

The Trinity in the Book of Revelation

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In the year 2000 Woody Whidden published a study of Trinitarian evidences in the book of Revelation.¹ In it he challenged Rob Wall's assertion that if there is a doctrine of the Trinity evident in the book of Revelation, it must be "primitive."² Whidden's own conclusion was that "one of the great permeating themes of the Apocalypse is the Triune nature of the Godhead."³ Although, as he notes in a subsequent republication of the study as a chapter in another work, the issue is not directly addressed per se in the book of Revelation,⁴ I conclude from my own research that the observant reader finds there perhaps the fullest delineation of the Trinity and the respective roles of its members in all of Scripture, with the exception of the Gospel of John.

This paper reports the results of my own comprehensive research in the book of Revelation regarding all references to Deity and the respective roles of the members of the Trinity as revealed by these references.⁵

¹ Woodrow W. Whidden, "Trinitarian Evidences in the Apocalypse," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11 (2000): 248–60.

² *Ibid.*, 248.

³ *Ibid.*, 260.

⁴ Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve, *The Trinity: Understanding God's Love, His Plan of Salvation, and Christian Relationships* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002), 79.

⁵ I read Revelation through carefully more than once, recording every reference to Deity, noting which member of the Deity is suggested by the evidence of the context, and classifying and recording all of the data in a report which was originally appended to this paper but has been omitted for publication. Whidden's study, although very good, was not fully comprehensive, in that it studied primarily four major settings, namely, chaps. 1–3, 4–5, 12–14, and 21–22, and it did not summarize the data across the book. Another study of God in Revelation deserves mention, namely, Richard Bauckham, *The Theology*

Following a short summary of the data, I move to a study of the similarities and distinctions between the three Persons, followed by the respective roles of the three members of the Trinity in the book of Revelation.

A Summary of the Data

It is difficult to render precise numbers for the data, since there are many ways in which it can be broken down or interpreted.⁶ Although I do summarize some numbers for the data, the emphasis is on patterns rather than on precision. I have not attempted to distinguish between names and titles, but I have treated most identifiers formed from substantial participles as descriptive statements rather than as names or titles, except where they appear with sufficient frequency and/or in such close connection with other names as to indicate that they begin to function more as an identifier than as a descriptor. The main examples of this would be characterizations of God as “the One who sits on the throne,” “the One who lives forever and ever,” and “the One who was and who is and who is coming.” One other construction of this type that seems, in context, to be used as an identifier is found in 14:7, where those who dwell on the earth are instructed to worship “the One who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and the fountains of waters.”

My study found about 124 separate names, titles, or identifying designations for God the Father in the book of Revelation. Of these, the most common by far is the simple designation *θεός*, translated “God,” used by itself about seventy-four times, including when accompanied by a possessive pronoun such as “my God,” “our God,” “his God,” or “their God.” In addition, the same designation appears in combination with a variety of other names or descriptors, including “Lord God,” “Lord God Almighty,” “our Lord and God,” “God Almighty,” “the living God,” “our God who sits on the throne,” “the God of heaven,” “God who lives

of the Book of Revelation, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 40–65, 109–25, but this excellent study did not accomplish my purpose. Therefore, I conducted my own primary, comprehensive research.

⁶ For example, would *κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ* (“Lord God Almighty”) in Rev 4:8 be considered one name or title for God or three? Is *ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος* (“the One who was and who is and who is coming”), which immediately follows in the same verse, a part of the same name, a separate name, three separate names, or merely a compound descriptive phrase? How can one clearly distinguish between a name, a title, and a descriptive phrase? These questions are in addition to any consideration of textual variants, which introduce more names and titles into the text. For the purposes of this study, the common Greek texts of Nestle-Aland, 27th ed., and the United Bible Societies, 4th ed., were used.

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forever and ever,” “the Lord God of the holy prophets,” and “the Lord God, who is and who was and who is coming.” These various designations account for another eighteen instances of identifying God the Father. That He is the Father of Jesus Christ is also mentioned four times, where He is three times called “My Father” by Jesus in His letters to the seven churches, and once He is called “His Father” with reference to “the Lamb” in 14:1. In addition, God is referred to simply as “the Lord,” “our Lord,” or “the Lord of the earth” at least four times.⁷ Eight additional times God is referred to as “the One who sits [or sat] on the throne,” besides those connected with His name. Another five times God is called “the One who lives forever and ever,” “the One who is and who was,” or “the One who was and who is and who is coming.” Additionally, God takes the titles “the Alpha and the Omega,”⁸ “the Holy One,” “King of the saints,” and “the Beginning and the End.”

