

Wariston at the Table: Lessons on the Use and Abuse of the Lord's Supper from the Diary of a Covenanter¹

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Introduction

This paper presents a practical perspective on the reception of the Lord's Supper, through the experience of the Scottish Covenanter, Archibald Johnston of Wariston (1611-63).² Wariston is often typecast by historians as the archetypal Scottish Presbyterian fundamentalist of the mid-17th century. His remarkable public career began as the lawyer largely responsible for the form and content of the National Covenant (1638) and Solemn League and Covenant (1643), going on to champion the latter's implementation in England as one of the Scottish commissioners to the Westminster Assembly. However, when this manifesto failed, Wariston collaborated with the Cromwell regime in the 1650s, which earned him a hangman's noose for treason at the Restoration of Charles II in 1663.

But while this public face is well documented by the historians, the complex and often turbulent world of Wariston's "inner man" is much less so: a place of intense puritan spirituality that centered primarily on copious Scripture intake from the pulpit and in the closet, but which also witnessed a great emphasis on the use of the Lord's Supper as a means of grace in the Christian life. The Puritans and Covenanters were not merely Calvinists; they were *experiential* Calvinists. Their Christianity was not just a matter of the head, but the heart: they experienced what Henry Scougal memorably called, "the life of God in the soul of man."³ They "tasted and saw that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8) when they came to the Lord's Table, and many expressed this intimate spiritual experience of the sacrament in their personal diaries. Wariston's diary provides a fascinating case study of an experiential Calvinist at the Table, with much to teach us about the use and potential abuse of the Lord's Supper in a confessionally Reformed context, demonstrating how a right theology of the sacrament does not necessarily guarantee a consistent application of that theology in practice.

¹ This article is a considerably extended version of a paper delivered at RPTS's Westminster Conference, Pittsburgh, September 9, 2022.

² For summaries of Wariston's life see John Coffey, "Johnston, Sir Archibald, Lord Wariston (Bap. 1611, d. 1663)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), and David G. Whitla, *Archibald Johnston of Wariston*, Famous Scots Series, (Edinburgh: Scottish Reformation Society, forthcoming, 2023).

³ Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man, or, The Nature and Excellency of the Christian Religion with the Method of Attaining the Happiness it Proposes* (London: Charles Smith, 1677).

Wariston's Theology of Communion

In order to rightly understand Wariston's experience of communion, it is important to situate that experience in his 17th-century Scottish theological context.

The standard text on the theology and experience of the Lord's Supper in the Scottish Presbyterian tradition was written by one of Wariston's childhood mentors, Robert Bruce, who had lived under the same roof as the fatherless Wariston in his youth. He seems to have been something of a "father in Christ" to him.⁴ Bruce's *Sermons on the Sacrament* were first published in Scots English in 1591,⁵ and the book remained a foundational work of Scottish ecclesiology for centuries, remaining in print today. Bruce's seminal work provides a good starting point to explain Wariston's theology of the Lord's Supper, not only because of its influence on Presbyterian sacramentology, but its probable personal impact on Wariston himself.⁶

Sacrament and Word

Following Bruce, Wariston understood that the first two marks of the Church—the Word and sacraments—were inseparable. The sacrament was always considered an adjunct of the Word and not *vice versa*.⁷ This was because both sacraments were considered "sealing" ordinances, following Romans 4:11: "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised." Bruce writes,

Now I come to the defining of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. I call this sacrament, an holy Seal, annexed to the covenant of grace and mercy in Christ. A seal to be ministered publicly, always according to the holy institution of Christ Jesus: that by the lawful administering thereof, the sacramental union between the signs and the thing signified, may stand: and this union standing, Christ Jesus who is the thing signified, is as truly delivered to the increase of our spiritual

⁴ For the underexplored links between Bruce and Wariston see David G. Whitla, "Archibald Johnston of Wariston: The Formation of a British Puritan, 1611-38" (PhD diss., Queens University Belfast, 2019), 41-3, 48, 86, 107.

⁵ Robert Bruce, *Sermons Vpon the Sacrament of the Lords Supper: Preached in the Kirk of Edinburgh Be M. Robert Bruce, Minister of Christes Euangel There: At the Time of the Celebration of the Supper, as They Were Receaved from His Mouth* (Edinburgh: Robert Waldegrave, 1591).

⁶ This is more than conjecture. Wariston compares his own Christian experience with Bruce (along with some English Puritan writers who also disciplined him): "the inward experience of all—Rogers, Byfield, Bruce—their signs did undoubtedly assure me." Archibald Johnston of Wariston, *Diary of Sir Archibald Johnston of Wariston, 1632-39*, ed. George Morison Paul (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1911), 144 (Hereinafter, *AJW Diary I*). Cf. D.C. MacNicol, *Robert Bruce, Minister in the Kirk of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust [reprint], 1961), 96-8. While it is possible that Wariston is simply referring to what he knew personally of Bruce's Christian experience, it is also quite probable that he was referring to Bruce's treatise on the Lord's Supper, which also offers signs of assurance that the Christian should seek out by way of preparation for the sacrament. See Robert Bruce, *Robert Bruce's Sermons on the Sacrament*, ed. John Laidlaw (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1901), 151-6 (This standard modernized text of Bruce will be used throughout this essay). There are other clear verbal parallels in the diary to Bruce's work on the Lord's Supper, most notably his reference to the "liquor of the Spirit" being poured through him as a conduit. *AJW Diary I*, 278, 280; c.f. Chapter 8 of Bruce, *Sermons on the Sacrament*.

⁷ See David George Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism, 1590-1638* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 64. C.f. William McMillan, *The Worship of the Scottish Reformed Church, 1550-1638* (London: James Clarke & Company, 1931), 169.

nourishment, as the signs are given and delivered to the body, for our *temporal* nourishment.⁸

As explained below, several important elements of Wariston’s theology of communion appear in this quotation.

Sacramental Seal

The Lord’s Supper signified the atoning sacrifice of Christ for sinners, but as a “seal annexed to the Covenant of Grace” (the Gospel), it did not offer anything not already offered by the Word. Like a seal attached to a document, it simply stamped the document as authentic.⁹ But also, just as a seal without its document is worthless, so the sacrament administered without the preached Word was pointless. Bruce continues, “For as I get a title to Him in the word ... so in the sacrament I get the confirmation of my title; I get the seal which confirms it.”¹⁰

Notice the important distinction: It is the preached Word that proclaims the crucified Christ, who is believed on for salvation—and as such, the Word is a *saving* ordinance. However, the sacrament is not a saving ordinance, but a *sealing* ordinance—sealing the Gospel to the believer who has already embraced it by faith. This Scottish sacramentology was absolutely congruent with that of the continental Reformed tradition; as the Heidelberg Catechism stated in Question 65: “Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all his benefits by faith only, whence comes this faith?” Answer: “The Holy Spirit *works faith* in our hearts through the *preaching* of the holy Gospel and *confirms* it through the use of *holy sacraments*” (emphasis added).

