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HERMAN BAVINCK (1854-1921)
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Christology and Economic Ethics:
Herman Bavinck's Prophet, Priest,
and King in the Marketplace
by Matthew Kaemingk

Christology and Economic Ethics: Herman Bavinck’s Prophet, Priest, and King in the Marketplace

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Introduction

How should a Christian follow Jesus in the marketplace? Around the world Christian activists and academics, pastors and professionals offer a wide variety of dissenting answers to the critically important relationship between faith and economic life. This article explores a latent potential within Herman Bavinck’s Christology to present a way forward for a divided church on the major marketplace questions of the day. An essay of “public theology,” this brief article develops and applies Herman Bavinck’s *munus triplex* Christology—Christ as prophet, priest, and king—to illustrate both the unity and diversity of the church’s marketplace responsibilities. This article will examine a Jesus-follower’s threefold vocation in the marketplace: a prophetic calling to speak words of economic truth and justice, a priestly calling to marketplace ministries of reconciliation, grace, and spiritual communion, and a royal calling to economic responsibility, creativity, productivity, and service.

A Christological Framework for Economic Engagement

How does one follow a first century carpenter in a twenty-first century global marketplace? In surveying the life of Jesus, which stories or commands, images or actions should one appropriate to develop faithful economic practices in the marketplace today? How should one *Christologically* frame complex economic issues of global wages and trade, corporate responsibility and governance, work and macroeconomics, vocational discernment and career ambition? Jesus of Nazareth never offered a course on economic ethics, business management, or marketplace spirituality. He gave no instructions on how to choose a career, how to structure employee salaries, how to streamline a corporation, or how to protest unjust global market structures.

To say that contemporary Christians are divided on the shape and contours of Christian faithfulness in the marketplace is, no doubt, an understatement. The debates and diversity within global Christianity over questions of faith, work, and economics is profound. Around the world subcultures of Christian activists and economists, pastors and professionals, theologians and entrepreneurs gather separately to discuss issues of work and wealth, industry and trade. These theo-economic subcultures each have their own idiosyncratic theological languages and interpretive economic lenses. Some of these groups call for a strenuous prophetic critique of the marketplace.¹ Others herald the free market and modern workplace as a potential space of divine blessing, productivity, and liberation.² Christian scholars gather in academic conferences to study, analyze, and reflect on market forces from a critical distance. Christian professionals embedded deeply within these market forces gather for prayer and mutual encouragement amidst the stress and strain of work and career.³ Christian pastors gather to wrestle with how they might help, encourage, and guide workers as they navigate the economic forces of work and unemployment, poverty and consumerism.⁴ Christian economists gather to discuss global economic theories, trends, and systems that are all active and powerful within their discipline.⁵

For the most part, these diverse discourses on faith, work, and economics rarely intersect with one another. Left on their own, it is not uncommon for these subcultures to select and elevate a single biblical image or Christological command that is meant to explain the whole of the global marketplace and direct the disciple's calling within it. Their favorite biblical image or command, once elevated, becomes *the* interpretive lens through which diverse and complex economic questions are understood. The unfortunate result of this singular focus can be a rather narrow and myopic account of "the" Christian response to diverse economic issues of property and markets, work and career, finance and trade. Inevitably, the complex

1. Rebecca Todd Peters, *In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization* (New York: Continuum, 2004); Ulrich Duchrow, *Global Economy: A Confessional Issue for the Churches* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1987), and his *Alternatives to Global Capitalism* (Kairos Europa: Heidelberg, 1995); Adam Kotsko, *Neoliberalism's Demons: On the Political Theology of Late Capital* (Stanford University, 2018); F. J. Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death: A Theological Critique of Capitalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986); Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui-Lan, *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield); Joerg Rieger, *No Rising Tide: Theology Economic, and the Future* (Fortress Press, 2009); Kevin Hargaden, *Theological Ethics in a Neoliberal Age* (Eugene, OR: Cascade books, 2018).

2. Samuel Gregg, *For God and Profit: How Banking and Finance Can Serve the Common Good* (Herder & Herder, 2020); Brent Waters, *Just Capitalism: A Christian Ethics of Economic Globalization* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2016); Kenneth Barnes, *Redeeming Capitalism* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2018).

3. See David Miller's helpful historical overview of America's faith and work movement *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

4. See the American pastoral resources, events, and networks that can be found within the Made to Flourish Network (madetoflourish.org) and the Theology of Work project (theologyofwork.org).

5. The Association of Christian Economists, "an academic society for Christians in the economics profession" (christianeconomists.org). See also the *Faith and Economics* journal.

and three-dimensional character, work, and mission of Christ in the world becomes one dimensional. Following Jesus in a complex global marketplace becomes simple, and rather simplistic.

