

THE DIVINE TRINITY IN REVELATION 1

by Ron Kangas

The Bible as a whole is the revelation of God, and the book of Revelation, being the completion and consummation of this revelation, contains the ultimate and final revelation of the Triune God, especially as revealed in the first chapter of Revelation. In this chapter a number of important matters are introduced that are developed in subsequent chapters. These crucial items provide the context for the unveiling of the Divine Trinity in Revelation 1; thus, it is necessary to identify them. As we consider these items for the purpose of knowing the Divine Trinity, we need to make a distinction between the Triune God and the Divine Trinity. The designation *the Triune God* refers mainly to God Himself, the Divine Being in His person; the designation *the Divine Trinity* refers mainly to God's being triune, which is the primary attribute of the Godhead. Both terms will be used in this essay.

Crucial Matters in Revelation 1

The revelation of Jesus Christ (v. 1). This expression indicates that Christ Himself is the focal point of the revelation in this book. In reading Revelation our attention should not be directed at beasts, frogs, and locusts, and we should not be distracted from the wonderful person presented in this book. Regarding this, vast numbers of readers, in their attempts to advance a particular view of prophecy, have neglected the One who is the center of God's administration according to His eternal economy (the subject of this book). The Christ revealed here is not merely Jesus the Savior—He is the all-inclusive Christ. This Christ—the Christ revealed to John on the island of Patmos—is the Son of God (2:18), the Son of Man (1:13), the faithful Witness (v. 5; 3:14), the Firstborn of the dead (1:5), the Ruler of the kings of the earth (v. 5), the First and the Last (v. 17; 2:8; 22:13), the Beginning and the End (v. 13), the Alpha and the Omega (v. 13), the living One (1:18), the Holy One (3:7), the true One (v. 7), the faithful One (19:11), the Amen (3:14), the beginning of the creation of God (v. 14), the Root and Offspring of David (5:5; 22:16), the Lamb (5:6; 21:23; 22:1), the Lion of the tribe of Judah (5:5), the King of kings and the Lord of lords (19:16), the Word of God (v. 13), the morning star (22:16), the lamp (21:23), and the Husband (v. 2). Although all these aspects of the all-inclusive Christ are unveiled in Revelation, in other ways He remains unknown. “He has a name written which no one knows but Himself” (19:12). “This indicates that there are certain aspects of Christ that we have not experienced and that only He Himself knows. It also indicates that the Christ whom we experience is inexhaustible” (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 12, note 3).

God gave to Him to show to His slaves the things that must quickly take place (1:1). The revelation of Jesus Christ is shown in the book of Revelation, which is the conclusion and the consummation of entire divine revelation in the Bible. This astounding revelation is shown to the Lord's slaves, to believers who realize that they have been

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bought, redeemed, with a great price—the precious blood of Jesus, God's Son—and who, motivated by love for the Lord, willingly serve Him, just as He came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Only those who assume such a lowly status and position in relation to the glorious Christ revealed in this book are qualified to receive the revelation contained therein. John, like Paul and Peter, was such a slave of Christ Jesus (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1).

He made it known by signs (Rev. 1:1). Throughout the centuries, serious mistakes in biblical interpretation have been made by ignoring the word *signs* mentioned in the opening word to the book of Revelation and by insisting on viewing literally things that have an organic, spiritual significance. The greatest of these mistakes with respect to Revelation is the teaching that the holy city, New Jerusalem, is a literal, physical city, a gigantic metropolis with only one street and no people. If we do not see that the revelation of Jesus Christ is made known by signs, we cannot understand this book but will be mired in spiritual darkness.

The revelation of this book is composed mainly of signs, i.e., symbols with spiritual significance, such as the seven lampstands, signifying the churches; the seven stars, signifying the messengers of the churches (v. 20)...Even the New Jerusalem is a sign, signifying the ultimate consummation of God's economy (chs. 21—22). This book, then, is a book of signs through which the revelation is made known to us. (Lee, Recovery Version, 1:1, note 2)

As a slave of Christ, John *testified the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ* and was on the island called Patmos *because of...the testimony of Jesus* (vv. 2, 9). The word of God is the verbal revelation of divine truth both in the Scriptures, the written Word, and in the incarnated Son of God, the living Word. For this word of God many have been slain (6:9), and for this word John was exiled. According to 1:2, John testified not only of the word of God but also of the testimony of Jesus. As the complete book of Revelation makes plain, the testimony of Jesus is the church as the corporate expression of the Triune God in Christ. "On one hand, this book gives us the revelation of Christ, and on the other hand, it shows us the testimony of Jesus, which is the church. It presents to us the revealed Christ and the testifying church" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 2, note 1). The consummate revelation of the Divine Trinity in Revelation is intrinsically related to the testimony of Jesus.

