

The BOOK of REVELATION

the CONSUMMATION of GOD'S ECONOMY

God's economy is His plan according to His eternal purpose to dispense Himself in Christ as the Spirit into His chosen and redeemed people as their life, their life supply, and their everything to make them His corporate expression. The economy of God, which is revealed in its intrinsic significance in the book of Ephesians, is the central line of the divine revelation in the Scriptures from the beginning in Genesis to the consummation in Revelation. As "the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:1), the book of Revelation is a remarkable unveiling of the consummation of God's economy—a consummation focused on the all-inclusive Christ as the center of God's administration. Although God is eternally triune in His inner being—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit coexist and coinhere from eternity to eternity—the book of Revelation emphasizes not the essential Trinity but the economical Trinity, that is, the Triune God processed and consummated for the dispensing of Himself into His redeemed and regenerated people. The divine dispensing is, therefore, a crucial matter in Revelation as a book of consummation. The goal of this dispensing is the corporate expression of the Triune God through Christ, the firstborn Son of God, and the believers as the many transformed and glorified sons of God. According to God's intention, this expression is with the churches as golden lampstands in this age and with the New Jerusalem as the ultimate golden lampstand in eternity. However, in his rebellion against God's administration, Satan, God's enemy, opposes God's economy and works to frustrate its fulfillment, especially through his strategy in causing the degradation of the church. In the book of Revelation, the Lord Jesus speaks directly concerning the church's degradation and calls repeatedly for overcomers, those who will overcome the degradation of the church and build up the Body of Christ, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem, the goal of God's eternal economy.

The All-inclusive Christ as the Center of God's Administration

God's economy is related to God's administration. In fact,

by Ron Kangas

oikonomia, the Greek word for *economy*, denotes a household administration. To speak of the divine economy is, therefore, to speak of the divine administration, the divine government. The Bible emphatically and repeatedly reveals that God's administration, His government, is a matter of His throne and of His rule over everything and everyone in the universe created by Him for His will (Rev. 4:11). The Psalms testify of this: "Thou dost sit on the throne judging righteously" (9:4); "the Lord's throne is in heaven" (11:4); "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever" (45:6); "God reigns over the nations, / God sits on His holy throne" (47:8); "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Thy throne" (89:14); "Thy throne is established from of old" (93:2); "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens; / And His sovereignty rules over all" (103:19). The prophets, who served under God's administration, had a vision of the throne. Micaiah declared, "I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left" (1 Kings 22:19). Isaiah testified, "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted" (6:1). In the vision granted to him, Ezekiel beheld a throne: "Now above the expanse...was something resembling a throne...and on that which resembled a throne, high up, was a figure with the appearance of a man" (1:26). Daniel says, "The Ancient of Days took His seat / ...His throne was ablaze with flames, / Its wheels were a burning fire" (7:9). God's throne is related to His administration, which is altogether a matter of His economy.

As a book that unveils the consummation of the divine economy, Revelation is a book of God's administration, a book concerned with the execution of God's government. Unless we realize the governmental and administrative character of this book, we cannot have a proper understanding of it. That Revelation is concerned with God's administration is indicated by the frequent use of the word *throne*: "the seven Spirits who are before His throne" (1:4); "sit with Me on My throne as I also overcame and

sat with My Father on His throne” (3:21); “behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and upon the throne there was One sitting” (4:2); “seven lamps of fire burning before the throne” (v. 5); “Him who sits upon the throne” (5:1); “the face of Him who sits upon the throne” (6:16); “caught up to God and to His throne” (12:5); “sing a new song before the throne” (14:3); “worshipped God, who sits upon the throne” (19:4); “a great white throne” (20:11); and “the throne of God and of the Lamb” (22:1). It is evident that Revelation is a book of the throne and that this throne is the throne of authority, the throne of the divine administration over the entire universe.

The center of this universal administration is Christ, the glorified and ascended God-man. In His ascension Christ is the One enthroned for the divine administration, the One enthroned to execute God’s governmental operation in the universe. “God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow” (Phil. 2:9-10). The Christ who “endured the cross, despising the shame,” has “sat down on the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). According to chapter five of the book of Revelation, the throne on which the ascended Christ is sitting is the throne of God’s administration for the consummation of His economy. Verse 6 says, “I saw in the midst of the throne...a Lamb standing as having just been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.” Here we have the tremendous vision of the Lamb—the Redeemer, the One slain on the cross for our sins—on the throne carrying out God’s administration over the entire universe. The enthroned Lamb with the seven eyes, the seven Spirits of God, is carrying out God’s administration for the accomplishment of God’s economy. The administering throne of God (7:15) has become, and will forever remain, the throne of God and of the Lamb (22:1, 3).

At this juncture we need to see that the book of Revelation further discloses that the Christ who is the center of the divine administration is the all-inclusive Christ. In a very real sense Christ is everything; that is, He is the reality of God, of humanity, and of every positive thing in the universe. As such, Christ is whatever is needed in God’s economy.

