



Munus triplex: A pedagogical application of a theological concept



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The authors considered the identity of Christian teachers to be an urgent matter because of rapid changes in society, and assumed that such a consideration could help to envision education in an authentic way. They recognised that the current understanding of Christian identity emphasises unity with Christ and, therefore, set out to demonstrate that this unity is not only a matter of private spiritual life, but must also be carefully considered in professional practice. This article is not a research paper per se, but rather an exploratory, constructive essay. The authors examined and elaborated on unity with Christ with the help of the so-called three offices of Christ: prophet, priest, and king. After interpreting the Heidelberg Catechism and bringing it into critical dialogue with contemporary voices, they identified the implications of the three offices for educational practice. The office of prophet was reflected in both the implicit and explicit messages of the teacher. The office of priest was observable in a teacher's compassionate behaviour, while the office of king was seen in the teacher's humble citizenship and struggle against evil, as well as in the ethical views that a teacher promotes in class. Three offices were found helpful in rethinking Christian teachers' role. The implications of this research included the potential for counterbalancing dualistic practices (role of the prophet), placing an emphasis on care instead of neoliberal pressures (role of the priest), and envisioning subject content within the coming of the kingdom (role of the king).

Contribution: Through its consideration of the teaching profession in terms of the three offices of Christ, this article's research seeks to enhance the professional identity of faithful Christian teachers. While the focus is primarily on those employed in Christian schools and also intends to influence the identity of those working in secular settings. The authors argue that teachers are prophets in the messages they impart, priests when they act compassionately, and kings when they encourage dedicated and exemplary citizenship.

Keywords: offices of Christ; Christian education; pedagogy; king; prophet; priest.

Introduction

The developed world countries are going through a time of unexpected change. In Europe, millions of a plethora of people from different cultures and religions have arrived through the gates of each country. In the United States, the tensions between black and white people are front-page news. Other countries have similar issues. Our societies are experiencing the results of collisions between cultures and religions, uncertainty caused by terrorist attacks, economic crises, tensions caused by diversity, threats to social safety, climate issues, tensions between East and West, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and political polarisation.

At the same time, developed world's culture is still developing in a certain direction. Charles Taylor's *A secular age* shows that from the late Middle Ages to the present day, our culture has developed into an irreversible centralisation of the individual (Gregory 2012:369, 385; Taylor 2007). This development coheres with the separation of theology and spirituality that started in the late Middle Ages (Boersma 2011:52–83). Descartes made reason the individual norm of existence. In modernity, people thought in terms of dead objects and living subjects, while postmodernity is characterised by the complete subjectivising of values, purposes, and truths (ed. Vanhoozer 2003).

The direction of our culture has also become visible in education. In academic circles, the new understanding of human beings and society has stimulated a reconsideration of education in which the cognitive object-subject framework has been abandoned (Bain 2004:23–24; eds. Svinivki & McKeachie 2011:86) and the affective dimension of learning is highlighted as more effective (Bain 2004:46). This means that interactions between students and study subjects have changed because the students must find out what their relationships to

the subjects are and determine how they understand the subjects in relation to their own (existential) worldviews (eds. Svinivki & McKeachie 2011:58). Students must connect the structures of newly found knowledge to the networks of existing concepts in their minds (eds. Svinivki & McKeachie 2011:57). Also, teachers are meant to participate in the lives of their students and be understood as mentors (ed. Flikkema 2016).

Problem statement

These developments have intensified Christian reflection on education. A lot of work has been done by, among others, Plantinga (2002), Smith (2018), and Wolterstorff (2002; 2004). Smith and Felch (2016) contribute to this ongoing reflection by offering a fresh vision in teaching. In Christian scholarship about teaching, we can discern two schools of thought. On the one hand, there is a critical response to the radical constructivist approach. Concerns have been expressed regarding the relativity of knowledge (Edlin 2014:1–37), the appropriation of knowledge, and the overestimation of mental activity, along with a neglect of receptivity (De Muynck & Van der Walt 2006). On the other hand, we find those who think that Christian educationalists have put too much trust in the transmission of propositional knowledge as such. In connection with Augustin's anthropology, James K. Smith (2009) argues that the forming of a person has much more to do with the shaping of habits, rituals, and liturgies than it does with knowledge. Accordingly, Smith and Smith (2011) emphasise the role of social imaginaries that shape the minds of teachers and students. These thinkers promote a critical attitude towards contemporary educational culture while proposing alternatives for embodied Christian practices.

