

The God of Purpose and Mystery

by John Pester

Our God is a God of purpose, but He is also a God of mystery. In fact, His purpose is hidden in a mystery, and His purpose is identified with mystery itself (Eph. 1:9; 3:9-11).¹ Even though many desire to perceive and hear this mystery, knowledge and understanding of it come only through a revelation from the Father. What a seeming contradiction in the divine intention! He wills to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, but this hidden mystery is manifested only to His saints, each of whom must be given a spirit of wisdom and revelation to know the riches of the glory of His inheritance in them (Col. 1:26-27; Eph. 1:17-18). When the mystery is revealed, however, it produces stewards of the mysteries of God who are given a stewardship of grace, which has the capacity to complete the word of God (1 Cor. 4:1; Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:25), both in content and in experience, because it conveys the intrinsic reality of the revealed mystery, which is the organic incorporation of God and man, first in the person of Christ and then in the Body of Christ. The progressive manifestation of this mysterious reality is the progressive realization of the purpose of God, which will consummately display the incorporated operation of the Triune God in Himself and in redeemed and regenerated humanity.²

The Triune God of Purpose and Mystery

Our Triune God is a God of purpose. His purpose is not merely a work or action that has come up in His heart at a particular point in time. His purpose is an *eternal* purpose (Eph. 3:11); as such, His purpose cannot be separated from His eternal being. The eternality of His purpose is co-terminous with the eternality of His being. There has never been a time when God did not exist, and there has never been a time when God did not have a specific and unique purpose. It, therefore, follows that none of His decisions, commands, and arrangements reflect the initiation of purpose; instead, they reflect the working out of His one eternal purpose. Our predestination, for example, is but one of the “all things” that He has worked out

according to the counsel of His will in order to accomplish His purpose (1:11). Furthermore, when God said in Genesis 1:26, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them have dominion,” He was not initiating a newly considered work but further unfolding His one purpose, building upon His predestination of the believers by making vessels in His image and likeness, who could organically receive, contain, and express Him.

Since God’s purpose emanates from His very being, there should be little wonder that the Scriptures equate God’s purpose with the word *mystery*. The purpose that He purposed in Himself is spoken of as the mystery of His will (Eph. 1:9). It is a mystery because the Triune God Himself is a mystery in regard to both His essential being and His economical operation. In the essential Trinity, God is both three and one. There is distinction but not separation of persons. There is eternal coexistence, which speaks to the truth of distinction, but there is also eternal coinherence, which speaks to the truth of the absence of separation. Who can fully explain this? No one! Who can truly appreciate this? All who receive the divine life by believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:31). By believing in the anointed One, Christ, the believers are joined with one another and firmly attached unto Christ. Thus, we are also anointed to economically experience and enjoy the Triune God by virtue of our union with Christ, the Son (2 Cor. 1:21). The essential Trinity reveals the economy of His mystery, that is, the plan that works out His eternal purpose in time, by revealing Himself economically. He reveals in Himself in time what was hidden in Himself in ages past.³ In His economic revelation of Himself, the Triune God remains triune. There remains a distinction of persons, but even in incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection, there is not separation. The actions of one depend upon the actions of the others and even manifests the others.⁴ This is the principle and reality of divine incorporation. Concerning the term *incorporation* Robichaux states, “It is a well-recognized principle of the life

of the Trinity that in every action of the one the three operate" ("Johannine [1] 39). *Incorporation* speaks to "the reality that exists in God by which the three of the Godhead and all three of the Godhead exist in relation to each other and act in relation to each other" (41). This reality involves the "the mystery of mutual existence, mutual indwelling, and mutual operation that exists in the Godhead" (40-41).

In addition to the mutual existence and mutual indwelling of the three of the Godhead, a mutual operation can be derived axiomatically from the biblical identification of the name of the Triune God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19).

