

Over the past three years we at *Affirmation & Critique* have worked steadily to present our views concerning the divine persons of the Holy Trinity. We have devoted roughly one year each to the Trinity, to Christ, and to the Spirit. As we wrote, we made frequent mention to something which some find a bit arcane in our writings, namely, God's economy, or the divine economy. Beginning with this issue of *A & C*, we wish to fully explore and fully explain what we mean when we speak about the economy of God. This issue, and the next few, will present God's economy from a number of perspectives, which we hope will fully persuade you our reader of the validity of this important concept in the divine revelation.



The Biblical Basis

The most direct reference to God's economy is in 1 Timothy 1:3-4, where the apostle advises his younger co-worker "not to teach different things nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God's economy, which is in faith." Although the reference is quite general, its position at the opening of this Epistle seems to indicate that it refers to the whole of the Christian endeavor and serves as a succinct label for God's entire activity. God's economy here is in contrast to the whole array of Jewish and rabbinical thought, the "myths and unending genealogies," which occupied much of the religious mind in Paul's day. These, maintained the apostle, were not to be given free way at the expense of the more important goal, the economy of God. Further, God's economy here is characterized as being "in faith," that is, "initiated and developed in the sphere and element of the faith" (Witness Lee, *Recovery Version New Testament*, ad loc.), which is the domain of operation for the New Testament believers. Though this instance of the phrase *God's economy* may seem casual, it should not be considered trivial; rather, it should be taken as the apostle's way of referring to God's full operation among and in His New Testament believers.

Recourse to the meaning of the Greek term is helpful here. The Greek word *oikonomia* (from *oikos*, 'house', and *nomos*, 'rule, law') is, of course, the source of the English word *economy*, but unlike the English word, it refers more simply to a plan or administrative scheme. In the ancient world, the word referred particularly to the household arrangement of large estates, over which a chief steward (Gk. *oikonomos*) was set (cf. Luke 16:1). In these ancient households the wealth of the household was distributed to the members of the household according to "economies" that specified the distributions of goods. An "economy" in this sense, then, was an administrative and distributive arrangement for the well-being of the household. The word also refers naturally to the responsibility of the person entrusted with it, the steward, and is therefore typically rendered "stewardship" when it is mentioned in reference to the steward (cf. Luke 16:2-4; 1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:25). Paul's use of the term is borrowed from this linguistic background. Specifically, in reference to God's move with mankind, *oikonomia* refers to God's "plan of salvation," "administration of salvation," "order of salvation" (*TDNT* V:152).

In two other places, Paul uses the term in much the same meaning as 1 Timothy 1:4. Writing to the Ephesians, he speaks of "the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ" (1:10), which again is a comprehensive way of speaking of the whole endeavor of God with mankind in time. Here Paul refers to the goal of God's activity with man to head up all things in Christ as an economy. Again, the reference should not be taken as trivial, for here Paul is referring to the great universal plan of God. Later in

Writing to the Ephesians, Paul speaks of "the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ" as a comprehensive way of speaking of the whole endeavor of God with mankind in time.

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the same Epistle, Paul declares that he was commissioned "to enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God" (3:9). This also is hardly a trivial reference, for it characterizes both the full intent of Paul's commission and, more importantly, the full compass of God's hidden plan.

In both passages in Ephesians Paul closely associates the economy with the notion of mystery. In chapter one he speaks of the economy as issuing from the mystery of God's will (vv. 9-10), and in chapter three he refers to "the economy of the mystery" (v. 9), indicating that the economy derives from and is based upon the mystery. *The mystery* is no doubt a reference to the mystery of God's will in chapter one; thus, in essence, Paul is repeating in chapter three the same notion first introduced in chapter one. The mystery of God's will is an all-extensive label for the full counsel and intent of God, and the economy of the mystery is the plan or arrangement that God uses to accomplish His will. Hence, the economy of God, far from being trivial, appears to be the special term used by Paul to refer to God's full plan and arrangement for the accomplishment of His eternal will. It is a plan that was hidden in God as a mystery before it was revealed to His holy apostles and prophets (3:4-5).

