

# Luther's Use of Aristotle in the Three Estates and Its Implications for Understanding *Oeconomia*

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This article seeks to tease out the relation between Martin Luther's concept of *oeconomia* in comparison to the biblical concept of *oikonomia* and the same concept in Aristotle. Section 1 lays the groundwork by examining Aristotle's usage of *oikonomia*. Section 2 brings this into dialogue with Luther's use of *oeconomia* in his "Exposition of Psalm 127." The article concludes by reflecting on what benefit there is in Luther's use of Aristotle for the development of *oeconomia*.

## Introduction

An important but often overlooked aspect of Martin Luther's theology is his formation of the three estates of *ecclesia*, *oeconomia*, and *politia*.<sup>1</sup> *Ecclesia* concerns a human's relationship as receiver from God, *oeconomia* focuses on a human's relation to other humans and the world around him or her, and *politia* focuses on the relation of humans to the political order.<sup>2</sup> According to Luther, *ecclesia*, *oeconomia*, and *politia* are categories grounded in creation rather than being specifically biblical. This article will seek to examine Luther's incorporation of Aristotle in his formulation of *oeconomia* and whether such use is an appropriate theological move. The first half of this article will provide some detail of the Bible's use of *οἰκονομία* (*oeconomia*'s Greek cognate) as well as Aristotle's use of *οἰκονομία*. The latter half will examine Luther's use of Aristotle's concept of *oeconomia* in his "Exposition of Psalm 127." The article will end with reflection

on what, if any, benefit there is in Luther's use of Aristotle for the development of *oeconomia*.

## ***Oeconomia* and Aristotle**

It is perhaps best to begin by making it clear that Luther's use of the Latin term *oeconomia* is not equivalent with its cognate Greek term *οικονομία*. The primary use of *οικονομία*<sup>3</sup> in the New Testament is that of household administration or management.<sup>4</sup> It is often translated as "direction" "administration" or "provision."<sup>5</sup> One instance where it is used in this manner is Luke 16:1–2 (ESV),

He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager [*οικονόμουν*], and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management [*οικονομίας*], for you can no longer be manager [*οικονομέϊν*].'"

The context of this verse is a parable being told by Jesus in which a rich man has placed a manager over his possessions—the household managerial aspect of this word. Paul uses it to refer to the apostolic office and his being entrusted with the gospel.<sup>5</sup> Luther maintains the administration and provisional aspects of *οικονομία*, but one does not find management connotations of *οικονομία* as much in Luther's *oeconomia*, perhaps because he sees the emphasis in *oeconomia* not as management but as thankfulness for provision.

Because Luther's understanding of *oeconomia* is not synonymous with the New Testament's use of *οικονομία*, he certainly had other sources in mind when thinking about the estates. Luther was by no means the first thinker to connect economy<sup>6</sup> with familial relationships. One of those sources was the Greek tradition of familial relations as seen in Aristotle's *Politics*. This section will show the similarity of Aristotle's formulation of domestic relations in *Politics* and how it can be used as a positive source for understanding the three estates. Today, when one thinks of the word *politics*, day to day personal relationships are probably not the first item that comes to mind. Rather than just viewing the political as the nature of the state or realm of political authority, Aristotle saw it as intrinsically being moral theory.<sup>7</sup> C. C. W. Taylor comments that Aristotle meant *Politics* to be a continuation and completion of the program that had begun in *Nichomachean Ethics*.<sup>8</sup> The reason for this is that the treatises that are present in *Politics* direct one to how to achieve the *eudaemonia*, and this cannot be done apart from the context of a political society. One editor of *Politics* comments on 1:13, "The art of household management is a moral art, aiming at the moral

goodness of the members of the household; and this is true in regards to slaves as well as to other members.<sup>9</sup> For Aristotle, the relationship of husband to wife, father to child, and so forth are not merely perfunctory roles to be filled—they have moral meaning attached to them. One is able to build character and virtues to achieve the good life through these relationships. For Aristotle, the manner in which the patriarch related to the rest of the family could either serve to make a person more virtuous or could damage one's personal morality. Perhaps the idea that the economic household carried moral weight is what drew Luther to Aristotle's thinking on this subject. Aristotle was correct that there is a proper and an improper manner of running a household, and morality is tied to how one goes about fulfilling these roles.

