

# *Receiving the Economical Revelation of the Triune God as the Word of God to Become the Economical Manifestation of the Triune God as the Testimony of Jesus*

by John Pester

What we see, we write in books. Whether our seeing is the product of fanciful flights of imagination in our fallen human soul-life or the mysterious impartation of wisdom into our regenerated human spirit, there is an impulse within us, as humans created in the image and likeness of God, to impart, to dispense, to communicate the content of our understanding to others. In the book of Revelation, the apostle John, responding to a divine unveiling and a divine directive, wrote concerning the consummating vision of the Holy Scriptures. What he saw, he wrote in Revelation. What he saw was deeper than simply an unveiling of future events, and what he saw was more profound than merely a cosmic confrontation between good and evil.<sup>1</sup> He saw the consummate economical revelation of the Triune God, and he saw the consummate economical manifestation of the Triune God. In his capacity as a slave and prisoner, John received the divine transmission of the word of God, which is the economical revelation of the Triune God; in his capacity as steward, John dispensed the divine contents of the word of God to enable the churches to become the testimony of Jesus, which is the economical manifestation of the Triune God. More importantly, the economical revelation he received and transmitted still contains the power to produce a manifestation of the received word as the testimony of Jesus because the blessings of the Triune God are promised to those who read, hear, and keep the words of his revelation, his prophecy, which are faithful and true (1:3; 21:5; 22:6-7).

## **The Transmission, Content, and Purpose of Revelation**

The transmission, the unveiling, of revelation involves more than seeing and comprehension; it is the divine means for imparting the Triune God and manifesting the Triune God in His economy.<sup>2</sup> Although the Triune God is unknowable in His essential Godhead, He unveils Himself in His economy through the Spirit who is joined to the

regenerated human spirit of redeemed humanity (1 Cor. 2:9-12). The Triune God also is holy and separate from everything common in His essential Godhead, but He imparts Himself in His economy through the Spirit who is received into the regenerated human spirit of redeemed humanity (Lev. 10:10; John 20:22). And even though the Triune God in His essential Godhead cannot be seen because He dwells in unapproachable light, He manifests Himself in His economy through the Spirit who testifies the reality of the Son out from the regenerated human spirit of redeemed humanity (1 Tim. 6:16; 3:16; 1 John 5:6).

The transmission of all revelation begins in the Father as the source. What the Father has He gives to the Son. The Spirit then declares what has been given to the Son to the apostles, who, in turn, lay the content of the revelation before the believers as the word of God (1 Tim. 4:6; Col. 1:25), which is the healthy teaching of the New Testament ministry (Titus 1:9; 2:1). The words of the New Testament clearly testify of this pattern of transmission. From the words concerning the Father's revelation of the Christ to Peter in Matthew 16:16-17 to the words of the apostle Paul's prayer that the Father would grant the believers a spirit of wisdom and revelation related to the Body of Christ in Ephesians 1:17-23, there is a testimony that the transmission of revelation comes to the believers through the economic involvement of the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the apostles.

The Lord directly indicated the involvement of the Triune God in this progressive transmission of revelation when He said that the Spirit of reality would guide us into all the reality because

He will not speak from Himself, but what He hears He will speak; and He will declare to you the things that are coming.<sup>3</sup> He will glorify Me, for He will receive of Mine and will declare it to you. All that the Father has is Mine;

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for this reason I have said that He receives of Mine and will declare it to you. (John 16:13-15)

The Son has been given all that the Father has, and the Spirit declares all that He has received from the Son. Whereas the economic involvement of the Triune God in the transmission of revelation is plainly stated in the New Testament, the equally important involvement of the apostles is less apparent.<sup>4</sup> An understanding of the role of the ministry of the apostles in the transmission of revelation is, consequently, a matter that requires perception, appreciation, and obedience, not to the apostles per se but to the guidance, the leadership, contained in the word of the truth which they ministered (Eph. 3:4; 2 Tim. 3:10; Rom. 6:17).

In Ephesians 3:4-5 Paul declared that the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to other generations, had been made known to the holy apostles and prophets in spirit. The revelation received by the Son from the Father and by the Spirit from the Son was given to the apostles and prophets in their regenerated human spirit, which was indwelt and mingled with the divine Spirit. This revelation became the foundation of their ministry and teaching (2:20), which was a stewardship of grace. This stewardship, Paul declared, “was given to me for you” (3:2; Col. 1:25). In his ministry, Paul did not shrink from declaring to the believers all the counsel of God (Acts 20:27), even when the toleration for his healthy teaching was at its greatest ebb and all of the churches of Asia had abandoned him (2 Tim. 4:3; 1:15). The words of life that the apostles declared were not only spoken (Acts 5:20) but also written down, inscribed on scrolls and parchments (2 Tim. 4:13), and handed down to the believers as the sacred Scriptures (3:15-16; 2 Pet. 3:16), the word of God, the Bible.

**T**he New Testament is the Word of God, but it is also the words and writings of men who received revelation from the Father and who were commissioned to pass this revelation to the believers. The very existence of the New Testament is a testimony to the involvement of the apostles in the divine transmission of revelation. Indeed, “blessed is he who reads” the Father’s divinely revealed words, the Son’s divinely received words, and the Spirit’s divinely declared words, all of which are contained in the apostle’s divinely written words (Rev. 1:3), for they are the key to receiving the Triune God as the gracious content of God’s economy.

The intrinsic content of all revelation is the Triune God who is imparted in Christ through the Spirit. Thus, the content of revelation is not a litany of future events;<sup>5</sup> rather, it is God Himself, who is realized in the believers as an economical Being who is three yet one. Through the transmission of revelation the Triune God unveils Himself, and in the content of revelation the Triune God imparts Himself. When the God of glory appeared to Abraham

while he was in Mesopotamia (Acts 7:2), the God of glory was imparted into Abraham, and He became Abraham’s believing ability, his faith. In principle, Abraham’s faith was the faith of the imparted Christ, just as our faith is the faith of Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:22). It pleases God to reveal His Son in us by dispensing Himself into vessels of mercy, which have been prepared unto glory (Gal. 1:15-16; Rom. 9:23). When the Triune God is revealed, the Triune God is received. And when the Triune God is received, the Triune God is manifested and made known.

**C**onsequently, the intrinsic purpose of all revelation is to make the Triune God known, to reveal the Father in the Son through the Spirit. This is not to say that God does not grant visions related to other matters, both mystical and practical, such as the visions that were received by His prophets in the Old Testament and His saints in the New Testament (Acts 7:31; 10:3; 16:9; 2 Cor. 12:1-4). Indeed, young men shall see visions, and old men shall dream dreams (Acts 2:17), but the ultimate purpose of every vision, every dream, every revelation is to reveal the Triune God Himself. When the Lord opens the eyes of the foolish and slow of heart, He shows them the things in the Scriptures concerning Himself (Luke 24:25-27), and when the Father enlightens the eyes of the heart of the believers, He grants them a fuller knowledge, even the full knowledge of Himself (Eph. 1:17-18).

The ultimate purpose of any genuine vision and sign is to reveal and make known the Triune God in His mysterious economy. There is no separate, intrinsic value in revelation apart from the realization of this purpose. When visions for the sake of visions and signs for the sake of signs become an end in themselves, the result is knowledge that puffs up and distracts us from the economy of God. The focus of God’s will to is make Christ known, but not individualistically or objectively but rather corporately and subjectively in us (Col. 1:27). The economic transmission of revelation imparts the Triune God in Christ as the Spirit, and the economic impartation of the Triune God results in an economic manifestation of the Triune God in Christ through the Spirit. In no other book in the Bible is this seen more clearly than in the book of Revelation.

### **The Transmission, Content, and Purpose of Revelation in the Book of Revelation**

The transmission, content, and purpose of revelation are related to the economy of God because the economy of God is a reflection of these three aspects of revelation. The economy of God unveils, imparts, and manifests the economical being and work of the Triune God. It should come as no surprise then that no other book in the Bible has such a consummate unveiling of the economical being and work of the Triune God as Revelation, the consummating word of God in the Holy Scriptures.

Although the book of Revelation has twenty-two chapters, which cover events that span the time from the Lord's ascension to the time of His return to establish His eternal kingdom and into eternity, the first eight verses of chapter 1 summarize the entire book and, by extension, the entire economy of God. These verses emphasize the transmission of God's economy through the word of God, which becomes a ministry of grace and peace to the local churches. This introductory word emphasizes the content of God's economy, which is the economical Trinity realized as grace and peace through the process of incarnation, inclusion, and intensification. And these verses emphasize the manifestation of God's economy, which is an eternal kingdom of priests who are the enlarged and eternal testimony of Jesus, the reality of the signs of the golden lampstands and the New Jerusalem. Revelation 1:1-8 says,

The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him to show to His slaves the things that must quickly take place; and He made it known by signs, sending it by His angel to His slave John, who testified the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, even all that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and keep the things written in it, for the time is near. 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. To 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, to Him be the glory and the might forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He comes with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the land will mourn over Him. Yes, amen. I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, He who is and who was and who is coming, the Almighty.

It is easy to categorize these verses merely as a perfunctory, albeit elaborate, greeting. In fact, such an approach is common in the exposition of the introductory and concluding words of other Epistles. Commentators who approach these verses in Revelation in this way, however, will miss the consummate characterization of the biblical revelation of the economy of God, which these verses contain, and they will fail to see realization of this consummation in the ensuing chapters. Instead, they will miss the spirit of the prophecy in their exposition of the prophetic signs in Revelation (19:10). G. H. Lang's study on Revelation, originally published in 1945, and Eugene H.

Peterson's more recent treatment of these verses illustrate the tendency to overlook the depths of these verses.

Lang refers to the first eight verses of Revelation as the "Title and Introduction," with the first three verses serving as the title, and the subsequent five verses serving as the introduction (70, 72). In speaking of the content of the introduction, Lang writes,

Here is outlined all the book. (1) The nature and co-operation of the Godhead. (2) The throne that rules over all. (3) The mediatorial and redeeming work of Jesus Christ. (4) The present outflow of grace and peace to the churches. (5) The future sphere and service of the "saints of the high places" (Dn 7. 22); and further, (6) that coming of Jesus Christ with the clouds of heaven of which Daniel had been granted a vision (Dn 7. 13), which Christ appropriated to Himself (Mt 24. 29-31), and which will strike with terror all His foes. These are the themes which occupy and are illuminated by the *Revelation*, all directed to (7) the glory of God, for which end the universe was created and is governed. (73)

*Through the transmission  
of revelation the Triune God  
unveils Himself, and in the content  
of revelation the Triune God  
imparts Himself.*

Lang's focus on verses 4 through 7 is understandable, given the uniqueness of John's descriptions of the three of the Trinity and of John's references to the consummation of God's purpose in the glory of Christ's return. Yet Lang fails to draw any significant correspondence between these verses and the first three

verses in regard to the role of the word of God in the consummation of the economy of God.

