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Reprioritizing the Lord's Supper among the Reformed

Jelmer Heeren and Maarten Wisse

There are questions which emerge in the thinking of mankind, claim the complete intellectual interest of a period, and then fade away.... Centuries pass by. Then, because of a turn in history, the same question again is thrust into the foreground and the game repeats itself. To these intermittent “volcanoes” belongs the question of the Lord's Supper.

—Albert Schweitzer, *The Problem of the Lord's Supper*¹

Writing more than a hundred years ago, Schweitzer concerned himself with questions related to the study of the historical Jesus, yet his observation concerning the Lord's Supper as a recurring theme in general remains valid. Over the past several years, there has been a growing interest among evangelicals, and more specifically the Reformed, in making Holy Communion more prominent in the life of the church. This is not to suggest that there has been no such call for change until recently: ever since the emergence of the Liturgical Movement, Protestant theologians have sought to address the issue.²

¹ Albert Schweitzer, *The Problem of the Lord's Supper according to the Scholarly Research of the Nineteenth Century and the Historical Accounts*, ed. John Reumann, trans. A. J. Mattill Jr., vol. 1, *The Lord's Supper in Relationship to the Life of Jesus and the History of the Early Church* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1982), 57.

² Cf. D. B. Forrester: “It is not unfair to suggest that this generation is experiencing a major renewal in eucharistic faith and practice in most of the major Christian denominations [i.e., in both Eastern and Western

And yet a general disinterest in the Supper and the sacraments more broadly remains. Those who do work on the topic often complain that it does not receive nearly enough attention. “The theology and practice of the Table of the Lord,” James Renihan writes, “seldom creates even a stir.”³ We can testify to this lack of interest from within our Dutch context. For example, the widely read Reformed-evangelical *Christelijke dogmatiek* by Gijsbert van den Brink and Cornelis van der Kooi devotes only a small section to the sacraments.⁴

Yet if our theological seismograph serves us correctly—to pick up on Schweitzer’s metaphor—Reformed theologians in the English-speaking world in particular have become increasingly uneasy about the present state of the practice of the Lord’s Supper. Although the sentiment is shared by Reformed scholars around the world,⁵ not to mention others within the Protestant fold,⁶ the devaluation of the Supper seems to be a source of lamentation especially among the Reformed in North America.⁷ We share their concerns, yet we are

Christianity]” (“Eucharist,” in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*, ed. Martin Davie et al., 2nd ed. [Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016], 308).

³ James M. Renihan, foreword to *The Lord’s Supper as a Means of Grace: More than a Memory*, by Richard C. Barcellos (Geanies House: Mentor, 2013), 12.

⁴ Gijsbert van den Brink and Cornelis van der Kooi, *Christelijke dogmatiek: een inleiding* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2012), 549–53. See also the recently published English translation: *Christian Dogmatics: An Introduction*, trans. Reinder Bruinsma with James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 610–14.

⁵ See, for example, B. J. Van der Walt, “Op soek na nuwe perspektiewe op die Mis en die Nagmaal,” *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe* 56, no. 1 (2016): 241. In the Netherlands Bram van de Beek has often lamented the secondary status of the Supper: see, for example, A. van de Beek, *Is God terug?* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2010), 92.

⁶ Baptist theologians too have taken up the sacraments anew: see, for example, Thomas R. Schreiner and Matthew R. Crawford, eds., *The Lord’s Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ until He Comes* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010); Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson, eds., *Baptist Sacramentalism* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006); Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson, eds., *Baptist Sacramentalism 2* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009).

⁷ At this point we will only speculate why this is so. Maybe the sheer number of Reformed theologians serves as an explanation. Or maybe this is so

unsure that the solutions they provide will suffice to address the crisis.⁸ Namely, the typical response prevalent among the Reformed is to simply correct the wrong (often called Zwinglian) take on Communion through an exposition of Calvin's (i.e., the right) view. We will argue that many recent attempts to reprioritize the Lord's Supper *only* through theorizing about its proper ontology lack any real connection with the practice itself. Furthermore, we will question the use of Calvin in the search of a revitalization of the Supper. Finally, we will suggest avenues of further research, discussing some of the theological and practical issues at hand. This includes probing the issue of the relationship between the Reformed view of the Lord's Supper and disenchantment (i.e., the historic relocation of meaning from the world into the human mind contributing to secularization). Noting that some, including Charles Taylor, blame the Reformation and especially its take on the Supper for contributing to the disenchantment of the world, we will question this thesis.

First, however, we will sketch the developments in continental Europe in the twentieth century. Long before recent theologians advocated a reprioritization of the Lord's Supper, Protestant theologians on the European continent called for the same thing, prompted to this by the rise of the Liturgical Movement primarily among Roman Catholics. This resulted in an intra-Reformed dialogue about the Supper. We will briefly touch upon this intra-Reformed dialogue, looking at the discussion between Gerardus van der Leeuw and Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer. This discussion, which took place several decades prior to the developments that we will describe below, illustrates the difficulties of rehabilitating the sacraments in the Reformed tradition. Next we will listen to Charles Taylor, whose criticism of reformational sacramentality will play an important role in our evaluation of the recent developments in Reformed theology.

because as yet the North American church in general is more familiar with the marketization of the gospel, resulting in ritually flattened services but excellent lightshows.

⁸ We will not go into detail as to why negligence of the Lord's Supper is a problem. For those who remain unconvinced of the sacrament's importance, see, for example, John Jefferson Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God: An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010), 115–18, 130, 164–70.

Van der Leeuw and Berkouwer on Reprioritizing the Sacraments

The Liturgical Movement that arose in the early twentieth-century Roman Catholic Church played an instrumental role in sparking the discussion on worship practices in Protestant circles. A key theologian that moved the conversation forward in the Netherlands was Gerardus van der Leeuw. On the first few pages of his *Sacramentstheologie*, van der Leeuw mentions a few key factors that, according to him, contribute to the reinvigorated attention to the sacraments in the life of the church. In addition to the rise of the Liturgical Movement, he mentions the newly developed resources in philosophical existentialism, the demise of the Cartesian separation of mind and body, the rediscovered creative force of symbol, and a new interest in confessions.⁹ He puts forward his proposal for a proper place of the sacraments, arguing that both the Reformers and Roman Catholics had strayed from what he saw as the biblical account of sacramentality. Van der Leeuw accused the former of “spiritualism” because of their inclination to define the sacraments in mere pedagogical terms.¹⁰ The consequent relegation of the sacraments to a secondary role next to the preached Word Van der Leeuw deemed to be a severe mistake in light of what he saw as the very sacramentality of the entirety of human existence and nature in general.¹¹

One of his contemporaries, Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer, argued however that it is Van der Leeuw’s “sacramentalism”—the idea that

⁹ G. van der Leeuw, *Sacramentstheologie* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1949), 5–12. Cf. Kenan B. Osborne who identifies five issues that played an important role in what he calls the “sacramental renewal” up until 1959: a renewed interest in the history of the sacraments, the recognition of Jesus as sacrament, the renewal instigated by the Liturgical Movement, the emergence of *La nouvelle théologie* and new currents in philosophy (*Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World: A Theology for the Third Millennium* [New York: Paulist Press, 1999], 5–17).

¹⁰ Take for example Article 33 of the Belgic Confession (1561), which states that because of “our weakness and infirmities” God has given the sacraments as “visible signs and seals of an inward and invisible matter.”

¹¹ Van der Leeuw, *Sacramentstheologie*, 246–47. Elsewhere he writes that sacramental theology is “niet een hoofdstuk van de theologie, doch het hart daarvan” (“not a chapter of theology, but its heart”) (225–26).

the Christian sacraments are to be viewed first and foremost in light of the broader sacramentality of human life—that devalues the Christian sacraments by its inability to address their concreteness and particularity.¹² Yet for him too “spiritualism”¹³ was not the answer. Berkouwer in fact agreed with sacramentalists that erroneous views of the essence and efficacy of the sacraments were to blame for the devaluation of sacrament within Protestantism;¹⁴ he simply provided a different solution, which he found in Calvin. Concerning specifically the Lord's Supper, he argued that although both Roman Catholics and Lutherans have called all Reformed positions “symbolic” (and thus spiritualistic),¹⁵ it is Calvin who treads the middle road successfully, steering away from the extremes of both sacramental “realism” and mere “symbolism.”¹⁶ Finding this dichotomy to be a false one, he suggested that if only we understood Calvin better we would be able to begin facing the spiritualism-sacramentalism dilemma,¹⁷ of

¹² G. C. Berkouwer, *The Sacraments*, trans. Hugo Bekker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 23, 25.

¹³ This is Berkouwer's own term, which he himself describes as a view of the sacraments “that fails to appreciate the real use of earthly elements in the divine acts” (Berkouwer, *The Sacraments*, 25).

¹⁴ Berkouwer, *The Sacraments*, 14.

¹⁵ Berkouwer, *The Sacraments*, 202.

¹⁶ For example, Berkouwer, *The Sacraments*, 79. Van der Leeuw acknowledged strong differences between Zwingli and Calvin, appreciating the latter's description of the sacrament in terms of gifts of the Spirit. Yet he ultimately concludes that Calvin's position is “uitermate gecompliceerd,” “theoretisch ... uiterst zwak” and “zeker niet logisch van structuur” (“very complicated,” “theoretically ... very weak” and “definitely not logical in structure”) (*Sacramentstheologie*, 81–82, 84).

¹⁷ Berkouwer concludes the first chapter of his book as follows: “Calvin did not search for a synthesis between realism and spiritualism, but he did fully honor the significance of the signs in the hand of God. Turning in faith toward these divine acts, he was able to transcend false dilemmas and to appreciate the sacraments in the light of Scripture.... Only if we reject false dilemmas can we find an alternative to the contemporary call for ‘sacramental reality.’ Then, hopefully, it will be possible to delve deeper, to discern the sovereign manner in which God stoops down to us, taking up simple earthly elements and using them for the affirmation and strengthening of our faith” (*The Sacraments*, 25–26).

which he said that “one may, without exaggeration, speak of a crisis here.”¹⁸ This crisis of how to approach Reformed sacramentality in light of this dilemma remains pertinent to this day.

Charles Taylor’s Criticism of Reformational Sacramentality

So far, we have listened to two voices from the Dutch Reformed tradition that made an attempt to rethink the Reformed approach to the Lord’s Supper. The crisis, however, has not yet been averted. Therefore, it seems that in order to diagnose the problems in the Reformed approach to the Lord’s Supper properly, we need to dig deeper. One proposal that aims to situate the Reformed tradition against the background of modernity is Charles Taylor’s. Taylor offers a more radical diagnosis of the problem of sacramentality since the Reformation. In this section, we introduce some key components of his proposal. In a later section, we will evaluate recent American attempts at reprioritizing the Lord’s Supper in terms of Taylor’s critique.

There are three interrelated issues in Taylor that are relevant for our purposes: disenchantment, the “buffered” self and “mediational” epistemology.

First, Taylor argues that because Calvin and others denied the locales of grace in the Host, rituals, relics and other things,¹⁹ they contributed to the disenchantment of the world and thus its secularization. On Taylor’s account, disenchantment mainly entails the relocation of meaning from the world, that which is out there, into the human mind. This relocation not only includes linguistic meaning, but, more importantly, also the meaning of life.²⁰ This development coincided with what Taylor calls “excarnation,” a shift of focus from the bodily and ritual to the spiritual and rational. It is indeed one of Taylor’s “main contentions” in *A Secular Age*, his magnum opus, that

¹⁸ Berkouwer, *The Sacraments*, 17.

¹⁹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 79.

²⁰ “Here I’m using it in the sense in which we talk about ‘the meaning of life,’ or of a relationship as having great ‘meaning’ for us” (Taylor, 31).

Reformed Christianity culminated in “a far-reaching exarnation.”²¹ The prioritization of the (immaterial) Word and the downgrading of the sacraments, however theologically motivated in correcting Rome, coincided with the winds of cultural change that contributed to the process of exarnation and the disenchantment of the world. Therefore by dismissing sacramentalism, Taylor suggests, the Reformers allowed breathing room for the emergence of deism and naturalism.

Second, and concomitantly, our view of the self changed with disenchantment. Before the relocation of meaning we envisioned ourselves as “porous,” open to the influence of the “outside.” We were open to the cosmic forces of spirits, demons, angels, God and relics. This vulnerability and openness was perceived to be an essential human quality.²² This image of the self changed as meaning came to be seen as generated by the mind, or better yet as imposed by the mind on the outside world (on Kant’s account). Whereas for our ancestors the mind/world boundary was a blurry one, it gradually came to be sharply defined in terms of an inside/outside distinction: the mind becomes an inward mental space, bounded as it were. Taylor calls this the “buffered” self, it being both isolated and protected from the outside world. Consequently, this new anthropology allowed us to see ourselves as capable of protecting ourselves from outside influence (for better or for worse) and furthermore empowered us to start thinking about “self-control or self-direction.”²³ In other words, autonomy becomes an option.

Third, this new anthropology generates a certain epistemological picture Taylor calls “mediational” because it necessitates an intermediary element to bridge the gap between mind and world. Because explicit or implicit proponents of this view—including a variety of thinkers such as Descartes, Kant, and Rorty—posit a definite boundary between the outside world and the mind, some kind of mediational element in the latter is assumed to allow for the possibility of knowledge. This could be a category, an idea, a sentence held true, and so forth. This outlook states that cognition is possible *only through* such an intermediary element: our contact with reality is mediated. “This

²¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 614.

²² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 36.

²³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 39.

means,” Taylor writes, “we can understand our grasp of the world as something that is, in principle, separable from what it is a grasp of.”²⁴

This aspect of Taylor’s work affects our argument in this article in two ways. One is that a mediational epistemology has been a factor in the marginalization of the sacraments in Reformed theology. Rather than mediating the reality itself, sacraments became mere “media” that stand between the reality of God in Christ and the believer. Second, as we will see below, Taylor’s argument against mediational epistemology helps us to diagnose attempts to reprioritize the Lord’s Supper as being overly cognitive rather than embedded in concrete social and ritual practices.

Taylor heartily disagrees with this mediational theory of knowledge as he argues it is both ideologically charged and simply not true. First, he points to the broader ethical ideal behind the theory, showing it to be a source of autonomy, freedom, the objectification of the world (which becomes in turn a source of power) and of disenchantment. Consequently, contra its proponents who insist on the matter-of-factness of this epistemological stance, to defend such a theory of knowledge is to tread not on neutral ground but on moral ground.²⁵ Instead, Taylor argues for a “contact” theory of knowledge. He wants to situate explicit thought and knowledge in its social-cultural and bodily context. First, our explicit portrayals of reality are not a matter of the individual buffered self, but are first and foremost socially situated. Our grasp of reality, Taylor writes, is “only secondarily imparted to each one of us, as we are inducted into the language and culture of our society.”²⁶ Second, knowledge is not *merely* a correct mental depiction of reality; our grasp of reality resides instead primarily in our actual bodily dealing with the world. Drawing on Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, Taylor posits we are being-in-/to-the-world. We are not mind-detached-from-the-world. We are engaged *in* rather than disengaged *from* reality.²⁷ Taylor views our

²⁴ Charles Taylor, “Merleau-Ponty and the Epistemological Picture,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Taylor Carman and Mark B. N. Hansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 33.

²⁵ Hubert L. Dreyfus and Charles Taylor, *Retrieving Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 24–25.

²⁶ Dreyfus and Taylor, *Retrieving Realism*, 28.

²⁷ Dreyfus and Taylor, *Retrieving Realism*, 24–25.

everyday coping, our capacity to maneuver ourselves through life, as a type of understanding, a practical know-how.

As such there is an implicit background understanding to everything we do—he calls this the “social imaginary”²⁸—and

drawing a sharp line between this implicit grasp on things and our formulated, explicit understanding is impossible. It is not only that any frontier is porous, that things explicitly formulated and understood can “sink down” into unarticulated know-how ... [and reversely, that] we articulate what was previously just lived out. It is also that any particular understanding of our situation blends explicit knowledge and unarticulated know-how.²⁹

For Taylor, only practices can shape the implicit background understanding, the social imaginary of a group of people. Practices in turn can be influenced by explicit knowledge (or theory) in two ways. It can reinterpret practices that are already there, or it can set up new practices. Theory then gives shape to our background understanding, but only if it is being embodied in new or reinterpreted practices. Furthermore, Taylor mentions two additional ways in which practices are more central than explicit theory in his account of knowledge. First, explicit knowledge is “translated” when it enters into the realm of common practice. Second, once in place practices can start to take on a life of their own, initiating transformation in our background understanding. Our social imaginary is “what *enables*, through making sense of, the practices of a society.”³⁰ Yet Taylor suggests that the reverse is also true. Practices can initiate change in the imaginary without theory directing them, because practices generate and carry the imaginary.³¹

The interrelatedness of these three issues cannot be understated, yet the first two—that of disenchantment and the buffered self—explicitly blame reformational sacramentality for riding the wave of Enlightenment culture toward atheism at best and for enabling it at

²⁸ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

²⁹ Taylor, “Merleau-Ponty and the Epistemological Picture,” 32.

³⁰ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 2 (italics added).

³¹ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 25–30.

worst. Taylor furthermore argues against the mediational picture of epistemology that undergirds and coincides with the development of the first two concerns and argues for a contact theory instead.³² This then is the cluster of criticism against reformational sacramentality today. Both Van der Leeuw decades ago and Taylor today point to serious problems related to the devaluation of the Lord's Supper in Protestant churches. What are some of the Reformed attempts at prioritizing the Supper? And do these succeed in light of Taylor's concerns?

Contemporary Attempts at Calvinizing the Lord's Supper

The following survey does not pretend to be comprehensive, but it will highlight an important type of response among the Reformed to the general devaluation of the Lord's Supper in the life of the church. Yet, if our aim was indeed to provide an exhaustive overview of all the twentieth-century Reformed reassessments of the Supper one must conclude that providing such an overview would hardly be troublesome. To reiterate the sentiment expressed in the introduction, now in the words of Keith Mathison, "the Lord's Supper is rarely the subject of books or sermons."³³ Yet the authors that *have* devoted books, articles and chapters on the theme of reprioritizing the Lord's Supper seem to be unanimous in their solution: a closer reading of Calvin. To be sure, some rely more on Calvin than others, but that is an observation peripheral to our purposes. We argue that many recent attempts to reprioritize Communion *only* through theorizing about its proper ontology lack any real connection with the practice itself, whether they draw entirely on Calvin or less so.

³² Elsewhere Taylor calls this false epistemology Hydra, because its "serpentine heads wreak havoc throughout the intellectual culture of modernity—in science, in criticism, in ethics, in political thinking, almost anywhere you look" (*Philosophical Arguments* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995], vii).

³³ Keith A. Mathison, *Given for You: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), xv.

The Problem: The Manner and Frequency of Celebration

Let us first sketch the way in which these writers diagnose the situation of the role of the Lord's Supper in Protestant faith communities today. They refer to two problems related to the practice of the Lord's Supper: the manner of celebration and its frequency. First, many complain that the congregants and even pastors themselves do not take the Supper seriously. Thomas Davis relates a story about a Communion service during which an older gentleman said to his granddaughter: "This is more than I had for breakfast." Davis remembers initially agreeing, thinking that if the older man believed about the sacrament what Calvin had believed this was of course very much the truth. However, when the gentleman and his granddaughter burst into laughter, Davis concluded the reverse: the celebration is not taken seriously.³⁴ Concerning the lack of a certain *gravitas* Renihan similarly remarks the following:

In certain cases, it [Communion] is ignored or rejected as an antiquated rite. I once visited a mega-church where the elements were placed on three or four tables scattered around the auditorium, with a notice in the bulletin that if anyone felt the need of observing the Supper, they were free to do so on a self-serve basis! Sadly, we might fairly characterize most churches and Christians today as indifferent to the Supper.³⁵

Second, when describing the general malpractice of the Lord's Supper many also refer to the relatively few times it is celebrated per year. Some explicitly cite the low frequency as a problem; many more do so implicitly by calling for a more frequent (in many cases weekly) celebration.³⁶

³⁴ Thomas J. Davis, *This Is My Body: The Presence of Christ in Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 13. For a description of a similar experience see Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 113.

³⁵ Renihan, foreword, 12.

³⁶ Richard C. Barcellos, *The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace: More than a Memory* (Geanies House: Mentor, 2013), 111; J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 118; Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 165–69; Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 161; Mathison, *Given for You*, chap. 9; David K. Naugle, "On the

Zwinglianism and the Devaluation of the Lord's Supper

Part of the diagnosis typical of the recent interest in the Lord's Supper is the construal of the cause of the problems around the Lord's Supper as "Zwinglianism."³⁷ Some note that although Zwingli's position on the sacraments is not included in any of the leading Reformed confessions, many in the Reformed tradition and evangelical churches today view the Lord's Supper in Zwinglian terms.³⁸ More specifically, it is a diminished view of the efficacy of the Supper that is identified as the biggest problem. Furthermore, what is also noted as a cause of the problems is the shift from the primacy of God's action to human action in the celebration.

First, what is received during Communion, we are reminded, is the very flesh and blood of Christ. On this many Reformed authors agree with Lutherans and Roman Catholics. While we typically distinguish between Protestants and Roman Catholics when it comes to sacramentality, Leonard Vander Zee speaks for many of the Reformed when he writes that "the real divide is between those who hold sacraments to be mere signs and nothing more [i.e., Zwinglians], and those who hold them to be signs *and* seals, signs that bear and confirm God's

Liturgical Consummation of a Christian Worldview: Worldview, Worship and Way of Life," in *Thriving in Babylon: Essays in Honor of A. J. Conyers*, ed. David B. Capes and Daryl J. Charles (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 116; Renihan, foreword, 12; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 165.

³⁷ The distinction must be made between what Zwingli actually taught and that which came to be seen as Zwinglianism (i.e., memorialism). Certain points of contemporary Reformed criticism will be aimed at both, some only at the latter (whether they know it or not). For the Zwingli-Zwinglianism distinction see, for example, John W. Riggs, *The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Tradition: An Essay on the Mystical True Presence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 113–14.

³⁸ Barcellos, *The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace*, 25; J. Todd Billings, "Sacraments," in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 350; Michael Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 140; Mathison, *Given for You*, 260–67; Leonard J. Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper: Recovering the Sacraments for Evangelical Worship* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 31.

grace [i.e., Calvin and others].”³⁹ Therefore, Michael Horton points out, for Calvin “infrequent Communion is in effect . . . a withholding of Christ and his benefits from the covenant assembly.”⁴⁰ In contrast, Zwinglianism (i.e., memorialism) asserts that the Lord’s Supper points to the grace given through Jesus Christ and constitutes a vow of obedience in faith to him.⁴¹

For Horton, this difference between Calvin and Zwingli means approaching the Lord’s Supper either “as mediating God’s presence-in-action” (Calvin) or as “naked manifestation” (Zwingli).⁴² In the latter instance, the elements of bread and wine have become empty signs, providing merely an opportunity to remember. Many note the relation between a low view of the efficacy of the Lord’s Supper and its diminished role, because—in the words of R. C. Sproul—“its use tends to follow its perceived significance. When the sacrament is reduced to the level of a ‘naked sign’ or ‘nude symbol,’ its importance and its practice all but disappear from the life of the church.”⁴³ John Jefferson Davis remarks that “perhaps too many Christians do not experience a richer sense of communion with Christ at the table because their expectations are too low,”⁴⁴ writing elsewhere that “questions such as, why are we doing this? or, what do we get from Communion that we can’t get in a good sermon? may be present in the minds of many.”⁴⁵ In sum, a diminished view of what the Lord’s Supper effects leads both to infrequent communion and a lack of seriousness.

Second, and relatedly, viewing the Lord’s Supper primarily in terms of human action (Zwinglianism) rather than God’s action (Calvin) constitutes a further problematization. Vander Zee elaborates upon what he calls the “great divide” in terms of either seeing

³⁹ Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper*, 30. Cf. Billings, “Sacraments,” 252–53.

⁴⁰ Horton, *People and Place*, 137–38.

⁴¹ Riggs, *The Lord’s Supper in the Reformed Tradition*, 113.

⁴² Horton, *People and Place*, 137.

⁴³ R. C. Sproul, introduction to *Given for You: Reclaiming Calvin’s Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper*, by Keith A. Mathison (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), x.

⁴⁴ Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 151.

⁴⁵ Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 113–14.

the sacraments as congregational action, during which we *express* our faith to God (i.e., Zwinglianism), or Divine action, during which we *receive* grace from God (i.e., Calvin and others).⁴⁶ For Todd Billings this means that if one moves from a Calvinistic to a Zwinglian conception of the Supper “the centrality of Christ and his promise to nourish his people with himself is replaced with an emphasis on the response of believers.”⁴⁷ Billings refrains from explicitly deducing a causal link with the devaluation of the Lord’s Supper, although it is clear he finds a Zwinglian emphasis on the congregational act to be problematic. Horton, however, does explicitly link the latter to infrequent celebration of the Lord’s Supper:

One’s view of the efficacy of Communion largely determines one’s views concerning frequency. It is not surprising that a more Zwinglian approach, which emphasizes the subjectivity of the believer and the community, will yield a more introspective eucharistic practice. To the extent that the Supper is considered a divine gift, its frequent celebration is likely to be affirmed.⁴⁸

The focus on the participant rather than on the work of God, Horton submits, has led to the abuse of I Corinthians 11:28–29: “Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself” (ESV). The Zwinglian-inclined have taken this to mean a call for meticulous self-examination, to see whether they are worthy to participate. The result, Horton writes, is that “instead of celebrating the foretaste of the marriage supper of the Lamb on Mount Zion, we are still trembling at the foot of Mount Sinai. It is no wonder, then, that there is a diminished interest in frequent communion.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper*, 31. Cf. Billings, “Sacraments,” 350; Horton, *People and Place*, 138.

⁴⁷ Billings, “Sacraments,” 350.

⁴⁸ Horton, *People and Place*, 137.

⁴⁹ Horton, *God of Promise*, 157–61, here 160–61.

Although many agree with Horton that “the Supper is a means of grace for the weak, not a reward for the strong,”⁵⁰ they do not all point the finger toward Zwinglianism. Richard C. Barcellos, although he often refers to Horton, simply asserts that because it is a means of grace the Lord’s Supper should be accompanied not only by reverence, but also by hope and joy; Davis remarks that already in Augustine we find an inclination toward introspectiveness which affected the medieval Communion experience and was not really overcome by the Reformers; Billings, however, pointing to an inappropriate focus on the participant, seems to place the issue in the larger context of the Reformed tendency to overintellectualize the Lord’s Supper.⁵¹

The Proposed Solution: Calvin

As it has become evident in the discussion above, the most important solution to the two problems of manner and frequency is adopting a Calvinistic take on the Lord’s Supper instead of the Zwinglian take. In short, a Calvinistic approach to the Supper combats the problems, we are told, through making the sacrament instrumental to spiritual health and stressing God’s action. We now turn to the particulars as to why, according to the authors, Calvin’s conception provides a solution to the problems and why it avoids Zwinglianism’s mistakes.

Throughout, the authors point to the matter-spirit dualism that underpins the wrong (i.e., explicitly or implicitly Zwinglian) view on the Supper. Horton quotes Zwingli saying that “faith springs not from things accessible to sense nor are they objects of faith,” and faith “draws us to the invisible and fixes all our hopes on that. For it dwelleth not amidst the sensible and bodily, and hath nothing in common therewith.”⁵² Horton adds that it is fortunate that Zwingli was not consistent in this, otherwise he would have thought preaching

⁵⁰ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 819.

⁵¹ Barcellos, *The Lord’s Supper as a Means of Grace*, 110; Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 119; Billings, “Sacraments,” 357–61.

⁵² Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religion*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller, trans. Samuel Macauley Jackson (Durham: Labyrinth Press, 1981), 214, quoted in Horton, *People and Place*, 125.

ineffective or inappropriate as means as well.⁵³ Vander Zee is the most articulate when he writes that Protestantism's apathy toward the sacraments is due to "an inherent dualism—or worse, what Philip Lee calls Protestant gnosticism."⁵⁴

Calvin, we are told, works against this dualism. As mentioned above, the Reformed authors agree with both Lutherans and Roman Catholics that what is received during Communion is the actual body of Christ. Thomas Davis complains that while

Calvin himself has often been characterized as a theologian of the Word, and he was, there was much more to Calvin's thought than some barren understanding of 'Word.' Indeed, Calvin thought that Christ, bodily, was given in the Word and the Sacrament; he believed that the bodily mediation of Christ was essential to the Christian's salvation.⁵⁵

Davis argues that Calvin has been falsely accused of dualism and disrespect for the bodily dimension of existence. To the contrary, it is a miracle, he observes, that despite Calvin's own pain and suffering he did *not* become a full-blown dualist and fought against spiritualistic inclinations.⁵⁶ Similarly, James K. A. Smith questions Taylor's judgment that Calvin was primarily a theologian of the Word and neglected the Lord's Supper. "However," he writes, "this is certainly true of the de-sacramentalized heirs of Calvin following Zwingli, etc."⁵⁷ As mentioned above, Billings views both the preached Word and the sacraments as "accommodations to our bodily existence," arguing that the language of Article 33 of the Belgic Confession—that because of our "weakness and infirmities" the sacraments are given⁵⁸—suggests God has provided in this way not because of our sinful nature but because of our human nature. Billings brings home this point by noting Calvin's remark that already in Genesis, before

⁵³ Horton, *People and Place*, 125.

⁵⁴ Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper*, 24, referring to Philip Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁵⁵ Davis, *This Is My Body*, 16.

⁵⁶ Davis, *This Is My Body*, 79–83.

⁵⁷ James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 39n10.

⁵⁸ See footnote 10 above.

the Fall, we find God accommodating to humanity in the tree of life. Consequently, God's accommodation "is not just an 'object lesson' to illustrate a verbal point. It is profoundly appropriate for who we are as creatures."⁵⁹ Vander Zee similarly argues that the sacraments are not "show-and-tell lessons."⁶⁰ He makes the observation that by virtue of our very bodily existence our relationship with Christ cannot just be brought about by words: "We need things."⁶¹

Finally, and relatedly, another way Calvin combats dualism and spiritualism is thought to be his actual ontological theorizing about the way the elements of bread and wine relate to the body of Christ. Namely, what is received is nothing less than the body of Christ: the sacrament is not an empty sign. On this point, Calvin agrees with Lutherans and Roman Catholics. Yet he tries to steer away from Roman Catholic transubstantiation and Lutheran consubstantiation. Calvin's road does not lead to Rome (or Wittenberg). He, we are told, held to a Spirit-enabled feeding on the actual body of Christ, through our mystical union with him. Riggs calls Calvin's position "symbolic instrumentalism" as "the nourishment happens because of the signs themselves—through the signs—because God has given them this ministry."⁶² Like Berkouwer many note that Calvin, in the words of Riggs, walks "the keen edge between too closely identifying sign and reality [i.e., the Roman Catholic and Lutheran positions] and too distantly separating sign and reality [i.e., Zwinglianism's position]."⁶³

Toward Reprioritizing the Lord's Supper

What are the next steps toward prioritizing the Lord's Supper anew? How may we start to deal with both the infrequency and manner of celebration? More specifically, in light of the section above, how does one Calvinize the Supper? The most important answer to

⁵⁹ Billings, "Sacraments," 343.

⁶⁰ Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper*, 11.

⁶¹ Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper*, 24.

⁶² Riggs, *The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Tradition*, 113. The term "symbolic instrumentalism" comes from Brian Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 128.

⁶³ Riggs, *The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Tradition*, 110. Cf. Horton, *God of Promise*, 157; Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 129.

this question constitutes the above section, that is, the exposition of correct Communion ontology is the key. Implicitly or explicitly the authors mentioned above provide as a solution the teaching and explication of a Calvinistic theology of the Supper over against the wrong (often Zwinglian) view. To be fair, the authors may not have intended to provide (more) practical solutions in writing their pieces. Yet their polemic against malpractice and wrong views of the Supper entails a clear solution: a closer reading of Calvin. In sum, if pastors want to transform the local Communion practice, we are told, they should simply teach Calvin's view.

Illustrative of this type of response are Barcellos's *The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace* and Davis's *Worship and the Reality of God*. The first is the result of the General Assembly of the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America asking Barcellos to address the topic. He understands his audience to be pastors and students and finds himself guided by the following question: "How is the Lord's Supper a means of grace?"⁶⁴ From the start the book is aimed at providing a Communion ontology rather than anything else. Yet at the end of the book, under the heading "practical and pastoral implications,"⁶⁵ Barcellos seems to venture into helping pastors instill a proper take on the Lord's Supper in the local congregation. At least, that is what a heading such as this one suggests. First, Barcellos submits, the Supper is a means of grace and not just a memory. It is a means through which we are nourished by Christ: "The people of God need to know this and be reminded of it often."⁶⁶ Second, because this is so, "we ought to think seriously about the corporate attitude or climate during the Supper."⁶⁷ Barcellos suggests we should be more joyful, celebrating the gift that is Christ. Third, infrequent Communion does not suffice. If the Supper is a means of grace, we ought to partake frequently.⁶⁸ Finally, because the Supper relates to the past, the present and the future, we would do well to draw attention to these aspects.⁶⁹ These four points are well made, but except for Barcellos's insistence on

⁶⁴ Barcellos, *The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace*, 16.

⁶⁵ Barcellos, *The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace*, 107.

⁶⁶ Barcellos, *The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace*, 108.

⁶⁷ Barcellos, *The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace*, 108.

⁶⁸ Barcellos, *The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace*, 111–13.

⁶⁹ Barcellos, *The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace*, 113–14.

more frequent celebration, the “practical and pastoral implications” seem not to really touch the Communion praxis itself. The first point is more of a summary of the book; the second raises the question: What does it mean to be more joyful during Communion? And the fourth point is like the first: it says something about what the Lord’s Supper is and not so much about the way the Communion service is observed next Sunday morning.

Davis’s book sets out to retrieve a sense of God’s real presence in the worship service. A major part of his proposal constitutes the reprioritization of the Lord’s Supper. Through historical, theological, and philosophical shifts we have somehow lost the awareness of the very presence of Christ at the Table. The way back, Davis submits, is the recovery of several insights including a correct understanding of (1) remembrance and participation, (2) Christ’s presence at the post-Easter Table gatherings in the New Testament, (3) the celebrant’s *unio mystica* with Christ, (4) atonement as marital (i.e., invoking the image of marriage) and (5) the way matter and spirit relate.⁷⁰ Similar to Barcellos’s comments, these are all insights about proper Communion ontology, about *what is*. Davis acknowledges this as the last chapter of his book is entitled “From Ontology to Doxology: From Theory to Practice in Worship Renewal.” He suggests “concrete ways” in which his understanding of real presence in worship, including the Lord’s Supper, can be put into practice.⁷¹ He develops this application along two lines:

first, some ideas on the teaching of the new ontological way of understanding biblical worship; second, more specific recommendations on how the new paradigm can be implemented in terms of an order of service, liturgy, music, spiritual gifts, visual arts and the celebration of the Eucharist. In some ways, the first element—the teaching of the new paradigm for worship to the congregation—is the really critical piece from which the specific steps of implementation can flow.⁷²

It is this last sentence that sums it up. He provides admittedly helpful ways to go about educating any given congregation on the reality of

⁷⁰ Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 137–55.

⁷¹ Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 171.

⁷² Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 171.

God in worship. These include teaching moments during and outside of the Sunday morning gatherings. Additionally, he suggests ways to transform the liturgy by introducing “an ancient-modern blended worship style,”⁷³ through which the new understanding of worship is manifested. Yet except for suggesting to use one solid, elegant cup or cups (instead of cheap plastic cups) and real loaves of bread, and opting for a certain table placement, he leaves the Lord’s Supper untouched. Davis simply refrains from speaking about what it looks like to fully *embody* the new paradigm during Communion.⁷⁴

Other Voices: Word and Mind

Before we come to the end of this section on contemporary Reformed attempts at reprioritizing and Calvinizing the Lord’s Supper, we first touch on other important streams of thought that are present in some of the authors. We do so now in order to facilitate the transition into an analysis and critique of the aforementioned, because some parts of this minority report relate to our analysis and critique below.

Several authors blame the emphasis on the sermon for the general disinterest in the Lord’s Supper. Some do so implicitly, as an aside without elaborating, while others make this critique more prominent. Among the latter we find David K. Naugle, who argues that the Reformed have gone too far in their correction of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox reading of *Lex orandi est lex credendi et agendi* (“the rule of prayer is the rule of belief and action”), which, for them, means that worship generates belief and praxis. The Reformed, by emphasizing the Word, have made *lex credendi* primary and as a result “their liturgy [including the Supper] is impoverished.”⁷⁵ According to Davis an important culprit is Charles Finney’s nineteenth-century pragmatism, which emphasized exciting preaching and neglected other service elements such as the Supper.⁷⁶ Vander Zee agrees and argues that because we have overemphasized the sermon “the

⁷³ Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 171.

⁷⁴ Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 205.

⁷⁵ Naugle, “On the Liturgical Consummation of a Christian Worldview,” 103–4.

⁷⁶ Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 134–35.

sacraments have become mere occasional props.”⁷⁷ Even Horton admits something along these lines when he notes Karl Deddens’s two reasons why the Supper has been neglected in the church, namely, the previously mentioned introspective pietism *and* “the inordinate length of an overly didactic form, which undermines the festive character of the sacrament.”⁷⁸ Yet for Horton the latter is only a problem insofar as it relates to the former; he nowhere elaborates upon this single sentence.

Relatedly, Billings argues that the Reformed tend to overintellectualize the Lord’s Supper by implicitly or explicitly suggesting that Paul’s call for self-examination insists on a certain cognitive maturation. As we have seen above, Billings is not alone in his critique of the abuse of the 1 Corinthians 11:27–29 passage, yet he takes matters a step further when he accepts, under certain conditions, the idea of paedocommunion. First Corinthians 11 does not provide us with a list of qualifications but with a caution against abuse:

God uses faith as an instrument for us to receive his promises. But if we overintellectualize what is involved in this faith presupposed in 1 Corinthians 11:27–29—using the standard that neither believing children nor persons with cognitive impairments can meet—then we have decentered the central reality of the sacrament itself: that the Triune God has united together unworthy sinners into one baptized body, having fellowship with Jesus Christ and one another at the supper.⁷⁹

He then refers to Martha Moore-Keish, who has pointed out the Reformed inclination to reduce the Supper to the enactment of intellectual belief, instead of celebration of our communion with God. In *Do This in Remembrance of Me* she argues that within the Reformed community a shift has taken place from encounter to interpretation. Reflecting the Reformers’ insistence on right belief in relation to liturgy we have come to see Communion as “a secondary acting out of

⁷⁷ Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper*, 24.

⁷⁸ Horton, *God of Promise*, 161. Throughout this section he refers to Karl Deddens, *Where Everything Points to Him*, trans. Theodore Plantinga (Neerlandia, AB: Inheritance Publications, 1993).

⁷⁹ Billings, “Sacraments,” 360. Mathison too starts a discussion on paedocommunion (*Given for You*, chap. 9).

a prior theology.”⁸⁰ Moore-Keish objects to this view of the Supper for several reasons. For one, any given celebration of the Lord’s Supper contains much more than any catechetical definition can provide.⁸¹ Concomitantly, she points out that ritual in and of itself is not merely enactment of already-formed belief. Belief does not merely originate in the mind, because “what we do impacts the way we think, and not just the other way around.”⁸² Rituals shape our beliefs.

Paradoxically, while pointing to the relevance of the actual ritual for theological reflection, her proposal for a new approach to the Lord’s Supper is primarily intellectual. She too argues that a proper reading of Calvin shows the way forward. According to her, Calvin stressed that Communion was just that, communion: a uniting with Christ and the other participants.⁸³ The Supper is not a moment of individual contemplative piety, she submits, rather “we need to take more seriously the event of the eucharist as a location for the activity of God.”⁸⁴ And this means we ought to pay more attention to the ritual itself and its particular features. Because even the group of people that holds to a pietistic version of the Supper, “the group that articulates a separation of meaning and doing, that separates interpretation from practice, depends on and favors a particular set of practices, and a history of such practices.”⁸⁵ They for example favor slow, contemplative music and as little physical action as possible so as to facilitate introspection. Moore-Keish thus argues that to change one’s view of the Supper the particular practices themselves need to be adjusted accordingly.

⁸⁰ Martha L. Moore-Keish, *Do This in Remembrance of Me: A Ritual Approach to Reformed Eucharistic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 10.

⁸¹ Moore-Keish, *Do This in Remembrance of Me*, 9. Cf. Naugle, “On the Liturgical Consummation of a Christian Worldview,” 117–18. Naugle provides here a list of twenty things the Lord’s Supper contributes to the church’s identity.

⁸² Moore-Keish, *Do This in Remembrance of Me*, 11.

⁸³ Moore-Keish, *Do This in Remembrance of Me*, 37–38.

⁸⁴ Moore-Keish, *Do This in Remembrance of Me*, 143.

⁸⁵ Moore-Keish, *Do This in Remembrance of Me*, 137.

An Analysis and Critique

What we have done so far is exposit an important thrust of the contemporary attempt among the Reformed to reprioritize the Lord's Supper. We have also noted a smaller current of thought present in some of these writers. We will now analyze and critique the section above in light of Taylor's criticism. To reiterate, we pointed to three interrelated issues in Taylor relevant for our present purposes: disenchantment, the buffered self and mediational epistemology. Two issues will be addressed: the adequacy of the provided solutions and the use of Calvin.

The Issue of Mere Theorization

A first issue that comes to the fore is that the majority of the writers above either implicitly or explicitly suggest that preaching and teaching the proper theology of the Lord's Supper suffices in dealing with the devaluation of the sacrament. Other than promoting more frequent celebration, and perhaps the usage of one cup, real bread and a table, it seems that further explorations on practical issues are not present. However, if Taylor is right in his critique, this way forward seems to be insufficient at best and dangerous at worst.

First, mere theorization as solution is insufficient to deal with the devaluation of the Lord's Supper. Taylor argues that explicit knowledge will only affect the way we imagine (i.e., perceive and deal with reality at the pretheoretical level) insofar it is carried out in practice. Correspondingly, if a pastor of a local church wants to transform the congregation's perception of the Lord's Supper, merely teaching the new view is not enough. Preaching and teaching alone will simply not suffice. This dimension of the way we learn things seems to be forgotten by many of the writers mentioned above. Instead, they implicitly endorse the mediational epistemology that Taylor rejects.

Yet, there are those in the Reformed community that likewise reject the mediational epistemology and concomitant pedagogy. James K. A. Smith is such a writer. He has become well known in evangelical and Reformed circles for his appropriation of Taylor's notion of social imaginary. He writes:

There is an understanding of the world that is carried in and implicit in the practices of religious worship and devotion. These rituals form the imagination of a people who thus

construe their world as a particular kind of environment based on the formation implicit in such practices. In just this sense Christianity is a unique social imaginary that “inhabits” and emerges from the matrix of preaching and prayer. The rhythms and rituals of Christian worship are not the “expression of” a Christian worldview, but are themselves an “understanding” implicit in practice—an understanding that cannot be had *apart from* the practices. It’s not that we start with beliefs and doctrine and then come up with worship practices that properly “express” these (cognitive) beliefs; rather, we begin with worship, and articulated beliefs bubble up from there. “Doctrines” are the cognitive, theoretical articulation of what we “understand” when we pray.⁸⁶

One of the things Smith points out here is a mistaken pedagogy. With Taylor, he argues we are not primarily thinking-beings, but that we first and foremost deal with the world at the level of the noncognitive imagination. This imagination is primarily fueled by our bodily praxis, because it is the latter that carries the understanding. Consequently, for Smith our understanding of the Lord’s Supper cannot be reduced to a mere prior theorization of the sacrament:

The distillation of the Christian worldview in terms of creation-fall-redemption-and-consummation can never adequately grasp what is *understood* when we participate in communion and eat the body of Christ, broken for the renewal of a broken world. And such an understanding is the condition of possibility for any later “knowledge.”⁸⁷

To treat church members as if they were, in Smith’s words, “brains-on-a-stick”⁸⁸ is therefore reductionistic and counterproductive. Recall in this regard also the brief discussion on Moore-Keish’s work. She has shown that a particular view on the Supper is always accompanied by a preferred collection of particular practices. For example, in her study she found that those who favored a pietistic version of the

⁸⁶ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 68–70.

