

“Seven Spirits of Revelation?”

I recently encountered a group that believes the seven spirits of Revelation are seven aspects of the Holy Spirit ... and the Trinity is actually a “nine-ity” (for lack of a better word). I obviously do NOT believe this hogwash, but I was wondering if this belief has ever been promulgated in history. I personally believe it’s a new heresy, but I wanted to check.

The interpretation of the “seven Spirits” in the book of Revelation as a reference to the Holy Spirit is actually not new. A number of interpreters throughout church history have adopted this position as their preferred view. However, it is by no means the ONLY view that has been advanced throughout church history.

John refers to the “seven Spirits” in Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 4:5 and 5:6. William Barclay points out that the Jews “talked of the seven angels of the presence,” citing 1 Enoch 90:21. Of course John does refer to seven angels of the seven churches (1:20). What he means by “angels” is not entirely clear. He could be referring to the pastors of the churches, or he might be referring to guardian angels of the churches. Thus, some commentators believe the reference to the “seven Spirits” is a reference to seven holy angels before the throne of God.

Barclay mentions that another “explanation connects the idea of the seven Spirits with the fact of the seven churches.” Since seven is often used as a number of completion, or perfection, in the Bible (and in the book of Revelation in particular) it is thought that the “seven” churches are representative of all churches, each of which has a share in God’s Holy Spirit in order to carry out its ministry to the world.

A third view ties the reference to the “seven Spirits” to Isaiah 11:2. The Greek translation of this verse in the Septuagint reads: “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and piety; by this spirit He shall be filled with the fear of God.” In this view, the “seven Spirits” of Revelation refer to this sevenfold ministry of the Holy Spirit, particularly evidenced in the life of Jesus, the Messiah.

Which of these views is correct? I honestly don't know. Maybe the correct view is none of the above! It's important to point out, however, that those who see the “seven Spirits” as a reference to the Holy Spirit would not typically endorse any but a Trinitarian view of God. Barclay cites Beatus as having said, “The Spirit is one in name but sevenfold in virtues.”

Thus, while I personally do not know what John intends by his reference to the “seven Spirits”, those who interpret this as referring to the Holy Spirit are usually not heretics. They could be, of course; but one need not reach that conclusion from this particular interpretation. It is actually an old and well-accepted view.

Hope this helps. God bless you!

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries