

.Papers.

back

## TRANSFIGURATION, GLORY AND GOLD DUST

### an exploratory paper

Paper presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> EPCRA Conference, Leuven, Belgium  
by Robert B. Smith, St. Stephen's University  
8 Main Street  
St. Stephen, NB, Canada E3L 3E2

"If we take the imagery of Scripture seriously, if we believe that God will one day give us the Morning Star and cause us to *put on* the splendour of the sun, then we may surmise that both the ancient myths and the modern poetry, so false as history, may be very near the truth as prophecy. . . . Meanwhile the cross comes before the crown and tomorrow is a Monday morning" (*The Weight of Glory*, 37f.). In these words, C.S. Lewis is pointing Christians beyond this life, to the vision of God and to the glory that shall be ours in our Blessed Lord..

But is this life merely Monday morning? 2 Corinthians 3:18 says "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" (NRSV). It appears that Paul is describing a process which is going on now, and which is visible now, not just something that will take place at a certain point in the future. Lewis goes on to claim, "there are no *ordinary* people," but only "immortal horrors or everlasting splendours." Yet there remains the question to what extent this is true *now* and to what extent our Lord reveals his glory *now* in his people. When we look in a mirror, what do we see? Our own face, of course, and it is in that face that Paul expects us to see

God's glory. When we give Paul's words their full import, there are two possible interpretations: (1) that we should expect to see in our own likeness on Monday morning and every other day the glory of God, perhaps faint, but increasing as the days and the years pass; and/or (2) that, increasingly, others will see Jesus in us. Since Paul is making a comparison with the shining face of Moses after he had been with God on Horeb, and the implication in Exodus is that Moses himself was unaware that he had changed, it may be that Paul has only the second of these possibilities in mind. On the other hand, the verse itself would seem to imply the first. Therefore it is likely that Paul intended both meanings.

"God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). In his book, *In The Image and Likeness of God*, Vladimir Lossky concludes from this epistle verse that "Light, whether interpreted in an allegorical or in a real sense, will then always accompany communion with God" (32), and he goes on to describe how this theme is found in the fathers, beginning with Origen's "mysticism of light." Yet in Origen it takes a form that Lossky describes as a "Platonic intellectualism," because in the theory of Origen and his followers "by its very nature the *nous* is a receiver of divine light," and when it reaches its pure state "the *nous* in seeing itself sees God, who fills it with his light" (36). The full development of a theology of light is found in the fourteenth-century Gregory of Palamas, who does not restrict the light of God to our minds, as Origen does, but equates light with grace, and sees it active in the transformation of our entire nature: "Being the light of the divinity, grace cannot remain hidden or unnoticed; acting in man, changing his nature, entering into a more and more intimate union with him, the divine energies become increasingly perceptible, revealing to man the face of the living God" (Lossky, 59). Twentieth century Russian theologian, Paul Evdokimov, in his book *The Art of the Icon*, adds that "whoever participates in the divine energies . . . in a sense becomes light himself. He is united to the light" (233). Leonid Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, writes that "through its doctrine of the Taboric light, the Church recognized that the divine action transfiguring man originates in the uncreated, imperishable light, the action of the Divinity felt and contemplated in the body" (II, 250). My subject in this exploratory paper is the glory of God as some Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians have recently claimed to find it through phenomena such as gold tooth fillings and gold dust appearing on the heads,

faces, hands, and sometimes other parts of the body when people worship God. I shall approach the topic in three ways:

- (1) By a description of some aspects of the phenomena involved, from a variety of sources;
- (2) By a comparison with certain elements of Orthodox mysticism, related to what is sometimes called "spirituality of light," and seen as a variation in contemporary western experience on traditional eastern spirituality of light, explained by some of the same theological reasoning;
- (3) A brief consideration of some of the dangers associated with phenomena such as gold dust, especially in their public manifestations, and suggestions as to their legitimate place and purpose in Christian life.

Concerning a comparison between Charismatic experience and eastern theology, I might note that, traditionally, Orthodox theology has never distinguished sharply between theology and mysticism, and has frequently reflected theologically on mystical experience (see Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 222). A recent article in *Pneuma* about Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue suggests that "together with Eastern Orthodox Theologians, Pentecostals might be able to correct pneumatological 'forgetfulness'" that is found in most parts of the western church" (Veli-Matti Kärkäinen, "Trinity as Communion in the Spirit: Koinonia, Trinity, and Filioque in the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue," *Pneuma*, XXII.2, Fall 2000, 209). My suggestion is that gold dust and light highlight one area in which there may be a natural affiliation between Pentecostal/Charismatic experience and Orthodox theological reflection on experience arising from mystical tradition.

Predictably, the phenomenon of gold dust, like the phenomenon of gold tooth fillings and that of healing oil dripping from people's hands, which came to prominence about the same time, has been greeted on the one hand with great openness and enthusiasm and on the other with a flood of warnings as hoaxes, occult manifestations, spiritual alchemy, and lying signs and wonders. *Christianity Today* quotes Regent College professor John Stackhouse's complaint that with gold fillings the church has reached "a new low" that combines "the anti-intellectualism and sectarianism that has plagued the Pentecostal and charismatic movements from their beginnings" (May 24, 1999, Vol. 43, No. 6, 17). One internet report refers sarcastically to "holy-dust dandruff," while another announces, "Tall

Tales of Dr. Divine, the Holy Ghost Dentist.”