The above-mentioned studies show that Christian scholars have tried to critically adopt new trends in the philosophy of education. They also reveal the need for an ongoing debate between the disciplines of theology and pedagogy. Christian philosophers of education are heavily reliant on theological concepts such as the *imago dei* regarding their view of human beings (De Muynck & Kunz 2021:83–110; Middleton 2005), or 'stewardship' when moral epistemology is at stake (De Muynck & Van der Walt 2016:61–84, 101–103).

In this article, we similarly attempt an interdisciplinary journey in which we show how education can profit from theological insight. The authors revisit the doctrine of the three offices of Christ aiming to answer the following question: How can the classic Christian concept of *unio mystica cum Christo* (spiritual union with Christ) in his *munus triplex* (the three offices of Christ) contribute to an interpretative framework for Christian pedagogy in contemporary culture?

Methodologically, this article takes an exploratory, constructive perspective. To answer the research question, we begin by describing each of the three offices considering the understanding we find in the Heidelberg Catechism. This is followed by a practical application of these offices to education while critically dialoguing with voices from

contemporary culture, concluding with an evaluation of a hypothetical model.

Theoretical framework

This choice of the *munus triplex* coheres with several considerations. Firstly, in Christian theology reflection on the theologoumenon of union with Christ is booming (Billings 2005; 2007; 2011; Burger 2008; Campbell 2012; Canlis 2010; Fesko 2012:53–75; eds. Thate, Vanhoozer & Campbell 2014; Wright 2009). By this concept, the Christian life is not viewed from the perspective of the individualised believer but from the perspective of Christ.

Secondly, the *munus triplex* is a basic Christian interpretation of Christ as the fulfilment of the Old Testament understanding of prophet, priest, and king (De Boer 2013). This 'triunity' of offices is at the heart of the Christian faith and the interpretation of Scripture.

Thirdly, through their union with Christ, believers share in this prophetic, priestly, and royal office with Christ (Ursinus & Olevianus n.d.:Q&A 32–33; Van Vlastuin 2015:174–176). As this is true of every Christian, the concept of the three offices can be applied to Christian teachers. This consideration is reinforced when the role of a Christian school teacher is viewed as an office, instead of a profession (De Muynck 2005). In this article, we explore whether and how this is possible. While we are aware that Christian teachers bring out their Christian self-awareness and perspective in a Christian school much more explicitly than those in a secular setting, we maintain that even for Christian teachers in secular environments, the Christian self-consciousness of prophet, priest, and king has meaning. Christian teachers in secular contexts also self-consciously live out these offices while acting within the limits of their profession.

The fourth consideration is that an emphasis on spiritual union with Christ could shed new light on the professionalism of teachers. The personal dimension that accompanies it, can help articulate the vocation of Christian school teachers in secular environments. Christians and non-Christians alike are related to the same disciplines and scientific facts, but they interpret reality from different perspectives, which makes a reflection on worldviews and presuppositions necessary (Cooling 2021). We concentrate on the application for those in Christian schools (where they are free to speak in explicitly Christian terms), although this will be implicitly possible for teachers in secular environments too.

The three offices of the teacher in terms of the Heidelberg Catechism

The teacher as a prophet

Living in a mystical union with Christ, believers share in his prophetic office. The Heidelberg Catechism explains this office as the confession of Christ's name (Ursinus & Olevianus

n.d.:Q&A 32). How can this confession of Christ's name be applied to the Christian teacher? And to the classroom?

In this article, we focus on the meta-issue of understanding reality as God's creation, because this interpretation could be difficult for contemporary teachers. In the authors' view, the focus of the prophetic task concerns the epistemology of the teacher and the related worldview, transmitted through the pedagogical choices (De Muynck & Kunz 2021:49, 68, 111–145). In this section, therefore we discuss the worldview of modernity, its risks for Christian education, and the worldview from Calvin, and then we give some examples of God's presence, and finally, we present the appeal that follows.

