

Kyle J. Dieleman

The Battle for the Sabbath in the Dutch Reformation

Devotion or Desecration?



Reformed Historical Theology

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To Andrea and Emden

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Introduction

Topic

Sunday observance has a long history in the Christian tradition. Often referred to as the Lord's Day or the Sabbath, Christians have observed Sunday as a holy day of rest and worship throughout their history. The basis for the Christian Sabbath comes from the Ten Commandments given to the Jewish people, either the third or fourth commandment depending on how the commandments are numbered. The Jewish Sabbath was observed on the seventh day of the week, but early on Christians altered their Sabbath to be held on the first day of the week. Thus, Christians observe their Sabbath on Sunday, and observance has primarily meant gathering for corporate worship and resting from one's work. However, Sunday observance has not been uniform throughout the Christian tradition, and the theological issues related to the Sabbath are surprisingly complex.

While Sabbath observance was important in the medieval Catholic setting, the Protestant Reformation brought significant changes to how Sundays were to be observed. Sunday was still a day of worship, but Protestant worship services were significantly different than Catholic worship. Furthermore, the Reformation also brought different expectations for Sabbath observance, including careful attention at sermon services, catechism services, and ecclesiastical discipline for failing to properly observe the day. As is the case with many aspects of Christian piety, the Protestant Reformation brought about important changes in how pious Christians were to observe the Sabbath.

My project seeks to better understand how the Protestant Reformation understood the theology behind Sabbath observance and how the Sabbath was practiced in Protestant churches. More specifically, my research focuses on the Reformed tradition, also known as "Calvinist," in the Low Countries during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. To properly understand the vision the Reformed church authorities had for the Sabbath it is important to begin with the theological understanding of the Sabbath found in the Dutch Reformed tradition. However, it is equally important to at least attempt to ascertain what actual

Dutch Reformed church members were doing on Sundays. Were they willing to attend worship and rest from their work? Were there other activities to which they were drawn?

Attending to the Sabbath in the Dutch Reformation is necessary for understanding more completely how the Protestant Reformation impacted the lived religious experience of Christians. Such an examination also provides fascinating insights into the relationship between theology and religious practice and how that relationship was navigated. As will be described below, assumptions about the importance of the Sabbath in the Dutch Reformation have often led to incomplete and unhelpful understandings of how the Sabbath functioned, both theologically and practically, in the Dutch Reformed tradition. My research will demonstrate that the Sabbath was an important way in which church authorities regulated order within their churches and a helpful way for the Reformed confessional group to establish their identity within the broader Dutch religious setting. As a result, it will become clear that previous attention to the Sabbath in the Dutch Reformation has been lacking and when such research has been undertaken it has underestimated or even misunderstood the importance of the Sabbath in the early years of the Dutch Reformed tradition.

Literature Review

Scholarly attention to Sabbath observance in the Protestant Reformation has been surprisingly sparse. This scholarly vacuum is all the more surprising given that Sabbath observance was of extreme importance in Reformed communities throughout the European Reformations.¹ It has been well established that a strict Sabbatarianism came to occupy a central place in the Puritan reform movement.² Unfortunately, scholars have frequently been too quick to dismiss the importance of the Sabbath in the Reformed traditions in the rest of Europe, including the Low Countries.

While studies of the Sabbath in Puritan regions have been numerous, less scholarly attention has been given to the Sabbath in the Continental Reformations. Given the close connection with the Reformed communities in England, the Dutch Reformed Church and its relationship to the Sabbath are of particular interest. By examining both the theological background of the Sabbath and the relationship between discipline and the Sabbath in the Dutch Reformed Church,

1 Kenneth A. Strand, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Reformation era," in *Sabbath in Scripture and History*, eds. Kenneth A. Strand and Daniel A. Augsburger, Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982, 215–228.