Sacramental Sermons

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that at Scottish communions, there was a lot of preaching—before, during, and after the administration of the elements. Ministers regularly chose texts that vividly portrayed the sufferings of Christ, reminding their flocks of the glory of the Gospel that this sacrament would seal to them. The sermons probed their consciences to expose the sin and unworthiness of the communicant, but also warmly invited the unworthy participant to participate worthily, that is, looking by faith to Christ as a greater Savior than they were sinners. This was especially true of the brief “table address”—an often-emotive Biblical exhortation to the communicants at each table as they partook of the elements.¹¹ Many Scottish communions were

⁸ Bruce, *Sermons on the Sacrament*, 93.

⁹ See Donald MacLeod, *Therefore the Truth I Speak: Scottish Theology, 1500-1700* (Fearn: Mentor, 2020), 135.

¹⁰ Bruce, *Sermons on the Sacrament*, 75. “The sacraments are therefore annexed to the word, to seal up the truth contained in the word, and to confirm it more and more in thy heart.” See also *ibid.*, 36.

¹¹ See e.g. Andrew Gray, *The Works of the Reverend and Pious Andrew Gray* (Aberdeen: George and Robert King, 1839), 484-9, where several table addresses are recorded, one for each “wave” of communicants approaching the tables in groups. Although widespread, McMillan claims this was a Scottish innovation, and one that shocked the English when a Scottish Westminster commissioner performed it in London (McMillan, 174n2). Cf. Margo Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 99-101. Todd’s singling out of this classification of Scottish sermons as “emotional roller-coasters” that “undeniably added to the emotional intensity of the experience” implies unfairly that they were intentionally emotionally manipulative. It is noteworthy, however, that published collections of sermons by Wariston’s colleagues like Samuel Rutherford and Andrew Gray should *distinguish* communion sermons and table addresses by a special category in their table of contents. Indeed, whole volumes of select communion sermons were also produced; see e.g. Samuel Rutherford, *Fourteen Communion Sermons*, ed. A. A. Bonar (Glasgow: Charles Glass, 1876).

remembered for revival-like outpourings of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with the impassioned preaching of men like Wariston's colleagues John Livingstone, David Dickson, and Robert Blair, most memorably the Kirk O' Shotts revival of 1630.¹²

Sacramental Means of Grace

Wariston understood that communion was a means of grace by which the recipient actually received Christ and the benefits of redemption by the instrument of faith. His theology of the sacrament is summed up well by the Westminster Confession:

Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this sacrament, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually, receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all benefits of his death.¹³

Wariston's theology of the sacrament was thus far removed from the nemesis of the Presbyterian sacrament, William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury (1573-1645), who argued, "The altar is the greatest place of God's residence on earth; yea, greater than the pulpit; for there 'tis *hoc est corpus meum*, 'this is my body', but in the pulpit 'tis at most but *hoc est verbum meum*, this is my word."¹⁴ It was the imposition of such sacerdotalism on Wariston's kirk that pushed him to join the Covenanter revolutionaries in 1637. But at the same time, neither was communion a mere memorial, or pious ritual; at the Table, a real spiritual transaction took place.

Sacramental Union of the Elements with Christ

Following Calvin, Wariston had been taught that there was a mystical conjunction¹⁵ between the consecrated elements and the realities they represented. The believing communicant received Christ Himself by faith (not corporally). Just as the body is physically nourished by bread and wine, so the soul is spiritually nourished by what the bread and wine represent, i.e. Christ's body and blood.

This "sacramental union" between the consecrated elements on the table and the body and blood of Christ locally present in heaven did not in any way increase the mystical *union* of the believer with Christ—which remains a constant and does not admit of degrees. But crucially, when he came to the Lord's Table, the believer could by partaking of them expect a closer degree of *communion* with Christ. James Melville, writing a half-century before the Westminster Shorter Catechism, yet pre-empting its language, explains,

What are the Sacraments? Outward signes and seales, of the inward grace of God, and of the covenant thereof, by the whilk being rightly used, Christ and all his benefits, are given and received for life and salvation. Wherein standes the right use of them? In this, namely, that as we bring the natural instruments of the bodie

¹² For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 2001), 11-41.

¹³ Westminster Assembly, Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), 29.7.

¹⁴ Cited in John Spurr, *Religion, Politics and Society in Britain: The Post-Reformation 1603-1714* (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), 74.

¹⁵ This is MacLeod's term. MacLeod, *Therefore the Truth I Speak*, 137.

to receive the signes, so wee bring [a] spirituall instrument, to wit, true faith in our hearts, to receive the things signified.¹⁶

It is on this aspect of the communicant's experience at the Table that we find Wariston's diary especially illuminating.

Sacramental Communion of the Communicants with Christ.

Bruce had been careful not to elevate the sacrament above the Word. But because it was a means of grace, and not a mere memorial, he also taught that there was something very particular about the believer's experience of Christ at His Table—a greater spiritual apprehension of Christ:

Therefore, I say, we get no other thing in the sacrament than we had in the Word: content thee with this. But suppose it be so; yet the sacrament is not superfluous ... Suppose thou get that same thing which thou hadst in the word, *yet thou gettest that same thing better.... Thou obtainest a greater and surer hold of that same thing in the sacrament, than thou hadst by the hearing of the word.* That same thing which thou possessedst by the *hearing* of the word, thou dost possess now *more largely*; He has larger bounds in thy soul by the receiving of the sacrament, than otherwise He could have by the hearing of the word only. Then, wilt thou ask what new thing we get? I say, we get this new thing: *we get Christ better than we did before*; we get the thing which we had, *more fully*, that is, *with a surer apprehension than we had of it before*; *we get a greater hold of Christ now.* For by the sacrament my faith is nourished, the bounds of my soul are enlarged: and so, whereas I had but a little hold of Christ before, as it were between my finger and my thumb, now I get Him in my whole hand; and still the more that my faith grows, the better hold I get of Christ Jesus. So the sacrament is very necessary, if it were no more but *to get Christ better, and to get a closer apprehension of Him,* by the Sacrament than we could have before.¹⁷

Armed with this understanding, Wariston came to the table with a great sense of expectation. He went seeking to “get Christ better.” In a very spiritually tangible way, the Lord's Supper was truly “communion”—communion with a Living Savior, by a means of grace He had instituted for this very purpose.

