tōn hierōs hesychazaontōn) is divided into three groups of three books and is more commonly known as the Triads. Between 1338 and 1341, each triad (group of three books) was published in response to Barlaam’s claims against the Hesychasts. The first was written in 1338 as a result of personal discussions and correspondence between Palamas and Barlaam; the second was penned in 1339 in direct response to Barlaam’s treatises On the Acquisition of Wisdom, On Prayer and On the Light of Knowledge. Finally, in 1340-41, Palamas wrote the third triad concerning deification and the essence/energies distinction as a refutation of Barlaam’s Against the Messalians. For more on this and the background of the Triads composition see John Meyendorff’s introduction to Gendle’s translation of The Triads, 1-22. It is noteworthy that according to Pyrgios (Dalla contraversia palamitica, 159) the first Triad was composed in 1337. Regarding The One Hundred Fifty Chapters On Topics of Natural and Theological Science, The Moral and Ascetic Life, Intended as a Purge for the Barlaamite Corruption, as its full title suggest, it is meant both as a positive treatment that brings together Palamas’ theology and as a polemical refutation of Barlaam and Gregory Akindynos. According to Meyendorff, the Chapters were written between 1344 to sometime before the Synod of 1347, see Meyendorff, Introduction, 373-374. Sinkewicz, however, places their composition between 1349 and 1350, the year during which Palamas took possession of his Episcopal See in Thessalonica, see his introduction to The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters, 49-54.
through the lens of theophany or manifestation. The commentary is subdivided into two sections, the first dealing with the Transfiguration as revelation of God and the second treating the Transfiguration as deifying revelation of the Kingdom. Throughout the chapter the relevant patristic background for Palamas’ positions will be noted and explored. The chapter will conclude with a set of summary observations and questions generated by those observations from each of the two sections. These conclusions will guide the inquiry into the next two chapters on the Transfiguration as revelatory theophany (Ch. 2) and the Transfiguration as deifying and eschatological theophany (Ch. 3) so that, having a more or less complete picture of Palamas’ position on the Transfiguration, I can be in a position to show what his position has to offer Catholic theology by my analysis of Thomas Aquinas on the Transfiguration and theophany (Ch.4).

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL

1.1 A Few Notes Concerning Patristic Exegesis

In his “The Transfiguration of Christ: A Study in The Patristic Exegesis of Scripture,” Peter A. Chamberas outlines several key features characteristic of patristic exegesis of the Transfiguration narratives. 55 Four of those features are particularly helpful when acquainting modern readers with Palamas’ exegesis.

First, Palamas’ purpose in engaging Scripture is neither literary nor historical criticism, but theology in service of divine, salvific truth. Scripture is “authoritative and inspired” revelation, whole and entire. Consequently, like the Fathers, Palamas shows

55 This brief section relies heavily on Peter A. Chamberas’ “The Transfiguration,” 60-65.
“little interest” regarding either the literary problems created by the three synoptic accounts or the historical problems related to the genesis of the narratives. When literary problems do arise between accounts, e.g., Matthew and Luke differing on the amount of days leading up to the Transfiguration, Palamas generally follows the Fathers by harmonizing the differences either historically or theologically.

Second, this is not to say, however, that his exegesis is wholly unconcerned with history. Rather, he seeks to defend and authentically interpret the three narratives as historical accounts of supernatural events in the life of Christ and the apostles. As such, taken in tandem with his commitment to the inspired and authoritative character of Scripture as revelation, Palamas seeks to “interpret the essential meanings and the message...not so much of the letter as of the event.” For Palamas history is sacred history, and he is mainly concerned with God’s economy of salvation and how Christians are to live and move within that economy.

Third, Palamas’ exegesis not only focuses on uncovering the literal meaning of scriptural passages, but also on what he calls its “godly meaning” (εὕσεβὴς διάνοια), namely, the divine realities that stand behind the human words and symbolic representations present in Scripture. In looking at the Transfiguration, like the Fathers, he regards “the light, the cloud, the voice, etc. as literary symbols imposed for human communication. Thus [he is] able to go beyond a merely allegorical explanation of them

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56 Chamberas, “The Transfiguration,” 60. However, Palamas’ exegetical method does look for what we might call “pious deceptions” in Scripture, i.e., things intentionally expressed by the evangelists in a “veiled way” (συνεσκιασμένως) or esoterically. For example, contra a plain reading of the Resurrection accounts, Palamas claims that a careful reading of the Gospels shows that Mary, mother of Jesus, was really the first witness of the resurrection and that this is fully the intention of the evangelists. He claims, “[i]f the evangelists do not say this openly, it is because they do not want to put forward His Mother as a witness, lest they give unbelievers grounds for suspicion,” Hom., 18.3.
59 Palamas, Hom., 34.2.
and to deal with the historical events they seek to communicate." This is not to say that
the light, cloud, etc. are not true accounts of the historical experiences of the apostles, but
that the historical realities indicate and contain a transcendental dimension that is not
exhausted by the ordinary symbols by which the experience is expressed.

The fourth relevant feature of Palamas’ exegesis is that the practice of exegesis is
both profoundly personal and ecclesial. The faith and holiness of the exegete is of
paramount importance when doing exegesis. The exegete’s participation in the life of
grace is the single most important factor in him being a good interpreter of Revelation.
The economy of salvation revealed in Scripture is the same one in which the exegete
lives. For Palamas, the exegete is not a commentator on an ancient text from which he is
far removed; rather he engages with a living resource that constantly sets the narrative for
his world.

1.2 Context and Provenance of Homilies 34 & 35

The occasions for Homily 34 and 35 were the vigil for the feast of the
Transfiguration and the Divine Liturgy for the feast proper (August 6th) respectively. In
light of these contexts, Veniamin claims that Homily 34 is based mainly on Luke 9:28-
36, the Gospel reading for Matins, and Homily 35 on Matt. 17:1-9, the Gospel reading for
the Divine Liturgy. Yet, over the course of Homily 34 Palamas quotes from Matthew’s
account of the Transfiguration as many times as he does Luke’s (five times each) and
more from Matthew’s gospel over all (eight times as opposed to six times from Luke;

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60 Chamberas, “The Transfiguration,” 61.
61 For the liturgical texts of the vigil for the Feast of the Transfiguration see FM, 470-496. For the texts of
the Divine Liturgy see FM, 496-503.
Mark’s account receives two mentions). In addition to this, near the end of Homily 34 Palamas tells his audience, “In order not to strain your understanding too much, we shall keep the remaining verses of the Gospel for the time of the holy and divine Liturgy.” Homily 34 only covers those verses up until the appearance of Moses and Elijah, and their conversation with the transfigured Jesus (Matt. 17:4, Mark 9:4, Luke 9:31), while Homily 35 is concerned with the remaining parts of the Transfiguration narrative; especially the voice of the Father from the luminous cloud (Matt. 17:5-7, Mark. 9:7, Luke 9:34-35). Rather than seeing Homilies 34 and 35 as standalone works particular to their respective contexts, it seems preferable to see them as having been conceived as one sermon broken up into two parts; the one sermon using all three synoptic Transfiguration accounts freely according to the interest of the preacher. This is why I will treat the homilies as a single unit with a single context. The main argument or thesis of the Homilies, if they can be said to have one, centers on the claim that the apostles, transformed by the Spirit, saw the uncreated glory of God as the light of the transfigured Jesus and that the light cannot be the essence of God.

Palamas begins the homily with an opposition between the wisdom of the “pagan Greek sages,” whose wonder at creation was against God’s glory due to their confusing the creature for the creator, and the Christian wisdom of those who follow Scripture and its interpretation by the Fathers, whose teachings are “suitable food for souls that listen and obey.” This opposition between wisdoms is a rhetorical device intended to make his hearers identify the folly of the Greek sages with the “leaders of any given heresy”

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63 Palamas does, however, rely heavily on Matthew’s version in Homily 35, quoting from it eight times. In Homily 35, Mark receives three mentions and Luke one.
64 Palamas, Hom., 34.17.
65 Palamas, Hom., 34.1.
who “reject patristic interpretations and attempt by themselves to deduce the complete opposite. While pretending to concern themselves with the literal sense of the passage they reject its godly meaning.”

Palamas tells his audience that the interpretation of the Taboric light that follows “is much opposed even in our own day by enemies of the light.”

These “enemies of the light” are most probably Palamas’ main adversaries in the various stages of the Hesychast Controversy, namely, Barlaam of Calabria, Gregory Akindynos and Nicephoras Gregoras. While all three had been condemned at previous councils which upheld the Palamite position—Barlaam in 1341, Akindynos in 1347, and Gregoras in 1351—Palamas was still engaged in polemics with Gregoras as late as 1355-1358, possibly around the time of the Transfiguration homilies.

All three of Palamas’ main opponents made ample use of the Fathers in support of their positions. But, in the homilies, Palamas relies on patristic exegesis of the Transfiguration in such a way as to show that his claims about Tabor are a natural extension of the Fathers’ own claims about it.

1.3 The Transfiguration as Promised θεοφάνεια

Palamas does not start his exegesis by using the reading for Matins (Luke 9:28-36), but with the parallel account in the gospel for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy on the next day (Matt. 17:1-2): “And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. And he was transfigured

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66 Palamas, Hom., 34.2.
67 Palamas, Hom., 34.3.
68 Although Gregoras had been condemned in 1351 and subsequently entered monastic life, he was able to return to court in 1355 with the ascension of John V Palaeologus (1332-1391) as sole emperor. In 1355 Palamas returned to Constantinople to engage in a disputation with Gregoras before the emperor. As late as 1358 Palamas was writing treatises against Gregoras at the request of Philotheus, the deposed Patriarch of Constantinople, see Meyendorff, A Study, 109-111.
before them, and his face shone like the sun.” Palamas begins by focusing his attention on the temporal context in which the event took place, “Six days after which day? Six days after the day the Lord taught His disciples, saying, ‘The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father’ (Matt. 16:27), and adding, ‘There be some standing here, which shall not taste death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom’ (Matt.16:28).”

Palamas reads Matt. 16:27-28 as the “promise” (ἐπαγγέλια) that is fulfilled in the “manifestation” (ἐπιφάνεια) of the light of the Transfiguration in Matt. 17:1-2.

Palamas treats the parallel accounts in Mark (9:1 and 9:2-3) and Luke (9:27 and 9:28-29) in the same way, that is, according to the relation of a promised vision of the glory and kingdom of God to the fulfillment of the promise in the manifestation of the Transfiguration. By connecting the Matthean pericopes and their parallels, Palamas provides the warrant for his characterization of the Taboric light:

He [Jesus] was referring to the light of His transfiguration as His Father’s glory and as His own Kingdom (δόξαν τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ βασιλείαν ἑαυτοῦ)... It was this power of the divine Spirit, through which those worthy will see God’s kingdom, that the Lord foretold, according to the divine Luke, when He declared to His disciples, “There be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power” (Mark 9:1, cf. Luke 9:27), bestowing on those who see it the power to behold what is invisible (τῷ δύναμιν τοῖς ὄρθοις παρασκεύαὶ ἰδεῖν τὰ ἀθέατα), and purifying them in advance from the deadly, soul-destroying defilement that is sin...and those who are cleansed beforehand will not experience death of the soul, having been preserved undefiled in their minds as well, as I understand it, by the power of the manifestation to come (τῇ δύναμεὶ τῆς μελλούσης ἐπιφανείας).

For Palamas, the light of the Transfiguration is first and foremost ἐπιφάνεια (manifestation, appearance) or more specifically θεοφάνεια (divine manifestation, vision)

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69 Palamas, Hom., 34.3.
70 Palamas, Hom., 34.4.
71 Palamas, Hom., 34.3 and 6 (emphasis mine).
of God). The Transfiguration is a theophany with three interrelated facets. First, as “His Father’s glory,” it is a supernatural revelation or disclosure of God, in Christ, by which he shows himself to the apostles. Second, this disclosure of the divine is simultaneously a revelation of “His own kingdom.” The revelation has an eschatological character in that it is a preview or anticipation of ultimate human destiny in God that is yet to be fully realized in “the manifestation to come.” Third, it is only by the “power of the divine Spirit” that the apostles were able to “behold what is invisible.”

The revelation of God and the kingdom was, from the standpoint of the apostles (and Moses and Elijah), a vision. The vision can also be characterized as esoteric (only for those whom God has chosen) in that transformation of the percipients was necessary in order to elevate them above their natural condition so as to make the vision of the glory and kingdom possible. In addition to this, the transformation was also “purifying” or, as Palamas will later say, deifying, making the disciples fit for the fully eschatological “manifestation to come.” In framing his exegesis of the Transfiguration in this way, Palamas’ furthers a strain in patristic exegesis which sees the Transfiguration as the promised manifestation of God’s glory and kingdom and, therefore, that the Transfiguration is revelatory, eschatological, and deifying. This can be seen in his

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72 Palamas claims that, on Tabor, the apostles fell down in fear “obviously on account of the divine manifestation.” (Hom., 35.13). In the homilies, ἐπιφάνεια is used as a synonym for θεοφάνεια in all cases but one: in Hom., 35.6, ἐπιφάνεια has the more general meaning of appearance, i.e., “illustrations fall short of conveying the appearance of those [Christ’s] garments.”

73 It is noteworthy that Matthew’s account of the Transfiguration, which is Palamas’ main source in the homily, is the only one among the synoptic Gospels which calls the event a “vision” (τὸ ὄραμα, Matt. 17:9). Matthew uses the same term (τὸ ὄραμα) to describe the apostles’ experience of the transfigured Christ that the Septuagint version of Exod. 3:3 uses to describe Moses’ experience of the burning bush (τὸ ὄραμα τὸ μέγα), see Bogdan Bucur, “Matt 17:1-9 as a Vision of a Vision: A Neglected Strand in the Patristic Reception of the Transfiguration Account,” Neotestamentica 44.1 (2010), 17.

74 According to McGuckin, it is “surprising” that the above interpretation is explicit in only six of the Fathers (four of whom I mention) given that the Transfiguration immediately follows the promise in the synoptic accounts. He plausibly claims that Origen, the first of the Fathers to comment extensively on the Transfiguration, “discouraged such an interpretative school” (McGuckin, The Transfiguration, 121).

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appropriation of the thought of four Fathers: Clement of Alexandria, Cyril of Alexandria, Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus.

1.4 The Promise/Manifestation Structure of the Transfiguration in the Fathers

In Clement of Alexandria, the light seen by the apostles on the mountain “was not secondary to the light on high, nor was it separated from on high when it was among us...No, this was the (light) which is everywhere, and even as it was with the Father, so it was also here, for it was the power of the Father. Indeed the Saviour’s words were to be fulfilled when he said: ‘There are some standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man in glory.’”\footnote{Clement of Alexandria, Excerpts from Theodotus 4.2 (GCS 17, 106) translation in McGuckin, The Transfiguration, 150. See also C. Scholten, "Ein Unerkannter Quaestioneskommentar (Exc.Theod. 4) Und Die Deutung Der Verklärung Christi in Frühchristlichen Texten," Vigiliae Christianae 57.4 (2003): 389-410.} For Clement, the promised vision of the Son of man’s glory is fulfilled in the light of the Transfiguration, which is a vision of the eternal light of the divinity shared by the Father and the Son (revelatory theophany).

Cyril of Alexandria focuses on the eschatological aspect of the promised vision of the kingdom in Matt. 16:28 when he claims,

But the Kingdom he spoke of was the vision of his glory in which he will be seen in that time when he will shine out upon all men on earth. For he will come in the glory of God the Father and no longer in our human pettiness. So how did he...
make them see this wonder...he was transfigured into a certain extraordinary and
godlike radiance.\textsuperscript{76}

The Transfiguration is the promised anticipatory vision of the eschatological Second
Coming of Christ.

Maximus the Confessor, while commenting on the differences between Matt.
16:28 (the Son of man comes \textit{in his glory}) and its parallel in Mark 9:1 (the kingdom of
God has come \textit{with power}), says “And ‘they will not taste death’ is said also regarding
the apostles, because ‘they will not taste’ of the physical ‘death until they see’ through
the transfiguration the image of the future splendor that will be [available] for the
saints.”\textsuperscript{77} Maximus sees Matthew’s version of the promise as a reference to the glory the
Son possesses eternally by which “he glorified the assumed humanity because just as he
was seen transfigured on the mountain in the body that is subject to suffering, so also we
shall be in the resurrection when we receive an incorruptible body.”\textsuperscript{78} Jesus, by
promising of a vision of the kingdom in Mark, “showed that the incorruptible and eternal
kingdom, hoped for by the saints, not yet present in its full actuality (\textit{energeia}).”\textsuperscript{79} In
Maximus’ exegesis especially, the three themes of theophany (a manifestation of the
glory of God), eschatology (the kingdom and the resurrection), and deification (“he
glorified the assumed humanity”) are clearly present.

Finally, John of Damascus interprets Matt. 16:28 and its parallel Luke 9:27 as
expressing a desire on the part of Christ “to confirm his words and deeds, and knowing
what he would do, the almighty ‘Wisdom and Power of God,’ ‘in whom all the treasures

\textsuperscript{76} Cyril of Alexandria, \textit{Homiliae diversae 9 in transfigurationem} (\textit{Patrologiae cursus complete}s, series
\textit{Graeca} 77.1009-1016; hereafter referred to as PG); translation in McGuckin, \textit{The Transfiguration}, 177.
\textsuperscript{77} Maximus the Confessor, \textit{Questions and Doubts}, q. 191 (\textit{Corpus Christianorum. Series Graeca} 10, 133;
hereafter referred to as CCSG) in \textit{Questions and Doubts}, trans. Despina D. Prassas (DeKalb, IL: Northern
\textsuperscript{78} Maximus the Confessor, \textit{Questions and Doubts}, q. 190 (CCSG 10, 131).
\textsuperscript{79} Maximus the Confessor, \textit{Questions and Doubts}, q. 190 (CCSG 10, 131).
of knowledge are hidden,’ said ‘There are some of those standing here…’”

These words of Jesus are “confirmed” in the Transfiguration when the apostles have a “vision that is beyond seeing” of “the natural splendor of the Godhead.”

For Palamas and all of the Fathers mentioned above, the characterization of the Transfiguration as a revelatory, eschatological, and deifying manifestation hinges upon the promise/manifestation relation by which it was introduced. One can be certain that the Transfiguration is a vision of the glory and kingdom of God because of Christ’s promise. Palamas’ reception of this strain of patristic interpretation is the exegetical foundation upon which all of his later claims about the Taboric light are based and from which they have their theological coherence. As the next sections show, Palamas claims that there are a number of theological conclusions that must follow about the Transfiguration in general, and the Taboric light specifically, if it is a deifying vision of the divinity of Christ that is, therefore, an anticipation of the eschaton. Now, I will trace out how Palamas develops each of these three aspects of the Transfiguration theophany.

**SECTION 2: “HIS FATHER’S GLORY” (REVELATORY THEOPHANY)**

2.1 The Light of the Trinitarian Godhead

In characterizing the Transfiguration as a revelatory θεοφάνεια, Palamas means that the light of Tabor was first and foremost “the light of the Godhead.” Citing John Chrysostom he claims “that the Lord graciously willed to open up a little of His divinity,

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and revealed God within Him to the initiated disciples.” The divinity of Christ is revealed as light (φῶς) which is “the glory (δόξα) that proceeds naturally from His divinity.” The Transfiguration is a revelation or unveiling of the divinity of Christ that had been, up until the Transfiguration, veiled by Christ’s pre-resurrection humanity. The unveiling takes place by way of an experience of the luminosity that is the natural accompaniment of the divine nature.

I noted above that Palamas is largely unconcerned with literary problems elicited by the differences among the synoptic accounts of the Transfiguration. Yet, the first place in Homily 34 where he develops the notion of the Transfiguration as revelatory theophany (both Christological and Trinitarian) is in the context of the first major difference between Matthew and Luke: “But how do the two accounts agree, when one clearly states that there were eight days [Luke] between the promise and the manifestation and the other says it followed after six days [Matt.]?” Palamas handles this problem in three ways: (1) he creatively interprets the days as a symbolic representation of the number of persons present, (2) he harmonizes the accounts by claiming that Luke counts the day of the promise and the day of the Transfiguration while Matthew does not, and (3) he relies on Maximus’ exegesis according to the spiritual sense which takes Luke’s “eight days” as referring to the eschatological “eighth day” of the kingdom of God. The first of these ways, the symbolic interpretation, is original to Palamas and sets up his account of the Transfiguration as a Trinitarian revelation. Since the Taboric light is the glory of the Godhead shared by the Father, Son, and Spirit,

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84 Palamas, Hom., 34.11.
85 Palamas, Hom., 34.4.
86 Palamas, Hom., 34.4-6.
Palamas’ exegesis has an explicitly Trinitarian dimension. The third way, Maximus’ spiritual interpretation, will be discussed in the next section on eschatology and deification.87

In both Matthew’s and Luke’s accounts six persons are clearly present: Jesus, Peter, James, John, Moses and Elijah. But, according to Palamas, Luke’s “eight days” can be a “figurative allusion” not only to the six mentioned above, but also to the Father and the Holy Spirit who, were invisibly (ἀοράτως) accompanying the Lord. The Father bore witness with His voice that Christ was his beloved Son, and the Holy Spirit joined His brilliance to Christ’s in the radiant cloud, and showed that the Son was of one nature with the Father and Himself united in Their light. For Their wealth consists in Their oneness of nature and in the unified outburst of Their brilliance. So the six persons were eight.88

In a way similar to the Baptism of Jesus89 (commemorated on the Feast of Holy Theophany in Orthodoxy) Palamas sees the Transfiguration as a Trinitarian revelation, with each of the persons of the Trinity accounted for in his own unique way: Christ

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87 The second way (a different method of counting days) is a standard move to harmonize the historical sense of the two accounts; it has little theological import and therefore it will not be discussed.

88 Palamas, Hom., 34.4. While calling Palamas’ figurative reading “creative” may seem a stretch, it does have a sort of precedent in the patristic exegesis of Clement of Alexandria who also saw a figurative significance in the number of persons present, “The Lord who ascended the mountain as the fourth becomes the sixth [with Moses and Elijah] and is illuminated all around with spiritual light by laying bare the power proceeding from him as far as those selected to see were able to behold it. By the voice, that is the seventh, he is proclaimed the Son of God so that the (disciples) might be convinced about him and so come to rest; while he by his birth (indicated by a six conspicuously marked) becoming the eighth, might appear to be God in a body of flesh by displaying his power. He was numbered as a man indeed, but was concealed as to who he was.” (Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis 6.16.140 (GCS 52, 530); translated in McGuckin, The Transfiguration, 149).

89 Identifying the voice from the cloud with the Father is obvious due to the repetition of the “this is my beloved son” logion from the Baptism at the Transfiguration. It may seem like Palamas forces the inclusion of the Holy Spirit as the cloud so as to strengthen the parallels with the traditional Trinitarian exegesis of the Baptism of Jesus. However, it could be that he saw the “cloud overshadowing the mountain” resonances with Old Testament theophanies (especially those at Sinai which will be discussed later). Another possibility is that Palamas is following Andrew of Crete (ca. 660-740), one of the first writers to exploit the Transfiguration’s parallels with the Baptism of Jesus so as to identify the Holy Spirit with the cloud in his Oration 7, Homilia in transfigurationem domini (PG 97:952D-953A); see Veniamin, “The Transfiguration of Christ,” 221. Cf. John of Damascus, Oration on the Transfiguration, 18 (PTS 29, 458; PPS 48, 228).
reveals the glory he shares with the Father which is made visible by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Father is present “invisibly” in the voice from the cloud, confirming the divinity of the Son. The Spirit invisibly (but for a different reason as I show below) overshadows the mountain joining “His brilliance to Christ’s in the radiant cloud” and instilling the power to behold the vision. Here Palamas employs the framework of the Trinitarian missions in the economy of salvation: The incarnate Son is the seat of the revelation of God the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now I will examine in detail Palamas’ claims regarding the nature of the light (which shines from the incarnate Son), the radiant cloud (Holy Spirit), and the voice (Father). The main point which Palamas’ exegesis stresses concerning the “unified outburst of Their brilliance” revealed in Christ on Tabor is that it is no ordinary or created (κτιστὸν) light, but that it is uncreated (ἄκτιστον) as a consequence of it being the glory which naturally pours forth from God.

2.2 “His face shone like the sun” The Light of the Son

Regarding the light that shone forth from Christ, Palamas focuses on one of the purposes for the Transfiguration as evidence for the extraordinary nature of the light, “Why does he take the leaders, and them alone, and go up with them? Obviously, [he takes them] to show them something great and mysterious. But how could a vision of ordinary light, visible to those chosen before they ascended, as well as to those left below, be a great mystery?”90 The thing “great and mysterious” is the disclosure of the

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90 Palamas, Hom., 34.15. See also Triads, III. i.19, “The Saviour did not ascend Thabor, accompanied by the chosen disciples, in order to show them that He was a man. For during the three years previous this, they had seen Him living with them and taking part in their way of life...No, He went up to show them ‘that He was the radiance of the Father.’”
divine nature of Christ. Palamas stresses this point in the way he reads the various
synoptic accounts’ descriptions of Jesus’ manifested luminosity. In a manner reminiscent
of Chrysostom, Palamas claims that Matthew’s simile “his face shone like the sun” (17:2) implies such an overpowering luminosity that one should not imagine that it was
“visible to bodily eyes” the way that natural light is. Being, in itself, too bright to
behold, the light is truly “unapproachable”--the suggestion here being that if the natural
faculty of sight cannot look directly into the natural light of the sun, then it certainly
cannot gaze upon the supernatural light of the Godhead. Palamas takes Mark’s
statement that “his garments became glistening, intensely white (as snow), as no fuller on
earth could bleach them,” as a demonstration “that images and illustrations fall short of
conveying the appearance of those garments. Snow is indeed white, but it does not
shine.” He adds,

> the evangelist added the word ‘shining’ to show that the light...was supernatural. It is not a property of light to render the objects it illuminates sparkling and white, but to show what colour they are. This light...transformed, the things it shone upon, which visible light cannot do...How could the light with which we are familiar do all this?

All of these textual details suggest to Palamas that the light of the Transfiguration does
not fit into any species of created reality (be it light or otherwise). He continues this
trend of examining the textual details of the account in light of previous patristic exegesis
when dealing with the appearance of the radiant cloud and the voice that issues from it.

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91 “The evangelist, wishing to show us this radiance of his, tells us how radiant he was. And how radiant was he? Immensely radiant...Like the Sun...Why was this? Because I do not have any other star so splendid and so brilliant...[But] if he was as radiant as the sun the disciples would not have fallen down, for they saw the sun everyday...But since he was radiant far beyond the sun or snow, this was why they could not bear the radiance.” (John Chrysostom, *Homilia 21. Eloga de imperio potestate gloria* (PG 63:700) translated in McGuckin, *The Transfiguration*, 174).
92 Palamas, *Hom.*, 34.10.
95 Palamas, *Hom.*, 35.7.
2.3 “A bright cloud overshadowed them” The Light of the Holy Spirit

Palamas takes Matthew’s description of the cloud as “bright” (φωτεινή) (17:5) as cementing a kinship with the shining face and garments of the transfigured Jesus. Since the light is the natural radiance of the divine nature and the Son and the Spirit are both co-equal in that nature, Palamas, following John of Damascus, asks rhetorically concerning the brightness of the cloud, “Was it not the unapproachable light in which God dwells, and with which He covers Himself as with a garment? (Ps. 104:3).” Since the cloud is described by Matthew as both bright and overshadowing, Palamas, under the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius, concludes “the same phenomenon was both light and darkness, overshadowing because of its exceeding brightness.”

On the one hand, the light is manifested to the apostles and variously described in visual, aesthetic terms such as radiance (λαμπρότης), glory (δόξα), and beauty (κάλλος). But, on the other, it is simultaneously unapproachable (ἀπρόσιτος) and described as darkness (σκότος). Although these sets of opposed descriptions regarding the same phenomenon may seem puzzling at first glance, they are an instance of what Vladimir Lossky has called theological “antinomies,” namely, two seemingly opposed

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96 See Pseudo-Basil, who identifies the luminous cloud of the Transfiguration with the eschatological cloud that will cover the blessed, who living “under it shall enjoy great glory for here they are illuminated....This cloud takes its origins only from the light itself” (Pseudo-Basil, Enarratio in prophetam Isaiam 4.5 (PG 30:341-44) translated in McGuckin, The Transfiguration, 168).
97 “Today the abyss of inaccessible light, today the boundless outpouring of divine radiance shines on the Apostles on Mount Thabor.” (John of Damascus, Oration on the Transfiguration, 2 [PTS 29, 438; PPS 48, 206]).
98 Palamas, Hom., 35.9.
99 “The divine darkness is that ‘unapproachable light’ where God is said to live. And if it is invisible because of a superabundant clarity, if it cannot be approached because of the outpouring of its transcendent gift of light, yet it is here that is found everyone worthy to know God and to look at him.” (Pseudo-Dionysius, Letter V, 1073A (PTS 36, 162) in Pseudo-Dionysius The Complete Works, trans. Colm Luibheid, (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 265). Cf. Bogdan Bucur, “The Theological reception of Dionysian Apophatism,” 139-141 where Bucur contextualizes Palamas’ reception of Letter V, 1073A within the framework of apophatic theology understood as a preparation for the apophatic experience of “the ascent to the paradoxical contemplation of God as ‘hidden light’ and ‘dazzling darkness’” (141).
100 Palamas, Hom., 35.9.
propositions, in this case about God as knowable (light/immanence) and God as hidden (darkness/transcendence), which must both be affirmed as true and thus held together in creative tension so as not to lose a deep theological insight.\footnote{Lossky, \textit{The Vision of God}, 127; cf. Vladimir Lossky, “The Theology of Light in Gregory Palamas” in \textit{The Image and Likeness of God}, eds. John H. Erikson and Thomas E. Bird (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 50-53.} This concept will be explored more fully in Chapter 2. I bring it up now only to point out that in this particular case, the opposition between light and darkness (God known and God hidden) is more along the lines of the opposition between two different degrees on a spectrum rather than contrariety. It is matter of less versus more intensity. The same light is described as darkness the more intense it becomes; the closer one approaches its source:

> It follows that the light, which the apostles saw shining from the Lord’s face, was the same as the bright cloud, which later overshadowed them. But in the first instance, because it appeared more dimly, it could be seen, whereas later it shone so much more strongly that it was invisible to them on account of its overwhelming brilliance, and thus it overshadowed Christ, the fount of divine, eternal light and the Sun of righteousness (Mal. 4:2). For the one and same light of the visible sun allows us to see by its rays, but also takes away our sight if we look directly at it, since its brilliance exceeds the measure of our eyes.\footnote{Palamas, \textit{Hom.}, 35.10.}

The light is reckoned darkness \textit{precisely because of} the intensity of its luminosity.

Within his Trinitarian framework, Palamas reads the Transfiguration as a theophany that ratchets up in intensity as each person of the Trinity is revealed. This is why I earlier pointed out Palamas’ claim that while the manifestation of the Son is visible, that of the Father and the Spirit is invisible. It isn’t because the Son’s manifestation is of one kind while the Father and the Spirit’s are of another. Rather, there is a way in which the \textit{visible} glory of the transfigured Son is the same as the \textit{invisible} glory of the Father and the Spirit. It is because the degree or intensity of the manifestation has increased such
that, pre-resurrection humanity (even strengthened by grace), cannot endure it.\textsuperscript{103}

Therefore, with the additional revelation of the Father and the Spirit, the visible light of the Son became “invisible to them [the apostles] on account of His exceeding splendour, as though He had entered a bright cloud.”\textsuperscript{104}

\section*{2.4 “And a voice from the cloud said” The Light of the Father}

Filling out his Trinitarian exegesis concerning the Transfiguration, Palamas turns his attention to the voice of the Father that is located within the cloud:

> A voice was heard from the Cloud saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Matt. 17:5). After the Lord was baptized in the Jordan the heavens were opened and the same voice came out of that glory (Matt. 3:16-17); that glory which Stephen later saw when, full of the Spirit, the heavens opened to him, and he looked up (Acts 7:55–57). Now this voice is heard out of the Cloud overshadowing Jesus, so this Cloud must be the same as God’s celestial glory.\textsuperscript{105}

Here Palamas uses the Father’s voice to connect the Transfiguration theophany with two other New Testament theophanies, the Baptism of Jesus and the martyrdom of Stephen. While the connection with the Baptism is obvious on account of the Father making virtually the same revelatory statement in both—the Transfiguration account adds “hear ye him”—the connection with Stephen’s theophany may seem less obvious because there is no voice of the Father from heaven during Stephen’s martyrdom. In Stephen’s case, the revelatory statement comes from Stephen himself, from earth as it were, as a response to a heavenly vision from above. It seems to me that Palamas includes Stephen’s

\textsuperscript{103} The reasons why such a vision must be modulated (in both intensity and duration) for pre-resurrection humanity will be briefly mentioned in the Section 2 of this chapter and treated more fully in Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{104} Palamas, \textit{Hom.}, 35.11.

\textsuperscript{105} Palamas, \textit{Hom.}, 35.11.
theophany in his connection between the Transfiguration and the Baptism for at least two reasons.

The first reason has to do with the source of the revelation. In all three theophanies the source or location of the revelation is “from heaven.” The theophanies in question are revelations which come out of, or originate in “God’s celestial glory.” All three are condescensions of God to humanity in service of the revelation or, in the case of the first two, confirmation of the divinity and mission of the Son. Even though in Stephen’s case the revelatory word comes from below, it is Stephen who says, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56), it is in response to a vision from above that he says it.

The Christological significance of these theophanies leads to the second and more subtle reason for Palamas linking them together: the purpose of the theophanies which is a revelation of the Trinity. As I have shown, Palamas interprets certain key details of the Transfiguration narrative, such as the luminosity of Christ, the bright cloud, and the voice, in an explicitly Trinitarian way. The context of Palamas’ connection between the Transfiguration, the Baptism, and Stephen is that of a Trinitarian framework. In the Transfiguration we have the luminosity of the Son, the Spirit manifested in the brilliant cloud, and the Father in the voice from heaven. In the Baptism we have the incarnate Son, the Spirit in the form of a dove, and again the voice of the Father. The additional link between these two theophanies and Stephen’s is that his is also Trinitarian: he is described as being “full of the Holy Spirit” which enables him to “gaze into heaven” and see “the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55). Stephen sees the glorified Son at the right hand of the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit.
This Trinitarian characterization of Stephen’s theophany closely approximates the revelatory model that Palamas assumes for the Transfiguration: the Father is revealed by the glorified Son in the Spirit.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Palamas’ identification of the source of the theophanies as “God’s celestial glory” is, in the above context, rooted in the biblical description of Stephen seeing “the glory of God” (Acts 7:55). For Palamas, the terms δόξα, φῶς, λαμπρότης, κάλλος, etc. are all ways of describing the effulgence which proceeds naturally from the divinity of God and which in turn, is what God reveals of himself in theophanies. The light of the transfigured Jesus and the brilliance of the cloud are the same as the glory of God seen by Stephen.

Returning to the details of the narratives, Palamas uses the identification of the cloud (precisely as it is luminous) with “God’s celestial glory” to explain the apostles’ reaction to the advent of the cloud and the voice of the Father in order to strengthen his case about the increasing revelatory nature of the light. Matthew’s account describes the apostle’s reaction to the bright cloud and the voice issuing from it this way: “When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe” (Matt. 17:6). Rather than focusing on the voice as the reason for the disciples falling on their faces with awe (a point that seems obvious in Matthew), Palamas instead claims that the voice alone cannot be the reason because there are other instances in Scripture where the Father’s voice is heard, e.g., by John the Baptist at Jesus’ baptism (Matt.3:16-17 and parallels) and by the crowds in John 12:28. In neither case was there a reaction on the
part of the hearers comparable to the apostles at the Transfiguration. He therefore concludes,

But here there was not just a voice, but with the voice limitless light blazed forth. That is why the God-bearing Fathers rightly recognized that the disciples fell on their faces, not because of the voice, but because of that extraordinary supernatural light. As Mark tells us, they were frightened even before the voice came (Mark 9:6), obviously on account of the divine manifestation (ἀπὸ τῆς θεοφανείας ἐκείνης πάντως). With the added brilliance of the Father and the Spirit, which completes the event’s Trinitarian character, the theophanic light of the Transfiguration has now become so intense that the apostles can no longer bear to gaze upon it, falling on their faces with awe in a way reminiscent of Old Testament theophanies concerning Abraham (Gen. 17:3, 18:2), Joshua (Josh. 5:14), Manoah (Judg. 13:20), and Moses (Exod. 32:20 “you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live”).

In his interpretation of the voice and the apostles’ reaction to it, Palamas parts with Clement of Alexandria who seems to root the apostles’ reaction of awe in the voice of the Father as opposed to the radiance of Christ “because ears are less believing than eyes.” On this point, Palamas prefers to follow authorities such as Origen and John Chrysostom. Origen describes the voice of the Father in decidedly visual terms saying that “the three apostles could not bear the glory of the voice (τῆς φωνῆς δόξαν) and the

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106 Palamas, Hom., 35.13. The closest thing we might have to a comparable reaction is in John 12:29, where the crowds claim that the voice “had thundered.”
107 Palamas, Hom., 35.13 (emphasis mine).
108 In his exegesis of the Transfiguration, Palamas does make explicit and significant connections between the Transfiguration and Old Testament theophanies. These connections and their significance are explored in Section 2 of this chapter and more fully in Chapter 2.
109 Clement of Alexandria, Excerpts from Theodotus, 5.3 (GCS 17, 107); translation in McGuckin, The Transfiguration, p.150. In seeing the connection between the Transfiguration and the Baptism of Jesus, Clement, like Palamas, is also interested in accounting for the difference in the disciples’ and the Baptist’s respective reactions to the voice. Rather than accounting for this difference in the theophanies themselves, as Palamas does, Clement claims that the different reactions are accounted for by the difference in the visionaries: “John the Baptist heard the voice but he was not afraid because he heard it in the spirit and was accustomed to it.” (Ibid.).
power that rested on it, and so fell on their face...terrified at the supernatural vision (θεάματος)...they could not bear the radiance of the Word (τὰς τοῦ λόγου ἀυγὰς) and so humbled themselves under the mighty hand of God.”¹¹⁰ Like Origen, Chrysostom does not oppose the radiance of Christ with the voice of the Father. Moreover, on describing the reason for the apostle’s reaction he doesn’t mention the voice at all, “But since he [Christ] was radiant far beyond sun or snow, this was why they could not bear the radiance and fell down.”¹¹¹ Along with Origen and Chrysostom, Palamas treats the radiance of Christ and the voice of the Father as two unified facets of the same phenomenon. In the Transfiguration the radiance, the voice, (and the cloud!) are all distinguishable yet unified parts of the “divine manifestation” that is received as a “vision.”

2.5 The Uncreated Light of Christ

Now, with the main lines of Palamas’ exegesis of the Transfiguration as revelatory theophany laid out, the time has come to clarify what Palamas means when he stresses the extraordinary character of the light. As we have seen, he thinks that the details of the Transfiguration narratives and the patristic interpretations of those narratives identify the Taboric light as the manifested divinity, eternally shared by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For Palamas, this assertion clearly entails that the light is “divine, supernatural and uncreated” and therefore that it does not “come into being or

¹¹⁰ Origen, Commentarium in evangelium Matthaei, 12.43 (GCS 40.1, 167), translation in McGuckin, The Transfiguration, 163 (emphasis mine).
“invisible” to creatures due to its status as uncreated. Rather, it is invisible to creatures due to its status as uncreated.

The first thing to notice is that, in his descriptions of the Taboric light seen by the apostles, Palamas uses predicates traditionally reserved for God: “divine” (θεῖον), “eternal” (ἄιδιον), “limitless” (ἄχωρητον), “ineffable” (ἀπόρρητον), and especially “uncreated” (ἀκτιστον). God possesses these properties “by nature” (φύσει) in virtue of being God. In other words, it is “the light of the Godhead” (τὸ φῶς τῆς θεότητος).

While Palamas might at times describe a creature in similar terms (e.g., the saints and the Fathers), the description is warranted only insofar as the creature in question possesses these properties in a participated way by deification. The saints, as it were, are rendered uncreated “by grace” (χάριτι).

By describing the light as “uncreated,” “divine,” etc, Palamas wants to make clear that the vision of the Taboric light is a vision of God, not the vision of a creature or a created intermediary. As I show in Chapter 2, affirming that the Taboric experience was a vision of uncreated light, and, therefore a vision of God, was one of the fundamental points of contention between Palamas and his adversaries. Yet, for all this, there is a final feature of Palamas’ exegesis of the Transfiguration as revelatory theophany that can be easily missed when affirming the uncreated nature of the light: Palamas is very much aware of the fact that all the gospel accounts stress that the source or location of the light are the face, countenance, and garments of the man Jesus. Or, as

112 Palamas, Hom., 35.14; 34.8.
113 Palamas, Hom., 34.6.
114 For a few examples see Palamas, Hom., 34.11, 35.8, and 35.14 (θεῖον); 34.8, 34.12, and 34.18 (ἀιδιον); 35.13 (ἀχώρητον); 34.8, 34.10, and 35.17 (ἀπόρρητον); 34.12, 34.13, 35.5, and 35.14 (ἀκτιστον).
115 Palamas, Hom., 34.13 and 35.5 (emphasis mine).
116 What Palamas means by this phrase will be examined in Chapter 3.
one might put it in Palamas’ own theological idiom, the very location and medium of the uncreated glory of God is the created human nature of Christ.\(^{117}\)

Palamas follows John of Damascus in claiming that the Transfiguration does not bring about anything new in Jesus himself, but is rather a manifestation of an already present reality that had (up until the moment of theophany) been concealed within a human reality.\(^{118}\) Jesus, in virtue of his identity as Son of the Father, eternally possesses the glory which naturally accompanies the divine nature. Therefore, on Tabor, “He did not manifest a radiance other than that which He already had invisibly. He possessed the splendour of the divine nature hidden under His flesh.”\(^{119}\) At this point, it would be a mistake to think that Palamas is claiming that because the humanity of Christ has been the means of concealment, it has no place in the manifestation. While Palamas certainly holds that the vision of the Taboric light is a vision of God, he does not claim that it is a vision of God in spite of the humanity of Christ. Rather, the Transfiguration is a vision of God in, with, and through the maximally deified humanity of the Son: at the Transfiguration the apostles “saw the transformation which our human clay had undergone, not at that time, but from the moment in which it had been assumed, when it was deified through union with the Word of God.”\(^{120}\) Palamas compares the revelation of the deity through the humanity of Christ on Tabor to less obviously theophanic

\(^{117}\) See the suggestion in Kappes et al, “Palamas among the Scolastics,” 211, n.94, that Theodoret of Cyrrhus is a probable origin of the notion that the disjuncts “create” and “increate” have their meeting place in Christ.

\(^{118}\) “If, then, the holy body never existed without a share in the divine glory, but because of the genuinely hypostatic union was always enriched in a perfect way by the glory of his divinity, so that the glory of the Word and that of his flesh are one and the same, still the glory present in the visible body had not been revealed …He was transfigured, then: not taking on what he was not, nor being changed to what he was not, but making what he was visible to his own disciples, opening their eyes and enabling them, who had been blind, to see” (John of Damascus, Oration on the Transfiguration, 12 (PTS 29, 451; PPS 48, 221)).

\(^{119}\) Palamas, Hom., 34.13.

\(^{120}\) Palamas, Hom., 34.14.
instances of similar revelations involving Mary, Simeon and Anna. In these three cases the “power of God shone out visibly as if through thin glass to people who had had the eyes of their hearts purified.”\(^\text{121}\) In the Transfiguration, the humanity of Christ manifests its state as maximally filled with God such that it becomes an all but transparent medium for the divinity that dwells therein. Since the humanity of Christ is the proper possession of the divine person of the Son, “[t]he glory that proceeds naturally from His divinity was shown on Tabor to be shared by His body as well, because of the unity of His person. Thus His face shone as the sun on account of this light.”\(^\text{122}\) Due to the grace of hypostatic union, the humanity of Christ, which was “made later for our sake,” received and so contains the “fullness of the Godhead, and so…[it is] kindled as a deifying and divinely radiant source of illumination.”\(^\text{123}\) Palamas even goes so far as to say that Christ’s “light is His body.”\(^\text{124}\) Even Christ’s garments became radiant on account of contact with his body.\(^\text{125}\) Palamas is clear that the Taboric light is not a creature, but his preaching affirms that it was revealed through a creature elevated by grace to the highest degree and in the highest way possible. As we will see in next section, it is a matter of the uncreated being manifested in and through the uncreated-by-grace.

\(^{121}\) Palamas, *Hom.*, 34.14.  
\(^{122}\) Palamas, *Hom.*, 34.11.  
\(^{123}\) Palamas, *Hom.*, 35.5 (emphasis mine).  
\(^{124}\) Palamas, *Hom.*, 34.15.  
\(^{125}\) Palamas, *Hom.*, 35.6.
SECTION 3: THE PURIFYING POWER TO BEHOLD HIS OWN KINGDOM
(EсхАТОLOGICAL AND DEIFYING THEОPHANY)

3.1 The Kingdom Present in the King

According to Palamas, not only is the Transfiguration a revelation of God, but it is also a revelation of who and what the human creature is destined to be in God both in via (through the life of grace) and in patria (the culmination of the life of grace). Returning to Palamas’ list of possible reasons why there is a discrepancy between Matthew (after six days) and Luke (after eight days) regarding the timing of the Transfiguration, his third reason why there is no contradiction between the two accounts now becomes important. Palamas interprets the different counting of days as indicating “another great mystery” beyond the historical sense of the texts:

Why did one evangelist say “after six days”, whereas the other went beyond a week and mentioned the eighth day? Because the great vision of the light of the Lord’s transfiguration is the mystery of the eighth day, that is, of the age to come, which is manifested after this world, which was made in six days, has ceased, and the sixfold action of our senses has been transcended. We have five senses, but if you add speech it brings the number of ways in which our senses work to six. The kingdom of God promised to those who are worthy surpasses not only our senses but also our words. The seventh day is honored with blessed rest from the activities of our sixfold senses, after this pause, the kingdom of God shines forth on the eighth day, by virtue of a higher energy. It was this power of the divine Spirit, through which those who are worthy will see God’s kingdom…

The “other great mystery” is that the light of the Transfiguration both foreshadows and effects the human being transcending the characteristic energies or activities of his nature, which are here symbolized by the six days of creation. By way of the Sabbath rest (the seventh day, which symbolizes deification) the creature receives a “higher energy” imparted to it by the Holy Spirit which enables him to reach the terminus of this process, namely, the eighth day of the eschatological “age to come,” the Kingdom of

126 Palamas, Hom., 34.6.
Due to Palamas’ Trinitarian characterization of the Taboric theophany, one must see that the “higher energy” of this passage not only refers to the “power of the divine Spirit” but also to the Taboric light itself.

The characterization of the Kingdom of God as the eighth day which both follows and completes creation is a common patristic theme seen in writers as diverse as Basil of Caesarea and Augustine. Here, however, Palamas follows Maximus the Confessor by using the six days of creation/eighth day of re-creation as an exegetical strategy not only to address a problem, but also to connect explicitly the eighth day with the vision of the kingdom promised to the apostles by Christ in the Transfiguration. Maximus’ interprets the difference between the six and eight days “according to contemplation” (κατὰ τὴν θεωρίαν). He sets up a parallel between the events of the Transfiguration and the mystical life of the Christian. As the apostles ascended Mt. Tabor with Christ so “those who have acquired faith, hope, and love” ascend “the mountain of theology” with the Logos. In order to see the radiance of the Logos, both the apostles and the Christian must first “pass through the things that are against nature, as though this were one day, and, according to six days, to pass through nature and come to that which is above nature,

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127 See Maximus the Confessor, Theological Chapters, I.47 (PG 90:1099C), “The Sabbath rest of God signifies the complete reversion of created beings to God. It is then that God suspends in created beings the operation of their natural energy by inexpressibly activating in them His divine energy. It is by virtue of this natural energy that each created being naturally acts; and God suspends its operation in each created being to the degree to which that being participates in His divine energy and so establishes its own natural energy with God Himself” (translated in The Philokalia, vol. 2, trans. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), 123).

which is the eighth day. For this [the eighth day] is beyond the state of time and characterizes our future condition.”

According to Palamas, just as the Transfiguration is the manifestation of the already present, yet hidden divinity of the Son, so it is also the manifestation of the already present, yet hidden kingdom; “The King of all is everywhere, and so is His kingdom, so the coming of his kingdom does not mean it arrives here from somewhere else, but that it is revealed through the power of the Divine Spirit.” The Kingdom is already fully present in the person of the King, but it is only partially manifested “to those who have stood with the Lord, those who have been established in His faith, men like Peter, James and John.” I say partially manifested, because there is still the fully realized “manifestation to come.” For Palamas, the difference between the Kingdom as presently manifested in the Transfiguration and the Kingdom of the “manifestation to come” is one of degree (a matter of less versus more) and mode (a matter of partial versus full). He uses the qualified identification between the two in order to strengthen his thesis that the Taboric light is uncreated: “God’s kingdom is not subservient or created, but uniquely unsubduable and invincible. It is beyond the bounds of both time and aeon, and cannot be said to have had a beginning or to have been overtaken by time or age.”

The Taboric light is not a created symbol which somehow indicates the far off, uncreated kingdom. The Taboric light simply just is the uncreated kingdom now present in, and partially revealed through, the transfigured Son. Therefore, Palamas claims that

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129 Maximus the Confessor, Questions and Doubts, q. 191 (CCSG 10, 133). Cf. Theological Chapters, I.54-55 (PG 90:1104A).
130 Palamas, Hom., 34.7.
131 Palamas, Hom., 34.7.
132 Palamas, Hom., 34.12.
as an anticipation of the kingdom, the Taboric light shares the attributes of the eschaton as described in Scripture:

How could ordinary light be the glory and the kingdom of the Father and the Spirit? How could Christ come in that sort of glory and kingdom in the age to come, when there will be no need for air, light, place or anything of the sort, but God, according to the apostle, will be everything for us? (cf. 1 Cor. 15:28). Clearly if He will be everything for us, He will also be our light. Again this demonstrates that this light is the light of the Godhead, because John, the greatest theologian among the evangelists, shows in revelation that the everlasting future “city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof” (Rev. 21:23). Surely here he is also pointing us towards Jesus divinely transfigured on Tabor…”

Here Palamas carries on a tradition among the Fathers which sees a deep connection between the Transfiguration, the Parousia and the resurrection. The Transfiguration is an anticipation and model of both the form and content of the Second Coming of Christ and the restoration of all things. As an anticipation of the content of the eschaton, the illumination of the humanity of Christ is an indication of the resurrection glory of both Christ and the saints: the Transfiguration shows “how God’s splendour will come to the saints and how they would appear [in the kingdom].” Regarding the form, Palamas claims that Christ “will come again as He was seen by the disciples on the mountain.”

He takes Peter’s desire to build three tabernacles (Matt. 17:4 and Mark 9:6) as confirmation of the eschatological nature of the vision. Following Cyril of Alexandria,

133 Palamas, Hom., 34.15.
134 Palamas, Hom., 34.11. Cf. Clement of Alexandria, Excerpts from Theodotus 4.3 (GCS 17, 106), Origen, Commentarium in evangelium Matthaei, 12.43 (GCS 40.1, 168), and Cyril of Alexandria, Commentariorum in Lucam, 9 (PG 72: 653-656).
135 Palamas, Hom., 34.13. Perhaps the most direct expression that the Transfiguration anticipates both what the saints will become and what they will see in the eschaton comes from Pseudo-Dionysus: “But in time to come, when we are incorruptible and immortal, when we have come at last to the blessed inheritance of being like Christ, then, as scripture says, ‘we shall always be with the Lord.’ In most holy contemplation we shall ever be filled with the sight of God shining gloriously around us as once it shone for the disciples at the divine transfiguration.” (Pseudo-Dionysius. The Divine Names, I.4 592B-C (PTS 33, 115) in The Complete Works, 52). This text is crucial for understanding Palamas’ view concerning the eschatological nature of the Transfiguration and will be looked at again in Chapter 3. For Palamas’ reception of this text see John D. Jones “Filled with the Visible Theophany of the Lord: Reading Dionysius East and West,” Logos 53:1-2 (2012), 13-41.
he sees Peter’s words as Peter mistaking the Transfiguration as the advent of the fully realized kingdom instead of its preview. Peter “did not know what to say” (Mark 9:6) because “[t]he time for all things to be restored had not yet come, but even when it does, we shall not need tents made by hand.”

For Palamas to claim that the Taboric light is a vision of both the divinity of Christ and the Kingdom of God, and that each of these is a way of characterizing the vision of God, suggests that for one to see God is to participate in God. Now we have arrived at that part of Palamas’ exegesis which revolves around the transformative nature of the Taborian theophany. Palamas’ treatment of the Transfiguration as a transformative or deifying theophany is guided by setting out answers to at least two sets of questions. The first set has to do with knowledge: how is it possible for a created nature to have a vision of and participate in the Uncreated? What exactly does it mean for a creature to see God in the light of the transfigured Christ? What must happen to the creature in order for such a vision to be possible? The second set has to do with the nature of the transformation itself: for what purpose does God elevate the creature so that he can be seen? How does the theophany of the Transfiguration fit into the economy of salvation? In other words, how do the previous characterizations of the Transfiguration as revelation of the divinity of Christ and anticipation of the kingdom of God relate to Tabor as a deifying theophany?

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137 Among the Fathers, the notion that to see God is to share in God’s divine life goes back to Irenaeus’ formula, “For the glory of God is a man who is alive; and the life of man is the vision of God.” (Irenaeus of Lyon, Adversus Haereses, 4.20.7 (Sources chrétiennes 100, 647; hereafter referred to as SC), translation in McGuckin, The Transfiguration, 147).
3.2 The Deification of Human Faculties of Perception

We now return for the third and final time to Palamas’ solution to the problem of the six and the eight days. As I showed, Palamas sees the Transfiguration as anticipation of the Kingdom such that the light of Tabor is the Kingdom itself, though not yet fully realized and only partially manifested. He characterizes the Kingdom of God, as related to the human being, as that state where the saints participate fully in the glory of God “by virtue of a higher energy,” but the saints only do so once “the sixfold action of our senses has been transcended.” As I also showed, Palamas is consistent in his Taboric light/kingdom identification up to the point of using texts from Revelation which describe the eschatological state as proof for his claims about the Taboric light’s uncreated nature. Therefore, even taking into account that the Taboric theophany is an experience in via of a reality that can only be fully experienced in patria, those conditions which must obtain for the saints in the kingdom (the transcending of natural human capacities), are, mutatis mutandis, the same conditions that must obtain for the apostles on Tabor.

On the one hand, the apostles’ experience is described as not just a seeing, but Palamas claims that on the mountain the Taboric light was “δι’ ὀφθαλμῶν σωματικῶν ἑώραται” (seen by bodily eyes). Yet, this does not mean that the uncreated light of Tabor was sensible (αἰσθητόν) in any ordinary sense or that it was seen by ordinary human eyes. The way that Palamas characterizes the theophany, relying on previous

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138 Palamas, Hom., 34.6.
139 Palamas, Hom., 34.8. I have altered Veniamin’s translation of “human eyes” in order to be truer to Palamas’ meaning. The claim that the Taboric light could be seen with the eyes of the body was one of the sticking points between Palamas and his opponents, i.e., Barlaam and Akindynos, who, in the context of his preaching, Palamas characterizes as those “who boast of pagan Greek learning and the wisdom of this world, and who completely disobey spiritual men in matters of the Spirit, and choose to oppose them. When they hear that the light of the Lord’s transfiguration on the mountain was seen by the eyes of the apostles, they immediately reduce it to visible, created light” (Hom., 34.12). I will examine Barlaam’s warrant for his position more fully in Chapter 2.
patristic exegesis, makes such a conclusion impossible. To illustrate why this is so we must again return to the promise/manifestation structure through which Palamas initially interprets the Transfiguration narratives. The promised manifestation of the kingdom is revealed through the power of the divine Spirit. That is why He said it would come with power. But this power is not just for anyone, but for those who have stood with the Lord, those who have been established in His faith, men like Peter, James and John, who, as Scripture tells us, were first brought up a high mountain, that is to say, above the lowliness of our nature. That is why God is imagined to be on a mountain, coming down from His heights and leading us up from the depths of our abasement, that He who cannot be contained might, to an extent compatible with our human nature and our safety, be contained. This idea is not something inferior to man’s mind, but far superior and more exalted than it, being instilled by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The first thing to notice about this passage is that the “power” (δύναμις) with which the kingdom comes is the same power by which the apostles are able to see it. If the Taboric light (as the natural glory of God and the Kingdom) is uncreated and therefore “above the lowliness of our nature” and “far superior and more exalted” than any idea obtainable by any created human faculty, then any cognition of that light by a creature can only take place in virtue of some sort of relation that elevates created δύναμις by way of uncreated δύναμις. In claiming this Palamas is assuming an epistemological principle at least as old as Aristotle, “like is known as well as perceived by like.”

This is why Palamas claims, following the Fathers like Clement of Alexandria, that the Taboric light is not perceptible to the senses, even though for a short time on the narrow mountain top it was seen by human eyes. Rather, at that moment the initiated disciples of the Lord ‘passed’...’from flesh to spirit’ by the transformation of their senses, which

140 Palamas, Hom., 34. 7.
142 “The disciples had not looked upon the light with fleshly eyes for there is no affinity or intimacy between the light and the flesh except in so far as the Saviour’s own power (δύναμις) and will empowers the flesh to behold. In this case he allowed the flesh to participate in seeing what the soul could see, since it is conjoined to it.” (Clement of Alexandria, Excerpts from Theodotus, 5.3 (GCS 17, 107); translation in McGuckin, The Transfiguration, 150).
the Spirit wrought in them, and so they saw that ineffable light, when and as much as the Holy Spirit’s power granted them to do so.\textsuperscript{143}

Not only are the senses of the apostles transformed, but also their faculties of reason (διάνοια)\textsuperscript{144} and mind (νόος).\textsuperscript{145} So, the apostles see the imperceptible, ineffable light (as kingdom) by way of the light’s transformation (as power) of their natural faculties of both understanding and sensation. The whole person, body and soul, must be moved from “flesh to spirit” by the Spirit in order for the vision to be effected. To be more precise, transformation by participation in the light is not only that which enables the apostles to see, but passing from “flesh to spirit” is also the purpose of the vision. According to Palamas, the transfigured Christ illuminates the apostles with a vision of his divinity and kingdom in order to show “that transformation which our human clay had undergone…from the moment it had been assumed, when it was deified through union with the Word of God”\textsuperscript{146} Christ “illuminates only those He wishes, and to the extent He chooses, providentially for their salvation.”\textsuperscript{147}

Therefore, to say that the Transfiguration is a transformative theophany is to claim that it is a deifying theophany, i.e., the process by which a person becomes a partaker of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) and is saved. As deifying theophany, the Transfiguration is an event which reveals and effects what God has done (the deification of human nature in the Incarnation), is doing (deifying the apostles by participation in

\textsuperscript{143} Palamas, \textit{Hom.}, 34.8.
\textsuperscript{144} Palamas, \textit{Hom.}, 35.9, “When Peter’s understanding (διάνοια) had been illuminated by that most blessed sight, he was raised to a greater love and longing for God, and did not want to be separated from that light.”
\textsuperscript{145} Palamas, \textit{Hom.}, 34.12, “They drag down that immaterial, never-setting, pre-eternal light, which surpasses not only our senses but also our minds (νόος).” Palamas is clear that to assert otherwise, e.g., that the apostles saw the light using ordinary visual powers, would be to deny supernatural character of the theophany and the light. However one would choose to characterize such an experience, it would not be a vision of God, see \textit{Hom.}, 34.8.
\textsuperscript{146} Palamas, \textit{Hom.}, 34.14.
\textsuperscript{147} Palamas, \textit{Hom.}, 35.11 (emphasis mine).
Christ by the power of the Spirit), and will do (full glorification in the Kingdom). In light of this view of the Transfiguration as deifying theophany, Palamas interprets it as having deep connections to various facets of salvation history in such a way that the Transfiguration is an exemplar of what God has done, is doing, and will do.

3.3 The Transfiguration and Salvation History

Beginning with what God is doing, Palamas uses the apostles’ experience on Tabor as a paradigm and guide for his audience’s experience of the life of grace. The Transfiguration represents the height of mystical experience available to the Christian in this life. Commenting on Matt. 17:2, Palamas claims that Matthew “compares the light to the sun, not that anyone should imagine that the light was visible to bodily eyes…but that we might know that Christ as God is for those who live by the Spirit and see with spiritual eyes…Those who behold God in divine contemplation (ἐν τῇ θεοπτίᾳ).” In this passage, θεοπτία (lit. divine vision or vision of God) functions as a synonym for θεωρία τοῦ Θεοῦ (contemplation of God). The background and meaning of (θεοπτία/θεωρία) as used by Palamas will be treated more fully in Chapter 3. For now it suffices to say that it indicates Palamas’ appropriation of the latter stages in the process of mystical ascent, first outlined by Evagrius of Pontus in the fourth century, where the vision of God is seen in this life. In line with the theme of mystical ascent, Palamas focuses in on the significance of the location of the Transfiguration being on a mountain,

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148 Palamas, Hom., 34.10 (emphasis mine).
149 Veniamin (ed.), The Homilies, n.521.
namely, the place of theophany. Jesus’ taking Peter, James, and John (“those who have stood with the Lord”) up the “high mountain” symbolizes our being raised “above the lowliness of our nature” by being caught up in θεωρία. God is “imagined to be on a mountain” in order to show him “coming down from His heights and leading us up from our abasement.” Notice that the ascent made by the apostles (up Tabor) and the saints (up the mountain of theology) is made possible if and only if there is first a theophany which is a descent on the part of God to the believer. What does it mean that Peter, James and John “stood with the Lord” and by implication serve as examples for Christians? Or, what attitudes, dispositions or activities serve as propaedeutic to θεωρία? According to Palamas one need to look no further than the Transfiguration accounts for the answer.

Palamas draws his hearer’s attention to the fact that Christ took the apostles up the mountain in order to pray (Luke 9:28). If one wants to “live by the Spirit and see with spiritual eyes” and therefore “behold God in divine contemplation” he must first live a life of prayer which “procury this blessed vision.” In tandem with the practice of “virtue” and “perfect good works,” “fervent prayer” enables a person to become one

151 For patristic examples of the mountain as the place of theophany see Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses*, 4.20.9 (SC 100, 654), Origen *Commentarium in evangelium Matthaei*, 12.36 (GCS 40.1, 151), Proclus of Constantinople, *Oratio viii in transfigurationem*, 1 (PG 65:764), and Maximus the Confessor, *Questions and Doubts*, q. 191 (CCSG 10, 133).
152 Palamas, *Hom.*, 34.7.
153 Palamas, *Hom.*, 34.7. This text is a good example of how Palamas can read scriptural texts on two levels. On the one hand, he is clear that the Transfiguration is a real, historical event which really took place on a mountain. Yet, on the other, God can be “imagined” to be on a mountain, meaning that the historical event also has symbolic significance for the life of the reader of Scripture. In this case, the symbolic significance relies upon the historical reality as its foundation and for its coherence. This will be important later on in Chapter 2 where I examine Palamas’ distinction between natural and conventional symbols and how he uses that distinction to affirm that the Taboric light is both hypostatic (really existing) and symbolic.
155 Palamas, *Hom.*, 34.7.
156 Palamas, *Hom.*, 34.10.
whose “mind has been purified” (τὸν νοῦν κεκαθαρμένον). Here Palamas is making an implicit reference to the stage of πρακτική (activity) through which one is purified by asceticism and prayer for θεωρία. The form of life and practices that make up that life are how Christians can be “those who have stood with the Lord and established in His faith” like the apostles. His point is that the grace that made the ineffable light of the Godhead visible to the apostles on Tabor is not isolated event, but it serves as a marker in salvation history that stands as a scriptural proof that the vision of God is an integral part of Christian mystical experience. The Transfiguration is then the paradigm of mystical experience and of the essence of the Christian life which is the person being made gradually more and more God-like by deification.

Moving on to what God has done, Palamas makes an explicit connection with the presence of Moses and the theophanies of the Old Testament in the context of his treatment of the Transfiguration as deifying theophany. He makes this connection immediately following his application of the Transfiguration as paradigm of Christian experience: “Anyone who gazes at its brilliant rays and its graces, partakes of it to some extent, as though his own face were touched by dazzling light. That is why Moses’ countenance was glorified when he spoke with God (Exod. 34:29).” It is significant that Palamas links up the experience of the Church’s saints with that of the apostles on Tabor and Moses on Sinai. Just as Tabor serves as a foundation and paradigm for the Christian experience of deification through the life of grace, so too does Moses’ Sinai theophany

157 Palamas, Hom., 34.10.
159 Palamas, Hom., 34.10.
serve as a paradigm for what the saints can expect now and in the eschaton. Palamas continues,

Do you observe that Moses too was transfigured (μετεμορφώθη) when he went up the mountain and beheld the Lord’s glory? But although he underwent transfiguration, he did not bring it about... Our Lord Jesus Christ, however, possessed that radiance in His own right. He did not need prayer to illuminate his body with divine light, but he showed how God’s splendor would come to the saints and how they would appear. For the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Matt. 13:34), and when they have all become divine light, they will behold, as children of that light, Christ’s indescribable divine radiance.

By using Moses’ Sinai experience in this context, Palamas accomplishes two things.

First, he makes a connection between the two mountains, Sinai and Tabor, and thus the two theophanies. It is important to highlight that Palamas assumes that glory of YHWH (the source from which Moses’ face received its glory in Exod. 33:17-23) is the same as the glory of the Son’s divinity which shone forth from the transfigured Jesus—I show in Chapter 2 that the glory is the same because, according to Palamas, the Son of God is the subject of both theophanies. It is the “celestial glory” from which the voice of the Father came at the Baptism of Jesus and that was seen by Stephen (Acts 7:55-56).

But, there is an important difference between the glory of Moses and the glory of Christ. On Sinai, Moses “appeared as a partaker in God’s splendor,” while on Tabor Christ possesses the glory of God “in His own right” as its locus and source. There is an implicit, triple parallelism at work here. We have three transformative encounters with

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160 For Palamas, the link between the Christian, the apostles, and Moses is that the experiences of all three are at bottom, theophanic. The significance of Palamas’ (and I would add the whole Christian East’s) theophanic view of salvation history will be treated in depth in Chapter 2 and will exert considerable influence on Chapter 3. So far, I have stressed the unity of the three kinds of theophany, i.e., Old Testament, New Testament, and the Church. Yet, there are significant differences between the three which also will be dealt with in Chapters 2 and 3.

161 Palamas, Hom., 34.11.
162 Palamas, Hom., 35.11.
163 Palamas, Hom., 35.15.
the glory of God: (1) Moses encountered the glory of God on Mt. Sinai and his face became transfigured, (2) the apostles encountered the transfigured Christ on Mt. Tabor and passed from flesh to spirit, and (3) the Christian encounters the transfigured Christ through prayer and the successive stages of the spiritual life on Maximus’ mountain of theology. Rather than speaking of two mountains, it seems more appropriate to speak of three. Mt. Tabor stands as the nexus of the Old Covenant and the age of the Church in the New. By connecting the first two mountains and incorporating the third, Palamas has given the first hints of his view of the theophanic pattern of salvation history. It is the history of a salvation which consists in human beings partaking in and being transformed by the glory which God naturally possesses as his own.

3.4 The Light is God’s Glory, Not His Substance

As I have shown, in his exegesis of the Transfiguration narratives Palamas has taken various positions and insights of the Fathers and woven them into a tapestry which has the revelatory, eschatological and deifying theophany of the Transfiguration as its central thread. Palamas ties up this thread in the following manner: On the one hand the Taboric light is “divine, supernatural and uncreated.” It is the kingdom, beauty, radiance and glory of God. The ineffable light is also called grace (χάρις) insofar as it can be shared with the angels and the saints. The glory of Sinai, Tabor, and Stephen’s theophany is the same glory that presently illuminates and deifies the saints of the Church.164 These visions and glorifications are partial foretastes of the vision and glorification that all the blessed will undergo in the Kingdom of God. That which God

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164 “The glory, kingdom and radiance shared by God and His saints are one and the same.” (Palamas, Hom., 35.16).
possesses and is by nature (φύσει) is that which the saints possess and become by grace (χάριτι), which begins in this life and which is brought to fulfillment in heaven. The theophanies in question are all, in a genuine sense, visions of God and therefore participations in God. Yet, for all this, Palamas is insistent that one must not claim that the light is the essence (οὐσία) of God. In other words, if one is so blessed as to see God in this life through the life of grace, or see him in the visio beatifica at the culmination of that life, in neither case would one be seeing the divine essence. Palamas makes this claim for at least four reasons which are internal to his interpretation of the Transfiguration narratives.

The first reason flows from his claim that the glory of God and the glory of the saints, e.g., the luminosity of Moses, differ mainly in mode of possession. God (as source) has the glory by nature and the creature (as recipient) has it by grace. As I will show in Chapter 3, Palamas’ interpretation of the traditional concept of “deification” is, precisely, the creature’s sharing by grace in what the uncreated God has by nature. If one were to claim that the light through which human persons are deified is the essence of God, it would be tantamount to asserting that the essence or the what-it-is-to-be of God and creatures is the same. Palamas takes such a position to be tantamount to pantheism claiming that “no one has yet dared to say that God shares one and the same essence with His saints.” He goes so far as to describe such thinking as “the extreme limit of profanity.”

While the first reason revolves around the effect of deification in the recipient, he roots the second reason in the Christological dimension of the theophany as source of

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165 Palamas, Hom., 35.16. I take the “no one” in the above quotation to refer to any theological authority in his tradition, i.e., the Fathers.
166 Palamas, Hom., 35.14.
deification: “The one divine splendor is seen now on the mountain to be common to the Word’s divinity and His flesh, but that His divinity and flesh have a common essence is an assertion of Eutyches and Dioscorus, not of those who want to be godly.”

The Christian has hope of deification and salvation only because human nature was first deified in the Incarnation, that deification being manifested on Tabor. Part of the soteriological logic of the Incarnation is that human nature assumed by Christ must be fully human. Without a fully human Christ, we are not saved. By his mention of Dioscorus and Eutyches, Palamas takes the claim that the humanity of Christ participated in and hence shared the divine essence as the heresy of monophysitism. For Palamas, that the light naturally accompanies the divine nature does not entail that it is the divine nature. If the light is the light of deification, and that deification comes through the human nature of Christ, then it simply cannot be the divine essence.

The third reason has to do with Palamas’ gnoseology regarding the divine essence and the hiddenness of God. Since he assumes that vision is participation and vice versa, what has so far obtained for participation must also obtain for vision and knowledge. If the Christian cannot participate or share in the divine essence, but only the light which is the natural effulgence of that essence, then he cannot see or know the divine essence either. Contrasting the divine light of Tabor with the divine essence Palamas comments, “All will see that glory and brightness when the Lord appears, shining from East to West (cf. Matt. 24:27), but those who went up with Jesus have seen them already. Nobody, however, has stood in the substance and essence of God (cf. Jer. 23:18 LXX), and seen or declared His nature.”

Following Fathers like Gregory Nazianzen—the last sentence of

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167 Palamas, *Hom.*, 35.16.
168 Palamas, *Hom.*, 35.16.
the above quotation is taken almost word for word from Nazianzen’s *Oration* 28\(^{169}\) -- Palamas holds that God’s essence is unknowable even for the angels and the blessed in heaven. The claim of the radical transcendence of the divine essence is one of the crucial elements of Palamas’ theology that colors most of his thought. His reception and use of this idea from the Greek Fathers will be looked at in detail in chapters 2 and 3. For now it is important to note that Palamas is far from the first to utilize the incomprehensibility of the divine essence as a hermeneutical key to understanding what the Transfiguration cannot be. Two examples will suffice.

First, John Chrysostom writes that when the gospels say that Jesus was transfigured, “they mean that he opened up a little of his godhead and showed them the indwelling deity.”\(^ {170}\) Chrysostom takes his characterization of the Transfiguration to demonstrate that when one reads that Isaiah “saw the Lord” (Is. 6:1), “he should not suppose that he [Isaiah] saw God’s essence, *but rather a condescension* (ἀλλὰ τὴν συγκατάβασιν), and even then (he saw it) much less clearly than the heavenly powers.”\(^ {171}\) According to Chrysostom, the Transfiguration was a condescension (συγκατάβασις) similar to both Old Testament theophanies and to what the angels see. Whatever the exact nature of a condescension is for Chrysostom, he is clear that in all three cases (i.e., the Transfiguration, Isaiah’s theophany, and in heaven) God’s essence remains hidden from view.

Second, as I have already shown, Maximus the Confessor makes a parallel between Mt. Tabor and the mountain of theology. Various details of the Transfiguration

\(^{169}\) Veniamin (ed.), *Saint Gregory Palamas: The Homilies*, n.551.
narrative serve as symbols for the spiritual life according to the “contemplative interpretation” of the text. Commenting on “his face shone like the sun” (Matt. 17:1) he says, “And the face of the Logos, which radiated like the sun, is the inaccessibility that characterizes his essence, upon which it is impossible to gaze by an interpretation of thoughts (τη των λογισμων ἐρμηνεια)”.  

The fourth and final reason follows from the first three. The light is revealed in the deified humanity of Christ and each of the apostles both experience the light and are deified by it through contact with Christ. The light cannot be the essence of God. Therefore, the light is given by measure and is received to a greater or lesser extent, being distributed, undividedly divided (ἀμερίστως μεριζομένον), according to the worthiness of the recipients...It is known partly now, partly later, so St. Paul says, ‘We know in part, and we prophesy in part’ (1 Cor 13:9). By contrast, God’s essence is totally indivisible and incomprehensible, and no other being can receive it, either to a greater or lesser extent.  

The divine essence’s incommunicability and indivisibility (it cannot be shared and therefore divided among the saints) are a function of its incomprehensibility or absolute transcendence. On the other hand, the light, as natural splendor of that essence, is precisely that which God communicates and makes known without any loss or division of the light on the part of God. Furthermore, it can be participated in to varying degrees as a gift to recipients, with “greater or lesser” being a description relative to the state of the recipient, not the gift itself. The light is “measured out and distributed, while remaining entire.”

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172 Maximus the Confessor, Questions and Doubts, q. 191, emphasis mine (CCSG 10, 133). Cf. Origen, Fragmenta in Lucam 140 (GCS 49, 283).
173 Palamas, Hom., 35.16-17 (emphasis mine).
174 Palamas, Hom., 35.17.
It is clear that Palamas’ above distinction between the Taboric light and the essence of God is another way of talking about the distinction between essence and energy. It is curious that Palamas avoids using the term ἐνέργεια in reference to the light when talking about the distinction in homilies on the Transfiguration, the scriptural event which, on Palamas’ account, shows most clearly the distinction.\textsuperscript{175} It could be that Palamas thought homilies were not the place for technical theological discussions. Yet, the distinction is mentioned in other homilies and in some of them is it explicitly framed in terms of a distinction between οὐσία and ἐνέργεια.\textsuperscript{176} A more plausible interpretation is that in homilies on the Transfiguration Palamas wants to keep his terminology as biblical and patristic as possible precisely because he is preaching about the Transfiguration. It may be that he wants to show that his systematic theology which preceded the homilies (and to which we will look back in upcoming chapters) is rooted in a certain reading of Scripture and a reception of patristic readings of the same. His theology of the divine energies is a theology of the glory, splendor, radiance, etc. of biblical theophanies (especially the Transfiguration). According to the Fathers on whom he relies, it is the biblical glory and radiance of God by which God touches us and by which we touch him.

3.5 Conclusions from Chapter 1

With the analysis of Palamas’ Transfiguration homilies at an end, I am now in a position to formulate two sets of summary conclusions regarding Palamas’ views on the

\textsuperscript{175} ἐνέργεια is used only 1 time in either of the Transfiguration homilies, Hom., 34.6.
\textsuperscript{176} Palamas, Hom., 11.12. As indicated by the Introduction, as I move forward I will not be dealing with specific questions regarding the nature of Palamas’ essence/energy distinction, e.g., whether it is real or notional, etc. save where such considerations might be directly relevant to understanding the material under consideration. Whatever insight my interpretation of Palamas might have for understanding Palamas’ distinction is contained in parts of Chapters 2-3.
Transfiguration as (1) revelatory and (2) eschatological and deifying theophany. Each set of conclusions gives rise to a number of questions that focus the inquiry for the next two chapters where they are set against the backdrop of Palamas’ larger body of thought. So far, Palamas’ claims about the Transfiguration have been looked at through very wide lenses. In the chapters to follow I will examine each of the two areas mentioned above in greater detail.

The first set of conclusions concerning Palamas’ claim that the light of the transfigured Jesus both reveals and is the divinity of the Son which he shares coequally with the Father and the Spirit are the focus of Chapter 2. The light is not something which God creates for the occasion of the theophany; rather it is the natural, uncreated radiance and glory of the divine nature which eternally accompanies God. Yet, while the light is uncreated and divine on account of it being God’s proper glory, it is somehow distinct from the divine nature, which remains transcendent to its own revelation. The more intense the revelation of the glory, the more the hiddenness of the source of the revelation becomes apparent. The source and seat of the revelation of divine hiddenness is the humanity of Christ, deified by the grace of union with the person of the Word. The Son’s deified humanity is the medium or channel through which the vision of God takes place and by which the revelation of God occurs according to the contours of the economy of salvation in which the Son reveals the Father in the Holy Spirit. Regarding the economy of salvation, the theophany of the Transfiguration bears an important relation with other biblical theophanies (both Old and New Testament) in that the glory of God seen by the apostles, Moses, and Stephen is the same glory. In Chapter 2 I will look at Palamas’ theology of revelation and see how each of the above conclusions
stemming from Palamas’ exegesis of the Transfiguration accounts both flow from and inform that theology in order to show that for Palamas, the Transfiguration has a central place in salvation history which is Christocentric and theophanic.

The second set of conclusions concerning Palamas’ claim that the Taboric light is a deifying theophany that is an anticipation of the eschaton is the focus of Chapter 3. Deification is the precondition for the vision of God, what is revealed in the vision of God, and the ultimately what is effected by the vision of God. The Transfiguration is a foretaste of participation in the glory of God such that the glory that will be in the Parousia and resurrection is manifested on Tabor. On Tabor it is manifested in the person of Christ as the source of deification, and in the visionaries as they “pass from flesh to spirit” as whole persons, body and soul. In Chapter 3 I will look at Palamas’ view of deification in light of the theophany of the incarnate Christ and show how the Transfiguration and the transfiguration of the person point to an economy of salvation that was created for deification by theophany.
CHAPTER 2: THE TRANSFIGURATION AS REVELATORY THEOPHANY IN BIBLICAL SALVATION HISTORY

In the previous chapter on Palamas’ Transfiguration homilies, I showed that Palamas characterizes the Transfiguration as a revelatory, deifying, and eschatological θεοφάνεια. The purpose of this chapter is to establish three essential features of Palamas’ view of the Transfiguration as revelatory theophany which he formulates according to his reception of the Eastern patristic tradition. These features will be used later in the work when I engage my interpretation of Palamas with Thomas Aquinas concerning the Transfiguration and theophany. These three features are: (1) The Transfiguration represents an encounter with God as manifested in his uncreated energies of light and glory in this life and as such it is in continuity with the vision of God in the next, (2) the Transfiguration is the theandric Christ manifesting the uncreated energies of his divine nature in and through his deified humanity and (3) the Transfiguration is the fulfillment of Old Testament theophanies because the Logos, even before the Incarnation, mediates the Father in the Holy Spirit in biblical theophanies.

By examining these three features I hope to show that, for Palamas, the Transfiguration is the θεοφάνεια of the Incarnation and, as such, it represents a central

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177 As the last chapter made clear, the revelatory, deifying, and eschatological aspects of the Transfiguration are three unified facets of the one reality of the theophany. Although they are distinguishable from each other as aspects, they do not exist in separation from one another nor are they experienced as such on Palamas’ account. They are, in fact, three complimentary ways of describing one single reality. In the final analysis, the vision of God is deification and both are ultimately eschatological. As Palamas might well put it, the three aspects are distinct, but not separate. Therefore, I must note a certain artificiality that characterizes my presentation in this chapter and the one that follows on the Transfiguration as deifying and eschatological. In this chapter, I have chosen to focus on, and thus separate out, the revelatory aspects of the Transfiguration and theophany. At times I will talk about θεοφάνεια as if it is only revelatory. It is not my intention to do this at the expense of the other two aspects. In the presentation that follows, I will certainly make note of deification and Palamas’ eschatology where appropriate (one cannot coherently talk about the vision of God in Palamas and not do so), but I will do so only insofar as it serves my purpose of highlighting those aspects of Palamas’ thought that serve the argument for the chapter.
point in salvation history whereby the plan of salvation history, the definitive revelation of God in Christ, is theophanically laid bare such that the Transfiguration is that to which all previous self-manifestations of God look forward for their fulfillment. Palamas’ characterization of the Taboric light is rooted in a theology of revelation which sees the economy of salvation as fundamentally theophanic and therefore Christocentric.

In the first section, I examine Palamas’ claim that as theophany, the Transfiguration is a true vision of the glory of God in this life and not a vision of the divine essence. This section will focus on the question: What does God reveal in the Transfiguration? As a theophany, the light of Tabor is not a created symbol, but is the uncreated God as manifested to creatures. According to Palamas, God’s divinity is revealed (as glory) even while it remains unrevealed (as the divine essence). I show that the paradox of this claim is part of what Palamas inherits from patristic commentary on the Transfiguration. I also look at Palamas’ arguments in defense of the Transfiguration as a vision of God in the face of the claims made by Barlaam of Calabria that all biblical theophanies are visions of created realities. In particular, I will focus on Palamas’ argument that the light of Tabor is God revealing himself in the natural symbol of his glory.

In section 2, I look at Palamas’ claims concerning Christ as the central referent of the Transfiguration theophany. This section will focus on the question: How does God reveal his glory in the Transfiguration? According to Palamas, the vision of the transfigured Christ is the vision of God. The focus of this section is on Palamas’ Christological warrants for his characterization of the Transfiguration. Specifically, I will show that one of the reasons that Palamas characterizes that Transfiguration as he
does is because of his reception of the communication of idioms.\footnote{178 See Meyendorff, A Study, 180-182.} I use Palamas’ claim that Christ is the unique “theandric hypostasis” in order to ground his assertion that Christ, as man, reveals God and deifies our nature due to the imprinting of his divine energy on his human energy on account of the hypostatic union. It is because Christ possesses the fullness of divine energy as man, that he can unveil that energy (as glory) on Tabor.

In the third and final section I bring the previous two sections together in an analysis of Palamas’ comments regarding Old Testament theophanies and the connections that the Transfiguration has with them, both theologically and textually. For Palamas, the Transfiguration stands at the center of a theophanic and Christocentric economy of salvation. In this section, I show that Palamas furthers a patristic tradition of interpreting Old Testament theophanies as theophanies of the pre-incarnate Son of God and, therefore, he sees the Transfiguration as the event to which all Old Testament theophanies look forward for their fulfillment.

**SECTION 1: THE TRANSFIGURATION AS REVELATION OF THE HIDDEN GODHEAD**

**1.1 A Revelation of the Divinity of Christ**

Palamas describes the supernatural condescension and manifestation of the Taboric light variously as a revelation or unveiling of “the divinity” (ἡ θεότης) of Christ, “the light of the Godhead” (τὸ φῶς τῆς θεότητος), “the glory that proceeds naturally from His divinity” (ἐκ τῆς θεότητος ἡ δόξα φυσικῶς προϊόντα), and the “beauty” (κάλλος) or
“radiance” (λαμπρότης) of God. Since Christ (as Son) shares his divinity coequally with the Father and the Spirit, the Transfiguration is a manifestation of the one glory of the one nature shared by the three divine persons:

The Father bore witness with His voice that Christ was His beloved Son, and the Holy Spirit joined His brilliance to Christ’s in the radiant cloud, and showed that the Son was of one nature with the Father and Himself and united in Their light. For Their wealth consists in Their oneness of nature and in the unified outburst of Their brilliance.

As the Trinitarian glory of the divine nature, the light of the Transfiguration must be uncreated, eternal, invisible to creatures by its very nature, and, in itself, unapproachable. Thus, according to Palamas, the revelation of the light is a revelation of God proper and not a creature of any sort. The Transfiguration then, is the vision of God in this life. This is why Palamas calls the Taboric light “the earnest” (ὁ ἀρραβών) of the eschatological vision of God that awaits the saints.

Yet, although Tabor represents a true vision of God in his glory, the light is not the ὑσία of God, namely, God in his “super-essentiality” (ἡ ὑπερουσιότης), which cannot be experienced or seen by any creature. The Transfiguration is a true revelation of God as he is, but it is not a revelation of all that God is—it is a revelation by which the reality of God is not exhausted and, therefore, a self-manifestation in his glory to which God is transcendent (in his essence). As Palamas puts it, “Thus they [the apostles] saw truly the uncreated and divine illumination of the God who remains invisible in his

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179 Palamas, Hom., 34.10, 34.13, and 34.11.
180 Palamas, Hom., 34. 4 and 11.
181 Palamas, Hom., 35.10.
183 Palamas, Cap., 149.
transcendent hiddenness.”\textsuperscript{184} In the Transfiguration, God is seen and dwells beyond being seen, is experienced and dwells beyond experience.

Vladimir Lossky notes that the tension in Palamas’ thought between God as knowable and unknowable is a case of what he calls the “antinomic theology” characteristic of many of the Eastern Fathers, where one “proceeds by oppositions of contrary but equally true propositions” so as to “maintain an equilibrium between the two members of the antinomy, in order not to lose contact with revealed realities.”\textsuperscript{185} Palamas is heir to a tradition in which, on one side of the antinomy, we have the invisible God who cannot be seen and, on the other side, the God who ushers in human fulfillment through a vision of himself.\textsuperscript{186}

I want to take a brief look at this antinomic tradition by glancing at some of the Fathers from which Palamas draws both the vocabulary with which he describes the Transfiguration and his characterization of it as a true vision of God in this life that is not a revelation of the divine essence. By this brief examination I hope to show that (1) this antinomic tradition sets certain parameters within which Palamas has to work when talking about what Christ manifested in the Transfiguration and (2) provide a context so as to better understand both Palamas’ claims and the resources he marshals in defense of this tradition when it is threatened by Barlaam of Calabria. Below, I will look at three patristic authors who bear a great deal of influence on Palamas’ claims regarding the

\textsuperscript{184} Palamas, \textit{Cap.}, 150.
\textsuperscript{185} Lossky, \textit{Image and Likeness}, 51-52.
\textsuperscript{186} For a good overview of this tradition of Eastern Patristic thought, which deals with this antinomy as it is handled by all the major Eastern Fathers see Lossky, \textit{The Vision of God.}
Transfiguration as revelatory theophany: Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzus, and John of Damascus.\textsuperscript{187}

### 1.2 ἡ θεότης Seen and Unseen in Patristic Sermons and Commentaries on the Transfiguration

In the Cappadocians and John of Damascus, Palamas finds two things concerning their respective theologies of revelation and the Transfiguration: (1) the affirmation that the Godhead (ἡ θεότης) is seen, known, and experienced in the Transfiguration and (2) the denial of any creature’s ability to see, know, name or experience the essence of God (οὐσία) or the Godhead (ἡ θεότης). I begin with Basil of Caesarea.

In his exegesis of Ps. 44:3 (LXX), “Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O thou most mighty. With thy ripeness and thy beauty,” Basil says that the phrase “with thy beauty” (τῷ κάλλει σου) refers to the divinity which can be known through contemplation and reason (τῇ θεωρητῇ καὶ νοητῇ θεότητι). For, that is truly beautiful which exceeds all human apprehension (κατάληψιν) and power and can be contemplated by the mind alone…Peter and the Sons of Thunder saw His beauty on the mountain, surpassing in splendor the brilliance of the sun, and they were considered worthy to perceive with their eyes the beginning of His glorious coming.\textsuperscript{188}

For Basil, the “beauty” of God is the Godhead as intelligible object of earthly contemplation revealed in the Transfiguration. The contemplation of this beauty is also “the beginning of His glorious coming” and, therefore, an anticipation of the Parousia.

Elsewhere, Basil claims that the “beauty, most true and most lovely, which can be

\textsuperscript{187} By choosing these three Fathers I am not suggesting that they compose an exhaustive list of either representatives of the antinomic tradition of Eastern theology or Palamas’ sources within that tradition. I choose them because they are particularly descriptive of this tradition and Palamas borrows many of his descriptions of the Transfiguration from them.

contemplated by him alone who has purified his mind, is that of the divine and blessed
nature (περὶ τῆς θείας καὶ μακαρίας φύσεως). He who gazes steadfastly at the splendor
and graces of it, receives some share (μεταλαμβάνει) of it.”

Here, beauty signifies a
property of the divine nature which can be experienced (contemplated) in this life. To
counterpart the beauty of the divine nature is to share in it and thus to be transformed by
the participation. Basil compares the results of the sharing, “tinging his own face with a
sort of brilliant radiance,” with Moses who “also was made resplendent in face by
receiving some share of beauty when he held converse with God.”

For both the
apostles at the Transfiguration and Moses on Sinai, God theophanically manifests himself
as beauty.

Alongside the above affirmations about God being contemplated in his beauty,
Basil is very strong in affirming the radical unknowability of the divine essence is his
polemic against the Anomaean theology of Eunomius of Cyzicus (d. 393).

According
to Basil, “the comprehension (τῆς κατάληψεως) of God’s substance transcends not only
human beings, but also every rational nature…the very substance of God is
incomprehensible to everyone except the Only-Begotten and the Holy Spirit.” For
Basil, the οὐσία of God is unapproachable and “inaccessible” to every creature.

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190 Basil, On Psalm, 29.5 (PG 29:317, TFOC 46, 221). It is noteworthy that even though the beauty is
contemplated by the mind according to Basil, the apostles see the anticipated beauty of the Second Coming
“with their eyes” and participation in the beauty made Moses “resplendent in face.” As Veniamin notes,
for Basil, the “vision of God does not exclude participation in the human body,” see his “The
Transfiguration of Christ,” 85.
191 Among other things, Eunomius taught that the notion “unbegottenness” expressed the defining
characteristic of the divine essence and therefore the Nicaean claim that the Son is the Only-begotten of the
Father entailed the Son’s creaturely status, that is, the begotten Son differed in nature from the unbegotten
Father. A part of the Cappadocian response to his claims was that no one notion or group of notions could
ever express or define the divine essence and therefore the divine essence could not be an object of thought
using such notions.
Next, I turn to Basil’s friend, Gregory of Nazianzus. He states in *Oration* 40, “God is light; the most high, the unapproachable, the ineffable. He cannot be conceived by the mind (νο̄ κατάληπτον) nor spoken by the lips.”\(^{194}\) However, the ineffable God “presents himself to our minds in the degree that we are cleansed” as he “pours himself out on all that is external to him. I speak of that light which is contemplated (θεωρούμενον) in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, *whose richness is their unity of nature, and their one brightness that flashes out* (ὁν πλούτος ἐστιν ἡ συμφυῖα,τὸ ἐν ἔξαλμα τῆς λαμπρότητος).”\(^{195}\) Here, φῶς serves for Gregory a similar function that κάλλος served for Basil: as a term denoting that by which the unapproachable God reaches down to humanity and makes himself known. God pours himself out to humanity as “light” in a succession of events in salvation history, many of which are theophanies. Among these lights is the Transfiguration: “Light was that godhead (θεότης) which was shown to the disciples on the mountain—a little too strong for their eyes.”\(^{196}\) According to Gregory, the Transfiguration is an instance of the Trinity pouring itself out to the apostles as light in the transfigured Christ. Gregory also sees the Transfiguration as having an eschatological dimension as a function of its status as light:

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According to DelCogliano and Radde-Gallwitz, Basil’s use of κατάληψις (comprehension) has a Stoic background in which it signifies a state of knowledge between opinion (*doxa*) and scientific understanding (*episteme*). According to them, comprehension is “the grasp of an individual proposition in such a way that it cannot be false and thus is a kind of knowledge that is certain, reliable, and impregnable to any reasoning aimed at producing a change of mind” (p.110, n. 83). According to Basil, human beings cannot even comprehend the οὐσία of any created being. Basil demonstrates this point by using the example of the element, earth. See *Against Eunomius*, 1.12 (PG 29:540-541, TFOC, 109-110).


\(^{195}\) Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 40.5 (PG 36:364), translation in McGuckin, *Transfiguration*, 169 (emphasis mine). The italicized portion of this text, ὅν πλούτος ἐστιν ἡ συμφυῖα,τὸ ἐν ἔξαλμα τῆς λαμπρότητος, is quoted by Palamas almost word for word in *Homily* 34.4 when he talks about the light of the Transfiguration as a Trinitarian light: τούτων γὰρ πλούτος ἡ συμφυῖα καὶ τὸ ἐν ἔξαλμα τῆς λαμπρότητος.

“on the mount he shines forth, becoming more luminous than the Sun, to reveal the future mystery.” 197 As for God in his οὐσία, Gregory’s claims regarding its unknowability are no less strong than Basil’s:

No one has yet discovered or ever shall discover what God is in his nature and essence…But for the present what reaches us is a scant emanation, as it were a small beam from a great light (μεγάλου φωτός μικρὸν ἄπασαμα)—which means that anyone who “knew” God or whose “knowledge” of him has been attested in the Bible, had a manifestly more brilliant knowledge than others not equally illuminated. This superiority was reckoned knowledge in the full sense, not because it was really so, but by contrast of relative strength. 198

Those whom scripture claims to have had “knowledge” of God are the recipients of both Old and New Testament theophanies; Gregory gives a list from Enoch to Paul—a list from which the Transfiguration is curiously absent, but there is no reason to think that it does not apply. He is clear that in all these theophanies, “[n]one saw, none told of God’s nature.” 199

Finally, John of Damascus affirms that, in the Transfiguration, Moses saw “the glory of the Godhead clearly” (τρανῶς τὴν δόξαν ὁρᾶ τῆς θεότητος). 200 The transfigured body of Christ reveals the “unapproachable light” that is God: “Now things that cannot be gazed on have appeared to human eyes: an earthly body radiating the brilliance of divine splendor (θεῖω λαμπρότητα), a mortal body pouring forth the glory of the Godhead.

200 John of Damascus, *Oration on the Transfiguration*, 2 (PTS 29, 437; PPS 48, 206). As he does in other places in the homily, the Damascene characterizes the Transfiguration as just as much of a visionary experience for Moses (and Elijah) as it is for the apostles. In the Transfiguration, the apostles are not only having a vision of the glorified Christ, but they are also witnessing Moses and Elijah having a vision of their own. For an exploration of this theme in patristic preaching and commentary of the Transfiguration see Bogdan Bucur, “Vision of a Vision,” 15-30. The significance of Moses and Elijah (and their vision!) will be examined in Section 3 of this chapter.
As was the case with Basil and Gregory, the Taboric light is a property “of the Godhead” (θεότητος). However, John’s claim that the Godhead is revealed in the light of the transfigured Jesus stands side-by-side with his commitment to the absolute hiddenness of the divine essence. Quoting John 1:18, the Damascene says, “‘No man hath seen God at any time: the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.’ The Godhead (ἡ θεότης), then, is ineffable and incomprehensible.” For John, human beings may be able to grasp “that God exists, but what He is in essence and nature is unknown and beyond all understanding.”

In all of these Fathers, God is both unknowable and yet makes himself known in the Transfiguration. Many times they use the same terminology to signify that which is unknowable and that which is made known, namely, “the Godhead.” What God is (in his essence) is unknown, incomprehensible, ineffable, and beyond the reach of every creature. Yet, God makes himself known and shares himself in the Transfiguration in which Christ reveals ἡ θεότης to the apostles, variously described by these Fathers as beauty, light, splendor, and glory. For all three of these Fathers the glory, etc. is characterized as the glory of the divine nature or the Godhead. As such, there is a certain continuity between the revelation of the Godhead on Tabor (in via) and the revelation of the Godhead in the Second Coming of Christ (in patria). While the light of Tabor is “small beam” compared to the “great light” from which it comes, it seems to be the same light nonetheless.

201 John of Damascus, Oration on the Transfiguration, 2 (PTS 29, 438; PPS 48, 207).
203 John of Damascus, De Fide, I.4 (PTS 12, 13; TFOC 37, 170).
Palamas sums up his reception of this tradition in a rhetorical passage aimed at Barlaam and his followers, “Do you see clearly that not only the completely invisible and unintelligible and imparticpable divinity, but also the divinity which is visible and intelligible and participable for only the saints in a mystical way, belongs to God?”\textsuperscript{204} The same God both reveals and grants access to himself in theophany while, at the same time, remaining unknown and beyond access. Palamas’ reception of this tradition was that upon which he based his theological claim of the continued possibility of the vision of God. When the possibility for this experience was opposed by Barlaam in his attacks on the Hesychasts, he also attacked any interpretation of Scripture or the Fathers that seemed to ground such an experience. I now turn to Barlaam’s reading of the Fathers and Palamas’ response to it.

1.3 The Taboric Light as Created Symbol in Barlaam

As I noted in the last chapter, Palamas begins his Transfiguration homily by highlighting the opposition between the wisdom of “the pagan Greek sages” and that of the “prophets, apostles, and fathers” as a rhetorical device designed to lead his audience to identify his opponents (Barlaam, Gregory Akindynos, and possibly Nicephorus Gregoras) with the idolatrous errors of the ancient Greek Philosophers.\textsuperscript{205} However, his opposition between wisdoms is not merely rhetorical, but is part of his critique of his

\textsuperscript{204} Palamas, \textit{Dialogue Between an Orthodox and a Barlaamite}, trans. Rein Ferwerda (Binghamton, NY: Global Publications/Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999), XI; hereafter referred to as \textit{Dialogue}.

\textsuperscript{205} Palamas, \textit{Hom.}, 34.1, “We are filled with praise and wonder when we see this magnificent work of God, the entire visible creation. The pagan Greek sages also extolled and admired it as they investigated it. But whereas we marvel at it to the glory of the Creator, they did so against His glory, for in their wretchedness they worshipped the creature rather than the Creator (cf. Rom. 1:15). In the same way, we elucidate the words of the prophets, apostles, and fathers for the benefit of those who read them in honour of the Spirit who spoke through them.”
The substance of Palamas’ critique is embedded precisely in his accusation of idolatry; “for in their wretchedness they [the Greeks] worshiped the creature rather than the creator.”206 Palamas is implying that his adversaries mistook the creator for a creature: Barlaam, Akindynos, and Gregoras all initially agreed (contra Palamas) that the light of Tabor was perceptible by the normal human faculties of sensation and therefore a created reality.207 As I have shown, Palamas goes to great length to argue for the uncreated nature of the Taboric light and that to experience the light is to experience God. According to Palamas, his opponents “drag down that immaterial, never-setting, pre-eternal light, which surpasses not only our senses, but also our minds, because they themselves are at a low level, and are incapable of conceiving of anything higher than earthly things.”208

For Barlaam, biblical theophanies are “symbolic apparitions (συμβολικὰ φάσματα), allusions to immaterial and intelligible realities, shown forth in the imagination (φανταστικῶς δεικνύμενα, lit. things shown forth imaginatively) through God’s providence in particular circumstances.”209 For example, he interpreted the light of the Transfiguration as a physical phenomenon created especially for the occasion of the Transfiguration that was “visible through the medium of air.”210 Barlaam is referring to patristic statements about the transfigured Christ revealing the Godhead when he claims,
“But, this light was a sensible light, visible through the medium of air, appearing to the amazement of all and at once disappearing. One calls it ‘divinity’ because it is a symbol of divinity (σύμβολον θεότητος).”

Therefore, the Transfiguration or any other theophany, the description of which implies a vision of something that a person would ordinarily see, like light or fire, is an experience of an evanescent created thing, perceptible to the senses, made especially for the occasion, which God stands behind so that the immediate perception is of the created symbol and not God.

The Barlaamite position on theophanies as created realities stems from a commitment to one side of the

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211 Palamas, Triads, III.i.11. Cf. Triads, I.iii.3 where Palamas accuses Barlaam of interpreting the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in a similar fashion. I say that Palamas “accuses” Barlaam, because all copies of Barlaam’s anti-Hesychast treatise Against the Messalians were ordered destroyed after the Council of 1341 and thus no copies survive see Robert Sinkewicz, C.S.B., “The Early Writings of Barlaam,” 182. Although Barlaam’s letters survive, see Fyrigos, Dalla controversia palamitica, 194-404 our main source of Barlaam’s claims regarding Tabor are Palamas’ quotations from Against the Messalians. Fyrigos (Dalla controversia palamitica, 121-122, 147, 159) has shown that, in all probability, only Palamas’ second and third Triads were written in response to Barlaam’s Against the Messalians and, as such, contain extracts from Barlaam’s now lost treatise.

212 As we will see in Chapter 4, there are seeming points of contact between Barlaam’s position on the created nature of theophanies (especially the Transfiguration) and Augustine of Hippo’s position regarding the same (which are also present in the work of Thomas Aquinas). John Romanides has argued, based on a similarity of claims, that Barlaam’s position concerning the created nature of biblical theophanies is a direct result of his “Latin formation” and he takes the influence of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas as obvious, see “Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics Part I,” The Greek Orthodox Theological Review 4:2 (Winter 1960-61), 186-205. According to Sinkewicz, “A careful reading of the Antilatin Treatises [early works of Barlaam meant to show the falsity of Western claims of filioque] leaves little doubt that Barlaam’s acquaintance with the works and theology of Thomas Aquinas was minimal and restricted entirely to what was provided for him by his Latin (Dominican) opponents” (“The Early Writings of Barlaam,” 195, n. 6). Therefore, Romanides’ claims would seem to be exaggerated. However, Reinhard Flogaus (“Palamas and Barlaam Revisited: A Reassessment of East and West in the Hesychast Controversy of 14th Century Byzantium,” St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly 42:1 (1998) 1-32) has convincingly shown, by thematic and textual analysis, that both Barlaam and Palamas made use of Maximus Planoudes’ (c. 1255-1305) Greek translation of Augustine’s De Trinitate. Cf. Flogaus, “Inspiration-Exploitation-Distortion: The Use of St. Augustine in the Hesychast Controversy,” in Orthodox Readings of Augustine, ed. George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolau (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008), 63-80. For a critical edition of Planoudes’ translation see Augostinou peri Triados Biblia pentekaideka aper ek tes latinon dialektou eis ten Hellada metenegeke Maximos ho Planoudes. Eisgoke, hellenikon kai latinikon keimenon, glossarion, ed. M. Papathomopoulos, I. Tsavari, and G. Rigotti (Athens, Kentron Ekdoseos Hellenon Syngrapheon, 1995). In light of Flogaus’ research which shows that both Palamas and Barlaam had a knowledge of Augustine through Planoudes’ translation, Alexander Golitzin has suggested that a potentially fruitful avenue of further research should center on the question: “To what degree, I wonder, might we then not see some of the Hesychast Controversy and its aftermath as, in certain respects at least, an episode in the assimilation of the great Father of the West to the theological Gestalt of the Christian East?” (“Dionysius Areopagites in the Works of Saint Gregory Palamas: On the Question of a ‘Christological Corrective’ and Related Matters,” St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly 46:2 (2002): 189).
patristic antimony outlined above: the Godhead is “[n]ot only invisible, but also
unintelligible and imparticipable.”213 If God is known in any way in this life, it is only
through the mediation of creatures. Furthermore, the light of Tabor and theophanies
occupy a low place on the epistemological scale, since they are sensible and thus are
“shown forth in the imagination” and not the mind (νόος). In any case, theophanic
experience does not give any real, direct knowledge of God.

1.4 The Uncreated Light of Theophany

Palamas’ frames his response to Barlaam’s claims regarding the symbolic nature
of the Taboric light, a response found mainly in the first question of the third Triad, in
terms of competing claims concerning the interpretation of the patristic witness and how
that witness had been received in the liturgy. Palamas’ first rhetorical evaluations of
Barlaam’s position, “What a novel opinion!”214 and, “What saint has ever said that this
light was a created symbol?” show this clearly.215 The core of Palamas’ initial response
hinges on two points.

First, Palamas notes, using Nazianzen’s Oration 40.6 (“Light was that Godhead
which was shown…”), that none of the Fathers talk about the light as a mediator of
divinity or a thing distinct from God, but simply as a description of divinity-as-revealed
to us. Palamas focuses on the patristic theme of the light of the Transfiguration being the
light of the divinity. Using an unidentified text which he attributes to Chrysostom, he
asks, “And how could it be a question of ‘rays of divinity’ if the light was only a symbol

213 Palamas, Dialogue, X.
214 Palamas, Triads, III.i.11.
215 Palamas, Triads, III.i.12.
of divinity, formed from another nature?" On Palamas’ account, the divinity shown on Tabor is the proper possession of Christ in virtue of his identity as eternal Son. He quotes both John of Damascus and the liturgy to this effect:

Hear John Damascene, who is wise in divine things: ‘Christ was transfigured, not by putting on some quality He did not possess previously…but by revealing to His disciples what He truly was, in opening their eyes and in giving sight to those who were blind’…And do not the annual hymns of the Church affirm that, even before the Transfiguration, He had previously been such as He the appeared? ‘What appeared today was hidden by the flesh, and the original beauty, more than resplendent, has been unveiled today.’

In light of the testimony of John of Damascus and the liturgy, if the divine nature of Christ is not a “simulacrum of divinity,” but truly divinity, then neither can the light of Tabor be such. In addition to this, Palamas sees the Damascene’s claim that the apostles needed a new set of eyes as a function of his commitment that the light of the Transfiguration is the same as the unapproachable light in which the Trinity dwells. Palamas’ point is that he cannot fathom how a straightforward reading of patristic texts (like the ones I examined above) can result in a claim that Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, or John of Damascus could have meant that the Godhead revealed in the Transfiguration was a creature instead of what they claimed it was, namely, the Godhead.

Second, Palamas focuses on the patristic connection between the light of the transfigured Jesus and his eschatological Second Coming. Citing Nazianzen, Palamas asks, “How can one speak of a sensible and created divinity which lasts only for one day,

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216 Palamas, Triads, III.i.12. He uses the same text to the same effect in Dialogue, XI.
217 Palamas, Triads, III.i.15, John of Damascus, Oration on the Transfiguration, 12-13 (PTS 29, 449-450; PPS 48, 220-222), and Third Sticheron of the Litya at Great Vespers for the Feast of the Transfiguration, see FM, 475.
218 Palamas, Triads, III.i.12.
219 Palamas, Triads, III.i.12. See John of Damascus, Oration on the Transfiguration, 2 (PTS 29, 438; PPS 48, 221).
220 “Yet he will come, along with his body I say, just such an one as he was when seen or revealed for the benefit of the disciples on the mount, the Godhead predominating over frail flesh.” (Gregory Nazianzus, Letter 101.5 (SC 208, 29; PPS 23, 158)
appearing only to disappear on the same day…Can this be the divinity which (without ever being true divinity) triumphed over that venerable flesh akin to God?”\textsuperscript{221} If the light shown in the Transfiguration is the same light (revealed in part) that will be shown in Second Coming and furthermore “the brilliancy of heaven to those who have been purified here when the righteous will shine like the sun,”\textsuperscript{222} then to say that the Taboric light is created is tantamount to saying that the face-to-face vision of God is also created.\textsuperscript{223} Since Palamas assumes the continuity between the light of Tabor and the light of the eschaton, a claim that the former is created entails that the latter is also created; in such a case the experience of God \textit{in patria} would not be appreciably different than the experience of God through creatures \textit{in via}.

Palamas finds the claim that the light was a created symbol especially puzzling in light of the above because such a vision, whatever it might be, would not be a vision \textit{of God}. As a creature, the alleged “sensible light” of Tabor would possess a nature “entirely foreign to God!”\textsuperscript{224} Palamas certainly thinks that God reveals himself through creation. By reflection on creation one can come to an indirect knowledge of the divine activities (energies) by which God created the world and “from this by means of analogy he infers the existence of God.”\textsuperscript{225} However exalted such knowledge of God’s existence and his creative energies may be, it could be accounted a vision of God only in an equivocal sense. The immediate object of such reflection is created nature and it is accomplished by natural faculties. By way of creatures one can know true things \textit{about} God, but this does not amount to knowing God. As I will show in Chapter 3, Palamas generally

\textsuperscript{221} Palamas, \textit{Triads}, III.i.11.  
\textsuperscript{222} Gregory of Nazianzus, \textit{Oration} 40.6 (PG 29:365), translation in McGuckin, \textit{The Transfiguration}, 170.  
\textsuperscript{223} Palamas, \textit{Triads}, III.i.12.  
\textsuperscript{224} Palamas, \textit{Triads}, III.i.11.  
\textsuperscript{225} Palamas, \textit{Triads}, II.iii.16.
eschews the term “knowledge” (γνῶσις) when talking about theophany due to its creaturely connotations and, instead, prefers the term “union” (ἐνωσις) to signify theophanic apprehension of the divine.

While on Palamas’ account it is true that one sort of creature can be more “akin to God” (ὁικείον θεοῖ) than another, for example, a human being as *Imago Dei* is more akin to God than a rock in virtue of his rationality, the field of comparison is on the plane of created being: “Therefore, when creatures are compared with one another they are said to be akin or alien to God by nature. But all these are in themselves and by nature alien to God (κατὰ φύσιν ἅπαντα ἄξιον ἑστὶ θεοῖ).” When the comparison switches to being between the created plane and the uncreated (that which causes and sustains the created plane), there literally can be no comparison made whatsoever. Just as “the drawing of a man is not humanity, nor is the symbol of an angel the nature of an angel,” so a vision of a creature is not a vision of God. So far, I have examined Palamas’ warrants for dismissing Barlaam’s characterization of the Taboric light as a created symbol. Yet, for Palamas, there are legitimate ways in which theophanies can be called symbolic.

### 1.5 Symbols and Theophany

There is a set of passages in Maximus the Confessor’s *Ambigua* 10 from which Barlaam drew his claim that the light was a symbol of divinity. In *Ambigua* 10.17, Maximus offers a “contemplation” (θεωρία) of the Transfiguration as the penultimate in a series of biblical examples of how “the intellect should think only of God and His virtues,

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227 Palamas, *Triads*, III.i.11.
and should cast itself in a manner beyond knowledge into the unutterable glory of God’s blessedness.”

Regarding the Transfiguration, Maximus says that the apostles,

ascended and were raised aloft with Him [Jesus] on the mountain of His manifestation, where they beheld Him transfigured, unapproachable by reason of the light of his face…they crossed over from the flesh to the spirit…through the substitution of their powers of sense perception by the activity of the Spirit, they were initiated into the spiritual principles of the mysteries that had been disclosed to them. They were taught, in a hidden way, that the wholly blessed radiance that shone with dazzling rays of light from the Lord’s face, completely overwhelming the power of their eye, was a symbol of His divinity, which transcends intellect, being, and knowledge….by means of theological negation that extols Him as being beyond all human comprehension they were raised up cognitively to the glory of the only-begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Further on, Maximus offers another “contemplation” where he affirms that through the light of the face of the transfigured Christ the apostles,

in a manner beyond words and knowledge, were mystically guided to the power and glory of God, which is completely incomprehensible to all beings, and learned that the light that had appeared before their senses was a symbol of the unseen hiddenness of God.”

The first part of *Ambigua* 10.17 is very amenable to many facets of Palamas’ interpretation encountered so far. Maximus characterizes the Transfiguration as an “ascent” and the light of Jesus’ face as “unapproachable.” The power of the light transcends the apostles’ human faculties and thus they must pass “from flesh to spirit” in order to perceive the light. However, Maximus’ claim that the light was “a symbol of divinity” was used by Palamas’ opponents as proof that the light was a created thing.

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231 Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua*, 10.31a (PG 91:1160C, emphasis mine).

232 Palamas quotes this text directly in *Hom.*, 34.8. The significance of this text will be examined in Chapter 3.
which symbolically pointed to God. Palamas, of course, accepts this text as authoritative and he tackles the problem in two ways.

The first way hinges upon what Palamas takes to be the proper interpretation of theophanic imagery:

Maximus, who is accustomed to reason by symbols, analogies and allegories, does not (as you know) always use the inferior as symbol of the superior, but sometimes the opposite…speaking allegorically, [he] claimed that this light was a symbol of cataphatic and apophatic theologies; he spoke of a superior reality which contains in itself the knowledge of theology, and its source. Did he not also say that Moses is the symbol of providence and Elijah of judgement? Are we to assume these prophets never really existed, but all was fantasy and imagination?

In this passage, Palamas is working from a distinction between what the visionaries themselves experienced (the biblical fact) and the way that the gospel account of their experience is being relayed by Maximus (the interpretation of the biblical fact). By pointing out that Maximus is giving an allegorical reading of the Transfiguration account, Palamas is asserting that there are various details of the account that function symbolically for the reader, not for those experiencing the vision recounted in the text. The symbols are for us, not necessarily for the apostles. As Palamas sees it, Maximus, as spiritual master, is trying to relay the divine mystery through symbols accessible to those who are not advanced in the spiritual life.

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233 Whereas Barlaam held that the light signified the divinity itself, Akindynos claimed that it symbolized the apostle’s faith in the divinity, see Romanides, “Notes Part II,” 20.

234 Palamas, *Triads*, III.i.13. See also Palamas’ previous discussion of Maximus’ text in *Triads*, II.ii.22, “In an analogical and spiritual Theophany, objects having an existence of their own become also symbols by homonymy [equivocation]; it is in this sense that Maximus calls this light a ‘symbol’; that is why he overtly gave his treatises the title of ‘contemplation.’ [He makes] Moses the symbol of judgment, and Elijah of foresight! Were those men therefore not really present, and had they too been devised symbolically?’ (translation in Meyendorff, *A Study*, 197 (emphasis original)).
In a similar way, Palamas sees the biblical authors as spiritual guides for the uninitiated in the way that they recount their theophanic experiences in the biblical narrative. As visions of God, theophanic revelations remain unknowable by reason of their transcendence. They appear, in fact, according to a law which is not appropriate to either human or divine nature—being, as it were, for us yet beyond us—so no name can properly describe them. And this God indicated when, in reply to Manoe’s question, ‘What is your name?’, He replied, ‘It is marvelous’; for that vision, being not only incomprehensible but also unnameable, is no less wonderful. However, although vision be beyond negation, yet the words used to explain it are inferior to the negative way. Such explanations proceed by use of examples or analogies, and this is why the word ‘like’, pointing to a simile, appears so often in theological discourse; for the vision itself is ineffable, and surpasses all expression.²³⁵

When relaying theophanic experiences in Scripture (the revelation is “for us”), the biblical authors use images such as clouds, fire, light, etc. in order to communicate their ineffable experience of the vision of God to us in ways that we can grasp (the revelation is “beyond us”).²³⁶ For Palamas, these scriptural images/symbols act as “veils” for us—veils through which we can rise to the experience of God in prayer.²³⁷ Theophanic imagery can also denote a veil which symbolizes an unrealized future event in the economy of salvation for the biblical visionary. Concerning Moses’ vision of the heavenly tabernacle (Exod. 25:1-9), Palamas says that the Tabernacle was a symbol which anticipated that the fact that,

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²³⁵ Palamas, Triads, Liii.4. Palamas’ claim that the vision of God is not a form of negative theology will be explored in Chapter 3.
²³⁶ Romanides, “Notes Part II,” 262.
²³⁷ This idea has very clear resonances with Pseudo-Dionysius: “This is the kind of enlightenment into which we have been initiated by the hidden tradition of our inspired teachers, a tradition at one with scripture. We now grasp these things in the best way we can, and as they come to us, wrapped in sacred veils (τῶν ἱερῶν παραπετασμάτων) of that love toward humanity with which scripture and hierarchical traditions [liturgy] cover the truths of the mind with things derived from the realm of the senses.” (Divine Names, I.4 592 B (PTS 33, 114) in Complete Works, 52) and “We must lift up the immaterial and steady eyes of our minds to that outpouring of Light which is so primal…and which comes from that source of divinity, I mean the Father. This light which, by way of representative symbols, makes known to us the most blessed hierarchies among angels. But we need to rise from this outpouring of illumination so as to come to the simple ray of Light itself.” (Celestial Hierarchy, I.2 121A-122B (PTS 36, 7-8) in Complete Works, 145-46).
the hypostasized power of God would one day permit itself to be lodged in a tabernacle, and that the superessential and formless Word would attach itself to a form and to an essence… These visible symbols (Σύμβολα αἰσθητά), the tabernacle… the priesthood and all pertaining thereto, were veils (παραπετάσματα) covering the visions seen by Moses through the darkness, but these visions themselves were not symbols (ἐκεῖνα δὲ αὐτὰ τὰ θεύματα σύμβολα οὐκ ἦν).”

In this theophany, the vision of God is “veiled” by symbols, but it is not itself a veil. Moses does not see a created form (the tabernacle) which God stands behind, but he sees God. However, the theophany does contain “visible symbols” which point to the future incarnation of Christ, which Moses “sees,” but only in a veiled way—I will return to this point in Section 3 below. As is the case with his interpretation of Maximus, Palamas acknowledges that there are symbolic theophanies, but their symbolism is directed either to us as a preliminary stage in the spiritual life or to the visionary as a symbol of a future event in the economy of salvation. In the latter case, Palamas’ assertion that a theophany is “symbolic” is not meant to imply that the vision of God takes place via a created intermediary.

In addition to the above, there is a second way that Palamas addresses the problem presented by Maximus’ text. He proposes an interpretation according to which “the phrase ‘symbol of divinity,’ wisely and properly understood, cannot be considered

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238 Palamas, Triads, II.iii.55, translated in Meyendorff, A Study, 195.
239 In interpreting Palamas on this issue, John Panteleimon Manoussakis has claimed that “such a mystical experience [theophany] can never become completely disassociated from a physical locus, be it in the form of a medium through which the uncreated manifests itself, or through the locale at which the manifestation takes place, or the channel through which the manifestation is received. I do not know of any passage in St. Gregory’s corpus where it speaks of an ‘uncreated’ earthquake or an ‘uncreated’ thunder with regard to the Old Testament theophanies” (“Theophanies and Indication: Reconciling Augustinian and Palamite Aesthetics, Modern Theology 26:1 (January 2010) 82). That Palamas never claimed that there is such a thing as uncreated thunder, etc. is certainly true. But, as I have shown, this is because the physical imagery of theophanies is either a linguistic symbol on the part of the visionary, or a created symbol of a future reality according to Palamas. However, I think that Manoussakis is correct in asserting that, for Palamas, theophanic experiences of the glory always have a physical (created) locus. As I show in Sections 2 and 3 below (and also in Chapter 3) the uncreated glory of God manifests itself in and through the humanity of Christ and in the humanity of the visionary because of his or her participation in Christ, either real or anticipatory. Reinhard Flogaus makes a claim concerning Palamas that is similar to Manoussakis’ in “Palamas and Barlaam Revisited,” 14, n.71. I judge him to be wrong for the same reasons as Manoussakis.
absolutely opposed to the truth." The Taboric light is indeed a symbol of divinity, but it is a natural symbol.

1.6 Natural and Non-natural Symbols

Palamas’ theory of natural symbol is mainly an interpretation of Ambiguum 10.31c where Maximus says the transfigured Christ became “a type and symbol of Himself, presenting Himself symbolically by means of His own self, and, through the manifestation of Himself, to lead all creation to himself.” In interpreting this text, Palamas proposes a theory that operates within the framework of η θεότης hidden and revealed of patristic teaching regarding the Transfiguration. It is important to keep in mind that the primary context for the following theory concerns what is experienced in the Transfiguration and by extension, other biblical theophanies. His distinction between different kinds of symbols is a way to show how divinity is both revealed and remains transcendent in theophanies.

Palamas begins by making the following distinction between two kinds of symbols: “For every symbol either derives from the nature of the object of which it is a symbol, or belongs to an entirely different nature. Thus, when the sun is about to rise, the dawn is a natural symbol of its light, and similarly heat is a natural symbol of the burning

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240 Palamas, Triads, III.i.13.
242 John Demetracopoulos (St. Augustine and Gregory Palamas: Aristotle’s Categories and the Psychological Images of the Holy Trinity (Athens: Parousia, 1997) [in modern Greek]) has convincingly shown that Palamas relied on Sextus Empiricus’ Πορφύρωνοι ὑποτυπώσεις and Πρός λογικοὺς for his distinction between natural and non-natural symbols, see Demetracopoulos’ ancient Greek table-comparison of the striking verbal parallels between Palamas and Sextus on p.211. However, Demetracopoulos is clear that Palamas relied on Sextus mainly for terminology, “Palamas’ theory is not the same as the Stoic theory… [in Palamas it is] purely an adapted principle for the purely theological needs of Palamas – so much so that ultimately, while in the beginning it appears as a philosophical theory about ‘symbol’ (with the concept of ‘sign’), it ends up not going at all beyond the known patristic teaching that the energies of one bear witness to the existence of his nature,” (74). My thanks to Fr. Christiaan Kappes for alerting me to this find and also assisting me in the translation.
power of fire.” On the one hand there are natural symbols which are connatural with what they symbolize in that they “always accompany the nature that gives them being, for the symbol is natural to that nature.” On the other, there are nonnatural symbols which derive “from an entirely different nature.” Concerning a nonnatural symbol, “it is quite impossible for it constantly to be associated with the object it symbolizes.” For the sake of clarity, I will refer to the former as natural symbols and to the latter as conventional symbols. I will look at conventional symbols first.

Palamas divides conventional symbols into two classes: those that are authypostatic (ἀυθύποστατον) and those that are anhypostatic (ἀνυπόστατον). What both of these kinds of conventional symbols have in common is that they are heterogeneous in nature with that which they symbolize, that is to say, they point to or signify something different in being than themselves. They are both symbols in the ordinary sense of the term. Palamas distinguishes these two classes of conventional symbols according to their respective ontological statuses.

Authypostatic symbols have “independent existence,” in other words; they are self-standing individuals (hypostases) which can function as the signifier of some other self-standing being. Palamas gives the example of “a burning torch,” which “might be taken as a symbol of attacking enemies.” Like any other self-standing being, it bears no necessary relation to that which it signifies, so nothing prevents it existing either before or after the thing signified.

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244 Palamas, Triads. III.i.14.
245 Palamas, Triads. III.i.14.
246 Palamas, Triads. III.i.20.
247 Palamas, Triads. III.i.14.
248 Palamas, Triads. III.i.14.
Palamas poses the following question: if the Taboric light was a symbol of this sort, and thus a self-standing creature, then why would the Fathers (including Maximus) call it “unapproachable?”

Furthermore, taking into account the patristic testimony that the Taboric light is “eternally associated with Christ in the Age to Come,” Palamas claims that calling the light an authypostatic symbol implies that “He [Christ] would be composed of three natures and three essences: the human, the divine and that of this light.”

The only creature eternally associated with Christ is his own humanity. Both of these critiques of the claim that the light is an authypostatic symbol revolve around the heterogeneous and contingent character of such symbols.

Anhypostatic symbols on the other hand, either do not possess independent existence (they are without hypostasis) at all or they have independent existence only for an instant. Palamas has in mind things like “not only non-being or hallucination, but everything which quickly disintegrates and runs away, which disappears and ceases to be…for example, thunder and lightning, and our own words and thoughts.” In some cases, this looks very close to what Barlaam claimed the Taboric light to be, i.e., something God made for the occasion of the Transfiguration which then passed away. In light of this resemblance, it is noteworthy that when Palamas musters up examples of anhypostatic symbols, he turns to prophetic visions in the Old Testament. These symbols “can serve as a kind of phantom (φάσμα) to foretell the future,” for example, “the scythe of Zachariah [Zach. 5:1-2 LXX], the axes of Ezekiel [Ezek. 9:2], and other signs of this

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249 Palamas, Triads, III.i.17.
250 Palamas, Triads, III.i.17.
251 Palamas, Triads, III.i.14.
252 Palamas, Triads, III.i.18.
sort.” In both of these cases, we have God creating temporary φάσματα resembling real objects that function as symbols pointing to future events. As φάσματα, they are objects of the faculty of imagination (ἡ φαντασία), the same faculty in which Barlaam claims that the Taboric light was “shown forth.” Implied in Palamas’ choice of examples is a critique against Barlaam who had mistaken a true theophany for a symbolic prophetic vision.

Palamas’ warrants for dismissing the possibility that the Transfiguration is a vision of an anhypostatic symbol are similar to the ones he voiced against it being an authypostatic symbol. If the light of Tabor was a “phantom,” then this must equally be the case with the light of the eschaton, since the Fathers (he refers again to Pseudo-Dionysius, Divine Names, I.4 and Nazianzen, Letter 101) “affirm clearly that Christ will be for all eternity as He then appeared” in the Transfiguration. According to Palamas, such a claim would make the following text from the Transfiguration liturgy absurd: “Come, let us ascend the holy mountain, let us contemplate the immaterial divinity of the Father and the Spirit, which shines forth in the only Son.” As Palamas sees it, the Feast of the Transfiguration does not commemorate the revelation of an evanescent symbol.

Having so far examined Palamas’ warrants for dismissing these two ways of characterizing the Taboric light’s symbolic character, I can now turn to Palamas’ claim that the Taboric light is a natural symbol.

253 Palamas, Triads, III.i.14.
254 Palamas, Triads, III.i.14.
255 Palamas, Triads, III.i.16. See John of Damascus, Canticle IX, Canon (troparion) 2 at Matins for the Feast of the Transfiguration in FM, 494.
1.7 Taboric Light as Natural Symbol

As I explained in the preceding section, natural symbols “always accompany the nature that gives them being, for the symbol is natural to that nature.”256 As such, natural symbols exist neither before nor after that which they symbolize, but are always coexistent with that which they point to or manifest.257 By the examples that Palamas uses to illustrate natural symbols, the sun and its rays or fire and heat, he is claiming that natural symbols are called “natural” precisely because they depend on the nature of a being for their existence as properties of that nature. In this way, natural symbols are inseparable from the nature on which they depend and which they manifest. Light is a natural property of the sun and heat is a natural property of fire. In comparison to symbols that are authypostatic (a self-standing existent/hypostasis) and anhypostatic (without self-standing existence), natural symbols are enhypostatic (ἐνυπόστατον, they exists in a hypostasis as a natural property). As a connatural property of that which it signifies, an enhypostatic symbol has “permanence and stability, because it remains in being, and does not elude the gaze, as does lightning, or words, or thoughts.”258 In other words, as long as there is a sun it will shine, and as long as there is fire it will heat. Both light and fire are permanent properties of the respective subjects in which they inhere.

Since the connection between natural symbols and that of which they are a symbol is based on a necessity of nature (unlike conventional symbols who exist separately from the signified and thus are “alien,” i.e., heterogeneous), natural symbols are homogeneous with “the nature that gives them being.” This homogeneity is verbally

256 Palamas, Triads, III.i.14.
257 See Palamas, Triads, III.i.19, “This glory did not appear or begin, it has no end, for natural symbols are always coexistent with the natures of which they are symbols.”
258 Palamas, Triads, III.i.18.
expressed when we refer to both the sun and its rays as “light” on account that both are light; the former is light as source and the later is light as it proceeds from its source. It is important to note that Palamas’ analogy does not concern the relation between an act of making and its product, but between an agent and its activities.

Palamas highlights the inseparability and homogeneity of natural symbols in relation to the natures on which they depend by the claim that “when the symbol naturally takes its being from the object of which it is the symbol, we say it is its own symbol.” The relation between signifier and signified is so close that to have cognition of one is to have cognition of the other. Palamas explains:

The capacity of fire to burn, which has as its symbol the heat accessible to the senses, becomes its own symbol, for it is always accompanied by its heat, yet remains a single entity, not undergoing any duplication; but it always uses heat as its natural symbol, whenever an object capable of receiving heat presents itself. In the same way, the light of the rising sun has as a symbol the glow of the dawn, which becomes its own proper symbol. We all know the sun’s light as something accessible to sight, which also enables us to behold the dawn, even though no one can look directly at the solar disc, and it is almost impossible to gaze upon its brilliance.

Natural symbols are the means by which one being participates in another (or in this case knows another). The point of this passage is that an encounter with the natural symbol of a being is an encounter with the being itself. There is a coincidence of signifier and signified such that when an appropriately situated perceiver encounters the heat of fire or the rays of the sun (their natural symbols) the perceiver encounters the “single entity” of fire or the sun. To perceive the heat of fire or the rays of the sun simply is to perceive fire or the sun. Since natural symbols do not have independent existence, but yet have stable

259 Palamas, Triads, III.i.20.
260 Palamas, Triads, III.i.20.
reality, they are not things which we encounter over and against the beings from which they proceed, but *are the beings as they manifest and share themselves with others*.

In light of the above analysis, Palamas claims that if the Taboric light was a symbol of any kind, it was a natural symbol of the divinity of Christ:

If then this light, which shone from the Saviour on the Mountain, is a natural symbol, it is not so in respect of both the natures in Him, for the natural characteristics of each nature are different. This light cannot pertain to His human nature, for our nature is not light, let alone a light such as this. The Saviour did not ascend Tabor, accompanied by the chosen disciples, in order to show them that He was a man…this light naturally symbolizes the divinity of the Only-Begotten.261

If one puts this claim in the context of Palamas’ notion of natural symbol there are several things which follow.

First, the light manifested on Tabor is coexistent with the divinity that Christ shares coequally with the Father and the Spirit. As a permanent, natural characteristic of the divinity of Christ, it is homogeneous in nature with the Godhead and therefore uncreated—it is the natural symbol of Christ’s divinity, not his humanity. Just as it is the case with the light of the sun or the heat of fire, to have an experience of the light of Tabor, the natural symbol of divinity, is to have an experience of the divinity itself. To see the light is to see God. On Palamas’ account, this is the correct interpretation of the Transfiguration as a vision of God and the correct interpretation of Maximus’ claim that the light was a symbol of divinity and that Christ became his own symbol.

Palamas’ theory of natural symbol renders one final piece of insight concerning the antinomy between the hiddenness and visibility of God that he inherits from the Fathers. The insight revolves around his claim that while the sun is visible in its natural

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261 Palamas, *Triads*, III.i.19.
symbol, “no one can look directly at the solar disc, and it is almost impossible to gaze upon its brilliance.”

1.8 Manifestation by Natural Symbol always Leaves a Remainder

Although the Godhead is truly revealed in the Transfiguration according to Palamas, he wishes to be faithful to the notion that the theophany is the revelation of “the God who remains invisible in his transcendent hiddenness.”

In the dynamic between a natural symbol and the nature which it symbolizes, there is a coincidence between signifier and signified, but there is not a total coincidence such that the signified is thus emptied out in its manifestation. There is always a remainder to which the percipient has no direct access. Palamas explains using the example of fire:

[T]hrough the sense of touch, a man perceives the warmth of fire, even though touch cannot have the least knowledge of the burning power of which the heat is a symbol (although it is well aware that this is the case). It [the percipient] knows neither its quality, nor its intensity, and would in fact perish (becoming itself all fire, and ceasing to be a perceiving subject), if it tried itself to learn by experience what is the nature of the power of fire which gives rise to heat. This is why, if it should ever venture to attempt this, it would at once shrink back and run away, bitterly regretting its curiosity. So we see that heat is accessible to the touch, but its burning power remains entirely beyond participation.

There is an aspect of things, which as the root and source of their natural manifestations by natural symbol, always remains beyond participation and cognition. In the case of his fire analogy, it is the power (δύναμις) on which heat considered as enhypostatic symbol depends that remains hidden from view. The power of fire is only perceptible as manifested in its natural symbol and not perceptible in itself or by itself as an object of cognition. The operative distinction is between a being as manifested and a being in

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262 Palamas, Cap., 150.
263 Palamas, Triads, III.i.20.
itself. The former category is that by which a being communicates itself to another and
the latter category is the condition for the possibility of the communication. When
applied to the revelation of the Godhead in the Transfiguration, what we have is the
Godhead revealing itself by its natural symbol of light so that God himself is experienced
(the coincidence of signifier and signified), but with the qualifier “as manifested,” i.e.,
not as he is in himself as ultimate source of his own revelation. Using the analogy of the
sun and its rays, God reveals himself by revealing his essential attributes or energies
(natural symbols) of glory, goodness, etc. Conceived of in this way, “divinity” signifies
God’s attributes as he shows them to us, and since God is his glory, goodness, etc. to see
his attributes is to see God. “Divinity” also signifies what these attributes are “in their
ground of being and principle of existence” which is beyond all participation.264 God is
his manifested glory, but that is not all he is. Thus, by talking about the Transfiguration
in this way, Palamas is offering a theory that operates within the patristic antinomy
concerning revelatory theophany. The same God, the same divinity is “completely
invisible and unintelligible and imparticipable…but also…visible and intelligible and
participable for only the saints in a mystical way.”265

1.9 Conclusion

In this section I have shown that Palamas’ claim that the Transfiguration (and by
extension theophany) is a revelation of God’s glory rather than essence is rooted in the
patristic antinomy of God hidden and revealed. For Palamas, theophanies are partial
visions of God is this life, but they consist not in a revelation of the divine essence (God

264 Palamas, Triads, III.i.21.
265 Palamas, Dialogue, XI.
in himself), but the divine essence as manifested in its natural symbol of glory and light (God for us). By his theory of natural symbol, Palamas lays out a framework through which he can maintain that God is simultaneously manifested (or signified) in the natural symbol of his essential attributes while remaining veiled and unknowable in himself. Palamas’ theory of natural symbol is constructed so as to defend the reality of the Transfiguration as revelatory theophany and also to give insight into just what a theophany is. Now I turn to Palamas’ claims regarding the Christocentric nature of the Transfiguration and show that, for him, the Transfiguration is theophany because it is a Christophany.

SECTION 2: THE THEOPHANY OF THE INCARNATE CHRIST

In the Transfiguration, the uncreated glory of God, the natural symbol of the divine essence, becomes “visible” (able to be experienced) in its Christological manifestation. Furthermore, that manifestation is only accessible if one passes “from flesh to spirit” by the power of the Holy Spirit. According to Palamas, the humanity of Christ is the location of the theophany. Even though the Taboric light is the natural symbol of the divinity of Christ, God is seen by the apostles in the luminous “face” and “body” of Christ. It is Jesus, as man, that is the “deifying and divinely radiant source of illumination.” One of the ways that Palamas highlights this is by focusing on Mt. Tabor as the place of theophany: “That is why God is imagined to be on a mountain, coming down (καταβαίνων) from His heights and leading us up from the depths of our abasement, that he who cannot be contained might, to an extent compatible with our

266 Palamas, Hom., 34.8.
267 Palamas, Hom., 35.5 (emphasis mine).
human nature and our safety, be contained.” Mt. Tabor is the place of theophany only because Christ stands at its summit. God comes down “from His heights” precisely in the Incarnation so as to lead us “up from the depths of our abasement.” The Transfiguration is a vision of God because it is a vision of Christ. The nature and purpose of the Incarnation lies at the root of Palamas’ account of the Transfiguration as revelatory theophany. In this section, I examine Palamas’ Christology in order to show that his claims about revelatory character of Tabor are a natural outgrowth of it.

2.1 Palamas’ Chalcedonian Christology

Palamas’ claims about Tabor are an extension of his Christology, the basic structure of which is Chalcedonian:

The pre-eternal and uncircumscribed and almighty Word is now born according to the flesh…He is not a spiritual creature coming into being after previously not existing; nor flesh which is brought to birth but will soon perish; nor flesh and mind united to form a rational creature, but God and flesh mingled unconfusedly by the divine Mind to form the existence of one theandric hypostasis.

For He did not receive from us a human person, but assumed our human nature and renewed it with his own person.

He was truly made man and became like us in everything apart from sin (cf. Heb. 4:15), while remaining true God in one person even after His incarnation.

In the Incarnation, the pre-existent divine person of the Logos unites a fully human nature to his divine person (the hypostatic union). The Incarnation is not the case of a created spirit becoming flesh (Arianism), nor is it the case of the Logos serving as the “mind”

268 Palamas, Hom., 34.7. See Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 45.11 (PG 36:637), “For in that Mount itself God is seen by men; on the one hand through His own descent from His lofty abode, on the other through His drawing us up from our abasement on earth, that the Incomprehensible may be in some degree, and as far as is safe, comprehended by a mortal nature,” translation in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 7 (Second Series), ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 426, hereafter referred to as NPNF.

269 Palamas, Hom., 58.2.

270 Palamas, Hom., 5.1.

271 Palamas, Hom., 8.8.
which unites to flesh “to form a rational creature” (Apollinarianism). The result of the hypostatic union is the one, divine person of Christ existing and acting in two natures, fully human (created) and fully divine (uncreated). Each of these natures was “mingled unconfusedly” (μεμιγμένων ἄφυρτως) and thus remains whole in its integrity, each maintaining its proper attributes and predicates. Thus, Christ “acted as God in all divine matters, as man in all human matters, subjecting Himself to all human passions as are blameless.”

According to Palamas, the “Son of God is one with the humanity which he put on, for in his hypostasis he is united with the first fruits of humanity; that is why we apply to him appellations which derive from humanity, and he [Christ] grants his appellations to humanity.” Here Palamas is making reference to the communication of idioms or exchange of properties. According to this principle, the Logos unites human and divine nature in his person such that each nature is his own proper possession. As Maximus the Confessor put it, the two natures are that “out of which and in which the one and only Christ God exists.” Since the human nature of Christ is the human nature of God, the attributes proper to each respective nature can be predicated of the one, divine subject, e.g., in Christ one can truly say that God ate, drank, suffered, or that this man is God, etc. In Christ, God is the bearer of genuinely human predicates: “we apply to him appellations derived from humanity” and a human being is the bearer of divine predicates: “he

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273 See Palamas, Triads, III.iii.7.
274 Palamas, Hom., 8.8.
275 Palamas, Against Akindynos, III.6. translated in Meyendorff, A Study, 182 (emphasis original).
[Christ] grants his appellations to humanity.” So far, this is a standard application of the communication of idioms. Palamas’ main concern is with what Christ gives to us by way of the exchange or sharing of divinity and humanity, i.e., how Christ “grants his appellations” to our humanity.

According to John Meyendorff, Palamas’ stresses the following two “main points” in his Christology on account of his appropriation of the communication of idioms: (1) “Humanity and divinity are united in the hypostasis of Christ, Son of God,” and (2) “Sanctifying and deifying grace does really reach us by virtue of the ‘communication of idioms’ starting from the humanity of Christ, ‘source of deification,’ and not only from his divinity.”

The hypostatic union enables the humanity of Christ to be the channel of his divinity. Human beings have access to God insofar as they have contact with Christ as man. I would like to use Meyendorff’s observation in order to focus on Palamas’ commitment to Christ (specifically in his humanity) as source of revelation as well as deification.

A key to Palamas’ understanding of the implications of the communication of idioms is in his characterization of the Incarnation as “God and flesh mingled unconfusedly by the divine Mind to form the existence of the one theandric hypostasis (μία θεανδρική ὑπόστασις).” In another place, Palamas talks about Christ’s “theandric way of life” (ἡ θεανδρικὴ πολιτεία) in the context of his “indescribable self-emptying” and “saving passion” as evidence of God’s purpose for creation. Also, he mentions “the consequences of His [Christ’s] theandric energy” (τὰ τῆς θεανδρικῆς ἐνεργείας

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277 Meyendorff, A Study, 181-182 (emphases original).
278 Palamas, Hom., 58.2. Cf. Hom., 57.3.
279 Palamas, Hom., 4.12.
ἀποτελέσµατα) as one of the “prerequisites for our salvation.”²⁸⁰ There is a connection between Christ as theandric and Christ as revealer. In order to get at what precisely this connection is, I will now take a brief look at the term’s background for the purpose of filling out the implications of Palamas’ use of the term. While θεανδρικόν has a long history in Byzantine Christology,²⁸¹ for the purposes of this section, I will look at three of Palamas’ favorite sources: Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor, and John of Damascus.

2.2 The Background of the “Theandric Hypostasis” of Christ

While the origin of the term does not ultimately lie in Pseudo-Dionysius, his use of the term was the most noteworthy in the patristic period.²⁸² In the context of talking about the “love for humanity” (φιλανθρωπία) shown by Christ in the Incarnation, Pseudo-Dionysius tells the monk Gaius, regarding the dual natures of Christ:

[H]e was neither human nor inhuman; although humanly born he was far superior to man, and being above men he yet truly did become man. Furthermore, it was not by virtue of being God that he did divine things, not by virtue of being man that he did what was human, but rather, by the fact of being God-made-man he accomplished something new in our midst—the activity of the God-man [κατὰ τὴν θεανδρικὴν ἐνέργειαν].²⁸³

²⁸⁰ Palamas, Hom., 41.11. Veniamin’s translation of τὰ τῆς θεανδρικῆς ἐνέργειας ἀποτελέσµατα, “the consequences of His activity as God and man,” obscures the connection I am trying to make, so I have slightly altered it.
²⁸¹ For a summary of that history see Anthony Papantoniou, “The Theandric Mystery of Jesus Christ in Byzantine Theology,” Studii Teologice, 3 (2009), 177-196.
²⁸² According to Papantoniou, “The actual notion “theandric” as a descriptive word referring to the reality of the incarnate Christ was an established phrase as early as the third century.” He gives examples ranging from Methodius of Olympus (d.311) to Theodoret of Cyrus (d. 457). See “The Theandric Mystery,” 189-190.
From the passage one could infer, and some monoenergists did, that while Christ had two natures, he had one, hybrid principle of activity. A plain reading of καὶνὴν τινὰ τῆν θεανδρικὴν ἐνέργειαν could understandably yield the conclusion that he was asserting some form of monoenergism. However, Dionysius was not received by the orthodox Byzantine tradition as asserting such. Rather, he was interpreted as emphasizing the unique character and utter novelty of a divine person acting in a human mode.

The first stage of orthodox reception and clarification that I wish to highlight occurs in Maximus the Confessor. According to Maximus, by the word “theandric” the teacher [Ps. Dionysius] obviously refers periphrastically to the double energy of the double nature. For he is clearly putting together in this word the adjectives “divine” and “human,” but not simply, for which reason he does not designate this energy with a number…[καινὴν τινὰ τῆν θεανδρικὴν ἐνέργειαν] is not affirmed by the teacher to destroy the essential difference of natural energies, out of which and in which the one and only Christ God exists but to maintain their exact union.

The thin end of the wedge that Maximus used against the monoenergists was a principle that would become axiomatic for orthodox Christology (and as I will show, very important for Palamas): every substance or nature has its own proper natural energy by which it acts and through which it manifests itself. If Christ, according to orthodox


285 See Pelikan’s comment that while the charge that Dionysius was a monophysite is historically questionable, “however, his ‘Monoenergism’ does indeed seem to be an ‘obvious fact’…That remains so even after putting as charitable a construction as possible on his words” (Pelikan’s introduction to The Complete Works, 21).


287 See Maximus the Confessor, Ambigua 2 (PG 91:1037C), “He [Christ] did not become man without the energy that is proper to human nature, for the principle of natural energy is what defines the essence of a thing, and as a rule characterizes the nature of every being in which it essentially inheres” and Ambigua, 5 (PG 91:1048A), “The only valid proof that this ‘essence’ [Christ’s human nature] is present in its ‘entity, ’ moreover, is its natural constitutive power, which one would not be mistaken in calling a ‘natural energy,’ properly and primarily characteristic of the nature in question, since it is the most generic motion
teaching, has two natures, then he must have two energies in which and by which he acts. In order to exonerate Dionysius from a potential charge of monoenergism, Maximus interprets him in light of this principle.

Maximus interprets him as asserting the *undivided* character of the dual activity of Christ such that they are the dual energies of a single, divine subject. For Maximus, theandric activity highlights the fact that the actions of Christ cannot be divided up into two *rigidly* separate categories, i.e., the acts of God and the acts of a man, but that every action of Christ is an action of the one God-man. Maximus is interpreting Ps. Dionysius in a way that is sympathetic to what the Third Council of Constantinople would eventually affirm: “we declare that his [Christ’s] two natures shine forth in his one *hypostasis*…the difference of nature being recognized in the same *hypostasis* by the fact that each nature wills and works what is proper to it, in communion with each other.”

The dual energies of Christ can be considered as theandric insofar as they proceed from one acting subject.

The second stage of reception that fills out the background for Palamas’ use of theandric is represented by John of Damascus. The Damascene expands on Maximus’ “clarification” of Ps. Dionysius in light of Third Constantinople. After dismissing the monoenergist interpretation of Dionysius’ statement on Maximian grounds, “things which have one operation also have one substance,” John explains that:

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288 See *Ambigua*, 5 (PG 91:1057A), “For the ‘theandric energy’ is not the natural manifestation of either divinity or humanity alone, nor is it that of a composite nature occupying some borderland between two extremes. Instead it is the energy that belongs most naturally to ‘God made man,’ to Him who became perfectly incarnate.”


290 John of Damascus, *De Fide*, III.19 (PTS 12, TFOC, 37, 321).
[H]e [Ps. Dionysus] wanted to show that the new and ineffable manner of the manifestation of the natural operations in Christ (τῆς τῶν φυσικῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐνεργειῶν ἐκφάνσεως) was consonant with the mutual indwelling of Christ’s natures in each other,…He also wanted to show the manner of the exchange (τὸν τρόπον τῆς ἀντιδόσεως) arising from the ineffable union. Thus, we do not say that the operations are separated and that the natures act separately, but we say that they act conjointly, with each nature doing in communion (μετὰ τῆς κοινωνίας) with the other that which is proper to itself…Accordingly when the flesh is acting, the divine nature is associated with it because the flesh is being permitted by the good pleasure of the divine will to suffer and do what is proper to it…[a]nd when the divinity of the Word is acting, the flesh is associated with it, because the divine operations are being performed by the flesh as by an instrument and because He who is acting at once in a divine and human way is one…Thus, the theandric operation shows this: when God became man, that is to say, was incarnate, His human operation was divine, that is to say, deified (τεθεωμένη).²⁹¹

There are several things in this long passage which fill out the background of Palamas’ use of “theandric.” John gives a robust content to the notion of the communion (κοινωνία) of the two natures in the one person of Christ. Like Maximus, John interprets theandric as signifying the non-separation of the two natures. The two natures are in communion through the divine person of Christ on the level of energy, i.e., “when the flesh is acting (τῇ σαρκὶ ἐνεργούσῃ), the divine nature is associated with it [and] when the divinity of the Word is acting (τῇ θεότητι τοῦ λόγου ἐνεργούσῃ), the flesh is associated with it.” Due to the hypostatic union, the acts of God are the acts of a human being and vice versa. The communion of natures is manifested by the resultant communion of energy. This communion of the dual energies of Christ is part of the “manner of exchange” by which the humanity of Christ is deified which, for the Damascene, is another way of saying that the human energy of Christ became divine: “His human operation was divine, that is to say, deified.” However, by its deification, the

²⁹¹ John of Damascus, De Fide, III.19 (PTS 12, TFOC 37, 321-22; emphasis mine).
humanity of Christ “did not change its own nature or its natural properties.”

