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# Elders and Deacons in Kampen and Wemeldinge: Dutch Reformed Approaches to Consistory Elections

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The consistory was a crucial institution in early modern Reformed churches. This article examines the nominations and elections of elders and deacons in the Dutch Reformed consistories of Kampen and Wemeldinge, shedding light on who was being nominated and elected and how such processes functioned in these churches. In particular, research into the Kampen consistory records demonstrates the importance given to the office of elder despite little theological backing for such a hierarchy; this was true to a lesser extent in Wemeldinge. In addition, the Kampen civil authorities played a significant role in the life of the consistory, most notably through the service of burgomasters as elders. The presence of burgomasters on the consistory is not present in Wemeldinge, indicating a more separate relationship between the church and state. In both Kampen and Wemeldinge, the elections of elders and deacons were unique and responded to the challenges and priorities of the individual contexts and communities.

**Keywords:** Reformed; elders; deacons; consistory; elections

The importance of the consistory in the Protestant Reformations is now universally acknowledged in Reformation studies. Any number of excellent works on consistory records now help provide a fuller picture of the lived religious experience in Reformed communities.<sup>1</sup> In this way, consistory records have been studied primarily with an eye toward discipline and lay religious experience. Less attention, however,

<sup>1</sup>The interest in consistory records began with Robert Kingdon's pioneering studies on Geneva. For a helpful introduction and summary to Kingdon's work and findings, see Robert M. Kingdon, *Reforming Geneva: Discipline, Faith and Anger in Calvin's Geneva* (Geneva: Droz, 2012). Since his initial inquiries, other scholars have done much work on consistories throughout Europe. Kingdon himself notes the excellent work Raymond A. Mentzer and Philippe Chareyre have done on French consistories and the work of Heinz Schilling on the Emden consistory. See Philippe Chareyre and Raymond A. Mentzer, "Organizing the Churches and Reforming Society," in *A Companion to the Huguenots*, ed. Raymond A. Mentzer and Bertrand Van Ruymbeke (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 17–42; and Heinz Schilling and Klaus-Dieter Schreiber, *Kirchenratsprotokolle der reformierten Gemeinde Emden, 1557–1620*, 2 vols. (Cologne: Böhlau, 1989, 1992). For a more complete introduction to consistories and the secondary literature, see Raymond A. Mentzer and Françoise Moreil, "Introduction," in *Dire l'interdit: The Vocabulary of Censure and Exclusion in the Early Modern Reformed Tradition*, ed. Raymond A. Mentzer, Françoise Moreil, and Philippe Chareyre (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1–9.

has been given to the members chosen to serve on the consistory and, more specifically, to how such officers were chosen.<sup>2</sup>

The present article examines the consistory records of two Dutch cities: Kampen<sup>3</sup> and Wemeldinge.<sup>4</sup> Frank van der Pol and I have each studied the Kampen consistory records, but neither of us has done so with the elections of elders and deacons in mind.<sup>5</sup> Less work has been done on the city of Wemeldinge, and very little attention has been given to its consistory records. With a close examination of who was nominated and elected to the positions of elders and deacons, this article will show the consistory in Kampen placed greater importance on the election of elders than that of deacons and saw ecclesiastical authorities as closely intertwined and overlapping with the civic authorities. However, a comparison with the consistory records of Wemeldinge demonstrates that the situation in Kampen was not replicated throughout Dutch Reformed churches. In fact, Wemeldinge's consistory records indicate less of a connection between the magistrates and the consistory and draws into question the preeminence of elders over deacons in the consistory. This article, then, argues that the elections of elders and deacons and how they were understood is best seen as a fluid and complex situation in Dutch Reformed churches where elders and deacons were elected and functioned differently based on local contexts.

Choosing to examine Kampen's and Wemeldinge's consistory records is not simply arbitrary. While much of the scholarly work on Dutch consistories has focused on the major province of Holland<sup>6</sup> and the work on the Dutch Reformation more generally has most often focused on larger cities,<sup>7</sup> these records provide insights into midsize and

<sup>2</sup>One exception is Robert M. Kingdon, "Calvin and the Establishment of Consistory Discipline in Geneva: The Institution and the Men Who Directed It," *Dutch Review of Church History* 70, no. 2 (January 1990): 158–172.

<sup>3</sup>The Kampen consistory records before 1618 were completely lost when the Remonstrants took the records with them after being dismissed from the Reformed Church. 1648 is a natural ending point for this study because the Dutch Republic's war with Spain officially concluded in 1648, and there is a break in the records from 1650–1654. The consistory records are found in twelve volumes; the years examined here are found in the first three volumes. In the *Stadsarchief Kampen*, the consistory records are in the *Archief Hervormde Gemeente Kampen (AHGK)* collection, catalogued under the *Gemeente Archief Kampen (GAK)* as II.A.9–20 and labeled "Register van handelingen van de Algemene Kerkeraad van Kampen 1618–1900." Hereafter the consistory records will be cited as follows: volume, date, AHGK.

<sup>4</sup>The Wemeldinge consistory records are held in the *Zeeuws Archief in Middelburg, Netherlands* and have been digitalized so that they are now available online. Within the archive, the records are catalogued as: 4063, *Hervormde Gemeente te Wemeldinge, 1606–1980, I.1.1. 8 Delen, "Notulen van de vergaderingen van de kerkenraad."* Of the eight volumes, only the first is examined here. Hereafter, "Hervormde Gemeente te Wemeldinge" will be abbreviated "HGW" and the Wemeldinge consistory records will be cited as follows: date, HGW.

<sup>5</sup>Frank van der Pol, *De Reformatie te Kampen in de Zestiende Eeuw* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1990); and Kyle Dieleman, *The Battle for the Sabbath in the Dutch Reformation: Devotion or Desecration?* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2019), 197–222.

<sup>6</sup>Christine Kooi, *Liberty and Religion: Church and State in Leiden's Reformation, 1572–1620* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Charles H. Parker, *The Reformation of Community: Social Welfare and Calvinist Charity in Holland, 1572–1620* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Herman Roodenburg, *Onder censuur: De kerkelijke tucht in de gereformeerde gemeente van Amsterdam, 1578–1700* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1990); and Joke Spaans, *Haarlem na de Reformatie: Stedelijke cultuur en kerkelijk leven, 1577–1620* ('s-Gravenhage: Stichting Hollandse Historische Reeks, 1989).

<sup>7</sup>This has been the case for studies of the province of Holland mentioned above, but it is also the case in the majority of the studies based outside of the Holland province. See the following excellent studies done on major Dutch cities: Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines: Confession and Community in*

small Dutch towns outside of Holland. Kampen is located in the much less studied province of Overijssel and, while not an insignificant city, could not be considered a major city in the Dutch Republic. Similarly, Wemeldinge was certainly not an important city and, in actuality, is nothing more than a village.

Kampen has a long history, gaining its city rights in 1236. Because of its position on the IJssel River, Kampen was a prosperous shipping city, connecting the Rhine River with the Zuiderzee.<sup>8</sup> Kampen reached its peak as a city, both with regard to population and economic success, around 1400. Kampen's population in 1400 was somewhere around 12,000, a figure not to be reached again in the early modern period.<sup>9</sup> Trading along the IJssel slowed considerably in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, largely due to the silting of the river.<sup>10</sup> The economic decline continued into the sixteenth century, and by the seventeenth century, the city of Kampen was struggling to adjust to its new, harsh reality.