⁷ There would be five times if counting 1:10, which is debatable. Many would see it as referring to Jesus Christ, but this is not necessarily the case. The closest context—and the only previous reference—in which anyone is called Lord is 1:8, in which the Lord God is the Almighty, who is and who was and who is coming, who is always God the Father in Revelation. While the Father is several times referred to as “the Lord,” Jesus is never called simply “the Lord” in Revelation. He is called “their Lord,” referring to the Two Witnesses in 11:8; He is called “the Lord Jesus” twice by John in the closing two verses of the book; and He is twice called Lord of lords with reference to His victory over the evil powers at the end of time (17:14; 19:16). If John has in mind “the holy day of the LORD,” which Yahweh calls “My holy day” in Isa 58:13, he would be thinking of the Creator who set apart the day as holy (Gen 2:2–3; Exod 20:11), and John does point to God the Father as the Creator in Rev 4:11; 10:6; and 14:7. This is the most consistent biblical position, though it is possible to argue that John may have had in mind the claim of Jesus in Mark 2:28. To see here a reference to something that appears only in later non-canonical literature, from the second century and beyond, namely, Sunday as “the Lord’s day” is not a justifiable biblical interpretation. This case is well presented by Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 2002), 90. But then neither should the expression be interpreted as pointing to the eschatological judgment day, the OT “day of the LORD,” as Stefanovic prefers to see it (*ibid.*, 90), since there is nothing in the context of the vision that suggests such a setting.

⁸ This is so whether or not 1:8 is held to refer to the Father. Many commentators do see it as a reference to God the Father, since the other ascriptions in the verse clearly point to Him as the Lord God, who is and who was and who is coming, the Almighty, a reference that does not elsewhere point to Christ but to the One who sits on the throne (cf. 4:8; 11:17–18; 21:5–6). See, e.g., Bauckham, 54–55; Alan F. Johnson, “Revelation,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 13, *Hebrews–Revelation*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 601; Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, 2d ed., Tyndale New Testament Commem-

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There are about eighty references to Jesus Christ by various designations in Revelation. The most common of these is “the Lamb,” used twenty-eight times. Second is “Jesus” or “Jesus Christ,” used twelve times. In addition, “the Lord Jesus” appears twice, “Christ” alone appears twice, and “His Christ” appears twice, the latter two referring, respectively, to the Messiah anointed by “our Lord” (11:15) and “our God” (12:10). In addition, Jesus claims or receives a host of other titles or designations in the book, including “the Faithful Witness,” “the Firstborn of the dead,” the Ruler of the kings of the earth,” “One like a son of man,” “the First and the Last,” “the Living One,” “the Holy One,” “the True One,” “the Amen,” “the Faithful and True Witness,” “the Beginning of God’s creation,” “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” “the Root of David,” “Michael,” “the Son of God,” “the Male Child [of the Woman],” “Lord of lords,” “King of kings,” “the Word of God,” “the Alpha and the Omega,”⁹ “the Beginning and the End,” and “the Bright Morning Star.”

The situation with regard to the names for the Holy Spirit is a bit more tenuous, with only seventeen references made, four of which are expressed symbolically. It seems clear from John’s salutation (1:4–5), in which he greets his readers with grace and peace from three separate entities, all of which he treats as members of the Deity, that John understands the Holy Spirit to be a separate person of the Godhead,¹⁰ but the Spirit receives significantly less attention in Revelation than the other two divine Persons, and He is four times mentioned in symbolic terms. His introduction in 1:4 is as “the seven Spirits who are before His [God’s] throne,” and He is similarly depicted symbolically in 3:1; 4:5; and 5:6 as “the seven Spirits of God.”¹¹ The other thirteen¹² times He is mentioned, He is referred to only as “the Spirit.” The emphasis seems to be more on His function than on His person, something also found widely elsewhere in Scripture.

taries (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1987; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 51; Whidden, “Trinitarian Evidences,” 249–250.

⁹ This is so from 22:12, even if, as noted above, 1:8 is considered to refer to the Father, and even if, as in this study, the variant reading found in 1:11 (KJV, NKJV) is not counted.

¹⁰ Whidden, “Trinitarian Evidences,” 248.

¹¹ Bauckham, 109, sees symbolic significance in the numerology of four times seven, which corresponds to the number (twenty-eight) of references to the Lamb.

¹² Bauckham, *ibid.*, counts fourteen, seeing the reference to the spirit of prophecy in 19:10 as a reference to the Holy Spirit.

Three Separate and Distinct Persons

There is very little overlap between the names, titles, or designations of the three divine Persons mentioned in the book of Revelation. Certainly, there is no overlap between the names or designations of the Spirit and that of God the Father or of Jesus Christ the Son. There is very limited overlap between the titles of the Father and those of the Son. The four titles¹³ that do overlap, namely, “the Alpha and the Omega,” “the Beginning and the End,” “the Holy One,” and “Lord,” designate essential attributes of Deity which are shared by them, no doubt with intent to characterize the Son as of the same essential attributes of Deity as the Father¹⁴ while trying to avoid confusing Their persons or Their roles. This virtual lack of overlap in names, titles, or designations makes clear that John has three separate Persons in view, and He introduces these Persons very early in his letter.

Although John introduces both God (the Father) and Jesus Christ as separate persons already in the very first verse of the book, he introduces the divine Trinity in 1:4, expressing his wish to his readers for grace and peace from (ὁ πῶς) the One who is and who was and who is to come, and from (καὶ ὁ πῶς) the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from (καὶ ὁ πῶς) Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn from the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. The three-fold repetition of ὁ πῶς connected by καὶ is clear indication that the three are separate entities or persons but are placed on an equal ground ontologically. Each one of these three is equally and fully able to communicate grace and peace to the readers and hearers of the book.

