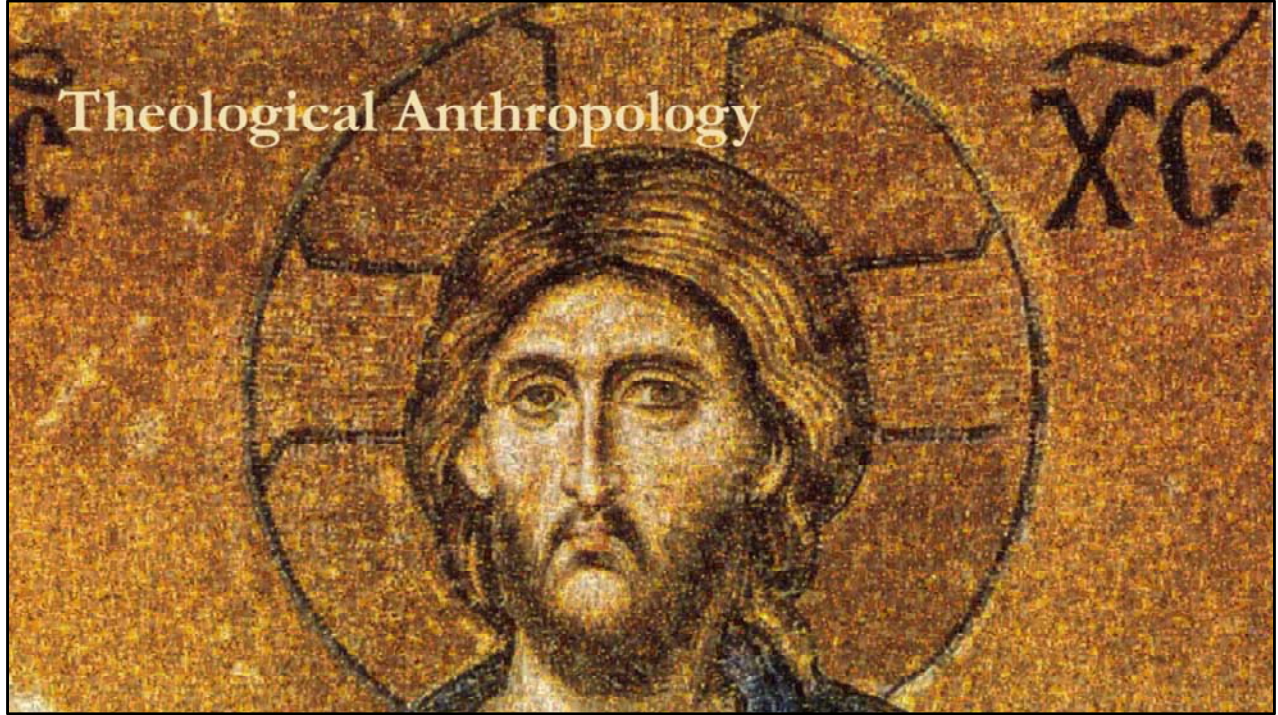




Part 1: The Book of Revelation

a. How does the Book of Revelation relate to the life of Christ?

Question 1: Did Christ definitively conquer death, evil, and suffering on the Cross? ... Then why is there still death, evil, and suffering in the world?

