

ADMISSION TO THE LORD'S SUPPER IN THE EARLY DUTCH REFORMED CHURCHES

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THE CONSIDERABLE DIVERSITY which exists within Presbyterian and Reformed churches in regulating admission to the Lord's Supper may lead one to the conclusion that this aspect of the administration of the sacrament bears little significance for its meaning. It may seem, for instance, to be mere historical happenstance that a certain custom of access to the table has come about in a given denomination. For churches that trace their modern history to the Reformation in the Lowlands, however, admission to the table has developed out of certain clear theological and ecclesiological commitments. In many of these churches, as a matter of biblical conviction, consistories admit to the Lord's Supper only those among them who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life, and who have submitted themselves to the supervision of the church. In other words, only members in good standing in a local congregation may participate in the sacrament in that particular congregation. Exception is made only for members of sister-churches whose doctrine and conduct are commended by a formal attestation.

These provisions, intended to preserve both the sanctity of the sacrament and the spiritual well-being of all concerned, have characterized the celebration in Reformed churches of Dutch background for centuries and may be traced to their formative years. Already before the Synod of Dort in 1618, several conventions and synods of the Dutch Reformed churches determined to establish and maintain what they believed to be the biblical and apostolic practice regarding the Lord's Supper. The

purpose of this article is to shed some light on the origins of the modern practice of admission to the sacrament by considering the earliest chapters in the history of the Reformed churches. It presents a selection of the evidence from the earliest Dutch Reformed churches in order to illustrate that this custom has been a hallmark from the time that the Reformation took hold in the Lowlands. First, it relates the relevant decisions of the broader assemblies in the Lowlands between 1568-1581. The influences upon these early conventions are complex and difficult to differentiate, and only one of the most important threads will be followed. Thus we shall consider secondly the evidence for regulations of the Lord's Supper in the Dutch Reformed churches during the period of its "exile" under Romanist persecution from 1541-1565. In fact, the earliest treatises on the celebration of the Lord's Supper in Dutch came from these churches, and it is reasonable to assume that both the teaching and the practices in the exiled congregations influenced the Dutch churches in the Netherlands.

The practices in the exile churches were in turn influenced by the biblical arguments from the writings of the Reformers themselves, John Calvin in particular, and we shall consider briefly the French theologian's writing on admission to the Lord's Supper, and the practice of the Reformed church in Geneva, from 1538-1542. Thus we shall conclude that the practice of strict governance over admission to the table is one that has longevity in the Reformed churches of the Lowlands and is a distinguishing feature of the Reformed churches in general.

Evidence Regarding Admission to the Lord's Supper in the Early Dutch Reformed Churches (1568-1581)

The earliest evidence of recorded decisions pertaining to admission to the sacrament in the Lowlands comes from the Convent of Wesel. Held in 1568, this meeting was attended by leaders of the reformation movement in the Netherlands, who, although they did not represent delegations from churches of an established federation, nevertheless arrived at decisions of some

consequence.¹ The comprehensive nature of the articles drafted at the Convent suggests that the participants made use of earlier regulations, and, as we shall see below, that these included the church order of the Reformed exile churches in London. The two sacraments are treated in Chapter Six of the Articles of the Convent at Wesel. The following decisions concern admission to the Lord's Supper:

[6.7] No one may be admitted to the Lord's Supper, except those who have provided a profession of faith beforehand, and have submitted themselves to ecclesiastical discipline. [6.8] Those who will wish to be admitted to the table, on the eighth day before the appointed day of the Supper, shall submit their names to the minister. Soon thereafter the task will be given by the consistory to one or more of the elders (in keeping with their ward and the number of persons), that they conscientiously and quickly enquire about their prior life, and that they shall bring to the attention of the consistory what they discover, so that if something arises that ought to prevent them from being admitted, intercession may be made immediately.²

There are three elements in these articles that should be noted, for they mark the practice of admission to the sacrament in nearly all subsequent regulations. First is that public profession of faith precedes participation in the Supper. Secondly, the believer must submit himself to the discipline of the church. And thirdly, the consistory supervises the table. These features are borne out by the description of the events leading to the celebration of the sacrament. On the Saturday preceding the day on which the

¹For the nature and significance of the convent see D. Nauta, "Wesel (1568) and Emden (1571)," in D. Nauta, *Opera Minora* (Kampen, 1956), 30-56. The traditional dating and location of the convent have been questioned in an influential article by J. P. van Dooren, "Der Weseler Konvent 1568: Neue Forschungsergebnisse," in *Monatshefte für evangelische Kirchengeschichte des Rheinlands* 31 (1982), 41-55.

