

The Lay Eldership in Presbyterianism

William Klempa, *Presbyterian College*

The office of the lay eldership is not only a venerable but also one of Presbyterianism's distinctive institutions. This essay aims to explore its origins and development; its transmission from Europe to Scotland and England, and then to Canada; how it was understood and the important role it has played in Reformed and Presbyterian churches.¹

Lay eldership is the distinctive contribution of John Calvin's reformation in Geneva of John Knox's in Scotland. Through this office, both Calvin and Knox, following the lead of Johannes Oecolampadius in Basel and Martin Bucer in Strasbourg, sought to give lay people a significant role in church discipline and government. "Each church," Calvin stated in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, "... had from its beginning a senate, chosen from godly, grave, and holy men, which had jurisdiction over the correcting of faults . . ." ² It was the order of government, the permanent office of lay eldership along with the office of minister or pastor, that Calvin's reformation endeavored to restore. Elders became, and continue to be, the distinguishing feature of those churches which stand in the Calvinistic tradition.

Extravagant claims were sometimes made for this office, as, for example by Professor Samuel Wilson, an American, who, at the 1880 Philadelphia Council Meeting of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, asserted that: "Jehovah sent Moses down to Egypt to convene the Presbytery. Through the elders, the representatives of the people, he was to act, and through them he did act. From the burning bush at Horeb Moses went to Presbytery. There were Presbyterians ages before Peter was born, or Rome was built or Pelacy or Papacy was ever heard or dreamed of." ³ Some Churches, Professor Wilson contended, may boast of apostolic succession; Presbyterians, however, can claim patriarchal succession. Similarly, at the First Council meeting in Edinburgh, a Bohemian Brethren pastor boasted, "Ere John Calvin was born, the Brethren had elders, and what was more, they had female elders too." ⁴ Needless to say, their enthusiasm for the office exceeded their critical judgement.

The Continental Background

It was in the sphere of the Swiss Reformation that lay eldership was restored and was given a significant role. Church discipline became a major concern of the sixteenth century Swiss reformers because of their conviction, based on the central text, Matthew 18: 15–18, that discipline is an essential aspect of proper church order. In Zurich, the Zwinglian reformation assigned church discipline to Christian civil magistrates. In Basel, as early as 1530, Johannes Oecolompadius created an ecclesiastical system of discipline to a committee of twelve: four pastors, four representatives of the magistrates and four representatives of the people, ie., two-thirds lay.⁵ Although this committee ceased after his death, it influenced the practice in Strasbourg and later in Geneva.

In 1531, Martin Bucer introduced the church office of elder or *Kirchenpfleger* in Strasbourg. Laymen were appointed by the city council to supervise the life of the church. Two-thirds of these lay people were appointed by the city council and one-third by the people. Bucer identified these *Kirchenpfleger* or church censors with the elders of the New Testament. He spoke of two kinds of elders, those who preached and those who admonished. Both pastors and laymen were shepherds, and they carried out their task as a collegium. Non-preaching elders not only had the task of governing but also the pastoral role of warning which they shared with pastors.⁶

These attempts to institute church discipline and to assign the task to a senate or collegium of pastors and laymen was taken up and developed further by John Calvin in Geneva. His view of the importance of discipline and of the office of the elders in administering it, along with pastors, had a profound and enduring impact on Reformed churches.

In his *Ordonnances ecclésiastiques* (1541), Calvin, following Bucer's lead, set out the four permanent offices of the churches as pastors, doctors, elders, and deacons. Of elders, he said: "Their office is to have oversight of the life of everyone, to admonish amicably those whom they see to be erring or to be living with a disordered life, and where it is required, to enjoin fraternal corrections themselves and along with others."⁷