Father, Son, and Spirit point to important aspects of God that should affect our faith in and appreciation and enjoyment of God. That God has chosen to reveal Himself to man through these terms indicates at least three things concerning Him: 1) that above all He is an organic Being; 2) that by virtue of His organic identity He is eternally three and yet one; and 3) that as an organic Being He exists as an eternal dispensing. (Robichaux, "Axioms" 7-8)

In this dispensing, the Father is eternally begetting the Son, the Son is eternally being begotten as the only Begotten, and the Spirit is the eternal essence, fellowship, and transmission of life between Father and Son. This mutual operation involves an eternal dispensing, receiving, and expression of the organic life of the Triune God within the eternal Godhead, and it also defines the scope of the Triune God's purpose in time.


The Father is ever dispensing the divine essence into the Son and thereby begetting Him eternally; the Son is ever receiving and expressing that dispensing and is thus eternally begotten of the Father; the Spirit is ever dispensed as the divine essence by the Father and eternally proceeds from Him. Because God is this way in His eternal existence, in time the economy of His salvation reflects this eternal, intrinsic trinitarian dispensing by being focused in the dispensing of Himself into His chosen believers. ("Axioms" 11)

The mutual operation of the three is often overlooked because considerations of mutual existence and mutual indwelling tend to dominate discussions of the inner trinitarian being of God. But our Triune God is an organic, living God⁵ (Psa. 42:2; Matt. 16:16; 1 Tim. 4:10), and in the life of the living God there is an operation that operates in power related to the eternal dispensing of the

divine life (Col. 1:29; Phil. 2:13). This operation is both a pattern for and a harbinger of the organic operation that fulfills the eternal purpose of God through the revelation and execution of the economy of the mystery in time. The mystery of God is revealed in time as the mystery of Christ, and the mystery of Christ is revealed in time as the great mystery of Christ and the church, which is further revealed as the mystery of godliness, the organic manifestation of the living God in the flesh (Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:4; 5:32; 1 Tim. 3:15-16). This organic manifestation and expression was initially accomplished through the incarnation of the only begotten Son in the person of Jesus Christ, but it has been extended and applied to the members of the Body of Christ through the resurrection of Christ as the Firstborn.

Mystery, Revelation, Ministry, and Organic Incorporation

The economical manifestation of the Triune God in time is a reality, but seeing and apprehending this mystery requires revelation, which is given only by the Father who is the source of light. Once given, revelation issues in ministry, which makes known the mystery of God's desire to



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expand His organic incorporation into redeemed and regenerated humanity in order to produce the Body of Christ, which will fulfill His eternal desire for an enlarged expression and manifestation of Himself in Christ and the church. The ministry not only makes known the mystery; it also imparts the contents of the mystery and enables the members of the Body to participate in the work of the ministry unto the building up of the Body in love (Eph. 4:12, 16).⁶ This process, which reflects the dispensing of life from within the eternal Godhead, begins with revelation.

In our increasingly skeptical culture, however, there is a tendency to regard revelation as a mere psychological contrivance or construct. Consequently, acknowledging our need for revelation is rare, even in theological circles. Those who accept such a skeptical view, especially true believers who are more molded to the course of the age than they have been transformed by the renewing of their mind, do so at the peril of their own vibrant participation in the economy of God that will prove the will of God (Rom. 12:2).

Revelation is needed at an ontological level because only

the Father fully knows the Son (Matt. 11:27), and only the Spirit of God can reveal the things of God (1 Cor. 2:10-11). Revelation is needed at a human level because no one can truly know his situation by simply examining his deceptive and incurably wicked heart (Jer. 17:9). Revelation is needed for salvation, because the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelieving in an effort to prevent the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ from shining on them (2 Cor. 4:4). And revelation is needed by maturing believers in order to know the hope of their calling and, by the Lord's mercy, to hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience (1 Tim. 3:9), neither being distracted by different teachings nor teaching differently, having been blinded with pride and being diseased with questionings and contentions (Eph. 1:17-18; 1 Tim. 6:3-4).