In *Politics* (1:10–13), Aristotle addresses the concept of household management. In 1:10, one finds the type of household manager similar to the manager previously seen in Jesus' parable in Luke 16. The question Aristotle here addresses is whether the gain of wealth should be the priority of the household manager.<sup>10</sup> In *Politics* 1:12–13, Aristotle sets forth an *oikonomia* that is similar to the type of estate for which Luther is arguing. He begins 1:12 by writing:

Of household management we have seen that there are three parts—one is the rule of a master over slaves, which has been discussed already, another of a father, and the third of a husband. A husband and father . . . rules over wife and children, both free, but the rule differs, the rule over his children being a royal, over his wife a constitutional rule. For although there may be exceptions to the order of nature, the male is by nature fitter for command than the female, just as the elder and full-grown is superior to the younger and more immature.<sup>11</sup>

The Greek word used here for household management is *οικονομής*.<sup>12</sup> One can easily see the etymological similarities between what is used here, and the *oikonomia* used in the Koine Greek of the New Testament. Aristotle obviously has a patriarchal society in mind when discussing *oikonomia*. Luther would have maintained the father as the head of the family, but this is seen in a Christological light. No longer is the man acting in a domineering fashion but as a husband who is to love his wife as Christ has loved the church. The man is not necessarily guiding the family because he possesses the most wisdom and is therefore able to lead the family best (as in Aristotle). He is leading the family because this is the place where God has put him. The roles of *oikonomia* revolve around the relationship of the patriarch to other members of the household. These other members are the slave, the child, and the wife.

It is interesting that Aristotle chooses to use the phrase *order of nature* to refer to the role of man, woman, and child in the family dynamic. There is a definite

symmetry to the manner in which Aristotle sees how the *oikonomia*<sup>13</sup> should be formed. Aristotle also frequently uses the word *natural* to refer to these relationships. For example, in *Politics* 1:12 the king is the natural superior over his subjects but “remains the same kin or kind with them” in the same manner that the elder is superior to the younger and the father to the son.<sup>14</sup> In 1:13 he argues that all things rule and are ruled, and this is “according to nature.”<sup>15</sup> Because the family dynamic is an order of nature, he also argues that the virtues will be displayed differently in men and women.<sup>16</sup> For example, he writes that courage is shown in a man through commanding but is shown in a woman through obeying.<sup>17</sup> The concept of “orders of creation” is tied closely to Luther’s understanding of the estates and aligns well with Aristotle’s understanding of there being a given symmetry to how the world is maintained.<sup>18</sup>

On further examination of the relation of the biblical and Hellenistic concepts of *oikonomia* to the Latin *oeconomia*, in one Latin translation of *The Politics* the word *yconomicae* is translated in 12:1 as “household management.”<sup>19</sup> Beginning a Latin word with *y* is not original to the language but usually indicates that the word is borrowed from the Greek.<sup>20</sup> The Western transliteration often reads as *oeconomia*.<sup>21</sup> This brief etymological study leaves little doubt concerning the roots of this word. As Luther was adept in both Latin and Greek, one wonders why he chose the Latin *oeconomia* (which he linked to Aristotle)<sup>22</sup> over the Greek *oikonomia* in his formulation of this estate. One can genuinely inquire as to why Luther who clung so tightly to the revealed Word and its God would choose to cite Aristotle rather than Paul for evidence of a creation order. The answer is (most likely) that Luther was not choosing Aristotle over Paul, but perhaps Luther believed that Aristotle’s concept of economy was closer to expressing what he was trying to express with *oeconomia*. There are several advantages to using Aristotle’s *oikonomia* to form *oeconomia* rather than the biblical *oikonomia*.

The first advantage is that when classifying Luther’s second prelapsarian estate as *oeconomia*, one is able to see more clearly how it differs from the biblical *oikonomia*. The New Testament understanding of *oikonomia* often carries spiritual overtones such as in the case of Ephesians 1:10 where a plan or dispensation is being revealed. This plan in Ephesians 1:10 is eschatological—looking forward to a time when Christ will unite all things in himself. Even when Paul uses *oikonomia* to refer to humans as possessing a responsibility, it often has spiritual overtones (such as the responsibility of being entrusted with the gospel) and thus does not quite touch the point that Luther wishes to get across with *oeconomia*. It is impossible to say with any degree of accuracy, but perhaps if *oikonomia* carried more connotations of familial relationships in the biblical text Luther may have used it instead. It should also be clarified that it is doubtful that Luther wished to