Wariston's theology of communion—in terms of sacrament and word, sacramental seal, sacramental sermons, sacramental means of grace, sacramental union, and sacramental communion— appears to have been fairly typical of the Scottish Kirk of his day. His view was in line with the confessional standards he subscribed to, as well as the great Scottish Reformation and Post-Reformation theologians with whom he had close personal relationships. Having established Wariston's theological “norms” for the Lord's Supper, consider now how his experience of communion compared to them.

¹⁶ James Melville, *A Spirituall Propine of a Pastour to His People* (Edinburgh: Robert Waldegrave, 1589), 49-50.

¹⁷ Bruce, *Sermons on the Sacrament*, 63-4; italics mine.

Wariston's Experience of Communion

Wariston is fulsome in his written records of coming to the Table. In fact, he sometimes even brought his diary to the Table with him and was seen scribbling notes down as he participated!¹⁸ This intimate record of Wariston at the Table is charted below in three categories: Preparation, Participation, and Post-Mortem.

Preparation

Self-examination was of course enjoined by the very words of institution: “But let a man examine himself, and so let him drink of the cup” (1 Cor. 11:28). “Fencing the Table” was a standard aspect of the Lord’s Supper in 17th-century Scotland. But as Donald MacLeod reminds us, “this emphasis in preparation for the sacrament was [not] one of the gloomy peculiarities of Scottish piety.”¹⁹ It was the minister’s duty to typically give his congregation at least one week’s formal notice to prepare themselves; indeed, the Westminster Directory for Public Worship (adopted by the Scottish General Assembly in 1645) instructed that “It is requisite that publick warning be given the sabbath-day before the administration thereof: and that either then, or on some day of that week, something concerning that ordinance, and the due preparation thereunto, and participation thereof, be taught; that, by the diligent use of all means sanctified of God to that end, both in publick and private, all may come better prepared to that heavenly feast.”²⁰ Consequently, Wariston was usually found at public exercises of preparation:

I resolved to go to the Kirkliston communion.... Mr. Ephraim Melville preached the preparation sermon on John 20:26 very spiritually and pertinently ... I got great liberty at the end of Mr. Ephraim’s sermon and prayer, and told him at the end of it ... he had given me ... great matter of encouragement to do and suffer all for the best of masters; which from manifold experience I ... seal that he is the best master that ever man served, and that to keep fellowship with Christ and to do service to him is the best life and the greatest gain, honour and pleasure that a creature is capable of.²¹

Here we see a good example of how the communion preparation sermon was geared to prepare would-be communicants to see the loveliness of Christ and fit their souls for meeting with Him at the Table. But Wariston not only ensured he was himself prepared by such ordinances; as a ruling elder of his local church, he also played a role in preparing others by pastoral visitation preceding the communion. “I called this afternoon upon one Cirstye, a servant that intended to

¹⁸ Archibald Johnston of Wariston, *The Diary of Sir Archibald Johnston of Wariston. Volume II*, ed. D. Hay Fleming (Edinburgh: Scottish Historical Society, 1919), 239 (Hereinafter, *AJW Diary II*). Note: all excerpts from Wariston’s diary in this article have been edited from the original braid Scots to contemporary English.

¹⁹ MacLeod, *Therefore the Truth I Speak*, 142.

²⁰ *Westminster Confession of Faith; the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, Together with the Sum of Saving Knowledge* (Edinburgh: Johnstone, Hunter & Co., n.d.), 295. See McMillan, *The Worship of the Scottish Reformed Church*, 226-8. It is not uncommon in session minutes of the period to find elders presiding over meetings to reconcile feuding church or family members as a prerequisite to come to the table (per Matt. 5:41). See also *ibid.*, 224-5.

²¹ David George Mullan, *Protestant Piety in Early-Modern Scotland: Letters, Lives and Covenants, 1650-1712* (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 2008), 41-2. This volume contains excerpts from Wariston’s unpublished diary for 1650; c.f. EUL Laing L.A.III.263, 4. “A Part of the Lord Wariston’s Diary at 2 Communions, 1650.”

communicate, and conferred with her and prayed with her, and then Janet Pourye, and found her to pray sensibly.”²²

Communion preparation was not only a part of the public ministrations of the church; it had important domestic dimensions too. The daily “family altar” provided a convenient time for Wariston to prepare his household for their approach to the Lord’s Table. His diary records, “This night I went through in my family the questions about the sacraments and about the Lord’s Supper and preparation thereunto in the Shorter Catechism to instruct them in the literal knowledge of that ordinance, and I prayed upon the same the Lord bless it to them for Jesus Christ’s sake.” And the next day he continues, “This morning I went through the Larger Catechism about the sacraments and the Lord’s Supper the most part of it in my family and prayed thereon.”²³

Wariston’s preparation of his household extended also to their choice of family activities on the eve of the Lord’s Supper, for it was possible to rob oneself of a blessing at the Table by distracting the mind with worldly entertainments beforehand, instead of preparing one’s heart by devotional exercises. On one occasion, when Wariston’s wife and daughters were invited to a Saturday wedding before a communion, he heard a report about “their promiscuous dancing” while there (i.e. mixed dancing of men and women), which he felt compelled to confront. “I spake my mind sharply to my wife and her daughter against their promiscuous dancing at the marriage, and was glad to see it affected my daughter.” Then he prays, “Pardon my two distempers at my wife’s spending yesterday and this day’s vanity and worldly business, instead of preparations to the communion.”²⁴ As disappointed as he seems to have been with the ladies of the house for their choice of entertainment on a Day of Preparation, he seems to have been equally upset with himself for letting his own anger (“distempers”) also hinder soul-preparation for the sacrament. Such examples reveal a man deeply conscientious in this duty towards others as well as himself.

