

The use of οἰκονομία for missions in Ephesians

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The concern which prompted the letter and the author's digression in Ephesians 3:2–12 represents a lacuna in Ephesians scholarship. Its function within the wider discourse remains uncertain. The term οἰκονομία is prominent in the discourse and has been interpreted as an administrative office or activity in the Pauline corpus. This article shows that the term has a missional nuance in Ephesians. It is used for the role of Christ in the execution of the plan of God (Eph 1:10) and the role of Paul in the implementation of the plan (Eph 3:2). The author of Ephesians acknowledges the role Paul played in the mission's movement of the gospel itself, 'I Paul the prisoner of Jesus Christ' (Eph 3:1, 7). He is identified as the person to whom 'the stewardship of the grace of God has been given' (Eph 3:2). The οἰκονομία of the gospel is committed by Paul to the church, marking a new phase in the development of the mission of the church.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The article suggests that in Ephesians 3:10, which is a *crux interpretum*, that the missional nuance of the term οἰκονομία indicates in Ephesians 3:10 the role of the Church in the execution of the plan of God and the *missio Dei* is implied.

Introduction

The article discusses the meaning of the term οἰκονομία about which there is no consensus. 'The meaning of the term has been rendered as "stewardship", Paul's activity of a steward, his office given him by God's grace, the administration of the grace given him, God's plan and his administration of it, or some combination of these senses' (cf. O'Brien 1999:227). Paul departs from his main argument to fill in a gap in his argument (cf. Best 1998:294). The digression formally begins in v. 2 with εἰ γε ἠκούσατε, an intensified *if* that entails a confident assumption that is best translated 'surely you heard' (cf. Lincoln 1990:173). Digression comprises two thought units, vv. 2–7 and 8–13, and the thought unit or block is concluded with διό, an inferential particle (v. 13). Ephesians 3 reveals that Paul is at least concerned with his involvement in God's *charis* and the mystery of Christ, and with the manner of the reception of that mystery. The material in vv. 2–13 is arguably the most intensely personal pericope of Ephesians. A slight semantic shift in meaning takes place between Ephesians 1:10 and 3:2 and 9. In Ephesians 3:2 the author expounds and develops the concept of οἰκονομία, which in 1:10 has the meaning of the plan of God, and he identifies his role in the activity of God. The term οἰκονομία in Ephesians 3:2 and 9 is developed and the semantic shift in meaning of the term expounded, which is an exploration of the outworking of the plan of God in Ephesians 1:10, to give insight into the holistic plan of God. The intention of the author is to make known and reveal the mystery, his role (Eph 3:3–7), and the role of the church (Eph 3:8–10) in the effectuation of God's plan. In Ephesians 3 these roles are then identified as part of 'the plan of the mystery' (Eph 3:9, English Standard Version), 'hidden through the ages' (Eph 3:9), 'the eternal purpose' (Eph 3:11) or plan that 'has realised in Christ' (Eph 3:11, ESV). This plan has progressively been revealed and worked out in history. The term οἰκονομία represents the task and responsibility of Paul and the Church in God's plan. The article will examine the development of the concept of οἰκονομία in the letter to the Ephesians.

The semantic meaning of οἰκονομία

In the use of οἰκονομία in Ephesians there are several possible uses. Hoehner (2002:217) identifies two possible meanings, the 'first, the position or office of an administrator; second, the activity of administering'. The term οἰκονομία is used by Paul in different contexts with a specific nuance that is determined by the particular context (Figure 1). In order to determine the nuanced meaning intended in Ephesians more is required than simply making a decision between which one of two possible usages, 'administrative office' or 'activity', is meant. The particular meaning in the context has to be determined¹. 'It is the setting of words, rather than the words themselves, which

1. Hoehner (2002:218) sees the use of οἰκονομία in all of its occurrences in the NT as 'talking about God's activity of administration'.

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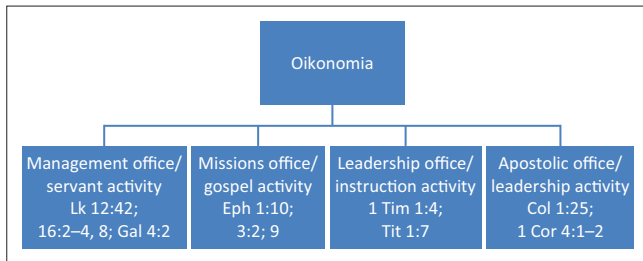


FIGURE 1: The diagram illustrates the various contextual meanings of the word 'oikonomia'.

forms the vital contribution to New Testament thought' (Black 1988:138). It has been recognised that 'a word can be used in a multiplicity of ways' (Louw 1982:54), and that:

one and the same author must certainly be allowed the privilege of using the same word both in its basic meaning and also, in a different context, in a somewhat modified sense. (Hendrickson 1967:44)

The particular nuance in Ephesians has to be determined.

The meaning of office, activity or plan of God?

It is suggested in this article that more is meant by the use of the term *οικονομία* in Ephesians than simply an administrative office or activity. A 'slight semantic shift' (Hendrickson 1967:44) in the meaning of *οικονομία* in Ephesians takes place (cf. Hendrickson 1967:44). There is a shift in meaning of *οικονομία* from Ephesians 1:10 to Ephesians 3:2 and 9 which is a change in nuance rather than a change of meaning². The term has been assigned different meanings by various authors in Ephesians 1:10 of 'effectuation' or 'the carrying into effect of the plan' (cf. Hendrickson 1967:44) and 'administration', 'management of a household' (cf. Plato *Apologia* 36b; *Respublica* 6.11; Xenophon *Oeconomicus* 1.1), or 'of an estate' (cf. Josephus 2.5.7:89) as a specific use in Ephesians has been suggested. The conceptualisation of the term as 'God's ordering of history' (Lincoln 1981:143) conveys the nuance of missions. The missional sense is that of the 'ordering, arranging, or implementing' (Kuhli 1981:2:500 EDNT) or *arrangement* (Robinson 1761:145) of God's plan by Christ in Ephesians 1:10 and the missions activity of Christ is his activity of fulfilling the task of 'carrying into effect the plan or purpose' of God (Eph 1:10; 3:9) (cf. Hendrickson 1967:44). In this sense Jesus brings to completion the mission of God. The idea of the execution of a special task or assignment is also the basic idea of the use of the word *οικονομία* in its occurrence in Ephesians 3:2. The special role or function given to Paul is that of 'the stewardship of the grace of God' (Eph 3:2) as part of the execution of the divine plan. The role of Paul can be characterised as missionary rather than as an administrative officer in Ephesians 3:2. Paul saw the execution of the *την οικονομίαν* (Eph 3:2) given to him as serving the *εἰς οἰκονομίαν ... τῷ Χριστῷ*, (belonging) to Christ (Eph 1:10). He was a missionary in the progressive movement of the *missio Dei* to its climax in *πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν*, 'the fullness

