

Calvin's concept of and the Formulary of the GKSA on the Lord's Supper

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Abstract

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*Dutch humanists provided Zwingli with a symbolic concept of the Lord's Supper by which the bread and wine symbolise the body and blood of Christ on Calvary. These symbolic concepts of body and blood should be commemorated (in memoriam) and believed to receive atonement from sin. The Formulary and formula for administering the sacrament in the GKSA were inherited from the Netherlands and contain phrases originally used by Calvin. It is widely claimed and assumed that the contents of the Formulary corresponds with concepts derived from Calvin. Calvin's commentaries on relevant passages and concepts expressed in his **Institutes** and **Tracts** differ radically and entirely from the trend and content of the Formulary and formula of administration used in the GKSA. Calvin does not isolate the death of Christ from resurrection. He does not dwell upon communion with something Christ did for us in the past. He accepts the sacrifice (blood) to ratify a covenant (new testament) by which the household of God is established. The bread and cup signify Christ, and are regarded as God's spiritual nourishment for his household. The living Christ in heaven is present in the Holy Spirit at the Lord's health-giving table. The symbols of bread and cup remain what they are but through faith change to represent Christ. Calvin's concept of communion and unity is irreconcilable with the concept of a sacramental meal of commemoration (Zwingli). The concept of communion corresponds with early Christian and even Roman and Lutheran traditions. Faith in atonement belongs to commencement of salvation (viz. baptism and the Formulary of the GKSA on the Lord's Supper). Being nourished with Christ through faith belongs to the consummation of salvation (viz. communion).*

1. Introduction

The Formulary used in the GKSA for the administering of the Lord's Supper was originally drafted by Olevianus in 1563, incorporated in the liturgy of Datheen and accepted by the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands at the Synod of Dordrecht in 1619 (Wielenga, 1913: 15 ff.). This formulary claimed to be based on the concepts of John Calvin (Wielenga, 1913:16; Van der Walt, 1990:187). Wielenga (1913:18 ff.) nevertheless concedes that Olevianus used phrases from Calvin's formulary in such a way that he created a new and his own original formulary.

The Dutch humanists, Hoen and Rode, presented Zwingli with a symbolic interpretation of the Lord's Supper, i.e. a meal of bread and wine symbolising the body and blood of Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary in order that this may be remembered as the foundation of redemption. The influence of Zwingli on the Dutch Reformation and Reformers like A Lasco, Micron and Olevianus is widely recognised¹. Calvin, on the other hand, had little direct influence in the Netherlands during his lifetime. It is significant that Olevianus informed Calvin in 1563 that his concept of the Lord's Supper was rejected in that part of Europe (Van 't Spijker 1980:373 cf. 414). It is remarkable that the Dutch churches also followed Zwingli's practice of celebrating the Supper. Synods during the 16th century and the Synod of Dordrecht 1618/19 prescribed – in line with Zwingli's views – a special Holy Communion service every few months. This service was to follow a preparatory service. The service had to be conducted with the prescribed formulary (Pont, 1981:183, 247). Calvin, on the other hand, argued that the gathering of believers should be consummated every week in communion with Christ and each other in celebrating communion by means of the the Lord's Supper.

Although the Formulary for baptism refers to circumcision in the Old Testament, Calvin as well as Olevianus do not refer to the Passover (Exod. 12) where blood on the posts testified to justification (redemption) and a meal as nourishment for the journey to the promised land (sanctification and glorification). Calvin's doctrine on the Lord's Supper is discussed elsewhere (cf. Balke, 1980b; Gerrish, 1993). In this article it attempted to explore original sources on Calvin's concepts of the Lord's Supper and to compare these findings cursorily with the main trend of the Formulary used in the GKSA.

1 Cf. Kaajan, s.a.:605 ff.; Nauta, 1959:360 ff.; Kooiman, 1959:506; Van Itterzon, 1961:721; De Groot, 1956:410; Bouwman, s.a.:206; Landwehr, s.a.(a):747; s.a.(b):842; Balke, 1980a:152 ff., 170 ff.; Tanis, 1991.