But by far the most extensive material we find in the diary for Wariston’s sacramental preparation concerns his own private exercises. Consider the following representative excerpts:

On Saturday night and on Sunday morning I spent many hours in seeking preparation....²⁵

On Saturday, [Day of Preparation for] Mauchlin communion After [the preparation] sermon, up in a little loft chamber in Mauchline I got great liberty of rushes of tears, groans and cries to the Lord in confessing the sins of my youth....²⁶

After [the preparation] sermon ... thou confessed unto God all thy sins ... enumerating the sins of every commandment, thou having read them successively,

²² NLS MS 6247 (“Diary of Sir Archibald Johnston of Wariston,” Aug. 1, 1655), fol. 89. It is perhaps worth mentioning here that there is no record anywhere in the diary of Wariston either receiving or issuing “communion tokens.” These were little lead discs (like coins) usually stamped with the parish name, or the minister’s initials, distributed by elders at pre-communion exercises and pastoral visits to ensure the bearer was spiritually fit to commune. See Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism*, 97. C.f. McMillan, McMillan, *The Worship of the Scottish Reformed Church*, 244.

²³ NLS MS 6247 (“Diary of Sir Archibald Johnston of Wariston,” July 31 – Aug 1, 1655), fol. 88.

²⁴ *AJW Diary II*, 296-7.

²⁵ *AJW Diary I*, 202.

²⁶ *AJW Diary II*, 194.

thou confessed them particularly, humbly craved pardon for them ... and in this manner of confession I spent all Friday afternoon.²⁷

Clearly, for Wariston personal preparation to come to the Table didn't mean a cursory prayer on the way out the door to church. Rather, preparation was a task involving deep self-examination and detailed repentance for sins he had listed in his diary.²⁸ These could then be examined prior to each communion to reflect whether or not he had experienced any degree of victory over them since the last time at the Table.

However, while his example of self-examination might have been considered exemplary, it also often verged on the legalistic. For instance, in a moment of deep depression before a communion we find him writing, "Therefore pitifully ... shrieking unto God as unto thy father, I cried, 'God's mercy, I have sinned; pardon in the blood of thy Son; pity my misery and I vow an amendment,' that thereby perhaps God ... would be moved by my repentance to withdraw the rod of his wrath."²⁹ Here we find a legalistic tendency to bargain with God: Wariston repents with clear trust in Christ's shed blood, but he also hopes that his vows and the intensity of his repentance might induce God to lift him out of his depression. And this is especially so in view of the upcoming communion, which he goes on to connect with Hosea chapter 2: "allure me and bring me into the wilderness, and speak comfortably to my wearied soul, and give me blessings in this Valley of Achor, even this communion at Kirkcaldy."³⁰

So, while Wariston's preparation is commendably thorough, he stands as a warning against a mechanical approach to the sacraments that reasons, "if I do so much preparation, I can expect so much blessing in return." This approach appears as if the precise measure of God's blessing was dependent on the measure of his self-deprecation beforehand, or as if God could be manipulated by Wariston's performance of a ritual!³¹ Sure enough, on this occasion he reflects on his performance and its reward, "One thing I am assured of, that if ever I went well-prepared and returned well-comforted from a communion, it was then."³²

²⁷ *AJW Diary I*, 94-5. Such records of personal preparation are commonplace among the diaries of the godly in 17th century Scotland. C.f. e.g. Alexander Brodie's diary: "3rd May. A Day of Humiliation ... That the Lord fit for the participation at the Lord's Table, whereto he desires to approach, for renewing his communion with the Lord, and for getting some increase of light and strength; that he may be more rooted in Christ, and in the truth, and abide in him..." James Brodie, *The Diary of Alexander Brodie of Brodie, 1652-1680* (Aberdeen: Spalding Club, 1863), 18.

²⁸ There are many instances in the diary of actually keeping coded "sin-lists" (in case his diary fell into the wrong hands). See e.g. *AJW Diary I*, 110, 119, 130, 159, 161, 166, 175, 185, 195, 233.

²⁹ *AJW Diary I*, 85.

³⁰ *AJW Diary I*, 85.

³¹ Wariston's sacramentology even seems to verge in places on the idea that God was in some sense "reconciled" at (if not *through*) the communion, so that the participant must therefore take full advantage of this window of feeling which the Table excites to pour out his heart to God. At one communion season, he writes, "After sermon, in my own chamber having prayed unto God for a contrite heart, I got my very soul humbly, instantly, and confidently poured out before God in an unspeakable manner and measure, yea even with greater confidence, humility, and instance, than ever in all my lifetime, which comforted me extraordinary, *seeing God then teaching me to pray when he being reconciled was assuredly readiest to hear.*" *AJW Diary I*, 97; c.f. also 216: "After yesterday's remissions..." (Italics mine). While it is unlikely that these unfortunate phrases flatly contradict his otherwise staunchly anti-sacerdotal sacramental theology, their unquestionable ambiguity suggest at the very least a legalistic inclination regarding sacramental efficacy.

³² *AJW Diary I*, 95.

This legalistic attitude could understandably create a crisis when he suddenly found he did not have the time to prepare as he was accustomed. On one occasion, when he had been traveling, Wariston found out that it was communion the next day at Liberton kirk, with little time to prepare himself. This left him “being in a doubt whether to go or not, seeing I was not at the preparation sermon.”³³ What was he to do? He took out a little book by the English Puritan John Dod entitled, *Ten Sermons Tending Chiefly to the Fitting of Men for the Lord’s Supper*, and tells us, “By God’s special providence the sermon which it fell to me to read in Dod (for I used to always read one before going to the communion) was his fourth sermon on 2 Chronicles 30:19.”³⁴ This is the passage about Hezekiah’s Passover, where not all of the priests were consecrated properly in time for the Feast, and yet the Lord graciously accepted their sacrifices. Dod’s grace-driven “doctrine” in this sermon is, “So long as we labour to keep the substance of God’s worship, though we fail in some circumstances thereof, he will be merciful to us.”³⁵ And so, for once, Wariston overcame his legalism and went to the Table anyway, discovering that God’s grace did not depend on his religious performance after all! Communion being a sacrament of the covenant of grace, he learned that God accepts unworthy sinners to His banquet not because they made themselves worthy by their intense exercises of preparation, but in the same way He accepts any of their acts of worship: through the merits of Christ.