Kampen, like so many Dutch cities, was not immune to the struggles and violence of the Dutch Revolt.<sup>11</sup> William van den Bergh, the brother of William of Orange, defeated the Spanish in Kampen in 1572, but after Alva's harsh reconquest of the region, Kampen and other nearby cities surrendered. However, in 1578, the rebels reclaimed the city. From this time forward, Kampen remained in the possession of the Dutch Republic, though the danger of the pro-Spanish forces retaking Kampen and surrounding cities was occasionally present.<sup>12</sup> Despite the shifting political climate, Kampen's Reformed congregation established a church around 1578 and proceeded with little public opposition.<sup>13</sup>

Relatively little is known about the early Reformed community in Kampen. Prior to the Protestant Reformation, Kampen was a center of Catholicism.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, Protestantism in Kampen, as in most of the Low Countries, was present already in the early 1520s.<sup>15</sup> This included both a substantial Lutheran presence and a more radical and diverse Anabaptist strand.<sup>16</sup> Still, even after the official establishment of the Reformed congregation in 1578, membership was still rather small, particularly as a percentage of Kampen's total population. Based on estimates taken from communion lists, membership in the Dutch Reformed Church in the first decade of the

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*Utrecht, 1578–1620* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Guido Marnef, *Antwerp in the Age of Reformation: Underground Protestantism in a Commercial Metropolis, 1550–1577* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); and A. P. H. F. Wouters and P. H. A. M. Abels, *Nieuw en ongezien: kerk en samenleving in de classis Delft en Delfland 1572–1621*, 2 vols. (Delft: Eburon, 1994).

<sup>8</sup>Joop W. Koopmans, *Historical Dictionary of the Netherlands*, 3rd ed. (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 173.

<sup>9</sup>Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 114.

<sup>10</sup>Israel, *Dutch Republic*, 119.

<sup>11</sup>Rients Reitsma, *Centrifugal and Centripetal Forces in the Early Dutch Republic: The States of Overijssel, 1566–1600* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1982). Reitsma has provided an excellent account of the history of the province of Overijssel, which includes Kampen.

<sup>12</sup>James D. Tracy, *The Founding of the Dutch Republic: War, Finance, and Politics in Holland, 1572–1588* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 158–160.

<sup>13</sup>Van der Pol, *De Reformatie te Kampen*, 231–232.

<sup>14</sup>Van der Pol, *De Reformatie te Kampen*, 17–87. Van der Pol provides a thorough and excellent, if lengthy, review of Kampen's religious situation prior to the Reformation in his chapter entitled "De Kerk in de Laat-Middeleeuwse IJsselstad Kampen."

<sup>15</sup>Van der Pol, *De Reformatie te Kampen*, 91–92.

<sup>16</sup>For the Lutheran presence, see Van der Pol, *De Reformatie te Kampen*, 89–113. For the Anabaptist presence, see Van der Pol, *De Reformatie te Kampen*, 114–126.

seventeenth century appears to have been somewhere from 1,130 to 1,265.<sup>17</sup> If, as Rients Reitsma has concluded, Kampen's population was around 8,000 people at 1600 and church membership was 1,265, then only around 16 percent of the population were official church members.<sup>18</sup> Church membership appears to have grown in the 1620s and 1630s, with an average of fifty to sixty new members per year.<sup>19</sup> But, even if by 1620 membership had gained 1,200 members, as Van der Pol has suggested, and the city's population held steady at 8,000, church members still only accounted for about one-third of the total population.<sup>20</sup>

Wemeldinge is a small village in the Dutch province of Zeeland.<sup>21</sup> As part of the Zuid-Beveland peninsula, the village and surrounding areas have long battled the water. For most of its history, Zuid-Beveland (including Wemeldinge) was an island where floods frequently conquered towns and villages. In 1850, construction on the Zuid-Beveland Canal began to connect the two estuaries of the Scheldt River. Wemeldinge sits at the northern mouth of the Zuid-Beveland Canal. Later, in 1871, the Sloedam was constructed to dam the Sloe Channel so that Zuid-Beveland and neighboring Walcheren were connected. One of the results of the long process of reclaiming land from the sea is that Zuid-Beveland is no longer an island but is now a peninsula. Today Wemeldinge has been incorporated into the municipality of Kapelle. Protestant preaching had early roots in Zeeland and, more specifically, in Zuid-Beveland. In October of 1578, the nearby town of Goes welcome the first Protestant preacher into their Church of Mary Magdalene. By December 1, 1578, seven towns (Wemeldinge, Kapelle, Baarland, Heinkenszand, Nisse, Hoedekenskerke, and Kruiningen) jointly called their first Reformed pastor.

Much scholarly attention has been given to the ways in which Reformed consistories interacted with their civic counterparts. Relationships between ecclesiastical authorities and secular authorities could certainly be strained, but in many situations the consistories cooperated with the city officials. Most famously, the consistory and the city council in Geneva frequently clashed over issues of authority and jurisdiction.<sup>22</sup> Other scholars have noted the importance of supportive political authorities for Reformed movements and the problems arising when those authorities were not supportive of the Reformed churches.<sup>23</sup> This tricky interplay between civic magistrates and consistories certainly occurred in the Dutch context as well.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Frank van der Pol, "Religious Diversity and Everyday Ethics in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch City Kampen," *Church History* 71, no. 1 (March 2002): 27.

<sup>18</sup>Reitsma, *Centrifugal and Centripetal Forces*, 14–15. Reitsma calculates Kampen's population in 1599 to be 8,104.

<sup>19</sup>Van der Pol, "Religious Diversity and Everyday Ethics," 28.

<sup>20</sup>Van der Pol, "Religious Diversity and Everyday Ethics," 27–28. As discussed above, Van der Pol notes that in the first two decades of the seventeenth century, church membership grew at a rate of fifty to sixty members per year. Over twenty years, figuring generously, church membership would have been up a total of 1,200 members. Added with the earlier number of 1,265, by 1620 church membership was somewhere around 2,465.

<sup>21</sup>For an introduction to Wemeldinge, see G. J. Lepoeter and J. C. de Groene, *Wemeldinge: Historie van een dorp tussen Kerk en Kanaal* (Kapelle: Lepoeter, 2005); and C. Philipse, *Wemeldinge: Een oud dorp* (Kapelle: Gemeentebestuur, 1984).

<sup>22</sup>Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002), 96–109.

<sup>23</sup>Graeme Murdock, *Beyond Calvin: The Intellectual, Political and Cultural World of Europe's Reformed Churches* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 54–75.

<sup>24</sup>For a couple of examples, see Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines*; and Kooi, *Liberty and Religion*.

Indeed, relationships between the ecclesiastical and civil authorities were notoriously complex in the Dutch Republic. Examining the elections of elders and deacons through the lens of the consistory records provides insights into how the consistory related to the civil authorities in the communities of Kampen and Wemeldinge. Such a case study is helpful for understanding the social situation in the early modern Dutch Republic. However, analysis of the consistory records in Kampen in particular might also shed light on similarities and differences with regard to how consistories related to civil authorities throughout the European Reformations. As will be demonstrated, in Kampen's consistory, the role of the magistrates was extremely important, particularly for the office of elder.