A Brief Presentation of the Divine Economy

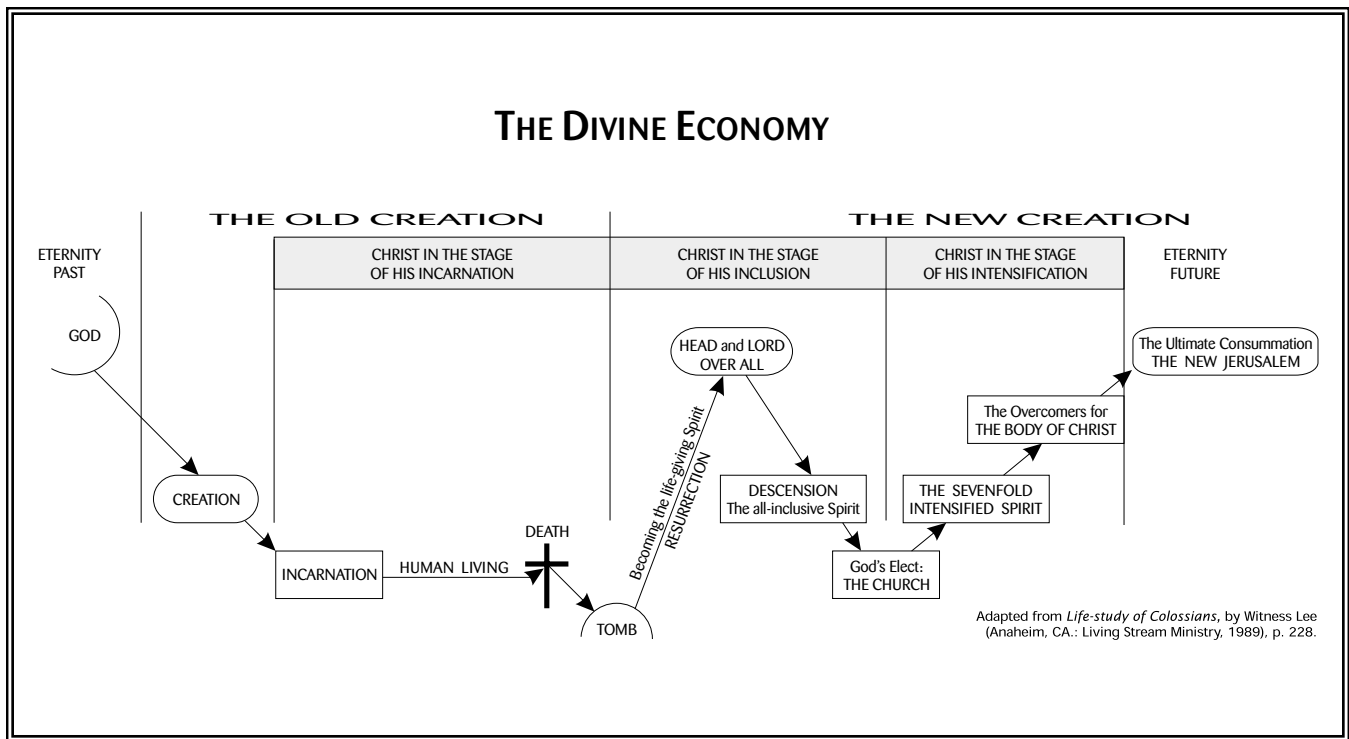
While the articles in this issue of *A & C* as well as those in the next few issues will fully develop our understanding of the divine economy, we felt it would be good to present in a brief way an overall description of this economy. The chart accompanying this article illustrates the major steps in God's economy as we understand it. In this article we wish to highlight these steps and point out those matters that make our understanding of the divine economy unique.

First, it is most important to note that the divine economy is actually the account of Christ in His move in and with mankind. Our capital realization concerning God's economy is that Christ is not only the major participant therein but that He is both the centrality and universality thereof. Everything that occurs in God's economy occurs as an action by Christ or as an experience that Christ undergoes. All of God's economy is therefore centered on Christ, and we must say that apart from Christ there is no economy of God. Paul declares that Christ must "have the first place in all things" (Col. 1:18), and God's economy not only assures that but also operates according to that. In this sense, we speak of a process that Christ undergoes, understanding that as to His eternal deity He can undergo no change, but as to His being a man He certainly has experienced changes through incarnation, death, and resurrection.

Because the divine economy takes Christ as its centrality and universality, the defining moment of this economy is the incarnation. Certainly God operated prior to Christ's incarnation, but all His operation before the incarnation was through and for Christ. Creation sprang into being not so much for creation's sake but for the sake of Christ becoming a man to fulfill the very foundational desire within God to have His expression and thus to be glorified. Here we must notice something that may not be unique in our understanding of the divine economy but something that certainly bears an emphasis different from that of many other understandings today: Christ became a man not merely for redemptive purposes but more importantly as the only actual fulfillment of God's original intention in creating man, that is, to bear God's image and express His dominion in the created realm.