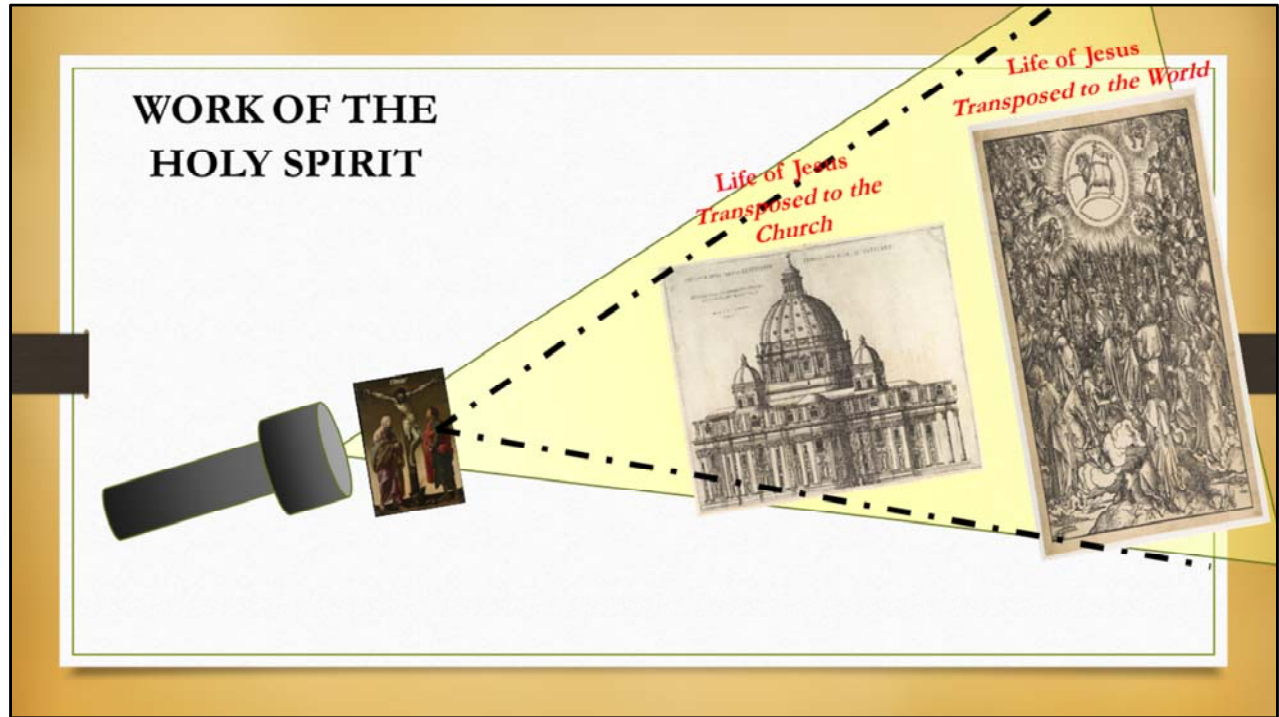
Question 2: What has Jesus' life, death, and resurrection revealed about the meaning of power? What has it revealed about the way that power works in this world?

Question 3: Up to now, we have discussed how *we* can understand what God has done "for us humans and for our salvation" in Jesus Christ, that is, *our perspective* of God and Christ. What does the Cross tell us about God's view of us and the world? What is God's perspective of the world, in light of what he has done in Jesus Christ?

The Work of the Holy Spirit

“He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things” (Eph 4:10).

When Jesus tells his disciples during the last supper that he will return to the Father, he tells them that it is better that he goes, “for if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you” (Jn 16:7). He says, “When the Advocate comes whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, he will testify to me” (Jn 16:26). There is a Trinitarian ordering to salvation. The Son reveals and embodies the Father’s love. The Son makes the Father present. The Spirit reveals and embodies the Son. The Spirit makes the Son present. This is why Paul writes that “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord!’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13).



“I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. **10** I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet **11** saying, “Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches (Revelation 1:9-11)

Thus does John the seer of the Book of Revelation introduce the account of the vision he received and recorded. What do we see when we look at the world? How do we see it? In the Book of Revelation, the category of “vision,” or of “seeing,” is the main conceptual category of the book, and so we are invited to think about how we see things. The book is not only about the future, and in some ways is not even mainly about the future, but about how we “see” things now in the present, in the light of “what is to come,” and, vice versa, how we see the destiny of the world in the light of what Christian faith believes has already come to pass.