remove all spiritual associations of *oikonomia*. The purpose in referring to this estate as *oeconomia* is not to create a sacred-secular divide between *ecclesia* and *oeconomia*. There is certainly a higher degree of sacredness in God's revealing his Word to humans, but there is also sacredness in the interaction that occurs between a man and his family and a man and his vocation. Even Aristotle recognized this point by attaching moral worth to how the head of a family relates to the rest of the family. Luther made this latter point clear when he spoke of the vocations of the common man often being more sacred than that of the clergy.<sup>23</sup> Even though there is spirituality and sacredness in *oeconomia*, Luther wanted it to refer to the relationships of humans with other humans and also with the world around them. The Latin *oeconomia* seldom carried the meaning of plan but instead referred to arrangement or division.<sup>24</sup> This is also seen in the Vulgate, the dominant Latin translation of the Bible for a millennium, where *oikonomia* in Ephesians 1:10 is *dispensationem* rather than *oeconomia*.<sup>25</sup> The same root word (*dispensatio*) is used for *oikonomia* in the verse Ephesians 3:9.

Referring to Aristotle to make a theological point would not have been an odd move for Luther. Luther was not alone among the Reformers in referencing the philosophies of the ancient Greeks and Romans,<sup>26</sup> being well acquainted with Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, and other ancient philosophers. Even so, the former lawyer John Calvin in a much more prolific manner wove the ancient philosophers into *The Institutes* more than Luther ever did in any of his writings.

Another advantage of using the nomenclature of *oeconomia* is a historical one. As Latin became the dominant written language of the Church, one is able to find more references of *oeconomia* to household management by the church fathers. This particular use of *oeconomia* by the fathers further cemented it and Paul's use of *oikonomia* to refer to administration of an office for the Church. In fact, Lampe in *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* cites no instances by the fathers where *oikonomia* is used for the familial household management.<sup>27</sup> Related to this point, it became common for the Western Church to use Latin phrases for theological concepts as expressed through the overwhelmingly popular use of the Vulgate, which had become the tongue of the Western Church. Remnants of the past glory of this language remain with the Church today through the Latin Mass. As Luther used Latin for the other two estates (*politia* and *ecclesia*) it would have been odd for him to use Greek for this concept, especially when Latin better expressed what he wanted to say about familial relationships.

It is also worth noting that the crux of Luther's distinction between *ecclesia* and *oeconomia* lies in the fact that there is significance in a person's relationship between flesh and the land. *Oeconomia* prevents the Christian life from becoming spiritualized to the point where there is no connection to the world we live

in. Something real, then, remains of spiritual significance in one's daily contact. An overemphasis on the doctrine of creation could lead one to a position in which dominance over creation, rather than interaction with creation, becomes most important.

## ***Oeconomia*, Aristotle, and Luther's "Exposition of Psalm 127"**

Now that a similarity has been established between familial relations in *Politics* and Luther's use of *oeconomia*, this section will examine Luther's use of Aristotle in his "Exposition of Psalm 127."<sup>28</sup> This will further demonstrate how *The Politics* influenced Luther's use of *oeconomia*. Throughout his work, Luther writes that it is not good works that the Church has condoned as spiritual that saves a person. Rather, the work of Christ and faith in the Son of God saves. The spiritual and the physical are not only often beautifully intertwined, but they are also both important in Luther's work. An excellent example of this occurs in his "Exposition of Psalm 127." The focal point of this psalm is household management and household relationships. The psalm begins with a theocentric emphasis: "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." Luther writes, "I selected this psalm because it so beautifully turns the heart away from covetousness and concern for temporal livelihood and possessions towards faith in God, and in a few words teaches us how Christians are to act with respect to the accumulation and ownership of this world's goods."<sup>29</sup> Luther's emphasis in this statement is on faith in God and how one understands his or her relationship to the world. It is too simple for the physical to be emphasized over the spiritual, or vice versa. *Oeconomia* allows one to view the world, and its affairs, in light of *ecclesia*. In a fallen world, it can become all too easy to form a dualism between *ecclesia* and *oeconomia*. Here Luther emphasizes the *ecclesia* as being the funnel through which *oeconomia* is properly understood. Although later verses in this psalm speak more directly of the *oeconomia* in raising children and the blessing they are, he does not leave verse 1 solely in the realm of the spiritual.