In contrast to Lang, Peterson alludes to the significance of the first three verses, noting the involvement of God as the source and in the content of the word of God. He states,

What is announced here is claimed for all of scripture: It originates in God ("which God gave"), it is about God ("revelation of Jesus Christ"), and God provides the means for our reception ("by sending his angel"). Origin, content, and means are all in God. (18)

Although Peterson speaks of the connection between God and the origin, content, and transmission of the word of God, his view of this connection is more objective than subjective; that is, he speaks of the word of God according to its objective origination from God, its objective content about God, and its objective transmission from God. Peterson also fails to draw any significant correspondence between the first three verses in the book of Revelation and the verses that immediately follow. This

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correspondence, however, is everything because it demonstrates the means by which the revealed word of God, which makes known the mystery of Christ, operates in us in power to present every believer full-grown in Christ (Col. 1:25-29), which produces the testimony of Jesus.

**T**hrough the economical revelation of the Triune God, which is transmitted as the word of God from the Father to the local churches<sup>6</sup> through the Son, the Spirit, and the apostles in Revelation 1:1 through the first half of verse 4, the believers are richly and bountifully supplied an entrance into the eternal kingdom of God in verse 6, which is the economical manifestation of the Triune God, having been released from their sins in verse 5. The content of this rich and bountiful supply is the Triune God Himself, as He is economically revealed in verses 4 and 5. With the realization of the economical manifestation of the testimony of Jesus, the purpose of God will be consummated with the coming of the Lord, who will be visibly revealed as the embodiment of the fullness of the God through His distinct but inseparable identification with the Father in verses 7 and 8. In short, verses 1 through 8 reveal that the Triune God in His economy has provided a way for the believers to receive the economical revelation of the Triune God through the word of God in order to become an economical manifestation of the Triune God as the testimony of Jesus.

### *The Revelation of the Economical Transmission of the Word of God*

The first four verses of the book of Revelation illustrate the economical transmission of the word of God, which involves dispensing, stewardship, and ministry. Dispensing is a matter that is axiomatically related to the essential being of the Triune God Himself, whose being incorporates an eternal dispensing of the eternal life from the Father to the Son through the Spirit.<sup>7</sup> The transmission of revelation is an economical dispensing which conveys the life of the Triune God as the content of the word of God. When the speaking Spirit imparts the word of God as spirit and life, the issue is a revelation of Jesus Christ. And even though it pleases God to reveal His Son in us (Gal. 1:15-16), He does not directly reveal Himself to every individual believer. Instead, He imparts revelation through the cooperation and participation of humanity, which is a matter of stewardship. The economical transmission of revelation is entrusted to stewards who impart the life of the Triune God as the content of the word of God (1 Cor. 9:17). Revelation comes from God to humanity by passing through human stewards, just as the fullness of God, as grace and reality, became available to humanity after the Word became flesh through the incarnation of the Word (John 1:14, 16).<sup>8</sup> The economical transmission of revelation through faithful stewards, ultimately, produces a ministry that is focused on the building up of the Body of Christ.

The transmission of revelation involves the economical dispensing of the life of the Triune God through stewards who minister and impart the content of the word of God into believers who are perfected unto the work of ministry to build up the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12), which is expressed in time and space as local churches. The Triune God dispenses life through revelation, faithful stewards impart life as the content of their revelatory speaking, and the recipients of their stewardship of grace are perfected unto the work of ministry, which manifests the life of the Triune God in the Body of Christ, the testimony of Jesus.

This pattern of transmission is illustrated in Revelation 1:1-4. In verse 1 the apostle John speaks of “the revelation of Jesus Christ” and of the process of its transmission, “which God gave to Him to show to His slaves, . . . sending it by His angel to His slave John.” In verses 2 through 4, John indicates that the word that he has received will be “testified” through “things written” and sent “to the seven churches which are in Asia.” The revelation of Jesus Christ originates in the Father and is given to the Son. Through His angel, the Son then entrusts His revelation to John, who, as a prisoner and a slave,<sup>9</sup> writes about what he has seen and then, as a faithful steward, sends it to local expressions of the Body of Christ, the seven churches in Asia. In his writing, he charges the believers in these localities to participate in the work of ministry by reading, hearing, and keeping the words of the prophecy because the word of God has the power to manifest the content of the revelation. By reading the word of God, it is possible to hear the speaking of the Spirit, and in the speaking of the Spirit, there is the supply to keep and manifest the word. The supply in the word is simply the Triune God as the economical content of the revelation of the word of God.

### *The Revelation of the Economical Content of the Word of God*

The revelation of Jesus Christ is more than a revelation about Jesus Christ; it is Jesus Christ Himself, who is the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead, being revealed and imparted. As such, the economic content of the revelation of Jesus Christ in the book of Revelation is the Triune God, who is made known by signs, which, according to Lang, are meant to illuminate meaning and not hide it (70). Some of the most significant signs in the book of Revelation relate to the designations given to the economic Trinity in verses 4 and 5, because the impartation of these revealed aspects of the Triune God into the believers in the local churches produces a testimony of Jesus which is a necessary precursor to the consummation of God’s eternal purpose.

**S**ome may argue that the designations for the three persons of the economical Trinity in verses 4 and 5 should not be regarded as signs, but at least three points blunt this

argument. First, the third person of the Trinity is referred to as “the seven Spirits who are before His throne.” Surely this is a sign that speaks to the unique operation of the Spirit as revealed in this book. If this designation is not a sign, then there must literally be seven Spirits rather than only the one unique Spirit as the third of the Trinity (Eph. 4:4). Second, in response to the direction of the Spirit, the apostle John did not maintain the traditional order of the persons in the Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit—in these verses. Instead, John pointed to the economical role of the Spirit before he described the threefold economic status of the Son. This inversion is significant and should not be ignored, because it illuminates the prominent role of the Spirit in the consummation of the age. Finally, as we consider all the various economic activities of the Trinity in this book, we realize many other designations could have been applied. However, the Spirit selected only five particular designations, one for the Father, one for the Spirit, and three for the Son, each of which have particular importance related to the local churches’ entrance into the revelation of Jesus Christ. For example, when the Father is addressed only as the One who is and who was and who is coming, it should be evident that much more could be revealed about Him. The same could be said for the Spirit and the Son. Consequently, these particular designations should be regarded as signs that point to the consummation of the eternal purpose of God as presented in Revelation.

*The revelation of Jesus Christ is more than a revelation about Jesus Christ; it is Jesus Christ Himself, who is the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead, being revealed and imparted.*

The book of Revelation is an unveiling of the economical Trinity in His operation to economically impart Himself into the believers in the local churches to produce overcomers,<sup>10</sup> who can usher in the fullness of the testimony of Jesus as the Body of Christ, which is signified by the golden lampstands in time and the New Jerusalem in eternity. Each of the designations given to the Triune God in verses 4 and 5 reinforces the specific functions that the Father, Son, and Spirit economically execute in order to fulfill this purpose. These designations also reflect the economical content that is imparted into the believers in order to produce the testimony of Jesus, which is the economical manifestation of the Triune God. This is the reason that the Trinity is spoken of in Revelation 1 in the way of God’s economy in a very complicated way, not in the simple way of God’s essence (Lee, *Economy* 228). R. C. H. Lenski comments on the uniqueness of the designations, stating,

Here is the Trinity, and each Person is designated in accordance with the revelation made in the visions of this book. Nothing similar to this appears elsewhere in Scripture. This greeting with these designations belongs

to Revelation, could not belong to any other document. As Revelation reaches out beyond what the other Scripture contains, so these designations of the Persons go beyond what we usually meet. They are part of the ἀποκάλυψις, the unveiling, made in these visions. (36)

The Trinity that is unveiled in these two verses is both complicated and unlike other scriptural references to the Trinity, because the focus of Revelation is on the fulfillment of the economy of God. Consequently, its revelation of the Triune God is inherently economic. Witness Lee speaks of the difference between the Triune God in His essential being and in His economy, which is reflected in the unique modifiers that are applied to the persons of the Trinity in verses 4 and 5:

There is no modifier needed for the essential Trinity. The book of Revelation, however, does not touch the existence of the Trinity but the economy of the Trinity. According to God’s economy the Father is the One who is now, who was in the past, and who shall be in the future. These modifiers indicate economy. Also, in God’s existence, the Spirit of God is one, but in God’s economy the Spirit of God is seven in function. Essentially God’s Spirit in existence is one, but economically God’s Spirit has to be intensified to fulfill His function to carry out God’s economy. In essence God the Son is just the Son, but in God’s economy He is Jesus, Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn

of the dead, the Ruler of the kings of the earth, the One who loves us and has loosed us from our sins by His blood, the One who has made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, and the One who comes to execute God’s final government. All these modifiers do not refer to the existence of the Son but to the Son in God’s economy, in God’s move, in God’s actions. The sequence of every modifier of the Son in Revelation 1:5-7 is related to God’s move, God’s economy. Again, Revelation does not touch the divine essence of the Trinity but the divine economy of the Trinity. (*Economy* 222-223)

R. C. H. Lenski’s statement concerning the uniqueness of John’s descriptors and Witness Lee’s statement that this uniqueness is related to the economic operation of the Trinity may seem to be simplistic observations, but it is not uncommon for commentators to lack even a basic understanding of these two verses. For example, in *Unveiling Revelation* John Allen states that in Revelation 1:4, “John refers to Jesus as the One who is, and Who was, and Who is to come. In other words, the eternal One” (xviii). In addition to wrongly associating Jesus with the

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designation that applies to the Father in verse 4, he also does not mention the Spirit. In commenting upon the designation of the Father, Tim LaHaye states that the phrase *Him who is and who was and who is coming* is a “reference to the Holy Trinity or the triune God” (29), apparently ignoring the clear and distinct references to the Spirit and Son that follow. If LaHaye is correct that the first designation refers to the Triune God, then John effectively ignores the Father when he provides further details of the operation of the Son and the Spirit in their subsequent designations. This is something that John would never do, given his many references to the Father in his Gospel and Epistles. Witness Lee discusses this threefold economic description of the Triune God in a footnote to verse 4:

He who is and who was and who is coming is God the eternal Father. The seven Spirits who are before God’s throne are the operating Spirit of God, God the Spirit. Jesus Christ, to God the faithful Witness, to the church the Firstborn of the dead, and to the world the Ruler of the kings of the earth (v. 5), is God the Son. This is the Triune God. As God the eternal Father, He was in the past, He is in the present, and He is coming in the future. As God the Spirit, He is the sevenfold intensified Spirit for God’s operation...As God the Son, He is (1) the Witness, the testimony, the expression of God; (2) the Firstborn of the dead for the church, the new creation; and (3) the Ruler of the kings of the earth for the world. From such a Triune God, grace and peace are imparted to the churches. (Recovery Version, note 3)

Each of these designations further unveils the economic content associated with the economic activity of each of the three persons of the Trinity in the accomplishment of the Triune God’s eternal economy during a time of degradation among the churches and tribulation in the world. This economic activity is directed toward local churches, as indicated by John’s reference to the threefold origin of grace and peace, which is extended to the churches in Asia. In principle, the Triune God is economically working to bring the believers, who are the constituents of the local churches, into the revelation of Jesus Christ by imparting the reality of His economic designations into them. As events are unfolded in the subsequent verses and chapters of the book of Revelation, it becomes increasingly evident that these designations and their economical content are vital factors in producing overcomers who can usher in the fullness of the testimony of Jesus as the Body of Christ, which is signified by the golden lampstands in time and the New Jerusalem in eternity.