As far as I have been able to determine, the first appearance of gold dust in North American religious circles was during a visit by a Brazilian woman, Sylvania Machado, to Calvary Pentecostal Campground in Ashland, Virginia, in August 1998. This woman gave an amazing testimony of coming to the Lord and finding salvation and complete healing, when by normal medical standards she should have been well beyond the point of death. A report posted on the Calvary Pentecostal website describes what else happened when the Lord healed her:

A holy woman from Brazil, named Sylvania, was at Calvary Pentecostal Campground from August 18-21, 1998 and again in February of 1999. In the process of her physical healing of four types of cancer, oil began to flow supernaturally from her body and later, gold dust began to be manifested on her face and the crown of her head. As she praises and worships, this phenomena is seen. Her Brazilian pastor gathers the holy gold flakes and anoints the forehead of the sick and needy. Many miracles fall. (<http://www.revivalglory.org/campstest.htm>, cited 5/7/01).

My wife and I were present in 1998 when Sylvania spoke in Ashland, and we saw the gold coloured dust that came from her hair. We saw it as well on the face of Ruth Heflin, director of Calvary Pentecostal Ministries, and on Jane Lowder, who later succeeded Miss Heflin as director, and on others—including my wife---as they worshipped. Similar phenomena have appeared in Canada, notably at the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship and at several churches in the Vancouver area. A Canadian newspaper, *Christian Week*, March 30, 1999, reported that as of that date more than three hundred people “claim to have received gold or silver fillings or gold caps on their teeth” at the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship. The report continues by attributing the origin of such “bizarre events” to gold fillings in Argentina in the early 1990’s. It refers to Pastor John Arnott seeing miraculous gold fillings in Mexico and in South Africa, and praying that the same thing would happen in Toronto. Gold dust has also been reported at the

Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship, yet *Charisma News* reported September 8, 1999, that after initial openness, Pastor Arnott decided to cancel three remaining evening services with Sylvania Machado, since an analysis of the "gold dust" that came from her head on the first of four scheduled appearances had reportedly showed it to be a type of plastic film. The same article notes that Ruth Heflin continued to support Sylvania, and quoted Heflin as saying that God's presence, not the gold dust, had convinced her, and that a more accurate designation of the phenomenon might be "glory dust", because its composition is not important ([www.charismanews.com/news.cgi?a=145&t=search.html](http://www.charismanews.com/news.cgi?a=145&t=search.html), cited 5/7/01).

Reports coming from Toronto, though, generally support gold dust along with other manifestations of the Lord's presence and glory. An article by Melinda Fish, "In the River: Basking in His Glory," reports and comments as follows:

All the manifestations including the drunkenness, the 'jerking' and laughter, the prophecy, the healings, the gold dust and the other signs and wonders are manifestations of the glory of God which prove that the origin of that glory exists. That origin is the face of Jesus Christ who is the radiance of the Heavenly Father's glory (Hebrews 1:3). (<http://www.tacf.org/stf/6-3/river.html>, cited 5/7/01))

Here we might note the similarity between the claim that these 'glory' manifestations are evidence of the existence of their Original and the Orthodox tradition that icons are an argument for the existence of God. Paul Edokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, says, "The icon is shining proof of God's existence, according to a 'kalokagathic' argument" (183). A footnote explains that "The Greek genius unites the Beautiful and the Good in one single word which designates the place where we encounter the Truth." The manifestations Melinda Fish lists may also be considered 'kalokagathic,'

in that they are ways in which the goodness and the beauty of God are manifested in his people, and through which we encounter the truth.

Since August 1998, gold dust has appeared on worshippers in various locations. In *Golden Glory*, Ruth Heflin recounts many testimonies, and quotes letters reporting gold dust in countries as remote from Virginia as Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Bolivia, France, Switzerland, Israel, Denmark, India and South Africa. One particularly dramatic letter describes a vision of an angel of solid gold, and recounts: "When he stopped in front of me he stretched out his right hand toward me. He simply opened his fingers and gold dust began to fall" (86). Others tell stories of gold in the hair, all over the body, in women's handbags, and even on window drapes in the house, and of the effects on people when these things happened. A Baptist pastor, Bob Shattles, from Austell, Georgia, USA, speaks of gold dust in his book, *Souls Harvest*. In describing an event in Dallas, Texas, at which he was preaching he says:

The visible glory of God was falling all over the auditorium. At one point, I noticed that all those on the platform had glory dust on them. When I went down among the people to pray for them, I saw it on them too. It was on their faces and on their hands, and people were being gloriously saved, healed and delivered. (100)

Shattles speaks of "multicolored dust," which is "often gold in color." He comments that when the dust begins to come he waits and allows others to call attention to it: "People realize very quickly that this is from God, and it moves them as nothing else can" (114). He describes the crowds who are attracted to meetings where this glory dust comes, and the large numbers who respond to the gospel invitation. Like Heflin, he dismisses the controversy over the composition of the gold dust: "It's immaterial what the supernatural dust is made of. Many thousands of people have experienced it now all over the world, and it has been documented and reported over and over, so how

can anyone deny that it is a miracle from God?" (116)

The Calvary Pentecostal website gives the following eyewitness account of one meeting when God came in glory:

As I looked, I literally saw the gold dust raining down. It was in an area of about 10 sq. ft. It rained for approximately 5 minutes. There were about 10 of us on the platform, and we went and stood in the area where it was falling. It was all over everyone!! Judith Miller had on a solid green dress, so it really showed up on her. It was all over my arms and dress. When I looked at everyone else, they were covered in the gold - Sister Ruth, Janice, Linda, everyone that was up there. It really brought an excitement like you would not believe. Then we went into worship, and it was just awesome! ([http://www.revivalglory.org/raining\\_gold.htm](http://www.revivalglory.org/raining_gold.htm), cited 5/7/01)

The report concludes by saying that after the sermon that evening an "altar call for sinners" resulted in about fifty people coming forward.