Luther's exposition of the first verse of this psalm is one of the clearest in his writings. He views *oeconomia* thus: "First we must understand that 'building the house' does not refer simply to the construction of walls and roof, rooms and chambers, out of wood and stone. It refers . . . to everything that goes on inside the house, which in German we call 'managing the household' [*haushalten*]; just as Aristotle writes, '*Oeconomia*,' that, is pertaining to the household economy which comprises wife and child, servant and maid, livestock and fodder."<sup>30</sup> Luther interprets this verse as not primarily referring to the physical construc-

tion of a house but as primarily referring to the role of God in the construction of a family household.

In his 1539 work *Of the Councils and the Church*, Luther also makes use of Psalm 127:1 to explain the estates. He writes:

This Psalm 127[:1] says that there are only two temporal governments on earth, that of the city and that of the home, “Unless the Lord builds the house; unless the Lord watches over the city.” The first government is that of the home, from which the people come; the second is that of the city, meaning the country, the people, princes and lords, which we call the secular government. These embrace everything—children, property, money, animals, etc. The home must produce, whereas the city must guard, protect and defend. Then follows the third, God’s own home and city, that is, the church, which must obtain people from the home and protection and defense from the city.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps Luther’s most telling statement of how he views the relation between *ecclesia* and *oeconomia* also occurs in his exposition of this verse. Luther explains that it is not riches that make a new family happy and content, as there are those with wealth who squander it and those without wealth who are content with what they have. Other reasons for people to marry include desire for each other and desire for children. He writes that the desire for the other may wane, and a household may remain barren. Thus this cannot be the primary intention of marriage and of building a household. In a short statement, Luther brings together the relation of *ecclesia* and *oeconomia*,

Who is it that so disrupts marriage and household management, and turns them so strangely topsy-turvy? It is he of whom Solomon says: *Unless the Lord keeps this house, household management is a lost cause*. He wishes to buttress this passage [Ps. 127:1a] and confirm its truth. This is why he permits such situations to arise in the world, as an assault on unbelief, to bring to shame the arrogance of reason with all works and cleverness, and to constrain them to believe.<sup>32</sup>

The everyday events of *oeconomia* are quickly misguided without our understanding our position in relation to God. Luther even says in this psalm, “Solomon’s purpose is to describe a Christian marriage; he is instructing everyone how to conduct himself as a Christian husband and head of a household.”<sup>33</sup> The Christian stands in a unique position of having received the Word and is able to act on moral principles in an attempt to properly establish one’s *oeconomia*. Luther believes that the Christian marriage, and, therefore, the Christian *oeconomia*, should be such that it is attractive to others. He argues that young people are hesitant to

start a home, or often when they do, it falters because they do not understand that it is God who builds the home. Luther's wisdom (as well as Solomon's) on this subject is as applicable now as it was at the time the psalm was written. Luther writes of how extremely difficult it would be for one to attempt to build a house apart from the work of God.

Luther provides an example of this in the marriage relationship, writing that where there was originally a longing of male for the female and for children to come of that relationship; now there exists lust, shame in sexuality, and pain in childbirth. As a creation order, there is still a remnant of that past harmony, but, in the present state, it is little more than a remnant. Without a christocentric focus in the marriage relationship, this remnant is even further diluted. The paradox here is that despite the fact that what is left is a vestige of what was before the fall, the Christian has freedom in this creation order.

Luther also links faith to *oeconomia*: "So we see that the management of a household should and must be done in faith—then there will be enough—so that men come to acknowledge that everything depends not on our doing, but on God's blessing and support."<sup>34</sup> This is a definitive statement of how Luther views the human response in *oeconomia*. In *ecclesia*, it is God who speaks through his Word, and the human who responds directly to God. In *oeconomia*, the human continues to respond to God in faith, but response is played out in the way the person interacts with the world around him or her. For Luther, Psalm 127:1 provides an excellent example of this. Shelter is a basic human need, and building a house is the labor required to meet that need. The writer of the psalm provides a dual meaning in that both the physical structure of the home and the building of the family must be done in faith in response to God. As mentioned earlier, Luther retains that faith is central to one's understanding of *oeconomia*. Without faith, one has no ground on which to properly build a household. The concept in Ecclesiastes of vanity is appropriate for understanding the building of a house apart from faith. The work of man is vain apart from acknowledgement of and faith in the Creator.

