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“MUNUS TRIPLEX OF THE TRINITY”: The Father as the Proper Potentate, the Spirit as the Permanent Prophet, and the Son as the Perpetual Priest: Trinity and Priesthood in the Thought of James Leo Garrett Jr.¹

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Systematic theologians of almost all confessions often explicate Jesus’ works through the theological notion of *munus triplex*; namely, the Son performs the threefold function of potentate, prophet, and priest. James Leo Garrett Jr. rightly observes,

In treating the doctrine of the work of Christ, numerous theologians have utilized as an organizing pattern the “threefold office” (*munus triplex*) of Christ, namely, as Prophet, Priest, and King. The concept of the threefold office is traceable to Eusebius of Caesarea (c.263-c.330), but the Protestant Reformers made its usage commonplace. Among the theologians who have employed the threefold office have been John Calvin, John L. Dagg, Charles Hodge, James P. Boyce, A. H. Strong, Theodor Haering, Emil Brunner, Dale Moody, Bruce Milne, and Millard Erickson.²

¹This article is dedicated to the late James Leo Garrett Jr. who inspired me to research further into the doctrine of Christ and Christian priesthood.

²James L. Garrett Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical and Evangelical*, 4th ed. (2 vols.; North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL, 2011; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 1:608-9. Other more recent theologians who follow the threefold pattern are: Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 767-72; Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 483-547; John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R 2013), 899-910.

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Garrett himself, however, "does not use the threefold office as an organizing pattern" for his study of the work of Christ; he, nonetheless, "treat[s] as titles and functions of Jesus's prophethood, priesthood, and kingship."³ It is appropriate to say that Christ's multifaceted work cannot be fairly and fully captured in the traditional concept of *munus triplex*, but one cannot adequately describe the work of Christ without at least taking the concept into account. Garrett does not ignore *munus triplex* altogether, especially when it relates to the priesthood of all believers. Garrett states clearly,

The Servant songs or poems and Isa. 61 embody the "kingdom of priests" motif and afford a transition to the New Testament doctrines of the high priesthood of Jesus and the priesthood of all Christians. Returning Israelites are called "priests of the LORD" and "ministers of our God" (Isa. 61: 6, RSV, NIV), and the Servant of the Lord has prophetic (Isa. 49: 2 a; 50: 4-5), royal (Isa. 49: 7; 52:13, 15), and priestly or sacrificial (Isa. 53: 3-12) functions.⁴

For Garrett, "The pattern of the Suffering Servant [in the Book of Isaiah] becomes the pattern of the priesthood of Christ; the pattern of the High Priest determines the pattern of the priesthood of all Christians."⁵ I recapitulate here Garrett's focus on Christ's and Christian priesthood:

³Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 1:609. Adam Harwood aptly observes, "James Leo Garrett Jr. also does not use this threefold structure. Instead, his major section titled 'The Person of Jesus Christ' surveys fourteen biblical titles and functions of Jesus Christ. Material is sprinkled throughout the chapters on Jesus as a prophet, high priest, and king." Adam Harwood, *Christian Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Systematic* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2022), 464.

⁴Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:606-7.

⁵Peter L. Tie, *Restore Unity, Recover Identity, and Refine Orthopraxy: The Believers' Priesthood in the Ecclesiology of James Leo Garrett Jr.* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 13. At the outset of the chapter on "Ministry of Churches," Garrett has already laid out the framework by quoting S. F. Winward that the threefold pattern of Christ is the threefold pattern of the church: "Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the essential form of the Church. It is from his person and work, his mission and ministry, that the Church receives her structure and pattern... Jesus Christ is the king in the form of a servant, and the Church is therefore diakonia... Christ is the prophet-apostle and the church is mission. He is the high priest, and his body the Church is a royal priesthood" (Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:603); see S. F. Winward, "The Church in the New Testament," in *The Pattern of the Church: A Baptist View*, ed. A. Gilmore (London: Lutterworth, 1963), 54-55.

[T]he doctrine of the universal priesthood is based on, though not identical with, the person and work of the High Priest, Jesus Christ, who is the only perfect and effective mediator opening once and for all the access for sinners to God and who also becomes the fundamental pattern for the church and its ministry... Christians are not to offer propitiatory or expiatory sacrifices, the works Christ has accomplished perfectly and effectively, but are to follow the pattern Christ the High Priest has set for church, i.e., the prophetic, priestly, and princely servanthood (*diakonia*).⁶

There are three relevant points worth mentioning here: first, the priesthood of Christ and Christians are comparable, and yet distinct in certain aspects; second, the priesthood of Christ seems to encompass his prophetic, priestly, and kingly ministry; third, the priesthood and the threefold function of Christ have become the pattern of Christian priesthood, which includes the prophetic, priestly, and kingly ministry of the Church.

Garrett interchanges terms (i.e., between the priesthood of Christ and his threefold ministry; between the priesthood of Christians and threefold ministry of the church) in a way that is common among theologians. Garrett quotes T. F. Torrance to support such interchangeability:

The conception of the Suffering Servant is the great characteristic of the Church's ministry, and it is that which above all determines the nature of priesthood in the Church. That applies to the Church's threefold participation in Christ's Prophetic, Priestly, and Kingly Ministry, for the Church is engaged in all these as servant bearing the cross like the man of Cyrene (Mat. 27:32). It is indeed in terms of the suffering servant ministry that we are to see the basic unity in the church's prophetic, priestly, and kingly functions.⁷

⁶Tie, *Restore Unity, Recover Identity, and Refine Orthopraxy*, 16-17.

⁷Quoted by Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:607. See Thomas F. Torrance, "Royal Priesthood," *Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers*, no. 3 (Edinburgh, London: Oliver and Boyd, 1955), 87.

This ambiguity between Christ's priesthood and his threefold ministry, and/or between the Christian priesthood and threefold church ministry seems to not only create confusion in the ministerial role of Christians and church, but also result in the conflation of the distinct roles (functions) of the Trinity. The latter is the primary concern of this article attempting to answer the question, "If the Son plays all the major roles of king, prophet, and priest, then are the roles of the Father and the Spirit distinct from that of the Son within the Godhead and in relation to his creation?"