Revelation is unique in its unveiling of this Christ, presenting Him in His ascension as the worthy Lion-Lamb (5:5-6); in His administration among the churches and in

the heavens (1:11-18; 5:7); in His coming back with its secret and open aspects (3:3; 16:15; 1:7; 14:14); in His judgment on all the world, on Babylon, on Antichrist, the false prophet, Satan, and their followers, and on the dead (chs. 6, 8, 11, 15—20); in His possession of the earth (10:1-7); in His reigning in His kingdom during the millennium (20:4, 6; 2:26-27); and in His centrality and universality in eternity in the New Jerusalem (21:9-10, 23; 22:1-2). Aspects of Christ’s all-inclusiveness seen in Revelation include His being the Son of God (2:18), the Son of Man (1:13; 14:14), the faithful Witness (1:5; 3:14), the

Firstborn of the dead, the Ruler of the kings of the earth (1:5), the First and the Last (1:17; 2:8; 22:13), the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega (22:13), the living One (1:18), the Holy One, the true One (3:7), the faithful One (19:11), the Amen,

the beginning of the creation of God (3:14), the Root and the Offspring of David (22:16), the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Lamb (5:5-6; 21:23; 22:1), the King of kings and Lord of lords (19:16), the Word of God (19:13), the morning star (22:16), the Husband (21:2), and another Angel (7:2; 8:3; 10:1; 18:1).

Two of these precious items—Christ as the Lion-Lamb and as another Angel—require comment, for they are of crucial importance with respect to God’s economy. In 5:5 Christ is called “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” but in verse 6 He is revealed as a Lamb; hence, He is the Lion-Lamb. As the overcoming Lion, Christ has defeated God’s enemy Satan, and as the redeeming Lamb, He has taken away the sin of the world (John 1:29) and “has released us from our sins by His blood” (Rev. 1:5). Now He, the Lion-Lamb, is uniquely worthy to open the scroll of God’s economy (see *Opening the Scroll of God’s Economy*, pp. 5-6).

A little known aspect of Christ in His all-inclusiveness is His status and function as another Angel, as a unique, special Angel (7:2; 8:3; 10:1; 18:1), standing in the position of One who has been sent by God. Revelation 8:3 says, “Another Angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer, and much incense was given to Him to offer with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.” Here Christ, another Angel, is portrayed as the One who executes God’s administration by ministering to God as the High Priest with the prayers of His redeemed and sanctified people. As He offers these prayers to God, He adds to them His incense, which signifies Himself with all His merit in His resurrection and

In His ascension Christ is the One enthroned for the divine administration, the One enthroned to execute God’s governmental operation in the universe.

ascension. This incense causes the prayers of God's people to be acceptable to Him.

It is important to realize that as another Angel Christ ministers at the golden altar (the incense altar—Heb. 9:4) which is before God's throne. This indicates that the One who sits on the throne executes His administration through the prayers offered at the golden altar. This means that, in actuality and in practicality, the executing center of the divine government is not the throne but the golden altar, where Christ now ministers as another Angel. If we realize this and understand its significance for the accomplishment of God's economy and if, as believers, we are committed to live on earth for the consummation of God's economy, our prayer life will be radically changed, even revolutionized, for we will join Christ in His role in the divine administration to pray for the carrying out of the divine economy.

The Economical Trinity

If we would have the proper understanding of the Divine Trinity as unveiled in the Bible as a whole and in Revelation in particular, we need to avoid two great trinitarian heresies—modalism and tritheism. According to the modalistic concept of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit do not eternally coexist and coinhere in the Godhead but are alleged to be merely three temporary and successive modes of God's activity. Modalism therefore denies that God is triune in His inner being. Tritheism, which stands in sharp contrast to modalism, is a belief in three Gods; it entails the notion, held by many believers unintentionally or unconsciously, that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are three Gods and views the Godhead as a family or society. Whereas modalism emphasizes the side of God's being one to a heretical extreme by denying the eternal coexistence and coinherence of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, tritheism emphasizes the side of God's being three to the opposite heretical extreme by asserting that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are three Gods. We must repudiate both of these heresies and embrace the biblical truth that God is triune economically as well as essentially.

According to the divine revelation in the Scriptures, God is triune both essentially—that is, in His inner being—and economically—that is, in the outworking of the various stages and aspects of His economy in relation to His chosen and redeemed people. The essential Trinity refers to the essence of the Triune God for His existence. Essentially, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit coexist and coinhere eternally without succession. There is distinction among the three of the Godhead but no separation. Although the Father is distinct from the Son and the Spirit, the Son is distinct from the Spirit and the Father, and the Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son, the Father,

Opening the Scroll of God's Economy

In the divine administration Christ, as the Lion-Lamb, the overcoming Redeemer, opens the scroll of God's economy (Rev. 5:3-7; 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8:1). In Revelation 5:1 the One sitting on the throne has a scroll in His hand sealed with seven seals. These seven seals are the contents of the scroll, and the scroll itself is the new covenant, enacted with the blood of the Lamb. Hence, the new covenant is a scroll covering the redemption of the church, Israel, the world, and the universe.

Here we see the secrecy of God's administration in the universe. Throughout the centuries, wise men have earnestly tried to learn the secret of the universe. But they failed because they did not have the revelation. Although the new testament was enacted by the death of Christ, it has been a mystery to mankind. In the book of Revelation the resurrected and ascended Christ opens the scroll of God's economy.

As the One who opens the scroll, Christ is portrayed as the Lion-Lamb, as the overcoming Redeemer. In Revelation 5:5 we have this word: "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome to open the scroll and its seven seals." Then verse 6 goes on to speak of a "Lamb standing as having been slain." Christ is both the fighting, victorious, and overcoming Lion and the Redeeming Lamb. As the Lion, He is the Fighter against the enemy, Satan; as the Lamb, He is the Redeemer for us. He has fought to redeem us, and He has won the battle over the enemy and accomplished redemption for us.