2 Kenneth Parker, *The English Reformation: A Study of Doctrine and Discipline From the Reformation to the Civil War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

the importance of the Sabbath observance and what that meant for the Dutch Reformed Church becomes clear, drawing into question the conclusions of previous scholars.³

Scholars have done a fair amount of research on the Protestant Reformers' theological understanding of the Sabbath. Not surprisingly, scholars have given Calvin's view of the Sabbath the most attention. However, surprisingly little exists in terms of an in-depth examination of Calvin's understanding of the Sabbath. Recently, Elsie McKee has done a fine job in examining Calvin's theology of the Sabbath but focuses largely only on his *Institutes*.⁴ Long ago Robert Cox assembled Calvin's various writings on the Sabbath in his audaciously titled *The Whole Doctrine of Calvin About the Sabbath and the Lord's Day*, though Cox provided no commentary on Calvin's works.⁵ Richard Gaffin's short book and Kwok Ting Cheung's doctoral dissertation on Calvin's understanding of the Sabbath are undoubtedly the two most significant treatments of the topic, though not without their issues. Gaffin's book is very helpful but does need to be used with caution given its clear confessional bent.⁶ Cheung's dissertation tends to interpret Calvin's understanding of the Sabbath in theological terms Calvin never articulated.⁷ Lyle Bierma has dedicated a well-done section of a chapter to Calvin and the Sabbath, but such an examination is hardly in depth.⁸ Similarly, Richard Bauckham spends a few pages on Calvin's understanding of the Sabbath in his chapter on the "Sabbath and Sunday in the Protestant Tradition."⁹ Others, such

3 The notion of a "Dutch Reformed" group of Christians is somewhat problematic for several reasons. First, the Dutch Republic was nonexistent when the Reformed faith began its inroads into the region. Even by the middle of the seventeenth century the Dutch Republic was only beginning to really come into its own. Second, the term "Reformed" is a designation the religious practitioners themselves would not have used. Other scholars have deemed these believers "Calvinists" or "the church under the cross." But, the former is itself quite problematic and the latter quite cumbersome. Thus, the term "Dutch Reformed" is serviceable in conveying the identity of the group in question and, therefore, will be used here.

4 Elsie Anne McKee, *The Pastoral Ministry and Worship in Calvin's Geneva*, Genève: Librairie Droz S.A., 2016, 177–187.

5 Robert Cox, ed., *The Whole Doctrine of Calvin About the Sabbath and the Lord's Day: Extracted from His Commentaries, Catechism, and Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Edinburgh: Macchlan and Stewart, 1860.

6 Richard B. Gaffin, *Calvin and the Sabbath*, Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 1998.

7 Kwok Ting Cheung, "The Sabbath in Calvin's Theology," Ph.D. Dissertation: University of Aberdeen, 1990, v–vi.

8 Lyle Bierma, "Remembering the Sabbath Day: Ursinus's Exposition of Exodus 20:8–11," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: Essays Presented to David C. Steinmetz in Honor of His Sixtieth Birthday*, eds. Richard A. Muller and John Lee Thompson, Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996, 272–291.

9 Richard J. Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Protestant Tradition," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D.A. Carson, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982, 311–341.

as Coldwell, Gilpin, Lauer, and Primus, have all written briefly, with varying degrees of thoroughness and success, on Calvin and the Sabbath.¹⁰

The theological understanding of the Sabbath in the Dutch Reformed tradition has also received significant attention. Most of the theological research has focused on the seventeenth century, particularly after the Synod of Dort (also referred to in English as Dordt) in 1618–1619. It was in the subsequent decades that the Dutch pietist movement, the Nadere Reformatie, became increasingly important. Since the Nadere Reformatie placed a great emphasis on the Sabbath, historical theologians have been drawn to studying these discussions and debates regarding the Sabbath during the middle of the seventeenth century. Undoubtedly, the most comprehensive examination remains Hans Visser's excellent, though slightly dated, work, *De geschiedenis van den sabbatsstrijd onder de gereformeerden in de zeventiende eeuw*.¹¹