*He who is and who was and who is coming:* The Spirit’s designation of the Father in verse 4 points to the name of Jehovah, which means, “I am that I am.” “His being the I Am signifies that He is the one who exists from eternity to eternity” (Lee, *Revelation* 39). In His eternal existence,

the Father is the source of endurance because what exists endures and what endures exists, and in His economic operation in Revelation, the reality of the Father’s eternal existence becomes the source of the believers’ economic endurance. Through revelation, the Father, as endurance, becomes endurance to the believers, enabling them to overcome the degradation in the church and to pass through the tribulation in the world. The designation of the Father as the eternally existing One in verse 4 points to the eternal availability of the endurance that is needed to overcome both degradation and tribulation. Through the impartation of the content of the revelation of the Father as the eternal, enduring One, the believers, like John, have the ground to boast in tribulations as fellow partakers in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus (Rom. 5:2; Rev. 1:9).

In the epistles to the seven local churches in chapters 2 and 3, the economic transmission of the eternal Father to the local churches is needed to overcome the creeping influence of degradation. The success of this transmission is manifested in the endurance of the saints, which is both praised by the Spirit and rewarded by the Lord. The local church in Ephesus is praised for its works, labor, and endurance related to not bearing evil men, to trying those who call themselves apostles and are not, and to not growing weary (2:2-3). Not bearing with evil men requires endurance, which is manifested as vigilance in the confirmation of the truth. Trying those who call themselves apostles requires endurance, which is manifested as vigilance in the defense of the truth. And not growing weary requires endurance, which is manifested as vigilance in watchfulness.

The local church in Thyatira also is praised for its “works and love and faith and service and your endurance” (v. 19), but there is little else worthy of praise in light of her degraded toleration of the deep things of Satan (v. 24). Turning from these deep things is the only burden that the Lord places upon the church, and the endurance of the eternal Father is sufficient to empower some within the church to overcome this aspect of degradation. The local church in Philadelphia, in contrast, is praised for keeping the word of the Lord’s endurance (3:10). In Philadelphia endurance is associated with the Lord rather than the Father because the Father is always economically expressed through the Son as the Word. The “word of My endurance” indicates that the Father’s endurance has been constituted into the church in Philadelphia to such an extent that there is a full economic expression of the Father’s endurance in the Son in the church in Philadelphia. This expression is worthy of receiving the reward of being kept out of the hour of trial, which is about to come on the whole inhabited earth (v. 10).

This promise of the Lord, like His promise in Luke 21:36,

indicates that the saints who keep the word of the Lord's endurance will be raptured before the great trial, implying that those who do not keep the word of the Lord's endurance will be left in the trial. (Recovery Version, Rev. 3:10, note 2)

The impartation of the Father as endurance, consequently, has great significance in terms of the timing of the believers' participation in the rapture. Without the endurance of the Father, many believers will remain in a degraded condition and have to pass through the hour of trial in order to be purged of the elements that linger in their being from their lack of vigilance toward evil men, false apostles, and the deep teachings of Satan. The believers who are constituted with the economic content of the Father's endurance, however, will be empowered to be vigilant against even the most intense manifestations of degradation and corruption, including the great harlot and the beast upon whom she sits upon (17:1, 3). Indeed, "here is the endurance and the faith of the saints" in its most potent manifestation (13:10). In order to overcome the degradation that pollutes the church and the evil that will rise up in the coming hour of trial, there is a need for the endurance of the Father, which is economically transmitted and imparted through the revelation of the Father as the One who is and who was and who is coming.

*The seven Spirits who are before His throne:* The Spirit's designation of Himself in Revelation

1:4 points to His intensified operation in applying the Son's accomplishment of God's eternal purpose in the Son's capacity as the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. It is the economic function of the Spirit to reveal and impart the reality of the Son's accomplishments; hence, in an intensified environment of degradation in the church and corruption in the world, there is a need for an intensified operation of the Spirit to produce a testimony of Jesus, which will manifest the Son's accomplishment of God's eternal purpose.

The designation of the Spirit as *the seven Spirits* has generated considerable speculation among commentators, who often only reluctantly concede that it is a reference to the Holy Spirit, given its proximity to the designations for the Father and the Son. Even with this concession, however, most commentators are at a loss to explain its significance. Sam Gordon's tentative treatment of this designation in *Worthy is the Lamb! A Walk through Revelation* exemplifies this tendency. He states,

I think this is a veiled reference which is appropriate to

the Holy Spirit. It can be easily translated to read, 'the sevenfold Spirit.' John is talking about one Holy Spirit with a sevenfold ministry and it probably refers back to what is recorded in Isaiah 11:2. (28)

Isaiah 11:2 is often cited in efforts to provide significance to this term, but explanations that rely upon it shed little light on the meaning of the term *the seven Spirits*, especially in the context of the book of Revelation.<sup>11</sup>

Lenski to his credit at least connects the number seven in the Spirit's designation with other instances of the number seven in Revelation, and thus, he draws closer to the significance of the term *the seven Spirits*. He states,

The phrase, "and from the seven spirits before his throne," causes no language difficulties. In 3:1, Christ is "the One who has the seven spirits" and with them the seven stars. In 4:5 seven lamps of fire burning before the throne are called "the seven spirits of God." In 5:6 the Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes, "which are the seven spirits of God, having been commissioned into all the earth." (40)

*In an intensified environment of degradation in the church and corruption in the world, there is a need for an intensified operation of the Spirit to produce a testimony of Jesus.*

Lenski importantly notes that the number seven is repeatedly used in references involving Christ in Revelation. In fact, the number seven is prominently featured in passages that speak of the move of the Triune God in Christ for the fulfillment of His administrative economy. In these passages the number seven is associated with both

the person and work of Christ. In regard to His person in Revelation, He is the One "who has the seven Spirits of God." Christ, however, does not have the seven Spirits in an objective way, as if the Spirit is separate and apart from Him, but in the way of coinherence. This understanding of the seven Spirits, which are sent forth into all the earth, is depicted through the use of another sign—the seven eyes of the Lamb (5:6). This sign within a sign points to the mutual coinherence of Christ and the Spirit in the Godhead and also to their continuing coinherence in the carrying out the economy of God.<sup>12</sup> The seven Spirits, as the seven eyes of the Lamb, are the economic eyes of Jehovah that run to and fro throughout all the earth in order to strengthen those whose heart is perfect toward Him (2 Chron. 16:9).

In regard to His work in Revelation, He is the One who has "the seven stars" (3:1). When the resurrected Christ initiates the application of God's New Testament economy, He opens a scroll with seven seals (5:1, 5), and when He ministers to the seven churches, He directs the work of the seven messengers who are in His hand. The Lord's speaking

to the seven churches through these seven messengers is the speaking of the sevenfold intensified Spirit. At the beginning of each epistle in chapters 2 and 3, the Lord initiates His speaking to one of the local churches in Asia by addressing a messenger to each particular church. At the end of each epistle, He concludes His speaking by acknowledging the economic role of the Spirit in conveying His speaking to the seven churches through these seven messengers. Lenski acknowledges this close relationship between the seven Spirits and the seven churches, stating, that *the seven Spirits of God* bears the “same symbolic seven that is found in the seven churches; seven = three, the number of God, plus four, the number of the earth, the world, and men—God, through the Spirit, dealing with men” (41). Lenski notes that God’s particular dealing with man involves the “Spirit’s commission to proceed from the throne and to make God and men one” (43).

**T**he seven Spirits, which are burning before the throne, are the seven eyes of the Lord. As the seven eyes of the Lord, the seven Spirits are sent forth into all the earth to economically strengthen those whose heart is perfect toward God. It seems strange that those with a perfect heart would need to be strengthened, but this need speaks of the powerful influence of the degradation in the churches and the corruption in the world at the time of the Lord’s coming. The degradation in the church will be so pervasive and the corruption in the world will be so operative in defiance of God that even those with a perfect heart will need to be strengthened through an intensified operation of the Spirit, a sevenfold intensification that will complete God’s operation. Witness Lees speaks to the deeper aspect of intensification, which is signified by the term *the seven Spirits*:

The seven Spirits are undoubtedly the Spirit of God because They are ranked among the Triune God in vv. 4 and 5. As seven is the number for completion in God’s operation, so the seven Spirits must be for God’s move on the earth. In essence and existence, God’s Spirit is one; in the intensified function and work of God’s operation, God’s Spirit is sevenfold. This is similar to the lampstand in Zech. 4:2. In its existence it is one lampstand, but in its function it is seven lamps. At the time this book was written, the church had become degraded; the age was dark. Therefore, the sevenfold intensified Spirit of God was needed for God’s move and work on the earth.

In Matt. 28:19 the sequence of the Triune God is: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Here the sequence is changed. The seven Spirits of God are listed in the second place instead of the third. This reveals the importance of the intensified function of the sevenfold Spirit of God. This point is confirmed by the repeated emphasis on the Spirit’s speaking in 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; 22:17. (Recovery Version, Rev. 1:4, note 5)

*Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth:* As the sevenfold intensified Spirit, the Spirit speaks the economic content of the Son into the local churches by revealing the Son as the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. The economic content of the Son that is imparted through the revelation of the word of God is the Son’s faithfulness in witnessing of the Father’s reality in the midst of opposition from every sphere of influence, the Son’s resurrection life in the midst of an environment of decay and death, and the Son’s authority in the administration of world events for the benefit of the growth and maturity of the Body of Christ.