In accordance with Matthew 18: 15–18, and its instruction to "tell it to the church" if an offender failed to listen to a personal

admonition, Calvin understood “church” to refer to a council comparable to the Jewish community’s Sanhedrin to which was assigned the superintendence of morals and doctrine. As Calvin says in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, “the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin is for the future transferred to Christ’s flock.”⁸ Such a council or consistory of twelve elders, and the nine ministers, was set up in Geneva. Although the elders were chosen from and appointed by the magistracy, in consultation with the ministers, they were entrusted with a task that in Calvin’s view was spiritual and ecclesiastical. Contrary to the long-accepted caricature of Calvin as the despot of Geneva who ruled with an iron hand, he emphasized that the primary purpose of discipline was to correct and not condemn and should be exercised firmly but “amicably.” Yet what distinguished Geneva from other centres of reformation was the success of the Genevan Consistory in enforcing morals.⁹ This achievement won for Calvin both the praise of those, who like John Knox, spoke of Geneva as “the most perfect school of Christ that existed since the time of the apostles” and the condemnation of those who regarded the work of the Consistory as a moral reign of terror. The truth lies somewhere in between. The ongoing work of translation and publication of the Consistory registers under Robert Kingdon’s editorship, supports a more balanced view of how discipline was exercised, not always perfectly but also not iron-handedly.¹⁰

In addition to Matthew 18, three other New Testament verses were central for Calvin’s view of the eldership as the agent of discipline. The first two were Romans 12:8 and 1 Corinthians 12:28, where Paul speaks of the gift of “ruling” or “government”. Calvin held that both passages refer to “elders (*seniors*)” chosen from the people, who were charged with the censure of morals and the exercise of discipline along with the bishops”.¹¹

The third passage was 1 Timothy: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching.” Like Oecopladius and Bucer, Calvin found in this passage his theory of two different kinds of presbyters, those who preach and rule and those who only rule and do not preach.¹² Most medieval and reformation exegetes interpreted the passages as referring to two kinds of presbyters but disagreed in identifying which two. What was unique, and shocking especially to Roman Catholics, was Calvin’s interpretation that this second sort of

presbyter was a layman and not a priest. For Roman Catholics, discipline was the prerogative of the clergy alone, while for Calvin, it was the responsibility of pastors along with the chosen lay representatives of the people.

The Scottish Background

The eldership, as instituted by Calvin, was taken over by the Scottish church. Indeed, there were elders in the “privy kirks” before John Knox returned to Scotland in 1559,¹³ and they evolved into the kirk sessions of the 1560s after the introduction of the *First Book of Discipline*. The hierarchical church offices from acolyte to archbishop were done away with and in their place three offices were recognized: pastors, elders, and deacons.¹⁴ Elders, whose duty it was to assist the minister in all public affairs of the Church, including discipline, were elected annually. Interestingly, unlike Calvin, Knox did not speak of the ordination of elders or of ministers.

A collegial understanding of the ministry of pastors and elders was emphasized, as is clear from the *Book of Common Order* in its prescription that “In assembling the people, nether they without the ministers, nor the ministers withoute them, may attempt anything.”¹⁵ The model was Calvin’s senate in which the minister and elders were on equal footing and the relation of the two offices was seen along horizontal rather than on vertical or hierarchical lines.

In 1576, the Scottish General Assembly decided to abandon its experiment in episcopacy and formulated a new statement of the Church’s constitution, the *Second Book of Discipline* of 1578. This represented a development of the principles enunciated in the *First Book of Discipline*. It stated that the titles, “bishop,” “pastor,” and “presbyter” all referred to the same office.¹⁶ All presbyters, ministers and elders, were elected for life and ordination was common to both of them. Pastors and doctors were to be “diligent in teaching and sowing the seed of the word” while elders were to “be careful in seeking the fruit of the same in the people.”¹⁷

The differences between the two Books of Discipline have been interpreted variously. Some have based the two main theories of the eldership that emerged later in Scotland—the “Lay Theory” and the “Presbyter Theory”—respectively on them. Supporters of the “Lay Theory,” according to which elders are understood as lay represent-

atives of the people, have appealed to the *First Book of Discipline*, since there the elder is elected annually, is not ordained, and thus remains a lay person. Advocates of the "Presbyter Theory", i.e. that elders are presbyters, have made much of the point that minister and elder are very closely connected in the *Second Book of Discipline*, since elders are appointed for life and, along with ministers, are ordained.¹⁸ Others, however, have argued that the underlying concept of the elder's office remained substantially the same in both Books of Discipline, and so there were never two theories to begin with. The new practice of appointing elders for life was simply a difference in detail and not in principle.¹⁹ Though appointed annually, most were re-elected year after year.