One of the characteristics of modernity is the separation of object and subject. As we saw in the introduction of this article, modernity has two sides. On the one hand, modernity is characterised by a turn to the human subject, and on the other hand, creation is reduced to a dead machine, while research on creation is aimed at controlling nature. This worldview not only separates us from an impersonal reality outside ourselves but also denies human subjectivity and objectifies the human mind (Nagel 2012).

Christian teachers are open to two temptations. The first temptation is dualism. All Christians are tempted to distinguish between God and the world, body and soul, Sabbath and work or school day. In morning devotions, practised by teachers working in Christian schools, God is present, while he is absent in the lessons. Dualism agrees with Immanuel Kant, in separating faith and knowledge: we know the things of this world, but we believe the things of God's kingdom. Accepting dualism implies that Christian teachers become secular teachers plus morning devotions. Dualism is the sister of materialism, which understands the world as a materialistically independent reality, that is determined by natural laws. A consequence of this approach is that the human mind is reduced to physics (Swaab 2014). This observation leads us to the second temptation to which we are open; the temptation of deism. Deism means that we confess God as the creator in an orthodox way, but we understand the cosmos as a great machine. We may confess to God as the designer of this great plan and the originator of this machine, but in fact, we treat the cosmos to be without God.

Christian teachers should be conscious of these dangers and redevelop a classic catholic worldview in which one perceives the presence of God in creation (Boersma 2011:84–184; Huttinga 2014). God is not far away, that is, behind billions of stars and galaxies, as we sometimes think; God is closer to us than we are to each other and even to ourselves. John Calvin's doctrine of creation is still worth considering. He understood the created reality as the *theatrum gloriae dei* (theatre of God's glory) (Schreiner 1991), and he spoke about creation as 'the very beautiful fabric of the world' and even as God's 'clothing' (Osterhaven 1971:128–129; Calvin n.d.b.). Using

this metaphor is a way of understanding creation as a sort of sacrament of the presence of God (Van der Kooi 2005:189–221). Calvin was deeply touched by God's presence in the world, as he indicates in the preface of the Genesis Commentary: 'But in those very things of which we attain some knowledge, there dwells such an immensity of divine power, goodness, and wisdom, as absorbs all our senses' (Calvin n.d.a.). He promotes meditating on this presence of God (Calvin 2002:1.14.21) and 'contemplat[ing] Him in His works whereby He renders Himself near and familiar to us, and in some manner communicates Himself' (Calvin 2002:1.5.9).

Such sensitivity to God's presence in his creation gives us a proper understanding of the subjects we teach. Teachers guide students in the reality of God's creation by teaching them geography, mathematics, history, and language in such a way that they understand and realise the wisdom, power, and presence of God in creation. From our relationship with God's heart, we admire the works of his head and his hands. God holds this universe within his fingertips. If gravity were only 0.1% greater, the solar system would collapse, and the earth would be unbearably hot. The relationship between the sun and the earth is in a very precise balance. This is only one example of the more than 50 factors in the universe that appear to be just in balance for sustaining a universe in which life is possible. This 'fine-tuning' of the cosmos refers to the great designer and maintainer of creation (Boa & Bowman 2006:187–188; Dawkins 2008; Groothuis 2011:240–329; Nagel 2012:6–7, 69, 66–67, 88–93, 121–124).

God is not absent; he is present in the smallest details of creation. Understanding this 'sacramental' presence of God in creation fills our hearts with respect. Teachers must understand that they are leading young students into the reality of God.

At the same time, we acknowledge that we understand so little of the great mysteries of creation. For thousands of years, the possibilities for the Internet were already in God's creation, and we only use a small part of these digital opportunities. We are also conscious that we, the visible part of God's creation, are the smallest part. Research done in physics during the last century has revealed the complexity of reality. If light can behave as particles or waves – how mysterious is that! If matter represents energy and energy represents vibrations – how mysterious is the matter! Whereas in deism, matter and mind are isolated from each other, recent developments in physics, however, reveal that matter is much more related to the invisible than we tend to think (Dürr 2012; König 2010). In a certain sense, the matter is solidified spirit, and reality is a manifestation of the divine spirit (Stadelman 2004:74). These modern developments help Christians to understand the Spirit as a wakeful mind and as the creator of the sleeping mind of matter (Gn 1:2; Ps 104:30). It also brings the reality of the invisible world of angels nearer.

