

JOHN CALVIN'S MOVEMENT FROM THE BIBLE TO THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE

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Recent interest in the topic of moving “beyond the Bible” to theology and practice has raised awareness of an issue facing the church throughout its existence.¹ While these conversations have sought to overcome the specialization that marks today’s ecclesiastical and academic worlds through dialogue between pastors and scholars from various disciplines,² such discussions can still remain abstract and academic.³ Studying the examples of individuals that lived before the gap between the church and the academy developed may be one way to prevent these conversations from lingering in the theoretical realm, as these figures sought to apply their exegetical and theological insights in the churches they led.⁴ John Calvin rises to the forefront of such individuals, as he was a prolific commentator on the Old and New Testaments, an influential systematic theologian, and an eminent pastor and church leader. Therefore, just as exegetes, theologians, and pastors continue to draw insights from Calvin’s work, persons interested in understanding how to move from the Bible to theology and practice can (and should) learn from John Calvin.

Instead of offering an explicit theory on how to move from the Bible to theology and practice, John Calvin can contribute to the discussion by presenting an example of how one person made such a move. One of the most accessible places to discover Calvin’s implicit approach is the topic of church leadership,

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¹ See the contributions and bibliography in Gary T. Meadors, ed., *Four Views on Moving from the Bible to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009). An examination of various ways theologians use the Bible in theology appears in David Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999). This article is a revision of a paper presented at the Midwest Evangelical Theological Society 2010 Meeting in St. Paul, MN, which had as its theme “Praxis . . . What Makes It Evangelical?”

² The interdisciplinary nature of these discussions appears in Meadors, *Four Views*, as it includes contributions by an OT scholar (Walter C. Kaiser Jr.), a NT scholar (William J. Webb), a theologian (Kevin J. Vanhoozer), and a NT scholar currently serving as a pastor (Daniel M. Doriani).

³ See Abraham Kuruvilla, review of Gary T. Meadors, ed., *Four Views on Moving from the Bible to Theology*, *JETS* 53 (2010) 191–94, who notes a shortcoming of the book is its inability to help the homiletician.

⁴ Writers frequently overlook the potential contributions of historical theologians in moving from the Bible to theology and practice. For example, although emphasizing the need for partnership between biblical and systematic theologians, Elmer A. Martens does not mention the role of historical theologians in “Moving from Scripture to Doctrine,” *BBR* 15 (2005) 77–102. A similar omission of historical theologians also appears in Meadors, *Four Views*, as the contributors are biblical and systematic theologians, with a missiologist (Christopher J. H. Wright) as one of the respondents (see *ibid.* 269, n. 66). The contribution of historical theologians would be comparable to that of missiologists, as they can describe how people in the past have moved from the Bible to theology and practice.

particularly church government, as one can see how he developed his insights from Scripture into a theological vision and attempted to bring this vision into real-life practice in the Genevan church.⁵ In addition to being readily accessible in Calvin's work, the topic of church government also serves as a place where the different meanings of "going beyond the Bible" may fuse, as it has both theological/doctrinal and ethical/practical elements.⁶

Therefore, the aim of this study is to understand how Calvin moved from the Bible to practice, not to evaluate Calvin's biblical interpretation and theological beliefs concerning church government. After examining Calvin's theology of church government and how he sought to appropriate these ideas in his reformation of the Genevan church,⁷ the paper will then discuss Calvin's movement from Scripture to theology and practice in comparison to contemporary models.⁸

I. FROM SCRIPTURE TO THEOLOGY

Some have argued that Calvin's views on church leadership originated from his experience in Strasbourg rather than from biblical exegesis.⁹ Like all his views in theology, Calvin's positions on church order certainly grew over time,¹⁰ and the exegetical history preceding him and his contemporary

⁵ While Calvin's sermons are the place where he sought to apply the meaning of the text to the lives of ordinary Christians (see Randall C. Zachman, "Expounding Scripture and Applying It to Our Use: Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians," *SJT* 56 [2003] 481–507, esp. 503–7), the nature of church government makes the practice in Geneva rather than Calvin's comments on the topic in sermons the best place to detect how he applied his theological ideas.

⁶ On the various ways of "moving beyond the Bible," see the reflections by Mark L. Strauss and Al Wolters in Meadors, *Four Views* 272, 300. In addition, this issue will integrate the concepts of direct teaching, implied teaching, and creative constructs discussed in Meadors' introductory remarks (ibid. 10–11).

⁷ All citations from the *Institutes* are from John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; 2 vols.; LCC 20–21; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960). All references to Calvin's commentaries are from John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (45 vols.; Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844–56; repr. 22 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981).

⁸ By using Calvin's practice rather than his explicit views on developing theology from the Bible, the approach of the present study loosely imitates the case study method used in Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine* xii, 4, 14–119. It goes further than Kelsey's examination, however, in noting both the use of the Bible in doctrinal formulations and the application of doctrine to the life of the church.

⁹ Scholars have leveled this accusation in regards to the elders and the deacons of Calvin's system, as discussed, respectively, in Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva, and the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988) 141; and Elsie McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate and Liturgical Almsgiving* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1984) 137. On the influence of Strasbourg on the Genevan Academy and office of teacher, see Robert W. Henderson, *The Teaching Office in the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) 36–41. Another hypothesis is that Calvin's view of church leadership derived from the *seniores laici* of the early church in North Africa (Thomas F. Torrance, "The Eldership in the Reformed Church," *SJT* 37 [1984] 503–5).

¹⁰ "Calvin's theology must be understood not as a finished product but as a theology in development—specifically, a theology that was learned in the course of a life of exegetical, homiletical, and ecclesial labor in close dialogue, positive and negative, with a definable group of partners in conversation" (Richard Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2000] 187. On the development of Calvin's thought as displayed in the successive editions of the *Institutes*, see Francois Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought* (trans. Philip Mairet; New York: Harper & Row, 1963) 112–355; Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin* 118–39. Calvin's commentaries also display expansion

historical setting affected how he interpreted the texts and how he expressed his views, as they do for every individual.¹¹ It is also true that Calvin only articulated his views on church government after his experience in Strasbourg, where Martin Bucer had already established the four offices Calvin would describe and introduce in Geneva.¹² It appears, however, that Calvin had at least some perspectives on church government before his exile to Strasbourg because of his discussion of the deacon in the 1536 edition of the *Institutes*,¹³ the mention of a group to oversee the morals of the church in the 1537 *Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship at Geneva Proposed by the Ministers at the Council*,¹⁴ and the reforms Calvin made to the school system before his expulsion from Geneva in 1538.¹⁵ While showing the influence of Martin Bucer, Calvin's use of the same biblical passages as Bucer in his discussion of these offices reveals a concern in Calvin that the Bible, not tradition, establish the offices,¹⁶ supporting Calvin's claim to use tradition when it conforms with Scripture.¹⁷ Furthermore, Calvin viewed himself as "a servant of the word of God in the Genevan church," whose task was to proclaim and interpret Scripture accurately to the people so that it might be useful to the church.¹⁸ Therefore, while many factors influenced Calvin's views, he saw his task as moving from the Bible to theology and practice, attempting to bring the truth of Scripture into contemporary practice.¹⁹

and development, as discussed in R. Ward Holder, "Calvin and Tradition: Tracing Expansion, Locating Development, Suggesting Authority," *TJT* 25 (2009) 215–25.

¹¹ On historical and contemporary influences on Calvin's work, see Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development* 122–44; David C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*. Detailed examinations of Calvin's exposition of passages on deacons and elders in light of their exegetical history appear in McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate*; idem, *Elders and the Plural Ministry: The Role of Exegetical History in Illuminating John Calvin's Theology* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1988).

¹² The chapters dealing with the organization and officers of the church first appeared in the 1543 edition of the *Institutes*, although Calvin had already described the four offices in the 1541 *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, noting that they derive from the will of God.

¹³ Jeannine E. Olson, "Calvin as Pastor-Administrator During the Reformation in Geneva," *Pacific Theological Review* 14 (1981) 12–13.

¹⁴ For text of the *Articles*, see J. K. S. Reid, ed., *Calvin: Theological Treatises* (LCC 22; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954) 48–55. While the 1537 *Articles* only mention the office of pastor, figures that functioned like the elders that later developed in Geneva also appear (see *ibid.* 53–54).

¹⁵ See W. Stanford Reid, "Calvin and the Founding of the Academy of Geneva," *WTJ* 18 (1955) 7–8; Henderson, *Teaching Office* 43–49. Cf. Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises* 54.

¹⁶ Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development* 76. For an analysis of the role of biblical exegesis in the views of Calvin and Bucer, see Robert E. Uprichard, "The Eldership in Martin Bucer and John Calvin," *EvQ* 61 (1989) 21–37.