The theology of Oneness Pentecostalism has entirely done away with the three distinct persons; it claims that Jesus is the one God who plays all three roles or identities comprehensively, though at different periods of time throughout salvation history.⁸ In short, Jesus has it all and has done it all; the Trinity is not necessary. On the other hand, the traditional doctrine of the Trinity emphasizes that the Father and the Spirit are actively involved in all of Christ's works in this *equal* Trinitarian relationship (i.e., equal in divine essence, as well as equally involved in all divine functions). Thus, the acts of the Trinity in relation to creation are indivisible. This statement, though consistent with the unity of the Trinity, obscures the distinctions of roles between the Father, Son, and Spirit.⁹ Thiselton rightly asks, "If the mission of the Holy Spirit is indistinguishable from that of Christ, might the Spirit then become an obscure, even shadowy, figure virtually overshadowed by the visible and public ministry of Jesus Christ, and by the Father's 'sending' of the Son?"¹⁰

The Father, Son, and Spirit *do* possess the same essence and attributes, but the only biblical way of knowing their distinction is by differentiating their roles. Grudem points out that "if there are no differences among them eternally, then how does one person differ from the other? They would no longer be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but rather Person A, Person A, and Person A, each identical to the other not only in being but also in role and in the way they

⁸Gregory A. Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals and the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 25-48. For Oneness Pentecostalism, Boyd explains, "The first biblical truth is that *there is only one God*, and the second is that *Jesus Christ is God*. From these two truths, Oneness groups deduce that Jesus Christ is God in his totality, and therefore that Jesus must himself be the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (26).

⁹Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 475.

¹⁰Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Holy Spirit—in Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries, and Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 461.

relate to one another.”¹¹ Unfortunately, the traditional expression of Jesus’s *munus triplex* contributes, intentionally or unintentionally, to the neglect of the distinct divine roles of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in relational, redemptive, and revelatory matters. If the Father, Son, and Spirit are considered to carry out all their functions indiscriminately (i.e., without a distinct order of roles), subsequent logical, though unscriptural, arguments may emerge, such as, “the Father died on the cross,” “the Father obeyed the Son,” or “the Spirit sent the Father.”¹² Conservative or evangelical theologians are highly unlikely to come to these extreme and unbiblical conclusions, but the concept of Christ’s *munus triplex* risks obscuring the differentiated roles of the Father, Son, and Spirit, which may eventually lead to a confusion of divine roles, and consequently, Christian roles in the church and family.

I. THESIS

Robert J. Sherman articulates Christ’s *munus triplex* in relation to the Trinity, “More specifically, while recognizing Christ’s three-fold work [king, priest, and prophet] to be fully his own and fully trinitarian, it is also appropriate to understand his royal work as done on behalf of the Father, his priestly work be understood as his own *proper* work as Son, and his prophetic work as done *on behalf* of the Spirit.”¹³ Sherman explains the term “proper” clearly: “I say ‘proper’ because as the Son he alone of the triune persons was to be the incarnate one (a prerequisite for his priestly, sacrificial work), and not because this office and work has primacy over the other two.”¹⁴ In general, while this writer agrees with Sherman that Christ’s works are inseparable or undivided in the external works of the Father and the Spirit, I attempt to move beyond Sherman’s thesis of the trinitarian works by, first, making a proper distinction between their roles. Since Christ’s kingly and prophetic works are actually “on behalf of” the Father and the Spirit, respectively, this

¹¹Wayne A. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions* (reprint, Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 433.

¹²In the second century A.D., forerunners of Sabellianism, emphasizing the unity of God, taught that the Father was incarnated, suffered, and died. See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* ed. John Bolt, and John Vriend (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 2:290.

¹³Robert Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet: A Trinitarian Theology of Atonement* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 116-17. Emphasis added.

¹⁴Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 117, n. 1.

means that the priestly works alone *properly* belong to Christ, and the other two roles (kingly and prophetic) should *properly* belong to the Father and the Spirit.

This article, therefore, argues from scriptural and theological grounds that *munus triplex* should be better applied, not to Jesus alone, but to the Three Persons of the Trinity, respectively. This writer will explore, first, the ultimate kingship belonging to the Father in relation to the Son, as seen in three vital concepts: "sending and obedience of the Son," "session and head of Christ," and "King of kings and Lord of lords."

Second, this writer attempts to demonstrate that the Spirit, properly speaking, is the permanent "prophet." One cannot deny the fact that God spoke through his Son (Heb 1:1-3), yet it has always been the Spirit who consistently speaks to/through the Old Testament prophets, the New Testament apostles (Acts 28:25; 2 Peter 1:20-21), and even to the churches (Rev 2:7; 3:6), then and now, through Spirit-inspired Scripture.

Finally, this chapter will show that Jesus primarily and perpetually carries out the royal priestly ministry, as seen in his permanent function as the "Lamb" (Rev 13:8), his continual high-priestly intercession (Heb 7:25), and his people's ultimate function as the royal priesthood modeled after Christ's priesthood (Rev 5:9-10; 20:6).

In summary, I attempt to demonstrate the distinctiveness of the Father as the "Proper Potentate,"¹⁵ the Spirit as the "Permanent Prophet," and the Son as the "Perpetual Priest." The ultimate intention of re-examining and revising the claim of Jesus's *munus triplex* is to enable Christians to appreciate the diversity of roles (as well as the unity) of the Triune God, and to reorient the church to her priestly task (rather than "prophetic" or "kingly" function) as the central mission-ministry of the church of Christ.¹⁶

II. FATHER AS THE PROPER POTENTATE

Scripture is clear that the Father is the *ultimate* potentate, although

¹⁵While the term "proper" can refer to "actual" or "in the strictest sense," it is also used in relation to "Theology Proper," or Paterology, the study of the first Person of the Trinity, God the Father. See, "What is Paterology? What is Theology Proper?" *Compelling Truth*, <https://www.compellingtruth.org/theology-proper.html>. Also, see Charles Hodge, "Theology Proper," <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/theologyproper.html#origin>.