Revelation is ultimately needed because the purpose of God has been hidden in a God who hides Himself (Eph. 3:9; Isa. 45:15), not only in the time of the old covenant but even in the time of the new covenant (Luke 5:16; John 6:15).⁷ "Our personalities are diametrically opposed to God's personality. He likes concealment, we like display; He does not crave outward manifestations, we cannot be content without them" (Lee, *God Who Hides* 2-3). Although He hides, He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6), and His most gracious reward is His revelation of His Son (Luke 2:25-32; Matt. 16:16-17; Gal. 1:16)—a revelation which is made possible by the operation of the Holy Spirit in the regenerated, mingled human spirit of every believer (1 Cor. 2:10-12). Flesh and blood simply cannot reveal what eye has not seen, ear has not heard, and what has not come up in the heart of man (Matt. 16:17; 1 Cor. 2:9). The prepared purpose of God can be revealed only by the Spirit in a human spirit that has been granted wisdom and revelation from the Father, who takes pleasure in revealing His Son in us (Eph. 1:17; Gal. 1:15-16).

In keeping with the axiomatic principle that God is eternally dispensing His divine life, the revelation of the mystery results in a ministry of the new covenant which dispenses the content of the mystery into redeemed and regenerated believers to build up the Body of Christ. The ministry is carried out by ministers, as servants and stewards, who have received the revelation of the mystery in spirit (Eph. 3:5, 7). Some of these servants are sent by God to dispense God as the truth and reality of the intrinsic content of the mystery. These are apostles. And some of these servants speak for God by speaking forth God as the content of the mystery. These are prophets. The initial qualification of an apostle and prophet is not based upon human capability, whether it be intelligence, eloquence, or other highly prized human attributes; the qualification is revelation and revelation only.⁸ When the mystery is made known through revelation, there is a calling through grace

and through the will of God to be a minister of this mystery (Gal. 1:15; 1 Cor. 1:1). The continuing qualification of a minister is faithfulness in service as a steward of the mysteries of God (4:1-2). A good minister faithfully lays before the brothers the healthy teaching of the apostles, which constitutes the nourishing words of the faith and the teaching which is according to godliness (1 Tim. 4:6; 6:3).

The revealed mystery that is imparted through ministry produces godliness, which is the organic issue of the mystery. Godliness is nothing less than the expression and manifestation of the organic incorporation of the processed Triune God with redeemed and regenerated humanity. It is the holy God expressed in holy apostles, holy prophets, and holy brothers (Eph. 3:5; Heb. 3:1), all of whom are growing into a holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:21) and all of whom will stand before Him, holy and without blemish in love when their predestinated sonship is realized in the consummate manifestation of the purpose and mystery of God (1:4-5), which will also be the consummate manifestation of the God of purpose and mystery.

Paul begins his description of the mystery of godliness with the phrase *He who was manifested in the flesh* (1 Tim. 3:16). Godliness is more than pious living; it is linked to both Christ and the church in this passage, and as such, it speaks of the organic manifestation of God in Christ and in the flesh of redeemed and regenerated humanity.

He refers to Christ, who was God manifested in the flesh as the mystery of godliness. The transition from *the mystery of godliness* to *He* implies that Christ as the manifestation of God in the flesh is the mystery of godliness (Col. 1:27; Gal. 2:20). This mystery of godliness is the living of a proper church, and such a living also is the manifestation of God in the flesh. (Recovery Version, 1 Tim. 3:16, note 3)

Even though *He* speaks directly to Christ, our understanding of Christ should include the consideration that all the fullness of the essentially incorporated and organic Triune God dwells in Christ (Col. 2:9). In his sermon on the mystery of godliness, John Calvin says, "If we seek life in Jesus Christ, we must understand that He hath the whole Godhead in Him; for it is written, 'For with thee is the foundation of life: in thy light shall we see light' (Psa. 36:9)" (19). For Calvin, life in Christ is related to the believers' being made one with Him, which extends the mystery of godliness from the person of Christ to those who are joined to Him:

Why doth St. Paul call this a mystery of faith, that Jesus Christ, who is God everlasting, was manifest in the flesh? It is as much as if he should say, when we are gathered to

God, and made one body with the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall behold the end for which we were made; to wit, that we might know that God is joined and made one with us in the person of His Son. (13)

He also refers to the economically manifested and processed Triune God, who has had the experiences of incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection compounded into the Godhead by virtue of the divinized humanity of Christ in ascension. Now, through the life-giving Spirit, the divinized humanity of Christ and all of the economical experiences of Christ have been made available to the believers, enabling them to partake of the organic incorporation that is the Triune God. The glory which was given to the Son has been given by Him to us in order that we can be one, even as the Triune God is one (John 17:22). Christ is in us, and the Father is in the Son who is in us (v. 23). Through the organic incorporation of Christ and the church as the mystery of godliness, the multifarious wisdom of God will be made known through the church (Eph. 3:10), and the world will know the incorporated, organic Triune God, both through the Father's economical sending of the Son and through His love toward the only begotten Son and His many sons, who are the brothers of the Firstborn.