It is an understatement to say that these diverse economic discourses and subcultures *need* to listen and learn from one another. They need each other's theo-economic insights. They need to dialogue with and even contest one another's Christological images and metaphors. In and through these discourses a more nuanced and generative understanding of economic faithfulness might begin to emerge. And yet, for a myriad of reasons, interdisciplinary and ecumenical conversations about faith, work, and economics rarely occur. By and large, these diverse theo-economic communities lack either the interest, desire, or ability to engage one other in meaningful discussion. All too often theologians and activists, entrepreneurs and economists, pastors and professionals are content to either ignore, dismiss, or demonize one another. Uninterested in what their sisters and brothers have to say about the theo-economic shape of marketplace faithfulness in the modern world, they continue to remain within their respective silos.

Seeing the problem, the public-theological purpose of this essay is two-fold. First, to make a *Christological* case as to why diverse theo-economic subcultures need one another. And second, to make this case by appealing to a more complex and multilayered Christology through which these diverse subcultures might begin to appreciate, learn from, and even collaborate with one another. Here we intend to demonstrate how a more multifaceted Christology can challenge some of the more myopic theo-economic images and lenses currently on offer within global Christianity. Further, a multilayered Christology promises a more kaleidoscopic range of ways in which Christian pastors and professionals, activists and academics might begin to engage the global marketplace.

The multilayered Christology developed within this essay emerges from Herman Bavinck's brief but potent reflections on the *munus triplex*—Christ's threefold office of prophet, priest, and king. Resisting simplistic forms of Christological reductionism, Bavinck argues that, as Israel's promised Messiah, Christ embodies and fulfills all three of Israel's public offices. He is—at one and the same time—a prophetic, priestly, and royal force within Israel, the church, and ultimately the world. *As a public prophet*, Jesus speaks and reveals God's truth and justice to the world. Through his prophetic word, he confronts the darkness with the light of God's public demand for truth and justice. *As a public priest*, Jesus heals, redeems, and reconciles the brokenhearted in and through his life, death, and resurrection. Through his priestly sacrifice, Christ restores and reconciles humanity and all creation into right relationship with God. *As a public king*, Jesus reigns as the sovereign creator in power and justice, humility and service, inaugurating the kingdom of God on each. Through Christ's royal office he restores human beings to their own creational callings to steward the earth and work together in ways that are humble, just, and life-giving.

Bavinck's threefold Christology produces a corresponding threefold anthropology. For Bavinck, humanity is called—in their own finite and fallen ways—to participate in Christ's threefold offices in the world. In other words, the body of Christ should reflect the prophetic, priestly, and royal work of Christ in the world. Every disciple of Christ is called to a prophetic, priestly, and royal witness (see 1 Pet. 2:9). Moreover, their lives should not be reduced to any one of these three. *Being in Christ*—the anointed *munus triplex*—disciples are called to follow him in all three offices never separating one from the other.

The historical roots of Bavinck's *munus triplex* Christology can be traced back to the early church and, indeed, to ancient Israel's sociopolitical leadership structure. While ancient in origin, the concept of the *munus triplex* experienced a revival during the protestant reformation. While Herman Bavinck is certainly not the inventor of the *munus triplex*, we will find that his brief formulation and nuance discussion of the doctrine offers the contemporary church a rather generative lens, one that can be particularly helpful in answering our primary question: *how should Christians engage the global marketplace in ways that are faithful to Christ?*

Here we must pause to consider a potential objection. There those who might wish to limit the mediatorial work of Christ to the sphere of private spirituality and personal salvation. While they would agree that Christ is a prophet, priest, and king, they would insist that he only assumes these roles within the four walls of institutional church. In short, Christ's mediatorial work has no meaningful relevance for public or economic life. Speaking anthropologically, Christians are called to be prophets, priests, and kings inside the church, but in the "kingdom of this world" they are called to simply be accountants, executives, activists, and economists. Christ's offices have no public import for their economic lives.

Herman Bavinck will have nothing of this sort of privatization of the gospel, nor will he abide by a Christology circumscribed by the four walls of the church. A thoroughgoing Neo-Calvinist, Bavinck sees the fruits of Christ's mediatorial work in every sphere of public life. Scripture, theology, and Christology should inform a disciple's personal, ecclesial, and public life. In his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck writes, "While scripture has a primarily religious and soteriological purpose, its nonetheless of primary significance for other areas of life."⁶ Further, scripture must not be "isolated from everything," but "must be employed to explain all of human living."⁷ For Bavinck, true Calvinism can never be limited to a "ecclesiastical distinction," nor is it a "purely theological conception." Instead, true Calvinism "is of wider application and denotes a specific type in the political, social, and civil spheres. It stands for that characteristic view of life and the world as a whole." A Calvinist is

6. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003–2008), 1:444. Hereafter *RD* with corresponding volume and page number. My thanks to Nathaniel Gray Sutanto for his helpful comments on this section.