While some critics question the authenticity of reported occurrences of both gold fillings and gold dust, UK-based Banner Ministries accepts them as genuine but denies that they come from God. According to their internet report, the gold miracles are a "lying sign and wonder" from the powers of evil, designed to deceive God's people, and are more closely associated with the New Age than with Christianity. This report gives links to other web sites testifying to gold dust and gold fillings, quotes Ruth Heflin's support and that of Gerald Coates and of Anglican Bishop David Pytches, and concludes that most of those who dismiss the phenomena as products of hysteria are wrong, in that "the gold dust is real; the teeth are real and there is something actually going on that is inexplicable and supernatural," but that this is the situation spoken of in the gospels "when the devil is permitted to create miracles, signs and wonders so daring and persuasive that 'even the elect' are shaken." The author mentions having been present about thirty years ago when a missionary group from Latin America described how some poor people found

that their teeth were filled with gold. He notes also that David Pytches reports having seen the "gold" experience in Chile in 1974. Yet he remarks that it is more difficult now to believe that these signs are from God than it was in the past: "Today gold teeth are being gleefully displayed by rich Westerners who already have personal doctors and dentists, and they are being taken as a proof of the Lord's favour. The revival needed authentication, and here it is!" An Anglican priest writing in *Renewal* magazine counters this view, arguing that God frequently shows his glory in unexpected ways, and that his miracles are not always practical—for example, Jesus' provision of about 500 litres of wine to compensate for the shortfall at a wedding reception. In this perspective, he says, "such blessings given to Westerners with access to dentists seem most likely to be signs from God to help the world believe" (Peter Lawrence, "God, Glory, and Gold Teeth"). The writer of the Banner report is critical not only of "rich westerners" but also of various forms of "revival and its strange behaviour" which come from South America. He mentions the work of Claudio Freidzion in Buenos Aires, where gold teeth were reported; a "clap offering" in El Salvador, after which "a kind of gold cloud came down upon the stadium"; and Sylvania Machado and the gold dust and oil being collected and used to anoint the sick. Prejudice becomes obvious in the statement that "all this is so reminiscent of Roman Catholic superstition that I greatly suspect that is what's behind it. Reportedly Ruth Heflin is equally at home with Catholics and Protestants!" ([www.banner.org.uk/tb/gold.html](http://www.banner.org.uk/tb/gold.html), cited 2/28/01).

The Banner report asks, "Some unbelievers might be awed and intrigued, but will they be saved?" Both Ruth Heflin and Bob Shattles answer this in their teaching that one major purpose of the manifestations is evangelism, and they cite numerous testimonies of conversions:

The gold is the lure God is using to bring in the lost. It is not for you and me to determine how God can bring them in. . . . Our only response must be to say, 'Here am I, Lord, use me' . . . . We are moving into the greatest outpouring of the Spirit the Church has ever known, and God will do unusual things that will amaze all of us. (*Golden Glory*, 223f.)

Ruth Heflin suggests that "the gold dust, the oil and the gold teeth are all signs that follow us and confirm God's presence with us . . . . supernatural help to enable us to reap the end-time harvest" (198, 200). As a gift of love from



God to us, a reminder of God's presence with us, "the golden glory is sent to us as a release of 'the new,'" a manifestation which makes us excited about what God is doing, so that people will serve him more because he so obviously loves them (211).

Consider now another criticism. Some people were claiming that Christians can shine like Jesus did on the mount of transfiguration. The critic charges that they claim to be able to see God with their physical eyes, a material vision of God—that they come to experience the uncreated light in which God reveals himself. According to this critic, they are wrong for two reasons: (1) that there is no way anything of the glory of God can be imparted to Christians, because God is spirit and we are flesh; and (2) that the light that surrounded Jesus on the mountain was not anything divine, but was a created, meteorological phenomenon, provided by God to give glory to his Son on that occasion. Jesus is divine, we are not, and we have to wait until we reach heaven and not presume to share anything of God's glory here on earth.

These charges were being hurled in 1339 by a monk named Barlaam against the Hesychasts of Mount Athos, ridiculing their ascetical practices and challenging their doctrine (Lossky, *The Vision of God*, 124-5, 131). Do they not have something in common with the criticisms we have been reading of gold dust? The basic presupposition appears to be, "God just doesn't do that kind of thing! It's not practical, does not make good sense!" Alternatively, one might say that the attitude is: "Since this kind of phenomena are outside my paradigm, they cannot be from God."

