

Trinitarian Evidences in the Apocalypse

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Wesleyan New Testament scholar Rob Wall has suggested that if there is a Trinitarian doctrine manifest in the Apocalypse, it is “primitive.” By “primitive” Wall clearly suggests that it is quite elementary, especially when compared with the sophistication the doctrine assumes from the times of Tertullian, Athanasius, and Augustine on to the present.¹

While Professor Wall certainly has a point, there definitely appears to be a “trinitarian” backdrop (at bare minimum), if not a major theme which permeates the Revelator’s expression of the “Godhead.” The following study presents evidence in support of three important aspects of the Trinitarian concept of God: 1) the Godhead manifest as a personal and profoundly united threesome, 2) the full deity of Christ, and 3) the personhood of the Holy Spirit. The most apparent evidence comes from chapters one—three, four and five, twelve—fourteen, twenty-one, and twenty-two.

Evidences from Chapters 1–3

The Trinitarian nature of the God of the Apocalypse is immediately suggested in the introduction to the book: in 1:4-6 the entire vision is said to be “from Him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ.”²

It is quite evident that the Father, Spirit, and Son are in focus here. What is impressive about these verses is that they are so straight forward in introducing a heavenly Threesome. While the reference to “Jesus Christ” is undeniable, the

¹Opinions expressed during a discussion on the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the Apocalypse at a recent Joint Meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society and the Society for Pentecostal Studies held in Cleveland, TN, in March 1998.

²All biblical citations in this article are from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

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expressions “seven Spirits” and “Him who is and who was and who is to come” merit some further comment.

The most obvious reasons why the Holy Spirit is presented as the “seven Spirits” has to do with:

1) The numerology of the book (seven, along with twelve, three, four, and eight have obvious symbolic significance)—seven most likely denoting the completeness, or the perfecting and creative power of God.³

2) The implication that the Spirit speaks and is available to all of the seven churches.

3) The Spirit’s involvement in the providences of God working through the numerous series of seven in the book: seven churches (2:1–3: 22), seals (6:1–8:1), trumpets (8:6–11: 15), thunders (10:2-4), signs (12:1–14:20), and plagues (15:1–16).⁴

The appellation given to the Father, however, is a bit more complex. In vs. 8 and 10 the same being “who is and who was and who is to come” is also called “the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” “the Lord,” and “the Almighty.” Who is this “Lord” of verse 8? Is He the Father or the Son?

What is interesting about these titles is that in the succeeding verses (10, 13, 17, and 18) the expressions “Alpha and Omega” and “the first and the last” are also applied to Jesus. What is to be made of the use of these titles?

The first suggestion is that quite obviously the profound oneness of the Father and the Son is evidenced by the stunning fact that they are both described with a title which is most obviously drawn from the prophet Isaiah (44:6) to describe the self-existing Yahweh.

What is most important to note, however, is that in the Apocalypse the expressions “Him who is and who was and who is to come” and “the Almighty” are never applied explicitly to Jesus (compare 4:8; 11:15, 17; 16:5, 7).⁵ This is rather strong implicit evidence that the one called “Him who is and who was

³See the perceptive discussion of numerology in the book of Revelation by G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 58–64.

⁴While many of the older commentaries interpret the “seven spirits” as referring to the Holy Spirit, there is a split opinion between the two latest magisterial commentaries on the Revelation: David Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 52: Revelation 1–5* (Dallas: Word, 1997), provides an excellent summation of the positions of the major ancient and modern commentaries (33, 34) and goes on to clearly deny the position of the older commentaries; he suggests they refer to “the seven principal angels of God” (34). In contrast to Aune, G. K. Beale interprets them as “a figurative designation of the effective working of the Holy Spirit” (189).

⁵It should be carefully noted that in 11:17 the expression “who is and who was and who is to come” (NKJV) should, according to the best manuscript evidence, not have the phrase “who is to come.” This manuscript evidence is reflected in the NIV: “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was.” Ranko Stefanovic, in *The Backgrounds and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation 5* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews UP, 1996), suggests the reason for this is that the scene here depicted is one where the Father has come—“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (NIV, v. 15).

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and who is to come” (NJKV) in v. 4 refers neither to the Son nor the Spirit, but exclusively to God the Father.

