

THE SEVEN SPIRITS OF GOD IN THE OPERATION OF THE DIVINE TRINITY

BY JAMES FITE

In addressing each of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, Christ designates Himself as having specific attributes and characteristics that relate to the condition of that particular church. Of all the designations provided in these two chapters, perhaps the most revealing, yet most misunderstood, designation is the one spoken to the church in Sardis. In the epistle to Sardis, John was instructed to write, “These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know your works, that you have a name that you are living, and yet you are dead” (3:1). To counteract the deadness of the church in Sardis, the Son of Man who walks in the midst of the lampstands emphasized that He “has the seven Spirits of God” (1:13; 3:1). *The seven Spirits of God* is a specific term used only four times in the Bible—all of which occur in Revelation (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). The implications of this unique title are profound because this designation points to the judging, enlightening, redeeming, life-dispensing, building, administrating, and reigning operation of the Divine Trinity in His economy.

Three Interpretations of the Seven Spirits of God

Among Bible commentators there are generally three distinct interpretations of the seven Spirits in Revelation, each of which can be found in some of the earliest extant commentaries on Revelation. The first interpretation considers that the seven Spirits refer to seven angels.¹ In his sixth-century Greek commentary Oecumenius, referring to 1:4, says that “the seven spirits are seven angels” but clarifies that “they are not to be regarded as of equal honor or co-eternal with the Holy Trinity, by no means, but as true assistants and faithful servants” (Weinrich 4).

The second interpretation considers that the seven Spirits correspond with the sevenfold gifts, energies, virtues, or powers of the Holy Spirit. For example, Andrew of Caesarea, another early sixth-century Greek commentator, while acknowledging the first understanding of the seven Spirits as angels, indicates, when commenting on 3:1, that the seven Spirits may also refer to what he calls “the energies” of the life-giving Spirit given by Christ: “We have said before that the “seven stars” are divine angels. The “seven spirits” are either the selfsame angels or they are the energies of the life-giving Spirit. Either way, both are in the hand of Christ, for he governs the former as Lord, and as the ἰσοούσιος² he is the supplier of the Spirit” (Weinrich 40).

The third interpretation is that the seven Spirits of God refer to the one Holy Spirit Himself with a sevenfold operation. The mid-sixth-century commentary of Primasius, referring to 4:5, may be among the earliest extant utterances of this interpretation: “These seven lamps are the seven spirits of God. Even if he had not explained it, we

would have properly understood these seven lamps to represent the Holy Spirit. For we know that at the beginning he had illuminated the apostles in the form of fiery tongues, and [we are aware] of his sevenfold operation” (Weinrich 61-62). In his sixth-century Latin commentary *Tractate on the Apocalypse*, Apringius of Beja, expounding 1:4, asserts that the seven Spirits are the one Holy Spirit, sevenfold in power, who is to be worshipped. In this context he also states that these sevenfold powers are those enumerated in Isaiah 11:2-3.³

Here the seven spirits are introduced, which are one and the same Spirit, that is, the Holy Spirit, who is one in name, sevenfold in power, invisible and incorporeal, and whose form is impossible to comprehend. The great Isaiah revealed the number of its sevenfold powers when he wrote: “the Spirit of wisdom and understanding”—that through understanding and wisdom he might teach that he is the creator of all things—“the Spirit of counsel and might”—who conceived these things that he might create them—“the Spirit of knowledge and piety”—who governs the creation with piety by the exercise of his knowledge and whose purposes are always according to mercy—“the Spirit of the fear of the Lord”—by whose gift the fear of the Lord is manifested to rational creatures. This is itself the sacred character of the Spirit who is to be worshiped. (Weinrich 4)⁴

Commenting on Revelation 5:6, Apringius reasserts that *the seven Spirits* speaks of the Holy Spirit with His virtues and gifts:

The number seven represents the condition of the world which he rules effectively and which he governs with great power. Moreover, he calls the seven eyes the seven spirits of God, and in this way speaks of the Holy Spirit who remains with our Lord, Jesus Christ, gloriously by the degrees of the seven virtues...He speaks of the Spirit as “those sent,” calling to mind the gifts of the Holy Spirit which have been abundantly spread throughout the entire earth. (Weinrich 76)

The early commentators also recognized the Trinity in the introductory greetings in Revelation 1. For example, Andrew of Caesarea says that “grace to you and peace” in verse 4 is from the “tri-hypostatic deity” (Weinrich 3).⁵ He then parses *who is*, *who was*, and *who is to come* to demonstrate that these phrases, which together connote the passage of time, refer to the Trinity:

Through the phrase “who is” the Father is indicated, who spoke to Moses: “I am Who I am.” Through the phrase “who was” the Word is indicated, who was in the beginning with God. And through the phrase “who is to come” the Paraclete is indicated, who always visits the children of the church in holy baptism but will come more perfectly and more clearly in the age to come. (Weinrich 3)

In the same passage Andrew offers an alternative interpretation, in which all three phrases can be considered as a single phrase and applied to the Father: “These phrases may be understood also in another manner. The phrase ‘who is and who was and who is to come’ may signify the Father, who encompasses in himself the beginning, the middle and the end of all things” (Weinrich 3). However, Andrew’s assertion that “it is possible to recognize in the seven spirits the seven angels who have received the governance of the churches” (3) may have precluded him from extending the trinitarian formula to the subsequent mention in Revelation 1:4-5 of “the seven Spirits of God” and “Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness.”

The first of the aforementioned interpretations excludes the seven Spirits from the Trinity. The second interpretation emphasizes what the Spirit gives—gifts, attributes, energies, powers, virtues of the one Holy Spirit—whereas the emphasis of the third interpretation is the person of the Spirit in the Trinity of the Godhead. In his collection of ancient commentaries on Revelation, Weinrich includes commentaries

supporting both the second and third interpretations, but one of his summary headings, “The Seven Spirits Correspond With the Sevenfold Gifts of the Holy Spirit” (3), conflates them. Most popular online descriptions of the seven Spirits speak only of the first and second interpretations.

