

The DIVINE TRINITY

in
the

DIVINE ECONOMY

In this and the previous issue of *A & C* by Kerzy S. Robichaux we have presented our understanding of the divine economy, that endeavor of God to fulfill His heart's desire from eternity past (Eph. 1:5, 9). The term *God's economy* (1 Tim. 1:4) can encompass quite a range of understanding, depending on what one's notion is concerning God and His relationship to His people. Our own distinctive understanding of God's economy rests upon the simple premise that God operates in time upon His elect to make them the same as He is in life, nature, and expression. The initiation of this operation is the incarnation, whereby He became what we are in life, nature, and expression; and the economy consummates in the New Jerusalem, where God's elect have become what He is in life, nature, and expression. This understanding reflects what Athanasius said concerning the incarnation in his well-known aphorism: "For He was made man that we might be made God" (*De incarnatione Verbi* 54.3). It is important to note that in this process God's uniqueness in Godhead and Trinity is preserved. At the simplest level, we can say that God *is* God by virtue of His eternal self-existence, whereas His elect *become* God by their union and communion with Him and by their continual dependence on Him and on what He is in Himself. God self-exists as God; His elect are made God because He is God. In this, God is glorified and not, as some may suspect, minified. This distinction between the God who self-exists eternally and the God whom His elect participate in as the goal of His economy was respected by the early church universally through the fifth century and is still maintained by many theologians today.

God's economy respects His eternal uniqueness, but it also admits His participation in humanity and the ultimate participation of His elect in His divinity. The economy is the process that brings God into man in order to bring man into God. And as we consider this economy

more deeply, we find another striking distinctive about it: God's economy operates according to His triune being. Unlike many other notions about God's operation on His elect, our notion of the divine economy rests upon the understanding that God in His trinity applies Himself to the believers to make them what He is. It is an economy of the Triune God applying Himself to the tripartite beings of His redeemed, regenerated, and transformed elect. In this article I wish to explore this aspect of the divine economy, that is, its particular trinitarian aspect.

When we examine God's economy according to its brief definition above, we find two lines in the process—one related to God becoming man and to all that He accomplishes as man, and one related to man being made God and to all that redeemed humankind enjoys as a result of the economy. The former is primarily the history of Christ from His incarnation through His final heading up of all things in Himself (Eph. 1:10); the latter is primarily the experience of God's elect from their predestination in eternity past through their redemption, regeneration, transformation, and glorification in time to their ultimate participation in God in the New Jerusalem in eternity future. Obviously, the former line of activity (that which relates to Christ) is for the accomplishment of the second line of activity (that which relates to the believers). In presenting the operation of the Divine Trinity in the divine economy, I will limit myself to the first of these lines, reviewing the biblical data for the trinitarian activity in it. Beyond what has been presented in my article in the last issue on the divine economy as seen from the perspective of Christ's process and what is presented in Ed Marks's article in this issue on the divine dispensing, my intention in this article is to focus on God's triadic operation in the divine economy and to demonstrate that God's economy is one that derives and proceeds from His triune being.

Before the Incarnation

While the incarnation is the actual initiation of God's economy, insofar as it is then that God first joins with His creature man for the accomplishment of His plan, the incarnation was conceived in eternity past within the Godhead, and this preternatural decision involved God in His trinity. Paul alludes to this decision when he speaks of "the wisdom which has been hidden, which God predestined before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age have known; for if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:7-8). The Lord of glory, who was indeed able to be crucified, was the incarnate God, and His incarnation was predestined before the ages. We certainly cannot know the details of this predetermination, but another passage in Scripture points to a similar counsel of the Godhead. This passage speaks more concerning the creation of humankind than directly concerning Christ's incarnation, yet His incarnation is certainly implied. Genesis 1:26, according to Christian interpretation since the early church period, relates a council in the Trinity in which the creation of humankind is contemplated and determined:

And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of heaven and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. (RcV)

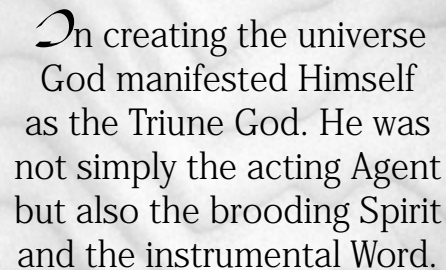
From the earliest times of the church, the *Us* and the *Our* in this verse have been understood to be latent references to the Triune God. Latent also in this verse is the incarnated Christ, who is the image of God and who provides the pattern for the creation of humankind.¹ In the contemplation of the creation of humankind, the incarnation of Christ is also contemplated, and in the counsel of the Godhead the incarnation is presented as trinitarian in nature.

