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**LONE RANGERS NO MORE:
CALVIN'S COMPANY OF PASTORS AS A MODEL
FOR PRESBYTERIAN CLERGY RELATIONSHIPS TODAY**

by

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ABSTRACT

The Company of Pastors moderated by John Calvin in sixteenth century Geneva was never formally adopted outside the Genevan context, yet it appears to have benefited the pastors and congregations of the city-state in its four-fold work of ordination, education, mutual and self-criticism and missionary work. The purpose of this dissertation is to determine how Calvin's Company of Pastors might serve as a model for engaging Presbyterian clergy in relationships of mutual accountability and encouragement today.

Of special interest in this thesis is the area of mutual and self-criticism, since denominational bodies tend to take care of ordination, education and missionary work, while leaving mutual and self-criticism to the individual. It has been determined that a Company of Pastors erected in a Canadian Presbyterian context could be of great benefit to the ministers and the wider church by engaging in mutual accountability. Different models are suggested, based on gender and geography.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the glory of God and to the many clergy, Presbyterian and otherwise, who suffer from isolation, loneliness, or burnout as they seek to be faithful to the calling placed on them by the Lord Jesus Christ. I am thankful to my wife, Diana, who has nurtured me and loved me through bad times and good, and to the congregations I have served, for their patience and care.

J.F.L.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Rationale: Why a Company of Pastors?

“Where would you be today if there had been a Company of Pastors available to you when you burned out?” This was the piercing question posed by my spiritual director when I explained to her that I had discovered an ancient body that provided structure, continuing education and accountability for clergy, dating back to the second generation of the Protestant Reformation.

“Well, I suppose I would still be in the church where it all happened,” said I, after a moment’s reflection. That simple statement in itself was enough to tell me that I needed to research this phenomenon called The Venerable Company of Pastors, or simply the Company of Pastors. The Company was the brain child of John Calvin (1509-1564), the Reformer of Geneva, who with the committee that prepared the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, first produced in 1541, decreed, “Firstly, in order that all ministers may maintain purity and agreement of doctrine among themselves, it will be expedient for them to meet together on one particular day of the week for discussion of the Scriptures, and no one

shall be exempted from this without legitimate excuse.”¹ Thus was born the idea of the Company of Pastors: a weekly meeting that included study and accountability.

As a pastor who has experienced burnout, and as one who also has served as a Presbytery Clerk for two judicatories within The Presbyterian Church in Canada, I am keenly aware that burnout is a serious problem among clergy. There are many, many reasons for this – reasons which go far beyond the scope of this dissertation. Briefly, though, statistics cited in *Ministry* magazine describes pastoral burnout statistics for American clergy:

- 45% of pastors say that they have experienced depression or burnout to the extent that they needed to take a leave of absence from ministry.
- 50% feel unable to meet the demands of the job.
- 52% of pastors say they and their spouses believe that being in pastoral ministry is hazardous to their family’s well-being and health.
- 70% do not have any close friends.
- 75% report severe stress causing anguish, worry, bewilderment, anger, depression, fear, and alienation.
- 80% of pastors say they have insufficient time with their spouse.
- 90% work more than 50 hours a week.
- 94% feel under pressure to have a perfect family.
- 1,500 pastors leave their ministries each month due to burnout, conflict, or moral failure.²

¹ Philip E. Hughes, ed. and tr., *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 37.

² N.a., “Pastoral burnout statistics,” sidebar in *Ministry*, Volume 83 Number 5 (May 2011): 13.

One of the reasons cited for clergy burnout is alienation, what one might call “Lone Ranger-ism”. That is, in the culture and context of most local churches, it is common for the minister to be alone in her or his work, simply because most churches are not large enough to employ multiple staff. Seminary typically trains us to work on our own, and ministry in the local church only serves to reinforce this idea. There is a sense of mystery in the isolation of the pastor’s work, which has spawned the “You only work an hour a week” sort of comments. To be sure, the pastor’s schedule is more flexible than that of most working people, but it comes at a price – a price often exacted at the expense of family time, or personal spiritual development. This reality led Eugene Peterson, when serving a local church, periodically to “write a congregational letter on topics such as ‘Why your pastor keeps a Sabbath,’ ‘Why your pastor reads books,’ ‘Why your pastor stays home with his family on Friday nights.’”³ Peterson noted that he did not write about these practices to seek approval, but to invite his church members into the same kinds of practices. Recognizing that he was in a position of having to give and give and give constantly, it was important for him to receive from the Lord. “If you’re going to negotiate this tricky terrain of intimacy, you must have a strong

³ David J. Wood, “Committing to Mutuality: An Interview With Eugene Peterson,” *Congregations*, Volume 28, Number 3 (May-June 2002): 5.

commitment to mutuality,"⁴ Peterson said. He was referring principally, in that case, to mutuality with the congregation, but in order to achieve that degree of mutuality, the pastor must be able to experience it in other settings as well. In the same article, he said, "I think burnout comes from working with no relational gratification....In the midst of the congregation, pastors become lonely and feel isolated – and that isolation can be deadly to the pastoral life. Those are the conditions in which inappropriate intimacies flourish."⁵

What's more, people who enter pastoral ministry, like all people, are to an extent emotionally, if not spiritually, wounded – suggesting that as people in a 'helping' profession, clergy need to care for themselves and each other in order to work through their woundedness, so that it is not an obstacle to their ministry. In reflecting on the importance of self-care, one author wrote, "We seek to heal that broken child within ourselves and others. Even those whose childhood was ideal may have internalized expectations from adults that 'winning' and 'succeeding' mean helping others at the expense of our own needs."⁶ When we engage in responsible accountability relationships, we can avoid these pitfalls of ministry.

Where do we find these relationships?

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁶ Jacqueline J. Lewis, "Good-Enough Self-Care," *Congregations*, Volume 28, Number 3 (May-June 2002): 21.

Ministers tend to shy away from deep personal relationships within the congregation because in the past, we were taught to keep our distance. Pastors have been educated to keep strict professional boundaries, often for good reasons, since we cannot be seen to be more friendly toward some than others within the congregation. We tend to shy away from deep personal relationships within the judicatory, out of fear that something we share may be used against us in the future. Further, because it is common for pastors to be busy all the time, they rarely take the opportunity to foster deep personal relationships outside the local church or the judicatory. Indeed, as Martin Marty pointed out many years ago, when clergy scandals were beginning to make headlines, reflection on friendship among clergy is conspicuous by its absence.⁷ Pastors, being in environments that are not conducive to friendship-building, have tended not to make friends easily. As a result, they find themselves alone, and rarely, if ever, accountable on a day-to-day basis – yet the need for both friendship and accountability is there. Jesus demonstrated the need for friendship himself, by having circles of relationship – most deeply with Peter, James and John; then with the twelve disciples as a group; and then spreading even more widely. Jesus would not let his ministry to all

⁷ Martin E. Marty in *The Christian Century*, cited by David Wood, “Friendship as a Pastoral, Congregational, and Missional Challenge” [lecture online]; available from <http://www.tyndale.ca/leadership/friendship/audio>; Internet.

people keep him from fostering his human need for deep personal relationships.

A study on clergy burnout conducted early in the first decade of the new millennium noted that while pastors are grateful for their training and the support of their judicatories, these pastors find that the demands on their time were their greatest stressors. The author cited a joke that says, "being a pastor is like being a dog at a whistlers' convention."⁸ It seems logical, then, that some pastors would argue against an accountability group such as a Company of Pastors, simply because they don't have the time to fit its meetings into their schedules. Yet the cultural milieu of the church today is such that it is no longer a badge of honour, in most mainline clergy circles, for pastors to boast about not taking a day off or keeping 90-hour work weeks. The 'work smarter, not harder' adage may finally be reaching the leadership of the church. If ministers are absolved of their false guilt from not overworking themselves, the risk they run is that they may become lazy. Both extremes call forth the need for a Company of Pastors, so that neither burnout nor laziness is normative. Balance is what should be sought.

Further, interrelational stresses within the local church elicit the need for a Company of Pastors, where clarity, openness and safety in

⁸ Michael Jenkins, "Great Expectations, Sobering Realities," *Congregations*, Volume 28, Number 3 (May-June 2002): 13.

relationships should be experienced. The Company could model these relationships, while studying the Scriptures together, helping to encourage pastors who are not engaged in the regular disciplines of Bible study and prayer. In the survey cited above, 62 percent of clergy had no disciplined or scheduled times of study, and 51 percent lacked disciplined or scheduled prayer times.⁹ Pastors, who so often work alone, cannot be expected to be accountable to themselves for these matters. Ultimately, we are all accountable to God for them, but why not also be accountable to each other for them? One would expect that pastors would be more willing to be accountable to each other than, say, to members of their congregation or governing board. One writer suggests creating a “ministers’ advisory council”, the mandate of which would be encouragement, protection, advice, resolution, reconciliation and discipline¹⁰ – though he writes from a congregationalist perspective where there is no outside judicatory to give external assistance and where denominational executives are powerless to provide oversight. It would take both mature people and strong relationships for a congregational ministers’ advisory council to work effectively. Some pastors may be willing to share with their spouses, but many pastors, perhaps rightly,

⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁰ Greg Greenfield, *The Wounded Minister: Healing From and Preventing Personal Attacks* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 173-175.

seek to shield their spouses from their struggles in order to allow him or her to maintain good relationships with church members.

The polity of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the tradition in which I serve, is such that the Presbytery, the minister's "boss", only tends to do any degree of supervision through the typically triennial visitation, and only at other times during a crisis of some sort. Often, the Presbytery's role as a corporate pastoral visitor and encourager is supplanted by the necessity to serve as an ecclesiastical fire brigade.

I believe that it can and should be different. And I believe that the model given to us by Calvin in his Company of Pastors may contribute to making it different for pastors. My desire is that they be Lone Rangers no more.

Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand the historical context, meaning, and value of the Company of Pastors as instituted by John Calvin in Geneva in the sixteenth century, to discover why it was never formally adopted outside the Genevan context, and to examine how it may apply today to pastors in the specific context of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for their mutual edification and encouragement. The research question that will be asked in this thesis is, "How can John Calvin's Company of Pastors serve as a model for engaging Presbyterian

clergy in relationships of mutual accountability and encouragement today?"

Overview

The focus of this paper will be to learn about Calvin's concept of the Company of Pastors, to understand his purpose in its design, and to explore how it can be adapted for application in a twenty-first century context among pastors serving in The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

It has long been understood that formal theological education for women and men training for pastoral ministry is limited in its scope, despite all attempts to be comprehensive. In the three years typically afforded schools in the Reformed tradition to prepare students for service in the church, theory tends to get more emphasis than practice; teaching exegetical skills trumps teaching people skills. Implicitly or explicitly, the seminary and the church depend on the minister to continue his or her theological education long after graduation and ordination.

Calvin's Company of Pastors helped to serve as a school for ministers to continue their education, learning from one another, as well as supporting and admonishing each other. Since the Company of Pastors was a subset of the Genevan Consistory (the main governing body of the church, comprising pastors and elders/magistrates), it seems logical that, for the purposes of this paper, the group to which the application is addressed be the ministers of the Presbytery. The hope is that the

outcome of this study will serve as a potential tool to bring renewal to Presbyterian pastors and particularly to bring them together in more intentionally collegial relationships that may include mutual accountability and encouragement.

Rationale: the significance of this study

As a Presbytery Clerk, serving now in my second judicatory, I get to see situations in local churches and among pastors that not every church leader sees. From this unique vantage point, I can see that even in reasonably healthy environments, all is not well among our pastors. There are many reasons for this, of course, but among those reasons is that too many suffer as a result of self-inflicted isolation. For some, it may be because past trust relationships among colleagues have been betrayed. For others, it may be the result of training they received in practical theology that keeps them 'to themselves'. For still others, it may be cultural or pathological. Whatever the reason, the "Lone Ranger" model among clergy – not just Presbyterian, but of all traditions – remains all too common, yet it is patently unbiblical. Moses had Aaron and Hur to support him (cf. Exodus 17.10-12). Even the earliest disciples were sent out in pairs by the Lord Jesus (cf. Luke 10.1). The apostle Paul exhorted the troubled churches of Galatia to "[c]arry each other's burdens, and in

this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”¹¹ As if we required further evidence of God’s commitment to mutuality, consider the encouragement of 1 John 4:

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins....Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.... We love each other because he loved us first.¹²

All except the most stringent of independent churches have some sort of connectional structure, whether voluntary or imposed. Whether regional or national, most denominations have assemblies of clergy and laity which convene at least periodically for business and, hopefully, fellowship. In this paper, I hope to demonstrate that, at least for Canadian Presbyterian pastors, this connectional structure (mandated, in our case) can be enhanced to serve the greater good of individual ministers, and the Kingdom of God, through the application of Calvin’s Company of Pastors as a model for clergy interrelationships.

Rarely is the word *intimacy* used positively in relationships outside married couples. It tends to be reserved for reference to sexual intimacy, yet that is only one facet of the word; etymologically, the word refers to

¹¹ Galatians 6.2 [New International Version].

¹² 1 John 4.9-12, 19 [New Living Translation].

'most inside'. That is, a 'best friend' relationship could be considered an intimate relationship, even if the two people never touch each other physically, because it's at least as much about emotion as it is about physical touch. Eric Berne maintains

that there are only three possible human transactions: pastimes, games, or intimacy. Pastimes are routine, superficial remarks, "How are you?" Games are the many dishonest manipulations and hidden agendas among people. The only emotionally honest and candid interchanges are called intimacy.¹³

Intimacy, then, is not about genitalia. It is about relationship. What pastors need today are intimate relationships with one another. Calvin likely did not often use the word himself, but it is almost certainly what he meant for the Company of Pastors, at least in part:

The company of pastors was about proficiency in preaching and spiritual formation, but it was also an exercise in holy friendship where each helped the other in lives pleasing to God. When Calvin was dying, he called for his friends in the company of pastors.¹⁴

A noble application/outcome for this research would be to have clergy involved in relationships as deep as what Calvin modelled – with one another. Too many choose alternatives to intimacy – counterfeits such as addictions or power.¹⁵ While the counterfeits, such as adultery and

¹³ Eric Berne, cited in Donald R. Hands and Wayne L. Fehr, *Spiritual Wholeness For Clergy: A New Psychology of Intimacy With God, Self and Others* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1993), 37.

¹⁴ Richard R. Topping, "Can You Imagine!", *Presbyterian Record*, Vol. CXXXV No. 1 (January 2011): 35.

¹⁵ Hands and Fehr, *Spiritual Wholeness For Clergy*, 38.

pornography addiction, can lay waste the family home, the power of the position can likewise ill affect the church. A regional judicatory visitation team may never pick up on a pastor's intimacy issues at home, unless they result in a public moral failure. But that visitation team may quickly ascertain that the pastor is having problems with intimacy because of power struggles within the church.

The culture that surrounds the church has changed many times over, but for church leaders today, the most notable change has occurred in the years since the 1960s, when authority has been questioned like in no other time since the Protestant Reformation. Pastors, who exercised almost unquestioned authority fifty or sixty years ago, now find their authority questioned at every turn. This leaves many clergy discouraged, and unable to find the will to build deep relationships within their congregations. Not wanting to feel vulnerable, most of these pastors also will not build deep relationships with other clergy – or, at least, not with clergy of the same denomination. Lacking that intimacy, the counterfeits and power issues resurface. It becomes a vicious cycle.

An important safeguard against such evils “is the practice of sharing one’s inner life with certain other people in a very intimate and personal way.”¹⁶ To that end, a positive trend being seen among Protestants today is the embracing of the concept of the spiritual director.

¹⁶ Ibid., 60.

Some Protestants, too, have begun to appreciate the spiritual practices of monastic communities, seeking affiliation either individually or through study groups. (An example is the Oblate program found in most Benedictine monasteries.) These options are providing many believers, clergy included, with opportunities for developing intimate relationships beyond their immediate peers. While this is good news, Calvin's Company of Pastors shows us that it should be possible to do this intradenominationally. What makes it so difficult?

A study of clergy support systems in the 1980s demonstrated that

[m]any clergy expressed the belief that "clergy aren't very good at ministering to each other," and that many clergy groups are only superficially supportive. The most frequent reasons given for this were:

- 1) Competitiveness and unwillingness to share vulnerability with colleagues;
- 2) Isolated work situations that often keep one unaware of another's need;
- 3) "We all have enough to do taking care of our own parishes." "We have to support people all the time. I can't handle any more";
- 4) "Seeing a colleague's pain brings it too close to home. It could happen to me";
- 5) "I'm much more concerned that a colleague will judge the way I try to minister, therefore I often shy away." "I'm afraid I'll look like a fool";
- 6) "I don't trust fellow clergy, especially in the area of confidentiality";
- 7) "I often assume that someone else is ministering to a fellow minister and they don't need me";
- 8) Clergy are afraid that a fellow clergy person will be playing a role. "I need to know if you are in a role or really care, before I share."¹⁷

¹⁷ Barbara G. Gilbert, *Who Ministers to Ministers? A Study of Support Systems for Clergy and Spouses* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1987), 56-57.