The English Background

The next important stage in the definition of the office of the elder is found in the Westminster Assembly's *Form of Presbyterial Government* of 1645. In its discussion of polity, the eldership proved to be a sticky wicket. The general opinion of the Assembly was that Calvin's exegesis of 1 Timothy 5:17—finding there two sorts of elders—was faulty, and that the passage referred only to "preaching elders."²⁰ Agreement on wording was finally reached by appealing to 2 Chronicles 19 which stated that in the Jewish Church: "elders of the people joined with the priests and Levites in the government of the church, so Christ, who hath instituted government and governors ecclesiastical in the Church, hath furnished some in his Church, beside the ministers of the word, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereunto, who are to join with the minister in the government of the church."²¹ The Assembly, in support of its use of "government and governors ecclesiastical," appealed to Romans 12:7–8 and 1 Corinthians 12:28, the two passages Calvin had emphasized. One of the divines, George Gillespie, a Scottish commissioner proposed that the phrase "ruling elders" be used to speak of them but his motion was defeated and the following sentence was added: "Which officers reformed churches commonly call Elders."

It may be noted in passing that Calvin, the Scottish books of discipline and the Westminster divines, were agreed about the office of church governors or rulers but differed regarding whether these

governors could be called “presbyters.” It was the considered judgment of the Westminster Assembly that the title “presbyter” should be reserved only for those who preached.

The Church of Scotland adopted the *Form of Presbyterial Church-Government* in 1645, but that did not settle the question. George Gillespie’s view that 1 Timothy 5:17 was a mandate for both preaching and ruling presbyters continued to have supporters. It was followed by the Secession Presbyterian churches and later the United Presbyterian Church. They spoke of teaching and ruling elders and grouped them together. For the most part, the established Church of Scotland tended to follow the Westminster *Form of Presbyterial Church-Government’s* position that elders are more properly called church governors and are not presbyters and so made a sharper distinction between ministers and elders.

The Canadian Scene

The different understandings of the eldership that prevailed in Scotland played out in Canadian Presbyterianism as Scots emigrated, and the Church of Scotland and the Secession churches were transplanted to Canada. When the different branches of Presbyterianism were united in 1875 to form The Presbyterian Church in Canada, a committee on Ecclesiastical Procedure, was appointed which resolved to use the principles and procedures that were all common to the four uniting Presbyterian church bodies. These were found in the *Second Book of Discipline* and the *Form of Presbyterial Church Government*, even though the two differed somewhat in their view of the eldership. Three basic principles were accepted from the *Second Book of Discipline* regarding the eldership: first, the equality or parity of ministers and ruling elders, (“To take away all occasion of tyranny” our Lord wills that office-bearers in his Church “should rule with mutual consent of brethren, and equality of power, every one according to his function [Bk.(sic) of Dis. II, 4]”);²² secondly, that the eldership “is a spiritual function as is the ministry” (2Bk. Of Dis. VI, 2, 3);²³ and thirdly, ordination to the eldership is, as a rule, for life: “elders once lawfully called to office, and having gifts of God meet to exercise the same, may not leave it again (2 Bk. of Dis. VI, 2).²⁴

Not all Canadian Presbyterians agreed with these principles. Since both the *Second Book of Discipline* and *The Form of Presbyterial*

Church Government formed the basis of Presbyterian polity, two different understandings of the eldership came to prevail in Canada as they had in Scotland.