¹⁶The latter is the focus of future research, namely, "The Priesthood of Christ and Christians," which is beyond the scope of this article.

this kind of expression often seems to offend some theologians who are adamant about the “equality” of the Father and the Son.¹⁷ Delving into some crucial passages concerning the concepts of the sending and obedience of the Son; the session and head of Christ; and the title “King of kings, Lord of lords” may suffice to explain that the Father is the “proper” King, even in relation to the Son.

1. *Sending and Obedience of the Son.* That “the Father sent the Son” is an irreversible act and fact in the Gospels, especially in the Fourth Gospel. Jesus never sent the Father, but the Father sent the Son (John 3:16-17; 4:34).¹⁸ This act of sending simply implies a greater authority of the Father over the Son. Never is a superior sent by his subordinate, but always a subordinate by his superior. In fact, Jesus himself said it plainly, “Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him” (John 13:16).¹⁹ Jesus was not only talking about his disciples, but also referring to himself as the one sent by his Father who is “greater” (John 13:20).²⁰ It is in this context of sending that Jesus declared unambiguously, “I go to the Father; the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28b).²¹ Some simply take the statement to mean Jesus’s inferiority to the Father, namely, his inferior deity (essence) to that of the Father. Nevertheless, Guthrie, from this statement, “the Father is greater than I,” perceives the Son’s total dependence on the Father (John 5:19, 30), that is, the Son’s “perfect obedience” to his Father’s will (John 15:10).²² Guthrie suggests that the Son’s act of total obedience is due to his earthly (temporal) state, in contrast to the heavenly (eternal) state.²³

¹⁷Kevin Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), 82, 85, 267.

¹⁸The Father’s sending of the Son does not in any way jeopardize the divine identity of the latter, but it presupposes the pre-existence of Jesus. Guthrie argues that the Son “could not be sent unless he was pre-existent. The relationship of the Father and the Son is seen as a continuation of that which existed before the incarnation (cf. John 17:4, 5).” Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1981), 314.

¹⁹All scriptural verses are taken from *New American Standard Bible* unless indicated otherwise.

²⁰“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me” (John 13:20).

²¹Jesus’s origination from the Father and his incarnation in servant form (or human nature) are the traditional positions to explain “the Father is greater than I,” but they have been found lacking. See a detailed critique in Hongyi Yang, *A Development, Not a Departure: The Lacunae in the Debate of the Doctrine of the Trinity and Gender Roles* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2018), 286-96.

²²Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 314.

²³Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 314.

All would agree that the aim of the incarnate Son is humility, that is, to obey his Father in the fullest sense in all of his works, including his knowledge. Regarding his limitation in knowledge about the exact time of his own *parousia* (Matt 24:36; Mark 13:32), Jesus, despite his mutual and comprehensive knowledge with God the Father (Matt 11:27), chose willingly not to know the time or, stated otherwise, voluntarily chose to obey his Father to the fullest in his incarnate form. Commenting on Matthew 24:36, Letham captures beautifully, "Jesus as the Son claims a relation to the Father of great personal intimacy, exclusive and unique, which is marked by full and willing obedience to the Father."²⁴ Edwards explains Mark 13:32 in a similar fashion on Jesus' alleged ignorance, "Here the bold assertion of divine Sonship is yoked to the unlikely limitation of ignorance;...he admits to what he does *not* know and *cannot* do;... for Jesus does not claim the prerogatives of divine Sonship apart from complete obedience to the Father's will but rather forsakes claims and calculations in favor of humble confidence in the Father's will."²⁵

The Father is never said in Scripture, explicitly or implicitly, to obey the Son. The theological statement, "the Son obeyed the Father who sent him," is another way of saying that the Father had a greater authority than the Son. Nonetheless, the Father gave his supreme authority to his Son without reservation (Matt 28:18-20) to reign over the whole universe until the moment he delivers the kingdom to God the Father again and subjects himself to the Father's authority (1 Cor 15:24, 28). That the Son received the universal authority from the Father is another direct indication that the Father is greater than the Son (Matt 28:18-20). After the resurrection, Jesus now reigns over the universe. In other words, he is the king. Jesus' authority to reign, however, is received from the Father.²⁶

The reality of the Father sending the Son and of the Son obeying his Father clearly indicates greater authority of the Father over the Son, and the latter's submission to the former. Guthrie incisively notes that "those books of the NT which have the most explicit teaching on the subordination of the Son (especially John and Hebrews), have

²⁴Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 39.

²⁵James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 407. Emphasis original.

²⁶Further discussion on Christ's kingship is under the section "King of Kings, Lord of Lords."

the highest Christology.²⁷ In other words, it is not an issue whether the Son submits (in total obedience) to the Father, as is clearly taught in Scripture, but the question is whether it is scriptural to speak of the Son's *eternal* equality (in essence) and *eternal* subordination (in function) to the Father in the same breath. Certainly, Jesus did not suffer from the so-called "inferiority complex" and was never trying to grasp equality with his Father (Phil 2:6) because he is already equal with the Father in divine essence (John 1:1-3).²⁸ The central and controversial issue concerns the Son's subordination, specifically, whether the Son's functional subordination is temporal (during incarnation) or eternal (throughout eternity). We shall explore the issue further in the next two themes.

2. "*Session and Head of Christ.*" After he defeated all enemies, especially death and the devil, Jesus ascended into heaven to be seated at the right hand of the Father (Matt 26:64; Mark 16:19; Luke 22:69; Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:55-56; Rom 8:34; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; 10:12-13; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22). This unambiguous teaching on Jesus' royal session is a direct fulfillment of Psalm 110:1: "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet'" (cf. Heb 10:12-13; 1 Peter 3:22). On the one hand, Christ's session refers to his equality with the Father in authority and glory; on the other hand, this strong image of session at the Father's right hand also portrays Jesus' subjection to the Father's supreme authority. The Father bestows on the Son authority over the entire universe. The twofold concept of Jesus' invincible reign as well as his absolute submission to his Father appears to be biblically consistent.