As Luther cites Aristotle in the exposition of this psalm, it is important to refer back to the way Aristotle was using *oikonomia* and contrast it with Luther's usage. Taylor writes concerning the *oikonomia* as seen in Aristotle's *Politics*: "Strictly speaking, then it [household management in *The Politics*] ought to be classed rather as a special sort of *oikonomia* than as a kind of political rule. Household management involves the rule of the developed practical wisdom of the patriarch over slaves, females, and children."<sup>35</sup> These were the three relationships that Aristotle saw as present in the *oikonomia*. Taylor goes on to explain that such a structure is in place because "slaves, females, and children" lack the



developed wisdom that is present in the patriarch. Because these other humans lack the developed wisdom of the patriarch, they make good on that deficiency by depending on the wisdom of the patriarch.<sup>36</sup>

Luther alters this structure in his interpretation. With both Aristotle and Luther, the relationship remains essentially the head of the household relating to the rest of the household. In Aristotle, this relationship is how he relates with (1) his wife, (2) his slaves, and (3) his children. Luther's three categories in the "Exposition of Psalm 127" are (1) wife and child(ren), (2) servant and maid, and (3) livestock and fodder.<sup>37</sup> The two thinkers had very different reasons for their classification. Aristotle's groups are dependent on the head of the household in three different ways. The society was formed in such a way that the patriarch was the one with the greatest amount of power, both physical and financial, in the family. Luther's classes are not based on levels of dependency. Rather they are three distinct categories of interaction. The nuclear family is that with which the head of household will have the closest relationship. Here Luther is relying more on the *Haustafeln* of Ephesians 5:21–33 than on Aristotle. He acknowledges that there is a unique, distinct, spirituality in the bond of husband and wife, as well as the role of husband and wife in raising children.

Luther's second category carries the connotation of those who are at an economic disadvantage to the head of household as stated in the phrase "servant and maid."<sup>38</sup> His mention of servant and maid may be because those relationships will connect directly to the family. The servant and maid are involved in the daily running of the house. Despite this involvement, these roles will not carry the same weight as the relationship of husband to wife and child. The household is an economic unit and is the basic locus of production. The servant may have his or her own *oeconomia* with their spouse and child, but there is a sense of transience with the servant that is not present with the wife and child. One might question why relationships with humans in other social relationships (i.e., at the marketplace, sporting event, community gathering, and so forth) are not placed under *oeconomia*. The most basic answer is that all economic production happens within the domestic realm. Bayer writes, "*Oeconomia* encompasses for Luther everything that we today, in our economically differentiated situation, place into three different categories: marriage and family, business, and education and academic study."<sup>39</sup>

The role of the servant in Luther's day would have been to aid in raising the family and to provide food for the family. Although one may balk at referring to someone as a servant in society today, the servant for Luther was the one who helped provide for the physical needs of the family and produced the surplus that drove trade. The servant today might be seen as the factory worker, the farmer,

the child-care worker, and others. The family unit still requires the aid of those outside the family to provide for the needs of the family.

The contemporary role of the servant in *oeconomia* raises a host of ethical questions. One must ask how to relate to those who are in relation to the *oeconomia*, both in the case of the factory worker the family has never met and the child-care worker who may spend more time with the child than do the parents. As the family responds to God's word in the *oeconomia*, the role these servants play in the family should be carefully considered. Methods of granting equity to those in this relationship should also be discussed. For instance, in Luther's context, he would have most likely seen it as immoral to underpay a household servant—a person in relationship to the household, fulfilling his or her God-given place in *oeconomia* and deserving of an equitable wage. Similarly, the contemporary family when considering their role in *oeconomia* should deliberate as to whether those institutions they support financially through a servant role are also being provided an equitable wage. These ethical issues can become more convoluted the further the family is removed from the farmer or household worker, but the underlying need to consider those in servant relationship to the family is crucial.

Another area for moral consideration concerning the role of the servant in *oeconomia* is the socioeconomic placement of that person. Bayer comments that as “callings” became more specialized in the Middle Ages, the roles of servants and maids were thought of as “the lowest and most scorned of occupations.”<sup>40</sup> Luther transformed this into a holy vocation.

