

THE ROLE OF REVELATION IN THE FULFILLMENT OF THE ECONOMY IN GOD IN EPHESIANS

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*Because out from Him and through Him and to Him
are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.*
(Rom. 11:36)

In Ephesians Paul speaks of God's economy in relation to the building up of the church comprised of both Jews and Gentiles to express the fullness of the One who fills all in all (2:11-15; 3:6; 1:22-23), acknowledging that the fulfillment of this economy is according to the revelation of the mystery of His will, which throughout the ages was hidden in God (v. 9; 3:9). In Romans 11 Paul also speaks of God's economy in relation to the selection of both Jews and Gentiles to participate in the riches and fullness of God (v. 12), similarly acknowledging that the fulfillment of this economy is according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept in silence in the times of the ages (16:25). In both Epistles the crucial role of revelation in the fulfillment of the economy in God is highlighted. In Romans the role of revelation seemingly is only a matter of cursory reference, but in Ephesians it is much more prominent (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:3). In both Epistles, however, it is clear that the fulfillment of the economy in God begins with revelation that is out from God, advances through an operation of God that conforms to this revelation, and consummates in an enlarged revelation of God in glory. While this process is explicitly declared in Romans 11:36, it is implicitly woven throughout the Epistle to the Ephesians.

The similarities related to the fulfillment of God's economy in Romans and Ephesians are not coincidental, because both Epistles are based on a revelation of the mystery, and both speak of our participation in this mystery. In Romans 11 Paul speaks of both Jews and Gentiles being grafted into Christ (vv. 19, 23-24), whose riches flow from Him as the root to us as the branches, making us fellow partakers of the root of fatness of the cultivated

olive tree, Christ (v. 17). Although our selection is according to grace (v. 5), our participation in this grace can be frustrated by the darkened eyes of a hardened heart (vv. 7-10). Nevertheless, His gracious gifts are according to an irrevocable calling, which comes out of Him, is accomplished through Him, and ultimately brings glory to Him (vv. 29, 36). In Ephesians Paul speaks of both Jews and Gentiles being reconciled in one Body to God through the cross in Christ (2:14-16), whose riches flow in our access to the Father in one Spirit (v. 18), making us fellow partakers of the promise (3:6). Although our selection is according to the grace with which we have been graced in the Beloved (1:6), our participation in this grace can be frustrated by walking according to the darkened understanding of our unrenewed mind (4:17-18, 23). Nevertheless, when the eyes of our heart are enlightened to know the hope of our calling, the economy of the mystery, which is initiated by revelation from God, can be accomplished through Him in order to ultimately glorify Him in the church and in Christ Jesus (1:17, 19; 3:21).

The Epistle to the Ephesians presents the hope of God's calling in six chapters as the mystery of the gospel (3:18; 6:19), a gospel that produces the church as the Body of Christ, the fullness of God (1:23; 3:19). The Epistle to the Romans presents this same calling in sixteen chapters as the gospel of God that is according to the revelation of the mystery (1:1; 16:25), a gospel that transforms sinners into sons of God to constitute the Body of Christ, which is expressed as the local churches.¹ These are not two different gospels or two different mysteries, but the same mysterious gospel seen from two different perspectives. Witness Lee notes these two perspectives in his introduction to the *Life-study of Ephesians*:

The book of Ephesians has a special characteristic. Unlike

Romans, which speaks from the sinners' condition, Ephesians speaks from God's eternal purpose. In the opening chapters of Romans, we see the sinners' condition. In Romans 1 all kinds of sins are listed. But no such list is found in chapter one of Ephesians. This is because Ephesians speaks, not from the sinners' condition, but from God's eternal purpose. Moreover, Ephesians speaks from eternity, not from time, and from the heavenlies, not from the earth. The book of Ephesians brings us into eternity...The specific and particular characteristic of this book is that it is written from eternity, from the heavenlies, from God's heart, and from God's eternal purpose. (8-9)

In the revelation of the mystery of the gospel from the standpoint of our sinful condition, Paul utilizes sixteen chapters in Romans to enlighten us concerning the economy that transforms us from sinners to sons of God to constitute the Body of Christ. From our standpoint this process understandably involves many steps due to the complication of sin and sins, including condemnation (1:18—3:20), justification (3:21—5:11), sanctification (5:12—8:13), transformation (12:1—15:13), and glorification (8:14-39). Paul, nevertheless, assures us that God is operating to bring us to the goal of being the Body of Christ in his explicit declaration that all things are out from God, through God, and to God (11:36). In the revelation of the mystery of the gospel from the standpoint of God's eternal purpose, Paul needs only six chapters in Ephesians to unveil the economy that results in the heading up of all things in Christ as the Head and the church as His Body. From God's standpoint the accomplishment of this process is implicitly unveiled throughout Ephesians. The Epistle to the Ephesians confirms that the economy which originates in God (1:3-6) will ultimately be accomplished through God (vv. 7-14; 2:17) and will be unto God (3:20-21; 4:13-16). This confirmation is woven into the overall structure of the six chapters in Ephesians, the progression of the verses in chapter 3, and the crystallized essence of the Epistle in 1:7-10. At each of these levels Paul stresses the role of revelation because all that comes out of God begins with an economical revelation of the economy in God, that is, a revelation that unveils the economy in God by economically imparting the God of revelation, who then economically operates to consummate the economy that He purposed in Himself.²

The Economy in God

God has an economy, that is, a plan, a purpose, a household arrangement, to accomplish the good pleasure of His will, which He purposed in Himself (vv. 5, 9). The good pleasure of His will involves His desire to gain an enlarged expression of Himself in the Son through the Spirit. This enlargement, this increase (John 3:30), is made possible by Christ's judicial satisfaction of God's righteous

requirement on the cross and by the Spirit's organic dispensing of God's divine life in resurrection (Rom. 8:2-4; 5:10). The Triune God is enlarged in expression when His divine nature is imparted into redeemed humanity through regeneration, and our humanity is brought into divinity through transformation, renewing, conformation, and glorification. This enlargement of the Triune God bears the image of Christ as His Body, which is the church (Col. 3:10; 2:19). In short, the economy of God involves the enlargement and expression of the Triune God in redeemed, regenerated, and glorified humanity.³

Even though God's economy involves judicial and organic actions, these actions cannot be separated from His intrinsic being. God has an economy because He is intrinsically economic. In his comments on Ephesians 1:10 in *Lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, William Graham notes the connection between God's economic being and His economic actions.

The word translated *dispensation* is *economy*, a Greek word which signifies "the law of the house," and means the plan which a father lays down for the management of his household—the house-law; and the apostle assures us that God is *Econome*, or Householder; that Jesus Christ, his Son, is the Head or Steward, under whom it is his pleasure to gather together all things which are in heaven and in earth. The Church Fathers, probably from this passage, apply the word "economy" to the incarnation of Christ, because this was the great fact which brought him into union with the family of God, and is, indeed, the most central truth in the system of grace and the one which gives character and importance to all the rest. (60)

Graham implies that the word *economy* has been applied by the church fathers to the incarnation of Christ because God intrinsically is *Econome*, that is, a Householder, who desires to manage and dispense the riches of His house through the stewardship of His Son. Consequently, the incarnation of Christ is both a revelation and a manifestation of the household imperative within the being of the Triune God. As such, the Triune God not only has an economy, but His very being is an economy.⁴

While this understanding of the economy of God expands upon the traditional theological application of the term *economy*, which focuses primarily on the activities of the Triune God in the incarnation of the Son,⁵ it does not undermine this understanding. Rather, it provides the hypostatic foundation for the accomplishment of God's economy in time.⁶ In fact, there is an economy of God in time only because the Triune God is economical in His essential being. Alternately stated, since the Triune God is economical in His essential Trinity in eternity, He reveals Himself economically in time. Thus, the economic Trinity actually unveils the economic axioms that

define the essential Trinity, namely that God is a triune, organic, eternal dispensing.⁷ The economic unveiling of this economic reality in time occurred specifically through the process of Christ's incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection.

Without Christ's incarnation God's economy would have remained forever hidden from created humanity, and without Christ's death and resurrection God's economy would have remained forever hidden from redeemed humanity. The incarnation and human living of Christ were needed in order to bring God into man in the person of Christ in preparation for the redemption of humanity, and the death and resurrection of Christ were needed in order to redeem humanity and to bring God into redeemed humanity through regeneration. It is only through the regeneration of the human spirit, made possible by the resurrection of Christ and by the impartation of Christ as the Spirit into the human spirit, that the revelation of God's economy was made known to man.⁸ When the Son was revealed in redeemed and regenerated humanity (Gal. 1:15-16), following the resurrection of Christ from the dead, God's economy was revealed and fully made known. A revelation of the economy of God cannot be separated from a revelation of the Triune God because a revelation of the Triune God reveals and imparts the Triune God Himself and, thus, the economy that is in the Triune God. This is the understanding of revelation that informed Paul's writing concerning the role of revelation in the fulfillment of God's economy in Ephesians.

The Revelation of the Economy of God in Ephesians

Paul's understanding of the nature of revelation is vastly different from the human, religious considerations commonly held by most believers, theologically trained or otherwise. Some tend to view revelation as the mental apprehension of doctrinal truths in the Bible, which is then generously spoken of as enlightenment; hence, revelation is reduced to the acquisition of biblical knowledge that is objective to the extent that there is no organic connection with the content of the revelation. Others tend to view revelation as the physical manifestation of spiritual things, which then reduces revelation to outward visions or events that also have no organic connection to the recipient of the revelation. In *The Purpose of God: An Exposition of Ephesians*, R. C. Sproul succinctly summarizes the first misplaced understanding of revelation when he comments on Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:17 that the Father of glory would give the believers a spirit of wisdom and revelation:

Paul is not saying that Christians can expect to receive new revelations from God and so become contemporary apostles. No, he is saying that the Spirit works in Christians to help them understand the revelation (the Bible) God has already given. (38)

Sproul's characterization of revelation as an understanding of the Bible is similar to Robert Govett's comments on the same passage:

Paul entreated for these believers, that God would give them by His Spirit, 'wisdom' in the things of God, and the discovery of truths not yet made known to them. The Christian, possessed of life in Christ, is to seek to grow both in grace and knowledge. (42)

For Govett the discovery of truth is implicitly equated with growth in knowledge. In contrast to Govett, F. C. Synge in *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, says, "No man can penetrate the secret of God's purpose by his own wis-

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dom or intuition or brilliance of intellect" (27). He goes on to state that this does not mean that "His purpose is contrary to reason; rather it is beyond reason" and that "once grasped by faith it is seen to be reasonable" (27). This is a healthy perspective because it does not deny the need of mental comprehension, but it does not place an absolute emphasis on it. Those who possess an understanding of revelation as being mere knowledge are in great danger of not receiving any revelation or its accompanying content because their concept of revelation will be reduced to a system of knowledge based on their own predispositions toward the truth.⁹

When revelation is regarded as a matter involving physical manifestations, it is easy to have a narrow focus on outward things that are seemingly spiritual. In two passages William Graham illustrates the tendency toward this misplaced understanding of revelation, when he comments on Paul's use of the word *revelation* in Ephesians 3:3: "That by revelation the mystery was made known to me."

I take the word *revelation* as designating the visible appearance of Jesus Christ near Damascus, and all the future progressive manifestations of divine truth in the soul of the apostle. The visible glory was probably the

commencement of the work of grace, the starting-point to which all future revelations are to be traced. In this sense I understand Gal. i. 16: "It pleased God to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen."...It is manifest that *revelation*, as applied to Christ in the New Testament, does not mean his communicating the knowledge of God, but the unveiling of his own person. Hence, it is often applied to his second coming. (180-181)

There should be no doubt that the Lord will visibly appear at His second coming or that Paul received a revelation of Christ on his way to Damascus, which was accompanied by a physical manifestation of light from heaven (Acts 9:3; 22:6; 26:13), but to define revelation in the context of these two significant events, one which was in the past and the other which will be in the future, is to place the experience of revelation beyond that of most Christians. When Paul prayed that the Ephesians would receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him, it is doubtful that he was praying that Christ would physically manifest Himself to every believer in Ephesus. In fact, the biblical record does not even clearly support Graham's assertion that Jesus Christ visibly appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus. Paul's three personal accounts of this event in Acts 9:1-8; 22:6-11; and 26:12-19 only say that a great light from heaven flashed around him. Paul makes no mention of visibly seeing Christ Himself.¹⁰

The revelation that Paul speaks of in Ephesians is not the product of knowledge, although it does, as the grammatical construction of 1:17 suggests, produce the "full knowledge of Him," and it is not the product of outward manifestations, although Christ does, as the account in Acts 26 suggests, appear to those who hear and receive His word. The revelation that Paul speaks of in Ephesians is more accurately described by Markus Barth in his discussion of revelation. He begins by arguing against the notion of revelation as propositional knowledge, which is the essence of Sproul's and Govett's comments.

The nature of God's revelation is described in clear terms. Neither propositions about attributes of God (saying, for instance, that God is immortal, invisible, inaccessible, cf. 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16), nor a code for moral living, nor a "perfect law of freedom" (as in James 1:25), are put in the foreground...In his work—in faithfulness to his eternal will, to the crucified Christ, and to the promises given to Israel—God reveals *who* he is: even "our Father" (1:2, etc.), and *what* he is: how rich, how gracious, how mighty! (80-81)

With an understanding that revelation revolves around matters of who God is and what God is, Barth then focuses on who are the beneficiaries of God's revelation and the purpose of God's revelation.

In this self-revelation of God, man has the largest possible place. The thought that man is nothing because God is all in all is absurd. Actually, man alone is declared to be the beneficiary of God's great act of self-manifestation... We may say also that men by revelation became participants and beneficiaries in the life of the triune God. "No more" are they "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance which was in them" (4:17 f.)...This revelation "through the Gospel" (3:5 f.) shows a solidarity of God with man, and it creates a participation of man in God's riches, which indeed "surpass knowledge" (3:19). (81-82)

What is worthy of note in Barth's comments is his acknowledgement of the relationship between revelation and a believer's participation in the life of the Triune God and in God's riches, which are the many expressions of the life of the Triune God as grace. Only this understanding highlights the relationship between revelation and the economy of God, which is a central component in Ephesians. In chapter 1 Paul speaks of God's economy, which involves the heading up of all things in the heavens and on the earth in Christ (v. 10) and which will result in glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever (3:21). Glory, the full expression of the Triune God in the church and in Christ Jesus, is the goal of God's economy, and so when Paul prays in regard to revelation in 1:17, he appeals to the Father of glory, underscoring the crucial role of revelation in the fulfillment of God's economy in glory. Without revelation, which imparts the God of glory and makes us participants in the riches of His grace (v. 7), the economy of God cannot be initiated within redeemed humanity. The God of glory must become to us the Father of glory by revealing Himself within us and making us in time the many sons whom He predestinated in eternity past to be to the praise of the glory of His grace (vv. 5-6).¹¹

In order for the economy in God to be fulfilled, there is a need for revelation. This is not to say that God does not economically operate apart from revelation,¹² but that apart from a revelation that imparts the Triune God, there can be no fulfillment or consummation of the inherent goal within the economy of God, which is an enlarged expression of God in glory. The Epistle to the Ephesians shows that the economy in God operates within redeemed and regenerated humanity because His revelation of Himself to us and in us has made us "participants and beneficiaries" of His life. Since the economical Triune God has been revealed in us, an economical operation has been initiated through God to ultimately issue in glory to God. This process is the basis for the overall structure of the six chapters of Ephesians; it is revealed in the progression of the verses in chapter 3 more specifically; and it is encapsulated in verses 7 through 10 of chapter 1 most succinctly.

The Fulfillment of the Economy of God in the Structure of Ephesians

Ephesians is structured to reflect the process that fulfills the economy of God, from the initiation of the economy of God through revelation in chapters 1 and 2, to the accomplishment of the economy of God in chapter 3, and to the consummation of God's economy in chapters 4 through 6. Chapters 1 and 2 focus on the revelation of the economy of God. This revelation points to the church as the goal of God's economy. These chapters reveal that the church is produced by the dispensing of the Triune God as grace, a dispensing that was purposed in God Himself in eternity past and that is activated in time whenever the revelation of the mystery of His economy is made known. Chapter 3 speaks of the experiential operation of the economy of God that produces the church in time by the dispensing of the Triune God through a stewardship of grace. When God's eternal economy is revealed, it produces a stewardship of grace that is conveyed through a ministry that is able to enlighten all concerning the economy of the mystery so that the riches of His grace can abound to produce glory in the church and in Christ Jesus. Chapters 4 through 6 speak of the living and expression of the church that has been produced through the dispensing operation in the economy of God. This expression is the issue of the church's full participation in the economy of God, which ultimately is an enlarged expression of the Triune God who has been revealed and constituted into redeemed, regenerated, and glorified humanity. Thus, in chapters 1 and 2 there is a revelation out from the Triune God, which reveals and imparts the economical Triune God in Christ into the church. In chapter 3 Christ is constituted into the church through a stewardship of grace that matches God's economy in order to produce an enlarged expression of Himself, which subsequently is revealed in chapters 4 through 6, through the living and responsibility of the church.

In a footnote to verse 1 of chapter 3, Witness Lee makes a simple statement: "Chapters 1 and 2 cover the revelation of the church," which unveils "God's blessings to the church and what the church is and how it is produced" (Recovery Version, note 1). It is relatively easy to regard Paul's high speaking in chapter 1 as revelation, but it is not as easy to view Paul's words in chapter 2 as revelation, but this is the case. Both chapters are focused on presenting God's desire and how He works out His desire, rather than on our experience of His economical desire. Even Paul's prayer in 1:17-21, the portion of the chapter most directly related to a believer's experience, is

a prayer that the Father would give to us a spirit of wisdom and revelation to see all that the Father has planned and purposed in His selection and predestination (vv. 3-6), all that the Son has accomplished in His redemption (vv. 7-12), and all that the Spirit has applied in His sealing and pledging (vv. 13-14). Although the believers are shown to be the blessed recipients of God's economical operations in these two chapters, Paul's intent is to clearly unveil the operation of the Triune God because in order for the church to enter into the abounding riches of His grace (v. 7), the mystery of His will must be made known through revelation (vv. 8-9; 3:3).

Consequently, in these two chapters Paul makes known the revelation of the economy of God that he received and was charged to announce (3:8), a revelation that speaks of the Triune God's operation to produce the church. The connection between the revelation of the economy of God and the production of the church is confirmed by the fact that both chapters conclude their

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presentation of the revealed actions of the Triune God with references to the church as the Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all, and to the church as the household of God, a holy temple in the Lord, and the dwelling place of God (1:22-23; 2:19, 21-22). Regarding the producing of the church, Paul speaks of the Father's planning, the Son's redemption, and the Spirit's sealing and pledging in chapter 1, and in chapter 2 he speaks of the Father's mercy in enlivening, raising up, and seating us together with Christ in the heavenlies (vv. 1-6), the Son's reconciling of Jews and Gentiles in Himself in one Body through His death on the cross, so making peace (vv. 11-16), and the Spirit's coming to preach the gospel of peace to grant us access in one Spirit unto the Father (vv. 17-18).

Through this access the church, which God purposed and planned in Himself, can be produced through His filling of the church with the riches of His grace unto all the fullness of God (3:19). Chapter 3 covers the producing, the experiential constitution, of the church, and thus speaks not only of the revelation of God's economy but also of the believer's response to this revelation. The church is produced through a stewardship of grace that is carried out by ministers who have been constituted with

the grace that they minister, which the Triune God has given according to the operation of His power (vv. 2, 7). Although Paul presents himself as an example of a minister who has been given a stewardship of grace, he does not limit the operation of the economy of God to himself or to a special group of believers. He only acknowledges that a believer who bears the responsibility to carry out God's stewardship must be one who has been sent by God, that is, an apostle, and one who can speak for and speak forth God, that is, a prophet (v. 5).

The apostle began, from this chapter, to beseech the saints to walk according to his revelation in a way worthy of God's calling. In order that the church might be constituted and realized in a practical, experiential way, he presented himself as a steward (v. 2), as one who had received grace (v. 2) and revelation (vv. 3, 5) and had become a minister of the high gospel, announcing the riches of Christ as the gospel for the producing of the church. (Recovery Version, 3:1, note 1)

The stewardship of grace that Paul received was according to God's economy. "With God it is a matter of economy; with us it is a matter of stewardship" (Lee, *Ephesians* 244-245). A revelation of God's economy produces a stewardship, and such a stewardship builds up the church according to the revelation of God's economy. The development of a stewardship of grace is the normal response within every believer who receives a revelation of God's economy. Paul emphasizes this point in two ways. First, he describes himself as being "less than the least of all saints" in verse 8, and thus he indicates that his experience is not beyond the norm but rather is below the norm. Second, he appeals to the Father to grant the believers to be strengthened with power into their inner man (v. 16), the regenerated human spirit, which is the receiving organ for revelation (1:17). This is the very same power that operated in him to constitute him according to the gift of the grace of God (3:7). Paul's focus in both these references is ultimately on the economical Triune God who effectively operates in those who, metaphorically speaking, have been imprisoned by the Lord and in the Lord to the point that they are not disobedient to the heavenly vision (v. 1; 4:1; Acts 26:19).

