

## Theological Theses on the Transfiguration of Christ

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I. There is certainly an explanation of the Transfiguration of Christ more suited to Lectures in the Schools, or sacred addresses to the people, than to composing Theses, in which either the doctrine of Religion is simply conveyed, or some part of Controversies is comprised. But still, that history is not entirely devoid of doctrine which deserves to be explained a little more accurately, and in its interpretation some things are found about which there is dispute among Theologians. Add that we hope in its treatment we will say some things which, if less excellent in themselves and worthy of being known (for what can proceed from us that is not common, and placed below mediocrity?), yet may be able to supply an occasion for inquiring more diligently into Christian doctrine. Then, after such various Theological questions, having been agitated in previous times, either silence must prevail henceforth, which the nature of our duty does not allow, or the same subjects must be ventilated anew; but the repetition of the same things breeds disgust; or we must roam more freely through the various passages of Scripture and various regions, as it were, of Theology, so that material may be selected for disputation. Finally, if anyone deems this which we have in hand rather unsuited for that purpose, at least he will take it in good part that in its selection we did not so much indulge our own inclination as either obey the judgment of others or comply with their demands.

II. If we combine the accounts of the three Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke (for John was silent on this matter), we shall have an almost complete history of the Transfiguration of Christ, nearly as follows. After our Lord had conversed with Peter, and elicited from him that excellent and illustrious confession, to which he himself replied, “Thou art Peter,” etc. and had more explicitly than before warned his disciples that His passion was at hand, whence arose Peter’s untimely thoughts, bold admonitions, and Christ’s severe rebukes, and most wise instructions, Luke says “about eight days after,” but Matthew and Mark “six days.” By these words is denoted that time which elapsed between the two Sabbaths, which Matthew, and after him Mark, precisely noted, Luke somewhat less carefully.

Namely, Matthew accurately counted the days themselves, Luke designated the period of the two Sabbaths broadly, prudently adding the word “about,” in the way that we are accustomed to say “around,” when we do not wish anyone to be captious in the observation of our words. Nor should it trouble us that he said “about eight days,” as if he had also wished to include the days. “Eight days” is not the same as “a week.” But a week among the Hebrews, just as among the Greeks it is called a “seven-day period,” among the Latins a “septimana,” is used for a certain fixed period of time, in which the former include only one terminus, namely the “from which,” while the Hebrews also embrace the terminus “to which.” For it is a course of days “from Sabbath to Sabbath,” as Josephus says somewhere, and Luke meant nothing else than if he had said, “there intervened nearly that time which is comprised by two Sabbaths.” And how correctly this agrees with Matthew, no one fails to see.

III. So at that time “Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John his brother”: namely three disciples, not all of them. For this was a matter which he did not wish to spread out immediately, and which therefore ought to be confined within the knowledge of a few. For what many know, it is amazing if it does not get spread abroad. Yet he wished there to be some witnesses of it, who at a suitable time and place could give testimony about it, which Peter did in 2 Peter 1:17. Of course neither ought so great a thing, which pertained so greatly to the glory of Christ, to be ignored, nor divulged by Christ himself, whom his incomparable modesty always prevented from speaking grandly about himself. But why he chose three is clear. According to the custom of all peoples, and even by the institution of God himself among the Jewish people, two witnesses, if unimpeachable, were sufficient for the confirmation of any matter. Christ thought a third should be added superfluously by him, so that the truth of the matter might be beyond any throw of doubt. And it has been well observed by some, just as there were three witnesses from heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and likewise three from earth, the Spirit, the Water, and the Blood, who would testify to the truth of the Gospel; so likewise there were three from heaven, God the Father, Moses, and Elijah; and three likewise from earth, Peter, James, and John, who would give testimony about the Transfiguration. For in that splendor which shone forth on the mountain, there was a marvelous image of the light which gleamed through the preaching of the

Gospel over the whole world; just as in the Transfiguration of Christ's person there was a sort of rudiment of that glorification.

IV. Moreover, he chose Peter for this event, then James and John the sons of Zebedee, to maintain the old custom. For he loved those three in a certain preeminent way, which he signified in various ways, and even by changing their names. For he called that one Peter, or Cephas, instead of Simon, and these ones Boanerges. But he did not give them new names except on account of the excellence of the operations for which he destined them, and for fulfilling which he furnished them with the necessary gifts. Some give this reason for his choice: that Christ had designated Peter as the leader of the apostolic company; James was to seal the testimony of the apostles first with his blood; John, because he was to be long-lived and to survive all the other apostles, was to transmit this testimony by living voice to the next age. How true this is, we do not wish to examine here. Certainly no one doubts John's longevity. James was the first of the apostles to end his life by martyrdom; for Stephen was not an apostle. If Peter's leadership consisted in this, that preserving full equality of office, he ruled and moderated the company of the rest when they came together, for the sake of preserving order only, it should not be obstinately denied. But Christ granted all these things to them, because he especially loved them; which cause could have impelled him, in addition to the other prerogatives which he had granted them, to add also this: that he wished them to be witnesses of his Transfiguration. But why he so loved them, since we can find no cause in themselves, by which they excelled others by nature, we must refer to Christ's will alone. For just as it was free and unfettered for him to choose the Apostles from among other men at his discretion, so that he might commit the apostolate to them; so nothing prevented him from preferring these three to the other Apostles at his discretion in the dispensation of certain special benefits.

V. Having made that selection, Christ "ascended a high mountain, and privately took the Disciples with him onto it, to pray." Luke noted the purpose of that ascent in this way: which might seem remarkable, not only because the other Evangelists said nothing about it, but also because Christ seems

to have had another purpose in view, namely, to be Transfigured. But he could have had those two purposes before his eyes: prayer and the Transfiguration, one of which he concealed from the disciples while declaring the other to them in his customary way. Moreover, Luke followed what Christ did and concealed. Passing over the Transfiguration until he came to narrate it, he stated that the practice of prayer gave the reason for that ascent. But if those two purposes were subordinated, so that Christ is thought to have ascended the mountain with the purpose that he might obtain the Transfiguration by the intervention of prayer (for it was certainly something like a prelude to that glorification which he requested from the Father in these words: "Father, glorify thy Son," John 17:1), then both Christ and Luke could make mention of the nearer purpose, while passing over the more remote in silence. For to pray is something which can be an end in itself, and which Christ often practiced without any reference to anything else, and for this reason alone, because a part of divine worship consisted in it. But why should not such means also be judged to be sought for their own sake?

VI. Moreover, prayers which ought to be conceived in the assembly of the Church require a public place, nor in them is there danger of that ostentation which must be especially guarded against in the business of piety. For things of that kind done by all are imputed neither to private zeal nor to hypocrisy. But other prayers seek retirement, both for the sake of avoiding ostentation, as Christ himself commanded in Matthew 6:6, and also for avoiding interruption, which otherwise disturbs the feeling of prayer and relaxes the vehemence of zeal, and calls the mind away from pious thoughts, and involves it in the solicitude of human affairs. And so Christ withdrew for the purpose of praying. But a mountain was most suitable for that purpose. For besides that from it the view toward heaven was more unobstructed, it seemed to remind him who prays that he ought to abstract his mind from human affairs, and to be borne upwards in mind and affection toward him to whom prayers are directed. Wherefore, even if there had been nothing else, Christ nevertheless, which was his custom, would have ascended the mountain to pray. But the Transfiguration required not only a mountain, but a lofty mountain. For just as that state of Christ was midway between the infirmity of the flesh and the glory which he now possesses, so the place itself ought to be in some way midway between the

habitation of men and heaven itself. But no place could be such except the summit of a lofty mountain. To this is added that since Moses and Elijah were to appear in that Transfiguration, and indeed clothed in bodies now raised above the ordinary state of natural bodies, it was much more fitting that they should stand on the summit of a lofty mountain, than if they had descended to the lower parts of the world. For thus they were nearer to the heaven to which they had to return, and that place less ill-suited their condition. Most wisely, therefore, was a considerably lofty mountain selected for that purpose, such as Tabor, or the mountain called Ithabyrius, of remarkable height among all which are in those regions where Christ then was. For it is the constant tradition of the ancients that the transfiguration took place on it: to which tradition, because it seems plausible, and there is nothing which can be opposed to it, we willingly assent. Whatever it is, Peter calls it “Holy,” undoubtedly because a most holy and illustrious thing had occurred on it.