These understandings imply various applications. For instance, Christian teachers could apply them explicitly when rejecting the exploitation of creation. The teacher, as a

prophet, expresses indignation about the exploitation of the human body through drugs, alcohol, or smoking. Teachers must actively participate in efforts to minimise air pollution, maximise biodiversity, and combat climate change. What we buy inexpensively, has consequences elsewhere in the world, for instance where children labour in dark factories to support the high standard of living for our developed world's youth. According to Slaveryfootprint.org (n.d.), there are still more than 27 million slaves throughout the world. We are depending on 27 million slaves to produce our clothing, cell phones, and accessories!

When teachers deal with our culture as prophets, they can lead students to the disconcerting discovery that Christians are much more modern than they would like to admit. Students have a worldview that is further away from the actual Christian worldview than the worldview of a stranger coming from a different context. Maybe this will help students to cultivate humble attitudes and receptive minds toward other cultures, and the ability to think critically, testing all opinions to the ultimate authority of the eternal Word of God.

The teacher as a priest

What does it mean to share Christ's priestly office? The Heidelberg Catechism interprets this as presenting oneself as a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Christ. The mystery of Christ sacrificing himself is found in the ethos of love, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness. Jesus was tempted by various means of infirmities, as we are, and he was touched by our suffering (Octavius n.d.:146–147). Union with Christ by his Spirit has the effect that we share in this ethos of Jesus. This ethos can be expanded and applied in several ways to the Christian teacher. In this article, we shall only discuss this ethos in a limited way. We give subsequent attention to the compassion of Jesus, the position of Christians as strangers connected to the suffering, the application to prayer and a few applications to content knowledge (languages and mathematics).

The union with Jesus's sacrificing ethos in our lives implies that we should listen carefully to students; we should try to understand their personalities, and we must be really interested in them. This attitude of compassion is at the heart of the Christian school. The mystery of mystical union with Christ also shows us that we cannot isolate ourselves from other Christians, for Christians from all over the world are connected in the same Christ. This is something that must be communicated in the classroom. Because Christ cannot be separated from his body, the members of his body cannot be separated from each other. Christians are characterised by their understanding of their co-suffering with others through their participation in the body of Christ (Heb 13:3).

Compassion is discussed in more detail by noting that, throughout the ages, Christians were thought of as strangers (1 Pt 1:1). This is affirmed abundantly by the history of the church. To give a few examples, the great scholar on the

Reformation, Oberman (2009:177–194), called Calvin the 'reformer of the refugees'. The Dutch refugees in Emden at the time of the Reformation, wrote above the door of the church, 'God's church scattered and dissipated; He has given comfort in this place'. This expression, 'scattered and dissipated', received a place in Article 27 of the Belgic Confession. This implies that the Protestant church did not regard being a stranger as accidental to Christianity but as an essential mark of it. Being a stranger is to relate with the mystical union with Christ because we share his heavenly position (Phlp 3:20). This common position is shared with Christians all over the world. The effects of the union with Christ imply an even greater range of sympathy and compassion because we feel the suffering of this world in such a way that we are included in it. Believers are not outside the groaning of creation: 'We, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, namely the redemption of our bodies' (Rm 8:23). This reality indicates that Christians do not experience less of the brokenness of creation than unbelievers do.

It is impossible for teachers to hide such an attitude at school. Teachers express this attitude in their daily devotions. Teachers could, for instance relate these to the suffering of peers who cannot attend school. Also, in our prayers with students, we could incorporate the stories of young people in bad circumstances. The importance of prayer is found in the fact that God rules this world through the prayers of his people (Mt 10:38). Our lives, histories, and developments are ultimately not decided by political tensions, economic circumstances, or cultural developments, but by God. Prayer for the needs of others is an expression of our love for them. It is the wonderful experience of faith, that we do not live for ourselves but belong to our Redeemer. The sacrifice of oneself for others is the reality of love (1 Cor 13:5). In love, we do not seek to serve ourselves, but deny private interests rather to cultivate a super-personal interest in others.