The broader relationship between "church and state" in the Dutch Republic was also complex. In the Dutch situation, the Reformed Church did have the status of an official church, albeit an official church that people were not required to join. In fact, best estimates are that professing members of the Reformed Church made up between 20 to 30 percent of most municipal populations.<sup>25</sup> The situation in the Low Countries was quite unique, and because the government did not mandate allegiance to a certain religious confession, scholars of the Dutch Reformation have questioned the use of the confessionalization concept in the Low Countries.<sup>26</sup>

In fact, the separation of secular and ecclesiastical authorities has led some scholars to assume that in the Dutch Reformation the two bodies were quite independent of one another. Heinz Schilling has gone so far as to assert that: "This separation of church and state was not only present in theory, but to a large extent was also observable in practice."<sup>27</sup> However, the situation in Kampen was quite different. The Kampen consistory records portray a situation where municipal magistrates overlapped a great deal with the consistory, continually serving as elders. Thus, the consistory records suggest that while the Reformation in Kampen might not have necessarily been "magisterial," it certainly incorporated the support of the local city officials. Similarly, while the consistory records do not indicate a complete process of confessionalization as formulated by Wolfgang Reinhard and Schilling, the hardening of the Reformed confession in Kampen did not happen apart from the city government.

In addition, the temptation in scholarship on the early modern period has been to separate social and intellectual history, particularly when looking at religion. In the world of religion, such an approach often drives a wedge between theology and church history. Therefore, in examining the theological ideas of elders and deacons in the Reformed tradition and then examining the social practices of electing elders and deacons, the present work seeks to bridge the divide between theology and practice. The situations in Kampen and Wemeldinge force us to wonder about how theological ideas were incorporated, ignored, rejected, or adapted in light of local circumstances. What emerges is a complicated picture where theology and practice do not neatly

<sup>25</sup>Christine Kooi, "The Netherlands," in *Reformation and Early Modern Europe: A Guide to Research*, ed. David M. Whitford (Kirkville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2008), 275.

<sup>26</sup>Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines*, 5–12; Benjamin Kaplan and Judith Pollmann, "Conclusion: Catholic Minorities in Protestant States: Britain and the Netherlands, c. 1570–1720," in *Catholic Communities in Protestant States: Britain and the Netherlands c. 1570–1720*, ed. Benjamin Kaplan, Bob Moore, Henk van Nierop, and Judith Pollmann (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 249–264.

<sup>27</sup>Heinz Schilling, *Religion, Political Culture, and the Emergence of Early Modern Society: Essays in German and Dutch History* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 370.

mirror each other but, instead, are used and adapted as lay Christians and ecclesiastical authorities negotiate between theology and practice in their lived religious experiences.

Before diving into the situations in Kampen and Wemeldinge, it is helpful to begin with a picture of how elders and deacons functioned in the broader Reformed tradition. Such an examination will first address the theological underpinnings of the offices of elder and deacon in Calvin's thought and the practical role of those offices in Geneva. Such a beginning is especially important because of Calvin's influence on the Dutch Reformed Church, both in terms of theology and church polity. Then, a brief examination of how elders and deacons functioned in other Reformed areas will demonstrate that the role of elders and deacons was not always uniform. Finally, I will turn my attention to the Dutch Reformed churches and the role of elders and deacons with particular attention to the elders and deacons in the Kampen and Wemeldinge consistories.

### I. Elders and Deacons in the Reformed Tradition

In Geneva, elders and deacons were elected—though Calvin himself was not particularly happy with such an arrangement. In a letter to the French-speaking congregation in Frankfurt, he wrote: “For my own part, I have not always approved of the elections which I have consented to, for I am not bound to believe that everyone possesses such sound judgment and discretion for electing, as were to be desired.”<sup>28</sup> Robert Kingdon has described the process of electing elders and deacons, a process intimately tied to the Genevan city government. Notably, Kingdon points out, the pastors were actively involved in the nomination of elders but curiously absent in the elections of deacons.<sup>29</sup> Elders and deacons in Geneva did serve on two separate institutions, each of which was relatively independent. Elders served with the pastors on the consistory. Deacons served in the Hospital-General, a body over which the pastors had no direct role.<sup>30</sup> Such a difference speaks not only to the importance of the diaconate as a lay institution but also to the greater importance Calvin and the other Geneva pastors gave to the office of elder.<sup>31</sup>

Elders and deacons were not important only in Calvin's Geneva. In France, elders and deacons were integral offices within the Reformed churches, as Raymond Mentzer has clearly demonstrated.<sup>32</sup> The offices of elder and deacon were established already at the 1559 national synod in Paris where the texts of the Gallican Confession and the *Discipline ecclésiastique* was formulated.<sup>33</sup> Glenn Sunshine has argued that “distinguishing between deacons and elders, *senat* and *consistoire*, was not well suited to the realities of sixteenth-century French Protestantism,” though

<sup>28</sup>John Calvin, *Letters of John Calvin*, ed. Jules Bonnet (1858; repr., Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 3:272.

<sup>29</sup>Robert M. Kingdon, *Church and Society in Reformation Europe* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), 6–8, 81–87, esp. 85.

<sup>30</sup>Robert M. Kingdon, “Social Welfare in Calvin's Geneva,” *American Historical Review* 76, no. 1 (February 1971): 50–69.

<sup>31</sup>Kingdon, *Church and Society*, 87.

<sup>32</sup>Raymond A. Mentzer Jr., “Organizational Endeavour and Charitable Impulse in Sixteenth-Century France: The Case of Protestant Nîmes,” *French History* 5, no. 1 (March 1991): 1–29.

<sup>33</sup>Philippe Chareyre and Raymond A. Mentzer, “Organizing the Churches and Reforming Society,” in *A Companion to the Huguenots*, ed. Raymond A. Mentzer and Bertrand Van Ruymbeke (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 17–42. For the particulars regarding the *Discipline ecclésiastique*, see especially 20–21.

that became less true over time.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, Philippe Chareyre has convincingly shown that deacons in the Reformed congregation in Nîmes were not simply involved in the care of the poor but also had other duties, including liturgical roles, which actually gave the deacons a more authoritative role than the elders.<sup>35</sup> However, such a situation was not typical even in France. Elders had an indispensable role in the French Reformed churches, while not all French Reformed churches had deacons.<sup>36</sup> Mentzer, too, notes that at Nîmes the role of elders and deacons tended to overlap, though elders were formally responsible for ensuring popular behavior and deacons were to attend to the poor and sick.<sup>37</sup>

Michael Graham has meticulously traced the development of the Scottish “kirk sessions,” including the development of elders and deacons.<sup>38</sup> As in most Reformed communities, elders were responsible for overseeing the spiritual health of their congregations, most clearly in moral oversight. Despite their prescribed role, as Margo Todd has shown, elders in Scotland were hesitant to exercise excommunication and often sent difficult discipline cases to the higher court of the presbytery, even though elders clearly had the authority to discipline and excommunicate.<sup>39</sup> Another distinctive aspect of the Scottish Reformed tradition was that elders and deacons were not elected to terms but for life.<sup>40</sup>

While the offices of elder and deacon were prevalent in many Reformed churches, not all Reformed churches adopted a church polity that incorporated them. As Graeme Murdock has noted, in Hungary, the introduction of elders and deacons was only partially successful. Elders and deacons were present in the province of Habsburg-ruled Hungary but were rejected in the Transylvania territory.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, efforts to incorporate Calvin’s system of elders and deacons in Reformed churches in England found little success and was met with significant opposition.<sup>42</sup>

Overall, the importance of consistories in Reformed communities and in people’s everyday spiritual experience is difficult to overstate. Certainly, the Reformed theological articulation of the importance of these elders and deacons emphasized the role these men had in developing people’s piety. Having briefly examined the consistory and the role of elders and deacons in various Reformed traditions, it is important to address in greater depth the role of elders and deacons in the Dutch Reformed churches.