John to the seven churches which are in Asia (v. 4). These churches were local manifestations of the one universal church (Matt. 16:18; 18:17), with one and only one church per city and one eldership in each locality (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). When the Lord Jesus commanded John to write what he saw in a scroll and "send it to the seven churches" (Rev. 1:11), He went on to speak of seven cities, indicating thereby that to send the scroll to a church was equal to sending it to a city, since God's way is to have only one church in a city. Furthermore, as the Lord began to speak to the messenger in each of the seven churches, He linked the word *church* to a particular city, e.g., *the church in Ephesus* (2:1). Toward the end of Revelation, the Lord Jesus said this: "I Jesus have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches" (22:16). Obviously, to the Lord, the unique Head of the church as the Body of Christ, there was in the first century (as there should be now) only one church in a city, one expression in a locality of the unique, universal church built by Christ Himself.

I John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus (1:9). Even though John was an apostle, he did not assume this position when writing in a scroll all that he had seen; rather, he referred to himself as a brother and a fellow partaker, indicating a total lack of self-importance or hierarchical superiority. As such a brother and fellow partaker, he was still living in the reality of the fellowship of the Body of Christ, despite the fact of his isolation. Outwardly, he was on Patmos; inwardly, he was with the believers in all the churches in the kingdom, for, as

he testified, Christ has “made us a kingdom” (v. 6). Like Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, he did not see visions and receive revelations as an individualistic believer who was preoccupied with personal spirituality. His spiritual experiences were truly a Body matter and therefore were a blessing to all the churches with all the believers, the members of the Body of Christ. To know and experience the Divine Trinity revealed in Revelation 1, we, too, need to take our standing not as isolated spiritual individuals but as corporate persons living for and being supplied by the divine life flowing in the Body.

I was in spirit (v. 10; cf. 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). The word *spirit* here refers not to the Spirit of God but to the spirit of man, the human spirit. Only the human spirit, not the soul (1 Cor. 2:11), can respond to the divine Spirit. “A soulish man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he is not able to know them because they are discerned spiritually” (v. 14). Thankfully, our brother John was not a soulish person but a spiritual person, one who denied himself and his natural life and experienced his regenerated human spirit to perceive and receive revelation from God. To be exact, for John to be in spirit was to be in the mingled spirit—the regenerated human spirit regenerated by the divine Spirit and mingled with the divine Spirit to be one spirit (6:17). This mingled spirit is both human and divine: human because it is an organ created by God (Zech. 12:1), and divine because it is in an organic union with the divine Spirit. Being in spirit is an indispensable requirement for receiving “the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

I saw seven golden lampstands (Rev. 1:12). John heard a voice behind him like the sound of a trumpet (v. 10), and when he turned to see the voice that spoke with him, he saw seven golden lampstands. Even before he saw the Son of Man in the midst of the lampstands (v. 13), he saw the golden lampstands themselves. Leaving no room for speculation concerning the spiritual significance of these lampstands, the Lord Jesus Himself said, “The seven lampstands are the seven churches” (v. 20). Seven churches, seven cities, seven lampstands—all refer to the same divine-human reality, the testimony of Jesus. The golden lampstands in chapter 1 consummate in the New Jerusalem as the universal golden lampstand in chapter 21. If we study carefully the record regarding the New Jerusalem, we will see that it is pure gold, that it is a mountain, and that it is a lamp shining with God as the light. The local churches as many golden lampstands ultimately, in eternity, will consummate in the New Jerusalem as the universal golden lampstand. This shows an essential connection between the local churches and the city of God, the New Jerusalem, the wife of the redeeming God. From this we may infer that, in a very real sense, the book of Revelation is framed by the sign of the lampstands and of the New Jerusalem. If we would understand what is disclosed in this revelation of Jesus Christ, we must have this perspective.

The intrinsic significance of the golden lampstand involves what rightly may be called the highest peak of the divine revelation—that, in Christ, God became a human being so that, in Christ, redeemed and regenerated human beings may become God in life and nature (but not in the Godhead) for the corporate expression of God. The golden lampstand signifies the Triune God. The pure gold substance signifies God the Father in the divine nature (Exo. 25:31). The stand signifies God the Son as the embodiment of God the Father (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; 2:9). The lamps signify God the Spirit as the seven Spirits of God (Exo. 25:37; Rev. 4:5). In Revelation 1 the golden lampstands signify the local churches as the reproduction of the Christ who is the embodiment and expression of God. The consummate, eternal golden lampstand is the New Jerusalem (21:18, 23; 22:5).

