Distinguishing saints from sinners, shepherds from sheep, and supervisors from servants: differentiating the community in sixteenth-century Geneva

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DISTINGUISHING SAINTS FROM SINNERS, SHEPHERDS FROM SHEEP, AND SUPERVISORS FROM SERVANTS: DIFFERENTIATING THE COMMUNITY IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY GENEVA

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Religious Studies in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

May 2014

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To Melinda
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ABSTRACT

With its slogan “the priesthood of all believers,” it has been long assumed that the Protestant Reformation aided the development of Western individualism. This dissertation reassesses this common and pervasive claim by examining dynamics in Geneva during the lifetime of its most famous minister, John Calvin. To lend new and illuminating lenses to this study, this dissertation not only examines Calvin’s theology with enough complexity to note how his proto-individualistic notions were embedded within a larger context of authority and hierarchy, but it also gives consideration to the practical rhythms of daily religious life in Geneva as well as the responses which Genevans gave to his initiatives. This blend of thorough intellectual history and social history offers a more comprehensive image of the subtleties of the Genevan context and permit a more nuanced analysis into the topic.

Certain proto-individualistic notions existed in Calvin’s theology. Yet, these proto-individualistic notions were heavily circumscribed by other commitments to ministerial authority and hierarchy. For example, though he placed intense emphasis on the renovation of the individual’s interior space in the process of developing piety, he feared individual and private tampering with personal interiority and instead mandated and policed Genevan attendance at public services where trained and authoritative ministers could give oversight to the shaping of Genevans’ hearts and minds. Similarly, the rigid and invasive nature of Calvin’s church disciplinary system was able to give surveillance to nearly every aspect of Genevans’ lives, and they sensed that their development of piety was not their own affair.
Though Calvin’s reforms did not encourage Genevans to feel an emerging sense of religious individualism, it established and reinforced various differentiations within the community. At times, Genevans felt differentiated from the rest of the community as unique individuals, but in more cases, they perceived that differentiations were being enforced at a less individualistic level. Such dynamics distinguished pastors from the laity, sinners from the faithful, the honorable from the dishonorable, natives from foreigners, masters from servants, men from women, and so forth.
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INTRODUCTION

Literature Review

Roughly a century ago, Max Weber proposed that “The question of eternal salvation constituted people’s primary life concern during the Reformation epoch, yet they were directed to pursue their life’s journey in solitude.” He concluded that “for the mood of a generation that devoted itself to the grandiose consistency of the doctrine of predestination, its melancholy inhumanity must have had one result above all: a feeling of unimaginable inner loneliness of the solitary individual.” He explicitly identified this as a form of “pessimistic individualism.”¹ Weber was far from alone in drawing this conclusion. Scholars from a range of academic disciplines have long assumed a significant connection between the Protestant Reformation and individualism.

A number of Reformation scholars have suggested a linkage between early Protestantism and individualism. Alister McGrath suggests that various shades of individualism were promoted by different sects of the Reformation. He claims that the magisterial Reformation only encouraged a limited form of individualism because it subjected individual judgment or interpretation of Scripture to tradition when treating the issue of baptism. He takes it that the Anabaptists most readily practiced interpretive individualism given that they overthrew traditional views on the matter.² Another Reformation scholar, Susan Karant-Nunn, has drawn attention to the tension between individualism and the community within the theological and practical matrices of Geneva during John Calvin’s lifetime. For example, she points out that medieval baptism, which largely had been a private affair concerned with the everlasting fate of the newly born


² Alister E. McGrath, Reformation Thought: An Introduction (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 154–156; Steven E. Ozment also briefly discusses the potential connection between the Reformation and individualism in The Reformation in the Cities: The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 22.
infant, was transformed into a public and communal affair in Geneva under Calvin. The ceremony took place before the entire church congregation, as the baby was welcomed and initiated into the community of faith. In this way, “All in attendance witnessed the sacrament and thus participated in it.” She concludes that “one takes cognizance of the young person [being baptized], but the comprehensive dimensions of the rite—including its setting—indicate the importance of the community.” This interpretation is nuanced in its capacity to balance individualism amidst communal concerns within an early Protestant context, and it also takes seriously the social practices that the Reformation inculcated, not just the theologies it promoted. However, given that the treatment barely spans more than a page, it invites further sustained investigation.

Scholars interested specifically in individualism have often considered the Reformation a key contributor to individualism. Daniel Shanahan’s *Toward a Genealogy of Individualism* falls within this category. He adopts Weber’s thesis that Calvinist religious culture, with its emphasis on divine election, isolated individuals. Then, he suggests that this isolation eventually led to a sense of self-empowerment. While Calvinists never thought that the ground of one’s election was one’s faith, Shanahan argues that Calvinists nonetheless promoted the practice of self-empowered faith; subjectively deeming or believing oneself to be among the elect. Further, and in accord with Weber, this self-empowered faith was also accompanied by self-empowered work in the world; the need to labor Christianly as an individual in the hopes of demonstrating the signs of one’s election.

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3 Susan Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling: Shaping the Religious Emotions in Early Modern Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 106-107; In an earlier book, Karant-Nunn offers a tantalizing invitation to pursue the possibility of individualism within the Reformation when she writes that during the Reformation “The Devil was no longer the objectified, exterior force, striving to frustrate all constructive human endeavor from without... The attitude of ecclesiastical leaders was now, more thoroughly than before, that the source of human ills lay within the guilty individual,” *The Reformation of Ritual: An Interpretation of Early Modern Germany* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 71.

In this same broad scholarly vein is Louis Dumont’s *Essays on Individualism*. Dumont suggests that early Christianity gave birth to outworldly individuals. As individuals, they were autonomous in thought and moral matters, and as outworldly, they remained detached from society. For Dumont, Calvin played the crucial role of completing the process by which Christians became inworldly individuals; believers who were autonomous in thought and moral matters while yet living within society. Pushing this view farther, Dumont echoes Michael Walzer and suggests that the Calvinist was not one who simply felt an individual responsibility in regards to salvation but one who also felt individual responsibility for his concrete world. Dumont claims that in Calvin’s day the church was “…the organ through which the elect were to rule over the reprobate and to carry out their task for the glory of God.”

At times, the assumed connection between the Reformation and individualism can appear in unexpected places. Stephen Feldman’s, *American Legal Thought from Premodernism to Postmodernism*, is not directly dedicated to the Reformation or individualism. Yet, his work briefly speaks to both issues. He claims that Luther and Calvin encouraged “proto-individualism” by placing the individual before God alone, emphasizing the importance of the individual believer’s non-coerced and internal faith in Christ. Feldman then suggests that these strains of proto-individualism were precursors to “an increasingly dignified individual—an individual who…could independently and autonomously choose values and goals.” Further, Feldman argues that Calvin placed such a heavy distinction between the spiritual and earthly realms that it set the stage for the later metaphysical dualism which opposed the individual to the objective world.

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Because of these and many other instances in which the Reformation and individualism are suggested to have a significant connection, Peter Matheson has asked “Reformation spirituality then. Was it, as is so often suggested, a shift from a visual and celebratory culture to a verbal and pedagogic one, from a more feminine to a more patriarchal mode, from a communal religiosity to a decidedly individualistic one?”

With the popular Reformation slogan, “the priesthood of all believers,” combined with efforts to put vernacular Bibles in the hands of the literate public, it is not surprising that many have assumed a powerful linkage between emerging Protestantism and individualism.

Yet, for the frequency with which readers are met with this claim, one is surprised at the relative paucity of works which specifically treat the topic in substantial length. Most works discuss the topic peripherally. For example, Feldman and McGrath begin and end their discussions within the space of two pages. And Weber only made isolated forays into the topic of individualism within a small handful of pages.

Other features of many of these works invite a renewed analysis. Some lack precision because they extract a particular doctrine from its larger context and connect it to individualism without considering how this one theological commitment was informed and nuanced by other related doctrines. Feldman suffers this at a number of levels. For example, he highlights Calvin’s belief that civil government, with the power of coercion, “is distinct from that spiritual and inward kingdom of Christ….” Feldman then concludes that the separation of the coercive power of the government from the church created an inward and free domain of personal conscience in which individuals could experience Christ. This, however, overlooks Calvin’s theological insistence that individuals know and encounter Christ primarily through the public ministries of the church. Further, Calvin’s theology of church discipline held that church leaders had the responsibility to exercise a spiritual jurisdiction over the community, a jurisdiction which required that

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7 Peter Matheson, The Imaginative World of the Reformation (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 121.
obstinate sinners be identified and shamed through temporary excommunication (i.e., being barred from Communion). Thus, when Calvin juxtaposed the civic government’s power of coercion over against the inward Kingdom of Christ, this did not strip the church of its capacity to put intense disciplinary pressure upon individuals to conform to certain standards. These factors limit the extent to which Calvin theologically proposed a free and inward domain for individuals to experience Christ as a matter of personal conscience.

Weber too suffered this problem. He extracted the doctrine of predestination from its larger theological context and concluded that individuals must have experienced inner loneliness and solitude as a result. While this might have been a more accurate description of the Puritan experience, which Weber tends to investigate, it is a less than apt description of how Calvin theologically construed the individual’s experience of salvation. While Calvin did believe that God elected specific individuals to salvation, he sincerely trusted that the individual experienced this, not alone, but in public contexts where one would encounter God’s Word through reliable pastoral preaching. Calvin’s sermons on Psalm 119 regularly refer to the doubt individuals experience in life. In this series of sermons, Calvin did insist on individuals turning within to discover their wretchedness. However, the remedy he proposed was not for individuals to continue to maintain an inward gaze in order to detect signs of their election. Rather, he exhorted individuals to understand and trust the sure promises of Scripture that God indeed loved them as a father and had provided for their salvation. The Calvin who delivered these sermons wanted believers to experience, in public, the proper pastoral exegesis of Psalm 119 which would produce faith in God, not faith in the internal signs of one’s election. Given that Shanahan builds upon Weber’s thesis, he too suffers this difficulty.

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8 This view is discussed in greater length throughout the dissertation, and it is outlined in Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. 
While Dumont’s work demonstrates a high degree of analytical precision (nearly each key term is given an explicit definition in a glossary), this precision appears to breakdown given that Dumont does not carefully qualify what he means by the autonomy of the Calvinist in worldly individual. If autonomy means that the regenerate individual does not rely on culture to make moral decisions, then this is an appropriate way of defining the Calvinist individual. However, if autonomy means that the regenerate individual is a source for generating moral knowledge, in a self-directed fashion, and that individuals can also, of their own power, direct their will and desires toward the good, this would not fit Calvin’s view. Indeed, Calvin took it that the individual lacked self-direction in the sense of being able to choose between good and evil; only divine aid could assist in turning or directing the individual toward the good. And even in this process, Calvin believed that such turning was often worked by God through the ministries of the church. Thus, Dumont’s treatment could explore the intricacies of Calvin’s thought in order to increase its specificity and clarity.

Two works stand out as particularly reliable investigations into the topic: Ernst Troeltsch’s, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Church*, and the more recent work of Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*. Troeltsch examined the ethical teachings of theologians and ministers throughout church history. More than others, Troeltsch treated individualism and the Reformation in greater depth and also contextualized his consideration of specific doctrines. His analysis of Calvin’s thought, in relation to individualism, is relatively extensive as well as balanced. Troeltsch suggested that it was Calvin’s view of divine glory which allowed for the gestation of proto-individualism. Troeltsch defined the individualism of primitive Calvinism as a form of responsibility in which the elect individual has to work or labor in the concrete world to create conditions which reflect God’s glory:

But since to him (Calvin) the central point of religion is not the blessedness of the creature, but the Glory of God, so also the glorification of God in action is the real test of individual personal reality in religion. In
Calvin’s view the individual is not satisfied with mere repose in his own happiness, or perhaps with giving himself to others in loving personal service; further, he is not satisfied with an attitude of mere passive endurance and toleration of the world in which he lives, without entering fully into its life. He feels that, on the contrary, the whole meaning of life consists precisely in entering into these circumstances, and, while inwardly rising above them, in shaping them into an expression of the Divine Will.\textsuperscript{9}

This interpretation is similar to that of Michael Walzer who argues that Calvinism aided the shift by which the elect came to view themselves as responsible for their world, including its political structures. Such a view valorizes the individual as an authoritative agent striving for social and political change instead of submitting the private individual to the authority of the prince.\textsuperscript{10}

In balanced fashion, Troeltsch also demonstrated certain strains of Calvin’s thought which hemmed in individualism. First, he noted that Calvin’s view of divine appointment or ordination was inimical to the concept of equality; Calvin was deeply committed to the concept of hierarchy, sought to establish ecclesiastical structures, and regularly supported civil institutions which enforced a certain hierarchy. Troeltsch wrote: “Thus the whole social ideal of Calvinism is controlled by the sense that human beings are unequal by Divine appointment, and that the only equality which exists is that of incapacity to do any good in one’s own strength….”\textsuperscript{11} Secondly, Calvin, reduced Luther’s emphasis on the priesthood of believers and opted for “making the control and the purity of the church effective.”\textsuperscript{12} This step on Calvin’s part “secured his religious system against all democratic and revolutionary excesses, and against the perils of religious subjectivity.”\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\item Walzer, \textit{The Revolution of the Saints}.
\item Troeltsch, \textit{Social Teaching of the Christian Churches}, 2: 620.
\item Ibid., 2: 591.
\item Ibid., 2: 592.
\end{thebibliography}
With these careful qualifications in mind, Troeltsch concluded that “…all the Calvinistic peoples are characterized by individualism and by democracy, combined with a strong bias towards authority and a sense of the unchangeable nature of law.”\

14 In this way, Troeltsch’s work stands out among others surveyed. He investigated Calvin’s thought with enough vigor to be able to provide a balanced view; one that sees Calvin struggling between individualism and authoritarian strictures and structures. Further, he took it that Calvin did not purposefully promote individualism. Indeed, Troeltsch argued that individualism was a byproduct of other of Calvin’s views.

For all of Troeltsch’s strengths, his work still presents some complications. As this dissertation demonstrates (see the conclusion), Calvin’s approach to democracy was thorny and tentative. Though he valued democracy, he believed in a limited form, one that was tempered with significant reliance upon the aristocracy. Thus, even Calvin’s ideal democracy was somewhat oligarchical. Likewise, Calvin was hesitant to promote political change in the direction of democracy for fear that such would disrupt the existing, albeit less than ideal, political and social order. To say that Calvin avoided democratic excess, as Troeltsch did, perhaps overstates the case. Though Calvin theoretically valued democracy, he instructed private individuals with no official political role to refrain from promoting even limited forms of democracy. He believed that the involvement of private individuals in the realm of politics was a transgression of their proper place in society, and he further feared that such efforts presented the opportunity for the breakdown of the political and social orders. And even his ideal form of democracy leaned upon commitments to aristocratic leadership.

Yet, the greatest limitation of Troeltsch’s work was his preoccupation with intellectual or theological history. Given that the aim of his project was to examine the social teaching of the church, it is understandable that he largely remained within the

14 Ibid., 2: 619.
realm of the history of ideas. However, this leaves untouched the matter of how ordinary people interpreted and responded to such teaching. This is a considerable shortcoming for the majority of works. By far, the vast majority of treatments privileges the voices of significant theologians and pastors and therefore ignores those of ordinary people. Little attention is given to how the broader population experienced and perceived the Protestant Reformation.

Brad Gregory’s recent book, *The Unintended Reformation*, gives fairly direct attention to the relationship between the Reformation and individualism, and his work has received much attention. Gregory maintains a number of related theses throughout his larger work, and one of them is that the Reformation wrought a form of individualism in varied ways. For example, he argues that the central Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* paved the way for later interpretive individualism. As he summarizes, “The history of the Reformation and very probably of Western modernity would have looked dramatically different if those who insisted on *sola scriptura* and abominated interpretive individualism had agreed among themselves about what the Bible taught and thus about what Christians were to believe and do.” On Gregory’s reading of Protestant history, reliance upon Scripture alone for guidance in faith and practice did not result in a singular interpretation of the text but an explosion of disagreement which has continued until the present. He argues that such a splintering, over time, has led to individualism in the sense that each person is allowed to approach the text and now derive his or her own interpretation: “Today, within the limits of the law, literally anything goes as far as truth claims and religious practices are concerned—an extension and latter-day manifestation of the full range of views produced by the Reformation unfettered.”

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16 Ibid., 112.
According to Gregory, today’s pluralistic and relativistic society is the heritage of the Reformation which encouraged interpretive individualism. Yet, Gregory is correct to point out that the early reformers “abominated interpretive individualism.” They insisted on the principle of *sola scriptura* while also refusing to believe that the Bible could be read in a relativistic fashion. In this context, when Protestants developed different interpretations of Scripture, they turned to other resources to defend and bolster their particular interpretations. Gregory notes that early Protestants relied upon ecclesiastical and political authorities to support their differing interpretations, which caused them to look and function in ways that mirrored some of their Catholic predecessors:

> …scripture officially interpreted by hermeneutic authorities and backed by political authorities led to confessional Protestant cities, territories, and states, whether Lutheran or Reformed Protestant (including the Church of England), which stipulated, imposed, and policed their respective versions of what the Bible said in a manner analogous to Catholic political regimes. Scripture “alone,” on the other hand, without an alliance between anti-Roman reformers supported by political authorities, resulted in a vast range of conflicting and irreconcilable Christian truth claims.17

Thus, Gregory suggests that interpretive individualism did not become prominent within Protestantism until the years following the wars of religion when the separation of church and state created a context for individuals to increasingly disagree about biblical interpretation.

One of the strengths of Gregory’s work is its ability to traverse and unite a broad range of historical phenomena to paint a larger narrative. This strength, by its very nature, requires that some exact details remain unexplored. As Alexandra Walsham has written: “…a work of this scope is hard pressed to do justice to the precise motors and mechanisms by which the long-term developments it identifies were brought into being; Gregory is compelled, at times, to make rather large logical leaps.” For example, she asks, “By what means did people adapt to the relativization of truth and morality that

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17 Ibid., 92.
Gregory charts in chapters two and three?18 In similar fashion, Gregory largely relies upon intellectual history. Walsham notes that “He acknowledges at various points that the contingent processes he discusses ‘derived from human interactions’ (307), but individual people are largely absent from his account.”

Like Troeltsch, Gregory is to be commended for noting the tensions inherent to the Reformation and for thus providing a nuanced proposal regarding its relationship to individualism. This enables Gregory to also mirror Troeltsch in arguing that the proposed individualism to which the Reformation eventually gave birth was unintended. Gregory’s broad narrative offers a potential explanatory account of the relationship between the Reformation and individualism. Yet, as Walsham notes, the nature of the account does not provide clear demonstration of its claim but invites other scholars to pick up the larger threads he has drawn together and to investigate particular cases in greater depth for verification. And as Walsham notes, such a project could be enhanced by considering important social historical details.

**Methods, Argument, and Outline**

The existing nature of scholarship on the topic of the Reformation and individualism invites a new investigation. Several methodological commitments give this dissertation new lenses with which to examine this topic of enduring interest.

In order to arrive at precise conclusions instead of positing broad generalizations, this dissertation has limited its scope of investigation to Geneva during the lifetime of its most famous Protestant minister, John Calvin. In this way, the early years of Protestant Reform in Genevan become a test-case for examining the broader assumption. This narrow context was selected for several reasons. A major contributing factor was the number of scholars who link individualism to some variation of the Calvinist tradition. A

related reason for this choice is that Calvin had a particularly prominent international influence. This, in part, could explain why so many remain preoccupied with Calvin and his many successors when discussing the Reformation and individualism. Further, and of considerable importance, studying Geneva as a test-case allowed me to lean on expert insights of my adviser, Raymond Mentzer, into the dynamics of the early Reformed religious context.

Narrowing the scope of the investigation presents certain limitations. For example, it does not allow one to identify common features among all sects of early Protestantism that would be the most important to consider as potential forms of proto-individualism. Likewise, this narrow scope does not permit one to examine continuities and differences between late-medieval Christianity and early Protestantism. Additionally, this narrow field of investigation does not allow one to trace developments from early to late Protestantism. However, a contracted range of inquiry does present substantial gains. First, this permits the dissertation to explore Calvin’s theology in greater depth in order to understand his larger theological outlook. This enables the dissertation to situate Calvin’s notions regarding the individual within their larger theological context which provides a more comprehensive or holistic understanding of how he perceived the nature, place, freedoms, and responsibilities of the individual within the church, community, society, and family.

Second, a narrow scope of inquiry enables this dissertation to examine the daily rhythms of religious life in Geneva. The Reformation did not simply see the emergence of renovated theologies but was also accompanied by changes in religious practice which produced important influences upon European culture and society. Perhaps no one has documented this more effectively than Susan Karant-Nunn. While Calvin’s theology had implications for the individual and the community, so too did Geneva’s new religious

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19 See her book *The Reformation of Ritual.*
cadences place the individual within certain institutional structures that demanded particular behavior and recognition of one’s place in the church, the city, the society, and the family. A growing body of literature has emerged which specifically analyzes these dynamics in Geneva, from patterned activity surrounding public Bible studies and rituals of Communion to weekly ecclesiastical discipline. These works enable one to investigate a range of daily Reformed practices in the city.

Third, this dissertation stands upon the assumption that the influence of the Reformation must be gauged, in part, by the ways in which ordinary people responded to its implementation. While Calvin’s theology has long been studied, until recently, relatively little attention had been given to the voices of ordinary Genevans. Due to the pioneering work of Robert Kingdon, who gave direct and persistent consideration to the social history of the Reformation of Geneva, an emerging body of scholarly work now exists which gives greater prominence to Genevans’ perspectives on the Reformation. Some, such as William Naphy, have poured over vast and sundry archival sources in order to develop a holistic rendering of how Genevans viewed themselves and how they perceived the Reformation of their city. Others, such as Jeffrey Watt, Karen Spierling, and Robert Kingdon, have focused more specifically upon the records of Geneva’s church disciplinary body, the consistory. These records provide an account of how church leaders went about the process of disciplining Genevans each week, but they also provide a chronicle of Genevan responses to their religious authorities. As such, consistory records give the researcher an opportunity to listen to ordinary Genevans to see how they negotiated the establishment of the Reformation in their city. This dissertation leans heavily upon the Genevan consistory records while also relying upon Naphy’s well-documented insights drawn from his careful research into a number of Genevan archival sources.

In addition to narrowing the field of investigation, this dissertation has also aimed at precision by comparing Genevan dynamics against specific understandings of
individualism. Given the historical nature of this dissertation, it does not attempt to identify and defend a singular constructive philosophical definition of individualism. Rather, this dissertation leans upon the work of others who have either identified historical uses of individualism or who have offered something of their own definition of individualism and its emergence in Western society. By surveying the various shades of meaning which have been assigned to individualism, this dissertation is able to provide a further detailed assessment of individualism in the Genevan context.

When examining Geneva during Calvin’s lifetime, the trajectory of this dissertation begins with intellectual history and moves increasingly toward social history. Chapter one considers the individual in Calvin’s larger theological thought. This chapter argues that Calvin prioritized the renovation of the individual’s interior space in matters of salvation and piety. However, chapter one also highlights a few of the ways in which Calvin believed that individuals were not equipped to manage their interiority on their own but needed external assistance and guidance. The chapter closes by drawing attention to the ways that Calvin’s theological thought had the powerful capacity to differentiate humanity into smaller categories, and much of this differentiation had an individuating quality: the capacity to identify each person as a unique or singular individual. Calvin’s views regarding predestination, life circumstances, and vocation were all linked to divine willing. In each of these cases, the specific details of a person’s life had been the result of God uniquely willing such conditions for each person. And Calvin’s theology of church discipline required that the church identify and proceed against particular sinful individuals, thus again drawing attention to the singular individual.

Chapter two continues an examination of Calvin’s theology but turns its attention to his view of the place of the individual within the church. While he prioritized the internal development of the individual in matters of salvation and piety, chapter two demonstrates that he further gave priority to the public and hierarchical ministries of the
church as the most reliable means of properly accessing and shaping individuals’ interior spaces. Calvin envisioned an interpretive hierarchy which differentiated between prophets, theological doctors, pastors, and the laity, giving greater authority to the former and less to the latter. For Calvin, ministers were trained authorities who could work through the thorny intricacies of the Bible and yet not lose their way. These were therefore equipped to feed the sheep. Even those cases in which Calvin encouraged lay reading of Scripture or lay religious education at the hands of other laity, he often insisted that this unfold in group contexts in which fathers and masters lead the way.

In similar fashion, while he believed Communion had the ability to influence individuals’ hearts and minds in positive directions, Calvin thought that access to the Supper should be guarded by authorized church officials to ensure that only those who were worthy could participate. Calvin’s interpretive hierarchy, as well as his call for church officials to weed out the unworthy from Communion, established the ministers and other church officials as important mediators between God and the flock. Yet, these arrangements also differentiated the community at multiple levels. Prophets were distinguished from doctors, doctors from pastors, pastors from the laity, and lay fathers and masters from lay mothers and servants, and so forth. Similarly, lay elders assigned with the task of assisting pastors in church discipline were differentiated from the rest of the congregation, and sinners were singled out for disciplinary action. It was not unusual for Calvin to continue to connect these discussions of differentiation to God’s providential willing in each person’s life, thus granting his theological writings on the topic an individuating quality at times.

Chapter three moves the dissertation closer to social historical inquiry as it considers practical dynamics that unfolded within contexts in which the Bible was opened. Attention is first given to sermon services. The content of sermons, prayers, and the purpose of congregational singing were all laced throughout with emphasis on individuals’ interior space. Yet, the content of sermons also powerfully confronted
Genevans with pastoral authority. For example, Genevans were explicitly instructed to recognize Calvin’s prophetic status. Sermons also urged lay religious activity to be overseen by fathers and masters, once again submitting lay religious education and Bible reading to group contexts which utilized existing familial and societal hierarchical structures. Additionally, the liturgy of sermon services and the public space in which sermons were delivered powerfully reinforced various hierarchical divisions within Geneva. Seating arrangements in Geneva not only differentiated various civic and religious officials from the rest of the congregation, but they also gave officials the opportunity to keep a watchful eye on congregants to ensure that they listened attentively to the sermon. Further, seating arrangements separated men from women and children. And such arrangements also drew particular attention to individuals who were required to take a prominent seat near the pulpit for disciplinary purposes.

Similar factors proved operative in the Genevan public Bible studies, called congrégations. These meetings, which were originally designed solely for the city’s pastors and only eventually opened to the laity, reinforced a significant gap between pastors and the laity while also demonstrating layers of differentiation between the members of Geneva’s company of pastors. Further, the congrégations tended to privilege the attendance of a particular sort of laity: rich males who often had some significant official connection to the institutional Reformation in Geneva. Chapter three thus concludes that the practice of approaching the Bible in Geneva powerfully reinforced the authoritative role of pastors over ordinary believers in matters of interpretation. Also, such practices entailed sermonic proclamations and visible representations of the varying layers of authority which were operative in Geneva, thus differentiating the community. Just stepping into the sermon service and taking one’s seat reminded a Genevan of his or her place within the community relative to others. And, Calvin’s sermons continued to include individuating language regarding God’s willing of the precise details of one’s life, whether in regards to salvation or one’s station.
Continuing its examination of daily religious life in Geneva, the dissertation turns to the pastoral goals and procedures of church discipline in chapter four. More than any other chapter, this one demonstrates the level of intense ecclesiastical oversight which Calvin and other church officials wielded over Genevans’ lives. For example, it illustrates that the consistory was able to mandate and police church attendance throughout the city. Yet, some important shifts arise within the consistory when compared to Calvin’s theology and sermons. First, though certain consistorial dynamics drew attention to individuals’ unique or singular status, thus providing an individuating influence, these tended to give way to less individualistic ways of differentiating the community. For example, while the consistory policed individuals’ fulfillment of their particular station in the church, the family, and society, the language of divine willing in regards to an individuals’ station was absent in consistory meetings. Thus, church disciplinary processes differentiated between fathers and mothers, masters and servants, and so forth, but they did not refer to these stations with the specifically individuating language of divine providence. Second, while the consistory was concerned with Genevans’ interior space, this interest proved relatively shallow and of secondary importance to ensuring straightforward conformity to basic standards of behavior, doctrine, and the parameters of one’s station. Thus chapter four argues that consistorial discipline increased the level of pastoral authority over Genevans’ lives, presented a limited capacity to individuate Genevans as singular or unique persons, and most readily differentiated the community into various stations at less overtly individualistic levels.

Chapter five gives consideration to Genevan responses to the Reformation of their city. First, it suggests that most Genevans, whether supporters or critics of the new faith, powerfully recognized the authoritative role their new pastors were playing in an effort to mediate between God and the flock. Second, evidence suggests that some Genevans did feel significantly individuated from others as unique individuals. For example, Genevans sensed that their personal honor was challenged and called into question by consistorial
discipline. Likewise, some Genevans felt that their personal interior space was being interrogated which caused them to refer to the condition of their heart. Third, though some felt individuated from others as unique persons, in more cases, Genevans felt that less individualistic forms of differentiation were at play. Numerous conversations unfolded within the consistory in which Genevans accepted, negotiated, and even challenged the new Reformed views of station which were being implemented.

The conclusion of the dissertation briefly surveys various historic uses of the word *individualism*, and then compares Genevan dynamics against these definitions. The first major argument of this dissertation is that it is very difficult to identify any definition of individualism with the Genevan context, either in regards to Calvin’s influence or in regards to Genevan responses. The second significant proposal of this dissertation is that the Genevan Reformation more readily differentiated the community. At times, such differentiation could be individuating by highlighting the uniqueness or singularity of individuals. However, in more cases, such differentiation proved less explicitly individualistic. As a result of religious dynamics in Geneva, most felt that societal, civic, and ecclesiastical roles, stations, and vocations were being affirmed, negotiated, or challenged. Genevans sensed a heightened awareness of the differentiations between pastors and laity, leading ministers and novices, fathers and mothers, masters and servants, and natives and foreigners.
CHAPTER 1

THE INDIVIDUAL IN CALVIN’S THEOLOGY

This chapter begins the re-evaluation of the common belief that the Protestant Reformation promoted notions and/or practices of individualism by first giving attention to John Calvin’s theology. ¹ This chapter attempts to look at Calvin’s comments about the individual across a range of doctrines, that is, within the framework of his larger theology.² Further, this chapter hints at potential responses which Genevans might have had to Calvin’s doctrines, but refrains from insisting that these were in fact the responses which Genevans had. Chapter five is reserved for a specific examination of the ways that Genevans received and responded to Calvin. This chapter’s analysis reveals that the individual was an important category in Calvin’s theological thought. Whether describing the individual’s need to recognize the sinful condition of his or her own interior space, whether explaining the processes by which God works through the Word and Spirit to change a person’s heart and mind, or whether stressing the unique stations, roles, and life circumstances to which God assigned each person, Calvin gave considerable priority to the individual in his works.

Given the expansive nature of Calvin’s written corpus, it would be impossible to review even a majority of his works, let alone all of them. To make this investigation manageable, attention will be largely isolated to his 1559 Institutes and to his commentary on the Psalms. Several considerations have led to these selections. First, though Calvin is most well-known for his Institutes of the Christian Religion, his biblical commentaries are just as important to consider when examining his thought. He

¹ Though there are clear differences between Calvin’s theological writings and his exegetical works, for the sake of ease this dissertation includes Calvin’s biblical commentaries as part of his larger theological body of works when referring to “Calvin’s theology.”

² This dissertation assumes that “the individual” and “individualism” are related but not identical. To understand whether individualism was a factor in Calvin’s theology requires an understanding of what place he assigned to the individual in his theology.
envisioned the *Institutes* as a set of *loci communes* or extended disputations about those theological issues one must grasp so as to be able to glean right doctrine from Scripture. Then, his commentaries briefly and clearly outlined the meaning and applications to be drawn from specific passages of Scripture. Thus, his *Institutes* cannot be separated from his exegetical work, for Calvin structured them as a cohesive unit. Focusing on the *Institutes* to the neglect of the commentaries overlooks the conclusions Calvin could draw in his exegetical works that are not necessarily discussed in his *Institutes*. Therefore, this dissertation seriously engages with both the *Institutes* and selected commentaries.

The *Institutes* was selected because it was an important text to Calvin. He repeatedly edited it and also produced several translations throughout his life. Further, it represents important conclusions he had drawn about how to approach Scripture while also outlining definitions and foundations for various practices, offices, and bodies of the church. And the 1559 edition gives access to Calvin’s mature articulations. The commentary on the Psalms was also selected because it seemed an important text to Calvin. The biblical book of Psalms was central to religious life in Geneva; it was the only Old Testament book from which Calvin preached on Sundays, and congregational worship in Geneva consisted of singing French versifications of the Psalms. If the biblical book itself was central to church life for Calvin, then his commentary on it would seem important as well. Further, he insisted that the biblical Psalms provided “an anatomy of all parts of the soul.” The commentary’s close attention to the inner makeup

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4 While the *Institutes* and the Psalms commentary are examined for their unique place in outlining Calvin’s view of the individual, attention will at times turn to other of Calvin’s works so as to better round out Calvin’s view of the individual as found in his theological and exegetical works.

5 Ioannis Calvini, *Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. Guilielmus Baum, Eduardus Cunitz, and Eduardus Reuss, vol. XXXI, Corpus Reformatorum (Brunsgeiae: Schwetschke et Filium, 1887), 15–16, (Hereafter, all references of any of Calvin’s individual works from the *Opera quae supersunt omnia* collection will be cited as *CO*).
and workings of the human soul make this a fruitful exegetical work to consider when thinking about Calvin and the individual. Lastly, it was published in 1557 and thus provides access to Calvin’s mature thought.

**Self-knowledge: Recognition of One’s Wretched Interior Condition**

The very framework of the 1559 *Institutes* seems to give primacy to the transformation of the interior life of the individual. Books one and two are not concerned with church practice or Christian behavior but instead discuss the knowledge of God as Creator and Redeemer. In these books, Calvin not only explained what should be known about God, but also discussed the internal dynamics of the fallen human intellect, which cannot rightly grasp God, and the will, which does not desire God or the good. Book three continues the discussion of knowledge about God by defining faith, that which is necessary for salvation, as a form of knowing that also involves one’s inclinations.\(^6\) Thus, books one through three tend to focus on the internal transformation of the believer’s mind and heart. It is only book four that finally turns to the external means by which one’s interior space is transformed; the ministries and ministers of the institutional church. And, even here, the focus is upon how these external ecclesiastical measures have a bearing upon one’s interior space. Thus, overall, the *Institutes* seem highly concerned with the individual’s heart and mind.

Before one can be transformed internally, Calvin believed one had to recognize his or her essential need for such transformation. He opened the *Institutes* by insisting that the knowledge of God the creator and knowledge of oneself are intricately intertwined, and by self-knowledge is meant an awareness of one’s incapacity to rightly know God and the good or to desire them through one’s own strength. Awareness of

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one’s lowliness and sinfulness leads to the awareness that true wisdom, righteousness and virtue must reside with God, not with humans. Conversely, and in some degree of tension with his previous claim, knowledge of God’s goodness and perfection yield further insights into one’s lowly and wretched state: “Again, it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God’s face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself.”

Calvin criticized ancient philosophers for believing that human reason could rightly discern the ethical good and that the human will could choose the good which reason had identified. According to Calvin, the human mind is usually confused about the good, and the human heart does not tend to desire the good. Further, he chastised those early church fathers who had acquiesced to the picture of humanity offered by the philosophers, one which granted greater capacity to the human intellect and will and thus caused individuals to become proud. Calvin believed that a proper knowledge of one’s lowly and corrupt nature was one of the first steps toward salvation, and a failure to recognize one’s state further sealed one’s lowly condition.

Though Calvin believed that all humans were desperately incapacitated in terms of their intellect and will, he did not merely conceive of this as an abstract universal

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8 Ibid., I, 1, 2; Serene Jones argues that the tension between Calvin's statements, that the knowledge of self can aid in acquiring knowledge of God and that the knowledge of God is necessary to gain knowledge of self, is a rhetorical tool specifically designed by Calvin to leave the reader with a feeling that the human intellect cannot attain clarity on these matters but must turn to Scripture for sure footing. Rather than solve the tension between these two propositions, Jones suggests that Calvin wanted readers to have the affective experience of the limitation of human reasoning capacities which would better prepare them to have an open disposition to the authority of the Scriptures, *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 87-120; While it is important that Calvin uses the phrase “descend into oneself,” it is not unique to him. The phrase is also found in Thomas à Kempis’ *De Imitatione Christi*, Thomas F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988), 75.

9 Calvin, *Institutes*, II, 2, 3.

10 Ibid., II, 2, 4; II, 2, 10.
principle for humanity broadly. Rather, he firmly believed that each individual had to come to grips with the reality of his or her own wretched state. Each person must “descend within himself” in order to recognize his situation and confess his miserable condition.\textsuperscript{11} It was not enough for individuals to confess that humanity, in general, suffered from slavery to sin. Each individual had to acknowledge his or her own internal faults. True awareness of one’s condition went beyond intellectual recognition to an emotional perception; “…Augustine does not consider it humility when a man, aware that he has some virtues, abstains from pride and arrogance; but when man truly feels that he has no refuge except in humility.”\textsuperscript{12}

Calvin’s commentary on the Psalms offers similar statements, though with greater intensity and a touch of poetic flair. Most conspicuous is his claim in the preface that the Psalms are particularly apt to help individuals become aware of their sinfulness. As mentioned earlier, Calvin called the book of Psalms “an anatomy of all parts of the soul.” His rationale was that the Psalms laid bare the inner thoughts and feelings of the prophets, offering the reader a glimpse into the full range of troubling emotions which vex humans. By attending to the Psalms, with its display of the prophets’ emotions and thoughts, readers could become aware of their own infirmities and vices which otherwise would be hidden to them.\textsuperscript{13} Such reading illuminates the dark places of one’s heart. In this way, Calvin called the Psalms a mirror into the soul.\textsuperscript{14}

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\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., II, 8, 3.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., II, 2, 11; Calvin echoed this later when he wrote that the emotions of dread and despair over the sinful individual’s state are proper prods to the development of humility and self-abasement, Ibid., II, 8, 3.
\textsuperscript{13} Regarding Calvin’s view of the authorship of the Psalms, Barbara Pitkin writes, “…Calvin did not think David was the author of all the Psalms, since many referred to events that did not occur in David's lifetime,” “Imitation of David: David As a Paradigm for Faith in Calvin’s Exegesis of the Psalms,” The Sixteenth Century Journal 24, no. 4 (December 1, 1993): 844. Thus, at times Calvin refers to David as the author of an individual Psalm and at other times, he refers to a prophet as the author. In this way, Calvin believed David was one of several authors.
\textsuperscript{14} CO, XXXI: 15.
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believers could find the confidence to confess their sins to God, even sins which they
would be ashamed to confess to other humans.

Calvin remained faithful to this effort when he commented on specific psalms. For example, Psalm 119:10 reads “With my whole heart I seek thee; let me not wander from thy commandments.” Calvin interpreted the first half of the verse within a predestinarian framework, stressing that David’s whole-hearted search after God was the result of divine work, not of the psalmist’s own initiative. With this in mind, Calvin argued that David’s prayer “let me not wander from thy commandments” served as an example to believers that even after one’s heart is divinely turned toward God, one must yet pray for additional support, for if God does not restrain believers, they will instantly wander from him. Here Calvin highlighted that even David, one famously described as a man after God’s own heart, prayed for divine aid to seek God because he was aware of his tendency to stray from God, when left to his own devices.

As Calvin moved on to treat the following verse, Psalm 119:11, he connected this matter to the individual’s interiority, writing that David set his own example before believers regarding the necessity of having God’s law rooted in one’s heart. If God’s wisdom does not govern one internally from the heart, then human wisdom will always fail to steer the believer away from the confusing lies of Satan. Here, Calvin insisted that David provided a glimpse of his own heart and mind which were not equipped in themselves to understand or seek God, and that all believers should attend to this example in order to understand the condition of their own heart and mind.

Similar treatments can be found throughout Calvin’s exegesis of Psalm 119. Commenting on verse 26, he argued that the prophet reveals to believers their need to meditate upon God’s law so as to understand it and delight in it. Throughout the discussion of this passage run two grounding notions: the human mind produces an

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15 CO, XXXII: 10-11, 119.
incorrect picture of life compared to the law of God, and the human heart is not inclined, of its own strength, to desire the law. Calvin interpreted the prophet’s prayer to God, “teach me thy statutes,” as a request that God would reveal the law to his mind and then cause his heart to desire this law. By emphasizing the prophet’s self-professed lowly status, which gave force to the prophet’s prayer to be taught, Calvin encouraged readers to recognize their own lowly status.¹⁶

Calvin insisted that reconciliation with God is only possible when individuals are wounded, depressed and persecuted by their own consciences.¹⁷ Further, he believed that the conscience, left to its own devices, struggled to accurately perceive the individual’s worst sins.¹⁸ For Calvin, the Psalms reveal or uncover sins that would otherwise remain hidden.¹⁹ Pitkin summarizes Calvin’s view thusly:

…the Psalms teach clearly the human need for God, that is, they provide true self-knowledge, and they urge believers to seek God’s aid. Calvin states on several occasions that the Psalms contain an anatomy of all the parts of the soul, for in them the diligent reader finds a mirror of his own affections and spiritual maladies.²⁰ Calvin believed the Psalms had the capacity to inform individuals about their nature and why they needed God’s help; through the words of the psalmists, readers could be confronted with their own spiritual faults.²¹

The language of the Psalms commentary certainly serves to highlight the extent to which Calvin believed all Christians should plumb the depths of their own souls by

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¹⁸ Ibid., 198.

¹⁹ Ibid., 23.


gazing into the souls of the prophets who composed the Psalms. However, what seems additionally important is that Calvin made the Psalms the lifeblood of the Genevan church, as mentioned above. Psalms was the only Old Testament book from which Calvin preached on Sundays, and worship in song during services consisted of singing French versifications of individual psalms. Given their central role in Genevan church life, and given Calvin’s belief that the Psalms could aid believers in gaining a right understanding of their individual interior spiritual state, it seems that he laid great practical stress upon individual introspection through the Psalms.

In the *Institutes* and the Psalms commentary, Calvin consistently emphasized that individual believers needed to grasp their own faults. It was not enough for believers to recognize humanity’s general deplorable condition. Rather, individuals needed to grasp their own shortcomings. Further, such faults were not simply described as external behaviors but as internal states: an incorrect understanding of God and his law accompanied by rogue desires which fastened upon unholy ends. Finally, while such an effort drew significant attention to the individual’s interior life, it is also important that Calvin insisted that the individual was not equipped to adequately reflect upon one’s interior state apart from the guidance of God’s word. In the *Institutes*, God’s law as summarized by the Ten Commandments was described as the means by which individuals become equipped to “descend within themselves” to discover their own true state. In the Psalms commentary, the descriptions of the prophets’ interior spiritual conditions served as a further window or mirror into the individual’s own soul. This final

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23 This view is further supported by the fact that most of Calvin’s public prayers included a plea for God to help Genevan individuals feel, taste, or sense their own sinful and miserable condition. This will be discussed further in chapter three.

24 Calvin, *Institutes*, II: 8, 1.
piece, Calvin’s sense that individuals are not equipped to plumb the depths of their own interior regions will prove important in future discussions.

**Piety: the Reshaping of One’s Interior Condition**

Obviously Calvin was not content for individuals to simply become increasingly aware of their own sinfulness. He believed that the Christian life consisted of piety in which one’s heart and mind were transformed to understand and love God to such a degree that one willingly served him externally.\(^{25}\) When referring to the *imago dei*, Calvin believed that “…the primary seat of the divine image…” in humans “…was in the mind and heart….” Prior to the fall, both of these central faculties of the soul were properly functioning and regulated in Adam. He had “…full possession of right understanding…he had his affections kept within the bounds of right understanding, all his senses tempered in right order, and he truly referred his excellence to exceptional gifts bestowed upon him by his Maker.”\(^{26}\) Yet, Calvin believed that humanity after Adam’s sin was marked by a disordering of individuals’ interior space. Thus the path toward salvation began with the individual’s recognition that his or her interior space was no longer properly aligned, and the subsequent development of piety naturally entailed the reorientation of heart and mind.

In the *Institutes*, Calvin defined piety as:

that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces. For until men recognize that they owe everything to God, that they are nourished by his fatherly care, that he is the Author of their

\(^{25}\) Though this chapter focuses on piety as a means of discussing Calvin’s view of religious interiority, one could also examine the interior dynamics of the believer’s life through Calvin’s theology of union with Christ. As Willem van ‘t Spijker summarizes, Calvin sought a theological balance between the work which Christ did outside of humans, apart from their own merit and ability (what Christ did *extra nos*), and the functioning of the Spirit which makes Christ’s work efficacious within believers (*in nobis*). As van ‘t Spijker writes “Christ *extra nos* through the Spirit becomes Christ *in nobis,*” “EXTRA NOS’ and ‘IN NOBIS’” Calvin in a Pneumatological Light,” *Calvin and the Holy Spirit: Papers and Responses Presented at the Sixth Colloquium on Calvin & Calvin Studies*, Peter De Klerk ed. (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1989), 44.

\(^{26}\) Calvin, *Institutes*, I: 15, 3.
every good, that they should seek nothing beyond him—they will never yield him willing service. Nay, unless they establish their complete happiness in him, they will never give themselves truly and sincerely to him.27

This quote raises several issues of significance. First, Calvin linked piety with knowledge in several ways. Most directly, this quote roots piety in the knowledge of God’s benefits and the recognition of what one owes God. Less explicit, and yet no less important, is the fact that this definition arises within the context of Calvin’s ongoing discussion in the Institutes of knowledge of God. Books one and two discuss the knowledge of God, and book three builds upon this when it identifies faith, the proper form of trust in God’s fatherly goodness toward humans, as a form of knowledge.28 Thus, piety is intricately linked to knowledge, and this is important when one remembers that knowledge is largely perceived by the internal faculty of the soul (the mind or the intellect). Torrance highlights that knowledge for Calvin was associated with the individual's interior space:

What is particularly distinctive of his [Calvin’s] thought is the way in which the personal and the objective come together under the pressure of the activity and majesty of God upon the knowing subject. Knowledge of God takes place in his presence as we are given a co-knowledge of him with ourselves, and as there arises in us an interior awareness (interior sensus) in which God’s own speaking resounds within us.29

This is not to suggest that Calvin outlined a simplistic account of the knowledge of God or for how the individual mind acquires such knowledge. As Dowey has demonstrated, Calvin proposed a twofold distinction in regards to the knowledge of God:

27 Ibid., I: 2, 1; Muller correctly points out that while pietas arises frequently in latter versions of the Institutes, this does not mean that Calvin considered these later editions, as a genre, to be works on piety. Rather, these works were series of loci communes and disputationes. The early editions which were intended for catechetical use included the phrase summa pietatis in the title, but the later editions dropped this phrase, The Unaccommodated Calvin, 107.

28 Calvin, Institutes, III: 2, 7; B. A. Gerrish holds that the kind of knowledge of which faith consists, for Calvin, is intimately linked with piety; faith is the “functional equivalent of piety,” Grace and Gratitude: the Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 63-68.

29 Torrance, The Hermeneutics of John Calvin, 163.
the *duplex cognitio domini*. To know God is to know him as God the Creator and God the Redeemer. These two arenas of knowledge were not completely distinct or separated but intricately intermingled: “…the Creator is rightly known only to the recipients of the redemptive revelation, and the redemptive revelation is of significance only when it is known to come from God the Creator.”\(^{30}\) Further, the means of acquiring knowledge in these two related arenas was multifaceted. Calvin’s distinction between knowledge of God the Creator and knowledge of God the Redeemer was not “identical with the distinction between general and special revelation, that is, with the revelation in creation and in Scripture.”\(^{31}\) Instead, as Dowey points out, Calvin believed that knowledge of God the Creator spanned both general and special revelation, while knowledge of God the Redeemer was only attainable through special revelation.\(^{32}\) For example, both creation and Scripture “present to the mind objectively,” certain truths about God, such as his eternity, self-existence, power, goodness, and so forth. However, only special revelation clarifies that God the Creator is Triune and works in a particularly providential fashion.\(^{33}\) Further, while knowledge of God the Creator is available through general revelation, Calvin held that this knowledge was more clearly drawn from general revelation after Christians had become aware of knowledge of God the Redeemer. Thus, while piety, for Calvin, entailed a reorientation of the individual’s mind, he understood this to be a complicated matter, both in terms of content and the process for arriving at right knowledge.

\(^{30}\) Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology*, 221.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 43.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., Dowey further notes that for Calvin, knowledge of God the Redeemer was “occasioned by sin” and was “aimed at overcoming sin,” thus further highlighting one way in which the fall produced a misalignment of the faculties of the soul, in this case, the mind, 221.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 131.
Second, piety is not simply the acquisition of knowledge. In Calvin’s definition of piety above, he maintained that reverence for God and love of God both flow from the knowledge of his benefits. Reverence and love both seem closer to dispositions rather than intellectual states. This was echoed later when Calvin wrote that piety is “instilled in the breasts of believers only;” that is, instilled in the heart.\(^{34}\) In this way Calvin’s piety emphasized the role of the heart, having one’s dispositions bent toward God and the good.\(^{35}\) Yet, knowledge and disposition are intricately united for Calvin in his view of piety. Sou-Young Lee has demonstrated that two fundamental dispositions that were ingredient in Calvin’s view of piety were fear of God and reverence toward God. She then unites these two particular dispositions to Dowey’s treatment of the *duplex cognitio domini* when she asks:

Then, for Calvin, what kind of knowledge is the foundation, the starting point, the absolute necessity of pietas to which he refers? If we express Calvin’s thought about this most concisely..., it is to know God as the Lord and Father. This knowledge of God corresponds to the twofold knowledge (*cognitio duplex*) of knowing God as the creator and savior.... The twofold knowledge of understanding God as the Lord and father, as

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\(^{34}\) Calvin, *Institutes*, I: 5, 4. It should be noted that Calvin’s understanding of the relationship between the heart and mind was complex. The mind does not simply grasp divine truths which the heart subsequently loves. Rather, even the recognition of divine truths requires some work within the heart. That is why, for example, Calvin stressed that it is not enough to hear Scripture. Rather, the knowledge of God made available in the Scriptures is only truly beneficial if it is sealed upon the individual’s heart by the Spirit of God. Similarly, Calvin insisted that Scripture authenticates itself, rather than relying upon human knowledge and argumentation. Such authentication occurs when the Spirit serves as an inner witness or testimony to the veracity of Scripture, and such a work is not only described by Calvin as a work of God upon the human mind but as a work of God upon one’s feelings, Ibid., I: 18, 5. While faith enables the believer to understand God’s self-revelation in nature, an apparent change within one’s intellect Ibid., I: 5, 14, faith itself is sealed upon the heart by the Spirit, Ibid., I: 18, 5. Calvin thus leaned upon a complex psychology which demonstrated an intricate mingling and interweaving of the mind and heart. Space does not permit a fuller elucidation of Calvin’s psychology, but the above merely notes that the matter is far from simple. For this dissertation’s purposes, it suffices to demonstrate that Calvin believed that regeneration and the development of piety required a renovation of one’s interiority.

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\(^{35}\) Jones has noted that Calvin refrained from associating piety with scholastic terms such as knowledge (*cognoscere*) or conceiving (*concipere*). Instead, he referred to the knowledge associated with piety as that which grasps (*tener*) and shapes. Jones concludes that Calvin’s sense of piety rests upon a form of knowing which “involves dispositional reorientation,” *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety*, 124; Beeke, suggests that Calvin gave priority to the heart over the mind in the development of piety; “Head and heart must work together, but the heart is more important,” “Calvin on Piety,” 125.
well as creator and savior, is the basis for explaining the difference between the meanings of fear and reverence within pietas. As Lee outlines, fear is what believers render to God when they gain knowledge of him as the Lord and Creator of creation. Reverence or honor is what believers feel toward God when they grasp him as their Father and Savior.

Finally, such knowledge and its associated appropriate dispositions have an influence upon one’s external habits; only when one recognizes God’s benefits with the mind and reveres and loves God from the heart does one offer willing service to God. While Calvin understood piety to produce externally visible acts of service to God, he remained convinced that such deeds must flow from a changed interior state, giving priority to one’s internal condition. For example, he juxtaposed human laws, which “are satisfied when a man merely keeps his hand from wrongdoings,” with heavenly law which is concerned that deeds are done with right intentions from the heart. Some people hear and externally obey God’s commands “You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal.” Yet, Calvin argued these same individuals “wholeheartedly…breathe out slaughter, burn with lust, look with jaundiced eye upon the goods of all others and devour them with covetousness.” Similarly, Calvin wrote “For the Lord requires that the glory of his divinity remain whole and uncorrupted not only in outward confession, but in his own eyes, which gaze upon the most secret recesses of our hearts.” Or again, when God gives the Law, he wills to guide human souls; “For it would be ridiculous that he who looks upon the thoughts of the heart and dwells especially upon them, should

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37 Ibid., 227-228, 231.

38 Calvin, *Institutes*, II: 8, 6.

39 Ibid., II: 8, 16.
instruct only the body in true righteousness.” This last quote is particularly striking in that Calvin said God “especially” dwells upon the thoughts of the heart.