***Mystery, Revelation,
Organic Incorporation,
and Ministry
in Matthew 16***



Flesh and blood simply cannot reveal what eye has not seen, ear has not heard, and what has not come up in the heart of man. The prepared purpose of God can be revealed only by the Spirit in a human spirit that has been granted wisdom and revelation from the Father, who takes pleasure in revealing His Son in us.

All the elements that are intrinsically related to knowing and participating in the purpose of God—*mystery, revelation, organic incorporation, and ministry*—are present throughout the New Testament. They are, however, succinctly presented in the account in Matthew 16:13-20, which is regarded by most theologians, teachers, and evangelists as a central passage related to our common faith. While this passage certainly confirms the divine status of Jesus Christ, it speaks much more to the purpose of God, which is shrouded in mystery even in the new testament age. The passage begins and ends with mystery in verses 13 and 20, and in between, it speaks of the role of revelation and of the call to ministry, both of which are needed in order to accomplish the will of God, which is the building up of the church through the incorporation of the believers with the Son of the living, dispensing God.

This passage begins with the Lord asking, “Who do men say that the Son of Man is?” and ends with the incarnated Son of the living God charging the disciples “not to tell anyone that He was the Christ” (vv. 13, 20). The Lord’s question opens the door to revelation, but the Lord’s charge continues to shroud the revelation in mystery. As the Son

of Man, the full nature and status of the Lord Jesus was a mystery to all those around Him. As such, He was the subject of intense scrutiny. Many tried to discern who He was, indicating that His person and work were beyond the comprehension of those living in Judea and Galilee, who even had a religious expectation of a coming one. “As a man, Christ was a mystery to that generation, as He is to people today” (Recovery Version, v. 13, note 2). Even though He was a great light to those sitting in the region and shadow of death (4:16), no one could comprehend the source of His light. They could only speculate according to the limits of their prevailing understanding of God’s operation, which was that He was another in a long line of men of God who spoke for God. The debate among men was limited to whether He was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets (16:14). “Without heavenly revelation people can realize, at most, only that Christ is the greatest among the prophets; no one can know that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God (v. 16)” (Recovery Version, v. 14, note 1).

The Lord’s second question in verse 15, “But you, who do you say that I am?” opened the door for this revelation. It

was a question that demonstrated both mercy and grace, beginning with the Lord’s words *but you*. The word *but* indicated that the highest, speculative thoughts of men are insufficient to characterize His person and work, thus opening up the possibility of a whole new realm of understanding. It reached further and planted deeper an awareness of a higher reality in their mind. This was mercy. His personal reference to the disciples with the word *you* demonstrated His care and concern that they would enter into the higher reality of His mysterious person. This was grace. With a comforted heart and in a clear atmosphere where his thoughts could “be released from the effects of the religious surroundings in the holy city and holy temple” (Recovery Version, v. 13, note 1), Peter then received a fuller knowledge of the mystery of God through a revelation from the Father: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v. 16).

In keeping with the Son’s eternal submission to the Father, it is interesting to note that the Lord did not directly confirm the content of Peter’s utterance. Instead, He acknowledged the source of Peter’s revelation. As the Son who incorporates the Father’s operation, even in

incarnation, He affirmed the Father's action of granting revelation: "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in the heavens" (v. 17), and in this act of affirmation, His status as the Son of the living God was confirmed. A revelation from the Father of the Son is the source of blessing, and Simon Barjona was so blessed. This initial revelation, however, was only the beginning of his blessing, as indicated by the Lord subsequently naming him Peter, a new name that would reflect the operation of the divine life in Simon Barjona which would transform him into a living stone (1 Pet. 2:4-5). Peter's transformation became a divine possibility because the Son of Man was revealed as the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The Christ refers to the One concerning whom God prophesied in the Old Testament through the prophets and whom His saints through the ages looked for (John 1:41, 45; Luke 2:25-26; 3:15), the One who would come to accomplish the will of God (Heb. 10:5-7).