²Latin text in F. L. Rutgers, *Acta van de Nederlandsche Synoden der Zestiende Eeuv* (s' Gravenhage, 1889), 20.

sacrament is to be used, the congregation gathers for a preparatory service, at which the candidates are asked in public to agree with the chief elements of the faith and religion, and whether they submit to Christian discipline (Art. 6.11).³ Their names are then inscribed in the public register of full members, and unless a lawful objection is raised, they are admitted to the sacrament.⁴

This procedure was defined further by the provincial synod of Dordrecht, held in 1574.⁵ The historical value of this synod pertains not only to the liturgy of the worship services in the Reformed churches of the Lowlands, but also to the forms for baptism and the Lord's Supper. The three features of profession, church discipline, and consistorial oversight recur in the relevant acts of this synod, and one may note also that the incorporation of the believer into the congregation is defined as a public act:

It is determined that the reception and examination of those who wish to join themselves to the congregation shall take place in the presence of a minister and two elders, or two ministers only. . . . Both the profession of faith and the submission to discipline must take place openly, in a place accessible to the public, either in the consistory room or in the church; and there the names of those who are being received shall be announced in an upbuilding manner.⁶

The first truly national synod of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands took place in June of 1578 at Dordrecht; its decisions, consequently, were of wider impact. Building upon the conclusions reached at Emden (1571) and Dordrecht (1574), the acts of this synod were organized carefully and were followed by a series of particular questions and answers. Regarding participation in the eucharist, the synod determined that only those who are full members of the congregation may attend the table of the Lord. It

³F. L. Rutgers, *Acta*, 29.

⁴F. L. Rutgers, *Acta*, 29.

⁵On the political and social situation in which this synod was held, see R. Bremmer, *Reformatie en Rebellie* (Franeker, 1984), 84-91.

⁶Dutch text in F. L. Rutgers, *Acta*, 147.

stated:

No one shall be received into the congregation except those who have been examined in advance by the consistory, or at least by the minister and an elder, in the chief points of the Christian faith. And before they attend the Lord's Supper, they shall openly testify—either before the consistory or in the church following the sermon which immediately precedes the celebration—that they accept the teaching of the church (which the minister summarizes briefly), make it their own, and by God's grace intend to keep it fully. They shall also testify that they submit themselves to Christian reproof.⁷

It is unfortunate that no official acts of the national synod of Middelburg, to which we now turn, survive. This synod, held in 1581, was an important and influential meeting for several reasons—not least that it composed the church order which would be altered little, even by the Synod of Dort in 1618.⁸ Fortunately, however, at least two series of brief but accurate notes of this synod are extant, and by means of these one is able to reconstruct both the decisions and general intent of the synod.⁹

Regarding admission to the table of the Lord, the synod made a decision that is very much in keeping with the acts quoted above. However, it should be noted that evidence of a lifestyle that reflects the profession of faith is explicitly added to the prerequisites. The synod furthermore extended the requirements for admission to the table to those believers who came from other Reformed congregations. It declared:

No one shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper, except he who—

⁷Dutch text in F. L. Rutgers, *Acta*, 250.12.

⁸Regarding the political and ecclesiastical circumstances surrounding this synod, see the contributions in J. P. van Dooren, ed., *De Nationale Synode te Middelburg in 1581* (Middelburg, 1981); R. Bremmer, *Reformatie en Rebellie*, 171-184.

⁹The first collection is published by F. L. Rutgers, *Acta*; these are supplemented by a later discovery of notes, published by W. Van't Spijker, "De Acta van de Synode van Middelburg (1581)," 64-126, in J. P. van Dooren, ed., *De Nationale Synode te Middelburg*.

according to the custom of the church to which he joins himself—has given profession of the Reformed religion, and at the same time giving witness of a pious walk of life. Without these also those who come from other churches shall not be admitted.¹⁰

Regarding the admission of guests to the table, the Synod of Dordrecht (1578) had decided:

As for those who come from other churches with letters of attestation, they shall be admitted without making a new profession of faith; but those who have neither written nor oral testimony from trustworthy persons shall not be admitted to the table.¹¹

In response to one of the many questions delivered by particular congregations, the Synod of Middelburg further clarified the process of admission to the Lord's Supper. And in it the connection between profession of faith and voluntary submission to church discipline is repeated. Following examination by the consistory, those who wish to attend the supper "shall profess—either in public following the sermon in the congregation, preparatory to the holy Supper, or in the consistory room—that they know the doctrines right well and that they submit to ecclesiastical discipline."¹²

From these acts the reader will have concluded that the Lord's Supper was to be celebrated only under the supervision of a consistory. Lest there be uncertainty in this matter, the provincial Synod at Dordrecht (1574) had determined that the sacrament shall not be distributed where no form of "congregation exists, that is, where there are no elders and deacons who are responsible for the acceptance and control of those who are admitted."¹³ The 1578 meeting in the same place clarified the matter by stating that "the Lord's Supper ought not to be administered in places where no church order has been established"; exception was made only for

¹⁰Dutch text in F. L. Rutgers, *Acta*, 392. 43.

¹¹F. L. Rutgers, *Acta*, 250.13.

¹²W. van't Spijker, "De Acta van de Synode van Middelburg (1581)," 101 *ad* 92.24.