Throughout the book the Father and the Son are juxtaposed in such a way as to make clear that they are separate persons while equally sharing the essential attributes of Deity. It would be tedious to render an exhaustive accounting of all of the evidence for this, but let us consider a variety of examples. The revelation to John comes from both God and Jesus Christ, each of whom plays a leading role in the origin and transmission of the revelation to John (1:1). Beginning in 1:2 and repeated frequently throughout the book, the two-fold witness of the word of God and the

¹³ Whidden, “Trinitarian Evidences,” 249–50, includes “the First and the Last” as another title used of both the Father and the Son, but it is never used of the Father in Revelation.

¹⁴ Whidden, “Trinitarian Evidences,” 250.

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testimony of Jesus Christ plays a significant role.¹⁵ The name of God and the name of Jesus Christ are both written on the foreheads of the one who overcomes in Philadelphia (3:12). To the overcomer in Laodicea, Jesus promises that He will grant the right to sit with Him on His throne just as He overcame and sat down with His Father on His throne (3:21). Every creature in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and in the sea sings, “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever”¹⁶ (5:13). Under the sixth seal the wicked flee from the face of the One who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb (6:16). The numberless multitude of the redeemed stands in white robes before the throne and before the Lamb, and they cry out, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb” (7:10). When the seventh trumpet sounds, loud voices in heaven announce, “The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever” (11:15).

In 19:11–16 the Rider on the white horse, whose name is Faithful and True (v. 11; cf. 3:14), the Word of God (v. 13), and King of kings and Lord of lords (v. 16), out of whose mouth goes a sharp sword with which to strike the nations (v. 15; cf. 1:16; 2:12), will rule the nations with a rod of iron (19:15; cf. 2:27; 12:5) and will Himself tread the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God (19:15; cf. 14:19–20). Thus Christ is depicted as having the attributes of and doing the work of judgment that belongs to Almighty God.

In 20:6, those who are raised in the first resurrection will function as priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Christ for a thousand years (cf. v. 4). In 21:22, John sees no temple in the holy city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. Further, the city has no need of the sun or moon to provide light, for the glory of God illuminates it, and its lamp is the Lamb (21:23; cf. 22:5). Most significant, perhaps, is 22:1, 3, where God and the Lamb share the same throne. Not only does the river of the water of life flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb (v. 1), but “the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name *will be* on their foreheads” (vv. 3–4). The use of the third person singular

¹⁵ Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible* (Sarasota: First Impressions, 1997), 223–25; Kenneth A. Strand, “The Two Witnesses of Rev 11:3–12,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 19 (1981): 131–34.

¹⁶ Extended quotations from Scripture are from the NASB (1995) unless otherwise noted.

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personal pronoun throughout this text to refer to God and the Lamb seems to lend extra force to the sense of unity that is demonstrated by their sharing the throne.¹⁷ In addition, the claim of Jesus to the titles of God in 22:13, in the midst of a series of first person statements about Himself in verses 12–16, substantiates still further His ontological equality with God the Father while at the same time being a separate person.¹⁸

Individual Roles of the Members of the Godhead

Although there is a fundamental ontological equality among the three members of the Deity, there are clearly separate individual roles that They play in the book. As soon as one begins to gather and sort the data from this study, it becomes immediately apparent that the different persons of the Godhead have different functions, and these functions seldom overlap. Although there are a few names that overlap between the Father and the Son, particularly “the Alpha and the Omega,” “the Beginning and the End,” “Lord,” and “the Holy One,” these names have more to do with the essential attributes of God than with roles or functions. Some of the other names or designations, however, do signify separate functions. Even more, the description of various activities and the association with different elements or functions creates distinctions in roles.

The Role of the Father. God the Father is portrayed throughout the book of Revelation as the figurehead, the One who sits on the throne (4:2–3, 9–10; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 20:11–12; 21:5), the Almighty or Sovereign Ruler (παντοκράτωρ: 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22), the Creator who rightfully receives the worship of all created things (3:14; 4:9–11; 7:11–12; 10:6; 11:16–17; 14:7; 15:3–4; 19:4, 10; 22:9), the One who lives forever and ever, who is and was and is coming¹⁹ (1:4, 8; 4:8–10; 10:6; 11:17; 15:7; 16:5). He is the Father of Jesus Christ, the Lamb (2:27; 3:5, 21; 14:1), who is the Son of God

¹⁷ Bauckham, 60–61, points out that John, motivated by a concern for monotheistic worship of God, “is evidently reluctant to speak of God and Christ together as a plurality. He never makes them the subjects of a plural verb or uses a plural pronoun to refer to them both.”

¹⁸ Cf. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, New Century Bible Commentary, softback ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981), 339. See also Ranko Stefanovic, *The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation 5*, Andrews University Seminary Dissertation Series, no. 22 (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1996), 296–300, on the issue of the subordination of the Son.