When Lee weaves together the various threads that comprise Calvin’s broader theological fabric in regards to piety, she concludes that piety begins with knowledge of God as Creator and Redeemer, which, if properly grasped, begets fear of and reverence for God, which in turn leads to submission and obedience to God. Thus, she demonstrates that piety, for Calvin, surely includes external acts of obedience but requires that these usher forth from a renovated interior space. She concludes that all matters of obedience are to be done “sincerely and gladly from the heart,” once again highlighting the interior roots of piety.

In the *Institutes* Calvin regularly criticized Roman ceremonies for reducing piety to external religious practices that left the interior life of the individual, one’s heart and mind, untouched. While he railed against “papist” ceremonies for their illegitimacy (i.e., he was convinced that these ceremonies were not permitted by Scripture), his criticisms were also leveled against the external focus of these observances. Because Calvin understood piety to stem from a regenerated heart and mind, one could argue that Calvin criticized these “papist” ceremonies because he believed they did little to influence one’s interior life. Consider the following examples.

Calvin defined the monastic vow of celibacy, thusly; “I call ‘continence’ not that continence by which the body alone is kept pure from fornication but also that by which the mind keeps its chastity unsullied.” Just a few sections later he added that though some remain physically pure, “they are not for this reason chaste, for the evil of

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40 Ibid., II: 18, 39.

41 Lee, “Calvin’s Understanding of Pietas,” 233-234.

unchastity, though repressed and confined, remains within.”

Thus, Calvin criticized monastic vows of celibacy for their stress on outward behavior to the neglect of inward disposition.

In similar fashion, Calvin critiqued the Roman practice of baptism. He charged that the Roman incorporation of a benediction, of candles, and of the chrism were unwarranted additions to the essential form of baptism given in Scripture. Further, he described these additions as “theatrical pomp, which dazzles the eyes of the simple and deadens their minds….” He thought these external and largely visible additions tended to minimize the ability of the baptismal ceremony to train the believer’s mind. Calvin’s proposed form of baptism included teaching elements through which the mind of the believer would be instructed; “the recitation of the confession of faith with which the catechumen should be instructed” and the recounting of “the promises to be had in baptism.”

Calvin was also highly critical of the Roman practice of Communion. He found the doctrine of transubstantiation unbiblical, yet he also complained that it reduced the sacrament to a magical and overly physical or external event, again, to the detriment of the believer’s interior life. Calvin characterized Romanists as believing “that Christ’s body, enclosed in bread, is transmitted by the mouth of the body into the stomach.” Such a physical emphasis overlooked that the bread was given by God as an apt sign that was able to teach the human mind about the ways in which Christ served as spiritual nourishment for believers. Further, Calvin was convinced that the Roman practice

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43 It should be noted that much of Calvin’s discussion of continence or celibacy consists of a rejection of celibacy as a widespread lifestyle. He argued that too many people make such vows when they have not been graced by God with the gift of chastity. As such, he believed marriage to be an apt provision for those who had not the gift of celibacy, Ibid., IV: 13, 21.

44 Ibid., IV: 15, 19.

focused on the magical capacity of the priestly consecration to change the Communion elements rather than the capacity of the elements combined with the spoken scriptural promises to illuminate the mind of the believer and fortify one’s heart. Calvin wrote “…the bread is a sacrament only to those persons to whom the word is directed; just as the water of baptism is not changed in itself, but as soon as the promise has been attached it begins to be for us what it was not before.” Or again:

…we should not imagine some magic incantation, supposing it enough to have mumbled the words, as if they were to be heard by the elements; but let us understand that these words are living preaching which edifies its hearers, penetrates into their very minds, impresses itself upon their hearts and settles there, and reveals its effectiveness in the fulfillment of what it promises.  

Thus, Calvin claimed that what is important is not that the bread changes in substance at the priestly words of consecration which allows Christ to enter physically into the human mouth. Instead, what is important is that the Word, that is the scriptural promise associated with the sacrament, is spoken so that believers’ minds are drawn to the promise which then allows the bread to be an apt sign and even presentation of the reality of the divine promise. As Calvin regularly insisted, one of the major goals of Communion is the feeding of souls with heavenly nourishment by raising up believers’ minds to heavenly realities. He was no less critical when discussing the Roman view and practice of penance. While it “wounded hearts deeply” by producing anxiety over one’s sin, it was “wonderfully silent concerning the inward renewal of the mind” and only offered a “light sprinkling of ceremonies.”

46 Ibid., IV: 17, 39.

47 Ibid., IV: 17, 18; This discussion does not mean to suggest that Calvin viewed Communion as a strictly intellectual affair. Rather, he believed that the illuminating of the believer’s mind in Communion was also closely related to union with Christ, a somewhat mystical experience which Calvin said “I rather experience than understand,” Ibid., IV: 17, 32. Further, Calvin believed that partaking of Christ in Communion was mediated by the Holy Spirit. The treatment above simply focuses on the link between Communion and the believer’s mind since this naturally arises when Calvin critiques certain aspects of Roman Communion, Ibid., IV: 17, 33.

48 Ibid., III: 4, 1.
Calvin was also critical of the scholastic notion of “implicit faith.” He vehemently rejected the idea that one could remain ignorant of God, the gospel, and right doctrine and yet still have faith in the church, which knew better about these matters. Instead, he insisted that real faith rests upon each believer possessing right knowledge of God and doctrine. For Calvin, one should not remain happily ignorant, deferring responsibility for knowledge of right doctrine to the church to which one trusts and submits.

These few examples demonstrate that Calvin considered many Roman rituals and practices to be external frivolities which left the individuals’ interior space untouched. Consider, by contrast, Calvin’s belief that Old Testament Jewish rituals, which were ordained by God, united piety and the individual’s religious interior life. He wrote “…God did not command [Old Testament] sacrifices in order to busy his worshipers with earthly exercises. Rather, he did so that he might lift their minds higher.” Here, Calvin argued that Old Testament sacrifices were “shadows and figures,” set in earthly and physical form, of spiritual realities, including the reality of reconciliation with God. In themselves, as bare physical acts, Old Testament sacrifices accomplished nothing; “For what is more vain or absurd than for men to offer a loathsome stench from the fat of cattle in order to reconcile themselves to God?” Rather, these sacrifices stood as shadows or figures of a spiritual reconciliation which God would later accomplish through Christ. Calvin claimed that had not these rites been signs of higher spiritual realities, the Jews would have frittered away their time by attending to them. Thus, Old Testament laws and sacrifices had a teaching capacity; to raise minds to spiritual or heavenly realities, even if in a shadowy fashion. Crucially, Calvin went on to disparage the impious who failed to consider the deeper realities to which the law and sacrifices pointed.

49 Ibid., III: 2, 2–5.
50 Ibid., II: 7, 1.
As the above demonstrates, Calvin could at times disparage the external visible trappings of Roman ceremonies. This has led some to errantly conclude that Calvin rigidly condemned the use of images, symbols, or visible objects in the effort to aid Christian development. As Carlos Eire has written, “Calvin insists that God is always improperly worshiped in the visible symbol, and that ‘whatever holds down and confines the senses to the earth is contrary to the covenant of God; in which, inviting us to himself, he permits us to think of nothing but what is spiritual.’”

Eire’s vehement stance that Calvin starkly rejected the use of visual symbols in worship has recently been corrected by Randall Zachman’s extensive work, *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin*. In opposition to the interpretation of Eire and others, who insist that Calvin overturned the Roman tradition which valorized images over the words of Scripture, Zachman writes:

> “Far from replacing images with words, Calvin combines image and word in all aspects of our lives with God and with others. We must hear the Word of God if we are rightly to behold the symbols in which the invisible God becomes somewhat visible; but we must also behold with our eyes the goodness of God that the Word declares to us, so that the truth of that Word might be confirmed for us.”

Zachman’s massive work traverses a host of images which required the individual’s attention according to Calvin. However, for an image to be worth viewing and pondering, it had to fit certain criteria. This accounts for Calvin’s distinction between living and dead images. Among other things, living images have the capacity to “refer the mind and heart of the one contemplating them to the reality being represented, by means of the similarity and dissimilarity they have with that reality, and raise the mind up...

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anagogically to that reality.”53 In this way, the symbols of Communion, the bread and wine, were divinely ordained images which had the capacity to present Christ to communicants and refer them to heavenly realities. When Calvin criticized the external nature of certain Roman ceremonies, this did not amount to a blanket rejection of all external helps in worship. Rather, he believed that the Roman tradition had incorporated improper images over time as opposed to the images which God had provided and specifically ordained. While these dead images fascinated the eyes and the senses, they lacked the capacity, among other things, to rightly engage and shape the mind and heart.

The above has indicated that within the Institutes Calvin held piety to be central to religious life and that piety not only included external acts of service to God but required that such acts usher forth from a transformed heart and mind. Some scholars have interpreted Calvin’s view of piety to consist primarily of the concrete and active engagement of believers in the world, as opposed to a monastic withdrawal from the world.54 However, such a view tends to overlook Calvin’s consistent commitment to external deeds flowing from internal changes.55

Similar sentiments can be found in the Psalms commentary. Throughout, Calvin described true religion is an internal matter as opposed to “external or ‘carnal’ formalities.”56 The following examples are taken from Calvin’s treatment of Psalm 119. When explaining verse 1 (“Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the

53 Ibid., 8.


law of the Lord”), Calvin held that while all people naturally desire happiness, their blindness and apathy causes them to seek fulfillment of their happiness in ungodly ways. It is important to note that Calvin believed that humans walk in disobedience because of the sinfulness of their interior faculties; their understanding is blinded and their hearts are apathetic, failing to desire what they should with appropriate vigor. Calvin concluded that these sinners treat true piety as a fable. Opposed to the wicked are those who are upright in their way, who consistently desire to study or practice righteousness. If the wicked who are not upright fail to recognize and respect true piety, then the righteous must be those who, at some level, properly recognize and honor piety. Further, Calvin held that the upright, those who value true piety, have a desire, an interior state, for practicing righteousness in deed. Yet, Calvin closed his treatment of this verse by arguing that God is not pleased with mere external acts of service but requires sincere affection of the heart as well as letting truth reside in one’s heart. For Calvin, it is insufficient to only serve God with one’s hands and feet.⁵⁷

Calvin explained Psalm 119:32 in similar fashion. The passage itself reads, “I will run in the way of thy commandments, when thou enlargest my understanding.” Calvin followed those translations of this verse which referred to the enlarging of the heart rather than the understanding, and he took this to mean that it is not enough for one to act righteously externally but that one must offer willing obedience from a heart that has been shaped by God so as to love the law.⁵⁸

Perhaps most telling is the explanation provided for Psalm 119:43. The passage reads, “And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for my hope is in thy ordinances.” Interestingly, Calvin asked why David prayed for his mouth and not his heart to be filled with God’s word, since the heart precedes the mouth both in temporal

⁵⁷ CO, XXXII: 215.
⁵⁸ Ibid., 227.
order as well as in excellence. Calvin concluded that when David asked for his mouth to be filled with God’s word, he must have also implied or included his heart. Calvin seems to have found it troubling that David did not give temporal or qualitative importance to the heart over a physical or external act. Calvin’s own prioritization of the interior life gave rise to his question about David’s wording and also stood behind his interpretation which insisted that David’s prayer must have implied a prioritization of the heart over external and physical acts.

This final example brings to the fore one of Calvin’s common exegetical practices which further reveals his theological commitment to religious interiority. In the above example, Calvin’s exegesis attempted to gain access to David’s inner thoughts, especially David’s intent in the words he uttered, an intent which might not be completely apparent from David’s spoken words. That is, Calvin was not just concerned with what David said but with what David meant. Behind this practical exegetical step was a broader grounding assumption: the goal of exegesis is to explain the mind of the biblical author. Calvin laid out his view in his preface to his Romans commentary, which Torrance cites thusly: “Since it is almost his [an interpreter’s] only task to unfold the mind of the writer whom he has undertaken to expound, he misses his mark (a scopo suo aberrat), or at least strays outside his limits, by the extent to which he leads his readers astray from the meaning of

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59 Ibid., 233.

60 Gary Neal Hansen highlights a similar case of Calvin insisting that a word must mean something other than what it seems to mean. Matthew 9:1-8 describes a scene in which a paralytic is carried by his companions to meet Jesus to be healed. When the companions were not able to reach Jesus, who was inside a house, the companions cut a hole in the house's roof and lowered the paralytic down to Jesus. Matthew, as well as the other synoptic gospels, indicates that Jesus saw the faith of the paralytic's companions and then turned to the paralytic, stating that his sins were forgiven. As the text stands, it seems that Jesus forgave the paralytic based upon the faith of the companions. Hansen notes that Calvin was clearly uncomfortable with this, given that he was firmly committed to the view that one can only be forgiven based upon one's own faith, not the faith of others. Calvin's means for overcoming this interpretive obstacle was to read the faith of the companions as a synecdoche; the faith of the companions is understood as a whole of which the faith of the paralytic was included as a part, “John Calvin and the Non-literal Interpretation of Scripture” (Ph.D., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1998), 314–319.
his author.” Among scholars of Calvin’s exegesis, it is now commonplace to cite his exegetical effort to gain access to the minds of biblical authors and to subsequently lay bare these thoughts to the readers of Calvin’s commentaries. Gary Hansen notes that Calvin’s preface to his commentary on 1 Corinthians refers to this exegetical principle. Calvin believed that “human speech reveals the mind of the speaker, and thus the interpreter can find the very thoughts of the biblical authors.” In this way, Calvin gave a dual priority to interiority in regards to Scriptural interpretation; the mind of the reader must be illuminated, and this only occurs properly when the reader understands the mind of the author. In this way, the interiority of the biblical author was understood to feed and nurture the interiority of the reader.

While Calvin’s commentaries remained faithful to this exegetical principle, they often went a step further by seeking to gain access to the inner thoughts and feelings of biblical characters, not simply of biblical authors. Regarding Calvin’s Old Testament commentaries, Parker writes “Character-study plays a large part in Calvin’s expositions of narrative. What the characters were like within themselves, why they acted in this or that way, what their aims and hopes were, how experience affected them, how the interaction of characters produced such a result.” Calvin’s exegesis was concerned with interior matters; he was interested in what characters were like “within themselves.”

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61 Torrance, Hermeneutics of John Calvin, 68.

62 Hans-Joachim Kraus, “Calvin’s Exegetical Principles,” Interpretation 31, no. 1 (January 1, 1977): 13; Holder maintains that Calvin’s preface to the Romans commentary is “the most important text for Calvin’s hermeneutics,” and when highlighting that which is significant from this preface, Holder quotes the exact same passage as Torrance above, Grounding of Interpretation, 33.

63 Hansen, “Non-literal Interpretation of Scripture,” 79.

Parker notes the ways in which Calvin drew out a biblical character’s motivation for acting, even when the motive was not stated in Scripture.65

For example, Genesis 25:28 simply indicates that Isaac loved Esau and Rebekah loved Jacob. However, Parker notes that Calvin devoted some space to explaining the possible motives for why Isaac loved the eldest son, Esau, over against Rebekah’s motive for loving Jacob, the younger son; “One would think there was little to add to this simple statement, but Calvin wants to know why there was this difference of affection.” Calvin held Isaac blameworthy for preferring his eldest son, Esau, for though it was natural for Isaac to prefer his first-born, God had already indicated that Isaac’s younger son, Jacob, should receive the birthright. Calvin was not so clear about Rebekah’s motives, but he concluded that her preference for Jacob could have been upright if it stemmed from obedience to God’s promise that the birthright would be Jacob’s, or it could have been immoral if it sprung from a natural opposition to her husband’s dismissal of the younger son.66

Even more illuminating is Calvin’s treatment of Genesis 47:1-7 in which Pharaoh grants Joseph’s family permission to live in the land of Goshen. Calvin sought to understand Joseph’s motivation for making his request to Pharaoh in an indirect manner. Calvin concluded that Joseph’s motive did not spring from cunning but from modesty, and that this allowed Pharaoh to understand the full scope of the situation to which he was responding, rather than requiring Pharaoh to make a decision out of ignorance.67

65 Douglas Kelly affirms Parker's view, though in reference to Calvin's sermons, writing: “In these vivid scenes Calvin was somehow able to enter into the very mind and soul of the biblical characters and ‘make them talk’ so that they reveal to us our inner motives and moral character,” “Varied Themes in Calvin's 2 Samuel Sermons and the Development of His Thought,” Calvinus sinceri oris religionis vindex, ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser and Brian G. Armstrong (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1997), 213.

66 Parker, Calvin’s Old Testament Commentaries, 1986, 104.

In both of these examples, Calvin expanded upon what seem to be simple statements in Scripture about the actions or emotions of certain biblical characters. His aim was to identify the motive behind their actions or the inner rationale for their emotions. Further, in both cases, Calvin wanted to determine whether the motivation of the characters was morally exemplary or questionable. In his discussion of Isaac and Rebekah, Calvin clearly saw Isaac as sinful or blameworthy and Rebekah as potentially blameworthy though with the possibility of being upright. In his discussion of Joseph making his request to Pharaoh, Calvin understood Joseph to be upright. And, in both of these examples, Calvin often linked characters’ motivation and moral status to specific inclinations or dispositions. If Rebekah’s preference for Jacob was immoral, it was because it was rooted in “contrary jealousy” to love the son whom her husband overlooked. Similarly, Calvin insisted that Joseph’s request to Pharaoh sprang from the disposition of modesty rather than cunning.

David Steinmetz provides a similar, though not identical, example when discussing Calvin’s treatment of Jacob’s wrestling match with God (Genesis 32:24-32). Steinmetz points out that Calvin was unique among other commentators for insisting that the wrestling match was strictly a vision, not a physical event: “the wrestling match was not an external event that anyone else could have seen; it was a divine self-disclosure to Jacob alone.” While Calvin did not refer to Jacob’s internal dispositions or inclinations, he did stress Jacob’s personal battle when faced with the ways in which God fights against believers while also fighting for believers. Jacob persevered by trusting in God’s providential care. Interestingly, Calvin’s interpretation of Jacob’s wrestling match as a mental or spiritual event puts Calvin in a bit of an exegetical bind since Jacob emerged with a real physical condition, namely a limp. In spite of this difficulty, Calvin thus offered a description of the way in which Jacob was tested internally regarding his faith in and perception of the goodness and providence of God. Though Calvin believed this to
have been a private and internal experience for Jacob, it was also given for the benefit of the church, seemingly to encourage later believers in their internal struggles with faith.68

These examples demonstrate Calvin’s consistent exegetical interest in the interior piety of biblical characters, not just their external deeds. When Old Testament narratives simply stated a character’s actions, Calvin’s exegesis sought to understand the internal thoughts, motives, and dispositions that gave rise to such behavior. It seems likely that Calvin offered this method of interpretation to aid believers in their own development of interior piety. Negative examples, such as Isaac’s refusal to accept God’s promise that his younger son Jacob would receive the birth-right, could awaken readers to their own disobedience and lack of faith, while positive examples, such as Joseph’s modesty before Pharaoh, could instruct and inspire believers in the shaping of proper interior piety.

Calvin’s exegetical commitment to understanding the mind or meaning of the biblical author along with his exegetical practice of offering an interiorized interpretation of Old Testament narratives highlight his focus on aiding the development of the individual’s interior piety. The Psalms were not unique in terms of providing Calvin with the opportunity to offer a glimpse into the lives of biblical authors or biblical characters. However, the Psalms were unique in the extent to which they allowed Calvin easy access to the mind and heart of the biblical authors or biblical characters. The effort to forefront the interior lives of the authors of the Psalms and of many biblical characters highlights Calvin’s commitment to aiding readers in nurturing their interior piety.

This survey of the *Institutes* and Calvin’s commentary on the Psalms has highlighted Calvin’s consistent insistence that believers should attend to their interior lives. Before believers can rightly appeal to God and even begin advancing in religion, Calvin believed each individual had to first gain awareness of his wretched internal

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condition. It was not enough for individuals to note the sinfulness of their actions. Rather, individuals had to come to grips with the many winding paths with which their own minds would be carried away from God and his truth. Similarly, individuals needed awareness of their own dispositions which were not oriented toward God or the good. Calvin also consistently insisted that growth in Christian piety depended not simply upon conforming one’s physical and external actions to Scriptural commands, but required the shaping of one’s intellect and one’s inclinations. As Oberman has suggested, Calvin was an “adventurer-into-the-interior.”

However, it must be noted that Calvin believed individuals needed assistance to navigate interior matters. The task of “descending into the self” to discover one’s sinful heart and mind had to be aided by God; sin so taints humans that a person cannot properly recognize his or her sinfulness without seeing himself or herself through Scripture as a mirror. Indeed, Calvin believed that the Ten Commandments aided one in descending within to discover his sinfulness. Or again, the Psalms were an aid in navigating one’s interior space, and Calvin’s particular exegesis sought to further assist this navigation by highlighting certain interior features and dynamics of particular passages. Additionally, Calvin believed that services could and should incorporate divinely ordained images which had the capacity to engage and enlighten individuals’ hearts and minds. Thus, Calvin conceived of a number of external helps which aided believers in the discovery and renovation of their interior spaces.

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Individuation: Differentiating Unique Individuals from Each Other

Self-knowledge and interior piety were not the only means by which Calvin drew attention to the religious life of the individual. In a number of ways Calvin’s theology and exegesis tended to individuate individuals from each other. By individuation this dissertation means a form of differentiation of individuals from other individuals based upon recognizing the uniqueness and singularity of each person. The following examines these various ways in turn.

Predestination and Individuation: For many, Calvin is best known for his doctrine of predestination. In rough outline, Calvin’s version of this doctrine maintained that God determined by an eternal decree who would be saved and who would be damned: “Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death.”70 The initiative behind any individual’s salvation was rooted entirely in God’s decision. Calvin rejected those notions of human free will that assumed humans played any role in starting on the path toward salvation. In his view, one’s acceptance of the gospel was only possible through God’s prior willing. Sinful and unregenerate humans were bound to slavery to sin; their minds rarely understood God or the good rightly, and even if they did, their hearts were intent upon unholy things. For Calvin, humans do not have free will in the sense of being able to choose between good and evil. They are always bound to choose the latter. It is only as a result of God’s divine initiative that humans are saved and thus able to know, desire, and choose the good, including the good of the gospel.

While this doctrine divided humanity into two broad groups, the elect and the reprobate, Calvin also understood it in individualistic terms; “We call predestination God’s eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of

70 Calvin, Institutes, III: 21, 5.
each man.” Calvin’s discussion of election or predestination in book three of the *Institutes* starts with general distinctions and moves toward increasingly individual distinctions. He first points out that God elected the descendants of Abraham in general. Then, he notes that not all of these descendants were truly elect in a more particular fashion. Though Ishmael was sealed by circumcision as a descendant of Abraham, he was yet cut off from election. Calvin concluded that:

> Although it is now sufficiently clear that God...chooses whom he pleases, rejecting others, still his free election has been only half explained until we come to individual persons, to whom God not only offers salvation but so assigns it that the certainty of its effect is not in suspense or doubt.\(^{71}\)

Thus, Calvin’s doctrine of election involves layers of differentiation of humanity. First, those who are generally called, the descendants of Abraham, are differentiated from those who are not generally called. Second, those who were truly or effectually called from within the descendants of Abraham are differentiated from other descendants of Abraham who were not effectually called. At this level, Calvin even used the language of distinguishing, separating, or discerning: “…the will of God…distinguishes (*discernit*) some from others, so that not all of the sons of Israel are true Israelites….”\(^{72}\)

However, Calvin did not conceive of the effectually called as a group of undifferentiated individuals; rather his theology further differentiated or individuated them from one another. Those among this number also receive unique and varying gifts, and it is this diversity of gifts which accounts for why some will receive greater reward in heaven than others; “…just as God, variously distributing his gifts to the saints in this world, beams upon them unequally, so there will not be an equal measure of glory in heaven…. For anyone who studies the Scriptures, they promise believers not only eternal life but a special reward for each.”\(^{73}\)

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\(^{71}\) Ibid., III: 21, 7.

\(^{72}\) Ibid., III: 22, 4.

\(^{73}\) Ibid., III: 25, 10.
not preached equally among all men, and among those to whom it is preached, it does not
gain the same acceptance either constantly or in equal degree.\footnote{Ibid., III: 21, 1.}

Calvin’s understanding of predestination explicitly maintained that God works
uniquely in the life of each individual, specifically electing or damming that individual.
Further, the elect were not an indiscriminate body in Calvin’s mind. Rather, he
understood God to have individuated each believer from others by the degree to which he
had gifted that believer.

While Calvin believed that God had a unique ordained outcome for each
individual, God also worked intimately within the mind and heart of individuals to bring
about his will. In a discussion of divine providence, Calvin vehemently argued that God’s
will is the cause of all things including the thoughts, plans, and intentions of the godly
and the wicked; “…since God’s will is said to be the cause of all things, I have made his
providence the determinative principle for all human plans and works, not only in order
to display its force in the elect, who are ruled by the Holy Spirit, but also to compel the
reprobate to obedience.”\footnote{Ibid., I: 18, 2.} Calvin insisted that God not only ordains particular acts but
ordains the nature of one’s heart and one’s mind, the two faculties of the soul that are
responsible for willing and choosing, so that one’s act carries out God’s will.

Calvin gave many biblical examples regarding God’s directing of the wicked.
When Pharaoh refused to release the Israelites, it was because God hardened his heart.
When the inhabitants of Canaan came out to do battle with Israel, it was because he had
turned their hearts “to hate his people.” While Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers, it is
ultimately God who has worked error in these, causing them to believe lies. Calvin
specifically rejected the idea that the wicked are allowed or permitted by God to remain
blind or to desire evil. Rather, Calvin maintained that God works even in the determining
of a person’s will and understanding. As he later wrote “But if we lend our ears to the many testimonies which proclaim that the Lord also rules men’s minds in external things, these will compel us to subordinate decision itself to the special impulse of God.”

Positive changes in the hearts and minds of the elect are also the result of God working upon individuals uniquely. Calvin believed that general election is an outward affair whereas effectual election requires “the working of inner grace.” Such inner working is the result of God sending the “spirit of regeneration” to the effectually called:

It is easy to explain why the general election of a people is not always firm and effectual: to those with whom God makes a covenant, he does not at once give the spirit of regeneration that would enable them to persevere in the covenant to the very end. Rather, the outward change, without the working of inner grace, which might have availed to keep them, is intermediate between the rejection of mankind and the election of a meager number of the godly.

Further, he wrote, “God begins his good work in us, therefore, by arousing love and desire and zeal for righteousness in our hearts; or to speak more correctly, by bending, forming, and directing our hearts to righteousness.” That is, the hearts of the elect only long for righteousness after God has done his work within them. Similarly, the elect only

76 Ibid., I: 8, 1. In this section, Calvin clearly claimed that while Pharaoh “himself made heavy his own heart,” God’s will is still posited as the “cause of the hardening.” However, Calvin did add the important proviso that when God acts upon humans, it is not without humans also acting themselves in some manner. That is, Calvin believed that while all events, including the condition of one’s intellect and will, were the result of God’s willing, this still implied that humans acted or willed of themselves: “As if these two statements did not perfectly agree, although in divers ways, that man, while he is acted upon by God, yet at the same time himself acts!”

77 Ibid., II: 4, 6.

78 Calvin believed that the “working of inner grace,” mentioned here in Book III: 21, 7, was the essential element which caused general election to be effectual election. This is similar to Calvin’s insistence that individuals will not consider the Bible to be authenticated unless they have received the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit. Calvin closed this discussion by writing “Whenever, then, the fewness of believers disturbs us, let the converse come to mind, that only those to whom it is given can comprehend the mysteries of God,” Ibid., I: 7, 5.

79 Ibid., III: 21, 7.

80 Ibid., II: 3, 6.
understand the nature and authenticity of Scripture when the Holy Spirit provides inner testimony of this reality. And, while God works on the hearts and minds of the elect, he does not do so in the same way or to the same extent for each individual. God did grant the Spirit of understanding and instruction to all believers, but not all believers were equally endowed.

Calvin’s commentary on the Psalms also reinforces the notion of individuation linked to predestination. In his treatment of Psalm 16:11, Calvin could conclude that God does not look upon everyone in the same way, and he does not open everyone’s eyes. Similarly, Calvin’s interpretation of Psalm 65:5 produced the conclusion that God does not elect all people to grace. Or again, God’s “…gracious election distinguishes one from the other.” When treating Psalm 87:6, Calvin wrote that while the basic situation of all people is equal, God separates humanity into two kinds. Based upon Psalm 130:8 Calvin wrote that God is not the savior “…of all indiscriminately but only of his chosen people.” Though “the law was shown to all without distinction” ("Lex promiscue omnibus erat exposita"”), it only bears fruit among those who receive the inward illuminating gift of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, God teaches all indiscriminately (promiscue) through preaching, but only those who have been influenced by the Holy Spirit are actually drawn to God. When the saints refer to their own piety before God, they have in mind that God distinguishes (discernit) between them and the wicked, based upon God’s work to adopt

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81 Ibid., I: 7, 5.
82 Ibid., IV: 8, 11.
83 Selderhuis, Theology of the Psalms, 272.
84 Ibid., 272–273.
85 CO, XXXII: 242. This is taken from Calvin’s comments on Psalm 119:64.
86 Ibid., 258. This is taken from his comments on Psalm 119:101.
them through the Holy Spirit, not based upon their own merits. In these ways, the Psalms commentary clearly maintains Calvin’s insistence in the Institutes that God divides humanity into two groups, the elect and the reprobate.

Calvin’s treatment of Psalm 24 demonstrates his belief that that called are differentiated into two groups; the outwardly and ineffectually called and the inward and effectually called. When interpreting 24:1, he claimed that God extended fatherly care to people of all nations, without exception (sine exceptione), but especially preferred (praetulerit) and distinguished (discernat) Israel from other nations. Yet, when treating 24:3, Calvin held that the psalmist distinguished between true and false Israelites (ut veros Israëlitas a falsis discernât). The former not only bear the external name of “Israelite” but also have the right to enter the sanctuary because they have bound themselves to holiness. The latter only bear the external name of “Israelite” and yet do not pursue holiness.

The Psalms commentary also maintains Calvin’s belief that the elect, the effectually or truly called, are further individuated one from another. As Selderhuis summarizes, “It is clear that God also makes distinctions when interacting with the believer. He does not manifest his favor equally or uniformly to all Christians.” While some of the elect are afflicted in the same way as the wicked, this is due at times to God’s effort to cause these elect individuals to perceive how greatly they need God’s protection. Similarly, when some believers suffer affliction, it is divine chastisement in response to a specific sin, aimed at reducing that sin’s hold upon an individual. Note that in these cases, God treats elect individuals uniquely. Further, some of these unique forms of

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87 Ibid., 286. This is taken from his comments on Psalm 119:159.

88 CO, XXXI: 243-245. When treating Psalm 24, Calvin directed readers to his interpretation of Psalm 15 (see in particular verse 1) where he wrote that hypocrites, who continue to occupy the temple, simply pretend to be God’s people.

89 Selderhuis, Theology of the Psalms, 100–101.
treatment have the goal of changing one’s internal conditions; developing awareness of one’s need for divine protection.

Consider the following example from Calvin’s discussion of Psalm 119:67. Broadly speaking, God sends manifold afflictions to believers because sinful humans do not respond appropriately to God’s gentle dealings. Yet, the affliction that God sends to specific individuals depends upon the vice with which that individual is plagued. Calvin believed that certain afflictions were fitting and suitable remedies for particular vices.90 As Selderhuis writes, “God promises temporal blessings to the faithful, but he confers these upon each person individually in so far as he considers it desirable in that particular case. Some need much prosperity to be persuaded of God’s favor towards them, but there may also be believers that, for this purpose, must be brought to poverty.”91

Just as God works uniquely in each individual believer, God works uniquely in the lives of each of the reprobate. When commenting on Psalm 1:5, Calvin held that one wicked individual might receive immediate punishment for sin in this life whereas another wicked individual’s punishment might be forestalled until final judgment.92

In both the Institutes and the Psalms commentary, Calvin divided humanity into increasingly smaller units of differentiation, beginning with the basic division between the elect and the reprobate and ultimately ending with the individual, whether elect or reprobate, whom God influenced in unique ways. Calvin didn’t believe that God simply deemed one to be elect or reprobate but that God had further means for affecting one’s election and damnation in ways unique to each individual, on a case by case basis.

Finally, God’s activity upon individuals differentiated them externally as well as internally. Calvin believed that God sent unique external circumstances to each person. In

90 CO, XXXII: 244.

91 Selderhuis, Theology of the Psalms, 102.

92 CO, XXXI: 40-41.
some cases, he poured out wealth upon an elect individual while in other cases he left one of the faithful to suffer poverty. Under God’s providential watch, one wicked man enjoyed prosperity whereas another experienced God’s hasty wrath for wrongs committed. For Calvin, God did not indiscriminately bless the faithful or curse the wicked in this life. Rather, each individual’s unique external condition was assigned through God’s providence. And yet, the above also demonstrates that individuals were further differentiated from each other based upon whether and to what extent God sent the Holy Spirit to illuminate an individual’s mind and guide the passions of one’s heart.\(^93\)

\textit{Vocation, Institutional Hierarchy, and Individuation:} Whether discussing the church, civil government, or familial and societal structures, Calvin regularly taught that God assigns individuals to unique vocations or roles within these hierarchies. The \textit{Institutes} and the Psalms commentary tended to refer to one’s vocation as fixed; one had a responsibility to discover and then faithfully fulfill his or her station within formal and informal institutional structures. Calvin’s doctrine of vocation differentiated the artisan from the magistrate, the lay believer from the minister, husbands from wives, and so forth. And, Calvin considered it a gross perversion for individuals to overstep the limits of the vocation God had uniquely ordained for them.

The \textit{Institutes} offer consistent statements about Calvin’s view of vocation and hierarchy. When discussing how believers should occupy themselves while living on earth, Calvin closed by insisting that they must discover their unique calling and fulfill it faithfully:

\textit{The magistrate will discharge his functions more willingly; the head of household will confine himself to his duty; each man will bear and swallow the discomforts, vexations, weariness, and anxieties in his way of

\(^{93}\) As the foregoing has suggested, Calvin often believed God’s assigning of an individual to a particular external circumstance had an internal goal. God aimed to teach something to an individual or to change an individual’s heart by sending affliction or wealth, pain or health, especially among the elect.
life, when he has been persuaded that the burden was laid upon him by God. 94

Conversely, Calvin maintained that one would fall into disobedience if one attempted to fulfill the responsibilities of another person’s calling:

Therefore each individual has his own kind of living assigned to him by the Lord as a sort of sentry post so that he may not heedlessly wander about throughout life. Now, so necessary is this distinction that all our actions are judged in his sight by it, often indeed far otherwise than in the judgment of human and philosophical reason. No deed is considered more noble, even among philosophers, than to free one’s country from tyranny. Yet a private citizen who lays his hand upon a tyrant is openly condemned by the heavenly judge.

Just as Calvin employed the language of distinction when discussing election, he again used similar language here, referring to one’s calling as a distinction; that which distinguishes one person who fills one particular role from another who fills a different role.

Calvin closed the *Institutes* with a discussion of the role of civil government and its relation to ecclesiastical government. In this context, his views regarding vocation again came to the fore. He noted that the role of civil authorities is a calling: “The Lord has declared his approval of their offices. Accordingly, no one ought to doubt that civil authority is a calling, not only holy and lawful before God, but also the most sacred and by far the most honorable….95 He also insisted that private individuals should not “deliberately intrude in public affairs, or pointlessly invade the magistrate’s office, or undertake anything at all politically.”96 If a public ordinance needed amending, Calvin instructed private individuals to leave this issue to the judgment of the magistrates.

Similarly, though Calvin valued the ideal of political liberty, even a moderate form of democracy, and despised the despotic rule of monarchs, he rigidly maintained that private

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95 Ibid., IV: 20, 4.

96 Ibid., IV: 20, 23.
individuals should not raise a hand in resistance to these rulers. Instead, they should trust the magistrates, those authorized by nature of their office or station, to resist despotic monarchs. Calvin even “disqualified” private individuals from speculating about the best form of government, suggesting that such pondering is better left to civil authorities.

When discussing ecclesiastical structures in the Institutes, Calvin urged believers to respect their place within the hierarchy. In the same way that he criticized private individuals who attempt to raise a hand against a tyrant (instead of leaving this in the hands of appointed civil authorities) Calvin criticized believers who usurped the role of appointed pastors:

…it is wrong for private individuals to assume the administration of baptism; for this as well as the serving of the Supper is a function of the ecclesiastical ministry. For Christ did not command women, or men of every sort, to baptize, but gave this command to those whom he had appointed apostles.

He thusly concluded that “whoever baptizes without a lawful call usurps another’s office.”

Similarly, Calvin was highly critical of those who denied the teaching and preaching authority of pastors. Though God could perfect his children in a moment, he yet desires them to mature through the ministries and education of the church, and in particular through the preaching of the heavenly doctrine which “has been enjoined upon

97 Calvin wrote, “For, if the correction of unbridled despotism is the Lord’s to avenge, let us not at once think that it is entrusted to us, to whom no command has been given except to obey and suffer....” Calvin then added “I am speaking all the while of private individuals. For if there are now any magistrates of the people, appointed to restrain the willfulness of kings...I am so far from forbidding them to withstand, in accordance with their duty, the fierce licentiousness of kings....” Ibid., IV: 20, 31.

98 Ibid., IV: 20, 8.

99 Ibid., IV: 15, 20.

100 Ibid., IV: 15, 22. Similarly, Calvin held that it was inappropriate for individuals to try to determine who ought to be received and who ought to be rejected for Communion. This task belonged to the church, and in particular to the consistory, the church’s appointed arm of discipline, IV: 1, 15.
Calvin pointed out that “Many are led either by pride, dislike, or rivalry to the conviction that they can profit enough from private reading and meditation; hence they despise public assemblies and deem preaching superfluous.” These rogue interpreters bewitch themselves “with pestilent errors and foulest delusions.” Though Calvin did not use the language of usurping another’s role in this specific context, he did insist that these self-educated “fanatics” were reaching beyond their station and were not giving due consideration to the divinely established authorities over them.

While some pastors might dash about from church to church, seeking their own advantage, Calvin instructed pastors to remain diligent in serving their own flock. Those who do otherwise “break over into another man’s province.” That is, each pastor is called and therefore appointed to a particular congregation. Undue activity within another congregation oversteps the pastor’s station; it is a usurping of another’s office.

When turning to the Psalms commentary, Calvin’s language of vocation is not as prevalent. Yet, the commentary is not completely devoid of such discussions. In his treatment of Psalm 131:1, he argued that David’s manner of carrying out his calling, as the appointed head over God’s people, served as an example for other believers regarding their callings. Though David was placed in authority over Israel, he remained humble in his post, not seeking personal ambition. With this in mind, Calvin concluded that each should remain content with the condition which God has ordained for him or her, not seeking fanciful and grandiose plans beyond the lot God has determined. As David was

101 Ibid., IV: 1, 5.
102 Ibid., IV: 3, 7.
103 Largely, this seems due to the nature of the Psalms themselves. That is, it would seem artificial and unnatural for Calvin to insert a theological discussion of vocation into his exegetical treatment of the Psalms when the Psalms themselves do not refer to vocation as much as they refer to the personal struggles of the psalmists.
called to a particularly high station, he carried out his duty with humility rather than
vanity and ambition. This sense of duty and humility, when applied to believers who have
been called to lower stations, should cause them to be content with the role God has
given them.

Similarly, the commentary contains multiple calls for believers to attend sermons.
While Calvin did encourage individual believers to read Scripture, he never thought
private reading would replace attendance at sermons. When explaining Psalm 84:2,
Calvin wrote that David knew religious services were not uselessly ordained by God but
that humans need such external helps in this life. With this in mind, Calvin criticized
those who neglect worship services because they think they can ascend to heaven via
their own strength. The consequence of going it alone, according to Calvin, was a
deficiency of understanding of Scripture and doctrine. Though not explicitly stated, it
seems possible that Calvin’s critique from the *Institutes* underlies his explanation here;
those who avoid sermons have stepped outside of their vocation and have sought to feed
themselves spiritually rather than sit at the feet of preachers whom God has called,
ordained, and specifically equipped to feed the sheep.

Calvin’s view of vocation and hierarchy had individuating qualities. It divided the
civil and religious community by distinguishing people based upon the unique calling
God had assigned to each person. Calvin clearly differentiated between preachers and
ordinary Christians, between civil leaders and private individuals. Further, he did not
conceive of simple two-part divisions within these hierarchies. Politically, magistrates

105 CO, XXXI, 780.

106 Selderhuis points out that Calvin stressed the preached word over the written word, 119. He further
argues that Calvin saw the service as a celestial theater; one into which God descended so as to manifest
himself through the word, sacraments, prayers, and other aspects of the service. These theological notions
certainly further ground Calvin’s insistence that believers faithfully attend service. Yet, they do not conflict
with or exclude Calvin’s additional trust in the need for ordinary believers to stay within the proper
boundaries of their vocation and to submit to the teaching provided by those whose vocation it is to preach
the word, *Theology of the Psalms*, 204-205.
had a unique role which differed from the role of the monarch, both of these differed from the role of the private individual, and depending upon where one lived and one’s status, private individuals’ limited role in politics could be legitimate if some form of democracy happened to be in place. Ecclesiastically, doctors of the church were distinguished from preachers, preachers were distinguished from elders and deacons, all of whom had different roles to play in the church, and all of these roles were different from the role to be played by the ordinary lay believer.107 And as demonstrated above, Calvin tended to conceive of a person’s vocation as fixed; one had a responsibility to find his or her role and faithfully fill it, leaving little room for the notion that one had freedom to move from role to role, from position to position. Gerrish has suggested that Calvin’s belief in God’s providential determinism of all aspects of one’s life gave birth to a quietism regarding one’s station in life.108

The unique place that each individual filled in civil government, in society, and in the church had an individuating effect. What granted such an individuating quality to Calvin’s view of station was not simply that a man belonged, by chance, to the larger class of carpenters or a woman belonged to the broad classification of nurses, thus providing general categorical divisions between groups of people. Rather, the individuating quality stemmed from the fact that God specifically willed for each person

107 Space does not permit a discussion of all forms of calling in Calvin's theology, but it should be noted that he conceived of political and familial roles in similar fashion. In fact, to prove his view that even wicked rulers ought to be obeyed, Calvin argued that few believed a father's authority over his wife and children in the home should be questioned just because he happened to be wicked, Institutes, IV: 20, 29. This demonstrates that Calvin viewed political offices and familial roles within the same broad heading of station and vocation. It further notes his insistence on station as rather rigid and unchanging in an individual’s life. However, this last feature must be balanced against Kingdon’s chronicling of Calvin’s eventual permission of “no-fault” divorce in Geneva in cases of wickedness and other faults, Adultery and Divorce in Calvin’s Geneva (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

to fill his or her particular vocation. For Calvin, in innkeeper was an innkeeper because God worked and willed this end uniquely in the innkeeper’s life.

Yet, it should be noted that Calvin’s understanding of vocation was not completely focused on the individual as individual but as a member of a larger community with responsibilities for fulfilling a unique role for the sake of communal goods. In this sense, Calvin’s concern for individuals to attend to their station was rooted in a desire for communal wellbeing and order. For example, Calvin urged private citizens to leave matters of political government to authorized officials. Even something as benign as the amendment of a public ordinance was off-limits to private individuals: “If anything in a public ordinance requires amendment, let them [private individuals] not raise a tumult….” In part, Calvin believed that disobedience to even an unjust or wicked ruler was identical with disobedience to God who had specifically appointed and established that ruler, via providence. However, another concern seems to have been that if a private individual stepped beyond his or her proper station, it would insert tumult or disorder into the existing, albeit less than ideal, order.

Calvin drew analogies between the familial and political arenas, and insisted that rulers and subjects, husbands and wives, and parents and children, are bound to one another by “mutual responsibilities.” While rulers have the responsibility to protect their subjects, subjects have the responsibility to obey their rulers. While fathers have the responsibility to rear their children without provoking them to anger, children have the responsibility to render respect, honor, and obedience to their fathers. This demonstrates that Calvin believed one’s fulfillment of his or her particular role had direct implications for others. That is, one’s attentiveness to his particular station served more than

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110 Ibid., IV: 20, 29.
individualistic goals but promoted communal aims. When all tended to their various roles, it promoted the overall health of the collective body, whether familial or civic.

The same commitment to the individual using her particular gifts to serve the wellbeing of the corporate body appears in Calvin’s understanding of the church. Adopting the Apostle Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 12, Calvin concluded that however excellent one’s particular abilities might be, “All such gifts…are still to be considered as nothing unless they serve love.” He clarified, writing “For they were given for the edification of the church, and unless they contribute to this they lose their grace.” Calvin believed that “the saints are gathered into the society of Christ on the principle that whatever benefits God confers upon them, they should in turn share with one another.” While believers receive a “diversity of graces, inasmuch as we know the gifts of the Spirit are variously distributed,” Calvin concluded that if Christians perceive “…that God is the common Father of all and Christ the common Head, being united in brotherly love, they cannot but share their benefits with one another.”

Church Discipline and Individuation: A final and yet very significant form of individuation in Calvin’s theology relates to his view of church discipline. Calvin’s doctrine of predestination differentiated between the elect and reprobate. Yet, he also maintained that it was not apparent, in this life, who was elect and who was reprobate. In this way, he thought it necessary to treat the church as if it consisted of elect individuals while remembering that it also contained reprobate individuals. However, in terms of discipline, Calvin believed the church had a mandate from God to regularly and diligently identify individuals who were suspected to have committed particular sins and to address the faults of these individuals through the consistory, the arm of the church responsible for discipline. Calvin’s theology of discipline found powerful practical application as the

111 Ibid., III: 2, 9.

112 Ibid., IV: 1, 3.
consistory met at least once a week, on Thursdays, to summon and discipline Genevans for a range of offenses, such as dancing, card playing, skipping sermons, and sexual misconduct among others.

Calvin offered several reasons for why the church should identify and discipline sinful individuals. Before summarizing these goals, it should be clarified that here, in the Institutes, Calvin tended to refer to discipline via the language of excommunication. By this, he meant a form of temporary excommunication in which known and obstinate sinners were refused access to Communion until they showed signs of repentance. Calvin believed that public sins that brought disgrace to the church should be met with disciplinary action. Such discipline not only redeems the church from scandal but also promotes unity. Note here that Calvin proposed broadly communal goals for discipline: the unity of the church and the honor of the church. Calvin then outlined three specific reasons for applying discipline. First, members of the church who have sinned publically disgrace the church and dishonor God. Allowing them to participate in Communion was sacrilege:

…we must preserve the order of the Lord’s Supper, that it may not be profaned by being administered indiscriminately. For it is very true that he to whom its distribution has been committed, if he knowingly and willingly admits an unworthy person whom he could rightfully turn away, is as guilty of sacrilege as if he had cast the Lord’s body to dogs.

In order to keep Communion from being disgraced, “discretion is very much needed in its distribution.”

113 As chapters four and five indicate more directly, church discipline in Geneva entailed far more than barring individuals from Communion.

114 Ibid., IV: 12, 3.

115 Ibid., IV: 12, 4.

116 Ibid., IV: 12, 5.
Second, church discipline purges the church so that “the good be not corrupted by the constant company of the wicked.”\footnote{Ibid., IV: 12, 5.} When making this point, Calvin referred to the command in 1 Corinthians 5:6 to expel the incestuous man from the church, indicating that he believed some form of excommunication was necessary for the health of the church; for the faithful to remain steadfastly faithful, they needed freedom from the corrupting influence of those who had fallen into sin. Calvin had no delusions that discipline would absolutely purify the church. Rather, he believed disciplinary measures would move the corporate church closer to purity. This too would seem to be a rather communal goal: seeking the purity of the corporate church.

The third goal of church discipline was to bring individual sinners to repentance. Calvin argued that treating some people gently after they had sinned would only cause them to become more stubborn in their sinfulness. For such individuals, Calvin believed chastisement was a better way to bring them to repentance.\footnote{Calvin seems to have offered a fourth reason for church discipline at the opening of his discussion on the topic. He claimed that discipline would complement doctrine; discipline is added so that doctrine does not remain idle, Ibid., IV: 12, 1.} Of the three goals Calvin outlined for church discipline, this is the one that had direct intention to influence the singular individual.

In all three cases, Calvin believed it was the church’s duty to distinguish sinners for some form of church discipline. This theology did not merely call for a theoretical differentiation of the community but was a call for practical discrimination of particular sinners. Anyone called in for church discipline would have already been differentiated from the community, broadly speaking, as one who had erred (at least allegedly). Further, if one was eventually excommunicated, he was physically separated from the community as he was restricted from participation in Communion (usually temporarily until he demonstrated appropriate signs of repentance). These disciplinary actions would seem to

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\footnote{Ibid., IV: 12, 5.}

\footnote{Calvin seems to have offered a fourth reason for church discipline at the opening of his discussion on the topic. He claimed that discipline would complement doctrine; discipline is added so that doctrine does not remain idle, Ibid., IV: 12, 1.}
be potentially individuating in that they required specific or particular individuals to be identified as sinners and proceeded against on an individual basis.

A final layer of individuation emerges when one considers that Calvin believed the consistory had to discern whether sinners showed signs of repentance. It is true that Calvin’s church discipline largely addressed public as opposed to private or secret sins. However, even private behavior, if it became known to the public and scandalously marred the honor of the church or proved to be a corrupting influence within the community, could ultimately end up as fodder for consistorial proceedings. Further, Calvin’s language suggests that the repentance which the consistory sought to accomplish in individuals’ lives was understood as an inner change. When he hoped to see offenders repent of their deeds, he referred to this as a form of awakening, something that seems a more internal affair of becoming aware of one’s sins and becoming aware of one’s need for change. Similarly, Calvin wanted chastisement to bring an offender “back to himself,” again seeming to indicate that the offender needed a new form of self-awareness, not just social or hierarchical pressure to conform to external behavioral standards (though Calvin believed discipline should rightly include shaming of the individual). In his discussion of church discipline in the *Institutes* Calvin argued that while civil discipline of drunkenness or adultery seeks the satisfaction of “the laws, the magistrate, and outward justice,” such can be accomplished without any “sign of repentance.” It is church discipline which can bring about inner repentance, not simply outward justice. When Calvin turned to the issue of civil government in the *Institutes*, he again raised this juxtaposition between civil government which is concerned with

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119 Ibid., IV: 12, 5.

120 Ibid., IV: 12, 6.
external matters, such as proper social behavior, and the spiritual and inward kingdom of Christ.  

Calvin’s discussion of King Nebuchadnezzar in his commentary on Daniel further illustrates how he linked repentance with interiority. The book of Daniel says that upon witnessing the way that God miraculously delivered Shadrach, Meshac, and Abednego from death in a fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar blessed God and made an edict that any who spoke against this God would be cut into pieces. Calvin concluded that Nebuchadnezzar acted momentarily, based upon the miracle which had gripped his senses. The king was not further grounded in an accurate understanding of the nature of God or his law, and thus, the king did not experience true repentance, as was evidenced by the short tenure of his conversion. Therefore, the king’s repentance was false. Had he sought and received instruction, or right doctrine, which would have transformed his understanding, he would have moved closer to true repentance. Without this important internal step, “piety did not strike a root” in the king’s heart.  

Summarizing Calvin’s view of repentance, Beeke writes that it “begins with turning to God from the heart and proceeds from a pure, earnest fear of God.” Calvin did not believe that the church could or should be silent in regards to external behavior. However, he also believed that church discipline was a divinely ordained means by which the Holy Spirit could transform the heart and mind of a sinner so that she lived righteously outwardly. This theology of church discipline called for practical differentiation between the faithful and the errant but also called for scrutiny and  

121 Ibid., IV: 20, 2.  

122 Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude*, 80. Interestingly, this case illustrates Zachman’s interpretation of Calvin’s marriage of image and word. Though Nebuchadnezzar witnessed a valid miracle, an important image, this was not able to bear appropriate fruit in the king’s life because he lacked the proper doctrinal and Biblical understanding by which to interpret or understand the image.  

123 Beeke, “Calvin on Piety,” 141.
correction of the errant individual so as to bring about a change in his or her heart and mind (i.e., repentance).

Zachman concludes that repentance for Calvin was a highly interior affair, being rooted in the renovation of one’s heart. However, Zachman also notes that Calvin believed such repentance should be accompanied by external signs of its accomplishment:

Calvin could not imagine that repentance for sin could be serious without it being manifested to others in the signs of repentance. He constantly cites the saying of Joel that we rend our hearts and not our garments (Joel 2:13), for the ceremonies of repentance are meaningless without the inward affection of the heart they are meant to reveal.124

While Calvin believed consistorial leaders should oversee such inner repentance as they sought external signs of inward repentance, Zachman also notes that Calvin recognized the difficulty of gauging the individual’s interior space. He refers to Calvin’s handling of the false repentance of king Nebuchadnezzar, discussed above. The king’s initial response, “to confess the Lord to be the God of gods,” was easy to interpret as a sign of repentance. However, because the king’s “conversion was ephemeral,” the initial external sings of repentance were not accurate measures of his actual inward state.125

It is crucial to note that the various individuating qualities of church discipline were mingled with Calvin’s concern for discipline to aid the corporate health of the church. Calvin wrote “Accordingly, as the saving doctrine of Christ is the soul of the church, so does discipline serve as its sinews, through which the members of the body hold together, each in its own place.”126 The specific context somewhat blurs the exact meaning of this passage: it is unsure whether Calvin means that discipline holds individuals within their stations or within proper behavioral boundaries. As future

125 Ibid., 372.
126 Calvin, Institutes, IV: 12, 1.
chapters will demonstrate, these issues were actually interrelated for Calvin. What is important is that Calvin here held together unity and cohesion of the corporate body through policing of particular individual believers: according to Calvin the corporate body will be a healthy, whole, and properly functioning organism when each individual is kept in his or her proper place. This dynamic draws attention to individuating influences amidst the goal for communal unity, order, and wellbeing. Discipline not only provided the opportunity and motivation for the sinful individual to repent but it also served the health of the collective body of believers, by placing intense attention and pressure upon particular individuals in the disciplinary process. Whether seeking the particular individual’s inward repentance or promoting the communal wellbeing of the church, discipline focused on specific individuals.