In chapter one, both the Father and the Son are referred to as the “Alpha and the Omega, The Beginning and the End,” “the First and the Last” (vs. 8, 11, 17). As was previously pointed out, these expressions are drawn from Isaiah 44:6: “Thus says the LORD [Yahweh], the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me There is no God.’” This passage, addressed to Yahweh and applied by the Revelator to both the Father and the Son, is compelling evidence for their equality in nature and purpose.

Furthermore, such a seemingly easy equation of the identity of the OT God with the Jesus of the New Testament is stunning evidence for the almost unconscious and spontaneous ascription of all characteristics of the Father to the Son. This is an arresting phenomenon in Scripture which presents a constant source of consternation for the Arians.⁶

While the evidence for the divine unity of the Godhead and the full deity of the Son is quite compelling in the Apocalypse, suggestions for the personhood of the Spirit, while not as compelling, are still appealingly suggestive.

The initial evidence is found in the letters to the seven churches: each letter concludes with the same exhortation: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (2:7, 11, 17, 29 and 3:6, 13, and 22). Speech in the context of spoken messages in Scripture is almost always associated with communications that go on between persons. Thus the Spirit’s speaking to the churches suggests the personhood of the Spirit.⁷

Evidences from Chapters 4–5

These chapters contain the most dramatic (possibly compelling) evidence for a Trinitarian consciousness in the Apocalypse (implicit at the very least, if not explicit).

Ranko Stefanovic⁸ has persuasively argued that the best way to understand these chapters is to see them as portraying the enthronement of Christ as spiritual Israel’s king at the time of the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). This arresting vision draws on the imagery of the inaugural ceremony of the kings of Israel. In these ceremonies the king was invested with covenant authority by virtue of the fact that he held the Law of Moses (the covenant book) in his right hand.

The thrust of all this seems to denote (in Revelation four and five) that the covenant privileges of the people of God are being restored through the rule of

⁶Compare this usage in Revelation 1 with Hebrews 1:10–12, where the author of the book of Hebrews easily applies to Jesus a Psalm (102:1, 25–27) which was originally directed to the LORD [Yahweh]. This is also very strong evidence that, in the mind of the author of the book of Hebrews, the Christ of the New Covenant is the Yahweh of the Old Testament.

⁷Very similar instances of the Spirit speaking are found in 14:13 and 22:17.

⁸Stefanovic, see especially 1–8 and 292–301.

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the Triune God who reigns not only by virtue of the creative power of the Father (4:11), but through the redemptive exploits of the “Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David” (5:5), Who has become a bloodied, sacrificial Lamb (5:6).

Chapter 4

This stunning and comprehensive vision of the heavenly enthronement scene unfolds in the kind of Trinitarian manifestation which is so reflective of the early church’s growing convictions of the eternity and Triune oneness of the God of Israel. There is little doubt that the central figure of chapter four, called “the One who sat on the throne” (v. 2) and who is worshiped as “Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come,” has reference to God the Father.

The appellations in 4:2 are clearly congruent with the scene given in 1:4 and 8. Once more it should be pointed out that while Jesus shares the title the “first and the last” with the Father in chapter one, in the book of Revelation He is never called the “Almighty” or the “One Who was and is and is to come” (4:8).

Furthermore, it should be duly noted that before the throne (and closely associated with the twenty-four elders of v. 4 and the four living creatures of vs. 6-8) are “the seven lamps of fire (which) were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God” (v. 5). The very strong implication of this scene of the close association of the “seven Spirits” with the “twenty-four elders” and the “four living creatures” is that the Holy Spirit is the inspiring catalyst which provokes the hymns of praise found in vs. 8 and 11.

This vision of the Spirit is consistent with the later trinitarian convictions of the church that the Spirit has willingly subjected Himself to the Father (and the Son) to proceed forth from Them and to inspire the intelligences of the created order to acknowledge the “worthiness” of the Father as the Almighty Creator/Lord of the universe.

The Spirit, however, is not merely content to provoke hymns of adulation to the Father: he is also presented as profoundly bound up with the Son in His work as the chief Agent of redemption—the Lion/Lamb of Revelation five.

Chapter 5

There is little doubt that 1) chapter five is a continuation of the vision begun in chapter four and that 2) the Son is the key figure in focus as this great covenantal/inaugural scene reaches its climax.⁹ The kingly facet of the Son’s person is denoted through the imagery of the Lion (v. 5), yet the key imagery which mainly provokes the great hymns of worship in this chapter (vs. 9, 10, 12, 13) has to do with the scene which presents the Son as the atoning, sacrificial Lamb (vs. 6, 9–12).