VII. “While praying,” says Luke, Christ, say Matthew and with him Mark, “was transformed before the disciples: and the appearance of his face became other, and it shone like the sun.” That this happened while praying is not observed casually. For if Christ asked to be transfigured, he was heard immediately, so that from this you can easily recognize the vehemence of his prayers, and on the other hand the benevolence of the Father towards the Son. But if he asked for something else, it could not have happened at a more fitting moment than during that communication of Christ with the Father. Indeed, just as God is glorious, so he makes him a partaker of his glory who draws near to him. But no one can draw nearer to him than by the fervor and assiduity of prayers. Moreover, the Greek text has *μετεμορφώθη*. *Μορφή* and *forma* differ no more than in the shape and figure of the characters, and their meaning is exactly the same. For each word denotes that outward appearance of corporeal things, which consists in the tracing of lineaments, in the position of parts, and in color, and which meets the eyes. The Greek word is used in this sense by Homer in those words of Ulysses to Euryalus: “For one man is of inferior appearance, but a god crowns him with beauty.” The Latin by Cicero in these: “Every animal loves its own form and appearance.” To which there are countless similar examples in good authors. But if, in the philosophical schools, *μορφή* and *εἶδος* mean the interior nature of things, it

is an almost metaphorical sense, because the word has been transferred by similitude from the corporeal and visible appearance to indicate that invisible nature of things. Therefore, that μεταμόρφωσις of Christ must be understood of the changing of his outward form, which became more majestic than it was accustomed to be and appear.

VIII. But that form is seen especially in the face. For the other parts of the body are such that we differ less in them from other men, and besides they are accustomed to be covered with garments, so that they are not visible to the eyes. We bear the face naked, so that it can easily be seen, and in each person it is so marked with its own characters and distinguished from others, that scarcely since the creation of the world have there been two faces entirely alike. And so the Evangelists interpret that transformation especially of the face of Christ, when they say that it shone like the sun. There is naturally in the face of a man whose humors are somewhat more happily tempered, and who is in the prime of life, a certain radiance blossoming from the excellent mixture; but by no means a brilliance. For that does not arise except from bodies luminous by their nature, not such as the human body which admits much of earth into its composition. Therefore it was necessary that something divine be imprinted on the countenance of Christ, whence that Light shone forth in an extraordinary way. But this seems to have come about either because God for a time rendered Christ's facial skin itself luminous, or because he inserted certain bright particles into its hidden pores, from which that splendor resulted. Nor did the countenance of Moses descending from the mount to the people shine forth otherwise of old, so that he was obliged to veil it before the eyes of the Israelites. But the former certainly seems more plausible. For he is said more properly to be transformed (metamorphouthai), who undergoes such a change in himself and in the parts of his body, than one who merely receives certain external particles from which, so to speak, he is interpolated. But when it is said that the face of Christ shone like the sun, it is emphatic, and pertains to proclaiming the greatness of the thing. For since among bodies which emit light the sun is the most luminous, the incredible magnitude of that unwonted splendor could scarcely be conveniently illustrated and represented otherwise than by the simile of the sun, which is accustomed to be employed for things of this kind. Thus in Matthew 13:43: "The righteous shall shine

forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” Which seems taken from Daniel 12:3: “And they that be teachers shall shine as the brightness of the firmament.” And in Homer it is frequent concerning the brightness of arms: “as the sun.”

IX. The metamorphosis of the remaining parts of Christ’s body the Evangelists describe thus: “And his garments became shining,” says Mark, “exceeding white like snow;” Matthew says, “as the light.” Mark adds further, “such that no fuller on earth can whiten them.” Whether Christ’s own limbs were transfigured and made luminous, though it seems plausible, yet since nothing has been said about it by the sacred writers, I likewise leave it undecided. The change of his garments, just as it was made in the same way as that of his face, is likewise described and illustrated by nearly the same similitudes and with the same emphasis. For whiteness is first attributed to them, and indeed snowy whiteness, because among all colors white excels in beauty and dignity, but snow surpasses in whiteness all other white bodies. And indeed the works of nature are for the most part such that man-made products cannot be compared with them. Therefore, scarcely any fuller or dyer among mortals can so whiten garments that they can vie with the whiteness of snow. Yet because sometimes the industry of artisans seems to emulate the very ingenuity of nature, lest anything be wanting to the force of the words or the commendation of the thing, it is added that whatever can proceed from the fuller’s art was surpassed by the whiteness of Christ’s garments. And since whiteness, especially if somewhat unusual, and light agree by some similitude, the splendor of light was also employed for representing that whiteness of Christ’s garments; hardly otherwise than as Homer, that most excellent portrayer, so to speak, of things, attributes a glittering and a kind of sparkling light not only to fiery eyes, but also to shining arms, the points of spears, and the ornamented robes of women.

X. Moreover since, as I said, there is no such radiance in human bodies naturally, wherever it exists in any person, it argues for a supernatural condition. Moses certainly, in that wonderful fellowship with God from which he drew the glory of his countenance, as Paul speaks, was raised far above the ordinary human state, and the Israelites therefore shunned his appearance, because he bore before himself

something that was abhorrent and discordant from the condition of the rest. But our bodies, which in the resurrection will become radiant, will then exceed beyond the boundaries of nature, and will attain a supernatural state. And so Christ at that time when he was transfigured, far surpassed our common humanity, and flesh and blood, as Holy Scripture is accustomed to speak, that is, the frailty of nature. Then too, such garments have in themselves likewise an argument for a certain more sublime nature. Of angels, that is, whenever they present themselves to human sight, “His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow” (Matthew 28:3). And those who wished to exalt themselves above the human state seem to have aimed at being clothed in garments whose radiance imitated the very splendor of the stars. Such was the silver robe of Agrippa, which Josephus describes as rivaling the sun’s rays, and dazzling the eyes of all beholders with its brilliance; struck by the marvelousness of which thing, they called him a god. Such was the mantle of Demetrius the Besieger, who just as he either allowed or demanded divine honors to be paid to himself, so strove to equal the majesty and radiance of his own immortal gods by the magnificence of his garment. Therefore, when God at that time invested Christ’s garments with such splendor, by this he signified that he wished to place him above the condition and dignity of all mortals. But what follows in the account makes some part of that glory.