**F**or the believers, the faithfulness of the faithful Witness is needed in order to overcome the lukewarmness of the church, the great speakings and blasphemies of the beast, the abominations and unclean things of the great harlot of religion, and the sumptuous and splendid things of the material world (3:14; 13:5; 17:4; 18:14). The success of this transmission is manifested in the faithfulness of the saints, which is seen in the testimony of Antipas (2:13), in the blood of the witnesses of Jesus (17:6), and in the word of the testimony of those who have overcome the accuser of our brothers (12:10-11). Every testimony is a witnessing, and every witness testifies. Thus the testimony of Jesus itself is a manifestation of the faithful Witness who has been imparted and constituted into the local churches as their economic content (1:9; 19:10; 20:4).

For the believers, the resurrection life of the Firstborn of the dead is needed in order to overcome persecution from those who oppose God and to overcome dead works in religion. The term *Firstborn* points to the resurrection of Christ from the dead. When John first saw the Lord Jesus as a High Priest walking amidst the golden lampstands (1:13-16), he fell at His feet as if dead, but Christ spoke Himself into John as the living One, who became dead, but who is living forever and ever (vv. 17-18). His resurrection and His living are according to the power of an indestructible life (Heb. 7:16-17). This same resurrection life is supplied to the church in Smyrna to empower them to be faithful even unto death, which is a precursor to receiving a crown of life as the manifestation of the application of the resurrection life (Rev. 2:8, 10). When the resurrection life of the Firstborn is applied to the church in Sardis, the believers who only have a name that they are living are empowered to turn from dead works to serve the living God, which is manifested by their names not being erased from the book of life and even being confessed before the Father and His angels (3:1, 5). And when the resurrection life of the Firstborn is applied to the overcomers, they become blessed and holy, having a part in the first resurrection which is the outstanding resurrection (20:5-6).<sup>13</sup> This resurrection will manifest to all that the testimony of Jesus is intrinsically constituted with the life of the

Firstborn, which was imparted into the Body of Christ through Christ's resurrection from the dead.

For the believers, the administrative authority of the Ruler of the kings of the earth is needed to overcome the lawlessness that is now operating in the world environment, that can creep into the church, and which eventually will be revealed (2 Thes. 2:7; Matt. 7:21-23; 2 Tim. 2:25-26). The authority of the Son is needed in the church in Pergamos, which is dwelling where Satan's throne is. The authority of the Son is needed in the church in Thyatira, which is under the authority of the teaching of the woman Jezebel rather than the authority of the speaking Spirit. However, there are some in Thyatira who do not receive the teaching associated with the deep things of Satan, and they are rewarded by being given authority over the nations. This authority comes from the Ruler of the kings of the earth, and shepherding that results from this giving, this imparting, manifests the Lord's iron rod, the Lord's authority (Rev. 2:27; 19:15). The authority of the Son is felt by the church in Laodicea through the rebuke and discipline that is meted out in response to their lukewarmness, which issues from their spiritual pride and blindness. Those who receive the revelation of Christ as the Amen, however, are constituted with the authority of the Lord to the point that they manifest the Lord who is sitting on the throne by sitting on the throne with Him (3:14, 16-17, 19, 21).

As signs, the economical designations of the Son—the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth—not only speak of the content of the revelation that is imparted into the churches through the word of God; they also speak of the economical process that makes this impartation and subsequent manifestation of the testimony of Jesus possible. This process is crystallized in the terms *incarnation*, *inclusion*, and *intensification*.<sup>14</sup>

Christ's history is divided into the section of His incarnation, the section of His inclusion, and the section of His intensification. Therefore we emphasize these three words—*incarnation*, *inclusion*, and *intensification*—and stress the facts that incarnation produces redeemed people, that inclusion produces the churches, and that intensification produces the overcomers to build up the Body, which consummates in the New Jerusalem as the unique goal of God's economy. This is the revelation in the New Testament. (*Incarnation* 21)

*Incarnation* refers to the economical step of Christ that is portrayed in the Gospels, involving the Word becoming

flesh (John 1:14). In this step the Word becomes *the faithful Witness*, in which the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, declares the God whom no one has ever seen (v. 18). In His witnessing, He faithfully testified of the Father in His words and works (14:10; 5:36; 9:4; 10:25). *Inclusion* refers to the economical step of Christ that is portrayed primarily in the Acts and the Epistles, involving the last Adam becoming the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). In this step, Christ becomes *the Firstborn of the dead*, the Firstborn among many brothers who are the enlargement of Christ as His Body. *Intensification* refers to the economical step of Christ that is portrayed primarily in Revelation, involving the life-giving Spirit becoming the sevenfold intensified Spirit, which burns before the throne (Rev. 1:4; 4:5). In this step Christ is fully manifested as *the Ruler of the kings of the earth*, the One who is in control of every outward event for the sake of providing an appropriate environment for the maturation and building up of the Body of Christ in order to end the present age and to usher in the age of the kingdom and the New Jerusalem. In *Incarnation, Inclusion, and Intensification* Witness Lee speaks of this process, as it

applies to the person and work of Christ, which is progressively unfolded in the New Testament, beginning with the incarnation of Christ in the Gospels and concluding with the intensification of Christ in Revelation. His summary, which is a summary of the New Testament economy of God, is worthy of extended quotation.

*The testimony of Jesus itself is a manifestation of the faithful Witness who has been imparted and constituted into the local churches as their economic content.*

In the first stage, the stage of Christ in the flesh, Christ produced a group of redeemed persons, such as Peter and all the other disciples. Although a redeemed people had been produced, the church had not yet been produced. The church was produced by Christ in the second stage. In this stage Christ is the pneumatic Christ, the compound, life-giving Spirit who produced the church on the day of Pentecost. The redeemed saints, who were produced by Christ in the flesh, became the church produced by Christ as the life-giving Spirit.

Shortly after the church was produced, it began to become degraded. This is clearly seen in Acts. In chapter five Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit; in chapter six there was a murmuring of the Hellenists against the Hebrews regarding the daily dispensing; and in chapter fifteen there was trouble concerning circumcision. The separation of Barnabas from Paul (15:35-39) should also be regarded as a part of the degradation. Eventually the church degraded to such an extent that the Lord could no longer tolerate it, and He reacted by intensifying Himself sevenfold to become the sevenfold intensified Spirit (Rev.

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1:4; 5:6). He became intensified sevenfold to deal with the degradation of the church.

In his Epistles Paul spoke about the Body (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12, 27; Eph. 1:23; 4:4, 16; Col. 2:19), but I do not believe that Paul saw the actual building up of the Body. Paul could see the church expressed in various localities, but he could not see, in actuality, the church as the Body in a perfect and complete way. In order for the Body to be produced in a full and complete way, there is the need of the third stage of Christ, the stage of intensification in which Christ becomes the sevenfold intensified Spirit.

After Paul died, the Lord waited more than twenty years until John wrote the book of Revelation. Revelation is an Epistle, but it is very different in character from all the other Epistles in the New Testament. In this book Christ, who became the compound, all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit, has become the sevenfold intensified Spirit. In Revelation 1:4 the third of the Divine Trinity, the Spirit, becomes the seven Spirits and is ranked as the second of the Divine Trinity.

We have pointed out that in His second stage, the stage of His being the compound, all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit, Christ has produced the churches, but not much of the Body was produced and built up in an actual and practical way. For this reason, Christ has become the sevenfold intensified Spirit to overcome the degradation of the church that the overcomers may be produced to bring forth the Body.

The issue of Christ in the flesh was a group of redeemed persons, and the issue of Christ as the compound, all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit was the churches. For the Body to be produced there is the need for the compound, all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit to be intensified sevenfold. This sevenfold intensification deals with the sevenfold situation of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. (18-19)

**T**he three economical designations for the Son in Revelation 1:5 reflect not only the content that is imparted through the economical revelation of Christ but also the process through which this content is imparted into the churches to produce a manifestation of the Triune God, which is the testimony of Jesus. Through the death of Christ as the faithful Witness, we were loosed from our sins. Through the resurrection of the Firstborn, we were regenerated unto a living hope to become the Body of Christ. And through the intensification of the seven Spirits, we can be built up as the Body of Christ to become a kingdom of priests to our God and Father to whom there is the glory and the might forever and ever (v. 6).

When the Triune God, who is economically revealed in

verses 4 and 5 of chapter 1, is economically imparted into the local churches as golden lampstands and then manifested through the overcoming testimony of the man-child, Christ will come quickly with the clouds and every eye will see Him and realize that the coming Christ, as the One who is and who was and who is coming, is the full expression of the Triune God (vv. 7-8).<sup>15</sup>

### *The Revelation of the Economical Manifestation of the Word of God as the Testimony of Jesus*

By revealing and imparting Himself into the local churches through the word of God, the revelation of Jesus Christ produces a testimony of Jesus as the elements of degradation are trimmed from the wicks of the golden lampstands through the burning and searching eyes of the Lamb, which are the seven Spirits. By receiving the economical revelation of the Triune God, the local churches as the golden lampstands in chapters 1 through 3, the overcomers as the man-child in chapter 12, and the Body of Christ as the New Jerusalem in chapters 21 and 22 will become an economic manifestation of the Triune God.<sup>16</sup> These manifestations ultimately will issue in an eternal testimony of Jesus.

*The local churches as the golden lampstands:* Upon receiving the revelation of Jesus Christ, John was instructed to write it in a scroll and send it to seven churches, which were then identified with the names of seven cities. When John turned to see the voice that spoke with him, he saw seven golden lampstands (1:11-12). The seven golden lampstands represent seven local churches, whose purpose is to manifest the Triune God as the testimony of Jesus in the church age. In his book *Revelation*, Paul Gardner acknowledges that the “lampstands represent the seven churches to which he is writing” (25), and in *God’s New Testament Economy*, Witness Lee states that the “testimony of Jesus is the shining of the seven Spirits from within all the believers in the churches” (257). These seven churches are local churches, which express the reality of the universal church. Without the local churches, there is no testimony of the universal church, no ability to faithfully witness to unbelievers that God is among the saints (1 Cor. 14:25), and no way for the world to see a testimony of the oneness between God and humanity (John 17:23). The practical oneness of the believers in a locality is the testimony of Jesus. The local church preserves the oneness of the believers by standing against every form of division, which is the condition of those whose living is governed by the spirit which is now operating in the sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:2) rather than by the one Spirit of the unique Triune God.