¹³Dutch text in S. Cramer, F. Pijper, eds., *Documenta Reformatoria. Teksten Uit de Geschiedenis van Kerk en Theologie in de Nederlanden sedert de Hervorming. Deel 1: tot het Einde van de 17e Eeuw* (Kampen, 1903), 196.

churches in areas of persecution.¹⁴

What these decisions and their implementation imply is that just as one is admitted to the table by the consistory, so too one may be kept from the celebration. The Synod at Emden (1571) had dealt with this task of the consistory by deciding that “whoever stubbornly rejects the admonitions of the consistory shall be barred from the communion of the Lord’s Supper, and, having been barred, if after numerous warnings he should show no sign of repentance, then this is reason for proceeding to excommunication.”¹⁵ Put positively, in the early Dutch Reformed churches membership was indicated by one’s attendance at the Lord’s Supper. In response to a question whether it would be beneficial to maintain a register in which the names of those who attend the Lord’s Supper are recorded, the Synod of Middelburg (1581) responded in the affirmative, thereby showing that in effect, communicant membership is full membership.¹⁶

When one considers the comprehensive nature of the acts of the synods and conventions treated above, one soon realizes that the practice of admission to the Lord’s Supper had received careful consideration even in the first years of public worship. Indeed, the evidence suggests that the decisions were based in part on practices already in place in cities with which the Dutch believers had particular ties. No doubt the influx of ministers, laypersons, and literature from the Palatinate in Germany, from Geneva and Frankfurt, as well as from London and Emden, played a considerable role. Moreover, the complexity of influences precludes determining one single line of development. However, in what follows next we shall consider one strand of influences, namely, that of the Dutch refugee churches, which formed an important link between the mainland churches at the time of their formalization and the reformation in France, Switzerland, and Germany.

¹⁴Dutch text in F. L. Rutgers, *Acta*, 252.21.

¹⁵Latin and Dutch text in F. L. Rutgers, *Acta*, 70.30.

¹⁶Dutch text in W. Van’t Spijker, “De Acta van de Synode van Middelburg (1581),” 100 *ad* 88.13.

Evidence from the Strangers Churches in London (1541-1565)

Due to persecutions in the Roman Catholic lands of northern Europe from 1540 onwards, many Dutch-speaking protestants emigrated from the Lowlands to Germany and England. During the reign of the young Edward VI (1547-1553), the exiles in England were granted permission to establish a legally non-conformist church, the so-called Strangers churches.¹⁷ The intention was that the churches be based closely on the Reformed churches on the continent. Therefore the royal charter states that the Dutch exiles are permitted to establish their own churches for “an uncorrupt interpretation of the most Holy Gospel and administration of the sacraments according to the word of God and apostolic observance.”¹⁸ The specific reference to the use of the sacraments is important, and later joined to the exercise of church discipline. The charter permits the Dutch exiles “to practice, enjoy, use, and exercise their own rites and ceremonies and their own peculiar ecclesiastical discipline, notwithstanding that they do not conform with the rites and ceremonies used in our kingdom.”¹⁹

It was for a good reason that the Roman Catholic historian Festus Hommius called the Strangers church the “mother and nursery” (*mater et propagatrix*) of all the Reformed churches in the Lowlands: the influence it exercised upon Reformed believers living under the cross of persecution was considerable. Looking to the established congregations in England for leadership and guidance, believers on the continent followed the example of the churches abroad, and adopted their forms of worship, church orders, and doctrinal treatises. Thus, for example, the refugee churches founded later in Frankfurt and elsewhere based their church orders on the

¹⁷A good portrayal of the exiles in London is given by A. Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth-Century London* (Oxford, 1986). On the Strangers Churches in particular, see J. Lindeboom, *Austin Friars: History of the Dutch Reformed Church in London 1550-1950*, tr. D. de Inough (The Hague, 1950).

¹⁸J. Lindeboom, *Austin Friars*, 201.

¹⁹J. Lindeboom, *Austin Friars*, 202.

London model. The London order was an example also for the church order of the Palatinate (1563); a translation of it appeared in Heidelberg in 1565.²⁰ While it is not easy to determine the extent of the influence of the London order, it does appear that the composers of the early Dutch ordinances desired especially to adopt its tone and many of its principles. The ones who gathered at the Convent of Wesel in 1568 to plan the formal organization of the Dutch Reformed churches stated that they had consulted the best Reformed “church disciplines,” which may refer to the London church order.²¹ Whatever the extent of the influence of the London Strangers church, especially regarding the practice of admission to the sacrament, a line may be traced from the nascent Dutch Reformed churches to the churches in exile in England.

The Strangers churches were governed by a Superintendent, the Polish baron John à Lasco. À Lasco was initially attracted to England by an invitation to a planned international conference on the Lord's Supper to be hosted by Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury. The fact that à Lasco was one of the few who responded positively to the invitation shows that he was prepared to resolve the eucharistic controversy by aiming for consensus. Cranmer's planned conference did not materialize, but à Lasco did visit England, and apprised himself of the political and ecclesiastical climate, learning that it was suitable to harbour refugee churches. For when Countess Anna of East Frisia accepted the Augsburg Interim in 1549, à Lasco, who had served as Superintendent of the Reformed churches in and around Emden in western Germany, was forced to find a safe place for his Reformed flock. In fact, the nucleus of the church in London was composed of Dutch-speaking refugees from Emden, who maintained close connections with the Netherlands.