Rather, it “was enriched with divine operations.” As a consequence of all this, it is by the union of human and divine energy that Christ manifests both his divinity and the divinization of his humanity. The Word manifests his divine energy in and through his human energy such that his human energy is an “instrument” of the divine.

2.3 Theandricity as Basis of the Theophany of Incarnation

It is on the basis of the unconfused mixture or exchange of the two natures in the one person of Christ, considered precisely as theandric, that the human energies of Christ are enriched by the divine. In his own Christology (based largely in Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus), Dumitru Stănilescu offers a summary that is applicable to Palamas on this issue:

the communication of attributes means not only the nominal attribution of characteristics and human operations to Christ as God, and of the divine characteristics to Christ as man by the fact that He is one and the same subject of both, but also the real imprinting of the human characteristics and operations with the divine ones and vice versa, through Him as subject through whom both are unitarily realized without confusion.

For Palamas, it is this “imprinting” of the divine energies on the human energies through the divine person of Christ by which “He raised on high the things below, or rather, He gathered both things into one, mingling humanity with divinity.”

This mingling without confusion enables Christ to be “an inexhaustible source of sanctification” and

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292 John of Damascus, *De Fide*, III.17 (PTS 12, TFOC 37, 316).
293 John of Damascus, *De Fide*, III.17 (PTS 12, TFOC 37, 317). John compares the effect of divine energy on the humanity of Christ with that of fire on a piece of steel: “Thus, the steel which has been heated burns, not because it has a naturally acquired power of burning, but because it has acquired it from its union with fire.” ibid.
295 Palamas, *Hom.*, 58.5.
also its very pattern. It is by this exchange of energy (which is a function of the exchange of natures through the divine person of the Logos) and the resultant theandric activity that Christ not only sanctifies (deifies) humanity, but also reveals and manifests God to humanity.

Because of the union or vision of God that Christ has as man, the human being has access to the vision of God in Christ. According to Palamas, the “Principle of deification, divinity by nature” (Ἡ φύσει τοιγαροῦν θεότης, ἥ ὄρχη τῆς θεώσεως) comes down to us through the Incarnation:

For it [φύσει θεότης] is believed to be and become visible only to the one who has been hypostatically united to a mind and a body, although not according to their proper nature. Only these [the mind and body of Christ] were deified ‘by the presence, in His entirety, of the One who grants anointing’ and received the energy corresponding to the deifying essence and containing all of it perfectly, revealing it through themselves; for, according to the Apostle, ‘in Christ the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily.’

Because of the hypostatic union, the humanity (mind and body) of Christ contains the fullness of divine energy. It is both from this fullness, and because of it, that Christ makes God, who is visible to him, visible to us. For Palamas, everything done by Christ during his earthly life and ministry was a theandric manifestation of human and divine energy and the manifestation of divinity by way of humanity.

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296 Palamas, *Hom.*, 16.6. As I will show in Chapter 3, it is contact with the deified humanity of Christ and the imprinting of his divine energies on our human energies by way of that contact made possible by the Holy Spirit, which constitutes our deification and thus makes our human activity theandric by participation. 297 μόνῳ γὰρ τῷ καθ’ ὑπόστασιν ἤνωμένῳ νῷ καὶ σώματι εἶναι τε καὶ γενέσθαι θεατὶ πιστεύεται, καὶ καὶ μὴ κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν φύσιν ἐαυτῶν. Μόνῳ γὰρ ἐκείνῳ «παρουσία τοῦ χρίσμον ὅλου» ἐθεώθησαν καὶ τὴν ἑαυτήν ἐνέργειαν τῇ θεοίᾳ οὐσίᾳ προσελάβοντο, πάσαιν αὐτὴν ἀνελπισίως χαρῆσαντα καὶ δὲ ἐαυτῶν ἐκφηναν• καὶ γὰρ ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ πάν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεοίατος σωματικῆς κατὰ τὸν Απόστολον «οἴκει» (Palamas, *Triads*, III.i.33 (translation mine)). Gendle renders μόνῳ γὰρ τῷ καθ’ ὑπόστασιν ἤνωμένῳ νῷ καὶ σώματι εἶναι τε καὶ γενέσθαι θεατὶ πιστεύεται as “For it is only when hypostatically united to a mind or body that we believe the divinity to have become visible” (*Triads*, p. 88 emphasis mine) and obscures the point that the hypostatic union makes φύσει θεότης visible to Christ as man first, and then to us. This was brought to my attention by Romanides, “Notes Part II,” 265. The point that Palamas is trying to make is that part of the *unicum* of the hypostatic union is that Christ sees the divine essence which enables him, as man, to impart the vision of God to creatures as divine energy.
According to Palamas, the revelatory purpose of the Incarnation is to make God, who is invisible by nature, visible:

He upon whom the six-winged seraphim cannot look, since they are unable to gaze intently not only at His nature but even at the radiance of His glory, and therefore covering their eyes with their wings (Isa. 6:2), having become flesh, appears to our senses and can be seen by bodily eyes.298

The visibility of God is rooted in Christ “having become flesh.” God can be seen in the flesh of Christ because the flesh and the acts performed in and through that flesh are God’s own. Every aspect of Christ’s humanity manifests “the radiance of His [divine] glory” in some way, the full vision of which even the seraphim cannot stand. The incarnation and subsequent life and ministry of Christ are, therefore, theophany, the condescension of the divine by which the invisible and unapproachable God becomes visible and approachable in the humanity of the Son. The Incarnation is theophanic precisely insofar as Christ is theandric, that is to say, Christ’s uncreated, divine energy becomes visible (and thus shared) because of its being unconfusedly imprinted on his human energies in virtue of the hypostatic union.

2.4 The Transfiguration as Vision of God through the Theandric Christ

According to Palamas, the Trinitarian glory that Christ manifested in his transfigured humanity on Tabor had previously been veiled by that same humanity, “He possessed the splendor of the divine nature hidden under his flesh.”299 Since Christ “took upon Himself our human flesh, which was subject to suffering and death” for our salvation, the full manifestation of his glory, or rather the full unveiling of the

298 Palamas, Hom., 58.7. As I will show later on in this chapter, a passage like this has a specificity about it that is not obvious at first glance. In referencing Isaiah’s vision, Palamas is not only claiming that the prophet saw God surrounded by the seraphim, but specifically that Isaiah saw the pre-incarnate Son.
299 Palamas, Hom., 34.13.
consequences of the hypostatic union for the human nature assumed by the Son, remained hidden.\textsuperscript{300} It is the full consequences of the hypostatic union that are unveiled in the Transfiguration. In the Transfiguration, the fullness of the divine energy and glory is revealed in the luminous body of Christ because that body contains the fullness of divine energy considered as glory: “[t]he glory that proceeds naturally from His divinity was shown on Tabor to be shared by His body as well, because of the unity of His person. Thus His face shone as the sun on account of this light.”\textsuperscript{301} Quoting Basil, Palamas says, ‘His divine power appeared as it were as a light through a screen of glass, that is to say, through the flesh the Lord which He has assumed from us.’\textsuperscript{302} Here the humanity of Christ is transparent to the hypostatically united divinity, but this does not entail that the humanity of Christ disappears altogether. In the Transfiguration, the vision of God is experienced by means of the maximally deified (theandric) humanity of Christ.

The Transfiguration is a case of Christ, as man, allowing the apostles to participate in his own experience of God in a way appropriate to creatures not hypostatically united to God. In a way similar to Palamas’ talk of natural symbol examined above, it could be said that the humanity of Christ, due to the hypostatic union, becomes the “natural-symbol-by-hypostatic union” of the divinity of Christ. When the full consequences of the hypostatic union are revealed, like in the Transfiguration, there is a coincidence between signifier and signified such that to see one is to see the other.\textsuperscript{303}

\textsuperscript{300} Palamas, \textit{Hom.}, 16.23.
\textsuperscript{301} Palamas, \textit{Hom.}, 34.11.
\textsuperscript{302} Palamas, \textit{Triads}, III.i.15, see Basil, \textit{Homily on Theophany} (PG 31:1473D)
\textsuperscript{303} This may very well be a point that is implied in Palamas’ talk of natural symbol in the third \textit{Triad} that I examined in Section 1 of this chapter. Palamas sums up his argument concerning natural symbol by returning to Maxmius and saying, “Also, the remark of Maximus, that ‘on account of His love of men, He became His own symbol’, shows that this light is a natural symbol” (Palamas, \textit{Triads}, III.i.20). When one takes a look at the larger context of Palamas quotation of Maximus, it is clear that Maximus is claiming that the Son becomes “his own symbol” in the Incarnation: “For in His measureless love for mankind, there was
The essential, uncreated attributes of God (that by which God manifest himself) have their earthly home in the incarnate Christ. It is due to this fact that creatures have theophanic access to them in the transfigured Christ.\(^\text{304}\) Thus, the Transfiguration as revelatory theophany can be considered as a kind of hyper-sacrament. I say “hyper” sacrament, because in the case of the Transfiguration, signum (the humanity of Christ) does not veil res significata (his divinity) as it communicates it. Rather, the Transfiguration represents signum becoming completely transparent to res significata.

For Palamas, the Taboric light is not revealed in the face of Christ in such a way that his face is “seen,” and the presence of the glory is “believed.” To “see” the face of the transfigured Christ, is to “see” the glory.

2.5 Conclusion

In this section I have shown that Palamas’ claims regarding the “this worldly” vision of God in the Transfiguration are, in part, a function and outgrowth of his Christology. I have shown that, for Palamas, the incarnation of Christ is theophanic because Christ is theandric in his person and activity. Palamas’ notion that Christ reveals God by his divine energy imprinted on his human energy is entailed by the concept of theandricity, which Palamas inherits from the patristic tradition. According to Palamas, the earthy seat of the revelation of the glory of God is the incarnate Christ, and this fact is laid bare in the Transfiguration which, in a manner similar to a sacrament, reveals the need for Him to be created in human form (without undergoing any change), and to become a type and symbol of Himself, presenting Himself symbolically by means of His own self, and, through the manifestation of Himself, to lead all creation to Himself…and to provide human beings, in a human-loving fashion, with the visible divine actions of His flesh as signs of His invisible infinity” (Maximus the Confessor, Ambigua 10.31c (PG 91:1065D, emphasis mine).

\(^{304}\) See Palamas, Cap., 56, “Prior to the incarnation of the Word of God the kingdom of heaven was as far from us as the sky is from earth.” For Palamas, the terms “kingdom of God/heaven” and “vision of God” are equivalent; see Palamas, Hom., 16.39.
vision of God in the luminous face of Christ. In summary, the Transfiguration is the theophany of the Incarnation.

In Section 1, I argued that Palamas sees the Transfiguration *qua* theophany as a true vision of God and not a vision of created intermediaries. For Palamas, all theophanies are visions of God with all that the term implies for him, that is, they are uncreated revelations of divinity as natural symbol and not divinity in itself. The Old Testament theophanies of Moses, Isaiah, etc. were true visions of God. Yet, in this section, I have argued that the Transfiguration is theophany or vision of God because it is a vision of *the incarnate Christ in his glory*. The Transfiguration shows that God definitively makes himself visible in and through the humanity of Christ. In light of these two sets of claims, the following question poses itself: how does Palamas account for the vision of God before the Incarnation and what is the Transfiguration’s relation to other biblical theophanies? In order to answer these questions I turn to this chapter’s final section in which I explore the Transfiguration’s place in the economy of salvation and therefore its relation to biblical theophanies.

**SECTION 3: THE TRANSFIGURATION AS THE CENTER OF THE THEOPHANIC ECONOMY**

**3.1 Theophany in the Old Testament**

In this section, before looking at the biblical theophanies in light of the Transfiguration, I wish to look at how Palamas characterizes Old Testament theophanies as visions of God. In Section 1, I outlined Palamas’ defense of the Transfiguration theophany as a true vision of the uncreated glory of God in the face of Barlaam of
Calabria’s assertion that the light of Tabor was a created symbol. In fact, Barlaam focused his attack not just on the Transfiguration, but on all biblical theophanies:

Thus in undertaking to speak of illumination (φωτισμός), they [Barlaam et al] consider any illumination which is accessible to the senses as illusion (πλάνη), but yet themselves affirm that all divine illumination is accessible to the senses. For they claim that all illuminations that occurred among the Jews and their prophets under the Old Law and before the coming of Christ were only symbolic.  

Palamas’ claims of the uncreated and non-symbolic nature of the Taboric light were also made in defense of all biblical theophanies. For Palamas, theophanies are illuminations because in them one experiences, to use Nazianzen’s terminology, “a scant emanation, as it were, a small beam” of the uncreated light, which is God himself as manifested in the natural symbol of his essential attributes. The light manifested in other biblical theophanies is the same light that was shown on Tabor. Like the Taboric light, the light of Old Testament illuminations “shines in part, as a pledge” of the eschaton.  

Palamas says,

I would also affirm that the prophets and patriarchs were not without experience of this light, but that (with a few exceptions) all their visions, especially the most divine ones, have participated in this light. For indeed, why should God have simulated some other light, when He possesses the eternal light in Himself, made visible (albeit in a mysterious way) to the pure in heart today just as in the Age to Come, as Denys affirms?

Throughout his works, Palamas cites numerous examples of “the prophets and patriarchs” who had experience of the uncreated light in theophanies. On Sinai, Moses “soared to the height of divine vision ( بصورة روحانية ἤφετη)” and “saw God, not darkly but face to face.”

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305 Palamas, *Triads*, I.iii.Third Question (emphasis mine). For Palamas, the term φωτισμός is a synonym for θεοφάνεια and therefore it connotes the same three correlative ideas as the latter: revelation, deification and eschatology.

306 Palamas, *Triads*, II.iii.66.


earlier…but passing beyond the fiery vision…saw the Lord in the sound of a light passing breeze.” At the oak of Mamre, Abraham had a “most wonderful vision of God (τὴς θαυμασιωτέρας τούτου θεοπτίας), when he clearly saw the one God in three persons, before He had been proclaimed to be such.” Such examples could easily be multiplied. The point is that these particular cases and all like them are visions of God and not visions of created symbols. Palamas’ assertion that Elijah “saw the Lord in the sound of a light passing breeze” is not meant to be an exception this. First, as I showed in Section 1, Palamas generally takes theophanic imagery to be a simile, the function of which is to express an ineffable experience on the part of the visionary. Second, Palamas highlighting that Elijah “saw” God in a “sound” is an illustration that the light is not sensible (in the ordinary sense) nor does it always have to be experienced with eyes transformed by grace as it was on Tabor. Perhaps with a bit of hyperbole, Palamas claims that Elijah has the ἐπονομία “the one who sees God, even according to the superlative, the greatest one who sees God (θεόπτης γὰρ, μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ μεθ’ ὑπερβολῆς θεοπτικότατος).” As I will show in Chapter 3, a necessary condition of theophanic experience according to Palamas is that the visionary is in the right state of soul under the influence of grace—he most often characterizes theophanic mystical experience as a vision within the person.

310 Palamas, Hom., 11.9. Compare this to Hom., 16.19, “If the Word of God had not been made flesh, the Father would not have been shown to be truly Father, nor the Son to be truly Son, nor would the Holy Spirit have been shown to shine forth from the Father. God would not have been shown to be essence and hypostases, but would have been seen to be merely some sort of energy observed in creatures, was said by the foolish sages of old, and now by those who think like Barlaam and Akindynus.” It is difficult to reconcile the preceding with Hom., 11.9’s claim that Abraham τὸν ἐνα Θεὸν σαφῶς τρισυπόστατον ἔθεασε, μὴ τοῖς κηρυττόμενοις οὕτως (clearly viewed the one God in three persons not yet proclaimed as such).
311 “Moreover, if one covers the eyes of him who sees, even if one gouges them out, he will still see the light no less clearly than before” (Palamas, Triads, III.i.36).
312 Palamas, Triads, Liii.24 (translation mine).
In any case, Palamas is clear that the vision of God was available before the Incarnation and its theophanic revelation in the Transfiguration. That it was the *same* glory seen on both Sinai, in the case of Moses, and on Tabor, in the case of the apostles, is the fundamental assumption behind *Homily 34*’s rhetorical flourish, “Do you observe that Moses too was transfigured when he went up the mountain and beheld the Lord’s glory?” In the face of Palamas’ claim that Old Testament theophanies were true visions of God’s uncreated glory, one wonders if there is any major difference between them and the Transfiguration, and if so, what that difference might be? To put the question another way, is the vision of God in the transfigured Christ deeper or fuller than Old Testament theophanies or is the glorified Christ just another delivery system for the vision of God that brings nothing new to the revelation? I argue that Palamas does, indeed, establish the difference between the Transfiguration and the Old Testament theophanies, and I do so on the basis of two passages that Palamas penned very early in his writing career, before the Hesychast Controversy.

First, Palamas uses particularly forceful language in order to express his conviction that it is through the incarnation of the Son *alone* that God’s plan of salvation characterized by the vision of God/participation in God is brought about. The ultimate Christological reference of the following text about the Virgin Mary shows this clearly: “She alone forms the boundary between created and uncreated nature, and no one can come to God except through her and the mediator born of her, and none of God’s gifts can be bestowed on angels or men except through her.” As the boundary between created and uncreated, the mediation of the God-man is the only means of participation in

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313 Palamas, *Hom.*, 34.11.
314 This seems to be the view of Romanides, “Notes Part II,” 263.
God or the vision of God. If the vision of God was available to the Old Testament saints as Palamas clearly affirms that it was, then it could not have been so without a relation of dependency on the mediating role of Christ.

Second, Palamas claims that Mary has a more intimate union with God and therefore a more intimate vision of God than any Old Testament visionary. Palamas illustrates this difference in the following comment made about the Annunciation of Mary:

Before long you received the tidings of Him from whom and through whom so great a promise was made (Luke 1:26-38), that the promises to God’s friends down through the ages which found fulfillment in you, and the great visions (τὰ μεγάλα θεάματα) they beheld, seemed merely like obscure reflections and vague ideas in comparison. You alone fulfilled all their visions (μόνη γὰρ ἄπαντων ἐτελείωσας θεωρίας), surpassing our common human nature by means of your union with God (τῇ πρὸς Θεόν συναφείᾳ).

As Meyendorff has pointed out, Palamas hieratic descriptions of the Virgin Mary are not primarily directed “to the person of Mary taken by itself,” but Mary as “Her who begat God,” i.e., Mary as Θεοτόκος. Palamas calls τὰ μεγάλα θεάματα of the prophets, which I take to include theophanies, μυστικάς ἐμφάσεις (lit. mystic appearances) as compared to Mary’s union (συνάφεια) with God in virtue of her being Theotokos. It must be kept in mind that these Old Testament visions are μυστικάς ἐμφάσεις only in comparison to the access to God that Mary has as Theotokos. His comment is not meant to disparage the reality of Old Testament theophanies, but to emphasize the difference that the Incarnation makes: because Mary is the bearer of the incarnate Son, she sees God in a way in which the Old Testament prophets did not and could not. The way that

318 According to Palamas, Mary “saw God’s glory more clearly than Moses” (Hom., 53.59). For the most recent account of Palamas’ Mariology see Christiaan W. Kappes, The Immaculate Conception: Why
Mary sees God is the fulfillment of all Old Testament visions. For Palamas, the Incarnation and the Transfiguration as its theophany are the fulfillment of a theophanic economy of salvation.

In order to show that this is the case, I will first take a brief look at the patristic claims regarding the Transfiguration as the fulfillment of a promise to Moses and Elijah (two who saw God according to Palamas) and how Palamas stands in relation to that tradition. I will pay special attention to one of Palamas’ favorite sources, John of Damascus.

3.2 Tabor and Sinai

In patristic exegesis and commentary on the Transfiguration, there is a tradition of interpreting Moses’ presence on Tabor in light of his theophanies on Mt. Sinai (Exod. 24:12-18 and 33:17-23) and Elijah’s presence in light of his theophany on Horeb (1 Kgs. 19). The Fathers who make this interpretive move generally juxtapose either the Bible’s description of Moses talking with God “face to face as with a friend” (Num. 12:8) or his encounters with the glory of God in the cloud and in the cleft of the rock (Exod. 33:22) with his vision of the transfigured Christ on Tabor. According to Bogdan Bucur, this tradition interprets the Transfiguration “not only as a vision that the disciples have of Christ, but as a vision of Christ granted to Moses and Elijah, witnessed by the disciples.” 319 The earliest example of such exegesis is found in Irenaeus of Lyons.

According to Irenaeus, “The prophets, therefore, did not openly behold the actual face of

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319 Bucur, “A Vision of a Vision,” 17. In addition to the two Father’s I have chosen to highlight, Bucur also discusses Tertullian, Ps. Leo, Ps. Ephrem, Anastasius the Sinaite, and Cosmas of Maiouma.
God, but [they saw] the dispensations and the mysteries through which man should afterwards see God." As examples of such dispensations and mysteries he cites Moses’ experience on Sinai (Exod. 33) and Elijah’s on Horeb (1 Kgs. 19.). Concerning Exod. 33:20-22 he continues:

And the Word spoke to Moses, appearing before him, just as any one might speak to his friend. But Moses desired to see Him openly who was speaking with him, and was thus addressed: Stand in the deep place of the rock, and with My hand I will cover you. But when My splendour shall pass by, then you shall see My back parts, but My face you shall not see: for no man sees My face, and shall live. 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 [the Lord] 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.

For Irenaeus, Moses and Elijah are able to see something at the Transfiguration that was denied them in their respective theophanies on Sinai/Horeb: the face-to-face vision of God in the incarnate Son. The cleft of the rock in which Moses had to hide in order to see God is a type (τύπος) of the Incarnation and, by extension, the Transfiguration as its theophany. It is also important to note that the logic of the Transfiguration fulfilling the ancient promise of Sinai/Horeb makes sense, “only on the assumption that the Christ on Tabor is the very one who summoned Moses on Sinai.” This aspect of Old Testament theophanies, i.e., that they are visions of the Son of God, will be returned to in Section 3.3. In any case, Irenaeus’ commitment to the Transfiguration as a vision of a vision hinges upon the continuity between the Sinai and Tabor, but also their difference in that the latter is superior to the former as its fulfillment.

321 Irenaeus, Adversus Haer. 4.20.9 (SC 100, 655-56: ANF 1, 490).
The other witness to this tradition I wish to highlight is John of Damascus by looking at his Transfiguration homily and his canons that are an official part of the Feast of the Transfiguration in the Byzantine liturgy. The Damascene says of Moses:

Today Moses, the leading figure of the Old Covenant, the divine lawgiver, is presented on Mount Thabor to Christ, who authored the Law, as to His Lord; he gazes on Christ’s divine work, which had long been represented in mystical figures—for I would say myself that this was the significance of ‘the back parts of God’—and he sees the glory of the Godhead clearly…But the rock is Christ, God who has become flesh.”

In a way similar to Irenaeus, the Damascene connects the theophanies of Sinai and Tabor and, through his connection, affirms that Moses now sees again the one who he had previously seen. But now, Moses sees the glory of the Godhead “clearly” in the transfigured Christ. John’s assertion that Moses sees “Christ’s divine work” on Tabor whereas previously he saw it “represented in mystical symbol” is not meant to be a denial of Moses’ vision of God on Sinai. “Christ’s divine work” denotes the Incarnation and it was this that was veiled to Moses by “mystical figures.” The Damascene makes the same general points about Elijah later in the Homily. He continues to compare and contrast Sinai and Tabor in his canons which have incorporated into the Byzantine festal hymnography:

In times past, Moses saw prophetically the glory of the Lord by the red Sea in the cloud and pillar of fire, and he shouted aloud: “Let us sing unto our Deliverer and our God.” Protected by a godlike body as by a rock and seeing Him who is invisible, Moses who beheld God shouted aloud: “Let us sing unto our Deliverer and our God.” Thou hast appeared to Moses both on the Mountain of the Law and on Tabor: of old in darkness, but now in the unapproachable light of the Godhead.

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323 John of Damascus, Oration on the Transfiguration, 2 (PTS 29, 438; PPS 48, 206).
324 John of Damascus, Oration on the Transfiguration, 15 (PTS 29, 453; PPS 48, 224).
325 John of Damascus, Canticle I, Canon (troparion) 2 at Matins for the Feast of the Transfiguration, FM 483.
As with the homily text above, the Damascene is stressing that Moses’ Sinai theophanies are types that are fulfilled in the Transfiguration. Moses’ experience of the glory is different now that it is seen in the theophany of the Incarnation, that is, the Transfiguration. Here he stresses that difference with the opposition between “in darkness” and “in the unapproachable light.” Again, the point is that Moses did indeed see God on Sinai, but on Tabor he sees God in the Transfigured Christ, the way that God is meant to be seen.

Although Palamas borrows heavily from John of Damascus when talking about the Transfiguration, he does not make much explicit use of the strand of interpretation briefly outlined above. Due to the polemical context in which Palamas wrote, a context in which the reality of theophanies was contested, it is understandable why Palamas would stress the continuity between Old Testament theophanies (especially Moses and Elijah) and the Transfiguration and not explicitly stress their difference as type versus fulfillment. However, based on the reverence that Palamas has for the Damascene as a Father and the liturgy as a normative locus theologiae (I have shown both are copiously used as sources of proof-texts by Palamas) it is certainly safe to read him in continuity with them. As I show in the next section, Palamas is indeed in continuity with this tradition on two fundamental points: (1) the Incarnation and its theophanic revelation in the Transfiguration stand as the fulfillment and purpose of Old Testament theophanies and (2) one of the reasons that the Transfiguration does so is

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326 As far as I can tell, Palamas does not refer to the texts of John of Damascus or any of the other Fathers which explicitly claim that Moses and Elijah are present at the Transfiguration specifically in order to see the fulfillment of their respective theophanies. However, as I will show below, Palamas certainly does see the Transfiguration as the fulfillment of all Old Testament theophanies.
because Old Testament theophanies were visions of the Pre-incarnate Son. I will now look at these two aspects of Palamas’ thought.

3.3 Old Testament Theophanies as *Verbum Incarnandum*

In addition to seeing Old Testament theophanies as true visions of God, Palamas also carries on the patristic tradition of seeing them as theophanies of the Pre-incarnate Son of God—a tradition that we have seen present in the exegesis of the Transfiguration exemplified by both Irenaeus and John of Damascus. Palamas’ reception of this tradition is a key to the claim that he sees the Transfiguration as the fulfillment of Old Testament theophanies and thus setting them in proper relation to the Transfiguration. According to Meyendorff, in Palamas “[t]he theophanies of the Old Testament are interpreted as apparitions of the Son of God; they, therefore, all anticipate his Incarnation, and have no other end but to prepare for it.” Rather than being a marginal strain in patristic exegesis of Old Testament theophanies, the Fathers’ claim that the prophets and visionaries of the Old Testament saw the Son of God was a “constitutive element of early Christology.” For Justin Martyr, the divinity of the Son is demonstrated because he is the LORD who spoke to Abraham at Mamre. For Irenaeus and Tertullian, the Son is not a “new” God precisely because of his presence in Old Testament theophanies. A point of agreement between Athanasius’ and his Arian opponents was that the angel

mentioned in theophanies like the burning bush was the Pre-incarnate Logos. The difference was that Athanasius argued for an interpretation of the text which identified the angel with YHWH. The Cappadocians use a similar argument against Eunomius to the same effect.

Palamas stands solidly within this tradition. This is seen clearly in his response to Barlaam’s claim that “a man can only meet God through the mediation of an angel, for we are subordinate to the angelic hierarchy.” The biblical passages in question are Moses’ encounter with the LORD/angel in the burning bush (Exod. 3:1-22) and Abraham’s encounter with the LORD/angel at the oak of Mamre (Gen. 3:18ff). Palamas is relying on traditional exegesis when he responds,

Tell me, which of the angels was it that said to Moses, ‘I am He who is, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,’ if not the Son of God, as the great Basil has written? What do these words of Exodus signify: ‘The Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend?’ And if He Who spoke to Abraham and ‘swore by Himself’ was only an angel, how could the Apostle have said, ‘He could not swear by one greater than Himself’? But if God saw fit to speak

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332 Basil, Contra Eunomium, II.18 (PG 29:609B-C); Gregory of Nyssa, Contra Eunomium, XI.3 (PG 45:865A-875A). Lest one think that this tradition was confined to Eastern Christianity, Ambrose of Milan in De Fide, I.12.80-84 (PL 16:547B-548C) claims that the Pre-incarnate Son was the subject of the theophanies/angelophanies of Gen. 18:1-3, Exod. 3:14, and Dan. 3:25.
333 Palamas, Triads, III.iii.5. According to Meyendorff, Barlaam’s claim that the experience/vision of God is always by way of the angelic hierarchy is based on an accurate reading of Pseudo-Dionysius’ Celestial Heirarchy. For Meyendorff, the Dionysian hierarchies constitute “a necessary and universal intermediary for the transmission of the divine outpouring (πρόοδος)” which grants us “no immediate communion with the divine life.” Therefore, in order to maintain his commitment to the vision of God without created intermediary, Palamas “had to resort to a forced and artificial exegesis” of Dionysian thought through which Palamas offers a “Christological corrective.” The corrective amounts to relegating the Dionysian hierarchies to the natural order of the universe which is superseded by the Incarnation of Christ who grants us direct access to God (A Study, 185-191). Meyendorff’s claim was first contested by Romanides (“Notes Part II, 249-257). More recently, Alexander Golitzin (“Dionysius Areopagites in the Works of Saint Gregory Palamas”) has offered a convincing critique of Meyendorff’s claim of Palamas’ Christological corrective by showing that Barlaam was the one who, in fact, misread the Areopagite. According to Golitzin, Palamas correctly reads texts like Celestial Hierarchy, 4.4, 181 BC as asserting that angels are not, in Golitzin’s words, “a series of ‘membranes’” through which the experience of God passes, but they instead act as guides who interpret the vision for the visionary (“Dionysius Areopagites in the Works of Saint Gregory Palamas,” 168-173). Cf. Alexander Golitzin, Mystagogy: A Monastic Reading of Dionysius Areopagita, ed. Bogdan Bucur (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 366-367, 392. For the relevant passages in Palamas see Triads, II.ii.28-30.
Himself to those Fathers in the shadow of the Law, how much the more has He manifested Himself directly to the saints, now that the truth has appeared, and the law of grace has been shown forth!\textsuperscript{334}

Here Palamas is asserting the traditional patristic position that the LORD/angel in the burning bush and at the oak of Mamre was the Pre-incarnate Son: it was the Son who spoke to Moses face to face. It was the Son who spoke to all “the Fathers in the shadow of the Law.”\textsuperscript{335} This is not simply a matter of reading the Old Testament through Christological lenses, which is to say, typologically. It is an affirmation of the actual revelatory presence of the Son in the Old Testament, a presence which prepares the world for his own Incarnation by way of types and symbols.

When Palamas asserts that, in the burning bush, Moses “foresaw the coming of Christ, which was then in the future,”\textsuperscript{336} he is claiming that the bush is a type or symbol of what Moses has yet to see: the Word made flesh. Moses’ vision of God in the burning bush can function as a prophetic symbol of the future incarnation of the Son of God (\textit{Verbum Incarnatum}) because his vision of God is an experience of the same Son yet to be incarnated (\textit{Verbum Incarnandum}). Hence, there is symmetry between Old Testament theophanies and the New Testament theophany of the Transfiguration because the Son is the subject of both revelations.

One can see roots of this theophanic symmetry in the way that Palamas describes God, as Trinity, manifesting himself in the economy of salvation by his works. For Palamas, all divine activity \textit{ad extra} is a “single work” (ἔργον ἕν) in virtue of the “single energy” (μία ἐνέργεια) of the three divine persons: “for the motion of the divine will [to

\textsuperscript{334} Palamas, Triads, III.iii.5.

\textsuperscript{335} See Palamas, \textit{Hom.}, 7.12, The Pre-incarnate Son was the fourth figure with the three young men in the furnace (Dn. 3:25); \textit{Hom.}, 44.1, The Son lead Israel across the Jordan (Jos. 3:11-13); \textit{Hom.}, 58.7, The LORD that Isaiah saw on the throne was the Son (Is. 6:2).

\textsuperscript{336} Palamas, \textit{Hom.}, 11.6.
creation] is unique in its origination from the primary cause in the Father, in its procession through the Son, and its manifestation in the Holy Spirit.”

The formula “from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit” is a traditional one. By using it, Palamas does not mean to emphasize any actual difference in the activity of the persons, but to emphasize their absolute unity of action:

Therefore, in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit a proper effect is not noted for each of the hypostases in the same manner as for similar created objects on the one hand, or on the other hand, or on the other hand as different nests are made by different swallows, and as different pages are copied by different scribes even though they are made up of the same letters; rather, all creation [and I would add revelation] is a single work of the three.

However, there is a certain economic ordering or taxis by which the single work of the Trinity is revealed in the economy of salvation. Applying this economic ordering to revelation, what we have are different facets of the single divine act of creation, revelation, salvation, etc, appropriated to each person of the Trinity based on the order in which God reveals himself. The Father “sends” the Son in order for him to “reveal” the Father and that revelation can only be accessed “in the power” of the Holy Spirit. It is easy to see this ordered movement in the New Testament—the Son is sent from the Father in the Incarnation and thus reveals the Father and the Son is in turn only accessible

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337 Palamas, Cap., 112.


339 Palmas, Cap., 112. Edmund Hussey has argued that this text (among others) is evidence that Palamas affirms that each person of the Trinity has “a proper effect” vis-à-vis creation and Palamas holds, as a function of this, that “the three divine persons possess an identical and common energy flowing from the one divine essence; yet each person can be said to possess the energy in a truly distinct, yet undivided, manner. We are presented with a kind of antimony which is common in patristic literature” (“The Persons-Energy Structure,” 41). Reinhard Flogaus has dismissed Hussey’s claim, seeing it based on a faulty translation of Cap., 112. The gist of his critique is that Hussey misplaces the negation “οὐχ” (“Palamas and Barlaam Revisited,” 30). Even if one grants Flogaus’ accusation of a faulty translation, Hussey’s claim still has merit in that Palamas does appropriate distinct roles to the persons of the Trinity based on the revealed contours of the economy of salvation. Perhaps Hussey’s claim that such a practice qualifies as an “antimony” is overstating matters.
by the gift of the Spirit. But, for Palamas and his tradition, this ordered movement characterizes the entire revelatory economy.

Everything God does is “through” the Son and “in” the Holy Spirit. For example, Palamas describes the one divine act of creation as, “God the Father creates through the Son in the Holy Spirit.” Now that I have shown that, for Palamas, the Son is the subject of Old Testament theophanies, one can see that the same pattern applies to them: the glory of the Father is theophanically revealed in the Pre-incarnate Son and, as with all theophanies, the power of the Holy Spirit in necessary for the vision to take place. In this way, the Son is the mediator between God and man in God’s condescension to creation: first in the very act of creation, then the Old Testament dispensation, and finally in the Incarnation. In turn, the incarnate Son is also the mediator between God and man in our ascension into the divine life.

This theophanic symmetry is of the same kind that we saw in John of Damascus’ Oration on the Transfiguration: at the Transfiguration, Moses’ former vision of God (the Son) is now fulfilled in his vision of God in the incarnate Son, transfigured in his glory. In the same way, for Palamas, the theophanies of the Old Testament are visions of God

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340 Palamas, Cap., 97, cf. Hom., 8.8. For revelation as a Trinitarian act see Hom., 8.9, “He [the Spirit] is sent by the Father as well as the Son, and also comes on His own behalf, for sending, that is to say revelation, is the common work of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.” For redemption, see Hom., 24.12, “Thus the Holy Spirit ever was and is and will be, co-Creator with the Father and the Son, together with them renewing that which has suffered corruption, and sustaining the things that endure.”

341 Since I have been focusing on the Transfiguration as revelation, I have been emphasizing the role of the Son as mediator in the economy. These efforts are not meant to downplay the role that Palamas appropriates to the Holy Spirit. If Christ stands at the center of God’s ad extra activity, the Spirit stands at the end of God’s condescension to human beings and at the beginning of our return. According to Jacques Lison (“L’Énergie des Trois Hypostases Divines Selon Grégoire Palamas,” Science et Esprit 44:1 (1992):67-77), “The Spirit is in any case at the end of the movement of the Trinitarian life. As the Father is the origin of the movement of divine energy, so the Spirit is the result. It is in the Spirit that God manifests himself last. The Spirit is, at the bottom, the hypostasis par excellence of the manifestation of the uncreated energy…The work of the Spirit is to rest in those who are worthy of divine energy. The Spirit dwells in their hearts, he deifies, he returns them to the Father, he is the principle of deification” (75). I will look more closely at Palamas’ Pneumatology in Chapter 3.
because they are instances of the Son preparing the world for, and pointing to, his incarnation and its theophany in the Transfiguration. Meyendorff is not far off the mark when he claims that, for Palamas, Old Testament theophanies are “symbols and types of the Theophany on Tabor.”\textsuperscript{342} While it is unquestionable that Palamas sees Old Testament theophanies as true visions of the glory of God and hence anticipations of the eschaton, they are so only because they anticipate Tabor.

On Sinai, Moses saw God, but the vision of God in the yet to be incarnate and transfigured Christ was veiled to him. For Palamas, it is the theophany of the transfigured Christ that is “a prelude of the coming visible theophany of God in glory (προοίμιον τῆς ἐν δόξῃ μελλούσης ὀρατῆς Θεοῦ θεοφανείας).”\textsuperscript{343} The Transfiguration is a “prelude” because it is the earthly anticipation of the heavenly vision of the glorified Christ. As I show in the next chapter, Palamas’ numerous references to \textit{Divine Names}, I.4 makes his commitments to this clear. Since the Transfiguration directly anticipates the eschaton, Old Testament theophanies anticipate the Transfiguration. Old Testament theophanies are visions of God which anticipate the eschaton, but they do so \textit{through} the Transfiguration. As such, Old Testament theophanies causally depend upon the Transfiguration for their efficacy just as the Transfiguration depends on the eschatological kingdom of God present in Jesus Christ for its own efficacy.\textsuperscript{344} Therefore, for their meaning, fulfillment and very occurrence, Old Testament theophanies depend upon the Transfiguration of Christ.

\textsuperscript{342} Meyendorff, \textit{A Study}, 196.
\textsuperscript{343} Palamas, \textit{Triads}, I.iii.38 (translation mine).
\textsuperscript{344} See Manoussakis, “Theophany and Indication,” 86.
3.4 Conclusion

In this section, I have shown that Palamas sees the Transfiguration as the central theophany in biblical salvation history because it unveils the full implications of the biblical economy: the vision of God in the incarnate Son. For Palamas, Old Testament theophanies are instances of the Son of God preparing the world for his Incarnation and its theophanic manifestation in the Transfiguration which, in turn, is the “this-worldly” pledge of the eschatological vision of God. For Palamas, the Taboric light stands at the center of a revelatory economy that is Christocentric and, therefore, theophanic. The very notion of revelatory θεοφάνεια always has an ultimate, Christological referent. Now that I have examined what was revealed in the Transfiguration, how it was revealed in Christ, and the place it holds in the economy of salvation, I must look at its deifying and eschatological aspects. In the next chapter, I move on to a different, though related, set of questions concerning how the apostles were able to experience the uncreated light in the transfigured Christ and the ultimate purpose for which their transformation was effected.
CHAPTER 3: THE TRANSFIGURATION AS DEIFYING AND ESCHATOLOGICAL THEOPHANY

So far my inquiry has been guided by the central claim that Palamas sees the Transfiguration primarily as θεοφάνεια. In this chapter I round out my treatment of the Transfiguration in the thought of Palamas by examining his claims concerning its transformative (deifying) and eschatological aspects by integrating them with some of the claims I made in the last chapter, specifically that the Transfiguration reveals the full implications the Incarnation and, as such, the Transfiguration is its definitive theophany. For Palamas, the Transfiguration holds such a central theological position because as the theophany of the Incarnation it is the paradigm of eschatological human fulfillment. The Transfiguration both reveals and is what we will see (the Father revealed in the transfigured Son in the Holy Spirit) and also anticipates what we will become by seeing it (transfigured persons in the Son). The purpose of this chapter is to examine two features of Palamas’ reception of the Eastern patristic tradition regarding the transformative character of the Taborian theophany.

First, the Transfiguration is deifying because, as the theophany of the Incarnation, it is the paradigm of deification. Under the tutelage of Maximus the Confessor, Palamas formulates his doctrine of deification in a context that is Christological and theophanic. In deification, human nature is transcended, or rather transfigured, by theophany. I will suggest that if one wants to find an analogue for deification in Palamas, one need look no further than the Incarnation and Transfiguration.

Second, I will examine Palamas’ firm commitment that human beings can experience theophany (the vision of God) with their bodies and not just their souls.
Palamas’ commitments about the spiritualization of the “bodily eyes” of the apostles at the Transfiguration is grounded in what he takes deification to be, namely, the purpose for which the human person was created. If human nature in its wholeness was made to be transfigured, it can only be so in union with the Transfigured Christ. This section will look at the idea that Palamas grounds the deification of the whole person (body and soul) in continuing a tradition present in Eastern theology that the Incarnation, or something very much like it, is the point of creation. His account of the transformation of the apostle’s eyes in the Transfiguration fits within a framework which sees all of salvation history as guided by the driving force of the vision of God in Christ.

SECTION 1: THE INCARNATION AND TRANSFIGURATION AS PARADIGM OF DEIFICATION

1.1 The Transfiguration as Vision and Occasion of Our Deification

Relying on the exegesis of certain Fathers, Palamas sees the Transfiguration as the fulfillment of Christ’s “promise” (ἐπαγγελία) to the apostles that “there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power” (Mark 9:1). According to Palamas, in order for the apostles to experience the light of Tabor there is a set of necessary conditions that must obtain for them as recipients of “the kingdom.” This set of conditions concerns the transformation of their human faculties of sensation (αἴσθησις), reason (διάνοια), and mind (νόος). They were given “eyes transformed by the power of the Spirit” which gave them “the power to behold

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345 Palamas, Hom., 34.3. Cf. Clement of Alexandria, Excerpts from Theodotus 4-5 (SC 23), Cyril of Alexandria, Homiliae diversae 9 in transfigurationem (PG 77:1009-1016), Maximus the Confessor, Questions and Doubts, q. 191 (CCSG 10, 133), and John of Damascus, Oration on the Transfiguration of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, 7 (PTS 29, 445; PPS, 214).
346 Palamas, Hom., 34.8, 35.9, and 34.12.
what is invisible.” Under the influence of divine activity, the apostles’ “flesh” (σάρξ) becomes “spirit” (πνεῦμα).

The gift of seeing with “spiritual eyes” (ἐν πνεύματι ὁ ἀρώσιν) enabled the apostles to witness “the transformation which our human clay had undergone…from the moment it had been assumed, when it was deified through union with the Word of God” and thus also see “how God’s splendour will come to the saints and how they would appear. For the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Matt. 13:43).” The apostles see a preview of how the blessed will be analogously transformed by the transformation of human nature wrought by the Incarnation.

In claiming that the Transfiguration is a revelation of our deification in Christ, Palamas is furthering an element which shows up relatively late in patristic exegesis and commentary on the Transfiguration. The notion that the Transfiguration shows Christ’s deification of human nature as a consequence of the hypostatic union does not explicitly appear until Anastasius of Sinai (d. 700) and is repeated in Andrew of Crete and John of Damascus. For Palamas, who is an inheritor of this tradition of

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347 Palamas, Hom., 34.8 and 6.
348 Palamas, Hom., 34.14 and 11.
349 See McGuckin, _The Transfiguration_, 117, “The notion of the deification of the flesh as a primary and salvific effect of the Incarnation of the Logos has been systematically set out as long ago as the early Alexandrian Fathers but not until the time of Andrew of Crete [c.650-720] that we find any allusion to the idea in the course of Transfiguration commentaries. Subsequently it is found in John of Damascus and Gregory Palamas. It is a theme wholly absent from Latin exegesis as far as I can discern.” The only quibble I would have with McGuckin’s assertion is that, as I show in the footnote below, is his failing to mention Anastasius of Sinai.
350 While it is true that many of the Fathers refer to the Transfiguration as a revelation or prefigurement of the Second Coming and resurrection glory (see McGuckin, _The Transfiguration_, 120-125 for a fairly comprehensive list of examples), Anastasius is the first to claim that the revelation concerns our deification. His sermon is also the earliest extant evidence for the liturgical celebration of the Feast of the Transfiguration, see Daley’s introduction to the homily in _Light on the Mountain_, PPS 48, 161. According to Anastasius, “Today he [Christ] forms the image of earthly man into the image of heavenly beauty, and transfers it to Mount Tabor…the old nature belonging to Adam…is transformed into shape once again, transfigured to its ancient beauty in God’s image and likeness…and now sparkles with the shining brilliance of the divinity…With him [Christ], let us also flash like lightning before spiritual eyes, renewed in the shape of our souls and made divine, transformed along with him in order to be like him, always.
interpretation, the very deifying transformation of our “human clay” in Christ, witnessed by the apostles, is also effected in them by their encounter with the transfigured Christ.

In addition to the power to see the invisible, the movement from flesh to spirit undergone by the apostles purifies them “in advance from the deadly, soul-destroying defilement of sin…those who are cleansed beforehand will not experience the death of the soul, having been preserved undefiled in their minds as well, as I understand it, by the power of the manifestation to come.”\(^{351}\) Because the eschatological vision of God is present in the incarnate Christ and is now unveiled in the transfigured Christ, the apostles receive some of the fruits of that eschatological union. Like Moses (Exod. 34:29) and Stephen (Acts 7:55-56) the apostles share in, and are therefore transformed by, the glory they see.\(^{352}\)

The power which accomplishes the transformation comes from the eschaton. For Palamas, all of the transformative effects of theophany listed above, which come from the eschaton present in Christ, namely, the spiritualization of human faculties (especially those exercised through the body), the reception of divine power, the purity of the mind, and purification from sin, are best understood as characteristics that denote the deification (οὐράνιος εἰσοδήμαρ) of the visionaries. Palamas understands the transformative effects of theophany to be deifying effects. This is why he claims that the Taboric light

\(^{351}\) Palamas, Hom., 34.6.

\(^{352}\) Palamas, Hom., 34.11.
deifies man and makes him worthy of personal converse with God (θεουργεῖται καὶ τῆς πρὸς πρόσωπον θείας ομιλίας καταξιοῦται ὁ ἄνθρωπος); the very Kingdom of God, eternal and endless, the very light beyond intellection and unapproachable, the heavenly and infinite light, out of time and eternal, the light that makes immortality shine forth, the light which deifies those who contemplate it (φῶς θεοῦ τοῦ θεωμένου).  

Palamas places the transformation of the apostles squarely within the context of deification by characterizing it as deification. For him, if the Transfiguration is a revelation of the deification wrought in Christ, then it is also an event where that deification occurs in the theophanic visionaries. Therefore, in order to adequately understand both the nature and purpose of Palamas’ claims regarding the transformation of the apostles in the Transfiguration (and by extension other theophanies) it is crucial to first understand what Palamas means by deification (θέωσις).  

1.2 Deification is Theophany 

There are only a few places where Palamas offers something that could pass for a definition of deification. Perhaps the most descriptive one, Triads, III.i.28, is found within the third Triad which bears the subtitle, Ἡ ΠΕΡΙ ΘΕΩΣΕΩΣ (Concerning Theosis). It is noteworthy that the immediate context of the passage is both theophanic 

353 Palamas, Triads, III.iii.9 (emphasis mine). 
354 What follows will not be an exhaustive treatment of deification in Palamas, but rather an examination of deification as theophany. As a consequence of this, many important aspects of deification, e.g., its connection to the ethical life, all of its ecclesiological dimensions, as well as the full background of Palamas’ anthropology, will only be covered in a summary fashion. For the fullest study on deification in Palamas available in English see Georgios I. Mantzaridis, The Deification of Man: St. Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition, Contemporary Greek Theologians, n.2, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984). For the magisterial study concerning deification in the Greek Fathers which is valuable for placing Palamas within the context of a whole tradition see Norman Russell, The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Russell includes Palamas in a brief appendix (304-308). 
355 Williams (The Ground of Union, 104-106) identifies three texts that could serve as definitions of theosis, i.e., Triads, III.i.28, III.1.34, and II.iii.26. She first examines Triads, III.i.28 saying that it is the “closest Palamas comes to a definition proper of theosis (The Ground of Union, 104). For reasons that will become apparent as the chapter unfolds, I believe that she has chosen well and so I too have chosen to use this text as my point of departure.
and eschatological; it is a discussion of the different categories of “divine vision” (θεια ἐποψία) experienced by Christians of our own times and the prophets of the Bible.