As with the topic of vocation, the Psalms commentary is somewhat quiet on the matter of church discipline. Further, the few passages in the commentary on the topic seem somewhat confused. When discussing Psalm 22:25, Calvin argued that it is not in the power of believers to cleanse the church but that it was simply their duty to desire the church’s purity. However, when commenting on Psalm 15:1, he wrote that believers should use the means available to them within their own spheres to purify the church. And on several occasions Calvin insisted that the church refrain from trying to separate the sheep from the goats since this task was Christ’s responsibility.

127 Again, this seems to be a natural consequence of Calvin being guided, largely, by the content of the Psalms themselves. While the Psalms’ language of the wicked and the godly provide for easy discussion of election, the Psalms do not lend themselves to a discussion of church discipline. For example, while David’s discussion of his relations with his enemies gives rise to the distinction between the godly and the wicked, Calvin viewed David’s authority to take vengeance upon these enemies as unique; David received from God the vocation of a royal ruler which carried with it the right and responsibility to bear the sword and carry out vengeance, CO, XXXI: 192-193. Had David not been a ruler, then perhaps Calvin would have considered him a model for church discipline, but given David’s special vocation, it means that David’s actions were conducted within a different context than that of the church which did not have authority to bear the sword or take vengeance.

128 CO, XXXI: 233.

129 Selderhuis, Theology of the Psalms, 230.
What is one to make of these seemingly confused statements? A few contextual matters would help to disentangle Calvin’s comments. First, when Calvin instructed believers to refrain from attempting to separate the sheep from the goats, he was largely arguing against the Anabaptists who believed that a church without sin was possible. According to Calvin, the church would always be plagued by some degree of sin since it would always consist of some who were truly elect and others who were only externally called. Yet, Calvin believed that Christians cannot distinguish in this life between the truly elect and those only externally called. Thus, definitively separating the wicked from the godly, the goats from the sheep, was not possible. When Calvin reminds Christians that it is not within their power to purify or cleanse the church, he has this distinction in mind, that of the truly elect and the externally called.

Second, though believers do not have the capacity to know who is effectually called and who is merely externally called, they do have the capacity to recognize sinful and hypocritical behavior within the church. When this arises, believers ought to purify the church, and one assumes that this effort of purification should follow the lines of church discipline outlined in the Institutes (i.e., purifying the church of behavior that dishonors God and purifying the church of wicked influences). But again, Calvin did not understand this as an attainable goal: the absolute purity of the church could not be experienced in this life, though the relative purity of the church could be enhanced.

Though the Psalms commentary is somewhat silent on the matter of church discipline, it still reinforces certain notions of individuation linked to discipline outlined in the Institutes. While believers cannot discern the effectually called from the externally called, and while believers are barred from attempting to purge the church of those who are not elect, believers should yet seek the purity of the church in the form of watching out for hypocritical and sinful individuals, who might be truly elect and simply require the work of church discipline to awaken them.
Conclusion

Calvin had much to write about the individual. Of immense importance was the individual’s interior life. Calvin thought it essential that each person descend within himself or herself to perceive the wretchedness that resided within. And development in piety required the reshaping of one’s faulty interior faculties, not simply the renovation of external behavior. Importantly, while Calvin placed enormous importance upon this internal work, he believed that the individual could not accomplish this alone. External helps were needed.

Calvin also drew attention to the individual through what this dissertation has called individuating influences. Such influences highlighted not just to the ways in which Calvin differentiated between various classes or categories of people but referred to individuals as unique and singular persons. Often this unfolded in relation to Calvin’s view of divine willing, whether in regards to predestination, which entailed that God explicitly ordained whether and to what extent an individual’s interior space would be reshaped toward pious ends, or in regards to vocation, which entailed that God specifically ordained this person to this role and that person to that role. In both cases, God willed intricate specifics of particular individuals’ lives, working uniquely in each person’s situation to bring about a distinctive set of circumstances and responsibilities. However, it must be noted that Calvin’s view of vocation was not concerned with individuals for the sake of individuals. Rather, he sensed that when each person identified his or her specific station and then faithfully fulfilled this role, it aided the wellbeing of the collective body. Susan Karant-Nunn has indicated, “Calvin’s standpoint cannot be described solely as isolating the individual before God.” Rather, for Calvin, “Each Christian is embedded in a collectivity,” namely “the visible church.”130

130 Karant-Nunn, Reformation of Feeling, 107.
Finally, Calvin’s view of church discipline, substantially aimed at protecting the church’s purity, unity, and cohesion as a collective body, included a clarion call for the church to actively identify specific individuals who had sinned. Such disciplinary efforts also seemed to overlap with Calvin’s emphasis on interiority, given that disciplinary measures were partially aimed at seeing sinners experience internal repentance. In this case, just as all believers needed external helps so as to perceive their wretched interior state or to have a renewed understanding of God and the good, church discipline too had some degree of concern to help specific individuals experience an internal change.
CHAPTER 2
THEOLOGICALLY PLACING
INDIVIDUALS WITHIN THE CHURCH

As chapter one demonstrated, John Calvin was convinced that the pious Christian life required a reworking of one’s interior space. Piety certainly included the exercise of externally visible moral deeds, and Calvin is indeed well known for promoting Christian activity in the concrete world. But to be sincere and genuine, Calvin believed such piety had to flow from right understanding of doctrine and a heart reoriented by the Spirit. It is for this reason that Calvin frequently focused on the internal dynamics of the believer’s heart and mind in his theological works. Calvin has thus received the title, from one interpreter, “adventurer-into-the-interior.”

Yet, close examination of Calvin’s theology and exegesis reveals his insistence that individual interior piety was best nurtured through the ministries and ministers of the church, institutions largely operated at a public and communal level with significant hierarchical authority. His understanding of preaching, the Lord’s Supper, and church discipline all leaned heavily upon the minister having unique abilities and authorization to interpret Scripture, to educate the laity, to lead the way in evaluating whether individuals were worthy to participate in Communion, and to oversee the process of internal repentance of sinners. In this way, Calvin laid great theological stress upon individual internal growth while refusing to believe that such development was the sole concern of the individual believer. He found it dangerous for individuals to attempt to oversee their own pious advancement apart from duly instituted ecclesiastical structures. This surely limits one’s ability to ascribe notions of private religious freedom to Calvin. Further, it highlights while Calvin believed the individual’s interior space was uniquely

1 A classic example is Michael Walzer's *The Revolution of the Saints*.

his or her own, it could and should be accessed and shaped through public or group contexts which almost always were hierarchically structured.

Additionally, Calvin’s means of conceiving of the ministries of the church relied upon careful identification of each person’s place within the complex church structure. He did not simply divide ministers from the laity. He saw crucial differences between doctors of the church and preachers, with the former having the responsibility of educating and equipping the latter in Scriptural interpretation. Likewise, the laity was stratified with lay elders having disciplinary authority over others, fathers having religious charge over wives and children, and masters having religious responsibility over servants. Not only did Calvin believe that these offices and stations were divinely ordained by God to establish order in preaching, moral oversight, and religious education, he believed that each person was providentially assigned by God to his or her unique place within the church, society, and the home, and this presented a potentially individuating effect: God had willed at an individual level for each particular person to fulfill a particular vocation and set of responsibilities.

Thus, even at a strictly theological level, it proves difficult to consider Calvin a proponent of equality, individual privacy, or individual religious liberty. Rather, it seems more plausible that he gave greater force to notions of differentiation among the community which highlighted each person’s place, identity, and role within various hierarchies. Methodologically, this chapter follows chapter one by focusing on Calvin’s theology through the lenses of his Institutes and his commentaries. However, in order to address the relevant issues, the Psalms commentary is not considered here as heavily. Rather, other commentaries are consulted on a thematic basis when they address a pertinent issue.
The Word, Individual Interiority, and Interpretive Hierarchy

For Calvin, the Bible, or the Word, was a primary tool through which God reshaped the interior lives of believers. Yet, the Word’s capacity to mold hearts and minds was attributed to the accompanying work of the Holy Spirit. Calvin endorsed an intimate connection between the external, and often public, encounter with the Word and the attendant working of the Spirit upon the interiority of the elect.

In the Institutes, Calvin maintained that a more reliable understanding of God the Creator and of God the Redeemer was only available through the Word. Just as the elderly need spectacles so as to be able to make sense of an otherwise blurry text placed before them, so too do all people need the Scriptures as a lens to clarify and organize the confused thoughts of humans about God. Calvin wrote “…no one can get even the slightest taste of right and sound doctrine unless he be a pupil of Scripture.” Yet, the Word alone is ineffective to inform one’s mind if it is not accompanied by the work of the Holy Spirit: “Paul shows the Spirit to be the inner teacher by whose effort the promise of salvation penetrates into our minds, a promise that would otherwise only strike the air

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3 Calvin, Institutes, I: 6, 1; As Dowey demonstrates, within Calvin's understanding of the duplex cognitio domini, certain things, such as the eternity and goodness of God, could be known about God the Creator via creation and general revelation. However, as a result of the fall, humans do not rightly perceive the knowledge of God the Creator. In reference to knowledge of the Creator, unaided by special revelation, Dowey wrote, "…because of the willful ignorance of sin all this revelation issues only in a mass of both crude and refined idolatries…" The Knowledge of God, 146. Calvin believed Scripture clearly repeated the knowledge which creation and general revelation made available to the human mind, thus providing a precise lens into these matters. Dowey summarized, writing "The Scripture pronounces the just condemnation of idolaters and functions for believers as a magnifying glass which clarifies their perception of God in creation….” And yet, even knowledge of God the Creator is informed by knowledge of God the Redeemer, the latter only being available through special revelation. Dowey concludes "The strate of special revelation called the knowledge of the Creator is available only as part of the historical revelation, of which the center and substance is Christ," 147.

4 Calvin, Institutes, I: 6, 2.
or beat upon our ears.”\textsuperscript{5} If attention to the Word is not followed by the work of the Spirit, “we coldly contemplate him [Christ] as outside ourselves—indeed, far from us.”\textsuperscript{6} Calvin concluded that the Word is given in vain if the Spirit is not also given to open the eyes of the mind. It is through the activity of the Spirit that Christ can be called the “inner Schoolmaster.” Similarly, in his Psalms commentary, Calvin wrote that it is not enough to have the law before one but that one needs the Spirit to be an internal teacher of the law.\textsuperscript{7} As Brian Gerrish has noted, “Word and Spirit,” for Calvin “are united by an ‘inviolable bond,’ and the ultimate norm is Scripture-plus-Spirit. The Word has become the instrument by which the illumination of the Spirit is dispensed.”\textsuperscript{8}

Further, knowledge of God through the unified work of the Word and the Spirit is intimately linked with the Spirit’s work upon an individual’s heart. Calvin defined faith as a form of knowledge, in particular “…a knowledge of God’s will toward us, perceived from his Word.”\textsuperscript{9} Yet, he quickly followed by insisting that faith “is more of the heart than of the brain, and more of the disposition than of the understanding.”\textsuperscript{10} While faith is a form of knowledge, it is closely related to the heart, to one’s dispositions, for two reasons. First, Calvin understood faith as a feeling of assurance, not comprehension; a feeling which the mind simply cannot comprehend.\textsuperscript{11} This would seem to indicate that the knowledge of faith is qualitatively unique from other forms of knowledge, having a connection to one’s dispositions. Second, even what knowledge the mind does naturally

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., III: 1, 4.

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., III: 1, 3.

\textsuperscript{7} CO, XXXI: 420.


\textsuperscript{9} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, III: 2, 6.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., III: 2, 8.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., III: 2, 14.
grasp from Scripture does not attain to faith unless it “takes root in the depth of the heart…. ”12 Faith is obtained when the message of Scripture is received by a heart that has a fundamental disposition of trust in God and his message.

While Calvin stressed the power of the Word, in conjunction with the Spirit, to shape an individual’s heart and mind, a number of theological commitments led him to trust public engagement with the Word rather than private reading, and this public engagement had to occur within a properly ordered ecclesiastical hierarchy. The end result was a theology which trusted that the ordinary means divinely ordained for the shaping of the individual’s interior life was the public and authoritative work of the church’s ministers.

Calvin called for all believers, even uneducated Christians, to attend to the Word. For example, when commenting on Psalm 119:130, he pointed out his desire, derided by “the papists,” for all people to read Scripture.13 Randall Zachman notes that Calvin once wrote that it is an abuse of power for a bishop or pastor to prohibit “any Christian freely and in his own language to read, handle, and hear his holy gospel…. ”14 In his response to Sadoleto, Calvin argued that the Roman church had marked out the Bible as a “thing inaccessible” to the laity, leaving ordinary Christians to revere the Word at a distance, excluding them from any investigation of it.15 Calvin wrote a preface to Olivetan’s French translation of the Bible (1535) in which he defended the effort to place Bibles in the hands of “the simple,” the “poor illiterates,” and the “untutored.”16 He also planned to translate Chrysostom’s homilies into French. He believed that these sermons, printed in

12 Ibid., III: 2, 36.

13 CO, XXXII: 273.

14 Randall C. Zachman, John Calvin as Teacher, Pastor, and Theologian: The Shape of His Writings and Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 57.

15 Ibid., 70.

16 Ibid., 56.
the vernacular, would “facilitate the reading of Holy Scripture for those who are humble and uneducated.”

This would seem to open the doors to notions of egalitarianism and individual liberty in matters of private devotion by offering ordinary believers the opportunity to read Scripture for themselves. When combined with Calvin’s view that the Word, through the Spirit, is equipped to shape a believer’s understanding and dispositions, one arrives at a rather modern notion of spirituality, one that is deeply interiorized, potentially privatized, and significantly rooted in individual freedom. Yet, Calvin’s mandate for lay readership was seriously circumscribed by his theological prioritization of a public interpretive hierarchy. That this was the case unfolds in a number of ways.

Though Calvin theologically stressed the need for private reading of Scripture, he never believed it should replace the primacy of the publically preached Word. This is made clear in the *Institutes*. When Calvin opened book four, he indicated that he aimed to describe the “outward helps” which would “beget and increase faith within us.” In this way, Calvin again affirmed that faith, as discussed in the previous three books, was largely understood in interior terms. Yet, this juxtaposition also highlights that he believed such inward development was effected through the external functions of the church.

As Calvin continued to lay out his view in book four, he specifically emphasized the teaching role of the church, writing that God had “instituted ‘pastors and teachers’ through whose lips he might teach his own….” While God could “in a moment perfect his own,” he nevertheless “desires them to grow up into manhood solely under the education of the church.” And this education was understood as “the preaching of the

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17 Ibid., 59. However, Calvin never completed this project.

18 Calvin, *Institutes*, IV: 1, 1.

19 Ibid.
heavenly doctrine” which was “enjoined upon the pastors.” Calvin believed that it was God’s will to “teach us through human means.” He explicitly rejected the notion that private reading was sufficient as the sole path of developing personal piety. He condemned private reading to the exclusion of attendance at sermons as fanatical, and he maintained that preaching at public assemblies was both “necessary and highly approved” since it was ordained by God. For Calvin, the church is not established upon private reading of Scripture. Rather, “…the church is built solely by outward preaching….”

Various scholars have highlighted this feature of Calvin’s theology. T. H. L. Parker concludes that Calvin understood the “Word of God” not just as the written text of Scripture but as the preached Word of God. Each time the message of the Bible is repeated or expounded in the pulpit, it can legitimately bear the title Word of God, as long as the message is faithfully interpreted and therefore reflects the essential message of Scripture. In his analysis of Calvin’s commentary on the Psalms, Selderhuis concludes that “For Calvin…the emphasis is more on the preached word than on the written word in the Bible.” Gerrish notes that like other Reformers, Calvin insisted “that for each to read privately at home is not enough; as proclamation, the Word takes on a public, churchly character, and the Reformers speak of it as…the ‘means’ by which God acts toward us.” Similarly, Elsie McKee summarizes that “Like others among the early

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20 Ibid., IV: 1, 5.

21 T. H. L. Parker, Calvin’s Preaching (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 23–24. Parker rightly indicates that preaching was not equivalent in every respect to Scripture. Preaching could only have its title “Word of God” as long as preaching remained subordinate and faithful to the Scriptures.

22 Selderhuis, Theology of the Psalms, 119.

23 Gerrish, The Old Protestantism and the New, 66.
Reformers, he [Calvin] also gave greater attention to the public, corporate teaching of the faith than to inculcating personal Bible reading....”

Thus, when Calvin referred to the individual’s interior space being shaped by the Word and the Spirit, he largely understood this to occur through public preaching, though not to the complete exclusion of private reading. Often, he substituted “preaching” for “Word” when discussing the Word and the Spirit. Calvin was careful to argue that though the Spirit accompanies the external preaching of the Word to affect internal change in individuals, God is ultimately the one who works in the hearts and minds of people, not preachers. That Calvin had to produce this caveat demonstrates just how closely he connected preaching of the ministers with the work of the Spirit to change the inner being of believers. For this reason, Francis Higman concludes that Calvin’s aim for preaching was “the conviction of the heart and mind.” Calvin believed the Spirit was the internal minister who promoted piety by employing the external minister to preach the Word. The external minister ‘holds forth the vocal word and it is received by the ears,’ but the internal minister ‘truly communicates the thing proclaimed…that is Christ.’ In his examination of Calvin’s preaching, Parker writes “The stimuli of exhortations have for their aim the building up of the believer in the head and heart

24 Elsie A. McKee, "John Calvin as Reformer of 'Spirituality,'" Calvin--Saint or Sinner?, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 310.

25 Calvin, Institutes, IV: 1, 6. Similarly, when commenting on John 15:27, Calvin pointed out that some overemphasized simple preaching and hearing of the Word, to the neglect of the Spirit, whereas fanatics believed the Spirit provided private revelations of knowledge apart from the Word. Calvin’s view wedded the Spirit and the Word, arguing that both operate together, CO, XLVII: 354-355. As Calvin put it elsewhere, God has two means of teaching; audible preaching from men and the inward address of the Spirit, CO, XLVII: 334.

26 Calvin, Institutes, IV: 1, 6.


28 Beeke, “Calvin on Piety,” 132.
knowledge of God in Christ.”

Zachman highlights Calvin’s efforts to preach in a way that would result in Genevans retaining the message of Paul in their heads and having this message inscribed on their hearts.

Calvin’s understanding of hierarchy and vocation, as discussed in chapter one, along with his view of the nature of Scripture were two pillars upon which his prioritization of public preaching rested. Individuals had been providentially assigned to unique stations with particular responsibilities. He largely conceived of these institutions as hierarchical, and this same thinking applied to the church. For Calvin, preaching had been “enjoined upon the pastors.” Therefore “all are brought under the same regulation, that with a gentle and teachable spirit they may allow themselves to be governed by teachers appointed to this function.” Calvin believed that pastors were especially equipped to teach the flock, given that they were gifted and trained with the ability to interpret Scripture rightly so as to make clear its true meaning and message, and as such, all others were to attend to such preaching “just as if he [God] himself spoke.”

Calvin’s comments on 2 Timothy 2:15 are perhaps even more explicit. He first asked “For since we should be satisfied only with God’s Word, what purpose is there in having daily sermons and even in the office of pastor itself? Does not everybody have a chance to read the Scriptures for himself?” He then answered “But Paul assigns to teachers the duty of carving or dividing the Word, like a father dividing the bread into small pieces to feed his children.” Several things are worth mentioning in regards to this

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29 Parker, *Calvin’s Preaching*, 127. Parker also notes that Calvin believed preachers would be more successful at influencing the inner space of hearers if they were to employ lively and strong language at times, 13-14, 114-115.


32 Ibid., IV: 1, 5.

33 Quoted in R. Ward Holder, “Calvin’s Exegetical Understanding of the Office of Pastor,” *Calvin and the Company of Pastors: Papers Presented at the 14th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society, May 22-24,*
passage. Calvin indicated that private reading of Scripture does not render preaching superfluous. Rather, preaching remains a necessity. And the necessary nature of preaching is itself rooted in the need for believers to be guided to right doctrine in the Scriptures as the Word is rightly divided by the pastor. Even though all are encouraged to read Scripture for themselves, not all are equally equipped to rightly divide or reliably interpret Scripture. Thus, pastors have been appointed as those particularly outfitted with the skills to direct the congregation through the Scriptures. Such implies a hierarchy, and Calvin indicated as much when he described the pastor’s relationship to the congregation with the familial hierarchy of a father who divides the bread into manageable pieces for his children.

Calvin’s trust in the necessity of pastors, as interpreters of Scripture, was closely related to his view of Scripture itself. As Ward Holder aptly demonstrates from his survey of the prefaces to various editions of the *Institutes*, Calvin believed the Bible contains right doctrine but is not equal to or identical with right doctrine.\(^{34}\) In order to glean right doctrine from Scripture, one has to be trained so as to know what to look for in the Bible; otherwise one runs the risk of becoming lost in the text. It is for this reason that Calvin insisted that readers need “guidance and direction” when turning to the Scriptures, and he believed his *Institutes* provided such guidance.\(^{35}\) Similar statements can be found in Calvin’s prefaces to various commentaries. His Psalms commentary was intended as an aid for readers who were not so exercised.\(^{36}\) His Romans commentary was

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\(^{34}\) Holder, *Grounding of Interpretation*, 6–7. Holder highlights Calvin’s wording from the preface to the 1560 edition of the *Institutes* which reads, “Holy Scripture contains a perfect doctrine….”


\(^{36}\) CO, XXXI: 15-16.
written to assist those who lacked independent judgment when they entered into the process of making interpretive decisions.\textsuperscript{37}

T. F. Torrance notes something similar in his examination of Calvin’s hermeneutics. While Calvin believed that the Spirit of God has an eloquence all his own that causes the Word to shine intrinsically, without any external aid, he also believed that God accommodated himself to humans in human speech, which unfolded in particular historical languages and styles in the biblical text. To get at the “solid teaching” that Scripture conveys, one must respect the languages and styles that were utilized when the Bible was written. Thus, “the need for all that the art and science of language can give in helping us to interpret the Scriptures.”\textsuperscript{38} In this way, Calvin believed that pastors needed to be trained in the art and science of language so as to be able to more readily interpret the text of Scripture rightly.

Largely, Calvin’s commentaries and later editions of the \textit{Institutes} were his means of providing guidance to pastors (or candidates in sacred theology) as they began to approach Scripture.\textsuperscript{39} These were clearly readers who were better trained than the average lay person. Yet, Holder concludes that Calvin tacitly acknowledged “that even prepared readers occasionally misunderstand scripture.”\textsuperscript{40} For this reason, Calvin trusted the

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\footnote{Cited in Fritz Büsser, “Bullinger as Calvin’s Model in Biblical Exposition,” \textit{In Honor of John Calvin, 1509-64: Papers from the 1986 International Calvin Symposium} (Montreal: Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University, 1987), 69. The form of guidance or help that Calvin intended to provide to readers through his commentaries and the \textit{Institutes} differed. As chapter one indicated, the \textit{Institutes} were a guide for how to approach the Bible as a whole, shedding light on the major narrative and themes of Scripture, whereas the commentaries aimed to show readers how to maneuver through individual passages, how to use specific exegetical steps to bring out the meaning of a particularly narrow set of words or sentences. These purposes were related and interwoven but not identical.}

\footnote{Torrance, \textit{Hermeneutics of John Calvin}, 143–144.}

\footnote{Zachman, \textit{John Calvin as Teacher, Pastor, and Theologian}, 79. Zachman also notes that all editions of the \textit{Institutes} from 1539 onward indicate that Calvin aimed to train “candidates in sacred theology.” Zachman further suggests that this “more likely meant those who were preparing to be pastors in the evangelical churches.” However, Muller indicates that Calvin’s 1541 French translation was aimed at less erudite readers than his Latin editions, \textit{The Unaccommodated Calvin}, 31.}

\footnote{Holder, \textit{Grounding of Interpretation}, 6–7.}
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interpretive expertise of trained pastors who could best guide the sheep through the Scriptures. If pastors as trained readers needed a guide to interpret Scripture rightly, how much more so would untrained readers, the flock, need such guides?

This prioritization of preaching, rooted in Calvin’s theology of vocation, hierarchy, and the nature of Scripture, gave rise to a public interpretive hierarchy. It should be clear by now that such a view distinguished between pastors and the laity. While Calvin wanted all believers to read Scripture for themselves, he still believed that pastors were better equipped to interpret and thus guide ordinary believers through the Bible through regular preaching. As Zachman notes, “Calvin agreed with the ‘fanatics’ that all Christians should read Scripture for themselves, but he denied their claim that this made seeking guidance from teachers and pastors unnecessary.”

Further, given that pastors, through their education, could more reliably interpret Scripture, this provided the congregation with the possibility for the Spirit to work in the hearts and minds of believers. The work of the Word and Spirit depends upon the Word first being rightly interpreted, and such was more aptly provided for through an educated clergy.

However, Calvin’s interpretive hierarchy extended beyond a simple distinction between clergy and laity. The above discussion implies as much by pointing out that Calvin’s *Institutes* and commentaries were intended to train pastors. Zachman summarizes Calvin’s hierarchy thusly:

By 1541, Calvin had become convinced that Christ willed to guide his church by means of two distinct kinds of scriptural interpreters: teachers (doctors) and pastors. Both are teaching offices, guiding the faithful in the right way to read Scripture to confirm their faith. However, doctors teach the universal church its essential dogmas and doctrines of piety, and defend such doctrines from error by preserving the true, simple, and genuine meaning of Scripture. Doctors have the responsibility for teaching future pastors, and for correcting any damage done to the church by faulty pastors. Pastors differ from teachers in that they do not instruct other

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pastors and the universal church, but teach only a particular congregation.”

Calvin’s interpretive hierarchy thusly consisted of doctors, then pastors, and finally the laity. Yet, Calvin’s hierarchy was potentially further expanded, though Zachman does not highlight it. Karin Maag points out that Calvin once preached that “every man” should “help forward his neighbor, and draw him with him” by teaching the principles of the faith. This would seem to undermine notions of hierarchy and demonstrate a more pristine reliance upon the Protestant notion of the priesthood of all believers. Yet, Calvin followed by saying that “fathers and masters” should “be careful to teach their children and servants.” This subsequent clause introduces hierarchy into the spiritual educational task, and in this case, makes use of both the familial and social hierarchies in the effort of the laity to instruct the laity. Calvin similarly relied upon the familial hierarchy for spiritual education of the laity by the laity when he initially entrusted catechizing of children into the hands of parents.

Finally, to the interpretive hierarchy outlined above one must add the role of prophets. A growing body of literature addresses Calvin’s view of prophets as well as his prophetic self-awareness. As will become clear, Calvin believed that God perpetually

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42 Ibid., 61. It should be noted that Zachman does not refer to Calvin’s educational structuring as a hierarchy.

43 Erik de Boer, “The Congrégation: An In-Service Training Center for Preachers to the People of Geneva,” Calvin and the Company of Pastors: Papers Presented at the 14th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society, 2003, ed. David L. Foxgrover (Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2004), The above discussion of Calvin’s sense of interpretive hierarchy is limited to his theology and thus does not address his practice within the congrégations, or weekly Bible studies, in Geneva. While these studies were open to the laity, de Boer has argued that Calvin placed a high value on the ability of these meetings to constantly keep watch on the interpretive capacities of the pastors of Geneva. This matter is discussed more fully in chapter three.


45 Zachman, John Calvin as Teacher, Pastor, and Theologian, 138–139. Zachman notes that Calvin eventually placed pastors in charge of catechizing children.

raised up prophets who were especially authoritative to interpret Scripture. This dissertation leans heavily upon the work of Jon Balserak, who has conducted some of the most careful analysis to build upon and clarify previous scholarly treatments of Calvin’s view of prophets.

Calvin believed that prophets during the biblical era were able to foretell the future, but this was of less significance to him than that they were especially skilled to interpret Scripture. Calvin wrote: “But with regard to the Prophets, this is true of them all, as we have sometimes said, that they are interpreters of the law.” As interpreters of the law, Old Testament prophets did not always foretell the future or convey new revelation. Rather, they explained “those parts of the Law which had been misunderstood.” As Calvin put it in his commentary on 1 Thessalonians (5:20), “By the term prophecy, however, I do not understand the gift of foretelling the future, but as in 1 Corinthians 14:3, the science of interpreting Scripture.” This same idea is found in Calvin’s commentary on 1 Corinthians: "By prophets he [Paul] means, in my judgment (meo quidem judicio), not those who had the gift of foretelling things to come, but those who had a particular gift not only of expounding (modo interpretandae) Scripture, but also that of accommodating it wisely and applying it according to the people and the time.”

Further, Calvin interpreted Deuteronomy 18:14-22 as a divine promise for the perpetual provision of prophets to the church. Deuteronomy 18:15 reads “The Lord your

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47 Jon Balserak, *Establishing the Remnant Church in France: Calvin’s Lectures on the Minor Prophets, 1556-1559* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 72. Balserak provides a host of quotations from various commentaries by Calvin which highlight the Scriptural interpretive work of prophets.

48 Jon Balserak, “’There will always be prophets,’ Deuteronomy 18:14-22 and Calvin’s Prophetic Awareness,” *Calvin--Saint or Sinner?,* ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 89.

God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren—him you shall heed.” While other exegetes understood this passage to foretell the coming of Christ, Calvin interpreted it to mean that God would provide prophets throughout all ages. Balserak writes:

Calvin’s treatment of Deuteronomy 18:14-22, in both his commentary and his sermons on it, argues that what is being promised here is not simply, or even primarily, Jesus…. Rather Moses promises prophets, who would be given to the church for the entirety of her existence on earth. That is what the promise is about, says Calvin. Calvin is emphatic: Moses “speaks of the continual order which God intended to establish in his church, which shall endure to the world’s end.”

Calvin held the authority of prophets in high esteem, continually insisting that their words were the words of God and that those who refused to listen to prophets were disobeying God. In a sermon on Deuteronomy 18:16-20, Calvin said “For as I declared, it is not enough for us to say, ‘God’s word is worthy to be heard,’ but we must also show this by proof. Whenever our Lord speaks—even if it is through the meanest of creatures—let us receive him quietly and obey him.” Calvin made it clear that such obedience is to be rendered specifically to prophets when he stated “God says not just hear my word but listen to my prophets who I send.”

Max Engammare has rightly noted that Calvin’s understanding of the role of prophets was not always clearly delineated, especially when considering Calvin’s self-understanding of his own role in Geneva: “sometimes Calvin considered his vocation as being based on an extraordinary prophetic ministry, sometimes simply as a pastoral and

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50 Balserak, *Establishing the Remnant Church*, 80; While Calvin insisted that God would ensure the perpetual existence of prophets, this did not mean that Calvin believed God had established a perpetual office of prophets. The Confession de La Rochelle indicated that prophets would be raised up in times of crisis, to repair the institutional church and restore its order, Engammare, “Prophet without a Prophecy,” 659. Thus, Calvin seems to have believed that prophets were promised to perpetually arise to meet the unique needs of the church in those moments when it had sunken into disrepair.

51 Balserak, *Establishing the Remnant Church*, 76.

52 Ibid., 83.
teaching ministry.”53 The distinctions between pastor and teacher could at times be somewhat blurred, such as the case of Calvin who, as a teacher or doctor of the church, instructed future pastors, while also serving as a local pastor. Similarly, the distinctions between pastor, teacher, and prophet could be somewhat ambiguous, since all had a role to play in the process of rightly interpreting Scripture ultimately for the sake of congregations (whether directly or indirectly). However, Balserak has done diligent work to argue persuasively for a distinction between pastors, teachers, and prophets in Calvin’s mind. While pastors, teachers, and prophets all interpret Scripture, prophets are unique in that they alone lead the way in reforming the church (e.g., censuring the institutional church for errors, replacing priests, establishing a new church outside the existing institutional church, and so forth.).54 The foregoing suggests that Calvin believed prophets had authority not simply to interpret Scripture and apply it to their present context but also the responsibility to rectify the institutional structures of the church when such structures strayed from their divinely ordained purposes. If Balserak is correct, then perhaps Calvin’s prophetic self-awareness gave him the requisite assurance to continue his ongoing struggle, not only to teach and preach authoritatively, but to implement various institutional developments within Geneva’s church structure.

While Calvin placed a strong theological value on the role of the Word and Spirit to shape an individual’s heart and mind, he also trusted that God had ordained the Word and Spirit to function within a rather complex public and ecclesiastical hierarchy. This did not render private reading unimportant to Calvin, but it served to place private reading of Scripture in a secondary position to attendance at public sermons. Part of Calvin’s rationale, if Brian Gerrish is correct, is that he believed public preaching had a sacramental quality. This served to give public preaching a unique spiritual dynamic

54 Balserak, Establishing the Remnant Church, 89.
which private reading could not attain. Others have suggested something similar; Calvin viewed the church service, including the preaching, as a celestial theater upon which God’s presence descended. While individual believers cannot ascend to God on their own, they can experience the presence of God as he descends upon the corporate gathering of the church to hear the Word and partake of the sacraments. Yet, a further aspect of Calvin’s prioritization of preaching over private reading was his trust that attendance at sermons allowed those graced (and trained) with the ability to better interpret Scripture to fulfill their divinely appointed task of making Scripture clear to believers as well as preparing them to read the Bible themselves.

For this dissertation’s purposes, it is of particular importance that this theological construction encouraged a public and hierarchical understanding of the interpretative task. Pastors cannot interpret the Word on their own but need the guidance of teachers. While lay believers were encouraged to instruct each other, Calvin seems to have insisted that even this effort unfold within a hierarchy which placed masters over servants, fathers over mothers and children.

Such a hierarchy not only minimized private individual religious freedom by insisting that each person give due respect and attention to those in authority over him or her, but it also served to differentiate members of the community. Prophets, teachers, and pastors were distinguished one from another based upon the unique role that each played within the church structure (granted some of these distinctions were not always hard and fast). Further, teachers not only were different in kind than pastors but in terms of the

\[55\text{ See Gerrish, } Grace and Gratitude.\]

\[56\text{ Selderhuis, } Theology of the Psalms, 204–205.\]

\[57\text{ Calvin also prioritized sermon attendance over private reading because it appropriately humbled believers when they submitted to other humans who spoke as God’s ambassadors, especially when such ambassadors were of low worth. Likewise, he believed attendance at sermons served to bind the church together in unity whereas private reading alone would divide the body, leaving each person to "despise the rest and be despised by them," Institutes, IV: 3, 1.}\]
interpretive hierarchy were in authority over pastors-in-training who needed the scholarly guidance of the doctors of the church. Calvin’s interpretive hierarchy also separated the ministers, whether prophets, teachers, or pastors, from the laity who were to attend to the instruction of their ministers. And, even in some cases where lay believers were to instruct each other, further differentiations were employed between fathers, mothers and children and between masters and servants, as those in social or familial hierarchies were tasked with educating those under them. In these ways, Calvin’s theology regarding interpretation of Scripture not only subordinated individuals to those in relative authority over them, but it also depended upon a hierarchical differentiation of the members of the congregation and community. Thus, when it came to the interpretation of Scripture, Calvin theologically envisioned various contexts, whether in sermons, in pastoral preparation, or in the homes of Genevans, nearly all of which depended upon some form of differentiation and hierarchy.

There is one particular aspect of Calvin’s theology which presents a substantial challenge to his trust in hierarchy. He insisted that congregations and ordinary believers evaluate the teaching of preachers and prophets. Thus, a considerable tension is present in Calvin’s thought, one that must be addressed before drawing any hard and fast conclusions about the nature of interpretive hierarchy in Calvin’s thought or the place of the individual in his theology.

While Calvin contended that prophets spoke for God and should thus be obeyed, as if they were delivering God’s message, he also demanded that prophets be tested by the church. For example, Deuteronomy 13:1-4 exhorted the Israelites not to follow prophets who espoused other gods, even if such prophets produced a miraculous sign. When treating this series of passages in his *Harmony of the Law*, Calvin insisted that believers thusly should not listen to prophets indiscriminately but should carefully weigh the teaching of any prophet against the Word and its divine doctrine. While ancient false prophets might be granted the ability to perform a sign or miracle, even these wonders
were not ultimate validation of a prophet’s authority. Rather, ultimate authority rested in whether such prophets spoke right doctrine. Calvin held that the same test applied in his day. A true prophet is one who speaks right doctrine. He further claimed that God would not have instructed believers to test the message of prophets if he had not provided the means to do so, such means consisting of the certainty of divine doctrines. Balserak succinctly summarizes that for Calvin, “God wills the church to heed the prophets but he does not wish to remove discretion from believers,” which is why Calvin wrote that God “…will have us examine men’s doctrine.” Lest one assume that Calvin here merely thinks that the church corporately, and not individual believers, is tasked with testing prophets, Calvin repeatedly mentions in his treatment of Deuteronomy 13:1-4 that elect individuals will rightly receive true prophets and dismiss false prophets.

In similar fashion, Holder demonstrates that Calvin called for ordinary believers to weigh and test the teaching of their ministers and even doctors. The 1537 Genevan Confession de la foy included statements of faith about the need for distinguishing between true and false teachers so as to be able to accept the former while rejecting the latter. Holder concludes that it was the congregation or the people of Geneva who were implicitly expected to judge between true and false messengers, and such would seem to be the case given that these sentiments were expressed in a public confession of faith. More explicit is Calvin’s exhortation in a 1550 sermon for all believers to be equipped so that when they encounter new teaching they can “ascertain whether it is God who speaks

58 Calvin referred to miracles, wonders, or signs as aids to right doctrine, not the foundation of right doctrine. This further bolsters his insistence on right doctrine being the means by which a prophet’s authority is weighed.

59 Balserak, “‘There will always be prophets,’” 102.

or not."^61 Holder has argued something similar elsewhere. He suggests that Calvin held his interpretive authority to be granted to him by those who sat under his ministry.^62 Such is evidenced when Calvin offered his biblical interpretations to the tribunal of his readers’ judgment.^63

Thus, Calvin proposed a strange tension. On the one hand, believers were to consider their pastors and their preachers as God’s messengers. Congregants were to listen to the words of these human instruments as if God himself had spoken. Yet, Calvin also affirmed the need for ordinary believers to be discerning, to test the teaching of pastors, prophets, and teachers by the standard of right doctrine. Taken together, these two demands appear circular: if ordinary believers are to test the doctrine of pastors, prophets, and teachers, they need to understand right doctrine, and yet, in order to understand right doctrine, ordinary believers need the interpretive guidance of pastors, prophets, and teachers.

The wording Calvin employs in some cases would seem to provide a degree of clarity in this matter. In his 1550 sermon on Micah 3:5-6, discussed above, Calvin iterated his desire for a discerning congregation which could “ascertain whether it is God who speaks or not.” Yet, the larger passage from the sermon indicates that it is preaching and lectures which equip believers for this task:

It [preaching] is not to add anything novel [to Scripture], but a more thorough explanation in order for us to be confirmed ever more in the doctrine of God. Thus, I say, what is the end of all the sermons that we

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^61 Ibid., 283–284. While this chapter focuses on Calvin’s theology and not the content of his sermons, this citation of Calvin’s sermon on Micah 3:5-6 serves to make explicit what Calvin left implicit in his theological works, namely that testing the validity of a pastor’s doctrine was not left to church leaders alone but was also the role of ordinary believers among the congregation.

^62 Holder writes “…Calvin assumes the stance of ‘granted’ authority. As authority to interpret scripture is granted by those who are less skilled and less learned to their better-trained pastors, the product of the interpretive effort, must be understandable to the mind of lesser scholars in the school of the Lord, namely, the laity,” *Grounding of Interpretation*, 221–222.

^63 Ibid., 80; see for example Calvin’s treatment of Romans 10:14 in his commentary on Romans.
give, and of all the lectures, what end but that everyone be better instructed in the will of God, so that when one places something before us, we always have that in order for us to inquire, to ascertain whether it is God who speaks or not.64

Here Calvin clearly indicated that the capacity for ordinary believers to test one’s preaching or teaching is one that is gained by first having been trained by preachers and teachers. Similarly, in his 1543 treatise entitled On the Necessity of Reforming the Church, Calvin wrote:

This much certainly must be clear alike to just and unjust, that the Reformers have done no small service to the Church in stirring up the world as from the deep darkness of ignorance to read the Scriptures, in laboring diligently to make them better understood, and in happily throwing light on certain points of doctrine of the highest practical importance.65

Calvin made it clear that the Reformers have not simply opened access to the Scriptures for ordinary believers. Rather, Reformers also instructed believers in how to understand the Word and what doctrines they should glean from the Bible. In order to know right doctrine, believers need more than the bare Scriptures but also need teachers to guide them in how to approach the Bible, and this is exactly what Calvin believed took place through reforming efforts of preaching and teaching. When addressing this tension, Holder has put it this way:

He [Calvin] sees nothing as more alien to faith than easy credulity, which does not test teachings by what is known of the Word of God. It is an issue of the work of faith to distinguish the Word of God from the human words, and this key is given to the faithful, that is to the laity. To facilitate this, Calvin cites both the Institutes and the planned edition of Chrysostom’s sermons. Though the laity must have a knowledge of the Scripture, they also must know what they should search for in it. The prefaces to the Institutes make clear that its function is to serve as a hermeneutical guide.66

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65 Ibid., 273.

66 Ibid., 275.
While it was Calvin’s goal to see the laity discern and properly judge the doctrine preached and taught by those in positions of authority over them, he understood this capacity to be the fruit of previous labors of prophets, pastors, and teachers who had faithfully equipped ordinary believers to engage in such careful discernment. As Holder’s language demonstrates, Calvin provided tools “to facilitate this” capacity.

T. H. L. Parker also makes this point, writing that for Calvin, “The congregation is not to listen uncritically, accepting anything and everything, but is to be sure that what is preached really is the message of Scripture.” He then quickly follows by pointing out “Calvin, however, has in mind a congregation that has been taught Christian truths from childhood; by the time they have reached years of discretion they should certainly be able to tell chalk from cheese.”

Thus, while Calvin envisioned a goal that would seem to grant greater leeway to individual believers in regards to the interpretation of Scripture, he tended to give greater priority to ecclesiastical hierarchies in this manner, trusting in the expertise and unique calling of prophets, pastors, and teachers to educate the laity. Only by being thoroughly trained at the feet of God’s mouthpieces could the laity become equipped to handle Scripture for themselves and adjudicate the teaching of others. And, even if many in the congregation were to become adept at interpreting Scripture, this would never free individual believers from attending sermons given that Calvin believed the service performed an important spiritual function that private reading could not.

A final point is worth mentioning in regards to Calvin’s view of the Word, though a fuller treatment of this dynamic is found in chapter three. Though Calvin saw the sermon as an educational instrument, one by which the congregation would be trained in right doctrine as well as the practice of reading the Bible, he also believed that the sermon should be effective in stirring the hearts of hearers. He did not conceive of public

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67 Parker, Calvin’s Preaching, 49–50.
preaching as a cold articulation of theological doctrines drawn from biblical passages. Rather, effective preaching both illuminated the hearer’s mind and stimulated the listener’s heart, thus having an impact on the entirety of the individual’s interior space. Further, the capacity to accomplish this required that the preacher be trained in rhetoric, which implied yet another educational hierarchy.

The Lord’s Supper, Individual Interiority, and Ministerial Oversight

The above has argued that Calvin believed sermons provided a means of accessing the individual’s interior space through religious hierarchy. So too did he believe that the sacraments could influence one’s interiority. Though Calvin had much to say regarding both baptism and Communion, due to space constraints, this chapter will focus solely on his view of the Eucharist or Communion. According to Calvin, the corporate church should gather for this public ceremony, one which was carefully overseen by the ministers, and in this process, believers were to have an experience which would bring about greater individual faith as the hearts and minds of members of the congregation were influenced by the Word, the Spirit, and the symbols of Communion.

Calvin understood that the Supper clearly entailed external activities. The bread and wine were both material substances which were consumed by physical bodies. He vehemently maintained that external preaching, or biblical instruction, should accompany Communion. All of this was to take place corporately within the confines of the church building. Finally, Calvin believed that partaking of the Supper would aid the process of repentance and that such repentance would be manifested through deeds. Yet, for all its external trappings, Calvin trusted that the Supper had a great capacity to influence the

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believer’s interior space. In particular, he held the Supper to be a divinely ordained aid in the maintenance and further development of faith, something which Calvin largely understood to be interior, though manifested externally.

The Supper’s capacity to bolster an individual’s faith was partly rooted in Calvin’s understanding of the nature of the Communion elements, the bread and the wine. While the preaching of right doctrine was a primary means for God to bring about right understanding in believers, Calvin believed that the bread and wine of Communion were even more aptly suited to convey central realities of the gospel. Calvin indicated that it is “very necessary” for believers to know that Christ himself is their life-giving bread and that through faith, they are united to him. Yet, such matters are a mystery to the natural mind, even incomprehensible.69 How can Christ, who dwells in heaven, also be united with believers and dwell in their hearts? How can Christ, again who dwells in heaven, be food for believers on earth? As Brian Gerrish has noted, Calvin’s own attempts to explain the mysteries of Communion produced certain ambiguities and tensions, thus demonstrating that Calvin struggled to articulate what he claimed was incomprehensible.70 Calvin clearly declared this to be the case when he wrote:

I therefore freely admit that no man should measure its [Communion or union with Christ] sublimity by the little measure of my childishness. Rather, I urge my readers not to confine their mental interest within these too narrow limits, but to strive to rise much higher than I can lead them. For, whenever this matter is discussed, when I have tried to say all, I feel that I have as yet said little in proportion to its worth. And although my mind can think beyond what my tongue can utter, yet even my mind is conquered by the greatness of the thing.71

69 Calvin, Institutes, IV: 17, 1.

70 Gerrish, Grace and Gratitude, 9–10.

71 Calvin, Institutes, IV: 17, 7.
For all its incomprehensibility, Calvin still insisted that it is necessary for believers to know or grasp this mystery, in some fashion. This is precisely where the efficacy of the bread and wine as symbols becomes important:

Since, however, this mystery of Christ’s secret union with the devout is by nature incomprehensible, he shows its figure and image in visible signs best adapted to our small capacity. Indeed, by giving guarantees and tokens he makes it as certain for us as if we had seen it with our own eyes. For this very familiar comparison penetrates into even the dullest minds: just as bread and wine sustain physical life, so are souls fed by Christ.\(^2\)

While the nature of union with Christ and his nourishment of believers escapes comprehension, the visible elements of bread and wine convey beyond words the nature of these realities to the human mind. Similar thoughts are expressed in Calvin’s 1541 *Short Treatise on the Lord’s Supper*. Christ is presented to people through teaching and preaching, but humans are so foolish that they cannot receive Christ in confidence of heart simply through these means. Thus, God has provided another mode that could more readily present the substance of the promises of the Gospel, the symbols of Communion. These confirm and fortify believers, and deliver them from doubt and uncertainty; in short, they strengthen faith.\(^3\) The symbols of bread and wine in the Supper cause believers to “see with the eye, and touch with the hand and manifestly feel” the inestimable blessing represented and presented in Communion.\(^4\) Though the gospel outlines the “treasures of his [the Lord’s] spiritual grace…in the Supper we have a more ample certainty and fuller enjoyment” of such grace.\(^5\)

It should be noted that Calvin came to believe that the symbols of bread and wine were not simply visible elements which merely represent or memorialize Christ’s body

\(^2\) Ibid., IV: 17, 1.

\(^3\) Calvin, *Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper*, 144.

\(^4\) Ibid., 148.

\(^5\) Ibid., 145; Calvin, *Institutes*, I: 11, 9.
and blood. As Thomas Davis has demonstrated, Calvin’s Eucharistic thought developed over time to give increasing emphasis to the symbols to present Christ himself. Whereas Calvin’s 1536 edition of the *Institutes* left the door open to the possibility that he believed Communion only made Christ’s benefits available, his later work clarified that it is Christ himself that is presented in the sacrament. In Calvin’s view of Communion, as Davis summarizes, “the Eucharist serves as an instrument by which the Christian…is joined to Christ.” 76

Though Communion presented Christ, this did not allow the symbols of the Supper to operate autonomously. The gifts one receives through the Supper require the Word for Calvin. Thus, the mystery of union with Christ must be explained to the congregation. Here, Calvin seemed to have indicated that while the mystery itself cannot be explained in words, words should yet be used to provide a context in which the symbols might make sense and thus more powerfully speak and present Christ. As Davis summarizes, for Calvin the Word is “a source of knowledge about the Eucharist” which “enables the Eucharist itself to become a source of knowledge.” 77 The symbols of Communion subsequently confirm and seal the preaching which precedes them. Calvin called such instruction which was to be attached to Communion “living preaching” which “edifies its hearers, penetrates into their very minds, impresses itself upon their hearts and settles there, and reveals its effectiveness in the fulfillment of what it promises.” 78

It is clear that Calvin wanted believers to understand, both through Communion symbols and through proper verbal instruction (i.e., preaching), the nature of the mysterious union with Christ and his manner of nourishing believers. In this way, Gerrish

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77 Ibid., 214.

refers to Calvin’s Communion as an object lesson, a kind of instruction which confirms, attests, shows, signifies, and teaches. Such illumination would strengthen believers’ faith, in particular faith in God’s benevolence toward them, his fatherly desire for their good which had been provided through Christ’s death and resurrection. In this way, Calvin rejected the notion that Communion simply commemorated or memorialized Christ work. Rather, the Eucharist was a means by which God accomplished something; the strengthening of the faith of believers.

Though Calvin emphasized the capacity of Communion to present Christ to believers in the Supper, he was insistent that believers not place too much emphasis on physically partaking of the elements alone. He was highly concerned that Christians grasp the spiritual realities which Communion reinforced. This stands behind his distinction between inward and outward eating. Those who partake outwardly merely press the bread of Communion with their teeth. These have prepared their jaws but not their hearts. Those who partake inwardly understand the visible food of Communion spiritually; they understand the spiritual realities represented and presented by the bread and wine and believe in such realities. For these, Communion is thus able to nourish the


80 Gerrish maintains that the Supper had some form of efficacy for Calvin, though that efficacy was one of supporting and aiding the maintenance and growth of faith within the believer. In this way, the Supper does not work outside of the believer to confer grace upon him or her but is a divinely ordained means of aiding the believer's understanding of God's provision through Christ and thus aiding the believer's faith, *Ibid.*, 160-173. As Calvin put it in the *Institutes*, the sacraments have no power of themselves to “confer the graces of the Holy Spirit upon us….” Rather, “the only function imparted to them is to attest and ratify for us God’s good will toward us,” which strengthens faith, IV: 14, 17. Thus, strictly speaking, the sacraments have no power in themselves to effect grace. Yet, because God has instituted or ordained them, they become infused with the capacity to be vehicles for initiating and strengthening faith. Davis not only agrees with Gerrish’s claim that Calvin thought the Supper had real efficacy, but goes further to argue that Calvin understood the Eucharist “as an instrument of grace…,” *The Clearest Promises of God*, 7; this is a simple reflection of Calvin’s own writing: “Not that I suppose there is some secret force or other perpetually seated in them [the sacraments] by which they are able to promote or confirm faith by themselves. Rather, I consider that they have been instituted by the Lord to the end that they may serve to establish and increase faith,” *Institutes*, IV: 14, 9.

soul as food nourishes the body. Even as early as his 1541 treatise on Communion, Calvin was careful to give pride of place not to the external symbols of the Supper but to the internal work the sacrament was ordained to accomplish: “…we must not suppose that the Lord only warns, incites and inflames our hearts with the external sign, for the chief thing is that he cares for us internally by his Holy Spirit.”

Further evidence suggests that while Calvin understood the Supper to consist of both internal and external dynamics, he prioritized the former. Calvin wrote that Christ “inwardly fulfills what he outwardly designates” through the symbols of Communion. Though the bread and wine visibly illustrate how Christ is the food of believers, and though Christ is present in Communion, the real partaking of such food occurs internally, when individuals understand the spiritual nature of Christ’s nourishment and heartily place their faith in God’s good will towards them. Similarly, though Communion entails the “outward confession” or “the confession of our mouth” of the Lord’s death until he come, such confession simply expresses “what our faith recognizes in the Sacrament.”

Though Calvin did not explicitly refer to faith as interior here, he did juxtapose it with confession which he called outward or that done with the mouth. Further, he prioritized the interior aspect, faith, because it stood as the foundation for the external confession.