The Triune God is expressed in Christ (John 1:1, 14; 1 Tim. 3:16; Col. 2:9); Christ is realized and experienced as the Spirit (John 14:16-18; 1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17;

Rom. 8:9; Phil. 1:19) and is expressed in His Body, the universal church (Eph. 1:22-23; 1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 4:4); and the universal church is expressed in the local churches. Therefore, to know and experience God, we need to know and experience Christ; to know and experience Christ, we need to participate in the universal church through the Spirit; and to participate in the universal church, we need to participate in the local churches. (Recovery Version, Rev. 1:4, note 2)

**I**n Revelation, the local churches, which are signified by golden lampstands, are an economical manifestation of the Triune God, just as the lampstand in the temple in the Old Testament was a type of the Triune God.<sup>17</sup>

In the Bible the lampstand is always related to God's building. The first time the lampstand was mentioned was in Exo. 25:31-40, when the tabernacle was built. The second instance was in regard to the building of the temple in 1 Kings 7:49. The third instance was closely related to the rebuilding of God's temple in Zech. 4:2-10. Here in Revelation the lampstand is related to the building of the churches. In Exo. 25 the emphasis is on Christ being the lampstand as the divine light, shining as seven lamps with the Spirit (the oil). In Zech. 4 the emphasis is on the Spirit (Zech. 4:6) as seven lamps shining, these seven lamps being the seven eyes of God (Zech. 4:2, 10). The seven eyes of God are the seven Spirits of God (Rev. 5:6) for God's intensified move. This indicates that the lampstand in Zechariah is the reality of the lampstand in Exodus, and that the lampstands in Revelation are the reproduction of the lampstand in Zechariah. Christ is realized as the Spirit, and the Spirit is expressed as the churches. The shining Spirit is the reality of the shining Christ, and the shining churches are the reproduction and expression of the shining Spirit to accomplish God's eternal purpose that the New Jerusalem as the shining city may be consummated. Christ, the Spirit, and the churches are all of the same divine nature. (Recovery Version, Rev. 1:12, note 3)

The church by virtue of having the same life and nature as the Triune God, which has been imparted into humanity through the person and work of Christ as the faithful Witness and the Firstborn of the dead, has, as the Body of Christ, the capacity to testify of Jesus through the manifestation of God in the flesh. Such a manifestation must be practical and must have a visible component because it is in the flesh. The local churches meet this criterion, and in a normal situation they would shine as luminaries in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation (Phil. 2:15).

The Lord's speaking to the churches in Revelation and the Spirit's call for some within the local churches to overcome, however, point to the degraded condition of the church and to the need for a stronger part of the Body of Christ, as it is expressed in localities, to rise up to meet the need of the Triune God to manifest the testimony of Jesus in order to usher in the age of the kingdom.

*The overcomers as the man-child:* The overcomers as the man-child are this stronger part. They come out of the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon underneath her feet, and with a crown of twelve stars on her head (Rev. 12:1). The overcomers, as the manifestation of the stronger part of God's people in the local churches throughout history, are signified by the man-child (vv. 2, 5). It is important to grasp the full significance of the sign of the woman and the man-child in order to have a balanced understanding of the overcomers, especially since the testimony of Jesus is corporate and our view of the overcomers tends toward the individualistic. While the overcomers are individual believers, they are not individualistic, coming as they do out of local churches, which

manifest the corporate Body of Christ. There is only one woman with only one man-child. This fact alone should cause every believer who aspires to be an overcomer to be properly related to a local church in order to participate in and be identified with the man-child. It is difficult to imagine that any believer who violates the principles of the

*While the overcomers are individual believers, they are not individualistic, coming as they do out of local churches, which manifest the corporate Body of Christ.*

Body would be recognized by the Body as being its stronger part. The travail of the woman to give birth to the man-child is, in principle, equal to the travail of the apostle Paul to have Christ formed within the believers (v. 2; Gal. 4:19). The man-child manifests the formed Christ, who is corporate, not a deformed believer, who is individualistic. The woman represents the totality of God's people, and the man-child represents the stronger, but still corporate, part that comes out of God's people.<sup>18</sup> Witness Lee notes that from the divine perspective, the overcomers are "considered in the Bible a collective unit fighting the battle of God and bringing God's kingdom down to earth" and that "throughout all generations there are some stronger ones among God's people" (Recovery Version, Rev. 12:2, note 1).

**A**s a collective unit that maintains the corporate principles of the Body in its manifestation, the overcomers testify of Christ in their coming forth as the one man-child. They have been a testimony of Jesus throughout the long history of the church, and they will testify of Jesus in the coming age of tribulation. They overcome the accuser

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of the brothers, Satan, by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony (v. 11); as such, they have the reality of the testimony of Jesus.

The most telling indication that the overcomers, as the man-child, are a testimony of Jesus relates to the promises given to the overcomers in each of the seven epistles to the seven churches. Each promise is a promise associated with the person or work of Christ, and thus, the recipients of these rewards testify of Jesus in His economical manifestation. The overcomers in Ephesus are rewarded with eating the tree of life. This indicates that they are organically constituted with Christ who is life and who is our life (2:7; Col. 3:4). The overcomers in Smyrna are rewarded with the crown of life, which rules out their being hurt by the second death (Rev. 2:10-11). This indicates a thorough constitution with the resurrection life of Christ to the extent that nothing of death can touch them, just as it could not touch Christ. The overcomers in Pergamos are rewarded with the hidden manna, a white stone for building, and a new name (v. 17). This indicates that they enjoy a special portion of Christ, which constitutes them as an integral part of God's building through their transformation in life. The overcomers in Thyatira are rewarded with authority over the nations and the morning star. This indicates that they manifest the Lord's authority and will testify of His rapture through their maturity in life (vv. 26-28). The overcomers in Sardis are rewarded with being clothed with white garments, the uninterrupted enjoyment of the divine life, and the Lord's confession of their names before the Father and His angels (3:5). This indicates that they will testify of the righteousness of Christ, which entitles them to an uninterrupted enjoyment of the divine life and fellowship with Christ. The overcomers in Philadelphia are rewarded with being made a pillar in the temple that will by no means go out anymore, the name of God and the name of the city of God, and the Lord's new name (v. 12). This indicates that they will be an immovable testimony of the building work of God and be utterly one in identification with God, Christ, and the church. The overcomers in Laodicea are rewarded by sitting with Christ on the throne (v. 21). This indicates that they manifest and testify of the ruling, reigning, and eternally administrating Triune God. The nature and expression of the lampstands and the economical aspects of the rewards to the overcomers all testify of the Triune God, and as a testimony of Jesus, they will usher in the ultimate sign of the economic manifestation of the Triune God, the New Jerusalem.

*The Body of Christ as the New Jerusalem:* The New Jerusalem has yet to be manifested in its fullness, but when the deep significances of this consummate sign of the economical move of the Triune God are unveiled following the conclusion of the millennial kingdom, the testimony of Jesus will be revealed through the Body of Christ as the fullness of the One who fills all in all (Eph.

1:23). It will be a corporate tabernacle of God among men, just as Christ in His incarnation was the tabernacling of God among men. The apostle John devotes the final two chapters of Revelation to describing the details of this holy city,<sup>19</sup> which is also the bride, the wife of the Lamb, signifying the full union of God and man. This union is organically sustained by the eternal dispensing of the life of the Triune God, which flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. And in this union, there is an eternal receiving and partaking of Christ as the tree of life, in which the economically processed Triune God and the Triune God's economically constituted corporate elect mutually indwell each other and thus display the multifarious wisdom of God.

**T**he New Jerusalem consummates the revelation of Jesus Christ. This revelation, which was economically conveyed from the Father to the local churches as the word of God, contains the very economical Triune God as its content, because He has been processed through the steps of incarnation, inclusion, and intensification to impart Himself into the local churches to reproduce an economical manifestation of Himself as the testimony of Jesus. There is no need for words to be added to this revelation and certainly every reason to keep the word, because the blessing that comes to those who read and hear the words of the spirit of the prophecy contained in the book of Revelation is the blessed Triune God Himself. May the grace and peace which are 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 empower us to increasingly receive the economical revelation of the Triune God as the Word of God in order to economically manifest the Triune God as the testimony of Jesus through the local church, as an overcomer, and ultimately as the New Jerusalem. **A<sup>c</sup>C**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>It is hard to look beyond the cultural connotations of the Greek word *apokalypsis*, both in its translated form as *revelation* and in its anglicized form as *apocalypse*, to see a vision of the economy of the Triune God. The word *revelation* pulls our thought in the direction of visions and wonders, of clues and signs, of prophetic significances and real-world similarities. This tendency imbues many interpretations of Revelation with a sense that it is an account of the inexorable unfolding of world events in the future that will ultimately culminate in the return of our Lord Jesus. Revelation thus is viewed as a key to unlock and understand world events as they arise and are reported through various forms of modern media. The word *apocalypse* pulls our thought in the direction of a cosmic confrontation between God and Satan, which culminates in the conflagration at Armageddon. This tendency imbues many interpretations of Revelation with a sense that it is an account of an inexorable

unfolding of the struggle between good and evil that will ultimately culminate in the triumphant return of our Lord Jesus and the establishment of His reign of righteousness. These interpretations are not limited to a particular branch of Christian thought or even to a particular level of Christian scholarship. From Orthodox to Fundamental to Evangelical schools of thought, and from scholarly to popular treatments of Revelation, these tendencies are evident and pervasive.

Hal Lindsey, author of *The Late Great Planet Earth*, perhaps the most popular book related to end-time events and prophetic fulfillment, begins his Evangelical commentary on the book of Revelation, *There's a New World Coming*, by saying,

In the seclusion of exile John the Apostle was to receive the most sweeping survey of future events ever to be granted to the mortal mind. God's revelations to John spanned twenty centuries, reaching past even our own sophisticated age of technology. (9)

Tim LaHaye, co-author of the popular *Left Behind* series, states that Revelation "reveals God's wonderful Plan for the future" and that the "student of the book of Revelation need not be taken unaware as these events unfold, for it is possible through the study of this book to know that future plan" (15-16). Even though LaHaye, like many other commentators, speaks of Jesus Christ as being the focus of the book, an emphasis on future events is never far from the forefront of his interpretation. He writes,

This book, then, is the unveiling of Jesus Christ. But not just Jesus Christ, for John has already presented Him very clearly as the divine Son of God in the Gospel that bears his name. Further on in the verse we find that this is the revelation of Jesus Christ "to show his servants what must soon take place." Again we see that the emphasis of the book is on future events. (25)

Charles C. Ryrie echoes this thought in *Revelation*, a commentary on Revelation that reflects his fundamental orientation, stating, "The book is a revelation of things that must soon take place" (8). The futuristic emphasis is so strong in his mind that he endeavors to assure the reader that Revelation is still applicable to the daily living of a believer, stating, "Even though this book is largely about the future, knowledge of it should affect our living in the present" (11).