As the Lion of the tribe of Judah, Christ has overcome the enemy of God. He has solved this problem for God and has removed the hindrances to the fulfillment of God's purpose. God's purpose needs someone to carry it out who can solve all the problems of God. The problems which God had were the rebellion of Satan and the fall of man. As the Lion, Christ has defeated rebellious Satan, and as the Lamb He has taken away the sin of fallen man. Because He has solved these problems for God, He is worthy to open the scroll of God's economy and its seven seals.

Christ opens the first four seals in Revelation 6:1-8. These seals comprise four horses with their riders in a four-horse race. These riders are not real persons but personified things. The rider of the second horse, the

Continued on the next page

red horse, is war (v. 4); the rider of the third horse, the black horse, is famine (vv. 5-6); and the rider of the fourth horse, the pale horse, is death (v. 8). According to historical facts, the rider of the first horse, the white horse, is the preaching of the gospel. White signifies clean, pure, just, and approvable. The white horse with its rider is a symbol of the preaching of the gospel which is clean, pure, just, and approvable both to men and to God. Immediately after Christ's ascension, these four things—the gospel, war, famine, and death—began to run like riders on four horses and will continue until Christ comes back.

The opening of the fifth seal (Rev. 6:9) discloses Christian martyrdom from the first century to the time near the end of this age. As the gospel is being preached, there is always the martyrdom of the faithful saints. In Revelation 6:12 Christ, the overcoming Redeemer, opens the sixth seal. This seal, which marks the beginning of supernatural calamities, is God's answer to the cry of the martyred saints in the fifth seal. After the opening of the sixth seal, the Lord comes in to shake the earth and the host of the heavens. This great shaking will be a warning on earth to repent and turn to God. This calamity is not the actual wrath of God. Rather, it indicates that God will soon come in to avenge the martyred saints and to vindicate Himself.

Whereas the first four seals of the scroll of God's economy are simultaneous, the fifth and sixth seals are consecutive. The seventh seal includes everything from after the sixth seal to eternity future. Thus, the seventh seal, consisting of the seven trumpets, is all-inclusive.

Revelation 8:1 says that when the Lion-Lamb "opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about half an hour." This silence indicates solemnity. At the opening of the seventh seal, all heaven becomes silent because the age is about to be changed. The period before the opening of the seventh seal was the age of God's toleration. For the sake of His purpose of preaching the gospel to produce the churches to fulfill His eternal plan, God has been tolerating the sinful situation on earth. But with the opening of the seventh seal the age of toleration is terminated, and another age is brought in—the age of God's wrath. The opening of these seven seals is Christ's work as the overcoming Redeemer in the divine administration.

Witness Lee, *The Conclusion of the New Testament, Messages 63—78*. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1986, pp. 831-833.

the Son, and the Spirit are not separated and cannot be separated, for they coinhere, mutually dwelling in one another. Regarding coexistence, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are distinctly three, and regarding their coinherence, they are inseparably one. Hence, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, coexisting in the way of coinherence, exist eternally in the Godhead with distinction but without separation. Whereas the essential Trinity refers to the eternal existence of the Triune God, the economical Trinity refers to the activity of the Triune God in the steps of His move to carry out His economy for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose to have a corporate expression of Himself. In God's economy, God's administrative arrangement, the Father purposed in the Son with the Spirit; the Son accomplished the Father's purpose by the Spirit and with the Father; and the Spirit, with the Father and the Son, applies what the Son has accomplished according to the Father's purpose. As God's economy is being carried out in this way by the economical Trinity, the truth and reality of the essential Trinity—the eternal coexistence and coinherence of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in the Godhead—is not compromised. The economical Trinity is the essential Trinity in action. This is revealed in the book of Ephesians and manifested in the book of Revelation.

Since the book of Revelation is the consummation of God's economy and since the subject of this book is Christ as the center of God's administration according to God's eternal economy, it is not surprising that the Divine Trinity in Revelation is not the essential Trinity but the economical Trinity. Revelation is concerned with God's administration, and God's administration is altogether related to His economy. Because this is the emphasis in Revelation, what is revealed in this book regarding the Trinity is related to the economical Trinity, not the essential Trinity.

This fact becomes apparent when we compare Matthew 28:19 and Revelation 1:4-5. The Trinity in the former is the Trinity of God's existence, the essential Trinity, and the Trinity in the latter is the Trinity for God's economy, the economical Trinity. Matthew 28:19 says, "Go therefore and disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The Trinity here refers to the existence of the Triune God; the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one in essence for their existence. Furthermore, just as the name of a person denotes not the activity but the being of that person, so the name in this verse denotes not the economical activity of the Triune God but the essential being of the Triune God. We baptize new believers into the person, the being, the essence, of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit; we do not baptize them into God's economy, God's administration, or God's activity.

As Matthew 28:19 indicates, in God's essence the Trinity is

simply the Father, the Son, and the Spirit; however, as Revelation 1:4-5 indicates, in God's economy the Trinity is rather complicated, or, as it may be better to say, the biblical revelation is complicated. These verses say, "Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is coming, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth." Regarding God's existence as the essential Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit eternally coexist and coinhere, and this fact can be stated succinctly without modifiers. However, regarding the economical Trinity as revealed in these verses, there are several modifiers. The Father is described as the One "who is and who was and who is coming." This points not to God's existence—for this, "I AM WHO I AM"

in Exodus 3:14 is sufficient; rather, this modifier refers to certain activities in the divine economy. The principle is the same with the Spirit and the Son. Regarding the existence of the Spirit in the Godhead essentially, the Spirit is one, but economically the Spirit has become "the seven Spirits" (Rev. 1:4); that is, the Spirit has been intensified sevenfold in His function to carry out God's economy. Likewise, regarding the essential Trinity, the Son is simply the Son; however, in the economical Trinity for God's economy, the Son is Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. He is also called "Him who loves us and has released us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father" (vv. 5b-6a). All this refers to the Son not in the essential Trinity but in His various functions and statuses in the economical Trinity.