In the midst of the lampstands One like the Son of Man (1:13). This marks the beginning of the vision of the glorious Christ, the details of which are seen in the following verses. The glorious Christ was “clothed with a garment reaching to the feet, and girded about at the breasts with a golden girdle” (v. 13). “His head and hair were as white as

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white wool, as snow," "His eyes were like a flame of fire," (v. 14), "His feet were like shining bronze, as having been fired in a furnace; and His voice was like the sound of many waters" (v. 15). "He had in His right hand seven stars; and out of His mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword; and His face shone as the sun shines in its power" (v. 16). This vision of Christ is unprecedented. John knew Christ in His incarnation (John 1:14) and testified of "that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we beheld and our hands handled" (1 John 1:1). John had also been rich in the experience of the resurrected Christ, the pneumatic Christ, in whom John lived and who lived in John. He knew the Son of God who has come and has given us an understanding of the true God and His Son, Jesus Christ (5:20). But, on the island of Patmos, he received a vision of a different Christ—a vision of the glorified Jesus that he had never seen before. John could not stand before this vision of the glorious Christ. "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead" (Rev. 1:17). Such was the initial impact of the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is in the context of this tremendous revelation that we consider the Divine Trinity in Revelation 1.

The Triune God as Revealed in the New Testament

Since the Bible is the revelation of God, and Revelation is the consummation of the revelation of God, it is worthwhile to trace the unveiling of the Triune God in the New Testament. A brief sketch of this unveiling will enable us to appreciate what is unfolded concerning the Triune God in Revelation 1.

Distinct but Not Separate

The one true and living God is triune—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (Matt. 28:19). All three are God, all three are eternal, all three coexist, and all three coinhere, dwelling mutually in one another. However, contrary to the heresies of tritheism and modalism, the three are not three separate Gods (tritheism), and the three are not merely three successive manifestations of the one God (modalism). The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one God eternally. Among the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, there is distinction but not separation. The Father is distinct from the Son, the Son is distinct from the Spirit, and the Spirit is distinct from the Son and the Father. But we must not say that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are separate, for this notion leads to tritheism. The three of the eternal Godhead cannot be separate, because They coinhere; They live in one another. In Their coexistence the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are distinct, but in Their coinherence They are inseparable. Because They coexist in Their coinherence, They are distinct but not separate. In Their coexistence the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are distinctly three, but in Their coinherence They are inseparably one.

If we are faithful to the apostles' teaching in the New Testament and continue steadfastly in it, we will believe and affirm the eternal coexistence and coinherence of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in the Godhead. We believe and testify that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit all exist essentially at the same time and under the same conditions. However, in the divine economy the three work and manifest Themselves in three consecutive stages (Eph. 1:3-14). In Their economical work and manifestations, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit remain essentially and eternally three-one in Their coexistence and coinherence.

The Essential Trinity and the Economical Trinity

According to the New Testament, God is triune both essentially—in His inner being—and economically—in the outworking of His purpose with His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people. The essential Trinity refers to the essence of the Triune God for

His existence. Essentially, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit coexist and coinhere eternally without succession. The economical Trinity refers to the Triune God in the steps, or stages, of His move to carry out His economy for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose. In the divine economy, God's administrative arrangement, the Father has purposed in the Son with the Spirit (Eph. 1:3-6)—the first step; the Son has accomplished the Father's purpose with the Father by the Spirit (vv. 7-12)—the second step; and the Spirit as the Son with the Father applies what the Son has accomplished according to the Father's purpose (vv. 13-14)—the third step. As God's economy is being carried out in the successive steps by the economical Trinity, the essential Trinity—the eternally coexisting and coinhering Father, Son, and Spirit in the Godhead—remains unchanged and intact and is not jeopardized.

Revealed for Experience and Enjoyment, Not for Theological Speculation

The Divine Trinity is revealed in the New Testament for the believers' experience and enjoyment, not for theoretical theological speculation resulting in various forms of systematic theology. Regarding this assertion, we encourage theologians, especially those of the dogmatic Reformed tradition, to restudy the New Testament in purity, simplicity, and sincerity and with the intention to believe and apply all that is revealed there concerning the Triune God. To illustrate the claim that the Divine Trinity has been made known primarily for genuine spiritual experience, we suggest a fresh consideration of a few crucial portions in the New Testament.