This can be illustrated by referring to the Rev. Peter Colin Campbell's view of the eldership. Ordained by the Church of Scotland in 1835, he went to serve, under the auspices of the Glasgow Colonial Society, in the Presbyterian Church in Brockville. In 1840, he was appointed Professor of Classical Literature at Queen's College, Kingston. He returned to Scotland a few years later and became the first Principal of the newly united University of Aberdeen. In 1866, he published an erudite book on *The Theory of Ruling Eldership*. In it he spoke with some disdain of the *Second Book of Discipline*. He laid stress, not on 1 Timothy 5:17, which the *Second Book of Discipline*, following the lead of Calvin, emphasized, but on Romans 12:8, where he believed the eldership was placed on a solid biblical basis. According to Campbell, there is only one kind of presbyter and that is the minister of Word and Sacrament. He found support for his position in Hugo Grotius, Blondel, Vitringa and especially in Thomas Smyth who asserted in *Presbytery and not Prelacy*, that the whole burden of proof "rests on those who generalize the term presbyter as to include *Ruling Elders*."²⁵

Peter Colin Campbell also objected to the term "ordination" for elders. He held that their ordination is "inconsistent with the true view of their position as *seniors plebes*, the representatives of the unordained members of the Church as distinct from its professional functionaries."²⁶ Why it is inconsistent is not clear since ministers also come from the unordained members of the Church and are ordained to their office.

Campbell's rejection of ordination for elders was at variance with the theology and practice of the Church of Scotland in both Scotland and Canada. Almost from its beginnings, the Church of Scotland admitted elders to their office by prayer. Elders were required to answer the prescribed questions and to sign the same formulae as was signed by ministers.²⁷ The act of admission was customarily described as "ordination."²⁸ In 1988—when the Church of Scotland Panel on Doctrine recommended that the eldership no longer be for life, that elders not be ordained, and that another term be used for their initiation—these recommendations were firmly rejected by presbyteries for fear that they would lead to the diminution of the eldership.²⁹

Recommendations similar to those mentioned above were approved by the United Church of Canada. In 1967, in its Report on the Eldership, the Committee on Christian Faith argued that the eldership is a ministry which is exercised solely in the local congregation and is for a limited term. Therefore, it recommended that "the term 'ordination' not be used to describe the service by which a person becomes an elder in the United Church of Canada."³⁰ Thus the present practice is to restrict ordination to ministers of Word and Sacrament. If anything, this has led to a reduced view of the role of the eldership.

The Presbyterian Church of Canada continues to follow the practice it inherited from Scotland, and particularly from the *Second Book of Discipline*, of ordaining elders. Elders are to be ordained "in the presence of the congregation and preferable on the Lord's Day".³¹ Ordination is with prayer. Since the Church has never pronounced on the imposition of hands in the case of elder's ordination,³² the practice has varied, although increasingly, ordination of elders is by both prayer and imposition of hands. This does not mean that they occupy the same office as ministers. As their functions are distinct, their ordinations are distinguished. "Ordain" means to "place in order" and their particular order is that of being ruling elders.

The ruling eldership has supplied Presbyterian churches with a form of lay representation not only at the congregational but also at the presbytery, synod, and general assembly level.³³ Eldership is, of course, viewed differently today than it was in Calvin's Geneva, John Knox's Scotland or for that matter in Thomas McCulloch's Pictou, Nova Scotia. Institutions tended to retain their original name but their activities changed. Discipline, for which lay eldership was principally introduced, and which was its main activity for centuries, is no longer exercised regularly. The task of elders is more in pastoral care, counseling, Christian education, evangelism, oversight and leadership of the congregation. But this is a plus rather than a minus. When sessions concentrated on discipline, the sexual sins of parishioners were singled out for attention while the sins of greed, pride, hypocrisy, which were more difficult to detect and deal with, escaped censure. "Open almost any volume of Kirk Session minutes," Anne Gordon has written, "and the words fornication, ante-nuptial fornication and

adultery were almost sure to leap out at one because these sins kept Sessions constantly busy, in the belief that they were doing the Lord's will."³⁴ Fines were levied on the guilty parties and these funds went to help the poor, "the lascivious providing for the needy" as Callum Brown has quipped.³⁵

Recent Developments

Two recent developments have strengthened the office of the lay eldership in Canadian Presbyterianism: first, the admission of women and second, the eligibility of elders for election to the offices of moderator of presbytery, synod and general assembly. Women were received into the eldership in 1966 and now make up about forty per cent of the total number of elders.³⁶ They have revitalized many church sessions and their contribution at the levels of presbytery, synod and general assembly, has been immeasurable. A recent study, *The Elders: Seniority Within Earliest Christianity* by Alistair Campbell, argues that women are among those who were called the elders or house-church leaders in the early church. Well-to-do women played a prominent role in Paul's mission and in the churches that grew from it. They opened their homes to the first house-churches in both Greece and Asia Minor. Later they were excluded from serving in that office.³⁷ Thankfully, they are now again an integral part of the eldership of most reformed and Presbyterian churches and this vast resource of leadership is once more being used.