Aided by four ministers, à Lasco sought to unite the Reformed believers in doctrine and life. To this end he composed a confession

²⁰W. F. Dankbaar, *Marten Micron. De Christlicke Ordinancien der Nederlantscher Ghemeinten te London (1554)* (s' Gravenhage, 1956), 24-25.

²¹W. F. Dankbaar, *Marten Micron*, 25.

for the Strangers churches and a church order. The Dutch and Latin publications concerning the sacrament of the Lord's Supper show that the leaders were much concerned with the doctrine and practice of this sacrament. The ministers promoted a non-partisan, moderate position. Not wishing to be associated with the Lutheran teaching of transubstantiation, nor with the position of the Zwinglians, they championed the biblical and apostolic practice of the Lord's Supper and wished that the growing Reformed churches could agree that the sacrament should be celebrated *sola Scriptura*. As church leaders seeking to unify the congregations in and around London, and to provide guidance to Protestants living in the Netherlands, the London ministers formulated an unbiased expression of the doctrine and exercise of the sacrament.

The most comprehensive exposition of the Lord's Supper to emanate from the Strangers churches in London is à Lasco's *Brief and Lucid Treatise on the Sacraments of the Church of Christ*, published in London in 1552.²² Also relevant is the form for the confession of faith for the Stranger churches, à Lasco's *Compendium of Doctrine* (1551), which, together with a Psalter, was translated into Dutch by an elder, Jan Utenhove, for use in the church services.²³ As was noted earlier, the most influential document from this period and place of the Dutch Reformed churches is the church order for the Strangers churches, often referred to by its abbreviated Latin title, *Forma ac Ratio*.²⁴ It treats both the doctrine and the practice of the Lord's Supper at length. Though this ordinance was not published until 1555, it was employed in the London churches, and widely used in the Lowlands from 1555 until the turn of the century. Marten Micronius used this order as the model for the earliest Dutch-language church order, the influential *Christlicke Ordinancien*

²² Bearing the title *Brevis et dilucida de Sacramentis Ecclesiae Christi Tractatio*, this work appears in A. Kuyper, *Joannis a Lasco Opera*, vol. 1, 97-232; it is discussed by D. W. Rodgers, *John à Lasco in England* (New York, 1994), 111-126.

²³ Both the Latin *Compendium Doctrinae de Vera Unicaque Dei et Christi Ecclesia, eiusque fide et confessione pura* (1551), and the Dutch *Een kort begriip der leeringhe van de waarachtige ende enighe Gbemeynte Gods ende Christi* appear in A. Kuyper, *Joannis a Lasco Opera*, vol. 2.285-339.

²⁴ The Latin church order appears in A. Kuyper, *Joannis a Lasco Opera*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam, 1866), 1-283.

(1554).²⁵

Only two of these treatises will be discussed here, namely the *Brief and Lucid Treatise on the Sacraments*, and the *Forma ac Ratio*.

The *Brief and Lucid Treatise* deals with the meaning of the word “sacrament,” different kinds of sacrament, the elements comprising a sacrament, the nature of the sacramental union, and, not surprisingly, the eucharistic controversy. As far as the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper is concerned, it reveals the influences of especially Huldrych Zwingli and Heinrich Bullinger, while for the practice it reflects the thinking of Martin Bucer and John Calvin. Most importantly, perhaps, à Lasco and his fellow ministers are careful to derive statements dealing with the practice of the sacrament from the biblical teaching about its meaning.

In part to avoid doctrinal conflict, the *Brief and Lucid Treatise* stresses the importance of the entire sacramental action, rather than the significance of the individual elements of bread and wine. Drawing comparisons between the Lord’s Supper and baptism, the *Brief and Lucid Treatise* suggests that the significance of the Lord’s Supper rests partly upon the participation of the believers—the deed rather than the external elements. Just as the doctrine of baptism focuses upon the washing away (and not the water), so too the Supper should focus on the eating and drinking, not the elements of bread and wine. Thus while Lutherans used the expression “this is my body” to argue for the real presence of the Lord in the bread, à Lasco shifted the focus to the communion with Christ as manifested by taking, eating, and drinking the bread and wine. Therefore, as participation is the most critical part of the Lord’s Supper, the manner of celebration must be only according to the institution of the Supper by the Lord himself. Of course, liturgical divergences among the churches is permitted, provided that the biblical and apostolic basis of the sacrament remains unaltered.