In 1 Corinthians 15:27-28, Paul taught that after everything is *subject* to the Son's authority by the Father, the Son will voluntarily *subject* himself to the supreme reign of the Father. The verb "subject" (*hypotassō*) appears six times in just two short verses, all referring to the Son's submission, both actively and passively, to his Father, who subjects all things, except himself, under his Son's authority. A simple concordance study will sufficiently demonstrate that *hypotassō* ("to submit," "to subject," or "to obey") is always about a subordinate in submission to a greater authority, and never the other way around,

²⁷Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 314, n. 288.

²⁸To clear the reader's doubt or speculation, this writer believes without a doubt that Jesus is fully God and fully man; the Son is co-existing, co-eternal, and co-equal in essence with the Father.

in all divine or human relationships:

- a. All authorities are subject to God the Son (1 Cor 15:24-27)
- b. God the Son submits to God the Father (1 Cor 15:28)
- c. Jesus obeys his parents (Luke 2:51)
- d. Demons submit to the disciples (Luke 10:17, 20)
- e. Believers submit to the gospel of Christ (2 Cor 9:13; see also Rom 8:7; 10:3)
- f. Slaves obey their masters (Titus 2:9; 1 Peter 2:18)
- g. Citizens are subject to their government (Rom 13:1, 5; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13)
- h. Believers submit to their church leaders (Heb 13:17; 1 Cor 16:16; 1 Peter 5:5)
- i. Church submits to Christ (Eph 5:24)²⁹
- j. Wife submits to her husband (Eph 5:21-22; Col 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1, 5)

If the order of any of the above relationships is reversed, it will certainly result in disarray (e.g., imagine if masters obeyed slaves, the disciples submitted to demons, or the government subjected itself to its citizens), or, imagine if the Father submitted to the Son, parents obeyed children, or the Son subjected himself to all other authorities, including death.

As for the intermediate state between Jesus' resurrection and return, the Father puts all enemies under the Son's feet, that is, the Father bestows on the Son the mediatorial authority to reign over all powers or dominions.³⁰ After the resurrection, the enthronement of the Son as the Father's vice-regent fulfills undoubtedly the prophecies of Psalms 8:5-6 and 110:1; namely, the Son is seated at the right hand of the Father and the Father subjects all things under his Son's feet. Then, at the end, the Son will return the kingdom to

²⁹The NT often portrays Christ as the bridegroom (Mark 2:19-20; John 3:29; Matt 25:1-13) and the Church as the bride of Christ (2 Cor 11:2).

³⁰Based on the order of resurrection (Christ first, Christians next, in 1 Cor 15:23), followed by Christ's return of the kingdom to the Father (15:24), the reign of Christ lasts from his resurrection up to his *parousia*, when the last enemy (death) is ultimately abolished (15:25-26). Regardless of one's Millennial perspectives (Premillennial or Amillennial), the passage certainly remains ambiguous about the exact timing of Christ's reign and Christ's return of the kingdom to the Father. Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 765-66.

his Father and place himself under the Father's supreme authority (1 Cor 15:24).³¹ Christ's surrender of the kingdom to his Father's reign does not mean that Christ ceases his reign or loses his authority. As noted in both the OT and NT, Christ's reign is everlasting (Isa 9:7; Dan 7:14; Heb 1:8; Rev 11:15). Nonetheless, the Son's submission to his Father remains indisputable biblical imagery of reality.

Attempts have been made to explain the submissive relationship of the Son to the Father: (1) Some argue that since the Son is subject to the Father, the former is, therefore, less than the latter in divine essence.³² The problem with this view is its heretical implication that Jesus is a "second" or "secondary" God, a position that is unanimously rejected by the evangelical theologians and churches. (2) Others, however, argue that the Son is subject to the Father only in respect to Jesus' humanity, but concerning his divine sonship, he is always equal to the Father.³³ At a closer look, this view seems to suggest that Jesus submits because of his incarnate form of "servanthood" (human), and yet, Jesus, with the identity of "sonship" (deity), does not need to obey his Father.³⁴ Unless one is prepared to deny Christ's *eternal* sonship (or the Father's *eternal* fatherhood), one has to admit that whether as a "human servant" or the "eternal son," Jesus *obeys* or *submits to* his Father. In other words, if one rejects the eternal submission of the Son to the Father, he or she is in danger of denying the eternal sonship with the Father.³⁵ (3) Thus, this writer

³¹On 1 Corinthians 15:24, "Then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power," Ciampa and Rosner state, "The timing implied by this verse is ambiguous, but the main point remains clear: the story ends with all things in perfect submission to the Father." Ciampa and Rosner, *Corinthians*, 765. On 1 Corinthians 15:23-28, Sherman states, "The Son truly is the king, but his royal office and work are exercised on behalf of the one who has granted this status and authority to him...[I]n his victorious and trinitarian work as king, God the Son acts on behalf of God the Father, the original and ultimate sovereign." Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 121-22.

³²Giles, *Trinity & Subordinationism*, 63-85.

³³Ciampa and Rosner, *Corinthians*, 777; Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 294.

³⁴Fee argues, "As in two earlier passages (2:22-23 and 11:3), the language of the subordination of the Son to the Father is functional, referring to the Son's 'work' of redemption, not ontological, referring to Christ's being as such." Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (revised, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 841-42.