It is also noteworthy that the sequence of the Trinity in Revelation 1:4-5 is different from that in Matthew 28:19. In Matthew 28:19 concerning the essential Trinity the sequence of the Triune God is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, but in Revelation 1:4-5 concerning the economical Trinity the sequence is the Father, the Spirit, and the Son. This change in sequence points to the crucial function of the seven Spirits, the sevenfold intensified Spirit, in the consummation of God's economy.

A further indication that the Trinity in Revelation is not the essential Trinity but the economical Trinity is found in 5:6: "I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures and in the midst of the elders a Lamb standing as having just been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God." The

Lamb is, of course, the Son as the Redeemer, and the seven Spirits are the Spirit of God. The view here is not essential but economical because what is revealed in this verse is related to God's move in His economy. In the Godhead essentially, the Son is the Son and the Spirit is the Spirit; however, according to 5:6, in God's economy the Spirit, the third in the Divine Trinity, is the eyes of the Son, the second in the Divine Trinity. In God's economy the Spirit is the eyes of the administering Son. In administrative, economical function, the Spirit is operating as the eyes of the Son. From this we see that in the divine administration Christ the Son needs, and has, the Spirit to be His eyes. By means of the seven Spirits as His seven eyes, Christ, the center of the divine administration, is carrying out God's economy. In the essential Trinity the Spirit is distinct from

the Son, but in the economical Trinity the Spirit is the eyes of the Son.

The Divine Dispensing in the Divine Economy

Whereas God's economy is His plan and arrangement according to His desire and purpose, God's dispensing is His imparting of Himself into His chosen and redeemed people according to His plan and arrangement. In feeding the multitude with five loaves and two fish, the Lord Jesus first made an arrangement of the people into groups; this is a picture of God's economy, His arrangement, for His dispensing. Then, through the disciples, He distributed an abundance of loaves and fish to the hungry men, women, and children; this is a picture of God's dispensing according to His arrangement in His economy. God's goal in His economy is to dispense, to impart, to transmit, Himself in Christ as the Spirit into His chosen and redeemed people as their life, their life supply, and their everything.

The book of Revelation indicates that God's dispensing is based on His will in His creation, on His redemption, and on His process. "You have created all things, and because of Your will they were, and were created" (4:11). God's creation is related to His will, to what God wants to do. Stated simply and directly, God wants to dispense Himself into His people, thereby filling and saturating them with Himself to make them His expression. This is God's will, and it is because of this will that the universe and humankind were created. We exist because God desires to dispense Himself into human beings. And we exist, by design, in a very particular way—as tripartite

We exist because God desires to dispense Himself into human beings. And we exist, by design, in a very particular way—as tripartite vessels, consisting of spirit, soul, and body.

vessels, consisting of spirit, soul, and body. We are “bot-tles” designed to contain the Triune God as life, and we are empty and life is meaningless unless we receive the di-vine dispensing according to the divine economy.

Because human beings have become fallen, corrupted, and defiled, God’s dispensing is based not only on God’s inten-tion in His creation but also on His redemption, on His reclaiming us and restoring us to Himself through the pay-ment of a great price, the blood of Jesus the Son of God. Those who have been redeemed, justified, forgiven, cleansed, and sancti-fied in position are now qualified in Christ to receive God’s dis-pensing.

At this juncture we must consider a matter of supreme im-portance—the fact that in order to dispense Himself into us, the Triune God has in Christ passed through a process to be-come “the Spirit,” the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. On the one hand, the Triune God is immutable in His essence; on the other hand, the Triune God has been processed in His economy. Concerning the immutability of the Triune God, the divine truth in the Bible is twofold. In Himself essen-tially, God is unchanging, for His essence is immutable, and His nature is unalterable; He can never become more or less or different from what He is. Nevertheless, the eternal, im-mutable, unchanging Triune God has, in Christ, passed through a process in time in order to dispense Himself into humankind for the accomplishment of His eternal purpose. Apart from this process, there is no way for the Triune God to dispense Himself into us.

The word *process* may be defined as a series of progressive and interdependent steps by which a goal is reached. The New Testament unfolds the steps of the process through which the Triune God has passed in Christ. By incarna-tion the Triune God embodied in the Son became a man, the Triune God-man, who is the mingling of divinity and humanity in one, unique person, Jesus Christ, the com-plete God and perfect man. This Triune God-man lived in His humanity for thirty-three and a half years, living His divinity in His humanity and expressing His divine attrib-utes in His uplifted human virtues. As the next step in His process, the Triune God-man was crucified, dying a substitutionary death for our redemption and releasing the divine life from within Him for our regeneration. The process continued with Christ’s resurrection. Christ was resurrected with a body of flesh and bones (Luke 24:36-43), yet in resurrection and through resurrection He became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Finally, as

the culmination of His process, the Triune God-man, with His resurrected, deified human nature, ascended to the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:3), where He was enthroned and made the Lord of all, the center of God’s administration according to God’s economy.