XI. “And behold,” says Matthew, “there appeared to those three disciples Moses and Elijah, talking with Christ.” The words of Mark are almost the same. Luke calls them men; he says they were seen with glory, and adds the subject of their conversation: “they spoke,” he says, “of his departure which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” All of which must be explained briefly but point by point. Who those two men were no one can doubt; for the Evangelists indicated them by name. And since they were seen, it is necessary that they appeared in a visible and bodily form. And certainly the matter seems free from all difficulty concerning Elijah. For since he did not see death, nor suffer the separation of his soul from his body, and was received entire, that is, clothed with his own body, into heaven, why should he have laid aside his own body, to approach Christ and converse with him? For it was done in an economical way that he descended from heaven, where he enjoyed beatitude, to Mount Tabor, and



there was a fitting reason for him to do so. But no economy required that he should put off his own body, to assume some extraneous one, in order to be seen by Christ's disciples. Concerning Moses there is ambiguity. For he experienced death, and left his body on Mount Nebo. Some think that not only was the body of Moses formerly guarded by angelic ministry, lest anyone should bring it forth to the view of the Israelites, to avoid superstition and idolatry, but also preserved and defended from decay, so that Moses could resume it at the time of the transfiguration. And they either infer or suspect this from what Jude relates, that "Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses" (Jude 9). But that altercation and dispute can be understood of the time when the devil strove to bring forth the as yet uncorrupted body of Moses, in order to ensnare the Israelites with superstition. But even if dissolved and reduced to dust, God could have regathered it, if Moses' soul had to be clothed with it at the time of the transfiguration. However it may be, for in a matter so doubtful it would be rash to affirm anything with confidence, since Moses could have had his own body, I do not see why he should have put on an extraneous one instead. But if anyone should think it strange that he rose again before other believers, whose resurrection is deferred to the last day, the answer is easy: Either that resurrection was economical and temporary only, so that Moses might discharge that appearance; or, which is more probable, God granted him the prerogative of enjoying beatitude in body also before others. And since this was granted to Enoch, Elijah, and some of the number of saints who came out of the tombs at the time of Christ's resurrection, I do not see why it could not be bestowed on Moses without detracting from divine wisdom.

XII. That the bodies of both Moses and Elijah then appeared with some splendor is evident chiefly from two things. First, that Luke says they were seen "with glory." For glory, according to the usage of Scripture, is not only Light, but Light shining in an extraordinary manner. Next, that when Elijah's body was translated to heaven, it acquired supernatural and heaven-worthy qualities. For here applies that saying, 1 Corinthians 15, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Nor could the condition of Moses' body have been different, which seems to have risen again for this purpose, that after this appearance it might likewise be received into heaven. But that occasion was so far from

obscuring or obliterating the splendor of those bodies, that rather, if they had been opaque, it would have required them to be made luminous. But what some maintain, that the phrase “in glory” denotes a lesser glory than that with which Christ’s person shone around, I would readily grant. For it was fitting that Christ should be distinguished from them by some pre-eminence. But what the same persons add, that this glory was given them as if borrowed, because they had not yet received the perfect fulfillment of the promise, needs explanation. For Moses indeed had not yet attained to it. But Elijah seems to have already obtained it by that time: unless we suppose that something will be added to his glorification at the full and perfect revelation of the salvation of the Church, which I would not think ought to be denied.

XIII. Unless Luke had revealed the subject of their conversation, no mortal would have divined it. But he says thus: “They spoke of his departure which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” That the death of Christ is declared by those words, all agree. And not without reason. For man is so constituted of body and soul, that the soul, by reason of its incomparably excellent nature, is regarded as the man, but the body as the dwelling of the man. Not that each part does not essentially concur to the composition of the man, but that in comparing them with each other, where there is reason and intelligence, there man is considered to exist: so that Paul himself did not shrink from such modes of speech. For he calls the body “the tabernacle of this our earthly house” (2 Corinthians 5:1), just as if we dwelt in the body as in some tent. Hence those words in Philippians 2:23, “Having a desire to depart” (εἰς τὸ ἀναλῦσαι). But ἀναλῦσαι means “to migrate;” which is said of one who departs from the place where he formerly was, in order to betake himself elsewhere. And Peter likewise calls his death “exodus” (2 Peter 1:15). Nor do most good authors speak otherwise. But that phrase “to accomplish an exodus” seems less usual. But the union of this our flesh with the divine nature in the person of Christ, and the course of his life on earth continuous even to death, up to the resurrection, was like a task or lesson appointed to Christ by the Father, which he was fully to discharge. What therefore he began by being born, what he continued by living, that he accomplished by dying, and perfectly and completely consummated by the resurrection. So that it ought not to seem strange if he is said to have

“accomplished the exodus.” But why they spoke of that thing rather than any other, the reason seems ready at hand. The death of Christ was imminent; for the transfiguration preceded it by a short interval. For this end Christ had come into the world, that he might undergo that death; and without it, there would scarcely have been need for him to assume human nature. On this thing, as on a single hinge, the salvation of the human race was poised. No otherwise than through death could Christ arrive at that glory of which he then beheld in himself a kind of prelude. To this, as to their end, tended both the legal sacrifices of which Moses had been the legislator and institutor, and the prophetic oracles and precepts of divine worship, the decayer of which Elijah had been the restorer.

XIV. Thus we gradually come down to considering those reasons for which God appointed those two men, rather than other prophets or patriarchs, for that event. We have said that it is not without reason, what some have observed, that it was fitting that there should be witnesses of the transfiguration of Christ both from heaven and from earth. But besides the Father, who gave his testimony by an oracle, there are scarcely any equally suitable to descend for that purpose from heaven. For to say nothing of angels, whose ministry is employed about the Church, but not in giving testimony, the other spirits who are sanctified in heaven could not have discharged that office without assuming a body. But it was more equitable and advisable that Elijah, who had his own body, should be employed for that purpose, than anyone else who lacked a body. If therefore there was any ambiguity in this matter, the deliberation ought to have turned on whether Enoch or Moses should be preferred to the other. For Enoch also, like Elijah, was translated to heaven together with his body. But Moses was undoubtedly to be preferred. For this was common to Moses and Elijah, that each prefigured Christ by a fast of forty days. If not entirely common, at least there was this similarity between them, that the one was the most wise promulgator of the Law, the other its most strenuous assertor. Neither of which applies to Enoch. Then indeed a highly honorable testimony is rendered to Enoch in Scripture; but he lacked a public office in the Church, which each of the others both had in an eminent degree, and discharged admirably. To this is added that Enoch pertained to that dispensation which is called natural, while the other two belonged to the Legal economy. Of the former Enoch was the promulgator, but neither

mediator nor interpreter. Therefore he could not represent it in himself. When Moses appeared in the presence of Christ, the whole Legal economy must be thought to have appeared along with him. Finally, each dispensation indeed tended towards Christ, and we must consider, on the authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews [chapter] 11, that those who excelled in faith and holiness under it believed in Christ and derived their holiness from it. But in this the Mosaic dispensation greatly excels, that if it is compared with the other in this respect, it can alone be said of it, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4). For the Law was appointed for this end by a certain peculiar reason, to lead men to Christ. It was fitting, therefore, that those who were most eminent under the Law (but who can be compared in it with Moses and Elijah?) should by their presence before Christ exhibit and attest this purpose of the institution of the Law, and this, as it were, genius of the Law itself. And since the names of those two prophets were among the Jews most august and of incomparable authority, it was fitting that presenting themselves before Christ, they should, as it were, submit their fasces to him and revere his majesty.