7. Herman Bavinck, "The Kingdom of God: The Highest Good," *The Bavinck Review* 2 (2011): 166.

a person who “reveals a specific character . . . not merely in his church and theology, but also in social and political life, in science and art.”⁸

These features within Bavinck’s thought evidence his conviction that Christ came to earth not simply to save souls or start a church; he came to restore the whole of his creation. In this sense, the “benefits that accrue to us from the reconciliation of God-in-Christ are too numerous to mention . . . [They are] juridical . . . mystical . . . ethical . . . moral . . . economic . . . physical . . . In a word, the whole enterprise of re-creation, the complete restoration of the world and humanity . . . is the fruit of Christ’s work.”⁹ Christ could not be privatized or reduced to either a teacher, healer, liberator, savior, or friend. The complex “work of Christ,” Bavinck insisted, “is so multifaceted that it cannot be captured in a single word nor summarized in a single formula.”¹⁰ Public disciples require multiple images and facets, he argued, “To give us a deep impression and a clear sense of the riches and many-sidedness of the mediator’s work.”¹¹ These multiple facets of Christ’s life would “supplement one another and enrich our knowledge.”¹²

With this objection briefly noted, the remaining structure of this essay is rather straightforward. We begin by examining three prominent Christian responses to the marketplace currently on offer: namely *prophetic* economic critique and confrontation, *priestly* workplace spirituality and reconciliation, and *royal* economic stewardship and marketplace development. Having completed this threefold survey, we turn to Herman Bavinck’s Christological reflections on the *munus triplex* in his *Reformed Dogmatics*. Here we explore how, according to Bavinck, Christ enacts his own threefold calling as prophet, priest, and king. Finally, we conclude with a brief articulation of a more variegated Christological account of marketplace discipleship.

Before we begin, it is necessary to briefly name a few of the limiting factors involved in appropriating a threefold typological structure like the *munus triplex*. First, the complex work of Jesus Christ can never be limited to or exhausted by any threefold office. In scripture Jesus is also rightly described as a shepherd, healer, protector, creator, liberator, defender, and friend. The same goes for the multifaceted callings of Christians in the world. Thus, the threefold office is not meant to exhaust the calling of Christ or his disciples. Within this essay the *munus triplex* is functionally meant to open the readers understanding of Christological complexity, not close it down. Second, we must make a critical distinction between the offices of Christ and the offices of the Christian. There is a critically important distance between the *primary* royal, priestly, and prophetic authority of Christ and the *secondary* authority

8. Herman Bavinck, “Future of Calvinism,” *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 5, no. 17 (1894): 3.

9. Bavinck, *RD*, 3:451–52.

10. Bavinck, *RD*, 3:383–84.

11. Bavinck, *RD*, 3:383.

12. Bavinck, *RD*, 3:384.

of the Christian. Christ's Word, Christ's Healing, and Christ's Reign is always infinite, infallible, and unwavering. The Christian's, on the other hand, will always be finite, fallen, and contingent. To say, for example, that a Christian participates in Christ's royal reign is *not* to say that Christians are endowed with Christ's infinite, infallible, and unwavering power and justice. A critical distinction between the two must remain. Third, properly understood, the *munus triplex* is a catechetical tool. It should be appropriated as a limited heuristic device, one that can inform and cultivate a Christological imagination. Within the *munus triplex* the disciple is invited to consider the complex and variegated works of Christ and the manifold callings of his disciples in the world. When one's economic imagination has grown overly myopic and simplistic the *munus triplex* can serve to open up a multiplicity of ways in which disciples can faithfully engage the marketplace. In due course we will add more nuance to this statement.¹³

In the next section we press forward with a brief discussion of contemporary Christian engagements with the global marketplace. We *synthetically* structure their diverse discourses along the three lines of the prophetic, the royal, and the priestly for reasons that will soon be revealed.

Engaging the Market: Prophetic, Royal, and Priestly

Prophetic analysis, critique, and confrontation is a prominent lens through which many Christians engage the marketplace today. Speaking out publicly and organizing politically on behalf of economic justice is a particularly central *modus operandi* for many Christian activists, theologians, labor unions, and advocates for poor and marginalized populations.¹⁴ Within this more prophetic camp, a strong and leading emphasis is placed on exposing and overturning the economic principalities and powers that be. Herein a clear line is drawn between the economy of the world and

13. Adam J. Johnson provides a helpful word of caution regarding the *munus triplex* in the following, "The Servant Lord: A Word of Caution Regarding the *Munus Triplex* in Karl Barth's Theology and the Church Today," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 65, no. 2 (2012): 159–73. See also Anthony Ekpo, "Triplex Munus in the 1983 Code: A Blessing or a Curse?" *The Australasian Catholic Record* 93, no. 3 (July 2016): 259–76; George W. Stroup III, "The Relevance of the *Munus Triplex* for Reformed Theology and Ministry," in *The Austin Presbyterian Seminary Bulletin* 98, no 9 (June 1983): 12–32; John Frederick Jansen, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Work of Christ* (London: James Clarke, 1956), 108.