Calvin highlighted the interior center of Communion when he appealed to baptism as an analogy to explain what happens in the Supper. Just as baptism provides assurance of internal washing, Communion attests to the manner in which Christ

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82 Calvin, *Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper*, 149; Davis cites a similar passage in Calvin's 1536 *Institutes* and then notes that while the young Calvin believed that it was the Holy Spirit who opens hearts and illuminates minds in Communion, it was the mature Calvin who had a more worked out understanding of the way in which the Spirit made the sacraments effective upon an individual's interior space, *The Clearest Promises of God*, 84.


84 Ibid., IV: 17, 37.
nourishes believers. Here Calvin drew parallels between baptism and Communion. Both have external elements, namely water, bread, and wine. And yet, if the parallelism is carried to its full extent, the true washing of baptism, which Calvin claimed was internal, indicates that the real eating of bread and drinking of wine in the Supper is also internal, consisting of understanding and trusting God’s provision of spiritual nourishment through Christ.

A final argument in favor of Calvin’s prioritization of interiority in the Supper arises from his view of the Holy Spirit’s work in the sacraments. Just as the Spirit accompanies public preaching so as to cause the Word to effectively reach an individual’s interior space, so too does the Spirit cause the sacraments to be effective internally. While the sacraments “attest and ratify for us God’s good will toward us,” they are “of no further benefit unless the Holy Spirit accompanies them. For he it is who opens our minds and hearts and makes us receptive to this testimony.” If Calvin stated this regarding the sacraments broadly, then it must surely apply to his view of the Supper specifically.

Thus, Calvin presented a picture in which the symbols of Communion, the preaching which accompanies them, and the functioning of the Holy Spirit all work together to make the Supper an event which stirs the interiority of individual believers. Preaching at Communion service aided the mind in understanding what should be learned and perceived when partaking. The bread and wine effectively presented Christ and the spiritual nourishment provided by the savior. Both the preaching and the symbols were thought to guide the believer’s mind toward spiritual truths, and such truths also strengthened one’s heart in the form of increased trust, or faith, in Christ and the fatherly love of God. Thus, both preaching and Communion symbols were thought to have special

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85 Calvin, *Short Treatise on the Lord’s Supper*, 158.

capacities for influencing one’s interior space. And yet, Calvin gave ultimate priority to the work of the Spirit who caused preaching and the symbols to be truly effective upon one’s interior space. Calvin’s definition of a sacrament in the *Institutes* illustrates this prioritization of one’s interiority: “It seems to me that a simple and proper definition would be to say that it [a sacrament] is an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith….“  

The external qualities of signs, and the preaching upon which they followed, were tools aimed at aiding an internal goal.

For all this stress on interiority in the Supper, Calvin yet believed that this sacrament should unfold in a hierarchical context with heavy ministerial oversight. In the *Institutes* when Calvin discussed the manner in which the Holy Spirit works to make the sacraments effective at an interior level, he wrote “…God accomplishes within what the minister represents and attests by outward action….“  

Here, Calvin raised a similar proviso as he did in his discussion of ministers who preach the Word (as outlined above); while pastors administer the sacrament outwardly and also preach outwardly, it is God who ultimately accomplishes the internal work. That Calvin had to make this clarification demonstrates how closely the work of the ministers, who oversaw and delivered the Supper, was tied to the effect of the sacrament on the internal lives of congregants.

Calvin criticized those who believed that each occurrence of the Supper within the church was a new sacrifice of Christ. While God had raised up priests during the Old Testament era who continually made numerous sacrifices, such was not the case after the death and resurrection of Christ. Though the numerous Jewish sacrifices prefigured the sacrifice that Christ was to perform, Christ’s sacrifice was once and for all, not needing to be repeated. For Calvin, what remained to be done was not further sacrificing, but the

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87 Ibid., IV: 14, 1.

88 Ibid., IV: 14, 17.
transmission to believers of the benefit of Christ’s sacrifice. Importantly, in this
discussion of the continuities and discontinuities between ancient Jewish sacrifice and the
Christian Supper, Calvin never indicated that individual Christian believers were granted
personal and immediate access to the Supper. Rather, Calvin affirmed that in God’s
ordination of things, he had assigned pastors the role of overseeing and administering the
Supper. Thus, while God replaced the sacrificial altar with the Communion Table, and
while God had done away with priests to perform sacrifices, God yet appointed
“ministers to distribute the sacred banquet.”

Calvin’s theological commitment to pastoral oversight in Communion was not
isolated to his insistence that pastors distribute the elements and provide proper preaching
regarding the Supper. He also believed that pastors should lead the way in distinguishing
between worthy and unworthy communicants, an effort which would result in barring the
latter from partaking of the Supper until they had proven themselves worthy.

Calvin assigned the role of excommunication (i.e., barring individuals from
Communion) to the consistory, the disciplinary arm of the church in Geneva. Though this
body included lay elders as well as pastors, the role of the pastors seemed dominant.
This argument can be more readily bolstered by appealing to Calvin’s practice in Geneva.
But, given that this chapter is limited to a treatment of Calvin’s theology, the discussion
must not wander into Calvin’s practical patterns of conduct (such will follow later).
However, even within the confines of the Institutes alone, Calvin seems to have given

89 Ibid., IV: 18, 12.

90 Calvin’s goal in excluding the unworthy from Communion was not to exercise permanent punishment.
Rather, he believed that barring individuals from the Supper was a temporary means of bringing the
unworthy to a condition of repentance. That is, he believed discipline was restorative. This coexisted with
his trust that discipline also encouraged the unity and purity of the church while safeguarding the sanctity
of the Eucharist as well.

91 Elsie A. McKee makes much of Calvin’s inclusion of lay elders within the consistory, arguing that this
stemmed from the Protestant emphasis on the role of the laity. Yet, McKee also notes that Calvin's role
within the Genevan consistory was dominant, Elders and the Plural Ministry (Genève: Droz, 1988), 25–31.
pride of place to pastors in the effort to guard the gate to the Communion table. He urged all believers to be discerning in their personal involvement with others, avoiding unnecessary fellowship with wicked persons, but he specifically rejected the idea that individual believers had the right or responsibility to bar others from the Supper. Rather, this task was assigned to the church corporately: “For individuals ought not to have the authority to determine who are to be received and who are to be rejected. This cognizance belongs to the church as a whole and cannot be exercised without lawful order…. It is telling, though, that in this same context, Calvin laid the blame for churches’ failure to properly excommunicate exclusively at the feet of pastors: “…because pastors are not always zealously on the watch, and are also sometimes more lenient than they should be…the result is that even the openly wicked are not always removed from the company of the saints.”

Calvin’s section on church discipline in the *Institutes* lays considerable stress on the corporate nature of excommunication, holding that lay believers play a significant role in overseeing the process. Yet, Calvin’s earlier criticism of pastors for failing to implement discipline seems to betray a sense of ministerial priority.

According to Calvin, individual believers should be subject to the scrutiny of church leadership in the form of the pastors and lay elders who ran the consistory. Such scrutiny had as its consequence the ongoing privilege of the consistory to admit one to or bar one from the Supper. In this case, both pastors and lay elders worked to ensure, to the

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92 Calvin, *Institutes*, IV: 1, 15.

93 Calvin also seems to have prioritized the role of pastors in another passage of the *Institutes*, IV: 12, 2. Here Calvin explained that it is the responsibility of every person to admonish others. He then followed immediately by indicating that pastors and elders should be especially watchful to do this. Finally, he shifted sole attention to the pastor by writing: “For doctrine obtains force and authority where the minister not only explains to all together what they owe to Christ, but also has the right and means to require that it be kept by those whom he has observed are either disrespectful or languid toward his teaching.” In this context, Calvin linked discipline and doctrine: righteous actions should accompany the acceptance of right doctrine. Since Calvin believed that the pastor was largely responsible for the doctrinal understanding of the local community, then the pastor also had a particular responsibility to oversee the process by which right doctrine becomes right action.
best of their abilities, that the community was effectively differentiated into two groups, the worthy and the unworthy. As Calvin wrote, “For…he to whom its [Communion’s] distribution has been committed, if he knowingly and willingly admits an unworthy person whom he could rightfully turn away, is as guilty of sacrilege as if he had cast the Lord’s body to dogs.” Differentiating between worthy and unworthy individuals would serve to maintain the purity of the Supper.

The above strands regarding Calvin’s view of Communion converge to produce several conclusions. First, Calvin theologically prioritized the interior dynamics of the Supper, seeing it as a divinely ordained sacrament which had particular power to influence the believer’s heart and mind. Calvin believed that through the Supper, one’s understanding of core elements of the gospel would be honed, and one’s trust in these spiritual truths would be bolstered. The external elements (i.e., preaching and the symbols of Communion) along with the work of the Spirit all combined to powerfully affect the minds and hearts of believers.

Second, this interiorized event was not experienced in isolation but publically and under the administration of the pastors. It was pastors who were to ensure that appropriate teaching laid the foundation for the Communion service. And it was pastors, along with the elders of the consistory, who were to carefully watch over the community to ensure that those admitted to the Supper were worthy. Yet, Calvin seems to have thought that pastors should play a leading role in overseeing this event in which an individual’s interior could be shaped. Not only did the pastor have the responsibility to

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94 Ibid., IV: 12, 5.

95 It should be noted that Calvin did not believe one had to be perfect to partake of the Supper. In fact, he believed the Supper was a divinely ordained remedy for those struggling to maintain their faith and abstain from sin. Suspension from the Supper was reserved for those who were “disrespectful or languid toward his [the minister’s] teaching,” or for those who “stubbornly reject” admonitions and who persist in their own vices even after receiving such admonitions, Ibid., IV: 12, 2. As later chapters demonstrate, one could actually be considered unfit to participate in Communion for a number of reasons, including having a lack of understanding of the rudiments of the Reformed faith.
provide appropriate preaching that accompanied Communion so as to minister to the minds of believers, but pastors, with the elders, were even to exercise control over who had access to this event.

In these ways, Calvin again subordinated the individual’s interior development of piety to a public realm, one governed by vocation, station, and hierarchy. In such a context, lay involvement in the Supper included significant pastoral mediation and oversight. Further, the theological guidelines provided for the practice of Communion differentiated the church body. The pastors, as the dispensers of preaching and the Communion elements, were distinguished from the rest of the community. Further, the pastors and elders were differentiated from the community as the gatekeepers to the Supper. And it seems possible that Calvin theologically gave authority to the pastors over the elders, producing yet another layer of differentiation. And finally, those who were in fact excommunicated were differentiated from the faithful as unworthy, unrepentant, and stubborn sinners. Calvin’s theology called for these individuals to be separated from the community in a physical and visible way through their abstention from the Supper.

**Church Discipline, Individual Interiority, and Ministerial Oversight**

The above discussion of Calvin’s theology of Communion has already raised the topic of church discipline; Calvin believed that the pastors and lay elders of the consistory were responsible for protecting the purity of the Supper by weeding out the unworthy from participating. As chapter one indicated, Calvin also thought excommunication would limit the extent of wicked influences within the church. In these ways, church discipline was designed to promote the health of the corporate church by addressing public sins. Yet, he additionally believed that those banned from Communion should largely be barred temporarily, in the hopes that such discipline would bring sinners to repentance. In this sense, Calvin conceived of excommunication at the hands of the consistory as a purgative effort aimed at promoting the purity and unity of the church.
as well as the sanctity of the Supper while yet being a restorative measure to bring the individual sinner back to repentance and full participation in the life of the body. Seeking the individual’s confession of sin and a turning from the same was therefore a singular goal amidst other communal goals. Church discipline was not punitive but corrective and redemptive, seeking the repentance and reincorporation of sinners. When one recalls that Calvin tended to link repentance and interiority, this once again brings together individual interiority and ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Many of the pertinent details regarding Calvin’s theology of church discipline have already been raised (in chapter one). Thus, a prolonged discussion here is unnecessary. Yet, it should be remembered that Calvin viewed repentance as an internal transformation which was accompanied by external and behavioral changes. This linkage between repentance and interiority meant that church discipline’s goal of repentance was aimed at influencing the interior space of individuals. Though discipline could involve public humiliation and even social exclusion, one of its aims was to see sinners have a change of heart. The external and at times public nature of the process of church discipline had the goal of personal interior repentance.

Elsie McKee has implicitly highlighted Calvin’s belief in the interior nature of repentance by employing a contrast; whereas civil authorities “use coercion to establish outward justice; ecclesiastical authorities may use only God’s Word to bring sinners to repentance.”96 McKee later writes “Obviously Calvin knows that ecclesiastical discipline by human beings cannot effect repentance, but he understands church discipline as the ordained instrument for the work of the Holy Spirit.”97 When one recalls that Calvin regularly identified the Holy Spirit as the agent who works upon an individual’s

96 McKee, Elders and the Plural Ministry, 1988, 30.
97 Ibid., 119.
interiority, whether through preaching or through Communion, further support for understanding Calvin’s view of repentance as an interior matter emerges.

Calvin’s language, that the consistory’s role was to observe one’s repentance, also hints at repentance being interior. Calvin wrote that an unworthy person should be deprived of Communion “until he gives assurance of his repentance.” Calvin then described the example of Theodosius, who appropriately submitted to church discipline, in spite of his royal stature. Such an example was included by Calvin to demonstrate that both small and great ought to render themselves teachable to the chastisement of the Lord through the church. Yet, Calvin also seems to have believed Theodosius was an exemplar, given that he gave clear signs of his repentance. Theodosius “threw down all his royal trappings; in church he publicly wept over his sin, which had overtaken him through others’ deceit, and begged pardon with groaning and tears.” Such external actions and behaviors were taken by Calvin to be signs of Theodosius’ inward repentance.

A final matter from the *Institutes* bolsters the claim that Calvin held repentance to be primarily internal. He urged a sort of balance in discipline, one that aimed at affecting the interior space of the sinner to just the appropriate level. On the one hand, proper church discipline causes the sinner to feel shame. Some persons only require gentle treatment to feel the weight of their sins while others would take advantage of such gentleness to become more stubborn in their sinfulness. Calvin held that for the latter, chastisement at the hands of the consistory often worked to bring about effective levels of shame. Yet, on the other hand, excessive chastisement, especially in the form of permanent or unduly extended excommunication, could send the sinner into despair or overwhelm him with sorrow. Thus, Calvin urged a form of balance in discipline; chastisement should be severe enough to awaken one to the reality of his or her sin while

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not causing the individual to spiral into despondency. In each case, the important factor was that external correction, dispensed in appropriate amounts, served to bring about a change in a person’s dispositions.

Therefore, even the seemingly external functions of the consistory were to have an internal aim, at least in certain cases; the repentance and internal renewal of individuals’ hearts and mind. If the Holy Spirit did not change a sinner’s mind and heart through preaching and sacraments alone, then the Spirit could accompany the work of the consistory so as to bring about such inward transformation.

However, though Calvin showed a prioritization of interiority when discussing repentance, and while church disciplinary officials were to aid such repentance as they sought signs of one’s repentance, Calvin indicated that gauging an individual’s interior space via one’s external actions can be quite difficult. In a discussion of the nature of faith, Calvin held that “Simon Magus believed” but eventually “betrayed his unbelief.” Simon heard the gospel and “showed a certain sort of faith,” and such faith appeared as valid to others and even Simon himself. However, Simon’s assent to the gospel, whatever sort it was, did not “at all penetrate to the heart itself, there to remain fixed.” In this instance, Calvin argued that one’s external actions are not always apt signs of one’s interiority. In spite of appearances, Simon’s faith was not genuine. This presents a parallel to Calvin’s view of king Nebuchadnezzar’s conversion, as discussed in chapter one. Just as Calvin believed king Nebuchadnezzar’s initial conversion and repentance appeared to others as legitimate, but later proved false, so too was Simon’s faith initially interpreted as true by others and only later revealed to be false. In these instances, Calvin demonstrated that external signs are not always clear indicators of an individual’s interior space.

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99 Ibid., IV: 12, 5–12.

100 Ibid., III: 2, 10.
In spite of this difficulty, Calvin still encouraged the disciplinary effort to seek the internal repentance of individuals. This suggests that he held a realistic and humble view in regards to the capacity of discipline to effectively gauge and shape an individual’s interior space. Perhaps this is why, in practice, enforcing straightforward conformity to doctrinal and behavioral standards proved of primary importance to the consistory compared to examining Genevans’ interior spaces. As chapter four indicates, the consistory did spend a significant amount of time attempting to gauge and direct Genevans’ interior spaces, but this proved secondary and somewhat subtle when contrasted against the number of instances in which the consistory was concerned with less interior matters, such as simple external obedience.

It is clear that Calvin believed such discipline unfolded within a hierarchy under official oversight. When opening his discussion of discipline in the *Institutes* he claimed that it “depends for the most part upon the power of the keys and upon spiritual jurisdiction.” He tended to define the power of the keys and spiritual jurisdiction in terms of the church’s responsibility to discipline morals. Though Calvin thought all Christians had a responsibility to warn, reprove and correct evil people, he argued that public faults and obstinate sinners were subject to special discipline at the hands of the consistory. Thus, Calvin identified an institutional hierarchy which was to oversee the life and morals of believers. Through its power and jurisdiction, Calvin believed the consistory had the leeway and even responsibility to call individual believers to account. This already outlines a hierarchy between the members of the consistory and ordinary believers who were subject to it.

Further, the members of the consistory were differentiated into two categories: pastors and lay elders. The inclusion of multiple pastors and multiple lay elders demonstrate Calvin’s insistence that church discipline not be rooted in the hands of a sole

101 Ibid., IV: 12, 1.
individual or even in the hands of pastors alone. However, as the above has attempted to argue, Calvin theologically believed that pastors had a unique responsibility in establishing and overseeing church discipline. And an additional layer of hierarchy was operative in the prerequisite that all elders of the consistory first be members of one of the city’s three councils. In other words, being a member of the consistorial hierarchy depended upon one already being part of the city hierarchy.  

**Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated the level to which Calvin theologically submitted the development of individual internal piety to the hierarchical structures of the church. While these authoritative structures limited the degree to which Calvin can be thought of as a proponent of egalitarianism or free and private religious devotion, they also demonstrate Calvin’s concern for the internal life of the individual. He was convinced that properly structured religious institutions would grant ready, reliable, and fruitful access to the interior lives of individuals.

Further, these authoritative structures had the effect of differentiating members of the community based upon what particular station they filled, and these structures were not simple but complex, at times differentiating not only pastors from ordinary believers, but pastors from elders, elders from ordinary believers, fathers from children, and masters from servants, and so forth. These are dynamics that can be observed in Calvin’s theology. The question remains as to what happened to these dynamics when they were shifted into the realm of practice.

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102 See chapter four for a discussion of the basic criteria to serve as a lay member of the consistory.
CHAPTER 3

THE PRACTICE OF THE WORD IN GENEVA

When Calvin wrote that the first mark of the true visible church is the proper preaching of the Word, he was not touting an empty slogan. He worked relentlessly to establish a range of contexts in which Genevans would regularly and repeatedly encounter the Scriptures. There were three sermon services on Sundays along with a catechism service, and sermons were delivered each weekday. Scriptures were studied by students in the Genevan Academy, and the public was welcome to attend the Genevan Bible studies (congrégations), which provided another means of immersing Genevans in Scripture. Even corporate worship in song during services was highly scriptural. Genevans sang French versifications of the biblical Psalms. In some ways, one could argue that Calvin attempted to organize Genevan life around exposure to the Word.

While Calvin wanted all believers to encounter the Word, and while the content of his sermons and prayers was in keeping with his theological prioritization of the individual’s interior space, his sermons also powerfully reminded Genevans that they were not assigned to the same place and role as preachers, and as such, they needed to honor, respect, and submit to their pastors who were equipped to reliably guide the sheep through Scripture. In similar fashion, though the Genevan Bible studies were open to the public, their principal function was to provide a context for Geneva’s pastors to exercise their interpretive skills and to hold one another accountable in the proper maintenance of such skills. The involvement of the laity was rather limited and something of an afterthought. Further, the practical and functional dynamics of services and Bible studies utilized and reinforced hierarchical structures and also at times reminded Genevans of their particular place within these structures. Services and Bible studies, in some ways,

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became theaters in which layers of religious, civic, and social hierarchy were represented and reinforced.

**Sermon Services**

*Dynamics of the Service and Interiority*: As discussed in chapter two, Calvin believed that sermons were a primary means by which the Spirit accessed the hearts and minds of believers. In practice, Calvin’s sermons give evidence to the ways in which he thought this happened and the means the pastor could employ to better facilitate the process. In some respects, especially in matters of rhetoric, application, and exhortation, Calvin’s sermons demonstrate a more emphatic attempt to influence the interior space of hearers than Calvin’s commentaries did for readers, and this attempt also relied upon a hierarchy in which pastors were trained for this task.

Even before Calvin began the sermon proper, the liturgy of the service drew attention to individual interiority. Prior to the sermon was a confession of sin, accompanied by a prayer, and then just before the message was given, a specific prayer for illumination was offered. Elsie McKee has highlighted an example of each along with a sermon given by Calvin on April 14, 1560. In the prayer which accompanied confession, Calvin asked congregants to pray along with him in their heart, a seeming invitation for congregants to engage their interior space. Further, the prayer petitions God for grace “so that as we acknowledge our unrighteousness with all our heart, we may be moved by that sorrow which shall bring forth true repentance in us….” In this way, Calvin asked Genevans to engage their heart in prayer and subsequently encouraged them to recognize their unrighteousness which would also induce inward sorrow and repentance. The prayer for illumination just prior to the sermon is similar. Calvin prayed

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3 In *La forme des prieres ecclésiastiques*, Calvin used this same language when writing about the prayer of confession. There, he urged the pastor to ask those in the congregation to follow along in their heart (“...suivant de son ceour mes parolles”), CO, VI: 127.
that God would “guide us by His Holy Spirit to the true understanding of His holy teaching….”

This dynamic of prayer within the sermon service provided an additional layer of emphasis on the individual’s interiority when compared to Calvin’s commentaries. His sermons on psalm 119 almost always concluded with a prayer, which in many ways, mirrors the prayers McKee excerpted. In his sermon on Psalm 119:25-32, Calvin’s closing petition asked God to help him and Genevans to increasingly feel and remember their sins. The prayer for self-knowledge was common at the close of Calvin’s sermons on Psalm 119. After preaching on Psalm 119:33-40, Calvin again asked that God would cause him and Genevans to feel their wretchedness and misery. Thus, his sermons were bookended by prayers which reinforced interior dynamics. These petitions called upon God to aid believers in gaining increased awareness of their inward fallen state while also gleaning right knowledge of God’s good will conveyed in the promises of the gospel which were to be accompanied by heartfelt trust in and love for God. Peter points out that Calvin’s prayers were aimed at listeners’ hearts, and they employed rhetoric that gave them the capacity to leave an impression upon Genevans.

In addition to prayers, corporate singing of the psalms during services had highly interior goals. In Geneva, believers sang French versifications of the biblical psalms, and various editions of these psalters were published throughout Calvin’s lifetime. Singing

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4 In nearly all of Calvin’s twenty two sermons on psalm 119, his closing prayer included some form of request for self-knowledge. Ford Lewis Battles has compiled and translated a significant number of Calvin’s prayers in The Piety of John Calvin: a Collection of His Spiritual Prose, Poems, and Hymns, ed. Ford Lewis Battles (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2009), 151–174. Battles’ collection amply demonstrates the frequency with which Calvin’s public prayers called for God to reveal to the minds of congregants their sinful condition as well as to illuminate their minds with right doctrine held out in the Scriptures and proclaimed by God’s ministers.


6 With the help of Clement Marot, Calvin published his first psalter in 1539 while in Strasbourg under the title Aulcuns pseaulmes et cantiques mys en chant. This was followed by a further expanded 1542 edition.
of the psalter was thought to highly influence the minds and hearts of Genevans. Calvin believed that music had immense capacity, either for good or ill, to stir a person’s emotions. In his Letter to the Reader which preface various editions of the psalter, Calvin wrote “It is true that every evil word...perverts good morals, but when the melody is with it, it pierces the heart that much more strongly and enters into it just as through a funnel wine is poured into a container, so also venom and corruption are distilled to the depth of the heart by the melody.” However, Calvin believed the power of music could and should be channeled for godly purposes. In the same letter, he wrote “song has great force and vigor to arouse and inflame people’s hearts to invoke and praise God with a more vehement and ardent zeal.”

For Calvin, the use of music in services offered considerable gains but it had to be handled with great care and precision in order to harness its power and ward off dangerous abuses. First, Calvin believed musical style needed to fit the occasion: “There must always be concern that the song be neither light nor frivolous, but have gravity and majesty.... And thus there is a great difference between the music which one makes to entertain people at table and in their homes, and the psalms which are sung in the church in the presence of God and His angels.” Second, the music must serve the verbal content which is sung. Calvin wrote that he and others “have looked thoroughly everywhere and searched high and low” but found “no better songs nor more appropriate to the purpose than the psalms of David.” By singing these psalms, which the Holy Spirit had inspired and spoken through David, Calvin concluded “we are certain that God puts the words in our mouths, as if He Himself were singing in us to exalt His glory.” Calvin was highly entitled La forme des preieres et chantz ecclesiastiques. Other expanded and revised editions followed, such as the 1543 Cinquante pseaumes en francoies par Clem. Marot and the 1551 Pseaumes octante trois David. The most definitive edition was the 1562 Les pseaumes mis en rime francoise, par Clement Marot, and Theodore de Beze which included 152 texts that represented not only each biblical psalm, but the Ten Commandments, and the Song of Simeon, John D. Witvliet, “The Spirituality of the Psalter: Metrical Psalms in Liturgy and Life in Calvin’s Geneva,” Calvin Theological Journal 32, no. 2 (November 1, 1997): 275-276.
concerned that the verbal content of corporate worship be appropriate, and the psalms fit the bill. With such content established, Calvin also believed that it needed to be memorized. Only then could the heart engage more fully: “Now the peculiar gift of a person is to sing knowing what he is saying. The heart and the affection must follow after the intelligence, which is impossible unless we have the hymn imprinted on our memory…”

This careful balancing act ensured that singing of the psalter remained focused on proper intellectual content, that the music fit and serve such content, and that the heart then be inflamed more deeply with emotions fitting to this content. This in itself demonstrates that Calvin had definite interior goals for corporate singing. Indeed, the 1537 Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church demonstrate Calvin’s frustration that “…as things are, the prayers of the faithful are so cold, that we ought to be ashamed and dismayed.” His response to this bleak circumstance demonstrates the level to which he believed singing of the psalter could invigorate Genevans’ hearts: “On the other hand there are the psalms which we desire to be sung in the Church….The psalms can incite us to lift up our hearts to God and move us to an ardour in invoking and exalting with praises the glory of his Name.”

**Dynamics of Sermons and Interiority:** When turning to the content of the sermons, further interior stress abounds. In his first sermon on Psalm 119, Calvin said

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7 These citations from Calvin's Letter to the Reader are taken from Charles Garside's translation as provided in McKee's, *Writings on Pastoral Piety*, 91–97.

that it is necessary for Genevans to enter into themselves (…il nous faut venir à nous) to examine why they should remain stubborn and immoveable once they have come to understand the riches of God’s blessings held out in the law. Calvin used a number of questions to actively guide Genevans through this process of individual introspection. “It is necessary that each one think to himself. How are you?” In light of God’s mercies, “should you be still? Should you be as a trunk of wood, like a creature without sense? Should you not be moved by such a grace that your God has shown you and made you to feel?”

This is significant. Calvin not only provided doctrinal content in the sermon, intended to aid believers’ understanding of God, but also urged active participation which was highly interior. It would not be a stretch to label this preaching activity as “guided introspection.” Calvin wanted Genevans not only to understand and even feel God’s graciousness towards them in the law, but to look into themselves to consider how they, as individuals, would respond to such grace.

This highly active and participatory component is absent from Calvin’s commentary on the same passage (Psalm 119:5). The commentary certainly conveyed many of the same exegetical conclusions and even pointed toward similar practical applications. However, the commentary did not ask the reader to actively examine his or her interior space in the moment of reading as the sermon did of its hearers in the moment of listening. A methodological note is important here. In 1561 Calvin translated his Latin commentary on the Psalms into French. The French translation closely followed the Latin original, and as such, it avoided the rhetorical questions which Calvin

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9 CO, XXXII: 490.

10 Calvin published his Latin commentary on the Psalms in 1557. He quickly followed with a French translation of it in 1558. However, this French translation did not follow the original Latin very closely, so Calvin published a second French translation in 1561 which was more accurate to the original, Wulfert de Greef, The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide, trans. Lyle D. Bierma, Expanded Edition (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 88; Jean Calvin, Commentaires sur le livre des pseaume ceste traduction est tellement revue, & si fidellement conferee sur le latin, qu’on la peut iuger ester nouvelle (Genève: Conrad Badius, 1561).
raised in his sermon. This demonstrates that Calvin’s use of these questions in the sermon was not simply a result of treating Psalm 119:5 in French. Rather, these questions are unique to the sermon as a form of communication that had slightly different goals than did the commentaries.\textsuperscript{11} When comparing the commentary and the sermons on Psalm 119 in this chapter, the Latin and French commentaries were checked against the French sermons.

The above example is quite telling though somewhat unique. It is not simply that Calvin asked questions of his listeners, for he often employed questions in his preaching.\textsuperscript{12} But the highly introspective nature of the questions posed when preaching on Psalm 119:5 is rare. Apart from this unique case, there are a number of repeated incidents in which Calvin’s sermons consistently conveyed slightly stronger and subtly direct references to interiority than did his commentary. In most of these cases, the sermons and the commentary discuss the same issue, but the sermon is unique in drawing a clearer distinction between hypocrisy on the one hand, which is marked by external and formal actions, and inward sincerity on the other.

For example, Psalm 119:11 reads “I have hid thy word in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.” The commentary treats this passage succinctly (in five sentences), explaining that if one does not have the doctrine of God rooted in one’s heart, one will surely fall into sin, even if one is wise according to human standards. In this way, the commentary briefly sets out the need for the Word to take root in one’s heart so as to avoid the errors of fallen human reasoning.\textsuperscript{13}

However, the sermon treats this same passage at greater length (nine sentences). It also explains how external habits and formalities do little to help one avoid sin. Calvin

\textsuperscript{11} Higman, “I Came Not to Send Peace, but a Sword,” 127–130.

\textsuperscript{12} Peter, ““Rhétorique et prédication selon Calvin,” 264.

\textsuperscript{13} CO, XXXII: 219.
stated “it is not enough that we have been to church to hear that which is said to us…,” and it is not enough to have one’s “ears beaten with the doctrine of salvation.” Over against these external activities, it is “necessary that Word of God should be there within, that we have hidden it in our heart, that is to say, that it resides there, that we have received it with one such affection, that it should be imprinted in us.” Note how Calvin here layered clause upon clause to give emphasis to the essential need to have the Word rooted in one’s heart (this layering is absent from the commentary). And, while the commentary tended to explain how human wisdom is insufficient for salvation, the sermon explicitly taught that without the Word in one’s heart, one’s affections and desires would continue to lead one awry.\(^{14}\) Thus while the sermon and the commentary both lay stress upon the need for the Word to be rooted in one’s heart to avoid falling into sin, the sermon is unique in three ways. First, it explains in greater detail what it looks like, in practice, to have the Word hidden in the heart as opposed to simply going through external ceremonial or religious formalities. Second, it piles up clauses which refer to the Word residing in one’s heart so as to give greater rhetorical emphasis to pious interiority. And third, the sermon provides a fuller description of interiority by addressing both the insufficiency of human wisdom and the errant nature of one’s affections apart from the Word residing in the heart, whereas the commentary’s further explication only addresses the human intellect.

Calvin’s manner of commenting and preaching upon Psalm 119:123 is similar. The biblical passage reads “My eyes have failed for thy salvation, and for thy righteous word.” The commentary takes considerable effort to explain the failure of David’s eyes as a reference to the psalmist’s ongoing and arduous effort to trust God amidst difficulty (even to the point of weariness). The commentary also briefly contrasts David’s persevering faith to those whose prayerful trust in God is fleeting. However, the sermon

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 500.
is more explicit and lengthy in contrasting interior and sincere prayer with external and hypocritical prayer. Calvin preached that neither “well-chosen words” nor a “loud and full mouth” make for useful prayer. These external formalities can coexist with a heart devoid of trust in God (…cependant nostre coeur sera vuide…). Calvin’s sermon urged Genevans to pray with sincerity, that is, with a heart that truly trusted in God.

A third example occurs with Psalm 119:145. The biblical passage reads: “I have cried with my whole heart; answer me, O Jehovah! and I will keep they statutes.” The commentary explains that David (the psalmist) placed his entire trust in God rather than in the objects of this world, that David set all his affections upon God, that David was able to pray with his whole heart because he recognized that all good things come from God, and that the sincerity of David’s prayer was evidenced by his promise to give thanks through his life and good works.

When preaching on this verse, Calvin took a somewhat different approach. Clearly the commentary addressed matters of interiority, with its references to David’s affections and his whole-hearted prayer. However, the sermon juxtaposed external hypocrisy with internal sincerity and thus gives further emphasis and clarity to the nature of pious interiority. In the sermon, Calvin preached that mumbling (barboté) and ceremonial invocation (invoqué Dieu par ceremonie) mark the nature of hypocritical prayer, while proper prayer is rooted in true zeal. Calvin further clarified that hypocrites allow their minds to turn here and there in prayer, but proper prayer is attentive, drawing attention to one’s understanding. Perhaps the most telling is a sentence in which Calvin moves from external actions to one’s intent and disposition in prayer: “Note thus that which is principally required in our prayers, that is that we not only wiggle the tongue, that we open the mouth, that we have some intention to pray to God; but that we

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15 Ibid., 668.

16 Ibid., 280–281.
diligently seek him from the depths of our hearts and with a true integrity.” Calvin continued this theme by teaching that in sincere prayer, people groan from the heart; groans which cannot be expressed by the mouth. Similarly, he said “…we have not only to open the mouth [in prayer], but that we unfold our heart and all our affections before God, that our prayers be made in spiritual truth.” Calvin’s persistent juxtaposition of external formalities with inward intent, understanding, and vigor is particularly interesting given that the commentary praised David’s sincerity which was marked by his promise to give thanks through his life and works, seemingly external matters! That is, while the commentary links David’s sincerity with external works, the sermon consistently links sincerity with inwardness.

While Calvin’s commentaries and sermons both reinforced notions of interiority, the three examples above demonstrate a regular effort in the sermons to articulate in detail the difference between proper interiority and empty external formality. These careful juxtapositions gave further clarity to the nature of pious interiority. Though the Psalms commentary could maintain that the reader needed to hide the Word in his or her heart or that the believer needed to cry to God from the heart amidst difficult circumstances, it was the sermon that took the opportunity to ensure that Genevans understood the proper meaning, application, and functional processes of such inward references.

Thus, when compared to the commentary on the Psalms, Calvin’s sermons on the same demonstrated a heightened focus upon interior piety. As chapters one and two have

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17 Ibid., 701–703.

18 It should be noted that Calvin’s Psalms commentary did employ the juxtaposition between external deeds and internal sincerity. However, in these cases, the sermons also tended to employ the juxtaposition. See for example Calvin’s manner of handling Psalm 119:1-2, 119:34, and 119:43. In all three cases, both the commentary and the sermons depend upon some discussion of external deeds and internal sincerity or uprightness. What is important is that there are other cases in which the sermons employ this juxtaposition when the commentary does not.
indicated, Calvin’s commentaries regularly focused upon interior matters. And, it should be noted that in many cases, the sermons mirrored the commentaries in their means of drawing attention to interiority. However, Calvin’s preaching efforts, seemingly for the sake of applying the message of the text, extended, clarified, and amplified the commentary’s concern for interior piety. This does not appear to be a difference in theological content but a difference wrought by the purpose of commenting on biblical passages and preaching upon them. Calvin’s sermons, as homilies presented to a local congregation, had to be understandable. Thus some of Calvin’s language was adjusted to meet this need for comprehension. Further, while the commentaries pointed in the direction of proper application, they spent more time explaining the exegetical steps used to unlock the meaning of a passage. The sermons, on the other hand, were more directly focused on application. As such, Calvin sought to employ moving rhetorical language that would strike the hearts of his hearers.

The concern for application in a sermon seems to have stood behind Calvin’s unique rhetoric in his preaching, rhetoric that aimed to move his listeners internally. A couple of additional examples will further illustrate this distinctive rhetoric. When treating Psalm 119:1 in a sermon, Calvin subtly used more colorful language when compared to his commentary. His intent in both commentary and sermon was to indicate how the sinful human condition leads one away from the righteous path. In the commentary, Calvin wrote that human blindness (caecitas), apathy (socordia), cupidity (cupiditas), and brutish impetuosity (bruto impetus), all play a role in leading individuals

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19 For example, Kelly demonstrates that just as Calvin’s commentaries attempted to reveal a biblical character’s interior motives, thoughts, and feelings, even when the Bible did not refer to such internal conditions, Calvin’s sermons adhered to this exegetical step, "Varied Themes in Calvin's 2 Samuel Sermons," 213–214.

20 Richard Stauffer's work is often cited to demonstrate that the content of Calvin's sermons was largely consistent with Calvin's theological writings, Dieu, la création et la providence dans la prédication de Calvin (Las Vegas: Peter Lang, 1978).
from the path God has laid out for them. The sermon seeks to convey the same ideas, but employs more words with stronger and more colorful language. Calvin preached that humans “live in this world as beasts, having neither sense nor reason: that each one follows after his affections and brutish lusts.” He stated that this poor human condition is a sign that one either cannot distinguish between good and evil or has been enchanted by the devil. Adding even further color, Calvin said “…if we had a single drop of reason in us, it is certain that we would not refuse thusly our blessedness…as we do.”

The sermon is similar to the commentary in several ways. The commentary’s reference to blindness seems similar to the sermon’s reference to a lack of reason. The commentary’s discussion of cupidity, apathy, and brutish impetuosity is echoed in the sermon’s language of brutish lust and affections. However, the sermon adds the following rhetorical elements: 1) the reference to the potential that one is enchanted by the devil, 2) the comment that humans live as beasts in the world, and 3) Calvin’s insistence that humans lack a single drop of reason. These differences are not substantial in terms of content but are subtly contrasted to the commentary in terms of rhetorical effect. The sermon’s language appears to have been crafted in a way to have a greater impact upon the hearts and minds of Genevan listeners.

A similar case occurs with Psalm 119:125. In this verse, the psalmist indicates that he is the Lord’s servant and then asks for understanding. The commentary is quite brief in its discussion of the human need for understanding. It indicates that without God’s illuminating work, humans would be blind. Further, Calvin wrote that no one would benefit from hearing or reading God’s Word did not God correct one’s slowness of apprehension. In contrast, the sermon again uses more language and a stronger tone to

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21 CO, XXXII: 215.

22 Ibid., 483-484.

23 Ibid., 269–270.
convey this notion. Calvin said that God took believers to be his, while they were yet “slaves to Satan.” On their own, humans are “worms of the earth.” In this condition, they are “completely given to evil,” and Calvin asked how such people, who cannot even think a righteous idea, can ever produce a good deed?24

Calvin was clearly convinced that some measure of rhetorical skill was essential to the preaching task, and he also believed that such skill aided the preacher in gaining access to the listener’s interior space. Citing Calvin’s twenty fourth sermon on 2 Timothy (2 Tim. 3:16-17) Parker points out that Calvin preached about the need for listeners to give attention to themselves and to the Word of God so as to be awakened to their dire state and to the salvation made available by God. Parker further notes Calvin’s instruction in the sermon that preachers use rhetorical means to aid the Word in its capacity to awaken and stir those in the congregation: “We can now see that it is inadequate for the preacher in expounding Holy Scripture to treat it as something in history, not even if he goes so far as to say, ‘It was God who was speaking.’ The faithful pastor must use vehemence and vivacité, ‘to give vigour and power to the Word of God.’”25 In several sermons on 1 Timothy, Calvin stated that the pastor’s role is to rightly teach doctrine from Scripture and then to apply that message to his hearers. This second homiletical task can make the souls of listeners “shake,” and it requires that pastors give vehemence to the Word through their rhetoric.26

In her analysis of feeling in Calvin’s sermons, Susan Karant-Nunn notes the rhetorical measures he employed in order to impress upon individuals their worthlessness, which prepared them to better approach the gospel:

24 Ibid., 670.
25 Parker, Calvin’s Preaching, 14.
…so important is it to him to impress his charges with their worthlessness that he resorts to the emotive language of shaming and condemnation. His language is extreme, and it is designed to break down any lingering sense of self-worth and self-reliance in those around him.27

Ward Holder has helpfully analyzed a passage in Calvin’s commentary on Galatians (Gal. 3:1) which demonstrates the Reformer’s dual trust in the work of the Spirit and the rhetorical craft of the preacher which, when combined, create the opportunity for the listener’s interior space to be affected. Calvin wrote “Let those who want to discharge the ministry of the Gospel aright learn not only to speak and declaim but also to penetrate into consciences….” Such rhetorical preaching allows the congregation to “see Christ crucified.” Indeed, Calvin argued that Paul’s preaching to the Galatians was exemplary in this fashion. Even “the actual sight of Christ’s death could not have affected them more than his preaching….” Calvin further noted, “When the church has such painters as these she no longer needs wood and stone, that is, dead images, she no longer requires any pictures.” Holder notes that Calvin’s passage, in its context, called for preachers to trust in the Spirit to do the ultimate work of reaching an individual’s interior space while yet requiring that preachers give attention to rhetoric in sermons: “Certainly, he [Calvin] wants to maintain his central point that the efficacy of preaching comes from the Holy Spirit, rather than from a false or attention-grabbing human eloquence.” But having established this proviso, Holder notes that Calvin immediately enters a discussion of useful preaching tactics: “If the point of preaching is to make Christ’s blood flow in the sight of believers, then the preacher must develop the rhetorical skills which will allow him to penetrate consciences, to make people feel the pain of their sin, and to generate empathy.28


Stauffer has also noted a closely related dynamic in Calvin’s preaching. Calvin knew that he had no power to transform those who listened to him. He cites Calvin’s ninety fifth sermon on Job in which the Reformer stated “When I speak, it is not in me to touch hearts nor to make the doctrine I propose enter into each one….” Rather, Calvin insisted that such interior work was accomplished by the Spirit. Yet in the same sermon Calvin noted that his language must be accommodated to the capacity of the Genevans. In many contexts, Calvin made it plain that all theology, regardless of audience, must be practical or useful. Speculative theology which only inquired into intellectual curiosities was always to be avoided. He indicated the same in this sermon but then noted that in order for his teaching to be useful to Genevans in particular, it must be tailored to their capacity. 29 Thus again, Calvin insisted that preachers must know how to craft language so as to enable it to reach one’s interiority, in this case one’s mind. 30 As Stauffer notes elsewhere, Calvin believed God accommodated his language to human capacities so as to make his language understandable. Further, Calvin likened God’s accommodation to a nurse who uses the language of children when speaking to her child. Stauffer concludes that Calvin believed pastors should follow God’s example. 31

29 Richard Stauffer, “Discours en <<Je>>,” 210–211; Wilhelmus H. Th. Moehn has also noted that Calvin accommodated his sermons “to the comprehension of his audience,” “God Calls Us to His Service”: The Relation Between God and His Audience in Calvin’s Sermons on Acts (Genèv: Droz, 2001), 190. This attempt to tailor language to Genevan capacities is noted in Calvin’s sermons on Psalm 119. His Psalms commentary regularly discussed specific exegetical steps taken when rendering a passage. For example, he often weighed the relative merits of previous interpretations of a verse and also explained why one particular meaning of a Hebrew word applied in a verse as opposed to other possible meanings. When preaching on these passages, however, these technical exegetical discussions were largely absent. The “critical apparatus” of the commentary proved unhelpful for Genevans.

30 The dynamic Stauffer has noted here is somewhat unique from that which Holder has raised. Holder examines a context in which Calvin praised the power of language to be deeply moving whereas Stauffer identifies a context in which Calvin called for language which aids understanding. Yet, both of these cases are broadly similar in that they require the preacher to tailor language so as to give it entrance to the interiority of listeners, whether interiority is understood in terms of one’s mind or heart. The preacher’s capacity to use appropriate rhetoric was crucial for the sermon to be able to reach both the mind (Stauffer) and heart (Holder) of listeners.

31 Stauffer, Interprètes de la Bible, 172.
In similar fashion, Zachman concludes that Calvin believed “The best way to apply Scripture to our use and profit is to bring it into our inmost thoughts, where we deliberate within ourselves concerning all that we hide from others, and even seek to hide from God.” For this reason, “…Calvin’s favorite device in his sermons is the imagined interior dialogue…” These dialogues were used:

first to show the way we think when we forget what God teaches us in his school, and then to show what difference it makes to keep the doctrine of God in our inmost thoughts. Only when the meaning and intention of Paul changes the way we actually think in our hearts about God, others, and ourselves will Scripture profit us the way it is intended to do.\(^{32}\)

It is for these above reasons that Calvin, when preaching on the Deuteronomy 3:12-22, could say:

It is said that the ministers are sent to illuminate the blind, to deliver the captives, to pardon sins, to convert hearts. How? Behold these belong to God only…. For there is nothing that should be more proper to him than to pardon sins: he reserves to himself also this, to convert hearts. However, he confers all these qualifications to those whom he appoints to bring forth his word, and declares that he does not separate himself from them, but instead shows that he uses them as his hands and as his instruments.\(^{33}\)

The above has attempted not only to identify cases in Calvin’s works and sermons where he claimed that preachers have a unique role to play in reaching the interior spaces of hearers. The above has also attempted to demonstrate, in practice, the rhetorical means by which Calvin thought preachers could craft their words so as to give them greater entrance into one’s interior space. As chapter two noted, pastors had a responsibility to learn how to interpret Scripture so as to rightly divide doctrine from Scripture for the sheep. This chapter adds that Calvin also believed that preachers had the responsibility to hone their rhetorical skills so as to be enable sermons to be both understandable and moving, two means of giving the sermon the qualities necessary for reaching into the hearts and minds of hearers.

\(^{32}\) Zachman, *John Calvin as Teacher, Pastor, and Theologian*, 172.

\(^{33}\) *CO*, XXVI: 66–67.
Sermons, Station, and Hierarchy: For Calvin, God had ordained preachers as mediators to the sheep, ones trained and equipped to explain Scripture, make it understandable to listeners, and give it internal force in the hearts of audiences. This meant that the preacher was “endowed with authority” and “eminent dignity.” Calvin did not shrink back from reminding Genevans explicitly in sermons that they should give due honor and obedience to the Word of God delivered in Genevan pulpits. The preacher’s authority was not an academic category for Calvin, one that should be relegated to theoretical consideration in commentaries, but was a living reality. He repeatedly confronted Genevans with this authority in sermons.

Balserak quotes from one of Calvin’s sermons on Ezekiel in which he said:
“There are some today who say: ‘There’s Calvin who makes himself a prophet, when he says that one will know that there is a prophet among us. He’s talking about himself.’ Is he a prophet? Well, since it is the doctrine of God that I am announcing, I have to use this language.” In this case, Calvin reminded Genevans of his seemingly prophetic status as one who brings the Word of God. Likewise, Engammare quotes from one of Calvin’s sermons on Daniel in which he said “For if one preaches in this city that God’s vengeance will be felt, that people do not wish to receive what we announce in the name of God, and that it is in his name that we have spoken, that there has been a prophet, they will ridicule all that.”

Parker provides a multitude of similar examples from Calvin’s sermons. When preaching from 1 Timothy, Calvin offered the following: “When a man has climbed up into the pulpit, is it so that he may be seen from afar, and that he may be pre-eminent? Not at all. It is that God may speak to us by the mouth of a man. And he does us that

34 Stauffer, Interprètes de la Bible, 168.
35 Balserak, Establishing the Remnant Church, 90.
36 Engammare, “Prophet Without a Prophecy,” 649.
favor of presenting himself here and wishes a mortal man to be his messenger.”

In his same sermon series on 1 Timothy, Calvin also called the pulpit “the throne of God, from where he wills to govern our souls.” When preaching from Deuteronomy 1:43, Calvin said:

More particularly it is said that the people was rebellious to the mouth of God. But how so? It is not related that God appeared in visible form, that they had heard some voice from heaven. It was Moses who spoke; it was a man who said that the people resisted the mouth of God. Now, then, we see how God wishes his Word to be received in such humility, when he sends men to announce what he commands them, as if he were in the midst of us. So the teaching which is put forward in the name of God ought to be as authoritative as if all the Angels of heaven descended to us, as if God himself were manifesting his majesty before our eyes….

Or again, from a sermon on Titus 1:1-4:

In sum, let us learn to be attentive hearers of the teaching that is presented to us in the name of God and to hear it with such humility that when we know that it is God who is speaking to us (although he uses men as his means, even men contemptible according to the flesh) we do not fail to be submissive and to show that we are truly his sheep, since he is pleased to be our Shepherd.

In these examples, Calvin clearly differentiated between preachers (or prophets) and the congregation which was to give due honor, respect, and attention to their shepherds. Before drawing an overly hasty conclusion, it should be noted that Calvin could balance these authoritative assertions with more egalitarian tones, even in sermons. Stauffer has identified several such passages in Calvin’s sermons and makes it clear that Calvin believed he and all preachers were part of the body of the faithful in that they too had to learn from and submit to the content of sermons. In several cases, Calvin preached that the sermons he or other preachers delivered were not only for the congregations but

37 Parker, Calvin’s Preaching, 24–25.

38 Ibid., 26.

39 Ibid., 41.

40 Ibid., 44.
must also apply to the preachers themselves. A similar implication seems to be that pastors were not free to disregard or skirt the commands of Scripture that they held forth; they too had to submit to all aspects of a proper sermon. In one context, Calvin’s language is particularly telling. In his seventeenth sermon on 1 Timothy he said that he must learn from the sermons just as everyone else and then indicated that “I am not exempt from the common station/rank” (“Je ne suis point exempté du rang commun…”). Here Calvin employed language of station or hierarchy to indicate his union and equality with the larger body rather than his differentiation from and authority over the flock.

While Stauffer is correct to indicate that Calvin thusly considered himself as one among the faithful, Stauffer perhaps overlooks that Calvin’s understanding was more complex. In each sermon Stauffer cites, Calvin indeed indicated that preachers too must profit from preaching, thus indicating that they are just like all other ordinary believers. However, in most of these same passages, these egalitarian overtones only arise because Calvin had already highlighted a practical differentiation between preachers and hearers. While Calvin could preach in his second sermon on Psalm 119 that he too must profit from the sermon, it was only after having first said “Daily we [preachers] rise in the pulpit…, when we teach the others.” Similar phrases of pastoral distinction are found in the other excerpts which Stauffer cites: “for when I rise in the pulpit” (“car quand je monte en chaire”); “I, in the office of teacher” (“Me voice en l’office d’enseigner…”); “I who speak now [in the sermon]” (“Moi qui parle maintenant…”); “When my voice will be heard [in the sermons]” (“Quand donc ma voix sera ouïe“). In this way, Calvin sounded an egalitarian tone while yet maintaining the practical differences of station and hierarchy within the church. Just because a pastor was equal to the congregation in that


42 John Thompson has identified a parallel dynamic in regards to Calvin's view of women in ministry. Though Calvin believed women were equal to men in a spiritual sense, which would see it fullest fruition in the age to come, he also believed that God had ordained that women be practically subjected to male ecclesiastical authority in this present life, John Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah: Women in Regular and
he too must profit from and submit to the content of the sermon, this did not mean that
the pastor had no practical authority over or differentiation from the congregation. Even
in his egalitarian moments in sermons, Calvin still retained the necessity of station and
hierarchy, both of which have differentiating tendencies to some extent. In this case,
Calvin’s station, along with other pastors, distinguished them from other Genevans.

There were other ways in which Calvin’s sermons could minimize the
authoritative role of pastors as mediators between God and believers. Again a comparison
of Calvin’s sermons on Psalm 119 and his treatment of these same passages in his Psalms
commentary is revealing. Perhaps most significant is that while several sermons clearly
and even extensively encourage ordinary believers to read Scripture privately or to
instruct other believers, the commentary remained silent on these issues. Psalm 119:27
reads “Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: and I will meditate on thy
wonderful works.” When treating this verse in his commentary, Calvin outlined the need
for an individual’s mind to be sanctified and prepared by God so as to be able to
understand, desire, and profit from the Word of God.43 However, when preaching on this
same verse, Calvin said that David (the psalmist) was praying not only for his own
instruction in God’s Word but also for the capacity to instruct others in the same.
Calvin’s immediate application of this passage was that Genevans should strive to help
others in their understanding of Scripture and doctrine, thus giving greater leeway to the
laity.44

Another example is Calvin’s handling of Psalm 119:141, which reads “I am
insignificant and despised; I have not forgotten thy commandments.” Calvin’s

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Exceptional Roles in the Exegesis of Calvin, His Predecessors, and His Contemporaries (Genève: Librarie
Droz, 1992), 158 & 264.

43 CO, XXXII: 225–226.

44 Ibid., 523.
commentary largely focused on how people refrain from obeying and praising God when their circumstances become difficult.  

