

Year 3 (2012): Week 8

## **GUILD SEMINAR**

### Week 8: "Already and Not Yet"

Overview:

1. Prayer
2. Notes on Retreat
3. Signs of Grace (the "already")
4. Notes on the Sacraments
5. The Traditional View of Last Things (the "not yet")
6. Notes on Eschatology
7. Christian Views on salvation of Buddhists, Muslims, Atheists, etc.
8. Hope: Last Words
9. "The Test"

As time may permit

10. Sketching an Argument for Infant Baptism
11. Notes on Purgatory
12. Notes on Book of Revelation

## Signs of Grace

We might have given this week's discussion the title "Signs of Grace and Hope of Glory." Grace is God's action to draw us to himself. Sacraments are signs and instruments of grace.

Let's situate ourselves theologically.



*Between the Times*

Let's recall what Barth says about the church gathered in time between the direct vision of the Resurrection (the "Already") and the direct vision of the Parousia (the "Not Yet.")

According to Barth, the church is **gathered** in the time between the direct vision of the resurrection and the direct vision of the parousia (CD IV.1,725.) It lives in "the strength of the resurrection," the "light of Easter day." The church "already has behind it the end which it awaits." The church is strong "because it knows what time it is." Its weakness is that it lives in this strength "by faith, not sight." (727-8.) The church exists when and because it recognizes its poverty apart from divine justification, and its richness in it.

Sacraments belong to this "time between." It is the time of "faith, not sight." It is the time of having the end that it awaits already in view in the resurrection. It is the time of the unbreakable strength of what it knows, experienced in the weakness of knowledge only by faith.

### Notes on the Sacraments

Sacraments are symbolic interpretations of literal events.

Baptism and Eucharist are both symbolic interpretations of literal actions: immersion in water and sharing bread and wine. According to the Gospels, the literal actions historically go back all the way to Jesus.

This prompts several reflections.

1. In our rituals today, we have a kind of physical link going back to the time that Jesus walked the earth. Some days the literal and physical side of these rituals, through which we have this historical connection, feels very important in its own right.
2. Both Baptism and Eucharist also show the intense reflection of the early church on the meaning of the crucifixion and resurrection. They thus enrich the symbolic meaning of the literal actions by light of those events. Both sacraments are heavily laden with the original light of Easter—living in what Barth calls the strength of the resurrection.
3. Thus the sacraments have a share in that which gives the church its strength, while still in the form characteristic of the church in its for-the-present weakness: faith.
4. They are potent “outward signs” of the grace that is invisible except to faith.

*Questions for Discussion:*

Is it helpful to see sacraments in light of theological understanding of the church in time?

Can we think of moments in our lives when the grace of a sacrament has shown through its outward sign with special transparency and strength?

### **The traditional view of last things**

Here is Owen Thomas's textbook summary of traditional catholic and protestant teaching concerning eschatology, as it took shape historically. Thomas:

For the most part, the outlines for Protestant and Catholic tradition "are roughly the same. At death the immortal soul is separated from the body, undergoes what is known as particular judgment, and proceeds to hell or a state of waiting until the end. Some affirmed that the martyrs and saints went directly to heaven. The punishment of hell includes the negative *poeni damni* or the forfeiture of the divine presence and the *poena sensus* involving the inner torture of despair and anguish and the external torment of demons, fire, etc..." (Thomas, *Introduction*, 165)

Of course, the great historical difference between protestant and catholic (other than that each tradition reserved heaven to itself and deposited the other in hell) concerns purgatory.

## Notes on Eschatology

We think now on the mysteries of the “last things”

The Parousia – Christ’s return in power.

The World’s Future

Our life after death

Purgatory

Heaven and Hell

It would be good to start by recalling and highlighting the importance of theological caution.

### *Migliore’s (and Luther’s) Reserve*

Migliore writes: “The language of Christian hope is language stretched to the limits, language rich in symbol and image.”