In regard to vocation, this connection to God, humanity, and the land does not necessarily make one vocation more holy than another. Luther writes in his 1530 message “A Sermon on Keeping Children in School,”<sup>41</sup>

I would take the work of a faithful, pious jurist and clerk over the holiness of all the priests, monks, and nuns, even the very best. And if these great and good works do not move you, then you ought at least to be moved by the honor and good pleasure of God, knowing that by this means you thank him so gloriously and render him such great service, as has been said.<sup>42</sup>

The place of self-righteousness through religious practices has been removed in favor of Christ the justifier.

This picture of the role of the servant to the family is quite different from that presented by Aristotle. For Aristotle, the patriarch remained in a dominant role over the family and over the servant. The male of the family was in a position of power because he supposedly possessed superior wisdom to the other members of the family and was therefore able to provide protection for the family. For Luther, these family roles take on a completely different dynamic. The family

exists in worshipful service to God, and whatever harmony present in the family is present because of Christ. Jesus' prayer in Matthew 6:11, "Give us this day our daily bread," is illustrative of Luther's understanding of *oeconomia*. Although bread is produced by tilling the soil, planting the grain, harvesting, and baking, it is God who gives the bread. It is to God that one should ask for provision rather than trust in one's own hand. This is the heart of the message in Luther's "Exposition of Psalm 127." No matter how hard a man works, if it is not in gratitude to God it will be in vain. Luther does not picture a dictatorial man as the leader of the family—instead picturing one who works and lives out relationships in service to God.

Each of the stations a person fills in *oeconomia* is a good, God-ordained activity. In one of his most eloquent passages on the beauty of one's station in the estates, Luther writes, "A servant, maid, son, daughter, man, woman, lord, subject, or whoever else may belong to a station ordained by God, as long as he fills his station, is as beautiful and glorious in the sight of God as a bride adorned for her marriage or as the image of a saint decorated for a high festival."<sup>43</sup>

Luther's third category of "livestock and fodder" also carries much theological significance. This category refers to man's relationship to the organic and inorganic world. It involves those who work to gather the fruit of the land. Although Luther says "*oeconomia*" is present in Aristotle, this category is not. Aristotle limited the concept to other human members of the household. One must therefore ask why Luther chose to add this category. If *oeconomia* is a biblical concept and a creation order as Bayer asserts, what is added by the inclusion of "livestock and fodder"? Luther's purpose here is perhaps to emphasize man's place in and dependence on the created order. Luther's exposition of Genesis 1:26 is helpful:

Thus Adam had a twofold life: a physical one and an immortal one, though this was not yet clearly revealed, but only in hope. Meanwhile he would have eaten, he would have drunk, he would have labored, he would have procreated, etc. In brief words I want to call attention to these facts concerning the difference which God makes through His counsel, by which he sets us apart from the rest of the animals with whom He lets us live.<sup>44</sup>

Man will always be in need of food and, therefore, in need of God to provide that food. The "daily bread" is a necessity just as it was in Jesus' day, and therefore worshipful gratitude to God is also necessary. Again, Jesus' statement concerning bread also aids in understanding this position: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4; cf. Deut. 8:3). It is the Word of God that is able to sustain man in daily relationship. It should also be noted that here Jesus acknowledges the necessity of daily sustenance. Food,

and thus the land, are good things given by God. However, these provisions are not all that is necessary when *oeconomia* is in response to God. Luther referred to this verse often in his writings.<sup>45</sup> In many of these references, his purpose in citing this verse is to point the reader to dependence on God as a necessary quality in the life of those who profess to trust the Word of God. Luther links the relationship between *ecclesia* and *oeconomia* as well as the blessing of God on his people and the land in his commentary on Genesis 27:28. This verse falls in the blessing of Isaac on his son Jacob (though Isaac is under the mistaken assumption that he is blessing Jacob's twin Esau): "May God give you the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine." On this passage Luther writes:

This blessing is far different from and much more sublime than the consecrated water concerning which the papists make many false assertions. They were blessings concerning eternal life over against eternal death. They were priestly and regal blessings that reached into the life to come. Nevertheless, they cannot be administered apart from this life, and it is necessary for us to have physical blessings as well, for we cannot enjoy the eternal blessing without the temporal blessings. God must bless the field, supply bread, meat, and all the other necessities of life. But "man does not live by bread alone" (Matt. 4:4), and the physical blessings are given because of that eternal blessing. Therefore the spiritual promises always include the temporal promises.<sup>46</sup>

Luther emphasizes the blessings provided in temporal life. In fact, he castigates the Roman Catholics whom he believes disregard such blessing. He provides a link between the earthly reality of the need for provision and the giving of that provision from God.

