



Texts in Context

The Mystery of the Transfiguration: Luke 9:28-36 (37-43)

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I. MYSTERION

“WHILE HE WAS PRAYING, THE APPEARANCE OF HIS FACE CHANGED, AND HIS clothes became dazzling white....[w]hen the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone.” Between those lines, something numinous, ineffable, happened. What was it? How long did it take? Was it a vision, a trance, an ecstatic episode? And what are those, anyway? Whatever happened on the mountain burned itself into the corporate memory of the early church. Not only in the synoptics, but in Paul and Peter as well. And one might argue that the same branded memory spread throughout the entirety of the Fourth Gospel, with its leitmotif of glory.

We have in Luke 9, as in Mark 9 and Matthew 17, a christophany, a theophany, an epiphany, a revelation of the divine. We use those terms, yet none of them adequately describes what Luke and the others evangelists struggle to portray, again inadequately, in narrative form. We could say that in these accounts we are encountered, as were Peter, James, and John, by mystery. In Rudolph Otto’s *mysterium tremendum* we sense a deeper resonance. I choose the Greek *mysterion*, though I must confess my choice is as much influenced by the sound of that word on my ear as by any other reason.

Mysterion...back in 1978, Samuel Terrien authored *The Elusive Presence*. He attempted to lay the groundwork for a new biblical theology on the theme of the presence of God. At the close of his work, he wrote:

In biblical faith, human beings discern that presence as a surging which soon vanishes and leaves in its disappearance an absence that has been overcome. It is neither absolute nor eternal but elusive and fragile, even and especially when human beings seek to prolong it in the form of cultus. The collective act of worship seems to be both the indispensable vehicle of presence and its destroyer....It is

when presence escapes man's grasp that it surges, survives, or returns. It is also when human beings meet in social responsibility that presence, once vanished, is heard....In biblical faith, presence eludes but does not delude. The hearing of the name, which is obedience to the will and the decision to live now for an eternal future, becomes the proleptic vision of the glory.¹

As finely crafted as Terrien's summary is, it too is inadequate—perhaps because of its prose character, written with great emphasis on precision and an economy of words. Prose written with a greater concern for beauty might be better. However, as I've worked with the Lukan account of the wonder of the transfiguration, nothing I've read quite matches this poem of Edwin Muir:

So from the ground we felt that virtue branch
Through all our veins till we were whole, our wrists
As fresh and pure as water from a well,
Our hands made new to handle holy things,
The source of all our seeing rinsed and cleansed
Till earth and light and water entering there
Gave back to us the clear unfallen world.
We would have thrown our clothes away for lightness,
But that even they, though sour and travel stained,
Seemed, like our flesh, made of immortal substance,
And the soiled flax and wool lay light upon us
Like friendly wonders, flower and flock entwined
As in a morning field. Was it a vision?
Or did we see that day the unseeable
One glory of the everlasting world
Perpetually at work, though never seen
Since Eden locked the gate that's everywhere
And nowhere? Was the change in us alone,
And the enormous earth still left forlorn,
An exile or a prisoner? Yet the world
We saw that day made this unreal, for all
Was in its place. The painted animals
Assembled there in gentle congregations,
Or sought apart their leafy oratories,
Or walked in peace, the wild and tame together,
As if, also for them, the day had come.
The shepherds' hovels shone, for underneath
The soot we saw the stone clean at the heart
As on the starting-day. The refuse heaps
Were grained with that fine dust that made the world;
For he had said, "To the pure all things are pure."
And when we went into the town, he with us,
The lurkers under doorways, murderers,
With rags tied round their feet for silence, came
Out of themselves to us and were with us,

¹Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978) 476-477.