2. The structure of the Formulary of the GKSA

The present Formulary of the GKSA for the celebration of the Lord's Supper is basically inherited from the Netherlands and analysed by Wielenga (1913). It is noteworthy that not the authentic words of Christ but Paul's tradition in 1 Corinthians 11:24, 25 is taken to introduce the Lord's Supper (Wielenga, 1913:31). Although Paul's tradition is authoritative, it must be kept in mind that he used it to correct certain abuses in the congregation. The question, however, remains why he did not follow the original institution by Christ.

The introduction of the Formulary is followed by an admonishment compelling self-examination to determine basically to what extent faith in God's promises of salvation and obedience to his will are in control of every believer's life. The emphasis in the Formulary on the confession of sins, faith in the justification because of the atonement on Calvary and the response of a new life of thanksgiving and sanctification correspond with the concepts of Calvin. The prayer before the Supper to great extent contains phrases from Calvin but does not represent the main core of the Formulary.

The way in which the Formulary refers to the future of the kingdom (kingship) of Christ, gives the impression that the kingdom of God belongs to the future and not to the present. According to Ridderbos (1950:51 ff., 337 ff.) that may happen when the motive of death as atonement replaces the aspect of "realised eschatology". From a perspective on the kingdom of God a celebration of the Supper that centres in the cross and death of Christ is, according to Ridderbos (1950:343), totally wrong because it denies the presence of Christ in the Spirit. He asserts that the Lord's Supper requires a joyful celebration and not the atmosphere of a funeral.

It is therefore important to analyse the second main issue in the Formulary, namely how Christ should be commemorated. The Formulary calls upon the believers to remember the gross suffering and death of Christ in order to achieve justification and atonement. The wording of the Formulary even gives the impression that this aspect of redemption comprises the covenant of grace. If this conclusion is correct the Formulary of the GKSA falls short to Calvin's explanation of the covenant of grace (the new testament ratified in the blood of Christ).

Calvin administered Holy Communion with the words (cf. Matt. 26): "This is the cup of the New Testament in the blood of Jesus which had been spilt on your behalf" (Schulze, 2000: CO 6; De Groot, 1956:413). The synods of the Dutch Churches 1574-1581 rejected this formula and had

chosen deliberately to administer the Supper with a formula which A Lasco had derived from 1 Corinthians 10:16 (De Groot, 1956:413; Wielenga, 1913:24). This formula asserts that the Lord's Supper is directed to commemorate the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary by means of bread and wine. The bread and wine serve as symbols of his body and blood in order to redeem us by faith (alone) from sin. Through faith the believer receives perfect atonement. The Lord's Supper is therefore a meal of remembrance (in memoriam) to commemorate the death of Christ on our behalf. A meal of remembrance commemorating the mediator's work on Calvary differs from the sacramental Eucharist of communion with the living Christ in the early Christian, Roman and Lutheran traditions. The question must therefore be raised if it can be claimed that the Formulary of the GKSA is in accordance with Calvin's guidelines for reformation: restore according to the custom of the early churches (Brienen, 1987).

3. Calvin's concept of the Lord's Supper

3.1 Calvin's interpretation of the institution of the Lord's Supper according to the Synoptic Gospels

3.1.1 The sacrament was instituted to sustain communion in a changed situation

The sacrament was instituted to sustain communion in a changed situation between Christ and his disciples after his death and resurrection. Calvin's commentary (1846:202-215) on Matthew 26, Mark 14 and Luke 22 emphasises the fact that a "new mystery" was instituted in the Passover-context because the disciples had to set their mind on Jesus as the core of a new testament, ratified by his death and "a clear testimony should be distinguished from the ancient shadow". Food is important to sustain this "fading life". Jesus took food from real life in order to give "testimony of the spiritual life". He participated in the meal with His disciples. The communion therefore testifies to the nourishment that the Heavenly Father provides for the children in his household (i.e. his covenant of grace). Christ gave himself to his disciples the way the food was given in the Supper because soon everything would change. He would be crucified, resurrected and glorified. His Ascension might have led to the impression that Jesus and his disciples had fallen apart. At this crucial moment He gave Himself by means of bread and a cup to his disciples in order that sacramental communion with Him might continue when they would no longer share His physical presence (Calvin, 1846:202-205, 214).

It is important to keep in mind that Calvin did not separate Christ's death from resurrection in the way the Formulary of the GKSA does. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:3 Calvin emphasises that as Jesus was like us in death he is also in his resurrection and states: "He has therefore died with us that we may rise with him". He asserts:

When however the Scripture in other places makes mention only of his death, let us understand that in those cases his resurrection is included in his death, but when they are mentioned separately the commencement of our salvation is (as we see) in the one and the consummation of it in the other (Calvin, 1849:9 ff.).

According to Calvin communion with Christ includes the receipt of all the benefits derived from Him, i.e. justification, sanctification and glorification. This concept of a new testament and covenant of grace is irreconcilable with the limited exposition of the covenant of grace in the Formulary of the GKSA. It seems as though the controversy with Rome during the Reformation caused the Formulary of the GKSA to describe the covenant of grace to faith in the limited terms of atonement. That is what Calvin called the "commencement of our salvation" (viz. the sacrament of baptism) and therefore falls short on what Calvin called the "consummation of our salvation".

3.1.2 The bread and cup testify to Christ himself

The bread and cup testify to Christ himself and not only to one redeeming act that He has accomplished. Jesus said: "Take, eat, this is my body". Calvin (1849a:187) asserts that Christ is the "substance" of the sacramental meal, although he clearly rejected transubstantiation as well as consubstantiation. He maintains that the bread "which has been appointed for the nourishment of the body, is chosen and sanctified by Christ for a different use, so as to be spiritual food" (Calvin, 1846:206 ff.). The sign receives the name of the thing it represents. The change from what the bread really is to what it represents is executed by faith. It is important that Calvin asserts that Jesus did not command us to drink his blood, but said: "*This **cup** is the new testament in my blood ...*". The formula in the Formulary of the GKSA by which the sacrament is administered, on the other hand, favours the idea that we must drink the wine as a symbol of the blood of Christ on Calvary and does not indicate anything about a new testament in his blood. As a matter fact, in the formula the bread and cup (wine?) testify to the same truth.

Calvin (1846:208) distinguishes between the *bread* as a sign of his (glorified) body and the *cup* as a sign of the new covenant in Him. Christ ratified the new covenant (unity) with his blood. It took effect by his resurrection. One must keep in mind that the reference to "flesh and

blood” was an idiomatic way to indicate a whole human being, bodily and spiritually (Grosheide, 1954:395). The spiritual communion with Christ demands *eating*, which according to Calvin, “draws into us the life of Christ by secret power of the Spirit, and which we obtain by faith alone”. Calvin (1846:209) confesses this to be a mystery. The Formulary of the GKSA, on the contrary, restricts believers by means of bread and wine to the crucified body and blood of Christ on the cross and does not bring by means of eating (communion) the experience of a new covenant with the living and risen Christ.

3.1.3 The new covenant compels partakers in Holy Communion to accept Christ

The new covenant compels partakers in Holy Communion to accept Christ and all his benefits and thus be lifted by the Holy Spirit into a new life. Calvin (1846:209 ff.) states that the

... proper method of seeking Christ [is that] our minds must not be fixed on the earth, but must ascend upwards to the heavenly glory in which he dwells. We must not draw Christ to the earth, when on the contrary He calls us upwards to himself ... The *flesh* of Christ, therefore is spiritual nourishment, because it gives life to us. Now it gives life, because the Holy Spirit pours into us the life that dwells in it ...

This concept of Calvin is mentioned in the Formulary but it is not clear what is meant by it. In the Confession of Faith of the Churches of France 1862 (art. 13) Calvin (1849a:144) states:

Now we understand that we are made partakers of all his blessings by means of faith; for this is which brings us into communication with Christ, in order that he may dwell in us, that we may be ingrafted into him as our root, that we may be members of his body, that we may live in him, and he in us, and possess him, with all his benefits (viz. also Calvin, 1848:335 re *κοινωνία*).

Olevianus's Formulary incorporated this important explanation of real spiritual communion in prayer before the sacrament is administered but this aspect is lost when actual communion with bread and cup focuses on remembering and accepting the unique sacrifice of Christ.

3.1.4 The Lord's Supper should ensure communion with the glorified Christ

The Lord's Supper was instituted at a critical moment to ensure that the disciples will look forward to communion (unity) with the glorified Christ. On the moment of his “approaching death, and the new and heavenly life” Jesus wanted his disciples to know that their communication with him will change drastically but will not be broken off (Calvin, 1846:210

ff.). At that moment He was passing over to what Calvin describes as “a blessed immortality, not to live without you in the kingdom of God, but to have you associated with me in the same life. Thus we see how Christ leads his disciples by the hand to the cross, and thence raises them to the hope of the resurrection” where he “allegorically spoken” again will celebrate with them in “a new kind of drinking”, or as Luke said, “until the kingdom comes”. Ridderbos (1950) points out that not deliverance from sin but the coming of the kingdom of God is the central theme of Jesus’ work on earth. Nevertheless, the Formulary of the GKSA states very little about the kingdom of Christ (realisation of his kingship) and even about the covenant of God.

3.1.5 New covenant based on the blood of Christ

The new covenant is based on the blood (sacrifice) of Christ and realised in his kingship. Calvin asserts that with the bread Christ gave his body to his disciples (Luke 22:19) while Matthew and Mark say the same about the cup. Calvin (1846: 212 ff.) states:

Whoever then desires that the flesh of Christ should afford nourishment to him, let him look at it as having been offered on the cross, that it might be the price of our reconciliation with God.

While the Formulary of the GKSA focuses on this reconciliation, Calvin emphasises the effect of the reconciliation. He refers to Matthew 26:27 and states that *all drinking from the cup* is “... the design of Christ to keep our faith wholly fixed on himself ... He employed two symbols” and said “that he supplies the place of meat and drink”.

The sacrament is therefore instituted (in his words)

... to keep our faith wholly fixed on himself, that we not seek anything apart from him ... Because he has made with us an everlasting covenant, that the sacrifice having been once offered, we may now be spiritually fed ... There is always a mutual relation between the covenant of God and the faith of man.

The Formulary of the GKSA focuses on the forgiveness of sins through faith in the sacrifice on Calvary and not on communion with the living Christ in an everlasting covenant in which believers and Christ are indissolubly joined.

3.2 Calvin’s commentary on 1 Corinthians 10:13-18

Calvin explains that because of the believer’s union to the one body of Christ Paul rejects the possibility of a difference between external and internal religion with reference to the Lord’s Supper. Calvin (1848:333-

336) states: "To bless the cup is to set it apart ... (to) be to us an emblem of the blood of Christ" – an act by which the new covenant is ratified.

Therefore he asserts that

... believers are united by Christ's blood, so as to become one body. It is also true that a unity of this kind is with propriety termed *koinonia*. I make the same acknowledgement to *the bread ... we all become one body because we are together partakers of the same bread*.

The one bread and one cup symbolise "that we must even by external profession maintain that unity which subsists between us and Christ, inasmuch we all assemble together to receive the symbol of that sacred unity ..." Because we are first incorporated in Christ "we may be united to each other". This interpretation based on unity does not support A Lasco's paraphrases which resulted in the formula by which the Supper is administered in the GKSA.

According to Calvin (1948:386, cf. the *filioque*) Christ cannot be disjoined from his Spirit and therefore he emphasises the "spiritual union" between the believers and Christ in order that "he may live in us, and we in him". The *symbol of sacred unity* is therefore seen at his *health-giving table* (Calvin, 1948:240). It is remarkable that the Formulary of the GKSA points to the unity of believers but compares it respectively with many grains of corn comprising one bread and many grapes pressed to obtain wine. The reference in the Formulary to the work of the Spirit in regard to this unity is presented very much on its own and not related to the living Christ.

Calvin's spirituality was based on John 6 (cf. notes Calvyn, 1991:IV, xvii). It, however, seems as if the intellectual and rationalistic trend in exponents of the humanist movement feared Calvin's concepts of spiritual communion with the body of Christ in heaven. They also thought that his spirituality would revive ideas like transubstantiation and consubstantiation. Therefore the Dutch Reformation favoured Zwingli's concept of the Lord's Supper (cf. Balke, 1980a:167; Kooiman, 1959:506).

3.3 Calvin's commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:23-29

Calvin (1848:372-389) points out that in this passage Paul rectifies abuses, because even a very small deviation from the "institution of Christ" bypasses the right course. There is no remedy for the correcting and purging of abuses except to return to God's pure institution. Therefore Paul says:

Christ gives thanks to the Father for his mercy towards the human race ... and he invites us ... to raise up our minds as often as we approach

the sacred table, to an acknowledgement of the boundless love of God towards us, and to have our minds kindled up to true gratitude.

The concept of *bread* represents the body of Christ (as He is now in heaven, see Calvin, 1848:380), without becoming the real body it represents. The reality is here conjoined with the sign so that we partake spiritually of the body of Christ in the way we partake of the bread as that represents Christ's real body "as food" (Calvin, 1848:378).

Calvin rejects the explanation sustained by die Formulary of the GKSA when het explicably asserts:

I say, we by faith embrace Christ as crucified for us, and raised from the dead, and in this way we are effectually made partakers of all its benefits As for myself, I acknowledge, that it is only when we obtain Christ himself, that we come to partake of Christ's benefits. He is, however *obtained*, I affirm, not only when we believe he was made an offering for us, but when he dwells in us ... When *we are members of his flesh* (Eph. V.30) – when, in fine, we are incorporated with him (so to speak) into one life and substance (Calvin, 1848:378 ff.; cf. Eph. 5:30).

Calvin maintains that Christ's body is

... *really* ... that [which] is *truly* given to us in the Supper, to be wholesome food for our souls. ... my meaning is that our souls are nourished by the substance of the body, that we may truly made one with him, or what amounts to the same thing, that the life-giving virtue from Christ's flesh is poured into us by the Spirit, though it is at great distance from us ... (He) communicates to us from heaven the virtue of his flesh (Calvin, 1848:380 ff.).

In this way, Christ while remaining in heaven, is received by us. "Let us bear in mind, that it is a secret and wonderful work of the Holy Spirit, which it is criminal to measure by the standard of our understanding" (Calvin, 1848:380). We must "rise heavenward" to participate in Christ by means of faith which "do not mean a sort of opinion, resting on human contrivances". The Supper is a "memorial" to assist us in our weakness, because He is not "visibly present", but the symbols "are [that] which excites our remembrance by representing him". In the Supper "we have both a covenant and a confirmatory pledge of the covenant" (Calvin, 1848:380-383).

These quotations from Calvin's commentary may be sufficient to prove that he experiences and presents the Supper as a mystical communion with the living Christ who is bodily glorified in heaven and in the Spirit present among the believers. On the other hand, the Formulary of the GKSA presents the Supper as a rational legalistic ritual in memory of the bail Christ provided 20 centuries ago. Although Olevianus used many

phrases from Calvin in the Formulary, the tenor of the Formulary as well as the formula for administration is not directed to mystical religious communion with the living and glorified Christ but limited to the acceptance of the benefits of atonement and reconciliation derived from the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. The Formulary of the GKSA therefore basically follows in the tradition of Zwingli and testifies to atonement and justification by means of faith alone.

3.4 Calvin's Formulary for the Lord's Supper

3.4.1 The prayer before the administering of the Supper

Calvin (1849a:105) tries to contain the communion between the believers and Christ in one difficult, long and overloaded sentence. He prays to be nourished by Christ for eternal life, to "enjoy him" being the holy bread from heaven "that gives us life" in order "that we no longer live in our selves ... but he may live in us ... thus making us truly partakers of the new and eternal covenant of grace" and he prays for perseverance in faith and good works.

3.4.2 Thanksgiving after the administering of the Supper

Calvin (1849a:106) thanks God for the privilege "to partake of thy Son Jesus Christ ... as food for everlasting life" and implore that "we may profit and increase in a faith which may be effectual unto every good work ... to the advancement and glory and the edification of our neighbours through the same Jesus Christ ... who reigneth for ever". The Formulary of the GKSA falls short in emphasising the quality of life and the motivation for good works.

3.4.3 The exposition of the Supper

Calvin (1849a: 19 ff.) asserts that Christ had promised "with his own lips viz. that he is indeed willing to make us partakers of his own body and blood in order that we may possess him entirely in such a manner that he may live in us and we in him". He is the bread from heaven "to feed and nourish us unto life eternal". He gave himself to us. We must give ourselves to him. He maintains:

With this view let us raise our hearts and minds on high where Jesus Christ is in the glory of the Father ... Let us be contented then to have the bread and wine as signs and evidences, spiritually seeking the reality where the word of God promises that we shall find it.

The Formulary contains the phrase "to raise our hearts and minds on high where Jesus Christ is" but not in the sense of communion with the living Christ. The Formulary brings the sacrifice in memory with a moving

and liturgical appealing exposition of the mediator-role which Christ had fulfilled (Wielenga, 1913:1, 8 ff., 18 ff.; Bouwman, s.a.:296 ff.).

3.5 Calvin's concept of the Supper in his *Institution* and tracts

- Baptism is the sacrament of being adopted into the household of God by virtue of the justification and forgiveness of sin. The Lord's Supper, on the other hand, is the sacrament of God's nourishing his household with Christ. Christ is therefore the substance of the sacrament, symbolised by the bread and the cup because "there is a truth which is enjoined by them, and which they represent" (cf. Calvin 1844:169; 1849a:165 ff., 169 ff., 177; Calvyn, 1991: V, xvii.1, 8-10, 17, 19, 32; IV, xviii.19).
- The blood of Christ ratifies the new covenant which guarantees communion (unity) with Christ in the interim period between his death (and resurrection) and the advent of Christ (Calvyn, 1991:IV, xvii.1, 4, 5, 11).
- Christ is really present in the Supper although his glorified body is in heaven. The Holy Spirit communicates real participation with the body of Christ in heaven by means of the symbols (Calvyn, 1991:IV, xvii.3, 5, 10, 18, 19, 26, 31, 33; Calvin, 1849a:187).
- Zwingli and Ecolompadius overemphasised the ascension of Christ to protest against the papal identification of the body of Christ with the bread and wine but "they forgot to show what presence of Jesus Christ ought to be believed in the Supper and what communion of his body and blood is received" (Calvin, 1849a:195). Calvin therefore asserts that he differs from Zwingli (and Olevianus) on the matter of *praesentia realis Christi* in the Lord's Supper.
- The real communion in the Supper is a sacramental mystery. Calvin states:

If somebody asks me further to elaborate on how his body is present, I will not be ashamed to admit that this mystery is too sublime for me to understand or to express in words. To be honest, I rather experience it ... I embrace without contradiction this truth on which I may rely ... His body is present in the way the sacrament requires ... (Calvyn, 1991:IV, xvii.32; cf. 5, 10, 19).

This was a bold statement of religious faith in the 16th century when humanism thrived on intellectualism and school-theology.

- By means of the bread and cup the Spirit of Christ establishes a mystical experience of communion with Christ and with one another –

the communion which will be fulfilled in the coming kingdom. The Supper therefore obliges partakers to a life of piety, love, peace and harmony (Calvyn, 1991:IV, xvii.1, 2, 10, 38).

- The Supper implies communion with Christ and in Him with each other. Therefore every partaker is obliged to examine his faith, relationship and communication with Christ thoroughly. This principle determines the necessity of responsible confession of faith before participation in communion and necessitates the office of overseer. The administering of discipline and even excommunication to ensure that nobody desecrates the communion by means of indifference or careless sin is also stressed (cf. Calvyn, 1991:IV, xi.17, xii.6, xvii.40; Spoelstra, 1989: 380 ff., 407 ff., 413 ff.).
- Because the Supper represents communion every gathering to worship ought to culminate in the celebration of the Holy Supper in order that the Lord may strengthen the communicants' faith, love and witness of his goodness to the world (Calvyn, 1991:IV, xvii.8, 9, 43; Calvin, 1849a:167; Brienen, 1987:233). Worship by a congregation of believers without celebrating the Lord's Supper is as incomplete as the torso of Michael Angelo (Van der Leeuw, 1946:133 ff.).
- Because God nourishes his household with one bread and cup (Christ) the holy table is part and parcel of the Lord's Supper (Calvyn, 1991:IV,xvii.43, 47, 48, 50; xviii.12; Calvin, 1844:167; Bouwman, s.a.:297).
- The believers must contemplate in the Holy Supper the crucified Redeemer "raised again to deliver us from corruption and death, restoring us to celestial immortality" (Calvin, 1849a:169 ff.).