These results suggest that clergy have been burned by other clergy – again, a vicious cycle that needs to be stopped if church leaders are going to be effective over the course of a long-haul ministry. As Eugene Peterson cites in his memoirs, one of his supervisors once told him, “Professors as well as pastors need a support system to which they are accountable. Professional ministry, whether as professor or pastor, is no place for lone wolves – there are too many pressures, too many seductions.”¹⁸ The establishment of regional companies of pastors could provide the antidote to those pressures and seductions.

Significant Terms

Benefice: Common in the mediaeval church, a benefice was a permanent Church appointment, typically for a clergyman, for which property and income were provided, usually (but not always) in return for the undertaking of pastoral duties.

Presbytery: In The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Presbytery is the main regional judicatory body, overseeing congregations within its geographical bounds. It serves as a ‘collective bishop’, a body composed of all active clergy and an equal number of ruling elders from local pastoral charges within the bounds. As a body, it is the ‘boss’ of its pastors, the group to which clergy are accountable for their actions. The

¹⁸ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 91.

Presbytery, along with the Session, Synod, and General Assembly, comprise what Canadian Presbyterians call Courts of the church.

Presbytery Clerk: In The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Presbytery Clerk is responsible for the keeping of accurate records of the proceedings of the Presbytery, and for advising on matters of church polity, law and practice.

Spiritual Director: A spiritual director is a Christian who listens to the directee, and listens to the Holy Spirit, to help the directee sense where and how God is at work in the directee's life.

Syndic: A civil magistrate who served on one of the councils that comprised the government of Reformed Geneva. A syndic could be named to serve on the Consistory by virtue of office.

Framework

This chapter has been designed to introduce the reader to the project. The second chapter will examine the primary sources in which Calvin described the Company of Pastors, the secondary sources from that period which made reference to it, and other sources that allude to the historical and theological models for the Company of Pastors, as well as the historical context in sixteenth century Geneva. The third chapter will move to an examination of the theology of the human person in the period when Calvin lived. Chapter 4 will investigate present practices of the principles embodied by Calvin's concept of the Company of Pastors. This

will be followed by an overview of the current theological and political context of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, with reference to any attempts in the denomination's history to employ the principles found in Calvin's Company of Pastors for its clergy (Chapter 5). Key learning points from this study will be set forth for application in Chapter 6. The dissertation will conclude with specific suggestions in the seventh chapter that will help Presbyteries encourage their pastors away from being Lone Rangers in their service to Christ.

CHAPTER 2:
**Primary and secondary sources, historical and theological models,
Historical context in sixteenth century Geneva**

A study of this nature is blessed with several things, two of them being (a) the fact that Calvin himself left many of his thoughts in writing, and (b) the earliest secretaries of the Company of Pastors kept records. Had they known their work would have been retained and translated for posterity, they may have kept more detailed accounts of the work of the Company. As a result of these extant documents, it is possible to get a snapshot of Calvin's vision for the Company, as well as some of its earliest proceedings.

Foundational documents

The foundational documents for this study are the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, first drafted in 1541¹⁹ (and later revised); *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the time of Calvin*²⁰; and various references to polity, and the role of pastors, in Calvin's seminal work, *The Institutes of*

¹⁹ The 1541 edition of the Ecclesiastical Ordinances are found in Hughes, *Register*, 35ff.

²⁰ See full citation at note 1.

*the Christian Religion*²¹. Other works in theology and church history have proven helpful in this study, particularly the writings of Robert M. Kingdon, whose work in Calvin and particularly in the area of the Company of Pastors is voluminous.

The *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* were first written in 1541, and revised in 1547 and 1561. This document “became the widely-imitated charter for the Reformation in Geneva,” wrote Heiko A. Oberman.²² The *Register* only began to be kept in late 1546²³ and, as noted, is not an exceptionally detailed account; nevertheless, it does help the reader understand what the Company’s work entailed, at least in its formative years under Calvin’s leadership. The *Institutes* help us comprehend the background behind what became the Company of Pastors, as we read Calvin’s more general thoughts on ministry and the role of governance.

Historically, regular gatherings of church leaders stretch back to New Testament times. Jesus spent concentrated time with his first disciples over the course of his ministry. The earliest church council took place in Jerusalem, as Luke records in Acts 15, when a dispute among believers caused a delegation to visit the apostles and elders there.

According to the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, Calvin sought to “maintain

²¹ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965).

²² Heiko A. Oberman, “John Calvin: The Mystery of His Impact,” *Calvin Studies VI*, ed. John H. Leith (Davidson, NC: n.p., 1992), 2.

²³ *Register*, 3.

purity and agreement of doctrine”²⁴ among the ministers of Geneva.

Certainly, the model portrayed in the Council of Jerusalem fits Calvin’s desire for “agreement of doctrine”. However, when Calvin wrote that he wished the clergy to “maintain purity and agreement of doctrine”, did ‘purity’ refer to moral purity or purity of doctrine?

Calvin believed that doctrinal purity would lead to moral purity, and he desired both, based on the lists of vices that are intolerable for pastors in the *Ordinances*²⁵ which include both doctrinal and moral sins. Scripturally, there is plenty of warrant for church leaders to admonish one another. In Colossians 3.16, the apostle Paul commends the church to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom”.²⁶ Earlier in his ministry, Paul encouraged the church in Thessalonica to “respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you”.²⁷ Paul told Timothy that the Scriptures are “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness”.²⁸ Reading the New Testament leaves one with the impression that God’s vision for the church included mutual edification, encouragement and admonition. For Calvin, it rested with the

²⁴ Ibid., 37.

²⁵ Ibid., 38-39.

²⁶ Colossians 3.16a [New International Version].

²⁷ 1 Thessalonians 5.12 [New International Version].

²⁸ 2 Timothy 3.16 [New International Version].

clergy to model this for the church, so the pastors would need to start with themselves and each other.

The role of pastors in the community of faith

In various places in his commentaries on Scripture, Calvin made passing reference to the role of pastors in the community of faith. For example, in commenting on 2 Corinthians 2.4, Calvin suggested that every good pastor should be like Paul, and “have a capacity for strong feeling.”²⁹ Pastors are people first, and need to be able to express themselves as people, within the confines of Scripture. This alludes to Calvin’s place in the spectrum of humanism, on which more will be written in Chapter 3.

Beyond the New Testament period, as monastic communities developed, discipline became a key feature of their various rules of life. Corporal punishment and being banished from the community were common forms of discipline handed down to the Reformation church from the monastics.³⁰ In Calvin’s Geneva, excommunication was as feared as it was in ancient monastic communities. But for some under Calvin’s watchful theological eye, excommunication was insufficient. If the doctrinal purity of the church was at risk, then the only way to preserve

²⁹ John Calvin, cited in William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 134.

³⁰ An example is found in Timothy Fry, OSB, ed., *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in English* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982), 49-50 (chapter 23).

the church was to keep the offender from spreading further theological toxins, which meant a careful trial, followed by execution.

This extreme action was, however, rarer than Calvin's detractors make it out to be. The *Register* gives an account of the trial of Michael Servetus. While Calvin approved of the burning at the stake of this troublesome heretic, the decision did not rest with Calvin alone, but ultimately with the Consistory. In such matters, of course, the pastors exercised much influence. For Calvin, the need for ecclesiastical policing of doctrine was as important as the need for a municipal police service to oversee the rule of law. He regarded discipline as first and foremost educational, though as François Wendel has remarked, "for all the vital importance that Calvin attaches to ecclesiastical discipline he refrained from making it one of the marks of the true Church."³¹ Many herald discipline as a mark of the true church in the Reformed tradition; however, it was not Calvin who codified this, but John Knox, in his authorship of the Scots Confession of 1560. Beyond that, Andrew Melville, Knox's theological successor, clarified the importance of discipline in the *Second Book of Discipline* in 1578. The Scots Confession, noted Michael F. Graham, "went beyond Calvin in one significant respect. Like the French Reformed Confession of 1559 and the Belgic Confession of

³¹ François Wendel, *Calvin: Origin and Development of His Religious Thought*, tr. Philip Mairet (New York: Harper & Row, 1950), 301.

1561, the Scots Confession insisted that congregational discipline was essential as the third mark of the true church, in addition to preaching and the proper administration of the Protestant sacraments of baptism and communion."³² With its feudalistic baggage, perhaps Knox and his colleagues recognized that the Scottish church required discipline among both its clergy and its people. Indeed, "The Books of Discipline laid out an ambitious programme of behavioural reform, although most first generation kirk sessions limited their efforts to punishing fornicators whose illicit unions resulted in illegitimate births."³³ These reforms were later extended, and the authority of the local Session became legendary: even in Canada, well into the twentieth century, a church member would shake in his boots if he saw a member of the Kirk Session walking up to his doorstep, fearing at least an upbraiding for some sin in which he had obviously been caught.

So, beyond Scripture and the monastic tradition that was part of the culture of the church, what may have influenced Calvin's decision to enact a Company of Pastors for Geneva?

Calvin's Early Life

Calvin had been sent by his father to study for the priesthood at Picardy at the age of 14. He transferred to Collège de Montaigu, where he

³² Michael F. Graham, "Scotland," in *The Reformation World*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (London: Routledge, 2000), 420.

³³ *Ibid.*, 425.

pursued a licentiate in arts, which then was essentially a preparatory program for the priesthood. As Calvin completed his licentiate, his father changed his mind and had him prepare to study law instead, which sent him to the University of Orléans. From there, he went to Bourges, and then back to Paris.³⁴ During his time of study, according to Calvin scholar Herman J. Selderhuis, the great reformer belonged to a prayer gathering against the plague, with colleagues, in the Roman Catholic cathedral in August of 1533.³⁵ He had been born, after all, a Roman Catholic in France, and experienced what mutual encouragement could do for people in crisis – and the plague had certainly been a crisis for much of Europe in the early sixteenth century. Calvin came to understand that ministry was also plagued with crises; he saw the need for clergy to be together and to be accountable to one another, for their own good and for the good of the whole church. But, one may ask, why was the good of the church dependent on clergy? “[F]or Calvin, the improvement of society and government depended finally on the improvement of human beings (and therefore) the crucial arena for the reformation was the church, for only the church, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, could reform the human heart.”³⁶ This is why Calvin so valued the strengthening of the clergy,

³⁴ Ford Lewis Battles, *Interpreting John Calvin*, ed. Robert Benedetto (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 48-51.

³⁵ Herman J. Selderhuis, *John Calvin: A Pilgrim's Life* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 25.

³⁶ Bouwsma, *A Sixteenth Century Portrait*, 214.

since it was the clergy who modelled health and growth and leadership for the whole church, which in turn brought improvement to society at large. This was, in part, why the Company of Pastors played so vital a role in Genevan society, especially in the criticism and self-criticism of the clergy. There were so many changes taking place as a result of the Reformation, the clergy were being thrown into theologically new territory, if not a time warp:

When the Reformation began and priests were virtually compelled to wed as a token of their theological conversions, they stepped into an area that quickly came to be governed by local law. Clerical lives were henceforward under public scrutiny....To produce a prodigal son or daughter could besmirch the reputation of a pastor and his wife, for this misfortune hinted at some fundamental flaw in the child-rearing practices of the parents, even if this had not been visible to their neighbours.³⁷

Pastors needed the support of fellow sojourners who were going through similar trials – support that both encouraged and admonished. Ministers needed to be above reproach at every level if society was to be called to the same high standard. This would help to fuel the dream of continental reformers to re-form the world into a place that truly lived by God's Word and honoured God. Calvin's motto was, in practice if not in word, "Improve the world, begin with Geneva."³⁸

³⁷ Susan C. Karant-Nunn, "Reformation Society, Women and the Family," in *The Reformation World*, 438.

³⁸ Selderhuis, *A Pilgrim's Life*, 129.

What was this Geneva, whose improvement Calvin believed would change the world? What kind of city did he inherit?

Sixteenth century Geneva

Prior to the Reformation, Geneva had been an episcopally governed city: the bishop was both the temporal and spiritual ruler. Typically, his authority was exercised by an ecclesiastical council. Some of his temporal responsibilities were delegated to laymen. As Robert Kingdon describes the hierarchy, the bishop had immediately under him an official and a vicar (who became the bishop's replacement in his absence). Under these men were 32 canons, who were nobles; and under them, several hundred ordained clergy, both secular and mendicant.³⁹ Beyond this, the bishop allowed the people to elect four syndics, who then chose a small council of 12 to 25 men who met at least once a week "to handle local civic problems."⁴⁰ However, among these local civic problems seemed not to be moral issues, for, "[t]he control of public morals should have been the responsibility of the bishop, but he was seldom interested."⁴¹ This may have been somewhat self-serving, since pre-reformation Geneva was

³⁹ R.M. Kingdon, *Church and Society in Reformation Europe*, "V: Reformation and resolution: the case of Geneva" (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), 207-208. The nature of this book as a compendium of previous publications means that pagination is inconsistent.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 210.

known for having prostitutes whose principal responsibility was to service the visiting merchants and clergymen!

When Geneva experienced its sixteenth century popular uprising that brought reform (and Reformation) to the city, it became, essentially, a secular city-state; the government confiscated ecclesiastical property, and the bishop and his clergy were all evicted from the city. The changes began in the 1520s, but it was not until May 21, 1536 that the males of the population of Geneva voted to adopt the Protestant Reformation.⁴² Much of the episcopal power migrated to the city council – some of which happened with the bishop's blessing prior to his eviction.

The Roman system of Geneva's past held a different view of the church than Calvin would bring. As Karl Barth has written, "The church is not for Calvin a saving institution, seriously though he takes it. It is the visible fellowship of believers."⁴³ The former episcopal government of Geneva had operated as an ecclesiastically-centred one, but the emphasis was on the institution and its maintenance rather than on the people as the church. With Calvin's view taking hold, the pastors would have a responsibility to develop and grow the church, requiring that they be educated and admonished to that end. Calvin entered Geneva with a political system that had been reformed, but a clergy that was, at best,

⁴² Ibid., 211.

⁴³ Karl Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, tr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 269.

confused. He said, "Our colleagues are more an obstacle than a help: they are rough and conceited, show no initiative, and even less knowledge. But the worst is that I cannot trust them."⁴⁴ The clergy were going to need to be reformed (literally), or replaced. In many cases, they were replaced, but even these men would need support and encouragement if they were to undertake the continuing reformation of this great city. They needed what would become the Company of Pastors.

Calvin and Farel

Calvin first went to Geneva in partnership with William (Guillaume) Farel. This first effort began in 1536 and was unceremoniously terminated in 1538, when people rebelled, not wanting to trade a Roman Catholic yoke for a Protestant one!⁴⁵ Because there was a lack of clerical leadership, people drifted and were more difficult to manage. This surely contributed to Calvin's conviction, later implemented in the Company of Pastors, that the people required strong leadership if they were to become the kind of city that could influence the world for Christ.

After spending two years in exile, principally in Strasbourg (under the influence of Martin Bucer), Calvin returned to Geneva on the

⁴⁴ Selderhuis, *A Pilgrim's Life*, 125.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 214.

invitation of the city fathers in 1541. Though some compare Calvin's role to that of the bishop in pre-reformation Geneva, it was never so. Calvin never had significant legal power such as the bishop had; his influence came principally through moral suasion. However, Calvin did have a measure of political power, though it was exercised almost exclusively in community. And that community was found in the Consistory and the Company of Pastors. As part of the terms of negotiating his return to Geneva, Calvin wrote sternly about the important role that the clergy were to play in the ongoing reformation of the city: "Those who hold the position of minister of the Word, since the governing of your souls has been committed to them, are to be acknowledged in the relation of parents to you, and valued and honoured for the service they perform among you through the Lord's calling."⁴⁶ Calvin would need to bring unity to both the pastors and the elders. Unity is a key theme in the New Testament, one that was especially dealt with by the apostle Paul in writing to the church at Corinth. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul said, "live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather be of one mind, united in thought and purpose."⁴⁷ Calvin reordered Paul's admonition for the Genevan community: "Logically speaking, the elimination of division should come first. This would lead to an inner

⁴⁶ Bouwsma, *A Sixteenth Century Portrait*, 219-220.

⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 1.10 [New Living Translation].

harmony...speaking with one voice logically came in third.”⁴⁸ In one sense, that ‘speaking with one voice’ did happen early, though it was with Calvin’s own voice. He needed to develop unity of doctrine and purpose to the Company and the Consistory if they, together, were going to bring harmony to public life in Geneva.