The Christ, referring to the anointed One of God, speaks of the Lord's commission, whereas *the Son of the living God*, referring to the Second of the Triune God, speaks of His person. His commission is to accomplish God's eternal purpose through His crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and second coming, whereas His person embodies the Father and consummates in the Spirit for a full expression of the Triune God. (Recovery Version, Matt. 16:16, note 1)

The Christ points to the purpose of God because it indicates that He was anointed to accomplish, or fulfill, God's purpose. If there is One who fulfills, there must be a purpose to fulfill and a means to fulfill that purpose. In human endeavors, there are manifold means to fulfill a purpose, but the revelation that the Son of Man is the Son of the living God points to the divine means of accomplishing the purpose of God, which is the extension of the eternal, axiomatic dispensing of life from within the Godhead into redeemed and regenerated humanity to produce living stones for the building of the church, which organically incorporates God in humanity and humanity in God.

To know the Son of Man as the Son of the living God is to know the mystery of God, which is Christ, but to know the mystery of Christ, which is the church, there is the need for further revelation. And since God's purpose involves both Christ and the church, the Lord spoke of the building of the church immediately after affirming the Father's initial revelation: "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church" (v. 18). "The Father's revelation concerning Christ is only the first half of the great mystery, which is Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32). Hence, the Lord needed to reveal to

Peter the second half also, which concerns the church" (Recovery Version, Matt. 16:18, note 1).⁹ The unfolding of the mystery of Christ and the church in these verses reveals the extension of the organic incorporation that eternally exists in the Godhead into humanity, first in the person of Christ and then in the church.

Although Christ was revealed as the Son of the living God, this revelation did not negate or supersede the reality that in His person He was also the Son of Man. Outwardly, He appeared to be only a man, but He was the Son of the living God and the Son of Man at the same time. In this man there was the element of divinity, and in this God there was the element of humanity. God was manifested in the flesh; He was made known in the flesh. The Son of the living God being made known in the Son of Man indicates that the Son who coexists and coinheres with the Father and the Spirit in the eternal Godhead was joined to the sinless humanity of Jesus and was incorporately operating in, with, and through humanity.

The Lord's further speaking related to the church, which is built upon the revelation of the organic incorporation of the Son of the living God in the Son of Man, indicates that God's purpose is not limited to the organic incorporation that was accomplished with the incarnation of Christ; it also extends into the building of the church, which is made possible through the death and resurrection of Christ.¹⁰ The church displays the extension of the organic incorporation of the Triune God, who was manifested in the sinless humanity of Jesus, into the redeemed humanity of the believers who have been regenerated unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3). In order for this mystery to be fully manifested, when it is taken up in glory, there is the need for the reality of our incorporation to be "justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world" (1 Tim. 3:16). Being justified in Spirit and seen by angels speak to the building and manifestation of the church in Christ as we live in our spirit, which is one with the Spirit. And being preached among the nations and believed on in the world speaks to the need for ministry in and through those who have been joined to the Lord in order to build the church.

The role of the ministry in manifesting the mystery of godliness is stressed by the Lord in Matthew 16 as well. Immediately after speaking of building the church, He said, "I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens" (v. 19). The keys of the kingdom involve the exercise of ministry.

According to history there were two keys. Peter used one on the day of Pentecost to open the gate so that the Jewish believers could enter the kingdom of the heavens (Acts 2:38-42), and he used the other in the house of

Cornelius to open the gate so that the Gentile believers could enter (Acts 10:34-48). (Recovery Version, Matt. 16:19, note 1)

Peter used the key of ministry on the day of Pentecost by speaking according to the revelation he had received. When he stood to speak, he spoke of the mystery of incorporation by emphasizing and explaining the pouring out of the Spirit (Acts 2:17-18) which was made possible through the incorporate processes of the Son in death, resurrection, and ascension (vv. 23-24, 32-36), all of which occurred in order to fulfill the purpose of God as reflected in His determined counsel and foreknowledge (v. 23). Peter then used the key of ministry in the house of Cornelius by speaking according to the revelation he had received, and as he was speaking of the incorporate processes of the Son in human living, death, resurrection, and ascension (10:38-42), the extension of the incorporation of the Triune God into believing Gentiles for the building up of the Body of Christ occurred as faith was received through hearing (vv. 44, 47).