Missing from the Nicene Creed and the Catholic Catechism

Neither the Apostles’ Creed nor the more detailed statement of Christian faith, the “Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed,” along with its Western Christian derivation, which includes the Filioque (Schaff 537), makes any reference to the seven Spirits of God. The later timing of Revelation’s universal acceptance into the canon of the New Testament and confusion about whether to interpret the seven Spirits of God as angels rather than the Holy Spirit may explain, but does not justify, the subsequent neglect of such an important and unique aspect of the Holy Spirit. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* does not refer explicitly to the seven Spirits of God. Instead, it refers to what it calls “the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit” and then lists the attributes contained in Isaiah 11:2-3.⁶

Some Recent Commentaries

In an article entitled “The Seven Spirits of God,” Ron Kangas starts with a critical review of nineteenth- and twentieth-century interpretations of the expression *the seven Spirits of God*. He begins by providing “examples of books on the Spirit that make absolutely no mention of the seven Spirits of God,” a list which surprisingly includes Andrew Murray’s classic work *The Spirit of Christ* (28-29). Having surveyed some of the books that mention the seven Spirits of God, Kangas then identifies some “unacceptable interpretations,” including the conjecture that the seven Spirits are “a ‘heavenly entourage’—a group of celestial associates, a holy retinue,” “seven principal angels,” or “a personification of the multiform providence of God” (29-30). These interpretations are variations of the first interpretation in that they suppose that this phrase is a reference to something other than the Holy Spirit.

Kangas continues with “acceptable but insufficient interpretations” (31), such as Henry Alford’s “energies of the Holy Spirit,” F. F. Bruce’s “sevenfold plenitude of grace,” and F. W. Grant’s “sevenfold energy of the One, the Holy Spirit” (31). These characterizations correspond to the second interpretation, since they refer to and emphasize certain aspects of the Spirit, not the Spirit Himself. Kangas concludes this section by concurring with Marvin R. Vincent’s statement that “the Holy Spirit is called *the seven Spirits*; the perfect, mystical number seven indicating unity through diversity (1 Cor. xii.4). Not the sevenfold *gifts* of the Spirit are meant, but the divine Personality who imparts them; the one Spirit under the diverse manifestations” (31). This understanding corresponds with the third interpretation, referring to the person of the Spirit.

Although additional explication has been added in other more recent commentaries, they nevertheless continue within the scope of the previously described three interpretations. For example, in his 1999 commentary on the Greek text of Revelation, G. K. Beale states that the seven Spirits “signify the fullness of divine sovereignty, which is ‘sent out into all the earth’ (5:6), probably through the church’s prophetic witness” (61). Commenting on Revelation 1:4, Beale says,

Although some identify these spirits with the seven archangels...or with the seven angels of the trumpets and bowls,...the expression is more likely a figurative designation of the effective working of the Holy Spirit, since this is the characteristic identification of πνεῦμα in the NT when found in conjunction with or as part of an apparent formula with God and Christ. (189)

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While somewhat obscurely stated, the “fullness of divine sovereignty” and the “effective working of the Holy Spirit” are consistent with the third interpretation, which refers to the person of the Spirit in the Trinity. However, Beale has no explanation as to why the Spirit is mentioned second, stating that “the reason for the unusual placement of the Spirit before Christ is not clear” (189). Beale does provide some rationale as to how “Isa. 11:2ff. (LXX) is included along with Zechariah in the background of the ‘seven spirits,’” saying that this is because “this text is alluded to in Rev. 5:5-6 (cf. ‘root’ of Isa. 11:1 in [Rev.] 5:5 and the mention of ‘the seven spirits of God’ in 5:6)” (189). Beale says that this section in the Septuagint version of Isaiah 11 shows that “God’s sevenfold Spirit is what equips the Messiah to establish his end-time reign, and this idea is already implied in Rev. 1:4b, since 3:1 expands it by explaining that Christ ‘has the seven spirits of God’” (189-190).

Daniel L. Akin, in his 2016 commentary on Revelation, helpfully and unambiguously says of the seven Spirits in 1:4, “I believe...the reference is to the Holy Spirit” (9). In the context of 3:1 he, referencing Robert Mounce, states that “the seven spirits of God are not a heavenly angelic entourage or planetary deities” but, rather, “the complete or perfect Holy Spirit; the Spirit in all His fullness” (81). Quoting Chuck Swindoll, Akin continues to say that the Savior, to counter the “rigor mortis” that has “set in” in the church, “through His life-giving Spirit” has “the power to breathe new life, resurrection life, into this church” (81). Akin also makes note of the experiential application and subjective indwelling of the seven Spirits, stating, “The Spirit who energizes and equips the churches for service is the Spirit who proceeds from the very throne of God...The One who is in heaven is the One who also is in us!” (9). This understanding is also consistent with the third interpretation, which asserts that *the seven Spirits* is a reference to the Holy Spirit Himself.

The Seven Spirits in the Ministry of Watchman Nee

In the 1920s Watchman Nee put out or conducted at least two studies on Revelation;⁷ these provide some insights as to how he interprets *the seven Spirits of God*. Nee’s a priori assumption coincides with the third interpretation, as he clearly considers that the seven Spirits are the one Holy Spirit of the Trinity. Concerning 1:4-5, Nee says that “the name of the Triune God here is quite different from that used in other epistles” and clarifies that “‘the seven Spirits’ does not mean that there are seven Holy Spirits (Eph. 4:4)” (“Revelation” 3).