This episode reveals a final instrument in Wariston’s pre-communion toolbox: the use of published aids to preparation. English Puritan writers of the 17th century published many such devotional manuals, such as Daniel Featley’s *Ancilla Pietatis* (1626) and Lewis Bayly’s *Practice of Pietie* (1630), which contained guidance on communion preparation among their more general spiritual counsels, both of which Wariston regularly drew from his bookshelf.³⁶ But probably the most popular work explicitly written as a pre-communion devotional was John Dod’s *Ten Sermons* mentioned above, which Wariston acknowledged he “used to always read ... before going to the communion.”³⁷ This sermon collection also contained a tract entitled *A Brief Dialogue Concerning Preparation for the Lord’s Supper*—another formulaic device used by the godly to prepare for the Table, listing personal sins categorized by each commandment in the Decalogue as an aid to self-examination. Wariston regularly followed his Puritan mentor’s formulae to the letter in order to maximize the preparatory effect:

At every commandment thou bowed thy knees and particularly humbled thyself, but chiefly thy heart melted at those two whereof thou was most guilty, wherefore thy very heart blessed God.... After my confession, according to Dod’s order I kept my ordinary custom of confessing every particular sin according to the order of my time and age; and in these two manners of confession I spent all Friday afternoon.³⁸

Wariston’s “ordinary custom” of delving into Puritan devotional manuals prior to the sacrament was a practice he also eagerly commended to others, including his wife: “I directed her before the

³³ *AJW Diary I*, 120.

³⁴ *AJW Diary I*, 120.

³⁵ John Dod, *Ten Sermons Tending Chiefly to the Fitting of Men for the Worthy Receiuing of the Lords Supper* (London: T.P., 1620), 122.

³⁶ “On Friday ... I studied the preparations contained in the *Practise of Pietie*. On Saturday morning I applied Featley’s præparatory confession by order of the commands, and, having prayed, vowed to praise God at my return [from the table] if he would be powerfully present with me at the exercise.” *AJW Diary I*, 202.

³⁷ Eight editions were published in Wariston’s lifetime. See Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 613.

³⁸ *AJW Diary I*, 94-5.

communion to go through the progress of her life and Dod's catalogue of the sins against the Ten Commandments.... I directed her to make her rules and catalogues according to Dod's catechesis, to go through all the sins of her life both by him."³⁹ While Wariston sought help from godly publications, it is still hard to read these entries without detecting still the cold hand of legalism.

In summary, Wariston's rigorous practices of communion preparation are fully proportional to his theology of the sacrament as a means of grace—and one that necessitated much sober self-examination and soul-readiness to commune with the living Christ. His recorded practices of public, domestic, and private preparations are not unusual for the godly in his generation, demonstrating a striking commonality of mid-seventeenth-century English Puritan and Scottish Presbyterian practice. But arguably, the degree of his exactitude and the insistence with which he urged a similar rigor on others in his domestic and ecclesiastical circle is also reflective of a legalistic spirit. As the Communion Sabbath drew near, Wariston's spiritual preparations for the Table were thorough, emotional, and intense. His expectations of the spiritual experience that awaited him at the Table were no less so.

Participation

The Scottish communion practice that Wariston experienced followed a directory rather than a strict liturgical form, reflecting a rigorous application of the regulative principle of worship to every specific aspect of administration. While there is some evidence of local variation, as one might expect with a directory (as opposed to the uniformity of an imposed liturgy such as that of the Laudian Prayer Book rejected by the 1637 Covenanter Revolution), each communion was nonetheless a detailed imitation of the original Supper as instituted by Christ.⁴⁰ Robert Bruce had argued, "there is never a ceremony which Christ instituted in this Supper, but it is as essential as the Bread and Wine are, and you cannot leave out one jot of them, but you pervert the whole institution: for whatever Christ commanded to be done, whatever he spake or did, in that whole action, it is essential and must be done."⁴¹

In practical terms, this meant Wariston's experience at the Table included a table address, singing of psalms, the "sacramental acts" of breaking the bread, displaying the cup, a common cup and a common table (often the congregation going in waves to several tables set up for the occasion). This was a far cry from the pre-Reformation practice of the Kirk: he did not come to a sacrifice at an altar from which he was physically separated by a rail but was an invitee to a feast with a Host who bid him join Him at His Table. He was coming to receive something, not offer something.

What was the posture of Wariston's heart at the Table? Wariston personalized the promises at the Table. We have written elsewhere about his practice of personalizing the text of Scripture in his diary by a process that might be called "self-interpolation": the reader literally writing himself by name into the text of Scripture for the devotional purpose of creating a heightened immediacy and application of the redemptive-historical text to the personal spiritual experience of the present-day believer.⁴² We witness a similar practice with Wariston at the Table:

Mr. Ephraim [Melville] at our table exhorted us to venture *to* Christ and *on* Christ and *for* Christ. I took the sacrament in belief that his body was broken for *me* and

³⁹ AJW *Diary I*, 250, 285, c.f. also 121, 129, 237.

⁴⁰ See e.g. MacLeod, *Therefore the Truth I Speak*, 134.

⁴¹ Bruce, *Sermons on the Sacrament*, 7.

⁴² David G. Whitla, "Wariston on the Word: Lessons on the Use and Abuse of Scripture from the Diary of a Covenanter," *Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal* 8 (2021): 32–45; italics mine.

his blood shed for *me* (as Luke and Paul express it with the application ‘for you’, and not just in general, as Matthew and Mark express the sacramental words).⁴³

By faith, (and applying the Pastor Melville’s “table address”), Wariston is moved at the Table to receive Christ’s body as not just “broken”, but “broken *for me*”. His blood is not just “shed for many” but “shed *for me*.” Here we see Wariston’s reception of the sacrament as not merely a memorial but a personal appropriation of the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice by faith.

Closely linked to this practice, Wariston frequently describes the communion service—a place of corporate worship—as a place of intensely private prayer and covenant renewal. “I went to the fourth table where I got great liberty at it ... and thereupon I consecrated and dedicated my wife, myself and seed to the Lord my God, and renewed my covenant ... and took the sacrament on his becoming mine and my becoming his.”⁴⁴ Considering the Table as an exceptional venue where the “throne of grace” was set up, we often read of Wariston rededicating and consecrating his life and family to the Lord, bringing special burdens and (in his words), “laying them on the table” of the Lord. For example, in the spring of 1654 when his family was suffering under great economic stress and his nation was under English military occupation, we read this entry: “Duddingston communion ... it pleased the Lord by the singing of Psalm 25 ... to speak very powerfully to my heart... I declared in my heart to God that I communicated *pro me et semine meo et ecclesia Christi in Scotia* [for me, and my seed and the church of Christ in Scotland].”⁴⁵ Given Wariston’s intensive anticipatory expectations, it is perhaps understandable that he found the Table a unique venue to unburden himself of the particular needs facing his own soul, his family and his nation. But there is also more than a suggestion here that he considered it perhaps as something more effectual—communing not only for himself, but for his family and nation as well—as if his own sacramental actions that day might covenantally secure a lateral blessing not only for himself, but for his family and his covenanted nation. At the very least, the ambiguity reveals a strong expectation of the believer’s experience of communion.⁴⁶

Most significantly, Wariston records his communion with Christ at the Table. At a communion service at the Eyemouth Kirk on May 25, 1634, he writes

At the table he made me most sensible of his present particular presence; he assured me that the outward signs conferred on me all the Father’s attributes, all the Son’s merits, all the Spirit’s graces as mine now by right of property, imputation, use, and possession, that they sealed up to me the remission of all my sins ... he wonderfully rebated all the doubts of these things which the devil cast in my mind from the imperfection of my preparation; he rejected them as Satan’s slights to hinder my heart.⁴⁷

Wariston frequently records a profound sense of Christ’s presence at the Table. In this instance, he receives a clearer view of the Gospel by faith—and the benefits bestowed in it by each Person of the Godhead—as belonging personally to Him. Satan’s doubts about his perceived lack of preparation on this occasion are dispelled, and for once, that tendency towards a sacramental

⁴³ Mullan, *Protestant Piety in Early-Modern Scotland*, 43; italics mine.

⁴⁴ Mullan, *Protestant Piety in Early-Modern Scotland*, 39.

⁴⁵ *AJW Diary II*, 239.

⁴⁶ For similar ambiguous link between Wariston’s prayers and the communion service having a direct bearing on the political events of the day, see *AJW Diary II*, 293-5.

⁴⁷ *AJW Diary I*, 215.

legalism is replaced with a sense of the sacrament as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, rich with personal assurance.

It is not surprising then to find that, like many of his contemporaries, Wariston's diary offers several glimpses of his heightened religious affections at the Table. Consider the following representative examples:

My heart was mightily moved at the table ... and then Mr. John Dick had [the Table Address], and read Ps. 91:14-16, and pressed it home for our comfort, which I took as ... a good reply from heaven ... this being joined with ... the presence of His Spirit granting me a soft heart all that forenoon.⁴⁸

At the taking of the cup both thy head and thy hand so tottered and trembled as almost thou could not get it drunk ... blessed be thy name for it, because, by that extraordinary humiliation at thy table, immediately wrought in me by thy own hand, I hope to stop the mouth of Satan in the day of temptation.... Soul, remember God never so prepared thee to a communion; never so moved thee at one.⁴⁹

Wariston's religion was an experiential religion. And such heightened religious affections were intentionally sought out as immediate, tangible experiences of communion with the Lord at His Table. As we shall see, such sacramental emotions not infrequently crossed the line into an emotionalism that arguably belied the sacramental theology he formally subscribed to. But certainly, there was a holy familiarity with Christ to be had at the Scottish Presbyterian communion table, in which Wariston—despite his peculiarly intense temperament—was not alone. As Laura Stewart has observed, “Even for those who did not share the fragile mental condition of people such as Mistress Rutherford or Archibald Johnston ... the Scottish way of taking the sacrament was still seen as the purest, most efficacious means of representing ‘the great friendship and familiarity that is betwixt him and Christian souls.’”⁵⁰

Post-Mortem

After the Supper, Wariston's work was not done. It was typical for Scottish Presbyterians and English Puritans to review their experience of the sacrament afterward. Had they communed with the Lord? Had they found the sacrament to be an effectual means of grace? And how were they going to live henceforth in greater service to the Lord? As James Melville reminded his congregation,

When thou perceivest in the action of the Supper, how God has so loved thee, that he has given his own only begotten son to suffer the most shameful death for thy sake, how should thou be moved? Even to love him again with all my heart, and my neighbour for his sake, and to bend all the powers of my soul and body, to his honour, service and obedience.⁵¹

By the mid-17th century, it was also common to have a sermon of thanksgiving following the Communion Sabbath, usually on the following Monday. This message often stressed the believer's responsibility to go and live in light of the finished work of Christ thus commemorated, and in the

⁴⁸ Mullan, *Protestant Piety in Early-Modern Scotland*, 39.

⁴⁹ *AJW Diary I*, 97.

⁵⁰ Laura Stewart, *Urban Politics and the British Civil Wars: Edinburgh 1617-1653* (Leiden, Brill, 2008), 181. The Scots spelling in Stewart's citation has been modernized.

⁵¹ Melville, *A Spirituall Propine*, 51.

renewed spiritual strength received from this means of grace.⁵² Wariston does not record attending a service of thanksgiving, but he engages in plenty of his own in private exercises following communion:

After I came from the table, I found my heart sensible of God's mercies, and most affectionate to praise with unspeakable ardency of soul, heart, and body, the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost for every one of their parts and kindness. Afternoon, I found my heart much stirred up to thankfulness, even not only because of the good I got at the action, but, even suppose I had gotten none, yet for the good some others of God's children had gotten at it... Seeing God's kindness in offering is not diminished by our unwillingness, unreadiness, unfitness to receive, let us wait ourselves and let us yet praise the Lord even the more, who is so indulgent as to offer such pearls to us who like brutish swine reject them, misesteem them, and will not so much as thank him for his offer.⁵³

Because the communion season had afforded several days of focused self-examination for personal sins, and intensive meditation upon the atoning blood of Christ, it was also not unusual for spiritual diaries to record their subjects coming away from the Table with a fresh assurance of their salvation, and a renewed earnestness to serve in His kingdom. For example, the day after a communion, Wariston writes, "On Monday morning, my heart being ravished with an assurance of my remission, I know not with what unspeakable confidence and covenanting earnestness I put up all my petitions unto God."⁵⁴ On another Monday morning after a communion he writes, "That night after supper I got a great liberty at private exercise, and have written down in my sermon book 3 sides of God's dealing with me at that communion, whereof the substance follows..."⁵⁵ Wariston then goes on to describe in vivid detail the communion he had enjoyed with Christ at the Table, and how he and his wife shared and compared their communion experiences as they lay in bed.⁵⁶

Wariston's Lessons for Today's Communicants

Having considered Wariston's theology and experience of communion, we conclude by suggesting three lessons on the use and abuse of the Lord's Supper from the diary of this Scottish Covenanter.

Lesson #1: Sacramental Efficacy

Today's churches face two opposite errors on this score. *The first error is that there is no efficacy in the Sacrament*—at least, not practically in the Christian experience of many communicants. It is to be feared that many in Reformed and Evangelical churches have perhaps come to undervalue the Lord's Supper as "an outward and ordinary means of grace, whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption."⁵⁷ For many, it has been reduced in practice to a mere memorial; a pious ritual that is tacked onto the end of the worship service as the congregants go their way.

⁵² Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland*, 111-2. C.f. McMillan, *Worship*, 228-9.

⁵³ *AJW Diary I*, 215-6.

⁵⁴ *AJW Diary I*, 202-3. "Covenanting" = "conjured" in original, which Mullan defines as "to band together by an oath". See also Mullan, *Protestant Piety*, 42n48.

⁵⁵ Mullan, *Protestant Piety*, 38 [sic].

⁵⁶ "My wife at night told me of God's presence with her both before and at being at the Table." Mullan, *Protestant Piety*, 43.

⁵⁷ Westminster Assembly, Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647), Q&A 88.

Here, Wariston's example is instructive. He went to the Table to commune with His Lord by faith, and His diary over a lifetime records how the sacrament was effectual in producing a deepening assurance, a quieted conscience even when his sins rose up to accuse him, sometimes exuberant joy, and gradual growth in grace that accompanied his Christian pilgrimage (with ebbs and flows to be sure) until he received a martyr's crown.

How do our expectations of communion compare with those of our forefathers? Some of us perhaps need to repent of our failure to truly examine ourselves, looking by faith to the finished work of Christ signified and sealed to us, and yes, expecting to meet with our Host at His table, and to draw fresh strength for the journey. Low expectations generally beget low spiritual frames. Once again, we do not make Wariston's experience *normative* for all Christians. But perhaps we should be concerned that at least some of his experience is not at least more *normal* to our own experience.⁵⁸ Perhaps that is because we have fallen into the error that there is no efficacy in the sacrament.

The second (and opposite) error is that the efficacy of the sacrament lies in our performance (i.e. in the earnestness of our preparation, participation, and post-mortem). Now, as Wariston understood well, these duties certainly are incumbent upon all participants—we have no right to expect a blessing from Christ's ordinances if we willfully neglect the self-examination He commands. But Wariston's example also stands as a *warning* against a kind of "slot machine" view of the ordinances. Communion is a means of grace, but there is nothing automatic about the grace dispensed: "Because I have humbled myself X much, God owes me X much blessing at the sacrament." As Shorter Catechism Q&A 91 reminds us, "The sacraments become effectual means of salvation ... only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them."

Lesson #2: Sacramental Communion

As noted, Wariston came to the Table with great expectations; or, as Robert Bruce put it quaintly, "To get Christ better." The challenge is, do we know anything of communion with Christ at the Table? In our busy and spiritually shallow age, most Christians do not keep spiritual journals as Wariston did, and so they maybe do not have a venue to keep a regular record of God's dealings with their souls. But even if we did, would we be able to speak of the sacramental communion we enjoyed with the Lord in His banqueting house, as Wariston and so many of his generation did regularly?

But there is again an opposite danger. Wariston stands as a warning of excessive emotionalism at the Table that can verge on mysticism. Sometimes Wariston's emotions at the Table became extreme. One noteworthy example is the Kirkcaldy Communion (4 August 1633), where he records,

Now, my soul, to God's glory and thy comfort, ever remember how extraordinarily God moved thee when thou went unto the Table.... When thou was sitting at the table, soul, never forget how all thy body trembled, and thy ... excessive ardour wherewith thou prayed to the Almighty: how thy heart was poured out before God

⁵⁸ It is worth recalling that "The benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification," namely, "*assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end*" according to Shorter Catechism Q&A 36, are the same "benefits of redemption" which according to Q&A 88 "accompany or flow" from redemption and are "communicated" by Christ through the sacraments as means of grace. Westminster Assembly, Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q&A 36, 88.

in innumerable tears and inexpressible groans. Then the minister seeing thee so moved, for thou sat next him, he began his exhortation with Matthew 11:28, ‘Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy burdened, and I will relieve you.’”⁵⁹

Now perhaps Wariston could be forgiven since this was the first communion he had attended after becoming a widower and that, understandably, his emotions were already running high. The Lord’s people bring their emotional baggage with them to the Table, and that often accounts for the wide variety of experiences. But there are several similar accounts of such emotional outbursts at communions in his diary that are suggestive of a temperamental tendency towards religious extremities of emotion, and this one is by no means the most graphic:

Before I went to the table I got fervent desires; but at the table, blessed be the Lord who so bended my affections, cleared my sight, softened my heart that in an instant I took the most terrible shuddering, not out of a meeting of two extremities, extreme grief arising from a clear sight (like the lightning of thunder) of all my iniquities, and extreme joie arising from a sensible sight and feeling assurance of God’s infinite mercies, the one so contracting, the other so dilating my animal spirits that like two winds checking one another, or like two jaws counter-jawing one another, they almost at the table left my body destitute of life and breath. After my coming from the table ... thrice my extreme ardor, grief, joy raised the shuddering in my private thanksgiving. All the rest of that public exercise this motion continued.⁶⁰

Not only were Wariston’s communion table affections excessive, but he also frequently put too much stock in them as indicators of divine guidance or approbation. For example, on one occasion he concluded, “At the table I got a sensible presence and great liberty, which I took for his sign from heaven ... of his acceptance of my consecration of myself, my wife, and seed to him, and of my resignation of his covenant, cause and people to his direction and protection.”⁶¹ Here, Wariston draws totally unwarranted conclusions about God’s happy plans for his family and the Covenanter cause in Scotland on the flimsy basis of a personal communion experience.

With hindsight, we know that Wariston got this prognostication badly wrong. Tragically, one of his sons apostatized,⁶² a daughter married one of the most notorious butchers of the Killing Times,⁶³ the Covenants were burned, and Wariston himself was hanged for treason! Wariston was not wrong to expect communion with God at the Table. But it is one thing to enjoy a felt sense of the Lord’s presence; it is quite another to interpret that religious experience as a revelation of God’s divine will and purpose for our lives! This is a sobering reminder that religious affections can become an unreliable measure of our true spiritual state, not least because they can outpace our rational faculties. Or, to put it another way, let us beware at the Table that our heart does not

⁵⁹ AJW *Diary I*, 96.

⁶⁰ AJW *Diary I*, 250.

⁶¹ Mullan, *Protestant Piety*, 42-3.