That the Triune God in Christ has passed through such a process in order to dispense Himself into us is indicated by the words *the Spirit* in Revelation 22:17. According to the Greek text, John 7:39 says that the Spirit was “not yet” because “Jesus had not yet been glorified.” This cer-tainly does not mean

that the Spirit of God did not exist eternally, for the Spirit of God, part of the essential Trinity, coexists and coinheres with the Fa-ther and the Son in the Godhead from eternity to eternity. On the contrary, it means that with re-

spect to the process of the Triune God, the Spirit as the all-inclusive Spirit was “not yet” until Christ was glorified through His resurrection (Luke 24:26). Now, for the car-rying out of the divine economy through the divine dispensing, the Spirit of God, who exists eternally as a distinct person in the Godhead, enters into the believers as *the Spirit*, as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. For this dispensing we were created and redeemed, and for this God Himself has been processed in His economy to be-come the Spirit for us to receive by drinking.

God’s desire to dispense Himself into us can be seen in the biblical references to living water. In the divine dis-pensing, the Father is the fountain, the Son is the spring, and the Spirit is the river, the flow. As the source, the origin, the Father is the fountain of living water (Jer. 2:13). As the embodiment and expression of the Father, the Son is the spring of water that gushes up in the believers into eternal life (John 4:14). As the flow, the Spirit is the river of water of life (Rev. 22:1; John 7:37-39). This is the Triune God in His dispensing—God the Father as the source, God the Son as the course, and God the Spirit as the flow dispensing Himself into us. Now simply by drinking the Spirit we can receive the dispensing of the Spirit. “For also in one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body...and were all given to drink one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13).

The Corporate Expression of the Triune God

Two great and crucial terms used in Revelation are *the reve-lation of Jesus Christ* (1:1) and *the testimony of Jesus Christ* (v. 2). These two terms are a “zip file” that includes the en-tire book of Revelation. This means that the contents of

For the carrying out of the divine economy, the Spirit of God, who exists eternally as a distinct person in the Godhead, enters into the believers as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit.

Revelation are *the revelation of Jesus Christ*—the revealed Christ, the all-inclusive Christ in God's economy—and *the testimony of Jesus Christ*—the testifying church as the expression of the all-inclusive Christ. In other words, the substance of the book of Revelation is Christ and the church.

Whereas Christ is the embodiment and expression of the Triune God, the church is the expression of Christ, the corporate expression of God in Christ. It is God's goal in His economy to have such a corporate expression of Himself in Christ, the firstborn Son of God, with the believers as the many sons of God. In Revelation *the testimony of Jesus Christ*, the church as the corporate expression of Christ, is presented through a series of signs, symbols with spiritual significance: the golden lampstands (ch. 1), the great multitude of the redeemed (ch. 7), the bright woman with her man-child (ch. 12), the harvest with its firstfruits (ch. 14), the overcomers on the sea of glass (ch. 15), the bride (ch. 19), and the New Jerusalem (chs. 21—22).

In the opening chapters of Revelation, the lampstands are of special importance. "I turned to see the voice that spoke with me; and when I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands" (1:12). "The mystery of the seven stars which you saw upon My right hand and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches" (v. 20). "To the messenger of the church in Ephesus write: These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, He who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands" (2:1). These lampstands were seven local churches in Asia, in seven cities respectively, with one church in each city. Revelation is addressed to "the seven churches which are in Asia" (1:4). John, the writer of the book, was commissioned to write in a scroll what he had seen and "send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamos and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea" (v. 11). When the Lord Jesus as the glorified Son of Man speaks to the messenger of each particular church, He—and this is extremely significant—links every church to the city in which it had been established: "the church in Ephesus" (2:1), "the church in Smyrna" (v. 8), "the church in Pergamos" (v. 12), "the church in Thyatira" (v. 18), "the church in Sardis" (3:1), "the church in Philadelphia" (v. 7), and "the church in Laodicea" (v. 14). Elsewhere, the Lord Jesus refers to the

churches. In 2:23 He says, "All the churches will know that I am He who searches the inward parts and the hearts." Seven times He reminds us that the Spirit speaks to the churches: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). In the last chapter of Revelation, the Lord Jesus again mentions the churches: "I Jesus have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches" (22:16). The golden lampstands are the churches, and the churches are local, that is, one church per city. From this we draw the conclusion that only a genuine church can be

a golden lampstand as the testimony of Jesus, the corporate expression of the revealed all-inclusive Christ.

The sign, or symbol, of the golden lampstand indicates that, for the sake of God's goal in His economy, the believers in Christ need

to be constituted with the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—in His economical Trinity to be His expression. The golden lampstand implies the Triune God in His economy. Gold, the substance with which the lampstand is made, signifies the Father with His nature as the substance (2 Pet. 1:4). The stand, the embodiment of the gold, signifies the Son as the embodiment of the Father. The seven lamps, the expression of the stand, signify the Spirit as the expression of the Father in the Son. Thus, the golden lampstand signifies the Triune God in His economy, with the Father embodied and expressed in the Son, the Son realized as the Spirit, and the Spirit intensified sevenfold.

Although the golden lampstand signifies the Triune God, in Revelation the seven golden lampstands are the seven churches. This indicates that a genuine and proper local church should be a golden lampstand bearing the significance of the Triune God. The function of the church is to be the corporate expression of the processed Triune God in His economy.