The Consistory

The Consistory was the principal level of government in Reformed Geneva, and by far the most controversial single institution established by the Reformation in Geneva.⁴⁹ Yet it was needed, especially given the gap left by the eviction of the bishop; even before the spiritual *coup d’état*, morals were quite lax in episcopally-governed Geneva. An ecclesiastical and political body of ministers and magistrates with a magistrate as its convener, the Consistory met each week on Thursday (and on Tuesdays before Communion), and acted as a court for legal purposes, “dealing primarily with matters of behaviour, including non-Reformed religious practices, financial disputes, marital strife, issues of sexual fidelity, and personal conflicts of various sorts.”⁵⁰ Though the Consistory had a legal tone, it was intended to strengthen faith: “For Calvin...what was meant to

⁴⁸ Eva-Maria Faber, “Mutual Connectedness as a Gift and a Task,” *John Calvin’s Impact on Church and Society, 1509-2009*, ed. Martin Ernst Hirzel and Martin Sallmann (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 133.

⁴⁹ R.M. Kingdon, *Church and Society*, 218.

⁵⁰ William Stacy Johnson, *John Calvin: Reformer For the 21st Century* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2009), 91-92.

have been of primary importance was not so much discipline and public order, but one's life with and for God."⁵¹ That is, the teaching and ruling elders who comprised the Consistory were to be less disciplinarians and more disciple-makers, helping people grow in their faith. Nevertheless, Calvin demanded, and received, the right of the Consistory to excommunicate – a controversial move, to say the least. Yet for Calvin, the Consistory was far less a punitive court than a confessional; those who were brought before the Consistory most often left not with a penalty, but with absolution.⁵² This would have taken the elders some getting used to, to be sure, but it would be the pastors who would assist them in creating a theological framework around which they could exercise their responsibility. The pastors helped to form and shape the elders in the Consistory, yet it had the power to dismiss a pastor, sometimes doing so without notice, usually because of words said in a sermon which offended a member of one of the councils.⁵³

Orders of leadership

The *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* prescribed four orders of church leadership: pastors, doctors (teachers), elders, and deacons. Joseph Small has written that “[i]t is misleading to think of them as a differentiated

⁵¹ Selderhuis, *John Calvin: A Pilgrim's Life*, 123.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 124.

⁵³ R.M. Kingdon, *Church and Society*, 217.

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."⁵⁴ In their function with the Word, the elders were those given primary responsibility for law and order in the community. Part of the established political structure in Geneva involved three councils outside these four orders of leadership: the Little Council, the Council of Sixty, and the Council of Two Hundred.⁵⁵ The Consistory was composed of two, four and six from each of these councils respectively, along with the pastors of the city. The elders were representatives of the magistracy, and their number was static; the pastors' numbers, however, changed regularly, and at one point there is speculation that there were as many as between 19 and 22 pastors in the Consistory at its peak.⁵⁶

The Consistory, as noted earlier, was designed to maintain discipline in the city. "It was made up of all the elders and city pastors

⁵⁴ Joseph D. Small, *The Travail of the Presbytery*, 2 [article online]; available from <http://oga.pcusa.org/mgbconnect/pubs/travail.pdf>; Internet.

⁵⁵ Hughes, *Register*, 41.

⁵⁶ William G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 76. Naphy appears to contradict himself when he notes on p. 78 that there were only between 9 and 12 pastors in the Company in this period.

with one syndic added as its presiding officer. It acted as a court and met once a week. The elders were chosen so as to represent all of the districts into which the city was divided....This was the most controversial single institution established by the reformation in Geneva"⁵⁷ – especially since it had the power to excommunicate, which was rare among disciplinary bodies in Protestant circles.⁵⁸ Apparently, the authority given to the Consistory had the desired effect; John Knox, during his period of exile in Geneva, reported that while he had seen good doctrine in other places, in no other city had he seen such good behaviour.⁵⁹ The Consistory, because it included the Company of Pastors, received the influence of the clergy on an ongoing basis, but the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* required that the councils consult with the pastors every year when drawing up slates of nominations for elders and deacons prior to elections, though this was not followed invariably. It was not until 1562 that there is sure evidence that the pastors were consulted by the Small Council when it drew up its annual slate of nominees, in this case, for the office of deacon.⁶⁰ Kingdon notes, "This ecclesiastical structure was an outstanding success in

⁵⁷ Kingdon, *Church and Society*, Chapter V, 218. The chapter from which this comes gives an exceptional overview of the process of reforming Geneva.

⁵⁸ Kingdon, *Church and Society*, "VIII: The Control of Morals in Calvin's Geneva", 11.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 12; cf. David Laing, ed., *The Works of John Knox*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1855), 240. In this letter to Mrs. Locke dated December 9, 1556, Knox says (in Braid Scots, of course), "...to this place, whair I nether feir nor eschame to say is the maist perfyte schoole of Chryst that ever was in the erth since the dayis of the Apostillis."

⁶⁰ Kingdon, *Church and Society*, Chapter VIII, 7.

consolidating the reformation in Geneva. Much of it persists there down to the present.”⁶¹

The Company’s meeting

The meeting of the Company began each Friday morning at 7:00 with a community Bible study called the *Congrégation*, where the public was invited to attend an exegetical study of a particular Bible passage, with comment and discussion among the pastors and teachers from the academy, always including Calvin himself; when appropriate, members of the church would be invited to participate. This study was intended “as something of a development course for members, and as continuing education for pastors. There was room for discussion, for treatment of new insights, but always within the context of guarding the true teaching.”⁶² Then, once that was complete, the pastors met together privately in the Company’s weekly meeting, “to handle routine business, to discuss theology, and to engage in criticism of themselves and their colleagues.”⁶³ Kingdon notes that the Company possessed four formal functions: ordination, education, mutual- and self-criticism, and missionary work.⁶⁴ It is the twofold responsibility of theological

⁶¹ Ibid., Chapter V, 219.

⁶² Selderhuis, *A Pilgrim’s Life*, 125-126.

⁶³ Kingdon, *Church and Society*, Chapter V, 216-217.

⁶⁴ Robert M. Kingdon, “Calvin and Presbytery: The Geneva Company of Pastors,” in *Pacific Theological Review* (Volume XVIII, Number 2: Winter 1985), 47-53.

discussion and mutual and self-critique that seems to be missing from the majority of Reformed judicatories today. The Company oversaw the church, and, with the leadership of a Moderator, presented “the wishes of the entire Company to the governing council.”⁶⁵ Some historians and theologians have viewed John Calvin as something of a dictator, since he was Moderator of the Company of Pastors from its inception until his death. But the fact is that Calvin did not speak with authority before the Consistory or one of the Councils on any matter about which the Company had not already ruled. And, contrary to popular belief, Calvin did not always get his way: for example, had Calvin exerted tyrannical influence, the Genevan church would have celebrated the Eucharist weekly. The great Reformer did not win that battle; he was not an autocrat. Indeed, the establishment of the Consistory was the result of Calvin’s demand for discipline, and his way of preventing a sort of antinomianism that he feared would stem from the doctrine of justification by faith alone.⁶⁶

The Company was something of a self-perpetuating body, since it was principally responsible for the choosing of pastors to fill pulpit vacancies. It was somewhat independent of state control, though a measure of influence from the councils seemed inevitable.

⁶⁵ Robert M. Kingdon, “Church and State,” in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 356.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 357.

It was clear that it was the company, not the council, that had the decisive role in their initial selection. They normally held office for life. If they were deposed, for bad behaviour or incorrect belief, it was normally, although not invariably, at the initiative of the company. If they were released to take positions elsewhere, it was normally the permission of the company that was decisive."⁶⁷

That said, it wasn't until 1546 that a stable, unified Company of Pastors existed. There was significant turnover among the clergy of Geneva until that time.⁶⁸

Participation in the Consistory was most pastors' only civic duty; in that culture, pastors were mostly *bourgeoisie*, limiting their participation outside what was required of them by their office. Attendance at weekly meetings was compulsory, and most pastors within the city had nearly perfect attendance records. Those from the rural areas were given greater leeway in their participation because of travelling constraints, but were required to attend at least once a month. All of these clergy "were marked by education, proven religious zeal, noble birth, fiery preaching, and economic activity."⁶⁹ These pastors were learned and high-quality leaders. Commonly, in that culture, the educated were often the wealthy, thus the *bourgeois* status of most clergy.

The Company's influence went beyond the Consistory into society as a whole in Geneva, because the pastors were the ones who occupied the

⁶⁷ Kingdon, *Church and Society*, Chapter VIII, 8.

⁶⁸ Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation*, 72.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

pulpits of the city, meaning that they “controlled the only means of mass communication and public indoctrination.”⁷⁰ While this was efficient, it was not all rosy. Genevans complained about the size and influence of the French refugee community, something Calvin was passionate about growing as a Frenchman himself; and they resented the attempt to ban certain traditional baptismal names, typically names of local saints or superstitious names.⁷¹ As the Reformed tradition developed, liturgies excised baptismal names altogether, assuming that the child’s given name had been chosen and would be used by the elder presenting the child for baptism on behalf of the Session.⁷² This seemingly austere policy on baptism was meant to attempt to curtail the last vestiges of Roman influence on the community, but it spawned several controversies. Indeed, not everyone was satisfied with the results of the Reformation. One anti-Calvinist in 1553 quipped, “Before Calvin was in this city, we drank good wine.”⁷³

Even though the pastors controlled the communication lines, their power was limited. Pastors were regularly called before the senate (the Little Council) to be censured – including Calvin. Still, as William Naphy asserts, “Any attempt to change Genevan society required a unified,

⁷⁰ Ibid., 154.

⁷¹ Ibid., 144.

⁷² A contemporary example may be found in *The Book of Common Worship*, ed. E. Margaret MacNaughton (Toronto: The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1991), 125.

⁷³ Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, tr. M. Wallace McDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 107.

articulate Company of Pastors.”⁷⁴ Clearly, the Company played a pivotal role in the Protestant Christianization of Geneva and points beyond.

In this chapter, we have reviewed sources, the historical and theological models presented in sixteenth century Geneva, as well as the city’s context. In Chapter 3, we will examine the understanding of the human person in Calvin’s socio-political context, to see how this may inform an understanding of the differences between that period and the present with respect to the oversight of clergy in the Reformed tradition.

⁷⁴ Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation*, 223.

CHAPTER 3:

Pastors as people? A sixteenth century view of the human person

When Christians write about “humanism”, it’s not usually in a very good light. The battle cry of conservative Christianity in the 1980s was uttered against “secular humanism” – a term that, ironically, few of its opponents likely would have been able to define correctly. Even fewer of them would have believed that in the time of the Reformation, many of the ‘movers and shakers’ for reforming the church of Jesus Christ would have been identified, if not self-identified, as humanists.

Humanism and the pastor

Humanism, however, was not always a bad thing for the church. In some respects, it may still not be a bad thing for the church; it depends on the context in which the term, or the philosophy, is used. In general terms, it may be defined as “An outlook or system of thought attaching prime importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters.”⁷⁵

⁷⁵ “Humanism,” available from http://www.google.ca/#hl=en&source=hp&q=define+humanism&oq=define+humanism&aq=f&aqi=g6&aql=undefined&gs_sm=e&gs_upl=46

Having looked at historical and theological foundations for Calvin's Company of Pastors in Chapter 2, the purpose of Chapter 3 is to understand how the human person was viewed in the sixteenth century context, and specifically, how this may have impacted Calvin's desire to provide the Company for himself and his colleagues in Geneva.

In a not-that-long-bygone era, the pastor was known as the *parson*; the terms were interchangeable. Now, we tend to think of the term *parson* as applying solely to an old-fashioned preacher dressed in a tired looking suit with a stained fedora on his head. But the word 'parson' is just a derivative of the word 'person'. The parson in the community was seen, in one sense, as a representative person among all persons. Yet today, in certain contexts, pastors are not seen as 'persons' in the sense that they are not always treated with the respect typically afforded persons of their office, education or community stature – especially by the congregations they serve. This is particularly true in traditions where congregational church government is followed. In many such environments, the pastor is seen as a hired servant, appointed to do the bidding of the congregation – irrespective of the degree of training he or she has received for the position, or the sense of call and gifting received from the Holy Spirit.

This reality is not limited, however, to congregationalist settings. Because most churches are sufficiently small to prevent them from having multiple staff, and because of the 'silo' nature of church leadership and the suspicions and difficulties of inter-church co-operation, pastors of all stripes tend to be 'Lone Rangers': men and women who 'do their thing' without much encouragement, or much accountability, from others walking the same path. Has this always been so?

It seems, if the Company of Pastors is any indication, that it has not always been so. In more hierarchical denominations, such as the episcopally-governed Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions, the phenomenon of regular gatherings of clergy are a fact of life. Could it be that these traditions have been less likely to eschew humanism? And did Calvin himself embrace humanism? We alluded earlier to the possibility of Calvin having a place in the spectrum of humanism as it was understood in the sixteenth century. He received a decidedly humanistic education; his teachers were "educational innovators";⁷⁶ they were humanists, and many were subsequently associated with the Reformation, especially in Switzerland. As a young learner, "[I]ike other cultivated men of his time, he was open to so much that the important question is less what he read than why he preferred and made a part of himself some

⁷⁶ Battles, *Interpreting John Calvin*, 50-51.

works and authors rather than others.”⁷⁷ His sources may at times be hard to trace, but his contemporary affinities were easier to spot. As Calvin biographer William Bouwsma has noted, “Calvinism was the creation of a devout sixteenth century French Catholic.”⁷⁸ Calvin’s childhood and youth significantly influenced him in later life. His education, it has been suggested, later made him an evangelical humanist – something many would say is a contradiction in terms. There may have been different streams of Protestant humanism in that period, for as Richard Rex has stated, “Mainstream Protestant theology denied the freedom of the human will, while humanists affirmed or assumed it... [T]he principle of free will was inscribed in the humanist education programme.”⁷⁹ In this sense, Calvin was decidedly not humanistic, since his conviction about God’s sovereignty was insatiably strong. Still, Bouwsma suggests that Calvin “remained in major ways always a humanist of the late Renaissance.”⁸⁰ Certainly, his education will have rendered him a humanist. It is suggested that Calvin “aimed to apply the novelties of humanism to recover a biblical understanding of Christianity...(seeking) to appeal rhetorically to the human heart rather

⁷⁷ Bouwsma, *A Sixteenth Century Portrait*, 3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷⁹ Richard Rex, “Humanism,” in *The Reformation World*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (London: Routledge, 2000), 66.

⁸⁰ Bouwsma, *A Sixteenth Century Portrait*, 13.

than to compel agreement.”⁸¹ Unlike Luther, whose vitriol against Erasmus (the poster-boy for humanism) is voluminous, Calvin rarely attacked him. Bouwsma views the great Reformer as a Renaissance humanist (essentially one who challenged mediaeval Scholasticism⁸²). To support his claim, he notes that Calvin used, in the last French edition of the *Institutes*, the description of the gospel most closely associated with Erasmus: “Christian philosophy.”⁸³ Mentoring, a common theme in humanism, became part of Calvin’s life-work, both as one mentored (by Cop, Farel, Bucer, even Luther⁸⁴) and as a mentor himself (to the pastors who came and went from the Company, especially Theodore Beza). Further, Calvin’s ideal that pastors and secular rulers should be generally educated orators is a humanist ideal.⁸⁵

Even those who are reluctant to view Calvin as a humanist must acknowledge – despite modern stereotypes – that he was not a stoic. He wrote: “We must reject that insane philosophy that requires men to be utterly without feeling if they are deemed wise. The Stoics of long ago

⁸¹ “John Calvin (French theologian),” in *Encyclopedia Britannica online* [online encyclopedia entry], available from <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/90247/John-Calvin/13433/Intellectual-formation;Internet>.

⁸² “Renaissance Humanism” [online article], available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance_humanism;Internet.

⁸³ Bouwsma, *A Sixteenth Century Portrait*, 14.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

must have been devoid of common sense in taking way all feeling from a man.”⁸⁶

While the rampant hiring-and-firing motif that is sometimes seen in American congregationalism today was not the norm in sixteenth century Geneva, pastors certainly were called on the carpet for things that they said that were not universally liked. The Senate, the Little Council, regularly censured pastors, including Calvin himself, for their sermons.⁸⁷ Doubtlessly, Calvin knew how stressful this could be for pastors, whom he knew to be true parsons, true persons. The Company would help them to avoid trouble, and if trouble were found in spite of it, the pastors in the Company would be able to nurture and console one another – even though, as Bouwsma states, “Karl Barth noted that the sixteenth century Reformers lacked an adequate (that is, fully biblical) understanding of the human personality.”⁸⁸ Yet, as Bouwsma goes on to say,

If the personality is not a hierarchy, the mind cannot rule over its lower faculties. This is why, for Calvin, Plato had been wrong in claiming that to know the good is enough to do the good. In addition, if human being is an undifferentiated unity, sin has vitiated every part of it. It cannot be identified with, much less limited to, the body; and no privileged area of the personality can be depended on for salvation. This was what Calvin meant by “total depravity.” Total depravity means, not that there is no capacity for good in human beings, but that no human activity is altogether blameless.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Ibid., 134. The author’s footnote highlights that Calvin had already been cool toward Stoicism in his Seneca commentary.