XV. Luke thus continues in his narrative: "But Peter and those who were with him were weighed down with sleep; but when they awoke, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him." Namely, Christ had not only withdrawn from the crowd of other people and ascended the mountain, but also when he reached the summit of the mountain, he sought a spot somewhat secluded from his disciples, in order to pray, yet not so far that he could not be seen by them. But as he was full of zeal and very ardent in mind for prayer, he applied himself most diligently to that task. The disciples, however, whom such a burning zeal did not excite, and whom perhaps the labor of the ascent had fatigued, were overcome by sleep, while the Lord persevered long and steadfastly in that practice. Nor did this happen to them then only. Elsewhere Christ reproached them for being too sluggish and sleepy, where it was fitting for them to watch (Matthew 26:40). Yet what was done through their fault, was directed by the wise providence of God. For if they had been awake, they would have heard that conversation between Christ and the two prophets; which neither their condition nor the circumstances of the times yet permitted. For Christ had indeed warned them a little before that he would shortly suffer an

ignominious death. But they had neither sufficiently understood that, nor indeed ought they to have understood what Christ, Moses, and Elijah discussed together on that subject. For they undoubtedly related how the cross of Christ had been foretold by oracles, prefigured by sacrifices, foreshadowed by other types, and providentially designated by various prophecies of the Psalms and Prophets, and marvelous sayings. Then, how satisfaction would thereby be made to divine justice, and the way opened for the mercy of God and the gift of the Holy Spirit. And they said many such things, which were not adapted to the capacity of the disciples, until after Christ rose from the dead, and the Holy Spirit descended from heaven on the day of Pentecost. It was necessary, therefore, that they should not hear those things which could have cast scruples into their minds, and troublesome and untimely thoughts.

XVI. But yet, since they ought not to be ignorant either of the transfiguration of Christ, of which they were to be witnesses, or of the appearance of Moses and Elijah, it came to pass by the same Providence of God that, the conversation being ended, they awoke and beheld the glory of Christ and those two men standing with him. For it was necessary that they should give testimony concerning a thing not gathered from common rumor or anyone's report, but seen by their own eyes, that it might be firmly believed by the Church. But, since after the thing was done for which they had come, it did not behoove Moses and Elijah to remain longer in that place, as soon as the disciples were awake, they themselves prepared to depart. "And it came to pass, as they were departing from Christ, that Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Whence it became known to Peter that Moses and Elijah were those two who presented themselves to his sight, there is no need to inquire too curiously. It is the custom of the Evangelists to compose summaries of the histories, mentioning only those things which were necessary to be known and believed, but passing over most of the circumstances which had no or little utility. Either Moses and Elijah themselves said or did something whereby they were recognized; or Christ called them by name; or the Spirit of God suggested it to the disciples; or they inferred it from some remains of the conversation. In whatever way it happened, the matter was as certain to them as things

can be most certain and undoubted. Nor would Peter have spoken so positively, unless he had been most certainly persuaded of it.

XVII. Therefore, being astounded by the marvelous vision and enraptured by its incredible sweetness, Peter addressed Christ, calling him Rabbi or Master, as was the custom, because he, like the others, had committed himself to his teaching in order to be his disciple of special admission. 'It is good for us to be here,' he said. Immediately forgetting his family, household, friends, human affairs, and even the condition of life which he certainly did not foresee could scarcely, if at all, be endured on the mountain peak, he decided to establish his dwelling in that place. This is great evidence that on the last day, when we rise again and are transferred to heaven, that future life will carry us away into such admiration of itself that we will easily set aside the perception and memory of all other things. For our souls too, raised to a supernatural state, will be more fit to judge rightly and appropriately the excellence of the heavenly life and glory above the condition of Nature, and that manifestation of Christ and restoration of the world, together with the Church's most glorious celebration, will surpass the marvelousness of the Transfiguration by an almost infinite degree. Moreover, in asking for tabernacles, Peter has in mind the place, which was out of doors, exposed to the sun's rays in a region where the sun's approach is quite intense. However, to build houses on the summit of the mountain would be inconvenient and too costly for their meager means. And in assigning a separate tabernacle to each, to Christ, Moses, and Elijah, he thinks he is acting with due propriety, so that they would not inconvenience one another and each could act in private as he wished. He supposed there would be room for himself and the two others in Christ's tabernacle, and so he took this additional concern, and did not plan to set up a separate tent for himself.

XVIII. "But he did not know what he was saying," says Mark, "for they were terrified." There are two kinds of things that can cause a certain terror. These are "fearful" things, that is, as Aristotle says, those that are "destructive" (φθαρτικὰ) or greatly 'distressing' (λυπηρὰ). For those things that threaten death or are capable of inflicting great pain are the true causes of fear. Secondly, there are things that are

extremely admirable because of their unusual beauty or a certain incomparable excellence and preeminence (ἐξοχήν) of nature or dignity. For these not only engender a certain veneration within us, whence the frequent phrase in Homer about remarkably beautiful and exceptional things, “reverence seizes me as I behold them” (σέβας μ’ ἔχει ἐισορόωντα); but also a certain terror or amazement (θάμβος) that shakes and makes the mind tremble, scarcely different from if some grievous misfortune were impending. The former does not pertain at all to the matter of the Transfiguration: for what was there that could have made the disciples think some evil was threatening them? That the latter applies here, no one can doubt. For they had all these things: Christ’s transfiguration, the appearance of the greatest Prophets snatched away from human company many ages ago, and that extraordinary manifestation of things, which contained not only a certain strangeness but also a heavenly idea worthy of being vehemently admired by mortal men. Such admiration, when joined with a certain terror, dislodges the mind somewhat from its proper state, so that it functions less correctly and less accurately. Here, then, nearly the same thing happened to Peter as to those who, due to some perturbation of mind, wrongly assume something as a starting point from which they then reason not entirely incorrectly. For having assumed that “it is good for us to be here,” Peter inferred not altogether incorrectly that tabernacles should be made. But to make that assumption was absurd, because that transformation of Christ was not meant to be lasting, having been arranged with a certain providential purpose, namely to be a foreshadowing of Christ’s future glorification; and he ought to have remembered that Christ had not yet completed his office as Mediator.

XIX. Yet even in that perturbation, Peter certainly retained some reverence for Christ, which he indicated by that word recorded by Matthew, “If you wish, let us make three tabernacles here.” For he did not dare to plan anything unless Christ permitted and consented; he would have abandoned that plan, as he professed, if Christ’s will had offered even slight opposition. In this, he acknowledged both the wisdom of the Master as superior to his own counsel, and an authority placed above himself. Yet apart from his rashness in forming this plan, which was not unusual for him due to a certain innate fervor of temperament which most of the ancients attributed to him, he seems to have erred somewhat

in his excessive desire for the company of Moses and Elijah. For to desire the company and conversation of men removed from human life was contrary to reason. But to hope that he could learn something from their lips in the presence of Christ was untimely, and an insult to so great a teacher. During the time when the Mosaic dispensation was in force, Moses was the teacher of the Jews, on whose mouth they ought to have hung. Therefore, that they professed themselves his disciples in John 9:28 was certainly not blameworthy, unless they had done so with contempt and insult toward Christ. When the Mosaic discipline fell away and religion became corrupt, those who lived in Elijah's time ought to have obeyed his admonitions; for he was the unvanquished champion and defender of the Divine Worship and the implacable enemy, or rather the triumphant conqueror, of false gods. In succeeding ages, if anything had become depraved or forgotten in religion, it ought to have been corrected with the same zeal that burned in Elijah and according to the same standard that he followed. But with Christ's manifestation, all other teachers ought to have fallen silent, nor was there any reason for Peter to seek the words and teachings of Moses and Elijah.