Palamas contrasts those who have seen God “in a dream” and in “enigmas and mirrors” with those who, like Moses, have seen God “face-to-face and not in enigmas.” He continues, paraphrasing Maximus the Confessor:

But when you hear of the vision of God face to face, recall the testimony of Maximus: “Deification is an enhypostatic and direct illumination (Θέωσις, την κατ’ εἶδος ἑνυπόστατον ἐλλαμψιν) which has no beginning, but appears in those worthy as something exceeding their comprehension. It is indeed a mystical union with God, beyond intellect and reason, in the age when creatures will no longer know corruption. Thanks to this union, the saints, observing the light of the hidden and more-than-ineffable glory, become themselves able to receive the blessed purity, in company with the celestial powers. Deification is also the invocation of the great God and Father, the symbol of the authentic and real adoption, according to the gift and grace of the Holy Spirit, thanks to the bestowal of which grace the saints become and will remain the sons of God.”

When thinking about deification, it is common for one to imagine it as primarily signifying a process which human persons undergo or a state which they possess. This is to say that for many people who are inclined to think about deification at all, it is a description of the human person in a certain relation to God. On Palamas’ account, deification is these things, but not primarily so.

As I showed previously, for Palamas, an enhypostatic illumination is a theophany, like the Transfiguration, where God manifests himself to creatures in the natural symbol of his attributes or energies, those uncreated properties of light, glory, and goodness.

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356 Palamas, Triads, III.i.28. Opening this section with Palamas’ “defining” deification with a paraphrase from Maximus foreshadows the fact that when talking about deification, Palamas, more often than not, either paraphrases him or quotes him directly. As this chapter will show, Palamas very often buttresses his assertions concerning deification by ad verecundiam appeals to Maximus.

357 Palamas, Triads, III.i.28. Gendle identifies this text as coming from Ad Thassalium 61 (PG 90:636C) and its accompanying Scholia 61.16 (PG 90:644C), (Triads, p.143, n. 101). However, the first sentence is a paraphrase of Scholia 61.14 not 61.16. The rest may be a paraphrase of Maximus culled from his various works. As far as I can tell, the last sentence about deification as “the invocation of the great God and Father” is a possible reference to Mystagogia, 24 (PG 91:709C) trans. in Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings, Classics of Western Spirituality, trans. George C. Berthold (New York: Paulist Press, 1985).
which God possesses by nature. In the text above, Palamas virtually equates the terms deification (θέωσις) and illumination (ἐλλαμψις/φωτισμός). This is particularly striking because, for Palamas, enhypostatic illuminations are God himself (as manifested).

Like God’s revelatory activity in theophany, God’s deifying activity is “for us yet beyond us.” For Palamas, deification is first and foremost “an essential energy [activity] of God” and, as such, it has God as its most proper referent. Deification is something God is in the sense that it is something God does. It is in this sense that deification, God himself as manifested in his power and activity, “has no beginning” (οὐκ ἔχει γένεσιν) because it is an uncreated power and activity that God possesses from all eternity. In himself, God is the “principle of deification, divinity by nature, the imparticpable Origin whence the deified derive their deification.” As theophany is God as directly revealed, so deification is God in direct relationship to the human being. Deification is for us precisely because it is beyond us.

Conceived as a direct relationship between God and the human being deification is “a mystical union” (μυστική ἔνωσις) achieved by “the gift and grace of the Holy Spirit” who is the agent of deification. When God manifests himself as light, divinity, and glory in theophany, those to whom the light is manifested take on the quality of the

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358 Palamas, Triads, Liii.4.
359 Palamas, Triads, III.i.31.
360 Palamas, Triads, III.i.32. That deification is ἀγένητος because it is an uncreated, divine power is also the point of the scholion which Palamas paraphrases. Scholia 61.14 is a gloss on the text, “This it seems to me is the gospel of God: that the incarnate Son is God’s ambassador and advocate for humanity, and has earned reconciliation to the Father for those who yield to him for the deification that is without origin [ἀγένητος θέωσις]” (Maximus the Confessor, Ad Thassalium 61(PG 90:638D) in On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor, PPS n.25, trans. Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), 141. Cf. On the Cosmic Mystery, p.141, n.15.
361 Palamas, Triads, III.i.33.
light. Palamas emphasizes that the enhypostatic illumination which is “revealed” also “appears” in those to whom it is revealed and enables them to “receive the blessed purity” along with the angels. From the perspective of the human person, deification is the appearance or inherence of the uncreated light in the deified. Palamas’ claim that the light inheres in human persons is a function of his claim that the light is ἐνυπόστατον.

As I have shown, enhypostatic signifies that the light of theophany is a real, durable manifestation of God himself, as opposed to a self-standing creature or an evanescent phenomenon.363 In the text under consideration, Palamas’ use of “enhypostatic” bears a correlative sense which indicates God himself as given to, or shared with, the human being. The uncreated light of the divine nature becomes the uncreated light of the creature. For Palamas, the grace of the Holy Spirit is “‘enhypostatic,’ not because it possesses a hypostasis of its own, but because the Spirit ‘sends it out into a hypostasis of another’, in which it is indeed contemplated.”364 For God, the light is enhypostatic “by nature” in that it is a permanent feature of what it means to be God. For deified human beings, it is enhypostatic in the sense that the light becomes a permanent, eschatological feature of the person by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the soul.

Following Maximus the Confessor, Palamas teaches that in deification we come to possess the energies of the Holy Spirit by our participation in them such that “[t]here is one energy of God and the saints.”365 It is on the grounds of the human being’s possession of divine attributes that Palamas gives the appellations “gods by grace”

363 Palamas, Triads, III.i.18, cf. Dialogue, XXVI.
(χάριτι θεοί) and “uncreated by grace” (ἀκτιστος διὰ τὴν χάριν) to deified human beings. The properties and activities (energies) of God become the energies of the saints. In the text above, the incorruptibility (ἀφθαρσία) and blessed purity (μακάρια καθαρότης) received by, and manifested in, the deified saints are first and foremost divine attributes that the saints possesses by grace (χάρις) or by participation (μέθεξις).

1.3 Deification as Participation in Energy of the Holy Spirit

According to Palamas, in deification God does not communicate his nature to us, but his power: “God, while remaining entirely in Himself, dwells entirely in us by His superessential power; and communicates to us not His nature, but His proper glory and splendor.” Deification is not participation in God “by substance” (κατ’οὐσίαν) which, for Palamas, would imply an ontological sharing on the level of being. For a hypostasis to participate κατ’οὐσίαν in another is to say that the hypostasis and the other are both beings of the same kind. As such they would have the same nature and all the same powers and energies as a consequence. Palamas uses the examples of a spark and a

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366 Palamas, *Triads*, III.i.12 and III.i.31. According to Norman Russell, it was statements like these that so unsettled Palamas’ opponents (*The Doctrine of Deification*, 307). For example, Gregory Akindynos thought that the desire to become “uncreated” or “gods” is like “the madness from which the first apostate [Satan] suffered…Just as the present apostates do, no less, to those who trust in them, both boasting that they have themselves become uncreated gods without beginning (θεοι ἄκτιστοι καὶ ἄνάρχοι) and promising that they will make such those who are obedient to them” (*Letter* 49.45, 51-52 in *Letters of Gregory Akindynos*, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 21, ed. and trans. Angela Constantinides-Hero (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1983)). The disconnect between Palamas and his adversaries can be at least partially explained by Russell’s observation that “[t]heosis did not mean much to most Byzantines in the early fourteenth century. Some writers referred to it in passing. Anyone who was at all familiar with the Orations of Gregory Nazianzus, or…the erudite discussions of Maximus the Confessor, could not have failed to have come across the term. But it was not used by later Byzantine writers. In patristic literature where theosis, or deification, was mentioned it usually a metaphor for baptismal adoption by grace, or the final consummation of the resurrected life. What it did not imply, except perhaps among some of the pioneers of hesychasm, was a personal experience attainable in this life through a programme of contemplative prayer. Gregory Palamas changed that.” (“Theosis and Gregory Palamas: Continuity or Doctrinal Change?,” St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly 50:4 (2006), 357).

367 Palamas, *Triads*, I.iii.23

368 Palamas, *Cap.*, 111, “[T]hat which participates in something by substance must possess a common substance with that in which it participates and be identical with it in some respect.”
torch which shares all of the essential properties of fire because they are particular
instantiations (hypostases) of fire considered as οὐσία.\textsuperscript{369} It is in this ontological sense
that there is “no participation in the substance of the creator.”\textsuperscript{370} For Palamas, the union
of God and the creature in deification is not a blending of created and uncreated nature.
Again, citing Maximus the Confessor, Palamas is clear that the deified person “remains
entirely man by nature in his soul and body, and becomes entirely God in his soul and
body through grace, and through the divine radiance of the blessed glory with which he is
made entirely resplendent.”\textsuperscript{371}

Rather, Palamas describes deification as a participation and union in God
κατ’ ἐνέργειαν (by energy). Palamas borrows two analogies from Basil of Caesarea’s \textit{De Spiritu Sancto} in order to illustrate how the Holy Spirit is present in the deified by
energy:

This energy does not manifest itself in deified creatures, as art does in a work of
art; for it is thus that the creative power manifests itself in things created by it,
becoming thereby universally visible and at the same time reflected in them. On
the contrary, deification manifests itself in these creatures “as art in the man who
has acquired it”…This is why the saints are the instruments (ὀργανά) of the Holy
Spirit, having received the same energy as he has….In the words of Basil, it is
present in those still imperfect as a certain disposition, “because of the instability
of their moral choice”, but in those more perfect, as an acquired state (ἐξίς ἐπίκτητος), or in some of them, as a fixed state (ἐνερριζωμένη)—indeed more
than this, “the energy of the Spirit is present in the purified soul as the visual
faculty in the healthy eye.”\textsuperscript{372}

\textsuperscript{369} Palamas, \textit{Cap.}, 108, “A part of the substance, even the smallest, contains all of its powers—just as a
spark is radiant and illuminating, capable of penetrating and burning those who come close…and in general
all those powers which fire possesses…Therefore, if indeed we participate in that undisclosed substance of
God, whether in all or part of it, we will be all powerful, and thus each being will be all powerful.” Cf.
\textit{Cap.}, 109, “A substance has as many hypostases as it has participants. And as many torches as you light
from a single one, just that many hypostases of fire you have created.” In both of these texts he seems to be
using οὐρία in the sense of Aristotle’s second substance or species.

\textsuperscript{370} Palamas, \textit{Cap.}, 94.

\textsuperscript{371} Palamas, \textit{Triads}, III.iii.13 (emphasis mine), cf. Maximus the Confessor, \textit{Ambigua}, 7 (PG 91:1088C).

Following Basil, Palamas presents us with a set of potentially paradoxical assertions. On the one hand, because of the deifying presence of the Holy Spirit, the activity of the Spirit is present in the person as “art in the man who has acquired it.” The image is an Aristotelian one, which suggests that the energy of the Holy Spirit is like a τέχνη (for example, the art of house building), which is both a knowledge and a state of the soul; having the τέχνη of house building as a state of the soul (ἐξις) gives one the power to freely engage in certain kinds of activities regarding the proper object of the particular τέχνη (for example, the act of building a house)—just as the visual faculty gives the eye the power to see.\textsuperscript{373} Therefore, the activity of the Holy Spirit is in the person as a supernatural principle (a ἐξις or state of the soul) from which the deified person receives a new power of action (δύναμις) which he or she can freely exercise.

On the other hand, the deified person is an ὄργανον (instrument) of the person of the Holy Spirit, which is a different image altogether. Human beings are not instruments of their own powers, either those seated in natural faculties or acquired by habituation. Instruments only have the power to act in virtue of that power passing through them by the agency of another. Palamas says regarding human activity in the Holy Spirit:

Anything taken hold of by somebody outside itself, sharing in the energy but not the essence of the one acting through it, is his instrument. As David declared through the Holy Spirit, ‘My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.” The pen is the writer’s instrument, sharing in the energy, though obviously not the essence, of the writer, and inscribing whatever he [the writer] wishes and is able to write.\textsuperscript{374}

\textsuperscript{373} See David Bradshaw’s comment on De Spiritu Sancto 26.61, “Here the energeiai of the Spirit are not only individual acts but also the states of soul that make these acts possible. Since both are energeiai, Basil comes to the paradoxical conclusion that an energeia can be present both potentially and “in operation.”’ This is verbally parallel to the Aristotelian that both first and second actualities are energeiai. The difference is that Basil is using energeiai to mean activity or operation…The entire passage underscores the immanence of the divine energeiai within the soul and the extent to which, once acquired, it is an integral and enduring characteristic even when it is not openly manifested” (Aristotle East and West, 173).

\textsuperscript{374} Palamas, Hom., 24.8.
In deification the human person is acted on and through by a *transcendent* agent. The deified person is acted upon from both within and from without. According to Palamas, the Holy Spirit is both immanent and transcendent in the deification of the human person.

The Spirit is truly present in the soul, but the reality of the Holy Spirit is not exhausted by his energetic presence. Just as there is always a transcendent remainder in theophany as revelation so there is always a remainder in theophany considered as deification:

But the Holy Spirit transcends the deifying life which is in Him and proceeds from Him, for it is His own natural energy, which is akin to Him, even if not exactly so…But the Holy Spirit does not only transcend it as Cause, but also in the measure to which what is received is only part of what is given, for he who receives the divine energy cannot contain it entirely.375 Palamas’ qualifier “even if not exactly so” (εἰ καὶ μὴ ἀκριβῶς) is dependent upon the notion that God is transcendent to his grace and his relationship to the human being that his activity establishes. According to Palamas, while it is true that “the Son gives, sends forth, and bestows freely…an energy which is not only uncreated, but also inseparable from the all-holy Spirit,” this grace “is not the Spirit himself” (οὐκ αὐτὸ τὸ Πνεῦμα).376 The “Spirit himself” refers to the Holy Spirit as person and agent of divine energy.

Palamas also maintains that the Holy Spirit is not present in the soul by essence as a corollary of the Spirit not being present in hypostasis, which for him would imply union κατ’οὐσίαν.377 God in himself is beyond all participation and contact.378 As agent, the Spirit transcends his deifying activity and presence “as Cause” (ὡς αἴτιον). By this phrase, Palamas is not suggesting that deification (the divine act) is a created effect or product. On the contrary, it is an act (energy) which proceeds from a personal agent by

375 Palamas, *Triads*, III.i.9.
376 Palamas, *Triads*, III.i.8 (translation mine).
378 Palamas, *Cap.*, 106.
which that agent enters into a direct relationship with another person and shares himself with that person—grace is ἐνυπόστατον.\textsuperscript{379} In relation to God, the light is an essential property or activity; it is what God does in the sense of the divine act itself, not its effect. In relation to the deified human being, the light is what God does in him or her. This is, as I already noted, not an effect, but God being present in the deified person in virtue of the divine act itself.\textsuperscript{380}

The logic of these assertions regarding the transcendence of the Holy Spirit to his energetic presence as deifying gift can be seen as essentially the same as the logic which governs God transcending his energetic manifestation of himself as glory and light in theophany. In deification, the human person receives the Holy Spirit as given in the natural symbol of his divinity, not the Holy Spirit as ultimate, personal source of the gift. Consequently, God is not encompassed, delimited, or qualified in any way when present

\textsuperscript{379} Christos Yannaras (Elements of Faith [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991], 43-44) gives an example on the plane of the relationship between created persons which is instructive, “There is no other way for us to know the personal otherness of man, than by the manifestation of natural energies. The natural energies permit us to know the otherness of the person by sharing in the way or in the how of their manifestation. The way or how the word of Kavafi differs from the word of Sepheris, the love of our father and the affection of our mother...In order for us to know this difference, we must share, have the experience of sharing, in the word or love of the other person...in his facial expression, in his word, in his loving manifestation, etc.” Even though Palamas does not place the relation of grace in such personalist terminology (although I think his theory of natural symbol comes close), Yannaras’ example does express Palamas’ commitment to the relational character of energetic manifestation.

\textsuperscript{380} Meyendorff has pointed out that Palamas does make a distinction between the uncreated activity of the Holy Spirit in the human person and the created effect which that activity has in the creature. He quotes Palamas as saying, “All that flows from the Spirit towards those who have been baptized in the Spirit according to the Gospel of grace, and who have been rendered completely spiritual, comes from the Source; it all comes from it, and also remains in it...So the word is the same because the origin is the same; men received by the grace of God, and not through themselves, what they have received, for God alone does not possess his realities through grace; in this context the word ‘grace’ indicates that it was given to them. But, all is not alike in what God gives us...God has said by the mouth of Ezekiel: ‘A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away your heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh’ (Ez. 36:26), and ‘I will put my Spirit into you’ (Ez. 37:5). Do you see the difference between the gifts? The new spirit and the new heart are created things: that is what the Apostle also calls ‘a new creature’ (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), because it was recreated and renewed by the coming in flesh of him who first created it; whereas the Spirit of God given to the new heart is the Holy Spirit” (Letter to Athanasius translated in Meyendorff, A Study, 164). When Palamas refers to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, his emphasis is invariably directed toward gift in the second sense mentioned in this passage, namely, God’s uncreated activity in the soul.
in the soul as grace: “This grace is in fact a relationship (σχέσις), albeit not a natural one; yet it is at the same time beyond relationship, not only in virtue of being supernatural, but also qua relationship.”381 The divine energy of the Holy Spirit which serves as both a power and an activity in the deified person is not a “thing” which the person “possesses,” but a relationship.382

But, in a way similar to the coincidence between signifier and signified in the interplay between natural symbol and that of which it is a symbol, where to perceive the natural symbol of an object is simply to perceive that object, the Holy Spirit is also entirely present in his deifying energy.383 The deifying activity of the Spirit is not something that touches us over and against the Spirit, but the uncreated energy of deification is the Spirit as given. On Palamas’ account, “God subsist entirely in each [energy] without any division at all.”384 For the Holy Spirit to be active in the soul is for the Holy Spirit to be fully present in the soul.385

1.4 The Hypostatic Union as Primary Analogue for Deifying Union κατ’ ἐνέργειαν

In order to better understand the mode of the Holy Spirit’s presence I return to the same Christological basis on which revelatory theophany rests, namely, the incarnate

381 Palamas, Triads, III.i.29.
382 As Russell has put it, “[t]heosis…is not something to be reified as a gift we receive and keep as a possession. It is the Spirit himself in his mode of self-giving. It expresses a relation and not a thing” (“Theosis and Gregory Palamas,” 370 [emphasis original]).
383 Palamas, Triads, III.ii.7.
384 Palamas, Triads, III.ii.7.
385 For Palamas, being present by natural symbol seems to be the way that one being is present to another. Following the criticism made by Dorothea Wendebourg (Geist oder Energie: Zur Frage der innergöttlichen Verankerung des christlichen Lebens in der byzantinischen Theologie (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1980) , 43), Catherine LaCugna sees Palamas as making the divine person of the Spirit an “intermediary level between essence and energies” which implies that “the creature cannot have immediate contact with a divine person, only a person as expressed through an energy.” On her account, this constitutes “the primary weakness of Palamite theology” (God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life (New York: Harper Collins, 1991, 189)). If the indwelling of the spirit is seen in light of theophany as natural symbol, then to encounter the energy of the Holy Spirit simply is to encounter the person of the Spirit.
Christ considered as theandric. I am proposing that there is an analogy between union of humanity and divinity in Christ and the union of divine and human energy in deification.\textsuperscript{386} As this is an analogy, there will be proportions of both similarity and dissimilarity. The points of similarity will show Palamas’ commitment to the reality of deification and union with God. The points of dissimilarity will show why Palamas’ qualifies that deified human persons possess divine energy “by grace” and not “by nature.”

According to Palamas every action of Christ is a theandric (and therefore a theophanic) manifestation and communication of his divinity. In the hypostatic union, humanity and divinity are “mingled unconfusedly” (\textit{μεμιγμένων ἀφύρτως}) in the one hypostasis of the Logos.\textsuperscript{387} In this union, the human and divine natures are not united \textit{κατ’ ὑσίαν}, but in the divine hypostasis of the Logos. They are not blended in such a way that the humanity of Christ is assimilated by his divinity; rather, each nature maintains its proper characteristics (energies).\textsuperscript{388} The human and divine are indeed in communion (\textit{κοινωνία}), but that communion occurs and is manifested on the level of energy. In Stăniloae’s terms, the divine energy is “imprinted” on the human energy.\textsuperscript{389} The result of this imprinting is the communication and revelation of divine energy, which, on Palamas’ account, is a communication and revelation of God himself in his natural symbol. The human activity of Christ, which is to say his \textit{whole} humanity, is the instrument/vehicle of his divinity—the divine person of the Logos acts in and through his humanity.

\textsuperscript{386} If this analogy is correct, Palamas’ use of the biblical image of adoption (becoming sons in the Son) as a synonym for deification would be entirely appropriate.
\textsuperscript{387} Palamas, \textit{Hom.}, 58.2.
\textsuperscript{388} Palamas, \textit{Hom.}, 8.8, cf. \textit{Triads}, III.iii.7.
\textsuperscript{389} Stăniloae, \textit{The Experience of God Vol. 3}, 49.
In the *unicum* of the hypostatic union, Christ contains the fullness of divine energy and as a consequence, communicates it:

For it [divinity by nature] is believed to be and become visible only to the one who has been hypostatically united to a mind and a body, although not according to their proper nature. Only these [the mind and body of Christ] were deified “by the presence, in His entirety, of the One who grants anointing and received the energy corresponding to the deifying essence and containing all of it perfectly, revealing it through themselves; for, according to the Apostle, ‘in Christ the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily.’”

For Palamas, our deification (like the Incarnation) comes from the Father, through the Son, and is perfected by the Holy Spirit: “[T]he Son gives, sends forth, and bestows freely…an energy which is not only uncreated, but also inseparable from the all-holy Spirit.” It is from the fullness of divine power and activity present in Christ as man, hypostatically united to the Logos, that the deifying activity of the Holy Spirit is sent forth: “That human part of the Lord possessed that glory completely and did not dimly partake in it. But the participation of the others is different; it is as if they draw (water from Him) as from a cistern.”

It is by contact with the person of Christ as man (the vehicle of his divinity) that one receives the grace of the Holy Spirit that is deification, namely, the Holy Spirit dwelling in the human person by his activity.

The union with Christ in the Holy Spirit accomplishes something in the deified person analogous to the communication of idioms in the incarnation of the Son. As in the case of Christ, the human being’s natural faculties (energies) are elevated by contact with divinity—the energies of the Holy Spirit and those of the deified person are “mingled

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390 Palamas, *Triads*, III.i.33 (translation mine), cf. *Triads*, III.i.34, “Indeed, what created thing could receive the entire, infinitely potent power of the Spirit, except He who was carried in the womb of the Virgin, by the presence of the Holy Spirit and the overshadowing of the power of the Most High? He received “all the fullness of the Divinity [Col. 2:9].”

391 Palamas, *Triads*, III.i.8 (translation mine).

unconfusedly”: in theophany the deified person “becomes itself all light and is assimilated to what it sees, or rather, it is united to it without mingling, being itself light and seeing through light.”³⁹³ Divine energy does not become a part of the person’s nature, it is a natural and essential energy of God alone, but human nature now becomes a vehicle for divine activity. As in the hypostatic union, which makes human deification possible and on which deification is modeled, essential human nature is not absorbed by God, but remains created by nature, though it is enriched with uncreated activity.

There is no reason to think that, when Palamas claims that the essential human nature remains unchanged in deification, he does not have in mind Maximus’ teaching regarding how created things are “renewed” by the activity of grace. For Maximus, “[e]very renewal, generally speaking, takes place in relation to the mode (τρόπος) of whatever is being renewed, not in relation to its principle of nature (λόγος τῆς φύσεως).”³⁹⁴ By τρόπος Maximus means specifically that creatures are renewed “with respect to their mode of activity” (περὶ τὸν τρόπον τῆς ἑνέργειας).³⁹⁵ A creature is elevated by divine energy such that “it manifests a wondrous power, for it displays nature being acted on and acting outside the limits of its own laws.”³⁹⁶ Because a creature is acted upon from outside the bounds of its nature it is able to act outside the bounds of its own nature. It is because of such a principle that Palamas claims that

the saints are the instruments of the Holy Spirit, having received the same energy as He has. As a certain proof of what I say, one might cite the charisms of healing, the working of miracles, foreknowledge…and also the sanctifying

³⁹³ Palamas, Triads, II.iii.36 (emphasis mine).
³⁹⁵ Maximus the Confessor, Ambigua, 42 (PG 91:1344B).
³⁹⁶ Maximus the Confessor, Ambigua, 42 (PG 91:1341D).
bestowal of the Spirit which those sanctified with these gifts receive from and through them.  

By the reception of a new τρόπος τῆς ἐνέργειας, deified humans are able to achieve created effects that are proper to divine energy. Maximus uses the image of a piece of iron that has become hot by being placed in a forge. The “iron” of the person becomes a transparent vehicle for the “fire” of divine activity while still remaining iron. The image of iron infused with fire was originally used in a Christological context to explain the relation of human and divine energy in Christ. Palamas, following Maximus, takes this image and uses it to show how the fire of divine activity becomes manifested in and through the deified person:

But just as one cannot see fire, if there is no matter to receive it, nor any sense organ capable of perceiving its luminous energy, in the same way one cannot contemplate deification if there is no matter to receive the divine manifestation. But if with every veil removed it lays hold of the appropriate matter, that is of any purified rational nature, freed from the veil of manifold evil, then it becomes itself visible as a spiritual light, or rather it transforms these creatures into spiritual light.

I noted in the last chapter that the embodied locus of the glory of God is Christ and thus that all theophanic manifestations of the glory are either an anticipation or a result of the Incarnation. Now, because of their deification through Christ, the saints become loci of his glory and the manifest it in their persons (it is enhypostatic). By theophany, deified humans become theophany.

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397 Palamas, Triads, III.i.33.
398 Maximus the Confessor, Ambigua, 7 (PG 91: 1073C-1076A). Maximus says that this transparency is “like an image that has ascended to its archetype, corresponding to it completely, in a way that an impression corresponds to its stamp” (Ambigua, 7 PG 91:1076C).
399 See Maximus the Confessor, Opuscula, (PG 91:189D), cf. von Balthasar, Cosmic Liturgy, 258.
400 Palamas, Triads, III.i.34. This may very well be the origin of why Palamas says in Triads, III.i.20 that one can only experience the natural symbol of fire and not the “burning power” of fire itself. Neither in theophany nor in deification is our nature consumed.
401 See Triads, III.i.35, “We can observe the same phenomenon here below with a mirror or a sheet of water: Receiving the sun's ray, they produce another ray from themselves. And we too will become luminous if we...
I would like to close out this section by focusing on the precise point where the analogy breaks down. In deification the human being becomes an instrument (ὀργανον) of the divine person of the Spirit, but not by a hypostatic union. In the hypostatic union both natures are the proper possession of the divine person of the Logos. The humanity of Christ possesses “energy equal to the deifying essence” because it is the energy of a man who is a divine person. In order to express the instrumental character of deified activity, Palamas teaches (following Maximus) that when a grace takes hold of a person all the natural activities of the body and soul cease:

[The soul] becomes god by participation in divine grace, ceasing from all activity of intellect and sense, and at the same time suspending all the natural operations of the body…Thus God alone is made manifest through the soul and the body, since their natural properties have been overcome by the superabundance of His glory.  

Deification (i.e., illumination and theophany) is something that human persons “suffer” (παθεῖν)—it is an ecstasy (ἐκστασις). By claiming that all human energy “ceases” Palamas does not seem to mean that human persons have no agency whatsoever in deification via theophanic experience. Although natural faculties are bypassed and one becomes an instrument of the Holy Spirit, this does not seem to entail that human energies are in no way exercised:

lift ourselves up, abandoning earthly shadows, by drawing near to the true light of Christ. And if the true light which ‘shines in darkness’ comes down to us, we will also be light, as the Lord told His disciples.” I will defer citing specific examples of theophanic visionaries to the next section which focuses on the specifics of theophanic transformation.

403 See Palamas, Hom., 34.11. For the apostle’s experience at the Transfiguration described as an ecstasy see Triads, III.i.23. Regarding Paul’s ecstasy (2 Cor. 12:1-4), Palamas claims that Paul lost his senses and became alienated from his body in the sense that he received a new power of sensation that did not come from his body or his mind, “For at such a time man truly sees neither by the intellect nor by the body, but by the Spirit, and he knows that he sees supernaturally a light which surpasses light. But at that moment he does not know by what organ he sees this light, nor can he search out its nature, for the Spirit through whom he sees is untraceable. This was what Paul said when he heard ineffable words and saw invisible things: ‘I know not whether I saw out of the body or in the body’” (Triads, Iii.21). Paul knew he was seeing God, but he didn’t know how he was seeing God. Cf. Triads, II.i.8.
When you hear the great Denys advising Timothy to “abandon the senses and intellectual activities”, do not conclude from this that a man is neither to reason nor see. For he does not lose these faculties, except by amazement. But you should hold that intellectual activities are entirely bypassed by the light of union and by the action of this light. This is clearly shown by Peter…At the time of holy Pentecost, when he was deemed worthy of the mysterious and divine union, he was nonetheless still able to see those who were being illumined and filled with light together with himself…For when the energy of the Holy Spirit overshadows the human mind, those in whom He is working do not become disturbed in mind, for this would be contrary to the promise of the divine presence. He who receives God does not lose his senses.\(^\text{404}\)

Deification does not destroy human energy, but elevates it in such a way that the human being still has agency—an agency empowered by grace. Deification does not make a person less active; becoming an ὀργανον of the Spirit is not tantamount to possession. To make this point clear I turn again to Maximus the Confessor, especially considering how close Palamas follows his teaching it seems a fair interpretive move. For Maximus, the human being

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\text{will have received divine energy—or rather it will have become God by divinization…This occurs through the grace of the Spirit which has conquered it, showing that it has God alone acting within it, so that through all there is only one sole energy, that of God and of those worthy of God, or rather God alone, who in a manner befitting His goodness wholly interpenetrates (περιχωρήσαντος) all who are worthy.}^{\text{405}}
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Maximus describes deification as if God alone acts and that one divine activity is shared between God and the deified. He does so in order to stress that the perichoresis of energy is mutual and total—when God is present as grace in the soul, he is not present in part nor do deified persons possess a part of God. As Palamas says, the saints “participate in God as a whole…because God, being present and active in them as a whole through the proper grace in a unified and simple and undivided way, is also known by them as a whole.”\(^\text{406}\)

\(^{404}\) Palamas, Triads, III.i.36.
\(^{405}\) Maximus the Confessor, Ambigua, 7 (PG 91:1076C).
\(^{406}\) Palamas, Dialogue, XLVII.
However, Maximus qualifies the perichoresis in a very important way: “let not these words disturb you, for I am not implying the destruction of our power of self-determination, but rather affirming our fixed and unchangeable natural disposition, that is, a voluntary surrender of the will.” This qualification is significant because it shows that human energy does not merge with divine activity in the sense that it is obliterated by it. In a word, deification does not seem to entail a confusion of human and divine activity, but a perichoresis of human and divine activity such that there is an infinite movement of human energy yielding to divine agency.

1.5. Conclusion

For Palamas, the contours of deification are dictated by its eschatological character as the human being’s participation in the Incarnation. With its primary horizon as eschatological and therefore ordered toward theophany, deification is a perichoresis by which human activity mingles without confusion with divine activity κατ’ ἐνέργειαν in a way analogous to the hypostatic union. In theophany the activity of the Holy Spirit is both immanent within the deified person and transcendent to that person as instrument of the Spirit. The transparency of humanity to divine glory is what is revealed to the apostles in the Transfiguration and this is the background for Palamas’ characterization of the transformation they underwent by witnessing this revelation.

407 Maximus the Confessor, Ambigua, 7 (PG 91: 1076B), cf. Opuscula (PG 90:33A).
SECTION 2: THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE BODY

2.1 Seeing with New Eyes

Now that I have given an outline what deification is according to Palamas, I can conclude my treatment of the Transfiguration in Palamas by exploring the specifics of his claim that the apostles saw the light of the Transfigured Christ with “bodily eyes” (ὁφθαλμοὶ σωματικοὶ).\(^{408}\)

In the patristic tradition of exegesis and commentary on the Transfiguration the claim that the apostles “saw” the light with their eyes is virtually ubiquitous.\(^{409}\) This is probably due to the fact that the gospel accounts of the Transfiguration describe it in decidedly visual terms, for example, in Matthew’s narrative (17:1-9) Jesus was transfigured “before/in front of them [the apostles] (ἔμπροσθεν αὐτῶν)” (v.2), Moses and Elijah “were seen (ὁφθη)” by the apostles (v.3), and finally Jesus tells the apostles to tell no one of their “vision (ὁραμα)” (v.9). However, there is no unanimous patristic witness as to whether or not the apostles needed a specific grace or transformed eyes in order to see the light. When Palamas claims that the apostles “passed…from flesh to spirit by the transformation of their senses” and as a result had “spiritual eyes” (ἐν πνεύματι ὁρῶσιν), he is relying on an element of patristic exegesis which emerged alongside the view that the Transfiguration was a vision of our deification in Christ, which I noted in Section 1 above.\(^{410}\)

\(^{408}\) Palamas, Hom., 34.8.
\(^{409}\) See Irenaeus, Adversus Haer. 4.20.8 (SC 100, 648-654); Clement of Alexandria, Excerpta to Theodotus 5.3 (GCS 17, 107); Origen, Contra Celsum, 2.64 (SC 132, 434), Homiliae in Genesim I.7 (GCS 29, 10), Commentarium in evangelium Matthaei, 12.43 (GCS 40.1, 166; Basil, On Psalm 44.5 (PG 29:400D); Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 40.6 (PG 36:193D); John Chrysostom, Ad Theodorum Lapsum I.11 (SC 117, 140); Cyril of Alexandria, Commentarii in Lucam, 9 (PG 72:653D); Ambrose of Milan, Expositio in Lucam VII, 17 (PL 15:1703D-1704A); Jerome, In Matthaeum III, 17, 2 (PL 26:121); and Leo I, Homily 51,2 (PL 54:309C-310B) for only some of the more noteworthy examples.
\(^{410}\) Palamas, Hom., 34.8 and 14.
John of Damascus all explicitly mention the apostles’ need of a new power or grace in order to see the light with their eyes.

Anastasius of Sinai tells his audience, “With him [Christ], let us also flash like lightning before spiritual eyes, renewed in the shape of our souls.”411 His point is that monks hearing his sermon should strive for a transfiguration of their own and be the object of an experience, like the apostles, that requires spiritual eyes to witness. John of Damascus’ claims that Christ was “transfigured, then: not, taking on what he was not, but making what he was visible to his own disciples, opening their eyes and enabling them, who had been blind, to see.”412 As I noted in Chapter 2, Palamas relies on the Damascene’s assertion as support for his case that the light of Tabor is uncreated.413 For the purposes of this section, Palamas’ most important influence in this regard is Maximus the Confessor.

As far as I can tell, Maximus is the first patristic author who explicitly claims that the transformation of the apostles’ eyes in Transfiguration was an instance of deification (θέωσις)—though Anastasius seems to imply it. According to Maximus, in the Transfiguration the apostles did not see Christ in his “first form” (the form of a servant), but in his “second form” (the form of God) which, is more hidden, and it can be perceived only by a few, that is, by those who have already become like the holy apostles Peter and John, before whom the Lord was transfigured with a glory that overwhelms their senses…The second [the form of God] prefigures the second and glorious advent, in which the spirit of the Gospel is apprehended, and which by means of wisdom transfigures and deifies those

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411 Anastasius of Sinai, Homily on the Transfiguration, trans. in PPS 48, 168 (emphasis mine).
412 John of Damascus, Oration on the Transfiguration, 12 (PTS 29, 451; PPS 48, 221, emphasis mine). For an earlier witness see Clement of Alexandria, Excerpts from Theodotus, 5.3 (GCS 17, 107), translation in McGuckin, The Transfiguration, 150, “The disciples had not looked upon the light with fleshy eyes for there is no affinity or intimacy between the light and the flesh except in so far as the Saviour’s own power (δύναμις) and will empowers the flesh to behold. In this case he allowed the flesh to participate in seeing what the soul could see, since it is conjoined to it.”
413 See Palamas, Triads, Liii.15.
imbued with spiritual knowledge: because of the transfiguration of the Logos within them ‘they reflect with unveiled face the glory of the Lord’ (2 Cor. 3:18).\textsuperscript{414}

In this passage the apostles’ experience of deification by perceiving the “form of God” in the Transfiguration is the model for those who experience “the transfiguration of the Logos within” in \(\textit{θεωρία}.\) In \textit{Ambigua} 10.17 Maximus asserts that the apostles “crossed over from the flesh to the spirit…through the substitution of their powers of sense perception by the activity of the Spirit…With the sensory organs of their souls and bodies purified through the Spirit, they were initiated into the spiritual principles of the mysteries that had been disclosed to them.”\textsuperscript{415} As I have shown, the divine energy of the Holy Spirit acting in and through human energy is one of the things that Maximus takes deification to be. When Palamas quotes this text in Homily 34.8 this is exactly how he takes it. On the whole, Palamas interprets the larger patristic witness regarding the apostles’ seeing the light of the Transfigured Christ through these lenses.

A second key influence in this regard is \textit{Divine Names} I.4, a text that Palamas cites often in order to buttress his claims about the uncreated and therefore eschatological nature of the light.\textsuperscript{416} While the claim that the light of Tabor is an anticipation of the \textit{Parousia} is a common theme in the Fathers,\textsuperscript{417} no witness is as explicit or as forceful as Pseudo-Dionysius:

But in time to come, when we are incorruptible and immortal, when we have come at last to the blessed inheritance of being like Christ (Χριστοειδής), then, as scripture says, “we shall always be with the Lord.” In most holy contemplation we shall be ever filled with the sight of God (τῆς ὁράτης αὐτοῦ θεοφανείας, lit. his

\begin{footnotes}
\item[415] Maximus the Confessor, \textit{Ambigua} 10.17 (PG 91:1126A) (emphasis mine).
\item[416] For example, Palamas, \textit{Triads}, II.iii.20, 66; iii.i.10, 21 and many others too numerous to cite.
\item[417] In addition to the texts I have cited in Chapters 1 and 2 see McGuckin, \textit{The Transfiguration}, 120-125 for more examples.
\end{footnotes}
visible theophany) shining gloriously around us as once it shone for the disciples at the divine transfiguration.\footnote{Pseudo-Dionysius, \textit{Divine Names}, I.4 592C (PTS 33, 115) in \textit{Complete Works}, 52 (emphasis mine).}

The “visible” (ὁρατή) theophany of the Transfiguration is the analogue of the “visible” (ὁρατή) theophany of the eschaton.\footnote{See John D. Jones (“Filled with the Visible Theophany,” 13-41) who takes Pseudo-Dionysius’ description of both the Transfiguration and the eschaton as “visible” theophanies as way to oppose them to the “symbolic” theophanies like that of Manoah (DN I.6 596A [PTS 33, 118]) in order to stress that “there can be a theophanic presence and vision of God in and through our bodies (18-19).”} Not only is the anticipation of the Second Coming “seen,” but the eschatological vision of God will be too. If the Transfiguration is the vision of the \textit{incarnate} Christ in his glory, then the \textit{incarnate} Christ in his glory is also the face-to-face vision of the blessed.\footnote{That the eschaton is the vision of God in the fully glorified Christ is present in John Chrysostom, \textit{In Joannem} 15.2 (PG 59:99, NPNF 14, 52-53), cf. Lossky, “The Problem of the Vision Face to Face,” 246 and Gregory of Nyssa, \textit{The Life of Moses}, II.170-188 (SC 1), translated in \textit{Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses, Classics of Western Spirituality}, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978) where Moses’ mystical ascent ends in a vision of “the tabernacle not made with hands” (II.169). Recently, Nathan Eubank (“Ineffably Effable: The Pinnacle of Mystical Ascent in Gregory of Nyssa’s \textit{De vita Moysis},” \textit{International Journal of Systematic Theology} 16:1 (Jan. 2014), 25-41) has convincingly argued that the Tabernacle is Christ.} For Palamas, the eyes of the apostles must be deified by the power of the Holy Spirit to see the light of the Transfiguration in this life because they will be fully deified and “see” the light of the eschatologically transfigured Christ in the next. It is against this horizon of the eschatological \textit{vision of Christ} that Palamas formulates his position concerning the need for the spiritualization of the apostles’ eyes in order to see the uncreated light.

\section*{2.2 The Necessity of Spiritual Vision}

According to Palamas, theophanic experience is described best in terms such as union (ἕνωσις) and vision (ὁρασίς). For him, every union is through contact, sensible in the realm of sense perception, intellectual in the realm of intellect. And since there is union with these illuminations, there must be contact with them, of an intellectual, or rather a spiritual kind…Now, this union (ἕνωσις) with the illuminations—what is it, if not...
Union with illuminations is union with God himself who completely transcends created nature, even as manifested in theophany—God as manifested is no less God.

Illumination and theophany are wholly other relative to creation, “in its transcendence ‘it is not,’ because it belongs to the divine nature in an effable manner.”

The deifying light of theophany is, in itself, “not only incomprehensible (ἄληπτος) but also unnamable (ἀνώνυμος).” As such, any and all human faculties and activities associated with those faculties are inadequate for the task of union with God. Palamas sees theophany and especially the Transfiguration as a real anticipation of the eschaton—the experience may be partial and the vision may be brief, but it is literally heaven that is experienced partially for a brief time.

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421 Palamas, Triads, III.ii.14.
422 Palamas, Triads, III.i.15.
423 Palamas, Triads, I.iii.4, cf. II.i.32, “Deification is in fact beyond every name. This is why we, who have written much about hesychia...have never dared hitherto to write much about deification. But now, since there is a necessity to speak, we will speak words of piety (by the grace of the Lord), but words are inadequate to describe it. For even when spoken about deification remains ineffable, and (as the Fathers teach us) can be given a name only by those who have received it (emphasis original).” While it is true Palamas holds that the divine names are names of God’s energies (see Cap., 82), our cognition of, and contact with, those energies is not direct contact as in theophany. Access to God’s activity through created effects only renders a knowledge that God exists by inference and analogy, see Triads, II.i.16. Cf. Basil of Caesarea, Letter 234, “We say that from His operations that we know our God; we do not undertake to approach His substance itself. His operations come down to us, but His substance remains inaccessible” (TOFC 28, 160-161) and Gregory of Nyssa, Sermon on the Beatitudes, 6 (PG 44:1269) where he opposes the knowledge that one can gain of God’s energies through creatures to the deeper meaning of the sixth beatitude, “But the meaning of the Beatitude is not only restricted to this that He who operates can be known by analogy through His operations; for perhaps the wise of this world, too, might gain some knowledge of the transcendent Wisdom and Power from the harmony of the universe. No; I think this magnificent Beatitude offers another counsel,” (translation in St. Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer The Beatitudes, Ancient Christian Writers, vol.18, trans. Hilda C. Graef (New York: Newman Press, 1954), 147-148).
Because of this, theophanic experience ought not be accounted a form of “knowledge” as the term is ordinarily understood:

Indeed this contemplation is not knowledge (γνῶσις), and not only should one not think or speak of it as such, but it is not in fact knowable (unless the term is employed in an improper and equivocal sense). Rather, employing the word “knowable” in its strictest sense, but giving it as transcendent meaning, one should believe it to be superior to all knowledge.424

Regarding the transcendent meaning that one ought to give knowledge as a metaphor for divine union, Palamas claims that “it might be better called ignorance than knowledge” because “[k]nowledge as a whole could not contain it [God], nor could this knowledge, when subdivided, possess it as one of its parts.”425

Neither is the union of deification the result of the practice of apophatic theology, even though the way of negation may be the best tool to describe and prepare for such an experience.426 Apophasis is an exercise of human rational faculties; it is a “kind of rational discourse” in which “one thinks of what is different from God. Thus it proceeds by means of discursive reasoning.”427 As an exercise of natural faculties, in apophasis “we do not need to go out from ourselves, whereas to enter into this union, even the angels must go out from themselves.”428 In theophany, negation is something we undergo, not something we do.429 By grace the deified

424 Palamas, Triads, II.iii.17.
425 Palamas, Triads, II.iii.33.
426 Palamas, Triads, I.iii.4.
427 Palamas, Triads, II.iii.35. For an excellent example of Palamas putting apophatic theology into action see Cap., 106.
428 Palamas, Triads, II.iii.35. For Palamas “going out of one’s self” (ἔκστασις) does not refer to an “out of body experience” of any sort, nor is it rooted in an anthropology which sees the body taken by itself as a hindrance to theophanic experience. Rather, ἔκστασις signifies the anticipatory participation in deification experienced in theophany—the person goes out of himself in the sense that he transcends his entire created nature by grace. According to Palamas, if a monk is to experience the grace of theophany, he must first return to himself and look within his body to the purified mind which operates through the physical organ of the heart as its instrument (see Triads, I.ii.3). As Meyendorff has noted (A Study, 147) in this Palamas is following the heart mysticism of the Macarian Homilies. See especially Homilies 15.20 and 43.1-9 (PTS
The suffering of negation is a reference to the ecstasy of theophany where all of one’s natural energies “cease” in order for one to become an instrument of the Holy Spirit. Since theophany is a supernatural form of union which directly anticipates eschatological union, Palamas shows a certain ambivalence about the images used to describe such an experience. Perhaps this is why he thinks the most proper term is union (ἕνωσις), which does not have any direct cognitive connotations. Theophany is equally an “intellectual illumination” (φωτισμὸς νοερὸς) and a “spiritual sensation” (αἴσθησις πνευματική). Such seemingly mutually exclusive descriptions are meant to stress that theophany is neither of these activities as ordinarily understood. This ambivalence opens up a space in which Palamas can talk about the apostles’ experience of the vision of God in their bodies.

That Palamas does not restrict theophanic experience to the mind only also stems from his commitment that deification/theophany does not perfect human faculties _qua_...
human faculties. Although the grace of deification acts on the person by way of determinate powers of the soul and body (I will explore this below), it does not do so in order to only make the rational faculty more rational or the sensitive faculty more sensitive. The main effect of grace is to empower the person to transcend his or her natural faculties. This is to say that effect of grace is not a ratcheting up, as it were, of human faculties such that they receive a higher degree of their natural energy—deification does not make human beings superhuman, but supernatural; human faculties receive a radically different kind of energy. This does not mean that grace is an abolishment of nature, but it is an ecstatic transfiguration of nature. Before I move to consider what the transfiguration of human nature looks like according to Palamas, a brief clarification about Palamas’ use of the terms “natural” and “supernatural” is in order.

2.3 Nature and Grace

From some of the texts I have considered, one could have an impression that Palamas conceives of the natural and the supernatural as two separate, self-standing realities with no intrinsic relation between them. Such an impression would be false. Palamas’ use of the term “nature” or “natural” has at least three different senses. In one sense, φύσις signifies created reality, i.e., all that which is not God:

Every nature is utterly remote and absolutely estranged from the divine nature. For if God is nature, other things are not nature, but if each of the other things is nature, he is not nature...[H]e is the very being of beings and the form in the forms as the primal form and wisdom of the wise and generally all things of all things. He is not nature because he is beyond all nature.”

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433 Palamas, Triads, III.i.26.
434 Palamas, Cap., 78.
Nature is first and foremost that which is created. All creation (and hence nature) has its source in God and is therefore radically dependent upon God. Nature has its all of its perfections along with its very existence by participation in God as creator and cause; God is the “being of beings” and the “wisdom of the wise.” Therefore, “nature” connotes the radical dependency, contingency, and finitude of a creature.

Second, “nature” can also signify the defining faculties and attributes of a creature which constitutes it as a creature of a certain kind. For example, the powers to perceive materially instantiated particulars (sensation), to preserve and organize these perceptions (imagination), to make judgments and think logically about our experience (reason), to unify the processes of reason so as to intuit the intelligible forms of things (mind), and finally the power to freely pursue those objects which are good (will), are all powers characteristic of human nature and are thus natural properties. Each of these powers was possessed by Adam and is possessed by all human beings “by nature.” When Palamas talks about the “natural wisdom” of Adam, or that “to give fellow human beings things proper to mankind…is a natural obligation” or “man’s natural spirit within the brain” through which all of the powers of the soul save mind are exercised, he is using natural in this sense. This sense of nature/natural is what Palamas calls, following Maximus the Confessor, the logos of being (λόγος εἶναι). By this term he means the creative intention by which God brings the human being into existence from nothing and conserves the human being as a creature of a certain kind. So, in one sense, what is

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435 For Palamas’ description of the various powers of the soul see especially Cap., 15-20 and Hom., 53.56-58.
436 Palamas, Triads, I.i.22, Hom., 46.10 and 53.56.
438 Maximus, Ambigua 7, (PG 91:1077C).
“natural” and “of nature” is what is given in creation. Yet, Palamas’ use of the term in this way always implies another correlative sense of “natural.”