The *Brief and Lucid Treatise* views the Lord’s Supper as an act of

²⁵Edition by W. F. Dankbaar, *Marten Micron*.

the community of believers, who, as one body, receive the benefits of Christ. The sacrament “is fixed deeply within the church of Christ, and is His eternal gift in the souls of the pious. Thus, since the sacrament was instituted by Christ the Lord, the entire Church itself is sealed in the faith that accompanies this sort of continual growth.”²⁶ By celebrating the Supper of the Lord, the entire congregation is assured that it is the body of Christ, and that its members are united with each other in him. As D. W. Rodgers observes, in the *Brief and Lucid Treatise* the sacrament is portrayed as “intended for the Church as a spiritual body, as much as for its individual members.”²⁷ The *Belgic Confession* (1561), composed by Guido de Brès after he had spent several years in London with à Lasco, expresses the specific application of the sacrament as follows: the Lord Jesus Christ “has instituted the sacrament of the holy supper to nourish and sustain those whom he has already regenerated and incorporated into his family, which is His church (Art. 35).” As was noted above, admitting to the sacrament those who belong to the manifest body of Christ becomes a hallmark of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. This practice was no doubt anticipated, in part, by the teaching and practice of the Dutch-speaking exiles in London.

Since the sacrament expresses the unity of those who belong to the body of Christ, celebration of it is an exercise of church discipline. Those who do not belong to the congregation, or who are members falsely, participate in the sacrament to their own condemnation. Behind such reasoning lies 1 Corinthians 11:29: “he who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment unto himself.” The *Brief and Clear Treatise* therefore ascribes the responsibility for heeding this warning not only to the individual who must exercise self-examination, but also to the consistory. “Those who have the government of the church entrusted to them—whether it be through the ministry of the word and sacraments, or through the sword—can readily perceive that it is their duty to restrain the license to sinning in accordance with

²⁶A. Kuyper, *Joannis a Lasco Opera*, vol. 1, 166.

²⁷D. W. Rodgers, *John à Lasco in England*, 123.

their respective ministries.”²⁸ For shame results when leaders, “because they are lax in their exercise of all discipline, permit [the mystical body of Christ] to be fouled and contaminated by various kinds of disgraceful acts.”²⁹

The church order of London may be reckoned as one of the earliest Reformed church ordinances. Not as influential as the ordinances of Geneva and Strasbourg associated with John Calvin and Martin Bucer, it was nevertheless one of the models for the orders decided upon at the Convent of Wesel (1568) and the Synod of Emden (1571). The adapted translation of this order by Marten Micronius, the *Forma ac Ratio*, was, as already noted, widely used in the Lowlands at the time. In other words, this document is also an important link between the practice of the Lord's Supper in the early Dutch Reformed churches and the age of the Reformers. Most importantly, the *Forma ac Ratio* places the doctrine and celebration of the sacrament, as defined in the *Brief and Lucid Treatise*, in the context of public worship. It will be useful, therefore, to depict briefly the context of the celebration as defined in the *Forma ac Ratio*.

Two weeks prior to each celebration of the Lord's Supper, announcement was made urging members to reconcile whatever differences existed between them. Furthermore, the members were reminded that they should not despise the sacrament by absenting themselves from the service, and prospective members were encouraged to undergo the required public examination of their faith. Some forty-five questions were posed to those requesting membership, including the query that they submit themselves to church discipline. In yet another special service of exhortation prior to the celebration, the names of all those present were recorded, and only those appearing on the register at that time were admitted to the sacrament. In effect, a new list of communicants was drawn up for each celebration, and the elders held a special gathering the day before to debar any that they thought unfit to take part. Also on

²⁸A. Kuyper, *Joannis a Lasco Opera*, vol. 1, 166.

²⁹A. Kuyper, *Joannis a Lasco Opera*, vol. 1, 166.

the Saturday before the sacrament was to be celebrated, the congregation met again, this time to be reminded of the necessity of self-examination, and to be instructed in the proper use of the sacrament. In stressing self-examination, the London order notes that all must know God as their Lord and Saviour, and also know that they themselves, though children of wrath, have been redeemed by Jesus Christ. Special emphasis is placed upon the hypocrisy of those who celebrate the sacrament without true faith. At this occasion the names of those who have been barred by the ministers and elders from participation are read in order that the congregation may undertake mutual exhortation.³⁰ Marten Micronius' Dutch adaptation of the order summarizes the entire process as follows: so that in "the use of the sacrament no sin be committed through our carelessness, we shall permit no other Dutch persons to the use of the Supper, except those who publicly before the congregation, or in the presence of the ministers and elders of the congregation, have made profession of their faith and willingly submitted themselves to the church's Christian discipline."³¹

This sketch of the Lord's Supper celebration in the Strangers churches in London would not be complete without a brief consideration of the evidence for actual practice. In keeping with its founding charter, the London Dutch church had a reputation for strict implementation of Christian discipline, and for identifying the celebration of the Supper with the expression of the unity of the congregation. This is evidenced by the minutes of the consistory meetings held from 1560 to 1563, as recorded by A. A. van Schelven.³² They reveal that ecclesiastical discipline was practised especially in order to restore relations among the communicant members. If we may consider the evidence from the year 1561 as representative, we note that the consistory regularly recorded the announcements of a scheduled celebration of the sacrament and preserved in writing the decisions regarding those who were to be

³⁰A. Kuyper, *Joannis a Lasco Opera*, vol. 2, 138.