Starting with the biblical affirmation that "God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all," many eastern fathers go on to investigate the nature of the uncreated light and how it relates to humans. Impelled by Barlaam's charges, St Gregory Palamas, monk, theologian and Archbishop of Thessalonica, developed a theory of the "energies" of God, as being so-to-speak the overflow outside his own being of his unknowable essence—or perhaps the way God acts outside his own being—and through which he makes himself known in his dynamic attributes, whereby he gives himself totally (Lossky, *Image and Likeness*, 54). What then is the uncreated light? Vladimir Lossky says that it is the reality of mystical experience in which God makes himself known:

In St. Gregory Palamas this mystical reality is rendered into the technical language of theology . . . "God is called light," he says, "not according to his essence, but according to his energy." But if the energies can be called light, this is not just by analogy to material light . . . but because they appear to contemplation as an ineffable reality for which the most suitable name is light. In so far as God manifests Himself and makes Himself known in His *dynameis* or energies, in His dynamic attributes, He is light. "This divine experience is given to each one according to the worthiness of those who experience it." The perfect vision of divinity becoming perceptible as uncreated light, which *is* the divinity, is the "mystery of the eighth day," it pertains to the age to come, where we shall see God face to face. However, those who are worthy, those who are united with God, may come even in this life to a vision of "the Kingdom of God coming in power," as did the disciples on Mount Tabor (*The Vision of God*, p. 130f.).

Barlaam was wrong. The light of the transfiguration was no meteorological phenomenon; it was the light which belongs by nature to God, which since the Incarnation has been concentrated in the God-Man, and which appeared clearly to the disciples when their eyes were opened at the moment of the Transfiguration.

Paul Evdokimov quotes Gregory Palamas' Homily on the Presentation of the Holy Virgin in the Temple to the effect that "the Father pronounces his Word, and the Spirit shows him forth; the Spirit is the *Light of the world*," and concludes from this that "at the ultimate heights of holiness, the human person 'becomes in a certain sense light.'" Evdokimov suggests that this is the reason "Seraphim of Sarov was . . . able to clothe himself in the sun and shine. Being himself called 'a striking likeness,' St Seraphim was the living icon of the God of Light. . . In line with St Gregory Palamas, St Seraphim underscored that the light of creation, of the transfiguration of Mt. Tabor, of pentecost, of the sacraments, and of the second coming is one and the same divine light" (*The Art of the Icon*, 7, 29).

Does this argument apply to light only, or to all manifestations of the glory of God? In other words, is the appearance of gold of the same order as the appearance of light? A letter from a professor at the University of Colombo, quoted in *Golden Glory*, makes a connection: "Since the word seraphim means 'burning bright ones' or 'shining ones,' and they are shining with God's glory presence, could it be that the gold dust is the result of our being rubbed upon by

the realms of God's nearness in which seraphs live?" (170). That halos on icons are painted in gold also suggests a definite connection between light and the recent phenomena associated with gold.

Evdokimov notes about the gold halos that "the saints become luminous in their bodies, and this is a normative sign of their holiness. 'You are the light of the world.' The halos which are painted on the saints in their icons are an expression of this normative sign" (*Art of the Icon*, 56). Ouspensky points out that just as Moses glowed when he descended from Sinai, so there is a light on the faces of the saints who have come close to God, and "the icon conveys this phenomenon of light by a halo, which is a precise sign, in an image, of a well-defined event in the spiritual world" (*Theology of the Icon*, I, 174). We might equally say that in the case of a living saint gold can be considered a precise sign of the presence of God. If it be objected that the Orthodox are referring only to those specially recognized as saints, how are we to judge sanctify? What is holiness, if not living in the presence of God? It is entirely possible that simple believers may be much closer to our Lord, in character and in relationship, than are we who think much more critically. Furthermore, the concepts of deification and of saints becoming luminous are not restricted to the Orthodox. While these themes have been more prominent in eastern mysticism than western, they have not been unknown in western tradition. The anonymous fourteenth century *Theologica Germanica* speaks at some length about deification. St. Theresa of Avila is a notable example of transfiguration. A recent biographer recounts:

At times the Lord Theresa loved so much chose to add a supernatural touch . . . Witnesses in the process of canonization remark that on occasion her face would become visibly radiant. Isabel of the Cross testified:

"Whenever she ceased praying owing to a few words she would utter and to a beautiful colour in her face and to such a strange manner so different from her usual self . . . it was obvious what great favours Our Lord had granted to her." Anne of St. Bartholemew spoke of Theresa's face "shining resplendently" on two occasions, and Isabel of St. Dominic several times saw the saint's "resplendent face" as she wrote her books. (Thomas Dubay, *Fire Within*, 17f.).

Earlier, in the twelfth century, Richard of St Victor had taught that in the highest stage of mystical union with God the soul "is 'deified,' 'passes utterly into God, and is glorified in Him': is transfigured, he says, by immediate contact with the Divine Substance, into an utterly different quality of being" (Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, 139). While these two examples may confirm some critics' anti-Catholic suspicions, the connection with the gold dust phenomenon, which has been reported among Catholics, Protestants of many traditions, and Pentecostals, tends rather to support the interpretation that God is doing a new thing, and helps connect the past experiences of great Christians with the present, and outstanding saints with everyday saints.

