The Ecclesiastical Ordinances.

Comp. § 83 (352 sqq.) and § 86 (367 sqq.). Calvin discusses the ministerial office in the third chapter of the fourth book of his Institutes.

Having considered Calvin’s general principles on Church government, we proceed to their introduction and application in the little Republic of Geneva.

We have seen that in his first interview with the Syndics and Council after his return, Sept. 13, 1541, he insisted on the introduction of an ecclesiastical constitution and discipline in accordance with the Word of God and the primitive Church.[685](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fnf_iv.xiii.vii-p7.1) The Council complied with his wishes, and intrusted the work to the five pastors (Calvin, Viret, Jacques Bernard, Henry de la Mare, and Aymé Champereau) and six councillors (decided Guillermins), to whom was added Jean Balard as advisory member. The document was prepared under his directing influence, submitted to the Councils, slightly altered, and solemnly ratified by a general assembly of citizens (the Conseil général), Jan. 2, 1542, as the fundamental church law of the Republic of Geneva.[686](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fnf_iv.xiii.vii-p8.1) Its essential features have passed into the constitution and discipline of most of the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches of Europe and America.

The official text of the "Ordinances "is preserved in the Registers of the Venerable Company, and opens with the following introduction: —

"In the name of God Almighty, we, the Syndics, Small and Great Councils with our people assembled at the sound of the trumpet and the great clock, according to our ancient customs, have considered that the matter above all others worthy of recommendation is to preserve the doctrine of the holy gospel of our Lord in its purity, to protect the Christian Church, to instruct faithfully the youth, and to provide a hospital for the proper support of the poor,—all of which cannot be done without a definite order and rule of life, from which every estate may learn the duty of its office. For this reason we have deemed it wise to reduce the spiritual government, such as our Lord has shown us and instituted by his Word, to a good form to be introduced and observed among us. Therefore we have ordered and established to follow and to guard in our city and territory the following ecclesiastical polity, taken from the gospel of Jesus Christ."[687](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fnf_iv.xiii.vii-p12.1)

The document is inspired by a high view of the dignity and responsibility of the ministry of the gospel, such as we find in the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians and Ephesians. "It may be confidently asserted," says a Catholic historian,[688](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fnf_iv.xiii.vii-p15.1) "that in no religious society of Christian Europe the clergy was assigned a position so dignified, prominent, and influential as in the Church which Calvin built up in Geneva."

In his Institutes Calvin distinguishes three extraordinary officers of the Church,—Apostles, Prophets, and Evangelists,—and four ordinary officers—Pastors (Bishops), Teachers, Ancients (Lay-elders), and Deacons.[689](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fnf_iv.xiii.vii-p17.1)

Extraordinary officers were raised up by the Lord at the beginning of his kingdom, and are raised up on special occasions when required "by the necessity of the times." The Reformers must be regarded as a secondary class of Apostles, Prophets, and Evangelists. Calvin himself intimates the parallel when he says:[690](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fnf_iv.xiii.vii-p19.1) "I do not deny that ever since that period [of the Apostles] God has sometimes raised up Apostles or Evangelists in their stead, as he has done in our own time. For there was a necessity for such persons to recover the Church from the defection of Antichrist. Nevertheless, I call this an extraordinary office, because it has no place in well-constituted Churches."[691](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fnf_iv.xiii.vii-p20.1)

The extraordinary offices cannot be regulated by law. The Ordinances, therefore, give directions only for the ordinary offices of the Church.

1. The Pastors,[692](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fnf_iv.xiii.vii-p23.1) or ministers of the gospel, as Calvin likes to call them, have "to preach the Word of God, to instruct, to admonish, to exhort and reprove in public and private, to administer the sacraments, and, jointly with the elders, to exercise discipline."[693](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fnf_iv.xiii.vii-p24.6)

No one can be a pastor who is not called, examined, ordained, or installed. In the examination, the candidate must give satisfactory evidence of his knowledge of the Scriptures, his soundness in doctrine, purity of motives, and integrity of character. If he proves worthy of the office, he receives a testimony to that effect from the Council to be presented to the congregation. If he fails in the examination, he must wait for another call and submit to another examination. The best mode of installation is by prayer and laying on of hands, according to the practice of the Apostles and the early Church; but it should be done without superstition.

All the ministers are to hold weekly conferences for mutual instruction, edification, correction, and encouragement in their official duties. No one should absent himself without a good excuse. This duty devolves also on the pastors of the country districts. If doctrinal controversies arise, the ministers settle them by discussion; and if they cannot agree, the matter is referred to the magistracy.