St. John's Vision



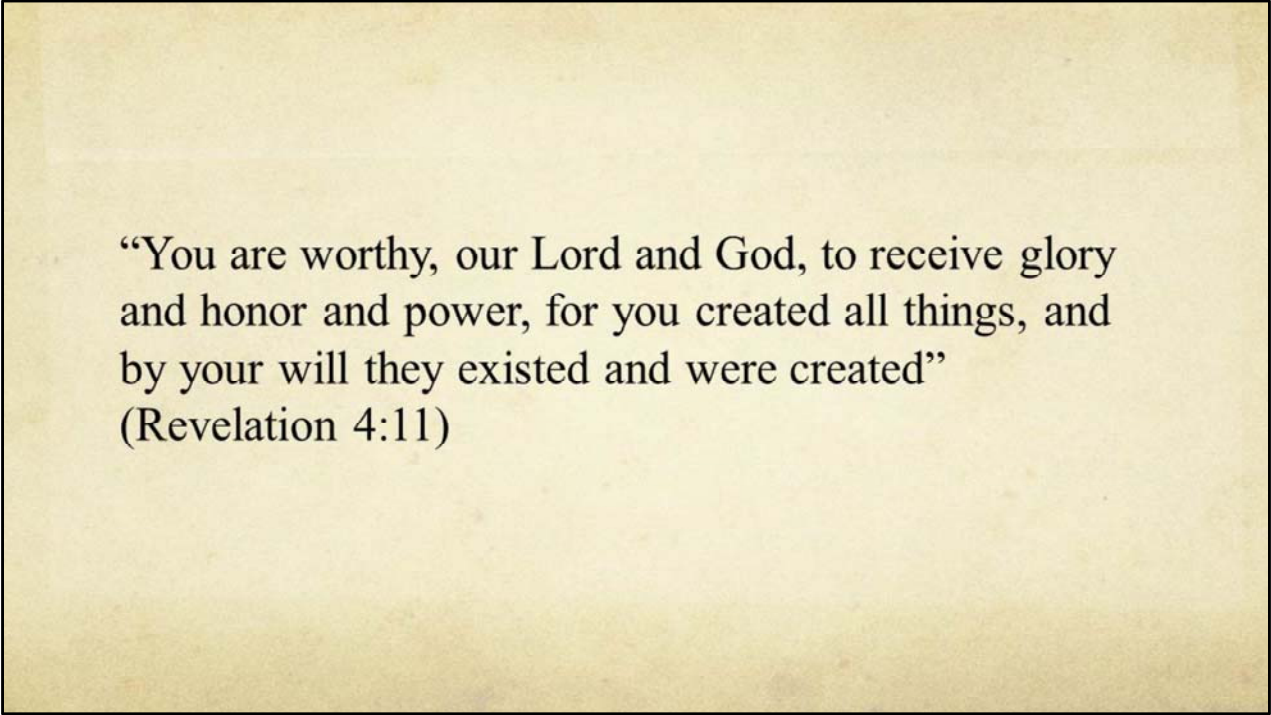
So, what does the seer see? Later in the Book, we receive a report of a second vision, or a second stage in the original vision:

“After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.’ **2** At once I was in the Spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated on the throne! **3** And the one seated on the there looks like jasper and carnelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald.” (Revelation 4:1-3)

Here is a vision, not in the first place of what must take place after this (that will come soon enough), but of what is true at present, now, in Heaven.