In order to accomplish His eternal economy, God created all things, and His act of creation involved His triune being.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. But the earth became waste and emptiness, and darkness was on the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was brooding upon the surface of the waters. And God said, Let there be light; and there was light. (Gen. 1:1-3, RcV)

In creating the universe God manifested Himself as the Triune God. He was not simply the acting Agent but also the

brooding Spirit and the instrumental Word. Whenever God speaks, we understand that the Logos as the second of the Trinity is implied. John relates the creation in this way: "All things came into being through Him [the Word], and apart from Him not one thing came into being which has come into being" (John 1:3). The writer of Hebrews offers a similar understanding concerning the creation: "By faith we understand that the universe has been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen has not come into being out of things which appear" (11:3). In both these passages, creation is contemplated not as the action of the divine Agent but through the active instrumentality of the Logos as the second of the Trinity. God created all things through His speaking, and in the Godhead God's speaking is hypostatic; that is, His speaking is the second of the Trinity. The third of the Trinity, the Spirit, participates in the creation as well, even if we cannot fully comprehend His function. The text says only that He "was brooding upon the surface of the waters." What ensues in the creation are all forms of life, and the Spirit as Communicant of life in the Godhead (John 6:63; Rom. 8:2, 6; 1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:6) participates in creation and charges creation with life.



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Before the creation of humankind the incarnation of Christ was contemplated in triadic terms, and in time, when humankind was actually created, the triune being of God was fully involved: "Jehovah God formed man with the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (Gen.

2:7, RcV). God, singly viewed, was the active Agent in man's creation, but the second of the Trinity provided the prototype for humankind's image and likeness (1:26), and the Spirit is implied in the breathing that God did to make man a living soul. The third of the Trinity is called Spirit, and in both Hebrew and Greek the word for Spirit is the same as that for breath. Hence, God in breath, so to speak, is God the Spirit, and in breathing into man to make of him a living being, God the Spirit should be understood as involved.

As Old Testament history unfolds, God operates among Israel for the fulfillment of His purpose. For the most part, God manifests Himself singly in the Old Testament, but it is not uncommon to find intimations of His trinity even before the incarnation. Perhaps the clearest of these are certain of the Angel of God (or Jehovah) passages, in which a distinction between God and His Angel is clearly made and the latter is understood to be a reference to God Himself. These occur a number of times in the Old Testament; here we need only examine a few of them to make the

point. In Genesis 22 the Angel of Jehovah speaks to Abraham out of heaven, directing him not to slay his son Isaac but to take the ram provided for the sacrifice he was to offer. After Abraham obeyed the Lord in the matter and offered up the ram that Jehovah had provided,

The Angel of Jehovah called to Abraham a second time from the heavens and said, By Myself I have sworn, declares Jehovah: Because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and will greatly multiply your seed like the stars of the heavens and like the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice. (vv. 15-18, RcV)

In this passage Jehovah and the Angel of Jehovah are identical: The Angel declares that He is Jehovah Himself, and as Jehovah Himself, He blesses Abraham. In Exodus the Angel of God is again mentioned, and here also He is identified with God Himself.

I am now sending an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Be careful before Him, and listen to His voice; do not rebel against Him, for He will not pardon your transgression; for My name is in Him. (23:20-21, RcV)

In 33:2-3 the actions of the Angel and of God Himself are one and the same, and in 33:14-15 the accompanying Angel is referred to as the very presence (literally, the face) of God among the children of Israel. In these passages, as in many others like it, the plurality in the Godhead is indicated, and again the operation of God through His triune being can be perceived. In calling Abraham, and through him all His chosen people in the Old Testament, and in leading Israel into the good land of promise, God moved in His trinity. Scattered throughout the Old Testament record, other allusions to the trinity of God can be found, and taken as a whole these indicate that even during this early period of His economy He operated according to His triune being.