⁹See Aune, 329–38, and Beale, 337, 340–48.

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A number of Trinitarian features of this vision must be carefully noted. First of all it should be observed that the “seven Spirits,” pictured as “seven lamps of fire burning before the throne” (4:5), are now envisioned in chapter five as the “seven eyes” of the slain “Lamb” and are called the “seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth” (v. 6).¹⁰

Such a close identity of the Spirit with the Son is quite congruent with the great Johannine understanding of the relationship between the Son and the Spirit outlined in the Fourth Gospel (especially chapters fourteen—seventeen): it is the Spirit which reaches out to enlighten the whole world, the One Who “will glorify Me [the Son], for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you” (John 16:14, 15).

Thus it seems fair to conclude that the powerful intent of the vision of chapter five is that the sacrificially redemptive exploits of the Lion-Lamb enable the Spirit to send with convicting power a laser beam of spiritual and redemptive light “into all the earth” (5:6).

Second, note that while the Lion/Lamb is found worthy to open the sealed book in the hand of the Father because He has been slain, He is worthy to be slain only because He is the Son. (This passage does not identify Him as such, but we remember Jesus Christ from earlier in the book, and we know He and the Lion/Lamb are one and the same.) No mere man could die a ransom for many (Matt 20:28). Only God could pay the price required for breaking His laws. But the Father could not die this death, so the Son took human flesh, indivisibly man and God, so God—the Son—could become the sacrificial Lamb and pay the cost.

The covenant privileges of the kingdom had been forfeited through Israel’s sinful unfaithfulness to the gracious, covenant keeping God; but the slain Lamb, sent as the Father’s co-regent Lion/Lamb, effects salvation and covenant restoration.¹¹

Third, the equality of the “Lord God Almighty” of chapter four and the Lion/Lamb of chapter five is strongly suggested by the fact that the worship of the Lord God Almighty by the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures in chapter four (vs. 8, 9) is now (in chapter five) directed to the Lion/Lamb (vs. 8, 9, 10, 14).

Fourth, not only are there the praises and adulation of the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, but this transcendent scene of heavenly worship is now augmented in chapter five with the praises of “ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousand of thousands” of angels (v. 11) and “every creature” in

¹⁰Once again, there is evidence of the Pentecostal setting of chapter five as the moment in redemptive history when Christ is enthroned as spiritual Israel’s king. One of the powerful effects of this enthronement is that the Spirit of God is “sent out into all the earth” (v.6); this phrase is absent in 1:4 and 4:5, strongly implying that the moment of enthronement is not portrayed until 5:6.

¹¹On the identity of the scroll, see Beale, 339–42.

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heaven and earth (v. 13)—all being directed to both “Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb” (v. 13).

As the implications of the redemptive exploits of the slain Lamb become apparent to all the orders of the created beings of the universe, there is a seemingly spontaneous manifestation of worship which is indiscriminately directed to the Father and the Son. Needless to say, this is powerful evidence of their profound equality as the divine co-regents of the restored kingdom. Yet, there are still more compelling implications arising from these scenes of worship.

Fifth, the most compelling evidence for the equality of the Father and the Son is contained in the hymns of chapters four and five. As has been pointed out, the hymns contained in 4:8 and 11 are directed to the Father, the “Lord God Almighty.” The first two hymns of chapter five are directed to the Son (vs. 9, 10 and 12) and the final hymn is directed to both the Father and the Son (v. 13). It should be carefully noted that the hymn of 5:12 is addressed to the Son and the final hymn of v. 13 is addressed to both the Father and the Son. What is truly compelling, though, is that both of these last two hymns ascribe predicates to the Son which, in chapter four, were ascribed to the Father. Though a bit repetitious, observe how these predicates are used in these hymns:

First, in v. 12 the “Lamb” is deemed “Worthy” “to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.” In v. 13, however, the final hymn ascribes to both the Father and the Son many of the same predicates (or characteristics and privileges) addressed to the Son in v. 12—especially “Blessing and honor and glory and power”—characteristics which have been ascribed to the Father in 4:11.