In the creation of the physical universe Christ is the active instrument. "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not one thing came into being which has come into being" (John 1:3). Christ was the means by which the physical universe came into being, but on a deeper level, "in Him all things were created, in the heavens and on the earth" (Col. 1:16); that is, the creation of the universe came forth in the virtue, power,





and characteristic of Christ's person. Thus, He is not simply instrumental in creation, but more intrinsically He lends to the created realm His own characteristic (cf. Rom. 1:20). Further, the writer of Hebrews, quoting Psalm 102:25, identifies Christ the Son as the Creator of the physical universe: "You in the beginning, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Your hands" (1:10). Here Christ participates in the agency of God to create the physical realm. In every way, Christ is the centrality and universality of God in creation.

Throughout the period of the Old Testament, God's economy is primarily shadowed and typified, and not practically fulfilled as it is in the New Testament age. While the Old Testament can be any number of things to those who study it, intrinsically and spiritually it testifies concerning Christ (John 5:39). On the day He rose from the dead, the Lord Jesus unveiled to two of His disciples that the Old Testament contains a thorough testimony concerning Him (Luke 24:27), and the long of history of Old Testament study confirms this. From the earliest Christian times to our own day, expositors have dug out countless prophecies, types, shadows, and figures of Christ from the Old Testament. Certainly not all students of the Old Testament would agree with all the correspondences to Christ that have been proposed, but a broad enough base of exegesis has been established to confirm that, at least for the New Testament believers, the Old Testament can be considered just as much a Christian testament as it is an ancient Jewish one. Seen from the perspective of the divine economy, the Old Testament period provides a people and a land through which the incarnated God could come. Paul speaks in this way

concerning the significance of Israel in the Old Testament: "Who are Israelites, whose are the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the law and the service and the promises; whose are the fathers, and out of whom, as regards what is according to flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen" (Rom. 9:4-5). It is Christ who gives value to both the people and the history of Israel. All things in the Old Testament look to the coming Christ as their fulfillment and goal. On the physical level ("as regards what is according to flesh"), Israel provided the race from which the incarnate God would spring forth and the land in which Christ would live, move, and act, but on the historiographical level, Israel lived out a history that illustrates the divine economy as it would ultimately be experienced and lived out by God's New Testament believers in their union with Christ. Paul realized that this was part of the significance of Israel's history: "Now these things occurred as figures of us" (Gk. 1 Cor. 10:6).

While the Old Testament is typical and illustrative, the reality of the divine economy is fully expressed in the New Testament. As we have mentioned above, the initiation of God's economy in reality is the incarnation of Christ. Through incarnation God became a man, and the divine economy became the living and activity of a human being. The purpose of the incarnation, we contend, was not merely redemptive, though redemption was a necessary accomplishment of Christ's earthly ministry. In the incarnation something much deeper occurred—divinity was brought into humanity, that is, God was mingled with man.¹ The union of God and man in Christ was not merely for an eternally efficacious redemption (Heb. 9:12)

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but to bring God and man into a new relationship and existence with each other. Now God dwells as a man, and man participates in God. Through the incarnation the full purpose for the creation of humankind was realized in the individual life and living of Christ, and the way was opened through the death and resurrection of Christ for all human beings—though only through faith in Christ—to enter into the proper status and function of humankind ordained by God.

The human living of Christ was the perfect fulfillment of the creation mandate for humankind to be in the image of God and after the likeness of God, having God's dominion on the earth (Gen. 1:26). Everything He did everywhere He went was according to God. He did not live according to the natural and physical realm but according to the divine and mystical realm, in which He coinheres with the Father and moves by the Spirit (John 10:30; 14:9; Matt. 12:28). By such a living, He fully manifested the attributes of God through the virtues of man and demonstrated what and how a human being should be. Through His human living, He prepared a "mold" that all His believers could eventually be conformed to (cf. Eph. 4:20-21), so that they too would be able to live God out, as He Himself had done. In His human living He lived God out hypostatically, that is, as One who exists eternally as God; in our human living, we the regenerated believers live God out by faith and through grace, that is, as ones having been brought into union with Him, indwelt by Him as the Spirit, and drawing on His divine nature as the source for our spiritual existence as God-men. Thus, as seen from the perspective of the divine economy, the human living of Christ was the full compounding of human experience into the God-man so that His believers may be able to also live as He lives, expressing the attributes of the Father in the virtues of humanity.