¹⁹ Or variations of the latter expression: 4:8 reverses the order of the first two elements (“who was and who is”), while 11:17 and 16:5 omit the third element (“and is coming”).

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(2:18). Although God shares His throne with the Son (3:21; 22:1, 3), it is usually depicted as His throne (1:4; 4:2–3; 7:15; 12:5), which He shares at His will (3:21), and the Son is never portrayed as sitting on it by Himself.²⁰ The Father is the God of heaven (11:13; 15:11) and Lord of the earth (11:4). He is also the Lord God of the holy prophets (22:6). If there is any seniority in rank among the three divine Persons, in terms of roles, it would be the Father who is depicted as holding that position. This is shown in a variety of ways.

In 1:1 He is the One who gives to Jesus Christ the revelation to pass along to His servants. He is the One who speaks in the first person in 1:8 at the end of the Prologue as the divine Author of the content of the revelation. Jesus states in 2:27 that He received from His Father authority to rule all nations with a rod of iron. In 3:5 Jesus says that He will confess the name of the overcomer before His Father and before His Father's angels. In 2:7 Paradise belongs to God, while in 3:12 Jesus calls the New Jerusalem "the city of My God" "which comes down out of heaven from My God." God the Father is seated on the throne at the center of the heavenly throne room, surrounded by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, with their thrones, receiving constant praise, adulation, and worship (4:2–11). He is the One who has the covenant document,²¹ the seven-sealed scroll, which needs to be opened and read so that its provisions can be put into effect (5:1–4). It is to God that people are redeemed and made kings and priests (5:9–10). In 7:2–3, the seal of God is placed on the foreheads of the servants of God (cf. 9:4; 14:2; 22:4). The heavenly temple belongs to God (7:15; 11:19; 13:6; 15:5, 8), and the smoke of the incense ascends from the hand of the ministering

²⁰ This is not to imply that Christ has no right to sit on it by Himself, but it is a matter of function. Bauckham, 46, sees the throne as representing God's transcendence: "God as the One who sits on the throne is at present in heaven and acts on earth only through angelic intermediaries. Only in God's eschatological coming to his creation at the end, only in the New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven and abolishes the distinction between heaven and earth, will God's dwelling be with his people on earth." Christ is represented as immanent and accessible.

²¹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999; Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 1999), 340–41; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 201–3. Stefanovic argues that the scroll is not in the right hand of the Father, as most texts read, but is lying on the throne at His right side (201). This is a possible way of reading the text, but is not required, especially in 5:7, where ἄπὸ would seem to have been a better reading than ἐπὶ for such intention. In any case, 5:7 reveals that the scroll is passed from the possession of the Father to that of the Lamb.

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Angel with the prayers of the saints before God and His throne (8:3–4). The kingdom is God’s (12:10), the commandments are God’s (12:17; 14:12), the word is God’s (1:2, 9; 6:9; 17:17; 19:13; 20:4). God directs the affairs of men and nations to accomplish His purposes (17:17), but in the end, as Sovereign, He will judge them in righteousness (6:10; 11:18; 14:7; 16:1, 5–7, 19; 18:8; 19:2, 17–18; 20:12; 22:18–19). Although there is some participation by others in some aspects of judgment (19:11, 15; 20:4), in the final analysis, God is depicted on the “great white throne” as presiding over the executive judgment of the wicked (20:11–12). His presence is so awesome that heaven and earth attempt to flee and hide from Him, but there is no place to hide (20:11). In the new creation, the holy city, the New Jerusalem, comes down from God out of heaven (21:2, 10), having the glory of God (v. 11), and the everlasting covenant is pronounced fulfilled²² when “the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them” (v. 3). It is the One who sits on the throne who declares that He will make all things new (21:5), and to the one who conquers He says, “I will be their God and they will be my children” (21:7 NRSV).

The Role of the Son. In many respects, the role of the Son is different in Revelation, although He shares the attributes of Deity and certain basic functions of Deity. Some of the functions of Deity that He shares include sitting with God on His throne (3:21; 22:1, 3), exercising wrath and judgment against sin and sinners (2:5, 16, 22–23; 6:16–17; 19:11, 15), rewarding the overcomers (1:7, 10, 17, 26–28; 3:5, 12, 21), and providing the light for the city of God (21:23).

At the same time, the Son of God has a variety of different functions in Revelation that are not shared by the Father. These are significant. Besides being the Son of God (2:18, 27; 3:5, 21; 14:1), in 1:13 and 14:14 He is “one like a son of man,” that is, like a human being. At the same time, He is clearly depicted as the Son of man from Dan 7:13, coming on the clouds of heaven (14:14; 1:7), just as He prophesied to Caiaphas at His trial (Matt 26:64). He is also the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root and the Offspring of David (5:5; 22:16). He is Jesus the Messiah (1:1–2, 5; 11:15; 12:10; 20:4, 6), the Offspring of the Woman, the Male Child, who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron (12:4–5, 13; 2:27). He is the

²² Cf. Lev 26:11–12; Ezek 37:26–28; Hans K. LaRondelle, *Light for the Last Days: Jesus’ End-time Prophecies Made Plain in the Book of Revelation* (Nampa: Pacific Press, 1999), 144–47; Morris, 238; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 577.