In this early period of his ministry Nee emphasizes that *the seven Spirits* indicates “various kinds of works of the Holy Spirit” (“Meditations (2)” 197). Since the seven Spirits proceed from the throne, “the place where God administrates His government,” the Holy Spirit is connected to God’s government and administration, especially “to give us grace and peace” (197-198). The Holy Spirit also reveals to us “the various aspects of His works” (“Meditations (3)” 473). The seven Spirits’ being the seven lamps burning before the throne speaks of “the power of the Holy Spirit in shedding forth light to judge sin and to accomplish what the throne decrees” (473). The seven Spirits’ being the seven eyes of the Lamb indicates that this accomplishment is “based on the Lord’s redemption” (473). Hence, Revelation 5:6 speaks of the “different ways the Holy Spirit works and His different attributes for the execution of God’s administration” (473-474).

Nee says that the Lord’s word to Sardis reminds His people of the Holy Spirit’s power. Since the Lord is the One who has the seven Spirits, “He Himself has the full power to bear much spiritual fruit” (476). Today the Lord is still the “source of power for faith” and has boundless power and unlimited wisdom to accomplish God’s desire (476). *The seven Spirits* refers to the powers and virtues of the Holy Spirit, which are not only for the Lord Himself but also for the church and the believers; they are “still

reserved for the church,” are the “source of supply for the faithful saints,” and are the present “channels of blessings for the church” (485-486).

Nee also connects the seven Spirits to the aspects of the Spirit resting upon the Lord in Isaiah 11, noting that *the seven Spirits* implies that “the Holy Spirit has various kinds of work” (“Revelation” 3). Although there is “only one Holy Spirit before God,” *the seven Spirits* in Revelation 4:5 emphasizes “the work and effectiveness of the Holy Spirit,” corresponding with “the meaning of the torches of fire (see Rev. 5:6; Isa. 11:2)” (38). Nee points out that in Revelation 5:6 the seven Spirits of God are “torches of fire sent forth” not to shine on God but “into the dark places” (44). Nee goes on to state, with reference to Isaiah 11, that “the seven Spirits upon the Lord Jesus cause Him to have power, intelligence, and so forth” (44).

Later in his ministry Nee speaks of the application of the seven Spirits for the believers’ subjective experience in their Christian life and work. In a 1936 message he connects the seven Spirits to the believers’ absolute consecration to God and His will: “The seven Spirits in Revelation are sent forth into all the earth, but they do not have anything to do with the earth. The seven Spirits are before the throne of God (1:4; 5:6) and are related to God alone. We must consecrate ourselves fully to God at least once, for the carrying out of His will” (“Conference” 260).

In his 1945 messages, published as *The Orthodoxy of the Church*, Nee relates the seven Spirits and the seven lamps to the recovery work of life: “The Lord manifests Himself as He who has the seven Spirits. The seven Spirits of God are sent of God to the world to work, and this refers to the work of life...The work of recovery is half in the Spirit and half in the light” (54).

The Seven Spirits in the Ministry of Witness Lee

We will now trace the seed and development of Witness Lee’s theological understanding and experiential application of the seven Spirits of God.⁸ A 1954 message, given in Manila, entitled “The Seven Lamps and Seven Eyes—Enlightening, Searching, and Burning” is one of the earliest samples of Lee’s commentary on a topic that he would continue to speak on over the subsequent forty-plus years of his ministry. Lee says, “The operating center of the universe is God’s throne, and the operating power of the universe is the seven lamps of fire that come forth from the throne” (“Messages” 127). He notes that “the seven lamps becoming the seven eyes of the Lamb show that God’s administration, operation, management, and work in the universe all depend on the Lord” (128).

In another message given in the same year, “The Seven Spirits—the Lamps, the Eyes, the Spirits, and the Fire,” Lee states that the period of time between the Lord’s resurrection and His return—from His ascension to His second coming—is “the age of the Holy Spirit” (*Spiritual Reality* 26). During this period Christ is, on the one hand, the High Priest who walks “in the midst of the seven golden lampstands” (Rev. 2:1; cf. 1:13), the churches on the earth. On the other hand, He is the Lamb standing “in the midst of the throne” in heaven (5:6; cf. 4:2). Lee notes that after John was “in spirit on the Lord’s Day” (1:10) and saw, in chapters 1 through 3, the Son of Man in the midst of the lampstands on the earth, he was again “in spirit” (4:2) and saw, in chapters 4 and 5, the throne as the center of the universe (28). Here Lee makes the key statement that “everything that happens in the universe is governed by the throne” (28).

We might question how the Lamb in heaven can simultaneously be with His disciples in the churches on the earth. Lee gives some clues. First we must see that the seven Spirits of God, the seven lamps of fire, and the seven eyes of the slain and resurrected

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Lamb are equivalent. In 4:5 there are “seven lamps of fire burning before the throne,” and these seven lamps “are the seven Spirits of God.” In 5:6 the seven eyes of the Lamb are the seven Spirits of God. A logical application of the mathematical transitive property validates Lee’s statement that “the seven lamps in chapter 4 are the seven eyes in chapter 5...The two are one. Both are the seven Spirits of God” (29). The second step to resolving the paradox of Christ being both in the heavens and with the believers on earth is to recognize, as Lee does, that the Lamb in Revelation 4 and 5 is the resurrected and ascended Christ who comes to the believers as the Spirit of God. That the Lamb has been slain but is now standing points to Christ’s redeeming death and life-giving resurrection. Although the holy God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29; Deut. 4:24; 9:3; cf. Exo. 3:2, 5), He can reach man through and by the lamps. The seven lamps of fire are the seven eyes of the Lamb, and both the eyes and the lamps are the seven Spirits of God. Lee applies these facts to explain how God can have a relationship with man: “The fire shines forth from the lamps, the lamps are diffused through the eyes, this diffusion is the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God is sent forth into all the earth...This is the process by which the Spirit of God enters into man to have a relationship with man” (30).