J. Ramsey Michaels has forcefully expressed the implications of these “paean(s) of praise.” Initially commenting on 5:12, Michaels says that

Again it is the Lamb that is worshiped, but what he “receives” is now more than the sealed scroll. To him are ascribed the very predicates (glory, honor, and power) which in 4:11 were reserved for God himself. Indeed the list has more than doubled in length. God and the Lamb are the recipients of precisely the same kind of homage from the heavenly court.

This equality between God and Christ reaches a crescendo in the fourth and last hymn, a paean of praise from “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, even all things that are in them.” Thus, using the vocabulary of worship rather than of speculative thought, the Book of Revelation has succeeded in elevating the familiar Davidic Messiah to the level of deity.¹²

The compelling evidence just presented for the full equality of the Father and the Son is the most forceful evidence in the entire book for the full deity of

¹²Glenn W. Barker, William L. Lane and J. Ramsey Michaels, *The New Testament Speaks* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 367.

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Jesus Christ. If Jesus has all of the “predicates” and royal prerogatives of the Father, then the full deity of the Father must be the full deity of the Son.

While the evidence for the full deity of Christ is strongest in these chapters, the suggestions of the personhood of the Spirit are appealing, though less compelling. In chapter five the “seven spirits” become the “seven eyes” of the Lamb “sent out into all the earth” (v.6). Eyes are most often associated with personal intelligence and thus provide some suggestive evidence for the reality of the Spirit as a personality.

Evidences from Chapters 11–14

A Literary/Structural Overview of the Apocalypse

Before speaking directly about the issue at hand, a few observations about the overall organization of the Apocalypse are in order. Recent scholarship has persuasively argued that the book is organized along the lines of a chiasmic structure.¹³ There also seems to be a rough division in the book, with chapters 1—11:14 covering the historical overview of God’s providential oversight through the history of the church and chapters 11:16—22:21 unfolding the dramatic events of the eschatological climax. Thus the first three major series of sevens—the seven letters (chapters two and three), the seven seals (chapters 6—8:1) and the seven trumpets (chapters 8:2—11:15) fall within the first half—the historical overview.¹⁴

The letters address the internal events of God’s dealing with His covenant people—the church, the Israel of God. The seals envision the exploits of the Lamb evangelizing through the witness of the church. The trumpets present the dire results of rejecting God’s redemptive offer given in the church’s proclamation of the “everlasting gospel”—beginning at Pentecost (chap. 5) and climaxing in 14:6–12.

While the first half of the book is introduced with a dramatic Trinitarian scene (1:4–8), climaxing with the vision of Jesus, the covenant priest of the Israel of God, walking among the lamp stands (1:11–20), the second half of the book also opens with a dramatic presentation of the Trinity. The introduction to the second half of the book is climaxed with the birth and ascension of Jesus, the “male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron” (11:16–12:17).

Trinitarian Evidences

The Trinitarian evidence in these three chapters is both “positive” and “negative.” There is not only a clear presentation of the true Trinity (“positive”), but also an arresting portrayal of a counterfeit trinity (“negative”) which seeks to

¹³Kenneth Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Worthington, OH: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1976), 43-52. Compare the comments of Beale, 108-51.

¹⁴See Jon Paulien, *What the Bible Says About the End-time* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1994), 105-08.

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foment a great false spiritual revival to counteract the genuine revival of Gospel proclamation spearheaded by the true Trinity.

Chapters 11:16–12:17 give an arresting overview of the eschatological crisis, introducing the main protagonists—the Father, the Son and the Spirit of the True Trinity and the “fiery red dragon”—the counterfeit father of the evil trinity. Chapter thirteen presents the great revival of false religion provoked by the false trinity: the false father “dragon” now goes off to seek the revivalistic support of the leopard-like sea beast (the false son of vs. 1–8) and the lamb-like land beast (the false holy spirit—the unholy spirit of vs. 11–18).

God’s response to the false revival portrayed in chapter thirteen is the great true revival of chapter fourteen with its climactic gospel proclamation and the subsequent manifestations of the righteous judgments of God on the allies and devotees of the false trinity. The entirety of chapter fourteen is permeated with the force of the Triune God actuating the proclamation of the everlasting Gospel through the three angels of 14:6–12.

“Positive” Evidences for the Trinity

The second half of the book, like the first half, opens with a grand vision of the “Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come” (11:17). Then is pictured the “great, fiery red dragon” who seeks to “devour” the “male Child” of the woman clothed with the sun. The “male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron” and “who was caught up to God and His throne” is clearly the Son. Now the key trinitarian question has to do with the identity of the Holy Spirit in these chapters.