Romans 8 is replete with trinitarian language. Here Paul speaks of Christ Jesus (vv. 1-2), the Spirit of life (v. 2), God sending His Son (v. 3), the Spirit (v. 5), God (vv. 7-8), the Spirit of God (v. 9), the Spirit of Christ (v. 9), Christ in us (v. 10), Abba, Father (v. 15), the Spirit Himself (vv. 16, 26), God's purpose (v. 28), the Firstborn (v. 29), Christ Jesus at the right hand of God interceding for us (v. 34), the love of Christ (v. 35), the love of God (v. 39), and Christ Jesus our Lord (v. 39). This is the language of a living spiritual experience, not of a dead, abstract, systematic theology. In this chapter full of rich utterances regarding the Triune God, one verse in particular, verse 11, mentions, in an experiential way, the three of the Godhead: "If the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you." This verse speaks of the Spirit dwelling in us, the One [God] who raised Jesus from the dead, and Christ—the three of the Divine Trinity revealed for the experience of the believers.

Another experiential verse is 2 Corinthians 13:14: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is actually the Lord Himself as grace to us (12:9), the love of God is God Himself (1 John 4:8, 16) as the source of grace, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is the Spirit Himself as the transmission of the grace of the Lord with the love of God for our participation. See all of note 1 by Witness Lee on 2 Corinthians 13:14 in the Recovery Version, which states, in part, "This verse is strong proof that the trinity of the Godhead is not for the doctrinal understanding of systematic theology but for the dispensing [experience] of God Himself in His Trinity into His chosen and redeemed people. In the Bible the Trinity is never revealed merely as a doctrine." Instead, the Trinity is consistently mentioned in relation to our experience and enjoyment.

Ephesians 2:18 speaks of experiencing the Triune God, through the believers' access through Christ in one Spirit unto the Father: "Through Him [Christ] we both [Jews and Gentiles] have access in one Spirit unto the Father." Through the Son, who is the Accomplisher, the means, and in the one Spirit, who is the Executor, the application, we have access unto the Father, who is the Originator, the unique source. Positionally, we

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have been reconciled to God through the death of His Son, but for our experience we have access unto the Father through the Son in the Spirit. To be reconciled to God is to be saved, whereas to have access unto the Father is to experience God. Having been reconciled to God once for all, we now have continual access unto the Father through the Son and in the Spirit. According to objective truth, there are three steps: access through the Son, access in the Spirit, and access unto the Father. In actual spiritual experience, however, these are three aspects of one experience. When we believe in the Lord and are in the Spirit, we have unhindered access unto the Father.

Perhaps the most experiential portion of the Word concerning the believers' experience of the Divine Trinity is Ephesians 3:14-17. Here Paul prayed to the Father (v. 14) that He would strengthen us with power through His Spirit into the inner man (v. 16), so that Christ may make His home in our hearts (v. 17). The spirit in Ephesians 1:17 is for revelation, but the inner man in 3:16 is for our experience of Christ with the Father and the Spirit. In particular, the goal of Paul's prayer is that Christ would make His home in our hearts, occupying, possessing, permeating, and saturating our entire inner being with Himself. For Christ to make His home in our hearts means that He is imparted into us in a full way. The more Christ spreads within us, occupying every part of our inner being, the more He makes His home deep in our hearts. This certainly is not a doctrine but a real and precious experience. Since the three of the Godhead coexist and coinhere and cannot be separated, where one of the three is, the others are also. For the church as the corporate expression of the Triune God (vv. 18-21), Christ with the Father and the Spirit must settle down in our hearts, making a permanent home there (John 14:23).

The Triune God Processed and Consummated

In order for the children of God to experience the Triune God, it was necessary for the Triune God, in His economy, to be processed and consummated. Only in this way can He enter into us, dwell in us, live in us, and be expressed through us. We see this process in the Gospel of John: the Word, who is God, became flesh (1:1, 14); God in the flesh died on the cross as the Lamb of God (v. 29); and in resurrection the One who died for us became the Spirit (7:37-39) and the holy breath (20:22). This process through which the Triune God passed is an economical, not an essential, matter. With God, change cannot be essential, for the Godhead is immutable, unchanging. In His economy—His plan and arrangement to make Himself experiential to us and able to live in us—God has changed in the sense of being processed. This process absolutely does not entail change in God's essence, for any such change is impossible, and to posit change is heretical. *Processed* refers to the steps through which the Triune God in Christ has passed in His economy; *consummated* indicates that the process has been completed. Now that the Triune God has been processed and consummated in His economy, we can experience Him in a personal, intimate, and subjective way.