If we would participate in a church life that fulfills this function, we need to have much spiritual experience. First, in order to be constituted with gold, we need to gain more of the golden element, more of the nature of the Father, by partaking of the divine nature. If in our experience we would gain God as gold, we need to pay a price, as required by the Lord Jesus in Revelation 3:18: "Buy from Me gold refined by fire." Believers who live not by the divine life but instead by the natural human life are not buying gold from the Lord and are not gaining the golden nature of the Father; therefore, in

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of Himself in Christ, the firstborn Son
of God, with the believers
as the many sons of God.**

actuality and practicality they are not part of the golden lampstand.

In order to have the form, the shape, of the lampstand, we need to be “transformed into the same image [of the resurrected and glorified Christ] from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18). Whereas regeneration takes place in our spirit, transformation is a metabolic change in our soul by which we express the Lord in glory. The sad condition of countless believers today is that although they have been regenerated in their spirit, they have not experienced any transformation in their soul and may even be dominated by a theology which denies the need of the transformation of the soul. Christ has been born into them, but He has not been formed in them (Gal. 4:19). Unfortunately, they lack the shape of the lampstand, being virtually the same in soul as unbelievers and therefore unable, in actual experience, to participate in the corporate expression of Christ.

We also need to experience the seven Spirits of God as the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne (Rev. 4:5) and as the seven eyes of the Lamb (5:6). The all-inclusive life-giving Spirit—the Spirit who is the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7), the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9), and the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:19)—economically has been intensified sevenfold to be the Spirit of sevenfold burning and sevenfold infusing. On the one hand, we need the seven Spirits as the seven lamps of fire to burn our being with the holy flame of God; on the other hand, we need the seven Spirits as the seven eyes of the Lamb to look upon us and infuse all that Christ is into us so that we may be transformed and conformed to His image (Rom. 8:29) to be His glorious expression.

If we are in the process of being constituted with the processed Triune God, we will eventually come to a crucial turning point in our spiritual life—the turn from individualistic spirituality and independent spiritual living to the corporate life and consciousness of the church as the Body of Christ. Then we will forsake our individualism and our independence and live in the Body, by the Body, through the Body, with the Body, and for the Body. Moreover, we will live such a life in the context of an actual and practical church life in a genuine local church. Then if we have the local church life as the practicality of the golden lampstand and the Triune God processed in His economy as the reality of the golden lampstand, we will be living in and for the goal of God’s economy—His corporate expression.

The Degradation of the Church

It is difficult to see such a corporate expression today because, unfortunately, the church has become degraded. In the epistles to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, the Lord gives us a clear picture concerning the degradation of the church in a number of aspects. To the church in Ephesus the Lord Jesus says, “I have one thing against you, that you have left your first love” (2:4). Here we see the source of degradation—leaving the first, or best, love for the Lord. To love the Lord Jesus with the first love,

the best love, is to love Him as our Bridegroom and as our Husband. The Lord must be our unique Husband, and we should “love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruptibility” (Eph. 6:24). We may love the Lord to a certain extent or in a particu-

lar way that seems satisfying to us, but we may not love Him in incorruptibility, that is, according to the revelation of God’s economy in the book of Ephesians. To love Him with the first and best love, to love Him in incorruptibility, is to love Him as our Beloved, according to the portrait of the divine romance in Song of Songs. Sadly, the church in Ephesus fell from such a love, and the Lord charged her to reckon with this, saying, “Remember therefore where you have fallen from and repent” (Rev. 2:5). The church in Ephesus had good works, labored for the Lord, endured suffering, and tried the false apostles; however, she had fallen from her first love, paying more attention to work than to the Lord Himself. Something—even working for the Lord—had become in her heart an idolatrous replacement of the Lord.

In the epistle to the church in Pergamos, we see a worsening of the degradation that began in Ephesus, for here the church married the world which once had persecuted her (cf. v. 10). The name *Pergamos* means “marriage,” implying that the church entered into a marriage union with the world, “where Satan’s throne is” and “where Satan dwells” (v. 13), opening the way for idolatry, fornication, the teaching of Balaam, and the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Whereas the teaching of Balaam, motivated by the love of money, distracts the believers from the person of Christ to idolatry, the teaching of the Nicolaitans destroys the function of the believers as members of the Body of Christ, thus rendering impossible the corporate expression of Christ through the church as His living, organic Body.

The most common interpretation of the word *Nicolaitans*

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is that it refers to supposed Christians who condoned, or even advocated, license in one's conduct and who themselves lived licentiously. A more accurate and faithful interpretation is to recognize that this word derives from two Greek words—*nikao*, meaning "to conquer," and *laos*, meaning "laity," or "common people." Regarding themselves as superior to common, ordinary believers, the Nicolaitans (like too many in the clergy today) lifted themselves above them and thus "conquered" them, annulling the universal priesthood of the believers and destroying their organic function as members of the Body. In Ephesus there were merely the works of the Nicolaitans (v. 6), but in Pergamos there was the teaching of the Nicolaitans, an official and formal doctrine concerning the clergy-laity distinction and concerning the need of a hierarchy, or mediatorial class, in the church. This doctrine abounds today in organized Christianity and is employed to justify the priestly system, the clerical system, and the pastoral system. No matter what form this system assumes, it is abhorrent to Christ, the Head of the church, it is contrary to God's economy, it destroys the function of the church as Christ's expression, and it is a sign of the church's degradation.