¹⁷ On the various ways that Calvin uses the Fathers, ranging from refuting them to using their authority to help establish his point, see Holder, "Calvin and Tradition" 215–25. Using Stephen Toulmin's analysis of an argument (as summarized in Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine* 125–31), one would thus see tradition as warrants, qualifiers, rebuttals, and backings for his claims.

¹⁸ Wulfert de Greef, "Calvin's Understanding and Interpretation of the Bible," in *John Calvin's Impact on Church and Society, 1509–2009* (ed. Martin Hirzel and Martin Sallman; trans. David Dichelle; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 67–68, 72–73 (quotation on p. 67). Calvin would view every minister as being a servant of the Word who was to expound it rather than create something new; see *Institutes* 4.8.9.

¹⁹ In Toulmin's scheme (see n. 17), the Bible functions as the data for Calvin's theological claims. See *Institutes*, 4.17.26: "the doctrine which we have put forward has been drawn from the pure Word of God, and rests upon its authority."

Calvin deemed Scripture to prescribe an “order by which the Lord willed his church to be governed,”²⁰ which is the “mode established by the Lord forever.”²¹ However, this conviction did not cause Calvin to argue that one must slavishly model today’s church after that of the NT, as he believed the NT neither is nor gives a church constitution. Instead, Scripture defines the basic structure and principles needed for church government, with outward circumstances affecting what it would look like in practice.²² The conditions of the early church influenced its organization, meaning that some details of its practice recorded in Scripture are not normative. For example, commenting on Acts 6, Calvin remarks, “The number of seven is applied unto the present necessity, lest any man should think that there is some mystery under the same.”²³ Because of this, Calvin believed that churches have freedom in making their constitutions, as his comment on 1 Cor 11:2 makes clear: “For we know that every Church has liberty to frame itself a form of government that is suitable and profitable for it, because the Lord has not prescribed anything definite.”²⁴ The church should thus frame a constitution that fits the “customs” of the “nation and age,” with it being advantageous at times for the church to “change and abrogate traditional practices and to establish new ones.”²⁵

While maintaining that a church has freedom to construct its own constitution, Calvin held that there are certain structures and principles that must be included in such governments in order for church leaders to derive their authority from God rather than human traditions.²⁶ Included among the principles is the need for a church constitution, as Calvin saw the command of 1 Cor 14:40 that all things be done decently and in order issuing an imperative for church constitutions since, in Calvin’s mind, the greatest danger for doing things irregularly occurs in church government.²⁷ In fact, Calvin refers to 1 Cor 14:40 and its abiding significance immediately after his comment on 1 Cor 11:2 about the lack of definiteness in the prescriptions of Scriptures, showing the reality that some structures and principles must be present in the church within the liberty allowed in church constitutions.²⁸ In structure, Calvin believed such a government must differ from Israel’s theocracy.²⁹ He also viewed it as different from the apostolic system in the NT because certain offices were temporary and designed for the establishment of

²⁰ Ibid 4.3.1; *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* 277, 281.

²¹ *Institutes* 4.3.3.

²² Wallace, *Calvin* 141–142; Carlos E. Wilton, “John Calvin’s Theology of Ordination,” *PTR* 6 (1999) 8. See *Institutes* 4.10.30.

²³ *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles* (2 vols.) 1.235.

²⁴ *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (2 vols.) 1.350–53. For more on this issue, see Benjamin Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1970) 173.

²⁵ *Institutes* 4.10.30.

²⁶ Ibid. 4.10.30–32; *Corinthians* 1.474.

²⁷ *Institutes* 4.3.1. Calvin calls 1 Cor 14:40 “a doctrine that is always in force, as to the purpose to which the polity of the Church ought to be directed” (*Corinthians* 1.474).

²⁸ *Institutes* 4.10.27, 28, 30. See Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine* 134–35, 173–75; Wallace, *Calvin* 135.

²⁹ This is a key difference between the views of Zwingli and Calvin. For Calvin’s view on the jurisdiction of the church’s authority, see *Institutes* 4.11.1.

the church.³⁰ According to Calvin, Scripture describes four permanent offices: pastor, teacher, governor, and deacon.³¹ Discussion of each office in turn will show Calvin's rationale for seeing these four offices as perpetual institutions of the church.

Calvin found the biblical basis for the office of pastor in Eph 4:11, as Paul notes that God gave pastors as gifts to the church, who are delegates to declare his Word and nurture the church (2 Cor 5:21, 27; Eph 4:4–16).³² According to Calvin, this office is the heir to the temporary office of apostle, as pastors are responsible to do for a particular flock what the apostles did for the whole world: proclaim the gospel, administer the sacraments, and govern the teaching and discipline of the church.³³ Unlike apostles, pastors are bound to a particular church.³⁴ Calvin notes a variety of didactic and narrative passages to show that the office of pastor is perpetual, as the pure preaching of the Word of God and the proper administration of the sacraments are essential for the well-being of the church.³⁵

Ephesians 4:11 also serves as the foundation for Calvin's second office, that of teacher or doctor.³⁶ Although some had argued that pastor-teacher was one office because of the grammar in Eph 4:11, Calvin believed the passage refers to two distinct offices with the two different terms.³⁷ One might hold both offices, but they have slightly different functions,³⁸ as the pastor is the

³⁰ Ibid. 4.4.4–5. Calvin does note the possibility of apostles and evangelists existing in later times, such as his own day, but states that this is because there was a need for such people to help restore the church, thus still making it an "extraordinary" office that does not exist in "duly constituted churches." Other temporary gifts include healing and interpretation (ibid. 4.3.8).

³¹ Confusion often arises in the terminology that Calvin employs in describing his four offices, as sometimes he labels pastors, teachers, and governors as "presbyters" but distinguishes between them at other places. Part of this ambiguity in Calvin's thought is due to the interchangeability of terms in Scripture (see ibid. 4.3.8). The fusion of the offices of pastors and teacher in Calvin may have also created some confusion (Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development* 303). It appears that the two functions of the presbyters in Calvin's thought are teaching and ruling, with pastors doing both, teachers only teaching, and governors only ruling. Therefore, all three are presbyters but they are three distinct offices according to their function, with the pastors uniting the different functions of the presbyters (Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine* 146). See *Institutes* 4.4.1; *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* 137–39.

³² *Institutes* 4.3.1; *Galatians and Ephesians* 278–80. This office was also called "bishop" and "presbyter," the latter a term that also included teachers and governors, as discussed in n. 31.

³³ The proclamation of the gospel includes both "public discourses" and "private admonitions" (*Institutes* 4.3.6).

³⁴ Ibid. 4.3.6–8; cf. *Acts* 2.27.

³⁵ For example, *Matt* 26:11; *Acts* 9:6; *Eph* 4:10–16; *Titus* 1:6. See *Institutes* 4.3.1–4; *Galatians and Ephesians* 280; *Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* 290.

³⁶ *Institutes* 4.3.4; *Galatians and Ephesians* 277–80. Calvin believed 1 Cor 12:28 establishes the office of teacher as well but did not list it in the *Institutes* because of Eph 4:11 (*Corinthians* 1.414–15, as noted in McKee, *Elders* 188).

³⁷ *Galatians and Ephesians* 279–80. Calvin makes the distinction between pastors and teachers more clear in his comments on Eph 4:11 than in his section of the *Institutes* (Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development* 303, n. 29).

³⁸ *Galatians and Ephesians* 280. Calvin would be an example of someone who was a pastor and a teacher in his ministries in Geneva and Strasbourg. For discussion of his work in each role, see Randall C. Zachman, "Do You Understand What You Are Reading? Calvin's Guidance for the Reading of Scripture," *SJT* 54 (2001) 9–13.

heir to the apostle and the teacher is the heir to the prophet.³⁹ The ministry of the teacher is in the university, as he⁴⁰ instructs the universal church by educating and training pastors, while the ministry of the pastor is in the parish, instructing and disciplining a particular congregation.⁴¹ A pastor teaches but also does more by preaching, handling discipline, and administering the sacraments.⁴² All pastors are teachers but not all teachers are pastors, as the pastor must be able to preach and counsel members towards godly living in addition to being able to teach Scripture like the teacher.⁴³ Since the church needs correct doctrine, this is a perpetual office.⁴⁴

The third permanent office prescribed in Calvin's scheme is the governor or elder, a layperson in charge of church discipline alongside of the pastors.⁴⁵ Calvin saw this office established in Rom 12:7–8 and 1 Cor 12:28, as these two passages list "governing" and "ruling" as gifts to be fulfilled in offices.⁴⁶ While the use of these passages might seem odd to modern exegetes, Calvin followed others in using these texts as the foundation for such an office but differed from them in noting that these were ecclesiastical rulers, not civil rulers, since there were no Christian civil rulers at the time of the NT.⁴⁷ Further, these officers were laymen chosen from the people, as Matthew 18 entrusted discipline to the church, not just the clergy.⁴⁸ Calvin believed that both the pastors and these governors were called presbyters, with pastors teaching and handling discipline while governors only handle discipline, alluding to the distinction in 1 Tim 5:17 between those elders who rule well and those who teach and rule well.⁴⁹ He defended the ongoing nature of this office, in contrast to other gifts listed in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, partly because experience shows the need for discipline and, more importantly, because Christ bestowed discipline to the church in Matthew 18.⁵⁰

³⁹ *Institutes* 4.3.5. At times, though, Calvin viewed the prophet as an ongoing office of interpreting and applying Scripture (*Romans* 460; *Corinthians* 1.415). The changes in Calvin's explanations of the gift of prophecy might be related to his battles with the Anabaptists (McKee, *Elders* 215).