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<sup>34</sup>Glenn S. Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism: The Development of Huguenot Ecclesiastical Institutions, 1557–1572* (Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2003), 141. For the role of the diaconate in the French Reformed churches, see Glenn S. Sunshine, “Geneva Meets Rome: The Development of the French Reformed Diaconate,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 26, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 329–346.

<sup>35</sup>Philippe Chareyre, “La fleur de tous les anciens’ ou le ministère des diacres à Nîmes XVI<sup>e</sup>–XVII<sup>e</sup>,” in *Agir pour l’Eglise: Ministères et charges ecclésiastiques dans les Eglises réformées (XVI<sup>e</sup>–XVII<sup>e</sup>)*, ed. Didier Poton and Raymond A. Mentzer (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2014), 95–115.

<sup>36</sup>Chareyre and Mentzer, “Organizing the Churches and Reforming Society,” 27–30.

<sup>37</sup>Mentzer, “Organizational Endeavor and Charitable Impulse,” 1–29.

<sup>38</sup>Michael F. Graham, *The Uses of Reform: “Godly Discipline” and Popular Behavior in Scotland and Beyond, 1560–1610* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

<sup>39</sup>Margo Todd, “‘None to Haunt, Frequent, nor Intercommon with Them’: The Problem of Excommunication in the Scottish Kirk,” in Mentzer, Moreil, and Chareyre, eds., *Dire l’interdit*, 219–238.

<sup>40</sup>Graham, *Uses of Reform*, 133.

<sup>41</sup>Murdock, *Beyond Calvin*, 82–83.

<sup>42</sup>Murdock, *Beyond Calvin*, 83–85.

## II. Elders and Deacons in the Dutch Reformed Church

Elders and deacons had a role crucial in the Dutch Reformed churches of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Again, some scholarly work has already laid a solid foundation for understanding said role. Arie Th. van Deursen's landmark work highlighted the importance of the consistory in Dutch Reformed churches and, furthermore, the importance of elders in the consistory.<sup>43</sup> Charles Parker published a thorough examination of the role of deacons and poor relief in the Dutch Reformed congregations.<sup>44</sup> Parker's work nicely highlights the complicated and often conflicted relationship between diaconal poor relief in Reformed churches and the civic poor relief cities offered. Certainly, scholars agree that elders and deacons played a major role, even if not a uniform one, in the Reformed churches throughout the Dutch Republic.

Theologically, early on in the Dutch Reformed tradition, the offices of elder and deacon were affirmed as part of God's divinely instituted government of his church. The Belgic Confession (1561), adopted as a confessional standard in the Dutch Reformed Church already in 1571, includes elders and deacons in its article on the government of the church.<sup>45</sup> Article 30 states: "There should also be elders and deacons, along with pastors, to make up the council of the church." The Belgic Confession does not delineate the specific tasks of the elders and deacons, noting instead that through them "evil people are corrected spiritually and held in check" and "the poor and all the afflicted may be helped and comforted according to their need." Article 31, on the officers of the church, describes how the church should elect elders and deacons to their office, being careful to wait for God's call and not improperly push themselves forward.<sup>46</sup>

No mention of elders or deacons is found in the Heidelberg Catechism, the other early confessional standard in the Dutch Reformed Church. However, in his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, Zacharias Ursinus makes brief mention of elders and deacons.<sup>47</sup> The discussion comes in his answer to "Question 103" under "Lord's Day 38." The topic is the fourth commandment, as numbered in the Reformed tradition, which deals with the Sabbath. Ursinus argues that the fourth commandment requires participation in the public ministries of the church. In elaborating on those ministries, Ursinus discusses what sorts of ministers serve the church. He argues that the church calls five offices of ministers. These five types of ministers include evangelists, bishops (that is, pastors), doctors (that is, teachers), governors (that is, elders), and deacons. Elders, or governors, are chosen "for the purpose of exercising discipline" and for managing the church. Deacons are to "take care of the poor" and "attend to the distribution of the alms of the church."<sup>48</sup>

In this same commentary, Ursinus also addresses the type of person who should be elected to the office of minister, which included elders and deacons. The first qualification was simple: those serving in office needed to be men, not women. Such men were

<sup>43</sup>A. Th. van Deursen, *Bavianen en slijkgeuzen: Kerk en kerkvolk ten tijde van Maurits en Oldenbarnevelt* (Franeker: Van Wijnen, 1991).

<sup>44</sup>Parker, *Reformation of Community*, 98–190.

<sup>45</sup>Nicolaas Gootjes, *The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007), 100–102.

<sup>46</sup>Guido de Brès, Belgic Confession, Articles 30–31, in *Our Faith: Ecumenical Creeds, Reformed Confessions, and Other Resources* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013), 56–57.

<sup>47</sup>Zacharias Ursinus, *Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard, ed. Eric D. Bristley, electronic ed. (s.l.: Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States, 2004), [http://www.rcus.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/UrsinusZ\\_HC-Commentary-17-NEW-HC.pdf](http://www.rcus.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/UrsinusZ_HC-Commentary-17-NEW-HC.pdf).

<sup>48</sup>Ursinus, *Commentary*, 1010–1011.



also to have a good relationship with the church, have a proper understanding of doctrine, and be able to teach such doctrine. Elders and deacons were also to excel in wisdom and authority and assist others through “their examples, counsels, and admonitions.”<sup>49</sup> The men were not fulfilling the duties of their office if they gave improper or careless counsel, presented a bad example through folly, or neglected to correct or reprove the sins of those under their care.<sup>50</sup>

The theological understanding of the offices of elder and deacon led to the swift establishment of the offices in the Dutch Reformed Church order. The 1571 Synod of Emden, generally considered the first “national” synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, set up the Dutch Reformed Church polity.<sup>51</sup> At the local level, this polity established the consistory, to be composed of ministers, elders, and deacons. According to the Synod of Emden, elders and deacons were to serve two-year terms with half of the elders and deacons stepping down each year. In this rotational system, the institutional memory and experience was preserved with half of the consistory remaining each year. The Synod of Emden did note that elders and deacons could be appointed for a longer or shorter period of time at the discretion of the particular consistory.