While more scholarly treatments tend to downplay the thought that Revelation is a key to deciphering the significance of unfolding world events, the view that Revelation speaks of a cosmic confrontation in which good triumphs over evil is prevalent. In his dense and dry treatment of Revelation, *The Book of Revelation in Christological Focus*, Dan Liroy sums up his exegetical analysis, stating, "John wrote Revelation to underscore that God, through the Messiah, will defeat the forces of evil, condemn

*the wicked, vindicate the righteous, fulfill all His promises, and accomplish His sovereign purpose in history"* (83).

Archbishop Averky Taushev and Father Seraphim Rose of the Russian Orthodox Church frame their study of Revelation, *The Apocalypse in the Teachings of Ancient Christianity*, along similar lines as Liroy, stating,

The subject of the Apocalypse is a mystical depiction of the future fate of the Church of Christ and of the whole world; it describes the battle of the Church against all its enemies and its final triumph over them...Historical events which we see about us are placed in the context of the whole battle of the Church against the powers of evil, and the final victory of the Church and the opening of the unending Kingdom of Heaven. (33)

An emphasis on neither the prophetic nor the cosmic, however, adequately presents the dominant feature of Revelation, which is the unveiling of the Triune God in His economy for the purpose of fulfilling His economy.

A focus on prophetic and futuristic events may seem quite appropriate, given the revelation of Christ as the "Ruler of the kings of the earth" in 1:5 and the lengthy account of the "things which are about to take place," which are referenced in verse 19 and presented in the section that begins in 4:1 and extends through 22:5. This type of focus, however, overlooks the context of Revelation 1:5 and the intrinsic significance of the general presentation and the detailed repetition of the content in 4:1 through 22:5.

*The unveiling of Christ as the Ruler of the kings of the earth primarily speaks of His involvement in world events in order to produce local churches and overcomers within the local churches.*

The unveiling of Christ as the Ruler of the kings of the earth does not simply speak of His role in directing world events; rather, it primarily speaks of His involvement in world events in order to produce local churches generally and overcomers within the local churches particularly. Christ is revealed in His threefold economical status first as the faithful Witness, then as the Firstborn of the dead, and finally as the Ruler of the kings of the earth, indicating that His ruling is linked to His faithful testimony of God in His incarnation and to His inclusion of the believers as His enlarged and continuing testimony, which has been made possible through His status as the Firstborn of the dead in resurrection. The revelation of many brothers, who are conformed to the image of the Firstborn (Rom. 8:29), occurs at the culmination of the world events spoken of in Revelation, and Christ aids it in His status as the Ruler of the kings of the earth in ascension. Christ operates in His status as Ruler of the kings of the earth within the context of His overarching status as the Head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22). His status as Head over all things subsumes all of His economical action as the Ruler of the kings of the earth, and all of His involvement as the Ruler is for the purpose of heading up all things in Christ (v. 10). The threefold designation of Christ in

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Revelation 1:5 relates to the unfolding of His economy to produce the church as the testimony of Jesus rather than only to His involvement in world events. Consequently, a futuristic focus that merely highlights the world events spoken of in 4:1 through 22:5 will miss the intrinsic significance of the Triune God's economical desire to produce the church as the testimony of Jesus through the impartation of the word of God.

Witness Lee divides the section unfolding "the things which are about to take place" into two subsections. The first section from 4:1 to 11:19 provides a "general view of the things to come, from Christ's ascension to eternity future," and the second section from 12:1 to 22:5 gives "details of the important things and the crucial matters covered in the first section" (Recovery Version, Revelation, outlines). The general view is a broad survey of world events, but within the context of these world events important things and crucial matters are unfolded. All these important things and crucial matters relate to the church and the church's response to world events that frame an environment for producing and building up the church and for manifesting the overcomers. These things and matters include the rapture of the overcomers as the man-child and the dragon's persecution of the church, following the man-child's casting down of Satan and the subsequent emergence of Antichrist and the false prophet (12:1—13:18), the reaping of believers in the gathering of the firstfruits before the great tribulation and the general harvest of the believers near the end of the great tribulation (14:1-20), who are ripened and matured in a tribulation environment that is marked by the outpouring of the seven bowls and the destruction of the material and religious Babylon (15:1—19:4), out from whom God calls His people (18:4-5). Prior to His return, the marriage dinner of the Lamb with His redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and unblemished bride occurs (19:5-10). Following Christ's return with His bride-army, Antichrist is defeated at Armageddon, Satan is imprisoned, and the millennial kingdom, which the overcomers share with Christ, is inaugurated and enjoyed (vv. 11—20:6). With the final rebellion of Satan quelled and the dominion of Christ and the believers fittingly established, the New Jerusalem, as the ultimate manifestation of the testimony of Jesus, is unveiled (20:7—22:5). All of the outward events in Revelation merely serve to create an environment for the fulfillment of God's economy, which is focused on the local churches and the overcomers. Consequently, a misplaced emphasis on future events, which fails to recognize their limited role in the inward realization and emergence of the church as the testimony of Jesus, will miss the mark of God's economy and distract the people of God from His economy with its different teaching.

A focus on the cosmic struggle between good and evil also may seem quite appropriate, given the unveiling of the evident operation of both the Triune God and His enemy, Satan, in the events spoken of in Revelation, and given the cosmic termination of the influence of Satan in the history of humanity which was first introduced in chapter 3 of Genesis. This type of focus, however, overlooks the very fact that Satan has no role in both the first two chapters of the Holy Scriptures and the last two

chapters. After the struggle between God and Satan concludes in chapter 20 of Revelation, the speaking Spirit continues to speak and John continues to write. Both the Spirit's speaking and John's writing reveal the continuing transmission of the Triune God in His economy into His redeemed, regenerated, and glorified sons as a river of water of life and the tree of life for an eternal testimony of God and of the Lamb. Consequently, a misplaced emphasis on cosmic events, which does not properly place this confrontation within the limited context of its necessary resolution on the way to the fulfillment of the good pleasure of the Triune God, will miss the mark of God's economy and distract the people of God from His economy with its different teaching.

<sup>2</sup>Another way to understand the function of revelation in the impartation and manifestation of the Triune God is to consider the two most significant passages in the New Testament related to the steps of Christ, the process of Christ, in the economy of God. The first verse is John 1:14, which speaks of the Word becoming flesh and tabernacling among us. In this economical step, the revelation and explanation of the Triune God, the Word, became flesh. In this revelation, this becoming, the content of the Godhead, the fullness, was imparted into the humanity of Jesus, and in the tabernacling of Jesus in the days of His flesh, the revealed and imparted Word was manifested (Col. 2:9; Heb. 5:7). The second verse is 1 Corinthians 15:45, which speaks of the last Adam becoming the life-giving Spirit. In this economical step, the revelation and explanation of the manifested Triune God, the last Adam, became a life-giving Spirit. In this revelation of the life-giving Spirit, this becoming, the fullness of Christ was imparted, given as life, into the believers, and in upholding the truth of the Word becoming flesh as the pillar and base of the reality, the revealed and imparted Christ is manifested through the church.

<sup>3</sup>The book of Revelation is part of the Spirit's declaration of the things that are coming, which He received from the Son. All the things that are coming ultimately relate to the Son's glorification, which is the Son's manifestation. Witness Lee speaks of the Spirit's guiding, saying,

The work of the Spirit is, first, to convict the world. Second, as the Spirit of reality He guides the believers into all the reality; that is, He makes all that the Son is and has real to the believers. All that the Father is and has is embodied in the Son (Col. 2:9), and all that the Son is and has is declared as reality to the believers through the Spirit (vv. 14-15). This declaring is the glorifying of the Son with the Father. Hence, it is a matter of the Triune God being wrought into and mingled with the believers. Third, the Spirit declares the things that are to come, which are revealed mainly in Revelation (Rev. 1:1, 19). The three aspects of the Spirit's work correspond with the three sections of John's writings: his Gospel, his Epistles, and his Revelation. (Recovery Version, John 16:13, note 1)

<sup>4</sup>It is easy for a believer to acknowledge the divine agency of

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the Triune God in the transmission of revelation because not doing so is tantamount to not keeping His word and to denying the Lord's name (Rev. 3:8). It is more difficult for a believer to acknowledge the divine agency of the apostles in the transmission of revelation. In part this may be due to the less apparent role of the apostles, but it is also easier, from a human standpoint, to dismiss their words as the words of mere men, words that can be received as long as they satisfy a believer's appetite and preferences, but cast off when their words become inconvenient reminders that expose shortages, fleshly predilections, and ambitions. Even as believers, given our inherent love to be the first, being subject to one another is difficult, but it is all the more reason to receive in meekness the word implanted by the apostles, which is able to save our souls (3 John 9; Eph. 5:21; 1 Pet. 5:5; James 1:21). The apostles' speaking, their reporting of what they have seen and heard, is the fellowship of the apostles, which brings the believers into the fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

<sup>5</sup>Revelation 1:1 seems to clearly refute my statement that the content of revelation in general is not things, especially since it speaks of showing "His slaves the things that must quickly take place." *The things that must quickly take place*, however, should not be read merely as a reference to future events, because the reference to *things* is modified by the phrase *made it known by signs*. More than the details of selected future events in the book of Revelation are designated by the use of signs. In fact, it is the divine and mystical things of God's economy that are most prominently designated by signs in the book of Revelation, including the golden lampstands as a sign of the local churches, the woman giving birth to the man-child as a sign of the overcomers being produced through the church, the bride making herself ready as a sign of the church attaining a desirable status, holy and without blemish, in order to consummate her union with Christ, and the Spirit and the bride as a sign of the New Jerusalem, which, in turn, is a sign of the eternal union of the processed Triune God with the tripartite man, who has been joined with the Triune God through His economy, which involves redemption, regeneration, transformation, and glorification. Witness Lee alludes to the significance of the things made known by signs, saying, "John's Revelation is a book of signs showing how Christ is now caring for the church and how He is coming to judge and possess the earth and bring the church, His bride, into God's full economy" (Recovery Version, Rev. 1:1, note 2). All the signs in the book of Revelation point either to the significance of God's economy or to its fulfillment. Even the signs related to the beast and the great harlot pertain to the judgment that is necessary in order for the Lord to possess the earth and to head up all things in Christ in His economy which is unto the fullness of the times (Eph. 1:10). In short, "the things that must quickly take place" in Revelation are primarily the things pertaining to God (Rom. 15:17), that is, the things of God (1 Cor. 2:11), the things of Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:21), and the things of the Spirit (Rom. 8:5), which are the things which are above, not the things which are on the earth (Col. 3:2).