However, almost no attention has been given to the Sabbath understandings that individual theologians such as Johannes a Lasco, Zacharias Ursinus, and Wilhelmus à Brakel articulated. Bierma's chapter, mentioned above, addresses Ursinus' Sabbath views, but no other scholar has paid any in depth attention to his understanding of the Sabbath. At best, the Sabbath as explained briefly in the Heidelberg Catechism has been occasionally studied, though frequently from a confessional viewpoint.¹² Regarding a Lasco and à Brakel, no significant study, to my knowledge, has been carried out which addresses their theological or even practical understandings of the Sabbath.¹³

While attention to the Sabbath in the Dutch Reformation has been somewhat limited, discipline in the Low Countries has received a great deal of scholarly investigation in the last few decades. Arie van Deursen pioneered the study of discipline in Dutch consistory records, examining some of the records of the Amsterdam church.¹⁴ While van Deursen's work remains a standard, additional

10 Christopher Coldwell, "Calvin in the Hands of the Philistines, Or, Did Calvin Bowl on the Sabbath?" *The Confessional Presbyterian* 6, (January 1, 2010): 31–49; Lawrence A. Gilpin, "An Analysis of Calvin's Sermons on the Fourth Commandment," *Presbyterian* 30, no. 2 (September 1, 2004): 90–105; Stewart E. Lauer, "John Calvin, the Nascent Sabbatarian: A Reconsideration of Calvin's View of Two Key Sabbath-Issues," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 3, (January 1, 2007): 3–14; John H. Primus, "Calvin and the Puritan Sabbath: A Comparative Study," in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. David E. Holwerda, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976, 40–75.

11 Hans Visser, *De geschiedenis van den sabbatsstrijd onder de gereformeerden in de zeventiende eeuw*, Utrecht: Kemink en Zoon, N.V., 1939.

12 Diedrich H. Kromminga, "The Heidelberg View of the Fourth Commandment: Is it Scriptural?" *The Calvin Forum* 6, no. 9 (April, 1941): 187–190.

13 Michael Stephen Springer, *Restoring Christ's Church John a Lasco and the Forma Ac Ratio*, Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2007. Springer addresses some of a Lasco's instructions for proper Sabbath observance, though he does not delve into the theological background.

14 Arie Th. van Deursen, *Bavianen en slijkgeuzen: kerk en kerkvolk ten tijde van Maurits en*

studies have been done that have now moved the scholarly conversation forward even more. Herman Roodenburg has done a careful examination of the process of church discipline and how the Amsterdam consistory dealt with a wide variety of sins.¹⁵ Church discipline, which was separate from social discipline, was focused on peace and reconciliation with an emphasis on honor and respectability.

A number of other scholars have undertaken studies of Dutch consistory records. Charles Parker has used consistory records to examine poor relief.¹⁶ Judith Pollmann and Joke Spaans have examined consistory records with an eye towards relationships among different confessional groups.¹⁷ Christine Kooi has used Leiden's consistory records to examine the relationship between the Reformed church and the political authorities in the city.¹⁸ Heinz Schilling has examined the consistory records in Emden and Groningen from a wide variety of perspectives, though typically with the issue of confessionalization in mind.¹⁹ In the last few decades these scholars have demonstrated, each in his or her own way, that studying Dutch consistory records can bring new, more complete ways of understanding the Dutch Reformation. Yet, no scholars have examined Dutch consistory records with a particular eye on Sabbath observance; my project will use the consistory records of the Reformed congregation in Kampen to do exactly that.

Similarly, a great deal of scholarly work has used church records from other, larger Dutch Reformed Church ecclesiastical bodies, namely the provincial synods and the regional classes. Many of these records have been transcribed and published and, as such, are readily available to scholars. At the level of provincial synods, the works include W. P. C. Knuttel's six volumes on the synod of South Holland, Johannes Reitsma and S. D. van Veen's eight volumes on the provincial synods of the northern Netherlands, and F. L. Rutgers' work on Dutch synods in the sixteenth century. At the level of regional classes, the most expansive records

Oldebarnevelt, 4th ed., Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974, 1991, Franeker: Uitgeverij Van Wijnen, 2010. Citations refer to the 2010 edition.

15 Herman Roodenburg, *Onder censuur: de kerkelijke tucht in de gereformeerde gemeente van Amsterdam, 1578–1700*, Hilversum: Verloren, 1990.