In Incarnation

The allusions to the Triune God in the Old Testament, though certainly present, are shadowy at best, often requiring more our New Testament perspective than our simple reading. In the New Testament, however, where God's economy is manifested physically in the person of Christ and afterward in His mystical Body, the operation of God

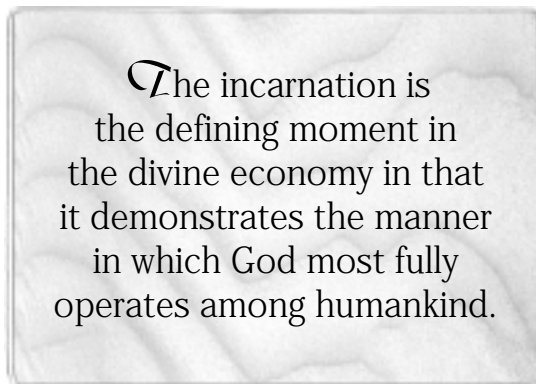
in His trinity can be clearly seen. The incarnation is the defining moment in the divine economy in that it demonstrates the manner in which God most fully operates among humankind, i.e., by incarnation, and in the incarnation the Trinity is fully involved. We understand the incarnation to be that of the Son, the second of the Trinity, but we should not understand it as the lone action of the Son, and though the Son bears the identity in the incarnation (that is, He is the person of the incarnation), we should not understand the incarnated Son as bearing to humankind the presence of merely the Son. The incarnation, and by extension the incarnated Son, involves the entire Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. This may seem to invite all sorts of suspicion of error, but only such an understanding of the incarnation accords with the theological mandates both that God is one and that God, though certainly distinguishable as the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (the orthodox view), cannot be separated as three individual persons (tritheism). Further, such an understanding of the incarnation best respects the biblical data. John tells us that the Word became flesh (John

1:14), thus establishing for us the fact that the second of the Trinity is the person of the incarnated God-man. But His coming into humanity was accomplished, mysteriously enough, through the Holy Spirit, as both Matthew and Luke tell us: "That which has been begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:20); "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore also the holy thing which is born

will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Certainly it is the Son of God who was born of the virgin (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23; Gal. 4:4), but His birth was through the Holy Spirit, the third of the Trinity, as the power of the Most High, the first in the Trinity. We can hardly comprehend what this means and even less define precisely how the three of the Trinity are involved in the incarnation, but the concept furthest from our mind should be that only the Son is involved. We worship the Son as the person of the God-man, but we must hold fast to the proper understanding concerning the Son: that He is not an independent God, separable from the Father and the Spirit, but rather always depends on the Father and the Spirit for His distinct existence, as they do Him. This is the eternal condition of the Son in the Godhead, and the incarnation provides no exception to this.

In Christ's Human Living

In Christ's human living and work, this eternal condition also obtains. His ministry was initiated with His baptism



in the Jordan by John the Baptist, and this was an operation of the entire Trinity, not just an experience of the incarnate Son.

And in those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. And immediately, coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens being parted and the Spirit as a dove descending upon Him. And a voice came out of the heavens: You are My Son, the Beloved; in You I have found My delight. (Mark 1:9-11)

In His baptism, both the Father and the Spirit operated. Though Christ in incarnation was intrinsically related to the Spirit from the moment of His conception, at His baptism the Spirit came upon Him now for His ministry ahead. At the same moment, the Father testified from heaven concerning His beloved Son and implicitly declared His approval of the initiation of Christ's ministry. We should be careful not to fall into the common error of thinking that the baptism of Christ demonstrates a separateness of the three in the Godhead. It is lamentable that many Christians look to these verses to prove that the three are separate, rather than to see that the three operate inseparably though distinctly. Augustine helps us here:

Not that the voice could be produced without the activity of the Son and Holy Spirit (the triad works inseparably); but it was produced to manifest the person of the Father alone, just as the three produced that human being of the virgin Mary and yet it is the person of the Son alone—the invisible three producing what is the visible person of the Son alone. (110)

Hence, the three operate inseparably to manifest any one of the three distinctly, and in every action of one the three are understood to be operating simultaneously. The trinitarian significance of the baptism account is not that the three are separate, but indeed that they are inseparable in their operation in the divine economy. We may expand Augustine's explanation and say that the Son's standing there in the water of His baptism and the Spirit's hovering overhead were as well an operation of all three. In the manifestation of the distinct actions of each of the three, all three operate simultaneously and inseparably.