And those who hide within the labyrinth
Of their own loneliness and greatness came,
And those entangled in their own devices,
The silent and the garrulous liars, all
Stepped out of their dungeons and were free.
Reality or vision, this we have seen.
If it had lasted but another moment
It might have held forever! But the world
Rolled back into its place, and we are here,
And all that radiant kingdom lies forlorn,
As if it had never stirred; no human voice
Is heard among its meadows, but it speaks
To itself alone, alone it flowers and shines
And blossoms for itself while time runs on.²

All this beyond our control to bring to pass or to withstand. Only poetry, I think, comes near to giving expression to this wonder, since poetry exhibits in language the same elusive presence, so near as to feel as if the word is in our hearts and yet gone when we grasp for it. How I remember Gertrude Webster, with great passion, trying to get us eighth graders to memorize a poem in the hopes that maybe, just maybe, against all odds, the wonder of the words would finally live in our hearts. Such valiant effort. At the time just a pain. Yet fifty years later I realize the gift she is still giving. Miss Webster didn't introduce us to Gerard Manly Hopkins; he came along many years later. In just two lines he is poetically present on the mountain:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil.³

Again, beyond our control, but like Peter and his proposal to set up three *suc-coth*, we too are tempted to pitch a few tents. Peter at least had the tradition of wilderness wandering and the corporate memory of an elusive God who led in pillars of cloud and fire, which made tents the housing of choice. We hanker for something more stable. In October 1999, a group of us on pilgrimage in the middle east were whisked up to the top of Mt. Tabor by cabbies whose speed on hairpin turns generated more wonder than did the Church of the Transfiguration, which was our goal. Inside the Franciscan church, we visited on either side the chapels of Moses and Elijah. Outside, looking back, one of our group announced, "Look! What Peter was kept from doing finally got done!" And, I might add, not with tents, but with stone and mosaics executed by fine Italian artisans.

We long for the *mysterion*. We sense, we know, some have experienced indelibly the elusive presence. We sense most deeply that it doesn't exist only in us or for us. As Muir queried, "Was the change in us alone?" A careful look at any of the synoptic accounts makes it clear that the very way of telling the story sets the events

²Edwin Muir, *Collected Poems* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965) 198-200.

³James Reeves, *Selected Poems of Gerard Manly Hopkins* (London: Heinemann, 1953) 18.

outside the lives of those who were present, as well as those of the evangelists who entered it into the church's written memory. The point, I think, is not that we should go looking for evidence that might demonstrate the historicity of what happened. Nor is the point to explain on the basis of the texts the interior psychic goings-on of Peter, James, and John. Like the poem, the event of the elusive presence stands outside of us, *extra nos*, beckoning, alluring, addressing us, even as it escapes our grasp. *Mysterion*.

II. GLORY

Comparing the transfiguration accounts of Matthew and Mark with Luke one can see some significant changes made by the third evangelist. Matthew and Mark read identically, "And he was transfigured before them" (Matt 17:2 and Mark 9:2). The Greek is identical as well. The description of the event is bold and objective. The three disciples seem to be standing there wide awake; and, with eyes wide open, they see everything. Luke, on the other hand, makes some distinctive interpretive changes. With great subtlety he introduces a sense of distance between the disciples and what they behold. The word "transfigured" does not appear in the text. And the disciples are described as "weighed down with sleep," as they will be later at Gethsemane. What they see is not the transfiguration itself but rather the *results* of the transfiguration: "They saw his glory" (Luke 9:32). They saw his *glory*. That's the heart of it.

In Luke's account, Moses and Elijah are suddenly present and talking with Jesus. "They appeared in glory," writes Luke (9:31). But of Jesus he writes, "They saw his glory." Whether the glory in which Moses and Elijah appeared originates in Jesus or from some other source, Luke clearly centers the event on Jesus, even as Matthew and Mark do (though they do not use the term glory). And all three evangelists present Moses and Elijah, the premier bearers of Torah and prophetic word, in conversation with Jesus. One could get the idea that we have three equals here. Indeed, Moses and Elijah make up pretty good company to keep. But Luke, with the content of the conversation, overheard as it were by the three disciples and the reader, makes it clear that Moses and Elijah are riveted on the departure, the exodus of Jesus at Jerusalem. To make it utterly clear that Jesus is unique, Luke, like Matthew and Mark, has the voice from the cloud say, "This is my Son, my Chosen," followed by Jesus being found alone by the disciples. He is the one whose glory they saw. Glory—how are we to understand that word?