In Orthodox theology, the concept of light is bound up with the teaching on *theosis* or deification. Salvation is not merely the re-establishment of what mankind was before the Fall, the image of God as found in Adam, but much more: "Christ made that image a reality, brought it to fullness, for having purified it, he opened it up to participation in divine beauty. . . . The most moving icon of God is man 'turned into the image we reflect,' according to the text of St. Paul." Evdokimov points out that in the Liturgy the priest censes the icons of the saints, recognizing their prototypes as mirrors of God, and censes the faithful also, recognizing the presence of the image of God in man (the faithful are censed for this reason in the West, of course, as well as in the East). St Basil the Great is quoted as saying that "Man has received the order to become god by grace," for "having come close to light, the soul is transformed into light" (*Art of the Icon*, 184f.). These statements are very close to 2 Cor 3:18, because if we are to look in the mirror to see the glory of God, we can only see his glory (or his light) as reflected by our own faces. Perhaps gold, like light, is an outward indication of the inward process of deification—not of one's own achievements but of God's initiative. Thirteenth century German mystic, Meister Eckhart, refers to 2 Cor 3:18, and asks where an image is, in the mirror or in the object? He answers, "The image is in me, of me, and to me. While the mirror is opposite my face, I see my image in it but if the mirror falls my image is gone" (*Meister Eckhart, A Modern Translation*, p. 221f.). His point is that it is not a question of where we look, but of who it is that is looking, and into what we are looking; God's image and glory are found in the faithful, not in the various manifestations that God gives. It is the human soul that is transformed into the likeness of God through the working of the Holy Spirit within. This is entirely the work of God.

To quote Eckhart again:

Grace comes only with the Holy Spirit. It carries the Holy Spirit on its back. Grace is not a stationary thing; it is always found in a Becoming. It can only flow out of God and then only immediately. The function of grace is to transform and reconvey [the soul] to God. Grace makes the soul godlike. God, the core of the soul, and grace belong together. (237)

Theosis is the same reality that Teilhard de Chardin speaks of when he refers to "christogenesis" and a "Christified Universe" ("The Christic," in *The Heart of Matter*, 90, 95), because it is Christ Jesus, the original of the image of God, into whose likeness Paul says we are being transformed, and into the fullness of which St Paul says the entire creation will be liberated when the sons of God are fully revealed (Rom 8:19-23). Matthew Fox—not generally regarded as a biblical literalist—when discussing 2 Cor 3:18 takes a very literal interpretation, and like Teilhard adds a corporate dimension, shifting the focus from the individual to the Body of Christ. He refers to Hildegard of Bingen's suggestion that Christ already exists as a "glittering, glistening mirror of Divinity," into which we look and into whose likeness we are being transformed. Then, "we are all called, like the Cosmic Christ," Fox says, "to radiate the divine presence to/with/from one another. . . Notice how Paul is speaking of our *increasing* from glory to glory as we turn 'brighter and brighter'" (*The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, 137). Fox is clearly implying that some of God's glory is already reflected in our faces, and that the glory is increasing in us and among us, because "'glory' is a cosmological term in the Scriptures and here we learn that all the divine glory in the universe has not occurred yet" (*The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, 137). He refers to Evelyn Underhill, who speaks of "everlasting bringing forth, in the universe and also in the individual ascending soul, of the divine and perfect Life, the pure character of God" (*Mysticism*, 118). Like light, gold dust or glory dust is nothing on its own, but only as it indicates the glory of the presence of God. Even then it is, as Evelyn Underhill cautions about mystical experience, not merely "a consciousness of the Divine in the world, a sense of the 'otherness' of things, a basking in the beams of the Uncreated Light. . . It is at once an act of love, an act of surrender, and an act of supreme perception." In other words, an experience of the presence and

the glory of God, if it does not result in a transformed life is, in her words, "only playing with reality" (*Mysticism*, 84). Evdokimov explains that deification is a matter of the core of who we are:

For the Christian East, being deified is to contemplate the uncreated Light and to allow it to penetrate us. It is to reproduce in our very being the Christological mystery: "through love, to reunite created nature to uncreated nature and through the acquisition of grace, to show them united." God, being always hidden in his essence, "multiplies himself in his (energetic and luminous) manifestations" so as to fill man with his "burning closeness" (*Art of the Icon*, p. 185).

Just as the uncreated light of God penetrates the believer who contemplates it, so gold from God, whether understood as dust from the fingers of a solid gold angel or as specks of glory coming from proximity to the Lord himself, or as supernatural fillings in teeth, appears to bring the one who receives it closer to Jesus in the presence of the Father, and to be one of the ways in which the Holy Spirit is transforming the believer into the likeness of Christ, as described in 2 Cor 3:18, reproducing, in Evdokimov's striking phrase, "in our very being the Christological mystery."

A comparison of the eschatological and pneumatological connection between the light of the Transfiguration and of the saints in Orthodox thought, and of gold dust and other contemporary manifestations of the glory of God in Pentecostal circles, is striking. In common with most Christians, both traditions would consider the essence of God — what he is in himself, his inmost nature — to be unfathomable. The Orthodox concept of God's "energies" helps explain how, in view of his inherent incomprehensibility, we can know him. We know God especially as he has shown himself, and supremely as he reveals himself to us in Jesus Christ, and recognize that this revelation is applied to us by the Holy Spirit, through whom alone we are enabled to call Jesus "Lord" (1 Cor 12:3). Although the terminology would be different, Orthodox and Pentecostals stress, more than most Christian communions, the role of the Holy Spirit not only in equipping the people of God for service but also in transforming them into the likeness of Christ, uniting us to Christ as part of his body, the Church. Speaking for the Orthodox, Leonid Ouspensky teaches

that "the power which resurrects the saints after their death is the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who, during the terrestrial life of the saints, vivifies not only their souls but also their bodies" (*Theology of the Icon*, I, 166) Evdokimov explains that "the fathers' doctrine of the knowledge of God is heavily colored by eschatology. It is therefore quite naturally centered on the Lord's transfiguration, resurrection and second coming" (*Art of the Icon*, 243). Pentecostal pastor Ruth Heflin writes at length about the eschatological significance of the gold phenomena, seeing them as personal indications to the people upon whom they come that Jesus will soon return for his own (*Golden Glory*, 196), and as encouragement to believers to "let your faith be raised to new levels through what God is doing" (203). We have been told that when our Lord returns he will give us new bodies, glorified, spiritual bodies. After the resurrection, Jesus could still be touched but his risen body was different. Methodist theologian, Thomas Oden, in the third volume of his *Systematic Theology*, cites the opinions of fathers and scholastics:

The transfiguration was a type of the glorified body, where Jesus' "face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as the light" . . . Jesus there and elsewhere anticipated his resurrection, showing "some of the endowments of a glorified body; of light-footedness, when he walked on the waves; of delicacy, when he broke not open the Virgin's womb; or invulnerability, when he escaped unhurt" (Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 405f., quoting Aquinas and Cyril of Jerusalem).

If God could anticipate the resurrection of Jesus in these ways and in the glory of the transfiguration, is it unreasonable to suppose that he might also anticipate our glorious future, in additional ways to the Orthodox tradition of the light of the transfiguration, and that gold dust and gold teeth may be among those ways?

In this eschatological perspective, gold dust may be seen as one of the *normal* occurrences the saints of God should expect. "For the saints," Evdokimov suggests, "the saying, 'you are the light of the world' is *ontologically normative*. The halos which encircle the heads of the saints on their icons are not simply distinctive signs of their holiness but the shining forth of their bodies' luminosity" (*Art of the Icon*, 187f.). Ouspensky connects gold and glory. Even in painted icons, he says, "the radiance of gold symbolizes the divine glory. This is neither allegorism

nor an unfounded imagery, but an expression that is quite adequate. . . 'The inaccessible light' is 'the light that is more luminous than light,' blinding and therefore impenetrable. Gold, which combines a radiating luminosity with opacity, adequately expresses the divine light—an impenetrable light, that is, something essentially different from natural light, the opposite of darkness" (II, 496).

Does gold dust imply sanctity? How is the transformation into the likeness of Christ accomplished? Both ancient writers and contemporary Pentecostals stress Jesus as the one who must be the focus of Christian life and the source of holiness, and stress the Holy Spirit who imparts to us his holiness. Evdokimov paraphrases Hebrews 1:3 in striking terms: "Christ's humanity is the icon of his divinity . . . the splendor . . . the effigy . . . the imprint" of God. Then he refers to Galatians 4:19 and to the creation of man in the image of God which, though defaced by the Fall, is restored and finds its fulfilment in and through Christ, and then the fullness is passed on to the "Christified ones," those in whom "Christ is being formed," those who carry Christ within themselves—the "christophers." Evdokimov concludes: "The Incarnation comes from God, from his desire to become Man and to make his Humanity a Theophany, a place and a living icon of his Presence" (*Art of the Icon*. 191). This means that the icon who is Jesus is now found in his holy people. At the same time, some reports have spoken of gold dust coming on people who have not yet committed themselves to Christ, leading to their conversion. Holiness is not so much a pre-condition as an irresistible consequence of the grace of God which has been freely conferred.

As a consequence of the grace of God, gold dust anointing "is a reminder to us and to others that God is with us," which leads to holy living. Ruth Heflin writes:

The golden glory and similar miracles in which God's presence is seen on our bodies, make us so aware of the Lord's presence that we are more careful of what we say, what we do and even of what we think. . . The visible sign of God's presence causes us to take hold of the reins of our own spirits and to cause them to be controlled by the power of the Holy Ghost. . . This gift is *for those who have a desire for God and a desire for His holiness*. This blessing is for those who love the Lord and are willing to become a spectacle to the world for His name's sake. (203, my italics).



The love of the Lord and willingness to stand with him are what is essential in holiness. At the least, transfiguration, light, or gold dust must represent a deep dependence on God and, as Heflin says, a desire for God and for his holiness. Ouspensky describes this kind of faith in vivid language:

The effect of this illumination on human nature and particularly on the body can . . . be described to a certain extent and indirectly represented. . . . When the usual state of dissipation . . . [is] replaced in man by silent prayer, and man is illuminated by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the entire human being flows like molten lava in a single burst toward God" (*Theology of the Icon* I,176).

Ouspensky discusses deification and holiness. "The divine image," he writes, "was reinstated in man in the perfect life of Christ. He destroyed the power of original sin by His freely accepted passion and led man to realize the task for which he was created: to achieve divine likeness." (I.157). Ruth Heflin counsels those who criticize and reject the idea of gold dust to make sure that they know Jesus well enough to recognize whether something like this is in harmony with his character, and to remember that when Jesus appeared after the resurrection to those disciples who had not believed the report of the first witnesses, he first upbraided them for their lack of faith but then commanded them to go and preach the gospel, with the assurance that he would provide "signs following" (214-218). Acting on the basis of faith is the surest way to grow spiritually. Ouspensky continues:

The rebirth of man consists in changing 'the present humiliated state' of his nature, making it participate in the divine life . . . Henceforth, by following Christ, by integrating himself to His body, man can reestablish in himself the divine likeness and make it shine forth in the universe. . . . When the human person attains this goal, he participates in divine life and transforms his very nature. . . . This ascension of man reverses the process of the fall and begins to deliver the universe from disorder and corruption, since the deification attained by the saint constitutes the beginning of the cosmic transformation to come" (I, 157f.).