While the Spirit is not expressly mentioned in chapters eleven and twelve, His presence is strongly suggested in 12:17, where God’s final people not only keep the covenant law, but also are furnished with the “testimony of Jesus Christ.” This “testimony” is plainly defined in the Revelation as the fruit of the mighty workings of the “spirit of prophecy.” Here is a clear reference to the office of the Holy Spirit as the divine power which inspires and makes effectual the work of the holy prophets (see 19:10 and 22:8, 9).

Thus the final half of John’s apocalypse is introduced against the backdrop of Trinitarian involvement in the resolution of the great controversy between the forces of the Gospel and its diabolic opposition.

The Trinitarian revelation, which has once again been introduced in chapters eleven and twelve, is further elaborated in chapter fourteen. The eschatological host (the 144,000) are pictured as triumphant on “Mount Zion” with the “Lamb” (14:1) before the “throne of God” (v. 5) as the “first fruits to God and to the Lamb” (v. 4). The balance of the chapter is filled with the story of the working of the Lamb and God the “Father” whose name is in the foreheads of the 144,000. Where, however, is the Holy Spirit in the portrayal of the great final revival of Gospel religion and proclamation?

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The presence of the Holy Spirit is both implicitly and explicitly portrayed in this chapter. First of all it must be carefully noted that the great revival of Gospel religion finds its climax in the proclamation of the three angels of vs. 6–12. The ripened characters of the 144,000 (vs. 1–5 and 12) are implicitly the fruit of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit which “seals” them with the very character of God in their foreheads (minds) and actions (“without fault before the throne of God” [v. 5]; compare with Ephesians 4:30).

Second, the presence of the Spirit is further implicitly suggested in that the proclamation of the three angels’ messages is the event which ripens “the harvest of the earth” (v. 15). Such ripeness not only involves the wheat (the righteous), but also the grapes (the rejecters of the “everlasting Gospel”). Behind all of this imagery are the phenomena of the former and latter rains, especially the latter rain—a clear allusion to the converting and transforming work of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2).

The explicit evidence for the person of the Spirit is found in v. 13: here the “Spirit” is speaking blessings on the martyrs, comforting them so that they may now “rest from their labors.” Finally, the people of God are assured “their” heroic “works” of witness will not be lost in the sound and fury of the last great crisis, but will “follow them.”

“Negative” Evidence for the Trinity

In opposition to God, the Man Child of the woman, the comforting work of the Spirit, and God’s covenant keeping people is a powerful counterfeit trinity—the beast, the dragon, and the false prophet (16:13).

This portrayal finds its climax in chapter thirteen. Clearly the “Dragon” is a parody of God the Father. The Leopard-like beast who receives a deadly wound and comes back from the dead is surely a parody of the person and the work of the Son. The lamb-like land beast with the “dragon” nature and speech is most certainly a parody of the Holy Spirit as He seeks to exalt the Leopard-like sea beast with the deadly wound.¹⁵

Furthermore, another arresting feature of this unholy three is their relentless opposition to the covenant law of God—especially the commandments contained in the first table of the covenant code.¹⁶ The great crisis of chapters thirteen and fourteen has to do with worship, and the great principles of divine worship are contained in the first four of the ten commandments. The counterfeit trinity is all about false worship, which always denigrates the law of God—especially the first four commandments (14:6, 7 and 12).

¹⁵On the concept of parody in Revelation 12 and 13, see Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 254 ff., and Beale, 690–92 and 707 ff.

¹⁶See Paulien’s penetrating portrayal of the unholy trinity’s severe and subtle opposition to the law of God, especially the commandments of the first table of the decalogue, in Section Four of his *What the Bible Says about the End-Time*.

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In notable contrast, the Holy Trinity is presented as fomenting a great true revival in chapter fourteen which eventuates in the worship of the creator God through the deep experience of the 144,000 obeying the first four commandments of the covenant code (14:12; cf. 12:17). Thus the entire eschatological crisis is a Trinitarian crisis of cosmic proportions!

So here we have both the positive and negative evidence, the implicit and explicit portrayals of the great Triune God in the eschatological center of the book. All of these scenes prepare the way for the final disposition of sin and sinners and the establishment of the everlasting covenant kingdom of the restored Israel of God.