⁴⁰ Calvin would seem to reserve this office for men; on his view of women in ministry, see n. 55.

⁴¹ Zachman, "Do You Understand" 7–9. While the *Institutes* focuses on what the teacher does not do, the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, which appeared first, discuss in more detail the activities of the teacher (Henderson, *Teaching* 60).

⁴² *Institutes* 4.3.4.

⁴³ *Romans* 462. Philip Melancthon would be an example of a teacher who was not a pastor (Zachman, "Do You Understand" 9).

⁴⁴ *Institutes* 4.3.4.

⁴⁵ This has been called many different titles, both within the writings of Calvin and Calvin historians (see n. 31). I am using the title Calvin used in *Institutes* 4.3.8.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*; *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* 462; *Corinthians* 1.416. According to Calvin, Eph 4:11 only discusses the ministry of the Word, with the office of governor and deacon appearing elsewhere (*Institutes* 4.3.8).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 4.11.1; *Romans* 463. See Elsie McKee, "John Calvin on the Elder Illuminated by Exegetical History," in *Calvin Studies IV* (eds. John H. Leith and W. Stacy Johnson; Davidson, NC: Davidson, 1988) 135–43.

⁴⁸ *Institutes* 4.3.8; 4.11.1, 4, 6. In 4.11.1, Calvin notes that doctrinal authority resides with the pastors and teachers due to Matt 16:19 and John 20:23 (cf. 4.1.22).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 4.11.1; *Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* 137–39.

⁵⁰ *Institutes* 4.11.1, 4; cf. 4.3.8.

The deacon is the final office that Calvin believed to be enduring in the government of the church.⁵¹ Calvin differed with the Roman Catholic view of the deacon as an assistant in liturgical functions and step towards the priesthood, arguing that Acts 6:3 establishes the office of deacon as one that cares for the poor and distributes church funds.⁵² These deacons were laypeople because the apostles gave them this responsibility so that the apostles could focus on the clerical tasks of prayer and the ministry of the Word. In addition, Paul differentiates between pastors and deacons in Phil 1:1 and 1 Tim 3:8.⁵³ Calvin saw Paul further describing this office in Rom 12:8 by noting two subgroups: one group in charge of distributing alms to the poor (the gift of giving) and the other in charge of caring for the needs of the poor (the gift of showing mercy).⁵⁴ Calvin then linked the second set of deacons to the widows of 1 Tim 5:3–10, as church support allowed them to care for the poor, with Phoebe an example of this second type of deacon.⁵⁵ The appointment of deacons in Acts 6:1–6 teaches by example the necessity for deacons to serve the poor, as it allows the presbyters to focus on the ministry of the Word while still accomplishing the essential task of caring for the poor.⁵⁶

An example of Calvin's belief that Scripture describes overarching principles rather than detailed instructions is his understanding of the election and installation processes for these officers. It is important that those who possess the offices do not "take it upon themselves to teach or to rule" but be "duly called," as Calvin notes that even Paul alludes to his authority only coming because of his calling by God.⁵⁷ While commanding the appointment of presbyters and deacons in 1 Tim 3:1–13, the apostle does not say how to appoint them, merely highlighting the kind of person who should serve in these offices. The examples in Acts 14:23 for elders and Acts 6:3 for deacons show that the selection of ministers and officers takes place through the vote and consent of the people rather than through appointment by the clergy.⁵⁸ In addition, the example of prayer and fasting in the selection of presbyters

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 4.3.9.

⁵² *Ibid.* 4.3.9; 4.4.5–9; 4.5.4; *Acts* 1.229.

⁵³ *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* 24; *Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* 85–86.

⁵⁴ *Institutes* 4.3.9; *Romans* 462–63.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 542–43; *Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* 139; cf. *Institutes* 4.3.9. Calvin's identification of these two groups of deacons seems partly dependent upon the fact that Paul calls Phoebe a deacon, as Calvin says, "Women could fill no other public office than to devote themselves to the care of the poor" (*ibid.*).

⁵⁶ *Acts* 1.229–33; cf. *Institutes* 4.3.8–9. Calvin held that Paul refers to this office in his discussion of deacons in 1 Tim 3:8–13 (*Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* 85).

⁵⁷ *Institutes* 4.3.10.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 4.3.15; *Acts* 1.234–35, 2.23. In discussing Acts 14:23, Calvin states that Paul and Barnabas were moderators in this practice (*Acts* 2.28; cf. *Corinthians* 2.300, as noted in Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine* 140). The nature of the selection of pastors is a bit more complicated, as one observes Calvin wrestling with the different examples of Matthias, Paul, the churches in Acts, and Paul's commands to Timothy and Titus to see whether it should be done by other pastors, the church, or a single person (*Institutes* 4.3.13–15). Calvin's conclusion indicates that the consent of the people is required in the selection process (4.3.15), and he then proceeds to criticize the early church for not following this order in its entirety (4.4.10) and document how the church took away the consent of the people in the election of the "bishop" (4.5.2–3).

in Acts 14:23 teaches the importance of “religious awe” in the selection of these officers.⁵⁹ The requirement that the first deacons be men of “Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:1–7) reveals that the people must consider whether the person has the proper character and gifts of the Spirit to execute the office.⁶⁰ The exact process of nomination, examination, and election, however, does not appear explained and would thus be at the discretion of the body. In effect, constitutions can differ on the specific processes involved but need to have decent and orderly processes that carefully examine candidates and involve the whole people, not just the pastors or elders.⁶¹

Three other key principles in Calvin’s view of church officers that church constitutions must reflect are that (1) the authority of church leaders is delegated by God; (2) a person called to ministry must have sound doctrine and conduct; and (3) leadership occurs through a plurality of leaders that includes the laity.⁶² Because Eph 4:11 presents Christ as the ultimate episcopate, Christ must always remain the head of the church, with church officers as servants to whom he has delegated authority.⁶³ As servants, these leaders must reflect the character of God and therefore demonstrate moral conduct and sound doctrine, being removed from their office if they fail to maintain these standards.⁶⁴ A group may call someone a bishop or a moderator, but this is in recognizing the need for someone to be in charge of a particular group rather than to elevate one person over the other leaders.⁶⁵ Calvin saw no place for a monarchy among church leaders because Christ is the supreme head, with a number of leaders performing particular ministries to benefit the church.⁶⁶ While still maintaining a distinction between clergy and laity,⁶⁷

⁵⁹ Ibid. 4.3.12. It is unclear if Calvin seeks to argue here that one must have prayer and fasting in the selection process, though he seems to suggest it; cf. *Acts* 2:28–29.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 1.235–36.

⁶¹ See *Institutes* 4.4.10, where Calvin summarizes his comments in 4.3.12–15. Calvin’s comments on the selection of officers indicates the basic principles required, as he views the proper practice as “when those who seemed fit are created by the consent and approval of the people; moreover, the 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” (4.3.15). The manner in which the people consent and the pastors preside is left vague, as well as the way that one determines how the candidates are deemed to be qualified.

⁶² Cf. Richard Robert Osmer, *A Teachable Spirit: Recovering the Teaching Office in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990) 113–14.

⁶³ *Institutes* 4.3.1, 4.6.8–10. See Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine* 135–38; Wallace, *Calvin* 144; Wilton, “John Calvin’s Theology” 5.

⁶⁴ *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony* (4 vols.) 2.197–198; cf. *Institutes* 4.3.12, where Calvin writes that these moral qualities are required for all offices. Calvin criticizes the moral conduct of Roman priests in 4.5.1, 14. For further discussion, see Milner, *Calvin’s Theology* 135; McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate* 136; Wilton, “John Calvin’s Theology” 11.

⁶⁵ Wallace, *Calvin* 142; Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine* 147. Calvin notes that the creation of the office of bishop was “introduced by human argument to meet the need of the times” and to prevent dissensions from the equality of the presbyters (*Institutes* 4.4.2; cf. *Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* 23).