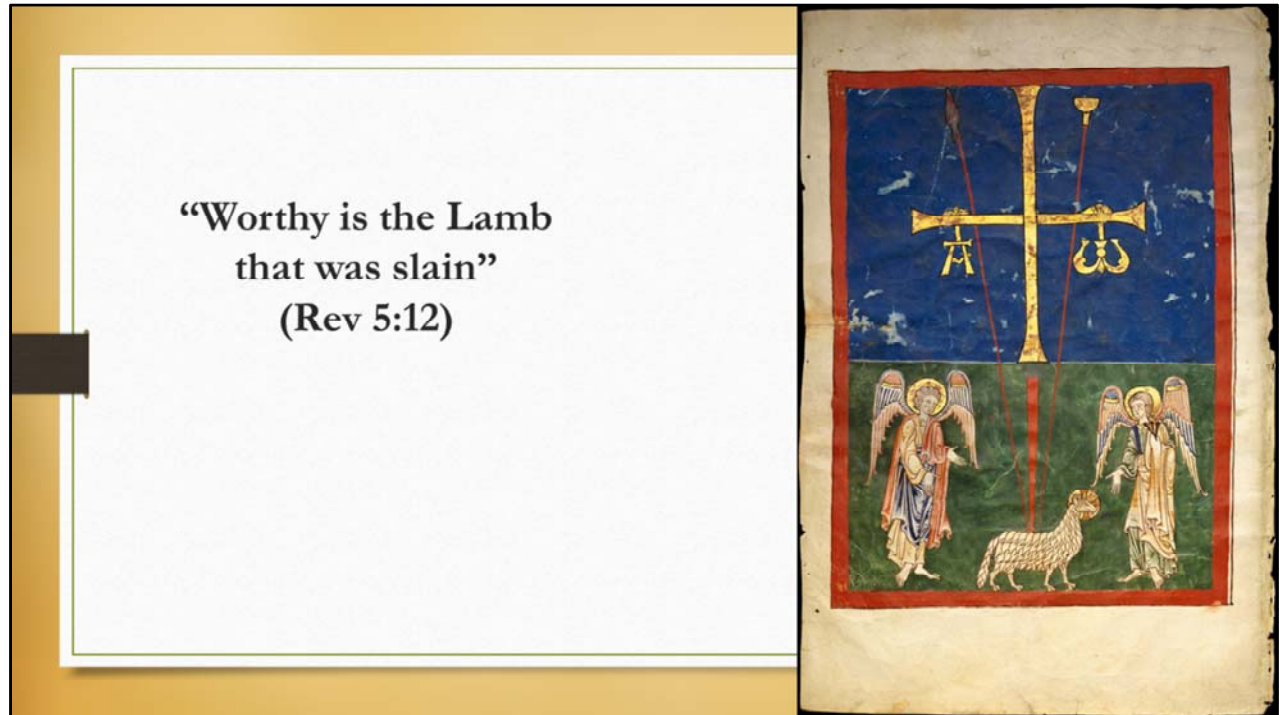
God is seated on His throne in majesty; we can recognize the imagery of bejeweled light from the Book of Ezekiel and other passages in the Old Testament. Seeing God enthroned in majesty means being able to see things, everything, from the perspective of God's absolute sovereignty, and thus in its true light. The heavenly chorus, expressing this sovereignty, sings to the One enthroned:



“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created”
(Revelation 4:11)

God as Creator is sovereign, and His will for the world that He created is presented as a scroll with seven seals. But who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?, an angel is said to ask. A candidate is found, but He may seem an unlikely candidate at first, because He is a Lamb, an image of something powerless and small, and even worse, a Lamb who was slain!

“Then I saw,” the seer reports, “between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered **7** He went and took the scroll from the one who was seated on the throne.... Upon doing so, **9** the heavenly chorus sings: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; **10** you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.”... And again, **12** “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing,” and, finally, **13** “To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” (Revelation 5:6-13)



In other words, what the seer sees, is that the Lamb who was slain, Jesus, is equal in honor and glory to God – here is another Scriptural forerunner of Trinitarian faith – and this means that looking at him, beholding him, we see in his sacrifice contained the whole will of God, the whole perspective on the world of God, we see the world that God created from the perspective that God sees it, in the loving sacrifice of the Lamb who was slain. This loving sacrifice IS God’s perspective on the world, and one thing it does is “ransom” a “kingdom” of priests, that is, those who are formed into a people by that one sacrifice and are willing, in turn, to offer their whole lives and beings as loving sacrifice in turn. This is the Church, and when it says they will reign on earth, it does not mean “reign” in necessarily the same sense as the power from whom they are ransomed.

Who is the Church ransomed from?

We see the full extent of this ransom after the seventh seal is broken open, and the scroll of God's will is fully revealed. The vision of the woman clothed with the sun, whose...