He adds: “We should not pretend to have precise and detailed information about the future. The symbolic language of hope is to be taken seriously but not literalistically.... We must have the humility to recognize with Luther that ‘as little as children know in their mother’s womb about their birth, so little do we know about life everlasting.’” (DM, 340)

### *Aquinas’s Reserve*

Aquinas believed, first, that the truth of Scripture “must be held inviolable.”

However, “[When] there are different ways of explaining a scriptural text, no particular explanation should be held so rigidly that, if convincing arguments show it to be false, anyone dare to insist that it is still the definitive sense of the text. Otherwise unbelievers will scorn sacred scripture, and the way to faith will be closed to them.” [Edward Grant in “Science and Theology in the Middle Ages,” in Lindberg and Numbers, *God and Nature*, p.63. The citation is from ST part 1, question 68.]

Aquinas developed that principle in consideration of “first things.” As he worked his way through the creation stories in Genesis, he declined to endorse any single interpretation, for example, of the heavenly “firmament,” or the “waters” above the firmament.

“Instead he enumerated different historical interpretations that were compatible with scripture and patiently explained how the application of different scientific theories implied different and sometimes conflicting consequences... With the presentation of [different available opinions]... Aquinas felt he had accomplished his

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objective. Because they were all compatible with the scriptural text, he saw no need – and indeed no way – to choose among them.”

Edward Grant, “Science and Theology in the Middle Ages.” P. 63-4.

Time has born out the wisdom in that principle as applied to first things, and all the more to last things.

We need Aquinas’s caution, because God hasn’t turned over all the cards.

*What we don’t know . . . and what we know.*

God has, however, turned over one card -- and that is crucial. According to Christian teaching about the last things, one of the last things has indeed occurred, in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Richard Hooker teaches us that theological reason interprets scriptures whose meaning is dark and obscure by light of scriptures whose meaning is bright and clear.

The resurrection is the light by which the New Testament itself was written, and it is the light by which we may now contemplate the end.

### The Last Things: When and Where?

	PRESENT	FUTURE
WITHIN HISTORY	Existentialist Theologies (Individual Transformed)	Process and Liberation Theologies (World and Society Transformed)
ABOVE HISTORY	Barth/Pannenberg (The 'Already')	Barth/Pannenberg (The 'Not Yet')

Here we get an indication of the varieties of interpretations that can be and have been given to Christian hope for consummation.

A purely historical understanding of Last Things (whether present or future) would clearly seem to represent a loss of hope.

We would be constrained by Aquinas's reserve not to foreclose on hopes for a future world transformed. To deny the possibility would be to give in to apathy or, to use Barth's term, "sloth."

But to reduce hope to this-worldly possibilities is to make Scripture out to be obscure at a point where it is as clear as clear can be.

We may not be sure how best to interpret the biblical and traditional material concerning the last things. We may have mostly questions about heaven and hell. We may be curious about purgatory. When we are asked about the second coming, our mantra might well be: "We know not the day."

But we may be certain of this: "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ," then Christianity has been a massive mistake from beginning to now. (1 Cor. 15:9)

And in that case—as Barth insisted—we can't be done with it soon enough.

Paul is on the record that, in his opinion, if the dead aren't raised, Christians are of all people in the world, the most pathetic.

That could be debated, one supposes.

One could argue that we are actually happier living under this particular delusion than we would be living with no illusion and no hope. The question would be: Would you rather trade lives with Jim Morrison, or Martin Luther King?

But that is really beside the point.



Paul has done what he could to dispel any possibility of the church being confused on two points:

- 1) The story of Jesus of Nazareth did not as a matter of fact “end on a Roman cross.” (Paula Fredrickson’s opinion notwithstanding.<sup>1</sup>) And, in that light,
- 2) Neither will our own stories end on the day we die.

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<sup>1</sup> “Strictly speaking, these reports tell us nothing of Jesus of Nazareth. His story ended on a Roman cross.” Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 261-262.

**Christian Views on the Salvation of Buddhists, Muslims, Atheists, etc.**

<b>PLURALISM</b>		<b>PARTICULARISM</b>		<b>EXCLUSIVISM</b>
	<b>Liberalism</b>		<b>Calvinism</b>	
		<b>Modern Catholic</b>		
		<b>Modern Reformed</b>		

## Pluralism

### *Image*

God is at the mountaintop, veiled in mist. God's truth may be approached from all sides, each approach representing a world religion.