of the times' (Eph 1:10). 'It is related to the *implementation* (emphasis added) of the decision made by God' (Eph 1:10) (Kuhli 1981:500 EDNT). Hoehner (2002:455) argues that *οικονομία* in Ephesians has two different nuances, that of an officer or administrator and that of the activity of administration. He argues that these nuances 'are intertwined and both may be in view' in 3:9 (Hoehner 2002:455). However, in the rest of this article, I will demonstrate that a single nuance is intended, namely missions, which brings together the commission and the task. In Ephesians 3:2 Paul's commission is to make known the mystery of the gospel to Gentiles; his missionary calling is that of 'the stewardship of the gospel' (Eph 3:2) which is the carrying out of the activity of missions. We do not find a missionary office in the context, but *διάκονος* is used for the ministry office of Paul (Eph 3:7).³ The task of *την διακονίαν* (Act 20:24) overlaps with *την οἰκονομίαν* (Eph 3:2), but it differs in that *οἰκονομίαν* is used of Paul's proclamation of the gospel of God's grace to those outside the Body of Christ and *διακονίαν* for the proclamation of God's grace to those in the Body of Christ, to the church (Eph 3:7).⁴ 'The majority of interpreters assume for *οικονομία* in Ephesians 3:2 the meaning of "office," "administration"' (Kuhli 1981:500 EDNT) and equivalent to the office of *διάκονος*, but this would make the term redundant.

The missional nuance of οἰκονομία

The use of *οικονομία* in Ephesians 3:2 is not identical to the use in Colossians 1:25. The author of Ephesians is less concerned with Paul's office of apostle than with God's plan of salvation (cf. Kuhli 1981:500 EDNT). In Ephesians we do not have to do with multiple meanings of the term, but an integrated meaning and relationship of the terms. The phrase 'the stewardship of the grace' indicates the missionary commission of Paul's apostolic office. Paul is not defending his apostolic mandate to the Ephesians⁵ nor does he assert his credentials over those of others as in Galatians and Philippians (cf. Fowl 2012:108). The core of Paul's assertion is that his stewardship activity is missionary in nature and part of the unfolding of the plan of salvation *initiated* and *sustained* by God (cf. Fowl 2012:107).⁶ 'The *missio Dei* which has been identified with the self-revelation of the Trinity in Ephesians can be concretely [*identified*] with the task *οικονομία*' (Van Aarde 2015:47).⁷ 'Paul elaborates on the content of the stewardship or mission given to him by God for the sake of the Gentiles' (Fowl 2012:107). The gospel and the task of the stewardship of the grace were

3. In Acts 20:24 *την διακονίαν* is used for Paul's ministry task of proclaiming the gospel to those in the body of Christ (Ac 20:17, 27–28). In Col. 1:25 *διάκονος* is used of Paul's appointment to the office of preacher.

4. In Ephesians 3:2 the entrance of the Gentiles into the church is through the means of the stewardship of the grace of God given to Paul. In Ephesians 3:7 it is the preaching activity of Paul to a church of Jew and Gentile that is the working of the power of him.

5. Kitchen (1994:30), Best (1998:292) and Arnold (1989:86) view the digression as an apostolic defense. Gombis (2004:314) correctly observes 'these readings, however, fail to do justice to the key features of this passage'.

6. Although the term *missio Dei* is not used by Fowl he identifies two of the essential ingredients of the *missio Dei*, the *initiation* and *sustaining* activity of God.

7. The identification of *οικονομία* with the *missio Dei* does not create a dialectical disjunction of the divine and human because the term *οικονομία* is used for both the divine and human in Ephesians' (Van Aarde 2015:47).

2. The change in meanings in Ephesians according to Mitton (1951:195–198) is one of a set of six arguments he makes against Pauline authorship based on 'the change of meaning of such words as *οικονομία* and *μυστήριον*' (cf. Kirby 1968:47).

given to him by God and through Paul God was at work carrying out His plans and purposes. In Ephesians 3:2 the term *οικονομία* does not simply mean 'plan of salvation' but the carrying out of the plan of salvation. It corresponds to Ephesians 1:10 where *οικονομία* has in mind the divine execution of the plan of salvation instead of the plan of salvation itself. *Οικονομία* is translated 'commission' in Ephesians 3:2 in the NRSV and NIV to indicate Paul's missionary task. The task of *οικονομία* in Ephesians (Eph 1:10, 3:2 & 9) is more than a position or office of administration. It is part of the unifying work of Christ (Eph 1:10) that Paul is involved in that will climax in the unification of the cosmos (Eph 1:20–23). For this reason *οικονομία* is not to be identified with an administration in the sense of a business concept⁸, but it has the sense of missions. Paul uses the term *οικονομία* not to mandate his high standing but to indicate his low servanthood stance in the proclamation of the gospel.⁹ The church also takes part in the activity of *οικονομία* (Eph 3:9).

Οἰκονομία – the role of Jesus Christ in the plan of God

The relation of *οικονομία* and *ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι* in Ephesians 1:10

In the letter to the Ephesians a disproportional amount of attention has been given to the precise meaning of the verb *ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι* as the central concept of Ephesians 1:10. The Greek expression in the immediate context of Ephesians 1:10 and its significance within the wider context of the letter has not received adequate consideration. The phrase *εἰς οἰκονομίαν* corresponds with the purpose expressed by the verb *προέθετο* (v. 9) and *ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι* (v. 10) which is a complementary infinitive and explains the preceding aorist, *προέθετο* (v. 9). The aorist infinitive verb points to a specific act, to 'the purpose' and 'semantically encode perfect aspect' (Campbell 2008:95).¹⁰ The action of the aorist infinitive in Ephesians 1:10 'does not mean that the action is once occurring just because it is conveyed with perfect aspect' (Campbell 2008:36). It is an ongoing activity that will climax with the return of Christ. The preposition *εἰς* in Ephesians 1:10 is used with *οἰκονομίαν* to indicate a significant double re-enforcement of the idea of purpose, the verb *προέθετο* and *ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι* re-enforces the idea of purpose,¹¹ 'a purpose destined to be put into effect' when the times will have reached their fulfilment (cf. Harris 1991:101). 'It is best to see it as temporal, a use of *εἰς* that is not common in the NT' (Hoehner 2002:217) which 'corresponds with the purpose of the verb (v. 9)' (Hoehner 2002:217).¹² Peter O'Brien