The Divine Dispensing of the Divine Trinity

The way to experience the Triune God is to receive His dispensing of Himself into us, that is, to receive the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity. The word *dispensing* as employed here denotes God imparting Himself in Christ as the Spirit into us, beginning with our regenerated human spirit mingled with the Lord as one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17) and continuing with the Triune God in our spirit dispensing Himself into our inward parts, thereby making His home in our hearts. The divine economy is God's plan and arrangement according to His will, desire, purpose, and counsel (Eph. 1:5, 9-11); the divine dispensing is the processed and consummated Triune God imparting Himself as life into our tripartite being—our spirit and soul and body (1 Thes. 5:23). Romans 8:11 speaks of this dispensing, assuring us that if we allow the Spirit of the

One who raised Jesus from the dead to dwell, to make home, in us, He who raised Christ from the dead will give, impart, dispense, life to our mortal bodies.

The revelation of God in the New Testament is focused primarily on the divine dispensing for the divine economy (Rom. 8:3, 11; Eph. 1:3-23). From this we justifiably conclude that the revelation concerning God in the New Testament is not for mere doctrinal understanding but for the dispensing of God in His Divine Trinity into His chosen and redeemed people for their experience and enjoyment (2 Cor. 13:14). The Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—has been economically processed and consummated to become the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b) so that we can drink of Him (12:13) and so that He can become in us a fountain of water springing up into eternal life (John 4:14) and rivers of living water flowing out of our innermost being (7:37-39). John 4:14 and 7:37-39 show that the Divine Trinity is for the divine dispensing, that is, for the distribution of Himself into the believers in Christ, with the Father as the origin and fountain, the Son as the expression and the spring, and the Spirit as the transmission and the flow. It is crucial that through an earnest and prayerful reading of the Word we see a spiritual vision of the processed and consummated Triune God dispensing Himself into us for our experience and enjoyment of Him now and for eternity (Rev. 7:17; 22:1-2).

Knowing the Triune God by Experiencing and Enjoying Him

We come to know the Triune God by experiencing and enjoying Him; this is the message conveyed to us in the Gospel of John and in John's Epistles. John's concern in writing his Gospel and his Epistles was that we would experience and enjoy the Triune God as our life and our life supply. In communicating this to his readers, John was assured that the Triune God is not merely the object of our faith but is living in us as our life and life supply for our experience and enjoyment (1 John 4:13-15). We need to know the Triune God experientially through the inner enjoyment of the subjective God, the One who dwells in us as life (5:11-12). The anointing mentioned in 1 John 2:20 and 27 is the moving of the Triune God experienced and enjoyed by us. The teaching of the anointing—the inner instruction that issues from the moving of the anointing Spirit within us to add God to us—is actually the Triune God teaching us about Himself. The more He moves within us as the anointing, the more we know Him by experiencing Him. From the written Word and from the teaching of the anointing, we know that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all in us, but from experience we know that we have only One in us, and this One who dwells in us is the Triune God (Eph. 4:6; Col. 1:27; John 14:17; 1 John 4:13, 15).

The Trinity of the Godhead is revealed more fully in the Gospel of John than in any other book of the Bible (14:6-24, 26; 15:26; 16:13-15). Concerning this revelation, the Epistles of John, especially 1 John, are both a continuation and a development of the Gospel of John (1 John 3:24; 4:13-14; 5:11-12). These Epistles reveal the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (1 John 1:1-2; 2:23-24; 3:24; 4:2, 6, 13-14; 5:6, 11-12; 2 John 9). To know God as the Father is to know Him as the source, the unique Initiator, the One who plans, originates, and initiates. Everything originates with Him, and everything proceeds from Him (1 John 1:2-3; 2:13, 15; 3:1; 4:14; Matt. 15:13; Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 3:14-16). The Father is the source of the eternal life; from Him and with Him the Son was manifested as the expression of the eternal life for those chosen by the Father to partake of and enjoy (1 John 1:2-3; 5:11-12). The title *Father* refers to the source and impartation of life. Through Christ's resurrection the Father has imparted His life into His children (3:1; 1 Pet. 1:3).

In 1 John 1:1-2 both *the Word of life* and *life* denote the divine person of Christ the Son of God, who was with the Father in eternity and was manifested in time through incarnation (John 1:1, 14). Christ the Son is the eternal, preexisting One who is from

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the beginning (1 John 2:13-14). The Son of God was manifested, John declares, so that He might undo and destroy the works of the devil (3:8). This was accomplished when God sent His Son as a propitiation for our sins (4:10). As the sacrifice for our propitiation before God (2:2), the Lord Jesus offered Himself to God as a sacrifice for our sins (Heb. 9:28), not only for our redemption but also for satisfying God's righteous requirements, thus appeasing the relationship between us and God. Furthermore, John says that God sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might have life and live through Him (1 John 4:9). The Son of God saves us not only from our sins by His blood but also from our death by His life (Eph. 1:7; 1 John 3:14-15; John 5:24).