XX. Therefore, "while he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And behold, a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.'" Every cloud that exists by nature tends to be opaque. For it is formed from subtle corpuscles, to be sure, but still earthly ones, which are carried aloft by some heat. Clouds become bright, however, from an impression of light which, having fallen from the heavenly bodies or kindled from some fire in the upper regions of the air, diffuses everywhere, and being received by the outer parts of the cloud, is refracted from them. Here, however, it is unlikely that anything of that sort occurred. For this entire dispensation of Christ's Transfiguration was miraculous, and outside the scope of natural causes. Therefore, we consider that cloud to have been created out of the ordinary, and composed of bodies luminous by their very nature, so that it was and appeared bright from itself, not by another's gift. For since Christ's person shone marvelously on every side, and the matter at hand was something like a prelude to Christ's glorification soon to come in heaven, everything that pertained to its administration had to accord with it in character and nature. But it should not seem strange if, as



they were enveloped by it (for that is what “entered into it” means), the disciples were afraid. For whatever happens in such a way above the order of nature, as we see afterward, has some signification of the presence of the Divine, which is accustomed to terrify human minds, not only because of its ineffable majesty, but also because conscience, awakened by a sense of sin, is then very often agitated by most acute fears.

XXI. The first use of this cloud seems to have been that it had to cut off the sight of the departing bodies of Moses and Elijah, lest Peter and the other disciples follow them with their eyes. For indulging vain curiosity, which is accustomed to anxiously investigate useless things while being nearly unconcerned about necessities, ought not to be permitted. And Luke indicates this, arranging his narrative so that the preparation of Moses and Elijah for departure, and that plan of Peter’s about building tabernacles, are continuously connected with the cloud’s arising by one thread. The other use, and by far the more important, consisted in this: that the voice of God had to be heard. It was therefore necessary that he speak: for speaking, his presence was required: and since his presence could not be sustained by mortal eyes, it had to be veiled by some covering. And what could be more fitting or suitable for this than a cloud? Sometimes he exhibited Himself to be seen in some way in human form. But it is certain that the future incarnation of Christ was hereby foretold and prefigured: which did not apply here, with Christ already manifested in the flesh. He showed himself to Moses in a burning bush that was not consumed by the fire. But there was something in that which looked to the condition of the Israelite people: which was not needed here. At other times he presented other forms to the eyes and minds of the Prophets, by which he willed to present himself to them as though present. But nearly all of those related definitely to certain particular circumstances of events and times. When no such cause for fashioning other forms existed, God enveloped himself in a cloud when he wished to address men and put forth some sign of his presence. The reason for this is readily apparent. For since he dwells in heaven, whenever he leaves his abode, it is fitting that he appear in a cloud, which seems to approach the nature of the heavens closely both in place and nature. And since he is invisible by nature and endowed with such majesty that the eyes of creatures cannot bear it, nothing can be chosen more

suitable for veiling it than a cloud, which serves him as a tent or sort of cloak in which he wraps himself, as it were, lest mortal eyes gaze upon him.

XXII. Thus he enveloped himself in a cloud on Mount Sinai; thus he was accustomed to surround the Tabernacle in the desert with a cloud; thus finally, to not be too lengthy, he once addressed Job from a cloud, about to assert his infinite power and infinite wisdom against his accusations. And indeed on Sinai he added to the cloud extraordinary sounds, and the blast of trumpets, and earthquakes, and lightnings, and whatever else there was that could engender terror in human minds. For he was promulgating a covenant terrifying and threatening by its very nature, and designed to strike human consciences. The cloud from which he addressed Job was whirling, as whirlwinds are accustomed to be, because it had to have some indication of divine wrath, on account of that man's rash words and mind roused and turbulent with grief. Finally, the cloud that enveloped and protected the Tabernacle was more tranquil and peaceful, because it foreshadowed Christ, the most gentle Savior. This one that Christ's disciples saw had nothing terrifying about it, except that it indicated God's presence. But it was bright, for the reasons I have mentioned above. To these may be added that from it would burst forth a voice which, resounding through the whole world, has suffused and illuminated it with the wondrous light of heavenly truth.

XXIII. "This is my beloved Son," God says, "in whom I am well pleased; listen to him." These words contain a declaration of Christ's condition, and furthermore a commandment. And Christ is first called the Son of God, which implies both his eternal generation and the miraculous union of the divine nature with the human. For that Christ was begotten from eternity by the Father is clear from those words of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:28: "I was brought forth," she says, "when as yet there were no deeps nor springs laden with waters." For to wish to refer this, and the many similar statements in the same place, to God's Wisdom merely insofar as it is an attribute and property of the divine nature, is at length to wish to rave against reason. For certainly no poetic ecstasy, no prophetic inspiration, no rapture of a frenzied writer out of himself is so great as to excuse the absurdity of Solomon, by far the

wisest man, if he merely wished to speak of that which is conceived in God after the manner of an intellectual virtue. Nor can that be referred elsewhere which the Apostle says, that “God created the ages through his Son” (Hebrews 1:2). For the creation of the world, which is understood by the constitution of the ages, preceded Christ’s incarnation by many ages. Wherefore, he who created those things must have existed before he became incarnate, and already then have been the Son of God. What could be said more fittingly than that he existed through generation, and thus from eternity? And there are very many other similar things to these. Concerning the theanthropic person, the matter is clear. For thus the angel speaks to Mary: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore also that holy one who is born will be called the Son of God.” To be and to be called, when the appellation is from God, are equivalent; that is, the name necessarily proves the reality of the thing. Therefore, that which was to be born holy from Mary would be the Son of God. But what was born of Mary, if not the theanthropic person? And what is the force of that word “therefore,” if it does not indicate that that which was to be born of Mary would be called the Son of God for this reason, that it was conceived by the overshadowing of the power of the Most High and the efficacy of the Holy Spirit? There are indeed not a few other such things which prove the same point. For what some babble about the name of Son being imposed upon the person of Christ on account of the mediatorial office alone, that is alien to Sacred Scripture and to true Religion.

XXIV. The most learned interpreter lays emphasis on the article “the” in that statement. If he had done so only in the first part of it, it could certainly have been borne, and its emphasis could be referred to the fact that God had promised the Son through the oracles of the prophets, and that the Church therefore eagerly desired and patiently awaited him who had been designated so long beforehand. But in that word “the beloved,” there does not seem to be a need to lay emphasis on it. For here “beloved,” in my judgment, is the same as “only-begotten.” For these two are usually confused, because he who is the Only Son is vehemently loved. Therefore even in the case of one-eyed people, the eye that is sound is called “beloved.” And I am led to think thus by these considerations: first, that Christ is thus distinguished from those to whom the appellation of sons of God is given for another reason; next,

that he who calls him the Only-begotten necessarily says that he is beloved. But the word “beloved,” if considered by itself, does not likewise necessarily signify only-begotten. Finally, that phrase “in whom I am well-pleased” seems to have signified love quite effectively, so that there was no need to repeat the same thing with two phrases. For it signifies not only the vehemence of love, but the condition of the object, so excellent and worthy to be loved that it satisfies the desire of the lover, just as the form of the heavens is thought to satisfy the full craving of matter, so that it requires nothing further and rests permanently and indivisibly in that form. For since in Sacred Scripture “well-pleasedness” denotes two things, namely, love whose cause is not in the thing loved, and also love which the qualities of the thing loved have brought about, it is right that we consider Christ to be supremely beloved because he is supremely worthy to be loved.

XXV. These things pertain to his person; the commandment, “Listen to him,” relates to his office, inasmuch as he is the supreme Prophet and supreme Teacher of the Church. For in the hearing of words there are usually three things: the striking of the sounds on the ears; the understanding of what is said; and the assent of the mind or agreement. Brute animals are capable of the first, for they have ears which the sound of articulate words can strike. The second belongs to humans, but is common to all of them, for they are endowed with the faculty which can grasp what is signified by articulate words. The third belongs to disciples, who are led by the authority of the Teacher. For the knowledge of the truth itself, whose evidence persuades the mind, is valid most of the time in this respect. But for the most part, disciples accommodate their assent to what he says out of deference to the Teacher’s authority. Here, then, is meant that hearing which includes assent. For that voice establishes Christ as the Teacher, and by that command we are bidden to give him our assent.