In a 1966 message entitled “The Seven Spirits for God’s Administration in Revelation,” Lee returns to the thought in Revelation 4 concerning the throne as “the center of the universe” (*Divine Spirit* 134). Lee notes that in verse 5 the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne of God are a fulfillment of the type of the seven lamps of the lampstand spoken of in Exodus 25 and Zechariah 4. These seven lamps, which are the seven Spirits of God, are “for enlightening and judging” (134). Lee goes on to say that the Lamb standing in Revelation 5:6 with seven horns and seven eyes is “no longer only for redemption” but is also “with power, authority, and might,” as signified by the seven horns (134). The seven eyes “are the seven Spirits of God sent forth to fulfill God’s purpose throughout the entire earth” (134). Lee points out that, as seen in the entire Bible, God has a divine administration. Creation was the first item of His administration. Redemption became the second item of God’s administration because of the fall. Judgment is the final item in God’s administration, as seen in the four great “sevens”—seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls—spoken of in Revelation 2 through 16.

In the Gospels John could recline on the Lord’s bosom (John 13:23), but in Revelation John fell at the Lord’s feet as dead when he saw Him (1:17); this is “because the atmosphere had changed from redemption to judgment” (135). According to Lee, the Spirit of God in Revelation is not the Spirit of grace but the seven Spirits sent forth into all the earth, because the Spirit is “for the divine administration through the divine judgment” (135). In chapters 2 and 3 Christ the Lord spoke to a certain church at the beginning of each of the seven epistles, “but at the end of the epistles, it is the Spirit who speaks to all the churches” (136). The Lord Jesus spoke the seven epistles in Revelation 2 and 3, “but today when we read them, the seven Spirits of God speak these words to us in our spirit for the purpose of God’s administration” (137).

A decade later, in 1976, Lee returned to the subject of the seven Spirits of God in the context of his comprehensive *Life-study of Revelation*. Commenting on 1:4, Lee addresses the question as to “why in Revelation the Spirit occupies the second place in the sequence of the divine Trinity” (40). Lee asserts that in the book of Revelation “the age has been changed from the Son to the Spirit,” and “in this age the Spirit has been intensified”; thus, “He is called the seven Spirits” (40). The phrase *seven Spirits* denotes not seven different Spirits but one sevenfold intensified Spirit. In contrast to the number twelve, which indicates completion in God’s eternal administration, the number seven refers to completion in God’s dispensational operation and move on the earth. Lee states that “in substance and existence, God’s Spirit is one; in the intensified function and work of God’s operation, God’s Spirit is sevenfold” (40). Lee

correlates the Spirit to the lampstand: “In existence, the Holy Spirit, like the lampstand in Zechariah [4:2], is one, but in function the Holy Spirit is seven” (41).

Later in the same study, Lee builds on the thought of the lampstand to establish that the seven eyes of the Lamb are for the building of God. Lee does so by tracing the scriptural record of the seven lamps. He notes that in the first mention of the seven lamps in Exodus 25 “we see seven lamps on the one lampstand” [cf. vv. 31, 37; Num. 8:2] (266). The seven lamps of the lampstand are mentioned again in Zechariah 4:2 in the context of a passage that refers to seven eyes upon an engraved stone, the seven eyes of Jehovah, and the Spirit (3:9; 4:10, 6). These three—the seven lamps, the seven eyes, and the seven Spirits—referred to somewhat obscurely in Zechariah, are then clearly seen in Revelation. Hence, Lee states that “as a recovery of divine revelation, this is absolutely new” (267).

Lee goes on to point out that the lamps in Exodus “are for the building up of the tabernacle, especially for the move in the tabernacle,” and thus they are for “God’s dwelling place on earth” (267). In the context of Zechariah, which refers to the rebuilding of the temple, the seven lamps are for “the recovery of God’s building” (267). Furthermore, not only the seven lamps but also the seven eyes are for God’s building. The seven eyes, the eyes of Jehovah, are “upon one stone” (3:9). That this stone has been engraved to “remove the iniquity of that land in one day” foretells Christ’s accomplishment of redemption on the cross. Hence, the stone with seven eyes in Zechariah 3:9 is prophetically the Lamb having seven eyes in Revelation 5:6. Lee concludes that “the seven lamps are the seven eyes of the Redeemer,” and “the seven eyes of the Redeemer are the seven Spirits of God for the building of God” (268).

In *God’s New Testament Economy*, drawn from messages spoken in 1984, Lee takes a further step by highlighting the prominent placement of the seven Spirits in God’s economy. Lee asserts that the “twenty-seven books of the New Testament are a full revelation of one great person—the Triune God” (11). Lee classifies the New Testament into three sections: Matthew through John as the initiation, Acts through Jude as the development, and Revelation as the finalization of God’s economy (15-18). Lee emphasizes that in the Gospels the Triune God is revealed “as the Son of God in His humanity—Jesus Christ”—coming “with the Father by the Spirit” to be “the embodiment of the Triune God” (11). Lee then demonstrates that the subsequent twenty-two books of the New Testament reveal that the Son—who became flesh, died and resurrected—became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b) (15-18). This life-giving Spirit, who “is the Spirit as the Son with the Father...is the consummation of the Triune God” (15). Lee goes on to state that “the seven Spirits are out from the Eternal One and of the Redeemer (Rev. 1:4-5) to be the intensification of the Triune God in the overcoming church, consummating in the golden lampstands and in the New Jerusalem” (18).