Throughout His ministry Christ lived, moved, and worked inseparably from the Father and the Spirit. After His baptism "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, while being tempted for forty days by the devil" (Luke 4:1). And after His trial in the desert, He "returned in the power

of the Spirit into Galilee" (v. 14). To the Pharisees He said, "But if I, by the Spirit of God, cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28). His work of manifesting God's kingdom on the earth (that is, not His own) was fully by the Spirit of God (that is, not by His own might and strength, even as the Son of God). Further, in the Gospel of John we find particular declarations by the Son regarding His coinherence with the Father in His work. "He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him" (8:29). We should not think that in coming to dwell among men and as man, the Son departed from the Father and was hence separate from Him. The Lord's testimony is quite striking when He was asked by Philip to manifest the Father to the disciples:

Have I been so long a time with you, and you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how is it that you say, Show us the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?

The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; but if not, believe because of the works themselves. (14:9-11)

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Who is the incarnate Son? He is the one who coinheres with the Father and whose works are the Father's within Him. Though distinctly the Son, He acts inseparably from the actions of the Father and the Spirit. Again, the entire Trinity is in operation to

manifest the distinct work of the Son in His ministry on the earth.

In His Crucifixion

What shall we say then concerning the death of Christ? Here most believers blanch. Even the most minimally educated in theology understand the error of patripassianism, against which Tertullian took careful aim (*Against Praxeas* II, XIII, XXIX-XXX). We must be careful to avoid understanding that the Father (or the Spirit) was the subject of the suffering in the death of Christ, but we must be equally careful to avoid understanding that the Son was separate from the Father and the Spirit in the crucifixion. What we must maintain is that in the visible death of Christ the three of the Trinity operated so as to make manifest the distinct activity of the Son on the cross. It was indeed the Son whom we should identify as the subject of the death of the God-man (even though we confess that God Himself does not die!), but we must hold at the same time the realization that the Father and the Spirit were also in operation and

that the operation of the three made the distinct action of the Son possible. The Scriptures bear this testimony as well. Paul tells us that in the death of Christ God was

wiping out the handwriting in ordinances, which was against us, which was contrary to us; and He has taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross. Stripping off the rulers and the authorities, He made a display of them openly, triumphing over them in it. (Col. 2:14-15)

There was more to the death of Christ than what met the eye. As the God-man hung on the cross dying for all humankind, God operated to forgive the offenses accumulated against us and to triumph over the fallen angelic host that opposed Him through humankind, and this operation issued in our redemption. We understand that redemption is of the Son, but in operation redemption is the activity of the entire Godhead, Father, Son, and Spirit. The writer of Hebrews likewise recognizes the operation of the Trinity in the death of Christ: "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (9:14). To gain a redemption that was eternal in quality and effect (v. 12), the Son offered Himself through the eternal Spirit to the living God.

In His Resurrection

In the resurrection of Christ, the same relationships within the Trinity exist and the same inseparable operation of the Trinity occurs. Certainly we confess that it is Jesus Christ the Son of God who rose from the dead, but we should not ignore or deny the full operation of the three in His resurrection. Generally in the New Testament Christ is said to have been raised from the dead simply by God. "This Jesus God has raised up, of which we all are witnesses" (Acts 2:32). "And the Author of life you killed, whom God has raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses" (3:15). "This One, God raised on the third day" (10:40). "He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies" (Rom. 8:11). But also the agency of the resurrection of Christ is ascribed to each of the three of the Godhead. Specifically, in 1 Thessalonians the Father is referred to as having raised Christ from the dead: "[We] await His Son from the heavens, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus" (1:10). In other places, the resurrection is spoken of as being the activity of Christ Himself. In John 2:19, the Lord told the Jews, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." John tells us that "He spoke of the temple of His body" (v. 21). Later in the same Gospel the Lord declares:

For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again. This commandment I received from My Father. (10:17-18)

Further, Paul speaks of our faith in this way: "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so also those who have fallen asleep through Jesus, God will bring with Him" (1 Thes. 4:14). Finally, the New Testament also characterizes the resurrection of Christ as involving the operation of the Spirit: "Who was designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:4). In Ephesians 1:19-20 reference is made to that power which raised Christ from the dead, and we should understand that power to be a reference to God the Spirit. As we have seen in the previous steps of the divine economy, the resurrection of Christ is an operation of the entire Trinity, the three working inseparably to accomplish what is distinct to the Son alone.

The life-giving Spirit is distinctly the third of the Trinity. But even in His distinction as Life-giver, the entire Trinity operates inseparably.