XXVI. And here three things must be carefully observed. One is that a comparison is drawn between Christ and Moses and Elijah, whose office of teacher is abrogated. For when they were invested with such great authority in the Jewish Church, to establish another teacher from whose lips we ought to hang is nothing else than to command the others to be silent and to draw away the disciples from

them, so that they may transfer to the discipline of that one alone. The second is that here there is a manifest allusion to the promise found in Deuteronomy 18:15: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.” For the heavenly voice signifies that this oracle has been fulfilled in Christ, whom God raised up in the fullness of time to discharge the office of supreme Teacher in the Church, so that no further revelation or new dispensation is to be awaited, since God designated him alone from whose lips the remaining ones would draw the life-giving streams and pour them forth and propagate them throughout the world. The third point, finally, is that since all doctrine such as the Christian is divided into two heads—of dogmas, by whose truth the mind is imbued, and of practical precepts, by which conduct is formed to piety and virtue—that hearing comprehends both. For we are not disciples of Christ if, assenting in some measure to the dogmas, we reject the moral precepts; nor indeed can we be his disciples if we profess obedience in respect to the practical precepts while rejecting those dogmas with which the mind ought to be imbued and enlightened. And indeed שמע and ἀκούει, among the Hebrews and Greeks, signify both of those things: namely, to believe and to obey. Indeed, in Latin one is said to be “obedient to commands” (*dicta audiens*) who complies with the one inviting and obeys the one commanding.

XXVII. “What then?” someone may say, “Are no prophets or apostles to be heeded except Christ alone? And not even Moses, to whom God granted this privilege of conversing with him as a friend converses with a friend face to face, while revealing himself to the rest as it were through riddles? Are not even his precepts, so wise and so divine, to be heeded?” The response concerning the Apostles is easy. Christ himself said to them, “He who hears you hears me,” and, “Just as the Father has granted me a kingdom, so I grant to you.” That is, if we consider the dogmas of the Apostles, they were handed down to them by Christ; but if their office, it was committed to them on this condition, that they would discharge it with supreme authority after Christ in the Church. Therefore, to hear the Apostles is to listen to Christ himself. The status of the Prophets was such, their office was to expound, confirm, and preserve the Law instituted by Moses and that whole dispensation of which he was the interpreter,

until the coming of Christ, and to impress it on the minds of men, each in his own time and place. What therefore will have been answered concerning Moses, must be considered to have been said likewise concerning them. But in Moses, the office itself and what he taught by virtue of the office must be distinguished. The office was extinguished with him; nor when he revived, could his office revive with him. For it was such as to be referred to Christ as the means to the end, the type to the reality. But with the end having been attained and the truth exhibited, the means had to cease and the types to vanish. But what he taught by virtue of his office was either drawn from the fountains of Nature, or pertained to the Evangelical covenant as its first beginnings and rudiments, or finally was purely legal, that is, designed merely for a time. The natural teachings had neither Christ nor Moses as their author, and are as it were the foundations laid by the nature of things itself, upon which the Christian Religion is built. The beginnings of the Evangelical covenant accord in nature with the covenant itself, and are considered part of the same dispensation. Therefore, Moses did not administer those things as Mediator, but as an attendant of future things, into which those rudiments flowed like rivulets into a great river, or burst forth like seeds into a harvest, having been absorbed or dissipated so as not to be recognized. The legal things must be entirely abolished, that time having elapsed during which they were to endure.

XXVIII. But how can we listen to Christ, who no longer dwells among men, nor did he leave behind any written monuments of his teaching? Certainly it is a rule of law that “he who acts through another is seen to act through himself.” Christ alone is indeed the primary Teacher, appointed in God’s very place to supply us with saving doctrine. The Apostles were merely his subordinate delegates, nor did they ever attempt or accomplish anything of that kind except in his name. But in such a subordinate Teacher, two things must be considered: namely Wisdom and Authority. Indeed, the Apostles had such great Wisdom that in the matter of Religion they could neither be deceived themselves nor deceive others. For the Holy Spirit was supplied to them in such abundance that he guided them “into all truth” (John 16:13). Moreover, they had such great Authority as could fall to mere men to the greatest degree, by the will of Christ our Lord. For what greater thing can be said than that they are

proclaimed to sit on twelve thrones from which they judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:30), that is, they exercise supreme power after Christ? Therefore, whatever they taught, Christ himself is considered to have taught; whatever they wrote, he is considered to have written; whatever writings by others they approved, he is considered to have approved. Nor therefore is anything to be detracted from what has been handed down to us by the Apostles, if we wish Christ's own authority to be kept safe and sound; nor indeed is anything to be added, unless it is clearly established that the one who adds it is endowed with apostolic authority. But certainly no one on earth was an Apostle after they were received into heaven, those whom Christ himself created as such with His own mouth while still acting on earth.

XXIX. These things follow in Matthew: "And when the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid." In which it may be doubted whether there is a *hysteron proteron* (ὕστερον πρότερον). For the fall could precede, and fear follow. Fear could also precede, and so strike the disciples that they fell. This, therefore, must be examined a little more carefully. To begin with this, that divine voice had to be believed. But this could not be obtained unless it was distinguished by certain things in such a way that it could be easily recognized that it did not proceed from natural causes. For each thing has its own characteristics by which it shows its origin, and in all effects the traces of their causes are impressed. Among those characteristics was undoubtedly the extraordinary magnitude of the sound, which immeasurably surpassed human voices. Therefore Nonnus, in a similar matter, somewhere calls such a voice "a voice echoing like thunder," because it imitates the crash of thunder. But the impact of such a voice heard from nearby strikes the ears with such force that it disturbs the spirits, shakes the brain, and interrupts and interferes with the natural economy of the body which serves the motive faculty, so that strength does not flow into the passages. One must therefore fall then, and the fall is nearly on the face, because with the knees first bent, the remaining mass of the body leans on the front parts. The fall could therefore in some way precede the fear, because that physical operation of the object precedes the moral one.

XXX. Again, that voice, as has already been observed, had a signification of the presence of the Divine, which naturally terrifies. But every disturbance of the mind moves the body; but none more vehemently than fear, which, as the saying goes, expectorates wisdom from the mind, so weakens the strength and debilitates the limbs, and induces trembling in the knees, and finally, when it is very great, so hinders with torpor that in that state no one is in control of himself. And if that appearance was first presented to the minds of the disciples, it could have cast them down as if thunderstruck. And besides other causes, a sense of piety made them fall forward on their faces rather than fall on their side or back. For those who think they have the Divine present prostrate themselves on their faces in adoration. Therefore, where piety inclined them, the magnitude of dread impelled them, and what had been spontaneous in the beginning was made in some way violent by the vehemence of the disturbance. Indeed, I could hardly judge which happened first, much less pronounce definitively. Since the same effect could come from those two causes, it is not absurd that they concurred in such a way and each made its attack with such speed on the faculty destined for it by nature, that not even those who felt it could notice which acted first and which later; so far is it from being accurately distinguished by us now. However the matter may be, it argues the weakness of our nature. For the fact that the bodily senses are so struck by the impact of extraordinary and supernatural things that such a great commotion of the whole body arises from it, shows that the strength of nature is immediately proportioned to the measure of natural objects, outside of whose scope they collapse when drawn out. But for the mind to be terrified and dislodged from its state by the presence of the divine nature is an argument both of human weakness and of the consciousness of sin.

