

The Eucharist in post-Reformation Scotland: A theological tale of harmony and diversity

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Abstract

This essay explores the Eucharistic theology of the confessions and catechisms in the Reformed tradition that were influential in Scotland between 1560 and 1640. A core purpose is to illumine the dogmatic architecture of early Reformed Scotland, and to reach a greater understanding of the different doctrinal impulses which shaped its churches and its people. A second purpose is to correct the way in which the doctrinal material from this period has been handled in some contemporary historic and constructive accounts. The essay first articulates a theological framework of harmony and diversity within which its source materials will be considered. It then exposts and analyses the content of these documents, aiming to locate them within this heuristic framework. In a final section, it draws some tentative conclusions in both historical and constructive directions.

Keywords: catechism, confession, Eucharist, Scottish Reformation

Introduction

Any articulation of what it is to be Reformed will at some point have to attend to the doctrine of the Eucharist.¹ It is not simply that issues of sacramental doctrine and practice were prominent in the sixteenth-century events which gave rise to the coalescing and construing of ‘Reformed’ as an identifiably distinct tradition of church life in the first place. It is also that these same issues have remained significant in the period between then and now, providing one prominent set of boundary markers for the ‘Reformed’ tradition over and against other ecclesiastical identities.²

In turning to explore the Reformed tradition of Eucharistic theology in particular, there arise certain problems not encountered everywhere. The lack of a decisive teaching authority, such as Roman Catholicism has in the Magisterium, together with the absence of a determinative confessional resource, such as Lutheranism has in the Book of Concord, poses the problem of which sources to select. And the diverse Reformed sources available – from the writings of individual theologians in the tradition through the official confessions of Reformed churches around the world to liturgical resources from those same churches – by no means express a univocal theology of the Eucharist.

¹ In the Reformed tradition terms such as ‘the Lord’s Supper’ or ‘Holy Communion’ have generally been more prevalent than ‘Eucharist’; by using the latter term, I seek neither to disparage nor to discontinue such denotations, but simply to frame my exploration in terms of current ecumenical parlance.

² Certainly, the various iterations of ‘Reformed’ identity have rested on more than simply the doctrine of the Eucharist: other doctrines – notably Christology, election, and sanctification – have been equally contentious and determinative at different points in the relationship between the Reformed and other traditions. At the same time, given that systematic theology is compelled to integrate its reflections on sacramental theology with its reflections upon other doctrines, and given that Eucharistic theology is intimately bound up precisely with these other doctrines – Christology, election, and sanctification – it should not surprise to find this sacrament to be a regularly presenting issue of discord.

It is into the waters of these complex issues that this essay wades, hoping to enter the murkier depths of Eucharistic theology and confessional identity without drowning in an ocean of rarefied linguistic precision and undiluted early-modern polemic. The intention is rather to offer a highly circumscribed investigation, limiting attention to certain confessions and catechisms in the Reformed tradition that were influential in Scotland between 1560 and 1640.³ This limitation arises from a concern to explore further the dogmatic architecture of early Reformed Scotland, and to reach a greater understanding of the different doctrinal impulses which have shaped its churches and its people. But it also arises from a concern to correct the way the doctrinal material from this period has been handled in some contemporary historic and constructive accounts.

This essay proceeds in three sections. In the first, it seeks to articulate the theological framework of harmony and diversity within which the pre-1640 Scottish confessions and catechisms will be explored. In a second, longer section, it seeks to exposit and analyse the content of some of these documents in some detail, aiming to locate them within the framework previously offered. And in a final section, it seeks to draw some tentative conclusions from this study in both historical and constructive directions.

The framework of enquiry

The introduction to this essay has already alluded to both the unity and the variety of Reformed understandings of the Eucharist. Each of these deserves further specification.

³ Unfortunately, this means that the documents of the Westminster Assembly, together with the flurry of catechetical documents which anticipated and accompanied its deliberations, are beyond the scope of this investigation.

First, some of the harmony between Reformed doctrines of the Eucharist can be briefly rehearsed. In common with Lutheran and many free-church traditions, the Reformed deny that grace is automatically conferred to participants by the sacrament simply by virtue of the rite being performed (*ex opere operato*). Instead, they emphasise the necessity of the Word preached and faith present in the valid and effective administration of the (two valid) sacraments. Again, in common with other Reformation traditions, the Reformed deny the character of the Eucharist as a propitiatory sacrifice, reject the doctrine of transubstantiation and the adoration of the elements, and insist upon communion in both kinds and in public worship. Yet against the Lutheran view of the Eucharist, the Reformed deny that Jesus Christ is locally present in the elements, and eaten also by the non-elect; instead they insist that the post-ascension body of Jesus Christ is to be found at the right hand of the Father in heaven – even as heaven itself is not a place above the skies.

Second, some of the diversity of Reformed doctrines of the Eucharist can be considered. This diversity is recognised even in basic theological textbooks: in their survey of Eucharistic theologies, these generally distinguish the views of Huldrych Zwingli and John Calvin, even as they sometimes recognise their commonalities, and occasionally avoid misrepresenting them.⁴ Such differentiation – and, sadly, misrepresentation – was already part of conversations in the sixteenth century, both

⁴ For example, in Richard J. Plantinga, Thomas R. Thompson, and Matthew D. Lundberg's *An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), reference is made to Zwingli's 'symbolic understanding of the Eucharist', in which 'the Eucharist is a symbolic remembrance of the death and resurrection of Christ, who is "present" in the Supper only by virtue of the faith of the Christian recipient' (p. 491). By contrast, it is asserted, Calvin 'argues that Christ is not physically present, but holds 'that Christ is truly present in *spiritual* form, since the divine Logos as the second person of the Trinity is present everywhere' (p. 496). These statements are all highly infelicitous.

within and between Reformed churches as well as in dialogue with other confessions, and the underlying material distinctions are further considered below.

Ahead of that doctrinal analysis, however, it should immediately be mentioned that the diversity of Reformed doctrines of the Eucharist has also been categorised in a more sophisticated way, notably by Brian A. Gerrish.⁵ Gerrish offers a tripartite typology for approaching Reformed understandings of the Eucharist that distinguishes between ‘symbolic memorialism’, ‘symbolic instrumentalism’, and – occupying a middle ground between them – ‘symbolic parallelism’. The three descriptors broadly represent the positions of Zwingli, Calvin, and Heinrich Bullinger respectively, though Gerrish is careful not to tie the descriptors to the persons too closely, and thereby allows for a welcome discretion in their application. The more fine-grained analysis of this threefold typology seems to have found broad acceptance in much of the secondary literature on the theme.⁶

⁵ B. A. Gerrish, ‘Sign and Reality: The Lord’s Supper in the Reformed Confessions’, in *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), pp. 118–30.

⁶ The typology is mentioned without any dissent by, among others, Paul Rorem, ‘Calvin and Bullinger on the Lord’s Supper’, in *Lutheran Quarterly* 2 (1988), pp. 155–84 (hereafter ‘Part I’) and pp. 357–39 (hereafter ‘Part II’), at ‘Part II’, p. 383; Lyle D. Bierma, *The Doctrine of the Sacraments in the Heidelberg Catechism: Melancthonian, Calvinist, or Zwinglian?* (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1999), *passim*; Michael Allen, ‘Sacraments in the Reformed and Anglican Reformation’, in Matthew Levering, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, (Oxford: OUP, 2015), pp. 292–3. Cornelis P. Venema seems to misrepresent the typology when he writes that ‘Gerrish places the second and third views together as representing the consensus of the Reformed confessions over against the Zwinglian view: Christ is communicated by means of the sacrament’, in ‘The Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper in the Reformed Confessions’, in *Mid-America Theological Journal*, 12 (2001), p. 114, n. 32. Emidio Campi, meanwhile, raises an unspecified reservation about the typology in ‘Consensus Tigurinus: Werden, Wertung und Wirkung’, in Emidio Campi and Ruedi Reich, eds., *Consensus Tigurinus: Heinrich Bullinger und Johannes Calvin über das Abendmahl* (Zürich: TVZ, 2009), p. 31.

What are the key material issues at stake in this threefold typology?⁷

The position of symbolic memorialism is primarily associated with Zwingli. For Zwingli, a sacrament is ‘a sign of a sacred thing, i.e., of grace that has been given’.⁸ The sacraments are thus sacred and venerable, being instituted and received by Jesus Christ, and representing high things; they also augment faith and serve as an oath of allegiance.⁹ Yet their primary function is anamnetic, for ‘far from conferring grace ... they do not even convey or dispense it’.¹⁰ Spiritual participation in Jesus Christ is not tied to the Eucharist, and is equivalent simply ‘to trusting with heart and soul upon the mercy and goodness of God through Christ’.¹¹ Sacramental participation, meanwhile, is to exercise faith while partaking of the bread and wine – to symbolise externally what happens internally.

In symbolic parallelism, the position is slightly different. For Bullinger, the key exemplar, the sacraments are given by God ‘to be witnesses and seals of the preaching of the gospel, to exercise and try faith, and ... to represent and set before our eyes the deep mysteries of God’.¹² In the Eucharist, then, the faithful externally receive the bread and wine given to those participating in the sacrament; inwardly, meanwhile, by the work of Christ in the power of the Spirit, they receive the body and blood of Jesus

⁷ For a slightly more expansive account of the relevant material, see Paul T. Nimmo, ‘Sacraments’, in *Cambridge Companion to Reformed Theology*, eds. Paul T. Nimmo and David A. S. Fergusson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 80–86.

⁸ Huldrych Zwingli, ‘An Account of the Faith’, in *On Providence and other essays*, edited by William John Hinke (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999), p. 48.

⁹ Huldrych Zwingli, ‘An Exposition of the Faith’, in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, edited by G. W. Bromiley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), pp. 262–5.

¹⁰ Zwingli, ‘An Account of the Faith’, p. 46.

¹¹ Zwingli, ‘An Exposition of the Faith’, p. 258.

¹² Henry Bullinger, *The Decades*, 5 vols., ed. Thomas Harding, trans. H. I. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009–2010), vol. V, p. 234.

Christ unto eternal life.¹³ In this way, for Bullinger, ‘the Lord ... certifies unto us his promise and communion, and shows unto us his gifts, ... gathers [us] into one body visibly, ... and admonishes us of our duty’.¹⁴ The active agent here is God, and the means of communion is receptive faith; the Eucharist is the seal and confirmation of the participant’s existing covenant membership.

The position of symbolic instrumentalism bears a different accent again. In this view, associated particularly with Calvin, the sacraments bear a mediatorial significance. Calvin posits not only that a sacrament is ‘a testimony of divine grace toward us, confirmed by an outward sign’,¹⁵ but also that the sacraments are ‘means and instruments of [God’s] secret grace’.¹⁶ In the Eucharist, then, ‘Christ attests himself to be the life-giving bread, upon which our souls feed unto true and blessed immortality’.¹⁷ Communion with Christ takes place as ‘Christ offers and sets forth the reality there signified to all who sit at that spiritual banquet’.¹⁸ Though the physical body of Christ remains in heaven, the souls of the elect are lifted unto heaven by the Holy Spirit to feed on Christ, and so to become one with him.

This typology of Gerrish thus presents a heuristic means of trying to conceive the position and inter-relation of Reformed understandings of the Eucharist.¹⁹ To this

¹³ *Second Helvetic Confession* (1566), §21, in *Reformierte Bekenntnisschriften* [hereafter RB], 6 vols. to date (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 2002–), 2/2, p. 330, with modern translation in *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*, edited by Arthur Cochrane (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), p. 284.

¹⁴ Bullinger, *Decades*, volume V, p. 403 (translation modernised).

¹⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), IV.xiv.1.

¹⁶ John Calvin, ‘Exposition of the Heads of Agreement’, in *Tracts and Letters*, volume 2, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), p. 227.

¹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.xvii.1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, IV.xvii.10.

¹⁹ It might be observed in passing that this typology may not be quite fine-grained enough to be definitively helpful in understanding the different Eucharistic theologies

extent, it offers a helpful analytic tool for exploring and classifying the materials from the early Reformed tradition in Scotland in the following section. Of particular importance in this regard will be the distinction between the ‘parallelism’ associated with Bullinger and the ‘instrumentalism’ associated with Calvin, since a purely ‘memorialist’ account of the Eucharist does not surface prominently in European Reformed confessions after 1545, a date some years before the Scottish Reformation.²⁰ Hence in considering here the relationship between Eucharistic sign and Eucharistic signified, the question tends to be one of ‘parallelism’ or ‘instrumentalism’. Paul Rorem states it thus:

Does a given Reformed statement of faith consider the Lord’s Supper as a testimony, an analogy, a parallel, even a simultaneous parallel to the internal workings of God’s grace in granting communion with Christ? If so, the actual ancestor may be Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli’s successor in Zurich. Or does it explicitly identify the Supper as the very instrument or means through which God offers and confers the grace of full communion with Christ’s body? The lineage would then go back to John Calvin, despite the opposition he faced among his Reformed brethren on this very point.²¹

within the Reformed tradition. In particular, there may be questions as to whether the category of ‘symbolic memorialism’ does sufficient justice to some of the later material in the Zwingli corpus, and as to whether the category of ‘symbolic instrumentalism’ does sufficient justice to some of the mystical statements in Calvin. On this and related themes, see Paul T. Nimmo, ‘Reformed Theologies of the Eucharist: A New Typology’ (forthcoming), and – with a rather different reading of the tradition – John W. Riggs, *The Lord’s Supper in the Reformed Tradition: An Essay on the True Mystical Presence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), pp. 112–3.

²⁰ In that year was published the strongly memorialist *Zürich Confession* (1545), in RB 1/2, pp. 456–65.

²¹ Rorem, ‘Part II’, p. 384.

The distinct approaches of Calvin and Bullinger to the Eucharist receive particularly clear articulation in their correspondence prior to their signing of the ‘Consensus of Zürich’ in 1549. For all that this document concludes a doctrinal agreement, the original differences remain evident in the work of both theologians after this event: the willingness to compromise for the sake of unity does not change the underlying doctrines.²²

In order to prosecute the kind of analysis of Reformed statements which Rorem indicates, it is possible to itemise a short list of verbal–conceptual points upon which Calvin and Bullinger differ. Bryan Spinks offers a helpful initial set of indicators:

Whereas Calvin (following Martin Bucer) could speak of sacraments as being instruments (*instrumenta*) and of exhibiting (*exhibent*) the grace they signify, Bullinger declined to use such language, allowing only that sacraments might be implements (*organa*), but his preferred terms were sign and signify.²³

This use in the work of Calvin of the term *instrumentum* to describe the sacrament, and of the term *exhibere* to denote the relation of the sacrament to grace, thus offers two ways of characterising a particular position.²⁴ Moreover, Lyle Bierma comments that while Calvin writes of believers being made partakers of the *substantia* (substance) of Christ in the Eucharist, Bullinger strongly opposes the use of this term as well as of the

²² See Rorem, ‘Part I’ and ‘Part II’, *passim*.

²³ Bryan D. Spinks, *Do This in Remembrance of Me: The Eucharist from the Early Church to the Present Day* (London: SCM Press, 2013), p. 278. This point is hugely important in light of the significant error in the standard English translation of the Consensus of Zürich which wrongly renders *organa* as ‘instruments’.

²⁴ Importantly, the term *exhibere* does not simply mean ‘to exhibit’ in the sense of modern English: for Calvin and others, it can only mean ‘to confer’, ‘to impart’, or ‘to bestow’. See David F. Wright, ‘Infant Baptism and the Christian Community in Bucer’, quoted in Spinks, *Do This in Remembrance of Me*, p. 280.

trope of eating the body of Christ *essentialiter* (essentially) in the sacrament.²⁵ And, finally, Rorem indicates two further ways of distinguishing the two positions, when he refers to Calvin's view that God confers or works *per sacramenta* (through the sacraments), and that they are correspondingly a 'means of grace' (*medium gratiae*) – both points at which Bullinger would demur.²⁶ Together, these six verbal–conceptual items may offer one manner of discriminating lens through which to view Reformed Eucharistic documents and thus to assess whether a given text resonates more with one or other of these sacramental views.

Before proceeding to test this procedure in respect of the Reformed documents in Scotland, it is worth noting that insofar as these distinct positions offer *positive* descriptions of the Eucharist, they indicate not so much mutually exclusive competing views as different points on an ascending scale.²⁷ It should be clear that Calvin, for example, would happily occupy the *positive* ground articulated by Bullinger, for he readily recognises the doctrinal import of the parallel dimension of the Eucharist; yet at the same time he seeks to claim a further, instrumentalist dimension.

The Reformed confessions and catechisms of Scotland to 1640

²⁵ Bierma, *Sacraments in the Heidelberg Catechism*, p. 23.

²⁶ Rorem, 'Part II', 379.

²⁷ In Gerrish's typology, the 'symbolic memorialist' position associated with Zwingli would form the third, albeit bottom, note of this scale. See Bierma, *Sacraments in the Heidelberg Catechism*, 9–20 for compelling evidence of how different theological descriptors have been applied to the Heidelberg Catechism for precisely this reason of 'adequacy yet not sufficiency'. Gerrish also averts to this complexity in respect of descriptors of types of theology: for example, the eucharistic theology of the Geneva Confession 'could be interpreted Calvinistically, but its language does not require such an interpretation', in 'Sign and Reality', 123.

This section turns to an exposition and evaluation of the Reformed confessions and catechisms that were influential in Scotland prior to 1640, using the framework and categories elucidated above. It begins with a sustained investigation of the Scots Confession of 1560, before considering more briefly other confessions with influence in Scotland within that period. Thereafter, it explores some of the significant catechetical documents circulating in the same era.

The Scots Confession

This is not the place to recount the history of the Scots Confession in full, and a few short comments might perhaps suffice.²⁸ It was in July 1560 that the Parliament of Scotland commissioned to draw up a new statement of Christian faith a number of prominent Protestant ministers: John Willock, John Spottiswoode, John Douglas, John Winram, John Row, and John Knox. Under the leadership of the last-named, the document that came to be known as the Scots Confession was drawn up in a matter of days and was officially adopted by the Parliament on 17th August 1560.²⁹ It was in effect the subordinate standard of the Kirk, with all ecclesiastical benefice-holders expected to subscribe formally to the Confession from 1567.³⁰ It was superseded

²⁸ Among introductions to the Scots Confession, see C. G. M'Crie, *The Confessions of the Church of Scotland: Their Evolution in History* (Edinburgh: Macniven & Wallace, 1907), pp. 14–21; G. D. Henderson, 'Introduction', in *The Scots Confession 1560* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1960), pp. 9–27; and Ian Hazlett, '54. Confessio Scotica 1560', in RB 2/1, pp. 209–18. For an excellent bibliography, see Hazlett, 'Confessio Scotica 1560', RB 2/1, pp. 230–9.

²⁹ Its official adoption by the Church of Scotland itself was – for a variety of reasons – a rather more protracted affair: see Hazlett, 'Confessio Scotica 1560', p. 217.

³⁰ Ibid..

(though not abrogated) by the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1647, though it briefly returned to a position of primacy in the late years of the seventeenth century.³¹

The doctrine of the sacraments in the Scots Confession occupies three articles, and it is the first article above all which will occupy attention in this section.³² The text of this article begins with some observations concerning sacraments in general, noting that there are

twa chief sacramentis onlie, institutit be the Lord Jesus, and commandit to be usit of all thay that will be reputit memberis of his body, to wit, baptisme, and the supper or table of the Lord Jesus, callit the communioun of his body and his blude. And thir sacramentis ... [war] institutit of God not onelie to make ane visibil difference betwix his peple and thay that was without his leigue, but alswa to exerce the faith of his children – and be participatioun of the same sacramentis to seill in thair heartis the assurance of his promise, and of that maist blessit conjunctioun, unioun and societie, quhilk the elect have with thair heid, Christ Jesus. [XXI, 281–282]

The idea that there are two legitimate sacraments, instituted by Jesus Christ for the use of all members of the church, is common to all Reformation traditions, as is the idea that the sacraments mark a visible difference between those within and those outwith the covenant. Important doctrinal ground is reached with the next sentence: the sacraments exercise faith, and seal in the hearts of the elect the assurance of God's promise, and of the blessed conjunction, union, and society which they have in Jesus

³¹ Ibid., p. 218.

³² The text of the Confession used here is the critical edition prepared by Hazlett and found under 'Confessio Scotica 1560', RB 2/1, 240–299. References to the text will be given inline by chapter and page number.

Christ. Referring to the sacraments as seals is a commonplace in the tradition of both Calvin and Bullinger, with sacramental participation confirming to the believer one's spiritual participation. The reference to union with Jesus Christ, meanwhile, evidently refers to a union existing independently of the Eucharist.

The Confession enters more complex terrain as it continues:

And this we utterly dampne the vanity of thay that affirme sacramentis to be nathing ellis bot nakit and bair signis. Na, we assuritlie beleif that be baptisme we ar ingraftit in Christ Jesus, to be maid partakeris of his justice, be quhilk our sinnis ar coverit and remittit. And alswa, that in the supper rychtlye usit, Christ Jesus is sa jointit with us that he becumis the verray nurishment and fude of our saulis. . . . this unioun and conjunctioun, quhilk we have with the body and blude of Christ Jesus in the rycht use of the sacramentis, [is] wrocht be operatioun of the haly Gaist – quha by trew faith caryis us above all thingis that are visibil, carnall and eirdly, and makis us to feid upon the body and blude of Christ Jesus, quhilk was anis brokin and sched for us, quhilk is now in the hevin, and appeiris in the presence of his Father for us. [XXI, 282–283]

In this excerpt, the Confession begins with a renunciation of (what seems a caricature of) the memorialist sacramental position associated with the early Zwingli: the sacraments are not naked and bare signs. Instead, Jesus Christ is so joined with the elect *in the right use* of the Eucharist that he becomes the nourishment and food of their souls. This occurs by the operation of the Holy Spirit *in the right use* of the sacrament(s) – the phrase is repeated – as the elect are carried by true faith above all things visible, carnal, and earthly to feed upon the body and blood of Jesus Christ in heaven.

At stake in this central theological material is the relationship between the internal and the external – between the sacramental eating of bread and wine and the spiritual eating of body and blood. The emphatic language of ‘in the supper rychtlic usit’ in connection with the feeding upon the body and blood of Jesus Christ is important not only for its obvious link to ‘the rycht administratioun of the sacramentis’ that is a note of the true church [XVIII, 273]; it is also significant in the effort to ascertain whether this confession owes more to Calvin or to Bullinger, to instrumentalism or to parallelism.

A natural first instinct might be to suggest that there is here a clear connection to Calvin: the spiritual feeding seems to take place through the physical sacraments, when the sacraments are rightly administered and received by the elect; in this way, the sacraments serve as instruments. Yet any such instinct might be tempered by the realisation that the preposition ‘through’ and the term ‘instrument’ are lacking at precisely this point. Moreover, to speak of what happens spiritually ‘in [the right use of] the sacrament’ is language with which Bullinger seems to have been comfortable throughout his work.³³

The issue – as Rorem indicates in his analysis of the Consensus Tigurinus and as Bierma relates in his analysis of the Heidelberg Catechism – is that both Bullinger and Calvin agree upon the agency of the Holy Spirit in the feeding of the elect upon the body and blood of Jesus Christ in heaven *in* the sacrament.³⁴ But in the Scots

³³ Significantly, the preposition ‘in’ in the phrase ‘in the sacrament’ is susceptible of diverse interpretations – it *could* mean ‘in’ with reference to instrumentality, but could *also* mean ‘in’ with reference to time – see Rorem, ‘Part II’, pp. 373–4. While Calvin might lean towards the former, Bullinger might lean towards the latter.

³⁴ See Rorem, ‘Part II’, pp. 365–75; and Bierma, *Sacraments in the Heidelberg Catechism*, pp. 9–20. For Bullinger, note particularly Bierma, *Sacraments in the Heidelberg Catechism*, p. 18, n. 72.

Confession, as in both the Consensus Tigurinus and the Heidelberg Catechism, no further information is given to indicate whether this feeding takes place *through* the sacrament and its elements of bread and wine, or *in parallel with* the sacrament and its elements of bread and wine.

The Confession continues with an acknowledgement of the presence of Christ in heaven, but a declaration (in the words 1 Corinthians 10:16) that nevertheless ‘the breid, quhilk we brek, is the communion of Christis body, and the coup, quhilk we blis, is the communion of his blude’ [XXI, 284]. It then proceeds:

Sa that we confes and undoutitlie beleif that the faithfull, in the rycht use of the Lords table, do sa eat the bodie and drink the blude of the Lord Jesus that he remanis in thame, and thay in him – yea, thay ar maid flesche of his flesche, and bane of his banis; that, as the eternall Godheid hes gevin to the flesche of Christ Jesus (quhilk of the awin condition and nature was mortall and corruptibill) lyfe and immortalitie, sa dois Christ Jesus – his flesche and blude eitin and drunkein be us – gif unto us the same prerogativis. Quhilk albeit we confes are nouter gevin unto us at the same tyme onelie, nouter yit be the proper power and vertew of the sacrament onelie, yit we affirme that the faithfull, in the rycht use of the Lordis table, hes conjunctioun with Christ Jesus as the naturall man can not apprehend.

[XXI, 284–285]

Once more, the emphasis (again twice-repeated) is on *the right use of the Lord’s Table*, and there exists the same ambiguity as to whether this use involves an instrument for feeding upon the body and blood of Jesus Christ or simply a testimony to that spiritual feeding. Meanwhile, the references to ‘only’ towards the end of this paragraph offer

additional clarifications. The first suggests that the gifts of life and immortality are not only given to us at the time of the sacrament, indicating – in a manner recognised by both Bullinger and Calvin – that feeding on the body and blood of Jesus Christ is not limited to the Eucharist.³⁵ The second suggests that the gifts of life and immortality are not in the power and virtue of the sacrament to give of itself; the power and virtue behind such gifts can only be God, and whether the sacrament serves as instrument for that power and virtue or merely attests that power and virtue is not clarified.³⁶

In the closing paragraph of this article, the Confession again rejects the idea that (on the one hand) the sacraments are ‘nakit and bair signs’, but also distinguishes carefully (on the other hand) ‘betuix Christ Jesus in his eternall substance and betuix the elementis of the sacramentall signis’ [XXI, 286], in a manner familiar to both Bullinger and Calvin.

The second and third articles on the Eucharist in the Scots Confession can be treated far more briefly. The second treats of the right administration of the sacraments, setting out that the conditions for the sacraments being ‘rychtlie ministrat’ are the presidency of lawful ministers and the adherence to biblical procedures [XXII, 287]. Positively, the article insists that both the minister and the recipients of the sacrament should have a right understanding of it [XXII, 290] – which implies the importance of instruction by preaching and catechesis. The third article is brief and addresses the question of who can legitimately receive the sacraments. In terms of the Eucharist,

³⁵ In the following paragraph, the benefit of participating in the Eucharist is not simply ‘the verry instant actioun of the supper’ – ‘yit sall it efter bring frute furth, as lively seid sawain in gude ground’ [XXI, 285].

³⁶ The agent of the making ‘effectuall’ of the sacraments at whatever time is declared in what follows to be Christ alone [XXI, 285], though this is evidently not incompatible with believing that that the effect of the sacraments is ‘wrocht be operatioun of the haly Gaist’ [XXI, 283].

participation is limited to those who are ‘of the houshald of faith and can try and examin
tham selfis asweill in thair faith as in thair dewtie towardis thair nichtbouris’ [XXIII,
293].

In light of this analysis, it is no surprise to find a diverse array of opinions concerning the kind of Eucharistic theology the Scots Confession contains. For some, such as Locher, one has to do here with ‘the Zwinglian doctrine of the Lord’s Supper in Article XXI of the basically Calvinistic *Confessio Scotica* of 1560’.³⁷ For others, such as Spinks, the Scots Confession ‘appears to reject the symbolic memorialism of Zwingli, espousing something akin to symbolic parallelism’.³⁸ For others yet, such as Gerrish, ‘the Scots Confession ... affirm[s] the full Calvinistic doctrine of the Lord’s Supper in strikingly realistic language’.³⁹ In navigating between these contrasting views, great care is required.

On the one hand, it would seem that the Eucharistic doctrine of the Scots Confession could only be called a ‘Zwinglian doctrine’ with severe hesitation. The articles surveyed testify to the Confession’s resolve to stress the divine act in the sacraments, and Zwingli’s broad emphasis generally lies in the other direction. On the other hand, it would be similarly difficult to describe the Eucharistic doctrine in the Scots Confession as the ‘full Calvinistic doctrine’, given the absence of any unequivocally instrumentalist conception in the text. Indeed, not one of the six verbal–

³⁷ Gottfried W. Locher, ‘Zwingli’s Influence in England and Scotland’, in *Zwingli’s Thought: New Perspectives*, translated by Milton Aylor and Stuart Casson, 340–378, at 371.

³⁸ Spinks, *Do This in Remembrance of Me*, p. 294.

³⁹ B. A. Gerrish, ‘Sign and Reality’, p. 127. Indeed, Gerrish continues: ‘It has indeed been said that the sacramental affirmations of the Scots Confession can lay claim to a validity that is transconfessional: not just *reformiert* but *reformatorisch*’; this claim seems rather difficult to accept in light of the above.

conceptual demarcators of a clearly instrumentalist approach outlined earlier are present. And here arises the point mentioned previously: it is certainly true that Calvin could subscribe to everything in the Scots Confession, just as could Bullinger. But Bullinger would go no ‘higher’ on the sacramental scale, whereas Calvin would. If so, how is the doctrine to be described: as Calvinist? as Bullingerian? or just as Reformed?

To explore the situation in Scotland further, it is helpful to turn to other ecclesiastical documents which had influence in a Scottish context in this early Reformation period.

Other confessions in Scotland

Beyond the Scots Confession, other confessions also had relevance in the early years of post-Reformation Scotland. The Apostles’ Creed, the only creed of which ‘all communicant members of the reformed Church in Scotland were consistently required to have an examinable knowledge’, has no mention of the Eucharist.⁴⁰ Of more interest, then, is the short Confession of the English congregation at Geneva, which confession – and not the Scots Confession – appeared in the Church of Scotland service-book in editions from 1562 until well into the following century.⁴¹ There is also the Second

⁴⁰ Hazlett, ‘Confessio Scotica 1560’, 217.

⁴¹ David F. Wright, ‘The Scottish Reformation: theology and theologians’, in *Cambridge Companion to the Reformation Theology*, edited by David Bagchi and David C. Steinmetz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004), 177. This confession, Wright observes, was ‘based in part on the confession by Valérand Poullain used in Frankfurt’, and ‘appeared in the 1556 Geneva printing of *The Forme of Prayers*’, in ‘The Scottish Reformation’, 177. Connecting this work and the service-book, Wright explains, ‘The service book which ordered the Reformed worship ... of the kirk was ... the work of a group of Scottish and English exiles at Frankfurt in 1555, whence it was adopted by the English-speaking congregation in Geneva, which counted Knox among its pastors. ... [I]t was printed [in 1562] in Edinburgh, as *The Forme of Prayers and Ministration of the Sacraments*. It is misleadingly referred to as John Knox’s Liturgy’, in ‘The Scottish Reformation’, 175–176.

Helvetic Confession, written by Bullinger in 1561 and formally approved by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1566.⁴² And finally, there is the Confession of Aberdeen of 1616, adopted by a controversial (and Episcopalian) General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and deeply contested at the time in view of its political dependence upon the king.⁴³

The material on the sacraments in the Confession of the English congregation at Geneva is rather concise. It opens with the familiar claim that they are ‘Sacraments Christ hath left unto us, as holy signes and seales of Gods promises’.⁴⁴ The central Eucharistic claim is that

the Supper declareth that God, as a moste provident Father, doth not only feed our bodies, but also spirituallie nourish our soules with the graces and benefites of Jesus Christ which the Scripture calleth eating of his flesh, and drinking of his blood.⁴⁵

The Eucharist thus offers a declaration: not only do the Eucharistic bread and wine feed the body, but the spiritual body and blood of Jesus Christ feed the soul. Yet there is no

⁴² As David F. Wright notes (in ‘The Scottish Reformation, pp. 176–7), the General Assembly had reservations only in respect of the Second Helvetic Confession’s ‘commendation of the major festivals of the Christian year’.

⁴³ See C. G. M’Crie, *The Confessions of the Church of Scotland: Their Evolution in History* (Edinburgh: Macniven & Wallace, 1907), pp. 27–35. M’Crie closes with a wonderful question and observation: ‘Could anything good come out of the packed, prelatic Assembly of Aberdeen? Well, worse things have emanated forth from that city of anti-covenanting doctors than the Confession of 1616’ (*The Confessions*, p. 35).

⁴⁴ ‘The Confession of Faith Used in the English Congregation at Geneva: Received and Approved by the Church of Scotland, &c.’ (1556), section IV, in *A Collection of Confessions of Faith, Catechisms, Directories, Books of Discipline, &c. Of public Authority in the Church of Scotland*, volume II (Edinburgh: James Watson, 1722), p. 9.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

particular explanation of any relationship between the two events. And finally, the one who either worships or condemns the sacrament ‘procureth to himselfe damnation’.⁴⁶

The Second Helvetic Confession, by contrast, provides a far more extensive sacramental theology, occupying three chapters of the text. In outline, the text declares that the sacraments are ‘mystical symbols or holy rites, or sacred actions, instituted by God himself’, and that by them God ‘keeps in mind, and from time to time recalls, his great benefits shown to humanity’.⁴⁷ Moreover, by the sacraments,

[God] seals his promises, and outwardly represents, and, as it were, offers unto our sight, those things which inwardly he performs for us, and so strengthens and increases our faith through the working of God’s Spirit in our hearts.⁴⁸

This parallel of inward and outward is recurrent in the text. Thus the Confession states that ‘the substance of the sacraments is given ... by the Lord, and the outward signs by the ministers of the Lord’.⁴⁹ And of the Eucharist itself, the Confession writes:

the faithful receive what is given by the ministers of the Lord, and they eat the bread of the Lord and drink of the Lord’s cup. Inwardly, meanwhile (*intus interim*), by the work of Christ through the Holy Spirit they also receive the flesh and blood of the Lord, and are thereby nourished unto life eternal.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁷ *Second Helvetic Confession* (1566), §19, in RB 2/2, p. 323, at Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, p. 277.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 278.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 284 (translation altered to indicate the force of the *intus interim*).

There may be an allusion to simultaneity here between the inward and the outward; indeed the Confession states that ‘he who outwardly receives the sacrament by true faith, not only receives the sign, but also, as we said, enjoys the thing itself’.⁵¹ However, there is no sense of instrumentality apparent in the conception of the Eucharist, and not one of the six verbal–conceptual motifs suggesting a higher Eucharistic theology appears.

In the controverted Aberdeen Confession of 1616, a different note is struck. Within the framework of a broadly Reformational theology, underscored by clear Calvinist teaching on election and reprobation, the text on the sacraments and the Eucharist reads:

We believe, that God has appointed his Word and Sacraments, as instruments of the Holy Ghost to work and confirm faith in man. ... that the Sacraments are certain visible seals of Gods eternal covenant, ordained be God to represent unto us Christ crucified, and to seal up our spiritual communion with him. ... that the Sacraments have power to confirm faith, and conferr grace, not of themselves, or *ex opere operato*, or force of the external action; but only by the powerfull operation of the Holy Ghost. ... that the body and blood of Jesus Christ are truely present in the holy Supper, that they are truely exhibit unto us; and that we in very truth doe participat of them, albeit only spiritually and by faith, not carnally or corporally.⁵²

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 286.

⁵² ‘The new Confession of Faith’, in Maitland Club, ‘Acts and Proceedings: 1616, August’, in *Acts and Proceedings of the General Assemblies of the Kirk of Scotland, 1560–1618* (Edinburgh: [s.n.], 1839), pp. 1116–1139, at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/church-scotland-records/acts-proceedings/1560-1618/pp1116-1139>, accessed 28 February, 2018.

Though the language of representation and sealing is again present, another semantic (and theological) domain is explicit here: that of instrument, of conferring grace, and of exhibition. Indeed its presence here, in this minority and controversial document, makes the absence of such language in the previous confessions examined all the more notable.

The Catechisms

Alongside the officially sanctioned confessions explored above, a central means of teaching the faith in post-Reformation Scotland was by the catechisms of the church.⁵³ This section will explore a number of the more influential of these texts, beginning with Calvin's French Genevan catechism published in 1541/1542. An English translation of this text was included in the Church of Scotland service-book from its second edition in 1564/1565 and through numerous subsequent editions.⁵⁴ Thereafter, attention will be given to the first catechism of Scottish origin to be widely used – *A Shorte Summe of the Whole Catechism* by John Craig, published in Edinburgh in 1581.⁵⁵ Finally, consideration will be given to the Heidelberg (or 'Palatine') Catechism of 1563, which was published in Edinburgh in Latin in 1591 and in English in 1615, and enjoyed widespread acceptance in Scotland.⁵⁶

⁵³ To turn to the Catechisms of Scotland to pose questions of sacramental theology is to take up a line of enquiry which Gerrish found himself without space to explore: see Gerrish, 'Sign and Reality', p. 333, n. 47; given the constraints of this essay, the task remains to be completed.

⁵⁴ Wright, 'The Scottish Reformation', p. 176.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 176. Henderson mentions among the pre-Westminster catechisms used in Scotland not only those of Calvin and Craig, but also those of Beza and Welsh. Of the last two, the former is explored in note 58 below, but no copy has thus far been located of the latter.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 188. T. F. Torrance notes that the 'Palatine Catechism' appeared in editions of the Church of Scotland *Book of Common Order* from 1615, see T. F. Torrance, 'The Little Catechism, 1556', in T. F. Torrance, ed., *The School of Faith* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1959), p. 239.

The French Genevan catechism opens its sacramental theology by defining a sacrament as

an outward token of Gods favour, which by a visible signe doeth represent unto us spiritual things, to the end that Gods promises might take the more deepe roote in our hearts, and that we might so much the more surelie give credite unto them.⁵⁷

Though the Spirit alone can move hearts, illumine minds, and assure consciences, nevertheless ‘it hath pleased our Lord to use his Sacraments as second instruments therof’, and again, ‘it is Gods pleasure to werke by meanes by him ordeined’ [A. 312 and 313, 229–230]. And correspondingly, the Catechism posits that ‘it is most certaine, that the promises which [our Saviour Christ] made at the Supper, bee there in deede accomplished, and that which is figured by the signes is truely performed’ [A. 353, 243], and that ‘If we will have the substance of the Sacrament, we must list up our heartes into heaven’ [A. 355, 243]. Though neither of these latter statements demands an instrumental rather than a parallel understanding, the earlier language of instruments and means and the mention of ‘substance’ might naturally lead towards understanding them instrumentally.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ John Calvin, ‘The Catechisme, or Manner to teach Children the Christian Religion’, A. 310, in *A Collection of Confessions of Faith*, p. 229. References to this text will be given inline by Question/Answer number and page number.

⁵⁸ There are strong resonances between this Catechism of Calvin and ‘A little catechisme, that is to say, a short instruction touching christian religion’ (1575), written by Théodore de Bèze and available at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo2/A09959.0001.001/1:1?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>, accessed 28 February, 2018. The latter also circulated widely in Scotland in this period, according to Henderson, ‘Introduction’, 15. The resonances exist in terms of the description of the sacraments as ‘instruments or meanes’ [section VII, Q./A.1] as well as in terms of what happens in the sacrament, which is described in terms susceptible of either instrumentalist or parallelist interpretation: ‘As I receiue with my hande and my mouth the sacrament, that is to saye, that bread and that wine, for the nourishment of

In Craig's Catechism, there is a long series of questions on the sacraments, falling under the over-arching rubric 'The Outward Instruments of our Salvation'.⁵⁹ The Catechism speaks of the sacraments not only as signs and seals [147], but as being 'added as effectual instruments of the Spirit' [148]. To the question of how the external action and the inward signification of the sacraments are joined together, the Catechism responds, rather opaquely, 'As the word and the signification are joined together' [149]. There is a clear affirmation of parallelism: one's soul being fed by the body and blood of Christ is represented by bread and wine because 'what the one does to the body, the other does to the soul spiritually' [154]. Yet there is clear evidence of instrumentalism also, for in response to the question 'How does [Christ] offer His body and blood?', the Catechism explicitly affirms 'By the Word and Sacraments' [155]; and to the question whether only tokens and not the body of Christ are received, the Catechism resolutely states, 'We receive His very substantial body and blood by faith' [156].⁶⁰ Indeed, and going far beyond Calvin's position, the Catechism even contends that 'Christ's natural body' is something that 'we receive on earth by faith' [156].⁶¹ In any event, across a range of verbal–conceptual indicators, a highly instrumentalist approach governs Craig's work.

thys bodye, euen so by the vertue, and power of the holye Ghoste, I doe inwardly and in my soule receiue and imbrace thorowe faythe our Lorde Iesus Christ, verye God and verye man, that by him I may liue eternally' [section X, A.3].

⁵⁹ 'Craig's Catechism' (1581), heading to section 8, in *The School of Faith*, 99–165, at 146. Further references to this text are given inline by page number.

⁶⁰ This can be proven, the Catechism states, 'By the truth of [Christ's] word, and nature of a sacrament' [156].

⁶¹ This occurs by 'the wonderful working of the Holy Spirit' [156]. Cf. Wright, 'The Scottish Reformation', p. 187.

Finally, there is the Heidelberg Catechism. Along with the language of the sacraments as signs and seals,⁶² the Catechism relates the promise of Jesus Christ thus:

First. That his Body was no less assuredly offered, and broken for me upon the cross, and his Blood shed for me, than with mine eyes I see that the Bread of the Lord is broken unto me, and the Cup reached unto me.

Secondly. That my Soul is no less assuredly fed unto everlasting Life by him, with his Body that was crucified, and his Blood that was shed for us, than I do with my bodily Mouth receive Bread and Wine, the Tokens of the Body and Blood of the Lord, being delivered unto me by the Hand of the Minister. [A. 75, 321]

The representation and reassurance of the Eucharist is linked to a didactic parallel, and the same pattern is evident in the way in which the Catechism explains why Jesus Christ (and Paul) speak of the Eucharistic bread and wine as the body and blood of Jesus Christ:

not only to teach us, that as Bread and Wine sustaineth the Life of the Body; so also his Body crucified, and his Blood shed, is indeed the Meat and Drink of our Soul, whereby it may be nourished to Life everlasting. But much more by this visible Sign and Pledge to assure us, that we are no less truly made Partakers of his Body and Blood, by the working of the Holy Ghost, than we do with the Mouth of the Body receive these holy Signs, in Remembrance of him. [A. 79, 324]

⁶² ‘Palatine Catechism’ (1563), Q. 66, in *A Collection of Confessions of Faith*, 273–362, at 315. Further references are given inline by Question/Answer number and page number.

The sacramental language of the Catechism carefully preserves this parallel discourse throughout, without ever moving beyond into the realm of instrumental language.⁶³

Conclusion

The above analysis has demonstrated that the early years of the Church of Scotland were marked by approval of a variety of sacramental theologies, from the memorialism of The Little Catechism of 1556 through the parallelism of the Scots Confession of 1560 to the instrumentalism of Craig's Catechism of 1581. It has also shown that the balance of Eucharistic material in the central texts explored – and significantly, in the three important confessions in view – lands squarely within the domain of parallelism, seldom invoking any of the verbal–conceptual terms associated with instrumentalism. To suggest that such documents remain content with a theology that appears indebted principally to Bullinger rather than Calvin is not to say, of course, that a Calvinist could not happily subscribe to them; it is to say, however, that a Calvinist would not consider such documents to tell the full story, and would require supplementary dogmatic material to do so.⁶⁴

If this understanding is correct, then three important consequences may follow. First, the characterisation of the early Reformed Church of Scotland as 'Calvinist' may have limited traction insofar as it pertains to the doctrine of the Eucharist. And given that the Eucharist is central to Reformed identity as a whole, this might give pause for

⁶³ Thus also Bierma, in *Sacraments in the Heidelberg Catechism*, pp. 29–30. He notes that both Bullinger and Calvin could subscribe to this Catechism: the text is simply silent in respect of the matters on which they differ.

⁶⁴ And perhaps such eirenic confessional outcomes finally attest not only theological diplomacy and doctrinal inclusivity, but also the complexity of dealing with the under-determined Eucharistic theology of Scripture.

thought in respect of the claim more generally.⁶⁵ To return to the early years and the early theology of the Church of Scotland, then, may not be to return to the land of high Calvinism, as the renewal movement of the late-nineteenth century and the ecumenical impetus of the late-twentieth century may have implied or suggested. In truth, the dogmatic inheritance of the early years of the Church of Scotland may owe far more to a moderate Zürich position in doctrine rather than to a staunchly Genevan position. Against this backdrop, efforts to appreciate the range of the early Reformed tradition in Scotland seem highly important.

Second, the characterisation of the Reformed tradition as a whole as one in which the Eucharist is conceived in instrumentalist terms as a means of grace may have to be revised. Such a characterisation remains prominent in the relevant literature.⁶⁶ Yet in light of the above exploration of the Eucharistic theology promulgated in the early Scottish Reformed tradition, this may not be sustainable as an accurate picture in respect, at least, of Scottish theology. And in light of the continental provenance of some of the relevant documents, this may not be sustainable as an accurate picture of Reformed theology as a whole. Far greater insight and far greater circumspection may be needed at this point.

⁶⁵ Such a concern grows when it is considered that the doctrine of election (rightly considered another *particula veri* of the Reformed tradition) in the Scots Confession is far more hesitant than Calvin himself on the topic of reprobation (see T. F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), pp. 14–17). This feature of the Scots Confession in respect of election finds a remarkable parallel in its Eucharistic theology.

⁶⁶ See, e.g., Cornelis P. Venema, ‘Sacraments and Baptism in the Reformed Confessions’, in *Mid-America Theological Journal*, 11 (2000), p. 78, n. 61; Scott Swain, ‘Lutheran and Reformed Sacramental Theology: Seventeenth–Nineteenth Centuries’, in Matthew Levering, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), p. 362; Michael Allen, ‘Sacraments in the Reformed and Anglican Reformation’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, p. 295.

Third and finally, the long-standing and deep-rooted resistance felt within Scottish church circles to certain more elevated doctrines and practices of the Eucharist may be afforded some historical foundation. It may not be for nothing, perhaps, that efforts down the years and centuries to beautify sacramental liturgies and to celebrate frequent communions have encountered measures of resistance or disapproval. And it may not be for nothing, perhaps, that the ecumenical documents of Leuenberg in 1973 and Lima in 1982 – with their normative assumptions of instrumentalist and substantialist accounts of the Eucharist – have had little evident impact upon church-life in Scotland.

Each of these themes may be deserving of further prosecution. But by way of conclusion, it is perhaps helpful to be reminded by Gottfried Locher, an expert on Zwingli, of the limits of Reformed confessions, indeed of every confession:

When Jesus Christ comes, to take home His disciples – and He will come, suddenly, and He already comes every day, by His Spirit – then He will not ask about confessions, but about confessors; about disciples who confess Him with a doubting and yet unshakable faith, in despair perhaps, or in a desperate world situation, yet in joyous hope, living in a world full of malice, exploitation, murder and hypocrisy, yet displaying sacrificial, loyal love. “Whoever confesses *me*, him will I also confess”, He says. *His* confession of us is always more important than our endeavours at confessing.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Gottfried W. Locher, ‘The Second Helvetic Confession’, in *Zwingli’s Thought: New Perspectives*, translated by Milton Aylor and Stuart Casson: 288–302, at 301–302.