There is also an eschatological aspect in including animals and the land in *oeconomia*. Creation groans for redemption, as do humans. Luther writes, "Moreover, it appears here [Gen. 3:17] what a great misfortune followed sin, because the earth, which is innocent and committed no sin, is nevertheless compelled to endure a curse and, as St. Paul says in Rom. 8:20, 'has been subjected to vanity.' But it will be freed from this on the Last Day, for which it is waiting."<sup>47</sup> *Oeconomia* encompasses the familial relationships, but in these marred relationships one is able to catch a glimpse of its pre-fall beauty. This could occur in the marriage relationship when the wife is loved as Christ loved the church. Such a glimpse could occur in relation with the land in the satisfaction that accompanies the end of a day's work well done. Luther refers to these glimpses as "remnants of the former blessing."<sup>48</sup>

In many ways, Luther's concept of *oeconomia* is a worthwhile development of which to take note. Luther's personal asceticism and harsh strictness toward the Augustinian order has been well documented.<sup>49</sup> Many of Luther's religious practices as a monk were to find a gracious God and to escape from this earthly life. Such a life could easily lead to a dualism between the flesh and a future heavenly reality. Even with this past, Luther was able to relate man's earthly reality within the context of the cosmos. *Oeconomia* involves the relationship of man to man and man to earth.

Of this relationship Bayer writes:

There is no question that the life and the theology of the Augustinian monk Martin Luther were characterized by the strictest asceticism up to the time of his reformational turning point.... It is most surprising that Luther studies to this point have not pursued the question about how this turn from a radical denial of the world to an impressive affirmation of everything that is of the world and nature took place, which shines forth more brightly in Luther's writings from 1520 on, with ever increasing emphasis.<sup>50</sup>

This spiritual connection to the earthly is most clearly seen in the roles of household management and parenthood in the *oeconomia*. Perhaps Luther's development of the earthly aspect of *oeconomia* was a reaction against his earlier practices as a monk.

Understanding *oeconomia* is a vital part of Luther's theology. Though Luther took the basic structure from Aristotle, it is clear that Luther views *oeconomia* as a biblical concept that should be understood by followers of Jesus. *Oeconomia* allows one to have meaningful relationships in faith given by God, while awaiting redemption. *Oeconomia* also allows man to flourish in the world that God has created for him. An emphasis on *oeconomia* can help us become comfortable with the context in which we are placed as well as to positively fulfill one's station in life.

## Notes

1. For a general overview of the estates, see Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 120–53; Bernd Wannewetsch, “Luther’s Moral Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 120–35.
2. For a further introduction to the estates, and in particular political economy, see Germano Maifreda, *From Oikonomia to Political Economy: Constructing Economic Knowledge from the Renaissance to the Scientific Revolution* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); and Jaroslav Pelikan, *Spirit Versus Structure: Luther and the Institutions of the Church* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).
3. Greek terms and their English transliteration will be used interchangeably as deemed appropriate by the context.
4. A secondary use is that of God’s ordering of the universe such as in Ephesians 1:9 and 3:10.
5. Cf. 1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 3:2; Col. 1: 25; 1 Thess. 2:4. For further information, see Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 5, trans. and ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 151–52. Friedrich also notes that in the prison letters there is a close connection between the two uses of *οικονομία*, and it is not always clear to which use Paul is referring. A third use that only occurs once in the New Testament is in 1 Timothy 1:4 where false teachers occupy themselves with myths and genealogies rather than the stewardship (*οικονομίαν*) that is from God by faith. See Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 5:153.
6. *Economy* is deliberately used here rather than *oeconomia* or *oikonomia*. The purpose being that Aristotle would have used *oikonomia* in his writing, but inserting *oikonomia* here would have been confusing because what Luther has in mind for *oeconomia* is not *oikonomia*.
7. C. C. W. Taylor, “Politics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 233.
8. Taylor, “Politics,” 233.
9. Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle*, ed. Ernest Barker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 33.
10. Aristotle, *The Politics*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 14.
11. Aristotle, *The Politics*, 17.