<sup>6</sup>It may offend some to hear that the revelation contained in

this book is directed toward the local churches, but this is the stated truth. In Revelation 1:3-4, John directs the "words of the prophecy" to the "seven churches which are in Asia." All these churches are local churches. Then in Revelation 22:16, the Lord Himself speaks, saying, "I Jesus have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches." Witness Lee notes in response to this speaking of the Lord: "The testimony of this book was made by the Lord Jesus for the churches. Hence, to comprehend and keep this testimony, we need to be in the churches and for the churches" (Recovery Version, v. 16, note 2). The book of Revelation

does not deal with the one universal church but with the local churches in many cities. First, in Matt. 16:18 the church is revealed as universal, and then in Matt. 18:17 it is revealed as local. In Acts the church was practiced in the way of local churches, such as the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1), the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:17), and the churches in the provinces of Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:41). The Epistles were written to the local churches, except for a few written to individuals. Not one was written to the universal church. Without the local churches, the universal church has no practicality or actuality. The universal church is realized in the local churches. Knowing the church in its universal aspect must be consummated in knowing the church in its local aspect. It is a great advance for us to know and practice the local churches. Concerning the church, the book of Revelation is in the advanced stage. To know this book, we must advance from the understanding of the universal church to the realization and practice of the local churches, because this book is written to the local churches. Only those who are in the local churches are positioned rightly, with the right angle and the proper perspective, to see the visions in this book. (Recovery Version, Rev. 1:4, note 2)

A genuine local church is a manifestation of the testimony of Jesus, which testifies of the believers' oneness with the Triune God and with all the other genuine believers in a geographical locality. It is not an organized division but an organic reality. When a believer is rightly positioned in relationship to other believers and to the Triune God, the revelation in the word of God begins to unfold and operate. As believers, our responsibility to hear and keep the words of the prophecy (v. 3) extends to hearing and keeping the word of the apostles and of the Lord Himself related to the truth of the local churches. Nothing of our own fragile sensibilities, religious traditions, or personal status should be allowed to influence us in this matter; otherwise, our offense will advance to an outright rejection of the truth concerning the local church, and in this rejection, there will be a taking away "from the words of the scroll of this prophecy" (22:19).

<sup>7</sup>See Robichaux, Kerry S. "Axioms of the Trinity." *Affirmation & Critique* I.1 (Jan. 1996): 6-11.

<sup>8</sup>The transmission of revelation is according to the principle of incarnation, which speaks of the mingling of divinity and

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humanity through the incarnation of the Word. This principle is always upheld in the transmission of revelation. We believe and receive the word, but the word that we hear comes through the preaching and speaking of those whose feet have been shod with the firm foundation of the gospel of peace (1 Cor. 15:11; Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:15), that is, those whose human living has been mingled and adorned with the divine realities contained in the gospel.

It may seem overly restrictive, even sacrilegious, to suggest that the power of God is not sufficient in itself to engender faith, but the word of God plainly affirms the necessary involvement of humanity: In order to be saved, we must call upon the name of the Lord, but “how then shall they call upon Him into whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe into Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without one who proclaims Him?” (Rom. 10:14). The economical process of the transmission of revelation as the word of God is not imposed on the Triune God from below; that is, we do not impose it on Him. Rather, it is imposed on us from above; that is, it is imposed on us by the Triune God, who will not violate the axiomatic principles of His economy, which are an expression of the axiomatic principles of His essential being.

<sup>9</sup>The Triune God reveals the content, the reality, of revelation to “prisoners” and “slaves,” who, as faithful stewards (1 Cor. 4:2), impart the intrinsic content of His faithful and true words into the members of the Body of Christ (Rev. 22:6), which is expressed in time and space in local churches. In his faithful response to receiving God’s revelation of Jesus Christ, John transmitted it to the seven churches, which were in Asia (1:4), ministering it as a good steward of the varied grace of God (1 Pet. 4:10).

True stewards and ministers are marked by these two conditions: enslavement and imprisonment. In their person they are slaves who serve others, being fully submissive to the Lord, and in their work they are prisoners who have no personal preferences, being fully confined, constrained, and limited by the Lord. John was both a slave and a prisoner (Rev. 1:1, 9); Paul was such a slave and prisoner (Acts 20:19; Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:8); and so was our Lord Jesus (Phil. 2:7; Luke 22:42). The willingness to serve rather than be served is the mark of a true slave (Mark 10:45). Nothing belongs to slaves and prisoners of the Lord; everything they have received is poured out on the chosen, redeemed, and regenerated believers to produce a manifestation of God in the flesh. The church in Ephesus, which is praised for its ability to discern those who call themselves apostles but are not, is also praised for its works, labor, and endurance, all of which are manifestations of the life and labor of a slave (Rev. 2:1-3). The believers in Ephesus had been properly served, and they were constituted with the heart and mind of apostles who, as slaves and prisoners, imparted their very souls into them (cf. 1 Thes. 2:8). Consequently, the believers in Ephesus could try and find false those who served only their own stomach and sought only their own things rather than the things of Christ Jesus (Rom. 16:16-18; Phil. 2:21).

It is good to be a slave and a prisoner in the Lord in this age, spending and being utterly spent on behalf of the souls of the

believers in the local churches (2 Cor. 12:15), because we also will serve as slaves for eternity (Rev. 22:3, 6). What is good for our Master is good for us (John 15:20). May the Lord have mercy and grant us all the grace, as ministers of the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:6), to be poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and priestly service of the believers’ faith (Phil. 2:17), knowing the joy and rejoicing that will be manifested in the midst of even the most challenging and pressing circumstances that a slave and a prisoner will encounter (2 Cor. 4:8-9). And may this joy be a sweet foretaste of the joy of the Lord that awaits every good and faithful slave of the Lord (Matt. 25:21, 23).

Practically speaking, every minister should have a realization that the extent of his participation in the economy of God is determined by the extent of his constitution as a slave and a prisoner. Those who serve their stomach rather than the saints will not receive the divine supply of life that flows from the throne to those who are under the ruling of the throne. Instead, they need to be granted the ability to repent, which is the Lord’s further mercy to them (2 Tim. 2:25).

<sup>10</sup>Within the degraded church, the sevenfold intensified Spirit operates to produce overcomers by speaking to the churches in general and by calling individual believers in particular to overcome the degradation within their local church. There is much debate about the identity of these overcomers. Some scholars of the Bible adamantly assert that the overcomers should not be viewed as a special class of believers. Charles C. Ryrie presents this view in *Revelation*, stating,

An overcomer is not one who has some special power in the Christian life or who has learned some secret of victory. John himself defined an overcomer as a believer in Christ (1 John 5:4-5). Thus every Christian is an overcomer, though the various promises in these seven letters are addressed particularly to each local believing group and tailored to the special circumstances found in each church. (26)

According to Ryrie, all Christians, no matter their condition, are overcomers. His view is based on an overly judicial reading of 1 John 5:4-5, which speaks of overcoming the world through our faith in verse 4. This faith is literally read in verse 5 as being our belief that Jesus is the Son of God. In the eyes of Ryrie, our justifying faith makes us all overcomers. This interpretation ignores the context of the verses and overlooks the numerous examples in the New Testament of believers mired in failure, defeat, and degradation.

The faith that overcomes the world in verse 4 is not simply our objective faith but our subjective faith “that brings us into the organic union with the Triune God and that believes that Jesus is the Son of God (v. 5) that we may be begotten of God and have His divine life, by which we are enabled to overcome the Satan-organized-and-usurped world” (Recovery Version, note 5). By living according to and out from the divine life which we received when our human spirit was regenerated with the divine Spirit, every believer truly has the capacity to be an overcomer. In fact, such overcomers are not a special class of

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believers, higher than others; rather, they are normal Christians, who live by the Triune God with whom they have been joined. Their status as overcomers is not determined through a comparison to other believers but by the degree of their disconnection from the “Satan-organized-and-usurped world.” In this regard, there are numerous examples of believers whose connection with the world is stronger than their connection with the Triune God (2:15). Lang offers a strong refutation of Ryrle in *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*.

The assertion that all believers are overcomers is so plainly contrary to fact and to Scripture that one wonders it ever has been made. It involves the false position that no believer can be a backslider. It avoids and nullifies the solemn warnings and urgent pleadings of the Spirit addressed to believers, and, by depriving the Christian of these, leaves him dangerously exposed to the perils they reveal.

In the house of the high priest Peter was defeated by the fear of man. Is he the last? Ananias and Sapphira were defeated by the love of money and pride of reputation. Were they the last? Demas forsook Paul, being overcome by the love of this present age. Was he the last? In the Corinthian church some were conquered by carnal lusts. Were they the last? Peter re-entered the battle and fought to the end. Ananias and his wife were cut off in their defeat. So were some of the Corinthian believers. We do not know that Demas won through finally.

If all Christians are conquerors how shall it be possible at the close of the age that “the love of many [the majority] shall wax cold” (Mt 24. 12)? Overcomers are to receive crowns; but if all overcome how can any be warned lest he lose his crown? (Rv 3.11). (91-92)

The way to overcome begins with opening to the speaking Spirit and by receiving the supply that enables a believer to overcome. Through such an opening, a separating line, a sanctifying line, will be drawn in a believer’s inner being, establishing a recognizable distinction between an overcoming believer and a believer who tolerates a situation of degradation in the churches rather than extricating himself from it.

This tolerance begins with the abandonment of the healthy teaching of God’s economy and advances into the acceptance of teachings that lead to committing both physical and spiritual fornication and to eating idol sacrifices. When the word of God, which embodies God and conveys God, is cast aside, and false and unhealthy teachings are substituted to satisfy itching ears, there is a separation in both experience and constitution between those who read and hear what the Spirit is speaking in the Bible and those who do not (Rev. 1:3), between those who hear what the Spirit is speaking in the midst of a local church’s particular experiences of degradation and those who do not (2:7, 11, 17, 26-29; 3:5-6, 12-13, 21-22), and between those who will not add or take away from the words of the prophecy in the scroll and those who do (22:18-19). May the Lord’s blood cover our priestly ears so that we may receive the anointing of

the Spirit through His speaking to the churches (Lev. 14:14-16).

<sup>11</sup>In many commentaries and studies of Revelation, the “seven Spirits who are before His throne” is not uniformly acknowledged as a reference to the third of the Trinity. Many commentators, however, acknowledge this identification, given its inclusion in John’s triadic reference in verses 4 and 5 of chapter 1. Following their acknowledgment, however, these same commentators tend to quickly move on to more familiar points, i.e., the witness of Christ as God and for God, the resurrection of Christ as the Firstborn, or Christ’s sovereign involvement in the unfolding of world history through His direction as the Ruler of the kings of the earth. Those who endeavor to take a further step of ascribing significance to the number seven often focus on seven as representing the “perfection of his person and...the plenitude of his power” (Gordon 28), making *the seven Spirits* “a figurative expression for the fulness of the one divine Spirit” (Lang 73).