(2004:219) has demonstrated that the statement of Ephesians 1:9–10, which proclaims that God has made known the mystery of his will, the content of which is that it is his intention to 'sum up all things in Christ',¹³ is the key text of the letter. The plan of God is realised in human history through a progression of successive ages as the plan of God is put into effect. The plan and *οικονομία* in Ephesians 1:9–10 is presented from the perspective of the climax, the point at which all of history reaches its full realisation 'in Christ'. The idea of *the summing up of all things* taken by itself, and separated from *οικονομία* and the idea of the plan of God in Ephesians, does not reflect the main idea of the letter. O'Brien (1999:111–115; 2004:206–219) focuses almost exclusively on the verb *ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι* and does so without discussing it in relation to the term *οικονομία* as a key concept in the letter. O'Brien (2004:213) determines the meaning of the verb *ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι* first within the immediate context before turning to the rest of Ephesians. He, however, overlooks that the verb used in Ephesians 1:9–10 is linked to the concept of *οικονομία* and that it is specifically *οικονομία* that is developed in the rest of the letter (Eph 3:2 & 9). It is by means of the activity of *οικονομία*, of Christ, that the plan of God is put into effect 'in Christ' and *the summing up of all things* takes place. The plan will be fulfilled in 'the fulfilment of the times' (Eph 1:10).¹⁴ It can be paraphrased as 'what has been realised will be fully realised in the fulfilment of the times' (van Aarde 2015:50).¹⁵ In the execution of the plan of God, *the summing up all things*, it is Christ who is central and the agent of unification who fills all (Eph 1:22–23).¹⁶ O'Brien (2004:212) connects the verb to the notion of unity which 'may not be part of the semantic range of the term', but 'an implication that Paul himself draws from the word in its sentence' (Eph 1:9, 10). He acknowledges that 'now in vv. 9 and 10 the stress is placed on the one in whom God's overarching purposes for the *whole* of the created order are included' (O'Brien 1999:112). The stress is placed on Christ who carries out the plan of God, the task of *οικονομία*, and brings the salvation historical plan of God to fulfilment and accomplishes the unity. O'Brien (2004:213) writes, 'it is certainly appropriate to place the thought of 1:10 within the context of the letter as a whole, and this will involve linking it with passages that point to Christ's relation to the cosmos (such as 1:22)' (O'Brien 2004:213). The exaltation of Christ is to be understood as the final step, the climactic point, in the *summing up of all things* in the grand plan of God. Unity stands in a relation to *οικονομία* and the plan of God (1:10; 3:2 & 9). The unity is secondary; it is the result of the plan of God which is primary in Ephesians. The full realisation of God's plan is 'the subordination of all things to Christ' (Eph 1:22–23). The infinitive *ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι*, 'to bring all things together',

8. The term *servant leader* was coined by business consultant Robert Greenleaf, to promote a less autocratic corporation environment (cf. Cohick 2010:85).

9. 'Paul is always the gospel's servant and not its master' (Fowl 2012:115). The 'account makes it clear that Paul is no more than a servant of the gospel...' (Fowl 2012:114). Strictly speaking, Paul's apostleship is irrelevant in Ephesians 3:2–13.

10. 'The aorist tense-form is universally regarded as being perfect in aspect. This means that the aorist provides an external view of action. It presents events in summary, from a distance and does not view the details of how the action took place' (Campbell 2008:34).

11. The aorist infinitive signifies purpose (cf. O'Brien 1999:114).

12. The phrase *εἰς οἰκονομία* taken together with the genitive phrase 'of the time of the fullness of time' indicates temporal time.

13. O'Brien (2004:206–219) identifies the verb *ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι* and the thought of 1:10 as central in the context of the letter as a whole.

14. This means the plan is fulfilled in successive ages, hence the use of *dispensation* (Eph 1:10; KJV).

15. O'Brien (1999:114) correctly comments 'the final goal of God's plan which has not yet been realized'. The perfective aspect of the aorist infinitive verb *ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι* views the action as a whole, in its entirety from beginning to end (cf. Campbell 2008:20, 95).

16. 'The perfect aspect of the aorist infinitive allows its usage in these temporal constructions that include antecedent and subsequent action' (Campbell 2008:95).

points to *the goal* to be achieved; perfect unity not as the end result but the goal of the fulfilment of God's plan.

The agency of Christ in the execution of οἰκονομία

It has been argued that although the Messiah may be the means (or instrument) through whom God *sums up the universe*, it is better to take the phrase as referring to him as the sphere, in line with earlier instances of this phrase within the paragraph (vv. 3–8, 9) (cf. O'Brien 2004:214–215). Christ is the one in whom God chooses to bring all things together, thereby restoring harmony to the universe (O'Brien 2004:215; cf. Lincoln 1981:143). He himself is the unity. He is the one who accomplishes the goal, the *summing up of all things* and unity is found in him. The term οἰκονομία refers to God's plan and purposes, the making known of the 'mystery of his will having been made known to us' (Jew and Gentile) (Eph 1:9). It implies an involvement in God's purposes. The dynamic work of Christ culminates in *the summing up of all things*. The end result is that all of creation will be restored in its relation to Christ, 'in him'. It is by means of the agency of Christ that the plan of God, *missio Dei*, is continued from heaven until all things are reconciled 'in Him' (cf. van Aarde 2015:50). The term οἰκονομία in Ephesians 1:10 indicates 'the plan of salvation'¹⁷ which pertains to the *effective execution* or 'effectuation' (Hendrickson 1967:84) of the mission of God. It is 'a plan for the fullness of time' (ESV), which means that the plan will be fully accomplished when the times will have reached the point of completeness.¹⁸ The meaning of οἰκονομία in Ephesians 1:10 has a missional nuance and what is in view is a commission rather than an office¹⁹ as it indicates the dynamic activity of Christ in the execution of the task of οἰκονομία and so it implies an office of administration. But it is not an office that is in view in Ephesians 1:10. In Ephesians 1:10 the term οἰκονομία has a missional nuance of the activity of administration and thus may be understood as 'arrangement, order, plan, strategy'. The activity of administration of Christ in the context is the fulfilment of the plan of God for the cosmos (Eph 1:22) and stands in relation to the work of the Spirit and the Father. Christ fulfils the predetermined plan of the Father (Eph 1:9), implying that the execution of the task is missional. 'The mission of Jesus and the Gospels is part of the execution of the *missio Dei* and οἰκονομία [sic] in Ephesians 1:10 stand in a continuum with Jesus [sic] earthly ministry' (Van Aarde 2015:56; cf. Green 1997:125). The earthly and heavenly ministry of Jesus are unified in the role of Christ within the

17. Contra Hoehner (2002:218), who states that 'some think οἰκονομία means "plan of salvation," but that is not what the passage is addressing'.

