

# THE TRAVAIL OF THE PRESBYTERY

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Contemporary presbyteries in North America's Presbyterian churches are the product of influences coming from Calvin's Geneva, by way of Knox's Scotland, through the colonial American experience and the westward migration, to the twentieth century institutionalization of the church. Time and interaction with American individualism, free enterprise, and the managerial spirit have weakened the originating influences, although their language and forms remain. So it is worth reminding ourselves of earlier terminology and structures, not as an exercise in nostalgia, but as possible resources for the re-formation of the church.

Calvin's distinctive approach to the church and its ministry remains evident – however dimly – in current Presbyterian polity. Together with other sixteenth century reformers, he understood the church as *creatura verbi*: “The holy Christian Church, whose only head is Christ, is born of the Word of God, and abides in the same, and listens not to the voice of a stranger.”<sup>1</sup> Because the church is a community called into being by the incarnate Word and shaped by witness to that Word in the word of Scripture, the church's faith, worship, and order should proclaim and reflect the Word. This does not mean that institutional structures are signs of the church, however; even at their best, they are only evidence of the power of the Word to transform corporate and personal life. For Calvin, the ordering of governance and ministry is neither a fundamental institutional given nor a matter of practical preference; ministry and polity must be tied to the church's origin, mission, and goal.

How do we know this creature of the Word when we see it? Word and Sacraments are the marks by which “the church comes forth and becomes visible to our eyes,” says Calvin. “Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.”<sup>2</sup> Calvin's use of the two marks is explicitly communal. He does not speak of a church's doctrinal deliverances and sacramental theology, nor does he focus exclusively on the exercise of the pastoral office. Instead, the marks concern the faithfulness of preaching *and hearing*, and the fidelity of sacramental *practice*, within the community of faith. Theological purity and ritual precision are not the real issue, and pastoral office is not the only issue. The criteria are matters of fundamental ecclesial faithfulness that allow the gospel to be received, believed, and lived.

Calvin placed Word and Sacraments together at the core of the church's true life as a visible expression of the church's existence as the body of Christ. "Therefore, let it be regarded as a settled principle," he wrote, "that the sacraments have the same office as the Word of God: to offer and set forth Christ to us, and in him the treasures of heavenly grace."<sup>3</sup> Thus, Baptism and Eucharist have the same function as Scripture and preaching: to disclose the presence of the living Christ, uniting the church to him in the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus the church, born of the Word, abides in Christ through word and sacraments.

Reformed churches have sometimes added a third mark – "ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered as God's Word prescribes, whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished."<sup>4</sup> There is no doubt that Calvin appreciated the centrality of discipline in the church's life, believing it to be basic to faith and faithfulness. He never elevated it to the status of an essential mark, however, for discipline's purpose is to ensure that Word and Sacraments have free space to live and act within the church. Where there is unconstrained room for the Word of God – preached, heard, seen, felt, tasted – there is the church. Where Word and Sacraments are suppressed, distorted, veiled, or marginalized, there is no true church – even if ordered structures endure. Discipline is important, not in itself, but because it seeks to establish a community capable of hearing the Word and prepared to celebrate the Sacraments so that the presence of Christ is disclosed. Discipline (what we might understand today as a combination of "order" and "formation") is the church's systematic effort to cultivate the Word, providing conditions for growth in Christian faith and life.

The church's ordered ministry is an essential component of discipline, indispensable to ensuring the church's fidelity to the Word. It is well known that Calvin commended four offices of ministry: pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons. It is misleading to think of them as a differentiated quadrilateral, however, because Calvin understood them as plural offices within two ecclesial functions: ministries of the Word performed by presbyters (pastors/teachers and elders) and ministries of service performed by deacons (distributing alms and caring directly for the poor and sick). In turn, these presbyterial and diaconal ministries are plural expressions of the church's one undivided ministry.