⁸⁷ Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation*, 159.

⁸⁸ Bouwsma, *A Sixteenth Century Portrait*, 131.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 139.

While the Anabaptists, and others, sought for the ideal human community composed of the righteous, Calvin understood, because of the doctrine of total depravity, that this was humanly impossible. In this he stood in concert with Luther and Bucer;⁹⁰ the local, visible church would never be a pure entity. Calvin saw the heart as the seat of intellect, even though for him, the human being is “both less and more than intellectual.”⁹¹ But in his sermons he gives evidence of viewing the human body as a good creation of God⁹² – something that sets him apart from his Puritan, Victorian, and even Calvinist successors! Calvin may indeed have had a more holistic understanding of the human person than he has been given popular credit for.

Calvin understood the importance of the human body in God’s economy. His “pronouncements about sex...range from conventional approval of what is kept properly under control to hints of gratitude for genital pleasure.”⁹³ To Bouwsma, Calvin was comfortable in one person as both a high scholastic philosopher and a rhetorician-humanist.⁹⁴

Humanism was the prevailing philosophy of the day, and there is no doubt, according to Christoph Burger, that Calvin was a product of the education of his time. Yet there appears to be little agreement among

⁹⁰ Wendel, *Origins and Development*, 297-298.

⁹¹ Bouwsma, *A Sixteenth Century Portrait*, 149.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 134; cf. Calvin’s Sermon #58 on Job.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 230-231.

Calvin scholars as to how he fit into humanism *per se*; he is seen by some as a lost son of humanism, and by others as a Christian humanist. But that he was a product of his day is a given.⁹⁵ For proof of this, one need turn no further than Book 1, Chapter 1, Section 1 of the *Institutes* themselves, wherein Calvin begins his *magnum opus* with these words: “Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”⁹⁶ For Calvin, there is no knowledge of God without knowledge of self, and there is no knowledge of self without knowledge of God. Knowledge of God and ourselves, says Eberhard Busch, is the centre of Christian theology; yet we cannot stand alone; human beings are fully dependent on God. For Calvin, what is good about humanity is “not something earned but something granted through grace.”⁹⁷ In that sense, Calvin did believe a Christian form of humanism, the philosophy of the day tempered by good theology. Calvin was by no means a pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps humanist. He fully believed that humanity was created perfect in God’s grace, and that the sin that has tainted humanity is by no means the Creator’s fault.⁹⁸ For Calvin, the soul is the noblest part of the human being: “the *imago Dei*

⁹⁵ Christoph Burger, “Calvin and Humanism,” tr. J. Guder, in *The Calvin Handbook*, 138-139. Burger cites scholars such as W.J. Bouwsma, B. Cottret and A. McGrath.

⁹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes* I.1.i., 35.

⁹⁷ Eberhard Busch, “The Knowledge of God and the Human Being,” tr. J. Guder, in *The Calvin Handbook*, 225, 227.

⁹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes* I.15.i, 183.

has...its place in the soul."⁹⁹ But it is all deeply overshadowed by the fall. Of course, in Calvin's time, pastoral care was called the *cure of souls*¹⁰⁰ – a fact lost today amid the advent of contemporary psychology which finds the root of our problems in places other than in the soul's distance from its Creator. As David Willis-Watkins points out, "the single, focused office of the pastor is to hear and re-speak the voice of Christ"¹⁰¹ – something possible only by trusting the promises of Christ.

The reigning view of humanity in the sixteenth century suggests that Calvin saw the need for pastors, fallen people that they are, through whom the Lord ministers to other equally fallen people, to have a support system, a system of accountability. The Company of Pastors would serve as that system.

Calvin: fully human(istic?)

The fact that this conversation even needs to occur is testament to the reality within the scholarship of ecclesiastical history and theology that many still view Calvin as something less than human himself – perhaps because of his shyness. Had Isabel Myers and her mother, Katharine Briggs, been around in the sixteenth century – to say nothing of Carl Jung

⁹⁹ Busch, "The Knowledge of God," 227.

¹⁰⁰ cf. John T. McNeill, *History of the Cure of Souls* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), esp. chapter 9.

¹⁰¹ David Willis-Watkins, "Calvin's Theology of Pastoral Care," in *Calvin Studies VI*, ed. John H. Leith (Davidson, NC: n.p., 1992), 142.

– Calvin likely would have been pegged as an introvert. An introvert is someone who receives his or her energy principally by being alone. In that aloneness, the introvert gathers the energy necessary to be able to be with people. Yet many people, still to this day, misunderstand introverts as being aloof, even arrogant. This is especially problematic for people in leadership. There is much to suggest that Calvin formed deep friendships, both in his youth and in his later years. “[T]hroughout his life he continues to be a man of deep attachments.... The waves of grief after the death of his wife Idelette belie the seemingly passionless courtship.”¹⁰²

Were Calvin not fully human in his context, he could not have cared for people, nor seen the need for people to be cared for, as he did. He, with his culture, saw all people as human beings made in God’s image. Even though there is no evidence to suggest that Calvin or the pastors of Geneva played any role in the operation of the General Hospital (a responsibility given to the fourth ecclesiastical order, the deacons),¹⁰³ Calvin still saw a role for the church in caring, especially through the pastors. His understanding of caring for others went far beyond the “I want to help people” of the social-work-that-passes-for-pastoral-care of our day:

¹⁰² Oberman, “John Calvin: The Mystery of His Impact,” 2. Oberman cites the Dutch writer A.M. Hugo, whose Dutch study of Calvin’s writing about Seneca’s *De Clementia* highlights the reality of Calvin’s deeply-felt humanity.

¹⁰³ Kingdon, *Church and Society*, “VI: Social Welfare in Calvin’s Geneva,” 59.

Calvin's theology of pastoral care is what the church must teach and do about the facts: (a) that Christ is the pastor who cares for those whom he joins to himself by the bond of the Spirit, (b) that this one pastor accommodates himself to govern through humans who are called pastors in so far as they are servants of his Word, and (c) that the wholeness which is the scope of this pastoral care is the freedom of those whom Christ more and more unites to himself until he is finally at one with them.¹⁰⁴

That is, because Christ himself was human, and the risen, exalted Christ longs to be united to his chosen people, the pastor – the parson – is the one whom Christ uses to exercise his care over his chosen people until that union with Christ is realized. Pastors stand in the gap, metaphorically speaking, between the here-and-now and the eternal now, nurturing faith that opens the eyes of the heart to see toward eternity, while living fully in the present moment.

If the pastor is expected to care for others, then the pastor must be able to identify with them, and be fully human himself or herself. Pastors, including Calvin, were people in sixteenth century Geneva. They required support and accountability – true Christian fellowship.

Even a cursory glance over Calvin's personal correspondence indicates that he modelled true Christian fellowship among pastors, finding and offering comfort and exhortation especially through theological orthodoxy and its defence. In his farewell letter to William Farel (his 'John the Baptist' forerunner figure), he wrote, "Farewell, my

¹⁰⁴ David Willis-Watkins, "Calvin's Theology of Pastoral Care," 137.

most excellent and upright brother; and since it is the will of God that you should survive me in the world, live mindful of our intimacy, which, as it was useful to the church of God, so the fruits of it await us in heaven.”¹⁰⁵

John Calvin was a pastoral theologian. For him, there was no theology divorced from the church, no talk of God apart from God’s covenant people. Knowing he was dying, in the spring of 1564, his notary aided him in preparing his last will and testament. It begins, before moving to the disbursement of his modest temporal goods, with thanks to God for his own redemption in Christ, and for divine grace to have had the privilege of teaching God’s Word. His fellow pastors in the Company served as his witnesses.¹⁰⁶ The next day, Calvin addressed the syndics and Council of Geneva to thank and exhort them, offering some advice for the continuance of gospel ministry in Geneva, not denying his own frail estate, and praying for them. According to Theodore Beza, who would follow him as Moderator of the Company of Pastors, Calvin then asked these same men to forgive him any faults, and “held out his hand to them...in respect of his affection as their father.”¹⁰⁷ A day after that, he addressed the ministers of Geneva, speaking frankly about his ill health (he would die a month later), and giving his testimony – a testimony

¹⁰⁵ John Calvin, *Letters of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980), 246.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 250, 252.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 253-256, and footnote.

which reads much like the apostle Paul before King Agrippa (cf. Acts 25-26).¹⁰⁸

Just more than a week before his death, Calvin symbolically shared a last meal with his friends, a sign of his love and care for the men with whom he had worked over the course of his 23 years in Geneva. Beza gives this account:

[On] Friday, May 19, because according to the custom of this church all the ministers gather to judge each other's lives and doctrine and then in sign of friendship take a meal together, he agreed that the supper would be held in his house, where, having had himself brought in a chair, he said these words on entering, "My brothers, I have come to see you for the last time, since after this I will never come to the table."... This was a pitiable entrance for us, although he himself gave the prayer as best he could and forced himself to entertain us, although he could eat very little. Nevertheless before the end of the supper he took leave and had himself carried back to his room, which was nearby, saying these words with the happiest expression he could: "A wall between us will not prevent me from being joined in spirit with you."¹⁰⁹

Calvin was lucid to his death, and Beza was with him on his last day. John Calvin, best known as the great theologian but best loved as the pastor's pastor, died and was buried without pomp or show. He died a person, and a believer that pastors are people. "The man who had continually submitted to father figures throughout his life had himself become a father figure."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 257.

¹⁰⁹ Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, 261.

¹¹⁰ Selderhuis, *A Pilgrim's Life*, 258.

The culture of sixteenth century Christian philosophy allowed for a broad understanding of pastors as people, giving us a foundation for the purpose behind the Company of Pastors. In Chapter 4, we will consider a sampling of the current practices resembling the Company of Pastors, to see what models exist today and how they compare with Calvin's.

CHAPTER 4

Investigation of Present Practices Resembling a Company of Pastors

The need for an organization resembling a Company of Pastors among clergy is no less great today than it was when Calvin first instituted the Geneva Company in the sixteenth century. This is because even pastors need to be pastored; shepherds need to be shepherded; pastors are people who need to experience care from others. Jesus, who is both Shepherd and Pasture on which we feed and grow, pastors us through other people. Calvin knew and understood this; in his commentary on John 21.15, where Jesus reinstates Peter and asks him if he loves Jesus, Calvin wrote that no one “will steadily persevere in the discharge of this office (of feeding the flock), unless the love of Christ shall reign in his heart”.¹¹¹ Jesus desires to pastor clergy through others; therefore, some form of support structure must exist for ministers.

There is a perpetual interest in clergy ‘support groups’ involving various levels of intimacy. Some are intradenominational, others interdenominational; some are even interfaith. The contemporary notion

¹¹¹ John Calvin, Commentary on John 21.15, in *The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection* [CD-ROM] (Rio, WI: Ages Software, 2004).

of the 'ministerial association' probably finds its genus in the connective nature of the early Reformed church, or, perhaps, in the colloquia of priests that would have existed in the pre-Reformation era. Some met for business, others for support, others for both. One dynamic that has changed since the time of the Reformation, for many Christian denominations, is the inclusion of women in official leadership roles, both as elders and as pastors.

Many factors

The gender dynamic makes the mutual sharing aspect of a Company of Pastors rather more challenging. There are certain parts of life and ministry which are best shared in a same-gender group, and except among the most conservative denominations within the Reformed tradition, single-gender judicatories are almost unheard of. Women and men share differently. One study has suggested that female clergy support each other better than males do, yet several women reported staying away from such groups because they tend to descend into gripe sessions.¹¹² Larger, more official gatherings only provide superficial support. How could they do otherwise? Pastoral care is, by definition, more intimate than a large, official gathering could ever be.

¹¹² Gilbert, *Who Ministers to Ministers?*, 57.

What is more, competent leadership is required for success of a supportive sharing group for pastors; Roy Oswald, a long-time consultant for the Alban Institute, suggests that the leadership should come from outside the group.¹¹³ Barbara Gilbert suggests six other key ingredients for a successful clergy group:

- 1) Common interest or relationships carried over from another context;
- 2) Small size of 4-6 persons;
- 3) One or two persons willing to risk openness and vulnerability (it is especially helpful if there is a person who is perceived as being 'strong and competent' and who is willing to be vulnerable);
- 4) Commitment to regular attendance;
- 5) Ground rules about confidentiality and group process;
- 6) Regular meetings over a long enough time that trusting relationships are built.¹¹⁴

Even the language used in a checklist of this nature, such as the term 'group process', indicates that the modern study of psychology has influenced how we talk about the manner in which groups function in contemporary society versus how they may have functioned in an earlier time.

At a cursory glance, one might assume that the Company of Pastors had ceased to exist shortly after the death of Calvin on May 27, 1564. Indeed, reading *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin*, a popularly available edition in English translation, can leave one with the impression that the Company never met again after

¹¹³ Ibid., 58.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 58-59.

November 1564, even though Theodore Beza accepted the role of Moderator of the Company after Calvin, being elected each year by the Company from 1564 to 1580.¹¹⁵ An encouraging word, however, has come from church history scholar Jennifer Powell McNutt, who has confirmed that, to the best of her wide knowledge, the Company of Pastors in Geneva has never ceased to exist. It continues to meet today and had its first female Moderator in 2001.¹¹⁶ McNutt wrote, "If there were ever any interruptions at all in the body, I would imagine it would have been the cause of French Revolutionary armies and the Napoleonic Wars."¹¹⁷

It appears that the records of the Company, beyond 1564, have not been translated into English. However, the article citing the appointment of the first female Moderator of the Company in 2001 indicates that its role has changed since Calvin's time, as one would expect. It now includes deacons as well as pastors. The article notes, "The Company of Pastors

¹¹⁵ Herman Hanko, "Theodore Beza: Reformed Theologian"[online article]; available from <http://prca.org/books/portraits/beza.htm>. Internet. Kingdon ("Geneva Company of Pastors", *Pacific Theological Review*) notes that after Beza refused re-election, the Company switched to electing its Moderator weekly. The process has since changed several times.

¹¹⁶ In fact, one online article by Roy Probert (http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/Home/Archive/Woman_pastor_aims_to_shake_up_Geneva_church.html?cid=43720) indicates that the Company, while still in existence, has found its role changed significantly, and its first female Moderator, who took the post in 2001, is a Lutheran. The article intimates that the Company now serves the Protestant Church in Geneva generally, acting more like a ministerial association with authority than what Calvin had originally set out in the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*. Michael D. Bush, writing in *The Calvin Handbook*, notes that by the 18th century, there is an inference in the work of Voltaire that the Company of Pastors "were no longer followers of Calvin" (485).

¹¹⁷ Conversation with Jennifer Powell McNutt by electronic mail, April 26-27, 2011. Dr. McNutt is Assistant Professor of Theology and History of Christianity at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois at the time of writing.

and Deacons is the theological and spiritual authority of the Protestant church. One of its main roles is to constantly interpret the gospel in the context of modern life, and to provide guidance to the Synod on these issues.”¹¹⁸ Given Calvin’s desire for the Company of Pastors to engender sound doctrine *and* mutual accountability among the participants, it seems the Geneva Company has shifted away, to an extent, from the original intent of the great Reformer.

Presbyterian Church (USA)

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has developed a Company of Pastors which serves as “a modest effort to encourage pastors to recover a shared sense of ministry’s grounding in the Faith, and to enhance the ability of pastors to live out a ministry of the Word and Sacrament.”¹¹⁹ It is not restricted to ministers of the PCUSA, and today is open to “all ministers, ordained elders, commissioned lay pastors and Christian educators.”¹²⁰ Its covenant of involvement includes agreeing to engage in daily spiritual disciplines (daily lectionary, praying the Psalms, prayers of thanksgiving and intercession), reading assigned portions from the

¹¹⁸ Roy Probert, “Woman pastor aims to shake up Geneva church” [online article], available from http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/Home/Archive/Woman_pastor_aims_to_shake_up_Geneva_church.html?cid=43720; Internet.

¹¹⁹ Joseph D. Small, “A Company of Pastors,” flyer produced by the Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (USA).