18. It is the point in time when the plan and purpose of God intersects with the historical fulfilment of the plan.

19. The term οἰκονομία has two nuances: the first, the position or office of an administrator as used of an administration or management of a household, or of a state; and second, of the activity of administration and thus arrangement, order, plan, strategy' (Hoehner 2002:217). The first is the activity of an administrator, and can be translated 'administration' (NASB) or 'dispensation' (Old Latin, Vg, KJ, AV, and ASV) and the second is the activity of administration, and can be translated 'to be put into effect' (NEB; NIV). Οἰκονομία in Ephesians 3:9 is a missional task and commission and the office διόκονος of the Church serves this task. Paul does not use two nuances in Ephesians, in Ephesians 1:10, 3:2 and 3:9 but only one, a missional nuance is in view. A commission rather than an office is in view which serves the mission. Luke (Lk 16:2–4) uses the first nuance to refer to the position or office of an administrator.

missio Dei and grounded in the Trinity (Eph 1). He is the person through whom this will be accomplished (Eph 1:10) and the focal point in whom all of creation will converge, which the 'in him' has in view.

Οἰκονομία – the role of Paul in the plan of God

The relation of οἰκονομία and μυστήριον in Ephesians 1:9–10

The term οἰκονομία is a key concept to unlock the letter to the Ephesians. It is the main term in Ephesians 1 and 3 and is related to God having made known to us (Jew and Gentile) the μυστήριον of his will. The μυστήριον springs from the will and eternal purpose of God which was to bring the whole created universe under the lordship of Christ (cf. Kirby 1968:14). The word οἰκονομία in Ephesians 1:10 is related to the 'making known to us the μυστήριον of his will'²⁰ (Eph 1:9). It is through the οἰκονομία work of Christ that the μυστήριον was made known to us.²¹ The *mystery* and *purpose* go together: 'the effectuation of the purpose is the revelation of the mystery' (Hendrickson 1967:86). The use of μυστήριον has in view the οἰκονομίαν work of Christ in 'making known the mystery of his will' (Hoehner 2002:214). 'The μυστήριον in Ephesians is the once secret now open plan of God that has been revealed. The content of the μυστήριον is to "sum up all things in Christ"' (O'Brien 2004:219; cf. Lincoln 1981:143). 'The mystery is his eternal purpose' (Hendrickson 1967:85), 'to sum up all things'. The οἰκονομία and μυστήριον are connected to 'the summing up of all things', the bringing together of everything under one head in Christ, 'the things in the heavens and the things on the earth' (Eph 1:20–23). O'Brien (2004:219) declares that 'the statement of Eph 1:9–10, which proclaims that God has made known to us the mystery of his will, the content of which is that it is his intention to "sum up all things in Christ," is the key text of the letter'. The verb ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι (Eph 1:10) expresses a key idea of the letter not only in relation to μυστήριον but specifically in relation to οἰκονομία. In Ephesians 3, to which we now turn, the implementation of the plan of God is worked out.

The relation of οἰκονομία and μυστήριον in Ephesians 3:2–3, 6 and 9

The mystery to the Church and the mystery of the Church

The use of οἰκονομία and μυστήριον also go together in Ephesians 3:2–4. In Ephesians 3 Paul is given the οἰκονομία of participating in the working out of the 'the plan of salvation' that Christ executes. 'In Ephesians 3:1–13 Paul makes it clear that his missionary calling to preach the gospel to the Gentiles is integral to God's redemptive plan' (Köstenberger & O'Brien 2001:166). The unity is more than a restoration to the original harmony in creation (Eph 3:6; Rev 7:9–10). Paul sets

20. Most examples of οἰκονομία terminology in Paul occur in the proximity to the word μυστήριον' (Reumann 1967:157). (Cf. 1 Cor 4:1; 9:17; Col 1:25).

21. The μυστήριον was important for understanding the meaning of οἰκονομία indicated by the many instances of the close proximity of the words (cf. O'Brien 1999:113).

out his role in the unfolding of the plan of salvation through the proclamation of the gospel (Eph 3:2–9), and it is through the proclamation of the gospel that heaven and earth, angels and people are brought into unity in Christ. Paul is given the task of ‘the implementation of this assignment, which is to make known the special revelation of the mystery of Christ’ (Grizzle 2013:80).²² The task of *οικονομία* committed to Paul (Eph 3:2) was to reveal the mystery *to* the church in Ephesians, not the mystery *of* the church.²³ The stewardship as the gracious gift of God is the stewardship of the gospel of grace and it is through the gospel that grace is revealed (Eph 3:2). Paul has also received grace ‘for enablement to make known the mystery’ (Eph 3:7) (Hoehner 2002:424–425). ‘Divine grace was not given for Paul’s personal enhancement. It was given for the sake of the Gentiles, as the following words, *for you, show*’ (O’Brien 1993:14). The reference in Ephesians 3:9 to the first creation rather than the new creation (cf. Barth 1974:344) indicates the mystery is not the plan ‘to create this new entity called the church and his timing was to reveal it in the NT era’ (Hoehner 2002:457). The *μυστήριον* in Ephesians 3:6 ‘springs from the mystery of the will of God whose eternal purpose was to bring the whole created universe under the lordship of Christ’ (Eph 1:23) (Kirby 1968:14). ‘The mystery was a new revelation in the manner in which the divine purpose would be fulfilled’ (Grizzle 2013:80). The purpose is fulfilled through the involvement of Paul in God’s purpose. In Ephesians 3 the *μυστήριον* was made known to Paul by revelation (Eph 3:3) so that [ὅτι] he was able to fulfil the task of ‘the stewardship of the grace of God (τὴν οἰκονομίαν τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ)’, to reveal the gospel that God had entrusted to him by commission.²⁴ The apostle Paul was entrusted with the *μυστήριον*, the gospel ‘of the grace of God’ (Eph 3:2). The genitive τῆς χάριτος (Eph 3:2) could be taken as an objective genitive with *οἰκονομίαν* indicating that it is the stewardship of the grace, that is, the responsibility for the gospel entrusted to Paul and a genitive of source with respect to the *δωρεάν*: ‘gift from the grace ...’ (Eph 3:7). This indicates that Paul’s ministry was a gift of grace. The object of Paul’s ministry is the preaching of the message of the grace of God. The particular combination of words τὴν οἰκονομίαν τῆς χάριτος ... τῆς δοθεῖσαν (Eph 3:2) is used in the NT in connection with the grace given to Paul to proclaim the gospel of grace to the Gentiles, ἡ χάρις ἡ δοθεῖσα (Ro 12:6, 15:15; 1 Co 3:10; Ga 2:9; Eph 3:7–8; 4:29) (cf. Hoehner 2002:423). Paul uses this phrase for his commission and extends this calling to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:9, *χάριν, τὴν δοθεῖσαν*.