Calvin's distinctive approach to the church's ordered ministries is clearly evident in his transformation of the office of deacon.<sup>5</sup> The Catholic Church's deacons were assistant ministers (future priests), and thus part of the clergy as distinct from the laity. In the emerging Lutheran churches, deacons were no longer clergy, but laity – usually civil servants – charged with care for the poor. But for Strasbourg-Geneva Reformed ecclesiology and practice, deacons were not "clergy," but were not "laity" either, for they held ecclesial office as an essential component of the church's ministry. Diaconal

functions – care for the poor, sick, widows and orphans, refugees, and others in need – are the responsibility of all Christians, of course, but for Calvin, ordered deacons were charged with leading the whole church in *officia caritatis*. Deacons were no longer a sub-set of another order of ministry nor were they removed from the church's orders of ministry. Instead, deacons were persons with dual vocations, secular and ecclesial. They were members of the church called and ordained as one of the “four orders of office instituted by our Lord for the government of his Church.”<sup>6</sup>

Calvin's understanding of the church's undivided plural ministry reflects two key features of his approach to the church's ordered ministries, features that endure in formal Presbyterian polity, even though they are weakened in practice. First, Calvin resists clericalism. Most continental Protestants rejected the Catholic Church's teaching on holy orders, replacing the Catholic pattern with a pastoral office centered on proclamation. Calvin, on the other hand, constructed a pattern of ministry that breaks down the distinction between “clergy” and “laity” by instituting two ecclesial ministries – deacon and elder – that most other churches would (and still do) consider “laypeople.” Second, the church's various ministries are corporate, not only within each order of ministry, but among the orders. No person can exercise an ordered ministry independently, and no order of ministry can function apart from its essential relationship to other orders.

The corporate character of Calvin's orders of ministry is evident in the exercise of ecclesial discipline (order and pastoral care). Pastors are called “to proclaim the Word of God, to instruct, admonish, exhort and censure, both in public and in private, to administer the sacraments and to enjoin brotherly correction *along with the elders and colleagues*” [emphasis added].<sup>7</sup> The ordered life of the church is a corporate responsibility shared not only among pastors, but within a council of pastors and elders. Indeed, pastors and elders are but “two kinds of presbyters: those who labor in the Word, and those who do not carry on the preaching of the Word yet rule well.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, *shared* presbyterial responsibilities include proclaiming the word and administering the sacraments, instructing the faithful in true doctrine, and ensuring that Word and Sacrament take root in the life of the church and its members. Pastors fulfill all three presbyterial functions; teaching is sometimes shared with persons who give formal instruction in school settings; discipline is always shared with elders who exercise full ecclesial office.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), following Calvin and the development of Reformed ecclesiology, has two kinds of presbyters: ministers, traditionally called “teaching elders,” and elders, traditionally called “ruling elders.”<sup>9</sup> Identifying ministers by their teaching role emphasizes the primacy of the Word and the centrality of the pastoral office within the *ecclesia docens*. The designation “ruling” elder is easily misunderstood, however. The historic understanding of the “ruling” exercised by elders

has far less to do with managerial governance than with *ruling out* or *measuring* the work of ministry, the fidelity of communal and personal lives, and the progress of the gospel in the church.<sup>10</sup> Elders' responsibilities for measuring the Word of God, sacraments, and discipline within the body of Christ place them squarely within presbyterial functioning – *ruling elders* are *canon presbyters*. The ruling/measuring ministry of elders is liturgically evident in their essential responsibility for ensuring that Scripture is read and proclaimed, and for ordering and participating in celebrations of Baptism and Eucharist.

Calvin's plurality of ministries sought to break open the ministry of the whole people of God. His ordering of ministry in the church gave visible form to what Luther called "priesthood of all believers" while protecting the church against the potential abuses of clericalism. Moreover, all of the ordered ministries were bound together in the common task of ensuring the church's fidelity to the Word. Therefore, in whatever ways Reformed ministries might be ordered today, they must remain undivided. When a minister – pastor, elder, deacon – performs any ministerial act, it is performed on behalf of the whole ministry; no one may act alone as the representative of Christ. This indivisibility of the plural ministry is a theological principle made concrete in the corporate functioning of pastor and elder presbyters in sessions, presbyteries, synods, and general assemblies, as well as in their joint oversight of the ministry of deacons.

