

Patrick Schreiner. *The Transfiguration of Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Reading*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024. 208 pages. \$26.99.

Contributing to the current Evangelical reappropriation of patristic theology, this wide-ranging exploration of Jesus' Transfiguration combines folksy personal anecdotes and references to popular culture (*The Lord of the Rings*, Seinfeld, Harry Potter, and Kung Fu Panda) with abundant citations of Orthodox commentators likely unfamiliar to most readers (Cyril of Alexandria, Ephrem the Syrian, Pantaleon, Timothy of Antioch, Gregory Palamas, Leo the Wise, Anastasius of Sinai, Maximus the Confessor, and many others).

Schreiner's argument is that, reflecting the Messiah's pre-existent and future majesty, "the transfiguration reveals Jesus as both the heavenly glorious Son and the earthly suffering messianic Son" (94). Lamenting its relative neglect in Western tradition, Schreiner examines this episode from three perspectives: "The Glorious Setting" (chapter 2); "The Glorious Signs" (chapter 3); and "The Glorious Saying" (chapter 4). Via the four classical perspectives on interpretation—literal (historical), spiritual (typological/allegorical), tropological (moral), and anagogical (eschatological)—each detail (timing, setting, participants, dialogue, and so on) becomes a springboard for a "globally expansive reconstructive" (36) exploration of related theological themes and symbols, generating "a multivalence of meaning" (86). Thus, for example, Peter, James, and John become "new covenant priests" (48); Jesus' luminous face and robes inspire extended discussion of light as characteristic of God, with the Son proceeding from the Father as "light from light" (60–67). "The cloud symbolizes divine presence—more specifically, the Holy Spirit" (72), rendering the Transfiguration fully Trinitarian; the voice from heaven ("This is my beloved Son") simultaneously alludes to the "sacrifice" of Isaac, Psalm 2, and the suffering servant of Isaiah 42, as well as Daniel's "Ancient of Days" and "one like a son of man" (102–117); "Listen to him" is intended as a "new covenant Shema" (123). Indeed, the Transfiguration accounts are said to mirror Adam's prelapsarian glory, along with the baptism, passion, resurrection, ascension, and return of Christ (130–144). All this seems like a lot of weight for one set of texts to bear.

With the focus primarily on doctrinal considerations, there is less attention to the moral or "tropological" sense of Scripture. Schreiner's brief discussions of spiritual illumination and participation in the divine nature (88–90, 124–127) would have benefited from attention to Eastern Orthodox iconography, which depicts the light of Transfiguration materially transforming all three disciples on Mount Tabor—and with them, those who view such icons devotionally.

In taking the approach that he does, Schreiner seems not to recognize that de-anchoring exegesis from its textual foundations (if only in part) unwittingly cedes an axiomatic Reformation principle, which is the determinative priority of the "plain sense" of Scripture. A fourfold interpretative horizon is governed by the *regula fidei* or "rule of faith"—not, however, in the usual Protestant sense that interpretation of Scripture must be governed by Scripture (xv), but in the broader, Catholic sense of *theological* tradition, crystalized in Vincent of Lérins's formula: "What has been believed everywhere, always, and by all." Schreiner assumes a consensus of orthodox theological conviction, but without sufficiently acknowledging it as such or—apart from an important discussion of "Christological Grammar" in chapter 4—clearly articulating its contours. The classic Protestant impulse has been to subject Christian theology to the standard (hence, "canon") of Scripture; theological exegesis takes the opposite tack, subjecting Scripture to theology (56). Whereas Protestantism has traditionally anchored

theological repristination in the faith and practice of the New Testament church, this study appeals instead to Christological affirmations from the ecumenical councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon.

However moot such matters may appear to a conservative Evangelical audience, they are critical for all readers of sacred texts, preachers among them, for they pose a key question: on what basis may we distinguish between valid and invalid forms of interpretation? Can a single text convey anything and everything we wish it to, as seems to be the case here, even within the bounds of traditional orthodoxy? In reviewing previous interpretations of this important passage, Schreiner catalogues the full range of its possible meanings. Yet freighting a single pericope with so many possibilities underscores, for preachers especially, the importance of letting Scripture speak for itself.

This study demonstrates the difference between biblical interpretation in the modern sense and the history of interpretation. Schreiner provides a fascinating introduction to the latter, highlighting a rich tradition that until recently has been largely overlooked in the West. It concludes with an extensive reference bibliography and indexes. As a minor point, the name index is incomplete, listing few of the many patristic authorities cited in the course of discussion.

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