The second development, the eligibility of lay elders for the office of moderator, can be discussed more briefly. It was adopted in 1993, and while there has been no stampede since, for ruling elders to become moderators, yet this action is a significant step in down-playing the traditional distinction between "laity" and "clergy." It underlines the important truth that all Christians are members of the people of God (*laos*) whether they be ministers, ruling elders, or diaconal workers. The eldership is not a lower class of Christian ministry but a different one from the office of teaching and preaching. Eric Jay in his important essay, "From Presbyter-Bishops to Bishops and Presbyters," has reminded us that originally presbyters were lay people, many of whom had to earn their own living.³⁸

Issues and Conclusions

In this final section, I wish to address three issues and draw some conclusions. The first issue concerns the question of the relation of elders to ministers and whether they are “lay” or “clergy.” James Kirk of Glasgow University has rightly pointed out that this question arose in Scotland despite the reformer’s repudiation of this antithesis. It has led, in his view, to much muddled thinking, especially in the claim that the elder of the *First Book of Discipline* was a “genuine layman” in contrast to the elder of the *Second Book of Discipline* who was considered a “clerical figure” because his office was described as “a spiritual function as is the ministry.” Calvin also spoke of elders as ecclesiastical and spiritual. “Spiritual,” however, is not to be identified with the term “clerical,” as if only “clergy” are spiritual.³⁹ James Kirk has also noted that the records of St. Andrews kirk session, state that elders were part of “the ministry” (not “clergy”). The kirk session means minister(s) and the elders.⁴⁰

This is a helpful way of putting the matter. Elders are not “clergy” but they are an integral part of the ministry of the church. The Presbyterian approach to collegiality has the minister presiding at the congregational session of elders or church governors, and of deacons. The relationship is along horizontal rather than vertical lines with the minister as *primus inter pares*.

The second issue concerns the relation of the Presbyterian understanding of collegiality and the traditional threefold structure of bishop, presbyter, and deacon. Arguably, one of the most significant ecumenical statements on the ministry appears in the World Council of Churches Faith and Order document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982). It opens with a section on “The Calling of the Whole People of God”, and states that “all members of the Church are called to confess their faith and to give account of their hope.” Yet, without expanding on what that phrase means, the text goes on rather abruptly, even though it acknowledges that churches differ on exactly how the life of the Christian Church is to be ordered, to speak of “The Church and the Ordained Ministry.”⁴¹ By “ordained ministry” BEM has in mind “persons who have received a charism and whom the church appoints for service by ordination through the invocation of the Spirit and the laying on of hands.”⁴² It speaks of a collegium of the three offices of bishop, presbyter, and deacon, but makes no refer-

ence to “lay elders” or “church governors.” In its description of the local eucharistic community and the “need for an ordained ministry acting within a collegial body” the constitution of the collegium is not spelled out.⁴³ Yet it does not include elders or any lay people and the document does not speak at this point of a shared ministry of *laos* and ordained ministry. The threefold structure of bishop, presbyter and deacon is what is recommended for the churches.

It is now generally acknowledged, also by *BEM*, that the threefold ministry is a later second and third century development. Why this vertical, hierarchical model should be preferred over against the more horizontal, collegial form of ministry in which bishop and presbyter are interchangeable terms and *seniors*, as representatives of the people, are included in the collegium, is not made clear. The hierarchical model may be justified on prudential grounds and as of long historical lineage. Yet it was not the earliest form, which was basically presbyteral and remained so for a century and a half. Moreover, it suffers from the disadvantage of regarding lay people as those who “pray, pay and obey” rather than giving them a significant role in the leadership of the local and wider Christian community.

The third issue pertains to the biblical basis for the eldership. This is a large and complex subject that would require a long essay or monograph. Yet a few points may be made on this subject. Calvin found support for the office of the elder in the Old Testament when Moses assembled the elders and went with them to Pharaoh before the exodus (Exodus 3:16, 18); when he was instructed by God to appoint seventy elders to share his burden (Numbers 11:16–17) and they were validated in their office by receiving a portion of the Spirit that God had put on Moses (Numbers 11:24–25). This passage was used by the rabbis as a basis for the Sanhedrin and for rabbinic ordination.⁴⁴ As previously noted, another important Old Testament passage to support the office of church governors was 2 Chronicles 19:8, which the Westminster divines used.

Oecolampadius, Bucer, Calvin, Knox, Melville, and the Westminster divines also found support for the office in the New Testament passages previously cited. Thomas F. Torrance has argued that there is no “definite or certain biblical evidence” for the lay eldership.⁴⁵ Calvin, Torrance believes, obtained his model of seniors or *gerontes* from the North African Church and then claimed to find it in such passages as Romans 12:8, 1 Corinthians 12:28 and particularly

1 Timothy 5:17. Calvin and the others would have rejected such an accusation.

In support of Calvin, reference may be made to Campbell's recent, important study. Although he seeks to revive Rudolf Sohm's questionable view that elders did not occupy an office but were honored or had rank,⁴⁶ Campbell nevertheless makes a number of important points. He argues that the earliest Christian congregations came to birth within households or extended families in which a well-to-do patron or elder who placed his or her house at the disposal of the church exercised a leading role. The term "elders" was used at the point when household churches multiplied.⁴⁷ These elders were overseers. The Pastoral epistles call for the appointment of elders in every city (Titus 1:5), which Campbell interprets as the appointment of "monepiskopoi" leaders in the various cities as over against their limited oversight κατ' οἶκον. In contrast to Calvin, Campbell sees 1 Timothy 5:17 as dealing with how such leaders are to be rewarded now that they are giving all their time to preaching and teaching. Such persons are both elders and full-time overseers and are doubly worthy of the church's honor.⁴⁸

Campbell makes the important point that elders did not fade away. That they did not all join the ranks of the "clergy" is indicated by the *seniors laici* or *seniors plebes* of the fourth century North African Church. Their functions were disciplinary and administrative. Some of the elders joined the ranks of the clergy, but as Campbell notes: "The other *seniores* then came to be known as *laici*, which is what, as 'non-bishops', they had always been!"⁴⁹ There is then more biblical evidence for the office than Torrance would admit and there is then justification for saying that Calvin and the other Swiss reformers restored a New Testament office, rather than imposed a fourth-century model on the New Testament passages.

St. Jerome observed that "there can be no church community without a leader or a team of leaders."⁵⁰ Presbyterianism has opted for "a team of leaders" because it holds that a team of leaders, a collegium in which lay elders are included, is best equipped to carry out the church's manifold and differentiated ministry.⁵¹ The lay eldership has served Presbyterian churches admirably and continues to serve them well. There can be no hesitation, therefore, in concurring with the conclusion of G.D. Henderson's fine study of ruling elders, when he

said: "It is a great institution, worth preserving, worth promoting, worth improving"⁵²

Notes

1. This essay seeks to acknowledge and honour Professor Frederik Wisse's significant achievements not only as a New Testament scholar and teacher but also his participation in the life and work of Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Beaconsfield where he served faithfully as an elder for many years. In that capacity, he represented his congregation in the Presbytery of Montreal, serving also as its moderator in 2000–2001.

2. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (LCC 21; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 4.3.8

3. *Report of the Proceedings of the Second General Council of the Presbyterian Alliance*, ed. John B. Dales and R.M. Patterson (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Journal Company, 1880), 152.

4. *Report of the Proceedings of the First Presbyterian General Council*, ed. J. Thomson (Edinburgh: Thomas and Archibald Constable, 1877), 121.

5. See Akura Demura, *Church Discipline according to Johannes Oecolampadius in the Setting of His life and Thought* (PhD. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1964), quoted by Elsie Anne McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry* (Geneva, Librairie Droz S.A., 1988), 18 and John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 82–84.

