

Celebrating the Lord's Supper in the Netherlands

Jasper Bosman

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Secretary

IRiLiS
De Boelelaan 1105
1081 HV Amsterdam
PO Box 7161
1007 MC Amsterdam
Phone: +31 20 598 57 16
Email: irilis@pthu.nl

Orders

Centre for Religion and Heritage
Oude Boteringestraat 38
9712 GK Groningen
Phone: +31 50 363 45 87
Email: crh@rug.nl

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THEOLOGISCHE UNIVERSITEIT VAN DE GEREFORMEERDE KERKEN
IN NEDERLAND TE KAMPEN

Celebrating the Lord's Supper in the Netherlands

A Study of Liturgical Ritual Practice in Dutch Reformed Churches

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Jasper Adelbert Geert Bosman

Promotores

Prof. dr. J.H.F. Schaeffer

Prof. dr. M. Barnard (Protestant Theological University, Amsterdam)

Leden beoordelingscommissie

Prof. dr. E.A. de Boer

Prof. dr. M.J. Kater (Apeldoorn Theological University)

Prof. dr. J.D. Witvliet (Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, MI)

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Abbreviations

BC Belgic Confession (1561).

BEM Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry (1982).

CanRC Canadian & American Reformed Churches.

CD Canons of Dort (1618-19).

CRC Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands
= *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*.

DOE Commission for Consultation on Unity
= *Deputaten Overleg Eenheid*.

EKD Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland.

ESV English Standard Version (2001).

HC Heidelberg Catechism (1563).

M Moderator (of an interview).

NIV New International Version (1978).

NKJV New King James Version (1982).

NOSTER Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion = *Nederlandse Onderzoekschool voor Theologie en Religiewetenschap*.

ÖAK Ökumenische Arbeitskreis evangelischer und katholischer Theologen.

PCN Protestant Church in the Netherlands
= *Protestantse Kerk in Nederland*.

QA Question & Answer (subsection in the Heidelberg Catechism).

R Respondent (interviewee).

RCL Reformed Churches Liberated in the Netherlands
= *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (vrijgemaakt)*.

RCS Regulation on the Church Services
= *Generale regeling voor de kerkdiensten*.

RD Reformatorisch Dagblad.

RvK Dutch Council of Churches
= *Raad van Kerken in Nederland*.

VSNU Association of Universities in the Netherlands
= *Vereniging van universiteiten*.

WCC World Council of Churches.

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“Let us rejoice and give Him the glory,
for the marriage feast of the Lamb is coming!”

Several years ago, I dove into a practice of the Christian faith as I could never have imagined before. Not only did I encounter many different church services, congregation members, and ministers, I also came upon even more books and other sources on the topic of this study: the Lord’s Supper. Some of these sources proved so special, that it would be unfair not to mention them. Here I will give two examples. My dissertation research was what led me to buy and view Ingmar Bergman’s *Nattvards-gästerna* (lit. “Communion Guests,” 1963), a movie that depicts the celebration of the Lord’s Supper from the perspective of a tormented Lutheran minister in a remote, Swedish village. I also read Ewoud Gosker’s *Avondmaalsgangers* (“Communicants,” 1988), a collection of poetry on the perception of various people who partake in the Lord’s Supper: ministers, elderly people, an adolescent, a widow, a gay man, an elder, the elder’s wife, a couple without children, a mother of eight, a new congregation member, etc. If I look back from where I am now, I see that I have met all of Gosker’s communicants in person, and even others yet. Therefore, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to them—to the congregants and ministers who were so kind as to share their thoughts and feelings on this topic.

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All he/him references in this thesis are interchangeable with she/her, unless indicated otherwise. Whenever multiple works are cited in footnotes, they are listed by year of publication, in ascending order. To clarify the order of publication, I regularly mentioned the year of appearance in parentheses when multiple works were cited.

I would like to conclude by quoting Andrei Tarkovsky’s words of dedication in *Offret* (1986): “*med hopp och förtröstan*” (with hope and consolation).

Jasper Bosman
Utrecht, summer 2019

Chapter 1

Introduction

The celebration of the Lord's Supper (or Holy Supper) is a central and meaningful element of Reformed worship. Churches and individuals have debated its meaning and function endlessly, going at least as far back as emergence of the Reformed churches in the 16th century. Although these debates have already been documented and analyzed at length, one question that remains is how theologians and church members themselves perceive the Lord's Supper today. What do they discuss when it comes to the interpretation and explanation of the liturgical celebration of the Holy Supper? And, how do their perspectives relate to the confessional texts and theological reflections within the Reformed tradition, as well as to current liturgical practices?

The present study uses qualitative empirical research to offer a description and assessment of the way the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is performed, perceived, and valued within two Calvinistic denominations in the Netherlands, namely the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (CRC) and the Reformed Churches Liberated (RCL).¹

1.1 Research Subject

Ever since the sixteenth-century Reformation, the meaning of the Lord's Supper has been an issue of continuous debate between Catholics and Protestants.² Within the Reformed movement itself as well, there was a

¹In Dutch, the CRC are called *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* (<https://cgk.nl/>). They were founded in 1892 and include about 72,000 members (and ca. 185 local churches). In spite of the similarity in name, the CRC are not affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA). The RCL are called *Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt)* (<https://www.gkv.nl/>) in Dutch. They were founded in 1944, and have some 115,000 members (and ca. 265 local churches).

²These discussions are described and analyzed in, e.g., Nichols, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition* (1968); Feld, *Das Verständnis des Abendmahls* (1976); Trimp,

parting of the ways between Calvin, Luther, and other Reformers.³ The differences between Protestants and Catholics, as well as those between Lutherans and Calvinists, persist until this very day.⁴ As an example, one might point to the *Leuvenberg Concord* (1973), in which the Lord's Supper was one of the issues for which several Protestant and Lutheran churches on the European continent found the words to express a common understanding.⁵ Notwithstanding the large number of churches that signed the agreement, there also were many other denominations within the Reformed tradition that refused to sign out of theological conviction.⁶ Their objections are indicative of the disagreements that were and still are found in denominations of both traditions. Another example is the report on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM; 1982), published in 1982 by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (WCC). This declaration was received positively by WCC member churches, including the larger Protestant denominations. Yet many other churches, including the CRC and RCL, have refused to accept BEM as a common ground of ecclesial and sacramental understanding.⁷

While many books and articles have been written on the different perspective on the Lord's Supper within the Reformed tradition, most address the topic from a systematic theological or church historical perspective.⁸ The present study explores another way, namely that of empirical

Het altaar gebroken, de tafel hersteld (1979); Stookey, *Eucharist* (1993); Bürki and Anker, "Messe oder reformiertes Abendmahl?" (2011); Root and Buckley, *What Does It Mean to Do This?* (2014); Boersma and Levering, *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, pp. 269–452 (2015); Holcomb and Johnson, *Christian Theologies of the Sacraments* (2017). See also ÖAK, *Gemeinsam am Tisch des Herrn* (2019).

³See Dankbaar, *De sacramentsleer van Calvijn* (1941); Munter, *Het Avondmaal bij Luther* (1954); Hageman, *Pulpit and Table* (1962); Gerrish, "The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Confessions" (1966); Van 't Spijker et al., *Bij brood en beker* (1980); Plasger, "Die reformierte Abendmahlslehre" (2012); Wandel, *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Reformation* (2014); Riggs, *The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Tradition* (2015); Nimmo, "Sacraments" (2016).

⁴See Heron, *Table and Tradition* (1983); Thurian and Wainwright, *BEM* (idem); Reumann, *The Supper of the Lord* (1985); Caspers, Lukken, and Rouwhorst, *Bread of Heaven* (1995); Brinkman, *Sacraments of Freedom* (1999); Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, pp. 67–89 (2003); Kereszty, *Rediscovering the Eucharist* (idem).

⁵See *Leuvenberger Konkordie*, par. II.2.

⁶Churches that refused to accept the Leuvenberg Concord include the more conservative Reformed churches like the CRC and the RCL. See Van der Zwaag, "Leuvenberger Konkordie bestaat 40 jaar".

⁷For the various responses of churches to the text of this report, see Thurian, *Churches Respond to BEM*. For RCL responses to BEM, see Trimp, *Woord, water en wijn*, pp. 75–77, 83 (1985) and Arntzen, "Nieuwere opvattingen", pp. 73–74 (1990); for a CRC response, see Brienens, *Oriëntatie in de liturgie*, p. 63 (1992). In 2013 a common vision from WCC members on the church was published, which included statements on the Eucharist (WCC, *The Church*, pp. 24–25). For an overview of other consensus texts, see Ploeger, *Celebrating Church*, pp. 389–456 (2008).

⁸E.g. Horton, *A Better Way* (2002); Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper* (2004); Dorn, *The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Church in America* (2007); Davis,

practical-theological research. The need for such an approach was recently addressed by Pete Ward, who wrote:

...if we want to explore the question of meaning in relation to the performance of this text [1 Corinthians 11:23–6] in the Eucharist we need to find ways of seeing which take into account of the complexities of community life, social context and liturgical formulation and expression.⁹

David Ford has similarly suggested that an “anthropological” approach is needed to grasp what happens in the Holy Supper:

...often it is neither the words nor the confessed theological understandings that are most helpful in appreciating the dynamics of the celebration. Rather, one needs to follow the patterns of architecture and decoration; how and why these particular people gather in these ways; practices of welcoming or excluding; habits of presiding; forms of attentiveness and inattentiveness; the distribution of roles; dress, body language, music and other non-verbal symbols.¹⁰

Empirical research has gained momentum in practical theology over the past several decades.¹¹ Following the “anthropological turn” of the 1960s, the “empirical turn” stimulated practical theologians not just to restrict themselves to theology or theologies of specific Christians traditions or churches, but to offer also systematic descriptions and analyses

Worship and the Reality of God (2010); Welker, *Was geht vor beim Abendmahl?* (2012, orig. 1999); Wisse, *Zo zou je kunnen geloven*, pp. 144–159 (2013). See also note 3 above.

⁹Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, p. 123, cf. 121–134 (2008). Tony Maan proposed a similar approach, albeit to a different problem: “The Protestant Reformers’ categorical rejection of transubstantiation has made the question of christological presence in the eucharist one of the most problematic points in the history of Catholic-Protestant discourse. Ecumenical dialogue on this issue has been conducted in official ecclesiastical language, located primarily on a doctrinal level. An alternate language and locus of investigation—namely, popular religious literature and lay perceptions of Christ’s presence in the sacrament—may provide new avenues of exploration and may prove beneficial in making progress on this question” (Maan, “The Eucharistic Presence of Christ”, p. 476).

¹⁰Ford, *Self and Salvation*, pp. 139–145, here 140–141. Ford mentions a total of four anthropological reasons for paying attention to “the complex developments of eucharistic practice:” 1. The Eucharist is a corporate practice or *habitus*, not a set of ideas; 2. The Eucharist is shaped by “the apprenticeships undergone by all actors” which are “complexly related to each other”; 3. The Eucharist consists of many “coinherent” practices which mutually influence each other over time; 4. Eucharistic practice is shaped by language, but cannot be reduced to discursive language alone. Ford adds also a theological reason: 5. Christian practices like the Eucharist are “a testimony to God’s creativity and abundance,” and as such the Eucharist “offers a superabundance of meaning” which may be explored endlessly since “there can be no pretence of completeness” (p. 145).

¹¹See Van der Ven, *Practical Theology* (1998, orig. 1994); Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (1996); Osmer, *Practical Theology* (2008).

of what church people believe and enact in their liturgical practices.¹² It is this approach that characterizes the present research project.

Several empirical studies on the Lord's Supper in a Reformed context have already been conducted.¹³ In 2008 Martha Moore-Keish published *Do This in Remembrance of Me: A Ritual Approach to Reformed Eucharistic Theology*. In this book, she presented the results of empirical research conducted within a Reformed congregation in Grand Rapids, MI. Her research included participatory observation, a quantitative survey, and a literature review, and focused on the relationship between Reformed theology and ritual studies.¹⁴ Not long thereafter, in 2011, John Tamilio III completed his doctoral dissertation *The Practice and Understanding of the Eucharist in the United Church of Christ*. In this study he presented the results of five focus group interviews conducted within five congregations of the United Church of Christ in the USA, two of which have Reformed roots.¹⁵ Several years later, the German theologian Christian Grethlein published his monograph *Abendmahl feiern in Geschichte, Gegenwart und Zukunft* (2015), in which he refers to several empirical research projects conducted in the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* (EKD).¹⁶ Most recently, during the final phase of the present research project, Ferdi Kruger published the results of his fieldwork in two Reformed denominations in Potchefstroom, South Africa, examining the Lord's Supper through the lenses of cognition and recognition.¹⁷

¹²The so-called "empirical turn" refers to a period of renewal in practical theology early in the 1990s; see Kaufman, "Normativity as Pitfall or Ally?", pp. 93–95 (2015). Since the beginning of the 21st century, this movement has also gained momentum within my own RCL denomination, see De Ruijter, *Meewerken met God* (2005); Schaeffer, "Praktische theologie en etnografie" (2019, orig. 2014). For comparable approaches within the Reformed tradition, see Witvliet, "For Our Own Purposes" (1995); Kater, *Liever langer luisteren*, esp. pp. 23–33 (2017).

¹³See Immink, "Meal and Sacrament", p. 265 (2001). While the research for the present investigation was being conducted, Peter Sinia completed his doctoral research on children at the Lord's Supper in the Dutch Reformed tradition (*From the Least to the Greatest*). In his chapter "Teaching Worship as a Christian Practice" (2008) John Witvliet similarly presented an overview of recent studies on the Lord's Supper in the United States (pp. 131–133). Most of these publications are interdisciplinary; only a few are ethnographic (e.g. Bales, *When I Was a Child*, 2005).

¹⁴Moore-Keish, *Do This in Remembrance of Me* (2008). Ritual studies is the field of study in the humanities that focuses on the use and interpretation of rituals in human action (see §2.6 below).

¹⁵Tamilio III, *Practice and Understanding of the Eucharist* (2014, defended in 2011).

¹⁶Grethlein, *Abendmahl feiern in Geschichte, Gegenwart und Zukunft*, pp. 124–146 (2015). Grethlein refers among others to the official "EKD-Statistik" from 1963 to 2012, the quantitative EKD reports *Untersuchungen zur Einstellung der evangelischen Kirchenmitglieder zu ihrer Kirche* published between 1972 and 2012, the gender oriented research of Ute Grömbel (*Abendmahl: "Für euch gegeben"?*, 1997), the empirical data included in the report *Konfirmandenarbeit in Deutschland* (2009), and the qualitative research published in Nüssel and Sattler, *Menschenstimmen zu Abendmahl und Eucharistie* (2004).

¹⁷Kruger, "Participation in Christ's Body and His Blood" (2018).

These books and research reports offered a starting point when designing the research for the present study. In the first place, both Moore-Keish and Tamilio used *qualitative* research methods like participant observation and interviews. Secondly, Moore-Keish developed a theoretical framework using both Reformed theology and ritual studies, thereby connecting two scholarly disciplines that appear not to have been connected before.¹⁸ Thirdly, the research reports discussed by Grethlein prove that empirical research on sacramental celebrations is not new, but is rather linked to developments within practical theology as such. In this light, the research presented here can be understood as a next step, albeit still explorative by virtue of its specific focus on the Dutch Reformed context.

While the present study was still in its infancy, a number of theologians in the Netherlands developed a 46 item *quantitative* survey for measuring the experience of the Lord's Supper and/or Eucharist, aimed at all Christian denominations in the Netherlands.¹⁹ Its goal was "to analyze the extent to which the celebration of the Lord's Supper and a sense of social cohesion correlate or not in their communal praxis."²⁰ Although this research instrument has been completed and was tested by its authors on a small scale, no further research has as yet been conducted.²¹

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The point of departure for this project is the changed context in which the Lord's Supper is currently celebrated in the Netherlands. Over the course of the past century, the Lord's Supper has received renewed attention among Protestants. Larger Protestant denominations like the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* and the *Gereformeerde Kerken (synodaal)* published new liturgical forms or revised existing ones to stimulate new ways for celebrating the sacrament.²² At the same time, some congrega-

¹⁸An exception I found is the inclusion of John Witvliet's essay "For Our Own Purposes" (1995) in Bradshaw and Melloh, *Foundations in Ritual Studies* (2007).

¹⁹The research team consisted of Peter-Ben Smit, Remco Robinson, Maarten Wisse, and Fabian Eikelboom. Their research project was called "*De verbindende en scheidende kracht van rituele maaltijden: op weg naar een kwantitatief meetinstrument*" (The unifying and dividing force of ritual meals: towards a quantitative analytical instrument). In 2017 the results of the test phase were presented in a meeting organized by the Dutch Council of Churches (RvK, *Opvatting boven cohesie*). Almost simultaneously, the RvK held a (non-scientific) survey on the same topic. The results were published online: Koffeman, *Impressies rond de beleving van de maaltijd van de Heer* (2015); Van der Kamp, *Rapportage kwantitatieve inventarisatie beleving eucharistie/ avondmaal* (idem); see also RvK, *Beleving eucharistie en avondmaal*, pp. 10–15 (2016).

²⁰Smit et al., *Interdisciplinarity and Difference*, p. 1 (2016).

²¹See Robinson, Wisse, and Smit, "Verbindende maaltijden?" (2018).

²²See Liturgische Kring, *Handboek voor den eeredienst* (1934) published by representatives of the Liturgical Movement in the Netherlands, the various editions of the Protestant *Dienstboek* ("Service Book"; 1955, 1998/2004) published by the *Nederlandse Hervormde*

tions within these denominations began celebrating the sacrament more frequently and/or admitting baptized children to their celebrations.²³ To some extent, similar developments could be seen in the RCL beginning in the 1990s. In this denomination, new liturgical styles for the celebration of the Lord's Supper were introduced,²⁴ the sacrament was celebrated more frequently, existing liturgical forms were updated, and new liturgical forms were introduced.²⁵ Similar trends can be traced within the CRC since the beginning of the 21st century, albeit on a smaller scale.²⁶

Meanwhile, other developments like secularization, the decline of traditional religiosity, the emergence of new types of religiosity, and the reevaluation of rituals have affected all Christian churches in the Netherlands, including the CRC and RCL.²⁷ As an example one might point to the new openness in Dutch society for all kinds of religious rituals in a private context, that is, not just within the bounds of the traditional churches. How does this development affect the perception of the Lord's Supper within the church?²⁸

Another impetus for this study was the confessional claim of Reformed theology that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is constitutive of mem-

Kerk, and the introduction of a new order of worship inspired by the Ordinary published in the 1967 hymnal (*Kerkboek*) of the *Gereformeerde Kerken (synodaal)*, as reported in Van de Kamp, "Liturgische bewustwording" (1992); Brinkman, "Het sacrament in de gereformeerde geloofsbeleving" (idem); Immink, "Heilig Avondmaal" (2001, orig. 1998).

²³See Brinkman, "Het sacrament in de gereformeerde geloofsbeleving", pp. 211–212 (1992); Boendermaker, "Maaltijd van de Heer", pp. 238–244 (2001, orig. 1998); Sinia, *From the Least to the Greatest*, pp. 358–400 (2018).

²⁴In this book, the term "style" refers to the way in which the Lord's Supper is celebrated (see Box 3.1 on page 38 below). The term "form" refers to the liturgical forms that are used during the celebrations (see §6.4).

²⁵See Smelik, "Vuur en vlam in de liturgie" (2004). See also §5.3.2 and §6.4.2 below.

²⁶In 2010 the CRC's General Synod approved two new liturgical forms, but the existing forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper were not updated. See also §5.3.1 and §6.4.1 below.

²⁷On secularization, see Taylor, *A Secular Age* (2007). On the changing religiosity in the Dutch context, see Barnard and Post, *Ritueel bestek* (2001); Barnard and Schuman, *Nieuwe wegen in de liturgie* (2002); Boeve et al., *Levensrituelen en sacramentaliteit* (2003); Lukken, *Rituals in Abundance*, pp. 510–516 (2005, orig. 1999); Van de Donk et al., *Geloven in het publieke domein* (2006); Barnard, *Liturgie voorbij de Liturgische Beweging* (idem); Barnard, "Het heilige gebeurt niet", pp. 127–128 (2012); De Hart et al., *God in Nederland 1966-2015* (2016). Beginning in the 2000s, attendance in CRC and RCL church services—especially for the second service held on Sunday afternoons or evenings—started to decline, as did the membership of the respective denominations as a whole. An insightful overview of changes in membership statistics of the Protestant denominations in the Netherlands over the past decade can be found in Janse, "Naar een andere kerk" (2018). On the CRC and RCL specifically, see RD, "Middagdienst onder druk" (2003); Vennik, *Telt haar torens*, pp. 12–13 (2015); Kuijper, "Krimp Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt zet door" (2019); RD, "Ruim 100 buitenkerkelijken sluiten zich aan bij CGK" (idem).

²⁸See De Hart and Van Houwelingen, *Christenen in Nederland*, p. 160 (2018): "...secularisation in our country manifests itself not only through the steady decline of churches, but also through a growing estrangement from the traditions of Christian faith. This trend is the strongest among later birth cohorts."

bership in the body of Christ. Within the Reformed tradition, this claim is traditionally elaborated on different levels ranging from church order and church discipline, to church doctrine, church teaching (catechisation), and church services. As such, the Lord's Supper is said to be essential in the formation of the believers' character, spirituality, and community.²⁹ Within the CRC and RCL, for example, adult believers can only become members of a local congregation after making public profession of their faith, thereby seeking admission to the Lord's Supper table.³⁰ Within the traditional system of church discipline in place in most Reformed churches, admission is typically denied to professing members as a means of keeping the congregation's identity "pure." So too the entire system of catechism instruction is ultimately aimed at guiding young people to seek admission to the Lord's Supper by the public profession of their faith.

As James K.A. Smith points out, the Lord's Supper is the heart of the church's worship.³¹ At the communion table, the church "is called to be the first-fruits of a new creation by embodying a reconciled community."³² Others have stressed the same point, noting that the ritual of the Eucharist is in its many variations "a condensation of the Christian habitus" (David Ford),³³ or that "vital Christianity is truly about participating in practices that comprise a life-giving way of life in and for the world" (John Witvliet).³⁴

Taken together, the above developments and theological statements lead to new questions. For example, should unbaptized seekers and/or children also be allowed at the Lord's table?³⁵ Should church discipline be used by church councils as a means to control who are included or excluded from participation?³⁶ And, more generally, how does the sacra-

²⁹See Allman, "Eucharist, Ritual & Narrative" (2000); Sweet, *From Tablet to Table* (2014); Bosman and Schaeffer, "Celebrating the Lord's Supper", pp. 197–199 (2018).

³⁰In CRC and RCL churches, one becomes a member after being baptized. Nevertheless, only professing members are allowed at the Lord's table. See CRC, *Kerkorde*, art. 59; RCL, *Kerkorde*, art. C41.1.

³¹Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, pp. 197–198: "In some ways, Christian worship culminates in another sacrament that is a compacted microcosm of the whole of worship: the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper." Cf. Kuyper, *Our Worship*, p. 261: "The worship service reaches its highest point in the celebration of the Lord's Supper" (= *Onze eeredienst*, p. 443: *In de bediening van het H. Avondmaal bereikt de Eeredienst zijn hoogtepunt*) and Kuyper, *E voto Dordraceno*, p. 134: "...the Holy Supper, in which the very focal point of our entire religion lies" (...*het heilig Avondmaal, waarin toch het brandpunt van onze geheele religie ligt*; my translation). Cf. also Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, p. 146: "...one of the high points of the liturgy, if not, indeed, the high point..." (ital. in original).

³²Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, p. 202 (2009).

³³Ford, *Self and Salvation*, pp. 140–141 (1999).

³⁴Witvliet, "Teaching Worship as a Christian Practice", p. 118 (2008).

³⁵E.g. Maan, "Should Seekers Be Invited to the Table?" (1998); Sinia, *From the Least to the Greatest* (2018).

³⁶See Van den Broeke, "Het Censura morum" (2018).

ment function within the life of the believers in the wake of the liturgical changes and within a secularized context?³⁷ A more detailed practical theological inquiry is necessary to shed light on the practice of the Lord's Supper within Reformed churches from a communicants' perspective. This study therefore seeks to gain greater insight into the way the Lord's Supper is performed, perceived, and valued within the Dutch Reformed tradition, more specifically within congregations of the *Christian Reformed Churches* (CRC) and the *Reformed Churches Liberated* (RCL).

1.3 Four Perspectives

This study combines four perspectives to describe and assess the communicants' perspective on the Lord's Supper. First, the researcher participated in two church services for each participating congregation to gain a physical impression of the liturgical practices studied here. The observed practices and the researcher's experience of participation in them have been described and analyzed. Secondly, various congregants were interviewed—in focus groups or individually—to share their personal perception of the Lord's Supper. These interviews were analyzed to include the communicants' perspective. Thirdly, the local ministers were interviewed so that their perceptions could be analyzed as well. In addition, a literature review has been conducted to include also the opinions of other CRC and RCL theologians. Fourthly, normative documents like the church's confessions recognized by the respective denominations have been analyzed to obtain a complete picture as possible.

In the context of this study, the terms “performance, perception, and valuation” embrace all four perspectives. The term *performance* is used for the performance of the liturgical ritual in worship services, understood as a description of how people do things that they experience as liturgical ritual practices through which God Himself may work.³⁸ *Perception* is defined as what the interviewees and literary sources “actually understand about the worship they use.”³⁹ Finally, *valuation* designates the valuation of the sacrament implicit and explicit in each of the four

³⁷Brinkman, “Het sacrament in de gereformeerde geloofsbeleving”, p. 212 (1992); Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, pp. 37–48 (2014).

³⁸In the past 10–15 years, the term “performance” has been used by practical theologians to reflect on Christian worship from a dramaturgical perspective. See e.g. Plüss, *Gottesdienst als Textinszenierung* (2007), Klomp, *The Sound of Worship*, esp. pp. 23–39 (2011), and Immink, *The Touch of the Sacred*, pp. 22–33 (2014, orig. 2011).

³⁹Stringer, “Anthropological Strand”, p. 95 (2005). According to Stringer, this “understanding” cannot be extracted directly but needs to be studied by discovering how the “individual and unknowable meanings of the rite are derived” (p. 96), for instance by focussing on four features of worship: repetition, significance, experience, and memory. In the present research, the four voices of theology are used as a similar model to describe how meaning is generated. See also his *On the Perception of Worship* (1999).

theological voices of the congregations recorded. Taken together, these three aspects are thus researched from a fourfold perspective.

To provide a deeper and better understanding of the performance, perception, and valuation of the Lord's Supper within CRC and RCL congregations,⁴⁰ the "voices" of the respective communicants (both church members and ministers), church leaders (theologians), and denominations (e.g. normative texts) will be described and analyzed using the *Theology in Four Voices* model.

1.3.1 Excursus: Theology in Four Voices

The Theology in Four Voices model (see figure 1.1) was developed as part of the *Action Research: Church and Society* (ARCS) project initiated by the Pastoral and Social Studies Department of Heythrop College, University of London, in cooperation with the Oxford Centre for Ecclesiology and Practical Theology at Ripon College Cuddesdon.⁴¹ Over the course of four years, researchers developed, tested, and fine-tuned a research instrument which could be used to describe and analyze in a systematic way how a congregation works, how it thinks (both laypeople and clergy), and what its normativity looks like. In a next step, this information can be used to intervene, should the researcher want to bring change. Such an approach is called "Action Research" and is used frequently within the social sciences. However, for the present purposes the Four Voices model is used in a limited way as a heuristic instrument to describe the four voices, thereby leaving aside the original component of "action."⁴²

The operant voice includes "the faith-carrying words and actions of believers" and is defined as "the theology embedded within the actual practices of a group."⁴³ The espoused voice is defined as the "theology embedded within a group's articulation of its beliefs,"⁴⁴ while the formal voice represents "the voice of the academy, of the 'professional' theologian."⁴⁵ Lastly, the normative voice covers "what the practicing group

⁴⁰This also implies that the present study is not aimed at the denominational level, since it could only examine a small number of congregations—although incidentally findings within congregations from both denominations will be compared.

⁴¹Cameron et al., *Talking About God in Practice*, pp. 49–56 (2010).

⁴²See McNiff, *Action Research* (2013); Graham, "Is Practical Theology a Form of 'Action Research'?" (idem); Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research" (2014); Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, pp. 260–266 (2016).

⁴³Cameron et al., *Talking About God in Practice*, p. 54, cf. 14 (2010), referring to Astley, *Ordinary Theology* (2002). See also: Astley and Francis, *Exploring Ordinary Theology* (2013).

⁴⁴Cameron et al., *Talking About God in Practice*, p. 54.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 55. The Four Voices model was developed within an Anglican context with a greater hierarchy between clergy and laypeople than in synodal-presbyterian Reformed churches like the CRC and RCL. Nevertheless, I have chosen to keep the formal voice as a separate voice, since the ministers within the CRC and RCL are educated theologians while

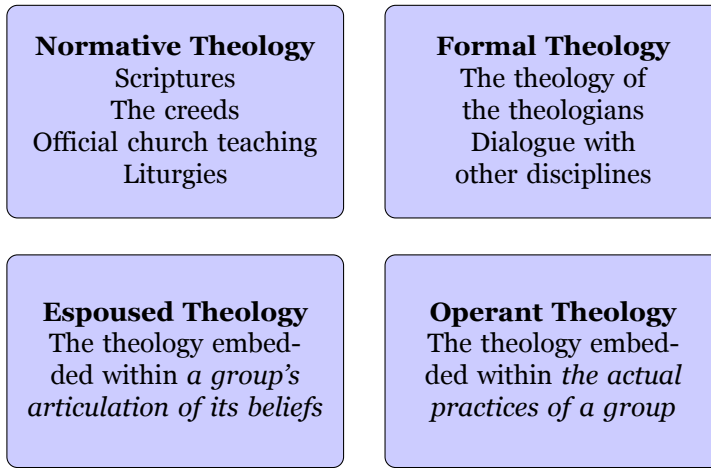


Figure 1.1: The Four Voices of Theology (inspired by Cameron et al., *Talking About God in Practice*, p. 54)

names as its theological authority—an authority which may even stand to correct, as well as inform, operant and espoused theologies.⁴⁶ As such, the distinct voices are not viewed as static or inert, but are various perspectives on the same reality of the church being church.

In this study, the four voices are used to describe four different aspects of the sacrament— what is enacted in the liturgical services where the Lord’s Supper is administered (*operant*), what congregants believe about the Lord’s Supper (*espoused*), what professional theologians—within the participating congregations—say about it (*formal*), and what is considered normative within the congregations and their denomination (*normative*).⁴⁷ As the Four Voices model does not include an explicit reference to the researchers’ own theological voice, I will reflect on my theological understanding of the Lord’s Supper in a separate section later in this chapter.⁴⁸

most church members are not.

⁴⁶Cameron et al., *Talking About God in Practice*, p. 54. In my understanding, the normative voice may also correct and inform the formal voice and vice versa. As such, I do not suppose an a priori hierarchy between the four voices.

⁴⁷An example of the use of the four voices in practical theological research can be found in Watkins and Cameron, “Epiphanic Sacramentality” (2012). For more on the Four Voices of Theology, see Watkins, “Practical Ecclesiology” (2012); Cameron and Duce, *Researching Practice in Ministry and Mission*, pp. xxx–xxxii (2013); Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, pp. 55–67 (2017); Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, pp. 95–99 (2017). Closely related to this approach is the “Lived Religion” theory (Hall, *Lived Religion in America*, 1997), as well as Jeff Astley’s concept of ordinary theology (see note 43).

⁴⁸This implies that I will not be describing my own theological understanding of the

1.4 Research Question and Sub-questions

The main research question for this study is:

How is the celebration of the Lord's Supper in local CRC and RCL churches performed, perceived, and valued, and what can be learned from this?

In order to answer this research question, the following sub-questions will be investigated:

1. What are the normative, operant, espoused, and formal theological voices with regard to the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the local churches?
2. How can a "conversation" between the four theological voices be constructed, and what can the local churches possibly learn from this conversation?

To answer the first sub-question, empirical research and literature review has been conducted to register each of the four voices separately. The empirical research entails the participatory observations and interviews as described above. The literature review includes an analysis of the literature written by CRC and RCL theologians as well as the normative texts recognized by the congregations studied. The results of these two types of research will be described in chapters 3 to 6.

The second sub-question is aimed at the construction of a "conversation" between the four voices. This conversation will be presented in chapter 7 to shed light on the similarities and differences between the four voices. The lessons that can be learned from this conversation will be discussed in chapter 8.

This eighth and final chapter will address the main research question at the hand of the combined results for the sub-questions, and in a separate section connect the outcome of this study to the results of previous practical theological reflection. As such, the four voices of theology are used to describe, analyze, and assess the performance, perception, and valuation of the Lord's Supper from a fourfold perspective.

Lord's Supper as part of the formal theological voice or describing it separately as a fifth voice, since I am already "co-creator" of the four voices in the process of observing, interviewing, and analyzing. See Kaufman, "Normativity as Pitfall or Ally?", pp. 95, 107 (2015).

1.5 Research Methodology

Both qualitative empirical research and literature review have been deployed to describe and assess the performance, perception, and valuation of the Lord's Supper. Following Denzin and Lincoln, I understand qualitative research to be

...multi-method in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.⁴⁹

These features make qualitative research methods more suitable than quantitative research to study the present subject matter, since they allow the researcher to study subjects from multiple perspectives, including the meanings people attribute to them (without a need for predefined categories).⁵⁰ Furthermore, qualitative research offers the possibility of conducting research on topics that have not been subjected to thorough exploration before. As such, the research presented here is both *qualitative* and *explorative* in nature.⁵¹

Due precisely to the explorative nature of this research project, the team of which the researcher was a member decided not to develop a theoretical framework in advance, but to reflect on the collected data afterwards. This decision was possible due to the researcher's existing familiarity with both denominations.⁵² To describe the operant voice, the espoused voice, and the first part of the formal voice (in interviews with the local ministers), different qualitative methods were operationalized (see §1.3). The next chapter will offer a more detailed description of the individual qualitative methods and their use within this study.

Additionally, a literature review was conducted for the second part of the formal voice (as published in the works of CRC and RCL theologians) as well as the normative voice (as documented in the normative documents of the respective denominations). These four voices of theology first needed to be described before a conversation between them could be presented in chapter 7.

⁴⁹Denzin and Lincoln, *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, p. 3 (1998), quoted in Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, p. 28 (2016).

⁵⁰See *Ibid.*, pp. 27–67.

⁵¹See Boeije, *Analysis in Qualitative Research*, pp. 11–14, 32–33 (2010); Denzin and Lincoln, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2011); Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research* (2013).

⁵²I.e., the researcher's connections with CRC members as well as previous fieldwork in three other RCL congregations (Bosman and Schaeffer, "Celebrating the Lord's Supper", 2018).

The present study comprises all four tasks of practical theology as they have been described by Richer Osmer, namely the descriptive-empirical, the interpretative, the normative, and the pragmatic. The first and second task are covered in the first sub-question, while the third and fourth tasks are addressed in answering both the second sub-question and the main research question.⁵³

1.6 Practical Theological Approach

Before we continue, some remarks need to be made on the practical theological approach adopted for this study. As is true for qualitative research, it is difficult to offer an all-encompassing definition for practical theology. This study follows an existing approach developed by John Swinton and Harriet Mowat:

Practical Theology is critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world.⁵⁴

In line with this definition, the present study reflects both critically and theologically on the practice of the Lord's Supper as one of the *core* practices of the Church.⁵⁵ For "practices," I follow the definition originally developed by Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass:

By "Christian practices" we mean things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of the world.⁵⁶

The practice of the Lord's Supper is not entirely distinct from the practices of the world, due to its connection to such basic human practices as eating and drinking (*similarity*). At the same time, the Lord's Supper also differs from an ordinary dinner since it is a Christian practice usually performed in a liturgical context (*difference*).⁵⁷ As such, the Lord's Supper is regarded in this study as a *liturgical ritual practice*. "Liturgical"

⁵³See Osmer, *Practical Theology*, esp. pp. 4-11 (2008).

⁵⁴Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, p. 7 (2016).

⁵⁵See Hütter, "The Church", pp. 33-35 (2001); Miller-McLemore, *Christian Theology in Practice*, pp. 170, 174-175, 188-189 (2012); Schaeffer, "Liturgie als centrum van kerkzijn" (2019). See also Bedouin, "Why Does Practice Matters Theologically?" (2016).

⁵⁶Dykstra and Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices", p. 18 (2002); cf. Dykstra and Bass, "Times of Yearning, Practices of Faith", pp. 6-11 (2010).

⁵⁷On the relationship between Christian and non-Christian actions, see Forrester, *Theology and Practice*, p. 16 (1990), quoted in Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, p. 8: "The actions of Christians are celebrations of and attestations

refers to the theological perspective of worship, “ritual” to its cultural-anthropological aspects.⁵⁸

For the present investigation of the Lord’s Supper as a liturgical ritual practice, theological and cultural-anthropological perspectives were combined. Ethnographic methods like participatory observation and interviewing were used to describe the liturgical ritual practice, just like the method of literature review was used for the written sources. Nevertheless, all these methods were applied *within* a practical theological study. This implies that theological and ethnographical methods were combined in an integrated manner, and that the research as a whole is fully theological in nature.⁵⁹

Lastly, according to Swinton and Mowat’s definition, the goal of practical theological research is to ensure and enable faithful practices. This means that practical theology seeks not only to describe and interpret the world, but also to change it if necessary. The latter implies that also the normative and pragmatic task are fundamentally part of the aim of the practical theological approach used in this study.⁶⁰

1.7 Reflexivity

Swinton and Mowat have pointed out that “reflexivity is perhaps *the* most crucial dimension of the qualitative research process,”⁶¹ defining it as “the process of critical self-reflection carried out by the researcher throughout the research process that enables her to monitor and respond to her contribution to the proceedings.”⁶²

to God’s reconciling work in the world which begins and ends in Jesus Christ. The relationship of these actions to non-Christians is one of both similarity and difference. The similarity is that all human actions both participate in and fall short of the purposes of God. The difference is that those who profess belief and adhere to membership of the church have been called to make explicit the celebration of God’s work.”

⁵⁸This distinction is derived from Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, p. 47.

⁵⁹As developed by the *Ecclesiology & Ethnography Research Network*, which argues that empirical-ethnographic research in theology can and should be both fully theological and empirical at one and the same time (i.e. theology is not only to be found in writings, but also in reality as such). See Ward, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (2012); Scharen, *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (idem); Idestrom and Kaufman, *What Really Matters* (2018). See also: Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*, pp. 3–74 (2011); Hegstad, *The Real Church*, pp. 3–13 (2013); Schaeffer, “Praktische theologie en etnografie” (2019). For a more critical stance on this approach, see Healy, “Practices and the New Ecclesiology” (2003); Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics*, pp. 47–57 (2011); Spickard, “The Porcupine Tango” (2016).

⁶⁰Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, pp. 9–10, 26; cf. the third and fourth tasks as defined by Osmer (see note 53).

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 56–63, here 56 (ital. in original). See also Berry and Clair, “Reflecting on the Call to Ethnographic Reflexivity” (2011); Kaufman, “Normativity as Pitfall or Ally?” (2015).

⁶²Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, p. 57.

Reflexivity is especially important in the context of this study, since the four theological voices are described and analyzed by the researcher himself.⁶³ Therefore, I will reflect on my own theological perspective on the Lord's Supper.

I am a young adult and lifelong RCL member. I studied Theology at Kampen Theological University, an institution that is founded by and still closely connected to the RCL denomination. During my studies, I was formed as a practical theologian with an open mind to culture and the arts in particular—ready to become a minister in a local church, but with little experience in empirical research. I did, however, rapidly gain such experience after conducting a six-month pilot study directly upon the completion of my education.

For three of the years when I was conducting research as a PhD student, I served as an elder in a large RCL congregation. As such, I was sometimes responsible for distributing the wine during the (monthly) celebration of the Lord's Supper—in my view an important and beautiful moment, as I encountered members there whom I also visited in my pastoral counseling. Years ago, I had also been given the responsibility to distribute the bread during an internship in another RCL congregation, under supervision of the local minister—that too a wonderful experience. One of the celebrations that had the greatest impact on me took place more than fifteen years ago, when I for the very first time experienced celebrating the Lord's Supper while standing in a circle, again in another RCL church.

Prior to and in the process of conducting my research, I sought to broaden my perspective on the Lord's Supper by visiting churches from other denominations, including weekly ecumenical celebrations in the PCN denomination. I also visited neighborhood meals—organized by local churches in my current hometown—both on weekdays and Sundays. In the course of study I have discovered that there is a close connection between the community meals and the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In my view, both practices embody something of the joy of the coming Kingdom—in communion, hospitality, and communal life.

Although it is perhaps more difficult to conduct ethnographic research within one's own context (i.e. the RCL denomination), measures were taken to be as attentive and open as possible when interacting with the

⁶³See note 48.

field.⁶⁴ These measures included the deployment of interview assistants during the focus group interviews, regular discussions within the research team (Jasper Bosman, Hans Schaeffer, and Marcel Barnard), and regular meetings with other PhD students and fellow scholars (most importantly with Koos Tamminga and Attila Csongor Kelemen at Kampen Theological University, as well as with others during the monthly NOSTER PhD Seminar “Empirical Research in Religion” and the quarterly NOSTER Research Collaboration Group “Meals in Search of Meanings”).

During the focus group interviews, an interview assistant took notes and observed the behavior of the interviewees and the researcher. After the interview was concluded, the assistant read a draft summary aloud so that interviewees could supplement or clarify what had been discussed (member check validation). Furthermore, each focus group interview was evaluated directly afterwards by the researcher and the interview assistant in a short conversation. The individual interviews were conducted without interview assistants, but recorded and transcribed verbatim (like the focus group interviews).⁶⁵

The participatory observations and the interviews conducted in the CRC congregations were particularly helpful, since they helped me as a researcher to reflect on practices and opinions within my own denomination that I had once considered self-evident. The same applies to my participation in the Lord’s Supper outside CRC and RCL churches; although this experience has not been included in this study as such, it did broaden my scope and helped me to develop a better understanding of what is going on in the field.

1.8 Relevance

1.8.1 Academic Relevance

As noted above (in §1.1), little empirical research has been conducted to date on the Lord’s Supper within the Reformed tradition, and especially within the Dutch context. This makes the present study one of the first empirical explorations of the Lord’s Supper in Reformed churches of the Netherlands. The results of this inquiry may therefore contribute to the understanding of “what happens in Holy Communion”⁶⁶ from an empirical perspective. Moreover, since this research is not only descriptive and analytical but also aimed at the presentation of lessons for the participating congregations and possibly for other congregations as well, it may

⁶⁴See Knoblauch, *Qualitative Religionsforschung* (2003); Ward, “The Messiness of Studying Congregations Using Ethnographic Methods” (2004); Knoblauch, “Grundlagen der qualitativen Religionsforschung” (2006).

⁶⁵For more on the use of interview methods, see the next chapter.

⁶⁶Cf. the title of the English edition of Michael Welker’s *Was geht vor beim Abendmahl?*

also contribute to the valuation of concrete liturgical ritual practice both within and outside the Dutch Reformed context.⁶⁷

This study contributes to the findings of previous scholarship by presenting a new reflection on one of the core practices of Christianity within a specific context. Even though numerous systematic or church historical publications have already been written on the subject, it is the practical theological reflection on the performance, perception, and valuation of the practice itself that makes this study unique, also because the context in which the sacrament is celebrated is ever changing (see §1.2).

1.8.2 Societal Relevance

The findings of this study may be used by the participating local churches to reflect on their own celebration of the Lord's Supper. Moreover, other congregations within or outside the CRC and RCL denominations may do the same, while taking account of potential theological, historical, and contextual differences. As such, the lessons formulated in the final chapter may contribute to the further development of the Church by enabling congregations to assess and foster the celebration of Lord's Supper from a fourfold perspective.

If the Lord's Supper indeed addresses "fundamental human needs,"⁶⁸ this study may contribute to the identification of those fundamental needs addressed in the celebration of the sacrament—not to "solve" these needs, but to contribute to the continuous development of the Church in and "for the life of the world."⁶⁹ As such, the fostering of the Lord's Supper celebration in the Church may also contribute to society, since the practices of Christian churches also contribute to the wellbeing of society at large.⁷⁰

⁶⁷Cf. the four tasks of practical theology as defined by Osmer in his *Practical Theology*.

⁶⁸Cf. the definition of "Christian practices" cited in §1.6.

⁶⁹As proposed by Hans Schaeffer in his inaugural lecture ("Liturgie als centrum van kerkzijn"), drawing on the work of Alexander Schmemmann (*For the Life of the World*).

⁷⁰See Posthumus, Den Ridder, and De Hart, *Verenigd in verandering*, pp. 141–147 (2014); De Hart and Van Houwelingen, *Christenen in Nederland*, pp. 150–154 (2018).

Chapter 2

Research Design

2.1 Introduction

This second chapter presents and discusses considerations relating to research design. As indicated in the previous chapter, this study combines various qualitative research methods as well as a review of theological literature (see §1.5). What follows will elaborate on the choice of denominations, congregations, and participants, as well as the selection of research methods. I will also reflect on topics like research ethics, data collection, and data analysis.

2.2 Selection of Denominations

The research population is limited to congregations from the Christian Reformed Churches (CRC) and the Reformed Churches Liberated (RCL), both Reformed denominations in the Netherlands. These denominations were selected for a number of reasons. First, as noted in §1.7, both the researcher and his institution (Kampen Theological University) are affiliated with the RCL denomination. Secondly, to date virtually no empirical research relating to the Lord's Supper has been conducted within this denomination.¹ Thirdly, in the past few decades many changes have occurred in RCL worship services, mostly on the local level, but also nationally. These changes include the introduction of new liturgical forms for

¹In 1994 the liturgy & worship deputies of the RCL General Synod conducted a survey on worship and liturgy among the secretaries of 266 local RCL churches. The results of this questionnaire were published in a report to the General Synod: RCL, *Rapport Studiedeputaten 1995*, pp. 7–16. One of the outcomes of this survey was that local congregations requested reflection on the style and frequency of the celebration (which in most RCL churches had up to that time been quarterly).

the celebration of the Lord's Supper.² Fourthly, in 2014 a growing need for empirically based reflection was reported, as based on conversations with numerous experts in the field of theology and ministry within the RCL denomination.³

Following a small pilot study conducted in three local RCL churches, a decision was made to make more time and resources available with a view to investigating the topic of the Lord's Supper in two denominations, rather than just one.⁴ The expanded sample size has made it possible to achieve greater diversity in the participating congregations. The comparison of fieldwork findings and literature review between the different churches ensured a clearer picture of what happens in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Since also time and resources were limited and in-depth information was considered of greater importance than rough exploration, a decision was made to *limit* the number of denominations to two, both located in the Netherlands. Alongside the RCL denomination, the CRC denomination seemed the most logical choice. A first consideration was the significant history shared by these denominations. Both stem from the same Protestant roots with origins in the nineteenth century.⁵ Secondly, the two denominations are roughly equal in size (with about 100,000 members each), share the same synodal-presbyterial church model, and use similar church orders. Thirdly, CRC and RCL cooperate with each other on both denominational and local levels.⁶ Fourthly, CRC and RCL use

²See §1.2. More on the history and content of the liturgical forms in the CRC and RCL is written in §6.4 below.

³See Geertsema and Schaeffer, *Een koninkrijk van priesters*, pp. 11–12.

⁴The pilot study was published in Bosman and Schaeffer, "Celebrating the Lord's Supper".

⁵Both denominations have their origins in the Secession of 1834, when a group of Protestants left the former state church and continued independently. After the Secession, one part of the seceders formed the *Gereformeerde Kerken onder het Kruis* (since 1838), while another part called themselves *Christelijke Afgescheiden Gemeenten* (idem). In 1869 the two groups merged to form the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*. When in 1892 this church merged with another group that had left the state church in 1886 (the "*Doleantie*"; led by Abraham Kuyper), the two groups founded the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (not to be confused with the former state church, which was called *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*). However, there was a part that did not go along with the 1892 merger, and it continued to call itself *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*. In 1947 the latter name was changed to *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* (CRC). A few years earlier, in 1944, the *Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt)* (RCL) were founded by a group that left the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*. See Van Middelkoop, *Kerken onderweg*, pp. 148–174, 246–329, 370–406.

⁶As early as 1946 there were mutual contacts between CRC and RCL concerning a potential merger, but these evaporated in the 1960s. It was not until the end of the 1980s that positive communication between the two denominations was renewed. Nevertheless, in 2007 the CRC's General Synod decided that there was "not enough support" to embark on a path to unification due to objections against such a merger coming from within the CRC itself (among other reasons for existing differences on the appropriation of salvation). Lately, however, there has been increasing cooperation at the local level, sometimes re-

largely similar liturgical forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. These factors make it interesting to investigate whether there are differences and/or similarities with regard to the actual celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Although CRC and RCL have much in common, there are also differences. For example, CRC members tend to be influenced to a greater degree by Pietism, while RCL members are on the whole more open to dialogue with contemporary culture as it emerged in the "Modern Reformed" or Neo-Calvinistic theology of Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and Klaas Schilder.⁷

When it comes to the theology and practice of the Lord's Supper, there is probably more uniformity in RCL congregations than there is in CRC congregations. In RCL congregations it is, generally speaking, common for professing members to participate in the Lord's Supper. In the CRC denomination the situation is different. Some CRC members are subscribers of a magazine called *Bewaar het Pand*, which seeks to foster maintenance of the "old Reformed principles."⁸ Member-subscribers of this magazine are found in a number of CRC congregations. These congregations and their members are called *bevindelijk* (lit. "Experiential"), and are considered part of a wider, strict Reformed subculture within Dutch society.⁹ In such congregations, it is not common for professing

sulting in so-called "cooperation congregations." See Trouw, "Vrijgemaakte opening naar christelijke gereformeerden" (1986); RCL, *In duplo* (1988); Van 't Spijker, Noorlandt, and Van der Schaaf, *Een eeuw christelijk-gereformeerd*, pp. 316–318 (1992); DOE, *Korte geschiedenis* (s.a.).

⁷The RCL theologian Mees te Velde (in "Vrijgemaakte vreemdelingen tussen verleden en toekomst", p. 200) argued that three categories of Reformed Christians can be identified in the Netherlands: Confessional-Reformed, Evangelical-Reformed, and *Bevindelijk*-Reformed. While RCL churches may be identified with the first and second categories, within the CRC all three can be found. For the identity of the CRC and RCL denominations, see Paas and Schaeffer, "Reconstructing Reformed Identity" (2014). More on the CRC is documented in CRC, *About the CRC* (s.a.); Van 't Spijker, Noorlandt, and Van der Schaaf, *Een eeuw christelijk-gereformeerd* (1992); Brienens, *De Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (2002); Wallet, "Tussen de vuren" (2007); Van Driel, *Consolidatie en crisis* (2018). More on the RCL: RCL, *Reformed Churches in the Netherlands* (s.a.); Deddens and te Velde, *Vrijmaking – Wederkeer* (1994); De Bruijne, "Een reis met uitzicht" (idem); Van Bakkum, "Verlangen naar tastbare genade" (2014).

⁸*Bewaar het Pand* (lit. "Guard the Deposit," derived from 1 Timothy 6:20) is a foundation established in 1966 which publishes a bi-weekly church magazine with the same title. See Kieviet, "Handhaving der oude gereformeerde beginselen" (2006). In this article, the following "Reformed principles" are mentioned: the absolute authority of God's Word, the sovereignty of God, recognition of the total depravity of man, the necessity of regeneration, and the holiness of God. In 2006 the magazine had about 4100 subscribers (see Bruins, "Bewaar het Pand' breekt niet").

⁹Identity markers of the *bevindelijk* Reformed distinguishing them from other Reformed Christians include in particular: 1. Greater emphasis on the inner experience of personal faith than the outward confessions of the church; 2. Emphasis on the necessity of personal repentance (Janse, *Bewaar het pand*, p. 64 [1985]; Zwemer, *In conflict met de cultuur* [1993]; Zwemer, *De bevindelijk gereformeerden* [2001]). Together these two identity

church members to participate in the Lord's Supper. This phenomenon is called *avondmaalsmijding* (abstinence from the Lord's Supper, see Box 2.1). Other CRC congregations are part of an "orthodox" group (in which participation in the Lord's Supper is not self-evident, but still common), or else they belong to a "modern" group (in which it is common to participate whenever the Lord's Supper is administered).¹⁰

Box 2.1: Abstaining from the Lord's Supper (*Avondmaalsmijding*)

Abstinence from the Lord's Supper is a tradition found in *bevindelijk* Reformed congregations, implying that professing Christians should in general first be converted to Christ before coming to the Lord's Table—that is, they must be convinced of their own sinfulness and of the gift of God's grace for them personally. The heavy emphasis on "self-examination" (*zelfbeproeving*) means that usually no more than fifty percent of the professing members take part in the celebration. The decision to participate in the Lord's Supper is an individual one; after professing one's faith, one is entitled to join the celebrations. However, after a person in a *bevindelijk* congregation joins for the very first time, the minister or an elder will visit that person in the following week to discuss their motives for attending. The heavy emphasis on personal faith makes it common, for example, for only one partner in married couples to participate, and for visitors not to participate as a matter of fact without special permission.¹¹

2.3 Selection of Congregations

In order to map the performance, perception, and valuation of the Lord's Supper within the CRC and RCL denominations, three congregations from each were approached for participation, for a total of six. The participating congregations were selected based on the following characteris-

markers result in a heavy emphasis on the existential experience of God in the heart of the believers. The experience of being saved by Him is given them by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, a person cannot find assurance of salvation within himself, but must wait for it in expectation (Van der Zwaag, *Afwachten of verwachten?*). See Brienens, *Bevinding* (1978); Van Lieburg, *Refogeschiedenis in perspectief* (2007); De Reuver, *Sweet Communion* (idem).

¹⁰The threefold distinction presented here was developed specifically for this study, but closely resembles the one in Vennik's *Telt haar torens*, pp. 25–26 between "modern", "orthodox," and "*bevindelijk*." In 2013 the groups represented respectively 53%, 30%, and 17% of the CRC membership.

¹¹More on this in the CRC context can be found in Zwemer, *De bevindelijk gereformeerden*, pp. 96–100 (2001) and Brienens, *De Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*, pp. 87–88 (2002). In the RCL context: Kruidhof, *Rust vinden*, p. 50 (2009). See also Walllet, *Ambt en avondmaalsmijding* (1982); Janse, *Bewaar het pand*, p. 83 (1985); Van Gorsel, "Avondmaalsmijding" (1990); Van Beelen, *Doet dit tot mijn gedachtenis* (1996); Van Beelen, *De nodiging gaat uit* (2000); Piper, *Am I Holy Enough to Take Communion?* (2017).

tics: membership statistics, geographical distribution, and theological position (see Table 2.1). With regard to membership, the following categories were used: small churches (fewer than 350 members), medium-sized churches (350–550 members), and large churches (more than 550 members).¹² Geographical distribution means that the selected churches are located throughout the country. In terms of theological position, significant differences occurred only within the CRC denomination (see §2.2). Here a distinction was retained between churches in which participation in the Lord’s Supper is considered self-evident (CRC-B and RCL churches), churches in which it is not self-evident but still common (CRC-A), and churches in which abstinence from the Lord’s Supper table is commonly practiced (CRC-C). The identities of the participating churches have been anonymized; they are therefore designated with the labels CRC-A, CRC-B, CRC-C, RCL-D, RCL-E, RCL-F.

Table 2.1: Participating congregations

Church	Size	Theol. position	Celebrations
CRC-A	Small	Middle position	4 celebrations/year
CRC-B	Large	Self-evident	5 celebrations/year
CRC-C	Medium	Abstinence	4 celebrations/year
RCL-D	Large	Self-evident	11 celebrations/year
RCL-E	Medium	Self-evident	7 celebrations/year
RCL-F	Small	Self-evident	7 celebrations/year

2.4 Recruitment of Participants

Potential research participants—by definition *professing members*¹³—were selected randomly using predefined criteria based on the most up-to-date member lists (stratified random sampling).¹⁴ The decision to select participants from different age groups was taken in the hope of obtaining a

¹²These categories are derived from *Steunpunt KerkenWerk*. They are used within both RCL and CRC for establishing the salary of their ministers (which depends, among others, on congregation size). See <https://www.steunpuntkerkenwerk.nl/>.

¹³Only professing members were eligible for participation, since this study focuses on the participation of those who are entitled to receive the sacrament. See chapter 1, note 30.

¹⁴See Bremborg, “Interviewing”, pp. 313–314. The following predefined criteria were used: *type of membership* (professing members only), *age* (using the age categories described in the main text), and *gender* (as many men as women). The selection in CRC-C was not random, but done in direct consultation with the consistory. It decided that this restriction would be necessary in order to protect professing members who do not yet celebrate the Lord’s Supper, or who find it difficult to speak about their participation with others. Since this was the only way for the congregation in question to be included, the research team (Jasper Bosman, Hans Schaeffer, and Marcel Barnard) decided to acquiesce. In the other churches, the first selection took place in accordance with a standard procedure, after

better view of the congregation as a whole, and in light of the pilot study, which identified considerable differences between interviewees from different age groups. In the selection procedure, the following age categories were applied: 20–39 years old, 40–64 years old, 65 years old and up.¹⁵ The intention was to find either two or three participants per age group for each focus group, equally balanced in the total number of men and women. In practice this did not always prove successful (see Table 2.2).¹⁶

Table 2.2: Participants by age groups (m = male, f = female)

Church	Age 20–39 years	Age 40–64 years	Age 65 years and older	Total
CRC-A	7 (m=3, f=4)	8 (m=3, f=5)	7 (m=4, f=3)	22 (m=10, f=12)
CRC-B	5 (m=2, f=3)	5 (m=1, f=4)	6 (m=3, f=3)	16 (m=6, f=10)
CRC-C	2 (m=1, f=1)	2 (m=1, f=1)	2 (m=1, f=1)	6 (m=3, f=3) ¹⁷
RCL-D	7 (m=4, f=3)	7 (m=4, f=3)	4 (m=2, f=2)	18 (m=10, f=8)
RCL-E	6 (m=2, f=4)	6 (m=3, f=3)	6 (m=4, f=2)	18 (m=9, f=9)
RCL-F	5 (m=2, f=3)	8 (m=5, f=3)	7 (m=4, f=3)	20 (m=11, f=9)
Total	32 (m=14, f=18)	36 (m=17, f=19)	32 (m=18, f=14)	100 (m=49, f=51)

Selected members were invited by telephone, in almost all cases by the researcher himself.¹⁸ Members who served on the local church council were excluded, with the exception of the ministers, who were inter-

which the minister could exercise a veto (for cases where inviting the selected person was deemed inappropriate). In a small number of cases the local ministers exercised their veto. Reasons for vetoes were: physical and/or mental illness (personal and/or within the family), death (idem), lack of personal involvement in the local congregation, and other reasons not specified.

¹⁵Age categories were derived from the national Dutch census organization Statistics Netherlands (CBS).

¹⁶In case not enough of the selected members were willing to participate, a new batch of members was selected randomly using the same predefined criteria (see note 14). This process was repeated until sufficient participants were found. However, due to last-minute cancellations or absences, some differences between the numbers of participants per age group or gender remain.

¹⁷In CRC-C, no focus groups could be conducted. The reason for this will be explained in §2.5.2 below.

¹⁸In CRC-C and RCL-F, the participants were not approached by the researcher himself but by the local secretary. In the first case this was due to the sensitive nature of the subject within the congregation, and in the latter case to protect the privacy of the church members.

viewed separately. This decision was taken to separate the espoused and formal theological voices, and to prevent hierarchical differences within the focus groups as much as possible.¹⁹

2.4.1 Response and Non-Response

For CRC-A, CRC-B, RCL-D, and RCL-E, selected church members were invited by the researcher himself. This made it possible to note the reasons for non-response (if mentioned) and to calculate the response rate. In these four congregations, a total of 74 men and 73 woman were invited for participation. In the end, 35 men and 39 women participated, amounting to an average response rate of 50% (in these four congregations, see Table 2.3). The response rates for CRC-C and RCL-F are not known.²⁰

Table 2.3: Number of approached and actual participants (m = male, f = female)

Church	Approached	Participated	Response rate
CRC-A	35 (m=18, f=17)	22 (m=10, f=12)	63%
CRC-B	42 (m=22, f=20)	16 (m=6, f=10)	38%
CRC-C	Unknown ¹⁸	6 (m=3, f=3) ¹⁷	Unknown ¹⁸
RCL-D	33 (m=15, f=18)	18 (m=10, f=8)	55%
RCL-E	37 (m=19, f=18)	18 (m=9, f=9)	49%
RCL-F	Unknown ¹⁸	20 (m=11, f=9)	Unknown ¹⁸

Reasons mentioned for not participating in this research included illness, apprehension over talking in groups or about the subject matter, vacation, time constraints, lack of interest, scheduling conflicts for interview dates, non-attendance, insufficient ties with the local church (i.e. nominal membership), conflicts with others in the congregation, disabilities (i.e. assistance required for visiting the church building), old age ailments, and language problems.²¹ Another group of non-participants was constituted by church members who had originally been selected, but be-

¹⁹Even though the local church council in churches following the presbyterial-synodal model usually consists of laypeople (except for the minister), the voice of council members may be deemed to have greater weight in a focus group interview also involving other congregation members, who may see them as “representing” the normative voice.

²⁰See note 18.

²¹Interestingly, the reason “apprehension over talking about the subject matter” implies that the focus group interview method utilized in this study is not suitable for these participants. I wonder whether a different research method would have made a significant difference, since some believers (especially within the CRC) rarely talk about the Lord’s Supper, except during pastoral counseling and within the family circle.

came members of the local church council during the later, field research phase.

In CRC-B the response rate was relatively low. Members did not mention any motives for declining the invitation apart from those listed above; remarkable, however, was the relatively large number of people who stated that they did not feel comfortable speaking in groups and/or about the subject matter with others.

2.5 Research Methods

Multiple empirical research methods were combined in this study to explore the performance, perception, and valuation of the Lord's Supper. In the following sections I will reflect on the following methods: participatory observations, focus group interviews, individual interviews, and literature review.

2.5.1 Participatory Observations

In the first place, participatory observations were conducted in all six congregations.²² This implied that the researcher visited two different celebrations of the Lord's Supper in each congregation. Where possible, he joined the Lord's Supper as a guest, introducing himself in person to the local church council before the start of the church service. In total, twelve observations were performed, and participation was possible for ten of the twelve celebrations.²³

Some congregations within the CRC and RCL denominations have the custom of holding a preparatory service in the week leading up to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Due to the limited time and means available, it was decided not to include these meetings in the present research.

Participatory Observation was the method used to describe the *operant theological voice* from the researcher's perspective (see §1.3.1). The participatory observations were also used to collect essential information for the focus group interviews ahead of time. Additionally, the observations were used as an aid for the interpretation of the interviews (after they were conducted). During the observations, special attention was given to the following aspects of ritual action as defined by Ronald Grimes:²⁴

²²See Harvey, "Field Research: Participant Observation".

²³In one congregation (CRC-C), it was not possible to join in the celebration of the Lord's Supper without an extra, prior personal meeting with delegates from the local church council. Due to limited time and resources, a decision was made simply to observe these celebrations without seeking permission to join in the actual celebration.

²⁴See Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, pp. 242-283, cf. 237-241 (2013). A similar approach is used in Sonnenberg and De Kock, "Een toast uitbrengen?", pp. 79-82 (2018).

- *Ritual Actions*: the actions, performances, enactments, practices, behaviors, or events that constitute or belong to the ritual
- *Ritual Actors*: the agents that act as part of the ritual
- *Ritual Places*: the places where, and orientations in which, the ritual occurs
- *Ritual Times*: when a ritual happens, how long it takes place, etc.
- *Ritual Objects*: the paraphernalia of ritual (the objects that play a role)
- *Ritual Languages*: the words, sounds, and utterings that are used
- *Ritual Groups*: the groups that may or may not participate in the ritual

2.5.2 Focus Group Interviews

Secondly, several focus group interviews were conducted.²⁵ In five out of six congregations (i.e. all except CRC-C), three focus groups were organized (Table 2.4). Participants in focus group interviews were selected using a list of demographic features like age and sex (see §2.4). In practice, the focus group size varied from 4 to 8 people, so that in some cases only one participant per age group was present. Participants could only participate once. In total, fifteen focus group interviews were conducted (i.e. three interviews in five congregations) to register the *espoused theological voice* from the church members' perspective.

Table 2.4: Number of participants in focus group interviews (m = male, f = female)

Church	Focus group 1	Focus group 2	Focus group 3	Total
CRC-A	8 (m=4, f=4)	8 (m=4, f=4)	6 (m=2, f=4)	22 (m=10, f=12)
CRC-B	7 (m=3, f=4)	5 (m=2, f=3)	4 (m=1, f=3)	16 (m=6, f=10)
CRC-C	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
RCL-D	7 (m=3, f=4)	6 (m=4, f=2)	5 (m=3, f=2)	18 (m=10, f=8)
RCL-E	6 (m=3, f=3)	4 (m=3, f=1)	8 (m=3, f=5)	18 (m=9, f=9)
RCL-F	8 (m=5, f=3)	8 (m=4, f=4)	4 (m=2, f=2)	20 (m=11, f=9)

²⁵See Krueger, *Focus Groups* (1994); Kitzinger, "The Methodology of Focus Groups" (idem); Bremborg, "Interviewing", pp. 312–313 (2011); Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, "Focus Groups" (idem); De Roest, "The Focus Group Method in Practical Ecclesiology" (2015). More on the theological character of interviewing in practical theological research can be found in Campbell-Reed and Scharen, "Ethnography on Holy Ground" (2013).

In one congregation (CRC-C), the local church council did not consent to focus group interviews. The reason alleged relates to this congregation's spiritual background: since it belonged to the *bevindelijke* Reformed wing of the CRC denomination, professing members of this church generally do not join the celebration of the Lord's Supper. As a result, the church council deemed the topic of study too sensitive for discussion in group interviews. As an alternative, individual interviews were conducted with five professing members who participate regularly in the Lord's Supper, and with one member who does not participate.

There is a variety of reasons for the choice of group interviews. In the first place, the object of study is not individual perception as such, but the perception of congregants who participate in the Lord's Supper together with others. The use of individual interviews alone would make it more difficult to analyze common aspects of the perception within a given congregation. Secondly, during focus group interviews, participants were able to respond to each other. This only enabled discussion between group members (so that commonalities and more sensitive topics became visible to the researcher), but also allowed the researcher to track the arguments that were used in the conversation between group members. Thirdly, group members may stimulate each other to provide more information than they would in an individual interview by asking each other for clarification, or challenging each other to provide more information. Furthermore, for some participants it may be more comfortable to talk about sensitive topics with other group members than with someone from outside.²⁶

The focus group interviews were semi-structured and revolved around five topics. Each interview started with a general, open question about one's first associations with "the Holy Supper." All participants were asked to note two or three keywords on paper before sharing them with others. After the various keywords had been discussed, four more specific questions followed. The list of topics was developed by the researcher in cooperation with his supervisors (Hans Schaeffer and Marcel Barnard), and can be found in Appendix A. A further explanation of the design process that led to this specific topic list can be found in §2.6 below.

2.5.3 Individual Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with members of one congregation (CRC-C) and with the local ministers of all participating congregations. As noted, it was not possible to conduct focus group interviews in CRC-C. For this congregation, six members from three different age groups were

²⁶See Evers, *Kwalitatief interviewen*, pp. 39–40, 107–137. Group members may also influence each other during the interviews. This interaction can become an object of study as well.

selected by the local church council, using the same selection criteria applied for the focus group interviews (see §2.4). The individual interviews in CRC-C complement the focus group interviews to document the *espoused theological voice*.

After all the interviews with congregation members had been conducted, an interview was also held with the local minister. The latter interviews were used to register the first part of the *formal theological voice* (from the local minister's point of view). Ministers were interviewed separately with a view to potential hierarchical differences, and out of consideration for the unbalance that local church leader would presumably cause by their participation in focus groups with church members. Furthermore, the inclusion of ministers in focus groups would make it impossible to register the espoused and formal theological voices separately, and thus to construct a conversation between the four voices.

The individual interviews were also semi-structured and revolved around the same five topics mentioned in Appendix A. For the ministers, several additional specific questions were later added concerning the local situation (liturgy, local church policy, etc.).

2.5.4 Literature Review

Finally, a literature review was conducted to describe and analyze the second part of the *formal theological voice* (as published in CRC and RCL theological literature) and the *normative theological voice* (as recorded in the normative documents of the respective denominations).

To describe the second part of the formal voice, all books and book chapters written by CRC and RCL theologians and published between 1944 and today were selected. The year 1944 marks the year the RCL came into existence. Although the CRC were founded earlier (1892), the same time span was maintained to facilitate a balanced comparison. The limited selection further implies that sermons, articles in regular and church magazines, passages in biblical commentaries, commentaries on the confessions, catechism materials, etc., were not surveyed, since that would require a much broader analysis and probably justify an independent publication.²⁷ The goal of the literature review is only to describe the second part of the formal voice as it “sounds” or resonates within the denominations included in this study. For this reason, only the most prominent sources were analyzed.

To describe the normative voice, the present study surveyed the respective confessions, church orders, and liturgical forms for the celebra-

²⁷This part of the research is presented in §5.3. However, in chapter 7 some magazine and newspaper articles written by CRC and RCL authors (also non-theologians) are referred to—not to correct what has been described earlier, but to illustrate the ongoing conversations on the topics related.

tion of the Lord's Supper. The selection of these sources was determined by the documents to which both denominations subscribe. It is important to note that each of the three sources for the normative voice originated from different times and places, and differ in the normativity attributed to them.²⁸

In both cases, the selected literature was analyzed selectively, namely with special attention for references or allusions to the Lord's Supper. The included sources cover a large time span (ca. 75 years for the formal voice, and even more for the normative voice). However, the review presented in this study is not intended to analyze the developments within each voice, but rather to present a *cross section of their current and common understanding*. For this reason, all sources were analyzed by the researcher himself. This limitation is justified by the limited scope of this part of the research, namely to describe the formal and normative voice for mapping how the Lord's Supper is perceived and valued within the participating denominations.²⁹

2.6 Design of the Topic List

The topic list used in this research (see Appendix A) was initially developed by the researcher in an earlier, small-scale pilot study.³⁰ The research instrument developed for this pilot study was used to describe the experience of the Lord's Supper in three RCL congregations (which are not included in this study). The topics used in the pilot study were formulated after designing a ritual studies perspective on liturgical ritual practices consisting of six items:³¹

- *Style* (repeatability, immutability, rule definiteness of the ritual)
- *Meaning* (religious meaning, interpretations, tradition, convictions individual/group)

²⁸In practice, the normativity of all three sources is derived from Scripture. The confessions in particular are considered normative within CRC and RCL because (*quia*) they teach the gospel. Such normativity does not apply to the respective church orders, which are considered to be the application of doctrine (thus standardized by Scripture and the confessions). Lastly, in the RCL in particular the liturgical forms are considered less normative since their texts are regularly changed and may even be replaced with an explanation of the sacrament by the minister in his own words (see chapter 6, note 38). Within the CRC, the liturgical forms are probably considered more normative than they are within the RCL (because CRC ministers are required to use them without exception), but they still are less normative than the confessions due to the new forms that were approved recently. However, the newer forms are not used within all CRC congregations (see chapter 5, note 49).

²⁹See §1.3.

³⁰Bosman and Schaeffer, "Celebrating the Lord's Supper".

³¹See *Ibid.*, pp. 194–197.

- *Conduct* (what needs to happen, what do I need to do, and what happens around me?)
- *Space* (influence of the physical space, also: what (ritual) space is being created?)
- *Experience of the self related to others* (expectations, norms, etc.)
- *Experience of the self related to God* (God image)

This was certainly not the first time a ritual studies perspective was applied in Reformed practical theological research. In 1993 the practical theologian Hans-Günter Heimbrock proposed research on worship as a *ritual*.³² Within Reformed theology, Martha Moore-Keish used a ritual studies approach to study the Lord's Supper specifically.³³

For the present study, the research team used the above six aspects to develop a new topic list which was used to guide the interviews—not to define the Lord's Supper theologically, but to differentiate between the various aspects of ritual action and to “identify the subjective and objective conditions under which people today might still be able to participate fruitfully in the liturgy.”³⁴ As such, the following five topics (which are also included in Appendix A) were constructed on the basis of the six items above:

1. *First associations with the Holy Supper* (which may include all potential items)
2. *Reasons for participating in celebrations* (incorporating meaning, conduct)
3. *Most impactful celebrations* (experience of the self, space, style, conduct)
4. *Personal developments in regard to the Holy Supper* (experience of the self, meaning, conduct)
5. *Desired ways to experience the Holy Supper* (conduct, meaning, style, space)

³²Heimbrock, *Gottesdienst*, p. 8 (1993; quoted in Hegstad, *The Real Church*, p. 198n39, his translation): “In my opinion, it seems to be meaningful to ask how worship as a ritual, not only provides a space for learning, but also has a certain anthropological, inner psychological and interactive role to play, where people can relate inner experiences and collective interpretive patterns to understand these experiences in relation to each other.” See also Jetter, *Symbol und Ritual* (1978); Jennings, “Ritual Studies and Liturgical Theology” (1987); Flanagan, *Sociology and Liturgy*, pp. 234–257 (1991); Driver, *Liberating Rites* (1998); Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit* (1999); Foley, “Ritual Theory” (2014).

³³Moore-Keish, *Do This in Remembrance of Me* (see also §1.1).

³⁴Searle, “Ritual”, p. 58.

After the results of the pilot study had been evaluated, the original topic list was emended to include also a more associative question (i.e. the first topic mentioned above) and further improved during the fieldwork phase. Hence, the final version presented here differs slightly from the original version used at the outset of the study.³⁵

Finally, upon the completion of each interview, all participants were asked to complete a short survey with quantitative questions (see Appendix B). The results of this survey have been included for reference in Appendix C.

2.7 Data Collection

Research data were collected between October 2016 and February 2018 (see Appendix D). In each congregation, two church services were selected as representative of the different celebration styles existing in the local congregation. For example, in RCL-D a morning service (with ambulatory style Lord's Supper) and an afternoon service (with seated communion) were visited on two different Sundays.³⁶ Usually, the first two focus group interviews were conducted after the first visit to a church service.³⁷ After these interviews (usually two or three months later), another service in which the Lord's Supper was celebrated was visited. Following this second visit, the third focus group interview was held, together with the individual interview with the local minister.

All interviews were conducted by the researcher himself. During the focus group interviews, the researcher was assisted by various assistants (one per focus group) who took notes during the interviews, using a standard form. When the focus group interviews were finished, the assistant was invited to provide a short summary of what had been discussed. Participants were asked to respond to this summary, in order to correct or

³⁵The original topic list used in this research was as follows: 1. *Reasons to participate in celebrations*; 2. *Most impactful celebrations*; 3. *Desired ways to experience the Holy Supper*; 4. *Personal developments in regard to the Holy Supper*; 5. *Are there events in your life that have influenced your experience of the Holy Supper? If so, what are they, and how?* In the start-up phase it was decided (1) to add a new opening topic ("*First associations*") to catch the initial personal associations on paper before the focus group conversations started (implying that all other topics moved down one place in order), and (2) to combine the original fourth and fifth topics since they had proved quite comparable. Later on, (3) the order of what had become the fourth and fifth topic was reversed following the first round of analysis conducted after the first two interviews (see §2.8 below).

³⁶The different styles of celebration will be explained in Box 3.1 on page 38.

³⁷In CRC-C, a similar approach was used. Following the researcher's visit to a first church service, five individual interviews with church members were conducted. Following the second church service visit, a sixth interview was organized, together with an individual interview with the local minister.

supplement what had been said (*member validation*).³⁸ The individual interviews were conducted without assistance. When the interviews were completed, the participants were asked to complete a short survey with a limited set of quantitative items.

Focus group interviews were organized in a room located in the local church building. They lasted about 75 minutes and were all video recorded. The individual interviews took about 40–50 minutes and were audio recorded. The individual interviews with congregation members (in CRC-C) were conducted at the participants' homes. The interviews with the local ministers took place in their office or living room, or else in the local church building. All interviews were transcribed verbatim.

2.8 Data Analysis

After the first two focus group interviews were conducted (in RCL-F), the contents of the transcripts were discussed within the research team (Jasper Bosman, Hans Schaeffer, and Marcel Barnard). As a result, the decision was made to change the order of the last two items on the topic list (see §2.6 and Appendix A), so that the “desired ways to experience the Lord’s Supper” would form the closing topic. The reason was that this latter topic was deemed more suitable for closing the discussion, since it could include items that had already been addressed in the section on “personal developments.”

The transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis.³⁹ First, inductive coding was applied to meaningful text fragments by the researcher, using Atlas.ti 7. After four transcripts had been coded (two CRC-A and two RCL-F focus groups), the initial codes and interpretations were discussed within the above research team and with the other PhD students in Kampen (Koos Tamminga and Attila Csongor Kelemen). Thereafter, inductive codes were grouped into themes (theoretical coding). Finally, all other transcripts were coded by the researcher and discussed several times within the research team. This resulted in the code tree included in Appendix E.

³⁸See Seale, *The Quality of Qualitative Research*, pp. 61–72 (1999); Boeije, *Analysis in Qualitative Research*, p. 177 (2010); Mortelmans, *Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden*, pp. 484–485 (2013); Evers, *Kwalitatieve analyse*, pp. 139–140 (2015).

³⁹See Braun and Clarke, “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology” (2006); Mortelmans, *Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden*, pp. 420–456 (2013); Evers, *Kwalitatieve analyse*, pp. 89, 93–94 (2015). In terms of Saldaña (*The Coding Manual*, pp. 14–16, 97, 198–204), initial coding was applied, and then the data were “themed.”

2.9 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the *validity* of what is reported in this dissertation, several questions were presented and reflected on during the research process: *Do the methods used measure what they are meant to measure? Does the data collection process collect what it says it does? and Is the analysis related to the data collection?*⁴⁰

As regards the first question, multiple methods were combined to investigate the Lord's Supper on a congregational level (see §1.2). Next to individual interviews and focus group interviews, also participatory observations and a literature review were conducted. The concurrent use of multiple methods made it possible to study different aspects like performance, perception, and valuation at the same time (methodological triangulation).⁴¹ Furthermore, member validation was practiced after each focus group interview by the presentation of a short summary of what had been discussed, during which interviewees were offered the possibility to respond or share additional information.⁴²

In terms of the second question, the quality of the data collected could be monitored and compared because all interviews were performed by the researcher himself. Conversely, potential bias resulting from the researcher's perspectivity during the data collection process was counteracted by continuous reflection on his personal perspective within the research team and the deployment of interview assistants during the focus group interviews (§1.7). Furthermore, the quality of the collected data was regularly discussed and reflected upon within the research team.

As regards the third question, the thematic analysis was performed in close cooperation with the research team and with other PhD students in Kampen, who were asked to check the initial coding (thematic analysis) and the formulation of themes (theoretical coding). This approach, called researcher triangulation, enabled the researcher to adjust and correct the analysis during the process. Furthermore, after the analysis of the first two focus group interviews, it was decided to change the order of the final two items in the topic list to ensure that the right information was collected in the remaining interviews (see §2.8). This way, results of the initial analysis were used to improve the data collection.

The combination of these research methods and techniques led to the conclusion that the methods used indeed measured what was intended, that the quality of the data collection process was regularly checked, and

⁴⁰Taken from: Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, p. 65.

⁴¹See Seale, *The Quality of Qualitative Research*, pp. 53–56, here 54 (1999); Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, pp. 48–49 (2016); Mortelmans, *Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden*, p. 481 (2013); Evers, *Kwalitatieve analyse*, pp. 138–139 (2015).

⁴²See note 38.

that the conducted analysis was related to the data collection and was also used to improve it. In sum, both the research methods used and the data collected in this study are suitable for answering the research questions central to it.

The *reliability* of this study is defined by the degree to which another researcher can reproduce the same data and analysis.⁴³ Several measures were taken to foster the reliability, namely the careful use of qualitative research methods (including the recording and transcription of the conducted interviews), methodological triangulation, and peer debriefing as described above.

The *generalizability* of this research is limited in various ways.⁴⁴ Because the fieldwork was conducted within six CRC and RCL congregations and the literature review was tailored to the two respective denominations, the research findings are especially applicable to these congregations. Other congregations or denominations may therefore choose to utilize the Four Voices model in a similar way to investigate the celebration of the Lord's Supper within their own context, including a replication of the conducted observations, interviews, and literature review. Such an approach would allow a full comparison with the findings of the present study.

However, also without full replication it is possible for general conclusions to be drawn from this study because the descriptions and findings presented here may resonate with the situation and questions of its readers. As such, this study may “throw theoretical light on similar but different situations” (theoretical generalization).⁴⁵ Other churches—in the Netherlands or elsewhere—that identify with the people and thoughts described in this study may use the descriptions, conclusions, and recommendations of the following chapters to reflect on the Lord's Supper within their own ecclesial context and situation.

2.10 Research Ethics and Data Management

In each congregation, prior approval was obtained and received from the local consistory. Any personal data obtained were used in accordance with the Dutch law “*Wet Bescherming Persoonsgegevens*” (Law for the Protection of Personal Information, 2001–2018) and the supplementary code of conduct for the use personal data in research (2005) published

⁴³Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, p. 66 (2016); cf. Mortelmans, *Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden*, pp. 477–478 (2013); Evers, *Kwalitatieve analyse*, pp. 134–137 (2015).

⁴⁴See Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, pp. 44–47 (2016); Mortelmans, *Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden*, pp. 485–486 (2013); Evers, *Kwalitatieve analyse*, pp. 141–142 (2015).

⁴⁵Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, p. 66.

by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU).⁴⁶ On May 25, 2018, the aforementioned law was replaced by the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), but by that time the fieldwork phase of this study had already been concluded.

All participants received an information letter prior to the start of the interview, and were asked to sign an informed consent form. Participants were not remunerated for their participation. Following the verbatim transcription of the interviews, transcripts were anonymized. During the study, access to the empirical data was restricted to the research team.⁴⁷ Once the research was completed, all relevant data were stored in accordance with the Data Management Guidelines of Kampen Theological University.

⁴⁶See VSNU, *Gedragcode voor gebruik van persoonsgegevens in wetenschappelijk onderzoek*.

⁴⁷See Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, pp. 209–229 (2007); Boeije, *Analysis in Qualitative Research*, pp. 43–55 (2010); Bird and Scholes, “Research Ethics” (2011); Mortelmans, *Handboek kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden*, pp. 189–201 (2013).

Chapter 3

Operant Voice

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, the research subject and research methodology were introduced. This third chapter will describe the collected and analyzed data with regard to the participatory observations or *operant voice*. For the sake of a clear description, each congregation is first characterized from the researcher's perspective. Thereafter, the operant theological voice will be described based on the visits to church services conducted between October 2016 and September 2017.

3.2 Characterization of Congregations

Before the results of empirical exploration are presented, it is helpful to offer a short introduction from the researcher's perspective describing the character of the participating congregations.¹ An initial introduction to these congregations can be found in §2.3. The present section will offer a more detailed description, pertaining in particular to the style with which the Lord's Supper is celebrated in each church (see Table 3.1 and Box 3.1).

¹Additional information on the history of Reformed worship in the Netherlands can be found in Runia, "The Reformed Liturgy in the Dutch Tradition" (1993); Oskamp and Schuman, *De weg van de liturgie* (2001, orig. 1998); Van der Velden, Van der Aa, and De Bie jr., *Als wij samenkomen* (2000); Immink, *The Touch of the Sacred* (2014). For a special focus on the Lord's Supper, see Luth, "Communion in the Churches of the Dutch Reformation to the Present Day" (1995).

Table 3.1: Style of celebration in participating congregations

Church	Celebrations	Style of Celebration
CRC-A	4 celebrations/year	Sitting at a table
CRC-B	5 celebrations/year	Sitting in the pews
CRC-C	4 celebrations/year	Sitting at a table
RCL-D	11 celebrations/year	Sitting at a table/Ambulatory ²
RCL-E	7 celebrations/year	Sitting at a table (4x)/Ambulatory (2x) ³
RCL-F	7 celebrations/year	Sitting at a table (2x)/Ambulatory (5x)

Box 3.1: Ideal-Typical Description of the Different Celebration Styles

Three different styles of celebration were used in the participating congregations: “sitting at a table,” “sitting in the pews,” and “ambulatory.”⁴

In the *sitting at a table* style, the Lord’s Supper is celebrated while participants are seated. Several tables are placed next to each other at the front of the sanctuary, surrounded by chairs. After the liturgical form for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is read, the congregation professes its faith by listening to or singing a confession of faith (e.g. the Apostles’ Creed). Then the participants are invited by row to be seated at the tables. They walk up to the front and take their seats next to each other. Non-participants like external guests, children, or non-professing members remain seated. When everyone has taken their seats, the minister speaks the words of institution, breaks bread, and pours wine from a silver carafe into one or more large, silver cups. After this, bread is distributed, with the silver plates being passed along from one person to the next. After this, the cups filled with wine are distributed in the same way. Afterwards, the minister may share a short meditation and/or the congregation may be requested to sing a song directly after receiving bread and wine. Lastly, the participants return to their seats in the sanctuary. Most of the time there are not enough seats for all participants at the “table” (i.e. one round); for that reason, this part of the ritual is repeated as many times as necessary until all participants

²In RCL-D, the sitting and ambulatory styles of celebrating are alternated every month. Moreover, the Lord’s Supper is only administered once per Sunday—seated in the morning services, or ambulatory in the afternoon services. During the summer vacation, the Lord’s Supper is not celebrated in this congregation.

³In RCL-E, the sacrament is celebrated on Maundy Thursday using a third style, namely “sitting in the pews.”

have joined the celebration (usually 3–4 times). Each time a new group takes its turn, the ritual is repeated starting with the words of institution.

In the *sitting in the pews* style, both participating and non-participating people remain seated in their original pews or seats. After the liturgical form has been read aloud, the minister says a prayer followed by the words of institution, and then the bread and wine are distributed by the elders through the rows. Usually, multiple plates and cups are used at the same time. These plates and cups are passed from one person to the next; those who would like to participate can take bread and wine, while those who prefer to abstain can pass the plate or cup on to their neighbor.

In the *ambulatory* style, only those who are eligible and would like to participate in the celebration are invited, row by row, to walk to the front of the sanctuary. This happens after the reading of a liturgical form, the recitation or singing of the confession of faith, and a prayer spoken by the minister. Walking in line, communicants first receive a piece of bread from the minister, and several steps further on a sip of wine from one of the elders. After this, they return to their seats in the sanctuary.

All participating churches used white bread cut into small squares (usually prior to the start of the church service) and sweet red wine. Sometimes grape juice is offered as an alternative to wine. During the celebration of the Lord's Supper, an offertory is held for the poor and the needy. Participants can bring their offerings when seated at the table, or while walking up to the front or back to their seats (i.e. before or after receiving the bread and wine). Where the Lord's Supper is celebrated seated in the pews, an additional offertory is held simultaneously with the normal offerings. After the celebration, the minister leads the congregation in a prayer of thanksgiving for God's gifts in Jesus Christ and the Lord's Supper.

3.2.1 CRC-A

CRC-A is a small-sized congregation (0–350 members) in which it is common but not self-evident for professing members to celebrate the Lord's

⁴There are indeed more than three styles of celebration in use within the Reformed tradition in the Netherlands. More on these styles can be found in Schotel, *De openbare Eeredienst (1)*, pp. 95–110 (1870); Schotel, *De openbare Eeredienst (2)*, pp. 421–428 (idem); Dankbaar, *Communiegebruiken in de eeuw der Reformatie* (1987). See also Brienen, "Ontwikkelingen in de liturgie rond het Heilig Avondmaal", pp. 115–117 (1990); Oosterhuis and Urban, *Praktijkschets liturgie*, pp. 44–47 (1995); Luth, "Communion in the Churches of the Dutch Reformation to the Present Day" (idem); Bosman and Schaeffer, "Celebrating the Lord's Supper", pp. 204–206 (2018).

Supper. In practice, the Lord's Supper is administered four times a year (usually in March, June, September, and December). It uses the "sitting at a table" style, but it should be noted that congregation size makes it impossible for all to be seated together at a single "table". Furthermore, the architecture of the church building and the pews means that the table is relatively small in size. This implies that only one side of the table can be used by the celebrants, while the others are seated in a wider circle around the table. Due to the positioning of the pews, also the front row is used to host the communicants.

On the Sunday prior to the celebration, the first part of the classical liturgical form for the celebration of the Lord's Supper is read during the morning service (this congregation holds two services every Sunday).⁵ This part of the liturgical form addresses the topics of *institution*, *self-examination*, and *invitation and admonition* (see Box 3.2). During the intervening week, a mid-week meeting is held for those who would like to participate in the celebration of the Lord's Supper on the following Sunday. During this service, which usually lasts less than an hour, a meditation is read by one of the elders, accompanied by the singing of some Psalms and hymns.

On the Sunday when the Lord's Supper is celebrated, the sacrament is administered in both morning and afternoon services. In the afternoon service, the celebration of the sacrament is followed by thanksgiving and spiritual reflection (*nabetrachtung*).

3.2.2 CRC-B

CRC-B is a large congregation (more than 550 members) in which it is common for professing members to join the Lord's Supper when it is administered. This happens five times a year (usually in January, March/April, June, September, and November, including a special silent celebration on Good Friday). The style of celebration is "sitting in the pews." The liturgy in this congregation varies between classic and modern. Congregants may choose the style they prefer, since both are offered on the same Sunday. The style of music is affected as well, also during the communion. Whereas in classic services only organ or piano are used, in modern services there is a band playing. For the rest, the style of celebration for the Lord's Supper remains the same across both liturgy styles.

⁵The term "classical liturgical form" refers to the liturgical form originally composed by Petrus Dathenus in 1566 for his congregation in Frankenthal, Germany. The original text can be found in Honders, "Das Abendmahl nach der Ordnung des Petrus Dathenus 1566". In CRC-A, the most recent CRC edition of this form is in use (CRC, "Formulier (1971)"). An English translation with some minor differences can be found in Dorn, *The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Church in America*, pp. 193–199 or online: CanRC, *Form*. In the following, I will refer to the online CanRC edition since it is readily available and comes from a denomination whose origins are in the RCL.

A week before the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated, an announcement to that effect is made during the church services (of which there are two per Sunday, one in the morning and one in the evening). The minister has the task of devoting attention to the coming Lord's Supper celebration, which he usually does by way of a reference in sermon or congregational prayer to next week's celebration. No special midweek preparation meetings are held in this church, and the spiritual reflection (*nabetrachting*) is usually addressed briefly in the sermon or in a prayer following the celebration of the sacrament in the second service.

Box 3.2: Self-Examination and Spiritual Reflection (*nabetrachting*)

According to the classical liturgical form for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, "true self-examination" consists of the following three parts:⁶

1. Consideration of one's own sinfulness, to humble oneself for God
2. Faith in God's promise of forgiveness in Jesus Christ
3. A sincere desire for a renewed life according to the will of God

The practice of *nabetrachting* (lit. "postprocessing") implies that believers are asked to reflect on what the Lord's Supper means for them both spiritually and practically. Traditionally, this takes place during the first church service that follows the celebration of the sacrament, usually the service held in the afternoon. In the classical liturgical form this practice is addressed shortly in the prayer of thanksgiving ("We earnestly ask you, faithful God and Father, that by your Holy Spirit this celebration may lead to our daily increase in true faith and fellowship with Christ, your beloved Son").⁷

3.2.3 CRC-C

CRC-C is a medium sized congregation (between 350 and 550 members) in which the Lord's Supper is administered four times a year (usually in

⁶CanRC, *Form*; cf. Lekkerkerker, *Kanttekeningen III*, pp. 149–155 (1956); Van 't Spijker, *Zijn verbond en woorden*, pp. 92–101 (1980); Leeffink, *Tot versterking van ons geloof*, pp. 9–21 (1998); Wallet, "Vorbereiding op het Heilig Avondmaal" (2011); Groenleer, "1 Korinthiërs 11 en de voorbereiding op het Heilig Avondmaal" (idem).

⁷CanRC, *Form*; cf. Wallet, "Nabetrachting" (2011).

March, June, September, and December). The style of celebration is “sitting at a table.” As there are more communicants than available seats at the table, in general three or four “tables” or seatings are required before everyone has participated in the sacrament. Although two church services are held every Sunday, the sacrament is only administered in the morning service.

One week before the Lord’s Supper is scheduled to be held, the first part of the classical liturgical form is read in the service on Sunday morning, as is also the custom in CRC-A. In both, a special “preparation sermon” is then held. This sermon takes about 40–50 minutes and is part of the regular church services. Additionally, a special preparation church service is held on an evening during the week of preparation for those who are eligible to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Lastly, after the sacrament has been celebrated on Sunday morning, a special “thanksgiving service” (*dankzeggingsdienst*) is held in the afternoon with special attention to the spiritual reflection (*nabetrachting*).

3.2.4 RCL-D

RCL-D is a large congregation (more than 550 members) in which the Lord’s Supper is celebrated once a month, with the exception of August (annual summer vacation). This frequency has been maintained now for more than a decade. As indicated above (in Table 3.1), in this congregation the sacrament is only administered once on that given Sunday, alternating between the morning and afternoon services. So too the celebration style alternates between the “ambulatory” (in the morning services) and “sitting at a table” (in the afternoon services) styles.

In this congregation, the coming celebration of the Lord’s Supper is announced by the church council a week ahead of time, but for the rest no special preparations or thanksgiving services are held. So too there is no spiritual reflection (*nabetrachting*) afterwards, except for what is contained in the brief *thanksgiving* section included in the RCL’s liturgical forms. These forms were not, however, used during the participatory observations conducted as described below.

3.2.5 RCL-E

RCL-E is a medium-sized congregation (between 350 and 550 members). There the Lord’s Supper is administered seven times a year (usually in January, March, on Maundy Thursday, May, July, September, and November). As in RCL-D, the celebration alternates between “ambulatory” (twice) and “sitting at a table” (four times) styles, with a third style being used on Maundy Thursday (“sitting in the pews”). In this congregation, two church services are held every Sunday. Furthermore, two times a year

the Lord's Supper is celebrated both in the morning and afternoon service. The other times the sacrament is only administered in the morning service.

As in RCL-D, no preparation sermons and/or mid-week preparation services are held. A week before the sacrament is to be celebrated, an announcement is made to that effect so that all can prepare themselves. No special thanksgiving services are held following the celebration, and so too there is no special attention for the spiritual reflection (*nabetracting*). Nevertheless, the RCL's liturgical forms are used consistently in this congregation.

3.2.6 RCL-F

RCL-F is small congregation (less than 350 members) in which the sacrament is administered seven times a year (once every two months, and on Easter Sunday). In this congregation as well, the styles of celebration vary: twice a year the "sitting at a table" style is used, and five times a year the celebration is "ambulatory."

During the afternoon service on the Sunday preceding the celebration of the sacrament, the first part of the classical liturgical form is read.⁸ Sometimes, this form is replaced by a part of one of the other four liturgical forms that have been approved for use within the RCL denomination—even though these forms sometimes devote less attention to the aspect of self-examination. During the intervening week of preparation, no mid-week meetings are organized. Similarly, there are no special thanksgiving sermons or services in RCL-F.

3.3 Operant Voice: Church Services

In order to describe the operant theological voice, participatory observations were conducted across all six congregations in the period from October 2016 to September 2017 (see Appendix D).⁹ In the following sections, these observations will be described and analyzed. During the observations, an observation protocol was used (see §2.5.1).

3.3.1 CRC-A Services

December 11, 2016—Advent (Sitting at a Table)

The doors of CRC-A's church building were open when I arrived on a cold Sunday morning. People were chatting with each other in the doorway.

⁸RCL, *Avondmaalsformulier 1 (2011 Revision)*. Recently, this and other RCL forms were given a linguistic revision: see RCL, "Avondmaalsformulier 1 (2016 Revision)".

⁹The operant theological voice is defined as "the theology embedded within the actual practices of a group" (Cameron et al., *Talking About God in Practice*, p. 54), see §1.3.1.