### *Definition*

Pluralism is the view, held by some Christians, that religions are all symbolic expressions of an underlying truth that is universally available.

### *Popular Version*

"Our government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is." Dwight Eisenhower

### *Academic Version*

John Hick and Paul Knitter, The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions

### *Central Idea*

For practical purposes, the major religions are equally valid, relative expressions of the Absolute that is the font of all religion.

### *Classic Statement*

"I am proud to belong to a religion that has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but accept all religions as true."

(From the Gita): "Whosoever comes to me, through whatever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me."

Swami Vivekananda, First World Congress of Religions, Chicago, Sept. 11, 1893

### *Salvation for Buddhists, Muslims, Atheists, etc:*

All can be "saved," each by their own faith.

### *A Problem*

If "all religions are true," what do we make of the fact that they have rather different things to say on important topics?

### *Example*

What happens to the soul at death?

Hindus typically maintain the soul survives; depending on one's quality of life and karma, the same soul may become re-incarnate.

Muslims maintain the faithful are rewarded with life eternal.

Buddhists have a doctrine of “no-soul.”

*Question*

In what sense of “truth” can all these views be true?

*Answer*

“Considering the specific character of Christian faith as based upon a historical past and related to an eschatological future of salvation, the truth claims of the Christian proclamation are at its basis, and the difference with other religions finally results from different truth claims.” W. Pannenberg, “Religious Pluralism and Conflicting Truth Claims,” 102-3 in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, Gavin D’Costa

*Bottom Line*

According to Leslie Newbigin, Religious Pluralism either:

- a) Logically collapses; or
- b) Concludes the truth about God cannot finally be known.

## Exclusivism

### *Image*

The truth of God in Christ is the pearl of great price. The one who discovers it gladly sells everything she owns, to have it.

### *Definition*

Exclusivism is the view “that revelation in Christ alone provides true knowledge of God, and that all other claims to know God are simply false.” (DM, 30.)

### *Favorite Text*

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.”  
John 14:6.

### *Who can be saved?*

“Only Christians, by their faith.”  
“Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus.”

### *Popular Expression*

This is not so much a popular view among Christians living in a time and place where one’s niece might be a Buddhist, one’s daughter might be married to a Jew, and one’s son might just play a lot of Sunday golf.

### *Problems*

- This excludes all who lived in the hundreds of thousands of years before Abraham.
- It excludes the millions after that who never heard of Christ.
- It excludes those who have only encountered the gospel in corrupt, unworthy forms.
- This sounds not at all like God, as God is known in Jesus.

To the contrary, Jesus himself offers a picture of the judgment of the nations, where those who hadn’t known what they were doing are praised for receiving Christ and ministering to him.

“In as much as you did it to me least of these, you did it unto me.”

As C.S. Lewis said, we know that no one comes to the Father except by the Son. We don’t know that only those who know the Son by name come to the Father through him.

*Bottom Line*

Exclusivism claims:

1. Jesus is the way, the truth, the life;
2. Only those who acknowledge Jesus as the way, the truth, the life can be saved.

However:

Jesus' own words suggest that there are those who might not have acknowledged him as way, the truth, the life who nevertheless will be saved.

## Particularism

### *Particularism Affirms*

Christ is the Absolute, the truth by which all other claims of truth are measured.

### *Particularism Acknowledges*

Christianity, the religion that proclaims Christ, is immersed in the pluralistic general phenomenology that is religion.

Particularism is the view of Christians who affirm that whatever is “true ... honorable ... just ... excellent ... lovely ... pure ... or gracious” (Phil. 4:8) is of God, who in Christ has “taken flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

### *A Particularist Text*

“The true light that enlightens everyone was coming into the world.” John 1:9.

### *In contrast with pluralism*

Particularism views Christ, in faith, as God’s self-defining revelation. Jesus is God’s message to the world: “From before all worlds, this is who I AM.”