14. See, for example, Rebecca Todd Peters, *In Search of the Good Life: The Ethics of Globalization* (New York: Continuum, 2004); Ulrich Duchrow, *Global Economy: A Confessional Issue for the Churches* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1987); Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism* (Kairos Europa: Heidelberg, 1995); Adam Kotsko, *Neoliberalism's Demons: On the Political Theology of Late Capital* (Stanford University, 2018); F. J. Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death: A Theological Critique of Capitalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986); Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui-Lan, *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield); Joerg Rieger, *No Rising Tide: Theology Economic, and the Future* (Fortress Press, 2009); Kevin Hargaden, *Theological Ethics in a Neoliberal Age* (Eugene, OR: Cascade books, 2018).

the economy of God. The global “neo-liberal” status quo is often portrayed as a cursed economy that is wholly other from the economy of divine justice and shalom found in Jesus Christ. Within this prophetic imagination, the remnant church should embody a small and alternative economy of grace that stands apart and in antithetical opposition to the oppressive economies of the world. Here the prophetic economy of God’s subaltern must oppose the rapacious economies of the world with the justice and truth of God. The diverse prophetic voices for economic justice in global Christianity are certainly not monolithic. However, their common traits often include a prophetic emphasis on economic analysis, critique, and confrontation.

Within academic circles the prophetic task is to intellectually expose the idolatry and injustice of neoliberalism, colonialism, and globalization embodied deep within its global institutional structures. Within Christian activist circles the prophetic task is to organize the church and various nonprofit organizations to publicly confront and contest economic injustice and environmental degradation through grassroots organizing and global action. Here, the prophetic task is to awaken the church to the radical corruption of the global economy and the radical otherness of the divine economy.

A *royal* engagement with the global marketplace—in contradistinction to the prophetic—seeks not so much to confront economic power from the outside but to actively wield economic power in a responsible, generative, and life-giving way from within. Here a royal marketplace posture is focused on developing engaging marketplace structures and wielding economic power in ways that are faithful to scripture. It should be no surprise that these more royal discourses are more prominent with Christian business leaders who already have already obtained at least a modicum of economic privilege and power within the global economic system.¹⁵ The royal language of economic dominion, stewardship, responsibility, innovation, and entrepreneurship are particularly popular and prominent within middle and upper-class professional contexts in the West. Here Christian pastors and professionals wrestle together with the rather privileged discussions of which career and calling to pursue, how to manage employees with justice and grace, where and how to invest one’s money, how to develop professional habits and patterns that are Godly and gracious.

Within royal discourses the themes of productivity, entrepreneurship, innovation, and creativity are upheld as a divine and holy calling from a God who is also productive, creative, innovative, and entrepreneurial. According to this royal framework, Adam and Eve were invested with power, dominion, and responsibility

15. Jeff Van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God: And What Still Needs to be Fixed* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010); R. Paul Stevens, *Doing God’s Business: Meaning and Motivation for the Marketplace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); Kenman L. Wong, Scott B. Rae, *Business for the Common Good: A Christian Vision for the Marketplace* (Downers Grove, IL, Intervarsity Academic, 2011); Albert M Erisman, *The Accidental Executive: Lessons on Business, Faith, and Calling from the Life of Joseph* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2015).

in creation. Christ is the sovereign king and creator of the world, Christ—the second Adam—therefore calls women and men to go into the marketplace to cultivate and create good things. Sons of Adam and daughters of Eve are called by Christ to cultivate creation as they wield their economic dominion, gifts, and callings in ways that honor Christ their king.

Third and finally, many global Christians have assumed a *priestly* posture towards the marketplace. Here Christian workers are primarily concerned with being a spiritual force of healing, prayer, and reconciliation within their places of work.¹⁶ In ancient Israel, priests served as divine mediators leading services of communal worship, intercessory prayer, and spiritual rituals of sacrifice, atonement, and harvest offering. They were mediators between God and the community. In contemporary Christianity a priestly method of marketplace engagement can take a variety of forms. Christian counselors, chaplains, pastors, and life-coaches come alongside Christian workers who are wrestling with a variety of spiritual struggles, heartbreaks, and questions in the marketplace. They provide priestly prayer, encouragement, community, and spiritual practices for healing. They help workers “integrate” their spiritual and economic lives, and workers themselves can take on a priestly role in the marketplace when they seek to heal severed workplace relationships, offer mercy and forgiveness, and humanize others within a particularly savage working environment.

These priestly workers embody Christ’s sacrificial love, healing hand, and priestly ministry of gracious reconciliation. Christian business fellowships who pray, encourage, and intercede for one another in spiritual community reflect Christ’s priestly work intercession on behalf of the working world. Throughout global Christianity, work-oriented prayers, devotionals, liturgies, and rituals are regularly developed to empower workers to carry their working lives to God in worship. Professional conferences and books are released arguing that the marketplace can be a place of Christian worship and service to God. Through participation in the global economy, the priesthood of all believers can offer glory, praise, and honor to God. Work can be worship, and the marketplace can be a sanctuary of praise. In all these marketplaces, priests work for a spiritual reconciliation and integration between faith and work, vocation and career, sanctuary and street.