Lee contrasts the sequence and complexity of the presentation of the Divine Trinity in Revelation 1:4-7 with the classic presentation in Matthew 28:19. Lee states that “Him who is and who was and who is coming is God the eternal Father” and that “this title refers to the Old Testament title of *Jehovah*,” who is “the great I Am,...the Triune God” (209). Hence, “the threefold predicate used for the first of the Divine Trinity implies and even indicates the Divine Trinity” (210).⁹ That the entire God in Revelation is the first of the Triune God shows the mystery of the infinite, eternal God. The Spirit is listed second, instead of third, and not in the singular, but as the seven Spirits. Furthermore, He is listed with “the modifier, ‘before the throne of God’” (212). Lee states that “as seven is the number for completion in God’s operation, so the seven Spirits must be for God’s move on the earth” (210). That the seven Spirits are before the throne indicates the function of the Spirit in carrying out God’s

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administration. That the seven Spirits of God are listed in the second place “reveals the importance of the intensified function of the sevenfold Spirit of God” (211). In contrast to Matthew 28:19, Revelation 1:5-7 speaks not explicitly of the Son but of Jesus Christ with seven functional descriptors.¹⁰ Lee notes that “in Revelation we see the administration, the government, the activity, the motion, the move, the act, and the work of the Trinity” (216). He points out that the Divine Trinity in Revelation is “not the essential Trinity but the economical Trinity” (212).

Lee devotes six chapters of *God's New Testament Economy* to speaking extensively concerning the seven Spirits. In contrast to the loving Jesus in the Gospels (cf. John 13:23), the Christ shown in Revelation 1 is the High Priest, in the midst of the lampstands, having eyes “like a flame of fire” (v. 14). Lee notes that this One has “seven eyes for Him to observe and search for His judging by enlightening” (208). Later, he says, “In the economical Trinity in Revelation, the second of the Godhead is the seven Spirits and becomes the seven eyes of the third in the Trinity...He is the Redeemer, but the seven Spirits are His eyes. He includes the Spirit” (222-223). The seven Spirits have a “twofold mission...to carry out God’s administration and to search and infuse the churches” (242). This is particularly seen in the seven epistles to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3. Each epistle begins with the Lord’s speaking, in which He first declared who He is (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14); however, each concludes with the Spirit speaking to the churches (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Based on this, Lee states that “this is a strong indication that the actual speaker is the Spirit” (225). For example, the message to Thyatira begins with, “These things says the Son of God, He who has eyes like a flame of fire” (2:18), and the message to Sardis opens with, “These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God” (3:1). Both epistles conclude by saying, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (2:29; 3:6). The seven epistles show “that Christ and the Spirit are one...The oneness of the Trinity here is economical based upon the essential aspect” (225).

In his *Life-study of Isaiah*, spoken in 1990, Witness Lee relates the prophecy concerning Christ in Isaiah 11:2-5 to the sevenfold intensified Spirit and to God’s government and administration: “Isaiah 11 reveals Christ as the twig and the branch. He is full of the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of Jehovah (v. 2). What a Spirit! This Spirit is the sevenfold intensified Spirit (Rev. 1:4). Along with this Spirit is God’s administration, God’s government (Isa. 11:3-5)” (263). Lee also applies this passage in Isaiah to the situation of the church: “Because this Spirit is of seven items—Jehovah, wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of Jehovah—we may say that He is the sevenfold intensified Spirit. These seven items depict the situation in the church” (265). This is in contrast to an earlier statement by Lee, in a 1970 message—“Concerning the Seven Spirits of God”—where he says that this verse does not refer to the seven Spirits but to “six functions of the one Spirit of Jehovah,” and therefore, “it is not appropriate to use Isaiah 11:2 to fully explain the seven Spirits in Revelation” (“Explanation” 603).

In 1996, in what was to be the final full year of his public ministry, Witness Lee introduced a new focus for reading and studying the New Testament—as the history and ministry of Christ in three stages. The seven Spirits of God feature prominently as a demarcation for the third stage. “In the first stage—incarnation—Christ was the Christ in the flesh. In the second stage—inclusion—Christ is the pneumatic Christ, the life-giving Spirit. Now in the third stage—intensification—Christ is the sevenfold intensified Spirit” (*Incarnation* 11). Lee asserts that to know these three stages is to “truly know the Bible” (11). Christ’s work in the first stage produces redeemed people, His work in the second stage produces churches, and in the stage of intensification His work “produces the overcomers to build up the Body, which consummates in the New Jerusalem as the unique goal of God’s economy” (21). The life-giving Spirit needs to

be intensified sevenfold for the Body of Christ to be produced. It is this sevenfold intensification that “deals with the sevenfold situation of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3” (19).

In *The Secret of God's Organic Salvation—“the Spirit Himself with Our Spirit,”* Lee continues to develop the basis for these three sections of Christ's ministry. Although Christians often consider that Christ's ministry has two parts—an earthly ministry and a heavenly ministry—Lee points out that Christ's heavenly ministry has an additional aspect—one that “is carried out by Him as the sevenfold intensified life-giving Spirit” (79). As the seven Spirits, the Spirit is the seven lamps (4:5) that function to enlighten the churches and at the same time burn away the many things that have come in due to the degradation of the church. Since the seven Spirits are the seven eyes of the Lamb (5:6), They are one with the Lamb, indicating that “Christ and the Spirit are one” (83). Lee relates this to the Christian's individual and corporate experience, stating that “with the seven Spirits as His eyes,” Christ is both searching and “infusing Himself into the churches and the saints” (84). Christ as the sevenfold intensified Spirit “saves the believers from the things related to the degradation of the church” (84), which are exemplified in the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. The degradation includes the formality of the church life in Ephesus; the possible defeat of those in Smyrna; the union with the world in Pergamos; the fornication, idolatry, and demonic teaching in Thyatira; the spiritual death in Sardis; the possible loss of the crown in Philadelphia; and the lukewarmness and Christlessness in Laodicea. In these epistles the speaking of Christ to each of the seven churches becomes universally “the speaking of the sevenfold intensified, all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit to all the seven churches” (87).