The Synod of Dort in 1618 to 1619, the single most significant national synod for the Dutch Reformed Church, reaffirmed the church order established in 1571.<sup>52</sup> The Synod of Dort endorsed the offices of elder and deacon as well as the assembling of consistories in each church. Elders were to conduct family visits, particularly before and after the Lord’s Supper. Visits prior to the Lord’s Supper were to ensure church members were in the proper spiritual and moral condition to participate in the supper. Visits after were conducted to determine whether all eligible members had participated. Additionally, elders were to comfort and teach the members of the congregation. Deacons were to gather alms for the poor and distribute them as needed, in addition to visiting and comforting members as necessary. The Synod of Dort authorized two systems of electing elders and deacons. First, the consistory could choose as many elders and deacons as necessary to propose to the congregation. Upon approval, they would be ordained in a public worship service. Second, the consistory could choose twice as many elders and deacons as needed and have the congregation vote to choose half of the nominees. Echoing the Synod of Emden, the Synod of Dort also recommended that elders and deacons serve two-year terms with half of the members retiring each year. However, the Synod of Dort recognized that individual circumstances may vary and allowed for some variation in the length of terms if the welfare of the church demanded it.

### III. The Kampen Consistory Elections

The Kampen consistory followed a routine pattern of nominating and electing elders and deacons, although the extant records do omit some details which would be relevant to creating a complete picture of the procedure.<sup>53</sup> Kampen’s process largely mirrored

<sup>49</sup>Ursinus, *Commentary*, 1022.

<sup>50</sup>Ursinus, *Commentary*, 1022.

<sup>51</sup>Frederik Lodewijk Rutgers, *Acta Van De Nederlandsche Synoden Der Zestiende Eeuw* (Dordrecht: Van den Tol, 1980), 57–58.

<sup>52</sup>C. van den Broeke, *Een geschiedenis van de classis: Classicale typen tussen idee en werkelijkheid (1571–2004)* (Kampen: Kok, 2005), 79–83, 534–536.

<sup>53</sup>From 1618–1648, four years have no record of the nomination and election of elders and deacons. The records which would contain the nominating and electing of elders and deacons from the years of 1624, 1625, and 1646 are lost. In addition, the records of 1634 mention the need to elect elders and deacons,

the system the Synods at Emden and Dort set up, following more closely the second model which Dort authorized. The nominating and electing of deacons took place toward the end of November. The typical process involved the nomination of six names for the position of elder and eight names for the position of deacon. Unfortunately, the records do not explicitly state who was responsible for nominating the men. It is likely the consistory nominated them, though it is also quite possible that the civic officials also had an influence. Such a process of the consistory making nominations was prescribed in the church orders of the Dutch Reformed Church, though in some places the magistrates approved the list of nominees.<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately, it is also unclear from the consistory records if such magisterial approval was needed in Kampen.

Upon their nomination, the men would be informed of their nomination, either in person or with a short letter.<sup>55</sup> Within a week, the names would then go before the congregation for a vote. Again, the records contain little information about those votes. The dates of the consistory meetings suggest the votes took place on Sundays, which would be a logical time and place for such elections.

Three men were elected as elders, and four men were elected as deacons. Occasionally, the number of nominations would vary slightly, with seven elder nominees and nine deacon nominees, but the number of men elected to each position was rarely altered. The records sometimes contain the name of “the next with the most votes,” presumably in case one of the elected men backed out of his position or some other emergency required a replacement. For example, in 1640, Jan van Breda was noted as the elder nominee who had received the fourth highest total of votes.<sup>56</sup> The same could be done for deacons. Pieter Hendricksen, a coppersmith, was not elected as a deacon in 1630, but he was noted as the one with the “next most votes.”<sup>57</sup> In each case, the person with the next most votes could fill in in case a replacement was needed for one of the men elected.

For a few years, the process was slightly different, though the records contain no indication as to why the process differed in these years. In the years 1639, 1640, 1642, and 1643, the consistory held two rounds of elections. In these years, the initial number of nominees was much higher. The number of deacons nominated ranged from nine to sixteen, and the number of elder nominees ranged from eight to fifteen. A first round of elections was then held, with six elders and eight deacons being selected. From there the process proceeded as normal, with the typical three elders and four deacons chosen from the six and eight nominations, respectively.

The repetition of nominees for either the position of elder or deacon quickly becomes apparent when reading the consistory records.<sup>58</sup> During the years under

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but the lists of names are not included. A space was left on the page for names to be included later, but unfortunately, the list was never entered into the records.

<sup>54</sup>Kooi, *Liberty and Religion*, 45–47.

<sup>55</sup>Vol. 11, 9 November 1644, AHGK: “Is goet gevonden dat de kerckenraet op morgen tegens de avont sal vergaderen om nade gewoonlijcke wijset met briefjes uijt dese genomineerde personen, ouderlingen de diaconen te verkiesen.”

<sup>56</sup>Vol. 10, 27 November 1640, AHGK.

<sup>57</sup>Vol. 10, 26 November 1630, AHGK.

<sup>58</sup>At least two things potentially cause the number of people nominated for both the positions of elder and deacon to be lower than it is in actuality. First, my study of the records begins in 1618 and ends in 1648. Naturally, several men nominated for the last time in the early years of the study may have been previously nominated, and those nominated for the first time in the years prior to 1648 might have been nominated in

consideration, a total of seventy-five men were nominated for the position of elder. Of those, thirty-seven—or 49 percent—men were nominated only once while thirty-eight men—or 51 percent—were nominated multiple times. In fact, those who were nominated more than once were often nominated several times. Eleven nominees were nominated two times, eight were nominated three times, and nineteen were nominated more than three times.

The situation for deacons was similar. In the years under consideration, 105 deacons were nominated. Of those, fifty-four nominees were nominated only one time, and fifty-one nominees were nominated more than one time. Those who were nominated more than once were nominated twice twenty-one times, thrice seventeen times, and more than thrice thirteen times.

Few trends emerge regarding how one got elected. The only reliable rule seems to be that there was no guarantee that one would be elected. Several men simply were not elected no matter how many nominations they received. For instance, Teunis Roeloffsen, Casper van Breda, and Gerrit van Zanten were all nominated for elder four times and never elected. Even more dramatic, Gerrit Christianssen was nominated for deacon seven times but was never elected. Sometimes it appears a little persistence was all that was needed. Cornelis Hendricksen, for example, was not elected as a deacon four times before he was eventually elected upon his fifth nomination. Other cases are more inexplicable. Wessel Jansen was frequently nominated as an elder and nearly alternated when he was elected and when he was not. He went unelected in 1632, 1640, 1641, and 1647 but was elected in 1636, 1642, and 1648. Similarly, Steven Evertsen was not elected as a deacon in 1633 and 1635 but was elected in 1636 and 1640, only to be nominated for a final time in 1645 when he was again not elected.

Unfortunately, the consistory records provide no explicit explanations for why someone was or was not elected. Any number of possible reasons for a person not being elected exist. Anything from suspect morality to inexperience to administrative incompetence would have been possible reasons for Kampen church members to not vote for nominees. The curious question is why certain men would continue to be nominated after not being selected. One would expect that if the congregation had significant reasons for not electing a certain nominee, those same reasons would be enough to disqualify one from even being nominated again. However, evidently those making the initial nominations occasionally valued different qualifications than those casting the votes for those nominated.

In Kampen, it was more difficult to be elected if it was one's first time being nominated.<sup>59</sup> For deacons, 70 percent of all nominees were not elected on their first nomination, meaning, of course, only 30 percent were elected on their first nomination. When a deacon was nominated a second time, those figures shifted dramatically. If it was a deacon's second nomination, he was elected nearly half of the time. The numbers for elders are similar. An elder's first nomination resulted in being elected in 36 percent of the cases. Again, the numbers shift quite significantly when it was the elder's second nomination, giving him a much better chance of being elected. In those instances, the elder is elected in 42 percent of the cases. Evidently, nominees who had previously been

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the years after 1648. Second, though likely less problematic, is the possibility that nominees moved away or, more tragically, died before they could be nominated a second time.