6. See Elsie Anne McKee, *op.cit.*, 18–19; Lukas Vischer, "Eldership: A General Survey" in *The Ministry of the Elders in the Reformed Churches*, ed. Lukas Vischer (Berne, Evangelische Arbeitsstelle, 1992), 34.; and John T. McNeill, *History and Character*, 145, 163.

7. John Calvin, *Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances* (1541), in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, trans. J.K.S. Reid (LCC 22; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 63.

8. 4.11.1. See also John Calvin's comments on Matthew 18: 15–17: "Among the Jews the power of excommunication rested with the elders, representing the whole Church. . . . We know that from the time they returned from the Babylonian exile the Jews committed the censure of morals and doctrine to an elected council, which they called the Sanhedrin, in Greek *synedrion*. . . . But it is certain that the lawful government of the Church was given to the elders (*presbyteris*) and this means not only the ministers of the Word but also those from the laity {*ex plebe*} who were joined to them as censors of morals" (*Commentary on Gospel Harmony*, vol. 2 [Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1959–1972], 228–29, 231).

9. Robert M. Kingdon, "The Control of Morals in Calvin's Geneva" in *The Social History of the Reformation*, ed. Lawrence P. Buck and Jonathan W. Zophy (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972), 4, 12–14. See also William G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994). Professor Naphy points out that in the case of the Syndic and Senatorial representatives, none served for more than three years as a member of the Consistory. Of the other nine elders, seven served for seven years (76–77). From 1546–1552, the Consistory possessed a stable collection of elders (178). Ministerial leadership in the Consistory also became more stable after 1546.

10. See *Registers of the Consistory of Geneva in the Time of Calvin*, vol. 1, 1542–1544, ed. Robert M. Kingdon, Thomas A. Lambert and Isabella M. Watt, trans. M. Wallace McDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). In the first 24 months it summoned almost 850 persons from a total population of less than 13,000.

11. *Institutes* 4.8.3. See also 4.11.1 and *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 463: ". . . elders who were the correctors of morals;" and *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 416: "By Governments I understand Elders, who had the charge of discipline. For the primitive Church had its senate (ou Consistoire)."

12. *Institutes* 4.11.1; *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 138–39 "We may learn from this, that there were at that time two kinds of elders; for all were not ordained to teach . . . there were some who "ruled well" and honourably, but who did not hold the office of teachers. And, indeed, there were chosen from among the people men of worth and of good character, who, united with the pastors in a common council and authority, administered the discipline of the Church, and were a kind of censors for the correction of morals."

13. See James Kirk, *Patterns of Reform: Continuity and Change in the Reformation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), Ch. 1, "'The Privy Kirks' and their Antecedents: The Hidden Face of Scottish Presbyterianism," esp. 12–13 and 78; and G.D. Henderson, *The Scottish Ruling Elder* (London: Clarke, 1935), 30.

14. *First Book of Discipline*, edited by J.K. Cameron (Edinburgh: 1972), 168–171, 174ff.

15. John Knox, *The Works of John Knox*, ed. D. Laing (Edinburgh, 1846–1864), iv, 176 quoted by James Kirk, *Patterns of Reform*, 304.

16. *Second Book of Discipline*, 183.

17. *Second Book of Discipline*, 193.

18. See Professor Lee's paper, "The Eldership: Its Theory and Practice" in *First Presbyterian General Council*, 102ff. and Henderson, *The Scottish Ruling Elder*, 205ff.
19. James Kirk, *The Second Book of Discipline*, 94, 90. The SBD asserts: "The Eldership is a spiritual function, as is the ministry. Elders once lawfully called to office, and having gifts of God meet to exercise the same may not leave it again" (vi,2,3). That "the eldership is a spiritual function, as is the ministry" is quoted in *The Book of Forms* (Don Mills, Ontario: The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1993), section 106, p.13.
20. See Robert S. Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1985), 163ff.
21. *The Form of Presbyterial Church-Government* (Edinburgh: Blackwood & Sons., 1959), 174. Part of this paragraph is quoted in the "Preamble and Questions" to be put to elders before ordination in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. See *The Book of Forms*, section 412, p.73.
22. *The Book of Forms*, section 4, p.2. James Kirk's edition, II, 6.
23. *The Book of Forms*, 13. Kirk, VI, 5, 10.
24. *The Book of Forms*, 13. Kirk, VI, 6.
25. Thomas Smyth, *Presbytery and not Prelacy* (Glasgow: Collins, 1844), 470.
26. Campbell, 69. Campbell holds that the term "ordination" is "vulgarly employed to designate the formal installation of members of the parochial council" but thinks that "nothing can be more proper . . . than the customary solemnity of admitting them to their important duties with public prayer"(69).
27. See A. Herron, "The Formula" in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Downers Grove: Ill.: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 330.
28. See "Panel on Doctrine Report" in *Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland* (1963), 757-59.
29. See Douglas Murray, "The Recent Debate on Eldership in the Church of Scotland" in Vischer, *The Ministry of the Elders*, 186.
30. *The Eldership: The Report of the Committee on Christian Faith*, J.R. Hord, secretary (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1967), 14, 10.
31. *Book of Forms*, 132.7, p. 22.
32. T. Wardlaw Taylor, *The Ruling Elder* (Toronto: Presbyterian Publications, 1947), 30.

33. While elders are in the ministry at the congregation or session level, in presbytery, synod and general assembly there are an equal number of ruling elders and ministers, each with an equal voice and vote.
34. Anne Gordon, *Candie for the Foundling* (Edinburgh: Pentland, 1992), 357.
35. Callum G. Brown, *The Social History of Religion in Scotland Since 1730* (London: Methuen, 1987), 94.
36. In 2002 there were 10,884 elders, of which there were 4,178 women elders.
37. S. Alistair Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority Within Earliest Christianity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 255–56.
38. Eric G. Jay, “From Presbyterian-Bishops to Bishops and Presbyters,” *SecCent* 1.3 (1981): 125–62. Jay argues that for about 150 years, the church’s ministry was basically presbyteral and thinks that greater progress in ecumenical conversations between Episcopal and Presbyterian Churches would be made if this were frankly acknowledged.
39. Calvin was unhappy with the title “clergy”: “I would have preferred them to be given a more proper name; for this appellation arose from error or at least from a wrong attitude, since Peter calls the whole church “the clergy”, that is the inheritance of the Lord (1 Peter 5:3)” (*Institutes* 4.4.9).
40. *RStAKS*, 1, 75, 131, 133, 138, 143, 147 quoted by Kirk, *Patterns of Reform*, 257.
41. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Faith and Order paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 20, 21.
42. *BEM*, para. 7, p. 21.
43. *BEM*, para. 26, 27, pp. 25–26.
44. See G. Bornkamm “πρέσβυς,” *TDNT* 6:651.
45. T.F. Torrance, “The Eldership in the Reformed Church,” *SJT* 37 (1984): 503.
46. Campbell, *The Elders*, 8–10, 246–48. Campbell holds that “in the ancient world the elders are those who bear a title of honor, not of office, a title that is imprecise, collective and representative, and rooted in the ancient family or household” (246). Adolf von Harnack argued that elders had both rank and office. Perhaps a better term is “leadership.” Because of their rank, elders tended to exercise a form of leadership.
47. Campbell, *The Elders*, 241.
48. Campbell, *The Elders*, 243–44.
49. Campbell, *The Elders*, 245–46.

50. St. Jerome, *Dialogue Against the Luciferians*, quoted by Edward Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 1.

51. Karl Barth has set out the manifold and differentiated ministry of the church in his discussion of the ministry of the community under two headings: ministries of speech and ministries of action. Under the former he includes: the praise of God, preaching, instruction, evangelization, mission, and theology. Under the latter, he discusses: prayer, cure of souls, the production and existence of definite personal examples of Christian faith and action, the diaconate, prophetic action, and the establishment of fellowship. See *Church Dogmatics* 4.3.2, translated by G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1962), 859–901.

52. Henderson, *The Scottish Ruling Elder*, 312.