Evidences from Chapters 21–22

In 21:1–6 there is one of the most touching scenes of the entire book. The “first earth had passed away” and “a new heaven and a new earth” had come forth with their “New Jerusalem” capital. The One “who is and who was and who is to come” (1:4 and 4:8) has now literally “come” to the earth with the New Jerusalem and is dwelling with His people.

These verses undoubtedly have reference to the Father God who is portrayed as doing the fatherly thing—wiping “away every tear from their eyes.” His very comforting presence seems to have completely banished “death,” “sorrow,” “crying,” and “pain.”

Furthermore, it is instructive to compare this scene with that found in 7:17, where the “great multitude” of the redeemed are pictured as before the throne and “the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

What is portrayed here is a telling picture of the close working relationship between the Father and the Son in bringing comfort to the redeemed after their pilgrimage through the kingdom of the Devil and sin. At the very least this is suggestive evidence for the profound “oneness” in purpose of the first two members of the Godhead.

Yet once more in 21:22, 23 is presented a vision of Their profound oneness: referring to the glorious “New Jerusalem,” the revelator “saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.” Here the oneness of the Godhead is portrayed primarily through the cultic imagery of the temple. The OT temple finds its anti-typical significance coming to culmination with the compelling suggestion that all the temple imagery ultimately points to triumphant redemption through the united efforts of the Father and the Son.

Not only are the united Father and Son displacing the temple, but They are also now envisioned as bringing to completion their full triumph over the forces of evil and sin. In the pentecostal coronation scene of chapter five, the vision climaxes with the worship of “every creature” being directed to “Him who sits on the throne (the Father) and to the Lamb” (v. 13).

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Now, however, this theme of the throne reaches its fullest consummation in 22:1–3: the throne is called, for the first time in the book, “the throne of God and of the Lamb.” Now it is explicit: the Father and the Son are full co-regents, both seated on the throne sharing all of the covenant prerogatives which had been secured through their common redemptive efforts (achieved through their vanquishing of the usurping forces of evil and restoring the covenant blessings of the redeemed).¹⁷

This vision of the co-regency of the Father and the Son is the final piece of compelling evidence for Christ’s full deity. Clearly the Son shares all of the royal prerogatives of the eternal Father on the Throne of the universe. Such royal prerogatives and shared rulership of full equality argues coercively for the full deity of the Father being shared with the Son. This is the climactic scene of the entire book and the Father and the Son are one and equal. What is said about the nature and the authority of the One can be said of the Other.

Quite obviously the enthroned Father and Son are in focus in these chapters; but is the Holy Spirit completely absent? Is the Spirit in this scene of glorious triumph? There is suggestive evidence that the Spirit is once again doing the two things in this setting which are very typical of the redemptive functions He has exercised all along:

1) He is drawing lost humanity back into covenant relationship with the Godhead, especially as He works through “the bride,” the church in its gospel mission: “And the Spirit and the bride say ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say ‘Come!’” (22:17).

2) The Spirit works, but He works as He finds currency in proceeding forth from the throne of the Father and the Son. Is it going too far to suggest that the “river of Life” which proceeds from the throne (22:1) is emblematic of the life giving power of the Spirit who bestows the grace of God on a world in desperate need of restoration?

There is both Biblical and Jewish literary evidence for identifying the “river of Life” with the Holy Spirit.¹⁸

Biblical Evidence

Just about every commentator has noted that the “river of Life” imagery of Revelation 22:1 is drawn primarily from Ezekiel 47:1–12 and Zechariah 14:8–11.

¹⁷Stefanovic suggests that until this scene in the book, there is the subordination of Christ to the Father. Now, however, with the full triumph of the Gospel of the true Trinity over the false Gospel of the counterfeit trinity, Christ is no longer subordinated to the Father (suggestions shared in personal conversations, to be published in a forthcoming commentary).

¹⁸The earliest of the major, modern commentators to take this position was H.B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices* (London: MacMillan, 1906), 294, 295. Compare Mounce, 398.