The degradation of the church reached its culmination with Thyatira, the apostate church. "I have something against you," the Son of God declares, "that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, she who calls herself a prophetess and teaches and leads My slaves astray to commit fornication and to eat idol sacrifices" (v. 20). Many of Jezebel's adherents have "known the deep things of Satan" (v. 24), indicating that to a great extent the apostate church has become the embodiment and expression of Satan, especially of satanic notions and concepts. The apostate church, having assumed the standing to teach with authority, has totally dishonored and disgraced her Head, Christ. Eventually, she will become "the great harlot who sits upon the many waters," the woman "clothed in purple and scarlet, and gilded with gold and precious stone and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the unclean things of her fornication," "the woman drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus" (17:1, 4, 6). The degradation that began with leaving the first love has advanced to unspeakable abominations and fornication.

Other aspects of the degradation of the church are exposed by the Lord's speaking to the churches in Sardis

and Laodicea respectively. Sardis is characterized by deadness, by spiritual death. "I know your works, that you have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead" (3:1). The crucial point regarding the condition of the church in Sardis is that this church was dead and dying. It had a name that it was living, but it was actually in a state of spiritual death. The conduct and daily living (symbolized by *garments* in verse 4) of the majority in this church had been defiled by death, stained and contaminated by continual contact with deadness. In the sight of the living God, death is even more defiling than sin (Lev. 11:24-25; Num. 6:6-7, 9). Nevertheless, although today's preachers may rail against sin, a great many are oblivious to spiritual death and even tolerate deadness. Those who are spiritually dead cannot carry out God's economy, and although they may be formally

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religious, they cannot be the corporate expression of the Triune God of life.

To Laodicea the Lord Jesus says, "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am about to spew you out of My mouth" (Rev. 3:15-16). Laodicea may be wealthy in vain knowledge, but this has caused a subtle form of degradation—lukewarmness, a condition unpalatable and intolerable to the Lord and which can lead to the Lord's rejection (being spewed out of His mouth) and to the loss of the enjoyment of Christ. Laodicea is not only lukewarm; she is "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (v. 17): wretched because she is lacking in the riches of Christ, miserable because she is full of shame and darkness, poor because she is devoid of spiritual reality, blind because she has no true spiritual insight, and naked because she does not express Christ as her righteousness in her daily living. Moreover, the Lord is outside the church, standing at the door and knocking, waiting for some responsive one to hear His voice and open the door (v. 20). What a deplorable situation when Christ, the Head of the church, is standing outside the church, wanting to come in!

Leaving the first love, marrying the world, practicing the clergy-laity system, assuming the headship of Christ in teaching, being saturated with the mind of Satan, living in a state of spiritual death, being lukewarm, wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked, being oblivious to the fact that Christ is outside the church—this is the vivid picture in Revelation of the degradation of the church.

The Overcomers

The Lord Jesus responds to this degradation by calling for overcomers, repeatedly speaking of “him who overcomes” (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). Literally, *nikao*, the Greek word rendered “overcomes,” means “to be a victor.” Hence, an overcomer is a victor, a conqueror. It is incorrect to claim that in Revelation 2 and 3 to be an overcomer is simply to be a Christian, a believer in Christ. This understanding may apply to 1 John 5, but it surely does not fit the situation of Revelation 2 and 3. In 1 John 5 the overcomers are all the genuine believers; in Revelation 2 and 3 the overcomers are a minority consisting of victorious believers, those who overcome the degradation of the church and carry out God’s economy.

It is a serious and costly error to teach, as many expositors do, that the overcomers in Revelation 2 and 3 and in 1 John 5 are of the same kind and in the same category and that in every case an overcomer is simply a true Christian. In 1 John 5 overcoming is a matter of victory over the satanic world system, whereas in Revelation 2 and 3 overcoming is a matter of victory over the degradation of the church. First John 5:4-5 says, “Everything that has been begotten of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory which has overcome the world—our faith. And who is he who overcomes the world except he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” In verse 4 *everything* refers generally to every person who has been born, begotten, of God to be a child of God; especially this word denotes that part of our tripartite being—our human spirit—that has been regenerated with the divine life. The regenerated spirit of every believer in Christ overcomes the world. By faith we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and by faith we have entered into an organic union, a union in life, with the Triune God; therefore, it is by faith that we overcome the world.

We should not be quick to assume that this is the kind of overcoming, or the kind of overcomer, spoken of by the Lord Jesus Himself in Revelation 2 and 3. In these chapters of Revelation, to overcome is not to overcome the world system in a general way by faith but to overcome the degradation of the church in a specific way by the sevenfold intensified Spirit. Not all believers in Christ—that is, not all who are overcomers in the sense defined by John in 1 John 5—are the overcomers as defined by the Lord Jesus in Revelation 2 and 3.

The overcomers in Revelation 2 and 3 are particular, victorious believers—believers who conquer the degradation of the church and carry out God’s economy to build up the Body of Christ and who will, as a result, receive the reward of reigning with Christ in the coming millennial kingdom. In the degradation of the church, many true believers have left their first love; the overcomers return to, maintain, and develop their first and best love for the Lord, giving Him the first place, the preeminence, in all things. In its degradation the church marries the world; the overcomers remain true to the Lord, refuse to be mixed with the world, and live a life hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3-4). In the degraded church the clergy-laity system is pervasive and prevailing; the overcomers hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, repudiate the teaching of the Nicolaitans as being contrary to the Scrip-

The overcomers in Revelation 2 and 3 are particular, victorious believers who conquer the degradation of the church and carry out God’s economy to build up the Body of Christ.