In the sermon, however, Calvin preached that people refrain from giving attention to God’s Word and use the excuse that they are of too lowly a station or condition for the task. There are those who say “Me, I am a poor idiot: I am not a clerk, I leave this to great doctors.” Others will say that such study is for “the priests and for the monks: we have our prelates who have charge to govern us: for our part, we are secular, lay people….” In this sermon then, Calvin again sounded egalitarian, not only opening the way for the laity to attend to Scripture but even placing responsibility upon them for this task. He urged that “great and small” should be given “to study” and that “we should all be scholars or pupils of the Law and the Prophets.”

The commentary raised neither the issue of station nor the emphasis on all people studying the Scriptures. Thus, Calvin’s sermons more frequently and more explicitly encouraged Genevan lay believers, regardless of station, to become students of the Word.

Finally, and most speculatively, it seems possible that the exegetical nature of the sermons, when compared to the commentary, could have encouraged lay reading of Scripture. The commentary, for obvious reasons, employed scholarly exegetical methods, what one might even call a critical apparatus, whereas the sermons were relatively silent about these scholarly interpretive steps. For example, when treating Psalm 119:122 in the commentary, Calvin listed the three possible translations for the Hebrew word arob. He

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45 Ibid., 278.

46 Ibid., 694–695.

47 Calvin’s means of handling Psalm 119:148 is similar. In his commentary he merely stressed that David spent his nights meditating upon the Law, whereas in the sermon, Calvin’s application was that Genevans too must mediate upon God’s promises, Ibid., 281–282, 706–708.

48 It should be noted that at times, both the commentary and the sermons could explicitly reinforce the habit of lay reading of Scripture. See Calvin’s handling of Psalm 119:130, Ibid., 274, 676-678.
also suggested that the last clause of the verse dictated which of the three translations was best. And, finally, he explained how his translation of the word was not compromised by other grammatical difficulties in the passage. Yet, when preaching on this verse, the critical apparatus is less prominent. Calvin did not refer to the Hebrew word specifically, but only indicated the two meanings of “the word which David used here.” Calvin knew that it would not profit his hearers to name the Hebrew word which they did not know. Further, Calvin did not provide exegetical reasons for why one translation of the word was more reliable than another; that is, he did not refer to the last clause of the verse which dictated the translation of the term, as he did in the commentary, nor did he explain how the grammatical difficulties of his translation could be eased. He simply indicated what “the true and most natural sense of the word” was.

As Conrad Badius noted, Calvin preached “…simply and nakedly to accommodate the coarseness of the people, without elaborate apparatus…” Parker concludes that Calvin gave the meaning of verses in simple and general terms. While he might occasionally explain the meaning of a specific word in a sermon, he never referred to the Hebrew or Greek original term. Though Calvin’s guiding principle was likely to make a passage understandable to Genevans, a potential consequence of this could have been that Genevans felt that less critical apparatus or scholarly education stood between them and the text of Scripture, giving them greater courage to approach the Scriptures themselves.

49 Ibid., 268–269.

50 Ibid., 666.

51 Quoted in Holder, Grounding of Interpretation, 173.

52 Parker, Calvin’s Preaching, 86–88.

53 Leaning upon Puckett’s John Calvin’s Exegesis of the Old Testament, Jones has argued that Calvin’s commentary on the Psalms follows four exegetical steps: 1) the discussion of historical and philological issues, 2) an evaluation of previous interpretations of the passage, 3) reflection on the nature of God which the Psalm raises, and 4) application of the meaning of the Psalm to everyday life, Calvin and the Rhetoric
In sermons, Calvin could thus encourage ordinary believers, from all stations of society, to become students of the Word and to teach one another. And, his manner of preaching without extensive exegetical explanation could further spur Genevans to feel less intimidated by the text, to feel that a lack of scholarly training did not separate them from the Bible. However, closer examination of each of these examples from Calvin’s sermons reveals that these egalitarian impulses were quickly checked by other commitments.

Though Calvin urged Genevans to strive to teach each other in his sermon on Psalm 119:27, he quickly added that before one can teach others, before one can become a master, one must first be a pupil. Further, the ability to teach is “according to the graces” which each one received from God, meaning that those who have been gifted by God to understand have the specific duty to teach. Calvin’s egalitarian ideal of ordinary believers educating ordinary believers was thus qualified by an unofficial hierarchy: those laity who had been providentially graced by God and already trained by others were to engage in teaching. The means toward this egalitarian goal was itself rather hierarchical, even if unofficial.

Similarly, Calvin’s preaching upon Psalm 119:141 placed responsibility on the laity to attend to God’s Word. As indicated above, he challenged Genevans to consider that all, regardless of station or condition in society, must be familiar with right doctrine drawn from Scripture. Such was not simply the responsibility of clergy. However, in the same sermon, Calvin indicated that attention to the Word did not merely consist of private Bible reading but also included attendance at sermons. He pointed out that some might shirk their responsibility to attend to the Word by claiming that they are too poor and have to spend their time working to make money instead of attending sermons.\footnote{CO, XXXII: 695.}

\footnote{of Piety, 266. Calvin’s sermons on the Psalms tended to minimize steps one and two while lingering more upon steps three and four.}
Thus, the egalitarian tone of Calvin’s insistence upon lay attention to the Word is somewhat minimized by the belief that this effort involved learning at the feet of pastors during sermons.

While it is possible that the lack of a critical exegetical apparatus in the sermons could have given Genevans the sense that they had greater access to Scripture, it is also possible that this had the opposite effect. If Calvin did not explain how he arrived at the “natural sense” of a word or passage in sermons, Genevans could have been left stupefied as to how he arrived at that meaning, leaving them either to question his logic, or marvel at his seemingly “magical” abilities. When this is coupled with Calvin’s indication in the first sermon on Psalm 119 that he would “chew the words of David” (mascher...les mots de David) so Genevans could digest them, it would seem to further reinforce his authoritative and mediating role as biblical interpreter.55

Calvin thus communicated to Genevans that preaching was a task in which preachers were practically set apart from the rest of the congregation as authoritative interpreters and exhorters. Preachers were not only distinguished for their capacity to rightly divide Scripture but were also unique for their ability to use rhetoric that would make its way into the hearts and minds of hearers. And, Calvin believed that ordinary believers were to listen to their preachers as if God himself were speaking. These sentiments all made their way into Calvin’s sermons. This was not scholarly jargon reserved for aspiring ministers alone. Rather ordinary Genevans were confronted in sermons with this understanding of the central and authoritative role of pastors.

In addition to pastors being distinguished from the laity, ordinary believers were also differentiated one from another in Calvin’s preaching. When Calvin preached on Psalm 119:27, cited above, he urged all Genevans to strive to be able to teach each other. However, he also indicated that each should teach according to the measure of grace

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55 Ibid., 483.
received from God and only after having become worthy for the task. This is mirrored in one of Calvin’s sermons on Deuteronomy. He first preached that “every man help forward his neighbor” by teaching the principles of the faith. Yet, Calvin immediately added that “fathers and masters” should be “careful to teach their children and servants.”

Wilhelmus Moehn cites Calvin’s comments in a sermon from Acts 5:30-32 which outlines fatherly responsibilities to oversee religious instruction in the home. Calvin said “A man should take care how he governs his own family. When he has wife and children, God has put him in charge over them, in order that he instructs them about all the right doctrine, and meanwhile our Lord keeps His government.” In the first example, Calvin argued that personal ability, which was attributable to God’s providential grace and one’s previous study, was the condition which granted one lay person the right to teach others. In the following two examples, placement at the top of familial and societal stations was believed to be an additional qualification for lay teaching in certain cases. In this way, Calvin identified various levels of distinction among the laity who were to teach others.

*Dynamics of Station and Hierarchy within Services:* Calvin’s sermonic exhortations for Genevans to render proper submission and respect to those in various positions of authority unfolded within a ritual context that powerfully represented and reinforced various layers of official hierarchy. As Lambert notes, “Genevans were expected to arrive on time for services under the threat of pecuniary penalty.” Further, as the next chapter demonstrates, those who simply failed to appear at sermons often

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56 Maag, "Calvin as the Ideal Teacher," 277–278.

57 Moehn notes that it might seem strange for Calvin to begin his sermon on Acts 5:30-32 with a short exhortation about the nature of marriage and religious life in the home, given that this is not a topic related to the sermon’s passage. However, Moehn points out that this was a natural beginning to the sermon given that Calvin had just performed marriages for three couples, “God Calls Us to His Service,” 88.

found themselves having to answer to the consistory. When Genevans crossed the
threshold of their churches, they were reminded that authorities retained the privilege to
keep watch over their attendance and punctuality.

Upon arriving at church, seating further reinforced hierarchy in a number of ways.
Grosse notes that implementation of pews forced Genevans to adopt an immobile
position that constrained them to listen to the sermon. Additionally, Calvin and the Small
Council cooperated more than once to place teachers and members of the city watch in
positions to carefully supervise and impose silence on those, often children, who were apt
to talk during the sermon. 59 Further, seating arrangements reinforced Genevan social and
civic authority. Grosse explains that the interior of Genevan churches were “organized
according to ranks of precedence, always defined more precisely.” He also notes that
“The organizational criteria of this hierarchy (cette hiérarchie)” was not a reflection of
religious authority but resulted “from political and social distinctions which organize the
city.” 60 Or again, “the faithful are divided in the interior of the temple according to
categories which correspond to fundamental structures of Genevan society.” 61

In the first place, this seating arrangement assigned separate locations to men,
women, and children. Grosse concludes that Genevan temples were “a stage where
society was represented in its most basic divisions.” 62 Women and children sat close to
the pulpit on low benches while the men surrounded them on raised rows of benches. 63

Grosse suggests that over time, the assignment of children to positions close to the pulpit

59 Further, Genevans were occasionally punished for talking during sermons rather than listening. Christian
Grosse, Les rituels de la cène: le culte eucharistique réformé à Genève (XVIe - XVIIe siècles) (Librairie
Droz, 2008), 267–269.

60 Ibid., 266.

61 Ibid., 269.

62 Ibid., 271.

was to ensure that they were receptive to instruction and also carefully watched and disciplined during the sermon.\textsuperscript{64} Perhaps most intriguing was the assignment of seats of dignity to governing and judicial officials. In 1545, the Small Council decided that a number of civil authorities should attend service in order to set a good example for the rest of the city’s inhabitants. Seats were subsequently reserved for these various officials. At Saint-Pierre, governing officials sat on one side. First were the syndics, then the entire Small Council, followed by the concierge of the city hall and fourteen men from the city watch. On the other side were the judicial officials, the Lieutenant, followed by his four judges and the secretary, and finally the bailiffs and officers. Similar arrangements were made at Saint-Gervais for one of the syndics, two members of the city watch, and two judges from the law courts. Over time, additional spaces were reserved at Saint-Pierre for the city’s chief prosecutor, the castellans who oversaw rural districts, the Hospital directors, the city’s building inspector, and Galeace Caracciolo, the marquis de Vico.\textsuperscript{65}

Grosse concludes that the seating arrangement of the officials produced a two-fold representation of official authority. It differentiated judicial and governing officials while also identifying the order of official ranks within both hierarchies. Not only did these officials set a good example of sermon attendance for Genevans, they faced the

\textsuperscript{64} Grosse, \textit{Les rituels de la cène}, 272; The practices of French Reformed churches, who took their theological and ritual cues from Geneva, suggests that this seating arrangement was intended to give men a supervisory role over the women and children who sat on lower rows of pews near to the pulpit. Describing French Reformed churches, Raymond A. Mentzer writes “Women and children also gathered close to the preacher, although their location had more to do with a perceived need for supervision than the recognition of prominence,” \textit{Masculinity and the Reformed Tradition in France}, ed. Scott H Hendrix and Susan C Karant-Nunn (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2008), 130–131; Elsewhere, Mentzer writes “Religious leaders confined women, who were commonly subject to stricter supervision than men, to the main floor,” \textit{The Reformed Churches of France and the Visual Arts}, \textit{Seeing Beyond the Word: Visual Arts and the Calvinist Tradition}, ed. Paul Corby Finney (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 207.

\textsuperscript{65} Lambert, “Preaching, Praying, and Policing the Reform,” 332–336; Grosse, \textit{Les rituels de la cène}, 272–276; Grosse and Lambert note that Caracciolo was the only Genevan during Calvin's lifetime to receive a seat of honor based upon his high social standing.
congregation, and thus kept “the assembly under the vigilant attention of their watch.” After Calvin’s lifetime, similar seats were provided for elders and deacons of the church. Grosse concludes that the congregation was placed under double disciplinary surveillance during sermons as both civil and religious authorities surrounded and supervised Genevans.

An important set of related details must be considered at this juncture when attempting to identify and weigh whether Calvin or Geneva’s leaders were the driving force for implementing such a display of civic authority in sermon services. As noted above, the 1545 impetus for assigned seating for governing and judicial officials at sermon services stemmed from an order of the Small Council. And, assigned seats for elders and deacons were not established until after Calvin’s lifetime. Thus, seating arrangements were not directly influenced by Calvin. However, it should be noted that Calvin’s liturgical forms were not only in keeping with these developments but even predated them. In his 1542 La Forme des prières et chantz ecclésiastiques Genève, Calvin outlined various liturgical prayers and patterns to be followed. His prayer for the close of sermons made specific intercession for authorities, and it followed the order of precedence established in Geneva’s seating arrangements. “Firstly, we have your commandment to pray for those that you have constituted over us, superiors and governors….” This general petition was followed by specific intercession for civil authorities, especially those of Geneva. “We pray, therefore, heavenly father, for all princes and lords, your servants, to whom you have committed the government of your justice: et particularly for the lords of this city….” Calvin then prayed to God “for all

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66 Grosse, Les rituels de la cène, 276.

67 Ibid., 277.
those whom you have ordained as pastors of the faithful, and to whom you have committed the charge of souls and the preaching of your holy gospel….”  

As Grosse concludes Calvin’s prayer included “a series of particular requests which concern, successively, each category of this [Genevan] society.” Or again, “This [spatial] distribution is not without a close relationship with the liturgy: it projects in the church a social order which the prayers signify is of divine institution.” This would seem to suggest that while the city authorities were responsible for establishing assigned seating for civic and judicial officials, this was in such keeping with Calvin’s thought and practice that it made for a seamless marriage between the goals and practices of Calvin and the Small Council.

A somewhat unrelated seating arrangement was instituted for individuals who needed particular correction and instruction. These Genevans were often assigned an éminent seat close to the pulpit. Those who suffered from ignorance of the basics of Reformed religion were at times required to sit close to the pulpit so that they could be better instructed. Similarly, those who needed correction were assigned a place close to the pulpit in the hopes that this would bring a sinner to repentance. Such seating served as a form of social stigmatization since these individuals were not only “under the vigilant eye” of the authorities “but also of the entire congregation.”

Finally, though no special seating arrangement was made for them, Calvin’s prayer did make mention of those upon whom God had specifically and individually visited his providential chastisement in the form of some sort of suffering. “Even so, O God of all consolation, we commend to you those whom you visit and chastise, with

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68 CO, VI: 175–176.

69 Grosse, Les rituels de la cène, 277.

70 Ibid., 269.

cross and tribulation, whether by poverty, or prison, or sickness, or banishment, or other calamity of the body, or affliction of spirit....”

In sermons, Genevans were told that they needed to listen to their pastors as if God himself were speaking. Official measures to reorganize the seating within churches and to police attendance, punctuality, silence, and attentiveness all reinforced the authority of the preachers who needed to be heard. It also bolstered the authority of the various officials who cooperated in making sure Genevans indeed attended sermons and listened to their pastors. Further, sermons exhorted ordinary Genevans to structure their lay Bible reading practices around existing social and familial hierarchies. These exhortations fell on Genevans’ ears as they sat in a ritual context that represented, defined, and reinforced the reality and living power of these hierarchies. This theatrical and ritual display of civic, religious, social, and familial hierarchy within services not only reminded Genevans that their personal religious development was under authoritative scrutiny, but it also reminded Genevans of their place within these hierarchies. Grosse nicely captures this sense of differentiation when he writes that “The spatial arrangement and the liturgical text instill in each person the place and the role that the divine will has assigned him in the Christian society.”

The Genevan Congrégations:

Hierarchy of Weekly Bible Studies

One major development in Geneva during the Reformation was the institution of weekly congélagions which were formal Bible studies largely designed for the city’s

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72 CO, VI: 177.

73 Raymond A. Mentzer notes that in French Reformed churches, "Benches and pews were without doubt among the most significant and innovative elements of the Protestant liturgical furnishings. Yet their incorporation soon led to the establishment of visible distinctions within the congregation...." “The Reformed Churches of France and the Visual Arts,” 212.

74 Grosse, Les rituels de la cène, 277.
pastors but also open to the public. Each Friday, following the morning sermon, a
different pastor was assigned the task of expositing a predetermined passage of Scripture,
and then two or three other pastors would comment upon the interpretation, adding
anything that might have been overlooked. Examining the dynamics of the congrégations
will reveal additional layers of practical ministerial authority over the laity as well as
layers of differentiation in Geneva.

The 1541 Ordonnances Ecclésiastiques originally stated that the congrégations
were established as a means of keeping pastors in their duty, especially in terms of
ensuring that all Genevan pastors preserved the purity of and agreement in doctrine. The
language of maintaining the purity of doctrine indicates that there was concern to
keep doctrinal error out of Genevan pulpits by means of regularly testing pastors. The
language of the 1561 Ordonnances Ecclésiastiques further augments the goal of the
congrégations to give surveillance to each minister’s ability to rightly handle Scripture:
“In order to recognize how diligent everyone is in his studies and that no one grows lax,
each one shall expound by turns the passage from Scripture that comes next….”

Ministerial hierarchy and equality were held in some degree of tension in the
congrégations. On the one hand, all pastors, not just Calvin, were responsible to give the
main exposition when it was their turn. Further, each week all Genevan ministers were
expected to have studied the passage to be able to critically respond to the main
exposition. When Calvin gave the main exposition, he concluded, rather formulaically,
with the following: “I know that the matter has not been treated as they well deserve. My

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75 Erik de Boer, The Genevan School of the Prophets: The Congrégations of the Company of Pastors and Their Influence in 16th Century Europe (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2012), 39. The scholarly community is indebted to Erik de Boer who has made a significant amount of information regarding the congrégations available through careful archival research. Until recently, much of this information was little known and largely cited on a sporadic basis in the secondary literature. The only previous work which brought these issues to any degree of light was a translation of two congrégations in which Calvin had given the exposition, Dieux congrégations et Exposition du Catéchisme. Première réimpression de l’édition de 1563 avec une introduction et des notes, ed. Rodolphe Peter (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964).
brethren, however, to whom God has given his grace, will fill up my shortcoming, and this I ask them to do.” These dynamics suggest that the congrégations provided a context in which Geneva’s ministers worked as equals. To a certain extent, these meetings had a collegial and seemingly egalitarian tone.

On the other hand, hierarchical trends also emerge upon further examination. After the main exposition was offered, and after all the pastors had provided their contributions to the exposition, Calvin would typically provide a closing summary. This in itself highlights his authoritative interpretive role among Geneva’s pastors. Yet, Calvin’s summaries were likened to lectures, indicating that he discoursed at length to provide an accurate assessment of the passage and how it had been handled during the meeting. In 1564, Théodore Béza described Calvin’s weekly contribution thusly: “He presented […] nearly a full lecture on every Friday in the conference on Scripture which we call the congrégation, and has so kept up this routine without interruption until his death that he never failed to be there one single time, except when extremely ill.”

Similarly, Nicolas Collodon described Calvin’s weekly comments as “like a lecture.” After his authoritative summary, Calvin would issue the closing prayer.

Calvin’s authority as an interpreter was not lost on the other Genevan pastors. De Boer writes “…some of the ministers, and especially Calvin, were considered more gifted expositors….” This gave “…the others a chance to learn week in week out.” Likewise,

76 De Boer, Genevan School of the Prophets, 33.

77 Ibid., 36.

78 Parker, Calvin’s Old Testament Commentaries, 15.

79 De Boer, Genevan School of the Prophets, 22.

80 Ibid., 49.
Calvin’s authority was not lost on those responsible for keeping record of the proceedings of the *congrégations*; “hardly any expositions by the other ministers were recorded….”

Thus, several layers of differentiation emerge in light of this hierarchy within the *congrégations*. Officially, Calvin was set apart from the other pastors as the “moderator.” Unofficially, and perhaps even more influentially, he was further set apart as the authoritative interpretive voice of Geneva since he offered the closing summary. While Calvin was clearly distinguished as the single most influential minister, other shades of differentiation emerged among the other pastors. For example, when discussion began after the main exposition, it was leading Genevan ministers who spoke first, and only then did other ministers join in. When one adds that Genevan ministers believed, with Calvin, that they received their individual interpretive abilities from God, this gives the differentiating dynamics of the meetings a markedly individuating quality.

These dynamics within the *congrégations* tended to distinguish Calvin over the other Genevan ministers while also providing additional layers of distinction between those under him. The practical realities of such distinction were palpable not only in the formal processes of the *congrégations* (e.g., everyone knew that Calvin would give the closing summary and prayer) but in the concrete vocational consequences of assessing existing and hopeful ministers in the *congrégations*. De Boer notes that Philippe D’Ecclesia’s comments in the *congrégations* were found doctrinally errant, and over time, they resulted in his dismissal from Genevan ministry. Similarly, de Boer has assembled evidence which suggests that prospective pastors were tested by being required to give an exposition in the *congrégations*.

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81 De Boer, “The *Congrégation*: An In-Service Training Center,” 75.

82 Ibid., 73.

83 De Boer, *Genevan School of the Prophets*, 56–57.

84 Ibid., 62–63.
Calvin sat at the head of a body which had great power to determine a pastor’s vocational fate. Naphy has documented Calvin’s ongoing efforts to overhaul the company of pastors in Geneva. Upon his return to the city in 1541, Calvin found the condition of Geneva’s pastors deplorable, complaining that they had little learning. He labored intensely to remedy this situation. Calvin sought to fill Geneva’s pulpits with competent and educated pastors. Kingdon notes that from among the new cadre of pastors which Calvin assembled “Not a one…came from either an artisan or peasant background.” Further, “By the time Calvin had won full control of the Reformed Church in Geneva…it is clear that he was working with a remarkably homogeneous group—all born in France, all educated in France, all from privileged social backgrounds.” As Kingdon summarizes, “All [pastors] were expected to have advanced training, at the university level, if possible including instruction in Greek and Hebrew. There were simply no native Genevans with this kind of background.” The result would seem to greatly separate the foreign, educated, and privileged pastors from native Genevans who were considerably less educated and less privileged.

The case of Jean Trolliet perhaps illustrates Calvin’s apparent single-handed authority in the process of selecting ministers. Trolliet was a Genevan-born citizen who abandoned the Catholic faith and his monastery to embrace Protestantism. When he expressed a desire to fill one of Geneva’s ministerial vacancies, the city’s magistrates supported him. Calvin refused Trolliet, and the magistrates responded by demanding that Calvin offer his reasons. Two weeks later, the city attempted to convince Calvin to affirm

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Trolliet, but Calvin still resisted. Two months later, Calvin twice rejected Trolliet without offering his reasons. A process that had begun in mid-June of 1545 ended on January 26 of 1546 when Trolliet “despaired of the impasse and begged the city for some other employment…”

Two factors regarding Genevan power dynamics seem important in this particular case. First, though Calvin himself was, strictly speaking, simply an employee of the city, he was able to resist the collective strength of the city’s leadership who wanted to see Trolliet installed as a minister. Second, and most pertinent to the present discussion, the city leaders recognized and reinforced Calvin’s singular authority over the company of pastors when they insisted on contending with him and him alone.

Just because a pastor was educated and proficient enough in Calvin’s mind to fill a pastoral position did not mean that this person was prepared to preach on a regular basis. Parker cites a 1542 letter to Farel in which Calvin indicated the four newly elected ministers would prove suitable enough for the task once they had more practice. Calvin felt compelled to “preach more frequently…until the others have become more acceptable to the people.”

Though elected, these pastors still needed further preparation and practice, as well as Calvin’s oversight and guidance, before they could serve as full-fledged preachers. In these ways, Calvin oversaw the election of Geneva’s pastors in addition to their ongoing preparedness and training for preaching, and it seems that part of his examination process of existing and aspiring ministers took place within the Genevan congrégations.

When isolating the dynamics among Geneva’s existing and prospective ministers in the congrégations, the above indicates that Calvin was clearly the city’s preeminent interpretive voice. It seems that the practical dynamics between pastors of the

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88 Naphy compiled this short narrative based upon close reading of records of the Small Council (Registres du Conseil de Genève), Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation, 94.

89 Parker, Calvin’s Preaching, 60.
congrégations affirmed Calvin’s role as doctor of the church with significant teaching authority over other pastors. Further, an evident ranking of pastors had arisen and was exercised in the meetings as leading pastors were the ones to begin the discussion of the exposition. And the examination process of the congrégations had the practical effect of distinguishing capable from incapable pastors. This, combined with Calvin’s overall supervision of the preaching staff of Geneva, indicate that a stratified interpretive hierarchy existed among Geneva’s pastors, and Calvin was clearly at the top. Yet, given that the congrégations were open to the public, they provide the opportunity to examine additional dynamics between pastors and laity in Geneva.

Just as the congrégations held ministerial hierarchy and equality in tension, they also held ministerial and lay participation in tension. In a number of ways, the meetings encouraged lay attendance and involvement. At times, Calvin attempted to tailor the proceeding of the meetings so as to make them more accessible for the laity. For example, he proposed that the order for how they would move through the last four books of Moses from the Old Testament should be adjusted to accommodate the laity who attended.90 Also, ordinary Genevans appear to have had the freedom to even ask questions once the pastors completed their discussion of the morning’s main exposition.91 Based upon two different sources, De Boer concludes that the average congrégation likely had an attendance of around fifty to sixty people and that forty percent were ministers and sixty percent were lay believers.92 These factors would seem to suggest that there was a significant amount of lay involvement at the congrégations.

90 De Boer, Genevan School of the Prophets, 60.
91 Ibid., 33.
In other ways, however, Calvin and Geneva’s other pastors showed signs of hesitancy regarding lay involvement. First and foremost, the *congrégations* were clearly established as a means of continually testing pastors’ interpretive skills, and as such, attendance was originally restricted to pastors only. It was a later development, seemingly an afterthought, for the laity to be allowed to attend. When the meetings were opened to lay believers, the time in which they were conducted, “during working hours,” favored the attendance of rich laity and hindered attendance of the poor. Further, lay attendees were never permitted to give the main exposition, only being allowed to ask questions of the morning’s proceedings once the ministers were done.

Apparently, some lay Genevans found this restrictive, as is evidenced by two separate requests for them to have a context in which they too could interpret Scripture. De Boer quotes from a 1551 entry from the *Registres de la Compagnie des pasteurs de Genève*: “several brethren who desired to improve their understanding of the Scriptures requested of the ministers that each of them [i.e. the brethren] in his turn could propound and treat a passage of Holy Scripture.” Though this request was granted, the initiative failed over time. A similar request was made two years later, and this time it was indicated that lay believers wanted pastoral supervision as they expounded upon Scripture. These repeated requests by the laity demonstrate that while Calvin preached about the need for all believers to read Scripture, it was lay members who had to take the impetus, twice, to establish a context in Geneva for the laity to engage in public exposition of Scripture. Further, Genevans felt the need to seek pastoral permission and

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93 De Boer, *Genevan School of the Prophets*, 59–60.

94 De Boer, “Presence and Participation of Laypeople in the *Congrégations*,” 657.

95 De Boer, *Genevan School of the Prophets*, 109.

96 Interestingly, during the first lay exposition, it was Calvin, not any of the other pastors, who responded to the exposition, Ibid., 109.
even oversight for these projects to take off. They did not feel free to establish them on their own. Thus, it seems that lay Genevans who were interested in honing their interpretive skills found the practices of the congrégations restrictive.

The available statistical data about lay attendance at the congrégations also deserves some attention. Drawing from a list of witnesses to the congrégation in which Jerome Bolsec famously made his opinions known (in 1550), De Boer notes that thirty one lay people were present that day. Even though that session of the congrégations proved historically significant in that it gave rise to the famous debate between Calvin and Bolsec over predestination, there was no prior indication that the meeting would prove particularly momentous. In fact, Calvin arrived late to this meeting, further suggesting that it was expected to be just another ordinary gathering. It is certainly significant that thirty lay individuals would take time out of their work day to attend a public Bible study. Yet, two factors urge caution in assigning too much weight to these numbers. First, from a purely statistical point, demographic evidence suggests that the population of Geneva in 1550 was between 12,000 and 13,000. A conservative calculation, based upon a total population of 12,000 indicates that less than half of a percent of lay Genevans were in attendance. Second, lay attendees tended to be of a unique sort. The vast majority of them had some official role to play with the Reformation in Geneva. The list of those in attendance includes those who were or eventually became elders of the consistory, men who eventually became ministers in Geneva, some who provided legal expertise in consistorial issues, men who financially supported or worked with the church’s deacons to manage the Bourse française, those

97 Ibid., 93–94.
98 Ibid., 99.
who edited some of Calvin’s commentaries, three different publishers, Calvin’s secretary, and so forth. Further, the majority of those in attendance were foreign refugees as opposed to native Genevans, and they tended to be wealthy and/or privileged. Finally, all of those recorded were male.100

Overall, the dynamics of the Genevan congérations granted a slim degree of involvement to the laity. It tended to prioritize the work and role of pastors. And most of the few lay members who managed to attend proved not to be typical lay believers but were individuals with official or quasi-official responsibilities in the Genevan Reformation; indeed, a large number of them eventually became pastors, suggesting that some of the laity in attendance were there precisely because they aspired to the pulpit. Interestingly, the demographics of the congérations roughly accord with Calvin’s exhortations in sermons for fathers and masters to take the lead in providing lay religious education.

**Conclusion**

Though Calvin’s prayers, songs, and sermons were all carefully crafted so as to gain access to the individual’s interior space, the content of sermons as well as the functional dynamics of services and Bible studies unfolded in a public space that was rife with hierarchical structures that defined various individuals’ place. While Genevans were encouraged to handle Scripture, the practice of approaching the Bible proved far from straightforward. Nearly every encounter with the Word in Geneva was submitted to hierarchical processes. These practices individuated and differentiated members of the community at various levels. The language of Calvin’s sermons confronted Genevans with pastoral interpretive authority, thus clearly distinguishing between preachers and ordinary Christians. Sermons also reminded Genevans that even their own attempts to approach Scripture or to teach others had to be tempered with healthy amounts of official

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100 De Boer, “Presence and Participation of Laypeople in the Congérations,” 660–669.
or unofficial hierarchy. Calvin told Genevans that their efforts to read Scripture or educate one another required the identification of those who were better equipped for the task as well as the identification of those who had some existing authority, as masters or fathers, which legitimated their responsibility to oversee the process. The same exhortation for fathers and masters to lead the way in educating the laity implied different imperatives for different listeners. Male heads of households were made to feel a unique responsibility for tending to the “flock” within their homes. Conversely, women, children, and servants were intended to sense their responsibility to submit not simply to Geneva’s pastors, but to the male authority figures over them at home or at work.

The different layers of religious, civic, and societal hierarchy which were represented in the liturgical rhythms and spatial arrangement of sermon services further reinforced these dynamics. Pastors took center stage. Genevans were placed in pews, constrained to listen quietly and attentively to their shepherds. The watchful eye of city leaders (and eventually deacons and elders), facing the congregation, reminded Genevans that their comportment at services was under surveillance, as was their attendance and punctuality. This not only underlined civic authority in Geneva but also reinforced the authority of pastors as something worthy of civic support. Children, women, and men were also reminded of their relative stations in society as they made their way to their designated areas in the temple. And all Genevans observed the placement of unfaithful or ignorant individuals near the pulpit, either for disciplinary or instructional purposes.

The dynamics of Geneva’s congregations further enacted, utilized, and reinforced a complex hierarchy. The limitations it placed upon lay involvement reinforced the gap between pastors and ordinary believers. Calvin’s ability to use the congregations and other means to fill Genevan pulpits with educated and noble French ministers additionally separated ministers from native Genevans. These social differentiations between Geneva’s pastors and its native population only widened the gap between preachers and ordinary believers which Calvin articulated in sermons. The processes of
the congrégations also clearly demonstrate that some Genevan pastors had more to learn from their better equipped peers, and all had much to learn from Calvin, the clear doctor of the church in Geneva. Additionally, the available evidence regarding those who attended the congrégations suggests that lay attention to Scripture was a relatively privileged affair, largely available only for males, the rich, and those with some official connection to the work of the Reformation in Geneva.
CHAPTER 4
THE PRACTICE OF DISCIPLINE IN GENEVA

The previous chapter argued that as Genevans entered sermon services, they were confronted with ecclesiastical, civil, and social hierarchies. From pastoral proclamations to assigned seating and congregational surveillance by both religious and civil leaders, Genevans were immersed in layers of hierarchical distinction and also knew that they were under the supervision of their authorities. Importantly, as Genevans were dismissed and stepped beyond the threshold of the church, making their way into the city’s streets, shops, and homes, they knew that the careful watch of the consistory would continue, even though the service had concluded: the sermon’s end did not mark the cessation of surveillance. Genevans were aware that words spoken at dinner parties, disputes between husbands and wives, arguments between neighbors, clandestine amorous liaisons, and the like, could earn them a summons before the consistory if their deeds came to public light, thus bringing scandal to the church.

This chapter examines the dynamics of consistorial discipline. While Calvin’s sermons were aimed, in part, at influencing the minds of Genevans, the consistory policed attendance at sermons to ensure that Genevans indeed “made progress” in their grasp of elementary matters of the faith. If one proved too ignorant of the basics of the faith, he or she was not permitted to participate in Communion. Likewise, while Calvin preached so as to see Genevan hearts turn toward God and the good, the language of consistorial discipline showed a level of concern for gauging and reorienting the condition of one’s dispositions. If one proved hard-hearted or obstinate, he or she was not allowed to take part in the Supper. Thus, Calvin’s consistory attempted to give supervision to the basic shape of Genevan hearts and minds, at an individual level, thus presenting a significant potential for individuating Genevans. However, this internal focus was often subtle, and it did not produce in-depth interrogation into a person’s
interiority. Indeed, consistorial discipline often demonstrated far greater concern for external obedience and conformity.

A more prominent dynamic within the consistory was the surveillance of stations. While Calvin could teach and preach that each individual had been called to a particular station in life which required the fulfillment of specific duties, the consistory worked to help individuals define their station in cases of ambiguity and to ensure that each person indeed tended to the sanctioned duties of his or her position, neither reaching beyond nor neglecting the duties of their particular lot. However, it seems important that Calvin’s language of divine willing or divine providence which granted his theological view of station such an individuating capacity was absent in consistorial meetings. This represents a potential limitation of the capacity of the consistory’s policing of station to have a highly individuating influence.

Further, the consistory brought intense social pressure and shame to bear upon individuals, even bringing them unwanted and yet powerful individual attention before members of the community. And finally, the layers of hierarchy within the consistory itself further delineated differences between Calvin and the other pastors, the pastors and the lay members of the consistory, and other similar layers of distinction within Genevan civic and religious life. In these ways, consistorial dynamics differentiated between various members of the community. At times, this differentiation could reinforce individuation, the uniqueness and singular identity of Genevan individuals, and yet, in other ways, the individuating influences were thinned and even overshadowed, leaving differentiation to unfold in less individualistic terms.

Over the last several decades, largely following the pioneering work of Robert Kingdon, a number of scholars have given extensive attention to consistorial records in the broader early-modern Reformed world.¹ These investigations have helped to clarify

¹ Those who have given careful study to Geneva’s consistory include, among others, Robert M. Kingdon, Thomas Lambert, Karen Spierling, and Jeffrey Watt. Philippe Chareyre and Raymond Mentzer have
the nature of the Reformed tradition by giving attention to Reformed practices and rhythms of life, not simply doctrine and preaching. This chapter is largely concerned with identifying how consistorial dynamics shed new light on the nature and possible influence of the Reformation on Genevan notions of the individual. For example, this dissertation has argued that Calvin theologically prioritized the renovation of an individual’s interior space as central to the development of piety. However, this examination of his and other pastor’s work within the consistory suggests that Calvin did not perceive interiority to be a private but public matter. Not only did he believe that an individual’s interior space was reached in public sermons in which preachers spoke as authorized and trained specialists, but the dynamics of consistorial discipline reveal that he attempted to influence individuals’ internal states through the corporate scrutiny and mechanisms of the consistory. Yet, this chapter also suggests that Calvin and his consistory placed greater concern upon external obedience and compliance, which was rooted in notions of hierarchy and station, than upon individual internal development.

As with Calvin’s commentaries and sermons, time only allowed for careful research into a representative selection of consistory records. Volumes one and six of the transcribed and published consistory records were chosen for study. Volume one sheds light on early dynamics of the consistory whereas volume six, the most recent volume available at the time of this study, gives evidence to more mature consistorial dynamics. When applicable, additional anecdotal evidence has been cited as well as secondary source material. Following the lead of Thomas Lambert, statistical analysis of cases has not proven of primary importance in this investigation. In his thorough and often-cited devoted study to consistories in France. For a survey of scholars, methods, and approaches to consistorial study, see Raymond A. Mentzer and Philippe Chareyre, eds., *La mesure du fait religieux: l’approche méthodologique des Registres Consistoriaux dans l’espace Calvinien XVI-XVIIIe siècle*, Special issue of *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire du Protestantisme Français* 153: 4 (octobre-novembre-décembre 2007): 451-714; also see Raymond A. Mentzer, Françoise Moreil, and Philippe Chareyre, eds., *Dire l’interdit: the Vocabulary of Censure and Exclusion in the Early Modern Reformed Tradition*, (Boston: Brill, 2010).
work on Geneva’s religious reform, he writes “At best any statistics derived from these records are ambiguous…. As a result, unless there is some reasonable control and a degree of uniformity, I have avoided statistical analysis throughout this thesis.”2 Like Lambert, I have referenced cases in which similar language, patterns, or concerns were repeated so as to provide some level of uniformity. If an issue, relevant to the dissertation, appeared in consistory dynamics in repeated and uniform fashion, I considered it worthy of mention. Finally, without leaning on careful quantitative or statistical analysis, I have yet noted the broad outlines of relative frequencies of certain dynamics.

An Introduction to the Consistory

While residing in Geneva, John Knox famously deemed the city to be “the most prefect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the Apostles.”3 His special praise for Geneva stemmed from its “manners and religion” being so “sincerely reformed.” Part of the reason for the thoroughgoing transformation of manners and religion in Geneva stemmed from the powerful influence of the consistory, the church disciplinary body which Calvin diligently labored to establish.

In the Institutes, Calvin wrote that discipline aimed to keep Communion pure of profanation, aided the unity and purity of the church, and helped to bring sinners to repentance. He also wrote that “…as the saving doctrine of Christ is the soul of the church, so does discipline serve as its sinews, through which the members of the body hold together, each in its own place.”4 This imagery of the body holding together demonstrates that for Calvin, church discipline entailed an interesting tension. On the one

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4 John Calvin, Institutes, IV: 12, 1.
hand, the union and well-being of the entire body was a concern. On the other hand, this was served by giving careful attention to the particular function of each member. For Calvin, discipline thus connected the flourishing of the collective body to the life of each individual within the community.

The consistory sought to accomplish its goals by summoning Genevan individuals on a weekly basis who were suspected of having committed immoral acts or of having inappropriate religious ideas and habits. In many ways, the consistory was omnipresent in Geneva, with official representatives in every quarter of the city in order to keep an eye on all Genevans and with numerous aspects of daily life falling under its scrutiny. In the course of questioning, the consistory could pry deeply into an individual’s personal life, and individuals could be called upon to comment upon the behavior of others within the home or workplace. As one Genevan complained, “the devil and the consistory never sleeps.” Every Thursday, the city’s pastors and lay elders met to discipline Genevans. There was a host of reasons for which an individual might be summoned: missing sermons, having a disagreement with a neighbor or family member, committing adultery or fornication, disrespecting authorities, uttering blasphemies, playing cards, singing lewd songs, attending Mass, dancing, showing subtle signs of Catholic sympathies, and so forth. Typically, those summoned were subjected to sharp questioning, to see if he or she would slip up and eventually contradict himself or herself. Once the consistory heard a case, it could, among other things, offer simple admonitions, call for reconciliation

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6 Robert M. Kingdon writes that this process entailed "Close questioning of the accused by panels of experts, going over the same material again and again from several points of view, probing the values of the accused and rehearsing his (or her) activities, looking closely for inconsistencies and irrelevancies….” *Adultery and Divorce in Calvin’s Geneva*, 21–23.
between angry parties, demand public shows of humiliation, bar someone from Communion, or refer the case to the City Council.⁷

**Consistorial Hierarchy**

Those summoned to the consistory were faced with an impressive array of ecclesiastical and civic authority. This section briefly examines these various layers of hierarchy and their relation to each other.

Though the *Institutes* outlined that lay elders and pastors should discipline the church, the actual institutional structure of this body proved quite complex. As one would expect, all of Geneva’s pastors sat on the consistory, and they were accompanied by lay elders. Further, the consistory had a presiding officer who “was always one of the four syndics” of the city’s government.⁸ Like the presiding syndic, lay elders of the consistory had to be members of city government.⁹ The 1541 *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* stipulated that two lay elders should be elected from the city’s Small Council, four elders should be elected from the Council of Sixty, and six should come from the Council of Two Hundred. Further, elders had to be selected based upon where they lived so that every quarter of the city had and elder. This enabled the consistory to “keep an eye on all” Genevans.¹⁰ Though the consistory was an institution of the church, it was also a branch of the city government, answerable to the Small Council.¹¹ Standing before the consistory, a Genevan was faced with both civic and religious authorities.

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⁷ The consistory had a scribe who recorded the proceedings of each session. These records have been preserved and are also in the process of being transcribed and published. These resources provide a unique lens with which to examine the nature of religious life in Geneva.


⁹ Ibid., 62.

¹⁰ CO, X: 22.

This in itself would seem rather complex, but in order to be a syndic, and thus to be a presiding officer of the consistory, one had to have two additional Genevan civic credentials. One had to be a “bourgeois,” a person who owned property and had a respectable profession, and one had to be a “citizen,” a bourgeois who had been born in Geneva. Until the final years of Calvin’s lifetime, these same credentials were required to serve as an elder as well.\textsuperscript{12} As such, layers of official civic qualification were prerequisites for lay members of the consistory.

Some have emphasized the involvement Calvin granted to the laity in the consistory.\textsuperscript{13} It cannot be denied that he called for lay elders to sit on the consistory. However, it should be remembered that this was not an overly egalitarian or thoroughly democratic body. It surely involved the laity, but it demanded that these be a certain sort of laity; those with civic credentials. Just as Calvin’s call for the laity to educate the laity in Scripture and doctrinal matters required that fathers and masters lead the way, lay involvement within the consistory required that Genevans with recognizable city status take the helm.

It is crucial to note Kingdon’s insight that lay members of the consistory “…were chosen in much the same way as members of the committees controlling fortifications and grain supplies.”\textsuperscript{14} That is, Geneva already had a practice of selecting citizens to serve on non-religious committees which utilized the same civic criteria. Thus, the impetus for the above prerequisites for lay members to sit on the consistory likely stemmed from Genevan civic practice, not Calvin’s influence. Yet, if the Small Council demanded these criteria, Calvin and the other pastors still had to accept them before they could be written

\textsuperscript{12} Kingdon, “Establishment of Consistory Discipline in Geneva,” 163-164.

\textsuperscript{13} See for example McKee, Elders and the Plural Ministry, 25–31, 216.

into the 1541 *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*. Further, these criteria are certainly in keeping with Calvin’s thought and practice regarding lay involvement as evidenced in other arenas. Thus, here is another case in which empowering of the laity utilized existing hierarchical structures, in this case, civic structures. And, in this instance, the interests and principles of operation of city government coincided with Calvin’s. These layered prerequisites for consistory service meant that Genevans summoned for discipline were confronted with representations and reminders of official Genevan status markers and official governing roles.

Though the consistory was answerable to the Small Council and was thus a branch of the city’s government, it was at the same time an institution of the church over which the pastors, especially Calvin, had a great deal of authority. The 1541 *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* required that consistory elders be nominated by the Small Council and affirmed by the Council of Two Hundred. However, before the nominations could be passed along to the Council of Two Hundred, the Small Council had to first consult with the pastors. In practice, this power of the pastors, especially Calvin’s, was clearly exercised. On multiple occasions, the city’s ministers, usually represented by Calvin, were consulted regarding the selection of elders. Kingdon concludes “The pastors, headed by Calvin, thus gained an important legal right to share in the selection of elders….” Kingdon thus argues, “The lay elders were almost always drawn from that faction of the city population most completely dedicated to Calvin’s ideas.” Further, “A lay elder who disagreed with Calvin’s program was likely to have a rather short term, to have his mandate ended after one year, or even to be dismissed in midterm.”

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15 CO, 1887, X: 22–23.


William Naphy affirms this picture, though he notes one instance in which Calvin’s authority over the selection of elders was overruled. In 1553, a good deal of anti-Calvinist sentiment had arisen in the city. Many Genevans had come to suspect that their foreign French ministers were becoming a political threat to treasured Genevan liberties and traditions. From 1546 until 1552, the consistory’s members represented a unified body in general support of Calvin and his program. In 1553, the growing tide of anti-Calvinist sentiment resulted in the city largely overhauling the makeup of the consistory's elders in an effort to dismantle Calvinist unity and strength. Yet, Naphy suggests that this was short-lived, noting that in the years leading up to 1555, the consistory elders were again largely pro-Calvin.

In addition to having significant influence over the selection of elders, Calvin played a leading role in giving remonstrances or admonitions at the conclusion of cases heard in the consistory. Those summoned could be admonished to tell the truth, to attend more sermons, to refrain from their bad behavior, to keep better company, to live in peace, and the like. Kingdon notes that when the identity of the one giving remonstrances is revealed in consistory records, it was always a pastor, and usually Calvin. As Kingdon summarizes elsewhere, “Calvin clearly developed considerable skill in the use of the remonstrance. The fact that he was so often asked to administer the remonstrance demonstrates the respect of his colleagues on the consistory for his skills in this kind of exercise.”

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18 This is discussed in greater length in chapter five.


20 Ibid., 220–221.


22 Ibid., 26–27.
The above picture is not intended to suggest that Calvin single-handedly forced religious and moral reforms upon all. It should be noted that other pastors as well as Geneva’s leaders initiated similar reforms independent of Calvin’s influence. Naphy points out that “legislation against immorality predated the Reformation….” Similarly, Calvin was banished from Geneva from 1538 to 1541. During this period, “the ministers still demanded that the city compel people to attend the sermons and the city was quick to comply. In 1538 strict laws against immorality with heavy fines were passed, connecting, for the first time, morality offences with automatic secular punishments.”

The above simply proposes that Calvin ultimately wielded significant control over the selection of personnel responsible for overseeing such discipline as well as the way discipline unfolded. While both Geneva’s leaders and Calvin agreed that some degree of morals control and religious enforcement was necessary, it was Calvin who believed that the church, not civil authorities, should have the power to excommunicate. His ability to implement this vision is a further testament to the level of influence he had in Geneva.

Because the consistory was “at once an agency of both the state and the church,” and because the layers of civil and religious power overlapped in complex ways, it can be hard to discern, cleanly and neatly, the exact power dynamics among the consistory. Calvin, like the other pastors, was a municipal servant, hired by the city. Further, the consistory was answerable to the Small Council. In these ways, Calvin and the company of pastors were subordinate to civil government. At the same time, Calvin seems to have established considerable control over dynamics within the confines of the consistory. Though Calvin was an employee of the city, within the consistory, his authority loomed large indeed. He was clearly the head of the company of pastors. It was Calvin who represented the will of the pastors during the elder selection process, and he also took

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charge in the giving of remonstrances. In these ways, the pastors, and especially Calvin, retained unique authority compared to the lay elders of the consistory.

The consistory therefore represented a theatre in which various overlapping hierarchies were displayed as authorities disciplined individuals. Though the pastors, including Calvin, were employees of the city, and though the consistory was answerable to the Small Council, the above suggests that pastors, especially Calvin, played the leading role in the consistory. Calvin took charge over the giving of remonstrances, and he seems to have had the greatest influence over which lay Genevans sat upon the consistory. Further, though the consistory leaned upon the service of lay members, this was not an overly egalitarian structure since lay members had to have the requisite civic credentials. Additionally, to accomplish its goals, the consistory had the leeway to enlist the assistance of a broad network of officials, from the Small Council, to guards, or to officials of rural districts surrounding Geneva. Finally, this structure seems to have been stratified, unofficially, with Calvin at the top, exercising incredible power, the rest of the pastors beneath him, and the lay members giving way to the guidance of the ministers.

**Dynamics of the Work of the Consistory**

To accomplish its disciplinary goals, the consistory brought all of its various layers of authority to bear upon the lives of Genevans. As discussed above, while the *Institutes* only mention a handful of broad purposes for church discipline, there were numerous specific reasons for which a person could be summoned to the consistory. The following examines dynamics that unfolded in the consistory as it pursued its assorted aims. Specific attention is given to the perspectives and goals of Geneva’s pastors.

*Overseeing the Basic Intellectual Development of Genevans:* As previous chapters demonstrated, Calvin placed a great deal of importance upon an individual’s interior space being reshaped by God. In no little part, this included the reconditioning of one’s understanding. To mature in piety required that one rightly grasp biblical doctrines. Calvin consistently insisted that the minds of ordinary Christians should primarily be fed
by ministers who were trained to handle Scripture. Indeed, Calvin exhorted Genevans in sermons to listen to their preachers as if God himself were speaking. This in itself would certainly circumscribe notions and habits of private religious devotion in Geneva.

However, consistory records reveal that Calvin did more than exhort his listeners to attend sermons. The consistory mandated and policed attendance at sermons (including catechism services) while also overseeing whether individuals were making acceptable progress in their understanding of the basics of the city’s new faith.

Frequently, especially in its founding years, the consistory would summon an individual who was suspected of skipping sermons. The procedure in these cases proved rather formulaic. First, the consistory attempted to determine whether a person had actually been skipping sermons. This could entail a string of related questions. For example, in 1542 Anthoine Servoz was asked whether he attended sermons. He responded that he went sometimes, when he was able. The consistory then asked “…when he last heard the sermon and who preached and what the preacher said.” Anthoine then described two recent sermons he attended. He went to one sermon “…four days ago at St. Gervase….” And at another sermon he “…heard Master Farel preach at St. Peter’s, he does not know when or on what day.”

After addressing whether the individual was actually attending sermons or not, the consistory would attempt to gauge whether he or she had made progress in understanding the rudiments of Reformed religion. This usually consisted of asking Genevans whether they could say, in French, the Lord’s Prayer and/or the Apostles’ Creed. The record of

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26 At times, the records also indicate that Genevans were asked about the Confession of the Faith. It seems highly unlikely that Genevans would have been held responsible for memorizing and quoting such a lengthy statement. In these cases, when the records refer to the Confession, this dissertation assumes that the Apostles’ Creed was likely meant. However, the dissertation has remained faithful to the language of the records, and when “confession” was written by the scribe, this dissertation quotes the original with the assumption that Genevans were probably being asked to refer to some other formulation that was more manageable.
Anthoine Servoz before the consistory again proves helpful: “Asked about his faith and creed. Answers that he does not understand it well. Said the Lord’s Prayer, but did not know the confession.” Finally, the consistory would give its concluding admonitions. In response to Anthoine Servoz’s progress in the faith, the consistory admonished him “to come within two weeks to render an account of his confession....”

Several additional examples from 1542 prove illustrative. Pernete Puvel was “Asked about the frequenting of sermons.” She answered that she had attended the morning and the vespers sermons at St. Peter’s the previous week, adding that Guillaume Farel had preached at the earlier service. The consistory then inquired into her basic understanding of the faith and concluded that “she does not know the Lord’s prayer” and that she had “great ignorance.” To remedy this, she was instructed to “learn her faith and continue every Thursday” before the consistory. Jaquemaz Camparet was “Asked about frequenting the sermons....” Like Pernete, Jaquemaz not only explained when she last attended but also stated who she believed had preached. Jaquemaz was also “asked about her faith” which consisted of testing her familiarity with the Lord’s Prayer and the creed. The consistory concluded by ordering her to “frequent the sermons.” Venturine, wife of Antoine Revilliod, was summoned regarding sermon attendance. Here follows the entire record of her interrogation before the consistory:

Asked about frequenting of sermons. Answers that she goes when she can and she was there today and Master Viret preached. Said her Pater and very little of her faith and confession. The Consistory advised her to frequent the sermons and learn to know her faith better than she does.

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28 Ibid., 23–24.
29 Ibid., 27.
30 Ibid., 37.
This familiar pattern of questioning Genevans about sermon attendance and inquiring into their basic doctrinal understanding was particularly pronounced in the early years of the consistory. While the number of cases in which Genevans were questioned before the consistory about church attendance waned over the years, it remained an ongoing issue. The following examples all come from the year 1551. Michel Petet was summoned because he “ne frequente point les sermons” and was instructed to go to sermons every day for a period of time. George d’Arlo was summoned, in part, for only coming to a portion of the sermon service. And the wife of Emard de La Planche was summoned for only attending when the Supper was given.

It should be noted that these cases in 1551 did not involve all elements of the formulaic questioning about Genevans’ understanding of the faith which was typical of the consistory’s early years. Perhaps this is because, in 1550, Calvin and the other pastors had been granted permission to conduct in-home visitations which entailed a number of procedures that mirrored the consistory’s early formulaic inquiry into an individual’s basic understanding of the faith. During a visitation, members of a household were asked about their sermon attendance, their understanding of the Christian faith, and their knowledge of the catechism. Though the later records of the weekly consistory meetings show a decreased concern to police Genevans’ basic grasp of the faith, consistorial visitation likely replaced this practice. Further, this step enabled the

31 The first volume of published consistory records includes numerous such cases.


33 Ibid., 33–34.

34 Ibid., 101.

35 Manetsch indicates that during visitations, consistorial officials could show concern for Genevan behavior as well, *Calvin’s Company of Pastors*, 281–282.
consistory to make annual testing of individuals’ doctrinal awareness a mandatory matter for all as opposed to a case-by-case or as-needed practice.36

Church attendance was thought to be a primary way in which Genevans gained a better understanding of doctrine, which is why attendance was policed. Thomas Lambert has noted some of the various measures which were taken to enforce Genevan church attendance. In 1545, communal officers were sent from house to house to remind people of their duty to attend sermons. In 1549, the ministers prepared a statement to be read in services as an indictment against Genevans for missing sermons. The Council allowed the ministers to read the statement and pronounce it in the name of the syndics. The Council feared that many might miss the sermon and thus not hear the announcement. So, the Council ordered the dizeniers to go door-to-door to enjoin all Genevans to attend the sermon and hear the announcement.37 The Lieutenant’s officer was supposed to patrol the streets during the sermon in order to send those absent to the church or fine them if they refused.38

Catechism services were particularly valued for their ability to give Genevans an understanding of the basics of the faith, and the consistory therefore mandated and policed attendance at these services as well. When Pernataz, the widow of Jehan Du Nant, could not say the confession before the consistory, she was given remonstrances to “frequent the catechism.”39 Likewise, when Jehan Bornand could not say the confession

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37 A dizenier was [the supervisor of a dizaine, literally a “tenth,” a quarter of the town.] Registers of the Consistory of Geneva, vol. 1, xxxviii.

38 Lambert, “Preaching, Praying, and Policing the Reform,” 307–310; the lieutenant's officer assisted the lieutenant who was [the judge of first jurisdiction in all criminal cases in Geneva.] Registers of the Consistory of Geneva, vol. 1, xxxviii.

very well, he was admonished to “frequent the catechism.” Though Calvin could call from the pulpit for believers to instruct fellow believers, and though Calvin stated that fathers should provide religious education in the home, the pride of place ultimately fell to Geneva’s ministers in the matter of catechism. As noted in chapter two, Genevan catechetical instruction shifted from the hands of parents into the hands of pastors. This chapter adds that catechism attendance was compulsory and even policed. As Watt has concluded, “the consistory often mandated attendance at catechism lessons, suggesting that the religious education in the home did not itself suffice.”

Watt has further noted that in the late 1550s and early 1560s the consistory became increasingly frustrated over the absence of youths at catechism. In many cases, young boys preferred to play games rather than attend. In response to this growing problem, the consistory initiated corporal punishment for truancy. Watt writes “Though corporal punishment was usually administered at the school or hospital, the consistory at times ordered fathers to beat their sons who skipped catechism lessons…” Note here that the pastors retained the responsibility to train the religious minds of youths through catechism services, and the consistory retained the ultimate responsibility to make sure youths were attending. It even held the authority to order fathers to punish their truant sons in some cases.

In addition to policing attendance at sermon and catechism services, the consistory often required individuals to repeatedly return to give evidence of the progress

40 Ibid., 165.
41 Zachman, John Calvin as Teacher, Pastor, and Theologian, 138–139.
they had made in their understanding. For example, Jean de Carro and his mother were summoned on July 20th, 1542 regarding their sermon attendance and their understanding of the faith. The consistory concluded that “they be admonished and that they go every day [to sermons] and come here [to the consistory] every Thursday to give an account of their improvement, and to the catechism.” On September 7th, Jean was summoned to demonstrate his progress. He still could not say the Lord’s Prayer or the confession though he said he attended sermons twice on Sundays and occasionally on weekdays. In response, the consistory “gave him a term to learn his prayer to God and his confession, within six weeks” and further required that he “frequent the catechism on Sundays and the sermons and come to render his duty here.” On the 9th of December, Jean appeared again and said the prayer and confession poorly. The consistory decided that his participation in the upcoming Supper was therefore in question. He was instructed to return again to the consistory, to go to catechism, and to frequent the sermons, “…otherwise he will be rigorously punished.”

In May of 1551, Jean Guillermet’s widow, Tevena, was summoned to give account of her faith. She did not know the new manner of praying. As the critical footnote indicates, she was summoned again in 1554, 1555, 1556, and 1557 and yet never learned “les nouvelles prières.” This repeated questioning on the part of the consistory demonstrates its tenacity in pursuing a single individual’s basic understanding of Reformed religion over the course of several years. Likewise, when Pernette Bardet could not say the Lord’s Prayer nor the confession, she was required to return just days later. She still couldn’t say the prayer at her next appearance and was required to return a

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46 Ibid., 157.
47 Registres du Consistoire de Genève, vol. 6, 104.
month later and before the next Supper service. A critical footnote indicates that in 1556, the consistory was still following up with her.\(^{48}\)

A final and crucial matter is worth raising at this juncture. Though the consistory records, especially volume one of the published records, are replete with cases in which Genevans were ordered to attend sermons and catechism, there are only a handful of cases in which Genevans were instructed to read their Bibles. When examining volume one of the consistory records, less than ten individuals were instructed to acquire and read a Bible.\(^{49}\) This may be a simple reflection of a low literacy rate in Geneva, but is also permits one to speculate that the consistory was more concerned with Genevan attendance as sermons than it was with lay Bible reading.\(^{50}\) Even in those few cases in which the consistory did encourage Bible reading, it instructed masters, innkeepers, or heads of households to have a Bible read to those under them. In this way, consistorial instruction regarding Bible reading followed Calvin’s homiletical exhortations for authority figures to give oversight to lay reading or education.

Another look at the case of Anthoine Servoz is illuminating in this matter. The consistory specifically asked him to explain “when he last heard the sermon and who preached and what the preacher said.” His response was recorded as follows: “Answers that it was four days ago at St. Gervase, he doesn’t know what day. He has a Bible. He

\(^{48}\) Incidentally, she still wasn’t familiar with the prayer, Ibid., 47; 60.

\(^{49}\) Registers of the Consistory of Geneva, vol. 1, Jaques Emyn, 22, 116, 158; the Breysson family, 13, 36; the Du Nant family, 134; Noble Pernete Du Pain, 226; and Jehan Bennar, 185. Further, when pastoral visitation was implemented, it did not include questioning about Bible reading but only about sermon attendance.

\(^{50}\) Most of the lay believers who attended the meetings of the congrégations appear to have been literate. Many lay attendees had careers or responsibilities that would require them to be literate (e.g., publishers, those with legal expertise, etc.). However, these literate lay Genevans felt the congrégations restrictive of their interpretive involvement and thus sensed that they were obligated to ask permission to have their own separate meeting in which they could give the exposition and therefore be more involved in the reading and interpretive process. Calvin’s hesitancy to overtly encourage lay handling of the Bible in the congrégations suggests that the consistory’s near silence regarding lay Bible reading was not entirely rooted in low literacy rates in Geneva.
heard Master Farel preach at St. Peter’s, he doesn’t know when or on what day.” The consistory admonished him to return in two weeks in order to say the confession, and it also instructed him to take his entire family to sermons on Sundays and Wednesdays.\footnote{Ibid., 19.}

Note, the consistory only initially asked him details about his church attendance. Servoz mentioned owning a Bible of his own prompting. Further, the consistory did not appear to be interested in this detail. They neither praised Servoz for owning a Bible, nor encouraged him to study it. The consistory remained concerned with his attendance at services. Something similar occurred when Noble Donne Jeanne was interrogated. She mentioned owning a Bible, though the consistory did not ask her whether she did. And, the consistory did not pursue the matter of Bible reading once it was raised. \footnote{Ibid., 32.}

While the consistory took various measures to examine the basic doctrinal understanding of Genevans, this should not be understood as an overly rigorous questioning into a host of detailed and complex theological issues. Most questioning seemed rather rudimentary, and if one could say the Apostles’ Creed or the Lord’s Prayer in basic fashion, one was considered to be in good standing. Additionally, in some cases the consistory seems to have overlooked opportunities to provide customized teaching when they presented themselves. In 1551, a woman was summoned to the consistory for kneeling at sermons. She confessed to this but also expressed that she didn’t understand or intend any wrong with kneeling during the sermons. Rather than offer her a theological rationale for why one does not kneel, the consistory simply asserted “…that it is not the order of the church to do as she has done.”\footnote{Registres du Consistoire de Genève, vol. 6, 68.} Likewise, Pierre Baux was summoned to demonstrate the progress he had made in “the Word of God since his last appearance” before the consistory. When his progress was proven less than satisfactory, the consistory
did not attempt to instruct him. Rather, it first advised that he be asked “whether he wants to obey and live according to the Reformation of the church…” It then instructed him to go to sermons daily, to the consistory every Thursday, and to catechism.\footnote{Registers of the Consistory of Geneva, vol. 1, 129.}

These two cases seem indicative of the consistory’s hesitancy to pry deeply into an individual’s theological understanding. In both instances, rather than provide theological explanation and instruction to individuals whose understanding was deficient, the consistory asked individuals to submit to existing church order and authority. In the case of Pierre Baux, the consistory trusted that his submission to church authority, and thus to instruction at sermons and catechism, would lead to appropriate intellectual maturation. Similar broad outlines emerge concerning the famous Bolsec affair in which he challenged the doctrine of predestination. Bolsec first challenged the doctrine within a Friday morning \textit{congrégation}. As his case is recorded in the \textit{Calvini Opera}, this theological debate primarily unfolded outside of the consistory, in other contexts (e.g., the Small Council or in meetings of the company of pastors).\footnote{CO, VIII: 141–248.} When the matter did come before the consistory, it often involved questioning of Genevans who were suspected of having sympathies with Bolsec. In these cases, Genevans were not given instruction about the doctrine of predestination but questioned about whether they were supporters of Bolsec. If consistory leaders thought instruction was needed, they made arrangements for such to occur in another context (e.g., private instruction from a minister). For example, Barthélemy Bouvert was suspected of adhering to Bolsec’s views. As Kingdon notes “He responded that he was determined to accept the doctrines officially taught by the

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Genevan Church and would never deliberately stray from them. He agreed to consult Calvin for further instruction.\textsuperscript{56}

The consistory was greatly concerned to cast a wide net, numerically, when testing individuals’ knowledge of the Reformed religion and less inclined to demand a deep grasp of complex doctrines. Thorough theological discussion and instruction were reserved for other contexts. As Grosse has summarized, “The consistory did not expect…the faithful to become theologians.”\textsuperscript{57}

\textit{Overseeing the Dispositional Development of Genevans:} The consistory also attempted to guide the basic direction of individuals’ hearts. Chapters one and two suggested that Calvin’s theological language indicated that church discipline was, in part, aimed at bringing sinners to repentance which he understood to be an inward or internal change of heart. The \textit{Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship at Geneva 1537} included similar language, describing those who remained resistant to church disciplinary efforts as persevering in “hardness of heart.” Further, while excommunication was aimed, in part, at breaking the heard-hearted, the \textit{Articles} maintained that such an individual should not be restricted from attending sermons because the Lord might very well use such teaching to “touch his heart and turn him into the right path.”\textsuperscript{58}

Language within consistory records demonstrates that pastors were indeed concerned to inquire into the status of individuals’ hearts and to give shape to individuals’ dispositions. Two brothers, Claude and Jean Curtet, were summoned for their conflict with each other. Claude said that he did “not love his said brother” and that


\textsuperscript{57} Grosse, \textit{Les rituels de la cène}, 470.

\textsuperscript{58} Calvin, \textit{Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church}, 52.
the two were “at law before the lieutenant” (i.e., in a lawsuit). The consistory concluded
that Claude was “outside the union of the faithful, and considering this the preachers do
not hold him as belonging to religion…” Further, the consistory stated that “…in view of
his bad heart that he be proceeded against more rigorously by the Seigneurie. And that
men be assigned to reconcile them, as otherwise there would be great scandal. And was
admonished to expel all rage from his heart.”59 While Claude referred to his anger and
hatred, it was the consistory that concluded that these were indicators of the condition of
his heart. Further, the consistory considered it within its authority to urge Claude to
change his heart.

Similarly, Pierre Baud was summoned regarding sermon attendance in April
1542. He failed to say the creed in French.60 He was summoned again in October
regarding “…his profiting by the Word of God since his last appearance.” Pierre had not
made sufficient progress. He only knew “…the Pater in Latin and the Ave Maria and
Credo.” The consistory thought that Pierre “did not observe the promise he made here
last time…,” and it concluded that “…he be proceeded further against and that the
fierceness of his heart be broken…”61 To the consistory, Pierre had failed to keep his
promise to progress in his grasp of the essentials of Reformed religion, and it considered
this a sign of a fierce or hard heart. The decision “that he be proceeded further against”
was an attempt to break such fierceness of heart.

When Jane Bonna was suspected of harboring papist sympathies, the consistory
not only attempted to assess her knowledge of the faith but advised “that she be made to
speak once more to learn her will…” If one remembers that Calvin believed the will to
be closely associated with the heart and one’s dispositions, this suggests that the

60 Ibid., 33.
61 Ibid., 129.
consistory viewed her potentially heretical faith a matter of the heart more than of the mind. When her answers proved unsatisfactory, the consistory decided “…that she cannot be received at Communion and we deprive her of it from now until the Lord touches her heart, and she is declared outside the church.” Thomas Lambert notes a telling case. Anne de Palex was suspected of papist practices. After interrogating her, the consistory concluded that she was of “good confession according to her word, but he [the minister questioning her] didn’t know if her heart was in it.”

The consistory’s efforts to reconcile Aymo Dufour and Loys Franc in 1544 are also illuminating. Dufour was summoned first for “his difference with Loys Franch.” Dufour said he was not aware of any difference and “he would like to do him [Franc] any service in his power.” The consistory interpreted this statement as evidence of Dufour’s “good will.” Its decision was that Franc should be summoned so the two could be reconciled and that Dufour could “do honor to the said Franch.” When Loys Franc appeared, he complained that Dufour had made him crippled and ill. Franc denied that he was seeking vengeance. However, Franc did indicate that he wanted to maintain some distance from Dufour. The consistory advised that two of its officials should “urge the said L[loys] Franc to correct his heart and pardon the said [Dufour]).…” In this instance, the consistory concluded that Dufour’s heart was of a good nature (of a good will) and that asking him to do honor to Franc was simply a matter of asking him to act upon this good will. Conversely, the consistory believed that Franc remained somewhat hard of

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62 Ibid., 31; Likewise, when Pierre Sermod confessed to having played dice, the consistory decided that he be “forbidden the next Communion until he is better disposed and worthy of receiving it…." ibid., 160.


64 Registers of the Consistory of Geneva, vol. 1, 405; The same language was used when the consistory decided that the wife of Louis Pyaget “…be left to her own good will, continuing always to the end from good to better….” It seems that the consistory viewed her demonstrable progress in the faith a sign of her good will, ibid., 34.

65 Ibid., 411–412.
heart because his needed correction. When the consistory required him to pardon Dufour, it was requiring him to change his heart in order to accomplish this.

While the consistory could inquire into Genevan hearts for a number of reasons, as outlined thus far, it was particularly interested that individuals take Communion with a good or pure heart. When Genevans participated in the Supper without malice, envy, or other feelings in their hearts, this protected the sacral nature of Communion and the wellbeing of the participants. As Watt has noted, to properly participate in the Supper, “Calvin and the other pastors believed that it was necessary to achieve an interior peace, and not feel any animosity toward” others.66 Further, it seems that the consistory put measures in place to see that such interior peace was attained. In 1551, Paul Humblet and Jacques Duval were summoned for having some difference between them. The consistory inquired into whether they were of the disposition to receive Communion.67 Both replied that “…they are of the intention to receive the Supper….” The consistory advised that “…they should be given good remonstrances to make a complete reconciliation of hearts.” The consistory also advised that “…they should be admonished to reconcile and if they do not want to, that the Supper should be forbidden to those who will not be disposed toward it.” Duval is recorded as saying “…that he still isn’t in disposition” to receive the Supper.

Watt summarizes the relevant details of a similar case. Jacques Morellet and his wife were summoned for domestic disputes and violence. The consistory barred Jacques from the Supper and indicated that it would keep a close eye on him. Jacques’ wife asked if she would be permitted to participate in the Supper. Watt concludes that before she could participate, a pastor had to “determine whether she was too angry with her husband


67 “…s’il sont en disposition de recepvoir la Cene,” Registres du Consistoire de Genève, vol. 6, 51.
to receive Communion.”\textsuperscript{68} Watt therefore suggests that a pastor was needed to evaluate Jacques’ wife’s interior condition before granting her entrance to the Supper.

In more subtle instances, the consistory showed concern for one’s dispositions without explicitly mentioning the heart. For example, in 1551 Nicod Du Chesne was summoned for binding some papist books. The consistory record not only summarizes what Nicod said in the meeting but also adds that he “confessed in anger” and answered “with great arrogance.”\textsuperscript{69} Another session demonstrates similar use of language. The consistory confronted Martin de Rieu about leading a scandalous life with his son. It offered no details about the nature of the scandal, and Martin simply denied the charges. However, the record indicates that Martin’s denial was made “avec grande arrogance.” Because of his arrogant denial, the consistory advised that he return in a week and that the appropriate minister (Fabri) and elder (Checcant) be informed of the matter.\textsuperscript{70} In these and other cases, the consistory not only noted and recorded the words Genevans used but also gauged their dispositional character.

Another subtle means of investigating Genevans’ hearts appears in the consistory’s nuanced language about repentance. For example, Guillaume Sermond was summoned for not only being angry with another woman but for beating her. When she denied the allegations, the consistory concluded that she should be barred from the Supper “until the consistory perceives repentance in her.”\textsuperscript{71} The same language was used when Pernette Tallabard was questioned. She was suspected of despising the French religious refugees in Geneva and of questioning the doctrine of predestination. After hearing witnesses, the consistory barred Pernette from Communion “until it sees

\textsuperscript{68} Watt, “Résistance et réconciliation.”

\textsuperscript{69} Registres du Consistoire de Genève, vol. 6, 137.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 143.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 8.
repentance in her”. In these entries, the language of the consistory records suggests that church officials were attempting to gain entrance into the interior disposition of these women.

Perhaps one of the most interesting situations was the convergence of civil punishment and religious discipline in single cases. On a number of occasions Genevans were imprisoned for certain deeds and afterwards still summoned to the consistory to repent of these deeds. Just as Calvin theologically differentiated between civil punishment, which accomplishes external justice, and church discipline, which brings about repentance, the consistory differentiated between civil and religious jurisdictions. After having been imprisoned for fornication, Bernard Chenallet was summoned to the consistory to see “whether he is repentant of his fault.” Pierre Ruffi also committed fornication with the same woman. Like Bernard, after his imprisonment, he was summoned to the consistory to see “whether or not he is penitent of his fault.” Jean Fontana was imprisoned for homosexuality, and upon his release, he stood before the consistory to see whether he was “repentant of his fault.” Or again, Jean Emonin was imprisoned for slandering Geneva’s religion and the pastor of Céligny. Yet, the same day he was released he was still required “to recognize his fault” before the consistory. Though these men had satisfied external justice through imprisonment, their subsequent mandatory appearance before the consistory suggests that it thought that these men still needed to demonstrate that they had a change of heart and had become contrite regarding their offenses.

72 “jusque à ce que l’on voye repentance en elle,” Ibid., 187–189.

73 Ibid., 116.

74 Ibid., 118.

75 Ibid., 132.

76 Ibid., 134, 139.
The above has emphasized the ways in which the consistory attempted to gauge and influence the condition of Genevans’ hearts. However, it is crucial to note that just as the consistory’s reach into Genevan minds was widespread but somewhat superficial on an individual basis, its reach into Genevan hearts was also relatively superficial. That is, though Calvin had a theology which viewed church discipline, in part, as a means of changing hearts, the actual proof that a heart was changed could often consist of a Genevan’s willingness to confess, to comply with the consistory’s demands for changed external behavior, or to provide an external sign of repentance which the consistory requested.

For example, Pierre Boulo was summoned in 1550 because the consistory suspected that he had impregnated Michée Dupra and had not married her. He was instructed to marry Michée. Pierre denied that he had promised marriage and thus refused to marry her. For this, the consistory barred him from the Supper. He was summoned again in 1551 regarding the matter. This time, he simply confessed his fault, said that he wanted to take Michée for his wife, and asked for permission to participate in Communion again. The consistory perceived his confession and compliance to marry Michée as sufficient signs of repentance. The record states that “seeing his repentance,” the consistory consented to his request to be readmitted to Communion.77 In this case, straightforward confession and obedience were taken to be signs of repentance. Conversely, the consistory concluded that Pernette Bergeron “shows no sign of repentance” because she continued to disobey explicit instructions to no longer associate with a man with whom she had conceived an illegitimate child.78 Her blatant refusal to conform to the behavioral mandates of the consistory was deemed a lack of repentance.

77 Ibid., 46.
78 Ibid., 96.
In other cases, the consistory required that sinful Genevans perform symbolic actions as demonstrations of their repentance. In cases of blasphemy or inappropriate speech, Genevans were often asked to kneel or kiss the earth. Jacques Ramier was summoned because he not only blasphemed the name of God but had also argued against those who had rebuked him. In this case, the consistory was content that its work had been accomplished when Jacques not only confessed but submitted to the consistory’s demand that he “kiss the earth.”

Around the same time, Marguerite Le Gayt was twice summoned for having spoken some inappropriate words. The first time she appeared, it took some doing before she eventually “confessed to have spoken badly.” When she reappeared, the record indicated that it was “to recognize her fault,” and the consistory further demanded that she “put her knees to the earth and cry to God for mercy….”

When the issue before the consistory was one of disagreement or conflict between angry parties, Genevans were often required to touch hands as a sign of reconciliation. Because of a grudge, Claude Falca and Roland Du Verney were “confronted with each other so they could receive the next Holy Communion. And they agreed together before the consistory and shook hands as a sign of friendship.” Henri Bully and one named Paquillon were called to the consistory for differences between them. It was not enough for both to express their desire for reconciliation, as they did. They “touched each other’s hand in a sign of good friendship.” Similarly, Ami Gros and Jacques-Nicolas Vulliet were at odds because the latter was suspected to have committed adultery with the

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79 Ibid., 74–75.
80 Ibid., 49.
82 Registres du Consistoire de Genève, vol. 6, 8.
former’s wife. Though Gros remained openly hesitant to reconcile with Vulliet, the record indicates that “they touched hands.”

One of the most revealing instances of the subtle interplay between the consistory’s interior goals and external means is the case of Jeanne Theysié and a woman with the last name Flasquin. The two had argued over some herbs in a garden. In May of 1551, the consistory deemed Jeanne “obstinate” for not wanting to reconcile with Flasquin. A week later, Jeanne clearly expressed her refusal to reconcile, and the consistory advised that she return next week “to see if she will be better advised.” Though there is no mention of heart, this language seems in keeping with the consistory’s goal to see individuals have a change of heart or disposition. Just as the 1537 Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church describe church discipline as a tool to soften the “hard-hearted,” the consistory hoped its manner of handling Jeanne would bring an end to her obstinacy. When Jeanne and Flasquin appeared again the following week, the consistory straightforwardly inquired “whether or not they have considered to be reconciled the one with the other.” The entry simply closes by indicating “they touched hands.” Though the consistory sought a change in heart on Jeanne’s part, it did not inquire deeply into her feelings or thoughts. The questioning remained brief, and the functional mark that the consistory’s work was accomplished was nothing more than a touching of the hands.

It is likely that the consistory’s satisfaction with less than intense scrutiny of individuals’ interior spaces, especially their dispositions, stems from Calvin’s belief that gauging an individual’s interior states is complex and tenuous. As his discussions of the

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83 Ibid., 26. Further, a critical footnote indicates that the two were “obligated to reconcile,” 8.

84 Ibid., 106.

85 Ibid., 110.

86 Ibid., 114.
conversion and/or repentance of Simon Magus and king Nebuchadnezzar indicate, Calvin sensed that it is quite difficult to accurately exegete the interior space of others. Perhaps this is why consistorial leaders proved satisfied with basic indicators of individuals’ interior bent and did not pursue them further.

Additionally, the consistory likely did not press further into individuals’ interiority because it was primarily concerned with other matters. Raymond Mentzer has noted that French Reformed consistories were less concerned with interior matters:

Their attention fastened on public failings of word and deed. Secret sin, though admittedly wrong, did not directly concern them. They refrained from minute examinations of conscience and the disclosure of private vices such as homosexuality, masturbation, or improper manner of sexual intercourse. They tended to forgo intense and penetrating cross-questioning and were occasionally left badly misinformed regarding the details of an offense.87

In many ways, the same could be said for Calvin’s consistory in Geneva. Indeed, a number of Calvin’s goals for church discipline, as outlined in the *Institutes* were aimed at other matters: maintaining the sanctity of the Supper, seeking to aid the purity of the church, and promoting the unity of the body. In these ways, communal goals could have proven more important to the consistory in some cases than giving careful attention to individuals’ interior spaces.

This section has gathered evidence which simply suggests that the consistory was secondarily and subtly concerned with the interior life of individuals. Such is evinced when the consistory admonished two fornicators to “repent, to recognize their faults, and hereafter to walk in newness of life, demonstrating recognition and a desire to amend their faults, the heart being touched by the Holy Spirit so as to mourn and receive the grace of God.”88


88 *Registres du Consistoire de Genève*, vol. 6, 44.
Policing the Supper: As chapter one notes, Calvin wrote in the *Institutes* that:

...we must preserve the order of the Lord’s Supper, that it may not be profaned by being administered indiscriminately. For it is very true that he to whom its distribution has been committed, if he knowingly and willingly admits an unworthy person whom he could rightfully turn away, is as guilty of sacrilege as if he had cast the Lord’s body to dogs.  

The language employed here is telling. Not only did Calvin believe that the administration of Communion was committed into certain hands but that these authorized individuals had the responsibility to guard the gate to the Communion table by carefully evaluating the worthiness of each potential communicant. In practice, immense effort was made to concretely discriminate between worthy and unworthy individuals. The language of Geneva’s ecclesiastical articles and ordinances reflects the concern to put such individual discrimination into practice. The 1537 *Articles* maintained that “It is then necessary that those who have the power to frame regulations make it a rule that they who come to this Communion be approved members of Jesus Christ.”  

And as the 1561 *Ordonnances Ecclésiastiques* indicate, in-home visitations were to be employed in order to “examine each simply about his faith…so that no one be admitted to Communion before having been approved.”

A number of issues could cause a person to be deemed unfit for Communion. Those who failed to demonstrate sufficient knowledge of the new faith were often barred. For example, the consistory decided that Robert Breysson “…be forbidden Communion until he can recite it [the Apostles’ Creed] well….” Genevans in this situation were required to attend sermons and catechism so as to improve. Once sufficient evidence of improvement was provided, these were readmitted to the Supper. Those who refused to

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89 Calvin, *Institutes*, IV: 12, 5.

90 Calvin, *Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church*, 50.

91 CO, X:116.

confess and repent of their immorality before the consistory were also excluded from the Supper. When Jean de la Pate showed no signs of repentance for committing adultery, the consistory advised that he not be admitted to Communion. These too were readmitted to the Supper once they demonstrated appropriate signs of repentance.

Communion was held four times a year in Geneva. Grosse notes that as early as 1542 the consistory had to meet twice during the week preceding Communion in order to deal with the great number of cases of excommunication and readmission. This demonstrates the level of concern that the consistory actually placed upon concretely policing the readiness of individual Genevans for Communion. Annual home visitations were a further effort to weed out unworthy communicants. Visitations were originally implemented in 1550, and the scope was relatively limited: they were designed to examine 1) the doctrinal soundness 2) of many of Geneva’s servants and new French religious refugees. Over time, these two purposes were broadened so that ultimately all Genevans were subject to visitation, and their life and morals were in question just as much as their understanding of the faith. These visitations seemed effective in policing individual readiness for the Supper. As Grosse indicates, “…nearly every year, some visitations concluded their examination with a suspension from the Supper.”

Selderhuis has suggested that due to Calvin’s implementation of home visitations, “…the confessional was not thrown out but was relocated to the living room.”

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93 *Registres du Consistoire de Genève*, vol. 6, 166.

94 For example, in 1542, the average number of cases heard by the consistory on an ordinary week was seven while the average number of cases heard the week before Communion was sixteen. The average number of cases heard on an ordinary week in 1563 was eighteen whereas the average exploded to fifty two for preparation week the same year, Grosse, *Les rituels de la cène*, 416.

95 Ibid., 402-403.

Selderhuis draws this conclusion based upon his consideration of the visitations in which Calvin participated during his brief sojourn in Strasbourg. However, evidence indicates that Genevan visitations did not take place in the privacy of one’s home but amidst the communal context of one’s neighborhood. Grosse agrees with Selderhuis that the rhythms of discipline surrounding the Supper, especially the placement of visitations prior to Easter Communion, seemed to be a new appropriation of traditional confession. Yet, Grosse notes that during visitations, “…people were interrogated by the minister, not within the home, but in a public manner.” André Ryff, a young man from Basel who was in Geneva for an apprenticeship, described the visitations thusly: “The ministers gather together the residents of six to eight households, both young and old, to interrogate and examine them….” Thus, when individual Genevans received remonstrances or suspensions during visitations, it was before one’s neighbors. Grosse suggests that this “marred the honor of the guilty and weakened his position in the complex framework of relationships of the neighborhood.”

In short, though Calvin believed Communion had the capacity to deeply influence an individual’s interior space, the entry way to the Supper was carefully guarded. And, the disciplinary mechanisms enabled Geneva’s religious hierarchy to place a great deal of scrutiny upon nearly every individual’s life. Before Genevans were allowed access to Communion, an event which Calvin believed had the capacity to shape a believer’s interior space, regular consistory meetings, supplementary consistory meetings prior to Communion, and annual visitations were all used to pry into the lives of Genevans to ensure they were worthy of the Supper.

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98 Manetsch, *Calvin’s Company of Pastors*, 282.

Policing Individuals’ Station: This chapter opened by discussing the various complex layers of hierarchy that overlapped in the consistory. A considerably interesting and important dynamic was that these layers of authority were frequently used to identify individual Genevans’ stations and to ensure that each person was fulfilling and living within the appropriate limits of their station. Theologically, Calvin insisted that individuals should not attempt to reach beyond their providentially ordained rank: pastors should tend to their own flock and not the flock of other ministers, ordinary believers should leave the power to bar the unfaithful from Communion to those with official authority, private individuals should leave political matters to governing officials, and so forth. In practice, the consistory ensured that individuals remained within their appropriate stations and fulfilled their duties.

As Kingdon has noted, consistory cases often involved charges of “disrespect for authority.” 100 As an example, he summarizes the case against Baltasar Sept who was summoned in 1548 for having mocked the minister, Abel Poupin, during a sermon. Sept was largely in trouble for having laughed at some of the minister’s remarks. Calvin himself addressed Sept, saying that it was “infamous for a young person to mock the Word of God in this way.” Given that Sept indicated that he had not intended to mock Poupin or the Word of God, it seems that he understood this as a reprimand for disrespecting his pastor, not just the Bible. Yet, Calvin’s language also suggests that Sept was in trouble for overstepping his bounds as a youth, given that Calvin said such behavior was inappropriate for a “young person.” In this way, Calvin sought to ensure that Sept remained in his station as a lay individual and as a young person.

An earlier case, in 1542, involved Andrier Piard who was suspected of having spoken against “the Word of God and justice.” In response, Piard claimed that he had “never spoken against the lords preachers…and he wants to obey the Seigneurie….” He then asked “that he be given in writing the manner in which he should help himself and live, and he will do it under penalty of the indignation of his superiors.” However, when pressed further by the Syndic, Piard turned upon the authorities, first indicating that he would not obey Calvin and then demonstrating rebellion toward the consistory and the Seigneurie. This blatant disrespect for authority earned Piard a period of imprisonment.  

In like manner, Claude Arthaud was summoned for “talking too much to the dishonor of the church,” and a woman named Uguynaz was admonished for mocking the Small Council. One of the most striking cases arose when Pierre Ameaux spoke against Calvin at a dinner party, calling the pastor a wicked foreigner. The Small Council demanded that Ameaux kneel and beg for Calvin’s forgiveness. Calvin thought this was not sufficient penance and therefore would not preach until Ameaux was made to perform a more fitting act of humiliation. Consequently, Ameaux was forced to do public penance, which consisted of asking forgiveness at each intersection as he made his way through the streets of Geneva, carrying a taper. Even adults were expected to respect their parents as illustrated by the consistory’s insistence that Guygo Veillard, a grown man with a family of his own, not only reconcile with his father and mother-in-law but also “honor” them.

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102 Ibid., 75.


Frequently, children were summoned regarding disrespect or disobedience to parents and guardians. Jehan Losserand was summoned because he had “a grudge against his mother” and was “not obedient to her.” Mermet de Loermoz was summoned “Because of disobedience to his mother and brother…” In some cases, admonitions to obey one’s parents showed up in unexpected places. For committing adultery, Pierre Golliet was not only imprisoned but also sent, by the Small Council, to the consistory to receive remonstrances. In the consistory’s remonstrances he was told that he should amend his ways, to not commit adultery, and “to be obedient to his father and mother.”

Failure to respect and obey one’s familial authorities could have serious consequences. Pierre Du Crest had squandered his means without the authorization of his guardian (his uncle). For this, the consistory deemed him “a very debauched child” and described him as “disobedient.” The case was referred to the Small Council, and because Pierre did not change his ways, he was imprisoned for three days. A month later, seeing no change in him, the Council condemned him to prison for an additional three days. In this case, Pierre was in trouble for two reasons. His lazy and extravagant behavior was considered “debauched,” and yet he was also disobedient as evidenced by failing to operate under his uncle’s authority. The consistory seems to have thought that if Pierre at least submitted to his uncle’s authority, he would then have avoided debauchery. Disrespecting and disobeying authority figures, whether pastors, city leaders, or parents, implied that an individual did not properly grasp or submit to the behavioral parameters of their station. Genevans summoned before the consistory were not simply reminded

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105 Ibid., 147.
106 Ibid., 256.
107 *Registres du Consistoire de Genève*, vol. 6, 129, 133.
108 Ibid., 63.
that their behavior was inappropriate but were also reminded that such behavior was not fitting to their particular station.

Closely related to disrespecting authorities were instances in which Genevans attempted to overstep the bounds of their station. For example, Reymond de Veyrier was summoned regarding a promise of marriage he was suspected to have made to Aymé Pyaget. It appears that he and Amyé had indeed made a promise of marriage. However, Aymé insisted that the promise was not only contingent upon her parents’ approval but that the promise had been made in response to pressure from a baker and others. While the marriage contract was eventually annulled due to a lack of parental consent, it is important that the consistory decided that “the baker and those who have meddled [in the proposed marriage] be admonished…”\textsuperscript{109} The consistory believed these meddlers should be corrected for stepping beyond their proper station and inserting themselves into a situation in which they had no proper responsibility.

In another case, a mother was thought to overstep her station by providing parental consent for her daughter’s engagement instead of leaving this to her husband. In 1547, a young girl named Maxima had become engaged to Etienne de Lonnay. Maxima’s mother provided the parental consent and also signed the engagement contract. However, Maxima told the consistory that she, herself, did not consent to the marriage and that her father would not consent. The consistory immediately annulled the engagement contract. And, as Kingdon and Witte summarize, the consistory referred the case to the Small Council who “imprisoned the mother both for perjury during trial and for consenting to the engagement, evidently in defiance of her husband’s wishes…”\textsuperscript{110} The particular issues of engagement, marriage, and parental consent are discussed in more detail below.


For the moment it should suffice to note that parental consent was “...indispensable to the validity of a minor child’s engagement and marriage. The consent of the father was sufficient; the consent of the mother counted only if the father was absent and other relatives concurred.” Within this hierarchical matrix, Maxima’s mother had not only disobeyed her husband but overstepped the proper limits of her station, attempting to do the work that only Maxima’s father could perform.

In similar fashion, the consistory barred Jacquema Milanesi and her fiancé from Communion because they had not finalized their marriage but yet spent a great deal of time together privately. In the consistory’s view, this behavior was scandalous because such was not fitting those who are unmarried. The consistory clearly assumed a reliable promise of marriage existed, and that the couple should refrain from visiting one another until they were married. Once they accomplished a change of station, their private interactions would no longer be scandalous but completely appropriate. This couple had reached for behavioral standards that were not within the proper limits of their current unmarried station.

Claude Levrat and Louis Bourgeois stood before the consistory due to “their difference and enmity.” A critical footnote in the published record indicates that these brothers-in-law were at odds because Bourgeois had married Claude’s sister, Jeanne, in spite of the disapproval of the Levrat family. The consistory admonished them that “Because they are brothers-in-law, the thing is a scandal to live in enmity and malice.”

The consistory frequently disciplined Genevans for disputes, and it often described such

111 Ibid., 164; Calvin's 1546 Marriage Ordinance defines the age of majority at which a person was no longer a minor in need of parental consent to marry. The age for a son was twenty, and for a daughter it was eighteen, Ibid., 165.


113 Ibid., 135.
behavior as scandalous, but in this scenario it found such hatred to be particularly ill-fitting for the station of two brothers-in-law.

The consistory also corrected people for failing to fulfill the unique responsibilities of their particular station. For example, when a notary named de Chenelet registered an engagement contract without the consent of the groom’s father, the consistory not only called into question the validity of the contract but remanded de Chenelet to the Small Council. They considered that he had “registered such a contract contrary to his duty.”\(^{114}\) In another case, Jeanne Loup was known to have been “badly governed” and to have “rumored badly.” The consistory believed this was because her husband, Claude, had allowed people of questionable character into his house.\(^{115}\) Thus, when Claude was permitting those with a morally corrupting influence into his home, he was not fulfilling his role as governor of the home, and as a result, his wife’s behavior had been morally compromised. Frequently, especially when it came to couples who owned and operated inns, the consistory held heads of households responsible for who was permitted into the home, how guests comported themselves, and how the servants and family were influenced by guests.

In February of 1542, the consistory had received word about Jaques Emyn’s governance of his inn. The consistory had been informed of “…the management and course of his household and his guests, muleteers, merchants and others from distant countries and of the words they use among themselves.”\(^{116}\) In March, Jaques’ wife, Tevenete, was also summoned, and again, part of the consistory’s concern had to do with household management. The consistory inquired about “the manner of living in religion and her foreign guests.” She was instructed to buy a Bible to “show to the guests.”

\(^{114}\) Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 189.

\(^{115}\) *Registers of the Consistory of Geneva*, vol. 1, 75.

\(^{116}\) Ibid., 11.
Further, she was admonished to “have good servants and maids and that God not be blasphemed or offended in her house.” In December, the consistory followed up with Jaques, and this time he reported that he had purchased a Bible which merchants would read in his house. In March of the following year, he was again before the consistory. It was very concerned because “his guests do not eat Lent-breaking food.” In all of these ways, the consistory labored to ensure that Jaques and Tevenet, in particular the former, exercised the responsibilities of their stations faithfully and appropriately. The consistory believed these innkeepers’ station required that they give careful watch over their own lives but over the lives of their guests, family, and servants as well. In short, the religious and moral health of the family, the servants, and the guests required proper governance on the part of Jaques and Tevenet.

A nearly identical case regarding Robert and Pernete Breysson occupied the consistory at the exact same time. Though most of the repeated summons and questioning revolved around whether Robert had made appropriate progress in the faith, initial questioning indicated that the consistory was concerned with how the couple fulfilled their station of moral responsibility over those in their home. The consistory inquired into “the discipline and fashion of living” in their household. Further, it asked about “the Word of God, about songs, sermons and her [Pernete’s] faith and her servants and maids.” When the consistory gave remonstrances, it demanded that a Bible be placed before those in the home “instead of game boards, cards, songs…” Again, the moral and religious comportment of the family, servants, and guests was thought to fall under the governance of these two innkeepers.

117 Ibid., 13.
118 Ibid., 158.
119 Ibid., 221–222.
120 Ibid., 13.
Likewise, Otto Chautemps and his wife, Jeanne Rachel, were summoned to give account for the immoral behavior within their inn and tavern. The particular language here is important. They were summoned in December of 1550 and January of 1551 “for having authorized some games and songs in their tavern.” They were summoned again in May of 1551. Otto was admonished for not having corrected himself for “permitting” songs and other immoral activity in his inn. The consistory believed Otto had the responsibility to restrict his guests from playing immoral games and signing immoral songs, and it further thought he had used his authority inappropriately by authorizing such games and singing.

The consistory had particular reasons for worrying about activities within inns and taverns. As Karen Spierling has noted, “…across early modern Germany and Switzerland, inns and taverns were sites of potential resistance to both political and religious authority, evading official efforts to regulate them or shut them down.” Yet, the consistory also gave special attention to the ways in which heads of households oversaw those under them. Thus, the policing of the governance of innkeepers was of a piece with the consistory’s efforts to watch over the shoulder of those in the city with any significant degree of responsibility for the moral and religious governance of those under them.

Fathers were often summoned to ensure that they were exercising proper oversight of their family’s religious development. Pierre Baud was made to stand before the consistory to explain “why he does not send his people to the sermons.” He was further told to “instruct his family” in the faith. François Vulliens was admonished “as

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121 Registres du Consistoire de Genève, vol. 6, 94, n. 590.


124 Ibid., 33.
the master of his family…to put to order the superstitions in which his wife always persists.” As Watt has demonstrated, the consistory at times ordered fathers to use corporal punishment upon their sons who had skipped catechism. Watt’s following summary proves helpfully illuminating:

…on a number of occasions the registers suggest that the male household head was deemed responsible for the religious instruction of family members, including wives as well as children. For example, a merchant was convoked because his wife was not attending church, though no cases can be found of women who were convoked because their husbands were truant from church. When a woman was suspected of saying “popish” prayers and the rosary, members of the Consistory decided to call her husband to ask him how he instructed his wife and children.

Similarly, fathers were responsible for the overall moral and religious comportment of the home. Spierling summarizes the broader Protestant mood regarding fathers: “It is now well-established among early modern scholars that Protestant Reformers perceived the household as the basic building block for a Reformed Christian society, and they viewed the male head of household as the key figure in enforcing correct behavior and beliefs.” She adds “This was certainly the case in Geneva. Male heads of households were ultimately responsible for the behavior of their wives, children, and servants.” In Geneva, this ideal was policed and enforced. When wives were immoral, it was often the husbands who were given instructions to take better care to govern their spouses. As Watt notes, Francois Dupra was admonished by the consistory “for not chastising his wife sufficiently to make her attentive to her duties.” Fathers were also responsible to provide for their children. Karen Spierling has indicated that the

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125 Registres du Consistoire de Genève, vol. 6, 52.
126 Watt, "Childhood and Youth,” 50.
consistory went to great efforts to identify the fathers of illegitimate children so as to ensure that these men fulfilled their responsibilities to provide and care for their children.\textsuperscript{130} Geneva’s consistory became a model for policing patriarchal responsibility in the home. The French Reformed churches followed in its footsteps when, as Raymond Mentzer points out, “Local consistories frequently summoned them [fathers and husbands] to answer for the misdeeds of their wives, offspring, and servants.”\textsuperscript{131}

At times, the consistory also required that a master play a role in the ecclesiastical discipline of a servant. As Karen Spierling summarizes, “According to the reformers’ concepts of a truly Reformed society, heads of household were vital enforcers of Christian morality within their homes and necessary agents in the successful imposition of the consistory’s authority.” Drawing from her careful examination of consistory records, she cites a case in which Jean Lullin was ordered to withhold salary from his servant who was suspected of having committed adultery. Lullin was also commanded to bring the adulterous man to the consistory. When the servant failed to appear, and no one seemed to have knowledge of his whereabouts, the consistory ordered Lullin to have the servant arrested the next time he was able to locate him.\textsuperscript{132} Spierling notes another case in which similar requirements were placed upon Jehanton Desboys to aid in the discipline of a servant.\textsuperscript{133}

Finally, there are numerous cases in which the consistory played a significant role in trying to determine or identify an individual’s station. Most of these cases revolved


\textsuperscript{131} Mentzer, “Masculinity and the Reformed Tradition in France,” 125.

\textsuperscript{132} Spierling, “Putting Order to Disorder,” 56–57.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 58–61.
around marriage and family issues, and typically, they arose when one or more individuals’ station was uncertain or contested. First, the consistory kept careful watch over Genevans’ entrance into marriage. The very first case heard in the consistory falls within this category. Jane, the daughter of Louis Gerod, stood before Geneva’s pastors and elders to explain the whereabouts of her husband, Jehan Mermecs. Jane stated that though she had “done her best to find her husband,” she had “not been able to find him.” Further, she indicated that she knew why he left: “his father did not want him to complete their marriage.” It seems that the two had likely made a promise of marriage to one another but that Jehan’s father refused to consent, which is one reason why the marriage remained unrealized. The consistory decided “that she [Jane] be chaste and responsible. And meanwhile one will learn from the preacher of Thonon where her husband could be in order to learn where he can be found.” As this couple was facing a transition into a new station, that of husband and wife, the consistory seemed concerned about the actual status of the couple’s arrangement, given the absence of Jehan Mermecs. The consistory exercised its authority to determine whether circumstances warranted a rightful transition into marriage. Further, if such proved to be the case, the consistory was anxious to see the marriage completed.

In 1542 Pierre Merciers was questioned “Because of the wife he promised so long ago [Claudine Chenu], what he is doing and what obstacle there is.” Apparently the

\[134\] Witte and Kingdon have demonstrated Calvin’s theological and practical insistence that Genevan minors have parental consent for an engagement and marriage to be valid, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 164–201.

\[135\] *Registers of the Consistory of Geneva*, vol. 1, 5; The 1546 Marriage Ordinance of Geneva stated: "If a man, after having sworn faith [that is, become engaged] to a girl or woman, goes to another country, and the girl or woman comes to make a complaint about this, asking to be delivered from her promise because of the other's disloyalty, let inquiry be made whether he did this for an honorable reason and with the knowledge of his fiancée, or instead through debauchery and because he does not wish to complete the marriage. If it is found that he has no apparent reason [for his departure] and that he has done it from bad motives, let one inquire to what place he has gone, and if possible let him be notified that he must return by a certain day to carry out the duty he has promised," cited in Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 424.
consistory was concerned that he was delaying the fulfillment of his marriage promise. Pierre stated that he entered into the agreement on the condition that he receive a set amount of money which had been promised to him by Claudine’s family. Claudine’s family thought it had provided sufficient money for the marriage to proceed, and they blamed Pierre for the delay. Though the consistory pressured Claudine’s family to put an end to the matter, the case ultimately went before the Small Council where it was drawn out over the course of the next year and apparently resulted in the eventual completion of the marriage.

When the consistory became aware of a promise between Jean de Cortean and Anne Le Peigner, it summoned both along with Anne’s step-father, Guillaume Cartier, and Anne’s mother. Guillaume stated that he knew of the promise. Yet, he further noted that it had been made without his knowledge and that he did not want to consent to the marriage. Jean attempted to minimize the extent of the promise of marriage, and he indicated his contentment if nothing be done about it. Anne’s mother, however, confessed to have consented to the promise between Jean and her daughter. At this, Jean promptly asked to be freed from the arrangement because he wanted to go to France. After hearing

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136 Witte and Kingdon note that “A Genevan couple, once properly betrothed, had little time to waste and little room to celebrate. Neither their publicly announced engagement nor the procurement of banns was sufficient to constitute a marriage. A formal wedding had to follow – within six weeks of engagement. If the couple procrastinated in the wedding plans, the Consistory would reprimand them: if they persisted, they would be ‘sent before the Council so that may be compelled to celebrate it,’” Sex, Marriage, and Family, 44–45.


138 Ibid., 170.

139 Ibid., 171–172; Witte and Kingdon have pointed out that engagement contracts in Geneva could be annulled if one party failed to meet a condition of the engagement contract. However, this only applied to conditions that did not relate to property or dowry payments. If one failed to meet a property or dowry condition of an engagement contract, “the Consistory disregarded them [the conditions] and enforced the engagement contracts without hesitation,” Sex, Marriage, and Family, 134.
all parties, the consistory decided not to recognize the promise as valid.\textsuperscript{140} It further demanded that remonstrances be made to Anne’s mother to not consent to marriage promises so lightly. Additional remonstrances were ordered for Jean for having been so vain or trifling.\textsuperscript{141}

Calvin and the Genevan consistory gave surveillance to a host of issues revolving around one’s entrance into marriage, and on numerous occasions, the consistory inquired into Genevan engagements and marriages. In the process of helping a young woman become a wife or young man become a husband, various layered hierarchies worked together to validate the fitness and appropriateness of the engagement and marriage process. As Kingdon and Witte have noted, Calvin believed that “God participates in the formation of the covenant of marriage through his chosen agents on earth….” The couple’s parents served as “God’s lieutenants” by educating children about the morals of marriage and by providing their consent. Witnesses to the couple’s marriage promise served as “God’s priests to their peers.” Pastors maintained “God’s spiritual power of the Word,” to exhort the couple and the city regarding their duties, and the magistrate, “God’s temporal power of the sword,” oversees the legality of the marriage.\textsuperscript{142} This was not mere theoretical language on Calvin’s part. Rather, the consistory practically gave oversight to the involvement of parents, witnesses, ministers, and notaries to attest to the fitness of the proposed marriage and engagement process. Frequently, these various parties were summoned in marriage cases so that the consistory could hear their testimony and make a decision as to whether an engagement contract was indeed valid.

\textsuperscript{140} The consistory may have dismissed the promise as invalid because Anne’s step-father failed to give consent. Additionally, the consistory could have been basing its decision on the 1546 Marriage Ordinance which “called for the annulment of engagement promises made frivolously or while the parties were drunk,” cited in Witte and Kingdon, \textit{Sex, Marriage, and Family}, 130.

\textsuperscript{141} The word the consistory scribe recorded was “\textit{gloreux},” which the editors note is perhaps uncertain in meaning. They suggest that here it probably should be understood \textit{[dans le sense de vaniteux,]} \textit{Registres du Consistoire de Genève}, vol. 6, 188.

\textsuperscript{142} Witte and Kingdon, \textit{Sex, Marriage, and Family}, 484.
In addition to guarding the gate to marriage by making sure that engagements were made properly, the consistory also ensured that those who made valid promises could not easily wiggle out of them. In 1546, the consistory questioned Nicolas Adduard and Jehanne Pyto because they were suspected of having made a marriage promise. Nicolas confessed to having sworn faith with her and to have shared a drink in the name of marriage. Jehanne, however, denied the claim, and said she had been swindled. Testimony from witnesses called into question her own account; witnesses confirmed that she had made a promise of marriage. When questioning continued over the course of a couple of weeks, Nicolas eventually voiced his desire to be free of the engagement as well. In spite of the fact that both wanted to be free of the obligation to marry, the consistory referred them to the Small Council with the recommendation that the marriage be enforced. It seems the consistory believed a marriage promise had occurred, as confirmed by witnesses. Further, the consistory seems to have thought Jehanne and Nicolas had lied in different ways, possibly to cover up the marriage promise. This likely only reinforced to the consistory that a marriage promise had actually occurred. In this and other similar cases, the consistory oversaw not only the transition into the station of husband or wife but also used its authority to reinforce and maintain a wife or husband in their station once an individual’s marital station had been effectively determined.

It is clear that Calvin viewed marriage as a vocation, station, or office. In the 1536 Institutes he wrote that marriage is “a good and holy ordinance of God just like farming, building, cobbling, and barbering.” In other contexts, he described marriage as “a heavenly calling” or “the principal and most sacred…of all the offices pertaining to human society.” As the above cases demonstrate, the consistory worked to determine

143 Ibid., 124–125, 145–146.
144 Ibid., 39.
145 Ibid., 488.
whether circumstances warranted an individual’s status as husband or wife, and if it did, the consistory also made provisions to ensure that each person indeed tended to and fulfilled their station.

In a second set of closely related instances, the consistory often attempted to determine the identity of an illegitimate child’s father. For example, when the consistory was notified that a woman at Ami Andrion’s house had given birth to an illegitimate child, it advised that the Small Council send the lieutenant to find out who the father was. Clearly the consistory suspected one of Andrion’s sons and asked that the suspected son be brought to the consistory.\(^{146}\) In another case, Pierre Boulo was identified as the father of an illegitimate child born to Michée Dupra. The consistory ordered him to marry Michée. When he was slow to comply, the consistory gave him a deadline to complete the marriage, otherwise they would refer him to the Small Council. Further, the consistory instructed him not to spend time with Michée until the marriage was completed, or else they would be punished.\(^{147}\)

Perhaps more telling is a case which Karen Spierling has documented. It involved Sieur Marin Malliet who was master of Françoys Humbert and a woman named Noelle. Both the consistory and the Small Council were involved in this case, and much of the work revolved around “uncovering the identity of the father in question….\(\) What made this case so interesting is that Humbert took responsibility for impregnating Noelle in an effort to cover up the fact that his master, Malliet, was actually the father of the illegitimate child. Further, Malliet died before his identity as father to the child was established. Spierling concludes that identifying the actual father was important for two reasons. First, “…increased attention on identifying the fathers” ensured that “…they would provide financially for their offspring.” Second, establishing the paternal identity

\(^{146}\) *Registres du Consistoire de Genève*, vol. 6, 93.