16 Charles Parker, *The Reformation of Community: Social Welfare and Calvinist Charity in Holland, 1572–1620*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

17 Judith Pollmann, *Religious Choice in the Dutch Republic: The Reformation of Arnoldus Buchelius, 1565–1641*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999; Joke Spaans, *Haarlem na de Reformatie: Stedelijke cultuur en kerkelijk leven, 1577–1620*, 's-Gravenhage: Stichting Hollandse Historische Reeks, 1989.

18 Christine Kooi, *Liberty and Religion: Church and State in Leiden's Reformation, 1572–1620*, Leiden: Brill, 2000.

19 Heinz Schilling, *Civic Calvinism in Northwestern Germany and the Netherlands: Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries*, Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1991; Heinz Schilling, *Religion, Political Culture, and the Emergence of Early Modern Society: Essays in German and Dutch History*, Leiden: Brill, 1992.

are found in the nine volumes in Series 49 of the Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatien.²⁰

A substantial number of scholars have used these church records to help arrive at a better understanding of the Protestant Reformation in the Low Countries. For instance, A. Ph. F. Wouters and P. H. A. M. Abels have thoroughly studied Delft and Delfland using, in large part, classis records.²¹ Similarly, John Paul Elliott's doctoral dissertation uses the records of Classis Dordrecht to examine religious and social life in Dordrecht.²² Donald Sinnema has used synod and classis records to examine catechism preaching on Sunday afternoons in Dutch Reformed churches.²³ However, outside of his work nothing has been done using these records with an attention to the Sabbath. So, my project will for the first time explore the records of the provincial synods and regional classes with a direct eye towards Sabbath observance as a whole.

This book will fill a gap in the existing scholarship on the Dutch Reformation. First, I will develop a richer portrait of how Reformed theologians, particularly in relation to the Dutch Reformed tradition, understood the theology of the Sabbath. This will include arriving at a fuller understanding of Calvin's view of the Sabbath than has previously been achieved. Even more significantly, my project will for the first time study in depth the role of the Sabbath in the thought of a Lasco, Ursinus, and à Brakel. The theologians addressed, except à Brakel, were primary authors of catechisms which were used widely in Dutch Reformed congregations. As such, average church members were frequently exposed to their theology. À Brakel, while not the author of a catechism, also wrote his major work with the average Christian in mind, and church members widely read his work. As such, the theologians I address expressed a theology of the Sabbath that would have been familiar to lay Dutch Christians.

Secondly, my research will lead to a better understanding of the role of church discipline the provincial synods, regional classes, and local consistories carried out in the Low Countries. In particular, my attention to the way the Sabbath was policed is something that has not previously been the focus of any in depth research. Finally, my work will seek to bridge the gap between social and intellectual history.²⁴ In this way, I will expand my focus beyond simply a theo-

20 For a complete bibliography, refer to Chapter 5, Note 2.

21 A. Ph. F. Wouters and P. H. A. M. Abels, *Nieuw en ongezien: kerk en samenleving in de classis Delft en Delfland 1572-1621*, Delft: Eburon, 1994. In the Dutch Reformed Church the classis refers to a regional group of churches.

22 John Paul Elliott, "Protestantization in the Northern Netherlands: A Case Study: the Classis of Dordrecht, 1572-1640," Ph. D. Dissertation: Columbia University, 1990.

23 Donald Sinnema, "The Second Sunday Service in the Early Dutch Reformed Tradition," *Calvin Theological Journal* 32, no. 2 (November 1997): 298-333.

24 Karen Spierling, *Infant Baptism in Reformation Geneva: The Shaping of a Community, 1536-*

logical examination or a historical reconstruction. Instead, I will examine how theological ideas impacted historical practices and discipline and how the Sunday practices of Dutch congregants influenced theology. In this way, the research here will provide a more complete picture of the theology and practice of the Sabbath in the Dutch Reformation, a topic to which scholars have previously not given much attention.

Theological Issues

Despite what one might presuppose, the theology of the Sabbath was not a straightforward issue. The Sabbath raised a number of theological issues that divided theologians. Hans Visser has expertly traced the theological debates about the Sabbath throughout the seventeenth century.²⁵ As Visser demonstrates, the theological debates in the Dutch Reformed tradition regarding the Sabbath involved a number of major figures, and the Sabbath was a major theological topic throughout the seventeenth century.²⁶ But, these debates dealt with theological issues that were being addressed already in the sixteenth century. It is worth mentioning a few of the important theological issues at stake when theologians were discussing the theology of the Sabbath, issues on which Reformed theologians came to vastly different conclusions.

Perhaps the most important issue relates to the distinction between the moral and ceremonial laws. Christian theology has long made a fairly standard threefold categorization of Jewish laws. In order to understand which Jewish laws still apply to Christians, theologians have noted the differences between moral laws, ceremonial laws, and civil laws.²⁷ Regarding the Sabbath, the issue is whether the Sabbath is best understood as a moral or ceremonial law. Moral laws are laws binding for all eternity; ceremonial laws were meant only for the Jewish people.

1564, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005. In Reformation studies Spierling's work is one of only a few examples that undertake such a synthesis.

25 Visser, *De geschiedenis van den sabbatsstrijd*, 35–274.

26 Visser, *De geschiedenis van den sabbatsstrijd*, Chapters 2–6. The debates included the provinces of South Holland and Walcheren and the universities in Leiden, Utrecht, and Groningen. Some of the major theologians involved in the debates included Voetius, Cocceius, Koelman, and Vlak.

27 The distinction can be found in any number of major theologians throughout Christian history. Aquinas is typically credited with the origination of the threefold distinction, which Calvin adopts. See John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.xx.14; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2a, Question 99, Article 4. However, while not as neatly systematized as in Aquinas, previous theologians also noted the differences in types of Jewish laws. See Augustine, *Reply to Faustus the Manichaean*, Chapter 6; Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, Chapter 2. For an introduction to the threefold division of the Jewish law, see Jonathan F. Bayes, *The Threefold Division of the Law*, Newcastle upon Tyne: The Christian Institute, 2012.

As such, if the Sabbath is best understood as a Jewish ceremony, then the Sabbath commandment need not apply to Christians. However, if the Sabbath is a moral law, then all Christians must still observe the Sabbath commandment. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, Reformed theologians debated the question, sometimes fiercely.

In addition, Reformed theologians had differing opinions on what exactly was referred to when the Lord commanded his people to rest on the Sabbath day. Determining what “rest” meant was both an exegetical and theological topic. The options for what “rest” indicated included a physical rest from work, spiritual rest from sin, or rest from all activity. Furthermore, as will be shown below, theologians had to determine whether or not rest was the primary purpose of the commandment. Was the commandment meant to address rest or was it meant to address worship? Reformed theologians would nuance their answers to this question quite differently.

Yet another theological issue relates to the day the Sabbath was to be celebrated. Obviously, the Christian tradition typically observed the Sabbath on the first day of the week, Sunday. This is a clear deviation from Jewish practice where the Sabbath was the last day of the week, Saturday. Theological reasonings for this change were numerous, though not exactly uniform. In addition, theologians had striking disagreements over whether or not Christians could observe the Sabbath on any day of the week. Did the Sabbath have to be Sunday, or could Christians observe the Sabbath on any day throughout the week? Opinions varied widely and so did the theological explanations given to support one’s position.

Related to the issue of what day the Sabbath should be celebrated is how often the Sabbath should be observed. In this instance the question revolves around whether the Sabbath must be observed once every seven days or if the Sabbath could be observed more or less often. The answer given was related to one’s understanding of the previous theological questions. As we will see, the theology behind these questions led to vastly different answers which, in turn, led to vastly different understandings of how the Sabbath should practically be observed.