³⁵Millard J. Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 44-48. Grudem argues for "equal in being but subordinate in role" because without the latter "there is no inherent difference" in how they relate to each other; and consequently, there is no eternal existence of the distinct persons. In the first edition, Grudem reasons, "if the Son is not eternally subordinate to the Father in role, then the Father is not eternally 'Father' and the Son is not eternally 'Son.' This would mean that the Trinity has not

supports the position of the Son's *eternal ontological equality* and yet *eternal functional subordination* to his Father (Phil 2:6-11; 1 Cor 15:24-28). In view of his deity, the Son is always of equal essence with the Father; with respect to his role (whether in the incarnate form or as the eternal Son) and function, Jesus is always and irreversibly submissive to his Father.³⁶

Paul, in fact, described the relational order of Father-Son in another place in 1 Corinthians: "God [the Father] is the head of Christ" (1 Cor 11:3c). "Headship," in this case, does not imply superiority in essence, but it does imply order of "leadership."³⁷ In this passage, that the Father is the "head" of the Son is not merely a reference to the latter's incarnation or humanity (cf. Eph 1:22-23; 1 Cor 11:3a).³⁸ Rather, it is more an expression of a permanent order in the Father-Son relationship. Stated otherwise, Jesus' submission to the Father's authority is not just in his incarnate state, but also in his ascension and his *parousia* states. Even more plainly, the subordination of the Son in obedience to the Father, or the headship of the Father over the Son, is neither temporal nor temporary, but eternal, in the divine relationship.

The fact and act of submission is manifest in the Son of God. His intentionally humble obedience to his Father is not just for a time but forever. The supreme authority or kingship, therefore, belongs to the Father. This leads us to explore Jesus's title "King of kings and Lord of lords," in view of the Father as the ultimate potentate.

3. "*King of kings and Lord of lords.*" The title "King of kings and Lord of lords" is directly applied to Christ Jesus in the last book of the Bible (Rev 17:14; 19:16). If Jesus is the absolute King, what do we

eternally existed." Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 251. This statement has been removed in page 300 of the second edition.

³⁶See Grudem's persuasive arguments for the Son's eternal submission to the authority of the Father in Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed., 301-19.

³⁷In Martin H. Manser, ed., *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (Logos Library System, 2009) under the theme "Headship" (entry 5700) and sub-theme "Headship within the Godhead," the author recognizes both "The Father's eternal headship" (1 Cor 11:3; 15:24-28; Phil 2:6) and "The Father's headship in the Son's earthly life and ministry" (John 6:38; Matt 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; Phil 2:6-8; Heb 5:7-8). In summary, the headship of the Father over the Son remains, whether in the Son's pre-existing or incarnate state. The NT clearly teaches the Father's eternal headship and, therefore, implies the Son's eternal submission to the Father.

³⁸Fee argues for the Father's headship over the Son only in his incarnational stage: the headship (1 Cor 11:3) "refers to the incarnational work of Christ. God is the source of Christ..." Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 505.

mean when we say that the Father is the ultimate King? The phrase “King of kings” appears six times in the whole Scripture. All three uses in the OT refer to Gentile kings (Ezra 7:12; Ezek 26:7; Dan 2:37).³⁹ In the NT, it is applied once to God (1 Tim 6:15b), twice to Jesus (Rev 17:14; 19:16). When referring to God or Jesus, the added phrase “Lord of lords” precedes or follows “King of kings.” A closer look reveals a few important observations: (1) The OT, except LXX, never uses “King of kings” for God, but only for human kings;⁴⁰ (2) The OT uses the combination of “God of gods” and “Lord of lords” to refer to God alone;⁴¹ and (3) The combined title “Kings of kings, Lord of lords,” while referring to God (1 Tim 6:15), is directly applied to the Son (Rev 17:14; 19:16). In other words, the title “Lord of lords” used to refer to Yahweh alone in the OT is now of Jesus in the NT. This is none other than a claim that Jesus is co-equal with God who deserves worship. The “King of kings, Lord of lords” expression is to “make the resounding claim that God’s authority and power to rule over all human powers are beyond compare.”⁴² Biblical scholars state that this NT phrase has its root in the OT and Hellenistic Judaism, as is particularly evident in the LXX, “God of gods and Lord of lords and King of kings” (*Theos tōn theōn kai kurios tōn kuriōn kai basileu tōn basileōn*, Dan 4:37), in and against the context of pagan polytheism,⁴³ as well as in the Pseudepigrapha First Enoch 9:4, “And they said to the Lord of the ages: ‘Lord of lords, God of gods, King of kings, and God of the ages...’” in the context of eschatological judgment.⁴⁴

What is the significance of the “King of kings, Lord of Lords” in respect to the Father and the Son in the NT? Paul’s doxological

³⁹Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 331.

⁴⁰Of course, one cannot neglect that God is described as the “King of all the earth” (Psalm 47:7) and the one who rules over the whole universe (Psalm 22:28). In other words, he is the King who rules over all kings (Dan 2:21). The concern of this writer, however, is about how Scripture uses the phrase “King of kings.”

⁴¹Deuteronomy 10:17 uses “the God of gods and the Lord of lords”; and Psalm 136:3 uses only “Lord of lords” to refer to Yahweh in worship. King Nebuchadnezzar spoke, knowingly or not, of Daniel’s God as “God of gods and a Lord of kings” (Dan 2:47). See also “God of gods and Lord of lords and King of kings” (LXX Dan 4:37); “the glorious Lord God, King of kings” (3 Macc 5:35).

⁴²Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 421.

⁴³Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 420.

⁴⁴G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1999), 881.

expression *monos dunastās* ("only Potentate")⁴⁵ is followed by "the King of kings and the Lord of lords" (1 Tim 6:15b).⁴⁶ Dale Moody asserts that this phrase speaks of Christ as the "Potentate," who possesses both kingship and lordship which are ascribed to God alone in the OT; therefore, "The sovereignty of Jesus grows out of his unity with God as disclosed in the resurrection."⁴⁷ On the other hand, I. Howard Marshall, commenting on this verse, explains that it refers to the belief that "God as supreme ruler. . . he alone occupies this status over against all possible rivals. . . whatever forces there are in the universe are subject to God."⁴⁸ In view of Paul's common usage of "God" for "God the Father" (e.g., 1 Cor 12:4-6), if "God" in this verse (1 Tim 6:15b) refers to God the Father, then we could perhaps substantiate the notion that the Father is the "ultimate" potentate over all creation as well as the Son. Nevertheless, in what sense are the Father and the Son "King of kings, Lord and lords" (Rev 17:14; 19:16)?