The mystery of Christ as the content of the gospel

The term *μυστήριον* is used in Ephesians 1:9, 3:3 & 4 not with a change of meaning, but with a change of nuance. It is the gospel that is the *μυστήριον* in Ephesians 3:3 that Paul has

22.Grizzle (2013:80) interprets *οἰκονομία* in Ephesians 1:10 & 3:2 as the ‘implementation of a strategy’-the enabling equipment to fulfill Paul’s missionary assignment to the Gentiles’.

23.The ‘mystery of Christ’ is not identical to the ‘mystery of the Church’. Hoehner (2002:457) identifies the mystery as ‘the mystery of the Church’ that has been hidden in God for all the ages until the present time.

24.The verb *πιστεύω* in Galatians 2:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:4; 1 Timothy 1:11; Titus 1:3 indicates that Paul has been ‘entrusted with the gospel for the Gentiles’.

been given insight and understanding into. The ‘mystery of Christ (τῷ μυστηρίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ)’ is the content of the gospel which has been made known to Paul by revelation (Eph 3:3).²⁵ In Ephesians 3:6 the mystery of Christ is the multinational and ethnic character of the church as the result of the gospel message. The reconciliation of Jew and Gentile, Israel and the nations, has taken place ‘through the gospel (διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου)’.²⁶ The church came into existence through the gospel. In Ephesians 1:13 it is through the gospel that the Gentiles came to share in salvation and in Ephesians 3:6 the idea is developed further so that it is ‘through the gospel’ that the Gentiles share in all the benefits and responsibilities. The church is ‘proof that God’s ultimate purpose, to unite all things in Christ, will be accomplished’ (Kirby 1968:54–55). The *μυστήριον* (Eph 3:3), taken together with *οἰκονομία* (Eph 3:2), is part of the working out of the salvation plan of God (Eph 1:9–10). The mystery of Christ ‘is the truth that people from all the nations of the world would be full and complete partners with the chosen people of God’ (Eph 3:6) (Piper 1993:149).

The mystery of the gospel and the inclusion of the Gentiles

The revelation of the *μυστήριον* to the Gentiles and the Jews (Eph 3:2, 4–5) is the inclusion of the Gentiles as equal heirs, equal members of the same body, and equal partakers of the promise in Jesus Christ (Eph 3:6). The mystery is more than:

about the church itself, or that the Gentiles would be part of that church, for the incorporation of the Gentiles into the ‘people of God’ had long been part of the promise-plan of God (Gen 12:3; 2 Sam 7:19; Ps 2:8; Isa 42:6 & Am 9:11–12). (Kaiser 1981:295)

The revelation is specifically that ‘through the gospel’ the Gentiles are included in an equal status and position, into the same relationship to God as the Jews, and therefore have the same responsibility for missions. It is only together as equal recipients of the promise of the heavenly inheritance or land (cf. Wright 1990:111) that they demonstrate the power of the gospel message. The inclusion of the Gentiles means that they have equal authority and responsibility for the purpose of the transmission of the gospel. It is the revelation that ‘through the gospel’ the Gentiles are included which ‘in other generations was not made known to the sons of men’ (Eph 3:5–6).

The inclusion of the Gentiles in God’s plan and missions

The body image is an ‘apt and dynamic picture of partnership’ (Sunquist 2013:377–378). The ‘now’ contrasts the past and present in terms of a fuller revelation that has been made known rather than a new revelation and so the revelation is not about the church itself but the mission of the church. Already in Ephesians 2:11–22, v. 11–13, Paul explained that the Gentiles and Israel are members of the same body and in Ephesians 3:6 he goes on to explain the resulting implications

25.The *μυστήριον* in Colossians 1:26 is the gospel and in 1:27 it is Christ, the content of the gospel, and so these usages are related in Colossians.

26.It is called the “mystery of Christ” because it is coming true “through the gospel” (3:6), which is about Christ’ (Piper 1993:149).

in terms of equality and mutual relations for the sake of missions. 'We should, therefore, expect mission to involve cooperation amongst different ethnic groups' (Sunquist 2013:377). In fact, where this is not present there is a missing ingredient.

The relation of οἰκονομία and διάκονος in Ephesians 3:2 & 7

The ministry task and office of Paul

The activity of οἰκονομία in Ephesians 1:10 and 3:2 is directed outwards. The mission activity of Paul is part of the discharge of the οἰκονομία of Christ (Eph 1:10). It involved the preaching of the good news by which 'the Gentiles' or 'nations' are included in the church. The task of the οἰκονομία specifically involved the revelation of the μυστήριον.²⁷ The sense of οἰκονομία in Ephesians 3:2 is the entrusting to Paul of the missionary assignment to the Gentiles (cf. Grizzle 2013:80). In Ephesians 3:7–9 the work of the διάκονος specifically involved the equipment of the church to fulfil its task, 'the stewardship of the mystery' (Eph 3:9). The office of διάκονος of the church functions within the οἰκονομία of God (cf. Reumann 1967:163).²⁸ The office of the διάκονος serves the οἰκονομία of God in that Paul conceives of his role to equip others to serve God's plan. In Ephesians 4:11–12 the author clarifies to whom the work of the ministry has been given. Paul uses the term διάκονος for the ministry office²⁹ which serves to equip others 'for the work of the ministry (εἰς ἔργον διακονίας)' (Eph 4:12). In Ephesians the task of 'the work of the ministry (διακονία)', is directed inward towards building up the Body of Christ for ministry (cf. Eph 4:12) and the term διάκονος in Ephesians 3:7 is not used with regard to spreading the gospel directly, but to preach about this grace (Eph 3:7), 'to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ'. The way Paul serves, through this grace, is to preach. So διακονία has to do with preaching and ministry in the congregation and οἰκονομία with preaching and ministry outside and to enlighten all³⁰ as to what is the stewardship given to the church (Eph 3:9). Οἰκονομία is directed outward and the task of the church in its relation to society. The term οἰκονομία is used for the mission's aspect as part of the apostolic office and both functioned 'according to the gift of the grace of God' (Eph 3:7). Unlike Col. 1:25 the participle δοθεῖσα does not modify οἰκονομία but χάρις (cf. Kuhli 1981:500 EDNT).³¹ 'Consequently, the author is concerned less with Paul's office of apostle than with God's plan of salvation ... and the position of the office of apostle within the divine plan' (Merklein 1973:174, cited in Kuhli 1981:500 EDNT). In Ephesians the author is concerned with the divine plan of salvation in which he has a participatory role to make it known. The term οἰκονομία in Col 1:25 'refers

27.1 Corinthians 4:1; 9:17; Colossians 1:25; Ephesians 3:2.

28.Οἰκονομία in Ephesians 3:9 is a missional task and the office διάκονος of the Church serves this task.