¹²⁰ N.a., “The Company of Pastors,” available from <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/companyofpastors/about-company-pastors/>; Internet.

denomination's creeds and confessions, reading common theological books and journals, and meeting regionally for prayer and study.¹²¹

While the concept was inspired by Calvin's vision for the Company, it does not mimic that which was practised in the sixteenth century in Geneva – nor need it necessarily do so to be called a Company of Pastors. The hope for the PCUSA's Company is a noble one:

Pastors deserve more from the church than a market-oriented boutique of institutional roles and functions. Their distinctive theological vocation should be encouraged and enhanced – not as an additional option, but as the defining center of pastoral calling. A company of pastors also matters, for ministerial isolation makes possible the institutional tyranny that ensnares pastors in a web of customary expectations and organizational ambitions.¹²²

This hope is variously achieved, as anecdotally, it appears that the PCUSA's Company of Pastors serves more as a reading group than an accountability body. It would be difficult to engender accountability among the members of a group which rarely met together. And while anything that encourages pastors to read once they have completed seminary is laudable, it fails to follow in the footsteps of Calvin, who desired that pastors be able to meet together to offer mutual accountability as well as encourage sound doctrine.

Before the union that created the PCUSA, a young pastor of a Presbyterian church plant in suburban Baltimore, Maryland, had a vision

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

to create a clergy group for study and fellowship, which he called a Company of Pastors. That young pastor was Eugene H. Peterson.

In an interview published in 2002, Peterson spoke of his Company this way:

Every Tuesday they'd come to my study at noon. They would bring a bag lunch. I'd have a coffeepot (*sic*). We'd meet for two hours. We were serious about what we were doing but not terribly disciplined. There was small talk. Sometimes somebody would come with a personal crisis. We'd drop everything and just spend the time listening and praying....We'd often have one evening a month, Friday evening usually, when we'd have a potluck supper together.¹²³

Later, when writing his memoirs, Peterson explained his Company of Pastors in greater detail. It began with sixteen clergy from varying denominations and, for a time, included one Jewish rabbi. It was hosted by Peterson, consistently, for its first twenty-six years at Christ Our King Presbyterian Church in Bel Air, Maryland; it continues to meet there to this day. This group would meet weekly through the year, but would have an off-site retreat day before breaking up for the summer.¹²⁴

While Peterson does not give specific indications of mutual accountability as part of his Company of Pastors, he does note that challenges of his own initiative were sometimes offered outside the group.¹²⁵

¹²³ Wood, "Committing to Mutuality," 7.

¹²⁴ Peterson, *The Pastor*, 143-160. The experience with the rabbi gave the inspiration for Peterson's book *Five Smooth Stones For Pastoral Work*.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

Another group, also part of the Presbyterian Church (USA), that has elements of a company of pastors is the Foundation for Reformed Theology. It was first begun by the late professor from Union Seminary in Virginia, John Leith. The Foundation “works to strengthen pastors in their ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ as attested to in the Scriptures, as summarized in the creeds and confessions of the church, and as articulated in the classic texts of Reformed theology, all to the glory of God and the building up of the church.”¹²⁶ It serves primarily as a continuing education resource. Since it does not purport to be a company of pastors, one may doubt its inclusion here, but because it carries – better than any other option so far noted, one might argue – the desire to promote sound doctrine, it deserves to be mentioned. Perhaps, if pastors who gathered for the seminars of the Foundation also gathered in accountability groups with one another, a truly Calvin-inspired Company of Pastors may be found therein.

There are two groups relating to the Company of Pastors on the social networking site, Facebook. One is for the PCUSA Company of Pastors already noted, and the other is for the PCUSA’s Company of New Pastors, designed to provide “vocational nurture for ministry candidates

¹²⁶ “Better Preaching, Better Teaching, Better Pastoral Care” [online article], available from <http://www.foundationrt.org/index.html>; Internet.

and new pastors”¹²⁷ following much the same format as the regular Company of Pastors, with a mentoring aspect included.

One of the ministers who belongs to the Company of Pastors Facebook group, Robert Foltz-Morrison, shared the agenda of the group to which he belongs, the North Jersey Company of Pastors. It began in September 2010 and intends to carry on after a summer break. It met monthly, and included eating a bag lunch together, structured learning around practices of ministry, and worship. Each month had a specific focus and a book or concept to be studied. Ministers from three New Jersey-area Presbyteries of the PCUSA participated, with an average attendance of 11. A total of 25 different pastors, one commissioned lay pastor and one elder participated over the course of the September-to-May meeting period, with more than half of the core group being women.

Foltz-Morrison wrote,

Most ‘sharing’ occurred in one of two formats: around lunch, someone might share with one or more persons, or the sharing might occur as pastors shared their responses to the practice(s) being spoken about. Accountability for group dynamics usually was monitored by (a) one or more of three design team members; (b) a leader who is well organized in his/her presentation; or (c) a participating pastor present that day. We did not ask pastors for accountability as ‘what did you do with that practice from the last gathering’... We did not have a behavioral covenant, but a number of design teams operate with some.... Encouragement was implicit in why we were gathered: to develop relationships and

¹²⁷ General Assembly Mission Council of the PCUSA [online article], available from <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/theologyandworship/whatwedo-new-pastors/>; Internet.

competencies in our practice of ministry. Accountability kept us from distracting conversations away from these ends. It was not a 'sharing' or support group as some pastors specifically said they already have such a group. This was a peer-learning group, or as other put it, 'a learning community.'¹²⁸

This group, like most others, has had continuing education as its focus.

But none of these aforementioned groups fulfills Calvin's desire for discipline among pastors.

The role of the Presbytery today

The arrangement in Calvin's *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* was decidedly political: the Consistory oversaw community discipline (the rule of law, essentially) and the Company of Pastors, as a subset of the Consistory, oversaw the purity of doctrine and the discipline of the clergy. As noted earlier, Robert Kingdon wrote in a lecture that the Company of Pastors had four primary functions: ordination, education, mutual criticism and self-criticism, and missionary work.¹²⁹ In theory, at least, each of these four functions became functions of the Presbytery in the polity inherited by North American Presbyterians via the Church of Scotland. Yet the missing jewel, to borrow a phrase from A.W. Tozer, seems to be the matter of mutual criticism and self-criticism. Ordination, education and missionary work are all undertaken within Presbyterian churches of every description, though in most cases, all three are overseen by agencies of the

¹²⁸ Conversation with Robert Foltz-Morrison by electronic mail, June 18, 211. Foltz-Morrison is Interim Pastor at Bloomfield Presbyterian Church on the Green, Bloomfield, New Jersey, at the time of writing.

¹²⁹ Robert M. Kingdon, "Calvin and Presbytery," 43-55.

national church or the General Assembly for the sake of consistency and convenience (an argument best saved for another occasion) rather than by presbyteries themselves. But the vast majority of clergy take vows to maintain personal deportment which does not damage the reputation of the gospel; for example, ministers of Word and Sacraments in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, at their ordination, are asked to affirm this question: “Do you promise in the strength and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to conduct yourself in your private and public life as becomes his gospel, and do you give yourself diligently and cheerfully to the service of Christ’s word, sacraments and discipline, for the furtherance of his reconciling mission in the world?”¹³⁰ One might logically ask how, without some form of mutual accountability, that could happen: does the judicatory only find out about difficulty when some moral lapse has been uncovered?

Some church leaders go to extremes, such as refusing to share a vehicle ride alone with someone of the opposite sex. Of course, the church must be *and be seen to be* a safe place for people, but that this sort of practice occurs speaks both to the litigious nature, and to the weak-willed nature of many people in the face of temptation today. Such an extreme approach would not likely have occurred to Calvin. In Calvin’s vision, the Company of Pastors would have done a sufficient job of teaching the

¹³⁰ *The Book of Common Worship*, 326.

ministers about purity of doctrine, leading to purity of mind and heart and body, such that when the time of mutual and self-criticism came along during the weekly Company meetings, none would have such sins to report! It stands to reason that if one knows one will be asked by one's colleagues about egregious behaviour, one is discouraged from engaging therein. Yet, within the Reformed tradition, there are few formalized avenues for maintaining that accountability today; it is left to the pastor to find, or begin, a group in which she or he can feel comfortable sharing and maintaining accountability for both doctrinal and moral purity. This was not Calvin's intent. Apart from the evolution (or devolution, depending on one's perspective) of the Geneva Company of Pastors, why has this not translated into modern society?

Part of the answer to this rests in the fact that the Company, like the Consistory, was integral to the republican government of the city-state of Geneva. Indeed, as Stacy Johnson has written, "Calvin's success in Geneva was due in significant part to his perceptive attention to politics. He had a gift for organization and a knack for reading political situations."¹³¹ Calvin fully understood the political system from which Geneva was reforming, and had a clear picture of that to which it was reforming. In this sense, Calvin was unique among reformers; Luther saw politics as a necessary evil, and the Anabaptists saw it as an unnecessary

¹³¹ Johnson, *John Calvin*, 109.

evil! While Calvin shared in writing the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, he also sat on a committee that wrote *Ordinances on Offices and Officers* to codify legislation governing the function of the state. While “most people during Calvin’s lifetime thought that the best government was that directed by a single person, following the monarchic principle”¹³² (and indeed this was the system under which Calvin had grown up), it was not the prevailing view in Geneva, where the idea was to govern by “small collectives of select groups rather than by a single ruler.”¹³³

Translation across the pond

Having been reformed from an episcopal government, Geneva nevertheless retained its unique nature as a city-state, meaning that anything political, including the Company, would not perfectly ‘translate’ into another national culture that did not closely resemble that of Geneva. Thus when John Knox returned to Scotland in 1559, following all of the political (and accompanying religious) upheaval of monarchical comings and goings, he returned to a nation that did not at all resemble what he had left behind in Geneva. Because the church’s structure was a key part of the political structure of Calvin’s Geneva, it was unique to that place. Anything that was to be exported to Edinburgh from Geneva was going to

¹³² Robert M. Kingdon, “Church and State,” in *The Calvin Handbook*, 355-356.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 356.

have to be altered to fit the landscape: the mountains of Switzerland and the Scottish highlands were not part of the same range!

Historian Andrew Pettegree has written that “[t]he Calvinist church in Scotland was the child of a political revolution; it was not to any extent underpinned by a broad basis of support in the population at large.”¹³⁴ It could be said that while the Genevan reformation was bloodless, the Scottish reformation was not: countless volumes document the history of the Reformation in Britain and the accompanying violence. While both Calvin and Knox experienced exile, each returned under decidedly different circumstances. Calvin returned to Geneva at the invitation of the city fathers, who sought his help in erecting a Reformed city-state that would withstand the Roman Catholic culture that surrounded it on nearly all sides; Knox returned to Edinburgh only when it was safe to do so, and by no means to the accolades of the entire populace. If one were to compare the polemic writings of Calvin and Knox, one would find far more deeply-seated vitriol in the writings of Knox, simply because the political structure to which he returned was not as amenable to his way of restructuring the church. Calvin was given a great deal of rein, while Knox was on a decidedly shorter leash.

¹³⁴ Andrew Pettegree, *Europe in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002), 199.

The Consistory of Geneva found its Scottish equivalent in the national Parliament. The Parliament was at least somewhat open to Knox's ways of reform, since it did endorse the Scots Confession, authored by Knox and based on the French Reformed Confession.¹³⁵ But the political structure would not have allowed the Scottish reformer to have adopted the Genevan model wholesale, without the complete upheaval of the already fragile Scottish governmental framework.

Further, it does not appear that Knox advocated the founding of churches in the exact manner that Calvin prescribed, described by Philip Benedict as being "with a permanent consistory that appointed a minister."¹³⁶ The *First Book of Discipline* calls for the election of ministers by the congregation, to be vetted by ministers and elders of the nearby principal towns to certify their capacity.¹³⁷ Curiously, *contra* Benedict, Calvin states in the *Institutes* that the call of a minister "is lawful according to the Word of God, when those who seemed fit are created by the consent and approval of the people; moreover, that other pastors ought to preside over the election in order that the multitude may not go wrong either through fickleness, through evil intentions, or through disorder."¹³⁸ This indicates that Knox actually stood in concert with Calvin on the matter of

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 199.

¹³⁶ Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 157.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹³⁸ Calvin, *Institutes* IV.3.xv., 1066.

the people's role in the call of a minister, rather than the description given by Benedict, which suggests the Consistory's role as more of a collective bishop than an advisor on the matter of calls. To be sure, in Calvin's Geneva, the Company (through the Consistory) played a very active role in the recruitment and call of pastors, but Calvin's own theology indicates that he was more favourable to the input of the people, as became normative in Scottish and subsequent forms of Presbyterianism.

Because Knox's plan for the church, initially outlined in the *First Book of Discipline*, was neither accepted nor implemented universally, the pre-Reformation system of church benefices carried on, "with beneficed clergymen in place retaining their right to their income. If these clergymen accepted the new Confession of Faith and were deemed qualified, they could continue to officiate at the services of the new Reformed church; if not, they simply collected their revenues."¹³⁹ In other words, clergy who refused to be Reformed continued to be paid even if they did nothing at all! The rights of ecclesiastical patronage also continued, a reality that ultimately led to the Great Disruption in the Kirk in 1843. However, by 1578 when the *Second Book of Discipline* was produced, it became clear that "Genevan principles had become dominant within the Scottish church":¹⁴⁰ there were four categories of ministry laid

¹³⁹ Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed*, 164-165.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 168.

out, with civil and ecclesiastical powers set forth as modelled in Calvin's *Institutes*; neither superintendents nor bishops were retained. The Presbytery-Synod system, similar to the French Reformed church, was instituted. Philip Benedict cites a list of questions asked of elders and heads of households in the Synod of Aberdeen in 1675, part of a visitation process by the Synod; all questions are of a practical nature, the sorts of questions that might similarly be asked today in the visitations expected to be conducted by Presbyteries in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. This demonstrates that the role of the Company of Pastors was played, in Scotland, by the Synod – a role today typically held by Presbyteries. (A parish-based system developed later in the sixteenth century which was intended for poverty relief; this responsibility fell to Kirk Sessions, including Deacons.)¹⁴¹ Yet mutual accountability remained notably absent.

With the Reformation in Scotland came the move from Priest of the Mass to Pastoral Minister. Perhaps a Company of Pastors would have helped and encouraged that transformation for the clergy.

Having seen, in this chapter, that groups resembling a company of pastors exist outside the Canadian context, Chapter 5 will examine the historical, theological and political context of Canadian Presbyterianism to

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 455.

determine if there are reasons why we see no companies of pastors in The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

CHAPTER 5:
**Historical, Theological and Political Context,
The Presbyterian Church in Canada**

The earliest Presbyterians in North America were not of Scottish descent, but French, Irish and Dutch. The Huguenots settled along the Mississippi and the St. Lawrence, and the first Presbytery formed in Canada was of the Dutch Reformed Church, via the United States. Later, Scots, Dutch, Huguenot, Irish, and others all entered various unions.¹⁴² The result was that Canadian Presbyterianism was not exactly like any of its antecedents, but has, like the culture of the nation, created a smorgasbord approach.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada was founded in 1875 as a union of several disparate Presbyterian groups across the dominion, many of which existed because of the ecclesiastical state of Scots Presbyterianism. To borrow a phrase used of Canadian-American relations, when the Scots Presbyterians would sneeze, the Canadian Presbyterians would get a cold! For example, what is known as the Great Disruption in the Church of Scotland was a split in the Auld Kirk in 1843 over who had the right to call

¹⁴² William Gregg, *A Short History of The Presbyterian Church in the Dominion of Canada* (Toronto: C. Blakett Robinson, 1893), 1, 9, 11.

the minister of the local church. The next year, a similar split happened in Canada, even though the political circumstances in Scotland were so different as to negate any need for Canadian Presbyterians to take a stand on the matter! Finally, the major groups of Canadian Presbyterians merged to become the largest Protestant body in the young nation. At this point, Canadian Presbyterianism was yet to have carved out its own identity, so it took much of its culture from those who brought it from overseas.

As stated earlier, John Knox had served the English congregation in Geneva during his period of exile, and had studied under Calvin (and, presumably, been a member of the Company of Pastors as a result). Since Knox imported back to Scotland so much of what he learned about Reformed Protestantism in Geneva, it might be assumed that the Company of Pastors would have been imported as well. But it was not.

The reason the Company of Pastors was not explicitly imported back to Scotland with Knox's return from exile appears, as noted in the previous chapter, to be political: that is, the existence of the three Councils, the Consistory, and the Company of Pastors in Geneva owed itself to the political structure of Geneva as a Reformed city-state. The Company was not just an arm of ecclesiastical polity; it was an arm of the government of Geneva. Because Knox's Edinburgh was governed

radically differently from Calvin's Geneva, the exact translation of the Company would not have worked politically.