While chapter 3 of Ephesians speaks of the constitution of the church, which is made possible through the dispensing of the riches of the Triune God, a dispensing that is according to a ministry that enlightens all concerning the economy of the mystery, chapters 4 through 6 speak of the living, responsibility, and expression of the church that is the issue of the fulfillment of the economy in the Triune God. Chapters 4 through 6 charge us

concerning the living and responsibility the church should have in the Spirit on the earth. The basic charge is that we

should walk worthily of God's calling, which is the totality of the blessings bestowed on the church, as revealed in 1:3-14. In the church, under the Triune God's abundant blessing, the saints should walk worthily of the Father's selection and predestination, the Son's redemption, and the Spirit's sealing and pledging. Hence, in chs. 4—6 we see, on the one hand, the living that the church should have, and, on the other hand, the responsibility that the church should bear. (Recovery Version, 4:1, note 3)

When considering the living of the church, it is easy to focus on the details of this living in 4:25 through 5:21. These details include such things as putting off the lie (4:25), not letting the sun go down on our indignation (v. 26), giving no place to the devil (v. 27), stealing no more but working with our own hands (v. 28), not letting corrupt words proceed out of our mouth (v. 29), not grieving the Holy Spirit (v. 30), and removing from us all bitterness and anger and wrath and clamor and evil speaking (v. 31). Still more details of this living are included in 5:2-21. It is important to see, however, that these details are only the outward expressions of the living that comes out of the dispensing of the Triune God into the church according to the economic operation within the Triune God. The more intrinsic reality that is expressed in the living of the church is the oneness of the Triune God which has been wrought into the church and which the church has been brought into through the dispensing of the Triune God. Although this oneness is the oneness inherent within the Triune God, it is also an enlarged oneness that now includes the church as the one Body of Christ. The dispensing that begins in the Triune God as a revelation of His economy operates through the Triune God in time to produce the church in order to reproduce the Triune God in the church through the incorporation of the church as one Body in one Spirit. This incorporation is based on the one hope of our calling, it is through the one Lord to whom we are joined through faith and baptism, and it is unto the one God and Father of all (4:4-6). With the Triune God as the base and source of the church's living, the intrinsic reality that is being expressed through the expressive details of the church's living is the oneness of Christ and the church as the great mystery in God's economy (5:23-32).

The most encouraging aspect of the unveiling of the economy of God in chapters 1 and 2, the constituting of the church according to the economy of God in chapter 3, and the realization of an enlarged expression of the Triune God in the church in chapters 4 through 6 is the fact that this realization is both necessary and possible in this age. It is possible because Paul's exhortation to keep the oneness of the Spirit (4:3) implies that we have already been brought into this oneness since we can only keep what we have. And it is necessary because the church as the one Body must put on God as its armor to execute His judgment on the enemy in this age in order

to cooperate with the Head in the heading up of all things in the universe for eternity (6:10-20; 1:10).

The Fulfillment of the Economy of God in Chapter 3 of Ephesians

Just as the six chapters in Ephesians follow the progressive operation of the divine economy, in which all things are out from the Triune God, through the Triune God, and unto the Triune God, the content of chapter 3 exhibits this same progressive pattern. It begins by speaking of revelation that is first out from God and then out from His constituted stewards in verses 1 through 13. It then speaks of the economical operation of the Triune God—the granting Father, the strengthening Spirit, and the indwelling Christ—to produce the church according to the revelation of the mystery in verses 14 through 19. Finally, verses 20 through 21 confirm that what is out from Him and through Him will issue in His glorification in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever. Thus, at the end of this chapter, there is the full consummation of the economy that God purposed in Himself in eternity past.

Paul begins chapter 3 with an acknowledgment that he is a prisoner of Christ Jesus because in and through his imprisonment he received a full revelation of the economy of God, which produced a ministry in him according to a stewardship of grace.

As one imprisoned in Christ, Paul saw a heavenly vision. The more he saw of this vision, the more he experienced Christ and gained Christ. Paul was also a steward dispensing the riches of Christ to the members of the household of God. Furthermore, he was a faithful minister, one who ministered Christ to the members of the Body so that Christ might be expressed in the Body. (Lee, *Ephesians* 249)

Following this acknowledgment, Paul includes a parenthetical word in verses 2 through 21,¹³ almost an aside, that elaborates on his personal experience of receiving and participating in the economic operation in the Triune God. As such, his experience mirrors the structure of the Epistle to the Ephesians, and it shows how the economy in God is imparted into humanity and how it passes through the members of the Body for the building up of the church as the Body for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose.

In verses 2 through 13 Paul details the content of the revelation that was made known to him, of which he had written previously in brief in chapter 1 (3:3; 1:9-10). He

speaks of its impact on him and, by extension, on others through his subsequent ministry. The content of the revelation that Paul received points to the participation and incorporation of both Jews and Gentiles into Christ as fellow heirs of God (3:6; Rom. 8:17), fellow members of the Body (Eph. 2:16), and fellow partakers of the promise of the Spirit through the gospel (Gal. 3:14). Based on his experience of inheriting God, of being a member of Christ, and of partaking of the divine nature, Paul was able to minister according to the gift of the grace of God through his preaching of the gospel and to impart grace into others through his faithfulness to the stewardship of grace that he had received (Eph. 3:7, 2). Such a preaching not only enlightened others concerning the economy of the mystery; it also resulted in a multifarious display of God's wisdom through the church, according to the eternal purpose which He made in Christ Jesus (vv. 9-11).

For the cause contained in the revelation that was made known to him, Paul prayed in verses 14 through 19 that

THE DISPENSING THAT BEGINS IN THE TRIUNE GOD AS A REVELATION OF HIS ECONOMY OPERATES THROUGH THE TRIUNE GOD TO REPRODUCE THE TRIUNE GOD IN THE CHURCH THROUGH THE INCORPORATION OF THE CHURCH AS ONE BODY IN ONE SPIRIT. THUS, THE INTRINSIC REALITY THAT IS BEING EXPRESSED THROUGH THE EXPRESSIVE DETAILS OF THE CHURCH'S LIVING IS THE ONENESS OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH.

the Triune God would operate in the experience of the saints by strengthening them with power through His Spirit into the inner man so that Christ could make His home in their hearts through an organic union established by faith (vv. 16-17). Paul realized that when the Spirit strengthened the believers into their inner man with the same power that raised Christ from the dead, seated Him in the heavenlies, subjected all things under His feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church (1:20-22), they would be rooted and grounded in Christ's love, and that in such an atmosphere of love, they would be further strengthened to apprehend the unlimited dimensions of Christ with all the saints so that they could be filled unto all the fullness of God (3:17-19). Paul's prayer is a prayer for the Triune God to work out the economy that He revealed to Paul and that Paul subsequently preached as the gospel. When God is joined by ministers who have boldness and access in confidence through faith in Christ and who do not faint at their own afflictions (vv. 12-13), the only result that can be expected is a superabundant working out of the words and thoughts of those who are singularly focused on the fulfillment of His economy (v. 20), a fulfillment that produces an enlarged expression of God's glory in the church and in Christ Jesus (v. 21). Through his revelation, prayer, and faith in

a superabundantly operating God, Paul spoke concerning the outworking of the economy in God in chapter 3, an outworking which was both through God and unto God and which he had also succinctly encapsulated in brief in chapter 1.

The Fulfillment of the Economy of God in Ephesians 1:7-10

It is indeed possible to perceive Paul's deep understanding in the mystery of Christ from his brief reference to the economy of God in Ephesians 1:7-10 because he presents the crystallized essence of the entire Epistle to the Ephesians in these verses when he speaks of the initiation (v. 9), the accomplishment (vv. 7-8), and the consummation of God's economy (v. 10). These four verses also summarize the operation of the Triune God in chapter 3, an operation that produces a stewardship of grace through revelation and ultimately consummates in glory. Both Ephesians 3 and the Epistle as a whole are simply a more detailed explanation of the process of the fulfillment of the economy that is depicted in 1:7-10. These four verses are contained in a section that unveils God's blessing to the church through the Son's redemption (vv. 7-12), which speaks of the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose:

In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offenses, according to the riches of His grace, which He caused to abound to us in all wisdom and prudence, making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself, unto the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him.