16. Denise Daniels and Shannon Vandewarker, *Working in the Presence of God: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Work* (Hendrickson, 2019); Fiona Stewart-Darling, *Multifaith Chaplaincy in the Workplace* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017); Norvene Vest, *Friend of the Soul: A Benedictine Spirituality of Work* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997); Parker J. Palmer, *The Active Life Leader’s Guide: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity, and Caring* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011); Eric Sammons, *Holiness for Everyone: The Practical Spirituality of St. Josemaria Escriva* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2012); Gregory F. A. Pierce, *Spirituality at Work: 10 Ways to Balance Your Life on the Job* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001); Bill Peel, *Workplace Grace: Becoming a Spiritual Influence at Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010); R. Paul Stevens and Alvin Ung, *Taking Your Soul to Work: Overcoming the Nine Deadly Sins of the Workplace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

The prophetic, the royal, and the priestly, bring their own wisdom, virtue, and Christological blessing to the marketplace. However, when they are disconnected from one another, their potential blind spots and weaknesses can quickly become exacerbated. The prophetic posture can quickly become self-righteous, detached, ungracious, irresponsible, and out of touch with the lived realities of the marketplace. The royal posture can begin to focus exclusively on creational dominion, productivity, power, expansion, and economic development for its own sake. The priestly posture can cultivate a self-serving form of spirituality or quietist complacency with the marketplace status quo. It is no surprise, therefore, that one can easily find gatherings of economic prophets who seem to do nothing but demonize Christian business leaders and entrepreneurs. Conversely, it is not difficult to find gatherings of Christian business leaders who cynically mock economic activists who yearn for a more just and liberating economy. More can be said here, but the point is rather straightforward: Marketplace prophets, priests, and kings need one another. Unfortunately, these communities rarely recognize this fact.

Organizing three exceedingly complex groups of human beings into a clean and simple threefold typology obviously has its limits. Real human beings—thankfully—don't fit neatly into these categories. Actual prophetic activists can be gracious and entrepreneurial. Royal managers can be prayerful and prophetic. Priestly prayer warriors can call out economic injustices and encourage responsible management. Complex human beings made in the image of God should never be reduced to a flat or simplistic caricature of a prophet, priest, or king. Moreover, it is worth noting that a close reading of the Old Testament reveals that Israel's prophets, priests, and kings rarely kept to the clean and clear boundaries of their office. In organizing these modern discourses into the ancient *munus triplex*, our aim is not to propose a grand or totalizing theological anthropology for economic life. Instead, our purpose is to briefly illustrate the variety of ways in which contemporary Christians are following their anointed prophet, priest, and king into the marketplace today.

For the remainder of this essay, our task is to explore both why and how these diverse discourses might begin to appreciate and ultimately learn from one another within the *munus triplex* of Christ. Holding this as our leading question, we turn to Herman Bavinck's account of the *munus triplex*. Appropriately, we will begin with his Christological formulations before we move to his anthropological conclusions.

The *Munus Triplex* within Herman Bavinck's Christology

We need a prophet who proclaims God to us, a priest who reconciles us with God, and a king who in the name of God rules and protects us.

—Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*

The *munus triplex* makes an appearance at several points within Herman Bavinck's four volume *Reformed Dogmatics*. The most extended discussion can be found in his section entitled "Christ's Threefold Office" in part three of volume three. Here, in the space of five pages, Bavinck deftly lays out a rich and multilayered Christological and anthropological reflection on the prophetic, priestly, and royal work of Christ in the world.

For Bavinck, Christ is the anointed and all-sufficient mediator between God and the world. Christ is the ultimate prophet who speaks God's final word of truth and justice. Christ is the high priest who offers God's ultimate act of grace and reconciliation. And Christ is the high king who comes to reign, not only over Israel, but over every nation and indeed the whole of creation. Succinctly put, "In Christ's God-to-humanity relation, he is a prophet; in his humanity-to-God relation he is a priest; in his headship over all humanity, he is a king."¹⁷ From the very beginning of creation, Bavinck argues, Christ assumes all three offices at once. The anointed one had

to be a prophet to know and to disclose the truth of God; a priest, to devote himself to God and, in our place to offer himself up to God; a king, to govern and protect us according to his will. To teach, to reconcile, and to lead; to instruct, to acquire, and to apply salvation; wisdom, righteousness, and redemption; truth, love, and power—all three are essential to the completeness of our salvation.¹⁸

This threefold office was foreseen by Israel's prophets. Bavinck writes,

In Isaiah all three offices come to light in the servant of the Lord: he is the priest who by his suffering atones for the sins of his people; he is a prophet who, anointed with the Spirit of God, announces the acceptable year of the Lord; and he is the king who is glorified and enjoys the fruit of his labor.¹⁹

For Bavinck, each of these three offices has its own distinct integrity and function within the mediatorial work of Christ. No single office could "be reduced to the

17. Bavinck, *RD*, 3:368.

18. Bavinck, *RD*, 3:367.

19. Bavinck, *RD*, 3:245.

other two.”²⁰ Further, “while it is not possible to separate them,” Bavinck insists, “the distinction between them is most certainly there.”²¹