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Lamb that was slain (5:6, 9, 12; 13:8)—crucified (11:8)—according to a plan established before the foundation of the world (13:8). He redeemed people to God from every nation by His blood (5:9; 12:11), and He has washed us from our sins in His own blood (1:5; 7:14). He died and came back to life (1:18; 2:8), the Firstborn from the dead (1:5), and He is alive forevermore and holds the keys of death and of Hades (1:18; 2:8; 11:8). He also holds the key of David, with the authority to open and to close (3:7–8; cf. Isa 22:22).

In addition to all of this, He is the Faithful and True Witness (1:5; 3:14) and the living Word of God (19:13). As such He is the role model for the Two Witnesses who follow in His footsteps by giving their faithful and true witness until they are martyred for their prophesying, lie dead for three and a half days while their enemies rejoice, then are raised to life again and ascend to heaven in a cloud in the sight of their enemies (11:3–12).²³ He is the author of the letters to the seven churches (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14), and He appears to John walking in the midst of the seven churches and holding the angels, or leaders, of the churches in His right hand (1:12–13, 20; 2:1; 3:1). He knows each of the churches intimately (2:2–4, 6, 9–10, 13–15, 19–20, 24–25; 3:1–2, 4, 8, 15, 17–18), their strengths, their weaknesses, their needs, and their problems. He is depicted as having seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth (5:6). His eyes are also described as like a flame of fire (1:14; 2:18), with which He says He searches minds and hearts (2:23). The relation between Jesus and the Spirit is so close that the things Jesus says to the churches are described as being spoken by the Spirit (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

Jesus is the One who gives personal counsel and appeal to the churches (2:5, 10, 16, 25; 3:2–3, 11, 18), who rebukes them and even disciplines them (3:19). He describes Himself as being the One who will personally hand out the rewards to the overcomer (2:7, 10, 17, 26–28; 3:5, 12, 21; 22:12) and judgment to those who refuse to repent or heed His counsel (2:5, 16, 21–23; 3:3, 16). He is the One who will either confess their name before His Father or blot their name out of His Book of Life (3:5; 13:8; 21:27).

²³ Robert W. Wall, *Revelation*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 146–47, notes the parallels with Jesus' experience and observes, "John's main point is therefore this: faithfulness unto death is always the ultimate measure of the disciple's faithfulness to God."

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Jesus, the Son of God, is the Lamb that takes the scroll of the covenant from the One who sits on the throne and breaks its seven seals so that He can open it and read it, that is, put it into effect (5:5, 7; 6:1). He is declared worthy to do this because He was slain and has redeemed people to God by His blood from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation, and has made them kings and priests to His God, and they will reign on the earth (5:9–10, 12). The Lamb has followers who follow Him wherever He goes (14:4; 19:14), like a flock following their divine Shepherd (7:17). Nonetheless, the salvation of the race is declared to be a joint venture between God, who sits on the throne, and the Lamb, who has come down and sacrificed Himself for humankind (7:10; 12:10–11).

It appears from the biblical evidence that the Son of God is also Michael (12:7), the heavenly combatant with Satan, the Dragon, and who casts the latter out of heaven along with his angels.²⁴ Michael is a figure in the book of Daniel who stands as the ruler and defender of God's people against their foes, who assists another heavenly being²⁵ in combating the opposition of the kings of Persia and Greece (Dan 10:13, 20–21), and who will at last deliver God's people from all their enemies and raise the dead to face their final rewards (12:1–2). In Jude 9 He is called Michael the archangel, and He contends with Satan over the body of Moses, whom He intends to resurrect from death. In 1 Thess 4:16 it is Christ Himself who descends from heaven with the voice of the archangel to raise those who have died in Christ so they can receive their reward. If Michael is Christ Himself, then it is not surprising that the Dragon is seen standing before the pregnant Woman ready to devour her Male Child as soon as He is born (Rev 12:4). But the Child is caught up to God and to His throne (12:5), and the Dragon turns his wrath on the Woman and on the rest of her offspring (12:6, 13–17).

Although the Son of God, the Male Child of the Woman, was caught up to God and to His throne, He is not inactive in regard to His people.

²⁴ Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 85–86.

²⁵ The heavenly being Michael assists is not named; he is referred to only as “one who resembled a human being” (Dan 10:16) and “one with human appearance” (v. 18). Without a further description, it is not possible to identify him certainly, but it seems probable that he was Gabriel, who appeared to Daniel first in 8:15 as “one who looked like a man,” then again in 9:21 as “the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision previously.” Beale, 651, however, identifies him with the divine Son of man of Dan 7:13, so that Michael, although “closely associated with the Son of man,” with both “set forth as heavenly representatives of Israel,” cannot himself be the Son of man, since he is distinguished from Him in 10:21. I do not find this argument convincing.