12. Aristotle, *APISTOTEDOUS TA PODITIKA: The Politics of Aristotle*, 2nd ed., English notes by Richard Congreve (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1874), 39.
13. As will be discussed shortly, *oeconomia* is the Latinizing of the Greek *oikonomia*. As Aristotle was writing in Greek, *oikonomia*, not *oeconomia* will be used in this section to refer to Aristotle's concept. This is also helpful hermeneutically in examining Aristotle by avoiding an anachronism and hence casting meaning on the word that may or may not have been originally present.
14. Aristotle, *The Politics*, 18.
15. Aristotle, *The Politics*, 19.
16. Aristotle is in contrast to Socrates on this point.
17. Aristotle, *The Politics*, 19.
18. For more on Luther and the orders of creation see Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 120–53. Following Luther, Dietrich Bonhoeffer offered a slightly different version of the orders of creation, naming them the orders of preservation, which emphasizes God's continuing activity in creation rather than viewing creation as a static entity. For more on Bonhoeffer and the orders of preservation, see Jordan J. Ballor, "Christ in Creation: Bonhoeffer's Orders of Preservation and Natural Theology," *Journal of Religion* 86, no. 1 (January 2006): 1–22.
19. Aristotle, *Politicorum Libri Octo*, ed. Francis Susemihl (Leipzig: Teubner, 1872), 51.
20. Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), 2018.
21. Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, 1257.
22. All citations from the works of Martin Luther are from *Luther's Works*, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman (Philadelphia: Muehlenberg and Fortress; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–86). Henceforth *LW*. Martin Luther, "Exposition of Psalm 127, for the Christians at Riga in Livonia," *LW* 45:322–23.
23. Martin Luther, "A Sermon on Keeping Children in School," *LW* 46:241.
24. D. P. Simpson, *Cassell's New Latin Dictionary* (London: Cassell, 1959), 409. The Vulgate prefers to use *dispensatio* when referring to Paul's stewardship rather than "a plan" as the English equivalent such as in 1 Corinthians 9:17; Ephesians 3:2; and Colossians 1:25. To complicate matters further, *oeconomia* and *dispensatio* are not the only Latin words used for *oikonomia*. Two such instances are in Luke 16:2 and 1 Thessalonians 2:4.
25. Roger Gryson, ed. *Biblica Sacra Vulgata* (Stuttgart: Biblgesellschaft, 1969), 1809.

26. See Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9, 15, 39–58; and Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 25–46.
27. G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 940–43. It is important to point to the fact that of the wealth of uses Lampe provides for *oikonomia* (administration, management, charge, office, dispensation, organization, constitution, ordering, prudent handling, and so forth), familial household management is never explicitly mentioned.
28. Luther, “Exposition of Psalm 127,” *LW* 45:311–37. It should be noted that Luther does not directly name *Politics* as his source, but this section will make the case that Luther’s reference to Aristotle and *oeconomia* almost certainly referred to *Politics*.
29. Luther, “Exposition of Psalm 127,” *LW* 45:317.
30. Luther, “Exposition of Psalm 127,” *LW* 45:317.
31. Luther, “On the Councils and the Church, 1539,” *LW* 41:177.
32. Luther, “Exposition of Psalm 127,” *LW* 45:323, emphasis added.
33. Luther, “Exposition of Psalm 127,” *LW* 45:323.
34. Luther, “Exposition of Psalm 127,” *LW* 45:324.
35. Taylor, “Politics,” 245.
36. Taylor, “Politics,” 245.
37. Luther, “Exposition of Psalm 127,” *LW* 45:322.
38. Luther, “Exposition of Psalm 127,” *LW* 45:322.
39. Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 142.
40. Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 141.
41. Luther, “A Sermon on Keeping Children in School,” *LW* 46:213–58.
42. Luther, “A Sermon on Keeping Children in School,” *LW* 46:241.
43. Luther, “Psalm 111,” *LW* 13:368.
44. Luther, “Lectures on Genesis 1–5,” *LW* 1:57.
45. *LW* 5:54, 61, 137, 144, 202; 7:128; 9:93; 14:192; 15:173; 25:238; 26:95; 28:143; 29:162, 216; 31:210, 345; 33:155; 35:344; 36:45; 39:200; 43:44; 48:206. References to this verse are taken from the *Index to Luther’s Works*, *LW* 55:405.



46. Martin Luther, "Lectures on Genesis Chapters 26–30," *LW* 5:137.
47. Luther, "Lectures on Genesis 1–5," *LW* 1:204.
48. Luther, "Lectures on Genesis 1–5," *LW* 1:204.
49. See, for example, Walther von Loewenich, *Martin Luther: The Man and His Work* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982), 72–82.
50. Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 140–41.