29. Paul speaks of himself as a minister of the gospel (Eph 3:7; Col 1:23), minister of God (2 Cor 6:4), minister of Christ (2 Cor 11:23) and minister of the new covenant (2 Cor 3:6).

30. The 'all' is all the people in the Church and not all men in society or the world.

31. Lincoln (1990:174) writes that 'given for me' modifies grace rather than stewardship in Colossians. 1:25.

to the commission God gave Paul to become an apostle' (Gaebelein 1978:191; MacDonald 2000:261). In Ephesians 3:2 it refers to 'how Paul's role brings God's plan to fruition' (MacDonald 2000:261). It is Paul's administration of his apostolic office which in Colossians 1:25 and in 1 Corinthians 9:17 are in view (cf. Grizzle 2013:80).

The missionary commission of Paul

Paul conceives of his social position and status as being of low social standing and he positions himself alongside those whom he serves and ministers to as a διάκονος (cf. Eph 3:7). It is an incredible thing to Paul that God would make use of him, 'the least of all the saints' as a missionary to proclaim 'the unsearchable riches of Christ' (Eph 3:8). The aorist infinitive verb εὐαγγελισασθαι, 'to proclaim the good news', indicates that the reason that Paul 'was given this grace' was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles or nations. The grace was given to discharge his 'missionary commission' (O'Brien 1999:241). Paul saw his task as being two-fold, to preach the gospel and further 'to enlighten everyone what is the administration of the mystery' (Eph 3:9). The essential exegetical question is whether the two infinitives are set in synonymous parallelism (i.e., describing only one task with two expressions), so φωτίσαι (v. 9) and εὐαγγελισασθαι in v. 8b are part of one task or whether there are two separate tasks in view. It has been suggested that 'the second infinitive is built upon the first so that it is the result of the activity of the first' (Gombis 2004:320). But 'the infinitive [sic] expression "and to enlighten" is not an expansion or amplification of the infinitive "to preach of v. 8"' (O'Brien 1999:243; cf. Mitton 1951:125). Paul's apostolic commission involved the two tasks, 'to preach' the gospel and 'to enlighten' about its implications 'so that all men can see God's unfolding plan' (O'Brien 1999:243).³² The first infinitive, 'to preach', relates back to v. 7 and Paul's function as a minister of the gospel, 'to preach the unsearchable wealth of Christ' (v.8b) (cf. Hoehner 2002:459). The second infinitive, 'to enlighten (v. 9)',³³ is related to v. 10 which is a purpose clause. Paul does not simply enlighten the church about his own stewardship (v. 8); the implication of both infinitives relates back to vv. 7–8. It is for the church to know 'what is the stewardship of the mystery', its own stewardship. Paul has the great privilege of revealing this magnificent mission, the mission of the church 'not as something additional or unrelated to the proclamation of the gospel but integral to it' (O'Brien 1999:244).

Οἰκονομία – the role of the Church in the universal plan of God

Paul breaks away in Ephesians 3:1–13 to discuss the Gentile's place amongst the people of God and the church's function in his universal plan.

32. The coordinate conjunction and the infinitive (καὶ φωτίσαι [πάντας]) make this parallel to the previous infinitive statement (εὐαγγελισασθαι τὸ ἀνεξίτηλον πλοῦτος) in v. 8b' (Hoehner 2002:455).

33. In Ephesians 1:18 φωτίζω literally means to 'bring to light' by which the recipients understand the mystery. It involves 'more than preaching or teaching' (Hoehner 2002:455) but divine disclosure.

TABLE 1: Repetition of thought structures in Ephesians 3:1–13.

The Thought Block 3:2–8: Paul's role in God's eschatological plan	The Thought Block 3:9–12: God's purpose is set out in v. 9–12
(A) v. 2 was given the stewardship as the gracious gift of God (v. 3–4 the mystery of Christ)†	(A') v. 7 according to the gift of grace
(B) v. 5 to Paul and the holy apostles and prophets	(B') the gospel for the Gentile audience
(C) v. 3 by means of revelation	(C') now by means of Paul
(D) v. 4 the content of the plan (the mystery of Christ)	(D') v. 8 A–C is recapitulated in v. 8: (A) the grace to him (B) it was given (C) to me for you
(E) v. 6 entails the incorporation of the Gentiles/nations in salvation and the mission	(E') v. 9–10 the implications of the realisation of God's eschatological plan: (A'') is disclosed (B'') to the powers (C'') by means of the church – including the audience (D'') this is the content of God's purposes
-	v. 11-a single plan through all the ages. v. 12-The plan was made in Jesus Christ in whom the church/believers have boldness and confidence

†, The genitive τῆς χάριτος could be taken as objective to οἰκονομίαν (i.e. the grace of God is to be stewarded), or as an exegetical genitive (i.e. Paul was given the stewardship as gracious gift of God). Within the context the latter seems to be preferable (cf. Floor 1995:125).

The thought structure analysis

In Ephesians 1:9 the verb γνωρίζω, 'having made known' (γνωρίσας) is related to the μυστήριον, the previously unknown plan or will of him. These terms stand in relation to εἰς οἰκονομίαν (1:10) and can be explained as 'the carrying into effect of the plan' (Hendrickson 1967:44). In Ephesians 3 the revelation that 'was made known' (ἐγνωρίσθη) is 'the mystery of Christ' (3:3–4) and what 'was not made known' (οὐκ ἐγνωρίσθη) has 'now been revealed' (νῦν ἀπεκαλύφθη) (3:5–6). The revelation implies 'the stewardship of the mystery' that Paul received (Eph 3:2) is the stewardship intended for the church that 'might now be made known' (γνωρισθῇ νῦν) to the angelic beings (3:10). The aorist subjunctive γνωρισθῇ (v. 10) implies that the church may or may not fulfil its stewardship role. The verb is in the passive which means that it is God who is doing the revealing 'through the church', and the church is the instrument. 'Most interpreters believe that Paul has in mind neither evangelism, social action, nor any other additional activity' (O'Brien 1999:246). Wink (1992:93, 95–96) interprets the preaching as directed at the powers but what Paul has in mind is the missionary role of the church that the powers observe (Table 1).

The οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου given to the Church

One of the reasons that Paul explains that he has received the task of οἰκονομία and that he has been made a servant of the gospel, not through any qualification or ambition of his own, was to enlighten all men as to their task (Eph 3:9). The οἰκονομία of the grace of God is given 'to me for you' occurs only in Ephesians 3:2, and in 7–8 it is implied by the personal pronoun 'me' that it is also intended for the Ephesians. It is the activity of οἰκονομία that Paul commits to the church (Eph 3:9). In Ephesians 3:9 neither an office nor the activity of administration fits the context but a commission. The suggestion by Hoehner (2002:455) that two 'nuances are intertwined and both may be in view' fits the context if it is seen as a commission. The idea by Hoehner (2002:456) that 'here it could have the idea of strategy' is not that of further nuance but a practical outworking of a missional nuance. The idea that οἰκονομία involves 'the strategy of God' or 'the implementation of the strategy' fits the immediate context and accords with the idea of 'the realisation

of the purpose' (Eph 1:9–10) (cf. Gaebelein 1978:47). Paul's strategy is to enlighten all, not about what is the importance of his role but why 'the unsearchable wealth of Christ' (Eph 3:8) has been intended for them, what elsewhere is referred to as 'the surpassing wealth of the grace of Him towards us in Christ' (Eph 2:7). The surpassing wealth of the grace of him (Eph 2:7) that the Ephesians had received in their salvation and that Paul had received (Eph 3:8) was intended for a purpose, which Paul enlightens them about (Eph 3:9). The Ephesians have the privileged position that 'the stewardship of the mystery (οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου)', 'having been hidden from the previous ages' has been made known to them so that they can participate in the *missio Dei*. God's strategy for re-creation has been made known to the church. It is to restore all of creation, beginning with the church as the community of the new creation. And it is through the church that the carrying into effect of the mystery is revealed and made known to all of creation and 'ripples across boundless space and echoes throughout the world of angels and spirits' (Grizzle 2013:83). The church then does not exist for itself but for Christ and for the sake of the world.

The phrase οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου (Eph 3:9) indicates that the church participates in making the μυστήριον known.³⁴ The οἰκονομία given to Paul is committed to the church. Paul and the Church participate in God's mission. 'Missions were not made for the church; the church was made for missions – God's mission' (Wright 2006:62). Missions are fundamentally and primarily not something we do – a human task of the church. God committed to Paul the gospel and he in turn made it known to the church. Paul revealed to the church the plan of God that was being carried out in Christ in which the church has a central role. 'Whatever God does in the world, he does primarily through the church' (Grizzle 2013:82).

The crux interpretum of Ephesians 3:10

The verse is a *crux interpretum* and it has been said that 'it is hardly an exaggeration to say that any interpretation of Ephesians stands or falls with this verse' (Caird 1976:660). The relation of Paul's ministry to the church begins in Ephesians 3:9 and is linked to verse 10 by means of a purpose

³⁴The church's role in God's program of redemption and reconciliation has not been fulfilled in Christ.

clause.³⁵ There is uncertainty as to whether the purpose clause is connected with the previous v. 9 or v. 8 (cf. Hoehner 2002:459).³⁶ There is good reason to take it as belonging to verse 9.³⁷ The verb γνωρισθῆναι, 'might be made known' (Eph 3:10) is related to the phrase ἡ οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου, 'the stewardship of the mystery', so that it is the stewardship of the mystery given to the church that might be made known to the angelic beings rather than the gospel itself. In the past age the revelation was made known at first to Paul (Eph 3:2), then to a limited group of individuals, 'the holy apostles and prophets' (Eph 3:5), and finally to the church (Eph 3:9).³⁸ The intention of the author is to show the progressive development of the task of the stewardship. The responsibility is first given to Paul, the prophets and apostles and finally to the church.

The disclosure to the powers

It has been suggested that the content of the disclosure to the powers is 'that their malign regime, particularly over that part of humanity, the Gentile world; thought to be especially under their sway, has come to an end' (Lincoln 1990:187). This necessitates a certain knowledge and proclamation by the church. It certainly is not a deduction that the spiritual powers make themselves by observing the existence of the church. The designation 'principalities and powers' could 'refer to angels in general, as in 1:21, to evil angels, as in 6:12, or good angels' and is determined by the context (Hendrickson 1967:158). 'I see no reason for disagreeing with Calvin, Bavinck, Grosheide, Hodge, Lenski, and a host of other leading theologians and commentators in believing that 3:10 refers to the good and not evil angels' (Hendrickson 1967:158). If it refers to the good angels, then the οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου, 'carrying out of the mystery', engenders a response of amazement and wonder as the good angels observe the plan of God as it unfolds and that God would use the church. Paul uses himself to demonstrate that God can use the most unlikely person in his plan. He reinforces the primacy of the church in connection with the preaching of the gospel and missions. In Ephesians 3:11 κατὰ πρόθεσιν serves to clarify that it is the plan of God unfolding through the ages that the angelic beings observe. The purpose Paul has in mind in proclaiming to the Gentiles the good news of the unfathomable riches of Christ is not to be limited in v.10 to the witness of the church to angelic beings. The intention of the verse is to communicate the cosmic scope of the message of salvation, that the angelic beings are observing and paying

35. The delayed position of the subject of the main verb διδωμι in v. 8 indicates that ἡ χάρις αὐτῆς is cataphoric. This leads to taking the subsequent infinitives as expegetical and then v. 10 as a purpose clause, yielding a translation such as 'To me what was given was the *charis* of evangelizing the Gentiles in order that the church might make God's wisdom known', an interpretation discounted by Sherwood (2012:104).

36. Hoehner (2002:458) sees the link of μυστήριον (v. 9), 'which has been hidden for ages' with the purpose clause (v. 10) as not taking the whole context or text into consideration.

37. If the purpose clause is related back to the whole context it leads to the view that the task of οἰκονομία is ultimately to make the μυστήριον known to the angelic beings.

38. It is also possible that the author of Ephesians is here giving a general description of the revelation, and not necessarily implying that Paul received the revelation after these two groups (the apostles and the prophets through the Spirit). The use of the adverb 'now' indicates 'a point of time simultaneous with the event of the discourse itself' (Louw & Nida 1996:67.38), and the contrast made between 'other generations' and the apostles and prophets, a group to whom it has 'now been revealed' (Eph 3:5) makes this interpretation highly improbable.

close attention to the unfolding of God's plan. The angelic beings are not the final intended recipients of the mystery. The purpose involves more than the enlightenment of the angelic beings as to the lordship of Christ.³⁹ It involves the active participation of the church in the revealing or unveiling of the manifold wisdom of God to all of creation.