⁸⁷ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 70.

⁸⁸ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 3.

Supper also favored certain practices, including slow, contemplative music and as little physical movement as possible so as to facilitate self-examination. Attending to the specific features of the celebration is key, then, in transforming a congregation's perception. Most writers mentioned above neglect the importance of embodied practices; they forget that "what we do impacts the way we think, and not just the other way around."⁸⁹ Yet, Smith and Moore-Keish show that there are resources available within the Reformed fold to address this.

Second, mere theorization as solution is not only insufficient, but also potentially dangerous. Taylor argues that the early modern adherence to the buffered self and its corollary, a mediational epistemology, has prepared the way for the disenchantment of the world and thus the spread of atheism. The new anthropology of the buffered self enabled us to perceive ourselves as capable to protect ourselves from "the outside," whether good or bad. Furthermore, it allowed us to start thinking about life in terms of autonomy. The mediational epistemology builds upon this anthropology, positing a sharp boundary between our "inside" mind and the "outside" world. So far from being a neutral stance, it has empowered us to become, in a sense, masters of our own fate. In this light, accepting the self as buffered and insisting on a mediational theory of knowledge seems to be a quintessentially skeptic or atheist move. Yet most writers mentioned above implicitly assume this stance when they suggest that to change someone's view is to change his or her mind. The bodily aspect of our existence seems to be neglected, thus contributing to a continuation of the process of excarnation.

Thus ironically, while these writers critique Zwinglianism's apparent mind-body dualism and argue that a Calvinistic take on the Supper makes sure that we attend to our bodily nature—recall Vander Zee's "we need things"⁹⁰—they seem to implicitly endorse the modern epistemological and anthropological stance that states that the mind is primary and the body secondary. Now, here too we note several voices from within the Reformed community that speak against the implicit endorsement of modernistic sympathies. For example, Naugle calls for a reprioritization of liturgy, arguing that the Word has become too important. Vander Zee and John Jefferson Davis likewise argue

⁸⁹ Moore-Keish, *Do This in Remembrance of Me*, 11.

⁹⁰ Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper*, 24.

that the sermon has become too central in today's services. Billings, following Moore-Keish, speaks of the overintellectualization of the Lord's Supper.⁹¹ However, they refrain from turning to the details of the set of practices that have sustained the priority of Word over liturgy and thus Communion. So while they acknowledge part of the issue, they do not seem to provide concrete ways of going forward.

Problematizing Calvin

As we have seen above, a strong distinction between an allegedly Zwinglian and Calvinist view of the Lord's Supper plays an important role in recent contributions to revitalizing the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the Reformed tradition. In this distinction, Zwingli is on the negative side of the spectrum, while Calvin symbolizes the way to go. Presupposing that Calvin is the primary anchor point for the Reformed tradition, this opposition suggests that the Reformed tradition is basically right when it comes to its view of the Lord's Supper, but that it has been influenced by a Zwinglian residue that is alien to it.

Diagnostically, the suggestion that Calvin is the primary anchor point also implies that the Reformed tradition broadly speaking is not affected by the problems that we experience concerning the spirituality of the Lord's Supper.

However, if this common claim is not correct, then the diagnosis of the problem will undergo a change as well, because it would imply that more serious interventions in the Reformed doctrine of the Lord's Supper are necessary than commonly suggested. We do indeed think that this is the case. The reason is that what is commonly called "Zwinglian" is in fact very much present in the Reformed tradition from the beginning, and particularly in Calvin.

To begin with, historically speaking, it must be noted that it is quite anachronistic to regard John Calvin as the father of the Reformed tradition, because this was in fact not true for most of the history of the Reformed tradition. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,

⁹¹ Naugle, "On the Liturgical Consummation of a Christian Worldview," 103–4; Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper*, 24; Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 134–35; Billings, "Sacraments," 357–61.

Calvin was not a prominent figure in Reformed theology.⁹² By appealing to Calvin's authority so easily and one-sidedly, some of the theologians discussed above subscribe to this anachronism uncritically.

Also, recent historical Calvin scholarship has shown that Calvin's view of the Lord's Supper is more complicated and ambiguous than most authors discussed above suggest. Church historian Wim Janse has shown that Calvin's view of the Lord's Supper is unstable throughout his career, with strong spiritualizing tendencies on the one hand, and shifts toward a stronger view of real presence on the other.⁹³ In fact, these two tendencies are already present in the first version of the *Institutes*, where at times he sounds very spiritualizing, while at the same time staying away from Zwingli and affirming real presence.⁹⁴ Janse has made an attempt to link the particular shifts in Calvin's accounts of the Lord's Supper with specific debates in which he was involved. It seems that when he was involved in conversation with Lutherans, he moved toward their side, and when he was involved in a debate with the more Zwinglian-oriented Reformers, he emphasized notions that appealed to them.

This historical debate would be of limited importance if it had no consequences for the nature of the theological diagnosis of the problems concerning the spirituality of the Lord's Supper in the Reformed tradition. If spiritualizing tendencies are indeed present throughout the theology of the Lord's Supper in the Reformed tradition, there may be something at stake with that tradition that is much less easily corrected than through an appeal to its alleged protagonist John Calvin.

⁹² Cf. for example, Richard A. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), chap. 1.

⁹³ Wim Janse, "Calvin's Eucharistic Theology: Three Dogma-Historical Observations," in *Calvinus Sacrarum Literarum Interpres: Papers of the International Congress on Calvin Research*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 27–69.

⁹⁴ John Calvin, *Institution of the Christian Religion (1536)*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), IV.1, 24, 25, 28–30.

Suggestions for Future Research and Preliminary Results

Indeed, we think the question of why the Lord's Supper became of secondary importance in Reformed theology is more complicated than the recent discussion in American theology suggests. Although it can be argued that Taylor and others' strong connection between disenchantment and the Reformation is exaggerated, nevertheless, Taylor and others have a point. There is a strand of thought in Christianity, probably starting with the New Testament, particularly the Johannine and Pauline traditions, in which the believer's relationship with God is primarily situated in one's "mental assent" to the Gospel. This strand may be construed more broadly as embracing God in Jesus Christ from the center of one's existence, often termed *the heart*. This line already influenced Augustine's view of the Eucharist, at least part of his work on this theme.⁹⁵ In this respect, it is not surprising that in his earlier major work *Sources of the Self*, Taylor draws a connection between the birth of the subject and the work of Augustine.⁹⁶ Augustine can already make the point very emphatically with the phrase "We do not run to Christ with our feet, but in faith, not with the motion of our body, but with the will of our heart we come to him," when he deals with our participation in the thing signified by the sacrament.⁹⁷

In its critique of the externalization of the Christian faith, the Reformation reinforced a development of radical Augustinianism starting already in the late Middle Ages. After the Reformation, stimulated by movements such as Pietism and Romanticism, the emphasis on the subject has only become stronger, with a radical disenchantment of our material context as a consequence. What is at stake in an attempt to address the problems around the celebration of the Lord's Supper is much more than just a simple appeal to Calvin as the alleged father of the Reformed tradition.

⁹⁵ Pamela Jackson, "Eucharist," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 330–34.

⁹⁶ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), chap. 7.