The third and final sense of “natural” concerns the fact that each of these powers (and the human being himself) has its own proper activity or finality as a function of its logos. God’s creative intention for the human being concerns not only his being, but also his activity (logos of well being: λόγος ἔυεἶναι) and his ultimate destiny (logos of eternal being: λόγος ἀεὶ ἔιναι). “Natural” in this third sense means both that for which human nature was created and that which perfects and fulfills it. A human being can properly exercise his powers and therefore act “according to nature” or improperly do so “against nature.” The creative intention of God, revealed in Christ, is the ultimate standard of activity according to nature, i.e., activity which brings the human being closer to the destiny designed for him by God. The destiny or end for which God has created the human being does not lie in the created order of φύσις, but in the vision of God. So, nature can only ultimately act “according to nature,” when under the influence of divine grace.439

In his protology, Palamas sees the original state of Adam colored by nature understood in the way just explained. In Adam, human nature was created, as imago Dei, with its natural faculties in order to

adorn itself with perpetual remembrance and contemplation of him [God] and with most fervent and ardent love for him. By these [accomplished through perichoretic sharing in divine energy] it is marvelously drawn to itself, or rather, it would eventually attract to itself the mysterious and ineffable radiance of that nature [i.e., the divine nature]. Then, it truly possesses the image and likeness of God, since through this it has been made gracious, wise and divine.”440

439 As I have shown in this chapter, it is a case of nature (logos) being elevated by receiving a new tropos or mode of activity.
440 Palamas, Cap., 40.
As I show later, the “perpetual remembrance and contemplation” of God is the “contemplation of God face to face…a union and a divinization which occurs mystically and ineffably by the grace of God.”

For Palamas, nature always presupposes grace and the supernatural for its existence (being), development (well being), and its final fulfillment (eternal well being). Nature exists for the sake of “super nature” and as such cannot be conceived without it. Now that this matter has been made clear, I now turn to examine how Palamas characterizes the transfiguration of human nature by grace.

2.4 From Soul to Body

Illuminations are “intellectual” (νοερὸς) because the human faculty of the mind (νόος) is the primary faculty or energy on which grace acts in theophany and deification. Mind is our highest faculty according to Palamas. He describes Mary (the proto-hesychast) as finding a human faculty by which she might attain union with God in νόος:

She found that the purest thing in us the only perfect and indivisible essence that we have, is precisely intended by nature for this holy and divine love. As the greatest power of the soul, the mind defines and unifies the processes of reason upon which things pertaining to the sciences are based…Although the mind can come down to the level of human reasoning, and by it to a life full of complexities, since its energies are available for all, yet it indubitably has another, superior mode of operation, which it is capable of putting into action by itself. For it is able to remain on its own, either when separated from the body and things pertaining to the body, or when, although still bound by it, it is enabled, by means of diligence, and assisted by divine grace, to leave behind this varied, complex and lowly way of living…if the mind did not wholly revolve without ceasing around base concerns, it could be given over to superior, more exalted activity, namely, that which is proper to it, and which is the sole means by which it can enter into union with God.

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441 Palamas, Triads, I.iiI.17.
442 See Palamas, Cap., 27, “nothing in our nature is superior to the mind.”
443 Palamas, Hom., 53.58. For Palamas, it is Mary and not Moses who is the paradigm of a person’s mystical ascent to God. She is the “inventor” of hesychasm and therefore the ideal of monastic spirituality. See Meyendorff, A Study, 232-236 and Kappes, The Immaculate Conception, 69-79.
Although mind, as chief faculty of the soul, is meant for the body and exercises its function through the heart as its instrument, it has its own activity of “unifying the processes of reason” which does not rely on any organ of the body for its exercise. Mind is that on which the human person’s status as Imago Dei depends. Mind is the faculty of which grace takes hold in theophany; this is its “superior, more exalted activity.” It is normally through the mind, suffused with divine activity, that the rest of the faculties of the soul and the body receive divine energy. All human faculties participate in and are touched by divine energy in this fashion. The overflowing of grace from the soul to the body occurs in way modeled off of the way that divine energy proceeds from the divine nature into the humanity of Christ in the hypostatic union:

For just as the divinity of the Word of God incarnate is common to the soul and body, since He has deified the flesh through the mediation of the soul to make it accomplish the works of God; so similarly, in spiritual man, the grace of the spirit transmitted to the body through the soul, grants to the body also experience of things divine, and allows it the same blessed experiences as the soul undergoes.

444 Palamas, Cap., 27, see Mantzaridis, The Deification of Man, 17. Palamas’ teaching on the human person as imago Dei does not consist in only this. Palamas’ anthropology contains two notable elements in the context of Eastern Christian theology: (1) the human being is imago Trinitatis and (2) the human being images God as creator and sustainer of the cosmos in a way that angels do not because his soul sustains his body by life giving energy, see Cap., 34-40 and Hom., 60.4 for the relevant texts. Mantzaridis surprisingly devotes only two pages to these aspects of Palamas’ anthropology (The Deification of Man, 18-19). For a more complete treatment see Sinkewicz’ introduction to the Capita, pp. 12-34, Reinhard Flogaus, “Palamas and Barlaam Revisited,” St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly 42 (1998), 1-32, and Jeremy Wilkins, ”'The Image of This Highest Love': The Trinitarian Analogy in Gregory Palamas's Capita 150,” St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly 47 (2003), 383-412.

445 Palamas, Triads, II.ii.9-12, cf. Hom., 26.1, “How much greater is the human mind than the heavens! It is the image of God, knows God, and alone of everything on earth, can, if it wishes, become God, exalting man’s humble body at the same time.”

446 There is one text concerning the Transfiguration where Palamas has the “flow” of deifying energy running in the opposite direction: “For, on the day of the Transfiguration, that Body, source of the light of grace, was not yet unified with our bodies; it illuminated from outside (exothev) those who worthily approached it, and sent the illumination into the soul by the intermediary of physical eyes” (Palamas, Triads, I.iii.38, trans. in Meyendorff, A Study, 151). This assertion seems difficult to harmonize with the account that Palamas gives of the role of the mind and body in deification and theophany above. The larger context of the passage is a defense of why the vision of God is no longer experienced with eyes, but as a spiritual light within.

447 Palamas, Triads, II.ii.12.
This is another instance where Palamas asserts that the hypostatic union is the pattern of human deification and transformation. The grace of deification is a “permanent energy produced by grace, united to a soul and rooted in it, a fountain of holy joy that attracts the soul to itself, liberating it from multiform and material images and making it joyful despise every fleshy thing.” The “fleshy thing” is a reference not to the body and its passions qua body and passions, but to disordered passions which turn the person from his or her true end by deriving pleasure from things for which the person was ultimately not made. The “spiritual joy” experienced by the soul in theophany “comes from the mind into the body [and] transforms the body and makes it spiritual, because it then rejects all the evil appetites of the body; it no longer drags the soul downwards, but is elevated together with it. Thus the whole man becomes spirit.” The spiritual joy and deification experienced by the soul in theophany is transmitted to the body so that it too is deified and shares in the fruits of the transformation.

For Palamas, the fact that Moses was “transfigured when he went up the mountain and beheld the Lords’ glory,” Stephen’s face “shone like the face of an angel,” and the apostles on Tabor saw the uncreated light with their “bodily eyes” are all instances of the body’s experience of divine things in theophany. In this light, it is clear that the natural faculties of the apostles’ received a new tropos or divine mode of activity such that they became, in both body and soul, spiritual. They were able to see the Spirit because they saw in spirit as instruments of the Holy Spirit. By the perichoresis of human and divine energy the apostles saw God by being empowered by God’s own activity of seeing.

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448 Palamas, *Triads*, II.ii.9.
449 Palamas, *Triads*, II.ii.9.
450 See Palamas, *Triads*, II.ii.12, “When the soul pursues this blessed activity, it deifies the body also.”
himself: “God is invisible to creatures, but he is not invisible to himself. O wonder, it is
God who will be perceived not only by the soul within us but also our body.” ⁴⁵¹

It is noteworthy that in the texts analyzed thus far, Palamas has not been operating
so much under the assumption of the opposition between material (body) and the
immaterial (mind), but more so under the assumed opposition between created (κτιστὸν)
and uncreated (ἀκτιστὸν) or the realm of nature (φύσις) and that of spirit (πνεῦμα). ⁴⁵²
Since the soul (and mind) is immaterial, it is more akin to God than the body in the same
way that angels are more akin to God than we are due to their incorporeal nature. ⁴⁵³
But, according to Palamas, the transformation of the apostles’ eyes on Tabor points to the fact
that in the Kingdom,

the body will also be “spiritual” (πνεωματικὸν) rather than “psychic” (ψυχικὸν)
according to the Apostle. “It is sown,” he says “a psychic body, it is raised a
spiritual body” [1 Cor. 15:44]; because it is spiritual and because it sees spiritually
it will apprehend the divine ray…it [the body] will become thin, so that it will not
seem to be material, no longer opposed to intellectual energy by the victory of the
mind. Through this they will enjoy the divine light with their bodily senses. ⁴⁵⁴

The eyes of the body and the embodied faculty of sensation do not become immaterial
but spiritual through deification flowing from the mind. On Mount Tabor, the
transformation of the apostle’s eyes points to Palamas’ commitment that the whole
person (body and soul) is in union with God in the eschaton and thus the whole person
experiences God face-to-face. Like in the hypostatic union revealed in the

Transfiguration as deification’s paradigm, where both Christ’s body and soul (the whole

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⁴⁵² According to Meyendorff, “[o]ne of Palamas’s great virtues was that he clearly established the
perspective and even the terminology of the Bible in a field in which Platonic dualism had, since Origen,
caused many misunderstandings; for him spirit (πνεῦμα) and spiritual (πνεωματικός) are terms signifying,
not the immaterial, but the supernatural and the revealed…In this sense the word ‘spirit’ (πνεῦμα) is
connected…with supernatural deification; it is contrasted with the intelligence as well as with created
matter” (A Study, 172).
⁴⁵³ Palamas, Cap., 27.
⁴⁵⁴ Palamas, Triads, I.iii.36 (translation mine).
Christ) is source of deification, so it is with the human being united to Christ in the Holy Spirit as recipient of deification.

2.5 Deification by Theophany as Purpose of Creation

There is one final point that I would like to explore concerning the Transfiguration as deifying and eschatological theophany which I think adds some additional clarity as to why Palamas is so emphatic about the body’s participation in deification and therefore in theophany. It concerns his commitment that deification is the very reason for which the human person was created: “Those who have pleased God and attained that for which they came into being, namely, divinization—for they say it was for this purpose that God made us, in order to make us partakers of his own divinity.”

According to Palamas, the creation of the human being in the image (κατ’ εἰκόνα) and likeness of God (ὁμοίωσιν τοῦ θεοῦ) entailed two things: on the one hand, being created in the image of God entailed the exigencies and autonomy of the human being as a creature with all of its natural properties and powers. On the other hand, being made in the likeness of God entailed Adam transcending his own nature by energetic participation in God. For Palamas, Adam’s likeness to God consisted in his “imitation” (μίμησις) of God by perichoretic sharing of human and divine energy, namely, deification by way of theophany: “the perfection of the likeness of God is effected by divine illumination.”

Palamas frames the effect of the Christ event in relation to Adam as a return to the vision of God:

That this plan for salvation should be made manifest (φανερωθῇ τὴν οἰκονομίαν ταύτην), and that Christ’s way of life should be put before us to

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455 Palamas, Cap., 105.
456 Palamas, Cap., 64.
emulate (καὶ προτεθήναι τὴν αὐτοῦ πολιτείαν εἰς μίμησιν), was highly necessary and beneficial. At one time God appeared visibly before man and the good angels that they might imitate Him. Later, when we had cast ourselves down and fallen away from this vision (τῆς ἐποψίας), God came down (συγκαταβαίνει) to us from on high in His surpassing love for mankind (φιλανθρωπίας), without in any way giving up His divinity, and by living among us set Himself before us as the pattern of the way back to life (ἐἰς ὑπόδειγμα τῆς πρὸς ζωὴν ἐπανόδου προτίθησιν).⁴⁵⁷

Here Palamas points to Christ’s πολιτεία as a way that God’s οἰκονομία is made manifest.⁴⁵⁸ Christ’s πολιτεία leads human beings back to life because it reconnects us with ὁ Θεὸς προϊκεῖτό καθορώμενος (lit. God visibly set forth) available to Adam and the angels. For Palamas, Adam’s imitation of the vision of God signifies the original “illumination and brilliance” of the divine likeness in which he shared and for which he was created. Adam’s blessedness (likeness to God) consisted in the imitation of, or sharing in, the divine glory, hence theophany. Following his tradition, Palamas describes Adams’ deification as being clothed in a “garment of glory” (στολή δόξης) because he had access to the vision of God along with the angels.⁴⁵⁹ Adam participated energetically in the divine attributes of immortality and incorruptibility on account of his theophanic union.

According to Palamas, the purpose of God’s “ineffable dispensation” (ἅπορρητον οἰκονομίαν) is the restoration, in Christ, of the “divine illumination and brilliance” lost in

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⁴⁵⁷ Palamas, Hom., 16.9.
⁴⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that Christ’s πολιτεία is a pattern to the way back to the vision of God precisely because it is θεανδρικὴ πολιτεία (a theandric way of life). The acts (energies) of the man Jesus are the acts (energies) of God made visible and accessible to the fallen human person and thereby reveal what God is like and what we ought to be like. Ultimately, the imitation of Christ’s theandric way of life and his teaching is an imitation of God’s φιλανθρωπία: “He Himself teaches us about His great love for mankind, demonstrating it by word and deed, while at the same time leading his followers to imitate His compassion and turn away from hardness of heart” (Palamas, Hom., 3.8 (emphasis mine)). The incarnation is the theophany of divine love.
⁴⁵⁹ See Palamas, Cap., 67.
God created Adam (and by extension all human beings) so that they would “reach perfection in the future contemplation of God face to face” by human nature partaking of God’s own “blessedness, radiance and incorruption.” Adam was created for theophany. The manifestation of the vision of God in Christ is the center and purpose of the oikovouia. It is the economy of salvation’s raison d’être.

When talking about our deification in Christ as manifested in the Transfiguration, Palamas often characterizes it as if it were a return to Eden and thus a return to theophany:

When our human nature was stripped of this divine illumination and radiance as a result of the ugly transgression, the Word of God had mercy on this nature and in His compassion took it upon Himself. On Mount Tabor he showed it clothed once more to His chosen disciples...proving to all what we once had been, and what those of us who believed in Him and attained to perfection in Him would be through Him in the age to come.

It seems as if the Transfiguration reveals that the Incarnation gives the human race back the perfection which it once possessed and no more. However, there is evidence which suggest that Palamas sees the deification of the human person, and hence the eschatological vision of the transfigured Christ as the very reason for creation.

In a particularly striking passage in his homily on the Feast of Epiphany, Palamas goes so far as to claim that there is virtually nothing that has occurred in the economy of

463 Stephen Thomas (“Are St. Gregory Palamas and St Thomas Aquinas Consistent with One Another after All?—Part II” Sourozh 86 (2001), 39-60) interprets Palamas in this way stating that “There is no felix culpa in Orthodoxy—no idea, that is, that a redeemed Christian may experience in paradise a superior and fuller knowledge of God than that experienced by Adam and Eve in the original paradise...Palamas’ account of fall and salvation is symmetrical: Adam experienced, originally, the energy of Uncreated Light, lost it in the Fall and regained it in Christ. His picture corresponds to the commonly held Orthodox view that Christian salvation is a return to the original Paradise and that Christ is the second Adam “recapitulating all things in himself” (53-54). While I have no interest in adjudicating what the “commonly held Orthodox view is” I will make clear below that his claim regarding Palamas seeing deification in Christ (revealed in the Transfiguration) as no more or less than a return to the Edenic state is wrong.
salvation that is not related to the theophany of the Incarnation as means to an end. Not only did “all those other things spoken earlier through the prophets, the giving of laws, the promises, the granting of sonship” look for their fulfillment in Christ, but “the original foundation of the world looked towards this.” He continues,

Consequently, man was also brought into being in the beginning because of Him, being formed according to God’s image so that one day he might contain his archetype. And the law given by God in paradise was on His account, because God would not have imposed it if it were always to remain unfulfilled. Almost everything said and accomplished subsequently by God was for Him, and you might be right to say that everything in heaven, the orders of angelic beings and the ordinances laid down there, were directed from the start towards this aim, namely, the dispensation whereby God became man (πρὸς τοῦτο τείνειν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς τὸ τέλος, τὴν θεανδρικὴν οἰκονομίαν λέγω), to which they ministered from beginning to end.464

First, Palamas suggest that the human being was made in imago Christi; the entirety of human nature (and by extension all human faculties and powers) was designed by the Son so that the Son could eventually assume it, deify it, and theophanically reveal the vision of God through it.465 The whole human person, body and soul, can experience the vision

464 Palamas, Hom., 60.19-20 (emphasis mine). Cf. Hom., 4.12, “The world was founded with this in view from the beginning. The heavenly, pre-eternal Counsel of the Father, according to which the Angel of the Father’s Great Counsel made man (Isa. 9:6) as a living creature in His own likeness as well as His image, was for this end: to enable man at some time to contain the greatness of God’s kingdom, the blessedness of God’s inheritance and the perfection of the heavenly Father’s blessing…Even the indescribable divine self-emptying, the theandric way of life, the saving passion, all the sacraments were planned beforehand in God’s providence and wisdom for this end.”

465 Bogdan Bucur (“Foreordained from All Eternity: The Mystery of the Incarnation According to Some Early Christian and Byzantine Writers,” in Dumberton Oaks Papers 62 (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2009), 199-215) has noted that this text is clear evidence of Palamas’ “Christomorphic anthropology” which roots his view of “Christ as “model” or “paradigm” of humanity, so that not only the restored humanity but also the old Adam is viewed as being “in Christ” (209). Although Palamas is clear that the hypostatic union is part of God’s initial purpose for creation, “Palamas does not specify whether the hypostatic union represents the prelapsarian goal of humanity (as in Maximus the Confessor), or a provision for the Fall (as in Cyril of Alexandria and Symeon the New theologian)” (209). Bucur concludes that Palamas thinks like Maximus and, later, Nicholas Cabasilas: “Palamas affirms that the future ‘accommodation’ of the Archetype (i.e., the Incarnation) is the final reason for creation. It is important to note that God's purpose for creation, including the hierarchies of angels, is the ‘theandric dispensation’ made possible only in Christ” (209). Below I will show that there is very good evidence for the view that Palamas does hold Maximus’ view that Incarnation and, therefore the transfiguration of humanity in Christ, is the pre-lapsarian goal of humanity. For locus classicus of Maximus’ view see Ad Thassalium 60 (PG 90:614), “This mystery was known solely to the Father, and the
of God in Christ because the Son, as mediator between God and the human being in the economy, has made the whole human person for that end. The economy of salvation is a “theandric economy” from the outset. For Palamas, God’s creative intention for the human being is for human nature to be transcended theandrically in Christ according to the pattern of the hypostatic union. This seems to be another reason why Palamas has no problem asserting that the whole person (even in the body) has a direct experience of the vision of God. All of the faculties of the soul that are instantiated in the body were made to be acted upon by grace and thus enjoy the vision of God. If this is the case, then deification in Christ cannot simply be a return to Eden.

2.6 The Transfiguration of the Human Person in the Transfigured Son as Foreordained from All Eternity

There is one place that I know of where Palamas qualifies the notion of salvation as a return to Eden in an intriguing way:

[F]rom the beginning man was not just a creation of God, but also a son in the Spirit, which was given to him at the same time as his soul, through God’s quickening breath (Gen. 2:7). It was granted to him as a pledge that, if waiting patiently for it, he kept the commandment, he would be able to share through the same Spirit in a more perfect union (τελειώτερα ἕνωσις) with God, by which he would live for ever with Him and obtain immortality.466

Palamas is claiming that there is a sense in which Adam’s illumination was incomplete. Although he was clothed in a garment of glory, he was destined for something even

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466 Palamas, Hom., 57.2.
greater on which he (and the rest of us) missed out because he misused his freedom. In what would have this greater union consisted? Palamas continues,

By heeding the evil counsel of the pernicious angel, man transgressed the divine commandments, was shown to be unworthy, forfeited the pledge and interrupted God’s plan. God’s grace, however, is unalterable and His purpose cannot prove false, so some man’s offspring were chosen, that, from among many, a suitable receptacle for this divine offspring would be found, who would serve God’s will perfectly, and would be revealed as a vessel worthy to unite divine and human nature in one person, not just exalting our nature, but restoring the human race.  

Even though Adam missed out on his gift, God continued his original plan and fulfilled the pledge meant for Adam by choosing Mary as a “suitable receptacle” for the Incarnation. The Incarnation is the working out of God’s “unalterable” grace and pledge to Adam. It looks as if Palamas is following Maximus the Confessor in asserting that the Fall determined the manner of the Incarnation and not the fact of it.

In the last chapter I noted that Palamas sees the economy of salvation as being effected from the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. As such, he sees the Son as the mediator between God and the human being from the very beginning of salvation history. Throughout salvation history it is the Son who manifests God in the theophanies of the Old Testament and, even in these theophanies, it is the grace and energy of the Holy Spirit which grants access to the glory of the Son. All Old Testament theophanies were types which both anticipated and prepared the world for the incarnation of the Son and its theophany in the Transfiguration. These theophanies were true, deifying visions of God precisely because they anticipated the Transfiguration which directly anticipates the eschaton.

As Palamas said of Mary on account of her being Theotokos, “no one can come to God except through her and the mediator born of her, and none of God’s gifts can be

467 Palamas, Hom., 57.3.
bestowed on angels or men except through her.” For Palamas, the deification of the whole person is tied up necessarily and inextricably with the assumption of all of human nature by the Logos. If there is no theophany without the glorified, incarnate Son (either after the Incarnation or by virtue of anticipation of it) then there can be no deification without the incarnate Son. If deification is the purpose of the creation of the human being as Palamas holds, then it seems to me that a plausible account of the τελειωτέρα ἐνωσις on which Adam missed out was his own transfiguration by the theophany of the incarnate Son or something very much like it.

The largest hurdle to my interpretation is a text where Palamas affirms something very much like the o felix culpa of the Latin Exultet. He says, “For if there had been no death, and if prior to death our race had not been mortal because of such a root, we would not in fact have gained the riches of the first fruits of immortality, nor would we have been summoned up to heaven, nor would our nature have been enthroned above every principality and power.” I admit that any interpretation of this text which has Palamas asserting that the Fall determined the manner of the Incarnation, but not the fact seems unconvincing. In the passage Palamas seems clear that without death, which for him is the primary effect of the Fall, our nature would not be enthroned at the right hand of the Father in the person of Christ. It may very well be that Palamas held more than one position of this issue at different times.

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468 Palamas, Hom., 53.37.
469 Palamas, Cap., 54. Cf. Hom., 16.1 where he claims that God, because of his omnipotence, could have saved man without the Incarnation, but the Incarnation was “the method of deliverance most in keeping with our nature and weakness.” These two texts show that if there is no felix culpa in Orthodoxy (see Stephen Thomas, “Are St. Gregory Palamas and St Thomas Aquinas Consistent,” 53) then Palamas must be the exception to that rule as far as these texts are concerned.
470 I have come across no indication of when Homily 57 was preached so there is no way to tell if it was before or after the Capita written between 1344-47 or 1349-50, depending on whose dating one follows. For the differing opinions on the dating of the Capita see Meyendorff, Introduction à l’étude de Grégoire
to Adam’s lost out on τελεωτέρα ἔνωσις and his clear characterization of it as fulfilled in the Incarnation with his views on deification and theophany as dependent on Christ that I have explored thus far, the implication that man was created for transfiguration by grace in the transfigured Son, Fall or no Fall, seems virtually inescapable. The main point is not the speculation that the Son would have become incarnate if even there was no sin, but it is the very logic of the view which sees our deification in the visible theophany of the incarnate Christ as the very point of creation. In the horizon of an economy of salvation that is, at its core, Christocentric and therefore theophanic and deifying, the Transfiguration is, in a manner of speaking, present from the very beginning as the final cause (or preview thereof) of the economy—the first in intention is the last in execution.

2.7 Conclusions to Chapters 1-3

In these last three chapters my inquiry into Palamas’ characterization of the Transfiguration has been guided by the claim that Palamas sees the Transfiguration first and foremost as a θεοφάνεια, the self-manifestation of God to the human being. As theophany, the Transfiguration has three aspects, which for Palamas are inseparable: the Transfiguration is the revelation which anticipates and thus makes present our deification in the eschatological theophany of the face to face vision of God. I have shown that, according to Palamas, the Taboric light is the “this worldly” vision of God in which God reveals himself in the natural, uncreated symbol of his divinity, light, and glory. The light is God as he manifests himself in his uncreated glory, not as he is in himself, which is beyond all manifestation. Revelatory theophany is God as he shares himself with

_Palamas, 373-374 and Sinkewicz’s introduction to the Capita, 49-54. There is as of yet no way to tell if Homily 57 came later than the Capita and therefore if it might possibly represent a development of Palamas’ thought._
creatures. For Palamas, this vision is both revealed in, and made possible by, the incarnation of the Son characterized as theandric: due to the communion of energy between his dual natures, the theandric Christ communicates his divinity in and through his humanity. The theandric Christ is the definitive locus of the vision of God and therefore the deification of the human person.

The Transfiguration as theophany of the theandric Christ is the paradigm and primary analogue of deification—the perichoretic sharing of divine and human energy by which human nature is perfected by being transfigured according to the pattern of the hypostatic union. Since the Transfiguration reveals the full implications of the Incarnation (Christ as theandric), it is both the fulfillment and cause of all previous theophanies in the economy of salvation. This is so because the latter are considered to be theophanies of the pre-incarnate Son, which look forward to his Incarnation and its theophany in the Transfiguration. The Transfiguration is that toward which Old Testament theophanies point because the theophany of the eschaton is that to which the Transfiguration points. Moreover, the Transfiguration is the anticipation of that toward which all creation points and that for which all of creation was made, namely, the “contemplation of His most visible theophany, shining around us with manifest brilliance as it shone round His disciples at the divine Transfiguration.”

I have gone to some length to show that all of Palamas’ insights summarized above come from his reception of several facets of the Eastern patristic tradition regarding theophany, deification, the Transfiguration, and eschatology. One could say that Palamas’ view of the Transfiguration is a synthesis of the highest views concerning it that are present in the Eastern Fathers. As I noted in the Introduction, all of these Fathers

are also revered *auctoritates* (to one degree or another) for Western Christianity, specifically Roman Catholicism. The task of the next chapter is to put Palamas’ synthesis concerning the Transfiguration of Christ in dialogue with St. Thomas Aquinas’ characterization of the Transfiguration in order to see what Palamas’ synthesis might have to offer Catholic theology.
CHAPTER 4: BREATHING WITH BOTH LUNGS

In this last chapter, I intend to supplement my reflections on the Transfiguration as theophany in the theology of Gregory Palamas by showing what his interpretation might have to offer Roman Catholic theological reflection on the Transfiguration, particularly in the area of ecumenism. As I noted in the Introduction, Palamas’ teaching that the light of Tabor is uncreated and hence a foretaste of the eschatological vision of God is enshrined in Orthodox dogma. According to the Synodikon of Orthodoxy,

that supremely Divine light [which shone at the Transfiguration] is neither a created thing (μήτε κτίσμα), nor the essence of God (μήτε οὐσίαν Θεοῦ), but is rather uncreated and natural grace, illumination, and energy (ἄλλ’ ἀκτιστον καὶ φυσικὴν χάριν καὶ ἐλλαμψῶν καὶ ἐνέργειαν) which everlastingly and inseparably proceeds from the very essence of God.472

As I also noted in the Introduction, a large part of Western engagement with Palamas has revolved around his teaching, also taken up in the Synodikon, that the Taboric light is not the essence of God, but his uncreated, divine energy.473 In this chapter, I am not directly concerned with Palamas’ distinction as such, that is, whether it concerns God in se (a real or formal distinction) or God quoad nos (a notional distinction), or whether such a distinction, if taken as real or formal, is compatible with Catholic notions of absolute divine simplicity. Rather, my concern is with that part of Palamas’ theology, taken up in

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473 In addition to the works already noted in the Introduction I would like to echo Kappes et al (“Palamas among the Scholastics”) bemoaning any interpretation “that stretches Palamas to fit him into the painful Procrustean bed made for Aquinas’ height” (180). In this chapter I hope to show that regarding the Transfiguration, such a thing cannot be done and instead, Catholic theologians ought to look elsewhere in our tradition for a place to engage Palamas on the Transfiguration. Similarly, Kappes et al make the welcome suggestion that a more productive move in ecumenical discussions concerning the distinction between essence and energies would be look at sources in the Catholic tradition that do not share all of Thomas’ assumptions concerning divine simplicity such as John Duns Scotus and Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (see 182-83, n.12; 185, n.18; 186-187, nn.21-22 for just a few examples).
the *Synodikon*, which affirms that the Taboric light was not a creature, but uncreated. In a Catholic idiom, the Orthodox position (and hence Palamas’) is tantamount to saying that, in the Transfiguration, the apostles were recipients of the beatific vision in this life, not a vision of God through a created intermediary such that the intermediary is directly seen, and God is not. In short, I take it as an Orthodox dogma that the Transfiguration is an instance of the eschatological vision of God in this life.\(^{474}\)

\(^{474}\) As I have shown, for Palamas the beatific vision does not consist in a vision of the divine essence, but in an integral vision (of body and soul) of the uncreated, essential energies of God in the fully glorified Christ. According to Jugie (*Theologia Dogmatica*, 144) such a position is heretical because it runs afool of Benedict XII’s *Benedictus Deus*, “It is heretical that which Palamas and his disciples say, namely the angels and the saints in heaven do not contemplate the divine essence itself, that is, God one and three as he is in himself. Pope Benedict XII expressly defined the contrary (29 January, 1336), a few months before the dispute between Barlaam and Palamas concerning the Tabor light began: ‘They see’ said the definition, ‘the divine essence with an intuitive vision and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature by way of the object of vision; rather the divine essence immediately manifest itself to them, plainly, clearly, and openly (sed divina essentia immediate se nude, clare et aperte eis ostendente).’ The Council of Florence [*Letentur caeli*, 6 July 1439, i.e., the formula of reunion] renewed the same definition in brief, ‘they clearly behold God three and one as he is (intueri clare ipsum Deum trinum et unum sicuti est),’” (144, translation mine; Jugie’s emphasis). Jugie takes Florence’s *intueri clare ipsum Deum trinum et unum sicuti est* as no more than a “brief” (*breviter*) restatement of Benedict XII’s *sed divina essentia immediate se nude, clare et aperte eis ostendente*. However, André de Halleux’s analysis (“Problémes de méthodes,” 251-302) of the debates between the Greek and Latins which led up to the formula of union (*Letentur*) tells a different story. According to de Halleux, during the debates at the council between Palamites and Thomists, Mark of Ephesus firmly held to a Palamite interpretation of the vision of God, i.e., it is a vision of God’s essential energies and not of the uncommunicable divine essence and that the God’s uncreated energy was revealed on Mt. Tabor (288-291). Florence’s substitution of *Deus trinus et unus* for *divina essentia* and *intueri clare* for *immediate se nude* (whether or not the full vision of God was seen immediately upon death was also a sticking point) was not a matter of briefly restating a dogmatic formula, but of a *compromise* (296). Therefore, de Halleux concludes that “the formula of the dogmatic decreal is compatible with the [Palamite] position presented by Mark of Ephesus at Ferrara,” (297). Pope Eugene IV’s endorsement of *Letentur caeli*’s compromise formula is even more remarkable in light of the consistent and vocal opposition from the Latin (Thomist) theologians present at the Council, see Christian Kappes’ Forward to J. Isaac Goff, *Caritas in Primo: A Historical-Theological Study of Bonaventure’s Quaestiones disputatae de mysterio Ss. Trinitas* (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 2015), xx-xxi, n.11, “Pope Eugene wisely foresaw the impossibility of Dominicans and Thomists giving Palamites a fair hearing. See the 1437 Thomist condemnation of Andrew Escobar, OSB, *De graecis errantibus*. Concilium Florentinum Doctores et Scriptores Series B, ed. M. Candal (Rome : Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1952), 4.1:83:

> O most blessed Father Eugene […] false, therefore, is the conclusion of some Greeks, and [their] errors, which claim that the attributes (*attributa*) differ essentially (*essentialiter*) from the divine essence (*ab essentia divina*) among [*ad intra*] divine items (*in divinis*). (*De graecis errantibus* 94, lines 3-4)

If one were to look for an “official” Catholic position on the light of Tabor, a good place to look would be in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In its characterization of the Transfiguration, the *Catechism* uses two sources in addition to Sacred Scripture, namely, Thomas Aquinas (the underlined text below) and a Byzantine festal hymn (the italicized text below):

For a moment Jesus discloses his divine glory, confirming Peter's confession. He also reveals that he will have to go by the way of the cross at Jerusalem in order to "enter into his glory". Moses and Elijah had seen God's glory on the Mountain; the Law and the Prophets had announced the Messiah's sufferings. Christ's Passion is the will of the Father: the Son acts as God's servant; The cloud indicates the presence of the Holy Spirit. "The whole Trinity appeared: the Father in the voice; the Son in the man; the Spirit in the shining cloud."

You were transfigured on the mountain, and your disciples, as much as they were capable of it, beheld your glory, O Christ our God, so that when they should see you crucified they would understand that your Passion was voluntary, and proclaim to the world that you truly are the splendor of the Father.

On the threshold of the public life: the baptism; on the threshold of the Passover: the Transfiguration. Jesus' baptism proclaimed "the mystery of the first regeneration", namely, our Baptism; the Transfiguration "is the sacrament of the second regeneration": our own Resurrection. From now on we share in the Lord's Resurrection through the Spirit who acts in the sacraments of the Body of Christ.

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Concerning “God three and one”: this is written against those saying that beatitude (*beatitudo*), glory (*gloria*), or final happiness (*felicitas ultima*) of men does not consist in the vision of God Himself. Rather [they say it consists] of some other entity (*entitas*), which is thought to be really distinct from the very divine essence (*essentia*), or as the Greeks call it, “energy (*energia*),” or “act (*actus*),” or “illumination (*fulgor*).” (*Apparatus*, 102, lines 30-34).


475 To my knowledge, the Transfiguration has never been the subject of any pronouncements of the Catholic Church’s teaching magisterium (see note above).
The Transfiguration gives us a foretaste of Christ's glorious coming, when he "will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body."476

According to the Catechism, the Transfiguration confirms Peter’s confession of Christ’s divine identity by revealing Christ’s “divine glory” (suam gloriam divinam). The Transfiguration is also a “foretaste” (praegustatio) of Christ’s Second Coming and of the general resurrection. The Transfiguration then, in an unspecified way, is a revelation of the divinity of Christ. The Catechism is silent as to how the glory of the Transfiguration is divine or what exactly the term “divine glory” signifies. It is also silent on the exact relation between the glory that is seen in the Transfiguration and the glory of the eschaton.477 As far as the Catechism is concerned, the Palamite/Orthodox interpretation of the light of Tabor is an open question. If this is the case, then a new question poses itself relative to the ongoing and utterly necessary rapprochement between East and West: Can Catholic theology find the resources necessary for seeing the Transfiguration as an event wherein “[t]he nature that knows no change, being mingled with the mortal nature, shone forth ineffably, unveiling in some small measure to the apostles the light of

476 Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd Edition, (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 555-556 (the italicized and underline emphases are mine); hereafter CCC. The citations from Aquinas are both from Summa Theologiae, III, q.45, a.4, ad.2 and the Byzantine hymn is the kontakion of the Feast of the Transfiguration (see FM, 492). There is a quotation from Augustine, Sermon 78, 6 (PL 38:492-493) at the end of CCC, 556 about Peter’s need to leave the Mount of the Transfiguration in order to return to both suffering and service. I have omitted it from my considerations because it neither engages what the Transfiguration is or what was revealed in it.

477 The prayers of the Roman Liturgy for the Feast of the Transfiguration on August 6 (The Roman Missal, English translation according to the Typical Third Edition (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 917-920) are also vague on the two above points. See the various liturgical texts for the Feast: the Collect, “O God, who in the glorious Transfiguration of your Only Begotten Son confirmed the mysteries of faith by the witness of the Fathers and wonderfully prefigured our full adoption to sonship...,” the Prayer over the Gifts, “Sanctify, O Lord, we pray, these offerings here made to celebrate the glorious Transfiguration of your Only Begotten son, and by his radiant splendor cleanse us from the stain of sin,” the Preface, “For he revealed his glory in the presence of chosen witnesses and filled with the greatest splendor that bodily form which he shares with all humanity...,” and the Communion Antiphon, “When Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” In all of these cases the nature of the “radiant splendor” and the “glory” or how exactly the Transfiguration models when “we shall see him as he is” are open to interpretation.
the immaterial Godhead”?

I believe that the answer is “yes,” and that it is only a question of where one looks to find those resources. The Catechism text, quoted above, points to Thomas and the Byzantine Liturgy.

On the one hand, I have already explored facets of the tradition represented by the Byzantine Liturgy in my treatment of Palamas’ reception and synthesis of that tradition concerning the Transfiguration as theophany. As the first three chapters have shown, Palamas teaches that the Transfiguration is θεοφάνεια, namely, an uncreated manifestation of God himself which, by its very nature as theophany, has transformative or deifying effects that anticipate the eschatological glorification of the persons who are recipients of the manifestation. According to Palamas, the Taboric light which shone from the transfigured Christ not only anticipates the eschatological vision of God, but it is the eschatological vision of God, shown to the apostles, Moses and Elijah for a brief time and in a way appropriate for creatures still in via. The Transfiguration is the ultimate vision of God (in via) because it does what no theophany before it could do; namely, manifest the vision of God in the uncreated glory of the incarnate Logos that awaits the saints in patria. It seems to me that the Eastern position is rooted in the following considerations: (1) God can and does manifest himself to human beings in via in such a way that God himself is seen/experienced, rather than God being an indirect object of perception as in a created likeness, (2) such manifestations are theophanies (i.e., visions of God) which do not stand in opposition to the eschatological vision of God as a different kind of vision, rather theophanies in via are partial visions of God which anticipate the full face-to-face theophany in patria, (3) the Transfiguration is the ultimate case of all such theophanies because it realizes what the theophanies of the Old

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478 Matins for the Feast of the Transfiguration, Canticle 5, First Canon, FM, 487.
Testament pre-figured, namely, the vision of God himself in the fully deified humanity of the incarnate Son, and finally (4) this prefiguration/fulfillment relation is grounded in the Christological commitment (virtually ubiquitous in early patristic writing until the fifth century and still present in Eastern Christianity) that the pre-incarnate Son is the subject of Old Testament theophanies.

On the other hand there is Thomas Aquinas, whose theology of the Transfiguration is the subject of the first two sections of this chapter. In the first section, I examine Thomas’ general characterization of the Transfiguration as a manifestation of eschatological glory in Christ along with his interpretation of the details of Matthew’s narrative which terminates in his characterization of the apostles’ experience as the contemplatio of future glory. I then explore what kind of contemplation it could be on Thomas’ account: either theophany (the vision of God as mystically communicated by a created effect) or ecstasy (the beatific vision in this life). In the second section, I examine Thomas’ claim that the light coming from the transfigured Christ is the “glorious clarity” (claritas gloria) of the blessed in the Kingdom. I then examine the relationship that Christ’s claritas gloria has with the eschatological vision of God in order to show that, for Thomas, the Transfiguration is a theophany and precisely as theophany, it cannot be an instance of the beatific vision in this life. Rather, it is an experience of the proper, visible, created effect of the beatific vision.

In the third and final section, I show that, based on my reading of Thomas, fundamental aspects of his position on the Taboric light (and theophany) are incommensurable with the Eastern position instantiated in the Catechism quotation from the Byzantine Liturgy. Following from this, I argue that, if Roman Catholic theology
desires to find common ground with the Orthodox tradition on the uncreated nature of the Taboric light (specifically that the Transfiguration represents a revelation of the beatific vision in this life) then it should look not so much to Thomas’ account of the Transfiguration, but rather East, so as to retrieve a series of insights from the Eastern Fathers that the Catholic tradition shares with the Orthodox; moreover, I think that this project of retrieval should include Palamas, who synthesizes the thought of the Eastern Fathers regarding the Transfiguration.

SECTION 1: CIRCUMSTANTIAE TRANSFIGURATIONIS IN THOMAS AQUINAS

Thomas makes substantial comment on the Transfiguration in four different works which span nearly twenty years of his career: his commentary on the Sentences (1250’s), the Catena aurea quatuor Evangelia (1260’s), his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew (1260-1270), and the Summa Theologiae (1265-1274). In this section, I mainly restrict myself to an analysis of Thomas’ most mature position on the Transfiguration in ST, III, q.45, a.1-4, supplemented by his Matthew commentary and the Catena in Matthaueum. This choice necessarily omits an examination of Thomas’ patristic citations concerning the Transfiguration in Mark and Luke and also his earliest

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reflections on the Transfiguration in the Commentary on the Sentences.\textsuperscript{480} Since the Catena does not constitute a direct commentary on the part of Thomas, but is instead a chain of selected patristic quotations arranged according the biblical verses and events to which they refer, I have chosen to make his Matthew commentary and the Catena in Matthaeum my main sources in exploring how he engages the Transfiguration on the level of exegesis.\textsuperscript{481} In the commentary, Thomas relies heavily on the patristic texts he included in the Catena in Matthaeum, and in this case one can actually see the use to which he puts the texts and thus the commentary gives a better indication of what Thomas takes the patristic texts to mean; whereas with the glosses on Mark and Luke, one can only speculate. As interesting as Thomas’ selection of patristic texts in the glosses on Mark and Luke’s account of the Transfiguration may be, they are only of limited usefulness in discovering Thomas’ own interpretation.\textsuperscript{482} In light of these


\textsuperscript{481} I use Thomas’ Matthew commentary despite the defective nature of some of the texts, even in the best available edition (Marietti). According to Jean-Pierre Torrell (Saint Thomas Aquinas Vol. 1: The Person and His Work, trans. Robert Royal, [Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996]), “[I]t is certain that the text currently transmitted in the printed editions is not only incomplete but erroneous. A good part of Thomas’s authentic commentary on the Sermon on the Mount is missing. That lacuna has been filled by the hardly scrupulous zeal of his first editor, Bartholomew of Spina (1527), who put in the place of the text missing from the manuscripts a part of the commentary by Peter de Scala, a Dominican of the late thirteenth century” (56-57). Basing himself on the work of H.V. Shooner (“La Lectura in Matthaeum de S. Thomas (Deux fragments inédits at la Reportatio de Pierre d’Andria)” Angelicum 33 (1956), 121-42), Torrell identifies the interpolations as nn.444-582 and 603-610 of the Marietti edition (57, n.17). Since these sections have nothing to do with the Transfiguration (nn.1417-1452), I judge my use of the Matthew commentary as safe.

\textsuperscript{482} The extracts from John of Damascus in the Catena in Lucam, 9, lect.6 constitute an exception, because Thomas explicitly uses the Damascene in order to claim that the light of the transfigured Jesus originates from his divinity. See ST, III, q.45, a.2 and my treatment of it below.
considerations, in this section I mainly restrict Thomas’ exegesis of the Transfiguration to Matthew’s account and the role it plays in his gospel.\textsuperscript{483}

\subsection*{1.1 The End of Future Glory}

Of the three patristic themes that I have used as a framework for my analysis of Palamas, namely, the Transfiguration as revelation of the deity of Christ, as soteriological event, and as eschatological event, the third theme of eschatology is the most prominent in Thomas’ treatment of the Transfiguration.\textsuperscript{484} That the Transfiguration reveals a significant facet of eschatological beatitude (exactly which facet remains to be seen) serves as the primary hermeneutic through which Thomas both interprets the details of Matthew’s narrative in his commentary and engages the Transfiguration theologically in the \textit{Summa}.

In his commentary on Matthew, Thomas sees the Transfiguration as the last stage in the progressive revelation of “evangelical teaching” (\textit{doctrina evangelica}) which begins with the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1-48) in which Jesus first “sets forth his own teaching,” and then continues with the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1-23) in which Christ “shows the power of the evangelical teaching.”\textsuperscript{485} The Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-13) culminates the series by revealing the end of evangelical teaching, “which is

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\textsuperscript{484} This not to say that the other two themes of the revelation of Christ’s deity and soteriology are not present. As I show, these two themes certainly are present in Thomas’ treatment of the Transfiguration, but they are present in such a way that they are almost wholly subsumed by eschatological concerns.
\end{flushright}
future glory.”\textsuperscript{486} The future glory manifested in the Transfiguration is an anticipation of the Second Coming and general resurrection, “where bodies will be brilliant and splendid” (\textit{erunt corpora clara et splendentia}).\textsuperscript{487}

In his treatment of the Transfiguration in the \textit{Summa}, which relies heavily on both his Matthew commentary and the \textit{Catena in Mattheum}, Thomas cites both Jerome and John Chrysostom to the same effect:

On the text, \textit{He was transfigured in their presence} [Matt. 17:2], Jerome says, \textit{He appeared to the apostles such as he will appear on the day of judgment}. And on the text, \textit{Until they see the Son of man coming with his kingdom} [Matt. 16:28], Chrysostom says, \textit{Wishing to show them with what kind of glory he would come afterwards, in so far as it was possible for them to learn from it, he manifested it to them in their present life, so that they might not grieve even over the death of their Lord}.\textsuperscript{488}

Here Thomas combines Jerome’s teaching that the transfigured Christ reveals his eschatological glory to the apostles with Chrysostom’s characterization of the event as a condescension of the divine in which Christ accommodates the revelation to the earthly condition of the apostles.\textsuperscript{489} In other words, the glory of the eschaton is revealed in such a way that the apostles can see it (we will latter see how Thomas interprets the light of the Transfiguration as accommodated to the apostles’ earthly condition). Chrysostom’s text further suggests that Christ reveals eschatological glory in order to strengthen the apostles for the coming crucifixion.

Thomas adds his own reasons for the Transfiguration in his account of why it was “fitting” (\textit{conveniens}) that Christ reveals “future glory” in the Transfiguration. He does

\begin{itemize}
  \item[486] Aquinas, \textit{Super Matth.}, 17, lect.1, n.1417.
  \item[487] Aquinas, \textit{Super Matth.}, 17, lect.1, n.1424.
  \item[489] See Canty, \textit{Light and Glory}, 231-32.
\end{itemize}
so by situating the Transfiguration as the revelation of the end of future glory in
connection with the passion prediction in Matt. 16:21:

After having foretold his Passion to his disciples [Matt. 16:21], our Lord had
persuaded them to follow the path of his Passion. Now in order for someone to
go straight along the way, he must have some foreknowledge of the end; just as an
archer will not shoot the arrow straight unless he has first seen the target he is
aiming at...And this is especially necessary when the way is rough and difficult,
the journey wearisome, but the end delightful. Now Christ underwent the Passion
in order to obtain glory, not only for his soul, which he had from the first moment
of his conception, but also for his body; according to Luke, *Was it not necessary
that Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory?* [Luke 24:26] To which
glory he leads those who follow in the footsteps of his passion...And so it was
fitting for him to manifest his glorious splendour (which is to be transfigured),
according to which he will configure those who belong to him; as it is written, *He
will configure these wretched bodies of ours into copies of his glorious body* [Phil.
3:21].