The Christian attitude as priest can be expressed in the several subjects taught at school. In teaching geography, we can show God's inter-connectedness with the nations of the world. When dealing with refugee crises around the globe, we experience the groaning of creation in the classroom. It is not difficult to imagine how the development of nations and cultural challenges relate to the subject of history. In addition, the subject of economics offers several possibilities for practising the priestly office, because discussing economics in a broken world raises big issues concerning righteousness. Our entire economic system can be treated in the context of brokenness. To stimulate discussion, one could ask the students whether money is an aim or an instrument to help others.

The importance of bringing these opinions explicitly into the classroom can also be stressed against the background of competing powers. Tom Wright (1992:28–36) provides a deep understanding of the powers present in this world. It is

understandable, he argues, that ancient heathen nations worshipped the sun, because it is very important for life and health. But the sun is not God. What happened? Good things were absolutised and interpreted as God. Other examples include sexuality and alcohol. However, if these gifts replace God, not only is God dishonoured, but these good gifts become destructive powers. We can make a comparison between modern gifts of money and the economy. On itself, money is good, and Christians can do much good with it. However, if money and the economy are viewed independently from God and absolutised, they become idols that are worshipped and therefore become destructive powers.

Studying the grammar of languages seems to be a skill that is isolated from the priestly office. The work of Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788), who underlined the relationship between the human mind and language, can help us arrive at a different understanding (Forster 2010:8–9; ed. Haynes 2007). In God's speaking, Adam experienced God's love for him and love for truth. This means that the reception of the word coheres with the experience of love and truth. The way in which a child learns to speak shows this principle. The child is touched by the words of a parent and is thereby touched by the mind of the mother. The child receives love expressed in words so that the mind of the child is formed. This indicates that a child will not come to a real understanding of words without the meeting of two minds. This understanding explains the broad meaning of language. As teachers, we need the spirit of priestly love to interact with our students. As teachers and students, we understand the great privilege of being in the sphere of a speaking God who opens his heart when he speaks in creation and recreation. The Creator gives us the possibility to understand the historical dimension of our lives by using past, present, and future tenses. Asking 'why questions' is the beginning of science. The capacity to think is related to language. Languages were at the heart of the Babylonian confusion, and the miracle of Pentecost, in which confused nations were united in Christ. Moreover, learning foreign languages is a way to practise love for our neighbours in different countries, and strangers in our own country.

This brings us to the subject of mathematics. It seems that this subject is so objective and abstract that it neither touches the priestly attitude of the teacher, nor the broken reality of life in this world. It appears, however, that even this subject can be treated in a priestly way (Klanderman et al. 2022). For example, in teaching mathematics, we can show students how immense the distances were that refugees travelled by foot. In higher classes, differentiating and integrating calculations can be made to determine the development and density of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere for years to come.

This short exploration shows that a creative, priestly attitude offers several possibilities for integrating a Christian worldview into our lessons so that our students are not

enclosed in their subjective reality and excluded from the 'objective creation' and can become participants in God's world, both in its suffering and its beauty.

The teacher as king

Union with Christ also means sharing in his kingship. The Heidelberg Catechism speaks in this context about fighting 'with a free and good conscience against sin and the devil in this life and to thereafter reign with Him eternally over all creatures'. In this approach, the accent is on the alienation of the Christian as an evangelical category. This dimension can be held in good balance with citizenship in the present world if Christ's kingdom is understood as the interpretative framework for this citizenship. When speaking about Christ's kingship and kingdom, John and James try to gain for themselves the most important places in his kingdom (Mt 20:21–28). Jesus criticises them and explains that in his kingdom, all things are just the opposite of those in earthly kingdoms. Whereas in earthly kingdoms, the most prominent people are those who occupy the most important seats, in his kingdom, this is reversed. Who is the greatest, is determined by service, not by hierarchy. Jesus explains the astonishing reality that he did not come to be served, but to serve others. Participation in this reality of Christ means serving each other.

In this section, we develop three basic aspects of practising this kingly office when teaching, namely the understanding of Christ's kingdom, the spiritual fight related to his kingdom, and the great perspective of his kingdom as the interpretative framework for the present reality in the classroom.