Who is the Church ransomed from? We see the full extent of this ransom after the seventh seal is broken open, and the scroll of God's will is fully revealed. The vision of the woman clothed with the sun, whose

“children are those who keep the commandments of
God and hold the testimony of Jesus”
(Revelation 12:17)

The woman clothed with the sun

... is a multivalent image, of Israel, of Mary, mother of the Messiah, and of the Church, mother of believers. Her enemy is the ancient dragon, the devil. And then, lo! Representing him, the ancient enemy, is someone else the secr secs.

“And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads; and on its horns were ten diadems, and on its heads were blasphemous names. ... And the dragon gave it his power and his throne and great authority. ... **3** One of its heads seemed to have received a death-blow, but its mortal wound had been healed. In amazement the whole earth followed the beast. **4** They worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?’” (Revelation 13:1-4)

Who is the beast?

This beast is the Roman Empire, seen from the perspective of the One on the Throne and from the Lamb, the various horns representing different emperors, claiming the place of God, that is, claiming worship in the person of the emperors. The beast mimics the Lamb who was slain, for one of the emperors, perhaps Julius Caesar, was killed and yet the empire did not fail. The Roman Empire mimics and claims God's power, and displaces the Creator in the imaginations of all who are amazed by the power of the Empire and worship it, seeming to have no choice.

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The Beast embodies and stands for “the kingdom of this world” (Rev 11:15)

Nor does the Roman Empire stand only for itself, as it is given the mystic name “Babylon” later in the text (17.5), meaning that it embodies and stands for (by embodying) the “kingdom of this world” (11.15) or the claims of political power everywhere as though it were self-standing and absolute, claiming to define all reality in its terms.



The “Whore of Babylon” (Rev 17)

The famous “whore of Babylon” depicted in chapter 17 is Babylon, in its guise as the Roman Empire, dominating all commerce and political power in the known world, exacting worship, for in the Old Testament, fornication is a symbol of idolatry. We worship the beast because we see no alternative to its power.



Indeed the alternative, the other beast in this paired duo (again following Wayne Meeks here) is an unlikely alternative, the Lamb.

The Lamb

If the Lamb is the one whose loving self-sacrifice ransomed so many from the power of the beast, which is the power of Satan, we are given to believe, I would suggest, that the Beast represents all that would deny that self-giving Love is a reality, that Love means anything, that Love is anything but an illusion deigned to perish in worship of the only thing that seems real, imperial power, “the kingdom of this world.”



How can a Lamb stand up against this powerful beast? If the Lamb is the one whose loving self-sacrifice ransomed so many from the power of the beast, which is the power of Satan, we are given to believe, I would suggest, that the Beast represents all that would deny that self-giving Love is a reality, that Love means anything, that Love is anything but an illusion deigned to perish in worship of the only thing that seems real, imperial power, “the kingdom of this world.” Don’t we all feel this temptation? That love, like a little lamb, is useless against the powers of this world and the forces of a nature that is winding down into dissolution? Why not worship the Beast? After all, doesn’t love always seem to be crushed by power?

The Perspective of the Lamb

Anyone who gazes on the power of the Empire, of Babylon, from the perspective of the heavenly throne room, that is, from the perspective of the Lamb who stands between the throne of God and all creation, the perspective of love revealed and poured out in His blood, anyone who “washes their robe white in the blood of the Lamb,” that is, anyone baptized -- can see right through the empty claims of the ancient dragon, purveyed through the beast of imperial power that claims to be divine.



But the message of the Book of Revelation is that the opposite is true. From the perspective of God's throne, it is the Lamb who was slain, and His love, that is already victorious, for he is seated at the right hand of God, and whose victory will be made complete as Creation is brought to the fulfillment that the Creator always intended, even from the foundation of the world, which was in the love revealed in the Lamb (cf. 13.8). Anyone who gazes on the power of the Empire, of Babylon, from the perspective of the heavenly throne room, that is, from the perspective of the Lamb who stands between the throne of God and all creation, the perspective of love revealed and poured out in His blood, anyone who “washes their robe white in the blood of the Lamb,” that is, anyone baptized -- can see right through the empty claims of the ancient dragon, purveyed through the beast of imperial power that claims to be divine:

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! ... Alas, alas the great city, Babylon the mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come. ... Alas, alas the great city... for in one hour she has been laid waste”
(Revelation 18:2, 10, 16, 19)

“The Kingdom of this world” destroyed in only one hour

. The point here is that if the Empire, and “the kingdom of this world” which it represents, will be destroyed by God’s power in only one hour in the future, it means that here and now, from the perspective of love victorious, one can see through its arrogant claims to monopolize reality, and replace love with power, easily



Love in the end will triumph

From the perspective of the Lamb who was slain, you can see right through it all, do not have to be intimidated by the Beast and all its empty claims, and can have the courage to act in love always. For love in the end will triumph, for that is the end for which the one on the throne, the Creator, created it.



The great battle of the Apocalypse

Just as the beast who was wounded is matched with the Lamb who was slain, so also we find in the Book of Revelation a matching pair of two women, the Whore of Babylon, and the Bride of the Lamb, each also representing two cities, the city of Rome and all that Rome represents, and the heavenly Jerusalem. The Bride of the Lamb is the Church, and the seer has a vision of the Bride, coming down from heaven after the overthrow of the great dragon and his representative on earth, Rome, signified by the beast and by the whore of Babylon.

The great battle of the Apocalypse		
The Love of Power		The Power of Love
The Beast	vs.	The Lamb
The Whore of Babylon	vs.	The Bride of Christ
Rome / Babylon	vs.	New Jerusalem
The Kingdom of this World		The Kingdom of Heaven

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; ... And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ... And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’”
(Revelation 21:1, 2, 5)

The Bride of the Lamb

The vision of the Bride of the Lamb and of the renewal of creation are given together. The Bride of the Lamb, the heavenly Jerusalem, is the Church, here glimpsed in her perfection. The Bride is an image of love, of someone whose very being is defined by love, the love of the Lamb who was slain, whose blood, that is, whose love, created the Spouse/Bride/Church, as a visible mystery, a sacrament, one could even say, of the renewal of all of creation.



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“The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’ And let everyone who hears say, ‘Come!’” – “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:17,20)

The Bride, the Church, is praying right now, “Come!”

In other words, the Bride Church is praying right now, in the same Spirit in which the seer has seen all this, to Come! To renew all things in the Love that is present defining the Church as spouse, a love so great that it will reach out and create the new heavens and the new earth, in which God will dwell openly with all of creation just as he now dwells, in a mystery, in the Church.



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The Church as the Sacrament of Creation

It is from such a perspective as this that the Second Vatican Council calls the Church a kind of sacrament of the unity between God and human beings, and of the unity of human beings among themselves. The presence of the Church in the world, of a visible communion formed not by human political action or human excellence but by the blood of the Lamb, mediates that the original destiny of all of creation in this same love of God, revealed in the blood of the Lamb, will be accomplished.



Shepherd of Hermas (2nd Cent.)

“The world was created for the sake of the Church”

... and we see that what that actually means is that the Church was created for the sake of the world, so that its true status from all eternity as beloved of God, might be revealed and accomplished, and the lies of power are shown up for exactly what they are, lies, and a debased simulacrum of God's real power, which is love.



In the early second century visionary text, The Shepherd of Hermas, we read, as noted in an earlier lecture, that the world was created for the sake of the Church – and we see that what that actually means is that the Church was created for the sake of the world, so that its true status from all eternity as beloved of God, might be revealed and accomplished, and the lies of power are shown up for exactly what they are, lies, and a debased simulacrum of God's real power, which is love.

“Hallelujah! For the Love our God the almighty reigns. **7** Let us rejoice and exult and give him glory, for the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; **8** to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure” – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. **9** And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:6-9)

THE WEDDING OF THE LAMB! -- Note how the writer tells you that what he is saying is symbolic (here the “fine linen” is the righteous deeds of the saints.)