⁹⁷ Augustine, *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus*, 26,3, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* (Paris: Migne, 1845) 35, col. 1608.

What is at stake is also much more than the development of an intellectual view of the true meaning of the Lord's Supper. Concrete practices need to be addressed but they also need to contribute to the development of intellectual reflection. A proper view of the Lord's Supper is a view which contributes to true practices. Having to contribute to true practices could well mean that there are multiple proper views and also multiple proper practices. Neither a purely empirical nor a purely intellectual account of the Lord's Supper will suffice. What we need is an account of how concrete practices of and past and present intellectual reflection on the Lord's Supper work together. Consequently, we need both theoretical and practical proposals for changing our current practices that are inspired by the dynamics among authority, theory, and practice; and to explore the paths traced out by the Spirit from the past, in the present, and toward the future.

We have written this article as part of the process of diagnosing the theological and practical problems around the Lord's Supper. We try to learn from developments in the American context and contribute to it critically. Of course, we understand that this approach raises the question of how to do more than simply propose Calvin as a solution. We have to admit that we are still exploring how to do better, primarily through a more thorough diagnosis of what the causes of our problems are. We have found a few themes for research that we think will open up useful ways forward, both theologically and practically. Often, theology and practice hang together. We will mention these themes here, albeit only briefly.

Theological Issues

In the Reformed tradition, at least in the Netherlands, the *Heidelberg Catechism* has an enormous influence. A common interpretation of its treatment of the "means of grace" suggests that the Holy Spirit works grace through the preaching of the Gospel and strengthens it through the use of the sacraments. Many interpret this approach as implying a secondary role for the sacraments, as they are not indispensable to salvation. This group includes well-known Reformed theologians such

as Gisbertus Voetius⁹⁸ and Herman Bavinck.⁹⁹ This tendency seems to have reinforced a secondary status for the sacraments, primarily the Lord's Supper (or certainly in a different way than for Baptism). Related to secondary status of the Lord's Supper is the question of how Calvin's pneumatological view of Christ's presence in the sacrament was received in the later tradition. There are reasons to believe that its influence became strong only in neo-Calvinism.¹⁰⁰

Additionally, we think present-day Reformed theology may benefit from a renewed appropriation and assessment of the results of the Liturgical Movement. As Berkouwer's discussion of Van der Leeuw shows, Van der Leeuw's view of the relationship between Word and Sacrament was seen by Berkouwer as a major shift away from the Reformed tradition, and was generally rejected by the more traditional Reformed communities in Europe. This result was not surprising, as it was promoted with much force by proponents of the Liturgical Movement, appealing to a historical reconstruction of the earliest forms of Christian worship. However, things have changed considerably in the last few decades. A reassessment is needed because on the one hand, the historical basis underlying the principles of the Liturgical Movement is being challenged.¹⁰¹ Also the twentieth-century traditional Reformed response to it was quite strongly determined by confessional prejudices that might no longer be so strongly

⁹⁸ Gisbertus Voetius, *Voetius' catechisatie over den Heidelbergschen Catechismus: naar Poudroyen's editie van 1662 op nieuw uitgegeven, bij ons publiek ingeleid, en met enkele aantekeningen voorzien*, ed. Abraham Kuiper (Rotterdam: Gebroeders Hoge, 1891), 610–13.

⁹⁹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 4:479, 569; Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, 2nd ed. (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1911), 4:523, 634.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Maarten Wisse, "Christ's Presence through the Spirit in the Holy Supper: Retrieving Abraham Kuiper," in *The Spirit Is Moving: New Pathways in Pneumatology*, ed. Gijsbert van den Brink, Eveline van Staalduine-Sulman, and Maarten Wisse (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 331–45.

¹⁰¹ Gerard Rouwhorst, "Historical Periods as Normative Sources. The Appeal to the Past in the Research on Liturgical History," in *Religious Identity and the Problem of Historical Foundation: The Foundational Character of Authoritative Sources in the History of Christianity and Judaism*, ed. Judith Frishman, Willemien Otten, and Gerard Rouwhorst (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 495–512.

held today. A constructively critical reassessment of the Liturgical Movement might enrich the Reformed tradition without giving up its strengths.

One of the issues emerging from the Liturgical Movement is a very basic question that the Reformed tradition raises with regard to the nature of Christian worship. For all sorts of reasons, worship in the Reformed tradition is strongly determined by a receptive and experiential attitude toward worship. The strong resistance against works righteousness and synergism in the Reformed tradition reinforced this. Grace comes from God, through hearing the sermon and receiving the sacraments. The receptive aspects of Christian worship take center stage in the Reformed tradition, whereas a cooperative model is more characteristic of the Roman Catholic view of worship and the ecumenical tradition based on the Liturgical Movement. The Liturgical Movement has explicitly attempted to rediscover the eucharistic and sacrificial aspects of Christian worship,¹⁰² but to limited avail among Protestants. It will take considerable theological effort to integrate these two models convincingly so that they stop being two separate views and instead become a robust part of Christian spirituality and praxis.

Practical Issues

Practically, we would like to start with the question of celebrating the Lord's Supper outside of the Sunday worship service. In the Netherlands, there is an increasing number of (particularly young) believers who celebrate the Lord's Supper on their own, in the circle of the family, Bible reading groups or in schools, with but often also without an ordained minister. Apart from all sorts of theological objections which may be brought forward against this practice, it shows a lively interest in the celebration of the Lord's Supper and it raises the question of what the "scalability" of the Lord's Supper has to offer for its spirituality.¹⁰³ In other words, is the secondary role of the Lord's Supper for Christian spirituality reinforced by the

¹⁰² Cf. Maarten Wisse et al., "Promoting Priestly Christianity: The Role of Scripture in Max Thurian's *The Eucharistic Memorial*," 2019, in preparation.

¹⁰³ Cf. Maarten Wisse and Fabian Eikelboom, "Alle gelovigen zijn gelijk, maar sommigen meer dan anderen: Een verkenning van de relatie tussen avondmaal en ambt," *Kerk en Theologie* 68, no. 1 (2017): 64–83.

fact that it is only celebrated in Sunday worship services? Part of the success of the ritual of Bible reading since the Reformation might be seen in its scalability. It can be practiced at every social stratum: the congregation, smaller groups, schools, up to individual reading.

The issue of scalability also relates to another practical ecclesiological question: Is the size of our congregations really fitting for a fruitful celebration of the Lord's Supper? Ordinary human experience shows us that meals where hundreds of people are present are often not the most intimate ways of being together. Also linked to this point is the question of whether the Lord's Supper is actually experienced as a meal or not at all, and to what extent this matters theologically and also experientially. The same goes for the experience of being together as members of the body of Christ. Many believers say that they do not experience this reality during worship, although theology tells us that it is an integral part of it.

It is perhaps significant that we mention the frequency of celebrating the Lord's Supper only at the very end of this list of issues that need more attention. Whereas the mode of the Lord's presence is the premier theological issue, the frequency of celebration of the sacrament is the leading practical one. It seems much of the discussion on the Lord's Supper in Reformed theology has been restricted to these two issues. We think this is to be lamented. Even in Protestant circles in Europe, where frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper was pushed strongly as part of the Liturgical Movement during the second half of the twentieth century, promoting frequent celebration was largely unsuccessful in the vast majority of congregations. Even if frequent celebration remains our goal, we have to find the theological and practical reasons that keep believers away from frequent celebration. Otherwise, that goal will never be reached.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ We would like to thank Dr. Karin Maag for her comments on an earlier version of this article.

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