Firstly, the basic characteristics of loyalty to our heavenly king are found in the understanding of his kingdom. The kingdom of Jesus cannot be interpreted in terms of history (Jn 18:36). The early church is a confronting and stimulating mirror for Christianity today. The well-known fifth chapter of the letter to Diognetus is still impressive, instructive, and fundamental, as Mathetes (n.d.) states:

For Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind either in locality or in speech or in customs. For they dwell not somewhere in cities of their own, neither do they use some different language, nor practice an extraordinary kind of life ... They dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners; they bear their share in all things as citizens, and they endure all hardships as strangers. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland is foreign. They marry like all other men, and they beget children; but they do not cast away their offspring. They have their meals in common, but not their wives. They find themselves in the flesh, and yet they live not after the flesh. Their existence is on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, and they surpass the laws in their own lives ... They are in beggary, and yet they make many rich. They are in want of all things, and yet they abound in all things. They are dishonored, and yet they are glorified in their dishonor. They are evil spoken of, and yet they are vindicated. They are reviled, and they bless; they are insulted, and they respect. Doing good they are punished as evil doers; being punished they rejoice, as if they were thereby quickened by life.

This interpretation of life by early Christians teaches us that we as Christians should not understand being strangers in sociological terms as such, but rather as being members of God's creation, understanding our responsibilities as citizens in public life, being driven by the compassion of Christ, and by living according to his order and commandments. The Christian interpretation of life as being strangers in this world, also clarifies that being a stranger is not a doctrine or a negative moral duty, but a spiritual reality, that is, the positive reality of the heavenly kingdom citizenship.

The second basic aspect of the kingly office is related to the first. Participation in Christ's heavenly kingdom means that we also must fight against the sinful dimension of the spirit of our times. Therefore, in our postmodern society, with its relativisation of truth and morals, we train our students to distinguish between one truth and the many lies. We make them conscious of the concept that lying is worse than murder – an insight of Augustine. Lies will kill souls, but murder can 'only' kill the body. To fight against the spirit of our times, we must understand our times. We must understand the pivotal point in our cultures, the difference between pre-modernity, modernity, postmodernity, and Christianity, and especially the spiritual character of the present battle. We do not fight with opinions about economics, politics, and cultures, but we must wrestle with spiritual wickedness in the high places (Eph 6:12). We must understand the subtle and complex way in which these powers influence our thinking, affection, imagination, and behaving (Lewis 1996).

Reading the Old Testament stories about the wars and battles of Israel with its surrounding nations, raises many questions: What do these wars mean in the civilised 21st century? Is the God who helps Israel in these wars the same as the Father of Jesus Christ (Versluis 2017)? Marcion, in the early church, removed the Old Testament from the Bible. His God was not a God of war but a God of love and peace. Understanding the spiritual dimension of cultural life, makes us grateful in the early church's confession that the Creator of heaven and earth and the God of the Old Testament is also the Father of Jesus Christ. In a certain way, we may identify ourselves with Israel's battles and enemies, and recognise the battle in our classrooms. It is a comfort that Scripture speaks so realistically about this war. Imagine if Scripture were silent about this issue, we would have been in utter despair about the reality that we experience around us. Mention of this reality helps us to make sense of the world around us.

Christians tend to apply spiritual warfare to personal conflicts in our souls. Those conflicts should not be underestimated, because in our hearts, the battle rages. We must be conscious of the fact that our greatest struggle is not with powers outside ourselves, but with the overconfidence and hubris, pride, and sin in ourselves (Rm 7:14–25; Gl 5:17). This humbles us to be dependent upon Christ's Spirit every day. This does not indicate that this conflict can be reduced to a personal conflict, in which the surrounding world is merely

passive. Christians certainly understand the dark powers as the ruling powers in this world (2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2). The pietistic and neo-Calvinistic wings of Calvinism depend on one another and complement each other in understanding that the intrinsic personal fight is related to the universal fight with the powers of the air (Van Vlastuin 2014:186–200).

In applying this spiritual reality in the classroom, it influences the ideals of the teacher and the students. Teachers who are conscious of the importance of Christian education in this spiritual warfare will understand the responsibility of the kingdom. We must be alert to the fact that every enemy that we do not conquer, might try to conquer us. Regarding practices within Christian schools, this spiritual war also concerns the admission of students. Opinions differ greatly concerning admission. Some schools emphasise their defence of Christian identity and will not accept other believers or non-believers. Others, however, understand the Christian school to be an instrument for reaching people from outside the kingdom of Christ. Both perspectives are defensible (De Muynck & Kunz 2021:267–292), and representatives from both perspectives must be conscious of the reality of spiritual warfare. We can, for instance defend a Christian identity that is more of a social identity than a Christian reality. In this case, one does not quite understand spiritual war and is not defending the students in a spiritual way. The devil could fall asleep if we demarcated a part of the world to live a worldly life. On the other hand, one can understand the missionary task of the school without understanding the spiritual battle, resulting in one becoming superficial and overly optimistic in one's approach. In this case, one may suffer from overconfidence.