Christ is not only the Lamb of God who takes away our sin but also the Son of God who gives us eternal life (1:29; 3:36; 10:10). The Son of God is the means through which God give us eternal life (1 John 5:11-12). Because the life, the eternal life, is in the Son and the Son is the life, the Son and the life are one (John 11:25; 14:6; Col. 3:4). We do not receive eternal life as a thing, an element, or a substance; eternal life is in the person of the Son and actually is the Son. He who has the Son has the life, and he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life (1 John 5:12). The Son, in whom is the life, is also our Advocate with the Father, and in this function He is called Jesus Christ the Righteous (2:1; Rom. 8:34). Whenever we sin, the Lord Jesus as our Advocate, based upon the propitiation that He accomplished for us, takes care of our case before God the Father by interceding and pleading for us.

First John also speaks of the Spirit. The Spirit of truth in 4:6 is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of reality (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). The Spirit is the reality (1 John 5:6); He is the reality of all that Christ as the Son of God is. By the Spirit whom God gave to us, we know that the Triune God abides in us (3:24). First John 4:13-14 reveals that we are abiding in God the Father and He in us, that God the Father has given to us of His Spirit, and that the Father has sent the Son as the Savior of the world. *Out of His Spirit* (a literal translation) in verse 13 implies that the Spirit of God, whom God has given to us, is bountiful and without measure (John 3:34). By such a bountiful, immeasurable Spirit, we know with full assurance that we and God are truly one and that we abide in each other. God the Father has given us the all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit, who is the bountiful supply of Jesus Christ, the Son (1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:17; Phil. 1:19).

When the Triune God becomes our experience and enjoyment, He is not only the One on the throne (Rev. 4:2-3; 5:6) but also the One who dwells in us, and we may know Him by experiencing and enjoying Him as the indwelling Triune God. The concern of the New Testament, therefore, is that we know the Triune God who has come to dwell in our spirit and who desires to make His home in our hearts by spreading from our regenerated spirit into all the inward parts of our being. This is to know God in a personal and detailed way by experiencing and enjoying Him. John, who wrote such marvelous things in his Gospel and Epistles, was also the one appointed to receive and communicate the consummate revelation of the Triune God in the book of Revelation.

The Economical Trinity in Revelation 1

We have pointed out that the essential Trinity refers to the essence of the Triune God for His eternal existence, and the economical Trinity refers to God's working in stages to carry out His will, desire, and purpose. The Trinity in Matthew 28:19 is the Trinity of God's existence—the essential Trinity—but the Trinity in Revelation 1:4-7 is the Trinity in God's economy—the economical Trinity. The subject of the book of Revelation is Christ as the center of God's administration according to His eternal economy, and in Revelation we see the administration, the government, the activity,

the act, and the move of the Trinity (4:5; 5:6). In God's essence the Trinity is simply the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (Matt. 28:19), but in God's economy the Trinity is complicated. As we consider these complications in Revelation 1:4-7, we need to have these verses set before us:

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 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.

Him who is and who was and who is coming (v. 4). The words *Him who is and who was and who is coming* certainly are a reference to Exodus 3:14: "God said to Moses, I AM WHO I AM. And He said, Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you." A note on this verse reads, "Or, I will be who I will be; or, I will become who I will become. The divine title *I AM* denotes that God is the One who is self-existing and ever-existing and who depends on nothing apart from Himself" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 14, note 1). In Revelation 1:4 He is who is, who was, and who is coming is God the eternal Father. The expression *who is coming* might imply the coming again of the Lord Jesus (v. 7), possibly indicating that "what the Triune God is will be more real at that time than in the past or in the present" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 4, note 4). In *YHWH at Patmos: Rev. 1:4 in Its Hellenistic and Early Jewish Setting* Sean M. McDonough remarks, "What sets John's description apart is the fact that this 'coming' of God is inextricably linked with the coming of Christ...John cannot utter the name of God without at the same time invoking the person of Christ" (233).

The seven Spirits who are before His throne (v. 4). The seven Spirits are undoubtedly the one Spirit of God (Eph. 4:4) because They are ranked in the Godhead along with the Father and the Son in Revelation 1:4-5. In essence and existence the Spirit is one; that is, in the essential Trinity the Spirit is uniquely one. In the economical Trinity, as unveiled in Revelation 1, the one Spirit has become seven Spirits for God's move to carry out His administration (4:5; 5:6). In function and work the Spirit is seven, even as the lampstand has seven lamps. The seven lamps of the lampstand signify the seven Spirits.