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He is depicted not only as Michael the Archangel but as a mighty Angel with the glory of God coming down from heaven with a little scroll in His hand and planting His right foot on the sea and His left foot on the land (10:1–2), showing His authority over all of creation.²⁶ He announces the time of the end and the urgent need to prophesy again to the peoples of the earth (10:6–7, 11). Though it cannot be stated conclusively from the text, it seems reasonable also to see Him as the Angel of Rev 8:3–5,²⁷ who is ministering before the golden altar before the throne of God, mingling incense with the prayers of the saints until the time comes when He throws the censer to the ground and concludes His intercessory ministry before God, a time apparently indicated by the opening of the temple in heaven in conjunction with the close of probation and the pouring out of the seven last plagues upon the earth (11:18–19; 15:5–8).

Associated with the final events of this earth's history is a final struggle between the powers of evil and the powers of righteousness. This final struggle has often been referred to as the battle of Armageddon, though the text refers to it as the battle of the great day of God Almighty (16:14). However, the actual combatants in the battle are named as the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet, along with the kings of the earth, and the Lamb, referred to as the King of kings and Lord of lords, along with His followers (16:13–14; 17:12–14; 19:11–16, 19–21). There is no description of an actual battle, only of the victory of the Lamb and the defeat of the evil powers (17:14; 19:20–21; cf. 16:18–19; 18:8–21). This is followed by great rejoicing in heaven, with praise to God for judging the oppressor and avenging the blood of His servants on her (19:1–4), followed in turn by the announcement in heaven of the marriage of the Lamb to His bride and an invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:7–9). The coming of Christ in glory in the clouds of

²⁶ LaRondelle, 197, citing His physical description in v. 1, says that He “is portrayed with Messianic characteristics.” One could even conclude from parallel descriptions, like those in Ezek 1:27–28; Dan 10:6; Rev 1:16; 2:18; and Matt 17:2, that they are *divine* characteristics.

²⁷ George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 125, while not necessarily concurring, states, “Many commentators feel that this angel must be Christ Himself, for the Bible does not teach the mediatorial role of angels in the prayers of God’s people.” It is true that a member of the Deity is often depicted in the OT as the Angel of God or the Angel of Yahweh (e.g., Gen 22:11–18; 31:11–13; Exod 3:2–7; Judg 2:1–5; 6:11–24; 13:3–22; Zech 3:1–5; 12:8), and this is frequently considered to be the pre-incarnate Christ. So it is not unreasonable to see a member of the Deity, especially Christ, represented as an angel. See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, one-vol. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983–85), 443.

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heaven is represented as occurring within the same general time frame, apparently at the end of the seventh bowl plague (16:15, 20; 6:14–17; 14:14–16; 19:11–16; cf. 1:7; 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20). The resurrection of the righteous also takes place at this time (20:4–6), before the thousand years during which they reign with Christ as kings and priests, participating in another judgment, apparently a review judgment of the wicked (v. 4), who have all been killed with the sword²⁸ that comes out of the mouth of Christ, the Rider on the white horse (19:15, 21).

In the eternal kingdom that is established at the time of Christ's return in glory to retrieve His followers, Jesus Christ and His Father co-rule the universe (11:15; 21:22–23; 22:1, 3–4), separate but equal. Despite their equality as the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, they have separate functions in the divine economy. Christ accepted the role of the Mediator between God and His creatures, the One who agreed from before the foundation of the world to come down and become incarnate in human flesh, to live and die for the salvation of humankind, and to be the active agent in interceding for those who would choose to follow Him. He communicates by the Spirit with His people and appeals to them to be faithful to the end, when He will reward the overcomers with all the privileges and blessings He can offer to them, including sitting with Him on His throne and, as kings and priests to God, assisting in judging those who have rejected His atoning work on their behalf. Finally, He will return in power and glory to establish the eternal kingdom in which He co-rules with His Father and receives the honor and worship of His loyal servants.

The Role of the Spirit. The role of the Spirit of God is much less fully described in the book of Revelation. One must be able first to understand the symbolic language in which some of the descriptions of the role of the Spirit are expressed.

²⁸ This sword must be the word of God (Heb 4:12), which will judge all at the last day (John 12:48). The Rider on the white horse is Himself called the Word of God in this very context, as well as Faithful and True, identifying Him with the Faithful and True Witness of 3:14. The word that comes out of the mouth of Christ is none other than the word of God. Cf. Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002), 177; Morris, 225; Wall, 232. It is the word of God and the testimony of Jesus that comprise the Two Witnesses out of whose mouths fire will proceed to devour their enemies, a probable allusion to Jer 5:14: "Behold, I am making My words in your mouth fire and this people wood, and it will consume them."