Although verse 7 begins with a reference to the redemption of Christ, which was accomplished on our behalf through His blood, the real emphasis in this verse and in those that immediately follow is on the phrase *according to the riches of His grace*, because the unveiling of the riches of His grace and the abounding of these revealed riches are the means through which God's eternal purpose is accomplished. Although redemption is a definite and crucial item of the riches of His grace, it does not represent the totality of the riches of Christ's grace.

Redemption is an example of the riches of His grace, but there are other aspects of His riches that abound as grace. Acts 20:32, 1 Corinthians 15:10, and 2 Corinthians 1:12; 4:15; 9:8-15 provide a few of the many examples of the operation of grace in matters other than redemption. The fact that redemption is a central, but not exclusive, component of the riches of His grace is also confirmed by Paul's reference to the unsearchable riches of Christ in Ephesians 3:8. This verse speaks of the unlimited aspects

of grace that are available to redeemed and regenerated humanity through Christ. Therefore, even though Paul draws attention to the redemption of Christ as a necessary and common component of grace to all believers, he also knows that no one individual can fully experience the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ, which are the unsearchable riches of Christ. All the saints, each of whom has a unique gift according to the unique measure of grace given to him and each of whom is being supplied with grace according to his unique measure of the gift of Christ, are needed for a full, balanced, and corporate apprehension of these unsearchable riches (Rom. 12:3, 6; Eph. 4:7, 16). The breadth and length and height and depth of Christ in 3:18 are the unsearchable riches of Christ in verse 8, and the unsearchable riches of Christ in verse 8 are the riches of His grace in 1:7. When these unsearchable riches are dispensed into the church and ministered as grace, there is an economy unto the fullness of the times to head up all things in Christ (v. 10). This heading up then displays the multifarious wisdom of God to the principalities and powers through the church (3:10), making us to the praise of His glory, which is the same glory that is in Christ Jesus (1:12; 3:21).

The riches of His grace are the implied subject in 1:8-10 because the revelation and experience of these riches are crucial to the execution of God's economy unto the fullness of the times. According to the causal order in verses 8 through 10, the riches of God's grace abound when the mystery of His will is made known, and the issue of these abounding riches is an economy unto the fullness of the times to head up all things in Christ. The mystery that Paul speaks of in verse 9 is the mystery of Christ that was made known to him by revelation from God (3:3-4). This mystery, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations, was revealed to Paul in his regenerated human spirit because Christ, as the mystery of God, was revealed in him through the economical operation of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and indwelling Christ (v. 5; Gal. 1:16). Consequently, the hidden mystery in God was revealed to Paul when the hidden God was revealed in him (Eph. 3:9).¹⁴

In order for God's economy to operate to head up all things in Christ, the riches of His grace must abound, but in order for the riches of His grace to abound, the hidden mystery of God's will must be made known. Revelation is the catalyst that causes the riches of His grace to abound; therefore, God initiates the accomplishment of His economy by making known the mystery of His will through revelation. The mystery of His will, which God purposed in Himself according to His good pleasure, is made known through revelation.

God's good pleasure was what He purposed in Himself unto the economy of the fullness of the times (v. 10),

indicating that God Himself is the initiation, the origination, and the sphere of His eternal purpose, which nothing can overthrow, for which everything is working, and regarding which He did not take counsel with anyone. (Recovery Version, 1:9, note 4)

The mystery of God's will is made known through revelation in time through His wisdom and prudence in order to energize the operation of His economy (v. 8). When the mystery of His will is made known, the availability of the riches of His grace is made known to the believers, and thus, they become accessible to the saints (2:18; 3:12). Although revelation enables the riches of His grace to abound through the operation of the Triune God, this operation also involves a further making known, that is, the making known that occurs through a minister who ministers according to a stewardship of grace. Paul was such a minister, one to whom the mystery was made known (v. 3) and one whose words enlightened others concerning the economy of the mystery, thereby bringing them into the same economy. Consequently, when God makes known the mystery of His will to His holy apostles and prophets and when these joints of the rich supply make known the economy of the mystery to the believers, there is an economical operation unto the fullness of the times (v. 5; 4:16; 1:10).

This economical operation involves the heading up of all things in Christ which, in turn, results in a full expression of the Triune God in Christ, who is the Head over all things to the church. God desires to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, and for this the church must be constituted with the riches of His grace. "This is accomplished through the dispensing of the abundant life supply of the Triune God as the life factor into all the members of the church that they may rise up from the death situation and be attached to the Body" (Recovery Version, v. 10, note 1).¹⁵ The death situation that the church must rise up from is the present situation that the whole fallen universe finds itself in because of the rebellion of God's enemy. It is a situation of enslavement under a law of decay and corruption in which sin reigns through death, leaving no one untouched by the age of this world, by the ruler of the authority of the air, or by the spirit which now operates in the sons of disobedience (Rom. 8:21; 5:12, 21; Eph. 2:2).

But in the riches of His grace, there is an abundant supply of the life of the Triune God, and when this life is dispensed as grace through a ministry that makes known the economy of the mystery, there is an impartation of divine power that enables the believers to spontaneously

rise up out of every situation of spiritual death brought about by the rebellion of God's enemy and the contamination of the heavens and the earth with the satanic elements of sin, chaos, and collapse. The dispensing of the life of the Triune God causes the church to be headed up and to grow into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, which is the Body of Christ (4:13). As the believers are headed up, there is a deeper, spontaneous attachment to the Body of Christ because this heading up occurs in Christ, who is the Head of the Body. Christ as the unchallenged Head and the church as His victorious Body are the issue of God's economy, which is unto the fullness of the times.

Just as the revelation of the mystery causes the riches of His grace to abound unto the heading up of all things in the heavens and on the earth, as seen in Ephesians 1:7-10, the ministry that imparts the contents of the economy of the mystery through a stewardship of grace also produces a multifarious display of God's wisdom to

IN ORDER FOR GOD'S ECONOMY TO OPERATE TO HEAD UP ALL THINGS IN CHRIST, THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE MUST ABOUND, BUT IN ORDER FOR THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE TO ABOUND, THE HIDDEN MYSTERY OF GOD'S WILL MUST BE MADE KNOWN. GOD INITIATES THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF HIS ECONOMY BY MAKING KNOWN THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL THROUGH REVELATION.

the rebellious rulers and authorities in the heavenlies in chapter 3. This universal display in chapter 3 is the issue of the experiential application of the revelation contained in chapters 1 and 2, and it is a testimony of the church's triumph over the rulers, the authorities, the world-rulers of this darkness, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies in this age which is spoken of in chapter 6. What begins with revelation in 1:7-10, in chapter 3, and in the Epistle to the Ephesians as a whole ends with triumph and glory through the fulfillment of the economy in God.