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Ezekiel 47:1–12 records a vision of a flow of water which erupts from the portal of the temple in Jerusalem.¹⁹ Using the interpretive principle of the analogy of scripture, Keil states the case quite succinctly in arguing for a figurative interpretation of the water:

“Water,” which renders the unfruitful land fertile, and supplies refreshing drink to the thirsty, is used in Scripture as a figure denoting blessing and salvation, which had been represented even in Paradise in the form of watering (cf. Gen. xiii.10). In Isa. xii.3, “and with joy ye draw water from the wells of salvation,” the figure is expressly interpreted. And so also in Isa. xlv. 3, “I will pour water upon the thirsty one, and streams upon desert; I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring:” where the blessing answers to the water, the Spirit is named as the principal form in which the blessing is manifested, “the foundation of all other salvation for the people of God” (Hengstenberg).²⁰

Furthermore, Ezekiel 36:24–27 speaks of the sprinkling of “clean water,” and this cleansing water is closely identified with the Spirit placed within the stony flesh that creates a “heart of flesh” which is in full conformity with God’s “statutes.”

The vision of the “day of the Lord” in Zechariah 14:8–11 is very similar to Ezekiel 47, with “living waters” flowing from Jerusalem. These waters flow both towards the Dead and the Mediterranean Seas and have a restorative effect on the “land” and the city of Jerusalem. The same principle of analogy that applies to Ezekiel 47 would also apply to this passage.

As for the New Testament evidence for “water” being emblematic of the Spirit, it is interesting that the most persuasive analogous references are from the Johannine literature: “water” is clearly associated with the workings of the Holy Spirit (see John 7:37–39 and compare with 3:5, 4:10–14 and I John 5:8–10). The clearest reference is John 7:37–39: “He who believes on Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit” (vs. 38, 39).

If one concedes the common authorship of the Fourth Gospel and the book of Revelation, the interpretation of the “river of life” as the Holy Spirit which proceeds from the throne becomes even more appealing.

Jewish Literary Evidence

First, from the Dead Sea Scrolls we have the following in 1 QS 4:21:

He will cleanse him of all wicked deeds with the spirit of holiness; like purifying waters He will shed upon him the spirit of truth (to cleanse him) of all abominations and injustice. And he

¹⁹Compare with Joel 3:18: “a spring will go out from the house of the LORD”

²⁰Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentaries on the Old Testament: Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 2:360.

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shall be plunged into the spirit of purification, that he may instruct the upright in the knowledge of the Most High.²¹

Furthermore, in *Peskita Rabbati* 1, 2, “water from the earthly temple is interpreted as the Holy Spirit . . . Likewise, *Odes Sol.* 6:7-18 portrays a ‘river’ and ‘living water’ that quench the thirst of the people and that are directly associated with the ‘Holy Spirit’.”²²

While the evidence for the interpretation that the “river of Life” pictured in Rev. 22:1, 2 has reference to the Holy Spirit is not coercive, it must be emphasized that this scene is fully congruent with the Trinitarian claims of the church and the thrust of Scripture that the Spirit gladly comes in redemptive procession from the Father and the Son.²³

Conclusion

The evidence for the oneness and the equality of the Father and the Son and the close association of the Spirit with them is quite compelling and strongly suggests that one of the great permeating themes of the Apocalypse is the Triune nature of the Godhead. Certainly the evidence for the divine unity of the Three and the full deity of Christ is more compelling than that given for the Personhood and full deity of the Holy Spirit. But the close association of the Spirit with the Father and the Son in these four major settings (chapters 1—3, 4 and 5, 11—14 and 21 and 22) and the trappings of personhood ascribed to the Spirit (speaking and intelligent, personal eyes) provide credible evidence of the Spirit’s full deity and personality.

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²¹Trans. by Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York: Allen Lau/Penguin, 1997), 103. Compare this citation with the following from 1 QSB 1.3–4: “(3) May Adonai bless thee [from his holy dwelling-place]. May He open for thee from the heights of heaven the everlasting spring (4) which shall never run dry.” (Also translated by Vermes, cited in A. Dupont-Sommer, *The Essene Writings from Qumran* [Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973], 110).

²²Beale, 1105.

²³Beale seems to be somewhat attracted to this interpretation, and his conclusions are appealing: “If the waters symbolize the Spirit, as in the similar portrayal in John 7:37-39, then Rev. 22:1 is an early picture of the later Christian confession that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son . . . As in Ezekiel 47, the living water flows from the temple, though now God and the Lamb are the temple (21:22). Though the Holy Spirit may be in mind, the water metaphor primarily represents the life of eternal fellowship with God and Christ, which is borne out by the way 22:3-5 develops 22:1, 2” (1104).