While distinct, Bavinck sees these three offices as deeply interrelated with one another not only in the person of Jesus Christ but in his teachings, work, and mission. While Bavinck carefully distinguishes their functions, he refuses to separate them from one another. When speaking of Christ’s kingship, for example, Bavinck argues that Christ’s “kingship also includes the prophetic and priestly offices.”²² These diverse offices actually inform one another within Christ’s person. Christ is our king, Bavinck writes, but “he rules not by the sword but by his Word and spirit. He is a prophet, but his word is power and [really] happens. He is a priest but lives by dying, conquers by suffering, and is all-powerful by his love.” For Bavinck,

no single activity of Christ can be exclusively restricted to one office. His words are a proclamation of law and gospel and thus point to the prophetic office; but he speaks as one having authority, and all things obey his command (Mark 1:22; 4:41 Luke 4:32; etc.); he calls himself king, comes into the world to bear witness to the truth (John 18:37). His miracles are signs of his teaching (John 2:11; 10:37; etc.) but also a revelation of his priestly compassion (Matt. 8:17) and his royal power (Matt 9:6,8; 21:23). In his intercessory prayer not only his high priestly but also his prophetic and royal offices are evidenced (John 17:2, 9–10, 24). His death is a confession and an example (1 Tim. 6:13; 1 Pet. 2:21; Rev. 1:5), but also a sacrifice (Eph 5:2) and a demonstration of his power (John 10:18. Dogmatics has been perplexed, therefore, as to what things from Jesus’ life and works had to be assigned to each office in particular... It is, accordingly, an atomistic approach, which detaches certain specific activities from the life of Jesus and assigns some to his prophetic and others to his priestly or royal office. Christ . . . does not perform prophetic, priestly, and kingly activities but is himself, in his whole person, prophet, priest, and king. And everything he is, says, and does manifests that threefold dignity.²³

While much of Bavinck’s doctrine of the *munus triplex* is inherited from the Reformed theologians who preceded him, his imaginative exploration of the ways in which the prophetic, priestly, and royal natures of Christ inform one another while remaining distinct, may itself be an important theological contribution to the tradition—an avenue that invites further scholarly attention.

20. Bavinck, *RD*, 3:367.

21. Bavinck, *RD*, 3:367.

22. Bavinck, *RD*, 3:366.

23. Bavinck, *RD*, 366–67.

The *Munus Triplex* in Herman Bavinck's Anthropology

Human beings—created by, for, and in Christ—are specifically designed to reflect, follow, and participate in Christ's three offices. Bavinck argues that

humanness already encompasses within itself this threefold dignity and activity. Human beings have a head to know, a heart to give themselves, a hand to govern and lead; correspondingly, they were in the beginning equipped by God with knowledge and understanding, with righteousness and holiness, with dominion and glory (blessedness).²⁴

While Christ alone is the only high king who singularly wields unlimited divine sovereignty over all creation, Christ “nevertheless employs people in this process.”²⁵ In a similar manner, human beings are invited to publicly participate in Christ's prophetic office in their everyday lives as they teach one another. The prophetic Christ is present and “active in teaching through parents in the home, through the teacher at school, through the presbyter at the time of home visitation, and through all believers in their mutual contacts and association with others.”²⁶ Made in the image of the great prophet, human beings are called to the prophetic ministry of speaking the word and truth of God as it is revealed to us in scripture and creation. Similarly, while Christ is the high priest who bears the ultimate sacrifice and ministry of reconciliation, his disciples are empowered to participate in Christ's priestly ministry of reconciliation in their own daily lives.

It bears mentioning that the *munus triplex* emerges, not simply in Bavinck's discussion of anthropology, but within his discussion of ecclesiology as well. Here individual prophets, priests, and kings gather together and take on Christ's threefold office within a new community. Bavinck writes, “Accordingly, in connection with the threefold office of Christ—the prophetic, the royal, and the priestly office—we must distinguish three kinds of power in Christ's church: the power to teach, the power to govern (of which the power to discipline is a part), and the power or rather ministry of mercy.”²⁷ Reflecting on these points, he argues that

The power to teach has its roots in the prophetic office for which Christ has been anointed. . . . Christ never transferred it to any human being and never appointed any pope or bishop, pastor or teacher, to be his special deputy and surrogate, but he is still continually our chief prophet. . . . Still, in this connection he regularly employs people as his organs, not only office-bearers in the strict sense, but all believers, every one of them according to the grace given them.

24. Bavinck, *RD*, 3:367.

25. Bavinck, *RD*, 4:421.

26. Bavinck, *RD*, 4:418.

27. Bavinck, *RD*, 4:418.

The church itself is a prophetic, and all Christians share in Christ's anointing and are called to confess his name.²⁸

While Adam and Eve were created to assume these three offices in creation, they fell into sin and corruption. Discussing the impact of the curse on humanity's *munus triplex*, Bavinck writes,

Human beings, who themselves lost the image of God and could no longer act as prophets, priests, and kings, felt a need for special persons, who, invested with these offices, could take their place, plead God's cause with them and their cause with God. In that way, all human priesthood and sacrifice points—directly in Israel, indirectly also among other peoples—to the one perfect sacrifice that was brought in the fullness of time by Christ, the mediator between God and humankind, on Golgotha.²⁹

The sons of Adam and daughters of Eve failed to execute their three offices and thus Christ came to stand in their place and “bear all three offices” on their behalf. Bavinck's Christological anthropology is here rooted in his global-historical understanding of humanity's creation, fall, redemption, and glorification. In the past, humanity's three offices were rooted in their original creation in Christ. In the present, humanity's three offices (though fallen) can be restored through a redemptive union with Christ. In the future, humanity's three offices will be glorified as they find their ultimate consummation Christ's glorification.