Fulfilling the Economy in God through Revelation

Revelation is the key to the fulfillment of the economy in God. This fulfillment will not come about by knowledge or organization; it will come about by the Father of glory giving us a spirit of wisdom and revelation, by the Spirit imparting revelation into our regenerated human spirit, by the riches of the Son being the content of the imparted revelation, by an enlightening ministry and a stewardship of grace that dispenses the content of the revelation, and by Christ being revealed as the Head over all things to the church. The heading up of all things in Christ depends upon revelation that is sourced from, imparted by, and filled with the Triune God, and it also depends upon the

dispensing of the riches of the Triune God through ministers who make known the economy of the mystery, enlightening the members of the Body of Christ, so that they may be brought into both life and function unto a further work of ministry that builds up the Body of Christ (4:11-12).¹⁶ The economy in God can be fulfilled only when the Triune God makes known the mystery of His will through revelation and when recipients of this revelation, as stewards of the mysteries of God, are faithful to make known the economy of this mystery (1 Cor. 4:1-2).

The mystery of God's will is focused on the heart's desire of the Triune God to be fully expressed and enlarged through many sons whom He has predestinated, called, justified, and glorified (Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:4-5). Since this desire reflects a purpose that is part of His very being, the Triune God alone can initiate, accomplish, and apply it. The Father of glory initiates His economical operation by making known the mystery of His will by giving His sons a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of the Son through the Spirit (v. 17; 4:13). The Son accomplishes God's economical purpose when the riches of His grace are imparted and applied by the Spirit as the content of the divine revelation into those who have been enlivened, raised, and seated together with Christ Jesus.

The Father of glory brings us into His economy, the operation of the might of His strength, by giving us a spirit of wisdom and revelation. Paul prayed in 1:17-18 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him, the eyes of our heart having been enlightened, that we would know what is the hope of His calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. In verse 17 *spirit* does not refer separately to either our human spirit or to the Holy Spirit but rather to "our regenerated spirit indwelt by the Spirit of God. Such a spirit is given to us by God that we may have wisdom and revelation to know Him and His economy" (Recovery Version, v. 17, note 3).¹⁷ The spirit of wisdom and revelation in verse 17 is the same as the spirit of the apostles and prophets to whom the mystery of Christ was made known in 3:5.

Verse 5 says that the mystery has been revealed to the apostles and prophets in spirit. The word "spirit" here refers to the human spirit of the apostles and prophets, a spirit regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. It can be considered the mingled spirit, the human spirit mingled with God's Spirit. Such a mingled spirit is the means by which the New Testament revelation concerning Christ and the church is unveiled to the apostles and prophets. We need the same spirit to see such a revelation. (Lee, *Ephesians* 254)

A revelation of the mystery of God's will is available to all believers because we all have a mingled spirit and because we all have the same Father of glory who delights in revealing His Son in us. When a believer receives a revelation of God's economy, the content of this economy is also imparted, and this content is the riches of the Son as grace. When grace is given, it is always given as a stewardship of grace for others (3:2; Col. 1:25).

This stewardship of the grace is for God's dispensation...After these riches have been dispensed into us, we need to take up the burden to dispense them into others. With God, these riches are His economy; with us, they are the stewardship; and when they are dispensed by us into others, they are God's dispensation. When God's economy reaches us, it becomes our stewardship. When we carry out our stewardship by dispensing Christ into others, it becomes the dispensation of God into them...By seeing this vision, we experience Christ, and Christ is wrought into our being to make us stewards to dispense the riches of Christ into others. We also become ministers dispensing the riches of Christ to the members of the Body so that the Body may be built up. (Lee, *Ephesians* 245-246, 249)

From God's standpoint the economy of God is unveiled through revelation, and from our standpoint the economy of God becomes a stewardship of grace that has been entrusted to us through revelation (1 Cor. 9:17). A faithful steward must, in turn, impart the unsearchable riches of Christ to others as a minister.¹⁸ A steward is a minister of grace, dispensing and imparting into others the grace that he has received and enjoyed. When these riches are imparted there is a corporate issue, an economy unto the fullness of the times to head up all things in Christ. This Christ is the Head over all things to the church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. Consequently, the economy of God produces the church as the corporate Christ, which is the many glorified sons who are in Christ and before Him, according to His selection and predestination. Thus, the economy in God comes out from Him through revelation, it is carried out through Him in the making known of revelation, and it is unto Him in the revelation of Himself in the glory that is to Him in the church and in Christ Jesus. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. **AC**

Notes

¹My characterizations of the content of the gospel in Romans and in Ephesians are taken from Witness Lee's outlines for each book in the Recovery Version of the Bible.

²Although Paul speaks of the mystery of God's will in both Ephesians and Romans in plain terms, it is clear from his speaking that the apprehension and fulfillment of this mystery begin

with revelation that comes from God and that imparts the God of revelation. Mere human knowledge is insufficient to the task of seeing and fulfilling the economy that is in God. Paul underscores this point in Romans 11 by highlighting the impassable chasm that exists between the wisdom and ways of fallen humanity and the wisdom and ways of the Triune God: "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and untraceable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him, and it will be repaid to him?" (vv. 33-35). This chasm is impassable because it is based on a fundamental incompatibility between our fallen human nature and God's holy, divine nature, which, apart from the operation of grace, would forever be contrary to one another (v. 24; 2 Cor. 6:14). There is a clear contrast between our attainments, knowledge, judgments, ways, and reasonings and the riches, wisdom, knowledge, judgments, ways, and thoughts in the Triune God. In consideration of the elevated status of the latter, the apostle Paul can only exclaim, "Oh, the depth," and "How unsearchable," before he emphatically asks, "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" and "Who has first given to Him?" Knowing the mind of the Lord is not an innate capacity of our human nature, and giving first to Him is equally impossible since an act of giving requires existence, and our existence depends upon God first giving life to us. Truly, all things are out from God; nothing that we have comes from ourselves. Although we cannot know the mind of the Lord with an unregenerated spirit and an unrenewed mind, it is possible to know the mind of the Lord through revelation (1 Cor. 2:11-16), and although we cannot first give to the Lord, we can give ourselves to the Lord to participate in a stewardship of grace by ministering the riches of Christ that have a divine capacity to fulfill the economy in God.

³This understanding of the economy of God is in accord with the entire content of the divine revelation in the Bible. For many expositors the economy of God is limited to the judicial accomplishment of redemption, but this view is too narrow. Consider the following statements, all of which limit the economic operation of the Triune God to redemption.

I have already expounded *economy*, or "dispensation," and need not here refer to it particularly. It is the plan or purpose of Jehovah's love for the redemption and benediction of his creatures, laid before the worlds (Eph. i. 4) in Christ, hidden from the ages...in the bosom of God, but gradually and slowly unfolding itself in the cycles of time like a seed of life in the form of promise and hope. (Graham 205)

The wisdom [in Ephesians 1:8], then, which the apostle says God has communicated to us is the divine wisdom in the Gospel, the mystery of redemption, which has been hidden for ages in God, but which he has now

revealed to his holy apostles and prophets through the Spirit...Mysterious not so much in the sense of incomprehensible as in that of not being able to be discovered by human reason, as it is a matter of divine revelation...In the present case the mystery of his will means "his secret purpose," that purpose of redemption which was hidden for ages, but which he has now graciously revealed. (Hodge 37-38)

The "mystery" spoken about [in Ephesians 3:9] is God's purpose of redemption, formed in the counsels of eternity, impenetrably hidden from human view until revealed in his own time. It was this plan of redemption thus formed, thus long concealed, but now made known through the Gospel that Paul was sent to carry as a guiding and saving light to everyone. (107)

While redemption is part of the economy of God, it is not all or even the goal of God's economy. His plan of redemption is not the extent His plan or even the extent of the content of the gospel that "Paul was sent to carry as a guiding and saving light."