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Given the apparent symbolic value of the number seven in Revelation, signifying completion or perfection,²⁹ one can understand the attempt to portray the perfection of the Spirit by its seven-fold representation. The setting is clearly symbolic in 3:1, where the seven Spirits of God are paralleled with the seven stars in Jesus' right hand, as well as in 4:5, where the seven Spirits of God are represented as seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, and in 5:6, where the seven-fold Spirit of God is represented as seven eyes on the Lamb which are sent out into all the earth. The latter is a probable allusion to 2 Chron 16:9 and, especially, to Zech 4:10, which states, "These seven [lamps] are the eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth," thus equating the seven lamps of fire in Rev 4:5 with the seven eyes on the Lamb in 5:6. What we see then is that the function of the Spirit of God in His relation to the other divine Persons is being described rather than statements being made about His person, as if He were seven-fold.³⁰

In 3:18, 23 we have seen already how the eyes of the Son of God are significant for their ability to search the mind and the heart. This is the work of the Spirit, as indicated in 5:6 and its allusions to 2 Chron 16:9 and Zech 4:10. This work is closely associated in Zechariah with the seven lamps of fire which are burning before the throne in Rev 4:5 and with the function of the Two Witnesses in 11:3–4, which are also represented as the two olive trees and the two lampstands which stand before

²⁹ John J. Davis, *Biblical Numerology: A Basic Study of the Use of Numbers in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 116, after a thorough study of the significance of numbers in the Bible, states, "It is the view of this writer that the only number used symbolically in the Scripture to any degree with discernible significance, is the number 7." After listing the evidence for this conclusion, including not only biblical but broad contemporary extrabiblical use, he summarizes, "It is generally agreed that the fundamental idea conveyed by the symbolic use of seven is that of 'completeness' or 'perfection.' This conclusion is not based on the sum of any of its factors or any other arithmetical feature of the number, but its *usus loquendi*" (ibid., 119).

³⁰ Bauckham, 115, concludes, "The seven Spirits represent the fullness of the divine Spirit in relation to God, to Christ and to the church's mission to the whole world." At the same time, other commentators see the seven-fold representation of the Spirit as integrally related to the giving of seven messages to the seven churches, even His "involvement in the providences of God working through the numerous series of seven in the book" (Whidden, "Trinitarian Evidences," 249). See also Johnson, 599, and Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 63. However, F. F. Bruce, "The Spirit in the Apocalypse," in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament*, ed. Barnabas Lindars and Stephen S. Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1973), 599, disagrees that the seven Spirits are tied to the seven churches, pointing out that the seven churches disappear after chap. 3, while the seven Spirits are still prominent in chaps. 4 and 5.

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the Lord of the earth (cf. Zech 4:2–14). When Zechariah asks what the lamps and olive trees represent, he is told first, “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts” (4:6). Subsequently, the interpreter adds, “These are the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth” (v. 14). Revelation brings all of this together to depict the function of the seven-fold Spirit of God in the presence of the Lord of all the earth.³¹

According to the function of the Spirit in Revelation, it is His work to represent God and Christ to the people of earth, to make God’s work effective on earth, to bring the light of truth to the world, to engender prophecy and faithful witness, to search the hearts and minds of people, and to bring conviction of truth forcefully to the mind. Thus, the appeal is given at the end of each of the letters to the seven churches, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).³² The Spirit becomes the voice of conscience, the voice of Christ spoken internally to the heart and mind. He is depicted as searching the heart and mind in the sense that He is able to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart and to respond with the voice of conscience to direct the human agent in making wise choices, which will lead to life.

In the message of Christ to the church of Sardis, He introduces Himself as the One who has the seven Spirits of God (3:1) because the church of Sardis is nearly dead, and it is the Spirit who gives life to the dead. This is a clear teaching of Scripture (Ezek 37:14; John 6:63; Rom 8:2; 2 Cor 3:6), even implied by the word *πνεῦμα* itself, which signifies not only spirit but also breath, air, or wind (cf. John 3:8). So it is not surprising that Jesus would use this concept in His message to Sardis to stress the life-giving power of the Spirit, which they badly need.

In Rev 22:17, the Spirit and the Bride invite everyone who is thirsty to come and take of the water of life freely. The water of life flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb (22:1) and brings life wherever it goes (v. 2; cf. Ezek 47:1, 9, 12). In this invitation we see the work of the Holy Spirit in appealing to the hearts of people to come to life, which God offers freely from His throne of grace and mercy. We also see a reminder of the call of Jesus in John 7:37–38: “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said,

³¹ Bauckham, 111–13; cf. Bruce, 334–36.

³² Bauckham, 114.

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‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’” John interpreted that call to refer to the promise of the Holy Spirit (v. 39), which was sometimes represented in the Old Testament as water or rain for the thirsty ground (Isa 44:3; Joel 2:23, 28–29). Again, the Spirit is depicted in its function of bringing the life of God to those who need it, a very personal ministry.³³

The Spirit is represented several times in Revelation in its function of communicating a prophetic message through visions and auditions to the mind of the prophet. John records several events reminiscent of the experience of Old Testament prophets in which he was transported “in the Spirit” to view a scene which was a vision of realities that could not be seen with the literal eye (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10; cf. Num 24:2; Ezek 2:2; 3:12, 14, 24; 8:3–4; 11:1, 24; 37:1; 43:5).³⁴ The Spirit also speaks in Rev 14:13 to confirm the voice that comes from heaven regarding those who die in the Lord, adding, “. . . so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.” This testimony about the role of the Spirit is in harmony with the rest of Scripture about His role in communicating God’s messages to the hearts and minds of people on earth (Joel 2:28–29; 2 Pet 1:20–21). In Rev 19:10 the interpreting angel tells John that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Even if this is not a direct reference to the Holy Spirit,³⁵ it may be seen as an indirect reference, since the parallel text in 22:9 reveals that John’s brethren who have the testimony of Jesus are in fact the prophets, whose minds are inspired by the Holy Spirit with messages from God (cf. 2 Pet 1:21).