According to Bavinck, the mediatorial work of Christ (and his many prophets, priests, and kings) has an eschatological character in that it continues in the new heavens and the new earth. For, he argues, “the rest enjoyed in the new Jerusalem is not to be conceived . . . as blessed inaction . . . [God's] children remain his servants. . . They are prophets, priests, and kings who reign on earth forever.”³⁰ In the eschatological fellowship,

Everyone has a place and task of one's own, based on personality and character, just as this is the case in the believing community on earth. . . the prophetic, priestly, and royal office, which was humanity's original possession, is fully restored in them by Christ. . . the new heaven and the new earth undoubtedly offer abundant opportunity for the exercise of these offices, even though the form and manner of this exercise remain unknown to us.³¹

They call themselves *Christ*-followers because “in communion with this Christ they are themselves anointed as prophets, priests, and kings.”³² G. C. Berkouwer,

28. Bavinck, *RD*, 4:418.

29. Bavinck, *RD*, 3:374.

30. Bavinck, *RD*, 4:727.

31. Bavinck, *RD*, 4:729.

32. Bavinck, *RD*, 3:362.

one of Bavinck's initial theological interpreters in the Netherlands, sums up the anthropological implications of the *munus triplex* when he writes that

By his office Christ gave service back to life again. Far from being an abstract idea or a logical schematization... [the *munus triplex* provides] insight into the fruit of Christ's work by which life can and does become restored. Whosoever follows him will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. That which became full reality in him becomes now—in his footsteps—possible again... [In him, the *munus triplex*] becomes manifest in the ordinary relationships of life and is acknowledged wherever life is lived... in the footsteps of the One... For there is only one explanation for this new life and it has only one source: the dying grain of when which bears much fruit.³³

The *Munus Triplex* and the Marketplace

There are several ways in which Bavinck's *munus triplex* might inform contemporary Christian debates and division regarding the relationship between faith, work, and economics. Within Bavinck's Christology we detect the seeds of a more complex, diverse, and multilayered vision for Christian discipleship in the marketplace—one that goes beyond the rather myopic and one-dimensional discourses currently on offer.

The first contribution is surely the generous posture of mutual respect Bavinck's Christology should cultivate between prophets, priests, and kings in the marketplace. Those engaging in either prophetic analysis and critique, royal administration and creation, or priestly reconciliation and healing are equal partners in the complex mission of Christ in the marketplace. According to Bavinck's schema, there can be no artificial hierarchy between royal, priestly, or prophetic marketplace vocations. Each calling finds a place of honor within the manifold offices of Christ.

The second Bavinckian contribution can be found in his well-known insistence that we must make "a distinction without a separation" when speaking of Christ's three offices. While the royal, prophetic, and priestly offices are unique, distinct, and have their own internal integrity, the three offices must always remain deeply interconnected. Furthermore, each office must *enrich* and *inform* the others. As Bavinck explains, Christ's "kingship also includes the prophetic and priestly offices."³⁴ Christ is a king, and his sovereign reign has an integrity of its own, however, "he rules not by the sword but by his Word and Spirit. He is a prophet, but his word is power and [really] happens. He is a priest but lives by dying, conquers by suffering, and is all-powerful by his love."³⁵ This interconnectivity has real consequences for

33. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ*, trans. Cornelius Lambregtse (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 87.

34. Bavinck, *RD*, 3:366.

35. Bavinck, *RD*, 3:367–68.

today's marketplace prophets, priests, and kings. A Christian activist engaged in prophetic marketplace critique must be mindful of her priestly calling to grace and reconciliation and her royal calling to responsibly execute economic power within community. She has more than a voice to cry out and speak, she also has heart to love, and a hand to govern and create. Any and all prophetic speech she utters must be enriched and informed by Christ's priestly ministry of grace and reconciliation and his royal ministry of life-giving creativity and power.

In a similar manner, a powerful Christian executive engaged in royal administration, wealth creation, and economic stewardship within a major corporation, must always be mindful of her priestly and prophetic callings as well. Running her company, she has a priestly responsibility to intercede before the Lord in prayer and petition on behalf of her clients, partners, and employees. Moreover, she also has the prophetic responsibility to speak the truth. If there is injustice or wrongdoing within her sphere of corporate governance, she must not only speak its name she must use her royal office, power, and privilege to correct it. These prophetic and priestly responsibilities must actively inform her royal administration of the company. This businesswoman could, in this instance, stand to learn from her sisters and brothers who regularly engage in prophetic speech and priestly intercession in the marketplace.