⁶² See Louise Yeoman, “Archie’s Invisible Worlds Discovered - Spirituality, Madness and the Johnston of Wariston Family,” *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 27 (1997): 156–86.

⁶³ This was her second husband, General William Drummond of Cromlix. Archibald Johnston, “Fragment of the Diary of Sir Archibald Johnston of Warriston, 1639,” in *Publications of the Scottish History Society*, ed. George Morison Paul (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1896), 12; Mullan, *Protestant Piety*, 33n8, 183n42.

rule our head, and our religious affections eclipse our Reformed theology, not least our theology of the sacraments.⁶⁴

While Wariston's experiences of sacramental communion are not always so dramatic, they illustrate well a type of revivalist fervor that challenges the common stereotype of the dour Presbyterian communion season, but which was in fact not so uncommon in the Scottish Presbyterian experience.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the introspective emotionalism expressed by Wariston at the Table often has a mystical flavor that is difficult to reconcile with the sober-minded "discerning of the Lord's body" which the Presbyterian sacrament enjoined.

Lesson #3: Sacramental Frequency

Most Scottish communicants only attended communion in their own parish, which was typically held just twice a year, or at most quarterly. This practice was largely due to the hallowed place the communion season came to hold in the Christian experience of Presbyterian communicants. The lengthy preparation process culminating in a weekend of communion services often officiated by several ministers came to be one of the most cherished elements of Scottish Presbyterian practice and was often associated with some remarkable revivals.

This sacramental infrequency was in part a practicality borne of church establishment. It must be remembered that the Scottish Kirk was a national, established church: every Scotsman was expected to be at church, and consequently, congregations were often very large. Even though not every attendee would be communing, the practicalities of seating all communicants around a common table and drinking from common cups were such that it was difficult to conveniently serve everyone on one Sabbath Day, and it certainly obviated any logistical possibility of a weekly communion. Most larger congregations would serve the sacrament over two Lord's Days, and in some larger city parishes as many as four.⁶⁶ Nor was this a practical expedient for a brief period of Presbyterian hegemony in Scotland. The tradition continued well beyond the Reformation and Post-Reformation to the present day in Presbyterian churches in Scotland, Ireland, America, Canada, and Australia.

In view of this tradition, Wariston's personal frequency of participation is quite extraordinary. Given how much he valued the Lord's Supper as a means of grace, his diary understandably reveals him attending as many as he possibly could! In the period 1632-34 alone, we find him at no less than nineteen communion seasons, some requiring considerable travel to reach. While still nothing close to a weekly communion (which was virtually unheard of in Presbyterian Scotland), it is reasonable to conclude that the frequency of Wariston's communing reveals something about his estimation of the efficacy of the sacrament.

Clearly, the sheer infrequency of communion in most Scottish parishes drove Wariston to supplement the usual biannual ration of the Supper by visiting neighboring parishes. Later in life, when he was providentially prevented from going to communion because he was a wanted man, he felt the omission keenly, writing on one such occasion, "I stand more in need of communions

⁶⁴ *AJW Diary I*, 250.

⁶⁵ For further treatment, see e.g. W. D. Baillie, *The Six Mile Water Revival of 1625* (Belfast: Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, 1993) and Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism*.

⁶⁶ Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, 85-6.

this year, where [I have had] but three, than the last, wherein seven.”⁶⁷ Wariston sought more frequent communion because he valued the Lord’s Table as a place where his faith was nourished, and if he was hindered, he felt weakened.

The question of the frequency of communion continues to be a contentious issue in Presbyterian and Reformed churches to the present day. While a lot of dogmatic ink has been spilled on both sides of the debate, arguably neither has yet provided a strong exegetical “clincher.” Wariston does not offer a conclusive answer to the frequency debate either, but he does perhaps caution us against the extremes that are possible on both sides. On the one hand, it is possible that rare communions may drive hungry communicants elsewhere to enjoy this means of grace. But on the other, it is possible to overestimate the sacrament by pursuing it with such regularity that it becomes imbued with mystical or legalistic impulses, or that its sheer commonness hinders communion with Christ by depriving communicants of anything close to adequate preparation time to commune with Him. Perhaps the solution (as is so often the case) lies somewhere in the middle.

Conclusion

We have considered Wariston’s theology of communion, his experience of communion, and three practical lessons for communicants today on sacramental efficacy, sacramental communion, and sacramental frequency. While we should make no man’s Christian experience normative for anyone else, Wariston’s case study stands as an example for Evangelical and Reformed Christians today who have perhaps devalued this means of grace, and perhaps come to the Table with low expectations. He undoubtedly had his occasional mystical and legalistic abuses of the Table. But on the whole, his experience of the sacrament was arguably more in accord with his theology of the sacrament than that of many Reformed Christians today.

We may pride ourselves that we are heirs of Calvin and not Aquinas on the Sacrament. Or that we are heirs of Knox and not Zwingli. Or that we view communion as neither a mass nor a mere memorial, but a means of grace. But Wariston’s example challenges how our *experience* of communion aligns with our *theology*. Do we come hungry, expectantly, believingly? Do we truly discern the Lord’s body? Do we approach with reverence, or a frivolousness borne of over-regularity and routine? Do we leave spiritually nourished? And do we leave with a fresh resolve to live for the Savior who “loved me and gave Himself for me?” (Gal. 2:20).

May we each develop a fresh appreciation of this means of grace, take the time to prepare our hearts, and so approach the Table in faith and expectation of communion with Christ, so that we can say with Wariston, “He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love” (Song 2:4).

⁶⁷ *AJW Diary II*, 298. Wariston’s diary records that the Lord often met with his people at the Table in a peculiar manner in times of persecution and national distress, which increased the earnestness of prayer and preparation. In 1654, while he was under imminent threat of violence from a local laird, the minister of Kilmarnock wrote to Wariston telling him that “they were not more refreshed these 7 years than at their communion, and that they had met Jesus Christ there ... and he assured me that Christ was at the communion at Fenwick and that it was a refreshing day; and that the Lord protected his people from Kenmure’s disturbing them.” *AJW Diary II*, 294. Likewise, “Mr. Alexander Moncrief told me more work in Fife than before; a great resorting to communions, and ministers speak much of people getting good thereat, and the Lord very gracious to communions in the north side of Fife, folks saying they never saw such days.” *AJW Diary II*, 312. This is similar to the testimony we read of the field communions in Fife during the Killing Times some forty years later, which were also accompanied by scenes of revival.