XXXI. "Then Jesus came to them," Matthew says, "and touched them and said, 'Rise, and do not be afraid.'" Christ came to them: why so? Moved by affection and mercy, lest they suffer something more serious from that disturbance. For sometimes stupor arising from such causes, if it is more prolonged, is continued with death; and great agitation, unless it is relieved, miserably torments the mind, so that no passion is more hostile to men. Therefore, it had to be provided that they not fall into that state either in body or in mind, which would bring some grief to Christ himself, in accordance with his



benevolence and kindness toward the disciples. For just as the lamentable state of Lazarus lying in the tomb brought tears to his eyes, so he could grieve on account of some grave calamity of his disciples. But here it must be noted that he did not rebuke his disciples, did not call them “of little faith,” which frequently happened with him, nor finally declare by anything that their disturbance displeased him. If you ask the reason, it is this: there the fault was avoidable, if they had wished. Here, it was a natural weakness, which is scarcely in our power. There fear arose from things perhaps formidable, but against which it was permitted to strengthen the mind, both through the space of time that was left for deliberation, and from the consideration of other objects that were able to engender confidence. Here the matter was so sudden, and filled the minds of the disciples with such great dread before they set their mind to think, that they could neither go against the rising disturbance nor resist it when it arose.

XXXII. To rouse them, Christ employed two things which are apt to recall the mind, whether stunned, or buried in sleep, or seized by lethargy: namely, touch and speech. For when we touch someone sleeping with the hand, in that part which we grasp we awaken the slumbering sense, and with the sense the spirits, which from there run to other places and similarly affect the remaining parts of the body; whence comes the awakening of the faculties in the other senses. But when we address him a little more vehemently, besides the fact that the spirits are awakened in the ears in the same way, from which sense flows to the other organs, the articulated words generate certain phantasms in the imagination, which both move by themselves and move the intellect; from which it happens that sleep is more effectively shaken off. But it is unlikely that Christ cried out loudly, or that he seized the disciples and shook them violently; nor is there anything in Matthew’s narrative that suggests this. But a light touch and a voice not very intense are scarcely enough to awaken men who are nearly thunderstruck. Therefore, there seems to be something more hidden here. When Christ was about to perform miracles, he used to employ certain things for them which, although altogether unequal to the performance of miracles, nevertheless had a certain character of similarity, so that if miracles could be effected by any natural causes, they would be effected by those or similar causes. Thus, when about to raise Lazarus, he cried out, “Lazarus, come out.” For so we compel those oppressed by deep sleep to

awaken. So he anointed the eyes of the blind man with his saliva, in the manner of an ointment suitable for lessening the discomforts of the eyelids; not so that they might produce a thing as great as a miracle, which only the infinite power of God is able to accomplish, but that he might determine the minds of men, otherwise vague and fluctuating, to what was being done and to the consideration of his power. Therefore, following this custom in this place, he applied those external signs rather than causes to the work, for the performance of which he supplied some interior and miraculous power.

XXXIII. Yet it must not be carelessly passed over that he said, "Do not be afraid." For the voice itself is one thing, insofar as it has an articulate sound which physically moves the sense of hearing when it strikes the ears; but what it signifies by agreement is another, and is apt to move the mind morally. Therefore, after he had awakened the disciples not so much by voice and sound, as I said, as by some internal power, they were able to comprehend in their mind what that was, "Do not be afraid." But every such exhortation is effective either because it has conjoined with it certain arguments for trusting, even apart from consideration of the person exhorting; or it moves by that reason alone, that he who exhorts is so great that he must not be thought to do it rashly or uselessly. The former has no place here. For what was present before their eyes that they should trust? But the latter incitement ought to have been most effective for them to have confidence. For they ought to have considered that he whom they had recognized as the Son of God, and whom they had seen commanding the winds and storms, desperate diseases, stubborn demons, and death itself, was able to free them from every danger. But that, whatever it was, was external, devoid of all power, unless it obtained a faculty well and suitably disposed. And so some spiritual force had to be added as a companion to the external exhortation. And this is the difference between the efficacy by which they were aroused from their torpor, and the cause which took away fear from their mind, that the former acted merely physically, if that is physical which does not happen by the intervention of the intellect moved by an object; the latter was rather moral, or approached more closely to the nature of moral things, because fear did not otherwise depart from the appetite, except by the command of the intellect which the external object had powerfully affected.

XXXIV. That Christ's exhortation and command did not lack success, Mark makes clear, who speaks thus: "And suddenly, when they had looked around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them." They looked around, therefore, and having recognized Christ after a short interval, they noticed that he had been left alone, with those two Prophets who had stood by a little before having been removed from sight. This seems to have been observed by Mark and the other Evangelists for no other reason than to signify that Moses and Elijah had departed. And it was certainly worthwhile to have signified this. For from it the disciples understood that Elijah's descent from heaven and the appearance of Moses raised from the dead on that mountain had been intended only for this, that they might be present at that glorious Transfiguration of Christ, so that Peter should no longer think that he ought to fix a home for himself in that place. Yet either I am greatly deceived, or something further is hinted at. When they previously planned to build Tabernacles, they seem to have had this in mind, that those two Prophets should be joined with Christ, if not with equal authority, at least as reserves in the Doctorate, and as Masters of a lower bench. For those names were too magnificent among the Jews for them to have designated them as private individuals or disciples of the same order as themselves. Therefore, so that they might abandon every such thought, Christ was left entirely alone to whom they might direct their zeal. And this agrees with the saying "Listen to him," which, as we have already said, renounced all authority for Moses and Elijah and any other Teacher for future time.

XXXV. With the matter thus transacted, and Christ's face and garments restored to their former state, he and his disciples began to descend from the mountain. "And as they were coming down, Jesus commanded them, saying, 'Tell no one what you have seen, until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.'" There is no reason for us to inquire why Christ prohibited this on the slope rather than on the summit of the mountain. For if he had done it on the summit itself, there would likewise be place for asking why he did not rather put off commanding it until they descended. Things indifferent by their nature are determined by a small moment. What if he wanted to grant some space to them, still somewhat perturbed, to collect their thoughts, so that they might be both more attentive and more retentive of the prohibition, lest after they had returned to the crowds, it slip away through

forgetfulness? But why he prohibited it altogether is something whose cause can be sought. For neither did it seem that so great a matter ought to be concealed, nor that those witnesses ought to have been brought to it, if it was necessary for it to be kept silent. But what need was there to lead down Moses from heaven and to call forth Elijah from an unknown place with such great effort, so that their appearance might be wrapped in eternal silence?

XXXVI. Of course, Christ did not forbid them to say it altogether or absolutely, but only “until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.” Doubtless, if those three had made it known before that time, it would perhaps have been believed by the other disciples; it would undoubtedly have been rejected by the unbelieving Jews. For if they denied that the things that fell before their own eyes had happened, or interpreted them perversely, and twisted them to causes other than the true ones, to such an extent that they referred the expulsion of demons by Christ, with the height of blasphemy, to magic arts and to some collusion with the Devil himself; how insolently would they have mocked that which rested on the testimony of Christ alone, and of two or three of his disciples? But if it was not believed at all, it would have provided an opportunity for slandering and declaiming, as if Christ were some deceiver and trickster and itinerant quack who falsely claimed that wondrous things had been done by him or by God for his sake, for the purpose of begging for fame. Add to this, moreover, that during the dispensation of Christ’s weakness, he conducted himself most modestly, and in a manner befitting his state of self-emptying. Therefore, he always most diligently shunned things that were a little too magnificent, except if any could not be avoided because they were necessary and had been foretold by the Prophets, as when he entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey in a solemn procession. He certainly had to be transfigured, then, for the wisest reasons. For he had to be strengthened both by that foretaste of his future glorification, and by that testimony of paternal goodwill in the face of his impending death; and the Church of subsequent times had to be taught by that argument how great both is and will be the one in whom it has believed and whom it has embraced as Redeemer. He did not want the fame of the Transfiguration to spread as long as the weakness of his flesh did not seem to admit such great glory.