In His death, Christ obtained an eternal redemption for mankind (Matt. 27:33-50; Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:12). This was according to the divine economy to open the way for all the believers in Christ to be brought back to God. Based on His redemptive death, those who believe in Christ are justified by God and, hence, are reconciled to Him. The redemption that Christ accomplished is once for all (7:27; 10:10), but it is applied individually to God's people as they believe in Him. But redemption and the ensuing reconciliation are not the end of salvation according to the revelation in the Bible. "For if we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled" (Rom. 5:10). For the believer, the fuller experience of salvation in His life follows the initial experiences of redemption, justification, and reconciliation. This fuller experience depends on a deeper realization of what happened when Christ first died then rose from the dead. Being the God-man, Christ lends an eternal value to everything He does. This is true as well with His death. While all other human beings die individually and bear no effect upon others when they die, Christ died as the incorporation of all humanity, and indeed as the incorporation of all creation, and involved all humanity and creation with His death. "We have judged this, that One died for all, therefore all died" (2 Cor. 5:14). Hence, in God's economy the redemptive death of Christ had also this deeper significance, that it terminated the old creation and all that is related to it—Satan, the world, sin, the old man, and the law with its ordinances (Heb. 2:14; John 12:31; 1:29; Rom. 6:6; Eph. 2:15). Further, through His death Christ spread abroad His life. "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). The life by which He lived became the life by which His believers live, and the one grain becomes the many grains. On the one hand, He died; but more significantly He also released the divine life for all who would believe in Him. This dual issue—redemptive death and regenerative life—are symbolized in John's account by the image of the deceased Christ on the cross from whom the blood and water flowed (19:34). Redemption is surely a necessary item in the divine economy, and we can never underestimate its value; but redemption is only the base for the greater issue of Christ's death, which is the release of His divine life for the full and organic salvation of those who believe in Him.



After His death, Christ's body lay in the tomb for three days, but His soul departed to Hades (Luke 23:43; Acts 2:24, 31; Eph. 4:9; Matt. 12:40). Prophetically, David spoke of Him exulting in Hades and victorious in death: "Therefore my heart was made glad and my tongue exulted; moreover, also my flesh will rest in hope, because You will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor will You permit Your Holy One to see corruption" (Psa. 16:9-10, quoted in Acts 2:26-27). Peter elsewhere tells us that after His death and before His resurrection, Christ went and proclaimed the victory of His death "to the spirits in prison," referring probably to the fallen rebellious angels (1 Pet. 3:19). In the physical realm, His body lay quietly in the sealed tomb, and the old creation, it seemed, rested in sabbath (cf. Luke 23:52-56); but in the divine and mystical realm, God's economy moved onward, and Christ in Hades rejoiced in His coming resurrection, victoriously declaring the triumphs wrought by His death.

When Christ rose from the dead, God vindicated His work on the cross and demonstrated His approval of Christ's redemptive death. Christ was raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25). But again this is only one side of the full significance of Christ's resurrection. It is imperative that we realize the judicial effect that Christ's resurrection had, but even more than His death, His resurrection has organic significances as well. The first of these is that through resurrection Christ uplifted His humanity into the divine sonship. "Who was designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1:4). Christ, the eternal Son, is eternally God, and in His divinity He needed no designation as such. But in becoming a man, His humanity was not brought into the divine sonship until His resurrection from the dead. In resurrection He is not only the eternal Son, only divine and only Begotten from the Father (John 1:14), but now also the firstborn Son, both divine and human, and the Son of God both in His divinity and in His humanity. "God has fully fulfilled this promise to us their children in raising up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'You are My Son; this day have I begotten You'" (Acts 13:33). For Christ, the resurrection was a begetting whereby His humanity was brought into the divine sonship.

Further, in resurrection Christ became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b). We have presented our views on this elsewhere in *A & C* (see particularly the main articles in I:4, October 1996), but here we should say that unlike many students of the Bible today, we feel compelled to take the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:45 in their most trinitarian sense. Typically expositors understand that here Paul is referring merely to a spiritual state of existence that Christ entered into after His resurrection. Where formerly He had been merely physical, in resurrection He became spiritual. Theologically, they maintain, it is inappropriate to say that Christ became the Spirit, because traditional theology emphasizes the distinction among the persons of the Trinity. But two facts argue against this interpretation. First, Paul describes Christ in resurrection as a "life-giving Spirit." But elsewhere in the New Testament the third of the Trinity is said to give life (John 6:63; 2 Cor. 3:6; Rom. 8:11). Does Christ then give life separately from the Spirit who gives life? Is He then a second life-giving Spirit? Certainly not, and this because of the second fact that argues against the typical interpretation. While traditional theology emphasizes the distinction among the persons of the Trinity, it has never allowed distinction to the point of separation. It is a fundamental tenet of trinitarian thought that the three of the Trinity are never separate and that one never acts independently of the other two. Every single act by one is an operation of the entire Trinity. Romans 8:11 shows that the single operation of giving life to the believers is an action of the entire Trinity: "And if the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you." Thus, the Son cannot give life apart from the Spirit who gives life nor apart from the Father who is the source of the life that is given. In the Gospel of John the Lord Jesus declares that He gives life (5:21; 6:27; 10:28; 17:2), but He does so through the Spirit who gives life. While He was on the earth, the Lord Jesus was not independent of the Spirit, even though He was hypostatically distinct from Him. The