I will admit I felt a bit tense, since I did not know anyone and had never been there before. After taking off my coat, I walked up to someone who looked “official,” to introduce myself and to ask if the minister—whom I had never met—had arrived. This man turned out to be one of the elders. He had heard about my research, and during our short conversation the minister turned up, still wearing his coat and accompanied by his wife. We greeted each other (and I received a warm welcome), and I asked whether I needed to submit an attestation of sound doctrine and good conduct from my own church council in order to receive the sacrament. He assured me that this was not necessary. We wished each other a blessed service, and I chose a seat somewhere in the middle of the sanctuary.

The liturgy was announced on a wooden display on the wall. The structure of the liturgy was classical, but it also had some new elements in it; thus the liturgy included Psalms from both the old (1773) and new (1967) Psalters. The display also listed a number of hymns from the interdenominational *Liedboek voor de kerken* (“Hymnbook for the churches,” 1973) and from the CRC song book *Schriftberijmingen* (“Songs from Scripture,” 2003, originally from 1987). So too a projector was used to display the text of the songs and liturgical forms.

Before the start of the service, an elder announced that “guests from elsewhere” would be participating in the celebration, without mentioning their names. After this and other announcements, the minister walked to the pulpit and prayed a silent prayer before climbing up. After he had welcomed the congregation and spoken the Declaration of Dependence (Votum) and the Lord’s Greeting (Salutation), the congregation sang a first hymn. Directly after the Salutation, we sang the first two stanzas of Psalm 24 (1967 Psalter).

The regular offertory was held after the reading of a summary of God’s Law (in Jesus’ own words), a prayer by the minister, and the Scripture reading. During the offertory, the organ played softly. I felt relaxed.

It was advent. The sermon was on Malachi 2:17–3:24, with special attention to Malachi 3:1–2.¹⁰ Right at the beginning of the sermon, the minister related Advent to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper that morning: Jesus came to earth, and He will come back. Christians expect His return. He said:

And the Lord’s Supper may stimulate us: as certainly as you taste bread and wine with your mouth, so certainly will the body and blood of Jesus feed you for the eternal life, will it be

¹⁰This congregation uses the *Herziene Statenvertaling* (“Revised States Translation,” 2010). This is a new translation based on the principles of translation of the *Statenvertaling* (“States Translation,” orig. 1637), the Dutch equivalent of the King James Version.

a source of eternal life for you. Remember that, and celebrate the Lord's Supper until I come.

After the sermon, we sang the second stanza of Psalm 65 (1773 Psalter) and the minister read the second part of the classical liturgical form.¹¹ The liturgical form includes the reading of the Apostles' Creed, which the minister did himself; the congregation remained seated and silent. Before we continued, the third stanza of the same Psalm was sung. Thereafter, the minister walked down from the pulpit to the table, and a first group from the congregation was invited to the table.

After reading the first part of the words of institution and breaking the bread (up high for everyone to see), the minister first took a piece of bread himself. After this, two silver plates with bread were distributed to all those sitting at the table. Next, the minister poured wine into a silver cup and read the second part of the words of institution. Again he was the first to take a sip, after which his cup and three others were distributed with the help of several elders.¹² Communicants had the opportunity, either before or after communion, to put money in a special offertory box in support of disabled children in Palestine. In Dutch, this phenomenon is referred to as *avondmaalscollecte*, a special collection held at the Lord's Supper, usually for the poor and needy.

In total, it took three "tables" or seatings before all professing members had participated. Some of those present in the sanctuary remained seated and did not participate – these included all children and ca. 5% of the adults. After the first seating, Psalm 85 was read and the first stanza from the 1967 Psalter was sung while the communicants were still seated. After they had returned to their original seats, an elder invited me and other communicant members around me to join the second table. Where I sat I had my back to the congregation, but I was still beside and facing other communicants. There was no opportunity to shake hands, since the ambiance was one of reverence and everyone remained silent, but I tried to nod kindly to those sitting next to me. Although we were sitting at one table, it was hard to see everyone's face from where I was sitting. Perhaps it was because I was a first-time visitor and did not really know anyone there that I felt a little uncomfortable during communion. After we had

¹¹CRC, "Formulier (1971)". This part follows the explanation of self-examination and starts with the words: "Let us now consider for what purpose the Lord has instituted His supper; namely, that we should use it in remembrance of Him."

¹²The words of institution read, respectively: "The bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ. Take, eat, remember and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was broken for the complete forgiveness of all our sins"; and: "The cup of blessing, for which we give thanks, is the communion of the blood of Christ. Take, drink from it, all of you, remember and believe that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was poured out for the complete forgiveness of all our sins" (CanRC, *Form*). The exact wording may vary per liturgical form, but is usually inspired by biblical texts.

received bread and wine, the minister read the words of the apostle Paul in the “thanksgiving” part of the liturgical form (Romans 8:32 and 5:8–11), followed by the singing of another stanza from Psalm 85. After this, we returned to our seats.

To conclude the celebration after the third table, the minister read the other part of the “thanksgiving” section (Psalm 103:1–13). After this, the final stanza of Psalm 85 was sung, everyone returned to their seats, and the minister concluded the celebration by reading the prayer of thanksgiving in the form. The content of this prayer was extended to include also a closing prayer for the morning service. It ended with the Lord’s Prayer, which the minister once again read himself. The church service as a whole was concluded with the singing of a hymn. In total, the service lasted 1 hour and 35 minutes.

May 21, 2017—Spring (Sitting at a Table)

I visited the second service after conducting two focus groups in this congregation. Recalling the procedure from my last visit, I did not go to the consistory to register for participation, but walked directly into the sanctuary. Before the service began, a middle-aged woman kindly asked me whether I was new to the church, after which I explained my research to her.

When the service had started, an elder read a list with the names of guests who had been given permission to participate (*gastrecht*).¹³ My name was missing from the list, but I figured that the minister and former focus group members would recognize me, so that my participation probably would not disrupt the service.

The structure of the liturgy was classical. Like the last time, it included songs from various traditions: Psalms (from the old and new Psalters), together with hymns from *Schriftberijmingen, Hervormde bundel* (“Protestant hymnal,” 1938, from the mainline Protestant church in the Netherlands), *Weerklank* (lit. “Resonance,” 2016, an interdenominational hymnal with a selection of evangelical-Reformed hymns), and *Opwekking* (lit. “Awakening,” a hymnal with evangelical songs that is still expanding).

The structure of the service was roughly similar to that of the first service I visited several months ago. Differences included the replacement of the reading of the Ten Commandments with a confession of sin (in the form of a prayer) and a declaration of forgiveness. Furthermore, *the second part* of the classical liturgical form was split into two halves: the first half was read before the offertory and sermon, while the second half was read afterwards.¹⁴

¹³See CRC, *Kerkorde*, art. 63.5.

¹⁴In the first reading, only the “Remembrance of Christ” section was read.

Following the declaration of forgiveness, the minister did the Scripture reading, which was taken from 1 Timothy 1:12–17. Next, he read the section “Remembrance of Christ” from the classical liturgical form. This was immediately followed by the offering. During the offertory, some younger children left the sanctuary to attend the “children’s service” in a separate room. I do not remember this happening during my first visit, so it caught me somewhat by surprise. Following the offering, we sang a song written and composed by the Dutch gospel band Sela (*Opwekking* 737: “At Your table”).¹⁵

The sermon was on 1 Timothy 1:15. The minister emphasized the life-saving work of Christ who had come to earth to save sinners. He mentioned the Lord’s Supper several times during his preaching. Directly after the sermon, we sang one stanza from Psalm 119 (1773 Psalter) and the minister then read the final part of the liturgical form (starting with the words “In order that we might firmly believe...”). After the reading of the Apostles’ Creed, the congregation sang a hymn¹⁶ and the table was prepared by a number of elders or deacons (I could not tell the difference between them). After they had removed the white cloth covering the table, the minister descended from the pulpit and the first group of congregation members was invited to the table by one of the elders.

When it was my turn to walk up to the front, I recognized some fellow communicants because they had participated in my research. Some other communicants seemed a bit surprised at or curious about my presence (this was my interpretation, at any rate; there were also other guests present). Bread and wine were again distributed using two silver plates and four silver cups.

This time the offering in the box placed at the table was destined for an orphanage in Africa. This was mentioned explicitly by the minister shortly before the administration of the sacrament began. After each “table” or seating he shared a short meditation on John 14, after which the congregation sang a stanza from Psalm 23 (1967 Psalter). Shortly before the third and final “table” was about to start, the minister whether there was anyone who wanted to participate but had not done so yet, after which a young child—apparently still there in the sanctuary, rather than the children’s service next door—raised his hand (not as a joke). This elicited the following remark from the minister:

It is our hope that also the youth would like to profess their faith and follow in Christ’s path and celebrate the Lord’s Supper with the congregation.

¹⁵See <https://www.sela.nl/liederen/68/aan-uw-tafel.html>.

¹⁶*Weerklank* 332:1–3: *Kom, kom nu, want het is volbracht* (“Come, come now, because it has been accomplished”).

To close this final table, the minister read the words of Paul included in the liturgical form. After everyone had returned to their seats and the table was again covered with the same white cloth, the minister returned to the pulpit, read Psalm 103:1–13, and ended the celebration with the thanksgiving prayer in the liturgical form. After this, we sang a closing hymn. Before the Lord’s Blessing (Benediction), the minister shared the hope that those who could attend the *thanksgiving service* that afternoon would do so, since the afternoon services tended to be quite empty. I felt a somewhat uncomfortable at this point, since I would not be able to attend that afternoon and thought of the others who found themselves in the same situation.

In reflecting on the service at its completion, I noted that virtually everything that had been read or spoken during the church service was done by the minister himself. The liturgy surprised me a bit due to the selection of hymns (as I did not expect to sing from *Opwekking* in this congregation given its theological position, see §2.3) as well as the division of the liturgical form into two parts. In total, the church service lasted 1 hour and 37 minutes.

3.3.2 CRC-B Services

April 14, 2017—Good Friday (Sitting in the Pews)

My first visit to a CRC-B church service took place on the evening of Good Friday. This congregation had the custom to celebrate the Lord’s Supper during Holy Week in an evening service. The evening of every weekday during Holy Week featured vespers with short meditations.

Due to a traffic jam I had to take a detour of about 15 minutes. I arrived right before the service was to begun. All the doors were closed and it seemed like the service had already begun, but when I listened at the door, I heard nothing—no organ playing, no talking even. When I entered the sanctuary, I discovered that the service had not started yet. I right away had the impression that everyone there was expecting the members of the church council to enter—instead, it was me, someone new. I chose a seat in one of the side rows, not too close to others, but gave a friendly non to my neighbors. They nodded back, but we did not talk because everyone was completely silent. Later on I learned that there always was silence whenever the service was about to start. I saw a candle burning and a large wooden cross standing on the podium.

After the church council had entered the sanctuary, the minister spoke some words of introduction. He announced that several guests had asked for and received permission to join the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (without mentioning their names), and added that anyone who had been baptized and had the custom to celebrate the sacrament in their own con-

gregation was welcome to join. This put me at greater ease, since I had not had the opportunity to speak to anyone prior to the service. After the service began with the Votum and Salutation spoken by the minister, we sang stanzas from several Psalms (1967 Psalter), all closely related to the theme of Good Friday. During the service, also hymns from the *Liedboek* (1973) were sung. All songs were displayed using a projector, and accompanied by organ playing.

In his opening prayer, the minister referred to the Lord's Supper that was to be celebrated later on:

Bless the service, o Lord, when we read from your Word, when we listen to it, when we sing and pray, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper together. When the bread and the cup pass through the pews and we celebrate the Lord's Supper—by eating the bread and drinking from the cup—[when we] ourselves too may confess that the sacrifice on the cross was also for me, is also for me.¹⁷

Furthermore, the minister prayed for those listening at home and unable to celebrate the Lord's Supper with us, as well as for the sick and the suffering.

The Scripture reading was from Luke 23:33–49, which the minister himself read.¹⁸ Halfway the reading, after verse 46, the minister extinguished the candle on the podium. After the reading had been completed, the congregation sang a hymn with a heavy emphasis on Christ's suffering.¹⁹ The "meditation" that followed was on the same subject. Halfway the meditation the minister referred to the Lord's Supper twice: first, in connection with the good gifts that come with Christ's sacrifice (as mentioned in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 15), and, secondly, in connection with forgiveness: "If we accept God's forgiveness, how then do we live our lives together with others?"

After the sermon, we sang another hymn on the suffering of Christ. I began feeling a little overwhelmed by all that mention of suffering, sin, and guilt, as virtually every song had been about that subject and was sung in the same mournful way (in a slow and solemn tempo). Directly after

¹⁷Translation of: "*Zegen deze dienst, Heer, als we lezen uit uw Woord, als we luisteren daarnaar, als we zingen en bidden, als we samen het avondmaal vieren. Als brood en beker door de rijen heengaan en wij door het avondmaal te vieren—door het brood te eten en uit de beker te drinken—ook zelf mogen belijden: dat offer aan het kruis was ook voor mij, is ook voor mij.*"

¹⁸The Bible translation used in this congregation is the contemporary *Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling* ("New Bible Translation," 2004). In 2007 the CRC General Synod "strongly" advised against the liturgical use of this translation. Nevertheless, various CRC congregations do use it in their church services.

¹⁹*Liedboek voor de kerken* hymn 189: *Mijn Verlosser hangt aan 't kruis* ("My Saviour is on the cross").

this, the minister read a short liturgical form.²⁰ This happened without any prior announcement, probably because the text of the liturgical form (like the songs) was projected on a screen.

Halfway the liturgical form, before the section on “thanksgiving,” we sang Psalm 22:11 (*From you, O Lord, comes the song of praise that I now sing*, 1967 Psalter)—announced as a song of praise. After this, the reading of the form was continued. Before the Lord’s Supper was administered, the minister prayed the prayer of invocation (epiclesis) included in the liturgical form, praying for the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts. The Lord’s Prayer and the optional mutual exchange of the sign of peace (*vredegroet*) were omitted, even though they were mentioned in that particular liturgical form. Instead, the minister spoke about the purpose of the meal (which was an element not included in the form), reminding us that we should not keep looking at the visible signs, but realize that the signs of bread and wine refer to “the body of Christ given for you, the blood of Jesus given for me.” He also admonished us to realize that Jesus is seated at the right hand of His Father, and that He is—by His Holy Spirit—also the Host of the table: “It is He who invites you.”

Shortly before the sacrament was administered, the minister took his place at a small table on the podium together with two elders, one on his left and one on his right. In my opinion, this resembled something of “sharing a table together,” although it was not done very well; due to the sheer size of the church building, the table seemed too small and it was not clear to me why the two elders were sitting there on the podium. After the words of institution (first part) had been read and some bread was broken (clearly visible to all), elders walked up the aisles to distribute pre-cut squares of white bread while everyone else remained seated and silent in their pews. Meanwhile, the organ played meditative music in the background. I received a silver plate from my neighbor and passed it on to the person on my other side, but without any personal contact with either of them (i.e. there was no eye contact, probably because we were both afraid of dropping the plate). After this, the minister poured wine into a silver cup—again, clearly visible to the congregation—and read the second part of the words of institution. The elders then distributed cups with wine in the same way. There were also a number of asylum seekers—or so I guessed, judging from their appearance—seated on the first row who participated in the celebration.

The celebration was closed with the reading of Philippians 2:5–11, as well as a long prayer which ended with the words of the Lord’s Prayer (recited by all attendees together). After the offerings were received, we sang

²⁰CRC, “Liturgisch formulier II (2010)”. In 2010 the CRC General Synod approved the use of two new forms for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. In Dutch, they are designated with the adjective “liturgical,” which is not used for the classical form and its abbreviated version. For more on this, see §6.4 below.

the closing hymn (which again related to Christ's suffering on the cross) and received the Benediction.²¹ Everyone left the sanctuary in complete silence, without music in the background. In total, the service took 1 hour and 13 minutes.

When I left the building, there was total silence. No one started a conversation with me, and I felt reluctant to start one myself. I walked outside and waited for the minister to introduce myself to him, but I could not find him. I went home and felt somewhat sad and alienated.

September 24, 2017—Modern Style Liturgy (Sitting in the Pews)

The second service I visited in CRC-B was totally different from the first one. I received a warm welcome on entering the church building. A band was playing gospel music, and many young children were present. Several praise songs (taken from the *Opwekking* hymnal) were sung by the band before the service started.

After the church council had entered the sanctuary, a host—who, I suppose, was neither an elder nor a deacon—introduced the service to all who were present (about 350–450 people). Only the theme of the service was announced: “There is no body without love.” After this, the minister came forward to read the announcements from the church council. Before doing so, he welcomed all guests to join in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, “if you are used to celebrating it in your own congregation or were baptized as an adult.” Perhaps it was because of the different atmosphere, but in any case I felt more connected than I did during the Good Friday service I had attended earlier.

The songs that we sang included a Psalm, several praise songs (including one hymn selected specifically for young children), a *Liedboek* hymn, and a song from the Dutch gospel band Sela (“At Your table”). The text for all songs was projected on a screen. The order of service was more or less classical Reformed, although some parts were led by the host, including the reading of the Law (which in this service was replaced by selections from John 15) and the first prayer.

After this prayer there was a special moment for children which the minister himself led. He used this occasion to explain why things were somewhat different today. From the beginning of the service, he pointed out to them, there had been a small table standing on the podium, probably with bread and wine on it, covered by a white cloth: “that is because the Lord's Supper is being administered.” In plain terms the minister explained to the children that we receive bread and wine to remember what Jesus did for us, namely that “He suffered and died for us.” After this,

²¹*Liedboek voor de kerken* hymn 192: *O kostbaar kruis, o wonder Gods* (a translation of “When I survey the wondrous cross”).

he mentioned three things that should be remembered when the Lord's Supper is celebrated: 1. *Past* (that Jesus died on the cross); 2. *Present* (where He is now, in heaven, taking care of us); and 3. *Future* (His coming Kingdom). In conclusion, he drew a line to the so-called children's hymn that was sung directly thereafter. After we had sung this song, the children were directed to the "children's service" held alongside the regular service.

At this point, the host walked onto the podium again. He told a fictional story that was in some way connected to the theme of the service, but I didn't exactly get the point ("You may decide for yourselves how this story ends," he concluded). Directly thereafter, the Scripture reading was done (1 Peter 4:7–11). Interestingly, the Bible text was projected in both the Dutch and Farsi languages. The latter was for the asylum seekers, so I supposed.

The sermon was on 1 Peter 4:8, about mutual love in the congregation ("we are one body"). During the sermon, the Lord's Supper was referred to on several occasions. Right after the sermon, we sang "At Your table" (Sela).

The celebration itself was introduced by the minister in his own words, repeating the three points he had made to the children earlier on and elaborating on the three elements of true self-examination as described in the classical liturgical form. All of this was accompanied by a short history of Christ's Passion, and the statement that He was also raised from the dead, returned to His Father in heaven, and is now present in the Lord's Supper through His Holy Spirit. The explanation was concluded with the statement that "we are one body," in line with the theme of the sermon. Finally, the minister ended his introduction to the celebration of the sacrament with a prayer of invocation taken from one of the new liturgical forms (2010).²²

At this point, the minister suddenly invited everyone to stand up to wish each other the Peace of Christ, which he explained as follows: "I accept you as you are, in Jesus' name, I love you as you are, in the name of the Lord." This surprised me, since this was the first time I had ever experienced this in a Reformed church service. The moment itself was wonderful, but also felt a little strange since I did not know my neighbors personally. They also did not really seem enthusiastic, but that may just have been my personal impression.

The administration itself happened exactly as it had during the first service I visited. Again the minister and two elders were seated at a small table on the podium, with their faces to the congregation. Everyone remained seated, except for the elders and deacons. While the bread and wine were distributed, the band played background music. However,

²²CRC, "Liturgisch formulier II (2010)", pp. 17–18.

there also was a small child who kept yelling quite loudly during almost the entire celebration, which annoyed me a bit.

The minister concluded the celebration by quoting Psalm 23 from memory, thereby giving it extra flair and a personal touch, or so it seemed to me. Then he prayed a thanksgiving prayer in which also the members who were unable to receive the sacrament were entrusted to God's care ("It leaves a hole," he said). This caught my attention, since I in preparing the interviews had spoken with several congregants who indicated that they could not participate in the celebrations and interviews because of their poor health. Then the host once more entered the podium with some announcements ("there's coffee and tea afterwards, and there are two brothers who can pray with you after the service"). After the announcements, the offering was held and a closing hymn was sung, after which we received the Benediction.

3.3.3 CRC-C Services

June 18, 2017—Summer (Sitting at a Table)

This Sunday morning, I was a bit nervous. It was my first time visiting a church service of the CRC-C congregation, where it is not common for professing members to participate in the Lord's Supper. I adapted my clothing to dress more neatly and to avoid bright colors. Furthermore, I wanted to be sure I was on time, since I assumed that everyone else would be.

It was a sunny morning, and when I parked my car, I saw churchgoers cycling to church from different directions. When I entered the building—15 minutes before the service started, but still a bit nervous—I tried to find a member of the church council to request permission to join the celebration as a guest.²³ I saw someone who looked official standing next to one of the main entrances (most people looked formal, but I assumed this to be the sexton or caretaker) and asked him to tell me where the church council meets. He told me that their meeting to prepare for the service already started, which led me to conclude that I had missed the opportunity to request permission. At that very moment I caught a glimpse of the secretary walking by. I shook his hand, and asked whether I could participate in the celebration. He paused for a moment, and then replied: "I would advise you not to." It is not common here, he explained, and would maybe cause unrest. I was not sure whether he meant unrest within the church council or within the congregation, but knowing that the meeting of the church council had already started, I accepted his explanation.

When I entered the sanctuary, I discovered that most seats had already been taken. A wide range of people, extending from young and

²³See note 13.

older children, to adults and senior citizens, were present in the church, and many more were still entering, so I tried to find a seat as soon as possible. Because I do not own a copy of the Psalter used in this congregation (i.e. the old and iso-rhythmic Psalter from 1773), and was not comfortable asking the people next to me to share their copy, I decided to download a copy from the App Store using my smart phone. As the use of mobile phones during church services is not common in this congregation, I tried to do this as discretely as possible. After I had settled everything, I had some 10 minutes remaining before the service began.

When I looked around, I saw that all people were dressed very well: men wore dark suits and/or white shirts, while all women wore dresses or skirts and hats. The same applied to young children, who remained present in the sanctuary during the whole service (except for the youngest up to the age of 4, who had been left at the nursery before the service had even started). At the front of the sanctuary stood a long, rectangular table dressed with white cloths. In the middle of the table, there was what seemed to be the bread and wine, covered under a small white cloth.

After the church council had entered the sanctuary, the minister stood still before the pulpit to pray in silence. He then climbed up and read the announcements, and thereafter spoke the Votum and Salutation. This whole time, everyone remained seated. During the entire service, the only time the congregation as a whole stood was during the Benediction—with the exception of some men, who stood up during the prayers, as well as those who joined in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

The liturgy in this service was classical Reformed. Only Psalms were sung, no hymns. Everything was presented or done by the minister. The Scripture reading was from Acts 10:24–44.²⁴ After the reading, the first prayer was held. This surprised me, since I had expected a prayer before the Scripture reading. The offerings took place between the first prayer and the sermon. In the sermon, the minister referred to the previous Sunday (“preparation Sunday”) and to the mid-week preparation service. In all these services, passages from the same chapter (Acts 10) had been explained. This morning, the sermon was on Acts 10:42–43.

After the sermon, which was about thirty minutes long, the second part of the classical form for the celebration of the Lord's Supper was read.²⁵ During the prayer, which can be found in the liturgical form and was read by the minister, some men stood to pray in silence. The rest of the congregation remained seated. As the final element to his prayer, the

²⁴CRC-C exclusively uses a slightly modernized edition of the *Statenvertaling* (orig. 1637) Bible translation, published by the *Gereformeerde Bijbel Stichting* (Reformed Bible Society). See note 10.

²⁵This was also true in CRC-A, see note 11. However, in CRC-C, an earlier translation—from before 1971, the date of the latest CRC revision—of the classical form was used. The version used in CRC-C can be found printed in the 1773 Psalter (e.g. *Bijbel met uitleg*, pp. 2193–2196). A slightly modified edition is also available in PCN, *Dienstboek I*, pp. 337–346.

minister included both the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed. This surprised me, as I had never experienced this custom before.²⁶

Shortly before the actual celebration of the Lord's Supper started, the minister walked to the middle of the long, rectangular table. He removed a small white cloth covering bread and a silver carafe, and invited those who were eligible to join the celebration at the table. At the same time, two elders took their position beside the table—to guard the table, so to speak. There were no elders passing through the aisles to invite the communicants. At that point, I saw some people beginning to get up, in no specific order. It seemed like everyone knew that there were only about thirty seats available, so that not all could stand up to join the one “table” or seating. There seemed to be no specific order in the way they walked up to the table, but everything still happened in an orderly manner.

After speaking the words of institution, the minister broke the bread himself for all thirty people present at the table; no white squares of bread seemed to be ready before the administration, just large, long strips of white bread. The broken bread was distributed on silver plates. After this, the minister poured wine in several silver cups; these seemed to have been empty before the service started, as this process took some time to complete. Next, the minister raised one cup and spoke the words of institution, after which the wine was passed around the table from person to person. After all communicants had taken a sip of wine, the minister shared a short meditation. Together we sang a stanza from Psalm 84, after which all participants returned to their seats.

This procedure was repeated another two times. During the third seating, all seats were taken, but a fourth “table” did not seem necessary. I estimated that about 40–60% of the professing members participated in the celebration, since about half of the adults present remained seated. After the celebration was completed, we sang Psalm 68 stanza 17 (*Praise God; everyone must fear Him, 1773 Psalter*) and received the Benediction. In total, the service lasted 2 hours and 15 minutes.

September 10, 2017—Indian Summer (Sitting at a Table)

My second visit to a service took place after five individual interviews were conducted with members of CRC-C. Thanks to these interviews, I felt more relaxed because I had gotten to know several members personally.

²⁶However, this was in accordance with the edition of the classical form included in the 1773 Psalter (e.g. *Bijbel met uitleg*, pp. 2193–2196). In the regular CRC edition of this form (“Formulier (1971)”), the Lord's Prayer is prayed only after communion as part of the thanksgiving prayer, while the Apostle's Creed is separated from the prayer before communion.

When I arrived at the church building, I did not immediately recognize anyone, so I continued on my way to find a seat. Recalling the secretary's advice during my first visit, I decided not to participate in the morning's Lord's Supper celebration. The ambiance in the church was once again subdued and reverent. Attendees did not talk with each other, and children remained quiet. I chose a seat somewhere in the middle. Although I was well on time, the church was already quite full. By the time the service started, almost all seats were taken.

Almost everything was similar to the way it had been during the first service I visited some time ago. The structure of the liturgy was exactly the same. On this morning, the Scripture reading was from Galatians 2:11–21 (again connected to the weekday preparation services, and looking ahead to the service of Thanksgiving and Reflection that was to be held later that afternoon).²⁷ After the Scripture reading, the minister referred to the Lord's Supper in his opening prayer:

May we be conscious of the sacred, indeed, as always whenever Thy Word is proclaimed. There seems to be and is something extra whenever it is portrayed before the eyes in the breaking of the bread and the pouring out of the wine. In that same way Thy body was shed, and in that same way Thou hast poured out Thy blood, and Thou sayest: 'I for you. I for you. Since you otherwise would have had to die the eternal death.' Now it is for sinners, for people, who must die, who offend Thee, and who no longer have any other foundation than Thee, Lord Jesus Christ, and Thy precious merit [earned on] the cross. And this morning we pray Thee for that blessing. (...) Keep us from sitting at the table without any benefit—because we bring ourselves, [or] because we have established all kinds of things ourselves. We beseech Thee, LORD, for the grace of discretion. Search and know us, and discern whether we are walking on the path of danger, and lead us on the eternal path...²⁸

²⁷See Box 3.2 on page 41.

²⁸Translation of: "Laat er het besef zijn van het heilige, ja, zoals dat altijd het geval is wanneer Uw Woord verkondigd wordt. Het lijkt wel, en het is ook zo, dat er toch nog iets extra's is, wanneer het in de breking van het brood voor ogen geschilderd wordt, en wanneer de wijn vergoten wordt. Alzo is uw lichaam vergoten en zo hebt U Uw bloed gestort en zegt U het: 'Ik voor U. Ik voor U. Daar gij anders de eeuwige dood zou moeten sterven.' Nu is het voor zondaren, voor mensen, die de dood moeten sterven, die zich voor U mishagen, en die geen andere grondslag meer hebben dan U Heere Jezus Christus en Uw kostbare kruisverdienste. En we bidden vanmorgen om die zegen. (...) Bewaar ons ervoor, dat we wel aan de tafel zitten, en dat het toch tevergeefs is. Omdat we onszelfmeebrengen, omdat we van alles en nog wat zelf hebben opgebouwd. We vragen, Heere, om de genade van de onderscheiding. Doorgrond en ken ons, en zie of er in ons een schadelijke weg is, en leid ons op de eeuwige weg..."

The sermon was on Galatians 2:19–20, the testimony of the apostle Paul: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.”²⁹ In his sermon, the minister urged his listeners to examine themselves to consider whether they were living by the grace of Christ alone, and applied this to the week of preparation: “It is not through our own efforts that we may join the table.” It is as Paul said: we died with Christ and He lives in us, so that we may now live through His grace. This “break” in our lives already happened on Golgotha, we only need to look at Christ and believe in Him.

Interestingly, during this service four “tables” or seatings were held, implying that more people were present in the service and/or attending the celebration. Occasionally, people had to wait “one round” before they could participate. I recognized several of my interviewees when they walked to the table. During the administration, the ambiance was once again one of “reverence.” To close each “table”, the minister shared a five-minute meditation, followed by the singing of Psalm 65 and Psalm 72, respectively (1773 Psalter). Like the last time, everything happened in an orderly fashion, and without any problems. Even the children who remained seated while one or both of their parents joined the celebration kept quiet.

In total, the service lasted 2 hours and 14 minutes. Afterwards, I felt somewhat entranced because the ambiance had been so intense. I decided not meet with anyone, and to drive home without the radio playing.

3.3.4 RCL-D Services

February 5, 2017—Morning Service (Ambulatory)

On a cold, February morning I drove to the RCL-D church. When I entered the building, a number of elders were waiting in the main hall to welcome visitors. One of them asked me if I was a guest and explained that the Lord’s Supper was being celebrated that morning. After telling him that I was an RCL member myself, I asked whether I could join the celebration. “You are welcome,” he assured me, inviting me to sign a guest book.

On entering the sanctuary, some fifteen minutes before the beginning of the service, I found that there were enough vacant seats. The sanctuary was quite wide, meaning there basically are three parts where one can sit: left, right, and in the middle. I chose to sit in the middle, right in front of the podium on which the pulpit stood. Right behind me someone was playing the organ. Meanwhile, people were chatting with each other. It was a bit noisy, but I felt comfortable. The people next to me asked

²⁹Read from the *Statenvertaling* Bible translation during the service, here quoted from the King James Version.

whether I was a first-time visitor and where I came from. I told them a little bit about my research; they were interested and we wished each other a blessed service to conclude our conversation.

Before the service started, the order of service was not projected nor visible anywhere else. What was going to happen in the next hour and a half or so therefore remained a surprise. When the service started, the order of service was indeed shown on the screen, but even then only for some ten seconds—too short to register. Then the church council entered the sanctuary, after which we were welcomed by one of the elders. He also introduced the new annual theme: “Searching for the Core” (of the gospel, JAGB). He announced that the sermon in that service would be about Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son, with special attention for the youngest son. After this introduction, the minister climbed the podium and the service began.

The Scripture reading that morning was taken from Luke 15:11–24 and Genesis 3:1–7, read by the minister himself.³⁰ I was surprised when a family with young children next to me started eating candy during the Scripture reading. This was not the first time I had encountered this in my life, but it still struck me as I wondered what the practice of reading Scripture—and the gospel in particular—actually meant to them. Between the Scripture reading and the sermon, we sang two stanzas from Psalm 103 (RCL Psalter, rhythmic): “*High as the vault of heaven, without end, /so great His mercy is to those who fear Him.*”³¹

The sermon was thematic. During the sermon, Rembrandt’s painting of the prodigal son was projected on the screen and the minister referred to Henri Nouwen’s book “The Return of the Prodigal Son” (*Eindelijk thuis*). According to the minister, both examples illustrate why this parable has attracted so much attention, namely “because it tells us about the core of the gospel, about who God is, what Jesus did for us, about the will of God for us and this world.” In the sermon, special attention was given to the nature of sin in human life, in the light of Genesis 3, which the minister described as “searching for happiness without God.” He asked us: “Do you dare to identify yourself with the youngest son?” and recounted the nature of grace: not to condemn, but to meet and embrace each other, breaking through the never ending circle of giving a little, taking a little. “Now is the time to celebrate, because nothing can defeat God’s grace,” he concluded—possibly referring to the Lord’s Supper.

After the sermon we sang “Amazing Grace” (in Dutch), after which the younger children returned from the Children’s Service so that they could

³⁰In the RCL congregations, the *Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling* (2004) was in use. In fact, within the RCL denomination, virtually all congregations use this translation.

³¹In all RCL congregations studied, the RCL’s own edition of the Genevan Psalter was in use. This edition was initially published in the RCL’s hymnal of 1986, and is reprinted in newer editions of this hymnal (2006/2017).

be present during the celebration. That morning, the Lord's Supper was celebrated in "ambulatory" style. Before the celebration started, the minister introduced the sacrament in his own words and without a liturgical form, after which he made it clear that "all who professed their faith in the Christian church" were welcome to join. The names of the guests who had presented themselves to the church council prior to the service were also announced, including my own. Guests were not requested to stand up, as is the custom in my home church.

After the minister spoke the complete words of institution for both bread and wine as found in one of the liturgical forms, some of the members of the congregation seated on the first row were served first. They remained seated during the whole celebration, I assumed because they had mental and/or physical disabilities. After this, one of the elders invited the other participants row by row to receive bread and wine, while the children remained seated. The communicants walked in line to the front of the sanctuary, where the minister was standing in front of the podium with a silver plate filled with squares of white bread. When it was my turn, the minister smiled but did not offer a piece to me, so I took a square from the plate myself. This surprised me, because I am used to receiving bread from the minister's hand. On the other side of the sanctuary, also in front of the podium, two elders were waiting with a cup of wine. The participants lined up behind each other: they first walked in a line to the minister to take a piece of bread, and then walked along the stage to one of the elders to take a sip of wine. Like the minister, the elders offered the wine without saying anything. After this, I returned to my seat and watched the other communicants walking by. During the whole celebration, which took about 20 minutes, we sang fifteen verses from three different hymns, all relating to the theme of grace.³² This was nice, but also became a bit tiresome.

The minister concluded the celebration with the reading of Romans 5:1–2, 6–11 and by saying a prayer of blessing and intercession.³³ Next, the offering was held and we sang a closing hymn before receiving the Benediction. The church service as a whole lasted about 1 hour and 30 minutes. Directly afterwards, coffee and tea were served in the entrance hall of the church (which was large enough to host almost all present). Many people stayed for a drink, and I met the minister and his wife, as well as other members of the congregation. It turned out that drinking coffee after church is a local tradition held every first Sunday morning of

³²*Gereformeerd Kerkboek* ("Reformed Hymnal," the 2006 edition of the RCL's hymnal), hymn 126:1–5: *Komt, wenkt de bruidegom* ("Come, beckon the groom"); and *Liedboek voor de kerken*, hymn 169:1–6: *Zingt nu de Heer, stemt allen in* ("Sing to the Lord now, let all agree") and hymn 440:1–4: *Ik heb de vaste grond gevonden* ("I found the solid ground").

³³Interestingly, these verses were read from the *Bijbel in Gewone Taal* (2014), a Dutch Bible translation comparable to the New International Reader's Version or the Bible in Basic English. I am not sure why a different translation was used.

the month, coinciding with the celebration of the Lord's Supper. According to the minister, the timing was purely coincidental.

May 7, 2017—Afternoon Service (Sitting at a Table)

The second service I visited in RCL-D was an afternoon service. Because the Lord's Supper is celebrated every month with alternating styles of celebration, this was a "seated" celebration (see §3.2.4).

When I arrived at the church parking lot, I was immediately recognized by one of my former interviewees. I felt welcome, and on entering the church building I was once again welcomed by an elder. I told him about the background to my visit, after which he requested me to write my name in a guest book. On entering the sanctuary, I chose to sit on the right-hand side to have a better view on the events during the service. This part of the church was mostly empty when I arrived, but a number of other people joined me there shortly before the service began. Less people were present in this service than in the morning service I had visited several months ago.³⁴

Like the last time, no order of service was projected before the service began. Instead, the projector displayed information about the offering. Meanwhile, a band was playing a gospel song called "My Refuge" (*Mijn toevlucht*, an adaptation of Psalm 91, written and composed by the Dutch gospel band Sela).³⁵

After the church council entered the sanctuary, an elder read the announcements. At the start of the service we sang "Come, Holy Spirit" (*Kom Heilige Geest*, written by Sela)³⁶ in place of the Votum, immediately followed by the hymn "Be still, for the spirit of the Lord" (Dutch version).³⁷ After this, the minister led us in prayer. The Scripture reading that followed was Matthew 28:20, announced as a follow-up on last week's sermon on Matthew 28:19. Then the minister shared a very short, three-minute meditation which at the same time functioned as the introduction to the Lord's Supper (i.e. no liturgical form was read). After these introductory words, the minister announced the names of the participating guests and we sang "At Your table" from Sela.

After the congregation had finished singing, the band continued to play instrumental music, and the first communicants were invited to join the table. In the meantime, the minister—who had up to that time been

³⁴This surprised me a little bit. While visitor attendance at RCL afternoon services is declining (in general), I still did not expect a large difference in attendance on that Sunday given that the Lord's Supper was being administered. I did not compare the attendance with attendance for other afternoon services in RCL-D.

³⁵See <https://www.sela.nl/liederen/10/mijn-toevlucht-psalm-91.html>.

³⁶See <https://www.sela.nl/liederen/3/kom-heilige-geest.html>.

³⁷*Gereformeerd Kerkboek* (2006 Ed.) hymn 171: *Wees stil voor het aangezicht van God* (a translation of "Be still, for the Spirit of the Lord").

standing on the podium—came down and took a seat in the middle of the long, rectangular placed along the front of the podium and covered with white cloths.

That afternoon three seatings were needed for all participants to celebrate the Lord's Supper. During the celebration, I encountered something unexpected in myself. After being invited to come up by an elder walking up the aisles, I found another person, whom I had never seen before and who looked somewhat unhealthy, sitting between the minister and me. When we shared bread and wine, I discovered another dimension of what it means to share "one cup," namely that we share the same tableware. This was an experience I had never had before, but it helped me to find new depths in what it means to "become one body" (also in a literal sense) and to "accept each other unconditionally"—which I had known in some way before, but never experienced that powerfully.

At the beginning of each "table," the minister again shared a three-minute meditation. Following the meditation, he spoke the full words of institution and then immediately distributed the bread and wine. During communion, the band played soft instrumental music. When seated, the communicants remained silent and seemed relaxed. Some participants smiled openly at each other. To close each seating, we sang a different verse of the same hymn (a trinitarian creed).³⁸ The church council joined the third and final table. After the "thanksgiving," for which the minister quoted from Romans 5:8–11, we sang the fourth and final verse of this hymn. When everyone had taken their place again and the minister had returned to the podium, he prayed. During the offering which followed immediately upon the prayer, we listened to the band playing the Hillsong song "I Desire Jesus" (Dutch version).³⁹ After singing the final hymn together ("Cornerstone," Dutch version), we received the Benediction.⁴⁰ The service lasted about 1 hour and 10 minutes.

On my way out, I met another former interviewee. We have a brief but nice conversation, during which I told him about the progress of my research. This time, there was no coffee after the service, so I decided not to stay too long and to drive back home. I felt relaxed and fulfilled.

3.3.5 RCL-E Services

November 6, 2016—Winter (Sitting at a Table)

On a cold and sunny November morning, I arrived early in the beautiful, old church building of RCL-E. I was not the only one, as various congregants were arriving at the same time. For some reason, the minister

³⁸*Gereformeerd Kerkboek* (2006 Ed.) hymn 161:1–4: *Heer, U bent mijn leven* ("Lord, you are my life").

³⁹*Opwekking* 774: *Ik verlang naar Jezus*.

⁴⁰*Opwekking* 785: *Fundament*.

was standing outside the church, perhaps waiting for someone or else to welcome guests. I decided to approach him to introduce myself and ask whether I needed to request permission to join the Lord's Supper. I received a warm welcome, and he assured me that I did not have to show an attestation as proof of membership. He did, however, note my name so that it could be announced together with the names of other guests at the beginning of the service.

When I entered the church building, I passed two members of the welcoming team. I was probably walking too fast, because I somehow managed to enter without being welcomed by them. After hanging up my coat, I realized that I did not even know whether I needed a hymnal during the service, so I decided to ask one of the members of the welcoming team. The friendly middle-aged woman assured me that all songs would be projected on a screen.

The sanctuary was nearly packed when I entered. It had been the custom at the celebration of the Lord's Supper to hold two morning services, since the church building would otherwise have been too small. But since membership numbers had been in slow decline over the past decade or so, this Sunday was the first time that a single morning service was being held for the entire congregation to celebrate the Lord's Supper together as an experiment.

When I looked around in the sanctuary, I discovered large rectangular tables covered with spotless white cloths in the front of the church, before the middle section of pews. On one table stood bread and wine, covered with a small white cloth.

Before the service began, the minister read a number of announcements. After noting that the Lord's Supper would be celebrated that morning, he read a list with the names of all guests who had been welcomed to the Lord's table. The minister then asked me to stand up for a moment to show my face to the congregation, by way of introduction as a researcher. This came as a bit of a surprise to me, but it was a nice introduction.

That morning, the Lord's Supper was celebrated seated at a table. Following the opening of the service (which included the singing of two Psalm verses, the reading of the Ten Commandments, and an opening prayer), the minister read the second RCL form for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, up to the prayer.⁴¹ Next, we sang Psalm 23 (*Nieuwe Psalmberijming*, "New Psalter"), after which the minister prayed the prayer in the liturgical form.⁴² This prayer was concluded with the congregational singing of the Lord's Prayer. Thereafter, the service continued with the Scripture reading (Matthew 11:28–30: "Come to me, all you who are

⁴¹This is the abbreviated version of the classical form, see RCL, *Avondmaalsformulier 2 (2011 Revision)*. An English version is available online: CanRC, *Abbreviated Form*.

⁴²This is a new rhyming set to the classical Genevan tunes (<https://www.denieuwepsalmberijming.nl/berijmingen/psalm-23>).

weary and burdened, and I will give you rest...”) and a short meditation from the minister lasting about four minutes. As such, the greatest part of the liturgical form was read before the “sermon” (as in CRC-A).

After the meditation, we sang two stanzas from Psalm 62 (*In God alone my soul finds rest, /for in His faithfulness I trust*, RCL Psalter), during which the white sheet covering the bread and wine was removed by two deacons.⁴³ The minister read the final part of the liturgical form (i.e. “Exhortation”), after which we professed our faith with the singing of the first verse of a confession song.⁴⁴

Next, an elder invited the communicants row by row to take their place at the table. While they were walking to the table, the organ played meditative music. At the beginning of each seating, the minister repeated the words of institution. As in CRC-A and C, but unlike what had happened in RCL-D, the words of institution were “separated”: first the minister read the words for the bread (which was also broken), after which it was distributed on silver plates; then wine was poured, the second part of the words of institution were read, and the wine was distributed in silver cups. What struck me was that the minister stood between communicants and congregation while doing this, thus facing the communicants but with his back to the rest of the congregation.

I joined the first seating. No additional meditation was shared by the minister following each seating. Instead, we sang two more verses from the same confession hymn to close each “table.” Fortunately, the projection screen was clearly visible so that we as communicants could sing along with the rest of the congregation. Afterwards, we returned to our seats, and the next group was invited to join the table. Two “tables” proved sufficient for all those seeking to participate to do so, and so we sang the final two verses of our song following the second table. During the entire celebration, the children remained seated.

After communion had ended and everyone was back at their seats, the minister prayed a brief prayer (by quoting a thanksgiving text included in the form). The offering was then held, accompanied with organ music in the background. Lastly, we sang the closing hymn (*Praise, my soul, the King of heaven*, Dutch version)⁴⁵ and received the Benediction. The church service took about 1 hour and 20 minutes.

Unfortunately, there was no coffee afterwards. Instead, I looked for the minister, secretary, and caretaker to ask whether everything had been

⁴³I could not tell whether they were deacons or elders, but my familiarity with the RCL denomination leads me to assume the latter.

⁴⁴*Gereformeerd Kerkboek* (2006 Ed.) hymn 123:1–5: *'k Geloof in God, de Vader, die uit niets* (“I believe in God the Father who out of nothing”). This hymn is a composed and adapted version of the Apostles’ Creed. It consists of five verses and is only used within the RCL denomination.

⁴⁵*Liedboek voor de kerken* hymn 460:1,2,5: *Loof de koning, heel mijn wezen*.

arranged for the continuation of my research in this congregation. They all were very kind and helpful, and wished me a safe journey back home.

March 5, 2017—Lent (Ambulatory)

My second visit to RCL-E was once again for a morning service, although this time the Lord's Supper was celebrated in the ambulatory style. On entering the building, I saw a small table standing below the pulpit. On that table were bread and wine, covered by a small white cloth.

A few days ago it had been Ash Wednesday (March 1, 2017). Usually, this day is not remembered in CRC and RCL churches, but some congregations do give attention to the Lenten season. I was not sure what to expect in the service I was attending.

The songs and Scripture readings for that morning were announced on a wooden display on the wall. I discovered that the reading would be taken from Mark 14, that is, the story of the woman who anointed Jesus with pure nard (verse 3–9). In my opinion, this passage is highly appropriate for this period of the liturgical year. It also made me curious about how things would develop in the service.

When the service started, I discovered that this morning a small church choir, directed by a choir director, was to sing a number of hymns during the service. Interestingly enough, also the minister was part of the choir. The liturgy was based on the Ordinary of the early church. I had not known before that this order of service would be used, and it surprised me, since I had never experienced it in an RCL service before.⁴⁶ I had the impression that the experience was new for the congregation as well, since some of the songs (e.g. the *Benedictus*) were sung softly as if the people did not know them very well; the *Sanctus* had been sung once by the choir before the start of the service to familiarize the congregation with it.

After the singing of the Votum, the minister spoke the Salutation. We sang two stanzas from Psalm 65, after which the minister led the congregation in a prayer of blessing and intercession. In this prayer, he emphasized that we are not saints but sinners and all in need of God's grace. "Grace that is given to us despite of our sinfulness, so that our thankfulness may grow." The minister asked God to give us growth in thankfulness, through the celebration of the Lord's Supper. "Also for the children, that their longing may grow to join the celebration themselves one day, to remember the work of Christ with images, for young and old."

⁴⁶This order of liturgy has never been formally accepted by the RCL's General Synod, but RCL congregations that would like to try it are free to do so provided they report this to the RCL's Synodical Committee on Worship (see RCL, *Acta 2001, 2002-2003*, art. 73 (pp. 16-17 = pp. 166-167); Steunpunt Liturgie, *Notitie Orde D*). What surprised me was that it was used in this service together with a liturgical form, while it was originally designed for use without the reading of the form.

Thereafter, the minister announced that the classical liturgical form would be used in this service.⁴⁷ Due to the length of this form, there would be no sermon, but instead a short meditation would be given prior to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. During the reading of the form, we sang several hymns.⁴⁸ The minister read the prayer included in the liturgical form, followed by the Lord's Prayer sung by the congregation. After this, we sang the Apostles' Creed—literal text, sung antiphonally by the men and women.

After the reading of the final part of the liturgical form (up to the words of institution), the choir was invited to sing the *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* with the congregation. Next, the minister read Mark 14:3–9 and delivered a short, eight minute meditation, interpreting the act of the nameless woman in the story as an act of love for Jesus who is about to meet his death. The meditation ended with a personal question: “Today we remember the sacrifice of Christ. How do you show your gratitude to God?”—accompanied by a minute of silence to reflect on this.

After the meditation, we sang a hymn reflective of the words the minister had spoken.⁴⁹ Thereafter, the minister read the complete words of institution, after which we were invited to sing the *Agnus Dei* with the choir. An elder then invited the congregants row by row to walk to the front of the sanctuary to receive bread and wine. We walked in line to a point before the pews, somewhere below the pulpit, where the minister gave us a piece of bread (white square). As I walked on, I took a sip of wine from a cup handed to me by one of the two elders, after which I returned to my seat.

During the celebration, the congregation sang two different hymns and a couple of stanzas from Psalm 103, for a total of eight verses/stanzas.⁵⁰ To conclude the celebration, the minister read Romans 8:32 and 5:8–10, and prayed the thanksgiving text included in the liturgical form. After this, the offerings were held and a closing Psalm was sung (Psalm 66:5,7). We received the Benediction and responded with the singing of “Amen, Amen, Amen...” In total, the service lasted about 1 hour and 15 minutes.

⁴⁷RCL, *Avondmaalsformulier 1 (2011 Revision)*; cf. English version (slightly different): CanRC, *Form*.

⁴⁸*Gereformeerd Kerkboek* (2006 Ed.) hymn 156:1–4: *Heer, ik kom tot U, /hoor naar mijn gebed* (a translation of “Hear our prayer, O Lord”) and thereafter hymn 155:3–5: *Heer, waar dan heen? /Tot U alleen!* (“Lord, where am I to go? /To You alone!”).

⁴⁹*Gereformeerd Kerkboek* (2006 Ed.) hymn 46: *Maria heeft aan Jezus /een goede daad gedaan* (“Mary did a good deed to Jesus”).

⁵⁰*Gereformeerd Kerkboek* (2006 Ed.) hymn 69: *U, heilig Godslam, loven wij* (“We praise you, holy lamb of God”), hymn 89:1–4: *Jezus leven van mijn leven* (“Jesus, life of my life”), and Psalm 103:3,4,9 (RCL Psalter).

3.3.6 RCL-F Services

October 30, 2016—Autumn (Seated at a Table)

This visit was the first participatory observation I carried out within the context of this research project. I was well on time and felt properly prepared, also because I was carrying an attestation or testimony from my own church with me. On arriving at the church building, I was welcomed by what seemed to be an elder, who was expecting me as a researcher. He was standing outside the church, next to the main entrance, to which a notice had been attached reading: “Today we celebrate the Lord’s Supper.” I asked him whether the minister was there already, and so he took me to the consistory room to introduce me there and to ask the church council for permission to join the celebration. This was no problem at all; I did not even have to show my attestation.

On entering the sanctuary, I saw a long, rectangular white table placed along the front of the podium. On the podium itself stood a pulpit, piano, and organ. Someone was playing the piano. I chose to sit somewhere in the middle, next to a family with two children. After some time I noticed a large tapestry on the wall, probably symbolizing the old and the new world. As it was rather abstract, I needed some time to contemplate its significance.

In the sanctuary I saw people of all ages. Younger children were brought to the nursery immediately upon arrival, but older children stayed in the sanctuary until the Scripture reading. The order of service was on a physical display on the wall. During the service, the songs, Bible readings, and liturgical form were all projected on a screen, so I did not have to use my hymnal even once.

After the church council had entered the sanctuary, we first sang two stanzas from Psalm 8 before the service started. This surprised me, as this practice does not occur in my home congregation. The singing of this Psalm was accompanied by the piano, as were all songs during this service. Following the singing, but still prior to the official start of the service, a number of announcements were made, first by an elder and then also by the minister. Interestingly, the minister announced that a special meeting had been organized for the congregation during the past week on the Jewish feast of Passover and the meaning of the Seder meal.

At this time, the *Votum* was recited by the whole congregation, followed by the Salutation read by the minister, to which the congregation responded with an “Amen.” Next, we sang Psalm 117 (*Praise all nations, praise the LORD*, RCL Psalter), and the minister prayed the opening prayer. Directly thereafter, we sang a children’s song that embodied a summary of the Ten Commandments. From what I recall, this was the first time I had ever heard this song; what I liked is that it was understandable for the whole congregation. After this song, the children (aged 4 to 7, or so I

guessed) went to the Children's Service in a separate room. As they were leaving, the piano played soft music.

The Scripture reading was performed by a regular member of the congregation. We read Genesis 22:1–14. The sermon that followed was on verse 8a (Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son”). In the first part of the sermon, the minister retold the biblical story, which he illustrated with the audio recording of another children's song (“*God will provide a lamb / Isaac has no scratch*”).⁵¹ Interestingly, in the second part of his sermon the minister drew a connection between the Passover feast and Golgotha: “God himself provided a perfect Lamb: His own Son.” That lamb was sacrificed in our place, but not defeated: “After His death, He arose from the dead; and by His death, Jesus put death itself to death.” According to the minister, this means that we do not need to offer sacrifices anymore to satisfy God. Instead, we may follow the Lamb to God's eternal feast—“until you are home with Him.”

Directly after the sermon, we sang “My Shepherd” (*Mijn Herder*; an adaptation of Psalm 23 by Sela),⁵² after which the table was prepared by some elders or deacons who removed the white cloth covering the bread and wine. Thereafter, the first group of people was invited by an elder, row by row, to join the table. Because the table was rather small, it took five tables for all to join. After the service I found out that also the first row of seats in the middle part of the sanctuary was available for people sit “at the table” (second-rate, as it were). Apparently this had been an idea of the caretaker, as the minister was only informed of this shortly before the service started. During the service I did not notice any of this; everything seemed to be business as usual. Throughout the administration of the sacrament, the minister sat at the middle of the table, facing the congregation. When all seats had been taken for the first seating, he introduced the sacrament in his own words, that is, without using a liturgical form:

When we celebrate the supper, our minds turn to Jesus Christ who has suffered for us. But He has overcome and is in heaven as conqueror, but also here in our midst: our host at the table. And so we think of Him: He who gave his life out of love for us, so that we might enter life.⁵³

During each seating or “table,” the words of institution were repeated

⁵¹In Dutch: *God zorgt voor een lammetje / Isaak heeft geen schrammetje*. The song is called “Abraham,” and is written by the Dutch singer-songwriter Rikkert Zuiderveld.

⁵²See <https://www.sela.nl/liederen/101/mijn-herder.html>.

⁵³Translation of: “*Als wij de maaltijd vieren, dan zijn onze gedachten bij Jezus Christus die voor ons heeft geleden. Maar Hij heeft overwonnen en is als overwinnaar in de hemel, maar ook hier bij ons: onze gastheer aan de tafel. Zo denken we aan Hem: Hij die zijn leven gaf uit liefde voor ons, zodat wij het leven mogen binnengaan.*”

by the minister.⁵⁴ To close each seating, the minister read a passage from Scripture, and together we sang one or two verses from a variety of hymns.⁵⁵ Although the proceedings took a long time, the meditations and songs at the end of each seating did offer new perspectives every time again. Despite the extra row of chairs added by the caretaker, a fifth table proved necessary. From what I could tell, the minister had to improvise with the selection of an extra Scripture passage and song, but everything worked out well. All the same, towards the end of the celebration I felt myself getting increasingly tired.

After everyone had returned to their seats, the minister led the congregation in a prayer of blessing and intercession. This prayer was concluded with the congregational recitation of the Lord's Prayer. After this, the offerings were held, during which we sang the hymn "Great is Thy faithfulness" (Dutch version).⁵⁶ The closing hymn, which we sang standing, was another song of praise. In total, the service lasted 1 hour and 40 minutes—although in my experience it had felt like less.

After the service, coffee and tea was served for everyone. The ambience following the service was relaxed and free, as people spontaneously approached me to ask about the reasons for my visit.

April 16, 2017—Easter Sunday (Ambulatory)

The second service I visited was on Easter Sunday morning. The same notice announcing the celebration of the Lord's Supper was posted on the door. When I entered the church building, I right away ran into the minister, and told him that I would like to participate in the celebration of the Lord's Supper that morning. He told me I was again welcome to join, after which we wished each other a blessed service.

When I entered the sanctuary, I saw that only a small white table had been placed in front of the stage, which I interpreted as a sign that the Lord's Supper would be celebrated in ambulatory style that morning (this had not been announced online). Another new element was a large cross on the stage, probably placed there because it was Easter Sunday—during the service I wondered whether it had already been there when I visited this church the first time.

⁵⁴As in CRC-A, CRC-C, and RCL-E, the words of institution for the bread and were read separately from the words of institution for the wine, so that silver plates with bread were distributed to the communicants right after the reading of the first part and the breaking of the bread. In this congregation, the process was repeated five times.

⁵⁵The following biblical texts were read in order: Hebrews 9:11–12; 1 Corinthians 11:25–26; Romans 8:38–39; Psalm 116:3–6; Psalm 116:7–10. Additionally, the following songs were sung: *Gereformeerd Kerkboek* (2006 Ed.) hymn 162:1: *'k Heb geloofd en daarom zing ik* ("I believed and that is why I sing"), hymn 140:2: *Alzo lief had God de wereld* ("God so loved the world"), and hymn 114:2,7,5,6: *Jezus is mijn toeverlaat* ("Jesus is my refuge").

⁵⁶*Gereformeerd Kerkboek* (2006 Ed.) hymn 160: *Groot is uw trouw, o Heer*.

The sanctuary was already quite full. The organ was playing, accompanied by a trumpet. I chose to sit on the left-hand side, and recognized a number of interviewees from the first two focus group meetings. By the time the service started, the church was packed.

Before the start of the service, an elder asked us to greet our neighbors: “Please shake each other’s hand and greet each other.” All responded to his invitation; I felt welcome. Next (but still before the official start of the service), we sang a song, this time a hymn rather than a Psalm. I wondered whether this was a local custom, as I had not very often come across this practice in other RCL congregations. After the Votum and Salutation (performed as during my first visit), we sang the hymn “He lives” (*Hij leeft*) a capella—probably because it is difficult to accompany with the organ due to the melody.⁵⁷

The minister then led us in a prayer of blessing and intercession, after which the first Scripture reading was performed by one of the younger members of the congregation. We read Luke 24:1–12, where Christ appears to the women on Easter Morning. This was immediately followed by the singing of another Easter hymn. The second reading was from 1 Corinthians 15:3–6, on Christ’s resurrection on the third day.

After the sermon, we sang Psalm 98:1–2 set to the traditional Genevan tune but with a modern rhymed text.⁵⁸ During the singing of these stanzas, the white cloth that covered several silver plates with squares of white bread, a silver carafe (filled with red wine), and a number of silver cups was removed by an elder or deacon. All these objects had already been there, but were hidden from view. Before communion started, the minister read the fourth liturgical form.⁵⁹ After an elder invited us row by row to walk in line up to the front, the minister gave me a piece of bread. After this, I had to wait some time to receive the cup, since there was only one elder distributing it (while in the other ambulatory celebrations there were always two). In my experience, this took too long, as we shuffled forward from bread to wine. During communion, which took about 17 minutes, we sang five different hymns in their entirety (for a total of sixteen verses).⁶⁰

When the celebration was concluded, the minister thanked God in prayer. After this, the regular offerings were held, and the children (4–8 years old) returned to their parents. The minister then read the summary of the Law that Jesus gave. In a short exposition, he added some expla-

⁵⁷*Op Toonhoogte* (2015 Ed.) hymn 433.

⁵⁸See <https://www.denieuwepsalamberijming.nl/berijmingen/psalm-98>.

⁵⁹RCL, *Avondmaalsformulier 4* (2011 Revision); cf. English version: <https://www.steunpuntliturgie.gkv.nl/download/2805>.

⁶⁰*Liedboek voor de kerken* hymn 217:1,3,4: *Jezus leeft en ik met Hem* (“Jesus lives and I live with Him”), Psalm 27:1,3,7 (RCL edition), *Gereformeerd Kerkboek* (2006 Ed.) hymn 164: *Jezus vol liefde* (“Jesus full of love”), hymn 161:1–4: *Heer, U bent mijn leven* (“Lord, You are my life”), and hymn 155:1–5: *God, enkel licht* (“God, only light”).

nation to Jesus' words. Thereafter, the minister prayed another prayer, which was concluded with the communal recitation of the Lord's Prayer. The closing hymn was "Thine Be the Glory."⁶¹ In total, the service took 1 hour and 22 minutes.

3.4 In Conclusion

In the above, observations from twelve church services in which the Lord's Supper was administered have been described. Although every service and every congregation is of course unique, the descriptions show that considerable variety was possible both within a denomination and even within a single congregation.

There was most continuity between the two services I visited at CRC-C; there was close correspondence in the style of celebration, the liturgical form used, and the songs selected. To use Grimes's terms, one might say that almost all aspects of ritual action overlapped (see §3.3). In the other CRC churches (CRC-A and CRC-B), there was less continuity between the first and second service I visited. Thus, the style in which the Lord's Supper was celebrated remained the same, but there was greater liturgical variation on the wider level. For example, in the second CRC-A service the remaining part⁶² of the liturgical form was divided into two parts, whereas it had been read through in once during the first service. So too the first service I visited at CRC-B was a special, Good Friday "silent celebration." Although most aspects of ritual action remained unchanged, this "silent celebration" differed significantly from the celebration in the second service, where music was playing in the background.

When the observations for each CRC congregation are compared with the observations for the other CRC congregations, greater differences become visible. Aside from the use of different styles (which may influence the *Ritual Actions*, *Times*, and/or *Places*), there were also differences in *Ritual Languages* and *Groups*. For example, each of the three congregations used a different Scripture translation. In addition, the congregations used different liturgical forms (with CRC-B being the only one to use also the newer forms), and CRC-A and B were more open than CRC-C to visitors who would like to join the congregation in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

There was less continuity (than in the case of the CRC congregations, as noted above) between the two services I visited for each RCL congregation. All three churches used alternating styles of celebration, leading to slight differences in *Ritual Actions*, *Times*, and/or *Places* in each celebra-

⁶¹*Gereformeerd Kerkboek* (2006 Ed.) hymn 99:1–3: *U zij de glorie*.

⁶²In this congregation, the first part of the classical liturgical form was read one week in advance; the *remaining part* was read during the actual celebrations. See §3.2.1 above.

tion. For example, when the Lord's Supper was celebrated in ambulatory style, the minister, elders, deacons, and congregants (*Ritual Actors*) performed different roles than they when the Lord's Supper was celebrated seated at a table. As was true for some CRC churches, the *Ritual Languages* could change when different liturgical forms were used in the RCL congregation, or when no form was used at all, as happened in the second RCL-D service I visited. The same applied when the classical Ordinary was used in RCL-E; classical songs like the *Sanctus*, *Benedictus*, and *Agnus Dei* were used alongside the extensive explanation of the sacrament as found in the classical liturgical form. In spite of this lower degree of continuity, there tended to be no changes in the *Ritual Actors*, *Objects*, and *Groups* for the two services I observed in each RCL congregation.

When the services in the three respective RCL congregations are compared with each other, a variety in liturgical styles and customs (*Ritual Actions*, *Languages*, *Times*, and *Places*) emerges. For example, although the prescribed liturgical forms were used most of the time, there were also two occasions when this did not happen (in RCL-D and E). At the same time there was continuity between the other ritual aspects: as was the case in the CRC, the Lord's Supper was only performed in a church building and during a church service, by an ordained minister assisted by elders and/or deacons, in the midst of the congregation, and with the elements of bread and wine.

What remained constant across all six congregations, both CRC and RCL, were the *Ritual Actors*, *Ritual Objects*, and *Ritual Groups*, although even there some differences existed on a micro level. With regard to the ritual actors, in all churches it was the minister who administered the Lord's Supper, but the task of the elders and deacons did vary from congregation to congregation (depending on the style of celebration). Secondly, the ritual objects were more or less similar in all congregations, although the size of the tables varied (depending on the style of celebration and/or size of the congregation/church building). Thirdly, the ritual groups were comparable, although some congregations (CRC-B, RCL-D) still were more "open" to visitors than the others were.

Other ritual aspects did sometimes differ between and within the two denominations, as well as within the congregations themselves. This suggests that there is not just one CRC or RCL "operant theology," nor six local "operant theologies," but that there may be multiple theological practices coexisting within the different congregations and maybe even alternating on the local level.

Chapter 4

Espoused Voice

4.1 Introduction

In order to describe the espoused theological voice, interviews with congregation members were conducted in the period from November 2016 to November 2017 (see Appendix D).¹ In this chapter, the results of these interviews are described, based on focus group and individual interviews conducted with church members in each congregation (see §2.5).

The interviews were conducted using the topic list as described in §2.6 and included in Appendix A. After the interviews had been conducted, they were all transcribed verbatim and analyzed inductively using thematic analysis (see §2.8). This resulted in a code tree with six main themes and several sub-themes (see Appendix E). In the following sections, these six themes and their sub-themes will be described in detail:

- §4.2 The Lord's Supper as Communion
- §4.3 Attributed Meanings
- §4.4 Opinions and Feelings
- §4.5 Style, Ambiance, and Liturgy
- §4.6 Personal Developments
- §4.7 Personal Desires

¹The espoused theological voice is defined as “the theology embedded within a group’s articulation of its beliefs” (Cameron et al., *Talking About God in Practice*, pp. 53–54), cf. §1.3.1.

4.2 The Lord's Supper as Communion

In this section, the first main theme will be described in different sections. First, the mutual communion or connection experienced in the Lord's Supper is circumscribed in two different subsections with both positive and negative examples. Secondly, the experience of communion with God is described in a third, separate subsection.

4.2.1 Mutual Communion: Positive Examples

The aspect of communion was identified as important by many interviewees. Participants mentioned experiences like *togetherness*, *unity*, and/or *mutual communion* when talking about the Lord's Supper—especially in RCL churches, but also in CRC congregations. This implies that for these participants the Lord's Supper is interpreted as a moment of mutual fellowship and communion. This was experienced above all in regular celebrations held in one's local congregation. One participant stressed the communal character of the sacrament in comparison to baptism:

I still think... I still think the communal [aspect] is very important. To me it really is the...—baptism is of course more individual as a sacrament, but the Lord's Supper is [in my opinion] something of the congregation and the community.²

Others emphasized their personal experiences during the celebrations, noting that they feel more connected to the congregation as a whole:

...to celebrate the Lord's Supper together as congregation. For me it's actually a highlight, something you do together as congregation. (...) Then I feel a close unity with all.³

Some participants explicitly stated that they experienced a connection between the style of the celebration and the experience of mutual communion. For example, one person remarked the following about the ambulatory style: "Especially when you all walk in a circle, everyone comes out. And I like that. From every hidden corner of the church—you see them all go."⁴ Another participant made a similar remark in the context of the seated in the pews style:

²R8 (male, 40–64yr, CRC-C): "*Ik vind toch... het gemeenschappelijke vind ik heel belangrijk. Het is volgens mij ook echt bij uitstek...—de doop is natuurlijk individueler als sacrament, maar het Avondmaal [zie ik] als iets van de gemeente en de gemeenschap.*"

³R2.5 (female, 65+, CRC-A): "*...om samen als gemeente het Avondmaal te vieren. Ik vind dat eigenlijk wel een hoogtepunt, wat je samen als gemeente doet. (...) Dan voel ik me erg verbonden met allen.*"

⁴R14.3 (female, 65+, RCL-D): "*Voorals je allemaal lopende rondgaat, dan komt iedereen tevoorschijn. En dat vind ik mooi. Uit alle hoeken en gaten van de kerk, die ik allemaal niet kan zien, die zie je dan allemaal gaan.*"

And what I really like about our [church] is the enormous [sense of] unity, especially because it gets passed up and down the aisles. I really like that, passing it on to each other, know what I mean?⁵

Such interpretations were also shared in connection with other styles of celebration, like sitting at a table or standing in a circle. One other participant also mentioned the practical side of being mutually connected:

I celebrate it also for the feeling of being together with my brothers and sisters, in church. It's something that also really offers me strength. [The fact] that I am not alone, in my faith, but I also see it as a... an aid in my life, that I... that if I need help, I know who I can count on, physically. And it's not just God, but also the people around me.⁶

Several participants also mentioned special experiences abroad. One man spoke about celebrating the Lord's Supper standing in a circle at a local church during his vacation:

So you held each other and at the end you also gave them a blessing. (...) To my right stood that trembling little old lady. And I thought: I don't even know you, and yet there was this sense of unity.⁷

These examples were for the most part related to the style of the celebration—especially when it differed from the experience at home. More generally, participants also mentioned the celebration in other churches as an experience of “worldwide communion” with other Christians:

A tiny little church in the south of France. How many of us were there? Fifteen, twenty max, and that included the people on vacation. But... when the Lord's Supper was celebrated,

⁵R5.1 (female, 40–64yr, CRC-B): “*En het mooie bij ons vind ik, de enorme saamhorigheid, vooral ook omdat het door de rijen heen gaat. Vind ik altijd zo mooi, dat je aan elkaar doorgeeft hè.*”

⁶R20.2 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-F): “*Ik vier het ook vanwege het samenzijn met m'n broers en zussen, in de kerk. Daardoor voel ik me ook heel erg door gesterkt. Dat ik zeker weet dat ik niet alleen sta, in m'n geloof, maar ik zie het ook als een... een hulp in m'n leven, dat ik... mocht ik hulp nodig hebben, dat ik weet op wie ik kan rekenen, fysiek. En dat is niet alleen God, maar ook de mensen om me heen.*”

⁷R15.1 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-D): “*Dus je hield elkaar vast en na afloop ging je ook elkaar iets toewensen. (...) Rechts stond dat oude vrouwtje bibberend naast me. En ik dacht: ik ken jou helemaal niet en toch was er iets van verbondenheid.*”

you really felt united with the church of all places. In my experience that happens much more there, at times like that, than it does here.⁸

Appreciation of Personal Attention When it came to the experience of a *mutual connection*, some participants also mentioned the importance of personal attention, gestures, and/or eye contact. One example related to when the minister distributed bread and/or wine during the ambulatory style of celebration:

R19.3 (female, 65+, RCL-F): That time we had [name of the guest preacher]. And he said to every person, “The body of Christ, the body of Christ,” as he distributed the bread.

R19.1 (male, 40–64yr; quietly): That’s right, yes [nods].

R19.3 (continues): And then it suddenly strikes you with power. I really liked that at the time! Deliberately giving each person the bread, looking them in the eyes one by one. Then I’m like: Wow, that’s awesome.⁹

Other aspects mentioned in regard to personal contact during the celebration of the Lord’s Supper included gestures (like passing on bread and wine to one’s neighbor instead of putting them back on the table) and eye contact:

...it’s so very special, standing in a circle. Also [the fact] that you pass it on to each other. I thought... Yes, we should, we should... as far as I’m concerned, we should be doing that here too. I do do it when I get the plate and grab a piece of bread, then I pass it on to the person next to me and do look them in the eyes. I don’t [just] like pass it on.¹⁰

⁸R15.4 (male, 65+, RCL-D): “Een heel klein kerkje in Zuid-Frankrijk. Ja, met hoeveel man zit je daar? Een man of vijftien, twintig hooguit, waarvan ook nog vakantiegangers. Maar... als dan het Avondmaal wordt gevierd dan voel je je inderdaad verbonden met de kerk van alle plaatsen. Dat vind ik veel meer daar, op zo’n moment tot z’n recht komen dan, dan hier.”

⁹R19.3: ...ik denk dat het met Goede Vrijdag was, een paar jaar geleden. Toen hadden we [naam gastpredikant] hier. En die zei tegen iedereen: “Het lichaam van Christus, het lichaam van Christus” als hij het brood aangaf. /R19.1 (zachtjes): Dat klopt, ja. [knikken] /R19.3 (vervolg): En dan dringt het ineens wel erg goed tot je door. Dat vond ik toen heel mooi! Echt bewust je het brood aangeven, per persoon je aankijken. Dan denk ik: joh, ja, dat is gaaf.

¹⁰R6.2 (female, 65+, CRC-B): “...ik vond het heel bijzonder dat, dat in een kring staan. En ook het elkaar aanrijken van. Dat vond ik toch wel... Ja dat mag, dat mag... zou van mij hier ook mogen. Ik doe het wel als ik de schaal krijg en ik pak een stukje brood, dan geef ik hem door aan mijn buurman en dan kijk ik hem wél aan. Niet zo eh, doorschuiven.”

Some preferred to have a short conversation with their neighbors at the table after sitting down, while others did not like such disruption of the usual silence (in RCL-E). A number of other participants mentioned that they were more open to greater physical contact during the celebrations held in their own congregation. During a discussion in RCL-F on a more festive/expressive style of celebration in other parts of the world, the following exchange took place:

R20.6 (male, 65+, RCL-F): ...look a little more happily at each other. Absolutely, you're [R20.5] right there. As far as I'm concerned, we could.

R20.5 (female, 40–64yr) [seriously]: A wink every now and then!

R20.6: A wink, or like a pinch every now and then.

R20.5: Right, or you hold each other like this [gestures: by the arm]. I don't know, people here are so stand-offish.¹¹

Another example of physical contact included the liturgical ritual of passing on the peace of Christ. This was mentioned several times as a positive example of personal contact, in both CRC and RCL churches (with the exception of CRC-C, RCL-D and RCL-F). It was only in CRC-B that I actually observed this ritual during a worship service (October 24, 2017).

Lord's Supper Strengthens the Spiritual Bond and Makes It Visible Participants in both denominations mentioned that the Lord's Supper strengthens the communion of the congregation. According to them, the sacrament cannot be celebrated as an individual; you need to partake of it together with others. Some explicitly stated that these "other people" are not just friends or a particular subgroup of Christians (like a Bible study group), but the entire congregation. One of the participants (in RCL-E) mentioned the possibility of celebrating the Lord's Supper as a congregation together with a congregation from another denomination.

There was another participant who emphasized that *mutual communion* is also related to the experience of communion with Jesus. To his mind, such communion is not limited to one's own congregation or to congregations within one's own denomination:

R18.5 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-E): ...well, I should probably admit I at times go to another church and have sometimes also celebrated the Lord's Supper there, because there too I see all

¹¹R20.6: ...wat blijer kijken naar elkaar. Absoluut, daar heb je [R20.5] gelijk in. Dat mag best van mij. /R20.5 [op serieuze toon]: Af en toe een knipoog! /R20.6: Een knipoog, of af en toe eens knippen of zo. /R20.5: Ja, of pak je elkaar of zo [maakt gebaar: bij de arm]. Ik weet niet, mensen zijn hier zo kil!

kinds of people who are one in Jesus. And you know the one person, and of that other [person] you know you... So it's not only inside these church walls [that] we're all one in Jesus, but I think it extends much further.

M: Right, OK. So [what you're] really [saying] is this: where you experience communion in Jesus, there you celebrate the Lord's Supper, or there you can celebrate the Lord's Supper?

R18.5: We can celebrate the Lord's Supper together with them, yes.

M: Right, OK, right. And that [communion] is something you also experience, is what you're saying.

R18.5: Yes.¹²

Participants In the context of *mutual communion*, it may seem evident that we are speaking about the Lord's Supper celebrated in worship services organized by local congregations. However, in the course of research it became clear that the sacrament was sometimes also celebrated in other groups within or even outside the local church. Examples included celebrations in cell groups or districts (*wijk*) within the congregation, in interdenominational Bible study groups (not affiliated with a specific church), with Christian friends at home, with classmates at a Bible school, with fellow members of a student association, with Christian tourists during a visit to the Holy Land, or with about 10,000 other Christians during a Sunday morning worship service at a Christian conference. With the exception of the final two examples, these celebrations were all conducted without the presence of a minister, sometimes also without the actual elements of bread and wine.

During the focus group interviews, such real-life experiences did not meet much opposition from other group members. However, one person objected to the celebration of the Lord's Supper with friends at home:

But won't it become a... a Lord's Supper [just] among friends? While it should be a matter of community? Because in a community there are also people who, like, are not your friends, but you still accept them for the sake of Christ.¹³

¹²R18.5: *...misschien moet ik dan ook wel erkennen dat ik weleens naar een andere kerk ga en dat ik ook daar weleens een keer Avondmaal gevierd heb, omdat ik ook daar ook allemaal mensen zie die één in Jezus zijn. En die ken je en die weet je dat je... Dus het is niet binnen deze kerkmuren allemaal één in Jezus, maar het is voor mij breder. /M: Ja, oké. Dus eigenlijk: waar jij de gemeenschap in Jezus ervaart, daar vier jij Avondmaal, of, daar kun jij Avondmaal vieren? /R18.5: Daar kunnen we Avondmaal mee vieren. Ja. /M: Ja, oké, ja. En die [gemeenschap] ervaar je ook, dat zeg je nu ook. /R18.5: Ja.*

¹³R20.5 (female, 40–64yr, RCL-F): *“Maar wordt het dan geen... geen vriendenavondmaal? Terwijl het een gemeenschap moet zijn? Want in een gemeenschap zit je ook met mensen die, ja, geen vrienden van je zijn, maar die je neemt om Christus' wil.”*

Remarkable about this response is that the community is introduced as an argument for celebrating the Lord's Supper not just with friends; nothing is mentioned about the need to celebrate in a worship context, nor for an ordained minister or elder, or the application of church discipline.¹⁴

Some participants mentioned examples of the *exclusion* of full members from the sacrament, for instance after divorce.¹⁵ A few others (all RCL-D) objected to the exclusion of children and non-professing members:

What I also find remarkable is the exclusive character. The way, like, we are church and treat the Lord's Supper. I hear you talking about 'community', but it is, like, the community of those who have done profession of faith. There are also lots of people in church, kids, who like don't participate. So the question is like: what is community? It's a question I struggle with, you know. The exclusive character we've given it. Is it legitimate?¹⁶

As a result, some participants proposed evaluating the possibility of paedocommunion, with some suggesting some sort of pre-profession of faith. Others preferred to retain the requirement of public profession of faith, but wanted more attention for children during the sacramental celebrations:

The catechism students too, they don't come when it's Lord's Supper. How are we supposed to get the youth to church during Lord's Supper? What are we supposed to do? It would be really nice to show we're listening [to these concerns]. But how?¹⁷

Conversely, less was said about the aspect of *inclusion*. For example, in RCL-D a number of congregants with mental disabilities were present. Many of them were professing members and participated regularly in the

¹⁴See BC art. 30, 35.

¹⁵For more on this, see subsection "Exclusion" in §4.4.4 below.

¹⁶R14.5 (male, 20–39yr, RCL-D): "*En wat ik ook bijzonder vind is het exclusieve karakter. Hoe we, zeg maar, als kerk zijn en met het Avondmaal omgaan. Ik hoor jullie wel zeggen 'gemeenschap', maar het is wel gemeenschap zeg maar voor diegenen die belijdenis gedaan hebben. Er zijn ook heel veel mensen in de kerk, kinderen, die zeg maar niet mee doen. De vraag is dan zo'n beetje: wat is gemeenschap? Dat is wel een van de vragen die ik zelf heb, van, hè? Die van dat exclusieve karakter dat we eraan hebben gegeven. Ja, is dat dan terecht?*"

¹⁷R5.1 (female, 40–64yr, CRC-B): "*De catechisanten ook, die komen niet als er avondmaal is. Hoe krijgen we nou de jongeren in de kerk tijdens het avondmaal? Wat moeten we dan doen? Dat lijkt me heel mooi om daar gehoor aan te geven. Maar hoe?*"

celebrations, but they were not mentioned in the interviews—which may, in fact, be an example of successful inclusion. Something similar applies to CRC-B, where a number of asylum seekers were part of the church community. Some regularly participated in the Lord’s Supper in CRC-B, but none of the interviewees mentioned this. In RCL-E, one participant mentioned an example from a year or two ago when several asylum seekers participated while they, strictly speaking, were not entitled to do so:

I can’t remember anyone going up to talk to them, but they did go to the table, and yes, I do seem to remember [them] partaking of the bread and wine. Right, but it wasn’t official. Everyone was kind of like: what’s going on?¹⁸

Finally, there was little attention for elderly and/or sick members who could not attend church services where the Lord’s Supper was being administered. However, four participants (2x CRC-A, and RCL-D and RCL-F) recalled a celebration with a terminally ill person present at the worship service in their (past) congregation. One of them remarked: “Every time again it really moves me to see him go, and when I see him just beaming, I think, like: ‘Oh, he’s already looking out in expectation to the eternal feast!’”¹⁹ In all cases, these experiences were identified as leaving an “impact” on the interviewee.

Communion With Other Participants at Home Three participants (2x RCL-D, and RCL-F) mentioned examples of bread and wine being distributed at home or in a retirement complex so that the sacrament could be administered to the elderly or sick. One example comes from a woman who was present at a home celebration together with a small group of congregants (7–8 people):

R21.3 (female, 65+, RCL-F): But... I have by now on several occasions had the experience, at [church member’s name] place... celebrating the Lord’s Supper and so I thought it was really something special. That’s really... She hadn’t been able to come to church for years and so one of the deacons comes with. He takes his little case with bread and wine. (...) And, right, I think it’s such a beautiful thing. And I think, I think it’s so awesome for her. Because she hasn’t been able to celebrate the Lord’s Supper for years, and now she can right there at

¹⁸R17.2 (male, 20–39yr, RCL-E): “*Ik kan me niet herinneren dat ze aangesproken zijn, maar ze zijn wel aan de tafel geweest, en ja volgens mij hebben [ze] wel brood en wijn gehad. Ja, maar dat is niet officieel gegaan. Je zag iedereen zo een beetje van: wat gebeurt hier?*”

¹⁹R19.5 (female, 65+, RCL-F): “*Iedere keer raakt het me weer enorm als ik hem zie gaan en als ik hem zie strålen, dat ik denk van: ‘O, hij kijkt al uit naar het eeuwige feest!’*”

home. You know, that deacon also does it so well; when our minister here breaks the bread in church, he just breaks the bread. And he pours the wine, and, no, I thought...

M: You listen live using the “church phone”?

R21.3: Live... so really... yes.

R21.4 (male, 20–39yr): Camera, video...

R21.3: The last time, yes, the last time, that she, that I was there, it was really too bad (...), you couldn't see the people [on the screen] then. But the time before you could. (...) [She told us]: ‘Well, now I still feel like I'm not a part of it.’²⁰

The above example describes a situation in which some congregation members were visiting an elderly woman who could not join the celebration together with the congregation in the church building. Instead, the sacrament was administered in her home by an elder and a deacon, while the “regular” administration was being performed in the worship service at church. There was a live connection with the church, in that case by video. Especially the visibility of the members of the community was deemed important by the elderly woman, since she expressed her disappointment when the other celebrants could not be seen on the screen: “Well, now I still feel like I'm not a part of it.” In other churches, like RCL-F, only an audio connection was available.

Examples like these were only shared by people who had been present at the “home celebrations” because they had been involved or invited in some way; no first-hand experiences of the sick or elderly themselves could be included. All three reports were clearly positive. The possibility for ill or elderly members to receive the sacrament at home was not mentioned by any of the other participants who had never attended such celebrations. This seems to imply that they either were not very familiar with this practice, or else did not deem it important (on the assumption that, for example, “mutual community” can only be experienced in one way), or that this practice was not available in the other congregations.²¹

²⁰R21.3: *Maar... ik heb nou ook een paar keer meegemaakt, bij [naam gemeentelid] thuis... avondmaal vieren en dat vond ik dus echt heel bijzonder. Dat is echt... Die kan al jaren dus niet meer in de kerk komen en dan gaat dus één van de diakenen gaat dus mee. Die komt dus ook met z'n koffertje met brood en wijn. (...) En, ja, dat vind ik toch heel mooi. En dat vind ik, voor haar vind ik het zo geweldig. Want ze heeft jaren geen Avondmaal kunnen vieren en nu kan het thuis. Nou ja, die diaken doet het dus ook echt mooi, als de dominee hier in de kerk het brood breekt, dan breekt hij dus ook brood. En hij schenkt wijn in en, nee, ik vond het... /M: Je luistert gewoon live mee met de kerkteléfono? /R21.3: Live... dus echt... ja. /R21.4 (male, 20–39yr): De camera, video... /R21.3: De laatste, ja, dat laatste keer dat ze, dat ik er was, was alleen heel jammer (...), toen waren de mensen dus niet in beeld. Die keer daarvoor dus wel. (...) [Toen zei ze tegen ons]: ‘Ja, nu heb ik nog het idee dat ik er niet bij hoorde’.*

²¹The CRC's church order allows for the possibility of administering the Lord's Supper, under certain conditions, “in nursing homes, care centers, and (other) institutions.” How-

Communion With All Saints Most of the time, “communion” was interpreted as the connection with the other celebrants at that moment or with the local church community. Sometimes, however, interview participants also mentioned communion with “all saints”, that is, Christians of all times and/or places:

R18.8 (female, 40–64yr, RCL-E): Because I’ve been to different countries, that you can celebrate the Lord’s Supper also in all those places. That there just are Christians throughout the entire world. That we have the freedom to do so... That not only here in The Netherlands...—It’s something I found... something I still find beautiful, special, yes.

M: Right.

R18.8: And kind of also when you have to explain things or feel tempted, like, “Does God actually exist?” you know? “Is it really true?” that you then think: “But it’s not just here, but also there, it’s everywhere”, and, like: “It’s got to be true.”

M: OK, right... So when you feel tempted you actually also think back to when you celebrated abroad, right, when you’re in The Netherlands, when you feel tempted, then you think, you feel encouraged by what you saw abroad?

R18.8: Yeah, yeah, yeah.²²

Such a connection was mentioned on several occasions in all interviews—in all cases by people who had visited other Christians abroad (CRC-A, RCL-D, RCL-E).

4.2.2 Mutual Communion: Negative Examples

Aside from these positive examples, also negative examples were shared during the interviews. These included lack of community, lack of unity in faith, and feelings of regret over those who could have participated

ever, these celebrations may not have the character of an individual administration (CRC, *Kerkorde*, art. 63.3 = 63.1.c (online edition), see chapter 6, note 33 and 45 below). In contrast, the RCL’s Regulation on Church Services explicitly allows for the celebration of the sacrament at home (RCL, *Generale regeling voor de kerkdiensten*, art. 7, see §6.3.2 below).

²²R18.8: *Omdat ik naar meerdere landen geweest ben, dat je dus ook daar allemaal Avondmaal mag vieren. Dat daar overal wereldwijd gewoon christenen zijn. Dat we dat in vrijheid mogen... Dat niet alleen maar hier in Nederland...—Dat vond ik wel... En dat vind ik nog steeds wat moois hebben, wat bijzonders hebben, inderdaad. /M: Ja. /R18.8: En dan ergens ook wel van als je dan dingen uit moet leggen of een aanvechting hebt of zo, ja “Bestaat God helemaal wel?” weet je? “Is het allemaal wel waar?”, dat je dan denkt: “Ja, maar het is niet alleen hier, het is daar ook, het is overal,” en: “het moet wel waar zijn,” zeg maar. /M: Oké, ja... Dus bij zo’n aanvechting denk je dan eigenlijk ook terug aan die vieringen in het buitenland, hè, als je in Nederland bent, als je een aanvechting hebt, dan denk je, word je weer bemoedigd door wat je in het buitenland hebt gezien? /R18.8: Ja, ja, ja.*

but were absent (e.g. because they had abandoned their faith or left the church). For example, in CRC-C—where the Lord's Supper is celebrated seated at a table—one of the participants pleaded for greater attention for the communal aspects of the Lord's Supper alongside the individual aspects:

But... I think especially when you're sitting at the Lord's Supper table as a group, with thirty, twenty-five people, how[ever] big the table may be. (...) Then I think... right, I think that's something the LORD Jesus explicitly wanted to stimulate when he instituted the Lord's Supper: that [aspect of] forming a community, being a congregation... So yeah, in our churches that doesn't..., and also in the congregation I was a member of before... The focus was always on the individual [aspect]... of being justified before God. And as long as that's taken care of, you celebrate the Lord's Supper. It's not like I'm saying that's not true, but sometimes that can or does get so heavily emphasized that the communal [aspect] is snowed under.²³

In this case, a direct link was drawn between the doctrine of justification and actual participation in the Lord's Supper. According to this participant, excessive emphasis on personal justification as a prerequisite for participation in the Lord's Supper leads to a loss of communal celebration.

Other examples—in the other congregations—included participants who preferred a particular celebration style because it, in their opinion, offered a better experience of community or togetherness. One woman (RCL-F) admitted preferring the ambulatory style of celebration over being seated at a table:

R20.8 (female, 20–39yr, RCL-F): Especially the unity is something I miss a bit. And I feel it more when it's ambulatory, because then there's, like, there's constantly...

M: ...Movement?

R20.8 (continues): ...motion, and, right, you're always looking in the hall, you see others walk by, and... So then... But

²³R8 (male, 40–64yr, CRC-C): “Maar... ik vind juist, als je aan een Avondmaalstafel zit als groep, als dertig, vijftig mensen, hoe groot de tafel is. (...) Dan denk ik van... ja, dat is volgens iets wat de Heere Jezus ook heel nadrukkelijk heeft willen stimuleren met de instelling van het Avondmaal: het gemeenschap vormen, het gemeente zijn... En ja, dat krijgt in onze kerken niet..., en ook in de gemeente waar ik hiervoor lid was... Er werd altijd zo gefocust op het individuele... het rechtvaardig voor God zijn. En als dat dan allemaal goed zit, dan vier je Avondmaal. Ik zeg daar niet [van] dat dat niet waar is overigens hoor, maar dat kan zoveel nadruk krijgen of krijgt soms zoveel nadruk dat dat gemeenschappelijke ondersneeuwt.”

sometimes it feels a little... too sacred, I think. Everyone is on their own, and... it feels more like a funeral, like.²⁴

In this example, even ambulatory celebration could not guarantee the experience of togetherness; the administration may be “too sacred” and resemble a funeral, so the woman acknowledged. Another negative example was the absence of participants who are (or were) members of the congregation. One reason for their absence was conflict:

I have sometimes also noticed people who weren't there. Brothers and sisters absent from the table. Because of that situation. They thought it was just too serious a matter. And they felt it just wouldn't be right for their other brothers and sisters, because, for example, there was literally conflict there. And they thought: Well, I'm not going to sit comfortably [at the table] to eat and drink with them.²⁵

In another case, someone declined to participate in the celebration for personal reasons:

At the time I knew there were people who weren't going to Lord's Supper because of conflicts with others. That actually left a really big impression on me, in a negative way. I'm not going to Lord's Supper, you abstain [from the table] because you think someone who is going to Lord's Supper shouldn't actually be going there. Man! [Other members of the group mumble in agreement] I thought that was so weird. (...) That [person] was there, he saw someone else get up to go to Lord's Supper when he'd already said before: if he goes, I'm not going. And so he didn't go. Yes, I thought that was really sad. That left a wrong... unfortunately, it left a very negative impression on me.²⁶

²⁴R20.8: *Vooral de eenheid mis ik een beetje. En die eenheid voel ik meer als het lopend is, omdat je dan, ja, een continue... /M: ...Beweging hebt? /R20.8 (continues): ...rondgang is, en je kijkt inderdaad ook de zaal in, je ziet anderen voorbij komen, en... Dus dan... Maar soms voelt het een beetje... misschien te heilig, denk ik. Iedereen is dan op zichzelf, en... voelt het meer als een begrafenismoment, zeg maar.*

²⁵R18.6 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-E): *“Ik heb ook een paar keer wel mensen gemist. Broers en zussen gemist aan tafel. Om die situatie. Dat ze het gewoon inderdaad te gewichtig vonden. En zich bezwaard voelden naar andere broers en zussen, omdat bijvoorbeeld er letterlijk een conflict was. En dat ze dachten: ja, dan ga ik niet gezellig zitten eten en drinken.”*

²⁶R13.4 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-D): *“Toen wist ik van mensen die niet aan het Avondmaal gingen omdat ze onmin hadden met andere mensen. Dat maakte eigenlijk heel veel indruk op mij, op een verkeerde manier. Ik ga niet aan het Avondmaal, je onthoudt jezelf omdat je vindt dat iemand die wel aan het avondmaal gaat niet aan het Avondmaal hoort te gaan.*

Other negative examples pertained to former church members like grown-up children or acquaintances who had abandoned the Christian faith and been absent ever since. Occasionally their relatives mentioned missing their presence (in RCL-E and F).

4.2.3 Communion With God

A smaller number of participants mentioned experiencing a direct relationship with God, or specifically with Christ, during the sacramental celebrations.²⁷ According to these participants, the Lord's Supper is an extra confirmation of one's personal relationship with God or Christ. Someone in CRC-A put it this way:

I actually see the [Lord's Supper] as an extra confirmation of my unity with Christ. So I do see that in the weekly administration of the Word, but in contrast to what [R3.2] says, I still consider it the highlight of the year when we receive extra nourishment through it. And when we clearly reflect on the fact that He died for me most personally. Right, and at the same time: the unity at the table with all brothers and sisters. Those two things.²⁸

In this quote, the sacrament is interpreted as an "extra confirmation" of one's personal relationship with Christ—"extra" in the sense of on top of the preaching of the Word of God.

Other participants expressed similar feelings, but were more vague about the relationship between the sacrament and Christ. One example comes from CRC-B, where someone emphasized the physicality of the relationship with God:

The Lord's Supper, to me it's something so great, so amazing.
That you can actually eat together with the Lord. His supper,

Poh! [instemmend gemompel van andere groepsleden] Dat vond ik toch raar. (...) Die [persoon] was aanwezig, die zag een ander persoon aan het Avondmaal gaan, had-ie van te voren al aangekondigd: dan ga ik niet. En die ging ook niet. Ja, dat vond ik wel erg. Dat heeft bij mij verkeerd... helaas nogal een negatieve indruk achtergelaten."

²⁷In total, "mutual communion" was mentioned about four times as often as "communion with God." This ratio is not mentioned for the sake of drawing quantitative conclusions, but for the purpose of a global comparison.

²⁸R3.5 (male, 65+, CRC-A): "*Ik zie het [avondmaal] eigenlijk als een extra bevestiging van mijn verbondenheid aan Christus. Ik zie dat dus wel in de wekelijkse bediening van het Woord, maar in tegenstelling van wat [R3.2] zegt, vind ik het toch het hoogtepunt in het jaar om daar extra door gevoed te worden. En duidelijk stil te staan bij: Hij stierf voor mij heel persoonlijk. Ja, en dan tegelijkertijd: de verbondenheid aan tafel met alle broeders en zusters. Die twee aspecten."*

his, so it's his body and his blood. But that we're united with it and... yeah, it actually means the world to me.²⁹

More concrete was a participant in CRC-C, who interpreted the sacramental celebrations as moments of "being one with Christ":

[The Holy Supper is] for me really a [special] moment... being one with Christ, as far as I'm concerned. Participating in... how should I put it? Like: experiencing assurance. What I feel is that for a moment it's [all] been lifted free from all earthly cares and then being allowed to taste for a moment what it means to be saved from everything that now still drags us down into sin and... away from Christ. That you may be confirmed in that for just a moment. That you are one with Him. That you've received it from Him.³⁰

Other participants interpreted the celebrations as a "meeting" with Christ, or called Him the *table Host* (regardless of whether or not actual tables were used during the celebrations). Some participants understood Jesus' role as Host to be a motive for participation, as if they were called by Christ Himself. In one case, that interpretation caused hesitance on the part of the participant:

...come to the Host. To me it's always something special, but also difficult. To the last second I actually sit... right, while I actually already know it, but I'm still always sitting there a little uptight. Like: do I really belong there? So actually I'm always sitting there praying, like: can I too have the boldness to come? And, up to now, I've always been given that boldness. But I still think it's very special, because actually we truly see Jesus there, as it were, at the table. Like: He's calling you, you know? He's standing there inviting you. We're allowed to come to his table.³¹

²⁹R5.3 (female, 65+, CRC-B): "...de maaltijd des Heren, dat is zoiets groots voor mij, zoiets geweldigs. Dat je dus met de Here eigenlijk kunt eten. Zijn maaltijd, Zijn, het is Zijn lichaam dus en Zijn bloed. Maar dat wij daar dus mee verbonden zijn en... ja, dat betekent eigenlijk voor mij alles."

³⁰R10 (female, 40–64yr, CRC-C): "[Het Heilig Avondmaal is] voor mij echt een moment... één zijn met Christus, voor mijn gevoel. Deel mogen nemen aan... hoe moet ik het goed zeggen? Laat maar zeggen: de zekerheid ervaren. Ik heb het gevoel dat het even los getild is uit alle aardse beslommingen en dan even te mogen proeven wat het inhoudt om verlost te zijn van alles wat nu ons in de zonde trekt en... afhoudt van Christus. Dat je er even een moment van bevestiging mag hebben. Dat je één bent met Hem. Dat je het van Hem ontvangen hebt."

³¹R1.3 (female, 40–64yr, CRC-A): "...bij de Gastheer komen. Dat vind ik zelf wel altijd iets bijzonders, maar ook altijd wel iets moeilijks. Ik zit echt tot de laatste minuut eigen-

One participant (RCL-F) used even more intimate language, explicitly mentioning “friendship with Jesus” as the most important motive for celebrating the Lord’s Supper:

Friendship. I take it to refer to a very personal relationship with God, with Jesus. If you know someone..., you want to be there [with them]. And if you love someone, that [feeling] becomes much more powerful. (...) At those times [I] think I can meet Jesus. I have the sense it’s possible. And at the Lord’s Supper it’s... quite powerfully present. (...) I would actually feel soiled, as it were, if I could, but just stayed home.³²

In sum, some participants described their experienced relationship with God and/or Christ in straightforward and concrete terms. Others were vaguer or did not mention this experience at all. Interestingly, this aspect was mentioned more frequently by members of CRC congregations than in the RCL, and most frequently by elderly people (65+). “Mutual communion,” on the other hand, was mentioned more frequently by members of RCL congregations.

Relationship with God Some participants associated the Lord’s Supper with having a relationship with God. The sacrament could signify one’s adoption as a child of God, or be interpreted as a merciful gift from God to the participant or the congregation as a whole. One person also called it a sign of “being secure” in God:

Grace, yes, because you’re a child of God. He is your father and He already protects you, actually your entire life. Uhm... And well, that also brings that sense of security. (...) ...whatever happens, I’m sure things will be well with me. I just feel secure in God. And Lord’s Supper is actually an external sign of that.³³

lijk... ja, terwijl ik het eigenlijk al weet, maar toch altijd nog een beetje gespannen. Van: is mijn plaats daar wel, hè? Dus eigenlijk zit ik continu te bidden van: mag ik die vrijmoedigheid hebben om ook te komen? En dan, altijd nog, heb ik ook de vrijmoedigheid gekregen. Maar ik vind het wel iets heel bijzonders, want eigenlijk zien we echt Jezus staan, als het ware, aan de tafel. Zo van: Hij roept je, hè? Hij staat daar ons uit te nodigen. We mogen aan Zijn tafel komen.”

³²R21.2 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-F): “Vriendschap. Daarmee bedoel ik een heel persoonlijke relatie met God, met Jezus. Als je iemand kent..., dan wil je erbij zijn. En als je iemand liefhebt wordt het nog veel sterker. (...) Op die momenten denk [ik] dat ik Jezus kan ontmoeten. Dat ik het gevoel heb dat het kan. En dat is met Avondmaal... toch wel sterk aanwezig. (...) Ik zou me, bij wijze van spreken eigenlijk een beetje vies voelen als ik zou kunnen, dat ik zou thuisblijven.”

³³R20.2 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-F): “Genade, ja, omdat je een kind van God bent. Hij is jouw vader en Hij beschermt je al, eigenlijk heel je leven. Eh... En ja, dat vormt ook die geborgenheid. (...) ...wat er ook gebeurt, ik weet zeker dat het goed is met mij. Ik voel me gewoon geborgen in God. En avondmaal is daar eigenlijk een uiterlijk teken van.”

The Work of the Holy Spirit Although most interviewees did not mention or discuss the work of the Holy Spirit, two women in RCL-E (in the same interview) explicitly related their experiences to the work of the Holy Spirit. According to the first woman (20–39yr), the Lord’s Supper is a “moment of awareness” in which the Holy Spirit makes you aware of what you receive from God. The other participant reported that her experience had changed due to her growth in knowledge of the Holy Spirit:

Last year I took Youth Alpha and attended the EO-Youth Rally, and also one day at *Opwekking*.³⁴ There you, like, you really begin to feel the Holy Spirit. And you pray for it and experience it together, and, well, I really think you have to expect to receive it from the Holy Spirit, and also have to ask every time again when you go to church or attend the Lord’s Supper, that He may just be there for you and that He may use the sermons to touch you or that you might understand them, and, well, I’m starting to become increasingly conscious of how much I really need him.³⁵

In RCL-F, one participant stated that the effectiveness of the celebration is proportional to your relationship with or “openness to” the Holy Spirit. In his view, you need to open yourself to the work of God who is already present at the table. The style and elements of the liturgy are means for opening yourself up, so that the Spirit can start working in you. But as a result, it is your own “fault” if you experience little or no effect during the administration of the sacrament:

It’s not that easy just to open yourself up and [for] the Holy Spirit to enter. (...) What sometimes happens is that you leave church, and then everything just feels right. You think like: it was an awesome service, everything... then you just feel good; but sometimes you also go to a service and think like: well, I might just as well have stayed in bed, because I just didn’t

³⁴EO-Youth Rally and *Opwekking* are, respectively, a one-day and multiple day evangelical Christian festival.

³⁵R18.1 (female, 20–39yr, RCL-E): “*Ik heb het afgelopen jaar Youth Alpha gedaan en naar de EO-Jongerendag geweest en ook een dag op Opwekking. Daar ga je, je, ja, je begint echt de Heilige Geest te voelen. En je bidt ervoor en je beleeft dat samen en, ja ik denk ook echt dat je het van de Heilige Geest moet verwachten om, ook elke keer weer om moet vragen als je naar de kerk gaat of aan het Avondmaal gaat, dat Hij je gewoon bijstaat en dat Hij je ook de preken, dat die je mogen raken of dat je die mag begrijpen en, ja, ik begin mezelf wel steeds meer bewust te worden van dat ik Hem echt nodig heb.*”

get anything from it. (...) And well, that often depends on you, because you couldn't open yourself up.³⁶

4.3 Attributed Meanings

During the interviews, several meanings were attributed to the Lord's Supper, both explicitly and implicitly.

4.3.1 Grace and Forgiveness

Aspects relating to forgiveness, such as *grace*, *guilt*, *salvation*, and *starting over*, were mentioned on a frequent basis. In the first place, the Lord's Supper was strongly associated with the *forgiveness of sins by God*. Closely connected was the understanding that *Jesus died for my or our sins*. For example, one participant (CRC-B) explicitly stated that the Lord's Supper is all about forgiveness:

...since of course, when we're talking Lord's Supper, we're in the end dealing with forgiveness. So that's a very important aspect and has to do with: needing forgiveness when you make mistakes, if I can put it that way.³⁷

Grace and Forgiveness as Central Meanings Various participants mentioned *grace* and/or *forgiveness* as central meanings connected to the Lord's Supper. One such example comes from a member in CRC-A:

At the Lord's Supper I can reflect on what it is that God..., what it is that God means to me. What he has done for me, and his Son. And that's why I quickly arrive at the word 'grace'. That you're aware of your sins and that I know I can receive grace. And to me that speaks of a whole lot of love.³⁸

³⁶R20.4 (male, 20–39yr, RCL-F): “*Het is niet zo gemakkelijk om je even open te stellen en de Heilige Geest komt even in je. (...) Soms heb je wel eens, dan loop je de kerk uit, en dan klopt het gewoon. Dan had je zoiets van: het was gewoon een geweldige dienst, met helemaal... dan voel je je gewoon fijn, maar soms ga je ook wel eens naar een dienst van: ja, ik had net zo goed in m'n bed blijven liggen, want ik heb er gewoon niks aan gehad. (...) En ja, dat ligt dan vaak aan jezelf dan, omdat je er niet voor open kon staan.*”

³⁷R4.7 (male, 65+, CRC-B): “*...want natuurlijk, als we het over avondmaal hebben, hebben we het ten diepste over vergeving. Dus dat is een heel belangrijk onderdeel en dat heeft te maken met: vergeving heb je nodig wanneer je fouten gemaakt hebt, om het zo maar uit te drukken.*”

³⁸R3.1 (female, 40–64yr, CRC-A): “*Bij het Heilig Avondmaal mag ik nadenken wat God voor mij..., wat God voor mij betekent. Wat Hij voor mij heeft gedaan, en zijn Zoon. En daarom kom ik al heel gauw bij het woord genade. Dat je je zonden beseft en dat ik mag weten dat ik genade mag ontvangen. En daaruit spreekt voor mij heel veel liefde.*”

Other participants in all remaining congregations shared similar sentiments. Some underscored the singularity of forgiveness through Jesus' sacrifice that is visualized in the sacrament, while others indicated that the celebration itself makes the gift of grace tangible and concrete in one's life. Members of the first group emphasized the commemoration aspect and interpreted the sacrament as a sign of God's forgiveness in Christ:

Through the visual [aspect] of what you see and by eating and drinking..., yes, grace is what you're thinking of then. You realize that you... that you don't have to do it yourself, but that it has already been done for you. (...) ...you realize, like: Why is it that you celebrate the Lord's Supper? How should I put it?—Because Jesus died for your sins.³⁹

On the other hand, representatives of the second group interpreted the forgiveness of sins more or less as an event that takes place *during* the celebration of the Lord's Supper:

R2.8 (female, 20–39yr, CRC-A): Every day I know through prayer that I can confess my sins [and] so receive forgiveness. But when I'm sitting at the Lord's Supper, then... yes, I really experience it like a clean slate. And I leave very happy.
M: OK, right.

R2.8: Yes, for me it's not something emotionally charged at all. But it does [demand] reverence... But afterwards I feel totally 'Blue Wonder'.⁴⁰ Yes, like, like, it makes me so happy. And at such moments I am so moved that I think: [sighs] I can start over with a clean slate for the umpteenth time again.⁴¹

Thus, on the one hand the Lord's Supper was perceived as a sign of God's forgiveness and grace, and on the other hand as a ritual through which you *receive* forgiveness. What is interesting with regard to the theme of *grace and forgiveness* (as discussed by the participants in this study) is its double meaning: on the one hand the sacrament was characterized as the recollection of the gift of God, but on the other hand it could

³⁹R14.6 (male, 20–39yr, RCL-D): “Door het visuele wat je ziet en door te eten en te drinken...—ja genade is wel de gedachte die je er dan bij hebt. Dat je je realiseert dat je het zelf niet hoeft te doen, maar dat het al voor je gedaan is. (...) ...je realiseert je, zeg maar, waarom vier je Avondmaal? Omdat Jezus voor jouw zonden gestorven is.”

⁴⁰Blue Wonder is a cleaning agent (all-purpose cleaner) sold in the Netherlands.

⁴¹R2.8: *Ik weet elke dag wel door het gebed dat ik mijn zonde mag belijden [en] dus vergeving krijg. Maar als ik dan aan het Avondmaal zit dan... ja, voel ik dat echt als een schone lei. En dan kom ik er heel vrolijk vandaan. /M: Oké, ja. /R2.8: Ja, het is voor mij helemaal niet een beladen iets. Wel een eerbiedig iets... Maar ik voel me echt helemaal 'blue wonder' daarna. Ja, zo, zo, ik word daar heel blij van. En dat ontroert me op zo'n moment dan ook, dat ik denk: [zucht] voor de zoveelste keer mag ik weer met een schone lei beginnen.*

also entail *receiving* grace and/or forgiveness when participating in the celebration itself.

To Receive Grace As noted above, some participants experienced a “gift of grace” when the Lord’s Supper was administered, as if they received grace or cleansing just by virtue of their participation. Some participants adhered to such a view, among them a 20–39 year old woman in RCL-E. When addressing her personal motivation for participating in the Lord’s Supper, she mentioned the following:

...receive a bit of grace, as it were. That you can also just be glad that Jesus died for us. That we can now live out of grace. That we really do receive the Holy Spirit. (...) Yes, and also that through that too we may live in freedom, even though we, like, do many wrong things, but that we also know that [you?] can turn to God and (...) know that you will receive grace.⁴²

A similar sentiment was shared by a man in RCL-F (same age group):

...the [Lord’s Supper, JAGB] isn’t for self-promotion, to show how good you are,—because you just know that you’re totally depraved—it’s just that you can come to the table regardless of how insignificant you may be and you just receive forgiveness and grace. That is actually..., right, you don’t do it for yourself, like. So you really do do it for God. And that brings a kind of... well, ‘relief’. What’s the Dutch word again? ‘*Opluchting*’, like.⁴³

Although a few CRC members supported similar interpretations, this view was mostly found in RCL congregations.

⁴²R18.7 (female, 20–39yr, RCL-E): “...een stukje genade ontvangen, zeg maar. Dat je ook gewoon blij mag zijn dat Jezus voor ons is gestorven. Dat we daarom ook uit genade mogen leven. Dat we inderdaad gewoon dus de Heilige Geest ontvangen. (...) Ja, en ook dat we daar ook door in vrijheid mogen leven, ook al begaan we wel fouten zeg maar, maar dat we ook mogen weten dat [je tot?] God terug mag keren en (...) mag weten dat je de genade ontvangt.”

⁴³R20.4 (male, 20–39yr, RCL-F): “...het [avondmaal, JAGB] is niet om jezelf te promoten, hoe goed je wel niet bent,—want je weet gewoon dat je door en door slecht bent—alleen je kan zo klein mogelijk aan tafel komen en je wordt gewoon vergeven en je krijgt genade. Dat is eigenlijk..., ja, je doet het niet voor jezelf, zeg maar. Je doet het dus inderdaad voor God. En dat geeft je toch wel weer een soort van... ja, ‘relief’. Ja, wat is het Nederlandse woord nou? *Opluchting*, zeg maar.”

Sinfulness and Guilt Some participants explicitly mentioned their own *sinfulness* when they spoke about the sacrament. A woman in CRC-A, for example, noted: "...that you realize, yes, this really is what Jesus did and we people screw up all the time. And that you know, like, well, the price was steep."⁴⁴ A participant in RCL-E alluded to the Heidelberg Catechism when he listed human sin and misery as the main reasons for celebrating the Lord's Supper:

...it's like what we sometimes say: there's a killer hidden in each and every one of us. You might say: not me. But, like, I do think that's true for me. By nature we're inclined to hate God and our neighbor. Maybe 'hate' is a loaded term. But it does show: we ourselves want to play the boss a bit.⁴⁵

Someone else (RCL-F) admitted that she felt guilty after joining in the celebration of the Lord's Supper while she had a personal conflict with another person:

I don't know anymore who it was, but... I was sitting comfortably at Lord's Supper. So it makes you think: when we've got something going on [in our life], we're not really used to not [going, JAGB] to Lord's Supper... Like, because people are going to ask: 'Hey, why weren't you at Lord's Supper?'⁴⁶

Another participant (RCL-E, 65+) similarly did not immediately start celebrating the sacrament after professing his faith in his youth, because back then he felt guilty before God because of things he had done. It was only after realizing the abundance of God's grace that he started to join the celebrations. Similar experiences were shared by some members of CRC-C.

What is interesting, however, is that some participants spoke consistently about forgiveness of their sins (*my sins*), while others spoke about sins in a communal sense (*our sins*). Both variants were found across both denominations and all congregations.

⁴⁴R3.2 (woman, 20–39yr, CRC-A): "...dat je beseft, ja, dit is wel wat Jezus gedaan heeft en [dat] wij er als mensen niks van bakken. En dat je weet van, nou ja, goed, het heeft heel veel gekost."

⁴⁵R16.4 (male, 65+, RCL-E): "...zo zeggen wij wel eens: in ieder mens schuilt een moordenaar. Nou, dan zeg je van: dat is bij mij niet zo. Nou, ik denk dat dat bij mij dus wel zo is. Van nature zijn wij geneigd om God en onze naaste te haten. Nu is dat woord 'haten' misschien wel wat beladen. Het geeft toch wel aan van: we willen zelf graag een beetje baas zijn."

⁴⁶R20.7 (female, 65+, RCL-F): "Ik weet niet meer wie het was, maar... ik zat daar toch maar lekker aan het avondmaal. Dus dan denk je: wij zijn niet zo gewend om als we ergens mee zitten, om dan toch maar niet aan het avondmaal [te gaan, JAGB]... Ja, want dan gaan ze vragen: 'Hé, joh, waarom was je niet aan het avondmaal?'"

4.3.2 Lord's Supper as Profession of Faith

Several participants experienced the sacrament as a *personal* testimony of their faith. In their experience, participating in the Lord's Supper was equivalent to professing or witnessing that you are Christian. This was expressed by one of the participants in RCL-F: "You're sitting there at the table, you see there... Just like [R19.5] was saying, you're really showing: I'm a Christian, I'm receiving the sacrifice of Jesus, because of Him I can sit here now... Yes, awesome!"⁴⁷ Another participant in CRC-B characterized the Lord's Supper as a repetition of his original profession of faith:

Look, when we did profession of faith, it was a very conscious choice. At that time you made it, and progress is actually the logical consequence. Yes, that progress is what you experience in the Lord's Supper. It's actually saying 'Yes' every time again. And that's the beauty of it. I'm not really one to spiritualize everything. I'm not really sure that's necessary, I always try to look at things somewhat soberly. But still there is an upward line.⁴⁸

4.3.3 Commemorating Christ

At the same time, reference was made to the sacrament as an act of *commemoration*. Several participants found themselves thinking back to what God has done for them through Jesus Christ. Part of this group recalled "what Christ did" in a general way, while another part thought more specifically about Christ's suffering and/or death.

In the first case, the Lord's Supper becomes a matter of recalling the work of Christ on earth. One participant drew a comparison to the act of remembering a loved one who has passed away:

It's a weird example, and maybe it doesn't quite fit, but still: when someone is buried, someone you love, it's good to visit the cemetery every now and then. It occupies your mind again.

⁴⁷R19.1 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-F): "*Je zit daar aan tafel, je ziet daar... Wat [R19.5] ook zegt, je laat inderdaad zien: ik ben christen, ik neem het offer van Jezus aan, dankzij Hem mag ik hier nu ook zitten... Ja, geweldig!*"

⁴⁸R5.4 (male, 65+, CRC-B): "*Kijk, toen we belijdenis gedaan hebben, dat was een heel bewuste keus. Die keuze heb je toen gemaakt, en eigenlijk is de logische consequentie dat je dus verder gaat. Ja dat verder gaan, dat beleef je in het Avondmaal. Dat is eigenlijk een steeds opnieuw 'Ja' zeggen. En dat vind ik het mooie wat erin zit. Ik ben niet zo om dat nou te vergeestelijken allemaal. Dat weet ik niet of dat allemaal wel zo moet, ik probeer het altijd een beetje nuchter te bekijken. Maar het is wel een doorgaande lijn die in je zit.*"

(...) And when you have Lord's Supper..., you once again emphasize: that's what it's about, it's really important.⁴⁹

In this quote, "remembering Christ" is deemed a very important aspect of the celebration. In line with this statement, albeit still of a slightly different nature, is the commonly expressed view that the Lord's Supper is specifically about remembering the *sacrifice* of Christ:

In the first place I think of the sacrifice Jesus made for us and through which we can receive forgiveness of our sins, which becomes visible, actually, in those signs at the Lord's Supper. And it is, like He Himself says, in remembrance of His suffering and His death. So that you're being reminded of that, like.⁵⁰

This view was also shared in RCL congregations, among them RCL-E:

R16.3 (male, 20–39yr, RCL-E): Yes, that is, I think, the core of the Lord's Supper, that you keep thinking back to what happened, and why it happened, and why it's so important.

M: Right, exactly, yes. And how would you sum that up like, like, what happened? What's your view on that?

R16.3: Well: the sacrifice of Christ, and that for that reason we all—because we are subject [to sin, JAGB]—need it so badly.⁵¹

The remembrance of Christ's *resurrection* was mentioned less frequently than Christ's work in general or His sacrifice specifically. Most participants mentioned Christ's suffering and death alone, while only a few added also His resurrection. An example of someone who did was an interviewee from CRC-B:

⁴⁹R1.8 (male, 65+, CRC-A): "*Om een raar voorbeeld te noemen, misschien past het helemaal niet, maar: als iemand begraven is, die je dierbaar is, dan is het toch wel eens goed om één keer in de zoveel tijd naar de begraafplaats te gaan. Dan ben je weer geconcentreerd daarmee. (...) En het Avondmaal houden..., daarmee accentueer je nog even van: daar gaat het om, dat is heel belangrijk.*"

⁵⁰R7 (male, 20–29yr, CRC-C): "*Ik denk in de eerste plaats aan het offer wat Jezus voor ons gebracht heeft en waardoor wij vergeving van onze zonden kunnen ontvangen, wat zichtbaar wordt, eigenlijk, in die tekenen in het Avondmaal. En het is, zoals Hij Zelf ook zegt, tot gedachtenis aan Zijn lijden en Zijn sterven. Dus dat je daaraan herinnerd wordt, zeg maar.*"

⁵¹R16.3: *Ja, dat is denk ik de kernactiviteit van het avondmaal, dat je blijft terugdenken aan wat er gebeurd is, en waarom dat gebeurd is, en waarom dat zo belangrijk is. /M: Ja, precies, ja. En hoe zou je dat dan kort samen willen vatten, zeg maar, wat er gebeurd is? Hoe zie je dat? /R16.3: Nou: het offer van Christus, en dat we dat allemaal—omdat we onderworpen zijn [aan de zonde, JAGB]—juist daarom zo nodig hebben.*

It is a command given by Jesus Christ. At its institution he says: Do this! (...) For me it is a commemoration five times a year, we do it five times per year: four Sundays and on Good Friday. And every time it is a commemoration of the suffering, death, resurrection, for our sins in the end, salvation.⁵²

Similar accounts were shared by a few RCL participants:

I wrote ‘commemoration’ and ‘reverence’. But also the festive aspect, I always think that too, I always think it’s a festive Sunday. Yes, of course you commemorate the death of Christ, or of Jesus Himself, and that He still arose, that’s that festive aspect, which I also always bring to expression by having something extra special to go with my coffee.⁵³

Lastly, another participant stated that she experiences different meanings when receiving the sacrament:

...there can be huge differences in the way you sometimes attend the Lord’s Supper. One time you’re taken up more with the commemoration of Jesus and you reflect on that. (...) and also especially your own sins. The next time you, like I go to Lord’s Supper especially thinking: Yes, it’s just one big party, the fact that I may live out of grace.⁵⁴

4.3.4 A Feast to Celebrate

In line with the above quote, some participants—most of them RCL members—characterized the Lord’s Supper as a feast. For some, the festive character of the sacrament is directly connected to the work of Christ, as one man in RCL-E explained:

R18.5 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-E): I think it’s a celebration, and that Jesus paid for our sins, and that through it we are free

⁵²R4.4 (male, 65+, CRC-B): “*Het is een opdracht van Jezus Christus. Hij zegt bij de instelling: doe dit! (...) Het is voor mij vijf keer per jaar een herdenking, wij doen het vijf keer per jaar: vier zondagen en Goede Vrijdag. En het is telkens een herinnering aan het lijden, sterven, opstanding, ten behoeve van uiteindelijk onze zonden, de zaligmaking.*”

⁵³R18.3 (female, 65+, RCL-E): “*Ik heb ‘gedenken’ en ‘eerbied’ opgeschreven. Maar ook het feestelijke aspect, dat vind ik ook altijd, ik vind het ook altijd een feestelijke zondag. Ja, je gedenkt natuurlijk de dood van Christus, of van Jezus zelf, en dat Hij toch opgestaan is, dat is het feestelijke weer, wat ik ook altijd uit in iets extra lekkers bij de koffie.*”

⁵⁴R18.1 (female, 20–39yr, RCL-E): “*...het is wel heel verschillend hoe je soms aan het Avondmaal zit. De ene keer ben je meer bezig met het herdenken van Jezus en dat je daar bij stilstaat, (...) en bij je eigen zonden ook vooral. En een andere keer ben je, dan ga ik vooral aan het Avondmaal van: Yeah, het is gewoon een groot feest, dat je uit genade mag leven.*”

from sin and may live in freedom and... yes, I think Lord's Supper should be a celebration.

M: OK. Right. Exactly, yes. So... for you it's especially a matter of celebration, I think.

R18:5: Right.

M: And if I follow you in what you're saying, it also has a lot to do with that second [aspect]. Because you're saying that we can be free from sin and that we can live because of Him. So for you, well, what would you say? That we're free from sin? What, how does that relate to the Lord's Supper?

R18.5: Right, well, we commemorate in it that Jesus' body was broken and his blood poured out for us and for our sins. And so that we can be free from sin. And we don't have to live under the constraint of sin, but that we may be free.

M: Right... so you also think about salvation, as it were, that's reflected [in the Lord's Supper]?

R18.5: Yes.⁵⁵

Another participant in the same group (female, 65+) explicitly referred to Jesus' resurrection as the main reason for calling the Lord's Supper a feast. In RCL-F, one of the participants even characterized the sacrament as a "party" (*feestje*), mainly because of the freedom of sin gained through Jesus' sacrifice:

Yes, it's like I was just saying: for me it's just like a party, together to... You're sitting there at the table, you see there... Like [R19.5] was saying, you're really showing: I'm a Christian, I am receiving the sacrifice of Jesus, because of Him I can also sit here now... Yes, awesome! (...) Just to realize: however tiny, powerless, sinful you might be, but through that awesome sacrificial work of Jesus... I can sit here, as if I were holy.⁵⁶

⁵⁵R18.5: *Ik vind het een feest, en dat Jezus voor onze zonden betaald heeft, en dat wij daardoor vrij mogen zijn van zonde en vrij mogen leven en... ja, ik vind dat het Avondmaal een feest moet zijn. /M: Oké. Ja. Precies, ja. Dus... het feest staat bij jou wel voorop, denk ik. /R18.5: Ja. /M: En dat heeft ook heel sterk te maken met dat tweede dan, als ik het goed begrijp. Want je zegt van dat we vrij van zonden kunnen zijn en dat we dankzij Hem kunnen leven. Dus voor jou, ja, hoe zie je dat? Dat we vrij van zonde zijn? Wat, hoe heeft dat met het Avondmaal te maken? /R18.5: Ja, wij gedenken daarin dat Jezus' lichaam gebroken is en Zijn bloed vergoten is voor ons en onze zonden. En dat wij daardoor vrij mogen zijn van de zonde. En we niet onder de dwang van de zonde hoeven te leven, maar dat we vrij mogen zijn. /M: Ja... dus je denkt ook eigenlijk terug aan verlossing, als het ware, die het [avondmaal] uitstraalt. /R18.5: Ja.*

⁵⁶R19.1 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-F): *"Ja, wat ik net al zei: voor mij is het gewoon echt een feestje, om met elkaar... Je zit daar aan tafel, je ziet daar... Wat [R19.5] ook zegt, je laat inderdaad zien: ik ben christen, ik neem het offer van Jezus aan, dankzij Hem mag ik hier*

Participants in CRC congregations also referred to the Lord's Supper as a "celebration" (*feest* or *viering*):

...in our church you still hear two expressions: the one is 'administration' of the Holy Supper, or should it be the 'celebration' of the Holy Supper? If I had to choose between the two, well, it maybe sounds a little strange, but still I would go for the term 'celebrate'. The minister administers and the congregation celebrates, is what I think. So if you use the term 'administer' too often also for the entire congregation, I think like... well, it doesn't quite do justice to the Lord's Supper.⁵⁷

Sometimes, this interpretation was explicitly connected to the personal experience of joy:

In my experience the Lord's Supper really is a [marked] point: the fact that I also truly [experience] some joy... Like: "O, this is true freedom, this is what Jesus has done and it's something we may really celebrate." So as far as I'm concerned we could do it more than four times a year.⁵⁸

However, not all participants who called the Lord's Supper a feast or celebration actually experienced it that way. In RCL congregations, some participants expressed their desire for a more "festive" celebration: "...it's what we always say, eh: "Today we're celebrating the Holy Supper." And then I think like: right, where are the streamers? And do I see any exuberance?"⁵⁹ Similar desires were sometimes expressed in CRC churches, among them CRC-B:

R4.2 (female, 20–39yr, CRC-B): ...we're always kind of serious when we're sitting there in church. And it's just the same

nu ook zitten... Ja, geweldig! (...) Gewoon beseffen van: hoe klein, machteloos, zondig jij zelf bent, maar door dat geweldige offerwerk van Jezus... mag ik hier toch zitten, als zijnde een heilige." Cf. note 47 above.

⁵⁷R8 (male, 40–64yr, CRC-C): "...bij ons in de gemeente is het nog wel zo, komen er twee woorden langs: de ene is bediening van het Heilig Avondmaal of is het nou de viering van het Heilig Avondmaal? Als je dat tegenover elkaar zet dan kies ik, ja dat klinkt misschien een beetje raar, maar toch kies ik voor het woord 'vieren'. De dominee bedient en de gemeente viert, denk ik dan. Dus als je dat 'bedienen' te veel ook voor de hele gemeente als term hanteert, vind ik dat een soort van... nou, stukje tekort doen aan het Avondmaal."

⁵⁸R3.2 (female, 20–39yr, CRC-A): "Voor mij is Avondmaal echt een punt: dat ik ook echt een stuk vreugde [ervaar]... Van: "Oh, dat is echt vrijheid, dat heeft Jezus gedaan en dat mogen we ook echt vieren." Wat mij betreft mogen we het ook vaker doen dan vier keer per jaar."

⁵⁹R15.2 (male, 20–39yr, RCL-D): "...we zeggen het altijd, hè: "We vieren vandaag het Heilig Avondmaal." En denk ik van: ja, waar zijn de slingers? En waar is de uitgelaten sfeer?"

way with baptism: it should be a celebration, but it's not what I typically see in church.

M: No.

R4.2: And the same thing here, it's called 'celebrating the Lord's Supper', but I'm not sure that's quite the right term for it, but...

R4.6 (female, 40–64yr): Then the organist goes on to play a funeral dirge and someone else walks by in a dark suit...

R4.2: Right! It's so solemn.

R4.6: I too have sometimes wondered: if someone were to come in now, they'd think: "Where am I, what's going on here?" And there's nothing left at all of the joy you [R4.2] were talking about.⁶⁰

4.3.5 A Moment of Reflection

Various participants associated the Lord's Supper with a moment of personal reflection before or during the administration of the sacrament. One member in CRC-B had this *during* the administration:

I wrote: 'forgiveness of sins', but also 'reflecting on sins': it's really a time to reflect on that. And I also wrote: 'What would Jesus do?' It's a question I often ask myself. (...) ...if I just in daily life, like, have to make a decision or think of something, it's a question that often returns and especially at the Lord's Supper you have the time and quiet [necessary] to give it some extra thought, to really think about it.⁶¹

In the participating CRC churches, this moment of reflection could also take place during the "week of preparation" (see §3.2.1-3.2.3) and was mostly focused on sin, repentance, and the question whether one was going to participate in the sacrament or not. In RCL churches, where it is common for professing members to participate in the celebration, the aspect of preparation was understood more in the sense of being attentive

⁶⁰R4.2: *...we zitten altijd wel wat sober in de kerk. En dat is net als met dopen: dat moet een feest zijn, maar ik zie dat niet altijd in de kerk. /M: Nee. /R4.2: En zoals dit ook, dan heet het 'Avondmaal vieren', dan weet ik niet of dat dan wel echt de juiste benaming daarvoor is, maar... /R4.6: Dan speelt de organist begrafenismuziek en dan loopt net iemand in een donker pak... /R4.2: Já! Het is ook sober. /R4.6: Ik heb me ook weleens afgevraagd, als er nú iemand binnen komt, die denkt echt: "Waar ben ik nou, wat is hier aan de hand?" En dan van die hele blijdschap van jou [R4.2] vind je niets meer terug.*

⁶¹R5.5 (male, 20–39yr, CRC-B): *"Ik had opgeschreven: 'vergeving van zonden', maar ook 'overdenking van zonden': dat is echt een moment om, om dat van jezelf ook te overdenken. En ik had verder opgeschreven: 'Wat zou Jezus doen?' Dat is een vraag die ik mezelf wel vaak stel. (...) ...als ik gewoon in het dagelijks leven, zeg maar, wat moet beslissen of bedenken, dan is dat een vraag die vaak terugkomt en juist met avondmaal heb je de tijd en de rust om dat nog extra aandacht aan te geven, echt goed over na te denken."*

to yourself and God. This was formulated as follows by one member from RCL-E:

R18.4 (female, 20–39yr, RCL-E): ...you're forced to stop for a moment again. It's a different service [compared to usual, JAGB], but you're also forced to stop, like: Where am I at in life and where am I actually..., what am I celebrating at the Lord's Supper?

M: OK, right. Do you have anything to add? (...)

R18.4: Well, when it's Lord's Supper again, then, then... You get dragged along by everything in daily life, and if I know that the next day is Sunday and that it's Lord's Supper, then I do pause to think about it. OK, so I'm going to Lord's Supper, what was it that I've received from God this past while? What are my blessings? What do I have the privilege of doing? And is it a feast to celebrate tomorrow or are there things going on in my life that are leaving their mark?

M: OK, right.

R18.4: Also forced to stop in that sense.

M: Right, right, exactly. So for you it's also like a moment of awareness?

R18.4: Yes.⁶²

4.3.6 Eschatological Perspective

Besides a backward look and a moment of reflection, the Lord's Supper was also interpreted as a sign pointing ahead to God's eternal future.⁶³ This was expressed by one member in RCL-D, for example:

And what I also like is that the [Lord's Supper, JAGB] in my opinion also points to the future, to the final day. That Jesus said: I myself will show you how to celebrate the Lord's Supper before I celebrate it with you again. Like, in his..., if I

⁶²R18.4: ...je wordt ook even stilgezet, weer. Het is een andere dienst [dan normaal, JAGB], maar je wordt ook even stilgezet van: Waar sta ik nu in mijn leven en waar ben ik nu eigenlijk..., wat ben ik aan het vieren bij het Avondmaal? /M: Oké, ja. En kun je daar iets meer over zeggen? (...) /R18.4: Nou, als het weer Avondmaal is, dan, dan... Je wordt zo meegesleurd in de dagelijkse dingen, en als ik dan weet dat het volgende dag zondag is en dat er dan Avondmaal is, dan denk ik er wel even over na. Oké, ik ga aan het Avondmaal, wat heb ik de laatste tijd ook van God gekregen? Wat zijn mijn zegeningen? Waar mag ik mee bezig zijn? En is het voor mij morgen een feest om te vieren of zijn er dingen in mijn leven die daar invloed op hebben? /M: Oké, ja. /R18.4: Op die manier stilgezet worden ook. /M: Ja, ja, precies. Dus het is ook een moment van bewustwording zeg maar voor jou. /R18.4: Ja.

⁶³Eschatological meanings were, however, mentioned less frequently than the commemoration of Christ (see §4.3.3).

were to paraphrase it. I actually find that a really beautiful... thought always.⁶⁴

Some other participants told us that they were reminded of their loved ones who had already passed away:

Often people point to the wedding feast of the Lamb. I also often feel a connection with those who are already in heaven. (...) I can't say it's sorrow. It's more like, well, a desire to... be together. But it should be about Jesus. Then I do really also think about all those who have come before us. Not only in my family, but also from the congregation.⁶⁵

Others even drew a continuous line between the remembrance of Christ and the expectation of His return, as one elderly woman in RCL-F did:

M: Why do you celebrate the Lord's Supper?

R20.7 (female, 65+, RCL-F): To commemorate, no?

M: OK.

R20.7: [To commemorate] Christ. The Lord's Supper as he celebrated it. Passover. Yeah.

M: I'm going to be a bit of a pain and ask what exactly you mean with 'commemorate'? How do you...?

R20.7: Well, that Christ there celebrated the final supper with his disciples, and that we too will once again celebrate the Lord's Supper with Him. That it [the Lord's Supper, JAGB] is a small reflection of that event.⁶⁶

4.3.7 Sacrament

Less frequent mentioned than the above aspects in this section was the term "sacrament" for qualifying the Lord's Supper. Usually, the term it-

⁶⁴R15.1 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-D): *"En wat ik ook mooi vind is dat, dat het [avondmaal, JAGB] volgens mij ook wel verwijst naar de toekomst, naar de jongste dag. Dat Jezus gezegd heeft: Ik zal zelf hier het avondmaal voorvieren, voordat ik het weer samen met jullie vier. Hè, in Zijn..., als ik het even vrij mag vertalen. Dat vind ik eigenlijk ook wel een hele mooie... gedachte altijd."*

⁶⁵R2.5 (female, 65+, CRC-A): *"Er wordt ook wel vaak verwezen naar de bruiloft van het Lam. Ik voel me dan ook vaak wel verbonden met degenen die al boven zijn. (...) Ik kan niet zeggen dat het verdriet is. Het is meer, ja, het verlangen om... bij elkaar te zijn. Maar het moet om Jezus gaan. Dan denk ik dan ook wel echt aan allen die ons zijn voorgegaan. Niet alleen maar vanuit mijn familie, maar ook vanuit de gemeente."*

⁶⁶M: *Waarom vier je het Heilig Avondmaal? /R20.7: Toch ter nagedachtenis? /M: Oké. /R20.7: Van Christus. Van het avondmaal zoals Hij dat vierde. Pesach. Ja. /M: En dan moet ik een beetje vervelend zijn, maar wat bedoel je dan precies met 'ter nagedachtenis'? Hoe zie je...? /R20.7: Nou dat Christus daar met zijn discipelen het laatste avondmaal heeft gevierd, en dat wij straks met Hem dat avondmaal ook weer zullen vieren. Dat het [avondmaal, JAGB] een hele kleine afspiegeling is van dit gebeuren.*

self was not defined by the interviewees during the interviews. When it was defined, they described a sacrament as “something holy”, “something visible,” or “something instituted by Christ Himself.” One example comes from a participant in RCL-E, who described a sacrament as something solemn:

R16.1 (female, 40–64yr, RCL-E): But on the other hand, if you [R16.2] say like: ‘No one is happy’, well, that’s not at all my experience. I really am happy! But the question is: how do you express that happiness?

R16.2 (female, 20–39yr): Right, well, that’s what I mean, yes!
R16.1: And then the form, I think, is the way we celebrate it here: and it may be that it suits the one better than the other. But I won’t express my joy with a smiling face or... No, because it also...—how should I put it? It’s a sacrament, it is something... It does have something solemn about it, that’s also a bit how... But it’s not like I can’t say it then: I’m not, like, happy on the inside.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, participants did at times use descriptions that might be called sacramental, like visible sign and/or seal, a confirmation of what is promised, or a visualization of salvation. One example was when bread and wine were interpreted as “signs”: “Well, bread and wine always makes it very practical for me, like, because you then really, well, actually hold a sign, like, and actually do something with it. For me that’s always a true moment of reflection.”⁶⁸ Or when the Lord’s Supper was described as “a meal where Christ is our host, and our salvation is made visible, as well as our mutual bond as congregation.”⁶⁹

Lastly, the Lord’s Supper was also compared with baptism, the other sacrament in the Protestant tradition. Both were called sacraments in the interviews, but they were not always considered equal. According to one participant, baptism is primarily an individual sacrament, whereas

⁶⁷R16.1: *Maar aan de andere kant, als jij [R16.2] zegt van: ‘Niemand is blij’, nou, dat ervaar ik dus absoluut niet. Ik ben echt wel blij! Alleen: hoe uit je je blijdschap? /R16.2: Ja, nou, dat bedoel ik, ja! /R16.1: En dan is de vorm gewoon, denk ik, zoals wij het zo hier vieren: de één kan daar misschien meer iets meer dan een ander. Maar ik zal mijn blijdschap niet uiten in een lachend gezicht of... Nee, omdat het ook wel iets...—hoe zal ik het zeggen? Het is een sacrament, het is iets... Toch wel iets plechtigs, zo komt het toch ook wel een beetje... Maar niet dat ik dan niet kan zeggen: ik ben van binnen niet blij of zo.*

⁶⁸R1.1 (female, 20–39yr, CRC-A): *“Nou, brood en wijn maakt het voor mij altijd wel weer even heel praktisch, zeg maar, omdat je dat dan gewoon echt, ja, een teken eigenlijk vasthebt zeg maar en er echt iets mee doet. Dat is altijd echt wel even een moment van nadenken voor mij.”*

⁶⁹R16.6 (female, 65+, RCL-E): *“een maaltijd waar Christus gastheer is, en onze verlossing zichtbaar wordt gemaakt, en onze onderlinge band als gemeente.”*

the Lord's Supper is communal.⁷⁰ According to another person, baptism is more common than the Holy Supper—because in the past the former was at times administered on a nearly weekly basis and without self-examination etc., while the latter happened only four times a year, following a week of preparation:

I was just saying that about the experience I've had from the time I was young and that was much, much more powerful for the Lord's Supper than it was for, well... almost every week a baby was baptized. And so... we came to know that pretty well.⁷¹

4.3.8 Other Attributed Meanings

Some participants mentioned the relationship between the Lord's Supper and other traditions like the Passover meal (CRC-B, RCL-F). One other participant described the Lord's Supper as "celebrating Easter four times a year" (CRC-A). Furthermore, a number of different expressions were used to describe the Lord's Supper: "experience the Lord," "giving your batteries an extra boost," "anchoring point," "looking at Jesus" (cf. Numbers 21:4–9), "tasting and seeing His glory" (cf. Psalm 34:9), and also "a buffet" (*lopend buffet*).

4.4 Opinions and Feelings

During the interviews, all kind of opinions and feelings were articulated. In this section, six different subjects will be presented based on what was shared by the various interviewees across all congregations studied.

4.4.1 Tensions When Celebrating

All kinds of tensions were mentioned during the interviews: the experience of stress before or during the celebration, the fear of doing something wrong (or describing someone else's mistakes), and the fear of experiencing the celebrations in an all too rational manner.

Additionally, various causes of stress were mentioned, including a fear of being watched (while walking up to the front), fear of choking or spilling when consuming bread and wine, hygiene concerns when cups were shared,⁷²

⁷⁰See note 2 above.

⁷¹R15.4 (male, 65+, RCL-D): "*Ik zei dat net al over de beleving die ik van jongs af aan heb meegemaakt en die ten aanzien van het Heilig Avondmaal veel en veel zwaarder [was] dan ten aanzien van, nou... elke week werd er wel een kind gedoopt. En dat... kennen we dan wel.*"

⁷²See Ritsema, "Is het nog wel de tijd om allen uit de avondmaalsbeker te drinken?"

stress about small children (who had to stay calm and quiet in their seats during the celebration), stress about a loved one who has difficulties walking but still wants to walk on his own to receive the sacrament, stress about celebrating for the first time, but sometimes also doubts about whether or not to participate. With the exception of the final cause, the emotions were often linked to the style of celebration, although personal preferences could also change in the course of time:

R20.7 (female, 65+, RCL-F): And that experience, right: when you're sitting there at the table, you always kind of feel like people are watching you or something?

R20.8 (female, 20–39yr): [nods in agreement]

R20.7: A little less when it's ambulatory.

M: OK.

R20.7: And in the beginning I was first really like: What is this? A buffet? Terrible! Awful! Grab a piece of bread and a sip of wine, and then we're off again?

R20.5 (female, 40–64yr): [chuckles]

R20.7: So I was like: well, I don't like it one bit. But now I don't like going to the table. So... well, I flipflop on that pretty much.⁷³

The greater majority of remarks relating to stress during the celebrations stemmed from interviews with RCL members. It is not clear from the interviews whether CRC members experienced less stress during the Lord's Supper, or whether they were less eager or bold to share such feeling with others during an interview.

Stress connected to doubts about participation or abstinence was almost exclusively connected to CRC interviews. For example, one participant (CRC-A) recounted her family history, where abstinence from the Lord's Supper was customary:

My background is in the *Gereformeerde Gemeente*.⁷⁴ So I didn't grow up celebrating Lord's Supper. (...) And that ten-

⁷³R20.7: *En die beleving inderdaad: als je aan tafel zit, dan voel je je altijd een beetje te kijk of zo?* /R20.8 (female, 20–39yr): [knikt instemmend] /R20.7: *Dat is lopend iets minder.* /M: *Oké.* /R20.7: *En ik had in het begin echt dat ik dacht van: Wat is dit? Lopend buffet? Vreselijk! Wat een toestand, zeg! Even een broodje halen en effe nog een slokkie wijn en dan gaan we weer?* /R20.5 (female, 40–64yr): [grinnikt] /R20.7: *Dus ik dacht: nou, dat vind ik helemaal niks. Maar nu vind ik dat aan tafel weer helemaal niks. Dus... het is toch wel erg wispelturig, hoor.*

⁷⁴The *Gereformeerde Gemeenten* ("Reformed Congregations") are a *bevindelijk*-Reformed denomination with about 107,000 members established in 1907. More information on its history and identity can be found in Zwemer, *In conflict met de cultuur*, pp. 56–118; Zwemer, *De bevindelijk gereformeerden*, pp. 44–52; Van Middelkoop, *Kerken onderweg*, pp. 342–367 and is available online (<https://www.gergeminfo.nl/>).

sion will always stay with me. I've never seen my parents celebrate Lord's Supper, for example, actually no one in my family. I wasn't used to it at all, so it's quite a step, know what I mean?⁷⁵

4.4.2 Desire to Celebrate Consciously

Another tension relating to the sacramental celebration was the desire to celebrate in a conscious manner. Multiple participants indicated experiencing a growth in consciousness over the years. One example is this woman in CRC-B, who noted:

Well, it's like, you know, I was eighteen when I did profession of faith, so I was pretty young when I started going to Lord's Supper. But at first it was something that really occupied my mind: I'd better not drop the ball, like that. Those kinds of things, just very practical, and then yes. (...) But now it's like: I do try very consciously to taste and feel at the moment I'm partaking and, like, this really is Jesus' body I'm tasting now, that way, like, he's there, he hung there for me, and, like, had a long road of suffering and did it all for me and everyone in church, that's what I do try to experience. Yes, more consciously, yes.⁷⁶

Other participants in RCL-E referred to the rational character of the religious education they had received in church during their youth (catechization), more than 40 years ago: they were only asked to memorize things, not to internalize them or to impress them on their heart. In their view, things have changed for the better since. Others in RCL-F stated that all ritual distractions surrounding the sacrament should be avoided as much as possible, referring to past debates over the pros and cons of different styles of celebration, and/or the use of liturgical forms (see §4.5 below).

⁷⁵R1.3 (female, 40–64yr, CRC-A): “Ik kom uit een Gereformeerde Gemeente achtergrond. Dus ik ben van huis eigenlijk niet gewend om Avondmaal te vieren. (...) Dat blijft altijd toch wel zeker een spanning. Ik heb mijn ouders nooit geen Avondmaal zien vieren bijvoorbeeld, niemand eigenlijk uit mijn familie. Ik was dat helemaal niet gewend, dus dat is best een hele stap dan, hè?”

⁷⁶R4.3 (female, 20–39yr, CRC-B): “Nou het is ook, ja weet je, ik was achttien toen ik belijdenis deed dus ik was vrij jong aan het avondmaal. Maar in het begin was ik daar heel erg mee bezig: Oh ja, als ik maar niet laat vallen enzo. Dat soort dingetjes, gewoon heel praktisch en ja, dan. (...) Maar het is nu inderdaad: ik probeer ook heel bewust ook te proeven en te voelen op dat moment, dat ik het tot me neem en van ja, dit is echt wel het lichaam van Jezus wat ik proef, op die manier, van Hij is daar, heeft daar voor mij gehangen en ja, heeft daar een hele tijdsweg gehad en dat allemaal voor mij en voor iedereen in de kerk, dat probeer ik wel te beleven. Ja, wel bewuster inderdaad ja.” For more on this topic, see §4.6.1 below.

Positive suggestions for more conscious celebrations were also mentioned, ranging from pleas for a more sober celebration—focusing on the core meaning of the Lord’ Supper—to greater emphasis on the physicality of the personal experience:⁷⁷

R1.3 (female, 40–64yr, CRC-A): This way, it comes concretely... seeing it concretely before your eyes. I really liked the example you just gave about baptism [looks at R1.7]. There’s so much to read about it, you know well enough what baptism means, but when you see it, you see it happen again and you hear it and... Right? You I have...

R1.7 (male, 65+): You I have called by name.

R1.3: Yeah, that too. It always overwhelms me when a minister also... But then there’s more that you’re experiencing then. It’s concrete. You see it. And I think that was how it was meant to be, that you see...

M: Uh-huh.

R1.2 (female, 65+): And then you taste it.

R1.3: And then you taste it and then it’s really there. Because it says ‘as surely’ as. And, yes... I do think that is... very important, that it’s not theory, but actual practice.⁷⁸

Lastly, another more indirect example of the desire to celebrate with a more conscious mindset stems from personal examples of participants who had forgotten, only to discover on entering the church that Lord’s Supper was being celebrated: “All that buzz of daily life sometimes also gets to me, like when you come to church in the morning and you’re like: ‘Oh yeah! It’s Lord’s Supper today! I haven’t been thinking about it at all.’”⁷⁹ For some this experience led them to conclude that their personal preparation had not been sufficient. They participated regardless, but indicated feeling guilty afterwards (CRC-A and B, RCL-D and F). Others

⁷⁷Appreciation for corporeal aspects related to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper was found among congregants in CRC-A and within all participating RCL congregations. See also §5.2.3 below for a minister’s perspective.

⁷⁸R1.3: *Zo, komt het concreet... het concreet voor je zien. Ik vond het net wel een heel mooi voorbeeld wat jij zei van dat dopen [kijkt naar R1.7]. Je kunt er zoveel over lezen, je weet best wel wat de doop inhoudt, maar als je dat dan voor je ziet, je ziet het weer gebeuren en je hoort het en... Hè? Ik heb je... /R1.7 (male, 65+): Bij je naam geroepen. /R1.3: Ja, ook dat. Dat vind ik ook zo indrukwekkend dat een dominee dat erbij... Maar dan komt er toch meer op je af. Het is dan concreet. Je ziet het. En ik denk dat dat ook dan de bedoeling was, dat je ziet... /M: [humt] /R1.2 (female, 65+): En dan proef je het. /R1.3: En dan proef je het en dan is het er echt. Want ‘zo zeker’ wordt er dan gezegd. En, ja... dat vind ik toch wel... heel belangrijk, dat het geen theorie is, maar dan eigenlijk praktisch.*

⁷⁹R4.6 (female, 40–64yr, CRC-B): “Ik vind het ook weleens vervelend, al die ruis, dat je inderdaad ’s morgens in de kerk komt, denkt: ‘Oh, ja! We hebben Avondmaal! Daar ben ik helemaal niet mee bezig geweest.’”

were less reluctant and did not find it problematic to participate without preparing themselves (CRC-B, RCL-F).⁸⁰

Custom and Tradition Participants described the Lord's Supper as a tradition, but sometimes also as something that should not become a habit (see the previous subsection). In both CRC and RCL denominations, people expressed concerns about the sacrament being reduced to something in which you can participate without any personal reflection. One member in RCL-E, for instance, noted:

R17.3 (male, 65+, RCL-E): ...because we have it six times, it becomes a bit of a routine. (...) In the form for baptism it says: you don't baptize your child out of routine or superstition. But when you start doing something a lot, it becomes routine. (...) Or it can become routine. (...) That's what we need to watch out for in the congregation, that it doesn't become routine.

M: And how could you do that?

R17.3: Every person has to do that for themselves. Everyone has to be manage that. Watch out for themselves. But that also means going to church. Being there two times [every Sunday, JAGB].⁸¹

Another group of participants—again across both denominations—was more positive about habituation, and did not reject it. Someone in RCL-D thus said:

And at the same time I think 'It's part of it' is actually a beautiful element about the way we celebrate the Lord's Supper in our churches, because there's little to withhold you from joining the celebration. Because 'it's part of it', it's what you do. You, you are a child of God, so you're allowed to come [to the table, JAGB] and you're allowed to celebrate the Lord's Supper together with the rest of the congregation. Without fear and stuff, because it's a place... It's the place where grace

⁸⁰For more on this topic, see §4.4.5 below.

⁸¹R17.3: ...*door[dat] we zes keer hebben, wordt het wat sleur. (...) In het doopformulier staat het: je laat je kind niet dopen uit sleur of bijgewoonte. Maar als je iets heel vaak gaat doen, wordt het sleur. (...) Of dan kan het sleur worden. (...) Daar moeten wij voor waken dat het geen sleur wordt, in de gemeente. /M: En hoe zou je daarvoor kunnen waken? /R17.3: Dat moet ieder voor zichzelf doen. Ieder moet voor zichzelf daarmee bezig wezen. Zelf zorgen. Maar dat is ook zelf naar de kerk gaan. Twee keer [per zondag, JAGB] d'r wezen.*

is... is demonstrated. And actually it's something I kind of like about... the fact that we sometimes feel it's become routine.⁸²

4.4.3 Experience of Holiness

Another important theme was the “holiness” of the Lord’s Supper and/or those who participate in it. This is partly related to the preparation of the communicants, and partly to the experienced sanctity of the meal itself. An example is found in the following exchange in CRC-A:

M: [First name 3.1], you were just like: There have been times when I didn’t go. But was that because of that one passage?⁸³ Or not?

R3.1 (female, 40–64yr, CRC-A): Yes, I consciously thought to myself: can I attend like this? But I also see... God is holy and for me: it’s also possible to be, like, too easy about participating. So... yes, I do see God as a Father figure, but still also as a powerful God. On the one hand very close, but on the other hand also someone you stand in awe of. And that I can’t *just* go [to the table]. That you really should be aware that...

R3.5 (male, 65+): It’s not automatic.

R3.1 (continues): ...his grace, what it’s meant to me. And actually also for everyone. But when I look specifically at myself, I think like: it was a very big sacrifice. And I don’t think I can you—you know, that’s how it feels—that I just kind of go there just like that. That I do really should think about how big a deal it is. That there’s an overflowing amount of love. Like that, it [has to be] in that context.⁸⁴

⁸²P15.2 (male, 20–39yr, RCL-D): “*En tegelijkertijd vind ik dat ‘het hoort erbij’ ook wel het mooie aan hoe wij Avondmaal vieren in onze kerken, want er is weinig schroom om het Avondmaal mee te gaan vieren. Want het hoort erbij, dat doe je. Je, je bent een kind van God, dus je mag aangaan en je mag samen met de rest van de gemeente het Avondmaal vieren. Zonder angst en dat soort dingen, want het is een plek... Het is bij uitstek een plek waar genade wordt... wordt getoond. Dat vind ik dan wel weer mooi aan... het feit dat wij het een beetje een sleur vinden.*”

⁸³In this quote, the moderator is referring to the sections on self-examination and admonition in the classical liturgical form in use in CRC-A and other congregations. In this part of the form, the emphasis is on the participants’ unworthiness: “We also are aware of our many sins and shortcomings. We do not have perfect faith and we do not serve God with such zeal as he requires. Daily we have to contend with the weakness of our faith and with the evil desires of our flesh”—which is explained as making it impossible for them to partake of the sacrament in a worthy manner. But, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, believers “may be fully assured that no sin or weakness which still remains in us against our will can prevent us from being received by God in grace and from being made worthy partakers of this heavenly food and drink.” Both quotes are taken from CanRC, *Form*, cf. CRC, “Formulier (1971)”; RCL, “Avondmaalsformulier 1 (2016 Revision)”.

⁸⁴M: [Voornaam R3.1], *jij zei net van: ik ben wel een keer niet aangegaan. Maar dat*

In the conversation above, group members largely agreed with each other when they spoke of the content of the first part of the classical liturgical form, stating that it is too negative. At the same time, the aspect of holiness also created friction for other reasons, namely that the sacrament is called sacred, even though the communicants do not always experience it that way. As one of the participants (RCL-F) stated in response to the term “Holy Supper”:

Holy Supper: the first thing that occurs to me is: ‘Holy, really?’ The second thing is: ‘O right, Holy Supper!’ (...) Yes, I’m very thankful for what God has done for me, let me clear about that. But it’s not what I experience at the Holy Supper. So what bothers me is the whole fuss, if there are five tables, then the form... or rather those rituals are repeated five times, there’s even been talk here of having second row seating, so: it doesn’t really appeal to me. That’s what... And then I do think: here it’s called ‘Holy Supper’, [and] then I think like: yes, but it really is holy. So I always feel a little guilty that I don’t really experience it that way. And ‘O right’ is also because I’m obviously not really thinking about it all that much during the week leading up to it, so I’m suddenly like: ‘O right, Lord’s Supper!’⁸⁵

The woman in question was referring here to “the fuss surrounding” the Lord’s Supper, that is, the many “tables” in seated celebrations, the number of times the words of institution are repeated, and at times also her experience of accidentally forgetting the element of self-examination

was wel vanwege die ene tekst? Of niet? /R3.1: Ja, bewust voor mijzelf dat ik dacht van: kan ik zo aangaan? Maar ik zie het ook... God is heilig en voor mijn gevoel: je zou ook te gemakkelijk aan kunnen gaan, bij wijze van spreken. Dus... ja, ik zie God ook wel als een Vaderfiguur, maar ook wel een machtige God. Aan de ene kant heel dichtbij, maar aan de andere kant ook iemand voor wie je ontzag hebt. En dat ik niet zomaar kan [aan]gaan. Dat je wel degelijk moet beseffen wat... /R3.5: Het is geen automatisme. /R3.1 (continues): ...zijn genade, wat dat voor mij heeft betekend. En ook voor iedereen eigenlijk wel. Maar als ik specifiek het op mijzelf betrek, denk ik van: het is een heel groot offer. En ik vind niet dat ik daar zo maar even—hè, zo voelt dat dan—dat ik dan zo maar even hup daarheen kan gaan. Dat ik toch echt wel mag beseffen wat dat voor groots is. Dat het overweldigend veel liefde is. Zo, in die context [moet] dat.

⁸⁵R20.3 (female, 40–64yr, RCL-F): “*Heilig Avondmaal: het eerste wat mij te binnen schiet is: ‘Heilig: o ja?’ Het tweede woord is: ‘O ja, Heilig Avondmaal!’ (...) Ja, ik ben heel dankbaar voor wat God voor mij gedaan heeft, laat ik dát vooropstellen. Maar ik ervaar dat niet bij het Heilig Avondmaal. Dus ik heb ook last van dat hele gedoe er omheen, als je vijf tafels hebt, dan wordt het formulier... of worden al die rituelen vijf keer herhaald, we hebben het hier zelfs gehad dat je tweederangs kon zitten, dus: ik heb daar niet zoveel mee. Dus dat.. En dan denk ik inderdaad: dan wordt hier genoemd: ‘Heilig Avondmaal’, dan denk ik van: ja, maar het is inderdaad wel heilig. Dus ik voel me dan altijd wel een beetje schuldig, dat ik het zo niet helemaal ervaar. En het ‘O ja’ is dat ik er kennelijk ook die week ervoor niet zo mee bezig ben, dat ik opeens denk van: ‘O ja, avondmaal!’”*

(which is deemed necessary in her tradition), even though the celebration is called “holy.”

Another participant (RCL-D) referred to the institution of the Lord’s Supper in the Bible to illustrate his point:

For me the question is (...): what does it say in the Bible, how was it celebrated then? We’ve managed to turn it into something so sacred. That means you also turn it into something very solemn, because: was it also at its institution so solemn and sacred?⁸⁶

In other congregations, most of them CRC, it was more common to consider both the congregation and the celebration itself as “holy,” although some participants (CRC-B, but also RCL-F) wondered why Jesus allowed Judas to participate in the Last Supper (cf. Matthew 26:25; John 13:26).⁸⁷

4.4.4 Participating in and Admission to the Celebration

During the interviews, participants discussed all kind of aspects related to admission to and motives for participation in the sacramental celebrations.

Reasons for Participation Most often, participants told us that they were participating in the Lord’s Supper because they were following the command of Christ or God, or because Christ/God invited them. When participation was interpreted as a command, some participants added that this type of command was not compulsory. As such, the two motives of command and invitation showed themselves to be closely related, as also reflected in the following interview statement:

Yes, for me it is also... Jesus himself at the final supper was like: ‘Commemorate it like this’, by breaking bread and... drinking wine, by drinking blood, and I think that it’s a very beautiful way for us every month, or once every eight weeks, or

⁸⁶R14.6 (male, 20–39yr, RCL-D): “*De vraag is voor mij (...): wat staat er in de Bijbel, hoe werd het toen gevierd? Wij hebben er iets heel heiligs van gemaakt. Daardoor maak je het ook wel heel zwaar, want: was het toen het werd ingevoerd ook iets heel zwaars en heiligs?*”

⁸⁷Interestingly, according to the CRC theologian J.J. van der Schuit (in *Ten dis geleid*, pp. 26–28, 33), Judas did not participate in the Last Supper. His view was not mentioned in any of the interviews.

however often, to pause to consider it very consciously, to, as Jesus himself put it, commemorate it in that way.⁸⁸

Other participants—mostly CRC members—stated that they were eligible to celebrate the sacrament because of God’s grace:

M: Why is it that you participate in the Lord’s Supper?
(...)

R16.5 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-E): First that... “Also for me...”
You know what I’m saying? That.

M: OK...

R16.5: That. Yes, for everyone, so also for me. That you don’t have to be a super Christian, that especially even with all those sins, all the wrong you do every day again, that I too can go to Lord’s Supper.⁸⁹

Some participants reported feeling an urgency to participate, while others stated that they could do without the sacrament. For some the sacrament felt like a duty, for others more like a personal choice:

R15.4 (male, 65+, RCL-D): But the question [R15.2] raised I actually find a very interesting one, like: ‘if [the Lord’s Supper, JAGB] hadn’t been there, what would we be missing?’ What would I be missing?

M: Uh-huh. [short silence] Do you have an answer?

R15.4: [laughs] No. Unfortunately not, no.⁹⁰

Who is Eligible to Participate? In all participating churches, it is the local church council that decides who is eligible to receive the sacrament. Within the CRC and RCL denominations, only professing members are allowed to come to the table of the Lord. This implies that one first

⁸⁸R19.2 (female, 20–39yr, RCL-F): “Ja, voor mij is het ook wel... Jezus zei zelf bij het laatste avondmaal van: ‘Gedenk dit zo’, door brood te breken en... door wijn te drinken, door bloed te drinken, en ik denk dat dat een heel mooie manier is voor ons om daar maandelijks, of één keer in de acht weken, of ik weet niet precies wanneer, om daar echt bewust bij stil te staan, om dat op die manier zoals Jezus het zelf zei, te herdenken.”

⁸⁹M: Wat maakt dat je meedoet aan het Heilig Avondmaal? (...) R16.5: Het eerste dat... “Ook voor mij...” Weet je? Dat. /M: Oké... /R16.5: Dat. Ja, voor iedereen, maar dus ook voor mij. Dat je niet super christen hoeft te zijn, dat je juist met al je zonden gewoon, met al je verkeerde dingen die je dagelijks doet, dat ik ook naar het avondmaal mag.

⁹⁰R15.4: Maar die vraag van [R15.2] vind ik heel interessant eigenlijk, van: ‘als het [avondmaal er, JAGB] nou niet was geweest, wat zouden we gemist hebben?’ Wat zou ik gemist hebben? /M: [humt, korte stilte] Heb je daar een antwoord op? /R15.4: [lacht] Nee. Jammer genoeg niet, nee.

needs to profess the Christian faith in a church service, thereby seeking permission to participate in the Lord's Supper.⁹¹

Until several years ago, it was customary in RCL churches for guests to have to prove their eligibility for partaking in the Lord's Supper by presenting a written declaration or "attestation" (Dutch: *attest*), signed by a representative of their local church. In the past few years, local RCL churches have started abolishing this system, usually replacing it with a short conversation that is held when a visiting guest enters the church or else in the consistory. During this conversation, an elder or minister can explain the purpose of the sacrament and the accompanying guidelines. A parallel development, which may have influenced this change in the practice for admitting guests to the table, was the 2005 decision allowing members of other Reformed churches to receive Holy Communion in RCL churches.⁹²

Within CRC churches, the attestation system for proving eligibility has never been in use. Visitors from other churches could ask the local church council for permission to join the celebration before the start of the worship service. In 2004 a decision was made formally allowing also members of other Reformed denominations to join the Lord's Supper celebrations in CRC churches.⁹³

Denominational traditions sometimes formed a topic of discussion among interviewees. Two elderly participants in RCL-E were of the opinion that the system of attestations for admission to the table in congregations other than one's own should be reintroduced, since in their view it is the church council's responsibility to guard the table of the Lord against possible abuses. Other participants were generally happy with the recent abolishment of the strict system, and stated that participation is a matter of personal choice.

Some of the RCL participants proposed a more welcoming attitude towards guests in their congregation. Some mentioned the issue of paedocommunion (previously discussed in the subsection on "Participants" in §4.2.1). However, none of the participants proposed allowing non-baptized Christians and/or non-Christians to receive the sacrament.

Exclusion In the interviews, some examples were mentioned where people were excluded from participation in the Lord's Supper. Remarkably, this aspect of exclusion was mentioned only in RCL churches. Not

⁹¹See CRC, *Kerkorde*, art. 61; RCL, *Kerkorde*, p. C41.1. Both denominations have developed their own liturgical form for public profession of faith (CRC, "Formulier voor de openbare geloofsbelijdenis"; RCL, "Formulier voor de openbare geloofsbelijdenis (2016 Revision)").

⁹²This decision was made by the RCL's General Synod in 2005. See RCL, *Generale regeling voor de kerkdiensten*, art. 6 and §6.3.2 below.

⁹³See CRC, *Kerkorde*, art. 63.5.

all examples that were shared necessarily took place in the congregation in which the interview was held. Some examples concerned the experiences of people who had been barred from participation, for instance after divorce:

Well, there have been times that I was kind of angry... at Lord's Supper. Not about Lord's Supper, but about the people who... My brother was getting a divorce. Well, that wasn't what he wanted. And I was thinking: why isn't he going to Lord's Supper anymore? But he wasn't allowed to. And same thing the next time. Because [of] his wife, who still is single even now. (...) That hurt me, because he used to say: isn't it for sinful people? And I... what am I supposed to change? Well, he didn't need to change anything, no, if only she were to find someone else, then it [the marriage, JAGB] would be broken [in the eyes of the consistory, JAGB]. And then... there just wasn't any room to negotiate. Because that was just how it was. And that really hurt me. In the end he just left.⁹⁴

In some cases, like the example above, the practice of exclusion led to church abandonment by one or both former spouses. Other examples concerned the exclusion of children and young adults who had not yet professed their faith. One person remarked: "Yes, my daughter [nine years old, JAGB] is really mad she can't participate. She thinks it's really, really stupid."⁹⁵

Abstaining from the Lord's Supper In some of the interviews, mostly but not exclusively in CRC congregations, abstaining from the Lord's Supper (Dutch: *avondmaalsmijding*) was mentioned as an important aspect of the celebration.⁹⁶ In some cases, participants reported temporary

⁹⁴R14.3 (female, 65+, RCL-D): "Nou, ik ben ook weleens een beetje bozig geweest... op het Avondmaal. Niet over het Avondmaal, maar over de mensen die... Mijn broer ging scheiden. Nou, dat was buiten zijn wil. En ik dacht: waarom gaat-ie niet meer aan het Avondmaal? Maar dat mocht-ie niet meer. En de volgende keer ook niet. Want die vrouw van hem, die is nu nog alleen. (...) Dat deed mij pijn, want hij zegt: het is toch voor mensen die zondig zijn? En ik... wat moet ik daaraan veranderen? Nou, hij hoefde niks te veranderen, nee, als die vrouw een ander had, dan was dat [het huwelijk, JAGB] verbroken [volgens de kerkenraad, JAGB]. Nou, ik vond dat zo raar. Dat vond ik echt een hele... Nou, dat vond ik gewoon stom. En dan... daar kon je dan gewoon niet over praten. Want zo hoorde het. En dat vond ik heel erg. Hij is uiteindelijk gewoon weggegaan."

⁹⁵R15.3 (female, 20–39yr, RCL-D): "Ja, mijn dochter [negen jaar oud, JAGB] is echt boos dat ze niet mee mag doen. Die vindt het echt heel stom."

⁹⁶Abstinence from the Lord's Supper is a practice found across several Reformed denominations (and is therefore not limited to CRC), especially in congregations with a "bevindelijke" identity (see chapter 2, note 9). CRC-C can be described as a religiously strict congregation, while in CRC-A traces of *bevinding* may be found on the individual level. See Box 2.1 on page 22.

periods of abstinence in their own lives. When reported by RCL members, the reasons for abstaining were either not detailed or else related to longer periods of illness. In other cases, interviewees reported that they had abstained—or still abstained—from participation because they had not yet received the boldness to go to the table.⁹⁷ This was mostly the case in CRC-C, although a number of individual examples were also found in CRC-A. One participant thus reported that it was uncommon in CRC-A (more than 40 years ago) to join the sacramental celebration directly after professing one's faith:

R2.5 (female, 65+, CRC-A): Well, the desire was there... I said that a moment ago. But of course we were very young and here it wasn't customary for young people to go to Lord's Supper so soon after profession of faith. So despite the desire it also gave me sweaty palms, like: Do I really dare?

M: Right.

R2.5: How did that text go again? "The Teacher has come and is calling for you" [John 11:28, NKJV]. Well, it's something you just never forget.

M: Like, the text for the sermon?

R2.5: Yes.

M: Right, OK.

R2.5: So we went. (...) But that wasn't normal then.

(...)

R2.8 (male, 65+): Well... so actually a social thing like that kept you [from the table]? Am I following you? If you didn't go, then...

R2.5: Well, people would start to talk, like: "Really, they are going to Lord's Supper?"

R2.8: Ouch.

R2.5: That hurts, you know, that really hurts, but... well, it still didn't manage to hold us back.⁹⁸

⁹⁷The concept of "boldness" must be understood here as part of *bevindelike* identity. A *bevinding* (lit. "experience") of personal salvation by God and after self-examination gives a believer the boldness to celebrate the sacrament. In practice, this dynamic often only leads people to abstain from the table, producing the phenomenon of only a minority of the professing members actually celebrating the sacrament. Almost all participants in this study who had struggled with this "boldness" had at the time been members in another *bevindelike* denomination, and only started participating in the Lord's Supper after becoming a CRC member. See chapter 2, note 9.

⁹⁸R2.5: *Nou, het verlangen was er... Dat zei ik straks al. Maar we waren natuurlijk heel jong en het was hier ook geen gewoonte dat jonge mensen zo direct na het belijdenis doen aan het Avondmaal gingen. Dus ondanks het verlangen had ik er ook hele natte handen van: durf ik dat? /M: Ja. /R2.5: Maar wat was de tekst? "De meester is daar en Hij roept u." Nou, dat vergeet je dus nooit meer. /M: De preektekst, zeg maar? /R2.5: Ja. /M: Ja, oké. /R2.5: Dus we gingen. (...) Maar dat was niet gewoon toen. (...) R2.8:*

An elderly member in CRC-C spoke at length about the doubts that came after first having celebrated the Lord's Supper for a number of years:

It also happened to me a couple of years ago that I didn't go, also in [town name]. Because I was really going through a difficult and dark time. And then I didn't go. I'll tell you, the minister came to visit right away: 'Why didn't you go, man?' Yeah, because, yeah, I was like: yeah, there was such darkness and there were so many accusers speaking against me. And, well, he really encouraged me. He said: if the LORD has filled your heart, then He expects you to proclaim his death. That you surrender yourself to Him. [sighs] Yeah. But, that is possible, yeah, now that I come to think of it. Once I also talked to someone who said: you should look inside to see if you're Judas. And then, well Rev. [name] then mentioned the example of Judas, you know? And then I felt it on the inside again, like: I told you, I told you, you are a Judas! And yes, then I didn't have that, the week when I couldn't [celebrate Lord's Supper, JAGB]. But the next time, the time after... Yes... then I knew, yes... That the love of Christ was surging over me, too. Right. So yeah, even if you're hearing good preaching, you can still be attacked. Then the road can be closed off...⁹⁹

In the same congregation, one of the interviewees had never joined in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. This was not uncommon in CRC-C, where about 40–60% of the professing members do not join the Lord's Supper table. When asked how she experiences the week of preparation, she acknowledged:

Nou... dus eigenlijk had zo'n sociaal iets je dus tegengehouden. Zeg ik dat goed? Als men dus niet gaat, dan... /R2.5: Nou, er werd wel over gepraat, van: "Dat gaat maar aan het Avondmaal." /R2.8: Ai. /R2.5: Dat doet zeer hoor, dat doet echt zeer, maar... ja, dat kon ons toch niet tegenhouden.

⁹⁹R12 (male, 65+, CRC-C): *"Ik heb het ook een paar jaar geleden een keer gehad, dat ik ook niet aangeweest ben, ook in [plaatsnaam]. Dat ik het ook echt zo moeilijk had en donker. En toen ben ik ook niet aangeweest. Nou, ik kreeg meteen bezoek van de dominee: 'waarom ben je niet aangeweest, jongen?' Ja, want, ja ik zei van: ja, het was zo donker bij me en ik had zoveel beschuldigers die tot mij spraken. En, ja, die heeft mij dus echt bemoedigd. Die heeft gezegd: als de Heere je hart vervuld heeft, dan verwacht Hij van je dat je zijn dood verkondigt. Dat je je aan Hem overgeeft. [zucht] Ja. Maar, dat kan ook, ja daar denk ik nu eventjes aan. Ik heb vroeger ook wel eens een keer een gesprek gehad met iemand, die zei: je moet maar eens nakijken of je geen Judas bent. En toen, ja dominee [naam] haalde toen dat voorbeeld aan van Judas, weet je wel? En toen kreeg ik het weer naar binnen, van: zie je wel, je bent toch een Judas! En ja, toen had ik het niet, die week toen kon ik niet [avondmaal vieren, JAGB]. Maar die volgende keer, die keer daarop... Ja... toen wist ik het, ja... Dat de liefde van Christus mij drong, ook. Ja. Dus ja, zelfs als je onder een goede prediking zit dan kun je nog bestreden worden. Dan kan de weg gesloten zijn..."*

R10 (female, 40–64yr, CRC-C): I think that here in this congregation, or rather the one I now belong to, I think it's made very accessible—not dumbed down, absolutely not, but still very accessible—every Sunday again, that Christ is truly preached. I've mentioned this during a home visit before, that it looks so simple that your unbelief begins to gain the upper hand. Then I think when you've had such preparation, I think: yes, that's just how it is. You know: you just can't resist. And look, if you don't want to have His glory and His grace revealed in your life, yes [I do] absolutely, but to believe it is—maybe I'm not expressing it right—so difficult and then the devil's power seems to be so enormous, while on the other hand... yes, if you use prayer again, that you receive peace again, like: let it go and seek it in His Word, you know? But I do really feel the struggle. On the one hand, you look forward to it, on the other hand, I sometimes feel like I think like: again—yeah, how should I put it?—that I think like: it's hard.
(...)

M: What about during the Lord's Supper service itself, because that's when that invitation comes again. Uhm... How do you experience that?

R10: Yeah, then you really see... Then you really meet a big hurdle. A pretty big hurdle, and so I'm like: when will there be that answer that I too am allowed, you know what I mean? You'd actually want to hear it out loud, as it were. While you do actually hear it [the invitation], but can't seem to apply it to yourself.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰R10: *Ik denk dat hier in de gemeente of althans of waar ik nu toe behoor dat het, denk ik, heel laagdrempelig gebracht wordt—niet makkelijk, dat absoluut niet, maar wel heel laagdrempelig eigenlijk—elke zondag weer, dat echt Christus verkondigd wordt. Dat heb ik ook wel eens op huisbezoek gezegd, dat het zo makkelijk lijkt dat je ongeloof toch de overhand daarin weer neemt. Dan denk ik als je zo'n voorbereiding hebt, dan denk ik: ja het is gewoon zo. Weet je: daar kan je geen nee op zeggen. En kijk, wil je Zijn heerlijkheid en Zijn genade niet in je leven geopenbaard zien, ja absoluut [wel], maar om dat te geloven dat is—misschien is dat niet goed gezegd—zo moeilijk en dan lijkt de macht van de duivel zo ontzettend groot terwijl anderzijds... ja als je je gebed weer gebruikt, dat je ook wel weer rust krijgt, van: laat het los en zoek het in Zijn Woord, weet je wel? Maar ik merk wel echt het worstelen. Enerzijds kijk je ernaar uit, anderzijds vind ik soms wel dat ik denk van: alweer—ja hoe moet ik het goed zeggen?—dat ik denk van: ik vind het moeilijk. (...) M: Hoe is dat tijdens de avondmaalsdienst zelf, want dan klinkt die uitnodiging opnieuw. Ehm... Hoe beleef je dat? /R10: Ja, dan zie je echt een... Dan ervaar ik echt een hoge drempel. Best wel een hoge drempel, dat ik denk van: wanneer is dat antwoord dat [het] voor mij ook mag, weet je wel? Je zou dat gewoon hardop willen horen, bij wijze van spreken. Terwijl je eigenlijk het hoort, maar dat niet voor jezelf toe kan passen.*

4.4.5 Personal and Communal Preparation

The theme of *self-examination* was raised on several occasions. For many participants (across all participating congregations) the sacrament and preparation for it are related to sin and self-reflection. Various participants emphasized that the Lord's Supper is instituted for sinners. One participant summarized it as follows:

Yes, there is reflection before the Lord's Supper, in the week leading up to it. Yes, at home I also said it, but the one moment is more intense than the other... [silence] But yes it is a week during which you're brought to a halt, like: hey, coming Sunday is Lord's Super, and so you think about it. And then... well, kinda weird, but you're also less occupied with the things I do during the week. That is kind of weird, yes. You should actually... be doing that all along. Not just very intensely during the week leading up to it. (...) By thinking about it you... you are also, like, confronted more and more with your sins. Yes, and that also implies forgiveness. And that's what comes to expression in the Lord's Supper.¹⁰¹

Another participant put this into perspective by stating that the urgency of self-examination should not be overstated:

Yes, but I do always say: It's good that there's this week of preparation, but on the other hand, I also think we shouldn't get all too uptight about it, in the sense of: 'It's preparation [time] because it's Lord's Supper on Sunday', because I think it means you haven't really been doing what you should have been doing the past few weeks. Because if things are well, you should be saying: 'O, next week it's Lord's Supper again, how nice'. And not like: 'O boy, well, I guess it's time to read *The Pious Communicant Encouraged* again...'¹⁰²

¹⁰¹R1.5 (male, 20–39yr, CRC-A): "Er is inderdaad een bezinning voor het Heilig Avondmaal, de week daar naartoe. Ja, thuis heb ik het ook al gezegd, maar het ene moment is intenser dan het andere... [stilte] Maar het is inderdaad wel een week dat je even stil wordt gezet, van: joh, aanstaande zondag het Heilig Avondmaal, dan ben je er gewoon mee bezig. En dan... ja, heel gek, maar dan ben je ook wat minder bezig met dingen die ik doordeweeks doe. Dat is ook raar, ja. Eigenlijk zou je dat... doorgaans moeten doen. Niet juist die week heel druk ervoor bezig. (...) Doordat je er meer mee bezig bent... word je ook meer, ja, geconfronteerd met de zonden die je doet. Ja, en daarbij hoort toch wel een stukje vergeving. Wat dan het Heilig Avondmaal inhoudt."

¹⁰²R11 (female, 65+, CRC-C): "Ja, nou ik zeg altijd wel: Het is goed dat er een voorbereidingsweek is, maar aan de andere kant vind ik het ook dat je nou niet krampachtig bezig moet zijn van: 'het is voorbereiding want het is zondag avondmaal', want ik denk dat je dan de afgelopen tijd niet goed bezig geweest bent. Want als het goed is moet je zeggen: 'O, volgende week is het weer avondmaal, dat is fijn'. En niet van: 'Oei, ja nu moet ik

As noted above, the practice of self-examination differs among the various participating congregations (see §3.2). In some congregations (CRC-A, CRC-C, and RCL-F), the first part of the classical liturgical form for the celebration of the Lord's Supper is read during a worship service a week in advance. In CRC-A and CRC-C, also a communal midweek preparation meeting is organized. Some participants were very positive about these meetings (CRC-C: "I do always find that valuable. Then it always looks like the pastor has kind of let go of his... warning triangle, as it were. Then it often is, very... generous. That's how I would put it"),¹⁰³ while others were less enthusiastic (CRC-A: "And here we have vespers. I've been there before, but it doesn't work for me").¹⁰⁴

Mixed Feelings In both denominations, the respective liturgical forms (and especially the classical liturgical form) include instructions on self-examination. However, not all participants were convinced about the need for self-examination every time again. One woman related this to the development of her own faith (CRC-A):

Yes, there's been change. When I was a lot younger, it really was more about: 'Well, am I really a child of God?' That was something I struggled with at the time, especially when I was younger. And now, the last little while, I have experienced a lot more peace. And that also had to do with that freedom. One time, I don't know when anymore, I just thought: 'OK, this is just how it is, I'm done with it, God's sacrifice was sufficient'. Now it's no longer tied to my awareness of sin. I no longer need to go back to: is it true, is it for me, can I go to Lord's Supper? That is... it's just celebration of the fact that I am a child of God, [and] so I've found rest in that, also when it's about just being allowed to do it as congregation. And wondering like: "Hey, how are things between God and me?" is something that's been introduced into my personal faith life, in my daily walk with God.¹⁰⁵

'De godvruchtige avondmaalsganger' gaan lezen...' The reference is to Petrus Immens, *De godvruchtige avondmaalsganger* (orig. 1752), translated as Peter Immens, *The Pious Communicant Encouraged* (orig. 1801).

¹⁰³R9 (female, 20–39yr, CRC-C): "Dat vind ik altijd wel heel waardevol hoor. Het lijkt wel of de dominee dan altijd een soort los is van z'n... gevarendriehoek. Dan is het wel vaak, wel heel... ruim. Laat ik het zo zeggen."

¹⁰⁴R1.6 (female, 40–64yr, CRC-A): "En hier hebben we een vesper. Daar ben ik ook wel eens geweest, maar dat werkt niet voor mij."

¹⁰⁵R3.2 (female, 20–39yr, CRC-A): "Ja, het is wel veranderd. Toen ik echt iets jonger was, dat het inderdaad veel meer ging over: 'O ja, ik ben een kind van God, is dat zo?' Die worsteling had ik toen, juist toen ik jonger was meer. Ik heb nu, de afgelopen tijd, veel meer rust. En dat heeft ook te maken gehad met die vrijheid. Ergens, ik weet niet meer wanneer,

A similar sound could be heard in CRC-B, where group members in two different interviews stated that they questioned the value of self-examination. For example:

R4.7 (male, 65+, CRC-B): Of course you have to prepare yourself, but that is... Your entire life is preparation, not just at Lord's Supper.

(...)

R4.7: At that moment, it is also the way I experience it and also the whole [process of] preparation, I think: right, it came from somewhere, but I wonder: the Bible also doesn't say there should be preparation for Lord's Supper. "When you do this, do it to remember Me," says the Lord Jesus, that is what it's actually about. So everyone time you do it, it's about: am I aware of that? It's something that could be given a little greater emphasis, but no more than that.¹⁰⁶

Conversely, in a congregation where collective self-examination and spiritual reflection (*nabetrachting*) is no longer practiced (RCL-D), one interviewee told us that he missed these practices:

Well, some things have also been lost... Let's say: those among us 40 and up may still remember that there used to be preparation for the Lord's Supper as well as a closing meditation afterwards. (...) There's no need to turn it into something bigger than it was, but it did have some rather nice elements. (...) I do think about it, maybe one day soon I'll do it. But why isn't it applied, living up to it during a week's time? And if you do so once a month... You can't do it every time, I know that. But why wouldn't you... do it?¹⁰⁷

maar ik wel een keer gewoon bedacht: 'oké, het is gewoon zo, hou ik erover op, Gods offer is genoeg geweest'. Het staat nu voor mij los van het besef van mijn zonde. Ik hoef nu niet elke keer weer terug naar: klopt het, is het voor mij, mag ik aan het Avondmaal? Dat staat... dat is gewoon het vieren van het feit dat ik kind van God ben, dus daar is rust in gekomen, ook inderdaad het gewoon het als gemeente te mogen doen. En me afvragen inderdaad, van: 'hè, hoe staat het tussen mij en God?' is nu iets in mijn persoonlijke geloofsleven gekomen, in m'n dagelijkse omgang met God."

¹⁰⁶R4.7: *Natuurlijk moet je jezelf voorbereiden, maar dat is... Je hele leven is een voorbereiding op, dat is niet alleen met het avondmaal zo. (...) R4.7: Op dat moment, zo ervaar ik dat ook en ook die hele voorbereiding, dan denk ik: ja, dat is ergens uit voortgekomen, maar ik vraag me af: de Bijbel spreekt er ook niet over dat er een voorbereiding moet zijn voor het avondmaal. "Telkens dus wanneer je dat doet, denk dan aan Mij," zegt de Here Jezus, daar gaat het eigenlijk om. Dus elke keer als je dat doet dan gaat het om: ben ik me dat bewust? Dat mag nog even wel benadrukt worden, maar meer dus ook niet.*

¹⁰⁷R15.1 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-D): *"Ja, sommige dingen zijn er ook weer in kwijtgeraakt... Nou, laten we zeggen: de 40-plussers onder ons die herinneren zich misschien nog dat er in het verleden voorbereiding op het Avondmaal was en ook een nabetrachting.*

4.4.6 Effects of Participating in the Lord's Supper

During the interviews, participants reported different experiences as “effects” of participating in the sacramental celebrations. The *strengthening of faith* was mentioned most frequently, as exemplified in the following image of the Lord's Supper as an anchoring point:

...it [Lord's Supper] truly is a part of my faith. It strengthens it. I see it like a landmark. A kind of anchor in my faith. Of course there are also other things, but I do think it's something that really... belongs to it. And I have also... Not like every time, but... there are also times I remember where it really touched me, like. So I mean it's not just a traditional anchoring point, but also an anchoring point that... well, that sometimes offers positive insight, a faith insight.¹⁰⁸

Another result of and/or motivation for participating in the Lord's Supper is *thankfulness*. Some congregants referred to Christ's sacrifice and their desire to thank God for it. This gratitude could also apply to the celebration as a whole, as two participants in CRC-B explained:

R5.1 (female, 40–64yr, CRC-B): Always a ‘thank you’, I think. Always thanksgiving for that enormous sacrifice.

R5.3 (female, 65+): Right.

R5.1: Yes, that's always the foremost thought in my mind.¹⁰⁹

In another case, a role was also played by thankfulness for acceptance by God after conversion to the Christian faith:

M: Why do you celebrate the Lord's Supper?

R19.8 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-F): Well, actually because we are allowed [to celebrate] it. I mean... Let's be clear about this: we fortunately may celebrate the Lord's Supper, to commemorate. Why do we celebrate, do I celebrate? Yes, like I said,

(...) Nu moet je het ook niet groter maken dan het is, maar er zaten best mooie elementen in. (...) Ik ben daar toch wel over aan het nadenken, misschien ga ik het binnenkort eens doen. Maar waarom wordt dat dan niet toegepast, een week leven daar naartoe? En als je dat één keer per maand doet... Je kunt het niet elke keer doen, dat snap ik ook wel. Maar waarom zou je dat niet... wel doen?”

¹⁰⁸R15.1 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-D): “...het [avondmaal, JAGB] is echt wel onderdeel van mijn geloof. Het wordt erdoor versterkt. Ik vind het gewoon een soort van herkenningpunt. Een soort anker in het geloof. Er zijn natuurlijk meer dingen, maar ik vind het wel iets wat er echt... positief bij hoort. En ik heb ook wel... Dat zal niet elke keer zo zijn, maar... ik kan me ook echt wel momenten herinneren dat het echt wel mij geraakt heeft, zeg maar. Dus dat het ook niet alleen een traditioneel ankerpunt is, maar ook wel een ankerpunt wat... ja, wat positief inzicht geeft soms, ook geloofsinzicht geeft.”

¹⁰⁹R5.1: Altijd een ‘dankjewel’ vind ik. Altijd een danken van voor dat enorme offer. / R5.3 (female, 65+): Ja. /R5.1: Ja, dat voel ik altijd wel als hoofdgedachte.

because I'm thankful that I'm allowed to go the Lord's Supper.

M: So OK, thankfulness is important to you.

R19.8: Yes.

M: Right, exactly. Right, thankful that you may draw near to God, like that, also at the Lord's Supper.

R19.8: [nods] I mean... Right, for me the experience is quite different from that of the average person in church here. I was baptized at 25 and did profession of faith, which means the experience is a little different for me, but at the same time I'm still very happy that we're allowed to.¹¹⁰

Thirdly, *encouragement* was mentioned, although less frequently, as another result. This was summarized by an elderly woman in CRC-B in the following statement:

Yes, well, you want to—at least, for me—I really want to belong to Jesus and He offers this, in this case in our church. And so I really want to be there and participate in it. Because I'm also encouraged by it, like you [R5.4] were saying. And it also establishes what it is that Jesus has done for us and so [what] God has given us in his Son, well, that we're confronted there with [the fact] that Christ died for our sins. And bore everything for us. And... so... it has been accomplished through Jesus. And well... I actually think that's so awesome and grand, I actually also see that [reflected] a bit in the Lord's Supper.¹¹¹

Fourthly, participants understood Lord's Supper to be fostering *reconciliation with others*. An elderly participant in the same congregation told us:

¹¹⁰M: *Waarom viert u het Heilig Avondmaal?* /R19.8 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-F): *Ja eigenlijk, omdat we het mogen [vieren]. Ik bedoel... Laten we dat vooropstellen: we mogen gelukkig het avondmaal vieren, om te gedenken. Waarom vieren we het, vier ik het? Ja, inderdaad, omdat ik dankbaar ben dat ik aan het avondmaal mag.* /M: *Ja oké, dankbaarheid is voor jou belangrijk.* /R19.8: *Ja.* /M: *Ja, precies. Ja, dankbaar zijn dat je bij God komen mag, zo, aan het avondmaal ook.* /R19.8: [Knikken] *Ik bedoel... Ja, voor mij ligt de beleving dus heel anders dan bij de gemiddelde hier binnen de gemeente. Ik ben op m'n 25e gedoopt en belijdenis gedaan, dus daardoor ligt het gevoel voor mij toch net even iets anders, maar daarbij ben ik nog steeds heel blij dat het mag.*

¹¹¹R5.3 (female, 65+, CRC-B): *"Ja, nou ja, je wil—tenminste voor mij is het—ik wil graag bij Jezus horen en Hij biedt dit aan, dan wel in onze kerk. En ja, dan wil ik er toch wel heel graag bij zijn en daaraan deelnemen. Omdat ik daar ook door bemoedigd word, zoals u [R5.4] zegt. En daar ook bij bepaald wordt wat Jezus voor ons gedaan heeft en God dus ook in Zijn Zoon ons gegeven heeft en ja, dat we dus ook daarbij bepaald worden dat Christus voor onze zonden is gestorven. En alles op zich heeft genomen. En... dus... het is volbracht door Jezus. En ja... dat vind ik eigenlijk zo iets geweldigs en zo iets groots, ik zie dat eigenlijk zo ook wel een beetje in het Avondmaal."*

So the more you think about your faith, the more you see. Paul also says that somewhere, I think (...)—so the more you know of Christ, the more you learn to recognize your sin. (...) Actually, I think that that process..., at least, I see it in my own life, that you at first just did something, but then later think: no, I can't do that anymore, can I? It's like, when you're younger, you sometimes start a fight with everyone, and then I forget [it]. But now you don't anymore, now you think: hey, it's something I actually can't be doing. I've got to fix this.¹¹²

Last but not least, the Lord's Supper was considered to offer *confirmation* and/or *comfort*, as illustrated by this quote from a participant in RCL-F:

R19.7 (male, 65+, RCL-F): Right, how amazing it is that this is given to us people, that you through... through the Lord's Supper, by partaking of the sacrament, that you know for sure that your sins have been forgiven, are being forgiven. No matter how great they are, and how often... And so that the Lord's Supper means a repetition of the promise, through which we indeed receive comfort, to be able to continue...

M: Right... [slight nod] So to sum up: the sealing of the p...

R19.7: [nods] Confirmation of the knowledge that you really as a sinner can at one time expect forgiveness.¹¹³

It should be noted here that several participants indicated that they were moved by the Lord's Supper, either during a church service or the interview itself. In almost half of the focus group interviews, at least one person cried or indicated that he/she was getting emotional about an aspect connected to the subject. In CRC-A, for example, a woman reported the following about the first time she celebrated the Lord's Supper: "And I, to me it felt like I was actually skipping through church. I was so happy.

¹¹²R4.7 (male, 65+, CRC-B): "Naarmate dat je dus meer bezig bent met geloof ga je veel meer dingen zien. Paulus zegt dat denk ik ook ergens (...)—hoe meer je dus van Christus weet, hoe meer je je zonde leert kennen. (...) Nou, ik denk dat dat proces dat..., tenminste, dat herken ik, als je iets van wat je aanvankelijk gewoon deed, dat je denkt: nee, dat kan ik dan toch niet meer doen. Kijk, als je wat jonger was, dan maak je weleens ruzie met iedereen en dan vergeet ik weer. Dat doe je nou niet meer, nou denk je: hé, maar dit kan ik eigenlijk niet zo doen. Dat moet ik oplossen."

¹¹³R19.7: Ja, hoe groot het wonder is, dat dit aan ons mensen gegeven wordt, dat je door... door het gebruik van het avondmaal, door deelnemen aan het sacrament, zeker weet dat je zonden vergeven zijn, worden. Hoe groot ze ook zijn, en hoe vaak... En dat het dus bij het avondmaal een herhaling van de belofte is, waardoor we dus inderdaad getroost zijn, om weer verder te kunnen... /M: Ja... [licht knikken] Dus kort samengevat: de verzegeling van de b... /R19.7: [knikken] De bevestiging van het weten dat je dus inderdaad als zondaar op gegeven moment vergeving mag verwachten.

I thought: ‘o yes, I too can now feel, notice what... God means’. I’m getting all emotional. [laughs, cries] Don’t worry, I’m not sad.”¹¹⁴

Little or No Effect While some participants explicitly stated that the Lord’s Supper was stimulating for their personal faith, for others the opposite was true. Some from the latter group told us that they experienced no effect whatsoever when celebrating the Lord’s Supper. Others said that they were not interested in the sacramental celebration per se; they would not miss it if it were abolished, since they did not consider it essential to their faith and/or relationship with God. Such a sentiment was evoked by a man (RCL-F) who responded as follows to other participants in his focus group:

But do you *really* have that? That you can’t do without the Lord’s Supper? I don’t at all. If it didn’t exist... if it wasn’t commanded... Of course, in a sense you would be missing it, but I don’t think I couldn’t do without.¹¹⁵

A similar sound could be heard in CRC-A:

R1.6 (female, 40–64yr, CRC-A): I sometimes even don’t really feel like I need Lord’s Supper. (...) I could do without, so to speak, for me it’s, like, not necessary, if I can put it that way. (...)

R1.6: It’s part of my faith. (...) And if, imagine Lord’s Supper were to be dropped? Concretely. It would have no impact on my faith.

M: OK.

R1.6: It’s just a form we happen to have here and it is of course also what Jesus instituted. It’s not the starting point, or it it’s not... it’s actually not necessary in order to have faith.

M: OK, right.

R1.6: At least, maybe. Of course I can’t really say whether that’s an answer. But I don’t have the feeling it’s something stimulating or the like.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴R2.8 (female, 20–39yr, CRC-A): “*En ik, voor mijn gevoel ging ik echt huppelend door die kerk. Ik was zo blij. Ik dacht: ‘oh yes, ik mag nu ook voelen, merken wat... God bedoelt’. Ik word helemaal warm. [lacht, huilt] Het is geen verdriet hoor...*”

¹¹⁵R20.4 (male, 20–39yr, RCL-F): “*Maar hebben jullie dat echt, ja? Dat je niet zonder het avondmaal kan? Ik heb dat echt totaal niet. Als het er niet zou zijn... als het niet opgedragen zou zijn... Natuurlijk, je zou het wel op een bepaalde manier missen, maar ik denk niet dat ik er niet zonder zou kunnen.*”

¹¹⁶R1.6: *Ik heb zelfs af en toe niet het gevoel dat ik het Avondmaal nodig heb. (...) Ik zou d’r buiten kunnen, bij wijze van spreken, dat is niet nodig in mijn geval in ieder geval, laat ik het zo zeggen. (...) R1.6: Het is onderdeel van mijn geloof. (...) En als het nou, stel*

4.4.7 Spiritual Reflection (or *Nabetracting*)

Few participants spoke about the spiritual reflection (*nabetracting*, see Box 3.2 on page 41) that takes place after the celebration. In CRC-C, the entire afternoon service is dedicated to this practice, while in other churches the spiritual reflection is limited to the reading of a declaration of thanksgiving (as part of the liturgical form) and/or a thanksgiving prayer.

When asked about their experience of this “part” of the celebration, most participants indicated being satisfied with the current practice in their congregation. However, one participant reported that he did not know there was such a thing as a spiritual reflection in the second service (CRC-B), while another insisted reported that the practice in her experience was rather mediocre (CRC-C):

M: Could you say a little more about that spiritual reflection? What does a service like that look like?

R9 (female, 20–39yr, CRC-C): OK. Well, if I can offer my opinion, I actually don’t ever find it all that special. But maybe that’s got to do with me. (...) It’s not like I always think: “O, good thing we also have a spiritual reflection to find some peace, etc.” My sense is that in our [church] it gets kind of overlooked, that spiritual reflection. But maybe that’s just my sense, it’s possible. I don’t know. But that’s the sense I have.

M: Uh-huh.

R9: And... like, in the sermon things sometimes gets mentioned, like: “You were there this morning, but... should you have?” Or: “You weren’t there: was that right?” That kind of thing, a kind of warning. But for the rest there’s very little that gets said about it concretely. And sometimes during the following service it’s like: “Last week we celebrated the Lord’s Supper.” But it’s not elaborate, as far as I can tell.

M: Right, exactly. And would I be right to say that you would actually want it to be more concrete?

R9: Well, yes. I would find that nice, actually, yes, because... sometimes it’s just one of those mornings, know what I mean? You’re home late and you have to be back at church soon again. That’s not necessarily a bad thing. But it would be nice if there were more continuity. It’s something that’s sometimes

dat het Avondmaal weg zou vallen? Dan even als concreet ding. Dat heeft geen invloed op mijn geloof. /M: Oké. /R1.6: Dat is gewoon een vorm die we kennelijk hier hebben en dat is natuurlijk ook wat Jezus ingezet heeft. Het is niet het uitgangspunt, of niet... het is eigenlijk niet nodig om te geloven. /M: Oké, ja. /R1.6: Althans, misschien. Ik kan het natuurlijk niet helemaal zeggen of het een antwoord is. Maar ik heb toch niet het gevoel dat het een stimulerende factor is ofzo.

lacking and so also in me it kind of drops away, know what I mean? Then I think like: it doesn't have to stay something very special, or you don't have to walk around the entire day in some mysterious haze, but it would be nice also to show greater thanksgiving or to devote more attention to it.¹¹⁷

Nevertheless, also *during* the celebrations personal reflection could take place, as indicated by a participant in CRC-B, for example.¹¹⁸ As such, the celebration itself may function as a moment of spiritual and ethical reflection that may serve to reinforce the daily life of the communicant. Another example comes from a participant in RCL-F, who interpreted the Lord's Supper as a moment of spiritual renewal:

R20.2 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-F): ...you just lay down your sins before God, at that moment, physically. And you begin... yeah, you try at that moment to make a new start.

M: Right, OK, yeah, exactly... A moment of purification, maybe?

R20.2: Yes!¹¹⁹

4.5 Style, Ambiance, and Liturgy

In this section, three subthemes mentioned by the interviewees are discussed in detail: first, the experience of different styles of celebration; second, the ambiance during the celebrations; and, third, the liturgy used during the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

¹¹⁷M: *Kun je misschien iets meer vertellen over die nabetrachting? Hoe ziet zo'n dienst er dan uit?* /R9: *Ja. Nou, als ik er een oordeel aan mag ophangen, dan vind ik het in die zin nooit heel bijzonder. Maar dat kan ook wel aan mij liggen, hoor. (...) Het is niet altijd dat ik denk: "Oh, gelukkig, we hebben ook nog een nabetrachting, nu kan ik daar zo nog even in rusten ofzo." Ik heb het idee dat het bij ons een beetje een ondergeschoven kindje is, de hele nabetrachting. Maar misschien is dat mijn persoonlijke idee hoor, dat kan ook. Dat weet ik niet. Dat gevoel heb ik.* /M: [humt] /R9: *En... in die zin: in de preek wordt er een aantal dingen dan genoemd, van: "u was daar vanmorgen, maar... kon dat eigenlijk wel?" Of: "u was daar niet: klopte dat?" Dat, als een soort waarschuwing. Maar verder wordt er niet concreet heel erg veel aandacht aan besteed. En er wordt ook wel eens gezegd in de volgende dienst van: "De vorige week hebben we Avondmaal gevierd." Maar niet heel uitgebreid, naar mijn idee.* /M: *Ja, precies. En begrijp ik dan goed dat je dat eigenlijk wel zou willen dat het concreter wordt dan?* /R9: *Nou, jawel. Ik zou dat best wel mooi vinden eigenlijk, ja, want... het is soms echt zo'n morgentje weet je wel? Je bent laat thuis en dan moet je gauw weer naar de kerk. Dat is ook niet erg. Alleen zou het wel mooi zijn als het meer een soort verlengstuk was. Dat mis ik soms wel eens en dan is het ook bij mezelf ook eens een beetje weg, weet je wel? Dan denk ik: het hoeft ook niet iets heel bijzonders te blijven, of je hoeft niet heel de dag in één of andere geheimzinnige waas te lopen, maar het zou wel mooi zijn om ook meer de dankbaarheid te tonen of daar aandacht aan te besteden.*

¹¹⁸As quoted in note 61 above.

¹¹⁹R20.2: *...je legt je zonden gewoon voor God neer, op dat moment, fysiek. En je begint... ja, je probeert op dat moment opnieuw te beginnen.* /M: *Ja, oké, ja, precies... Een moment van reiniging, zou je kunnen zeggen?* /R20.2: *Ja!*

4.5.1 Style of Celebration

A reoccurring theme was formed by conversations surrounding the variety liturgical styles that may be used for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Especially in RCL congregations, a wide range of options was discussed during the focus group meetings. Remarkably, within CRC-C virtually no remarks were made about the use of other styles than the current one (i.e. seated at a table). In RCL congregations, options varied from sitting in the pews, to walking up to the front to receive bread and wine, standing in a circle with all fellow churchgoers (both participants and non-participants), celebrating the Lord's Supper as part of a potluck dinner with the congregation as a whole, and celebrating it in smaller groups at home. In this final instance, the liturgical role of the minister and/or elders was not mentioned or discussed. One participant (RCL-D) suggested:

Why don't we just do it like..., [when we] organize a small group BBQ and halfway through somebody gets up, breaks bread, hands it out, and celebrates the Lord's Supper there?¹²⁰

In CRC congregations, similar suggestions were shared. Generally speaking, however, participants in these churches showed themselves more satisfied with the status quo. A majority of CRC participants did not want to change the style of celebration. This thought was captured well in the response of one participant (CRC-A):

I've never thought about it that way. I think: well, it is as it is, and I just think it's fine this way. I don't think there are other ways.¹²¹

Argumentation The nature of arguments for one style of celebration or the other varied from more substantive to more practical. Practical objections included the size of the congregation and/or the limited size of the sanctuary (CRC-B, RCL-E), the extra time required by table celebrations over the ambulatory style (RCL-D), the required efforts for organizing a potluck dinner for the entire congregation (RCL-D), and the lack of space for celebrating standing in a circle (RCL-F). More positively, participants also mentioned arguments for the introduction of new styles, such

¹²⁰R18.5 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-E): "*Waarom doen we niet als er gewoon een..., [als we] een wijkbarbecue organiseren en halverwege een barbecue gaat er iemand staan, die gaat een brood breken, die gaat het uitdelen en die gaat daar het Avondmaal vieren?*" See also the subsection on "Participants" in §4.2.1 above.

¹²¹R1.7 (male, 65+, CRC-A): "*Ik heb er nog nooit over nagedacht. Ik denk: ja, zoals het gaat, gaat het en ik denk dat het gewoon zo heel erg goed is. Ik denk niet dat er andere manieren zijn.*"

as the concurrent eating of bread (and drinking of wine) by all participants, on the assumption that this practice would enhance the experience of togetherness (RCL-F).¹²²

More substantive arguments that were shared included “obedience” to the symbolism in sitting at one table (amounting also to a rejection of other styles of celebration; RCL-E), the fostering of a qualitatively better experience of the sacrament by taking more time and adhering to a quieter style of celebration (CRC-A), or New Testament references (e.g. when Jesus instituted the sacrament, it was part of a Passover dinner that included more than just a small piece of bread and a sip of wine alone; RCL-D).

The interviewees also mentioned personal arguments: not wanting to confuse people with the introduction of styles they are not used to in their local context (CRC-B, RCL-E), lack of boldness (to kneel or to cheer out loud in joy during the celebration, as proposed by one participant in CRC-B), a sense of unease while sitting at the table (RCL-D), and the conviction that the remembrance of Christ cannot happen without a quiet style of celebration (CRC-A).

At times opposing arguments both for and against a certain style could be found within the same congregation. For example, some participants in CRC-B (where the Lord’s Supper is administered seated in the pews) expressed a longing for the experience of greater community during the celebrations:

M: How would you want to celebrate Lord’s Supper?

R4.3 (female, 20–39yr, CRC-B): As long as it stays personal: that you get something out of it, but also personal together with others, unity.

M: OK. Is that something you’d like to experience more, or...?

R4.3: Yeah, always more. That’s what I think, yes.

R4.2 (female, 20–39yr): Right, maybe it’s something I wish for too, yes, that it is a little more visible, that it’s more congregation..., what you [R4.3] were saying—it’s something I actually miss, because to me it’s really your own thing. At least, that’s how I experience it now. You’re there together with everyone, but I don’t have that experience of... togetherness.

R4.1 (female, 65+): Community.

R4.2: No, not really.¹²³

¹²²The latter example is inspired by churches in which pieces of bread are first distributed through the pews, and then held by all communicants until all eat at the same moment. The same procedure is repeated with small, plastic cups filled with wine.

¹²³M: *Hoe zou je graag het avondmaal willen vieren?* /R4.3: *Als het maar persoonlijk blijft: dat je er zelf wat aan hebt, maar ook wel persoonlijk met elkaar, verbondenheid.* / M: *Oké. Is dat een wens om dat meer te ervaren, of...?* /R4.3: *Ja, steeds meer. Dat denk ik,*

Other CRC-B participants (in another focus group) stated exactly the opposite, namely that they experience “togetherness” precisely *because* the sacrament is celebrated seated in the pews (more than they would if seated at a table).¹²⁴ Together the examples indicate that the same style of celebration may evoke different experiences—even within the same congregation.

The Use of Bread and Wine A number of participants across both denominations shared remarks on the use of bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper. For example, some participants were positive about the use of matzos instead of squares of white bread as they had experienced it in denominations abroad or during a celebration at *Opwekking*, a yearly Christian festival in the Netherlands. None of them, however, attributed additional significance to the use of matzos.

Participants were more outspoken about the role of the minister in the distribution of the bread during the ambulatory celebrations. Several participants expressed themselves positively on the minister’s efforts to make personal contact with the communicants at this moment by making eye contact and/or saying something. This is not customary, since not all CRC and RCL ministers do so when administering the sacrament, as reported by someone in RCL-F.¹²⁵ In another case, also the experience of receiving the bread from the hand of the minister was given special meaning, as noted by a participant in CRC-B:

R4.1 (female, 65+, CRC-B): ...I did know that Christ had died for me, I knew that. And in my mind I knew that, and so I did make a choice for him when I did profession of faith, but when that minister [in Austria, JAGB] put it in my hands like that, it came so close!

M: OK, right. Could you say it became personal?

R4.1: Yes, it became personal, yes.¹²⁶

ja. /R4.2: *Ja, misschien is dat ook wel een wens van mij, ja, dat het wat meer zichtbaar is, dat het wat meer gemeente..., wat jij [R4.3] zei—dat mis ik dan eigenlijk, want het is toch voor mijn gevoel toch echt wel een dingetje van jezelf. Tenminste, zo beleef ik dat nu wel. Je zit er wel met z’n allen, maar ik heb niet de beleving van... samen.* /R4.1: *Gemeenschap.* /R4.2: *Nee, niet echt.*

¹²⁴As quoted in note 5 above. In this case, the participant’s personal history may be a factor, since R5.1 admitted that she disliked the many “tables” necessary in the congregation where she grew up.

¹²⁵See note 9 above.

¹²⁶R4.1: *...ik wist wel dat Christus voor mij gestorven was, dat wist ik. En mijn verstand wist dat ook wel, en ik had dus ook wel met het belijdenis-doen voor Hem gekozen, maar toen die dominee [in Oostenrijk, JAGB] dat zo in mijn handen legde, kwam dat zo dichtbij! /M: Oké, ja. Zou je kunnen zeggen dat het persoonlijk werd? /R4.1: Ja, het werd persoonlijk, ja.*

With regard to the wine, some participants proposed the use of individual cups for reasons of hygiene or to be able to drink together with all communicants at the same time. None of the participants proposed the use of grape juice over wine, although the possibility of using grape juice in individual cases was not rejected, either.

Meaning of Bread and Wine In the interviews, different meanings were attributed to the elements of bread and wine. For example, the bread was interpreted as a vital necessity of life and as “waybread” (like biblical manna), or as signifying Christ’s body that was “broken” (referring to the words of institution).¹²⁷

R3.5 (male, 65+, CRC-A): I once experienced that very powerfully, very explicitly, (...) in Switzerland. The baker there had baked bread in the shape of a person, and so we stood in a circle, and everyone broke a piece off the body and put it in their mouth. It made for a very special experience.

M: Could you say a little more, what was it that made it so special?

R3.5: Well, that you actually, like, physically see that it’s a person. And not only on the spiritual level, but also naturally. And, well, here in our services the bread is already broken, so you take a piece and then pass it on to your sister and brother. But this here: Jesus’ body was literally being broken.¹²⁸

In the interviews, the wine was mostly linked to the blood of Christ that was poured out as a sacrifice. None of the participants referred to the wine as a festive drink, for example, as a sign of joy pointing forward to the coming kingdom (cf. Mark 14:25).

Lastly, one participant reported experiencing the substitution of the elements of bread and wine for things like tortilla chips and lemonade:

R20.8 (female, 20–39yr, RCL-F): I went to Bible college, for a year. (...) And then we one time also celebrated Lord’s Supper with the class, right there during class. (...) We had just

¹²⁷Multiple interviewees experienced a strong connection between the breaking of the bread and the presumed breaking of the body of Christ. Ironically, Jesus’ bones were not broken (cf. John 19:36), even though the temple of His body was indeed broken down (John 2:19–21).

¹²⁸R3.5: *Dat heb ik heel sterk (...) een keer in Zwitserland, heel specifiek meegemaakt. Daar had de bakker brood gebakken in de vorm van een mens, en we stonden dus in een kring, en ieder brak van dat lichaam een stukje af en nam dat tot zich. Dat gaf wel een heel bijzondere ervaring. /M: Kun je daar iets meer over vertellen, wat was er zo bijzonder aan? /R3.5: Nou, dat je dus inderdaad, ja, lijfelijk ziet dat het een mens is. En niet alleen op het geestelijke vlak, maar ook in het natuurlijke. En ja, het brood is hier al gebroken in onze diensten, dus je neemt een stukje en je geeft het door aan je zuster en broeder. Maar dit: het lichaam van Jezus wordt dan werkelijk ook verbroken.*

finished a unit on Jesus' sacrifice, and then we, like, closed it off by celebrating the Lord's Supper.

M: OK, right.

R20.8: With tortilla chips and lemonade, haha.

(people laughing)

M: OK!

R20.8: But there also was like that unity, and, like, the awareness.

M: Yeah, so on the one hand that unity, together, and on the other hand the awareness, because of what it means, from the Bible.

R20.9: Yeah, of the sacrifice, of salvation, that yeah.¹²⁹

Location of the Celebration Interviewees did not discuss potential locations for celebration in the focus groups. Nevertheless, various different options were mentioned alongside the sanctuary, namely in a local retirement or nursing home, at home with sick or elderly people unable to attend the church services, at home with friends or members of a Bible study group, or with friends or other Christians somewhere else (see the subsection on "Participants" in §4.2.1). In general, the location did not seem decisive for the congregants.

When to Celebrate The same applies more or less for the time of celebration. Most congregants seemed simply to assume that the Lord's Supper is celebrated on Sundays in the context of a worship service, but some participants also mentioned other occasions like right after Bible study meetings on weekdays, or at a Bible school following a lecture (as quoted above). With regard to the liturgical year, almost none of the congregants seemed to care when the Lord's Supper is or is not celebrated. Several participants mentioned Good Friday as an excellent moment for the Lord's Supper, including one participant in CRC-B:

M: Can you mention an occasion when it had a big impact on you?

R5.5 (male, 20–39yr, CRC-B): For me it's actually always the Good Friday celebration.

M: Right.

¹²⁹R20.8: *Ik heb op een bijbelschool gezeten, een jaar. (...) En toen hebben we met de klas ook een keer avondmaal gevierd, gewoon in de klas. (...) We hadden toen net een aantal lessen gehad over het offer van Jezus, en toen hebben we zeg maar aansluitend daaraan het avondmaal gevierd. /M: Oké, ja. /R20.8: Met tortillachips en limonade, haha. / (people laughing) /M: Oké! /R20.8: Maar ja, het was wel gewoon ook die eenheid, en het besef, zeg maar. /M: Ja, dus de eenheid aan de ene kant, met elkaar, en het besef, vanwege de inhoud, vanuit de bijbel, van de andere kant... /R20.8: Ja, van het offer, van de verlossing, ja, dat.*

R5.3 (female, 65+): Yes.

R5.5: For me that [celebration] is... well, more moving. And I think it's also because the Good Friday celebration also really [has] a moment of silence, longer than usual, I think.

R5.1 (female, 40–64yr): Right.

M: OK.

R5.5: And there's such calm, I really like that. And actually, I like to keep my eyes closed then. And sometimes it might look like I'm falling asleep, so every now and then I also keep them open, but I actually prefer just to keep my eyes closed, so you don't see anyone, because otherwise you're easily distracted by other things. So by closing your eyes you can cut your mind off from the other things around you. Then you can really...

M: Concentrate?

R5.5: Back to, yes, concentrate, back actually to... yeah, actually it's like you're sitting there, at the [last] supper. With Jesus, like.¹³⁰

Another congregant (RCL-F) remarked instead that the sacrament should be celebrated on Maundy Thursday, although no explanation was provided.

Frequency With regard to the frequency of celebration, participants in congregations where the Lord's Supper was celebrated four times a year were for the most part satisfied with the current frequency. In congregations where the Lord's Supper was celebrated more often, participants showed themselves more open to an even higher frequency.¹³¹ In general, participants were more inclined to support a higher than a lower

¹³⁰M: *Kunt u een viering noemen die indruk heeft gemaakt?* /R5.5: *Voor mij is het eigenlijk altijd de Goede Vrijdag-viering.* /M: *Ja.* /R5.3: *Ja.* /R5.5: *Die is voor mij... ja, aangrijpend. En dat komt denk ik ook wel omdat de Goede Vrijdag-viering echt ook een poos van stilte, volgens mij langer dan met andere vieringen.* /R5.1: *Ja.* /M: *Oké.* /R5.5: *En dat is gewoon zo'n rust dat vind ik zelf heel prettig. En dan eigenlijk, ik doe het liefst ook mijn ogen dicht. Dan lijkt het alsof ik in slaap val, dus dan doe ik soms ook wel open, maar eigenlijk heb ik het liefst gewoon mijn ogen dicht, zodat je ook niet andere mensen ziet, want anders gaan je gedachten gauw ook weer over andere dingen. Dus je ogen sluiten dan kun je gedachten afsluiten van andere dingen die je om je ziet. Dan kun je echt... /M: *Concentreren?* /R5.5: *Terug naar, ja concentreren, terug naar eigenlijk... ja, eigenlijk zit je er als het ware bij, bij het avondmaal. Bij Jezus, zeg maar.**

¹³¹The latter applies to the content of the interviews. Afterwards, interviewees were requested to complete a survey (Appendix B). The quantitative results of this survey tell a slightly different story: the difference between the current frequency and the desired frequency is relatively larger within congregations with a lower frequency of celebration (e.g. CRC-A and B) than it is in congregations with a higher frequency (RCL-D). Exceptions include CRC-C and RCL-E; in these congregations, the difference was relatively small. See Appendix C.

frequency of celebration. Some proposed a weekly celebration (in CRC-A and B, RCL-E and F), while a small minority opposed this idea (CRC-B and C, RCL-D and F). Others were satisfied with the current frequency in their congregation or did not speak out on the topic.

In RCL-D, where the Lord's Supper is administered on a monthly basis, some congregants expressed their preference for a higher frequency. One participant opposed this idea, and expressed his fear for the danger of custom and routine:

...I also sense (...) some routine and monotony. And that also has to do with the frequency with which the Lord's Supper is celebrated, in my opinion. For long our custom was to do it once every two months in [town in The Netherlands]. And then the service when the Lord's Supper alone was celebrated was actually a very solemn one. And here in [place of current church] we do it once a month and that makes the experience somewhat different, I think. At that time in [former place of residence], when we'd be planning something, it was like: 'O, wait a sec, it's Lord's Supper, so we'll be in church.' Here we're more like: 'Yeah, it's Lord's Supper, but we could also do that.'¹³²

However, other participants from this congregation were predominantly positive about the current frequency.

Group Size With regard to group size, RCL members expressed a preference for smaller group size when the sacrament is being celebrated:

It's something I do recognize, because I also did it once, not on Sunday, just on a weekday. And with a very small group. For me it was actually the most beautiful [celebration] I've ever experienced. It was especially intense. Like you were really celebrating at that moment.¹³³

¹³²R15.4 (male, 65+, RCL-D): "...ik bespeur ook (...) iets van sleur en gewenning. En dat heeft ook een beetje te maken met de frequentie waarin het Avondmaal gevierd wordt, vind ik zelf. Ik was gewend lange tijd in [plaats in Nederland] dat één keer in de twee maanden te doen. En, dat was dan eigenlijk een heel zwaarwichtige dienst waarin alleen het Avondmaal werd gevierd. En hier in [plaats van huidige kerk] doen we dat één keer per maand en dat geeft toch wel een iets andere beleving, vind ik zelf. Destijds in [voorige woonplaats] was het zo van dat als we iets planden: 'Oh, maar wacht even, dan is het Avondmaal, dus we zijn in de kerk.' Hier zijn we veel meer van: 'Ja het is Avondmaal, maar dat andere dat kan ook wel.'"

¹³³R14.1 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-D): "Nou ik herken het wel, want ik heb het ook een keertje gedaan, buiten de zondag om, gewoon een keer op een doordeweekse dag. En ook met een heel klein groepje mensen. Dat vond ik eigenlijk ook de mooiste [viering] die ik toe nu toe heb meegemaakt. Dat is intens vooral. Dat je echt feest aan het vieren was op dat moment."

Among CRC interviewees, the question of group size was never raised for discussion.

Duration In general, RCL members were critical on the length of time required by celebrations, while CRC members were for the most part satisfied with the current practice. Some participants who opposed very long celebrations referred to their personal history and shared negative memories from their childhood:

R5.4 (male, 65+, CRC-B): [Lord's Supper] is a conscious choice every time, yes.

R5.5 (male, 20–39yr): Yeah, that's also how I experience it, because when I was—well, if I look back to when I was a lot younger—then the Lord's Supper was a service you didn't want to go to.

M: OK, right.

R5.5: Because it took long, and you hated that, having to sit still for so long. But when you're consciously thinking about it and make a conscious choice for it, you're sitting there totally differently. Then those services [are]... For me specifically those services are very nice and *don't* last long. Even though they may actually be long, you don't notice it. You're not thinking about it, you're thinking about altogether different things.¹³⁴

Similar childhood experiences were shared in RCL congregations, for example, as they related to the number of seatings: “Five, six, seven tables... [You just had to] sit still. Every time the bread was broken, every time again. Those times I as a child went grudgingly to church.”¹³⁵

4.5.2 Ambiance

The emotions “joy” and “thankfulness” were regularly mentioned as the first personal association with the term “Holy Supper.”¹³⁶ The Lord's Supper was generally perceived as something positive, although some partici-

¹³⁴R5.4: [*Avondmaal*] is steeds weer een bewuste keus, ja. /R5.5: Ja zo ervaar ik het ook, want toen ik—nou als ik even terugkijk naar toen ik echt nog een stuk jonger was—dan was het Avondmaal was juist een dienst waar je niet heen wou. /M: Oké, ja. /R5.5: Want dat duurde lang, en je vond het vervelend, lang stilzitten. Maar als je er bewust mee bezig gaat en er bewust voor kiest, dan zit je er zo anders. Dan [zijn] die diensten... Voor mij zijn dat juist fijne diensten die juist niet lang duren. Terwijl dat misschien wel [zo] is, maar daar heb je dan geen besef van. Je let daar niet op, je bent met hele andere dingen bezig.

¹³⁵R19.7 (male, 65+, RCL-F): “Vijf, zes, zeven tafels... Stilzitten. Elke keer weer dat brood breken, elke keer weer. Ik ging dan met tegenzin naar de kerk, als kind.”

¹³⁶On thankfulness, see §4.4.6.

pants also indicated that they could not sufficiently express their positive emotions during celebrations in words or recognize them in others. In such cases, the ambiance was experienced as being excessively modest or sober. Participants across both denominations particularly disliked the solemn faces of other participants during the celebration. One of them (RCL-E) once questioned a past minister about this some fifteen years ago. She still remembered his answer: the Lord's Supper is "a feast and funeral all in one."¹³⁷ This example illustrates a feeling shared also by some other participants (mostly CRC members), namely that the Lord's Supper is something that requires reverence. At the same time, a number of other participants interpreted the Lord's Supper as a "feast" or "party" (see §4.3.4). For some, the combination of solemnity and festivity led to conflicting feelings:

I myself come from the evangelical side, where it was a real celebration. Just up to the front, together, singing and praying for each other. So also that communion. [That communion] is also present here, but of course in a different way. Here it happens in all calm, you have more [opportunity for] reflection, but it's also like... such a depressing event sometimes, I feel. It makes me think: But this is no celebration!¹³⁸

Participants who reported something similar mentioned an "excessively holy" or "excessively individualistic" ambiance (see §4.2.2). Other interpretations that were shared included "rest" vs. "unrest" (caused by their children who remained seated in the pews), "custom or habit," and "peace."

4.5.3 Liturgy During the Celebration

In most interviews, there was no reflection on the liturgical role of the minister, elders, and/or deacons. Virtually all congregants assumed that it is a minister who must administer the sacrament. In some interviews, the role of elders and deacons was mentioned, albeit then without further discussion.

¹³⁷R16.2 (female, 20–39yr, RCL-E), as quoted in chapter 7, note 66. Interestingly, her current minister shared a similar metaphor in his interview (quoted in chapter 5, note 48 and chapter 7, note 65).

¹³⁸R13.1 (male, 20–39yr, RCL-D): "*Ik kom zelf uit de evangelische kant, daar werd het echt gevierd. Gewoon naar voren, met elkaar, met zang en gebed voor elkaar. Dus ook met gemeenschap. Dat is hier ook wel, maar natuurlijk anders. Het is hier wel in alle rust, heb je meer bezinning, maar het is ook een soort... zo'n triest gebeuren af en toe, voor mijn gevoel. Dat ik denk: het voelt niet als een feest.*"

The Role of the Minister With regard to the minister and his liturgical role, one participant voiced a sense of compassion:

I always feel sorry for the minister because he can't himself go to Lord's Supper in all peace. Ministers can never sit calmly at the Lord's Supper [table] and partake. I always feel very sorry for them. Well, sorry..., yeah, [sorry]! Ministers always have to administer the Lord's Supper.¹³⁹

On the other hand, congregants were also grateful when they received attention from their minister during a celebration (in the form of a personal remark or eye contact; see §4.5.1).

Sermon and Sacrament Some participants mentioned the sermon as an element affecting their experience of the sacrament. Sometimes the sermon proved helpful for experiencing the Lord's Supper in a "better" way (especially when congregants experienced a connection between the two), while in other cases the sermon could become a disturbing element. Moreover, some congregants appreciated a shorter sermon prior to the celebration, while others proposed skipping the sermon altogether (only in RCL congregations).

Prayer During the Celebration In the interviews, no references were made to the prayers included in the liturgical forms. In one congregation (CRC-A), members of one focus group proposed reciting the Lord's Prayer out loud instead of having the minister alone speak the words on behalf of the congregation. In other cases, participants reported praying during the celebrations, either for themselves or for others, that they might receive the boldness or confirmation needed to join in the celebration (CRC-A and C).

Reading of Liturgical Forms Most CRC participants did not debate the practice of reading a liturgical form prior to the administration of the sacrament, or contest their content. One CRC-B participant did state that one could also celebrate without the use of liturgical forms, while another person (CRC-A) was critical of the serious tone of the classical liturgical form:

Lord's Supper is no proof of [faith, JAGB], but a gift. And in that sense I still also find the form [for the celebration of the

¹³⁹R1.8 (female, 65+, CRC-A): "*Ik vind ik ook altijd zo zielig voor de dominee dat hij zelf nooit aan het Avondmaal rustig kan gaan. Dominees kunnen nooit aan het Avondmaal rustig zitten en deelnemen. Dat vind ik altijd heel zielig. Of zielig..., ja! Een dominee moet altijd het Avondmaal bedienen.*"

Lord's Supper] problematic. Yes, I think..., well I'm really not in favor of it at all. I think it's... If you just look at what Jesus said about it, and only that, I think it's...—what's a nice way of putting it?—pretty exaggerated. In what we in the end added to it, how we articulated it, it really is a very heavy text. To say after the comma, 'But luckily...' ¹⁴⁰ And that's when I think: this is where it actually begins for me. Right. And it's already a big improvement compared to... right, the text [has been] adjusted and made more comprehensible [than the 1971 revision, JAGB]. But there's still always that sense of 'Too bad...'. The Lord's Supper has become so charged, while I think: That is... It's not the core of the gospel. It just isn't. ¹⁴¹

Meanwhile, in the RCL interviews the reading of liturgical forms was a matter of debate in almost all focus groups. Some participants approved of this practice, while others opposed it and rather suggested the use of Bible texts or an explanation by the minister in his own words. One participant—who was raised in the Roman Catholic church—associated the reading of liturgical forms with intellectualism:

R20.3 (female, 40–64yr, RCL-F): Of course you end up in a church [the RCL, JAGB] where everything is set in stone from A to Z, know what I mean? That's also why I think: that form for the [celebration of the] Lord's Supper is just so long that literally every sentence... every... all... literally everything had to be nailed down and set in stone, imagine that! Yeah! And even then we're lucky to be in a church that is, well, pretty (...) ...that is pretty relaxed about these things, thankfully, because otherwise I would already have left long ago, I think. (...)

M (trying to interrupt): But...

R20.3 (continues): But OK. That's the intellectual [part]. *That*, I think, is what began to irritate me most. That we... account

¹⁴⁰See note 83 above.

¹⁴¹R3.2 (female, 20–39yr, CRC-A): "*Avondmaal is geen bewijs van [geloof, JAGB], maar een geschenk. En in die zin vind ik het formulier nog steeds ook moeilijk. Ja, ik vind..., ik sta er inderdaad niet helemaal achter. Ik vind het... Als je nou heel sec kijkt naar wat Jezus erover gezegd heeft, vind ik [het]...—hoe zeg je dat netjes?—erg uitvergroet. In wat we er uiteindelijk toch bij hebben gehaald, hoe we dat verwoord hebben, is het inderdaad een hele zware tekst. Om vervolgens na de komma te zeggen: 'Maar gelukkig...' En dan denk ik: ja, nu begint het voor mij pas. Ja. En dat is al een hele verbetering ten opzichte van... hè, de tekst [is] erop aangepast en begrijpelijker geworden [sinds de herziening in 1971, JAGB]. Maar toch altijd dat 'jammer' gevoel. Er is heel veel lading op dat Avondmaal gekomen, terwijl ik denk: Dat is... Het is niet de kern van het evangelie. Dat is het gewoon niet.*"

for everything—that we want to have even every comma nailed down. In forms...¹⁴²

Music and Singing During the Celebration Meditative music during the celebrations was appreciated by some participants across all congregations, with the exception of CRC-C, although there were also two participants (CRC-B) who expressed themselves negatively on the “funeral music” that was sometimes played in their church. A number of other congregants were especially fond of the singing that takes place during the administration when the Lord’s Supper is celebrated in ambulatory style (in the RCL congregations), although too much singing was rejected by a number of others (RCL-D and F). As a solution, two participants proposed the use of musical interludes:

R21.1 (female, 40–64yr, RCL-F): ...I don’t think you should be saying: “O, this is the only way, this is how you should always be doing it,” because you’ll notice that people..., well, after a while they want something different again. So I think: maybe it’s good to sing the one time, but maybe also one time [to have] piano playing in between. So you don’t have to sing.

R21.4 (male, 20–29yr): Yeah. Yeah. Just a musical interlude...

R21.1: Right. You know what? Sometimes... sometimes it’s a burden to be singing one song after the other for so long.¹⁴³

4.6 Personal Developments

Several participants reported personal developments in their experience of the Lord’s Supper.

¹⁴²R20.3: *Je komt natuurlijk in een kerk terecht [de GKv, JAGB] waar alles van voor tot achter dichtgetimmerd is, hè? Daarom denk ik ook: dat avondmaalsformulier dat is zo lang, dat ze werkelijk elk regeltje... elk... alles... werkelijk alles moest afgetimmerd en dichtgetimmerd worden, want stel je voor dat! Ja! En dan zitten we gelukkig nog in een gemeente die, nou, best wel (...) ...die er wel makkelijk mee omgaat, gelukkig, want anders was ik allang weggeweest, denk ik. (...) /M (probeert te interrumperen): Maar... /R20.3 (vervolgt): Dus maar goed. Dat is het verstandelijke. Dát is denk ik wat mij dan het meeste tegen is gaan staan. Dat we het... Het alles beredeneren—dat we alles tot achter de komma dichtgetimmerd willen hebben. Door formulieren...*

¹⁴³R21.1: *...ik denk niet dat je moet zeggen: “Oh, dit is de manier. Zo moet je het altijd doen,” want dan merk je dat mensen..., nou, na verloop van tijd willen ze wel weer eens iets anders. Dus denk ik: misschien is het goed de ene keer wel zingen, maar misschien ook een keer een stuk pianospel tussendoor. Dat je niet hoeft te zingen. /R21.4: Ja. Ja. Gewoon een muzikaal intermezzo... /R21.1: Ja. Maar weet je? Het is ook wel... soms belastend om zo lang achter elkaar te zingen.*

4.6.1 Accumulation of Meaning

During the interviews, various participants mentioned experiencing an accumulation of meaning for the Lord's Supper over the course of their lives (see §4.4.2). This experience was shared by participants from all age groups in congregations across both denominations. Reasons mentioned for the accumulation included numerous life experiences such as getting married or divorced, the birth of a child, seeing children or grandchildren growing up, the loss of a loved one, etc.

In the following quote, a participant explained how she in her situation discovered more of the Lord's Supper after growing older and celebrating it in different places:

Yeah, I think, like I was saying, it grows wider. The intention, the intensity... But when you're young, [you] don't understand and experience every aspect and... So like I was saying: first only that suffering, but later also the celebration, the commemoration, the promise, the communion... with all believers throughout the entire world. Yeah, we are of course... we've lived in different places. And everywhere you celebrate the Lord's Supper again and everywhere you meet believers again and everywhere you see people who do that same thing. So the unity of faith is something you experience more there. But that it becomes wider, yeah. I hope I'm explaining it well.¹⁴⁴

In some cases, these developments were also connected to concrete practices:

When our children still lived at home, it wasn't like it is now when just the two of us are home, on Sunday mornings you sit together, have breakfast and then you usually like pray together before you go to church and you pray about the Lord's Supper and that you may celebrate the Lord's Supper. And that's different when there's just the two of you, before you go to bed at night, when you're in your bed on Saturday night and are like: tomorrow it's Lord's Supper, we think about it together, sometimes even read a little from the form for the Lord's Supper. And when the children were young, we didn't

¹⁴⁴R2.7 (female, 40–64yr, CRC-A): “Ja, ik denk, wat ik net ook zei, dat het breder wordt. De intentie, de intensiteit... Maar dat als je jong bent, [je] nog niet alle aspecten doorziet en ervaart en... Dus wat ik al zei: eerst alleen dat lijden, maar later ook het vieren, het gedenken, de belofte, de gemeenschap... met alle gelovigen over heel de wereld. Ja, we zijn natuurlijk... op verschillende plaatsen hebben we gewoond. En overal vier je weer het Avondmaal en overal kom je weer gelovigen tegen en overal zie je weer mensen die datzelfde doen. Dus de eenheid in het geloof ervaar je daar ook meer. Maar dat het dus breder wordt, ja. Ik hoop dat ik het goed uitleg.”

do that, but now when there's just the two of us and you get older, you become more conscious [of it] and so it really changes.¹⁴⁵

Other reasons for a richer experience of the sacrament included faith experiences such as Bible reading, prayer, growing in knowledge of God during one's lifetime, etc. One woman in CRC-B reported:

Right, you do profession of faith and then you're allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper, and yeah, like R5.2 was saying, then out of custom, and like, yeah, you belong, so then, then you participate. But as your faith grows, and you experience all kinds of things in life and learn more about Jesus and God, by living very close to Him... and you also want to be led by his Spirit, God also reveals Himself increasingly to you. He shows who He is and so also the Lord's Supper becomes [a] more profound [experience]. At least, that's how it is for me.¹⁴⁶

It should be noted that not all elderly participants (65 years and older) recognized such a development in retrospect, while conversely some younger participants (20–39 years) also reported a deepening of their experiences over their short lives. Furthermore, other participants stated that their experiences in the celebration of the Holy Supper fluctuated: sometimes high and positive, sometimes low and negative. Some of them stated that there was no growth in their up-and-down experiences, while others insisted that the “wave” in their lives slowly evolved from mostly negative (or without meaning) to more positive (with greater meaning). The following is an example of this:

Well, I think's already been mentioned, kind of, I dare say that there's been change, yes, especially [in the sense of] people not

¹⁴⁵R4.1 (female, 65+, CRC-B): “Toen de kinderen nog in huis waren was het ook niet zoals nu als je dus met z'n tweeën in huis bent, ben je zondags 's morgens dan zit je met z'n beiden, ga je ontbijten en dan is het meestal van dan ga je samen bidden voor je naar de kerk gaat en dan bid je voor het avondmaal en dat je het avondmaal mag vieren. En dat is toch anders als je met z'n tweeën bent, je 's avonds voor je naar bed gaat, als je op bed ligt zaterdagavond, dat je zegt: we hebben morgen avondmaal, gaan we er even om denken met z'n tweeën, leest soms nog een stukje in het avondmaalsformulier. En toen we de kinderen klein hadden, toen deden we dat niet, maar nu als we dus met z'n tweeën zijn en je wordt ouder dan wordt het toch wat bewuster en dan is het toch anders.”

¹⁴⁶R5.3 (female, 65+, CRC-B): “Ja, je doet belijdenis en dan mag je deelnemen aan het Heilig Avondmaal, en ja, wat R5.2 dan ook zegt, dat je dan uit gewoonte en ja, je hoort erbij, dus dan, dan neem je daar deel aan. Maar goed, naarmate je geloof verdiept, en je maakt van alles mee in je leven en je leert Jezus steeds beter kennen en God, doordat je heel dicht bij Hem leeft... en je ook je wilt laten leiden door Zijn Geest, openbaart God zich ook steeds meer aan je. Laat Hij zien wie Hij is en daardoor verdiept het avondmaal zich ook. Tenminste, voor mij.”

just following along as much anymore, but on the other hand [the Lord's Supper is celebrated] with greater consciousness and joy. Because when the question a second ago was: "What are your key words?," it wasn't for no reason that I said: grace and gratitude, since it was that you're increasingly reflecting on it, at that moment, when you're celebrating it. So yes, I dare say I celebrate the Lord's Supper more consciously. And that too has its ups and down. So yes, it also resonates with my faith life, which also goes like that: up and down. The one time better than the other. But yeah, I dare say that it's a lot more consciously than twenty years ago.¹⁴⁷

4.6.2 Celebrating for the First Time

For some participants, celebrating the Lord's Supper for the first time was an experience that had great impact on them. Most frequently, congregants valued this celebration as positive, while some others reported a more or less negative experience. Some of these experiences happened more than sixty years ago, as was reported by someone in RCL-D:

M: Can you describe one occasion where the Lord's Supper celebration left its deepest impression on you?

(everyone reflects, 5 seconds of silence)

R13.6 (female, 65+, RCL-D): I think the first time after I did profession of faith... Yeah, I think so, that's a long time ago. So yeah.

M: How old were you then?

R13.6: I was twenty when I did profession, and by now that's more than sixty years ago. (...)

M: And that celebration, how was it to... Why did it leave such an impression?

R13.6: Because it was the first time you went, I thought you [pointing to R13.1] also mentioned something about that a second ago. Like: I'm allowed to participate.

¹⁴⁷R14.1 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-D): "Nou, ik denk dat het al een klein beetje ter sprake is geweest, ik durf toch wel te zeggen dat dat veranderd is, ja, vooral minder meedoen, maar wel wat meer bewuster en blijdschap hebben. Want net toen gevraagd werd: "Wat zijn je trefwoorden?" Toen zei ik ook niet voor niks: genade en dankbaarheid, omdat dat was dat je daar steeds meer bij stilstaat, op het moment, dat je aan het vieren bent. Dus ja, dat ik bewuster aan het Avondmaal vieren ben, durf ik wel te zeggen. En dat gaat ook met pieken en dalen. Dus ja, dat resonanceert ook wel in je geloofsleven, dat gaat ook een beetje zo: op en neer. De ene keer is het iets meer dan het andere. Maar ja, ik durf wel te zeggen dat het ten opzichte van twintig jaar terug een stuk bewuster is."

R13.1 (male, 20–39yr): Yes, yes, yes, finally.
 R13.6: Something like that.¹⁴⁸

In CRC-C, where greater emphasis is laid on the necessity of personal conversion before one joins the Lord's Supper celebrations, multiple participants reported in detail about their first celebration:

M: Can you describe a Lord's Supper celebration that left the deepest impression on you?

R7 (male, 20–39, CRC-C): Yes, still the first time, I think. (...) But at the time I was actually already convinced ahead of time that I was allowed to go. Because, right, [three years earlier] I had obtained certainty of my faith. But then time passes and at one point you start going to pre-confession class. And the moment comes ever closer and then you start to get pretty nervous. And then there's the calm. And, right, in the weeks leading up to it I begged God for a sign of life. And... well, I didn't get it then, know what I mean? You're left with empty hands. Then I got all kinds of clichés—or so I thought—like that you [first] have to end up empty-handed. But at the time I really experienced... those so-called clichés... for me at the time it suddenly really proved true. Because in that week, right, that Sunday kept coming closer and then it was there. And then you're still hoping, like, please let the minister preach about the passage that gave me such encouragement when I obtained certainty [of faith, JAGB], or... Well, of course that didn't happen, and then you hope that in the prayer he's going to say something that really touches you, or in the sermon, or... Well, then the first table... And, right. I don't know, it was like I experienced increasing calm in my heart. And then the second table and actually at that time I'd decided for myself: I'm just going to wait one more time; I just don't really know anymore. But then, at the third table, the minister spoke about that Mediator who descended so far down for us, measly sinners... and that He as it were extends His hand to us. He said: "Anyone who knows what I'm talking about, they just can't stay behind." Yeah, and at that moment I just didn't dare

¹⁴⁸M: *Kun je een Avondmaalsviering beschrijven die op jou het meest indruk heeft gemaakt? / (iedereen denk na, 5 sec. stilte) / R13.6 (female, 65+, RCL-D): Ik denk de eerste keer na mijn belijdenis... Denk ik dan, ja, dat is erg lang geleden. Dus ja. / M: Hoe oud was je toen? / R13.6: Ik was twintig toen ik belijdenis deed, en dat is dan nu, meer dan zestig jaar geleden. (...) / M: En hoe was het om aan die viering... Waarom was het zo indrukwekkend? / R13.6: Omdat je dan voor het eerst gaat, ik dacht dat jij [wijst naar R13.1] daar zonet ook iets over zei. Zo van: ik mag meedoen. / R13.1 (male, 20–39yr): Ja ja ja, eindelijk. / R13.6: Zoiets.*

to say that I didn't know what he was talking about. (...) All that came up again, and then I was like: I just can't stay behind. If I do, I'll be denying Him. Actually denying Him.¹⁴⁹

Nevertheless, in some other cases the first celebration also ended up evoking feelings of disappointment, as reported by a participant in CRC-A, for example:

R3.2 (female, 20–39yr, CRC-A): I was thinking: is this it? But I also wasn't very sure..., it [was] very weird.

R3.5 (male, 65+): Towering expectations?

R3.2: No, I was seventeen, I think. I wanted to do profession from the time I was fifteen. And at the time that was just too young and (...) as of my sixteenth [birthday] I was allowed to go to pre-confession class. And then you've been looking forward to it for so long and you turn it into this big thing, and then you've suddenly got to start thinking about preparation, whatever. So I thought in the end I didn't really know what I was supposed to do. I just kind of let it happen, because I thought: "O, now I'm supposed to get this special feeling, and the Spirit is going to work in me." I had all kinds of ideas about that. I seem to recall I was really disappointed. Too high expectations. (...) Yeah, that first time I thought: now something is supposed [to happen], but nothing did.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹M: *Kun je misschien ook een avondmaalsviering omschrijven die op jou het meeste indruk heeft gemaakt? /R7: Ja, dat zal nog wel de eerste zijn, denk ik. (...) Maar ja, ik was toen eigenlijk al van tevoren van overtuigd dat ik aan mocht gaan. Want, ja, [drie jaar voor dat moment] heb ik zekerheid om mijn geloof mogen ontvangen. Maar daar gaat dan een periode overheen en dan ga je op een gegeven moment belijdeniscatechisatie volgen. En dan komt dat moment steeds dichterbij en dan wordt je toch best wel zenuwachtig. En dan wordt het stil. En, ja, ik heb toen echt in die weken daarvoor ook God gesmeekt om een teken van leven. En... ja, dat kwam toen niet, weet je wel? Dan sta je toch ook wel met lege handen. Ik hoorde vervolgens natuurlijk clichés—dacht ik—over dat je inderdaad ook met lege handen moet komen te staan. Maar toen heb ik heel erg ervaren van... die zogenaamde clichés... dat bleek toen voor mij in één keer heel erg waar. Want in die week, ja, die zondag kwam steeds dichterbij en die zondag brak aan. En dan hoop je nog, nou laat die dominee preken over de tekst die mij toen ik tot zekerheid kwam [in het geloof, JAGB] zo bemoedigd heeft, of... Nou, dat gebeurt dan natuurlijk niet, en dan hoop je dat hij in het gebed dan wat zegt wat je heel erg raakt of in de preek nog, of... Mjah, toen kwam de eerste tafel... En, ja. Ik weet niet, het werd wel steeds stiller in mijn hart of zo. En toen kwam die tweede tafel en eigenlijk had ik toen al voor mijzelf besloten van: ik wacht gewoon nog een keer. Ik weet het gewoon niet meer. Maar toen, bij die derde tafel, toen had de dominee het over die Middelaar die zo diep neergedaald is voor ons, nietige zondaren... en dat Hij als het ware ons zo de hand reikt. Hij zei: "wie daar iets van kent, die kan niet achterblijven." Ja, en ik durfde op dat moment ook gewoon niet te zeggen dat ik er niet iets van kende. (...) Dat kwam allemaal weer boven en toen dacht ik, ik mag gewoon niet achterblijven. Als ik dat doe, dan verloochen je Hem. Verloochen je Hem eigenlijk ook.*

¹⁵⁰R3.2: *Dat ik dacht: is dit het? Maar ik wist ook niet zo goed..., dat [was] heel gek.*

Several other participants across both denominations called their first celebration stressful, for instance because they were afraid of spilling wine or did not know what exactly to do. Aside from this, a number of congregants indicated finding it encouraging to see new participants joining the Lord's Table for the first time:

Because your [M] question, specifically: "Which one impacted you most?", for me it was specifically the time we were in [name of building], together with that whole group of young people—how many were there then? Eight, nine at the same time? To do profession of faith and to celebrate the Lord's Supper together, well... for me it really was like one big party! So awesome! You know, that experience: All of us here..., with the young people who have also come to realize: 'We've been saved, through Jesus'—beautiful! That really left an impression on me.¹⁵¹

4.6.3 "When Everything Goes Differently"

In several focus groups, participants shared experiences of celebrating the Lord's Supper outside their own congregation. A wide range of experiences was shared, among them the celebration of the Lord's Supper in other churches during vacation or family visits, in the Netherlands or abroad. Usually, these celebrations were organized by a church and held in a church building.

Most frequent mention was made of celebrations *abroad* (small-scale and/or standing in a circle). A number of participants also mentioned celebrations with friends at home or on vacation (see §4.2.1). Lastly, some participants reported having celebrated the sacrament in special places (e.g. in the Holy Land) or at special moments (shortly before or after the death of a loved one or minister).

/R3.5: *Hoge verwachtingen.* /R3.2: *Nee, ik was zeventien, geloof ik. Ik wilde al vanaf mijn vijftiende belijdenis doen. En dat was toen net te jong en (...) vanaf m'n zestiende mocht ik op belijdeniscatechisatie. En dan kijk je er zo lang naar uit en dan stel je er heel wat bij voor en dan moet je ineens nadenken over voorbereiding, wist ik veel. Dat ik dacht dat ik uiteindelijk niet zo goed wist wat ik ermee moest. Ik heb het een beetje over mij heen laten komen, want ik dacht: "O, nu moet ik een bepaald gevoel erbij hebben, en de Geest gaat dan in mij werken." Ik had daar allerlei ideeën over. Volgens mij viel me dat heel erg tegen. Te hoge verwachtingen. (...) Ja, die eerste keer dacht ik: nu moet er wat [gebeuren], maar toen gebeurde niks.*

¹⁵¹R19.1 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-F): "Want die vraag van jou [M], specifiek dan: "Welke heeft dan indruk gemaakt?", dan vond ik juist die keer dat we in [naam gebouw] zaten, met die hele club jeugd—hoeveel waren het er? Acht, negen tegelijk? Belijdenis doen en dan ook met z'n allen avondmaal vieren, nou... dat was voor mij echt een topfeestje! Zo gaaf! Echt die beleving van: We gaan hier met z'n allen..., met die jeugd die ook beseft: "Wij zijn ook gered, door Jezus," nou, zo mooi! Dát heeft indruk gemaakt."

In some cases, inspiration from abroad led to alienation from practices back home in the Netherlands. This happened in the case of one person who in conversation with us compared the Dutch celebration styles with other Reformed churches in the southern hemisphere:

Because we've lived in a lot of different places, well then... here [in The Netherlands, JAGB] I find it a pretty cold affair. (...) There's no emotion, no [sense of] unity: I more or less just go for my own sake. Yeah, I find it... I find it very cold. And everyone is looking so solemn...¹⁵²

4.6.4 Influence of External Events

Interestingly, personal developments regularly coincided with external events in a person's life, or in the life of the congregation. Examples included the suffering or sudden death of others, the birth of a child, raising a child with disabilities, the adoption of grandchildren, and natural disasters (like the North Sea flood of 1953). In almost all of these cases, participants indicated either directly or indirectly that these events in the end had a positive effect on their experience of the sacrament. In general, these events contributed to an accumulation of meaning (see §4.6.1), as was true, for example, in CRC-A:

For me personally: my husband has passed away, and it was on a Tuesday that I buried him and on Sunday it was Lord's Supper. It still gets me. I've never experienced it as intensely as I did then [becomes emotional].¹⁵³

In another case, a participant told us about the process following the birth of his son that radically changed his view on the Lord's Supper:

R21.2 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-F): My experience of the Lord's Supper has certainly changed, yes. And if I were to trace things through the entire course of my life, it actually proves to run parallel to... the degree to which I once knew God, later came to know Him? There's been development there. We have a son who is... handicapped.

¹⁵²R20.5 (female, 40–64yr, RCL-F): “*Omdat we op heel veel plaatsen gewoond hebben, dan ja... vind ik het hier [in the Netherlands, JAGB] wat kil. (...) Er is geen gevoel, geen eenheid: ik ga eigenlijk bijna voor mezelf. Ja, ik vind het... ik vind het heel kil. En iedereen strak zo kijken...*” When questioned about the positive characteristics of Reformed celebrations in other parts of the world, this woman mentioned that the ambiance during the administration of the Lord's Supper is “less solemn” (*minder geladen*).

¹⁵³R1.6 (female, 40–64yr, CRC-A): “*Voor mij persoonlijk: mijn man is overleden en ik heb hem dinsdags begraven en zondags was het avondmaal. Het raakt me nog steeds wel. Ik heb het nog nooit zo intens beleefd als toen [wordt emotioneel].*”

M: Right.

R21.2: And like I always say: my son was the one who taught me who God is.

M: OK. Right.

R21.2: He is now [age] years old, so from that time I've experienced everything differently. In the past it was about knowledge. A lot of knowledge. And now it is... now knowledge isn't really that important anymore. Because I know who God is. He walks with us. And that's a feeling that stays with me everywhere, also at the Lord's Supper.¹⁵⁴

Nevertheless, there were also congregants who reported negative effects from external events happening in their lives, such as family quarrels or the divorce of a close relative.¹⁵⁵

4.6.5 Spiritual Developments

Personal development of the experience of the Lord's Supper coincided relatively often with a variety of personal spiritual developments; multiple congregants thus reported an increased understanding of the significance of grace. One CRC member said the following:

R2.8 (female, 20–39yr, CRC-A): O right, experience... Yes, I think it's become more intense and... especially [that aspect about living] out of grace. About the amount of grace God is showing humankind and me...

M: Uh-huh.

R2.8: That we... Yes, it really hits me then.

M: OK.

R2.8: And especially in thankfulness.

M: Right, exactly. You've started experiencing that more in-

¹⁵⁴R21.2: *Mijn beleving van het Avondmaal is zeker wel veranderd. En als ik dat zeg maar in mijn hele leven nog eens op een rijtje zet, dan loopt dat eigenlijk parallel met... in hoeverre heb ik God vroeger gekend in hoeverre ken ik Hem later? Dat is een ontwikkeling geweest. We hebben een... gehandicapte zoon. /M: Ja. /R21.2: En ik zeg altijd: mijn zoon heeft mij geleerd wie God is. /M: Oké. Ja. /R21.2: Hij is nou [leeftijd] jaar, dus vanaf die tijd beleef ik alles anders. Vroeger was het kennis. Heel veel kennis. En nu is het... is kennis niet meer belangrijk. Want ik weet wie God is. Hij gaat met ons mee. En dat gevoel dat neem ik overal in mee, ook in het Avondmaal.* Before sharing this, R21.2 had told us in the same interview that “friendship with Jesus” was his primary motivation for participating in the Lord's Supper: “If you know someone..., you want to be there [with them]. And if you love someone, that [feeling] becomes much more powerful” (fully quoted in note 32 above).

¹⁵⁵E.g. note 94 above.

tensely the last few years?

R2.8: Yes. Yes. That aspect of grace... and salvation. Yes.¹⁵⁶

Similar developments were also experienced by RCL members. Some spoke specifically about a development from a more “cognitive” experience of faith to a more emotionally experienced faith. Someone from RCL-E said:

M: So [first name 16.5], are there things about which you would say: if I look back on my own life...?

R16.5 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-E): Yeah, I know those ups and down [16.1] was talking about.¹⁵⁷

R16.1 (female, 40–64yr): [laughs out loud]

R16.5: (continues): But that’s actually true for the last twenty years or so. Before then, if I look back to the time I [did] profession, I just think back to the moment we were just talking about—the poor preparation, like—well, so for me... yes, forty years ago... Right, on the road to profession, to Lord’s Supper: right, like we were saying: you had to memorize, you had to have knowledge, but asking personal questions like we do now, like: “Hey, what’s your experience like?”—we never did that. (...) If you could just answer the questions and answers [from the Heidelberg Catechism, JAGB], it was good enough. And then you were allowed to do profession. So the first few years I went to Lord’s Supper, I can’t really say I really did so consciously. And from then on, you of course in the course...—like I already said—when you get married, you of course begin to think somewhat differently compared to when you’re 18, then you more consciously..., and then it remains like a wave [of ups-and-down], like.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶R2.8: *Oh ja, beleving... Ja, ik denk wel dat die intenser is geworden en... vooral het uit genade. Het stukje, dat God zoveel genade heeft met de mensen en met mij... /M: [humt] /R2.8: Dat we... Ja, dat komt wel heel erg binnen. /M: Oké. /R2.8: En dan vooral in dankbaarheid. /M: Ja, precies. Ja. Dat ben je de laatste jaren meer gaan ervaren? /R2.8: Ja. Ja. Dat genade-aspect... en de verlossing. Ja.*

¹⁵⁷See the fluctuating experiences as reported in §4.6.1.

¹⁵⁸M: *[Voornaam R16.5], heb jij nog dingen waarvan je zegt: als ik terugkijk in m’n eigen leven...? /R16.5 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-E): Ja, ik herken heel erg dat golfje van [R16.1]. /R16.1 (female, 40–64yr): [lacht hardop] /R16.5 (vervolgt): Maar dat is eigenlijk de laatste twintig jaar, zoiets. Daarvoor, als ik kijk naar het moment dat ik belijdenis [deed], dan kijk ik gewoon terug naar het moment waar we het net over hadden—de slechte voorbereiding, zeg maar—nou, voor mij dus... ja, veertig jaar geleden... Ja, naar de belijdenis toe, naar het avondmaal toe: ja, wat we net al gezegd hebben: je moest je rijtjes leren, je moest je kennis hebben, maar echt persoonlijk doorvragen, zoals we nu eens even met elkaar praten, van: ‘Hè, hoe beleef jij dat?’ Dat kwam toen nooit aan de orde. (...) Als je de vraag en antwoorden [uit de Heidelbergse Catechismus, JAGB] maar kon beantwoorden, dan was het goed. En dan mocht je belijdenis doen. De eerste jaren dat ik dus aan het*

Some congregants across both denominations explicitly suggested a correlation between an accumulation of life experience and a richer experience of the sacrament (see §4.6.1). But also in case of a younger participant who had only recently joined the celebrations, there was a coherence between different potential “moods of faith” and the actual experience of the Lord’s Supper:

R19.2 (female, 20–39yr, RCL-F): Yes, I think... Yes, I didn’t really join in the celebration until all that long, since it was a year ago, I think, that I did profession... But I also recognize what people were saying about how things are turning in your head, how intense the experience is. It’s... Sometimes you’re so thankful: “O, I’m so happy my sins have been forgiven, and glad that there still is a future in this wretched world,” you know, and at another moment you are... your mood is different, like, so it varies a bit.

M: Right, exactly. It depends on what’s going on in your mind at that moment, whether you...

R19.2: Are more on the side of misery or more the gratitude side, more the profession side.

M: Right, exactly.

R19.2: And well, as a child... I saw everyone walking down, but at the time you’re not really consciously occupied with it. So yes, the last few years it has become more intense for me.¹⁵⁹

4.6.6 No Substantial Developments

Lastly, there were also participants across all congregations who reported no specific developments in their personal lives with regard to their experience of the Lord’s Supper. One person in CRC-B stated:

avondmaal ging, kan ik niet zo zeggen dat ik dat zo heel erg bewust gedaan heb. En vanaf dat moment, ging het wel natuurlijk in de loop van...—dat zei ik op gegeven moment al—als je dan gaat trouwen, dan gaan je gedachten nog eens wat anders dan wanneer je 18 bent, dan ga je wel bewust..., en dan blijft het een golfje, zeg maar.

¹⁵⁹R19.2: *Ja, ik vind... Ja, echt meevieren doe ik nog niet heel lang, omdat ik een jaar geleden, denk ik, belijdenis heb gedaan... Maar ik herken me wel in ook hoe je zelf bezig bent in je hoofd met dingen, hoe intens je iets beleeft. Het is... Soms ben je zo ontzettend dankbaar van: “Oh, ik ben zo blij dat mijn zonden vergeven zijn, en zo blij dat er nog een toekomst is in deze ellendige wereld,” weet je wel, en op het andere moment ben je... zit je weer in een andere mood, zeg maar, dus het is een beetje wisselend. /M: Ja, precies. Het hangt er vanaf wat je op dat moment aan je hoofd hebt, of je... /R19.2: Juist meer aan die ellendige kant zit of meer aan die dankbaarheidskant, meer naar die belijdeniskant. /M: Ja, precies. /R19.2: En ja, als kind... zag ik iedereen altijd wel lopen, maar dan denk je daar ook niet heel, heel bewust bij na. Dus ja, de laatste jaren is het voor mij wel intenser geworden.*

I like the way you put it, because I myself, I think that I, when I did profession, that those first couple of times, they were really special. But later on it kind of drops off. At least, that's how I think it was for me. And actually I also have very few high or low points when it comes to the Lord's Supper. It's been pretty level. Actually, that is still how it is now... That tension, I guess you could say, is kind of gone. The tension at the start. But, it's kind of just like..., it's kind of become more level. That's actually how it's been my whole life. Just level. Yes.¹⁶⁰

4.7 Personal Desires

When asked about “personal desires” for their experience of the Lord's Supper, participants mentioned a number of things that in their mind would help foster their experience of the sacrament. What participants mentioned most often was their desire for a different style for the celebration of the sacrament. Since the desires and arguments for specific styles have already been discussed elsewhere (see §4.5.1), they will not be listed here again. The other desires mentioned can be grouped under three themes: satisfaction, “more festive celebrations,” and celebration in the hereafter (“eschatological desire”).

4.7.1 Satisfied

Multiple interviewees reported being satisfied with their current experience of the Lord's Supper. Remarkably, this experience was commonly reported by CRC participants, as in CRC-C:

I'm really happy, the way we celebrate and also experience the Lord's Supper in our church here. And the way...—yes, I'm actually 100% happy with it. And so I also see it as a highlight, not something that just happens automatically. There's also a deeply rooted desire, one I've always had, when the Lord's Supper is administered, then I always pray: 'LORD, wouldst Thou grant many more the boldness to witness to Thee. So

¹⁶⁰R5.4 (male, 65+, CRC-B): “Ik vind het wel mooi dat je het zo zegt, want ik heb bij mezelf, denk ik dat ik, toen ik belijdenis deed, dat die eerste paar keer, die waren heel bijzonder. Maar later vervlakt dat toch wat. Tenminste, vind ik eigenlijk bij mezelf wel. En ik moet ook zeggen, ik heb ook weinig hoogtepunten en dieptepunten voor het avondmaal. Het is vrij gelijkmatig allemaal. Dat is eigenlijk nog zo wel... De spanning is er, zou je bijna zeggen, een beetje af. De spanning van het begin. Maar, het is wel gewoon..., het is wat egalier geworden. Dat heb ik eigenlijk mijn hele leven gehad. Gewoon egaal. Ja.”

that they too may proclaim Thy death, because Thine is the glory. Thou hast done it.' Yes.¹⁶¹

For some CRC members, this satisfaction was to some degree tied to the style of celebration. For others, their satisfaction was explicitly connected to other feelings like joy or solemnity. One such example comes from CRC-B:

R5.4 (male, 65+, CRC-B): Well, the way it happens here, I think it's very practical and I'm actually just fine with it, the way things are going.

M: Hm, OK.

R5.4: It's, it really is a solemn moment, it always is, as it indeed should be.

R5.3 (female, 65+): Yes. M: Right, OK. R5.4: I'm happy with the way things are now, yes.¹⁶²

4.7.2 A More Festive Celebration

Others expressed a longing for a more festive celebration of the sacrament (see §4.3.4). This desire was predominantly found in the RCL congregations, as well as CRC-B, although it was also mentioned incidentally in CRC-A and C. An example is the following conversation:

R1.4 (male, 40–64yr, CRC-A): Yes, but I do think: there should be more joy at Lord's Supper. But maybe it's a question that will come up later on...

M: No, yes, well, you can just ask it now already, but...

R1.4: Well, I'm just being honest..., my experience at Lord's Supper, yeah, is very solemn, serious faces. And of course it's serious; I'm not saying it's not. But sometimes I just don't see any smiles, on the people, their joy.

R1.1 (female, 20–39yr): [mumbles incomprehensibly]

R1.2 (female, 65+): I'm always bawling with joy.

R1.4: No, but that's a beautiful thing, but I just mean...

¹⁶¹R12 (male, 65+, CRC-C): *"Ik ben heel blij, de manier waarop wij hier in onze gemeente het Avondmaal vieren en beleven ook. En zoals dat...—jawel, daar ben ik echt van honderd procent blij mee. En ook zie ik dus dat het een hoogtepunt is, het is niet een automatisme. En er is een hartelijke wens ook en dat heb ik altijd gehad, als er een Avondmaalsbediening is, dat ik dan altijd bid: 'Heere, geeft U nog veel mensen de vrijmoedigheid om te getuigen van U. Opdat zij ook Uw dood mogen verkondigen, want U komt de eer toe. U hebt het gedaan.' Ja."*

¹⁶²R5.4: *Nou, zoals dat je hier reilt en zeilt, denk ik dat het heel praktisch is en ik vind het eigenlijk heel goed, zoals het gaat. /M: Hm, oké. /R5.4: Het is een, toch wel een plechtig moment, dat is het altijd, maar dat mag ook wel. /R5.3: Ja. /M: Ja, oké. /R5.4: Ik ben zo tevrede, ja.*

R1.2: I'm not kidding, but... [incomprehensible]

R1.4: I sometimes see people sitting there with such serious faces, and...

R1.2: [keeps on going while R1.4 is talking] ...of joy, it's not laughter.¹⁶³

This conversation illustrates that happiness or joy may not simply be understood to come to expression in a cheerful face, but may also be connected to other expressions like weeping. Regardless of whether or not this weeping is visible, this example shows that the interpretation of emotions is rather difficult and may require explanation during or after the celebration. In RCL-D, one of the participants told of his quest for a more joyous celebration, especially when it took place seated at a table:

R15.2 (male, 20–39yr, RCL-D): But... my impression is that our primary concern still is the remembrance of [his] suffering and death, and [there's] hardly any celebration of the grace we receive at the table. And it's something you could, for example, do with a hymn afterwards... either a song of praise or a song of thanksgiving.

M: Right.

R15.2: But it's something I hardly see during the celebration. The more I go to the table, the more it irritates me. Because I think, like: what can we change, so that we can sit at the table with greater joy? And when I sometimes crack a joke with the person sitting next to me, then... sometimes that person may even smile about it, but I see others looking very annoyed, like: you shouldn't be joking at the Lord's Supper table! Maybe it's not a smart thing to do. But it's one of the things I do to... make things a little more upbeat at the table.

M: Uh-huh, OK.

R15.2: My sense is that people my age feel a need for that.

M: That things become more upbeat?

R15.2: To celebrate more. To see it more as a celebration.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³R1.4: *Ja, ik vind wel: er zou meer blijmoedigheid moeten zijn aan het Avondmaal. Maar dat is misschien ook nog wel een vraag die komt...* /M: *Nee, ja, goed, je mag het nu gewoon aan de orde stellen, maar...* /R1.4: *Nou, dat is gewoon puur..., wat ik beleef aan het Avondmaal, ja, hele strakke, serieuze gezichten. En het is ook serieus; ik zeg niet dat het niet serieus is, hoor. Maar soms zie ik de glimlach niet, van de mensen, de blijdschap.* /R1.1: [zegt iets onverstaanbaars tussendoor] /R1.2: *Ik jank van blijdschap, altijd.* /R1.4: *Nee, maar dat is ook mooi, maar ik bedoel maar...* /R1.2: *Echt hoor, maar...* [onverstaanbaar] /R1.4: *Ik zie wel eens mensen die zitten heel serieus, en...* /R1.2: [praat door R1.4 heen, onverstaanbaar] ...van blijdschap, het is niet lachen.

¹⁶⁴R15.2: *Maar... ik heb het idee dat wij nog heel erg zitten in het gedenken van het lijden en sterven en heel weinig in het vieren van de genade die wij daar aan tafel krijgen. En dat kun je soms bijvoorbeeld door een lied dat we achteraf zingen... of dat dat meer een loflied*

When addressing practical suggestions for improvement, this same participant and another group member proposed organizing a supper with the whole congregation right after the service, decorating the sanctuary with garlands (“Because what we’re celebrating today is that we can live out of grace”),¹⁶⁵ and putting flowers on the communion tables. In CRC-B, someone suggested that singing more praise hymns (*Opwekking*) helps her to experience greater happiness during the celebrations:

There’s a little more *Opwekking* and it does make me a little more upbeat than those old Psalms and hymns and... in my experience, it does change things a little.¹⁶⁶

4.7.3 A Less “Individualistic” Style

One participant in RCL-E stated that making personal contact during the administration could help to make the Lord’s Supper a less individualistic experience, regardless of the chosen style of celebration:

R16.3 (male, 20–39yr, RCL-E): ...if I look at the question, like: “How would you want to celebrate the Lord’s Supper?”, then I think for me it’s especially important—like I already said—that there be something in there that makes it less individual. M: OK, less than now, at this moment?

R16.3: Well, the moment you [receive] that piece of bread and the wine, and you sit down again, or it gets passed around, then it’s really very individual. But if someone were to say, “The body of Christ,” or if you wish each other the peace of Christ, then it feels more like you’re celebrating together. For me, I think, that’s the most important thing, that some ele-

is of een danklied. /M: Ja. /R15.2: Maar tijdens de viering vind ik dat nog heel weinig naar voren komen. Dat begint me, hoe vaker ik aan tafel zit, begint me dat meer tegen te staan. Omdat ik denk: hoe krijgen we hier nou eens een verandering in dat we een keer vrolijk met elkaar aan tafel gaan zitten? En als ik dan een keer een grapje maak tegen de persoon die naast me zit, dan... kan die persoon er soms zelf wel om glimlachen, maar zie ik andere mensen heel erg geërgerd kijken van: een grapje maken aan de Avondmaaltafel, dat doe je toch niet? Misschien ook niet handig om te doen. Maar dat is één van mijn manieren om te proberen om het... iets vrolijker te maken aan tafel. /M: [humt] Oké. /R15.2: Ik merk daar, daar bij mijn leeftijdsgenoten dat daar behoefte aan is. /M: Om het meer vrolijk te maken? /R15.2: Om meer te vieren. Om het meer te zien als een feest. This quote contains not just an argument for more exuberance, but perhaps also for a more informal celebration. I will reflect more on this in §7.3 below.

¹⁶⁵R15.2 (male, 20–39yr): *Want we vieren vandaag dat we van genade mogen leven.*

¹⁶⁶R4.2 (female, 20–39yr, CRC-B): *“Het is wat meer Opwekking en ik word daar toch wat vrolijker van dan die oude psalmen en gezangen en... in mijn beleving wordt het daar wel anders van.”*

ment like that be included. And then it doesn't matter whether it's in the pews or ambulatory, because any style will work.¹⁶⁷

Another participant, in CRC-B, mentioned a celebration where people were standing in a circle, passing bread and wine from one person to the next, accompanied by eye contact, as a positive example of mutual communion:

Well, I've celebrated Lord's Supper a few times in France and there they do it in a special way. They stand in a circle, and as participant you offer the person next to you a piece of bread and look them in the eyes. I kind of like that. (...) Right, it makes you very involved, you know?¹⁶⁸

Role of Children in the Celebrations Some parents or primary school teachers advocated a larger role or more attention for children when the Lord's Supper is celebrated in their church (CRC-B, RCL-D, E, and F), although they found it hard to offer a clear solution. In their view, young children were largely being ignored during the celebrations. At the same time, they found it hard to motivate adolescents who had not yet made a public profession of their faith to go to church, especially when the Lord's Supper was being celebrated. One woman (RCL-F) recalled a situation in her own family:

Well, I remember the time came when our children started saying: It's Lord's Supper? O, we're not going then. Well, there's just nothing I can do. I was thinking: I actually get it. Yes. Everyone has times like that when they're teenagers. Then they're like: Well...¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷R16.3: *...als ik dan naar de vraag kijk van: hoe zou je het Heilig Avondmaal willen vieren, is voor mij denk ik vooral belangrijk—wat ik eerder al zei—dat er ergens een element in zit dat het minder een individuele gebeurtenis is. /M: Oké, minder dan nu, op dit moment? /R16.3: Nou ja, op het moment dat je je stukje brood en je wijn [krijgt], en weer gaat zitten, of het komt langs, dan is het echt heel individueel. Maar op het moment dat er op een bepaald moment wordt gezegd: “Dit is het lichaam van Christus,” of je wenst elkaar de vrede van Christus, dan heb je meer het idee dat je het gezamenlijk viert. Dat is voor mij, denk ik, het belangrijkste, dat er zo iets ergens inzit. En dan maakt het niet uit of het zittend is of gaand, want dat kan altijd op één of andere manier wel.*

¹⁶⁸R6.2 (female, 65+, CRC-B): *“Nou, ik heb in Frankrijk een paar keer Avondmaal gevierd en daar doen ze het in een speciale manier, hè? Staan ze in een kring, en dan geef je als deelnemer een stukje brood aan je buurman en dan kijk je hem daar ook bij aan. Dat vind ik ook wel wat hebben. (...) Hè, dan ben je ook heel erg betrokken, hè?”* See also §4.2.1.

¹⁶⁹R21.1 (female, 40–64yr, RCL-F): *“Nou, ik weet wel dat onze kinderen op een gegeven moment zeiden: het is Avondmaal? Oh, dan gaan we niet mee. Nou, daar kan ik echt helemaal niks meer mee. Ik dacht: ja, ik snap het ook nog wel. Ja. Iedereen maakt zulke periodes mee als ze puber zijn. Dan hebben ze zo iets van: nou...”*

The inclusion of children—regardless of whether or not they actually receive bread and wine—may be related to the style of celebration used. In all congregations studied, the children present¹⁷⁰ remained seated while the communicants walked up to the front (for ambulatory celebrations, or when seated at a table), or else were simply skipped when the bread and wine was distributed through the rows (in case of celebrations seated in the pews):

R4.6 (female, 40–64yr, CRC-B): Maybe it's also because, at least, that's my sense, that you're sometimes doing it more for yourself.

R4.2 (female, 20–39yr): Right.

R4.6: Because, for example, you..., well, our children, at least with us the children no longer go to, at least only the youngest only goes to the children's service, but the cup, like, passes right before their nose. (...) And the plates too, they get... They are literally not allowed to participate.¹⁷¹

In two other congregations as well (RCL-D and E), participants stressed the need for a more inclusive style of celebration with regard to the children. In other congregations, the role of children during the celebrations was not discussed during the focus groups or individual interviews (CRC-A and C). In RCL-D the admission of children to the Lord's table was mentioned by two participants as something that needed to be considered in the near future (see §4.2.1 and §4.4.4).

4.7.4 A Common Meal

Some participants expressed their desire for a more embodied experience and argued for greater exuberance during celebrations (possibly in combination with a common meal) or a celebration at home in small groups in order to do greater justice to the meal character of the Lord's Supper.¹⁷² One of the participants (RCL-E) said:

If I think back to the Last Supper, how you just read there that Jesus broke the bread and had the meal... It's not just one sip,

¹⁷⁰The previous chapter noted that in some cases the younger children were absent from the sanctuary during the celebration of the sacrament, leading to the question of when and how they are involved in what happens in the liturgy and the Lord's Supper in particular.

¹⁷¹R4.6: *Misschien komt het ook, tenminste, dat gevoel heb ik dan ook wel, dat je het soms meer alleen voor jezelf doet.* /R4.2: *Ja.* /R4.6: *Omdat je bijvoorbeeld..., nou wij hebben de kinderen, de kinderen gaan bij ons niet meer naar, tenminste alleen de jongste gaat alleen nog naar de kindernevendienst, maar, die beker gaat echt zo voor ze langs hè? (...)* *En die borden ook, van, die worden zo... Letterlijk mogen ze niet meedoen.*

¹⁷²The desire for a more embodied experience may correlate with the desire to experience greater "mutual communion" (§4.2.1) and a less individualistic style of celebration (§4.7.3).

it's not just one piece. There were bigger pieces of bread and more wine than that one sip.¹⁷³

The participants concerned usually referred to New Testament passages to support their views, although some also drew a comparison with the annual Passover meal in the Old Testament. One other participant (RCL-D) saw a substantive coherence with daily meals at home:

...when we eat and drink at home, it's not a bad idea to think of what Jesus has done for you. And I think that most of us, when we eat, read a passage from the Bible and pray and give thanks. At that moment you also reflect on how Jesus is the one who died for your sins. And that way you integrate the Lord's Supper you celebrate in church also into your personal life.¹⁷⁴

It is significant to note that the wish to celebrate the Lord's Supper as part of, or in combination with, a common meal was mentioned frequently in RCL congregations, but almost never in CRC congregations.

4.7.5 Eschatological Desire

Some participants across all age groups expressed a sense of longing for celebrating the Lord's Supper in the hereafter:

The Lord's Supper, right, what I'm always thinking of then, is the Lord's Supper, you know, like, as I think [R2.5] was just saying, like: the wedding feast of the Lamb, the Lord's Supper we will one day celebrate in heaven.¹⁷⁵

This desire was mentioned most often by CRC members, although it also came up once in RCL-D and F. That celebration was typically identified as being "without defects, flawless, and perfect." Sometimes this particular desire reminded participants of loved ones who had passed away:

¹⁷³R16.5 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-E): "*Als ik terugdenk aan het Laatste Avondmaal, dat je daar gewoon leest dat Jezus het brood brak en de maaltijd genoot... Dat is niet één slokje, dat is niet één brokje. Dat waren grotere stukken brood en meer wijn dan dat ene slokje.*"

¹⁷⁴R14.2 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-D): "*...als we thuis eten en drinken, dan is het ook niet verkeerd om te denken aan wat Jezus voor je gedaan heeft. En ik denk dat de meesten van ons gewoon bij het eten een stukje uit de Bijbel lezen en bidden en danken. Dan sta je er op dat moment ook bij stil, dat Jezus degene is die voor je zonden is gestorven. En op die manier integreer je dat Avondmaal wat je in de kerk viert ook in je eigen leven.*"

¹⁷⁵R2.3 (male, 65+, CRC-A): "*Het Avondmaal, hè, wat ik dan altijd in gedachten heb, dat is het Avondmaal, inderdaad, hè, wat [R2.5] net zei geloof ik, hè: de bruiloft des Lams, het Avondmaal dat we eens boven mogen vieren.*"

My son died in an accident at a young age, and my offspring can already praise God while I am still here on this world and I long, not only to see my son again—or not, I don't know. But indeed you say: in all perfection. The entire burden you're carrying now, it's gone.¹⁷⁶

4.7.6 Other Desires

Other desires were shared much less frequently during the interviews. Those that did come up included the desire for a more “conscious” experience (see §4.4.2), for greater thankfulness (to God), for the introduction of more symbolism and mystical experiences, and for less tensions surrounding celebrations (§4.4.1).

4.8 Summary

As described in this chapter, there proved to be many different experiences and opinions related to the Lord's Supper among the population of this study. This makes it difficult to present one “espoused theological voice,” as if there was such a thing as a single voice comprising all participants. Instead, many different espoused voices emerged, differing not only from congregation to congregation, but also within the participating congregations themselves. In what follows, these voices are summarized using themes that emerged from the interviews with the congregants.

Lord's Supper as Communion

The Lord's Supper was powerfully associated with *mutual communion*, and to a lesser degree with *communion with God*. In the interviews with congregants, communion with God was mentioned less frequently than communion with fellow communicants was. In one congregation, some congregants paid special attention to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Attributed Meanings

Other meanings associated with the Lord's Supper included *grace and forgiveness*, the Lord's Supper as a *profession of faith*, a *commemoration*, a *feast to celebrate*, a moment of *personal reflection*, a moment of *looking forward* (eschatological), and *sacrament*. Most attention was paid to the aspects of grace and forgiveness as well as commemoration, while there was less emphasis on the other themes.

¹⁷⁶R3.5 (male, 65+, CRC-A): “Mijn zoon is op jonge leeftijd verongelukt en mijn nageslacht mag God al grootmaken en dan sta ik hier nog in deze wereld en dan verlang ik, niet alleen om mijn zoon te herzien—of niet, dat weet ik niet. Maar dat je inderdaad zegt: in alle volmaaktheid. Al die ballast die je meedraagt, dat die weg is.”

Opinions and Feelings

Multiple participants reported feelings of stress during the celebration of the sacrament. At the same time, participants shared the opinion that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated in a conscious manner. For example, when someone forgot about the coming the celebration only to find out on arriving at church, this was almost always valued negatively. Distraction, hassle, and lack of personal reflection during the celebrations were valued negatively, while physical aspects like seeing, tasting, smelling, etc., were mentioned by some as positive examples of a conscious celebration.

The "holiness" of the celebration and/or its participants was mentioned by some participants, either as a positive or as a negative aspect. For some, the Lord's Supper is something special demanding a good preparation, while others indicated that there is too much "fuss" surrounding it (also on accounts of the presumed holiness of the Lord's Supper).

Reasons for participation in the Lord's Supper included the *commandment or invitation of Christ*, which was mentioned several times. Some interviewees noted that they participate because of the grace they have received, or characterized their choice for participation as a conscious one. The role of the church council in controlling admission to the sacrament was not widely discussed, although hospitality was a widely appreciated theme amongst RCL participants.

Some participants across both denominations indicated that they had at times temporarily withdrawn from the celebration of the sacrament in their own congregation, while a number of participants in CRC-C spoke of their past or even present abstinence from the Lord's Supper table (*avondmaalsmijding*). In RCL-D and F, some participants questioned the exclusion of children from the Lord's Supper in their congregation.

Self-examination was discussed by a number of participants across all six congregations. Some questioned the current practices in their congregation, while others were more positive or even favored the reintroduction of a week of preparation (RCL-D).

Lastly, participants reported various effects of participating in the celebrations, like the strengthening of their faith, thankfulness (towards God), encouragement, and comfort. During the interviews, some participants were deeply moved when they spoke of their experiences, while others indicated that they had experienced no effect or profound impact at all.

Style, Ambiance, and Liturgy

With regard to the different styles of celebration, participants shared multiple (sometimes contradicting) preferences. Overall, participants were satisfied with the current style in use in their congregation. The congregants who were most convinced or enthusiastic about changing the status quo were those who at an earlier time had experienced a different style

elsewhere (mostly RCL members). Some participants never even contemplated the introduction of a different style (CRC-A and C).

With regard to the frequency of celebration, relatively more RCL members than CRC members favored a higher frequency. Besides, some RCL participants indicated that the celebrations were taking too much time.

The ambiance during the celebrations was given positive characterizations by some, like joyful, quiet, and silent, while others indicated that they found it excessively emotionally charged. Some disliked the tense or solemn faces they saw during the celebrations.

Regarding the liturgy used during the celebrations, participants were predominantly positive on the selection of Psalms or hymns. Some RCL members were critical of the practice of singing many—that is, too many—verses during ambulatory celebrations. The reading of the liturgical forms prior to communion was discussed in RCL congregations, both by its proponents and opponents, but it was not raised in CRC churches.

Personal Developments

Various participants reported celebrating the Lord's Supper more consciously and intensely than before. This *accumulation of meaning* was reported to some degree among all age groups. A number of other participants reported an up-and-down development, or denied any personal development at all.

Important aspects of personal development were the first celebration experienced (mostly positive), and the influence of external life events on the experience of the sacrament. Some participants indicated that their personal development with regard to the Lord's Supper correlated with accumulated life experiences and the development of their personal faith. Interestingly, different participants reported being inspired by visits to other churches or places where the Lord's Supper was celebrated—often during vacations and abroad.

Personal Desires

Personal desires regarding the Lord's Supper revolved for the most part around two positions: some participants were satisfied with the current practice and experience of the Lord's Supper in their congregation, while others longed for more festive celebrations and/or a more conscious experience. Other desires mentioned included a longing for celebrating the Lord's Supper with Jesus Himself and/or in combination with a common meal.

Chapter 5

Formal Voice

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the formal theological voice will be described based on the individual interviews with the ministers in each congregation (§5.2) as well as a literature review of theological literature published by CRC and RCL theologians (§5.3).

5.2 Formal Voice: Interviews

Once the interviews with participants in each congregation had been conducted, the six local ministers were each interviewed individually. These interviews took place between October 2017 and February 2018, and were conducted at the minister's home or in the local church building. They were semi-structured and consisted of five topics, supplemented with several more specific questions pertaining to the local situation (liturgy, local church policy, etc.).¹ Afterwards, these interviews were analyzed thematically using open coding (see §2.8).

For this chapter the meta-structure is identical to that used in the report on the interviews with congregants, so as to facilitate comparison between the two types of interviews. Not every aspect was discussed as extensively with ministers as it was with the congregation members. For this reason, not all sub-themes from the previous chapters appear in the subsections below.

¹The topic list was the same as that used during the interviews with the congregants (see §2.5.3 and Appendix A).

5.2.1 The Lord's Supper as Communion

Communion with Christ As in the interviews with congregants, the theme “communion with Christ” was mentioned several times in the conversations with the ministers, and especially those serving CRC churches. This aspect was mentioned most often for CRC-A, for example, when the minister gave a summary of his interpretation of the Lord's Supper: “The supper of the Lord Jesus Christ... Where you experience unity with Him. (...) And in Him also with one another.”² So too in RCL-D the connection with Christ and with each other was mentioned in a single breath: “...why it is that I too join in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, then I would say: to celebrate our bond with Jesus and with one another.”³ Thirdly, in CRC-C one of the ways in which the Lord's Supper was characterized was a “meal of communion”:

R24: The Lord's Supper is also the meal of communion, right? He partakes of it with the disciples. He gives Himself away. He as it were introduces them to His body. Because it is His body that is broken, but He does so in communion with His people and He does it for..., He also does it as ransom, in their place.

M: [mumbles approvingly]

R24: Indeed, the Lord's Supper is the meal of *communio*: the communion which He shares. And yes, Calvin: spiritual communion, the *unio mystica*, which can be seen and felt, and as it were also tasted and smelled. All the senses are involved.⁴

Lastly, in CRC-A, CRC-B, and RCL-D, Christ was mentioned as the “host of the table.”

²R22 (minister CRC-A): “*De maaltijd van de Here Jezus Christus... Waarin je de verbondenheid met Hem beleeft. (...) En in Hem dan ook met elkaar.*”

³R25 (minister RCL-D): “*...wat maakt dat ik het Avondmaal meevier, dan zou ik zeggen: om mijn band met Jezus en met elkaar te vieren.*”

⁴R24: *Het avondmaal is ook de gemeenschapsmaaltijd, hè? Hij deelt het met de jongeren. Hij geeft Zichzelf weg. Hij leidt ze als het ware in in Zijn lichaam. Want Zijn lichaam wordt gebroken, maar Hij doet dat in gemeenschap met de Zijnen en Hij doet het ten behoeve van..., Hij doet het ook als borg, plaatsvervangend. /M: [instemmend geluid] /R24: Ja, het avondmaal is ook bij uitstek de maaltijd van de communio: de gemeenschap die Hij deelt. En ja, Calvin: de geestelijke gemeenschap, de unio mystica die daar zichtbaar wordt en tastbaar wordt en als het ware ook proefbaar wordt en reukbaar wordt. Alle zintuigen komen erin mee.—In this quote, various sub-themes can be distinguished: the Lord's Supper as a meal of communion, shared by Jesus with His disciples but these days also spiritually with believers (*unio mystica*), including also physical aspects that can be experienced by the human body. Furthermore, Jesus' work is interpreted as being vicarious (with Jesus as the ransom for atonement with God by his satisfaction).*

Mutual Communion At the same time, the theme of “mutual communion” among communicants was mentioned almost as frequently as communion with Christ; this held true for both CRC and RCL ministers. An illustrative example comes from CRC-A:

R22: Faith is not something you do on your own, is it? It offers a sense of unity—also through the ages—with all who have passed before us on the same path, and together as congregation. It is very personal, that experience of faith as you turn to Christ, but you’re never the only one.

M: No, right.

R22: It’s something you are aware of. You share the bread with each other, which also unites you to one another as body.

M: Right.

R22: So... you’re standing beside each other, He as our head, regardless of how different we might be.⁵

When speaking of their personal experiences, ministers reported experiencing fellowship when administering the sacrament in their own congregation. Another example is the experience of a minister (CRC-C) who in one of his former congregations used to hold a meeting with other congregants on Sunday evenings following the celebration of the sacrament. There opportunity was given for people to talk about their personal faith as well as their experiences during the celebration of the Lord’s Supper earlier that day, as an example of the exercise of the communion of saints.

Also other related themes were mentioned in regard to “mutual communion.” Several ministers, for example, noted their personal preference for a small group size when the sacrament is celebrated, on the assumption that this fosters the experience of mutual communion among celebrants. Secondly, two ministers (RCL-D and F) mentioned current discussions in the RCL denomination on the role of children at the Lord’s Supper; they did not do so to choose a side in the debate, but to note that this already was or probably would become a topic of discussion in their congregation. Thirdly, also other sub-groups were mentioned as part of the celebrating community, like the asylum seekers in CRC-B or the members with mental disabilities in RCL-D. In CRC-B, the church council decided that baptized asylum seekers were to be admitted to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper regardless of whether or not they had made a public profession of their faith, since the latter ritual was not practiced in

⁵R22: *Je gelooft nooit alleen hè? Dat geeft een stuk verbondenheid—de eeuwen door ook—met allen die ons zijn voorgedaan ook in hetzelfde spoor, en samen als gemeente. Het is wel heel persoonlijk, je beleving van het geloof als je je op Christus richt, maar je bent nooit de enige. /M: Nee, ja. /R22: Dat besef je ook. Je deelt het brood met elkaar, dus daarin word je ook als lichaam aan elkaar verbonden. /M: Ja. /R22: Dus... je staat naast elkaar, Hij als ons hoofd, hoe verschillend we ook allemaal kunnen zijn.*

their country of origin. In RCL-D, various members with mental disabilities had received religious instruction, each at his or her own level. After making a public profession of their faith, they were admitted to the Lord's table.

5.2.2 Attributed Meanings

Aside from the topics of communion with God and with fellow worshipers, the interviewed ministers also attributed other meanings to the Lord's Supper.

Reconciliation and Forgiveness One such theme mentioned by a number of ministers across both denominations was the Lord's Supper as a sign of reconciliation and forgiveness. Illustrative is the following statement made by the minister of RCL-E:

M: How would you describe the core of the Lord's Supper?

R26: [brief silence] Well, like I was just saying: that there is forgiveness, atonement. It's a sign and seal of what God wants to promise, which I may offer every Sunday in the preaching, but which now comes to us very explicitly in signs that can be seen and smelled and tasted.⁶

Notwithstanding differences in formulation, the above is comparable with the first association CRC-C's minister had with the Lord's Supper:

It is the sacrament which Christ has given to His church... to testify to believers the truth of His Word and the certainty of His promise, namely that He has given His body and His blood to atone for sinners.⁷

In both examples, the most important theme is reconciliation. Interestingly, ministers used both the terms "reconciliation" and "forgiveness," while congregants used only the latter (see §4.3.1).

⁶M: *Hoe zou je de kern van het Avondmaal omschrijven?* /R26: [korte stilte] *Nou, wat ik net ook al zei: dat er vergeving, verzoening is. Het is een teken en een zegel van wat God wil beloven, wat ik elke zondag in de verkondiging mag meegeven, maar wat nu dan heel expliciet in zichtbare en ruikbare en proefbare tekens naar ons toe mag komen.*

⁷R24 (minister CRC-C): *"Dat is het sacrament dat Christus aan Zijn kerk heeft gegeven... om de gelovigen te betuigen de waarachtigheid van Zijn Woord en de betrouwbaarheid van Zijn belofte, namelijk dat Hij Zijn lichaam en Zijn bloed gegeven heeft tot verzoening van zondaren."*

Sign and Seal (Sacrament) Both CRC and RCL ministers referred to the Lord's Supper as a "sign and seal" (cf. HC QA 66; BC art. 33). This was done by the minister of RCL-E (as quoted above), as well as the minister of CRC-C:

...that that sign has been given [by Christ, JAGB] to emphasize the firmness and certainty of His Word. Of course it is related to the faith of His people, which gets put to the test and is so little. They should actually have enough in His Word, but in his bounty, as it were, He has also given the sign. And that sign is not only a visible sign, but also a seal: assurance of the truth of His Word.⁸

This way, the Lord's Supper is understood as a sign and seal added to the Word of God.

Moreover, the Lord's Supper was interpreted as a "sign of God's promise," and on various occasions explicitly referred to as a "sacrament." The minister of CRC-B, for instance, noted:

Reverence is still how I from the very start have experienced the Lord's Supper here. (...) So that meant sober, solemn, but also with piety—the idea being that this service is different from the others. It's like we often say: "Word and sacrament are on one level." But in the experience of the people it was and still is different. (...) The effect is—because people experience this service as being different—that they, often, go to church more consciously and celebrate the Lord's Supper consciously. It is something they do consciously, but also undergo consciously. And what I see is a fair number of people who also close their eyes or keep them fixed in front of them, and it gives me the impression that they are also seeking God personally in it.⁹

⁸R24 (minister CRC-C): "...dat dat teken [door Christus, JAGB] gegeven wordt om de vastheid en de betrouwbaarheid van Zijn Woord te benadrukken. Dat heeft dan natuurlijk te maken met het aangevochten geloof en het kleine geloof van de Zijnen. Ze zouden genoeg moeten hebben aan Zijn Woord, maar ten overvloede als het ware geeft Hij ook het teken. En dat teken is dan niet alleen een zichtbaar teken, maar het is ook nog een keer een verzegeling: een garantie van de waarachtigheid van Zijn Woord."

⁹R23 (minister CRC-B): "Eerbid is toch wel hoe ik van het begin af aan de avondsmaalsvieringen hier heb beleefd. (...) Dus dat was stemmig, serieus, maar ook wel met vroomheid—echt wel met het idee, van: deze dienst is anders dan andere diensten. Hè, we zeggen vaak: "Woord en sacrament staan op één lijn." Maar voor de beleving van de mensen was en is dat echt anders. (...) Dat maakt—omdat mensen de ervaring hebben, van: dit is een andere dienst dan anders—dat ze ook bewust, vaak, naar de kerk gaan en bewust Avondmaal vieren. Het is iets wat ze bewust doen, maar ook bewust ondergaan. En ik zie dat een behoorlijk aantal mensen ook de ogen sluit of voor zich uit staart, dus

This quote illustrates not only that the Lord's Supper is called a sacrament, but seems also to demonstrate how it is experienced in a congregation—as interpreted in retrospect by the minister. Remarkable is the observation that people close their eyes or stare in front of them while celebrating a sacrament that visualizes the gospel or God's promises.

Commemorating Christ Interestingly, the participating ministers all infrequently used the verbs “commemorate” or “remember” in their description of what happens at the Lord's Supper. Instead, they used the verbs “celebrate” or “administer” to describe both their own actions and those of others. So too Christ's resurrection and the expectation of his return were rarely mentioned. The only exception in this regard was the minister of CRC-B:

I always really like that little phrase: “For that reason we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.” And of course it's something you proclaim as congregation—it is the confession of the church of all times and places—but it's also something you believe personally and the truth for you personally. That's why for me the celebration of the Lord's Supper is also an act of confessing one's faith—I confess my faith when I celebrate the Lord's Supper and I confess that He is my personal Lord and Savior, and I would be lost without Him, so, that it is through Him and his saving work that I have eternal life.¹⁰

In this quotation, the celebration of the Lord's Supper is also characterized as an act of profession of faith, as was the case for a number of congregants as well (see §4.3.2). None of the other ministers, however, used that characterization.

A Feast to Celebrate Although none of the ministers referred to the Lord's Supper literally as a “feast,” some of them (CRC-B, RCL-D and E) expressed the wish that they might experience celebrations as being more joyful in character. The minister of CRC-B thus stated:

dan krijg ik de indruk dat die mensen persoonlijk ook God zoeken daarin.” See also note 99 below for comparable reflections on the relationship between Word and sacrament.

¹⁰R23 (minister CRC-B): *“Ik vind een heel mooi zinnetje altijd, van: “daarom verkondigen wij de dood van de Here totdat Hij komt.” En dat is natuurlijk iets wat je als gemeente proclameert—dat is de belijdenis van de kerk van alle tijden en plaatsen—maar het is ook iets wat jij persoonlijk gelooft en wat voor jou persoonlijk de waarheid is. Daarom is voor mij Avondmaalvieren ook een daad van geloof belijden—ik belijd mijn geloof als ik het Avondmaal vier en ik belijd dat Hij mijn persoonlijke Heer en Heiland is en dat ik zonder Hem verloren zou zijn, dus dat ik door Hem en zijn verlossend werk het eeuwige leven heb.”*

But the aspect of joy is to my mind something that has receded into the background in the Reformed tradition, maybe even forgotten altogether. And if joy can be found somewhere, even there it is very subdued. I would really like it if we celebrated Lord's Supper with thanksgiving, praise, and worship. And I don't just mean in word, but also in the way we experience it.¹¹

Meanwhile, RCL-D's minister was looking for styles to further the experience of joy and celebration:

R25: I would be ready to, in my mind it would be a good intermediate step, if you were to say, for example, like: maybe we won't be able to realize that festive and communal [aspect] in church right away.

M: Right, OK.

R25: But why couldn't we..., for example, see whether we could celebrate the Lord's Supper in smaller groups?

M: Right.

R25: So, for example, once every two months we have an afternoon service when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Would it be negotiable and feasible for people—also in terms of their experience—if you were to say: we're not going to go to church, but in our neighborhoods, in our small groups, we are going to hold a meeting where something of a liturgical nature takes place? Or we're just going to organize a meal for everyone who wants to, who attends? And during that meal the Lord's Supper will then be celebrated?¹²

The latter seems to match closely with the desire expressed by some congregants (also in RCL-D) for experiencing greater festivity (§4.3.4) and mutual communion (§4.2.1) during the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

¹¹R23 (minister CRC-B): *“Maar dat vreugdeaspect, dat vind ik wel iets wat in onze gereformeerde traditie echt op de achtergrond is geraakt, misschien zelfs in de vergetelheid is geraakt. En als het al een vreugde is, dan is het een heel ingetogen vreugde. Ik zou het ook mooi vinden als we het Avondmaal kunnen vieren met dankzegging, lofprijzing en aanbidding. En dan bedoel ik dus niet alleen met bewoording, maar ook met beleving.”*

¹²R25: *Ik zou bijvoorbeeld best, dat zou voor mij een goede tussenstap zijn, dat je bijvoorbeeld zegt, zo van, nou: misschien lukt het ons niet meteen om in de kerk dat feestelijke en gemeenschappelijke te organiseren. /M: Ja, oké. /R25: Maar waarom zouden we dan niet in..., bijvoorbeeld, kunnen gaan kijken of wij in kleinere groepen een Avondmaal zouden kunnen laten plaatsvinden? /M: Ja. /R25: Wij hebben bijvoorbeeld dus één keer per twee maand een middagdienst met Avondmaal. Nou, in hoeverre zou het bespreekbaar zijn en haalbaar voor mensen, qua beleving ook, dat je zegt, zo van: dan gaan we niet naar de kerk, maar we hebben in onze wijken, in onze kleine kringen, hebben wij een bijeenkomst waarin er liturgisch iets gebeurt. Of we organiseren gewoon een maaltijd met iedereen die dat wil, die erbij is. En in die maaltijd wordt dan het Avondmaal gevierd.*

Eschatological Perspective Largely absent from the interviews with ministers were the characterization of the Lord's Supper as a foretaste of the eternal joy, and references to the expectation of Christ's return. One exception was the minister of CRC-B, who used the triad: *past-present-future*. In regard to the third element, he stated: "And [in the Lord's Supper, JAGB] you look out in expectation to the future, since we direct our minds to the marriage feast of the Lamb, because He has said: 'I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'"¹³

Other Attributed Meanings Other attributed meanings included the interpretation of the Lord's Supper as a *command of Christ* (as a reason for celebrating it personally or as congregation), as a *moment of reflection or repentance*, a *gift of God*, a *source of peace, comfort, and/or encouragement*, and a *symbol displaying the core of the faith/gospel*.

5.2.3 Opinions and Feelings

During the interviews, several opinions and feelings on the Lord's Supper were expressed by the individual ministers.

Reflecting on Sinfulness and Guilt

Several ministers underlined the need to consider your own sinfulness when celebrating the Lord's Supper. In RCL-E, for example, the minister mentioned an example of congregants who had told him they could not participate in the Lord's Supper because of problems in their personal lives. Reflecting on this, the minister offered a short explanation of his understanding of "self-examination" (not included in the following quote) and of the necessity of reflecting on personal sin and misery:

R26: What Paul calls 'self-examination'... Of course in our ecclesiastical documents, in the confession, we have produced a tidy description of what that means: misery, knowledge... or knowledge of sin, actually, knowledge of your Savior, and awareness of thankfulness.

M: Yes.

R26: Well, to my mind those three aspects do really all belong there, and they are what make the celebration of the Lord's Supper fruitful for me. And also the first [element] belongs

¹³R23 (minister CRC-B): "En je ziet [in het avondmaal, JAGB] uit naar de toekomst, want we richten ons op het bruiloftsmaal van het Lam, omdat Hij heeft gezegd: 'Ik zal niet meer van de vrucht van de wijnstok drinken tot dat ik met jullie die nieuw zal drinken in het koninkrijk van mijn Vader.'"

there. I notice that it makes some people uncomfortable, like: “Always that consciousness of sin, especially at Lord’s Supper!”—but I couldn’t do without. Because to me the Lord’s Supper would become a mere ritual, without substance.

M: Right, exactly, yes, yes.

R26: But it’s precisely when I discover the backdrop of my sins, or my sinfulness, have become aware of it, that I can take also that second step and then experience also that thankfulness at the Lord’s Supper. Like: “Wow, it’s amazing that I, I too, am allowed to partake of this!”¹⁴

So too in CRC-B the minister mentioned the threefold distinction “Miserery, Deliverance, and Thankfulness” as the three central elements connected to the Lord’s Supper. In his view, these three sometimes make it hard for congregants to experience all meanings at the same time or in the right proportion.

Corporeality of the Celebration

Another theme mentioned by the ministers was the corporeality of the Lord’s Supper (cf. the subsection on “Sign and Seal” above). The physical aspects of the celebration were mentioned by both CRC and RCL ministers, for example in RCL-D:

M: If I were to say, “The Holy Lord’s Supper,” what would come to mind?

R25: [First:] “Jesus”. As host. You could almost say: the food itself. The one who communicates himself. So in the entire Lord’s Supper he is what stands central before, behind, under, above, and in it. [Second:] “Unity,” where I’m thinking primarily of unity with Jesus himself, but also very clearly with each other. And [third:] “The senses”. You could maybe [put?] it differently, but the beautiful thing about the Lord’s Supper is how it is specifically in connection with unity and

¹⁴R26: *Dat wat Paulus de zelfbeproeving noemt... Daar hebben we natuurlijk in onze kerkelijke papieren, in de belijdenis, een keurige omschrijving van gemaakt van wat dat dan inhoudt: ellende, kennis... of zondekennis eigenlijk, kennis van je verlosser en besef van dankbaarheid. /M: Ja. /R26: Nou, die drie elementen horen bij mij wel alle drie erbij en maken juist ook dat ik met vrucht het Avondmaal kan vieren. En ook het begin hoort erbij. Ik merk dat sommige mensen daar moeite mee hebben, van: “altijd maar juist met het Avondmaal aandacht voor zondebesef”—ik zou daar niet zonder kunnen. Want dan zou het Avondmaal voor mij een ritueel worden, zonder werkelijke inhoud. /M: Ja, precies, ja, ja. /R26: Maar juist als ik dan de achtergrond van mijn zonden heb ontdekt, of mijn zondig-zijn heb ontdekt, daarvan bewust ben geworden, dan kan ik ook die tweede stap nemen en vervolgens dan ook die dankbaarheid ervaren bij het avondmaal. Van: “Wow, het is toch wel geweldig dat ik, ja, dat ik hier ook in mag delen!”*

with Jesus that the senses, touch, are addressed.

(...)

R25: Yes... in my opinion the added benefit of the Lord's Supper compared to, for example, attending or participating in a worship service, (...) [is] that you feel and taste and experience, like. (...) It's something about the Lord's Supper that I appreciate in theory, [but] whether it's also something that people actually sense and experience that way in practice—that's a question I'll leave for you to study. (...) But I do think it's important.¹⁵

In the above quotation, the minister of RCL-D stated that bodily aspects like “feeling and tasting” that come with the Lord's Supper are absent from regular church services. The ministers of CRC-A and C, as well as RCL-E, provided similar interpretations. CRC-C's minister did so, for example, when he spoke about the connection between Passover and Lord's Supper:

So Lord's Supper first of all tells me something about Christ's incomprehensible willingness to go down that road: His self-sacrificing love, *agape*, which manifests itself in particular in the Holy Supper. (...) And then He displays it for us. And of course also those images are derived from the Passover, in the breaking of the bread, the matzo. In our church things are a little different; we just use soft bread. But I would prefer to have matzos. They make a crackling noise. When they are broken, you hear something of His deep suffering, as it were. Yes, the breaking of His body and the pouring out of His blood. Those two signs are remarkably illustrative in nature, and serve to foster the experience the great value of the sacrifice of Christ.¹⁶

¹⁵M: *Als ik zeg: “het Heilig Avondmaal,” wat zeg jij dan? /R25: [Ten eerste:] “Jezus”. Als gastheer. Je zou bijna kunnen zeggen: voedsel als zodanig. Degene die zich communiceert. Dus die staat voor, achter, onder, boven en in het hele Avondmaal centraal, wat mij betreft. [Ten tweede:] “Verbondenheid,” waarbij ik denk aan verbondenheid met Jezus zelf, maar ook heel duidelijk met elkaar. En [ten derde]: “zintuigen”. Je kunt het misschien nog anders [verwoorden?], maar ik vind het mooie van avondmaal de manier waarop juist in relatie met verbondenheid en met Jezus het zintuigelijk waarneembare, voelbare wordt aangesproken. (...) R25: Ja... Als het gaat om dat “zintuigen”, vind ik het surplus van Avondmaal ten opzichte van bijvoorbeeld in een kerkdienst aanwezig zijn en deelnemen aan een kerkdienst, (...) juist dat voelen en proeven en de ervaring, zeg maar. (...) In theorie vind ik dat een mooie kant van het Avondmaal, [maar] of het in de praktijk er ook altijd zo uitkomt en zo beleefd wordt, nou ja, dat mag jij onderzoeken. (...) Maar dat vind ik wel belangrijk.*

¹⁶R24: *Dus het het Heilig Avondmaal zegt mij allereerst iets over de onbegrijpelijke bereidwilligheid van Christus om Zich daartoe te geven: de zelfopofferende liefde, de agapè, die met name in het Heilig Avondmaal blijkt. (...) En dan beeldt Hij dat uit. En*

Experience of Holiness

The experience of holiness was referred to by several ministers. One example came from CRC-B, where liturgical renewal of communion services had met with criticism from the congregation. According to some members, the proposed new styles of worship (like the singing of *Opwekking* praise songs) were not suitable for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, even though such styles were already in use for baptism. The minister recalled:

So for a baptism service that was no problem, since people were used to it there. But for the Lord's Supper it wasn't deemed reverent enough. Not holy and sacred enough. So many people think Lord's Supper should be accompanied by silence, reflection, solemnity, penitence. Actually, these are my words, but in terms of experience the Lord's Supper matches the color purple, that is, Advent and Holy Week. There it's all about repentance, sorrow, conversion, meditation. That's how the Lord's Supper has more or less been experienced since long ago.¹⁷

RCL-F's minister shared a positive connotation he had with the term "holy" (as in *Holy Supper*). In his view, the celebration is "special," but should not be made either excessively special or too normal. It was as if a fine equilibrium is to be maintained when the sacrament is celebrated:

R27: To me that little word "holy" also means something like: it's special. And of course it's something tiny, just one bite and one sip, but it is special and we also treat it that way.

M: OK, right. So the Lord's Supper is something special, even if small, and yet it's also holy, like. (...)

R27: Right, right. But you can also take it too far, you know?

M: Right...

R27: When I say that, it makes me think of how there are also

ook die beelden zijn natuurlijk ontleend aan het Pascha, door de breking van het brood, de matses. Bij ons is dat anders: wij hebben van dat zachte brood. Maar het was me liever geweest wanneer we matses zouden gebruiken. Dat kraakt. Als dat breekt hoor je als het ware iets van Zijn diepe lijden. Ja, van de breking van Zijn lichaam en de vergieting van Zijn bloed. Nou die twee tekenen die zijn buitengewoon beeldend en ondersteunend voor de ervaring van de grote waarde van het offer van Christus. Cf. also note 4 above.

¹⁷R23 (minister CRC-B): "Dus voor een doopdienst was dat geen enkel probleem, daar was men al aan gewend. Maar voor het Avondmaal was dat toch niet eerbiedig genoeg. Niet heilig en gewijd genoeg. Dus veel mensen vinden dan toch wel dat avondmaal moet samengaan met stilte, bezinning, ingetogenheid, inkeer. Eigenlijk, dat zijn mijn woorden, maar Avondmaal past qua beleving bij de kleur paars, dus de adventstijd en de lijdenstijd. Waarin dus boete, berouw, bekering, bezinning centraal staan. Dat is een beetje hoe men vanouds het avondmaal beleeft."

people who make it so special that you're barely even allowed to smile, as it were. Or move a chair, because it's all interpreted so strictly.

M: And what do you mean with the word "holy", like, if we zoom in on that first term? If you say it shouldn't be too holy, but also not too normal, how do you [arrive at] the right balance?

R27: Yeah, well that is hard. So I do think it's important to flesh out the term "holiness".

M: OK, right.

R27: So I associate it first and foremost with "special"—it is a special moment and a special event. And of course that does not mean that you can't touch it, so that it's dangerous or something. (...) But on the other hand I think there are also people, or there are also situations, when I'm like: Yes, it's almost as if God has disappeared from view, it's turned into a cozy meal or something.¹⁸

In the interviews with the ministers of CRC-A and C, the aspect of holiness was not discussed, except to the extent that in the latter congregation the question of the experience of appropriate clothing for communicants came up in the course of conversation. This minister deemed the celebration to be extremely holy in its nature:

Yes, I was raised in a climate where—actually, that's still where I'm at, it's not like I've taken distance from it, not at all—where the administration of the Lord's Supper is experienced as most holy and also presented that way. (...) I did profession in the conviction that the doctrine I was confessing also really is the truth and has a lot to say about my life. And at the time I was

¹⁸R27: *Dat woordje "heilig" heeft voor mij ook iets, van: het is bijzonder. En het is natuurlijk maar iets kleins, één hapje en een slokje, maar het is bijzonder en we gaan er ook zo mee om. /M: Oké, ja. Dus het Avondmaal is iets bijzonders, hoewel het klein is, maar toch is het ook iets heiligs, zeg maar. (...) /R27: Ja, ja. En daarin kan je natuurlijk ook te ver gaan, hè? /M: Ja... /R27: Als ik dat zeg, dan denk ik ook: Ja, en er zijn dan ook mensen die maken het zó bijzonder dat je nauwelijks nog mag glimlachen, bij wijze van spreken. Of een stoel mag verzetten, omdat het allemaal dan wel heel erg strikt begrepen wordt. /M: En hoe bedoel je dan het begrip "heilig", zeg maar, als we even inzoomen op dat eerste woord? Als je zegt: het moet niet te heilig zijn, maar het moet ook niet te gewoon [zijn], hoe [bepaal] je dan de balans? /R27: Ja, dat is wel moeilijk. Dus ik denk dat het wel belangrijk is om dat begrip "heiligheid," om dat verder in te vullen. /M: Oké, ja. /R27: Dus ik associeer het in eerste plaats met "bijzonder"—het is een bijzonder moment en een bijzonder gebeuren. En dat betekent natuurlijk niet dat je er niet aan mag komen, dus dat het gevaarlijk zou zijn ofzo. (...) Terwijl aan de andere kant, denk ik, zijn er ook mensen, of er zijn ook situaties en dan denk ik, van: Ja, het wordt bijna iets waarbij God dan weer uit beeld verdwijnt, het wordt een gezellige maaltijd ofzo.*

still only [age] years old, I really was. And yet: I didn't have the boldness to come to the Lord's Supper.¹⁹

The ministers of RCL-D and E both stated that in their view the Lord's Supper had become somewhat less of a "sacred" moment than it had been in the past, indicating that they found this a positive development, since an excessively "holy" ambiance implied excessive disruption of the ordinary.²⁰

Personal and Communal Preparation

In three of six congregations, the first part of the classical liturgical form was read one week before the Lord's Supper was to be celebrated (see §3.2). This was the custom in CRC-A and C, as well as RCL-F. However, in RCL-F this practice had been changing over the past several years. This was partly a result of the decreasing turnout for afternoon services. As the preparation had always taken place in the afternoon, a declining number of members now heard the first part of the liturgical form when it was read. As a solution, the minister suggested—during the interview—moving the preparation from the afternoon to the morning service, when more people were in attendance. Alternatively, he suggested a mid-week service of preparation. His final consideration was to use digital communication to remind members about the upcoming celebration:

R27: I'm little worried, like, by how often people go to church in the morning and are like: "O, it's Lord's Supper?" Like, they're taken by surprise. I think, like: Well, we're falling short here, if that's how it goes. And I don't think that reading the form on the preceding Sunday afternoon is a good solution. It has to be done another way. Like, for example: maybe we should use the digital channels, and say: Starting Wednesday we're just going to come into action..., via internet to remind people that it's Lord's Supper on Sunday. Then they'll have enough time to prepare, won't they?

¹⁹R24 (minister CRC-C): *"Ja, ik ben zelf opgevoed in een klimaat dat—dat is overigens nog steeds mijn eigen klimaat hoor, ik heb daar geen afstand van genomen, zeker niet—waarin toch de avondmaalsbediening als uitermate heilig werd ervaren en zo ook voorgesteld. (...) Ik heb belijdenis gedaan met overtuiging dat de leer die ik beleed ook echt de waarheid is en ook veel voor mijn eigen leven te zeggen had. En toen was ik toch nog maar [leeftijd] jaar, zo lag het wel. En toch: ik had geen vrijmoedigheid om aan het avondmaal te gaan."*

²⁰See note 56 below.

M: Right, right, exactly.

R27: The entire Saturday to work it out.²¹

In the remaining congregations (CRC-B, RCL-D and E), where the first part of the form was not read ahead of time, the celebration was rather announced a week in advance by the church council. In CRC-B, the minister also had the custom to prepare a special “preparation sermon” in which he addressed the upcoming celebration. In the two remaining congregations, this was no longer the case (even though, of course, references to the Lord’s Supper could still be made in the sermon).

CRC-A and C also had the custom of holding a mid-week preparatory service. When discussing these meetings, CRC-A’s minister noted that typically only a small number of professing members attended them, mostly the elderly. He interpreted this as an indication of waning interest among younger members for these mid-week services:

So I sometimes wonder how long it will last. But there still will always be a group of people who attach value to it. Of course it’s nice to have a moment like that. But of course you can put it into practice many different ways.²²

In CRC-C, attendance rates for these meetings were not discussed.

In RCL-D, where the need for special preparation services had diminished following the institution of monthly Lord’s Supper celebrations, there was almost no attention for the practice of communal preparation and self-examination (except to the extent that the church council was accustomed to announcing that the sacrament would be celebrated the following week). This was discussed in the interview with RCL-D’s minister:

So sometimes [I] also get that feeling, like: what are people actually doing to prepare? Look, I could say: “I’m glad I no longer have that preparation [service on the preceding Sunday, JAGB]”—I happen to think that if you do it the preceding

²¹R27: *Ik ben wel een beetje bezorgd over, zeg maar, hoeveel het gebeurt dat mensen soms 's morgens naar de kerk komen, van: “Oh, was het Avondmaal?” Zo van: ze worden erdoor overvallen. Dan denk ik van: Nou, dan schieten we wel tekort, als het zo werkt. En ik denk dat het lezen van het formulier op de zondagmiddag daarvoor, dat dat geen goede oplossing daarvoor is. Dat moet op een andere manier. Dus bijvoorbeeld: misschien moeten we meer het digitale netwerk gebruiken en zeggen: Vanaf woensdag gaan we gewoon eens actie op..., via internet om mensen eraan te herinneren dat zondag Avondmaal is. Dan hebben ze toch wel genoeg tijd om zich voor te bereiden? /M: Ja, ja, precies. /R27: De hele zaterdag om invulling daaraan te geven.*

²²R22 (minister CRC-A): *“Dus ik vraag me wel eens af hoe lang dat standhoudt. Maar er is altijd nog een groep mensen die er toch aan hecht. Het is natuurlijk ook best mooi als je zo'n moment hebt. Maar dat kun je natuurlijk op allerlei manieren vormgeven.”*

Sunday and then so much happens during the week, I wonder how much use it has.²³

In his view, the best moment of preparation is right before the celebration itself takes place:

I would really prefer to keep that preparation [during the Lord's Supper service, shortly before the celebration begins, JAGB]... (...) Then the part before you celebrate the Lord's Supper really has meaning. (...) Like: what is your relationship with God really like? That's not a question that's always put that way in sermons.²⁴

On this account, there is simply no problem when someone forgets to prepare himself earlier that week. Moreover, for RCL-D's minister his stance on preparation related to his view on self-examination. For him, such self-examination ought not to focus primarily on the worth of the individual, but on his/her relationship with the body of Christ, that is, the congregation:

R25: I've sometimes also held meditations at the table on 1 Corinthians 11 where I just show how we've turned it into something, something inward... Something internal, directed to the soul, while Paul meant it much more, like: the different [parts of the] body, it has to do with: are you aware that you're part of the whole?

M: Right.

R25: And... you could also celebrate the Lord's Supper like: "I don't care who I'm dealing with," but that's also why I said at the beginning: this [awareness that you are part of the body of Christ, JAGB] really is very important.

M: Right, exactly, yes.

R25: And of course that comes to the fore especially in self-examination.²⁵

²³R25 (minister RCL-D): "Dus dat gevoel bekruipt [mij] ook wel eens, zo van: wat komt er nou daadwerkelijk bij mensen terecht van voorbereiding? Kijk, dus ik kan wel zeggen: "Ik ben blij dat ik niet die voorbereiding[szondag = een week van tevoren, JAGB] meer heb"—ik vind zelf als je dat op de zondag van tevoren doet en dan gebeurt er weer zoveel doordeweeks, dan vraag ik me af of dat zin heeft."

²⁴Ibid.: "Ik zou die voorbereiding [tijdens de avondmaalsdienst, kort voor de viering, JAGB] dan het liefst ook echt willen laten... (...) Het deel voordat je avondmaal viert is dan echt wel van belang. (...) Zo van: hoe verhoud jij je nou echt tot God? Dat is niet een vraag die altijd dan ook zo wordt neergelegd in een preek."

²⁵R25: "Ik heb ook wel eens meditatie gehouden bij de tafel over 1 Korintiërs 11 waarin ik dan ook gewoon laat zien: wij hebben er iets van gemaakt, iets heel intern... Iets innerlijks, op onze ziel gericht, terwijl Paulus het veel meer bedoelt als: het lichaam onderschei-

The *personal* self-examination of the ministers was discussed with the ministers of CRC-A and B, and RCL-E. For RCL-E, the minister noted in this context that it would be difficult for him to abstain from the table:

R26: Look, I sometimes speak members of the congregation who are like: “At this moment there are things in my life that make it hard for me to join in the Lord’s Supper, so I won’t be there on Sunday.” And, to put it bluntly: for me that choice would be a lot more difficult to make.

M: Right, exactly.

R26: Of course I could [abstain from the table, JAGB], but then my sense is that I’d have a lot of explaining to do.

M: Right, indeed, yes.

R26: So if I then take a passage from Paul in 1 Corinthians 11, about self-examination: “Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread” [ESV]. So you can only celebrate the Lord’s Supper fruitfully if you yourself..., like, if you’ve geared your life towards it well, like.

M: OK, right, right.

R26: At least, that’s how I understand that text. And not like: “Well, you need to check whether you should be going.”²⁶

For CRC-A, the minister indicated that for him participation in the celebrations had never been a question:

M: So if I’ve understood you properly: in your life, you did profession and then you also went to celebrate the Lord’s Supper.

R22: Yes. For me it was never a question. (...) And yes, then you notice—yes, also in our churches—that it sometimes gets pulled apart: “I might have an ecclesiastical right [to partake] when I do profession, but do you then also have a divine right?” (...) Sometimes it bothers me when the two are separated like

den, dat heeft te maken met: ben jij je ervan bewust dat je deel uitmaakt van dit geheel? /M: Ja. /R25: En... je kunt ook Avondmaal heel erg zo vieren, zo van: “Het boeit me niet met wie ik bezig ben,” maar daarom zei ik ook in het begin: maar dit [het besef dat je deel uitmaakt van het lichaam van Christus, JAGB] is écht heel belangrijk. /M: Ja, precies, ja. /R25: En dat komt natuurlijk juist in zo’n zelfbeproeving naar voren.

²⁶R26: *Kijk, ik spreek wel eens gemeenteleden die dan zeggen, van: “Er zijn in mijn leven dingen momenteel aan de hand waardoor ik het lastig vind om aan te gaan aan het Avondmaal, dus ik ga maar niet deze zondag.” En ja, even cru gezegd: voor mij wordt die keuze wel heel wat lastiger. /M: Ja, precies. /R26: Het zou natuurlijk wel kunnen, maar dan heb ik wel het gevoel dat ik veel uit moet leggen. /M: Ja, inderdaad, ja. /R26: Dus als ik dan de tekst van Paulus neem in 1 Korinte 11, over de zelfbeproeving: “ieder beproeve zichzelf en ete dan van het brood.” Dus je kan alleen maar vruchtbaar Avondmaal vieren als je jezelf..., nou als je ook op een goede manier er naartoe geleefd bent, zeg maar. /M: Oké, ja, ja. /R26: Tenminste, zo lees ik die tekst. En niet in de trant, van: “Nou, je moet maar eens kijken of je wel aan mag gaan.”*

that.

M: Right.

R22: I do understand what people mean... but that divine right lies in His promise. He comes to you in His Word, He calls you. And it's not like it's something you thought up on your own, like: "I guess I'm good enough." Or like: "I've got this or that... I'm a super believer", or whatever, it's got nothing to do with that.

M: Right.

R22: And I sometimes think that people are all too often seeking a personal experience in it. The form for preparation speaks about self-examination...—it's sometimes taken on a life of its own, I sometimes think. It says: "To celebrate the Lord's Supper to our comfort, we must first..." etcetera. Those aspects of self-examination. But I don't think it's the intention here for there to be conditions first, and if you [then] sufficiently..., and what is good enough? When can you celebrate the Lord's Supper then? You'll never get there, I doubt.²⁷

Participating in the Lord's Supper

When talking about their own participation, the ministers reported experiencing both a personal and a professional call to celebrate the Lord's Supper. The personal aspect of their motivation related to their personal faith, as indicated by CRC-B's minister:

I [am] of course also just a member of the congregation. I sit there together with my brothers and sisters. And I am there just as a member of that congregation who is celebrating the Lord's Supper. And as a person I am of course also a person with sins and shortcomings who needs the grace of Christ like

²⁷M: *Dus als ik het goed begrijp: in uw eigen leven heeft u belijdenis gedaan en bent u daarna ook het avondmaal mee gaan vieren. /R22: Ja. Dat is voor mij nooit een vraag geweest. (...) En ja, dan merk je—ja, ook in onze kerken—dat het wel eens uit elkaar getrokken wordt: "Ik kan wel een kerkelijk recht hebben wanneer je belijdenis hebt gedaan, maar heb je dan ook een goddelijk recht?" (...) Daar heb ik wel eens wat moeite mee, om daar zo'n scheiding tussen te maken. /M: Ja. /R22: Ik begrijp wel wat men bedoelt... maar ja, dat goddelijke recht dat ligt in Zijn belofte. Hij komt in Zijn Woord naar je toe, Hij roept je. En het is niet zo dat je dat zelf bedenkt, van: "Nou, ik ben wel goed genoeg." Of: "Ik heb dit of dat... ik ben echt super gelovig", of wat dan ook, daar heeft het helemaal niets mee te maken. /M: Ja. /R22: En dan denk ik wel eens dat men daar dan toch weer teveel een eigen ervaring in zoekt. Het voorbereidingsformulier, dat spreekt over zo'n zelfonderzoek...—dat dat ook wel eens een eigen leven is gaan leiden denk ik dan wel. Dan staat er: "om getroost het Avondmaal te vieren, is het goed dat je..." enzovoort. Die elementen van de zelfbeproeving. Maar ja, het is denk ik niet bedoeld van dat eerst er voorwaarden zijn, en als je [dan] in voldoende mate..., en wanneer is het dan goed genoeg? Wanneer kun je dan avondmaal vieren? Dan kom je er nooit aan toe, denk ik.*

everyone else. Who also wants to confess that Jesus has died and risen for me.²⁸

Other ministers reported comparable motivations from their personal lives. However, in their liturgical role, personal experiences and professional duties come together. This can sometimes lead to a personal dilemma, as reported by the same minister:

Look, I can't call people to something or invite them to something if I myself am not a part of it. As a matter of fact, I think that the invitation to come to Christ in the Lord's Supper really has to pass through me. And that sometimes also makes it hard, like when I've had a difficult week or if things didn't go too well at home that Sunday morning, then that step to the pulpit is itself already hard, never mind the step to the Lord's Supper, because you are after all inviting people on behalf of Christ who is the host. So then there really is a cleft separating the sacred, in which you have a role as minister, from the broken reality of the day or week.²⁹

Participation of Congregants When it came to the participation of professing members, the ministers of CRC-C and B reported that some degree of abstinence from the Lord's Supper table was practiced in their congregations. This came as a surprise, since CRC-B had been categorized as a congregation where it is "common" to participate (see §2.3). The minister, however, told me:

You also see some people who don't come when there's Lord's Supper, so attendance is always a little lower. So the people who do come, they're very consciously choosing to go to the Lord's Supper service.³⁰

²⁸R23 (minister CRC-B): *"Ik [ben] natuurlijk ook gewoon lid van de gemeente. Ik zit daar met mijn broeders en zusters. En ik ben daar ook gewoon een lid van die gemeente die het avondmaal viert. En als persoon ben ik natuurlijk ook een mens met zonde en gebreken die net zo goed de genade van Christus nodig heeft als iedereen. En die ook gewoon wil belijden dat Jezus voor mij is gestorven en is opgestaan."*

²⁹Ibid.: *"Kijk, ik kan mensen niet oproepen tot iets of uitnodigen tot iets als ik daar zelf niet deel van ben. Sterker nog, ik vind dat de uitnodiging om tot Christus te komen in het Avondmaal ook echt door mijzelf heen moet gaan. En dat geeft soms ook wel moeite, want als de week lastig verlopen is of zondagochtend gaat het thuis niet lekker, dan is de stap naar de kansel al lastig, laat staan de stap naar het avondmaal, omdat je mensen toch nodig namens Christus die de gastheer is. Dus dan is [er] toch wel een kloof tussen de heilige dingen waarin jij een voorgangersrol hebt en de gebroken werkelijkheid van de dag of van de week."*

³⁰R23 (minister CRC-B): *"Je ziet ook een aantal mensen die niet komen met Avondmaal, dus de opkomst is altijd wat minder. Dus de mensen die er zijn, die kiezen heel bewust om naar de Avondmaalsdienst te gaan."*

When questioned about the reasons, the minister responded that this was not the same as “abstaining from the Lord’s Supper” (2.2), but was more a matter of personal reluctance:

My impression is that for most people it’s not about abstaining from the Lord’s Supper, of nonparticipation. It’s more like the service doesn’t speak to them. Or they think it’s way too long. Maybe also from the past there is this sense of oppressiveness, and that’s how people experience it. You also often see families with children where one [partner] does go, while the other stays at home with the children. But I don’t think there are a lot of people who don’t celebrate the Lord’s Supper because they don’t feel free to do so. I don’t think so.³¹

Another variant on abstinence resulted from declining attendance in the afternoon services, since in RCL-D the celebration of the Lord’s Supper alternates between morning and afternoon services:

My sense is that there are a lot of people who only come to the [Lord’s Supper] services in the morning, because they don’t go to church in the afternoon anymore. So a stimulus, like: “Hey, we’re celebrating the Lord’s Supper, so maybe I don’t have the habit of going to church in the afternoon anymore, but maybe I will go this afternoon because I want to celebrate the Lord’s Supper”—that’s not something I encounter.³²

In CRC-C, where abstinence from the table is practiced in the classical sense of the term (see §2.2), the minister nuanced the importance of the Lord’s Supper in comparison with one’s personal relationship with God:

Look, what I also often notice, also in my own pastoral ministry, is that spiritual conversations often revolve around the Lord’s Supper. To my mind that’s always somewhat misplaced. The Lord’s Supper ought to be a fruit. Of course they can be

³¹Ibid.: *“Ik heb het idee dat voor de meeste mensen dat niet een kwestie is van Avondmaalschroom, van mijding. Maar dat het meer zoiets is dat de dienst hen niet aanspreekt. Of dat ze vinden dat het te lang duurt. Misschien ook wel vanouds dat er een zekere beklemming was, en mensen dat zo ervaren. Je ziet ook vaak gezinnen met kinderen waarvan dan de één wel gaat en de ander met de kinderen thuisblijft. Maar ik denk niet dat er veel mensen zijn die niet Avondmaal vieren omdat ze daar geen vrijmoedigheid toe hebben. Dat denk ik niet.”*

³²R25 (minister RCL-D): *“Ik denk dat er een heleboel mensen zijn die alleen maar de ochtendvieringen meemaken omdat ze ’s middags niet meer in de kerk komen. Dus iets van prikkel, van: “Hé, we vieren wel Avondmaal, dus ook al ben ik niet gewend om ’s middags naar de kerk te gaan, misschien ga ik dat vanmiddag wel doen want ik vind het fijn om Avondmaal te vieren,” dat kom ik niet zo tegen.”*

about that, but then in the proper context: Who am I before the LORD? Do I know Christ? [Those are] the elements of true self-examination. And they have their place in the context of the Lord's Supper, but they are above all about my relationship with God.³³

Admission and Church Discipline In some interviews with ministers, the admission policy and the maintenance of church discipline was discussed. As has been noted above, in CRC churches outside visitors can receive “guest rights” (*gastrecht*) for celebrating the Lord's Supper in a congregation other than their own.³⁴ In the interviews with the CRC ministers, the current admission policy was not mentioned, except in CRC-B, where the minister recounted how baptized asylum seekers had been admitted to the table even if they had not necessarily professed their faith publicly.

In RCL churches it has been customary since 2005 to welcome guests from other churches upholding the Reformed confession to the Lord's Supper table.³⁵ The ministers of RCL-D and RCL-F were positive about this development; the topic was not discussed with RCL-E's minister. In the participating RCL congregations, it is now customary for guests to have a short conversation with one of the elders prior to the service. Sometimes this conversation even takes place *during* the celebration itself:

...also in the invitation, then I say—before or sometimes after the [recitation of the Apostles'] Creed, sometimes not at all,

³³R24 (minister CRC-C): “*Kijk, ik signaleer ook dikwijls, ook in mijn eigen pastorale praktijk, dat dikwijls geestelijke gesprekken gaan over het avondmaal. Ik vind dat toch altijd wat oneigenlijk. Het avondmaal moet een vrucht zijn. Natuurlijk mag het er wel over gaan, maar in de juiste context: Wie ben ik tegenover de Heere? Ken ik Christus? De elementen van de waarachtige zelfbeproeving. En die staan in het kader van het Heilig Avondmaal, maar die hebben vooral alles te maken met mijn verhouding tot God.*”

³⁴CRC, *Kerkorde*, art. 63.5.

³⁵See RCL, *Acta 2005*, art. 50, decision B (p. 77), Attachment III-II (pp. 602-9). Up until 2005, it had been customary only for guests from sister churches to be admitted to the table, and even then only upon producing a written attestation (*attest*) signed by the council of their home congregation as proof of membership and a God-fearing life. Since 2005, guests are admitted to the table provided that they are “admitted to the sacrament in [their] own church, are not barred from participation, agree with the Reformed confession and live a God-fearing life.” Three years later, the next General Synod decided that the requirement of “agreement with the Reformed confession” could be defined as agreement with the “doctrine of the Old and New Testament as summarized in the Apostles' Creed and proclaimed here in this Christian church”; this formulation followed the formulation found in the RCL's Liturgical Form for Public Profession of Faith (cf. RCL, *Acta 2008*, art. 22, decision 3 (p. 17 = p. 41)). The latter decision was confirmed by another General Synod in 2011 (RCL, *Acta 2011-2012*, art. 23 (p. 29)). See §6.3.2 below for further explanation of the current regulations (RCL, *Generale regeling voor de kerkdiensten*, art. 6).

it doesn't really matter—but in any case I announce: we are celebrating the Lord's Supper, which is the experience of the unity with Jesus as redeemer. So if you've made profession of your faith in a Christian church, feel free to participate with us. But if you're not there yet, please feel free to stay seated. Feel free to participate from your seat. And if you really do want to [participate], speak to one of us and we'll see what we can [do?].³⁶

No extensive discussions were held on the connection between church discipline and the Lord's Supper. RCL-F's minister indicated that if someone who has been barred from the table (for disciplinary reasons) were to join regardless, he or she would not be removed during the celebration, but rather addressed individually afterwards. In RCL-D, the minister stated that he did not want to use the Lord's Supper as a means to force people to change:

R25: ...the first thing people might say when things emerge about members of the congregation of which one would say, like, that's not good, [is]: "What are we going to do about the Lord's Supper?" I'm glad conversations like that don't really happen that way here anymore.

M: OK.

R25: But, it really makes me happy, since that link that used to be drawn..., I've increasingly come to recognize it as problematic.

M: But how do you solve that these days? Or what happens when things do come up, for example? Is it just left up to each person's own responsibility?

R25: Well, more than before.

M: [So] more than before.

R25: Well, for example, in case of divorce or whatever, that you don't right away say like: "Maybe for now you shouldn't be celebrating [the Lord's Supper, JAGB] together with him." No, we'd rather say: "Do celebrate." And in case it proves too hard to do it together, well, then we can start looking for a solution.³⁷

³⁶R25 (minister RCL-D): "...ook in de uitnodiging, dan zeg ik—vóór of soms na de geloofsbelijdenis, soms niet, maar dat maakt niet uit—maar in ieder geval dat ik aankondig van: we viëren het Avondmaal, dat is de beleving van de eenheid met Jezus als verlosser. Dus heb je van jouw geloof belijdenis gedaan in een christelijke kerk, voel je [dan] vrij om met ons mee te doen. Maar als je nog niet zo ver bent, dan mag je gewoon blijven zitten. Dan mag je die viering vanaf je eigen plaats meemaken. En mocht je het wel graag willen, spreek [dan] iemand van ons aan en we zien wel hoe het [verder loopt(?)]."

³⁷R25: ...het eerste wat er kan worden geroepen als er dingen bij gemeenteleden naar

Effects of Participating in the Lord's Supper

Various ministers mentioned effects of their participation in the Lord's Supper. One example is CRC-C, where the minister defined the "blessing of the Lord's Supper"³⁸ as receiving the gift of faith, communion with Christ, the communion of saints, as well as personal humility:

And also the humbling. Personal humbling. Also to reflect more and more on who you are as a sinner who constantly has to be reconnected to that Well, who always has to receive it from Christ. That certainly. [brief pause] Knowledge of [our] misery is not just an early phase or something, but should mark the Christian's entire life. The image of the beggar, you know? Those were Luther's final words before he died: "We are beggars. This is true."³⁹

The minister of RCL-E in turn reported being thankful for what the Lord's Supper is all about:

If I think of what the Lord's Supper is about and for what end Christ gave it, and then consider the symbolism of the Lord's Supper, then I think the very core of the Lord's Supper is that Christ wants to impress upon me: forgiveness is available for everything that went wrong in your life, if you bring it before me, I will forgive. And the more conscious I become of that, the more I also experience that thankfulness. Like, how amaz-

voren komen waarvan wordt gezegd, zo van: nou, dat is toch niet goed: "Wat gaan we doen met die viering van het Avondmaal?" Gelukkig hebben we dat soort gesprekken hier op die manier niet meer zo. /M: Oké. /R25: Maar, daar ben ik ook gewoon wel blij om, omdat ik die verbinding van oudsher..., die ben ik steeds problematischer gaan vinden. /M: Maar hoe lossen jullie dat nu op? Of hoe gaat het op dit moment als er dingen spelen, bijvoorbeeld? Wordt het dan aan ieders eigen verantwoordelijkheid overgelaten? /R25: Nou, wel meer. /M: Wel meer. /R25: Nou, bijvoorbeeld dat je niet automatisch in geval van echtscheiding, of wat dan maar ook, er wat van zegt, zo van: "Ga je dat nog met hem maar even niet vieren." Nee, liever zeggen we, van: wel vieren. En stel dat het moeilijk wordt om met z'n tweeën dat te doen, nou, dan kunnen we gaan kijken hoe we dat kunnen oplossen.

³⁸This is also the title of a small booklet on the Lord's Supper written by a CRC minister. See Van Amstel, *De zegen van het avondmaal*.

³⁹R24 (minister CRC-C): "En ook de verootmoediging. De persoonlijke verootmoediging. Om ook des te meer je te bezinnen op wie je zelf bent als zondaar die altijd weer op die Bron aangesloten moet worden, die het altijd weer van Christus moet ontvangen. Dat zeker ook. [korte stilte] De kennis der ellende is niet maar een voorstadium ofzo, maar dat moet het christenleven ook stempelen. De bedelaarsgestalte, hè? Dat was Luthers laatste verzuchting, voordat hij sterven ging: "Wir sind bettler. Hoc est verum.""

ing that Christ was willing to do this for me, that Christ wants to give that to me.⁴⁰

Also other personal emotions were mentioned by the ministers, including the experience of peace and calm (CRC-A and B) or gladness (RCL-E).

Spiritual Reflection and Thanksgiving When questioned about the role of spiritual reflection (see Box 3.2 on page 41) in his congregation, the minister of CRC-A reported that it was unclear to him how it functions there:

For some people very clearly, the spiritual reflection, to reflect once more very carefully on it: what have you just celebrated, and what consequences does it have? What does the fact that we celebrated the Lord's Supper yet again demand of us? But also the thanksgiving, [which is] also very important. I do think that for a certain number of people it is also important, like when you give thanks [in prayer] after a meal, that you also after having celebrated the meal of Christ, that you give that moment of thanksgiving a very clear place. (...) So that, but I don't hear too much about that.⁴¹

In CRC-B, the minister reported implementing the spiritual reflection and thanksgiving in the afternoon service following the celebration of the Lord's Supper that morning:

R23: The spiritual reflection—I see it more as the closing of the Lord's Supper. You look back, and with the Lord's Supper [behind you] you also go on to preach again. I try also to maintain unity with the morning celebration when it's my turn in the evening, too.

M: Right, exactly. Right.

⁴⁰R26 (minister RCL-E): *Als ik denk aan waar het Avondmaal over gaat en waarvoor Christus het gegeven heeft en ik kijk dan naar de symboliek bij het avondmaal, dan is dat volgens mij de kern van het avondmaal: dat Christus mij wil duidelijk maken: er is vergeving voor alles wat er in jouw leven misging, als je ermee bij mij komt, dan vergeef ik het. En hoe meer ik me dat realiseer, hoe meer ik ook die dankbaarheid ervaar. Van: wat geweldig dat Christus dit voor mij heeft willen doen, dat Christus dat mij wil geven.*

⁴¹R22 (minister CRC-A): *“Voor sommige mensen wel heel duidelijk, van het nabetrachten, nog eens even goed bedenken van: wat heb je nu gevierd en welke consequenties heeft dat? Wat vraagt dat van ons, ook nu weer, dat we dit avondmaal gevierd hebben? Maar ook de dankzegging, ook wel heel belangrijk. Ik denk wel dat het voor een zeker aantal mensen dat ook wel belangrijk is, zoals je dankt na het eten, dat je ook nadat je de maaltijd van Christus gevierd hebt, dat je ook dat moment van dankzegging heel duidelijk een plek geeft. (...) Dus dat wel, maar ik hoor daar niet zo heel veel over.”*

R23: So I read the same passage again or what comes next.

M: Right, exactly.

R23: So it's a closing, and indeed the term "thanksgiving" is sometimes also used [for it]. It's just that you also give thanks for having been allowed to celebrate the Lord's Supper together, and look back on it. And in that sense it is a closing. So I do think that preparation has greater weight than that closing meditation.

M: Yes, exactly, right, right.

R23: Yes. But that's also because you have less people attending the second service.⁴²

In the interviews with RCL ministers as well as the minister of CRC-C, the spiritual reflection did not come up for discussion.

5.2.4 Style, Ambiance, and Liturgy

Style of Celebration

When it comes to the style of celebration (see Box 3.1 on page 38), RCL ministers in particular proved to be appreciative of the ambulatory style of celebration. In all participating RCL congregations, this style was used at least part of the time, whereas in CRC-B the sacrament was only celebrated "seated in the pews." When reflecting on the different styles, CRC-B's minister proposed alternating the three styles in order to emphasize the personal choice that comes with the Lord's Supper:

The celebration of the Lord's Supper of course demands a conscious choice, since you receive an invitation. What I do regret is that we... in our church the people don't have to get up. In my first congregation we went to tables, so then you actually had to get up and go. That's not the case here; but it's also cumbersome with such a large congregation.⁴³

⁴²R23: *Nabetrachting, ik zie dat meer als de afsluiting van het avondmaal. Je kijkt nog terug en vanuit het avondmaal ga je ook weer preken. Ik probeer ook een eenheid te hebben met de viering van 's ochtends als ik 's avonds ook moet. /M: Ja, precies. Ja. /R23: Dus dat ik hetzelfde tekstgedeelte nog eens lees of het gedeelte wat erop volgt. /M: Ja, precies. /R23: Dus het is een afsluiting en, ja, het woord "dankzegging" wordt ook wel gebruikt. Het is gewoon dat je ook dankt voor het avondmaal dat je samen hebt mogen vieren en daarop terugkijkt. En in die zin is het een afsluiting. Ik denk dat de voorbereiding dan wat meer gewicht heeft dan die nabetrachting. /M: Ja, precies, ja, ja. /R23: Ja. Maar dat komt ook gewoon omdat je in de tweede dienst minder bezoekers hebt.*

⁴³R23 (minister CRC-B): "Avondmaal vieren vraagt natuurlijk om een bewuste keuze, want je wordt genodigd. Wat ik wel jammer vind is dat wij... bij ons hoeven de mensen niet op te staan. In mijn eerste gemeente gingen we aan tafels, dus dan moest je echt opstaan en aangaan. Dat is hier niet; dat is ook lastig met zo'n grote gemeente."

The “sitting at a table” style, which CRC-A, CRC-C, and all participating RCL congregations used, also received a positive evaluation. However, RCL-D’s minister noted that he disliked the large number of tables that were necessary in a former congregation of which he had been a member (prior to becoming a minister). Lastly, the “standing in a circle” style was received positively by the ministers of RCL-D and RCL-F, while the “celebrating in the pews” style was received neither a positive nor a negative valuation (except in the quote above).

Ambiance

Different statements on the ambiance were shared. In the first place, ministers used the terms *holy* or *holiness* to describe an aspect of the ambiance during the celebration of the Lord’s Supper in their current or past congregations. More on this has already been described above in the section on the “Experience of Holiness” in §5.2.3.

Secondly, CRC-B’s minister in particular referred to *reverence* and *deference* as important aspects related to the celebrations, both during the silent celebrations on Good Friday and in particular in reference to several years ago, prior to a period of liturgical renewal that had taken place in his congregation:

Reverence is still how I from the very start have experienced the Lord’s Supper here. (...) So that meant sober, solemn, but also with piety—the idea being that this service is different from the others. It’s like we often say: “Word and sacrament are on one level.” But in the experience of the people it was and still is different.⁴⁴

Thirdly, the ministers of both CRC-A and B appreciated an *ambiance of peace* during celebrations. The former in particular mentioned his appreciation of the silence during the celebrations:

R22: ...that you partake of bread and wine, and then especially the silence. It’s something people sometimes experience as a threat, right, or at least that’s been my experience at times. In my last congregation, the organ continued playing whenever possible. Beautiful music often, the organist really had a sense for what fit the occasion. But then again, there can also be silence in such a service, there’s also something appealing about that.

M: Right, exactly.

R22: I understand that some people sometimes can really feel

⁴⁴R23 (minister CRC-B), quoted in note 9 above.

oppressed by it, that for some people it has this extra burden, almost on a psychiatric level. I do understand all that, but just for myself I also really appreciate that element of silence.

(...)

R22: The wonder, it makes me think, like: yes, the wonder of the sacrifice of Christ already speaks so clearly and powerfully of itself. All kinds of things you can.... We already use so many words in connection with the Lord's Supper, to explain its meaning. But given all those words and the like and the songs, it's also good to be silent for a bit—what is God Himself telling us now?⁴⁵

CRC-B's minister explicitly mentioned the term "peace" and compared the Lord's Supper to an oasis of rest in the desert of a rushed and hectic life:

A resting point, finding yourself. Meditating, just doing nothing for once, drawing near to God just as you are. And feeling how He comes to you in those signs of bread and wine.⁴⁶

Fourthly, RCL-D's minister disliked the fuss and the solemn ambiance that had surrounded the sacrament in the past, before he himself became a minister. On the other hand, RCL-E's minister expressed the desire for a more exuberant ambiance:

M: How would you want to experience the Holy Supper? (...)
(short silence)

R26: I would... want to have a little more exuberance, festivity, than we do now. Maybe it also has to do with me, that I somewhat... I know that many members of the congregation favor a solemn celebration. Another part of the congregation would prefer to have it differently, and seeks joy, happiness,

⁴⁵R22: *...dat je brood en wijn tot je neemt en dan vooral de stilte. Wat soms mensen ook weleens bedreigend vinden, hè, dat heb ik ook weleens ervaren. In de vorige gemeente speelde het orgel zoveel mogelijk door. Van die prachtige muziek ook vaak, de organist wist dat ook wel goed aan te voelen dat het ook wel passend was. Maar ja, dat het ook stil kan zijn in zo'n dienst, dat heeft ook wel iets, hè? /M: Ja, precies. /R22: Ik begrijp het dat mensen zich daar heel bezwaard kunnen voelen, dat het daardoor extra lading krijgt, haast psychisch, voor sommige mensen. Dat begrijp ik allemaal, maar gewoon puur voor mijzelf vind ik dat element van die stilte toch ook mooi. /(...) /R22: Het wonder, dan denk ik van: ja, het wonder van het offer van Christus dat spreekt zelf al zo duidelijk en zo krachtig. Je kunt er allerlei... We gebruiken al heel veel woorden rond het Avondmaal, om het te duiden. Maar dan is het ook goed met al die woorden en zo en liederen, om ook eens even stil te zijn—wat zegt God zelf nou?*

⁴⁶R23 (minister CRC-B): *"Rustpunt, tot jezelf komen. Tot bezinning komen, even niks moeten, gewoon zoals je bent dicht bij God komen. En merken dat Hij naar jou toekomt in die tekenen van brood en wijn."*

and..., well, I would want to see a little more on the joy or happiness side of things. Even though the Lord's Supper of course has two sides to it, I do know that: on the one hand, the death of Christ and its necessity, which leaves an impression on you, [but] on the other hand, there should be room for joy too. I often compare it to the fourth and fifth of May. It's the fourth and fifth of May all in one.⁴⁷

M: Right.

R26: Like, on May 4 the feeling is one of solemnity, while May 5 is more exuberant. And that exuberance is something I would like to experience a little more, also together. Even though for me it could also be expressed using solemn Psalms.⁴⁸

Liturgy During the Celebration

With regard to the liturgy that was in use, several aspects were discussed. For example, the CRC general synod has made four different liturgical forms available, but not all of them are actually used in every congregation.⁴⁹ In CRC-A, the minister indicated that the introduction of the two recently (2010) approved liturgical forms in his congregation could be discussed with his local church council in the future. The other CRC ministers did not speak out on this topic.

Within the RCL denomination, there currently are five different liturgical forms in use.⁵⁰ All were used alternately in the participating RCL

⁴⁷Every year in the Netherlands, the national commemoration of the dead for war victims takes place on May 4. The next day (May 5) is Liberation Day.

⁴⁸M: *Hoe zou je graag het heilig Avondmaal willen beleven? (...) / [korte stilte] / R26: Ik zou er... een wat uitbundiger, feestelijker karakter willen ervaren dan het nu vaak is. Dat heeft wellicht ook met mijzelf te maken, dat ik mij toch een beetje... Ik weet dat veel gemeenteleden graag een gedragen viering willen. Een ander deel van de gemeente wil dat graag wat anders en vraagt wel om blijdschap, vrolijkheid, en..., ja, ik zou die blijdschap-kant, die vrolijkheid-kant wel wat meer willen zien. Hoewel het Avondmaal natuurlijk twee kanten heeft, dat besef ik ook: aan de ene kant de dood van Christus en dat dat nodig was dat, dat maakt indruk, [maar] aan de andere kant mag de vreugde er ook zijn, zeg maar. Ik vergelijk het zelf vaak met 4 mei en 5 mei. Het is 4 mei en 5 mei ineen. / M: Ja. / R26: Nou, 4 mei hangt een wat gedragen sfeer, 5 mei is de uitbundige sfeer. En die uitbundige sfeer zou ik wel graag wat meer willen beleven, ook met z'n allen. Hoewel voor mij die uitbundige sfeer ook in gedragen psalmen kan uitkomen.*

⁴⁹Namely the classical liturgical form (CRC, "Formulier (1971)") and its abbreviated version (CRC, "Kort formulier (1971)"), and two new forms: CRC, "Liturgisch formulier I (2010)" and CRC, "Liturgisch formulier II (2010)". In CRC-C, only the classical liturgical form is used, albeit in a revision predating the latest CRC edition of 1971 (see chapter 3, note 25). In CRC-A, also the abbreviated version of the classical form is in use (1971), and in CRC-B all different CRC forms are being used.

⁵⁰The latest definitive revisions (2016) are all printed in the RCL's hymnal (*Gereformeerde kerkboek*, pp. 686–707) and are available online: <https://www.gkv.nl/geloven/formulieren/>. However, while this study was being conducted, all RCL congregations still used the penultimate revision (2011) of these liturgical forms.

congregations, although liturgical forms were not always used to introduce the Lord's Supper in RCL-D or RCL-F. Both ministers defended this practice. In RCL-E, the minister indicated that the use of the Ordinary (on March 5, 2017, see §3.3.5) was a one-time experiment.

With regard to the frequency of the celebrations, the ministers of CRC-A and B, as well as RCL-D and E, reported being satisfied with the current practice, although the first two also indicated that they would be open to a higher frequency. The ministers of CRC-C and RCL-F would prefer the sacrament to be celebrated more frequently, with the former noting:

R24: At the same time we of course also stand in a certain tradition. So we maintain the Calvinist tradition where the administration of the sacrament is limited to four times a year. Whether that agrees with the intention of Scripture is something I honestly wonder about.

M: OK, right.

R24: It's a question I ask myself. Even someone like Calvin limited himself to four to six times a year because he was forced to. And I share in that pain. But whatever, the tradition has been set. And on the other hand I also have to admit that the restriction has something special to it. Then the administration of the sacrament remains something exclusive, something special, something that gives the service extra luster so that it doesn't just become routine.

M: Right.

R24: It also wasn't without reason that in the Old Testament worship, also the Passover was celebrated only once a year. So I can explain it, but on the other hand I ask myself whether it really was the pristine Christian or ancient catholic tradition to do it four times a year. But then again, I also know of churches where it never happens. *Oud Gereformeerde Gemeenten* and the like.⁵¹

(...)

M (much later on in the interview): If it were up to you, how often would you want to celebrate the Lord's Supper?

R24: Practically or ideally?

M: Well, actually both.

R24: Practically more often than we do now. I'd certainly allow for six times a year. Yes, at least.

⁵¹The *Oud Gereformeerde Gemeenten* ("Old-Reformed Congregations") are a *bevindelijk*-Reformed denomination. They were established following the founding of the *Gereformeerde Gemeenten* in 1907 (see chapter 4, note 74). More on this denomination's history and identity can be found in Zwemer, *In conflict met de cultuur*, pp. 143–146; Zwemer, *De bevindelijk gereformeerden*, pp. 56–59; Hille, *Tweestromenland*; Hille, *Samengevloeid*.

M: Right.

R24: Ideally every week.⁵²

During the interviews, the time needed for the celebration was not reflected upon, except by RCL-F's minister (who indicated that he shortened his sermon whenever the Lord's Supper was celebrated), and in the interview with CRC-A's minister:

R22: In [another congregation] we sometimes talked about changing things up a bit. There came a time when we had five tables, and I too found it somewhat cumbersome to repeat the words of institution every time again. So we sometimes did it in a way that allowed things to move along a little more, that the words of institution were only pronounced a single time. (...) That also turned it into more of a whole.

M: Right, exactly.

R22: It was an ongoing search. I wasn't all too happy about that. But sometimes you have to keep searching, especially when there are multiple consecutive tables.⁵³

With regard to the liturgical year, RCL-F's minister indicated that he did not favor celebrating the sacrament on Good Friday. Instead, he proposed celebrating the Lord's Supper on Maundy Thursday, although several years ago his church council decided to move it to Easter Sunday.

⁵²R24: *Tegelijkertijd staan we ook in een bepaalde traditie natuurlijk. Wij hanteren dan de calvinistische traditie waarin we de bediening van het sacrament beperken tot viermaal per jaar. Of dat helemaal in overeenstemming met de bedoeling van de Schrift is vraag ik me af, in alle eerlijkheid. /M: Oke, ja. /R24: Dat vraag ik me af. Ook iemand als Calvin heeft ook alleen maar omdat hij daartoe gedwongen werd zich beperkt tot vier tot zes keer per jaar. En ik voel die pijn ook wel wat mee. Maar goed, die traditie heeft zich gesettled. En aan de andere kant moet ik ook zeggen: er zit ook iets bijzonders in, in die beperking. Dan blijft die bediening toch iets exclusiefs, iets bijzonders, iets waardoor die dienst toch een extra glans krijgt en ja, toch niet zo sleurachtig wordt. /M: Ja. /R24: Het is ook niet voor niks dat er in de Oudtestamentische viering ook maar éénmaal per jaar Pacha was. Dus ik kan het wel verklaren, maar aan de andere kant vraag ik me af of het echt de oerchristelijke en de oudkatholieke traditie is om het viermaal per jaar te doen. Maar ja, ik ken ook wel gemeenten waar het nooit gebeurt. Oud Gereformeerde Gemeenten enzo. /(...) /M (veel later in het interview): Als u het zelf zou mogen zeggen. Hoe vaak zou u het avondmaal dan willen vieren? /R24: Praktisch of idealiter? /M: Nou, mag allebei wel. /R24: Praktisch wel wat meer dan nu. Zes keer per jaar zou van mij wel mogen. Ja, zeker wel. /M: Ja. /R24: Idealiter elke week.*

⁵³R22: *In [plaatsnaam andere gemeente] hebben we daar wel eens over gesproken, om het wat anders te doen. We hadden op een gegeven moment vijf tafels, en ik vond het zelf ook wel eens wat bezwaarlijk om iedere keer weer die instellingswoorden uit te spreken. Toen hebben we het wel eens zo gedaan dat het iets meer doorliep, dat we één keer die instellingswoorden uitspraken. (...) Waardoor je ook meer één geheel kreeg. /M: Ja, precies. /R22: Het bleef wel een beetje zoeken. Ik was daar ook niet zo heel erg gelukkig mee. Maar ja, het blijft soms wat zoeken, zeker als je meerdere tafels achter elkaar hebt.*

Lastly, it was also the minister of RCL-D who reflected on congregants celebrating the Lord's Supper outside church services (see §4.2.1):

R25: I think I've changed somewhat on that point. And that's related to what I was just saying, like: what was the original intention in 1 Corinthians 11, [the people] who are together for the meal and during the meal... Then it was in a smaller circle, like, that the bread was broken and the wine poured out.

M: Right.

R25: When exactly does that take place? Does it always have to be in...? No, no.

M: No, no, exactly.

R25: I would be in favor—can [it] also be outside the church? Right, what is the church then? Is it the church service? Yeah, I would really like it if, well, if you did it within a congregation's boundaries, [which] to my mind already makes the connection to the church sufficiently strong.

M: Right, well, OK.

R25: And what about the Fourth Musketeer?⁵⁴ Well, I'm not involved, but if I were, yes, then I think I would wholeheartedly—it could indeed be very beautiful, yes.

M: Right, exactly, yes.

R25: But Jesus really did just say to his disciples: "Do this every time again in remembrance of me." He didn't add all kinds of restricting clauses, like: right, but only once you're a church, once you have a building, once you..., those kinds of things.

M: No, no.

R25: So you have to be little more easygoing about these kinds of things.⁵⁵

⁵⁴The Fourth Musketeer (*de 4e muskietier*) is an Evangelical movement to inspire Christian men. It was founded in 2008 and, among other things, holds marathons and bushcraft events. In 2012 a branch was founded in the US (4M). More information is available online (<https://de4emuskietier.nl/> and <https://www.4musa.com/>).

⁵⁵R25: *Ik geloof dat ik daar toch wel in ben veranderd. En dat heeft ook wel te maken met wat ik net beschreef, van: hoe is het oorspronkelijk bedoeld in 1 Korintiërs 11, die bij elkaar zijn voor de maaltijd en tijdens de maaltijd... In kleiner verband werd dan brood gebroken en wijn geschonken, zeg maar. /M: Ja. /R25: Wanneer vindt dat dan plaats? Moet dat altijd in de...? Nee, nee. /M: Nee, nee, precies. /R25: Ik zou het wel fijn vinden—kan [dat] ook buiten de kerk? Ja, wat is dan de kerk? Is dat de kerkdienst? Ja, ik zou het fijn vinden, nou, oké, als je het binnen het erf van een gemeente doet, dan vind ik dat verbinding genoeg met de kerk. /M: Ja, nou, oké. /R25: En hoe je dat met die 4e Muskietier doet? Nou, ik doe er niet aan mee, maar stel dat ik het wel zou doen, ja, dan denk ik dat ik mij met overgave daar—het kan heel mooi zijn, ja. /M: Ja, precies, ja. /R25: Maar Jezus heeft toch gewoon echt tegen de discipelen gezegd: "Doe dit telkens opnieuw om mij te gedenken." Hij haalde er niet alle beperkende zinnen bij, van: ja, pas als je kerk bent,*

In the interviews with the other ministers, the option of celebrating the Lord's Supper outside official worship services was not discussed.

5.2.5 Personal Developments

Some ministers reported personal (psychological) tensions in the past when administering the sacrament early on in their pastoral careers (CRC-A and B, RCL-D and E), but all indicated that this kind of stress gradually declined over the years. No other causes of personal stress were reported. The ministers in RCL-D and E reported specifically that the celebrations had in their experience become more relaxed and less "holy" than in the past. This development may relate to an increased frequency in the celebrations, or so RCL-E's minister suggested:

In my last congregation it was always four times. And my impression is that at the time there was much greater emphasis on it, like: "O, it's Lord's Supper." Something sacred, like. [There was] much more that aura of sanctity surrounding it than I experience now. It's becoming more normal because you celebrate it more often.⁵⁶

According to the ministers of CRC-A and RCL-D, the celebrations have become "more meaningful" or "more intense" over the years. According to the latter, they are also more relaxed nowadays:

I also see people being more easygoing when they celebrate. Sometimes they take their small children by the hand, like, who just walk along with dad or mom and just kind of look up at me, like: "What is this?" And, but, so that it's more relaxed... People sometimes smile at each other a bit and make eye contact, like, that I do think is a difference. (...) That doesn't make it too much a sacred event, like, for example having to be very solemn and serious all of a sudden.⁵⁷

pas als je een gebouw hebt, pas als, en dat soort dingen meer. /M: Nee, nee. /R25: Dus, je moet er een beetje relaxter mee omgaan.

⁵⁶R26 (minister RCL-E): *"In de vorige gemeentes was het altijd vier keer. En ik merk wel dat er toen veel meer nadruk op lag, van: "Oh, het is Avondmaal." Iets heiligs, zeg maar. Veel meer dus het aura van heiligheid eromheen dan dat ik dat nu ervaar. Het wordt nu gewoner, omdat je het vaker mag vieren."*

⁵⁷R25 (minister RCL-D): *"Ik zie ook mensen ontspannener vieren, hè. Ze nemen soms hun kleine kindjes mee aan de hand om gewoon, hè, die lopen gewoon mee met papa of mama en die kijken dan een beetje zo naar mij omhoog, zo van: "wat is dat?" En, maar, hè, dus dat er meer ontspanning komt... Dat er ook een beetje naar mekaar wordt geglimlacht en contact gemaakt, zeg maar, dat vind ik wel een verschil. (...) Dat maakt het niet te veel een heel heilig gebeuren, van, bijvoorbeeld opeens heel ernstig en serieus moeten zijn."*

RCL-F's minister reported both ups and downs, where the ups were materialized in casual, relaxed celebrations every month, while the downs had their origins in an excessively formal approach to liturgy in one of his previous congregations (thereby making spontaneous liturgical variations virtually impossible):

There sometimes are highlights and also moments on Sundays when I'm like: it doesn't feel quite like other times, like. So ups and downs. It's something that gets me most when the celebration of the Lord's Supper has become a subject of debate.⁵⁸

Other developments mentioned by others included the (personal) experience of celebrating the Lord's Supper in different styles (minister CRC-A), and the realization after several years of pastoral experience that the sacrament is "sufficiently enough"—that is, that the minister himself (CRC-B) does not need to make it special. The minister of CRC-C did not report any substantial personal developments.

5.2.6 Personal Desires

With regard to the personal desires, the ministers shared many different suggestions during the interviews. A first category pertained to different liturgical styles: implementing an "ambulatory style" or alternating three different styles (CRC-B), celebrating the sacrament in a more relaxed, "reception-like style" or "standing in a circle" (RCL-D), and celebrating it with greater exuberance/festivity, possibly with appropriate background music (RCL-E). However, RCL-E's minister did also wonder about a potential conflict between a sense of sin and a joyfulness in his congregation:

R26: ...I also don't notice much of a need, like: something's got to change some time. Well, I do when I ask about change, then it's more like: we could make it more joyful, festive. It's something I hear especially from the young people at catechism.

M: OK.

R26: But also from young adults, or like those in their twenties or thirties, like, who raise the question like: What is Lord's Supper about really? And I can't really put my finger on it,

⁵⁸R27 (minister RCL-F): "*Er zijn wel eens hoogtepunten en dan ook momenten of zondagen dat ik dacht, van: het voelt niet zo mooi ook als een andere keer, of zo. Dus ups en downs. Waar ik eigenlijk het meeste last van heb is als avondmaalsviering een onderwerp van discussie wordt.*"

[but] I do sometimes ask myself then: How do you view the Lord's Supper? Does the awareness of my sin then still have a place when we, to put it irreverently...

M: Festive celebration...

R26 (continues): Turn it into some happy-clappy thing?⁵⁹

This minister therefore did propose making the celebrations more joyful, albeit without cutting back on the Reformed teaching on the Lord's Supper.

With regard to the ambiance or experience of the celebrations, RCL-F's minister desire was to experience "more intense" and "less static" celebrations, suggesting smaller group size (just a single table) and less decorum (e.g. making it possible to walk during the celebration) as potential solutions. Similarly, RCL-D's minister proposed greater rejoicing during the celebration, for example, in one's relationship with Christ and with one another:

R25: ...something, everything around it, people should be enjoying things a little more, if I can put it that way. Enjoying in the sense that it is visible that we are just happy that we can be together here, and we rejoice in the bond that exists with Christ. Right, how could you bring that to expression? As far as I'm concerned we could use music, although that isn't altogether necessary.

(...)

R25: The silent celebration is quite good, but not always. It doesn't have to monopolize things.

M: No, exactly, right, right.

R25: Laughing, talking, and sharing.

M: Ok, right.

R25: And not laughing in the sense of... Well, whatever, you know what I mean: the joy of the gospel.

M: Right, OK.

R25: I would want that to be tangible.⁶⁰

⁵⁹R26: *...ik merk ook niet heel veel behoefte, van: er moet eens een keer iets veranderen. Wel, als ik vragen naar verandering hoor, dan gaat het meer om, van: het zou wat vrolijker, wat meer feestelijker mogen. Vooral van jongeren op catechisatie hoor ik dat. /M: Oké. /R26: Maar ook van jongvolwassenen, of twintigers, dertigers, zeg maar, die dat dan aangeven, van: waar gaat het nou om bij het Avondmaal? En ik kan dat niet helemaal hardmaken, [maar] ik vraag mijzelf nog wel eens af: Wat is nou je eigen beeld bij het Avondmaal? Komt het besef van mijn zonde dan nog wel voldoende aan bod als we er een, oneerbiedig gezegd... /M: Feestelijke viering... /R26 (vervolgt): Een vrolijke, vrolijke boel van maken?*

⁶⁰R25: *...iets, de entourage eromheen, er mag wel iets meer genoten worden, laat ik het zo zeggen. Genoten worden in de zin van dat het zichtbaar is dat: we zijn gewoon blij dat we hier bij elkaar kunnen zijn, en wij verheugen ons in de band met Christus die er*

As a possibility, he suggested that this be “organized” in subgroups already existing in the congregation:

So, for example, once every two months we have an afternoon service when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Would it be negotiable and feasible for people—also in terms of their experience—if you were to say: we’re not going to go to church, but in our neighborhoods, in our small groups, we are going to hold a meeting where something liturgical takes place? Or we’re just going to organize a meal for everyone who wants to, who attends? And during that meal the Lord’s Supper will then be celebrated?⁶¹

In addition, CRC-B’s minister expressed the wish that communicants in his congregation experience more joy during the celebrations:

What I would really want is for people to experience a lot more joy at the Lord’s Supper. I do understand the complaint young people have who say: “Celebrate the Lord’s Supper? Why then do so many people have such tight faces?” Of course... Celebrating Lord’s Supper is difficult. Why? Because things come together there that you can’t ever always fully experience all at once. I mean, for example: misery, salvation, and thankfulness. Because it was because of my sin that Jesus had to walk that road. He hung on the cross because of my guilt, but also in my place, that is: He is my Redeemer, and so I have been redeemed. And at the same time: He also did it to save me, to give me eternal life, that also makes me thankful.⁶²

Lastly, CRC-A’s minister sought greater attention for the “riches of unity with Christ” by the use of more accessible liturgical forms, while

is. Ja, hoe zou je dat tot uiting kunnen brengen? Wat mij betreft mag dat met muziek, maar dat hoeft niet zo nodig. /(...) /R25: De stilteviering is best goed, maar [dat werkt] niet altijd. Die hoeft niet het monopolie te hebben, ofzo. /M: Nee, precies, ja, ja. /R25: Gelachen, gepraat en gedeeld. /M: Oké, ja. /R25: En dan lachen niet, van... Nou ja, goed, je snapt wat ik bedoel: de vreugde om het evangelie. /M: Ja, oké. /R25: Die zou ik graag tastbaar willen hebben.

⁶¹R25 (minister RCL-D), quoted in note 12 above.

⁶²R23 (minister CRC-B): “*Ik zou heel graag willen dat er een stuk meer vreugde wordt beleefd bij het avondmaal. Ik kan [me] de klacht van jongelui heel goed voorstellen, die zeggen dus: “Avondmaal vieren, waarom hebben zoveel mensen dan zo’n uitgestreken gezicht?” Het is natuurlijk... Avondmaal vieren is moeilijk. Waarom? Omdat er dingen samenkomen die je nooit allemaal tegelijk kunt beleven. Ik bedoel bijvoorbeeld: ellende, verlossing en dankbaarheid. Want het was mijn zonde waardoor Jezus die weg moest gaan. Hij hing aan het kruis door mijn schuld, maar ook in mijn plaats, dat is: Hij is mijn verlosser, dus zo ben ik verlost. En tegelijk: Hij deed het ook om mij te redden, het eeuwige leven te geven, dat maakt me ook dankbaar.*”

the minister of CRC-C longed for nothing more than to celebrate “Like a poor beggar. Especially that. Who has nothing to offer and can live from the trough of God’s grace.”⁶³ This implies attention for Christ alone: “...the Lord’s Supper is administered most fruitfully when Christ really stands central. Like the disciples on the mount of transfiguration, they saw nobody except Jesus. That’s when it is most fruitful.”⁶⁴

5.3 Formal Voice: Literature Review

In this section, we will discuss the formal theological voice as documented in written publications by CRC and RCL theologians.⁶⁵ Due to the rather broad range of available publications, this chapter will be restricted to books and book chapters published between 1944 and the time of writing (see §2.5.4). I will first treat the CRC literature, and then move on to that of RCL theologians.

5.3.1 Christian Reformed Churches

In the CRC, several brochures treating the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper either directly or indirectly were published soon after the end of the Second World War.⁶⁶ In these texts, the sacrament does not always stand central. Nevertheless, there is great unanimity among their various authors. During this period, CRC theologians tried implicitly or explicitly to align themselves with the contents of the Three Forms of Unity (i.e. Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dort) and the Bible itself. This is apparent, for example, when J.H. Velema argues that the position of the CRC on covenant and baptism “is of course no other stance than that of Scripture and Confession” (p. 103). A similar approach can be seen in the other CRC authors from this period. G. Wisse, for example, refers to HC QA 81 in answering the question “For whom is the Lord’s Supper?,” while L.H. van der Meiden plainly writes: “How then will we keep the path to the Lord’s Supper pure? When we act according to the Word of God” (p. 49).

The dedication to Scripture and confession is also clearly visible in later CRC literature; the various authors always seek to connect their dis-

⁶³R24 (minister CRC-C): “*Als een arme bedelaar. Dat vooraf. Die niks meebrengt en die uit de korf van Gods genade mag leven.*”

⁶⁴Ibid.: “*...de meest vruchtbare avondmaalsbediening, dat is wanneer Christus echt centraal staat. Zoals de discipelen op de berg der verheerlijking, ze zagen niemand dan Jezus alleen. Dat is de meest vruchtbare bediening.*”

⁶⁵This section has been translated, with adaptation, from: Bosman, “Avondmaal in CGK en GKv”.

⁶⁶E.g. Velema, *Wat is Christelijk Gereformeerd?*, pp. 102–118; Wisse, *Mag ik ten Avondmaal gaan?*; Maris, *Van het doopvont tot de bondsdis*; Van der Meiden, *Het heilige avondmaal*; Op den Velde, *Onze eredienst*; Van der Schuit, *Ten dis geleid*.

course to Bible and confessions, sometimes as supplemented with an appeal to the Reformers (Calvin, Zwingli, Luther) or Reformed ministers from the time of the *Nadere Reformatie* (Further Reformation).⁶⁷ Authors cited positively from the latter current in Reformed theology include Willem Teellinck (1579–1629), Theodorus à Brakel (1608–1669), Jodocus van Lodenstein (1620–1677), Petrus Immens (1664–1720), and Alexander Comrie (1706–1774).

The literature itself does not offer direct indications as to why so much was written about the Lord's Supper in the CRC at the end of the 1940s.⁶⁸ What is clear, however, is that the CRC's General Synod made a statement on the relationship between public profession of faith and "the use of the sacraments" in 1950.⁶⁹ At the next General Synod three years later, another debate broke out over this relationship, since a number of ministers were troubled by the course of ecclesiastical life, since to their minds the link between profession of faith and participation in the celebration of the Lord's Supper had become overly self-evident.⁷⁰ In response, the synod issued a national statement to be read from every CRC pulpit in 1953. When in 1962 and 1965 renewed unrest arose over other matters, this did not lead to an ecclesiastical schism, but rather to the founding of the *Bewaar het Pand*-foundation in 1966 (see §2.2).

Origin

In CRC literature, the origins of the Lord's Supper are traced back to the Bible, and summarized with the words "instituted by Christ" or "commanded by Christ."⁷¹ The most comprehensive summary of the origins of the Lord's Supper (and the debates surrounding this issue) was presented by J.P. Versteeg in a book chapter on the Lord's Supper in New

⁶⁷Van 't Spijker et al., *Bij brood en beker* (various chapters); Van 't Spijker, *Zijn verbond en woorden*; Knevel, *Het Heilig Avondmaal* (partly); Van Amstel, *De zegen van het avondmaal*; Van Genderen and Velema, *Beknopte gereformeerde dogmatiek*, pp. 724–737; Westerink, *Doet dat tot Mijn gedachtenis*; Kieviet, *Tot Mijn gedachtenis*.

⁶⁸A reason for the relatively large number of publications may be found in the (new) questions that arose after World War II from the debate on the CRC's identity in relation to other Reformed denominations (like the RCL and the *Gereformeerde Gemeenten*), and in the CRC's internal debates on issues such as the value of profession of faith. See Van 't Spijker, "Enkele hoofdlijnen", pp. 111–120, 123; Velema, "Kerk en strijd", pp. 232–235.

⁶⁹The main reason for this statement was Rev. P. Westerloo (Zwolle), who only wanted to allow parents to answer the questions included in the Liturgical Form for the Baptism of Infants if they regularly celebrated the Lord's Supper. See Van 't Spijker, "Enkele hoofdlijnen", pp. 120–121; Velema, "Kerk en strijd", pp. 234–235.

⁷⁰See Brienens, *De Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*, pp. 82–84.

⁷¹Wisse, *Mag ik ten Avondmaal gaan?*, p. 8; Van der Meiden, *Het heilige avondmaal*, p. 50; Versteeg, "Nieuwe Testament", pp. 9, 19–28, 34–41; Van Amstel, *De zegen van het avondmaal*, pp. 20–22.

Testament exegesis. Versteeg and several other authors also refer to the Jewish Passover meal as a forerunner of the Lord's Supper.⁷²

Attributed Meanings

CRC theologians attribute several different meanings (or interpretations) to the Lord's Supper. In this subsection, I will present a concise overview of the various meanings, without attempting to be exhaustive.

The Lord's Supper is often called *holy* and a *sacrament*.⁷³ Most of the time, these terms are used without further explanation. When the term "sacrament" is explained, it is described as "an outward sign that confirms God's promises to our conscience" (Calvin).⁷⁴ The Lord's Supper is also called a *sign and seal* of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, for our salvation.⁷⁵ These words are derived from classic Reformed confessions like the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. When CRC authors explain these terms, they use all kinds of images and metaphors to illustrate what they mean: that Christ's sacrifice, or Christ Himself, is a pledge, that the Lord's Supper is a pledge ring or a "spiritual engagement ring" (G. Wisse) of God's promise, given to us by God: "The Lord's Supper is a seal of the covenant. And in that covenant, Christ and the righteousness he won as ransom is the substance of the promise. Of that promise the sacrament is a seal and pledge."⁷⁶

The sacrament is also described as a joyful *celebration meal*. According to L.H. van der Meiden, the celebrants may start rejoicing in the Lord when the Lord's Supper is administered to them, foreshadowing their eternal joy.⁷⁷ CRC theologians forcefully deny that the Lord's Supper can itself be a sacrifice; it is no repetition of the sacrifice of Christ. Instead, they characterize it as a meal of deliverance denoting *the forgiveness God offers us*, for the sake the sacrifice of Christ alone.⁷⁸

⁷²Maris, *Van het doopvont tot de bondsdiss*, p. 74; Van der Meiden, *Het heilige avondmaal*, p. 53; Van der Schuit, *Ten dis geleid*, p. 20; Versteeg, "Nieuwe Testament", pp. 32–34; Van Genderen, *Naar de norm van het Woord*, p. 91; Van Genderen and Velema, *Beknopte gereformeerde dogmatiek*, pp. 724–725.

⁷³Wisse, *Mag ik ten Avondmaal gaan?*, pp. 4, 24; Op den Velde, *Onze eredienst*, p. 49; Van 't Spijker, *Zijn verbond en woorden*, pp. 87–88; Van Genderen and Velema, *Beknopte gereformeerde dogmatiek*, pp. 704–737.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 704.

⁷⁵Wisse, *Mag ik ten Avondmaal gaan?*, pp. 4–5; Van der Meiden, *Het heilige avondmaal*, p. 55; Op den Velde, *Onze eredienst*, p. 49; Van Genderen and Velema, *Beknopte gereformeerde dogmatiek*, pp. 705, 724; Van 't Spijker, *De toeëigening van het heil*, p. 47.

⁷⁶Wisse, *Mag ik ten Avondmaal gaan?*, pp. 13–17: "Het Avondmaal is een Bondszegel. En in dat verbond is Christus en Zijne Borgtochtelijke gerechtigheid de inhoud der belofte. En van die belofte is het sacrament een zegel en onderpand"; cf. Van der Meiden, *Het heilige avondmaal*, p. 54.

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 56–60; cf. Brienens, *Oriëntatie in de liturgie*, p. 70; Van Amstel, *De zegen van het avondmaal*, pp. 49–53.

⁷⁸Maris, *Van het doopvont tot de bondsdiss*, p. 82; Op den Velde, *Onze eredienst*, p. 51;

Aside from the attributed meanings, various authors also mention different *acts* that are part of the Lord's Supper or its celebration; these include *commemorating* the sacrifice of Christ, *proclaiming* the death of Christ, *showing thankfulness* to God, and *waiting in expectation* of Christ's return.⁷⁹

Preparation

When they speak of preparation for Lord's Supper, different authors offer their readers recommendations. Most frequent mention is made of the admonition to the self-examination and sanctification deemed necessary for partaking of the sacrament.⁸⁰ All who are eligible to receive the sacrament are to prepare themselves by following the steps of "true self-examination" (as explained in the classical liturgical form). G. Wisse, for instance, refers to the parable of the wedding feast to underscore the necessity of having a suitable wedding garment (as a metaphor of the believer's preparation, cf. Matthew 22:1–14) and also offers advice of a more practical nature for personal preparation: wearing appropriate clothing ("it is not a woman of questionable morals who approaches, but the bride of the Lamb"), seeking no distractions, getting up on time, reading edifying literature, finding good company, and holding conversations about the Lord's Supper.⁸¹

Some of the older publications mention a distinction between an (outward) profession of truth and an (inward) profession of faith.⁸² All authors who mention this distinction nevertheless reject it, urging their readers not to doubt themselves, but to participate in the celebration on the basis of God's promises (instead of using their own faith or reason to build an argument for participation). This call is repeated in a number of books or book chapters, and probably represents a response to the practice of abstinence (*mijding*) from the Lord's Supper table in one wing of the CRC.⁸³

Van 't Spijker, *Zijn verbond en woorden*, pp. 88, 97, 133; Van Genderen and Velema, *Beknopte gereformeerde dogmatiek*, pp. 725–726, 729–730.

⁷⁹Van der Meiden, *Het heilige avondmaal*, p. 67; Versteeg, "Nieuwe Testament", pp. 58–64; Van 't Spijker, *Zijn verbond en woorden*, pp. 88, 133; Brienens, "Ontwikkelingen in de liturgie rond het Heilig Avondmaal", p. 117; Brienens, *Oriëntatie in de liturgie*, p. 69; Van Genderen, *Naar de norm van het Woord*, pp. 92–93; Van Genderen and Velema, *Beknopte gereformeerde dogmatiek*, pp. 724–726; CRC, *Stijlvol samenkomen*, pp. 9–10.

⁸⁰Wisse, *Mag ik ten Avondmaal gaan?*, pp. 23–25; Maris, *Van het doopvont tot de bondsdis*, pp. 80–84, 89; Van der Meiden, *Het heilige avondmaal*, p. 73; Van der Schuit, *Ten dis geleid*, p. 85; Van 't Spijker, *Zijn verbond en woorden*, pp. 90–102; Van Amstel, *De zegen van het avondmaal*, pp. 26–40, 79; Van Genderen and Velema, *Beknopte gereformeerde dogmatiek*, p. 733.

⁸¹Wisse, *Mag ik ten Avondmaal gaan?*, pp. 25, 30: "*niet een verdachte deerne maar de bruid des Lams treedt toe*", cf. Van Amstel, *De zegen van het avondmaal*, pp. 55–57.

⁸²E.g. Van der Schuit, *Ten dis geleid*, pp. 37, 75.

⁸³Wisse, *Mag ik ten Avondmaal gaan?*, pp. 17, 31; Maris, *Van het doopvont tot de*

J.J. van der Schuit in particular stresses the importance of having a mystical (personal) relationship with God when preparing for the Lord's Supper. In his eyes, *unio mystica* serves as an antidote to both an overly rational or strict view on the sacrament, and, conversely, to an excessive boldness.⁸⁴ This aspect was not discussed extensively in the work of other CRC authors, however.

Some authors explicitly mentioned the necessity of church discipline for a pure administration of the sacrament, or of the offices and a congregation for the sacrament to be administered properly.⁸⁵ The participation of children is rejected in two publications.⁸⁶

Actual Celebration

With regard to the actual celebration, the various authors offer advice on how the Lord's Supper should be received and performed, both personally and as a congregation. Some authors stress the importance of reverence and concentration during the celebrations, while according to one author a "holy silence" should be observed during the administration.⁸⁷ Most importantly, however, one must be truly converted before taking part in the celebration. Without conversion, the celebration of the Lord's Supper will lead to divine judgment (with reference to 1 Corinthians 11:29), albeit not necessarily of an eternal nature.⁸⁸

Most CRC authors do not mention different styles for celebrating the Lord's Supper. It is only in more recent literature that some authors note the possibility of practical differences on a local level, usually doing so without offering their personal standpoint.⁸⁹ So too the frequency of celebration (which in most CRC churches is set at four times per year) is

bondsdis, pp. 83–84; Van der Schuit, *Ten dis geleid*, pp. 69–89; Starreveld, "Avondmaal en Ambt", pp. 91–92; Knevel, *Ruim van hart*, pp. 12–16; Westerink, *Doet dat tot Mijn gedachtenis*, pp. 156–160; Kieviet, *Tot Mijn gedachtenis*, pp. 308–313.

⁸⁴Van der Schuit, *Ten dis geleid*, pp. 12, 75.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 32; Van 't Spijker, "Het klassieke avondmaalsformulier", pp. 366–371; Van 't Spijker, *Zijn verbond en woorden*, pp. 75–76, 79–80, 103; Starreveld, "Avondmaal en Ambt".

⁸⁶Van Genderen, *Naar de norm van het Woord*, pp. 95–97; CRC, *Handreiking doop en avondmaal voor zendingsgemeenten*, pp. 35–36.

⁸⁷Wisse, *Mag ik ten Avondmaal gaan?*, p. 4; Van der Meiden, *Het heilige avondmaal*, pp. 55, 65, 78; Van Amstel, *De zegen van het avondmaal*, pp. 41–42.

⁸⁸Van der Meiden, *Het heilige avondmaal*, pp. 55–56; Op den Velde, *Onze eredienst*, p. 51; Van 't Spijker, *Zijn verbond en woorden*, p. 122; Westerink, *Doet dat tot Mijn gedachtenis*, pp. 55–62; Kieviet, *Tot Mijn gedachtenis*, pp. 42–46, 96–112.

⁸⁹Brienen, *Oriëntatie in de liturgie*, p. 72; Doolaard, "De protestantse eredienst in de Nederlanden na de Reformatie", pp. 40–41; Van Amstel, *De zegen van het avondmaal*, pp. 54–55; Brienen, *De Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*, pp. 87–90; Westerink, *Doet dat tot Mijn gedachtenis*, pp. 186–189. Westerink was alone in sharing his view promoting the "seated at a table" style, defending the use of a shared cup, and rejecting the use of grape juice instead of wine.

usually not mentioned or discussed.⁹⁰ In general, virtually no instructions are offered pertaining to the liturgy.

When describing what happens on the theological level, most authors mention that it is primarily God who acts, that Christ is present at the meal (as the Host), and that the work of the Holy Spirit is necessary (to have “true communion with Christ and share in all His riches,” as CRC authors write after the classical liturgical form).⁹¹

Last but not least, mutual communion among believers is mentioned as an important aspect of the sacramental celebration.⁹²

Purpose and Effect

When reflecting on the purpose and/or effect of the Lord’s Supper, CRC authors offer various responses. For example, the Lord’s Supper is said to be have been given to strengthen believers, or for the purpose of consolation.⁹³ Besides, the Lord’s Supper may lead to the renewal of faith and sanctification, and the celebrating community may show its thankfulness to God.⁹⁴ This implies that the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is interpreted as a way to thank God for what He does and has done for believers.

Following the celebration, some CRC churches devote a special service or sermon to a spiritual reflection (*nabetrachting*) on the Lord’s Supper. Although this practice is in place in various CRC congregations (including some of those participating in this study), very little has been written about it in CRC literature.⁹⁵

⁹⁰In 1990 and 1992, T. Brienens expressed himself positively on a higher frequency of celebration (in “Liturgie als dienst van de kerk”, p. 449 and *Oriëntatie in de liturgie*, p. 89). See also Brienens, *De liturgie bij Johannes Calvijn*, pp. 214–218; Brienens, *Calvijn en de kerkdienst*, pp. 72–74.

⁹¹Wisse, *Mag ik ten Avondmaal gaan?*, p. 4; Maris, *Van het doopvont tot de bondsdien*, pp. 74–75, 88; Van der Meiden, *Het heilige avondmaal*, pp. 13, 50, 53–54; Op den Velde, *Onze eredienst*, p. 52; Van ’t Spijker, *De toeëigening van het heil*, pp. 46–50; Van Amstel, *De zegen van het avondmaal*, pp. 26, 52–53; Van Genderen and Velema, *Beknopte gereformeerde dogmatiek*, pp. 709, 727.

⁹²Versteeg, “Nieuwe Testament”, pp. 54–58; Brienens, “Ontwikkelingen in de liturgie rond het Heilig Avondmaal”, p. 116; Van Genderen, *Naar de norm van het Woord*, pp. 94–95; Van Amstel, *De zegen van het avondmaal*, pp. 52–53; Van Genderen and Velema, *Beknopte gereformeerde dogmatiek*, pp. 727–729; Westerink, *Doet dat tot Mijn gedachtenis*, pp. 153–160; Kieviet, *Tot Mijn gedachtenis*, pp. 286–289. Cf. Van ’t Spijker, “Het klassieke avondmaalsformulier”, p. 371: “For it is precisely there that the church manifests itself: at the bread and the cup.”

⁹³Wisse, *Mag ik ten Avondmaal gaan?*, p. 4; Van ’t Spijker, *Zijn verbond en woorden*, pp. 88–89; Van Amstel, *De zegen van het avondmaal*, pp. 20–25, 70–75.

⁹⁴Van ’t Spijker, *Zijn verbond en woorden*, p. 133; Brienens, “Ontwikkelingen in de liturgie rond het Heilig Avondmaal”, p. 117; Van Genderen and Velema, *Beknopte gereformeerde dogmatiek*, p. 726.

⁹⁵The only exception is: Maris, *Van het doopvont tot de bondsdien*, p. 92. Recently, Rev. A.K. Wallet wrote a magazine article on the topic: Wallet, “Nabetrachting”.

The diaconal aspects of the sacrament were discussed in 1994 when K.T. de Jonge called the Lord's Supper "the source and the origin of the diaconate," noting that this diaconal aspect of the Supper was particularly strong in the early church. That is why the sacrament still is "the center of worship" for the diaconate.⁹⁶ Other CRC theologians, however, were much less attentive to this aspect in their work.

Recent Developments

Recently, two books were published that each provide an explanation of the classical liturgical form, underlining the continuing relevance of this form for the CRC membership.⁹⁷ The most recent publications are a brochure on baptism and the Lord's Supper in mission churches (written by a committee of the CRC's General Synod)⁹⁸ and a booklet on the liturgy from M.J. Kater in which the author states that it is fundamentally incorrect to separate Word (sermon) and sacrament, while at the same time indicating that a weekly celebration is no solution for "our hardened hearts."⁹⁹

5.3.2 Reformed Churches Liberated

In the RCL, it was not until 1956 that a first monograph on liturgy was published. Strikingly, there is very little attention in either this work or in later publications from the 1950s and 1960s for the sacraments.¹⁰⁰ Only after 1978 did the theological literature begin to pay more attention to baptism and the Lord's Supper, among others in the work of C. Trimp, G. van Rongen and K. Deddens.¹⁰¹ The work of Trimp and Deddens in

⁹⁶De Jonge, "Diaconaat en liturgie", pp. 56–57, cf. De Jonge, "Liturgie"; De Jonge, "Dubbelspoor en monoraal"; De Jonge, "Diaconaat en gemeente", pp. 144–147; CRC, *Stijlvol samenkomen*, pp. 10–11. T. Brienens previously emphasized the unity of *leiturgia* and *diakonia* in Brienens, *Twee in één*, pp. 42, 44.

⁹⁷Westerink, *Doet dat tot Mijn gedachtenis*; Kieviet, *Tot Mijn gedachtenis*. However, as early as 1992 and 1994 T. Brienens had formulated a critique on the style and content of parts of the classical liturgical form (see his *Oriëntatie in de liturgie*, p. 101 and "Liturgie en kerkordelijke zaken", pp. 61–62), following W. van 't Spijker (*Zijn verbond en woorden*, p. 104), C. Trimp (*Formulieren en gebeden*, pp. 55–57; *De gemeente en haar liturgie*, pp. 150–154) and A.F.N. Lekkerkerker (*Kanttekeningen III*, pp. 51–61).

⁹⁸CRC, *Handreiking doop en avondmaal voor zendingsgemeenten*.

⁹⁹Kater, *Een samenkomst om naar te verlangen*, pp. 87–90; cf. Hoek, "De beleving van het Heilig Avondmaal", pp. 119–120. On the relationship between Word and sacrament from a CRC perspective, see also Brienens, *Oriëntatie in de liturgie*, p. 63 in which the priority of the Lord's Supper over the Word is implicitly rejected.

¹⁰⁰Van Rongen, *Zijn schone dienst* and Van Rongen, *De liturgie van Gods verbond*. In the first book, the Lord's Supper is mentioned in the context of the "service of the offering," as well as in the Dutch translation of Farel's *Manière et Fassung* (1533) included in that work.

¹⁰¹Trimp, *Formulieren en gebeden*; Trimp, "Sacrificium laudis"; Trimp, *Het altaar gebroken, de tafel hersteld*; Deddens, *Antwoord op je doop*; Deddens, *Waar alles van Hem spreekt*; Trimp, *De gemeente en haar liturgie*; Trimp, *Woord, water en wijn*; Hendriks, *Kinderen aan de tafel van Christus?*; Knevel, *Het Heilig Avondmaal* (partly), and Van Ron-

particular offer both substantive and practical proposals for liturgical renewal.

Trimp, for instance, explicitly defined the sacrament as a festive meal: “the *celebration* of salvation.” This has a more positive ring to it than the tone that is struck in the confession, which states that the sacraments were instituted for “our weakness” (BC art. 33).¹⁰² Trimp does not criticize the confession, but argues that the “weakness” mentioned here does not refer to original sin, but to the creatural limitation of human nature, thereby presenting a re-reading of the confession text with an appeal to Calvin. In addition, Trimp and other authors like Van Rongen and Deddens mention concrete suggestions for improvement, among others for the content of the classical form and the design of the liturgy.¹⁰³

Origin

When it comes to the origin of the Lord’s Supper, RCL authors show themselves in large agreement with their CRC colleagues when they too underline the institution of the Lord’s Supper by Christ. Also noteworthy are the remarks of several authors that the Lord’s Supper is, in a sense, a continuation of the Old Testament Passover meal.¹⁰⁴ In 1995 a committee of the RCL’s General Synod concluded that there still are too many gaps in our knowledge of the manner and frequency in which the first Christians celebrated the sacrament.¹⁰⁵

Attributed Meanings

In the literature of RCL theologians, various meanings are attributed to the Lord’s Supper. Some meanings correspond largely with those mentioned in CRC literature, like the identification of the Lord’s Supper as *holy* and a *sacrament*. As in the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism, the Lord’s Supper is called a *sign and seal*, although the metaphors typical to CRC literature (e.g. Christ as collateral) are for the most part absent from RCL literature.¹⁰⁶

gen, *Met al de heiligen III*, pp. 160–183.

¹⁰²Trimp, *De gemeente en haar liturgie*, pp. 114–118; cf. Trimp, *Formulieren en gebeden*, pp. 55–56.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, pp. 55–57 (drawing on the original critique of Lekkerkerker, *Kanttekeningen III*, pp. 51–57, 134–148); Trimp, *Het altaar gebroken, de tafel hersteld*, pp. 44–46; Deddens, *Waar alles van Hem spreekt*, pp. 67–69; Van Rongen, *Met al de heiligen III*, esp. pp. 173–175.

¹⁰⁴See for example Trimp, *De gemeente en haar liturgie*, pp. 104–110, 117; Sliggers, *Wat is hierop uw antwoord?*, p. 46; Verbree, *Over dopen*, pp. 134–136; Kruidhof, *Rust vinden*, pp. 46–48.

¹⁰⁵RCL, *Rapport Studiedeputaten 1995*, pp. 57–61.

¹⁰⁶An exception is C. Trimp, who referred to Christ as the *Collateral of Good Friday*. Trimp also compared the Lord’s Supper to a wedding ring that God gave to His bride (the

Like their CRC colleagues, RCL theologians ascribe the following acts to the Lord's Supper: *commemorating* Christ's sacrifice, *proclaiming* His death, *waiting in expectation* of His return.¹⁰⁷ They are, however, more insistent than their CRC counterparts in their emphasis on the Lord's Supper as a feast (Trimp: "*the celebration of salvation*") and as a thanksgiving/sacrifice of thanksgiving (*dankzegging/dankoffer*).¹⁰⁸

Preparation

With regard to personal preparation for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, RCL theologians in general do write that self-examination is necessary. Nevertheless, no warnings against abstaining from the Lord's Supper were found in RCL literature, nor did the authors draw any distinctions between profession of truth and profession of faith (as in some CRC publications). Various RCL authors do try to clarify what self-examination means, thereby offering further aid to fully grasp what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11:27–28 and/or what the liturgical forms mention about self-examination. C. Trimp, for example, underscored that the apostle is not speaking about the unworthiness of the communicant but of the meal, and that the self-examination Paul proposed does not pertain to a personal choice regarding participation or abstinence, but to the communicant's fruitful participation (by an examination of his own conduct before the face of God, rather than the collection of personal arguments for participation).¹⁰⁹

In RCL literature, church discipline is regarded as a self-evident part of the Lord's Supper—that is, the local church council decides who is eligible to take part in the celebrations.¹¹⁰ In a recent book chapter, Erik de

church) despite of her unfaithfulness (Trimp, *De gemeente en haar liturgie*, pp. 111, 116–117). This metaphor may have been inspired by Zwingli, who used similar imagery to describe the elements of bread and wine (cf. Opitz, "Huldrych Zwingli", p. 129). For the Lord's Supper as *holy*, see Hendriks, *Kinderen aan de tafel van Christus?*, p. 118; as *sacrament*: Trimp, *Woord, water en wijn*, pp. 103–108; as *sign and seal*: *Ibid.*, pp. 97, 103.

¹⁰⁷E.g. Trimp, *De gemeente en haar liturgie*, pp. 108–111, 113, 151; Trimp, *Woord, water en wijn*, pp. 76–95, 97–98, 100, 108; Sliggers, *Wat is hierop uw antwoord?*, pp. 47, 49, 52; Van Rongen, *Met al de heiligen III*, pp. 172–173.

¹⁰⁸Deddens, *Het begon in Jeruzalem*, pp. 184–187; Trimp, "Sacrificium laudis", pp. 200–201; Deddens, *Waar alles van Hem spreekt*, pp. 68–69; Trimp, *De gemeente en haar liturgie*, pp. 112–118; Van Rongen, *Met al de heiligen III*, pp. 171–172; cf. RCL, *Rapport Studiedeputaten 1995*, p. 60. Cf. also Kamphuis, *Juda's hallel*, p. 7, which includes a comparison between the *joy* of singing Psalms and hymns after dinner and the singing that takes place during the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

¹⁰⁹Trimp, *Woord, water en wijn*, p. 88; cf. Hendriks, "De voorbereidingspreek", pp. 106–108; Hendriks, *Kinderen aan de tafel van Christus?*, pp. 83–84, 118–120; Hendriks, "Over de ware zelfbeproeving"; Anderson, *1 Korintiërs*, pp. 166–167; Kruidhof, *Rust vinden*, pp. 49–50; De Boer, "Spiritualiteit van het avondmaal", pp. 120–121.

¹¹⁰RCL, *Kerkorde*, art. C41; RCL, *Generale regeling voor de kerkdiensten*, art. 6.

Boer questions this practice, and asks how it can be applied in these days when people tend to be more mobile than ever before.¹¹¹

RCL theologians have not written all that extensively on the necessity of church offices or a congregation for the celebration of the Lord's Supper.¹¹² Most of their writings implicitly take it for granted that the Lord's Supper is not celebrated individually, but as a congregation.¹¹³ Furthermore, RCL literature does not include arguments against abstinence from the Lord's Supper, or mention distinctions between profession of truth and profession of faith (as is true for older CRC literature).¹¹⁴ The participation of children is rejected by two authors, although recently other RCL theologians have argued in favor of the practice of paedocommunion.¹¹⁵

Actual Celebration

The actual celebration is discussed by RCL theologians in a way similar to that of CRC literature, although virtually no remarks are made on the attitude or clothing of the participants. On the other hand, there is more attention for the frequency of celebration; from the 1970s onwards, various authors begin to plead for a higher frequency.¹¹⁶ In newer literature dating from 1990 and later, different styles of celebration are mentioned, together with the possibility of administering the Lord's Supper at a person's home (in case of long-term illness).¹¹⁷

One author, C. Trimp, speaks about the "covenant community" as the community where the Lord's Supper is celebrated.¹¹⁸ Elsewhere he calls

¹¹¹De Boer, "Spiritualiteit van het avondmaal".

¹¹²It is only recently that the relationship between Lord's Supper and the offices was mentioned in an RCL magazine for officebearers (Van Dusseldorp, "Avondmaal buiten de kerk?"), following the publication of an article written by a CRC minister (De Bruin, "In-formeel vieren"). Outside CRC and RCL, this topic had already been discussed at an earlier time, cf. Wisse and Eikelboom, "Alle gelovigen zijn gelijk".

¹¹³See Deddens, *Antwoord op je doop*, pp. 91–98; Hendriks, "Huisbezoek en avondmaal"; De Boer, "Spiritualiteit van het avondmaal", pp. 120–121.

¹¹⁴Shortly after the emergence of the RCL denomination in 1944, the issue of abstinence from the Lord's Supper table was subjected to theological attention due to its relationship to the question of assurance of salvation, which—according to RCL members—is not to be sought in a believer's spiritual inner being. See Kruidhof, *Rust vinden*, p. 50.

¹¹⁵Contra: Trimp, *Woord, water en wijn*, p. 101; Hendriks, *Kinderen aan de tafel van Christus?* Pro: Verbree, *Over dopen*, pp. 131–140; De Ruijter, "Sacrament voor kinderen". See also Sinia, *From the Least to the Greatest*.

¹¹⁶Deddens, *Het begon in Jeruzalem*, p. 208; Van Rongen, *Zo dikwijls ...* Deddens, *Waar alles van Hem spreekt*, p. 68; Van Rongen, *Met al de heiligen III*, pp. 160–175; cf. RCL, *Rapport Studiedeputaten 1995*, pp. 61, 74 and RCL, *Rapporten deputaten 1999*, pp. 150–152.

¹¹⁷Different styles are mentioned in Van Rongen, *Met al de heiligen III*, pp. 173–174 and Oosterhuis and Urban, *Praktijkschets liturgie*, pp. 44–47. A special communion for the sick was rejected in Sliggers, *Wat is hierop uw antwoord?* but mentioned as a topic for discussion in Oosterhuis and Urban, *Praktijkschets liturgie*, p. 48. Cf. RCL, *Generale regeling voor de kerkdiensten*, art. 7–8.

¹¹⁸Trimp, *Woord, water en wijn*, p. 106: "The kernel of both sacraments we found to be

the celebration of the Lord's Supper the culmination of worship (thereby quoting Abraham Kuyper).¹¹⁹ Other theological interpretations, also from other authors, include the statement that *God acts* by means of the Lord's Supper, that *Christ is present* at the table, and that the operation of the sacrament depends on the work of the *Holy Spirit*.¹²⁰

Purpose and Effect

In general, RCL authors interpret the purpose and effect of the Lord's Supper as their CRC counterparts do. This implies that the Lord's Supper is primarily given to strengthen and comfort believers.¹²¹ As noted above, an important feature of RCL literature is the interpretation of the Lord's Supper from the perspective of thanksgiving (peace offering) and a feast.¹²² On the other hand, almost nothing is written about the spiritual reflection (*nabetrachting*) after the celebration.¹²³

The diaconal aspect is present in the work of several RCL authors. K. Deddens, for instance, pleads for an offertory collected to show "Christian mercy" during the Lord's Supper.¹²⁴ In his opinion, the offering that takes place during the Lord's Supper could replace the regular offering. In addition, Trimp situates the "joy of celebration" of the Lord's Supper in the concrete care for the poor: "The mutual care exercised in the first church took place in *this* climate and *this* is where diaconal ministry has its roots."¹²⁵

Recent Developments

From the beginning of the 1990s, various changes can be observed in publications from RCL theologians on the Lord's Supper. At this time greater openness begins to be shown for the use of different styles, different liturgical forms, and (again) a higher frequency of celebration.¹²⁶

in communion, and we saw their nature to be determined by the use God makes of them. That communion we call the communion of the covenant" (ital. in original).

¹¹⁹Trimp, *De gemeente en haar liturgie*, p. 114, with reference to Kuyper, *Onze eeredienst*, p. 443 (quoted above in chapter 1, note 31).

¹²⁰Trimp, *Woord, water en wijn*, pp. 97–100, 105; Hendriks, *Kinderen aan de tafel van Christus?*, p. 115; Van Rongen, *Met al de heiligen III*, p. 172; Sliggers, *Wat is hierop uw antwoord?*, p. 49; De Boer, "Spiritualiteit van het avondmaal", p. 111.

¹²¹Trimp, *Woord, water en wijn*, p. 108; Sliggers, *Wat is hierop uw antwoord?*, p. 47.

¹²²See note 108.

¹²³Except in Deddens, *Waar alles van Hem spreekt*, pp. 66–67.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 69, cf. Van Rongen, *Met al de heiligen III*, pp. 176–185, esp. 183–184; Trimp, *Zorgen voor de gemeente*, pp. 173–176.

¹²⁵Trimp, *De gemeente en haar liturgie*, pp. 113–114 (ital. in original), cf. Trimp, "Het diaconaat van de kerk", p. 460; Trimp, *Zorgen voor de gemeente*, pp. 165–168, 175. On the relationship between *leiturgia* and *diakonia*, cf. also Van Rongen, "Liturgie en diaconie".

¹²⁶In the spring of 1990, a liturgical conference in the RCL was in its entirety devoted to the Lord's Supper (see RD, "Avondmaal is te somber en te weinig feestelijk."), while in 1992

This has not brought developments to a standstill. From the year 2000 onwards, the RCL's Worship Institute (*Liturgisch Steunpunt*) made so-called "advisory documents" available to local churches. Since then, the list of available documents has grown steadily.¹²⁷

In 2012 Harrie de Hullu issued a plea for the celebration of the Lord's Supper on Maundy Thursday and/or on Easter Sunday, while at the same time rejecting the practice of celebrating it on Good Friday.¹²⁸

In 2014 Erik de Boer published a sketch of contemporary changes with regard to the Lord's Supper.¹²⁹ He pointed out that the connection between the sacrament and the church service is now experienced as less self-evident than it used to be; some congregants prefer to celebrate it at home or as part of a complete dinner (p. 115). In order to keep the relationship with the congregation alive and at the same time to create room for intimacy and solidarity, De Boer suggested celebrations in a smaller context. One proposal would be to celebrate the Lord's Supper following *every* morning service, in smaller groups spread across different halls in the church building (p. 121). Lastly, De Boer also raised questions relating to hospitality at the Lord's Supper and celebrations together with churches from other denominations.

5.4 Summary

In this study, the formal theological voice consists of two parts: six individual interviews, and a review of theological literature.

A.N. Hendriks presented a new, alternative liturgical form for the celebration of the Lord's Supper (see Dijkema, "Lang en kort"). Most liturgical changes since then have been summarized by G. van Rongen (in *Ja en amen*, pp. 149–160) and musicologist Jan Smelik (in "Vuur en vlam in de liturgie", pp. 299–300). Also the RCL's Worship Institute (*Liturgisch Steunpunt*) maintains a list of decisions that have been made by the various General Synods since 1993 (see Steunpunt Liturgie, *Liturgische besluiten*).

¹²⁷The author of these documents is the musicologist Anje de Heer, who also serves as an advisor to the RCL General Synod's committee on worship. The list of subjects covered includes preparation for the Lord's Supper, the style, structure, and frequency of the celebration, the use of liturgical forms, children and the Lord's Supper, offerings and the Lord's Supper, etc. A full list is available online: Steunpunt Liturgie, *Producten*. De Heer also published several articles on the Lord's Supper herself, e.g. De Heer, "Avondmaalsviering rond Pasen"; De Heer, "Doe dit, telkens opnieuw' - Maar waar?"

¹²⁸De Hullu, *Tijd voor het geheim van Christus*, pp. 102–106, cf. Smelik, *Gods lof op de lippen*, pp. 190–205.

¹²⁹De Boer, "Spiritualiteit van het avondmaal", pp. 113–116. Other recent publications, albeit from a church-historical or musicological perspective, include: Speelman, "Eucharistische vroomheid bij Calvijn"; Speelman, *Melanchthon and Calvin on Confession and Communion*; Speelman, *Bij God aan tafel*; Smelik, "Zingen en spelen bij brood en wijn"; Smelik, "Het gebruik en ongebruik van liturgische formulieren".

Interviews with Ministers

In the interviews with the ministers of the participating congregations, different meanings were attributed to the Lord's Supper. Both *communion with Christ* and *mutual communion* were mentioned, as well as the themes of *reconciliation* and *forgiveness*.

Ministers did not hesitate to call the Lord's Supper a *sacrament* and/or a *sign and seal*. The sacrament was characterized both as a *commemoration* and as a *feast to celebrate*. So too aspects like *eschatological expectation*, *command of Christ*, *moment of reflection*, and *gift of God* were mentioned. Some ministers called it a *source of comfort and peace*, or a symbolization of the core of the Christian faith.

Interestingly, some ministers emphasized the importance of the theme of *sinfulness/guilt* with regard to the practice of self-examination (CRC-C, RCL-D, RCL-E), although there are at times considerable differences between their congregations in terms of actual practice. Something similar applies to the experience of *holiness*: some RCL ministers were happy to report that the celebrations in their congregation(s) had become more "normal" or "relaxed" over the years, while one of their CRC colleagues stated that in his surroundings the celebration is sometimes experienced as being "extremely holy" (CRC-C).

Two ministers reported the possibility of an internal conflict between their self-examination and their liturgical role as minister (CRC-B, RCL-E). Furthermore, one other minister discussed the evident nature of the relationship between the Lord's Supper and church discipline (RCL-D). None of the ministers questioned the admission policy in their local church, although one did emphasize that participation demands a positive personal choice on the part of all participants.

Concerning the style of celebration, RCL ministers in particular were positive about the ambulatory style of celebration. CRC ministers were more satisfied with the current style of celebration, although one did also propose the alternating use of different styles (CRC-B). With regard to the ambiance, different ministers characterized the celebrations as holy, reverent, and peaceful. Concerning the liturgy, most were satisfied with the current frequency practiced in their congregation, or else proposed a higher frequency (CRC-C, RCL-F). Some of them indicated being flexible in their use of the liturgical forms (RCL-D and F).

With regard their personal development, various ministers reported currently experiencing less stress when administering the sacrament than they had at the beginning of their careers. Various personal desires were also shared, among them the wish to experience more joyful celebrations (CRC-B, RCL-D, RCL-E), or the use of multiple celebration styles (CRC-B). Other wishes expressed included the celebration of the sacrament as a poor beggar, living from God's grace (CRC-C), and the desire to "more

fully reflect the richness of communion with Christ” through a more diverse selection of liturgical forms (CRC-A).

Review of Theological Literature

The theological books published after 1944 by CRC and RCL theologians were discussed in §5.3. In this section it became clear that *CRC theologians* closely align themselves with Scripture and the text of the confessions in their explanation of the Lord’s Supper. In their publications, they emphasized the themes of *reconciliation, sin and guilt, commemoration, proclamation* (of “the death of Christ” by the celebration of the Lord’s Supper), and the *expectation* of Christ’s return. One of the CRC authors called the sacrament a “festive meal of commemoration.”¹³⁰

The practice of self-examination was discussed in some CRC publications, especially the older ones. Almost all authors rejected the practice of *avondmaalsmijding*, mainly on the grounds that “it is God who gives what He demands.”¹³¹ With regard to the actual celebrations, CRC authors in general demanded a proper attitude (reverent, concentrated, silent) and appropriate clothing for the administration of the Lord’s Supper. Meanwhile, there was virtually no attention at all for the style of celebration.

The purpose and effect of the Lord’s Supper were described as giving *comfort* and *strength*, and fostering *renewal of faith* and *sanctification*. In their writings, the theologians rarely discussed the “spiritual reflection” following the celebration of the sacrament. The same applies for the diaconal aspects; they were only mentioned by two authors (one CRC, one RCL).

Recent developments reported in CRC literature included two explanations of the classical liturgical form, and a plea for the fundamental unity of Word (sermon) and sacrament—thereby criticizing the low frequency of celebrations, but at the same time also warning that a higher frequency requires true conversion on the part of the participants.

The views of *RCL theologians* on the Lord’s Supper were discussed separately. They too closely aligned themselves with Scripture and confession, although some did stress the importance of a correct interpretation of certain passages (e.g. BC art. 33; 1 Corinthians 11:28). Consequently, different accents were detected with regard to the themes of *sin and guilt* and the *festive character* of the meal. With regard to the former, Trimp stated that the Lord’s Supper was not given with a view to original sin, but due to the limitations of human nature (Calvin). Furthermore, he and others defended the joyous nature of the Lord’s Supper on the basis of

¹³⁰Van der Meiden, *Het heilige avondmaal*, p. 57.

¹³¹Maris, *Van het doopvont tot de bondsdic*, p. 88.

its description as a celebration of salvation.¹³² Emphasis was also placed on themes like *reconciliation*, *commemoration*, *proclamation*, and *expectation*. There was less attention than there was in CRC literature for *sin and guilt* and *self-examination* (although these themes were still discussed). The topic of *avondmaalsmijding* was only mentioned by a few authors, and these days no longer plays a significant role in the writings of RCL theologians at all.

Regarding the actual celebration, ever since the end of the 1970s a number of authors have been pleading for a higher frequency and for greater festivity with the celebrations. Beginning in the 1990s, multiple celebration styles came to be mentioned. Meanwhile, in RCL literature virtually no remarks could be found on the attitude or clothing of the participants.

The purpose and effect of the celebration were interpreted along the lines detected in CRC literature, although there was greater emphasis on the perspective of thanksgiving and feast. As in CRC literature, the admonition to “spiritual reflection” was absent.

Recent developments in RCL literature include greater openness for liturgical renewal (since the 1990s), and more attention for the relationship between the sacrament and the worship service, as discussed by Erik de Boer. As early as the 1970s, pleas could be heard for a higher frequency of celebration; these have been repeated by others from the 1990s up until the present day.

¹³²Trimp, *De gemeente en haar liturgie*, pp. 114–118; cf. Trimp, *Woord, water en wijn*, p. 85.

Chapter 6

Normative Voice

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the normative theological voice as it was found in the participating congregations will be described.¹ Since all congregations were full members of either the CRC or RCL denomination, I will focus on the normative documents that apply in them.

In the CRC and RCL, at least three types of documents are considered “normative”: their respective confessions, church orders, and, to a lesser extent, liturgical forms.² First, I will summarize the sections on the Lord’s Supper in the confessions of faith. Secondly, I will examine the regulations applying to the sacrament in the church order of each denomination. Thirdly, I will consider the liturgical forms for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper currently in use.

What I will not do in this chapter, however, is either to provide an in-depth analysis of the full history of each of these documents or to give an overview of all possible interpretations and commentaries. Given the present scope, the goal of this chapter is to summarize a “common understanding” of these documents from my viewpoint as the author of this study.³

¹The normative theological voice is defined as: “what the practising group names as its theological authority” (Cameron et al., *Talking About God in Practice*, p. 54), cf. §1.3.1.

²The authors of the Four Voices of Theology model include also “Scripture and the hermeneutic of the particular community” as part of the normative voice. However, a study of the varying exegeses of biblical texts relating to the Lord’s Supper in the CRC and RCL denominations would extend well beyond the confines of this research project. Therefore, a decision was made to limit the description and analysis of the normative voice to the three sources described in this chapter. For the normativity of these sources, see chapter 2, note 28.

³As such, this chapter is not intended to offer an interpretation of all these documents, since they may be understood in different ways even within the participating congregations themselves. The limited scope of this chapter is possible, given that the Four Voices model

6.2 Confessions of Faith

In CRC and RCL, three Reformed confessions have normative status: the *Belgic Confession* (BC, orig. 1561), the *Heidelberg Catechism* (HC, orig. 1563), and the *Canons of Dort* (CD, orig. 1619).⁴ These documents are used within both denominations as guidelines defining the interpretation of doctrine and Scripture. Together, they are also referred to as the “Three Forms of Unity,” since the churches use them to mark their confessional identity.⁵

In the CRC, two different translations of these confessional documents are in use. On the one hand, churches from its middle and left wings use the (ecumenical) translation that was completed in 1971 and accepted, with minor modifications, by the CRC’s General Synod in 1980.⁶ On the other hand, the stricter CRC churches retain the translation included in the 1773 Psalter. The RCL uses other translations yet. In 1981 and 1985 the RCL’s General Synod approved new translations of the texts of its confessions, which were published in the 1986 hymnal. Since then they were reprinted in 2006 and 2017.⁷

In the CRC and RCL congregations participating in this study, no *local* confessions deemed normative were in use, nor could any congregational regulations with regard to the Lord’s Supper be found that could be viewed as having a normative status.

6.2.1 Belgic Confession

The Belgic Confession is the first Protestant confession endorsed by the CRC and RCL denominations. Both use their own translation of the original, sixteenth-century text.⁸ In most cases, the differences between the

is being used as a lens for the researcher, and not to provide an “objective” view of reality. See §1.3.1.

⁴See for the history and interpretation of these confessions: Bakhuizen van den Brink, *De Nederlandse belijdenisgeschriften*; Doekes, *Credo*; Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*; Mühling and Opitz, *Reformierte Bekenntnisschriften, Band II/2*; Dennison, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*. Alongside the Reformed confessions, CRC and RCL also endorse three ecumenical confessions, namely the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene (or Niceno-Constantinopolitan) Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.

⁵See Vree, “Drie Formulieren van Enigheid”, cf. Kuyper, *De Drie Formulieren van Eenigheid*. In the CRC and RCL denominations, ministers, elders, and deacons are required to sign a subscription form (*ondertekeningsformulier*) pledging allegiance to the Three Forms of Unity. See CRC, *Kerkorde*, art. 52-53; RCL, *Kerkorde*, art. B7.

⁶*De Nederlandse belijdenisgeschriften*, pp. 5–10. These translations were also used by the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* and the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*, which later joined the merger that became the PCN.

⁷See RCL, *Gereformeerd kerkboek*.

⁸The current CRC edition is available online (CRC, *Belijdenisgeschriften en kerkorde*) and published in *De Nederlandse belijdenisgeschriften*, pp. 16–45. The version used by stricter CRC churches is included in the 1773 Psalter, and is also available online: <https://>

two versions are too insignificant to be worthy of mention here. Therefore, in the following subsections, only major differences will be noted.

Interestingly, in the BC the Lord's Supper is consistently referred to as the "Holy Supper" (or *heilig avondmaal* in Dutch) or "this holy sacrament" (*dit heilige sacrament*). However, in the RCL translation the word *avondmaal* had been added to the original text one time without the adjective "holy" (*heilig*).⁹

Article 35

For our topic, the most important article in the BC is article 35 on the Lord's Supper. It states that the Lord's Supper has been instituted by Christ "to nourish and sustain those whom He has already regenerated and incorporated into His family, which is His church."¹⁰ This implies that those who participate in the sacrament are born anew, and have in them not only a physical but also a spiritual life. For their physical life they depend on earthly food, but for the nourishing of their "spiritual and heavenly life" God sent Christ down to earth, that is, "the living bread" (John 6:51) who "nourishes and sustains the spiritual life of the believers when He is eaten by them, that is, spiritually appropriated and received by faith."

The confession continues with the observation that Christ instituted "earthly and visible bread as a sacrament of His body and wine as a sacrament of His blood," thereby connecting the visibility of the elements of bread and wine to the body and blood of Christ. Next, it draws a close parallel between physical experience and the trustworthiness of God's action:

As certainly as we take and hold the sacrament in our hands and eat and drink it with our mouth, by which our physical life is then sustained, so certainly do we receive by faith, as the hand and mouth of our soul, the true body and true blood of Christ, our only Saviour, in our souls for our spiritual life.¹¹

psalmboek.nl/belijdenis.php?bel=3. The latest RCL revision was adopted by its General Synod in 1981. It is available online (RCL, *Belijdenissen*) and published in the RCL's hymnal (RCL, *Gereformeerd kerkboek*, pp. 501–527). See Gootjes, *The Belgic Confession* for an introduction to the history and sources of the BC.

⁹CanRC translation: "Therefore no one should come to this table..."; RCL: "*Daarom behoort niemand aan het avondmaal te gaan...*" (Therefore no one should join the Supper...); CRC: "*Daarom behoort niemand daar te komen...*" (Therefore no one should come there...). In these three translations, baptism is called "holy" only in BC art. 33 (headings excluded).

¹⁰All quotes in this section are taken from the CanRC edition included in CanRC, *Book of Praise*, pp. 499–516 (online: <https://canrc.org/the-belgic-confession>).

¹¹In HC QA 75 and 77, the phrase "as surely as" is used to draw a similar parallel. See §6.2.2 below.

The sacraments are not instituted by Christ without reason; all that is represented to us by the signs of bread and wine is worked in the believers by Christ Himself:

We do not understand the manner in which this is done, just as we do not comprehend the hidden activity of the Spirit of God. Yet we do not go wrong when we say that what we eat and drink is the true, natural body and the true blood of Christ. However, the manner in which we eat it is not by mouth but in the spirit by faith.

In this passage, the confession draws on Calvin's teaching concerning the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper to explain in what way bread and wine are the real body and blood of Christ, while He still is in heaven. All this happens through the hidden work of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord's Supper is also called a banquet: "This banquet is a spiritual table at which Christ makes us partakers of Himself with all His benefits and gives us the grace to enjoy both Himself and the merit of His suffering and death." Interestingly, the beginning of this quote is translated as "*dit geestelijke feestmaal*" ("this spiritual feast/banquet") in the RCL translation, while the CRC reads "*Deze maaltijd is een geestelijke dis*" ("This meal is a spiritual table").¹² Compared to the translation adopted by the CRC, the RCL edition is more explicit on the feast character of the sacrament.

As the confession continues, it draws a distinction between believers and "the wicked," where the latter may indeed receive bread and wine but does so "to his condemnation." This implies a distinction between the sacrament (or its outward sign) and Christ: "Judas and Simon the sorcerer both received the sacrament, but they did not receive Christ, who is signified by it. He is communicated exclusively to the believers."

Finally, something is said about the *mind* with which believers receive or ought to receive the sacrament, that is, "with humility and reverence," as they "together commemorate the death of Christ [their] Saviour with thanksgiving" and "confess [their] faith and Christian religion." In these passages, the sacrament is characterized as an *act* of commemoration (with thanksgiving) and of profession of the Christian faith. This is to be accompanied by *careful* self-examination ("Therefore no one should come to this table without careful self-examination, lest by eating this bread and drinking from this cup, he eat and drink judgment upon him-

¹²The original French and Dutch text read, respectively: "*Ce banquet est une table spirituelle*" and "*Dese maeltijt is een geestelike tafel*." This was translated into Latin as: "*Convivium hoc, mensa est spiritualis*." See Bakhuizen van den Brink, *De Nederlandse belijdenisgeschriften*, pp. 137–139.

self”)¹³ and the practice of charity towards both God and others (“In short, we are moved by the use of this holy sacrament to a fervent love of God and our neighbours.”)

Other Related Articles

In other articles as well, the BC mentions or refers to the Lord’s Supper. This is especially so in article 33 (on the sacraments), but also in articles 29 and 30.

In *article 33* the sacraments are introduced as means given by God in view of “our insensitivity and weakness”¹⁴ to “seal His promises to [the believers] and to be pledges of His good will and grace towards [them].” They are “added to” the Word of the gospel as means through which He “confirms to us the salvation which He imparts to us.” Furthermore, the sacraments are called “visible signs and seals of something internal and invisible, by means of which God works in us through the power of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁵ Lastly, the BC only acknowledges two sacraments as having been instituted by Christ, namely baptism and the Holy Supper.

Article 29 (on the marks of the true and false church) lists the “pure administration” of the sacraments as one of the marks of the true church, while also charging that the false church does not administer them “as Christ commanded in His Word, but adds to them and subtracts from them as it pleases.”

Lastly, in *article 30* ministers or pastors are identified as the only ones in church who are authorized “to preach the Word of God and to administer the sacraments.”

6.2.2 Heidelberg Catechism

As with the Belgic Confession, the CRC and RCL denominations each use their own translation of the original, sixteenth-century text of the Heidelberg Catechism.¹⁶ Here too mention will only be made of significant differences.

¹³Both the CRC and RCL translations refer to 1 Corinthians 11:28–29, a text not found in the original. See *Ibid.*, pp. 137–139. Moreover, in these translations the word “careful” has been translated, respectively, as “*op de rechte wijze*” and “*op de juiste wijze*” (i.e. in the right manner).

¹⁴According to C. Trimp, these words do not refer to original sin, but to the creatural limitation of human nature. See Chapter 5, note 102.

¹⁵The terms “sign” and/or “seal” are also used in HC QA 66, 75, and 79.

¹⁶The current CRC edition is available online (CRC, *Belijdenisgeschriften en kerkorde*) and published in *De Nederlandse belijdenisgeschriften*, pp. 46–79. The version used by stricter CRC churches is included in the 1773 Psalter, see <https://psalmboek.nl/belijdenis.php?bel=2>. The latest RCL revision was adopted by its General Synod in 1981. It is available online (RCL, *Belijdenissen*) and published in the RCL’s hymnal (RCL, *Gereformeerde kerkboek*, pp. 528–570).

In the HC, the Lord's Supper is twice called the "Holy Supper" (in QA 68 and 75), in all other cases just "Supper" (Dutch: *avondmaal*).¹⁷ It primarily treats of the Lord's Supper in QA 75–82 (or Lord's Days 28–30). In the following subsections, these parts will be discussed first. Thereafter, I will discuss also other references to the Lord's Supper in the HC.

QA 75–82

According to QA 75, Christ commands us "to eat of this broken bread and drink of this cup."¹⁸ It is a command that comes with promises on His behalf. First, "as surely as" believers *see* the bread broken for them and the cup given to them, "so surely was His body offered for [them] and His blood poured out for [them] on the cross."¹⁹ As in the BC, here in the HC sense experience is deemed very important for the assurance of believers. Second, "as surely as I receive from the hand of the minister and taste with my mouth the bread and the cup of the Lord as sure signs of Christ's body and blood, so surely does He Himself nourish and refresh my soul to everlasting life with His crucified body and shed blood." In this second part, the elements of bread and wine are called "sure signs," since it is Christ who uses them to "nourish and refresh" the souls of the believers "to everlasting life."²⁰

QA 76 expands further on what it means to eat "the crucified body of Christ" and to drink "His shed blood." This is explained, first, as accepting "all the suffering and the death of Christ, and so receive forgiveness of sins and life eternal." Secondly, by the celebration of the sacrament, the believer is "to be united more and more to [Christ's] sacred body through the Holy Spirit."²¹ The HC goes on to call believers "flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones" (even though Christ is in heaven while they are on earth). It is through one (Holy) Spirit that they live forever and are gov-

¹⁷In QA 68, the Latin and German original respectively read "baptismum et sacram coenam" and "den heiligen tauf und das heilig abendmal." Interestingly, baptism is not called "holy" in the Latin version. In QA 75 the Lord's Supper is called "coena Domini," while the German text reads "heiligen abendmal." In both cases, the CRC as well as the RCL translation read "*heilig avondmaal*," although in the CanRC edition the adjective "holy" has been omitted in QA 75. See Bakhuizen van den Brink, *De Nederlandse belijdenisgeschriften*, pp. 184, 188.

¹⁸Quotes in this section are derived from the CanRC edition included in CanRC, *Book of Praise*, pp. 517–564 (online: <http://www.heidelberg-catechism.com/>). The individual "I" has been replaced with a plural "them" or "the believers."

¹⁹On the ritual of the breaking of bread and its resonance in the HC, see De Boer, "Liturgical Reform".

²⁰See Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, p. 677: "This sacrament, therefore, consists in the rite and the promise annexed to it, or in the signs and things signified."

²¹The words "His sacred body" are not explained in the text.

erned, “as the members of our body are by one soul.”²² Then, in QA 77, the catechism refers to 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, “where Christ [has] promised that He will nourish and refresh believers with His body and blood.”

In QA 78 the HC answers the question whether the bread and wine are changed into the real body and blood of Christ with a decided “no.” It draws a parallel between baptism and the Lord’s Supper, stipulating that water, bread, and wine are all given by God as a sign and pledge.²³ Next, QA 79 explains what this exactly means, introducing another parallel for the sake of explanation: “as bread and wine sustain us in this temporal life, so [Christ’s] crucified body and shed blood are true food and drink for our souls to eternal life.” This sign and pledge (singular) are used by Christ to assure believers, first, that that they share in his true body and blood “through the working of the Holy Spirit,” and second, that “all [Christ’s] suffering and obedience are as certainly ours as if we personally had suffered and paid for our sins.”²⁴

Thereafter, the catechism in QA 80 addresses the difference between the Lord’s Supper and the Roman Catholic Mass.²⁵ The Lord’s Supper is once again described from a Reformed perspective, as the HC first notes “that [believers] have complete forgiveness of all [their] sins through the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ” and second, “that through the Holy Spirit we are grafted into Christ” who is in heaven where He wants to be worshipped. To the contrary, the papal Mass is explained as teaching, first, that “the living and the dead do not have forgiveness of sins” unless Christ’s offer is repeated daily by the priests, and, second, “that Christ is bodily present in the form of bread and wine, and there is to be worshipped.” For this reason, the Mass is “an accursed idolatry.”

QA 81 clarifies who may come to the Lord’s table: “Those who are truly displeased with themselves (...) and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and amend their life.” The “hypocrites and those who do not repent” will eat and drink judgment upon themselves if they

²²The CRC and RCL translations read, respectively: “zoals de leden van een lichaam door één ziel” (as the members of a body by one soul) and “zoals de leden van het lichaam door één ziel” (as the members of the body by one soul). The Latin original reads “*utque omnia corporis membra ab una anima*,” and the German translation “*wie die glieder unsers leibs von einer seelen*” (see Bakhuizen van den Brink, *De Nederlandse belijdenisgeschriften*, p. 190).

²³BC art. 35 states that believers receive by faith “the real body and the real blood of Christ” in their souls. Cf. §6.2.1.

²⁴In this section, a parallel is once again drawn between bodily experience and the trustworthy nature of the sign. See note 11 above.

²⁵QA 80 was not included in the first edition, but added starting with the second edition (see Beyer, *Abendmahl und Messe*). In 2010 the RCL congregation Barneveld-Voorthuizen requested the support of other churches in the classis of Harderwijk for a motion to have this QA removed from the HC. This proposal was rejected on the grounds that the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Mass has not changed since the writing of the HC. See Kuiper, “Jaaroverzicht 2010”, pp. 518–519 and Haaksma, *Verslag*.

join the table.²⁶ QA 82 in turn insists once more that those “who by their confession and life show that they are unbelieving and ungodly” need to be excluded from the Lord’s Supper, so that “the covenant of God” will not be “profaned.”

Other References

Other references to the Lord’s Supper in the HC include the following passages:

In QA 65 the Holy Spirit is identified as the source of the faith given to believers to make them “share in Christ and all his benefits.” It is the Holy Spirit who “works” faith in their hearts by “the preaching of the gospel, and strengthens it by the use of the sacraments.”²⁷

In QA 66 the sacraments are called “holy, visible signs and seals” that were “instituted by God so that by their use He might the more fully declare and seal to [the believers] the promise of the gospel.” Next, QA 67 underscores the content of QA 65–66 by insisting that it is the Holy Spirit who “teaches [the believers] in the gospel and assures [them] by the sacraments that [their] entire salvation rests on Christ’s one sacrifice.” Immediately thereafter, in QA 68, these sacraments are identified as holy baptism and the holy supper.

Following the elaboration of the Lord’s Supper in QA 75–82, the sacraments are mentioned again in QA 85, where the HC reads that those who “call themselves Christians but show themselves to be un-christian” are to be admonished “in a brotherly manner.” If they remain unrepentant, they are to be reported to the elders. In case they do not repent, they “are forbidden the use of the sacraments” before eventually being excluded by the elders from the congregation, “and by God Himself from the kingdom of Christ.”

Lastly, in QA 103 the use of the sacraments is mentioned as part of obedience to the fourth commandment on the Sabbath rest.

6.2.3 Canons of Dort

In the Canons of Dort, the Lord’s Supper is not discussed explicitly, but the sacraments are still mentioned in two articles which we will discuss

²⁶The type of judgment is not specified in the text. However, a note in the RCL’s edition refers to 1 Corinthians 10:19–22; 11:28–29.

²⁷The verb “to strengthen” (Dutch: *versterken*) is a translation of the Latin verb “confirmo” and the German “bestätigen.” Both the Latin and German verbs could also be translated as “to confirm” (Dutch: *bevestigen*). Furthermore, in the HC the relationship between the “working” (through the preaching of the gospel) and the “strengthening” (by means of the sacraments) is not explicitly defined. See Bakhuizen van den Brink, *De Nederlandse belijdenisgeschriften*, p. 184.

below. As with the BC and the HC, the CRC and RCL each use their own translation of the original text of 1618–1619.²⁸

Chapter 3–4, Article 17

The third/fourth chapter addresses human corruption and conversion to God. At the outset of this chapter, the Canons state that man could not save himself after the Fall, despite his free will by which he had been brought into opposition with God. Instead, it is God’s grace alone—which is given him freely—that can save him. Faith in God is given by God, and is not a means by which man rescues himself (articles 13–16). Article 17 then states that God’s omnipotence does not prevent Him from using means “to exercise His power.”²⁹ These means include the use of the gospel, the administration of the Word, the sacraments, and church discipline. “For grace is conferred through admonitions.”

Chapter 5, Article 14

In chapter 5, which is on the perseverance of the saints, the sacraments are mentioned again in article 14. This article states that God, who began “this work of grace” in believers, will also maintain, continue, and perfect it “by the hearing and reading of His Word, by meditation on it, by its exhortations, threats, and promises, and by the use of the sacraments.”³⁰ The sacraments are thus characterized as means of grace that are given by God and may be used by the believers. Interestingly, in the CanRC edition the adjective “holy” is omitted before the noun “sacraments,” although it does occur in the Dutch original as well as in the CRC and RCL translations.

²⁸The current CRC edition is available online (CRC, *Belijdenisgeschriften en kerkorde*) and published in *De Nederlandse belijdenisgeschriften*, pp. 80–121. The version used by stricter CRC churches is included in the 1773 Psalter, see <https://psalmboek.nl/belijdenis.php?bel=1>. The latest RCL revision was adopted by its General Synod in 1985. It is available online (RCL, *Belijdenissen*) and published in the RCL’s hymnal (RCL, *Gereformeerde kerkboek*, pp. 571–610).

²⁹Quotes in this section are taken from the CanRC edition included in CanRC, *Book of Praise*, pp. 565–588 (online: <https://canrc.org/canons-of-dordt>).

³⁰The CanRC edition reads “by its exhortations...,” which would mean that it is the Word of God that exhorts, threatens, and promises. The original Dutch text has a slightly different reading, namely: “*alsoo bewaert, achtervolcht ende volbrenght [God] hetselve door het hooren, lesen ende overlegghen van dien [i.e. the gospel], mitsgaders vermaninghen, dreygementen, beloften ende ’t gebruyck der H. Sacramenten*”—which implies that God is subject. Moreover, the archaic word “mitsgaders” has a variety of meanings, including “moreover,” “together with,” “by means of,” or “because of.” On its own, it is not clear from the Dutch text which of these meanings is being intended. The Latin text here reads: “ita per eiusdem auditum, lectionem, meditationem, adhortationes, minas, promissa, nec non per usum Sacramentorum.” The latter part of this sentence may be translated as “and *moreover* the use of the sacraments” (italics added).

6.3 Church Order

In the CRC and RCL, there are various regulations that play a role in the context of the Lord's Supper. These regulations are discussed as part of the *normative theological voice* because they play a normative role in both denominations (on all levels, that is, also in the local congregations).

6.3.1 Christian Reformed Churches (CRC)

The latest revision of the CRC church order was adopted by its General Synod in 2016–2017.³¹ In the following, I will only mention the passages in which the Lord's Supper is discussed, either directly or indirectly.

First, the CRC decided that only those who are legitimately called may “administer the Word and the sacraments” (art. 3). This “calling” implies a procedure described in the church order, which includes a regulation stipulating that only those may be called who have been declared eligible for call by the Board of Governors of the *Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn* (i.e. the CRC's theological university; its Board of Governors consists of ministers appointed by the General Synod; art. 4). An exemption is left open for candidates who have not completed a formal, academic theological training, if the churches are convinced of the suitability of that candidate (with special gifts). In such cases, an adapted, shorter educational program is drawn up, and the examination for eligibility follows a different procedure (art. 8). In the case of candidates newly converted to the faith, so the CRC church order warns, special caution is to be exercised (art. 9).

Secondly, CRC ministers may not administer the Word and sacraments in “places” where there is no church, except with permission from the nearest church council. This church council must be represented and in charge of the administration, while the relevant classis is to monitor the situation (art. 15).

Thirdly, one of the tasks of the *elders* is to comfort, admonish, and teach the members of the congregation, among others for the celebration of the Lord's Supper (art. 23).

Fourthly, those who are baptized as adults become full members of the congregation. Therefore, “they are required to celebrate the Lord's Supper, which they will promise to do at their baptism” (art. 59).

Fifthly, articles 61 to 63 include all kinds of regulations with regard to the Lord's Supper itself. The church order stipulates that only professing members with an attestation testifying to a godly walk of life may partake

³¹CRC, *Kerkorde*. All article numbers in this section refer to church order articles in this edition.

in the celebrations (art. 61).³² This applies both to CRC members and to guests from sister churches. The next article states that “every church is to celebrate the sacrament in the way that, in its judgment, best serves the edification of the congregation, provided that the signs of bread and wine are used according to the institution of Christ and that the form for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is used together with the prayers included there” (art. 62). Article 63 stipulates that the administration of the sacrament “may only take place under the supervision of elders, in accordance with ecclesiastical order, and in a public meeting of the congregation,” and that it is to be celebrated “at least once every three months, after preparation.”³³

Sixthly, the church council is not to admit to the Lord’s Supper anyone who is under church discipline, “if someone stubbornly rejects his admonition, and also if someone has committed a public or gross sin.” (art. 76) Conversely, a person is to be readmitted to the congregation and the Lord’s Supper after true repentance and reconciliation (art. 78).

Seventh, the ministers, elders, and deacons are to hold *censura morum* in the meeting of the church council leading up to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, “in particular by admonishing each other with love regarding their ministry” (art. 81).

Lastly, there are provisional arrangements for cooperation with “other [local] churches with a Reformed confession.”³⁴ Article 1.d determines that ministers of other denominations recognized by the CRC’s General Synod as faithful to “the foundation of Scripture and the Reformed confessing” and whose deputies maintain correspondence with CRC deputies, are allowed to administer the Word and the sacraments, etc., in a worship service of a CRC congregation, provided that they have been invited by the local church council. Moreover, under certain conditions and only after several mandatory steps, a local CRC church may celebrate the Lord’s Supper together with a non-CRC congregation (attachment 8, art. 3.a).

³²The text of this article mentions several decisions of former synods. One example is the decision of the synod of 1836 (shortly after the 1834 Secession) that no one can become a member of the church of Christ except by professing their faith, “and in no way as a result of an outward learning of truths” (art. 61.1). The synod in 1913 required “a living faith,” and in 1950 another synod condemned the idea that professing the faith amounts merely to a profession of the truth. Instead, it urged the churches most seriously to experience “the inextricable link between the profession of one’s faith and the use of the sacraments” (art. 61.4).

³³Additional regulations accompanying article 63 determine that under certain conditions the Lord’s Supper may be administered “in nursing homes, care centers, and other institutions.” However, the character of these celebrations may not be that of an individual administration (art. 63.3 = 63.1.c [online edition]). Furthermore, guests from other denominations may be admitted to the celebration, provided that they have professed their faith, that they are not under church discipline in their own congregation, and that they notify the local church council in advance of their desire to join the celebration (art. 63.5 = 63.2 [online edition]).

³⁴CRC, *Bijlagen bij de Kerkorde*, attachment 8 (pp. 15-16).

6.3.2 Reformed Churches Liberated (RCL)

In 2014 the RCL denomination adopted a completely new church order.³⁵ Since this makes the contents difficult to compare with the regulations applying in the CRC, the RCL regulations will be discussed separately in this subsection.

First, as in the CRC, the preaching of the gospel (“to church and world”) and the administration of the sacraments are designated as the minister’s task (art. B9.1). One of the following articles explicitly states that retired ministers retain the license to administer the sacraments (B22.4), and that no minister may administer Word or sacraments elsewhere without permission from the local church council (B32.1).

Secondly, article C36 determines that congregations ought to celebrate the Sunday as the day of Christ’s resurrection. The local church council convenes the congregation in public church services, normally two times per Sunday. In these church services the administration of God’s Word and the sacraments takes place, together with the ministries of song, prayer, and mercy (C36.2).

Thirdly, articles C40 and C41 describe the administration of the Lord’s Supper as well as regulations concerning admission to the table. The former specifies that each congregation should celebrate the sacrament in its worship services “regularly,” as instituted by Christ (C40.1). Furthermore, the church council may lend its cooperation for the administration of the sacrament at home, or, for example, in nursing homes, prisons, and military barracks (C40.2). In all cases, one of the approved liturgical forms is to be used (C40.3). Those who have professed their faith “according to the Reformed doctrine and who live a God-fearing life” are to be admitted to the celebration of the sacrament (C41.1). For the admission of guests, a separate regulation has been adopted (C41.4), which will be discussed below.

Fourthly, the sacraments are also mentioned in the regulations on church discipline (D51.1). Denial of admission to the Lord’s Supper is mentioned as one of the means of church discipline (D53.1), following mutual exhortation and official admonitions from the church council. In article D57, the measures for denying a person access to the sacrament are described in detail. A church council may decide to apply this measure in case its admonitions are not followed by conversion (D57.1). The church council may also decide to proceed to this measure before it conducts an investigation, in order to safeguard the holiness of the congregation (D57.3). While this measure is in place, the person barred from the Lord’s Supper is also denied the right to have their child baptized in church or to marry in church (D57.2).

³⁵The most recent edition is published online: RCL, *Kerkorde* (2017). All article numbers in this section refer to church order articles in this edition.

Lastly, the RCL adopted a separate “Regulation on the Church Services” (RCS).³⁶ This regulation is one of the various regulations developed and adapted by the RCL’s General Synod for the implementation of the church order. It includes several stipulations applying to the sacraments, as well as the Lord’s Supper in particular. For example, the “administration of the sacraments” is mentioned as one of the components of a *regular* church service, implying that the Lord’s Supper is to be included in the Sunday morning services (RCS art. 2.1).³⁷ There are also additional regulations pertaining to the use of the liturgical forms. The minister may thus introduce his own “variations” in the teaching part of the liturgical forms, provided that he has obtained permission from the local church council. He may not, however, change anything “in the promises to be made or in other formulae with legal consequences” (RCS art. 5.2).³⁸ Next, the regulation adds instructions for the admission of guests, as well as for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper at home. For the former (RCS art. 6), guests must be full members of a sister church *or* 1) be baptized and allowed to the Lord’s Supper in their own congregation, 2) accept the doctrine of the Old and New Testament (as summarized in the Apostles’ Creed and proclaimed in the church where the sacrament is being celebrated), and 3) live—as far as is known—a God-fearing life. For the latter (RCS art. 7), bread and wine can be administered by the church council “to those who are connected to the church service via Internet or other technical means (under the supervision of one or more officials).” Finally, the RCS includes a regulation on the celebration of the Lord’s Supper in non-ecclesiastical institutions like hospitals, penal institutions, or the army. RCL ministers who have been set apart for a special task in these institutions may, with the cooperation of a church council (cf. C40.2), administer the Lord’s Supper there. These meetings “must have the character of a Christian community where oversight is exercised over its members on the basis of God’s Word” (RCS art. 8.3).

³⁶RCL, *Generale regeling voor de kerkdiensten* (2017, orig. 2014).

³⁷A literal interpretation of this regulation would suggest that the sacraments are to be administered in the Sunday morning service. However, up to the present no RCL congregation has put such a literal reading into practice. The second Sunday service is discussed separately in RCS art. 2.3, and as such considered a non-regular church service.

³⁸*Ibid.*, art. 5.2: “With permission from the consistory, the minister may make alterations in the teaching part of the forms. But he may not change anything in the promises that are to be made or in other formulae with legal consequences. Baptism is to be administered with the words from Matthew 28:19b. The bread and the cup of the Lord’s Supper are to be distributed with words that go back to its institution by Jesus Christ, or to their adaptation in 1 Corinthians 10:16.”

6.4 Liturgical Forms

Like the confessional documents and the church order, both denominations' liturgical forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper are discussed in this chapter on the normative theological voice. The nature of the liturgical forms is such that they are only derived from Scripture and the confessions, but in practice they also function as a normative source of theology on their own. For this reason, they will be discussed below.

The scope of this discussion of the CRC's and RCL's liturgical forms is not to present a complete picture of their history and editions. Instead, I will focus on the forms that are currently in use.

Both denominations share the classical liturgical form, but use different translations.³⁹ The original was composed by Petrus Dathenus in 1566 for his congregation in Frankenthal, Germany.⁴⁰ Both denominations also use an abbreviated version of this form, for which a separate version was composed by each.

6.4.1 CRC Liturgical Forms for the Lord's Supper

Until 1971, the CRC denomination used only the classical form for the celebration of the Lord's Supper included in the 1773 Psalter. Although this form is still in use in stricter CRC churches (and in a number of other Reformed denominations in the Netherlands), at present the CRC has no less than four liturgical forms available for the celebration of the Lord's Supper (including a revised version of the classical liturgical form). In the following subsections, I will first sketch a concise history of these forms, after which the content and features of each form will be summarized.

Concise History

On September 17, 1953, the CRC's General Synod decided *not* to allow local churches to revise the liturgical forms (or their language) as they were included in the 1773 Psalter. Instead, it stipulated that the liturgical forms were to be used "unabridged and unchanged," even though in practice the

³⁹The CRC edition is published as: CRC, "Formulier (1971)". Stricter CRC churches use the translation included in the 1773 Psalter (e.g. *Bijbel met uitleg*, pp. 2193–2196), which is also published—with some modification—in PCN, *Dienstboek I*, pp. 337–346 (see Chapter 3, note 25). The RCL edition is included in the RCL's hymnal: RCL, "Avondmaalsformulier 1 (2016 Revision)".

⁴⁰See Honders, "Das Abendmahl nach der Ordnung des Petrus Dathenus 1566" for the original text. More on the history of this liturgical form can be found in Lekkerkerker, *Kanttekeningen III*, pp. 134–148; Dorn, *The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Church in America*, pp. 11–39; Immink, *The Touch of the Sacred*, pp. 227–235. For the composition of this form and its sources, see Lekkerkerker, *Kanttekeningen III*, pp. 165–173 and Immink, "Heilig Avondmaal", pp. 248–255.

opposite was happening.⁴¹ During the next decade, the liturgical forms remained unchanged, until the synod decided on September 19, 1962, to have the possibility of revising the liturgical forms investigated. Significantly, the new synodical committee (*deputaatschap*) that was appointed to fulfill this task was authorized to consult with “other churches of Reformed conviction.”⁴² This point is important to note, since the RCL denomination had asked the CRC’s General Synod for consultation on this topic already in 1959.⁴³

Three years after the decision, the CRC’s General Synod decided on January 11, 1966, that the classical liturgical form was to be revised “in terms of language and style,” and that a new liturgical form for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper for the second service was to be composed. Additionally, it decided that the results of the work of liturgical committees from other Reformed denominations were to be consulted.⁴⁴

The revision of other liturgical forms was given higher priority, however, so that the revised version of the classical form for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper and the new abbreviated form were not presented during the next synod of 1968–1969. It was not until nearly six years after the initial decision that the CRC’s General Synod decided, on September 23, 1971, to approve the proposed revision of a number of liturgical forms, including the classical form for the Lord’s Supper, as well as the introduction of the new, abbreviated form. One day earlier, the Synod had decided that CRC congregations may be allowed to use the abbreviated form “in the second service on the same day” (i.e. if the sacrament had already been administered also in the morning service) and during the administration of the sacrament in nursing homes and other institutions.⁴⁵ The text of the synod’s proceedings make no mention of (official) consultations with other Reformed denominations like the RCL.

In 1992 and 1994, T. Brienens suggested some improvements to the classical liturgical form.⁴⁶ However, these proposals have never been officially proposed or implemented.

More recently, in 2001 the CRC’s General Synod decided that its Worship Committee (*deputaatschap Eredienst*) was (once again) to correspond with “all other churches of Reformed conviction” to achieve, if pos-

⁴¹CRC, *Acta 1953*, art. 156 (pp. 62-63). More on the history that followed this decision is found in CRC, *Acta 1962*, attachment XXXIX (pp. 189-191).

⁴²*Ibid.*, art. 94 (pp. 40-41).

⁴³CRC, *Acta 1959*, art. 154 (p. 76); cf. RCL, *Acta 1958-1959*, art. 102 (pp. 46-47).

⁴⁴Decision 2e: “[Synod decides] insofar as this is possible to take account of the results of the work that is being done by deputies from other churches of Reformed confession responsible for the liturgical forms, and, if requested, to make drafts available to these deputies” (in CRC, *Acta 1965-1966*, art. 198 (p. 90)). See also the report on the history of liturgical forms (in general) and proposed revisions in *Ibid.*, attachment LXXIV (pp. 307-321).

⁴⁵CRC, *Acta 1971-1972*, art. 143 (pp. 64-65).

⁴⁶See Chapter 5, note 97.

sible, “cooperation and agreement on language and content of the liturgical forms.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, it was decided that the committee was to prepare new liturgical forms, giving special priority to the forms for baptism and marriage.

It took yet another six years for the two new liturgical forms for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper to be prepared. The one was didactical in nature, the other more celebrative, leaving the CRC with a total of four forms that could be used for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. To add to the confusion, the new forms were not given clearly identifiable names: the didactical form is called “Liturgisch formulier I (2010)”, the celebrative one “Liturgisch formulier II (2010)”. Both were first presented at the General Synod in 2007, after which the synod decided that they could be tested in local churches as “draft versions” (*proeve*), meaning that they had not yet been fully approved. The results of the testing phase could be shared with the Worship Committee.⁴⁸ Finally, on September 30, 2010, the synod decided to approve the revised versions of the two new liturgical forms.

Interestingly, the introduction of the “celebrative form” in particular was contested in 2007 and 2010 on the basis that it contained less educational content and seemed to lack a section on self-examination. To counter the critique, the authors had explained as early as 2007 that “also when the ‘celebrative’ liturgical form is used, a preparation sermon will be held.”⁴⁹ Later, in 2010, the synod ordered that a separate instruction on the preparation was to be added in the (definitive) printed edition of this form.⁵⁰

Content

In the following subsections, the content of the CRC forms for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper will be examined.

Classical Liturgical Form (1773/1971, orig. 1566) The content of the classical liturgical form was described at length by W. van ’t Spijker in a work published in 1980.⁵¹ The form consists of the following sections:

- Institution

⁴⁷CRC, *Acta 2004*, attachment 16 (p. 225).

⁴⁸The results of the survey conducted by the respective synodical committee itself were published in CRC, *Acta 2010*, attachment 37 (pp. 403-406). Only 45 of the 183 local churches responded.

⁴⁹CRC, *Acta 2007*, art. 285 (pp. 170-172): “Ook bij het gebruik van het ‘vierende’ conceptavondmaalsformulier zal een voorbereidingspreek worden gehouden; de kerkorde is daar helder over.” Cf. CRC, *Kerkorde*, art. 63.

⁵⁰CRC, *Acta 2010*, art. 81 (pp. 117-119).

⁵¹Van ’t Spijker, *Zijn verbond en woorden*, pp. 82-136 (= *Bij brood en beker*, pp. 371-419). Cf. also note 40.

- Self-examination
- Invitation and Admonition
- Remembrance of Christ
- Assurance
- Fellowship
- Prayer (including the Lord's Prayer)
- Profession of Faith (the Apostles' Creed)
- Exhortation (including the *sursum corda*)
- Communion
- Doxology
- Thanksgiving

In the section on *Invitation and Admonition*, the 1773 edition includes a “catalog of sins.”⁵² In the 1971 CRC revision, this catalog was replaced with a shorter description.⁵³ In the section on *Fellowship*, the 1773 edition includes a quote from the *Didache* (1st century AD) to illustrate brotherly love.⁵⁴ In the 1971 CRC revision, this quote was removed, while the quote from 1 Corinthians 10:17 (which in the original form comes immediately before the *Didache* quote) is expanded to include also verse 16b.⁵⁵

In this form, much attention is given to the value of Christ's one and ultimate sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. Moreover, an explanation is offered on the meaning of communion with Christ in the Lord's Supper through the work of the Holy Spirit. What is “missing,” as it were, in this form is attention for the significance of Christ's resurrection and the expectation of His return.⁵⁶

⁵²*Bijbel met uitleg*, p. 2194, cf. PCN, *Dienstboek I*, pp. 338–339. Interestingly, in the liturgical form developed by Calvin in Strasbourg, the teaching on the Lord's Supper (including instructions on self-examination and admonition) was added *after* the Profession of Faith. See Lekkerkerker, *Kanttekeningen III*, pp. 136, 142; Immink, “Heilig Avondmaal”, pp. 251–252.

⁵³CRC, “Formulier (1971)”: “To all who are not sorry for their sins, do not trust God's promises, and continue to live a disobedient and unrepentant life, we declare that they have no part in the kingdom of Christ, and, lest God's judgment be the heavier, we admonish them while they persist in their sins to abstain from the Lord's Supper, which Christ has ordained only for his believers.” Cf. Van 't Spijker, *Zijn verbond en woorden*, p. 104; Brienens, *Oriëntatie in de liturgie*, p. 101.

⁵⁴Dorn, *The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Church in America*, p. 196: “For as out of many grains one meal is ground and one bread baked, and out of many berries being pressed together one wine flows and mixes itself together...” This quote is copied from the Lutheran *Agenda of Württemberg* (1553), cf. Lekkerkerker, *Kanttekeningen III*, pp. 139–140; Immink, “Heilig Avondmaal”, pp. 249–250; Immink, *The Touch of the Sacred*, p. 234.

⁵⁵CRC, “Formulier (1971)”, p. 3, cf. 1 Corinthians 10:16b–17 (NIV): “And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.”

⁵⁶The latter subject has been added as a separate section in the CanRC edition (*Form*), but is absent from the CRC and RCL editions of the classical form. The quote from Romans 5:10 in the *Thanksgiving* section may be understood as an indirect reference to the resurrection of Christ.

As has already been noted in Chapter 3, in some CRC congregations (like CRC-A and CRC-C) the first three parts are read a week before the coming celebration.⁵⁷ According to the Liturgical Committee of the CRC's General Synod (2010), this custom has its origins in the 1950's.⁵⁸

Abbreviated Liturgical Form (1971) The abbreviated form was developed between 1969 and 1971, and consists of the following sections (without explicitly being identified as such):⁵⁹

- Institution
- Self-examination
- Invitation and Admonition
- Remembrance of Christ
- Assurance
- Fellowship
- Expectation of Christ's Return
- Prayer (*without* the Lord's Prayer)
- Exhortation (including the *sursum corda*)
- Communion
- Doxology
- The Lord's Prayer

Characteristic of this liturgical form is the brevity of all sections compared to the classical form. For example, the sections *Remembrance of Christ* and *Assurance* are each summarized in a single sentence, while the *Thanksgiving* section has been completely removed altogether. Instead, a section on the *Expectation of Christ's Return* has been added, and the Lord's Prayer has been moved after the doxology to conclude the celebration.

A number of changes in content were also made. The *Institution* is quoted from Luke 22:14–20 (instead of 1 Corinthians 11:23–29). The section on *Fellowship* quotes only 1 Corinthians 10:17 (without verse 16b, as is also the case in the CRC's classical form in its 1971 revision). Finally, the *Doxology* is comprised of other Scripture passages (Ephesians 2:4–10 and 3:20–21, instead of Psalm 103:1–4; 8–12 and Romans 8:32; 5:8–10, as in the classical form). Christ's resurrection is still not mentioned in this form.

⁵⁷See Chapter 3, note 11.

⁵⁸CRC, *Acta 2010*, art. 81 (p. 117 = p. 57). This custom was criticized by T. Brienen in *Oriëntatie in de liturgie*, p. 101.

⁵⁹CRC, "Kort formulier (1971)".

(New) Liturgical Form I (2010) This form was developed between 2004 and 2010. Like the abbreviated form, it consists of the following sections (once again, without explicit identification):⁶⁰

- Institution
- Remembrance of Christ
- Self-examination
- Invitation and Admonition
- Assurance
- Fellowship
- Expectation of Christ's Return
- Prayer (*without* the Lord's Prayer)
- Exhortation (including the *sursum corda*)
- Communion
- Doxology
- Prayer (including The Lord's Prayer)

Like the first two forms, this form is “didactical.” It is even slightly longer than the abbreviated version of the classical form. What makes this form special is the placement of the section on the *Remembrance of Christ* directly after the section on the *Institution* of the Lord's Supper. In this form, special attention is demanded for the sacrifice of Christ.

Interestingly, this new form once again includes a “catalog of sins” (following its removal from the classical form in 1971). Furthermore, some quoted Scripture passages have been replaced by others.⁶¹

(New) Liturgical Form II (2010) Like the preceding form, this liturgical form was developed between 2004 and 2010. It consists of the following sections:⁶²

- Command to celebrate the Lord's Supper
- Self-examination and Invitation
- Doxology (including the *sursum corda*)
- Remembrance of Christ
- Institution
- Prayer of Invocation (Epiclesis)
- The Lord's Prayer

⁶⁰CRC, “Liturgisch formulier I (2010)”.

⁶¹For example, the *Institution* section quotes Matthew 26:26–29, while the *Doxology* section consists of citations from Psalm 146:5–10 and Revelations 5:13.

⁶²CRC, “Liturgisch formulier II (2010)”.

- Exchange of a sign of peace (optional)
- Communion
- Thanksgiving

Unlike the other forms, this form is called “celebrative.” It follows the structure of eucharistic celebrations in the early church and begins with a reference to the commission given by Jesus. Thereafter one finds a combined section on *Self-examination and Invitation*. The actual celebration starts with the section called *Doxology*, which is in fact one large doxological prayer. It comprises the next sections on *Remembrance and Institution*, and ends with the *Epiclesis*. After the Lord’s Prayer, congregations have the option of passing the peace (depending on “local customs and agreements”). Following communion, a passage of Scripture may be read by way of *Thanksgiving*.

Interestingly, Jesus’ resurrection is mentioned explicitly in this form (with a reference to Romans 4:25), while such a reference is absent from the other CRC forms. Some passages, which in the form itself are marked with an asterisk, may be recited out loud with the whole congregation. Furthermore, the optional element of passing the peace (*vredegroet*) seems to be new within the CRC tradition. While the “catalog of sins” is missing, the “bread and wine” imagery (from the *Didache*) has been included again in the *Epiclesis* prayer. Lastly, in a preface included with the printed version, the authors mention the option of reading a “preparatory” part from another liturgical form a week prior to the celebration.⁶³

6.4.2 RCL Liturgical Forms for the Lord’s Supper

Until 1972, churches in the RCL denomination used a slightly revised edition of the classical form for the Lord’s Supper approved in 1936.⁶⁴ Nowadays, five different forms are in use, including a revised version of the classical liturgical form. In the following subsections, a concise history of these forms will be given. Thereafter, the content and features of each form will be summarized.

⁶³CRC, “Liturgisch formulier II (2010)”, pp. 12–13.

⁶⁴This form was originally published in 1896 (Rutgers, Bavinck, and Kuyper, *De berijmde Psalmen met eenige gezangen*, pp. 71-76 = pp. 305-310) and approved by the General Synod of the *Gereformeerde Kerken* in 1936. Cf. RCL, *Acta 1958-1959*, attachment III-a (p. 110): “Na een ingesteld onderzoek bleek deputaten, dat de tekst van de formulieren van enigheid en de liturgische formulieren, welke door een drietal deputaten van de generale synode van 1933 werd uitgegeven, voor de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland de officiële tekst is geworden. (Zie acta generale synode van 1936, art. 276 (p. 134) en bijlage LXV, p. 333v).”

Concise History

Already in 1955, the RCL's General Synod decided to appoint deputies to investigate the possibility of a linguistic revision of the Three Forms of Unity together with all liturgical forms.⁶⁵ The conclusions of their investigation, including a sample of a revised form for baptism, were presented at the next General Synod in 1958–1959. After discussion, the synod decided that both the Heidelberg Catechism and, “if possible,” the liturgical forms were to be translated into “contemporary Dutch.” The draft revisions were to be presented at the following synod.⁶⁶ A request of the classis of Haarlem for a new, shorter form for the celebration of the Lord's Supper was rejected at the same time.⁶⁷

Three years later, during the synod of 1961, the revision of the Heidelberg Catechism alone was discussed—not that of the liturgical forms. However, on April 30, 1964, the next General Synod decided that a new and shorter liturgical form for the celebration of the Lord's Supper was to be developed, adding the wish that once the new form had been completed, the classical form would continue to be used “at least four times per year.”⁶⁸ On September 2 of that same year, the synod decided that “also the other liturgical forms, especially those that are frequently used, are to be translated into modern Dutch.”⁶⁹

In 1967, the year when a schism took place within the RCL leading to the founding of the *Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken*,⁷⁰ the General Synod noted that a draft version of the second form had been completed (as well as a modernized version of the form for baptism), but added the observation that these results had been presented too late. Local congregations had therefore not been given enough time to evaluate the draft versions. Interestingly, at this synod also an “even shorter” version of the form for the Lord's Supper was presented, developed by the congregation in Oostzaan. In consideration of all factors, the synod decided that the draft versions would not be discussed (for the reason mentioned above), and that a new synodical committee was to complete the assignments given back in 1964.⁷¹

⁶⁵RCL, *Acta 1955*, art. 132b (p. 47).

⁶⁶RCL, *Acta 1958-1959*, art. 39 (pp. 13-15).

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, art. 77 (pp. 30-31), art. 82 (pp. 33-34).

⁶⁸RCL, *Acta 1964*, art. 71b (p. 26): “If in the future a shorter form should be adopted for use [in the churches], [synod] still recommends that the existing form be read at least four times per year at the celebration of the Lord's Supper” (*[De synode] spreekt hierbij uit het gewenst te achten, dat, indien te zijner tijd een korter formulier naast het bestaande in gebruik mocht worden genomen, wordt bepaald, dat het bestaande formulier tenminste vier maal per jaar bij de viering van het Heilig Avondmaal zal worden gelezen.*)

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, art. 167c (p. 64); cf. Smelik, “Vuur en vlam in de liturgie”, pp. 281–282.

⁷⁰See Van Middelkoop, *Kerken onderweg*, pp. 227–292, 330–339.

⁷¹RCL, *Acta 1966-1967*, art. 52 (p. 51).

As the subject was not discussed during the next General Synod in 1969–1970, the first draft version of a second form for the Lord's Supper was not evaluated until three years later, during a meeting of the next General Synod on June 14, 1972. At this meeting, also modernized versions of some of the other forms were discussed, including the classical form for the Lord's Supper. After consideration it was decided to approve the revised forms (with some modifications) as well as the introduction of the second form (*idem*) for liturgical use, although the latter was to remain a draft "until a new hymnal is published."⁷² In a session on September 12, 1972, the synod also decided to revise "the entire hymnal," including all remaining liturgical forms.⁷³

In the end, the publication of RCL's hymnal would have to wait until 1986.⁷⁴ Between 1972 and 1986, much work was done by the deputies of a series of Worship Committees, mostly on the linguistic revision of the confessions and the selection of Psalms (new rhyming) and hymns.

As early as 1975, the deputies had recommended that the synod develop "a highly simplified liturgy for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, without an extensive teaching section, thus proceeding almost immediately to the celebration of communion itself."⁷⁵ In this proposed "third option," such traditional elements as the sacramental prayer, the words of institution, the remembrance of Christ, an admonition and invitation, the "sursum corda," and the thanksgiving were to be included. However, this recommendation from the committee was never implemented.⁷⁶

In 1978 the next General Synod decided to approve the draft versions of the modernized classical form (1972) and the second form (*idem*) "with reservation" (p. 179), implying that they had not yet been approved for liturgical use.⁷⁷ Several questions were posed with regard to the *content* of both liturgical forms, which needed answering before the forms could be included in the new hymnal.⁷⁸ Interestingly, this synod (in 1978) gave its Liturgical Committee the mandate not only to modernize the language,

⁷²RCL, *Acta 1972*, art. 96 (pp. 68-70), attachment 15 (pp. 348-350), cf. RCL, *Rapport deputaten 1969/1970*; Trimp, *Formulieren en gebeden*, p. 57; RCL, *Rapporten deputaten 1999*, p. 160. It must be noted that the approved "second form" was received as a possible replacement for the classical form—that is, it could also be used in the morning services (which does not hold true for the CRC's abbreviated form). See §6.4.1.

⁷³RCL, *Acta 1972*, art. 139 (pp. 116-118).

⁷⁴See Schelling, "Het nieuwe kerkboek"; Smelik, "Vuur en vlam in de liturgie", pp. 292–293.

⁷⁵RCL, *Acta 1975*, attachment 8D (pp. 327-437, here p. 344).

⁷⁶RCL, *Rapporten deputaten 1999*, p. 160.

⁷⁷RCL, *Acta 1978*, art. 21 (p. 15), art. 426 (pp. 177-194), attachment 3 (pp. 253-288, esp. 281-284 and 287), attachment 19 (pp. 522-525). The "reservation" was based on four questions that first needed answering prior to the next General Synod, which was held in 1981.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, art. 426 (p. 179), decision 2c: 1. Should the "catalog of sins" be included, and, if so, how?; 2. Should the "bread and wine" imagery be maintained in the classical form, and, if so, in what way?; 3. Should the Lord's Prayer be included before or after communion?;

but also to revise the content of these forms. After the necessary modifications, both the new and the revised forms were approved for liturgical use by the next General Synod in 1981.⁷⁹

Well after the publication of the RCL's hymnal, the General Synod of 1993 appointed a synodical study committee to develop recommendations for the liturgy. In its report to the next synod, this committee—on the basis of a survey sent to the secretaries of all RCL congregations—identified great diversity in preferences and desires among RCL churches.⁸⁰ One of the recommendations in this report concerned the drafting of “more and much shorter” liturgical forms for the celebration of the sacrament, with a view to an increase in the frequency of celebrations. Secondly, it also mentioned the option of approving the use of a special order of service (the Ordinary) in which no didactical text needs to be read.⁸¹ Thirdly, the synodical committee suggested that alternative styles should be considered for the sacrament, so that the celebration takes less time. On September 3 and 5, 1996, this report was discussed, after which the synod decided among others “to reflect on the place and structure of the celebration of the Lord's Supper and to design texts or forms that would allow for greater variety if the sacrament is celebrated more frequently.” Additionally, it decided “to pay attention to variation in or expansion of the liturgical forms.”⁸²

In a new report for the next General Synod in 1999, the RCL's Worship Committee included a lengthy reflection on the use and function of liturgical forms.⁸³ In this report, the existing two liturgical forms (approved in 1981) were discussed, as well as the possibility of a compilation of the existing forms and another liturgical form that had already

4. Should quotes from Scripture in the 1951 Bible translation be corrected using the (older) *Statenvertaling*? Some of these questions had already been formulated twenty years earlier by A.F.N. Lekkerkerker (in *Kanttekeningen III*, pp. 51–61), cf. Trimp, *Formulieren en gebeden*, p. 57.

⁷⁹RCL, *Acta 1981*, art. 56.2 (pp. 101–102, cf. 307–313). In fact, the 1981 synod decided: to maintain the “catalog of sins,” albeit in a linguistically modernized form; to replace the “bread and wine” imagery with a reference to 1 Corinthians 10:17; to include the Lord's Prayer in the prayer *before* communion; and not to alter the Scripture quotations after other Bible translations. For a full list of all (proposed) changes, see RCL, *Rapport deputaten 1969/1970*, pp. 33–35, 41–42; Trimp, *De gemeente en haar liturgie*, pp. 150–154; Van Rongen, “Het ‘Onze Vader’ in de liturgie”.

⁸⁰RCL, *Rapport Studiedeputaten 1995*, pp. 7–16. In total, 168 out of 266 congregations responded.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁸²RCL, *Acta 1996*, art. 63 (p. 75). These and other decisions on liturgy were explained to RCL members in a booklet: RCL, *Licht op liturgie*.

⁸³RCL, *Rapporten deputaten 1999*, pp. 153–176. In their report, the committee distinguished three functions: 1. A dogmatic function; 2. A didactic function; 3. An ecumenical function. According to the report, this implied that local churches or ministers were not free to alter or abbreviate liturgical forms on their own (p. 159). Cf. Steunpunt Liturgie, *Notitie Formulieren*, pp. 6–10; Smelik, “Het gebruik en ongebruik van liturgische formulieren”.

been developed in 1992 by A.N. Hendriks.⁸⁴ Additionally, the report included two more, even shorter forms, as well as an order of service based on the Ordinary.⁸⁵ Lastly, it also included a plea for a weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper.⁸⁶ In several meetings in September 1999, the General Synod decided to approve the proposed revision of the liturgical forms, as well as the introduction of three new liturgical forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, leaving the RCL with a total number of five approved forms. Moreover, the synod accepted a new order of service in which the celebration of the Lord's Supper is included—always—in the morning services, but *not* in the afternoon services (“Order of Service C”). However, a proposal to approve the draft version of the Ordinary was rejected. Instead, the synod decided that more study was needed to determine whether this order of service is, or could be made, serviceable “in the present time and culture.”⁸⁷

In 2002 the General Synod decided to approve a draft version of the Ordinary, since then called “Order of Service D.”⁸⁸ Using this order of service, the Lord's Supper could be celebrated without necessarily using a liturgical form. However, in 2005 the next synod decided to stop further development and study. Instead, it determined that the material which had already been developed was to remain available, implying that congregations were *not* prohibited from keeping on using it.⁸⁹ The reasons for this twofold decision included the presumed lack of interest among congregations for the use of this form.

In 2008, 2011, and 2016 the liturgical forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper were once again modernized. In 2008 draft versions of all liturgical forms were approved, with all Scripture citations now being taken from the *Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling* (2004).⁹⁰ The next revisions in 2011 and 2016 for the most part represented linguistic modernizations.⁹¹ However, in 2014 the General Synod decided that RCL ministers could

⁸⁴RCL, *Rapporten deputaten 1999*, pp. 164–169; cf. Dijkema, “Lang en kort”.

⁸⁵RCL, *Rapporten deputaten 1999*, pp. 169–174, 187–209; cf. Steunpunt Liturgie, *Notitie Orde D*.

⁸⁶RCL, *Rapporten deputaten 1999*, pp. 144–176, esp. 152, cf. Smelik, “Vuur en vlam in de liturgie”, pp. 299–300.

⁸⁷RCL, *Acta 1999*, art. 49 (pp. 83–103), here p. 100. The “draft version” of A.N. Hendriks (1992) was approved, together with two new, shorter liturgical forms (p. 101). Interestingly, the synod offered congregations the option to “remove the sections ‘self-examination’ and ‘invitation and admonition’ from the abbreviated (classical) form,” for instance when using Order of Service C. This option was mentioned in *Liturgisch katern*, p. 25, which was published later. Finally, a new form for the celebration of the sacrament in “adapted church services” for people with disabilities was rejected.

⁸⁸RCL, *Acta 2001, 2002–2003*, art. 66 (p.156–8), art. 73 (pp. 165–167); Steunpunt Liturgie, *Liturgische besluiten*, p. 4, cf. Steunpunt Liturgie, *Notitie Orde D*.

⁸⁹RCL, *Acta 2005*, art. 76 (pp. 159–161), attachment V-IX (pp. 1018–1021, 1028–1035).

⁹⁰These draft versions were published in a green booklet: RCL, *Liturgische formulieren*.

⁹¹The most recent versions have been published in a new edition of the RCL's hymnal (*Gereformeerde kerkboek*).

introduce “variations” of their own in the teaching part of the liturgical forms, while noting at the same time that the official or legal parts, like the Words of Institution, were not to be modified.⁹²

Content

In the following subsections, the content of the RCL forms for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper will be described.⁹³

Liturgical Form 1 (2016, orig. 1566) This form is a modernized and revised version of the classical form. It consists of the following sections (as identified in the form itself):⁹⁴

- Institution
- Self-examination
- Invitation and Admonition
- Remembrance of Christ
- Teaching
- Fellowship with Christ and with His brothers and sisters
- Prayer (including the Lord’s Prayer)
- Profession of Faith (the Apostles’ Creed or Nicene Creed)
- Exhortation (including the *sursum corda*)
- Communion
- Thanksgiving (two parts)

A few differences emerge when this version is compared to the CRC edition. First, quotes from Scripture are taken from the *Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling* (2004; the CRC edition uses the *Statenvertaling* and the *1951 Bible Translation*). Secondly, it includes a “catalog of sins,” as in the 1773 edition (but unlike the 1971 CRC revision).⁹⁵ Thirdly, the “bread and wine” imagery has been removed from the *Fellowship* section.⁹⁶ Fourthly, the *Doxology* section is added as a “second part” to the *Thanksgiving* section,

⁹²RCL, *Generale regeling voor de kerkdiensten*, art. 5.2 (quoted in note 38). However, nothing has been determined regarding the use of the prayers that are also included in the liturgical forms. Cf. Burger, “Geen doop en avondmaal zonder gebed om de Geest”; Burger, “Gebed om Geest”.

⁹³See also Steunpunt Liturgie, *Notitie Avondmaal*, p. 3 and Steunpunt Liturgie, *Notitie Formulieren*, p. 2 for a short characterization and comparison of the various RCL forms for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

⁹⁴RCL, “Avondmaalsformulier 1 (2016 Revision)”, cf. RCL, *Avondmaalsformulier 1 (2011 Revision)*; RCL, *Rapport deputaten 1969/1970*, pp. 25–35. Cf. also note 56.

⁹⁵Trimp, *Formulieren en gebeden*, p. 57; Trimp, *De gemeente en haar liturgie*, pp. 151–152.

⁹⁶See note 54 above.

meaning that ministers may choose whether to read only the first or the second part, or both parts together.⁹⁷

In the 1972 edition of this version, the verb “to commemorate” in the first sentence of the *Prayer* was replaced with “to celebrate,” although that revision has since been reversed again in the 2008 revision.⁹⁸ Secondly, between 1972 and 2011, the *sursum corda* (“Lift up your hearts!” = “*de harten omhoog!*”) was formulated in a more strongly hortative sense than it was in the CRC editions.⁹⁹ Thirdly, ever since the 2008 revision, the text includes two variants of the Words of Institution: a “separate” (or classical) version for celebrations seated at a table or in the pews, and a “combined” version for ambulatory celebrations. The most recent version available reads as follows:

The bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ. The cup of wine, for which we give praise and thanks, is the communion of the blood of Christ. Take this bread and cup, eat and drink from it, remember and believe that our Lord Jesus Christ has given his body and blood for the complete forgiveness of all our sins.¹⁰⁰

Liturgical Form 2 (2016, orig. 1972) The abbreviated form was developed between 1964 and 1972, and has since been modernized in 2008,

⁹⁷The second part is in fact a thanksgiving prayer.

⁹⁸Trimp, *De gemeente en haar liturgie*, p. 153. Before 1972 it was: “*Barmhartige God en Vader, wij bidden U, dat Gij in dit Avondmaal (waarin wij oefenen de heerlijke gedachtenis van den bitteren dood van uwen lieven Zoon Jezus Christus) door uwen Heiligen Geest in onze harten wilt bewerken...*” After 1972 it became: “*Barmhartige God en Vader, nu wij in dit avondmaal de heerlijke gedachtenis vieren aan de bittere dood van uw geliefde Zoon Jezus Christus, bidden wij U, of U door uw Heilige Geest in onze harten wilt bewerken...*” And since 2008: “*Barmhartige God, onze Vader, dankbaar gedenken wij aan deze maaltijd de bittere dood van uw geliefde Zoon Jezus Christus. Wij bidden u: wil met dit avondmaal door uw heilige Geest bewerken...*”

⁹⁹Before 1972: “*Opdat wij dan met het waarachtige hemelsche brood Christus gespijzigd mogen worden, zoo laat ons met onze harten niet aan het uiterlijke brood en wijn blijven hangen; maar onze harten opwaarts in den hemel verheffen, waar Jezus Christus is, onze Voorspraak, ter rechterhands zijns hemelschen Vaders...*” Proposed in 1972: “*Om met het ware hemelse brood Christus gevoed te worden, moeten wij niet alleen op de tekenen van brood en wijn zien, maar de harten omhoog!—op Jezus Christus zien, die in de hemel onze Voorspraak is aan de rechterhand van zijn Vader...*” In 2011 the clause with the exclamation mark was removed again, so that the text now reads: “*We moeten juist omhoog kijken...*”

¹⁰⁰RCL, “Avondmaalsformulier 1 (2016 Revision)”, pp. 691–692: “*Het brood dat we breken, maakt ons één met het lichaam van Christus. De beker met wijn, waarvoor we God loven en danken, maakt ons één met het bloed van Christus. Neem dit brood en deze beker, eet en drink, gedenk en geloof dat Jezus Christus, onze Heer, zijn lichaam en bloed gegeven heeft om al onze zonden te vergeven.*”

2011, and 2016. It consists of the following sections (as identified in the form itself):¹⁰¹

- Institution
- Self-examination
- Invitation and Admonition
- Remembrance of Christ
- Assurance
- Fellowship
- Expectation of Christ's Return
- Prayer (*including* the Lord's Prayer)
- Exhortation (*including* the *sursum corda*)
- Communion
- Thanksgiving (two parts)

Like the CRC abbreviated form, this form is a concise version of the classical liturgical form. In the RCL version as well, a section on the *Expectation of Christ's Return* has been added. Interestingly, the RCL authors of the 1972 edition tried to emphasize the joy of the expectation that can be tasted in the celebration using the Dutch word "*voorsmaak*" (foretaste):¹⁰²

Christ has commanded us to celebrate the holy supper until he comes. We receive at his table a foretaste of the abundant joy which he has promised and look forward to the marriage feast of the Lamb, when he will drink the wine new with us in the kingdom of his Father. Let us rejoice and give him the glory, for the marriage feast of the Lamb is coming! ¹⁰³

Unlike the first RCL form, the abbreviated form does not include a "catalog of sins." The *Fellowship* is again rooted in 1 Corinthians 10:17 (without reference to the *Didache*), while an abbreviated version of the *Doxology* is included in the *Thanksgiving* section (which once again has

¹⁰¹RCL, "Avondmaalsformulier 2 (2016 Revision)", cf. RCL, *Avondmaalsformulier 2 (2011 Revision)*; RCL, *Rapport deputaten 1969/1970*, pp. 36–42.

¹⁰²In the 2008 revision, this word was replaced with the alternative "*voorproef*," which in 2011 was further changed to "*voorproefje*." In my opinion, this final revision in particular (with the diminutive *-je* nominal form) has a somewhat belittling ring to it.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, p. 38 (with reference to Acts 2:46 and Revelations 19:7), cf. the CRC edition ("Kort formulier (1971)": "At the Lord's Supper we together look forward in great expectation to the return of our Savior, who has invited us to the marriage feast of the Lamb. Then He will drink fruit of the vine new with us in the kingdom of his Father." More on the history and/or content of the RCL version can be found in Trimp, *Formulieren en gebeden*, p. 57; Trimp, *De gemeente en haar liturgie*, pp. 152–154; Dijkema, "Lang en kort", esp. pp. 128–133; Van Houwelingen, "Voortgezette maaltijd in het voltooid koninkrijk".

two options). As in the classical RCL form, there is no reference at all to the resurrection of Christ, and the Lord's Prayer is prayed *before* communion takes place (unlike the abbreviated CRC form).¹⁰⁴ Lastly, the Words of Institution may be combined for the ambulatory style of celebration.¹⁰⁵

Liturgical Form 3 (2016, orig. 1999/1992) The third RCL form was developed in 1992 by Rev A.N. Hendriks.¹⁰⁶ In 1999 the RCL's General Synod decided to approve this form for liturgical use.¹⁰⁷ It consists of the following sections (as identified in the form itself).¹⁰⁸

- Institution
- Remembrance of Christ
- Conviction and Assurance
- Fellowship
- Expectation of Christ's Return
- Prayer (without the Lord's Prayer)
- Song
- Exhortation and Invitation (including the *sursum corda*)
- Communion
- Thanksgiving (Psalm or hymn)

Compared to the first two RCL forms, this form does not include the traditional, separate sections on *Self-examination* and *Invitation and Admonition*. Instead, the sections on *Fellowship* and *Expectation* are more extensive than they are in the second RCL form. The *Thanksgiving* section consists only of the singing of a Psalm or hymn, without a closing prayer. This liturgy also does not include the Lord's Prayer.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴See RCL, *Acta 1984-1985*, art. 56, p. 101; Dijkema, "Lang en kort", 133n9.

¹⁰⁵See note 100. However, the printed edition of the second RCL form (2016 revision) contains an editorial error. In this form, the Words of Institution end with the words "to take away all our sins completely" (*om al onze zonden volledig weg te nemen*), instead of "to forgive all our sins" (*om al onze zonden te vergeven*), which is the version found in the other forms. This has been corrected in an online version: <https://www.gkv.nl/download/24149>.

¹⁰⁶A.N. Hendriks also served as secretary to the synodical committee that developed the second RCL form, implying that he may also be identified as one of the authors of this second RCL form. The committee was chaired by C. Trimp.

¹⁰⁷RCL, *Acta 1999*, art. 49 (88-90, 101), cf. Dijkema, "Lang en kort" and note 87 above.

¹⁰⁸RCL, "Avondmaalsformulier 3 (2016 Revision)", cf. RCL, *Avondmaalsformulier 3 (2011 Revision)*; RCL, *Liturgisch katern*, pp. 25-28.

¹⁰⁹In a later explanation, the editors of the 1999 RCL forms stated: "If the Lord's Prayer is not included in the liturgical form, we recommend ending the intercessory prayer with it" (in *Ibid.*, p. 46). This recommendation was, however, removed in the 2008 and later revisions.

The printed version of the 1999 edition included suggestions for specific songs to sing before and after communion.¹¹⁰ Beginning with the 2008 revision, these suggestions are no longer included. Another change since the original publication concerns the Words of Institution. As in the other RCL forms, these words can now be combined when the ambulatory style of celebration is used.

A closer look at the content of this form reveals that great emphasis is placed on joy and thanksgiving (i.e. doxology), for example, in the *Remembrance* section:

With joy we proclaim that the death [of Christ] gives us life.
We praise our heavenly Father, who in love offered up for
us his only Son. (...) We celebrate the great mystery of our
faith...¹¹¹

Furthermore, there is greater emphasis on the mutual fellowship among communicants: “*Come, all of you, in joy and unity to the table of your Lord. (...) Thus you will be filled with love for God and also move others to that love.*”¹¹²

Liturgical Form 4 (2016, orig. 1999) The fourth RCL form was developed between 1997 and 1999, and consists of the following sections:¹¹³

- Institution
- Remembrance of Christ
- Invitation and Admonition¹¹⁴
- Prayer (without the Lord’s Prayer)¹¹⁵
- Profession of Faith (the Nicene Creed or Apostles’ Creed)
- Exhortation (including the *sursum corda*)
- Communion
- Thanksgiving (two parts)
- Song¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰Before communion: *Liedboek voor de Kerken* (1973) hymn 356, 357, 358, or 360. After communion: Psalm 103:1,2,3,5 (*Gereformeerd kerkboek*), or Psalm 138 (*idem*), or *Liedboek voor de Kerken* hymn 15.

¹¹¹RCL, “Avondmaalsformulier 3 (2016 Revision)”, pp. 698–699.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 700–701.

¹¹³RCL, “Avondmaalsformulier 4 (2016 Revision)”, cf. RCL, *Avondmaalsformulier 4 (2011 Revision)*; RCL, *Liturgisch katern*, pp. 28–31.

¹¹⁴After the 2008 revision, the order of words in this section title was reversed. Before 2008, it was *Admonition and Invitation*. The content of this section was not significantly changed.

¹¹⁵See note 109.

¹¹⁶As in the third RCL form, suggestions for song selection were included in the 1999 edition (here Psalm 103, 107, 113–118). However, these suggestions were removed in the 2008 and subsequent revisions.

The content of this form closely follows that of the first and second RCL forms (with extensive attention for Christ's sacrifice and the forgiveness of sins), although it does not include separate sections on *Self-examination*, *Fellowship*, and *Expectation*. As in the other RCL forms, the Words of Institution for the elements of bread and wine may be combined. After communion, the minister may choose one of the two parts included in the *Thanksgiving* section, or even combine them. The celebration is closed with the singing of a Psalm or hymn.

Liturgical Form 5 (2016, orig. 1999) Like the preceding form, the fifth and final RCL form was developed between 1997 and 1999. It consists of the following sections:¹¹⁷

- Institution
- Remembrance of Christ
- Fellowship and Expectation
- Prayer (without the Lord's Prayer)¹¹⁸
- Profession of Faith (the Apostles' Creed or Nicene Creed)
- Exhortation (including the *sursum corda*)
- Communion
- Thanksgiving (two parts)
- Song¹¹⁹

In this form, there are no separate sections on *Self-examination*, *Invitation and Admonition*, or *Assurance*. Most attention is given to the element of "communion with Christ and with each other," as well as to the foretaste of the joy that lies in the future wedding feast of the Lamb; both are mentioned in the section on *Fellowship and Expectation*. Furthermore, the first part of the *Thanksgiving* section includes a direct reference to the resurrection of Christ.¹²⁰ As in the other RCL forms, the Words of Institution may be combined. After communion, the minister may choose one of the two parts included in the *Thanksgiving* section, or even combine them. Lastly, the celebration is closed with the singing of a Psalm or hymn.

¹¹⁷RCL, "Avondmaalsformulier 5 (2016 Revision)", cf. RCL, *Avondmaalsformulier 5 (2011 Revision)*; RCL, *Liturgisch katern*, pp. 31–33.

¹¹⁸See note 109.

¹¹⁹See note 116.

¹²⁰This is done with a direct quotation from Romans 8:34 (*Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling*): "Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (NIV).

6.5 In Conclusion

In the above, the normative theological voice was characterized on the basis of three different sources. First, the confessions of faith were summarized and analyzed for their explicit or implicit statements on the Lord's Supper. Secondly, the regulations on the Lord's Supper included in the church orders of the two respective denominations were examined. Thirdly, the approved liturgical forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper were analyzed and compared. All three sources are considered to be normative within the CRC and RCL denominations, and are therefore to a certain degree representative of the normative voice.

Chapter 7

Conversation

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, the four voices of theology were described in detail. In this chapter, I will consider how a “conversation” between these different voices can be constructed. This conversation is in a sense artificial, since the descriptions in chapters 3 through 6 are based on observations, interviews, and a literature review I conducted. In this chapter, I will use these descriptions to *initiate* a conversation between the four voices to lay the groundwork for the next chapter, which will consider what this conversation may bring for the CRC and RCL congregations.

The conversation will be initiated with the definition of discussion topics. These topics are based on the differences and similarities between at least two of the four theological voices. As such, each topic marks a *starting point* for theological reflection evolving from the observations in the previous chapters. Furthermore, since the various topics have been derived from different sources across four different voices, they are heterogeneous in nature; some are more empirical (the operant, espoused, and formal voices), while others originate from the literature review (formal and normative voices).

The use of the term “conversation” makes it clear that there can be no “abstract” analysis of the similarities and differences between the four voices, as if each voice were totally separate from the others. Even *within* each voice, there proved to be variety and diversity. Furthermore, the term “voice” assumes a conversation, because there are always groups and individuals who speak—in a living conversation, or through various media—with and to each other, continually or just every now and then.

7.2 Conversation Topics

After the four voices had been described separately, the researcher first analyzed the most striking similarities and differences between them, in consultation with the two other members of the research team (Hans Schaeffer, and Marcel Barnard). This analysis resulted in seven different topics that were formulated inductively, that is, as based on the results presented in the previous chapters. Next, the researcher discussed these topics with two colleagues (Koos Tamminga and Attila Csongor Kelemen) to check whether the data were presented in a complete and balanced way. This discussion resulted in the prioritization of two topics, namely “The Role of Experience” (topic 1) and “Lord’s Supper as Communion” (topic 2).

Once a draft version of this chapter had been written, the researcher decided, in consultation with the two other members of the research team, to change the sequence of the topics to align more closely with the priority as it had been ascribed to them before. Thus, what initially was the final topic, for example, has now become the first. Furthermore, the title and content of each topic has been defined more precisely and described in greater detail.

In what follows, new quotes are sometimes included, often to illustrate ideas that have already been introduced elsewhere in this study. Wherever possible, references have been supplied to the corresponding sections. Finally, since every conversation emerges within a given context, a separate section offers an additional reflection on the perspectivity of the topics presented (§7.3).

7.2.1 The Role of Experience

The first topic of conversation is the role of experience (*beleving*) in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.¹

With regard to the *espoused voice*, various interviewees indicated that in their experience the celebrations of the Lord’s Supper over time came to have greater impact on them (see §4.6.1). Although this does not imply that every celebration necessarily has greater impact than the previous one, participants did share different examples of celebrations that

¹In Dutch, the term *beleving* is commonly used to denote all kinds of experiences, usually not in a strictly psychological sense, but as something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through. It is etymologically related to the German word *Erlebnis*. In this section, when speaking about “experience” I refer to experiences in this sense of *beleving*. For clarification, the Dutch word has been added in parentheses. More on *beleving* can be found in Dekker, “Van overlevings- naar belevingscultuur” (2004); Van der Stoep, Kuiper, and Ramaker, *Alles wat je hart begeert?* (esp. the chapter of Marleen Hengelaar-Rookmaaker on worship; 2007); Beunder et al., *Postmodern gereformeerd* (2009); Visser, *De druk van de beleving* (2012, orig. 1998).

struck them because of what happened to themselves or others, such as when the Lord's Supper was celebrated shortly after the passing away of a loved one. Such an experience could at times even be evoked by a change in context or style of celebration, as when participants had celebrated abroad (§4.6.3 and §4.6.4). As such, the celebrations that were identified as having great "impact" left an impression that participants recalled during their participation in this study and possibly also at other occasions like a later sacramental celebrations.

Various other congregants, who partly overlap with the previous group, shared their longing for a more intense or conscious experience of the sacramental celebrations (§4.4.2 and §4.7). When discussing their desired experience for future celebrations, multiple interviewees (mostly in RCL churches, but also in CRC-A and B) adduced one or more celebration styles that differed from what they were used to in their own congregation, as when the sacrament was celebrated standing in a circle, or as part of a potluck dinner with the whole congregation, or during a barbecue organized by a small group (§4.5.1). These desires were often inspired by personal experiences in other churches, also when abroad.²

Some of the desires expressed by congregants led to new questions. For example, can we celebrate the Lord's Supper outside a church service (e.g. in a Bible study group, or out in nature), without the use of liturgical forms/prayers, without elders and deacons present, without the presence of the whole congregation, without a minister (to administer the sacrament), as part of a normal meal, or even without the elements of bread and wine? So too the frequency or moment of celebration was a subject of debate. Should the Lord's Supper be administered more or less often? Should it be celebrated also on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, or Easter Sunday?³

²Arguments for the introduction of a new celebration style included a more conscious experience (i.e. greater impact), all kinds of personal preferences (e.g. a preference for walking, sitting, or standing), practical advantages (e.g. less time-consuming), and occasionally a personal dislike of the styles in use. See §4.5.1 and §4.7.

³Some of the questions mentioned were already discussed by CRC and RCL members in theological literature. On top of the sources already noted in §5.3, publications limited to the past 10–15 years include: on the *time and frequency of celebration*: Smelik, *Gods lof op de lippen*, pp. 190–205 (2005); Vrijhof, "Avondmaal vieren op Goede Vrijdag?" (2008); Groenleer, "Goede Vrijdag en viering van het avondmaal" (2009); De Heer, "Avondmaalsviering rond Pasen" (2011); Van den Berg, "(Te) grote woorden op Goede Vrijdag" (2015); Speelman, "Weekly at the Lord's Table" (2018); on *self-examination*: Wallet, "Voorbereiding op het Heilig Avondmaal" (2011); Groenleer, "1 Korinthiërs 11 en de voorbereiding op het Heilig Avondmaal" (2011); on the *style of celebration*: Romkes, "Avondmaal nieuwe stijl?" (2013); on *celebrations outside church services*: De Heer, "Doe dit, telkens opnieuw - Maar waar?" (2014); De Bruin, "Informeel vieren" (2017); Van Dusseldorp, "Avondmaal buiten de kerk?" (2017); on the *relationship to the preaching*: RD, "Prediking en avondmaal horen bij elkaar" (2017); on the *use of liturgical forms*: Smelik, "Het gebruik en ongebruik van liturgische formulieren" (2018); Roth, "Liturgische teksten misvormen" (2018); Burger, "Geen doop en avondmaal zonder gebed om de Geest" (2018).

These questions were discussed primarily within the espoused voice, although references to the importance of experience were also documented in the discussion of the other theological voices. First, with regard to the *formal voice*, some ministers reported a similar accumulation of meaning in their own lives (§5.2.5), while various other ministers stressed the importance of bodily experiences by emphasizing the “added benefit” of the Lord’s Supper (see §5.2.3). This sentiment was captured by RCL-D’s minister when he said:

...the beautiful thing about the Lord’s Supper is how it is specifically in connection with unity and with Jesus that the senses, touch, are addressed. (...) in my opinion the added benefit of the Lord’s Supper compared to, for example, attending or participating in a worship service, (...) [is] that you feel and taste and experience, like.⁴

Thus, according to this minister the Lord’s Supper allows believers to experience something that cannot be experienced in regular church services. Nevertheless, CRC and RCL theological literature on the Lord’s Supper included virtually no reflection on the value of corporeality and bodily experiences, even though the interviewed congregants gave expression to various desires for the fostering of their sacramental experiences, as described above. *Therefore, the espoused voice urges the formal voice to re-evaluate bodily experiences at the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. What is it that the sacraments contribute alongside the preaching of the Word and the other elements of worship?*⁵

Secondly, with regard to the *normative voice*, some passages in the confession texts speak about the value of sense experience, while others seem to downplay the importance of such experience. For instance, both BC article 35 and HC QA 75 underscore the importance of bodily experiences to guarantee the trustworthiness of the sacrament, while BC article 33 simply states that the sacraments have been given due to “our insensitivity and weakness.”⁶ The ambiguous nature of this emphasis on human

⁴R25 (minister RCL-D), quoted above in chapter 5, note 15.

⁵Apart from reflections on classical terms like “sign and seal,” I only found a handful of writings on the topic by CRC and especially RCL theologians: De Boer, “Spiritualiteit van het avondmaal” (2014); De Heer, “Doe dit, telkens opnieuw’ - Maar waar?” (2014); De Ruijter, “Het lichaam mag meedoen in de kerkdienst” (2014); De Jong, “Nat hout” (2014); Praktijkcentrum, “Lichamelijke beleving van het avondmaal” (2017); De Heer, “Je hele lijf doet mee” (2018); Van Bekkum, “Voor jou gegeven” (2018). CRC authors barely addressed this topic in their publications—H.J.Th. Velema’s article “Kerkenraad en avondmaal” (2016) is more like a practical reflection on the celebration itself. Relatedly, the CRC’s General Synod in 2017 decided against allowing the performance of dance or drama during worship services, see RD, “CGK wijzen dans en drama in eredienst af”.

⁶BC art. 35: “as certainly as we take and hold the sacrament in our hands and eat and drink it with our mouths...”, and HC QA 75: “as surely as I see with my eyes the bread of

experience is reflected in the liturgical forms, which on the one hand emphasize the visibility of bread and wine,⁷ while they on the other hand also urge believers to look beyond the visible signs of bread and wine (*sursum corda*).⁸ Elsewhere I have called this combination “paradoxical,” since both aspects are stressed at the same time.⁹ However, according to the normative voice, it is precisely this tension that is materialized in the ritual of the sacrament as a material sign of what cannot be seen. *Within the context of this study, this observation leads to a discussion between the normative voice and the espoused and formal voices, since the “espoused” appreciation of physicality seems at odds with the call to “lift our hearts on high.” How should this tension be resolved?*¹⁰

Thirdly, observations conducted to register the *operant voice* illustrated that in virtually every celebration, the Lord’s Supper was administered in roughly the same way, even though the styles of celebration differed. In every case, for example, silver plates with squares of white bread and silver cups with red wine were used, while meanings like communion and thankfulness can also be symbolized using *regular* bread instead, or with the display of everyday food on the Lord’s Supper’s table.¹¹ The latter could be combined with a collection for the local food bank which can take place *during* the church service, shortly before the administration of the sacrament. At the same time, it must be noted that in the observed celebrations the breaking of the bread and the pouring out of the wine was a central moment demanding all attention. In all cases, no music was played and everyone remained silent while the minister performed this part of the ritual and spoke the words of institution. In that sense, one could say that there already is a lot of attention for visible experiences, especially in the congregations that celebrate the sacrament seated at a table or in ambulatory style.¹² While this is strictly speaking correct, the downside of this rather strong concentration is the risk of the celebra-

the Lord broken for me and the cup given to me...” and “as surely as I receive from the hand of the minister and taste with my mouth...” BC art. 33: “We believe that our gracious God, mindful of our insensitivity and weakness, has ordained sacraments to seal his promises to us and to be pledges of his good will and grace towards us.”

⁷E.g. in the classical form of Dathenus (CanRC, *Form*): “as certainly as this bread is broken before our eyes and this cup is given to us...”

⁸Ibid.: “we must not cling with our hearts to the outward symbols of bread and wine, but lift our hearts on high in heaven, where Christ, our advocate, is, at the right hand of his heavenly Father.”

⁹Bosman, “De harten omhoog!”, p. 104.

¹⁰I will reflect more extensively on this tension in the next chapter, especially in §8.4.1 and §8.5.2.

¹¹See Brown, *God and Grace of Body*, pp. 143–145, 169–170; Barnard, “De avondmaals-tafel en de eetkamertafel”.

¹²Other physical elements observed include the reverent ambiance, the neat clothes that the communicants wore, that the communicants had to stand up and walk to join the celebration (except in CRC-B), the movements of the minister, elders, and deacons, the music, silence, and/or singing during the celebrations, etc.

tion becoming disconnected from the world in which it is performed and losing important aspects of its meaning. *Therefore, the interviews with congregants and ministers question the operant voice with regard to the way in which the administration of the sacrament is performed, just as the normative voice (i.e. the confessions and the liturgical forms) demands attention for the physicality of the celebration while at the same time also warning against the overvaluation of that corporeality.*

7.2.2 Lord's Supper as Communion

Another topic evolving more directly from the interviews with the congregants (*espoused voice*) is the Lord's Supper as communion.¹³ Congregants from both denominations experienced the celebration of the sacrament as a moment of connection with one another as well as with God (§4.2.1 and §4.2.3). Whether the emphasis falls more on the connection with fellow participants or with God varies from person to person, but regardless it seems evident from the data that the Lord's Supper contributes to such communion. However, some congregants also indicated that they experienced a lack of communion with fellow communicants in the sacramental celebrations (§4.2.2)—a signal that demands both pastoral and practical attention.¹⁴

Relatedly, abstinence from the Lord's Supper table (*avondmaalsmijding*) may intersect with the experience of mutual communion and communion with God, since a group of believers who are actually eligible to join in the celebration is present but does not actually participate. Quotes from interviewees who practiced such abstinence indicated that they were reluctant to join, and that this influenced their view of inclusion in the congregation or acceptance by God. In concrete terms, one interviewee reported negative responses from others after she joined the Lord's Supper right after doing profession of faith (more than 40 years ago), while another participant still doubted whether she was actually eligible to join the celebrations since she had not yet received 'assurance of faith.'¹⁵

Secondly, communion with God and with other communicants was also mentioned in the interviews with the ministers and in theological literature published by CRC and RCL theologians, both included in the *for-*

¹³"Communion" here had a wide range of meanings attributed to this and other notions of communion. Examples of attributed meanings include a feeling of togetherness or unity, although also the theological term "communion" was used in all four voices.

¹⁴Some of the examples mentioned will be discussed in an excursus on "Inclusion and Exclusion" below (see page 247 and beyond).

¹⁵See chapter 4, note 98 and 100. Both examples may be indicative of a strong group culture. See chapter 4, note 23 and the excursus on "Inclusion and Exclusion" below for more. Also related is the relatively new phenomenon of "modern abstinence"—that people who are eligible stay at home when the Lord's Supper is celebrated. None of the congregants mentioned this, compared to one minister (CRC-B) who did. See chapter 5, note 30 and 31.

mal voice. However, in the interviews conducted with ministers, there proved to be greater emphasis on communion with God than there was in the espoused voice. For example, various ministers stressed the *precedence* of communion with Christ: “The supper of the Lord Jesus Christ... Where you experience unity with Him. (...) And in Him also with one another.”¹⁶ In general, the ministers spoke about as frequently about communion with Christ as they did about mutual communion, whereas the congregants mentioned the second relatively more frequently than the first.¹⁷ The reasons for this difference unfortunately cannot be ascertained. *Nevertheless, this difference between ministers and congregants calls for a conversation between the espoused and formal voices.* Ministers and congregants could discuss how they experience communion with Christ. Furthermore, ministers, church councils, and congregants may ask themselves in mutual conversation how they can foster the experience of that *communio cum Christo*, given their agreement on its importance in one’s personal experience of the Lord’s Supper. This conversation may further mutual understanding between congregants and ministers, and help both groups to enhance their sacramental experience.¹⁸

Thirdly, mutual communion was also thematized in the *normative voice*, especially in the liturgical forms and the confessions. For example, the classical liturgical form states that “we shall now love one another, and shall show this to one another not just in words but also in deeds.”¹⁹ However, this definition of brotherly love seems somewhat ideal compared to the way congregants and ministers described their experience of “togetherness” in the interviews. This leads to the question whether mutual communion *as it is experienced in practice* is comparable with the high standards described in the classical liturgical form.²⁰ The discrepancy can in large measure be explained by the fact that “to love one another in deeds” is something not only to be performed and experienced during the celebration of the sacrament, but also afterwards in everyday

¹⁶R22 (minister CRC-A), quoted above in chapter 5, note 2.

¹⁷See §5.2.1 and chapter 4, note 27.

¹⁸Perhaps ritual elements like passing the peace of Christ or greeting each other with a holy kiss (Romans 16:16 etc.) should be reintroduced—not occasionally, but on a regular basis—to better enable congregants to experience a connection between communion with Christ and communion with fellow believers. So too the celebration styles “standing in a circle” or “seated at a table” (with Christ being the Host of the table) may evoke a similar experience. Furthermore, the frequency of celebration may be a factor, as a higher frequency may lower the possibly high expectations among congregants and enable them to experience the sacrament in a more relaxed way. More recommendations like these will be presented in the next chapter (§8.2.2).

¹⁹CanRC, *Form*, cf. CRC, “Formulier (1971)”; RCL, “Avondmaalsformulier 1 (2016 Revision)”.

²⁰The other liturgical forms also describe the aspect of communion with fellow believers, among others with reference to 1 Corinthians 10:17, Galatians 5:13, and John 15:12. So too in the respective church orders, living a “God-fearing life” is mentioned as a requirement for participation in the celebrations.

life. Strikingly, there was only one participant who reported experiencing a relationship between the Lord's Supper, mutual communion (during the celebrations), and practical help:

I celebrate it also for the feeling of being together with my brothers and sisters, in church. It's something that also really offers me strength. [The fact] that I am not alone, in my faith, but I also see it as a... an aid in my life, that I... that if I need help, I know who I can count on, physically. And it's not just God, but also the people around me.²¹

Although this quote may be interpreted as illustrating a "best practice," it leads one to wonder why other participants did not report similar experiences. *Therefore, contrasting the normative voice with the espoused and formal voices produces the question whether participation in the Lord's Supper affects relationships with other people in everyday life.*²²

Lastly, from the perspective of the *operant voice*, few liturgical practices were observed that attempt to embody communion in particular. For example, it was only in CRC-B that congregants were invited to pass the peace of Christ. Accordingly, several questions can be formulated with the other three voices in mind. For example, with regard to *communion with God* one might ask: how is the celebrant's relationship with Father, Son, and Spirit named and addressed in the celebration? To what extent is this relationship thematized in the liturgical forms and prayers? Is the Lord's Prayer and/or creed used, and, if so, is it recited in unison or just read by the minister alone? And what happens when no liturgical form is used at all, as happened twice in RCL-D and once in RCL-F? Is in such cases a prayer of invocation (*epiclesis*) prayed before the administration of the sacrament?²³ So too questions can be formulated with regard to the *mutual communion between congregants*: How are members and guests invited to join the celebration? How are people with disabilities, elderly people, and the sick included in the celebrations? If they cannot attend the actual church service, are they offered the sacrament on a different occasion? How do local churches apply the denominational rules with regard to church discipline? How are children involved in the celebration? Is the offertory liturgically connected to the Lord's Supper?²⁴ And how is

²¹R20.2 (male, 40–64yr, RCL-F), quoted above in chapter 4, note 6.

²²The latter question is reflected on more extensively in §8.4.2 below.

²³See Burger, "Geen doop en avondmaal zonder gebed om de Geest" and Burger, "Gebed om Geest". See also chapter 8, note 79 below.

²⁴As noted in chapter 3, all congregations held at least two offerings in services where the Lord's Supper was celebrated: one regular collection, and another offering during the sacramental celebration. For both, one wonders whether they were actually perceived as spiritual exercises. See Bosman, "Collecte is meer dan even doneren".

the physical interaction between minister and communicants, and among the communicants themselves? These and other questions demand honest deliberation by the practitioners in the field.²⁵ *In conversation with the other voices, the operant voice leads to the question as to the means that could express communion with God and with fellow congregants in the liturgical ritual.*

Inclusion and Exclusion at the Lord's Supper

The question of admission to the celebrating community was discussed in the interviews with both congregants and ministers. First, in some congregations (RCL-D and F) interviewees wondered whether children should be admitted to the Lord's Supper (*espoused voice*). Without taking a stance of their own, the minister of RCL-D and F recognized that this question would become a subject of deliberation in their congregations (*formal voice*). Older writings from RCL theologians did not defend but rejected the practice of paedocommunion.²⁶ However, recently RCL theologians have begun expressing themselves more positively on the issue.²⁷

The debate on the participation of children in Reformed churches, which as such is too complex for summary or judgment here, also touches on observations in practice as well as the normative documents. In the observed celebrations (*operant voice*), the role of children was restricted to a bare minimum. It was only in the second CRC-B service that the children were addressed by the minister, who explained what was about to happen. In the other services, the children were either ignored, or else were even absent during the administration because they had gone to their own "children's service." This implies that children under the age of ca. 12 do not experience anything of the celebration, except insofar as they may see a table covered with white cloths in the front of the sanctuary at the beginning of the church service and notice that the service takes longer than normal. Some of the participating congregations, however, were attentive to "non-mainline groups" visiting the services, including asylum seekers and/or people with disabilities. In CRC-B, asylum seekers were allowed to join the celebrations after a short examination, but

²⁵The preceding questions were formulated by the researcher during the writing of this chapter. Similar questions, together with potential answers for the CRC context, are provided in Velema, "Kerkenraad en avondmaal".

²⁶E.g. in 1986 the possibility of children at the Lord's Supper was considered by A.N. Hendriks, but rejected (in *Kinderen aan de tafel van Christus?*). See Chapter 5, note 115.

²⁷The church magazines *De Reformatie* 86, no. 14 (April 8, 2011) and its successor *OnderWeg* 2, no. 23 (December 10, 2016) both published a special issue on the issue, see also Verbree, *Over dopen*, pp. 131–140; De Ruijter, "Sacrament voor kinderen"; Roth, "Kinderen horen erbij, maar soms even niet". Within the CRC, the general view is to deny admission to non-professing members like children (see Quant, "Avondmaal en kinderen"; Huijgen, "Geen avondmaal zonder bekering").

without necessarily having to make a public profession of their faith, as required under normal circumstances. In RCL-D, the people with disabilities were asked to profess their faith on their respective intellectual level.²⁸ None of the participating congregations, however, had decided to admit children to the Lord's Supper prior to profession of faith.

When it comes to the official church documents in the two denominations (*normative voice*), they stipulate that only those who have professed their faith are to be admitted to the celebrations. This regulation is at odds with the wish of some interviewees, who wanted to create room for the participation of children who had not yet done profession of faith. Furthermore, the exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11:28–29 used in the different liturgical forms implies that celebrants consciously “discern the body of the Lord.” *In the case of children and other baptized members like those mentioned above, this exegesis leads to the question as to whether they could be admitted, and, if so, when—directly after being baptized, or only after professing their faith?*²⁹

A second example of inclusion and exclusion is the application of church discipline by which those subjected to it are denied admission to the Lord's Supper. Some interviewees expressed their grief about past events that had happened to some of their loved ones or relatives, for example, upon divorce.³⁰ For some of these relatives, the denial of admission to the Lord's Supper was one of the reasons for them to start looking for another church or to leave the church all together. As one interviewee stated:

My brother was getting a divorce. Well, that wasn't what he wanted. And I was thinking: why isn't he going to Lord's Supper anymore? But he wasn't allowed to. And same thing the next time. (...) And then... there just wasn't any room to negotiate. Because that was just how it was. And that really hurt me. In the end he just left.³¹

In some congregations such exclusion is a common practice, while others leave participation more to the conscience of the individual believer. A current example is RCL-D, whose minister said:

²⁸This was noted by RCL-D's minister (R25) during his interview. To my knowledge, there have been no discussions in this congregations regarding people with severe disabilities who cannot speak at all, but who have still been baptized and are included as members of the congregation. In a sense, this issue is closely related to that concerning young children or even babies who are brought to the Lord's Supper. See Sinia, *From the Least to the Greatest*, pp. 583–584, 589–592.

²⁹The latter question is formulated with children and young adolescents in mind. For adults, the custom in CRC and RCL churches is for them first to profess their faith publicly and then immediately to be baptized.

³⁰This was noted by relatives in their interviews. Unfortunately, due to a lack of time and resources, these experiences could not be verified.

³¹R14.3 (female, 65+, RCL-D), quoted above in chapter 4, note 94.

...the first thing people might say when things emerge about members of the congregation of which one would say, like, that's not good, [is]: "What are we going to do about the Lord's Supper?" I'm glad conversations like that don't really happen that way here anymore.³²

Thirdly, some RCL participants expressed their relief at the fact that guests no longer need to show a signed proof of membership in good standing (attestation), as required in the past. Meanwhile, some elderly members in RCL-E defended the useful nature of this system for guarding the Lord's Table, citing the need for active church discipline to monitor and correct the life of professing members.³³

Taken together, these three examples show that each of the four voices offers a unique perspective on inclusion and exclusion. In essence, all three examples treat the question of sacramental hospitality. Formulated more along the lines of a continuum, the resulting question can be stated as follows: *should the Lord's Supper be explained more as a welcoming meal for all who are "hungry and thirsty," or should it be more exclusive, that is, mainly accessible for the professing members of the community of believers?*³⁴

7.2.3 Divine and Human Agency in the Liturgy

A third topic that stems from the four voices concerns the identity of the primary actor during the celebration of the Lord's Supper (*operant voice*): is it primarily the minister, or the elders and deacons, the participants, the congregation as a whole, or even God Himself? This question may sound theoretical in nature, but resonates with what emerged from the formal, normative, and espoused voices. For example, in the confessions (*normative voice*) the greatest emphasis is placed on the efficacy of God; that is, it is *God* (Christ) who instituted the sacraments, and He confirms the message of the gospel through them by His Holy Spirit (HC

³²R25 (minister RCL-D), quoted above in chapter 5, note 37.

³³In the CRC, where church discipline is practiced more or less like it is in the RCL, I did not encounter the use of written attestations for proving membership in another church.

³⁴This question is related to many different aspects of the sacramental celebrations. These include not only formal aspects, like eligibility, but also aspects of a more informal nature, like the manner of invitation before and during the church service, compliance with the implicit dress code for communicants (see note 12), a sense of comfortability with the local style of celebration (see topic 6 and 7 below), knowledge of the different meanings of the ritual, and possibly also the impact of the celebration on daily life (i.e. diaconal aspects). What may also play a role is discrimination between ingroup and outgroup. For a Reformed perspective on "eucharistic hospitality," see Maan, "Should Seekers Be Invited to the Table?"; Stephenson, "Inclusive Communion"; Carvalhaes, *Eucharist and Globalization*, pp. 78–140.

QA 66–67). At the same time, the confessions speak about *believers* acting through the sacraments, namely by “eating and drinking,” “accepting,” “seeing,” “tasting,” “spiritually appropriating,” and “receiving (by faith)” (HC QA 75–79 and BC art. 35). Taken together, the normative voice speaks of both divine and human action that may occur simultaneously in the same sacramental celebration.

The combination of human and divine agency is reflected in CRC and RCL literature, and was also reflected in the interviews with the ministers (*formal voice*). For instance, CRC-C’s minister stressed both the physical and spiritual communion shared by Christ Himself: “Indeed, the Lord’s Supper is the meal of *communio*: the communion which He shares.”³⁵ Similar statements about an active God were found in writings of both CRC and RCL theologians.³⁶ On the other hand, RCL-D’s minister placed greater emphasis on the role of the believers, even when he was addressing his own liturgical role (new quote):

...I don’t really have the sense that I at that moment [i.e., when distributing the bread during ambulatory communion, JAGB] really am a kind of representative of Christ, but I feel more like one of the members of the congregation: we give each other bread and wine.³⁷

Taken together, not only the relationship between divine and human action but also the relationship between the liturgical roles of ordained and non-ordained believers needs to be taken into consideration.³⁸

In the interviews with the congregants (*espoused voice*), relatively greater emphasis was placed on human action, that is, the believer’s role in the celebration of the sacrament. This may include the choice between participation and non-participation. On the whole, it leads to the assumption that congregants typically interpret the Lord’s Supper as something they perform (actively), although there were also participants who emphasized God’s role in the sacrament.³⁹ Participants of the first group used predominantly active verbs to describe their sacramental experiences, like “to commemorate,” “to witness,” “to reflect,” “to receive,” etc., whereas

³⁵R24 (minister CRC-C), quoted above in chapter 5, note 4.

³⁶See Chapter 5, note 91 and 120.

³⁷R25 (minister RCL-D): “...ik heb niet het gevoel dat ik dan op dat moment [tijdens het uitdelen van het brood tijdens de gaande viering, JAGB] een soort representant van Christus ben, maar meer ook één van de gemeenteleden: wij delen elkaar brood en wijn uit.”

³⁸In this study, the perception of elders and deacons has largely been ignored due to restrictions on time and circumstances, although these officebearers do play a role during the celebrations in that they invite the participants to the table, assist the minister, and occasionally distribute bread and wine. Later studies could be carried out to clarify their perception of the Lord’s Supper.

³⁹The latter interpretation may also apply to other liturgical acts or to worship as a whole.

other participants also expressed God's work in the words they used. For instance, some called Christ the "Host of the table" (which may imply active divine involvement), characterized the Lord's Supper as a "gift of grace" (which in some cases also implied active involvement from God; §4.3.1), or else mentioned the work of the Holy Spirit (new quote, see also §4.2.3):

M: Why is that you participate in the Lord's Supper?

R6.3 (female, 20–39yr, CRC-B): Of course something in you has to be sparked to life to participate, because otherwise you'd just sitting there, of course.

M: So you're saying: something has to be sparked to life...

R6.3: Yes, you do have to... I mean: the Holy Spirit of course has to do something before you can really celebrate, I think. That you experience it, like you [R6.1] were saying, right, that you really feel it powerfully. The older you become, the more powerful it becomes, it really does.⁴⁰

As such, the four voices lead to an important conversation on human agency during the church services in which the Lord's Supper is administered. In most church services, in practice it was the minister alone who performed a leading role during the celebrations—as indeed required by the respective church orders. Moreover, during the interviews with congregants and ministers, there was virtually no reflection on the liturgical roles of elders, deacons, and the congregation itself (§4.5.3). *In what way, then, could the congregation (including the children present) be made more aware of their own liturgical role, or how could they be involved more actively in the celebration?*⁴¹ *And how can congregants be made more aware of divine action in the Lord's Supper as it is professed in the Reformed confessions?*

⁴⁰M: *Wat maakt dat je meedoet aan de viering van het Heilig Avondmaal?* /R6.3: *Iets in je moet natuurlijk aangewakkerd worden om mee te gaan [doen], want anders zit je er gewoon maar bij zo, te zitten, natuurlijk.* /M: *Dus je zegt: iets in je moet aangewakkerd worden...* /R6.3: *Ja, je moet wel... Ik bedoel: de Heilige Geest moet wel wat gaan doen natuurlijk, voordat je pas gaat meevieren, denk ik. Dat je dat gaat beleven, wat jij [R6.1] ook zegt, hè, dat je echt dat heel sterk voelt. Als je ouder wordt, wordt dat meer, echt.*

⁴¹The latter is hinted at in an article by Maarten den Dulk ("Tafelen in de kerk", pp. 25–26) on the new order of service for the celebration of the Lord's Supper (1554) as developed by Marten Micron and John a Lasco in London. According to Den Dulk, it was Micron's intention to stimulate the congregation's liturgical role in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Micron (and his teacher John a Lasco) had argued that the demonstrative pronoun "this" in Jesus' words "This is my body" and "This cup" (1 Corinthians 11:23–26) does not refer to the signs of bread and wine (and their essence), but to the *act* of breaking and sharing these signs. Consequently, Micron developed a liturgy in which the congregation was given a prominent role by the prescription of gestures for it during the celebration—among other reasons, to avoid a priest-like performance by the minister. Cf. his *De Christlicke Ordinancien*, pp. 95–105.

7.2.4 Preparation and Spiritual Reflection

Another topic revolves around the question of the need for communicants to prepare themselves spiritually, either individually or together with others, and, if so, how. Some congregations participating in this study (CRC-A and C) held both a preparation sermon (one week in advance) and a weeknight meeting during the week leading up to the celebration in order to facilitate communal self-examination, while other congregations only held a preparation sermon or simply read the first part of the classical liturgical form (*operant voice*). Although these preparation services and meetings were not visited by the researcher, both congregants and ministers sometimes mentioned them in the interviews.⁴²

Some congregants (*espoused voice*) stressed the need for self-examination, while others indicated that they found it less important now than they had in the past, or not important at all. Illustrative in this regard are the remarks of some congregants, from both CRC and RCL churches, that there were times when they had forgotten to prepare themselves and yet participated in the celebration, although they did note feeling uncomfortable with it (§4.4.2). Another case is represented by the CRC members who doubted about participation, and therefore practiced abstinence (*avondmaalsmijding*) either incidentally or on a permanent basis. Some CRC-A congregants indicated that they skipped the midweek preparation meetings intentionally, since they did not find them particularly useful. In RCL-D, a congregation where the Lord's Supper is celebrated on a monthly basis, one interviewee wondered why the "week of preparation" had disappeared and considered reintroducing it in his personal life (see §4.4.5). Members of the other congregations indicated preparing themselves personally or as a family, or not preparing at all, either accidentally or deliberately. In general, CRC-B and RCL members regarded preparation as a personal matter. *When compared with the practices described in the operant voice, congregants (with the exception of those in CRC-C) proved to opt to a certain degree for their own set of spiritual preparation practices which they wanted to implement in their personal lives.*

In the *formal voice*, the greatest emphasis on self-examination was found in CRC literature. The authors of these books, as described in chapter 5, demanded attention for a proper personal preparation, for example, by referring to the need to have a suitable garment for a wedding feast (Matthew 22:11–12). On the other hand, CRC authors, in particular in sources published during the 1950s and 1960s, tried to encourage their readers not to doubt God's grace and forgiveness, and rather to start participating in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. These encouragements were obviously directed against the practice of CRC members

⁴²Unfortunately, these meetings could not be visited due to constraints of time and resources (see §2.5.1).

who abstained from the Lord's Supper (see Box 2.1 on page 22). In the interviews with the CRC ministers, one minister wondered how long the midweek preparation services would last in his congregation, leaving him with the option to find an alternative solution.⁴³

In RCL literature, the topic of self-examination was not mentioned as often as it was in CRC literature. RCL authors rarely admonished their readers to prepare themselves spiritually, although this does not as such imply that no self-examination takes place among RCL members. Noteworthy in this regard are the comments made by C. Trimp on 1 Corinthians 11:27–28, stating that the apostle Paul was not speaking about the unworthiness of the communicant but rather of the meal, and that self-examination is thus to be aimed at the fruitful *participation* of the communicant (§5.3.2). This interpretation of the passage from Paul's epistle was echoed in interviews with the ministers of RCL-E and D:

I've sometimes also held meditations at the table on 1 Corinthians 11 where I just show how we've turned it into something, something inward... Something internal, directed to the soul, while Paul meant it much more, like: the different [parts of the] body, it has to do with: are you aware that you're part of the whole?⁴⁴

Lastly, the *normative voice* offered relatively little on the need for preparation. It is only in the liturgical forms and in the CRC church order (art. 63) that self-examination is explained or mentioned; the confessions and the RCL church order are silent on the issue. In the classical liturgical form, three elements of "true self-examination" are listed (see Box 3.2 on page 41).⁴⁵ So too the CRC church order stipulates mandatory preparation (article 63) and *censura morum* for ministers, elders, and deacons in the time leading up to the celebration of the Lord's Supper (article 81).

Related to the question of preparation are the practices of thanksgiving and spiritual reflection (*dankzegging en nabetrachting*), as the minister of CRC-A noted:

...what have you just celebrated, and what consequences does it have? What does the fact that we celebrated the Lord's Supper yet again demand of us? But also the thanksgiving, [which is] also very important. I do think that for a certain number of people it is also important, like when you give thanks [in prayer] after a meal, that you also after having celebrated the

⁴³See chapter 5, note 22.

⁴⁴R25 (minister RCL-D), quoted above in chapter 5, note 25.

⁴⁵This form has, however, been in use for more than 400 years, implying that it has shaped the hearts and minds of believers over the course of many centuries.

meal of Christ, that you give that moment of thanksgiving a very clear place.⁴⁶

In most of the congregations participating in this study, the elements of thanksgiving and spiritual reflection were included in the sermon in the afternoon service, or only in the prayer that followed the celebration of communion itself, although in CRC-C the entire afternoon service was dedicated to both. However, in the interviews as well as in the theological literature, virtually no remarks were made about the practice of spiritual reflection, perhaps indicating that it was not considered all that important—even though some participants indicated that they reflected on their lives already *during* the celebrations themselves (§4.4.7).

Together the four voices illustrate how the practice of preparation differs from congregation to congregation, and even within congregations themselves. For instance, self-examination is prescribed for all communicants in most liturgical forms (normative voice), but the personal views of the congregants on this requirement nevertheless diverged (espoused voice). Furthermore, some congregations upheld the practice of communal preparation, while others had abandoned it (operant voice). *Taken together, these differences lead to the question how strong the requirement of self-preparation really is, and how congregants are educated and supported in this practice, either in their personal lives or together as congregation.*

In addition, the spiritual reflection was usually not mentioned spontaneously in the interviews with either congregants or ministers, and was largely missing in the theological literature.⁴⁷ Although some congregants indicated reflecting on their lives during the celebrations, I presume that in the perception of both congregants and ministers reflection and thanksgiving were considered to be of less importance than the element of preparation. This produces the question how the Lord's Supper is connected to daily life: *to what extent do the communicants relate their perception of the Lord's Supper to everyday life?*

7.2.5 Sin and Forgiveness

Closely connected to the previous topic is the role of sin and forgiveness in the Lord's Supper. For instance, from a *normative voice perspective*,

⁴⁶R22 (minister CRC-A), quoted above in chapter 5, note 41.

⁴⁷During the interviews, neither preparation (or self-examination) nor the spiritual reflection were introduced by the researcher as separate topics. Instead, interviewees were free to start conversations on these topics on their own initiative. In case neither of the two topics came up, the researcher addressed it briefly by asking about personal experiences. In the interviews, participants usually mentioned the element of preparation spontaneously, whereas the spiritual reflection was omitted frequently and therefore introduced by the researcher.

meditating on one's sinfulness is considered the first element of self-examination (see Box 3.2). So too in the liturgical forms and confessions, the Lord's Supper is explicitly related to the forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice of Christ (atonement). How do these two meanings—i.e. *one's own sinfulness* and the *atonement*—work out in practice?

First, regarding the *espoused voice*, congregants often referred to the theme of “grace and forgiveness” (see §4.3.1) by interpreting the sacrament as a sign of God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ. As such, the Lord's Supper was often associated with atonement in both denominations. In contrast, the other meaning of one's own sinfulness was on the whole considered more important in CRC congregations than it was in RCL congregants. Illustrative is the following quote from a member of RCL-D (not quoted before):

Of course, at the beginning I had said that I more... That it sometimes is a moment of reflection—and that is indeed what it is, and I appreciate it. But what I sometimes also miss is the element of joy, because... sometimes it really is a very somber affair, like we're at a funeral or something. But Jesus also arose from the dead. That makes me think, like: “Right, we're celebrating, but at the same time we've walking around looking very sad.” But then again, if you [the other members of the focus group, JAGB] say that you at the table really do still reflect on your sins—for me that moment has passed. Like, because it's at the Lord's Supper that we may be happy that God gives it to us. That's the impression I have—so I sometimes find that hard, when I see all those somber faces at the table.⁴⁸

This quote is illustrative of a difference between reflection on one's sinfulness (included in the self-reflection *before* the celebration) and the experience of joy and forgiveness *during* celebration of the Lord's Supper. Some other congregants (most of them RCL and CRC-B members) shared similar interpretations, although others (most of them CRC-A and C members) did not make this distinction.⁴⁹

⁴⁸R13.3 (female, 20–29yr, RCL-D): “*Ik zei natuurlijk aan het begin dat ik het meer... Dat het soms een gedenkmoment is—en dat is het ook, en dat vind ik mooi. Maar ik mis soms wel de blijdschap, want... het is soms echt heel somber, alsof we iemand aan het begraven zijn. Maar Jezus is ook weer opgestaan. Dan denk ik: “Ja, we vieren iets, maar ondertussen lopen we heel verdrietig.” Maar ja, als jullie [de andere groepsleden, JAGB] zeggen dat jullie aan de tafel nog echt je zonden overdenken—dat is bij mij dan al wel geweest. Soort [van], want aan het Avondmaal mag je juist blij zijn, dat God dat geeft. Dat idee heb ik—dus dat vind ik nog wel eens moeilijk, als ik dan al die sombere gezichten aan tafel zie.*”

⁴⁹Significantly, it is also only in CRC-A and C that “preparation meetings” were held (see §3.2.1 and §3.2.3).

Taken together, these mixed sounds illustrate that the sacrament is interpreted in different ways. Although aspects like sin and forgiveness were frequently mentioned, the aspect of “sin” was not always experienced during the celebration of the Lord’s Supper itself. Instead, some congregants drew a distinction between reflecting on their sinfulness and commemorating the atonement. *Combined with the normative voice perspective above, the question arises how sin and forgiveness ought to play a role in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.*

In the interviews with the ministers and in the theological literature published in the two denominations (*formal voice*), the aspects of grace, sin, and forgiveness were frequently mentioned or evoked. A distinction between “one’s sinfulness” and “atonement” was present more or less as it was in the normative voice; the former was associated foremost with self-examination, the latter with the Lord’s Supper as a whole.

In the actual celebrations (*operant voice*), the forgiveness of sins was explained in the reading of one of the liturgical forms and symbolized in the elements of bread and wine (see §4.5.1). The meaning attributed to these elements could be actualized from time to time by the introduction of additional rituals. One member from RCL-F had the following suggestion:

R21.4 (male, 20–39yr, RCL-F): In the church my sister now attends in [place name], (...). They had a (...) minister who had put a plate at the door.

M: Right.

R21.4: He stood beside it while greeting people in the morning, and he gave everyone a stone... It was Lord’s Supper. He preached, like ten or twelve minutes, I believe. It was a short sermon. And at the end of the sermon he invited everyone to the Lord’s Supper. Like, you could take that stone and leave it on the [Communion] table, since... they were the sins you carry with you. And you can leave them with Jesus.⁵⁰

Moreover, CRC-B held a celebration on Good Friday (§3.3.2). In this celebration, there was extra attention for the element of personal sinfulness requiring Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. Although this is indeed a central element of the Lord’s Supper, other aspects

⁵⁰R21.4: *In de kerk waar mijn zus nu heen gaat in [plaatsnaam], (...). Die hadden een (...) dominee, die had een schaal neergezet bij de deur. /M: Ja. /R21.4: Daar stond hij zelf bij, bij het begroeten van iedereen ’s ochtends, en hij gaf aan iedereen een steen mee... Er was Avondmaal. Hij had een preek, dat was volgens mij tien minuten, twaalf minuten ofzo. Het was een korte preek. En aan het eind van die preek nodigde hij iedereen uit voor het Avondmaal. En dat was dus: je mag die steen meenemen en die mag je achterlaten op die [avondmaals]tafel, omdat... dat zijn je zonden die je bij je draagt. En die mag je bij Jezus achterlaten.*

like the implications for one's life in the present and the expectation of Christ's return (eschatological perspective) were largely missing, also in the service as a whole.⁵¹

Taken together, the two “operant” examples above—combined with the distinction sometimes made in the espoused voice—lead to the question as to how the forgiveness of sins is to be ritualized and experienced during the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

7.2.6 Holiness and Stress

Relatedly, questions emerge from the use of the term “holy” in the context of the Lord's Supper. As described in chapter 6, both CRC and RCL denominations use this adjective to describe the sacrament in their confessions, liturgical forms, and church order (*normative voice*).⁵²

In the interviews, congregants from both denominations similarly referred to the Lord's Supper as “holy” (*espoused voice*, see §4.4.3). For some, this term bore a rather negative meaning (e.g. the celebration is too solemn), while others assigned it a more positive connotation. One participant in RCL-D, for example, stated that the Lord's Supper is called “holy” for a reason, even though the section on self-examination in the classical liturgical form is no longer read very often in his congregation (*holiness bound to inclusion/exclusion*):

R13.5 (male, 65+, RCL-D): Well, I still remember that... Here too, I believe, there was once someone, right? You're invited, and that's not without reason, of course. Because it is the “Holy” Supper, so it also needs to be guarded, I think. But one time there was someone who..., who wasn't familiar [with the custom] and just walked along with everyone else. It was long ago. And then there comes a point where: are you supposed to... keep that man [from the table], right then and there? Or, that's pretty...

⁵¹For example, the late CRC theologian J.P. Versteeg distinguished five aspects related to the Lord's Supper in the New Testament: 1) The meal of communion with Christ; 2) The meal of community with fellow believers; 3) The aspect of commemoration and the past; 4) The aspect of proclamation and the present; 5) The aspect of expectation and the future (in Versteeg, “Nieuwe Testament”, pp. 50–64). Where the Lord's Supper is associated primarily with sin and forgiveness and the commemoration of Christ, the threat is that it turns solely into a backwards looking act, while in reality the Lord's Supper also includes present proclamation and future implications. See §5.2.2. See also Trimp, *De gemeente en haar liturgie*, pp. 109–111 who argued that the biblical verb “to commemorate” has implications not only with respect to the past, but also for the present and the future.

⁵²In the respective normative documents, however, the adjective “holy” is not used consistently. See chapter 6, note 9 and 17.

R13.1 (male, 20–39yr): How are you going to do that, yeah, without making a big deal of it?⁵³

Some other congregants referred to the communicants as “holy,” while others stated the very opposite (*holiness associated with being sanctified as a sinner*). In CRC-B, for example, the following exchange took place between interviewees (not quoted before):

R4.7 (male, 65+, RCL-F): If you’re a Christian, and you really know it, then you’re no longer a sinner, then you’re holy in the eyes of God. If I now apply that to the Lord’s Supper, I think you participate in the Lord’s Supper as a holy person. Although you know that you are a sinner. And I think that’s very important. That we start to realize together that we have been freed...

R4.1 (female, 65+): But do you know that at the first Lord’s Supper, with the Lord Jesus, that the Lord Jesus said: “You are holy, but not all of you.” And that He gave Judas the first piece of bread?

R4.7: That’s also why I say: we are all holy...⁵⁴

The ministers (*formal voice*) did not use the adjective “holy” in a negative sense, although two of them reported a development in that the celebrations had become “less holy” than they had been in the past (RCL-D and E, see §5.2.5). Meanwhile, RCL-F’s minister warned against two extremes (§5.2.3): a view on the Lord’s Supper that excessively underscores its holiness, and a view that makes it an overly cozy affair and disconnected from God (*holiness associated with the Lord’s Supper as something special*):

So I associate it first and foremost with “special”—it is a special moment and a special event. And of course that does not mean that you can’t touch it, so that it’s dangerous or something.

⁵³R13.5: *Nou, dat kan ik me wel herinneren... Dat was hier ook, volgens mij, dat er toch eens iemand, hè? Je wordt genodigd, en dat is niet voor niks, natuurlijk. Want het is “Heilig” Avondmaal, dus dat moet dan ook wel bewaakt worden, denk ik. Maar dat er op een gegeven moment toch iemand..., die was niet helemaal bekend en die dus gewoon meeliiep. Dat is al weer jaren geleden. En dan komt het punt ook: moet je die man iets... Afhouden, ter plekke? Of, dat is best wel... /R13.1: Hoe ga je dat doen, ja, zonder heisa te schoppen?*

⁵⁴R4.7: *Wanneer je christen bent, en je beseft dat ook eigenlijk, dan ben je geen zondaar meer, dan ben je heilig voor God. Als ik dan weer even terugkom op het Heilig Avondmaal, dan denk ik dat je als geheiligde aan het avondmaal gaat. Wetende dat je zondaar bent. En ik denk dat dat heel erg belangrijk is. Dat we dat met elkaar gaan beseffen, dat we bevrijd zijn... /R4.1 (female, 65+): Maar weet je wel dat het toen als het eerste avondmaal bij de Here Jezus, dat de Here Jezus zei: “Jullie zijn heilig, maar niet allemaal.” En dat Hij Judas het eerste het brood gaf? /R4.7: Daarom zeg ik ook: we zijn allemaal heilig...*

(...) But on the other hand I think there are also people, or there are also situations, when I'm like: Yes, it's almost as if God has disappeared from view, it's turned into a cozy meal or something.⁵⁵

Furthermore, the Lord's Supper was frequently called "holy" in literature written by CRC and RCL theologians, although the meaning of the term is almost never explicated there.⁵⁶ With a view to the previous two voices, this leads to the question as to what "holiness" entails with regard to the Lord's Supper. *What is the meaning of "holiness" in the context of the Lord's Supper? To what extent should the meal itself and the celebrating community be "holy," and how may their "holiness" be related to the holiness of God?*

From an *operant voice* perspective, it is understandable that some congregants called the celebrations in their congregation "holy." This presumably relates to the way the sacrament is administered: often at tables covered with white tablecloths, with silver tableware, with participants wearing clean, sharp clothes (indicative of an implicit dress code), usually only after the reading of a liturgical form, accompanied by silence or reverent music, and in most congregations following an invitation from one of the elders to join the celebration in a certain order. Each of these elements may be interpreted as a sign of something special (*holiness as embodied in formality*). During the interviews with congregants (*espoused voice*), some of these elements were also mentioned as contributing to a negative sense of holiness:

We've managed to turn it into something so sacred. That means you also turn it into something very solemn, because: was it also at its institution so solemn and sacred?⁵⁷

As such, the operant and espoused voices lead to the question as to the point where holiness becomes a negative experience in the sense just illustrated.

In the interviews, congregants sometimes related the experience of holiness with feelings of *stress*. In RCL-E, for example, one person noted (not quoted before):

⁵⁵R27 (minister RCL-F), quoted above in chapter 5, note 18.

⁵⁶E.g. in Wisse, *Mag ik ten Avondmaal gaan?*, p. 24; Van der Meiden, *Het heilige avondmaal*; Van 't Spijker, *Zijn verbond en woorden*, pp. 87–88; Hendriks, *Kinderen aan de tafel van Christus?*, p. 118. In *Gods lof op de lippen*, pp. 24–30 the musicologist and RCL member Jan Smelik discusses the image of God in worship. Alongside the image of God as Father and of the worshipers as His children, he adds also the images of God as the Highest, the Almighty, and the Holy One. For him, this does not imply that also worship services necessarily have a holy character, but that worship should have "a certain degree of formality, sublimity, dignity, of forms and customs that express and underline reverence" (p. 29; see also Smelik, *Eredienstwaardig*, pp. 22–24).

⁵⁷R14.6 (male, 20–39yr, RCL-D), quoted above in chapter 4, note 86.

In my experience—and it’s something I’ve always had, from the time I did profession—Lord’s Supper, going to Lord’s Supper, always makes me a little tense. I always feel a certain anxiety. I don’t know if you have the same, but for me it’s always been that way. Maybe a bit because of the sanctity of the sacrament. And also, because I find the celebration pretty formal. It’s always been the same for so long. Except for the alternating between at-table and ambulatory [Communion styles], I still find things pretty formal. Maybe that’s why it always makes me feel a little anxious.⁵⁸

In this quote, the experience of tension is related both to the association of holiness with the sacrament and to the formal style of celebration (*holiness related to stress/formality*). The first reason may be related to the interpretation of what sacraments entail and how they relate to God, while the second may depend on the way people interact with each other during the celebrations. Yet also when other tensions mentioned by congregants are analyzed (§4.4.1), it could well be that the experiences of holiness and stress are interrelated. It may thus be due to the emphasis on formality that communicants are afraid of choking or spilling, or worry about their children who have to remain seated and quiet. An elderly woman in RCL-F summarized that experience as follows (not quoted before):

...I always experienced stress about my children’s behavior in church when I was at Lord’s Supper. I also tried to sit on that side [far left end of the sanctuary], so that I could see them. (...) So that I could keep an eye on them. It was holy, but it’s always been a kind of... a stressful thing, and especially the last few years, I’ve really had to stop and tell myself, like: ‘Yes, I’m receiving the bread from the minister,’ [while] behind me I’m worrying, like: ‘Won’t [my husband] lose his balance?’ Know what I mean?⁵⁹

⁵⁸R17.1 (female, 40–64yr, RCL-E): “*Wat ik in mijn beleving ook wel merk—en dat heb ik altijd gehad, al vanaf mijn belijdenis—dat is dat ik het Avondmaal, aan het Avondmaal gaan, toch altijd nog een beetje spannend vind. Ik voel toch altijd wel een bepaalde spanning. Ik weet niet of jullie dat herkennen, maar dat is altijd een beetje bij mij gebleven. Een beetje de heiligheid misschien van het sacrament aan de ene kant. Aan de andere kant vind ik de viering toch ook vrij formeel. Hij is al heel lang altijd hetzelfde. Behalve de afwisseling van het gaan en zitten vind ik het toch vrij formeel. Misschien is dat ook wel waardoor ik het altijd een beetje spannend vind.*”

⁵⁹R19.3 (female, 65+, RCL-F): “*...ik heb altijd de stress gevoeld dat de kinderen zich gedroegen in de kerk, als ik naar het avondmaal was. Ik zat ook het liefst aan die kant [linker uiteinde van de kerkzaal], zodat ik ze kon zien. (...) Dat je ze in de gaten kon houden. Het was heilig, maar het is altijd een soort stressvolle... iets geweest, en zeker ook de laatste jaren weer, dan moet ik me dus echt bepalen van: ja, ik krijg het brood van de dominee, [en] achter me denk ik van: ‘Houdt [mijn man] zich wel in evenwicht?’ Snap je?’*”

In the other theological voices, there was little reflection on either stress or holiness/sanctity. One of the few examples that could be found in the *formal voice* concerned the reports by some ministers of stress during the Lord's Supper early on in their pastor careers, although they indicated that this kind of stress disappeared gradually (§5.2.5).⁶⁰ In the theological literature, some authors included spiritual advice to encourage their readers not to doubt, and rather to start participating in the celebrations.⁶¹ In the *normative voice*, remarks on personal tensions with regard to the sacrament were virtually absent.⁶² And, lastly, from an *operant voice* perspective, I recognize that the experiences of stress—as it was shared by various congregants during the interviews—may occur during the celebration. In my personal experience, however, I did not discover a direct link between holiness and stress, but this does not rule out the possible existence of such a relationship in others.

With regard to the experience of stress during the celebrations, the four voices lead to the question how such stress could be managed during the celebrations. Should the Lord's Supper preferably be experienced without stress, or is the experience of stress to a certain degree beneficial when meeting the Holy One?

7.2.7 Feast and Commemoration

A final important topic of reflection is the interpretation of the Lord's Supper as a feast and as a commemoration. With the former, the celebration is supposed to be one of joy, accompanied by cheerful songs and happy faces, and as such it is considered a symbol of human thanksgiving to God. With the latter, the Lord's Supper is experienced as being more solemn, sober, and silent, and more like a commemorative ceremony (see §7.2.5).⁶³

⁶⁰In some congregations, however, there were past examples of stress related to conflicts regarding the Lord's Supper (e.g. about the style of celebration) or other related conflicts (e.g. when the Lord's Supper could not be celebrated because of issues that had emerged from the *censura morum*).

⁶¹Especially in CRC literature; see the section on "Preparation" in §5.3.1.

⁶²The only exception may be the passage in the classical liturgical form on the "hesitation" that a believer may have, after which he/she is encouraged not to trust in his/her own feelings but Christ alone: "But all this, beloved brothers and sisters, is not meant to discourage broken and contrite hearts, as if only those who are without sin may come to the table of the Lord. (...) Therefore we may be fully assured that no sin or weakness which still remains in us against our will can prevent us from being received by God in grace and from being made worthy partakers of this heavenly food and drink." (CanRC, *Form*). See §6.4.

⁶³In this context, the difference between "feast" and "commemoration" is slightly overstated, since a "commemoration" in the biblical sense of the word can also be festive. See Trimp, *De gemeente en haar liturgie*, pp. 109–111. See also Lammens, *Tot zijn gedachtenis*, pp. 24–85; Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically*, pp. 171–187.

Both interpretations were present across the six participating congregations (*espoused voice*). In the RCL congregations in particular, as well as in CRC-B, a number of congregants longed for more joyful celebrations (see §4.7.2). Such suggestions were also shared by several individuals in the other two congregations, as in CRC-C (new quote):

So yes, in short: what I sometimes miss during Lord's Supper is something of that joy of faith, and I would really like it if there were more of it. But how you would give that shape, concretely, I don't really know, either.⁶⁴

The ministers of CRC-B, RCL-D and E shared a similar personal desire (*formal voice*, see §5.2.6). This was indicated by the minister of RCL-E as follows:

M: How would you want to experience the Holy Supper? (...)
(short silence)

R26: I would... want to have a little more exuberance, festivity, than we do now. Maybe it also has to do with me, that I somewhat... I know that many members of the congregation favor a solemn celebration. Another part of the congregation would prefer to have it differently, and seeks joy, happiness, and..., well, I would want to see a little more from the joy or happiness side of things. Even though the Lord's Supper of course has two sides to it, I do know that: on the one hand, the death of Christ and its necessity, which leaves an impression on you, [but] on the other hand, there should be room for joy too. I often compare it to the fourth and fifth of May. It's the fourth and fifth of May all in one.⁶⁵

This quotation forms an illustrating example of the combination of feast and commemoration. Interestingly, a similar metaphor was used by a congregant in the same congregation (*espoused voice*):

R16.2 (female, 20–39yr, RCL-E): Yes, if I can just pick up on that [aspect of] celebration: it's also something that always bothered me, like, no one is happy. So one time I, like, asked Rev. [last name], like, you call [it] a 'celebration', but no one's happy. But he said: 'Of course it's a feast, but at the same time you're commemorating Jesus, so actually it's a feast and

⁶⁴R9 (female, 20–39yr, CRC-C): "*Dus ja, kortom: een stukje vreugde in het geloof dat mis ik wel tijdens een Avondmaalsviering en dat zou ik wel mooi vinden als dat er meer was. Maar hoe je dat concreet zou in kunnen vullen, weet ik ook niet zo goed.*"

⁶⁵Quoted above in chapter 5, note 48. See note 47 in the same chapter for an explanation of the fourth and fifth of May metaphor.

funeral all in one...'

M: OK!

R16.2 (continues): So that's how you should look at it. And then... how should you view it then? Well, like neutrally. You're not... So you start to look at the entire thing in a totally different way, as it were.

M: Right.

R16.2: Yes, so the Lord's Supper as I experience it, like, yes, there are these two sides to it. I'm happy it all happened, and you commemorate it, but you also think of all those things you, confessing together, the whole thing, like.⁶⁶

The woman in question indicated that this conversation with her minister had taken place more than ten years ago, implying that this interpretation of the Lord's Supper already existed before the current minister started his work in RCL-E. Members in other congregations (CRC-B and RCL-D) shared similar stories of the concurrent experience of joy and sorrow, which they sometimes summarized with reference to the classical triad *misery-salvation-thankfulness* (Heidelberg Catechism).⁶⁷

If we compare all of this with what has been written by the theologians (*formal voice*), C. Trimp's characterization of the Lord's Supper primarily as "a celebration of salvation" is striking (§5.3.2). In his explanation of this expression, Trimp explicitly rejected a two-fold interpretation of the Lord's Supper (i.e. both celebrating and mourning), charging that it is "especially the commemoration of the death of Christ that brings to light the root of our joy."⁶⁸ In other words, the Lord's Supper is a *joyful* celebration precisely because the death of Christ brought salvation. To illustrate this, Trimp referred to the prayer in the classical liturgical form: "now that we (...) celebrate the *glorious* memory of the bitter death..." (ital. added by Trimp).⁶⁹ After him, some RCL theologians have adopted

⁶⁶R16.2: *Ja, om op die viering in te haken: daar zat ik ook altijd tegenaan, van ja: niemand is blij. Toen vroeg ik aan dominee [achternaam], zo van: hé, ja, weet je wel, je noemt [het] viering, maar niemand is blij: maar hij zegt: 'Tuurlijk, het is een feest, maar het is ook: je gedenkt Jezus, dus het is eigenlijk feest en begrafenis ineen...'* /M: Oké! /R16.2 (vervolgt): *Zo moet je het zien. En dan... Hoe kijk je dan? Ja, neutraal. Je bent dan niet... Dus dan ga je wel heel anders kijken naar het hele gebeuren, zeg maar.* /M: Ja. /R16.2: *Ja, zo heb ik zeg maar het avondmaal dat ik het beleef, zeg maar, ja, dat het dubbel is. Ik ben blij dat het allemaal gebeurd is, en je gedenkt dat, maar je denkt ook aan de dingen wat jij, je belijden met, het hele gebeuren, zeg maar.*

⁶⁷The same triad was also mentioned by CRC-B's minister (as quoted in chapter 5, note 62).

⁶⁸Trimp, *De gemeente en haar liturgie*, p. 113: "[omdat] juist het gedenken van de dood van Christus de wortel van de vreugde blootlegt," cf. Trimp, *Woord, water en wijn*, pp. 80–83. See also chapter 5, note 108.

⁶⁹Dutch: "nu wij (...) de heerlijke gedachtenis vieren aan de bittere dood..." Trimp quoted the latest RCL revision of this form (1972), later to be published in the 1986 RCL

his interpretation, while still retaining the verb “to commemorate.”⁷⁰

Within CRC literature the term “commemoration” has not been subjected to criticism, but is used frequently for the purpose of describing the Lord’s Supper.⁷¹ Meanwhile, both past and present CRC theologians also characterize the sacrament as a *joyful* event.⁷² In 2010, for example, the CRC’s General Synod approved the new “Liturgical Form II” which strikes a more cheerful note than the other forms (see §6.4.1). In practice, this form has not yet been implemented in CRC-A, and will probably never be used in CRC-C (*operant voice*).

Taken together, the relationship between feast and commemoration leads to the following questions: *Should the celebrations in CRC and RCL congregations become more cheerful, and, if so, how could this be accomplished?*

7.3 Contextual Considerations

Now that the seven topics have been described as above, another step needs to be taken before we can proceed to the next and final chapter. This step is related to the fact that each conversation emerges in a certain time and context—and these aspects have not received attention ever since their introduction above (in §1.2). In this section, I will present a very brief reflection on contextual aspects that may have influenced the findings in this study. The scope of this section is limited, since a full and thorough reflection would probably justify an independent investigation in its own right. Therefore, only the most important cultural developments will be discussed.

The necessity of taking contextual factors into consideration in the study of Christian practices like the Lord’s Supper is defended and explained by Dorothy Bass, whom I will quote here at length:

hymnal. In this edition, the original verb “to commemorate” was replaced with “to celebrate.” In 2008 this change was reversed (see chapter 6, note 98). By way of comparison, the current CRC edition reads: “now that we (...) commemorate the bitter death” (*nu wij (...) de bittere dood gedenken*), see CRC, “Formulier (1971)”.

⁷⁰E.g. Van Rongen, *Met al de heiligen III*, pp. 172–173; RCL, *Rapport Studiedeputaten 1995*, p. 60, cf. Smelik, *Gods lof op de lippen*, pp. 190–205, esp. 204. Perhaps Trimp’s emphasis on the Lord’s Supper as a feast also influenced the RCL’s revision of Belgic Confession, article 35. As noted above in §6.2.1, the RCL translation reads “this spiritual feast” (*dit geestelijke feestmaal*), while the CRC translates reads “a spiritual table” (*een geestelijke dis*). The RCL translation certainly has a more festive ring to it than its CRC counterpart does, although this difference was not mentioned in any of the interviews or in the CRC and RCL literature. See chapter 6, note 12.

⁷¹E.g. Van ’t Spijker, *Zijn verbond en woorden*, pp. 58–64; Brienen, *Oriëntatie in de liturgie*, p. 69; Van Genderen and Velema, *Beknopte gereformeerde dogmatiek*, pp. 724–725; Westerink, *Doet dat tot Mijn gedachtenis*, pp. 105, 189; CRC, *Stijlvol samenkomen*, pp. 9–10.

⁷²See chapter 5, note 77.

Christian practices, we have argued, bear wisdom that has been and continues to be embodied in the actual life together of Christian people across many generations and cultures—wisdom about the nature of the human condition and the needs of the world and about the character of God’s life-giving response to them in Christ and, through the Holy Spirit, in the people who are now Christ’s body. Because communities engage in given practices in a wide range of circumstances, the variety and creativity in precisely how they are performed in specific settings is enormous. Because communities engage in these practices forever imperfectly—faltering, forgetting, even falling into gross distortions—theological discernment, repentance, and renewal are necessary dimensions of each practice and of the Christian life as a whole.⁷³

One of the things this quote illustrates is that practices are always performed in “a wide range of circumstances” and “in specific settings.” If we apply this to the practice of the Lord’s Supper, it leads us to the question of the contexts in which the conversation topics emerged.⁷⁴ Apart from the ecclesial developments described in the preceding chapters (especially in §5.3 and §6.4), there are at least two cultural changes that need to be taken into consideration:

First, cultural developments like secularization and the decline of traditional religiosity have influenced the existing churches in the Netherlands ever since the 1960s. These developments have led to a decline in church attendance over the past decades.⁷⁵ Belief in God has become just one option among others,⁷⁶ and there is “a growing estrangement from the traditions of Christian faith.”⁷⁷ Meanwhile, other developments like new types of religiosity and non-church rituals have emerged in Dutch society. There is nothing indicating that Reformed Christians are immune to these developments. In other words, the Lord’s Supper has become one ritual alongside many others, also within Reformed churches.⁷⁸

⁷³Bass, “Ways of Life Abundant”, p. 29.

⁷⁴These questions relate to the definition of practices as developed by Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass (see chapter 1, note 56). Barnard et al. (in *Worship in the Network Culture*, pp. 39–48) similarly state that liturgical ritual should always be understood “within its cultural and anthropological contexts” (p. 39).

⁷⁵De Hart et al., *God in Nederland 1966-2015*.

⁷⁶Taylor, *A Secular Age*; cf. Burger and Spijker, *Open voor God*.

⁷⁷De Hart and Van Houwelingen, *Christenen in Nederland*, p. 160.

⁷⁸See chapter 1, note 27. See also Immink, *Terugkeer van het heilige?*, pp. 8–9. In his lecture “Christus’ evangelie aan den lijve ervaren”, Hans Burger drew a connection between the use of Dathenus’s liturgical form and malformation that may occur when using this form. He distinguished four types of Christian responses to disenchantment in a late modern culture: *distant reason*; *expressive experience*; *mythical reenchantment*; and *sacramental liturgy* (see also Burger, “Zelfverstaan en wereldverstaan tussen geslotenheid en openheid”,

Secondly, as early as 2004 Paul Schnabel described five cultural processes to indicate changes that would take place in Dutch society. These processes were captured with the terms *Individualization*, *Informalization*, *Computerization*, *Internationalization*, and *Intensification*.⁷⁹ This is not the place to explain all five, but “Intensification” in particular captures the desire for “experience” (*beleving*) which is found in contemporary Dutch society.⁸⁰ This cultural trend, which is sometimes also referred to as *belevingscultuur* (lit. “culture of experience”), may influence the way people think and speak about their perception of the Lord’s Supper and their desire to celebrate it, for example, in a “more conscious” manner. Given the findings described above, my hypothesis is that in particular the RCL congregations as well as CRC-B are influenced by this trend.⁸¹

Aside from these developments, Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener have discussed several anthropological and theological considerations relating to the sacraments, like *embodiment* and different ways of *approaching God and the other*.⁸² With regard to embodiment they conclude that in various liturgical ritual practices “a theology of the body has been reinvented.”⁸³ After centuries in which the Reformed faith was increasingly dematerialized, nowadays there is “a desire for an expanding of bodily performance and an enlargement of material objects,”⁸⁴ tangible for instance in the desire for more exuberant celebrations (§4.7.2 and §4.7.4) and the preference for matzos over soft bread.⁸⁵

With regard to *approaching God and the other*, Barnard et al. state that “God cannot be captured with or within our liturgical ritual acting.”⁸⁶ To their mind, sacraments in late modern culture are not iconic or pre-

pp. 34–35). According to Burger, the first two types are dominant in contemporary RCL spirituality, while a healthy balance may actually be found in a combination of all four types.

⁷⁹Schnabel, “Het zestiende Sociaal en Cultureel Rapport kijkt zestien jaar vooruit”, pp. 51–65.

⁸⁰See note 1 above.

⁸¹CRC-C may also have been influenced by this trend, albeit to a lesser extent. The term “experience” (*beleving* or *ervaring*) refers to something different than the Dutch word *bevindelijk* (lit. “experiential”), although the two terms are indeed related. While *beleving* is commonly used to denote all kinds of experiences (see note 1), *bevinding* has a strongly religious connotation (explained in chapter 2, note 9). For more on the relationship between the two terms, see Van der Graaf, “Bevinding en ervaring in een belevingscultuur”.

⁸²Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, pp. 208–243, 330–345.

⁸³*Ibid.*, p. 214, cf. Brown, *God and Grace of Body* (2007); Miller-McLemore, “Embodied Knowing, Embodied Theology” (2013); Miller-McLemore, “Coming to Our Senses” (2014); Hughes, *Reformed Sacramentality*, pp. 91–111, 153–176 (2017); Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically*, pp. 78–96 (2018).

⁸⁴Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, p. 214.

⁸⁵See chapter 5, note 16. See also §4.5.1.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, p. 330.

sentative in the sense that they are images of what cannot be seen.⁸⁷ Instead, they are best understood as performative-eschatological acts that thematize God's presence.⁸⁸ In worship, the presence of God must not be enforced but is to be expected, so they state. As such, the way in which the congregation approaches God (*the Other*) in worship should influence the way in which it approaches *the other* in daily life: "not 'me', but 'you' is the foremost subject."⁸⁹

In terms of the findings presented in this study, the thoughts on "approaching God and the other" resonate with the observed difference in perception between congregants and ministers relating to communion with God (§7.2.2). If Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener are right, it is altogether understandable that late modern believers perceive communion with God in the Lord's Supper less than they do mutual communion with each other, even though both types of communion are, theologically speaking, inextricably interwoven.⁹⁰

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 343: "More and more we have become convinced that this is too simple, not only from a late-modern perspective, which does not acknowledge anything beyond meaning and that had to give up an essentialism which took for granted that language has stable referents. The use of metaphysical language is no longer defensible."

⁸⁸Ibid., pp. 344–345: "The sacrament is a game consisting of acts, words and other elements. God's presence in the game is not fixed in doctrine, but thematised [sic] in the human ritual game. (...) As we have said before: liturgical ritual is an anticipatory participation in the presence of the coming One. The acting does not guarantee that the new eschatological reality that we expect will really come about. But sacramental acting is neither superfluous nor just an illustration of the words that we speak. Ritual and artistic acting is an acting that expects another reality: the coming One. It is radically eschatological in shape."

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 331, quoting Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, p. 149: "We may thus think of the church as reproducing in its everyday life in witness before the world the pattern of the kingdom which it itself receives and learns in entire dependence on the Lord present at the Eucharist."

⁹⁰Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, p. 331; Barnard, "De avondmaalstafel en de eetkamertafel", p. 352. A more extensive reflection on Barnard's view is included in §8.5.1 and §8.5.2 below.

Chapter 8

Conclusion and Discussion

8.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapters I described and analyzed the celebration of the Lord's Supper in CRC and RCL congregations to investigate how it is performed, perceived, and valued. To conclude this study, I would first like to formulate an answer to the sub-questions and main research question (see §1.4), and thereafter reflect on the responses by connecting them to current topics in the field of practical theology.

8.2 Sub-questions

8.2.1 First Sub-question

What are the normative, operant, espoused, and formal theological voices with regard to the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the local churches?

The first sub-question was addressed in chapters 3 through 6. In chapter 3, the operant theological voice was documented by means of participatory observations. In chapter 4, the espoused theological voice was summarized by way of a discussion of the interviews conducted with congregants. Chapter 5 offered a summary of the interviews with the ministers, together with a review of CRC and RCL theological literature on the Lord's Supper. Finally, in chapter 6 the normative theological voice was analyzed on the basis of a review of three different types of written sources.

8.2.2 Second Sub-question

How can a “conversation” between the four theological voices be constructed, and what can the local churches possibly learn from this conversation?

The first part of the second sub-question, concerning the construction of a conversation between the four theological voices, was addressed in chapter 7. Here the similarities and differences, interrelationships and conflicts, between the four voices were summarized at the hand of seven discussion topics that had been identified on the basis of the research presented in chapters 3–6. In these chapters it became clear that each theological voice offered a more or less unique perspective on the Lord’s Supper in the participating churches, even though in some cases the individual voices were difficult to distinguish (e.g. the use of “normative theological language” by congregation members and ministers in the espoused and formal voices).

Each of the seven topics originated from similarities and differences between one or more of the individual voices. Sometimes, two or more voices overlapped on a specific subject and made similar contributions to one topic. Alternatively, voices contradicted each other, thereby contributing to the formulation of another topic. As such, the formulated topics do not, by way of conclusion, represent the static result of “the only possible conversation” between the four voices of theology, but mark the current state of my construction of this particular conversation. Furthermore, the seven topics may function as starting points for follow-up conversations in congregations and denominations, both in the Dutch context and elsewhere. When church members and ministers share their experiences and expectations, they may be able to help each other to enrich and deepen their respective understanding and perception of the Lord’s Supper by using the Four Voices model as a conversation guide.¹

The second part of this sub-question, namely what the congregations studied can learn from this conversation, does not just have a single answer. For that reason, I will address this sub-question by formulating three statements based on the seven topics and the resulting follow-up questions as presented in the last chapter above.

¹This follows from an observation during the focus group interviews. Afterwards, some interviewees indicated that in normal life they barely discuss their experience of the Lord’s Supper with fellow congregants, and that their understanding of the sacrament had grown during the interview. Furthermore, after being interviewed they had gained a better understanding of the experiences of fellow participants. The same may happen when the interview topics are discussed by congregants and their minister, together in one session. As such, these church-wide conversations may lead to a better understanding between congregants and ministers in local congregations. Although the current study was not aimed at intervention, these examples may very well be used in future Theological Action Research (see Cameron et al., *Talking About God in Practice*).

1. *Experience (“beleving”) is important with regard to the Lord’s Supper (topic 1)*: The experience of the Lord’s Supper—i.e. the personal experience of the interviewees themselves—was deemed very important by congregants and ministers in the participating CRC and RCL congregations. Even within the stricter congregations, there was a longing for a sincere and conscious experience of the sacrament. Some interviewees, including a number of ministers, indicated that their experience had become more intense over the past decades, which may serve as an indicator of the growing importance of “experience” (*beleving*) in the perception of believers.² Furthermore, some congregants described their longing for more frequent and/or more exuberant celebrations, or indicated that they sometimes also celebrated the Lord’s Supper outside the weekly church services, usually without the presence of an ordained minister. These “espoused” desires produce new questions, especially when compared with the other theological voices. This tension might be summarized as follows: while congregants longed for a more physical experience of the Lord’s Supper, virtually no attention was given to such physical aspects of the celebration in either the theological literature or the normative voice.
2. *Communion is central in the perception of the Lord’s Supper (topic 2–3)*: In the interviews, communion with Christ was mentioned relatively more frequently by ministers than by congregation members, indicating an important difference in the experience of the Lord’s Supper between theologians and non-theologians. Furthermore, congregants tended to be more focused on communion with fellow believers than they were on communion with Christ. This observation correlates with the topic of “Divine and Human Agency,” since the primary focus of congregants on the whole went out to human agency (i.e. what the minister did), whereas ministers mentioned the roles of Christ and the Holy Spirit relatively more frequently. Furthermore, some RCL congregants questioned the current policy with regard to the admission of children and people under church discipline. In short, communion with Christ was not experienced by congregants as it is described in the formal voice (both interviews with ministers and theological literature) and in the normative voice (confessions and liturgical forms).
3. *In the Lord’s Supper, both sin and forgiveness, feast and commemoration, are symbolized (topic 4–7)*: Within the participating con-

²The reason for this cannot be ascertained, since both younger and elderly participants reported this development. Nevertheless, the elderly indicated a greater increase in the significance the sacrament had for them over the course of their lives. See §4.6.1. See also chapter 7, note 1.

gregations, a significant difference was detected in the role of preparation and reflection. In CRC-C and, to a lesser degree, CRC-A, self-examination was also interpreted as a communal practice, while in the other congregations it was considered more an individual activity. Some congregants in both denominations indicated that they no longer recognized a need for self-examination. This development is related to the question of the role sin and forgiveness ought to play in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. More attention for it and for other, related aspects—like self-examination, commemoration, and holiness—may conversely lead to an undervaluation of other meanings like communion with God and fellow communicants, the significance for the present time, and the expectation of Christ's return. Furthermore, different meanings of "holiness" and negative experiences with stress were detected among the congregants, raising questions concerning the significance of holiness for the Lord's Supper as well as the role stress ought to have in its celebration—questions that need to be considered in a conversation between all four theological voices. Lastly, some RCL members together with members of CRC-B (including some of the ministers) shared a desire for more festive celebrations, while in the remaining CRC congregations the commemorative aspect was interpreted in terms of greater solemnity and soberness.

In this study, the Four Voices model was used as a heuristic model to first describe the four voices separately and then to construct a conversation between them. A logical next step would be to turn the result of this exercise—i.e. the questions formulated above—back on the congregations studied in order to formulate specific answers for each separate congregation. Given the limitations of time, however, a decision was made to formulate the following recommendations (or practical lessons) which local churches may implement after careful consideration of their specific ecclesial context.³ All recommendations are tailored to the corresponding topics as described in §7.2.

1. Congregations should take "experience" (*beleving*) and corporeal aspects of the Lord's Supper more seriously—not in the first place because of the desires shared by congregants and ministers, but

³The recommendations presented here were formulated by the researcher himself, based on the research described in this study. They are presented here to inspire others to formulate answers tailored to their local ecclesial context, drawing on the results of this study. In the formulation of these recommendations, an attempt has been made to achieve a balance between the four voices. In this study, that entails an open and equal dialog between the different voices (see §1.3.1). Depending on the characteristics of the specific congregation and one's understanding of practical theology (§1.6), other recommendations may need to be formulated.

rather in view of the very nature of the Lord's Supper as a Christian practice.⁴ It is precisely in the celebration of the Lord's Supper that physical signs and symbols are used to materialize an important part of what is believed, as this is explained in the Reformed confessions and reflected in the different theological voices in this study (see chapter 3–6). To address the longing for a more physical perception of the faith among congregants and ministers, new theological reflection is needed—in both the formal and normative voices—to rethink the value of corporeality in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The value and performance of the sacramental celebration compared to the sermon and other liturgical rituals should be reconsidered with the expressed desires for a more embodied experience of the liturgy in mind.

2. The differences between congregants and ministers in terms of their perception of communion as summarized earlier in this section may be indicative of a divide in the perception of communion with others (*horizontal*) and with God (*vertical*).⁵ Additional theological research is necessary to shed light on how these two manifestations of communion relate to each other in practice. For instance, can communion with Christ be experienced in all its richness if there is an experienced lack of communion with fellow believers (see §4.2.2)? This experience could perhaps be bolstered if congregants were given the opportunity to discuss the perception of the Lord's Supper with others (as happened in the focus group interviews themselves), or if the sacrament is celebrated more frequently with a view to better recognition of the spiritual gifts God has prepared for us.⁶ So too the relationship between the Lord's Supper and daily life could be reinforced, for example, by revitalizing the relationship between the Lord's Supper and practices of *diakonia*, both in the offering and in daily life.⁷ Lastly, congregations could reflect theologically on the question why and how certain communicants are barred from par-

⁴See the definition of Christian practices by Dykstra and Bass as quoted in §1.6 and further explained in §7.3. According to this definition, Christian practices embody wisdom that can only be fully grasped after personal participation in them. The plea to take "experience" and corporeality more seriously must therefore be understood as an incentive to put theology into practice, for example, by beginning to celebrate the Lord's Supper on a more frequent basis. In other words, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

⁵The distinction between horizontal and vertical communion is derived from Volf, *Free of Charge*, pp. 195–202 who applied it to reconciliation (true horizontal reconciliation is not possible without vertical reconciliation).

⁶Various participants in the focus group interviews indicated afterwards that they appreciated the conversation with others, since they usually never shared their personal experience of the celebrations (see note 1 above). On the frequency of celebration, see note 30 below.

⁷See note 32 below.

ticipation.⁸ Conversely, also the inclusion of people who are not, or not yet, included (e.g. baptized children) could be reflected upon. Even granted the exclusion of certain groups, practical reflection is needed on how congregants and guests are invited before and during the celebration, as well as on the style of celebration itself (e.g. when celebrating standing in a circle, all people in the sanctuary could be invited to join the circle, regardless of whether or not they actually participate).

3. Theological and liturgical education may help congregants as well as ministers to discover both their own liturgical role and God's role in worship.⁹ The Lord's Supper is one of the most physical liturgical practices within Reformed worship, and yet the minister had the foremost actor's role both in the reading of the liturgical form and in the administration of the sacrament itself. This is not to say that congregants were not involved at all, but their active participation could be stimulated further if they came to have a larger liturgical role (e.g. by reciting the creed and the Lord's Prayer in unison, or by walking to the front of the sanctuary to celebrate), if there was greater variation in liturgical roles (between minister and congregation), if liturgical rites like passing the peace of Christ were to be reintroduced, or possibly also if the Ordinary was used.¹⁰ So too the styles of celebration could be taken into consideration: does the current style still fit the local situation, does it need to be replaced, or could different styles even be alternated?¹¹ And, last but not least, awareness of the agency of God could be fostered, for example, by the use of the Ordinary or the communal recitation of the prayer of invocation (*epiclesis*).¹²

⁸An example of theological reflection that occurred in a congregation is documented and analyzed in Schaeffer, "Liturgical Formation and Practical Ecclesiology" (2018). In that example, the formative relationship between liturgy and ethics is explored from the perspective of liturgical ecclesiology in the context of community-building. A similar approach could be used in reflection on the Lord's Supper.

⁹Education here includes not only *cognitive* but possibly also *affective* and *active* ways of learning. Following the definition of Christian practices provided in §1.6 and §7.3 I consider Christian worship to be an educational practice in itself. For more on theological education and worship, see Astley, "The Role of Worship in Christian Learning" (1984), Witvliet, "Teaching Worship as a Christian Practice" (2008), Abernethy, *Worship That Changes Lives* (idem), the *Cultural Liturgies* series of James K.A. Smith and his book *You Are What You Love* (2016), and the work of Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass (2002, 2008, 2010, and 2016).

¹⁰See chapter 7, note 41. At this point, a parallel can be drawn with the liturgical renewal of the Roman Catholic Mass introduced by Vatican II (1962–1965). Ever since, the active participation of the communicants has been increasingly stimulated. For a recent reevaluation of this renewal, see Lukken, *Met de rug naar het volk* (2010).

¹¹See Box 3.1 on page 38.

¹²The songs included in the Ordinary (the Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei) all

4. Connected to the previous suggestion, the functioning of self-examination and the spiritual reflection needs to be considered by congregations, on both the communal and individual levels. Although the CRC and RCL denominations have the same classical liturgical form that includes an extensive instruction on self-examination, actual practices of self-examination and spiritual reflection proved to differ widely. Congregations could therefore reconsider their theological interpretation of self-examination—e.g. is it aimed primarily at a personal choice on participation or non-participation, or more at a fruitful participation for the communicant?—and decide what communal and/or individual practices would be most fitting in view of their theological positions.¹³ The same applies to the practice of spiritual reflection (*nabetrachting*).
5. A one-sided emphasis on the aspect of sin and forgiveness—for example, when the Lord's Supper is celebrated on Good Friday (see §3.3.2)—may very well result in a one-dimensional perception of the sacrament. The Reformed confessions, theological literature, and the interviews as described in this study illustrate that the Lord's Supper is associated with a wide range of meanings, among them the triads of past-present-future and misery-salvation-thankfulness.¹⁴ These meanings could be emphasized in the celebrations with some variation so as to avoid one-sidedness; one example would be for the congregations to alternate between different liturgical forms and celebration styles.¹⁵
6. Similarly, an overemphasis on the holiness of the meal or its participants may result in the practice of abstinence by some believers (§4.4.3). Without denying either the holiness of God or the holiness of His people, I would recommend that congregations find a balance between fear and trust in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.¹⁶ Causes of human stress may be taken away by the application of a number of practical measures or by a more frequent celebration,

consist of liturgical language that is ultimately directed to God personally. By singing these songs, the congregation dedicates itself to God. On the *epiclesis*, see note 79 below.

¹³For example, the practice of reading the first part of the classical liturgical form a week prior to the celebration of the Lord's Supper only emerged recently in the Netherlands (see chapter 6, note 58). It has resulted in great emphasis on self-examination and the awareness of sin. Secondly, the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11 may play a decisive role with regard to the interpretation of the practice of self-examination. Thirdly, also the goal of self-examination should be taken into consideration (see §5.3.2).

¹⁴See chapter 5, note 13 and 62; chapter 7, note 51.

¹⁵This does not imply that there should be less attention for aspects like sin and forgiveness, but that this attention should be more balanced and combined with other meanings.

¹⁶See Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, pp. 331–332 and Wisse, “Vieren tussen vrees en vertrouwen” who suggested something similar, both in reference to the work of Otto.

although it seems unlikely that all causes can be effectively removed for everyone—in fact, in individual cases a higher frequency of celebration may actually result in even greater stress.¹⁷

7. Depending on the theological interpretation of the Lord's Supper maintained in each congregation or denomination, the sacrament could be celebrated in a more or less festive manner, according to their respective understanding of the verb “to commemorate.”¹⁸ More exuberant celebrations may be alternated with more solemn ones, following the liturgical calendar.

The above statements and recommendations may be used by congregants and ministers together—both within and outside the CRC and RCL denominations—so as to learn from the conversation between the four voices as it was presented in the previous chapter and to formulate answers tailored to their local situation and theological understanding. As such, this learning process may help them to evaluate what is happening in practice so to advance the transformative power of the liturgy.¹⁹

8.3 Main Research Question

The following main research question was the subject of research:

How is the celebration of the Lord's Supper in local CRC and RCL churches performed, perceived, and valued, and what can be learned from this?

In this study, the model of the Four Voices of Theology was used as a tool to describe and assess the performance, perception, and valuation of the Lord's Supper in CRC and RCL congregations. The perceptions of both congregants and their ministers have been described, based on qualitative research. Furthermore, other theological voices were included, among them the theology as it is practiced, the theology of the theologians, and the theology in the documents qualified as normative in the CRC and RCL denominations.

¹⁷Furthermore, caution must be observed when changing the style of celebration, since form and content are interrelated. For example, some meanings of the Lord's Supper are changed or effectively removed when the communal drinking of wine from one cup is replaced with the drinking of grape juice from individual cups.

¹⁸See chapter 7, note 63.

¹⁹This is not to say that the liturgy should be instrumentalized, but that the liturgy's function as a “means of grace” (in the Reformed sense) could be fostered. The latter may prove beneficial for the transformative power of worship in local contexts. See Wood, “The Liturgy” (2001); Abernethy, *Worship That Changes Lives* (2008); Schaeffer, “Liturgie als centrum van kerkzijn” (2019). See also Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality*, pp. 96–97 (1993); Bosman and Schaeffer, “Celebrating the Lord's Supper”, pp. 196–199 (2018).

Once these four voices had been described, I presented seven conversation topics with several follow-up questions, illustrating the similarities and differences, interrelationships and contradictions, between the voices in the six congregations. Once these topics had been presented, three statements and several practical recommendations were formulated (§8.2.2). As such, the main research question for this study was addressed.

8.4 Discussion

Now that the main conclusions have been presented, I will attempt to connect them with ongoing reflection on the Lord's Supper in contemporary Reformed theology.²⁰ In this section, I will further explore potential connections between the Lord's Supper as performed, perceived and valued in the six local churches and the theological reflection on the sacrament in other contexts. I will indicate what can be learned from these mutual connections, both for the local congregations and for broader theological deliberation and reflection within the worldwide Church.

In the present section and the following (§8.5), I will use a more deliberative style than I have in previous sections. This change of style could actually justify the start of a separate chapter, but since the deliberations presented here are only presented on top of the findings thus far, I have chosen to keep the conclusion and discussion together.

Given the enormous and ever growing amount of scholarship on the Lord's Supper, I will for the most part restrict myself to related discussions in contemporary Reformed theology; debates in other traditions will only be referenced occasionally. As my principle of classification, I will use the three statements above (see §8.2.2).

8.4.1 The Importance of Experience

The conclusion regarding the importance of "experience" for the Lord's Supper (topic 1) is reflective of developments in other fields of practical theology. In this subsection, I will discuss five different themes.

²⁰The Reformed doctrine of the Lord's Supper is summarized in e.g. Van 't Spijker et al., *Bij brood en beker* (1980); Shelton, "A Theology of the Lord's Supper" (1992); Gootjes, "The Meaning of the Lord's Supper" (1995); Venema, "The Doctrine of the Lord's Supper in the Reformed Confessions" (2001); Mathison, *Given for You* (2002); Plasger, "Die reformierte Abendmahlslehre" (2012). More generally on Reformed Worship, see: Wolterstorff, "The Reformed Liturgy" (1992); McKim, "Reflections on Liturgy and Worship in the Reformed Tradition" (idem); Runia, "The Reformed Liturgy in the Dutch Tradition" (1993); Vischer, *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present* (2003); Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding* (idem); Fergusson, "The Theology of Worship within the Reformed Tradition" (2004); Immink, *The Touch of the Sacred* (2014, orig. 2011). See also chapter 1, note 3.

The past decade has seen the publication of several theological books and articles *on the Lord's Supper and on eating in general* from a ritual or anthropological-theological perspective.²¹ The present study contributes to these reflections from a practical theological perspective by underscoring the importance of bodily experiences in worship. Conversely, a study of the Lord's Supper may also contribute to a reevaluation of daily food in general.²²

Another important field of research that has recently emerged revolves around the quest for the origins of the Lord's Supper; it too includes a vast and growing amount of literature.²³ This found reflection in the interviews conducted for this study in the desire expressed by some interviewees for a return to "the original" way of celebrating the Lord's Supper, an expression usually used to indicate small-scale meals in which the sacrament is celebrated, during regular dinners at home or in church.²⁴ The fact of the matter is, however, that these interviewees only referred to a single hypothesized aspect of these celebrations, namely group size. They did not, however, express any desire for the reintroduction of other elements like a eucharistic prayer, as some of the sources of the early church prescribe.²⁵ Furthermore, the latest scholarship offers a variety of different conclusions pertaining to the style and manner in which the first Christians celebrated the Eucharist, making it difficult to present a clear way ahead to fulfill the desire of these congregants.

The valuation of "experience" (*beleving*) by the participants in this study may also correspond closely with the *attention for practices* in contemporary practical theological research. Adherents of the latter approach claim that practices, if indeed practiced regularly, may become habits that thoroughly transform a person's life.²⁶ In theology, this claim has been

²¹E.g. (not limited to Reformed and/or practical theological perspectives): Grumett and Muers, *Eating and Believing* (2008); Wirzba, *Food and Faith* (2011); Méndez-Montoya, *The Theology of Food* (2012); Sweet, *From Tablet to Table* (2014); Grumett, *Material Eucharist* (2016); Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary* (idem); Klomp, Smit, and Speckmann, *Rond de tafel* (2018). See also Fox, *Food and Eating*, pp. 18–20 for an anthropological perspective.

²²See Barnard, "De avondmaalstafel en de eetkamertafel" (2017) who refers to Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, pp. 392–408 (1995, orig. 1987). See also Leithart, "The Way Things Really Ought to Be", pp. 168–171 (1997); Klomp and Barnard, "Dagelijkse kost" (2018); and §8.5.2 below.

²³See the classic study of Hans Lietzmann (*Messe und Herrenmahl*, orig. 1926), quoted in Immink, *The Touch of the Sacred*, pp. 103–105 (2014). More recent works include: De Jonge, "The Early History of the Lord's Supper" (2001); Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins* (2004); Rouwhorst, "The Roots of the Early Christian Eucharist" (2007); De Jonge, "Avondmaal en symposium" (idem); Foley, *From Age to Age* (2008); Bradshaw, *Reconstructing Early Christian Worship* (2009); Stringer, *Rethinking the Origins of the Eucharist* (2011); McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship* (2016).

²⁴E.g. chapter 4, note 86 and 173.

²⁵See e.g. *Didache* IX and X.

²⁶E.g. Volf and Bass, *Practicing Theology* (2002); Hauerwas and Wells, *The Blackwell*

applied primarily in the fields of Ethics, Theological Education, and Worship. Worship is thus considered the practice that transforms the worshippers, having the power to change both their personal life and their relationships (i.e. the worshipping community).²⁷ One of the questions this thesis raises concerns the extent to which the Lord's Supper—i.e. being part of the practice of worship—is formative for those who partake in it.²⁸ The findings in this study indicate that the participants' experiences of the Lord's Supper became more meaningful over the years, possibly suggesting that the sacrament is indeed formative, even though its influence on daily life has not yet been studied in detail.

Since the experience of the Lord's Supper is deemed so important, new questions arise about *how, when, and how often it should be celebrated*. Some theological publications include reflections on the style of celebration, which is an important aspect that needs further study, also from a more anthropological perspective, to obtain a better understanding of the experiences described in the preceding chapters.²⁹ So too there needs to be further study on the influence that the frequency of Lord's Supper celebrations has.³⁰ In light of what I wrote above, I assume that a low frequency and a passive style of celebration make it harder for participants to be transformed by the sacrament as a liturgical practice.³¹

Companion to Christian Ethics (2011, orig. 2004); Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* (2009); Smith, "Theories of Practice" (2014); Mager, "Action Theories" (2014).

²⁷See Cahalan, "Three Approaches", pp. 74–80 (2005); Witvliet, "Teaching Worship as a Christian Practice" (2008); Nieman, "Liturgy and Life" (2008); Abernethy, *Worship That Changes Lives* (2008); Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* (2009); Bass et al., *Christian Practical Wisdom* (2016). See also Ford, *Self and Salvation*, pp. 140–141 (1999), who stated that the ritual of the Eucharist is "a condensation of the Christian *habitus*."

²⁸In Bosman and Schaeffer, "Celebrating the Lord's Supper" we concluded that the Lord's Supper may not be as formative as some have suggested, based on a small pilot study that preceded the present research.

²⁹E.g. Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper*, pp. 223–245 (2004); Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, pp. 345–354 (2014); Miller-McLemore, "Spoonings" (2016); Kunz, "Warum das Abendmahl vom Tisch muss und doch nicht *tabula rasa* herrscht" (idem). Cf. Miller-McLemore, "Embodied Knowing, Embodied Theology", p. 750: "...what does it mean to process forward and hold out your hands to receive the Eucharist from a priest in a university Episcopalian congregation versus sitting and passing a communion plate, taking bread, and then serving your neighbor in my own tradition?"

³⁰As far as I know, no empirical (longitudinal) research has been conducted on this topic within the Reformed tradition. For more on the frequency of celebration, see e.g. Wolterstorff, "The Reformed Liturgy", pp. 294–295 (1992); Venema, "The Doctrine of the Lord's Supper in the Reformed Confessions", pp. 185–187, 194–195 (2001); Barnard, "Belijden is vieren", pp. 42–43 (2003); Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper*, pp. 230–233 (2004); Immink, *The Touch of the Sacred*, pp. 94–95, 98–99 (2014); De Leede, "Geboren uit water en Geest - leven op brood en wijn", pp. 116–118 (2016); Speelman, "Weekly at the Lord's Table" (2018). Also the RCL's Worship Institute (*Liturgisch Steunpunt*) has developed a brochure with details on the frequency of the celebration.

³¹A low frequency would be four times/year, and a passive style "celebrating in the pews." The hypothesis introduced here does not amount to a case for a higher frequency or a more

The latter point applies not only to the celebration itself (see §7.2.1), but also to *its place and function in worship services*. For example, in the interviews with congregants and ministers, the intrinsic connection between the Lord's Supper and the offering was hardly ever mentioned, and some were even entirely ignorant of it. Moreover, in the literature, this connection was mentioned by only a few CRC and RCL theologians.³² So too the place of the offering in the order of service (regardless of its connection with the Lord's Supper)³³ and the sacraments' relationship to the preaching of the Word (i.e. are they equal to "the Word," or less important?) are questions relating directly to this topic.³⁴ The literature cited in the previous two footnotes indicates that there is a closer relationship between these elements of worship than assumed in most interviews as well as the majority of CRC and RCL literature. Similarly related to this topic are the questions raised by several RCL participants concerning the requirement of an official church service and/or an ordained minister for the administration of the Lord's Supper.³⁵ These final questions cannot, however, be solved here without additional reflection and consideration, and rather demand further study.

active style of celebration.

³²See chapter 5, note 96, 124, and 125. Cf. Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, pp. 346–349 (2014); Wannenwetsch, "Eucharist and the Ethics of Sacrifice and Self-Giving" (2018); Bosman, "Avondmaal in CGK en GKv" (2018); Rouwhorst and Van Tongeren, *Vieren en delen* (2019).

³³Until 1975 it was customary in RCL services for the offering to be held after the reading of Scripture and the opening prayer, just prior to the sermon (albeit not connected to the Lord's Supper). In some CRC congregations like CRC-A and C, this is still a common practice. In CRC-B and the researched RCL congregations, the offering was held right after the celebration of the Lord's Supper. More generally, also the relationship between the offering and the elements of bread and wine as the congregation's gifts to God (cf. Mark 6:35–44) could be reconsidered. See Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, p. 348: "The collection is the act in the liturgy in which the working capital of the kingdom of God is being collected. We ourselves are collected. We ourselves, our own lives, our work, are brought to the Lord's Table. The offering is the symbol of our availability for the kingdom of God." This leads Barnard et al. to the conclusion that the proceeds of the offering should be brought up—together with bread and wine—for consideration in the service, and that the covering of bread and wine with a tablecloth before and after the celebration should be abolished: "This mystifies the gifts in the wrong way" (Ibid., p. 349).

³⁴On the Word-sacrament relationship, M.J. Kater stated in 2017 that both should be considered equal, see chapter 5, note 99; chapter 6, note 27. See also Trimp, *De gemeente en haar liturgie*, pp. 117–118 (1983); Small, "A Church of the Word and Sacrament" (2003); Moore-Keish, *Do This in Remembrance of Me*, pp. 22–32 (2008); Fergusson, "The Theology of Worship", pp. 79–80 (2009); Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, pp. 158–159 (2015); Wisse, "Christ's Presence through the Spirit in the Holy Supper", pp. 337–344 (2019).

³⁵Cf. Mitchell, "Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass" (1999); Smit, "Eucharistie und Mahlzeit" (2007); Wisse and Eikelboom, "Alle gelovigen zijn gelijk" (2017). On March 28, 2019, the Protestant Theological University (PThU) and Kampen Theological University (TUK) held a seminar on this topic.

8.4.2 Communion, Participation, and Hospitality

Numerous related discussions in the field of practical theology emerge also in connection with the second conclusion regarding the centrality of communion in the experience of the Lord's Supper (topic 2–4). In this section, I will refer to seven important themes related to the findings in this study.

A first connection originates from the *difference between the experience of communion with Christ and the experience of mutual communion*. This finding is revelatory of an important difference between professional theologians and other church members: whereas church members tended to focus primarily on the connection with fellow believers, ministers stressed the importance of both the horizontal and vertical connection. Unfortunately, the reason for this difference could not be ascertained. Is it just easier for theologians to find words to describe their religious experiences, or do ministers and congregants really attach different levels of value to communion with Christ? A potential solution lies in an insistence on greater attention for the work of the Holy Spirit. As Calvin wrote, it is the Spirit who unites believers with Christ through the sacrament.³⁶ More attention for the work of the Holy Spirit in the Lord's Supper will also help people to understand that there is no real conflict between communion with Christ and communion with fellow believers, since it is *through Christ* that the latter are united.³⁷ On a practical level, this demands reflection on styles of celebration, song selection, and the language that is used during communion to better enable communicants to perceive communion with both Christ and each other.