Ministry according to revelation opens the door to the *kingdom of the heavens*, a term

which is used interchangeably for *church* (Recovery Version, Matt. 16:19, note 2), and produces an incorporate, organic operation involving God and redeemed and regenerated humanity that carries out the will of God: “What-


ever you bind on the earth shall have been bound in the heavens, and whatever you loose on the earth shall have been loosed in the heavens” (v. 19). “Whatever the church people bind or loose on earth must be something that has already been bound or loosed in the heavens. We can bind or loose only what has already been bound or loosed in the heavens” (Recovery Version, v. 19, note 4). The organic incorporation of the church is such that what has been bound in the heavens is what is bound on the earth through the prayer of the church. The church is not a mere conduit of the divine will, passively receiving and uttering divine instructions, but rather the organic executor of the divine will through prayer. What the church binds has been bound, and what the church looses has been loosed. The church binds what has been bound and looses what has been loosed because it is organically incorporated with the working and operating Triune God. Just as the words of the Son are the works of the Father, the prayers of the church are the works of God. This is a mystery, but it is the consummation of seeing the Son of Man as the Son of the living God and of having the ways of life made known to us (Acts 2:28).

In eight short verses, verses 13 through 20 of Matthew 16, the mystery and purpose of God are summarized and presented as a pattern for many of the subsequent New Testament references to the purpose of God, especially in the Epistles of Paul.¹¹ The pattern in Matthew 16 speaks of the presence of mystery, the need for revelation, and the reality of organic incorporation that is demonstrated and extended into the church as the Body of Christ through ministry.

The purpose of God is a mystery, but it is knowable, just as the Triune God is a mystery, but also knowable. To know Him is to know the mystery, and to know the mystery is to know Him. Oh, that we may receive sight of our high calling to live in an organic union, organically incorporated in the living and moving Triune God, working together with Him by receiving the grace of God for the fulfillment of His eternal, mysterious purpose. **AFC**

Notes

¹Ephesians is an Epistle uniquely focused on the eternal



The revelation that the Son of Man is the Son of the living God points to the divine means of accomplishing the purpose of God, which is the extension of the eternal, axiomatic dispensing of life from within the Godhead into redeemed and regenerated humanity to produce living stones for the building of the church.

purpose of God. It begins with a revelation of the threefold blessing of the Triune God in the economical accomplishment of His eternal purpose in chapter 1 and continues throughout the subsequent chapters to unfold the economical operation that produces the goal of God’s purpose—an enlarged, organic incorporation of His Son in the church as the Body of Christ, the one new man, and the bride for His image and expression and as the corporate warrior for His dominion and representation. It is not a coincidence that this Epistle speaks so strongly of purpose, mystery, even great mystery, revelation, and ministry.

²The idea that the execution of the will of God involves a process goes against our religious notion of how an omnipotent God, who has the power to instantly call not being as being, should act. In regard to creation, when God speaks, it is so, and not being is called into being, but in the execution of His eternal purpose to bring forth a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), He operates as the God who gives life to the dead (Rom. 4:17). God’s ability to impart the divine life into fallen humanity is contingent upon the process of incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection in the person of Christ, and then upon the process of regeneration, renewing, sanctification,