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Lord was conceived of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35) and was thus intrinsically related to Him. He began His ministry by being baptized in the Spirit (Matt. 3:16) and was anointed with the Spirit for His service (Luke 4:18-21). He lived and moved by the Spirit throughout His earthly ministry (Matt. 4:1; 12:28). On the cross He offered Himself through the eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14), and when He rose from the dead, again the Spirit was intimately involved (Rom. 8:11a). These were not options that Christ chose for His life and living but trinitarian imperatives that issue from the eternal existence of the Godhead. In His living on the earth, the Son lived in the physical realm in and by the Spirit. He was certainly distinct from the Spirit but just as certainly not separate from the Spirit. In His resurrection, the Spirit bears Him forth to the believers and makes Him real in the world. Through resurrection Christ has become the life-giving Spirit, not in the sense that He ceases to be the Son or in the sense that He ceases to be distinct from the Spirit, but in the sense that what He was before His death and resurrection is now borne and communicated through the Spirit. The early apostles understood and expressed this fundamental relationship between Christ and the Spirit both in His incarnation and human living and in His existence after resurrection, and it is this relationship that Paul expresses in 1 Corinthians 15.

Finally, in resurrecting from the dead, Christ accomplished the regeneration of all His chosen people. As with the other many aspects of His death and resurrection, the regeneration of the believers has both a spiritual, factual aspect, which was accomplished by Christ once for all at His resurrection, and an experiential aspect, which is applied to God's chosen people individually when they believe. Peter tells us that God "according to His great mercy has regenerated us unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). *Through* here should not be denied its full sense; we were regenerated not merely based upon Christ's resurrection but actually through it. Just as through the incarnation humanity entered into union with divinity, and through Christ's death humanity died, so also through His resurrection, humanity was reborn, regenerated, with the divine life and nature so that human beings may live to God. As with the effects of Christ's redemptive death, the effects of His resurrection are not applied universally but only upon those who believe in Him. When Christ died, humanity died with Him. This is the actual state of humankind before God, dead with the crucified and buried Christ. But Christ rose from the dead, bearing up humanity with Him in the newness of divine life, with which He now imbued it. All God's chosen people through faith enter into that newness of life and the full experience of that accomplished fact. Those who do not believe in Christ lie in death in old Adam. Hence, faith forms the effective bridge between the spiritual fact of Christ's accomplishment and the subjective experience of God's chosen people, and the absence of faith prevents the unbelieving from entering into this spiritual accomplishment. Through the resurrection of Christ God's chosen people are regenerated to become the many sons of God and are constituted the many members of His mystical Body (John 1:12; Rom. 8:16; 12:4-5). Formerly, before His resurrection, Christ was, as to His divinity, the only begotten Son of God; now in resurrection, He is the firstborn Son among many brothers (8:29). Formerly, He was the individual Christ, the single God-man, expressing the attributes of God through the virtues of His humanity in His human living; now in resurrection, He is the Head of the Body, the church, which is His corporate expression to manifest again the attributes of God through the virtues of humanity in the human living of the believers. "For even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12). The Christ today is not only the wonderful single person who was in the Gospels on the earth 2,000 years ago but also the marvelous corporate person who is in the Epistles and on the earth today.

While the resurrection of Christ produces both many sons of God and the corporate Christ, we must never lose sight of His own uniqueness even in the sonship and the Body. He is the Firstborn among the many brothers and He is the Head among the many members. His priority derives from His unique divine status, for He alone is God



by virtue of His self-existence and not by anything communicated to Him. He is not only the firstborn Son of God among the regenerated race of the believing, but eternally the only begotten Son of God in the Godhead. And He is not only the corporate Christ embodied in the many members but the unique Christ embodied in the individual humanity that He took on in incarnation. To accept the incorporate and universal aspect of His existence, which He enjoys through His union with His believers, we need not deny the individual and unique aspect of His existence, which He enjoys by virtue of His own wonderful person.

The first application of the spiritual accomplishments of Christ's resurrection occurred on the night after His resurrection, when He appeared to the disciples in the closed room. Appearing to them, Jesus "breathed into them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God appeared to His disciples and imparted Himself as the Spirit into His believers. Again, here we see that while the distinction of the persons of the Trinity is preserved, there is no separation of the persons, and the singleness of the operation of the Trinity is clearly manifested. In the one action of imparting the divine element into the believers, Christ breathed into them and they received the Spirit, who bore into them all the fullness of the resurrected Christ. This impartation gave the disciples the inner life that enabled them to become sons of God and members of Christ's Body.