### *In contrast with Exclusivism*

Particularism views God’s love in Christ as comprehensive, or “inclusive,” of the entire creation, including, but not limited to, the church; including, but not limited to, the avowedly religious.

### *A Dialectic of “Inclusive Exclusivity”*

“The ultimacy that Christian doctrine attaches to the person of Jesus Christ is based upon the New Testament conviction that the origin and future of all creation is bound up with this life, death, and destiny.”

“What happens exclusively in a specific and particular pattern of events is held to be decisive for what happens inclusively to all creation and to all of us as creatures. No human story shall be concluded without reference to this story.”

Christopher Morse, Not Every Spirit, p. 141

### *Bottom Line*

“Everything which is said by human word is drawn into the darkness and light of {the Bible’s} mystery.”

K. Barth  
C.D. 1.2.471

**Hope: Last Words**

On April 9, 1945, at Flossenburg Concentration Camp, a Nazi officer came to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's cell to take him to the gallows. This was 11 days before Flossenburg would be liberated by allied troops.

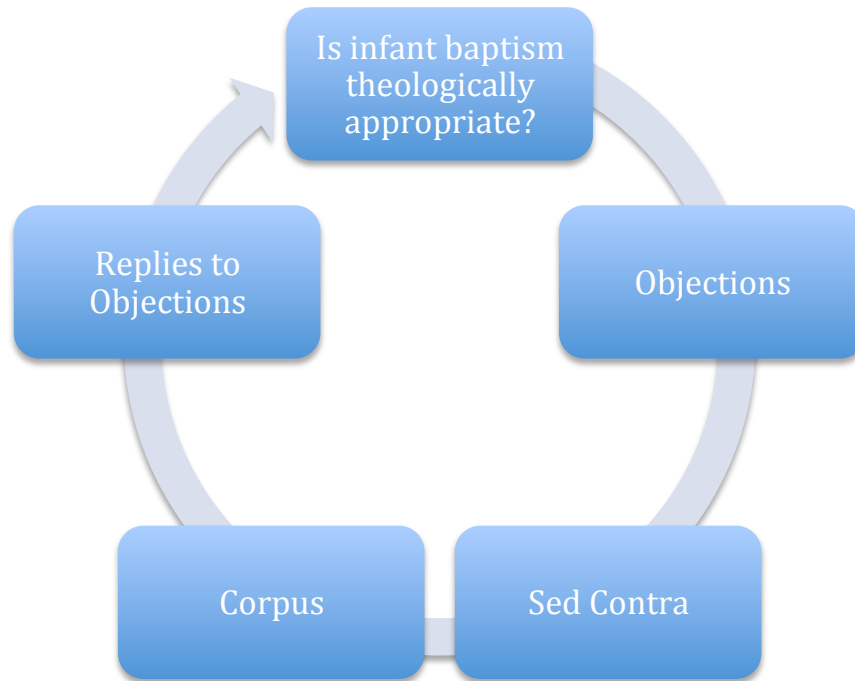
Bonhoeffer's last act was to celebrate communion with a group of fellow prisoners.

The Nazi officer arrived to lead Bonhoeffer away to the gallows. As he left, Bonhoeffer turned to a friend and said "This is the end, and for me the beginning of life."



### Sketching an Argument for Infant Baptism

If we had time, it could be interesting to take up the question of infant baptism following Aquinas's form for argumentation.



*Objections:* Note Barth's objections as mediated by Migliore.. Infant baptism has no explicit basis in Scripture. It leads to the assumption that people are Christians by birth and it obscures the meaning of baptism "as an entrance into free and responsible Christian discipleship." (DM, 284).

*Sed Contra:* Notwithstanding Barth, most of us were baptized as infants.

*Corpus:* The core of the case is that infant baptism is grounded on the objective nature of reconciliation. It is appropriate to a church that is representative of what is true for all people. Thus it is consistent with theological positions that are important to Barth.