What, then, is the qualification for receiving gold dust? It might be expected that the normal requirement would be receiving first the much greater glory of salvation, yet we have already seen that sometimes the gold comes even before this. Perhaps it is a case of God doing things differently on occasion—as, for example, when the Spirit came upon Cornelius and his household, before they had been baptized, as they were just reaching the point of faith. While we must surely say that the essential requirement is that God in his grace decides to give it to us, we recognize that faith normally comes first. Nicholas Cabasilas, Gregory Palamas' successor in the see of Thessalonica, teaches that when we come to Christ in baptism,

he transforms, refashions and renews our psychosomatic functions, turning them into functions of His own body. . . . Christ infuses Himself into us and mingles Himself with us. He changes and transforms us into Himself as a small drop of water is changed by being poured into a vast sea of perfume. . . Greater things are stronger than lesser ones, what is divine prevails over what is human" (quoted in Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, 123)

Essentially the same claim was made by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1925, stating that when the faithful are born again they become "partakers of the divine nature and a holy disposition is given, leading to the love and practice of righteousness" (quoted by Thomas Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 176).

What does gold signify? It has already been noted that Ouspensky equates the gold of the painted halo with the light of the divine glory, that glory which was glimpsed by the three disciples at the transfiguration. Eastern theologians have described at length the significance of the light of Transfiguration. In somewhat different language from that used by the Orthodox, Russell Hart, *The Icon Through Western Eyes*, summarizes their teaching:

For Jesus, the Transfiguration was a mighty confirmation of his vision of Messiahship . . . At the moment of his deepest humiliation on the cross, this vision of glorification would give him strength.<sup>[1]</sup> The Transfiguration was for the disciples a means of grace. They had been shattered by Jesus' statement at Caesarea Philippi that he was going to Jerusalem to be killed. . . After the Transfiguration, they would be able to perceive Jesus' passion as the beginning of God's Kingdom, coming in power. .

. They would look forward to his appearing at the Second Coming, and coming in glory upon the occasions of their own martyrdoms. The Transfiguration is a means of grace for the Church, because it affords us a glimpse of life after the resurrection. . . . The Transfiguration tells us that our faith journey survives death. This is what Paul means when he says that we will continue to go forward, growing 'brighter as we are transformed into the image that we reflect' (II Corinthians 3:18) (73f.).

Ouspensky teaches that "just as the body of our Lord was glorified and transfigured, becoming resplendent with divine glory and infinite light, so also the bodies of the saints are glorified and become luminous, being transfigured by the force of divine grace" (I, 159). Like so many Orthodox theologians, he refers for his prime example to St Seraphim of Sarov, and he also refers to St Symeon the New Theologian, who describes his own experience as follows: "The man whose soul is all on fire also transmits the glory attained internally to his body, just as a fire transfers its heat to iron" (160).

Christ works among his people in many ways. After discussing the way Jesus comes to us through the Eucharist, Evdokimov suggests how Jesus can also be encountered in icons: "In an icon, the Hypostasis, Christ's person, 'enhypostasizes' not a substance (the wood and colors) but the *likeness*. It is the likeness alone and not the board that is the meeting place where we encounter the presence" (195). While the Orthodox have always believed they can encounter the presence of God in icons, the whole Church also has the tradition of holy men and women in whom the presence of God may be encountered even more powerfully. If what is said of icons may be believed, how much more does Christ's person "enhypostasize" his saints, whatever variations of manifestation the Lord decides to employ—whether light as in the perpetually quoted example of St Seraphim of Sarov, or stigmata as with St Francis and Padre Pio, or gold dust as with Sylvania Machado and others? Are these not all ways in which human beings can be recognized as "icons" of Jesus, and in which others can meet Jesus through them?

There does need to be caution, and we must look for the fruit of the manifestations. Banner Ministries is right in saying that God does not put on nightly shows just for the sake of creating a spectacle or to have people come for an emotional 'high.' Fixation on manifestations is both unhealthy and unproductive, and God calls us to holiness. St Seraphim did not stress his own holiness and glory, and Sylvania Machado does not focus mainly on the gold dust.

Yet when God comes in glory the results will be noticed. If God is truly doing a new thing in our time, we do not want to miss it.

The words of C. S. Lewis are still true. "If we take the imagery of Scripture seriously, if we believe that God will one day give us the Morning Star and cause us to *put on* the splendor of the sun, then we may surmise that both the ancient myths and the modern poetry, so false as history, may be very near the truth as prophecy." Lewis reminds us very forcibly that this outcome to human life has not been fully realized yet, and brings the gospel message down to earth: "Meanwhile the cross comes before the crown and tomorrow is a Monday morning." But he also recognizes that through the cross the glory has now entered the world: "A cleft has opened in the pitiless walls of the world, and we are invited to follow our great Captain inside" (Lewis, *Weight of Glory*, 38f.).