Discipline is to be strictly exercised over the ministers, and a number of sins and vices are specified which cannot be tolerated among them, such as heresy, schism, rebellion against ecclesiastical order, blasphemy, impurity, falsehood, perjury, usury, avarice, dancing, negligence in the study of the Scriptures.

The Ordinances prescribe for Sunday a service in the morning, catechism—that is, instruction of little children—at noon, a second sermon in the afternoon at three o’clock. Three sermons are to be preached during the week—Monday, Tuesday, and Friday. For these services are required, in the city, five regular ministers and three assistant ministers.

In the Institutes, Calvin describes the office of Pastors to be the same as that of the Apostles, except in the extent of their field and authority. They are all ambassadors of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God ([1 Cor. 4:1](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iCor.4.html" \l "iCor.4.1)). What Paul says of himself applies to them all: "Woe is to me, if I preach not the gospel" ([1 Cor. 9:16](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iCor.9.html" \l "iCor.9.16)).

2. The office of the Teachers[694](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fnf_iv.xiii.vii-p31.1) is to instruct the believers in sound doctrine, in order that the purity of the gospel be not corrupted by ignorance or false opinions.

Calvin derived the distinction between Teachers and Pastors from [Eph. 4:11](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Eph.4.html" \l "Eph.4.11), and states the difference to consist in this, "that Teachers have no official concern with discipline, nor the administration of the sacraments, nor admonitions and exhortations, but only with the interpretation of the Scripture; whereas the pastoral office includes all these duties."[695](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fnf_iv.xiii.vii-p33.2) He also says that the Teachers sustain the same resemblance to the ancient Prophets as the Pastors to the Apostles. He himself had the prophetic gift of luminous and convincing teaching in a rare degree. Theological Professors occupy the highest rank among Teachers.

3. The Ancients or Lay-Elders watch over the good conduct of the people. They must be God-fearing and wise men, without and above suspicion. Twelve were to be selected—two from the Little Council, four from the Council of the Sixty, and six from the Council of the Two Hundred. Each was to be assigned a special district of the city.

This is a very important office in the Presbyterian Churches. In the Institutes, Calvin. quotes in support of it the gifts of government.[696](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fnf_iv.xiii.vii-p36.1) "From the beginning," he says,[697](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fnf_iv.xiii.vii-p37.4) "every Church has had its senate or council, composed of pious, grave, and holy men, who were invested with that jurisdiction in the correction of vices … . This office of government is necessary in every age." He makes a distinction between two classes of Elders,—Ruling Elders and Teaching Elders,—on the basis of [1 Tim. 5:17](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iTim.5.html" \l "iTim.5.17):, Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching."[698](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fnf_iv.xiii.vii-p38.2) The exegetical foundation for such a distinction is weak, but the ruling Lay-Eldership has proved a very useful institution and great help to the teaching ministry.

4. The Deacons have the care of the poor and the sick, and of the hospitals. They must prevent mendicancy which is contrary to good order.[699](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fnf_iv.xiii.vii-p40.1) Two classes of Deacons are distinguished, those who administer alms, and those who devote themselves to the poor and sick.[700](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fnf_iv.xiii.vii-p41.4)

5. Baptism is to be performed in the Church, and only by ministers and their assistants. The names of the children and their parents must be entered in the Church registers.

6. The Lord’s Supper is to be administered every month in one of the Churches, and at Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas. The elements must be distributed reverently by the ministers and deacons. None is to be admitted before having been instructed in the catechism and made a profession of his faith.

The remainder of the Ordinances contains regulations about marriage, burial, the visitation of the sick, and prisons.

The Ministers and Ancients are to meet once a week on Thursday, to discuss together the state of the Church and to exercise discipline. The object of discipline is to bring the sinner back to the Lord.[701](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fnf_iv.xiii.vii-p46.1)

The Ecclesiastical Ordinances of 1541 were revised and enlarged by Calvin, and adopted by the Little and Large Councils, Nov. 13, 1561. This edition contains also the oaths of allegiance of the Ministers, Pastors, Doctors, Elders, Deacons, and the members of the Consistory, and fuller directions concerning the administration of the sacraments, marriage, the visitation of the sick and prisoners, the election of members of the Consistory, and excommunication.[702](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fnf_iv.xiii.vii-p48.1)

A new revision of the Ordinances was made and adopted by the General Council, June 3, 1576.