<sup>59</sup>The data for this paragraph begins in 1626. Prior to 1626, the records only indicate the final men chosen; there is no indication of who was nominated and not elected. Thus, the previous years are not applicable for this analysis.

nominated were seen as more suited for the task. Second-time nominees would not necessarily be more experienced, since they were frequently not elected upon their first nomination. It does seem possible, though, that second time nominees were seen as more fit for the job given that they had more instruction in the faith and there was more evidence of their good moral behavior, both qualities Calvin listed as essential to the task. Perhaps church members voting for the nominees simply saw second-time nominees as possessing more “life experience” and the associated increase in wisdom.

The consistory records also show that nominations for elders were frequently drawn from the ranks of the deacons. Out of the seventy-five men nominated as elders, twenty-four of them—or 32 percent—had previously been nominated as deacons.<sup>60</sup> Nearly one-third of the deacon nominees were later nominated as elders.<sup>61</sup> Such a pattern was not without precedent. In his commentary on 1 Timothy 3:13, Calvin notes that within a century or two after the death of the apostles, the elders were chosen from the order of deacons. Calvin says that he does not necessarily object to selecting elders from deacons who have served well; yet he is clear, the biblical text simply means that deacons who serve well are worthy of honor since the office of deacon is, in its own right, a highly honorable one.<sup>62</sup>

Men could also be nominated as deacons after having already been nominated or even having already served as elders. Hendrik Janssen Smit, for example, was nominated as a deacon in 1626 (not elected), as an elder in 1627 (not elected), and then again as a deacon in 1631, when he was finally elected. Jan Gerritssen Veen had served as an elder in 1623 but was then elected as a deacon in 1627 and 1631. After serving those two terms as a deacon, Gerritssen Veen then was again elected as an elder in 1639, 1643, and 1647. As one final example, Jan Jansen was not elected as an elder in 1629 but was nominated and elected as a deacon in 1633. Thus, while it was more typical for deacons to then be nominated as elders, it did happen that men who were nominated or served as elders could later be nominated and elected as deacons.

Curiously, on several occasions, men nominated to be elders who were not elected were instead elected as deacons. While not overly frequent, such a situation occurred six times: in 1626, 1627, 1628, 1629, 1632, and 1635. In each year, the normal procedure with regard to nominees was followed, with eight nominees put forward for deacon. However, the four men elected to become deacons were not chosen solely from the list of nominated deacons. In five of the six years, one of the nominated elders who was not elected was instead elected as a deacon, leaving only three of the deacon positions chosen from the eight deacon nominees. Twice Jan Sabe was nominated as an elder but, instead, elected as a deacon. The same for Hendrick Janssen Smit in 1627, Jan Verscapen in 1629, and Jan Gerrigen in 1635. In 1632, two of the deacons chosen, Casper van Breda and Wissel Janssen, were elder nominees who had not been elected as

<sup>60</sup>This percentage could very well have been higher in reality. It is probable that men nominated in the early years of this study had been nominated as deacons prior to 1618. If that is true, then the percentage of elders having previously served as deacons would be higher.

<sup>61</sup>Again, this percentage was also certainly higher in reality since deacons in the last years of this study were likely nominated in later years as elders. From 1642 to 1648, sixteen men were nominated as a deacon for the first time; none of these men were nominated as elders in the years up to 1648. It is quite likely at least a few of them were nominated as elders after 1648, the final year of my study. If that was indeed the case, the percentage of deacons later nominated as elders would be higher.

<sup>62</sup>John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. William Pringle (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1856), 66, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom43.pdf>.

elders. As such, only half of the four elected deacons came from original list of eight nominated deacons!

In sum, the election of elders and deacons in Kampen points to the greater emphasis given to the office of elder. At least three trends support such a conclusion. First, compared to those nominated as deacons, men nominated to the position of elder tended to have more ecclesiastical experience and have a more proven record of service on the consistory. Second, in six different years, an elder nominee who was not elected was instead substituted as a deacon. A man not elected as an elder could still be considered qualified for the office of deacon. Third, it was quite common for deacons to “move up” to the position of elder. Conversely, it was uncommon for the opposite to happen; elders did not typically later serve as deacons. The practical process of electing elders and deacons leads one to conclude that the office of deacon was not given the same importance as that of elder.

#### IV. Elders and Burgomasters

Van der Pol has used the Kampen city council records to show the close alliance between the Kampen consistory and the Kampen city council.<sup>63</sup> Prior to the Synod of Dort in 1618–1619, the Remonstrant presence in Kampen was very strong and split the consistory and city council. The Remonstrants were those followers of Jacob Arminius who had theological disagreements with the “orthodox” Dutch Reformed Church. The controversy began in the last decade of the sixteenth century with theological debates about predestination and election but soon came to encompass issues of atonement, ecclesiastical authority, and the role of the state in religious affairs.<sup>64</sup> The Remonstrants presented five points of disagreement that they had with their Calvinist counterparts. The Synod of Dort famously condemned the Remonstrant pastors throughout the Dutch Republic, which dealt a serious blow to the Remonstrant presence in Kampen. Stadhouder Prince Maurits dismissed Kampen’s entire city council in 1620. The new city council, not surprisingly, was more aligned with the stricter Counter-Remonstrants and faced political pressure from Prince Maurits to uphold the decisions of the Synod of Dort. A new requirement was also added that to hold a municipal office required becoming a full member of the Reformed church, meaning the orthodox church as defined at the Synod of Dort.

The consistory records also demonstrate the importance of the burgomasters for the consistory, most often noted in the records as “Borg.” The burgomasters were not, properly speaking, mayors in the modern sense of the Dutch word but, instead, were members of the city council. The burgomasters were always represented on the Kampen consistory, a practice that was not ended until 1784.<sup>65</sup> In the years under consideration, generally at least two burgomasters were nominated as elders every year. In years with two rounds of elections, four burgomasters were nominated in the first round and two were elected to the final ballot. Notably, only one of the two nominated burgomasters was ever elected as an elder.

Having burgomasters serve as elders speaks to the importance given to the office of elder. In Geneva, all elders were also members of the municipal councils, and the same

<sup>63</sup>Van der Pol, “Religious Diversity and Everyday Ethics,” 16–62, 30–33.

<sup>64</sup>Benedict, *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed*, 305–312. For a recent study of the Synod of Dort, see Aza Goudriaan and Fred A. van Lieburg, eds., *Revisiting the Synod of Dort (1618–1619)* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

<sup>65</sup>Van der Pol, “Religious Diversity and Everyday Ethics,” 28.

close overlap can also be seen in Kampen. It was, of course, no accident that burgomasters were chosen to serve as elders and not as deacons. If the office of elder was more highly regarded, as argued above, then the burgomasters would undoubtedly desire positions as elders rather than as deacons. But, the presence of the city councilmen as elders also likely relates to the functions of each office. As noted earlier, deacons were primarily responsible for caring for the poor. Elders' primary responsibility was to oversee the spiritual care, including discipline, of the people. The city council would have had a vested interest in the discipline the elders undertook, whether that discipline dealt with moral or doctrinal matters. As such, the participation of the burgomasters in the consistory as elders indicates the importance of the elders in regulating the lives of Kampen's Reformed Christians.