In *How to Be a Co-worker and an Elder and How to Fulfill Their Obligations*, Lee provides a crystallized recap of the third stage, which is that it is in this stage that Christ intensifies His organic salvation, produces the overcomers, and consummates the New Jerusalem. In this context, Lee provides his final understanding concerning the seven Spirits of God. The seven Spirits of God referred to in Revelation are not seven individual or separate Spirits “but the one Spirit who is intensified sevenfold” (46). Lee states that Christ became the sevenfold intensified Spirit to accomplish three main things. The first is to “intensify the organic salvation of God sevenfold for the building up of the Body of Christ to consummate God's eternal goal, which is the New Jerusalem” (46). The second is to produce overcomers, who are needed because “nearly all the believers in Christ have become defeated in their old man by Satan, sin, the world, and their flesh” (46). Today “Christ is calling the defeated believers to be His overcomers by Himself as the sevenfold intensified Spirit for their experience of His organic salvation in His sevenfold intensification...In such a sevenfold intensified organic salvation, we can become overcomers by Christ as the sevenfold intensified Spirit” (48-49). The third is to build and “consummate the New Jerusalem,” which should be “the unique goal of the Christian work” because it is “the ultimate goal of God's eternal economy” (49) and “the consummation of the full ministry of Christ” (52).

The Seven Spirits for the Operation of the Divine Trinity in His Economy

The seven Spirits, mentioned explicitly in Revelation, and indirectly mentioned, implied, or typified in other sections of the Bible, is the one Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Divine Trinity. The grammatical construction and theological substance of Revelation 1:4-5 leave little room for an alternative interpretation. In contrast to the presentation in Matthew 28:19 and Ephesians 1:3-14 (Father, Christ, Spirit) and in Ephesians 4:4-6 (Spirit, Lord, Father), the sequence of the Triune God in Revelation 1:4-5 (Father, Spirit, Jesus Christ) focuses attention on the Spirit's central position in the intensified implementation of God's operation and economy. The Spirit is one in

CHRIST BECAME THE SEVENFOLD INTENSIFIED SPIRIT TO INTENSIFY HIS ORGANIC SALVATION SEVENFOLD FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE BODY OF CHRIST, TO PRODUCE OVERCOMERS, AND TO BUILD AND CONSUMMATE THE NEW JERUSALEM, THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF GOD'S ETERNAL ECONOMY.

substance and existence but is sevenfold in the intensified function and work of God's operation. That the seven Spirits are also the eyes of the redeeming Lamb (5:6-7)—who has resurrected (“standing”), ascended (“in the midst of the throne”), and is qualified to administrate God's economy (“took the scroll”)—clearly illustrates that there is unity but with distinction in the Godhead. This undercuts the tritheistic understanding that posits three separate persons in the Godhead.

The appellation *seven* in reference to the Spirit gives a sense of intensity and fullness—as in seven trumpets, seven thunders, seven bowls (8:2; 10:4; 16:1). The number seven (used over fifty times in Revelation) also implies completion, especially in operation, dispensation, and administration—positively, as with the seven churches, seven seals, seven horns, seven eyes, and seven angels (1:11; 5:1, 6; 8:2), and negatively, as with the seven trumpets and seven bowls (v. 2; 16:1; 12:3). Hence, *the seven Spirits* indicates the intensified function of the Triune God to carry out the administration of His economy by judging, enlightening, redeeming, life dispensing, building, administrating, and reigning.

Judging and Enlightening

The Son of Man whom John saw in Revelation has eyes “like a flame of fire” (1:14), a description reminiscent of Daniel's vision of a man whose eyes were like “torches of fire” (Dan. 10:6). In His word to the church in Thyatira, the Son of God emphasized this aspect of Himself by also speaking of His bronze feet (Rev. 2:18; cf. “feet like pillars of fire” in 10:1); both the flaming eyes and the flaming feet of bronze connote judgment. In the context of Revelation there is a three-way equivalence between the eyes of the Lamb, the seven lamps of fire, and the seven Spirits of God (5:6; 4:5). Hence, in a negative sense, the seven Spirits of God as flames, torches of fire, and lamps of fire will test, try, manifest, and judge what is or is not of Him in the experience of both the churches and the believers (cf. 1 Cor. 3:13, 15).

The seven lamps of fire also have a more positive connotation when considered in the context of the lampstand that was placed in the Holy Place of the tabernacle (Exo. 26:35). Earlier, Moses was instructed to “make its lamps, seven,” and to set them up “to give light to the area in front of it” (25:37). God is the light who shines in our hearts (2 Cor. 4:6; 1 John 1:5), and the Son is “the true light which...enlightens every man” (John 1:9). The seven Spirits of God, in the reality and fulfillment of the type of the lampstand, function positively as the seven lamps of the lampstand to enlighten. Judgment and enlightenment are thus important aspects of the seven Spirits in the operation of the Divine Trinity.

Redeeming and Life Dispensing

In Revelation 5:6 John saw “a Lamb standing as having just been slain, having...seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God.” The Lamb, recommended by His forerunner in John's Gospel as the One who “takes away the sin of the world” (1:29), is a central figure in John's Revelation. God's redeemed throughout the ages “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14), and they have overcome the opposing and accusing enemy of God, Satan, “because of the blood of the Lamb” (12:11). Zechariah 3:9, a somewhat parallel verse to Revelation 5:6, refers to an engraved stone with seven eyes and to the declaration of Jehovah of hosts that He “will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.” Hence, the seven Spirits of God, functioning as the seven eyes of the Lamb, are instrumental in applying the Lamb's redemption to God's people.