Several years back Fred Meuser, then president of Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio, preached the sermon at the dedication of the new Gloria Dei Chapel. Even in the reading, that sermon was riveting. What stuck out for me was his presentation of the word glory. Though I no longer have that sermon, I recall Meuser saying that the root of glory, *kabod* in Hebrew, means "heavy, weighty, to be of great substance." "God is a heavyweight!" said Meuser. Suddenly, glory, a word that had always come across to me as a sudden acclamation ("Glory be!") or a

synonym for the word praise (“Glory to God”) or, in referring to humans, as a synonym for prestige, power, and lately, celebrity—suddenly glory expressed the depths of God’s own being, the heart of the divine. Nowhere is the relationship of glory to presence to God more vividly expressed than in Exod 33, where Moses asks to see God’s glory. In response, the Lord replies, “See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft in the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by” (Exod 33:21-22). The glory-presence of the Lord passed by (see also Lev 9:4, 6, 23; Ps 113:4; Zech 2:8). Peter, James, and John saw Jesus’ glory. Something much deeper is being said here, something beyond the shining presence even of the divine. How are we to understand this glory of Jesus, this center, this heart of the One whom Luke and all the evangelists claim is God’s unique self-revelation?

Luke alone includes the content of the conversation of Moses and Elijah with Jesus, and thus adds to the tradition his interpretation of his Markan and/or Matthean sources: “They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). The Greek for departure is *exodos*. The text’s wording is odd and ambiguous; but if we turn to another pivotal conversation, between Jesus and two other men, disciples on the road to Emmaus, the word glory reappears. Bracketed between the two appearances of the term is the account of the journey to Jerusalem and the central message of Luke’s story: the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The risen Lord says to his slow-of-heart-to-believe disciples, “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory? Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures” (Luke 24:26-27). What was glimpsed on the mountain by Peter, James, and John, the glory of the elusive presence that Peter tried to contain, was fully revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The glory of God is the paradoxical opposite of all human glory: light revealed in darkness, triumph through defeat, greatness expressed in lowliness, freedom expressed in obedience, life through death. Jesus entered the way of suffering, and exactly in that way he entered, expressed, revealed the heart, the glory of the self-giving God.

The conversation about the exodus that Jesus will accomplish in Jerusalem is reinforced by the voice from the cloud, a virtual repetition of the voice from heaven at his baptism, with two notable exceptions: At his baptism, Jesus alone hears the voice, “You are my Son” (Luke 3:22). On the mountain, the disciples are addressed, “This is my Son.” And further, Luke changes Matthew and Mark so that the voice calls Jesus “my Chosen” rather than “the Beloved” (Luke 9:35). There is more than an echo here of Isa 42:1, the introduction to the Lord’s servant. Jesus’ baptism is his way of servanthood, the way by which the paradoxical glory of God is revealed as the heart of the self-giving God.

Clearly, one should not leap around here and there in the Scriptures, plucking up texts to bolster a case. However, the virtual leitmotif of the word glory in the

Gospel of John simply cannot be overlooked. Notably, there is not even a suggestion of the transfiguration as a single event in John. But the number of times “glory,” “glorify,” and “glorified” appear in the gospel, and the critical points at which they appear in the narrative, is near breathtaking. Beginning with the prologue, where the word’s glory is seen to be full of grace and truth (John 1:14), to the revelation of Jesus’ glory at Cana (2:11), on to glorification of the Son through the death of Lazarus (11:4), and reaching the zenith in the portrayal of the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Son as his glorification, one could call John the gospel of the glory of God. As I said, there’s not a suggestion of the transfiguration as a single event in John. But when one considers the numinous quality just barely below the surface in John’s portrayal of the Son, the stream of “I am” declarations spoken by Jesus, and his control most especially of the events of his passion, it is not too eccentric to sense the *mysterion* of the transfiguration of Christ running throughout the Fourth Gospel. It is enough to note here the last appearance of glory in John. On the beach, breakfast finished, the risen Lord calls Peter back to feed his sheep and speaks of the apostle later being led where he does not wish to go. Then, parenthetically, the evangelist adds, “He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God. After this he said to him, ‘Follow me’” (John 21:19). The glory is for Jesus’ followers as well.