While this view provides a plausible explanation of the significance of the number seven itself, that is, fullness and perfection, which is an essential aspect of the Holy Spirit, biblical references that actually link the Spirit with the number seven cannot be found. With the assertion that *the seven Spirits* is a symbolic reference to the Holy Spirit, these same commentators are thus placed in the difficult position of finding scriptural support for their assertion. The scriptural reference most cited in oblique support of this assertion is Isaiah 11:2, which says, “The Spirit of Jehovah will rest upon Him, / The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, / The Spirit of counsel and might, / The Spirit of knowledge and the fear of Jehovah.” Like Gordon, LaHaye says, “‘The seven spirits’ is a reference to the sevenfold work of the Spirit as revealed in Isaiah 11:2” (29), and Ryrle says, “The ‘seven Spirits’ likely represent the sevenfold ministry of the Spirit as depicted in Isaiah 11:2” (14). Margaret Barker in her flawed discussion of the Son of Man who is standing amidst the seven golden lampstands, which she regards as “one, composite lamp, rather than...seven freestanding lamps as often depicted” (83), at least tangentially refers to the problem that arises when Isaiah 11:2 is relied upon as the key for understanding the seven Spirits in Revelation 1:4. This problem lies in the fact that six rather than seven aspects of the Spirit are referenced in Isaiah 11:2—wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of Jehovah. She states,

The seven-branched lamp as a whole was the presence of the Lord with his people, the seven spirits before the throne (1.4) who were all present in the Anointed One. ‘The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord’ is how Isaiah had expressed the idea of the Spirit as a sevenfold presence (Isa. 11.2). Even though the Spirit of the Lord is described as a separate entity, it was nevertheless part of the seven. It was one and seven, just as the Man was part of the lamps. (83)

Barker attempts to circumvent the fact that Isaiah 11:2 refers to a sixfold ministry rather than a sevenfold one by counting the

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Spirit of Jehovah as the seventh component, even though it is a “separate entity.” Lenski also recognizes that six rather than seven components are listed, but he does not try to buttress this weakness with an argument as specious as Barker’s. He effectively challenges the common assertion that there is an interpretational link between Isaiah 11:2 and Revelation 1:4 in his comments on the seven Spirits and then points his readers in a direction that holds more promise of arriving at an understanding of the significance of *the seven Spirits*.

In our opinion this “seven,” then, does not refer to Isa. 11:2: the spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, fear of the Lord—which also are only six designations and not seven. Since the “seven” of the Spirit and the “seven” of the church agree, i.e., since the Spirit fills the church and bestows God’s grace and peace, we go back to Zech. 4:2, to the golden candelabrum with seven lamps that were fed with olive oil. (42)

In effect, Lenski argues that the significance of the seven Spirits should be understood in relationship to the sign of the seven golden lampstands, especially since the seven lampstands serve as symbols for the local churches which the Spirit subsequently addresses in chapters 2 and 3. The lampstand is a sign of the church as the testimony of Jesus, and the seven local churches need a sevenfold intensified operation of the Spirit in order to withstand the tide of degradation that unfolds throughout as the history of the church, as depicted in the seven epistles in Revelation.

There is a strong indication that the seven epistles to the seven local churches are comprised of two groups, the first group consisting of the epistles to Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamos and the second group consisting of the epistles to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. In the first three epistles, the Spirit issues a call to those who would hear and then a promise is given to the overcomers (2:7, 11, 17). In the final four epistles, this order is reversed; that is, a promise is given to the overcomers, and then the call to listen to the speaking Spirit is sounded out. There is a clear reference to the Lord’s coming in the epistles to Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia (v. 28; 3:3, 10), and given the grouping of the final four churches, there is a strong implication that the conditions in the four final churches will mark the general condition of the church at the time of the Lord’s coming back. The inward condition of the church primarily will reflect a mixture of impurity, deficiency, and degradation, coming out teachings associated with the deep things of Satan (2:24), incomplete and dead works that defile the righteousness of Christ (3:1-2, 4), and lukewarmness that brings in spiritual pride, poverty, and blindness (vv. 16-17). In addition, the outward environment of the church that is filled with the deceptive speaking of Antichrist and the deceptive signs of the false prophet (13:5, 13-14) will be so strong that, if it were possible, the very chosen would be deceived (Mark 13:22). In order to overcome the inward impulse toward degradation and the outward environment of deception, the Spirit will intensify His shining, His operation, sevenfold as the Son of Man walks amidst the lampstands and trims away all the barriers that hinder His believers from fully entering into and enduring in His

economy (Rev. 13:10; 14:12). The proof of the power of the sevenfold intensified Spirit’s operation will be displayed through the church in Philadelphia, whose little power from the Lord Spirit is sufficient for them to keep His word and not deny His name (3:8). Overcoming the degradation of Thyatira, Smyrna, and Laodicea in order to become Philadelphia requires a sevenfold intensified operation of the Spirit, an operation in its fullest intensity, and thus John has shown, as a sign, “the seven Spirits who are before His throne” (1:4).

<sup>12</sup>When speaking of the economy of God, we need to realize that the Triune God in His economy does not operate in a way that violates the axiomatic principles of His essential being. In His essential being, God is triune, He is distinctly three but also inseparably one, and the three of the Godhead mutually coexist and coinhere in one another. These principles are upheld within the being of God even when He is operating economically. The Triune God is who He is in His essential being and in His economic operation. For example, the perichoresis that is present in the Godhead essentially is also present in the economic operation of the Godhead, whose fullness was manifested bodily in Christ. Witness Lee comments on this truth as it applies to the depiction of the economic operation of the Triune God in Revelation.

Whatever the Father did, He did in the Son by the Spirit; whatever the Son did, He did with the Father by the Spirit; and whatever the Spirit does, He does as the Son with the Father. The three in the Godhead are not separate, but They are essentially one. Economically the three in the Godhead are consecutive, yet the essential aspect still remains in the economical aspect. The Father’s choosing, the Son’s redeeming, and the Spirit’s applying are all economical, yet in these economical aspects, the essential aspect of the Trinity is still here. When the Father was choosing, the essential Trinity was there also. When the Son came to redeem and when the Spirit comes to apply, the essential Trinity is there. As the conclusion of the sixty-six books of the Bible, Revelation is an all-inclusive revelation comprising all the essential and economical aspects of the Trinity. We have seen a wonderful Person who is both essential and economical. (*Economy* 232-233)

<sup>13</sup>In the footnote on *first* in Revelation 20:5, Witness Lee writes of the significance of the first resurrection:

The first resurrection is the best one. It is not only the resurrection of life (John 5:29; 1 Cor. 15:23b; 1 Thes. 4:16) but also the resurrection of reward (Luke 14:14), the out-resurrection, i.e., the outstanding resurrection, which the apostle Paul sought (Phil. 3:11), the resurrection of kingship as a reward to the overcomers, which enables them to reign as co-kings with Christ in the millennial kingdom (vv. 4, 6). Hence, blessed is he who has part in the first resurrection (v. 6). (Recovery Version, note 2)

<sup>14</sup>Witness Lee’s use of the terms *incarnation*, *inclusion*, and *intensification* is not just a nice turning of phrases; rather, these

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terms illuminate and crystallize the process of God's economy, which fulfills God's eternal purpose. Without the incarnation of the Word, redemption would not be possible. Without the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the enlarged expression of Christ as the church of the firstborn (Heb. 12:23) would not be possible. And without the heavenly ministry of the ascended Christ through the intensified operation of the Spirit, the building up of the church as the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all, would not be possible.

Within the apostles' teaching there are numerous references that allude to incarnation, inclusion, and intensification. Sometimes what is implied by these terms is highlighted separately, depending upon the particular emphasis that is being stressed, but occasionally, as in Revelation 1:5 and 12:10, they are succinctly stressed in combination with one another in a way that accurately reflects the ordered accomplishment of God's economy.

<sup>15</sup>The coming Christ is the Alpha and Omega, but in Revelation 1:8, He is also identified as He who is and who was and who is coming, which is the designation of the Father in verse 4. Witness Lee does not view this as a contradiction but rather as a confirmation of the wonderful mystery that is God the Triune. In *God's New Testament Economy*, he notes,

Both God the Triune as the Father, and Christ as the Son, declare to be the Alpha and the Omega, indicating that God the Father and God the Son are one (Rev. 1:8; 22:12-13). Both the Son and the Father declare that They are the Alpha and Omega in the book of Revelation. This shows us, again, that the Son and the Father can never be separated. (224-225)

<sup>16</sup>The book of Revelation speaks of other manifestations of the testimony of Jesus in addition to the three I have chosen to highlight in this article. These include the great multitude (ch. 7), the harvest with the firstfruits (ch. 14), the overcomers on the glassy sea (ch. 15), and the bride (ch. 19).

<sup>17</sup>For a fuller treatment of the lampstand as a type of the Triune God, see Messages 92 through 94 of the *Life-study of Exodus* by Witness Lee, published by Living Stream Ministry and available online at [www.ministrybooks.org](http://www.ministrybooks.org).

<sup>18</sup>This woman is "clothed with the sun, and the moon underneath her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." In Gen. 37:9, Joseph in his dream saw the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars, signifying his father, his mother, and his eleven brothers. There the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars, plus Joseph himself, signified the totality of God's people on the earth. Based on the principle of that dream, the sun, the moon, and the twelve stars here must signify the totality of God's people on earth, which is symbolized here by a woman. Most of her being is clothed with the sun. The sun signifies God's people in the New Testament age. Before Christ came to the world, it was the dark night of the Old Testament age. When Christ as the rising sun came from on high (Luke 1:78), the age of the sun came. Before that, it was the age of the moon, which signifies

God's people in the Old Testament time. The moon is underneath the feet of the woman, for the age of the moon was the age of the law, which should not be exalted as the stars are. The stars, which signify the patriarchs, God's people before the law was given, are on her head as a crown. All God's people in these three ages, who together constitute this woman, are light-bearers. Hence, she is the bright woman shining throughout all generations. (Recovery Version, Rev. 12:1, note 1)

<sup>19</sup>There is too much that can be said in regard to the significant features of the New Jerusalem, and at the conclusion of this article, this consummate sign cannot be served well by even attempting to cursorily speak of all its aspects. The April 2000 issue of *Affirmation & Critique* was devoted in its entirety to the New Jerusalem, which is not, as many think, a depiction of heaven. I would encourage our readers to consult this issue, which is available online at [www.affcrit.com](http://www.affcrit.com) in the archive section.

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