⁶⁶ *Institutes* 4.6.10. On this element in Calvin’s thought, see George S. M. Walker, “Calvin and the Church,” *SJT* 16 (1963) 373; Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine* 147; Wallace, *Calvin* 142.

⁶⁷ Harro Höpfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 92, 98. While Wendel questions whether one should see a difference between clergy and laity in Calvin’s thought because “Calvin even more than Luther effaced all distinction between clergy

leadership of the church belongs with the laity as well as the clergy because of the lay status of governors and deacons.⁶⁸

In sum, Calvin sought biblical precedent for church government and its practice but did not view Scripture as being clear or complete in every detail. Some details, such as the four offices, he viewed as normative, while others were tied to the historical situation of the early church and are not mandated, the number of deacons being an example. The Bible gives minimal instruction on other elements, such as the exact processes of electing the officers. In noting that churches have freedom to construct their constitutions as long as they align with certain theological principles, one sees a rudimentary understanding of contextualization in Calvin's work, acknowledging the need to apply principles differently in light of changing cultures. Therefore, Calvin walked between a perspective that throws out the relevancy of the Bible too quickly and one that holds too closely to details related to the culture of the text.

II. FROM THEOLOGY TO PRACTICE

Because Calvin also served as a pastor in Geneva, he made an attempt to apply the teachings he saw in Scripture concerning church government to the Genevan church; he moved beyond theological proposals to practice, a step also relevant in moving "beyond the Bible." The political nature of the Genevan Reformation caused the civil leaders of Geneva to assume much of the authority and many of the responsibilities that previously belonged to the Catholic clergy and to retain authority over the church in the city constitution, believing that they had jurisdiction in church affairs.⁶⁹ There was also a distrust of foreign leaders, as Geneva did not want to give foreigners, particularly religious leaders like Calvin and the foreign-born pastors, too much power, fearing the creation of a church in Geneva just like the one they recently overthrew.⁷⁰ Therefore, Calvin had to work with, and at times against, the civil government in order to enact his changes,⁷¹ including getting their approval for the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* and the selection of pastors.⁷²

and laity" (*Calvin: Origins and Development* 304; cf. *Institutes* 4.4.9), Calvin still seems to make a distinction between pastors and teachers (clergy) and governors and deacons (laity). He emphasizes that governors and the deacons come "from the people" (*Institutes*, 4.3.8; *Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* 138–39) and at times distinguishes these two offices from pastors (*Institutes* 4.3.12; *Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* 24).

⁶⁸ In many ways, including the laity in the church offices, viewing supervision of care for the poor as an office, and maintaining a plurality of ministry were the most distinctive and radical elements of Calvin's church government, derivatives of doctrines of justification by faith and the sacredness of all vocations (Walker, "Calvin and the Church" 387; McKee, "John Calvin on the Elder" 139–40).

⁶⁹ Wallace, *Calvin* 55; William Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994) 18–20.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 27. The city did not make Calvin a citizen until 1559. At the end of Calvin's life, all pastors were still French, in large part because Geneva lacked an effective school system upon Calvin's arrival. For a discussion of the tension caused by the foreign origin of the pastors, see *ibid.* 144–66.

⁷¹ On the modifications to Calvin's proposal for the *Ordinances* of 1541, see Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development* 71–75.

⁷² For an example of the problems that Calvin faced in dismissing pastors, see the discussion of the de Ecclesia affair in Philip Hughes, *The Register of the Company of Pastors in the Time of Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966) 13–16.

Within twenty days of his return from Strasbourg in 1541, Calvin finished the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*,⁷³ which established the four offices Calvin would later discuss in the *Institutes*. While not providing a detailed exposition of these offices, the *Ordinances* note the Scriptural mandate and vital need for those offices, stating that “there are four orders of offices instituted by our Savior for the government of his Church” and that “if we wish to see the Church well-ordered and maintained we ought to observe this form of government.”⁷⁴ Because Calvin thought that the restoration of proper church order would be a gradual process and maintained that the 1541 *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* were imperfect,⁷⁵ one must look both at this initial document as well as Calvin’s work throughout his ministry in Geneva in order to understand how he approached the actualization of his vision.⁷⁶

The office of pastor already existed in Geneva, forcing Calvin to raise it to his biblical standard rather than create it in the *Ordinances*.⁷⁷ The rapid changes in Geneva caused the city to hire ministers as quickly as possible, which led to a low quality of character and knowledge in many of the pastors.⁷⁸ Therefore, the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* feature higher standards for becoming and staying a pastor, with the Company of Pastors⁷⁹ examining the life, doctrine, and giftedness of candidates.⁸⁰ By requiring weekly meetings to discuss doctrine and biblical interpretation, the *Ordinances* reflect the importance of pastors knowing sound doctrine and supervision of the pastors.⁸¹ The *Ordinances* also contains a system to discipline and dismiss errant pastors, noting that some crimes are “quite intolerable in a minister,” leading to deposi-

⁷³ Höpfl, *Christian Polity* 79. Calvin formed a commission to draft the *Ordinances* on September 13, the day of his return, and had a proposal by September 20. The General Council of Geneva adopted the proposal with revisions on November 20 (Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development* 71–72, 75). For the text of the *Ordinances*, see Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises* 58–72.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 58.

⁷⁵ A revision appeared in 1561 which affirmed the role of the pastors and the Consistory in excommunication (Olson, “Calvin as Pastor-Administrator” 14). Even this revision, however, did not implement all of Calvin’s views on church government (Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development* 106).

⁷⁶ Höpfl, *Christian Polity* 61.

⁷⁷ On the office of pastor, see Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises* 58–62.

⁷⁸ William E. Monter, *Calvin’s Geneva* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1967) 125; William J. Bouwsma, “The Peculiarity of the Reformation in Geneva,” in *Religion and Culture in the Renaissance and Reformation* (ed. Steven Ozment; Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Publishers, 1989) 71–73. For Calvin’s evaluation of the pastors of Geneva, see Mark Larson, “John Calvin and Genevan Presbyterianism,” *WTJ* 60 (1998) 48.

⁷⁹ While the Company of Pastors would select the candidates in the original draft of the *Ordinances*, the magistrates forced revisions that made the selection of candidates a cooperative decision of the pastors and the magistrates (Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development* 71–72). It would seem that the pastors retained the upper-hand in this relationship, however, as the magistrate did not reject any candidate suggested by the Company during Calvin’s ministry while the pastors would resist the recommendations of the magistrate at times (Höpfl, *Christian Polity* 92).

⁸⁰ While the *Ordinances* portray a two-part examination (see Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises* 59), the first part concerning doctrine and the second part concerning conduct of the candidate, the description of the first part actually has two sections, as the Company was to examine the candidate’s view and knowledge of theology as well as the candidate’s ability to teach. On the three step process, see Robert Kingdon, “Calvin and ‘Presbytery’: The Geneva Company of Pastors,” *Pacific Theological Review* 18 (1985) 48–49.

⁸¹ As the *Ordinances* explicitly state (Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises* 60).

tion, and that others “may be endured” but require “fraternal admonition.”⁸² While it is unclear whether the time devoted to criticism of self and others described in the *Ordinances* was a regular or occasional practice in Geneva, there seems to be some evidence of meetings resembling the quarterly meetings for discipline on vices and lifestyle issues mandated in the *Ordinances*.⁸³ Therefore, the regulations of the *Ordinances* attempt to reform the office of pastor into one that depends on giftedness, orthodoxy, and holy living of the minister. The implementation of these standards allowed Calvin to gather a good body of ministers by 1546.⁸⁴

In addition to revising the selection and supervision of pastors, Calvin also sought to establish channels to reflect the equality of ministers and plurality of leadership. Multiple pastors served the city, with nine pastors in the Company at the commencement of Calvin's permanent ministry in Geneva,⁸⁵ a number that would increase to sixteen shortly thereafter and oscillate to as many as twenty-two during Calvin's life.⁸⁶ Furthermore, there was no hierarchy or office of bishop, only the offices of moderator and secretary.⁸⁷ The secretary primarily took notes, and the moderator served more as a spokesperson, representative, and convener of the Company rather than the ruler of this group, as he presided over meetings, represented the Company at the meetings of the Small Council, and led the pastors at Consistory meetings but claimed no special role in ordaining candidates or in resolving disputes.⁸⁸ Although not elected, Calvin served as the moderator throughout his life;⁸⁹ pastors would later remark that he would be the obvious choice as moderator every year because of the grace bestowed upon him.⁹⁰ As moderator, however, Calvin was just one voice among many who could be, and was, challenged.⁹¹

The equality of pastors and plurality of leaders also appears in the rotation established among the pastors in their parish ministries. Multiple pastors preached at each church, and the pastors rotated between the three parishes

⁸² Ibid. 60–61, which contains a list of the offenses in each category. The records of the deposition of a pastor named Jean Ferron appear in Hughes, *Register* 109–12.

