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JOH. JANSEN ON ADMITTANCE TO LORD'S SUPPERTranslated by Rev. Dr. R. Dean Anderson ([Brief Biography](#))**Joh. Jansen, Korte Verklaring van de Kerkenordening (Kampen: Kok, 1923)**

Art.61 Nobody shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper except those who according to the custom of the church to which they belong, have made profession of the Reformed religion, at the same time as having testimony of a pious walk, without which even those who come from other churches shall not be admitted. (*Church Order of Dort*)

Translation

(p.270)

The question who may be admitted to the Lord's Supper was already handled very early on. The Convent of Wezel, 1568, decided already that "nobody shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper, except that he has made profession of faith and has submitted himself to church discipline," and gave several decisions regarding the visitation of adults and children and regarding public profession in the midst of the congregation (Ch. 6:7-11). The Synod of Dordrecht, 1578, took these decisions over in other words (art.64). And the Synod of Middelburg, 1581, put this decision in the words which they are now printed above, so that they have since then not undergone any change. The article deals with two distinct matters, namely the admission to the Lord's Supper by profession of faith in one's own church; and the admission of professing members that come from other churches.

1. The admission to the Lord's Supper in one's own church: No one shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper except those who according to the custom of the church (to which he complies) have made profession of the Reformed religion, together with testimony of a pious life. Thus right from the beginning the rule held that the admission to the Lord's Supper was NOT FREE; that the Lord's Supper itself did not stand open for every baptized member. The churches must watch that only believers take part. They must not admit anyone who does not belong there. On this point they came into conflict with Duifhuis, Erastus and the Remonstrants, who taught that you must leave it to each person's conscience whether they partake of the Supper or not. This thinking still lives in some areas, also among Reformed people. If men feel free enough they go. If they feel in a pressed frame of mind they stay away. In the free church of Waadland anyone may go to the Lord's Supper. But this is completely in conflict with the character of both the church and of the Lord's Supper. ...

(p.273)

2. The admission to the Lord's Supper of members from other Reformed churches: without which also those, who come from other churches, shall not be admitted. This admission

by proof from attestation flows forth from the federation of the churches. The churches that have accepted the same confession and live by the same church order, accept each other's members and office bearers on testimony of doctrine and life. Such letters of testimony were of old used in every circle of life. We find mention of them already in the apostolic churches. The disciples in Ephesus gave letters of recommendation with Apollos to the congregation in Achaia, in order that they may receive him, Acts 18:27. Paul recommended Phoebe to the congregation at Rome, Rom.16:1. In the first period of the Reformation the acceptance of each other's members on proof of attestation was not yet regulated. Men were accepted by verbal testimony. A written clarification was dangerous were it to fall in the hands of the inquisition. But it did not take long before the misuse by beggars and tramps, who gave themselves as persecuted believers and knew how to win the hearts of the pious in order to receive offerings, made it necessary for the churches to safeguard against deceit. The Synod of Emden, 1571, decided then also, that in each church it should be announced, that those who move elsewhere, from now on shall only be accepted upon presentation of attestation. This attestation shall describe how they have conducted themselves in doctrine and life (art.44). Also the particular Synod of Dordrecht, 1574, decided that only those who brought "a legal testimony" with them "should be admitted to the Lord's Supper." That testimony must however not be too old, but no time limit was specified. However to avoid wronging refugees, there was added in softening, that men should sooner be admitted than refused. The Synod of Middelburg, 1581, posited the redaction of this article for the first time as it now stands: "without which also those, who come from other churches, shall not be admitted" (art.43). This wording has remained in force up till now. Grammatically there is only spoken of a testimony of a pious life. But on the strength of the federation a testimony of doctrine is also understood. Anyone who held to a heretical doctrine did not receive testimony of a pious walk, even if he lived a blameless life. The meaning was that anyone that brought an attestation, that he was sound in faith and blameless in walk, may be admitted. The most used expressions were: that anyone who was sound in the faith and edifying or unpunishable or without blame in walk (life). With regard to admission by attestation, there is a series of questions to be proposed.