³¹W. F. Dankbaar, *Marten Micron*, 82.

³²A. A. van Schelven, *Kerkerads-protocollen der nederduitsche vluchteling-en-kerk te Londen, 1560-1563* (Amsterdam, 1921).

admitted to, or withheld from, the celebration.³³ O. Boersma and A.J. Jelsma, who summarize the nature of the formal admonitions in the Dutch (and French and Italian) churches in London from 1569-1575 and 1578-1585, go so far as to state that “numerous strangers refused to submit themselves to the strict discipline maintained in the Dutch and French Churches, rather preferring the relative liberty of the English Church.”³⁴

Lastly, it should be noted that the practice of the Dutch-speaking Strangers churches in London is paralleled by that of the Italian Reformed Church there. In the recently published ordinance composed by Nicholas des Gallars, called *Forma Politiae Ecclesiasticae* (1561), we read the following about admission to the table:

When the Supper is to be celebrated, on at least the eighth day in advance let it be announced to the people, so that neither youth nor anyone else approach the supper with improper instruction. And let the foreigners and guests first present themselves to the minister, so that as the situation requires, they may be instructed by him, lest anyone come to the table for judgement and his own destruction. In fact no one shall be admitted to the table, except he who is well known or approved by witness, and also has given an account of his own faith.³⁵

The Evidence Regarding Admission to the Lord's Supper from Geneva (1538-1542)

In this section we wish to suggest that the practice of admission to the Lord's Supper as reflected in the decisions of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands between 1568-1581 and of the Strangers churches in London especially between 1550 and 1553

³³See the entries in A. A. van Schelven, *Kerkeraads-protocollen*, for May 8 (p. 192), August 26 (p. 243), November 26 (p. 269), December 14 (p. 273), December 21 (p. 274).

³⁴O. Boersma, A. J. Jelsma, eds., *Unity in Multiformity. The Minutes of the Coetus of London, 1575 and the Consistory Minutes of the Italian Church of London, 1570-1591*. N.p., 1997, 6.

³⁵Latin text in O. Boersma, A.J. Jelsma, eds., *Unity in Multiformity*, 5.

were anticipated in the Reformed churches in Strasbourg and Geneva, and in the writings of John Calvin in particular. It is not difficult to show the link between London and Strasbourg and Geneva, or to show the direct influence of Calvin upon the reformation in the Lowlands. Let us consider but one example of the influence which the writings and teaching of Martin Bucer had upon John à Lasco.

The Polish Reformer had met Bucer in Cologne and expressed also in writing the intention to base the church order of London in part on the ordinances of the Reformed Church in that city (1543).³⁶ That order states also that no one may be admitted to the Lord's Supper who has not given prior notice, and that those who wish to partake of the supper for the first time are to be examined publicly.³⁷ Readers will recall that of sixteenth-century Reformers it is especially Bucer who argued the need for ecclesiastical oversight. Indeed, it was he who deemed proper discipline a third mark of a true church. The London order follows him in this regard. Concerning admission to the table it is Bucer who writes: "How would it be permissible for ministers of salvation of God's elect to offer these most holy mysteries of salvation to those whose faith and piety they did not know? Hence they must rightly fear that they administer to men's judgment and condemnation what the Lord instituted for their salvation."³⁸ Clearly, the teaching and the practice in the Strangers churches in London were affected by the precedents set in Strasbourg and Cologne.

The influence of John Calvin on the Dutch Reformed churches of the sixteenth century is arguably more direct and extensive, and it is to his writings that we turn now. Writing to William Farel in 1540 about his observations of the manner in which people in Strasbourg were approaching the table, Calvin first notes "many individuals were in the habit of making a rash approach to the sacrament of the

³⁶A. Kuyper, *Joannis a Lasco Opera*, vol. 2, 575. See further D. W. Rodgers, *John à Lasco in England*, 56-57.

³⁷G. J. van de Poll, *Martin Bucer's Liturgical Ideas* (Assen, 1954), 138.

³⁸Quoted from E. Pauck's translation of *De Regno Christi*, in *Melancthon and Bucer* (Philadelphia, 1969), 237.

supper.”³⁹ Apparently many people wanted to participate in the sacrament by their own choice. With an allusion to 1 Corinthians 11:27-29, he states: “for although the faith of many people was unknown to us, and especially even suspect, nevertheless everyone rushed forward unrestrained. Indeed, such people were consuming the wrath of God, rather than participating in the sacrament of life. What is more, should not also the pastor himself be considered to have profaned so great a mystery, when he makes no distinction among those who participate?”⁴⁰ Calvin thus came to the conclusion that because too many people approach the table rashly and without proper self-examination, “it is expedient to have a certain order in the churches. . . . No one therefore ought to take it ill, when his Christian faith is tested very carefully when he is to be admitted to the sacrament.”⁴¹ Like Bucer, Calvin was forced to announce that “no one would be admitted to the table of the Lord by me, who had not beforehand presented himself for examination.”⁴²