In the Bible seven is the number for completion in God's move, God's operation. In God's move to accomplish the restoration and further creation was completed in seven days. The seven churches in Revelation give us a complete view of God's move in the church throughout its history (chs. 2—3). The mystery of God's economical move is contained in seven seals (6:1—8:5). The executing of God's move to judge the earth and bring in His kingdom is carried out with seven trumpets (8:6—11:19). The seven bowls are the complete outpouring of God's wrath on Antichrist and rebellious humanity (ch. 16). The seven Spirits are needed for the completion of God's move on earth to carry out His economy.

The number seven also signifies intensification. Daniel 3:19 speaks of the sevenfold intensification of the heat of the furnace. Isaiah 30:26 speaks of the sevenfold intensification of the light of the sun. Regarding the seven Spirits in Revelation 1:4, the number seven also signifies intensification. The Spirit who is filling us and empowering us for God's move is the sevenfold intensified Spirit. Since the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b) has been intensified sevenfold, all the elements of the Spirit have been intensified sevenfold. For example, the Spirit is the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2), and the life in the sevenfold Spirit is intensified life. The Spirit is the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29), and the grace in the intensified Spirit is an intensified grace.

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All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. Whether or not political leaders recognize Christ's rulership, He, the center of God's administration, reigns over them, causing them to carry out God's intention for His move on earth.

In Revelation 1:4-5 the seven Spirits become the second, the center, of the Divine Trinity, revealing the importance of the intensified function of the sevenfold Spirit of God. These seven Spirits are burning before the throne to carry out God's administration, to execute God's economy in the universe, by directing the world situation (4:5; 5:6). The sevenfold intensified Spirit is the seven lamps of fire to burn, enlighten, expose, judge, purify, and refine the believers to produce the golden lampstands for the fulfillment of God's New Testament economy to produce the New Jerusalem (4:5). The sevenfold intensified Spirit is the eyes of Christ as the redeeming Lamb and the building stone to observe and search God's people and to infuse into them Christ's essence, riches, and burden for God's building (Zech. 3:9; 4:6; Rev. 1:14; 5:6). The golden lampstands, as the multiplied embodiment of the Triune God, are filled with God the Spirit as the seven shining Spirits—the full expression of the Triune God (1:12, 20; Eph. 5:18; Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:16, 22-23). By the operation of the sevenfold intensified Spirit within Christ's seeking believers, they are intensified to be produced as overcomers to build up the Body of Christ, which consummates in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 2:7).

Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth (1:5). The Son is Jesus the Savior and Christ, the One appointed and anointed to fulfill God's purpose. As such, in His ministry on earth He was a faithful Witness of God. As He stood before Pilate, He declared, "For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, that I would testify to the truth" (John 18:37).

In 1 Corinthians 15:20 Paul says, "Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep," and in verse 23 he goes on to say, "Each one in his own order: the firstfruits, Christ; then those who are Christ's at His coming." Here Christ is presented as the firstfruits of resurrection, the first one raised from the dead. Christ as the first one to be resurrected is the Firstborn of the dead (Rev. 1:5), the Firstborn from the dead and the Head of the Body, the church (Col. 1:18). Christ's being the Firstborn of the dead is for the new creation in resurrection; this new creation is the church, the Body of Christ, where Christ has the preeminence, the first place.

Now in His ascension and enthronement for God's administration, Christ is the Ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5). All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him (Matt. 28:18), and He exercises this authority to rule over the kings of the earth, that is, over all who possess power in human government. He directs their hearts (Prov. 21:1) and causes them "to perform His mind" (Rev. 17:17). Whether or not political leaders recognize Christ's rulership, He, the center of God's administration, reigns over them, causing them to carry out God's intention for the sake of His move on earth.

The One who loves us and has released us from our sins (1:5). Revelation 1:5 sets forth yet another aspect of Christ, referring to "Him who loves us and has released us from our sins by His blood." In Revelation the blood of Jesus is seen in its power and efficacy. "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14), and, having washed their robes in this way, they have right to the tree of life (22:14). According to 12:11, the victorious believers overcome Satan's accusations by the blood of the Lamb. From 1:5 we learn that believers in Christ are not only washed from their sins but also released from their sins, indicating that being released from sins is more significant than being washed from them. It is the Christ as the One who loves us (John 15:9; Eph. 5:25) who has released us from our sins by His blood.