According to Thomas, the fittingness of the Transfiguration, that is, its coherence in view
of the revealed contours of the redemptive work of Christ in the economy of salvation,
rests on how its eschatological character stands in relation to that redemptive work,
especially Christ’s passion. Thomas expands Chrysostom’s idea that the manifested
glory of the Transfiguration serves as a comfort for the apostles to include the notion that
it also serves as a target that guides the apostles through the suffering of the cross as a
necessary means to the end of glory. As the revelation of future glory, the
Transfiguration manifests the very reason for the passion and as such reveals its *telos,*

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490 Aquinas, ST, I, q.45, a.1.
491 The notion of fittingness (*coveniens*) is a crucial one in Thomas’ Christology, which touches upon
virtually every aspect of the Incarnation. Thomas sets out his Christology exploring *de convenientia
incarnationis* (ST, III, q.1, aa.1-6) in order to show that while the Incarnation is not of absolute necessity
regarding our salvation (in his omnipotence, God could redeem humanity in any number of ways), it was
certainly necessary “for a better and more expeditious attainment of the goal (*per quod melius et
convenientius pervenitur ad finem*)” (q.1, a.2). According to Paul Gondreau, “In Aquinas’ vocabulary,
*coveniens* signifies not only fittingness but also coherence, or even, in a more extended sense, ordered
beauty” (“The Humanity of Christ, the Incarnate Word,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik Van
Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 259). For
a broader view of how coveniens fits into Thomas’ Christology (with examples) see Paul Gondreau, *The
Passions of Christ’s Soul in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie
which is to be configured to Christ in his passion and therefore his glory. Thomas takes both the Transfiguration’s strengthening function (Chrysostom) and its guiding function (Thomas) as pointing to its reality as a soteriological revelation. The manifestation of the glorification of Christ on Tabor shows the apostles their end, the end that awaits them in virtue of their Christoformity.\footnote{See Aquinas, \textit{De divinis nom.}, lect.1, cap.2, \textquote[\textit{But then}, that is, after the resurrection of the blessed, \textit{when we shall be immortal and incorruptible}, this corruptible body receiving incorruption, and this mortal body receiving immortality, as it says in 1 Cor. 15, \textit{and when we achieve the Christoform end}, that is, the process of assimilation to Christ, according to Phil. 3: ‘he will reform the body of our humiliation, conformed to the body of his glory, and (we will be) most blessed’ because not only will the soul be beatified, but also, in its own way, the body will be glorified, then, \textit{we shall always be with the Lord, according to the saying}, as it says in 1 Thess. 4” (translation mine; the italicized phrases are from DN I.4 592B-C [PTS 33, 114-115]).} The transfiguration of Christ reveals the eventual transfiguration of the apostles. At this stage, it is clear that Thomas sees the Transfiguration as soteriological or transformative, but only in terms of what will happen, that is, eschatologically. That Thomas characterizes the Transfiguration as a mainly eschatological event can also be seen in the way that eschatological concerns are at the forefront of his interpretation of the timeframe of the Transfiguration (“After six days”), the choice of Peter, James, and John, and the location of the revelation (“a high mountain apart”) in his commentary on Matthew. Thomas interprets each of these facets of the Transfiguration narrative against the standard of future glory.

1.2 The Six Days, the Apostles, and the Mountain

Concerning the timing of the Transfiguration (“After six days”), Thomas’ opening comments place the Transfiguration in an eschatological frame: “But there is a literal question here, namely why he was not transfigured right away when he said [Matt. 16:28]: ‘There are some of those who stand here…’ Chrysostom solves it. First, to arouse the Apostle’s desire; second, to mitigate their envy, because maybe they had been
troubled after his word.” 493 It is noteworthy that the first “literal question” about the passage rests on the assumption that the Transfiguration is the fulfillment of the promise made in Matt. 16:28. 494 Otherwise, Thomas’ insertion of Chrysostom’s solution to why there is a six day gap between Matt. 16:28 and 17:1 makes no sense. The Transfiguration is a vision of the “Son of Man coming in his kingdom” and the rest of Thomas’ commentary on the circumstantiae transfigurationis presupposes this identification.

For example, he utilizes Rabanus Maurus’ spiritual exegesis of the six days as signifying the “six ages after which we come to future glory.” 495 In addition to this, Thomas, most probably relying on Origen, sees the six days of Matthew’s account as paralleling the six days of creation which, for Thomas, suggest the principle that “unless we are lifted up to God above all creatures which the Lord created in those six days, we cannot arrive at the kingdom of God.” 496 Here Thomas applies a detail of the Transfiguration account to the spiritual life of the listeners of the lectura; the six days show that one must transcend the created order to arrive at future glory. For Thomas, the apostles’ experience of the Transfiguration is an example of the experience of the Kingdom of God by transcending creation. His interpretation of the choice of the three apostles and the location of the Transfiguration make this clear.

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493 See Aquinas, Super Matth. 17, lect.1, n.1418, Catena in Matth., 17, lect.1, and John Chrysostom, In Matthaeum, 56 (PG 58:549).
494 Aquinas, Super Matth., 17, lect.1, n.1418. Cf. Remigius of Auxerre (d.908) apud Thomas in Catena in Matt., 17, lect.1, “Remigius: In this Transfiguration undergone on the Mount the Lord fulfilled after six days the vision of his clarity which he had promised to his disciples” (translation mine).
According to Thomas, the apostles were three in number to signify that “no one shall arrive [at the Kingdom] except in faith of the Trinity.” As to why only Peter, James and John were chosen to be led up the mountain, Thomas relies on Chrysostom in asserting that these three in particular were superior to the rest of the apostles: “Sublime mysteries should not be explained to everyone immediately, but should be handed down through superiors to others in their proper turn.” Each had a particular quality which made him worthy: Peter was more fervent than the rest, John was specially loved by Christ, and James was “especially a warrior against the adversaries of the faith” which led to his martyrdom. On its own, this seems to be no more than an answer to common question elicited by the text: why these three at the exclusion of the others? However, Thomas’ point is that each of the apostles has qualities that make him particularly worthy to be brought up the mountain. The mountain of the Transfiguration signifies the place of contemplation.

For Thomas, a mountain was chosen for the eschatological revelation “to indicate that no one is led to contemplation but he who goes up onto a mountain,” with “very high” signifying “the loftiness of contemplation...For that loftiness of glory will be above every loftiness of knowledge and virtue.” The apostles’ experience of the Transfiguration is an example of one transcending the created order of the “six days” by affording them the opportunity to engage in an act of contemplatio. These three apostles were chosen to be brought up the mountain because each one possessed qualities that

497 Aquinas, Super Matth., 17, lect. 1, n.1419.
498 Aquinas, ST, III, q.45, a.3, ad.4, cf. John Chrysostom, In Matthaeum, 56 (PG 58:550)
499 Aquinas, Super Matth., 17, lect.1, n.1419, cf. ST, III, q.45, a.3, ad.4.
500 Aquinas, Super Matth., 17, lect.1, n.1420.
disposed him for the reception of the gift of the contemplation of future glory of the Parousia and their own future glorification in Christ.  

In Thomas’ treatment of the circumstances surrounding the Transfiguration we see that each detail forms a sequence, the interpretation of which is guided by the logic of the eschatological revelation. The sequence is ordered towards and hence culminates with the apostles’ experience of the glory of the transfigured Christ upon the mountain of contemplation. Thomas characterizes the contemplation of the apostles in a quotation from Bede: “For this reason [Christ manifesting future glory] Bede says, By his loving foresight he prepared them to endure adversity bravely by allowing them to taste for a short time the contemplation of everlasting joy (contemplatione semper manentis gaudii).” The question becomes what kind of contemplation is Thomas asserting of the apostles at the Transfiguration?

According to Thomas, contemplation is an intellectual activity, consequent on the gift of faith, which consists in “a simple gaze upon a truth (simplicem intuitum veritatis).” By simplicem intuitum Thomas means a non-discursive act of judgment (as opposed to an act of simple apprehension or reasoning) by which truth is grasped intuitively. The specific object of contemplation is divine truth, namely, those truths

501 See Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.180, a. 2, “[T]he moral virtues do have their place in the contemplative life as dispositions. The act of contemplation, in which the contemplative life consists essentially, is impeded by the vehemence of the passions, which turns the soul’s desire from the things of mind to things of sense, and by external disturbances. Now the moral virtues restrain the vehemence of the passions and quell disturbance from external distractions. Therefore, the moral virtues are part of the contemplative life dispositively.” See also (ad.1) “the contemplative life has a motive cause in the will, and in this respect the love of God and neighbor is required,” and (ad.2) “Holiness, or cleanness of heart, is caused by the virtues that control the passions tarnishing purity of mind; and peace is caused by justice, which looks to actions.”
502 Aquinas, ST, III, q.45, a.1 quoting Bede, In Marcam, III, 8:29 (PL 92:216).
503 Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.180, a.3.
504 See Jordan Aumann’s footnote (vol.46, p.23, n.b) to II-II, q.180, a.3 in the Blackfriars’ edition of the Summa Theologiae.
which can only be known by revelation. The ultimate object of contemplation is God himself, which can only be attained in the beatific vision. Thomas divides up contemplation into two categories.

The first is the imperfect contemplation of a viator (a wayfarer or one on the journey), which is the sort of contemplation available to those of us who still walk in this life awaiting the glorification of beatitude. Second, there is the perfect contemplation of a comprehensor (one who has arrived at the end), which is the contemplation of the divine essence enjoyed by the blessed in heaven. The perfect contemplation of a comprehensor is the completion and end toward which imperfect contemplation is ordered. Therefore, while the imperfect contemplation of a viator “gives us a certain dawning happiness which begins here so as to be continued in the life to come,” the contemplation of a comprehensor is “perfect in the next life when we shall see God face to face, wherefore it will make us perfectly happy.” Since, at the Transfiguration, the apostles were still viatores, their contemplation had to be of the imperfect variety. The next question is whether their imperfect contemplation of divine truth was (1) that which ordinarily takes place by created likenesses, as is the case with contemplatives and those who experience theophanies or (2) the exceptional experience of rapture in which the divine essence itself is seen (albeit imperfectly), as in the cases of Moses and Paul.

505 Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.180, a.1. By contemplation of specifically divine truth Thomas means the “consideration of intelligible things which the intellect can neither discover nor exhaust” like “the teaching on the mystery of the Trinity” (q.180, a.4, ad.3).
506 Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.180, a.4. Delight (dilectio) always accompanies an act of contemplation (even of the imperfect sort) since the act itself is the highest activity of which the intellect is capable (it is, therefore, pleasurable by nature) and its ultimate object is the fulfillment of the intellect. See ST, II-II, q.180, a.7.
507 Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.180, a.4.
1.3 Imperfect Contemplation and Theophany

Thomas claims that, ordinarily, for those of us who are viatores “the contemplation of divine truth can only be ours imperfectly, through a glass in a dark manner (per speculum et in aenigmate) [1 Cor 13:12].” Thomas follows Augustine in asserting that speculum and aenigma refer to “certain likenesses [quaecumque similitudines] that may help us to understand God.” The fact that wayfarers require created likenesses to know God is a function of their living under this-worldly conditions. According to Thomas, “[a] thing is known by being present in the knower; how it is present is determined by the way of being (modus essendi) of the knower.” Since the modus essendi of a viator’s soul is to be the form his body, a viator “cannot by nature know anything except what has its form in matter or what can be known through such things.” Hence, for Thomas, the knowledge of divine truth obtainable in this life (even if one is the recipient of a theophany as I show below) ordinarily follows the broad contours of the natural operations of the knowing subject, namely, it is mediated by a likeness (similitudo): in the ordinary act of knowing a truth accessible by reason, the intellect must turn to phantasms (images located in the faculty of imagination which are normally the result of sense experience, though they can be implanted directly into the imagination by grace in theophany) from which the agent intellect abstracts an intelligible species. An intelligible species is the likeness (similitudo) of the extra-mental object, residing in the soul, by which the person knows the intelligible object outside the mind.

508 Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.180, a.4 (italics original).
509 Aquinas, ST, I, q.12, a.2 (translation modified), cf. Augustine, De Trinitate, 15.9 (PL 42:1069).
510 Aquinas, ST, I, q.12, a.4.
511 Aquinas, ST, I, q.12, a.4.
512 Intelligible species are not likenesses in the sense of a copy or a picture, but they are the same substantial form which exists in the thing and by which that thing is what it is, which now exists in the intellect in a new mode. The new mode of the substantial form is that it exists in the mind without matter,
This same process obtains for the imperfect contemplation of divine truth accessible by faith in revelation: “In the present life human contemplation is impossible without phantasms, because it is connatural to man to see the intelligible species in phantasms.” Even by the light of grace strengthening the intellect, a viator can ordinarily know God only through some created likeness (similitudo creada). Part of what makes contemplation imperfect (relative to the perfection of the beatific vision) is precisely the fact that the viator remains trapped by the natural conditions and mechanics of human cognition, namely, the need to understand by way of species which originate in sense experience. The limits of human knowing while in the state of a viator that obtain for the contemplative, also obtain for those who experience theophanies. For Thomas, that God is seen in a created similitude and not directly is a defining characteristic of theophany.

Thomas classifies theophanic experience under the broad heading of the gratuitous grace of prophecy; specifically, theophanies are cases of prophetic vision (visio prophetica). Since the objects of prophecy are beyond the natural light of reason, the prophets must receive the grace of prophecy (and hence prophetic visions) by a participation in a “light which surpasses the light of natural reason,” because “there must be a proportion between the light and what the light makes visible, as between cause and

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which means without any and all individuating characteristics, corporeal or otherwise. The species or concept is the “that by which” we know the particular object outside the mind. Things are the proper objects of human knowing, not ideas. See ST, I, q.85, a.2

513 Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.180, a.5, ad.2. For the role of imagination and phantasms in cognition see ST, I, q.78, a.4 and q.85, a.1.

Visions of supernatural realities (the effect) must be brought about by the agency of “divine light” (*lumen divinum*), which is the “formal” or defining element of prophetic vision.\(^5\) In contrast to the situation of the blessed, the divine light does not inhere in the prophet as “a permanent and perfect form (*per modum formae permanentis et perfectae*),” but as a “transient passion or impression (*per modum passionis vel impressionis transeuntis*).”\(^6\) The contrast between *forma permanens* and *passio* is meant to suggest the difference between that which enables one to act in a certain way because of a permanent quality that he possesses and the passive possession of a quality only insofar as one is being acted upon by another. Here, the permanent quality is like a habit (*habitus*), which Thomas defines as “a disposition determining a power in reference to something.”\(^7\) Habits are qualities in the soul which determine (or enable) one to act with excellence in reference to certain ends and thus habits are perfective of powers.\(^8\) In the case of prophecy, the end is the knowledge of divine truth and in order to have access to it, a person must receive a new form or power which functions as a new principle of action by participation in divine light.\(^9\)

\(^5\) Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.171, a.2. Cf. ST, I-II, q.112, a.1 where Thomas engages in a similar piece of reasoning regarding sanctifying grace: “Nothing can act beyond its species, since the cause must always be more powerful than its effect. Now the gift of grace surpasses every capability of created nature, since it is nothing short of a partaking of the Divine Nature, which exceeds every other nature. And thus it is impossible that any creature should cause grace. For it is as necessary that God alone should deify, bestowing a partaking of the Divine Nature by a participated likeness, as it is impossible that anything save fire should enkindle.”

\(^6\) Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.171, a.3.

\(^7\) Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.171, a.2.


Thomas uses an analogy from his physics of light to illustrate the difference in these two modes of participation (permanent and transitory):

[Physical light is in the stars as a quality of the stars, since it is a form remaining in them (quaedam forma in eis permanens). But it is in air as a transient impression (quaedam passio), since air does not retain light, but only receives it by being placed in the path of a shining body (corpus lucidum).]

According this analogy, the prophets, like a diaphanous medium, participate in lumen for determinate periods of time and are illuminated only for as long as those periods last.

Therefore, the prophets do not always possess the ability to prophesy:

So too just as the atmosphere ever needs to be newly lighted up, so too the prophet’s mind ever needs a new revelation, just as a pupil who has not mastered the principles of his art needs instruction about each single point.

The transitory nature of prophecy’s participation in light is not only a matter of occasion (the prophet sees supernatural realities only on the occasion of his being illuminated), but also a matter of mode and intensity, which dictates what the prophet can experience. This is made clear by Thomas’ contrasting the vision of the prophets with that of the blessed who participate in the light “per modum formae permanentis et perfectae.” Those who see the vision of God participate in divine light both permanently and perfectly. To refer back again to the physical light analogy, the blessed are like heavenly bodies because divine light is in them as a permanent form or habitus. This is why the blessed see God face to face and the prophets do not.

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supernatural good, than for creatures, whom He loves that they may acquire natural good. Now He so provides for natural creatures, that not merely does He move them to their natural acts, but He bestows upon them certain forms and powers, which are the principles of acts, in order that they may of themselves be inclined to these movements, and thus the movements whereby they are moved by God become natural and easy to creatures, according to Wisdom 8:1: "she . . . ordereth all things sweetly." Much more therefore does He infuse into such as He moves towards the acquisition of supernatural good, certain forms or supernatural qualities, whereby they may be moved by Him sweetly and promptly to acquire eternal good; and thus the gift of grace is a quality (emphasis mine)."

Aquinas, De Veritate, q.12, a.1. Cf. ST, II-II, q.171, a.2.

Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.171, a.2.
It is important to highlight that in ST, II-II, q.171, a.2 and De Veritate, q.12, a.1, Thomas does not make a distinction between the light of the prophets (theophany) and the light of the blessed (the beatific vision) according to what the light is (or “the essence” of the light as Thomas might say). It seems as if the difference lies in the respective modalities of the participation on the part of the prophets and the blessed—in prophetic visions it is called the light of prophecy (lumen propheticum), while in the blessed the same light is called the light of glory (lumen gloriae). Prophetic vision is distinguished from beatific vision “as the imperfect is from the perfect,” i.e., as imperfect and perfect participations in divine light (lux divina).523

Consistent with the above, Thomas defines what a theophany is in relation to what theophany is not, namely, the beatific vision. He does so with reference to Pseudo-Dionysius (not Augustine as one might expect):

[P]rophetic vision is not of the divine essence itself. When the prophets see what they do see, it is not in the divine essence but in certain similitudes lighted up by God-given light (secundum illustrationem divini luminis). Thus Dionysius speaking about prophetic visions says, *A wise theologian calls that vision divine which is effected by images of things lacking a bodily form through the seer being rapt in divine things* (sapiens theologus visionem illam dicit esse divinam, quae fit per similitudinem rerum forma corporali carentium ex reduction videntium in divina). It is these similitudes, made light by the divine light, which deserve the name mirror for more than the divine essence.524

In the above Dionysian passage quoted by Thomas, the divine vision which is “effected by images” is θεοφάνεια.525 According to Thomas’ reading of Pseudo-Dionysius, the “images of things lacking a bodily form” are created likenesses that become vehicles for supernatural truth by being “made light,” that is, intelligible carriers of meaning, by

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523 Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.173, a.1.
524 Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.173, a.1 (italics original), cf. Pseudo-Dionysius, CH IV.3 180C (PTS 36, 22).
525 See CH IV.3 180C (PTS 36, 22), “Ἡ πάνσοφος δὲ ἥθελλα ἡ διαταγή τῆς θείας ἢ ἐν μνήμη τῶν ἀμφοτέρων ὁμοιώσεως, ἢ ἐν τῇ ὁμοίωσε καλεῖ θεοφάνειαν (emphasis mine).”
divine light. Thomas also takes the “images of things lacking bodily form” to be the “sacred veils” of *Celestial Hierarchy* I.4, 121B-C: “the divine ray can enlighten us only by being upliftingly concealed in a variety of sacred veils which the Providence of the Father adapts to our nature as human beings.” Commenting on CH I.4, Thomas says, “But, for him [Pseudo-Dionysius] veils are the imagery of the imagination, in which the purity of the light of understanding is, as it were, shrouded.” As is the case in imperfect contemplation, the veils (created likenesses) are necessary because of the condition obtaining for all *viatores*: “Divine rays of light do not enlighten us in this present life without the veils of some or other images—because it is natural to men, in this present life, only to be able to understand with images.” By the very nature of theophany, the prophet does not know supernatural truth in itself (the beatific vision), but “in some of its [created] effects. And it [knowledge of supernatural truth] would be more remote if that knowledge was effected by symbols drawn from bodily rather than intellectual effects. Such most properly is prophetic vision which is conveyed by symbols of bodily things.” Theophany is “most properly” (*talis maxime*), conveyed by created symbols of bodily things in the imagination of the visionary from which the intelligible content of divine truth can be understood by the intellect, but only understood as veiled (i.e., as mediated) by a creature.

For Thomas, these created likenesses or veils can be either “a created substitute presented to bodily sight; as Abraham is believed to have seen God when he saw three [men] and adored one (Gen. 18)” or “a representation in the imagination; and in this way

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526 See also Pseudo-Dionysius, DN I.4, 592B. I showed in Chapter 2 that Palamas interprets Dionysius’ “sacred veils” in quite a different manner. I highlight the significance of this difference in Section 3.
527 *Aquinas, De Veritate,* q.12, a.12, c.9.
528 *Aquinas, ST,* II-II, q.174, a.2, ad.4.
529 *Aquinas, ST,* II-II, q.174, a.5.
Isaiah saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne (Is. 6:1).”

In De Veritate, Thomas calls these ways of experiencing God visio corporalis and visio imaginaria respectively. Thomas’ other examples of corporeal visions are Moses’ experience of the burning bush (Exod. 3) and the fingers writing on Belshazzar’s wall in Dan. 5. Regarding imaginative vision, Thomas claims that Moses represents the height of all such visions:

[T]he sight of imagination (imaginaria visio) existed in Moses most perfectly because he had it, as it were, at will. Hence, we read in Exodus (33:10): “And the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man is wont to speak to his friend.” We can also note in this another excellence with reference to the sight of imagination, that he not only heard the words of the one revealing, but saw Him, and this not in the shape (in figura) of a man or an angel, but as God Himself; not in a dream, but when awake. We read this of none of the other prophets.

In each of these cases the visionaries beheld either a sensible body or an image of a sensible body which are the proper objects of the sensitive power and the imagination respectively. On Thomas’ account, for either of these powers to apprehend any object above their nature (e.g., an immaterial reality) would entail a change in the specific being of each and hence the corruption of sensation and imagination qua powers of the soul. Since God is not a body, he cannot be seen directly by the exercise of either power.

1.4 Rapture

However, Thomas teaches that there is another way that one can experience God in via that is beyond imperfect contemplation as it is ordinarily understood and also

531 Aquinas, De Veritate, q.12, a.7.
532 Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.173, a.3.
533 Aquinas, De Veritate, q.12, a.14, cf. ST. II-II, a.174, a.4.
534 See Aquinas, ST, I, q.12, a.3.
beyond the corporeal and imaginative vision of theophany. There is intellectual vision
(visio intellectualis) of ecstasy or rapture (raptus) which is an exceptional mystical
experience where a viator can, for a brief time and in a qualified way, be a comprehensor
wherein he has a limited, passing experience of the beatific vision while still in this
life.\textsuperscript{535} As was the case with imaginative vision, Thomas teaches that Moses excelled all
the prophets in intellectual vision “seeing that he gazed upon God’s very essence, as St.
Paul did in ecstasy, according to Augustine. Hence we say that he sees God plainly, not
by riddles (palam, non per aenigmata Deum vidit).”\textsuperscript{536} It is noteworthy that, following
Augustine, Thomas roots Moses’ intellectual vision in Num. 12:8, which, according to
the Vulgate and unlike Exod. 33:11, describes Moses’ vision as occurring palam non per
aenigmata et figuras (not through riddles and figures). Enigmas and figures are just what
Thomas takes the created species of theophany to be. While both Exod. 33:11 and Num.
12:8 describe Moses’ relationship to God in intimate terms (i.e., “face to face” and
“mouth to mouth” respectively), they represent two very different kinds of visions for
Thomas. Although Thomas does not say explicitly that Moses’ intellectual vision
occurred on Sinai in Exod. 33:13-23 (“Show me thy glory”), due to Thomas’ reliance on
Augustine in the area of theophany, I judge it safe to assume that he follows the
interpretation of Augustine who claims that Moses did.\textsuperscript{537}

\textsuperscript{535} See Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.175, aa.1-6 and De Veritate, q.13, aa.1-5 where Thomas treats ecstasy.
\textsuperscript{536} Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.174, a.4, cf. Augustine, Super Gen. ad litt. XII, 27-28 (PL 34:477-478). Thomas
also invokes Augustine as an auctoritas to settle the question “whether Paul, rapt to heaven, saw God’s
essence” (ST, II-II, q.173, a.3) in that question’s sed contra: “Augustine lays down that God’s own
substance could be seen by some in a this-life state, as it was by Moses and Paul who was rapt up to hear
ineffable words which no man can utter” (Augustine, Letter 147, 13 [PL 33:610]). In addition to an appeal
to authority, Thomas offers his own reason why it was fitting for both Moses and Paul to contemplate
divine truth in its essence: “Fittingly enough, for as Moses was the first Doctor of the Jews, so Paul was
first Doctor of the Gentiles” (ST, II-II, q.175, a.3, ad.1, cf. I, q.12, a.11, ad.2).
\textsuperscript{537} See Augustine, Super Gen. ad litt. XII, 27 (PL 34:477) where he argues that the anthropomorphisms of
Exod. 33:23, i.e., God’s “hand” and “back parts,” do not suggest either a corporeal or spiritual vision
because, “the account that follows in the sacred text does not state that this took place in a corporeal way,
Thomas calls rapture “the highest degree of contemplation in the present life” because it stands “midway between the present life and the life to come.” In ecstasy, “one is uplifted by the Spirit of God to a supernatural level, with abstraction from the senses” in order “to contemplate the divine truth in its essence.” For Thomas, that anyone sees the divine essence in this life must entail an abstraction from both the sense powers and the imagination because the divine essence can only be seen by the glorified intellect:

[B]y no image (phantasma) can the essence of God be seen; it cannot even be seen by any created intellectual idea [i.e., intelligible species], because the essence of God infinitely exceeds not only all bodily realities (images are among these), but also all spiritual creatures. When the intellect of man is raised to the supreme vision of God’s essence, it must be that the whole of a mind’s intent is borne that way—to the extent that he grasps no other reality from images but is wholly borne to God.

The divine essence cannot be seen through any created similitude or medium because no creature, not even the most the exalted one, could contain or convey God’s infinite perfection. In the case of such creaturely mediation, which obtains for all human cognition by nature (including contemplation and theophany), God would be seen through the creature and not directly. Rapture requires that the normal process of human

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538 Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.180, a.5. It is both noteworthy and perhaps puzzling that rapture differs from imperfect contemplation in both degree and kind. It doesn’t fit neatly into the category of imperfect contemplation because in it God is not seen in the mirror of a creature, which is a defining note of the life of a viator. Yet, its partial and temporary nature make it unfit for inclusion in perfect contemplation. It seems clear that Thomas puts it as the highest degree of imperfect contemplation for lack of a better option.
539 Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.175, a.1 and a.3, ad.1.
540 Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.175, a.4.
541 Aquinas, ST, I, q.12, a.4.
cognition be suspended (as opposed to being removed) “lest it should impede its [the intellect’s] elevation to that which excels all images.”

In the beatific vision, of which rapture is a foretaste, the intellect is elevated by the light of glory (lumen gloriae) so that the divine essence itself becomes the form of the intellect, namely, the divine essence is that by which the intellect understands (the likeness) and that which the intellect understands (the object). In other words, God becomes present to the soul in such a way that he replaces the normal mechanics of human knowing, that is, God becomes both the species by which he is known (the phantasm and intelligible species) and also the light by which he is known (the intellectus agens). In order to explain the limited and passing nature of rapture, Thomas invokes the same terms he uses to distinguish prophetic vision from the beatific vision. In rapture, a person participates in the light of glory as a “transient affection” (passionis transeuntis), like the air (a diaphanous body) when it is made temporarily luminous by the sun. This is different than the blessed who participate in the light of glory “by way of

542 Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.175, a.6., cf. II-II, q.173, a.4, “Such an alienation from the senses does not take place in prophets with a distortion of nature, as with the possessed or the raving mad; but it is due to some well-ordered cause: natural, as in sleep, or spiritual when there is very great intensity of contemplation.”

543 Thomas’ description of the divine essence as the form of the intellect in the beatific vision has historically been a sticking point with those who hold to Palamas’ account of the vision of God. See Christiaan Kappes’ review essay: “Siniossoglou’s ‘Radical Platonism in Byzantium’,” Archiv Für Mittelalterliche Philosophie Und Kultur 19 (2013), 210-43, “Whereas God may not be in any metaphysical genus of “being” for either Palamas or Aquinas, nonetheless, Aquinas is adamantly convinced and quite vocal that the human intellect can be capacitated to see God’s essence via the lumen gloriae. After the translation of Aquinas’ Summae into Greek, Palamites made this a point of contention with Thomists. The Council of Florence (1439) marks a crescendo in the conflict between the Thomistic school’s assertion that man can see God’s essence and the Palamites’ denial thereof. The Palamites refused to concede this point at the Council. Therefore, a compromise formula had to be adopted to please the Greek contingent present at Florence. Even before the Council, there already existed a consistent interpretive tradition of Palamas that pitted Thomism against Palamism precisely on the point of the visio beatifica. So far as the present author is aware, interpretation of the Angelic Doctor on this point has never wavered, even withstanding Scotist attacks. Scotists thought it absurd that an accidental quality could be added to the soul to allow it to see an infinite essence, especially since Thomists claimed that the only adequate objects of the intellect are created essences via abstraction,” (227-28).

an immanent form” (*per modum formae immanentis*), which would be more like a heavenly bodies (*corpora lucida*) that are in a constant state of luminosity.\(^{545}\) Thus, ecstasy is only a “momentary actualization of blessedness” in which the person neither experiences the full glory of the beatific vision nor the overflow of that glory into his body.\(^{546}\) While Thomas acknowledges that the shared distinction between immanent and transient participation in divine light connects rapture to prophecy,\(^ {547}\) he is less clear as to the exact difference between the two regarding their respective participations in divine light. It seems plausible that Thomas might say that although the mode of participation is just as transient in rapture as it is in theophany, in rapture, the mode of participation is more perfect and therefore more intense than in theophany. In prophetic vision, the prophet’s participation is both transient and imperfect, while in rapture the visionary’s participation is transient and *perfect enough* that it is now called *lumen gloriae* rather than *lumen propheticum*—the visionary’s participation is still imperfect when measured against the full glory of beatitude.

1.5 Conclusions

In summary, the only two options that Thomas gives one in interpreting the apostles’ act of *contemplatio* in the Transfiguration are either: (1) an ordinary act of imperfect contemplation or theophany wherein the apostles transiently and imperfectly participated in divine light in such a way that that God was “seen” insofar as he is mediated by a created species, either sensibly or imaginatively, or (2) an extraordinary

\(^{545}\) Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.175, a.3, ad.2.

\(^{546}\) Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.175, a.3, ad.2 and 3.

\(^{547}\) Aquinas, ST, II-II, q.175, a.3, ad.2, “Being rapt up in this way relates in some sense to prophecy (ad prophetiam pertinent).”
experience of ecstasy wherein the apostles participated in divine light transiently and
perfectly enough such that their intellects were illumined by the lumen gloriae so that
they had a qualified experience of the beatific vision—an ecstasy not requiring a
transformation of, but rather an alienation from, the sensitive and imaginary powers of
the soul. For now, it is important to note that if it turns out that the apostles’ experience
of the Transfiguration is best characterized as theophanic on Thomas’ account, then,
according to what Thomas takes the nature of a theophany to be, it could not have been
the beatific vision.

SECTION 2: TRANSFIGURATIO

2.1 The Meaning of Transfiguration

Thomas defines transfiguratio in such a way that he forestalls any interpretation
of the event which would take the term as implying that Christ assumed some sort of non-
human or imaginary body:

To be transfigured is the same as to be changed from one’s own figure, as it is
written in 2 Cor. 11:14 that Satan transfigures himself into an angel of light. So it
is no marvel if the just shall be transfigured into a figure of glory (in figuram
gloriae)...Some have said he assumed another body, which is false; but whoever
is changed in figure, in his exterior appearance, is called ‘transfigured,’ just as
when someone is healthy and ruddy and then becomes sick and pallid...In the
same way Christ was transfigured because he appeared in another form than the
one in which he was appearing before, since his body was not luminescent (non
erat lucidum), but only took on a brightness (sed tantum claritatem acceptit).”548

548 Aquinas, Super Matth., 17, lect.1, n.1422 (emphasis mine). See ST, III, q.45, obj.1-2 and their
corresponding replies, especially ad. 1 in which Thomas quotes Jerome, In Matthaeum., III, 17.2 (PL
26:122), “Let no one think that Christ lost his original form and countenance, or laid aside his real body and
took up a spiritual or ethereal body.” Thomas’ curious use of 2 Cor. 11:14, Satanas transfigurat se in
angelum lucis, as an illustration of what the term transfiguratio means is based on the Vulgate rendering of
the Greek αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ Σατανᾶς μετασχηματίζεται εἰς ἀγγελὸν φωτὸς (for Satan transforms himself as an
angel of light).
Transfiguratio does not mean a change in the shape or specific nature of a body, but a change in figure insofar as figure is made perceptible by the reflection of light and color.\(^{549}\) In the Transfiguration, Christ’s body manifested claritas, which is light (lumen) considered as brightness, splendor, or brilliance.\(^{550}\) To be more precise, Thomas calls the light of the transfigured Christ “the brightness of glory” (claritas gloriae), “glorious brightness” (claritas gloriosa), or “the glory of his brightness (gloriam suae claritatis)…according to which he [Christ] will configure those who belong to him; as it is written, *He will configure these wretched bodies of ours into copies of his glorious body* [Phil. 3:21].\(^{551}\) In the Transfiguration, Christ assumed the claritas of the “figure of glory” (figura gloriae) which he will manifest to both the elect and non-elect at the Second Coming.\(^{552}\)

*Claritas gloriae* is one of the four endowments (*dotes*) of the resurrection according to the common scholastic interpretation of 1 Cor. 15:42-44.\(^{553}\) *Claritas* is that

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\(^{549}\) See Aquinas, ST, III q.45, a.1, ad.2, “Figure has to do with the outline of a body, for a figure is that which is encompassed by a boundary or boundaries [see Euclid, Elements I, 14]. Therefore whatever has to do with the outline of a body seems to pertain somehow to figure. Now the splendour (claritas), just as colour, of a non-transparent body is perceived on its surface, and so the assumption of splendour is called transfiguration.”

\(^{550}\) In Thomas’ physics of light, claritas is *lumen* made perceptible: “The reflection of light is visible when it comes from a shining body; for then the reflection is accompanied by some brightness (claritas), as was the original emission of light. The reflection is not visible when it comes from an opaque body, for then it takes place with no brightness or radiance (*sine claritate et radiorum*)…light is not reflected by opaque bodies in the same way as by water or air or any of the smooth and polished bodies which throw back light brightly and radiantely” (*Sentencia libri de anima*, ed. A.M. Pierotta, (Turin, Italy: Marietti, 1959), II.vii.421; translation in Thomas Aquinas, *Aristotle’s De Anima in the Version of William of Moerbeke and the Commentary of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Kenelm Foster and Silvester Humphries (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1951). Hereafter referred to as *De Anima*). *Claritas* is also a property of the “original emission of light” (*prima luminis emissione*) from its source (*lux*), the brilliance of which is carried over in the reflection of that light from the right kind of body. I have chosen to eschew translating *claritas* as “clarity” because in English this term connotes transparency, which, for Thomas, is a distinct though related concept. Instead, I have chosen to leave *claritas* untranslated.

\(^{551}\) Aquinas, ST, III, q.45, a.2 and a.1 (italics original; translation modified).

\(^{552}\) Aquinas, *Super Matth.*, 17, lect.1, n.1422.

\(^{553}\) Carlo Leget, “Eschatology,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, 377. See Leget’s note (p.377, n.57) about the study of N. Wicki, *Die Lehre von der himmlischen Seligkeit in der mittelalterlichen Scholastik von Petrus Lombardus bis Thomas von Aquin* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1954), 202-37 which traces the developments which led to the interpretation of 1 Cor. 15:42-44 in terms of the four endowments.
gift of the resurrection in which the normally opaque bodies of the saints will shine with
the glory experienced by the soul’s vision of God.\textsuperscript{554} The other three endowments are:
(1) agility, the body will “obey the spirit in all the movements of the soul” without any
labor, (2) impassibility, the body is no longer subject to corruption and thus it will be
incapable of suffering pain in any way whatsoever, and (3) subtlety, the body will be
fully subject to the soul’s spiritual nature.\textsuperscript{555} Since the resurrection of Christ is both the
pattern and cause of our resurrection according to Thomas, all four endowments are
manifested preeminently in Christ.\textsuperscript{556} Broadly considered, \textit{claritas} (along with the other
endowments) is an instance of the body’s perfect subjection to the glorified soul. The
\textit{claritas} of the transfigured Christ then, is the heavenly \textit{claritas} of the kingdom of God as
manifested in the glorified persons of the saints. In the Transfiguration, Christ reveals the
eschatological phenomenon of the body’s glorification insofar as the body receives it
from the soul’s enjoyment of the beatific vision.

More to the point, for Thomas, is that Christ reveals the glorification of \textit{his} body
which it receives from \textit{his} vision of God:

\begin{quote}
[T]his brilliancy (\textit{claritas}) was not from the essence [of his body], but from the
brilliance of the interior soul, full of charity…Hence there was a certain splendor
of his body. For Christ’s soul was seeing God, and beyond all brilliancy, from the
beginning of his conception.\textsuperscript{557}
\end{quote}

The light of Christ’s transfigured body is a manifestation of the light of his glorified soul
which is itself enlightened by his vision of the divine essence “beyond all brilliancy.”

\textsuperscript{554} Aquinas, SCG, I, 86, 2.
\textsuperscript{555} For Thomas' general treatment of the endowments see \textit{Super I Epistolam B. Pauli ad Corinthios lectura},
ed. R. Cai (Turin, Italy, 1953), 15, lect.6, nn.980-86; translated in Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Commentary on the
Letters of St. Paul to the Corinthians}, trans. Fabian Larcher, Daniel Keating et al (Lander, WY: The
Aquinas Institute, 2012). Cf. SCG, IV, 86, 1-6, and IV \textit{Sent.}, d.49, q.4, a.5 qc.1-3.
\textsuperscript{556} Aquinas, ST, III, q.54, aa.1-2. Yet, \textit{claritas} was not manifested in the resurrection, but in the
Transfiguration alone, see ST, III, q.55, a.6, ad.4, a text that I examine later in the work.
\textsuperscript{557} Aquinas, \textit{Super Matth.}, 17, lect.1, n.1424.
Thomas clarifies this notion in two very important ways. The first regards the mode in which Christ possesses *claritas*, the second concerns the light’s ultimate source:

The splendour which Christ assumed in the transfiguration was the splendour of glory as to essence, but not as to mode of being. For the splendor of the glorious body is derived from the splendor of the soul, as Augustine says. And similarly, the splendor of Christ’s body in the transfiguration was derived from his divinity, as Damascene says, and from the glory of his soul. That the glory of his soul did not overflow into his body from the first moment of Christ’s conception was a divine dispensation, that, as stated above [III, q.14, a.1, ad.2] he might fulfill the mysteries of our redemption in a passible body. This did not, however, deprive Christ of the power to let the glory of his soul flow into his body. And as regards splendor, this is what he did in the transfiguration, but other than in a glorious body. For splendour flows from the soul into the glorified body, by way of a permanent quality affecting the body. And so bodily refulgence is not miraculous in a glorified body. But in Christ’s transfiguration, splendor flowed from his divinity and from his soul into his body, not by way of an inherent quality of his body, but rather by way of a transient passion, as when the air is lit up by the sun. And so the refulgence, which appeared in Christ’s body, was miraculous; just as the fact that he walked upon the waves of the sea...And so the explanation, as regards his soul, is similar to what is stated in the Second Part [II-II, q.175, a.3, ad.2] concerning the vision which Paul saw God in rapture.558

First, regarding the mode in which Christ possessed *claritas*, Thomas distinguishes how the *claritas* manifested by Christ is both similar to and different from eschatological glory. He does so without undermining the reality of the Transfiguration as an inbreaking of the eschaton into history: the difference between the *claritas* manifested at the Transfiguration and the *claritas* that will be manifested at the Second Coming does not concern what the light is (essence), but how it is present in the body of Christ and therefore its mode of manifestation. According to Thomas, by the very nature of Christ’s full participation in divine light by virtue of his beatific vision, the glory experienced by his soul should overflow into all of its powers and into the bodily organs actualized by those powers. This expected glorification of all of Christ’s humanity would cause obvious problems regarding the equally important doctrine that the humanity of Christ,

558 Aquinas, ST, III, q.45, a.2.
like ours, is possible, i.e., capable of suffering. In order to solve this problem, Thomas invokes the principle of dispensation. Although the “natural” consequence of the beatific vision is full glorification, Christ, by an act of divine will, contained the effects of beatitude in the depths of his soul so that they did not overflow into the lower powers of his soul, e.g., sensation, in order that he might be capable of suffering in, and therefore redeem, our fallen (passible) humanity.

According to an act of divine will, Christ possessed *claritas gloriae per modum passionis transeuntis* and not *per modum qualitas immanentis*. Here again, Thomas uses the same distinction I examined previously regarding the *in via* experiences of theophany and rapture. Since Christ still awaits the full glorification of his body, he cannot possess the endowment of *claritas* as a habit or inherent quality. The moment that Christ would do this, he would effectively cease to be a *viator* in any sense and as a consequence, be incapable of the passion. This is why Thomas claims that Christ possessed the gift of *claritas* not as an inherent quality, but by way of a miracle. The miracle consist in Christ temporarily allowing what should already be the case by virtue of the hypostatic union, namely, the overflow of the glory of his beatific vision into his body. For Thomas, the endowments are a necessary consequence of the overflow of glory into the body of a fully glorified human being—the possession of one endowment as a stable property

559 Aquinas, ST, II, q.14, a.1-2.
560 Aquinas, ST, III, q.14, a.1, ad.2.
561 It is on these grounds that Thomas rejects a position he ascribes to Hugh of St. Victor’s that Christ assumed different endowments at different times during his pre-resurrected life. Rather, according to Thomas, Christ only manifested the acts that pertain (pertinent) to the endowments by a miracle (ST, III, q.45, a.2). According to Canty (*Light and Glory*, 205, n.35), Thomas’ attribution to Hugh is not wholly accurate. The position most probably comes from Pope Innocent III’s *De sacro altaris mysterio* (PL 217:864) or *Sermo XIV de tempore* (PL 217: 380-82). Cf. Divry, *La Transfiguration*, 253-54.
562 For Thomas, the natural relation between soul and body entails that the glory of the soul is shared with the body. In the case of Christ, whose soul is glorified by the beatific vision consequent on the hypostatic union, the natural relation between body and soul was subject to his divine will. Thomas views Christ’s soul and body in terms of their proper natures and as instruments of the person of the Word. See Aquinas, ST, III, q.13, a.3 and q.14, a.1, ad.2.
implies the possession of them all. Since Christ’s claritas is essentially claritas gloriae, Thomas rejects the notion that the light of the Transfiguration was only an image of eschatological glory residing in the imagination. Thomas wants to be clear that the claritas of Christ was not imaginary; rather it was a representation of future glory:

This splendour (illa claritas) is said to have been imaginary, not as though it were not really the splendour of glory, but because it was a kind of image representing (quaedam imago repraesentans) that perfection of glory according to which the body will be glorious.

I take Thomas to mean that, due to the miraculous and temporary nature of the Transfiguration and its function as a guide to the end of glory in order to strengthen the apostles for the coming passion, the Transfiguration is a preview of that for which the apostles hope.

Second, concerning the source of the light, Thomas’ invokes John of Damascus for the claim that the divinity of Christ is the ultimate source of his manifested claritas. The reference to John of Damascus comes from one of Thomas’ seven quotations of the Damascene’s Homily on the Transfiguration in the Catena in Lucam:

Now the devil, seeing [His face] shining in prayer, thought of Moses, whose face was glorified. But Moses indeed was glorified with glory coming from without; the Lord, however, was glorified with the natural radiance of divine glory. For since, because of the hypostatic union, there is one and the same glory of the Word and the flesh, He was transfigured not as though receiving what he was not, but manifesting to his disciples what He was.

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563 See Aquinas, ST, III, q.45, a.2, obj.2 in which Thomas refers to a gloss of Alexander of Hales, which Thomas mistakenly attributes to Bede, “Furthermore, on the text, Who will not taste death unless they see the reign of God [Luke 9:27], Bede’s [sic] gloss says, That is, the glorification of the body in an imaginary representation (in imaginaria repraesentatione) of future beatitude. But the image of a thing is not the same as the thing itself” (italics original), cf. Alexander of Hales, Summa theologica (Summa fratriis Alexandri), ed. Pp. Collegii S. Bonaventurae (Quaracchi, Italy: Ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1924-1948), III, 21, 2.
564 Aquinas, ST, III, q.45, a.2, ad.2.
565 Aquinas, Catena in Lucam, IX, 6, lect.6 (translation in Canty, Light and Glory, 212), cf. John of Damascus, Oration on the Transfiguration, 12 (PTS 29, 449-450).
This passage from the Damascene suggests that the glory shining from Christ on Tabor is *divine* glory because it comes *from his divinity*. In the larger context of the homily, this entails for the Damascene that the light of the Transfiguration reveals and communicates the divinity of Christ: “Now things that cannot be gazed on have appeared to human eyes: an earthly body radiating the brilliance of divine splendor, a mortal body pouring forth the glory of the Godhead (δόξαν θεότητος).”\(^6\) It seems clear that, for the Damascene, the fact that the light comes from the divinity of Christ means that the light is divine which in turn implies that the Transfiguration manifests the divinity of Christ *in virtue of the light itself*. The question becomes does Thomas also see the claim that the source of Christ’s *claritas* is his divinity as entailing the light being divine and therefore that the light, in virtue of itself, is a revelation of Christ’s divinity? Or does Thomas mean something else by his appropriation of the Damascene?\(^7\) A look at Thomas’ teaching regarding the nature of *claritas gloriae* and its relation to the beatific vision (both of Christ and the saints) will show that he means something quite different from John of Damascus.

### 2.2 Claritas Gloriae and the Beatific Vision

As I noted above, *claritas gloriae* is one of the four endowments of the resurrected body. For Thomas, *claritas* is a property of the glorified body, but it is not

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\(^7\) It seems to me that Thomas uses the Damascene in order to find an additional way to highlight that the *claritas* of Christ is a result of the hypostatic union and therefore Christ’s vision of God, not in order to affirm the divine status of the light or that the light *qua* light reveals the divinity of Christ. According to my reading of Thomas, the *claritas* of Christ could be considered a manifestation of his divinity insofar as it comes from his human nature hypostatically united to the Word—his human nature that is glorified precisely because of the union. As I show below, the *claritas* of the transfigured Christ is a created effect of the union and on this account manifests the united divinity. Strictly speaking, the light itself is not divine, only its source is.
primarily so—nor is any other endowment for that matter. Rather, it is a grace of the soul imparted to the body and thus it is a property of the glorified person:

Therefore, just as the soul which enjoys the divine vision will be filled with a kind of spiritual brilliance (quadam spirituali claritate), so by a certain overflow from the soul to the body, the body will in its own way put on the brilliance of glory (ipsum corpus suo modo claritatis gloriae induetur).

As a property of the person, claritas inheres in him or her in two different modalities, that is, in a spiritual modality for the intellectual soul and a corporeal modality for the body. On Thomas’ account, even though the bodies of the blessed will be spiritual, this does not entail that they will be incorporeal. The spiritual character of resurrected bodies is founded upon their being wholly subject to the spiritual nature of the soul, not upon their being immaterial in any way. For the spiritual glory of the soul to be shared with the body in such a way that the glory is the property of the body and not merely in an extrinsic relation to it, the glory has to reside in the body in a way consonant with the body’s corporeal nature. Therefore, it must be both created and corporeal. The claritas manifested in the resurrection, and hence in the transfigured Christ, is a created, corporeal manifestation of a created, spiritual reality—the glory of the body is a sign of the glory of the soul. In other words, the glory of the body and the glory of the soul are the same glory that comes from the human person’s experience of the beatific vision. The glory of the soul and the glory of the body are the result of diverse participations in the one divine light.

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569 Aquinas, SCG, I, 86, 2 (translation modified).
570 See Aquinas, IV Sent., d.44, q.2, a.4, qc.1, “[T]his clarity will result from the overflow of the glory of the soul into the body. For what is received into something is not received according to the mode of the inflowing [cause], but according to the mode of the receiver; and so the clarity which is in the soul as spiritual is received in the body as corporeal.” All translations from Thomas’ Sentences commentary are mine unless otherwise noted.
571 Aquinas, SCG, I, 86, 5.
According to Thomas, God is *lux*—that is, uncreated light itself—and the source of all light. Commenting on 1 Tim. 6:16 (“Who alone has immortality and inhabits light inaccessible…”), Thomas says:

For in material things light is the principle of seeing; hence that by which something is known in any way whatsoever is called light (*lux*). But that by which each thing is known is its form, insofar as that form is actual; hence to the extent that a thing’s form is actual, to that extent it has light. Therefore, things which are acts, but not pure act, are said to be lucent, but not light (*lucentia sunt, not erat lux*). But the divine essence, which is pure act, is light itself…But God abides with himself, and this light is inaccessible, i.e., not visible to a bodily eye, but to the intellectual eye. Yet no created intellect can approach it.

According to Thomas, the divine essence is pure actuality, light (*lux*) itself. In the beatific vision, the soul is glorified by its participation in the divine essence. As I’ve already mentioned, Thomas calls this participation “the light of divine glory” (*lumen divinae gloriae*). The *lumen gloriae* is a gift of grace which shines in the blessed “from its source in the Word of God.” It acts in the creature as a supernatural power which elevates the intellect so that it is capable of receiving the divine essence so that “that very divine essence becomes the form through which the intellect understands.”

For Thomas, God cannot be seen by the mediation of a created likeness, but God can be seen if the human being *becomes a created likeness*:

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572 In an analogy with Thomas’ physics of light, “light [*lux*] is a quality of the primary change-effecting body,” namely, the sun (*De Anima*, II.vii.421). *Lux* is that quality or act by which the sun is itself luminous and through which it illuminates and communicates itself to other bodies. On the other hand, light (*lumen*) is the illumination emitted by the light source (see Robert Pasnau trans., *A Commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 218, n.8).


