

Gregory David Soderberg, *As Often As You Eat This Bread: Communion Frequency in English, Scottish, and Early American Churches* [Reformed Historical Theology 74]. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2022, 280 pp. ISBN: 978-3-525-56070-9. €120.

Gregory David Soderberg takes us on a long journey in this book, the fruit of his PhD research conducted under the supervision of Gijsbert van den Brink and Wim Janse and defended in November 2021. The author's goal is to trace the arguments put forward in favour of either the rare or the frequent celebration of the communion in the Reformed churches, especially those in the English-speaking world. The period under investigation is vast, spanning from the Late Middle Ages to the first half of the nineteenth century. Adopting a chronological structure, the book presents in chapter 2 the positions of the most important theologians of the Reformed tradition or those who exerted a decisive influence (Oecolampadius, Bucer, Zwingli, Bullinger, Calvin). Chapter 3 continues with the English and Scottish protestants who took up the issue of communion frequency in the second half of the sixteenth century and then during the seventeenth century. Chapter 4 describes in depth the debates that opposed the authors close to the High Church and the puritans, and no less significantly, that divided the puritans themselves. One central argument of this book is that the debates occurring in seventeenth-century England had a considerable impact on the controversies surrounding communion frequency, which plagued the Churches of New England from the first half of the seventeenth century. Chapter 5 endeavours to reconstruct these controversies, while Chapter 6, which is the longest and final chapter of the book, lends support to the argument that the issue of communion frequency was deliberated on both sides of the Atlantic.

To reconstruct the debates on this matter, Soderberg successively reviews one key figure after another and summarises the arguments set forth by each one. The book thus juxtaposes biblical sources, historical references and theological or pastoral explanations that are cited by each author to lend support to his viewpoint. The book thus constitutes a sort of catalogue of opinions and arguments expressed in the course of this long-standing debate, with the authors often being chosen simply because they were “influential” and spoke out on the issue of communion frequency.

This approach probably stems from the objective articulated by the author at the outset of the book. Taking a stance in favour of a more frequent celebration (p. 12, n. 5), his aim, as stated on the back cover, is to provide a historical perspective so as to help contemporary churches from the Reformed tradition determine the frequency of the Eucharistic celebration. These churches may certainly draw from the wealth of Old and New Testament sources, his-

torical precedents and theological and pastoral ideas that were painstakingly collected by the author.

Nonetheless, readers seeking more than a mere collection of opinions may find this book somewhat frustrating. Indeed, the analytical dimension of this work is rather scant. In comparison with the lengthy overview of the arguments, too little space is devoted to synthesis and analysis. The review of each author ends with a short concluding paragraph, which often provides only a summary without adopting a broader view of the issues underlying the authors' opinions. On the few occasions when greater distance is taken, it is merely to observe that the authors' convictions cross the entire spectrum, ranging from the defence of a rare communion service (at least once a year) to the plea in favour of a more frequent celebration, not to mention the theologians whose views are somewhere in between these two extremes. The process of juxtaposition even continues in the last pages of the final chapter in spite of its promise to provide an overview: thus, instead of undertaking an analysis of the debate, these pages once again summarise the aforementioned arguments.

The author does not engage in a work of periodisation regarding the debate on the frequency of communion: the chronological structure adopted in the book is based on the history of the churches examined therein rather than on an analysis of the major phases of the debate on communion frequency. Consequently, the reader has the impression that the same arguments are reiterated throughout the entire study period: on the one hand, those seeking to preserve the purity of the sacrament and to dedicate time to its preparation by exercising ecclesiastical discipline and penance, and on the other, those viewing the more regular celebration of the ritual as an opportunity to strengthen the faith of the church members. The dissensions observed with the sixteenth-century reformers on this issue thus remain mostly unchanged with their successors in the following centuries.

This repetitive effect also arises from Soderberg's overly strict theological framework, with the exception of one passage in which he advances the economic arguments put forward in Scotland in support of a more sporadic celebration of the Holy Communion. As a result, he fails to situate the debates in the social, political and cultural context from which they emerge. One particularly striking example in this respect relates to the circumstances in which the Genevan Reformed tradition adopted a quarterly rhythm of the Eucharistic celebration. By ignoring the political context and failing to consult more extensive documentation in French (the book's bibliography includes only a handful of French and German references), the author neglects the fact that this quarterly rhythm marks a compromise between Calvin's theological ideas and the need to maintain a degree of conformity with the powerful Bernese neighbours.

Furthermore, by not drawing a parallel between the discussions of the Reformed and Catholic churches, especially in the seventeenth century, the author also overlooks an insight that would have undoubtedly been quite pertinent: the dispute between Jesuits and Jansenists on this subject, which culminates with Antoine Arnaud's famous work *De la fréquente communion* (1643), could have offered an interesting point of comparison, especially since this well-documented conflict would have required no further investigation.

To conclude, the critical apparatus of Soderberg's book is surprisingly incomplete. On the one hand, some publications are mentioned in the bibliography but not cited in the notes and vice versa. On the other hand, the index of names is rather brief, as if compiled in haste: the name of Zurich theologian Bullinger appears twice, both with and without his first name, whereas the index omits dozens of names, including renowned figures such as the Scottish reformer John Knox, who was a key theologian for the traditions featured in the book. This is quite a shame, because with such a comprehensive index, the book could have served as a sort of compendium of opinions on this yet unresolved issue of the Reformed traditions regarding the frequency of Eucharistic celebrations.

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