The Eucharist

But if the Bride is a present reality (who pleads in the Spirit for the Lord to come) seen here in her future perfection, so we may believe is the wedding supper of the Lamb, even if present now in mystery or in a “sacrament” of what is to come, namely, in the Eucharist. Those who can see the “bride” in her perfection, despite her present, not yet perfected reality, are those who can see the love of God at work. Such are those who have, in baptism, washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, and who are formed, by participation in his sacrificial blood, into one Kingdom of Priests, in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is our “vision adjustment,” available weekly or even daily, so that we may see the world as God sees the world, not as the Dragon would have us see it.



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The Eucharist (Cont'd)

Seeing the love which gathered the Church, we see the love which is perfecting the whole world. Participation in the Eucharist IS participation in the endtimes of God's triumph, in advance, and it forms us to see what is coming, by helping us to recognize that it is already here, in the Church, though not yet consummated fully, when the lie that power is God, and not Love, is finally fully revealed for what it is and deprived completely of its power to deceive.



Who is Jesus? Who is the Church?

Who is Jesus? Who is the Church? These questions interpenetrate. If you do not see the Bride, the work of the Lamb transfiguring and perfecting and renewing the world in His love, then you do not really see the Lamb, you do not know who Jesus is. If you do not see Jesus as the divine Word made flesh, reigning with God from the one throne, you do not really see his work in deifying humanity through the creation of a new people. ... Then you do not see that God's purposes in election are from the beginning, and are a part of the mystery of His love, that of a bridegroom for a bride, which will ultimately draw all of creation into itself as beloved in the blood of the Paschal Lamb, who died for us all.

Epilogue: The Saints' Deeds as the Fine Linen Clothing the Bride of the Lamb

As an epilogue, it is interesting to think about the saints, whose deeds, the Book of Revelation says, are the fine linen clothing the Bride of the Lamb. We can go back to St. Augustine's portrayal of the Church as, with Christ the head, the "whole Christ." The intimacy is so great, he insists, that Christians in baptism have become not only Christians, but Christ.



“Let us rejoice then and give thanks that we have become not only Christians, but Christ himself. Do you understand and grasp, brethren, God’s grace toward us? Marvel and rejoice: we have become Christ. For if he is the head, we are the members; he and we together are the whole man. ... The fullness of Christ then is the head and the members. But what does “head and members” mean? Christ and the Church.”

(Augustine, *Tractate on the Gospel of John* 21.8, cited in the Catechism of the Catholic Church #795).

Sometimes Augustine can even say that Head and members are not only one Christ, but one “person.”

“The Psalm speaks as though one single person is praying, but it is not a lone individual, it is a unity, speaking as one. In Christ we all form one human person whose head is in heaven and whose limbs are toiling on Earth.”

(Augustine, *Exposition of the Psalms 51-72*, Exposition of Psalm 60).

And Gregory the Great follows him in using the word person this way:

“Our redeemer has shown himself to be one person
with the holy Church, whom he has taken to himself”

(Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, Preface 14, cited
in the Catechism of the Catholic Church #795).

The Intimacy of the Union seen in the Saints

This doesn't mean that the Church is taken into the hypostatic union, the personal union of the two natures, divine and human in Christ, and yet I think it is intended to mean that, as members of Christ, His body, we are transfigured into the Love which poured itself out for us to create a new solidarity, a new "man," a new humanity, in Him, in such a way that each of us, in our own way, participates in that hypostatic union which is nevertheless uniquely the Head's. Those members of Christ whom this participation has transfigured the farthest, into the exemplary members, as it were, are the saints, and the idea is that we can see in them the mystery of the Word Incarnate, renewed and interpreted anew in each age. Knowing the saints enables us to know Christ more completely, because we see the results of His work more clearly.

The Saints “Perform” the Gospel

The mystery of the person of Christ lives on in the Church and in the saints who are the most perfected members of the Church, the fine linen of the bridal gown, whose deeds have been more perfectly transfigured and configured to Christ’s sacrificial love, and in whose person, therefore, we see the “person” of the Word reflected and refracted, living in every age. We do not simply find out about Jesus from the pages of a book, but from the saints who “perform” the Gospel and so interpret it anew.



The Wedding of the Lamb!