Redemption is the basis upon which the operating Triune God as the Spirit dispenses His divine and eternal life. Revelation 7:17 describes the Lamb “in the midst of the

throne” who shepherds and guides the redeemed “to springs of waters of life.” In 22:1 John was shown “a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” In John’s Gospel Jesus foretold that after His glorification “those who believed into Him” would receive the Spirit and thereby experience the flowing of rivers of living water out of their innermost being (7:38-39). John indicates that the fulfillment of this word refers to the receiving of the Spirit, which would not take place until the Lord was glorified, that is, resurrected (cf. Luke 24:26, 46). Paul, in the context of a chapter rebutting the heresy that there is no resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12), asserts that “the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit” (v. 45b), indicating that the Spirit of the glorified Jesus given to the disciples after the Lord’s process of death and resurrection is a life-dispensing Spirit. This provides insight as to why the message delivered to the church in Sardis emphasizes that the Sender is “He who has the seven Spirits of God” (Rev. 3:1). Although Sardis has a name of being living, in the Lord’s estimation she is dead. Her works remain incomplete before God, and even the few “things which remain” are “about to die” (v. 2). The remedy for such a condition is God’s sevenfold intensified life-giving Spirit.

Building

The most notable shortcoming among the many incomplete matters in Sardis is the building of the church. In Matthew 16:18-19 the Lord prophesied that He would build the church, which would be the reality of the kingdom of God. The need for the building of the church is reflected in the Lord’s subsequent promises to the overcomers in the church in Philadelphia that they will become “a pillar in the temple” of His God and that He will write upon them the name of His God and the name of the city of His God, “the New Jerusalem,” and His “new name” (Rev. 3:12).


In the Old Testament type, the temple was built by Solomon on the specific location designated by David, with the materials gained through David’s warfare (2 Chron. 3:1; 1 Chron. 29:2-3). However, that temple was eventually destroyed, and God’s defeated people were carried away into captivity. It was not until the time of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi that there was a recovery of the city and a rebuilding of God’s house. In the context of that recovery, Jehovah through Zechariah prophesied concerning a stone with seven eyes (Zech. 3:9), which are the eyes of Jehovah (4:10), and concerning a lampstand with “seven lamps upon it, with seven pipes for each of the lamps” (v. 2). Furthermore, verse 6 speaks of God’s Spirit. Hence, in this context, the Spirit, the seven eyes, and the seven lamps are instrumental in the recovery of God’s building. A similar correlation between the seven Spirits of God, the seven eyes of the Lamb, and the seven lamps of fire in Revelation 4:5 and 5:6 has already been noted.

The New Testament building requires transformed materials (cf. 1 Cor. 3:12, 14-15), that is, transformed persons (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). Transformation proceeds from our undergoing an intensified experiential process of the operating Spirit through our beholding and reflecting the glorious Lord. The Spirit, as the seven lamps, shines, enlightens, exposes, breaks down, and burns away that which is old, natural, and fleshly. The Spirit, as the seven eyes, positively refines, purifies, infuses, and imparts that which corresponds to God’s holy, righteous, and glorious nature. As a result of such a spiritual process, the believers individually and corporately become the expression, representation, and building of God.

Administrating and Reigning

In the Triune God’s economical operation, the seven Spirits are “sent forth into all the earth” (Rev. 5:6; cf. 2 Chron. 16:9; Prov. 15:3). Here we see the administrating function of the sevenfold intensified Spirit to reach and rule over men, especially the

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believers who have an ear to hear what the Spirit is speaking to the churches. In this operation the Lamb is in the midst of the throne, and His eyes are the seven Spirits of God, indicating that He is the One reigning. The seven Spirits as the seven lamps are “burning before the throne” (Rev. 4:5), but at the same time the seven eyes of the Lamb are “the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth” (5:6). In Revelation 6:1 through 8:1 it is the worthy Lamb who opens the seven seals of the scroll that is “on the right hand of Him who sits upon the throne” (5:1). The scene in Revelation 4 and 5 illustrates the operation of the Divine Trinity in His economical administration and reign. Furthermore, in this operation the seven Spirits are instrumental in the Divine Trinity’s judging, enlightening, redeeming, life dispensing, building, administering, and reigning. 

Notes

¹The Greek word for *angel*, ἄγγελος (*angelos*), means “a messenger.” As used in the New Testament, *angelos* does not necessarily indicate a spiritual, non-human being. The *Recovery Version* distinguishes between various understandings of this word. When referring to a human agent, *angelos* is translated “messenger” (cf. Matthew 11:10 and Luke 7:27, which refer to John the Baptist, and 9:52, which refers to some of the disciples sent by the Lord to cities that He was about to visit). When referring to the Divine, the word *Angel* is capitalized. For example, Acts 7:30 speaks of “an Angel” who appeared to Moses “in the flame of a thornbush fire.” Witness Lee, in the footnote on this verse, says, “Here and in vv. 35 and 38 the Angel (Messenger) in the Old Testament was Christ the Lord, who is Jehovah, the Triune God (Exo. 3:2-16; Judg. 6:12-24; Zech. 2:6-11). This is proved by *the Lord* and *God* in the following verses” (*Recovery Version*, v. 30, note 1). When referring to a spiritual messenger, the word *angel* is not capitalized, as in Luke 1:26, for example, “the angel Gabriel” (cf. vv. 30, 34-35, 38).