Argument

Sabbatarianism and the Dutch Reformed Tradition

Sabbatarianism, the term used in various ways to describe a literal and strict Christian appropriation of the Jewish Sabbath, has long been associated with Dutch Reformed communities.²⁸ Virtually all scholars have supposed that this

²⁸ A more thorough definition of the term “Sabbatarian” will occur in the first chapter.

sabbatarian strain within the Dutch Reformed tradition owes its origins to the influence of English Puritanism and, to a lesser extent, German Pietism. Keith Sprunger has argued for this influence of Puritan Sabbatarianism on the Dutch Reformed tradition. He writes, “An English Puritan influence in the camp of the strict Dutch Sabbatarians frequently is discernible. In fact, wherever in the world a strict Sabbath observance movement of any kind emerged, an English or Scottish connection is likely.”²⁹ Other scholars from both English and Dutch perspectives, such as M. M. Knappen and G. D. J. Schotel, have made similar arguments.³⁰ Parker notes the tendency among scholars, writing, “Two conclusions seem to be common to studies of sabbatarianism written by religious historians. The first is that sabbatarianism was a puritan [sic] innovation which began to surface in the 1570s and 1580s and was crystallized into a formal doctrine by the 1590s.”³¹ In his impressive tome, Philip Benedict also connects the emphasis on the Sabbath in Dutch circles as a result of influences from English Puritanism.³² Scholars have gone so far to assert that a strict Sabbatarianism in the seventeenth century was uniquely English and Scottish. For instance, Sprunger explicitly states, “Although English Protestant religion drew heavily from the international Calvinist movement, strict Sabbatarianism in the seventeenth century was unique to the English and Scottish people.”³³ Similarly, Winton Solberg has argued that “the Continental Reformation, including Calvin, produced nothing resembling the Puritan doctrine of the Sabbath. But Reformed theology was highly conducive to the development of such a theory.”³⁴ Carl Trueman, too, has taken such a position: “One of the distinctives of British

Scholarly grammatical conventions vary, but I have chosen to capitalize the term when used as a noun (e.g. Sabbatarianisms, Sabbatarians) and to not capitalize the term when used as an adjective (e.g. sabbatarian theology, sabbatarian positions).

- 29 Keith L. Sprunger, “English and Dutch Sabbatarianism and the Development of Puritan Social Theology (1600–1660),” *Church History* 51, no. 1 (1982): 32.
- 30 From an English historian, see M.M. Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism: A Chapter in the History of Idealism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970, 187. From a Dutch historian, see Gilles Dionysius Jacob Schotel, *De openbare eeredienst der Nederl. Hervormde Kerk in de zestiende, zeventiende en achttiende eeuw*, Haarlem: Kruseman, 1870, 211.
- 31 Parker, *The English Sabbath*, 3.
- 32 Philip Benedict, *Christ’s Churches Purley Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002, 324–326 and 518–526.
- 33 Sprunger, “English and Dutch Sabbatarianism,” 24. Sprunger is correct in noting the influence the Netherlands had on Puritanism both in England and in America, though he does not make such a case regarding the Sabbath. See, Keith L. Sprunger, *The Learned Doctor William Ames: Dutch Backgrounds of English and American Puritanism*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1972, 256.
- 34 Winton U. Solberg, *Redeem the Time: The Puritan Sabbath in Early America*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977, 26–27.

Puritan Reformed piety over against its continental counterpart was its vigorous Sabbatarianism.”³⁵

Dutch Sabbatarianism, the typical argument goes, was not a crucial part of the Dutch Reformed identity and did not develop in its churches until relatively late. Sprunger summarizes such a position, arguing that, “The strict Sabbath practice associated with the Dutch Reformed people in America and elsewhere tends to be a later development.”³⁶

However, in what follows, I will demonstrate that this understanding of Dutch Sabbatarianism is deeply flawed. The strength of the argument is that, indeed, the Dutch Reformed theological tradition was by and large not sabbatarian. As the subsequent chapters will demonstrate, Sabbatarianism was not the theological norm for early Dutch Reformed theology. Rather, the theological origins of such Sabbatarianism can be found in the Dutch Nadere Reformatie, in the first half of the seventeenth century. English Puritanism, with its emphasis on Sabbatarianism, certainly impacted this movement within the Dutch Reformed Church.³⁷