One needs a program to be able to follow the changes that took place in imperial-feudal-national British politics during the period surrounding the Reformation. The occupant of the royal throne dictated the religious tone of Scotland through these years. When the monarchy had settled down, and the Reformed expression of Christianity was able to establish itself as the Church of Scotland, Knox's *First Book of Discipline* in 1560, and the *Second Book of Discipline* which followed it in 1578 became the political handbooks for the church. The government of the nation was already established, so Calvin's Genevan pattern would not work for the Scots. The government of the church would thus be established with the Consistory-Company model as its inspiration, but only as its inspiration; it would not be a cookie-cutter model for church governance. "John Knox agreed (with Calvin) that civil government was divinely instituted and that the authority of rules was limited by divine law, but he also recognized that the feudal kingdom of Scotland was not the republican city-state of Geneva."¹⁴³

¹⁴³ John Moir, "'Who Pays the Piper...': Canadian Presbyterianism and Church-State Relations," in *The Burning Bush and a Few Acres of Snow: The Presbyterian Contribution to Canadian Life and Culture*, ed. William Klempa (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1994), 68.

The government of the church in Scotland evolved to be by sessions, presbyteries, synods and general assemblies. And this would be exported to North America with immigration to the new world.

From Geneva to Edinburgh to the New World

Given the Huguenot influence in French settlement in Canada, one wonders whether the Presbyterians in Québec might have been more likely to have adopted the Company of Pastors as a more obvious model for governance, yet “[m]igrant Huguenots took their Calvinistic doctrine and polity wherever they went, but ironically, never established permanent Huguenot churches on a world-wide scale. The trend among Huguenots was to amalgamate usually with either Presbyterian or Dutch or German Reformed groups wherever they found themselves.”¹⁴⁴ Thus the Huguenot influence in the Canadian church did not exert itself, choosing instead to unify itself with other Reformed bodies – further ‘watering down’ the direct continental Calvinist approach to church government and pastoral oversight. Further, the French *Ecclesiastical Discipline* of 1559 does not mention a Company of Pastors, further highlighting the idea that the Company was viewed more as a level of civil governance than a necessary and integral part of the doctrinal and moral oversight of ministers.

¹⁴⁴ Editors’ introduction to “Ecclesiastical Discipline, 1559,” in *Paradigms in Polity: Classic Readings in Reformed and Presbyterian Church Government*, ed. David W. Hall and Joseph H. Hall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 134.

Because of the differing political circumstances, as noted, what worked in Geneva would not work in Scotland (nor in Germany, the Netherlands, or England, where Calvinist reforms also found some favour); but because of the similar political structures between Britain and its colonial children, what worked in Scotland would work in North America, and particularly in Canada.

The presbytery would play the primary role among the different 'courts' of the church. It would be the primary instigator of revisions to church law and doctrine; it would be the ordaining body for clergy; it would be the body through which church planting activity would take place; and it would be the supervisor of the ministers within its bounds. Thus, in theory at least, the presbytery would be, or contain, the New World equivalent of the Company of Pastors. This worked well and thoroughly, at least for a time – at least, until institutionalism transformed the church from an organism to an organization.

Organisms are living, breathing entities; organizations usually are not. It may be argued that the formation of The Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1875 was the beginning of what may have been a short peregrination from organism to organization for the newly amalgamated denomination. This may be witnessed in the fact that the final heresy trial documented among Canadian Presbyterians took place in 1876, when D.J. Macdonnell, the minister of St. Andrew's Church, Toronto, was tried by

the Presbytery based on doctrinally controversial sermons he preached that were highlighted in a Montreal newspaper. Macdonnell was acquitted and went on to continue as minister of the congregation until his death in 1896.¹⁴⁵

While the cessation of heresy trials hardly dictates the end of ministerial accountability at the Presbytery level, the unfolding of Canadian Presbyterian history that follows contributes to this conclusion. Calvin's desire for doctrinal purity, exercised and enforced through the Company of Pastors, took a turn for the diverse in the latter years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century in Canada. The church union movement, about which much has been written, reduced The Presbyterian Church in Canada to a mere one-third of its former size following the formal creation of the United Church of Canada in 1925. That a large majority of Presbyterian clergy opted to enter a doctrinally foundation-less denomination is testament to the passing of the role of the Presbytery as a theological enforcer. Some would argue that the bower of desire for Christian unity trumped the ace of doctrinal faithfulness, which is a debate beyond the scope of this treatise. Nevertheless, it demonstrates that Calvin's original vision for the moral and doctrinal purity of the church's ministers had been lost, with what

¹⁴⁵ John S. Moir, *Enduring Witness* (Toronto: The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1987), 172ff.

appears to be no formal desire to regain it through some body that might parallel the Company of Pastors at some level. Indeed, there appears to be no documented evidence anywhere in Canadian Presbyterian history of the formation of anything resembling a Company of Pastors established (or even suggested) at the denominational level. The closest there may have been was the camaraderie among the ministers who opted not to enter church union after 1925, even across the theological spectrum, for not all clergy who did not enter union were theologically conservative. “There was a remarkable degree of sharing, hospitality in manses, (and) collegiality in presbyteries as ordained clergy rushed around to provide the sacraments for pastor-less congregations....As memories of 1925 faded we became less and less cohesive.”¹⁴⁶

Many Canadian Presbyterians have eschewed groups that might resemble a Company of Pastors because the denominational culture has taught them to be singularly focused on their role in governance. It is often said of Presbyterians that everything they do is done decently and in good order; some do get a bit uncomfortable when reminded that this is an allusion to 1 Corinthians 14.40, where Paul is writing about the gifts of prophecy and speaking in tongues – decidedly *not* common in Presbyterian culture! However, it can be argued that caring for one

¹⁴⁶ Conversation with A. Donald MacLeod by electronic mail, June 17, 2011. MacLeod is a retired minister of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and Research Professor of Church History at Tyndale Seminary, Toronto, Ontario, at the time of writing.

another is a form of good governance. As David Willis-Watkins has written,

Pastoral care is governance by attending to Christ's voice which governs by leading, protecting and feeding – on himself – those whom Christ has united to himself. It belongs to the humanly office of pastoral care, which...is one of governing in response to and by the Word of Christ, to grow in the practice of the decalogue. That is why social reform is not an addition to pastoral care but integral to it. It is part of the governance for wholeness which is the pastor's office. That, incidentally, is why Calvin's own international leadership to an increasing refugee movement and his own local social humanism are of a whole cloth with his own functioning in the explicit, direct offices of teacher and preacher and minister of the sacraments.¹⁴⁷

Historically, periods of profound change have tended to unify clergy and solidify theological positions among church leaders. Likewise, the further we have moved, chronologically, from those periods of profound change, the less unity has existed. One could muse as to whether this unity might still exist had some equivalent of a company of pastors existed in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, but such musing will not alter the historical reality that exists today.

The more obvious reality faced by the church today, contributing to the avoidance of mutual accountability, is rampant individualism. While this may be seen more obviously in the United States, it exists in Canada as well. Joseph Small describes what he sees in the Presbyterian Church (USA): "Time and interaction with American individualism, free

¹⁴⁷ Willis-Watkins, "Calvin's Theology of Pastoral Care," 142.

enterprise, and the managerial spirit have weakened the originating influences, although their language and forms remain.”¹⁴⁸ As countercultural as the mainline church claims to be in its ways of being and doing (over against its evangelical ‘business model’ counterpart), the reality is that individualism and the ‘silo’ mentality (popularized in business literature by Patrick Lencioni) is rampant among the clergy, both in the United States and in Canada. It is fuelled largely by fear, but is demonstrated in protest: pastors say, “I don’t have to share my deepest feelings with another pastor,” when what they almost certainly mean is, “I’m afraid of what will happen if I share my deepest feelings with another pastor.”¹⁴⁹ Yet, ironically, by virtue of its ordered nature, the ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada cannot envision its clergy functioning independently; even before the laying on of hands at ordination, the connectional nature of the church’s polity should preclude any sense of the local church as a silo, an entity unto itself, where no others may have input.

Too often, Presbyteries have become purely bureaucratic bodies, going through the required motions but lacking pastoral zeal for either the churches under their care or the leaders of those churches who are fellow presbyters. In most cases, ongoing theological study as a group, or even

¹⁴⁸ Joseph D. Small, *The Travail of the Presbytery*, 1.

¹⁴⁹ In a discussion about clergy accountability with other Presbytery Clerks in my denomination, this is exactly what I heard, both audibly and subliminally, from the Clerks themselves, let alone their colleagues.

keeping pastors accountable for their continuing education, has gone by the wayside. Mutual exhortation – encouragement *and* accountability – has been left behind in favour of an attitude that says, “Let’s get the business finished so I can go back to the real work of the church.” The Presbytery needs to be a body that challenges its own to grow deeper in the Lord, for more than the few minutes of worship at the beginning of a meeting. As the members grow, their care for one another should emerge from that growth. When we decide that we learned everything we needed to know in seminary, we’ve lost the proverbial race; it must be the Presbytery that challenges its pastors to continue to develop.

It is difficult to adapt a model that worked in a city-state to a denomination whose 900-plus congregations are spread across the terrain of the second-largest nation in the world by land mass. For example, at its peak, the Genevan Company of Pastors had approximately the same number of clergy as The Presbyterian Church in Canada has currently in the entire province of Saskatchewan. This would make weekly face-to-face meetings impossible for these pastors (who with the elders make up two Presbyteries), especially in the winter months.

If both the culture and the geography serve as barriers, how could a Company of Pastors serve The Presbyterian Church in Canada today? This will be the focus of Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6

**Application of Key Learning Points
For The Presbyterian Church in Canada**

Herman Melville, in his popular work *Moby Dick*, wrote, "...Heaven have mercy on us all – Presbyterians and Pagans alike – for we are all somehow dreadfully cracked about the head, and sadly in need of mending."¹⁵⁰ The reality of our fallen human nature is altogether too obvious simply by scanning news from any medium, be it radio, television, newspaper or Internet. When we hear that in some traditions, there are numbers of clergy who leave ministry *daily*, and others who end up sick or fall into moral error, believers are saddened, because we expect that the life of the minister is not supposed to be a calling from which one would run – that pastors would not be among those "in need of mending." But it happens every day, and most instances do not make the news.

If pastors live in silos (albeit silos with glass walls, in many cases), and individualism is the reigning ontology, what can be done to help these isolated servants of the gospel? Having seen the history and

¹⁵⁰ "Good Reads" [online quotations website], available from [http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/search?q= Presbyterian&commit=find+quotes;](http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/search?q=Presbyterian&commit=find+quotes;) Internet.

background of Calvin's Company of Pastors, this chapter will seek to bring together the learning points for application in The Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC).

As was noted earlier, because of its nature as part of the political structure of Reformed Geneva, the Company of Pastors was not purely "importable" by John Knox when he gave leadership to what became the Church of Scotland, the mother church of the PCC. We now understand how, in its original form, the Company could not be replicated in the Scottish or the Canadian church. We will now examine how the Company may serve as a model for mutual accountability among ministers in the PCC.

We have seen that while Knox was not able to import the Company, he admired what it accomplished and did attempt to import the intent of the Company, as demonstrated in the *First Book of Discipline* and the role of the Presbytery and Synod that developed in Scottish church polity. So, to honour the intent of our spiritual forebears, how can the Company of Pastors serve as a model for clergy in The Presbyterian Church in Canada as they seek to serve faithfully, before a watching, individualistic world?

While the PCC is connectional in structure (with its system of courts and theoretical accountability systems), it is not led by clergy who are connected spiritually. This is easily demonstrated in the various

Presbyteries across the country: we tend almost always to be strictly about business, getting the necessary business done so that we can go back to our silos and do what we've been called to do. This seems to be the prevailing attitude among many ministers. We get caught up in doing things right, often at the expense of doing the right things.

We tend to accept this as normal, yet it need not be so, even within Presbyterianism. For example, one minister who left the PCC to serve a congregation that recently joined the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (a denomination based in the United States) related his experience in attending his first General Assembly of that denomination. He said that, unlike his experience in the Canadian church, pastors are encouraged to come and go from the business meetings, giving them time to make meaningful connections with other pastors. Interestingly, when he asked one of the experienced pastors why he was not sitting in on the business meeting, this senior pastor said, "I don't need to be in the meeting. I completely trust everyone in that room to make the right decision."¹⁵¹

The biggest difference between the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the PCC appears to be that the former has a greater measure of doctrinal unity than the latter. The motto of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church is "In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In

¹⁵¹ Conversation with Bryn MacPhail, July 2, 2011. MacPhail serves as Minister of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Kirk in Nassau, Bahamas, at the time of writing.

all things, charity. Truth in love.”¹⁵² A cursory glance over the *Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly* of the PCC would demonstrate that even in essentials there is not unity, even though a measure of unity is mandated in the standards to which a minister must subscribe at ordination and induction.¹⁵³ While there may be theoretical unity, there is no practical unity as to what constitutes essentials in the PCC. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in the United States has only existed as a denomination since 1981, and was created as a union of conservative Presbyterians dissenting from the two antecedent denominations that now constitute the Presbyterian Church (USA). As a result, there is a greater sense of unity, both doctrinally and pastorally, because those who were part of the original constitution of the denomination were unified in their desire to create something new, something that they found agreeable doctrinally.

Sufficient time has elapsed since the union that created The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and even since the union that left the PCC as a mere remnant of its former incarnation with the creation of the United Church of Canada, that no corporate memory of the common ground that

¹⁵² “Evangelical Presbyterian Church (United States)”[online article], available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical_Presbyterian_Church_\(United_States\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical_Presbyterian_Church_(United_States)); Internet.

¹⁵³ Ministers of the PCC are required to assent to the Old and New Testaments as God’s Word, and to the Westminster Confession of Faith, as well as two denominational statements of faith (the Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation and *Living Faith/Foi Vivante*).

forged the creation of the PCC remains. So, even if doctrinal unity does not exist practically in the PCC, can a Company of Pastors help to encourage the ministers in other ways?

It could be argued that a Company of Pastors that followed after Calvin's model could help to restore some of the doctrinal purity that has eroded from the PCC over the course of its 137-year history, depending on the strength and influence of the leadership given to the Company. As stated earlier, Calvin's Company of Pastors had a fourfold mandate: ordination, education, mutual and self-criticism, and missionary work. Let us examine how these four areas of ministry can be used to make a difference in The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Ordination

In Canadian Presbyterian polity, the Presbytery is the body which ordains candidates for the ministry of Word and Sacraments; it also interviews and certifies candidates to attend one of the denomination's seminaries. However, the number of courses required, and the content of the courses assigned to students, is overseen principally by the seminaries and, when required, by the denomination's Committee on Education and Reception. Courts of the church rarely have any input on these matters.

A Company of Pastors within a Presbytery could supplement the certification interview process with a time of sharing where the candidate

would learn some of the experiences of the ministers, and be encouraged to think critically about the material being taught to them in seminary so that they could integrate faith and life effectively. As a result, once the final examinations for certification for ordination took place, the candidates would already have an advantage as they head into their first full-time ministry experience, thanks to the Company of Pastors. Further, there would be few surprises, since the ministers comprise half of the Presbytery, the body that has to certify the candidates for ordination.

This happened more simply in Calvin's Geneva, where there were fewer churches and less diversity in the theological education that candidates for ministry received. At least initially, a Company of Pastors would have to allow for a measure of diversity in theology, always guiding the candidates back to Scripture and the historic Reformed tradition as they provide encouragement for candidates.

Education

Canadian Presbyterian pastors are given a minimum of \$600 and two weeks of study leave each year to allow them to engage in continuing education; many are given more, because the tradition values education. In reality, what is taught in seminary merely lays a foundation for lifelong learning. Unfortunately, too many clergy either ignore opportunities for study leave, or spend it in unedifying ways. A Company of Pastors could

provide, or sponsor, a continuing education event each year for the Presbytery; it could also encourage pastors to sign up for particular courses or seminars that, as a group, it believes would be beneficial for clergy.

The Company could also engage in a book study, where members come to each gathering prepared to discuss a chapter or section of the agreed-upon book. Each member could take a turn choosing a book, perhaps giving leadership to that part of the meeting since that pastor had presumably already read the book.

Further, the Company could spend time at each meeting in Scripture study. One pastor could lecture and another respond, as happened in Calvin's time; one could lead and another reflect, or the discussion could take a more traditional Bible study format. Given what was noted earlier about statistics concerning pastors' personal Bible study disciplines, any opportunity for clergy to engage with God's Word outside of sermon preparation time will be valuable. Ministers cannot expect their congregations to go where they themselves have not been, so encouraging pastors to study the Scriptures together will help them to draw their people into the Bible as well.

Missionary Work

For Calvin, missionary work usually meant drawing Reformed pastors from France, educating them, encouraging them, and sending them out for ordained missionary service to plant Reformed congregations where they did not already exist. Today, in Canada, mission endeavour and church planting are currently overseen in The Presbyterian Church in Canada at three levels: an agency of the national church, the synod, and the presbytery. While it seems a bit bureaucratic, and can be at times, this approach draws the greatest amount of wisdom from a variety of people who are committed to the cause of growing the church in Canada. Given that Canada is a much broader country geographically than the city-state of Geneva, it stands to reason that additional structure would be required here.