⁸³ Kingdon, “Calvin and ‘Presbytery’” 52–53. The private nature of these meetings might be the reason for the lack of detailed minutes for these meetings (Olson, “Calvin as Pastor-Administrator” 16).

⁸⁴ Although there were still failings among the ministers after this date, the amount of turnover and scandalous behavior seems to have decreased significantly (Naphy, *Calvin* 72). For details of these events, see *ibid.* 53–83.

⁸⁵ The *Ordinances* require eight ministers, three of which are coadjutors (Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises* 62).

⁸⁶ Kingdon, “Calvin and ‘Presbytery’” 45; Elsie McKee, “Calvin and His Colleagues as Pastors: Some New Insights into the Collegial Ministry of Word and Sacraments,” in *Calvinus Praeceptor Ecclesiae* (ed. Herman J. Selderhuis; Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2004) 19. The number of pastors, which included those serving in the city as well as the villages outside the city, was usually nine to twelve (Naphy, *Calvin* 78).

⁸⁷ Kingdon, “Calvin and ‘Presbytery’” 46.

⁸⁸ Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* 134; Kingdon, “Calvin and ‘Presbytery’” 44, 47–49. According to the *Ordinances*, the elders as a body (revised to include the magistrates) would resolve disputes within the Company (Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatise* 60).

⁸⁹ Many secretaries served during Calvin's lifetime, typically until they left the town, died, or quit (Kingdon, “Calvin and ‘Presbytery’” 47). After Calvin's death, yearly elections were established for the moderator (with Beza elected every year for sixteen years). Weekly elections began after 1580.

⁹⁰ Hughes, *Register* 363–64.

⁹¹ Calvin would even be rebuked for his behavior by the Company (*ibid.* 17).

(St. Pierre, Magdeleine, St. Gervais) of the city, sharing the ministry of the Word and sacrament.⁹² In fact, it seems that Calvin did not always preach at the same location in his ministry or assume sole responsibility at one parish, as he preached at St. Pierre on Sundays and the second Wednesday service, at the daily services of Magdeleine, and at St. Gervais at various points in his ministry.⁹³ This rotation was intentional, as Calvin thought that it would render allegiance to the Word rather than to a particular pastor, showing that “the ministry of the Word and sacraments was the central focus; the personnel were essentially interchangeable.”⁹⁴ Therefore, Calvin sought to reflect his theological principles that the ministers are equal and under the authority of Christ in the daily practices of the Genevan church.

The office of teacher also appears in *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* as one who maintains true doctrine and protects against the effects of unfaithful pastors.⁹⁵ In noting that this is the “order of the schools” and discussing the need to establish schools for the instruction of children in the humanities, it seems that Calvin includes all school teachers in this order.⁹⁶ There appear to be two types of teachers, however, as one group trains people in the humanities and one group instructs in theology.⁹⁷ Both serve in the training of ministers, as the *Ordinances* note that the latter group shares characteristics with the minister and is “most closely joined to the government of the church,” while the first group is necessary because of the need to know humanities and languages in order to receive theological instruction.⁹⁸ The inclusion of the teachers of humanities could be tied to the present circumstances of the Genevan church, as the *Ordinances* state, “As things disposed today, we always include under this title aids and instructions for maintaining the doctrine of God and defending the Church from injury by fault of the pastors and ministers. So, to use a more intelligible word, we call this the order of the schools.”⁹⁹ These teachers would face discipline and require approval like the ministers.

While the *Ordinances* reveal Calvin’s intention to establish this office and the Academy upon his return to Geneva, the opening of the Academy described in the *Ordinances* would not occur until 1559,¹⁰⁰ after Calvin had resolved

⁹² Discussion of the rotation of pastors in Geneva appears in McKee, “Calvin and His Colleagues” 19–21.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 19–20.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 40.

⁹⁵ Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises* 62–63.

⁹⁶ The section concerning teachers also features instructions for the establishment of a school for the training of boys for government and ministry, of a person who is able to teach to oversee such education in the city, and of other instructors to assist in the education of the children.

⁹⁷ Henderson, *Teaching Office* 35.

⁹⁸ Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises* 62–63.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 62.

¹⁰⁰ The school that existed from 1541–1559 was in many ways a continuation of the college Calvin established in his first stay in Geneva because of the disintegration of the school system during the revolution in Geneva (Reid, “Calvin and the Founding” 7–8) rather than the school envisioned in the *Ordinances* (Henderson, *Teaching Office* 60). While teachers such as Sebastian Castellion had to be approved by the Company of Pastors, it is unclear if they were teachers of the *Ordinances* (*ibid.* 48), and a significant change seems to occur with the creation of the Academy in 1559. The requirement of approval of teachers by the pastors may have been another area in which Calvin sought to take control from the magistrates, as the city council would force a compromise on this issue similar to

conflicts with the leadership of Geneva and gathered a good body of ministers.¹⁰¹ The poor conditions of the Genevan schools appears as another reason for the delay in the creation of the Academy, as educational reform needed to precede the creation of the Academy because education in the humanities must precede instruction in divinity.¹⁰² Other practical factors that delayed the establishment of the Academy included the need to secure land, funding, and a faculty.¹⁰³ In the interim, Calvin essentially filled this office by mentoring the brighter students of the city, giving lectures on Scriptures, and writing commentaries and Latin treatises, including the *Institutes*.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, Calvin sought to improve the Genevan school system during these years, thus laying the foundation for the Academy.¹⁰⁵

The establishment of the Academy in 1559 created the proper location for the office of teacher to function, bringing to fruition the office of teacher.¹⁰⁶ The division and distinction between the *schola privata*, which served as a preparatory school for children up to sixteen, and the *schola publica*, which trained ministers, reflects the two types of teachers discussed in the *Ordinances*.¹⁰⁷ While the pastors selected the teachers of the *schola privata*,¹⁰⁸ only the lecturers of the *schola publica* are said to attend the Friday meetings of the Company of Pastors¹⁰⁹ and appear to be members of the Company, even

the one concerning the appointment of pastors (Reid, "Calvin and the Founding" 8, 11). The revision of the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* in 1561 would remove this requirement (Henderson, *Teaching Office* 65), perhaps reflecting Calvin's success in gaining ecclesiastical authority for the school.

¹⁰¹ Calvin's visit to Strasbourg in 1557 could also have served as an impetus to establish the Academy (Reid, "Calvin and the Founding" 9; Osmer, *Teachable Spirit* 125).

¹⁰² Bouwsma, "Peculiarity" 71; Osmer, *Teachable Spirit* 123, 125. On the history of education in Geneva before Calvin, see Reid, "Calvin and the Founding" 6–7. The dismissal of Sebastian Castellion as director of the school also delayed the establishment of the Academy (Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development* 81–83).

¹⁰³ Reid, "Calvin and the Founding" 9–10. Calvin acquired land for the school in 1552 and raised funds for it in 1558 (Henderson, *Teaching Office* 60–61). The dismissal of the faculty at Lausanne, including Theodore Beza, made a competent faculty available (Osmer, *Teachable Spirit* 125).

¹⁰⁴ Wallace, *Calvin* 98; Zachman, "'Do You Understand?'" 9. In filling the office of teacher while remaining a pastor of the city, Calvin (and later Beza) saved the city money, as they were paid as pastors rather than as teachers (Reid, "Calvin and the Founding" 16). Financial factors thus may have been a factor for the practice and its continuation.

¹⁰⁵ Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* 136. A tentative attempt to reform the school system occurred in 1550, but this only seems to have altered the organization of the elementary schools (Reid, "Calvin and the Founding" 9).

¹⁰⁶ On the organization of the Academy, see Reid's translation of *The Order of the College of Geneva* in "Calvin and the Founding" 22–33.

¹⁰⁷ Osmer, *Teachable Spirit* 126. The regulations of the college establish two lecturers in theology just as suggested in the *Ordinances*. The creation of the offices of Rector and Principal of the college also seems to reflect the description of the *Ordinances* for a master and assistants. The Rector was a pastor, which is surprising in light of the fact that pastors both teach and help rule over the church alongside of the governors; a pastor would thus be a logical choice as the one the *Ordinances* require to be "learned and expert in arranging both the house and instruction, who is also able to lecture" (Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises* 63).

¹⁰⁸ Reid, "Calvin and the Founding" 24. As one may suspect, the council then had to approve them. The pastors and professors selected the rector (*ibid.* 29) and, it appears, the public lecturers as well (*ibid.* 31).