\(^{147}\) Ibid., 46, 106.
meant that fathers had to openly acknowledge their illegitimate children and confess their sin. The first purpose meant that authorities were able to identify the father and make him fulfill his rightful station as provider for his child. The second purpose meant that the father would have to own up to his sinful behavior. The consistory’s efforts were part of a larger Protestant shift. As Watt notes, when it came to illegitimate children, Protestants “placed considerable emphasis on the individual, insisting that people were responsible for their actions and had to pay the price for their misdeeds. Accordingly, they sought to force the parents of illegitimate children to support them.”

In summary, the consistory gave careful watch over individual Genevans’ stations. Calvin did utilize existing hierarchical structures and stations to enforce moral and religious reforms. However, this was not simply pragmatic or utilitarian. That is, he did not lean on such hierarchies as a mere practical means to an end. Rather, the very goal itself, of a properly Reformed city, entailed that each person fulfill the moral and religious responsibilities of his or her station. Thus, the consistory did not merely police morals and basic doctrinal awareness but also gave special attention to whether each Genevan was fulfilling his or her unique responsibilities. The consistory even played a significant role in determining and establishing individual Genevans’ station. As Calvin wrote in the Institutes, “…as the saving doctrine of Christ is the soul of the church, so does discipline serve as its sinews, through which the members of the body hold together, each in its own place.”

Individual Scrutiny and Public Shame: Clearly, the consistory drew immense attention to individuals in the disciplinary process. Even though the consistory might not

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148 Spierling, “Putting Order to Disorder,” 47–52.


150 Calvin, Institutes, IV: 12, 1.
have delved deeply into Genevans’ doctrinal understandings, and even though the consistory was content with relatively external and formal displays of repentance, this does not detract from the fact that the consistory was highly concerned with individuals. When inquiring into Genevans’ awareness of the basics of Reformed religion, attention was drawn to what a specific individual actually knew. Similar scrutiny was brought to bear upon individuals in an effort to determine guilt in cases of moral infraction.

Spierling has noted the consistory’s worry to discipline “the correct person for the correct offense.” When analyzing cases of illegitimate child birth in Geneva, Spierling has further concluded the concern of the consistory to identify offenders and to see such offenders acknowledge the sinfulness of their behavior.151 Indeed, in numerous cases in which the consistory was convinced of an individual’s guilt, the consistory required them to return to “recognize their fault.”

Records demonstrate that, in many instances, individuals were questioned before the consistory. At times, multiple people were summoned because they were both involved in the same case: husbands and wives at odds with one another were summoned together, disputing neighbors were questioned at the same time, and so forth. However, even in these circumstances, the consistory would take time, not only to hear from both parties, but to question individuals separately and privately. For example, the above case between Claude Levrat and Louis Bourgeois entailed that both were summoned together. Yet, during the questioning, Claude was called to answer “in private” (à part).152 Or again, though Laurence Viongiere and Mauris Du Chastel were summoned together, the consistory thought it important at one point to hear from Laurence privately: the record reads “When separated from the said Mauris the said Laurence said that….”153 Or yet

151 Spierling, “Putting Order to Disorder,” 47–52.

152 Registres du Consistoire de Genève, vols. 6, 135.

again, after Laurent Prire and Rolande Blanch were “confronted with each other” regarding a promise of marriage between them, the consistory then addressed “the said Rolande in private.”

Lambert has noted the consistory’s rigorous insistence on isolating specific individuals for disciplinary interrogation. “Occasionally…people presented themselves before the consistory without being summoned, usually to lend moral support to someone else. The consistory did not take kindly to this practice. Not only did the person put himself at risk of being scolded too, but for reasons that are obscure, the Council even decided that such people could be jailed.” Further, as Kingdon and Witte point out, “Individuals were not allowed to bring a lawyer or adviser, but had to handle questions entirely on their own.”

Though consistorial meetings were conducted in private, the annual visitations were considerably more public. As outlined above, Grosse demonstrates that home visitations took place in neighborhoods, not within homes, and they typically involved multiple families. That is, when a person was questioned about his or her understanding of the faith, this took place in front of one’s neighbors. Further, when individual Genevans received remonstrances or suspensions during these home visitations, it was before one’s neighbors. Grosse suggests that this drew negative attention to the individual; it “marred the honor of the guilty and weakened his position in the complex framework of relationships of the neighborhood.”

In other situations individuals had to perform public acts of contrition before the entire congregation. As Lambert notes, before an excommunicate could be readmitted to the Supper, he or she had to admit fault before the consistory “as a minimum, thereby

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154 Ibid., 262–263.
155 Witte and Kingdon, Sex, Marriage, and Family, 66.
156 Grosse, Les rituels de la cène, 405.
subjecting themselves to at least a semi-private shaming.” Further, over time, “the consistory increasingly demanded that excommunicates make a public reparation in front of the entire assembled congregation.” Such entailed that a person, “presented himself or herself before the congregation at the main Sunday sermon, got down on his knees and begged for forgiveness from God and man (in particular from ‘la justice’).” This form of reparation before the congregation was also required of those who “caused a notable scandal in the church” as well as for French religious refugees who were found to have renounced the Reform while in their homeland in an effort to avoid persecution.¹⁵⁷ Women who were pregnant prior to their weddings were also required to perform this reparation before the congregation. Yet, they had the added disgrace of having to “wear a veil signifying their sin on the day of the wedding.”¹⁵⁸

Those who had been temporarily excommunicated were clearly humiliated as individuals. Their shame was made visible when they were denied access to the Communion table with the rest of the community, and their reintegration into the body entailed a public act of repentance before the entire congregation. However, these factors were further compounded by two sanctions that were applied to excommunicates. Prior to their reintegration into the congregation, these Genevans could neither be married nor serve as godparents. Lambert notes that “The severity of these sanctions cannot be exaggerated.” Such sanctions restricted individuals from participating in the community at fundamental levels. The inability to marry meant that neither economic unions between families nor participation in the rite that marked one’s passage into adulthood could be completed. Similarly, serving as a godparent allowed one to seal social relations and participate in an honorable tradition, and as such, being restricted from this ceremony

¹⁵⁷ Lambert, “Preaching, Praying, and Policing the Reform,” 263–266.

¹⁵⁸ Witte and Kingdon, Sex, Marriage, and Family, 45.
proved undesirable.\textsuperscript{159} As such, these sanctions further excluded individuals from participation in the community and increased the disgrace to their honor. 

**Conclusion**

Jeffrey Watt has written that “Calvin and his colleagues on the consistory…viewed their own role as that of ‘fathers’ to the rest of society, providing guidance and coercion to their ‘children’ in order to establish and maintain their strong faith and a well-ordered society.”\textsuperscript{160} This chapter has clearly demonstrated, more than any other, the intense and invasive oversight Calvin gave to the development of piety among Genevans. A basic grasp of the faith and proper Christian behavior were not only encouraged but demanded and even enforced. Rather than promote private individual liberty in matters of religion, Calvin’s consistory had considerable access to supervise the lives of Genevans, whether regarding their faith or morals. Calvin established a disciplinary system that granted considerable authority to pastors in the effort to oversee many aspects of the lives of ordinary Christians.

Yet, the consistory did have significant individuating potentialities. An important dynamic, albeit a secondary one, was the consistory’s broad policing of the interior lives of individuals. Geneva’s pastors and elders summoned individuals to examine and shape not only their basic grasp of the faith, but the elementary direction of their dispositions as well. Consistorial interrogation could inquire into the hearts and minds of Genevans. While Calvin frequently prayed in sermon services for God to enlighten the minds of believers, the consistory was concerned to make sure that each individual actually attended services and made appropriate progress so as to know the faith, at a rudimentary level. Those who failed were held culpable for their ignorance and were pursued and even barred from Communion until they remedied such ignorance. Similarly, the

\textsuperscript{159} Lambert, “Preaching, Praying, and Policing the Reform,” 260–261.

\textsuperscript{160} Watt, “Calvinism, Childhood, and Education,” 448.
language pastors used in consistory meetings clearly indicates that in a significant number of cases, they were attempting to shape a person’s dispositions (e.g. demanding that a Genevan expel anger from his or her heart). In these ways, the consistory examined the unique contours of specific individuals’ interior regions, thus providing a significant potential individuating quality.

However, in all of these cases, the consistory’s questioning did not plunge deeply into the intricacies of Genevans’ hearts or minds. While the consistory examined a very large number of Genevans in regards to their basic doctrinal understanding, it did not employ overly rigorous questioning regarding doctrinal intricacies. When compared to the number of cases which were simply concerned with changing Genevans’ external behavior, fewer cases emerged in which Genevans were questioned about their inclinations and dispositions. And, in these cases, questioning did not pry deeply into one’s feelings or emotions, often leaving the language regarding one’s interiority at a subtle and superficial level.

Of more central and frequent concern was the effort to ensure that individuals indeed tended to their particular station in life. In his theological writings and sermons, Calvin often described each person’s station and situation in life as uniquely ordained by the divine will. While the language of divine providence makes no appearance in consistory records, Calvin’s disciplinary efforts were wedded to identifying and maintaining Genevan individuals within their divinely ordained station. As Watt’s conclusion just above suggests, the consistory used its hierarchical authority to ensure a well-ordered society. This chapter argues that for Calvin, such order not only entailed good behavior in general but behavior fitting to each individual’s station. In this way, the consistory drew great attention to the unique vocation and status of each individual and also sought to ensure that each person lived within the proper limits and responsibilities of their particular lot in life. In some cases, a person’s status could prove ambiguous, and the consistory attempted to define a person’s station. Again following the lead of
Geneva’s consistory, French Reformed churches showed a similar affinity for “categorization, classification, and hierarchization” of the community.\(^{161}\)

However, it must be emphasized that Calvin’s language regarding divine willing, that which granted his view of station such a highly individuating quality in his theology, was absent in consistorial dialogue. While Calvin likely understood church discipline of individuals’ station against this theological backdrop, the individuating quality of station was somewhat diluted in the consistory due to the absence of this language.

One of the greatest individuating tendencies of the consistory was its capacity to bring hierarchical authority and public scrutiny to bear upon the individual’s guilt and shame. By seeking to identify guilty parties and by demanding that these confess their guilt, intense pressure was placed upon the individual before the members of the consistory, before one’s neighbors, and in some cases, even before an entire congregation. While Calvin’s public prayers petitioned God to make Genevans aware of their sinful condition, the hierarchical authority of the consistory seems to have played a mediating role in helping Genevans to recognize and confess their faults before others. The consistory shamed and called into question an individual’s honor while having the capacity to alienate and isolate individuals from participating in important communal events.

When analyzing consistorial dynamics in Nîmes, Philippe Chareyre has concluded that “the individual in general and certain types of behavior in particular had to be corrected, or reformed.”\(^{162}\) Chareyre has noted an interesting dialectical tension in this short description, and it is a tension that seems just as common to Calvin’s Geneva. In

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general, Genevans were subjected to discipline, and yet, disciplinary scrutiny fell upon specific individuals for specific infractions. A similar dialectical tension exists when one recalls that discipline served to maintain, in general, a well-ordered society by examining, questioning, and policing the lives of specific individuals. In this way, the goods of the community or of the collective were served by bringing the status of the individual to the fore.

Finally, the hierarchical mechanisms of the consistory itself and the broader civic hierarchies which it utilized and with which it cooperated reinforced various shades of authority and differentiation connected to certain offices. Those summoned to the consistory were confronted with a range of unique forms of authority. Calvin’s presence loomed large as he was the clear leader of this disciplinary body, having power not only over the selection and retention of pastors and elders but also over the role of giving remonstrances. The pastors, as a group, were set apart from elders in that they took charge over giving remonstrances. The syndic and elders were distinguished not only by their consistorial station but by holding the requisite civic credentials to serve in the consistory. In this way, the members of the consistory were distinguished from one another by these markers but also distinguished from some of the Genevans who stood before them who lacked similar status.
CHAPTER 5

GENEVAN RECEPTIONS OF THE REFORMATION

When Genevans found themselves before the consistory, they were not only confronted with various layers of hierarchy but had the opportunity to speak for themselves. Their answers, which were recorded in the minutes of the consistory’s meetings, have been preserved and are now in the process of being transcribed and published. This gives others a chance to listen in on important conversations between Genevans and their religious leaders, and it allows the voices of ordinary Christians in the city to be heard. Thus, these records have proven quite valuable when trying to gauge the ways in which Genevans responded to Calvin’s initiatives.

As Thomas Lambert has noted, such records do present some difficulties. These are not diaries or personal correspondence in which individuals felt greater degrees of freedom to express their true thoughts and feelings. Rather, the consistory set the agenda, and Genevans knew that serious consequences could ensue if they did not choose their words wisely. Further, those called to the consistory were suspected of wrongdoing by church officials. This limits the extent to which consistorial answers can be considered representative of the broader population. As Lambert concludes, the records give us the words of Genevans “uttered in response to interrogation in a tense situation and as filtered and rendered into the third person (normally), by the secretary.”¹ In spite of these limitations, consistory records still give some of the best evidence of the thoughts and ideas of ordinary Genevans. By “teasing out” information from consistory cases, Lambert believes that he has been able to “let the sixteenth-century Genevans” speak at some level. Such records reveal “religious thought and practice from several perspectives,” including that of ordinary Genevans.² This dissertation follows these assumptions.

² Ibid., 23.
This chapter argues that Genevans grasped the ways in which Calvin and his fellow pastors had powerfully established themselves as mediators between God and the laity. Some Genevans could even voice frustration over the intense supervision which pastors wanted to wield over ordinary Christians. This chapter also argues that Genevans felt individuated through consistorial discipline. Some perceived that their personal interior condition was being examined, and they therefore made reference to the status of their hearts. Others simply felt that their individual honor was being challenged, and they spoke up to defend it. These factors proved individuating but only as Genevans filtered the views and aims of their religious leaders through their own perspectives, values, and assumptions. However, the most prominent dynamic is that Genevans sensed that stations were being negotiated through consistorial discipline. Church officials brought hierarchical power to bear upon Genevan lives in an effort to put each person in his or her proper place. Genevans grasped that the various hierarchies of their city, along with their own place within these hierarchies, were being affirmed, challenged and negotiated. Some took the opportunity to enter into this process and voice their own understanding of station, even if it was contrary to the view of Calvin and the other ministers. Importantly, these discussions regarding station differentiated the community but lacked the language of divine willing which Calvin attached to station in his theological works. Thus, Genevans tended to discuss station within the consistory in less than explicitly individuating terms.

Historical Context:

Civic Autonomy and Religious Reform

Genevans were not a blank slate upon which Calvin and the other pastors could simply inscribe Reformed doctrines and morals. Understanding the responses of Genevans to Calvin’s influence in general, or to his notion of the individual in particular, requires at the very least an elementary survey of the context in which Calvin worked and the people to whom he ministered. This brief overview of the city on the verge of
Calvin’s arrival helps to contextualize and explain some of the Genevan responses to Calvin’s influence. While Calvin attained significant authority in the city, Genevans still actively processed and filtered Reformed preaching and discipline through the lenses of Genevan values, traditions, and concerns. Though significant histories of Geneva have been written since the middle of the nineteenth-century, a number of more recent works have emerged which are particularly notable for their rigorous reliance upon primary source documentation.³ To date, the most well-documented and reliable treatment is William Naphy’s, *The Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*.⁴ The following brief summary draws from a number of works but leans heavily upon Naphy’s.

Prior to 1536, Geneva had been a Catholic city, largely ruled by a Prince-Bishop. The city owed allegiance to the Dukes of Savoy, and often the Prince-Bishop was from the House of Savoy.⁵ Through a complex series of political maneuvers, involving various factions, Geneva won its civic autonomy, freeing itself from the rule of the Prince-Bishop and Savoy. While some Genevans had purely religious reasons for supporting religious reforms, the city’s official conversion from Catholicism to the Reformed religion must be seen in light of its struggle to win and maintain political autonomy. Lambert notes that even before the city liberated itself, as early as 1387, efforts had been made to ensure that the bishop did not tread upon certain rights of Genevans. This largely consisted of the *Franchises* which limited the authority of the bishop. Before he could be installed, a bishop had to swear to uphold the *Franchises* which outlined certain protections for


⁴ Much of this brief overview is referenced in Naphy’s chapter entitled “Factionalism: The Genevan Disease.”

⁵ Thomas Lambert write that Geneva was “…a city-state under the authority of the prince-bishop who, for all intents and purposes, was appointed by the duke of Savoy.” He also notes that the vidomme, who was himself closely aligned with Savoy, often played a significant role in governing Geneva, “Preaching, Praying, and Policing the Reform,” 48.
Genevans. However, Naphy points out that after winning its autonomy, Geneva was faced with the pressure from a number of states who made varying degrees of claims upon control of Genevan territory. Importantly, France was one of several with hopes to lay hold of Geneva. Berne, Geneva’s strongest military ally, had already embraced the Reformation and also encouraged Geneva to do the same. In this context, Geneva sought to secure the ongoing support of Berne and officially declared its commitment to the Reformation.

As Naphy summarizes, “The break with Savoy and Geneva’s international situation made the city wary of foreign domination. Geneva, to protect its liberty, had striven to break the power of the ecclesiastical establishment which was dominated by foreigners with allegiances and concerns beyond those of the city.” While Genevans had earned their civic autonomy, many harbored the memory of being ruled by foreign Prince-Bishops. The city seems to have remained on the alert for any signs of similar encroaching foreign religious domination.

Some of the changes the Small Council made to the institutional structure of religious life after the city achieved its autonomy were influenced by this concern. In 1538, the Small Council demanded that Calvin and the other ministers conform to specific Bernese religious practices. As Naphy summarizes, “The ministers protested but were warned not to meddle in political matters. This act, though provocative from the ministers’ viewpoint, was not inconsistent with the earlier actions of the magistrates in establishing the Reformation.” The preachers and magistrates arrived at a standoff that eventually led to Calvin being expelled from Geneva until 1541. In Calvin’s absence, the

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6 Ibid., 50–51; Christian Grosse suggests that the 1535 iconoclastic act, carried out by Genevans, of moving the seats which were designated for priests in the cathedral was motivated by disgust for clerical power and privilege, *Les rituels de la cène*, 273.


8 Ibid., 33-34.
Small Council made pastors “salaried employees of the state,” which further limited the independence and authority of Genevan ministers.

Thus, Genevan political autonomy proved a crucial backdrop for the emergence and unfolding of the Reformation of Geneva. In this context, not only were Genevan rights, privileges, and freedoms of importance, but the very identity of native Genevans, with traditions attached to this identity, proved important when responding to Calvin’s initiatives. As the following demonstrates, even Genevan concerns regarding religious practices were rooted in deeper worries about preserving native identity, political freedom, and the right to participate in deeply valued traditions.

An addition to concern for native identity and rights, many Genevans gave a great deal of attention to further markers of distinction within the broader community. Some of these were closely connected to matters of native identity. The city’s population was divided into three categories: citoyens, bourgeois, and habitants. A citoyen was one born in Geneva to either citoyen or bourgeois parents and had full political rights (e.g., voting privileges, the ability to serve on all levels of city government, etc.). “The humbler status” of bourgeois was available to long-standing residents who either purchased or were granted the rights and responsibilities of a citoyen. A bourgeois was able to vote and was also eligible to serve on all of the city’s councils, except for the Small Council (the highest of the three councils). Finally, a habitant was a registered alien resident. Habitants “had the right to sue in civil cases, and were subject to the same laws and duties as everyone else, but had no right to carry swords, to participate in elections, or to hold any public post, except pastor or lecturer at the school.”

Political factions also divided Geneva. As Naphy notes, “The city was famous for its divisions, which formed and re-formed throughout the period of Calvin’s ministry.” Further, “Until 1555 every victorious political faction splintered into rival groups which

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competed until one side was defeated.”

Various names, at times derogatory in nature, were assigned to these differing factions: “Mammelus,” “Articulants,” “Guillermans,” and “les enfants’ of the city” were all terms applied to different Genevan factions at different moments. And, finally, Genevan individuals could distinguish themselves by their membership or connections with prominent or leading families of the city. In their own way, nearly all of these layers of distinction proved important and influential as Genevans responded to Calvin’s influence.

**Genevan Responses before the Consistory**

There was no single response to the Reform of Geneva. As the above brief historical overview demonstrates, the city had reasons for both supporting and resisting the Reformation, and it therefore went through a long and arduous series of waves in which backing for religious reforms waxed and waned. Not only were there various sentiments regarding the Reformation from different Genevans, individuals changed their position during Calvin’s lifetime. Thus, when trying to ascertain Genevans’ views of the influence of the Reformation on notions of the individual, a singular answer should not be expected. However, certain responses of Genevans at consistory meetings proved paradigmatic in that they were patterned and repeated. This section analyzes several of these paradigmatic responses while also weaving in corroborating anecdotal evidence when fitting.

**Genevan References to Individual Interiority before the Consistory:** Calvin clearly valued church discipline as a means of attempting to protect Communion from profanation by restricting the participation of those who were morally or doctrinally unworthy. Further, discipline aimed, to the best of its abilities, to minimize the presence and influence of impure influences within the church, and it was also a method for bringing individual sinners to repentance. This dissertation has argued that the third goal,

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repentance, had an important internal focus for Calvin. Though Calvin’s theological construal of repentance as internal was subtle, and though the consistory’s attempts to gauge the interior space of Genevans, especially their hearts, was also subtle, a significant number of Genevans used language before the consistory which suggests that they felt their individual interior space was under examination.

Whether explaining their readiness to receive the Supper or describing their rationale for voluntarily abstaining from Communion, Genevans did at times refer to the condition of their heart. One of Calvin’s most ardent opponents, Philibert Berthelier, was summoned in February of 1551 to explain why he abstained from the Supper and didn’t frequent sermons. He replied that he abstained “for something that he had on his heart.” He further insisted that “from this hour on, he is in good disposition to receive it [the Supper].” Berthelier made clear reference to his interiority, first by mentioning the condition of his heart and then by saying that he was in good disposition to receive, which suggests that the matter of heart had been remedied since the previous Supper. It should be noted that Berthelier did not go into any detail regarding what was on his heart, and further, the consistory did not pry into this detail but remained content with his generic reference to interiority and his promise that the condition had been cleared.

The case of Henry Bully is similar. He was summoned because of some difference he had with his cousin, named Paquillon. Henry said that “because of a certain grudge he had with his cousin,” he had voluntarily refrained from Communion five times. However, he indicated that he was now ready to be reconciled with his cousin, which would permit him access to the Supper. Two weeks earlier, when Henry was originally asked to give account for their differences, he had answered similarly. He explained that he had abstained from the Supper because of some difference between him and his

11 *Registres du Consistoire de Genève*, vol. 6, 7.

12 Ibid., 8.
cousin. However, he also indicated that he could not recite the Lord’s Prayer “with a good heart.” The editors of the records indicate that in some cases, Genevans refused to say the Lord’s Prayer when they were not able to pardon someone. In this case, Henry not only abstained from Communion because of the grudge he harbored, but he also refused to say the Lord’s Prayer because it would come from a bad heart, one filled with unholy dispositions.\textsuperscript{13}

In another case, the consistory suspected that Claude Vuarin had impregnated Jehanete Dentant. When defending himself, Calude provided a lengthy list of witnesses who could attest to his innocence and also reveal the true father of the child. Further, he was known to be unhappy with some who had insulted his brother. Claude claimed that he pardoned “everything and means to receive Communion.” By stating this, he indicated that he pardoned all those who dishonored his brother as well as those who dishonored him by accusing him of fathering Jehanete’s illegitimate child. Clearly, he believed that an open willingness to pardon these offenders would grant him entrance to the upcoming Communion. Jehanete then offered her side of the story, in which she insisted that Claude was the father. Seeing that no clear answer could be ascertained in the matter, the consistory referred the case to the Small Council. In the meantime, Jehanete was firmly suspended from the Supper. Initially, the consistory seems to have similarly suspended Claude, but as the entry continues, he was allowed a moment to speak for himself again. The interaction between him and the consistory is as follows: “[Claude] Answers as above, pardons everyone with a good heart. It is left to his own good will whether he retains anything, and if he takes Communion with resentment, it will be by his own judgment. And he takes God to witness that he retains nothing in himself.”\textsuperscript{14} This time,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Isabella M. Watt et al., eds., \textit{Registres du Consistoire de Genève au temps de Calvin}, vol. 5 (Genève: Librarie Droz, 2010), 198, 326.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} \textit{Registers of the Consistory of Geneva}, vol. 1, 162–163.
\end{itemize}
Claude’s response made explicit and repeated reference to his interior space. Taken together, his comments suggest that his heart and will were of a good nature in that he held no anger, malice, or resentment towards others. And, he believed this demonstrated his internal readiness for the Supper.

In another case, Petremand Pellouz plainly stated that “he will not take Holy Communion because his heart is charged against someone who has done him great injury, by whom he was wounded, and he cannot earn his living or that of his family, and he prays to God every day to remove this hate from his heart.”  

Likewise Roud Monet is recorded as flatly stating “that he will not receive Communion this time, because he is troubled in his heart.”  

Or again, when Jehan Soutiez was asked why he did not receive Communion the previous Easter, he answered that it was “because of someone who had done him an injury, a woman who cursed him, and he fell into illness…. ” Apparently Jehan held some anger in his heart over this and therefore voluntarily absented himself from Communion. At the time of his summons, he indicated his desire to take Communion and repented “of the evil heart he had at Easter.”  

Or yet again, when Jane Pinard was questioned about her history of participation in Communion, she said “She did not want to receive Communion last Christmas, and her conscience did not allow her to receive it…. ” Further, she said “no one knows her heart,” which appears to have been a way of suggesting that she knew well why her conscience restricted her from taking Christmas Communion, and that this was something only she could actually know.  

It was quite rare for individuals to refer to their interior space in reference to personal religious devotion, though this did occasionally take place. Jehan Chappon was

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15 Ibid., 74.
16 Ibid., 73.
17 Ibid., 235.
18 Ibid., 312–314.
asked about his sermon attendance. He replied that he was “obedient to the Gospel,” did not “want to drive it away, and had “it at heart.” However, in most circumstances, Genevans referred to the status of their heart within the context of familial or communal disputes and disagreements. Other instances bear this out. Two brothers, Pierre and George d’Arlo, were summoned because of their scandalous fighting. George flatly stated not only his refusal to touch his brother’s hand in a sign of reconciliation, but added “that his heart cannot make him touch the hand of his brother.” Andrier Piard, who was summoned for having spoken against John Calvin, indicated that he was “always sorry that he insulted Monsieur Calvin…and retains nothing in his heart.” Andrier thus insisted that there was no longer anything in his heart against Calvin, in spite of the things he had said previously. Claude Tapponier and Pierre Furjon were summoned for a quarrelling. Tapponier indicated that he had pardoned Furjon, but he continued by saying that Furjon had treated him so badly “that he will never see him with a good heart….” Likewise, Pierre Berthet pardoned, “with a good heart,” the opponent with whom he had quarreled. Jean Bergeron made clear his anger towards Jacques Violat who had fathered an illegitimate child with Jean’s sister, saying that he “forbid” Violat from “being in his heart.”

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19 Ibid., 170.
20 Registres du Consistoire de Genève, vol. 6, 159.
22 Ibid., 385.
23 Ibid., 384.
24 Registres du Consistoire de Genève, vol. 6, 96–97; The language of having one in another's heart was common in Geneva. When Trisant de Branges was questioned along with Madeleine Cornille about their marriage proposal, Trisant stated that "his heart is not in her, because he would not know how to earn a living for her and him," Registers of the Consistory of Geneva, vol. 1, 83.
These sample cases demonstrate some repeated patterns that reveal important understandings which many Genevans shared. A significant number accepted Calvin’s imperative that Communion should be taken in a worthy fashion, and commonly enough, Genevans would voluntarily abstain from Communion because they deemed themselves unfit. As Isabella Watt and Thomas Lambert have indicated, “Genevans who feared to present themselves for Communion with a troubled heart often abstained without the intervention of the authorities rather than put themselves in danger of inviting the wrath of God. If their absence was noted, the consistory summoned them to learn whether some anger troubled them.” Further, these individuals often perceived that their unfitness was related to a dialectical tension. On the one hand, they experienced some internal struggle, in the form of a troubled conscience or troubled heart, and yet, on the other hand, this was frequently the result of having some dispute or disagreement with a friend, neighbor, or family member. Thus, Genevans sensed that their communal or familial discord was intricately united to their inward disposition. Additionally, while subtle forms of interior language were woven throughout these cases of communal and familial dispute, it was often Genevans themselves, not the consistory, who initiated the overt language of interiority. That is, these Genevans were not directly asked about the nature of their interiority. This strongly suggests that at least for some Genevans, they perceived the consistory to be subtly inquiring into their hearts. For some, this even harkened back to the confessional. As Jane Pinard complained before the consistory, she felt that “she was searched out as the confessors did in former times.”

25 Registers of the Consistory of Geneva, vol.1, xxii. The consistory’s willingness to police those who had voluntarily abstained from Communion further illustrates its hierarchical oversight of Genevan life. In this case, it proves quite telling that individuals who had voluntarily exercised their consciences were still summoned to explain their behavior and motivation.

26 Ibid., 313; Watt has noted a number of comments by Genevans in which they compared the pastoral visitations of the consistory leaders with the confessional. In 1551, a woman was summoned to the consistory for having become angry during a pastoral visitation and said “She was going to the confessors.” In April of 1557, two men were accused of having said to some who were being examined “Have you confessed?” In another case the following week, three men and a woman were admonished for "having
While the consistory gave corporate surveillance to communal disputes in an effort to produce unity and reconciliation among believers, Genevans could at times sense that the process required that they give voice to the condition of their hearts. It is true that this investigation of interior space did not delve deeply. The discourse did not require overly rigorous probing into intricate and varied internal states. Instead, discussions often remained brief and somewhat superficial, consisting of statements about having something in one’s heart against another but not describing this internal condition at great length. Further, as chapter four demonstrated, the consistory was apt to use interior language in reference to a broader class of cases, not simply those regarding reconciliation of differing parties. Genevans, however, largely restricted interior references to cases in which they worked out communal or familial discord before the watch of Geneva’s religious leaders. This suggests that the interior references were rooted in traditional Genevan notions of the individual and community and naturally arose when the consistory inquired into disputes.

These dynamics did serve to individuate Genevans as they discussed, debated, and contested not only the conflict itself, but gave testimony before church leaders to the internal dispositions that they harbored at the time of the offense and during the days in which reconciliation was expected to occur. But one should be cautious to not push this interpretation farther than Genevan voices warrant. While a significant number felt obliged to refer to their interior space, this interior language was not as closely associated

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27 This chapter has taken a conservative approach, limiting its treatment to those cases in which Genevans specifically made reference to their heart (coeur). However, if one assumes that Genevans understood that their dispositions were rooted in their hearts, then the occurrence of such cases could be multiplied, for many instances of communal dispute and reconciliation were discussed by Genevans using dispositional language. Frequently, Genevans referred to the anger, malice, or hatred that they carried toward others. If these words were semantically associated by Genevans with the heart, then one could argue that an even greater number of consistory meetings included interior language on the part of Genevans.
with the kinds of interior language Calvin employed. Genevans largely did not refer to inclinations that would be associated with certain spiritual vices, such as greed or lust, nor did they discuss matters of religious fear or doubt which arise in Calvin’s theological works. Instead, they spoke of having anger in the heart towards others, or of having a heart charged against someone else. Thus, Genevans tended to refer to the uniqueness of their interior space within the context of communal relations, thus indicating that their singularity, as individuals, was understood as intricately united to communal and familial interactions and identities. Within this particular context, Genevans did not understand their interior space as highly privatized or as directed solely toward God. Instead, they understood their interior condition in reference to their external relations with others.

**Genevan References to Individual Honor and Shame before the Consistory:** As Philip Benedict has summarized, “…the sixteenth-century was a period in which individuals were intensely concerned about their honor…” Yet this coexisted with the practice of policing morals and beliefs out of fear that such crimes “endangered the commonweal.”28 Within Calvinist contexts, such surveillance for the sake of communal wellbeing placed considerable strain upon the honor which individuals valued so highly. In reference to Huguenot discipline Raymond Mentzer writes "It embarrassed, shamed, and ridiculed those who trespassed on announced standards of public behavior."29 And the same appears to have been the case in Calvin’s Geneva.

In many cases, Genevans defended themselves before the consistory by making simple reference to their honorable status. For example, when Claude Loup was summoned in 1551 regarding how he managed his household, he must have had in the back of his mind the words of the consistory from a previous summons, in 1547, in which

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they claimed that the bad company he allowed in their home had wrought a bad influence upon his wife. This seems to be behind Claude’s insistence in 1551 that his wife was a “respectable woman” (*femme de bien*).\(^30\) Almost a decade earlier, in 1542, Claude’s wife appeared before the consistory to give account of her faith. While she made reference to a number of issues, such as her church attendance, she also said “she does not do anything that a respectable woman should not do…”\(^31\) Similarly, when Françoise Lengard was suspected of having adultery with Hudri Rojod, she not only provided a note which purportedly attested to her innocence but also said “she is a respectable girl.”\(^32\)

Pierre Rosseti and his wife, Anthoyne, were summoned because it was rumored that she had committed adultery. Pierre was clearly upset, and he further argued that his wife did not obey him, which is why she did not live in a godly fashion. Eventually, Pierre openly confessed to beating her for her disobedience, and the consistory told him to refrain from such beatings while also exhorting Anthoyne to obey her husband’s commands. Pierre seems to have been angered by these admonitions, and he also seems to have given the lie to his own sexual misconduct. He then tried to clear himself by claiming that “he is a respectable man.” He repeated this more vehemently at the close of the session, saying “he was as respectable a man as any of the city.”\(^33\)

Some Genevans even directly compared their honor with that of the consistory’s pastors. Guigonne Du Roverey was summoned for fighting and singing inappropriate songs. When the pastor, Fabri, gave her remonstrances, she argued with him saying “she is also a respectable woman,” as he is a respectable man.\(^34\) In another case, Philibert

\(^{30}\) *Registres du Consistoire de Genève*, vol. 6, 26 and note.

\(^{31}\) *Registers of the Consistory of Geneva*, vol.1, 145–146.

\(^{32}\) *Registres du Consistoire de Genève*, vol. 6, 121.

\(^{33}\) *Registers of the Consistory of Geneva*, vol. 1, 322.

\(^{34}\) *Registres du Consistoire de Genève*, vol. 6, 177.
Berthelier, a vocal opponent to Calvin, was questioned under suspicion of having committed adultery. He directed his comments toward Calvin and insisted that “he was as respectable a man as him.”

Many Genevans clearly felt that their honor was being questioned in the consistory and that they were subjected to shaming. This was Calvin’s intent. In the Institutes he wrote that the third purpose of church discipline, that of seeing sinners repent, specifically involved shaming:

The third purpose [of church discipline] is that those overcome by shame for their baseness begin to repent. They who under gentler treatment would have become more stubborn so profit by the chastisement of their own evil as to be awakened when they feel the rod. The apostle means this when he speaks as follows: “If anyone does not obey our teaching, note that man; and do not mingle with him, that he may be ashamed.”

This shaming had an individuating quality for Genevans. Those answers which compared a Genevan’s respectability to either that of a specific pastor or of the city’s population as a whole tended to isolate and highlight the individual’s honor via juxtaposition. Thus, in the proceedings of consistory meetings, dynamics unfolded in which Genevans felt their individual honor was in question. William Naphy has written that many Genevans were humiliated “as a result of being questioned and censured about their personal affairs by foreigners [French pastors] in front of fellow-citizens [elders]….” This description nicely captures the various layered notions of honor that were called into question through the dynamics of the consistory. Apart from the processes of the meetings, a simple summons itself was interpreted by some as an irreparable blemish to one’s honor. As Thomas Lambert has noted, “even a summons to

35 Ibid., 40.

36 Calvin, Institutes, IV: 12, 5. However, in the following sections of the Institutes, Calvin outlined measures that would balance the shaming effects of discipline so as not to push an individual into despair. For Calvin, discipline had to remain balanced between appropriate shaming that effectively brought a sinner back to the right path and excessive shaming that pushed a sinner too far.

37 Naphy, Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation, 224.
appear before the Consistory was a slight to one’s honor. In an age that gave particular importance to one’s honor, it was a public insult that was little appreciated. As the Perrinists complained, merely having been called by the Consistory ‘was like an oil stain that one could never get rid of.’”

However, just as Genevans made reference to their individual interior space within the context of communal or familial disputes, they made reference to their individual honor within the context of seeing themselves as being members in good standing with prominent families or of the city itself. Genevans were highly concerned with their native communal identity as well as familial identity. This is likely why Pierre Rosseti defended his honor, as outlined above, by saying that he was as good a man as any in the city. In other words, Pierre and other Genevans thought themselves honorable individuals because they belonged to established and recognized bodies of honor. Thus, when Genevans defended their honor, the extent to which this was a reference to their individual status is potentially minimized. The Perrinist complaint that a summons to the consistory irreparably marred one’s honor indicates that individual honor was at stake, but the larger context of Genevan identity and respectability markers do suggest that individual honor was intricately connected to communal and familial dynamics. Thus, Genevans likely sensed, at one and the same time, that their individual honor, as well as that of their beloved native population, was isolated and highlighted through consistorial discipline. As Raymond Mentzer has spoken of Reformed discipline in France, “The loss of dignity and sense of shame associated with public reparation unquestionably reinforced the disgraceful social exclusion of excommunication.”

38 Lambert, “Preaching, Praying, and Policing the Reform,” 270.

39 Mentzer, “Marking the Taboo,” 123.
Genevan References to Station before the Consistory: While it was not unusual for Genevans to refer to their individual interiority or their individual honor before the consistory, it was far more common for them to demonstrate awareness that Reformed notions of station were being enforced. Genevans give clear evidence that they understood the notions of hierarchical station which Calvin proposed and sought to impose. At times, Genevans supported these conceptions, and in other instances they opposed them. In both scenarios, it was clear that Genevans perceived the power dynamics at play: they understood that consistorial authorities, often in connection with civic authorities, were utilizing their power to make sure that each individual took his or her particular place within the broader network of Genevan hierarchies.

A large number of Genevans voiced an understanding and acceptance of various stations as Calvin defined them. Claude Magnin was asked about “the behavior of his household.” He recognized the station which the consistory wanted him to fulfill as the male head of the household, with responsibility for all matters of governance in the home, including spiritual governance. He answered that “he has made an oath to the city that he would live according to the commandments of God and that he did not want to permit anything improper in his household.” Further, he mentioned that he was a dizainier, the supervisor of a quarter of the city, and that in this role too, he would not “permit anyone to do anything improper.”

When the consistory asked Aymoz Cortagier about “the faith and frequenting of sermons and other things involving the Reformation of the church,” he not only voiced his pure devotion to the faith (saying he had no scruples), but he also demonstrated his support for the Reformation as evidenced by his efforts to make “his daughters learn the evangelical faith.” As such, he was properly fulfilling his role as a good Reformed father. Children too could voice an understanding and acceptance of

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41 Ibid., 46.
Reformed station by expressing their willingness to obey their parents. Though Nicod des Planches had clearly made a promise of marriage, he told the consistory “that his father does not want to consent and he does not want to disobey him.”

Perhaps more interesting are those cases in which some Genevans agreed with the consistory’s Reformed view of station as it applied to others, not themselves. Huguet Bigeunaut and his wife, Jeanette, were questioned about the bad and scandalous life which they lead together. Huguet excused himself by pointing out that his wife was disobedient and “beyond his command.” In this answer, he did not simply blame his wife for causing trouble in general but specifically for transgressing his authority in the home. In the case above involving Pierre Rosseti and his wife Anthoyne, something similar occurred (leastways before Pierre stumbled badly and implicated himself in a case of sexual misconduct). When asked about why the couple did not live according to God, Pierre answered that “his wife does not want to do what he commands her” and “she wants to be the master.”

Likewise Étienna and Claude Carrion were summoned on May 12, 1551, regarding poor behavior within their household and fighting between them. They were summoned again in November, apparently for the same reasons. Claude quickly complained that Étienna was “unfaithful” and when he admonishes her “she is incorrigible.”

Women too had recourse to see that men fulfill their roles. A woman by the name of Anthoyne was questioned because she was pregnant and unmarried. She insisted that

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42 Cited in Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 188.

43 *Registres du Consistoire de Genève*, vol. 6, 167.

44 *Registers of the Consistory of Geneva*, vol.1, 322.

45 *Registres du Consistoire de Genève*, vol. 6, 91.

46 Ibid., 198.
Pierre Rolet was the father and further demanded that he support the child.\textsuperscript{47} As a critical footnote supplied by the editors indicates, Anthoyne was successful in procuring some support from Pierre’s guarantor, but she was also banished from the city for a year, on pain of being whipped, because she had fornicated three times.

Most of the time, Genevans found themselves before the consistory because they had received a summons. Yet, in some situations, it seems that Genevans themselves initiated contact with the consistory specifically for the purposes of enlisting the church’s authority to bring someone else back to their proper station. Most consistory entries begin with an indication of why the church leaders summoned an individual. Common introductions for most entries include descriptive phrases such as “Admonished regarding…,” “Interrogated about…,” “Asked about….” However, when Claude Guenant appeared before the consistory, the entry begins with “He complains against his wife…” Thus, it seems likely that Claude himself initiated this complaint before the consistory. He further stated the nature of his complaint, saying his wife “left without his permission, to serve at the house of Claude Loup, husband of la Dobliere.” He further argued that she would not obey him by returning to his house, and she thus abandoned the household. Though Pernon, Claude’s wife, had earlier complained that she had to go serve at the Loup’s house out of financial necessity, and though she here complained that she had also left because her husband treated her badly, her husband seems to have been successful in his attempts, for the consistory saw them forgive one another and promise to correct their ways.\textsuperscript{48}

Likewise, Jacquème Papa was asked “what complaint she had made about her husband.” As with the case of Claude Guenant, this seems to suggest that she brought the matter before the consistory. She answered that “Everyday her husband goes wandering

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Registers of the Consistory of Geneva}, vol.1, 14.

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Registres du Consistoire de Genève}, vol. 6, 112, 91.
and she does what she can…. She doesn’t know why he beats and hits her….” Most likely, Jacquème was appealing to Reformed notions of husbandly station here. In the first case, her complaint that her husband goes wandering was probably an appeal for him to work and provide for their household. In the second case, she likely appealed to Reformed teachings that husbands not be physically abusive to their wives. The consistory seems to have supported her, because it gave remonstrances to Jacquème’s husband. However, unlike Claude Guenant’s case, this effort was not successful. The husband was incorrigible, didn’t comply with the remonstrances, and he further insisted that he must chastise her, and that he should be her master or else she should leave.49 One wonders why further consistorial action was not taken against the husband, especially since the consistory now had grounds to proceed against him for having disrespected and resisted its authority.

As chapter three demonstrated, seating arrangements at sermon services reinforced various hierarchies of Geneva, including differentiation between men and women. Citing consistory records, Grosse indicates that Genevans were “sensitive to this definition of identities produced by the spatial separation of men and of women….” In 1563, François Longet chastised some women who had taken seats designated for men, saying that if they indeed wanted to sit in men’s seats, they should bring the shameful parts of their husbands with them. François was not the only one to react. Some women denounced these transgressors, calling them “glorieuses.” Grosse suggests that this derogatory term indicated that the women were considered at fault for trying to pretentiously overstep the bounds of their station.50

The above cases demonstrate that many Genevans understood and accepted Reformed definitions of various stations. At times, Genevans accepted Reformed notions

49 Ibid., 198.

50 Grosse, Les rituels de la cène, 271.
regarding their own station, and in other instances, they accepted Calvin’s idea of station as it applied to other people. In a third class of cases, Genevans challenged and even resisted Calvin’s definitions of various stations. What proves important is that Genevans perceived the new hierarchy Calvin proposed, along with the various assigned places for different individuals that this hierarchy required, but they perceived it in a stance of resistance, based upon their own notions of station.

Martin de L’Olme presented himself before the consistory regarding the bad comportment of his son, Pierre. Interestingly, Martin seems to have vacillated between the consistory’s view of the stations involved in this case and a less rigid view of the same. As the three relevant entries indicate, Martin at first complained about his son’s disobedience. When Pierre stood before the consistory to answer for himself, he proved quite rebellious, even challenging the ministers who admonished him. So far, Martin would seem to be in keeping with a Reformed view of a father’s station. He had identified his son’s disobedience and understood his fatherly responsibility to correct it.

A week later, Martin stood before the consistory, and this time, he appeared to have changed his stance. First, when he came alone to the consistory, he excused his son’s absence by stating his son had already been admonished enough. He further argued that he, himself, had pardoned his son, and that Pierre was now of a better mind. In this session, Martin thus challenged the consistory’s station as judge of the sufficiency of admonitions. In short, Martin suggested that he knew better than the pastors and elders whether further correction was required. It seems Martin also challenged the consistory’s notion of fatherly station since he did not want to proceed further in the process of correcting his son. The consistory found this suspicious and asked Martin whether he had indeed complained about his son’s disobedience. The consistory’s implication here seems to have been that if Martin had made a legitimate complaint about his son’s behavior, that, as a good Reformed father, he should see this through to the proper end, even if it required further discipline of Pierre by the pastors and elders. Wanting perhaps to redeem
himself as a good Reformed father in the consistory’s eyes, Martin again affirmed that he had made the complaint but that he had also pardoned his son, suggesting that no further action was required. The consistory ultimately disagreed with Martin and had Pierre summoned the following week. In this final meeting, the consistory found Pierre so rebellious that it not only offered severe admonitions but referred him to the Small Council. In these meetings, Martin subtly attempted, at least momentarily, to question the stations and roles which the consistory enforced and upon which its operations stood.

While Jeffrey Watt has highlighted the consistory’s consistent efforts to encourage its understanding of the responsibilities of a father’s station, Karen Spierling has documented the ways in which Genevan males opposed Reformed notions of fatherly station in favor of traditional notions. She summarizes the case of Denis Potier in 1555. The consistory was troubled because he had served as godfather to his step grandson who was found to have been an illegitimate child. Potier had even presented the child for baptism before the scandal broke out. When the consistory confronted him, he refused to give the name of the child’s father. Spierling concludes that “While Potier was not the father of the illegitimate child in this case, he felt a responsibility as the male head of the family to protect the honor of his family generally and his stepdaughter specifically by concealing the illegitimacy of the birth.” Further, though the consistory rejected his rationale, “Potier believed he was upholding his masculine duty of protecting his family and ensuring that his grandson would be cared for and recognized as a citizen of Geneva. The members of the consistory, on the other hand, found Potier lacking in the honesty and piety required of Reformed Christian men.”

51 Registres du Consistoire de Genève, vol. 6, 115–123.

52 Watt, "Childhood and Youth."

Potier lacked the proper Reformed desire to pursue the fatherly correction of his stepdaughter. His unwillingness to cooperate with the consistory demonstrates that he understood and refused the role it wanted him to play.

More endemic were cases in which boys were truant or absent from catechism services. Like Watt, Spierling chronicles these cases, but from a different perspective. Watt has largely examined the consistory and Small Council’s rationale and efforts to enforce attendance whereas Spierling highlights the reasons why boys and their fathers were less apt to encourage attendance. First, she notes that fathers largely did not find their sons’ truancy problematic: “None of these entries about catechism involve parents complaining about their sons’ behavior.” Further, she suggests that fathers may have supported their sons’ absence because it allowed them time to practice habits and develop skills which conformed to traditional Genevan notions of masculinity. For in many cases of absence, boys were engaging in military and hunting games. Spierling thus concludes that such play “may not have prepared boys to be pious Christians, but it did prepare them to undertake other masculine roles, including family provider and defender of the city, and it gave them the opportunity to demonstrate the traditional masculine virtues of physical strength and skill.”

Clearly, some fathers did encourage their sons’ absence from catechism service because in 1561 (August 21\textsuperscript{st}), the consistory records indicate the recommendation of the Small Council to report weekly the names of fathers who helped their sons skip so that these men could be chastised. Just as with the case of Potier which Spierling highlighted, the ongoing problem of catechism absence demonstrates that a good number of Genevan fathers actively resisted the role of pious head of household which Calvin

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 114.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 115.
sought to inculcate. In its place remained other, and perhaps traditional, notions of fatherly station.

Some Genevans also challenged Reformed notions of responsibility that were attached to a master’s station. Chapter four discussed the case of Jean Lullin, the master of a servant who was suspected of having committed adultery. As Spierling summarizes, “According to the reformers’ concepts of a truly Reformed society, heads of household were vital enforcers of Christian morality within their homes and necessary agents in the successful imposition of the consistory’s authority.” 56 As such, the consistory commanded Lullin to make his servant appear before the consistory. However, Lullin did not comply, though he had opportunity to do so. Spierling concludes that Lullin “was acting on what he determined to be the best interest of his household based on traditional notions of patriarchal responsibility and loyalty.” 57

As with masters in their homes, the consistory believed innkeepers were responsible for the governance and discipline within their inns. Some innkeepers had different notions about what the governance of their inn should look like. Claude Pirasset, himself a host of an inn, was staying with his aunt, who also ran an inn. While he was there, some merchants spoke against Geneva’s religion, and someone in the inn rebuked them for this. At this, the merchants became severely angry and were even described as wanting to kill their chastiser. Claude was in trouble for not defending the faithful Christian who attempted to admonish the merchants. It seems that the consistory thought Claude’s relation to the innkeeper as well as his vocation as an innkeeper at another establishment gave him a responsibility to provide proper governance in this situation. Witnesses were summoned to explain what had happened that night. It was reported that Claude had actually said to the man who issued the correction “It is not for you to rebuke

56 Spierling, “Putting Order to Disorder,” 56–57.

the guests.” Further, Claude had added that these guests had paid money to be in the inn and to say what pleases them.\textsuperscript{58} As chapter four illustrated, the consistory urged innkeepers to keep careful watch over the way of life in their establishments. Innkeepers were to be judicious about which guests would be permitted to stay, and they were also to support Reformed religion and morals among their family, servants, and guests. Pirasset, did consider himself to have authority in this situation, which is why he spoke up. The faithful Reformed person who chastised the merchants was acting out of place, and Claude believed it was his responsibility to intervene. However, Claude rejected the particular ways in which the consistory wanted him to exercise the authority of his station. He believed his station required different responsibilities, in particular those which would not prove detrimental to the bottom line. This does not necessarily mean that Claude rejected all Reformed notions regarding his station. He may have thought that by being less scrupulous about his guests’ behavior he was best providing for the material needs of his family. Regardless, there was clear disagreement between him and the consistory regarding his station.

At times, resistance to elements of Calvin’s religious program was rooted in notions of station. Marie Lullin and another woman appeared before the consistory for not attending sermons and for having said that “catechism hour is for children.”\textsuperscript{59} Evidently one, if not both, of these women felt that attendance at catechism was below their station.

As chapter three outlined, Calvin did not especially encourage lay involvement at the \textit{congrégations} (i.e., the Genevan Bible studies). However, attendance and some small degree of involvement were permitted to the laity. Aymé du Nant, a carpenter, was one of the few Genevans to become a regular attendee. When his attendance dropped off, his

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Registres du Consistoire de Genève}, vol. 6, 64, 67–68.

\textsuperscript{59} Spierling, “The Complexity of Community,” 89.
absence was noted by others. Du Nant was summoned to the consistory, and he explained that a fellow carpenter, Jaques Duval, had intimidated him into no longer attending by arguing that “it is the behavior of a rich man to go to the congrégations and stay there until ten o'clock, and that it would be much better to work to feed his small children, since he is a poor man.” Du Nant answered that “he really wanted to work in order to feed his children, but to do so one should follow the word of God, since God has given him the grace to do so.” While the consistory was often the party attempting to ensure that fathers worked so as to provide for their families, in this case, it evinced no such concerns. Perhaps it believed du Nant’s absence did not jeopardize his ability to provide. However, Duval, du Nant’s fellow carpenter, did seem concerned, and further, he thought du Nant was overstepping his socio-economic station, acting as a rich man. Duval perceived du Nant’s attendance as a dereliction of fatherly responsibility and an impertinent disrespect for his place as a poor artisan laborer.

Some of the most notable rejections of Calvin’s notions of station consisted of vehement and direct refusals of the authority of the pastors and the consistory. Naphy has chronicled these dynamics extensively. As discussed in chapter three, in 1546 Calvin refused to affirm Jean Trolliet, a native Genevan, as a minister. The Small Council tried repeatedly to see Trolliet accepted and installed, but Calvin repeatedly resisted. Calvin’s refusal to affirm Trolliet as a minister, and his refusal to concede to the Small Council’s prompting, both served to anger native Genevans. This sparked strong antagonism of native Genevans toward Calvin and the rest of the foreign ministers.