In addition, the role of the burgomasters in the consistory indicates a very close relationship between the consistory and the civic authorities. Of course, throughout the Dutch Republic, Reformed authorities were required to work closely with city officials. Such a cooperation was a matter of practicality, but it also was a theological point. The Belgic Confession articulates a theological perspective that holds the civil government responsible for maintaining the true Christian faith. Article 36 states: "And the government's task is not limited to caring for and watching over the public domain but extends also to upholding the sacred ministry; . . . to promoting the kingdom of Jesus Christ; and to furthering the preaching of the gospel everywhere; to the end that God may be honored and served by everyone, as he requires in his Word."<sup>66</sup> Such a position was not unique in the Dutch Reformed tradition, and Calvin himself articulated such a position. The government is not only to look after people's physical well-being but also "prevents idolatry, sacrilege against God's name, blasphemies against his truth, and other public offenses against religion from arising and spreading among the people."<sup>67</sup>

Several scholars of the Reformation in the Low Countries have noted the interplay of the Reformed consistories and the political authorities. Increasingly, following van Deursen's lead, scholars have recognized the local nature of these interactions.<sup>68</sup> Work on the Reformed presence has shown that the cooperation between church and political authorities has varied dramatically. As Christine Kooi has demonstrated, in Leiden, the relationship between the magistrates and the church authorities frequently contributed to "a troubled and contentious process of religious change."<sup>69</sup> In Utrecht, the city magistrates initially much preferred the more open "Libertine" church, in which Herbert Duifhuis argued for religious tolerance and rejected ecclesiastic discipline. Nonetheless, the stricter "Calvinist" church, with its emphasis on discipline, the suppression of other religions, and official state support, was ultimately able to prevail and incorporate, at least to some extent, the support of the magistrates.<sup>70</sup> In other places, such as Delft and Dordrecht, the cooperation between the city officials and the Reformed consistories was much more harmonious. Not surprisingly, the incorporation of or, at least, collaboration with political authorities was often essential to the success of the Reformed congregations in the Low Countries throughout the sixteenth

<sup>66</sup>Brès, Belgic Confession, Article 36, in *Our Faith*, 64–66.

<sup>67</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 4.10.3.

<sup>68</sup>Van Deursen, *Bavianen en slijkgeuzen*, 83–101.

<sup>69</sup>Kooi, *Liberty and Religion*, 215.

<sup>70</sup>Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines*, 2–3.

and into the seventeenth centuries. The results of research on the Kampen consistory reaffirm these previous conclusions.

In addition, at least in Kampen, the interplay between civic and ecclesiastical authorities was played out in the office of elder. Of course, ministers were influential in promoting the Reformed faith and seeking the aid of the city magistrates. This was particularly true at the broader regional and provincial levels. However, as the situation in Kampen indicates, at the local level, the role of the elders in Dutch religious life should not be underestimated, especially given its close relationship and interconnection with the secular authorities.

## V. Elders and Deacons from the Congregation

Of course, it was not just the burgomasters who were nominated as elders. Nominees also came from the general population within the congregation. Typically, those names are simply listed in the records, distinguished from the burgomasters because they lack the designation “Borg.” Occasionally the records do indicate separate sections of nominees. For example, in 1637, the records list the two nominees for elders “out of the honorable magistracy.”<sup>71</sup> The next section of names, with four nominees, is under the heading “out of the congregation.”<sup>72</sup>

Unfortunately, little information exists on many of the men who were nominated as elders or deacons. Generally, no indication is given regarding their age, occupation, or social standing. Presumably, the men nominated were regarded as orthodox in doctrine and pious in life, two of the most basic expectations for officeholders in the Dutch Reformed Church. The records do sometimes list the occupations of certain men.<sup>73</sup> Of the men listed for deacon, the occupations that appear are those of coppersmith (Pieter Hendricksen), glassmaker (Armen Jarten), shoemaker (Dirck Jansen, Jan Jansen, and Gerrit Henricksen), baker (Gerrit Williamssen), chestmaker (Daniel Brinegen), potter (Arent), and pharmacist (Peter Veen).

Elders almost never have occupations listed with their names. However, on the occasions the occupations are listed for the elders, they are typically of a different sort. Occupations given for elder nominees include flax buyer (Jan Jansen) and school rector (Johannes Winblijk). While the sample size is regrettably small, both of these occupations are of a higher social standing than those of the deacons. Being a flax buyer meant significant involvement in trade, and a school rector was of obvious influence given his work with educating youth.

Furthermore, the actual omission of the elders’ occupations might also be telling. Of course, a third of all men elected were burgomasters, and significantly fewer men were nominated as elders than as deacons. So, while it may not be surprising that few elders were identified through their occupation, perhaps the lack of occupations listed can be attributed to the fact that the elders nominated were of sufficient social standing not to need their occupations listed.

It seems, though the suggestion should be made tentatively, that in Kampen men nominated to the position of elder tended to be of a higher social class than men nominated as deacons. It seems quite possible, in fact, that a man’s occupation played

<sup>71</sup>Vol. 10, 20 November 1637, AHGK: “uijt de achtbaer magistraet.”

<sup>72</sup>Vol. 10, 20 November 1637, AHGK: “uijt de gemeente.”

<sup>73</sup>Van der Pol has used the lists of those partaking of the Lord’s Supper to catalogue the occupations of members of the Reformed congregation in Kampen. His list contains seventy occupations ranging widely from things like fisher to organist to merchant to doctor. See Van der Pol, *De Reformatie te Kampen*, 433.

a significant role in his opportunity to serve as an elder or a deacon. The inclusion of the men's occupations might simply be for identification purposes, but it may also provide information about the *type* of person the man was. Notably, not one of the men nominated for deacon whose occupation was listed was ever later nominated to be an elder.

## VI. Wemeldinge Elders and Deacons

Elections of elders and deacons in Wemeldinge followed similar procedural patterns to Kampen with some minor differences. In the earliest years of the consistory records, the typical pattern was for two elders and one deacon to be elected. Exceptions do exist. In 1612, the records list two men as being elected to the position of elder, but there is no mention of anyone being elected as deacon.<sup>74</sup> In 1644, two deacons were elected and only one elder.<sup>75</sup> In these early years, the records give no indication of a process of nominations. Instead, the entries note the men have been elected by congregational vote. As such, it is unclear whether the men voted into office were simply elected from the entire congregation or from a smaller pool of nominees.

In later years, in 1645 and following, the consistory records list men who were nominated to be elders and deacons. Typically, four deacons were nominated, with two then being elected. Depending on the year, either two or four elders would be nominated, with either one or two, respectively, of the nominees being elected. The nominated men would go before the congregation for a vote, and the results of those elections would be entered at the next consistory.<sup>76</sup> In the years from 1606 to 1615, these elections took place in November or December, but when the records begin again in the 1640s, these elections typically took place in late May or early June.