transformation, conformation, and glorification as this life is imparted into redeemed humanity. The new creation is the issue of the impartation of the divine life into the sinless humanity of Jesus Christ: "In Him was life" (John 1:4) and into redeemed humanity: "This is the testimony, that God gave to us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life" (1 John 5:11-12). The first process was initiated in the fullness of the time (Gal. 4:4), and the latter process will consummate in the fullness of the times (Eph. 1:10). On the bridge of time, which connects eternity past with eternity future, God will not actualize the organic manifestation of His divine life through an instantaneous divine decree; rather, He will manifest it in accord with the axiomatic principles of His own essential being. The One who cannot deny Himself will not act contrary to the nature of His incorporated being; consequently, He will produce His enlarged expression in His many sons only in accord with the principle of organic incorporation. Within the essential Trinity, this organic incorporation is an eternal reality; however, within the operation of the economical Trinity, the organic incorporation of redeemed humanity involves time as God sovereignly arranges the environment and circumstances of humans in general and the predestined believers in particular to recover and fully reconcile the believers to Himself (2 Cor. 5:18-20). For example, there was a point in the history of humanity when sin was not even clearly recognized as sin (Rom. 3:20), and thus there was a need for the law and also a time for the law, as a child-conductor unto Christ (Gal. 3:24), to prepare a way for the Lord by establishing an environment for repentance and faith (Matt. 3:2-3).

³Elsewhere, I have stressed the point that the revelation of the economy of the mystery is intrinsically related to the progressive revelation of the Triune God Himself in His economy. See "The Economy of Grace and Glory in Ephesians" in *Affirmation & Critique*, IV.1 (Jan. 1999): 31-42.

The content of this mystery was not made known to the sons of men in other generations. It was hidden in God, and only as the Triune God was progressively revealed, first as the Son with the Father by the Spirit in incarnation and then through the Spirit as the Son with the Father in resurrection, was it possible for this revelation to be made known to the sons of men. This is because the economy of God, the mystery of God and the mystery of Christ (Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:4), is not separate from the Triune God Himself. The economy of God is God. Therefore, as the Triune God was progressively revealed, the economy of the mystery progressively unfolded. (35)

⁴See Kerry S. Robichaux's series on incorporation that began in *Affirmation & Critique* in 2004, specifically parts 1 and 2, "The Johannine Jesus as Bridge and Model for the Incorporation of the Believers into the Divine Trinity," and which continues in this issue.

⁵Robichaux provides a succinct explanation of the use of the term *organic* in "Axioms of the Trinity":

Father, Son, and Spirit are organic terms expressing relationships in life. From these terms we should expect that the Triune God is, for lack of a better term, organic in His identity and character. Certainly in His actions He is a God of life, but more intrinsically, He is a Being of life. The distinctions in the Trinity are defined by relationships in life. As Father He is the source of divine life, as Son He is the expression of divine life, and as the Spirit He is the essence of divine life. (8)

⁶I have entitled this section of my article "Mystery, Revelation, Ministry, and Organic Incorporation." The subsection that immediately follows is entitled "*Mystery, Revelation, Organic Incorporation, and Ministry in Matthew 16*." The reversal of the words *ministry* and *organic incorporation* in the subsection title is intentional. The overall section title reflects the role of ministry in teaching and conveying the contents of the truth of the mystery of God, and so *ministry* precedes *organic incorporation*. The healthy teaching of the apostles involves a message of organic incorporation. Paul declares, "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17); Peter declares that we have been made "partakers of the divine nature" through God's precious and exceedingly great promises (2 Pet. 1:4), and John declares that he announces what he has seen and heard in order to bring us into the fellowship of the apostles which is "with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

The subsection title, in contrast, reflects a minister's need for experience and constitution with the reality of organic incorporation in order to validate and demonstrate the contents of the mystery of which he will speak. In many respects, a true minister organically embodies the organic content of the ministry. Paul declares that he "labored more abundantly" by the grace of God which was with him (1 Cor. 15:10); Peter, no doubt drawing upon his own experiences of calling, suffering, and perfecting, declares that the God of all grace would Himself "perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground" the believers (1 Pet. 5:10); and John declares, "We are of God," and "We are in Him who is true" (1 John 5:19-20). Ministry without constitution results in a ministry of the dead letter. Ministry with constitution produces ministers of the new covenant, who have a ministry of the Spirit and whose sufficiency is from the God who is organically incorporated into their person and work to the point that they are a manifestation of the truth (2 Cor. 3:5-6; 4:1-2). In Matthew 16 the Lord's emphasis is on Peter's need for transformation through his experience of the organic incorporation that builds the church. Knowing that Peter would have such experiences, the Lord charged him with the exercise of the keys of the kingdom, which involved ministry and teaching.

