

Personal Notes  
060806 The Transfiguration of the Lord 614B  
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Transfiguration theology has the ability to prioritize cultural mores from competitive to sharing. Both competition and sharing have their legitimate place. In the Biblical image of the Transfiguration, Moses represents competing, Elijah sharing. Moses, from his seat of power, treats human rights as optional objects of charity. Moses offers the Faithful the Ten Commandments that they are free and in fact do break.

Elijah, from his seat of prophecy on Mount Carmel, treats human rights as mandatory objects of justice. Elijah rewards the Faithful with the bread of life, as something to which they are entitled. In other words, the theology of the Transfiguration can change human rights from options of charity to entitlements of justice. There is little concern, scholarly or otherwise, for such an approach.

This is one of those rare Sundays on which the Richmond Diocese celebrates the feast of the Transfiguration. The reason is that the Diocesan schedule for the feast on Sunday falls on the same day as the Lectionary schedule for August 6. The Diocese does not classify this feast as at the level of a Holy Day of Obligation, as sometimes happens elsewhere throughout the world.

As a result of the liturgical calendar, this is the first time Personal Notes contemplates these readings. Drawing from the work of scholars, these Notes are commentaries on the Sunday readings. The lack of documentation in these Notes means that not much is available. The index at [www.western-civilization.com](http://www.western-civilization.com) does not have anything, though there are some citations for Daniel 7 at reading 161B, the last Sunday of this liturgical calendar. The only Catholic Biblical Association web site material on Daniel, dates from 1983, more than twenty years ago. This lack of academic concern causes me to leave my usual scholarly resources and look to non-academic material in painting.

The painting to which I am referring was the featured painting in the Josephite calendar for 2003. This painting, therefore, is before the Catholic community. The painting, however, is personal to me.

I have the original painting by Fernando Arizti, S.J., a Mexican Jesuit priest, who died this year, February 17, working in Nigeria. The history of the painting is that when I went to Rome in 2000, the Bethlehem Monastery of Poor Clare Sisters asked me to look for a Transfiguration icon. At that time, the Bethlehem Monastery was in my Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church.

In Rome, I found nothing that I wanted to give to the Sisters, including Rafael's Transfiguration painting, both the original and the copy I viewed in St. Peter's Basilica. I felt the Renaissance art carried a subliminal message honoring the rich and famous and denigrating the poor and unknown. Such an approach to anything disturbs my sense of propriety. Such an approach implies that human rights are more options of charity, rather than entitlements of justice.

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Not finding anything in Rome, I began to look elsewhere. Since I knew Father Fernando from Saint Bridget's Josephite church in South Central Los Angeles, I prevailed upon him to accept a commission to do the painting for the Sisters. He and I agreed that his sense of a Black Christ might not set well with the Sisters or many others. I wanted to commission the painting anyway and he had a sense of obligation to God for having recently restored his eyesight. As we thought might happen, the painting remained with the Sisters on trial about six months before they returned it, because it did not suit their tastes. There were no hard feelings in any of this, because everyone had anticipated what happened.

The painting is now on the wall of my study, in a burnt gold frame. An athletic Jesus raises his hands to heaven, with a smile of joy on his face. Moses and Elijah sit at his feet. A row of trees extends toward the horizon on the left. A small, easy to overlook man, in Carmelite brown is on the right side, in the background, pointing up to Jesus. The top torso of Jesus arises from an illuminated bush and extends about two-thirds of the way to the top of the painting. The top quarter of the painting has clouds of a golden hue.

Father Fernando used to like to refer to the cornrows into which he wove the hair of Jesus. He felt those cornrows might be particularly offensive to some people. His is a portrait of Jesus, pleased with himself, happy, positive, and outgoing. I like to refer to the painting as "Jesus in Cornrows." In many ways, this painting of the soul of Jesus mirrors the souls of the Sisters, pleased with themselves, happy, positive, and outgoing. Presenting Jesus as Black presents human rights more as entitlements of justice, rather than as options of charity. Jesus is entitled not only to human rights, but also to divine rights.

Father Fernando included Elijah and Moses in the painting. I often wondered why the Biblical apparition included those two. The reason may be because Elijah and Moses come from God in different ways, Elijah from the prophetic periphery, Moses from the administrative center. Both are legitimate. That idea lessens my wonderment.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, Moses has wooly white hair. I remember Father Fernando telling me his inspiration was from Daniel 7:9, "the hair on his head as white as wool." In general, wooly hair signifies African descent.