The Holy Spirit is never portrayed in Revelation as sitting on a throne, ruling, judging, receiving worship and adoration, or even sacrificing Himself to save fallen humanity.³⁶ Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit has a

³³ Whidden, “Trinitarian Evidences,” 258–59, argues for identifying the river of the water of life in 22:1 with the Holy Spirit, indicating the life-giving power of the Spirit that proceeds from the throne of God and the Lamb.

³⁴ Bauckham, 116, observes that John models his accounts of his prophetic experience and claims primarily on those of Ezekiel, and the effect of strategically placing his claims where he does in the book is “to attribute the whole of it to the agency of the divine Spirit.” Cf. Bruce, 340.

³⁵ Bauckham, 115, 119, and Bruce, 337, see it as a direct reference to the Spirit of God.

³⁶ This does not imply that the Holy Spirit does not have the prerogatives of God. It is important to remember that Revelation focuses primarily on the *function* of the Spirit rather than on His person or prerogatives. And since the Spirit’s primary function is to reveal the truth about God and the Lamb to human beings, it is natural that He will not

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very important role to play in the plan of salvation.³⁷ This role is equivalent in Revelation to the role which Jesus described for Him in John 14–16, a work of comforting and counseling, of reminding and convicting, of guiding and teaching, of doing the work of Christ in His absence³⁸ to help to prepare His followers for the judgment and for Christ's return to reward those who have been faithful to Him. The Spirit is an integral part of the triune Deity from whom grace and peace are communicated to the readers and hearers of the book of Revelation (Rev 1:4–5). The fact that He is never portrayed as sitting on a throne, ruling, or receiving worship and adoration should not be construed to imply that He is not ontologically equal with God. It reflects rather the unique *function* that the Spirit maintains in Revelation, a function that emphasizes a ministry on earth rather than an exalted state in heaven. As the Communicator of God's will and His grace to humanity, He does not exalt Himself, but He exalts the Father and the Son. Yet, implicitly, the Spirit is portrayed as a full member of the heavenly Trinity.

Conclusion

I have shown from a close study of the book of Revelation that there are three divine Persons who are introduced in the opening verses of the book as a Trinity composed of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Various names, titles, and designations are used throughout the book to describe these three divine Persons, and the text describes various activities in which They are engaged. These names, titles, and designations, presented in close relationship to each other, along with their complementary functions, demonstrate the fundamental ontological equality that exists between the three Persons of the Godhead. At the same time, the various designations and activities of each of the Three point very clearly to different roles or functions which They assume in the divine economy, especially with respect to the carrying out of the plan for humanity's salvation and the eradication of sin from the universe.

In this divine economy, the separation of functions makes for a more effective administration of the government of the universe, and each of

focus attention on Himself and His own prerogatives. Cf. John 14:26; 15:26; 16:8–15; 1 John 4:2; Bruce, 337–39.

³⁷ Bauckham, 109, observes that “the Spirit plays an essential role in the divine activity of establishing God's kingdom in the world.”

³⁸ Jesus told His disciples that it was to their advantage that He should go away so that the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, would be able to come to them (John 16:7).

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the members of the Godhead makes His own unique contribution. The Father is the figurehead Administrator, the Sovereign, Almighty God, who remains on the throne directing the affairs of the universe while the other Two are engaged in other activities, especially activities connected with the salvation of humanity.

The Son, on the other hand, agreed to come down to earth and be incarnated in human flesh, to live and die in order to redeem humanity from death by meeting the enemy on his own ground and overcoming him on earth as He had overcome him in heaven. The Son was victorious and was caught back up to God and to His throne, but He continues to intercede there for humanity before the bar of justice, rebuking the accusations of Satan against the faithful followers of Christ until the time comes for Him to destroy the evil powers, claim the kingdom He has already won, and reward His saints who have been faithful even to death.

The Spirit is less prominent in the book, yet is pervasively active nonetheless. His role is to communicate God's will to His people, both in the form of prophetic oracles and in the form of individual working upon the hearts and minds. He is Christ's personal representative on earth to carry on the work that Christ began when He was on earth. He is the One who brings spiritual life to the soul in a very personal way.

There should be no doubt from a close study of the book of Revelation that God is comprised of a trinity of Persons working as a team for the administration of the universe and the salvation of this fallen race. Although we do not have all the detailed answers we would like to have, the evidence is abundant for three divine Persons working together in a distribution of functions to accomplish their collective will for the eradication of sin from the universe and for the salvation of as many fallen human beings as absolutely possible in the process.

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