If we embrace the many manifestations of God's glory that have been appearing in our time, we recognize that there is more than a cleft, there is a wide open door. The pace has accelerated, God is doing a new thing, which is bringing about a transformation of the whole created order. Ruth Heflin urges us to embrace "the New": "This is a new day, and in this day, we no longer need to come in as Ezekiel did. . . In this day, the wave of God's glory comes crashing in and carries you out into the depths of the Spirit. . . In the glory, it just happens, and you are changed and move from glory to glory" (*Golden Glory*, 110, 227f.). There is another way of describing this in patristic terms. Both the Bible and the fathers tell us that the resurrection of Jesus inaugurated a new day, *the* new day, and while this will be fully manifested at the second coming, there is also an element of realized eschatology. Lossky describes the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas:

The perfect vision of divinity becoming perceptible as uncreated light, which *is* the divinity, is the "mystery of the eighth day," it pertains to the age to come, where we shall see God face to face. However, those who are worthy, those who are united with God, may come even in this life to a vision of "the Kingdom of God coming in power," as did the disciples on Mount Tabor. (*Vision of God*, 130f.)

Nicholas Cabasilas speaks in biblical terms of the coming full revelation of Christ, when "the righteous will shine with

one brightness and glory. They will become bright by receiving that light, He by imparting it." Then he notes the present relevance of this perspective:

With this radiance the blessed ones live, and at death that light does not depart from them. The righteous constantly have light, and they come to that new life shining with it. At the time of universal judgment they will run to Him with whom they will have been all the time. . . . So when He flashes like lightning upon the clouds He will receive His own members from all places, as God in the midst of gods, the glorious Leader of the glorious company. (*The Life in Christ*, 146)

While scripture teaches us to look forward to that Day, it is equally Biblical to maintain with these eastern mystics and theologians that while we wait for Christ we are already "risen with Christ" (Col 3:1), already walking in his new eighth day, "seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, [and] being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18).

The things of God must not be distorted and made into a human spectacle. There is always the danger of this happening when God begins to act in new ways. If the focus comes to be primarily on the gifts rather than the Giver, there is something wrong. Yet equally, if gifts are rejected simply because they seem to be 'different' or not what we have always expected, we limit God and miss out on his best. Like Moses, St Seraphim of Sarov was clothed with the brightness of the sun, because of his holiness. While there is a similarity between this and the appearance of gold dust coming on worshippers today, there is also one major difference. The gold dust is not a manifestation of human holiness, however transformed the person may be, but of divine holiness, and of what God is doing in his people and his world. Like the gifts of the Spirit, the gold dust and the light are for the building up of the Body of Christ toward what Teilhard calls "the consummation of the divine milieu" (*The Divine Milieu*, 134). God is doing a new thing, and sharing with his people the glory of his face, and a little of his splendour is rubbing off in the form of dust, so that the individual may be edified, as with tongues, the Church strengthened, the sick healed, and the lost brought into the Kingdom of God. For those who receive this blessing, just as for those who, like St Seraphim, are

transfigured with the burning light of the transfiguration, there is a great privilege in being so marked and a great responsibility conferred to be in the forefront of those following "our great Captain" inside through the cleft in the wall of this world which is his death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit.

#### WORKS CITED

Cabasilas, Nicholas, *The Life in Christ*, trans. C.J. de Catanzaro. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974

Dubay, Thomas. *Fire Within*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989

Eckhart, Johannes, *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, trans. Raymond Bernard Blakney. New York: Harper, 1940.

Evdokimov, Paul. *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty*, trans. Steven Bigham. Redondo Beach, CA: Oakwood Publications, 1990

Fish, Melinda. "In the River: Basking in His Glory," *Spread the Fire*, 2000, Vol. 6, Issue 3 (quoted from <http://www.tacf.org/6-3/river.html>)

Fox, Matthew. *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988

Heflin, Ruth Ward. *Golden Glory*. Hagerstown, MD: McDougal Publishing, 2000.

Kärkäinen, Veli-Matti. "Trinity as Communion in the Spirit: Koinonia, Trinity, and Filioque in the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue," *Pneuma*, XXII.2 (Fall 2000)

Lawrence, Peter. "God, Glory, and Gold Teeth," *Renewal*, September 1999, 37

Lewis, C.S. *The Weight of Glory, and Other Addresses*. London & New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996

Lossky, Vladimir. *In the Image and Likeness of God*. London & Oxford: Mowbrays, 1975

. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. Cambridge & London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1957.

. *The Vision of God*, trans. Ashleigh Morehouse. Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire: Faith Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1973

Oden, Thomas C. *Life in the Spirit (Systematic Theology, Vol. 3)*. Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1998

Nellas, Panayiotis. *Deification in Christ*, trans. Norman Russell. Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987

Ouspensky, Leonid. *Theology of the Icon*, Vol. I, trans. Anthony Gythiel. Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992

*Theology of the Icon*, Vol. II, trans. Anthony Gythiel. Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992

Shattles, Bob. *Souls Harvest*. Hagerstown, MD: McDougal Publishing, 2000.

Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre. *The Heart of Matter*, trans. Renée Hague. London: Collins, 1978.

*The Divine Milieu*. New York: Harper, 1960.

Underhill, Evelyn, *Mysticism*. New York: Meridian Books, 1955

-  
<http://www.banner.org.uk/tb/gold.html>

<http://www.charismanews.com/news.cgi?a=145&t=search.html>

<http://www.revivalglory.org/campstest.htm>

[http://www.revivalglory.org/raining\\_gold.htm](http://www.revivalglory.org/raining_gold.htm)

[1] The suggestion that the Transfiguration was a confirmation to Jesus would be denied by many orthodox theologians. For example, Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 223, says: "The Transfiguration was not a phenomenon circumscribed in time and space; Christ underwent no change at that moment, even in His human nature, but a change occurred in the awareness of the apostles, who for a time received the power to see their Master as He was, resplendent in the eternal light of His Godhead."

top of text