Scholars use the "suzerain-vassal" analogy to describe the kingship of the Father and the Son, where the Father is the ultimate king (suzerain) who grants the Son, another king (vassal), power to rule (Psalm 2:7).⁴⁹ Another possible explanation is the emperor-general imagery, where the Father (king) sends out his Son (military general) to execute the former's mission and power against all rebellious or disobedient powers. When the mission is accomplished, the Son (general) returns to the Father (king) to acknowledge his ultimate submission to the Father's sovereignty (1 Cor 15:27-28).⁵⁰ Both of these analogies may contribute positively, though not perfectly, to explaining the kingship of the Father and the Son.

The pattern of the divine relationship where the Son's kingship always submits to his Father's sovereignty could be better illustrated with the analogy of a king and his son, namely, his "prince," where

⁴⁵This writer's literal translation. NASB uses "only Sovereign"; NIV uses "only Ruler" (1 Tim 6:15).

⁴⁶First Timothy 6:15b-16 corresponds with the doxological statement, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be glory and honor forever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim 1:17).

⁴⁷Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christians Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 378-79.

⁴⁸I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 666-67.

⁴⁹Ciampa and Rosner, *Corinthians*, 776.

⁵⁰Ciampa and Rosner, *Corinthians*, 776-77.

the king grants his son power by sending out his son to battle against the enemies, and subjects all authorities under his prince. This king-prince imagery appears in both the OT and NT. The coronation language (as fulfilled in Jesus) states, “But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain. I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You’” (Psalm 2:6-7; cf. Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). In the NT, Jesus’s parables of the temple tax (Matt 17:24-27) and the marriage feast (Matt 22:1-14) depict God the Father as the “king” and his son (i.e., Jesus himself) as a “prince” figure, though implicitly. In Acts 5:31, Peter and other apostles proclaimed that Jesus “is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as “Prince” (*argāgos*). The translation portrays an adequate picture of the “prince” sitting at the right hand of the sovereign King, the Father, to grant repentance and forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:31).⁵¹

Jesus’ “kingship,” as described in Revelation 17:14 and 19:16, is against the backdrop of wicked human kings or demonic rulers who will fight him. Jesus is depicted as the one who is sent out to execute God’s justice and judgment (19:11, 15) and to wage war against those “pseudo” kings. He proves to be the undefeatable and most worthy king among all human or demonic kings (19:21; 20:10). All dominions, powers, or enemies are subject to the kingship of Christ, who is seated at the right hand of the Father (Psalm 110:1; Rev 3:21). By taking into consideration the subthemes mentioned above, namely, the “sending and obedience,” and “session and head,” it is adequate to conclude that God the Father subjects all things to the Son’s authority; and yet the Father himself is not subject to the Son but the Son to the Father, so that “God the Father may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:27-29). In summary, Jesus is the King over all (human or demonic) kings, but his kingship remains under the kingship of the Father, who is the King over all, including the Son. This may explain the confession that God the Father is the ultimate potentate (1 Tim 6:15b), even in relation to the Son.

⁵¹The term *argāgos* appears only four times in the NT, all referring to Christ (Acts 3:15; 5:31; Heb 2:10; 12:2), who is the founder or “author” of life, salvation, and faith for all believers (NIV used “author” in Acts 3:15; Heb 2:10; 12:2). Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (10 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:487-88.

III. SPIRIT AS PERMANENT PROPHET

God the Father revealed and spoke through his Son during his incarnate state (John 1:18; 14:9; Heb 1:2), but Scripture as a whole perceives that the Holy Spirit is the one continuously speaking to/through the OT prophets, the NT apostles, and even to the churches (Rev 2:7; 3:6) past and present, through Spirit-inspired Scripture.

The Spirit is the "permanent prophet" who continually spoke God's word from the OT period to NT times. In the OT, the Spirit initiates, impels, or inspires the chosen prophets to convey God's will and word. The fact that the Spirit spoke through the prophets is testified in, for example, Paul's word: "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers" (Acts 28:25b). The author of Hebrews also clearly identified the Holy Spirit as the one speaking through the psalmist (compare Heb 3:7-11 and Ps 95:7-11) to rebuke the people's hardened hearts. In other words, the Spirit is seen as Yahweh who consistently speaks to, or through, the prophets. In the NT, God spoke through his Son perfectly (Heb 1:1-3) for a time, but it is the Holy Spirit who would continue to teach and remind the apostles of Christ's words (John 14:26); who would speak of Christ and guide them into all truth (John 16:7, 13); who would empower them to preach the gospel to all nations (Acts 1:8); and who would speak through them in times of persecution (Matt 10:19-20; Mark 13:11). First Peter 1:10-12⁵² beautifully captures the Spirit's ongoing prophetic works from the OT to NT times: (1) The "Spirit of Christ," namely, the Holy Spirit, inspired the OT prophets to foretell with eager anticipation Christ's sufferings and subsequent glories, which were also the focus of the angels; (2) The same Holy Spirit enabled the NT evangelists and Christians to proclaim the gospel of Christ, "as one with the message of the OT" (i.e., crucifixion and resurrection) to all people, including the generations to follow.⁵³

The Spirit is the one who inspired Scripture, which is God's words

⁵²"As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look."

⁵³Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 98, 103-5; see 97-106 for detailed exegesis on this passage, especially on the Spirit's work in both OT and NT times.

written in and through human words.⁵⁴ The Apostle Peter claimed, “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet 1:20-21). Thiselton succinctly explains, regarding this verse, that “the declarations of the Old Testament prophets are confirmed by the Spirit, who inspired them.”⁵⁵ Peter’s claim about Scripture corresponds with Paul’s teaching that all Scripture is *theopneustos* “God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16), that is, the Holy Spirit is one who not only inspires but also interprets Scripture, for the “spiritual things are interpreted by the Spirit” (1 Cor 2:9-15).⁵⁶ The purpose of Spirit-inspired Scripture is “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). Paul described the Word of God as the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17) by which Christians may stand firm in their faith against the devil’s attacks.