Modern presbyteries have developed from two ecclesial institutions in Calvin's Geneva: the Geneva Consistory and the Venerable Company of Pastors. The Consistory, composed of pastors and elders, was responsible for church order and discipline. The Company of Pastors was responsible for examination and ordination of ministers, continuing biblical and theological education, mutual theological and ethical encouragement, and missionary work in neighboring countries.<sup>11</sup>

Ordination and mission have joined order and discipline as major responsibilities of modern presbyteries, but sustained theological work and mutual encouragement are no longer central. Without the corporate engagement of pastors and elders in biblical, theological, and ecclesiological inquiry, ecclesial order is easily bureaucratized while discipline is either ignored or factionalized. At this time in the life of Presbyterian churches, there is a conspicuous absence of presbyteries as communities of spiritual, intellectual, and vocational discipline that ensure open space for Word and Sacrament, and sharpen clear vision of the presence of Christ.

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George Orwell, in his classic essay, "Politics and the English Language," makes the telling point that language "becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts."<sup>12</sup> Orwell was not referring to what we dismissively call "political

correctness,” the bending of language to conform to ideological positions. He was talking about the way in which careless thinking leads to mistaken use of words, and the way in which inappropriate words reinforce flawed thinking.

Orwell’s observation illuminates what has happened to modern presbyteries. We used to call presbyteries, along with sessions, synods, and the general assembly, “judicatories.” While sometimes understood as “courts of the church,” the term judicatory did not denote a judicial court patterned along the lines of the American legal system, but rather indicated an assembly to enquire into significant matters and reach considered conclusions. Its meaning had become obscure, however, and so the reunion of the northern and southern Presbyterian churches in 1983 devised a new generic term. Foolish thoughts produce ugly and inaccurate language; thus, the church decided to call presbyteries, sessions, synods, and the general assembly, “governing bodies.” Quite apart from the gracelessness of the term, it emerged from and reinforced the warped notion that the purpose of these gatherings of presbyters was to govern the church – to direct, regulate, and manage the affairs of the institution. Thus, the change in terminology was significant: while judicatories are assemblies for the exercise of discerning judgment; “governing bodies” are managerial and legislative meetings for the regulation of institutions.

The language is ugly, and it both reflects foolish thought and makes it easier for foolish thought to persist and to shape behavior. True to their new label, presbyteries have fulfilled their “calling” as governing bodies. What led to the bureaucratization of sessions and presbyteries? At root, it was the bureaucratization of American society, and the church’s endemic eagerness to follow culture’s lead. But there are proximate symptoms and causes. In the 1950’s, Presbyterian polity was changed at several points for the very best of reasons, but with unintended, unfortunate consequences.

First, the understanding of “elder” as a called ministry within the congregation was weakened by the introduction of a regulation stipulating that elders could serve no more than two consecutive three-year terms on the session. This mandatory rotation of elders was instituted for one very good reason and one of questionable intention. The ordination of women as ruling elders had been part of (northern) Presbyterian polity since 1930, but most sessions had few if any women serving. Limiting terms of service on sessions was one way of opening the eldership to new persons, notably women. The regulation had its desired result, but this appropriate motive was joined by another, less noble one. It was thought that mandatory rotation would break the hold of “bull elders” on the life of the church, reducing the capacity of sessions to thwart pastors in their attempts to modernize and renew congregational life.

The *unintended* result of mandatory rotation was the loss of an understanding of elders as persons called to one of the ordered ministries of the church. Term limits for service on the church session produced brief tenure by an ever expanding circle of members. In many congregations, one three-year term became the norm, and the understanding of the eldership was transformed from a called ministry to merely taking one's turn on the board. Short-term, inexperienced elders also increased the influence of pastors by diminishing the *ministry* of called, knowledgeable elders. This imbalance, evident in sessions, became especially pronounced in presbyteries where well-informed pastors were accompanied by revolving elders who knew less and less about matters before the assembly.

A second move was made to solve an apparent problem, but its consequences were also unfortunate. Presbyterian congregations once had boards of trustees as well as sessions. Trustees handled matters of finance and property while sessions dealt with the church's worship, education, pastoral care, mission, and other ecclesial matters. Not surprisingly, conflicts sometimes arose as "idealistic" sessions and "hard-headed" trustees differed on matters of mission and money. The church's solution was to permit the so-called "unicameral system" where the session or one of its committees could fulfill the function of trustees. The result, of course, was that sessions were transformed into boards of trustees, devoting increasing time and energy to fiduciary matters, leaving "spiritual" concerns to the pastor.

A third move came later, at the time of north-south reunion. The traditional language, differentiating "teaching elder" and "ruling elder," was abandoned in favor of the more ecumenically recognizable distinction between "minister of the Word and Sacrament" and "elder." However, identifying pastors and other ministers by the vocational centrality of Word and Sacrament failed to acknowledge the centrality of Word and Sacrament in the vocation of elders whose ruling/measuring of fidelity to the gospel in the congregation was at the core of their ministry. The change in terminology had unpleasant consequences for ministers as well. Identification of their vocation with Word and Sacrament came at the expense of their vocation as "teaching elders," teachers of the faith in every aspect of their ministry.

Most harmful of all was the severing of the unified ministries of teaching and ruling elders. The unified plural ministry was no longer specified by the common term "elder," modified by the plural terms "teaching" and "ruling." Just as the current use of the terms "Hebrew Scriptures" and "Early Christian Writings" has the disastrous effect of destroying the theological unity of the first and second *testaments*, so the abandonment of teaching/ruling elder contributes to the ecclesiological division of these ministries. This division has led, inevitably, to the clericalization of the Presbyterian Church: pastors are seen as the real ministers, while elders are relegated to minor supporting roles.

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These moves were consistent with a revolutionary change in the nature and purpose of presbyteries brought about by the massive denominational reorganizations of the early 1970's (UPCUSA: 1972; PCUS: 1973).<sup>13</sup> Ten years in the making, reorganization was based on the premise that “church structures exist for mission and must be designed for mission.” Thus, a greatly enlarged role was set out for presbyteries and synods, now designated “agents of mission.” Rather than supporting the mission of congregations, including support for the congregations’ teaching and ruling elders, presbyteries were expected to develop and carry out their own mission. Not surprisingly, presbyteries as autonomous mission agencies required staffing at an unprecedented level, and large staffs required larger presbyteries and synods to support them. Synods, which had tended to follow state boundaries, became regional, multi-state bodies composed of presbyteries of increased geographic size, with increased numbers of churches, members, and ministers.

In mid-twentieth century, the typical presbytery was composed of 35 churches, about the same number of ministers, and about 4,000 members. By 1980, when reorganization had taken full effect, the typical presbytery had grown to 65 churches, 90 ministers, and 15,000 members! Reunion then resulted in even larger presbyteries such as New Hope in North Carolina, stretching from the Outer Banks to the Research Triangle, with 134 churches, over 300 ministers, and more than 32,000 members. The entire state of Texas is served by only five presbyteries: Grace, with 185 churches and 47,000 members; Mission, with 157 churches and 32,000 members; New Covenant, with 109 churches and 40,000 members. Poor little Palo Duro and Tres Rios have only 90 churches and 18,000 members between them.

Not all presbyteries are mega-governing bodies, but even the smaller presbyteries were expected to be comprehensive program presbyteries with an elaborate configuration of divisions, commissions, and committees, managed by a full time staff person labeled (tellingly) “presbytery executive.” The expectation was that all but the smallest presbyteries would also have “associate executives” who presided over particular aspects of the presbytery’s programmatic work. Large presbyteries with large staffs and large programs required large budgets and large numbers of persons to determine and administer the “work” of the “governing body.”

The comprehensive program presbytery – and large program synods – joined the large program general assembly as agents of mission, built on the model of what was perceived to be efficient business practice, complete with “planning – program – budget – evaluation” models and management by objectives. This corporate-managerial model for presbyteries was instituted at about the same time that the corporation model was being

joined by another organizational model at the national level: the regulatory model.<sup>14</sup> Just as regulatory agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Agency and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration proliferated in the national government, so elaborated rules and regulations began to multiply in the church. Each regulation was designed to ensure that governing bodies “did the right thing.” But since “the right thing” was not always agreed to by all, governing bodies were not only burdened by a *Book of Order* that seemed to expand by geometric progression, but also by constant political duels between competing proposals for further regulation, and disputes over the enforcement of regulations.

The odd blend of corporation and regulatory agency models had a dramatic impact on all governing bodies, but its most telling affect was on presbyteries. General assemblies meet once a year (now biennially) as do synod assemblies. However, presbyteries meet multiple times each year. While general and synod assemblies involve a handful of ministers and elders, presbytery meetings involve every minister and an equal number of elders, with every congregation represented. Thus, every minister and a large number of elders from every congregation are regularly drawn into the workings of a large, often impersonal agency with its own structure, committees, staff, and budget, designed to carry out its own mission while at the same time ensuring that ministers, sessions, and congregations abide by regulations that are determined nationally and regionally.

The upshot of all this – the loss of elders’ ordered ministry, the increased clericalism of the church, the bureaucratization of enlarged presbyteries with their own staffs and programs – was that presbyteries became divorced from the lives of elders and ministers and remote from the lives of congregations. Agencies of regulation and management *required* more money, more people, more time, and more energy, while *giving* less support, less discernment, less nurture, less community. But it could not last. The alienation of ministers and elders from the presbytery, increasingly evident, has now resulted in less money, fewer people, reduced time and energy for presbyteries. Across the board, presbyteries are cutting budgets, reducing staff, simplifying structures, and decreasing the number and duration of meetings.

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I have titled this essay “The Travail of the Presbytery.” I mean “travail” in both senses: as painful, tormenting exertion, and as labor that leads to the birth of new life. Something new is emerging in the church’s understanding of what presbyteries can become.

Brazilian theologian Rubem Alves notes that the first word in the emergence of hope is “No!” – “No” to the validity of the current state of affairs, and “No” to its

continuation.<sup>15</sup> Some presbyteries are saying “No.” All presbyteries are changing, but while some are simply adjusting to the reality of diminished resources by reorganizing and streamlining the same old system, others are engaged in discerning searches for new ways of being. Presbyteries as diverse as St. Augustine in Florida, San Diego and Los ranchos in Southern California, and Lehigh in eastern Pennsylvania, have said “No” to some or all of the practices of “governing bodies.” In different yet complementary ways, these and other presbyteries are exploring what it can mean to live out patterns of genuine communion among congregations, among ministers, and between ministers and elders.

The “No” of many presbyteries has contributed to a radical proposal to re-form the entire system of Presbyterian governance by clearing away most of the bureaucratized, managerial, regulatory accretions of the past generation. A General Assembly appointed task force to revise the Form of Government has produced a proposed new constitutional document that is breathtaking in scope. Among its features is a reverse Orwell. If slovenly language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts, graceful language may encourage wise thought.

- It is proposed that presbyteries, along with sessions, synods, and the general assembly are no longer to be called by the execrable term, “governing body.” Instead, recovering a term from deep within the Christian tradition, presbyteries, sessions, synods, and the general assembly are now to be called “councils” (think Nicaea, Westminster, Barmen, and Vatican II!). Councils of the church are representative assemblies that seek to preserve, interpret, and proclaim the faith and to order the faithful life and mission of the church. Recovery of “council” signals to our own church what we intend presbyteries to be, ordering faith and life in a conciliar rather than a managerial manner.
- The councils of the church are placed within an explicitly theological framework, focusing on explications of language from the deep tradition – the church as one holy catholic and apostolic – as well as giving careful attention to the Reformed notes of Word and Sacrament. The theological nature of the proposed Form of Government is more than obligatory window dressing; it proposes councils of the church that are marked by serious, sustained attention to the faith.
- The terms “teaching elder” and “ruling elder” are recovered and given new prominence. Together with deacons, teaching and ruling presbyters are no longer called “officers,” but rather are termed “ordered ministries,” thus reinforcing their indispensable partnership in a unified ministry that equips the whole people of God for the ministry and mission of the whole church.

- All of this, and much more, is set forth within a framework that is radically simplified, removing pages and pages of regulations. Presbyteries are set free to discern the shape of their life.