After His resurrection and after breathing Himself into His disciples, Christ ascended to the heavens and was enthroned, receiving a crown of glory (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9; 2:33; Heb. 2:9). There He was made Lord, Christ (Acts 2:36), the Ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5), and the Savior (Acts 5:31). In ascension He is the Minister of the new covenant (Heb. 8:2), the High Priest (2:17; 4:14; 7:26; 8:1), and the Mediator and guarantee of the new covenant (v. 6; 9:15; 7:22). As such, He administers God's economy for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose in His heavenly ministry, which endures unto eternity. In His earthly ministry He accomplished redemption and imparted the Triune God into the redeemed elect. In His heavenly ministry He operates to build up the regenerated and redeemed elect into His Body, as a corporate expression of Himself, the Son of God. The greater portion of the New Testament age is occupied by this heavenly ministry of Christ, which is fully revealed and described in the New Testament Epistles, including Revelation.

These attainments and obtainments of Christ in ascension enable Him to carry out His organic salvation. Incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection were needed for the accomplishment of the judicial redemption that issues from Christ's earthly ministry. As a result of this judicial redemption, God's elect through faith are redeemed, justified, reconciled, and regenerated to be the many sons of God and the members of Christ's Body. In His heavenly ministry, with the many statuses He obtained and attained, Christ carries out His organic salvation. His earthly ministry therefore serves as a base for His heavenly ministry, and the judicial redemption that He accomplished serves as a base for the organic salvation that He is now carrying out among His believers. It is the organic salvation that ultimately completes and fulfills the divine economy, for this aspect of God's salvation, which operates through the dispensing of the divine life into the believers, transforms God's elect into His corporate expression for eternity. The organic salvation is initiated by regeneration, which is the pivotal action by which God moves from the judicial redemption to the organic salvation in His dealings with His elect.

In this organic salvation the believers firstly enjoy Christ's shepherding (John 21:15-17; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Heb. 13:20), which refers not so much to His leading them as to His feeding them (John 21:15-17; 1 Pet. 2:2). The integral element in God's organic salvation is the constant and abundant supply of life, by which the believers are nourished and strengthened (Eph. 3:16; 4:16; 5:29; Phil. 1:19; 1 Tim. 4:6). Christ shepherds the believers by His life, and the life that He ministers to them brings the proper

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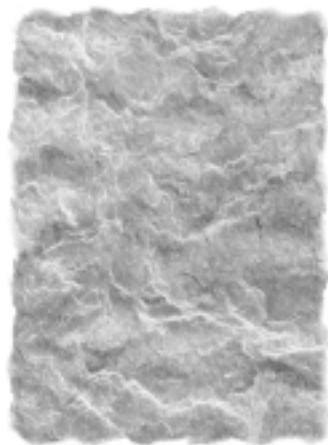
God's marvelous economy operates upon persons who have not yet fully arrived, and hence, there has been, since its inception, the element of the old creation in the church. Because of this, the church has suffered decline, degradation, and even devastation throughout the centuries.

living and function for the accomplishment of the divine economy. This life is Christ Himself (Col. 3:4), operating within the believers to sanctify them dispositionally (Rom. 6:19, 22; 15:16), to renew them (12:2; Eph. 4:23; Titus 3:5), to transform them (2 Cor. 3:16, 18; Rom. 12:2), to build them up into His organic Body (Eph. 4:15-16), to conform them to His glorious image (Rom. 8:29), and ultimately to glorify them with His own glory, making them His expression for eternity (v. 30; Heb. 2:10; 1 Pet. 5:10; 1 Thes. 2:12).

As Head and Lord over all, Christ administers this organic salvation into the believers through the Spirit. Again, we must not lose sight of the inseparability of Christ and the Spirit. At the same moment, He is in the heavens as the heavenly Minister, and He is in the believers through the life-giving Spirit. On the night of His resurrection He first entered the believers as the Spirit when He breathed into the disciples. Then, on Pentecost He descended as the Spirit on all who heard the gospel that was preached by the apostle Peter, and through this, He clothed His Body with Himself as power and authority (Acts 2:33; Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 1:19-21). These two events point to two aspects of the Spirit's application to the believers, the inward or essential aspect, for their inner enlivening and living, and the outward or economical aspect, for their outer empowering and work. While these two aspects were experienced at different times by the early believers (because the Lord's ascension, which permitted the second aspect, intervened in their case), the experience of most believers since then includes both aspects of the Spirit at once, when they first believe. Through faith we receive Christ as the Spirit for life within and are clothed with Him as the Spirit for power without.