The continual act of the Spirit speaking to the churches in the past and present shows distinctly that he is the permanent prophet. The Book of Revelation presents the Spirit as one who declares authoritatively to the victorious churches or Christians the promises of enjoying the tree of life, escaping the second death, and receiving a new name on a white stone (Rev 2:7, 11, 17; see also 2:29; 3:6, 13, 22). This Spirit is the “seven spirits of God” (Rev 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6), which may be understood as the “prophetic Spirit,” according to Montague.⁵⁷ Did the Spirit’s “prophetic” work cease after Revelation, or with the passing of the apostles and the apostolic churches? Jesus promised that the *paraklētos*, i.e., the Holy Spirit, will indwell believers and be with them forever (John 4:16-17). Furthermore, the Spirit will continue to mediate the presence of the Son and the Father, as well as carry out the universal ministry to “convict” (*elegxō*) the

⁵⁴Peter L. H. Tie, “Spirit, Scripture, Saints, and Seminary: Toward a Reappropriation of ‘Spirit Illumination’ in ‘Scripture Interpretation’ for Seminarians,” in *Spirit Wind: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Global Theology—A Chinese Perspective*, ed. Peter L. H. Tie and Justin T. T. Tan (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2020), 4.

⁵⁵Thiselton, *Holy Spirit*, 151.

⁵⁶Thiselton, *Holy Spirit*, 151; Peter Toon, “Historical Perspectives on the Doctrine of Christ’s Ascension, Pt 4: The Exalted Jesus and God’s Revelation,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141, no. 562 (1984): 118.

⁵⁷George T. Montague, *The Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition* (New York: Paulist, 1976), 323.

world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-11). This Spirit's ministry of conviction parallels the teaching of Paul that "through the Spirit of 'prophecy' (preaching?)" the non-believers' hearts are brought to conviction of repentance and acknowledgment of God's presence among his people (1 Cor 14:24-25).⁵⁸

Jesus is traditionally seen as the "Word Incarnate," and yet the Spirit could be properly described as the "Word Insciber," the one who inspired the OT prophets, the NT apostles, and the Bible; who inscribes God's Word in people's hearts; who illuminates God's Word; and who indwells God's people to live out and speak out God's Word effectively and persuasively. Thus, the Holy Spirit is the permanent prophet.

IV. CHRIST AS PERPETUAL PRIEST

While the Father reigns as the ultimate king and the Spirit acts as the permanent prophet, the Son functions as the perpetual priest, as supported by the notions of the "Lamb" (Rev 13:8), the "High Priest" (Heb 7:25), and the Christian priesthood (Rev 5:9-10; 20:6).

1. *The "Lamb."* The idea of the "Lamb" suggests that Jesus holds to the priestly service not just in his incarnate state, but also before time and in the *eschaton*. First, Jesus was depicted as the Lamb of God who died to bear the sins of the world (John 1:29, 36), the Lamb who was prefigured in the sacrificial lamb of the OT practices (Exod 12:11-13; 29:38-34) and prophesied by the prophet Isaiah (Isa 53:6-7; cf. Acts 8:32). Jesus was seen and slain as the Lamb in historical times.

Furthermore, the Lamb's identity and work are not merely restricted to his incarnate period. Revelation 13:8b mentions⁵⁹ "in the book of life of the lamb who has been slain from the foundation of the world" (my translation).⁶⁰ Scholars debate whether "from the foundation of the world" modifies "the book of life" or the "lamb who was slain."⁶¹ The former is parallel to the language of Revelation

⁵⁸Thiselton, *The Holy Spirit*, 143.

⁵⁹Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (Lexham Press; Logos Library System; Society of Biblical Literature), 2011–2013.

⁶⁰NASB translates Rev 13:8: "from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain." NIV, however, takes a more literal translation: "in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world."

⁶¹Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 503; David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, Word Biblical Commentary 52B (Dallas, TX: Word, 1998), 746-47.

17:8, “the book of life from the foundation of the world.” Osborne adequately advises Christians to respect the original “word order and recognize God’s redemptive plan that has been established ‘from the foundation of the world’” based on God’s foreknowledge (1 Pet 1:2, 18-20), without adhering to a supralapsarian view of salvation.⁶² The main idea is that the Son was already considered (i.e., foreknown and chosen) to be the “Lamb” before human history (1 Pet 1:19-20).

In John’s vision of the future, Jesus is also portrayed as the Lamb: (1) The Lamb will receive worship (Rev 5:8, 12-13; 7:9-10; 15:3), execute judgment (6:1, 7, 9, 16; 8:1; 14:10; 17:14), and shepherd and save his people (7:17; 14:1); (2) The book of life that will be disclosed is the book belonging to the Lamb (13:8); (3) The believers follow and belong to the Lamb (14:4); and (4) The final marriage and supper of the Lamb, as well as the bride of the Lamb, will appear (19:7, 9; 21:9). Jesus is not only the Lamb who died but also the Lamb who reigns and will do so eternally (Rev 5:5-6). In summary, Jesus was, is, and will be deemed the Lamb, from before the beginning to the very end of time. Thus, this “Lamb” imagery supports the concept that Jesus’s constant role is priestly in character.

2. *The “High Priest.”* Scripture plainly teaches that Jesus is the perpetual high priest who offered the sacrificial lamb, that is, himself, on behalf of sinners. After “this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God” (Heb 10:12, NIV). Although Jesus accomplished his salvific work on the cross as he uttered his last words, “It is finished” (John 19:30), he did not cease his priestly ministry. At his resurrection and ascension, he sat down at the right hand of the Father to continue his high-priestly intercession in order to secure the ultimate justification and salvation of his people (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25).⁶³ By sitting at the right hand of the Father, Jesus is not just called the “High Priest,” but

⁶²Osborne, *Revelation*, 503-4. “From the foundation of the world” appears 10 times in the NT (Matt 13:35; 25:34; Luke 11:50; John 17:24; Eph 1:4; Heb 4:3; 9:26; 1 Pet 1:20; Rev 13:8; 17:8).