Regarding the election of elders and deacons, while the Wemeldinge consistory records provide a helpful point of comparison with the Kampen consistory records, the data from the former is far more limited. Consistory records are not extant after 1615 until 1644. The unfortunate gap of three decades causes significant problems when attempting to draw conclusions about those elected as either elders or deacons. Similar to the Kampen consistory records, it is, of course, impossible to know who was nominated and elected in those years. Consequently, it is possible for the consistory records to portray someone as being elected as either an elder or deacon for the first time when they had previously been elected to one or the other offices. Additionally, a person might appear to have been elected only once when in actuality they were elected again in later years for which no records exist. These source limitations require that any statistics be used cautiously.

According to my count, from the years 1608 to 1615 and from 1644 to 1649, forty names are listed as having either been elected or nominated for a position on the consistory. Six of those names were not elected during those years, meaning thirty-four men were elected as an elder and/or deacon. Of those thirty-four men, twelve served only as deacon, and fifteen served only as elder. Seven men served as both elder and deacon. Six of those seven men served first as deacon and then were later elected as elders; only one man served first as elder and was later elected as deacon. While the

<sup>74</sup>2 September 1612, HGW.

<sup>75</sup>8 May 1644, HGW.

<sup>76</sup>For example, in 1647, men were nominated at the May 12, 1646 consistory meeting, and the results of the election were recorded at the following meeting on May 21, 1646.



sample size is too small and problematic to make any definite conclusions, several important trends do occur in the existing Wemeldinge consistory records.

First, the consistory records do not note the presence of any burgomasters as members of the consistory. None of the names listed as being elected as elders or deacons include the title of burgomaster. More broadly, the names listed only occasionally include a person's occupation. For example, Adrian Cornelissen is noted as being a wagon maker. Cornelissen was nominated as an elder in 1646 but was not elected; however, he was nominated again in 1647 and was elected as an elder.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, Jan Heijndricksen is denoted as being a tailor. He was an out-going deacon in 1645 and was elected as an elder the very same year.<sup>78</sup>

Second, in ways similar to Kampen, the Wemeldinge congregation does appear to give the office of elder a higher status than that of deacon. A number of men in the records do serve as elder without any previous experience as deacon, though given the source limitations, it seems likely a number of those men had served in previous years for which the records are not extant. Even so, among those men who are listed as having served as both elder and deacon, the norm was for a person to first serve as deacon and then later "graduate" to the office of elder. As in Kampen, this indicates that the office of elder was given priority over that of deacon, despite theological tenets stating otherwise.

Finally, it is certainly the case that the Wemeldinge congregation did not approve of certain men who were nominated for office. Some men served one term but were subsequently not elected, even when nominated multiple times. Such was the case of Samuel Cornelissen, who was nominated and elected as a deacon in 1645. Cornelissen was nominated for deacon again in 1648 and 1649, but both times he was not elected.<sup>79</sup> Other times, repetition seems to have been the key to getting elected. Gillis Jansen was nominated for deacon in 1646 and 1647 but elected neither time. When he was nominated again in 1649, he was finally elected as a deacon.<sup>80</sup> In all instances like these, the records, unfortunately, give no explanation of why certain men were not elected or re-elected, leaving the distant observer frustratingly in the dark.

## VII. Conclusions

The Kampen consistory records demonstrate at least two points regarding the perception of elders and deacons. First, the office of elder in the Kampen consistory was a significant position, more so than that of deacon. As detailed above, several factors indicate this to be the case. Deacons frequently "moved up" to serve as elders later in their careers. Occasionally, elder candidates who were not elected served instead as deacons. Even the careers listed with the names of the elected men indicate that elders often were higher up on the social ladder than deacons. All of this points to one conclusion: despite a theology where elders and deacons were regarded as equal callings, in Kampen, the position of elder was given more importance than that of deacon.

The pattern of graduating from deacon to elder also occurred in Wemeldinge, while the opposite—elders later serving as deacons—rarely happened. Unlike in Kampen, unelected elders were not transitioned to the role of deacon, and the Wemeldinge

<sup>77</sup>12 May 1646, HGW; 6 June 1647, HGW; and 9 June 1647, HGW.

<sup>78</sup>5 June 1645, HGW.

<sup>79</sup>5 June 1645, HGW; 24 May 1648, HGW; and 20 May 1649, HGW.

<sup>80</sup>12 May 1646, HGW; 6 June 1647, HGW; 20 May 1649, HGW; and 24 May 1649, HGW.

records give little indication regarding the careers of either elders or deacons. All of these factors suggest that in Wemeldinge the hierarchal view of elders and deacons was present though perhaps to a lesser degree than in Kampen, and it certainly was not evidenced in Wemeldinge in the ways seen in Kampen.

Second, the ubiquitous presence of the burgomasters as elders in the Kampen consistory speaks to the close relationship between the city officials and the consistory. Such a relationship was not unique in the Dutch Republic, where local relationships between consistories and city officials were often complicated and contested. In Kampen, burgomasters obviously had an important role in the consistory. The consistory records themselves do not make it clear whether this relationship with the civil authorities was wanted or simply forced on them. Nonetheless, the fact that burgomasters also served as elders demonstrates the importance given to the office of elder. In other words, the burgomasters evidently thought the office of elder important enough that they had their own members involved. But the fact that elders also served as burgomasters shows just how closely the religious and political issues in Kampen were intertwined. While in other places throughout the Dutch Republic, and in Europe more generally—though not in Geneva—Reformed churches were able to operate quite independently of the city officials, this was most certainly not the case in Kampen. In fact, just the opposite was true, as the members of Kampen's ecclesiastical governing body were also frequently involved in the city government.

Here the Wemeldinge situation is quite different. As explored earlier, the Wemeldinge records give no indication of whether or not the men serving as elders and deacons were also serving as burgomasters. Even if men were serving in both ecclesiastical and civic roles, the consistory records intentionally make no mention of it. In Wemeldinge, the relationship between the consistory and the city government was more sharply dichotomous, at least as pertains to the elections of elders and deacons.

Furthermore, the election of elders and deacons in Kampen was quite incongruent with the Reformed theology of elders and deacons. Theologically, elders and deacons were regarded as equals, both divinely called to their offices. The qualifications were intended to be largely spiritual, focused on morality and one's ability to oversee the care of others' spiritual lives. However, the Kampen consistory records demonstrate that the position of elder was given more importance and priority than that of deacon. Furthermore, the close connections between being an elder and a burgomaster demonstrate a greater concern with social standing than spiritual qualifications. A close examination of the Kampen consistory records reveals a local situation where electing elders and deacons was less a matter of theological ideals and, instead, a negotiated process of political compromise and local necessity. The disconnect between theology and practice is not as evident in the Wemeldinge elections of elders and deacons, though it does seem as if the theological equality of the offices is undermined in Wemeldinge as it was in Kampen.

Finally, the comparison between Kampen and Wemeldinge does certainly reinforce the locality of consistories. In the process of electing elders and deacons, the consistories in Kampen and Wemeldinge had different priorities, and as a result, the men elected to these positions and the process by which they were elected took different shapes in each local community. What each consistory shares in common is a clear priority on the office of elder. But the role of the political authorities and the social standing of the men elected is more varied between Kampen and Wemeldinge. All the while, in electing elders and deacons, these local communities had to balance theological convictions with complicated hierarchies among elders, deacons, and burgomasters where concerns of

social class, civil service, and ability existed. The results are election processes that were negotiated at local levels given the unique challenges, opportunities, and convictions of the local communities.

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