Admission to the Lord's Supper receives an important place in the church order proposed for Geneva in 1537. Several themes noted in the order of the Strangers churches and in the acts of the Dutch synods can be traced to this order. The expression of the unity of the body of Christ, the purity of the sacrament and the danger of defilement, the necessity of vigilance, and the biblical basis for supervision are four features that support the argument that all participants must be confessing believers. The *Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances* (1537) state:

But the most important rule required and to be observed to the utmost is that this holy supper, which has been ordered and

³⁹Latin text of *Letter to Farel* (1540) in *Calvini Opera*, vol. 11, in G. Baum, E. Cunitz, E. Reuss, eds., *Corpus Reformatorum*, vol. 39 (Brunswick, 1873), 31.

⁴⁰Preamble to the Latin Edition of the *Catechism* (1538), in *Calvini Opera*, vol. 5 in G. Baum, E. Cunitz, E. Reuss, eds., *Corpus Reformatorum*, vol. 33 (Brunswick, 1866), 319.

⁴¹Latin text in *Calvini Opera*, vol.10 in G. Baum, E. Cunitz, E. Reuss, eds., *Corpus Reformatorum*, vol. 38 (Brunswick, 1871), 258.

⁴²Latin text of *Letter to Farel* (1540) in *Calvini Opera*, vol. 11, 31.

instituted to unite the members of our Lord Jesus Christ with their head and with one another into one body and one spirit, not be soiled and stained by those participants who declare and manifest through their misbehaviour and evil life that they do not belong to Jesus. . . . Thus we are demanded to be on our guard lest this pollution, so shameful to our Lord, be promoted through our negligence, seeing that Paul denounces such as use the sacrament unworthily. Therefore it is necessary that those who have the power to make policies see to it that those coming to the Lord's Supper be approved members of Jesus Christ.⁴³

Just imagine, Calvin exclaims, "how wretched would be the state of the Church if she could be forced to receive to the partaking of so great a mystery, those of whom she is deeply ignorant, or perhaps, regards with suspicion!"⁴⁴

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One of the purposes served by the proposed ecclesiastical ordinances is that the sacrament be celebrated "with such good supervision that no one dares to presume to present himself except in a holy manner and with genuine reverence. For this reason, in order to preserve the church in her integrity, the discipline of excommunication is necessary."⁴⁵ The duty of the consistory to supervise the participants in the celebration of the Supper extended even to those who are unknown to the congregation. The proposed church order states that on "the Sunday before the celebration, announcement will be made . . . that all strangers and new-comers may be exhorted first to come and present themselves at the church, so that they be instructed and thus none approach to his own condemnation."⁴⁶ In the letter to William Farel mentioned

⁴³French text of the *Projet d'Ordonnances Ecclésiastiques in Calvini Opera*, vol. 10, in G. Baum, E. Cunitz, E. Reuss, eds., *Corpus Reformatorum*, vol. 38 (Brunswick, 1871), 8-9. Calvin, of course, was banished from Geneva from 1538-1541 in part over the issue of his refusal to allow scandalous sinners access to the Lord's Supper.

⁴⁴*Corpus Reformatorum*, vol. 38, 8-9.

⁴⁵French text of *Projet d'Ordonnances Ecclésiastiques*, 6.

⁴⁶*Projet d'Ordonnances Ecclésiastiques*, 26.

earlier, Calvin admits that such an announcement may be misinterpreted by some as too restrictive and reminiscent of Romanist custom: “the common people, who do not sufficiently distinguish between the kingdom of Christ and the tyranny of the Antichrist, may think themselves brought back under a new slavery.”⁴⁷ Therefore, Calvin writes, the ministers must explain carefully to all that such an announcement “in no way detracts from our Christian freedom, since I enjoin nothing whatever that Christ himself has not prescribed.”⁴⁸

Thus we have reached the root of the Reformed principle of admission to the Lord's Supper: every aspect of the sacrament derives only from the Word of God.