XXXVII. After his resurrection, there was no reason why the Transfiguration should be kept silent. For, first, he had begun to put off “flesh and blood,” that is, the state of weak nature, and having died and been called back to life, he was either already glorified, with his self-emptying ended, or he was standing in the vestibule of his glory. Therefore, the splendor of the Transfiguration no longer clashed with the state which he had entered through the resurrection. Then, it was much more credible at that time than before. For was it absurd or alien to faith that he whom God had led out from the power of death after an ignominious and so bloody punishment, and had gifted with incorruption and immortality, had in some way foretasted heavenly glory in the Transfiguration? And so, for those to whom his resurrection was not unbelievable, it was easy to persuade them of the Transfiguration. Those who were going to consider the story of the Transfiguration fabulous were likewise not going to believe the testimony about the resurrection. Finally, if the Transfiguration was not some part of Christ's glory, it was nevertheless some representation of it, and if it is permissible to speak in this way, a “preparation and prelude.” Therefore, its manifestation pertained to the full and clear preaching of the Gospel. But that ought to have been deferred not only until after Christ's resurrection, but also until after his ascension into heaven. And so the Transfiguration could indeed be made known among the disciples immediately after the resurrection. But it was not fitting for it to be preached openly and before all indifferently, until Christ had obtained that glory of which it was a specimen and, as it were, a small part taken from the whole.

XXXVIII. Different people have explained differently why Christ called himself the “Son of Man.” We are not dealing with that now, because it has nothing to do with the doctrine of the Transfiguration. Certainly “Son of Man,” according to Hebrew idiom, means “man,” just as “Son of the King” means “King” in Psalm 72:1. Furthermore, Man, insofar as he is “flesh and blood,” is a weak and almost contemptible creature. But insofar as he is endowed with reason, he excels above all other visible things, and is the most excellent nature. According to this twofold way of considering man, one can go in two discrepant interpretations of that name. For either Christ called himself the Son of Man modestly and

humbly, to indicate that he was a man, and indeed a weak man - for he was like us in all things, except for sin. Or he called himself man "par excellence," because he was first of all in both dignity and virtue, and by far the most excellent. As if Cicero had called himself "the orator," or Homer "the poet." Neither seems accurate enough. For that designation, in nearly all the places where it is used, contains in itself a signification of some dignity. But Christ, as he was most modest and shunned all boasting, would never have designated himself in this "preeminent" way, if he had had nothing else in view. It seems that it was customary at that time in the Jewish Church for the state of the Church under the Messiah to be called the "kingdom of heaven," and the Messiah himself the "Son of Man." And just as some thought that the passage in Daniel 2:44 provided the occasion for the former expression, so the passage of the same Prophet in chapter 7, verse 13, undoubtedly provided the reason for the latter: "Behold, one like a Son of Man was coming with the clouds of heaven." These words denote only this: that someone came with the clouds who was indeed not a man (for the Son of God had not yet assumed human nature), but who nevertheless imitated human nature in external and visible appearance. But since this passage was commonly understood to refer to the Messiah, as it should have been, it came about that the Messiah was called the "Son of Man." Since this was a common usage among the Jews, he no more hesitated to call himself the "Son of Man" than to call his Church and Religion the "kingdom of heaven."

XXXIX. Be that as it may, the disciples obeyed Christ's prohibition. For Luke relates it thus: "But they kept silent and reported nothing of what they had seen to anyone during that time." Moreover, Mark adds that "they asked one another what this 'rising from the dead' meant." Of these, one deserves praise, the other blame. For as to the first, there are indeed appropriate times for speaking and for keeping silent, which are observed without difficulty by the wise. However, what ought to be secret is, for the most part, kept in check with difficulty by most people. For they want others to know that they were judged worthy to be entrusted with secrets. Likewise, they think they can win friends in this way, when they similarly judge them worthy to become sharers of the same secrets. And if there are any other causes of this kind of babbling, through which most people flow this way and that, as if they were

full of cracks. Add that we always strive for what is forbidden, and the more diligently we have been ordered to be silent, the more vehemently we desire to blab. Therefore, that there was such strength in the minds of the disciples that they did not blurt out that secret, either through intemperance of the tongue or through defiance of the mind against the command of Christ, cannot but be deservedly praised.

XL. In the other matter it cannot be said how preposterous their reasoning was, and how confused. For it is no wonder that the Gentiles were ignorant of what the resurrection of the dead was, and hesitated at its mention, and even were astounded. But for Jewish men, living in the time of Christ, and educated in his teaching for nearly three whole years, to have asked what that was, is a thing almost unbelievable, if it did not have a divinely inspired writer as its author. Besides other oracles of earlier Prophets, Daniel had promised the universal resurrection in explicit words (Dan. 12:2). And that hope had taken hold of all the Jews, except the Sadducees. The history of Elisha, which the Disciples of Christ ought not to have been ignorant of, was witness that some had been raised from the dead out of the ordinary and through a miracle. In their very presence and sight, Christ had raised some dead. What, then, do they mean when they ask what the resurrection of the dead is? For it is unlikely that all these things had slipped from their memory, nor indeed is it much more likely what some say here, that the disciples thought that the souls of those who had previously risen were not “in Hades,” that is, separated from the body. Therefore, what Mark seems to have expressed a little more generally, “what ‘rising from the dead’ means,” we think should be understood of Christ’s resurrection. God had foretold that he would send the Messiah in such a way that he promised, in the same prophecies of the Prophets, both that he would be King and that he would reign forever. But he could not reign unless he lived. And so the Jews had absorbed in their minds this opinion about the Messiah, that his life would have no end. For there are indeed many passages of the Old Testament in which it had been foretold that Christ would die. And Isaiah 53 seems to have narrated it historically rather than prophetically foretold it, so clearly did he speak about this matter. But that clarity, which now, with the Gospel revealed, is obvious and open to anyone, was once involved in some riddles, so that what was

contained in those oracles could not be grasped by minds that were not at all perceptive, and were devoted to carnal things, and were thoroughly imbued with preconceived opinions about the eternity and magnificence of the Messiah's kingdom. But how could they have brought themselves to believe that he whom they thought would live forever would be raised from the dead? That was the reason why the Disciples of Christ, hindered by the same errors as the rest of the Jews, shuddered and were almost astounded whenever Christ reminded them of the death that was imminent for him, as if at the hearing of something unbelievable and in some way abominable. But if they shrank from the mention of Christ's death, it followed that his resurrection seemed to them an astonishing thing and impossible to understand. Therefore, Mark adds in this very ninth chapter, in which he related the story of the Transfiguration: Christ was teaching his disciples and saying to them, "The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men, who will kill him; but having been killed, he will rise on the third day. But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask him." These are the things we have to say about that wondrous history, in which God wished to show both who Christ was, and what sort of person he would be. To him, with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, be praise, honor, and glory for all eternity. Amen.

THE END.