It is by no means certain that the Form of Government proposal will be adopted by the church, however. It turns out that every onerous regulation has its constituency, and each is willing to dump all regulations but its own. It also turns out that there is comfort for some in the security of rules and regulations. It is far more difficult to engage in deep discernment of the shape of faithful living. As the famous American theologian Mike Krzyzewski says, “People who can’t make decisions make rules.” There are many who are frightened by the freedom of decision-making, assured by the presence of structure.

But even if the Form of Government proposal is accepted by the church, the systemic problem of geographically large presbyteries with bloated membership will continue to present challenges. Distance and anonymity is not conducive to inter-personal communion, to a serious and sustained theological life, to the centrality of worship that nurtures souls.

The leadership in the reformation of presbytery life will come from presbyteries, not from a General Assembly task force. Real change will be initiated those presbyteries that say “No” to the reality given to them, hope in a different and better way of being the church, and thereby enable others to hope as well.

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What will faithful presbytery life look like? There are clues in the basic shape of the Venerable Company of Pastors in Calvin’s Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances of 1551. Because he believed that faithful ministers were essential for the renewal of the church he recognized the necessity for continuous renewal of ministers themselves. A *company* of pastors [and now, given our journey through Scotland to the United States, a company of pastors and elders] provided the properly communal context for mutual education, encouragement, and supervision. No less than sixteenth century Genevans, today’s presbyters deserve the fullest opportunity to pray the faith together, think the faith together, and live the faith together, so that the whole body of Christ may be built up and grow together into Christ.

A glance at Calvin’s ecclesiastical ordinances suggests contemporary possibilities.

*First it will be expedient that all the ministers, for preserving purity and concord among themselves, meet*

*together one certain day each week, for discussion of the Scriptures.*<sup>16</sup>

Geneva's Venerable Company of Pastors embodied a commitment to collegial leadership. Meeting weekly, the Company engaged in biblical and theological study, enhancing one another's capacity to think the faith. Many of the meetings centered on interpreting the Scriptures, perhaps related to Calvin's lectures on books of the Bible. Pastors also presented theological papers for discussion.

Weekly meetings of pastors and elders for prayer and study are almost unimaginable in the contemporary church. The reasons for this reality are worth pondering, but it is probably more useful to encourage presbytery meetings that enable presbyters to engage in study of the Scriptures, discuss central theological issues that shape the church's faith and life, and pray with and for one another. These should be at the center of presbytery life, core functions rather than occasional add-ons to the business agenda.

*If there appear differences of doctrine, let the ministers come together to discuss the matter. Afterwards, if need be, let them call the elders to assist in composing the contention.*<sup>17</sup>

Discussion of biblical and theological matters was not a polite academic exercise in Geneva. The search for truth sometimes required vigorous debate and mutual critique because the issues were not merely private matters of personal opinion. The Company's theological work mattered for the life of the whole church.

"Difference of doctrine" is not in short supply in the contemporary church, but "coming together to discuss the matter" is too often reduced to debating and voting in an essentially political context. A company of ministers and elders, working together on difficult theological and ethical issues, does not produce automatic agreement, but it can provide a more faithful way of struggling with questions that matter for the life of the whole church.

*To obviate all scandals of living, it will be proper that there be a form of correction to which all submit themselves. It will also be the means by which the ministry may retain respect, and the Word of God be neither dishonoured nor scorned.*<sup>18</sup>

The Venerable Company of Pastors was a disciplined community. Its meetings were more than conversation about abstractions, for their purpose was to encourage

pastors to grow in love of God and thereby to grow in faith, hope, and love of neighbors. All of this was for the sake of the gospel – its proclamation, reception, and fulfillment throughout God’s creation.

Experience shows that the practice of mutual correction can become dangerous, but patterns of mutual encouragement and counsel are both possible and necessary. Ministerial support groups are important ways of dealing with pastors’ isolation and loneliness. However, these groups are better able to deal with fundamental vocational issues and problems when they move beyond personal support to become groups of ministers and elders who come together for sustained study and prayer.