Finally, a Christian worker regularly engages in the priestly practice of prayer, meditation, and spiritual discipline within the workplace, should be mindful of her own prophetic and royal responsibilities. While she is regularly engaged in intercessory prayer and priestly communion with God in the workplace, she must remember that these spiritual practices are not for their own sake. Instead, she must pray with a purpose, that God might strengthen and direct her to grow in her prophetic and royal responsibilities. This priestly worker might pray for the courage to speak prophetically of economic truth and justice when the time calls. She might pray that God would direct her hands and give them strength as she works and executes her royal dominion for the economic good and flourishing of her neighbors. Her priestly ministry of reconciliation and spiritual union is here directly informed by her prophetic and royal identity in Christ.

In each of these three examples we see how the complex fullness of Christ's *munus triplex* exposes ethical, spiritual, and vocational blind spots latent within today's marketplace prophets, priests, and kings. Having exposed our myopic approaches, Christ—in the fullness of his grace—offers the fullness of his threefold-self for our marketplace lives. This leads to Bavinck's third contribution to theo-economic discipleship. We spoke earlier of the dialogical silos that divide prophetic activists, royal managers, and priestly chaplains. Separated from one another these subcultures appropriate narrow and myopic understandings of marketplace discipleship. These three communities need one another and, more than that, they need the fullness of Christ's mediatorial work. In this way, it is only in submission to

the kaleidoscopic work of Christ's *munus triplex* that marketplace leaders can begin to envision to fullness of Christ's call.

Moreover, the diverse fullness of Christ can be witnessed today in Christ's body, the church as it gathers together (in one worshipping body) pastors and professionals, activists and academics, corporate managers and corporate chaplains. Each of these diverse vocations will necessarily view, experience, and engage the marketplace from a different angle. Herein diverse economic discourses begin to recognize their need for one another if they wish to fullness of Christ and his economy in the world.

Engaging Christ and his broader church in a transformative dialogue begins when disciples learn to not only respect those who engage the marketplace from a different angle, it begins when they begin to see their sisters and brothers *in the munus triplex of Christ*. The corporate chaplain begins to value the corporate activist in the light of Christ's prophetic justice. The activist begins to value the manager in the light of Christ's royal and life-giving reign. The manager begins to value the chaplain in the light of Christ's priestly ministry of intercession, reconciliation, and divine communion. Once a mutual process of valuing one another in Christ has begun, a deeper and more transformative dialogue between pastors and professionals, academics and activists can begin.

A fourth and final contribution can be witnessed in the "already, not yet" character of Bavinck's Christological anthropology. Here Bavinck's chastened anthropology humbles any eschatological dreams of realizing a perfect Christological form of marketplace justice, reconciliation, and productivity within this present epoch. There is a critical difference between this age and the one to come, between our *munus triplex* and Christ's. Thus, while royal managers participate in Christ's sovereign kingship in the marketplace, they are not *the* king (or queen). While prophetic activists and academics bear witness to Christ's truth and justice in the marketplace, they do not themselves *fully possess* Christ's truth and justice. And while priestly corporate chaplains can participate in Christ's ministry of reconciliation, intercession, and healing to others in the marketplace, Christ alone is the high priest who can offer full restoration and communion with God. Herman Bavinck here makes the critical distinction (not separation) between the threefold office of Christ and that of the Christian. In this present age followers of Christ will always fall short of the priestly, prophetic, and royal offices to which they have been called. For Bavinck, the fullness of our *munus triplex* will not be realized until the full consummation of the eschaton. For, in the new heavens and the new earth,

Everyone has a place and task of one's own, based on personality and character... the prophetic, priestly, and royal office, which was humanity's original possession, is fully restored in them by Christ... the new heaven and the new earth undoubtedly offer abundant opportunity for the exercise

of these offices, even though the form and manner of this exercise remain unknown to us.³⁶

Conclusion

So, how does one follow a first century carpenter in a twenty-first century global marketplace? How should one *Christologically* frame complex economic issues of global wages and trade, corporate responsibility and governance, work and macroeconomics, vocational discernment and career ambition?

In this brief essay we have explored and developed the Christological potential latent within Herman Bavinck's articulation of the *munus triplex* for a more nuanced Christian approach to the marketplace. We began by exploring the diverse and often divided ways in which various Christians engage the marketplace. We outlined a few of the negative consequences of this division. From there we explored Herman Bavinck's brief but nuanced exposition of the *munus triplex* in his *Reformed Dogmatics*. Finally, we examined how his threefold Christology—and its corresponding anthropology—might inform and even enrich our contemporary discussions around faith, work, and the marketplace.

As noted earlier, the *munus triplex* is not a universal panacea. It should never be allowed to become an overly tidy, rigid, brittle, or limiting theological system. Neither Christ nor than Christian life can be summarized or subsumed by the threefold office. The *munus triplex*, rightly understood, is a humble heuristic tool which, in limited ways, can disciples avoid myopic Christologies that lead to simplistic understandings of discipleship in the world. At its best, the *munus triplex* can invite marketplace prophets, priests, and kings into a more complex and generative Christological imagination. In this, they might begin to explore *together* emerging challenges, opportunities, and responsibilities for Christians in the marketplace today.

36. Bavinck, *RD*, 4:729.