*Replies to Objections:* The basis for Barth's objections is recognized and can be satisfied by our practice of confirmation, where the subjective dimensions of reconciliation are brought to the front. Regarding scripture: Hooker's understanding of the church's authority in relation to scripture leaves us to decide whether, under present circumstances, infant baptism is appropriate or not.

## Notes on Purgatory

Eamon Duffy gives a wonderful review of the late medieval view of purgatory, which our church finally rejected.<sup>2</sup>

“Christians feared Hell but hoped for Heaven. Through a lifetime of observant piety, but more especially through the deathbed ministrations of the Church, even the half-hearted might hope for salvation.” [The last rites were extremely important].

“Hell was for hell-hounds, the infidel, and the reprobate...”

“Though every Christian might hope for Heaven, only the saints could hope to go there directly.”

“All who died in a state of venial sin, all who had forgotten or concealed such sins in confession, all who had not fulfilled every part of the penance imposed in confession for sins repented, confessed, and absolved, all who had insufficient penance imposed on them by over-indulgent confessors, all who fell short of that fullness of charity which lay at the root of salvation... all these were bound to spend some time in Purgatory.”

Now the “vision of God was granted only to those who were in charity, who truly loved him for his own sake and not his benefits...”

And “the natural school of charity and the proper place for purging was not Purgatory, but here on earth, now in the time of grace, for after death would be the time of justice. Penance for sins was far more easily done in life than after death.”

In England, purgatory was conceived as an outpost of hell. Thomas More imagined it as staffed by “cruel damned sprites, odious, envious, hateful . . . enemies.”

But for Dante, it was the ante-room of heaven, a “place of hope and a means of ascent towards Heaven... From this Purgatory the devils are barred by protecting angels, and although all the souls whom Dante encounters are suffering, their sufferings are eagerly embraced and impatiently returned to, for they lead the soul through a pedagogy of love to the vision of God.”

Aquinas also held that the devils are barred from purgatory. (Duffy, 345.)

Our Anglican tradition rejected purgatory at the outset (the doctrine was at least in serious need of reformation) -- but C.S. Lewis would speak for many of us in seeing a need for further training in the school of charity -- indeed, its hard to imagine how our entrance into heaven could be conceived in any other way.

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<sup>2</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 341–45.

## Notes on the Book of Revelation

Here is the book where “fools rush in” and experts fear to tread. We offer no expertise, but two books may crack the husk to some extent.

One is Bruce Metzger’s *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation*. The other, highly recommended, is Richard Bauckham’s *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. We will mostly follow Bauckham here.

Bauckham asks: “What kind of Book is Revelation?”

According to 1:1, it is a “Revelation,” or *Apocalypse*. “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what must soon take place; and he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John...”

According to 1:3, it is a “Prophecy”

In 1:4-6, we see that it is also an epistle, a “letter” to “the seven the seven churches in Asia.”

“Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.”

That short greeting shows that, with all else, this is going to be an exquisite piece of Trinitarian theology. (Bauckham, 23-5)

Does the revelation concern the present-- or the future? It concerns both.  
Does it inform us concerning earth -- or heaven? It informs us concerning both.

*Prophetic Apocalypse*

Bauckham calls the book a “prophetic apocalypse in that it communicates a disclosure of a transcendent perspective on the world.”

*“Prophetic* in the way it addresses a concrete historical situation, that of Christians in the Roman province of Asia towards the end of the first century AD – and... [enables]...readers to discern the divine purpose in their situation and respond to this situation in a way appropriate to this purpose.”

*“Apocalyptic*, because the way that it enables its readers to see their situation with prophetic insight into God’s purpose is by disclosing the content of a vision in which John is taken, as it were, out of this world in order to see it differently...” (Bauckham, *Theology*, 7.)

John “is transported in vision into the final future of the world, so that he can see the present from the perspective of... its final outcome.”