Yet, while a sabbatarian theology was lacking in the early days of the Dutch Reformed theology, the Dutch Reformed tradition was sabbatarian in its piety very early on. As the church records will suggest, Dutch Reformed Sabbatarianism practices came not from English Puritanism but, rather, arose from within the Dutch Reformed churches. While the theological backing for such a Sabbatarianism may have come from English Puritanism, Dutch Reformed church authorities emphasized a careful, sabbatarian observance of Sundays for their own reasons particular to their own religious and cultural setting. This must be the case, I will demonstrate, because the Dutch Reformed concern with Sabbath observance is evident before English Puritanism’s influence found its way to the Low Countries.³⁸

Thus, part of my overall argument is that the Sabbath in the Low Countries was more important, theologically and practically, than previous scholars have acknowledged. It is my contention that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Sabbath was an integral aspect of Christian piety in the Dutch Reformed tradition. The Sabbath became for Dutch religious authorities a way to ensure order within the church but was also a way to distinguish Reformed Christians

35 Carl R. Trueman, “Reformed Orthodoxy in Britain,” in *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis, Leiden: Brill, 2013, 274.

36 Sprunger, “English and Dutch Sabbatarianism,” 29.

37 Joel R. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation*, New York: P. Lang, 1991. Much work has been done tracing the influence of English Puritanism on the Nadere Reformatie, Beeke’s being among the best.

38 Trueman, “Reformed Orthodoxy in Britain,” 274–275. Trueman notes the emphasis on the Sabbath in Britain became “a focal point” towards the end of the sixteenth century and at the beginning of the seventeenth century. I will demonstrate that the strict concern with the Sabbath was present in the Dutch churches prior to that time period.

from Catholics and Anabaptists. I will go on to argue, however, that the church authorities' efforts at enforcing Sunday observance were met with resistance from the laity and were largely unsuccessful. As Philip Benedict has written, assessing the "success" of church discipline is difficult, but church discipline clearly had its limits and was resisted.³⁹ Such resistance certainly is evident, my research will demonstrate, in the Dutch Reformed situation.

The importance of the Sabbath becomes clear when studying the attention Reformed theologians give to it. Calvin, a Lasco, Ursinus, and à Brakel all devote a considerable amount of attention to the Sabbath. They are concerned with the theological understanding of the Sabbath, particularly regarding the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament.⁴⁰ However, they also deal explicitly with what sorts of behaviors and practices are required and forbidden on Sundays.⁴¹ Even for these theologians, then, the Sabbath was important theologically but also for the lived experience of Reformed congregants.

Similarly, Sunday observance was a significant issue for consistories, regional classes, and provincial synods. Simply the number of times the governing bodies dealt with Sunday observance indicates that they were concerned with people's practices. As the later chapters will prove, at each level of church government desecration of the Sabbath was, albeit with varying frequencies, a concern of the church authorities.

The Sabbath was, I will argue, a clear way in which Reformed Christians could demonstrate their piety. This demonstration of piety was important within the Reformed Church but also for the general public. As a demonstration of the genuineness of the Reformed faith, Reformed Christians' piety was to be above reproach. Sabbath observance, namely attendance at worship services and ceasing from work, was a demonstration of piety that everyone could see. On the other hand, a desecration of the Sabbath was equally as noticeable and tarnished the reputation of the Reformed faith and the Dutch Reformed Church. Thus, Sabbath observance was a crucial aspect of the piety expected of Dutch Reformed Christians.

If my argument is correct, then scholars need to reevaluate how and why the Sabbath came to occupy the position that it held within the Dutch Reformed Church. By way of explanation, I offer two main theories. First, the emphasis on Sabbath-keeping in the Dutch Reformed churches was a way for Dutch ecclesiastical authorities to maintain order within their churches and, ideally, society

39 Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed*, 484–489.

40 For example, reference Calvin, *Institutes*, II.ix.1–2; Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Day 34, I–II; Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, III.44.

41 Calvin, *Institutes*, II.viii, 28–33; Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Day 38, IV; à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, III.49.