4. Conclusion

It is unacceptable to claim that the Formulary of the GKSA reflects Calvin's exegesis of Scripture and his concept of the Lord's Supper. Bouwman (s.a.:296 ff; cf. Van 't Spijker, 1980:364) asserts correctly that the Formulary inherited from the Netherlands (Wielenga, 1913:33, 36; GKSA, 1987:620-622, 624) wants to highlight that Holy Communion is primarily a meal of remembrance commemorating Christ's vicarious death. This view corresponds with Zwingli's humanistic and intellectual understanding of the Lord's Supper (cf. Balke, 1980a:152 ff., 170 ff.) which originated in the 16th century as a result of the controversies with Rome. The Formulary in essence deviates from the spiritual concept of Calvin's mysticism explaining the sacrament as symbol and guarantee of communion with the living Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Gerrish (1993:back-cover) asserts that the “core of Calvin’s doctrine of the Eucharist is the analogy of ‘feeding’ on Christ, the Bread of Life” (cf. John 6). Some of Calvin’s contemporaries rejected his doctrine from a rationalistic fear that spiritual “feeding” on Christ may revive Roman transubstantiation (Gerrish, 1993:157-190; Van ’t Spijker, 1980:373, 414). Zwingli was humanist enough to interpret the Supper by means of the Aristotelian intellectual theology of analysis and deduction (cf. Polman, s.a:l, 160-167). It is a pity that ecclesiastical controversies nowadays deal with aspects like cup or cups, the meaning of the table, child communion, etc., while the real meaning of the sacrament goes astray.

In comparison with Passover (Exod.12) baptism relates to the blood on the posts and the Supper to meal as nourishment for the journey through the desert to the land of promise. Calvin correctly distinguishes between commencement and consummation of salvation. It can be said that the Formulary of the GKSA on the Supper repeats the truth of the sacrament of baptism and reaffirms justification (adoption in the household of God). Calvin’s concept of the Supper compliments the supplication made in the thanksgiving prayer of the Formulary for baptism in the GKSA (GKSA, 1987:606), i.e. that the christened child may thrive and prosper in Christ and keep up the battle against evil and sin under the banner of his King, Jesus Christ. The question may rightfully be raised whether the Formulary on the Supper has contributed to over-emphasising the aspect of justification and sermons on “faith in the blood of Christ purifies from all sin”. Calvin’s emphasis on being nourished by Christ in a living relationship in a new covenant could indeed have furthered obedience to the Ten Commandments and an identified Christianity serving God in unison with Calvin’s motto *Soli Deo Gloria*.

It is said that the theories of Einstein and Planck had already brought about a “radical reformulation of the most fundamental aspects of reality” in the natural sciences. And the remark is made that it “seemed to turn common sense on its head and found closer accord with mysticism rather than materialism” (Beukes, 1994:74). Against this background the following questions can also be raised: Does the Reformed religion need to break with some trends of 16th century intellectualism? And does the Reformed religion need a “radical reformulation of the most fundamental aspects” of religion along the lines of Calvin’s mysticism to escape the onslaught of modern humanism? Perhaps the GKSA can start with the Formulary for the Lord’s Supper. *Ecclessia Reformata semper reformanda*.

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Key concepts:

Dutch Humanism –influence: GKSA's formulary
Holy Communion: meal of commemoration
Holy Communion as new covenant
Zwingli – influence on GKSA's formulary

Kernbegrippe:

Nagmaal: herinnerings- of gemeenskapsmaal
Nagmaal as nuwe verbond
Nederlandse humanisme en die nagmaalsformulier van die GKSA
Zwingli – invloed op GKSA se nagmaalsformulier