[685](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fna_iv.xiii.vii-p7.1)    He wrote to Farel, Sept. 16, 1541 (in *Opera*, XI. 281; Herminjard, VII. 249): "*Exposui* (*Senatui*), *non posse consistere ecclesiam, nisi certum regimen constitueretur, quale ex Verbo Dei nobis praescriptum est, et in veteri Ecclesia fuit observatum*."

[686](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fna_iv.xiii.vii-p8.1)    See above, p. 440.

[687](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fna_iv.xiii.vii-p12.1)    The French text in *Opera*, X. 16. note a.

[688](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fna_iv.xiii.vii-p15.1)    Kampschulte I. 396.

[689](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fna_iv.xiii.vii-p17.1)    In the "Ordinances" they are called *Pasteurs, Docteurs, Anciens, Diacres*.

[690](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fna_iv.xiii.vii-p19.1)    *Inst.* IV. ch. III. § 4.

[691](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fna_iv.xiii.vii-p20.1)    This confirms the view I have taken of Calvin’s extraordinary calling (§ 73, pp. 313 sqq.). In his letter to Sadolet he expresses his firm conviction that his ministry was from God. (See § 91, pp. 398 sqq.) Luther had the same conviction concerning his own mission. On his return from the Wartburg to Wittenberg, he wrote to the Elector Frederick of Saxony that he had his gospel not from men, but from heaven, and that he was Christ’s evangelist.

[692](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fna_iv.xiii.vii-p23.1)    ποιμένες, *pastores*, [Eph. 4:11](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Eph.4.html#Eph.4.11). They are the same with Bishops and Presbyters. " In calling those who preside over Churches by the appellations of ’Bishops,’ ’Presbyters,’ and, ’Pastors,’ without any distinction, I have followed the usage of the Scripture." *Inst.* IV. ch. III. § 8. Then he quotes [Phil. 1:1](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Phil.1.html" \l "Phil.1.1); [Tit. 1:5, 7](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Titus.1.html" \l "Titus.1.5); [Acts 20:17, 28](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Acts.20.html" \l "Acts.20.17). See above, p. 469.

[693](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fna_iv.xiii.vii-p24.6)    "*Faire les corrections fraternelles*."

[694](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fna_iv.xiii.vii-p31.1)    διδάσκαλοι, *doctores*, [Eph. 4:11](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Eph.4.html#Eph.4.11).

[695](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fna_iv.xiii.vii-p33.2)    *Inst.* IV. ch. III. § 4.

[696](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fna_iv.xiii.vii-p36.1)    κυβερνήσεις, [1 Cor. 12:28](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iCor.12.html" \l "iCor.12.28); comp. [Rom. 12:8](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Rom.12.html" \l "Rom.12.8).

[697](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fna_iv.xiii.vii-p37.4)    *Inst.* IV. ch. III. § 8.

[698](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fna_iv.xiii.vii-p38.2)    In his Commentary on the passage. Comp. *Inst.* IV. ch. III. § 8: "*Gubernatores fuisse existimo seniores ex plebe delectos qui censurae morum et exercendae disciplinae una cum episcopis praeessent*." The distinction was first made by Calvin and followed by many Presbyterian and some Lutheran divines, but it is denied by some of the best modern exegetes. Paul requires all presbyters to be apt to teach, [1 Tim. 3:2](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iTim.3.html" \l "iTim.3.2); [2 Tim. 2:2](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iiTim.2.html" \l "iiTim.2.2); 2:24. See Schaff’s *History of the Apostolic Church*, p. 529 sq.

[699](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fna_iv.xiii.vii-p40.1)    [Acts 6:1-3](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Acts.6.html" \l "Acts.6.1); [Phil. 1:1](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.Phil.1.html#Phil.1.1); [1 Tim. 3:8](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bible/asv.iTim.3.html" \l "iTim.3.8) sqq.; 5:9, 10.

[700](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fna_iv.xiii.vii-p41.4)    Comp. the *Inst.* IV. ch. III. 9.

[701](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fna_iv.xiii.vii-p46.1)    "*Les corrections ne soient sinon medicines pour reduyre les pecheurs a nostre Seigneur*."

[702](https://www.ccel.org/print/schaff/hcc8/iv.xiii.vii#fna_iv.xiii.vii-p48.1)    *Opera*, X. Pars I. 91-124.

**http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc8.iv.xiii.vii.html**