A *Company of Pastors* could contribute to the collective wisdom of the church by encouraging Presbytery and Synod mission committees, as well as the Life and Mission Agency of the national church, to look at church planting opportunities within Presbytery bounds where the need exists. The vision required to do this is often missed simply because those who are 'on the ground', closest to the action, are preoccupied with their own congregational work and problems, preventing them from being 'on the lookout' for opportunities to expand God's kingdom.

A few generations ago, most new church development visions were cast by a synod staff person who was a mission superintendent – an office carried over from the early days of the denomination as the country expanded westward. As the population spread from Upper and Lower Canada toward the prairies, the mountains and the west coast, Presbyterian mission superintendents were appointed to find suitable places to begin new congregations, and ordained missionaries (usually recent seminary graduates) were appointed to begin the new work. In most synods, this position has been abolished in favour of a congregational development staff person to help existing churches be revived.

While the need to revive existing churches is important (a task to which a Company of Pastors could contribute), new church development also plays an important role, particularly in urban centres where new suburbs and communities are being built. A Company of Pastors, whose members best understand the geography and demography of the areas in which they serve, could constantly be keeping abreast of new communities that are being developed, alerting Presbytery mission committees (and thereby similar bodies at the Synod and national levels) of the potential for new church development in those areas. Given their involvement in the ordination and education aspects of Calvin's model for a Company of Pastors, these ministers would also best know the

candidates within their own bounds who might best serve in church planting capacities to meet the needs of growing communities.

If some sort of connection existed between companies of pastors, either formally or informally, ordained missionaries from other Presbyteries may be appointed, should there be no suitable candidates within the bounds of a Presbytery with the need for a church planter.

Mutual and Self-Criticism

It is possible that the other three parts of Calvin's mandate for the Company of Pastors – ordination, education and missionary work – could all be (and, arguably, have been) accomplished with some success without a Company of Pastors at the Presbytery level. However, it is highly unlikely that mutual and self-criticism could happen (or will happen) any other way except through a gathering of this sort. This, it could be argued, ought to be the main purpose for beginning a Company of Pastors in a given Presbytery.

In order for it to be successful, a Company of Pastors that meets to engage in mutual and self-criticism would need to have competent leadership that sees the need for this kind of ministry among clergy. As noted earlier, clergy support groups of any sort only tend to succeed under strong leadership. It may be best, then, for a minister who has captured the vision for a Company of Pastors to gather interested clergy

and provide leadership for a protracted period of time. The group, when it forms, could decide on the length of that tenure, and rely on the Holy Spirit to raise up that leader's successors.

Gender-Based?

Would a truly open, caring group of clergy be able to function as a Company of Pastors with men and women meeting together, or should they meet separately? In the PCC, where men and women both engage in pastoral responsibilities, this reality needs to be considered. Depending on the level of trust that these pastors develop, it may be possible to share intimately in a mixed-gender group. In the local church, after all, ministers do engage with their congregants of both genders, and tend to be aware of gender dynamics. Many ministers, however, may prefer to meet in same-gender groups so that they can share details of their lives that they may feel uncomfortable sharing with clergy of the opposite sex. Certain subjects are better understood and appreciated within same-gender groups. Female pastors may not want to discuss their perimenopausal strains and stresses among men, for example; male pastors may not want to discuss issues surrounding pornography addiction.

There are options to consider in the aversion of possible problems. First, the Company could meet in mixed-gender sessions all the time. This

is not the ideal scenario, given the potential difficulties in personal sharing noted above. Second, the Company could be split in two, with one Company for men and another for women, where the two coexist with complete independence. This is not the ideal scenario either, given the potential of the good things that they could do by meeting together. A third option is to have the men and women meet together in the Company's regular gathering, and separate only for times of personal accountability and sharing.

The third option is the best of the three, since it allows the Company to fulfill its mandate on all levels while respecting personal gender boundaries. Calvin, of course, would not have needed to consider such an option, since women were not admitted into the ranks of Reformed clergy in his day.

Include the ruling elders?

As explored earlier, contemporary equivalents of the Company of Pastors have tended to involve both teaching and ruling elders (as well as Christian educators and the like). Should a new model for the Company include the ruling elders?

There are advantages to including the elders in the Company. There is value in having elders well-educated in theology, which the continuing education events would do for them (provided they had

sufficient foundational biblical and theological knowledge to keep them from abject confusion as a result). Engaging elders in the thought processes behind church planting efforts is also valuable.

On the whole, however, it is probably unwise to include the elders. If pastors may be uncomfortable sharing certain aspects of their personal accountability with clergy of the opposite sex, it is even more likely that they will be uncomfortable sharing such details with members of their congregations. While there is room for a measure of transparency in the local church, so that people may understand that their minister is fully human, many people lack the perspective or the maturity to be able to sit under the teaching and leadership of a pastor about whom they know many personal details. In addition, there is 'shop talk' that occurs in gatherings of people who do the same thing for a living that would be lost on those outside the vocation. Including elders in a pastors' gathering of this nature would be similar to including picture-framers in a gathering of chemical engineers – quite apart from the personal nature of much of the conversation, trying to help elders catch up on a discussion about infralapsarianism or supersessionism would be challenging, and discouraging for the elders.

In congregations that use the meta-church model, elders already have an avenue for personal sharing in their small groups. The Company of Pastors has the potential to be a small group – for pastors.

Should other staff be included in the Company of Pastors? In Calvin's Geneva, deacons were welcome in the *Congrégation*, but not in the Company; their role was not strictly pastoral; they cared for the needy, and the dynamics of their ministry would have been significantly different than that of the pastors. In contemporary Canadian Presbyterianism, the diaconal role tends to be more that of a Christian educator (though even that role is waning in popularity). According to church law, deacons remain those responsible for the care of the poor. Either way, their role and responsibility varies so much from that of the minister that they should be excluded from the Company of Pastors. People engaging in diaconal ministries who wish to meet together for fellowship and support (and even accountability, if they wish) ought to be encouraged to do so, but not as part of the Company.

Voluntary or mandated?

At the PCC's General Assembly in June, 1998, there was a commissioner who left the meeting following a debate over a sensitive issue on which the majority of commissioners did not side with him in a vote. He was told by one of the lay volunteers at the Assembly that sometimes, the Assembly has to play the role of the parent, and we are to obey the parent, because the parent has our best interests at heart. This is not a particularly popular stance, but it is true to the role the church plays.

If God is our Father, then the church is, in many respects, our mother.

This is nowhere more true than in the more hierarchical denominations.

When a minister takes ordination vows, she or he promises this:

“Do you accept the government of this Church by sessions, presbyteries,

synods and general assemblies, and do you promise to share in and

submit yourself to all lawful oversight therein, and to follow no divisive

course but to seek the peace and unity of Christ among your people and

throughout the Holy, Catholic Church?”¹⁵⁴ That is, pastors within the

PCC place themselves under the oversight of the higher courts of the

church (they are not responsible to the Session, but serve as part of it in

responsibility to the Presbytery, and thereby the Synod and Assembly). If

it were to become mandatory for pastors to become part of the Company,

it would have to happen in one of two ways: either the General Assembly

would have to alter church law to include mandatory participation in the

Company as legislation, or the Presbytery would have to mandate

participation through its standing orders (and make this clear to all

ministers considering calls into the Presbytery).

While uniformity would be the ideal (necessitating an action of the

Assembly), it seems that, at least for an introductory period, mandating

participation in the Company could be left to a Presbytery feeling so led.

Then, if it were successful as a ‘pilot project’, an overture could be made to

¹⁵⁴ *Book of Common Worship*, 326.

the General Assembly that would place the idea of mandated Companies of Pastors within Presbyteries before the entire church for consideration.

The advantage of mandatory participation is that the Company cannot then be seen as an elitist group, since all are involved. Besides, everyone then would have the potential to receive the benefits of participation. The advantage of voluntary participation is that not everyone responds well to 'forced' group involvement. This is especially true when something new is being introduced and people are required to engage before buying into the concept.

Perhaps the best approach to take for implementation of the Company of Pastors is to allow the group to be composed of clergy who are interested and willing to be involved, and allow word-of-mouth to pique the curiosity of other ministers until the Company becomes a movement unto itself within the Presbytery. Then the Presbytery may entertain necessary notices and motions to enable the Company to become an integral and mandatory part of the life of the Presbytery. After that, it could spread to other Presbyteries as pastors move and their own good experiences are shared, such that there may eventually be a sufficient groundswell to enable legislation to be approved at the national level, making the Company of Pastors a mandatory part of Canadian Presbyterian culture. The 'silo' mentality and 'Lone Ranger-ism' that has crept into the reality of pastoral ministry has made it such that clergy are

less and less receptive to authority; allowing a Company of Pastors to form from the grassroots makes the ongoing spiritual formation of ministers less an issue of authority.

A case could be made to mandate participation in the Company on an individual basis, in situations where ministers are sent by the Presbytery for counselling or are in danger of being under some sort of disciplinary measures. By engaging with their fellow clergy in the Company, they may find restoration and wisdom to bring a new lease on their ministries. This type of scenario may require some legal finesse with respect to provincial human rights codes and labour laws, lest the order to engage with the Company be seen as a form of constructive dismissal. Nevertheless, if it could be done, the lawyer's fee would be made up quickly in the cost saving to congregations whose pastors would otherwise have experienced moral failure or other disciplinary issues.

Calvin succeeded in mandating attendance at the Company's weekly meetings because he was working with a clean slate. Nearly everything about the new Reformed church in Geneva was new, so when Calvin introduced the Company, conceptually with the first edition of the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* in 1541, and fully implemented by 1546 (or so we surmise because the record of the *Registers* begins in that year), the Company was just assumed to be 'part of the job'. Not so today! If a new denomination were being created, or were reinventing itself, beginning a

mandated Company of Pastors would be quite simple; but with a well-established church body, it would be much harder to mandate, at least not without much background work to create initial buy-in from the clergy, many of whom have functioned in ministry for decades without the benefit of the Company.

In The Presbyterian Church in Canada, it makes more sense to allow the concept of the Company of Pastors to be a grass-roots movement, praying that if it is of God, it will catch on and, perhaps, become so popular that it need not be mandated.

Ideal size?

Calvin's Company of Pastors was established for the churches of Geneva and the outlying areas – something closer in size to a modern-day ministerial association (or deanery, among Anglicans). The number of clergy in the Company in the time of Calvin was never more than 22, as noted earlier, and was normally smaller. It is generally understood that people feel safer sharing details about their lives in smaller groups. In the age of the twelve-step group, where people sit in a circle and talk about their particular addiction, small groups for accountability are not uncommon. At least for those starting out, to confess, for example, one's alcoholism would be much harder to do in a group of 50 than in a group

of 10. It would be more difficult to sense the affirmation of the group when so many were present.

The sixteenth century dynamic was different. The mutual and self-criticism that took place in the Company of Pastors was primarily aimed at keeping the ministers on the theological straight-and-narrow; if they were caught doing anything untoward, syndics could easily report them to one of the Councils or to the Consistory. The accountability that took place in the Company was less about personal sin and more about theological error. As a result, the larger group may not have been as threatening a place for the criticism to take place. Most pastors would sooner stand before a group of 20-plus to answer for their preaching than for their personal moral conduct.

In a denomination with the diversity of theology that is the PCC, it has grown difficult to limit the wideness of God's mercy when it comes to biblical interpretation and application, or lack thereof. The temptation, then, is to limit any contemporary expression of the Company of Pastors to critiquing only personal issues, as the pastors may share them. However, there must be a foundation of some sort to enable that to happen. Therefore, the pastors' personal theology must come in to play if their moral character is to be criticized, either by themselves or by their fellow pastors.

Still, it would seem, at least in this society, that smaller groups would serve better as Companies of Pastors rather than larger ones. So, for example, in a Presbytery that has 20 pastors, there could be four groups of five pastors each, meeting together by geographical area. (Division by geography is better than division by church size or theological bent, because of the mutual enrichment that can come as a result of diversity.) Otherwise, as noted earlier, divisions could be made along gender lines. If any of the geographically-divided groups need to combine in order to provide a 'critical mass' of one gender or the other for sharing, that could be done; there ought to be a measure of flexibility in the size and divisions.

Given that a Company of Pastors requires strong leadership, there ought only to be as many companies within a given Presbytery as there are leaders to facilitate them. If only one leader exists within a Presbytery, then there should be one Company of Pastors. It could sub-divide (male/female, and for size) for times of mutual accountability and sharing.

As the concept begins to take root, each Presbytery may be able to determine, according to local culture and custom, how many ministers may appropriately be included in each Company of Pastors.

Ecumenical involvement?

Up to this point, it has been assumed that the Company of Pastors would be unique to the PCC. Earlier, when the present Geneva Company of Pastors was examined, we noted that it served rather more like a local ministerial association, with more than clergy involved, and more than one denomination involved. The woman who was elected Moderator of the Company in 2001, according to the article heralding her election, was a Lutheran pastor – something Calvin would have been unlikely to sanction. Still, would it be helpful to include clergy from other denominations, even other faiths, in a Company of Pastors?

Eugene Peterson's model, explored earlier, was both interdenominational and interfaith, including (for a time) a Jewish rabbi. Peterson did not indicate that there was any friction between them as a group, but others' experience has not always been so rosy. Many modern ministerial associations spend their time discussing their differences, or avoiding discussing their differences. Some, with a peculiar focus (such as lectionary study or prayer) can come together with greater unity, but these groups seem in our experience to be exceptional rather than normative.

There are advantages, however, to ecumenical groups. When one's own denominational colleagues are so far spread out as to render regular meetings highly difficult (such as in the western provinces or northern Ontario), ecumenical gatherings within one's general vicinity can be easier

to attend on a regular basis. Despite whatever group covenant may have been signed by the Company members, some pastors feel more safe sharing what's on their hearts with other clergy who will not have reasons or opportunities to use that information against them in the future. This would be especially true in denominations where pastors can be named as district superintendents or bishops, which is not really an issue in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Still, for some, it can feel safer sharing difficult things with pastors who are less acquainted with your own tradition's polity.

That said, the model that we are advocating is a mono-denominational one: as Calvin's Company of Pastors was a subset of the Genevan Consistory of the Reformed Church, so we suggest that the Company of Pastors in the PCC be a subset of the Presbytery, and be composed of the ministers of the Presbytery. This would be especially helpful when the Company spends time in doctrinal matters; while there may be some diversity within a denomination, there is certainly more diversity without.

Frequency

The *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* mandated that the Company of Pastors meet weekly, which it did, on Friday mornings. As noted earlier, it was one of the few 'meetings' that clergy had to attend in that church culture.

Today, many ministers are overrun with meetings. While they may appreciate the concept of a Company of Pastors, how would many of them fit it into their already too busy schedules?

Weekly meetings of the Company likely helped to maintain the doctrinal unity that characterized the clergy of Geneva. If you sharpen your best kitchen knife weekly, you will find it never grows dull.

Likewise, pastors who had their skills honed and their character examined weekly would be unlikely to grow dull spiritually. The Geneva pastors were mandated to meet weekly, and most found that they wanted to meet so regularly. Again, because this was built into their culture early on, it was a regular part of each week. For contemporary implementation, however, weekly meetings would be more of a challenge.

One possibility would be for the Company, introduced to the Presbytery, to meet monthly at first, and to let the group decide upon greater frequency of gatherings. If the pastors find it valuable, they will be more inclined to make the meeting a priority in their schedule. We value healthy living, so we tend to schedule meals and exercise into our routines; if we value the kind of spiritual and emotional refreshment offered by a Company of Pastors, we will make time for it in our schedules, even if it is once a week.

One way to make a weekly meeting work into pastors' busy schedules is to do as others have, and meet over lunch. If the host pastor

is responsible for beverages, and each pastor brings a lunch, great fellowship can be had over the meal, and a time of study and prayer can fill out the time. If it is kept to a maximum of two hours weekly, and the drive to the meeting is relatively short, weekly gatherings of the Company of Pastors can be achieved.

Another level of bureaucracy?

Since Calvin's Company of Pastors had an influential role, especially in the work of the Consistory, could a contemporary model set apart the Company as another level of church government, alongside the Presbytery? This is not recommended, not least because of the legislative nightmare it would be to add to the current polity (which is already strongly bureaucratic), but also because the ministers all participate in the Presbytery, which tends to be heavily (if unduly) influenced by the clergy anyway. If there were to be a matter on which the Company wished to exert legislative influence, it could determine to debate clearly and vote as a block, meaning that its wish would almost certainly be granted. The Presbytery could decide, either *ad hoc* or formally through its standing orders, to seek the counsel of the Company of Pastors on various issues if it so chose.

Giving the Company a formalized authority would only further discourage those who already believe that the clergy-laity gap is

cavernously wide and that the church is run by the ministers. If the pastors are properly influencing their people from the pulpit with God's Word, elders and clergy will tend to vote on many matters with the same mind.

Chapter 6 has shown key learning points for application within The Presbyterian Church in Canada. The final chapter will offer some suggestions on how a Company of Pastors can help Presbyteries within the PCC.

CHAPTER 7:

How a Company of Pastors Can Help Presbyteries Today

Shame: it's an awful feeling. I still remember vividly the time the school guidance counsellor came into my Grade 6 classroom and announced that she had come for me. I was more than a little surprised, but went with her. Thankfully, my seat was near the door, so I didn't have to endure too many stares as I left the classroom to accompany the guidance counsellor to her office downstairs. I felt ashamed that I had been sent to the guidance counsellor, for reasons that remain unknown to me to this day. Once the interview was over – it was brief, but that is all I remember about it – I was sent back to my class. All I remember about it afterward was my teacher telling me that “there must have been some mistake” (in response to my query as to why I had been sent) and the teasing I endured from my classmates for “having to see the guidance counsellor”.

The shame associated with counselling does not stop following adolescence. In my experience as a Presbytery clerk, I have witnessed numbers of clergy who have been “sent for counselling”, and many of them have resisted it. A few, in my experience, have even given up

ministry rather than seek counselling. In some cases, one may suppose that the shame is associated with “being sent”, while in other cases the shame may be associated with being compelled to reveal whatever lay behind the problem for which the counselling was prescribed. Either way, there remains resistance among many ministers to accept their need to receive counselling.

For pastors in the PCC, until very recently, if they actually *wished* to receive counselling, most had to seek a counsellor and pay for the visits on their own; for many, this was financially burdensome, so the problem was often swept under the rug. Problems would then continue to fester without the necessary attention. In September 2010, The Presbyterian Church in Canada instituted a pilot project to provide an employee assistance program for all employees of the denomination who are enrolled in the health and dental plan of the church. There are approximately 820 employees, including ministers, national and synod staff, and denominational seminary professors. Their spouses and dependent children are also covered under the program.

The employee assistance program, though only a pilot project, covers no-questions-asked-nor-answers-required counselling costs related not only to work, but to marriage, family, life transition, addiction, and other forms of counselling. It also provides for consultation services of a legal, nutritional and financial nature, among others. In many ways it is a

'Cadillac' plan. Would the EAP encourage pastors needing counselling to seek it on their own?

In the first nine months of the program, from September 2010 to May 2011, 60 employees and family members availed themselves of the EAP. Of those 60, 52 were employees of the church; the other 8 were family members. Forty-six of the 60 calls on the program were for counselling.¹⁵⁵ At a glance, this does not seem like an overwhelming tide of response, but it is possible that any or all of those 52 church employees sought counselling voluntarily. It is also possible that any number of them may have been mandated to receive counselling by their Presbyteries. One must assume that the majority of the 52 are clergy, since the majority of church employees are pastors in local congregations – though this is decidedly an assumption, since more detailed information is not collected through the program.

If even *one* pastor was helped through receiving counselling that was covered by the EAP, the program is already a success. Yet what if the program had not been instituted, or is not carried forward beyond a pilot project? Could a Company of Pastors serve as a form of ongoing, mutual counselling for the clergy within the bounds? Or, could a Company be a body that encouraged, even admonished pastors to accept and embrace

¹⁵⁵ Email conversation with Liz Brewer, a program manager in the Ministry and Church Vocations office of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, July 6, 2011.

professional counselling? In this chapter, we will consider how a Company of Pastors can help Presbyteries in the PCC today.

Emotional health and spiritual health

Peter Scazzero's ground-breaking book, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, has helped numerous church leadership teams examine the connection between emotional health and spiritual health in the dynamics of their congregations. His follow-up volume, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, delves deeper into the spiritual and emotional health of the individual, and especially the pastor (since Scazzero writes from the perspective of a pastor). His thesis is simple: no individual, and no congregation, can be spiritually healthy if not also emotionally healthy. We can only grow in our spiritual development as much as our emotional health will allow. For example, if a person is still emotionally an adolescent, that person cannot advance spiritually beyond the level of an adolescent.

In *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, Scazzero interprets the work of others who have studied stages of faith by noting that there is a wall that must be overcome if one is going to advance to the deepest levels of spiritual development. He cites stage 1 as 'life-changing awareness of God' (when a journey with the Lord consciously begins); stage 2 is discipleship; stage 3 is serving – and then the wall is hit. The fourth stage

is the journey inward; the fifth is the journey outward from the inner life, and the final stage is transformation into love. Scazzero, and the authors he cites, demonstrate that the most difficult part of the life of faith development comes at the time when we must delve inward – when we must look inside ourselves and deal with the ‘stuff’ that keeps us from full maturity in Christ, and in life. He writes, “Notice that the Wall and the Inward Journey are closely related. The Wall compels us into an Inward Journey.”¹⁵⁶ Some people, however, refuse to be compelled, and remain stagnant in an earlier stage, never experiencing deeper intimacy with the Lord.

What constitutes “the Wall” for most pastors? This will be different for each minister, but each ‘hitting the wall’ experience is likely to have a common component across the board: crisis (and Scazzero affirms this). It may be a crisis of faith, or a crisis in ministry, or a crisis in the family or in life in general – but one may assume that, because “the Wall” brings about a full stop in development for people, a crisis will ensue. It may be that this is a natural part of the growth process, and that the reality of a crisis is the only commonality between people enduring it. Each one’s crisis will be different from another’s – in scope, depth, circumstance, and so forth. Thus there can be no ‘cookie-cutter’ approach to dealing with one’s own crisis, or helping another through it.

¹⁵⁶ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 120.

The mutual and self-criticism that were part of Calvin's mandate for his Company of Pastors could, and should, help pastors who struggle with the reality of what Scazzero calls "the Wall". Mutual and self-criticism can involve encouragement to continue to grow in faith, and in one's personal walk with God. The Company of Pastors could challenge ministers to develop into emotionally and spiritually healthy and mature people, so that those ministers could help their congregants, and congregations, deepen similarly.

Congregants, and therefore congregations, will never become more mature in Christ than those who lead them, especially their pastors. A Company of Pastors that worked to encourage spiritual development in clergy would, by association, bring about spiritual development in the local churches those clergy serve. Further, it would also deepen the discernment of the Presbytery, since its ministers (and its elders, led and taught by the pastors in their congregations) would be making wise, Spirit-led decisions on matters facing the church at large because of their deepened walk with God. A spiritually mature clergy leads not only to a spiritually mature local church, but a spiritually mature denomination. One could say, then, that a Company of Pastors would help to break down walls that keep pastors, and their people, from fully-developed spiritual lives, through its ministry of mutual and self-criticism.

A group covenant

In order for mutual and self-criticism to happen in a safe environment, there must be ground rules established that will enable a Company of Pastors to be a gathering where confidences are kept and everyone understands the requirements and expectations of the group. A group covenant can be drawn up by mutual agreement of the Company and signed by all members; any new members welcomed into the Company would be expected to sign the same covenant. (The hope is that it could be kept simple enough that members of the Company would not be giving ‘notice of motion’ to change the covenant, either to add to it or subtract from it.)

Here is a sample group covenant that could be used as-is or altered to meet the needs of a given Company of Pastors:

In sixteenth century Geneva, John Calvin led a Company of Pastors that oversaw and gave advice to the Consistory and Councils concerning the matters of ordination and education of clergy, church planting and missionary work, and mutual and self-criticism. Recognizing that the work of ordination, education, church planting and missionary work takes place largely under the auspices of the Presbytery and the national church in our context, we will continue as faithful presbyters to advise on and participate in these ventures. The matter of mutual and self-criticism is key to the growth of pastors and will be, along with deep Christian fellowship, the main focus of the Company of Pastors. In Galatians 6.2, God’s people are enjoined to “Share each other’s burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ” (NLT). As a minister in the Presbytery of _____, I hereby engage in a Company of Pastors within the bounds in obedience to God’s Word, and agree to:

- *attend all Company gatherings except when inhibited by weather, illness or a personal family emergency;*¹⁵⁷
- *participate fully in all activities taking place in Company gatherings;*
- *pray with and for fellow pastors within and outside the Company;*
- *avoid gossip of any sort, and maintain absolute confidentiality in all matters pertaining to others shared within Company gatherings;*
- *take personal responsibility for what I say, speaking in the first person when sharing any criticism of others in the spirit of Christian love and with Scriptural encouragement in light of the concern that is shared, with a goal of edification of the leader;*
- *listen empathetically to others who share, pausing before speaking in response;*
- *accept criticism that is offered from others in the spirit of humility, carefully thinking and praying about the matter before responding to the critic; and*
- *seek the edification of all Company members and the church universal through sharing, study and prayer.*¹⁵⁸

Signature of minister

The big risk

One of the greatest risks inherent in creating an opt-in group for pastors, as noted in chapter 6, is that it can become a clique. Of course, the group would not want to become cliquish – but it must only admit those who are willing to sign the group covenant. The key to avoiding becoming a clique will be bearing the fruit of the Spirit, especially love.¹⁵⁹ Pastors

¹⁵⁷ I have not included pastoral emergencies in the list of exceptions because, in the vast majority of cases, a pastoral emergency can be attended to apart from the hours of the Company's gathering.

¹⁵⁸ In the preparation of this covenant, I noted the use by the North Jersey Company of Pastors of Eric Law's "RESPECT" code from my email conversation with Robert Foltz-Morrison cited earlier. Upon researching what the acronym stands for, I opted not to include it because using it would soft-pedal the important role that mutual and self-criticism can play (for example, the "T" refers to 'trust ambiguity', not making calls of right and wrong). Criticism implies the existence of absolutes.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Galatians 5.22-23.

involved in the Company must be very careful to avoid looking down their noses at other clergy who choose not to join the Company. They will need to understand that belonging to the Company of Pastors will not be a badge of honour, like receiving a Doctor of Divinity *honoris causa*; it will be a tool for increasing discipleship. Company members must always be aware of the potential for cliquishness and admonish each other to avoid behaviour which may cast aspersions on the Company. Ideally, members would behave in such a manner as to attract pastors who may have been reluctant to join earlier. An open door for the admission of new members will be important if the Company of Pastors is to be kept from being a clique.

Sign on the line?

Given the Lone Ranger-ism that is the reality of much of pastoral ministry today, one does well to wonder aloud whether many pastors would be willing to sign a group covenant, in a sense placing them under the authority of the group (at least in a spiritual sense). Perhaps some will be so much in need of the kind of community offered by the Company that they would sign in a heartbeat; others may require some convincing to engage in this kind of 'gloves off' relationship with their colleagues. Nevertheless, a group covenant is important for detailing the expectations

of all participants in the process of growing together and should be prepared and signed by each participant.

A Students' Company

Ideally, reaching pastors before they reach a point of desperation would be in the best interest of the church. A Company of Pastors that was aimed at seminary students, with leadership from a seasoned minister, would provide both a model for community as well as mentoring for those who are entering ministry. A students' Company of Pastors would enhance the theological education provided to students for ministry with formation that the regular curriculum cannot provide. If something like this could be mandated for theologues, the concept of the Company of Pastors could become mainstream within the wider church.

Key exercises for the Company

While it is beyond the scope of this work to give a detailed outline of the curriculum of a Company of Pastors, a number of valuable exercises may be considered, including:

- creating a rule of life for the pastor;¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Scazzero gives a good outline for a suggested rule of life in *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 198ff.

- practising spiritual disciplines such as journaling, silence, *lectio divina*, etc.;
- cultivating emotional and spiritual health, and being willing to refer members to qualified counsellors when necessary;
- studying Scripture together;
- group spiritual direction, including praying for and with each other;
- studying classic Christian literature together;
- engaging in culturally relevant issues in light of Scripture;
- examining issues before the General Assembly in light of Scripture and the historic Reformed tradition; and
- holding one another accountable for deepening Christian faith, improved ministry skill, and responses to sins with which individual pastors may struggle.

While this list is not exhaustive, it can give a Company of Pastors a full agenda for many years of engagement. One of the keys to a successful Company of Pastors is the long-term nature of the relationships that develop, so it would be important for those who 'sign on' to do so for the length of their ministries, allowing those relationships to be cultivated.

A front line for discipline?

In Calvin's time, the Company of Pastors served as a front line for discipline. That is, when clergy were in need of correction or admonition, the Company provided it first, before the Consistory needed to be involved (unless the matter was first raised by a member of one of the Councils, as happened with issues relating to preaching). It is hoped that a Company of Pastors in the Canadian Presbyterian context would lessen the need for Presbyteries to be involved in disciplinary matters. It would still remain the prerogative of the Courts of the Church to discipline clergy when necessary, but if the Company of Pastors could, in many ways, self-police, it would save the Courts countless hours of time and energy in prosecuting disciplinary (and even some non-disciplinary) cases. Of course, this suggests that the pastors engaged in the Company are willing to submit themselves to its informal discipline in much the same way they agree, in their ordination vows, to submit themselves to the formal discipline of the Courts of the Church. This kind of relationship implies a degree of trust that is not often considered, or taken seriously, in the Courts of the Church. Whether because of theological differences or other issues, many clergy do not inherently trust their colleagues. If a Company of Pastors can work to help build trust among colleagues, the Courts will be able to function (and discipline) in useful and effective ways.

Healthy pastors, under the Holy Spirit's guidance, cultivate healthy elders and healthy congregations, which in turn result in healthy presbyteries. Erecting a Company of Pastors within the bounds of a given Presbytery can only help that Presbytery to exercise its given role in the structure of the church at large, edifying the Kingdom of God in the process. By introducing the concept of a Company of Pastors to Presbyteries across the country, The Presbyterian Church in Canada may be able to experience renewal at the grassroots level, perhaps even participating in a sort of reformation.¹⁶¹

One may rightly ask if a Company of Pastors is God's will for church leaders. If biblical faithfulness, renewal, and growing spiritual development for pastors are God's will, then a Company of Pastors may be one way God can implement his will in the church – at least, in The Presbyterian Church in Canada – today.

Conclusion

I began by relating the question asked by my spiritual director surrounding the lowest period of my ministry: "Where would you be today if there had been a Company of Pastors available to you when you burned out?" Concluding this study of the Company's past and potential

¹⁶¹ Phyllis Tickle, at the "Presentensions" conference in Toronto, Ontario in May 2011, spoke of the current time in Christian history as having the potential to be a reformation period for the church, such as was demonstrated to have happened in the sixth, eleventh, and sixteenth centuries.

for the future, I affirm that my participation in a Company of Pastors in those dark months probably would have kept me in the congregation where it all took place. While I received plenty of support and affirmation from several colleagues, and my Presbytery agreed to pay for the counselling I requested, it wasn't enough. The counsellor declared me fit to move on to the call I accepted that would "get me out", but either that counsellor had little experience in dealing with burned out pastors, or I did an excellent job of pulling the wool over her eyes. It took the final crash, eighteen months after the move, to learn that nothing I did – not even move – changed my downward spiral.

Had there been a Company of Pastors active in that Presbytery where I could have laid my situation out in safety, allowing other clergy to observe over the course of years (rather than weeks) how my ministry was progressing, they could have counselled me to act differently, or to understand the possible consequences of acting as I did. Indeed, in nearly every dissolution of the pastoral tie through which I have provided judicial advice to the church, the presence of long-term relationships expressed in mutual and self-criticism through a Company of Pastors would have been able to save those pastor-people unions.

In an era where respect for authority in the church, whether expressed through a judicatory or through the minister, is constantly questioned, the presence of a Company of Pastors in a Presbytery can help

build clergy into leaders who can withstand the struggle over power issues, maintaining pastoral relationships longer and allowing churches to grow stronger.

In an era where churches decline due to a lack of adequately equipped leaders, the presence of a Company of Pastors in a Presbytery can help build clergy into leaders who can build the church into a growing organism instead of allowing them to be palliative caregivers who watch, seemingly helplessly, while the church dies.

In an era where society is always changing, the presence of a Company of Pastors in a Presbytery can help build clergy into leaders who can discern what must change from what must not change, enabling the church to provide the unchanging truth of God's love in Jesus Christ in ways that relate to the world around them, bringing hope where there seems to be none.

Was Calvin prescient in his creation of the Geneva Company of Pastors in the sixteenth century? One might think so, but in reality, the clergy of Reformation-era Geneva faced similar challenges to The Presbyterian Church in Canada in the twenty-first century. Opposition to the gospel has always existed, though manifested in different ways. The Company of Pastors in sixteenth century Geneva worked through the church leaders to oppose the opposition. It can do the same today, if we have the will to make it happen. Pastors may be more 'connected' today,

thanks to technology, but electronic connections are not enough. We need each other, in community, to ensure that clergy are Lone Rangers no more.

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