Individually, those Jewish hearers of the gospel received the Spirit through faith in Christ in these two aspects, but corporately something else was occurring, that is, the church was formed. Pentecost marks the initiation of the formation of the church, which on that day encompassed the Jewish believers. Some time later, again through the preaching of the apostle Peter, the Gentile believers were added to the church (Acts 10:34-48), and the reality of Christ's work on the cross to create the two peoples in Himself into one new man was fully applied and practically realized (Eph. 2:15). The church is the corporate expression of God's elect and, more intrinsically, the Body of Christ. It is also the new man of the new creation, replacing the old man of the old creation, who became fallen and dead through disobedience and sin. In this new creation, Christ is the element and constituent of the new man. He is the Head, but by virtue of His indwelling of the believers and their living out of Him, He is said to be all the members. "Christ is all and in all" (Col. 3:11).

The divine economy is ultimately fulfilled through the building up of the Body of Christ. While His work on the cross brought the Body as the new man into existence, and His descending as the Spirit formed the Body practically, He as the life-giving Spirit operates through the long period of the New Testament age to fully build up His Body into His complete and proper expression for eternity. This glorious expression is the ideal and goal of the divine economy, even if the church on the earth across the ages has thus far failed to reach it. We cannot deny that the church today is far short of expressing Christ properly, but we must not despair or abandon the hope that Christ's heavenly ministry will prevail and that the intrinsic reality of the church, that is, the organic Body of Christ, will become also its outward expression. We must be "diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace...until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:3, 13). God's marvelous economy operates upon persons who have not yet fully arrived, and hence, there has been, since its inception, the element of the old creation in the church. Because of this, the church has suffered decline, degradation, and even devastation throughout the centuries. We find early attestation to this within the New Testament itself (cf. Acts 5:1-10; Gal. 2:11-14; Acts 15:36-39; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 2 Tim. 1:15; 4:14-17; 2 John 9-11; 3 John 9-10; Jude 11-13). By the end of the period of the ministry of the first apostles, the church was in a state of



thorough decline, and the Lord appeared to John the apostle in the book of Revelation to deliver a call for overcomers to rise up and overcome the defeated situation of the church (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 20-21). Here again the Lord moves as the Spirit (compare Rev. 2:1 with 2:7; 2:8 with 2:11; 2:12 with 2:17; 2:18 with 2:29; 3:1 with 3:6; 3:7 with 3:13; and 3:14 with 3:22), but in this last book of the Bible the Spirit is intensified sevenfold for the accomplishment of the divine economy in the darkened and degraded situation of the church. Today we are in the age of Revelation, and the Spirit today is the sevenfold intensified Spirit (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6), who is producing overcomers for the building up of the Body of Christ.

Here we should pause to review the process of God's economy thus far presented as it relates to the person of Christ. We can define the divine economy in terms of three stages that Christ goes through to fulfill the economy. The first stage is that of His incarnation, which commenced with His human birth. In the stage of incarnation, He lived a human life, died a vicarious, redemptive death, and was buried for three days. Without ceasing to be a man, He rose from the dead on the third day and entered into a second stage, that of His inclusion. We characterize this stage as that of inclusion because in resurrection all that Christ experienced, obtained, and attained was compounded into the life-giving Spirit, who we may now characterize as the all-inclusive Spirit. For this reason, in the Epistles the Spirit is frequently mentioned in reference to Christ (Rom. 8:9; Phil. 1:19; Acts 16:7; 2 Cor. 3:17-18). All of Christ's activity and operation in His heavenly ministry is carried out through the Spirit, who bears the reality of Christ into the believers (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:6). Finally, because of the degradation that has set in, Christ has intensified His ministry as the Spirit, and hence we speak of a third stage for Christ, a stage of intensification. In this last stage, He produces the overcomers who rise up to build up His Body for the accomplishment of the divine economy. We should point out that the stage of intensification is not a new "becoming" in Christ's history; rather, it is the intensification of what He is in the stage of His inclusion as the life-giving Spirit. All that He is in resurrection is now intensified for the completion of the divine economy. Further, we should say that the overcomers are not a separate class of believers but those believers who are proper before the Lord and who rise up to withstand the decline and degradation in the church for the fulfillment of God's economy. If we read the epistles in Revelation 2 and 3 carefully, we find that the overcomers are not heroes but proper believers reacting to spiritual decadence in the church. Their reaction, according to the whole of the New Testament revelation, should be that which builds up the Body of Christ and produces the corporate expression of God. They are overcomers for the Body of Christ. Seen from this perspective, the divine economy is an economy of Christ in three stages to produce His corporate expression for eternity.