¹⁰⁹ Henderson, *Teaching Office* 62. See Reid, "Calvin and the Founding," 31. While there were two parts of the Friday meetings of the Company, one a lecture open to the public and the other a private meeting, it seems that they attended both meetings, not just the public lecture.

if they were not pastors.¹¹⁰ That a professor needed approval to become a preacher shows that the differentiation Calvin made between the teacher and the pastor existed, as skills as a teacher would not necessarily qualify one to be a pastor.¹¹¹ With the Academy, the office of teacher, an office different from but closely related to the pastor, could now function in its appropriate sphere.

Calvin's establishment of the biblical office of governor occurred in the creation of the office of elder, as the *Ordinances* feature an office of those with the responsibility to watch over the lives of the people and administer discipline with the Company of Pastors.¹¹² These twelve men were native Genevans who were not ordained or admitted to the Company of Pastors, and the presiding officer of the Consistory was a layman.¹¹³ In the practical establishment of this office, Calvin drew these officers from the magistrates, as two elders came from the Little Council, four elders from the Council of Sixty, and six elders from the Large Council. The Little Council, in consultation with the pastors, nominated the best candidates who were then approved by the Large Council and elected by the public.¹¹⁴

Since these elders were members of the secular government, it may appear that Calvin ignored the distinction he advocated between secular and ecclesiastical authorities. Calvin, however, maintained that these rulers left their civil authority outside of the Consistory meetings; their actions as elders were different from their work as magistrates.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, it does not seem that Calvin thought that these elders must be from the civil government, as the *Ordinances* say, "In the present condition of the church, it would be good" for the elders to come from the magistrate.¹¹⁶ Wisdom seems to be a factor in this policy, as magistrates who demonstrated skill in ruling the city were also

¹¹⁰ See discussion in Henderson, *Teaching Office* 62–67, which notes that many of the first faculty members were either pastors before or while they taught at the Academy but some, particularly the professors of Greek, philosophy, and law, were not, though some of these men later became pastors. The fact that these posts did not directly teach theology (see the description of the duties of the Professor of Greek in Reid, "Calvin and the Founding" 32) may be a reason that these professors were not always pastors. Their teaching, however, was not "secular," as they taught general revelation, which Calvin believed also to be important for theology (*ibid.* 14–15). The inclusion of these teachers in the Company of Pastors may show the need to rethink this title. Henderson regularly calls it the *Compagnie des Ministres et Professeurs* (see *Teaching Office* 62, 66–71), following the description in *The Order of the College of Geneva* (Reid, "Calvin and the Founding" 23, 29). It would seem that the Company was a mixture of pastors and teachers just as the Consistory was a mixture of pastors and elders.

¹¹¹ On the unanimous appointment of Professor Theodore Beza to become a pastor in 1558, see Hughes, *Register* 341. Though this occurred in 1558, the close proximity of the date to the creation of the Academy seems to point to such differentiation at the birth of the Academy.

¹¹² Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises* 63–64. As noted before, pastors, teachers, and governors were all elders in Calvin's mind, but in the Genevan system, the title of elder was the title given to the office Calvin described as a governor.

¹¹³ Uprichard, "Eldership" 36; Kingdon, "Calvin and 'Presbytery'" 46–47. Wendel notes, however, that minutes of the Consistory reveal Calvin's great influence over the Consistory (*Calvin: Origins and Development* 85).

¹¹⁴ Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises* 63; Larson, "John Calvin" 50–51.

¹¹⁵ Torrance, "Eldership" 505.

¹¹⁶ Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises* 63. The recognition of the influence of the present circumstances on the church also appears in the discussion of the teacher, which similarly states "as things are disposed today" (*ibid.* 62).

likely to be competent to help rule the church.¹¹⁷ Not every city ruler could be an elder because these leaders had to demonstrate good character and be above reproach, paralleling the biblical standards of 1 Tim 3:1–13 and Titus 1:5–9.¹¹⁸ In addition, Calvin did not have complete freedom in establishing the order of the church, particularly before 1555, as he had to involve the magistrate in the government of the church. Therefore, this policy may have been a prudent way to include the magistrates among the leaders of the church while also being faithful to Calvin's view of the biblical teaching about governors.¹¹⁹

Calvin also attempted to bring his final biblical office, the deacon, to Geneva. The *Ordinances* describe two types of deacons, one distributing alms and the other caring for the poor, corresponding to Calvin's explanation of the deacon.¹²⁰ Geneva already had a system of caring for the poor similar to most towns of the day.¹²¹ Therefore, Calvin did not create a system but amended it and attached it to the church, encouraging the church to care for the poor as part of its spiritual call and making the administrators of the hospitals officers of the church.¹²² Calvin encountered opposition from the magistrates in making this a recognized office of the church, as it does not seem that the *procureurs* of the hospitals, the subcommittee of the city council that oversaw the hospital, ever received the title "deacons" during Calvin's lifetime.¹²³ Furthermore, the *hospitallers*, who oversaw the day-to-day operations of the hospital, were not called deacons and retained administration over these hospitals rather than the widows Calvin saw as the second division of the deacons.¹²⁴ Deacon-administrators would emerge among the French, Italian, and English refugee groups in Geneva, managing particular funds for the poor of those communities.¹²⁵ Therefore, the deacons were the administrators of the refugee funds, and the *procureurs* and *hospitallers* remained in charge of the hospital, contrary to Calvin's wishes.¹²⁶ He thought that establishment of this office

¹¹⁷ Naphy, *Calvin* 77–78; Larson, "John Calvin" 49–50.

¹¹⁸ They were to be "men of good and honest life, without reproach and beyond suspicion, and above all fearing God and possessing the gift of spiritual prudence" (Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatise* 63). Their yearly election ensured that the men remained competent and spiritual (Larson, "John Calvin" 51).

¹¹⁹ As Olson notes, this was also a way to foster cooperation between the ecclesial and civic leaders, perhaps cultivating a better relationship between two groups who often saw each other as adversaries ("Calvin as Pastor-Administrator" 14).

¹²⁰ Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises* 64–66. A discussion of the hospital also appears in this section.

¹²¹ McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate* 106.

¹²² In effect, Calvin "sanctified" the office that these people already possessed (Olson, "Calvin as Pastor-Administrator" 15). He also supported "disestablished" deacons not directly tied to the hospital (McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate* 112–13).

¹²³ Jeanine Olson, "Protestant Deacons in Geneva and Europe after John Calvin," in *Caritas et reformatio* (ed. David Whitford; St. Louis: Concordia, 2002) 157.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ The funds were labeled according to their respective group (*Bourse fancaise, italienne, etc.*). See *idem*, "Calvin as Pastor-Administrator" 14. Later, deacons emerged for the German refugees, managing the *Bourse allemande*.

¹²⁶ The people who served in these positions were often businessmen and nobles, with the foreigners who oversaw the funds for refugees becoming bourgeois in the city (*idem*, "Protestant Deacons" 156–57).

was incomplete and a disgrace to Geneva.¹²⁷ While lamenting this fact, it also seems that Calvin did not view replacing the *hospitallers* with widows as a high priority because the poor received care and there were qualified men and their wives providing this care. Calvin's greater goal was to have the function of the office working properly in his city, particularly in light of the number of reforms the city needed during his ministry.¹²⁸ The example of the diaconate, however, shows that Calvin realized that Geneva did not fully embody his vision of church.¹²⁹

Calvin's ministry in Geneva shows that he did not simply develop a theology of church government. Rather, he sought to bring it into existence in the church of Geneva. In doing, he had to create structures and procedures that would reflect and reinforce what he saw Scripture teaching, considering what faithfulness to the biblical text would look like in his circumstances and how to move towards this goal. Implementation of his vision, however, was difficult and incomplete at the time of his death, remaining a work still in progress.

III. FROM THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY TO TODAY

Calvin recognized that church government and church constitutions were not directly addressed in Scripture but he still sought to apply the Bible to these interrelated issues. In effect, he took seriously both the authority of Scripture and the inherent limitations of the biblical text,¹³⁰ reflecting the premise of *Four Views on Moving from the Bible to Theology*.¹³¹ One can thus compare the implicit principles Calvin used in moving "beyond the Bible" to the explicit proposals of Walter Kaiser, Daniel Doriani, Kevin Vanhoozer, and William Webb appearing in that volume.¹³² Such an examination shows that Calvin seemed to utilize aspects of each proposal, revealing the various proposals to be complementary rather than competing, conventional rather than novel.¹³³ In addition, observing Calvin's example raises awareness of issues in moving from the Bible to theology and practice that proposals can overlook or underestimate.