1) Whether the attestation ought to be sent on from one church to another, or handed over by the members themselves. They should be in due time requested by the members themselves, of the session of the church they are leaving, and handed into the session of the church where they come to. According to the collegial system a person is a member of the greater whole. If he moves, he remains a member of it. Only his name should be removed from the part where he was, and enrolled in the region he is moving to, and that happens when he sends news of his movement to the chief board. His membership remains undisturbed. But this does not happen in the Reformed churches. Whenever someone moves from A to B, he is not automatically a member of B. Inasmuch as he has received an attestation, he belongs formally as a member of A. And first, when he has handed it in to B and is accepted there, then he becomes a member there. That is why a member must first ask for an attestation, and then hand it over to the church where he is going to live. Only with visitation and consultation of the members may it be sent by the session.

2) Must a session per se accept each attestation from another Reformed congregation? No, if there are well grounded reasons for mistrusting it. Each local church is an independent church, and can say: I will allow no other to the Lord's Supper than those whom I have myself examined. But from the church federation, that is from the unity of confession and church government it flows that anyone who is admitted in another church, does not have to be examined anew, but may be in good faith admitted by attestation that he is sound in the faith and

blameless in walk. It is thus a matter of trust. From there it flows however that a session, that in its trust towards another church receives a shock, also will not trust her attestations, if they are incomplete or untrustworthy, and examine people herself. In the time of the Remonstrants disputes arose frequently, and attestations were refused. So for example the attestation from someone that came from Alkmaar, with an attestation signed by a Remonstrant minister and elder, would be provisionally refused by an Amsterdam session "in order to take it into consideration and notify the classis." Likewise the attestation of the Remonstrant Simon Episcopius, who in 1611 came with a good attestation from Franeker and a couple of months later handed it into the commission for attestations in Amsterdam, without having to wait for an answer, was refused by the session. In similar cases there had to be a closer investigation or talk with the person.

3) How old may an attestation be? An attestation is no ecclesiastical ticket for moving, but a testimony in respect of profession and life. If someone neglects to hand it in then it loses its force and a session can no longer trust it. One cannot set a certain time as to how old it may be. The reasons for neglect can be very different. Each situation must be separately examined. In the 16th century it was decided that they should not be older than 3 months (Acts of the particular Synod of Alkmaar, 1587, art.). This is in general a good rule. One month, as is sometimes suggested, is too short. A session should ask in each case that comes up for the reasons for delay; and if this does not satisfy, they should set a time for the person to prove himself, or a new examination.

4) May sailors be admitted to the Lord's Supper where they are at dock? To this question the Synod of Dordrecht 1893 answered (art.89): "For sailors, due to their roaming life, a proof of membership should be given out." This "proof of membership," or as it is sometimes called, a "sailors' attestation" is no ordinary attestation for moving to another place, but an explanation or testimony that he is member of the church where he has his home, and is not under censure, so that he can partake of the Lord's Supper wherever he lays at dock, and eventually should a child be born to him during his travels, it may be baptised. The custom is to hand out such an attestation not for longer than one year, and to mention this on it. At the same time it is requested that the sessions contacted [by the sailor en route] make notes on the reverse side of the attestation, whenever he partakes of Lord's Supper, or should he have a child baptised together with its name. Such at least provides some control over wandering members.

5) May attestations be accepted from churches that do not belong to the church federation, e.g. from Lutheran, Baptist, independent Reformed churches, Hervormde Kerk? In general the rule is that attestations are only received that are given out by churches that belong to the federation. Attestations from churches that are not one with the confession of the Reformed churches count as waste paper. Even attestations from churches that have a Reformed confession, but however are not federated to the Reformed churches, cannot just be accepted. They may give an indication, that such persons only need to be examined if they agree with the Reformed confession and then after announcement before and assent from the congregation, may be enrolled [in the roll of the church].