III. ALL CREATION

We return to a great insight in Edwin Muir’s poem, shared by some New Testament scholars, and a major theme of the transfiguration in Eastern Orthodox tradition:

Was the change in us alone,
And the enormous earth still left forlorn,
An exile or a prisoner? Yet the world
We saw that day made this unreal, for all
Was in its place.⁴

As Muir’s poem unfolds, it becomes clear that the question, “Was the change in us alone?” is rhetorical. The event on the mountain, along with the fullness of Christ’s person and work, is for “the enormous earth” as well.

When the author of 2 Peter brings the transfiguration into his letter, he ties it to the parousia of the Messiah and thus gives it cosmic proportions. Significantly, he argues that the centrality and truth of the parousia is undergirded by what happened on the mountain, namely, that Christ was appointed by God as judge and ruler of the cosmos (2 Pet 1:16-18).

In the eastern church the transfiguration is thoroughly cosmic and is understood as a foretaste of the transfiguration of all creation in Christ. For the fathers of the early church, the transfiguration became a mystical symbol of the transforma-

⁴Muir, *Collected Poems*, 199.

tion of this world and the world to come. And one might note that the August 6 celebration of the transfiguration as a major holy day was in place in the east in the eighth century, whereas it was not ordered in the west until the fifteenth century.⁵ The figure of the cosmic Christ, powerfully portrayed in Ephesians, Colossians, and Revelation, has always been far more influential in eastern worship, doctrine, and piety than in the western church.

However, one need not go to other New Testament writings for the cosmic theme. It is present in the synoptic texts of the transfiguration themselves. Donald Juel comments on the transfiguration in Mark, though what he says applies as well to Matthew and Luke:

He withdraws with the inner circle of the Twelve...to offer to them a glimpse of his "glory"—the glory with which the Son of man will return. What the disciples see and hear on the mountain are matters reserved for the last times. They are offered a preview, a foretaste of what is to come.

The inner group of the disciples is given a preliminary glimpse of his glory. But it is only preliminary. There can be no final glory until after the cross. That is the "necessity" which dominates Jesus' career.⁶

Further, the exodus noted by Moses and Elijah, which Jesus will accomplish in Jerusalem, can be understood as a term that encompasses the entire departure of Jesus, that is, his death, resurrection, and exaltation to heaven. He is the exalted Lord who will come in the glory revealed on the mountain (Acts 1:6-11).⁷

There is more to be made of this cosmic character of the transfiguration. Following the stormy years of the 1960s, with revolutionary movement afoot around the globe, Paul Lehmann took up the theme in *The Transfiguration of Politics: The Presence and Power of Jesus of Nazareth in and over Human Affairs*. In that volume, Lehmann critically and sensitively assessed major revolutionary movements. He correctly understood the deep passion for human justice that fueled so many of them and that inspired such great hope in the lives of the world's poorest citizens. But Lehmann also refused to transmute the gospel into a political agenda. Rather, out of his own conviction and drawing on the cosmic character of the Christ of the gospel, he called for a transfiguration of politics in a stunning summary paragraph:

In that light, the mystery and meaning of the ultimate presence and power by which reality *is*, and is defined and directed, are unveiled and concealed in the hiddenness and openness of a human person whose presence and power set the whole off-course world and human story on course again.⁸

This Christ whose radiance illuminates the mountaintop is none other than the *pan-*

⁵D. M. Beck, "Transfiguration," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* 4:686.

⁶Donald H. Juel, *Mark* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990) 126-127.

⁷David L. Tiede, *Luke* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress 1988) 188.

⁸Paul Lehmann, *The Transfiguration of Politics: The Presence and Power of Jesus of Nazareth in and over Human Affairs* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) 83.

toerator, the Almighty, whose icon shimmers in the domes of orthodox churches round the world, calling the faithful to follow this one who is Lord of all. The transfiguration is nothing less than the anticipation, the premonition, the prolepsis of the luminescent new creation, about to be given birth in the cross and resurrection of this shining Son of Man. Muir again:

Was it a vision?
Or did we see that day the unseeable
One glory of the everlasting world
Perpetually at work, though never seen
Since Eden locked the gate that's everywhere
And nowhere?⁹

As an aside, I've always been puzzled by the suggestion that the transfiguration might be a "misplaced" resurrection appearance. In the visual images conveyed in the text, the transfiguration doesn't seem at all like the appearances of the risen Lord, at least in the gospel accounts—though I suppose one could see similarities in Luke's account of Paul's Damascus road vision and in the appearance to John in Revelation. Be that as it may, what is intriguing is that each of the evangelists centers the transfiguration in the midst of Jesus' proclamation of his death and resurrection. It is as if they have set this blazing light on the mountaintop as the sign that in Jesus' cross and resurrection the new creation has begun. What might that mean for us?