In using the Bible to speak to an issue it does not directly address, Calvin did not simply use the Bible for proof-texts of doctrine.¹³⁴ Rather, he engaged

¹²⁷ McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate* 107, 215. This makeup of the diaconate did not change upon Calvin's death (Olson, "Protestant Deacons" 156–57). For a discussion of the Genevan diaconate post-Calvin, see *ibid.* 157–62.

¹²⁸ McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate* 216–17.

¹²⁹ Another area in which Calvin was unable to implement his biblical and theological convictions concerns the rite of ordination. For discussion of Calvin's views and his inability to bring them to Geneva, see Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine* 142–44; Wilton, "Calvin's Theology."

¹³⁰ Once again adopting the terminology of Toulmin (see nn. 17, 19), Calvin (as well as the contributors to *Four Views*) uses the Bible as the data for his claims but do so in light of certain qualifications, warrants, etc.

¹³¹ See the introductory comments in Meadors, *Four Views* 7–17.

¹³² Perhaps one should view this section as an overview of what Calvin may have said if he had the opportunity to write an essay like those by Strauss, Wolters, and Wright reflecting on the proposals of Kaiser, Doriani, Vanhoozer, and Webb (*ibid.* 271–346).

¹³³ Calvin's example is thus similar to the remarks of Wright (*ibid.* 320–30).

¹³⁴ As also observed in Richard Muller, "The Foundation of Calvin's Theology: Scripture as Revealing God's Word," *Duke Divinity School Review* 44 (1979) 23.

in a close reading of passages of the Bible, as implied in the proposals of the other contributors and overtly suggested by Doriani, quoting Calvin.¹³⁵ Like modern scholars, Calvin believed that a proper reading of the biblical text meant analyzing the passage in its historical and literary context to understand the author's intended meaning.¹³⁶ In addition, by making distinctions between the government of the people of God in the Old and New Testaments and the temporary and permanent offices in the church,¹³⁷ one also sees Calvin placing an importance on the location of a text in salvation history, as specifically noted by Doriani, Vanhoozer, and Webb.¹³⁸ While not demonstrated as clearly in the present discussion on church government, Calvin's interest in the author's meaning was not just on the content expressed, as he also paid attention to the desired effects of the author's words,¹³⁹ which in some ways is analogous to Vanhoozer's focus on what the author is doing with the text¹⁴⁰ and to Webb's discussion of the "trajectory" of the text in its historical and social context.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, Calvin's reading of the biblical text at times leads him to note and emphasize principles in line with Kaiser's focus on principalization.¹⁴²

In addition to reading the text in its historical, literary, and canonical context, Calvin's historical context also played a significant role, though only partially acknowledged, in his exegetical and theological formulations. By discussing the interpretation of texts throughout church history,¹⁴³ Calvin's writings reveal how his location in the history of the church influenced his

¹³⁵ Meadors, *Four Views* 84. On this starting point in the approach of others, see, e.g., 121–22, 242.

¹³⁶ See Randall C. Zachman, "Gathering Meaning from the Context: Calvin's Exegetical Method," *JR* 82 (2002) 1–26, esp. 7–18. Of course, the tools of Calvin's day made this examination different from those in contemporary scholarship.

¹³⁷ While viewing the Old and the New Testaments as speaking about a single covenant, Calvin also saw significant distinctions in the administration of the covenant, as discussed in *Institutes* 2.10–11. For a recent proposal of the importance of biblical history in Calvin's thought and structure of the *Institutes*, see Stephen Edmondson, "The Biblical Historical Structure of Calvin's *Institutes*," *SJT* 59 (2006) 1–13.

¹³⁸ Meadors, *Four Views* 85, 173–74, 179–81, 217–21. Kaiser's emphasis on "timeless" principles seems to undercut the concept of placing the text within its canonical/redemptive context, as Vanhoozer observes (*ibid.* 60).

¹³⁹ John L. Thompson, "Calvin as Biblical Interpreter," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (ed. Donald K. McKim; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 61.

¹⁴⁰ Meadors, *Four Views* 159–60, 165–70. For a more complete discussion of Vanhoozer's emphasis on speech acts, see Kevin Vanhoozer, "From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts: The Covenant of Discourse and the Discourse of Covenant," in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Möller; Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) 1–49.

¹⁴¹ Meadors, *Four Views* 217–21. Calvin's discussion of the shift that happens in terms of state/church relations and his application of it in Geneva would also seem to reflect the sort of movement that Webb notes happens inside of the canon.

¹⁴² While the other contributors criticize Kaiser's "Principlizing Model" (see *ibid.* 51–73), all employ some form of principalization, as Strauss and Wolters point out (*ibid.* 275, 302). That even after strongly critiquing the principalization method, David Clark notes that one must principalize "softly" reveals the inevitability of principalization in moving from the Bible to theology (*To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* [Wheaton: Crossway, 2003] 91–98).

¹⁴³ Thompson, "Calvin as Biblical Interpreter" 62–67; de Greef, "Calvin's Understanding" 77. For a monograph on Calvin's use of the Church fathers, see A. N. S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (London: T & T Clark, 1999).

explanation of Scripture and theology, manifesting a likeness to the concept of “Catholic sensibility” highlighted in Vanhoozer’s proposal but often overlooked in discussions of exegetical method.¹⁴⁴ Contemporary cultural experiences also affected Calvin’s interpretation and synthesis of biblical teachings, as the practices of Strasbourg and the Roman church seem to have shaped his exegetical and theological conclusions on church government, demonstrating or suggesting true and false interpretations of Scripture. Furthermore, Calvin also considered how current understandings of the liberal arts and sciences could help unlock the meaning of Scripture, utilizing general revelation to understand and communicate special revelation.¹⁴⁵ This explicit use of general revelation by Calvin seems to be missing in the proposals of Kaiser, Doriani, Vanhoozer, and Webb, as Al Wolters notes,¹⁴⁶ but appears in other recent discussions of the task of theology.¹⁴⁷ Thus, Calvin did not just move from the text to his world but also from his world to the text, being influenced, both intentionally and unintentionally, by his historical context; he grounded his views in Scripture, but his observation and experience of God working in the world shaped and justified his exegetical and theological conclusions.¹⁴⁸ Calvin’s use of previous interpretations and the insights of other disciplines to help develop his exegetical and theological views could offer a practical illustration of Vanhoozer’s requirement of “fittingness to the situation” in theological proposals.¹⁴⁹

Calvin’s movement from his textual findings to his theological proposals also reflects ideas and elements found in contemporary proposals. By noting that Acts 6 shows the need for deacons but does not assign an exact number of them, one sees Calvin moving up something akin to Kaiser’s “Ladder of Abstraction” from specificities embedded in circumstances of the early church to the general, timeless principle the passage intends to teach.¹⁵⁰ Calvin moves down the “Ladder” to his contemporary historical situation by selecting the elders of the church from the civil magistrate, finding their ability to rule over the city well as comparable to the requirement that an elder rule over his house well. Furthermore, Calvin’s strong emphasis on 1 Cor 14:40 as issuing an enduring principle for church government may also prompt associations with Kaiser’s stress on discerning “timeless abiding truths” to apply in con-

¹⁴⁴ Meadors, *Four Views* 181; cf. 128, where Vanhoozer criticizes Doriani, as well as Kaiser and Webb, on not paying enough attention to tradition. Strauss also points to the importance of listening to church tradition to guard against unintentional biases (ibid. 280). In addition to guarding against biases, however, attention to church history may also spark better insights into the text missed when only employing historical-grammatical methods.

¹⁴⁵ Zachman, “Gathering Meaning,” 19–21; cf. 12, 17–18. Calvin uses experience to help substantiate his claim about the perpetual nature of the office of government in *Institutes* 4.3.8.

¹⁴⁶ See Meadors, *Four Views* 314, 317–19. Although not explicitly mentioned in their contributions to *Four Views*, Kaiser, Doriani, Vanhoozer, and Webb all utilize insights drawn from other disciplines.

¹⁴⁷ On the value of culture, science, and philosophy in theological discussion highlighted, see Clark, *To Know* 113–22, 259–318.

¹⁴⁸ McKee, *John Calvin on the Diaconate* 137. Calvin thus uses tradition, experience, and other disciplines as warrants, qualifiers, rebuttals, etc. in moving from the data of Scripture to his theological views and pastoral practices (see nn. 17, 19, 130).