⁶³For a detailed discussion on the intercession of Christ (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25), see Peter C. Orr, *Exalted Above the Heavens: The Risen and Ascended Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2018), 182-98. Orr argues, “This intercessory prayer of Christ mirrors both God’s desire to give believers all things ([8:]32) and the Spirit’s intercession for us ([8:]26-27) and shows the absurdity of Christ’s ever condemning us” (190-91). On Hebrews 7:25, Orr explains that “there is ‘now-not yet’ tension with respect to the salvation of believers. In 7:25 it is Christ’s ongoing intercessory prayer that undergirds the assurance that believers *will* be saved permanently” (197).

also considered the "Royal Priest" (Heb 5:5-6).⁶⁴ This latter image becomes the crucial and central model for Christian identity: the royal priesthood.

3. *The Christian Priesthood.* Christian priesthood imitates the priesthood of Christ. The role of royal priesthood is God's original intention and calling for his chosen people (Exod 19:6; Isa 61:6; 66:21). They have become the priests of God (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6) and will continue to be so until they become priests who will eventually reign with Christ (5:9-10; 20:6); that is, their *kingly* priesthood will be fully materialized.⁶⁵ Revelation 20:6 specifically mentions that they will be "priests of God and of Christ," suggesting, on the one hand, that "Christ is on a par with God, which is underscored elsewhere in the Apocalypse (e.g., 5:13-14; 7:9-17)," and on the other hand, that the resurrected saints will be *like Christ* (in view of his royal high-priestly role indicated in Heb 5:5-6; 7:11, 17, 21), serving as priests who reign for eternity.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, there is no indication that Christians or the church as a whole serve God by emulating Christ's prophetic function. In fact, only a few may receive the gift (of prophecy) from the Spirit to prophesy (1 Cor 12:7, 27-30). Neither Christ nor any Christian will continue the prophetic role in the *eschaton*.⁶⁷ Furthermore, although the believers will serve as the *royal* priesthood, the "kingly" aspect will only be consummated at their resurrection, just as Christ assumed his ultimate kingly authority at his resurrection or ascension, without in any way minimizing his priestly status. In short, it is Christ's priestly role, rather than his kingly or prophetic function, that has become the constant model

⁶⁴The idea of the priest who reigns is based on Zechariah 6:13, "Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the LORD, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices."

⁶⁵Peter L. Tie, *Restore Unity, Recover Identity, Refine Orthopraxy*, 98. Notably, Garrett does not include Revelation 20:6 in his exposition: "Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years" (ESV). For example, in his *Systematic Theology*, while exploring the NT passages related to the Christian priesthood, Garrett notes Revelation 20:6 in his footnote but does not include it in his three main texts, 1 Pet 2:4-6; Rev 1:5b-6; 5:9-10 (2:609, and footnote 32). Also, see James L. Garrett Jr., "The Priesthood of All Christians: From Cyprian to John Chrysostom," *SWJT* 30 (1988): 22.

⁶⁶Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 1002-3.

⁶⁷Toon argues that at Christ's ascension he is not just the exalted king and priest but also the "exalted prophet." A closer look, however, reveals that it is actually the Holy Spirit who directly mediates, inspires, and illuminates Christ's words to and through his people. See Peter Toon, "Historical Perspectives on the Doctrine of Christ's Ascension," 112-19.

or perpetual pattern for Christians, now and forever.

V. CONCLUSION

The concept of *munus triplex* has been prevalent since the Reformation, especially through the work of John Calvin. Since then, churches have been trying to apply the *munus triplex* to Christian mission-ministry, but at the risk of minimizing the Trinity's distinctiveness and misdirecting the people in their calling. By looking into the distinct roles of the Trinity, we have learned that the threefold role should be applied to the Triune God, distinctively and respectively: Father the Potentate, Son the Priest, and Spirit the Prophet. Only when we have properly distinguished the respective roles of the Trinity are we ready to focus on fulfilling the role God has for his church, namely, the Christian priesthood after the pattern of Christ's priesthood.

In his earliest work on the Christian priesthood, Garrett seems thoroughly convinced on the biblical doctrine of Christian priesthood and its practical implications:

The priesthood of believers was not a dead phrase, not a shibboleth of Sixteenth Century controversies. It was alive, for priests were still offering living sacrifices of intercession and beneficent deeds! Such deeds were demonstrations of faith that issued in love, of love that was not limited to words, of service to "one of the least of these my brethren." I was convinced in the inner fibers of my being that herein was the true meaning of our common priesthood and it was a ray of hope for an effectual ministry in today's world. I prayed: God be merciful to this poor failing and faltering priest, and give me the vision, the love, and the grace to fulfill that priestly calling to which we all who are Christ's have been called.⁶⁸

Garrett's recovery of the Christian priesthood personally (for himself) and universally (for all believers) is a call for church renewal, but the "priestly calling" of all believers must be rooted, not in the kingship

⁶⁸Garrett, "Recovering My Priesthood," *Home Missions* (February 1962): 15.

or prophethood that properly and respectively belong to the Father and the Spirit, but distinctively in the priesthood of Christ.

The re-appropriation of *munus triplex* on the Trinity,⁶⁹ as this article argues, is only an initial step to the "priesthood" research. This writer by no means denies the kingly and prophetic tasks of Christ, but will in the near future biblically re-examine the traditional *munus triplex* (threefold office) of Christ and propose a more nuanced concept that may capture more precisely the central and unique role of Jesus, the so-called *munus monoplex* of Christ.⁷⁰



⁶⁹Hank Voss provides a helpful explanation for "appropriation": "Appropriation helps the royal priesthood identify what a mature response to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit might look like. The doctrine can be defined as follows: Appropriation is a way of speaking about the God revealed in Scripture in which a divine action or attribute is assigned to a particular Person of the Trinity based on that Person's properties. The explicit goal of appropriation is to better manifest the divine Persons in the minds of believers." Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ: A Vision for the Priesthood of All Believers* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2016), 96-97.

⁷⁰This new concept was previously presented. See Peter L. Tie, "Jesus' *Munus Triplex* Re-examined: A Proposal for *Munus Monoplex* or the One Unified Role of Jesus Christ." Presentation at the Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meeting (Southwest Region), Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas, USA, March 1-2, 2013.