“The bounds which Roman power and ideology set to the readers’ world are broken open and that world is seen as open to the greater purpose of its transcendent Creator and Lord.” (7)

“John’s artistry takes his readers into a new “symbolic world” ...”but really it is not another world. It is John’s readers’ concrete, day-to-day world seen in heavenly and eschatological perspective... Its function... is to counter the Roman imperial view of the world.” (8)

“The visual power of the book effects a kind of purging of the Christian imagination, refurbishing it with alternative visions of the how the world is and will be...” (17)

The book is a prediction and a call to faithfulness. It predicts a great conflict between the church and Rome in the present and near future, which does occur and escalate “in the two centuries after it was written.” (151)

It reads the meaning of that conflict by its vision of the way it looks from heaven, where “the dragon, who gives his throne and authority to the beast (13:2), is the satanic parody of God as the One who sits on the throne, and the beast, who recovers from a mortal wound (13:3), is a parody of the slaughtered Lamb...” (114)

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*Samples of the Symbolic Imagery*

These examples are drawn both from Bauckham and Metzger's *Breaking the Code*.

Rev. 1:12-16 pictures "One like a Son of Man" in the midst of 7 golden lamp stands.

"Seven." Seven days complete a week, and "so seven means completion or perfection..." (Metzger, 13).

Revelation includes seven

- |                    |             |                        |
|--------------------|-------------|------------------------|
| -- lampstands      | -- eyes     | -- heads on a dragon   |
| -- stars           | -- seals    | -- plagues             |
| -- flaming torches | -- angels   | -- bowls               |
| -- spirits of God  | -- trumpets | -- mountains           |
| -- thunders        | -- kings    | -- praises to the lamb |

(Metzger, 18)

According to Bauckham:

"Christ" occurs 7 times.

"Jesus" occurs 14 (7x2)

"Lamb" occurs 28 (7X4)

4 represents the number of the world (four corners 7:1; 20:8, four divisions 5:13; 14:7)

"The 7X4 occurrences of "lamb" therefore indicate the worldwide scope of his complete victory." (Bauckham, 66-7)

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*More imagery*

Returning to Metzger:

John has told us that “the seven lampstands are the seven churches.” (1:20) Thus by placing Christ in the *midst* of the lampstands, John “wants to let us know that he is not an absentee landlord. On the contrary, he is in the midst of his churches, supporting them during trials and persecutions.” (Metzger 26)

Later Christ will be represented as a lamb “with seven horns” (for perfect power), “seven eyes,” (he sees all, knows all, through the seven spirits sent throughout the earth.”)

Here he stands before a throne, and by the throne are four living creatures... 4 covers all the earth:

A lion... an ox... a human... and an eagle: what is “noblest, strongest, wisest, and swiftest in creation.” (Metzger, 50).

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*One like a Son of Man* (The following notes also draw from Metzger.)

What are we to make of this terrifying picture of one like a son of man?

Metzger: "John's description of the heavenly Christ does not mean what it says, it means what it means." (27)

He wears a long robe with a golden sash. This is the garment of a king. It means that Christ is king.

His hair is white as wool. In Daniel 7:9, the Ancient of Days appears with hair as white as wool. It means that Christ and God are one.

His eyes were like a flame of fire. It means his insight penetrates our self-delusion, hypocrisy, and shame. (Metzger)

His feet...like burnished bronze. That is to say, not like feet of clay. (Dan.2:33). He is strong and stable.

His voice was like the sound of many waters. Ezekiel had said of God, "the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters." (43:2). Again and again, this book identifies Christ with God, over and against the power of the Roman Empire. (This is to suggest that, contrary to the claims of some, high Christology was not "Constantine's invention to unite the empire.")

In his right hand he held seven stars. The seven angels of the seven churches (1:20).

And from his mouth issues a sharp two edged sword." Hebrews 4:12: "the word of God is active... living...sharper than any two-edged sword."

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*3 Images of Christ* (following Bauckham 67-73)

The Book gives us three images for Christ:

This royal figure who leads the church in a messianic war, where the power of the beast is answered only by the power of truth.

The sacrificial lamb, the Passover lamb of the new exodus, who ransoms a people for God.

A faithful witness, by whose example John calls the church to be faithful even unto death.

In other words, the Book of Revelation presents Jesus Christ as King, Priest, and Prophet.