¹⁴⁹ Meadors, *Four Views* 181–84.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 19–26.

temporary circumstances.¹⁵¹ In reading Scripture Christocentrically and also using the examples of biblical figures, including the early church, as a way to teach doctrine, Calvin's approach coheres with Doriani's emphasis on the history of redemption and the possibility of using narratives in the formulation of doctrine when they create a certain pattern.¹⁵² In defining the offices of the church prescribed in the Bible as well as the ambiguities concerning these offices, such as the exact mechanisms of their election, Calvin's example also illustrates Doriani's caution to remain within the bounds of Scripture and not to enforce as commands elements that are ambiguous.¹⁵³ Connections appear between Calvin's work and Doriani's emphasis on casuistry since Calvin's focus on church government examines questions he felt that Scripture does not address or answer directly but were relevant for his time.¹⁵⁴ Likewise, Calvin's attempt to train other pastors, as well as the laity,¹⁵⁵ indicate a desire to cultivate the "moral judgment and character" needed in interpretation highlighted in Doriani's contribution.¹⁵⁶

Calvin also manifests similarities to the less traditional proposals of Vanhoozer and Webb. The importance Calvin placed on a church being able to construct its own constitution and alter practices in changing situations seems to be a less poetic form of Vanhoozer's image of "improvising with a script,"¹⁵⁷ as the text gives direction rather than direct answers to the question of how to live faithfully in new and changing circumstances.¹⁵⁸ Calvin may thus be an answer to the criticisms of Vanhoozer made by Kaiser, Doriani, and Strauss that it is difficult to understand what Vanhoozer's approach looks like in practice.¹⁵⁹ While I suspect that Calvin would have some reservations about Webb's "Redemptive-Movement Model," Calvin's practice reflects awareness that his views function within a movement that seeks to redeem practices and ideas to the concepts expressed by Scripture.¹⁶⁰ In seeking to redeem

¹⁵¹ For example, *ibid.* 28–30. David Clark's criticism about the influence of one's culture in the formulation of principles (*To Know* 91–98) seems fitting to the principles Calvin finds, as his emphasis on order, democratic processes, and a plurality of leadership may be a greater reflection of values of his culture than the intended meaning of the biblical text.

¹⁵² Meadors, *Four Views* 86–89, 118. As already noted, Calvin uses a narrative that describes divine approval to establish the office of deacons (*Institutes* 4.3.9). On Calvin's Christocentric reading of Scripture, see Klaas Runia, "The Hermeneutics of the Reformers," *CTJ* 19 (1984) 144–45; de Greef, "Calvin's Understanding," 80–89.

¹⁵³ Meadors, *Four Views* 102. See n. 58 and Calvin's restraint in developing a strict model for election of officers.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 99–102.

¹⁵⁵ On Calvin's mission to educate both pastors and the laity, see Zachman, "'Do You Understand?'"

¹⁵⁶ Meadors, *Four Views* 101–2.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 172–74.

¹⁵⁸ In light of the fact that Calvin does not see Scripture acting as a church constitution, one could see his approach as a "redescription" rather than "translation" of the Scripture into today's world described (see Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine* 185–92). Vanhoozer's language of "modulation" may be even more appropriate (Meadors, *Four Views* 182–83), as Calvin seeks to transpose the principles to his temporal and cultural location.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 204, 209, 285. Also note the connections made above between Calvin's example and Vanhoozer's discussion of "Catholic Sensibility: Fittingness to the Situation."

¹⁶⁰ Both Webb and Calvin talk about contrast but in different ways, as Webb discusses the contrast between the biblical texts and their historical culture(s) while Calvin highlights the difference between what he found to be the biblical view and that of the current church or culture. For an example of Calvin's contrasting emphasis, see *Institutes* 4.3–10, as 4.3 discusses Calvin's view of the

faulty practices, Calvin at times employed an incremental approach, making gradual changes in line with his historical and cultural context until he could institute fully what he saw as the ultimate aim of Scripture, showing Calvin practicing what Webb's proposal sees the biblical text doing.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, although Calvin's ideas about church government seem traditional in today's ecclesiastical world, elements of his proposal could be viewed as radical by his contemporaries, akin to the response of many to Webb's interpretive proposal.¹⁶² Thus, one finds elements of Webb's "spirit" in Calvin's movement from the Bible to theology and practice.

While the contributors to *Four Views* emphasize the need to apply the results of their proposals to the life of the church,¹⁶³ Calvin's experience in Geneva goes "beyond" their discussions by offering a paradigm for appropriating theological proposals to the life of the church. Calvin could not bring his church into conformity with his theological ideas quickly because of opposition of the city leaders to his proposals and the wide gap between the practice Genevan church and Calvin's views of the biblical ideal created by past failures and the nature of the Genevan Reformation. Seeing the multitude of changes needed, it seems that Calvin laid out an intention to make these changes with the 1541 *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* but implemented them gradually and strategically throughout his lifetime. He first addressed issues he deemed the most important or most dire, such as gathering a group of qualified pastors or establishing the office of governor. For reforms that would take time, like the creation of a school for the office of teacher, Calvin patiently sought changes that would help him realize his ultimate plan. Although the diaconate did not yet meet the biblical ideal, because ministry to the poor had been reclaimed by the church, godly men and women cared for the poor, and the Genevan deacon was different from what Calvin perceived as false practices of the Roman church, Calvin considered the most critical elements of the diaconate to be in place, causing him to focus on other issues he saw as imperative in restoring and maintaining purity in the church rather than fighting for the implementation of his vision of the diaconate in its entirety. Thus, Calvin wrestled with drawing theology from Scripture and with applying this theology to his community of faith.

Calvin's example can remind theologians and pastors that moving from the Bible to theology is only step one, and that step two, implementing the teachings of Scripture, is also a complicated process. Application of biblical principles and practices requires transformation of broken systems and behaviors, sometimes occurring in a context with many complex problems and opponents

biblical teaching on church government and 4.5–10 is a description of how this government fell out of practice. One may wonder if Calvin would have highlighted the contrast to the original culture more if he had today's tools.

¹⁶¹ Webb discusses how the Bible is part of an "incremental movement toward an ultimate ethic" (Meadors, *Four Views* 217; emphasis original). For Vanhoozer's evaluation of Webb's use of Calvin's concept of "accommodation" (ibid. 226), see ibid. 268.

¹⁶² For the "radical" elements of Calvin's polity, see n. 68. One can find the controversy generated by Webb's views in Thomas R. Schreiner, "William J. Webb's *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*: A Review Article," *SBJT* (2002) 46–64; Wayne Grudem, "Should We Move beyond the New Testament to a Better Ethic?" *JETS* 47 (2004) 299–346.

¹⁶³ See, e.g., Meadors, *Four Views* 77–80, 153–55.

to change. These factors mean that Christian leaders may need to be selective and strategic in how to bring biblical truth to bear in the fallen world, being wise as serpents and innocent as doves in this process. Hopefully, this understanding leads to more charity in evaluating the praxis of others, noting the resistance that some leaders face in implementing theological truths and the need to address the issues most important to the spiritual welfare of a community first. In addition, one must remember that the work of redemption is ongoing; the church must continually sharpen its theology and praxis in light of Scripture, recognizing that theological ideas and community practices may not yet fully reflect faithfulness to biblical standards. Finally, it should also lead to discussions concerning how to discern the places to start reform and how to move from faulty practices to biblical practices, considering how the Bible may speak to such challenges.

IV. CONCLUSION

While certainly less deliberate than recent discussions on moving “beyond the Bible” to theology and practice, Calvin’s movement from the Bible to theology and practice in regards to church government shows awareness of many of the issues raised in contemporary discussions, such as considering the historical and redemptive context of a passage, finding both circumstantial particularities and universal principles in the biblical text, and commanding the church to be faithful to biblical teachings in new circumstances rather than imitating every action of the first-century church. Furthermore, his use of interpretative history and general revelation in exegeting Scripture and developing theological systems shows the important role these two factors can play in aiding and advancing biblical interpretation and theological formulations. As a pastor, Calvin attempted to implement his theological vision, but he did so gradually, recognizing that the failure of current conditions may require numerous steps before achieving the biblical ideal. Thus, understanding how to move from the Bible to theology is only half of the challenge of moving “beyond the Bible,” as one must also figure out tangible ways to exemplify such a theology in specific circumstances.

Because of the vast amount of his exegetical, theological, and pastoral work available, Calvin can serve as a prime example of how someone moved from biblical interpretation to theological explication and ecclesiastical application, but the examples of other figures throughout church history would also offer helpful insights in contemporary discussions of moving “beyond the Bible.”¹⁶⁴ Therefore, historical theologians need to come alongside of biblical scholars, systematic theologians, missiologists, and pastors in the conversation about moving “beyond the Bible,”¹⁶⁵ reminding today’s church that the challenge of moving from the Bible to theology and practice is one that Christians have always and will always face.

¹⁶⁴ Perhaps another “Four Views” book could include discussions of how four figures in the past moved “beyond the Bible.”

¹⁶⁵ In seeking to include historical theologians in these discussions, there is no intent to exclude the potential value of philosophical theologians. On the need for integration of biblical, systematic, historical, and philosophical theology, see Clark, *To Know* 182–93.