THE ECONOMY OF GOD IS UNVEILED THROUGH REVELATION, AND THE ECONOMY OF GOD BECOMES A STEWARDSHIP OF GRACE THAT IS ENTRUSTED TO US THROUGH REVELATION. A STEWARD IS A MINISTER OF GRACE, DISPENSING AND IMPARTING THE GRACE THAT HE HAS RECEIVED AND ENJOYED. THESE RICHES THEN ISSUE IN AN ECONOMY UNTO THE FULLNESS OF THE TIMES TO HEAD UP ALL THINGS IN CHRIST.

Redemption is for sonship, and sonship is for the enlarged expression of the God of glory, which is the consummation of God's economy. God did not predestinate us for redemption; rather, He redeemed us because we were predestinated unto sonship.

⁴Witness Lee makes this point in relation to our participation in the divine economy in our initial salvation; that is, when we received the Lord, we received Him as the divine economy.

Before we were saved, we all, old and young, male and female, were in a condition of chaos. Every year, every day, and even every moment we were in a chaotic situation. But one day something else came into us, and this thing is the divine economy. We repented to God, confessed our sins, failures, mistakes, and wrongdoings, and received the Lord Jesus. Upon our receiving of the Lord Jesus, something wonderful, heavenly, and divine came into us. We may say that Christ came into us. We may also say that the Holy Spirit or the Divine Trinity came into us. Yes, the One who came into us is Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Divine Trinity. Now we need to see that this One is the divine economy. This means that God is our economy. You have heard that Jesus Christ is our Savior, Lord, and Master and that He is our life, nature, and person, but probably you have never heard

that Jesus Christ is also the divine economy. Thus, we need to realize that when we were saved, the divine economy came into us. (*Satanic Chaos* 12-13)

⁵Graham acknowledges the traditional use of the term *economy* as it relates to the incarnation of Christ, but he also notes that the principle inherent in God's economy, namely, the union of divinity and humanity through the impartation of divinity into humanity, applies to all aspects of the person and work of Christ, which makes possible our receiving of grace. According to Graham, the union of God with humanity is the central truth in God's "system of grace" (60). He also indicates that the principle of the union of divinity with humanity is the overarching characteristic of the rest of the truths associated with our obtaining of and participation in God's grace. For example, the union of divinity and humanity can be seen in the perfect human living of Christ, the redemptive death of Christ, and the life-imparting resurrection of Christ. In His human living as a God-man, Christ lived in union with the Father (John 6:57; 16:32), according to the life of the Father, and being without sin in His humanity, He was qualified to redeem humanity by shedding His blood as the spotless Lamb of God (1:29). In His identification as the Lamb of God, *Lamb* speaks of creation and thus humanity, *of God* speaks of divinity, and *Lamb of God* points to the union of divinity and humanity in the person of Christ. In His death as the Lamb of God, Christ shed His blood, the blood of a God-man, for the forgiveness of our sins, and based on His divinity, this blood obtained an eternal redemption for all who believe (Heb. 9:22, 12). In His resurrection Christ's humanity was brought into union with divinity in the designation of Him in His humanity as the Son of God (Rom. 1:3-4), and He also made our participation in the economy of God, that is, our union with the Triune God, possible through His regeneration of us unto a living hope (1 Pet. 1:3).

⁶The distinction between the hypostatic nature of God's economy and the actions that proceed forth from His economy in many respects parallels the distinction between the ways of God, which are based on His being, and the acts of God, which are based on His ways. Psalm 103:7 says, "He made His ways known to Moses; / His acts, to the children of Israel." In the *Life-study of Revelation* Witness Lee comments on Moses' deeper understanding:

God's works are His acts, whereas God's ways are His governing principles. Moses knew God's ways, but the children of Israel knew only His acts (Psa. 103:7). God's ways are righteous in His principles and true in His promises. If you know God's ways, you do not need to wait to see His works. Although His works have not yet come, you know that they will come because you know the governing principles by which God does things. (566)

The Triune God has an economy to dispense and impart Himself as life into redeemed humanity, and He acts according to this economy because He is an economical, dispensing, organic reality. There is an eternal organic dispensing of divine life in the

Godhead from the Father who is eternally begetting the Son through the fellowship of the Spirit. This is a governing principle in the Triune God, an axiom that is not static in nature but economic in nature. Based on this principle, He acts. In *The Trinity*, Karl Rahner identifies the economic Trinity with the immanent Trinity, stating, "The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity" (22). The main point to be derived from his formulation is the fact that there is nothing in the economic Trinity that derives its expression apart from the reality inherent within the immanent, or essential, Trinity. For example, the incarnation of the Word in the Son of Man, as the realization of the fullness of the Godhead bodily, is possible because there is an only begotten Son of God in the eternal Godhead.

⁷This point is developed in a clear and concise manner in Kerry S. Robichaux's article, "Axioms of the Trinity," in the very first issue of *Affirmation & Critique*, which is available online at http://www.affcrit.com/archives/ac_96_01.html. Readers are encouraged to read this article.

⁸Some may argue that Peter's revelation of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16), which occurred before Christ's resurrection, was a revelation of God's economy. I will not deny this point, but only comment that Peter's revelation was limited. It did not impart the full content of God's economy or even fully unveil the process of the fulfillment of God's economy. The Father showed Peter that Jesus was the anointed One to carry out His will and that Jesus, as the Son of the living God, was one with the Triune God. Although Christ confirmed that the Father's revelation was the rock, the foundation of God economy, He had to add a further word about how God's economy would be enlarged through the building of the church and then spoke of how this enlargement would be made possible through His death and resurrection (vv. 18, 21). There is no indication that Peter or any of the disciples, those who were closest to the incarnated Christ, received or understood any of His further words. In fact, when Christ first began to speak of His death and resurrection, following Peter's revelation from the Father, Peter registered his disapproval because his mind was set on the things of men (vv. 22-23). Later, when the Lord revealed His death and resurrection a second time, the disciples were "greatly grieved" (17:23) because they again failed to see the economical necessity of Christ's death and resurrection for their economical participation in the risen Christ. The revelation of God's economy was only able to be made fully known to redeemed humanity when the resurrection of Christ as the life-giving Spirit made the regeneration of the human spirit possible through the impartation of Christ as the Spirit. In Matthew 16:16 Peter only saw a glimpse of God's economy, a glimpse that corresponded to the stage of the Triune God's revelation of Himself to humanity at the time of the Father's revelation, the stage of incarnation. In this stage Peter could receive a revelation of the incarnated Christ, but since Christ had yet to pass through death and resurrection to become the life-giving Spirit, his apprehension of the full import of God's economy was not possible. His apprehension was incomplete

because the Spirit, who would convey and impart the resurrected Christ, was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified through death and resurrection (John 7:38-39).