The Ancient One in the readings (quoted below) is not Moses, but God. Like the Lectionary with the Book of Daniel, as will be shown, Father Fernando used artistic license with wooly hair. God will judge the Syrians and place the Jews in charge. Christians shifted the dominion from something based on competitive politics to something else based on sharing truth.

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<sup>1</sup> Jon D. Levenson, "Some Unnoticed Connotations in Jeremiah 20:9," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 46, No. 2 (April 1984) 225.

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Daniel came long after Elijah and Moses. Moses dates from 1250 B.C.; Elijah 850 B.C. and Daniel 550 B.C.<sup>2</sup> The key verse is Daniel 7:13.

As the visions during the night continued, I saw  
one like a Son of man coming,  
on the clouds of heaven;  
when he reached the Ancient One  
and was presented before him

Working in the scholarship, in 1976, Alexander A. Di Lella, O.F.M. delivered his presidential address to the thirty-ninth general meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association of America at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His title was "The One in Human Likeness and the Holy Ones of the Most High in Daniel 7."

I offer an interlinear translation between the Lectionary and Di Lella:

Lectionary: the one a Son of man received dominion, glory, and kingship  
Di Lella: Then to him was given dominion—glory and kingship.

Lectionary: all peoples, nations, and languages serve him  
Di Lella: Every nation, tribe, and tongue must serve him;

Lectionary: His dominion is an everlasting dominion  
That shall not be taken away  
Di Lella: His dominion is to be everlasting, never passing away;

Lectionary: his kingship shall not be destroyed.  
Di Lella: his kingship never to be destroyed.

Who is the Son of man and why does the Lectionary capitalize Son? How is the Son of man the transfigured Jesus? After much thought about who the Son of man might be, Di Lella concludes that the Son of man refers to the Faithful Jewish people, withstanding persecution, keeping the law. The Book of Daniel sides with those who endure persecution, rather than take up arms against it. Evidently, the Lectionary regards the Son of man as Jesus. This is tricky, because there is no mention of a messiah, transfigured or not, in the Book of Daniel. The Lectionary is taking a Christian liberty with the Daniel text.

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<sup>2</sup> Henry Wansbrough, General Editor, The New Jerusalem Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1985) 2056, 2057, 2061.

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The immediate context for when the Book of Daniel was committed to the writing that has passed down, is Antiochus IV (Antiochus Epiphanes) who ruled Syria between 175 and 163 B.C., when he died. Antiochus was king, when the Maccabees revolted.<sup>3</sup> Judas Maccabaeus died in 160 B.C., after Antiochus. In the passage the Lectionary uses, the Jews are anticipating an earthly kingdom, rather than a kingdom not of this world.

As part of my effort to bring scholarship to bear on the Lectionary readings, I note sloppy scholarship as I become aware of it. The Lectionary presents Psalm 97 with sloppy scholarship. To set out the sloppiness in these Notes, the Lectionary uses Psalm 97, reading 15ABC, at the Christmas Mass at Dawn and at the Seventh Sunday of Easter, reading 61C according to the following chart:

Reading	verses
15 ABC	1, 6, 11-12
61C	1-2, 6-7, 9
Page 614	1-2, 5-6, 9

The Lectionary is inconsistent in three places.

1. In verse 6, the first two readings use a comma after the word *justice*, but the third uses a semi-colon.
2. In verse 9, the second reading omits *Because* as the first word, but the third uses *Because*.
3. Most disheartening, the second reading omits the first part of verse 2, while the third reading uses the whole verse, as correctly cited. The citation for the second reading is simply wrong.

Mark 9:2-10 did help inspire Father Fernando. Mark 2b, "his clothes became dazzling white," a white I hope time does not dim in the painting. Father Fernando has Elijah sitting, but resting with his arm on a rock, a symbol for Peter. Moses is holding a crosier, another symbol for Peter as Bishop of Rome.

Mark 9:7 mentions a cloud. In the painting, Father Fernando has three clouds, all heading in one direction, from left to right, with the lead cloud looking like an African baboon, one of the most intelligent of the primates, that I remember Father Fernando mentioning. The painting captures the meaning of the scriptures used for this Sunday.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.encyclopedia.com/html/A/Antiochu4.asp> 060626

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Transfiguration theology has the ability to transfigure cultural mores from competitive between Moses and the Faithful to sharing between Elijah and the Faithful. The feast of the Transfiguration can prioritize the theology of human rights from options of charity to entitlements of justice. Both charity and justice have their legitimate place.

For more on sources see the Appendix file. Personal Notes are on the web site at [www.western-civilization.com/CBQ/Personal%20Notes](http://www.western-civilization.com/CBQ/Personal%20Notes)