tures and unfaithful to the Lord’s word that all believers are simply brothers, exercise to function as members of the living, organic Body of Christ, and being neither clergy nor laity, encourage other believers to develop and exercise their various functions. In the degraded church the unique headship of Christ is dishonored and satanic concepts abound; the overcomers humble themselves under the Lord and before His word and, keeping the position of a wife in relation to Christ, do not presume to teach on their own but instead teach and preach the pure word of God. The degraded church is in a condition of spiritual death; the overcomers, supplied by the seven Spirits of God, are intensely living, keep their garments from the defilement of death, and exercise to live Christ as their subjective righteousness. The degraded church is lukewarm, wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked, and causes Christ to be outside the church; the overcomers are “hot,” “boiling,” with the proper zeal; they pay whatever price is required by the Lord to gain gold (the divine nature), white garments (Christ as subjective righteousness), and eyesalve (the anointing Spirit); and they hear the Lord’s voice, open the door, and enjoy a delightful feast with Him.

Simultaneously, the overcomers conquer the degradation of the church and carry out God’s economy to its ultimate consummation. Having a vision of God’s throne, they honor the divine administration, respect the Lord’s arrangement in His government, and recognize the centrality of the all-inclusive Christ in God’s administration according to God’s eternal economy. The overcomers not only adhere to the totality of revealed truth concerning the essential Trinity, testifying that the true and living God is eternally the Father, the Son, and the Spirit; they also

experience the economical Trinity, daily receiving and enjoying the dispensing of the processed and consummated Triune God into them as their life, their life supply, and their everything. Perhaps most important, the overcomers care for the goal of God's economy—the corporate expression of Himself in Christ—and live in and for this goal. God's goal is their goal; His will is their will; and the desire of His heart has become the desire of their heart. These overcomers live under the divine administration, by the divine dispensing, and for the divine expression. Through them the goal of God's economy in the present age—the building up of the Body of Christ—is achieved, and the bride is prepared for the coming of the Lord in kingly glory.

At His coming the Lord Jesus will reward His overcoming believers. In the millennial kingdom they will be given to eat of the tree of life (Rev. 2:7); they (in contrast to unfaithful believers) will not be hurt of the second death (v. 11); they will be given the hidden manna and a white stone upon which a new name is written known only to them (v. 17); they will receive authority over the nations and shepherd them with an iron rod, even as the Lord has received from His Father (vv. 26-27); they will be clothed in white garments, their names will not be erased from the book of life, and the Lord will confess their names before His Father and before His angels (3:5); they will become pillars in the temple of God, with the name of God, the name of the city of God, the New Jerusalem, and the name of the Lord written on them (v. 12); and it will be given to them to sit with the Lord on His throne, even as He also overcame and sat with the Father on His throne (v. 21). Indeed, for the consummation of God's economy, the Lord needs the overcomers, He treasures the overcomers, and He will reward the overcomers in the age of the kingdom.

The Ultimate Consummation of God's Economy—the New Jerusalem

We conclude this essay with an exceedingly brief word about a tremendous matter—the New Jerusalem as the ultimate consummation of God's economy. (We intend that the April 2000 issue of this quarterly, Vol. V, No. 2, will be an enlarged 96-page issue devoted to contrasting the New Jerusalem to the religious, and unbiblical, notion of heaven as the eternal abode of the believers in Christ.)

In Revelation 3:7-13 we see the relationship between the church Christ appreciates, the overcomers, and the New

Jerusalem as the ultimate consummation of God's economy. Verse 12 says, "He who overcomes, him I will make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall by no means go out anymore, and I will write upon him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which descends out of heaven from My God, and My new name." The New Jerusalem "descends out of heaven." This indicates that the New Jerusalem is neither heaven nor a synonym of heaven, as erroneously taught by some. The overcomer will be made a pillar in the temple of God, which temple is not a physical structure but the redeeming God Himself (21:22). This indicates that the New Jerusalem is not a literal, physical, material city, as mistakenly supposed by many. (Furthermore, the New Jerusalem is the wife of Christ the Lamb, and Christ could not possibly marry a physical city—vv. 2, 9; 22:17; 19:7-9.)

Now we, the believers in Christ, are, for God's economy, passing through a process in and with the Triune God in Christ to become the New Jerusalem as His expression.

If the New Jerusalem is neither heaven nor a material city, what is it? The New Jerusalem is a corporate person, the consummate enlargement (increase—John 3:29-30) and expression of the processed and consummated Triune God in and with His redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified tripartite people. The New Jerusalem is the eternal, mutual abode of God and His glorified people, where we will dwell in Him as the temple and He will dwell in us as the tabernacle. The New Jerusalem is the enlarged, universal divine-human incorporation produced by the union, mingling, and mutual indwelling (coinherence) of the consummated Triune God and the glorified tripartite man.

This marvelous spiritual structure, this wonderful organic entity, this glorious corporate expression of the processed and consummated Triune God is the consummation of God's economy. Those who see God's economy and care for God's economy will live and labor for the New Jerusalem as the ultimate consummation of God's economy. In His economy the Triune God in Christ has passed through a process to produce the New Jerusalem as His expression. Now we, the believers in Christ, are, for God's economy, passing through a process in and with the Triune God in Christ to become the New Jerusalem as His expression. Therefore, both we and the Triune God will participate in the same consummation—the New Jerusalem as the eternal corporate expression of the Triune God. This is God's revelation, this is our testimony, and this is the unique goal of our life, our labor, and our ministry. 