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Literature: W. Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*. Translated by W. Heynen. Grand Rapids, 1981. G. Baum, , E. Cunitz, E. Reuss, eds., *Corpus Reformatorum*. Brunswick, 1863 - ; O. Boersma, A. J. Jelsma, eds. *Unity in Multiforimity. The Minutes of the Coetus of London, 1575 and the Consistory Minutes of the Italian Church of London, 1570-1591*. Publications of the Huguenot Society of Great Britain and Ireland, vol. LIX. 1997; J. G. J. van Booma, J. L. van der Gouw, eds. *Communio et mater fidelium. Acta des Konsistoriums der niederländischen reformierten Flüchtlingsgemeinde in Wesel 1573-1582* (Schriftenreihe des Vereins für Rheinische Kirchengeschichte 103). Delft, 1991; G. Bouwmeester, *Johannis a Lasco: Een Uitverkoren Instrument Gods*. Den Haag, 1956; R. Bremmer, “De Nationale Synode van Middelburg (1581): Politieke Achtergronden van kerkelijke Besluit-vorming,” 1-62, in J.P. van Dooren, ed., *De Nationale Synode te Middelburg in 1581*. Middelburg, 1981; idem, *Reformatie en Rebelle*. Franeker, 1984; S. Cramer, F. Pijper, eds., *Documenta Reformatoria*. Teksten Uit de Geschiedenis van Kerk en Theologie in de Nederlanden sedert de Hervorming. Deel 1: tot het Einde van de 17e Eeuw. Kampen, 1903; W. F. Dankbaar, *Marten Micron. De Christlicke Ordinancien der Nederlantscher Ghemeinten te London (1554)*. The Hague, 1956; T. J. Davis, *The Clearest Promises of God. The Development of Calvin's Eucharistic Teaching*. New York, 1995; J. P. van Dooren, ed., *De Nationale Synode te Middelburg in 1581*. Middelburg, 1981; idem, “Der Weseler Konvent 1568: Neue Forschungsergebnisse,” in *Monatshefte für evangelische Kirchengeschichte des Rheinlands* 31 (1982), 41-55; B. A. Gerrish, “The Lord's Supper in the Reformed

⁴⁷Latin text of *Letter to Farel* (1540) in *Calvini Opera*, vol. 11, 41.

⁴⁸Ibid.

Confessions,” *Theology Today* 23 (1966): 224-243; A. M. Hunter, *The Teaching of Calvin*. London, 1950; A. J. Jelsma, O. Boersma, eds. *Acta van het Consistorie van de Nederlandse Gemeente te Londen 1569-1585*. Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën, Kleine Serie nr. 76. The Hague, 1993; F. R. J. Knetsch, “The National Synod of Dordrecht, 1578, and the Position of the Walloon Churches,” in *The Low Countries History Yearbook: Acta Historiae Neerlandicae* 13 (1980), 40-50; idem, “Church Ordinances and the Regulations of the Dutch Synods ‘under the Cross’ (1563-1566) Compared with the French (1559-1563),” 187-205, in J. Kirk, ed., *Humanism and Reform: the Church in Europe, England and Scotland, 1400-1643*. Oxford, 1991; A. Kuyper, ed. *Kerkeraads-Protocollen der Hollandsche Gemeente te Londen, 1569-1571*. Vol. 1; Utrecht, 1870; idem, *Opera Omnia tam Editam quam Ineditam*. 2 Vol. Amsterdam, 1866; J. Lindeboom, *Austin Friars: History of the Dutch Reformed Church in London 1550-1950*. Translation by D. de Inough. The Hague, 1950; K. McDonnell, *John Calvin, the Church, and the Eucharist*. Princeton, 1967; D. Nauta, “Wesel (1568) en Emden (1571),” 30-56 in D. Nauta, *Opera Minora*. Kampen, 1956; F. Norwood, “The Strangers’ ‘Model Churches’ in Sixteenth Century England,” 181-196, in F. H. Littell, ed., *Reformation Studies: Sixteen Essays in Honour of Roland H. Bainton*. Richmond, 1962; F. Lurz, *Die Feier des Abendmahls nach der Kurpfälzischen Kirchenordnung von 1563*. Berlin, 1998; A. Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth-Century London*. Oxford, 1986; idem, “The London Exile Community and the Second Sacramentarian Controversy, 1553-1560,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 78 (1987), 223-252; idem, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt. Exile and the Development of Reformed Protestantism*. Oxford, 1992; G. J. van de Poll, *Martin Bucer’s Liturgical Ideas*. Assen, 1954; D. W. Rodgers, *John à Lasco in England*. New York, 1994; F. L. Rutgers, *Acta van de Nederlandsche Synoden der Zestiende Eeuw. s’ Gravenhage, 1889*; A. A. van Schelven, *Kerkeraads-Protocollen der Nederduitsche Vluchtelingen-kerk te Londen 1560-1563*. Amsterdam, 1921; H. Schilling, *Die Kirchenratsprotokolle der reformierten Gemeinde Emden, 1557-1620*. Vol. 1,2. Cologne, 1990, 1992; W. van’t Spijker, “Het klassieke Avondmaalsformulier,” 363-419, in W. van’t Spijker, W. Balke, et al., *Bij Brood en Beker*. Goudriaan, de Groot, 1980; idem, *The Ecclesiastical Offices in the Thought of Martin Bucer*. Tr. J. Vriend, L. Bierma. Leiden, 1996; idem, “De Acta van de Synode van Middelburg (1581),” 64-126, in J.P. van Dooren, ed., *De Nationale Synode te Middelburg in 1581*. Middelburg, 1981; B. Thompson, “The Palatinate Church Order of 1563,” *Church History* 23 (1954): 339-354; R. S. Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*. Grand Rapids, 1957; G. S. M. Walker, “The Lord’s Supper in the Theology and Practice of Calvin,” 131-148, in G. Duffield, ed., *John Calvin*. London, 1966.