IV. FROM ONE DEGREE OF GLORY TO ANOTHER

Among Lutherans, the Transfiguration of Our Lord brings to a crescendo the Epiphany season of light. The reading paired with Luke for Year C is 2 Cor 3:12-4:2. Paul's main theme in the larger context of 2 Cor 3-4 is the ministry of the new covenant, of the Spirit that gives life. The word "glory" is strikingly redundant in these chapters wherein Paul makes this statement:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, *are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another*; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17-18; emphasis added).

One might get the impression that Paul has launched into unbridled triumphalism, except for the continuation of the ministry theme and the image of clay jars that follows in 4:7-12. But even before that, Paul tips his hand in 4:4, with his insight that unbelievers have been blinded "to keep them from seeing the light of *the gospel of the glory of Christ*, who is the image of God" (emphasis added). The glory we see reflected in the mirror, that image into which we are being transformed (μεταμορφούμεθα) from one degree of glory to another, is none other than the im-

⁹Muir, *Collected Poems*, 199.

age of the crucified Christ. One is truly tempted here to leave Luke and simply continue to follow Paul as he fleshes this out in 2 Cor 5 with his further insight that all who are in Christ are a new creation, set in the midst of the old as ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:17-19). It is enough to be astounded that all who are in Christ are being transformed, reshaped, conformed to his cruciform image, and to note that all of this is the work of the Spirit; that is, the transformation is by grace alone. It is God's work whereby the faithful become *conformitas Christi*, Christ to the neighbor.

There is a context within which much of this work of the Spirit takes place. It was hinted at back in the earlier comments by Samuel Terrien:

The collective act of worship seems to be both the indispensable vehicle of presence and its destroyer....The proprietary sight of glory destroys the vision, whether in the temple of Zion or in the eucharistic body.¹⁰

It is certain that we do not control the presence, and if our attitude toward worship is proprietary, the likelihood of any sense of presence is slim to none. Nevertheless, since the glory is associated with cultus in so much of the biblical record,¹¹ we need to address, at least in passing, the character of the eucharistic assembly.

Though we most certainly do not determine the presence anywhere or anytime, and perhaps especially in the worship assembly, how we approach that gathering—our attitude, our posture, our expectations—does affect what we might encounter or perceive or receive. In her small book, *Holy the Firm*, Annie Dillard writes of her congregation, where on a big Sunday twenty people may gather. She then goes on to say:

The higher Christian churches—where, if anywhere, I belong—come at God with an unwarranted air of professionalism, with authority and pomp, as though they knew what they were doing, as though people in themselves were an appropriate set of creatures to have dealings with God. I often think of the set pieces of liturgy as certain words which people have successfully addressed to God without being killed. In the high churches they saunter through the liturgy like Mohawks along a strand of scaffolding who have long since forgotten their danger. If God were to blast such a service to bits, the congregation would be, I believe, genuinely shocked. But in the low churches you expect it any minute. This is the beginning of wisdom.¹²

Elsewhere in her writing, Dillard comments that ushers should stand ready to issue each worshiper a helmet and other protective equipment, for God alone knows the kind of danger that may be encountered in the eucharistic assembly. Gordon Lathrop makes the same point in a less humorous way when he notes that ushers may be regarded as gatekeepers for the sake of the people, since not only do they welcome us, they also lead us into the presence of the Holy One whose presence, while full of grace, is also one of awe and dread. In these days when consumerism can make

¹⁰Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, 476.

¹¹G. Henton Davies, "Glory," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 2:401-402.