Made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father (Rev. 1:6). Through His redemptive death and life-imparting resurrection, Christ has made His believers "a kingdom, priests to His God and Father" (v. 6). This thought is echoed in 5:10, which declares

that He has “made them a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign on the earth” during the age of the millennial kingdom. For eternity as the New Jerusalem the glorified believers will continually serve God as priests (22:3) and “will reign forever and ever” (v. 5). In 1:9 the apostle John testifies that even though he was in exile on the island of Patmos, he is a fellow partaker with other believers in the kingdom. God has delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love (Col. 1:13). This deliverance is based on Christ’s redemption and the impartation of His resurrection life into us for regeneration. All those who have been born of God, born of water and of the Spirit, have entered into the kingdom of God as a realm of the divine life (John 3:3, 5). The gospel of the kingdom of God brings to us the divine life through which we are born into the kingdom of God as the delightful kingdom of the Son of God’s love, where we are ruled in life, light, and love. God’s intention is that this kingdom life would be lived out in the genuine church life, for the local churches (1:9, 20) are the practicality of the kingdom of God today.

Revelation 1:6 shows that as the kingdom and in the kingdom, we are priests to God the Father. The believers in Christ have been redeemed in order to be a kingdom of priests (Exo. 19:6). According to the divine truth in the Bible as a whole, a priest is a person who is absolutely for God, who is fully possessed by God, and who lives and has his or her being wholly for God, having God as the unique object of love. A priest lives solely for God’s interests and serves Him (Rom. 14:7-8; 2 Cor. 5:15) in both the holy priesthood and the royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). To be holy is to be separated from worldly things unto God (1:16) and to be saturated and permeated with God and thus to be qualified to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God (2:5). As holy priests, the believers go to God to represent God’s people and bring their needs to Him for care and provision. As royal priests, the believers come from God to the people to represent God and minister God to them. The holy priests offer something to God for the sake of His people, and the royal priests declare the things of God to others. The believers are both holy priests and royal, kingly, priests, who go to God and come forth from God for the fulfillment of His purpose.

He comes with the clouds (Rev. 1:7). The Lord Jesus ascended to the heavens on a cloud, and He will come back to earth also on a cloud (Acts 1:9, 11). In Matthew 26:64 the Lord told the religionists, “From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.” In Revelation 14:15 He is referred to as the One “who sat on the cloud.” All these portions of the Word speak of Christ’s open, visible coming, not His secret coming for His watchful believers. The following note makes clear the difference between Christ’s secret coming and open coming:

In this book, Christ’s coming back is revealed in two aspects. In one aspect Christ will come secretly as a thief (3:3; 16:15), and in another aspect He will come openly on the cloud (v. 7, 14:14). This corresponds with Matt. 24:43, 30. The day and hour of His coming in the first aspect are unknown (Matt. 24:36), whereas the day of His coming in the second aspect is clearly revealed—it will be at the last trumpet (the seventh trumpet), at the end of the great tribulation (1 Thes. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:52; 2 Thes. 2:1-3). (Lee, Recovery Version, Rev. 1:7, note 1)

The Divine Trinity as revealed in chapter 1 of Revelation is the economical Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit working in various ways to carry out God’s economy. Attempts to force Revelation 1:4-7 into a systematic theology of the Triune God involve two great risks. On the one hand, certain details might be ignored or distorted or misinterpreted. On the other hand, the rich experience of the Divine Trinity as unveiled here might be neglected, causing enormous loss to one’s life with the Lord. To refer to verses cited earlier, the intention of the Lord Jesus was to testify the things

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in the book of Revelation “for the churches” (22:16), so God made the revelation of Jesus Christ known to His slaves (1:1). Systematic theologians and exegetes will continue their debates concerning points of truth in Revelation, but those who are slaves of Jesus Christ and who live in and care for the churches will want to know, experience, and enjoy the Divine Trinity in Revelation 1, the Trinity functioning for God’s administration, of which the Christ made known in Revelation is the center. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (2:7). **[AC]**

Works Cited

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The Essential Trinity in the Move of the Economic Trinity

In Revelation we have seen that the first of the Trinity was moving in the past, is moving in the present, and is going to move in the future. This is economical. The second of the Trinity is the seven Spirits before the administrative throne of God. This is also economical. Finally, all the points concerning the Son as Jesus Christ, the Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth, do not refer to His essence but to His move and His activity. The Triune God became Jesus, and Jesus was anointed to be the Christ. Jesus Christ was the faithful Witness on this earth who died and was resurrected to be the Firstborn of God to produce many brothers that the church might be brought forth. Now He is the Ruler of the kings of the earth, He has accomplished redemption for us, and He has made us a kingdom, even the priesthood to His God and Father. Also, He will come again. All these points indicate His move and His economy. When Jesus comes again do you believe that the Father will be left in the heavens and the Spirit will be standing by in the air? Actually, when Jesus Christ comes back, the Son will come with the Father by the Spirit. The Triune God will come in the person of the Son in His economy.

I hope that we all realize that 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; 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.

From *God’s New Testament Economy* by Witness Lee, p. 220