Angelos appears repeatedly in Revelation (in over seventy verses). While in most cases the reference is to an angel, a spiritual messenger, the *Recovery Version* identifies four instances where *angelos* must refer to Christ (7:2; 8:3; 10:1; and 18:1). For example, the Angel in 8:3 offered incense “with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne,” and the prayers of the saints went up with the smoke of the incense “out of the hand of the Angel before God” (v. 4); only Christ, the Lord Spirit, has such an intercessory role (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:26, 34). The *Recovery Version* considers that *angelos* in Revelation 1:20; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, and 14 refers to human messengers. This is reasonable since these agents were both the recipients to whom John’s physically written message was delivered and the conveyors of the message to other human recipients in seven physical cities.

²“One who is of one substance with the Father” (Weinrich 40).

³Commentators such as Thomas, Alford, and Lenski have noted that Isaiah 11:2 contains only six, not seven, designations of the Spirit, a seemingly “fatal” objection to this correlation (Kangas 31). However, this apparent discrepancy can be traced to a difference between the earlier Greek Septuagint translation and the later Hebrew Masoretic text. For example, the *Recovery Version*, based on the Hebrew text of verses 2 and 3, says, “The Spirit of Jehovah will rest upon Him, / The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, / The Spirit of counsel and might, / The Spirit of the knowledge and fear of Jehovah. / He will delight in the fear of Jehovah...” Here, the Spirit is mentioned four times—once as the Spirit of Jehovah, and three times each with a pair of descriptors (“wisdom and understanding,” “counsel and might,” “knowledge and fear”), for a total of six descriptors. Some readers consider “of Jehovah” in the first part of verse 2 to be another descriptor, thus arriving at seven descriptors; however, as just seen, the text can also be reasonably construed as the Spirit of Jehovah having six attributes. The other translation, the Septuagint, says, “The Spirit of God shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and godliness shall fill him; the spirit of the fear of God” (*The Septuagint Version*, Isa. 11:2). Here seven attributes are ascribed to the Spirit of God —“wisdom and understanding,” “counsel and strength,” “knowledge and godliness,” and “the fear of God.” The word *spirit*, *pneuma*, appears five times. In the Hebrew text the word that is translated “fear” is the same word in both verse 2

and verse 3 (i.e., “fear of Jehovah”). The Septuagint, however, uses two different Greek words—*eusebeia* in verse 2, translated variously as “godliness,” “piety,” or “reverence,” and *phobos* in verse 3, translated “fear.”

⁴Commenting on this portion in a footnote, Weinrich says, “Victorinus of Petovium also quotes this passage [Isaiah 11:2-3] to interpret the seven spirits as the one Holy Spirit” (4).

⁵Weinrich defines tri-hypostatic deity as “one God in three persons” (3).

⁶Paragraph 1831, whose footnote 109 references Isaiah 11:1-2, says, “The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. They belong in their fullness to Christ, Son of David. They complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them. They make the faithful docile in readily obeying divine inspirations.” These “seven gifts of the Holy Spirit” are reiterated in paragraph 1845.

⁷We will focus on (1) the study on the first three chapters of Revelation, published originally as articles in Nee’s magazine *The Christian* (found in volumes 3–5 of *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*) and (2) the study on Revelation that Nee conducted prior to 1928 for a small number of attendees. One of an attendee’s longhand notes are the basis of the published version of this second study (in volume 16 of *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*). Regretfully, these notes are missing the section on Revelation 2:19–3:22, which could have been particularly germane to this article. However, what remains is still a fairly complete study on Revelation.

⁸*The Collected Works of Witness Lee*, published recently, is an invaluable resource for such an endeavor.

⁹Note the correlation of Lee’s conclusion with that of Andrew of Caesarea concerning the same phrase.

¹⁰(1) The faithful Witness; (2) the Firstborn of the dead; (3) the Ruler of the kings of the earth; (4) the One who loves us; (5) the One who has released us from our sins by His blood [i.e., the Redeemer]; (6) the One who has made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; and (7) the One who “comes with the clouds” to execute God’s final government.

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REVELATION 4 AND 5
ILLUSTRATE THE
OPERATION OF THE
DIVINE TRINITY IN
HIS ECONOMICAL
ADMINISTRATION.
IN THIS OPERATION
THE SEVEN SPIRITS
ARE INSTRUMENTAL
IN THE DIVINE
TRINITY’S JUDGING,
ENLIGHTENING,
REDEEMING, LIFE
DISPENSING, BUILDING,
ADMINISTRATING,
AND REIGNING.

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Bringing Forth the Golden Lampstands

The purpose of the burning flame in carrying out God’s economy is to bring forth the golden lampstands, the churches. Burning implies judging, purifying, refining, and producing. Never be disappointed by the rottenness, corruption, and immorality of today’s human society. Do not be disappointed or so concerned for the world situation. Also, do not be disappointed by the weakness of the local churches. I do not believe in the seemingly disappointing condition in the world or in the churches. I believe in the flame of the burning seven Spirits that control and direct the world and that also judge, purify, and refine the church to produce a pure golden lampstand...Nearly all the doors are closed to Christ in today’s situation. By His mercy, though, we are open to Him. Every day, every morning, and every evening, we need to pray, “Lord, come; we are open to You! We open every avenue of our being to You.” I do not know how much you pray or how you pray, but I can testify that nearly every day I pray, “Lord, enlighten me; search me within and expose me, Lord. I like to be enlightened by You and exposed in Your light.” Are you like this, or do you shut yourself up and hide something from Him? We all need to pray, “Lord, we are open. Come and shine upon us and shine from within us and enlighten every avenue and every corner of our being. We like to be exposed, purged, and purified.” Then the Lord has a way to produce a pure golden lampstand. The burning is going on not only in the entire world situation but also in the churches. The more I read the newspapers, the more I get confirmed that the flaming Spirits direct the world situation, and also this flaming purifies the church to produce the golden lampstands.

From *God’s New Testament Economy* by Witness Lee, pp. 241-242