574 Aquinas, ST, I, q.12, a.2. For the longest treatment on the beatific vision in the works of Thomas and some of his contemporaries see Christian Trottmann, *La vision béatifique: Des disputes scolastiques à sa définition par Benoît XII* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1995).

575 Aquinas, ST, III, q.9, a.2.

576 Aquinas, ST, I, q.12, a.5.
Whatever is raised beyond its own nature must be made apt to this by a disposition beyond its own nature—as air, if it is to receive the form of fire, needs to be predisposed to it. When however a created intellect sees the essence of God, that very divine essence becomes the form through which the intellect understands. Hence there must be some disposition given to the understanding beyond its own nature so that it can be raised to such sublimity. Since as we have shown, the natural power of the intellect is not sufficient to see the essence of God, this power of understanding must come to it by divine grace. This increase in the power of understanding we call ‘illumination’ of the mind, as also we speak of the intelligible form as ‘light’ (lumen), or ‘light’ (lux). This is the light that is spoken of in the Apocalypse, The brightness of God will illuminate her [Rev. 21:23], i.e., the community of the blessed enjoying the vision of God. By this light we are made ‘deiform’, that is, like to God, as is said by John, When he shall appear we shall be like to him, and we shall see him just as he is [1 John 3:2].

Deiformity is the intellectual soul’s full conformity to the “likeness of glory,” the perfection of the person as imago Dei. The lumen gloriae is not a medium in or through which God is seen (medium in quo—as is the case with created species in theophany), but it is a gift of grace which serves as the medium under which, or rather by which God is seen (medium sub quo—in the sense of a new power or habitus).

According to this distinction, the blessed do not see God in the way we see color, i.e., through the actualized diaphanous medium of air, but rather they become the diaphanous medium itself, their minds become illuminated by divine light. In this way, the divine essence is seen “in” or “through” the Word—the beatified person sees God by being illuminated by the Word’s gift of light by way of a permanent and perfected form.

While it is true that Thomas calls the lumen gloriae a “created light,” this does not necessarily mean that the lumen gloriae is, in itself, a creature. Thomas is clear that

577 Aquinas, ST, I, q.12, a.5 (translation modified).
578 Aquinas, ST, I, q.93, a.4.
579 Aquinas, ST, I, q.12, a.5.
580 See Aquinas, ST, I, q.12, a.5, ad.1, “The function of the created light is not to make the essence of God intelligible, for it is intelligible of itself; its purpose is to strengthen our minds in understanding, rather as a skill increases the effectiveness of any of our powers. As also light in bodily vision makes the medium actually transparent so that it can be altered by colour.”
581 Aquinas, ST, I, q.12, a.5.
both the object of vision and the “that by which" the object is seen are the same light in the beatific vision. He is fond of quoting Psalm 35:10, “In thy light we shall see light” in this regard.\textsuperscript{582} It could be said that in God, \textit{lumen gloriae} is \textit{lux}, light as it is in its source, namely, the light that is the divine nature:

\begin{quote}
A disposition to the form of fire could only belong by nature to something that has the form of fire. \textit{Hence the light of glory could be natural to a creature only if that creature were by nature divine}, which is self-contradictory. It is by this light that the creature becomes godlike or deiform as we have already said.\textsuperscript{583}
\end{quote}

Since God is above all creation (and hence similitude) the human person’s power of perception needs to be made God-like, which is to say conformed to the divine essence by the elevation of the \textit{lumen gloriae}. The infinite uncreated intelligibility that is God resides in the created intellect as a new supernatural power—\textit{the uncreated is received by the creature in a created mode}. If it were not, then the creature’s participation would be merely extrinsic. The \textit{lumen gloriae}, which shines from the Word of God, enables the intellect to have the divine essence itself as its form, namely, the divine essence is \textit{that by which} the intellect understands (the likeness) and \textit{that which} the intellect understands (the object). In this way, God is not an object of human cognition properly speaking, but that by which the human intellect is what it now is: deiform.\textsuperscript{584} The distinction between \textit{lux} and \textit{lumen gloriae} comes about when the beatific vision is analyzed from the dual perspective of the object and the power to perceive the object residing in the glorified creature. God is, in an analogical sense, both: \textit{lux} by nature in himself and \textit{lumen gloriae}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotemark[582] Aquinas, ST, I, q.12, a.5, sed contra.
\footnotemark[583] Aquinas, ST, I, q.12, a.5, ad.3 (emphasis mine).
\footnotemark[584] See Brian Davies, \textit{The Thought of Thomas Aquinas} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 252, “There is no form of God existing in matter which is raised to a level of meaning by its reception immaterially in the mind. With direct knowledge of God by grace, however, there is, says Aquinas, something like this. God, for him, is pure form, for he is wholly immaterial. And, in knowing him directly, we are, says Aquinas, informed with his form. In the vision of God the actual life by which our minds are what they will have become is divinity pure and simple. In Aquinas’s view, to enjoy the vision of God is to be made like God.”
\end{footnotes}
in the creature by grace. This is why Thomas says that no creature could possibly possess the *lumen gloriae* save as a gift of grace, because to possess it by nature would entail being God. In this perspective, the human being becomes deiform as a consequence of participating in God’s act of self-knowledge in the only way appropriate to a rational creature.\(^585\)

### 2.3 *Claritas Gloriae* and the Beatific Vision in Christ

Yet, it cannot be forgotten that, in the Transfiguration, the manifested *claritas gloriae* is the light of the *incarnate Word* and is the result of Christ’s vision of God. According to Thomas, the soul of Christ beheld the beatific vision from the moment of his conception.\(^586\) For Thomas, that the soul of Christ always sees the divine essence is a function of Christ’s role as redeemer. Human beings were created with the capacity to be elevated to beatific union with God by grace and such union is the proper end of human life.\(^587\) The humanity of Christ, hypostatically united to the Word (divine light itself), possesses the fullness of grace and therefore is the instrumental cause of the human being’s attainment of union with God. “Hence,” says Thomas’ “beatific knowledge, which consists in the vision of God, must be found in its supreme degree in Christ, since the cause must always be greater than its effect.”\(^588\) The blessed see God because of their conformity to Christ who has first seen God. Because of the hypostatic union,

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585 See Aquinas, SCG, II, 52, 2, “Now to see God through His divine essence is proper to the divine nature, for it is the special prerogative of any agent to perform its operation through its own form. So, no intellectual substance can see God through His divine essence unless God is the agent of this operation” and II, 52, 5, “But the divine intellect sees the divine substance through itself, for the divine intellect is the divine essence itself whereby the substance of God is seen…However, the created intellect sees the divine substance through the essence of God, as through something other than itself” (emphasis mine).

586 Aquinas, ST, III, q.34, a.4.

587 Aquinas, ST, I, q.12, a.1.

588 Aquinas, ST, III, q.9, a.2.
Christ as man is the instrumental and exemplary cause of human conformity to the divine and participates in divine light (and therefore possesses grace) in a way that surpasses every creature:

All the blessed have the vision of the divine essence by participating in a light that comes to them from its source in the Word of God...The soul of Christ, which is united to the Word in person, is more closely joined to this Word than any other creature. And therefore is influenced by that light [i.e., the lumen gloriae], in which God is seen by the Word himself, than any other creature. And so it sees the first truth, which is the essence of God, more perfectly than any other creatures.\footnote{Aquinas, ST, III, q.10, a.4.}

Because the soul of Christ participates in God by the light of glory in the highest degree through his vision of God, his body must manifest claritas gloriae in the highest degree in the eschaton.\footnote{See Aquinas, ST., III, q.45, a.2, ad.3 where Thomas roots this teaching not only in his Christology, but in the Transfiguration: “Just as the splendour of Christ’s body represented the future splendour of his body, so the splendour of his clothes signified the future splendour of the saints, which is surpassed by the splendour of Christ, just as the brightness of the snow is surpassed by the brightness of the sun.”} “Thus,” says Thomas, “the glory of the soul will be known in a glorified body just as the color of a body that is contained in a glass vessel is known through the glass, as Gregory says on Job 28, ‘Gold or crystal cannot equal it.’”\footnote{Aquinas, IV Sent., d.44, q.2, a.4, qc.1, cf. Gregory the Great, Moralium Libri, XVIII, c.47 (PL 76:83C).}

Thomas takes Gregory the Great’s simile that the glorified body is like both gold and glass to mean that the glorified body is both “transparent” (pervia) to and “lightsome” (lucidum) with the soul’s glory.\footnote{Aquinas, IV Sent., d.44, q.2, a.4, qc.1, ad.2.} In the Kingdom, the human body will be like a heavenly body (corpus lucidum) and therefore be a constant bearer of light (lumen) from its source (lux). In the Kingdom, the body will also be like a diaphanous medium, that is, transparent to the glory of the soul. In both cases, i.e., the body as pervia and lucidum, the light (lumen) is the corporeal manifestation of divine glory as it has been received by
a creature. The transparency and lucidity of the glorified body will be the case “especially in Christ’s body.”

According to Thomas, in the eschaton, the blessed see the uncreated divine essence by their participation in the *lumen gloriae* which comes from the divinity of Christ, and the *claritas gloriae* which shines from the glorified humanity of Christ as the corporeal, created effect of his beatific vision:

He says that he not only wants them to be with him, but he also wants them to behold my glory [Jn. 17:24], in a beatifying vision…This can be understood to refer to the glory of his human nature after the resurrection - "He will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body" (Phil 3:21) - or to the glory of his divine nature, for he is the radiance of the Father’s glory and the image of his substance…The saints in glory will see both of these glories.

Since the first glory, namely, *claritas gloriae* is corporeal light, it is also, on Thomas’ account, a visible light. The divine essence cannot be seen with the eyes of the body or the imagination, but its created, corporeal manifestation can. For Thomas, the glorification of the sensory and imaginative faculties, by the overflow of the *lumen gloriae* into the soul, does not entail that either faculty can apprehend anything other than bodies or the images of bodies. He goes so far as to claim that since *claritas gloriae* is corporeal and thus analogically still light, it can be seen, in principle, by non glorified eyes. The example he uses to illustrate his point is the Transfiguration (!): “Now this clarity was seen by the non-glorified eyes of the disciples [at the Transfiguration]. Therefore the clarity of the glorified body will be visible to non-glorified eyes.” Yet, the Transfiguration is still a revelation because the glorified Christ could choose when to

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593 Aquinas, *IV Sent.*, d.49, q.2, a.2, ad.6.
594 Aquinas, *Super Ioannem*, 17, lect.6, n.2260.
595 See Aquinas, *IV Sent.*, d.44, q.2, a.4, qc.2, ad.1, “The clarity of glory will be of a different genus than the clarity of nature as to its cause, but not with respect to species. Hence just as the clarity of nature is proportionate to sight by reason of its species, so too is the clarity of glory.”
596 Aquinas, *IV Sent.*, d.44, q.2, a.4, qc.2, sc.1.
manifest it. Using an analogy from Augustine, Thomas teaches that the blessed “see” God (with their eyes)

as now they see the life of another. For life is not seen by bodily eyesight as though it were visible in itself as a proper object of sight; it is an indirect object of sense, not itself perceived by sense, yet straightaway known in sensation by some other cognitive power. The “other cognitive power” is the beatified intellect which, seeing the essence of God intellectually, infallibly judges the visual sensation of *claritas gloriae* coming from Christ (and all creatures by their participation in Christ) as the proper, most immanent corporeal effect of the divine essence.

2.4 Conclusions to Sections 1 and 2

On this account, the apostles’ contemplation of future glory at the Transfiguration could not have been an ecstasy and hence it could not have been an experience of the beatific vision. At no point does Thomas say that the apostles were alienated from their senses, but to the contrary, the object of their contemplation was beheld with their bodily eyes without the need for the transformation of their visual faculties. The Transfiguration cannot represent even an imperfect degree of the beatific vision. It is a *different kind of vision*.

It seems probable that the Transfiguration was more like a theophany or prophetic vision for Thomas. It is not likely that Thomas would see the Transfiguration as an

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597 Aquinas, IV Sent., d.44, q.2, a.4, qc.3.  
598 Aquinas, ST, I, q.12, a.3., ad.2, cf. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XXII, 29 (PL 41:800). See John D. Jones’ analysis of this analogy in “Filled with the Visible Theophany,” 23: “Aquinas seems to be employing what is often referred to as the distinction between sensation and perception. For example, if you close your eyes and I shake the keys I am holding, you will most likely say that you hear a set of keys. But the ears strictly do not hear the keys; they only provide sensory awareness of certain sounds. A number of other cognitive capacities come into play in virtue of which we recognize that the sounds are sounds of a set of keys.” Jones analysis seems correct, because for Thomas, the indirect perception of the divine essence by way of the faculty of sensation consists solely in the judgment of the beatified intellect.”
imaginative vision of God, because he is clear that the light was not a phantasm or product of the imagination. Rather, the *claritas* of Christ is something the apostles saw with their eyes and therefore it was more like a corporeal theophany; albeit one of the highest order. In it, the apostles do not see a “created substitute” or a sensible species created by God for the occasion, but the proper corporeal instantiation of divine light in the humanity of the Son from whom that same light will be seen in the Kingdom. This last point about the Transfiguration as a theophany is consistent with Thomas’ commentary of DN I.4 592C:

_We, I say, will be filled with the visible apparition_, that is, by a sensible and a corporeal one _of God himself_, in the humanity of Christ and this _in most pure contemplations_, because we will not be attached to the flesh of Christ carnally, but spiritually, according to the saying of the Apostle (2 Cor. 5:16): “and if we have known Christ according to the flesh, but now we no longer know him so;” I say by Christ _shining around us_ through the clarity of his body, _by the most manifest splendors just as_ he did _around the disciples in that most divine transformation_, that is, the transfiguration, as we read in Matt. 17: “his face shone as the sun;” and not only will we be filled with his sensible apparition, but also we will be _participants in the intelligible gift of the light_ of Christ, which he will pour out on us, according to the power of his divinity. And we will participate in this light [of the Godhead] within _the impassible and immaterial mind._

The Transfiguration is a foretaste of the sensible and corporeal “visible apparition” (*visibile apparitio*) of God (Ὄρατη θεοφάνεια in Pseudo-Dionysius’ Greek), which comes from the humanity of Christ in the eschaton. For Thomas, the visible theophany is _in addition to_ the “intelligible gift of light” by which we see God in the beatific vision. In light of Thomas’ opposition between theophany (prophetic vision) and ecstasy (beatific vision) it would seem that the vision of *claritas gloriae* in both the Transfiguration and

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599 See Aquinas, ST, III, q.45, a.2, ad. 2.
600 Thomas’ claim that the light was present in Christ by a miracle is not meant to undermine the reality of the light, but only to qualify its presence so as to preserve the possibility of suffering in Christ—in the Transfiguration Christ temporarily allows the glory of his soul to overflow into his body.
601 Aquinas, *De divinis nom.*, lect.1, c.2 (the italicized texts represent quotations from DN I.4 592C [PTS 33, 115]).
the eschaton is created, visible, and corporeal precisely because it is theophany. In other words, it is a theophany because it is God in a created manifestation.\textsuperscript{602} Furthermore, for Thomas, the contemplations (in the eschaton) are “most pure” (\textit{castissimae}) because they are judged by a beatified intellect that is “neither impeded through bodily passions nor subdued by material affections.”\textsuperscript{603} In no place does Thomas even hint that the intellects of the apostles were beatified. He is also clear that the apostles’ eyes needed no transformation, but does it necessarily follow that their experience was in no way transformative? If the best characterization of the Transfiguration is that it represents a kind of theophany, then it seems that the apostles would be in need of a special grace so that they might recognize the \textit{claritas} of Christ for what it truly was. According to Thomas, prophetic vision requires the intellect’s transitory and imperfect participation in divine light (\textit{lumen propheticum}) so that the prophet can judge the experience (either sensible or imaginative) to be an instance of divine revelation.\textsuperscript{604} Although Thomas never explicitly claims such to be the case for the apostles at the Transfiguration, it is consistent with his thought to infer that the apostles would have had to have participated in \textit{lumen propheticum} in order to have recognized the \textit{claritas} of Christ as divine in origin.\textsuperscript{605}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{602} Bernard McGinn (“Visions and Visualizations in the Here and Hereafter,” \textit{Harvard Theological Review}, 98:3 (2005), 227-46) notes that unlike his teacher Albert the Great, Thomas did not attempt to preserve the Eastern notion of the eschatological vision of God as theophany (233-234). For an example of Albert’s position see McGinn’s translation of Albert’s \textit{Super Dionysium De caelesti hierarchia}, 1:71 in \textit{Alberti Magni Opera Omnia (Editio Coloniensis)}, vol. 36 (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 1951-present), “Thus God himself is in each of the blessed as an illumination by whose participation he makes himself his own likeness. In such a likeness the vision of God is called theophany. In this way, the same God will be illumination and object [illuminated], but object as he is in himself, illumination insofar as he is participated in by the blessed” (234).
\bibitem{603} Aquinas, \textit{De divinis nom.}, lect.1, c.2.
\bibitem{604} Aquinas, \textit{De Veritate}, q.12, a.7, responsio.
\bibitem{605} Divry (\textit{La Transfiguration}, 425) also interprets Thomas in this way using a text from Thomas’ fellow Dominican Nicholas of Gorran (1232-1295): “In his \textit{Seven Canonical Epistles}, Nicholas of Gorran (†1295), in a text very close to the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas but posterior to it, judiciously poses to us the...
\end{thebibliography}
SECTION 3: LOOKING EAST

3.1 Thomas: Why Not?

In light of the work done in the previous two sections, it seems clear that Thomas’ interpretation of the Transfiguration cannot bear the weight of an interpretation through which one might find common ground with Orthodox teaching on the Taboric light. For Thomas, the claritas of Christ is a created, corporeal effect of Christ’s beatific vision that is, in principle, visible to the normal visual faculties, in a way similar to the corporeal light of the sun. From an Eastern perspective, this seems to me to be the most fundamental issue at hand. It is true that, on Thomas’ account, the light of Tabor is certainly not, in the language of the Synodikon, an “image” (ινδαλμα) or “a phantom which appears for an instant and then immediately vanishes” (φάσμα ἐπὶ βραχὺ φανὲν καὶ διαλυθὲν παραχρῆμα). Rather, it is the proper corporeal instantiation of divine glory; the light was truly present and it truly represented the glory of the eschaton. However, it is, nonetheless, a “created thing” (κτίσμα) or effect. In addition to this, while it may be

problem of the light of the Transfiguration considered in its double intelligibility: ‘I believe that this light was glorious by an analogical similitude, not by univocation. In effect, this was a light formed (formata) in the body by the divinity (a divinitate) that the Apostles apprehended by their external senses. It was through this light that their corporeal eyes were seeing, but they understood by their intellect (intellexerunt) the light of glory that they did not see, however, with their carnal eye’” (emphasis original, translation mine).

606 Commenting on the 1368 trial of Byzantine Thomist and Athonite monk Prochorus Kydones (1330-1369), Marcus Pleased (Orthodox Readings of Aquinas [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012]) claims that had Prochorus adhered more closely to ST, III, q.45, aa.1-4 in his own on treatment of the Taboric light in De essentia et operatione Dei, VI, then “he would have been on considerably surer ground at the trial” (84). According to Plesed, one of the points (among many) that gets Prochorus in trouble is his assertion that the Taboric light is created: “The last section [of De essentia, VI] reaffirms the created nature of the light of Thabor. This created light, says Prochoros, shone forth from the body of Christ representing by analogy the interior light of the soul (§24). All this is very different to what we find in Aquinas.” (80, emphasis mine). Pace Plesed, I do not think that this last point is very different from Thomas’ account. Regarding the created nature of the Taboric light, I am not sure what Prochorus could have added from Thomas’ account of the Transfiguration save that the light of Christ’s soul (of which the light of his body is an analogical instantiation) is itself a further analogical (and therefore created) instantiation of the uncreated light of his divinity. While Plesed is right in asserting that “Thomas does not address the question of the Transfiguration in terms of a choice between created and uncreated” (80), this is because, for Thomas, there is no choice to be made. His view of theophany does not permit one. For the text and translation (French) of Prochorus’ De essentia et operatione Dei, VI see M. Candal, “El libro VI de
true that, on a Thomistic account, the apostles had to have been the recipients of prophetic illumination in order to recognize the claritas of Christ as having its ultimate source in his divinity, the fact remains that the light that they saw was not, *qua* light, divine, i.e., God himself. The opposition between Thomas’ *claritas gloriae* on the one hand and the uncreated light of the East on the other is due, at least in part, to two very different notions of the nature of theophany and its relation to the eschatological vision of God.

At the beginning of the chapter I asserted there are four fundamental premises to the Eastern teaching on the Taboric light as theophany. The first two bear repeating: (1) God can and does manifest himself to human beings *in via* in such a way that God himself is seen/experienced, rather than God being an indirect object of perception as in a created likeness and (2) such manifestations are theophanies (i.e., visions of God) which do not stand in opposition to the eschatological vision of God as a different kind of vision, rather theophanies *in via* are partial visions of God which anticipate the full face-to-face theophany *in patria*. Hence, Palamas teaches that the Transfiguration is a vision of God, in part, precisely because it is a theophany. Theophany is a manifestation of God, in his uncreated energy, namely, *Deus pro nobis*, revealing himself in the natural symbol of his divinity. By contrast, Thomas’ premises are: (1) God ordinarily manifests himself to human beings *in via* in such a way that he is not directly seen/experienced; in these instances God is seen as an indirect object of perception by way of a created likeness and (2) such manifestations are theophanies which do stand in opposition to the beatific vision in which God himself is seen without any created intermediary. Hence

Prócoro Cidonio (Sobre la luz tabórica),” in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 20 (1954), 247-297. For the text of his condemnation and an account of his trial see *Tomus Synodicus* II (PG 151:693-716).
theophany and contemplative experience are not manifestations of God per se (conceived as divine essence), but always a manifestation of God in a created effect. Therefore if, according to Thomas, the Transfiguration represents a theophany or something very much like one, then it cannot represent an experience of the beatific vision in this life.

Thomas’ teaching on theophany and its relation to the beatific vision are obviously influenced by Augustine—Thomas’ description and taxonomy of theophanies, as well as his use of Augustinian texts make this clear. It has already been thoroughly noted in scholarship that Augustine’s interpretation of Biblical theophanies represents a significant departure from the first five centuries of Christian reflection on theophany. As a function of this, his position is also fundamentally at odds with the doctrinal and liturgical reception of the ancient view in Eastern Christianity. Furthermore, likely due to his Augustinian view of theophany, Thomas’ reception of the Dionysian “veils” is markedly different than Palamas’. As I have shown, for Palamas, the “veils” represent either the symbols by which both liturgy and Scripture convey theophanic experience, or prefigurations of yet to be revealed New Testament realities. The former act as veils for us and the latter are veils for the biblical visionary. Like Palamas, Thomas does recognize the velamina/παραπετάσματα of DN I.4 592B as scriptural and sacramental symbols, but unlike Palamas—and this makes all the difference!—he also takes them

608 This point is heavily emphasized by Bucur, “Theophanies and Vision of God in Augustine’s De Trinitate,” 88-93.
609 See Palamas, Triads, II.i.22, 55 and III.i.13.
610 See Aquinas, In divinii nom., I, lect.2, “Then, when he says, we have learned these things, he shows the difference between the knowledge which we have received from God in the present life through the divine names, and the knowledge which the saints have in the life to come. When he says these things that have
to be integral to the structure of theophany itself. For Thomas, they veil the vision of God for the visionary.

3.2 Tabor and Sinai?

Regarding Palamas’ reception of Pseudo-Dionysius referred to above, the main thing which is veiled or partially shrouded from the theoponic visionaries of the Old Testament is the future incarnation of the Son. Palamas assumes along with the ante-Nicene and early post-Nicene Fathers and the Byzantine Liturgy that the Son is the proper subject of such theophanies.611 This commitment that theophanies are Christophanies is the root of Palamas seeing the Transfiguration as the fulfillment of all Old Testament theophanies and the Eastern exegetical tradition of interpreting Sinai and Tabor in light of each other. Palamas sees the Transfiguration as the culmination of a whole theoponic history. In Thomas, the Christological connection between Tabor and Sinai (or any other Old Testament theophany for that matter) remains at most a subtext.

In patristic writing, one of the classical loci of the Transfiguration’s role in a theoponic history relative to Sinai and Tabor is John of Damascus. Although Thomas makes substantial use of John of Damascus’ Homily of the Transfiguration, and has texts

been said in the exposition of the divine names, we have been instructed now concerning God, that is, in the present life, in accordance with our capacity through the sacred veils of utterances, that is, Sacred Scripture and the hierarchical traditions, that is, the other dogmas that the apostles and their disciples handed down that are not are not contained in Sacred Scripture, for example, those which pertain to the knowledge of the Sacred Mysteries…But, he says, through sacred veils, because in the present life, we cannot see the essence of God, insofar as he is in himself, through the things handed down to us. But, we are instructed about God in Scripture through the likeness of his effects, as by a sort of veil, according to 1 Cor. 13: “we see now through a glass and in a dark manner”” (the italicized text is from DN I.4 592B [PTS 33, 114]).

611 For Palamas see, Triads, II.iii.67, III.iii.5, Hom., 7.12, Hom., 44.1, and Hom., 58.7; to cite just one of the many examples from Byzantine hymnography see Matins for the Feast of the Transfiguration, First Canon, Canticle Four, “Thou, O Christ our God, hast delivered the written Law upon Mount Sinai, and hast appeared there riding upon the cloud, in the midst of fire and darkness and tempest…Those with whom Thou hast conversed of old in fiery vapour, in darkness and the lightest of winds, stood before Thee in the manner of servants, O Christ our Master, and talked with Thee” (FM, 485).
at his disposal which abound in references that connect the presence of Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration to their respective theophanies on Sinai/Horeb, Thomas makes very little use of the parallel. Of the reasons he lists for the presence of Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration, only two have relations to Sinai and neither is exploited in any way. The little use he does make, does not center on the light of the Transfigured Christ, but the presence of the Father in the voice and the Holy Spirit in the cloud.

Thomas connects Tabor with Sinai regarding Matt. 17:5, “And while he was till speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them” which he contrast with Exod. 19:18, “Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the LORD had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently.” Regarding the latter text Thomas says, “it says that a darksome cloud appeared; but here a shining one appeared, because it signifies the consolation of glory, since they will be protected from all agitation.” For Thomas, the shining cloud of the Transfiguration symbolizes the glory of beatitude rather than the dark cloud of unknowing on Sinai. Regarding the disciples falling on their faces (Matt. 17:6 and parallels), Thomas relies on Jerome claiming that it was fitting the disciples were terrified and made to fall by the voice of the Father, to show them that the magnificence of that glory which was then being manifested was beyond the capacity of every mortal sense and faculty; according to Exodus, No man can see my face and live. And this is what Jerome says, Such is human frailty that it cannot bear to gaze upon such great glory. But men are healed of

612 See John of Damascus, Oration on the Transfiguration, 2 (PTS 29, 438; PPS 48, 206-207), 4 (PTS 29, 441; PPS 48, 210), 10 (PTS 29, 449-450; PPS 48, 219), and 15 (PTS 29, 453; PPS 48, 224).
613 See Aquinas, ST, III, q.45, a.3, ad.3 where Thomas cites Chrysostom (In Matthaeum, 56 [PG 58:550]), “A second reason is that Moses gave the Law and Elijah was jealous for the glory of the Lord,” and Hilary of Poitier (In Matthaeum 17, 2 (PL 9:1014), “Hilary adds a sixth reason, namely, to show that he had been foretold by the Law, which Moses gave them, and by the prophets, among whom Elijah ranked first” (italics original).
614 See Aquinas, Super Matth., 17, lect.1, nn.1433-44 and ST, III, q.45, a.4.
615 Aquinas, Super Matth., 17, lect.1, n.1433.
this frailty by Christ when he brings them into glory. And this is signified by him saying to them, *Stand up, and fear not.*\textsuperscript{616} Thomas makes this comment in response to the objection that the voice of the Father was not fittingly revealed on account of the disciples falling on their faces because they could not stand the revelation.\textsuperscript{617} His use of the quotation from Jerome suggests that he sees the glory of the cloud as the beatific vision or the glory of the divine essence itself. The glory manifested in the voice/cloud is “beyond the capacity of every mortal sense and faculty.” Since the Transfiguration is the revelation of our future glory in Christ, at least as far as far as the endowment of *claritas* is concerned, the cloud/voice reveals the inaccessible nature of that glory/vision without the mediation of Christ and our final conformity to him. Such inability/inaccessibility will be healed “when Christ brings us to glory.” Here Thomas exploits the resonances with Sinai in order to highlight that while Christ reveals a visible facet of resurrection glory, the presence of the Father and the Spirit highlight the hiddenness of God and the transformation that awaits us in the eschaton. The light of Christ reveals a visible, created reality that the apostles can bear; the light of the voice/cloud reveals the uncreated reality that they cannot.

There is another text in which Thomas addresses the objection that since *claritas* is the foremost property of a resurrected body, the fact that Christ did not manifest it after the resurrection implies something lacking in the resurrection appearances.\textsuperscript{618} He responds to this objection by quoting Pseudo-Augustine,

> the Lord rose with his flesh in the state of clarity but he was unwilling to appear to his disciples in this way for their eyes were unable to grasp this vision. At the time of his Transfiguration his disciples were unable to see him in this state. How


\textsuperscript{617} Aquinas, ST, III, q.45, a.4, obj.4.

\textsuperscript{618} Aquinas, ST, III, q.55, a.6, obj.4.
much more would they have been unable to see him with his flesh in the clarity of the resurrection.\footnote{Pseudo-Augustine, \textit{Dialogus quaestionum}, LXV, 14 (PL 40:738) as quoted in Aquinas, ST, III, q.55, a.6, ad.4. Although the flavor of the passage is decidedly un-Augustinian, Thomas is under the impression that he is quoting \textit{the} Augustine (e.g., \textit{sicut Augustinus dicit}).}

While the point of the quote is that the disciples could not stand the \textit{claritas} of the transfigured Christ, which may imply that the author saw the apostles’ reaction of falling on their faces as a response to the brightness of Christ \textit{and} the cloud, Thomas’ uses the quotation to quite a different point. He follows the citation with the claims that the manifestation of \textit{claritas} by the resurrected Christ (i.e., being transfigured) would have impeded his ability to be recognized by the disciples. But, on account of the weakness of the disciples before the passion, Christ showed them his glory: “Clarity, therefore, before the passion was a preview of this, but after the resurrection other signs were offered.”\footnote{Aquinas, ST, III, q.55, a.6, ad.4.}

The risen Christ did not manifest the gift of clarity because he had done so already and it would have been confusing, not because there is anything in the nature of \textit{claritas} itself which requires any special condition on the part of the percipient. For Thomas, the revelation of the uncreated glory of God comes with the voice/cloud and is not centered on the transfigured person of Christ. His connections with Sinai are centered on the cloud/voice and hence on the Holy Spirit and the Father. For Thomas, the Tabor/Sinai parallel does not pivot on the Son or the light that comes from the Son. As far as I am aware, Thomas makes no explicit connection between the person of the Son and the Sinai theophanies nor does he place the Transfiguration in the context of a larger theophanic history. However, there is some evidence that Thomas thinks that the Person of the Son has some fitting connection with theophanies.
According to his analysis of Thomas’ treatment of Trinitarian appropriations in ST, I, qq.39 and 45, David Whidden has shown that Thomas “understands the primary mission of the Son to be the illumination of our intellects in ways that allow the Holy Spirit to kindle our affections…This kind of illumination is one that properly orders our mind to God.”621 If this is the case, then it would seem that part and parcel of the Son’s primary mission is to enlighten the minds of the prophets of the Old Testament in preparation for his incarnation. Thomas explicitly teaches that the lumen gloriae (perfect participation in lux divina who is God) shines forth “from its source in the Word of God.”622 Since the light of theophany (lux propheticum) represents an imperfect participation in the same light, it must come from the same source. Commenting on John 1:18 (“No one has ever seen God; it is the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, who has made him known), Thomas says,

For in the past, the Only Begotten Son revealed knowledge of God through the prophets, who made him known to the extent that they shared in the eternal Word.

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621 David L. Whidden III, Christ the Light: The Theology of Light and Illumination in Thomas Aquinas (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 113. Whidden centers his case around ST, I, q.45, a.5, ad.1 and 2, “Although all the gifts, considered as such, are attributed to the Holy Ghost, forasmuch as He is by His nature the first Gift, since He is Love, as stated above [q.38,a.1], some gifts nevertheless, by reason of their own particular nature, are appropriated in a certain way to the Son, those, namely, which belong to the intellect, and in respect of which we speak of the mission of the Son. The soul is made like to God by grace. Hence for a divine person to be sent to anyone by grace, there must needs be a likening of the soul to the divine person Who is sent, by some gift of grace. Because the Holy Ghost is Love, the soul is assimilated to the Holy Ghost by the gift of charity: hence the mission of the Holy Ghost is according to the mode of charity. Whereas the Son is the Word, not any sort of word, but one Who breathes forth Love…Thus the Son is sent not in accordance with every and any kind of intellectual perfection, but according to the intellectual illumination, which breaks forth into the affection of love” (emphasis mine). Whidden concludes, “As a result, Aquinas has a theory of divine illumination quite different than anything that had come before it, because it is primarily Christological” (ibid). While I’m not quite sure Thomas’ theory of Christological illumination is “quite different than anything” that had come before it—I’m sure many Eastern Christians and quite a few patrologists would justifiably quibble with his statement—it may very well be that Thomas represents a novel approach in his own immediate context. For a detailed look at that context see É.H. Weber, “L’herméneutique christologique d’Exode 3,14 chez quelques maîtres parisiens du XIIIe siècle,” in Celui qui est: Interprétations juives et chrétiennes d’Exode 3,14, ed. Alain de Libera and Emile Zum Brunn, (Paris: Centre d’ Etudes des Religions du Livre, 1986), 47-101 cited in Jean-Pierre Torrell, Saint Thomas Aquinas Vol. 2: Spiritual Master, trans. Robert Royal, (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 47.

622 Aquinas, ST, III, q.9, a.2 (emphasis mine).
Hence they said things like, “The Word of the Lord came to me.” But now the Only Begotten Son has made him known to the faithful…“God, who in many and varied ways, spoke to the fathers in past times through the prophets, has spoken to us in these days in his Son” (Heb 1:1). In this text, Thomas affirms that the Son as Logos revealed divine truth to the prophets of the Old Testament “to the extent that they shared in the eternal Word.” In light of what I have shown so far, it seems plausible to take this last phrase to mean something like “insofar as they participated in the light of prophecy which shines forth from the Word.” If my characterization of Thomas is correct, then he appropriates to the pre-incarnate Son the first component of prophetic vision, namely, the enlightenment of the prophet’s intellect. Yet, is this tantamount to Thomas claiming that the Logos is the subject of Old Testament prophetic visions, at least insofar as it was the Logos who was symbolized by created similitudes or stood behind them? There are two texts, both from the commentary on John, which could suggest as much.

In the prologue to the commentary on John, Thomas offers a meditation on Isaiah 6:1 as a paradigm of contemplation and how the evangelist John instantiates that paradigm in his gospel. “Now,” Thomas says, “since John rose above whatever had been created…it is clear that his contemplation was most high. Thus, I saw the Lord. And because, as John himself says below (12:41), ‘Isaiah said this because he had seen his glory,’ that is, the glory of Christ, ‘and spoke of him,’ the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne is Christ.” Thomas is unclear whether he means that Isaiah saw the Son as

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623 Aquinas, Super Ioannem, 1, lect.11, n.221.
624 Aquinas, Super Ioannem, prologue, 2 (italics original). Cf. Catena in Ioannem, prooemium (prologue) where Thomas quotes Jerome, In Isaiam, III, 6:1 (PL 36:92B), “Who is that Lord who is seen, we learn fully in the Evangelist John, who said, Thus said Isaiah, when he saw the glory of God, and spoke of him; no doubt he meant Christ.”
standing behind an appearance in specie Dei or that Isaiah’s vision was mainly a foreseeing of Christ.  

The second text is Thomas’ exegesis of the “I AM” logion in John 8:28 (“When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will understand that I AM, and that I do nothing of myself; but as the Father taught me, so I speak.”). Regarding this passage Thomas says, “He mentions the greatness of his divinity when he says, that I am, that is, that I have in me the nature of God, and that it is I who spoke to Moses, saying: "I am who am" (Ex. 3:14).” On its face, this seems like a direct assertion of the Son standing behind the created species of the burning bush. However, in his treatment of appropriation, Thomas offers reasons why “He who is” is appropriated to the Son “not because of its direct meaning (non secundum propriam rationem), but because of the circumstance (sed ratione adjuncti) that God speaking to Moses prefigured the deliverance of mankind, accomplished by the Son.” The ratione adjuncti depends upon the standard Christian practice of interpreting the Old Testament in light of Christ and implies that the burning bush only points forward to the Incarnation.

625 See Aquinas, Super Ioannem, 12, lect.7, n.1704 where Thomas cautions interpreters of Jn 12:41 by saying, “we should avoid the error of the Arians, who say that the Father alone is invisible to every creature, but that the Son was seen in the visions of the Old Testament. But since it is stated that “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (14:9), it is obvious that the Father and the Son are visible in one and the same way. And, Isaiah, seeing the glory of the Son, also saw the glory of the Father, and indeed the entire Trinity.” In the passage it is clear that Thomas (like Augustine before him) is critiquing a Homoian interpretation of theophanies based on the theology of common operations, but it is less clear if he is casting doubt as to the Son’s particular presence due to that theology. For Thomas, Isaiah’s vision is still a vision of the glory of the Son (albeit by way of a creature), and in seeing the glory of the Son (Videns gloriam filii) the glory of the Trinity was seen (vidit gloriam totius Trinitatis). Here it seems as if Thomas is combining two patristic interpretations of Is. 6 that were I initially distinct: (1) a vision of the Son on the heavenly throne, attended by two seraphim and (2) a vision of the Trinity, with the Father on the throne, flanked by the Son and the Spirit. See Bogdan Bucur, “‘I Saw the Lord’: Observations on the Christian Reception History of Isaiah 6,” Pro Ecclesia XXIII, 3 (2014): 309-330, especially 309-318.

626 Aquinas, Super Ioannem, 8, lect.3, n.1192.

627 Aquinas, ST, I, q.39, a.8.
In any case, even if Thomas asserts some sort of actual presence of the Son in Old Testament theophanies as a matter of policy (which is far from clear), he makes no use of it in his interpretation of the Transfiguration. As I noted in Section 1, it is certain that Thomas is familiar with and also very likely that he holds to the Augustinian interpretation of the “back parts” of God and the “cleft of the rock” mentioned in Exod. 33:23 as foreshadowing the incarnation of Christ and that this episode was the occasion for Moses’ intellectual vision. John of Damascus makes a similar interpretive move to which Thomas also has access.\textsuperscript{628} Even without John of Damascus’ Transfiguration homily, Thomas has this tradition of interpretation which seems ripe for some sort of a connection with the Transfiguration. However, without the commitment to the revelatory presence of the Son in Old Testament theophanies (especially Sinai), the connection is difficult to make. Besides, even if Thomas did make this connection, with the addition that the Transfiguration was also a vision for Moses (and Elijah), then it would seem that Moses saw less of God in the Transfiguration (a corporeal theophany) than he did on Mount Sinai (an intellectual vision or ecstasy). If this is the case, in what possible sense could the Transfiguration be a fulfillment of Sinai?

3.3 A Light from the East

What now? If Thomas is not, at least as far as the Transfiguration as theophany is concerned, a fruitful point of contact with the Orthodox East regarding the

\textsuperscript{628} See John of Damascus, \textit{Oration on the Transfiguration}, 2 (PTS 29, 438; PPS 48, 206), a text which I have already quoted but will quote again, “Today Moses…is presented on Mount Thabor to Christ, who authored the Law, as to his Lord; he gazes on Christ’s divine work, which had long been represented in mystical figures—for I would say myself that this was the significance of ‘the back parts of God’—and he sees the glory of God clearly, while sheltered in a hole in the rock, as Scripture says. But the rock is Christ…who opened a kind of tiny cave, as it were, in his own flesh, and from it flooded those in his presence with boundless light, stronger than any powers of vision.”
Transfiguration as theophany, then who is?\textsuperscript{629} My answer would be to begin with: Irenaeus of Lyon, the Cappadocians, Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor, Anastasius of Sinai, Andrew of Crete and John of Damascus. Each of these Fathers represent various strands concerning theophany and the Transfiguration and each of these strands played a part in the formation in the Eastern teaching that the Transfiguration is the revelatory, deifying, and eschatological theophany \textit{in via}. Alexander Golitzin characterizes the \textit{entire} Eastern Christian tradition as ineluctably theophanic:

\begin{quote}
Theophany is at the heart of Orthodox Tradition. It is what the Christian East has always understood as the very content of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The word means, literally, the manifestation or appearance of God: God become visible…Theophany permeates Orthodox tradition throughout, informing its dogmatic theology and its liturgy. That Jesus, Mary’s son, is the very One who appeared to Moses and the prophets — this is the consistent witness of the ante-Nicene Fathers, and remains foundational throughout the fourth century Trinitarian controversies and the later christological disputes.\textsuperscript{630}
\end{quote}

This characterization of the Eastern Christian tradition is certainly true of Palamas as an inhabitant of this tradition. As I hope this work has made clear, Palamas is not only one representative among others of the theophanic tradition of the Christian East, but, relative to the Transfiguration at least, he may very well be the preeminent representative. Indeed, Palamas synthesizes his tradition so as to bring together insights from, among others, the Cappadocians concerning the antinomy of \( \dot{\eta} \theta\varepsilon\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron \) hidden and revealed in the Transfiguration, the Christological commitment of the early Fathers concerning the presence of the pre-incarnate Son in the theophanies of the Hebrew Bible which culminates in the Incarnation and Transfiguration of the Son, and the monastic tradition of exegesis and commentary on the Transfiguration represented by Maximus the

\textsuperscript{629} This, of course, implies that Thomas may very well be a fruitful point of contact in other areas.

Confessor, Anastasius of Sinai, Andrew of Crete and John of Damascus which forged a deep interrelation between theophany, the Transfiguration, and deification. If I am right, it would be important that any engagement with the Eastern tradition concerning the Transfiguration (even on the part of Roman Catholic theology) take into account the voice of Gregory Palamas.

Yet, all of the Fathers mentioned in this work are common Fathers for both East and West. Hence, a Catholic retrieval of Patristic insights concerning the Transfiguration as theophany would be a retrieval of what Roman Catholic theology ought to consider, in some sense, its *proprium*. To my mind, it remains to be seen what the benefits to Catholic theology (both dogmatic and ecumenical) could be by retrieving this *proprium* through its Palamite reception and synthesis in its “native soil” East of the Adriatic. I would like to suggest three areas in which such a project of retrieval, which takes into account Palamas’ reception of the Fathers concerning the Transfiguration as theophany, might bear fruit in Catholic theological reflection. Each of these areas represents theological notions that are, more or less, already present in the Roman Catholic theological tradition.

The first centers on the implications of the Transfiguration’s place in salvation history as the terrestrial culmination of a theophanic economy of salvation which unfolds “from the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit.” According to this view, the above Trinitarian taxis orders and shapes the contours of the entire economy, from creation to the eschaton—the center of the economy is, of course, the incarnation of the Son and its theophany in the Transfiguration. In short, this taxis is how God, as Trinity, takes to the world. It orders how creation proceeds from God and, therefore, it
normatively orders how creation returns to God. Nowhere is this expressed better than in the “eucharistic sacrifice, the source and summit of the Christian life” in which the Church offers the Son to the Father in the Holy Spirit. If this principle is taken with its full weight, then the notion that it is always the Son who, by the power of the Spirit, reveals God to humanity—starting with creation, through the theophanies of the Old Testament, and finally in the Incarnation and eschaton—is no more than a working out of an implication concerning the normative Trinitarian dimensions of salvation history.

Although the reception of this implication has, historically, been muted in the West, the Catechism seems to take it as standard:

The theophanies (manifestations of God) light up the way of the promise, from the patriarchs to Moses and from Joshua to the visions that inaugurated the missions of the great prophets. Christian tradition has always recognized that God's Word allowed himself to be seen and heard in these theophanies, in which the cloud of the Holy Spirit both revealed him and concealed him in its shadow.

It has also been noted that there are vestiges of this view still present in Latin rite liturgical usage in places such as the O Antiphons and the hymn Veni veni Emmanuel of the Advent season and the Improperia (more commonly known as the Reproaches) of the Good Friday liturgy. The connections between the Transfiguration and the above Christoform character of salvation history that Palamas inherits and furthers are part of what makes his interpretation of the light of Tabor possible. The making of such connections in Roman Catholic theology may make a similar interpretation possible.

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632 Lest one be worried that the standard theophanic presence of the Son in the Old Testament runs afoul of the orthodox theology of common operations, Kari Kloos (*Augustine’s Transformation*, 8, n.6) notes the researches of Jean-Louis Maier who has shown that “Augustine’s predecessors identified the theophanies with the Son precisely to safeguard his equality and consubstantiality with the Father” (emphasis mine). For the details of Maier’s argument see his *Les missions divines selon saint Augustin*, Paradosis: Etudes de litterature et de theologie anciennes 16 (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1960).

633 CCC 704.

634 See Bucur, “A Vision of a Vision,” 24
Second, if the entire economy of salvation is Christoform, then one might want to revisit the place of the Incarnation in the economy. As I showed, Palamas holds to the “Maximian” position that the Fall dictated the manner of the Incarnation and not the fact of the Incarnation. From a Catholic perspective, this position, most famously associated with John Duns Scotus, is usually seen as a piece of legitimate (although eccentric) theological speculation. As I stated in Chapter 3, the point of the position, at least as present in Maximus and Palamas, is not its speculative aspect, namely, “What would have happened had human beings never become alienated from God?” Rather, it is the commitment that Adam (and by extension all of humanity) was made to be fully deified by union with God and that this “theandric” union occurs in the assumption and elevation of human nature by the Son—through whom the Father shares himself in the power of the Holy Spirit. From a Roman Catholic perspective, if, as the Catechism says, “Creation is the foundation of ‘all God’s saving plans,’ the ‘beginning of the history of salvation’ that culminates in Christ…[F]rom the beginning, God envisaged the glory of the new creation in Christ…” then it seems to me that the Incarnation’s foreordination from all eternity is much more than an exercise in valid theological pluralism. The union of God and man, first in Christ and then in us through Christ, is not God’s “plan B.” The Transfiguration’s role in the Christoform economy of salvation shows the way.

Finally, an essential part of the Christoform economy is that it is a deifying economy. The Son creates human nature in such a way that it, whole and entire, can be assumed and fully deified in the theophany of the fully glorified, incarnate Son. In this

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636 CCC 280.
view, the fully deified humanity of the Son is not only the instrumental cause of our union with God by divine grace, but it is also the instrumental source of the beatific vision. All of human nature becomes transparent to the uncreated divinity within; in the case of Christ in virtue of the hypostatic union and in the case of the blessed in virtue of their participation in that union in the life of grace. Must the elevation of the sensitive and imaginative powers (in virtue of their union with the beatified mind) such that they are able to directly participate in God’s own act of self-knowledge made accessible to us in Christ’s vision of God involve a violation of nature? Rather, could not the λόγος ἀεὶ εἶναι of those powers of the soul that are instantiated in the body simply be such an elevation? A reevaluation of the traditional answers to these questions might shed new light on the Roman Liturgy’s Communion Antiphon for the Feast of the Transfiguration: “When Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

In any case, one indispensable condition for the retrieval project involving Palamas’ reception of the Eastern Fathers regarding the Transfiguration as theophany is that we do not culpably engage in what, for Thomas, was most probably unavoidable: Palamas’ affirmation that the Taboric light is an instance of the beatific vision in this life hinges, in part, upon his reception of certain features of the Eastern patristic tradition which were, for the most part, unavailable to Thomas. Thomas does not stand as a “direct” heir to the Eastern monastic milieu to the extent that Palamas does. While Thomas knows the Damascene’s homily on the Transfiguration, his reception of its contents is colored by at least two important factors: (1) he reads/filters it through Augustinian teaching (by his time standard in the West) on the created nature of theophanies and possibly Augustine’s caution of appropriating Old Testament

637 The Roman Missal, 920 (emphasis mine).
theophanies to the person of the Son and (2) Thomas has not been reared on the liturgical
texts of the feast of the Transfiguration (as we have seen many of which are written by
John of Damascus and Andrew of Crete) which are a central loci for Palamas’ position
that the light of Tabor was an instance of the vision of God in this life. If I may be so
bold, these two factors probably obtain for the majority of Latin Christianity to this day.
Because of time, scholarship, and ecumenical efforts on the part of both Catholics and
Orthodox Christians, these factors ought to obtain no longer. It is my hope that this work
is a testimony to this.
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230


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