⁹Two cases in the New Testament illustrate the danger inherent in objectifying revelation as knowledge. In the first case, when Paul spoke to Festus in Acts 26:23, concerning the death and resurrection of Christ that would bring light to the people and the Gentiles, Festus responded, saying, “Much learning is driving you insane” (v. 24). The words of Paul were of the truth and therefore commanded a rightful sobriety, but to Festus, Paul’s revelation was nothing more than the accumulation of much learning, and therefore, it was evaluated according to human standards of what constitutes knowledge. Consequently, his words were rejected as foolishness. When the word, the revelation, of the cross is evaluated as knowledge according to human standards of wisdom, which are the standards of those who are perishing, it is regarded as foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18). In the second case, Jesus spoke to religious Jews, who were knowledgeable in the Scriptures, in John 5:39-40, saying, “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that testify concerning Me. Yet you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.” These religious Jews studied the Scriptures as if they were a source of knowledge only, and thus the content of the word, the testified Christ, was missed entirely. Even though the Jews were filled with religious knowledge, the word was not abiding in them. What is interesting to

note in the Lord’s rebuke is the fact that Christ was in front of them as both the form and voice of the Father, but they still missed Him: “The Father who sent Me, He has testified concerning Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor have you seen His form” (v. 37). The Jews missed Him because the first coming of Christ did not conform to their knowledgeable expectations related to the outward physical appearing of Christ; they were expecting a Messiah who would overthrow Roman rule and restore the physical kingdom of David, not a king who would sow Himself as a seed of life (Matt. 13:24). This speaks to the danger of regarding revelation as a physical manifestation—it is easy to miss the reality and to be distracted by false manifestations of signs and wonders that can be easily made to conform to our human predispositions (2 Cor. 11:14).

¹⁰In all three accounts in Acts of Paul’s encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus, there is no clear indication that Paul saw the Lord Himself. The nearest inference to this possibility is contained in the Lord’s charge to Paul in 26:16: “Rise up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a minister and a witness both of the things in which you have seen Me and of the things in which I will appear to you.” This could be read as an indication that the Lord visibly appeared to Paul, but the Lord’s own words qualify His appearing with reference to “the things in which you have

seen Me” and “the things in which I will appear to you.” On the road to Damascus, Paul experienced things: he saw light, and he heard the word. In the Lord’s shining and speaking, there was an appearing, a realization of the Lord, but this appearance was not unequivocally dependent upon a visible manifestation of Himself. Consider 1 John 1:7, which charges us to walk in the light as He is in the light. God is in the light because He is light (v. 5), and when we walk in the light, this light is both a mystical and hypostasized thing. There is no need for Christ to physically manifest Himself in order for God to appear to us in the light. The same considerations apply to the appearing of the Lord in the hearing of His word. When the word of the Lord comes to us, He is the word that is in our mouth and in our heart (Rom. 10:8), appearing to us in His speaking. Consequently, it is foolishness and a bit of religious superstition to expect to see Christ’s visible presence when He appears in the light and in the word.

¹¹In Luke 10:21 the Lord extols the Father for hiding “these things from the wise and intelligent” and revealing them to

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THIS IS A GOVERNING PRINCIPLE IN THE TRIUNE GOD, AN AXIOM
THAT IS NOT STATIC IN NATURE BUT ECONOMIC IN NATURE.

“babes.” It is easy to read *babes* as meaning those who are simple in their approach and receptivity to God, that is, those who come forward to God based on faith rather than on elaborate scientific, philosophic, or even apologetic arguments for His existence. But this understanding largely ignores the relationship in life that is implied by the words *Father* and *babes*. The Father’s revelation imparts the life of the Father and thus produces babes who will ultimately express Him fully through their sonship. In a cross reference to verse 21, Witness Lee points to 1 Corinthians 1:18-29, which contrasts the wisdom of the wise and intelligent with the foolishness of the believers, indicating that the “babes” who receive revelation in Luke 10:21 are “those who believe” in 1 Corinthians 1:21, that is, those who have believed the word and received the Father’s life. It is this life that is the basis for revelation, not mere knowledge.

¹²As the sovereign God of creation, the Triune God operates at every level of human existence. For example, He is the Ruler of the kings of the earth who arranges all the outward circumstances and situations in the world to prepare an environment that is receptive to the gospel and the building up of the church (Rev. 1:5). He is also the sanctifying Spirit who arranges all the situations and circumstances of one who has been predestinated unto glory in order for him to come to the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ

(1 Pet. 1:2). These two aspects of His operation are surely economical in nature, but they do not necessarily involve the impartation of revelation. Rather, they produce a willingness to receive the gospel, which then imparts the revelation that initiates the intrinsic operation of God's economy within redeemed humanity. It is in this sense that Barth speaks of redeemed humanity alone being "the beneficiary of God's great act of self-manifestation" (81). Ultimately, the fulfillment of God's economy depends upon the actions of God and to the response of redeemed and regenerated humanity to God's inward economic operation.

¹³Verses 2 through 21 are considered to be parenthetical because the thought that Paul begins in 3:1 is continued in 4:1. Verse 1 "in part repeats 3:1, where the apostle's exhortation in chs. 4—6 begins. This indicates that 3:2-21 is parenthetical" (Recovery Version, 4:1, note 1).

¹⁴By hidden, I do not mean unknowable. God is knowable, even from the things that He has created (Rom. 1:19-20), but not all that can be known concerning Him was known to the sons of men in other generations, and in this sense He was hidden in His economy from them. For example, only after Christ's resurrection could the apostle John explain the Lord's word in John 7:38-39 related to rivers of living water flowing out of the innermost being of a believer. This is because the explanation required a revelation from the Spirit who was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified in resurrection. The phrase *but this He said* confirms that John's explanation is retrospective in nature and that this aspect of the economical Triune God's being was hidden from him when the Lord spoke these words.

¹⁵The true test of whether or not a ministry is in accord with the ministry of the New Testament can be determined by whether or not those who receive the teaching of a particular ministry are being headed up in Christ and attached to the Body through their enjoyment of and participation in the riches of Christ's life.

¹⁶The words *minister* and *ministry* should not be read as references to the common uses that are attached to these terms in organized Christianity, including theologically trained and organizationally supported teachers who claim to possess a ministry by virtue of their training, speaking, and ability to draw inspiring lessons from the Word of God to teach others. If the riches of Christ are not being dispensed as grace, a person is not a minister, no matter how smooth the words and flattering the speech (Rom. 16:18). A true ministry also results in the obedience of faith (1:5; 16:26), an obedience that reflects submission to the Head and that empowers the church, as the blessed recipient of the riches of Christ, to crush Satan under its feet (v. 20).

¹⁷Paul's references to the tripartite nature of humanity in verses 17 and 18 also reinforce the fact that our regenerated human spirit is the recipient of the Father's revelation. In verse 17 the regenerated human spirit is directly mentioned, and in verse 18 the soul is implied in Paul's reference to the eyes of our heart because the heart is related to the functions of the soul—the

mind, emotion, and will—plus the function of the conscience in our spirit. Our body is also implied in verse 18 in Paul's reference to the glory of God's inheritance in the saints because the glory that will be revealed in us will occur at the time of the redemption of our body. The economy of the Triune God that comes out of the being of the Triune God and that applies the Triune God to every part of a believer's being begins with wisdom in our spirit and revelation from the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸Without a proper understanding of the economical nature of revelation, specifically as it relates to the content of revelation, it is possible to see but at the same time not see clearly, just like the blind man in Mark 8:23-25, who saw men but who saw them as trees walking. When Charles Hodge comments on the meaning of stewardship, he provides a clear explanation of the function of a steward but an inadequate explanation of what a steward actually dispenses. He states, "As the business of a steward is to administer or dispense, so the apostle was a steward of the mysteries of God. It was his office to dispense to others the truths which God had revealed to him" (39). According to his concept of stewardship, a steward dispenses objective truths, but according to the New Testament, a steward dispenses grace, which is nothing less than the unsearchably rich Christ Himself who has been processed through incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection to become the life-giving Spirit in our spirit as the reality of all the positive things in the universe.

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