Geneva’s Venerable Company of Pastors recorded its roster and the proceedings of its meetings in *The Register of the Company of Pastors*. These sixteenth century records reveal a gathering of pastors who placed Scripture and worship, theology and prayer, at the center of the church’s life and the heart of pastoral vocation. In an age of ecclesial uncertainty and pastoral confusion, the pattern is suggestive.

There is no simple blueprint that will rebuild the ruins of presbyteries. Even so, contemporary presbyteries could do worse than to think through Calvin’s originating vision for councils that were able to hear God’s word as they shaped the ministry and mission of congregations and of the wider church.

What is called for is the restoration of communion – *koinonia* – among teaching and ruling elders, and through them, communion among congregations in presbyteries. Then, communion among presbyteries will be a possibility in general assemblies, opening the way for communion with other churches. That is a grand vision, of course, and the fullness of communion is only a small cloud on the horizon. Yet the restoration of the originating intention is one small step on the way to the fulfillment of our Lord’s prayer “that they may become completely one so that the world may believe” (John 17:23).

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<sup>1</sup> “The Ten Conclusions of Berne” (1528) in John H. Leith, ed., *Creeks of the Churches* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963) p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill, ed., Ford Lewis battles, trans. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) 4.1.9., p. 1023.

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<sup>3</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.17., p. 1292.

<sup>4</sup> The Scots Confession, *The Book of Confessions* (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, 2002) 3.18, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> For a fuller treatment, see Elsie Ann McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1986)

<sup>6</sup> Calvin, “Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances, 1541,” in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, J.K.S. Reid, ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954) p. 58.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.1., p. 1211. References to the dual presbyterate can be found throughout Calvin’s writing. Note especially commentaries on Romans 12:8, 1 Corinthians 12:28, and 1 Timothy 5:17.

<sup>9</sup> Calvin’s fourth office – teacher – is usually incorporated into ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

<sup>10</sup> Geddes MacGregor, *Corpus Christi: The Nature of the Church According to the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958) p. 216f.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Robert M. Kingdon, “Calvin and Presbytery: The Geneva Company of Pastors.” *Pacific Theological Review*, XVIII.2., pp. 43-55.

<sup>12</sup> George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language,” in *A Collection of Essays by George Orwell* (Garden City NY: Doubleday & Co., 1954) p. 163.

<sup>13</sup> For fuller treatments, see Richard W. Reifsnyder, “Managing the Mission: Church Restructuring in the Twentieth Century,” and Lewis L. Wilkins, “The American Presbytery in the Twentieth Century,” in *The Organizational Revolution: Presbyterians and American Denominationalism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> For a provocative discussion of this phenomenon, see Craig Dykstra and James Hudnut-Beumler, “The National Organizational Structures of Protestant Denominations” in *The Organizational Revolution*.

<sup>15</sup> Rubem A. Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope* (New York: Corpus Books, 1969) pp. 5-17.

<sup>16</sup> Calvin, “Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” p. 60.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

plural presbyteries. Definition of presbytery. 1 : the part of a church reserved for the officiating clergy. 2 : a ruling body in presbyterian churches consisting of the ministers and representative elders from congregations within a district. 3 : the jurisdiction of a presbytery. 4 : the house of a Roman Catholic parish priest. Examples of presbytery in a Sentence. Recent Examples on the Web On the road into the city from Melbourne, the state capital, the red brick Gothic-like presbytery of St. Alipius immediately stands out. â€” Jacqueline Williams, New York Times, "Cardinal George Pellâ€™s Transparent. Trap. Travail. Travel. Tread, Trod, Trodden. Treasure. Tree. Tremble. Trembling.â€” Zipporah. Table of Contents. Presbytery. Bookmarks. Bookmarks. Edit. Add Bookmark. Print. Text Settings.â€” laying on of the hands of the presbytery, 1 Tim. 4:14. previous. next. Related Content. Close Panel. No Related Content. Presbyterianism is a part of the Reformed tradition within Protestantism, which traces its origins to Great Britain, specifically Scotland. Presbyterian churches derive their name from the presbyterian form of church government, which is governed by representative assemblies of elders. A great number of Reformed churches are organised this way, but the word Presbyterian, when capitalised, is often applied uniquely to churches that trace their roots to the Church of Scotland, as well as several English