The divine economy is primarily concerned with the application of Christ's person and work upon God's elect for their redemption, regeneration, transformation, and ultimate glorification, and it ultimately issues in the corporate and organic expression of the Triune God in eternity in the New Jerusalem. However, many other matters in the created realm must also have their final consummations, and Christ again bears this responsibility. The old creation came into being with a view to the new creation, and once the new creation reaches the maturity of being the proper expression of God, the old creation will be dissolved. Christ accomplished the spiritual fact of this dissolution on the cross, but the practical outworking of this will not be fully completed until the end of time. Christ will return at the end of this age (1 Thes. 4:16; Matt. 25:31) to judge the believers (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10, 12) and give to those who have overcome the reward of the enjoyment of the millennial kingdom with Him (Matt. 25:21, 23); those believers who fall short of His glory will suffer loss for the duration of the millennial kingdom but will be saved as through fire into the eternal destiny of God's elect (vv. 26-30; 1 Cor. 3:15). He will marry His overcomers and take them as His bride (Rev. 19:7-9). Christ will also rule over the nations and dispel the rebellious element among humankind, which will be headed up by Antichrist; him and his will He cast into the lake of fire for


Because of the degradation that has set in, Christ has intensified His ministry as the Spirit. In this last stage of intensification, He produces the overcomers who rise up to build up His Body for the accomplishment of the divine economy.



God's economy is fully the history of Christ in His relationship with humankind. As the embodiment of the Triune God, He brings divinity into humanity and ultimately uplifts humanity into the divine realm. This He does through the dispensing of Himself as life into the believers, which life regenerates, transforms, and glorifies them.

eternity (19:11-16, 19-21). Finally, at the end of this age Christ will bind Satan, the evil serpent, and cast him into the abyss for the thousand years of His earthly reign (20:1-3). Then, His kingdom will commence, and He will reign, now openly and manifestly, with His saints for a thousand years (vv. 4-6). At the end of the millennium Satan will be released from his prison to instigate the final rebellion among humankind and ultimately will be cast into the lake of fire for eternity (vv. 7-10; cf. Matt. 25:41). The final action of Christ in time will be to judge all the unbelieving dead and cast them into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-12, 15), thereby clearing up the created realm of all the negative elements. Peter tells us that at the end of time the old heavens will pass away and the old earth will be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10).

After these things a new heaven and new earth will ensue, and all of God's operation through Christ upon His elect will consummate in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1-2). The New Jerusalem is the aggregate sign in the Bible of the consummation of the divine economy, symbolizing how God and man will dwell together for eternity. On the one hand, God's elect, now redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and fully glorified, will be a loving counterpart for God, a bride; on the other hand, they will be a dwelling place for Him, a tabernacle (vv. 2-3; 22:17). God will also be a dwelling to His people, a temple, and the divine Husband (21:22). This glorious city will be a mutual dwelling place of God and man, and a loving couple for eternity. In every way, the New Jerusalem symbolizes the consummation of God's economy through time and illustrates the product of His great work upon His elect. Its gold street, its pearl gates, its wall and foundations of precious stones, its throne, its temple, its light, its river, its tree—all signify the work of the Triune God in His great economy to bring God and man into a mingled oneness that expresses Him for eternity.

God's economy, as we have presented it here, is fully the history of Christ in His relationship with humankind. As the embodiment of the Triune God, He brings divinity into humanity and ultimately uplifts humanity into the divine realm. This He does through the dispensing of Himself as life into the believers, which life regenerates, transforms, and glorifies them. Contrary to many modern views of God's operation among humankind, this view of the divine economy is highly organic and intrinsically related to the persons of God. It is not merely a judicial economy, though it has a judicial component, but an organic one, taking the divine life as its very essence and element. Having its source in God the Father, taking its form in God the Son, and finding its application in God the Spirit, the divine economy is simply the move of God in humanity for His ultimate expression. This view of God's economy flatly rejects the notion that God desires the chasm between Himself and His creation to remain unbridged forever; rather, it embraces the concept that the old creation, which by nature must ever be apart from God, came into being for the new creation, which is by nature invested with God and mingled with Him, and that God's intention is to dwell forever, not apart from humankind, but in and with humankind for His glorious expression. Trinitarian, organic, and intimately relating God to man, this view of the divine economy uplifts our vision not only of who we are but also of what God is and what God does. All glory be to Him for His magnificent and divine economy! 

Notes

¹I will not rehearse the arguments in favor of the use of the term *mingle*, as they have been adequately set out elsewhere ("*Mingling*—Was There Ever a Better Word?" *A & C*, I.3 (July 1996): 31, 62). Lest our readers wonder, however, we should note here that the word *mingle* means "to mix or bring together in combination, usually without loss of individual characteristics" (*American Heritage College Dictionary*, 3rd ed.), and that we use it with the understanding that in Christ both His divine and human natures are preserved distinctly and unconfusedly, that there is no third nature produced by the incarnation that is neither divine nor human.