Understanding the intrinsic involvement of the entire Trinity in the economic process that Christ passed through, we can begin to see in a different light certain difficult passages in the Epistles where the distinction between Christ in resurrection and the Spirit is seemingly blurred. The most striking of these is 1 Corinthians 15:45: "The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit." Typically, commentators on this verse

have avoided taking *Spirit* here as a reference to the third of the Trinity, understanding it instead as a reference to a post-resurrectional condition of Christ, which they would characterize as spiritual, as opposed to physical. But the simple problem with this interpretation is that, so taken, it makes of Christ another Spirit who gives life. As mentioned earlier, it is the Spirit who gives life (John 6:63; Rom. 8:2, 6; 2 Cor. 3:6); hence, we should expect that the life-giving Spirit spoken of here is distinctly the third of the Trinity. But, as we have seen, even in His distinction as Life-giver, we must understand that the entire Trinity operates inseparably. In the economy of God, just as it was distinctly the Son's role to be the incarnate God, to die the redemptive death, and to rise from the dead, so also it is distinctly the Spirit's role to give life to believers. Yet in these distinctive roles the activities are not independently those of the Son and those of the Spirit. The Son's distinction in the economy is achieved through the operation of the three inseparably, and this is also the case with the Spirit's distinction in the economy. Hence, with the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the economy of God passes from the distinct

agency of the Son to that of the Spirit, and in this sense, Christ can be said to become the life-giving Spirit. The expression of the apostle is very economic and very economical. He did not need to worry about theological confusion setting in because his base assumption is that it is the one entire God who operates, here as the Father distinctly, there as the Son distinctly, and still elsewhere as the Spirit distinctly. Nowhere in his thought does there seem to be the notion that first the Father acted in the divine economy, and then the Son took up the task while the Father rested; nor that when the Son had completed His work on the earth, the economic baton passed on to the Spirit, and the Son joined the Father to watch with approval. Notions that the Spirit today is the representative or proxy of Christ, so common among the majority of Christians, do not correspond to the thought and utterance of the New Testament. Rather, what we find in the Scriptures is a constant interchanging of Son and Spirit after the resurrection of Christ, not through any confusion of the persons on the part of the inspired writers, but through the deliberate understanding that Christ in resurrection operates in and as the Spirit.

A second difficult passage is 2 Corinthians 3:17-18: "And the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. But we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit." Again, the common tack in handling these verses is to identify the Lord here as God in general, not specifically as Christ the Lord, and thus to avoid equating Christ with the Spirit. But the Lord to whom the New Testament believers turn their hearts (v. 16) can be none other than Christ, and with that in mind, the force of the passage appears to be that Christ the Lord to whom we must turn our hearts is the Spirit today. Then follows the interchanging of Christ and the Spirit. *The Spirit of the Lord* and *the Lord Spirit* look to be terms that signify the operational oneness of the Son and the Spirit after Christ's resurrection. In the mind of the apostle, turning to Christ the Lord means experiencing the Spirit because in the distinct work of the Spirit the Son is present and operating as well. It is distinctly the Son whom we turn to and whom we believe in, but it is distinctly the Spirit who bears and communicates the Son to us. His role as the Spirit of reality (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13) is not merely to give testimony of Christ to the believers, in the distant absence of Him, but to give Christ Himself to the believers by virtue of His inseparable oneness with Him. The many titles of the Spirit in the Bible—e.g., the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Father, the

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Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of Jesus Christ—do not indicate that He merely represents the other two of the Godhead to the believers, as though He is separate from them; rather, they intimate the intrinsic oneness of the Triune God and the inseparable presence and operation of all three in the Spirit's work in and on the believers. He works to make manifest the Father and the Son within the hearts of God's elect. That is distinctly His role in the economy, a role that is not for His own manifestation but for the manifestation of the Son (vv. 3-14), who in His role manifests and expresses the Father to God's elect (1:14).

In His Ascension and Lordship

In the ascension of Christ we can also see the operation of the entire Trinity indicated in the New Testament. Since it was His ascension, Christ is said to be the subject of the action. He "is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being subjected to Him" (1 Pet. 3:22). The Lord declared that He would ascend, when He sent Mary to announce His resurrection to His disciples, now become His brothers: "Go to My brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God" (John 20:17). But His ascension was the operation of the Father and the Spirit as well. In Ephesians Paul commends this operation to the saints, praying that they too would experience its greatness:

[I pray that you would know] what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the operation of the might of His strength, which He caused to operate in Christ in raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every name that is named not only in this age but also in that which is to come. (1:19-21)

The Father caused the great power to operate in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him in the heavens. This power, as we saw both in the conception of Christ (Luke 1:35) and in His human living (4:14), should be understood to be a reference to the Spirit. Hence, in the fullest sense, Christ ascended to the heavens through the operation of the Father by the Spirit of power. Again, the three operate inseparably to produce an action that distinctly belongs to one. Because of this, in the New Testament the ascension of Christ is also said to be simply the work of God (Acts 5:31).

The chief result of the ascension is that Christ was made Lord of all (Acts 2:36; 10:36; Rom. 14:9; Phil. 2:11). Yet we should not think that He reigns as a second Lord, like some co-regent of the Father. Paul declares that there is only one Lord (Eph. 4:5). Should we then consider that perhaps the lordship has been passed on from the Father to the Son? This is equally impossible, for the lordship of the Father is eternal, not temporal (Exo. 15:18; Psa. 146:10; Micah 4:7), and when we ascribe lordship to the Son, we do not by any means imply that the Father is now less than Lord as well. To compound the problem, we must not only understand but even confess that this lordship has been vested in a man (Phil. 2:11; Rom. 10:8-13; 1 Cor. 12:3). What we have here is again the manifestation of the Trinity's inseparable operation. There is but one Lord (Deut. 6:4), yet His lordly attribute is to be ascribed to each of the three of the Trinity, and that, because each is Lord by the full operation of the three of the Trinity. This is graphically depicted in the image of the one throne of both God and the Lamb (Rev. 22:1, 3). Casting aside any comical physical notions of two sitting on one siege, we should understand the image as expressing the operation of the entire Trinity in the lordship of any one of the three. Here the Father and the incarnate Son (Lamb) are in focus, but even the Spirit can be said to be Lord, as Paul does in 2 Corinthians 3:18, calling Him the Lord Spirit.

Through the Sevenfold Intensified Spirit

Few have noticed the next stage in the divine economy, the stage of the intensification of Christ as the sevenfold intensified Spirit. Elsewhere in *A & C* we have fully presented our understanding of this,² but here I should say simply that according to what we read in the book of Revelation, in the divine economy there is an intensification of the Spirit in the face of the worsening degradation of the church, and this intensification serves to produce the overcomers who will cooperate with the Lord to fulfill His economy. In Revelation the sevenfold intensified Spirit, called the seven Spirits in the text, is mentioned four times:

John to the seven churches which are in Asia: 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. (1:4-5)

And to the messenger of the church in Sardis write: These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the

seven stars: I know your works, that you have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead. (3:1)

And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. (4:5)

And 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 sent forth into all the earth. (5:6)

The first mention of the seven Spirits (1:4-5) makes clear that the reference is to the Spirit of God, not to some angelic beings (as some commentators have suggested). Here the three of the Trinity are clearly indicated, but what is most interesting is that the Spirit is more fully called "the seven Spirits." The sevenness of the Spirit is best understood as indicating the intensification in the work of the Spirit in the face of degradation, which work we must now consider to be the inseparable operation of the three of the

In the divine economy there is an intensification of the Spirit in the face of the worsening degradation of the church, and this serves to produce overcomers.

Trinity. From that perspective, it becomes somewhat easier to comprehend what John means when he refers to Christ in 3:1 as "He who has the seven Spirits of God" and to the seven Spirits in 5:6 as the seven eyes of the Lamb. These vivid images in the vision that John saw carefully respect the intrinsic relationship between the Son and the Spirit that we have observed elsewhere in the New Testament. The Lamb, as the Designate with the

responsibility for carrying out the divine economy (Rev. 5), does not work independently, but with the Father and by the Spirit. The inseparable quality of the Son and the Spirit is vividly depicted by the image of the seven Spirits as the seven eyes of the Lamb. These seven eyes are sent forth into all the earth, no doubt, to accomplish the economy entrusted to the Son. In the imagery of John's Revelation, we can say that the Lamb is, for all practical purposes, the seven eyes that go forth into all the earth. As eyes, they bear forth His expression and capture for Him all that He must observe for His work. Though certainly distinct from the Lamb, the Lamb's eyes are nevertheless the expression of the Lamb, and these eyes are the intensified Spirit of God. As we have seen it elsewhere in the New Testament, we see it again here in Revelation: The function of one of the Trinity depends on the operation of all three. The Lamb acts through His eyes, who are the sevenfold intensified Spirit; and the sevenfold intensified Spirit operates as the expression of the Lamb, of the incarnate Son with whom the economy of God is entrusted. The epistles in Revelation 2 and 3 show this inseparable


operation at work. Each begins with a declaration that the Son is the Speaker (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14), and each ends with an affirmation that it is the Spirit who is speaking the epistles to the churches (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). We need not concoct, in some attempt to preserve a latent tritheism, some fanciful explanation that what the Son speaks the Spirit repeats as a Witness, or some other notion that implies a separation of labor. A proper recognition of the inseparable operation of the Trinity demands that we understand only one operation of speaking here, that of the Son in and as the Spirit.