The manifold wisdom of God

The manifold wisdom of God is revealed 'through the church' in that diverse peoples from different social, economic, cultural, ethnic, and national backgrounds are brought together into one community of the Spirit. It is the church unified in its diversity that makes known the mystery of the gospel. The multifaceted wisdom is revealed in that a Church of Jew and Gentile, which in the previous age was unimaginable, has come into existence. The 'grace of God' and the 'working of the power of Him' are evident in Paul's life (Eph 3:8). The church is unified for a purpose, to proclaim the gospel. The unification of diverse ethnicities is not only part of the end goal and purpose of God's plan of salvation; it is part of the process and means by which God works out his plan (Eph 3:6). The church stands at the very centre of God's plan and plays an essential part in the execution of God's plan. It does not exist for itself but to fulfil and carry out God's purpose in the world. The church is both an end in itself and a means to an end. The tendency is to separate the existence or being of the church and its function which naturally belong together and are inseparable. It is apparent in views that emphasise the one aspect at the expense of the other such as, 'the church is but a means to an end, not an end in itself' (Greenwood 2002:86). Wallace (1996:434) suggests a balanced approach when he writes, 'God's wisdom should be displayed by what the church collectively does, rather than via its mere existence'. It is a tired debate in Ephesians 3:9–10 that separates being and doing. In Ephesians 3:9–10 the church is at the same time the realisation of the kingdom of God and the instrument by which the kingdom is realised.

The mission agency of the Church

It was a revolutionary concept that the angelic beings take interest in the proclamation of the gospel. The revolutionary concept is that the church exists by and for the proclamation of the gospel. It is the gospel that provides the connection between Paul's own activity and that of the church (cf. O'Brien 1993:55). Paul commits to the Ephesians 'the stewardship of the mystery (οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου)'. The prepositional phrase 'through the church' shows that the church is the agent of proclaiming the gospel.⁴⁰ The use of διὰ with the

39. Lincoln (1990:187) has interpreted the verse as 'best understood as being that by her existence as a new humanity, in which the major division of the first century world has been overcome, the Church reveals God's secret in action and heralds to the hostile heavenly powers the overcoming of cosmic divisions with their defeat'.

40. The church is recognized to be the instrument to which 'through the church' refers by most interpreters but it is viewed as having in mind the unity of the church as a manifestation of God's rich diverse wisdom (cf. Arnold 1989:63; Caragounis 1977:109; Porter 1994:149, 150). This interpretation is based on a generally accepted assumption that the manifestation of God's wisdom is about the existence of the church. 'Paul's mission is ultimately to make the manifold wisdom of God known to the rulers and authorities' (MacDonald 2000:266). It is through the active proclamation of the gospel and not simply the existence of the church that the manifold wisdom of God is made known.

genitive τῆς ἐκκλησίας is 'a marker of intermediate agent, with implicit or explicit causative agent – "through, by"' (Louw & Nida 1996:797). 'It is because the church alone is Christ's body and fullness that only through the church can the principalities and authorities be shown with clarity the claims of Christ's lordship' (Lincoln 1972–1973:188–189). The mission's agency of the church in this verse is evidenced by the fact that 'the church in this verse is not only the universal church but also the local visible church' (Hoehner 2002:461). There is no indication in this verse that the church is to proclaim or that it proclaims the gospel to the spiritual authorities, powers and beings as suggested by Wink (1984:89, 95–96).

The plan throughout the ages in Ephesians 3:11

The divine purpose of God in Ephesians 3:11 is presented from the perspective of having been accomplished in Christ, 'that he realised in Christ' (cf. Eph 3:11 ESV). It has in view the certain full realisation of 'the plan of the ages' (Eph 3:11). The plan is explained in relation to Christ in Ephesians 1:10 and it is worked out in Ephesians 3:1–10 through the involvement of Paul and the church.

The boldness and confidence in participating in the execution of God's plan in Ephesians 3:12

The eternal purpose and plan of God in which the church has a participatory role was realised (ESV) in Jesus Christ (Eph 3:11). Verse 12 closes with a phrase which can be taken as an objective or subjective genitive. The use as a subjective genitive places the emphasis on Christ's faithfulness rather than the believer's faith in Christ. In the execution of the plan of God it is Christ's faithfulness, rather than faith in Christ that accomplishes God's mission. 'Christ's faithfulness in accomplishing the eternal purposes of God enables believers to have bold, confident access to the Father' (Fowl 2012:113). 'Here in 3:12 the issue is not who has access to God' (Fowl 2012:113) but it is 'in whom', in relation to Jesus Christ that the eternal purposes of God are accomplished.⁴¹ The task of οἰκονομία can be fulfilled by the church only through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. Paul exhibited boldness and confidence or courage in proclaiming the gospel and he wants to impart this to the church. He brings to a close the digression through linking it to Ephesians 3:1, he is a prisoner for preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, and conceives of his situation as being 'the prisoner of Christ' (Eph 3:1). 'Missionally, it is both the mark and price for reaching the Gentiles with the gospel' (Grizzle 2013:80). Wallace (2000:47) argues that the two genitives 'prisoner of Christ' and 'apostle of Christ Jesus' can both generally be labelled genitives of possession, but more closely should be genitives of relationship. The second one indicates that 'Christ sent out Paul' (apostle of Christ), the first indicates that Paul is 'a prisoner for the sake of Christ', that is for the sake of the cause (mission) of Christ (NRSV).⁴² The afflictions of Paul are 'for you' (Eph 3:13) and is a link to 'the stewardship of the mystery' – the gospel which was given 'for you' (Eph 3:2).

41. Fowl (2012:113) identifies the phrase as indicating manner, 'the manner in which believers have access'.

42. 'For this reason' (ESV).

Paul is in prison for having been sent out as a representative of Jesus Christ. The Ephesians may have been discouraged by Paul's imprisonment and so not take up the responsibility to be stewards of the grace of God. He encourages them that his afflictions are for their glory, and the implication is that the afflictions that the Ephesians may experience will be for the glory of those to whom they preach and proclaim the gospel.

Conclusion

The term οἰκονομία is a key concept in the letter to the Ephesians. The author links the role of Christ in the summing up of all things and the execution of the plan of God, his own activity and that of the apostles and prophets, and the activity of the church through the use of the concept. In Ephesians οἰκονομία has the nuance of the activity of missions (Eph 1:10; 3:2 & 9). The church stands at the very centre of God's plan and plays an essential part in the execution of God's plan to whom has been given the task of οἰκονομία (Eph 3:9–10). It does not exist for itself but to fulfil and carry out God's purpose in the world.

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