Some Genevans thought Calvin’s actions provided reasons for concern, and such concern makes sense in light of Geneva’s political history and ongoing concerns to retain

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60 De Boer, “Presence and Participation of Laypeople in the Congrégations,” 656. The consistory’s inquiry into du Nant’s absence is some of the strongest evidence suggestive that Geneva’s religious establishment indeed wanted the laity present at the Bible studies.

61 Naphy, Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation, 93-94.
political autonomy. Genevans knew of France’s desire to claim Genevan territory. With this in mind, some Genevans were suspicious when Calvin filled the city’s pulpits only with French ministers. Further, Calvin’s ongoing influence within the Small Council as well as his evident desire for the city’s leaders to surrender the power of excommunication into the hands of the consistory smacked of Geneva’s past subjugation to the Prince-Bishop and House of Savoy. Excommunication had been a power of civic governance, and shifting it into the hands of foreign ministers seemed a slippery slope in which additional political power would fall into the hands of French pastors. Also, in response to Catholic persecution, thousands of French Protestant refugees eventually flocked to Geneva for safety. This only served to exacerbate native Genevan fears about foreign and religious domination.

Naphy explains that Genevan complaints about Calvin and the ministers were relatively few prior to the Trolliet affair of 1546. After this, one sees a steady rise in the frequency of complaints against Calvin and the pastors, and the complaints were woven through with xenophobic overtones as well as concerns about foreign domination. When François Favre was summoned, he said the “consistory is another authority over the jurisdiction of Geneva.” His son, Gaspard, was also summoned and expressed similar remarks. Naphy indicates that “he felt that his father had been treated in an arrogant manner by the foreign ministers, which he resented.” This is why Gaspard interrupted Calvin’s interrogation in the consistory, saying “that he will only answer to Monsieur the Syndic and not to another.” Gaspard was asked to expound on this, and he further said “that he should only respond to Monsieur the Syndic and to Sirs who are bourgeois and citizens of the city and also to the Small Council.” He explicitly said “that he does not acknowledge the ministers.”62 When Jaques Gruet was summoned to the consistory in 1547, he said that another Favre, this time Jean, told him “Don’t let yourselves be

62 Ibid., 96.
governed by these preachers…they will do like the bishop, and if the bishops of the past had done what they do, we would not have put up with so much.”

Direct challenges to Calvin and the consistory’s authority continued throughout a good portion of Calvin’s lifetime. Pierre d’Arlo was summoned for a suspected case of adultery. He first appeared regarding this in 1550, and consistorial investigation into the matter continued well into 1551. In one of his last appearances before the consistory on the matter, he excused himself, and said he would only speak to Monsieur the syndic and not to any of the other members of the consistory. François Burdet was summoned for having insulted Jean Fabri, a pastor. The insult occurred when pastor Fabri reprimanded Burdet for being drunk. This in itself was something of a challenge to pastoral authority, though it occurred outside of the consistory. However, Burdet remained steadfast in his rejection of pastoral and consistorial authority. He said that if he was drunk, he would cry to God for mercy, but he would not accept the authority of the consistory.

In a more substantial case, Jean-Philibert Bonna repeatedly and vehemently challenged the authority of the pastors and the consistory. Interestingly, Bonna himself was a member of a prominent Genevan family and also a newly selected elder of the consistory. He very quickly proved problematic for the consistory. In one of his first sessions as elder, he offended others of the consistory by wearing clothes which had been deemed inappropriate by Calvin. This earned him his own summons before the consistory, and in this session he argued that he should answer to the Small Council. Three months later, he was again in hot water for dancing, for having criticized the French pastors, in general, and for having said that Jeanton Jeno, another member of the

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64 Registres du Consistoire de Genève, vol. 6, 13–14.
65 Ibid., 92–93.
consistory, “wanted to uphold the law of France better than that of Geneva.” The consistory suspended Bonna from his consistorial duty, but he still showed up. This greatly angered Calvin, who took the matter before the Small Council where Bonna’s suspension was affirmed. Nevertheless, Bonna appeared one more time, six months later on Christmas day, to try to assist in the consistory’s duties.

Several issues are worthy of comment in Bonna’s ongoing resistance. Most basically, he clearly believed that the authority of Geneva’s new religious establishment should only extend so far, and he was convinced that the consistory and pastors overstepped their bounds. Further, he thought that the consistory was not simply promoting religious authority but presented a foreign and subversive threat to Geneva’s political autonomy. It seems likely that Bonna valued Genevan traditions, such as dancing and dress, along with Genevan political independence and saw the growing power of the pastors as a threat to Genevan communal identity and civic freedom.

In a very similar case, Philibert Berthelier, a member of another prominent Genevan family, forcefully confronted the authority of the consistory. He appeared on March 24, 1551, to defend himself against rumors that he had committed adultery. In the process, he challenged Calvin in particular which set off a longer series of appearances before the Small Council and the consistory. The Small Council heard Berthelier and decided to send him back to the consistory to recognize his fault for speaking so disrespectfully to Calvin. He appeared in the consistory on the 26th, and declared boldly that he had not done anything wrong, that the Council only demanded that he reconcile with the consistory, and that he “will die before saying that Monsieur Calvin is a more respectable man than him.” Berthelier thus refused to confess any wrong deed. The consistory found his comportment unsatisfactory and warned that if he did not “confess

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67 Ibid., 115–116.

68 Ibid., 20, 120 footnote.
entirely,” he would be forbidden Communion and sent again before the Small Council. Berthelier immediately challenged the consistory in return by saying that when he next stood before the Council he would ask them if the consistory actually had the power of excommunication. The next day, Berthelier was again before the consistory, and he again refused to confess entirely and added that only God would be his judge, not the consistory.

As Watt has chronicled, in the years that followed, Berthelier continued to heatedly contest the authority of the consistory to bar the entryway to Communion via the power of excommunication. In 1553, he went above the consistory and appealed directly to the Small Council to be readmitted to the Supper. The Council complied on condition that his conscience permitted him to participate. When Calvin challenged this decision, the Small Council upheld it, though it did encourage Berthelier to voluntarily sit out the next Communion. Watt demonstrates that this case persisted much in the same way well into 1555.

A prevalent issue which involved recurrent resistance to Geneva’s pastors revolved around baptismal names. Many traditional Genevan names happened to coincide with Catholic saints’ names. In an effort to erase all vestiges of Catholic practice, belief, and sentiment, Calvin and the other pastors, with the tenuous support of the Small Council, initiated a heavy-handed practice in which they refused to baptize children using these traditional Genevan names. The first case occurred in 1546 when

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69 Ibid., 48–49.

70 Ibid., 52–53.

71 Watt notes that the Genevan government eventually condemned Berthelier to death for sedition. He was in Berne at the time of his sentencing, and he never returned to Geneva, living out the remainder of his days in Berne, “Résistance et réconciliation.”

72 Naphy, Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation, 144–153.

73 In place of traditional Genevan names, Calvin wanted children to be baptized with biblical names.
Ami Chappuis presented his son for baptism. The child’s sponsor indicated that the baptismal name to be used for the child was Claude. As Naphy describes it, “The minister…promptly, and without warning, baptized the child ‘Abraham.’ The father then grabbed the child back and said that no true baptism had taken place and that he would let his son wait until he was fifteen years old and could pick his own name.” The congregation was overcome with commotion, and many people spoke out against “this act of ministerial arrogance.” This set off an ongoing and very contentious set of events in which Genevans and ministers resisted one another and also put the Small Council in the uncomfortable position of having to mediate between their clergy and native population.74

As Naphy points out, Geneva’s pastors frequently refused to baptize children with traditional Genevan names and also assigned “appropriate” names, on the spot, apart from the consent of parents. Genevan resentment toward this policy grew so severe that the General Assembly of the city had to be called to deal with the crisis. The ministers were told, as Naphy puts it, that they had exceeded their authority. Further, three prominent members of the Small Council were to admonish the pastors, again as Naphy puts it, “to keep their place and to obey the edicts.”75 Naphy’s language here strongly suggests that Genevans perceived their pastors to be reaching beyond their appropriate station. Specific Genevan responses bear this out further. Nicolas Gentil, himself the castellan of Jussy, responded to the actions of the ministers by saying “we will endure no more…the foreigners rule everything.”76 Louis Bandière held prominent Genevan status. His father had twice been a syndic as well as a member of the Small Council. He was

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74 The Small Council had initially supported the pastors in this effort, but eventually protested the policy, Ibid., 146–148.

75 Ibid., 147.

76 Ibid., 148.
also related to the Bertheliers and Chapereaurouges, both leading families of the city. He was accused of saying, “God take the preachers; they’ve consumed their goods and lands in France and want to take over here,” adding “the foreigners want to rule over us.”

Both Gentil and Bandière perceived the pastoral actions as more than distasteful or unwanted. Rather, they believed that their foreign pastors were usurping roles of political governance.

Some of the most striking language arose during a public disturbance at the close of a sermon service in 1552. Balthazar Sept presented a child, and Calvin simply refused to conduct the baptism, claiming that since Sept had not recognized Calvin’s authority as a minister, he didn’t see any purpose in performing ministerial duties for him. While Sept was angered by this, others were too. Philibert Berthelier grew so angry that at the close of the service he began to criticize one of the other pastors he saw. He is recorded as saying to the pastor, named Chauvet, “There’s that dandy, there’s that dandy.” Chauvet asked the bystanders to observe that he was being slandered. However, Berthelier continued to mock Chauvet, and he particularly chastised the pastor for wearing a sword since such was a right reserved for Genevan citizens and bourgeois. Another minister who was present, named Poupin, pleaded for the syndic to do his duty and put an end to this display of disrespect. At this, Berthelier said to Poupin “It’s not your place to order the Syndic about.” Poupin agreed, saying “I didn’t order him, I’m not some prince to order him about.” Sept then joined in, saying “You’re quite correct (you’re not), rather I’m one of your princes….”

Again, Genevan voices complained that foreign pastors were reaching beyond their station to wield what seemed like political authority.

Naphy writes, “Genevans appear to have been striving, unsuccessfully, to maintain their traditions and customs in the face of growing foreign influence. In any

77 Ibid., 150.

78 Ibid., 151–152.
case it is clear that many Genevans viewed the actions of the ministers as an unacceptable infringement of their liberties as Genevan citizens.” 79 Further, the language of disgruntled Genevans demonstrates that they perceived this foreign pastoral influence as becoming increasingly political, given the frequent references to ruling and governing. Thus, Naphy concludes “To these Genevans the problem was the arrogance of the French ministers who were acting above their station.” 80

Conclusion

As Genevans sat under the authority of their new Reformed leaders, they negotiated their reception of Reformed religion. Though this chapter has been far from exhaustive, it has attempted to isolate some important patterns and uniform ideas which a number of Genevans voiced.

At the most basic level, the majority of Genevans did not perceive the Reformation to be a source of increased private religious freedom or equality. One Genevan’s complaint, that “the devil and the consistory never sleeps,” clearly expressed the level of frustration some felt about the intense religious oversight which Genevans were made to endure at the hands of their new pastors. 81 Philibert Berthelier’s comment, as recorded above, that only God would be his judge, and not the consistory, specifically highlights the perception that the new religious establishment was inserting itself between Genevans and God. Jane Pinard’s comment, that no one knows her heart, falls within this same category: she perceived that the consistory was attempting to give oversight into her interior life, and she seems to have resisted this. The number of instances in which Genevans linked pastoral visitations to confession further highlights the mediating and supervisory role which they perceived their ministers to be playing. Some Genevans

79 Ibid., 153.
80 Ibid., 100.
81 Manetsch, Calvin’s Company of Pastors, 190.
interpreted the Reformation to be an obstacle to enjoying traditional freedoms. As Spierling notes, “the consistory’s efforts to enforce the Reformed vision of paternal responsibility was also perceived by some men as an intrusion and an unwelcome restriction of their autonomy.” Even those who supported and affirmed Calvin’s reforms were, seemingly by default, in a position to recognize and respect pastoral authority and oversight of individuals’ lives. Again, as Spierling has noted, to be an upstanding Reformed man required that one was practiced in obeying and respecting authorities, including religious authority. Thus, Genevans did not seem to identify the Reformation of their city with notions and habits of autonomy, freedom, privacy, or equality.

At some level, Genevans did feel individuated as unique persons by the dynamics of the Reformation. Clearly, a significant number sensed their unique interior space was being investigated as they were quick to refer to the condition of their hearts. But even these references by Genevans demonstrate that their understanding of interiority was not overly individuating because they largely relegated such references to contexts of communal disputes. These were not references to descending within the self to discover one’s arrogance or pride or to identify one’s disposition toward God but references to anger or hatred that arose as a result of communal or familial disagreement. Genevans also felt individuated as church discipline brought unwanted negative attention to their individual identity, often in the form of shaming. For these individuals, their personal honor was at stake. Though at times this honor itself was likely rooted to an individual’s belonging to a particular group, the Perrenist complaint that merely being summoned to

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83 Ibid., 97–98.
the consistory “was like an oil stain that one could never get rid of” reinforces the notion that individual honor was at stake for Genevans when subjected to church discipline.\(^8^4\)

Of greater repeated concern was ongoing negotiation about station. Most living in the city understood the institutional power structures that had been erected and how these were being brought to bear upon their own sense of station. Some accepted the new norms for their own station. As such, fathers could voice willingness to take charge of their families, and children could express a desire to obey their parents. Others accepted the new norms as they applied to other people. Husbands and wives could appeal to the consistory in an effort to see a spouse tend to their station. Not all of these Genevans necessarily agreed with Reformed stations for Reformed reasons. Clearly, a good number of men appealed to Reformed notions of male authority and responsibility in the home. In cases of domestic disputes, some husbands may have argued that their wives were disobedient simply in order to shift the weight of blame to their spouses so as to avoid impending correction and humiliation. Other husbands may have argued thusly simply to increase the personal control they would have in the home if their wives proved more submissive. Finally, some Genevans directly refused and challenged the notion of station which the consistory was seeking to enforce. In place of Calvin’s ideal, these Genevans had their own understandings and priorities regarding vocations and roles.

Thus, many Genevans knew and perceived that they were either affirming or negotiating understandings of various stations within the community. However, Genevans did not express the belief that each individual’s station was the direct result of special and explicit divine willing, as Calvin did in his theology. This belief gave Calvin’s doctrine of station a highly individuating quality by insisting that God uniquely ordained the precise details of each person’s life’s circumstances. With this quality absent from Genevan language, at least before the consistory, it seems they understood the

\(^8^4\) Lambert, “Preaching, Praying, and Policing the Reform,” 270.
differences between various stations and how different stations could relate but did not associate such highly individuating qualities to said stations.
CONCLUSION

Having completed a long journey across Calvin’s theology, the daily rhythms of religious life in Geneva, and responses of ordinary believers to Calvin’s initiatives, this dissertation is now in a better position to draw some basic conclusions and place them in conversation with relevant works on individualism.

The Difficulties of Identifying Individualism with Genevan Dynamics

At the most basic level, this dissertation argues that individualism was not promoted in Geneva. To argue thusly requires not only traversing the complex dynamics of Genevan life, as this dissertation has attempted to do, but also entails at least a cursory consideration of various historical uses of the term individualism. Given that the scope of this dissertation has been devoted to examining dynamics in Geneva, space does not permit an attempt to define individualism in a constructive philosophical manner. As such, this dissertation relies upon the work of others who have identified historic definitions and uses of individualism or who have, themselves, attempted to develop a constructive definition of the term. Among the works upon individualism, Steven Lukes’ is of particular importance given its focus on historic uses of the term and its reliability as evidenced by its frequent citation in current works.

As John Jeffries Martin notes, the word individualism “is a relative newcomer to English and other European languages,” first appearing in French in the 1820s.¹ Not only is the term new, but Lukes demonstrates that it has been identified with a range of different notions. The following is a condensed summary of some of the highlights of Lukes’ historical survey. One of the earliest uses of the word individualism was as a French pejorative for a political division of minds which threatened authority, social

order, and the well-being of the state. In spite of this early derogatory usage, later French figures came to value individualism within a socialist framework: “For all these socialist thinkers, individualism signified the autonomy, freedom and sacredness of the individual—values which had hitherto taken a negative, oppressive and anarchic form but could henceforth only be preserved within a co-operative and rationally-organized social order.”

Turning to Germany, Lukes argues that the French view, which tended to see individuals as atomized and undifferentiated, gave way to individuality (Individualität). In this German sense, originating with Romantic figures such as Novalis, individuality referred to the unique sense of self one cultivates.

Next, Lukes summarizes Jacob Burckhart’s classic use of the term, which referred to the autonomy of individual morality, the cultivation of privacy, and the individuality of a person’s character. In the American context, Lukes argues that individualism has largely referred to equal rights for each person, tempered with a sense of self-reliance. Finally, Lukes points out that the term has had a number of uses in England, some mirroring the German and French definitions. Yet, he suggests that the most influential use was as a reference to “the absence or minimum of state intervention in the economic and other spheres.”

Having surveyed the history of individualism, Lukes concludes that four unit-ideas have often been associated with or ingredient within individualism: human dignity,


3 Ibid., 12.

4 Ibid., 18.

5 Ibid., 24.

6 Ibid., 26-29. This seems somewhat similar to Walter Ullmann’s definition of the individual in the Middle Ages: a citizen with rights, though certainly not equal rights, *The Individual and Society in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1966), 26-29.

autonomy, privacy, and self-development. Lukes then implies a further collapsing of these ideas under two rubrics: equality and freedom. He suggests that “the idea of human dignity or respect for persons lies at the heart of the idea of equality, while autonomy, privacy, and self-development represent the three faces of liberty or freedom.”

Other scholars have taken a different methodological approach while yet broadly affirming certain aspects of Lukes’ study. Louis Dumont agrees with Lukes’ association of individualism and autonomy. Dumont suggests that individualist ideology valorizes the individual, and he further claims that part of this valorization stems from the capacity of individuals to be autonomous in thought and morality. And, Dumont attempts to locate the moments in history in which such autonomy emerged and developed. Charles Taylor broadly affirms Lukes’ connection between individualism and individuality, or individualism and the uniqueness of the individual. While Lukes cites German Romantic notions of individuality, Taylor argues that Montaigne stressed the need for the individual to turn his or her gaze inward to discover individual uniqueness. As he writes, Montaigne is the “point of origin of another kind of modern individualism” in which the irreducible individual turns inward to discover his or her particularity.

However, some scholarly works suggest an expansion of Lukes’ survey, especially an augmentation of his unit ideas of individualism: human dignity, autonomy, privacy, and self-development. Taylor and Martin both propose a connection between individualism and interiority or inwardness. For example, Taylor argues that Descartes and Montaigne both encouraged forms of individualism united to inwardness. Cartesian individualism, Taylor argues, “gives us a science of the subject in its general essence; and

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8 Ibid., 124.


it proceeds by a critique of first-person self-interpretations, rather than by the proofs of impersonal reasoning.” Taylor’s reading claims that Descartes insisted that knowledge begins when one arrives at certainty of “clear and distinct perception” which is “unconditional and self-generated.” That is, Descartes’ concern for epistemic foundations was highly focused upon the self reflexively analyzing its own insights, perceptions, and thinking process. According to Taylor, while Augustine encouraged the inward turn so the individual could discover and experience God, Descartes encouraged an inward turn that is more focused on the self: “The Cartesian proof is no longer a search for an encounter with God within. It is no longer the way to an experience of everything in God. Rather, what I now meet is myself: I achieve a clarity and a fullness of self-presence that was lacking before.” On this reading, Taylor unites individualism with the inward and self-reflexive thinking subject. “Descartes is a founder of modern individualism, because his theory throws the individual thinker back on his own responsibility, requires him to build an order of thought for himself, in the first-person singular.”

When Taylor treats Montaigne, he argues that an inward turn occurs, but in a different fashion. Montaigne encourages the individual to turn inward to discover himself or herself. Such a process reveals “my own demands, aspirations, desires, in their originality….” Montaigne’s individualism, unlike Descartes’, is not concerned with discovering an order of thought that accords with universal criteria. Rather, Montaigne “is an originator of the search for each person’s individuality.” While these forms of individualism are quite different, they are both accomplished as the individual turns within.

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., 157.
13 Ibid., 182.
14 Ibid., 182.
Martin, too, affirms this sense of inwardness as ingredient to certain notions of individualism. He suggests that Burckhardt’s understanding of early-modern individualism is paradigmatic or representative of later views of individualism, and such a view took the individual to be “autonomous, self-contained, and psychologically complex.”\(^\text{15}\) The idea of individuals as “self-contained” hints at notions of interiority or inwardness, and such is appropriate given that Burckhardt emphasized that the discovery of “man” unfolded in Western history as poets were able to turn inward and paint pictures of the human soul.\(^\text{16}\) The epigraph Martin includes to open his first chapter explicitly references “inner personal identity” as an important ingredient for thinking of individualism.\(^\text{17}\)

Martin and Taylor suggest that inwardness or interiority proved important notions to certain forms of individualism. Thus, Lukes unit-ideas can be expanded to include interiority in addition to human dignity, autonomy, privacy, and self-development.

It seems somewhat strange that Lukes did not include individuality as one of his unit-ideas. Taylor’s view, which suggests that Montaigne encouraged a form of individualism which was linked to individuality, along with Lukes’ mention of individuality as a significant means of construing individualism in the German context, would seem to require that individuality warrant some mention in these unit ideas.

Space does not permit a more rigorous inquiry into whether these unit-ideas properly define what individualism is. Rather, they represent common notions that have been identified with individualism. In a number of instances, these unit-ideas converge to inform one another, demonstrating that they are not themselves entirely independent.

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\(^\text{15}\) Martin, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism*, 5.


\(^\text{17}\) Martin, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism*, 1.
This dissertation treats these unit-ideas and argues that none of them proved significantly applicable in Geneva, either for Calvin or for ordinary Christians of the city. Given some of the considerable overlap between the unit-ideas of autonomy, privacy, and self-development, these three will be treated at once while the other unit-ideas will be handled separately, though even in these separate treatments of single unit-ideas, discussion of other related unit-ideas proves important and informative.

As noted above, Lukes holds that “the idea of human dignity or respect for persons lies at the heart of the idea of equality….”18 In spirit, Calvin valued notions of egalitarianism. Yet, he regularly submitted his abstract appreciation for equality to a practical insistence upon authoritative hierarchies.19 Though Calvin could preach that he and other pastors were not exempt from the common rank in the sense that pastors too were required to benefit from and submit to the content of sermons, he still insisted and highlighted the practical and authoritative role pastors had which set them apart from their congregants.

Calvin approached the issues of democracy and gender roles in the church in much the same way. It is well known that Calvin despised monarchies and preferred a form of democracy tempered by reliance upon the aristocracy.20 Calvin believed that

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18 Ibid., 124.
19 William Bouwsma has famously argued that Calvin was caught between two tensions. On the one hand was a Calvin who was fearful of chaos, disorder, formlessness, limitlessness, the unbounded, and the unintelligible, whether in regards to theology, society, or the church. This Calvin assuaged his fears of boundlessness with cultural constructions and patterns of control. Yet, on the other hand, Bouwsma identified another Calvin; one who felt constrained and restricted by the very boundaries established to bring order to various arenas of life. Bouwsma's reading does suffer a number of shortcomings. At times he reads later modern intellectual dynamics upon Calvin, and he also fails to consider that Calvin more often than not thought of boundaries as divinely ordained, not cultural constructs. Further, and closely related to the last point, Bouwsma tends to suggest that Calvin's fear of disorder and distaste for boundaries were nearly equal, when it seems likely that Calvin more readily feared disorder. Yet, more than anyone else, Bouwsma has highlighted tension in Calvin between freedom and constraint, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
monarchs rarely governed themselves so as to always side with justice or to always interpret matters correctly. Rather, rulers often become blinded with pride. Yet, in practice, Calvin did not promote political change in the direction of his ideal democratic vision. As Höpfl has noted, Calvin’s “own theology of political obedience made it impossible for him to do more than merely set down an abstract ideal.” Calvin insisted that private individuals should not step beyond their station by taking part in political activity. This entailed obedience even to tyrannical rulers at times. Part of Calvin’s insistence was that any ruler, regardless of how despicable, was appointed by God and thus worthy of honor and obedience. However, Calvin was also worried that unauthorized attempts to dislodge a tyrannical ruler could usher in social disorder. Even matters as simple as the amending of public ordinances were off limits for private individuals. Rather, Calvin insisted that political change in positive directions should be encouraged by those who had been duly authorized; the magistrates. As McNeill has noted, Calvin was caught between the tensions of change and stability, and his usual commitment was that change should not subvert an established public order. Though Calvin valued democracy, he was worried that its implementation, if not handled appropriately, could usher in disorder. And even his ultimate ideal was tempered by reliance upon the aristocracy.


22 Calvin, Institutes, IV: 20, 26-29.

23 Ibid., IV: 20, 23.

24 Ibid., IV: 20, 31.

When addressing the role of women in the church, Calvin praised the spiritual equality of both genders while retaining a powerful practical hierarchy between them. John Thompson has analyzed these dynamics with great precision. Citing Calvin’s sermon on 1 Timothy 2:13, Thompson points out that for Calvin women should only be permitted to teach in exceptional or emergency situations when no capable males were present. He contended that these exceptional instances should not change the common order of things, this side of heaven. Similarly, in a sermon on Galatians 3 Calvin stated that the common order, which included male authority over women, was established by God and was inviolable. Even more telling, and explicit, is Calvin’s following conclusion from his commentary on Acts:

The common arrangements by which God wishes us to be bound are not overturned by his extraordinary acts. Thus, if at some time women served as prophets and teachers, having been raised up by the spirit of God, he who is immune from every law could do this. But because this is an exceptional case, it does not conflict with the perpetual and usual arrangement.

Thompson highlights that in Calvin’s mind, the perpetual arrangement, which included degrees of hierarchy between men and women in the church, would “vanish along with the form of this world” and “would not obtain in the life to come.” Thus, Calvin believed women to be equal to men in a future spiritual realm but remained steadfast in his trust that they should remain subordinate to men in this earthly life.

27 Thompson, Calvin and the Daughters of Sara, 182.
28 Ibid., taken from Calvin’s Sermon on Galatians 3:28, 157.
29 Ibid., 204.
30 Ibid., 264.
31 Ibid., 158.
Calvin’s handling of these two issues, democracy and gender roles in the church, only further highlight dynamics which this dissertation has already outlined. Though Calvin could encourage all, even the unlearned, to read Scripture, he gave greater emphasis to the authoritative role of pastors to expertly divide the Word for their spiritual children within sermons. While the consistory demanded attendance at sermons to ensure that Genevans were submitting to the approved teaching of certified pastors, Calvin expended far less effort to encourage lay Bible reading in Geneva. In those few cases in which Calvin did encourage lay Bible reading, he frequently insisted that authorities within existing social or familial hierarchies lead the way. Similar hierarchical structures enabled the consistory to police the entryway to Communion, and the consistory even retained authority to help define individuals’ station in cases of ambiguity.

Genevans largely did not interpret the implementation of the Reformation as a source for emerging equality. Genevan attitudes regarding the Bible demonstrate this. Those lay Genevans who did show interest in pursuing Bible study did not have the opportunity to participate in the congrégations at the same level as Geneva’s pastors. Indeed, these believers felt that in order to have similar leeway to practice interpretive skills, they needed their own Bible study and also needed the permission of the pastors before they could initiate it. These literate lay Genevans sensed that the path toward the Scriptures was not open to all equally. Likewise, the time in which the congrégations were held tended to disadvantage the attendance of poorer laborers.

In other matters, Genevans give evidence that they did not feel a sense of equality emerging from the Reformation. Those instances in which Genevans argued before the consistory that they were as good and honorable as Calvin reveal that some Genevans believed they were on equal footing with Calvin in terms of honor but felt that their new pastors were challenging this equality. Grosse’s research demonstrates that Genevans were aware of the hierarchical divisions of the city, whether religious, civic, or social, which the liturgy and seating arrangements of sermon services reinforced. As Naphy has
demonstrated, many Genevans saw their new pastors as a threat to hard-won civic autonomy. Genevans had thrown off foreign domination and established a new form of governance which was relatively more democratic than their previous submission to Savoy and its bishop. When Calvin sought to shift the power of excommunication from the city’s government into the hands of the pastors, many Genevans interpreted this as a potential step back into foreign and less democratic domination. Indeed, the frequent complaints of Genevans that their new pastors were attempting to rule over the city demonstrate the level of hierarchical authority which Genevans attributed to the Reformation within Geneva.

Recognition of pastoral authority was not limited to those who were critical of Geneva’s new religious institutions. Spierling has noted that being a good Reformed father included submission and obedience to authorities. In this same vein, Kingdon has noted that there were those in Geneva who supported and valued not just Calvin’s initiatives broadly, but church discipline in particular. In short, whether critical of Calvin’s Reforms or supporters of the same, most Genevans recognized the authoritative role the news pastors were playing. In these and other ways, Genevans did not perceive the Reformation as a source for encouraging equality among individuals.

When turning to the unit-ideas of autonomy, privacy, and self-development, these too seemed particularly limited in Geneva during the Reformation’s initiation. For example, though Calvin placed intense stress upon individuals becoming aware of the sinfulness of their interior space, he believed that individuals were not equipped to tackle this process alone. As discussed in chapter one, Calvin believed that individuals had to

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32 This is not to suggest that Genevans were themselves committed to pure or ideal forms of equality. For example, the city officially differentiated between citizens, bourgeois, and inhabitants of the city, assigning differing levels of rights and privileges to each group.

turn to an external source, the Bible, in order to be able to return to themselves with appropriate lenses to grasp their wretched interior state. And as chapters two and three indicated, Calvin believed that individuals could not properly approach the Bible without trusted guidance. When instructing individuals to plumb the depths of their own interior space, Calvin therefore encouraged individuals to seek guidance and assistance from two external sources: Scripture and reliable interpreters of Scripture.

Likewise, while Calvin believed that Communion had the capacity to influence an individual’s interior space for the good, this capacity was often linked to the proper functioning of hierarchical bodies. For Communion to have effect depended in part upon the minister providing accurate teaching about the Eucharist. Further, while individuals were encouraged to examine themselves in preparation for Communion, the consistory also provided external and even compulsory examination of communicants to determine their worthiness to participate.

Those cases in which the consistory gave admonitions for an individual to change the dispositions of his or her heart prove quite telling. Calvin and his fellow consistory members felt at liberty not only to gauge the nature of an individual’s interior space but to instruct individuals to change the direction of his or her inclinations. In such cases, the consistory demonstrated a belief that individuals are not always equipped of themselves to oversee their internal states but need religious supervision. While Calvin consistently gave theological prioritization to the renovation of individuals’ interiority, he just as consistently demanded that the individual’s interior space be reached in public and hierarchical contexts. In other situations, Calvin and the consistory could prove less concerned with matters of interiority but still encroach upon Genevan privacy. As the case of the Tapponiers illustrates, the consistory even had grounds for asking husbands and wives when they last had sexual intercourse.  

34 Registres du Consistoire de Genève, vol. 6, 120–121.
Genevans give little evidence that they felt their religious development was left to their own private devices. When individual Genevans voluntarily (or autonomously) abstained from Communion, the consistory felt obliged to summon them to inquire into why they had done so and whether they had properly dealt with the matter of the heart that kept them from participating. Thus, even when Genevans did act according to individual conscience, making a seemingly autonomous, free, and private judgment, they knew that they could be summoned to give account for this. One Genevan’s complaint that “the devil and the consistory never sleeps” captures the sense in which many within the city felt that they were under constant surveillance, leaving them very little private space. In response to being repeatedly summoned to confess his fault, Philibert Berthelier boldly asserted to the consistory that only God would be his judge, no the consistory. In saying this, Berthelier powerfully expressed his perception of the role which the consistory was trying to play in giving oversight to his life. Indeed, many Genevans felt that certain freedoms that were not necessarily bound up with religious development were being jeopardized by the Reformation. For example, many worried that their freedom to determine their child’s baptismal name was being trampled upon by the ministers.

Even those who wanted to play a particularly involved role in their own religious development did so by submitting to pastoral oversight. Consider, again, the manner in which lay Genevans requested permission to conduct their own Bible study and further asked that a pastor be present to supervise the meetings.

Privacy, autonomy, and self-development were not encouraged by Calvin. As Lukes defines self-development, he understands it as a process often united to the individual’s capacity to aid such development. Though Calvin sought the development of selves, this was not understood as an autonomous or private adventure but was a public matter. For Calvin, self-development was a corporate ecclesiastical affair. Genevans did not sense that privacy, autonomy, or self-development was being promoted. In some cases, Genevans believed their privacy or freedom was actually being undercut.
The unit-idea of interiority proves a bit more complex in Geneva, though ultimately not permitting a form of individualism. Taylor’s understanding of interiority as it relates to individualism, whether discussing Descartes or Montaigne, offers a picture which differs from conditions in Geneva. Taylor’s reading of Descartes proposes that in the Cartesian search for certainty and knowledge, the individual does not turn to God but is herself the source for “clear and distinct perception” which is “unconditional and self-generated.”

Taylor summarizes this capacity of the individual, writing that Descartes “throws the individual thinker back on his own responsibility, requires him to build an order of thought for himself, in the first-person singular.”

Taylor concludes that the Cartesian individual is equipped to traverse this inward journey to arrive at a foundation of knowledge. Cartesian individualism, according to Taylor, involves a highly equipped self that can turn inward to find knowledge.

Taylor argues that Montaigne presents a somewhat different rendering of the inward turn of the individual. As mentioned above, Taylor sees Montaigne as encouraging individuals to turn inward, not to find roots for certainty, but to discover their unique identity. It is important that Montaigne does not necessarily view this as an entirely solitary effort but one which is enhanced by dialogue with a friend. As Taylor summarizes, for Montaigne, “The self is both made and explored with words; and the best for both are words spoken in the dialogue of friendship. In default of that, the debate with the solitary self comes limping far behind.”

For Calvin, the turn inward is different from that of Descartes or Montaigne. Like Descartes, Calvin was concerned with the thoughts of the thinking subject. Calvin

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36 Ibid., 182.

37 Ibid., 157.

38 Ibid., 183.
conceived of the mind as an internal faculty, and he believed it was essential for the mind to properly grasp basic doctrines. As Torrance has noted:

What is particularly distinctive of his [Calvin’s] thought is the way in which the personal and the objective come together under the pressure of the activity and majesty of God upon the knowing subject. Knowledge of God takes place in his presence as we are given a co-knowledge of him with ourselves, and as there arises in us an interior awareness (*interior sensus*) in which God’s own speaking resounds within us. \(^{39}\)

The crucial difference is that Calvin did not believe the individual was equipped to arrive at this knowledge alone. Calvin expressly condemned the activity of those who neglected services “as if they were able to mount up to heaven by their own unaided efforts.”\(^{40}\) For Calvin, it was not just that individuals needed Scripture so as to arrive at right knowledge regarding matters of salvation but that individuals largely needed trained interpreters to walk them through the otherwise thorny text. God had ordained services as external helps by which the Bible would be made to speak to the congregation through the mouths of trained, reliable, and authorized ministers.

Like Montaigne, Calvin wanted Genevans to turn inward to discover their unique selves. Calvin frequently referenced the need to “descend within” oneself in order to discover one’s wretched interior condition. Further, as chapter one argued, this was not a bland recognition of humanity’s faults but an honest and penetrating willingness to accept the real conditions of one’s own heart and mind. However, whereas Montaigne encouraged this as a relatively private matter between close friends who enjoyed free flowing dialogue, Calvin made such introspection a rather public affair that lacked the back and forth of friendly dialogue. In sermons, Calvin prayed and preached so as to help individuals

\(^{39}\) Torrance, *Hermeneutics of John Calvin*, 163.

\(^{40}\) CO, XXXI: 780.
become aware of their interior state. Calvin’s use of guided introspection when preaching his first sermon on Psalm 119 comes to mind. Additionally, some aspects of consistorial discipline seemed aimed at helping individuals understand their wretchedness as is evidenced by the many times the consistory attempted to make individuals “recognize their faults.”

Interestingly, Genevans did show some concern for interiority when standing before the consistory. However, their references proved of a rather unique sort when compared to Calvin, Descartes, or Montaigne. While Calvin’s theology and preaching as well as the nature of consistorial questioning afforded various opportunities for Genevans to discuss interiority, the vast majority of Genevan references to interiority unfolded within the context of discussing relational discord. For Genevans, the journey inward did not seem quite as complex but was more often a simple recognition that, as a result of some offence, within one’s heart resided ill will, anger, or hatred towards another. For Genevans, the language of interiority was indicative of dispositions that arose as a result of dispute and difference with a friend, spouse, neighbor, or some other individual. Thus, due to the influence of the Reformation, Genevans did feel prompted to refer to their interiority, but these references were understood in ways that are not connected to the kinds of interiority which Taylor associates with individualism.

As with interiority, the unit-idea of individuality proves somewhat complex in the sixteenth-century Genevan context. Part of this stems from the extended refrain within the dissertation that certain forms of individuation emerged in Geneva as a result of the Reformation. Individuation proves rather similar to individuality in certain ways. This dissertation has defined individuation as a sense of one’s uniqueness or one’s particularity over against others. That is, the Reformation placed attention upon specific individuals as particular and singular. However, what sets individuation apart from the
individuality associated with individualism is that individuation lacks a strong sense of agency or freedom as well as privacy.

Calvin’s theological emphases on divine predestination and providence both had significant individuating capacities. Calvin believed that God ordained, at a very particular and individual level, each person’s eternal fate as well as his or her earthly circumstances. It is not simply that God ordained for broad classes of humans to exist but specifically ordained the intricate details of each person’s life. In practice, however, the hierarchy of the church played a significant role in aiding the individual through the process of salvation. Though Calvin believed God willed whether and to what extent an individual’s heart and mind would be regenerated, Calvin also believed that God brought about such a transformation in the individual’s interiority through the ministries of the church. In this way, though one’s heart and mind were ultimately the result of God’s willing of an individual to a particular state, the means by which God brought this state to fruition, for Calvin, was the public and hierarchical ecclesiastical institution. As has been discussed already, even the effort to discover one’s unique sinful interior condition needed the external assistance of the church. Likewise, one’s station in life, though uniquely ordained by God, was policed and at times even defined by the consistory in cases of ambiguity.

Further, the consistory’s disciplinary efforts placed a great deal of pressure upon particular Genevan individuals. Shaming as well as interrogation into one’s private and even interior life drew attention to the unique or singular individual. However, the aim was not to affirm a person’s individuality or uniqueness but to identify sin and seek its eradication. Further, the process did not involve the free activity of the individual to pursue his or her originality, as with German individuality, nor did it allow for relatively private and friendly discourse which aided self-discovery, as for Montaigne. Instead, consistorial discipline involved a less private and less liberating investigation into the particularities of one’s life.
While some Genevans expressed awareness that their individual interior space or their personal identity, as an honorable person, was in question through consistorial discipline, they did powerfully perceive that this was not a free or private context in which to consider such matters. In fact, while their individual identity was at times brought to the fore, it was particularly for the sake of seeing them conform to certain pre-established standards of belief and conduct. In these ways, individuality was not a significant development in the Genevan Reformation.

This survey suggests that it is difficult to identify Genevan dynamics with any of the major unit-ideas of individualism. Some, such as privacy, autonomy, and self-direction, clearly have little relation to matters in Geneva. Others, such as interiority or individuality, seem like stronger possibilities in the Genevan context, but even they lack certain key features to be able to link to Genevan life.

It is quite possible that the Genevan Reformation laid the groundwork for interiority to blossom into a more rigorous form of religious individualism in other contexts. For example, later English Calvinists, such as John Bunyan, engaged in experimental religion which explicitly entailed an inward turn to carefully examine the self in order to discern whether there were signs of one’s election.41 This seems a better fit with notions of individualism in which the individual privately and intensely turns within to examine his or her feelings and thoughts. In this way, the Reformation of Geneva potentially laid the groundwork for a basic notion of the individual which could later be tweaked so as to allow for a form of religious individualism. Calvin provided an intense focus on individual interiority which could later be wedded to notions and habits of privacy and autonomy in Bunyan’s experimental religion, thus enabling Calvin’s foundational ideas regarding the individual to transition into a form of individualism.

However, this was not a practice which Calvin encouraged in Geneva. He did not prompt Genevans to seek signs of their election, but rather regularly encouraged them to have faith in the grace of God in Christ.\textsuperscript{42} Further, when Calvin did encourage Genevans to turn inward, to descend within themselves, this was often in public sermons, with the aid of Scripture and reliable preachers. Thus, while Bunyan presents a later development of Calvinism which has the potential to be associated with individualism, this is a different form of Calvinism than that of Geneva. And, perhaps Bunyan’s religious individualism was shaped as his Calvinist theological moorings were mingled with broader social and intellectual trends toward individualism. In this way, Calvin possibly planted a seed of religious individualism, but it had to be extracted from its original theological and practical context and planted in different soil in order to germinate.

Indeed, this is what Brad Gregory argues in \textit{The Unintended Reformation}. He proposes that the Reformation principle of \textit{sola scriptura} was the seed which eventually gave way to interpretive individualism in later contexts. While Gregory has broadly demonstrated the authoritative and coercive nature of early Protestantism, this dissertation has attempted to provide a more detailed description of the ways in which the early Reformation hemmed in notions and practices of religious individualism, at least in Geneva. Such a detailed account lays the groundwork for tracing precise developments in later Calvinist contexts, whether Geneva, France, or England. If Walsham suggests that Gregory’s work fails to “do justice to the precise motors and mechanisms by which the long-term developments...were brought into being,” this dissertation examines the precise mechanisms of the early Reformation and invites further investigation into how these were adapted in later years and in different locales.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{42} See, for example, Calvin’s sermons on Psalm 119 which frequently call for individuals to overcome doubt not with evidence of their election but with certainty in the grace of God and his benevolent, fatherly will.

\textsuperscript{43} Alexandra Walsham, “A Response to Brad Gregory’s \textit{The Unintended Reformation},” 5–8.
Differentiating the Community

If the Genevan Reformation was not a source for individualism, it yet had the power to highlight existing and new divisions which differentiated members of the Genevan community. At times, such divisions had the potential to be understood in individuating terms, bringing attention to individuals’ unique identity. In more cases, however, such individuating language was absent, leaving communal differentiation to unfold according to group categorizations and identities. Thus, the Reformation of Geneva tended to identify and reinforce differences between people of various stations and roles in the city.

The most prominent sense of individuation emerges from Calvin’s theological treatments of divine providence and predestination. Calvin was convinced that God determined all aspects of a person’s life. Salvation and damnation were the result of God’s specific willing, not just regarding two classes of humanity, but in regards to specific individuals. Further, God not only ordained the individual’s eternal outcome but also was at work at the level of decision to bring about one’s regeneration. Given that Calvin prioritized the renovation of interiority in regeneration, this meant that God worked uniquely in each Christian individual’s heart and mind: the interior space of each person was unique in that God worked to renew each of the elect in different ways and at different times. God also willed particular differences for elect individuals. For example, not all would experience equal reward in heaven, and some people were given greater gifts to interpret Scripture than others.

Additionally, God willed for particular individuals to fulfill specific stations in life. For Calvin, Claude was a carpenter because Claude had been ordained by God to be such, and the same was true for each person. That God willed life’s circumstances for each person at an individual level gave Calvin’s theology an individuating quality. Further, Calvin believed that all arenas of life, political government, society, the family, and so forth, should be ordered by a hierarchy, and frequently, such stratification and
division had in mind the stations to which God had assigned individuals. Finally, Calvin’s theology of church discipline aimed to identify, isolate, and even shame sinners in the hopes to preserve the unity and purity of the church and to see sinners repent. This too had an individuating quality as attention was given to specific individuals for specific sins.

Such differentiation was not an academic matter for Calvin. He confronted Genevans with sermonic exhortations to attend to their appropriate place within various hierarchies. Often, he urged those in the pews to give proper respect and attentiveness to the preaching of trained and authoritative pastors. He further instructed fathers and masters to educate their families and servants in the Reformed faith. By mandating and policing sermon attendance, the disciplinary work of the consistory further ensured that Genevans indeed submitted to the teaching authority of the city’s pastors, and the consistory also supervised whether individuals were properly fulfilling the responsibilities of their particular station. The liturgy and seating arrangements of sermon services also reinforced religious, civic, and social stations and hierarchies within the city.

The rhythms of church discipline in Geneva retained some individuating influences. The unique space of Genevans’ interior lives was subtly examined. In a significant number of cases, individuals were summoned to explain what they knew of the faith, or they were instructed to change the inclinations of their hearts. Church discipline placed a great deal of social pressure upon the individual, either through shaming or calling the individual’s honor into question. Yet, these individuating influences within the consistory, while present, tended to be overshadowed by discussions of station which lacked the language of divine willing. The element which granted station such an individuating quality was Calvin’s theology of divine willing. Without this language being attached to dialogues regarding station in the consistory, the individuating quality of the discussion was diluted. Similarly, though the consistory was
concerned with the unique nature of the individual’s interior space, it neither pried deeply into interior matters nor gave them the same priority as matters of external behavior and simple submission. In this way, the consistory’s discussions about station and policing of the same encouraged Genevans to recognize the various hierarchies within the city and to take their place within them, but these discussions largely lost their overt individuating qualities.

At important, though not primary, levels, the language of Genevans, as recorded in consistory records, illustrates that they felt the Reformation to have individuating influences upon them. In particular, Genevans did feel that their personal interior space was being investigated, as evidenced by a significant number of references by Genevans to their hearts. However, for Genevans, the status of one’s heart had much less to do with whether and to what extent God had shaped it. Rather, the condition of one’s heart had far more to do with one’s relationship with others. Genevans tended to mention their hearts only in cases in which they felt some anger or bitterness towards one who wronged them. In these instances, Genevans felt their personal interior space was examined, but they also demonstrated that they understood their interior space as intricately linked to relational affairs. This suggests that they did not perceive their unique interior space in highly privatized terms but as a relationally oriented space, thus somewhat limiting the extent to which this was a highly individuating influence.

The dynamic of shaming also proved individuating. Genevans felt that their individual honor was at stake, and they also felt obliged to defend it. While one’s belonging to and being in right standing with the community likely stood behind one’s sense of honor, some Genevans nonetheless viewed discipline at the hands of the consistory to be a slight to their individual honor. In these limited and yet important ways, the Reformation did result in Genevans feeling individuated. In certain repeated instances, they sensed that their particularity as a singular and unique individual was brought to the fore.
However, Genevans showed far more concern and familiarity with discussions of station and hierarchy which were less individuating. Whether accepting or challenging new Reformed hierarchies and the roles which they attached to different stations, Genevans were more at home with discourses about the authority, privileges, and restrictions that were associated with different ranks in the city. Just as the consistory’s language regarding station lacked reference to a theology of divine willing, so too did Genevans refer to stations without the language of divine willing. In the absence of this language, it is difficult to say that Genevans understood their stations or those of others in such highly individuating terms. Indeed it is possible, and perhaps likely, that they understood each station as a broad classification to which they either belonged or did not belong. As Naphy has demonstrated, many of the Genevan complaints about Calvin and his fellow French ministers were couched in communal as opposed to individuating language. Genevans grumbled that “the foreigners want to rule over us,”44 while others simply stated “we will endure no more…the foreigners rule everything.”45 Calvin’s bent for implementing institutional and hierarchical structures which distinguished between various ranks and stations found a ready home in Geneva. Though Genevans may not give evidence that they understood and adopted Calvin’s language of indiduation, they were prepared to discuss and even contest matters of station, civic division, responsibility, domestic roles, and privilege.

While the Genevan Reformation did not usher in a wave of religious individualism, Genevans sensed that its implementation brought on a series of ongoing conversations about differentiations within the community. At a significant level, some differentiation was perceived by Genevans to be individuating, highlighting each person’s uniqueness and singularity. As with Calvin’s theological emphasis on interiority,

44 Naphy, Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation, 150.
this dynamic potentially reinforced foundational notions of the individual to which later understandings of individualism could be attached. For example, the capacity of church discipline to draw attention to the particular individual could have reinforced notions of individual singularity which, in later contexts, became wedded to habits of self-development by which a person could nurture her individuality. However, such a form of individualism was itself not present in Geneva.

In more cases, Genevans sensed that less individuating communal differentiations were at play. The initiation of the Reformation in Geneva gave way to discussions and practices which powerfully differentiated between pastors and congregants, masters and servants, natives and foreigners, fathers and mothers, parents and children, and so forth.

**Implications and Further Study**

This dissertation is by no means a comprehensive study of the Reformation in Geneva. This project has given considerable focus to contextualizing Calvin’s theology of the individual within his larger theological thought. This has revealed some illuminating conclusions. Yet, far from being definitive, these conclusions suggest that further research into the larger body of Calvin’s theological works could bring additional nuances to light. Similar amplified attention into dynamics of religious life in Geneva could also uncover additional points of clarification. Most importantly, increased attention into the nature of Genevan responses seems in order. For example, while the consistory records provide one important means by which to listen to Genevans, intense research into the records of the city’s Small Council, in particular its decisions regarding matters of the Reformation, could provide another and significantly different manner of listening to Genevans.

Future projects could build upon the foundations provided in this dissertation by broadening the scope of inquiry. For example, this dissertation has not considered Calvin’s correspondence with other leading European Reformers. One wonders if Calvin’s tone proves less authoritative when writing to fellow colleagues who had similar
credentials as him. Does a different Calvin emerge in his personal discussions with figures who were considerably well-educated and who also had religious authority in different Protestant cities? The project could be expanded even further by tracing matters into the past, attempting to determine how Geneva’s Reformation differed from Geneva’s Catholic past. Likewise, research could be expanded by following developments into the years after Calvin’s lifetime. Such investigation could uncover whether the rigid parameters Calvin placed upon the Genevan Reformation were relatively unique to a time when the Reformation was being implemented and formalized. Did different dynamics emerge after Calvin’s lifetime in Geneva? Did Genevans and their pastors interact differently once the Reformation became a firm fixture of Genevan life? What were French or English responses to the implementation of Calvinism? These are just a number of ways in which further study could expand the scope of investigation while also providing greater clarity and precision to the existing project.

Finally, this project offers the potential to contribute to ongoing scholarly discussions about the nature of the individual in the early modern era. The convergence and comingling of dynamics of individuation and communal differentiation seems to accord with some recent reinterpretations of the Renaissance individual. Over against Jacob Burckhardt’s classic thesis that the Italian Renaissance saw the emergence of “autonomous, self-contained, psychologically complex persons,” John Jeffries Martin has argued that “the Renaissance self…was almost always understood as the enigmatic relation of the interior life to life in society.” For the Renaissance individual, according to Martin, the interior life was important, but it was not clearly bounded by the physical body. The edge of the individual’s interior space was porous, and one’s identity was shaped in no small part by group associations and social location.46 Broadly speaking,

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46 Martin, Myths of Renaissance Individualism, 16-18.
this seems to have been the case in Geneva. Calvin and Genevans both tended to unite individual interiority and external social realities, though not always in the same ways.

Calvin’s theology granted significant importance to individual interiority. That interiority belonged to individuals is evident from Calvin’s commitment that each person needed to descend within himself or herself to discover his or her own wretchedness. One’s sinful interior state was one’s own, and it was constituted by the condition of one’s heart and mind. But Calvin largely believed that this space was subject to access through public hierarchical contexts. He feared individual tampering with interiority in private. Further, he tended to insist that these public spaces be governed and supervised by those with appropriate authority and abilities. Even domestic piety was often discussed as a group event, governed and supervised by fathers and masters, and not a private or individual affair. Church discipline too showed concern with individual interiority, though in limited fashion. In all these ways, Calvin stressed that the pious shaping of the individual’s interior life was linked to public events and contexts.

For Calvin, the porous boundaries of the individual’s interior space were not so permeable as to permit notions of souls migrating from one to another or similar ideas which Martin notes were common of Renaissance individuals. Rather, Calvin’s view seems far more subtle. He believed that public institutional ministries were structured and designed in a way to open lines of access into the individual’s interior space. The pastor’s training in doctrine and exegesis provided reliable content for believers, but for such content to take root in the heart of hearers, it had to be presented in a way that could be understood by one’s hearers, granting it access to the mind. It also had to be presented with force and rhetorical vigor so as to gain access to the heart. Likewise, discipline at times was spoken of as a means of reaching and changing the direction of one’s heart by employing appropriate and customized amounts of shaming at the hands of church

47 Ibid., 18.
officials. Indeed, Calvin believed that certain institutions and sacraments of the church had been divinely ordained precisely because they granted access to the individual’s interior space. Conversely, Calvin believed that other external practices had the capacity to influence one’s interiority negatively. Consider his fear regarding the power of song, as cited in chapter three. While certain words are evil, song grants these words more ready entrance into the heart: “so also venom and corruption are distilled to the depth of the heart by the melody.”

Genevans too believed in the convergence of interiority and exteriority as evidenced by their references to their hearts largely within the context of domestic and communal disputes. For Genevans, matters of the heart were real, and they were aware of them. However, these matters were connected to external relational affairs. One’s interiority had much to do with whether one experienced harmony with family, neighbors, and friends or discord with the same. Genevans were aware of the feelings they carried inside, but they were often feelings they felt toward others.

With Martin, this dissertation suggests that the early modern individual, both Calvin and his Genevan hearers, felt a strong interdependence between the individual’s interior and exterior life. Further research of Geneva could clarify and add to this important and ongoing study.
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