In the New Jerusalem

The divine economy consummates in the New Jerusalem; there the grand work of God reaches its final issue for eternity. The vision of the New Jerusalem at the conclusion of the Scriptures is an aggregate vision that encompasses a myriad of biblical images, themes, and motifs drawn from the rest of the Bible. The intertextuality of Revelation 21 and 22 is extremely high, and a full appreciation of this intertextuality is necessary for an adequate interpretation of the vision. I do not view the vision as a glimpse into the physical existence of the believers in eternity; rather, as with many things in the book of Revelation, the vision is symbolic and describes the spiritual realities that will exist (cf. 1:1, where we should translate the second half of the verse in this way: "and He made it known by signs..."). We can hardly exhaust the figures that compose the vision, and while we must admit that the interpretation of the figures is open to debate, a vividly trinitarian interpretation of the many signs in the vision is not at all beyond possibility. Taken as a whole, the vision manifests the mutual dwelling of the Triune God with His redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified elect.³ For example, the center of the city is the single "throne of God and of the Lamb," out from which proceeds "a river of water of life, bright as crystal" (22:1). The Father and the Son are clearly indicated here, distinctly though not separately, and the Spirit is typified by the river of water of life, as He is elsewhere in the Bible (John 7:37-39). The one throne and the one flowing river symbolize the one inseparable administration of the Trinity in eternity, which will be carried out not by means of might but by means of supply. Along either side of the river, the tree of life grows (Rev. 22:2), typifying the incarnate Son as the embodiment of the Triune God for the expression of the Father and the nourishment of the believers (cf. John 15:1-8). "And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon that they should shine in it, for the glory of God illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev. 21:23). Here also the inseparable operation of the Father and the Son is indicated: God illumines the city within the Lamb as the lamp. The same holds true concerning the temple in the city: "And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its

temple" (v. 22). God Himself, in His inseparable trinity, provides the city a temple for the people of God to enter and worship within. These many figures, and others like them, show us that in eternity future, as in time before and in eternity past, the three of the Divine Trinity operate inseparably in the divine economy.

Conclusion

In this article I have attempted to demonstrate the inseparable operation of the Triune God in His economy, particularly as it relates to God becoming man and to His work in and as man, that is, as it relates to the history of Christ. Space constrains us from examining a second line of the Trinity's inseparable operation in the full and organic salvation of God's elect, that is, in man becoming God in life, nature, and expression (though not in the Godhead). However, we must not neglect the fact that in the believers' predestination, calling, redemption, justification, regeneration, sanctification, growth, transformation, maturation, and glorification, the three of the Trinity operate at every turn inseparably for the accomplishment of the divine economy. There are certainly distinctions in this operation, which should each be ascribed to the distinct hypostases of the Trinity (e.g., redemption is of the Son, regeneration is of the Father, sanctification is of the Spirit), but each distinction is underwrought by the inseparable action of all three in the Godhead. The development of this notion and the particulars for each stage of the believers' full salvation deserve its own article, which we may attempt in the future. My earnest hope for now, however, is that by seeing in some detail the operation of the Divine Trinity in the divine economy as it relates to the history of Christ, we may at least vaguely perceive the operation of His trinity in that economy as it relates to our Christian experience of God's complete salvation. All blessing, praise, honor, and glory be to Him who leads us in salvation according to His holy Trinity in His marvelous economy! Amen. 

Notes

¹I have elsewhere developed this notion of Christ as the prototype in the creation of humankind. See my article "Christ the Firstborn" in *A&C*, II.2 (April 1997): 30-38.

²See Ed Marks's article "The Ministry of Christ in the Stage of Intensification," *A&C*, III.2 (April 1998): 18-31.

³Most of what follows is taken in thought from Witness Lee, *The Application of the Interpretation of the New Jerusalem to the Seeking Believers* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1995).

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