⁷In a booklet entitled *A God Who Hides Himself*, Witness Lee makes the point that even in the new testament age, the manifestation of God in the flesh was carried out in a hidden way:

When this only begotten Son came for the very purpose of showing forth the Father, He hid Him in a human life—

a human life whose “appearance was marred,” a human life that had “no attracting form nor majesty” (Isa. 52:14; 53:2). And He came from Galilee, an insignificant province, and from the town of Nazareth, a small town of which it was said by the Jews that no prophet or person of repute ever came from there (John 1:46; 7:52). So, when He appeared, people not only found it hard to believe that God was present in Him—they found it hard even to believe that He was a prophet of God. Yet God was hidden within Jesus of Nazareth. (6-7)

⁸Highly prized human attributes in secular circles often are associated with human talent and capacity, and in Christian circles these same human talents and capacities are often associated with the biblical term *talents*, as spoken of in Matthew 25. Consequently, Christians are often urged to use their human talents in the divine service of the Lord. The talents in Matthew 25, however, do not refer to human abilities, because these talents are given to each “according to his own ability” (v. 15). If the talents were the abilities that each one already had, there would be no need for the giving of additional talents. The talents in this chapter refer to the grace that is given according to the measure of the gift of Christ (Eph. 4:7).


The extent to which Christ is revealed and formed in us is the extent of the gift of Christ, who alone is the basis of the grace that we receive and of the talent that we can invest in service to the Lord.

⁹It is interesting to note that the revelation of the church comes from the Son, as indicated by *and I also say*. It is an operation of the Father to initially reveal the Son, but once revealed and manifested, the Father, who is well pleased with the Son in every aspect of His manifestation, including the Son’s speaking of the words of the Father (John 14:10), wants us to “hear Him” (Matt. 17:5).

¹⁰The Lord began to speak of His death and resurrection only in verse 21 of Matthew 16, after the mysterious purpose of God was revealed in verse 18. This indicates that redemption is not the end of God’s purpose but rather the means to accomplish His purpose. Many evangelists use this passage in Matthew 16 only to point to the divinity of Jesus in order to stress the eternal efficaciousness of His substitutionary death on our behalf. The Lord, however, revealed that the building up of the church through the experience of the Son who incorporates the living God is the purpose of God. Knowing that the disciples would be full of considerations as to how He would build the church, the Lord “from that time...began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised” (v. 21).

¹¹The connection between purpose and mystery can clearly be seen in Ephesians 1:9, where Paul declares that the

mystery of God’s will was made known according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself. The need for the mystery to be revealed can be seen in Romans 16:25, where Paul declares that the gospel which establishes the churches is according to the revelation of the mystery, which has been kept in silence in the times of the ages. Once the mystery is revealed, it is spoken forth in ministry, as Paul testifies in numerous verses, including 1 Corinthians 2:1, 7; Ephesians 3:3-4, 9; 6:19; and Colossians 2:2; 4:3. The reality of the mystery being organic incorporation in relation to the Triune God and redeemed and regenerated humanity can be seen in Romans 11:25, 1 Corinthians 15:1, Ephesians 5:32, Colossians 1:26-27, and 1 Timothy 3:9 and 16. The one instance in which Paul uses the term *mystery* not in reference to the divine economy occurs in 2 Thessalonians 2:7: “It is the mystery of lawlessness that is now operating, but only until the one now restraining goes out of the way.” In many respects, I believe that Paul’s use of *mystery* here implies, at a minimum, the organic expression of the satanic nature, manifested as sin in contrast to godliness. I hope to consider these verses in relation to the revelation of the mystery of organic incorporation in the ministry of Paul in a future issue of *Affirmation & Critique*.



God will not actualize the organic manifestation of His divine life through an instantaneous divine decree; rather, He will manifest it in accord with the axiomatic principles of His own essential being. He will produce His enlarged expression in His many sons only in accord with the principle of organic incorporation.

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