A third aspect of participation in Christ's kingly office concerns the perspective of his coming kingdom. In considering the subjects we teach; we realise the limits of our human possibilities. We study economics, but are riches more evenly divided in this world as a result? We research political structures, but is there any guarantee that the powers of this world will be better balanced? The results of the study of psychology are enormous, but people still feel miserable. We know much about social laws, but we are unable to enforce better unity among the diverse groups in society. Every subject taught in schools reminds us of the brokenness in this world, the fragmentation of society, and the process of war in history. These remarks are not meant for relativist study; however, the study must never be absolutised. In this context, we may be comforted by speaking about Christ as our triumphant king. He died in a fierce war with sin, Satan, and death. He did not suffer from overconfidence but was anxious and fearful. He prayed that, if possible, he would be spared from having to enter the war. He died, but death couldn't keep him (Rm 8:34). He conquered death, the devil, and sin. In Christ, we are more than conquerors (Rm 8:37). We fight with confidence because the outcome of the war is already certain. The victory in Christ means that the union of faith with Christ cannot be separated from Christian hope. In spiritual union with Christ, Christians already share in his

future. There is no other way for believers than to long for the complete revelation of the hidden reality in Christ. They await the new creation with great expectation. The final judgement is included in the breakthrough of the new creation. This means that the unrighteousness of history will be revealed, dealt with, and corrected. This drama relates to relationships between students, practices in families, tensions in churches, and dark structures in politics and economics. The unrighteousness in history will not be denied, nor will it continue in the future kingdom, but the kingdom of God will be a kingdom of righteousness. Justice will be done to innocent victims, and the earth will become heavenly. Teachers will be rewarded for the faithful teaching of these realities to the students (Mt 25:21; Rv 14:13). In the judgement of Christ, it is not the public works as such that are of value, but rather the small things done faithfully. While emperors govern over temporary and civic interests, all Christian educators are involved in the forming of individuals with eternal perspectives to 'hereafter reign with him eternally over all creatures' (Heidelberg Catechism, Q/A 32).

Conclusion

By means of this investigation, the authors have formulated an answer to the research question: 'How can the classic Christian concept of the *unio mystica cum Christo* (the spiritual union with Christ) in his *munus triplex* (three offices) contribute to an interpretative framework for Christian pedagogy in contemporary culture?' and also evaluated their answer. From the preceding exploration of the three offices in the person of the teacher, it appears that the theologoumenon of mystical union with Christ and the classic Christian application to the three offices can be helpful in rethinking the teacher's position in the 21st century. Having used the three offices as a hermeneutical key in understanding the calling of Christian teachers in the contemporary context, the authors found the following deepening insights for education: The office of the prophet reveals the option that the confession of Christ's name must be understood in a broad sense. This is renewing the dualistic practices in which Christian education is restricted to religious education as a subject. The office of the priest stresses the importance of care and surpasses the contradiction between nurturing the authentic flourishing of pupils on the one hand, and neoliberal pressure on learners on the other hand. The reflection on the office of the king leads one to view the task of teachers as threefold. They should present themselves as servants and fighters against evil spirits and apply school subjects to the coming of the kingdom. Furthermore, the efficiency of teaching can be expected to increase when students see exactly how subjects and their lives relate to their Christian worldview.

The findings of this study are limited because they are based only on a conceptual comparison of a theological concept in educational practice. The results of this study could lead to a qualitative empirical study of how teachers should recognise the offices of Christ in their professional practice.

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Authors' contributions

W.v.V composed the body of the article and is responsible for the first paragraph of the Introduction, and the theological parts in the sections on prophet, priest, and king. A.d.M finalised the introduction section and the conclusion and added knowledge from the educational sources in the sections on prophet, priest, and king. On top of that, A.d.M provided also proofreading and language checks.

Ethical considerations

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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