¹²Annie Dillard, *Holy the Firm* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) 59.

going to worship often feel like going to the mall, when koinonia is understood as conviviality, when secularity so forms our life that the possibility of the presence of God is all but ruled out, when comfort and meeting our and others' needs makes us the center of worship, we need to tend to expectations, lest thinking we've worshiped, we never notice what we've missed.

Years ago, the great Russian Orthodox liturgical theologian Alexander Schmemmann noted that the Sunday liturgy begins when one's feet touch the bedroom floor and take the first steps toward the assembly. He commented that one does not need to check the time at the Eucharist since future appointments lose their meaning when one is on the way to the eschatological banquet. I took him seriously and found what he said to be true. And the older I become, the more I realize the depth of what he said. To gather in this assembly of the new creation is to be ever so briefly at home base, in the presence. And to lift up another insight from Schmemmann, whether we dramatically encounter the presence of God or not is not the point. The church's history is full of the lives of people who waited for a mystical encounter with the presence and never received that gift. *The point is in the waiting, waiting for God*, since the Sunday assembly is the gathering to sing the praises of the risen One who is both revealed and hidden.

But to be there is to position oneself, as the Lutheran confessions have it, in the presence of the church, the presence of word and sacrament, where Christ has promised to be. There in that assembly one risks the possibility of transfiguration. For there the community is gathered around the transfigured and transfiguring One. There the community may find itself drawn anew to live toward the future of God revealed on the mountaintop. There God may, in Annie Dillard's words, "blast the service to bits." In these days of casual, relaxed, informal, consumerist worship, let *that* be the beginning of wisdom! For though it is the case, praise God, that for the sake of Christ we are deeply loved, received, and set right with God just as we are, it is also true that God is out to form us into the body of the Son, to transform us into his image.

Few authors have given a more transfigurational twist to God's work than Flannery O'Connor at the conclusion of her story "Revelation," making strong use of the shocking language of her character. Leaning on the rail of the hog pen, sick to death with the no-account character of most people she knew, Mrs. Turpin lifted her head:

There was only a purple streak in the sky, cutting through a field of crimson and leading, like an extension of the highway, into the descending dusk....She saw the streak as a vast swinging bridge extending upward from the earth through a field of living fire. Upon it a vast horde of souls were rumbling toward heaven. There were whole companies of white trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as those who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little of everything and the God-given wit to

use it right....They were marching behind the others with great dignity, accountable as they had always been for good order and common sense and respectable behavior. They alone were on key. Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces that even their virtues were being burned away.¹³

V. A FEARSOME AND SAVING LIGHT

Luke concludes his account of the transfiguration with, “When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone” (Luke 9:36a). With 9:51, Jesus would turn his face toward Jerusalem, where aloneness would be his lot again. The next day, he would heal a boy with a demon, one that epitomizes the powers that enthrall us and from which Jesus had come to liberate us according to his own inaugural address in Nazareth (Luke 4:18-19). Evil remained, and yet remains. The transfiguration was the sign, the premonition, the prolepsis of the new creation; the necessary suffering of its birth was yet to come. Even light, in all its wondrous luminosity, remains ambiguous. August 6, the ancient date for the feast both in the east and west, is as well, and with terrible irony, the commemoration of the deathly light over Hiroshima. Evil remains. Still, in repentance and hope we persevere, we lean toward the light of God’s future.

We conclude as we began, with the poet:

But he will come again, it’s said, though not
Unwanted and unsummoned; for all things,
Beasts of the field, and woods, and rocks, and seas,
And all mankind from end to end of the earth
Will call him with one voice. In our own time,
Some say, or at a time when time is ripe.
Then he will come, Christ the uncrucified,
Christ the dis-crucified, his death undone,
His agony unmade, his cross dismantled—
Glad to be so—and the tormented wood
Will cure its hurt and grow into a tree
In a green springing corner of young Eden,
And Judas damned take his long journey backward
From darkness into light and be a child
Beside his mother’s knee, and the betrayal
Be quite undone and never more be done.¹⁴

New creation! ☩

¹³Flannery O’Connor, *The Complete Stories* (New York: Noonday, 1996) 508.

¹⁴Muir, *Collected Poems*, 200.