Furthermore, the conclusions on the experience of communion with Christ closely reflect the theological debate on the *presence of Christ in the sacrament*. While the details of this discussion are best left elsewhere,³⁸ here attention will be drawn to one small but important part of it. Within the Dutch Reformed tradition, there is the oft-repeated as-

³⁶Immink, "Meal and Sacrament", pp. 268–270 (2001), cf. Hegstad, *The Real Church*, pp. 97–125, 171–202 (2013). Recently, the themes of *unio mystica* and *presentia realis* in the work of Calvin have been studied by several scholars in the field of Reformed theology, e.g. Muis, "De presentie van de Heer in het heilig avondmaal" (2010); Billings, *Union with Christ* (2011); Marshall, "The Eucharistic Presence of Christ" (2014); Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, pp. 154–157 (2015). This topic is closely related to the theme of participation, as recently reflected upon by Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift* (2007); Boersma, *Heavenly Participation* (2011); Huttinga, *Participation and Communicability* (2014).

³⁷Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, pp. 366–367: "What we have here is a regularly repeated renewal of the covenant in which past (the sacrifice), future (the Kingdom of God), and present (the presence of Christ in the Spirit) meet, and in which the fellowship with God in Christ through the Spirit coincides with the fellowship of the members of Christ's body with each other." Cf. Barnard, "De avondmaalstafel en de eetkamertafel", p. 352: "Communion is in a single movement both communion with God and communion with fellow believers."

³⁸More extensive reflection on the real presence is provided in §8.5.2 below. See also §4.2.3 and §5.2.1 above.

sumption that the Dutch Reformed churches in theory confess the teachings of Calvin, but in practice act as if they were adherents of Zwingli.³⁹ The findings of this study suggest that this only holds true in a part in the researched CRC and RCL congregations, as a considerable number of congregants did refer to Christ as the Host of the table and called the Supper a meeting with Christ (§4.2.3). On the other hand, others placed greater emphasis on the commemorative aspect of the Lord's Supper, or else interpreted it more as a personal moment of reflection (§4.3.3 and §4.3.5).⁴⁰ The latter emphases may be interpreted along the lines of a Zwinglian view of the sacrament, although additional research is needed to reach a final conclusion.⁴¹

Similarly, more reflection is required on the aspect of “*mutual communion*.” In the interviews, also other words like *togetherness*, *unity*, or *connectedness* were used to describe this notion. However, in the classical liturgical form of Dathenus this aspect only receives a very concise description, as part of the renewed life that is possible in Christ: “For the sake of Christ, who so exceedingly loved us first, we shall now love one another, (...) not just in words but also in deeds.”⁴² This kind of fellowship is more than the individual experience of “togetherness” alone; according to the liturgical form, it is to be embodied in concrete practices like diaconal care and hospitality.

Furthermore, some participants indicated that they did *not experience any connection or communion with others* when they celebrated the sacrament (see §4.2.2). This may result from a lack of personal contacts

³⁹Tony Maan (in “The Eucharistic Presence of Christ”, pp. 478–480, 490–494) has argued that this view is undifferentiated and simply does not hold true for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestant orthodoxy in the Netherlands, noting that the Dutch Reformers back then taught an “actual presence” (like Calvin) and not a “symbolic presence” (like Zwingli). His view has been countered by observations in Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, p. 192, 198n22, 201 (2005, orig. 2002) and Wisse and Meijer, “Pneumatology”, pp. 509–514 (2013), both quoted in Wisse, “Christ’s Presence through the Spirit in the Holy Supper”, p. 332 (2019). More on the difference between Zwingli’s actual teachings and what is nowadays called “Zwinglianism” can be found in Riggs, *The Lord’s Supper in the Reformed Tradition*, pp. 113–114 (2015). For more on the appreciation of Zwingli in Dutch Reformed spirituality, see: Immink, “Meal and Sacrament” (2001); Heeren and Wisse, “Reprioritizing the Lord’s Supper Among the Reformed”, esp. pp. 93, 102–105 (2019).

⁴⁰The latter may also be influenced by the current appreciation in the Dutch context for corporeality as well as new types of strongly individual religiosity (see §7.3).

⁴¹Immink warned against Zwinglian memorialism when he wrote: “When the words “secular” and “profane” take the lead in the discussion on the Lord’s Supper in the Reformed tradition, then Zwinglian memorialism [sic] is the next step.” He concluded: “Consequently, if we don’t want to fall victim to a so-called Zwinglian interpretation of the Lord’s Supper, we not only need an anthropological but also a theistic conceptualization of the human-divine encounter” (Immink, “Meal and Sacrament”, pp. 271, 275).

⁴²CanRC, *Form*. Mutual communion among believers is also mentioned alongside communion with Christ in the final thanksgiving section of the form: “We praise You that You give us the privilege to rejoice in the communion of Your Son, as well as in the fellowship with one another.”

in the congregation, the style of celebration used, personal preferences or capacities, or other unidentified factors. Perhaps this problem is also related to the emphasis on the individual and his/her relationship with God in Reformed spirituality.⁴³ In any case, the connection between congregation and individual, as well as the connection of these two with the triune God, need to be taken into consideration in future reflection on the Lord's Supper in Reformed theology.

The *inclusion of (baptized) children* was mentioned by some RCL interviewees, but not by CRC members. This desire raises new questions, among them on the place and function of profession of faith, to mention just one. Recently, a number of studies have been published on this topic.⁴⁴ The recommendations that follow from these inquiries could be assessed and implemented by Reformed congregations and denominations.

Another aspect that demands further reflection is the relationship between the Lord's Supper and *hospitality*. Over the course of the past several years, RCL churches have become increasingly hospitable to guests from other denominations. However, in view of such normative statements that "we confess our faith"⁴⁵ and "proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26) in the Lord's Supper, questions emerge as to what the Lord's Supper really is. Is it more like a "confessional meal," or "meal of hospitality"?⁴⁶ In the interviews, a relatively higher number of adherents to the first option were found, although some RCL members did opt for a more hospitable meal (including, for example, also members who are or will be barred from the table because they are under church discipline, as well as non-professing members, see §4.2.1 and §4.4.4).⁴⁷ Such views were not, however, shared by participants in CRC interviews. A follow-up study could clarify the "new" borders of hospitality within the

⁴³See Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (1981); Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, pp. 180–234 (2012).

⁴⁴See Zegwaard, *Als kinderen meevieren* (2006); Venema, *Children at the Lord's Table?* (2009); Sinia, *From the Least to the Greatest* (2018).

⁴⁵See BC article 35 (CanRC edition): "Finally, we receive this holy sacrament in the congregation of the people of God with humility and reverence as we together commemorate the death of Christ our Saviour with thanksgiving and we confess our faith and Christian religion."

⁴⁶Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, p. 368: "...if a church denies to believers not belonging to its particular community access to the meal, it looks at itself, not at Christ as the host, and renders his presence doubtful." Cf. Immink, "Meal and Sacrament", p. 275 (2001); Hawn, *One Bread, One Body*, pp. 1–34 (2003); Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper*, p. 31 (2004). This question also relates to the theme of communion and one's view on holiness: is the Lord's Supper more directed at the meeting with God as the Holy One, or rather at the meeting with fellow believers? See note 16 above. See also Wisse, "Het mag schuren en kraken rond het avondmaal" (2014).

⁴⁷The inclusion of LGBTI members was not mentioned by participants in this study, however.

Reformed tradition, also with regard to the welcoming of non-Reformed guests.⁴⁸

Lastly, the topic of hospitality may also draw attention to the understanding of the Lord's Supper as *a moment of sharing food*, even across social boundaries. Some churches consciously or unconsciously adhere to this tradition by the practice of holding a coffee social following the communion service, which can itself become a "celebration."⁴⁹ Other churches collect food for the poor which is then distributed to the local food bank (*voedselbank*). However, in practice a liturgical connection is almost never visible, since all food items are collected outside the sanctuary and prior to the start of the worship service, while in the early church food was collected *during* the service, right before the celebration of the Eucharist.⁵⁰ By combining the collection of food and the sharing of bread and wine in the church service itself, CRC and RCL churches may be helped to connect to their social context and to overcome divisions within society.⁵¹

8.4.3 The Role of Sin and Forgiveness, Feast and Commemoration

The third conclusion about the role of sin and forgiveness, and feast and commemoration, in the perception of the Lord's Supper (topic 5–8) relates to six new themes.

A first pertains to *self-examination*. Some participants in both denominations stated that they did not find self-examination either necessary or particularly useful (see §4.4.5). On the other hand, there were also positive voices that defended the practice or even its re-introduction. However, in both cases self-examination was interpreted as an *introspective* activity, aimed at the disclosure of personal sin and asking God and neighbor for forgiveness—especially in the week leading up to the sacra-

⁴⁸See chapter 7, note 34. The term "borders" also denotes that hospitality is always connected with the exercise of power (i.e. who decides who is eligible to join, and who invites whom to the Lord's table?). In my opinion, Christ's position as the host at the table should always be decisive (see note 46 above and chapter 5, note 35).

⁴⁹Illustrative in this regard is the quote from the late Rev. Hans van der Werf of the Dom Church Utrecht (in *Woord en Dienst* 27.12 (June 10, 1978), p. 201, quoted in Den Dekker, *Architect van kerkenwerk*, p. 354): "We do not establish our character as a communion in the many cups of coffee we drink following the service, but in the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper."

⁵⁰See note 23. See also Rouwhorst and Van Tongeren, *Vieren en delen* (2019).

⁵¹Stories from South-African and American contexts may help Dutch Reformed churches to discover their one-sidedness with regard to social equality, racial divisions, etc. See Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper*, pp. 233–237 (2004); De Klerk, "Die Nagmaal en broodgebrek" (2007); Cilliers and Wepener, "Ritual and the Generation of Social Capital in Contexts of Poverty" (idem); Fulkerson and Mount Shoop, *A Body Broken, A Body Betrayed* (2015); Vosloo, "Do This in Remembrance of Me" (2018).

mental celebration. This view aligns itself with the classic Reformed exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11:28–29 found in several liturgical forms, most notably that of Dathenus. In these forms, Paul’s words are understood to prescribe the necessity of individual self-examination, an exegesis that is nowadays contested, also within CRC and RCL circles.⁵² In order to overcome such misunderstandings, the relevant passages in the liturgical forms could be rewritten to be better aligned with newer exegetical insights.

Secondly, the Lord’s Supper was frequently associated with “*commemorating the death of Christ*” who “*died for our sins*,” with a resulting primary focus on the sacrifice of Jesus and the sin and salvation of the individual participants.⁵³ In view of the fivefold classification drawn by J.P. Versteeg, this is only one of five aspects attributed to the sacrament.⁵⁴ More than that, yet other meanings were mentioned in the participating congregations. These included the Lord’s Supper as a festive celebration connecting the sacrament to the resurrection of Christ, His future return, and the Kingdom to come. Another aspect that may easily be forgotten is the relationship to one’s neighbor, both within and outside the church, marking the ethical implications of the Lord’s Supper in the present. This oversight could give the Lord’s Supper an excessively one-sided meaning, if the focus—in the liturgical forms, meditations, and songs sung during the celebrations, just to mention a few—lies primarily on aspects like “sin and misery” and “deliverance,” even though also the element of “thankfulness” should be playing a role.⁵⁵ A comparable triad is that of *past-*

⁵²This observation is inspired by Brock and Wannewetsch, *The Therapy of the Christian Body*, pp. 61–65. Cf. the discussion between the CRC ministers Aart Wallet and Jan Groenleer as documented in Wallet, “Voorbereiding op het Heilig Avondmaal” and Groenleer, “1 Korinthiërs 11 en de voorbereiding op het Heilig Avondmaal”. The former RCL minister Dean Anderson (in his commentary *1 Korintiërs*, pp. 166–167) interpreted the “examination” in 1 Corinthians 11:28 as an *individual* practice aimed at the *manner* in which the supper is celebrated, rather than the inner condition of the communicants. Cf. also Van ’t Spijker, *Zijn verbond en woorden*, pp. 85–88 (1980); Hendriks, “Over de ware zelfbeproeving”, pp. 27–28 (1995); De Boer, “Spiritualiteit van het avondmaal”, pp. 120–121 (2014).

⁵³Cf. Scharen, “Judicious Narratives”, p. 134 (2005) reflecting on the theology of a specific Presbyterian church in the USA: “Combining a common protestant view of the meal as a remembrance rather than the real presence of Christ and a peculiar Calvinist focus on God’s divine sovereignty that effectively decentres the question of an individual’s salvation, the meal takes on the ethos of a rededication to God’s mission in the world as revealed in Christ.”

⁵⁴See chapter 7, note 51. See also McKenna, “Eucharist and Memorial” (2005); Van Houwelingen, “Renewal of the Covenant at the Last Supper” (2017).

⁵⁵Cf. the three parts of the Heidelberg Catechism (HC). According to Michael Horton (in *God of Promise*, pp. 157–161), excessive emphasis on self-examination may also lead to a lower frequency of communion: “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” (pp. 160–161). Cf. also Horton, *People and Place*, p. 137 and Immink, “Meal and Sacrament”, pp. 270–271 who stated something similar.

present-future; excessive attention for the past may distract communicants from the implications of the Holy Supper in the present or for the future.⁵⁶

On a more concrete level, Reformed churches sometimes *ban members from participation in the Lord's Supper*. Both CRC and RCL denominations maintain their own ecclesiastical regulations allowing local church councils to do so under certain conditions.⁵⁷ If a person is excluded, he or she must first repent and seek reconciliation before being re-admitted to the table. This follows from the classic Reformed exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11 included, among others, in Dathenus's liturgical form. However, the findings in this research indicate that the application of church discipline and the practice of self-examination were contested, at least by congregants in the participating RCL congregations (see §4.4.4). Similarly, RCL-D's minister admitted that his church council would not ban members automatically—i.e. without consideration of their personal situation—in cases of divorce, for example (see §5.2.3).⁵⁸ Taken together, this suggests that the functioning of church discipline should be subjected to reevaluation, especially since it is considered one of the identity markers of the “true church” in the Reformed tradition (BC article 29).⁵⁹

Another theme in need of reconsideration with regard to the sacrament is that of *reconciliation*. Many participants mentioned concepts like grace, forgiveness, and “gift of God” during the interviews. For most of them, these words were connected to God as the one who acts: grace is something that God performs or provides. Far less participants mentioned also mutual reconciliation among congregants, although it is described in Dathenus's form as the sincere desire “to live with [one's] neigh-

⁵⁶See Versteeg, “Nieuwe Testament”, pp. 50–64. Other perspectives on the Lord's Supper may include the oft-quoted fivefold interpretation in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982), the five notions mentioned in Shelton, “A Theology of the Lord's Supper” (1992), and the fivefold classification presented by Hendrikus Berkhof (in *Christian Faith*, p. 367): 1. To look backward (commemoration); 2. To look forward (expectation of the kingdom of God); 3. To look upward (communion with Christ); 4. To look around us (to the people); and 5. To look to what is in front of us (the signs of bread and wine and the rite).

⁵⁷CRC, *Kerkorde*, art. 71–81; RCL, *Kerkorde*, art. D51–D61. This practice was well known among most interviewees. However, none of them admitted having been subjected to such censure. Some did acknowledge that they had abstained once or for longer periods of time for personal reasons. The purpose of church discipline has always been to guard the community, not to punish individuals within.

⁵⁸Recently, an empirical study on the application of church discipline in the RCL denomination was carried out; see Schaeffer, “Staat de tucht op de tocht?” (2016). In the CRC, the General Synod re-evaluated the application of church discipline in 2016 (see CRC, “Rapport van deputaten kerkorde en kerkrecht”, pp. 517–524, cf. 109–112 (art. 150)). For a theological perspective on sin from CRC and RCL theologians, see Maris and Van der Pol, *De zonde uit beeld* (1994).

⁵⁹See Te Velde and Harmannij, *Christelijke tucht* (2016); Van den Broeke, “Het Censura morum” (2018); Van den Broeke, “Tucht en tuchtrecht” (forthcoming); Schaeffer, “Wat is er met de kerkelijke tucht gebeurd?” (idem).

bor in true love and unity” by “laying aside all enmity, hatred, and envy...”⁶⁰ If indeed the sacrament aims to function as a “catalyst for practices of reconciliation,” how does this work on the personal level, in the lives of believers?⁶¹ There is thus reason to reevaluate the functioning of self-examination and *censura morum*, and to introduce new practices of interpersonal reconciliation. Since reconciliation to God is intrinsically connected with reconciliation to fellow human beings,⁶² elements of self-examination and *censura morum* remain essential to the Lord’s Supper. They could be fostered by the introduction of the liturgical rite of passing the peace (as in CRC-B), since this rite truly embodies the interpersonal reconciliation made possible by God.

Similarly, the meaning of “holiness” as it was perceived in all four theological voices could be subjected to discussion (see §7.2.6). Based on what has emerged from this study, my hypothesis is that congregants in both denominations primarily experience holiness or sanctity as something applying to the celebrating community; participants thus need to sanctify themselves prior to communion, and are considered “holy” during the celebration.⁶³ This interpretation is related to the exhortations to self-examination found in the confessions and liturgical forms, as well as the regulations concerning initiation and church discipline included in the respective church orders (*normative voice*). The celebration itself is usually also experienced as a more or less holy moment, even though such sanctity resembles rather an *ambiance* of reverence, given the fact that the elements of bread and wine themselves are not considered holy in CRC and RCL churches (cf. HC QA 78).⁶⁴ However, there is a certain rituality (*operant voice*) that contributes to this atmosphere which could be subjected to more extensive research in the future.⁶⁵ The results of this follow-up study may lead to the conclusion that the sacramental celebrations are experienced as excessively sacred or venerable, leading to stress and other similar issues among communicants. The ritual of the Lord’s

⁶⁰CanRC, *Form*.

⁶¹Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, p. 203 (2009), who refers to Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, pp. 176–177 (1995). See also Volf, *The End of Memory*, pp. 119–120 (2006); Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, pp. 349–354 (2014); Bosman and Schaeffer, “Celebrating the Lord’s Supper”, p. 201 (2018).

⁶²Cf. Volf, *The End of Memory*, p. 119 (2006): “In the eucharistic feast we remember each other as those who are reconciled to God and to each other. Our past, marked by enmity, has given way to a future marked by love.” In the same chapter, Volf rightly states that reconciliation is not only a political event but also an eschatological event: “If it were not, there would be no hope for those who have died in the grip of enmity” (*Ibid.*, p. 120).

⁶³See §4.4.3. See also the different types of “holiness” distinguished in §7.2.6.

⁶⁴Also the reading of the words of institution, moments of prayer, and the moment of eating and drinking are part of this sacred ambiance, but from the perspective of the normative voice they are not considered sacred practices.

⁶⁵E.g. what does the holiness of the meal teach us about the style of celebration? See note 29 above.

Supper could then be adjusted so as to be more welcoming for those who suffer such stress. Furthermore, also the meaning and implications of the different types of holiness (§7.2.6) could be subjected to future research. For instance, how should the Lord's Supper be celebrated in a disenchanted and secularized Western context in which the sacred is not naturally associated with a personal God?⁶⁶ If meeting God (the Holy One) in the Lord's Supper is indeed key to a Reformed understanding of the sacrament,⁶⁷ maintaining a right balance between fear and trust could prove helpful in seeking an answer to that question.⁶⁸

Lastly, the contribution that participation in the Lord's Supper makes to the believer's *sanctification* is another potential topic of study. Given the practical limitations of this study, that aspect could not be investigated, even though it seems a promising one given the indication by some interviewees that they received a "gift of grace" during the celebrations (§4.3.1).⁶⁹ Another potential question concerns the extent to which the sacrament contributes and connects to the universal human quest for "the holy." This element will be reflected upon in the next section (§8.5.1).

8.5 Final Considerations

Several new questions arise in the wake of the conclusions, recommendations, and considerations presented above. In this final section, I would like to reflect further on two topics that originate directly from the preceding sections, before closing this work with a final conclusion.

8.5.1 The Meaning of Holiness

The question as to what holiness entails touches on a recent debate between two practical theologians in the Netherlands. Following the publication of Gerrit Immink's work *Het heilige gebeurt* (2011) on the sacred in Reformed church services, Marcel Barnard responded with a critical review in which he charged that the author had failed to take account of the current cultural climate.⁷⁰ He wrote: "The book lacks an analysis of the *Zeitgeist*, [and fails to] reach out to the domain of the secular or profane, to people for whom the sacred within the walls of the church has become irrelevant."⁷¹ Barnard referred to the statistics indicating that

⁶⁶See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 505–593 (2007); Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen* (2017).

⁶⁷See Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, pp. 161–162 (2015).

⁶⁸See note 16 above.

⁶⁹See Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (2015) for more on this topic.

⁷⁰See Barnard's lecture delivered at a seminar on September 30, 2011, at Hydepark, Doorn, later published as Barnard, *Het heilige gebeurt niet meer* (2011) and further developed in Barnard, "Het heilige gebeurt niet" (2012). Immink's book was later translated into English (*The Touch of the Sacred*, 2014).

⁷¹Barnard, "Het heilige gebeurt niet", p. 128.

only a small percentage of the Dutch population visits worship services on a regular basis. He summed up his critique with this pithy statement: “The sacred has simply become irrelevant.”⁷²

One year earlier, Immink had defined the sacred or holy in the context of worship services as “a meeting that takes place between the triune God and the congregation.”⁷³ This meeting occurs through the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers. Immink had also included a more anthropological approach to the sacred in his work by quoting Rudolf Otto’s *Das Heilige* (orig. 1917) and by referring to the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, no reflection on “the holy” in contemporary culture can be found anywhere in Immink’s work.

In the current cultural and religious context in the Netherlands, holiness is an important and relevant topic. While it used to be limited exclusively to the domain of the church, various developments have shown that it is nowadays more frequently found outside the church, in rituals or nature, or in subjective experience as such.⁷⁵ This raises new questions relating to the Lord’s Supper, such as: should the ritual of bread and wine also be reinvented or adjusted, or, conversely, should it be preserved as something that cannot be changed?⁷⁶

Other important developments include the disenchantment and secularization of Western culture as it has been documented by various scholars.⁷⁷ As a result of these developments, an encounter with God or the sacred has become increasingly problematic in a disenchanted world. How then to “approach God” in worship, or more specific, in the Lord’s Supper?⁷⁸

Ironically, both Barnard and Immink agree that God’s presence in the liturgical ritual cannot be forced. To “solve” this problem, Immink refers to the necessity of the prayer of invocation (*epiclesis*), and he wants to preserve “an autonomous act of God” in the liturgical act. Barnard, in contrast, speaks about a tension within the liturgical ritual between human and divine aspects that fundamentally cannot be resolved.⁷⁹

⁷²Ibid., p. 128.

⁷³Immink, *Terugkeer van het heilige?*, p. 17.

⁷⁴Immink, *The Touch of the Sacred*, pp. 30–31.

⁷⁵See chapter 1, note 27. See Versnel-Mergaerts and Van Tongeren, *Heilig, heilig, heilig* (2011) for a recent study on holiness and sacrality in the Dutch context. See also Boeve, *The Presence of Transcendence* (2001); Heelas and Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution* (2005); Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, pp. 330–345 (2014); Boeve, “Symbols of Who We Are Called to Become” (2018).

⁷⁶See Van der Velde, “Het gezellige avondmaal” (1994). See also §8.5.2 below.

⁷⁷See Taylor, *A Secular Age* (2007); Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation* (2012); Joas, *Die Macht des Heiligen* (2017). See also §1.2 and §7.3.

⁷⁸See Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, pp. 330–332.

⁷⁹See Immink, “Meal and Sacrament”, pp. 270, 274–275 (2001); Immink, *Terugkeer van het heilige?*, pp. 13, 17 (2010); Barnard, “Het heilige gebeurt niet”, pp. 113–114 (2012). See also Aan het Rot, “De epiclesis in de gereformeerde avondmaals-liturgie” (2002);

In my view, Immink and Barnard are not talking about precisely the same thing. Whereas Immink departs from a *believer's perspective* by stressing the need for praying the *epiclesis* (which I too would consider necessary), Barnard is speaking from an *anthropological perspective* when he states that the sacred has vanished in Western culture. From their own perspective, each is therefore right. Perhaps the reason—and solution—for their disagreement can be found in the title of Immink's work *Het heilige gebeurt* and its English translation. This title, which represents a quotation from the Dutch poet Gerrit Achterberg (1905–1962), literally translates into English as “the holy happens,” although for the English edition it has been rendered as “*The Touch of the Sacred*.” The latter leaves open the question whether “the Holy” necessarily acts in worship, and whether believers can do anything to make this happen. In the end, God's presence indeed cannot be forced, nor can it be naturally assumed, but what we can do is to pray for it and to expect it in our prayer (HC QA 116–117).⁸⁰

8.5.2 A Renewed Reformed Theology of the Lord's Supper?

Related to all the aspects discussed above, the data in this study also elicit questions with respect to the *Reformed view of the Lord's Supper*.⁸¹ For example, the fact that communion with Christ is experienced less by congregants than it is by ministers, as well as the relatively dominant interpretation of the Supper as a commemorative meal alongside or rather than “a means of grace,”⁸² produce new questions on the relationship between Reformed doctrine and the present experience of the Lord's Supper. Is it true, for instance, that there has been a “gradual but steady erosion of the Reformed view of the sacrament so that in the present era the doctrine of the real presence is decidedly a minority report”?⁸³

Some time ago Marcel Barnard proposed a reconceptualization of the connection between the signs of bread and wine and what is signified in the Lord's Supper, drawing in this on thoughts earlier developed by Gerardus van der Leeuw, Louis-Marie Chauvet, and Roy Rappaport.⁸⁴

Barnard, “Ambivalent Images” (2010).

⁸⁰As such, liturgical participation may open one's eyes for God's perspective on reality, as suggested by Hans Schaeffer: “It is not I who stand at the center, nor the success of an ecclesiastical denomination or institution. The liturgy revolves around God as its center, who restores us to life” (in Schaeffer, “Liturgie als centrum van kerkzijn”, p. 200).

⁸¹See note 20 above.

⁸²Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, p. 181 (in the context of Zwingli's teaching), quoted in Immink, “Meal and Sacrament”, p. 268.

⁸³Sproul, “Foreword”, p. x.

⁸⁴See Barnard, “Naar een nieuwe protestantse avondmaalstheologie” (2007); Barnard, “Reconstructing Protestant Identity in Liturgy and Spirituality” (2009); Barnard, Cilliers,

Barnard argues that the signs in the Reformed tradition have become a “picture” referring to the “real” reality.⁸⁵ This may be a result of historical circumstances, since Reformed confessions like the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession were formulated against the tendency to confine salvation to the elements of bread and wine. That is also why in Dathenus’s classical liturgical form the *sursum corda* is pronounced immediately before the elevation of the elements and the reading of the Words of Institution, to highlight the difference between signifier (*signifiant*) and the signified (*signifié*): “We must not cling with our hearts to the outward symbols of bread and wine, but lift our hearts on high in heaven, where Christ, our advocate, is, at the right hand of his heavenly Father.”⁸⁶ As a result, the Lord’s Supper has become less “material,” and more like a cognitive-linguistic activity referring to a reality beyond the visible.⁸⁷ One might summarize it as follows: the Holy Supper has become an illustration of what is already communicated in the gospel. Or, in other words: it has become a sign referring to mental ideas that can only be grasped by language and words, namely the words of the gospel (HC QA 65).

In another article, Barnard has argued that we cannot escape our own language: “There is no [Archimedean, JAGB] point outside language and outside practice. (...) [T]he signifier and the signified are separated and we can only hope for their eschatological reunification.”⁸⁸ In other words, there is nothing that can guarantee the presence of God in the ritual: “There is nothing more than the practice with bread and wine, together with a few words of tradition.”⁸⁹ But instead of completely desacralizing the sacrament, Barnard proposes retaining the tension between anthropology and theology in the ritual itself by following Chauvet in calling the presence of God “presence-as-trace; trace of a passing always-already past; trace thus of something absent. But still trace, that is, the sign of a happening which calls us to be attentive to something new still to come.”⁹⁰

and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, pp. 242–243, 323–354 (2014); Barnard, “De avondmaalstafel en de eetkamertafel”, pp. 345–348 (2017).

⁸⁵See *Ibid.*, p. 346, while referring to Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, p. 47.

⁸⁶CanRC, *Form*.

⁸⁷The latter development was described by Maarten Wisse in an unpublished lecture delivered during a seminar on the Lord’s Supper, organized by the PCN’s Advisory Council for the Profession of Reformed Teaching (*Raad van advies voor het gereformeerd belijden*) on June 1, 2016 in Utrecht.

⁸⁸Barnard, “Het heilige gebeurt niet”, p. 124, cf. 112–114, with reference to Long, “Making Sense of Christian Worship” (2009). See also Hughes, *Worship as Meaning* (2003); Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, pp. 8–9, 49–63 (2014).

⁸⁹Barnard, “Het heilige gebeurt niet”, p. 124.

⁹⁰Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, p. 124, quoted in Barnard, “Het heilige gebeurt niet”, p. 124. See also Barnard, “Ambivalent Images” (2010) for more on Barnard’s position.

Stated otherwise, one might say that one needs to *participate* in a ritual to grasp its meaning.⁹¹ This implies that ritual and meaning cannot be separated, just like anthropological and theological aspects within a ritual cannot be fully separated. As such, Barnard's proposal to maintain the tension within the ritual itself offers a solution for overcoming the dichotomy between signifier and signified, since both are an inseparable part of the ritual itself, and all our human understanding is dependent on the language we use.

This position may sound relativistic, but it is formulated from a human point of view (both anthropologically and theologically). From a *divine perspective*, one could argue that God Himself overcomes the dichotomy between signifier and signified in the ritual of the Lord's Supper. This implies that the signs of the sacraments do not simply refer to the meaning of the gospel, which can only be grasped in *language* (as implied by Barnard's position), but that they are used by God to work faith in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.⁹² It is this Spirit who may use both the "preaching of the gospel" (HC QA 65) and the sacraments to work *and* strengthen the faith in our hearts. In my view, Word and sacraments should not be overly separated, as if the sacraments only refer to a set of ideas that can be found in the gospel.⁹³ Instead, I presume that both means may be used by God to work faith in us—not only by cognitive means, but also by physical means. This implies that God may use both the cognitive *and* physical faculties of human perception in a way that transcends our understanding and imagination.

Our motive can indeed no longer be "that of a rational and argumentative logic frozen in the knowledge of its objective representations,"⁹⁴ and yet that does not mean that God does not work through the sacraments. From a *human point of view*, this implies that the Lord's Supper does not "do" something because we perform it, but that we celebrate it as an act of faith and therefore as a fruit of that faith that is given to us by God Himself.⁹⁵ God has given to us two kinds of means—one more cognitive

⁹¹Jennings, "On Ritual Knowledge" (1996); Knibbe, Van der Meulen, and Versteeg, "Why Participation Matters to Understand Ritual Experience" (2011).

⁹²See HC QA 65 and the language of bridal mysticism used in HC QA 76.

⁹³Cf. Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, pp. 338–339 who refer to Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, pp. 151–152. Cf. also Wisse, "Christ's Presence through the Spirit in the Holy Supper", p. 344: "From this point of view, we can also see why the sacraments are of the utmost importance, indeed, as important as the proclamation of the Word of God. They are necessary for us because they make us grow in faith in a way that the proclamation of the Word of God can never do since the Word of God is a cognitive means of communicating with us."

⁹⁴Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, p. 54, quoted in Barnard, "Het heilige gebeurt niet", p. 124.

⁹⁵Cf. Wisse, "Christ's Presence through the Spirit in the Holy Supper", pp. 343–344: "In the Lord's Supper, different from the hearing of the Word, God is present in a bodily way. Participating in it is not automatically linked to eternal salvation. Such linkage would be

and the other more physical—and both are necessary to practice our faith as well as communion with Him and with each other.⁹⁶

8.5.3 In Conclusion

I conclude this study with the presentation of three practical theological questions resulting from its findings.

A first question arises from the expressed *desires* of both congregants and ministers to experience more communion with fellow believers during the celebrations, or to celebrate the sacrament more frequently. These desires have already been realized in part in some RCL congregations (e.g. a higher frequency in RCL-D, the participation of some in sacramental celebrations outside church services). This, however, raises the above question as to whether the Lord's Supper really belongs within or outside church services, with or without an ordained minister, elders and deacons, and in the presence of the entire congregation. These questions are related not only to one's own view on the sacraments (e.g. what elements are essential in a celebration of the Lord's Supper?), but also to one's view on the offices, church discipline, and the Christian community itself.⁹⁷ These questions thus demand future clarification.

A second question is whether the Lord's Supper is primarily an act of "looking back" to what Jesus did 2000 years ago, or whether it is more than that—bringing something for the present age, and also contributing to the expectation of the future Kingdom. This in turn relates to the topic of sin and forgiveness in terms of the experience of the Lord's Supper. Is the sacrament primarily intended to remind us of our sinfulness, and to commemorate the forgiveness of sins through Jesus' sacrifice and death? Or is it also meant to give meaning for new life (i.e. Jesus' resurrection and our communion with Him) and as a foreshadowing or foretaste of the eternal joy and perfection of His coming Kingdom?⁹⁸

the divine perspective. Our perspective, while ordained and effected as it is by God through the Spirit, is that we grow in faith not only through reason."

⁹⁶I have borrowed these final thoughts from Maarten Wisse's lecture (see note 87). Cf. Trimp, *Woord, water en wijn*, pp. 105–108 (1985); Brinkman, "Het sacrament in de gereformeerde geloofsbeleving" (1992); Small, "A Church of the Word and Sacrament" (2003); Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper*, pp. 190–193 (2004); Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, pp. 189–224 (2005, orig. 2002); Wisse, "Christ's Presence through the Spirit in the Holy Supper", pp. 343–344 (2019) for more on this topic. Cf. also Immink, "Meal and Sacrament", pp. 270–275 who speaks of a "double agency" with regard to the role of God and human beings in the Lord's Supper.

⁹⁷See Schaeffer, "Taylor en traditie".

⁹⁸See Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, p. 149: "The eschatological condition in which God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28) is envisaged by the New Testament as new heavens and a new earth (2 Peter 3:13), peopled by men and women in their risen and glorified bodies (1 Corinthians 15:35–58; Philippians 3:21): any eschatology which reduces the cosmic reference to anthropology, and the anthropology to 'spiritualism', is guilty simply

Together these two questions raise a third and final question: “How might we respond?”⁹⁹ Is there a potential response to these questions, and, if so, what is it? During the interviews, various congregants indicated that simply reading the liturgical forms during the celebration is no solution. This objection may be circumvented by the introduction of more sermons on the Lord’s Supper, additional Sunday school teaching (also for adults), or special courses for the congregation as a whole.¹⁰⁰ Even then one wonders whether more knowledge in itself offers a sufficient solution. Some of the congregation members already expressed their sincere longing desire for the celebrations to have the potential of greater impact or to be celebrated more frequently. Apparently they did not find this in their local churches, and started looking for it elsewhere.

Knowledge may help both congregants and ministers to understand what is going on in the liturgy, but the liturgy itself may also educate those who participate in it. In this way, by a more frequent celebration of the Lord’s Supper, for example, or perhaps more personally or in different styles as some suggested, participants can learn by experience.¹⁰¹ This thought is also consistent with the definition of Christian practices developed by Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass (§1.6 and §7.3). Following this definition, the Lord’s Supper is not only an expression of the faith of the individual or the congregation, but may also educate or inspire those who partake in it.¹⁰² As such, the answer to the questions above may not be found in education alone, but in the fruitful combination of doing and learning—in that order—in local congregations celebrating the Lord’s Supper until the return of Christ.

In the end, the conversation between the four theological voices initiated in this study could be repeated in other congregations. Each local church could use this model to start a conversation in its own context in which the congregants share their theological thoughts, the minister and other liturgical professionals share their expertise, and theologically laden practice is taken seriously, and all of this in critical conversation with the congregation’s normative beliefs.

of ignoring the bread and wine of the Eucharist” (quoted in Barnard, Cilliers, and Wepener, *Worship in the Network Culture*, p. 329).

⁹⁹This question is inspired by the fourth task of practical theology as defined by Osmer in his *Practical Theology*, pp. 4, 10.

¹⁰⁰The RCL’s Practice Center (*Praktijkcentrum*) had already developed courses for Reformed congregations to respond to these desires, e.g. *Vieren met vreugde* (“To Celebrate with Joy”) and *Het jaar rond met Jezus* (“A Year with Jesus”).

¹⁰¹See Smith, *You Are What You Love*, esp. pp. 83-110 (2016); Bass et al., *Christian Practical Wisdom*, esp. pp. 1-44 (idem). See also note 9 and 19 above.

¹⁰²See Schaeffer, “Liturgie als centrum van kerkzijn” (2019), who interprets the practice of Christian worship (including the Lord’s Supper) as the most fundamental practice and resource of the church being church, mainly inspired by the work of Dorothy C. Bass, Craig Dykstra, and James K.A. Smith.

Appendix A

Topic List

The topic list below was used during the focus group interviews (§2.5.2) and the individual interviews (§2.5.3). A reflection on its design is included in §2.6.

1. First associations with the Holy Supper
 - Two or three keywords per person (to be written down on paper during the focus group interviews, and discussed among the interviewees thereafter)
2. Reasons for participating in the celebration of the Holy Supper
 - Existential, emotional, rational, etc., arguments
3. Most impactful celebrations of the Holy Supper
 - When, How, Where, What?
 - Are they repeatable, and, if so, how?
4. Personal developments in regard to the Holy Supper
 - Has personal perception changed over the years?
 - Is this related to personal developments in faith, and, if so, how?
5. Desired ways to experience the Holy Supper
 - Is this desire related to a certain style of celebration?
 - Is this desire related to the above personal developments?

Appendix B

Quantitative Survey

After each interview, the interviewees were requested to complete a short survey consisting of the following twelve questions.

1. What is your gender?
 - Male
 - Female
2. In what year were you born?
3. What is your highest completed level of education?
 - Primary education or lower
 - Mavo, vbo, lbo, or equivalent
 - MBO or equivalent
 - Havo, VWO, or equivalent
 - HBO or equivalent
 - WO or equivalent
 - Other, namely:
4. In what year were you baptized?
5. In what year did you do profession of faith?
6. In what year did you become a member of your current congregation?
7. Since what year have you been member of a CRC/RCL congregation?
8. Consider the past calendar year. How often did you attend church services in your own congregation?
 - Weekly, twice a Sunday
 - Weekly, once or twice a Sunday
 - Weekly, once a Sunday

- Two or three times a month
 - Once a month
 - Less than once a month
 - Other, namely: _____ times
9. Consider the past calendar year. How often did you celebrate the Lord's Supper in your own congregation?
10. Consider the past calendar year. How often did you attend a church service in another congregation? (both CRC/RCL and non-CRC/RCL)
- Weekly, once a Sunday
 - Two or three times a month
 - Once a month
 - Less than once a month
 - Other, namely: _____ times
11. Consider the past calendar year. How often did you celebrate the Lord's Supper in another congregation? (both CRC/RCL and non-CRC/RCL)
12. How often would you like to celebrate the Lord's Supper? _____ times a year

Appendix C

Survey Results

The results of the survey included in Appendix B have been included here for reference. The tables below are presented in addition to the information provided in chapter 2.

Level of Education per Congregation

Table C.1: Number of participants by level of education (ministers excl.)

<i>Level of education</i>	<i>CRC-A</i>	<i>CRC-B</i>	<i>CRC-C</i>	<i>RCL-D</i>	<i>RCL-E</i>	<i>RCL-F</i>	<i>Total</i>
Primary education or lower	-	1	-	-	3	-	4
Mavo, vbo, lbo or equivalent	5	2	-	3	3	1	14
MBO or equivalent	12	5	2	6	6	4	35
Havo, VWO or equivalent	-	3	1	1	-	3	8
HBO or equivalent	4	4	3	2	4	11	28
WO or equivalent	1	1	-	6	2	1	11
<i>Total</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>100</i>

Average Age and Membership Details

Table C.2: Average age, years baptized, years since profession of faith, and years of church membership per congregation (ministers excl., with SD)

<i>Con- grega- tion</i>	<i>Avg. age</i>	<i>Bap- tism</i>	<i>Profes- sion of faith</i>	<i>Membersh- ip own congregation</i>	<i>Membersh- ip own denomination</i>
CRC-A (<i>n</i> =22)	51 yrs old (16,0)	51 yrs ago (16,0)	31 yrs ago (16,0)	Since 32 yrs (18,3)	Since 42 yrs (20,8)
CRC-B (<i>n</i> =16)	53 yrs old (17,0)	53 yrs ago (17,1)	31 yrs ago (17,9)	Since 26 yrs (19,4)	Since 30 yrs (25,3)
CRC-C (<i>n</i> =6)	47 yrs old (15,3)	47 yrs ago (15,3)	25 yrs ago (15,5)	Since 6 yrs (2,8)	Since 20 yrs (19,2)
RCL-D (<i>n</i> =18)	48 yrs old (16,3)	47 yrs ago (17,4)	29 yrs ago (16,8)	Since 23 yrs (19,1)	Since 45 yrs (18,6)
RCL-E (<i>n</i> =18)	51 yrs old (17,9)	51 yrs ago (18,0)	33 yrs ago (17,6)	Since 17 yrs (13,7)	Since 46 yrs (15,7)
RCL-F (<i>n</i> =20)	53 yrs old (17,6)	50 yrs ago (20,2)	33 yrs ago (17,6)	Since 25 yrs (12,0)	Since 44 yrs (21,0)

Average Frequencies of Church Attendance

Table C.3: Average frequencies of church attendance per congregation (ministers excl.)

<i>Congrega- tion</i>	<i>Services/ week</i>	<i>Attendance own congr.</i>	<i>Attendance other congr.</i>
CRC-A (<i>n</i> =22)	2 times/week	1.8 times/week	5.6 times/year
CRC-B (<i>n</i> =16)	2 times/week	1.3 times/week	8.2 times/year
CRC-C (<i>n</i> =6)	2 times/week	1.9 times/week	6.4 times/year
RCL-D (<i>n</i> =18)	2 times/week	1.6 times/week	6.0 times/year
RCL-E (<i>n</i> =18)	2 times/week	1.5 times/week	9.5 times/year
RCL-F (<i>n</i> =20)	2 times/week	1.6 times/week	8.8 times/year

Table C.4: Frequencies of church attendance per minister

<i>Minister</i>	<i>Attendance own congr.</i>	<i>Attendance other congr.</i>
R22 (CRC-A)	2 times/week	12 times/year
R23 (CRC-B)	1 time/week	12 times/year
R24 (CRC-C)	2 times/week	12 times/year
R25 (RCL-D)	1 time/week	52 times/year
R26 (RCL-E)	1 time/week	52 times/year
R27 (RCL-F)	1 time/week	52 times/year

Average Participation in Celebrations

Table C.5: Average participation in celebrations per congregation (ministers excl.)

<i>Congregation</i>	<i>Celeb./year</i>	<i>Partic. in own congr.</i>	<i>Partic. in other congr.</i>	<i>Ideal frequency</i>
CRC-A (n=22)	4 times/year	4.0 times/year	0.2 times/year	7.1 times/year ¹
CRC-B (n=16)	5 times/year	4.3 times/year	0.2 times/year	9.1 times/year
CRC-C (n=6)	4 times/year	3.2 times/year ²	0 times/year	5.3 times/year
RCL-D (n=18)	11 times/year	8.0 times/year	0.3 times/year	11.4 times/year
RCL-E (n=18)	7 times/year	5.1 times/year	0.5 times/year	6.1 times/year ³
RCL-F (n=20)	7 times/year	5.2 times/year	1.5 times/year	7.9 times/year

¹In CRC-A, one participant indicated that he would like to celebrate the Lord's Supper 100 times per year. This answer has not been taken into account due to the deviating number.

²The average participation in CRC-C is lower because one participant indicated not celebrating the Lord's Supper at all. If this entry is disregarded, the average participation would be 3.8.

³One participant answered this question with "As often as possible." Since this reply could not be quantified, it has been excluded from the results.

Table C.6: Participation in celebrations per minister

<i>Minister</i>	<i>Partic. in own congr.</i>	<i>Partic. in other congr.</i>	<i>Ideal frequency</i>
R22 (CRC-A)	4 times/year	0 times/year	4 times/year
R23 (CRC-B)	5 times/year	1 time/year	11 times/year
R24 (CRC-C)	4 times/year	2 times/year	6 times/year
R25 (RCL-D)	9 times/year	2 times/year	12 times/year
R26 (RCL-E)	7 times/year	3 times/year	7 times/year
R27 (RCL-F)	6 times/year	3 times/year	12 times/year

Appendix D

Observations and Interviews

Table D.1: List of conducted observations and interviews

<i>Con- gre- ga- tion</i>	<i>First Obser- vation</i>	<i>First Focus Group</i>	<i>Second Focus Group</i>	<i>Second Obser- vation</i>	<i>Third Focus Group</i>	<i>Interview w/ Minister</i>
CRC-A	Dec. 11, 2016	March 7, 2017	March 9, 2017	May 21, 2017	June 27, 2017	Nov. 22, 2017
CRC-B	April 14, 2017	May 15, 2017	May 18, 2017	Sept. 24, 2017	Nov. 14, 2017	Feb. 7, 2018
CRC-C	June 18, 2017	N/A	N/A	Sept. 10, 2017	N/A	Jan. 23, 2018
RCL-D	Feb. 5, 2017	Feb. 20, 2017	Feb. 23, 2017	May 7, 2017	June 22, 2017	Nov. 15, 2017
RCL-E	Nov. 6, 2016	Dec. 14, 2016	Dec. 22, 2016	March 5, 2017	June 12, 2017	Nov. 23, 2017
RCL-F	Oct. 30, 2016	Nov. 14, 2016	Nov. 17, 2016	April 16, 2017	April 24, 2017	Oct. 9, 2017

Table D.2: List of conducted individual interviews in CRC-C

<i>Date</i>	<i>Activity</i>
June 19, 2017	Interview with R7 (male, 20–39yr)
June 28, 2017	Interview with R8 (male, 40–64yr)
June 29, 2017	Interview with R9 (female, 20–39yr)
August 15, 2017	Interview with R10 (female, 40–64yr)
September 4, 2017	Interview with R11 (female, 65+)
September 21, 2017	Interview with R12 (male, 65+)

Appendix E

Code Tree

The code tree included below is the result of qualitative open coding of the interviews (in both focus groups and individual settings) with congregants as described in chapters 2 and 4.

1. The Lord's Supper as Communion

a) Mutual Communion

- Positive examples
 - Togetherness/unity/connectedness
 - Appreciation of personal attention
 - Lord's Supper strengthens the spiritual bond and makes it visible
 - Participants
 - * As a congregation/district/cell group, etc.
 - * With friends/during vacation, etc.
 - * Inclusion/exclusion (of children, asylum seekers, etc.)
 - * Celebrating outside church services
- Negative examples
 - Lack of unity
 - Lack of participants (abandonment of faith)

b) Communion with God

- Communion with God/Christ (during the Lord's Supper)
 - God/Christ is the host at the table
 - The Work of the Holy Spirit

2. Attributed meanings (the Lord's Supper is ~/is all about ~)

a) Grace and forgiveness

- Sacrifice (of Christ)
- Grace
 - Experiencing grace (during the Lord's Supper)
 - Receiving grace (during the Lord's Supper)
- Awareness of sin/guilt (towards God)

- b) Lord's Supper as a profession of faith/testimony (the core of faith)
- c) Remembering/commemorating Christ (looking back)
- d) Party/celebration
 - Honor/praise/thank God
- e) Lord's Supper as a moment of reflection
- f) Eschatological perspective (looking ahead)
- g) Sacrament (visible sign and/or seal)
 - Comparison with baptism
- h) Relationship with God
- i) Other attributed meanings

3. Opinions and feelings with regard to the Lord's Supper

- a) Tensions when celebrating
 - Surrounding hassle (negative/neutral)
 - Hypocritical behavior of participants
 - Experiences of doing something wrong
 - "Hard to cope with the fact that God knows everything about you"
 - Rational experiences (negative/positive)
 - Fear of an intellectual faith
 - Stress (negative/neutral)
 - Stress related to hygiene, spilling, dropping, choking, etc.
 - Stress related to a real or perceived sense of being watched (negative)
- b) Desire to celebrate consciously
 - Distraction (negative/positive)
 - Celebrating consciously (no requirement/requirement)
 - Lack of personal experiences with regard to the Lord's Supper (negative feeling)
 - Physically tangible experiences (neutral/positive)
 - Forgetting that there is a celebration (negative/neutral/positive)
 - Custom and tradition
 - Culture/context dependent (yes/no)
 - Habit (yes/no, negative/positive)
 - Rut (often/must be prevented/never)
 - Dealing with tradition
- c) Holiness of the meal and/or the participants
 - Holiness (experienced/not experienced)
 - Holiness (negative/neutral/positive)
- d) Participation in and admission to the celebration
 - Admission by local church council (positive/negative)
 - Attestation/profession of faith (required/not required)
 - "Open Table" (with non-Reformed Christians)
 - Participation (choice for or against; abstaining from the Lord's Supper)

- e) Personal and communal preparation
 - Preparation (joint/individual/continuous/etc.)
 - *Censura morum*
 - Feelings with regard to preparation/self-examination
 - Preparation (yes/no; positive/negative)
- f) Effects of participating in the Lord's Supper
 - Being touched (by the Lord's Supper)
 - Being touched (during interview)
 - Euphoria moment (during the Lord's Supper)
 - Sense of relief (by the Lord's Supper)
 - Gratitude (experienced/not experienced; required; etc.)
 - Stimulating/not stimulating (for personal faith)
 - Strengthening/encouraging (idem)
 - Dependent on your faith (certainty) or mood (at the moment)
 - Dependent on your commitment
- g) Spiritual reflection (or *Nabetracting*; required/not necessary/more or less useful)

4. Style, atmosphere and liturgy

- a) Style of celebration
 - Practical/fundamental arguments for/against particular styles
 - The use of bread and wine
 - Supposed meaning of the elements of bread and/or wine
 - Location of the celebration (in church building/at home/elsewhere)
 - Frequency (more often/less often)
 - Group size
 - Duration (longer/shorter)
 - Time (liturgical calendar/personal life/etc.)
- b) Ambiance
 - Restrained (negative/neutral/positive)
 - Sober faces (negative/neutral/positive)
 - Depressing mood (negative)
 - Overly individualized (negative)
 - Joy (experienced/not experienced)
 - Solemn (neutral/positive)
 - Cold (negative)
 - Unrest (small children)
 - Rest/peace (positive)
 - Boring (negative)
 - Serious/grave (negative/positive)
 - Black/neat clothing (neutral/negative, important/unimportant)
- c) Liturgy
 - Relationship between sermon and Holy Supper (also: with/without sermon)

- Praying during the Lord's Supper/personal prayer
- Instruction on the Lord's Supper (positive/neutral/negative)
 - Reading of liturgical forms (yes/no, positive/negative)
- Music and singing during the celebration (before/during/after the Lord's Supper, positive/negative)

5. Personal developments

- Accumulation of meaning
- First-time celebration (positive/negative/forgotten)
- "When everything goes differently" (learning from other churches)
- Influence of external events (positive/neutral/negative)
- Spiritual developments (in the personal relationship with God)
- No/little development noticeable

6. Personal desires

- Satisfied
- More festive celebration
- A less "individualistic" style
- A common meal
- Eschatological desires
- Other desires
 - More conscious/intense experience
 - More gratitude/thanksgiving
 - More symbolism/mystical experience
 - Less tensions

Summary

Introduction

The main research question of this study is: *How is the celebration of the Lord's Supper in local CRC and RCL churches performed, perceived, and valued, and what can be learned from this?* The question originated from the observation that little empirical research has been conducted to date on the Lord's Supper in the Reformed tradition, and especially within the Dutch context. This study seeks to fill this void by describing and analyzing the performance, perception, and valuation of the Lord's Supper within two Reformed denominations in the Netherlands from four different perspectives. These perspectives are derived from the Theology in Four Voices model, a research instrument developed by the *Action Research: Church and Society* (ARCS) project in the United Kingdom. Each "voice" is fully theological and represents one possible perspective on the same reality.

In this study, the Lord's Supper is first described from an *Operant Voice* perspective. This includes what is enacted in the liturgical services where the Lord's Supper is administered (i.e. the theology embedded within the actual practices of the congregations). Secondly, the Lord's Supper is described from an *Espoused Voice* perspective. The espoused voice embodies the opinion of professing members of the studied congregations (excluding ministers, elders, and deacons). They were interviewed either in focus groups or individually, and were asked about their personal experiences of the Lord's Supper. Thirdly, a *Formal Voice* perspective is described on the basis of two different sources, namely individual interviews with the local ministers of the congregations studied, and a literature review of theological writings produced by theologians affiliated with the respective denominations. Lastly, a *Normative Voice* perspective is investigated through the analysis of relevant sections in the confessions, church orders, and liturgical forms that are adhered to by the denominations involved. All these sources were studied in the form of a literature review.

Following the description of the four perspectives in chapters 3–6, a “conversation” between them is constructed in chapter 7, in order to describe and analyze the similarities and differences between them. Possible lessons from this conversation have been formulated in chapter 8.

The results of this inquiry may contribute to our understanding of what happens in the Lord’s Supper from an empirical perspective. Moreover, it can serve to bolster the valuation of concrete liturgical ritual practice both within and outside the Dutch Reformed context by enabling congregations to assess and foster the celebration of Lord’s Supper from a fourfold perspective.

Research Design

For the description of the four perspectives on the Lord’s Supper, we opted for a qualitative research methodology. This choice made it possible to study and interpret the personal experiences of the interviewees without being restricted to predefined categories. The latter was especially important given the explorative nature of this study.

To limit the scope of this research, it was decided to select six congregations across two denominations. The following two denominations were selected: the *Christian Reformed Churches* (CRC) and the *Reformed Churches Liberated* (RCL), both located in the Netherlands. The latter was included because the researcher and his institution are affiliated with the RCL; the former was chosen because it shares a significant part of its history with the RCL, is roughly equal in size, shares the same synodal-presbyterial church model, and uses a similar church order. Furthermore, congregations of both denominations use largely similar liturgical forms.

Three CRC and three RCL congregations were selected for participation: CRC-A, CRC-B, CRC-C, RCL-D, RCL-E, and RCL-F. These differed in membership statistics, geographical location, and theological position. First, a worship service of these congregations in which the Lord’s Supper was administered was observed to describe the *operant* perspective. Next, various congregants from different age groups were randomly invited to participate in one of three focus group interviews per congregation, to investigate the *espoused* perspective. In one congregation (CRC-C), only individual interviews could be conducted. Following two focus group interviews (or multiple individual interviews), a second church service was observed, after which a third focus group interview was conducted. Afterwards, the local ministers were interviewed individually with a view to describing the *formal* perspective. Furthermore, a literature review was conducted to describe the relevant theological corpus written by CRC and RCL theologians (again, *formal* perspective) as well as the

relevant normative documents adhered to by both denominations (*normative perspective*).

The topic list used in this research was designed on the basis of a ritual studies perspective consisting of six items: style, meaning, conduct, space, experience of the self related to others, and experience of the self related to God. The data collection was conducted between October 2016 and February 2018. All interviews were conducted by the researcher himself. In total, 100 congregants and six ministers were interviewed. The data analysis was performed by the researcher in consultation with the research team as a whole (Jasper Bosman, Hans Schaeffer, Marcel Barnard). The transcripts were analyzed inductively using thematic analysis.

Operant Voice

In chapter 3, the *operant voice* is described based on the participatory observations conducted by the researcher. Two church services in which the Lord's Supper was administered are described per congregation. When these services were visited, special attention was paid to the aspects of ritual action as defined by Ronald Grimes. In total, twelve church services have been described. The descriptions show that there is room for considerable variety both within a denomination and even within a single congregation.

The greatest continuity between the two observed services could be observed in CRC-C, a congregation in which the Lord's Supper is celebrated four times per year, seated at a table. In the other congregations, less continuity was observed. The RCL churches in particular used alternating styles of celebration (e.g. sitting at a table, sitting in the pews, or ambulatory), leading to slight differences in *Ritual Actions*, *Ritual Times*, and/or *Ritual Places* in each celebration.

What remained constant across all six congregations were the *Ritual Actors*, *Ritual Objects*, and *Ritual Groups*, although even there some differences existed on a micro level. With regard to the ritual actors, in all churches it was the minister who administered the Lord's Supper, but the task of the elders and deacons did vary from congregation to congregation (depending on the style of celebration). Secondly, the ritual objects were more or less similar in all congregations, although there was variation in the size of the tables. Thirdly, the ritual groups were comparable, although some congregations were still more "open" to visitors than the others were.

Other ritual aspects did sometimes differ between and within the two denominations, as well as within the congregations themselves. This suggests that there is not just one CRC or RCL "operant theology," nor six local "operant theologies," but that there may be multiple theological prac-

tices coexisting within the different congregations and maybe even alternating on the local level.

Espoused Voice

The *espoused voice* is described in chapter 4. The analysis reveals that there are many different perceptions of and opinions on the Lord's Supper within the population of this study. These have been summarized using the themes that emerged from the interview data: (1) *Lord's Supper as Communion*, (2) *Attributed Meanings*, (3) *Opinions and Feelings*, (4) *Style, Ambiance, and Liturgy*, (5) *Personal Developments*, and (6) *Personal Desires*.

Lord's Supper as Communion The Lord's Supper was powerfully associated with *mutual communion*, and to a lesser degree with *communion with God*. In the interviews with congregants, communion with God was mentioned less frequently than communion with fellow communicants was. In one congregation, some congregants paid special attention to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Attributed Meanings Other meanings associated with the Lord's Supper included *grace and forgiveness*, the Lord's Supper as a *profession of faith*, a *commemoration*, a *feast to celebrate*, a moment of *personal reflection*, a moment of *looking forward* (eschatological), and *sacrament*. Most attention was paid to the aspects of grace and forgiveness as well as commemoration, while there was less emphasis on the other themes.

Opinions and Feelings Various opinions and feelings were shared by the interviewees: tensions when celebrating, the desire to celebrate consciously, the experience of "holiness," opinions on participating in and admission to the Lord's Supper, on preparation (or *zelfbeproeving*), the effects of participating in the celebrations, and the spiritual reflection (*nabetrachting*) following the celebrations.

Some participants indicated that they had at times temporarily withdrawn from the celebration of the sacrament in their own congregation, while a number of participants in CRC-C spoke of their past or even present abstinence from the Lord's Supper table (*avondmaalsmijding*). In RCL-D and F, some participants questioned the exclusion of children from the Lord's Supper in their congregation, as it is customarily practiced in almost all CRC and RCL congregations.

Style, Ambiance, and Liturgy With regard to the different styles of celebration, congregants shared multiple (sometimes contradicting)

preferences. Overall, participants were satisfied with the current style in use in their congregation. The congregants who were most convinced or enthusiastic about changing the status quo were those who at an earlier time had experienced a different style elsewhere (mostly RCL members).

The ambiance during the celebrations was given positive characterizations by some, like joyful, quiet, and silent, while others indicated that they found it excessively emotionally charged. Some disliked the tense or solemn faces they saw during the celebrations.

Regarding the liturgy used during the celebrations, participants were predominantly positive on the selection of Psalms or hymns. Some RCL members were critical of the practice of singing many—that is, too many—verses during ambulatory celebrations. The reading of the liturgical forms prior to communion was discussed in RCL congregations, both by its proponents and opponents, but it was not raised in CRC churches.

Personal Developments Various participants reported celebrating the Lord's Supper more consciously and intensely than before. This accumulation of meaning was reported to some degree among all age groups. A number of other participants reported an up-and-down development, or denied any personal development at all.

Personal Desires Personal desires regarding the Lord's Supper revolved for the most part around two positions: some participants were satisfied with the current practice and experience of the Lord's Supper in their congregation, while others longed for more festive celebrations and/or a more conscious experience. Other desires mentioned included a longing for celebrating the Lord's Supper with Jesus Himself and/or in combination with a common meal.

Formal Voice

The *formal voice* in this study is described in chapter 5 and consists of two parts: six individual interviews, and a review of theological literature.

Interviews with Ministers In the interviews with the local ministers, different meanings were attributed to the Lord's Supper. Both *communion with Christ* and *mutual communion* were mentioned, as well as the themes of *reconciliation* and *forgiveness*.

Ministers did not hesitate to call the Lord's Supper a *sacrament* and/or a *sign and seal*. The sacrament was characterized both as a *commemoration* and as a *feast to celebrate*. So too aspects like *eschatological expectation*, *command of Christ*, *moment of reflection*, and *gift of God* were mentioned. Some ministers called it a *source of comfort and peace*,

or a symbolization of the core of the Christian faith. None of the ministers questioned the admission policy in their local church, although one did emphasize that participation demands a positive personal choice on the part of all participants.

With regard their personal development, various ministers reported currently experiencing less stress when administering the sacrament than they had at the beginning of their careers. Various personal desires were also shared, among them the wish to experience more joyful celebrations, or the use of multiple celebration styles.

Review of Theological Literature The theological books published after 1944 by CRC and RCL theologians are discussed in the second part of chapter 5. What emerged is that CRC theologians closely align themselves with Scripture and the text of the confessions in their explanation of the Lord's Supper. In their publications, they emphasized the themes of *reconciliation, sin and guilt, commemoration, proclamation* (of "the death of Christ" by the celebration of the Lord's Supper), and the *expectation* of Christ's return.

Recent developments reported in CRC literature included two explanations of the classical liturgical form (composed by Dathenus in 1566), and a plea for the fundamental unity of Word (sermon) and sacrament—thereby criticizing the low frequency of celebrations, but at the same time also warning that a higher frequency requires true conversion on the part of the participants.

The views of RCL theologians on the Lord's Supper were discussed separately. They too closely aligned themselves with Scripture and confession, although some did stress the importance of a correct interpretation of certain passages more than their CRC colleagues did. Consequently, the *festive character* of the meal was given more attention. Emphasis was also placed on themes like *reconciliation, commemoration, proclamation, and expectation*. There was less attention than there was in CRC literature for *sin and guilt* and *self-examination* (although these themes were still discussed).

Recent developments in RCL literature include greater openness for liturgical renewal (since the 1990s), and more attention for the relationship between the sacrament and the worship service. As early as the 1970s, pleas could be heard for a higher frequency of celebration; these have been repeated by others from the 1990s up until the present day.

Normative Voice

In chapter 6, the *normative voice* is characterized on the basis of three different sources: confessions, church orders, and liturgical forms.

First, the relevant passages in the Belgic Confession (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and the Canons of Dort (1619) are summarized. Both the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism draw a close parallel between physical experience and the trustworthiness of God's acts. Both documents also stress that the sacrament is instituted by Christ Himself and that by eating and drinking bread and wine, believers are united more and more with Christ's body through the Holy Spirit. In the Canons of Dort, the sacraments are considered one of the means that God may use to exercise His power. They are thus characterized as means of grace that are given by God and may be used by believers.

Next, all regulations concerning the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the CRC and RCL church orders are analyzed. In CRC congregations, the sacrament is to be held at least once every three months, after preparation (self-examination and *censura morum*). According to the RCL regulations, the sacrament is to be celebrated "regularly." No instructions on preparation are included in them. RCL ministers may even introduce their own "variations" in the teaching part of the liturgical forms, provided that they obtain prior permission from the local church council. In the CRC, the liturgical forms are to be used at all times.

Lastly, the history and content of the different liturgical forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper are summarized.

Conversation

In chapter 7, the four theological voices described in the previous four chapters are brought into conversation with each other. Seven conversation topics are formulated following comparison of the similarities and differences between two or more different voices.

The Role of Experience A first topic of conversation is the role of experience (*beleving*) in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. According to various ministers, the Lord's Supper allows believers to experience something that cannot be experienced in "regular" church services. Nevertheless, CRC and RCL theological literature on the Lord's Supper included virtually no reflection on the value of corporeality and bodily experiences, even though the interviewed congregants gave expression to various desires for the fostering of their sacramental experiences (espoused voice). Similarly, the normative voice demands attention for the physicality of the celebration, while at the same time warning against the overvaluation of that corporeality.

Lord's Supper as Communion A second topic consists of a tension between greater emphasis on either communion with God or mutual

communion with fellow believers. In general, congregants tended to be more focused on the aspect of mutual communion, while ministers tried to keep a balance between the two. This difference between ministers and congregants calls for a conversation between the espoused and formal voices. Furthermore, it raises the question how mutual communion affects the communicants' daily life, given both the positive and the negative experiences shared by some interviewees.

Additionally, admission to the Lord's Supper was a subject of debate among some congregants, especially in RCL congregations. In the interviews, some of the RCL congregants raised new questions about the welcoming of children to the Lord's Supper and the exclusion of those who are under church discipline. Other questions, raised not by congregants but by some ministers, related to the admission of asylum seekers and people with disabilities.

Divine and Human Agency Thirdly, another difference between congregants and ministers revolved around the question of liturgical agency: while congregants spoke more about the role of human actors, ministers sought greater attention for the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the administration of the sacrament. Some congregants, however, also stressed the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit (RCL-E). In practice, all observed celebrations were performed primarily by the local minister. This raised the question whether the liturgical role of the communicants might be able to take another shape.

Preparation and Spiritual Reflection Fourthly, the preceding chapters noted how self-examination is deemed necessary for those who would like to participate in the Lord's Supper within CRC and RCL congregations. However, while some congregants underscored the need for personal and communal preparation, others indicated that they found it less important than in the past or not important at all. In general, CRC-B and RCL congregants regarded preparation as a more personal matter. One CRC minister doubted that the current practice for the midweek preparation meetings in his congregation would continue on for long. Similarly, some RCL ministers questioned the effectiveness and functioning of the practice of self-examination in their congregations. Taken together, this produces the question how strong the requirement for self-preparation really is. The same question applies to the spiritual reflection following the celebration.

Sin and Forgiveness A fifth topic revolved around the connection between the Lord's Supper and the theme of sin and forgiveness. The confessions and liturgical forms state that Christ died for the sins of believ-

ers, and that the Lord's Supper refers to that sacrifice through the signs of bread and wine. Although many congregants and all ministers generously agreed, some congregants also indicated experiencing forgiveness *during* the celebrations or feeling cleansed afterwards. Other congregants did place greater emphasis on other aspects of meaning like "mutual communion," or else interpreted the celebrations as a moment of personal reflection. This raises the question as to how "forgiveness of sins" is to be ritualized and experienced during the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Holiness and Stress The Lord's Supper is called "holy" in various normative documents of both denominations, although not consistently so. During the interviews, some congregants mentioned "holy" as a keyword when naming their first associations with the sacrament. For some of them, this word had a negative connotation as if the Lord's Supper has become excessively holy in their congregation (RCL-E and F). Some ministers recognized this development, and yet none of them used the adjective in a negative sense. The existence of feelings of stress among congregants with regard to sacramental participation may be related to their interpretation of holiness (espoused voice). However, feelings of stress and "negative" holiness were not extensively covered in the other theological voices, raising the question how such feelings might best be managed during the celebrations.

Feast and Commemoration Lastly, some RCL congregants proposed characterizing the Lord's Supper as a feast rather than a commemoration. The latter correlates with new accents in RCL theology published beginning in the 1980s. In the CRC, these accents are absent or play a less prominent role. In general, congregants and ministers in CRC-A and C did not express a longing for more cheerful celebrations, whereas various RCL members and some members of CRC-B did. Taken together, this yields the following questions: Should the celebrations in CRC and RCL congregations be given a more cheerful character, and, if so, how could this be accomplished?

Following the treatment of the seven conversation topics, chapter 7 includes a separate section on contextual aspects that may have influenced the findings in this study. These aspects include secularization, "intensification," embodiment, and "approaching God and the other."

Conclusion and Discussion

Chapter 8 offers an answer to the main research question of this study. Following the description of the performance, perception, and valuation of the celebration of the Lord's Supper in local CRC and RCL churches

in the preceding chapters, this final chapter formulates three concluding statements: (1) *Experience (Dutch: “beleving”) is important with regard to the Lord’s Supper*; (2) *Communion is central in the perception of the Lord’s Supper*; and (3) *In the Lord’s Supper, both sin and forgiveness, feast and commemoration, are symbolized*. Additionally, several practical recommendations have been formulated to inspire others to come up with answers tailored to their local ecclesial context.

In the “Discussion” section, the findings and recommendations of this study are then connected to ongoing reflection on the Lord’s Supper in contemporary Reformed theology, using the three concluding statements above.

The study closes with two final considerations with regard to the meaning of holiness and a renewed Reformed theology of the Lord’s Supper (especially with regard to the connection between the signs and the signified). These considerations are accompanied with three questions for further thought: (1) *Where does the Lord’s Supper really belong?* (e.g. within or outside church services); (2) *Is the Lord’s Supper primarily an act of “looking back” or is it more than that?*; and (3) *How might congregations in their practice respond to the findings presented in this study?*

Samenvatting

Introductie

De centrale vraag in dit onderzoek luidt: *Hoe wordt de viering van het Heilig Avondmaal in lokale CGK- en GKV-kerken uitgevoerd, ervaren en gewaardeerd, en wat kan daarvan geleerd worden?* Deze vraag is voortgekomen uit de waarneming dat er tot op heden weinig empirisch onderzoek gedaan is naar het avondmaal in de gereformeerde traditie en in de Nederlandse context in het bijzonder. Dit onderzoek probeert deze leemte te vullen door de uitvoering, beleving en waardering van het avondmaal binnen twee gereformeerde denominaties in Nederland te beschrijven en te analyseren vanuit vier verschillende perspectieven. Deze perspectieven zijn afgeleid van het “theologie in vier stemmen”-model (*Theology in Four Voices*), een onderzoeksinstrument dat ontwikkeld is door het project *Action Research: Church and Society* (ARCS) in Groot-Brittannië. Elke “stem” in dit model is volledig theologisch van aard en vertegenwoordigt een mogelijk perspectief op de ene realiteit.

In dit boek wordt het avondmaal eerst omschreven vanuit het perspectief van de operante stem (*Operant Voice*). Dit behelst wat wordt gedaan en gezegd in de kerkdiensten waarin het avondmaal wordt bediend (d.i. de theologie die begrepen is in de kerkelijke praktijken die ter plaatse worden beoefend). Ten tweede wordt het avondmaal beschreven vanuit het perspectief van de “aangehangen” stem (*Espoused Voice*). Deze stem belichaamt in dit onderzoek de mening van de belijdende leden (predikanten, ouderlingen en diakenen uitgezonderd). Deze zijn ofwel in focusgroepen ofwel individueel geïnterviewd over hun persoonlijke beleving van het avondmaal. Ten derde wordt de formele stem (*Formal Voice*) beschreven op basis van twee verschillende bronnen: enerzijds individuele interviews met de lokale predikanten, anderzijds een literatuuronderzoek naar de theologische opvattingen over het avondmaal in publicaties van de hand van respectievelijk CGK- en GKV-theologen. Tenslotte wordt het perspectief van de normatieve stem (*Normative Voice*) onderzocht door de analyse van relevante tekstgedeelten uit de belijdenissen, kerkordes en liturgische formulieren die gelden binnen beide denominaties. Al deze

bronnen zijn onderzocht door middel van literatuuronderzoek.

Na beschrijving van de vier perspectieven in de hoofdstukken 3–6 is een “gesprek” tussen de vier stemmen geconstrueerd in hoofdstuk 7 ten einde de overeenkomsten en verschillen tussen deze stemmen te beschrijven en te analyseren. Mogelijke lessen die uit deze conversatie volgen zijn geformuleerd in hoofdstuk 8.

De resultaten van dit onderzoek kunnen bijdragen aan het verstaan van wat er gebeurt in het avondmaal vanuit een empirisch perspectief. Bovendien kan dit onderzoek de waardering van concrete, liturgisch-rituele praktijken bevorderen, zowel binnen als buiten de Nederlandse gereformeerde context, door lokale kerken in de gelegenheid te stellen om de beleving van het avondmaal te onderzoeken en te bevorderen vanuit een viervoudig perspectief.

Onderzoeksontwerp

Om de vier perspectieven op het avondmaal te beschrijven is gekozen voor het gebruik van een kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethodologie. Deze keuze maakte het mogelijk om de persoonlijke ervaringen van de geïnterviewden te onderzoeken zonder beperkt te worden door vooraf gedefinieerde antwoordcategorieën. Het laatste was met name van belang gezien het exploratieve karakter van dit onderzoek.

Om de reikwijdte van dit onderzoek te beperken is besloten om zes lokale kerken binnen twee denominaties te selecteren. De volgende twee denominaties werden geselecteerd: de *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* (CGK = CRC) en de *Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt)* (GKV = RCL). De laatste werd geselecteerd omdat de onderzoeker en zijn onderzoeksinstituut verbonden zijn aan de GKV; de eerste werd gekozen omdat het een groot deel van zijn geschiedenis deelt met de GKV, ongeveer even groot is qua ledental, hetzelfde model van kerkregering toepast (synodaal-presbyteriaal) en een soortgelijke kerkorde gebruikt. Bovendien gebruiken lokale kerken binnen beide denominaties soortgelijke liturgische formulieren.

Drie CGK- en drie GKV-kerken werden geselecteerd voor deelname: CRC-A, CRC-B, CRC-C, RCL-D, RCL-E en RCL-F. Deze kerken verschilden in ledental, geografische locatie en theologische ligging. In elk van deze kerken werd eerst een avondmaalsdienst geobserveerd, om het *operante* perspectief te beschrijven. Vervolgens werden gemeenteleden van verschillende leeftijdscategorieën aselect uitgenodigd om deel te nemen aan één van de drie focusgroepen per gemeente, om het *aangehangen* perspectief te onderzoeken. In één gemeente (CRC-C) konden alleen individuele interviews gehouden worden. Na twee focusgroepen (of meerdere individuele interviews) werd een tweede avondmaalsdienst geobserveerd

waarna een derde focusgroep werd gehouden. Vervolgens werden de lokale predikanten individueel geïnterviewd om het *formele* perspectief te beschrijven. Aanvullend werd relevante theologische literatuur van de hand van CGK- en GKV-theologen onderzocht (opnieuw om het *formele* perspectief te beschrijven) evenals de relevante normatieve documenten die door beide denominaties worden onderschreven (met het oog op het *normatieve* perspectief).

De *topic list* die in dit onderzoek is gebruikt is ontworpen op basis van een *ritual studies* perspectief dat bestaat uit zes items: vorm, betekenis, gedrag, ruimte, ervaring van het zelf in relatie tot anderen en ervaring van het zelf in relatie tot God. De datacollectie is uitgevoerd tussen oktober 2016 en februari 2018. Alle interviews zijn uitgevoerd door de onderzoeker zelf. In totaal zijn 100 gemeenteleden en zes predikanten geïnterviewd. De data-analyse is uitgevoerd door de onderzoeker in overleg met het onderzoeksteam als geheel (Jasper Bosman, Hans Schaeffer en Marcel Barnard). De interviewtranscripten zijn inductief geanalyseerd door middel van thematische analyse.

Operante stem

In hoofdstuk 3 is de *operante stem* beschreven op basis van de participerende observaties die door de onderzoeker zijn uitgevoerd. Per lokale kerk zijn twee avondmaalsdiensten beschreven. Toen deze diensten zijn bezocht is speciale aandacht geschonken aan de aspecten van ritueel handelen zoals gedefinieerd door Ronald Grimes. In totaal zijn twaalf kerkdiensten omschreven. De beschrijvingen laten zien dat er ruimte is voor aanzienlijke variatie, zowel binnen een denominatie alsook binnen sommige individuele gemeenten.

De grootste continuïteit tussen beide geobserveerde kerkdiensten kon waargenomen worden in CRC-C, een gemeente waarin het avondmaal vier keer per jaar zittend aan tafel wordt bediend. In andere gemeenten was er minder continuïteit zichtbaar. De GKV-gemeenten in het bijzonder gebruikten afwisselend verschillende vormen van vieren (bv. zittend aan een tafel, zittend in de banken of lopend), wat leidt tot kleine verschillen op het gebied van *rituele handelingen*, *rituele tijden* en/of *rituele plaatsen* per viering.

Andere aspecten als *rituele actoren*, *rituele objecten* en *rituele groepen* bleven grotendeels gelijk binnen de onderzochte gemeenten, hoewel er ook op deze punten kleine verschillen bestonden. Met betrekking tot de rituele actoren was het in alle gevallen de predikant die het avondmaal bediende, maar de taak van de ouderlingen en diakenen verschilde per gemeente (afhankelijk van de vorm van vieren). Ten tweede waren de rituele objecten min of meer gelijk in alle gemeenten hoewel er variatie was

in de grootte van de avondmaalstafels. Ten derde waren de rituele groepen vergelijkbaar hoewel sommige gemeenten meer “open” waren naar gasten dan andere.

Andere rituele aspecten verschilden soms tussen en binnen de beide denominaties alsook binnen de lokale kerken zelf. Dit suggereert dat er niet een enkele CGK of GKV “operante theologie” bestaat, noch zes lokale “operante theologieën,” maar dat er meerdere theologische praktijken naast elkaar kunnen bestaan binnen de verschillende gemeenten en dat deze eventueel afgewisseld kunnen worden op lokaal niveau.

Aangehangen stem

De *aangehangen stem* is omschreven in hoofdstuk 4. De analyse laat zien dat er veel verschillende waarnemingen van en meningen over het avondmaal bestaan onder de deelnemers aan dit onderzoek. Deze perspectieven en meningen zijn samengevat aan de hand van de thema’s die naar voren kwamen uit de interviewdata: (1) *Avondmaal als gemeenschap*, (2) *Toegekende betekenissen*, (3) *Meningen en gevoelens*, (4) *Vorm, sfeer en liturgie*, (5) *Persoonlijke ontwikkelingen* en (6) *Persoonlijke verlangens*.

Avondmaal als gemeenschap Het avondmaal werd sterk geassocieerd met *gemeenschap met elkaar*, en in mindere mate met *gemeenschap met God*. In de interviews met gemeenteleden werd gemeenschap met God minder vaak genoemd dan gemeenschap met elkaar. In één gemeente schonken sommige gemeenteleden extra aandacht aan het werk van de Heilige Geest.

Toegekende betekenissen Andere betekenissen die met het avondmaal werden geassocieerd waren *genade en vergeving*, het avondmaal als *belijdenis van geloof*, het *gedenken* van iets, een *feest om te vieren*, een moment van *persoonlijke reflectie*, een moment van *vooruitkijken* (eschatologisch), en *sacrament*. De meeste aandacht ging uit naar de aspecten ‘genade en vergeving’ evenals ‘gedenken’. Aan de andere thema’s werd relatief minder aandacht besteed.

Meningen en gevoelens Meerdere meningen en gevoelens werden gedeeld door de geïnterviewden: spanningen tijdens het vieren, het verlangen om bewust te vieren, de ervaring van “heiligheid,” meningen over het deelnemen aan en de toelating tot het avondmaal, over de zelfbeproeving, over de effecten van het participeren in de vieringen en over de nabetrachting die daarop volgt.

Sommige deelnemers gaven aan dat ze op sommige momenten niet hadden deelgenomen aan de vieringen van het avondmaal in hun eigen

gemeente. Tegelijkertijd sprak een aantal deelnemers in CRC-C over hun mijding van het avondmaal in heden of verleden (specifiek in de zin van *avondmaalsmijding*). Andere deelnemers in RCL-D en -F stelden vragen bij de in hun gemeente gangbare praktijk van het uitsluiten van kinderen van deelname aan het avondmaal, een praktijk die ook gebruikelijk is in bijna alle andere CGK- en GKV-gemeenten.

Vorm, sfeer en liturgie Met betrekking tot de verschillende vormen van vieren deelden de deelnemers meerdere (soms tegenstrijdige) voorkeuren. In het algemeen waren de geïnterviewden tevreden met de huidige vorm van vieren in hun eigen gemeente. De gemeenteleden die het meest overtuigd of enthousiast waren over het veranderen van de status quo waren degenen die eerder elders een andere vorm hadden meegemaakt (voornamelijk GKV-leden)

De sfeer tijdens de vieringen (zoals vrolijk, rustig en stil) werd positief gewaardeerd door sommigen terwijl anderen aangaven dat ze deze teveel emotioneel geladen vonden. Sommigen hekelden de gespannen of ernstige gezichten die zij waarnamen tijdens de vieringen.

Wat betreft de liturgie die tijdens de vieringen wordt gebruikt waren de deelnemers overwegend positief over de liedkeuze (psalmen of gezangen). Sommige GKV-leden waren kritisch op het gebruik van het zingen van (te) veel verzen tijdens de lopende vieringen. Het lezen van de liturgische formulieren voor de daadwerkelijke bediening werd bediscussieerd in GKV-gemeenten (zowel door voor- als tegenstanders), maar werd niet genoemd in CGK-gemeenten.

Persoonlijke ontwikkelingen Meerdere deelnemers gaven aan het avondmaal meer bewust en intens te vieren dan eerder. Deze toename van betekenis werd tot op zekere hoogte gerapporteerd door deelnemers uit alle leeftijdscategorieën. Sommige deelnemers spraken over een op-en-neer-gaande ontwikkeling terwijl anderen in het geheel geen persoonlijke ontwikkeling met betrekking tot het avondmaal bij zichzelf opmerkten.

Persoonlijke verlangens Persoonlijke verlangens met betrekking tot het avondmaal waren grofweg in te delen in twee verschillende standpunten: sommige deelnemers waren tevreden met de huidige praktijk en beleving van het avondmaal in hun eigen gemeente terwijl anderen verlangen naar meer feestelijke vieringen en/of een meer bewuste ervaring. Andere verlangens waren: het avondmaal met Jezus zelf willen vieren en/of in combinatie met een gewone maaltijd.

Formele stem

De *formele stem* in dit boek is omschreven in hoofdstuk 5. Dit hoofdstuk bestaat uit twee delen: de analyse van zes individuele interviews met predikanten en de beschrijving van een theologisch literatuuronderzoek.

Interviews met predikanten In de interviews met de lokale predikanten werden verschillende betekenissen toegekend aan het avondmaal. Zowel *gemeenschap met Christus* en *gemeenschap met elkaar* werden genoemd als de thema's *verzoening* en *vergeving*.

Predikanten noemden het avondmaal zonder aarzelen een *sacrament* en/of een *teken en zegel*. Het sacrament werd getypeerd als *gedenken* en als een *feest om te vieren*. Tegelijk werden aspecten als *eschatologische verwachting*, *opdracht van Christus*, *moment van reflectie* en *geschenk van God* genoemd. Sommige predikanten noemden het avondmaal een *bron van troost en vrede* of een uitbeelding van de kern van het christelijke geloof. Geen van de predikanten stelde vragen bij het toelatingsbeleid in zijn gemeente, hoewel één predikant benadrukte dat deelname een positieve keuze vraagt van alle deelnemers persoonlijk.

Met betrekking tot hun persoonlijke ontwikkeling in relatie tot het avondmaal stelden verschillende predikanten momenteel minder stress te ervaren tijdens het bedienen dan tijdens het begin van hun carrière. Daarnaast werden diverse persoonlijke verlangens gedeeld, waaronder het verlangen om meer vreugdevolle vieringen te beleven of meerdere vormen van vieren te gebruiken.

Theologische literatuur In het tweede deel van hoofdstuk 5 worden de theologische boeken besproken die door CGK- of GKV-theologen zijn gepubliceerd sinds 1944. Wat opvalt is dat CGK-theologen in hun uitleg van het avondmaal nauw aansluiten bij de tekst van de Bijbel en van de belijdenissen. In hun publicaties benadrukken zij de thema's *verzoening*, *zonde en schuld*, *gedenken*, *verkondiging* (van "de dood van Christus," door het avondmaal te vieren) en de *verwachting* van Christus' wederkomst.

Recente ontwikkelingen in de CGK-literatuur betreffen twee verklaringen van het klassieke avondmaalsformulier (samengesteld door Dathen in 1566) en een pleidooi voor de fundamentele eenheid van Woord (preek) en sacrament—wat tegelijkertijd de lage frequentie van vieren onder kritiek stelt, maar vergezeld door een waarschuwing dat een hogere avondmaalsfrequentie ware bekering vereist van de kant van de deelnemers.

De bijdragen van GKV-theologen over het avondmaal werden apart besproken. Ook zij sluiten nauw aan bij Schrift en belijdenis, hoewel sommigen het belang van een juiste interpretatie van bepaalde passages

benadrukten (meer dan CGK-theologen). Als gevolg hiervan legden ze meer nadruk op het *feestelijke karakter* van de maaltijd. Andere thema's die werden benadrukt waren *verzoening, gedenken, verkondiging, en verwachting*. Minder dan in de CGK-literatuur werd er aandacht geschonken aan de thema's *zonde en schuld* en *zelfbeproeving* (hoewel deze thema's wel ter sprake kwamen).

Recente ontwikkelingen binnen de GKV-literatuur behelzen een grotere openheid voor liturgische vernieuwing (sinds de jaren 1990) en meer aandacht voor de relatie tussen het sacrament en de kerkdienst. Pleidooien voor een hogere avondmaalsfrequentie konden gehoord worden vanaf de jaren 1970; vanaf de jaren 1990 tot heden zijn deze pleidooien herhaald.

Normatieve stem

De *normatieve stem* is gekarakteriseerd in hoofdstuk 6 op basis van drie verschillende bronnen: de belijdenissen, kerkordes en liturgische formulieren.

Ten eerste worden de relevante passages in de Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis (1561), de Heidelbergse Catechismus (1563) en de Dordtse Leerregels (1619) samengevat. Zowel in de Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis als in de Heidelbergse Catechismus wordt er een nauwe parallel getekend tussen de lichamelijke ervaring en de betrouwbaarheid van Gods handelen. Tevens wordt in beide documenten benadrukt dat het sacrament door Christus zelf is ingesteld en dat de gelovigen door het eten en drinken van brood en wijn meer en meer met Christus' lichaam verenigd worden, door de Heilige Geest. In de Dordtse Leerregels worden de sacramenten beschouwd als één van de middelen die God kan gebruiken om Zijn macht uit te oefenen. Deze worden dus beschouwd als genademiddelen die door God gegeven zijn en door de gelovigen gebruikt kunnen worden.

Vervolgens worden alle bepalingen met betrekking tot de viering van het avondmaal in de kerkordes van CGK en GKV geanalyseerd. In CGK-kerken is bepaald dat het sacrament minstens eenmaal per drie maanden bediend wordt, na gehouden voorbereiding (zelfbeproeving en *censura morum*). Volgens de GKV-regelingen moet het sacrament "regelmatig" bediend worden. Bepalingen over de voorbereiding ontbreken. GKV-predikanten mogen "variëren" in het onderwijzende deel van de formulieren, op voorwaarde dat zij eerst toestemming van de plaatselijke kerkeraad hebben verkregen. Binnen de CGK moeten de liturgische formulieren onverkort gebruikt worden.

Tenslotte wordt de geschiedenis en inhoud van de verschillende avondmaalsformulieren samengevat.

Conversatie

In hoofdstuk 7 worden de vier theologische stemmen, die in de voorgaande hoofdstukken zijn beschreven, met elkaar in gesprek gebracht. Zeven verschillende discussiepunten zijn geformuleerd, volgend uit een vergelijking van de overeenkomsten en verschillen tussen twee of meer verschillende theologische stemmen.

De rol van beleving Een eerste discussiepunt is de rol van beleving tijdens de viering van het avondmaal. Volgens meerdere predikanten stelt het avondmaal gelovigen in staat om iets te ervaren dat niet in “reguliere” kerkdiensten ervaren kan worden. Desondanks is er nauwelijks reflectie op de waarde van lichamelijke en fysieke ervaringen in CGK- en GKV-literatuur over avondmaal opgenomen, ondanks dat de geïnterviewde gemeenteleden verschillende verlangens benoemden ter bevordering van hun beleving van het sacrament (aangehangen stem). Op soortgelijke wijze vraagt de normatieve stem aandacht voor de tastbaarheid van de viering, maar niet zonder een waarschuwing tegen overwaardering van deze lichamelijkeheid.

Avondmaal als gemeenschap Een tweede gespreksonderwerp bestaat uit de spanning tussen meer nadruk op ofwel de gemeenschap met God ofwel de gemeenschap met elkaar. Gemeenteleden schonken over het algemeen meer aandacht aan de gemeenschap met elkaar terwijl predikanten evenwicht probeerden te bewaren tussen beide vormen van gemeenschap. Dit verschil tussen predikanten en gemeenteleden vraagt om een gesprek tussen de aangehangen en formele stemmen. Daarnaast leidt dit tot de vraag hoe de gemeenschap met elkaar het dagelijks leven van gemeenteleden beïnvloedt, vanwege zowel positieve als negatieve connotaties die werden gedeeld door sommige geïnterviewden.

Aanvullend was de toelating tot het Heilig Avondmaal onderwerp van discussie onder sommige gemeenteleden, met name in de GKV-gemeenten. Sommige GKV-leden stelden nieuwe vragen over het toelaten van kinderen aan het avondmaal en over de uitsluiting van degenen die onder de tucht staan. Andere vragen, niet door gemeenteleden maar door predikanten gesteld, betroffen de toelating van asielzoekers en mensen met een beperking.

Goddelijke en menselijke interventie Een derde verschil tussen gemeenteleden en predikanten ontwikkelde zich rond de vraag naar interventie (*agency*) in de liturgie: terwijl gemeenteleden vaker spraken over de rol van menselijke actoren vroegen predikanten meer aandacht voor het werk van Christus en de Heilige Geest in de bediening van het sacrament. Echter, sommige gemeenteleden benadrukten ook het belang

van het werk van de Heilige Geest (RCL-E). In de praktijk werden alle geobserveerde vieringen voornamelijk uitgevoerd door de lokale predikant, wat tot de vraag leidt hoe de liturgische rollen van gemeenteleden eventueel anders vorm zouden kunnen krijgen.

Vorbereitung en nabetrachtung Ten vierde is in de voorgaande hoofdstukken uitgelegd dat zelfbeproeving nodig wordt geacht voor wie wil deelnemen aan het avondmaal binnen CGK- en GKV-gemeenten. Echter, hoewel sommige gemeenteleden de noodzaak van persoonlijke en gemeenschappelijke voorbereiding onderstreepten, stelden anderen dit niet meer zo belangrijk te vinden als in het verleden of in het geheel niet belangrijk. In het algemeen beschouwden leden van CRC-B en GKV-gemeenteleden de voorbereiding als een persoonlijke zaak. Eén CGK-predikant vroeg zich af hoe lang de doordeweekse voorbereidingsbijeenkomsten in zijn gemeente nog op de huidige manier georganiseerd zouden worden. Tegelijk vroegen sommige GKV-predikanten zich af of de voorbereidingspraktijk in hun gemeenten nog wel effectief functioneert. Samengenomen leidt dit tot de vraag hoe sterk de eis tot zelfbeproeving moet zijn. Dezelfde vraag geldt ook met betrekking tot de nabetrachtung ná de viering.

Zonde en vergeving Een vijfde discussiepunt ontspon zich rond het verband tussen avondmaal en het thema van zonde en vergeving. De belijdenissen en liturgische formulieren stellen dat Christus is gestorven voor de zonden van de gelovigen en dat het avondmaal verwijst naar dit offer door de tekenen van brood en wijn. Hoewel veel gemeenteleden en alle predikanten hier ruimhartig instemming mee verklaarden, gaven sommige gemeenteleden aan *tijdens* of na afloop van de avondmaalsvieringen een gevoel van gereinigd-zijn te ervaren. Andere gemeenteleden legden meer nadruk op andere betekenisaspecten, zoals “gemeenschap met elkaar,” of interpreteerden de vieringen als een moment van persoonlijke reflectie. Dit leidt tot de vraag hoe “vergeving van zonden” het beste vormgegeven en beleefd kan worden tijdens de viering van het avondmaal.

Heiligheid en stress Het avondmaal wordt “heilig” genoemd in meerdere normatieve documenten van beide denominaties, hoewel niet consequent. Sommige gemeenteleden noemden het trefwoord “heilig” tijdens de interviews wanneer zij spraken over hun eerste associaties met het sacrament. Voor sommigen van hen had dit woord een negatieve connotatie als zou het avondmaal extreem heilig geworden zijn in hun gemeente (RCL-E en F). Sommige predikanten herkenden deze ontwikkelingen, hoewel geen van hen dit trefwoord in negatieve zin gebruikte. Het bestaan van gevoelens van stress onder gemeenteleden met betrekking

tot de participatie in het avondmaal zou gerelateerd kunnen zijn aan hun interpretatie van heiligheid (aangehangen stem). Echter, deze gevoelens van stress en “negatieve” heiligheid werden niet uitgebreid genoemd in de andere theologische stemmen, wat leidt tot de vraag hoe het beste met zulke gevoelens omgegaan kan worden tijdens de vieringen.

Feest en gedenken Tenslotte hebben sommige GKV-gemeenteleden voorgesteld om het avondmaal meer als een feest dan als een herdenking te interpreteren. Dit correleert met nieuwe accenten in het werk van GKV-theologen vanaf de jaren 1980. Binnen de CGK zijn deze accenten afwezig of spelen zij een minder prominente rol. In het algemeen hebben gemeenteleden en predikanten van CRC-A en C geen verlangen geuit naar meer feestelijke vieringen, terwijl meerdere GKV-leden en sommige leden van CRC-B dit wel gedaan hebben. Samengenomen leidt dit tot de volgende vragen: Moeten de vieringen in CGK- en GKV-gemeenten een meer feestelijk karakter krijgen, en zo ja, hoe zou dit bereikt kunnen worden?

Na behandeling van de zeven gespreksonderwerpen bevat hoofdstuk 7 een aparte paragraaf over de contextuele aspecten die mogelijk samenhangen met de uitkomsten van dit onderzoek als geheel. Deze aspecten zijn: secularisatie, “intensivering,” belichaming, en “het benaderen van God en de ander.”

Conclusie en discussie

Hoofdstuk 8 biedt een antwoord op de hoofdvraag van dit onderzoek. Nadat in de voorgaande hoofdstukken is beschreven hoe de viering van het Heilig Avondmaal in lokale CGK en GKV kerken wordt uitgevoerd, ervaren en gewaardeerd, worden er in het slothoofdstuk drie stellingen geformuleerd bij wijze van leerpunten die daaruit volgen: (1) *Beleving is belangrijk met betrekking tot het avondmaal*; (2) *Gemeenschap is een kernpunt in de perceptie van het avondmaal*; (3) *In het avondmaal worden zowel zonde als genade, zowel feest als gedenken, gesymboliseerd*. Aanvullend zijn diverse praktische aanbevelingen geformuleerd om anderen te inspireren om antwoorden te vinden die toegepast zijn op hun eigen lokale, kerkelijke situatie.

In de hierop volgende “discussie” worden de conclusies en aanbevelingen uit dit onderzoek verbonden met de doorgaande reflectie op het avondmaal in de hedendaagse gereformeerde theologie, op basis van de drie concluderende stellingen hierboven.

Het onderzoek wordt afgesloten met twee afsluitende beschouwingen met betrekking tot de betekenis van heiligheid en een vernieuwde gereformeerde avondmaalsleer (met name met betrekking tot de relatie tussen

de tekenen en de betekende zaak). Deze beschouwingen worden aangevuld met drie vragen voor vervolgonderzoek: (1) *Waar hoort het avondmaal nu echt thuis?* (bijvoorbeeld binnen of buiten de kerkdienst); (2) *Is het avondmaal voornamelijk een daad van “terugkijken” of is het meer dan dat?*; en (3) *Op welke manier kunnen kerken praktisch aan de slag met de conclusies van dit onderzoek?*

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Curriculum Vitae

Jasper Bosman was born in Zwolle in 1986. Between 1998 and 2004 he attended Greijdanus College in Zwolle. In 2004 he enrolled in the preparatory classical education program at Kampen Theological University (Broederweg), and began the study of theology in 2005. He completed his bachelor's and master's degree (cum laude) in 2011 and 2014, respectively, the latter with a major in practical theology. Between 2006 and 2008 he also took propaedeutic courses in philosophy at Utrecht University. In 2015 he was accepted to the PhD program at Kampen Theological University, completing his dissertation in 2019. He is currently working as a pastor in a CRC and RCL merger church in the city of Hilversum.

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